

**Ain Shams University  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of English  
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**ESCAPISM AND WISH FULFILLMENT: A STUDY OF  
HARRY POTTER NOVELS BY  
JOANNE KATHLEEN ROWLING**

*A Thesis Submitted by*

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# **PREFACE**

## PREFACE

This dissertation aims at reading *Harry Potter* from thematic, psychoanalytical and allegorical perspectives. It explains the plurality and ambivalence of the treatment of “Escapism and Wish Fulfillment” as two major components of literary fantasy in general, and as a partial part of the J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter Novels* in particular. The Series is a clever adaptation of Joseph Campbell’s Hero Cycle Theory that succeeds in evoking classical tales and appropriating them into its own innovative myths. In other words, Harry Potter depicts the archetypal good/evil battle, and the young hero’s heroic, mythical and adventurous journey, according to what is known as “allegorical fantasy”(Wendy 5). The text can be read eclectically i.e. its analysis lends itself to the use of the tools of Jung with his archetypes as well as Sigmund Freud’s and Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic theories.

*Harry Potter* has become so popular that *The Goblet of Fire*, for example, has gained “the fastest selling title of any kind in history” (*Newsweek*, July17, 2000). J.K. Rowling’s *series of seven books* has attained unprecedented success, topped all bestseller lists, won numerous awards, and then translated into over sixty languages. Worldwide, *The Harry Potter Books* have exceeded 300 million copies and have been adapted into films. Noel Smith points out that the psychoanalytic authors, of course have responded to the series’ success with various analysis of Harry (*Psychoanalytic Studies*, 199). The popularity of the series goes back also to J.K. Rowling’s handling of the fantasy genre with its features and types, particularly the escapist fantasy. In his article, “The Psychic Truth of Fiction: Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Drama and Children’s Literature”, Gavin Ivey explains that J.K. Rowling manages to do this by

means of a skilful melding of traditional fantasy elements (fairy tale references, magic spells) with those of other genres (gothic novels, thrillers, and science fiction) and contemporary technology. These aspects, together with and acute awareness of the relationship and identity issues conforming children, allow her readers to be subject of her fiction. Rowling’s stories are not merely entertaining adventures because she understands and speaks to children’s unconscious emotional life.

(*Psychological Forum*, 43).

The popularity of *Harry Potter* extends also to the treatment of an old tale of the orphan child hero that evokes the popular and ordinary childhood fantasy story that the child’s bad

surrogates substitute his beloved and noble family. That is a defensive resolution to the reality that recalls Melanie Klein's principle that these parents are "whole objects", embodying good and bad qualities. In their article "Narratives of Love and Loss: Studies in Modern Children's Fiction, The Inner World of Harry Potter" Michael and Margret Rustins maintain that this Kleinian splitting of good from bad objects of the real and surrogate parents declares "a world of absolutes" and add that "this is the world of a child who is not yet able to think in more complex and subtle ways about him and others. There is only good and bad, and both are extreme-only victim, persecutor, heroic rescues" (274).

Much of the appeal and popularity of *The Harry Potter Novels* is due to the description of the old battle between good and evil which is the heart of escapism. The instinctual desire to evade the evil of the uncanny sustains Harry's escapism. Evil, as Rowling signifies, resides both internally within a character's psyche and externally as reflected in its symbols such as Voldemort, the Dementors and the Army of the Death Eaters. The argument about evil from a psychoanalytical point of view is "the outer representation of the forces of death (hatred, destructive envy, a world turned upside down), and the struggle between him and Harry is also the struggle within Harry to side with his better self" (*The Rustins*, 274). The evil person's demolishing nature reflects his inner escapism and the desire to terminate the new course of life by adopting the death instinct as his main provoker in life. The Death instinct, "Thanatos", which is the main and central role in the Freudian and Kleinian Psychoanalysis, is apparent when the operating destructive force becomes the activating power of the psyche and has the full support. This threatens the work of our good internal objects and becomes the source of much anxiety and guilt. The differentiation between Freudian and Kleinian death instinct is that the Kleinian is an extension.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Novels* reflect the Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory that has provided an additional focus on the implementation of the psychological concepts in literature and literary criticism. 'Escapism' is both a psychological and a literary term which is very diverse and more complicated because it implies negative connotations of cowardice and a literary view which was inclined to be suspicious of any work of escapism is always considered negative. Today's critics tend to consider 'Escapism' and 'Escapist Fiction' as of less importance however, these terms have extra-literary connotation, which in fact, has much to do with both literature and psychology. In her essay "On Harry Potter: the Adventure of Post-Potterdom", Sarah Boyes points out that: "as many have realized, Harry Potter isn't at all a new story, it's an updated version of the very old. Whereas, the point of all this evolution of the master narrative business is not about updating old stories, but

radically recreating them, coming up with strange and new ones”(http://www.culturewars.org.org.uk/2013). Another distinguishing aspect of popularity of the series is that Harry stands as the master of the two worlds, the mundane world of everyday reality (the Muggle world) and the magic world of the wizardry community. The latter is “the world beneath the surface, the unconscious, the difficult to integrate elements in human nature and experience” (*The Rustins*, 276). This new world defies the rules of conscious reality, but it is disturbing and dangerous. It inserts itself into consciousness and requires acknowledgement.

