Volume 7 | (2005) Issue 2   Article 2

Harry Potter and the Susceptible Child Audience

Kara Lynn Andersen
University of Pittsburgh

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, Purdue University Press selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

Recommended Citation

Abstract: Kara Lynn Andersen, in her paper "*Harry Potter* and the Susceptible Child Audience," argues for a rethinking of assumptions of child audiences as passive readers and viewers through an analysis of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Andersen argues that instead of categorizing children as passive and homogenous subjects of analysis, they should instead be incorporated as partici-pants in the discourse about children's books and films. Although frequently figured as especially susceptible to the affects of advertising and other media, young *Harry Potter* fans are particularly visible as not only consumers of the texts, but creators of new texts. Using work done on *Harry Potter* in reception studies, film spectatorship, literary criticism, and internet publications, Ander-sen dissects ideas of passivity and activity in child readers and viewers.

Kara Lynn ANDERSON

Harry Potter and the Susceptible Child Audience

Loved by children and adults alike, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has been translated into forty-two languages (at last count) and generated countless merchandise tie-ins, to date three film adaptations, a parody series (Michael Gerber's *Barry Trotter and the Unauthorized Parody*), and a flood of fan websites and fan fiction. Its broad and multi-faceted fan base makes it ideal for fan studies, and its hostile reception by certain Christians and scholars makes it ideal for reception/audience studies in general. The majority of critical work on *Harry Potter* has failed to study the primary audience for these works, however, in favor of a more traditional close reading of the text alone. In this paper, I argue that the treatment of children as participants in writing and research rather than as objects of study is necessary to advance the field of reception studies, and that the approach to doing so may be adapted from existing methods for analyzing both intercultural and adult media audiences (for sources of audience studies online, link to Underwood at <http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/>; Tötösy at <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library/audiencestudies.html>). For those unfamiliar, Harry Potter is a British boy who discovers on his eleventh birthday that he is a wizard. With his acceptance into Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry leaves the Muggle world (a Muggle is a non-magical person) and enters the wizard world. Harry's adventures center on his experiences at boarding school and his attempts to evade the evil Lord Voldemort, the wizard who killed Harry's parents when he was a baby, and in an attempt to kill Harry as well, left him with a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Rowling has written five novels of the seven planned (one for each year Harry is in school). Rowling's work became wildly popular in the United Kingdom, and when released by Scholastic in the United States a year later, became an international phenomenon.

    Harry Potter is credited with creating a new generation of child readers and thereby promoting literacy, but it also has its detractors. The first, and most vocal, are certain conservative Christian groups who feel *Harry Potter*'s content is dangerous for children. Stories about witchcraft and the occult lead children to try out spells of their own or research Satanism or Wicca on the Internet, the argument goes. The books are therefore the tools of Satan placed in our world through Rowling to lead children astray. A less drastic Christian criticism is that *Harry Potter* teachers children to disobey authority, lie, and steal, because Harry and his friends engage in these activities at various points in the novels. The other strand of criticism comes from certain educators and scholars who feel that *Harry Potter* is not high-quality children's writing. Harold Bloom typifies this objection. In an article for *The Los Angeles Times* on 23 September 2003, Bloom iterates his earlier objections to the first novel: "The writing was dreadful. The book was terrible ... Rowling's mind is so governed by clichés and dead metaphors that she has no other style of writing" (Bloom <http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2003/09/24/dumbing_down_american_readers/>). Bloom claims that children who read *Harry Potter* will grow up only to read Stephen King -- they will not use *Harry Potter* as a stepping stone to what he feels are greater works of literature: Lewis Carroll, Thomas Pynchon and Don Delillo. Instead, he claims, "When you read *Harry Potter* you are, in fact, trained to read Stephen King" (Bloom <http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2003/09/24/dumbing_down_american_readers/>). What is shared by both groups of objectors is an image of the child reader as susceptible to the text they are exposed to, and their focus is exclusively on the properties of the text.

    Children are seen frequently as a unified category, exempt somehow from the postmodern fragmenting of identity. Except for a few very specific instances, class, race, and gender are irrelevant in studies of the effects of media on children. In the case of *Harry Potter*, the international appreciation of the books has suggested to some that child audiences are relatively homogenous. In an interview with Audrey Woods for the Associate Press, Rowling relates that she initially foresaw different reactions between American children and British children: "'The first time I did a

reading to American children ... I was terrified,'' Rowling says. 'The passage I was reading I had read countless times before and I always knew where the first laugh came.' She knew she had no guarantee the American kids were going to get that part of the humor. 'But the roar of laughter came ... and it has been exactly the same every other place,' she says. 'It's universal in children'" (Rowling qtd. in Woods <http://www.cesnur.org/recens/potter_030.htm>).

