

The 15th Annual Harry Potter Academic Conference

October 23-24, 2026



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In Case of Emergency

HPAC Google Voice	302 599 8209	For urgent conference concerns
Chestnut Hill College campus security	215 242 7777	For campus concerns (note: CHC security is not in direct contact with the HPAC Board)
Emergency	9 1 1	For true medical and safety emergencies

About The Harry Potter Academic Conference

The Harry Potter Academic Conference (HPAC) emerged from an Interdisciplinary Honors course for undergraduate students at Chestnut Hill College, “The Emergence of the Hero in the Epic Voyage,” developed by Professor McCauley and Dr. Wendling and taught from 2009–2012. This course used the Harry Potter series as an example of Bildungsroman literature to study the often-competing influences of science and philosophy/religion on the development of personal truth and meaning. HPAC was first held in October 2012 as part of the town of Chestnut Hill’s Harry Potter Weekend to provide an academic outlet for a serious – but always enjoyable – study of the themes in the Potter series. We gratefully acknowledge our “Hero” students, whose excellent scholarship provided the initial spark (and ongoing inspiration) to create and continue the Harry Potter Academic Conference.

HPAC continues to exist as a space of inquiry and community. Everything we do pursues twin priorities: to pursue accessible but rigorous academic inquiry and to be a safer space for “the half-blood fan,” LGBTQIA+ fans and their allies who are harmed by the author’s vitriol but still find a home at Hogwarts.

HPAC Board

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Our Thanks

Land and labor acknowledgements are the smallest, first acts of decolonization and equity-seeking. Chestnut Hill College is located at the northwestern edge of Philadelphia on 75 acres overlooking the Wissahickon Creek on land stewarded by Lenapehoking (Lenni-Lenape). We acknowledge the sacred and historical significance of these lands and waters we benefit from today. HPAC also acknowledges that this country and the city of Philadelphia would not exist if it were not for the enslaved labor of Black and Brown people. We honor the legacy of the African diaspora and the lives, knowledge, and skills stolen by violence and white supremacy.

The Board gratefully acknowledges all the members of the Chestnut Hill College community, especially Greg Gorski and Ryan Silverthorn, our Tech Wizards, and to 45Press, our very generous Web Wizards.

And we are grateful to you, our HPAC community, for sharing scholarship and fellowship with this community of Potterheads for 15 years.



Chestnut Hill College, founded by the Sisters of Saint Joseph in 1924, is an independent, Catholic institution that fosters equality through education. Faithful to its strong liberal arts tradition, Chestnut Hill College offers academic programs of excellence in the areas of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing studies. Sponsorship of HPAC is just one of the many ways in which Chestnut Hill College demonstrates its commitment to its mission: to provide students with a holistic education in an inclusive Catholic community marked by academic excellence, shared responsibility, personal and professional growth, service to one another and the global community, and concern for the Earth.

Chestnut Hill College is a non-profit institution. The Harry Potter Academic Conference and Chestnut Hill College are not affiliated with the author, Bloomsbury Press, Scholastic Books, HBO, Warner Bros., or Pottermore.

HPAC XV Celebrations

We are both proud and humbled to be celebrating 15 years of scholarship and community. In honor of this milestone anniversary, the conference will feature several celebratory events.

Event	About	Where & When	Payment(s) Accepted
The Cupboard Under the Stairs Rummage Sale	Looking for some classic, pre-loved Potter merch? The Sale is a great place to shop ethically. 100% of Rummage Sale proceeds will be donated to Philadelphia's The Attic Youth Center , "A Place Where It's OK2BU" for LGBTQ youth.	Under the Rotunda stairs, both days during breaks	Venmo (preferred), Cash, CashApp
Merch Sales	Get your commemorative HPAC XV poster and other merch from some Potterific proprietors.	Alcove table (Redmond side)	Venmo (preferred), Cash, CashApp
Book Signings	Some presenters will have copies of their books available for sale and signing.	Alcove table (Redmond side)	<i>Varies per author</i>
HPAC Potluck	Back by popular demand, Saturday morning will begin with a Potter-inspired potluck. Food plays an important role in the Potter series. Join us for a light, pre-conference repast, and contribute a dish if you can.	East Parlor, Saturday	FREE; sign up to contribute
12 Failsafe Ways to Charm Witches	Can't get enough HPAC scholarship? David Martin will share a come-as-you-can talk about his book during lunch.	East Parlor, Saturday	FREE
<i>Puffs & Pizza</i>	Stay at CHC after Matt Cox's retrospective on <i>Puffs</i> 10 years later for a screening & dinner.	Redmond Room, 5:30PM Friday	FREE; donations accepted
Conference Toast	Continue the conversation and community at a post-conference Happy Harry Hour.	Brittingham's , 6:00PM Saturday	Individual pay

Those wishing to make monetary donations to HPAC may do so any time. Donors of \$100 or more may use a "Donation" ticket via the event TicketLeap or make a gift [directly to Chestnut Hill College](#) (select Other from the dropdown and specify The Harry Potter Academic Conference). The HPAC Venmo code will be available at the conference, but please note that Venmo donations are not tax-deductible.

HPAC XV Conference Schedule

All times are in Eastern Time (UTC-4) and U.S. (12-hour) clock times.
Both rooms will livestream from 8:50AM to 5PM, excluding breaks and lunches.

Day 1 – Friday, October 23, 2026		
8:15–8:50	Registration	Rotunda
8:50–9:00	Conference Welcome	East Parlor
9:00–11:40	Concurrent Sessions 1	
	1a – East Parlor	
	Moderator: Eisenhardt	
9:00–9:20	Dark Times Ahead: Color Grading in the <i>Harry Potter</i> Films (And Another Way the HBO Series is Already Messing Up)	Eisenhardt
9:30–9:50	<i>Harry Potter</i> and Chiasmus/Chiasmus and <i>Harry Potter</i>	Ostrum
10:00–10:20	Emptying the Trunk: Reviewing the Series in List Form	Parks
10:30–10:50	“Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!”: On the Power of Words in <i>Harry Potter</i>	McLaughlin
	1b – Redmond Room	
	Moderator: McDaniel	
9:00–9:20	Care, Knowledge, and Power: Rethinking Leadership in <i>Harry Potter</i>	Wech & Dolowitz
9:30–9:50	The Triwizard Maze and the Forest of Dean: Getting Lost in <i>Harry Potter</i>	McDaniel
10:00–10:20	The Wand Chooses the Wizard: Unpacking the Agency of Wands in the <i>Harry Potter</i> Book Series	Sheppard & Wright
10:30–10:50	Understanding Blood Status as a Reflection of the British System of Hereditary Aristocracy	Martin
11:20–11:50	Webster & Weisberg (invited speakers), Why Fantasy Matters: The Psychological Appeal of <i>Harry Potter</i>	East Parlor
11:50–12:50	Lunch Break	

