Harry Potter and the American Response: Persecution and Popularity of the Boy Who Lived

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Harry Potter and the American Response:
Persecution and Popularity of the Boy Who Lived

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Abstract

Some people, such as J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter, eagerly embrace the opportunities that magic promises. Others, however, fear and despise magic, and so condemn anything that contains so much as a sprinkle of pixie dust, just as Harry’s aunt and uncle do. A look into the reception of the *Harry Potter* series, particularly in the United States, demonstrates how these two responses to magic occur, and why this series in particular created such strong reactions from both sides.

With a long history of banning literature that contains magic, it is little surprise that many religious conservatives felt the need to publicly defame Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. However, despite citing religious principles as the source for their contention, a close examination of the texts shows that Rowling’s books do not, in fact, contradict Christian values, but actually support Christian ideas of life and death and the imperative to love and fight against evil. It is perhaps because Rowling’s inclusion of these values is subtle rather than explicitly stated that many people miss this important component of the texts.

The other response is to embrace the fantasy aspect of this series. Doing so naturally creates a safe space for a reader to work through real-life issues. Studying the series as a whole, it is clear that many of the events in the Wizarding World mimic events in our world, particularly in regards to the War on Terror and the U.S. and U.K. governments’ behaviors surrounding it. One such behavior is censorship, and so it is imperative to look at the various forms of censorship within the text, as well as the censorship the books received themselves. This exists both on an individual level (such as the Dursleys refusing to allow Harry to read his Hogwarts letters), or on a governmental level (such as Umbridge banning the *Quibbler* from school grounds).
This thesis seeks to examine the ways in which the magic of *Harry Potter* elicits such varying responses, as well as to look at the way that the text so neatly parallels and addresses the real-life concerns of the time in which it was published, including the pressures of censorship.
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INTRODUCTION

Magic has always been an important part of storytelling. Not only does it provide an aspect of wonder that elevates the entertainment factor of a story, but it also gives an easy answer to some of life’s most confounding questions. However, despite the fact that magic has a long history of appearing in stories, its right to exist, even in books, is often fiercely contested. Those who are against the inclusion of magic in literature often call for the censorship of such works, citing the irresistible temptation these texts could incite in readers to turn to sorcery as the cause for their concern. Advocates for fantasy literature, on the other hand, both appreciate the texts on a literary and entertainment level and recognize that fantasy worlds create a safe space for readers to work through real-world issues.

No work better exemplifies this split reaction than J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Rowling’s series has been a worldwide phenomenon, selling millions of books and spawning a film and theme park empire, as well as an interactive website, spin-off books, plays, and the upcoming spin-off film trilogy, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Rowling’s books have also been deeply contested, with numerous people (mostly religious groups) demanding their removal from school libraries and classrooms. According to the American Library Association, the *Harry Potter* series is the number one most challenged work of the past decade, and ranks at 48th in the list of most challenged works from 1990-1999 (the first book was published in the United States in 1998). That was only the beginning, as “from 1999 to 2002, it topped the list of titles ‘challenged,’ or targeted for censorship, in libraries and schools in the United States, because it portrays wizardry and magic. In 2003, it ranked second” (120 241). With the final installment in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, published in 2007, the *Harry Potter* series was number one on the list of the most challenged books from
2000-2009 (American Library Association). Rowling was even reportedly denied a presidential medal of freedom from the Bush administration because her books “encouraged witchcraft” (Flood). To understand those who fear these books and those who adore them, it is useful to study both the reasons for its censorship, as well as the societal and political reasons that could cause it to resonate with much of its audience. For the former, that requires examining the history of censorship, which has historically been linked to the ideas of witchcraft since its inception. This very early idea of keeping illicit material away from good, Christian, audiences is one that has been passed on and continues to this day. As for the opposite reaction, the *Harry Potter* series was met with an enthusiasm that has rarely if ever been seen before in the literary world. The books have been immensely popular (the first book was the first to make it on the *New York Times* Best-Seller List since *Charlotte’s Web* (Killinger 1), and on its first day of release, the final book sold 11 million copies in the U.S. and U.K. alone (Time)), and Rowling’s fan base continues to grow. In 2014, the books were rereleased with new covers, which resulted in a 29% increase of people purchasing the series (Rankin). As of December 2015, the Barnes and Noble website lists a *Harry Potter* coloring book as its top seller. Not only was Rowling’s series popular with the children who first read it, but it continues to be relevant, both to them and to the younger generation that is just now discovering the Wizarding World. To gain an understanding of these dual reactions, it is vital to look at the series as both a reflection and a critique of the society in which it was produced. To do so is to recognize a common theme of hope against dark forces, and one which Rowling’s audience desperately needed. While many of the characteristics of any point in time are similar in various countries and cultures, especially in this age of globalization, for the sake of a focused investigation, this thesis will examine the series in regards to its reception in the United States. This will enable a close investigation of
social events that are specifically American, such as early American views on witchcraft and censorship, as well as the culture of a post-9/11 society.

An examination of the history of the censorship of witchcraft requires first a definition of censorship, and then, of magic itself. Censorship is defined by Henry Reichman as:

…the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic, or educational materials – of images, ideas, and information – on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of standards applied by the censor. Frequently, the single occurrence of an offending word will arouse protest. In other cases, objection will be made to the underlying values and basic message conveyed – or said to be conveyed – by a given work. (2-3)

In relation to *Harry Potter*, the moral threat that most censors have cited is that of witchcraft. This censorship has been acted out in various ways, including physically removing books from libraries, pressuring schools to remove the books from class discussions and reading lists, actually burning books, and by prominent community figures (such as church leaders) forbidding their communities to read the series. With this definition in mind, an exploration can be made of the reasons behind this reaction to the series, as well as how censorship is portrayed within the books themselves.

The second term to be defined is magic. Looking throughout history, it is revealed that magic has undergone various changes in definition. This is, primarily, because what might seem like magic to one group of people can be perfectly mundane to another, meaning that the definition of magic has historically depended largely on who was in power at the time. This included, of course, the issue of differing medical processes, as well as that of religion. As Birgit
Wiedl, an archivist and historian with a focus on the Middle Ages, states in her essay, “Magic for Daily Use and Profit”, “Magic, is, after all, in the eyes of the beholder: what some might call magic another might call religion” (12). The Middle Ages, Wiedl states, was when the belief in magic was made illegal, so that non-Christians could be discovered and punished for their pagan beliefs. However, it was not long until such fantasy works as Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur and Spenser’s The Faerie Queene were penned, which not only included magic, but also did not result in the sort of punishment that a complete banishment of magic might suggest, namely religious and political ramifications, despite the church’s official stance on the occult.

Eventually, politics lent themselves in such a way that it was more convenient for those in power to accuse their enemies of witchcraft than to deny it outright, and so, with an official papal bull confirming the existence of wizards in 1484, witch hunts were able to begin in earnest.

Witch hunts demonstrate that while people feared and hated magic, they also very much believed in its power over them. This same idea can be applied to the reactions that were elicited by the popularity of the Harry Potter books. For those who read and enjoyed the books, they were an entrance to a world of magic, one in which they saw themselves as fitting in with Harry and his friends in the wizarding world. Like all fantasy literature, Harry Potter enables readers to escape into the world of imagination. However, those who oppose the books see a book about magic that entices throngs of people, and they see their friends and neighbors being pulled into a world of the occult. The very fact that Harry begins the books in an abusive home and finds himself to be possessed with magical ability, enough money to last him a lifetime, and the opportunity to leave his abusive life, can be seen to promote the idea that anyone, no matter how dreary their situation, could find a magical solution to all of their problems. Not only could it cause children to abstain from hard work in favor of awaiting a magical promised land, but it
could also confuse them into thinking that magic was not only real, but an easy solution to their problems, as well as promising untold powers, and so tempt them into practicing sorcery. One account from the ALA quotes a parent from Michigan stating, “These books are bases on sorcery, which is an abomination to the Lord…I read a couple of chapters and felt like God didn’t want me reading it. My daughter shouldn’t have to be subjected to that” (Reichman 68).

The would-be censors of *Harry Potter* are pitted against a readership that numbers in the millions. In part, this is thanks to its genre, which enables it to serve as a source of escapism. The idea of literature, and in particular fantasy literature, being used as a means of escape is certainly not a new one. Much of ancient literature is what we would now consider fantasy, with magical elements abounding. As previously mentioned, the 16th and 17th centuries were no stranger to fantasy, and these works are generally well-regarded. It is only once we enter a more modern, industrialized age that fantasy stories are seen more as children’s tales. It is not until the world needs a collective escape from the reality of a World War that another fantasy work is accepted as a great literary achievement – Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. It is with this in mind that some of Harry’s appeal might be understood. In a post 9/11 world, children and adults alike needed an escape into a world where people fought against corrupt governments and even neglected orphans could turn out to have astounding powers. In addition to serving as a means of escape in the most simple of ways, of moving into a world of magic, the series also tackles many of the political and social issues that the world, and particularly the United States, faced at the time of the books’ publication, and with which this nation continues to grapple, meaning that the series is just as relevant to readers now as it was when they first read it.