In its broadest sense, reception studies seek to understand how audiences interact with texts, de-emphasizing textual analysis of the Bloom/Christian sort in favor of audience analysis. Frequently, the emphasis is on whether audiences are passive consumers or active meaning-makers. While this is often debated in reference to reading alone, when film and television viewing is studied, popular opinion is firmly on the side of passivity. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn point out in *The Audience Studies Reader* that all of their selections in "Moral Panic and Censorship: the Vulnerable Audience" are texts that, "tellingly, employ the image of the child audience -- sometimes as a specific group that is particularly in need of protection, sometimes as a metaphor for the docile, unresisting nature of the audience as a whole" (51). In the "Reading as Resistance" section, however, none of the essays mention children as being resistant readers. Ellen Seiter has done the most work directly on children's viewing habits, in particular in "Notes on Children as a Television Audience," where she notes that "the middle class belief in the badness of television viewing for children has proven to be exceedingly durable" (131). This durability is not so much because television viewing is bad for children, she argues, as it is because this belief is propagated by the print media, the industry with the most to lose when children turn to television over books. She claims it is the print media who portray "the children's audience as the passive, unwitting victims of the devil television" (131). Seiter's essay is ultimately about how parents absorb the academic discourse on children's television viewing, but is valuable in defining how television is figured in the adult world. What is lacking in this and most other studies of children as readers or viewers is direct observation of, and conversation with, the children themselves. This is not to say that children are not observed or spoken to in the course of the studies, but that this research is not presented directly in the texts in favor of the researcher's interpretation alone. As per usual, children are seen as incapable of participating in adult discussion, even when that discussion is about their own activities.

In reading the analyses of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, it becomes clear that reading is imagined as active, while television or film viewing is understood as passive. In account after account, parents and teachers have praised the *Harry Potter* series for turning children into active readers instead of passive viewers. Elizabeth Teare observes, for example, that reading is more highly valued because it is seen as less commercial than film. She notes in an October 1999 *Washington Post* article that "The ... article, published well before Rowling's film and product-licensing deal with Warner Brothers, quotes a boy who perfectly embodies adult fantasies of children's contented innocence and resistance to commercial exploitation of the book. ... 'I don't think they should make TV shows because then when you imagine stuff from the book, then it will be much different,' says Sam Piazza, 10, of Silver Spring" (Teare 332). Children who express this opinion turn up in article after article, attesting to the power of *Harry Potter* to turn children away from television, movies, and video games. Teare, however, is highly critical of the way consumer culture intrudes on children's lives, even in books. She notes that Rowling's novels critique consumer culture, but ultimately concludes that they are no more than an "uneven, interesting, and compromised depiction of children and commodity culture" which "offers a useful arena in which such concerns can be thought about, though not satisfactorily resolved" (Teare 342). Other than a brief note that the Warner Brothers' films increased production of *Harry Potter*-related commodities, Teare does not locate the source of the problem specifically in film or television viewing, but in corruption in the book publishers themselves. The most she says about the films is that "with the flood of products released into the marketplace since the Warner licensing agreement, it is much more difficult to differentiate between Harry Potter and the Powerpuff Girls" (Teare 333). If it is the commodification of the series that is the problem, then there is no clear answer why books are better or more active than films, since merchandise tie-ins are separate from the film texts themselves.

