

Reading

New Critical
Essays

Harry Potter Again

Edited by
Giselle Liza Anatol



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PRAEGER

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Introduction

When my first collection of scholarship on J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series—*Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays* (2003)—was published, many readers had been finished with book IV, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, for months, and were eagerly anticipating the next installment in the seven-book sequence. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was released in summer 2003 to the usual eye-popping fanfare and earth-shattering sales; it was followed by *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in 2005 and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in 2007. As they finished the last page of *Hallows*, I suspect that many fans of Rowling's series reacted as I did: with a start of panic at the thought, "What am I supposed to do now?"

Many readers confessed to be suffering from withdrawal until summer 2008, when—on Harry's and Rowling's July 31 birthday—it was announced that *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* would be published on December 4. The title comes from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where Albus Dumbledore leaves Hermione Granger a copy of the collection of children's tales in his will. Rowling crafted seven duplicates of the handwritten illustrated work, giving six to friends and supporters; the seventh was auctioned at Sotheby's in London for a record-breaking £1,950,000 (US\$4 million), to be donated to Children's High Level Group, the European children's charity cofounded by Rowling in 2005.¹ The successful buyer at the auction, Amazon.com, allowed readers to access the work through its website, and produced a collector's edition resembling the original; *Harry Potter* publishers Bloomsbury and Scholastic will release a cheaper edition of the tales, "translated from the original runes by Hermione Granger" and featuring an introduction and illustrations by Rowling.

Besides noting Hermione's participation in the project in a July 2008 statement, the Potter author claimed that the new text would include "notes by

Professor Albus Dumbledore, which appear by generous permission of the Hogwarts Headmasters' Archive."² Rowling effectively blurs the lines between author and character, creator and creation in this comment—much like she blurs the lines between the “real” and “fantasy” worlds throughout the Harry Potter series. Whereas in book I, Hogwarts, and the magical realm seem quite distinct from the normalcy-obsessed suburbia of Harry's upbringing in the Dursley household, by the time one reaches *Order of the Phoenix*, the dementors infiltrate Little Whinging, triggering “a breach in the great, invisible wall that divided the relentlessly nonmagical world of Privet Drive and the world beyond. Harry's two lives had somehow become fused.”³ In *Half-Blood Prince*, Voldemort himself enters nonmagical Britain, destroying the Brockdale Bridge and killing masses of nonmagical humans. And on the other side of the alleged divide, the secure boundaries of Hogwarts continue to deteriorate after Dumbledore's death. Ron states, “Everywhere's the same now,” revealing the eradication of borders between safe and unsafe, private and public, inside and outside, even home (or home-like spaces) and away.⁴

On an individual level, Harry straddles many borders throughout the series. His age renders him a child for the majority of the narrative, whereas his skills, the problems he is required to solve, and his encounters with malignant forces suggest he is ready to be an adult. He occupies the position of both student and teacher as he combats Professor Umbridge's bureaucratic rules by secretly instructing the members of Dumbledore's Army in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry and Voldemort pierce each other's consciousness—the borders of self—on numerous occasions, perhaps most frighteningly when Voldemort possesses Harry at the end of *Phoenix*. And Harry enters the intriguing liminal space between life and death in the mystical King's Cross Station of book VII.

After the final battle in *Deathly Hallows* and the defeat of Voldemort's forces, Rowling suggests a complete erasure of social boundaries and hierarchies in that “nobody was sitting according to House anymore: All were jumbled together, teachers and pupils, ghosts and parents, centaurs and house-elves.”⁵ Even in front of the headmaster's study, the gargoyle does not require a password; it merely groans, “Feel free” when Harry asks if he, Ron, and Hermione can enter. Some might argue that the author encourages a radical reordering of not only the magical world, but the world in which readers live and are often constrained by hierarchical systems that privilege various groups on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, religion, occupation, title, or whatever it may be. Others might point out, however, that Rowling does not sustain this radical social vision. In the epilogue of the series, we see Harry's son Albus worrying about the sorting procedures as he is about to go off to Hogwarts for the first time. Clearly, a reinstatement of the practice of sorting the students into Houses signals the reestablishment of certain norms.

As I argued in *Reading Harry Potter*, despite the claims of well-known figures such as William Safire, Roger Sutton, and Jack Zipes, Rowling's series is critically significant and should be taken as seriously by adult critics as

youthful fans. Children are not simply mesmerized by the plots and excitement of popular adventure tales; the future thinkers and leaders of societies worldwide are readily absorbing the social values and cultural mores imbedded within the literature they read. Even if, as Lana Whited argues, Rowling had not so successfully crumbled the stereotype that “works of great literary or artistic value do not enjoy commercial success,” or, in other words, that “commercial success and literary value are mutually exclusive,”⁶ the sheer popularity of the Harry Potter series merits a rigorous exploration of the texts. And thus, when, in the world of literary criticism and postcolonial studies Edward Said asks, “How does Orientalism”—or, I would add, *any* systematic way of thinking about the world—“transmit or reproduce itself from one epoch to another?”⁷ critics in those fields often neglect the most obvious answer: through children’s literature.