This lasting meaningfulness is even more remarkable considering that the *Harry Potter* books are, nominally, children’s books. Part of what makes the *Harry Potter* series so unusual in
its popularity is the fact that, despite being written for children, people of all ages have embraced the books. In this way it is able to stand out from many of the other fantasy works that are popular among children and young adults. Not only do those who grew up with the books continue to read and appreciate them as they grow into adulthood, but it is also common for adults who never read the series as children to also begin reading *Harry Potter*. This latter trend continues to the point that it has become something of a pop phenomenon in itself – people documenting their adult experiences with *Harry Potter*, such as the popular user “Muggle Hustle” (@MuggleHustle) does on Twitter, having garnered over 41,000 followers. Readers are eager to relive their own first experiences with reading the series through the eyes of an uninitiated peer, and those who have made it to adulthood without reading the series are able to realize the unusualness in their own situation, to the extent where they understand that there is, in fact, an audience for a Twitter account that is comprised solely of comments from a twenty-something-year-old reading *Harry Potter* for the first time. This continued desire to relive that initial experience, as well as the eagerness of those who are new to the series, are a testament to the lasting power of these books’ influence.

It seems probable, at least, that the immense popularity is the reason that this series has been targeted in a way that many other children’s fantasy series have not, despite the fact that there are several that, if those so inclined were to read them, include content that would be found far more objectionable than anything found in *Harry Potter*. Take Garth Nix’s *Abhorsen* series, for example, in which the main character is a necromancer; or anything by Tamora Pierce, whose teenaged female protagonists not only practice magic, but also engage in premarital sex and open discussions about birth control. It is most likely the popularity of the series that first brings attention to its existence as books featuring magic, and second creates the fear that children
might like it a little *too* much, and therefore become at the very least confused about the reality of magic, and at the very worst actually become a witch. An interesting result of the censorship regarding this series is that that censorship then begins to be reflected back within the pages of the later books. The characters who are guilty of censoring are either allied with the government (which, as will be elaborated upon, frequently stands in for the conservative leaders of the day), or with the Death Eaters. Neither side paints a particularly flattering picture of the censors, and it is clear that Rowling holds a certain level of disdain for such people, as the person guilty of the most censorship throughout the books throughout the book is the character for whom Rowling has stated to have “the purest dislike” (Awford), Dolores Umbridge.

In addition to explicating the causes and results of censorship, this thesis seeks to connect that with the large-scale positive response to Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Just as magic is the cause for the negative reactions to the series, so too does a certain kind of magic allow for such a strong positive response, as it enables readers to enter a fantasy world, which acts as a safe place for the reader to work through real-world issues. It cannot be denied that the books are in themselves worthy of admiration – the world Rowling creates is a richly populated one, with an impressive level of depth that brings *Harry Potter* above the level of many of its children’s fantasy counterparts. However, as mentioned, the level of continued love for this series, far beyond childhood, signals that there is something more to *Harry Potter* than simply a good story. It fills a need in society, and the need it fills changes as society changes. This level of sophistication is not immediately apparent: the first few books enter into a world that is desperate for some sort of clear cut sense of good and evil, and the fun, if somewhat predictable, beginning books provide that. There is a clear-cut villain, who is defeated at the end of the school year. And yet, the series begins to morph into something darker, just as the real world it comes into is...
also changing into a darker, more cynical one. With 9/11 came a disillusioned populace, who could no longer trust their government. As time passed, the initial *Harry Potter* readers grew older, and the books matured as they did. It becomes clear rather quickly that the latter books, beginning with *Goblet of Fire*, but becoming truly dark with *Order of the Phoenix*, are written for a very different world than their predecessors. This reflection of the times in which they are published enables readers to use the books not only as a form of escapism in a time of war, but also as a way to work through the issues they are experiencing. It is the magical setting that allows for these reflections upon our real world to be made. It is these two varying effects of magic—censorship and the ability to understand and cope with real life events—that this thesis will explore. This examination of magic’s influence will paint a picture of the forces behind the largest literary phenomenon in modern history.

**CENSORSHIP**

“What exactly are you so happy about?” Harry asked her.

“Oh Harry, don't you see?” Hermione breathed. “If she could have done one thing to make absolutely sure that every single person in this school will read your interview, it was banning it!” (*Order of the Phoenix* 581-582)

To discern the cause for censorship of the *Harry Potter* series, it is helpful to first examine the history and causes of censorship in general. As explained in *100 Banned Books*, “Book censorship in Western culture can be traced to the earliest years of Christianity, when the church began to suppress competing views as heretical” (169). Frequently, the label of heresy
has been accomplished through branding someone with the label of witch. The idea of magic, with its quick fixes and great power that has the potential for both good and evil, easily captures public imagination and fuels not only envy and admiration, but also hate and distrust. As such, it has been easy for people to use the idea and label of magic to persuade public opinion regarding certain people or practices through the ages. As a result, magic has undergone various changes in definition throughout history. After all, what might seem like magic to one group of people can be perfectly mundane to another, meaning that the definition of magic has historically depended largely on who was in power at the time. Even the medical knowledge and procedures of certain cultures were regarded as magic.

Undoubtedly, things such as miracles and the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ seem magical to many people. They certainly do seem to follow the definition of magic. However, because Christianity has long been in a position of power, these things are largely attributed to religion rather than wizardry. Wiedl states, “Similarly, a pagan priest would not perceive his (or her) actions as “magical,” but instead as religious, and would only appear as a “sorcerer,” rather than a “priest,” to Christian authorities” (“Magic” 12). No matter the similarities in the execution of religious practices, if one group has the power to define magic, they can do so in a way that makes their rivals out to be heretical witches. This was, in fact, the reason for the official papal bull confirming the existence of witches – by establishing that witches were in fact real, the pope and his allies were able to claim that their enemies were witches. Definitions were further clouded by the fact that Christian churches often adopted some of the very practices they condemned as “magical” in order to make their religion more accessible and welcoming to their local pagan charges, resulting in traditions that have continued to this day, such as important Christian holidays falling on old pagan feast days. “The priests of
the medieval church won converts by incorporating pagan supernaturalism, blurring the
distinction between magic and religion. There was a wide-spread belief that consecrated objects,
even the soil of the church-yard, had magical powers. Holy water was splashed around to ward
off evil spirits” (Highfield 268). In doing so, the church appealed to the belief that magic had
power in order to attribute some of that power to themselves. And so, even though people in the
medieval era readily believed that magic existed and that there were people among them who
had magical knowledge, the exact meaning of the word “magic” remained vague, and depended
largely on one’s location and personal (mainly religious) background.

However, historically, the often vague quality of the definitions of magic did nothing to
prevent people from charging others with witchcraft. Originally, the blame of heresy was put on
those who believed in magic rather than those who had been accused of magic, because it was
the very act of believing in magic that was considered sacrilegious (“Why 108”). At a time in
which magic did not officially exist, it was thereby impossible for someone to actually be
practicing magic. In other words, those who believed their neighbor to be a witch were in more
trouble than the potential witch. In this way, people who practiced a religion other than the
officially sanctioned Christianity were more likely to be the ones to be punished, even if they
were not the ones being accused of practicing sorcery, because their beliefs in what constituted
as magic in the Christian line of thinking meant that they were not following the church’s official
line on the subject. Because of this, those in authority (Christians) would not need to be
concerned with being accused of witchcraft, because they would not be the ones actually
committing the heresy. This official stance of considering anyone who believed in witchcraft to
be guilty was heresy was created by the papal declaration that magic did not exist, which was
given when Pope Alexander IV forbade the active persecution of witches in 1260. This both
protected innocents from being accused of witchcraft (but not from the heresy of believing in it) as well as prevented Christian authorities from being accused of sorcery. It is clear, however, that the church was still suspicious that magic existed, with debates over the precise nature and ability of witches continuing. In 1484 a papal bull was issued by Pope Innocent VIII that confirmed the existence of wizards, meaning that the pope himself should have been convicted of believing in magic. The pope did so at the request of a priest who wished to persecute witches within the Holy Roman Empire, but lacked the necessary local support to do so (“Why” 104). By proclaiming that the priest was right in his belief in and persecution of witchcraft, the Holy Roman Empire was able to combat local authorities who resisted them in an official, sanctioned capacity. Magic, with the difficulties it presented in being either proven or disproven, became an easy way to create doubt about someone, and so “sorcery served as a ‘popular’ political tool to denounce, denigrate, and, in the best of cases, oust your political enemy. People such as the English treasurer and chamberlain of Edward I or the bishop of Troyes, who had acquired many enemies during their rise to power and wealth, were classic targets of witchcraft accusations” (“Why” 100). In addition to enabling politicians to take down their rivals, witchcraft accusations also gave power to the church, as it was the ultimate defender against the evil of magic. “Perhaps church officials, who had previously dismissed witchcraft as mere superstition, decided it was real and sufficiently widespread to be used to bolster wavering spiritual doubts against a background of social, religious and political upheaval” (Highfield 239). And so, the pope’s official confirmation of what many people had already accepted, that wizards did exist, enabled witch hunts to gather force across Europe. Neighbors accused one another for the unfortunate events they experienced. “When faced with incomprehensible and uncontrollable misfortune, whether disease, stillbirth or crop failure caused by climate change, people ‘projected’ the evil in
their community onto an individual who was disliked for some preexisting reason. Witch candidates were those who were envied, or unsociable, or simply had a face that did not fit. Who were these people? Annoying neighbors, of course” (Highfield 234). For many people, it would have been easier to blame someone else than to accept that there are some things in life that simply happen without reason. In addition, torture became legalized, enabling the torturers to garner far more confessions than they would have otherwise, and eventually witchcraft became its own crime, separate from heresy (“Why” 102). This enabled even more accusations to be levered, as the success of the accusations and the so-called confessions lent credence to the idea that this was, in fact, an actual crime that people were capable of committing. According to Wiedl, while the exact number of witch hunt victims can never be known, “Estimates range from 25,000 to 30,000 for the high point of the witch craze between 1530 and 1660 and may total 50,000 for the whole period from 1400 to 1800” (“Why” 108). As Sutherland states, “the authorities always retained the charge of blasphemy somewhere deep in their arsenal. It was invoked, typically, during periods when civil unrest was abroad” (177).

