

Alternative Heroism for the Postmodern Age: J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series[❖]

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I argue that J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series illustrates a positive way to embrace postmodern culture and to reassess the past with a critical mind while nourishing the culture that we are creating here and now. Rowling's portrait of Harry as an alternative kind of hero parodies the masculine tradition of heroism. Simultaneously, Rowling warns the media, audience and readers against hailing and stereotyping Harry as a traditional hero. By modelling the villain Voldemort's life on a heroic quest and emphasising the biographical similarities between him and Harry, Rowling allows her teenage protagonist Harry to choose a different path to heroism, i.e., not through violence, conquest or murder. Although he endorses the positive, lenient patriarchy represented by Dumbledore, Harry does not become his duplicate. In this way, Rowling advocates Harry's distancing himself from the benevolent fatherly Dumbledore, as she often shows to readers how Harry becomes a more competent individual when he cannot or does not receive Dumbledore's help. Meanwhile, Rowling also shows to readers Harry's suffering from the incongruity between his everyday experience of self and his publicised heroic image. By contrasting Harry with the true attention-seeker Lockhart, Rowling also highlights the substantiality of Harry's heroism. The series thus urges its readers to see beyond the signs and commodities clustered in today's life.

KEYWORDS: alternative heroism, postmodern age,
consumerist society, children's literature

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後現代世代的另類英雄主義： J.K.羅琳的哈利波特系列

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摘 要

對於 J.K.羅琳的哈利波特系列造就的讀者狂熱現象，多數學者已提出具體的負面批評。相對於這些負面批評，筆者意圖藉由文本分析，並強調此系列產出的年代脈絡，對此一狂熱現象做出另一種詮釋與解讀。筆者強調此系列能引起讀者共鳴之因或許是此系列能與當代社會，即後現代進入全球化的社會，形成回應、對話與反思的關係。筆者認為 J.K.羅琳打造的魔法世界非與當代社會截然不同的異次元世界，而是類似後現代社會中帶有後現代主義色彩的拼貼世界，將悠久傳統與科技創新並置，而主人翁哈利波特在其中的成長過程，則暗示讀者能與當代社會形成一種積極主動的關係。筆者強調此系列尤其著重探討至今仍為人著迷的英雄主義迷思。藉由呈現主人翁哈利如何在魔法世界成為另類英雄人物，J.K.羅琳不僅質疑傳統的英雄形塑過程，也批判大眾媒體如何營造英雄假象。J.K.羅琳強調主人翁哈利如何將自己與傳統英雄人物與媒體傳頌的英雄做區分，因而能在時代潮流中找到自主的聲音與自身的價值。因此，與其一味的接受後現代社會各式的文化衝擊，讀者也能在其中找尋自己的主體性，成為另類英雄。

關鍵詞：另類英雄主義、後現代、消費主義社會、兒童文學

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As the last episode of the Harry Potter films—*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II*—was released in the summer of 2011, we may wonder now whether the popularity of the series continue or the curtain has finally fallen on “Pottermania,” the phenomenon where the reading public enthusiastically embrace the Harry Potter series and its spin-offs (Zipes 182). As it has been translated into many languages, the Harry Potter series has actually taken root not only in English-speaking communities but also in other ethnic groups and societies. There is no denying that millions of young readers worldwide have grown up with Harry, and they, like Harry, have gone through the adventures at Hogwarts, one of the major magic schools in Rowling’s fictional world, and have been prepared for the destined conquest of the great evil, Lord Voldemort. Instead of reducing the popularity of series to a product of consumerist culture or a passing fad, we should explore the cultural significance of such popularity and what the series has offered to us.

First of all, the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series has provoked a critical rethinking of the traditional categorisation of Western literature, which debases literature for young adults and popular literature as lowbrow. For those who aim to defend the criteria of Western highbrow literature, the *Harry Potter* series has ruined the reading taste of contemporary readers, particularly that of adult readers. The series, as they argue, promotes a delightful regression to a mythicised, carefree status of childhood (Byatt “Harry Potter”; Zipes 182). On the other hand, some critics, through various approaches, seek to praise Rowling’s technique of mixing genres to address diverse and complicated themes and therefore justify the overwhelming popularity of the series.¹ Nevertheless, it is notable that critics of both parties agree that a *bildungsroman*, the narrative of an underdog orphan child’s becoming a successful and respected man, has again proved to be universally attractive to most readers, regardless of their differences in age and social background.

In my view, the debate over the value of the *Harry Potter* series initiates, if not reflects, a very postmodern attempt to enquire into cultural hegemony (Nel 24-26). As Tammy Turner-Vorbeck suggests, we can “talk back to

¹ For more pro- and con-views on *Harry Potter* books, see Nel 53-63. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is as follows: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

Pottermania” once we stop regarding the *Harry Potter* series and its commercial spinoffs as innocent forms of entertainment (13-24). We may then start uncovering their connections with our dominant social ideologies and increasingly commercialised, fetishistic cultures. Following Turner-Vorbeck’s argument, the *Harry Potter* series gains its merit by challenging the tradition when it activates discussions about religion, culture, economy and politics.² The merit of the *Harry Potter* series can thus be better understood when it is surveyed in the context where it was produced. As Steven Barfield suggests, the *Harry Potter* series is easily debased as “trivial” and “less valuable” as it is often put in the competition with classic high fantasy such as J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Ursula LeGuin’s *The Earthsea Quartet* (179; Nel 59-60).

I will argue that rather than being a second-rate copy of classic fantasy that caters to the inferior taste of the general reading public, the *Harry Potter* series, when closely read, can be regarded as a postmodern reproduction of a hero tale that shows readers how they can read against the grain of traditional heroism (Anatol, “Introduction” xiv). In the series, Rowling revisits conventional themes in *bildungsroman* and fantasy, such as a hero’s rising from rags to riches and the triumph of good over evil, to rehearse them to reflect her concerns about problems within contemporary society, such as the craze for the media’s hyped celebrity culture, the continuous coercion by various kinds of authority, the remaining under-representation of personal suffering, and the increasing isolation of individuals. Her writing can thus encourage readers to explore the tradition of a hero tale, and the exploration, in turn, can function as a starting point for readers to rethink other existing traditions and rules in their society.

