# Heroism in the Harry Potter Series

*Edited by*
**Katrin Berndt and Lena Steveker**

# HEROISM IN THE HARRY POTTER SERIES

# Ashgate Studies in Childhood, 1700 to the Present

*Series Editor: Claudia Nelson, Texas A&M University, USA*

This series recognizes and supports innovative work on the child and on literature for children and adolescents that informs teaching and engages with current and emerging debates in the field. Proposals are welcome for interdisciplinary and comparative studies by humanities scholars working in a variety of fields, including literature; book history, periodicals history, and print culture and the sociology of texts; theater, film, musicology, and performance studies; history, including the history of education; gender studies; art history and visual culture; cultural studies; and religion.

Topics might include, among other possibilities, how concepts and representations of the child have changed in response to adult concerns; postcolonial and transnational perspectives; "domestic imperialism" and the acculturation of the young within and across class and ethnic lines; the commercialization of childhood and children's bodies; views of young people as consumers and/or originators of culture; the child and religious discourse; children's and adolescents' self-representations; and adults' recollections of childhood.

Also in the series

*Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals
and Prints, 1689–1789*
Anja Müller

*Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England
Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC*
Monica Flegel

*The Writings of Hesba Stretton
Reclaiming the Outcast*
Elaine Lomax

*Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain
Beliefs, Cultures, Practices*
Edited by Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin

*The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*
Edited by Dennis Denisoff

# Heroism in the Harry Potter Series

*Edited by*

KATRIN BERNDT
*University of Bremen, Germany*

LENA STEVEKER
*Saarland University, Germany*

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

# Contents

# List of Abbreviations

**Harry Potter Novels**

*PS*      *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)
*CoS*     *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998)
*PoA*     *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999)
*GoF*     *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000)
*OoP*     *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003)
*HBP*     *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005)
*DH*      *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)

All quotations are taken from the respective first British hardcover editions of the Harry Potter novels, published by Bloomsbury (see individual Works Cited sections for details).

**Harry Potter Films**

*Stone*      *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Warner Bros, 2001)
*Chamber*    *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Warner Bros, 2002)
*Prisoner*   *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Warner Bros, 2004)
*Goblet*     *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Warner Bros, 2005)
*Order*      *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Warner Bros, 2007)
*Prince*     *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Warner Bros, 2009)

For detailed filmographic information please see the Works Cited sections of the individual chapters.

*This page has been left blank intentionally*

# Notes on Contributors

**Karley Adney** earned her PhD from Northern Illinois University. She specializes in sixteenth and seventeenth century British literature, with an emphasis on Shakespearean studies. She is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Marathon County. Adney has published extensively on the Harry Potter series, and also presented a number of papers on 'Potter studies' at various conferences. She is co-author of the *Critical Companion to J.K. Rowling.*

**Christine Berberich** is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Her research interest focuses mainly on National Identity and she has published widely on the notion of Englishness as well as the authors Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro, W.G. Sebald and James Hawes. Her monograph, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* was published by Ashgate in December 2007.

**Katrin Berndt** is Assistant Professor at the Chair for British and Anglophone Literatures at the University of Bremen. Her research interests include narrative theory; African literature; Canadian writing; and popular music. She published *Female Identity in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction* (2005), *Yoko Ono – In Her Own Write* (1999) and co-edited *Words and Worlds: African Writing, Literature, and Society* (with Susan Arndt, 2007). At present, she is working on a project dealing with friendship in the British novel of the eighteenth century.

**Nadine Böhm** holds a PhD from the Friedrich-Alexander University at Erlangen-Nuremberg, where she works as a Lecturer in British Literary and Cultural Studies. She is interested in intersections of different fields of knowledge, and has published on the role of religious and ethical discourses in contemporary popular film and literature. Her most recent project deals with nineteenth-century texts combining scientific and aesthetic discourses.

