

## INTRODUCTION

From ardent fans queuing for hours outside bookstores worldwide, the adaptation into eight blockbuster films or the proliferation of various spin-off products to extensive media coverage and growing religious critiques, there are slim chances for anyone to be oblivious of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels and deny their heralded status as a publishing and cultural phenomenon. Without a doubt, we should admit that these novels are literary works that have left a permanent mark on children's and young adult literature. Not only are they the main children's publishing event of modern times, but their role in culture-sharing between generations has also proven paramount.

This book focuses on the general development of a theory of literary genres as an appropriate methodological approach, relying on the argument that a text succeeds in stimulating thought and discussion when the literary genres employed are most appropriate to a reader's expectations of that particular category. As such, the present investigation focuses primarily on the study of literary genre and the strenuous and repetitive efforts of scholars to establish a legitimate and universal method of categorising texts in relation to genres. Therefore, this study endeavours to investigate how and if the incorporation of literary genres helps us provide a valid connection between Rowling's novels in the canon of literature and readers' preferences. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the connection between generic hybridity (created through the embeddedness of genres) and the doubts expressed by some literary critics whether being popular is the same as being quality literature.

As suggested by the title, a diachronic perspective is provided for each of the investigated literary genres which aims at understanding the reasons behind their emergence in the fictional field. Definitions and delimitations regarding the concept of genre and the manner in which it has been applied to the division of literature inevitably lead to studying its etymology, thus adopting a linguistic approach.

One of the fundamental assumptions of this study is that the global phenomenon which Harry Potter has turned into represents one of the reasons for its controversial status in the literary realm. The craze, however, should not be overlooked, but cautiously left aside in order to investigate the texts that generated it. Our analysis intends to pursue this goal by investigating

J. K. Rowling's treatment of literary genres, specifically her incorporation of the school story and the fantasy genres.

The next assumption is that each of these two converging genres can be studied from a theoretical and historical point of view in their individual form as categorised entities, displaying a set of characteristics (known as genre markers, tropes or conventional features). This research proposes an investigation of how J. K. Rowling has blended the two generic patterns and managed to create a boarding school fantasy with an unprecedented appeal. Examining genre embeddedness should result in demonstrating that the British writer has skilfully fused literary genres, rather than create a hodgepodge with no recognisable pattern. Furthermore, the investigation wants to discover if the manner in which Rowling has combined genres asserts the literary quality of the novels.

The *Harry Potter* series can be seen as a dichotomy between its publishing success and the literary merit of J. K. Rowling. It is widely acknowledged that the British author has gained unmatched success with the release of the first book and her "rags-to-riches" story did not end there. As the overarching purpose of this study is twofold (provide arguments for the unprecedented popularity of the novels and attempt to prove that they do not contribute to the declining standards of literacy), we propose literary genre theory as an appropriate methodological approach. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* heptalogy serves as the main case study in order to discuss the characteristics of each genre and their embeddedness in the narrative. The conceptual framework inevitably undermines the presence of other literary techniques, forms, genres or subgenres, as it favours a content analysis based on the novels written by the British author, revealing the fusion of the school story and fantasy generic patterns. On the linguistic level of analysis, the present study endeavours to investigate as many examples as possible related to Rowling's focus on wordplay by exploiting lexical ambiguity, but also by name punning, anagrams or portmanteaus. Moreover, the linguistic perspective encompasses the writer's proclivity towards imbuing various elements of the narrative with French, Latin, and Greek etymologies, phonetic symbolism and even lexical derivation which produced word coinage (like *muggle*).

The study is mainly composed of two parts which focus on the interplay of genre-literary text-author. From this perspective, it appropriates literary genre theory to investigate the evolution, characteristics and critical body that each genre has received since its emergence. It also assumes that this approach has the potential to challenge some of the criticism that Rowling has received regarding the literary value of her work. Ultimately, the focus is shifted towards the fourth crucial element in the abovementioned triad: the readers. Therefore, the author's capacity to play with genres is intended to illustrate important qualities such as narrative technique and prose style that may contribute to a celebration of literary merit. The last part of the study is centred on proving through statistics the impact of the series on the readers, providing answers for

its popular reception and indicating the perilous outcome that contemporary elements of child culture (computer games, films, marketable products) may generate: cultural hegemony.

**Chapter One** – *Overview of the novels* offers a detailed description of the complex plot, as it aims to emphasise J. K. Rowling's deft use of narrative misdirection, alongside her well-paced unfolding of mysteries and successful culmination to her heptalogy. This chapter is not intended to be exhaustive, but illustrates specific magical devices, locations, creatures, characters, etc. that become valuable material to be analysed in the following chapters of the book.