Although there is little satisfactory theoretical work on how child readers and viewers interact with a text (exceptions include work by Ang; Geertz), there is valuable work done on inter-cultural audiences, such as Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas.* While I do not mean to elide the differences between adults and children, studies of transcultural reception are analogous in several ways to trans-generational reception. First, language is potentially a barrier for both groups. Children's books are supposed to be written "at their level," but in the case of the *Harry Potter* novels especially, readers younger and older than the intended reading level are enjoying the books. Second, both children and foreign cultures are "other" to American adult culture. While our children are inarguably more familiar to us than members of foreign cultures, the constant debate about children's development and behavior reveal how little we really know about them. Finally, both children and foreign cultures are oppressed, in different ways, and often represented in texts in ways which serve the dominant/home culture. Seiter and others have found that parents are frequently convinced that exposing their children to television advertising is damaging because they are especially susceptible to it, and as a result many impose limits to how much time their children spend watching television. But as Olga Ignatyeva notes in Bert Kork's "The People vs. Harry Potter, "advertising alone cannot sway children to like something. As any teacher knows, "children ... will readily reject [a] large volume of information if it is dull" (Ignatyeva qtd. in Kork <http://english.pravda.ru/main/18/90/359/10765_potter.html>). Thus, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's work in *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas* I mention above helps shed light on the reception of *Harry Potter*. They explore the issue of cultural translation through a study of Moroccan couples living in Israel watching the American television program *Dallas* (on the seldom studied matter of ethnic minority children as audience -- reading or viewing -- see Ghesquiere; Ibsch). In their work, they provide a transcript of the participants' discussion of the program. While they also interpret the transcript, this approach gives a voice to the Moroccans which children are denied in academic work on *Harry Potter*. The fact that the Moroccan/Israeli couples are outsiders to the culture of the television program is significant because it results in different interpretations of the text. Liebes and Katz note that "the program serves as more of a forum ... for Israeli Moroccans than for Americans. The constant negotiation between their own values and those of the program leads the group to commute between discussion of the program and discussion of life" (286). The argument here is that confrontation with difference leads to mental activity because the difference must be accounted for, essentially turning television viewers into "active" makers of meaning. Some examples of this in action are where Machluf uses a quotation from Psalms "to contrast and express the mores of *Dallas* with those of Jewish culture; thus, he reinforces traditional values" (Liebes and Katz 294). Later, Liebes and Katz say of Machluf that "[b]y comparing J.R. to a member of the Israeli Parliament who went through a well-publicized divorce case, Machluf is assuming (1) that *Dallas* reflects American society, (2) that American is corrupt, and (3) that Israel is not. Thus, he again uses *Dallas* to reinforce his own values" (299). This is not the only use of *Dallas* the couples perform. In a combination of television show text and response to her husband's requests that she serve tea, Cecile makes remarks about women's right to self-realization: "they are, in effect, making use of *Dallas* to enter into a debate on the roles of the sexes" (Liebes and Katz 300).

Additionally, *The Export of Meaning* is useful because the *Harry Potter* texts are frequently discussed in relation to the transnational reception of a British book by American children. And even though we may think our language is essentially the same, Scholastic Books saw fit to "translate" a number of Britishisms for the American readers who would not likely have encountered them before. Neil Harper, in "Farewell Father Christmas: Marketing the British Trilogy to the US" notes that in addition to changing the title of the first novel from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the words "letterbox," "motorway," "queue," "dustbins," "jumper," "biscuit," "bogie," "Father Christmas," and "timetable" were all changed to more American words. Translation is an issue in *The Export of Meaning* as well. Liebes and Katz note that "With one exception, the participants can all read the subtitles: they do not understand English" (287). Though this is clearly established, the excerpt does not do much with the questions

of translation. They claim that "the group clearly understood the basic narrative, unimpeded by subtitles and cultural differences" (Liebes and Katz 288). At the same time, the transcript indicates that language differences have some effect on viewing experience. When the character Mitch's name comes up, Cecile and Massudi "make a play on words in Hebrew in saying that 'Mitch' is not *mitz* -- the Hebrew word for fruit juice" (Liebes and Katz 297). The women merely find the linguistic coincidence funny; they don't misunderstand *Dallas* as a result. Nevertheless, the coincidence lends an element of comedy not present in the original language. The tone of that particular moment is changed as a result of linguistic difference.

