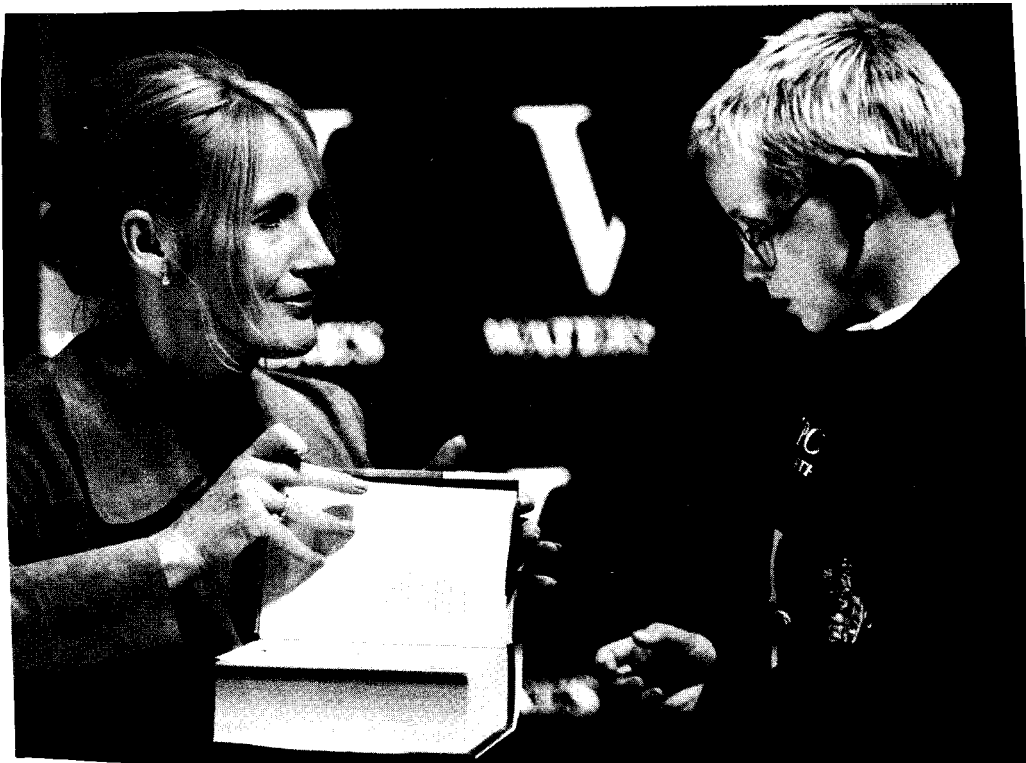


COUNTERFEIT CREATIONS AND CULTURAL ICONS: The Harry Potter Books and Other Fantasies

by

Paula Haigh



J.K. Rowling and a Harry Potter Fan

COUNTERFEIT CREATIONS AND CULTURAL ICONS: The Harry Potter Books and Other Fantasy Literature

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Harry Potter

The Harry Potter books are such whopping good stories from the strictly literary point of view, that is, plot, character and mode of narration, that it is extremely easy to swallow the subversive elements along with the sheer pleasure of the literary brilliance. And this is what both children and adults are doing.

But the books are subversive of just about everything truly good. Whether this is simply the result of cultural reflection or something more of a cause is open to debate. I tend to think it is the former because the subversive elements in the books are already quite well established in our time as cultural and political givens. Of course, such establishment implies a long period of political and religious choices on the part of most people. Those, however, who write books such as the Harry Potter series and *Lord of the Rings*, because of their greater influence on society, act as causes of the continuing evil and error as well as reflective effects or mirrors.

The Impact of Structure

Because it is primarily the structure of anything to which we respond and which reveals to us its essential significance in terms of ideas, it is well to look first at this literary structure in the Harry Potter books.

Aristotle in chapters 9 and 10 of his *Poetics* describes the kind of plot that is most pleasing in a narrative. Of the three kinds of plot, the simple, the complex and the episodic, the complex is the most pleasing and the one that requires the most skill on the part of the maker. The complex plot involves either Peripety or Discovery and it may involve both, as it does in the Harry Potter books. In fact, the overall plot of the books is as complex as it is possible to be and still remain within the grasp of the mind. Older minds, like mine, have trouble keeping all the strands of the plot in memory, but children and younger adults do not have this trouble. If there is not already, there is sure to be soon a Harry Potter Trivia on the market.

In the complex plot, Peripety is the change from one state of things to its opposite. We see this at the beginning and the end of each Harry Potter book as well as within the action of each. Harry is presented as the world's most "abused child," a victim of the most despicable parental cruelty and neglect. Consequently, he suffers from very low "self-esteem." But this situation changes drastically when Harry enters the Hogwarts

School of Witchcraft and Wizardry at the age of eleven. At Hogwarts he is not only treated as a normal boy but as a hero who is known to have survived the attack of the Dark Lord Voldemort. And at least once within each book, Harry finds himself in the hospital wing of the school as a result of some catastrophic accident that reduces him from a state of reasonable physical stamina to utter debility.

The plot also involves many surprising Discoveries with which any reader of the classic mystery-detective story will be familiar. And each Harry Potter book abounds with these. The most important is the gradual revelation of Harry's parents, who they were, how they died, their continued presence in the story and most significantly of all, their relation to Lord Voldemort as well as to Harry. Nor can Discovery arise out of the blue. It must be prepared for by hints and clues, little mysterious unknowns that are later revealed to be most important. A good example of this is the little brown package that Hagrid takes from vault number 713 on the trip with Harry down into the basement of Gringotts Bank in order to supply Harry with money for the school year, money from the fortune Harry's parents have left him. Hagrid, a point of great pride for him, has been commissioned by Professor Dumbledore himself to retrieve the package in order to hide it at Hogwarts since Dumbledore has been warned that Voldemort is going to try to steal it. And indeed, Gringotts Bank is broken into but the package is gone. This little package turns out to be none other than the Sorcerer's Stone which guarantees Immortality to its owner and it is Immortality that Lord Voldemort, now reduced to an almost bodiless being, is seeking. Thwarted of obtaining it by Harry, the enmity between the two is increased a hundred-fold. Another striking discovery in the first book is the revelation of Lord Voldemort himself residing in the back part of the strange Turban worn by Professor Quirrell, the first teacher of the course in Defense Against the Dark Arts, who is murdered by Voldemort for his ineptitude. Revelations like these increase with each book and add to the intensity of the emotional impact upon both Harry and his readers.

The most striking feature of the Harry Potter books from the strictly literary point of view is the brilliantly achieved unity of the Plot. We might think at first that there are at least five plots since the appearance of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix in the year 2003, which is the story of Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts. But closer examination reveals that the five books published so far are skillfully unified in the way that Aristotle describes a complex plot should be. He says:

... the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole. (*Poetics*, ch. 8)

And so, while each Harry Potter book is more or less complete in itself as representing one each of Harry's successive years at Hogwarts, still the characters remain the same, with some new ones added as the plot increases in complexity with each book. And what unites them all is the central

relationship of Harry and his parents to the Dark Lord Voldemort. This, like the “anger of Achilles” in the *Iliad*, is the unifying factor of all the books. It is what Harry Potter is “all about”. Moreover, it is not possible to withdraw any one of the characters without unraveling the whole. A possible exception to this unity is the girl Cho Chang. It is debatable, I think, whether or not, given Harry’s mission in life, later revealed to be solely the annihilation of Voldemort, – whether given this mission, his relationship with Cho is necessary. In a recent *Newsweek* article, a fifteen-year old boy reader found the “romantic subplots” to be unnecessary. Cho was necessary as Cedric’s hostage in the Second Task of the Goblet of Fire, but I think that Harry’s interest in her could well have faded into the past with Cedric himself as the enormity of his future task looms. This would have added to the stature of his character and Cho would have fulfilled her part in the plot. But it seems that Rowling is determined to reflect modern teen-age obsession with sex as well as all the other subversive elements of society. If the epic structure is to succeed, however, and if the unity of the plot is to be maintained, Harry simply must rise above such a distraction as Cho proved to be in his fifth year at Hogwarts.

And so it is not only possible but also necessary to speak of the Plot of the Harry Potter books as one. It is precisely this aspect of the structure that keeps readers so anxiously awaiting the next book in the series, Harry’s next school year at Hogwarts, Harry’s next birthday in July which heralds his return to school and to his wizard friends as well as his next encounter with Voldemort.

To better appreciate the unity of the Harry Potter books, one can look at the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. The books in this series are related but only very loosely. In fact, the episode in The Magician’s Nephew wherein Diggory rescues the apple that cures his mother, has no connection at all with what happens in the following books. The only unifying factor is Aslan and the fact that the same children grow up during the series and are adults at the end. But they are not at all central to the stories. It is rather the episodes that are strung together as differently shaped beads on a single string. The overall plot of Narnia is episodic, the least pleasing of Aristotle’s three kinds. The books of Narnia can easily be read separately and I, for one, at least, felt no great desire to read the others as a result of having read the first. It is true they all come together in the end, but this is not implied from the beginning. Whereas we are impelled to envision Harry as a future Auror perhaps, even, in a final battle which, as the Prophecy has foretold, either Harry or Voldemort must be killed.