12:50–1:50	Bachman (Plenary Lecturer), Understanding Genocide in the World of <i>Harry Potter</i> to Better Understand Genocide in Our World	East Parlor
1:50–2:10	Break	
2:10–4:10	Concurrent Sessions 2	
	2a – East Parlor	
	Moderator: Beckoff	
2:10–2:30	To Dwell on Dreams: Unconscious and Waking Visions in <i>Harry Potter</i> and Arthurian Literature	Beckoff
2:40–3:00	Mastering the Hallows: Morality and Destiny for Harry Potter	Crofoot
3:10–3:30	J.K. Rowling & P.D. James: Mysterious Connections	Strand
3:40–4:00	Binky – Lavender Brown's Dead Rabbit or Death's Flying Horse? An Intertextual Reading of the <i>Harry Potter</i> Series and Terry Pratchett's Mort	Keiter
	2b – Redmond Room	
	Moderator: Dunne	
2:10–2:30	Experiential Learning and Agency at Hogwarts: Why Wizards Should Never Teach with AI	Hardman & Amuso
2:40–3:00	From Hogwarts to Ilvermorny: Faculty Development, Institutional Culture, and Teaching in the Wizarding World	Amin
3:10–3:30	Potter Proclivity: The Human Condition in the Wizarding World	Dauksys
3:40–4:00	Navigating Hogwarts: The First-Gen Experience	Stigter-Hayden
4:10–4:25	Break	
4:30–5:00	Cox (invited speaker), <i>Puffs: Ten Years Later</i> (A Look Back at the Journey of the Hit Off-Broadway Play)	East Parlor
5:30–8:00	Puffs and Pizza- All conference attendees are welcome. Pizza and water provided. Gifts of food or Galleons (donations) gratefully accepted! Those with dietary restrictions are encouraged to DoorDash a meal to the hall.	

Day 2 – Saturday, October 24, 2026		
8:00–8:50	Registration Breakfast Potluck	Rotunda East Parlor
8:50–9:00	Conference Welcome	East Parlor
9:00–9:15	Satterly (invited speaker), Special Message	East Parlor
9:20–10:50	Session 3	East Parlor
	Moderator: McLaughlin	
9:20–9:40	S.P.E.W: A Case Study in the Positives, Pitfalls, and Perils of Protest Acts	Lewis
9:50–10:10	The Author Isn't Dead and She Has a Knife: How the Hermeneutics of Suspicion Can Free the <i>Harry Potter</i> Fandom	King
10:20–10:40	Recasting the Dark Arts: Critical Race Theory, Fan Resistance, and the Racial Politics of Severus Snape	Leshko
10:50–11:00	Break	
11:00–11:20	Concurrent Sessions 4	
	4a – East Parlor	
	Moderator: Parks	
11:00–11:20	The Hanged Man, the Devil, and the Tower: A Tarot- Centric Exploration of Tom Marvolo Riddle (+ signing)	Candido- Beecher
	Session 4b – Redmond Room	
	Moderator: Strand	
11:20–12:05	<i>Pottiversity</i> Live!	<i>Pottiversity</i>
12:05–1:00	Lunch Break Martin, 12 Failsafe Ways to Charm Witches	East Parlor
1:00–1:30	Wamble (invited speaker), Wands, Identity, & State-Sanctioned Belonging in <i>Harry Potter</i>	East Parlor
1:30–1:50	Break	

1:50–4:35	Concurrent Sessions 5	
	5a – East Parlor	
	Moderator: Taggart	
1:50–2:10	Remus (Lupin) The Dire Wolf: Fantasy, Reality, and Why We Prefer the Fantasy	Aaron
2:20–2:40	Quilt Art: <i>Expelliarmus</i> and the Elder Wand	Kim
2:50–3:00	Short Break	
3:00–3:20	Severus Snape and the Postmodern Tragic Hero	Taggart
3:30–3:50	“Too Big To Be Allowed”: What Hagrid’s Size Tells Us About J.K. Rowling and Disability	Nicolas
	5b – Redmond Room	
	Moderator: Wendling	
1:50–2:10	Accuracy and Accessibility in Communicating Natural Sciences: Depiction of Astronomy in the <i>Potter</i> Series	Kliapets
2:20–2:40	Written in the (Neutron) Stars: Alchemy and the Astrophysical Origins of Gold	Bright
2:50–3:00	Short Break	
3:00–3:20	A Midlife Letter for The Girl Who Lived: An Autoethnographic Coming-of-Age at 40	Lore
3:30–3:50	What Wood Really Makes the Best Wand?	Daneshgar
4:00–4:05	Short Break	
4:05–4:25	Freeman, Sorting Way, Way, Way Too Soon? A Social and Statistical Look at the 9 ¾–Month Sorting Ceremony, a Social Media Trend Among Potterhead Parents	East Parlor (w/ stream)
4:35–4:45	Conference Closing Remarks	East Parlor (w/ stream)
6:00–8:00	<i>Post-conference Happy Harry Hour</i>	

Plenary Lecture

Jeff Bachman, PhD



“Understanding Genocide in the World of Harry Potter to Better Understand Genocide in Our World”

The appropriate use of the term “genocide” to describe events is hotly contested and politicized. Meanwhile, studies have shown that students who have attended schools with genocide education requirements have demonstrated weak genocide content knowledge. Moreover, Holocaust and Genocide Studies curricula tend to focus on a limited number of “consensus” cases, which tend to reinforce particular understandings about what genocide is and, therefore, is not. As a scholar of genocide and mass atrocities, it is Dr. Bachman’s view that much can be learned about the study of genocide by situating key, emerging, and contested concepts in the World of *Harry Potter* (including *Fantastic Beasts*), while making such ideas, concepts, and debates accessible to readers of all ages.

Jeff Bachman is Cohen Endowed Chair in Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College. He is also Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*. He is the author of three books: *Harry Potter and Genocide: An Introduction to Genocide Studies Through the World of Harry Potter* (2026), *The Politics of Genocide: From the Genocide Convention to the Responsibility to Protect* (2022), and *The United States and Genocide: (Re)Defining the Relationship* (2017). He is also the editor or co-editor of four volumes: *The Routledge Handbook of Genocide Studies* (2026), *A Modern History of Forgotten Genocides and Mass Atrocities* (2024), *Genocide Studies: Pathways Ahead* (2024), and *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations* (2019).

Presenter Abstracts

Feel welcome to continue the conversation with presenters
by email (where available) or on our Slack workspace.

Co-authored presentations are listed under the first author's name.

✍ indicates a first-time HPAC presenter 🏡 indicates an invited presenter

Melissa D. Aaron (she) maaron@cpp.edu Cal Poly Pomona

Remus (Lupin) the Dire Wolf: Fantasy, Reality, and Why We Prefer the Fantasy

In 2024, Colossal Laboratories and Biosciences introduced a genetically modified animal that they claimed “de-extincted” the dire wolf. Biologists specializing in Ice Age mammals have pushed back on this, pointing out the complications of genetic sequencing, the Linnean reclassification of the dire wolf from *Canis dirus* to *Aenocyon dirus*, the difficulties of restoring an animal to a habitat that no longer exists, and the complicated and hostile relations between modern wild canids and human populations. The question for the humanities and literature scholar is “Why do we want this so badly?” Colossal itself has a web page listing pop culture references to dire wolves, and George R.R. Martin is a major investor.