I would like to extend Suman Gupta’s analysis of how Rowling challenges the long-run stereotyping of fantasy writing for young people as formulaic and unsophisticated to how she constructs an alternative heroism for the postmodern age. As Gupta suggests, via the narrative strategy “repetition and progression,” Rowling plays, fuses and evolves several familiar generic forms and literary motifs while gradually complicating her constructed world, integrating into it her criticism of the negative aspects of

² Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty list several reasons for some adults’ objections to their youngsters’ reading the *Harry Potter* books: the anti-Christian tendency, the confusion of fantasy with reality, frightening imagery, and dire motifs such as death. See Taub and Servaty 53-72.

contemporary life (93-96). I argue that the narrative strategy also allows Rowling to give the *Harry Potter* series a postmodern thrust to parody traditional heroism and the media's hyped hero worship. Linda Hutcheon identifies parody as one important factor that forges postmodern culture, and for her, parody is revolutionary when it emphasises the differences of what seems to be repeated (xii). Whereas the series is permeated with a sense of light-heartedness that characterises most children's books and renders it traditional at first glance, it cannot be therefore dismissed as nostalgic or escapist. On the contrary, the set tone of lightness common to many children's books further grants Rowling a poetic license to caricature and satirise the celebration of a hero in mediatised culture and to bestow on Harry an alternative kind of heroism that counteracts individualist heroism whose virtues such as prowess and single-mindedness are revisited and criticised as male-dominated by Margery Hourihan.

A Twist to Nostalgia: The Later Development of the Series

At first glance, Rowling's alternative world is admittedly saturated with nostalgia for an era when personal life and social development was more predictable. However, as if in protest against the suggestion that she capitalises on a recurrent narrative pattern to make her books popular, Rowling provides a thematic justification of narrative repetition in the text. She has one of her most respected characters, Albus Dumbledore, explain that in order to strengthen his mother's protective spell on him, Harry needs to return to the Dursleys to be close to his maternal relatives despite the fact that they are cruel and unkind. Rowling further reinforces the credibility of this thematic justification by having Harry and the magic world eventually saved by this protective spell and its derivative power.

Even if Rowling seems to establish a narrative pattern, she also gives a twist to the nostalgia that permeates the genre of literature for young people, and she manages to establish something new by playfully borrowing from different literary traditions. Through hybridising highbrow and lowbrow cultural elements and reinterpreting cultural clichés and stereotypes in the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling exposes and challenges the increasingly ossified standard of good literature for young people and more extensively, the existing social and cultural hierarchies. Gupta notes that the narrative dynamic unfolded in the *Harry Potter* series derives from Rowling's ability to

reconcile the incongruity between “repetition” and “progression” (93-96). As Gupta explains, Rowling “involve[es] certain common denominators (particular settings, certain central characters) and yet also ha[s] these common denominators change[d] and/or adapt[ed] in consequent fashion as circumstances change” (94). In other words, Rowling can manage to open up new narrative dimensions and invests new meanings in what she repetitively employs, be it an image, an icon or an episode: it will become the opening of a new plot or the point of convergence of several storylines. Most noticeably, the teaching position of The Defence Against the Dark Arts (DADA) is devised to be constantly vacant, so those who fill the vacancy help to reveal a new chapter in Harry’s life and in the magic world. In my view, this strategy of “repeating and progressing” not only contributes to the complexity of the *Harry Potter* series but also allows Rowling to construe an alternative hero tale for contemporary readers.

Starting from the fourth book of the series, the narration seems to contradict readers’ desire for a comfortable reading and becomes more challenging (Barfield 182).³ First, the narrative frame of a traditional school adventure story, that is, a closed campus, is obviously shattered: Hogwarts is now revealed as intricately intertwined within the social context of an international magic community. Secondly, Rowling has also strengthened the epic dimension of Harry’s adventure, sending him to leave the school to defeat the arch-enemy of the magic community, Lord Voldemort. Harry’s life then is deeply intertwined with the prosperity of the whole community. By juxtaposing “schoolboy humour with the battle against the darkness,” Amanda Cockrell points out that Rowling presents “an ambiguity that is rare in children’s literature”(17). Barfield also suggests that Rowling’s blending of various, sometimes incongruous, genres creates a narrative tension, “generat[ing] a form of both instability and imaginative space within the text for a variety of ways of consumption of readers” (183). The “ambiguity” and “tension” shown in the later *Harry Potter* series turn out to be the strength of Rowling’s writing of an alternative hero tale for contemporary readers. Rather than providing a straightforward, entertaining school story, Rowling presents various aspects of Harry’s life and makes his struggle to fit into the magic society more complex and realistic to readers.

³ For more discussion about the references in the series to boarding school stories such as *Tom Brown’s School Days*, see Steege 27-30.

In the meantime, despite the fact that the later books of the series become thematically darker and less predictable than the first three, they have remained unflinching popular. This may suggest that the series as a whole demands a reassessment, for its universal appeal cannot simply be attributed to the innocent reproduction of a rags-to-riches master plot as widely practiced in Horatio Alger's adolescent novels.⁴ In this sense, no matter how diseased Pottermania has appeared to some critics or whether the frenzy eventually came to an end with the release of the last film of the series, readers' ability to respond actively to their reading should not be underestimated. Regardless of the age differences, readers who have enjoyed reading the series are not passive receivers but active participants in producing the meanings of the text.

As most readers cannot fail to notice, the magic world in the *Harry Potter* series does not remain wholly positive and morally impeccable, even though Rowling persistently mocks the narrow-mindedness of the non-magic or "Muggle" people. As Harry's enrolment in Hogwarts already suggests, he needs to be enculturated into the magic community. When Harry grows older, he encounters more difficult situations in life, among them, governmental oppression. Even if Harry was born to belong to the magic world, he nevertheless cannot naturally fall into it. Anatol notes that Rowling's later development of the magic world turns paradoxical: "on the one hand [Rowling's magic world is] a space of difference, inhabited by the Other, and quite separate from the 'real' and flawed British sphere" yet "on the other hand, [it] serves as an accurate reflection of British reality" ("The Fallen Empire" 167). Having Harry shift his position between an insider and an outsider in the magic world, Rowling further contradicts readers' expectation of the magic world as a harmonious, less conflictive alternative society.⁵ In this respect, despite its first appearance, the magic world does not function as the opposition of the oppressive Muggle (or non-magic) society, represented by the middle-class Dursleys. As Rowling reveals the more problematic aspects of the magic society that have parallels in our contemporary society, for example, governmental persecution and child abuse, she eventually breaks

⁴ See Weiss 48-63.