It is clear that Rowling is very much aware of the history surrounding her subject matter. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, one of Harry’s homework assignments is: “Witch Burning in the Fourteenth Century was Completely Useless – discuss” (1). Harry’s textbook informs him:

Non-magic people (more commonly known as Muggles) were particularly afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognizing it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no effect whatsoever – the witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame Freezing Charm and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation. Indeed, Wendelin the Weird enjoyed
being burned so much that she allowed herself to be caught no less than forty-seven times in various disguises. (2)

Rowling’s rather tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of witch hunt history points out a fatal flaw in all witch hunts – that a real witch would, undoubtedly, be able to use their powers to escape the witch hunters. Rowling makes another nod to witch hunts in *Goblet of Fire*, when Harry and his friends spot a group of American witches at the Quidditch World Cup: “…a group of middle-aged American witches sat gossiping happily beneath a spangled banner stretched between their tents that read: The Salem Witches’ Institute” (82).

What is perhaps another reference is pointed out by David Colbert, in his book, *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter*. Colbert explains that witch hunters frequently used marks on people’s bodies as evidence that they were witches. These marks were called the Devil’s Mark, and it supposedly marked the pact between the bearer and the Devil. “Witch hunters often declared scars, birthmarks, warts, or other blemishes to be the Devil’s Mark. Accused witches were shaved completely so that every bit of their bodies could be examined” (Colbert 56). The interesting connection that Colbert makes with this bit history and *Harry Potter* is that there is, in fact, a group who bears a mark on their skin as evidence of a pact with an evil figure. Voldemort’s followers, the Death Eaters, all bear the Dark Mark on their forearms. Harry first sees this magical tattoo when he becomes Voldemort’s prisoner at the end of *Goblet of Fire*. “Voldemort bent down and pulled out Wormtail’s left arm; he forced the sleeve of Wormtail’s robes up past his elbow, and Harry saw something upon the skin there, something like a vivid red tattoo – a skull with a snake protruding from its mouth – the image that had appeared in the sky at the Quidditch World Cup: the Dark Mark” (645). Much like the Devil’s Mark, the Dark Mark only appears on people who have a relationship with the individual who is the epitome of evil –
in this case, Voldemort. It also becomes a cause for secrecy, much as it might have been for someone who had a mark on their skin that might have been construed as a Devil’s Mark. Snape, a former Death Eater turned potions master, is insistent that Igor Karkaroff, another former Death Eater, does not speak about their Dark Marks where anyone can overhear. When Karkaroff attempts to speak to Snape after one of Harry’s classes, Snape refuses.

“What’s so urgent?” he heard Snape hiss at Karkaroff.

“This,” said Karkaroff, and Harry, peering around the edge of his cauldron, saw Karkaroff pull up the left-hand sleeve of his robe and show Snape something on his inner forearm.

“Well?” said Karkaroff, still making every effort not to move his lips. “Do you see? It’s never been this clear, never since –”

“Put it away!” snarled Snape, his black eyes sweeping the classroom.

“But you must have noticed –” Karkaroff began in an agitated voice.

“We can talk later, Karkaroff!” spat Snape. “Potter! What are you doing?” (519)

Later, in *Half-Blood Prince*, Draco Malfoy shows a similar desire to keep his Dark Mark a complete secret, despite bragging to his friends about his new status. While being fitted for new school robes, Malfoy throws a tantrum to avoid being detected:

She bent toward Malfoy, who was still glaring at Harry.

“I think this left sleeve could come up a little bit more, dear, let me just –”
“Ouch!” bellowed Malfoy, slapping her hand away. “Watch where you’re putting your pins, woman! Mother – I don’t think I want these anymore – ”

He pulled the robes over his head and threw them onto the floor at Madam Malkin’s feet.

(114)

It is clear that a Death Mark is remarkably like a Devil’s Mark, both in the fact that it depicts an alignment with evil, but also because those who bear it know that it is best to hide such a mark while among those who are not initiated into their doings.

Not only does Rowling acknowledge the history of witchcraft with these references, but also with the fact that the Wizarding World operates under a Statute of Secrecy, meaning that they are not allowed to do anything that might alert the Muggles to the existence of magic. This law is taken seriously enough that Arthur Weasley, Harry’s friend Ron’s father, works in an office at the Ministry of Magic that is devoted to apprehending wizards who are misusing Muggle artifacts. In Order of the Phoenix, Harry undergoes disciplinary hearing for using magic to save his cousin, Dudley, from the dementors that were attacking him. He also receives an official warning from the Ministry in Chamber of Secrets when Dobby the house-elf performs magic in Harry’s aunt’s and uncle’s house, because it seems as though Harry has performed magic in front of Muggles. The warning includes, “We would also ask you to remember that any magical activity that risks notice by members of the non-magical community (Muggles) is a serious offense under section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks’ Statute of Secrecy” (21). That such a statute is necessary is clear to any reader with a basic knowledge of historical witch hunts, but the importance of keeping magic a secret is underscored in Deathly
*Hallows*, when Harry and his friends learn that Dumbledore’s sister, Ariana, was attacked by Muggles because they saw her use magic:

“When my sister was six years old, she was attacked, set upon, by three Muggle boys. They’d seen her doing magic, spying through the back garden hedge: She was a kid, she couldn’t control it, no witch or wizard can at that age. What they saw scared them, I expect. They forced their way through the hedge, and when she couldn’t show them the trick, they got a bit carried away trying to stop the little freak doing it.” (564)

It is no wonder that the magical community would choose to stay secret, if that is the sort of reception they can expect from Muggles. And history backs Rowling up on that – people would most certainly react with fear to what they do not understand.

While burning at the stake is no longer the go-to method for dealing with heretics, the sentiment behind the accusations remains. Even as the tendency to kill heretics began to wane, the idea that their ideas could be snuffed out in another manner began to take shape. This took the form of banning books, which enabled the church to control the flow of knowledge and regulate the types of ideas that were being made accessible to the masses. “The Catholic church actually published a list of forbidden books, which it updated regularly. The ‘Index librorum prohibitorum’ was launched in 1557 and wasn’t discontinued until 1966” (Boston 36). The end of the official list came around the same time as a transition in censorship, particularly in regards to children’s literature.

“Children’s literature has always been subjected to censorship, but prior to the 1970s most censorship activity took place in an author’s study or an editor’s office. Authors from the 1940s or 1950s, for example, knew that if they wanted to write for children they
needed to uphold a whole gamut of taboos. They accepted as a given that they could not use swear words, make references to sexuality, or address controversial social problems. By accepting these restrictions, they became their own censors” (West xv).

However, after the 1970s brought a shift in thought that meant that publishers were willing to broach those topics, even if parents were not. This meant that those parents who did not find their children’s reading to be acceptable began to protest texts they considered unsuitable. “Irate parents began demanding that many of these books be banned from school and public libraries, and several conservative political and religious organizations launched campaigns against a number of books” (West xv). The variety of reading materials in schools has only increased over time, creating even more opportunity for dissention. “Teachers of our grandparents’ and even parents’ generations were often limited to using a single hard-covered textbook, but teachers today seldom face such limitations. Teachers’ choices of materials have been changed forever by inexpensive paperback books, photocopying machines, and computers” (“Teaching” 1). With this expansion of classroom materials, the censorship trend has undergone yet another shift, with parents now focusing the most on the religious aspects of books. As Tunnell explains,

According to children’s book editor Phyllis J. Fogleman, censorship letters received by publishers in the 1970s and 80s mostly complained about sexuality, but now censors are broadening their scope to include anything that seems even vaguely anti-Christian to them. For a number of fundamentalist groups, certain words are seen as red flags. If a book simply includes the words devil and witch, it’s enough to cause these people to file a complaint. (606)
In other words, just as much evidence is needed to call a book blasphemous as was once needed to call a neighbor a witch. Although it seems like these complaints could be largely ignored, they do, unfortunately, have fairly large impacts. Karolides explains:

Though the First Amendment prevents government authorities from practicing religious censorship in the United States, individuals and organized religious fundamentalist have successfully pressed to remove books viewed as anti-Christian from public and school libraries and curricula. The majority of these instances have focused on perceived immorality, profane language or treatment of sexuality, rather than religious content per se. Their targets have included textbooks that teach evolution without presenting the alternative theory of “creationism,” books said to promote the religion of “secular humanism” and, in a growing trend, material with references to Eastern religions, “New Age” thought, witchcraft or the occult. (100 170)