Arthur Levine, the US editor for Rowling's novels, argues, "I wasn't trying to 'Americanize' them ... What I was trying to do was translate, which I think is different. I wanted to make sure than an American kid would have the same literary experience that a British kid would have. A kid should be confused or challenged when the author wants the kid to be confused or challenged and not because of a difference of language" (Levine qtd. in Harper 38). In this way, Scholastic places the child reader at the author's mercy in spite of assertions that reading is really active. Readers should receive texts the way authors intended them to be received. And by removing most traces of British language and culture, Scholastic prevents the kind of word play and cultural comparison that the Moroccan Israelis performed with *Dallas*. Levin's position on "translation" between cultures makes one wonder how reading could possibly be seen as more "active" than watching television or movies. A further problem, however, is that even with translation from one kind of English to another, the experience is not going to be the same due to other cultural differences, as Liebes and Katz illuminated. The *Harry Potter* series is part of a long tradition of British school novels, for instance, which American children will have to confront regardless of whether a biscuit is called a cookie or a lorry a truck. Furthermore, Harper claims that "it appears Scholastic has underestimated the enjoyment children gain from reading a book and learning new words as they go" (Harper 39). Harper provides no reason for believing that this is what children enjoy, but in a more extensive study of the language changes in *Harry Potter*, Philip Nel aptly suggests that "most American children would love to learn a new word for 'booger'" (Nel 275). The perception of children as unwilling to have to struggle with unknown words or ideas has resulted in a dearth of opportunities for them to do so. Nel is somewhat fatalistic about changing Scholastic's practice of translating all British works for children, saying that American editors will only change if American readers resort *en masse* to buying the unadulterated versions from booksellers in the United Kingdom. Part of the problem of translating *Harry Potter* for Americans is that the distinctions between English dialects disappears. Rowling includes standard British English, Irish and other dialects in her book. If "mum" and "mam" are both translated as "mom," American readers lose the cultural distinction between the English Harry, Ron, and Hermione and the Irish Seamus. Thus, "translating British English to American English effaces differences, creates distortions, and can introduce meanings unintended by the author or translator" (Nel 283).

To return to the question of authorial intention and translation, neither Harper nor Nel seem to place any value on the creative play between languages that can occur in transnational reading or viewing. This, however, is exactly what the Mitch/fruit juice comment in *The Export of Meaning* does. Should the subtitles of *Dallas* have changed Mitch's name to avoid any fruit juicing of the text? If "jumper" were not changed to "sweater" in *Harry Potter*, would it matter that, as Rowling herself notes, "Harry, Ron, and Fred would have all been wearing pinafore dresses as far as the American readers were concerned" (Nel 274). Or can we sit comfortably in a transnational reading of a text that includes moments of humor or confusion unintended by the author? To do otherwise smacks of the "brand control" Warner Brothers seeks to retain through careful regulation fan websites. Had they not been challenged, fan and for-profit sites would have suffered equally. Warner Brothers also operate separately from Rowling. When Warner Brothers bought the rights to the film, they bought the right to control what then became the *Harry Potter* brand. Nel's work speaks to the text as a commodity, but he does not consider the film adaptations of *Harry Potter* . The fact that the novels have become successful film adaptations initially sounds like a death knell for the reading of *Harry Potter* novels. This has not turned out to be the case, however. So far, only the first three novels have been released on film: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001),

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002), and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) (The fourth film, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* is currently in production). Both are direct adaptations of the novel -- no new events occur (although, by necessity, some have been left out). As much as possible, the characters, creatures, settings, and actions are made to look just as Rowling described them. The most significant difference is that even in the special American release (which is titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, while the British release is titled *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) the British dialects are restored. Harry, Ron, and Hermione now have "mums" and Seamus has a "mam" again. The dialects are subdued at times, but reflect the performance aspect of film as a medium: viewers unfamiliar with mum or mam as words for mom sometimes hear what they expect (mom), while differences between "trolley" and "cart" are easily understood due to the appearance of the object itself as the words are being spoken.