We find this concept brought to life in Rowling’s *Deathly Hallows*. Hermione argues that “The Tale of the Three Brothers” contains no explicit reference to the objects known as the Deathly Hallows, to which true-believer Xenophilus Lovegood retorts, “[O]f course not. . . . That is a children’s tale, told to amuse rather than to instruct.”⁸ As the contributors to this volume and many other scholars will attest, children’s books—the Harry Potter novels among them—can certainly instruct and amuse at the same time. Children are inculcated with the moral, behavioral, and social codes of their time through a variety of “texts”: their caregivers’ lectures as well as urban legends shared on the playground; television programs as well as magazine advertisements; song lyrics and films; textbooks and comic books. In Rowling’s novel, Ron astutely notes that children’s stories such as that of the three brothers are one example “of those things you tell kids to teach them lessons. . . . ‘Don’t go looking for trouble, don’t pick fights, don’t go messing around with stuff that’s best left alone!’”⁹ The themes and “lessons” described in the current collection are often more subtle, but no less powerful in the messages they have the power to convey.

Metaphors for reading come up in the series yet again in the fifth book during Harry’s Occlumency lessons. This skill is meant to protect the young protagonist against Voldemort’s expertise at Legilimency—the ability to read the minds and emotions of others. Rowling’s creation of the term Legilimency, with its root in the Latin word *legere*, which means “to read,” heightens her reader’s consciousness of the power involved in reading and penetrating a text. Professor Snape berates Harry: “The mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure. Thoughts are not etched on the inside of skulls, to be perused by any invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing.”¹⁰ Texts, too, can be complicated, and the exchange provides an excellent model for anyone hoping to engage in an interpretation of the Potter series.

Although when I first began planning *Reading Harry Potter* there was very little analytical interrogation of Rowling’s work, the past decade has seen a surge in literary criticism and cultural studies on the narratives: Lana Whited’s *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, Elizabeth Heilman’s *Harry Potter’s World* and

Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter, and Mercedes Lackey and Leah Wilson's *Mapping the World of Harry Potter*, to name just a few. The contributors of *Reading Harry Potter Again* and I are excited to enter into the existing critical conversation in several ways: not only by engaging with the writers of the mentioned texts, but also with each other, and with our writing Selves of five years past. Brycchan Carey, Lisa Damour, Ximena Gallardo C. and C. Jason Smith, Margaret Oakes, Rebecca Stephens, and I are delighted to have the opportunity to continue the strands we began in the earlier collection, re-addressing and revising arguments made there in light of the completion of Rowling's series. Tracy Bealer, Trish Donaher and James Okapal, Peg Duthie, Leslee Friedman, Lisa Hopkins, Michael Johnson, Chantel Lavoie, and Shama Rangwalla provide the new voices and new perspectives to some of the concepts introduced in the former volume and to some new topics as well.

Damour approaches the series with her expertise as a clinical child psychologist, and places the character of Harry Potter in a behavioral context. She demonstrates how, by depicting Harry as in the throes of emotional pain, Rowling creates a young protagonist who, far from acting abnormally irrational and melodramatic, is a realistic portrait of a normally developing teenager.

Stephens and Duthie both consider the radically different impact of the Potter narratives on various religious communities. In *Reading Harry Potter*, Stephens explored challenges to the Potter books as linked to anxieties about authority and hierarchy among conservative Christians; in *Reading Harry Potter Again*, she continues her examination of how the series has been interpreted as "anti-Church"—and this despite obvious spiritual signification in the novels, including Harry's search for the Deathly Hallows, a type of Holy Grail. Stephens tracks shifts in the sources of attempted censorship, arguing that a more conservative political climate in the United States has actually led to a *decreased* number of challenges. Duthie, on the other hand, probes how ministers from various congregations positively invoke Rowling's novels in their sermons to establish common cultural connections with their members.

Donaher, Okapal, and Hopkins investigate how the Potter series presents notions of destiny and free will. The existence of Professor Trelawney's prophecy regarding Voldemort's demise causes Donaher and Okapal to contemplate the validity of Harry Potter's heroic status: if Harry does not *choose* his actions, but merely *reacts* in accordance with some preordained plan, can he truly be considered a hero? Their chapter engages with the philosophical concepts of determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism to investigate how Rowling's series presents notions of fate and choice. Hopkins, a literary scholar, compares Harry to canonical figures such as King Arthur and Prince Hal from Shakespeare's Henry plays—the former as a prime example of predestination; the latter, the emblem of independent thought and action whose choices enable personal growth.

