

Cross-Culturalism of Harry Potter

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Abstract

Seven books in the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling have broken sales records worldwide. They have been made into films which have also attracted millions of fans, and the *Harry Potter* brand has been a hallmark since the beginning of the new millennium. Fifteen years after publishing the first book in the heptalogy, e-books again made more than 1 million pounds in just three days in April 2012. The article “Cross-Culturalism of Harry Potter” examines what attracted readers to the first and then subsequent books in the *Harry Potter* series and presents some of the cross-cultural implications in socio-linguistic, educational and psychological areas. It analyzes the reasons for the sales records around the world and why the books appeal to both young and adult population. It also includes some controversy following the series’ world success. The research methods include: evaluation of the primary sources (seven books in the series), the media coverage, literary reviews by scholars such as Bloom and Thomas, literary critics’ essays, and a survey of English language instructors in an educational institution. The main contributing factors to the global popularity of the series are: highly entertaining, well-plotted text with fantastic setting but also realistic references to the modern era; the text which continues the archetypal story-telling traditions, incorporating the contemporary socio-economic, political and educational issues; smart marketing; excessive media coverage; the Internet; the film industry involvement; and the universal human need to believe that good can triumph over evil.

Keywords: *Harry Potter, Youth and Adult Readers, Cross-Culturalism, Book Selling, Scio-linguistics.*

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Introduction

450 million books in print worldwide; translated in 73 languages; 150 million books printed in the USA only; and another record – Harry Potter e-books made more than 1 million pounds in just three days in April 2012 (Flood, *The Guardian online*). Setting all the figures related to the sales aside, the *Harry Potter* 7-book series made its way to readers across the globe – and is still enchanting its audiences – young and old. This paper will present some of the many reasons why *Harry Potter* books stirred a global frenzy and the cross cultural impact of the books in the social, educational, linguistic and psychological areas.

Background to the Popularity of *Harry Potter*

J. K. Rowling's first work in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* had a very humble emergence into the wide world. It was published on June 30th, 1997 by Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, a modest English publishing house which endeavoured to print it in only 500 copies. It seemed that the book would attract young male readers, for which reason the author's name was not disclosed but put in initials, as it was judged that a female author would not be credible enough for them. More than half of the books were distributed to libraries, and a word-of-mouth marketing strategy had been planned for its promotion. The first publication signed copies are now being sold on the internet from USD 7,000 to 40,000. Initial reviews were affirmative and in the same year, the book won a UK National Book Award. It soon found its place in the children's hearts, who voted for it so the book won three consecutive *Smarties' Prize* in the *Nestle Smarties Book Prize* competition.

J. K. Rowling had tried to offer *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to various publishers. Then, with a stroke of luck, she offered part of the manuscript to an agent, Christopher Little, who found the book fascinating so consequently he took part in the auction at the Bologna Book Fair and sold the book with exclusive rights to New York Scholastic Club for a staggering £100,000. The important fact in opening the book's door to the public was that the New York Scholastic Club had about 80,000 readers so it was anticipated that the book would attract population aged 9-13 (Glaister, *The Guardian online*). The

information that such an amount was paid for publishing the first-time author could not remain unnoticed, and as a result various publishing houses from other countries showed interest in having the book translated. Reviews were also encouraging, and the readers' community was spreading.

It would be too simplistic, however, to attribute the books' appeal to the young readers due to its commercial effects only. No commercial would make a child who does not like vegetables to eat amounts of carrots, for example. A carrot or two, yes, but not loads of it. The same applies to the Harry Potter series. To read the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), a child should read 223 pages - more or less, depending on the publisher and/or the language of translation. Then, as the series continues, the books become thicker and thicker, growing from 223 to 251 pages in the second volume, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998), then 317 (Rowling, 1999), then to staggering 636 (Rowling, 2000) in the fourth, then to even bigger 766 (Rowling, 2003), to finally conclude with approximately 600 pages each in the sixth (Rowling, 2005) and seventh (Rowling, 2007) volumes. All together, there are between 3,500 and 4,000 pages to be read. Which child could be forced to read that many pages only because "So-and-So said that", or because a TV advertisement was shown ten times?