The appearance of these “de-extincted” animals makes a useful lens through which to re-examine the wolves and werewolves of *Harry Potter*, from those deep in the Forbidden Forest who are presented as charismatic megafauna; Remus Lupin, who as a sympathetic werewolf rejects everything wolfish about himself, including his Patronus; and Fenrir Greyback, who represents the worst of what humans envision wolves to be. What about the dire wolf captures the imagination and brings about a longing to form a relationship with these animals, or even to be one?

This presentation includes information and research from the La Brea Tar Pits Museum and cute pictures of dire wolf pups.

Nouran Amin, PhD (she) ✍

nouran.amin@bsu.edu

Ball State University

From Hogwarts to Ilvermorny:

Faculty Development, Institutional Culture, and Teaching in the Wizarding World

This presentation examines what the *Harry Potter* books and J.K. Rowling’s expanded canon suggest about faculty development in magical educational institutions, with particular attention to Hogwarts and Ilvermorny. Rather than assuming that magical expertise automatically produces effective teaching, it asks what evidence the canon offers about how professors are recruited, socialized, mentored, evaluated, and supported across wizarding schools. In the *Hogwarts* novels, faculty members are depicted as highly knowledgeable but uneven in pedagogy, classroom management, assessment, and student care, implying an institution rich in disciplinary mastery but thin in systematic professional development. At the same time, recurring examples of apprenticeship, collegial modeling, informal mentoring, and role-based learning suggest that faculty development may exist in decentralized and tacit forms rather than through formal programs. Rowling’s *Ilvermorny* history adds an important comparative dimension: the school grows from a family-led teaching enterprise into a larger institution that eventually recruits more teachers and develops a reputation as a democratic, less elitist school, raising questions about institutional culture and its effects on professional learning. By placing canonical evidence in conversation with modern faculty-development theory, this presentation argues that the wizarding world presents a surprisingly rich case study of how institutions support teaching unevenly, implicitly, and through culture as much as through structure.

Laurie Beckoff, MSc (she)

Lbeckoff22@gmail.com

Independent Scholar

To Dwell on Dreams: Unconscious and Waking Visions in Harry Potter and Arthurian Literature

In the first scene of the series in which he is no longer a baby, Harry Potter wakes from a dream of a flying motorcycle. He continues to experience dreams, nightmares, or visions—both asleep and awake—over 20 times throughout the series. Harry's dreams are often more than just flights of fancy—they can be repressed memories, hidden truths, deep-seated anxieties, or glimpses into Voldemort's mind.

Among many other similarities, profound dreams such as these are also present in Arthurian literature, experienced by King Arthur throughout his reign and knights on their quests. While Harry scoffs at dream interpretation in Professor Trelawney's Divination class, Arthurian characters actively seek to understand the meaning of their dreams. Dreams can help or hinder, provide clarity or sow doubt, offer comfort or inspire terror. In works featuring magic and the supernatural, dreams are not merely symbolic. They may foretell the future, deliver messages from the dead, and reveal information to which the dreamer would not otherwise have access.

This paper examines the functions of dreams in *Harry Potter* and Arthurian romance, exploring their emotional and practical significance, their bearing on plot and character, and what happens when dreams do—or don't—come true.

Jane Bright, PhD (she)

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University of Colorado

Written in the (Neutron) Stars: Alchemy and the Astrophysical Origins of Gold

In the first *Harry Potter* installment, the Philosopher's Stone serves as the central catalyst for the plot. This legendary object is famous for two extraordinary powers: producing the Elixir of Life to grant immortality and turning any metal into pure gold. While the pursuit of creating gold was once the domain of alchemists like Nicolas Flamel, modern astrophysics reveals that every ounce of gold in existence was indeed "transmuted" from other matter. This talk explores the "real" alchemy of our universe. It unpacks how gold is forged not by a magical stone but through the violent collisions of the universe's true Philosopher's Stones: neutron stars. It examines how these explosive mergers produce the conditions necessary to create gold, proving that the alchemical pursuit is actually a cosmic reality written in the stars.

Grace V. Candido-Beecher (she) gracecandido@gmail.com Independent Scholar

The Hanged Man, the Devil, and the Tower: A Tarot-Centric Exploration of Tom Marvolo Riddle

There's a devil in the details and a lightning-struck tower on the horizon.

Tarot cards play a fairly small role in the *Harry Potter* series, acting as well-placed foreshadowing for events to come. Yet, the power and significance of Tarot extends beyond ominous warnings and minor foreshadowing. In its beautiful, symbolic illustrations, we find significance for all characters. The one that specifically captures this author's curiosity is, as always, Tom.

This presentation provides a very brief introduction to what the cards are, how they work, and where they have been used in the series to telegraph important events in the story. It expands on how the cards are generally viewed by important characters in the series and why those characters have come to their conclusions.

Following this, we explore which cards in the Tarot deck suit Tom specifically. This assessment will center around the general understanding of what the cards mean as we review the events of Tom's life, his mentality, his relationships, his secrets, his fears, and his choices. Time permitting, we may even be able to pull a few cards on the spot to see what the cards have to say about this delightfully nefarious antagonist!

Sayan Chattopadhyay (he) ✍️ sayanphd11@gmail.com Adamas University, India

"This is no time to be a gentleman": Studying Affective Worlds, Normalized Danger, and the Post-Catastrophic Condition in Young Adult Speculative Narratives

Catastrophe, crisis, and restoration have long shaped the critical vocabulary through which fantasy and speculative narratives are read. In children's and young adult fantasy, these modes often organize stories of initiation, danger, and moral testing, where young protagonists move through fractured or threatened worlds. However, this framework still tends to treat such narratives as moving toward resolution, recovery, or closure and therefore fails to account for worlds that remain unstable, coercive, and perilous while still being inhabited, desired, and narratively sustained. What remains insufficiently theorized is this condition of living within crisis without either complete ruin or full restoration. Hogwarts functions not simply as a magical school but as a space of refuge structured through discipline, ritual, and repeated exposure to threat. The Sorting, the Triwizard Tournament, the Ministry's failures, the Horcruxes, and the Battle of Hogwarts together produce a world in which danger is normalized and "becoming" occurs through sustained proximity to instability. This paper also asks how the literary and movie series transform the concept of "crisis" into a habitable condition, how young adulthood is shaped through this ongoing tension, and why at all recognizing this mode is urgent for the study of contemporary and speculative literature.

Matt Cox (he) 🦉✍️

Independent Scholar

Puffs: Ten Years Later (A Look Back at the Journey of the Hit Off-Broadway Play)

This presentation offers a look back at the 10-year history of *Puffs* (or: *Seven Increasingly Eventful Years at a Certain School of Magic & Magic*) with playwright Matt Cox. From its creative origins to its Off-Broadway run to its widespread adoption as one of the most produced plays in high schools around the world, the session explores the unexpected trajectory of this little-play-that-could.

