

Harry Potter: A Modern Epic

By

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I would like to dedicate this piece to all and any *Harry Potter* readers and fans.

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Abstract

Harry Potter has become one of the largest literary phenomena in history. In addition to books, the Potter phenomenon has branched out into many other areas of media. While they were written for a younger audience, people of all ages can enjoy these books. J.K. Rowling has brought people from televisions, phones, radios, and iPods, back to one of the most basic forms of entertainment and enlightenment: reading. Everyone can relate to the characters and storyline of Harry Potter in some form. In this work, I establish how the *Harry Potter* series is a Modern Epic and how Harry is an archetypal epic hero. In order to do so, I show how Rowling's work fits into many different genres, but belongs most to the Epic form, albeit a modern version. Therefore, I show how Rowling's influences mold the novels, as well as the archetypal hero into a modern epic form.

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Harry Potter: An Epic Story

Over the last fourteen years, the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling rocketed to one of the best-selling series in all of literature. On December 27, 1998, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* stepped onto the *New York Times* hardback fiction best seller list. Rowling produced two more novels over the next year and half, which immediately captured the top three of the fifteen spots (Garner). Due to the immense and ever-growing popularity of the books, *The New York Times Book Review*, headed by Charles McGrath, made the controversial decision to establish a separate list for Children's Literature, so that well-selling adult fiction could be more visible to the public in 2000 (Byam). McGrath claimed, "The sales and popularity of children's books can rival and, in the case of the Harry Potter books, even exceed those of adult books" (Byam).

By 2004, *The New York Times Book Review* decided to introduce yet another list, since the *Harry Potter* books were constantly keeping other children's books off the list. They introduced the Best Selling Children's Series List in 2004, which would disregard individual title sales, and follow each series as a whole (Garner). It took nearly ten years, until May of 2008, for the Potter books to fall from any one of these lists (Garner). However, they continue to go on and off the lists to this date.

For example, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the final installment, broke numerous literary records in July 2007. It sold 8.3 million copies in the first 24 hours of its release and sales climbed to 11.5 million copies within ten days in the United States (Rich). As of June 18, 2008, Christopher Little (Rowling's literary agent) reported that

the series had sold over 400 million copies worldwide and had been printed in 67 different languages (Damman). In 2012, e-book versions of the books will be made available, which will certainly add more sales.

In addition to books, the Potter phenomenon has branched out into many other areas of media. All of the volumes have been adapted into movies (the last book has been made into two films), video game adaptations, plenty of merchandise, conventions, and plenteous fan fiction. Universal Studios even opened a Potter theme park in Orlando, Florida, called The Wizarding World of Harry Potter on June 1, 2010. In 2011, the park drew 7 million people and was a huge draw for Universal Studios, boosting the overall universal attendance by 36% increase in the first three months of the season (Fritz). Needless to say, *Harry Potter* has made a large mark on modern mainstream culture.

If it is indeed “children’s literature,” then *Harry Potter* is children’s literature at its best. While written for a younger audience, people of all ages can enjoy these books. J.K. Rowling has brought people from televisions, phones, radios, and Ipods, back to one of the most basic forms of entertainment and enlightenment: reading. Everyone can relate to the characters and storyline of *Harry Potter* in some form. This is because *Harry Potter* fits into many different genres of literature, but most importantly into the Modern Epic model. This paper will describe the different genres into which *Harry*

Potter may fit, with an emphasis on the epic form and how it has developed, how previous authors may have influenced Rowling's writing, and finally how the *Harry Potter* series is a modern epic, with Harry as the archetypal epic hero.

Chapter One – The Varied Versions of *Harry Potter*

Harry Potter, as viewed from different literary perspectives fits into many genres. Interpretations of the story read as a fairy tale, parable, mystery, and Bildungsroman. In an *Introduction to Fiction* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, A fairy tale is defined as the following:

A traditional form of short narrative folklore, originally transmitted orally, that features supernatural characters such as witches, giants, fairies, or animals with human personality traits. Fairy tales often feature a hero or heroine who seems destined to achieve some desirable fate; such as marrying a prince or princess, becoming wealthy, or destroying an enemy. (G9)

To this day, fairy tales can be found throughout popular culture. “Snow White,” “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Beauty and the Beast” are all fairy tales that are still widely known. These tales have lasted in literature due to the Brothers Grimm, who arranged and published a collection of folklore called *Children’s and Household Tales* in the early 19th century. Modern writers and artists transferred their stories to cartoon movies, especially by the Walt Disney Company, allowing these stories to pass on to more and more generations.

Fairy tales contain some notable aspects as well. In many instances they retain the values of the current culture described, using children as the main characters, and incorporating supernatural elements; they also have stock characters, and can show a

clear battle of good versus evil (G9). Rowling has incorporated these elements into *Harry Potter* as well. The stories take place at a school, and are centered on an eleven-year-old boy who knows nothing of his real identity. Additionally, the books contain supernatural elements because they not only describe wizards, witches, trolls, goblins, unicorns, giants, and a myriad of mythical creatures, but also because Hogwarts is a school of magic. The books include a variety of stock characters as well. Kennedy and Gioia provide another definition for stock characters:

A common or stereotypical character that occurs frequently in literature.

Examples of stock characters include the mad scientist, the battle-scarred veteran, or the strong-but-silent cowboy (G14).

“Cinderella,” “Snow White,” and “Hansel and Gretel” all feature non-caring or absent parents, so the roles are filled in by stepparents who are horrible to the children. Vernon and Petunia Dursley are the active embodiments of the evil stepparents in *Harry Potter*. They make Harry sleep in a broom cupboard under the stairs: “Harry was used to spiders because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* 19). They also force him to clean and cook but essentially ignore his existence besides to scrutinize his behavior or deprive him of the basic necessities. The evil stepparents go along with the theme of abandonment which pervades many fairy tales, where the child character must become independent many times out of necessity (Grimes).