⁵ For more detail and critique of Harry's being both an insider and an outsider, see Heilman and Gregory, "Images of the Privileged Insider and Outcast Outsider" 245-49.

and blurs the boundaries between the three worlds the *Harry Potter* series is based upon: the magic world, the non-magic world and readers' universes.⁶

Most readers may also recognise that Hogwarts does not always stand for a secure sanctuary or a harmonious, self-sufficient utopia, though it is Harry's home away from home (Kornfeld and Prothro 196; Eccleshare 49-57). Hogwarts is a far more complex institution. Having a long history and harbouring many secrets, the school itself is an unfathomable mystery in itself. The revelation of every secret, as achieved by Harry in his adventures, in turn, reveals the greater complexity of this magic world. Moreover, the reopening of the Triwizard Tournament and later governmental intervention in the school administration indicate that the school is embedded in a larger social context. Subject to the local (or Rowling's fictional British) government and a wider network of other magic schools and countries, Hogwarts is then open to possible political and social tumult at domestic and international levels.

Furthermore, the harmony and intimacy of the school community can be fragile, depending on the characters and intentions of its participants (Kornfeld and Prothro 194). The recurring teaching vacancy of The Defence Against the Dark Arts (DADA) serves as an important device to add ambiguity to Harry's as well as the readers' learning and understanding of the magic world. First, the subject of study indicates a kind of paradox: in order to defend against dark magic, students have to understand it first, and they are to various extents exposed to its negative influence. Second, the vacancy of the position disrupts the routine and the intimate cast of the characters in the school, as those who take on the position often reveal the dark side of the magic community. The teaching position has been twice used by Voldemort's henchmen to penetrate the protection the school provides for Harry—once by Harry's first instructor of defence magic, Quirinus Quirrel, and the second time by Harry's fourth instructor, a Voldemort henchman in the guise of Alastor Moody. Quirinus Quirrel is secretly converted to Voldemort's side and is responsible for most of the danger Harry encounters in his first academic year. The disguised Alastor Moody aims to kidnap and deliver Harry to Voldemort. Whereas the third instructor Remus Lupin is a good friend of Harry's parents who helps Harry recover part of his lost family past and has his godfather Sirius Black reintroduced to him, Harry learns the appalling truth of his parents' death: his parents were indeed betrayed by one of their

⁶ For more discussion of the relationship between the three worlds, see Gupta 85-92.

close friends, Peter Pettigrew. Through learning the new knowledge, Harry not only once again knows the evil of Voldemort, who uses people's weaknesses to convert them into his slaves, but also learns the cruelty of the magic society in treating those it labels as dangerous: without recognising how they unfairly suffer, the society keeps condemning the innocent Black and despising Lupin for his double identity as a werewolf.

Lupin's resignation from the DADA post indicates that even in this magic world, his marginalised status cannot be magically changed at one stroke. This institutionalised, governmentally-approved evil is more pronouncedly introduced by Dolores Umbridge, who takes the DADA post in Harry's fifth year. Working as a bureaucrat in the local (or Rowling's fictional British) government of the magic community, Umbridge prioritises the governmental anti-dark magic propaganda over the practice of defence magic and refuses to face squarely how dark magic can harm the magic community. The government's top-down interference with the operation of Hogwarts further demonstrates that not only is the school far from autonomous but that it can be transformed from a happy learning environment into a repressive state apparatus.⁷

Besides these narrative twists that challenge readers' and critics' presumption of a popular fantasy for young adults, Rowling further employs the strategy of "repetition and progression" to endow some of her initially stereotyped or caricatured characters, such as Dumbledore and Severus Snape, with greater complexity. In this sense, unlike her early model, Roald Dahl, Rowling presents many of the adult characters as fully rounded human beings.⁸ The respected headmaster, Dumbledore, does not always represent moral impeccability and divine wisdom. And the fastidious and morally ambiguous Snape turns out to be a double agent who helps Dumbledore spy on Voldemort. As characters like these evolve, they complicate Harry's moral judgment and influence his life values. Harry is thus placed in a struggle that

⁷ As Louis Althusser defines it, the State Apparatus (SA) is composed of "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.," which turn to be "repressive" because SA "functions by violence—at least ultimately (since repression, e.g., administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)." See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>>

⁸ Cf. Tucker's argument about Rowling's following the tradition of Roald Dahl's writing and subtly displaying a series of "social and personality stereotypes" to arouse readers' instant sympathies. See Tucker 222-26, Kornfeld and Prothro 188-91, and Nel 35.

resembles what we readers may encounter in everyday life: that some people are simply not what they appear to be.

While cautioning her readers against making a hasty judgement based on her characters' appearances alone, Rowling implicitly protests against viewing her series in a stereotyped, biased way. In the episode where Snape argues with Dumbledore about Harry's personality, Snape accuses Harry of being as "mediocre [and] arrogant as his father, a determined rule-breaker, delighted to find himself famous, attention-seeking and impertinent," yet Dumbledore calmly replies, "You see what you expect to see [...]. Other teachers report that the boy is modest, likeable and reasonably talented" (*The Deathly Hallows* 545). Different viewpoints lead to different interpretations, which can enhance mutual comprehension or deepen misunderstanding. It is not because Snape is particularly narrow-minded that he misinterprets Harry's personality. The good-natured Harry also misreads Snape's intentions and actions, as he always assumes that Snape is as difficult and untrustworthy as he looks. Harry's misreading of Snape can be interpreted as the tragic outcome of insisting on viewing a person or an incident in a partial/one-dimensional way. These episodes can be Rowling's implicit message to her critics: if they are determined to judge the series on its generic appearance and dismiss it as an unoriginal, outdated, formulaic fantasy, they may overlook the fact that she is actually developing an alternative kind of heroism, and that the series in fact evolves in tone, style and content.