Chantel Lavoie, a former contributor, shifts her topic from the sorting ritual and the traits associated with each of the Hogwarts dormitory Houses to a

consideration of lies and deceitfulness. Both of her chapters, however, interrogate how Rowling subverts binaries and challenges traditional notions, such as truth-telling as inherently “good” and lying as intrinsically immoral—an important concept especially since the concept of “truth” becomes murky as the series progresses. In book VI, is Harry lying when he soothes, “Yes . . . yes, this’ll make it stop” while tipping the poisoned potion into Dumbledore’s mouth in “The Cave” chapter? In book VII, Harry assumes that written texts contain essential truths when, looking at a copy of Rita Skeeter’s tell-all biography of Dumbledore, he thinks: “Now he would know all the things that Dumbledore had never thought it worth telling him.”¹¹ He must learn, however, to account for personal bias on the parts of both the reader and the writer; written documents must be interpreted, and not just taken as fact, whether they are tabloid pieces, history textbooks, biographies, or autobiographies.

Correspondingly, when in *Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore informs Harry, “I think you will find [my memory] both rich in detail and satisfyingly accurate,”¹² the reader who recognizes the unreliability of remembrances must question the veracity of this statement. Memories may be fixed in the mind of remembering subject, but that does not mean they are necessarily *true*; they can be tempered by the passage of time, one’s current mood and circumstance, one’s perspective on the recalled event, and one’s relationship with the recollected participants or the person to whom the reminiscence is conveyed. Readers might recall that in the sixth novel, Voldemort plants a false memory in Morfin Gaunt’s mind after using his wand to kill the Riddle family; Professor Slughorn’s shame causes him to modify his own memories of conversations with the schoolboy Tom Riddle; Hokey’s memories are distorted to cause her to recall putting poison into her mistress’s drink. Does this mean that Dumbledore—an eminently wise man, and an old man—must be speaking tongue-in-cheek? Or has Rowling’s establishment of Dumbledore as a supremely heroic figure, along with his ability to use Legilimency to pull the “real” memories from weak or altered minds, plus the young reader’s likely lack of perspective on the unreliability of memory, reasserted a false binary of “true” versus “false” texts?

The next three chapters explicitly pursue the social issues of gender, race, and class in the Potter books. Gallardo C. and Smith describe how upon reading the second half of Rowling’s series, with its apparent focus on Harry’s connections to his father and emphasis on heteronormative paradigms, they at first believed that their argument from *Reading Harry Potter*—that Harry is actually identified with the feminine more than conventional masculinity in the novels—would be undermined. However a closer reading of the narratives led them to conclude that Rowling’s work actually unravels rigidly defined binaries of “male” and “female,” challenging common conceptions of what it means to be gendered in contemporary society.

My chapter continues to push a reading of Rowling’s narratives as harkening back to much earlier children’s books, especially stories published before the fall of the British empire. Although the overt message of the Potter series is

antiracist, a conservative colonial ideology peeks forth in the author's allegorical renditions of racial "Others." Scholars like Karin Westman have asserted that "The multi-ethnic Hogwarts, with its students such as Cho Chang, Pavarti Patil, Lee Jordan . . . and top-notch black Quidditch player Angelina Johnson, hardly offers a rosy-hued return to a child-book Edwardian past."¹³ I would counter, however, that these characters are hardly examples of social and cultural progress: they are portrayed in strongly assimilationist terms that render their cultural uniqueness all-but-invisible except for, in a couple of cases, their names. Further, Rowling's representations of the giants, centaurs, and goblins echo the tropes of the brutish (American) Indian, the Noble Savage, and the sneaky "Oriental" in ways that undermine the antiracist message of the series.

Rangwala uses a neo-Marxist approach to delve into issues of socioeconomic class in the novels. She asserts that Rowling's narratives work to produce and reproduce traditional middle-class values, including privileging the intelligentsia and critiquing the rampant consumption of a newer middle class. Oakes, also a former contributor, considers questions of inclusion and social exclusivity as well: she posits a reading of the books based on conventional definitions of alchemy. She identifies the Death Eaters' desires to see magic as an innate skill, with secret processes much like alchemy, and their fear of magic as a science, open to be learned and practiced by anyone, as related to their yearnings to preserve an elitist hierarchy of power in the wizarding world.

Carey's and Bealer's chapters fit together seamlessly; both address Rowling's encouragement of political participation in her young readers. Carey again takes up the question of the house-elves and their bondage; he argues that although Harry's struggle with Voldemort provides a productive site for the discussion of a democratic society's reactions to elitism, totalitarianism, and racism, Rowling's treatment of the house-elf issue becomes less and less radical as the series progresses. Nevertheless, he demonstrates how Rowling continues to tap into certain literary and historical tropes that suggest that she sees the elf/slavery problem as inseparable from larger political issues. Bealer focuses on a single Potter novel—*Order of the Phoenix*—to analyze the parallels between adult and student resistance movements against authoritarian regimes. Exploring how Harry's interactions with corrupted political institutions influence his existential conflict with the Dark Lord, Bealer proposes that the emotions of love and compassion are privileged as paramount to political strategy and agency.

