

Constructing a Distinct Other

Harry Potter and the Enchantment of the Future

by

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In this article I argue that the Harry Potter series could function as a critique or commentary to the ordinary contemporary society. Rowling's construction of the Wizard world bears resemblance to a distinct Other, which is frequently used by the tourist industry and various religious traditions. While the main purpose for the tourist industry to invoke a distinct Other lies in its promoting abilities, the religious traditions often use the distinct Other to show their ethic supremacy. The last, I believe, is the case with the Harry Potter series as well since the books promote a meritocratic, causal orientation towards the world.

When arguing for a meritocratic and causal orientation towards the world, Rowling disenchants the past and enchants the future. She lets the main characters in the series conduct a crusade against participation oriented attitudes and characters. Contrary to what certain Christian groups seem to think this is by no means hostile towards religion as we find it in Northern Europe and North America. Only traditions with a participatory orientation are under attack.

In the late modern world characterised by a lack of faith in the agenda of political modernity, people's longing for a place of belonging, a centre in their world, has not declined. To the shortcoming of the agents of modernity (politicians), people tend to construct their centres in much more varying ways than before. Both nationalism and regionalism seem to be overridden by glocalism or membership in various civil societies that prosper on the Internet. Needless to say, this has had an

enormous effect on the number of identities people of today are fostering. A comparison with pre-modern society where identity was constructed in less general ways might not do, but it is hard to neglect the scope of identities that contemporary society makes possible. Consumer society opens up a number of possibilities, of course, but the identities of today do not necessarily restrict themselves to *I am what I buy*. You could very well first and foremost consider yourself a Gryffindor and not a Swede, Dane, cosmopolite or the more consumption oriented identity as a BMW-owner or Armani-wearer, if you happen to be a member of those Harry Potter related groups, or fandoms, that flourish on the Internet.¹

Centre building outside the dominant tendencies in whatever society the individual lives in, is not an uncommon phenomenon. Indeed, the yearning for a place of belonging is a powerful drive in both tourism and the *good life abroad*-literature. Constructing a world different to the ordinary one and market this, can certainly be a very lucrative enterprise. In 2003, the tourism industry represented approximately 6% of the worldwide export of goods and services,² and writers such as Chris Stewart, the author of *Driving over Lemons* and *A Parrot in the Peppertree*, telling the charming and successful story of the author's move from metropolitan England to outback Spain, are immensely popular. As most people who has ever browsed through a few traveller's brochures know, the descriptions of not only eastern tourist destinations are laden with orientalist expressions. When constructing the exotic and erotic *Other* as an opposite to the normal or ordinary world of the customer, the travel agencies often skilfully commercialize the drawbacks of modernity at large. The over-organised, materialistic, disenchanting and thereby utterly boring world where few people have any time and energy left for their family and friends, is indirectly contrasted with the fantastic, sensual, enchanting and pleasant world just a few hours journey away. A dream world is constructed and this world is not so much a representation of the actual tourist destination as an outcome of the culture in which this *Other* is produced. Tourism is "very much about *our* culture, not about *their* culture or our desire to learn about it", as Malcolm Crick puts it (1996: 34). Just how attractive this distinct *Other* may be for the tourist in time and/or space, depends on the grade and type of alienation s/he suffers/experiences. Deeply alienated individuals often return from their *elected* centres to their homeland only to make money for the next trip (Cohen 1996), while more moderately alienated tourists might not have forsaken their old centre, but only temporarily experienced something different. Even so, most tourists travel for recreation and return to their centres somewhat better fit for their daily life, or, at least, that is what they think they do.

One does not, however, need to travel abroad or to the most deserted areas of one's homeland to experience the distinct *Other*. Quite a few non-protestant religious leaders are bound to forsake the pleasures of this world in one way or the other, with Asian Theravada Buddhist monks as the perhaps most conspicuous example. Strictly restricted to the domain of religion, these monks have little less choice than to live on what is given. Certain attempts to cross the line will not only be frowned upon by the laity, but also directly affect the monk's ability to make a living. The pureness of

¹ We must not, however, forget the commercial aspects of Potteromania and the identity constructions involved in this (Turner-Vorbeck 2003).