However, there is a noticeable unevenness in Rowling's characterisation. While the developed characters come to invest more moral ambiguity in the series, the remaining flat characters stand out as well: they are shown as role models for Harry and readers to either identify themselves with or distinguish themselves from. For example, Voldemort and Mr. Dursley represent tyrannical patriarchy that both Harry and readers should reject, and the Weasleys embody the positive nuclear family values that Harry and readers are meant to identify with. Through these undeveloped, unchanging characters, Rowling, to some extent, plays on what Nicholas Tucker terms "social and personality stereotypes," and in this way, she can more easily evoke readers' sympathy with the characters and the fictional world she creates (222). Most importantly, the juxtaposition of rounded and stereotyped characters lays the foundation for the development of Harry's alternative heroism. In developing his own judgement and refusing to be influenced by what he considers

negative, Harry becomes an anti-violent, anti-idolatrous and anti-individualistic hero in Rowling's fictional world.

Cathartic Light-Heartedness

Following the light-hearted tradition of children's literature, Rowling emphasises its cathartic function to make Harry's heroism different from the traditional one. As he is able to laugh in difficult times, Harry is often redeemed from self-pity, and the light-heartedness becomes cathartic when it further helps him to adapt himself to different situations and adopt different approaches to cope with difficulties. Laughter, like pity in Aristotle's classical argument about the cathartic effect in Greek tragedy, is an affective emotion that can purge readers of their negative sense of self or negative reflections about life more generally (Cronk 199-204; Russell and Winterbottom 132-34). In the episode where Harry, Ron and Hermione feel most frustrated in their mission to destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes, the containers that preserve his split selves or pieces of soul, Rowling illustrates the uplifting power of laughter. The three regain their hope and courage when they find themselves all laughing at the dark joke that Ron's brother makes about people's confusing Voldemort with the Basilisk, a reptile monster: people nevertheless die immediately after spotting either Voldemort or the Basilisk (*The Deathly Hallows* 359). Harry's capacity to laugh at such a comparison is most marvellous, for he alone has experienced narrow escapes from both dangers, Voldemort and the Basilisk; it proves that he has the strength to relive his horrifying experience through humour. Harry also feels more released from tension and stress when he finds himself "beaming": "Hearing familiar, friendly voices was an extraordinary tonic; Harry had become so used to their isolation he had nearly forgotten that other people were resisting Voldemort" (360). Through laughing, Harry again learns that he is not alone in facing his fearsome enemy, and his enemy seems less fearsome to him when he also thinks of those he wants to protect, not just his own personal weakness. While Rowling does not naively endorse that laughing is the panacea for all ills, she does demonstrate that laughing can lift people's spirits and help them out of hardship.

Harry's ability to laugh and his sense of humour also renders him more congenial and friendly to contemporary readers. As Mary Pharr argues, humour in Rowling's series has not only a "cathartic" but an "empathetic"

function (65). Though arguing in a different context, M. M. Bakhtin highlights that “laughter [...] destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorised) distance [...]. Everything that makes us laugh is close at hand, all comical creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity” (23). In the series, in addition to having Harry sometimes give ironic comments on his own life, Rowling shows that Harry can be clumsy in dating girls, fighting monsters, and seeking answers to his own questions. Laughing with and at a hero destroys the distance between the heroic figure and his admirers; a hero is thus revealed as an ordinary person, on the same level as his admirers. As Pharr explains, “we readers could, perhaps, be at least a little like these heroes in their greatness if they are sometimes like us in our folly” (65).

Particularly, learning how to maintain a sense of light-heartedness can help an individual to resiliently respond to postmodern, rapidly changing society. As Harry positively demonstrates it, trying to laugh at our own fears or miseries enables us to activate our imagination and to view them from another perspective; in this way, we are more likely to construe an alternative way to solve our present conundrums. Rachel Falconer suggests that the prevailing sense and imagery of lightness in the *Harry Potter* series manifests “a mental agility and flexibility of which Italo Calvino would have approved” (61).⁹ As Falconer points out, Calvino endorses the value of “the liveliness and mobility of the intelligence,” which he believes, may help contemporary people adopt a more positive way to participate in the increasingly hectic, information-overloaded conditions of the twentieth century (48-49). For Calvino, this lightness does not indicate a lack of seriousness or commitment but represents a more flexible attitude toward various, different opinions and voices rising from an increasingly hybridised, global society. It is possibly out of this same approval of “being mentally and intelligently light” that Rowling never allows a sense of humour or a tinge of light-heartedness to be absent even at the most intense moments of Harry’s life-or-death struggle against Voldemort.

Constituting Alternative Heroism

The narrative strategy of “repetition and progression” also strongly

⁹ For more details about Calvino’s idea about “lightness,” see Italo Calvino, *Six Memos of the Next Millennium: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1985-86*.

contributes to Rowling's illustration of an alternative path to become a hero. Mainly, Rowling constitutes Harry's alternative heroism through satirising traditional heroism: she often distances Harry from patriarchal characters with the features of a traditional hero, be they the saint-like Dumbledore or the villainous Voldemort. At the same time, Harry's heroism is also an alternative to the media's portrayal of him as a famous hero. His heroism is the parody of traditional heroism and full of reflexivity. Rowling employs Joseph Campbell's model of a classic heroic quest to pattern her hero's life, so Harry is also under the process of "separation—initiation—return" (30-46). Like many of his predecessors, Harry has been singled out and entrusted with the important task of saving an endangered world since his birth (30-46). However, Rowling later stresses more on how Harry understands and redefines heroism rather than his heroic action of conquest. As Pharr suggests, "Harry corroborates Thomas Greene's theory that a hero's life 'is devoted to informing his name with meanings'" (64). In this sense, Harry's heroism is a self-reflexive type.

Rather than making Harry into the most powerful wizard, Rowling highlights his feature of being valiant without resorting to violence. In one aspect, Rowling addresses the unquestioned process of Campbell's model of a classic heroic quest, i.e., to what extent violence can be justified in a hero's uncompromising pursuit of a "decisive victory" over different others (30). Revisiting Campbell's model, Hourihan contends that many prevailing Western hero tales continue to inculcate and promote patriarchal values through glorifying their heroes' individualism. In these tales, heroes are typically portrayed as men of action and protectors of social order: their suppression of enemies or monsters is often celebrated as a righteous way to combat rising evil and chaos (3). Moreover, the heroes' acquiring the power to crush their enemies is often endorsed as a successful "transition from boyhood to manhood" as evidence of their being able to overcome their own "fears and self-doubts" (3). Therefore, while celebrating a hero's power to conquer chaos, many hero tales implicitly legitimise violence, single-mindedness and the determination to win at any cost as inevitable traits needed in reaching heroism. In Hourihan's view, such traditional hero tales in fact celebrate "superiority, dominance and success" as virtues in themselves (1, 3). If Hourihan's argument holds weight, Harry can be regarded as Rowling's conscious construction of a hero who opposes traditional heroism that elevates

individualism: Harry decisively refuses to win his battles by committing manslaughter; instead, he chooses to disarm his enemies or sacrifice himself.