In this sense *Harry Potter* fits the bill as objectionable material, as it falls under that “growing trend” of banning anything that references witchcraft or the occult. That *Harry Potter* falls under this category would be clear to anyone wishing to ban books, even if they had not heard about the books’ content or read them themselves – the first book has a cover with a boy riding a broomstick on the cover, and the word “Sorcerer” in bright gold letters. Simply by falling into the modern-day definition of magic, *Harry Potter* became a target for book banners. In other words, without even considering the actual plot of the books, the very existence of magic within them was enough to cause people to censor them. And if a person who is anti-fantasy books does read the texts, the existence of magic is confirmed, and so it still falls under that category of having sorcery within it, regardless of the rest of the books’ content.
However, that content should make a difference. Karolides states that:

Conservative groups and Christian fundamentalist organizations, such as Focus on the Family, Family Friendly Libraries, Freedom Village USA and actives Phyllis Schafly’s Eagle Forum, have organized efforts to remove the *Harry Potter* series from schools or libraries. They believe that the books are dangerous to children because they promote the occult, Satanism and antifamily themes and encourage witchcraft and drug use. (120 242)

It is impossible to know for sure how many of those efforts were successful, or even how many protests were lodged. “ALA’s research suggests that for every one incident reported, there are as many as four or five unreported” (“Teaching” 10). It is also impossible to know how many religious leaders spoke out against the books, persuading their congregations not to read them. However, there are some records of cases, which help to paint a picture of what others might have looked like. One such case took place in Zeeland, Michigan. “School superintendent Gary L. Feenstra ordered that *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* could not be used in classrooms or displayed on library shelves, that students could check it out or write reports about it only with parental permission and that no new copies could be purchased for school libraries” (120 241). Feenstra was eventually made to rescind the ban after ordered to do so by a committee set up by the Zeeland Board of Education specifically in order to decide on the matter.

A close examination of the series shows that censors who sincerely consider the *Harry Potter* books to be anti-Christian are mistaken. Although the objections to *Harry Potter* are largely religious in nature, it is in truth difficult to find cause for that stance in the actual texts. For one thing, while *Harry Potter* is set within a largely Christian society, as we can guess from the mentions of things like holidays, the actual idea of religion is more or less ignored. As
Simmons states, “Although Rowling alludes to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, she employs their words as prioritizing moral maxims, potentially secularized and thoroughly disconnected from the larger theo-ethical frameworks associated with either figure. Rowling’s story-line could conceivably carry itself without referencing the existence of gods, God, or any formal religion” (Simmons 55). There is Christmas without mention of Christ, and ghosts without discussions of heaven and hell.

The afterlife is directly discussed at multiple points in the series. One occurs in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Harry, having recently witnessed his godfather Sirius die, seeks out his ghostly friend Nearly Headless Nick to find out if there would be any possibility of Sirius becoming a ghost. Though Nick is certain that Sirius will not return as a ghost, he admits that he knows little about how death works. “I was afraid of death,” said Nick. ‘I chose to remain behind. I sometimes wonder whether I oughtn’t to have…Well, that is neither here nor there…In fact, I am neither here nor there…” (*Order* 861). He explains the way that ghosts come to be. “Wizards can leave an imprint of themselves upon the earth, to walk palely where their living selves once trod,” said Nick miserably. ‘But very few wizards choose that path’” (*Order* 861). It is clear that Nick does not endorse this manner of cheating death, despite having chosen it for himself.

One of the main themes of the series is that immortality is not a goal that is morally right to pursue. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Voldemort’s goal is to obtain the Sorcerer’s Stone, which has the power to give its bearer eternal life. In the end the Stone is destroyed, meaning that its owners, Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel, must also die. This is not, however, depicted as a sad ending, but rather an inevitable and even happy one. Speaking to Harry, Dumbledore explains, “To one as young as you, I’m sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and
Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, very long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure” (*Sorcerer’s* 297). He continues, “You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all – the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them” (297). As such, Rowling does not contradict Christian ideas of the afterlife by promoting everlasting life on earth, but rather encourages readers to think about death as a natural progression from life, and one that is not necessarily a cause for sadness.

Not only does Rowling avoid explicit criticism of Christianity, but she also creates a world in which the violation of traditional Christian understandings of the afterlife are forbidden. Voldemort’s main quest throughout the series is to become immortal, and the means he takes to do so involves the darkest of all magic. The fact that such magic exists in Rowling’s fictional world might lend credence to the religious censorship claims, if it weren’t for the fact that the characters within the series so strongly oppose it. The magic Voldemort employs to create horcruxes, which are the pieces of his soul that he separates in order to remain immortal, is described as magic so evil that it literally rips one’s soul to pieces. The very name he gives himself, Voldemort, means “flight of death,” and his followers are called Death Eaters, showing clearly that the pursuit of immortality is linked with evil. Even the Resurrection Stone, whose purpose is to resurrect loved ones from the dead, comes with a price. Not only is the Stone only able to bring back a pale impression of the person, but the original owner, it is told, was driven mad with longing for his lost love, and ended up taking his own life, “so as to truly join her” (*Deathly Hallows* 409). It is clear that the unnatural disruption of life and death, which would,
understandably, be a cause for concern among conservative Christians were it to be promoted, is actually condemned within the world of *Harry Potter*.

In his article, “Children’s Literature as Implicit Religion: The Concept of Grace Unpacked,” Howard Worsley makes an argument for *Harry Potter* as being a series of pro-Christian texts. In the final book of the series, Harry and Hermione come across Harry’s parents’ gravestone, which reads, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (*Deathly Hallows* 269). Worsley points out, “This overt borrowing from the Christian traditions, ‘and the last enemy to be deposed is death; (1 Corinthians 15: 26), mirrors Harry as the Christ figure victorious against the demons of hell, the one willing to sacrifice himself for others so that a greater freedom might emerge” (170). Harry is initially worried that the epitaph refers to Voldemort’s ideas of defeating death through immortality – he is horrified to think that his parents might have been associated with Death Eaters. Hermione explains to him, “‘It means…you know…living beyond death. Living after death” (*Deathly* 328). Harry does not believe in this philosophy, however. “But they were not living, thought Harry: They were gone. The empty words could not disguise the fact that his parents’ moldering remains lay beneath the snow and stone, indifferent, unknowing” (328). In fact, much of Harry’s journey involves understanding that there is an afterlife, which continues the idea established in *Sorcerer’s Stone* that dying is neither the end, nor something to try to avoid indefinitely.

Luna Lovegood is the first to truly bring up the idea of an afterlife, as opposed to simply not knowing what might come after death. Discussing her mother’s death with Harry, she says:

“And anyway, it’s not as though I’ll never see Mum again, is it?”

“Er – isn’t it?” said Harry uncertainly.
She shook her head in disbelief. "Oh, come on. You heard them, just behind the veil, didn’t you?” (Order of the Phoenix 863)

This particular aspect of theology, in which there is an afterlife in which we are able to see our loved ones after death (though Heaven is never specified in the books, it is clear that this is to what Rowling refers) is given the most support in a scene near the end of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Harry, having sacrificed himself to Voldemort in order to ensure that the horcrux that lives within him is destroyed, finds himself in a sort of limbo, where he is neither part of this world nor the next. To Harry, this place takes the form of King’s Cross Station, which is symbolic for him personally as the place he catches the train to Hogwarts each year, or, the link between the Muggle world and the wizarding world. It is a place that exists in-between two states of being. In this place, Harry’s “unscathed” (Deathly 706), perfect body (he does not even need his glasses) offers a stark contrast to the small and bloody mess of a body that represents Voldemort, showing the difference in the state of their souls. “It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath” (Deathly 706). Naturally, the person Harry runs into at this version of King’s Cross is Dumbledore, who, in Harry’s mind, is the very epitome of wisdom. It is from Dumbledore that readers are given a concrete answer as to the meaning of the state Harry is in.

“But you’re dead,” said Harry.

“Oh yes,” said Dumbledore matter-of-factly.

“Then…I’m dead too?”

“Ah,” said Dumbledore, smiling still more broadly. “That is the question, isn’t it? On the whole, dear boy, I think not.” (Deathly Hallows 707)
Harry, like so many heroes before him\(^1\), manages to travel nearly to the point of death without quite dying himself. And yet he does not do so in a way that supports necromancy or witchcraft, but rather in a way, that, if anything, follows the Christian ideas of the afterlife. Harry finds himself in a sort of limbo, where he, the example of the pure of heart, finds himself whole, while Voldemort, in the whimpering form that he takes at King’s Cross, is clearly suffering for the wrongs he has committed in life. Speaking about Voldemort, Dumbledore says, “I know this, Harry, that you have less to fear from returning here than he does” (*Deathly Hallows* 722). This emphasizes the idea that the bad are punished in the afterlife, while the good are rewarded. That King’s Cross acts as a sort of limbo is explained by Dumbledore:

“We are in King’s Cross, you say? I think that if you decided not to go back, you would be able to…let’s say…board a train.”

“And where would it take me?”

“On,” said Dumbledore simply. (*Deathly Hallows* 722)

It is a continuation of the idea that is brought up when Harry asks Nick why Sirius will not become a ghost, and when Luna professes her assurance that she will see her mother again. The fact that Dumbledore says the train would take Harry on implies that there is somewhere to go on to, and it is likely that it is there that Harry will be reunited with all of his lost loved ones.