Along with these stock characters, *Harry Potter's* plot centers on a classic battle of good versus evil (Byam). In many fairy tales, the evil is made clearly visible so that the children reading or hearing will automatically recognize a character as bad. This is also true for *Harry Potter*. Voldemort is a clear-cut example of pure evil. For any unsure of Voldemort's evil nature, Rowling provides a small detail through the voice of Mr. Ollivander, whom Harry visits in the first hundred pages of the opening tome, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in order to buy his first wand:

I remember every wand I have ever sold, Mr. Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather – just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother – why, its brother gave you that scar...After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great. (85)

Towards the end of Book One, Rowling throws any lasting skepticism of evil, this time through the voice of Firenze, a centaur (which are regarded as very wise but distant creatures in the Wizarding World). Harry has been searching the Forbidden Forrest for an injured unicorn as part of his detention, and Firenze tells him:

It is a monstrous thing to slay a unicorn...only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save

yourself, and you will live but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips. (258)

Harry later confirms that the individual drinking the unicorn blood is Voldemort, as he initially suspected, and with this action Voldemort shows himself to be the most disgusting of people living a cursed life. Additionally, Voldemort is so evil and scary, no one even calls him by name. Most people refer to him as “You-Know-Who” or “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.” Also, when we meet Voldemort on the back of Professor Quirrel’s head in the final chapters of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, his face is disfigured. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort is returned to his full physical being, but his face and hands show some disfiguring (in the film they make him look snakelike). This is a clear distinction for the reader, for even Voldemort’s body reflects his vileness.

The final fairy tale aspect of *Harry Potter* is Harry, who readers can easily identify as the fairy tale hero. Harry is the protagonist of all seven books and throughout them he encounters many challenges that not only challenge his wits but also his courage. He fits the description of a fairy tale hero because he is an orphan (as is common among heroes of fairy tales, such as Cinderella) and while he is not the most moral of individuals (for example, he cheats on his homework), he is a good-natured young man who helps his friends and shows he is capable of handling himself (Byam).

Harry Potter may also be seen as a parable. Kennedy and Gioia define the “parable” as:

A brief, usually allegorical narrative that teaches a moral...In parables, unlike fables (where the moral is explicitly stated within the narrative), the moral themes are implicit and can often be interpreted in several ways. (G11)

The *Harry Potter* books contain many separate parables that can be compared and contrasted to other pieces of literature. The episodes with The Mirror of Erised in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* are such parables. Over Christmas break, Harry stumbles upon the mirror one night while escaping Argus Filch, the school caretaker. He finds it to show his parents, whom he has never known. After returning for the next few nights, he unexpectedly meets Albus Dumbledore, who explains the mirror:

(The Mirror) Shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts...However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible...It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that. (213)

The Mirror of Erised is a parable onto itself. Dumbledore makes his point very clear, that while dreams are wonderful things, it does not pay to dream forever, and excessive dreaming can cause bitter consequences.

Gilderoy Lockhart, Harry's Defense Against the Dark Arts professor in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Book Two), is an extended example of "pride coming

before the fall.” Throughout the volume, Lockhart builds himself up through a series of books he wrote, about everything from slaying werewolves to simple things like home maintenance. However, nearing the end of the book, Harry and Ron corner Lockhart into showing his true colors, he reveals himself as a fraud whose only true gift is the memory charms which he used on those from whom he stole stories: “If there’s one thing I pride myself on it’s my Memory Charms” (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, 298). When attempting to perform one of these charms to erase the memories of both Harry and Ron, his wand backfires, destroying his own memory.

Diving even deeper into genres reveals Harry Potter possesses components of mysteries in many of the books; in fact some of them revolve solely around the mystery.

The Britannica Encyclopedia describes mysteries as:

Tales dealing with the unknown as revealed through human or worldly dilemmas; they may be a narrative of horror and terror, a pseudoscientific fantasy, a crime-solving story, an account of diplomatic intrigue, an affair of codes and ciphers and secret societies, or any situation involving an enigma. By and large, mystery stories may be divided into two sorts: tales of the supernatural and riddle stories.

(Mystery)

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione try to discover what has been hidden inside Hogwarts; additionally, they seek to deter those (whom they believe to be Professor Snape), who would steal the item. Through various clues they

find that Voldemort has been trying to get the Sorcerer's Stone (which can make gold and give everlasting life), with the assistance of Professor Quirrell. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, they are trying to track down the villain who is harming the Hogwarts students and to discover who is the Heir of Slytherin. In the end, Voldemort has been using an old diary to control Ginny Weasley and open the Chamber. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry discovers much about his parents and their friends, including Remus Lupin, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew. It should be noted that at the end of the book, Harry learns Pettigrew had been working for Voldemort for years before Harry's parents were murdered, and his faked death (leaving only a finger) in which he killed many innocent people with him, was nothing but a hoax. Therefore, the perfect crime remained perfect no longer. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry finds his name is entered into the Triwizard Tournament as a fourth contestant, and no one but Harry or Hermione knows that he did not do it himself, and they speculate how someone is trying to have Harry killed. It is revealed that once again, Voldemort is distantly responsible for it, with one of his servants acting for him. The last three books do not include major mystery plot lines; however, both supernatural and riddle mysteries do play significant roles in the earlier books.

While Harry Potter is clearly a novel of education (it takes place at a school), it is more than that. It also encompasses the Bildungsroman, which is "German for 'novel of growth and development'". Sometimes called an apprenticeship novel, this genre

depicts a youth who struggles toward maturity, forming a worldview or philosophy” (Kennedy, G2).

