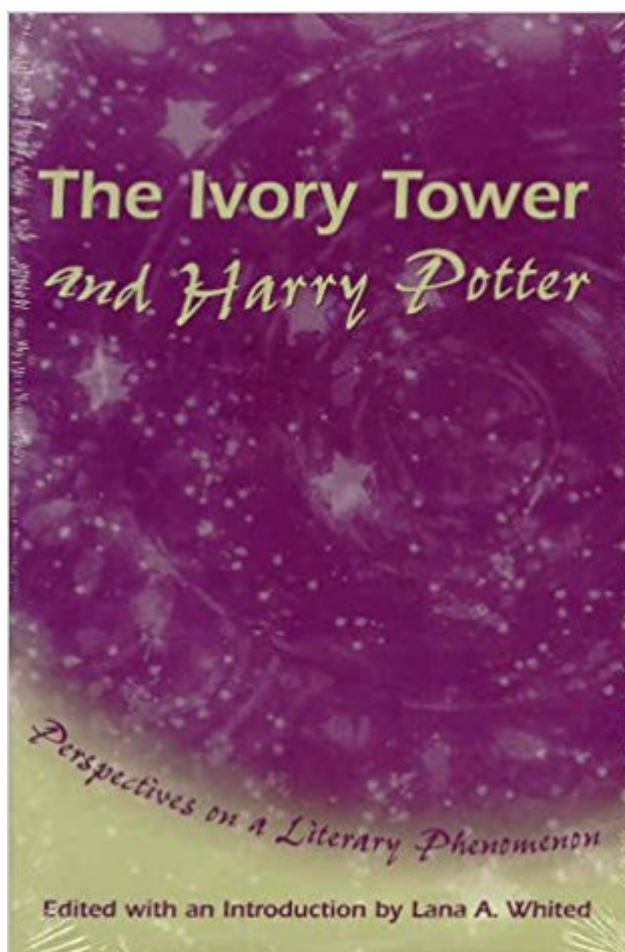


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The Ivory Tower And Harry Potter: Perspectives On A Literary Phenomenon



Synopsis

In this volume, contributors from Great Britain, the United States and Canada offer a serious critical examination of J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" books from a broad range of perspectives, including literature, folklore, psychology, sociology, and popular culture. A significant proportion of the book explores the Harry Potter series' literary ancestors, such as magic and fantasy works by Ursula K. LeGuin, Monica Furlong, and Jill Murphy, and even previous works about such topics as the British boarding school. Rowling's use of folkloric devices is examined in detail, particularly in terms of how these elements increase the books' appeal for children. Language issues such as translation and the handling of British slang in US and foreign-language editions of the books are also addressed. The books' appeal for adolescent boys, who have not recently been a presence in the reading market, is explored from a cultural frame of reference, and gender dynamics are discussed from the standpoint of contemporary feminist literary theory, focusing on the character of Hermione Granger. The concluding essays survey religious objections to the book, as well as the moral order presented by Rowling within the series. Written to ensure its accessibility not only to serious literary scholars but also to the general Potter reader, this volume should appeal to a broad audience.

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Customer Reviews

Lana A. Whited is Professor of English at Ferrum College in Virginia and a weekly columnist on media issues for roanoke.com.