**Julia Boll** is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, where she researches the representation of war and conflict in contemporary drama, teaches literature and drama and is director of the Scottish Universities' International Summer School. She is also an editor of *newleaf* magazine. She has published on the relation between new war theory and contemporary plays on civil war and on contemporary adaptations of Euripides' *Women of Troy*.

**Susanne Gruss** is a Lecturer in English literature and culture at Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen. She has published a monograph on contemporary feminist writing (*The Pleasure of the Feminist Text: Reading Michèle Roberts and Angela Carter*), and has written articles on theodicy in postmodern literature, *Bride and Prejudice*, *Omkara* (a Bollywood-*Othello*) and ecofeminism. Her research interests include feminism and gender studies, film and media studies, contemporary literature, Neo-Victorianism and Jacobean tragedy.

**Lisa Hopkins** is Professor of English at Sheffield Hallam University and co-editor of *Shakespeare*, Journal of the British Shakespeare Association. Hopkins works primarily in the fields of early modern literature and culture and of literature on screen. In her book *Screening the Gothic* (University of Texas Press, 2005) she explored the Gothic elements of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. She has also published widely on Shakespeare, Marlowe and Ford.

**Kathleen McEvoy** holds a PhD in Rhetoric, Composition and Pedagogy from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her research and teaching interests include composition theory/pedagogy, rhetoric, American literature, and women writers. She has published on feminist pedagogy and Shakespeare, and is the author of 'Aesthetic Organization: The Structural Beauty of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series' (in *TOPIC* 54, 2004). McEvoy is an Associate Professor of English at Washington & Jefferson College, PA.

**Maria Nikolajeva** is a Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge. She is the recipient of the International Grimm Award for lifetime achievements in children's literature research. Her recent publications include *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (2000), *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2002), *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature* (2005), and *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young People* (2009).

**Mary Pharr** is a Professor Emeritus in English at Florida Southern College. She has edited two collections of criticism on fantastic literature, and has published extensively on fantastic film and fiction, including essays on Stephen King, on epic mythology in film, and on vampires in modern literature. Her work on Harry Potter includes the article 'In Medias Res: Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress' (in Whited, 2002).

**Rita Singer** studied English Literature and Culture and German as a Foreign Language at the University of Leipzig. Her research interests include Welsh literature in English; Anglo-Welsh identity construction; the English renaissance; Charles Chaplin's work and art; and the history of photography. At present, she is working on her PhD about the performance of Anglo-Welsh identities in the nineteenth century.

**Jennifer Schütz** received her MA in English Literature and Culture from Saarland University in Saarbrücken, Germany. She has worked on fantasy literature and filmic adaptations of fantasy novels. Her research includes a study on the oeuvre of director Alfonso Cuarón, which deals with Cuarón's film versions of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.*

**Lena Steveker** holds a PhD from the Friedrich-Alexander University at Erlangen-Nuremberg. She is Assistant Professor of British Literary and Cultural Studies at Saarland University in Germany. Her main research interests are contemporary British fiction and popular culture, memory cultures and early modern English drama. She has published articles on cultural memory, trauma and ethics in British literature. Her first monograph *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A.S. Byatt* was published by Palgrave in 2009.

*This page has been left blank intentionally*

# Acknowledgements

*This page has been left blank intentionally*

# Introduction

Katrin Berndt and Lena Steveker

In the course of the twentieth century, we have become suspicious of the idea of heroism. Looking back on decades that taught us like none before how easily humans fall prey to corruption, avarice and evil, we have indeed grown cynical and distrustful of heroes. As Jenni Calder stated in 1977, '[t]here is a tendency to feel we ought to do without them, that they are redundant – or useless – in a technological age, that a belief in heroes indicates a lack of realism in our approach to life's problems' (Calder, 1977, p.ix). Changing gender constructions and the resulting crisis of masculinity have further undermined the conception of the hero as '[a] man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, [… who is] admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).[1] In the last decades, the number of figures traditionally characterized as heroes has seemed, in fact, to decrease dramatically in both realist and postmodern fiction and drama. More often than not, the characters serving as male protagonists – thus occupying the position usually claimed by the 'hero' of a story – lacked qualities which would be described as heroic. Instead of displaying noble behaviour, outstanding courage, disinterested fortitude and quasi-superhuman strength of both mind and character, male protagonists in novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007) and many more are determined by self-doubt, cynicism, failure and (moral) corruption.