Harry Potter is a Bildungsroman tale because it takes place at school, and it follows Harry through his entire formal wizarding education, from day one to the final battle at Hogwarts. Readers witness Harry grow from an eleven-year-old boy who knows nothing of the world, to one of the greatest wizards of his time. In a typical Bildungsroman tale, the main character may be an orphan. King Arthur is exemplary Bildungsroman tale (Byam). Arthur is an orphan who is raised away from his parents and studies under the wise wizard Merlin, who mentors Arthur to be the King that England needs him to be. In much the same way, Harry grew up completely separated from the entire wizarding community. He knows nothing about himself or his fame until Hagrid comes to find him. When he finally enters the wizarding world, Harry is shocked to learn of his fame and fortune. People he does not know greet him and know him by the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. He is “The Boy Who Lived.” Harry goes to Hogwarts to study “under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* 58). In addition to learning from Albus Dumbledore, characters like Hagrid, Mr. Weasley, and his father’s friends Remus Lupin and Sirius Black all contribute to Harry’s education and maturation.

Harry Potter contains features of all these different genres, and yet it is most importantly an epic in a modern sense. Before *Harry Potter* can be seen as a modern epic, one must look at the epic narrative from classical literature and see how the epic

changes over time. Dr. L Kip Wheeler from Carson-Newman College defines the epic as “genre of classical poetry originating from ancient Greece” (Wheeler). He goes on to establish necessary elements a piece must contain to be considered an ancient epic.

- (a) It is a long narrative about a serious or worthy traditional subject.
- (b) Its diction is elevated in style. It employs a formal, dignified, objective tone and many figures of speech.
- (c) The narrative focuses on the exploits of a hero or demigod who represents the cultural values of a race, nation, or religious group.
- (d) The hero's success or failure will determine the fate of that people or nation.
- (e) The action takes place in a vast setting, and covers a wide geographic area. The setting is frequently sometime in the remote past.
- (f) The action contains superhuman feats of strength or military prowess.
- (g) Gods or supernatural beings frequently take part in the action to affect the outcome.
- (h) The poem begins with the invocation of a muse to inspire the poet, a prayer to an appropriate supernatural being. The speaker asks that this being provide him the suitable emotion, creativity, or words to finish the poem.

(i) The narrative starts *in medias res*, in the middle of the action.

Subsequently, the earlier events leading up to the start of the poem will be recounted in the characters' narratives or in flashbacks.

(j) The epic contains long catalogs of heroes or important characters, focusing on highborn kings and great warriors rather than peasants and commoners.

(k) The epic employs extended similes (called epic similes) at appropriate spots of the story, and a traditional scene of extended description in which the hero arms himself. (Wheeler)

For a work to be considered an ancient epic, it must include many of these aspects.

Homer's *The Odyssey* and Virgil's *The Aeneid* are prime examples of ancient mythological epics. Both of these incorporate each one of the components listed above at some point. Throughout many cultures from the ancient world scholars and readers find ancient epics. Other examples include the medieval era *Beowulf* and Sumerian tale *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. All of these works exhibit the traits of the epic.

To compare *Harry Potter* to any of these classical pieces would be presumptuous. These ancient epics were some of the first stories passed down by people. *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* defined whole cultures and people with the rich mythology found in the lines. From these pieces of epic literature all stories and tales descend (in manner of layout, etc.). By examining the ancient epic form readers and scholars can trace the progression of the "epic" (and indeed literature itself) from

ancient times to modern times, and therefore we can see how *Harry Potter* may fit the modern epic model. However, to gather a more clear understanding of how the books came to contain these aspects, and most importantly how *Harry Potter* embodies the Modern Epic model, one needs to look into Rowling's life and education, and to see what is clearly reflected in her writing.

Chapter 2 – Rowling’s Life, Education, and Literary Influences

Joanne Kathleen Rowling was born on July 31, 1965 in Chipping Sodbury, England. Rowling attended the University of Exeter where she studied the Classics, and later became a researcher for Amnesty International (Memmott). In 1990, Rowling was traveling on a train from Manchester to London, where she claims that the idea for Harry Potter just “popped” into her head (Memmott). Many of the characters and major plotlines began to flow, and she started writing later that evening. However, her writing would be delayed by the death of her mother later that year. In 1992, living in Portugal as a teacher, Rowling married a television journalist. The marriage did not last, but left Rowling with a baby daughter. Rowling moved to Edinburgh, Scotland where she cared for her newborn daughter and wrote in local cafes. After finishing the first installment, she found an agent and received an offer from Bloomburg, a British publishing company in 1996. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published in 1997 in England, and in the United States in 1998 under the name *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

Despite her story of the idea for *Harry Potter* simply “popping into her head,” Rowling insists that multiple works by other authors influence her directly and indirectly. However, it also stands to reason that many other authors and works may have helped her build the story of Harry, or at least connections can be drawn between Rowling and these other works.

As was another great and popular British children's author, it would be hard to deny that Roald Dahl had no influence on Rowling. What is arguably his best book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* published in 1964, made her top ten books for children to read, published in January of 2006 by *The Guardian* (Higgins). One can draw comparisons between the Dursley family in *Harry Potter* and the Wormwood family from *Matilda*, and Aunts Sponge and Spiker from *James and the Giant Peach*. All of these books show dysfunctional or ignorant caretakers who ignore or abuse the gifted child in question, as many fairy tales tend to do.

The Chronicles of Narnia is a seven-book series of fantasy novels by renowned English author, C.S. Lewis. These books are widely regarded as Lewis's best work and are classics of children's literature. Throughout the series, children from the real world stumble into the magical world of Narnia, the lion, Aslan, asks them to help rid Narnia of evil once again. Lewis published the stories in the 1950's; they span the entire history of Narnia. They borrow many characters and ideas from Greek and Roman Mythology, Christian story arcs, and traditional British and Irish folklore.