The final two chapters take distinctly intertextual approaches to Rowling's work. Friedman reframes the processes of reading and writing, once seen as, respectively, passive and active, to examine how major female characters in the series access written texts and power. She compellingly asserts that various characters' success is predicated on their ability to read intertextually or between and among a variety of written materials. Johnson's chapter details the "magical" transfiguration of one text into another: Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* into Alfonso Cuarón's film of the same name. Johnson

surveys how several key themes get transformed in the process, as well as how the film fits into multiple cinematic traditions, from the classic Universal horror films of the 1930s to the French New Wave films of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore tells Harry, "That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing."¹⁴ Unfortunately, Voldemort is not the only one. And although this collection of essays cannot instill the values of uncompromising justice, love, loyalty, and kindness in our readers, we anticipate that our work will help readers of all types to value children's literature beyond its ability to entertain and come to a greater understanding of Rowling's work and the society in which we live.

NOTES

1. Rowling's donations to charities are well documented: £500,000 to Britain's National Council for One Parent Families in 2000; the proceeds of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch through the Ages* to Comic Relief UK, for AIDS education and uniting war-torn families in the world's most impoverished nations, and so on.
2. Shannon Maughan, "Rowling's Rare Book to Hit Shelves in December." *Publishers Weekly*. July 31, 2008 <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6583159.html?nid=2788>>.
3. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Scholastic, 2003), 37.
4. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York: Scholastic, 2005), 650.
5. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Scholastic, 2007), 745.
6. Lana A. Whited, "Introduction—Harry Potter: From Craze to Classic?" *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 7.
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 15.
8. Rowling, *Hallows*, 409.
9. Rowling, *Hallows*, 414.
10. Rowling, *Phoenix*, 530.
11. Rowling, *Hallows*, 353.
12. Rowling, *Prince*, 263.
13. Karin E. Westman, "Specters of Thatcherism: Contemporary British Culture in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*. Ed. Lana A. Whited (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004): 305–28, 307.
14. Rowling, *Hallows*, 709.

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Harry the Teenager: Muggle Themes in a Magical Adolescence

Lisa Damour

The last three volumes of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series carry us into the heart of Harry's adolescence; Harry turns fifteen at the beginning of book V, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, and nears eighteen as the series comes to its close. In an earlier essay, I proposed that young readers are likely attracted to elements in Rowling's first four books that reflect the dynamic, unconscious elements of preadolescent psychological development.¹ Here, I argue that the last three books of the Potter saga not only spin a complex tale of the triumph of good over evil, but do so while exploring some central aspects of normal psychological development during adolescence proper. The story is a fantastic, magical tale with plenty to entertain adolescents and adults alike; it also offers a rich portrait of what nonmagical adolescence looks and feels like. Teenage readers likely find many reflections of their own experiences in Rowling's last three books. Adult readers who tune in to the more subtle aspects of Rowling's narrative stand to learn a lot about the complex relationships between teenagers and the adults who surround them.

Many elements in the last three books of the Harry Potter series hold an obvious appeal to the teenage reader. The arc of Ginny Weasley's tale—from having a giddy crush on Harry in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* to becoming his girlfriend, then wife—surely delights any girl who ever pined for her big brother's best friend, or any older boy for that matter. This is no small club. In general, twelve- to thirteen-year-old girls are much more romantically inclined than their male age-mates and tend to channel their ambitions toward slightly older boys. Indeed, the "boy band" division of the music industry has profited massively from creating singing groups whose looks and lyrics are marketed straight at the romantically bereft young adolescent girl.

If Ginny's tale resonates with the girl who daydreams about emerging from adolescence as a witty dynamo who walks off with the most popular boy in the world, Neville Longbottom's story appeals to any boy who hopes to go from zero to hero. In the early Harry Potter books, Neville is a sad, bumbling nerd whose academic strengths are limited to herbology. He blooms in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, when he joins Dumbledore's Army. From there, he fights side by side with Harry in the Department of Mysteries, leads the resistance when Hogwarts is taken over by Death Eaters, and renders Voldemort mortal by decapitating his pet snake, Nagini. Our last look at Neville finds him "surrounded by a knot of fervent admirers."²

Rowling's creation and destruction of Dolores Umbridge is also understandably appealing to teenage readers. A highly sadistic character sporting a thin veneer of sickly sweetness, Umbridge represents a "type" with whom teen readers are undoubtedly familiar: the self-satisfied adult who freely abuses the power differential between grown-ups and children in order to serve her own needs. First appearing in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Umbridge cruelly punishes Harry for insisting that Voldemort has returned, a fact vehemently denied by the Ministry of Magic for whom Umbridge works. In the end, Rowling more than evens the score with the punishments that befall Umbridge—she continually likens Umbridge to a toad,³ has her beaten by centaurs whom she has publicly insulted, and ultimately has her tried and imprisoned for her cruelty to Muggle-borns.