While the hero turned anti-hero in the 'serious' literature of the late twentieth century, characters who comply with stereotypical notions of heroic masculinity have populated the screens of film theatres. Even if the 'die-hard' masculine heroism of the likes of James Bond, Indiana Jones and John McClane has been toned down in the last years, the immense popularity of such film heroes makes it unmistakably clear that the idea of heroism has not altogether disappeared, but has been transposed to popular culture.

It is therefore hardly an accidental phenomenon that the novels which have successfully re-installed the figure of the hero in literature belong to non-realist popular fiction. When J.K. Rowling's character of a young boy named Harry Potter hit the book market in 1997, fictional heroism had been eking out a miserable existence in pulp fiction and popular romances. In the wake of the dramatically

---

[1]    See the entry 'hero' (subentry 3) in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989).

growing popularity of Rowling's series it became obvious, however, that its ambivalent and multiform heroism significantly contributed to its extraordinary success. The Harry Potter books, it is justified to say, have reintroduced the literary hero to public recognition. But while they have certainly 'revived the supposedly defunct tradition of heroic romance, behind which lies the ancient heritage of myth' (Wrigley, 2005, p.2), as Christopher Wrigley put it in his spirited defence of Rowling's novels, the heroism they display differs significantly from the old-fashioned notions of men embarking on dangerous adventures or exploring unconquered terrain.

In this book, we therefore pursue the task of approaching and understanding the various conceptions of heroism that are conjured up in the Harry Potter series. Our collection of essays identifies the heroic dimensions of Rowling's heptalogy in order to highlight that fictional heroism in the twenty-first century challenges stereotypical notions of a courageous, valiant and somewhat simplistic masculinity once promoted by genres such as the epic, the romance and the classic adventure story. The articles assembled in our book discuss how Rowling's novels and their filmic adaptations rely on established generic, moral and popular codes to develop a new and genuine mode of expressing what a globalized world has applauded to be ethically exemplary models worth aspiring to. In addition, our collection addresses the more marginalized dimensions of Rowling's heroism when discussing whether a hero has to be a good person who lives in accordance with acknowledged values, or whether villains can act in a heroic manner, as well. In short, the contributions to this volume consider whether – and how – Rowling's heptalogy exemplifies the different agendas of heroism suggested by a globalized, pluralist world.

At the close of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, the Harry Potter series has invited a reassessment of the concept of heroism, for it suggests that the protection and careful adjustment of what has been achieved should be deemed just as heroic as traditional notions of masculine courage and action. One of the most distinctive features of Rowling's visions of heroism is, we believe, that they thrive on sympathy and compassion rather than merely resulting from physical strength, dominance or superior power of any kind. In a time in which artistic excellence is often synonymous with an artist's preoccupation with the dark side of life and its representation in art, Rowling dares to portray a hero who is, above all, kind.

The contributions to this volume address established notions of heroism in addition to the pluralist conceptions of heroes and heroines to be found in the Harry Potter universe. The first section focuses on the variety of literary genres, and their respective idea(l)s of heroes, which have influenced both the Harry Potter novels and films. Mary Pharr argues that the novel series should be read as a postmodern epic since it narrates the final victory over evil forces by a compassionate empathy which represents the only virtue that has survived the postmodern rejection of a code of essential values. Moreover, she stresses that while the epic character of the series encourages its readers to reconsider their conceptions of heroism, its postmodern appeal conceives its hero as essentially human because he (still) knows

how to love. Providing a theologically balanced evaluation of the heptalogy, Rita Singer's article explores the influence of the psychomachia on the Harry Potter series. Singer identifies the Christian origin of the structure that underlies each novel as well as the series as a whole. The 'battle of the soul' that takes place in the Harry Potter novels suggests that Christian morality wins the struggle between virtues and vices, a victory that Singer exemplifies in her discussion of how charity cures envy in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

