

## Harry Potter: A Social Critique

The aim of this thesis is to offer an analysis of J.K. Rowling's fantasy novels, the Harry Potter series, as a work of social criticism. The striking contrast between the two diametrically opposed fictional worlds, the wizarding world in which the governing principle is magic and its *muggle* (a term denoting non-magical or status) counterpart defined mainly by the lack of magic, enables Rowling to present and explore various social issues: racial bigotry, social stratification, prejudice, corruption, child welfare, moral questions, misuse of power, civil conflicts, national bias, slavery, terrorism and gender issues. The two coexisting cultures constructed in her novels are reflected in language, customs and values. The complexity of Rowling's work allows her to gradually move towards bigger issues, at first revolving mainly around the main character, Harry Potter, and later involving both, the wizarding and muggle world as a whole. In other words, what starts out as a children's story of childhood changes its course towards a critique of greater social injustices as the characters grow up, a clear bildungsroman in which additional themes are developed apart from the basic struggle between good and evil.

Attention will also be paid as to how Rowling's novels are influenced by the nineteenth century fiction in particular her employment of motifs typical for the Victorian era, for example the narrative of an orphaned child or the issue of the traditional roles of women, both themes persisting to the present day. However, Rowling is not a neo-victorian author as she champions a contemporary perspective when dealing with the alternative world of the decadent magical culture. She employs deliberate ambiguity, sampling the Victorian era in terms of lifestyle, characterization and mannerism. Victoriana is thus used pragmatically and serves as an exotic background for the presentation of various social discriminations, and is arguably the dominant mode in children's modern literature. Rowling's style is thus perhaps best characterized as fantastic adventure, a fabergé text incorporating many well-established genres such as detective, mystery, romance, etc.

A body of critical writing is now forming around Rowling's oeuvre in direct relation to the decline in *Pottermania*, the consumerist hype around the phenomenon. This critical analysis now requires analysis of her debt to Victorian modes of social criticism and her deployment of a raft of techniques gleaned from a critical knowledge of the history of children's writing, in itself a reasonably new development in Children's Literature.