Cox will discuss his own process of balancing what is expected of parody with the goal of creating a work that transcends those expectations and stands with its own identity. Plus, how the changing fandom shaped the play's own evolution in the decade since its premiere. A peek behind the curtain of how the magic happened.

In-person attendees are invited to join HPAC's "Pizza and Puffs" event immediately following this talk.

Thomas L. Crofoot, MSW, tcrofoot@ewu.edu
PhD (he) ✍

Eastern Washington University
(Professor Emeritus)

Mastering the Hallows: Morality and Destiny for Harry Potter

Harry Potter makes value-based decisions to solve moral dilemmas in Rowling's modern fairy tale. Within Harry's story, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* is a moral fairy tale about the Deathly Hallows. Harry Potter's background helps him make the right choices to claim the three Deathly Hallows. Khaytman (2021) in *Dumbledore* claims Harry Potter's mastery of the Deathly Hallows—"Plan D"—was doomed. Given Rowling's intricate plotting and attention to the Hallows, this presentation suggests Dumbledore was right to believe Harry would find and benefit from the Hallows. "Plan D" was likely to succeed. Using moral theories of possession described by Rowling, Harry had the right to claim all the Hallows. By the Goblin Theory of Ownership, whoever makes an object owns that object, and Harry's ancestors made the Deathly Hallows. Harry inherited the Cloak of Invisibility from his family. By British Common Law, theft does not change ownership. Therefore, any of the Hallows that were stolen still belong to Harry. By the theory of victory by combat, Harry defeated every enemy including Draco Malfoy, who might have claimed the Elder Wand. The most important principle may be the principle of best use (Sword of Gryffindor Principle)—Harry made the best use of the Hallows, therefore the Hallows would come to him. While he did not have the Resurrection Stone in his direct possession, Harry was the last person to possess the stone and benefited from protection against Voldemort's otherwise fatal attack.

Ped Daneshgar, PhD (he) pdaneshg@monmouth.edu Monmouth University

What Wood Really Makes the Best Wand?

The legendary wandmaker Garrick Ollivander described wand woods as having personalities—that each type of wood used in wands contributed to its magical style and destiny. He also famously said that each wand selects the wizard, but over time the wand and wizard may learn and teach each other. If the wand makes the wizard and the wood makes the wand, then what woods are best for wands? Harry Potter's first wand was made of holly, which is associated with protection and overcoming adversity. In reality, holly wood has very fine grain, is heavy and tough, and is difficult to work with due to its high resistance and density. Would holly wood really have made a good wand? To contrast, the most powerful wand in the world, the Elder Wand, if in fact made of elder, would be problematic, as elder is soft, brittle, and often hollow. More than 30 woody plant species are referenced in the *Harry Potter* series, but which of these makes sense for actual usage as a wand? Join a botanist, *Harry Potter* enthusiast, and tree specialist to examine wand woods and discuss which woods would make the best wands.

Julia Dauksys, PhD (she) ✍ juliedauksys@rmc.edu Randolph Macon College

Potter Proclivity: The Human Condition in the Wizarding World and Ours

"It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."
—Dumbledore, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Human condition can be described as the key events in a lived experience: birth, emotion, morality, and mortality. When we compare our Muggle experiences to those of the phenomenon known as the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, we see similarities and differences within the complex characters that mirror the choices we make in our own lives. This presentation explores how a group of Muggle college students explored their own human condition in a course called "Potter Proclivity" by reflecting on the choices and actions of the magical witches and wizards in the first four books of the *Harry Potter* canon and then comparing this to their

own chosen experiences. Students gained new perspectives about the meanings and intentions of the literature and themselves through house-organized discussions, comparative literature analyses, development of Muggle quidditch (“quadball”), and a break-out simulation. In a culminating project-based learning experience, students leaned on their major areas of study to find themselves and their place in the wizarding world to demonstrate their growth. Through this experience, students discovered it really is their choices that show who they truly are.

Maria (Matsakis) Eisenhardt, MA, MAT (she) mariajmatsakis@gmail.com Independent Scholar

*Dark Times Ahead: Color Grading in Harry Potter Films
(And Another Way the HBO Series Is Already Messing Up)*

In turbulent times, many Potterheads (re)turn to the *Harry Potter* films on DVD, a treasured, nostalgic memory of childhood that helps to quell rising anxieties in fraught times like these. The films work to capture visually the magic we read about in the novels, and they do an incredible job, especially of showing the vibrancy and light in the early films. It is no wonder, then, that the color grading of the series darkens with each subsequent film, ending in a two-part finale (one of the first of its kind) that is deeply dark and visually representative of the feelings of hopelessness that are weaved into the final novel. This presentation explores the importance of this color grading and touches on how the upcoming HBO series (that no one asked for!) can add color and tone to the already long list of errors they have made in remaking a series that is both beloved and reviled by people worldwide.

Louise M. Freeman, PhD (she) lfreeman@marybaldwin.edu Mary Baldwin University

*Sorting Way, Way, Way Too Soon?
A Social And Statistical Look at the 9 ¾-Month Sorting Ceremony,
a Social Media Trend Among Potterhead Parents*

As first-generation *Harry Potter* readers become adults, Potterhead parents have begun introducing the franchise to their children through a “sorting ceremony” when their child reaches 9 ¾ months of age. Parents commonly set four examples of House swag in a row and let the babies select their Hogwarts House by crawling to touch one of the items. This sorting ceremony exploded in popularity in 2021, possibly as a substitute for in-person birthday or christening ceremonies that parents had to avoid due to COVID.

A statistical analysis of 112 ceremonies found the percentages of Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw babies consistent with 25% predicted by chance. This is the outcome predicted if 1) babies made their choice at random, with no preference for particular colors or positions, and 2) parents placed the House stimuli in random order. However, data analysis showed that neither assumption was true. Babies were three times as likely to select one of the middle two targets than the ones on the ends. Furthermore, of the 24 possible orders for arranging the House targets, the most popular by far, selected on 28% of ceremonies, was Gryffindor-Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw-Slytherin.

This presentation looks at some of the variations that the ceremony takes and examines the statistical quirks that “magically” result in even House numbers, despite clearly non-random choices by parents and babies. It also includes practical advice on how parents considering these ceremonies can maximize the chance that their precious little witch or wizard will select the parents’ preferred House.