Much speculation and negotiation went into the making of these films, however. During initial discussions of adapting *Harry Potter*, Steven Spielberg expressed interest in taking on the project, but when Rowling found out that he planned to cast Haley Joel Osment as Harry and have him attend Hogwart's High rather than Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, she refused (Nel 271). In the end, she agreed to Chris Columbus as director when he promised "they would film entirely in the United Kingdom and use an all-British cast" (see Nel <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/trivia>). The films retain much more of the original language and dialects of the Scholastic US releases. In the special features section of the DVD of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, there is also a section where a particular scene can be viewed dubbed in eight different languages (one being English). These languages are written in the language and script of that language with no translation -- so while I recognize English, Spanish, German, and Japanese, I am only guessing that the other four languages are Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese (presumably Mandarin?), and something Slavic. The display of multiculturalism for young viewers (most of whom will also not be able to identify all eight languages) emphasizes both difference by not writing all eight language names in English, and similarity by suggesting *Harry Potter* is beloved universally worldwide (which book sales suggest it more or less is) and that it can be easily translated. More importantly, it displays the vastness of the market for *Harry Potter* commodities. The film adaptations of Rowling's work have also introduced some young fans to US-American capitalism first-hand. Part of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon is the fan participation on numerous websites, including fan fiction sites where aspiring authors not only read the novels, but write their own stories and create fan artwork about Rowling's fictional world. Parents and teachers alike applaud the ability of Rowling's books to inspire children to discuss the texts and write their own stories. Yet when Warner Brothers produced the first *Harry Potter* movies, it took an aggressive stance on web domain name rights. According to a British website called *The Bringers: Fighting for the Rights of Fans Online*: "It all started ... when British teenager Claire Field received a letter from Neil Blair, Warner Bros [sic] director of Legal and Business Affairs. The letter, dated 1 December 2000, stated that Claire's *Harry Potter* site, "The Boy Who Lived" at <http://harrypotterguide.co.uk> was "likely to cause consumer confusion or dilution of intellectual property rights" and demanded she transfer ownership of the domain to Warner Bros" (see *The Bringers* <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/bringers/temp/c-potter.html>). This spurred an Internet campaign organized by fans to defend the rights of individuals to maintain fan sites. Field was eventually allowed to maintain her site, with the addition of some disclaimers, and most other fan sites not operating for profit were also allowed to continue. Alastair Alexander, a 33 year old activist who assisted in the "Potter War," as it was called, went on to form FanDefence.org, the intent of which was to provide information and resources to "fans being put under the cosh by corporations" (*The Bringers* <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/bringers/temp/c-potter.html>). Together with Megora McGonagall, the webmistress of another *Harry Potter* fan site (<http://www.dprophet.com>), Potter War and McGonagall's organization, Defense Against the Dark Arts, planned a boycott of *Harry Potter* merchandise and included the following statement in their manifesto: "Defense Against the Dark Arts is a community of *Harry Potter* fans, it is a safe haven for those who have been ostracized by Time Warner, and it is a call to arms. This is no

longer just something for a quick glance and a sympathetic heart for the few who have fallen vic-
tim. This is no longer a trivial matter. This is a tragedy. This is a battle for our freedom of speech,
and this is a battle for something we love" (<http://www.fandefence.org>; when I began this es-
say in 2003, fandefence.org was operational, but although references to it still exist on *The Bring-
ers*, it seems no longer to be operational). While Alexander is an adult, the campaign was focused
on children and teenagers, and it was their active involvement along with the adults which lead to
the eventual dropping of most of the threatened lawsuits by Warner Brothers. The teens and chil-
dren involved in this campaign, and any others visiting the websites, have now become conscious
of how corporations treat texts and ideas as products and brands which they seek to control. Be-
cause of their successful resistance, the image of the innocent and susceptible young reader or
viewer is broken. Warner Brothers now provides a "Harry Potter Webmaster Community" which
webmasters of non-profit *Harry Potter* sites can register with. In exchange for the free use of *Har-
ry Potter* images, fan websites must link to the official Warner Brothers *Harry Potter* site.

When looking at film audiences, the specific context of film spectatorship cannot be ignored.
Reviews of the first three film adaptations of Rowling's novels have been generally good. Chris Co-
lumbus (*Sorcerer's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets*) and Alfonso Cuarón (*Prisoner of Azkaban*) are
praised for being faithful to the text, bringing mythical creatures to life with well-integrated CGI
effects, and setting the proper tone. The films are most often criticized for being too much like the
books (and therefore, dull) and disrupting the reader's imaginative process. As Jess Cagle writes in
time.com, "Critics will certainly point out that the book is a more transporting piece of entertain-
ment" (<http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1001148,00.html>). This transport-
ing effect of film is frequently analyzed in terms of apparatus theory and the psychology of specta-
torship in film studies discourses. For Laura Mulvey and others, viewers take pleasure in looking,
and "the man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a fur-
ther sense: as a bearer of the look of the spectator" (Mulvey 138). While Mulvey's essay is only
referring to Hollywood's classical period, Rowling creates Harry Potter as someone who is looked at
beginning with the first novel. When Harry first appears in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*,
the narrative makes explicit that "under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a
curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning" (Rowling, *Sorcerer* 15). The wizard and witch who are
in the process of handing Harry over to relatives to be raised have a discussion over whether or
not the scar can be removed. Professor McGonagall is for removing the scar, but the male (and
higher-ranking) Professor Dumbledore refuses: "Even if I could, I wouldn't" (*Sorcerer* 15). His re-
fusal is ostensibly because "[s]cars can come in handy" (*Sorcerer* 15), but it is also an act of patri-
archal authority. Dumbledore is ensuring that Harry will be a figure who is constantly looked at
once he enters the wizard world. His scar identifies him as "the boy who lived" (*Sorcerer* 17) -- a
figure of uncertain phallic power. He did not actively defeat Voldemort, yet his existence suggests
Harry has unknown power which will allow him to assume the patriarchal mantle when he has
grown older. It is important to note that the series is not yet finished, and so it is unclear whether
Harry will uphold or challenge the patriarchal narrative. There are studies on the gender roles in
the *Harry Potter* series thus far, but as it is an unfinished *Bildungsroman*, I hesitate to draw con-
clusions at this point (for more on gender in *Harry Potter*, see Heilman; Dresang). The theme of
Harry as a celebrity who is constantly watched continues in the later novels. In *Harry Potter and
the Chamber of Secrets*, Colin Creevey, a first-year student follows Harry around snapping photos
to send home. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry becomes the focus of visual attention
by becoming a school champion who must perform several tasks in front of a large audience. Here,
however, his status is changing from someone who is looked at simply for his physical features
(the scar) to someone who is watched because of the actions he performs.