Aslan, the Lion King of Narnia, is the most important character in the series. Aslan may be understood as the Jesus figure from Christianity for Narnia (Nelson). He is the omnipotent and omniscient creator of Narnia, as well as its protector. Because he is so powerful, he is feared by many evil-doers, but is in the heart of every Narnian. He can also change form, appearing to some as a lamb in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. This is a direct reference to Jesus, who is referenced as a lamb in the New Testament of

the Bible. In the story of John the Baptist, baptizing people in the River Jordan, John describes Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). However, it is not just in Aslan that readers find Christian parallels. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the four children are many times referred to as "Sons of Adam" and "Daughters of Eve." Additionally, after Edmund Pevensie has betrayed his family and friends (for several pieces of Turkish Delight, rather than Judas's 30 pieces of silver in the New Testament), Aslan saves him. He becomes the perfect "sacrificial lamb" (much like Jesus), that the White Witch kills in order to forgive Edmund's oath to her. However, the next morning Aslan appears again, claiming a "deep magic" which states that pure sacrifice is greater than death. It is a correlation to Jesus's sacrifice. Aslan takes Edmund's mistakes and sins and bears them like Christ did for the people of the world.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, readers can see the parallels between the creation of Narnia and the creation of the Earth by God. At one point in the book, the main characters watch Aslan creating the world of Narnia. After the creation, Aslan informs Digory that he must travel to a garden in the mountains to retrieve an apple from a certain tree and bring it back to be planted in Narnia. This penance is for Digory's previous mistakes, where he could not resist ringing a bell that awakened the White Witch from her deep slumber. In doing so, Digory brought evil into Aslan's new world, and he therefore must be responsible for eliminating it. While there, Digory must restrain himself from eating an apple. He meets the White Witch (Jadis) who has eaten

an apple and gained immortality. She attempts to persuade him to eat an apple or to steal one back for his dying mother. He resists her ploy and the Witch scurries to the North, whilst Digory returns with the apple and plants it in Narnia. Aslan assures him that the growing tree will prevent the Witch from returning.

This part of the story is an allusion to the introduction of evil into the world in the book of Genesis from the Bible. Set in a garden, parallel to the Garden of Eden, the story focuses on forbidden fruit. However, Digory is able to resist temptation, unlike his biblical counterparts (Adam and Eve). Each of the books in the *Chronicles* shows a different aspect of Christianity: not only does *The Magician's Nephew* tell of creation and how evil entered the world and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* describes the sacrifice of Aslan and his resurrection - but every book in the series conceptualizes some aspect of Christianity in a fantastic story and setting.

Rowling also uses Christian symbols and themes in *Harry Potter*. Readers can interpret Harry as a Jesus figure. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the seventh installment of the series, Harry decides he must sacrifice himself for all of his friends. He is also aware that there is a small portion of Voldemort's soul inside of him which must be destroyed in order for Voldemort to be killed. Therefore, Harry must ultimately die to defeat Voldemort. Harry meets with Voldemort who uses the killing curse "Avada Kedavra," but due to reasons undefined at that point in the narrative, the spell does not actually kill Harry. Rowling even quotes lines from scripture when Harry reads Bible verses on his parents' tombstones earlier in the book: "The last enemy that shall be

destroyed is death” (Corinthians 15:26) and “Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also,” which is a direct quote from Jesus in Matthew 6:19 and appears on Dumbledore’s family tombstone, which Harry also sees in the commentary (Tudor 186). Readers may infer that Rowling was very much influenced by Christian ideology, as she is a Christian herself. She was raised in the Anglican Church and now currently attends the Church of Scotland (Guardian).

While looking at *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, one finds many similarities between Ginny Weasley and Eve from the Book of Genesis (Yeo). Ginny is a naïve first-year student at Hogwarts who is corrupted by Tom Riddle (a young Voldemort), who takes control of her through his diary. She writes to him and he writes back, taking over her mind and body at times to try and kill other students. Tom’s accomplice is a basilisk, a large snake that is able to travel through the pipes of the building. Since Voldemort (Tom Riddle) is the Heir of Slytherin and a parselmouth (one who can talk to snakes), he is able to control the snake. Therefore, we can see the connection of the snake (Tom) deceiving Ginny, like the serpent deceives Eve.

Along with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the *Lord of the Rings* series by Lewis’s friend J.R.R. Tolkien also influenced Rowling’s writing, especially through his use of Christian themes and characters. Much like Aslan, Frodo acts as a Christ figure in the stories. Frodo possesses the One Ring, a creation by the Dark Lord Sauron. The ring corrupts and destroys the hearts of men and many others. Frodo Baggins is a Halfling or Hobbit

from the peaceful Shire who volunteers to bring the One Ring to its making place, Mount Doom in the heart of Mordor, the only place it can be destroyed. A studious reader cannot help but to notice similarities between Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Multiple characters run parallel, like Wormtail and Wormtongue who, with their wit and words, conceal their inner evils and connive against others. Shelob and Aragog are both large spiders who plan to consume the saviors (Frodo and Harry, respectively) of the individual books. The Nazgul and the Dementors both use fear as their main weapons, with the Nazgul cry and the Dementors' presence instilling fear into the bravest of hearts. Finally, Lord Sauron and Lord Voldemort are easily comparable. Both of the dark lords names are indecent to their enemies, both are called "The Dark Lord," neither of them have physical bodies for a large amount of time in either series, and finally both of these villains try to regain power they had previously possessed.

Charles Dickens is one of the great writers in the English language from the 19th century. In many of Charles Dickens' works readers find stories of orphans. *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* are two such stories; *David Copperfield* is another of Rowling's top ten books for children to read (Higgins). These tales tell of two very different young men who are orphans. Yet, while they are still young, the two boys are wily and competent enough to live on their own. Harry is in a similar situation. While he lives with his aunt and uncle, they do not love him or care for him in a way that his own parents would. They spurn and ignore Harry as much as possible. Harry is an orphan

taking up residency in their house, which both Oliver and David do throughout their stories.