**Chapter Two** – *Theoretical framework* offers a clear insight of theories and development of genre studies, with emphasis on the conceptualisation of genre in the literary field. It aims at identifying, understanding the key notions (modes, genres, subgenres, techniques, categories) and, ultimately, finding the best method(s) to apply them to literature itself. This chapter is, thus, subdivided into *Genres and modes* which explains our human urge to return to classification, not matter the field, period or society in which we employ it. In order to illustrate the difficult task of organising genres and applying them to literature, the book also includes a conceptual framework with the purpose to help us gain a clearer insight into this challenging term. *Approaches to literary genre study* examines the various ways genre has been defined and used throughout five major trajectories that have emerged so far. They demonstrate how genre theories have changed course, from textual trajectories to contextual ones. Thus, this part of the second chapter aims to illustrate a shift in genre theory from complying to generic norms (before the Romantic period) to acknowledging and embracing a modern genre theory based on the evolution and dynamism of genres (genres are not prescriptive, but descriptive; they are not straightjackets, but left to be moulded by authors).

In **Chapter Three** – *Fantasy as a literary genre*, one of the main goals is to establish a clear distinction between *fantasy* and the *fantastic*. Thus, the fantastic ought to be viewed as an ancient literary mode, whereas fantasy identified with a modern genre. Afterwards, the study deals with genre fiction, sets the genre terminology according to the distinctions between history, fiction and the fantastic, while also referring to their roots, illustrates the modern division between fantasy and science fiction and gradually shifts the discussion towards literary fantasy alone. The analysis starts from Tzvetan Todorov's groundbreaking works *Introduction á la littérature fantastique* (1970) and *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973) as two of the most important and influential critical studies of fantastic literature that fantasy is a part of. The next part of this chapter – *Literature review* – proposes that the critical attention gained so far by fantasy (as a literary genre) should be based on accredited scholars (such as Clute and Grant or Stableford) that present valuable surveys and resources; firstly, due to their extensive attention to the development of fantasy theories, motifs and themes from early centuries up to

present time, and secondly owing to their well-selected bibliographies, comprehensive approaches and pertinent selections concerning most of the seminal works.

The following section – *Aesthetic and theoretical studies on fantasy as a literary genre* – encompasses the various definitions that distinguished researchers (E. F. Bleiler, W. R. Irwin, C. N. Manlove, J. Clute) have attached to fantasy and aims to illustrate that an early defence of its literary validity was necessary. It also encompasses various discourses on fantasy and fantastic literature, including the study of generic qualities of fantasy, fantasy imagery, the aesthetic values and reasons for the high popularity of this genre, the supernatural motifs that can be found within a fantasy work, investigations regarding its general status within literature itself or experimental techniques in postmodern fiction by Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth or Robert Coover.

The next part – *Generic patterns in fantasy literature* – approaches a literary fantasy text and its legitimacy by enumerating some important criteria which a work of fantasy should include based on several characteristics enumerated by academics who have studied fantasy as a modern literary genre. To see how and if the generic patterns have gradually modified, the time of publication generally follows a five-year gap. The scope is to treat them as evaluative criteria for deciding how many of them J. K. Rowling has incorporated, and which underwent reinterpretations on behalf of the author.

The last part of this main chapter – *The fantasy genre in the Harry Potter novels* – illustrates the writer's incorporation of the most significant and recurrent patterns of fantasy literature and is, therefore, divided into five sections. Each part is subdivided, as follows: the first section comprises five magical institutions and the way their activity is reflected by mass media, all of which provide self-consistency and unity for the internal organisation of the wizarding world. The study is also centred on the immersion into the fantastic educational system so that the sense of coherence which readers should sense in a fantasy work is partly guaranteed with a generous list of textbooks that the British writer has invented both inside and outside the Hogwarts curriculum. *Appendix I* comprises in chronological order each title, starting with the ones in the first novel along with the authors of the books as they are mentioned by Rowling. The writer's poetic quality and the incantational magic of words is reinforced by her propensity towards Latin and Greek etymologies. *Appendix II* illustrates the list of spells, curses and hexes that she has devised, along with their description and place in the novels. The second section illustrates five other magical places that the author creates as the series progresses which testify to the multidimensional universe. The third component depicts the various magical devices that wizards and witches use, and the inanimate objects imbued with a sense of consciousness that prevail in fantasy and fairy tales, in general. Since Rowling has invented many devices and instruments in her presentation of magic-tech, it seemed rather difficult to describe each item

according to the set parameters (name, usage/function, description, modern equivalent and place in text) as clearly illustrated in *Appendix III*. The fourth section explores three categories of magical animals that inhabit the wizarding world, as they have either been popular in different mythologies, illustrated the man-beast archetype or can be characterised as magical beings with dark counterparts. The fifth section is dedicated to the multiple and intriguing methods used by characters to cross the boundary between the magical world and the mundane universe; it also compares these five techniques with other methods of navigation imagined by major precursors such as Lewis Carroll.