The popularity and widespread success of the series are due to its adult and children’s appeal. Although the series was “originally published entirely for children”, Rowling “had not thought of the book as specifically for children when she wrote it” (Julia Eccleshare, 10). This phenomenon is literary known as the “the cross-over” state of the novels, but it turns from a popular or folktale fiction and the phenomenon of “Pottermania” (Bradley, 66) to be a literary text. However, *The Harry Potter Novels* have become a literary and cultural phenomenon as Mei-Ying Wu maintains:

By now, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potters Books are among the most well known and widely read children's books ever published, not only in the English-speaking countries but also in the global communities. The popularity of Harry Potter's Books as many children's literature scholars and critics have stated is evident in its commercial triumph such as the tremendous amount of copies sold, the transformation of the stories into a myriad of commodities including films and videos, the translation of the books into over thirty languages, as well as the impact of such a commercial hype on the operation of book awards in Britain and USA.

(*What Fantastic Creatures Boys ARE!* 67).

The characters of *Harry Potter* have penetrated the global popular cultures and greatly affected them everywhere; on the internet, many fan sites and television channels are launched to celebrate them. The series have also permeated the media: Harry Potter's icons, pictures and anything from the novels could be found in magazines, in giant lighted signs, or on bus stops as well as the high ways and streets. Finally, the British Ministry of culture has made the Harry Potter School, places and characters' stuff an open museum to be visited by local and foreign visitors. Such popularity has its own hazards since it adds to the diversity and fragmentation in today's British culture and the whole world, providing fear and unease



of the intrusion of fantasy in society, though it constitutes the main drive behind the reading habits of children.

Schaeffer defines culture as “the totality of learned transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior. It includes the ideas, values, customs, and artifacts of groups of people”(51). The cultural impact of *Harry Potter* in Britain and USA extends to values, ideas, customs, sanctions, norms and language. MacCaffrey points out that the word “Muggle” which is first coined by Rowling in *Harry Potter* has been included in the *Online Edition of Oxford English Dictionary*. In addition to Rowling's influence on language, the article ‘*Harry Potter and the Dangers of Alcoholism*’, *The Consumers Research Magazine* points out that the US Department of Health and Human services uses the same secret of Hagrid about the use of music to make the three-headed dog Fluffy sleep as if being under alcohol's effect, to ban the overuse of alcohol for children and youth. The cultural analysis of the British Society and *Harry Potter* illustrate that Rowling's fictional and fantasy wizarding world mimics the cultural conditions of contemporary Britain. Rowling avoided description through what Jean Baudrillard describes as “the glare of technology” (44). Instead, Rowling depends on magic not technology or science. In his essay, “*The Liberty Tree and the Whomping Willow; Political Justice Magical Science and Harry Potter*” Noel Chevalier confirms that the novels have “admirably presented the wizarding world as a sharp contrast to the antiseptic world of Privet Drive. Diagon Alley, in particular, strikingly resembles an 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century Commercial Street. Rowling removes the technological complications of the contemporary world not out of nostalgia for cultural stability, but to reveal that, without the veneer of technology, the world wrestles with the same social and political issues of 1990s” (*Project Muse*, 402).

Cultural conditions in contemporary Britain include a wide scope of activities such as schooling, the British identity, language, policy, and communication, cinemas, T.V, sport, fiction, art and the ethnocentric community status. All of them shed light on the relation between the realms of the person and the state in addition to the variety of daily activities and different social relations among the aborigines and those of foreign origins and various religions. All these aspects are considered various mechanisms that direct and moderate contemporary British life. Many critics point out that “aside from its divisibility into nations, ethnicities and regions, what is...exceptional about Britain and British culture...is its retention of an informal but nevertheless pervasive system of social class. The influence of social class is easily recognizable in British culture of accent, dialect and social belonging” (Michael Higgins, 2).