² [URL=<http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>, print-out 2006-09-06]

the monk, or the ability to forsake the world and thereby being a distinct Other, is directly related to the monk's relevance for his followers since it affects his merit giving or generative capacity (Wiktorin 2005). As work and biological reproduction are commonly regarded as fatal to religious reproduction and the bless-giving ability of any religion (Parry & Bloch 1995), distinct Others are found in most cultures across the world where the sacred is considered present in human beings. Since this is not the case in the dominant protestant tradition where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the only beings held sacred – which excludes a *human* sacred physiology – the need for the distinct Other has taken other forms. A salient example of this is the literary fantasy genre which attracts children, and youths as well as adults. In C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* for instance, the main characters stumble into a parallel world full of magical creatures and other fairytale related characters. Telling the story of children taking shelter in the countryside during the Blitz, the author lets the characters move from an extremely exposed and vulnerable state as children in London under attack, to become powerful heroes in the land of Narnia. This shift in status is by no means restricted to C.S. Lewis' authorship, but is rather characteristic in the literature that has children or youths as its main readers.³ The *gundam* heroes in Japanese fiction are further examples of this (Appelbaum 2003: 29).

As an illustration of fantasy literature that in an elaborate way regards a parallel world but predominantly have adult readers, Stephen Donaldson's chronicles of Thomas Covenant could do. The status shift from an extremely low position to the state of a hero is even in Donaldson's chronicle a major theme. Being an outcast in his own society with little hope of survival, the main character lurches into a parallel world where his presence is not only longed for, but essential for the world's existence. Another and even more popular character that fits into this plot is, of course, Harry Potter and I will below outline a few of the characteristics that defines the carefully hidden *Wizard world*. Before that, however, I wish to remind the reader of the importance of Crick's observation that tourism is very much about *our* culture. This means that a construction of a positive distinct Other, religious or not, can and will be used as a critique of and a commentary to the culture in which it is produced.

Muggle world versus Wizard world

Mr and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.⁴

J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter literature, lets the character Harry Potter be born into a British wizard family on July 31, 1980. This was a time of terror. A fallen wizard, Lord Voldemort, and his followers, the Death Eaters, tried to kill everyone who opposed their ambition to create a pure-blood wizard society. According to this group, whose efforts certainly reminds us of the Nazis

³ See Black (2003) for a discussion of the child-hero.

⁴ PS, p. 7

and various groups in former Yugoslavia, no children of non-magical parents should be allowed to enter the Wizard world, even if these children clearly showed the qualities that distinguish magical people from non-magical people, Muggles. The Harry Potter universe is thereby divided into magical and non-magical creatures, where humans are only one species of many. In the Wizard world the usual fairytale creatures such as elves, dragons, centaurs, unicorns and oversized “normal” animals exist side by side with humans and less common creatures of Rowling’s invention such as Blast-Ended Skrewts, Cornish pixies and Inferies, to name a few. The magical humans are divided into pure bloods, with both parents being wizards, half bloods, with one muggle and one wizard parent, and muggles, with two muggle parents. The qualities that make magical people able to affect the world in quite different ways than muggles are thus not restricted to wizard families. Indeed, the most able and competent young witch or wizard that Rowling lets us meet is Hermione Granger, a witch with all muggle ancestry.

British pure- or half-blood children are at eleven years of age expected to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a boarding school located somewhere in northern Britain. Muggle children are allowed to enter Hogwarts if, and only if, they are born with a *magic physiology*.⁵ The qualities such a physiology entails are normally exposed during stress or anger when odd things like unexpectedly getting up on the school roof to avoid a gang of bullies just happen. The Ministry of Magic, which is the governmental instance of the Wizard world, somehow monitors the Muggle world for these abnormalities and invites these magic muggle born children to Hogwarts and thereby to the wizard community. Harry Potter himself, for instance, did not know that he was a wizard until his eleventh birthday when Rubeus Hagrid, the gamekeeper of Hogwarts, brought the happy news. Entering the Wizard world meant an enormous change for Harry who had lived a poor life with the Dursley muggles since the age of one.