To say that William Shakespeare, one of the greatest writers of all time, has not influenced anyone to pick up the pen since he put it down would be blasphemy, and Rowling is no exception to his influence. Shakespeare is required reading in schools around the world, and has influenced hundreds of writers. Readers find direct examples in the *Harry Potter* books showing studies of Shakespeare. In Act V of *Richard III*, Shakespeare writes a dream sequence where all of the people Richard has murdered appear and talk with both Richard, condemning him, and to his opponent Richmond, to whom they give their vote of confidence. This dream sequence is replicated almost exactly at the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Jacobs). As Harry and Lord Voldemort duel, a reaction between their wands allows Voldemort's most recent murders to emit from the tip of his wand. They each in turn speak with Harry (however briefly) and ensure his safety by restraining Lord Voldemort after the connection is broken between their wands. Harry sees Cedric Diggory (a friend from school), Frank Bryce (a muggle man), Bertha Jorkins (a witch who had worked for the Ministry of Magic), and his parents (666-667).

Like Shakespeare, Rowling also uses muddled or incomplete prophecies to distort the actions of the evil one. The use of prophecy throughout Shakespeare's plays is well-known. For example, in *Macbeth* a string of prophecies brings an end to the title character. Likewise, the prophecy made by Sybill Trelawney about the fall of Voldemort,

reported to Voldemort without all the details, leads to his own fall from power. As in *Macbeth*, the prophecy is a catalyst for the situation (Jacobs). The prophecy is not fulfilled unless acted upon. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, we hear the full contents of the prophecy made about Harry and Voldemort:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies... (841)

Rowling shows in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* that Professor Severus Snape was responsible for delivering the partial prophecy he had heard to Lord Voldemort. Upon hearing this, Voldemort made the decision to snuff out his rival. Only Harry and Neville Longbottom fitted the description from the prophecy. Voldemort chose Harry because, like himself, he was not a pureblood wizard (which Neville was), therefore he marked Harry as his equal. Like *Macbeth*, had Voldemort ignored the prophecy, he could have remained in power indefinitely. The prophecy made to *Macbeth* by the Three Witches and the one made about Voldemort and Harry are quite similar (both can be likened to the prophecy in the story of Oedipus as well). On her website, Rowling discussed the importance of Neville being the other boy in the prophecy, and how he is “the boy who was so nearly king” (Rowling 2005). In this way she likened Neville to

Harry Percy from *Henry IV*. Percy was in line for the throne behind Henry V, and as close to it as Neville was to being “The Chosen One”. They are both “nearly king” characters. Neville does however, figure more prominently into the *Harry Potter* storyline in the later books. He becomes an accomplished wizard and a valuable ally for Harry. His most notable action is the destruction the last of Voldemort’s Horcruxes near the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. He proves himself to be a true Gryffindor (like Harry does in *Chamber of Secrets*) by pulling the Sword of Godric Gryffindor from the Sorting Hat and uses it to kill Nagini, Voldemort’s pet snake (which also has part of his soul inside of it). With this, Harry is able to vanquish Voldemort entirely. Finally, Rowling gave Shakespeare a literary nod by naming the popular wizard band who performs at the Yule Ball in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, “The Weird Sisters”. This is a clear reference to the three witches in Macbeth who sometimes go by the same name (Jacobs).

When looking further into Rowling’s works, one finds influences from even farther back in time. Within *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, audiences learn of a collection of folk tales known as *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. Within Beedle the Bard’s tales comes the “The Tale of the Three Brothers” (who are later revealed to be the Peverell Brothers, and Harry’s ancestors). In the tale, three brothers go out to seek and destroy Death. After creating a magical bridge to cross a treacherous river, the three are met by Death in the middle of the bridge, who impressed by the brothers’ skill, agrees to grant them each a wish. The first brother asks for an unbeatable dueling wand

(the Elder Wand), and is later murdered in his sleep after bragging about it too much. The middle brother asks for the ability to raise the dead, so he is given the Resurrection Stone. However, the stone does not bring his dead beloved back fully, but only in a half form and full of sorrow. The middle brother then kills himself to be with her. Finally, the last brother does not trust Death, and asks for a way to stop Death from finding him and therefore Death hands over a Cloak of Invisibility. Death cannot find him for many years. However, the brother eventually passes the Cloak to his son and greets Death as an old friend.

“The Tale of the Three Brothers” was inspired by “The Pardoner’s Tale” from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. In “The Pardoner’s Tale,” three men go seeking Death, who has taken their friend from them, and from an old man they learn that beneath a nearby tree they will find the means to defeat Death. They find a stash of gold coins, and eventually kill each other through their greed. Therefore, they have found Death.

The tale of King Arthur has also been a large influence on Rowling’s writings, as revealed by the many parallels between Harry and the legendary King. Arthur and Harry are both orphans, raised away from their true lives; prophecies and destinies have shaped their lives; and they both study under protective and quirky wizards (Merlin and Dumbledore, respectively). Rowling has confirmed that Wart, from T.H. White’s *The Sword in the Stone*, is Harry’s “spiritual ancestor” (Guardian). While White differentiates the sword in the stone as different from Arthur’s Excalibur, many previous stories

identify them as the same sword. Much like Wart (or Arthur) pulling the sword from the stone to prove his destiny as the soon-to-be King of England, Harry also pulls the sword of Godric Gryffindor (one of the founders of Hogwarts) from the Sorting Hat in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In so doing, Harry proves himself to be a true Gryffindor, like Arthur proved he was the rightful heir to the throne.

J.K. Rowling graduated from the University of Exeter with a degree in Classics, so scholars can assume she must have studied Classical Literature, including epic poems such as *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, and *The Aeneid*. Accordingly, she uses many creatures from Greek mythology. Firenze is a centaur in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, who later comes back to teach at Hogwarts in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Additionally, Albus Dumbledore, the Hogwarts headmaster, has a pet phoenix named Fawkes. The first person Harry meets from the wizarding world, Hagrid, is half-giant, and he is promoted to the position of Care for Magical Creatures teacher in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Hagrid brings hippogriffs (a combination of a male Griffth and a mare) as his first creatures in class, and Buckbeak the hippogriff becomes a prominent animal character in many of the books. Hagrid also has a three-headed dog in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, with an uncanny likeness to Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of the underworld in Greek mythology.