The lack of explicit criticism of Christianity, the opposition to traditional targets of Christian theology, and the affirmation of an afterlife culminate in the point that if anything is to be made out of religion in *Harry Potter*, the only textual evidence points toward a positive, if vague, support of Christian ideals. Furthermore, “magic in Harry’s world is not the opposite of

\(^1\) The list of the many characters who travel to death itself and return to the land of the living include but is not limited to: Gandalf, Odysseus, Heracles, Aslan, and, of course, Jesus.
theology; rather, it is the opposite of technology” (Simmons 55). The clash between magic and technology is made clear multiple times throughout the series, from Arthur Weasley’s incessant curiosity about all things non-magical (emphasizing the “otherness” of the non-magical world in his mind), to Ron’s horror at the idea of Muggle doctors cutting patients in order to operate on them. Even Muggle technology such as tape recorders does not work in wizarding areas – Hermione explains, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, “All those substitutes for magic Muggles use – electricity, computers, and radar, and all those things – they all go haywire around Hogwarts, there’s too much magic in the air” (548). It is clear that magic is meant as an opposition to Muggle technology, not Muggle religion. As Simmons says, “There is about as much ‘Satan’ in Harry Potter’s magic as there is in a fairy godmother’s ‘bippity boppity boo’” (55).

It is possible, of course, that many of the censors may not have not read the books and so do not actually know whether or not their concerns are valid. However, it is equally plausible that those who participate in censorship truly believe that they are doing so for religious reasons, when, in reality, the source of their discomfort is something else entirely. In her article, “Afraid of Harry Potter?,” Marylaine Block brings up this precise point. “Is Harry Potter threatening because of magic, or because the books show so clearly how many adults are clueless, humorless muggles?” (Block 9). Rather than being truly offended by the slight (and, if anything, positive) references to religion in *Harry Potter*, “the real reasons have more to do with a pervasive sense of disquiet, which the censors may not even understand themselves, a sense that these books threaten their entire system of beliefs” (Block 9). It is understandable that someone might feel threatened by an extremely popular book series that essentially paints adults in general, and
conservative ones in particular, as stupid, useless Muggles at best and corrupt government officials at worst.

When examining the phenomena of *Harry Potter*, it seems natural to compare the reactions to the series to those of similar texts. Certainly J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* were born out of a similar desire to escape a war-torn world – in their case, World War I. They have both always been enormously popular, have inspired numerous film and television adaptations, and continue to be read around the world today. Furthermore, they are both frequently supported by conservative Christians, despite their magical content. The main concern (the one that is voiced, at least) seems to be that by allowing children to read books about a world where ordinary children can grow up to be powerful witches and wizards, they will believe that magic is real and become immersed in a life of witchcraft and pacts with the devil. On the other hand, many people celebrate Tolkein’s and Lewis’s works as religious parables. They certainly can be read in that context, but overall their content is not all that different from what is found in *Harry Potter*. In fact, discussing the *Narnia* books, Rebecca Stephens points out that, “the series’ cast of mythological characters includes not only characters from Greek mythology, such as Bacchus, but characters like the ancient Italian woodland deities, fauns, and tree spirits. The use of such non-Christian figures derives, of course, from rituals for and beliefs about worshipping the natural world” (54). In this sense, Lewis actually goes further into the world of pagan beliefs than Rowling does.

It is interesting to note that all three texts (*Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings* and *Chronicles of Narnia*) all include a resurrection scene. In *Narnia*, this more or less confirms to the reader that Aslan is indeed meant to be a stand-in for Jesus. “Aslan’s final coming oozes grace. He speaks with calmness and establishes order. He is all-powerful but highly approachable. He
offers his own life for the life of a single follower, absorbing the consequences. He then entrusts his followers with the task of bringing about victory, while he goes elsewhere to release those entrapped by stone” (Worsley 164). This is why so many people support Lewis’s texts rather than condemn them – because the entire story turns out to have been an allegory for finding religion through Christ. And so, because that essentially makes it a Bible story, it is considered okay for children to read. In Lord of the Rings, it is the wizard Gandalf who dies and is reborn as Gandalf the White. And with his new title comes renewed power, enabling him to turn the tides for the side of good. Furthermore, the idea of grace and forgiveness is emphasized throughout the text, with “a tension between Frodo’s forgiveness of Gollum and Sam’s unwillingness to forgive” (Worsley 165) a main conflict. And in these texts, these are the values that supporters laud as being pro-Christian (whether or not it was the authors’ intent).

Perhaps one difference is that it is Harry who comes back from the dead, rather than Dumbledore. Unlike Aslan and Gandalf, Harry is an angsty teenager, not an older, wiser authority figure upon whom the main character has come to depend. Dumbledore is the provider of wisdom for Harry throughout the series, and it is that reason that he is the one who Harry meets in King’s Cross after having been killed. In that sense, Dumbledore’s appearance continues with the tradition set by Aslan and Gandalf. However, since Harry is the one who ultimately comes back to life, not Dumbledore, the trend is discontinued. Dumbledore could have been forgiven for coming back from the dead, but Harry cannot be.

Another possibility is that it is the lack of an all-knowing, purely good figure, such as Aslan, that causes people to see Harry Potter as non-Christian. The children learn to respect Aslan, whereas Harry learns to see Dumbledore as a flawed, though brilliant and kind-hearted, human. Even beyond learning Dumbledore’s faults, much of Harry’s journey involves learning
to rely on himself. Nearly every parental figure he has dies at some point – his parents are killed at the beginning of the series, his godfather, Sirius Black, in book three, Dumbledore in book six, and his mentor, Remus Lupin, in book seven. Even Harry’s pet owl dies, helping to sever the cord between Harry and his childhood. Unlike the kings and queens of Narnia, whose ultimate lesson is to trust in Aslan, Harry has to learn how to do things on his own. “Ultimately, it is this paradigm of a single controlling authority figure that finally seems to be the underlying force in the repeated categorization of Narnia as Christian, and Harry Potter as non-Christian, and even anti-Christian” (Stephens 56).

It is possible that the religious intent in Harry Potter is simply too subtle for people to pick up on without reading the books themselves, especially in an era when religious texts and analogies have become somewhat less mainstream. As Worsley points out, “The 1950s would have understood the references to Christian faith and theology, with greater connection (seen through the writings of Lewis and Tolkien) than those made obliquely yet implicitly in the writings of J.K. Rowling” (170). Rowling’s references are subtle, making them more difficult to find in a world that no longer prioritizes religious teachings as it once did. It is this subtlety that also allows readers of all faiths (or lack thereof) to enjoy the books, since religious themes and references, while they are there, do not overwhelm the text, and are not presented as the foremost reason for the story, as opposed to, for instance, the Narnia books. Because of this, those who would prefer their literature to have religious intent might not immediately recognize it in Rowling’s work. Furthermore, “little is known about Rowling’s religious beliefs, which leaves plenty of room for the unease of conservative Christian parents to grow, unassuaged by the sanctions that Lewis’s religious credentials provide for the Narnia books” (Stephens 53). Some
critics even believe that Rowling’s gender might play a role in the treatment of her books. Stephens states:

Given the long history of associating the practice of witchcraft exclusively with women, it is not surprising that conservative groups are more ready to buy into the idea that a woman – one who is also a single mother, an anathema to the ‘family values’ advocated by many of these organizations – is actually advocating witchcraft as a religion than to attribute the same motives to a male author who engages in similar depictions – especially a male author who is already allied in the popular mind with evangelical Christianity. (54)

Regardless of whether or not the Harry Potter series is pro-Christian, anti-Christian, or completely devoid of religious intent altogether, the fact remains that it was immensely contested in its early years. An interesting facet of this conflict in the books’ history is that this censorship is also reflected within the later books, showing not only the different ways in which censorship can occur, but also painting a picture of the types of people who censor books and information, whether out of a sense of doing good or for their own personal gain.

**CENSORSHIP WITHIN THE TEXTS**

By Order of the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts:

Any student found in possession of the magazine The Quibbler will be expelled.

*Order of the Phoenix 581*
By examining the ways in which censorship is portrayed within the texts themselves, one is enabled to gain a larger understanding behind the various types of censorship, as well as something of the public feeling regarding those who ban books. The inclusion of censorship in the books not only makes a point about the censorship that Rowling was facing while writing the books, but also shows that there are varying degrees of censorship, as well as different motivations behind it.

With their black and white view of the world, the Dursleys, Harry’s cruel aunt and uncle and guardians, can be seen as a version of censors. The Dursleys are so afraid that someone might learn of their connection to the magical world that they go far out of their way to deny the existence of a world that they know perfectly well does exist. Vernon starts the beginning of *Sorcerer’s Stone* denying that the various odd things he sees throughout the day have anything to do with the magical. He starts by telling himself that people are simply dressed oddly, then that they must be collecting for something, and finally, when even that explanation breaks down in the face of a distinct lack of collecting tins, that he must be imagining things (a sign of just how desperate he is, considering the low regard in which Vernon holds the imagination). Even when he hears his wife’s wizarding relatives’ names, he convinces himself that it was just a coincidence. He is willing to tell himself anything rather than admit that he has knowledge of this very different world. Vernon’s denial does break down occasionally – he is afraid to leave Harry alone for fear he’ll blow up the house, which is perhaps a reference to the fact that Harry was found as the lone survivor in the Potters’ house – and he strictly punishes Harry for anything that could be connected to magic, which would be unnecessary if magic did not exist. He even does everything in his power to prevent Harry from reading his Hogwarts acceptance letter, going to such extremes as nailing shut all of the windows and doors in the house and throwing
the letters that make it into the house into the fire and, when that does not work, secluding his family in a desolate shack in the middle of a remote lake during a thunderstorm.