The extension of Harry's to-be-looked-at-ness outside the text by adapting *Harry Potter and
the Sorcerer's Stone* therefore seems fitting. If for readers Harry is a figure the other characters
watch, then in the films he is also watched by the viewers. Harry's discomfort at being a figure of
celebrity is de-emphasized, and the viewer is aligned with the minor characters (watchers), in-
stead of with Harry (watched). As Mulvey explains, "At first glance, the cinema would seem to be
remote from the undercover world of the surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling

victim. What is seen on the screen is so manifestly shown. But the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (135). Suman Gupta, in *Re-Reading Harry Potter*, pays the most attention to the specific circumstances of the *Harry Potter* movies. She claims that because of the magic content of the novels and their widespread advertisement as commodities, "they draw attention to the illusionary qualities of films generally, and the manipulations that underlie them, in our world" (Gupta 141). To induce an audience already intimately familiar and happy with the *Harry Potter* novels, the films had to be spectacular yet faithful to the text. This meant including images of mythical creatures, flying broomsticks and acts of magic. Gupta argues that the special effects have to look realistic due to the myth of cinema as instrument of realism. Spectators, all familiar with this myth, demand that the unreal appear real in the *Harry Potter* films. Gupta argues that "spectators expect the *Harry Potter* films to make virtually *real* the Magic world that defeats rationalistic and technological enterprise. Ironically, the means through which this can be done is through the technologically manipulable medium of the film" (Gupta 149). What is exciting about the *Harry Potter* novels is the impossibility of the content. Film technology makes this content possible, not magically, but technologically.

Surprisingly, then, although viewing is figured as passive and Hollywood is linked to psychological manipulation and consumer commodities, the release of the *Harry Potter* films were apparently not seen as any more dangerous than the books. Those critiques which were released or renewed with the movies stressed the same problems as they did with the novel: witchcraft and questioning of authority. Part of this may be due to the popular conception that adaptations of books are always inferior. As Linton Weeks wrote in the 12 July 2000 edition of the *Washington Post*, "'Ironically,' says film critic David Thomson, when a movie is made from a popular book, 'the people most likely to be disappointed are the people for whom the book meant the most. They've invested more in it. People who haven't read the book are more likely to enjoy the movie.' If that's true, the movie could be in real trouble. After all, who hasn't read the book?" (<http://www.cesnur.org/recens/potter_041.htm>). Both the danger and the enjoyment potential are based on content. On the one hand, the *Harry Potter* novels are the target of bans because the books are promoted by teachers, stocked in school libraries, and frequently read aloud in class. This lends a sense of seriousness to the novel that movies are not perceived to have (but on the other hand, movies have been a staple of elementary school classrooms for the last twenty years, and many teachers made the *Harry Potter* movies a field trip). A novel is more ubiquitous and given more authority. A movie on the other hand, is bound to the theatre and the television screen, places parents feel they have more control over than the classroom. Yet media in general are arguably more pervasive and persuasive than school teachers and textbooks. Gupta's analysis may have inadvertently revealed the reason for the lack of outcry over the films: If the films prevent viewers from believing in the existence of magic by making technology create realistic representations of the novel's magical content, then the Christian opposition to occult content is essentially silent on the topic of the film adaptations because there is no more occult content. If the very act of watching a film turns magic into technology, children will not be tempted to dabble in the dark arts, as opponents of the novels fear.