In addition to the classically-influenced creatures, Rowling also uses Latin for many of the spells the wizards use. She takes many Latin words and uses them as basis for spells. For instance, *incendo* in Latin means "I light." In *Harry Potter and the*

Sorcerer's Stone, we see Hagrid use the spell "Incendio" to create fire, and many other times throughout the series people use the spell in battle. The spell "Lumos" found in many of the books (which allows a light to glow from the tip of the caster's wand), comes from the Latin word "lux," meaning light.

Apart from the spells and animals, Rowling borrows themes and even actions from ancient epics. For instance, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is asked by the ghost of Cedric Diggory to bring his body back for his parents, so that he may have a proper burial. This is a reference to the funeral of Hector from *The Iliad* (Tudor). After Achilles kills Hector in battle he disgraces the body for many days. However, after a divine intervention, he agrees for King Priam to come and retrieve his son's body. Achilles is so moved by Priam that he promises a truce of twelve days so the Trojans may give Hector full funeral rites and burial. Cedric's request may reference another situation in Sophocles' classical play *Antigone*. Antigone is persecuted by King Creon for wanting to give both of her brothers a proper burial and saving the one brother's body from the battlefield to do so.

The question of Life and Death is quite prevalent throughout the Potter series. Voldemort's entire life has been a quest to defeat death and gain immortality. He went so far as to split his soul into multiple pieces so he may live forever. In Classical mythology, the major difference between gods and humans is that gods are immortal while men die. Voldemort's journey resembles that of the other heroes in ancient literature. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh spends the entire latter part of the

story searching the world for a way to gain immortality. He comes to fear death after his friend Enkidu passes way. He finds the survivor of the great flood, Utnapishtim, who has been granted immortality by the gods. Utnapishtim informs Gilgamesh that his gift was a singular thing, never to be repeated. Gilgamesh returns to his city, and is overcome with joy when he sees the enduring walls he built around it.

While Rowling cannot pinpoint many exact influences on her work, the work itself can be examined and influences can be inferred. These influences descend from her studies. She develops her story on common themes like good versus evil, as well as the value of love and friendship, and finally the development of the archetypal hero. In the next chapter we will discuss the origins of the “epic hero” and how the hero and the epic have developed since the ancient epics.

Chapter 3 – Harry as the Archetypal Hero

Harry Potter is full of archetypal characters. According to Kennedy and Gioia, an archetype is “A recurring symbol, character, landscape, or event found in a myth and literature across different cultures and eras” (G2). The concept of the archetype was first discussed by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who thought that all people shared a “collective unconscious,” described as “a set of primal memories common to the human race that exists in our subconscious” (G2). He describes the “collective unconscious”:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature...there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes... (Jung 60)

Jung suggests that many fields of studies run into this question of archetypes when they find things pervading throughout their field from different areas of the globe. For instance, the archetypal hero can be found in various pieces of literature from around the world before the civilizations had contact with one another. Carl Jung had an immense influence on many, including Joseph Campbell.

In his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell speaks about how myths and stories from around the world share a similar structure, which he refers to as the “monomyth” (Campbell). The *monomyth* is a result of the collective unconscious which Jung describes. Campbell’s *monomyth* begins with the hero in the ordinary world, but

he/she is called into an unordinary world where strange powers and mystery await. When he/she accepts the call for this world, the hero must face many challenges or trials, either alone or with some assistance. When he/she achieves his/her goal, he/she may return to the ordinary world with the knowledge he/she learned, often facing more challenges on the way back. His/her goal may have given them knowledge to help him/her improve the ordinary world. This journey is referred to more simply as the Departure or Separation, the Initiation, and Return. Campbell has identified many characters from literature and mythology completing the *monomyth*, including Jesus, Moses, Prometheus, and Osiris (Campbell).

Campbell's idea of a *monomyth* can be applied to the concept of the archetype. It is a description of the journey of many archetypal heroes throughout literature and mythology. Many stories may not contain every section of the *monomyth*, but they tend to feature some of them. The myths, tales, and stories discussed in this chapter all provide examples of the archetypal hero who follows the concept of the *monomyth*. These heroes have developed as literature has through passing years. Scholars must first look at aspects of the heroes before we can see how they have changed.

According to Otto Rank, a student of Sigmund Freud, hero tales contain ten basic elements.

1. The boy is the son of royal or even immortal parents.
2. Difficulties precede the conception, and in some cases the mother is a virgin.

3. The child's life is threatened when a dream or oracle warns the father or another royal personage that the boy will be a danger.
4. The boy is separated from his parents.
5. The boy is exposed, often in a basket or other receptacle.
6. The boy is put into water, either to kill him or save him.
7. The child is rescued by animals or underlings, often shepherds.
8. The baby is suckled or reared by animals or lowly persons
9. The hero is eventually recognized as such, often because of a mark or a wound.
10. The hero is reconciled with his father, or he exacts revenge upon his father. (Grimes, 12)

With each piece described, readers can see exactly how the heroes fit into the description given by Rank, and how the ideal of a hero-and more specifically the "epic hero"-has changed.

Scholars believe *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to be one of the first manuscripts of literature. It describes Gilgamesh, a savage ruler of Uruk. He is oppressing his people, by sleeping with newly-wedded brides on their wedding nights and exhausting the men through constant labor and sport. Gilgamesh, despite being king and part god, can be considered a savage in many ways. The gods therefore send Enkidu, a Wildman, into Gilgamesh's life. The two bond as friends and travel, conquer, fight, and undertake adventures.

Like Gilgamesh, many other “heroes” from ancient literature are actually quite savage people. In *The Iliad*, we see many different “heroes” who are primeval, boastful, and fueled by wrath. *The Iliad*’s first two lines refer to Achilles’ anger “Sing, Goddess, of the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles / the accursed rage that brought great suffering to the Achaeans” (Homer). Achilles, the partially-divine hero and the greatest fighter for the Greeks in the Trojan War, is perhaps the epitome of savagery when it comes to fighting. He is ruthless in battle, and completely confident in the art of combat. His rage is all consuming, especially when his friend Patroclus is killed by Hector. Achilles takes his revenge upon Hector and shows his barbarity by dragging Hector’s body around the outskirts of Troy, completely desecrating the body. Achilles fits many of Rank’s descriptions. He is the child of Peleus, the king of the Myrmidons, and the nymph Thetis. Additionally, Thetis dipped Achilles into the River Styx to try and make him immortal. However, his heel was not covered by the water and Achilles is marked by the tendon which bears his name to this day.