There are at least two reasons I can think of as to why the *Chronicles of Narnia* have not enjoyed the same degree of popularity as the Harry Potter books and *Lord of the Rings*. The first is that the Narnia books do have a kind of Christian aura about them with a good deal of moral lessons. That’s one reason why they would be neglected in this our anti-Christian age. The second reason is this: Lewis himself is not totally serious about his subject. It is a very light-hearted series of stories. And the books are plotted episodically. They much more resemble the tales of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table which are entirely episodic, being united only by the

same characters whose main quest seems romantic love as much as the quest for the Holy Grail.

Tolkien's work is much more unified than the *Narnia Chronicles* but also lacks the intense cohesion of the Harry Potter books. Everything in *Lord of the Rings* does, indeed, relate either to the possession or to the destruction of the one Ring of Power. But Tolkien's narrative is much more diffusive than Rowling's and his love of language for its own sake is evident in his prose. Rowling's love for words is rather for the sake of their descriptive-conceptual meaning, as manifested in her often comical Latin spells and charms as well as in her names: Nearly Headless Nick, the Bloody Baron, Moaning Myrtle, and even Professor Dumbledore which latter gives the impression of an almost bumbling kind of person. And so he is. Tolkien's books are full of lengthy dialogues and descriptions whereas Rowling's are honed down to the bone. I think it is the medieval paraphernalia plus the very appealing nature of the Hobbits that has caused the Tolkien books to be so popular. The Hobbits appeal to all the liberal causes of freedom, environmentalism and natural comforts that see a real enemy in the domination of Technology.

And there is nothing in Tolkien's books that compares with the pervasive principle of juxtaposition of opposites that is present in the Harry Potter books. Tolkien's overall plot is basically simple, and this fact allows him to exploit his gift for language in a way that is not possible in Rowling's work.

This central relationship of Harry and his parents with Lord Voldemort and his Death-Eater followers is one of juxtaposition of opposites. This structural principle causes the narrative to proceed by this same constant opposition of meanings. Throughout the books, we find more detailed aspects of the central opposition: the Muggle world is set in opposition, even physically by means of the parallel Wizard-world, with the world of Hogwarts and its environs, such as the village of Hogsmead and the shops of Diagon Alley. Perhaps most striking of all is the opposition of the Dursleys and the Weasleys. This contrast of families extends to the most minute details, such as the fact that Aunt Petunia is thin and scrawny whereas Mrs. Weasley is portly; Mr. Weasley is tall and lean whereas Uncle Vernon is huge and loud. Harry himself is puny and undernourished whereas the Dursley's son Dudley is obese and in every way Harry's opposite. The Dursleys constantly persecute and reject Harry whereas the Weasleys embrace him and provide for him a taste of what it is to have a real family. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon have only the one son around whom their entire world revolves whereas the Weasleys are a family of six boys and one girl, all of whom keep both parents concerned in many directions at once, but especially Mrs. Weasley. Her husband, Arthur Weasley, is the Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office (a sub-department of the Ministry of Magic) nourishes an un-wizard-like love for Muggles and as such, he is a neutralizing force in the hostility between the Muggles and the Wizards, somewhat as Professor Dumbledore is between all opposing forces, especially when it comes to what kinds of students should be admitted to Hogwarts. The characters on the Slytherin-Dark Side want Hogwarts to be limited to pure-blood wizards but Dumbledore is for "multiculturalism" and "diversity". In Harry's fifth year, the Head of the Quidditch team is a Black girl and there is at least one Black boy in the school.

The most minute oppositions grow into and reflect the juxtaposition of the bad Malfoy clan of pure-bloods with the good Mudbloods or Muggle-borns. However, Rowling does not oversimplify here, for the Weasleys are pure-blood wizards though very poor and having “more children than they can afford” in the eyes of the Dark Malfoys, who view the Weasleys as inferior on that account. Harry himself is a Mudblood, that is, his mother was born of Muggle parents though his father was pure-blood wizard. Hermione Granger also is Muggle-born, being the only witch in her family, just as Harry’s mother was the only witch in her family. This aspect of Hermione’s ancestry probably accounts for her later obsession with the treatment of the House-Elves and any of the other inferior creatures in the wizard world that seem to her to be abused and deprived of their “equal rights”. By this means, Rowling incorporates her major political theme, that of the democratization of all creatures, the “equal rights” of all formerly oppressed peoples.

Finally, there is the ever-present rivalry of the Hogwarts intra-mural schools fought out in the game of Quidditch. The most intense rivalry, of course, is that between the Slytherins, from which school issued Tom Riddle, the Muggle-born future Lord Voldemort, Harry’s arch-Enemy, and the Gryffindors, the House from which issued Harry’s father James Potter and all those on the Right side of the powers of magic. In this way, the Quidditch games, so prominent in the first four books, reflect and drive forward the central opposition of the one plot. The fact that they are not so prominent in the fifth book is due to the growing maturity of the characters and the deepening darkness of the forces aligned against Harry.

Along with the increasing revelation of what Harry’s parents were really like and their relation to Lord Voldemort, there is the growth in maturity of the teenage characters and corresponding changes and revelations in the adult characters, some of whom turn out to be covertly working for Voldemort. Professor Dumbledore is revealed more and more clearly as the great and most lovable permissive and tolerant father-figure that he was vaguely perceived to be at the beginning. Mad-Eye Moody is the subject of a startling discovery when he becomes the victim of Barty Crouch’s dark-side son but is delivered at that evil one’s death. And so it is with all the characters. This causes the total structure of the successive stories to take on the quality of a living drama. The characters truly interact and as a result, grow and change.

Especially important is the character of Harry himself who, if the literary structure of the work is to maintain its epic-like unity, must emerge as a truly heroic figure consistent with his magical gifts and the mission entrusted to him, of which we only learn details in the fifth book. As Aristotle says, it is not the fact that a story is about one person that causes its unity but rather that one person’s relationship to all the other characters and actions so that the incidents that happen are intrinsically related. And so far, this holds true of the Harry Potter books. For while Harry is physically weak and always on the verge of a nervous break-down, he is capable of heroic actions, and in the fifth book emerges as a very angry young man of fifteen whose passion is increased by the mysterious take-over of the School by the Ministry of Magic which has, in turn, been seriously infiltrated by Dark-Side people,

especially in the person of the new Headmistress, Dolores Umbridge. Dumbledore is temporarily banished and seemingly aligned with Professor Snape against Harry by commanding him to take classes in Occlumency, a form of mind-control, which turns out to be but an effort to teach Harry to master his anger since he is vulnerable to Voldemort's influence and even possession when his passions are aroused. But through it all he emerges the hero and in such a way as to make his earlier infatuation with Cho seem utterly insignificant, indeed. As a character, too, Cho is unworthy of Harry for she is superficial and silly. Let's hope she is gone forever.

Hermione Granger is the Brain, the Intellect, and even the moral conscience of the team of Harry, Ron and Hermione, a team that will later include Neville Longbottom. It is most fitting that Neville be admitted to this special group of friends because his parents are living victims of Voldemort's Death-Eaters.

A final word about structure concerns what Aristotle calls diction and what most critics today consider under the term *style*. Aristotle says it should be clear but not vulgar. Rowling's style is certainly clear but it cannot be said that it avoids the vulgar. Her teenage characters speak in the same vulgar and irreverent way that most teens do today. Only occasionally does Professor Dumbledore reprimand Harry for his lack of respect for the other teachers. But more of this later.

Rowling's style is so clear that we feel we know every nook and cranny of Hogwarts Castle as well as every other place to which the narrative takes us. Rowling is completely self-effaced and this contributes greatly to the clarity of the visual perceptions. Her use of words is uncannily precise. A typical example of the diction in Aristotle's sense can be seen in the following passage from the Sorcerer's Stone, pp. 131-3:

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. There were doors that wouldn't open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren't really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other, and Harry was sure the coats of armor could walk.

The characteristics of clarity and concrete specificity are operative throughout all the books and contribute to the action of the plot. More than once Harry and his friends are hindered by the vanishing step. The following characters also play an essential part in the plot when their turn comes around:

The ghosts didn't help, either. It was always a nasty shock when one of them glided suddenly through a door you were trying to open. Nearly Headless Nick was always happy to point new Gryffindors in the right direction, but Peeves the Poltergeist was worth two locked doors and a trick staircase if you met him when you were late for class. He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, "GOT YOUR CONK!"

The spirit of fun, the comic aura mentioned earlier, is also evident in these passages. Whether Aristotle would approve or not, I cannot say. But the prose is colorful, dynamic, clear and all achieved by a most economical use of words. This is typical of most modern literature. It is fast-paced and does not indulge in language for its own sake as, for example, the 19th century novelists love to do. There are no “purple passages” in the Harry Potter books nor is there anything similar to the long didactic and philosophical passages we are familiar with in, say, the novels of George Eliot and Charles Dickens. But the above description of Hogwarts is quite essential for the action. The action of the Harry Potter books could not, really, take place in any other kind of place.