None of the critical approaches reviewed thus far give a voice to the child/teen audiences themselves, however. Of all the scholarly publications consulted for this essay, only three sources gave any significant space to the voices of children or teenagers. The first was *Kids' Letters to Harry Potter*, a collection of letters solicited by Bill Adler. Since the focus of the book is squarely on children's writing, the potential for meaningful study of young audiences is great. But in Adler's interviews with some of the children, this potential is deflated. The questions he asks are so bland and directive ("Who is your favorite character? If you could have one magic power, what would it be?") that the answers are predictably repetitive and uninteresting for a study of reception. The second source was a single essay (out of fourteen) in *Harry Potter's World.* Alexander Wang, fifteen-years old at the time of publication, wrote "Authenticity in *Harry Potter:* The Movie and the Books" for his school, and the editor saw fit to include it at the end of the book. While I applaud

the sentiment, Wang's essay is problematic. In fact, it is not an essay, but rather a list. Wang begins by stating that "I disapproved of the books being made into a movie because I believed it would hurt the image of the books ... The following lists reveal my concerns about authenticity" (279). What follows are a list of details that were not "authentic" in the movie (some of which are simply matters of personal taste, however), followed by a list of "inconsistencies" within the books themselves. Wang's text is a testimonial to Gupta's claim that spectators demand realism from the film industry; the majority of his concerns are in the vein of "Dudley was also supposed to be blonde as was Aunt Petunia" (Wang 280). However, other than the short introductory paragraph, Wang does not construct an argument or make any case for why these details matter. And just to be clear: teenagers and children *are* capable of writing essays. Elizabeth E. Heilman, the editor of *Harry Potter's World* clearly (though perhaps subconsciously) has included Wang's text as an afterthought, and it seems unlikely that it was even solicited. Finally, in *The Plot Thickens: Harry Potter Investigated by Fans for Fans*, Galadriel Waters has assembled short essays on *Harry Potter* by fans ranging in age from eight to "40(ish)" (72). The essays all come from the *MuggleNet* website <http://www.mugglenet.com>, "an elaborate fan site run by teenagers, and … the most popular fan-based *Harry Potter* site on the Web" (Waters x). The essays are all consistent in their approach to analyzing the texts. New theories must be backed with textual evidence in all cases. Even eight-year-old Brendan R. Courtsal performs a close reading of the text to support his theory that Severus Snape's patronus is a dementor. "I did most of my research in Book 3 because it had a lot of Dementors in it," Courtsal says, and compares the language used to described the different characters involved because "when JK Rowling uses like words to describe different things, it often means they're connected" (Courtsal 254). Additionally, Waters provided a readability score for each essay so that, "there are discussions in here for all age levels" (Waters xxvi). The result is a work of criticism written by and accessible to both children and adults. Unfortunately, *The Plot Thickens* is the rare exception in work on *Harry Potter*. What editors of academic texts and media studies consistently overlook is that *Harry Potter* is ultimately a set of texts that adults read, watch, consume, and create *with* children. What is most in need of study is how children and teenagers think and feel about just this: a book which they made popular, which is not dismissed as just "kid's stuff," but that their parents and teachers enjoy as much as they do. This more than anything makes children active -- active participants in a culture which usually tries to limit their access to the books, television shows and movies that adults enjoy.