Socio-Psychological and Linguistic Values of Books

The main purposes of books are: to entertain, to inform, and to persuade. The authors who are read by the greatest number of children must be examined most carefully because it is not only the plot and the adventure that the children are attracted by, but also the attitudes, values, cultural assumptions, and ideologies which make grounds to form the children of today into the adults of tomorrow. The purpose to *entertain* is fulfilled by following adventures of various circles of characters intertwined in an interesting plot which subdivides into many branches which form a kaleidoscope of events. Further, readers are *informed* about practices in the world of wizards, which can easily be translated into the world of Muggles (ourselves). Consequently, it is possible to *persuade*

the audience to adhere to certain ideologies or viewpoints offered by protagonists. Brycchan Carey, in his critical article “Hermione and the House-Elves: The Literary and Historical Contexts of J. K. Rowling’s Antislavery Campaign” (2003) asserts that the subplot in the *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* where Hermione is preoccupied with the campaign to emancipate house elves can persuade the readers, especially the young ones, to take part in school activities, such as to promote tolerance, equality, or anti-discrimination in their own school environment, neighborhood or at a workplace in the future.

The educational and linguistic value of the books should not be undermined either. J. K. Rowling’s writing is full of linguistic challenges. Her lexis is colorful, embellished, and rich in neologisms. The author draws on her familiarity with the classical literature and invents lexis with Latin, Greek or Medieval English resemblances. These are mostly evident in magical spells, for instance in *Expecto Patronum*; *Expelliarmus*; *Lumos*, and so on. J. K. Rowling is especially innovative with names of people inhabiting Hogwarts and the Muggles’ world. Some of them are humorous; some are referential to their characters. “Filch was the Hogwarts caretaker, bad-tempered, failed wizard who waged a constant war against the students.”(Rowling, 1999, 99) According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, “to filch is to pilfer, to steal”. Therefore, the caretaker’s petty pilferer’s personality is clearly described. Or, the name of Madam Hooch (hootch = alcoholic liquor, especially of inferior quality, or illicit whisky) hints at Madam’s secret inclination to alcohol. Madam Pomfrey works in the wizard hospital, thus her slightly altered name of a medicinal plant (*comfrey*) reveals her role as a healer. The name of Draco (Malfoy, one of the negative characters), brings the resemblance with the antique Greek dictator infamous for brutal legislation (Draconian laws).

School teachers fostered the students’ thirst for reading by assisting them to open Harry Potter reading clubs. Practice of loud reading had been almost abandoned by most teachers due to the demanding school curricula and test preparation practices; however, reading chapters from *Harry Potter* books created an opportunity to use the literary text for teaching – language skills, social skills, study skills,

to name a few. The books are written from children's perspective, but they are not childish or simple. The characters develop naturally through puberty to adolescence, and on this journey they encounter all sorts of problems – from typical school issues (studying, research, assessments), teacher-student interactions (teacher's pet, authoritative teachers, punishments), to social issues (bullying at school, government, ministries, and politicians holding power and thus influencing education), or emotional development (from insecurity to self-confidence; loyalty; family relationships). Therefore, the array of issues could be used as topics for discussions and thus more children could get interested in reading the book(s). Furthermore, the readers can get an insight of how to deal with conflicts when they arise, what could be consequences of their decisions, and so on. However, these ethical and life lessons are not given in a proscriptive, adult-threatening tone, but through situations the young readers could relate to. They may not have been aware of that while they had been first reading the book, but the message, or the "lessons" they had learnt then could have assisted them in conflict resolution strategies later on in their lives. On the surface, these issues may not be the primary reasons why the books attracted young readers, however in the time of crisis, many of them may have referred back to the problem and its solution in the book, thus gaining more self-confidence.