This extreme denial of the wizarding world quickly consumes the Dursleys’ life. As Diana Hsieh explains in her article, “Dursley Duplicity”, Vernon and Petunia’s fear and hatred of all things magical cannot, by its very nature, be limited only to things magical” (29). For that to be so, Hsieh explains, the Dursleys would have to look carefully at something that they desperately want to avoid – the existence of magic – in order to discern exactly where it starts and stops in their lives. And so, the inability to look closely at their own prejudices renders them incapable of tolerating even the slightest connection to fantasy, whether it be dreams of flying motorcycles or people wearing funny clothes. This is the same sort of fear that is seen with people who demand the censorship of absolutely anything regarding magic, regardless of the actual content.

In addition to having characters who are anti-magic, the *Harry Potter* books also include examples of censorship within the wizarding community. Some of the very first questions about what sorts of books should be available for students to read takes place in the very beginning of the series. In *Sorcerer’s Stone*, it comes to light that certain books are relegated to the Restricted Section in the Hogwarts Library, meaning that students cannot use them without a professor’s explicit permission. Harry and his friends find themselves unable to peruse the books as they would like when trying to find information about the elusive Nicholas Flamel. “Unfortunately, you needed a specially signed note from one of the teachers to look in any of the restricted books, and he knew he’d never get one. These were the books containing Dark Magic never taught at Hogwarts, and only read by older students studying advanced Defense against the Dark Arts” (*Sorcerer’s* 198). In this example, it is important to note that the books are, in fact,
included in the library, despite the fact that they are deemed too dangerous for students to browse unsupervised. In this Rowling does validate the idea that there is a need for adults to make decisions about what books are suitable for children. However, the difference is that, at Hogwarts, those books that have been deemed dangerous are still included in the library, rather than simply being banned, and thereby dismissing their existence entirely. The only exception to this are the books about Horcruxes, which, it is revealed in the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore removed from the library after discovering that Tom Riddle had used them in his quest to become Lord Voldemort. As Brinkley explains, the necessity of using good judgment to occasionally remove a text that is not appropriate for students is something all teachers and librarians face. “In spite of being warned not to self-censor, in the real world of classroom decision making, teachers whose primary consideration is educational suitability often consider to some extent how problematic a choice might be. Also, we often consider to some extent how materials agree or conflict with our own ideas and beliefs and/or those of the school and local community” (“Rethinking” 44). In this instance, Dumbledore understandably does not feel that instructional books about splitting your soul are appropriate reading material for teenagers. However, Dumbledore does not destroy even these books, despite them being, as Hermione says, “a horrible book, really awful, full of evil magic” (*Deathly Hallows* 102). Instead, he keeps them in his office, where, despite being out of sight and certainly more difficult to gain access to, they still do exist within the school and so technically a student could ask Dumbledore for permission to read one. Likewise, rather than completely banning books for being inappropriate, students at Hogwarts are allowed to check out books from the Restricted Section if they receive permission from a teacher. It is interesting to note that the flaw in that logic, which is that some adults might not be any more able to discern appropriate reading material for young students than the students
themselves, is exemplified in the second book in the series, in which Gilderoy Lockhart, a professor, signs Hermione’s permission slip to check out a book without even reading it: “‘I don’t believe it,’ he said as the three of them examined the signature on the note. ‘He didn’t even look at the book we wanted’” (Chamber of Secrets 163). This in itself sends some conflicting messages. It is certainly irresponsible of Lockhart to give so little attention to the permission slips he signs, and it definitely seems that the book the group checks out is one that has been rightfully restricted from general use. “It was clear from a glance why it belonged in the Restricted Section. Some of the potions had effects almost too gruesome to think about, and there were some very unpleasant illustrations, which included a man who seemed to have been turned inside out and a witch sprouting several extra pairs of arms out of her head” (Chamber of Secrets 164).

This naturally raises the question of what, exactly, creates the line between what should and should not be placed in the restricted section, and under what circumstances a student should be allowed to check out a restricted item. There is, however, a distinct difference between this sort of restricted access, in which students need permission to access certain titles, and the type of censorship in which books are banned from the school completely. True censorship, as defined in the introduction, would mean that no one would have access to a text, regardless of age, talent, or need. It would seem that Rowling would agree that yes, on occasion there are books which are dangerous for children to be reading, but that does not give anyone the right to completely eradicate those books from use. In this sense the Restricted Section acts more like the age restrictions on movies than like true book banning.

Another form of censorship is media manipulation. While censors act more out of a sense of moral obligation, media propaganda tends to be more for some sort of personal or
political gain. However, it acts in the same way as banning and removing books by deciding what information is to be given to the public and how it is to be spun. Throughout the series, the main newspaper of the wizarding world, the *Daily Prophet*, is used to promote propaganda for political purposes. At first, this is done by the Ministry of Magic. Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic for much of the series, panicked at the thought of having to deal with a newly returned Voldemort, and so did anything in his power to discredit those who claimed Voldemort had returned to power. Since the people who discovered Voldemort’s rise to power were Harry and Dumbledore, they were, naturally, the first to come forward with the story and the most insistent about its truth. Therefore, Fudge focused his attention on discrediting the two of them, in order to keep the truth of their story from the wider population. Fudge managed to turn popular opinion against Harry and Dumbledore first by stripping Dumbledore of all of his titles and positions that are not school-related, and then by encouraging the *Daily Prophet* to print stories that paint Harry as an attention-seeking liar and Dumbledore as a senile old man, “ as well as using Harry and Dumbledore as running jokes, such as, “If some far-fetched story appears they say something like ‘a tale worthy of Harry Potter’ and if anyone has a funny accident or anything it’s ‘let’s hope he hasn’t got a scar on his forehead or we’ll be asked to worship him next – ‘” *(Order of the Phoenix 74)*. By doing so, Fudge discredits their reputations, and therefore their stories, with much of the Wizarding community. And while it can be reasonably surmised that the Ministry is behind these stories, he fact that Fudge was encouraging these articles is actually confirmed by reporter Rita Skeeter: “‘All right, Fudge is leaning on the *Prophet*, but it comes to the same thing. They won’t print a story that shows Harry in a good light. Nobody wants to read it. It’s against the public mood. People just don’t want to believe You-Know-Who’s back’” *(Order of the Phoenix 567)*. Rita’s added comment to her confession, “It’s against the public
mood,” brings to mind another issue regarding media portrayal – that, at the end of the day, most are in it for the money. It’s a concept that is unsavory, and one that Hermione, bright as she is, does not immediately grasp:

“So the *Daily Prophet* exists to tell people what they want to hear, does it?” said Hermione scathingly.

Rita sat up straight again, her eyebrows raised, and drained her glass of firewhisky.

“The *Prophet* exists to sell itself, you silly girl,” she said coldly.” (Order of the Phoenix 567)

It is possible that, even without the Ministry’s influence the *Daily Prophet* might have printed false reports about Harry, Dumbledore, and Voldemort’s ascent to power. As it was, their need for a continued readership aligned perfectly with the Ministry’s political goals. In the real world, media outlets have had to find ways to keep their audience’s attention, and so were more than willing to perpetuate the ideas that there was, in fact, an urgent danger to the country. Similarly, the *Daily Prophet* caters to public mood by working in the same way, but to the opposite effect. Rather than exaggerate a somewhat remote danger, Skeeter and company downplay a very real concern, in order to serve as the source of comfort many of the wizarding community would have wanted to turn to at that time. With strange occurrences abounding and prominent figures such as Dumbledore saying that those are in fact the work of a returned Voldemort, the wizarding community would know but not want to believe the truth, and so would continue to seek out a publication that told them that they were safe, thus ensuring a continued readership for the *Daily Prophet*, in addition to helping Fudge’s Ministry in their political aims. By forcing the *Daily Prophet* to take a pro-Ministry stance, Fudge is completely in control of the Wizarding World’s source of information, meaning that he is also in control of what information is not
shared, similar to the way in which a censor makes decisions about what people should and should not be allowed to read. While it is true that Fudge’s propaganda differs slightly from a censor’s approach, in that he is promoting his own agenda, and censors by definition act out of a moral compulsion, Fudge, too, is dispensing knowledge and literature as he sees fit, according to his own judgement.

Fudge’s influence extended to censorship within Hogwarts, once Harry told his story to Skeeter, and had it published in an alternative magazine, *The Quibbler*. *The Quibbler* was instantly banned, which naturally made it the most popular reading material in school:

By the end of the day, though Harry had not seen so much as a corner of *The Quibbler* anywhere in the school, the whole place seemed to be quoting the interview at each other; Harry heard them whispering about it as they queued up outside classes, discussing it over lunch and in the back of lessons, while Hermione even reported that every occupant of the cubicles in the girls’ toilets had been talking about it when she nipped in there before Ancient Runes. (*Order of the Phoenix* 582)

As so frequently seems to be the case in real-world situations, prohibiting teenagers from reading a text only incites their curiosity.

*The Quibbler*’s reputation as a less-than reputable magazine (as Hermione says near the beginning of the book, “*The Quibbler*‘s rubbish, everyone knows that” (*Order of the Phoenix* 193)) quickly becomes irrelevant in the face of the demand for the new information it contains. The edition with Harry’s interview becomes the highest selling edition of the magazine yet –

“To cap it all, Luna told him over dinner that no copy of *The Quibbler* had ever sold out faster.
‘Dad’s reprinting!’ she told Harry, her eyes popping excitedly. ‘He can’t believe it, he says people seem even more interested in this than the Crumple-Horned Snorkacks!’”