The structure is really the most if not the only original aspect of the Harry Potter books, for Rowling has taken many elements from Grimm’s Fairy Tales, from Hans Christian Andersen, not to mention medieval tales of chivalry and romance. But only Rowling has exalted the wizard himself to the status of the central epic-hero of the story. And not only one wizard but the entire world of wizardry is elevated to the status of an entirely independent world to which the Muggle world of normal beings is vastly inferior. This is Rowling’s counterfeit creation which we cannot help but see as the wish-fulfillment of Lucifer himself.

Harry is conspicuous for his physical and nervous weakness – his stomach and heart react to every event as only the typically near-neurotic system is known to. In other words, he is subject to anxiety and panic attacks. But this is a necessary qualification for the Gnostic-hero. Furthermore, the narrative structure of successive years combined with the Aristotelian complexities of Peripeties and Discoveries – even out-doing most classic mysteries in this regard – marks the Harry Potter books as highly original, especially in the unity of its Plot, and the nature of its main characters.

These remarks about the structure of the Harry Potter books must supply for a description of the main reason why the books make for such compelling reading. The Plot is everything from the purely literary point of view. Those who have read the first five books will understand this very well and admire the literary skill that has produced them. Those who have not read the books and who are determined not to read them (may their tribe increase!) may accept or reject my evaluation of Rowling’s literary talents. And all of us may well lament that such gifts are not being put into the service of the Truth and the Faith. Rowling, Tolkien, Lewis and many others have produced cultural icon’s and counterfeit creations that represent the desired entertainment of our degenerate times. Lucifer chooses his means with discernment.

The Nature of the Meaning: Thematic Aspects

In one special way all fantasy literature comes up against Aristotle’s canon of verisimilitude. He does not call it that but describes it in connection with the distinction between narrative poetry (or all fiction) and historical writing. In chapter 9 of the *Poetics* he says:

... it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened [as in historical narrative] but a kind of thing that might happen, that is, what is possible as being probable or necessary.

The happenings in the Harry Potter books are certainly not possible or probable in the real world, at least not on the scale that they occur in Harry's wizard world. Some scholars are trying to explain the magical events as predictive of what technology will produce in the future, especially in the areas of particle physics and genetics. Such a one is Roger Highfield in his book *The Science of Harry Potter: How Magic Really Works* (Viking, 2002), but I find most of his examples very unconvincing. His main blind spot, too, is the documented fact that much of what happens around Harry Potter is possible to Lucifer, the fallen Angel and his followers. For example, what Peeves the Poltergeist does in the castle of Hogwarts is entirely possible and probable and according to Aristotle's canon of verisimilitude. But the reality of spirits is anathema to today's technocrats and "real" scientists. However, it is the impossible and improbable events that constitute today's genre of fantasy. Such events would include the constant access to the broomstick form of transportation, especially as it is used in the game of Quidditch. We might also include the use of Floo powder by which the wizards are transported from one fireplace to another, and most particularly of all, the situation of the parallel world of wizardry which exists at some kind of inter-face with the Muggle world and is reached by going through the barrier that separates them, as the students go through Platform Nine and Three-Quarters to board the Hogwarts Express. Number 12 Grimmauld Place is also situated on this inter-face of the two worlds and disappears when Harry and his friends descend the front door-steps. These impossible events and places give the plot an aura of comedy which is enhanced by the antics of the Weasley twins, Fred and George, especially in their final exit from Hogwarts. Just what Aristotle would think of this kind of thing that emanates from the essential aspects of the story, I cannot say. I suspect he would find it a great fault since he did not esteem comedy at all. But then, he would not be thinking of fantasy as we know it today, especially when it seems to be built upon the modern sciences of physics and biology. And we should remind ourselves, too, that in Aristotle's world of the Homeric epics and the great Greek tragedians, the actions of the gods was believed to be real. And they were entirely correct in that – they only had the wrong gods!

Why is it, then, that fantasy has such a wide appeal today? I suggest that in the Harry Potter books, for example, in the plainly serious parts such as all the encounters with Voldemort and even talk of him, what keeps the comic elements from disrupting the unity of the overall Plot is the fact that they form necessary parts of the environment, of the very physical nature of the wizard world. This world is crazy by its very definition as fantasy. But also, because of this, I suggest that it is in the nature of a vast metaphor. Aristotle says that

...the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. (*Poetics* ch. 22)

Now I will venture into the realm of speculation. The Dursleys are described as having "a

very medieval attitude toward magic.” (Page 2 in *Prisoner of Azkaban*) So far from being predictive of what science can or will achieve, it seems to me possible that Rowling is contrasting our modern world of technology with the medieval world that unlike the Dursleys, had a real appreciation of the preternatural marvels that Lucifer is capable of performing. The Dursleys equated magic with superstition and imagination. Rowling wants to show us it is real insofar as it might be an evolution from or progress beyond that medieval view that knew magic either as demonic or as superstition. For Rowling it is neither demonic nor superstitious but, I believe, a kind of “magical” substitute for the world of the supernatural which is real but only participated in by those with divine Faith. For Rowling, the magical world is the world of human love and goodness, as will be demonstrated later.

So, on the one hand, the wizard world of Harry Potter may be a kind of parody of our electronic age wherein electricity substitutes for divine Grace, as Solange Hertz describes in her chapter on “Hell’s Amazing Grace in *Beyond Politics*, pp. 69ff. The artificiality of the modern environment has, indeed, made electricity a substitute for divine Grace. But I don’t think Rowling is objecting to that so much as she is trying to show that the very human but also “magical” world of Harry Potter is indeed, a rational and desirable substitute for what the Catholic Faith teaches is the real supernatural Order of Divine Grace. Harry’s magical powers are inborn and as such are for him a kind of “habitual grace” while the use of charms and spells constitute the “actual graces” that come to him from whatever source bestows the magic. For Rowling and for Harry, it is something very deeply human.

Neo-Gnosticism and New Age Spirituality

The philosophy underlying and pervading all modern fantasy literature is that of Neo-Gnosticism which is essentially the same as New Age Spirituality. Instead of cauldrons for potions and wands for the casting of spells, New Agers use crystals, visualization to obtain what one desires and channeling to contact spirits which latter practice can open the door to all the rest. Holistic Health includes what Harry Potter studies in Herbology under Professor Sprout; Potions under Professor Snape; Divination and Astrology under Professor Trewlaney and later, the Centaur Firenze; History of Magic under the Ghost, Professor Binns; Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall; Charms with Professor Flitwick; Care of Magical Creatures with Hagrid and for a time, with Professor Grubbly-Plank; and Defense Against the Dark Arts with a succession of teachers who all fail to be up to the task.

New Agers, I imagine, love the Harry Potter books!

1. The Spirit of Rebellion.

All fiction is a powerful teaching tool because it teaches by example, what the ancients called the *exemplum*. The novel is but an extended form of this literary device and film extends it into the more brutal form of the audio-visual attack on the senses.

The prototype of all rebellious spirits is Lucifer himself whose eternal statement stands forever as “I will not serve” and who elaborated his own nature when he added, in Milton’s words, “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven” and “Evil be thou my good.”

The prototype in mythology is Prometheus, like Harry Potter, of mixed blood. He is half-Titan on his father’s side leaving his full genealogy in doubt. He is defined by his rebellious and deceitful nature. He is a trickster, “in an orderly universe, an expression of internal dissent.” (Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Universe, Gods, and Men*. Harper-Collins, 1999-2001)

The prototype in the history of the Church is Simon Magus who sought to buy from Saint Peter the supernatural gifts of Grace and Miracles. He would thus turn the mission of Christ into a spectacle, a circus for the vulgar masses. (*Acts* 8:9-24) And this is pretty much what fantasy literature accomplishes with its trumped-up quests and magical shows of power. (John Paul Two, *We Witches and Wizards Love You!*)

But there is another prototype from fairy tale lore which comes closer to our own times and is more typical of present-day dissent. It is the story of Cinderella. She answers to both the male abused child in Harry Potter and to the feminist abused gender as exemplified by Hermione Granger. Cinderella is magically transformed from the abused and neglected underling into the beautiful and exalted Princess. This transformation comes about by most magical means that transport the transformed Cinderella to the Prince’s Ball; and she is finally discovered in all her innate royalty by the smallness of her foot that alone fits the lost slipper. And so she lives happily ever after with her King-husband in the Royal Palace, with all oppressed peoples forever banished from the realm. Such is the dream of Hermione. But it is against the created hierarchy of reality, and the Church alone has provided us with the remedy for Cinderella’s predicament. It is God’s answer given to us through His Church.