Harry’s parents were killed by the powerful dark wizard Lord Voldemort when they tried to prevent him from killing their child. While Voldemort had no problem finishing Harry’s parents James and Lily off, his mother’s selfless love provided Harry with such a powerful magical protection that Voldemort’s attempt to kill him not only failed, but also reduced Voldemort to a less human existence. The majority of the wizard community learned of Lord Voldemort’s disappearance with great relief and his followers were prosecuted or went into hiding. Harry became famous as “the boy who lived” and considered a hero. To avoid the influence such a destiny could have on Harry’s upbringing, the baby child was placed in his muggle aunt’s family, the Dursleys. Though still his family, the Dursleys can hardly be called Harry’s centre in the world. During his ten years with the Dursleys Harry is constantly bullied by his cousin Dudley, Dursley’s only child, whose appetite for food only matches his thirst for “Harry-hunting”. The reason for Harry’s foster parents to keep him unaware of his past is their fear for anything abnormal to happen. While Harry’s muggle grandparents were quite proud of having a witch in the family, Harry’s aunt, Petunia, is not thrilled.

⁵ I owe the term “magic physiology” to Iver Neumann (2006: 86).

'You *knew*?' said Harry. 'You *knew* I'm a – a wizard?'

'Knew!' shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. 'Knew! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that – that *school* – and came home every holiday with her pockets full of frog-spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!'⁶

Rowling often describes the Dursleys and their neighbourhood in a condescending way. The family lives in respectable Privet Drive in suburban London where “large, square owners” who drive clean cars, own “large, square houses with perfectly manicured lawns”.⁷ The law abiding, lawn-moving, car-washing men have descent jobs while the women keep their houses flawless when not gossiping with or spying on their neighbours. Dudley Dursley, the son, is a fat, spoiled, dumb “little tyke” that terrorizes his school and the neighbourhood. Harry, on the other hand, is thin, clever, and anything but spoiled since the Dursleys never provide him what his cousin Dudley has not worn out or finished with. While Dudley never opens a book but constantly watches TV, Harry takes long walks and spends a great deal of time reading.

Binary oppositions like these are often used throughout the series. When Harry for the first time visits a wizard family's home, the Burrow, Rowling makes sure that the house and its surroundings are as different to suburban London as possible.

It looked as though it had once been a large pigsty, but extra rooms had been added here and there until it was several storeys high and so crooked it looked as though it was held up by magic (which, Harry reminded himself, it probably was). [...] Round the front door lay a jumble of Wellington boots and a very rusty cauldron. Several fat brown chickens were pecking their way around the yard.

'It's not much,' said Ron.

'It's *brilliant*,' said Harry happily, thinking of Privet Drive.⁸

The Burrow's garden – with heaps of weeds, a definitely not “manicured” lawn, a pond full of frogs, several crooked trees and mysterious plants spilling out of the flowerbeds, – would certainly have been frowned upon in Privet Drive. The wizard family which own the Burrow, the Weasleys, are, with a few exceptions, quite as different to the Dursleys as their house is.

Though both the muggle and the wizard families seem to be middle class upholding classical gender roles (both women are housewives while their husbands hold respectable positions within their societies) they have little else in common. While Mr Dursley is portrayed as an unpleasant owner of a drill manufacturing company who loves to shout at the employees, Mr Weasley is characterised as a hard working, good tempered, and loyal civil servant at the Ministry of Magic. Mrs Dursley is characterised as a nosy, intolerant housewife who compulsively cleans her kitchen every evening. Mrs Weasley, on the other hand, is a good-hearted, friendly woman who cares not only for

⁶ PS, p. 44.

⁷ OP, p. 16.