Sara Hardman, PhD (she) seh2196@tc.columbia.edu Columbia University
Peter Amuso, JD (he) AmusoP@chc.edu Chestnut Hill College

Experiential Learning and Agency at Hogwarts: Why Wizards Should Never Teach with AI

This paper examines the educational methods of Hogwarts, drawing from two philosophers of education: John Dewey and Paulo Freire. First, it discusses the many ways that Hogwarts professors implement experiential education: students mainly learn by doing, not by passively taking in. To Dewey, this is an essential component of learning that generates interest in students and cultivates community. In addition, learning by doing goes against the “banking method” of education that Freire warns about. He argues that when learning is solely passive and transactional, students are treated as cogs in a machine and are more likely to simply reproduce the status quo. But when students are expected to take some ownership of their education, they are more likely to gain individual agency outside the classroom. We see this with Harry Potter and other students at Hogwarts. They are willing to go against the status quo, to act as agents in the world, and to stand up for what they think is right, even if it goes against the wishes of their professors.

Currently, AI is threatening experiential learning. With the rise of this technology, education is often treated in the “transactional” way that Freire warns against. It is product-oriented, rather than process-oriented. The final section of this paper considers the ways that AI at Hogwarts would prohibit student agency. Would Dumbledore’s Army ever have been created if Hogwarts’s curriculum was AI-centered? This paper argues that it would not.

Meghan Johnson, PhD (she) johnsonmt@smu.edu Southern Methodist University

“Powerful Restoratives” and Flourishing Fungus: The Environmental Matter of Harry Potter

This paper reads the *Harry Potter* series through the lens of object life and vibrant materiality, arguing that J.K. Rowling’s wizarding world depends upon the persistent animation of environmental and organic matter. From the Whomping Willow and the Mandrakes to the sentient forests and holly-wood wands, the series constructs a universe in which objects—and particularly plant life—possess agency, memory, and resistance. Rather than functioning as passive background, these forms of environmental matter shape plot, character development, and moral ambiguity. Drawing on theories of object agency, this paper suggests that the wizarding world models a kind of object permanence that exceeds utility: things are not merely tools but coparticipants in narrative action.

This paper argues that the series invites readers to reconsider their own perceptual habits of environmental matters and spaces. The animation of plant and environmental life encourages readers to make an ethical shift in attention, one that asks us to resist treating the material world as inert or disposable. In this way, *Harry Potter* offers not only a fantasy of enchantment but a subtle ecological philosophy. The series suggests that what we see—and how we use it—shapes the moral boundaries between domination and coexistence, magic, and materiality.

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*Binky – Lavender Brown’s Dead Rabbit or Death’s Flying Horse?
An Intertextual Reading of the Harry Potter Series and Terry Pratchett’s Mort*

J.K. Rowling once said that the *Harry Potter* series is “largely about death.” Similarly, Terry Pratchett’s *Mort* explores topics of mortality, fate, and human engagement with death. Published in 1987 as a part of Pratchett’s famous *Discworld* series, *Mort* predates the first *Harry Potter* book by a decade. The two works share intriguing parallels: from names—for example, in *Mort*,

the character of Death is accompanied by his skeletal horse, Binky—to broader questions about fate, prophecies, and the human experience of mortality, these stories offer rich ground for comparison. Moreover, both authors use humor or satire to address heavy themes.

Despite many striking similarities, the connection between the two works remains yet to be explored. Besides, the fandoms of both series seem rather separated. This presentation introduces the links between the two works, focusing on a reader-centered perspective based on the concept of intertextuality. Rather than exploring whether Rowling meant to allude to *Mort*, it examines how being aware of these connections can shed new light on *Harry Potter* and deepen our understanding of both those beloved works of fantasy literature.

Lorrie Kim (she) lorriekimwriter@gmail.com Independent Scholar

Quilt Art: Expelliarmus and the Elder Wand

By tracking the use of *Expelliarmus*, the Disarming Spell, through the seven-book series, we can understand how ownership of the Elder Wand moved from Grindelwald to Dumbledore, Draco, and finally Harry. This bed-sized quilt transcribes the analysis into quilting vernacular, resulting in a textual but nonverbal document arguing that Snape knowingly taught Draco and Harry the simple spell that was powerful enough to enable two schoolboys to bring down the most powerful wizards of the era.

Seven rows of quilt blocks represent the seven volumes and their chapters, top to bottom, left to right. Characters are represented in fabrics with colors and motifs associated with them in the series, such as purple with metallic celestial accents for Dumbledore or matte black broadcloth for Snape. Strategic use of color placement depicts emotional developments in the plot, such as heavy quilting lines in gold thread around confrontations between Harry and Voldemort. Patchwork patterns depict character analysis, such as Sunshine and Shadow blocks showing internal conflict, or parallels between characters, such as use of mirror-image shapes or identical blocks rendered in different colorways.

This quilt art presentation was inspired by Patrick McCauley characterizing his 2024 presentation as a quilt because it was an assemblage of connected ideas, like a patchwork of pieced blocks.

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Bowling Green State University

The Author Isn't Dead and She Has a Knife:

How the Hermeneutics of Suspicion Can Free the Harry Potter Fandom

When J.K. Rowling began to publicly promote anti-transgender bigotry in 2019, the *Harry Potter* fandom experienced an identity crisis. The resulting fracturing of *Harry Potter* fan spaces continues to reverberate through the community as fans struggle to separate the art from the artist, including in their personal interpretations of the series.

This presentation uses Rowling's relationship with the *Harry Potter* fandom to critically analyze the impact of authorial voice over fan interpretations. Drawing on extratextual amplifications created by interviews, online commentary, additional lore, and the text of the *Harry Potter* books, it examines the extent to which Rowling exerted power over fan interpretation, arguing she did so to a higher degree than similar authors, particularly as a reaction against fan interpretation she disagreed with. Secondly, it evaluates how Rowling bestowed power over the "correct" interpretation upon key figures in the *Harry Potter* fandom, influencing the creation of a normative *Potter* canon that devalued dissenting interpretations.

This presentation argues that by changing how we read *Harry Potter* hermeneutically—through the theory behind literary theory—we can wield a suspicious reading of the *Harry Potter* books as a means to understand, then free ourselves of, Rowling's decades-long enmeshment with the *Harry Potter* fandom. The hermeneutics of suspicion gives fans agency to resist her reactionary additions to the text, allowing them to produce a new, personal canon in line with the meaning they take from the books.

Mykyta Kliapets, MSc (he) ✓

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*Accuracy and Accessibility in Communicating Natural Sciences:
Depiction of Astronomy in the Harry Potter Series*

Many classes in the *Harry Potter* universe are inspired by real-world school subjects. Astronomy stands out as one directly based on real science, with only limited magical add-ons. This allows us to make an inquiry into the Potterverse as a medium for astronomy outreach.

This talk examines the *Harry Potter* books and supplementary materials, such as the official website and the Hogwarts Mystery game, through the lens of science communication theory and practice. In particular, it focuses on the issue of balancing accessibility and scientific accuracy. One prominent example it considers is the observation of Venus during late-night O.W.L. exams in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, a scientifically inaccurate simplification.

Drawing on results from a survey of students studying space sciences and science communication, in which we assess perceived scientific relevance and communication effectiveness, this talk argues that the inclusion of real-world science within a fictional narrative enhances immersion, in line with Narrative Transportation Theory. Finally, it discusses the broader potential of fiction as a tool for communicating natural sciences, particularly in light of the upcoming HBO adaptation.