(Order of the Phoenix 583).

This transition from the mainstream media (the Daily Prophet) being a reliable source of information to the transferring of that trust to a less traditional source continues throughout the series. In the final book, the editor of the Quibbler, Xenophilius Lovegood (Luna’s father) published articles supporting Harry, at a time when the Ministry, and thereby the Daily Prophet, had fallen under the control of the Death Eaters. Despite the fact that it had a less prestigious reputation, The Quibbler became a more reliable news source than its more traditional counterpart. Members of the Order of the Phoenix also create a secret radio program, called Potterwatch, in order to put out information. Because of the absolute censorship of anything that took an anti-Voldemort stance, they use codenames and air their programs sporadically, and require wizards to use a password in order to tune in. While this keeps the members of the radio program safe, Lovegood does not use any such failsafes, and so ends up paying for his rebellion. “‘They took my Luna,’ he whispered. ‘Because of what I’ve been writing. They took my Luna and I don’t know where she is, what they’ve done to her’” (Deathly Hallows 419).

Lovegood’s experience is far from unusual, and it is the possibility of similar, if not worse, things happening to anyone who openly disagrees with those in power that creates the third sort of censorship, self-censorship. “Self-censorship is censoring action that a person consciously or unconsciously decides to take without consulting others or going through channels” (“Rethinking” 43). This appears when the greater populace as a whole actively censors themselves, either in fear of being accused of being on the wrong side, or from a fear of
being labeled inappropriate, or from a fear of being targeted by the opposition. Cook and Heilmann state that self-censorship comes in two forms, public and private:

*Public self-censorship* refers to a range of individual reactions to a public censorship regime. Self-censorship thus understood means that individuals internalise some aspects of the public censor and then censor themselves. Second, *private self-censorship* is the suppression by an agent of his or her own attitudes where a public censor is either absent or irrelevant. Private self-censorship is a process of regulation between what an individual regards as permissible to express publicly, and that which he or she wishes to express publicly (179).

In the case of the United States, people began to self-censor after 9/11, especially comments about the government, as they did not want to be seen as unpatriotic. People called French fries “freedom fries” out of a misplaced sense of patriotism, and those who did speak their minds were often ostracized, such as the Dixie Chicks, who said nothing that would not be considered simply freedom of speech today if they had spoken out against Obama rather than Bush. “September was not over before Ari Fleischer, the President’s press secretary, set the tone. ‘There are reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do, and this is not a time for remarks like that,’ he said, commenting about a wisecrack by a late-night TV comic, Bill Maher, that had gone against the administration’s grain (Didion vii). For some people this was public self-censorship, and for others it was private self-censorship. The self-censorship in *Harry Potter* tends to be of the private variety. An example of the self-censorship that was occurring in the wizarding community during Voldemort’s takeover of power is seen when the Weasleys, Harry, and Hermione visit Diagon Alley. They go to the twins’ new joke shop, Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes, where they see the displays in the shop windows, which
read: “Why are you worrying about You-Know-Who? You should be worrying about U-No-Poo – The constipation sensation that’s gripping the nation!” (Half-Blood Prince 116). Not only do the twins openly mock the other advertisements in Diagon Alley that promise protection against the Dark Arts, but they take a stand against the very demeanor of their surrounding environment. “Set against the dull, poster-muffled shop fronts around them, Fred and George’s windows hit the eye like a firework display” (Half-Blood Prince 116). This juxtaposition, along with Mrs. Weasley’s reaction, tells readers the sort of atmosphere that is prevalent in the wizarding world:

Harry started to laugh. He heard a weak sort of moan beside him and look around to see Mrs. Weasley gazing, dumbfounded, at the poster. Her lips moved silently, mouthing the name “U-No-Poo.”

“They’ll be murdered in their beds!” she whispered. (Half-Blood Prince 116)

That the twins are even able to pull off their joke is due to the deeply entrenched nature of the fear of their community. Because everyone around them is acting afraid and self-censoring, by acting boldly, they stand out by default. It is important to note Molly’s reaction, because she tends to stand as the voice of sense and matronly reason when it comes to the twins’ antics, and also because she, as an adult, can represent the adult community as a whole. Her fear is not that the twins will not do well in their business venture, but that because they do not appear to be taking the threat seriously, they will be turning themselves into a target. That sort of fear-based self-censorship is clearly the way most of Diagon Alley (and so, it can be assumed, the majority of the wizarding community) handles the inevitable news that Voldemort has come back into power. Interestingly, while this is certainly a negative sort of way to handle a situation, the way in which it so neatly mirrors real-life reactions to terrorist attacks enables readers to identify with those behaviors and analyze their own feelings about the subject. Do they align more with Mrs.
Weasley, or with the twins? In examining the culture that these books entered into, much can be understood about why they were and continue to be such popular and, to many readers, important books.

CAUSES FOR POPULARITY

“To Miss Hermione Jean Granger, I leave my copy of The Tales of Beedle the Bard, in the hopes that she will find it entertaining and instructive.” (Deathly Hallows 111)

It cannot be denied that much of Harry Potter’s popularity stems from being a fantastic book series on its own. However, there are many wonderful series that do not receive the same amount of attention, and it is important to look at the world that Harry Potter entered, and understand why its timing has been so significant. It cannot be denied that the books reflect a great many of the issues of the day. It is the magical world that Rowling creates that enables readers to enter that space and work through that reflection. Unlike censors, readers of Rowling’s series react to the idea of magic not with fear, but with curiosity, which enables them to explore a world that experiences many of the same struggles as their own, and emerge more capable of coping with their own reality. It is this, and not potions or Quidditch matches, that is the true magic of the series.

This sort of magic enables readers to grapple with the issues of their own lives by experiencing the difficulties and solutions through Harry and his friends. The idea that fantasy literature is an effective tool in this manner is well-documented. Discussing the children of
Holocaust survivors, Maureen Katz elaborates on the difficulties these individuals experience by living their lives with a constant sense of the terror their parents experienced. Katz explains, “Their organized structure is defined, propelled, by the absence of hope, the unquestioning belief in loss and destruction which functions to perversely protect an aspect of sanity, a preservation of early object ties” (203). Katz continues, “As long as this structure cannot be symbolized and put into language, there is no possibility of understanding or escape: only the sense of terrible cold invading the very heart of desire” (205). People, then, who live under the shadow of a horrible experience are unable to work through the pain of that shared trauma without somehow doing so through language. Language, as Katz points out, serves as the gateway to gaining understanding and acceptance in the midst of a chaotic, terror-filled world. Many of Katz’s patients’ breakthroughs come in the form of using language in therapy, which can be extended to the language of literature as well. As Roberta Silva points out in “Representing Adolescent Fears: Theory of Mind and Adolescent Fiction,” “Works of fiction offer an analogy with theory of mind processes employed in our interactions with real-life people and situations, and one amongst the many outcomes readers may derive from fiction is imaginative engagement with the strategies attributed to characters which enable them to deal with the challenges they are presented with” (161-162). In other words, people are able to work through their anxieties and personal trauma metaphorically through fiction, enabling them to give language to a situation that they may not be ready or able to discuss directly. It is with this idea that one can see why the social conditions were ripe for the Harry Potter series to explode into popularity in the beginning of the 21st century.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (Philosopher’s Stone in the original UK title) was published in the United States in 1998. That it was an immediate hit is a bit of an
understatement. A film on the book was planned as early as 1997, when the book had still only been released in the UK, and it remained on the best-seller charts in both the US and the UK through 2000. The environment in the early years of the series shows a world living “in the shadow of a longing for the togetherness and purposefulness that supposedly characterized the American people during World War II” (Stein 190). In his article, “Days of Awe: September 11, 2001 and its Cultural Psychodynamics,” Howard Stein explains how this societal feeling of a lack of purpose led to a rise in war movies, particularly those about World War II, starting with *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998. Not only did these films depict a generation of Americans who, in retellings, at least, embodied the hardworking values and moral righteousness that many present-day Americans yearned for, but they also provided a clear villain with Hitler and the Nazis. As Stein explains, “For the U.S., the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War had been filled with a search for a sustainable, good-enough enemy: Japan, Iraq, and China were candidates, but none attained this permanent status” (191). This created the attraction of those World War II films, as Americans were “projecting our inner struggles with our own aggression onto the cinema screen” (Stein 191). It is easy to extend this explanation to *Harry Potter*, which gives readers the satisfaction of a clear-cut enemy, as well as a sort of formula to defeat him – in the first three books, Voldemort is nearly always beaten, conveniently, at the end of the school year, after Harry and his friends spend a year unraveling the mysteries behind the sorcerer’s stone, or the Chamber of Secrets, or the truth about the Potter murders. Such a neatly constructed way of knowing one’s enemy and having a plan to defeat him would understandably appeal to the same society who sought some sort of solace in the single-minded purposefulness of World War II dramas.
It also cannot be ignored that there are a great many parallels between to be made between Voldemort and Hitler. Both are obsessed with creating a superior race (Voldemort’s is that of pureblood wizards), both have control over fanatical groups, and both heavily employ fear as a tactic to control people. While Voldemort himself becomes mainly concerned with securing his own immortality, his followers’ takeover of the wizarding world through increasingly restrictive decrees and pureblood propaganda strongly echoes the tactics of the National Socialist Party. Interviews with Rowling confirm that the parallels were very much deliberate. Reagin provides a transcript of an interview with BBC Newsround in 2000 that supports that Rowling created Voldemort with Hitler in mind:

Lizo Mzimba: “Voldemort’s a half-blood too.”