Sometime in the late 13th or early 14th century, just when the fairy tales later collected by the Brothers Grimm probably began to be composed by illiterate story-tellers of the lower classes, God raised up a great Saint now known to us as Blessed Margaret of Castello. She was born blind and severely crippled, her right leg much shorter than her left and her spine unnaturally curved. But her mind was unusually bright and her Confessor described it as “luminous”. Despised and cruelly rejected by her upper-class wealthy parents, Margaret was immured in a cell to keep her from the prying eyes of the neighbors. But she was permitted the visits of a priest who taught her the basics of the Faith. Wide open to Grace and supernatural Light, she grew rapidly in virtue and holiness. She was never known to speak ill of her parents but gave every indication rather of lovingly embracing all her afflictions in a spirit of union with her Crucified and Rejected Lord. Eventually she was released from her prison and allowed to join the Dominican Order of Mantellates. Many miracles of both soul and body accompanied her penitential life and she died at the age of 33 in the year 1320. (W.R. Bonniwell, O.P. *The Life of Blessed Margaret of Castello*. IDEA, 1979. A project of Father Charles Fiore, R.I.P.)

Perhaps even more like Cinderella of the fairy tale is the life of Saint Germaine (1579-1601). There is no record of her parentage and she was probably an orphan or foundling abandoned to the household of relatives by the name of Cousin. Frail and sickly from birth, afflicted with scrofula and a deformed arm, constantly tormented by illness, she was cruelly mistreated by “the stepmother” – a term of opprobrium in those days. Allowed to attend religious instruction on Sundays, Germaine, like little Margaret, was wide open to the Grace of God and allowed Him to take possession of her soul. She was raised to the heights of sanctity and worked many miracles. (Pamphlet. *Saint Germaine. Model of Humility. Flower of Purity. Devoted to the Holy Eucharist.* Msgr. Joseph A. Keener. No date. No publisher.)

And in the 20th century, God raised up from Bourgeois mediocrity the “greatest Saint of modern times”, Saint Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, again teaching us that He uses the weak to confound the strong and showing us by real, live human beings the way He wills for the oppressed of this world to react to the injustices of men.

Now obviously, we are taught quite the opposite in every way by Harry Potter, by Frodo and Sam, by the children of Namia and all the clever and deceitful underlings of the Brothers Grimm. Even “The Ugly Duckling” is essentially deceitful because it makes of a natural difference a cause for inordinate exaltation. The duckling was “ugly” only because he was out of place – not because he was inferior and destined to become superior.

The examples of the Saints are the only answer to human injustice and oppression. Our Lord has given us the Example. There is no other if we are to be exalted by Him on the Last Day and be admitted to the Supper Feast of the Lamb.

It is just this ancient and modern spirit of rebellion against established order that is the passion motivating all the heroes of fantasy.

In the Harry Potter books, the rules of the School of Hogwarts are exceedingly flexible under the Headmaster Professor Dumbledore. It is the evil covert Death-Eater Bartemus Crouch, Minister of Magic, who is most rigid when it comes to enforcing rules. This is emphatically underlined when Dolores Umbridge becomes Headmistress.

By having lawful authority to be represented in the most evil and irrationally tyrannical of characters, Dolores Umbridge, Rowling is attacking authority as such. Her ideal is Professor Dumbledore who allows the rules to be broken with impunity, and even praises the culprits whose disobedience furthers some important quest or adventure to uncover some mystery. At the end of Chamber of Secrets, he says to Harry and Ron,

“I seem to remember telling you both that I would have to expel you if you broke any more school rules... Which goes to show that the best of us must sometimes eat our words.... You will both receive Special Awards for Service to the School and – let me see – I think two hundred points apiece for Gryffindor.”

The message is sent and received that the End Justifies the Means. Thus, Authority dissolves into an indulgent parent-type figure and rules become the merest of “guidelines”. Worst of all, this kind of permissiveness places a terrible burden of choice upon pre-adolescent and adolescent children who hardly have the experience to make prudent judgments in what turn out to be life-and-death situations. But Rowling, in the conduct of her authority figures, such as Dumbledore, especially, is reflecting and endorsing our society’s inordinate respect for the child and his so-called “rights”. This is not argued explicitly, as it would be in a 19th century novel, but rather it is presented in action, in the characters – really, a much more persuasive form of presentation. Plainly, according to Rowling, Rules are made to be broken when the situation requires and Rules, as such, are even mocked in the inordinately rigid applications of some teachers like Snape, in the Caretaker, Argus Filch, and in the Ministers of Magic, Cornelius Fudge and Bartemus Crouch.

The same laxity of morality is seen when it comes to lying. Basically honest Harry does not hesitate to lie in casual matters, in insincere conventions of politeness, to save himself embarrassment or when it seems inconsequential and especially when it appears justified in order to achieve what are to him higher ends laid upon him by his mission as the child who caused the Dark Lord Voldemort to lose his powers and disappear from the Wizard World.

But the crowning act of rebellion is achieved by the Weasley twins, Fred and George, when, after six years of serious pranks and breaking of rules, not to mention the most outlandish acts of disrespect, they rescue their confiscated brooms by the Accio command-charm and take off into the night sky for Hogsmead to realize their dream of operating a Joke-Shop with the Tri-Wizard Cup winnings that Harry has given them. “Special discounts to Hogwarts students who swear they’re going to use our products to get rid of this old bat” shouts George pointing to Professor Umbridge. Pursued by shrieks of “Stop them!” they fling back to Peeves, the Poltergeist, the order “Give her hell from us, Peeves”, referring to Dolores Umbridge, the tyrant of Hogwarts in the absence of Dumbledore. The chapter ends:

And Peeves, whom Harry had never seen take an order from a student before, swept his belled hat from his head and sprang to a salute as Fred and George wheeled about to tumultuous applause from the students below and sped out of the open front doors into the glorious sunset. (p. 675)

Fred and George glorify what seems a really justified rebellion, much as Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* glorifies and justifies the French Revolution, backed, as he was, by Thomas Carlyle, the English social philosopher. But with Rowling we have progressed up to and beyond Dickens and Carlyle and even the English ex-patriot Thomas Paine who greatly encouraged and inflamed the American Revolution with his books *Common Sense* and the *Rights of Man* and went on to attack Christianity and the Bible in *The Age of Reason*. For this is the ultimate aim of the modern Revolution going back to Lucifer himself – to destroy the Church and Her Guardianship of Divine Revelation in Holy Scripture and Tradition.

I have often felt reading Rowling’s presentation of both Voldemort and Umbridge that

she is attacking in them what she perceives to be the Catholic Church, especially in the Church's divine institution as the One and Only true Authoritarian Teacher and Guardian of divine Truth. Modern fantasy writers like Rowling and especially Philip Pullman whose work has not yet achieved much popularity due, I believe, to its much more adult style, see the Church as the incarnation of an authoritarianism that is opposed to the absolute autonomy of modern man. And so She is! This much maligned Church is indeed the Guardian of the Rights of God, above all, and how well She realizes that man's only true freedom is to be found in submission to Her Yoke which is the same as that of Christ. And it is both light and sweet. (*Matthew* 11: 29-35)

And what about Tolkien and Lewis? Are they too inspired by the same spirit of Rebellion and Revolution? I maintain that they are. Their characters mainly represent a hankering after the old pre-Industrial days but their rebellious character consists in the very fact that both of their creations, both Middle-Earth and Narnia, represent protests against the Truth of Divine Revelation as constantly taught by the Church throughout the ages. Narnia protests against that Truth in its revival of paganism and Middle-Earth in the many ways it departs from and contradicts the real world that God has created. Neither Tolkien nor Lewis acknowledges the divine and necessary mission of the Church founded by Christ for the salvation of men. Neither gives due respect to the tremendous Fact of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity and the exalted place of the Ever-Virgin Mary in the Redemption of mankind. These omissions make of their laborious fantasies the shrillest of Mockeries.

2. The Feminist Rebellion.

Some today are openly espousing the heresy of Gnosticism. One such is June Singer, author of *A Gnostic Book of Hours: Keys to Inner Wisdom*. (HarperCollins, 1992). The anti-authoritarian and essentially rebellious nature of Gnosticism is seen in the following quotation:

... they vehemently opposed the establishment of an authoritative institution to which people should look for moral guidance and spiritual instruction. Gnostics, as we can see from their original writings, were clear in their assertion that gnosis [i.e., knowledge] cannot be acquired through the services of an intermediary. With a firm conviction that the spark of the divine rests within the human soul and can only be discovered through self-knowledge, the Gnostics found the idea of a hierarchy that would approve or disapprove of the validity of their direct experience unacceptable.

Obviously, the Gnostic approach to reality undermines not only all secular authority but most especially the spiritual authority of the Church which Christ founded to carry on His work. Anglican scholar Montague Summers in *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (University Books, 1956, originally published 1925) points this out very well in his chapter on "The Witch: Heretic and Anarchist", for, as he demonstrates, the Gnostic "Manichean system was in truth a simultaneous attack upon the Church and the State, a desperate but well-planned organization to destroy the whole fabric of society, to reduce civilization to chaos." (p. 17)

Recall that Saint Teresa of Avila was investigated by the Inquisition for this Gnostic heresy which was identified as a private “Illuminism”. But the great Saint of the Interior Life was found free of all heresy because she submitted all of her writings to the judgment of the Church. This is the only sure and safe way to God.