Christina Leshko, PhD (she) ✓

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SUNY Canton

*Recasting the Dark Arts: Critical Race Theory, Fan Resistance, and the Racial Politics of
Severus Snape*

This paper examines the online backlash surrounding the casting of Paapa Essiedu, a Black British actor, as Severus Snape in HBO's forthcoming adaptation of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and recent scholarship on race, representation, and public disputes over "colorblind" versus "colorconscious" casting, the paper analyzes how fans mobilize claims of "authenticity," "book accuracy," and "character synchronicity" to mask anxieties about racialized disruptions to culturally entrenched white imaginaries. This paper argues that such public pushback functions less as neutral interpretive concerns and more as manifestations of whiteness-as-default in fantasy genre adaptations.

By situating the Snape controversy within broader CRT frameworks, particularly the critique of colorblindness, the property value of whiteness, and the racialization of authenticity, this paper challenges the assumption that fidelity to source material is an objective standard. Instead, it highlights how authenticity becomes a racialized discourse deployed to contest representational change. Ultimately, the paper positions race-conscious casting not as distortion but as a counter-storytelling practice that destabilizes hegemonic norms and expands the narrative possibilities within contemporary screen adaptations.

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Independent Scholar

S.P.E.W.: A Case Study in the Positives, Pitfalls, and Perils of Protest Acts

While Hermione's Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (a.k.a. S.P.E.W.) is treated as misguided, naive, or a failure over the course of the Harry Potter series, the activist organization can still have value to readers as a case study in why protests fail and how they might succeed. Over the course of the later half of the book series, readers get to watch S.P.E.W. from its inception grow, stumble through messaging attempts, meet unexpected obstacles, and, in the end, influence indirect but real change in the hierarchy of the wizarding world.

This paper analyzes the effectiveness of S.P.E.W. as an organization (along with its protest methods, lobbying techniques, and rhetorical savvy) and compares it with real-world collective action and community leaders to offer readers (and Hermione) the tools to more effectively organize in their own communities and help new organizers manage expectations on what success looks like.

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A Midlife Letter for The Girl Who Lived: An Autoethnographic Coming-of-Age at 40

This autoethnographic study reflects the year of Caitlin's life (December 2025–December 2026) as she rereads the *Harry Potter* series through the lens of an elder millennial craving the magic from her childhood. In early 2025, when Caitlin first started thinking about her upcoming 40th birthday, she realized that she was the magical age of eleven when *Harry Potter* was published in the United States and she first discovered the story. In the decades since, she has read the series multiple times—in joy, in grief, in boredom—but as she drew closer to 40, and after several years of heavy grief, infertility, and vocational turmoil, a different reread felt imminent. In the throes of perimenopause, a new life trajectory, and a heavy world, Caitlin embarked on a slow and deliberate reread of the series while also walking a planned 605 miles for the Harry Potter Conqueror Challenge series as a way to process whether she could really become the girl who lived (by her own design) or if, like Harry, she was fated to live the story previously written for her. This autoethnographic study offers an introspective look at how coming back to a beloved and defining series from childhood reawakens our inner child and leads to a rediscovery of self in midlife.

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Independent Scholar

Understanding Blood Status as a Reflection of the British System of Hereditary Aristocracy

We Americans sometimes forget that *Harry Potter* is a British story, told in a British context. This causes occasional misunderstandings, mostly on minor points such as why Mr. Weasley collects plugs. However one major item where we can go wrong is in our understanding of blood status. We Americans see blood status as a form of racism, but in a British context it is more appropriate to see it as a reflection of the British system of hereditary aristocracy. This presentation shows the similarities between blood status and the British system of hereditary aristocracy.

Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches: Lessons from Ron's Success with Hermione

On Ron's 17th birthday, Fred and George gave him a book—*Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches*—which Ron later told Harry was “pure gold” and “explains everything you need to know about girls.” By the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Ron has won Hermione's love, so maybe that *Twelve Fail-Safe Ways* book had something to do with it.

This presentation looks for twelve ways in which Ron's behavior changed after reading the *Twelve Fail-Safe Ways* book and then speculates humorously about what that book might have said. Ron obviously did something right. If the book worked for Ron, it might work for some of the rest of us as well.

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The Triwizard Maze and the Forest of Dean: Getting Lost in Harry Potter

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows does not follow the typical school-year schedule readers have been trained to expect by the last book in the seven-book series. Instead of following the anticipated path from number four, Privet Drive, to Hogwarts, the Trio are dislodged from that journey at the very start. For much of the novel, Harry, Hermione, and Ron are lost, both in the physical and spiritual sense. That disorientation is modeled first in the Triwizard maze in Book 4 and then realized in the less-controlled environment of the Forest of Dean in Book 7.

Although the prevalent wandering in the final book seems a formless disruption of the established narrative structure, it communicates important ideas about living in the midst of uncertainty, struggling with alienation, and finding direction amid chaos. “Getting lost” has significant neurological benefits. Psychologists have expressed concern about the unintended effects of GPS as it creates a generation who have never been lost and thus have never truly had to struggle to be found. In spiritual tradition, the practice of losing oneself has a long history, often expressed through the physical or at least metaphorical use of labyrinths. Without the wrong turns, the confusion, the wandering, the Trio could not find their way to the spiritual (and narrative) center. Examining such lost moments in the *Harry Potter* series reveals the value of time spent neither-here-nor-there for ultimately finding what is good and true at journey's end.

Kathryn N. McDaniel (she)

Emily Strand (she)

Laurie Beckoff (she)

Marietta College

Ohio Dominican University

Independent Scholar

Potterversity Live! Magic and Technology:

Never Trust Anything That Can Think for Itself If You Can't See Where It Keeps Its Brain

Potterversity's Katy, Emily, and Laurie, plus guests, discuss insights from the magical world that may help us navigate the latest Muggle technologies. We'll contemplate parallels between wizarding world magic and modern technologies and consider questions about costs versus benefits, access and barriers, as well as how human relationships and environments are shaped by powerful objects and systems. Once such power is discovered, can it—and should it—be contained?

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"Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!": On the Power of Words in Harry Potter

"Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" These are the "few words" Albus Dumbledore offers at the start of the school year in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. These words stay with Harry throughout his time at Hogwarts, as do many others: identifiers (Mudblood, Death Eater, The Boy Who Lived), imperatives ("I must not tell lies," *Imperio*), and incantations (*Expelliarmus*, *Expecto Patronum*, *Avada Kedavra*).

What gives these words their power? Is it the ethos of the speaker, the meanings that society has foisted upon them, the connotations in the mind of the listener, or the intentions behind their use? While each of these plays a role, none fully accounts for the peculiar persistence and force of language in the series. Words in *Harry Potter* often exceed what speakers intend, what audiences interpret, and what social contexts prescribe.

