

# Introduction

“You get a lot of funny folk in the Hog’s Head.”

~ Rubeus Hagrid

Two years after J.K. Rowling wrote about the boy wizard Harry Potter and his defeat of the evil Lord Voldemort, conversation about the stories has not died down in the slightest. All around the world, *Harry Potter* conferences are gathering hundreds of attendees. Academic papers, panel discussions, artwork, wizard rock, and all sorts of other creative endeavors are contributing to the ongoing discussion. Fan sites and weblogs continue to enjoy and analyze the series. *Harry Potter* courses are found on college and university campuses everywhere. Despite early predictions that this would just be a passing fad, Rowling’s 7-book saga continues to delight and to fascinate.

Gathered together here are some of the best of the ongoing conversations on *Harry Potter*. While categorized into five different types of conversations there are, broadly speaking, two types of essays in this book: those explaining why this series is great literature, and those representative of the kinds of conversations happening in today’s world of literature. The first three sections contain essays of the former kind, while the last two contain essays of the latter.

The two essays in “Conversations on Literary Value” defend *Harry Potter* as great literature. Colin Manlove, whose expert analysis on fantasy fiction has been published since 1975, lends a credible and seasoned voice to the chorus of critics who find great literary themes in Rowling’s saga in his essay “The Literary Value of the *Harry Potter* Books.” In “Repotting *Harry Potter*,” James W. Thomas, a university literature professor for over 30 years, takes on the negative critics and argues that the “7-part book” is “legit lit,” deserving a place in the Great Books canon.

The section titled “Conversations on Eternal Truth” examines how Rowling’s stories interact with deeper matters of reality. John Granger’s essay, “The *Deathly Hallows* Epigraphs,” analyzes the two quotations that preface the final *Potter* book, *Deathly Hallows* -- quotations which Rowling said “sum up” the theme of her series. Danielle Tumminio, whose class on *Harry Potter* and Christian theology at Yale was featured at CNN.com, reflects in “God and *Harry Potter* at Yale” on how the *Potter* books have opened up conversations about God and faith.

“Conversations on Imagination” considers the appeal and power of imaginative fiction. Amy H. Sturgis, Tolkien expert, explores in “When Harry Met Faërie” how Tolkien’s rejection of the false dichotomy of children’s versus adult literature opens up the door for readers of all ages to enjoy the gifts of the true fairy tale. My own essay, “The Well-Ordered Mind,” explores how Rowling’s series embraces a moral imagination, making it literature that instructs in and inspires the striving toward right order in the soul and in society.

“Conversations on Literary Criticism” gives two examples of how different types of literary critics might approach the *Harry Potter* series. Ryan Kerr’s essay, “Tom Riddle’s Diary,” explores the different ways we read books by looking at how characters interact with young Voldemort’s journal. In “If J.K. Rowling Says Dumbledore is Gay, is He Gay?,” Karen Kebarle explores how an intentionalist – one who believes an author’s intentions are the key to a text’s meaning – responds when Rowling’s interpretation of her own text does not seem to fit the text itself.

“Conversations on Characters” explores the First Couple of the *Harry Potter* series – Harry and Ginny. Gwendolyn Limbach’s essay, “Ginny Weasley – Girl Next Doormat?,” takes a feminist approach to the youngest Weasley, arguing that a very strong female character was forced into a diminutive role because of Harry’s need to be the male hero. Dave Jones’s essay, “Interpret Your Findings Correctly,” takes a look at the way Rowling wove together her key theme – choice – and three magical devices in the process of Harry’s personal development.

A wide variety of conversations take place at The Hog’s Head. These ten are not the final word on any of these subjects, nor does its editor agree with everything in them. The contributors may not always agree with each other, but that’s the nature of conversation at The Hog’s Head, where a variety of voices – “a lot of funny folk,” as Hagrid would say – come together to enjoy

Rowling's saga. These are the kinds of conversations happening all around the world about the beloved *Potter* tales, and they are all essays which serve to further that discussion.

So pull up a barstool. Aberforth will pour you the drink of your choosing, and let's talk *Potter*.

~ Travis Prinzi, editor

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