With such an emphasis upon the individual’s own experience as the only source of validity, we can see also the source of the egalitarian emphasis in the Harry Potter books, especially as it emerges in Hermione’s House-Elf Liberation Front. But it is seen also in her very character as a female, as a girl and part of the Harry and Ron team. Hermione is the Intellect of the group as her superior logic and brain-power is manifested throughout the books; and in this we see a powerful argument, in the concrete example, for the modern Feminist agenda. Behind it is not only the larger philosophy of Gnosticism but also the Gnostic worship of the female Goddess Sophia and the more earthly witch-related Gaia. June Singer says,

... for the Gnostics the Feminine was an essential and dynamic aspect of the divine Unity. Their view of the Feminine ... was radically different from the Church’s idealized image of Mary, whose prime function was to serve as a vessel for the manifestation of the male representative of God.

This kind of thinking about the Blessed Virgin is behind the wholesale downgrading of the Mother of God that we suffer from today. It is essentially Protestant to eliminate from Mary’s being the sublime prerogatives that flow from the fact that this Spiritual Vessel of Honor and Singular Vessel of Devotion also supplied the very Flesh and Blood of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

The Church’s “image of Mary” is far from being merely “idealized”, for it is the fact of Her Divine Motherhood requiring Her Immaculate Conception and perpetual Virginité that places her far above all the angels and other creatures, both male and female. Her true nature can only be seen in Her unique relation not only to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God made Man in Her, but also in Her consequent relation to God the Father Whose unique Daughter She is, and to God the Holy Ghost Whose unique Spouse She is. Neo-Gnostics, therefore, downgrade the Most Blessed Ever Virgin Mary while they deify the pagan Goddess Sophia-Gaia because this better suits their anti-Catholic, anti-Truth purposes which are to exalt the human at the expense of the truly Divine.

Because the Blessed Virgin Mary is Who She is, we find no mention nor even any faint symbol of Her in modern fantasy literature such as Narnia, Middle-Earth or the Harry Potter wizard world. And because Mary is not there, neither is the true God.

Here is a good description of Hermione Granger from June Singer’s *Gnostic Book of Hours*:

Sophia represents the feminine soul or anima, an inner figure whose leading characteristics are wisdom and compassion and who often loses herself in her desire to save others.

This is Hermione as she provides the wisdom, from her course books and constant recourse to library books, but also from her own innate intellectual acuity. It is Hermione who concocts

the Polyjuice Potion that enables the three of them to transform into the three Slytherins; it is Hermione who figures out the logic behind the Seven bottles in *Goblet*; she is also the moral conscience of the group, constantly reminding the boys to do their homework and even providing them with elaborate schedule planners. When in *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry promises Nearly Headless Nick that he will attend his Deathday Party and then tries to back out of it in order to attend the Halloween Party in the Great Hall, it is Hermione that vehemently protests he cannot break his promise! And in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, she protests that they cannot break the Wizard Law against meddling with time by using the Time-Turner in their sleuthing, while at the same time she has obtained permission from Professor McGonagall to use it in order that she can attend three classes at the same time! And she is a superb psychologist as in the 5th book, she explains at length to Harry why Cho reacts the way she does to his clumsy advances. This prompts Ron to tell her, “You should write a book translating mad things girls do so boys can understand them,” (p. 573)

Hermione is actually a more skillful witch than the boys are wizards, for her charms and spells in the classes they attend together always turn out to be superior to all the rest.

It seems to me that all this is Rowling’s way of furthering the Gnostic Feminist agenda. We can easily imagine the effect Hermione has on pre-teen and teen-aged girls of today: In fact, I hear by radio that there is a new book out calculated to “appeal to Harry Potter fans” about a little girl who gains tremendous power by means of hypnotism!

And this is at the root of it all: power for children – a complete reversal of the natural moral order of things. Truly, our world is headed for chaos.

3. Humanism

June Singer in her book *A Gnostic Book of Hours* points out an interesting development in modern Gnosticism brought about by the psychology of Karl Jung who suggested that the archetypal characters of the myths are best understood as metaphors for our own human qualities and characteristics. Thus, the chief archon, Yaldabaoth (Sabaoth) represents the creative impulse that goes awry when it is dominated by blind ambition and jealousy of any other being who might be superior. We see this in *Star Wars* wherein the Jedi doctrine of never giving way to anger and ambition figures prominently, for the Dark Side of the Force is ruled by blind hatred. In the Harry Potter books, Harry is indeed motivated throughout by his anger against Voldemort who killed his parents, but as time goes on, he is counseled by Professor Dumbledore that he must learn to control this anger. In the 5th book, Dumbledore insists that Harry take the course in Occlumency from Professor Snape that he might learn to control his thoughts because Voldemort has access to Harry’s mind when Harry’s anger is aroused.

Thus we have in the fantasy literature, reflecting the same natural light as ancient paganism, a recognition of the need for discipline. Insofar as it adheres to the natural law written in the hearts of all men who come

into the world, humanism can maintain a semblance of morality. But this same emphasis upon the merely human, especially when it is accompanied by a failure to acknowledge or even a rejection of God's Law as revealed in Holy Scripture and Tradition, – such humanism can very easily lead people far astray, as we witness today in the abnormal and unnatural clamorous insistence that equal rights be granted to homosexuals, to children, to the mentally disabled and insane and even to animals. Most offensive to the normal moral sense is the present achievement of homosexuals gaining recognition as equal in dignity and morality with heterosexuals, even to the granting of same-sex “marriage”. Sodom and Gomorrah did not sink so low! It would not surprise me if in the remaining two books of the Harry Potter series we find some examples of Gay and Lesbian life styles, and even marriage. Hermione could be headed this way. But let's hope that Rowling does not push her humanist philosophy to that logical extreme. The established dis-order is bad enough.

Just as important in the present Harry Potter books, however, is the emphasis upon human love and sacrifice, most prominently in Harry's parents, especially his mother,, and also in Harry himself as he risks his own life, on more than one occasion, to save others.

The most explicit statement of this humanistic theme comes at the end of The Sorcerer's Stone from Professor Dumbledore. Voldemort, existing as a faceless and bodiless shadowy vapor in the back of Professor Quirrell's Turban, a veritable parasite, attempts, through Quirrell to retrieve the Stone from Harry's pocket. There is a fierce struggle during which Harry faints. (Typical Gnostic hero who is by nature vulnerable and defective.) Later, with Harry laid out in the hospital wing of the Castle, Dumbledore explains how he rescued Harry from Quirrell's grasp and that Voldemort has disappeared and left Quirrell to die. Harry is full of questions. Much of what Harry wants to know is only to be revealed in later episodes of the overall plot, but for now, Dumbledore discloses the following:

... Voldemort said that he only killed my mother because she tried to stop him from killing me. But why would he want to kill me in the first place?" Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

"Alas, the first thing you ask me, I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day ... put it from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older ... I know you hate to hear this ... when you are ready, you will know."

And Harry knew it would be no good to argue.

It is this kind of narrative technique that keeps readers anxious to read the next installment of the story in the next Harry Potter book. Harry continues:

"But why couldn't Quirrell touch me?"

Harry's flesh was like fire to Quirrell's touch and he was burned severely by grasping Harry's arm. In turn, Harry's grasp of Quirrell's face also burned Quirrell severely. So Dumbledore continues:

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been

loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good. (p. 299)

Voldemort's words when Harry sees what Quirrell reveals on unwrapping his turban, give the dark opposite and distorted mirror image of Harry's mother's love:

"I have form only when I can share another's body ... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds ... Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks ... you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest ... and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own ..." (p. 293)

There is also the enduring friendship between Harry, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, a friendship never described by explanatory discourse but simply illustrated in action and perceived by the reader as powerful examples. It is also seen in Harry's admiration for his rival, Cedric Diggory, whose body he brings back to Cedric's parents from the terrible experience of Lord Voldemort's return in the 4th book. In this same book, Harry's own heroic love is seen in his attempt to rescue all the hostages in addition to the one assigned him.

But there is not a hint in all the books, nor would it be consistent with the wizard world established from the beginning – though it could conceivably be introduced – not a hint that this human love so powerfully illustrated, must draw its goodness and power from a higher Example, in fact, that of God Himself Who so loved the world that He gave His only Son Who in turn, suffered the most extreme form of torture and death to redeem mankind. Harry Potter and his world know nothing of the Savior, the Redeemer nor the Creator of mankind. Rowling's philosophy is that of Jung's Neo-Gnostic humanism.

The characters in the Harry Potter books never rise above the human level. Some may claim that Lilly Potter's sacrifice is an illustration of Our Lord's words in *John* 15:13, that "Greater love than this no man hath, that he lay down his life for his friends." But the Gospels do not separate this kind of love from that of God Himself. In fact, the Great Commandment, echoing the Ten given on Mount Sinai, insists that the Love of God comes first and that the second is only like unto it. The two commandments simply cannot be separated. And this is the great divorce, the terrible wrenching away from God what belongs to Him – the love of His creatures.