⁸ CS, p. 29

her husband and six children, but also for Harry. While the muggle parents spoil their only child, this is not the case with the Weasleys. This, I would argue, is not due to the fact that the Weasley are relatively poor and hence can not afford such extravagancies. Rather, Rowling is quite anxious to show us what dreadful parents the Dursleys are and how valuable a loving but more restrictive upbringing can be. Indeed, Dudley has, so far, grown up to be a fat, dumb bully, while the Weasley children of age all have respectable jobs in the wizard community. Percy Weasley, their third son and a careerist politician, is so far an exception to Rowling's argument that a loving but restrictive upbringing is of crucial importance.

While the Weasleys are quite tolerant to the Muggle world, the opposite characterise the Dursleys' opinion of the Wizard world. Mr Weasley, who is "Head of Misuse of Muggle Artefacts at the Ministry of Magic", is totally fascinated by the Muggle world and questions muggles whenever he gets the opportunity to do so. He wants to know how bus stops works, he finds "eckeltricity" (electricity) amazing and collects, to his wife's regret, plugs and batteries. His dearest ambition is to find out how aeroplanes stay up.⁹ Mrs Weasley's interest for the Muggle world is, however, less childish. The Dursleys, on the other hand, find the Wizard world revolting, show no tolerance what-so-ever towards Harry's "lot", and find having a wizard in the family "a matter of deepest shame".¹⁰ Rowling characterises the Dursleys in the same manner as she does with other unpleasant or morally ambiguous characters in the series; they are simply selfish, malicious individuals who enjoy harassing others. Harry, for instance, is forced to live in a cupboard full of spiders under the stairs. By maltreating him, the Dursleys hope to rid him from his magic. After his first year at Hogwarts, however, the Dursleys allow him the spare room due to their fear for being transformed into dung beetles by Harry. The Dursleys do not know that Harry, like other underage in the Wizard world, is not permitted to perform magic outside school.

The carefully hidden Wizard world

The Wizard world in the Harry Potter series is a hidden world kept away from muggles. Since pure wizard communities are rare – the village Hogsmead being the only entirely wizard settlement in Britain – a number of restrictions regulate the wizard community's interaction with the ordinary world. Underage wizards are, as we have seen, not allowed to perform magic outside Hogwarts and even adult magic people are monitored by the ministry. Any performance of magic in front of muggles is a transgression to the *International Statute of Secrecy* and will result in a hearing or court at the Ministry of Magic. The punishment for performing magic in the presence of muggles depends on the magic performed. Underage magic people risk being expelled from Hogwarts while adults usually are fined. If, however, magic is performed "in exceptional circumstances" such as self-defence, the underage witch or wizard in question will be cleared of charges.¹¹

Despite these precautions, muggles are frequently exposed to magic. On these unfortunate occasions the Ministry rush to modify the poor muggles memory. A memory charm is used to induce

⁹ Wizards travel by "brooms", "floo powder" or "port keys" when they do not "apparate", which requires no means of transport.

¹⁰ CS, p. 9

¹¹ OP, p. 135

a dreamlike state and the victim has no longer any recollection of being exposed to magic. If a muggle unknowingly should walk into a magic place like Hogwarts, for instance, they are not only unable to see the place but also all of a sudden remember something urgent that must be taken care of.

Muggles are kept aware of the Wizard world on a need to know-basis. Since cross marriages are necessary for the Wizard world's survival, quite a few muggles are well informed about the whereabouts of the magic world. Like the Dursleys, these muggles are not inclined to tell their story to the rest of the Muggle world. When the Prime Minister of Britain first meets his counterpart in the Wizard world, he is terrified:

'But,' said the Prime Minister breathlessly..., 'but why – why has nobody told me –?'

'The Minister for Magic only reveals him or herself to the Muggle Prime Minister of the day,' said Fudge [the Prime Minister for Magic], poking his wand back inside his jacket. 'We find it the best way to maintain the secrecy.'

'But then,' bleated the Prime Minister, 'why hasn't a former Prime Minister warned me –?'

At this, Fudge had actually laughed.

'My dear Prime Minister, are you ever going to tell anybody?'