Rowling's critique of traditional heroism becomes obvious in her demonstration of how Harry, learning to judge on his own, chooses to keep a distance from other patriarchal, heroic characters, particularly Dumbledore and arguably Voldemort. Harry's growth into a heroic character becomes more pronounced when he detaches himself from Dumbledore's influence. In Harry's fifth year at school, he stands up and resists the corrupt bureaucrat Umbridge who abuses her authority and tortures students during the period when Dumbledore uncustomarily withdraws from the administration of the school. Despite Umbridge's ban on extracurricular activities, Harry, considering the danger of the government's understating the harm of Voldemort's return, starts up a club with his schoolmates to study and practice the skills of defence against dark magic. Harry thereby becomes more aware of his own agency: "Knowing they were doing something to resist Umbridge and the Ministry, and that he was a key part of the rebellion, gave Harry a feeling of immense satisfaction" (*The Order of the Phoenix* 312). Although he has not yet become as resourceful as Dumbledore, Harry, with the help of Ron and Hermione, nevertheless overcomes his individual limitations and finds a way to fight against the governmental authority's highhanded control of their campus.

Harry also has to overcome his disillusionment over Dumbledore, the impact of which is probably severer than his disappointment over his deceased father. After Dumbledore's death, Harry learns the shocking fact that his liberal-minded mentor once shared fascist views with a dark magic wizard, believing that wizards should take control of the world because they are superior human beings: the two wizards had once embellished their dictatorial thoughts with euphemisms like 'FOR THE MUGGLES' OWN GOOD' and 'FOR THE GREATER GOOD' (*The Deathly Hallows* 291). This revelation about Dumbledore's semi-fascist past shatters Harry's picture of him as the avatar of absolute goodness: "He had trusted Dumbledore, believed him the embodiment of goodness and wisdom. All was ashes" (293). However, when he overcomes this disillusionment, Harry is able to reassess Dumbledore as a fallible human being with his own periods of weakness. Harry thus decides to forgive Dumbledore for his human shortcomings and keeps respecting him for his goodness, even though his image as a holy saint

has been tarnished.

Although he continues to regard Dumbledore as worthy of respect, Harry does not choose to step into Dumbledore's patriarchal shoes as he takes over the task of fighting Voldemort. Instead of seeking out the Elder Wand, which might have increased his chance to overpower Voldemort in a glorious, heroic final duel, Harry chooses the less glorious task of destroying Voldemort's remaining Horcruxes (*The Deathly Hallows* 406). Unconventionally, Rowling suggests that Harry possesses no less courage than traditional heroes when he decides "not to act":

The enormity of his decision not to race Voldemort to the wand still scared Harry. He could not remember, ever before, choosing *not* to act. He was full of doubts. . . . [H]e had chosen his path but kept looking back, wondering whether he had misread the signs, whether he should have taken the other way. (406-07)

Violating the ethos and code of traditional heroism and not stepping into the shoes of previous patriarchs, Harry has to withstand more doubts and uncertainties in choosing the alternative of non-violence.

On the other hand, as a foil for the conventionally idealised, lenient patriarchal heroism which Dumbledore represents, Voldemort is arguably Rowling's satirical portrait of the conventional hero. While emphasising the similarities between the villainous Voldemort and the young Harry, Rowling actually foregrounds two contrasting paths towards heroism and suggestively, two generations' different ways to define a hero. Voldemort's life is ironically modelled on a heroic quest, and he is endowed with more of the characteristics of an individualist hero. Unlike the modest Harry who is content with his ordinary life, the ambitious, determined, and confident Voldemort aims high in life: he dreams about becoming one in a million, the mightiest wizard who can conquer death and reach immortality. Nevertheless, Voldemort's attempt to fulfil this self-proclaimed heroic task eventually ends in frustration and disillusionment. Obsessed with building up his personal fame and reaching his future goal, Voldemort goes to extremes to commit patricide as he eagerly seeks to obliterate his humble origins. Although in many classic hero tales, patricides may symbolise social revolutions and the hero's rise to power, Rowling shows that Voldemort can

never fulfil his ambitions for glory by killing and fighting. Moreover, his heroic appearance hides only selfishness and a very unheroic fear of death. As Rowling portrays it, this lack of self-reflexivity or the inability to repent is beyond justification and salvation in Voldemort's case (*The Deathly Hallows* 594). In the episode where Harry meets Dumbledore and a strange, ugly child in limbo, Harry is told by Dumbledore to leave the child where he is, because he is Voldemort's split piece of soul and simply cannot be redeemed (566). Through her satirical portrayal of Voldemort as a conventional hero, Rowling suggests that a traditional heroic quest can end in a violent vicious circle, in an inescapable fate of either being killed or killing others.

Rowling further suggests how the quest for individualist heroism can lead to psychological bleakness. Lacking the power of reflection, Voldemort is wrapped in isolation and his sense of self is ironically annihilated when he can trust and love no one but himself. His followers, the Death Eaters, may worship him, but they are in fact frightened of him. Although he himself eradicates his personal roots, he turns out to be obsessed with collecting precious items with historical significance to enhance his self-importance and assert his identity. This fetishism of Voldemort nevertheless does not win him the entrance to immortality; instead, it renders him vulnerable and destructible. Without realising that his life cannot be replaced by a collection of objects or his Horcruxes, he commits the folly of destroying the integrity of his soul and having his life's vitality seriously undermined. Moreover, were he not so obsessed with the prophecy that the baby born in the end of July would be his future rival, Voldemort would not have singled Harry out and fulfilled this one of many possibilities of the future by trying to prevent it (*The Order of the Phoenix* 742). While Voldemort can be interpreted as pursuing the pattern of a heroic quest according to the letter of tradition, following this path in Rowling's fictional world eventually leads him to become, not a hero, but a cold-blooded murderer and a deluded fool who brings on his own destruction.