Beowulf is another example of a savage ancient hero. In the medieval European tale bearing his own name, Beowulf is constantly bragging of his own strength, brutally killing monsters, and receiving tribute in many forms. His deeds, while great, are also bloody and brutal. Beowulf’s story, was composed after the story of Jesus. However, it is essentially a pagan work which was later edited or modified slightly to incorporate more Christian overtones through several retellings over the years.

These three men Gilgamesh, Achilles, and Beowulf, from completely separate pieces of literature and different sides of the world, are illustrations of an archetypal ancient hero. They are strong, fearless, confident, and savage. They span thousands of years of literature. They are examples of the *epic hero* at its best.

However, the idea of an “epic hero” changed since these stories first came to be. In the early centuries A.D. we find descriptions of a completely different hero, Jesus Christ. The son of a carpenter, wholly divine and wholly human, Jesus is an unexpected and vastly different person than Achilles, Gilgamesh, or Beowulf. The New Testament, which details the birth and maturation of the Son of God, shows Jesus performing miracles, gathering followers, and changing the way many people thought. Since the Bible is indeed a piece of epic literature, Jesus is then an epic hero. Jesus embodied an entirely different set of aspects for an epic hero: he was kind, compassionate, supportive of those less fortunate, helpful, and in the end of the story he gave himself for all of humanity. His personal sacrifice for others is what makes him an epic hero. With Jesus, the entire set of values held by an epic hero changed, and his effect on epic literature can be seen in pieces written or collected later in history. Jesus, as well as other characters from the Bible (such as Moses), may fit Rank’s description of heroes. His birth was prophesied by angels, God was his father, he was born in a manger full of animals, his mother was a virgin, his human father was a carpenter, he became separated from his parents when they found him at the temple, he is exposed to the

wilderness when he enters the desert for 40 days before beginning his ministry, and his death and resurrection saved all people.

Jesus's story and the introduction of Christianity, changed the world. The New Testament tells the story of Christ's life, and became the most widely published and read book of all time. It shaped the much of the Western World in all areas, including much of the literature. As the world emerged from the Dark Ages into the Middle Ages, a new type of literature became popular, the romance. Kennedy and Gioia describe the romance as:

A narrative mode that employs exotic adventure and idealized emotion rather than realistic depiction of character and action. In the romantic mode – out of which most popular genre fictions – people, actions, and events are depicted more as we wish them to be rather than the complex ways they usually are. (G13)

Medieval Romance literature featured knights, kings, and high society ladies (G13). King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table were popular Middle Age romance stories. His rise to the throne of England is well-known. With Arthur, and other heroes from his era, scholars see a change in the concept of the epic hero. They are what many would call "Romance heroes." They are knights who embody Christian ideals, are courteous to women, and respect their authorities. While Jesus was a polar opposite of the ancient epic heroes, the romance heroes are combination of the two. Arthur and his knights are unperturbed about shedding the blood of their enemies, and yet they are humble.

The Quest for the Holy Grail is a constant reminder of the clearly Christian aspects of these tales. The Holy Grail is essentially the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper and is said to have fantastic powers. It was very important in the Arthurian Cycle as characters searched constantly for it. Additionally, this direct insertion of a Christian object into the Arthurian tales shows how Christianity played a role in much of the lore. Finally, Arthur fits into some of Rank's aspects because his conception, he was separated from his true parents, he was raised by farmers or underlings, and yet he became royalty in the end.

The romance developed into adventure or quest novels around the 18th century (G13). This was in part due to a development in technology which allowed for writing, printing, and publishing to become much cheaper and easier. With the use of a printing press, books became far more available for many people. These adventure tales retained their "symbolic quests and idealized characters" like that of their predecessors (G13). With such a large impact on literature, aspects of the romance can be traced into different genres of today. One of these types is fantasy novels like *Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and the *Star Wars* movies. Once again, Kennedy and Gioia provide a definition of the fantasy novels.

A narrative that depicts events, characters, or places that could not exist in the real world. Fantasy has limited interest in portraying experience realistically. Instead it freely pursues the possibilities of the

imagination...usually includes elements of magic or the supernatural...

[and] is a type of romance. (G6)

The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien is clearly a fantasy. It takes place in Middle Earth (a separate world from our own) and features many different kinds of creatures living there, including wizards, dwarves, and elves. While the story takes place in a fantastic setting, *The Lord of the Rings* is still an epic tale following the journey of an unlikely hero, Frodo Baggins. Frodo, a hobbit (peaceful creatures, known for their kindness and fun-loving personalities) of the Shire, is a selfless, determined, and brave individual who takes on the burden of bringing the One Ring to Mount Doom where it will be destroyed. Frodo is an unlikely hero because he only becomes involved with the war beyond the borders of the Shire due to inheriting the ring. However, Frodo truly becomes the epic hero when he shows his courage, determination, and selflessness time and time again throughout the books. Frodo is important to literature because he is a fine example of an epic hero who may not possess an innate ability to fight or do battle (much like Jesus was unwilling to do). Despite his small size and lack of proper combat training, Frodo is able to overcome the largest of adversaries, the Dark Lord Sauron. As he continues throughout the journey, the ring of Sauron continuously tries to corrupt him. Frodo shows he is the only one capable of carrying this burden, as many others would have succumbed to the ring's power. Yet Frodo falls to the Ring only at the very end inside of Mount Doom. The temptation is a mirror image to Satan's

temptation of Jesus in the desert. Frodo's courage, determination, and moral values allow him to become an epic hero.