Youth and *Harry Potter*

There have been numerous children's books that featured magic or spells, such as Dahl's *The Witches*, or *Matilda*, or heroes and their adventures, as in Blyton's *The Famous Five* series, or C. L. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*; however, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* book was innovative in the sense that it intertwined the real world with the world of magic in such a way that it looked and felt believable. The books' appeal was that the reader could feel *to belong* to something special, something magical. The main protagonists – Harry, Ron and Hermione – were just starting their "high" school, and the new experiences presented before them were also new experiences for the young readers. J. K. Rowling wrote about those children's experiences from the child's perspective, so that those young readers could easily

relate to them. In her webcast interview posted on October 17, 2012 at Pottermore.com, she refers to one of the first young readers' comment: "Harry doesn't know what's going on, and neither do I". The readers were hooked on such an enchanting terrain that quite a number of them had been waiting for *the letter* on their eleventh birthday and were disappointed when it failed to arrive.

The first as well the subsequent books in the series became a sort of a status symbol. Amongst their peers, students were judged as the ones who had read it, or not. Events from the book, spells, magic, predictions of what would happen in the following book, all circulated in the schools' courtyards, in classrooms, at home, so it caused a sense of embarrassment and intimidation if one could not participate in such discussions. Instead of being singled out as "ignorant", young population opted for reading, which served as a tool of inclusion in the circle of friends, and by doing so many have become fervent Harry Potter fans. Those who had been reading the book also liked to be seen carrying the book around, which had to be interpreted as "I'm one of them".

In 1999, around the time of publication of the third book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, a Hollywood studio entered the game. Warner Brothers purchased the rights to the entire Harry Potter franchise, from the film-making rights, to the rights to the plethora of paraphernalia – toys, T-shirts, stationery, video games, board games – to foreign book translations. This empowered them to control how Harry Potter would be marketed in the future. However, as a status symbol, *Harry Potter* became not only a book to read and talk about, it was also becoming a lifestyle – what you wear, what you carry in your school bag, what you give or get as a birthday gift.

As the readers learn from the first book in the series – *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the wand chooses the wizard, and there is no control over which wand to take. Interpreted in the realm of our real-life situations, our talents, gifts, natural abilities, or skills are determined by our genes; but then it is up to us to use such gifts i.e. *wands* in the best possible way. Thanks to the *Sorting Hat*, there is no control over which school house to be in. Similarly, in our daily lives people cannot choose the social class in which they are born, or a place of

living – area / city / country; that is something that others (parents) decide. Also, who can choose which family to belong at birth – for instance, whether one’s parents would be educated / “wizards” / nurturing / alcoholics / with many children / with genetic diseases / with longevity / with people in prison, etc. There are so many ways for the protagonists and the events in the story to be so life-like, although wrapped in their magical covers.

The books also offer a multicultural perspective and exotic flavor. The world of wizards is inhabited by various European nationals – Germans, Bulgarians, Romanians, French, and Albanians. For an average American, Australian or British child, countries like Romania or Albania are as remote as any Asian or African country. For young readers from other continents, however, description of students’ life in a boarding school somewhere in England is also as exotic as description of school life in any other remote country in the world. It is important to note though that by bringing these different cultures together J. K. Rowling promotes positive aspects of multicultural societies, fostering tolerance, understanding and co-operation. The cross-cultural aspect of *Harry Potter* is achieved by crossing the boundaries between the “real” and “unreal” world, a form of parallel universes (once you get on the Platform 9 ¾) where magic exists in real-life situations.

This captivating book owes a lot to its intricate structure, elaborate relationships between characters and especially to vivid and detailed descriptions of places – buildings, rooms, objects, albeit small – as well as descriptions of various creatures. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the dragons are described in this way:

Four fully grown, enormous, vicious-looking dragons were rearing on their hind legs inside an enclosure fenced with thick plans of wood, roaring and snorting – torrents of fire were shooting into the dark sky from their open, fanged mouths, fifty feet above the ground on their outstretched necks. There was a silvery blue one with long, pointed horns, snapping and snarling at the wizards on the ground; a smooth-scaled green one, which was writhing and stamping with all its might; a red one with an odd fringe of fine gold spikes around its face, which was shooting mushroom-shaped fire clouds into the air, and a gigantic black one, more lizard-like than the others, which was nearest to them (286).