The first part of **the fourth chapter** – *The school story as a literary genre* – provides a survey of scholarly sources that represent some of the most significant contributions to the study of the school story genre. The second part – *The school story. Genesis and evolution* – covers the evolution of the school story as a literary genre (definitions, categories, major writers), but prior to this goal, we intend to provide a diachronic perspective of this form of education in real life. Afterwards, the analysis is based on its reflection in children's fiction, as well. This angle is intentionally set in order to link the fictional field with the main targeted audience – the young readers – and attempt to provide an explanation for them being so fond of Harry's school experience. Additionally, the perspective should help us discover the reason(s) behind one of the eccentricities of *the Harry Potter* novels, specifically Rowling's choice of incorporating this precise genre in her fantasy tale. Subsequently, *Generic patterns in school stories* focuses on investigating the conventional features and key elements of this genre. The study also examines if there are other levels of categorisation and subgenres that have emerged as a result of the writers' ingeniousness or adaptation to prescribed societal norms. One may also choose to discover if there is a boarding school story subgenre and, if the case, look at the discrepancies. The fourth part of the chapter – *The school story in the Harry Potter novels* – is based on investigating Rowling's incorporation of the school story genre based on nine characteristics that, once more, prove their salient position through their repetitive use in other noteworthy critical studies provided by Jeffrey Richards, Isabel Quigly and John Rowe Townsend.

The teachers and headmaster are first analysed just like other generic patterns with the goal of exploring Rowling's conformity to the school story genre. In addition to studying the mentors' personalities and their link to the conventional genre, the research discusses the author's effort to bestow linguistic meaning in their characterisation. It also offers a useful linguistic insight into Harry Potter, the connection between his seemingly ordinary name and heroic path (he must either commit murder or be killed), and, last but not least, his archenemy. Moreover, *Appendix IV* represents our endeavour to investigate if Rowling has included such a vast number of characters for critics to name her work an epic fantasy (Philip Nel). We have also attached a column which separately illustrates if and how a considerable number of important characters

die in the series, thus confirming Rowling's incorporation of death as an inescapable outcome even in children's literature. The investigation also encompasses the classes that students must attend at the magical school with an increased interest in trying to discover their correspondent subject in real school life. Also, the book examines how academic achievement is encouraged in a fantasy boarding school and if readers find familiar forms of evaluation at Hogwarts.

**Chapter five** – *Interrogating the genre-reader interface* – encourages a discussion on the ways in which J. K. Rowling's works and the Harry Potter phenomenon fit into contemporary culture. By focusing on the triad genre – literary text – socio-culture, this is the only chapter which navigates beyond the internal structure and is, therefore, intentionally placed in the last part of this research. The first section of this chapter – *Genre and crossover literature* – is based on statistics conjured by various scholars (Adney and Hassel, 2011; Anatol, 2003; Hallett and Huey, 2012; Heilman, 2009; Trevarthen, 2008) who have already explored the impact of the *Harry Potter* books in the publishing field due to the high demand. Even so, the abovementioned researchers have also focused on record-breaking regarding the film versions and the proliferation of 400 other Potter products in the marketplace, which leads to a selective process on our behalf. The habit of reading book series is also discussed in terms of readers' preferences as there seems to be some resemblance between their excitement at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the enthusiasm generated by the serialised format of Victorian narratives.

The following division – *Implications of genre reception* – explores the dual reception of the novels, as their intrinsic value and popularity have offered J. K. Rowling both positive experiences (literary or honorary awards and critical praise) and negative outcomes (lawsuits concerning the occult practices that children are exposed to and critique in terms of narrative integrity, prose style, fostering cultural infantilization etc.). The third part of this chapter analyses the huge success of *Pottermania* and the implications of this cultural phenomenon. It aims at illustrating how scholars have engaged in organising academic conferences to present papers on the aesthetic value of these popular novels, thus proving that literary criticism can and ought to be applied to them. Nevertheless, it also investigates how child culture can easily become a powerful tool in the ideological struggle that we are confronted with, when a capitalist marketing machine develops hegemonic structures.

Having all things considered, it is both the universality and spontaneity of an unprecedented appeal to generations of readers that provide the impetus for a new examination based on the complex interaction between several factors: genres and their contingent formation, children's and adults' reading habits, the shrewd marketing that the *Harry Potter* books have received and the timing of such phenomenal response.