This paper argues that such words are best understood as aesthetic objects that exist alongside—rather than merely between—speaker and listener. From curses that act with deadly precision to offhand phrases that live rent-free in the mind, language in the series resists reduction to a simple tool of communication. Instead, words take on a kind of autonomy, shaping action, identity, and memory in ways that cannot be fully controlled, embedding themselves in both narrative and reader alike.

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"Too Big To Be Allowed": What Hagrid's Size Tells Us About J.K. Rowling and Disability

While nowhere in the *Harry Potter* books is the immense gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid described as disabled, he nevertheless faces discrimination owing to his unique physical dimensions. Described as "almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide," Hagrid's size hinders his participation in many facets of wizarding society. Despite the wizarding world's reliance on enchantments that disrupt normal spatial conventions, they are rarely used to accommodate Hagrid. In fact, the man who is described first to us as appearing "simply too big to be allowed," is indeed often relegated to lingering outside places like commercial venues while his friends go about their business inside.

Welcome neither entirely in wizarding civilization nor in the magical wilderness, the half-giant Hagrid exists in the liminal space between them, in his wooden cabin on the edge of the Forbidden Forest that alone accommodates his size. While symbolically apt, that Hagrid's disability-coded existence is rarely considered by the author to be deserving of attention reveals an unconscious bias in Rowling's approach to the subject. This leaves critical fans with another reason to remind ourselves of why although we might still draw comfort from *Harry Potter*, we should be wary of being enchanted with Rowling's vision of a just and equitable society.

Jordan Ostrum, MLIS (he)

Independent Scholar

Harry Potter and Chiasmus/Chiasmus and Harry Potter

As John Granger, Brett Fish, Caitlin Elizabeth Harper, and others have demonstrated, the *Harry Potter* series uses chiasmus. An arguably esoteric literary device, chiasmus is the repetition in reverse order of key words, phrases, and concepts. This back-to-basics presentation examines which elements of the *Harry Potter* series comprise its use of chiasmus. The focus is on the

series-wide echoes: the mirroring moments of Books 1 and 7, 2 and 6, and 3 and 5, and the important outlier and pivot point of Book 4. These instances of chiasmus serve as Easter eggs; rewards for repeat readers and delicacies for detail-oriented fans. This presentation seeks to examine the series' use of chiasmus, not in comparison with other literary works, nor at the level of close reading, but in broad strokes: it seeks to summarize the series' use of the device in toto. In so doing, it seeks to not only validate the efficacy and importance of chiasmus in the *Harry Potter* series but also seeks to validate the importance and efficacy of chiasmus as an underutilized and underappreciated literary device.

Mitchell H. Parks, PhD (he)

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Knox College

Emptying the Trunk: Reviewing the Series in List Form

Catalogs and lists have a long history in narrative, from the "Catalogue of Ships" in the *Iliad* onward. It is unsurprising that the *Harry Potter* series, which delights in small details, contains numerous and frequently quite charming lists. These lists often perform a worldbuilding function. For example, the Famous Witches and Wizards cards that Harry encounters soon after entering the magical world situate his experiences within a web of historical and literary references. This talk examines two less obvious examples of lists in the final novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The first is the collection of objects Harry unearths from his school trunk in Chapter 2 ("In Memoriam"); the second is the sequence of events at the start of the fight against Voldemort in Chapter 31 ("The Battle of Hogwarts"). The presence of these listing scenes in the final novel of the series creates both a sense of closure and, perhaps paradoxically, a sense that the adventure is starting anew.

Brent A Satterly, PhD, LCSW (he/they) 🦉

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Our beloved colleague is unable to attend the conference in person this year so that they may host Widener University's "[Dr. Brent's Queer History Mystery](#)." We will share a pre-recorded special message from Dr. Satterly/Professor Umbridge.

**Becca Sheppard (she) and
Elizabethada Wright, PhD (she)** ✍️

University of Minnesota Duluth

The Wand Chooses the Wizard: Unpacking the Agency of Wands in the Harry Potter Series

Within J.K. Rowling's world-building, wand lore is one of the least understood aspects. Though her characters make clear that wands and wand choice are essential within this world, how "the wand chooses the wizard" is never made clear nor are the means through which the combination of wood and internal components is given power.

In an attempt to better understand this aspect of her world and how wand lore extends the author's purposes, this paper analyzes the components of all the wands detailed in the seven books to explore how wood type, internal threads, length, and flexibility combine to provide magic to their holder and choose their owner. The paper concludes that wand lore subtly reinforces Rowling's emphasis on the importance of individual choice love and redemption

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Butler University

Navigating Hogwarts: The First-Gen Experience

For many first-generation students, entering higher education feels like walking into a castle full of secret passwords, shifting staircases, and unspoken rules. This session examines how the *Harry Potter* franchise can serve as a pedagogical lens to help these students deconstruct the “hidden curriculum” of academia. By exploring the parallels between Muggle-born (or -raised) and contemporary first-gen experiences, we can address critical issues like imposter syndrome, institutional literacy, and the pressure of “cultural straddling.” This presentation discusses how reframing the first-year seminar as a “Room of Requirement” enables faculty to act as translators and navigators, moving beyond traditional instruction toward holistic mentorship. Ultimately, this session demonstrates how the Pottermore can reframe the daunting first year as a structured Hero’s Journey, empowering students to see themselves as the protagonists of their own academic success.

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Ohio Dominican University

J.K. Rowling and P.D. James: Mysterious Connections

Even before *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling began to publish the *Cormoran Strike* detective series under a pseudonym, scholars like Amy H. Sturgis, Christopher Routledge, and Chris McGee had noted the affinities between the *Potter* books and classic detective stories. Such parallels shine in Rowling’s complex plots that place the question of “who-dun-it” at the center of installments like *Chamber of Secrets* and *Goblet of Fire*, among others. Even in *The Casual Vacancy*, a Muggle-focused book that darkly explores social issues and the range of our human responses, the initial mystery of who is posting damning yet accurate truths as the “Ghost of Barry Fairbrother” fires the plot. Rowling has acknowledged her love of detective fiction in interviews, noting her admiration for writers like Agatha Christie, Ruth Rendell, Margery Allingham, and P.D. James.

This presentation explores the allusive relationship between Rowling’s works and that final author mentioned: P.D. James. From her chosen monikers to the liberal borrowing of names from the Jamesverse in Rowling’s works to the creation of pivotal characters patterned after those in James’s murder mysteries, this presentation introduces P.D. James as a significant and distinctive literary influence on the *Harry Potter* series and on Rowling’s growing body of work.

Jackey Taggart, M.Ed. (she) jackey.taggart@verizon.net Independent Scholar

Severus Snape and the Postmodern Tragic Hero

Severus Snape is often perceived as an antagonistic figure within the *Harry Potter* series, yet his character arc reveals a complex reconfiguration of the tragic hero. This analysis examines Snape through the dual frameworks of Aristotelian tragedy and Arthur Miller’s theory of the common man, arguing that existing models of the tragic hero are insufficient to account for his characterization. While Aristotle emphasizes noble stature, hamartia, and immediate catharsis, and Miller redefines tragedy through the experiences of ordinary individuals engaged in a struggle for dignity, both models assume that recognition and emotional resolution occur within the hero’s lifetime.