Whited's work is a thought-provoking collection of essays and critiques of J.K. Rowling's highly successful and popular, yet frequently criticized, Harry Potter series. Whited, along with a number of the contributing authors, address the overall questions of: (a) are the Harry Potter novels, marketed primarily to children to date but highly successful with adult readers as well, worthy of critical study and acclaim, (b) are they destined to be classics or are they merely a passing popular phenomenon, and (c) is there any merit to charges by critics such as William Safire that the HP books are a waste of adult reading time? Not surprisingly, the conclusion seems to be "yes," "yes," and "no." The book consists of 16 articles/essays by scholars in diverse fields. Many of the contributors take issue with the criticisms of Safire, Bloom and other critics that the series is not worth adult attention, and notes that as the characters age, the series becomes even more complex and adult. Several of the contributors compare and contrast HP with various literary antecedents, but almost uniformly conclude that Rowling's works are fresh and worthwhile for children and adult readers. Professor Mary Pharr views the series as a bildungsroman, a hero's journey and spends time examining the role each principal character plays in Harry's development (the Potters as the foundation, the Dursleys as the counterpoint, Dumbledore as mentor and guardian, Sirius as the family tie and Ron and Hermione as friends). Professor Grimes makes an effective case for HP as a truly cross-generational series: Harry is a fairy tale prince to young readers, a "real boy" to adolescent fans and an archetypal hero to adult readers. Farah Mendlesohn takes a close look at the structure of authority within the universe of the HP books, concluding that Rowling advocates a traditional and conservative hierarchical system that maintains the status quo. While this piece is without question the most critical of the HP series in Whited's book, it is thought-provoking and worthy of further discussion. In the opinion of this reviewer, though, many of Mendlesohn's arguments are undermined by her misinterpretations of the text or reliance on factual inaccuracies. In evaluating gender issues in the HP series, Professor Eliza Dresang begins her critique of the treatment of gender in the HP series by tracing the various "Hermiones" of mythology and literature, concluding that all of Hermione Granger's literary antecedents are strong, intellectual and resilient individuals. Dresang notes that Hermione has played a decisive role in all the key events of each novel in the series and she sticks to her principles. Dresang believes Rowling has depicted a realistic view of gender that mirrors that of the current muggle world, though she reserves some criticism for Rowling's descriptive language as applied to the female characters. Professor Philip Nel evaluates the "translation" of British English to American English in both HP and other books. He argues that in many cases, the *meaning* was changed and that the assertion by Scholastic's Levine (and confirmed by Rowling) that the intent was to ensure that American children had the same reading

experience as British children is flawed. Nel is particularly critical of context changes (bogey changed to booger), equivalent word changes (motorbike changed to motorcycle) and onomatopoeic word changes (splutter changed to sputter). I found all of the essays to be immensely interesting and would highly recommend this book for anyone interested in examining a scholarly angle to the HP series. I should note that it probably isn't going to be interesting reading to younger fans, though interested parents or educators should certainly consider it. It will probably be most valuable to academics and adult fans with a strong interest in what scholars are saying about HP.

Compiled and edited by Lana A. Whited (Professor of English, Ferrum College, Virginia), *The Ivory Tower And Harry Potter: Perspectives On A Literary Phenomenon* is an extensive analysis of J.K. Rowling's immensely popular and widely acclaimed Harry Potter series of fantasy novels. Originally intended for young adults, this fantasy series proved fascinating, exciting, and complex enough to attract readers of all ages and backgrounds. The scholarly essays here assembled are from a wide variety of authors and discuss Harry Potter's roots in folklore, its connection to gender issues, literary comparisons and archetypes, and much, much more. A highly scholarly and insightful text, offering new perceptions on beloved favorites, *The Ivory Tower And Harry Potter* is a welcome addition to Literary Criticism reference collections and highly recommended for scholars and non-specialist general readers who enjoy J.K. Rowling's original, intricate, (and continuing to expand) cannon of deftly written and increasingly influential fantasy.

The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon is an exciting publication for people who enjoy literary discourse, but cannot gain access to "Ivory Tower" journal publications since leaving the rarified atmosphere of college academics. This book offers a healthy cross-section of topical essays, giving readers a feel for the current critical dialogue about Harry Potter - something that is sadly lacking amid the media hype. Some of the essays concern the hype itself, and Harry Potter's role as a cultural phenomenon - but many others beg us to approach the texts of J.K. Rowling's books on their own merit - a chance to "deconstruct Harry" as it were. For we who are forced by life (and more mundane jobs that require fewer college degrees) to remain armchair critics instead of college professors, it is both a blessing and a curse...for I guarantee that it will be an ex-English major's urge to respond to many of these essays with a paper of one's own! But who would grade it? Seriously, though, it is a wonderful way to explore the myriad characters, symbols and themes contained in Rowling's incredibly rich text, while feeling vindicated all along that Harry Potter, no matter how enjoyable (or marketable) is a phenomenon worthy of literary merit...and more

importantly, O.K. for grown-ups to read.

It is good to see Harry taken seriously. We need more books like this. Another good one is "Hidden Key to Harry Potter" by a University of Chicago graduate who majored in ancient languages and English (Cum Laude) John Granger. He offers an air tight case that Rowlings is writing from within the same world view as C.S. Lewis and Tolkein with the same purpose and that her books are popular for the same reasons. Absolute must reading for serious Potterites.

What I found to be an excellent read for the comfort of my mind is *The Ivory Tower - The Many Steps in life.* The Poetic suggestion covered many avenues to give the opportunity in my restructure a better approach in living despite the alarming events in the world I live in. Yes very thought-provoking of Mr. Jeffery Lynn Ivory as his poetic thoughts intermix with starting my early morning off on a sounder note.

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