Still chortling, Fudge had thrown some powder [flow powder] into the fireplace, stepped into the emerald flames and vanished with a whooshing sound. The Prime Minister had stood there, quite motionless, and realised that he would never, as long as he lived, dare mention this encounter to a living soul, for who in the wide world would believe him?¹²

In the Harry Potter series Rowling has, so far and with one book to go, not revealed any form of "Muggles aware of the Wizard world-society". The reasons for this could be numerous, of course, but since the construction of the Wizard world as a distinct Other seems to be of importance to her, the function of the ordinary world is reduced to one of reference. The only reason exposed so far for the need to keep the Wizard world hidden, is brought to us in the first book by Hagrid.

'But what does a Ministry of Magic do?' [Harry asked]

'Well [said Hagrid], their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country.'

'Why?'

'Why? Blimey, Harry, everyone'd be wantin' magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we're best left alone.'¹³

Rowling's use of the ordinary or familiar world as a mere platform for the construction of the positive Other, is a salient feature of religious discourse as well. Lay people, regardless of religious declination, are constantly informed of the imperfections of the ordinary world, while the distinct Other is not subject to the same scrutiny. Detached from but still desperately dependent of the

¹² HBP, p. 12

¹³ PS, p. 51

ordinary world's creativity, the distinct Other is often presented as the realm of ethic. Again Asian Theravada Buddhism can be used as an example.

Like any other field or discourse, the Wizard world has its distinctions which sets it apart from significant others. Trespassers are frowned upon, openly laughed at or sent to *Azkaban*, the wizard prison. As in the real world the battle of what should be labelled "knowledge" and what should be regarded as "nonsense" or "superstition" is centred round the educational institutions.

The enchantment of the future

Following Michael Ostling I consider most of the magic presented in the Harry Potter books as instrumental and not participatory. Hogwarts are indeed a place where magic skills are taught, "not through ritual, initiation, or the transmission of charismatic power, but through book-learning, homework, practice, and regular tests" (Ostling 2003: 10). As such, the magic taught with headmaster Albus Dumbledore's consent for the most part represent what Stanley J. Tambiah might call a causality orientation to the world. This mode of orientation is easily spotted when scientist, engineers, doctors and economists meet in professional settings. The causality orientation also characterises the discourse found at university curriculum when trying to reduce complexity to elementary principles (Tambiah 1996: 109), and so even at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The students are taught how to master magic, what counter curses are to be used to lift or block hostile curses and how to treat magical animals. Though all professors but one teach causality orientation to the magic world, its dearest protagonist is the headmaster himself.

Professor Dumbledore is not only characterised as the most skilful wizard of the world, his followers also consider him a genius while his opponents fear his vast knowledge of magic. Together with Hermione Granger, who by the way is described as the cleverest witch of her age, Rowling seem to use these characters as 'if anyone know what is going on its Dumbledore or Hermione' throughout the series, which, of course, makes their orientation towards the world of extra interest. The causality orientation is highlighted when Harry, Ron and the model student Hermione take up divination and thereby meet Professor Trelawney, who very well could be said to foster a participation orientation towards the world.

'Welcome to Divination,' said Professor Trelawney, who had seated herself in a winged armchair in front of the fire. 'My name is Professor Trelawney. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye.'

Nobody said anything in answer to this extraordinary pronouncement. Professor Trelawney delicately rearranged her shawl and continued, 'So you have chosen to study Divination, the most difficult of all magical arts. I must warn you at the outset that if you do not have the Sight, there is very little I will be able to teach you. Books can take you only so far in this field ...'

At these words, both Harry and Ron glanced, grinning, at Hermione, who looked startled at the news that books wouldn't be much help in this subject.¹⁴

¹⁴ PA, p. 80

After asking all the students to drink a cup of tea and with the help of the book *Unfogging the Future* interpret the patterns of the dreg, Trelawney moves around in class encouraging the students to “broaden their minds”. Then she lowers her eyes to Harry’s cup, gasps and screams.

‘My dear,’ Professor Trelawney’s huge eyes open dramatically, ‘you have the Grim.’

‘The what?’ said Harry. [...]