Works Cited

Adler, Bill, ed. *Kids' Letters to Harry Potter from Around the World: An Unauthorized Collection*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001.
Ang, Ian. "Ethnography and Radical Contextualism in Audience Studies." *The Audience and Its Landscape*. Ed. James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg, and Ellen Wartella. Boulder: Westview P, 1996. 247-61.
Bloom, Harold. "Dumbing Down American Readers." *The Los Angeles Times* (24 September 2004): <http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2003/09/24/dumbing_down_american_readers/>.
The Bringers. "The Potterwar Campaign." *Fighting for the Rights of Fans Online* (21 March 2005): <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/bringers/temp/c-potter.html>.
Brooker, Will, and Deborah Jermyn. *The Audience Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003.
Cagle, Jess. "The First Look at Harry." *time.com* (22 March 2005): <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1001148,00.html>.
Courtsal, Brendan R. "Snape's Patronus." *The Plot Thickens: Harry Potter Investigated by Fans for Fans*. Ed. Galadriel Waters. Niles: Wizarding World P, 2004. 254-55.
Dresang, Eliza T. "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana A. Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 211-42.
Gallardo, Ximena C., and C. Jason Smith. "Cinderfella: J.K. Rowling's Wily Web of Gender." *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays.* Ed. Gizelle Liza Anatole. Westport: Praeger, 2003. 191-206.
Geertz, Clifford. *Interpretation of Cultures.* London: Basic Books, 1977.
Gerber, Michael. *Barry Trotter and the Unauthorized Parody.* New York: Fireside, 2001.
Ghesquiere, Rita. "How Differently do Ethnic Minority Children Read?" *International Perspectives on Reading*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Special Issue of *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy* 35-36 (1996): 21-38.
Gupta, Suman. *Re-Reading Harry Potter*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.
Harper, Neil. "Farewell, Father Christmas: Marketing the British *Harry Potter* Trilogy in the US." *Language International* (April 2000): 38-39.
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Dir. Chris Columbus. Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 2001.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Dir. Chris Columbus. Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 2002.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Dir. Alfonso Cuarón. Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 2004.

"Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." *The Internet Movie Database* (21 March 2005):
    <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/trivia>.

Heilman, Elizabeth E. "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Identity and Power." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, 2003. 221-40.

Ibsch, Elrud. "How Different is the Other? A Case Study of Literary Reading in a Multicultural Society." *The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature: Theory and Application*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. *Literatura Comparada: Os Novos Paradigmas*. Ed. Margarida Losa, Isménia de Sousa, and Gonçalo Vilas-Boas. Porto: Afrontamento, 1996. 362-67.

Kork, Bert. "The People vs. Harry Potter." *Pravda* (21 March 2005):
    <http://english.pravda.ru/main/18/90/359/10765_potter.html>.

Liebes, Tamar, and Elihu Katz. *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.

McCarthy, Kieran. "Warner Bros. Backs Down on Harry Potter Web Site." *The Register* (25 September 2003):
    <http://www.theregister.co.uk/2000/12/15/warner_bros_backs_down/>.

Mugglenet (1999-2005): <http://www.mugglenet.com>.

Nel, Philip. "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O'? Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana A. Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 261-84.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003.

Seiter, Ellen. "Notes on Children as a Television Audience." *The Audience and Its Landscape*. Ed. James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg, and Ellen Wartella. Boulder: Westview P, 1996. 131-44.

Teare, Elizabeth. "Harry Potter and the Technology of Magic." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana A. Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 329-42.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Toward a Framework of Audience Studies." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (*Library*) (2000): <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library/audiencestudies.html>.

Underwood, Mick. *cultural.studies* (2000): <http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/>.

Vickers, Amy. "Warner Brothers in Fresh Battle over Harry Potter Website." *Guardian Unlimited* (22 January 2001): <http://media.guardian.co.uk/newmedia/story/0,,426494,00.html>.

Wang, Alexander R. "Authenticity in *Harry Potter*: The Movie and the Books." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, 2003. 279-84.

Waters, Galadriel, ed. *The Plot Thickens: Harry Potter Investigated by Fans for Fans*. Niles: Wizarding World P, 2004.

Weeks, Linton. "Harry's Downfall?" *Washington Post* (12 July 2000):
    <http://www.cesnur.org/recens/potter_041.htm>.

Woods, Audrey. "Success Stuns *Harry Potter* Author." *Associated Press* (6 July 2000):
    <http://www.cesnur.org/recens/potter_030.htm>.

Author's profile: Kara Lynn Andersen teaches film studies courses as a teaching fellow at the University of Pittsburgh where she is working towards her Ph.D. in cultural studies. Andersen's interests in scholarship include material culture, classical film theory, new media, film animation, and objects in film, and she has presented her work at conferences, including "Red and Blue: Non-Binary Color Relations in David Cronenberg's *Scanners*" at the conference of the *Society for Cinema and Media Studies*, Atlanta, March 2004 and "'Peculiar Reality': Film in *The Moviegoer*" at *(Dis)junctions: Morphing the Written Word*," at the University of California Riverside's Tenth Annual Humanities Conference, April 2003. E-mail: <kara.andersen@verizon.net>.