The curriculum in Umbridge's first Defense Against the Dark Arts class must also confirm for teenage readers that Rowling "gets it." Despite massive evidence that Voldemort is alive, gaining followers, and on the march, Umbridge insists that the Hogwarts students do not need to be prepared or encouraged to actually *use* defensive spells:

"Now, it is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through your examination, which, after all, is what school is all about. . .

"And what good's theory going to be in the real world?" said Harry loudly, his fist in the air again.

Professor Umbridge looked up.

"This is school, Mr. Potter, not the real world," she added softly.

"So we're not supposed to be prepared for what's waiting out there?"

"There is nothing waiting out there, Mr. Potter."⁴

This scene must seem startlingly familiar to any adolescent who has ever attended an abstinence-only sex education class.⁵ Even in classrooms that provide comprehensive sex education, teens consistently find that it's hard to get adults to talk realistically about what's "out there." This is not to say that the general adolescent attitude toward sexual activity matches the Hogwarts students' attitude toward fighting Death Eaters. Rather, it is to say that real teenagers

and Rowling's teenagers share the misery of having to deal with adults who deny the reality, and risks, of that which lies plainly all around them.⁶

In addition to including plots with obvious appeal to teenagers the last three volumes in the Harry Potter series include subtle narrative threads that speak to some of the central challenges of adolescence. Harry's erratic emotionality, complex relationship with Dumbledore, and precipitous maturation at the end of the series display Rowling's deep and unusual appreciation for the less-than-obvious psychological strands of normal adolescent development.

Rowling understands that adolescence, by its nature, involves psychological distress. In the first four volumes of the Harry Potter series—Harry's eleventh to fourteenth years—Harry is a relatively mild-mannered boy, especially considering his extraordinary life circumstances. Harry's mood changes significantly in *Order of the Phoenix*. Featuring Harry as a fifteen-year-old, hardly a chapter of *Phoenix* goes by in which Harry fails to openly defy an authority figure, explode in rage at his friends, bicker with his Quidditch teammates, suffer from tormenting nightmares, make destructive choices, feel isolated and bereft, or seriously consider dropping out of school. Even when his outlook brightens somewhat in the following year, Harry's mood still ranges from kind and earnest to irascible and bellicose.

Through all the fireworks, Rowling never suggests that Harry is out of touch or unbalanced. In this, she sets herself apart from many contemporary adults who are increasingly unwilling to view adolescent distress as in some way developmentally essential. As part of a broader cultural war against negative emotions, even normal adolescent behavior has now become grounds for medical intervention; alarming statistics testify to the rising use of psychotropic medications to tame the emotions of children and teens. Antidepressant prescriptions for teenagers nearly doubled from 1997 to 2002, notwithstanding FDA black box warnings that some antidepressant drugs are associated with adolescent suicide.⁷ Antipsychotic prescriptions for children and teens more than doubled in roughly the same period despite the fact that these powerful drugs are not well tested in children under the age of eighteen.⁸ Prescriptions for Ritalin, a popular stimulant, increased almost threefold during the 1990s, and as many as 6 percent of American children are now treated with psychostimulant medications.⁹

To be sure, psychotropic medications *can* be a critical component in the effective treatment of some children and adolescents. Antidepressants and antipsychotics have the potential to be life saving when carefully prescribed to properly evaluated patients. The failure to consider psychostimulants when treating a child with bona fide attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is malpractice at best. Yet, the rapid rise of prescriptions for psychotropic medications for children and teenagers indicates a trend toward substituting diagnoses and medication for the thoughtful assessment of legitimate, and often developmentally normal, sources of psychological pain.¹⁰

In 1958, Anna Freud, Sigmund's daughter and an influential theorist in her own right, wrote the following:

I take it that it is normal for an adolescent to behave for a considerable length of time in an inconsistent and unpredictable manner; to fight his impulses and accept them; . . . to love his parents and to hate them; to revolt against them and be dependent on them; . . . to be more idealistic, artistic, generous, and unselfish than he will ever be again, but also the opposite: self-centered, egoistic, calculating. Such fluctuations and extreme opposites would be deemed highly abnormal at any other time of life. At this time they may signify no more than that an adult structure of personality takes a long time to emerge, that the individual in question does not cease to experiment and is in no hurry to close down on possibilities.¹¹