‘The Grim, my dear, the Grim!’ cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn’t understood. ‘The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen – the worst omen – of *death!*’ [...]

Everyone was looking at Harry; everyone except Hermione, who had got up and moved around to the back of Professor Trelawney’s chair.

‘I don’t think it looks like a Grim,’ she said flatly.

Professor Trelawney surveyed Hermione with mounting dislike.

‘You’ll forgive me for saying so, my dear, but I perceive very little aura around you. Very little receptivity to the resonances of the future.’¹⁵

Later, when Professor Trelawney introduces Crystal-gazing, the causality oriented Hermione no longer can stand the “guesswork” of Divination. Her decision to leave class was, of course, foreseen by Professor Trelawney.

‘Oooooo!’ said Lavender suddenly, making everyone start. ‘Oooooo, Professor Trelawney, I’ve just remembered! You saw her leaving, didn’t you? Didn’t you, Professor? “*Around Easter, one of our number will leave us forever!*” You said it *ages* ago, Professor!’

Professor Trelawney gave her a dewy smile.

‘Yes, my dear, I did indeed know that Miss Granger would be leaving us. One hopes, however, that one might have mistaken the Signs ... the Inner Eye can be a burden, you know ...’¹⁶

Seeing the Signs can, indeed, be a burden for Sybil Trelawney. When the highly unpleasant High Inquisitor Dolores Umbridge asks her to make a prediction, Trelawney responds in a truly non-instrumental way that “The Inner Eye does not see upon command!”¹⁷ While it could be argued that Rowling usually uses the Divination teacher as a binary opposition to Hermione and Headmaster Dumbledore, Trelawney has another role in the series.

When Albus Dumbledore becomes Headmaster, he is reluctant to allow Divination to continue at Hogwarts.¹⁸ He does, however, meet with a teacher who applies for the post as a Divination teacher: Sybil Trelawney. Sybil is the great-great-granddaughter of Cassandra Trelawney, a very famous and very gifted Seer according to Dumbledore. Sybil, however, makes him disappointed since she does not seem to have any gift at all. At the end of their meeting Sybil becomes what could be described as possessed. In this possessed state she declares that the one with the power to

¹⁵ PA, p. 82-83

¹⁶ PA, p. 220

¹⁷ OP, p. 281

¹⁸ OP, p. 740

vanquish the Dark Lord (Voldemort) will be born at the end of July. This boy will be born to parents who defied the Dark Lord (Lord Voldemort) three times, and will by Voldemort be marked as his equal. Even though the prophecy contained such as “...either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...” Dumbledore does not consider Harry’s destiny sealed. He goes to great length to convince Harry that a prophecy only comes true if one lets it do so. In this case Trelawney’s predictions comes true when Voldemort finds out about the prophecy, kills Harry’s parents and make Harry the only person in the Wizard world who hitherto has survived the fatal Avada Kedavra-curse.

The second time Trelawney is possessed is not in Dumbledore’s but Harry’s presence:

..., but then a loud, harsh voice spoke behind him.

‘It will happen tonight.’

Harry wheeled around. Professor Trelawney had gone rigid in her armchair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging.

‘S-sorry?’ said Harry.

But Professor Trelawney didn’t seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. Harry stood there in panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated, thinking of running to the hospital wing – and then Professor Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her own:

‘The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever before. [...]’

Professor Trelawney’s head fell forwards onto her chest. She made a grunting sort of noise. Then, quite suddenly, her head snapped up again.

‘I’m so sorry, dear boy,’ she said dreamily. ‘The heat of the day, you know ... I drifted off for a moment ...’¹⁹

The difference between these two predictions, which both came true, and Sybil Trelawney’s normal attempts to “unfogg” the future, is her awareness of what has happened. While Rowling lets Trelawney’s more trivial predictions be foolish, the two above are described with an air of authenticity; neither Dumbledore nor Hermione question those. Religiously styled predictions are certainly possible in the Wizard world, but very few have the gift and it can not be used in an instrumental way. So far, these “true” predictions have concerned Lord Voldemort and that, I would argue, is by no means a coincidence. While Hermione and Dumbledore express a causality or scientific orientation to the world, Voldemort and the Death Eaters are by far the most participant or religiously oriented characters in the series.

