



One Fine Potion: The Literary Magic of Harry Potter

Greg Garrett

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It was Friday night, July 21, 2007, a hot summer night in Austin, Texas. I realized, as I wiped sweat from my forehead for the fiftieth time, my discomfort couldn't have been much compared to that of my nine-year-old son, Chandler, or, for that matter, to that of any of the others around us wearing robes, cloaks, tall wizard's hats, wigs and false facial hair, and other unseasonal and unusual garb. All five thousand of us overheated human beings were milling about in the parking lot of Book People, waiting for midnight, when 1,500 lucky people with book vouchers were going to take home Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. . . .

From a literary standpoint, we might explain that Rowling creates compelling characters and a world where magic is possible, dragons breathe flame, and giants stomp, but she is hardly the first to do this, or even to do it well; she does, however, join the elite club of writers of powerful fantasy or 'children's' tales, such as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, whose works are read by children and teens, and then reread by them, often throughout their lives. As Lewis noted in his role as literary critic, when a book is powerful enough to not only be read but reread, then those who return to it must be gaining something more than mere excitement. . . .

adapted from the Introduction

One of the most beloved stories in history, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series topped the best-seller charts, inspired the highest-grossing film series of all time, and has now become a \$250 million Universal Studio theme park. What is it about this story that has ignited such fandom and struck such a chord with people around the world? As English professor, culture critic, and Potter devotee Greg Garrett explains, these novels not only entertain but teach deeply held truths about ourselves, others, and the world around us. Unlocking the textual intricacies behind the *Harry Potter* narrative, Garrett reveals Rowling's magical formula—one that, he contends, earns her a place right next to the literary giants of old.

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