Today, heavy-duty diagnoses, like bipolar disorder, and heavy-duty drugs, like lithium, are used more frequently to categorize and suppress "symptoms" that Anna Freud described, nearly fifty years ago, as the typical face of adolescent development. To her credit, Rowling gives us a Harry who matches Anna Freud's description (assuming, of course, that we substitute "parental figures" for "parents"). The reader and Rowling understand that Harry—in all his anger and despondence—makes sense. We do not question the basis of Harry's moodiness, but see it as the expectable outward sign of his painful past and conflicted present. For example, Harry's reunion with Ron and Hermione after a summer at the Dursleys' takes on a striking new tone in *Order of the Phoenix*. Rather than settling joyfully into his old friendships, Harry rails at his friends and accuses them of deliberately keeping him in the dark.¹² Even when Harry is at his most outrageous his struggle is depicted throughout as a meaningful, reasonable response to his circumstances and a catalyst for his personal growth. Rowling balances Harry's tantrum with a tender description of its source: "Every bitter and resentful thought that Harry had had in the past month was pouring out of him; his frustration with the lack of news, the hurt that they had all been together without him, his fury at being followed and not told about it: All the feelings he was half-ashamed of finally burst their boundaries."¹³ Teenage readers are likely comforted by Rowling's clear recognition that it is not "crazy" for teenagers to have intense, conflicted, even bewildering emotions in response to the real and stressful challenges associated with growing up.

Rowling explores two other elements of adolescent development that are rarely acknowledged between parents and teenagers yet likely resonate with teenage readers: the influence of parents' *own* adolescent experiences on how they approach the task of parenting their teenage children and the sudden maturation that typically occurs when teens develop the ability to see their parents as having free standing psychologies that predate—and operate independently of—the parent-teen relationship.

Throughout book VII, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry struggles with a painful question: if Dumbledore knew that his own death was imminent, and knew that he was leaving Harry with the life-threatening task

of vanquishing Voldemort, why didn't Dumbledore lead Harry to the Deathly Hallows, the three magical objects that make their owner immortal? Feeling hopelessly stuck, Harry becomes incensed: "'Look what he asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again! And again! And don't expect me to explain everything, just trust me blindly, trust that I know what I'm doing, trust me even though I don't trust you! Never the whole truth! Never!'"¹⁴ Harry's confusion about Dumbledore's silence deepens when it becomes clear that Dumbledore not only failed to *lead* Harry to the Hallows (as Harry originally assumed), but in fact failed to simply *give* Harry the Resurrection Stone and the Elder Wand, which were in his possession, and which, in combination with Harry's Invisibility Cloak, would have made the protagonist the owner of all three Hallows. When Harry meets Dumbledore in the limbo of King's Cross he asks:

"Why did you have to make it so difficult?"

Dumbledore's smile was tremulous.

[...] "I was afraid that your hot head might dominate your good heart. I was scared that, if presented outright with the facts and those tempting objects, you might seize the Hallows as I did, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons. If you laid hands on them, I wanted you to possess them safely."¹⁵

Here, Dumbledore refers to the pivotal events of his own seventeenth year. Upon graduating as the finest student ever to attend Hogwarts, Dumbledore had no choice but to return home to care for his orphaned sister, Ariana. At King's Cross, Dumbledore explains to Harry that bitter resentment of his situation made him vulnerable to becoming "inflamed" by Grindelwald's belief that ownership of the Deathly Hallows would help them become the "glorious young leaders of the revolution" giving wizards power over the Muggle-born.¹⁶ Dumbledore's association with Grindelwald sets into motion a chain of events that culminate with the accidental murder—perhaps by Dumbledore—of Ariana.

Ariana's death haunts Dumbledore for the rest of his life. While draining the goblet in the cave where Voldemort hid Merope's locket, Dumbledore revisits his sister's death: "'It's all my fault, all my fault,' he sobbed. 'Please make it stop, I know I did wrong, oh please make it stop and I'll never, never again'."¹⁷ Dumbledore's shame about his adolescent mistake is so intense that he refuses to become Minister of Magic, fearing that he cannot be trusted with power, and he fails to give Harry information that might have eased Harry's mind, if not his mission.

In this thread, Rowling captures a prevalent dynamic between parents and their adolescent children: the parents' tendency to perceive their children through the scrim of their own adolescence. Two forces contribute to this common state of affairs. First, children typically become quite a bit more private when they enter adolescence. This often begins with the twelve- to thirteen-year-old closing her bedroom door to do the same, usually innocuous, things she used to do with the door open. It extends over time to sharing far more

information with one's friends than one's parents and sometimes to living "in the home in the attitude of a boarder, usually a very inconsiderate one so far as the older and younger family members are concerned."¹⁸ Teenagers create a blank space with their privacy, and parents inevitably fill in the blank with memories from their own adolescence. Parents who are fearful that their children will make irreparable mistakes during adolescence—as most are—find themselves filling in the blank with memories that are now quite frightening. Fathers recall how eager they and their friends were to make sexual progress with girls; mothers recall dicey scenarios involving unsupervised parties with drugs and drinking.¹⁹ Add to this the reality that teenage behavior *is* often quite risky. Even if teens aren't telling their parents exactly what happened last Saturday night, parents can usually come up with enough information to fan the flame of selective memory.