A refusal or even a failure to acknowledge the obligation of the First Commandment is a Sin of the first magnitude. It is the supreme dis-order, a denial of the first of all ordered relations, that of the Creator to His creature, a relation purely of Love, and of the creature to his Creator, a relation of the most absolute dependence for existence. Add to this the dimension of the Redemption and we begin to see the monstrous disorder projected by those who deny or refuse God's rights to the total love of His creatures. Theologians tell us that the moral order must be repaired in the same measure that it has been disturbed by the disorder of sin. Imagine, then, what repair will be required of all those who make human

love supreme and exalt finite human love with no reference whatever to the infinite God Who IS Love.

And yet, most English fiction for the last 200 years has reflected this obsessive exaltation of the human without reference to God the Creator and Redeemer.

There are beautiful examples of the right order in the lives of the Saints, for God never leaves us orphans, that is, He never leaves us without stunning examples of the Truth of things. My favorite is that of Zelig and Louis Martin, the parents of the Little Flower, Saint Therese of Lisieux. Their conjugal love was greatly human but transformed by Grace in the Supernatural Order wherein the primacy of the love of God rules all. No one could say that their married love was any less than any other love, say, that of Heathcliff and Catherine, of Jane Eyre and Rochester, or even of Eloise and Abelard or of Dante and Beatrice. It was far better than all these because it was higher and rightly ordered to its proper End in God. Most significant of all, the fruit of this wonderful union was four child-angels and five saintly Religious, the youngest of whom has been hailed as “the greatest Saint of modern times”. There is no more beautiful example of conjugal love than that of Zelig and Louis Martin.

Finally, we must recognize that it is this presence and primacy of human love in the Harry Potter books that prevents Rowling’s philosophy from falling into the hellish ideology of Nihilism, which so quickly degenerates into Sadism – Hell on earth – wherein even natural human love is transformed into a diabolical Hatred. We shudder as we hear more and more frequently of Sadistic crimes both in stark reality and in such media representations as film and the novel. There are pornographic films that feature on-screen murders in a context of sexual relations. And in a film like *Silence of the Lambs*, the “hero” is a cannibalistic serial killer named Hannibal Lector. This character continues in books that follow the first one, supposedly illustrating the genre of mystery-detective-horror. Emphasis on the latter. (See the book by Catholic Thomas Hibbs *Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld*. Spence, 1999)

There are some faint indications that Harry Potter could be headed in the same direction despite the philosophy manifested by Dumbledore’s words and by his character. But I found offensive and really unnecessary, thus agreeing with the 15-year old critic quoted earlier, the kissing scenes in the 5th book. One is embarrassed for oneself as well as for Harry. Happily, though, speaking from the purely literary point of view, the plot has become so increasingly complex in this most recent book, that the “love interest” fades into utter insignificance. And so it must do if Harry is to fulfill his promised mission as we are led to believe he must by all that has gone before as well as by the Prophecy of this 5th book wherein it is established that either Harry or Lord Voldemort must finally be annihilated. (Wow! The child in me cannot wait for the 6th book!)

4. Good and Evil.

The question is rightly raised: If there is good and evil, then there must be a God over all. Yes, there must be, but in the philosophy of the Fantasies, this natural primordial Truth is distorted and denied by the heresies of Pantheism and Manicheism wherein all is God and good and evil are simply parts of one “nature” like the Yin and Yang of Chinese myth. The Fantasies, in fact, are a Great Evasion of the Divine Revelation of an Original Sin committed by the First Man and Woman, Adam and Eve, whose personal Original Disobedience is transmitted by inheritance to all their descendants who, in turn, are inclined to evil and commit numberless personal sins. Furthermore, the Original Sin was committed at the instigation of the great Fallen Angel Lucifer who continues, throughout history, to tempt to sin all the descendants of Adam and who is at eternal enmity with the Woman of *Genesis* 3:15 whose Divine Son is both Creator and Redeemer of the human race.

There is nothing like a Dark Side versus a good or Light Side in traditional literature such as ancient epic and medieval chivalric romance because these genres, especially in the West, retained the idea, at least implicitly, of the Providence of God wherein all human action took place. The Gnostic Manichean description of magical powers seems to have originated in modern times with George Lucas’s mythical epic of *Star Wars*, and it is not impossible that this Jewish film-maker got his idea of “The Force” from Kabbalistic sources. In any case, here is a description of the Force from the *Star Wars Encyclopedia*, by Stephen J. Sansweet (Ballantine, 1998):

FORCE, the. Both a natural and mystical presence, it is an energy field that both suffuses and binds the entire galaxy. The Force is generated by all living things, surrounding and penetrating them with its essence. Like most forms of energy, the Force can be manipulated, and it is the knowledge and predisposition to do so that empowers the Jedi Knights – and the Dark Jedi. For there are two sides to the Force. The light side bestows great knowledge, peace, and an inner serenity, the dark side is filled with fear, anger, and the vilest aggression. Yet both sides of the Force, the life-affirming and the destructive, are part of the natural order. Through the Force, a Jedi Knight can see far off places, perform amazing feats, and accomplish what would otherwise be impossible. A Jedi’s strength flows from the Force, but a true Jedi uses it for knowledge and defense – never attack. The Force is a powerful ally, however it is used.

Here is the Gnostic emphasis upon knowledge (gnosis) combined with the ancient philosophy of pantheism and the later heresy of the Manichees.

There is no God above nature, let alone a Personal God, the Triune God of Scripture and Tradition. In the Harry Potter books, it seems that the Auror is similar to the Jedi Knight. Undoubtedly, the similarities will become clearer in the last two books of the series, for we are led to believe that Harry will, in spite of his scholarly ineptitude, become an Auror.

The author of the article on “The Force” continues:

There are three major Force skills: control, sense, and alter. Only Force-sensitive living things can master Jedi skills and the techniques that they control, but the training to reach full Jedi status usually requires time and great patience. Control is the ability of a Jedi to control his or

her own inner force. With this skill, a Jedi learns to master the functions of his or her own body. The sense skill helps Jedi sense the Force in things beyond themselves. Jedi learn to feel the bonds that connect all things. “You must feel the Force around you,” Jedi Master Yoda once told Luke Skywalker. “Here between you ... me,.. the tree.., the rock.., everywhere.” The alter skill allows a Jedi to change the distribution and nature of the Force to create illusions, move objects, and change the perceptions of others.

A Dark Jedi gives in to his or her anger. “If you once start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny,” Yoda warned Luke. Emperor Palpatine, on the other hand, urged Luke to continue down the path of blind fury and aggression. “Give in to your anger,” he told Luke. “Strike me down with all of your hatred, and your journey toward the dark side will be complete.”

We can see all of these “forces” operating in the Harry Potter books. There is also a “Force lightning” – by which white or blue bolts of pure energy fly from the user’s fingertips toward a target. It is usually a corruption of the Force by those who follow the dark side. It flows into a target and causes great pain as it siphons off the living energy and eventually kills its victim. This “lightning Force” is almost identical with the Avada Kadavra Curse used by Voldemort in Goblet of Fire. And Voldemort’s curses are always accompanied by green light of a blinding force. It is this alone that Harry remembers from the event of his parents’ death at the hands of Voldemort and which inflicted the lasting scar on his forehead. In fact, the skills of the Jedi Knights all correspond, quite plainly, with the Latin Spells and Curses and other hexes and jinxes available to Harry, Ron and Hermione as students of the Magical Arts at Hogwarts. Thus, the Force Lock, a strong force field used for imprisonment, corresponds to the Imperius and also the Cruciatus Curses, both of which cause extreme pain added to the specific impairment of each. Then there are “Force storms”, tornado magnitude energy storms used particularly by the Dark Side adepts. This is probably what Crouch used during the stormy night of the Quidditch World Cup in order to inscribe the Dark Mark of the Skull and Serpent in the night sky. Star Wars also has its Magicians in Master Yoda and Obi-Wan, Ben Kenobi.

In this false world of Star Wars and Hogwarts Wizardry which is separate from the Muggle-world of those who are not “Force-sensitive”, the Source of evil is outside of and apart from the individual’s free choice. Therefore, the free choice of each individual is placed in a world wherein one is not responsible to a personal God but only to one’s own Self. Gone is all belief in an all-Good and living God such as the Blessed Trinity Who created man and raised him to a state of Grace and perfection from which he fell by a deliberate and personal choice directed specifically against this God Who created him, and Who, after his Fall, promised to come Himself and redeem him.

Both the *Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* books, as well as the trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman, place great emphasis upon this fact of human free will and the choices we make. But this crucial gift of human nature is blasphemously wrenched from its Source as gift and its End as reward or punishment, and made to exist as something autonomous and free from all dependence upon the Creator. It’s hard to imagine a more illusory situation and one more calculated to lead souls to perdition. The demonic inspiration of such a view of man’s free will is revealed by Lucifer’s eternal statement: “I will not

serve!” The passion behind that statement is that of the nihilist who takes an intense delight in his defiance of all natural and supernatural manifestation of the true God. And so, Rowling in her Harry Potter books, is never very far from this abyss of Nothingness, which is pure Evil.