The Hogwarts castle, dark passageways, monsters, secrets, eerie atmosphere, etc. are all elements of a gothic novel which bring magic into our living rooms and so capture imagination of children. It took J.K.Rowling seventeen years to write the whole series; nonetheless she remains faithful to the original idea and skillfully connects different parts of the story – bringing light to various previously unnoticed events, statements or clues, thus thrilling the readers who now look at the event from a different perspective, having grown themselves. J.K.Rowling employs elements of *bildungsroman*. It follows Harry from age 11 – the age when most children in English speaking countries start high school – who starts education in a Wizarding school, through his formative years into adolescence, ending when he becomes a legally responsible young adult at 17. The characters develop through puberty to adolescence emotionally, socially, and physically. The story is about their emotional journey, which the readers can associate with through their own learning about themselves and their own pathways, choices, dreams, understanding and learning life lessons. All protagonists have real-life attributes; they have their virtues as well as faults; even Harry Potter as the main protagonist is not the flawless hero.

Another reason for its appeal amongst young readers is that the book is obviously very entertaining and humorous. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry, Ron and Hermione are buying some textbooks for their third year in *Hogwarts*. The shop manager has a lot of difficulties to reach the *Monsters Book of Monsters* because the books are alive and ferocious and they bite those who touch them. The manager had had other problems with selling the books in the past. “I thought we’d seen the worst when we bought two hundred copies of *The Invisible Book of Invisibility* – cost a fortune, and we never found them...” (45).

The school for wizards and witchcraft in the series is also quite different from the mainstream “Muggle” school. Subjects taught are focusing on conjuring magic, or dealing with magical, such as Transfiguration, Divination, or Care of Magical Creatures; there is no Maths, or English, or other “difficult” subjects. Students learn through

experiments and by observation as well as by studying from heavy textbooks. History subject refers only to the history of the wizarding world, and there is also an atypical wizarding subject – Muggle Studies. However, to bring the world of the magical school closer to the mainstream “Muggle” readers, Hogwarts’ students have proper assessments, final examinations, and their attitude to their studies is quite serious. They do their homework regularly, they apply themselves to their studies without being pushed by their parents. They know that learning a particular spell or magical formula can save their life in the future. Thus the readers learn that their “regular” subjects like Maths, or English, or Chemistry are equally important for their future studies, employment, or life in general.

Subsequent film and video games production popularized the books and the adventures of the protagonists. There are also numerous fan sites, blogs, or other access points for discussions. *Pottermore* is a new interactive website which offers new experiences to the Harry Potter fans. J. K. Rowling added additional information about the characters or events and in order to take part, you have *to read* more.

Adult Readers of *Harry Potter*

There may be different reasons why the book series gained its popularity with adults. At first, adults were enticed to reading it because children had been so mesmerized by the first books in the series, and they wanted to know why. Emma Saunders claimed that the *Harry Potter* books are a “crossover” between Lewis Carroll and Roald Dahl (*BBC Online News*). Adult readers could regress into their own childhoods and find the “missing link” with the past reading experiences. Other reviewers also compare the books in the *Harry Potter* series with the children’s classics; however, arguing that adults are attracted to the books due to the global “cultural infantilism” (Bristow, *Spiked*). In his article in 2000, “Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes.” (*The Wall Street Journal*), Professor Harold Bloom from Yale University compares J. K. Rowling’s popularity with “rock stars, movie idols, TV anchors, and successful politicians”. He criticizes her for the lack of style and for being overly clichéd, albeit that is what attracts the readers because there

are “no demands upon (her) readers”. It is our popular culture which lowers the threshold of what is favored as “good” literature. He puts J. K. Rowling in the same hat with best-sellers like Stephen King or John Grisham. “Easy” literature sells and that is why Bloom believes that more than 35 million book buyers, and their offspring, are wrong when they regard the *Harry Potter* books worth reading. He concludes that “the cultural critics will, soon enough, introduce Harry Potter into their college curriculum, and the New York Times will go on celebrating another confirmation of the dumbing-down it leads and exemplifies.”