The enchantment of the past

At the arrival at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry new students take part in one of the few rituals described in the Harry Potter books. When put onto the students head, the Sorting Hat is able to decide which house (Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff) will suit the student

¹⁹ CS, p. 238

best. The sorting ritual hence transforms the students into members of one of the four Houses, founded and named over a thousand years ago by Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff.

In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the Sorting Hat's song is rather harmless.

[...]
*For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
And I can cap them all.
There's nothing hidden in your head
The Sorting Hat can't see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
If you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends. [...]*²⁰

Four books later, when Rowling's story line has gone so much darker,²¹ the description is less innocent.

[...]
*For each of the four founders had
A house in which they might
Take only those they wanted, so,
For instance, Slytherin
Took only pure-blood wizards
Of great cunning, just like him,
And only those of sharpest mind*

²⁰ PS, p. 88

²¹ See Chevalier (2005) for a discussion of how Rowling change the metanarrative in the series from a straightforward fantasy adventure in the first book to a political fiction in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

Were taught by Ravenclaw
While the bravest and the boldest
Went to daring Gryffindor.
Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest,
And taught them all she knew,
[...]²²

Family members are normally sorted into the same house; the Patil identical twins (Parvati: Gryffindor, Padma: Ravenclaw) and Harry's godfather Sirius Black (Gryffindor, family: Slytherin) are exceptions to this. Combined with Harry's observation that the Slytherin house has produced more Dark witches and wizards than any other,²³ one could of course argue that Rowling makes a statement of the importance of biological heritage. The contrary seems, however, to be the case.

Harry's main rival at school is Draco Malfoy, the somewhat less talented son of the Death Eaters Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy. The Malfoy family seems to be as much aristocracy there is in the series and the Malfoy's opinion of muggles is hostile. As one of Voldemort's closest allies, Lucius Malfoy does not only sympathize with his leader's wish for a pure wizard society, but also encourages his son Draco to avoid the company of Mudbloods, i.e. Magic people with all muggle ancestry. When the *chamber of secrets* are open and a monstrous Basilisk is let free and finds its first victim in a cat, Draco shouts out: "Enemies of the heir, beware! You'll be next Mudbloods!".²⁴ The irony of Lord Voldemort's and his allies' quest for a pure blood wizard society is Voldemort's own descent. Though his mother was related to Salazar Slytherin himself, Voldemort's father had a non-magical physiology. The rage Rowling lets Voldemort express towards his father's ancestry is only matched by his love for his mother's. The magic aristocracy's love for the past in combination with Voldemort's and other half bloods' distaste for their muggle ancestry could be considered essential to the story line in the series. Whether this is a result of Rowling's own middle class background and life as a divorced mother from a marriage to a non British man, or just a typical European middle class objection towards any violations of article 1 in the Declaration of the Human Rights, I dare not say. Never the less, Lord Voldemort's and the Death Eaters' enchantment of the past is skilfully opposed to the "good force's" enchantment of the future. It should therefore come as no surprise that participant magic is of more importance for Lord Voldemort than for Albus Dumbledore. The churchyard scene in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* when Voldemort is restored to a "human" existence is perhaps the most obvious example:

Wormtail [Peter Pettigrew: the friend who betrayed Harry's parents] was speaking. His voice shook, he seemed frightened beyond his wits. He raised his wand, closed his eyes, and spoke to the night. 'Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!'
The surface of the grave at Harry's feet cracked. Horrified, Harry watched as a fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command, and fell softly into the cauldron. [...]

²² *OP*, p 185

²³ *GF*, p. 158

²⁴ *CS*, p. 106

And now Wormtail was whimpering. He pulled a long, thin, shining silver dagger from inside his robes. His voice broke into petrified sobs. *'Flesh - of the servant - w-willingly given - you will - revive - your master.'*

He stretched his right hand out in front of him [...] He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand, and swung it upwards. [...]