In the New Age system, which is roughly the same as that of the world of Star Wars and Harry Potter, despite their emphasis upon human free will, moral evil is actually spiritualized away entirely, for, in the words of Neo-Gnostic June Singer, the “enlightened person transcends the crude duality of good and evil and realizes that it is all part of the cosmic balance.” This is what is behind today’s talk of reconciling opposites, and of the extreme reluctance of most people, even Catholics, to speak of sin but rather to euphemize the concept as “mistake” or sickness.

In *Lord of the Rings*, the emphasis upon the human and the human autonomous free will and choice is the same as in Star Wars and the Harry Potter books, but the Source of magical power is quite ambiguous, mainly because of the Silmarillion. Gandalf the Grey possesses spellcraft but also has a staff of magical power and his Elven sword. Saruman the White is the greatest of the good Wizards and plans to create an army, a new breed of creature, to rival the hosts of the Dark Lord Sauron. This latter is The Enemy. Melkor of the Silmarillion, does not appear at all in the *Lord of the Rings* or in the *Hobbit*, but many assume his presence as the Source of the evil in the epic. Likewise, Gandalf claims to have been sent by the Valar, the “good angels” of Tolkien’s alternative creation. Eru or Iluvatar, God Himself, is quite absent and even dissolves into the impersonal Force of all other Neo-Gnostic and New Age counterfeits. With his description of the “good” magicians as Grey and White and of Sauron as “the Dark Lord”, Tolkien plainly aligns himself and his characters with the Manichean, Neo-Gnostic world of two sides, quite apart from the all-Good God, the Blessed Trinity. Indeed, the true God is entirely unknown in these counterfeit creations. For evil cannot be separated from the created will of angels and of men who choose to obey or to disobey the one true God of Divine Revelation, the Holy Trinity, and the Second Person of that Most Holy Trinity Who became Man, Who took His Human Nature from the Immaculate Body of the ever-Virgin Mary, and died on the Cross in His Human Nature to redeem us from the Original Sin of the First Man Adam and from our own personal sins committed as a consequence of that First Sin of our First Parents.

All of these counterfeit creations are false worlds built on heresy and sinful infidelity to Divine Revelation and the constant teaching of the Church.

An interesting side-light is seen in Rowling’s apparent mockery at times and in small ways of the very philosophy she obviously espouses.. A very valuable little book for locating some of Rowling’s sources is *The Magical World of Harry Potter* by David Colbert (Lumina Press, 2001). On page 186 he explains that the name Cassandra Vablatsky, author of a Divination textbook (fictional) used at Hogwarts, called *Unfogging the Future*, is a play on the name of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), a founder of the Theosophical Society whose aims include “investigating unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity” – in other words, Magic. This also includes the pantheistic-monistic view of the universe as discussed above.

5. The Dementors.

Related as much to the Humanism of Neo-Gnosticism as to the Neo-Gnostic dualism of good and evil is Rowling's personification in concrete form of Depression. These creatures are also a striking example of the substitute grace in Magic. The only way of overcoming an attack of the Dementors is to confront them with a powerful Patronus Charm. This consists of happy thoughts and memories that by their strength defeat the overwhelming weight of sadness and prevent the final Kiss of the Dementors that consists in sucking the very soul out of a person, resulting in death.

That a charm or spell like the Patronus can defeat Depression is an example of Pelagianism, the heresy that places the entire effort of achieving virtue in the human will and spirit alone. Charms and Spells are the "actual graces" in Harry Potter's Wizard-world whereas the natural and acquired bravery and determination of Harry constitute his "habitual grace". This he has in common with the Hobbits of Tolkien. But Harry, in the end, always succeeds whereas Frodo, the main character in the *Lord of the Rings*, fails and is carried off into a land that might vaguely be seen to signify a kind of Purgatory.

The Dementors are, in fact, a kind of metaphor or symbol of the plague that strikes so many souls today and to cure or alleviate which the Pharmaceutical companies are growing immensely wealthy – with drugs such as Prozac. Harry's charm always works for him, since he has mastered and acquired its strength, but in the real world of Muggledom, it is another story altogether. Only Divine Grace obtained by deep supernatural Faith and prayer can cure this spiritual malady and-or hold it at bay.

The fact that Magic replaces the true Supernatural life of Divine Grace in us is also presented forcibly in the case of Professor Lupin (in *Prisoner of Azkaban*). Lupin is a werewolf and cannot prevent himself from transforming into this terrible state of beastiality without taking, beforehand in the time of the full moon, a potion that Professor Snape prepares for him. This, of course, is a parody of the way that Divine Grace works in us, for Lupin is at the mercy of his own evil propensity, his will plays no part in the transformation itself, but the "grace" of the magical potion acts in spite of his own inclination for either good or evil. Many people even today view the action of Grace in this way – as some kind of magical potion. It is this aspect of the Harry Potter books that makes it to be in reality one of Satan's masterpieces of Counterfeit Creation. We might say that Tolkien's *Lord of the Kings*, founded on the distorted Creation story of the Silmarillion, is a masterpiece of counterfeit creation in the physical order whereas Rowling's Wizard-world is a counterfeit creation of the spiritual order. And for this reason, it is probably the much more dangerous.

6. Life after Death.

This theme is quite original with Rowling, although she is surely drawing upon an immense amount of folklore and modern spiritualist writing. At the end of The Sorcerer's Stone, Professor Dumbledore explains to the horrified Harry why he, Dumbledore, destroyed the Sorcerer's Stone, for now Nicholas Flamel and his wife, who have lived for 665 years because of the Stone, will die:

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry's face. "To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicholas and Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, very long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing.

As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all – the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them." (p. 297)

This is nothing more than the ancient pagan ideal of honor above all and the nobility of fighting and conquering some perceived evil. Humanism adopts it and makes it its own. But it is, along with the motherly love of Lilly Potter, what prevents the Harry Potter books from descending into Nihilism. The same could be said of the heroes of the Robin Cook novels, those of Clive Cussler, of Michael Crichton, the X-Men and all the other Supermen and Superheroes of modern popular literature.

In most of modern literature, the high-brow as well as the low, the inescapable implication of all death events is that there is no life after death but only oblivion. This is especially true of the high brow type. Take Hemingway, for example. His own suicide gives us the clue to the fate of his characters. But some of the best ideas of the ancients seem to be seeping in through the low-brow science fiction genres. As Professor Dumbledore says to Harry, "to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." Now Harry's mind is anything but "well-organized" in this or any of the following books. But Professor Dumbledore speaks for Rowling, I venture to say, and at least we can look forward to "the great Unknown" – the "next great adventure."

But when we come to the Ghosts in the Harry Potter books, there is quite something else! In The Chamber of Secrets, Moaning Myrtle tells Harry how she died in the Girl's Bathroom:

Myrtle's whole aspect changed at once. She looked as though she had never been asked such a flattering question.

"Ooooh, it was dreadful," she said with relish. "It happened right here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked, and I was crying, and then I heard somebody come in. They said something funny. A different language,, I think it must have been. Anyway, what really got me was that it was a boy speaking. So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet, and then – "Myrtle swelled importantly, her face shining – "I died,"

“How?” said Harry.

“No idea,” said Myrtle in hushed tones. “I just remember seeing a pair of great, big yellow eyes. My whole body sort of seized up, and then I was floating away...” She looked dreamily at Harry. “And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see. Oh, she was sorry she’d ever laughed at my glasses.” (p. 299)

Well, it was Voldemort that killed Myrtle, though she did not know it at the time. And there is a comical note in this whole incident. But the tone becomes much more serious in the 5th book wherein Harry, on the death of Sirius, is desperate for Sirius to come back, even as Myrtle did and Nearly Headless Nick. And so, he seeks out Nick for the answer:

Nick sighed and continued to gaze out at the grounds.

“That’s right, isn’t it?” Harry urged him. “You died, but I’m talking to you.... You can walk around Hogwarts and everything, can’t you?”

“Yes,” said Nearly Headless Nick quietly, “I walk and talk, yes.”

So, you came back, didn’t you?” said Harry urgently. “People can come back, right? As ghosts. They don’t have to disappear completely. Well?” he added impatiently, when Nick continued to say nothing.

Nearly Headless Nick hesitated, then said, “Not everyone can come back as a ghost.”

“What d’you mean?” said Harry quickly.

“Only ... only wizards.”

“Oh,” said Harry, and he almost laughed with relief. “Well, that’s okay then, the person I’m asking about is a wizard. So he can come back, right?”

Nick turned away from the window, and looked mournfully at Harry. “He won’t come back.”

“Who?”

“Sirius Black,” said Nick.

“But you did!” said Harry angrily. You came back – you’re dead and you didn’t disappear – ”

“Wizards can leave an imprint of themselves upon the earth, to walk palely where their living selves once trod,” said Nick miserably. “But very few wizards choose that path.”

“Why not?” said Harry, “Anyway – it doesn’t matter – Sirius won’t care if it’s unusual, he’ll come back, I know he will!”

And so strong was his belief that Harry actually turned his head to check the door, sure, for a split second, that he was going to see Sirius, pearly white and transparent, but beaming, walking through it toward him.