A different perspective to the eternal struggle between good and evil can be found in Susanne Gruss's contribution, which examines the impact of Gothic conventions on *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Reading the novel as a culmination of Rowling's fascination with the Gothic, Gruss points out how the filmic adaptation either diminishes the abject significance of the Gothic, or interprets Gothic elements in relation to Harry's social position. Both strategies serve to conceive the protagonist as an integral part of a network of friends whose abilities to fight evil are never in doubt. The heroic company outlined by Lisa Hopkins, however, not only highlights the influence of Jane Austen on Rowling's plot structures, but also positions several major and minor characters of the heptalogy in a cross-referential palimpsest of popular culture. The author links Rowling's books to a number of TV series such as *Jeeves and Wooster* and *Blackadder* to emphasize that heroism does not need to thrive on the exceptional, but may be achieved by ordinary figures who either simply manage to survive, or are able to see the potentially comic in disastrous situations.

While the contributions to the first section discuss the representations of heroism in Rowling's heptalogy and its filmic adaptations within the context of literary and popular-cultural traditions, the second section is dedicated entirely to the development of Harry Potter as the central heroic character of both the novels and the films. The four contributions assembled here relate the formation of the hero-protagonist to philosophical and psychological conceptualizations of heroism. The reliance of Harry's identity on philosophical and mythical standards of Western cultures becomes obvious in the articles of Lena Steveker and Julia Boll, respectively. Steveker identifies Harry as a hero who is firmly grounded in late twentieth-century discourses of ethical selfhood, yet depends on liberal-humanist notions of the autonomous and knowing Self. While Rowling's protagonist is enhanced with an external relationality that allows for the inclusion of emotions and passions, the Harry Potter series clearly represents its hero as a Cartesian Cogito, thus negating notions of internal plurality. Considering the motif of the hero's progressive development in regard to the narrative structure of Rowling's novels, Boll reads Harry Potter's formation as an archetypal quest modelled after the stages of the hero's journey described by Joseph Campbell. Boll points out that, in spite of postmodern deconstruction, popular culture has remained fascinated with the Campbellian hero and his or her quest, a phenomenon that deserves to be reconsidered since it relates to essential questions of human nature and mortality. The filmic development of the hero-protagonist is the focus of Jennifer Schütz's contribution, which acknowledges the conventional

composition of the main character in the novels to explore whether his filmic formation can be considered as relying on equally established methods used to present heroism on screen. Schütz stresses that, analogous to the literary texts, the filmic Harry conforms to the romantic tradition and the structural principle of the monomyth. Consequently, he is visualized by conventional filmic means such as the *hero shot*, which becomes more significant with each film. Nadine Böhm, whose contribution concludes the second section, returns to the effect of visual iconicity on Harry's construction as a film hero in her discussion of the third adaptation, Alfonso Cuarón's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Suggesting that this movie is actually designed as an allegorization of Harry's formation into a heroic character, Böhm uses a psychoanalytic approach to investigate the interdependence of visual strategies and the protagonist's valiant identity which, she argues, serves to 'analogize' the audience with the hero.

In deliberate contrast to the different perspectives on heroism presented in sections one and two, the third section addresses the problem of what actually qualifies as heroic in Rowling's heptalogy, suggesting pluralist conceptions of the phenomenon as well as the inclusion of marginalized and ambivalent characters. Christine Berberich's contribution identifies an allegedly out-dated role model in the Harry Potter series when she characterizes its protagonist as a twenty-first-century manifestation of the 'old' ideal of the English gentleman. As such, Harry reanimates the value of placing the well-being of others before personal gain, a heroic achievement indeed considering the preoccupation of contemporary popular culture with individual contentment. The idea of the role model, albeit in a feminist respect, is also rendered in Katrin Berndt's analysis of Hermione Granger, the main female character of the novel series who combines respect for the plurality of values with a humanist notion of responsibility. Hermione is portrayed as maturing outside of the 'male gaze'. Therefore, she is able to develop a female heroism that not only undermines sentimental and stereotypical constructions of femininity, but also attacks ideologies of racial superiority in order to acknowledge the dignity of each individual.