Peter from the *Chronicles of Narnia* is similar to Frodo. He is a young man who enters Narnia without the slightest clue of how to wage battle, etc. Throughout his travels in Narnia, Peter develops into a man fit to rule. His qualities include courage, persistence, and determination much like Frodo. With these qualities Peter rises to the throne of Narnia protecting the lands for many years. Additionally, in Narnia many different animals aid Peter, fitting into Rank's description.

George Lucas' Luke Skywalker is the main protagonist of the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Luke's journey spans three featured films directed by Lucas. He is also the closest hero to Harry, chronologically speaking. Luke is a farm boy living on a distant outer planet of the galaxy with his aunt and uncle. However, with the introduction of his mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Luke learns his true destiny and help save the galaxy when he becomes a Jedi. In much the same way, Harry hears of his true identity from Hagrid.

Luke travels all over the galaxy gaining knowledge and helps the rebels defeat the evil Galactic Empire in this science fiction fantasy work. Luke is the epic hero of Lucas' films, and he follows Campbell's *monomyth* quite directly. Luke develops his skills as a Jedi while showing his fortitude, intelligence, and skills as an excellent pilot. His virtue can be seen quite clearly next to his friend Han Solo, a smuggler and "scoundrel" who works mostly for personal profit rather than for the Rebel cause. Lucas

cites Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as being hugely influential with his scriptwriting for *Star Wars*.

Harry Potter embodies many of the heroic qualities mentioned by Rank.

1. His parents are wizards, which can be considered somewhat royal or distinguished.
2. Harry's mother has a strong disliking for Harry's father while they are both attending Hogwarts, and only later takes a liking for him. This does imply difficulties in conception.
3. Harry's life is put in danger when Professor Trelawney makes the prophecy concerning him and Lord Voldemort.
4. Harry's parents died when he was only a year old, and therefore he has been separated from them for quite some time.
5. Harry is exposed in a blanket when Professor Dumbledore leaves him on Vernon and Petunia Dursely's doorstep on the night his parents are killed
6. Hagrid saves Harry from the wreckage after Voldemort's attack and carries him over a large body of water.
7. Hagrid, a gamekeeper, rescues Harry. His Godfather, Sirius, who takes the form of a dog (as he is an Animagus – one who can change into an animal), also helps Harry.
8. Harry is raised by his aunt and uncle who are Muggles (non-magical people), and Voldemort thinks Muggles are lowly. Hagrid, his helper and

friend, is half-giant (considered by some to be lowly as well). Finally, Harry is considered by Mr. and Mrs. Weasley to be like another son times. It is not a secret that many look down on the Weasleys for having little to no money.

9. Harry is recognized by the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, which is a result of the attack by Voldemort.
10. Harry reunites with his parents in the final book by using the Resurrection Stone to see them once more. (Grimes, 12)

Harry Potter is a tale of the hero in development (Pharr). Like many other heroes (Luke Skywalker, King Arthur, and even Jesus), Harry develops as a character, a person, and hero throughout the books. All of these heroes, including Harry must face their fears in the end, and acknowledge they alone are capable of defeating the enemy: Achilles is the greatest hero and the only one to defeat Hector; Beowulf is needed to defeat Grendel and Grendel's mother; Jesus is the only one who is not only fully human and fully divine, but only he can go to Hell and defeat the devil; King Arthur is born to unite England and beat off the intruders; Frodo is the only one who can carry the One Ring to Mordor without giving into temptation; Peter must liberate Narnia; Luke has to face his father and convert him back to the good side before the Rebellion is squashed.

Harry comes to know his true identity, but he must (through his development and education) have faith in himself in order to succeed and fulfill his destiny. Harry already possesses qualities like courage, intelligence, and altruism from a young age.

Harry follows the *monomyth* in each book by preparing for his challenges at school in the Wizarding World, and defeats Voldemort each year, before returning to the normal Muggle world at his aunt and uncle's house.

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry descends into the Chamber made by Salazar Slytherin (one of Hogwart's founding fathers), and defeats the basilisk, which can be seen as a symbol of death. He is very much like Jesus in this respect when Jesus went to Hell and beat Death and the Devil, only to rise three days later. Also, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry must sacrifice himself in order to destroy the part of Voldemort's soul that resides within him. He is fully aware that he must sacrifice himself in order for all of his friends to be safe. This enables him to fully destroy Voldemort. He travels to what many would call "limbo," where he talks with Dumbledore, before returning to finally kill Voldemort once and for all.

Harry is an archetypal epic hero. Through his similarities with other epic heroes in different stories, we can identify Harry as an archetypal hero. Through his qualities, characteristics, and demeanor everyone can identify with Harry as an archetype. His common characteristics with other heroes from across various pieces of literature, he is distinguished as a modern epic hero as well as an archetypal hero.

Conclusion

The *Harry Potter* series has certainly left a mark on pop culture, as well as literature. The series is defined by Lucia-Alexandria Tudor as a “postmodern work that by means of intertextuality enters in a cross-temporal, cross-genre, and even cross cultural dialogue with famous classics” (Tudor 187) We have shown how the books fit into many different genres, and how Rowling exhibits the influence of many different authors from over the years. Through these influences and her own genius, Rowling has written a Modern Epic piece that people from all over the world enjoy. It is quite possibly the largest ever literary phenomenon. While helping people return to reading as a source of entertainment, Rowling has also opened the door for many other authors of this age and genre to become more successful with their writings.

While it is easy to classify the series as a Modern Epic, the real question yet to be answered is how it will fare in the coming years. A characteristic of epic literature (or good literature at all) is how it is seen in years to come. Does it become a cultural classic? Or is it thrown aside when something else comes along? We will have to wait many years to see whether *Harry Potter* is just a passing fad or if it will stand the test of time and become a classic for children to read over and over again. I do believe it will stand the test and earn its spot among other series of recent years. People will be reading *Harry Potter* for years to come because everyone can relate to the books.

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