In his article “The Popularity of Harry Potter” in *The American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, Mohacsy points out that, “Rowling writes stories of fantasy....the stories are a kind of modernized and sophisticated fairy tales” (aapdp.org/index). Fantasy, like the fairy tale, fits into the way a child treats his world. In fact, he/she can obtain better relief from a fairy tale than from any adults’ reasoning. A child trusts what he learns from a fairy story because its worldview accords with his own. Children explore both gratifying and horrible scenarios from the wellbeing of the fairy tales. Although the magic world is an unsteady world, the child finds his way toward reason. He has to fight the dangerous creatures of his imagination and the real and imagined danger of the outer world (Bettelheim 40; Fraiberg, *Preface IX*).

In fantasy fiction, villains and heroes are rewarded or punished for their actions. Freud shows in ‘*Creative Writers and Daydreaming*’ (1995) that reward or punishment is determined by how well or badly a character will cope with the unexpected or the uncanny (145) thus, children admire reading *Harry Potter* for this reason. It has become a commonplace to relate Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of the Fantasy and the Fantastic to Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich* or the ‘uncanny’. This, in turn, refers to the ambivalence of fancy and reality in *Harry Potter*. In mentioning Freud’s *unheimlich* or the ‘uncanny’ it is preferred to link it to Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of the Fantastic and to Fantasy that explain that *Harry Potter* novels depict a hesitating state between reality and fancy. Todorov maintains that the Fantastic assigns two forms of storytelling in fantasy fiction the “uncanny”, and the “marvellous” (*The Fantastic* 40). More recently, Rosemary Jackson argues that fantasy is inherently fantastic. The Fantastic fiction is characterized by the wish to flee reality (escapism) because it provisionally moves the readers to impossible worlds and provides unrealistic and unusual solutions to their problems (*Fantasy*, 40). Fantasy stories are reality-oriented books because “literature is the product of two impulses. These are mimesis,...to describe events, people,...and objects with verisimilitude... and[escapism], the desire to...alter reality-out of boredom...longing for something lacking” (Kathryn Hume, 20). Rowling writes her fantasy about coping and the dualistic feeling of despise and admiration, which Harry experiences among the Muggles and the wizardry community. It is noteworthy that the world that Harry escapes to is filled with wonder and is reminiscent of the puckish world of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*.

Harry’s noble and royal descent is kept secret from him. His “self-discovery follows the pattern of Freud’s Family Romance...follows a mélange of folk legend orphaned Oedipus and the English King Arthur” (Mohacsy). *Harry Potter* shares many common things with

children heroes such as the four siblings of C.S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*. He also resembles Charles Dickens' hero Oliver Twist, who survives among the thieves though he has a rich grandfather. In addition, Harry seems to echo the character of David Copperfield who lived an exiled life of pasting labels on wine bottles among the proletariat.

Psychoanalytically speaking, Rowling's works are parables about defence mechanisms like denial, escapism, adaptation and integration. Because something unexpected will happen all the time, Rowling's characters cope and escape such situations. As any child, Harry's coping with ingenuity, tenacity, endurance and patience compels him to resort to the defense mechanism of escape and wish fulfillment. These claustrophobic situations are described as the "anticipatory anxiety" (Fraiberg, 65). Children admire Harry because he is a common boy with weak body who resorts to an enough self-solace to protect him from pain but with the use of magic.

The popularity of the *novels* is also due to children's preference to read imaginative and fantasy reading to reality-based classics. Thus, Winnicott believes that "children thrive in environments that have safe boundaries, but do not impinge on their ability to think and act spontaneously" (<http://aapdp.org/index>). Such fantasized wild things come from the children themselves, from their desires, fears and projected wishes and they realize that the outside real world is dangerous. Grown-ups like children admire *Harry Potter* because according to Freud, scrape a grown up and you will find a child underneath. Fears, prejudices and hopes, all have their roots in human development. Mohacsy points out "grown-ups frequently feel helpless as children. They want miracles to change unfortunate situations. Rowling's books resonate with what may be termed a Cinderella complex-the ever-present inferiority complex most people suffer from. Many grown-ups suspect that they, too, are living in Cinderella type situations"([aapdp.org/index](http://aapdp.org/index)). In *The New York Times*, Stephen King rightly admits, "Harry is a male Cinderella, waiting for someone to invite him to a ball" (July 23, 10). It is noteworthy that most children identify with Cinderella and all her archetypal figures. Therefore, their inner resources in Harry Potter are externalized. Although adolescents are mostly deprived of infantile imaginings, they believe in magic. However, the popularity of the series is paradoxically related to the idea that not all grown-ups admire Harry Potter and Rowling's works are considered the most controversial literature. According to Laurie Sydell of *National Public Radio* some groups "advocate banning Harry" from schoolbook shelves. In addition, others want more parents' censorship for libraries. Diana Patterson clarifies that:

There are many people who believe that the books are too popular to be of no value; they are long and repetitive; they are childish; they are

derivative; they are insufficiently “literary” to be worthy of attention, much less of study. Each of these claims might as easily be made against Dickens. Some still persist against J.R.R.Tolkien. Popularity, particularly across immense cultural divides, is itself worthy of study; as much as one might consider why a tale of a 10-year siege of a town 3000 years ago might still have any interest today. Length and repetitiveness have certain values, particularly in building characters, creating a camouflage, obscuring plot lines. While the tale of Harry Potter begins in a childlike fashion, it matures along with the protagonist in a way highly unusual, to works of fiction (IV).

Many conferences and websites analyzing, dissecting, and illustrating *Harry Potter* are mostly academic and with insightful contents which prove that there is something valuable to pursue in the series. Diana Patterson adds, the Potter analytical studies have created “ideas worthy of analysis from a variety of areas of Knowledge... For one of the intriguing aspects of *Harry Potter* is the closeness to our modern life...and the magnet of universality...The quality of the epic that explores the vastness and complexity of human life is reflected in the variety of disciplines...comment on their discipline, world view, and moral compass”. In addition “Harry Potter is a school, a fantasy [and] a postcolonial novel” (Liza Anatol, XI).

Rowling herself intended to escape through fantasy by writing *The Harry Potter Novels* because if “wizards simply offered a way to empower her young hero and allow him to escape from his stifling existence as the unwanted ward of his aunt and uncle” (Bradley 24) it provides Rowling herself with a place to escape to “... a small part of that wishes you could alter external things to be the way they ought to be,...that's why there will always, always, always be books about magic, discovering secret powers, stuff that you're not allowed to do” (Rowling to Malcolm Jones in *Newsweek*, 59). In addition, Lev Grossman maintains that “grandly, Rowling's books beginning like invitations to garden variety escapism” (*Time Magazine*, July 2005). She also confirmed in another interview entitled, “Living with Harry Potter” with Stephen Fry that “we need a place to escape to, whether as a writer or a reader, and obviously, the world that I have created is a particularly shining example of a world to which it is very pleasant to escape”. Thus, the element of escapism in *Harry Potter* is typical of any escapist literature; it involves the writer, the character and is intended to ultimately affect the reader.

It has also been suggested that Rowling builds most of her *Harry Potter's* fiction on political intrigues and facts, which truly reflect her view concerning the British politics. It has

even been claimed that the making of the evil Voldemort's character resembles the character of the iron woman Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister and the Nazi leader the furor Adolf Hitler. Rowling also points out in a Spanish Magazine called *XL Semanal* the relation between the wizarding world and the real world. In addition, the relationship between September 9-2001 terrorist attacks in the USA and Harry Potter, Rowling refuses any relation and clarifies the true inspiration for the character of the Minister Cornelius Fudge in her novels saying: "My model of the world after Voldemort's return was directly, the government of Neville Chamberlin in Great Britain during the Second World War when he tried to minimize the menace of the Nazi regime for political convenience" (Accio.Quote.Index, 2008). The novels have this political twist not only due to the writer's own admission but because Rowling is fully aware of the current political dilemmas and conditions which are echoed in portraying her characters and the incidents of the narrative. All these traits make the novels a political allegory for many real characters and events as will be later explained in chapters three and four.

Rowling admires many fantasy writers when she declares: "writers I most admire are: E. Nesbit, Jane Austin, Vladimir Nabokov and Collette. However, as for being influenced by them...I think it [may be] more accurate to say that they represent untouchable ideals to me. It is impossible for me to say what my influences are; I don't analyze my own writing in that way" (*Writer's Digest*, February 2000). Thus, J.K. Rowling's "Pottermania" (Bradley, 66) lends her much honorary fame among the fantasy pioneers. In addition, Rowling admits that people numerously compare her to the fantasy children writer Roald Dahl. She answers the interviewer Jennie Renton on this relation "I've been compared to him more than anyone else. I take it as a compliment. There are similarities in our humour sometimes. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach* are brilliant...Our writing is really quite dissimilar. My books are ultimately moral. An unfashionable ward...They are not moralistic, but there is often a good versus-evil subtext. They're not absolutely black and white, though Harry breaks a lot of rules" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2001).