Rowling endorses the alternative heroic path Harry takes by showing readers that Harry need not become Dumbledore's equal to be able to challenge Voldemort. As Harry embodies alternative heroism, his defeat of Voldemort indicates the triumph over individualist heroism, as Voldemort is defeated by a power he does not recognise, the "strength derived from the refusal to dominate by power" (Pharr 64). Moreover, it is the decision "not to act" that enables Harry to change part of his destiny, leading him out of the

dilemma of either slaughtering Voldemort for his own survival or dying himself. Besides stopping Voldemort's ambition, Harry makes clear his refusal to succeed Dumbledore when he declines to take the Elder Wand which symbolises the most acknowledged and powerful wizard in the magic world. As Harry declares, "I don't want it. . . . I know it's powerful. . . . But I was happier with mine. . . . That wand's more trouble than it's worth" (*The Deathly Hallows* 599-600). Not becoming a mighty wizard like Dumbledore, Harry decides to stay "reasonably talented" and proceed to a less eventful, more ordinary life (545). Rowling allows her hero Harry to be a fallible ordinary young man who suffers from self-doubt and fear yet nevertheless progresses towards his own alternative heroism.

Rowling also unconventionally suggests that Harry's developing heroism is more deeply influenced by his mother than by his father. Instead of regarding his father as his ideal role model, Harry finds himself temperamentally more close to his mother. As Harry unwittingly follows in his mother's footsteps in sacrificing himself and saves his beloved friends by reproducing his mother's powerful protective spell, Rowling comes to celebrate Harry's maternal heritage and its influence on his developing his heroism in seeing beyond appearances and empathising with others. Besides the power of love, Harry also inherits his mother's sensibility and judgement. This sensibility enables Harry to maintain a critical distance from his father and recognise his wrongdoing when he once cruelly took pleasure in humiliating Snape in public: "Harry [felt] so horrified and unhappy . . . [H]e knew how it felt to be humiliated in the middle of a circle of onlookers, knew exactly how Snape had felt as his father had taunted him" (*The Order of the Phoenix* 573). Learning this episode about his father, Harry comes to endorse his mother's action of defending the bullied Snape. In addition to this endorsement of defending the weak and the unpopular, Harry further shows his courage to admit his own mistake: despite the belated reconciliation, Harry comes to acknowledge that he, blinded by his own dislike, has exceedingly misunderstood Snape. Inheriting the personality of his mother and having the same green eyes, Harry learns to see the world as his mother does, with compassion, love and respect for justice.

Again, that love saves the world may sound like a cliché. With the narrative strategy of "repetition and progression," Rowling nevertheless creates a situation in her fictional world where this cliché proves to be

effective and convincing. The emphasis on the power of love makes Rowling's version of heroism different from traditional heroism that puts much stress on prowess and force. Like some readers, Harry at first cynically disputes Dumbledore's theory that his capacity for love and understanding can be more powerful than Voldemort's destructive dark magic (*The Half-Blood Prince* 476). Nevertheless, as the series unfolds, readers repeatedly see Harry surviving Voldemort's attacks due to his mother's protective spell, her legacy of love for him. Rowling also convincingly demonstrates that Voldemort can be defeated by the power of maternal love and familial bond, whose strength he cannot understand and therefore underestimates. Voldemort unwittingly relinquishes his power to kill Harry when he uses Harry's blood for his resurrection and thus transfers the protective spell to himself. Voldemort also unwittingly destroys with his death curse his own split soul saved in his last Horcrux, i.e., Harry. On the other hand, Voldemort's act of killing Harry ironically enables him to cast a protective spell over his friends at the school of Hogwarts, and they will be hence safe from Voldemort's deadly threat. In other words, the self-centred Voldemort has paved his own way to death, whereas Harry, by resorting to the power of love, wins the battle without turning himself into a murderous hero. In Rowling's fictional world, conquering is not the only way to gain power, for to love is shown to be a more feasible way to become powerful.

Demystifying the Media's Hyped Heroism

Besides revealing the limitations of traditional heroism through the negative example of Voldemort, Rowling also critiques the media for its tendency to pander to hero worship and idolatry of celebrity. Through portraying Harry's difficulties in living with his fame and his sense of isolation from his mediated, publicised image as a hero, Rowling shows how the media's hyped hero idolatry can damage the wellbeing of an individual. Above all, Harry could not have desired the fame that cost both of his parents' lives, yet most characters nevertheless assume that he must have enjoyed it. To demonstrate how the media can misrepresent an individual's living reality, Rowling creates an unreliable journalist, Rita Skeeter, who randomly adopts Harry's comments and life events into melodramas to cater for readers' curiosity about a celebrity (Nel 24). In Skeeter's coverage of the Triwizard Tournament, Harry finds his interview fabricated; she has invented a tragic

hero who speaks of his parents with great emotion: “*I suppose I get my strength from my parents, I know they’d be very proud of me if they could see me now [...] yes, sometimes at night I still cry about them, I’m not ashamed to admit it*” (*The Goblet of Fire* 276; original italics). Contrary to what Skeeter reports, Harry can hardly remember his parents, let alone recall their images. Through stereotyping Harry as an orphan honouring his deceased parents with his own success, Skeeter actually denies Harry’s real difficulty and sorrow in tackling the loss of his parents.

As a foil to Harry’s genuine modesty, Rowling gives her readers a real attention-seeking figure, Gilderoy Lockhart, Harry’s second instructor of defence magic.¹⁰ Authoring and publishing several books about his own adventures, Lockhart appears to meet most magic people’s expectations of a good-looking, chivalric hero. Despite his glamorous appearance, Lockhart is in fact an impostor, who plagiarises others’ heroic deeds as his own: when caught by Harry and Ron, he shamelessly argues, “My books wouldn’t have sold half as well if people didn’t think I’d done all those things. No one wants to read about some ugly old American warlock . . . He’d look dreadful on the front cover” (*The Chamber of Secrets* 220). Though Lockhart is derided as a hypocritical scoundrel, Rowling nevertheless imparts the message to her readers that they too should be cautious of being deceived by their own wishful projections of ideal heroes. As far as Harry is concerned, he will not identify himself with Lockhart whose vanity and ostentation he has always detested. Compared to Lockhart’s pretentious kind of heroism, Rowling also implies that Harry’s is truly substantial.

