

# Letters from our readers

23 August 2011

*On "The betrayal of the Verizon strike"*

Stalinism and the "red unions" of the 1930s, the "no strike clauses" of the 1940s and the support of Roosevelt are part of what has led to the decline of unions in the US. The unprincipled, destructive zigzagging made way for the purges of the 1950s and the racist abstentionism to the movements of the 1960s. A critical piece of the labor movement in the US.

S

22 August 2011

*On "India's government uses authoritarian measures against self-styled anti-corruption crusade"*

The face-off between the Indian government and the "Team Anna" (supporters of "Anna" Hazare) has become more of a battle of wits or one-upmanship. The gross hypocrisy in the movement, ignoring the underlying causes and issues, has gone unnoticed. I am not sure how long this wave will last.

Prabhakar

India

20 August 2011

*On "Historic heat wave and drought in southwestern US"*

The Texas governor says there's no such thing as global warming and he's running for president of the United States.

Just who we need to run the country.

Kim H

18 August 2011

*On "The magical allegory of Harry Potter: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2"*

The review by Adam Haig does not explain HP's popularity.

HP is popular amongst young people especially because of its relevance to today's society. It has been said that JK Rowling has done more for reading than any other person.

Firstly, let's scrap the right-wing religious viewpoint, which is a fixation against witchcraft, and for obeying the rules. As well, HP is no more about boarding school and magic than Titanic is about shipping.

Professor Lupin is able to bring genuine inspiration, empathy and assistance to Harry. He represents good teachers who are forced to leave because of their personal life. HP depicts

victimized teachers such as Professor Trelawney, who is dismissed because of lack of quantifiable achievements.

Sirius Black represents the unjustly accused who is demonised in the media—plenty of examples today. Severus Snape shows you don't have to personally like people to sacrifice yourself for the cause.

The humour in the HP books is frequently well done, but mostly lost in the movies, with some exceptions, notably blowing up Aunt Marge. Much of the books are not included in the movies, so they appear awkward, even meaningless sometimes.

"The chosen one" and having things chosen *for* you is definitely the main drawback of the series. The cartoonish depiction of Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle in particular make HP less relevant to older readers.

Students have a right to reject unjust authority—the students lure Dolores Umbridge into the forest, where Centaurs take her away. Punitive punishment is shown—a court orders the hippogriff be killed.

The Dementors, who are literally inhuman prison wardens, highlight the inhumanity of prisons. Dumbledore's army—the students teach themselves when they are not being taught important skills.

The Ministry of Magic is depicted as "either corrupt, incompetent or both, its high officials blind to actual events and dangers in the wizarding world" (Wikipedia)—this has strong parallels to today's society.

I would like to take issue with Harold Bloom's comment that Rowling had also incarnated a middle-class world "divided not by social classes." The poor Weasley family really struggles to make ends meet and is depicted very favourably compared to the wealthy Malfoy family. The HP series also depicts Indian and Chinese characters. The "mudblood" theme is a metaphor for racism, and shows popular opposition to it.

Stan

New Zealand

20 August 2011

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This shallow and condescending article is nothing but depressing and alienating. Yes, the latest Harry Potter movies are terrible, but the way the books are dismissed as nothing but middle-class fantasies does the original works no justice at all. In fact, it sounds

like this review was written by someone who has either not actually read the books and is repeating the nonsense various intellectual snobs insist on spouting (mostly simply because they resent the popularity of the books), or by someone who read the books without ever taking them seriously because they're "children's books."

The social and political content of the books may not be perfect, but it is considerably more serious and complex than anything presented in the movies and most certainly cannot be reduced down to simplistic allegories of good and evil. That, in fact—the very humane portrayal of the Malfoys, the questioning of Dumbledore's wisdom, the heroism not of Harry but of Snape, the rotten basis on which the wizarding society is built—is precisely what makes the later books such a delight to read. There is a lot more here than this review would let anyone think.

Criticism is fine and necessary, but it must be based on reality. This review reads like it was based on the antisocial elitist fantasies of Harold Bloom (down to the gloating tone and the tiresome nonsense about commas and improper sentences).

Jonas  
20 August 2011  
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This was an excellent review.

As someone who grew up with Harry Potter, following the adventures as I grew older, I completely agree with the assessments made. Especially concerning the movies. They were a ploy to make an insane amount of money, nothing more. Nothing was gained in telling the story in movie form outside of that consideration.

However, one point I would make about the books, especially Rowling's earlier works, was the isolation that Harry felt. In particular, in his second year, the whole plot arc of the Heir of Slytherin left him completely isolated from his peers, even more so than he had been in the previous years. I think this speaks to a lot of youth who themselves feel very isolated from society, shunned and scorned.

Of course, this may be the only redeeming quality of the series. I haven't read the books in a while, but I was struck even when I first read *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* about the stupidity of some plot devices. Particularly how Dumbledore left a 15-month-old child on a doorstep with only a letter as explanation. In my mind that's criminal behavior, especially then to not check up on Harry.

I could go on about Rowling's inability to make a coherent narrative over the seven books, but I believe I'll stop here. Again, good show with the review. The Harry Potter phenomenon deserves to be understood critically. It truly is a "middle-class fantasy".

Bryan D  
20 August 2011  
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Most of this article was a tedious recounting of detail of no interest to non-Harry Potter fans. What exactly was the point of all that?

"... the seven popular novels and eight films have more likely resonated with millions of adults and children around the world for the reason that people have realized, intuitively, that something is wrong with the present state of things—that social and artistic life, as they are, are unsatisfactory." People go to see a bad film because they realize the present state of artistic life is unsatisfactory? That doesn't make any sense. And I think most people realize more than just "intuitively" that there is something wrong with social reality. Their recognition that high unemployment, social inequality and unpopular imperialist wars are serious problems is more than an intuition. They just haven't understood their character scientifically or determined the solution.

Finally, I do not agree that an "allegorical symbolic mode" is the same as replacing history with teleology, economics with morality, etc. *Animal Farm* is allegorical, but this does not mean it is ahistorical or moralizes. Was Orwell slipping into identity politics just because the bureaucracy was represented by pigs? It may well be that wizards don't represent any sort of class, but that is an independent issue. This reviewer seems more concerned with composing tortured academic phrases than thinking about what he is saying.

The only interesting and insightful content contained in this review is the following paragraph: "Harry Potter, moreover, represents the mythology of the great hero—a special variety of the human race on whom everything depends—who is placed before the crowd and whom the crowd must admire and follow. This is a fundamentally condescending and demeaning idea, translating socially as political and psychological dependence on a small group of elites, not the democratic initiative of the masses of people themselves." While it is not necessary for every movie and novel to portray any sort of uprising on the part of the masses of people themselves, the hero mythology in many movies probably reflects some pretty backward political sentiments.

Rosa S  
22 August 2011



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