The theoretical base and area of study focuses also on C.G. Jung's Theory of the Archetypes and the Collective Consciousness as he identified in his study of dreams and its relation to escapism and wish fulfillment. The thesis discusses the general thought on the archetypes themselves and particularly the archetypal nature of the text in chapter three (p.103 and on). *The Harry Potter Novels* are an adaptation of Joseph Campbell's Hero Cycle Theory that succeeds in evoking classical tales and appropriating them into its own innovative myths. The bulk of this section is assigned to going through specific archetypes,

the role of the archetypes as related to escapism and wish fulfillment, and then listing a number of examples for each one. I will proceed to show how various characters in the series fit into each role by using the words of Jung himself, as well as Jungian and post-Jungian scholars themselves. A number of characters will be defined in terms of the archetypes of the Wise Old Man, the Mother and the female archetypes, the Trickster, and the Shadow. Studying them will help us situate characters of *Harry Potter* and the entire text within the parameters of Escapism literature with its varied connotations and influences.

Escapism and wish fulfillment are two ambivalent aspects of escapist fantasy which signifies that the readers read to escape and escape to read. Escapist fantasy provides mental and psychological escape to more ideal and imaginary worlds for the sake of entertainment, comfort and tranquility from daily life stresses and problems. Therefore, it involves separation, evading and running away. Escapism is not totally negative despite the superficial meaning of the word which denotes cowardice and weakness but it is always accompanied by estrangement even among friends and relatives. When someone escapes, he/she is feeling alienated, despite of the rightfulness of his/her views and will to change the ills in his/her society. The escapist writers like Rowling constantly not only try to evade the social problems of their mundane worlds but offer ideal fanciful universes whether built within the real world or entering them through portals, or built in the future or as a nostalgia to the lost dreamy past. This idea in itself seems to point to the oldest and most prevalent archetype of storytelling: that of storytelling for the sake of evading or avoiding death itself as in the classical *One Thousand and One Nights*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. What brings all these texts together is the idea of escaping reality to the dreamy worlds of stories.

As earlier explained, the thesis tries to shed light on J.K. Rowling's treatment of escapism and wish fulfillment in the following novels: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007).

This thesis is composed of a preface, four chapters and a conclusion:

## **Chapter I: Escapism and Wish Fulfillment:**

This chapter aims to study the diverse connotations of escapism and wish fulfillment in general and as manipulated in the works of the escapist fictional writers like J.R.R. Tolkien,

C.S. Lewis, who are the fathers of the escapist fantasy, as direct influences on Rowling's escapist fiction. Escapism in literature is a wish to move away into imaginative activity rather than dealing with the stress, tediousness and daily problems of the cruel, atrocious and dreary mundane world. Accordingly, most of popular fictions have some elements of escapism and wish fulfillment and serve a psychological purpose by offering a relief from the daily life stresses.

This chapter examines the intricate relation between escapism and wish fulfillment, which are partial parts of fantasy fiction, as the main spring of escapism. The chapter focuses also on explaining the concept of wish fulfillment and its qualities that are merged with that of escapism. The chapter clarifies how far the elements of escapism and wish fulfillment are related to the psychoanalysis of Freud and allegorical fantasy as means of encapsulating escapist fiction. This perspective denotes something in literature that satisfies the conscious or subconscious desires of either the writer or the reader of a literary work. The chapter also investigates the different reasons of the appearance of escapism and wish fulfillment as direct reasons of the spread of fantasy such as the social, political, cultural, technological and literary conditions of modern Britain.

Escape fiction is all about wish fulfilment which is featured by imagination versus reality and which has to do with dreams "daydreams, to easy solutions, to egoism and escapism, in contrast to the reality testing imagination" (T.E. Apter, 3). Psychologically speaking daydreams are the imaginative, creative and thinking up of the fantastic, feared or looked-for situations, which are a variety of the authentically and emotionally testing activities, such as the expectancy of the problematical situations in everyday life. They comprise dreams that articulate great wishes or whimsical adventures which can be joined together to make possible what is impossible. Thus, escape fiction is a personification of the daydreams, which are wish fulfilment according to Freud and "the motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes and every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality" (*On Freud's Creative Writers and Daydreaming* 146). In imaginative worlds, everything can happen; men and boys are gallant and chivalrous, the heroes can ride dragons, they can fly with cars, horses, griffins and fairies in addition, they shoot lightening from the tips of their fingers. In addition, all of the readers' desires can be fulfilled, fancifully, simply with the turn of a page or the flick of a pen.

## **Chapter II: Between Two Worlds of Fantasy and Reality:**

The chapter clarifies the main features of escapist Fantasy and its relation to Todorov's theory of the Fantastic. Fantasy is an umbrella genre that comprises many sub-genres such as