By showing how Harry suffers from and resists being turned into a heroic icon and manipulated for different purposes, Rowling implicitly appeals to her readers not to commodify Harry, despite her series’ commercial success. The majority of the magic people unfairly isolate Harry: they either admiringly exaggerate his ability to combat Voldemort or become scared of him when they suspect his connections with dark magic. When the government intends to cover up the fact of Voldemort’s return, Harry can be condemned as a maniac by the media: “Harry knew that half the people inside Hogwarts thought him strange, even mad; he knew that the *Daily Prophet* [a

¹⁰ Gupta provides another interesting interpretation of Gilderoy Lockhart: the author constructed by readers from their reading does not match the real being of the author. Therefore, Gupta suggests that Rowling, as the author of the *Harry Potter* series, also runs the risk of losing her “author-ity” (or authorship) when she becomes part of the Harry phenomenon (33).

tabloid newspaper] had been making snide allusions to him for months” (*The Order of the Phoenix* 269). However, when the government tries to convince the magic people of the effectiveness of their policy of defence against Voldemort, Harry is again favoured and flattered as a legendary hero. Thus, when he refuses to support the government’s propaganda against Voldemort, Harry significantly rejects being considered an icon any longer. As he protests, “I don’t like your methods,” showing the scars on his fist which spell, “*I must not tell lies*,” a proof of the government’s willingness to sanction the torture of its citizens and children (*The Deathly Hallows* 110-11). Ironically, this government that should tolerate no lies now asks Harry to lie about its competence in dealing with the Voldemort issue. With this irony, Harry’s protest carries an implicit message not only for his people but more importantly, for Rowling’s readers: if they continue to regard Harry as an iconic hero in conventional terms or view him as a traditional, patriarchal hero, they will eventually sacrifice his particularity and flatten his life into their wishful dreaming.

Furthermore, Rowling emphasises Harry’s mundanity and ordinariness in many ways, which contribute to his development of an alternative heroism rather than hindering it. Maria Nikolajeva maintains that apart from “the ongoing progressive plot featuring the struggle of good and evil,” there is a “never-ending chain of everyday episodes” paradoxically set in a magical world (131). This narrative combination implies that apart from the grandeur of a heroic quest, a hero has a mundane life to lead. Harry himself always wishes to be understood as an ordinary person, to be seen as who he really is. After Ron replaces Harry to destroy one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes, Harry puts Ron’s heroism in three speech acts, “Getting the sword. Finishing off the Horcrux. Saving my life,” yet Ron has learned by then that playing the hero is much more difficult than he had expected (*The Deathly Hallows* 378-79). The three speech acts cannot spell out the hesitation and fear he himself experienced in taking heroic action. Harry therefore informs Ron of a lesson he has himself already learned about playing the hero: “Stuff like that always sounds cooler than it really was . . . I’ve been trying to tell you that for years” (*The Deathly Hallows* 308). He therefore urges Ron, as well as the readers, to pay attention to the mundane aspect of a hero.

As Harry prefers to stay ordinary, he is again decisively different from the solitary, individualistic Voldemort. Again, precisely due to his similarities

with Voldemort, it is highly significant that Harry refuses the quest for absolute power and chooses to stay with his beloved ones. He is therefore a social hero who does not accomplish his heroic tasks alone.¹¹ As the series ends in the episode where the grown-up Harry, among many other parents, sees his two sons off to Hogwarts at King's Cross station, Rowling insures that Harry moves on beyond the heroic moment, in which he defeated Voldemort, and returns to the ordinary life: Harry used to be a hero, one in a million, but he has chosen finally to become one of the million again.

An Ordinary Hero for the Postmodern Era

It is what this ordinary Harry can achieve that makes him more attractive and inspiring to contemporary readers than a traditional hero.¹² Nikolajeva points out that the tendency to level heroes with ordinary people is "a relatively recent development": "contemporary characters are not meant as examples for young readers to admire, but as equal subjectivities" (132). M. Katherine Grimes also maintains that Harry's falling short of the criteria of a traditional hero, or his lack of heroic superiority, turns out to be a bliss and comfort for readers (105).¹³ According to Grimes, if Harry, as imperfect as most of us, manages to achieve great things in life, we can also overcome our present difficulties and improve our status quo (101). Pharr further hazards the suggestion that Harry is the type of hero we particularly need in contemporary society, as we "live with a daily media-driven awareness of the interconnectedness of our world, of its vulnerability as a whole to individual acts of violence and mayhem" (54). Despite his doubt and fear, Harry

¹¹ I am grateful to Professor Rachel Falconer for pointing out that the heroism in the series is based on fellowship and it is eventually democratised, as every member in Dumbledore and Harry's party contributes to defeating Voldemort and his gang. Also see Nel 49.

¹² Roni Natov suggests that Harry has attracted readers of different generations because of his duality, his leading an extraordinary life as an adventurous hero yet possessing traits that are common to most people. See Natov 310-27. Deborah de Rosa argues that Harry does not "re-create himself as a powerful and oppressive, Dudley-like figure," even though he suddenly becomes resourceful and powerful in the magic world: "Instead, [he] gauges his footing along with his peers to find his place among them, not above them" (174).

¹³ Cf. Terence Blacker's argument about Harry Potter as a suitable hero for contemporary society: "Potter [...] is the perfect hero for the late 1990s, a time when readers are looking for reassurance and a certain nannyish moral certainty. Unwittingly, Rowling has invented the perfect protagonist and set-up for the age."

manages to “do *something*” to redress the chaos in his life and his society (54).