This is exactly what has happened. The *Harry Potter* books have become a phenomenon which has been discussed at conferences, seminars, symposia, and not only amongst literary circles, but also amongst psychiatrists, or scholars from various fields. “At the 2001 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, one session was dedicated entirely to the *Harry Potter* books.” (*Reading Harry Potter. Critical Essays*. Introduction xi). In November 2011, The School of Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication, James Madison University, hosted a two-day conference ‘*Replacing Wands with Quills: A Harry Potter Symposium for Muggle Scholars*’. They invited proposals from scholars and enthusiasts from all disciplines and levels. Other similar conventions were held in the previous years, including: *Convention Alley in Ottawa, ON, Canada*, which took place from June 19-22, 2008; *Portus: A Harry Potter Symposium* in Dallas, TX, from July 10-13 2008; *Accio* at Magdalen College, Oxford, UK, from July 25-27, 2008; or, recently, “*Magic is Might 2012*”, *An International Conference Exploring the Cultural Influences of the Harry Potter Books*, hosted by the University of Limerick, Department of Sociology with the UL Interaction Design Centre, University of Limerick, Ireland, from July 23-24, 2012.

Academic presentations in such conferences, symposia, or conventions range from cultural and literary analyses, sociological and philosophical interpretations, design practices, to recognized medical publications. The books have been included in the national curricula and undergraduate studies in several countries. Erin Vollmer, for instance, published her undergraduate research paper “Harry’s World: An

Exploration of J.K. Rowling's Social and Political Agenda in the Harry Potter Series" in the University of Wisconsin La Crosse *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research X* (2007), where she discusses issues such as power and prejudice, racism and the creation of the ultimate villain, or power and ethics, drawing a comparison between Voldemort's and the Death Eaters' fight for "blood (racial) purity" and the Nazi (Hitler's) ideology of "supernation" and thus brings forward the issue of existence of "a combination of multiple past and present political and social evils".

Professor of literature of thirty years, James W. Thomas, PhD, University of Tennessee, in his "*Repotting Harry Potter – A Professor's Book-By-Book Guide for the Serious Reader*"(2011) identifies most critics of the *Harry Potter* books as PRUBON victims (PRUBON = Presumptive Reader Unworthiness Based On Non-Reading), including Professor Bloom, "author of dozens of books and a giant in Shakespearean studies who read only *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (i.e. the first book in the series, however with the American title) before writing his article (in 2000)". Professor Thomas reiterates his frustration with those who have not read the book trying to convince the readers of the books' unworthiness. In 2000, the New York Times put the books in both the adults' and children's top-selling lists, thus for the first time acknowledging the different readers' populations of the same opus. Professor Thomas argues that "a good book is a good book" and that most academicians are reluctant to label it as such because it has to endure "the test of time" first. He is of the opinion, however, that the books have already found their place in the literary world and therefore should not wait until the author is dead for a long time to be appreciated. He also contests those academicians who believe that "popular literature" cannot be "serious literature". In the introduction to his "guide for the serious reader" he compares Tolkien and Lewis to J. K. Rowling and finds the latter superior to both of her predecessors because she is equally touching the heart and challenging the mind, thus combining the child in the adult and the adult in the child.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, the sixth book to appear, was the first in the Top Ten adult fiction in 2005 in USA, with its first day sale exceeding 4.1 m\$, thus leaving behind Khaled Hosseini's *Kite*

Runner or Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, other international bestsellers that year. Publishers recognized the need of the adult readers' population not to be labeled as readers of "children's literature" in public, so different book covers appeared for the same titles, bearing "dark and gloomy" features. Another reason for soaring sales of e-books released in April 2012 is that "grown-up fans, who would have loved Potter as a child, read the books five or ten or 15 years ago, but maybe do not own copies of all the books in print" (Flood, *the Guardian online*).