The heroic potential of friends and foes is further discussed by Karley Adney, who convincingly depicts the protagonist as a psychologically androgynous hero who possesses the ability to transgress gender categories, thus managing to integrate both feminine and masculine traits into his personality. Harry's resulting sense of balance challenges notions of 'nature vs. nurture'. It allows him to adapt to varying conditions and, ultimately, to succeed in his fight against evil magic which is characterized as equally flexible. In fact, the 'ever changing nature of the dark arts' may even bring forth an ambiguous character like Severus Snape, who, according to Maria Nikolajeva, exemplifies moral heroism in spite of lacking superficial heroic features. Nikolajeva's contribution discusses the ethical implications of the various forms of adult heroism in the series, concluding that those characters who are introduced as role models are revealed to possess major flaws, while some of the less attractive adults are eventually redeemed.

Things come full circle with Kathleen McEvoy's examination of the characters she calls the 'heroic villains and non-heroic heroes' of Rowling's heptalogy. After acknowledging that the Harry Potter novels show much ambiguity when portraying heroism, McEvoy focuses on marginal heroes such as Neville Longbottom but also attempts to trace humanity in the arch-villain Voldemort. She demonstrates that while the novels do not answer the question where evil comes from, they encourage their readers not only to fight, but also to pity evil people. This way, the series once more insists on the worth of values such as sympathy and compassion in any conception of heroism.

As the enormous success of the boy with the lightning scar has made most impressively clear, the figure of the hero is by no means 'defunct' in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Drawing on cultural and literary traditions of the Western world, the Harry Potter novels and their filmic adaptations promote notions of heroism that do not deny traditional ideals of masculine courage, action and solitude, but that are also committed to enhancing the hero – and, in fact, the heroine – with kindness, compassion and a capacity to bond with others. Characters such as Hermione, Snape and, in particular, Harry himself, become heroes because of their actions and the decisions they take. Their heroism lies in the choices they make, not only for themselves, but above all for the world they live in.

**Works Cited**

Calder, J. (1977) *Heroes* (London: Hamilton).

*Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) http://dictionary.oed.com (online edition), date accessed 15 September 2009.

Wrigley, C. (2005) *The Return of the Hero* (Lewes: Book Guild).

*This page has been left blank intentionally*

# PART I
# Heroism in Generic Perspective

*This page has been left blank intentionally*

# Chapter 1

# A Paradox: The Harry Potter Series as Both Epic and Postmodern

Mary Pharr

In a sense, the conclusion of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series was never in doubt: the first chapter of *Philosopher's Stone* is, after all, entitled 'The Boy Who Lived', and within the narrative context, life means not just existence but victory – just what Harry reaches at the formal close of *Deathly Hallows*. Prolonged life is Lord Voldemort's ultimate goal, but the Boy Who Lived thwarts this goal repeatedly. Victory, however, comes only when Harry recognizes his duty to sacrifice his own life as a climax to his crusade to save his society, a sacrifice the increasingly inhuman Voldemort cannot comprehend. Rowling neatly twists the sacrifice so that Harry survives by giving in to death, Voldemort dies by longing too much for life, and stability returns to the wizarding culture through the restoration of mortality. It seems the inevitable close to a contemporary epic, the serious triumph of compassionate acceptance over evil solipsism after a prolonged and violent conflict involving journeys, suffering and introspection. But the series is also a postmodern work, targeted first at older children but reaching a generation of both youths and adults desperate for accessible but fantastic heroism – yet reluctant to commit to any extended code of values beyond an essential belief in compassion. In this sense, the series is a paradox: a myth whose higher truth is ambiguous, an epic that reflects the general distrust of code prevalent in its creator's culture. Marked as much by his lack of any coherent theology or philosophy as by his font of empathy and power, Harry really is an epic hero for the postmodern world.