Wormtail was gasping and moaning with agony. Not until Harry felt Wormtail's anguished breath on his face did he realise that Wormtail was right in front of him.

'B-blood of the enemy ... forcibly taken ... you will ... resurrect your foe.' [...]

But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron. [...]

Lord Voldemort had risen again.²⁵

Concluding remarks

J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is a success story. The scope of this success is however not restricted to the literary domain. The impact on the tourism industry is also significant since the books and films emphasise the 'Britishness' in form of traditions and formalities which indeed promote tourism (Iwashita 2006: 69). Interestingly enough, the series is sometimes not only regarded as beneficial for children (Strimel 2004, Black 2003) but also used in therapeutic storytelling (Noctor 2006).

Rowling's construction of the Wizard world, which almost immediately becomes Harry Potter's centre in the world, bears the characteristics of a distinct Other. While the contemporary British Muggle world is characterized in pejorative manners, the Wizard world is full of the "magic" that has been banned from public life by modernity. Creations of a distinct Other are, however, by no means as apolitical as their adherents often claim them to be. They can indeed function as platforms for an elaborate critique of the society in which they are produced, and I would argue that the Harry Potter universe should be regarded as such. The series does not only proclaim the crucial importance of a loving and caring motherhood, but also typical contemporary European middle-class attitudes such as meritocracy, belief in article 1 in the U.N. convention for Human Rights, and disbelief in the agents of modernity (read: politicians). Constructing the Wizard world as truly undemocratic and full of corrupt politicians ought not to be considered as just an imaginative twist of the author, if you consider the construction of a distinct Other as a mean for criticising the ordinary post 9/11 society.

The Wizard world construction has, however, further implications. It also serves as a device for propagation of a causal orientation towards the world, which stands in contrast to the extra protestantladen participatory orientation. When establishing Albus Dumbledore as the most powerful, wisest and most good-hearted wizard of the world, and Hermione Granger as the most intelligent and talented young witch, Rowling also puts their opinions in stark opposition to those of the fallen wizard Lord Voldemort and other participatory oriented characters such as Professor Trelawney. Trelawney is an object of ridicule throughout the series and the only reason she remains at the temple of magic causality, Hogwarts, is Professor Dumbeldore's concern for her well-being.

²⁵ GF, p. 556-8

While the attitudes of Lord Voldemort and Trelawney imply a belief in the *enchantment of the past*, the contrary is true for Dumbledore and Hermione.

Are we in the Harry Potter books witnessing an attack against other forms of religious orientations than those who predominate in northern Europe and North America? Concerning the construction of the distinct Other I would certainly say so. The Harry Potter books would therefore, in contrast to what certain Christian groups claim, promote religion rather than offend it. But not any religion of course, just the causality oriented kind; the one ridden of rituals and whose followers *believe* in the absent God, the *Deus Otiosus*. A true God of *western* modernity, I dare say, even though this by no means is restricted to Abrahamic religions. Western Buddhists often consider mainstream Asian Buddhism as a deviation of what the Buddha originally taught which makes encounters between them and their Asian fellows in faith somewhat problematic (Wiktorin 2005). The westerners' lack of faith in other rituals than meditation is not shared by mainstream Asian Buddhists.

Participatory magic is in the Harry Potter series rejected in favour of causality oriented magic. The enchantment of the past that we so often find in religious traditions is represented in the series by characters that are either ridiculous (Trelawney) or highly unpleasant (Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters). By doing so, Rowling disenchants the past – the sacred physiology that so often legitimise sovereignty (aristocratic as well as priestly) is characterised as evil – and turn our attention to the meritocratic paradigm; *the enchantment of the future*. Being of black, white, Asian, muggle or pureblood descent is of no importance to Albus Dumbledore and Hermione Granger. What matters is instead the individual's ability to learn and thereby affect the future. Since this discourse is welcome to the vast majority of the human population who, after all, is not "blue-blooded", the popularity of the Harry Potter series among adults comes as no surprise.

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Abbreviations

PS – Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone
CS – Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets
PA – Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
GF – Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
OP – Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
HBP – Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

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