Finally, commercial effects of the books, films, and the Harry Potter franchise must be taken into account when considering why the adult population opted to read the books. There has been so much in the media about the author, the actors, the pros and cons of the books, that any curious person with enough free time on hand can and will be magnetized to it. Besides, standing in queues and waiting for a new book to be released, or a film to be watched, has become more of a family affair with more appeal than discussing economics around the dinner table; or, reading together with their children has brought many family members together. The translation of the books into Faroese, for example, reinforced community ties and enabled grandparents to read the story to their grandchildren in the language that is being used by fewer and fewer speakers.

I personally decided not to be a PRUBON. I read all the books so that I could discuss them with my daughter who has been a Harry Potter fan since the first book in the series. Having familiarized myself with what else has been written on and about the books, I realized that there are other "serious" readers, but also authors who have made their names in the academicians' circles by analyzing, criticizing, or building upon J. K. Rowling's opus. I agree with Professor Thomas that we should not wait until the author dies to start evaluating her work. Since *Harry Potter* has become part of our popular culture, it is perfectly justifiable to focus on all the positive and negative aspects it leaves on our culture(s). It is the "fantastic reality" that differentiates J. K. Rowling's work from the works of other contemporary writers (including the writers for children).

The World of Adults in the *Harry Potter*

One may say that the human society is becoming more technologically advanced and globally inter-connected, but that the individual is becoming more and more alienated – from society, from themselves. Adult readers may relate to most situations or characters in the story since the interaction of characters with magical powers and the world of common humans – *Muggles* – is realistic but also metaphorical. There are laws, governments, ministries, transportation, communication means, the whole structure of a society with all the corresponding functional strata that adults can relate to. Is it in our human nature, as C. G. Jung suggests in his theory of collective unconsciousness, to get hooked on sagas about a superpower or a superhuman winning over another superpower. Mr. Ollivander, who sells the wands to wizards and students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, brings out these expectations in the first book: “I think we must expect great things from you, Mr. Potter... After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great” (Rowling, 1997:65). The heptalogy is also in a form of an epic. It is evident that Harry Potter is a true hero with the qualities such as: acceptance of sacrifice and death; empathy and compassion; recognition of his own limitations and awareness of his own faults.

Mary Pharr, Professor Emeritus in English at Florida Southern College, in her essay titled “A Paradox: The Harry Potter Series As Both Epic and Postmodern” suggests that Harry Potter is an epic hero (*Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*, 2011). As his predecessors in the epic narrative tradition (Achilles, or Gilgamesh, for example), Harry must complete an epic mission – find and destroy all six Horcruxes in order to save the world of wizards and Muggles as well – which puts him under enormous pressure and ensures that the magnitude of accomplishment he manages to fulfill becomes so significant. However, the power or strength is not in the focus of Harry Potter’s heroic qualities; however, his humanity and benevolence are winning against the cruelty. In the new millennium, Harry’s youth makes him a representative of not just the pull between the glorious daydreams and the real-life angst of his younger readers, but also a symbol of the older readers’ hope for a hero

to appear amid contemporary chaos from the least likely of population (17). The series also possesses characteristics of postmodern culture – interest in the New Age spiritualism and fantasy; gender issues; social equality issues; and symbolism, to name a few of those that attract adult readers.

The books relay a transformative power to the readers – an opportunity to change themselves, as well as the world, at least those around themselves for a start. As C.G. Jung advocated, life is a constant learning process in order to achieve the ideal – a well-rounded individual capable of improving oneself. Life challenges are not to be viewed as obstacles, but as the motivation and reason for change to better ourselves (A public lecture, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). It has been argued that modern generations do not have role models – or heroes – with whom they can associate. Modern days' challenges of the material world emphasize the intellectual-rationalistic views of the world, thus bringing imbalance which consequently leads to pandemics of various psychological disorders, such as depression or neurosis. Individuals lose a focal point in themselves – who they are, where they have come from and where they are going to. Less weight is put on *individuation* – improvement of one's self and obtaining the ultimate goal of one's self-realization. Adult readers may furthermore feel to have been trapped in the fast pace of life by all the daily, monthly, quarterly assignments to be completed, profits to be made, expectations and demands to be met, so reading books like *Harry Potter series* may serve as a form of escapism from everyday stresses. There is a child in all of us who is still developing, and who needs constant care, nurturing, protection, safety.