“He will not come back,” repeated Nick quietly. “He will have gone on.” “What d’you mean, ‘gone on’?” said Harry quickly. “Gone on where? Listen -- what happens when you die, anyway? Where do you go? Why doesn’t everyone come back? Why isn’t this place full of ghosts? Why ---?”

“I cannot answer,” said Nick.

“You’re dead, aren’t you?” said Harry exasperatedly. “Who can answer better than you?”

“I was afraid of death,” said Nick. “I chose to remain behind. I sometimes wonder whether I oughtn’t to have ... Well, that’s neither here nor there. ... In fact, I am neither here nor there.” He gave a small sad chuckle, “I know nothing of the secrets of death, Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead. I believe learned wizards study the matter in the Department of Mysteries – ”

“Don’t talk to me about that place!” said Harry fiercely.

“I am sorry not to have been more help,” said Nick gently. “Well ... well, do excuse me... the feast, you know...”

And he left the room, leaving Harry there alone, gazing blankly at the wall through which Nick had disappeared.

Harry felt almost as though he had lost his godfather all over again in losing the hope that he might be able to see or speak to him once more. He walked slowly and miserably back up through the empty castle, wondering whether he would ever feel cheerful again. (pp. 860-862)

Rowling is deadly serious here. Nick is giving Harry the best information that the modern world – Muggle or Wizard – can give and a sorry, sorry story it is, indeed, for children today to hear! Why, even the pagan Socrates could have given Harry more real hope than Nick does! This pathetic account of life after death – and who does not weep for Harry and children like him – is all that this Godless modern world can offer its children.

Given the fact that children today are deeply influenced by the Harry Potter books, Rowling must be a prime candidate for one of those Millstones Our Lord promised to those who would scandalize one of the little ones who believe in Him. For what is more scandalous to a child than to have all hope of Eternal Life withheld from him and to be fed this ghastly tripe of being able to choose whether to come back as a ghost or to “go on” – to what? The humanism of today emphasizes choice but in a truly diabolical fashion leaves out of the picture the most crucially important choice of all – that offered by God to every man that is born into the world: to believe in God, His Divine Revelation, and His Church.

I have heard Catholics and even Catholic Sisters praise the Harry Potter books because they lead children to read who otherwise could not be persuaded to read. But surely it is better to remain illiterate than to be led astray or what I fear is even more probable, to be imbued with these occult doctrines. It is surely a time of great responsibility for those who have the care of children in any way whatever.

Finally, there is the view of death given in the *Encyclopedia of Star Wars*. In the article on “Kenobi, Ben (Obi Wan)” there is this mysterious account of his death.

... Darth Vader confronted Obi Wan and the two engaged in a fierce lightsaber duel. Seeing the need for a diversion, Kenobi let himself be cleaved by Vader’s saber – but his cloak fell empty to the Death Star floor, for Kenobi had become one with the Force. That didn’t mean that Obi-

Wan couldn't still be Luke's mentor and protector. He continued to guide Luke – "Use the Force" he said – when Skywalker hit an exhaust port with torpedoes that would blow up the fearsome Death Star. He later guided Luke to the planet Dagobah to continue his training under Jedi Master Yoda. And he made Luke realize that he had to confront and kill Vader if the rebellion was to have any chance of success.

The spirit of Obi-Wan appeared to Luke several times more. But in a final appearance when Luke was on Coruscant, Kenobi told him that the distances were too great for him to appear again. "I loved you as a son, and as a student, and as a friend," Kenobi told Skywalker. "Until we meet again, may the Force be with you." Luke, he said, was not the last of the Jedi, but "the first of the new."

After death, Kenobi resembles Harry's parents more than the ghosts because Harry's father, especially, appears to him in times of need as the Patronus in his Animagus form of a Stag, whereas Harry's mother provides him with a special kind of protection against Voldemort's evil influence and attacks.

In any case, though, this is a diabolical philosophy that denies the eternal realities of Heaven and Hell after death and is an essential part of all fantasy literature that relies on Magic and the Humanism of this secular world.

7. The Name.

A rather subtle indication of Rowling's absolute rejection of both the demonic and the supernatural is Professor Dumbledore's encouragement of Harry's pronouncement of Voldemort's name. Early in the first book, there is this exchange between Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore:

"... Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A what?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of."

"No, thank you," said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn't think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if You-Know-Who has gone –

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this 'You-Know-Who' nonsense – for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: Voldemort." Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice. "It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name."

"I know you haven't," said Professor McGonagall, sounding half exasperated, half admiring. "But you're different. Everyone knows you're the only one You-Know-Who -- oh, all right, Voldemort, was frightened of."

"You flatter me," said Dumbledore calmly. "Voldemort had powers I will never have."

“Only because you’re too – well – noble to use them.”

“It’s lucky it’s dark. I haven’t blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs.” (pp. 10-11)

And at the end of this same first book, Harry, in a respectful attitude that he reserves for Dumbledore alone, says

“Sir?” said Harry. “I’ve been thinking ... Sir – even if the Stone’s gone, Vol–, I mean, You-Know-Who – ”

“Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.” (p. 298)

I heard on an *NPR* news program (July 17, 2003) a Colonel in our Military who was being interviewed on the war in Iraq, quote Dumbledore verbatim on referring to the current war as a “guerrilla” war. He termed Dumbledore “that great strategist,” and emphasized calling this war by the name of what it is – guerrilla warfare, following Dumbledore’s advice! Certainly, the Harry Potter books are not only for children!

Rowling here is debunking the ancient reverence for the power of words and especially names and their symbolism even though she often makes use of this device herself *albeit* in an irreverent and comical way, as we have noted.

But the fact is that, for example, in ancient Egypt it was believed that names reflected the soul of a person. This gave rise to the pagan belief that a name could have a magical effect upon some other person, as a kind of verbal voodoo.

But there is a divine sanction for this fact as Our Lord Himself often emphasized: “Thou art Peter and upon this Rock...” All through Scripture the importance of a name is indicated, so much so that metaphors are often used in place of God’s Name. And in the Tradition of the Church, the Holy Name of Jesus used to be honored by a bow of the head. Some extend this practice to the Holy Name of Mary. This is but an application of St. Paul’s admonition in *Philippians* 2:10-11: “In the Name of Jesus let every knee bow, of them that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth ...” In pre-Vatican Two days, Catholics differed from Protestants in their reverence for the Name of Jesus, for, whereas Protestants name Him as commonly as every other Tom, Dick and Harry (Potter!), Catholics preferred to use the title Our Lord. Nowadays, though, there is no difference between Catholics and Protestants when it comes to this usage – as in so many other things.

In Conclusion

There is no more serious incident in the Harry Potter books than that in which Voldemort returns to full bodily life and strength by immersing the remnant of himself in a great Cauldron containing the dust of his father’s bones, the flesh of his faithful servant Wormtail, and blood from his

Arch-Enemy Harry Potter.

I believe we are meant to understand by this and other incidents that there is a very intimate relationship between Harry and Voldemort. This intimacy is hinted at in the very first book as Mr. Ollivander fits Harry with a wand the hollow of which is filled with the tail feather of the same phoenix that fills Voldemort's wand. And as he tells Harry, somewhat enigmatically, "The wand chooses the wizard..."

There is a fatalism, a destiny indicated in this mingling of the very souls of Harry and Voldemort that I expect the last two volumes will bring out more clearly. It may resemble the relationship between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker. Or it may be nothing more than Rowling's way of acknowledging that "there's so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us ..." However, I suspect it will turn out to be something much more sinister. All through the books, Harry's Scar, the mark left on his forehead by Voldemort's attack upon Harry as a one-year old baby, pains him when Voldemort is either physically near him or able to penetrate his mind spiritually. And those critics are probably right who see in the Cauldron scene a parody of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Rowling is not above such mockery. As Neo-Gnostic June Singer says, "the whole of Gnostic mythology... reads everything in a direction opposite from orthodox theology." It may well turn out to be a final triumph of Harry over the Dark Side in himself that he emerges as the Perfect Hero though still wearing his glasses and being always on the verge of a nervous break-down!

Clark Kent wore glasses in his disguise but not as Superman. Harry, though, is different! For, the comic and tragic elements are woven together inextricably but the overall impact is serious – deadly so. "Hogwarts" may inadvertently slip into "Hogwash" but that Castle, its Forbidden Forest concealing Giants, Unicorns and Centaurs and its Lake in which lurk Giant Squid and numberless Merpeople, are all as serious as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* when it comes to speaking the mind of a civilization poised on the brink of the abyss of Hell.

For the Harry Potter books are deceptively juvenile, though children lead the way in hailing its heroes and heroines. But beneath, within and through it all, Rowling has constructed a counterfeit world and a cultural icon that I fear will remain a long time and become a classic of Luciferian Neo-Gnosticism.

Much more could be said about the Harry Potter books and about fantasy literature in general, especially as it appeals to children. But I hope that enough is said here to warn souls about the seductive nature of such literature.

July 22, 2003

Feast of Saint Mary Magdalen, Penitent