Ideally, parents would draw on recollections of their own adolescence to empathize with their teenager's experiences and enforce fair but firm behavioral expectations. Yet, quite commonly, parents are ashamed of aspects of their adolescence and shame—one of the most slippery and toxic of all emotions—tends to get in the way of parenting in the same way that it interferes with Dumbledore's care of Harry. Rather than viewing the teenager for who he is, the parent treats the teenager as if he is on the verge of repeating the parent's own mistakes. Although the parent's anxiety comes from a loving place, it is experienced by real teens in the same way it is experienced by Harry: for reasons that aren't clear, the parent seems not to trust the child, especially in certain arenas. Unfortunately, this is generally an unconscious process. In other words, it is a rare parent who is fully aware that his distrust of his teenager derives from past events the parent feels bad about. Instead, the parent often feels justified in his suspicions and takes one of two tacks. Either he becomes entrenched in his refusal to get into the details of certain teenage topics, or he repeatedly warns the teenager of the risks associated with particular adolescent behaviors. Either way, the teenager feels hurt and bewildered.

For the most part, teens and their parents survive this misunderstanding. Otherwise good parenting can compensate for the presence of a few shameful memories, and sometimes, parents balance each other out. The father who can't stand to have his daughter go on a date is tamed by the mother who knows that the girl can take good care of herself; the mother who is fearful of letting her daughter attend a party is reassured by the dad who points out that "she's a careful kid." Ultimately, Harry makes sense of Dumbledore's strange omissions when he gets a full account of Dumbledore's painful early experiences and the pair ends the series on the warm terms they enjoyed in the early novels. This last point ties to a broader theme in the final three volumes: that Harry only truly "grows up" when he understands the early experiences and attendant psychologies of the critical adults in his world.

In the second half of the series, Harry and the reader learn the developmental histories of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape, the two adults with whom

Harry maintains the most intense—and intensely conflicted—relationships. We learn that Dumbledore’s inscrutability derives, in no small part, from his painful and complex past as noted earlier. With regard to Snape, the first six volumes in the series lead the reader believe that Snape dislikes Harry because Harry—with his “boy who lived” status and daring hijinks—reminds Snape of James Potter, the popular boy who bullied Snape during their Hogwarts days. However, in *Deathly Hallows*, we learn that Snape loved Harry’s mother Lily from the time they were children and that he lived out his days tortured by his own accidental role in her death. In the end, it becomes clear to Harry and the reader that Snape’s poor treatment of Harry may have little or nothing to do with Harry’s behavior (which, in actuality, is quite *unlike* James²⁰); Snape persecutes Harry because he is the spitting image of the man who ran off with the love of his life.

Armed with insight into Dumbledore and Snape’s early lives, Harry suddenly, and completely, grows up. As Voldemort and Harry circle each other in their final meeting, Voldemort accuses Harry of being a “little boy”²¹ with a “childish dream,”²² but Harry makes it clear that he is no child. Harry tells Voldemort that he “won’t be killing anyone else tonight”²³ and goes on to educate Voldemort about the truth behind Dumbledore’s death, Snape’s loyalty, and the ownership of the Elder Wand. In a final appeal, it’s Harry who exhorts Voldemort to “Be a man.”²⁴

When Harry gains an objective understanding of the men who have “raised” him, he crosses the Rubicon that divides teenagers from true adults. Ideally, at some point in their late adolescence, teenagers come to appreciate that not every aspect of their parents’ behavior should be taken personally.²⁵ Adolescents mature precipitously when their lifelong and developmentally normal egocentrism gives way to an ability to take an objective view of their parents’ freestanding psychologies. For example, a daughter who was angered and hurt by her mother’s persistent snooping might suddenly realize that her mother noses into everyone’s business, and that she snoops not because she truly suspects she’ll find anything, but because she’s lonely. Even behavior that appears to be directed specifically at the child, such as Snape’s clear dislike of Harry, can take on unsuspected dimensions. A son who feels humiliated by his father’s persistent criticism from the sidelines of the sports field might come to appreciate that the father is struggling to make peace with his own aging. Rather than gracefully accepting middle age, the father may be wishing this his son’s athletic prowess will make up for his own loss of potency. Suddenly, it becomes clear to the teenager that the problem is not his athletic ability but his father’s narcissism.