One may argue that modern day adults are extending their adolescence by taking more time to complete their education, start a career, start a family, so when it finally comes to the point when they should become “responsible adults”, they suddenly feel trapped to accumulate the material reserves to “live life fully”. Therefore, they purchase a house, a car, furniture, appliances, and the mortgage, credit card repayments, or other forms of debts force them to work more, thus significantly cutting off the time to enjoy life. Long working hours, lots of work-related or family responsibilities can cause enormous amounts of

stress, so one way to cope with it is to dive into the world which is fun, youthful, the place where you feel happy and safe.

Our personality develops during our formative years. By learning how to control our temperament and impulses, we mature and accept responsibilities of an adult. To realize potentials of our personality we have to listen to our inner voice and make our own moral criteria to mark the pathways of our future. Protagonists in the heptalogy, both adults and students, make such decisions, thus identifying their personal issues as universal human problems. Harry Potter, for instance, becomes aware of his own limitations as well as potentials. The text emphasizes the importance of adhering to ethical values for a healthy psyche. It is interesting to note that *Harry Potter* series went on fascinating the readers even though there are only few modern technological devices so to say. No modern day communication gadgets or equipment, such as mobile phones, or computers, are used for fast exchange of information. There are no Facebooks, Twitters, MySpaces, or other social networks. Letters are handwritten, delivered by owls, communication is face to face. Formal announcements are usually made in the *Daily Prophet*, or by placing notices in the school halls. There is a time-space value in communication. There is a gap between the time when the message has been sent and the response received. In the meantime one can ponder how the message will be received, what kind of response it will produce, what could be the consequences of actions required or suggested in the message. In modern-day communication, however, the time is of crucial importance; decisions are made quickly, and so sometimes it takes more time to repair the harm caused by insensitive comments, than to halt and formulate the message properly. An old-fashioned style of letter writing is probably still appealing to many adults (although they themselves are not prepared to apply it in their daily routines) so they may find it relaxing and enjoyable to read about such practices and imagine the time before the Internet.

The commercial effects of the film adaptations of the *Harry Potter* have demonstrated popularity of the books. However, the idiosyncrasy of the films was widely criticized by the readers who wanted to see every small detail from the text in the visual format. Most

readers expressed their disappointment with how the main protagonists were portrayed, or how certain issues were presented. This demonstrates that the readers are not concerned with the plot only and that the literary text has created space for contemplation, imagination, assessment, verification of assumptions, and so on.

Survey Results

In November 2012, I ran a survey at an educational institution in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina[†]. The participants in the survey were 24 English language instructors and one Assistant Professor at a local university. Out of 25 participants, 20 were Bosnian nationals, 4 Turkish, and 1 American. Only five of them have read all seven *Harry Potter* books; five have read *one or more books*, whilst fifteen participants have not read any of the books in the series. The reasons for not reading the books were: *not interested in the topic; not interested in the HP series; Harry Potter books are scary; watched most HP movies; not interested in fantasy*. It is worth mentioning that most Bosnian participants in the survey were in their early thirties, so when the books first appeared, they were in their early teens. Their country had just come out of the war, so the lack of resources, inadequate English language skills to read the text in the original language, or the lack of access to translated books could also be the reasons why they did not read the books when they were in the “target” age, and then, having become young adults, they may have considered being “too old” for children’s literature. However, six participants said that they would read the book(s) in the future when *they have children (1) / have more free time (4) /or, when the books become less popular (1)*. In other words, they recognized the value of the books in the family environment (1), or that the books should first stand the test of time (1).