Part of the cultural intrigue of this series is the nature of its success: undeniable at every commercial level but still in the early stages of comprehensive interpretation by critics and scholars. Years before its conclusion, the series was prematurely and quasi-officially branded as children's literature by its own publishers as well as by hegemonic institutions such as the *New York Times*. Fundamentalist zealots also set up temporary roadblocks to serious consideration of the series as literature with their objections to its use of magic, but those roadblocks collapsed under the feet of the masses of readers rushing to get each new volume. The popularity of the (admittedly simplified) film adaptations of the early books merely added to controversy. Harry always had his supporters, of course. Articles lauding the series as a means of resurrecting reading appeared early on, followed soon enough by books interpreting Harry as a master of virtue according to everything from scripture to business ethics (for example, Connie Neal's *The Gospel According*

*to Harry Potter* [2002] and Tom Morris's *If Harry Potter Ran General Electric* [2006]). Meanwhile, on their own and in groups, readers independently created a multitude of fan sites on the Web, enough so that Rowling herself called online Potter fandom 'a global phenomenon' (Rowling, 2008, p.xii) in her foreword to *Leaky Cauldron* Webmaster Melissa Anelli's *Harry, a History* (2008). As the millennium took off, millions of readers were defined by the 'wild about Harry' label.

Where readers go, scholars follow. Harry became the focus of numerous symposia such as Nimbus and Prophecy, and an expected session topic at scholarly gatherings such as The International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts and Meetings of the Popular Culture Association. Simultaneously, critical anthologies appeared, among them *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* (Whited, 2002) and *Harry Potter's World* (Heilman, 2003). While newspaper and magazine critics tended to focus on the social aspects of the Potter phenomenon (especially its impact on a postmodern generation hitherto uncomfortable with print literacy), scholars looked as well at literary antecedents, structures and themes. Rowling's books were both praised and criticized as fairy tale, *bildungsroman* and schooldays series, with their author justly lauded for her gift at creating charming transgenre detail that sweeps readers through a range of literary traditions. She was also censured for the sexism and elitism that scholars such as Farah Mendelsohn (2002) saw lurking beneath such charming detail. As best I can tell, far more works have been presented and published praising the series' virtues than citing its flaws, but even those of us most wild about Harry have to admit that the wizarding world seems an Anglo-Saxon colonial construct, dominated by action-orientated white men. Yet what the critics of Rowling's series sometimes overlook is the way her characters instinctively struggle against the limitations of their world. Harry's empathy, Hermione's intellect, Lupin's forbearance, Luna's independence all serve as models for a more tolerant culture not just within the wizarding world but also within the postmodern construct in which readers live. What makes Rowling's seemingly old-fashioned construct remarkable is the way it has stirred the imaginations of contemporary readers with the possibility of positive action.

Ironically, Rowling's ability to penetrate and stir millennial culture has itself generated controversy among non-fundamentalist critics. From the beginning, cultural mavens such as Harold Bloom (2000) indicated their sense of the series as an offensive sign of the current *zeitgeist*, of culture warped and/or reduced to the most conventional public denominator. After the fifth book, A.S. Byatt (2003) wrote that Rowling's 'magic world' was written 'for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated [...] mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip'. In other words, Rowling's narrative is derivative enough not to tax a postmodern audience accustomed to endless variations on old stories reworked as gaudy, contemporary fantasies. What this perspectives misses, however, is that Rowling's accessible narrative is more than another popular fantasy. Anne Hiebert Alton calls the series 'a generic mosaic', a narrative 'made up of numerous individual pieces combined in a way that allows them to keep