Snape complicates these assumptions. Marked by moral fallibility in his early allegiance to the Death Eaters, his life is defined by sustained internal conflict, self-sacrifice, and a lifelong

journey toward redemption. However, unlike both Aristotelian and Millerian figures, Snape's defining characteristic lies in the concealment of his actions, motives, and true identity. His actions are consistently misinterpreted, and both his moral significance and the audience's cathartic response remain unrecognized until after his death.

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Independent Scholar

Learning to See Magic: Romanticizing the Ordinary in Harry Potter

This presentation explores the concept of “romanticizing your life” through the lens of magic in *Harry Potter*. While the phrase has recently gained popularity in modern culture, its roots can be traced to earlier philosophical traditions that center meaning making, attention, and the value of individual experience. Within the wizarding world, magic is not only a system of power but a way of perceiving and engaging with everyday life.

Through close examination of spaces, routines, and magic in *Harry Potter*, this presentation shows that the series models a form of intentional living in which ordinary moments are embedded with meaning. From candlelit studying, shared meals in the Great Hall, and handwritten letters, *Harry Potter* demonstrates how ritual, environment, and attention shape one's experience of the world. These elements invite us to consider how meaning is constructed not only through extraordinary events but through the ways we choose to engage with the ordinary.

With magic as a metaphor for perception, this presentation reframes romanticizing one's life as an act of noticing rather than escapism. *Harry Potter* offers a framework for understanding how individuals can cultivate a deeper sense of presence, belonging, and meaning in their own lives by attending to the moments that might otherwise go unnoticed.

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George Washington
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Wands, Identity, and State-Sanctioned Belonging in Harry Potter

“The wand chooses the wizard” is the first thing Harry learns about magic, and it frames everything that follows: the idea that there is a wand meant only for you, a piece of wood, and a core that recognizes something essential about who you are. But the wizarding world's relationship to wands is far less mystical than Ollivander makes it sound. Drawing on the series' treatment of wand legislation, the Trace, and the Muggle-born Registration Commission, this paper submits that wands function not as neutral instruments of magic but as state-endorsed identifiers that transform an innate condition into a public status that can be granted, monitored, and revoked.

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Why Fantasy Matters: The Psychological Appeal of Harry Potter

Human beings are widely captivated by fantasy, yet behavioral science has devoted relatively little systematic attention to understanding why. This talk draws on the speakers' recent theoretical framework (Webster, Weisberg, and Saucier, 2025) to examine the psychological appeal of fantasy through the case of the *Harry Potter* series—one of the most commercially and culturally successful narrative franchises in history, estimated at \$25–35 billion today.

To begin, this paper applies our working definition of fantasy to situate *Harry Potter* within a broader taxonomy of fictional forms, clarifying what distinguishes it from adjacent genres. It then explores two key psychological functions of fantasy engagement, drawing on Tolkien's (1983) landmark critique of fantasy. First, it argues that the *Harry Potter* series emulates Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe: an emotionally powerful experience of sudden, meaningful resolution in the face of overwhelming despair. Second, it connects fantasy engagement to contemporary research on Terror Management Theory; it suggests that narratives like *Harry Potter* help individuals symbolically manage existential concerns about mortality while highlighting key potential individual differences in fantasy appreciation, engagement, and enrichment.

Together, this analysis illustrates how fantasy narratives are not merely escapist but may serve important psychological and existential functions for audiences.

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Care, Knowledge, and Power: Rethinking Leadership in Harry Potter

This presentation offers an analysis of leadership as portrayed through four characters in the *Harry Potter* books: Luna Lovegood, Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, and Harry Potter. Discussions of HP leadership typically emphasize visible and authority-driven examples, particularly those associated with Harry and, to a lesser extent, Hermione. These discussions tend to focus on leadership models based in action, expertise, and decisiveness. This paper argues that this lens overlooks an important form of leadership embodied by Luna—one that relies on care, adaptability, and intellectual humility.

This analysis explores how leadership is enacted, recognized, and valued in HP, examining questions of credibility, emotional labor, moral reasoning, and influence exercised without formal authority. It examines whose knowledge is taken seriously, how emotional presence functions as leadership, and how people are supported during uncertainty, loss, and instability. From this perspective, Luna's leadership is relational and steadying, indicated by attentiveness to others, validation of lived experience, and a willingness to engage ambiguity without attempting to control it.

In contrast, Hermione's leadership is embedded in institutionally sanctioned knowledge and procedural competence, Neville's leadership gains recognition as he becomes a visible and courageous resister, and Harry's leadership fits familiar heroic patterns. Luna's contributions, by comparison, are often dismissed or minimized—not because they are ineffective, but because they fall outside prevailing expectations of what leadership looks like.

This presentation highlights care-based and relational leadership as essential, though frequently invisible, and invites us to reconsider how leadership is defined and recognized.

A Note on Our Mission

The Harry Potter Academic Conference (HPAC) exists to provide an intimate gathering where fans and scholars of all levels are welcome to engage deeply and critically with the Harry Potter series and fandom. It is an interdisciplinary space using open dialogue, community, and scholarly inquiry to study the Potterverse and its cultural impact.

The HPAC Board firmly and unequivocally condemns the anti-transgender prejudice of the series' author. For many fans, it's devastating to try to reconcile the creator of this beloved magical world and its message of inclusion with her amplification and financial support of beliefs, rhetoric, and judicial actions that cause uncalculated harm to trans and nonbinary people, including trans and nonbinary Potterheads and the people who love them.

Some now-former fans have walked away from the *Harry Potter* fandom in protest of the author's transphobia. But many LGBTQIA2S+ people and their allies still find a home at Hogwarts and at HPAC. As beloved member of the HPAC community Dr. Brent Satterly asks, where does "canceling" the series leave "the Half-Blood Fan," queer people and allies who still consider their *Harry Potter* fandom an important part of their identity and who still find value in engaging with the series?

HPAC has always been and will always be an open space for critical inquiry of the series and queering the Potterverse. We are a non-profit, academic entity with no ties, financial or otherwise, to the author or Warner Bros. Since the author made her politics clear in 2020, HPAC has firmly disavowed her and her beliefs through our words, our community, and our conference programming.

HPAC continues to exist in support of the Half-Blood Fan. Through our research, advocacy, and community, we maintain our immovable commitment to keeping our slice of the Potterverse a queer-safe space. The Board maintains and nurtures the HPAC community in ways that put our collective relationships with each other first, in dignity and worth. We actively embrace our trans and nonbinary Potterheads, allowing space for grief, anger, joy, discourse, and healing. Our message to you, who may be struggling with how—or even whether—to engage with this conference: We love you, and we love the HPAC community we've built together. Nobody, not even the author, can take that away from us.

Mischief Managed.

The Board