However, Harry is more an alternative kind of hero than a faulty one in terms of the heroic conventions. Instead of being individualistic and self-centred like the would-be conventional hero, Voldemort, Harry chooses unselfish sacrifice, and he eventually earns his agency and independence, protects his friends and saves the magic world.¹⁴ Harry refuses to compromise his concerns for suffering human beings and to privilege the task of destroying evil and saving the world, as shown in the episode where he gives up the urgent task to destroy another of Voldemort’s Horcruxes and goes to rescue his long-standing school enemies, Draco Malfoy and his acolytes, who are trapped in the fire they themselves have caused: “[Harry] swooped as low as he dared over the marauding monsters of flame to try to find them [Malfoy, Crabbe or Goyle] . . . what a terrible way to die . . . he had never wanted this” (*The Deathly Hallows* 508). Because Harry is ordinary yet empathetic, he cannot bear to sacrifice others’ welfare and life to make himself successful, even when it comes to those he dislikes. As his conscience remains clear, his ultimate triumph is greater and more untarnished. Harry’s courageous defence of humanity and human beings can thus serve as a corrective to the progressive myth, which has long taken root in most developed societies or perhaps, in our own upbringing, that success is something worth pursuing at any cost. The alternative heroism illustrated by Harry indicates that there could be an alternative way to treat life: one can achieve marvellous things in life, even if one privileges humanity and empathy over the determination to reach success or “greater good”; a hero can protect his people more when he sacrifices none of them.

Harry’s alternative heroism can also be regarded as a corrective to consumerist culture in which an identity can be asserted through owning certain commodities. Harry’s ability to see beyond signs and icons prevents him from committing the same folly as Voldemort, who dies in pursuing the forms of the rightness of power, such as a prophecy that proclaims his uniqueness, a ritual for his rebirth, and rarities for his Horcruxes, to elevate

¹⁴ The hero’s willingness to sacrifice himself for his people may stem from the tradition of Christianity. John Steadman suggests that in the canonical epic, *Paradise Lost*, John Milton combines Classic and Christian ethics and complicates the concept of heroism (Steadman xix).

his self-importance.¹⁵ Unlike Voldemort, Harry is not bound by forms and symbols to make himself prominent. His choosing “not to act” thus can modify the prophecy about him and Voldemort. This ability is equally important when Harry relocates himself in the more mundane magic society, which, like the Muggle (or non-magic) world, is saturated with commodities, advertisements and sensational news coverage. As Karin E. Westman avers, in contrast with Dudley’s insatiable desire for material goods, Harry manifests circumspection and frugality even though he can afford many personal items in the similarly materially excessive magic world (310-11).¹⁶

Furthermore, instead of just owning them, Harry extends and explores the significance of his belongings, which, in turn, leads him to a richer, spiritual world. Harry’s invisible cloak, for example, is not just a handy tool for his clandestine investigations into school mysteries. As a family legacy, the cloak connects Harry with his deceased parents and family past. As the cloak further turns out to be one of the three Deathly Hallows, which were once used to outwit Death as recorded in a ballad, “The Tale of Three Brothers,” Harry comes to grasp a greater historical picture of the magic world, learning that most magic families have been somehow connected with one another in the ancient past. Even if they are deadly enemies now, Harry and Voldemort possibly share the same origin, as Harry inherits the third Deathly Hallow and Voldemort owns the second, the resurrection stone (*The Deathly Hallows* 332). Giving up the first Deathly Hallow, the Elder Wand, Harry shows that he has no interest in collecting magical items to enhance his importance. Instead, seeing through them, he deepens his knowledge of the past and the present, which helps him to make more positive connections with others in society.

Harry may also become an example for readers to distance themselves from patriarchal or monologic readings of the series and to form their own interpretations. Rowling continuously demonstrates that Harry finds himself

¹⁵ In this respect, Rowling seems to protest against Tucker’s argument that Harry’s adventure attracts millions of young readers because it also mirrors a video game they might enjoy. Cf. Tucker 231-32. As Nel suggests, although Rowling provides many magical items in her series, she often “carefully alter[s] them to suit the plot . . . [So, her] plots are always grounded in characters, not gimmicks” (33-34).

¹⁶ I agree that Rowling’s fictional world is modelled on a consumerist society and is thus invested with a sense of realism and contemporariness. But it does not follow that Rowling curries favour with her readers by satisfying their desires to own many personal belongings, for Harry himself does not seem to enjoy spending and purchasing.

more capable than he expected when his mentor, Dumbledore, is absent. In the episode where he meets the deceased Dumbledore and Voldemort's split soul in limbo, instead of being annihilated by death or "the unformed nothingness," Harry creates a chance for himself to return to life, transforming the threshold of death into a train station, a junction where a passenger like him can decide where he would like to go (*The Deathly Hallows* 570, 565). At this moment, Dumbledore defers to Harry, suggesting that he needs no patriarchal approval to host his own life "party": "My dear boy, I have no idea. This is, as they say, your party" (570). This episode thus suggests that readers, like Harry, have no less capacity for making meaning out of the *Harry Potter* series and suggestively, their own lives.

Returning from the limbo-like train station, Harry is reborn as a purged hero, who will hence have an independent life, as he symbolically leaves behind both the small, repulsive child and the deceased Dumbledore. He recognises his bonds with his past and other predecessors, be they good or evil, but learns not to be bound by them. The repulsive, unredeemable child is not just Voldemort's split, much reduced soul; it also mirrors the unhappy memory of childhood Harry similarly had, which could have turned Harry into a negative adult like Voldemort, if he had not left it behind. On the other hand, by sympathising with Dumbledore and understanding what he has paid for his old obsession with power, Harry realises that by seeking different aims in life, he can avoid reliving Dumbledore's remorse. Harry thus is able to mend the once broken relationship with Dumbledore and bid a fond farewell to him. Harry is eventually transformed into a hero, but he achieves his chivalry and independence by choosing to be different from his patriarchal, heroic role models. Together with his ability to see beyond signs and to empathise with suffering people, Harry's alternative heroism can be inspiring to contemporary readers, for Harry illustrates a possibility of confronting the rapidly changing, increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world with a more positive attitude.

Through Harry, Rowling suggests a positive pattern of how people can embed themselves in a world they come to belong to: how they can more actively engage themselves in the society and culture they are forging. By presenting Harry as an alternative kind of hero, Rowling challenges her readers' preconceptions of traditional, patriarchal heroism. Whether or not it becomes a literary classic, the *Harry Potter* series influenced millions of

readers in the decade between 1997 and 2007. Rather than simply being acted upon by Pottermania, readers can share the responsibility of enacting and contributing to the series' global influence, as Rowling reflects the heroism she creates in postmodern context. Instead of dismissing writing for young people as sub-literary, we may choose the alternative of exploring what it conveys to us, why we read it and how we can be inspired by it. As Rowling has demonstrated in her *Harry Potter* series, it helps us be mindful of the culture we are creating now.

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