Those who have read the books thought that *the books are highly entertaining, with fast-paced action, the characters are well-developed and that the main theme of the fight of the good vs. the evil is eternal (7)*;

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excessive media coverage and Harry Potter franchise created the need to read it to become a member of the group (3); people like fantasy that creates new ideas, places, beings, which are all far away from ordinary, boring, or threatening daily life (3).

This illustration, although the sample of readers and non-readers is too small and restricted to only one institution, shows that the *Harry Potter* theme is still attractive and that there may be future readers in the adult population.

Conclusion

The global phenomenon of the series can be viewed as a result of the constant human need to seek a hero to win over evil. The archetypal form of the text continues the tradition of old myths, albeit in the modern context, thus making it recognizable and acceptable to people of different cultural backgrounds. The alienation of modern individuals from themselves and a lack of role models to assist the modern generations face challenges of the new era, created a space to view the main protagonists in the series as the New-Age role models. The universality of their contest to stand up against evil makes the text cross-cultural and collectively appealing.

What perplexes most “serious” academicians is – why *Harry Potter* “infected” so many people. What is more, not why it attracted so many children, but *adults* as well. If 450 million copies, for instance, of the Grimm Brothers’ *Fairy Tales* had been recently published and sold in a few years, the world literary critics would view it as sudden interest in the traditional, conservative values. Would children beg their parents to buy them such old-fashioned, traditional books? Would parents yield to their requests? The reality is that the Nineteenth century literature for children is not published in such numbers *by popular demand*, although such stories are still read to children worldwide. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* is offering something new to the readers. However, the most burning issue is – why are the adults interested in reading the books? What literary value can they see there? Professor Bloom believes that all of them are wrong, partly because the shallowness of our popular culture created an overall decline in the critical reading perspectives. One must

ponder here: what fraction of the world population *is willing* to seek the deeper meaning of life? How much do people know and care about philosophy? Is being popular a paradigm of being of a lesser value? Where can we put Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; or Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; or Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*? Books are much more accessible and affordable than ever before and most readers regard them more because of their entertaining than educational or philosophical values.

How much is there in the contemporary literature to teach about human values? J. K. Rowling managed to fill the void, at least in the literature for children. Although it may seem on the surface that the books are based only on a good plot and a lot of stereotypes, as she is obviously drawing from different literary traditions, it is undeniable that the *Harry Potter* series brought freshness and applicability of the themes in the contemporary context. Those who expect that one book will change the world are more unrealistic than all the books in the series combined. Harry Potter's community *is* utopian in the black-and-white (good vs. bad) sense of prevailing justice, but it also demonstrates how the world of *Muggles* functions today. Everyone can recognize terrorists in Death Eaters; institutional deficiencies which are present in all systems and governments of the world; and the materialistic culture described in the Dursley family is globally spread. However, the books' strong point is their focus on the importance of love and care. Voldemort is defeated because he is too selfish and not able to love anyone or anything but himself. He is so power hungry that not only does he destruct his enemies, he destructs himself as well. Is that message powerful enough for both children and adults?

The publishing of the books in yearly installments has contributed to the increase of interest amongst the readers' populations, and also as a motivational factor for amassing new readers. Obviously, the development of technology, the Internet, the media, marketing, corporate businesses et cetera have contributed to the world success of the *Harry Potter Series*. One should remember, however, that there are millions of other writers waiting to be published, but most of them will never be a new J. K. Rowling, whose magic marked the beginning of 21st century.

Although J. K. Rowling states in her webcast interview that she had not had readers in mind because she had been too busy creating the story, she admits that “getting the kids reading has been one of the most gratifying outcomes” (Rowling, webcast, 17.10.2012). Regardless of whether the books will be judged as superficial, cheap, or powerful, there will be those who will in years to come identify themselves as the first *Harry Potter* generation. The books have pulled together children from all continents and united them in their zest for reading. At least some of them will find motivation to explore other authors.

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