It is hard to overstate the developmental shift that occurs when teenagers begin to view their parents objectively. Instead of thinking that the parent’s behavior accurately mirrors some aspect of the teenager—untrustworthiness, athletic incompetence—teens can see that the parent’s behavior often derives from sources that may have little or nothing to do with them. Rather than

feeling hurt by the adult and thrust into an effort to disprove, or at least try to make sense of, the parent's view, the teenager becomes merely annoyed by his or her parent's quirks and empathetic to their vulnerabilities. At that point, a world of possibility opens up. Less reactive to life at home, the teenager is now more fully prepared to face life at large. Relieved of some of the effort of living up to, or at least negotiating with their parents' expectations, young adults begin to grapple with what they want for themselves. No longer trying to make sense of Dumbledore and Snape, Harry directs his full force at Voldemort, telling him "It's just you and me."²⁶

As coming-of-age tales go, *Harry Potter's* is hard to beat. Harry not only saves the world but also does so while acting in developmentally appropriate ways from ages eleven to seventeen. In the epilogue to the final volume, Rowling underlines Harry's full-blown maturation; seven volumes of Harry's pure distaste for Snape are capped by the adult Harry's plausible reference to Snape as the "probably the bravest man I ever knew."²⁷ In Rowling's stories the easily observable elements of childhood and adolescence are undergirded by a pitch-perfect depiction of the more subtle aspects of normal development. For teenage readers, Rowling creates adolescent characters who feel reassuringly real, even as they navigate an utterly fantastical world. For adults, Rowling provides an insightful guide to the thorny aspects of the parent-teen relationship while laying out some of the essential catalysts of adolescent maturation.

NOTES

1. Lisa Damour, "Harry Potter and the Magical Looking Glass: Reading the Secret Life of the Preadolescent," in *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*, ed. Giselle Liza Anatol (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 15–24.

2. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2007), 745.

3. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2003), 146.

4. *Ibid.*, 244

5. At present in the United States, any state that uses federal funding to support the teaching of sex education must emphasize abstinence until marriage as the ideal option for teenagers and may only discuss contraception in the context of failure rates. Heather D. Boonstra, "The Case for a New Approach to Sex Education Mounts: Will Policymakers Heed the Message?" *Guttmacher Policy Review* 10, 2 (2007): 2–7. <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/10/2/gpr100202.html> (accessed 30 June 2008).

6. One can easily extend this scenario to the many ways in which adults make themselves somewhat ridiculous to teenagers. The same adults who fail to raise an eyebrow at "Harold and Kumar" movies (about two potheads) will become surprisingly cagey and moralizing when asked about real-life marijuana use. Teens who listen to rapper Lil' Wayne's sexually explicit lyrics—as many teens do—would be hard pressed to find an adult who will speak frankly with them about the physical acts Lil' Wayne describes.

7. B. Vitiello, S. Zuvekas, and G. S. Norquist, "National Estimates of Antidepressant Medication Use among U.S. Children, 1997–2002," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 45, 3 (2006): 271–79.

8. N. Patel, et al., "Trends in the Use of Typical and Atypical Antipsychotics in Children and Adolescents," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 44, 6 (2005): 548–56.

9. J.M. Rey and G. Sawyer, "Are Psychostimulant Drugs Being Used Appropriately to Treat Child and Adolescent Disorders?" *The British Journal of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science* 182 (2003): 284–86.

10. The strangeness of this situation is hardly lost on the teenagers themselves. On more than a few occasions, a teenaged patient of mine has arrived at our appointment in a fury: "You're not going to *believe* this! My friend's parents are divorcing and haven't been on speaking terms for months. When my friend told her pediatrician that she was crying all the time and had trouble sleeping, do you know what happened? The pediatrician put MY FRIEND on antidepressants!"

11. Anna Freud, "Adolescence," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 13 (1958): 255–78. 275.

12. Rowling, *Phoenix*, 65–66.

13. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

14. Rowling, *Hallows*, 362.

15. *Ibid.*, 720.

16. *Ibid.*, 716.

17. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2005), 572.

18. Freud, "Adolescence," 269.

19. In all likelihood, parent's memories of adolescence are weighted toward the risky moments. People tend not to dwell on their good decisions; tamely hanging out with friends may not make much of a mark on memory.

20. As the series unfolds, the reader learns that James Potter, although charming and talented, was also quite a bully as a teenager. For example, in *Phoenix* Harry sneaks into a memory that Snape meant to hide in a Pensieve for the duration of their Occlumency lesson. In the memory, Harry watches as his father and Sirius torment Snape for their own entertainment. The scene ends with Snape suspended in midair, and James Potter asking his classmates "Who wants to see me take off Snivelly's pants?" Never does Harry's behavior even approximate the kind of cruelty in which James and Sirius Black engaged. Rowling, *Phoenix*, 649.

21. Rowling, *Hallows*, 741.

22. *Ibid.*, 740.

23. *Ibid.*, 738.

24. *Ibid.*, 741.

25. Indeed, Phineas Nigellus—the former Hogwarts headmaster—chastises Harry for his egocentricity. Traveling between his portraits at Hogwarts and Grimmauld Place in *Phoenix*, Nigellus transmits a terse message from Dumbledore telling Harry to stay with his friends at the Order's headquarters. Harry bristles at the instruction, fearing that has become a dangerous weapon under Voldemort's mental control.

"So that's it, is it?" [Harry] said loudly. "*Stay there?* . . . Just stay put while the grown-ups sort it out, Harry! We won't bother telling you anything, though, because your tiny little brain might not be able to cope with it!"