J.K. Rowling: “Like Hitler! See! I think it’s the case that the biggest bully takes their own defects and they put them on someone else.” (Reagin 127)

Furthermore, Rowling points out the similarities on her website:

The expressions “pure-blood,” “half-blood” and “Muggle-born” have been coined by people to whom these distinctions matter, and express their originators’ prejudices. As far as somebody like Lucius Malfoy is concerned, for instance, a Muggle-born is as “bad” as a Muggle. Therefore Harry would be considered only “half” wizard, because of his mother’s grandparents.

If you think this is far-fetched, look at some of the real charts the Nazis used to show what constituted “Aryan” or “Jewish” blood. I saw one in the Holocaust Museum in Washington when I had already devised the “pure-blood,” “half-blood,” and “Muggle-born” definitions and was chilled to see that the Nazis
used precisely the same warped logic as the Death Eaters. A single Jewish
grandparent “polluted” the blood, according to their propaganda. (Reagin 128)

Even more similarities abound in Rowling’s texts. A German wizard who had been bent on
subjugating Muggles resides in Nurmengard Prison, whose name evokes the Nuremberg Trials.
Death Eaters work within the legal avenues of the Ministry of Magic to force Muggle-borns to
submit proof of their magical ancestry. Those who cannot do so are condemned to live as
wandless outcasts on the outskirts of wizarding society. Their fates, while not quite so tragic and
on a much smaller scale, is clearly meant to bring the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi
Germany to the forefront of the reader’s mind. Even the symbol of Death Eaters and Nazis are
similar, with both choosing to use a skull – the Death Eaters with their Dark Mark and the Nazis
with their totenkopf (see figures 1 and 2).

Fig. 1. Nazi totenkopf (Weßelhöft)  Fig. 2. Death Eater Dark Mark (Goblet of Fire 692)

Nancy Reagin comments, in her article, “Was Voldemort a Nazi?,” “Rowling probably chose to
use symbols and language that would remind her audience of Hitler (instead of some other
historical villain) because the Nazis are a sort of historical shorthand that all readers would
understand; she thus invoked a fictional scenario with particular ideas about power and social
hierarchies, good and evil, and political movements” (129). Readers would easily make the connection and instantly feel the weight of the emotional baggage that is attached to the subject of the Holocaust. As Stein points out, “Much of cultural folklore is held in emotional ‘cold storage’ until emotionally needed, whereupon belief becomes direct experience” (190). In other words, because the symbols of the Holocaust have become so deeply ingrained into cultural memory, those symbols act as a sort of memory for readers – readers recognize the symbols and what they represent, and so including such striking parallels enables Rowling to convey a complete sense of horror by simply building on a foundation that already exists in readers’ minds. The events of World War II are ingrained in public consciousness so that the merest reference brings it to mind. Stein gives another example: “When the heroic firefighters planted the American flag in the rubble of the World Trade Center, one immediately “knew” – recognized via projection – that a re-enactment of the Asian Theatre in World War II was taking place” (190). Because the image of soldiers raising a flag amongst the rubble is one that has been shown again and again, in textbooks and documentaries, the typical American immediately recognizes both the reference that planting a flag in that manner makes and the significance behind such an action.

Similarly, in purposefully drawing such strong parallels, Rowling created Harry Potter in such a way that it held its own among the era into which it was born. Just as Saving Private Ryan and Band of Brothers provided an outlet and relief for the sense of torment that came from having no definable enemy and therefore no purpose, Harry Potter gave readers Voldemort, an enemy who was unambiguously evil, and who, through Harry, they could vanquish. However, the cultural needs changed suddenly when the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 created a very real enemy, and along with it, fear that was both inevitable and cultivated.
CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF FEAR

“Sir—I got a Ministry of Magic leaflet by owl, about security measures we should all take against the Death Eaters…”

"Yes, I received one myself," said Dumbledore, still smiling. "Did you find it useful?"

"Not really."

"No, I thought not. You have not asked me, for instance, what is my favorite flavor of jam, to check that I am indeed Professor Dumbledore and not an impostor.” (Half-Blood Prince 61)

The cultural landscape changed drastically with the events of September 11, 2001. With the terrorist attacks of that day, Americans’ anxiety for an enemy was ended. As Stein states, “Terrible as the attacks were, they symbolically focused the decade-old problem of intense, free-floating anxiety among Americans” (190). Suddenly, there was not simply the vague impression of a potential enemy, out there, somewhere in the world, but a group of individuals who did not stop at verbally attacking the country, but went even further by physically attacking it. By doing so, they volunteered themselves as that long-sought after enemy for the United States, a solution to the sense that our nation would never live up to the generations before us. Finally, a generation of Americans had found a purpose – to fight terrorism. Such newfound purpose did not, however, guarantee relief. The horrifying images were burned into public consciousness, evoking a sense of trauma in even those with absolutely no ties to those directly affected.
Although it was not the first terrorist attack the US has ever faced, it impacted the country to an extent that no other event had. In *The Science of Fear*, Daniel Gardner explains why a single terrorist attack had such an enormous impact on the entire populace:

> It also made an enormous difference that we had seen televised images so clear, immediate, and graphic that it was as if we had watched everything through the living-room window. Many even saw the catastrophe live. That magnified the shock. What was happening was so perfectly unanticipated and so horrific that we balked at comprehension even as the images burned into our memories like acid etching steel. (247)

In an age of live news reporting and high-quality televisions, there was no way to escape from the brutality and immediacy of the attack. This was more than the inherited grief and guilt experienced by Maureen Katz’s patients born to Holocaust survivors – this was a trauma delivered directly to the American public through the convenience of their television screens.

Gardner continues, “Even for those who had no personal stake in the events of September 11, the emotions of that day, and those that followed, were among the most intense and dreadful we will ever experience. To an unconscious mind so sensitive to feelings that even minor changes in language can influence its perception of a threat, these emotions were the wail of an air-raid siren” (247). And, unlike most emotional responses, this one did not abate over time in the fashion that would have been expected, meaning that the US continued to exist in a chronic state of fear and anxiety.

One way to measure the level of fear that pervaded American society is to look at Gallup polls asking Americans what they thought the likelihood of another terrorist attack was. Originally, the level of fear as demonstrated by these polls declined in an expected fashion, with
the percentage of Americans who believed another terrorist was very or somewhat likely dropping from 85 percent in October 2001 to 52 percent in March 2002. However, that percentage then plateaued. Five years later, 50 percent of Americans polled still believed that a terrorist attack was very or somewhat likely, despite there having been no terrorist attacks on the United States since September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the percentage of Americans who said they were very or somewhat worried that they or their families would be victims of terrorism actually increased over time, going from 35 percent to 44 percent (Gardner 249). These feelings were not limited to adults – a survey of adolescents performed in 2002 determined that a combined 55.2 percent of them met criteria for a probable panic attack, probable PTSD, or probable subthreshold PTSD due to the terrorist attack in 2001 (Pfefferbaum 221). Another 8.7 percent qualified as having probable depression (Pfefferbaum 222). It is logical to believe that these rates stayed steady at the same rate as their adult counterparts, considering that adolescents were receiving much of the same information and media input as their parents. In fact, 62 percent of schoolchildren polled six months after the attack reported watching a lot of tv about 9/11 (Duarte 554), meaning that they were exposed to the very same media coverage that adults watched. An additional study found that trauma occurred to school-aged children regardless of their distance from the actual event, resulting in “distance trauma” (Burnham 327). This continued sense of fear and lasting mental effect was despite the fact that the terrorism threat to the United States had, in fact, declined, considering there were no further attacks to report.

So why would the populace become more afraid, rather than less afraid? In part, the answer lies in the way that western leaders and media portrayed the idea of terrorism and the threat it posed to our countries. This “occurred through protofascist talk, the manipulation of the nation’s fear and sense of vulnerability that something worse than 9/11 awaited them”
President George W. Bush stated that the day’s events were “more than acts of terror. They were acts of war…Freedom and democracy are under attack” (Gardner 261). This manner of address on the issue was not limited to the United States. “British prime minister Tony Blair added his own rhetorical escalation four days later when he warned, ‘We know they would, if they could, go further and use chemical or biological or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction” (Gardner 261). This sort of wording became commonplace in the media, with news channels of all political persuasions incessantly speaking about the War on Terror and the probable dangers that would come with it. A color-coded terrorism warning system was introduced, with terror levels changing at any moment between ominous-sounding colors such as yellow and orange and red, inducing anxiety in a public who had no way of knowing precisely what the difference between the colors meant, or how assigning a color to an unknown threat could make them any safer. And all the time, government officials used any speaking opportunity to point out the dangers the country was in. Naturally, these anxieties began to appear in popular culture. Similarly to how Rowling was able to use the cultural background of WWII symbols as a sort of shortcut to denote evil, the media quickly realized that they could use terrorism imagery to evoke fear and tension. Entertainment media frequently refers to the real events of September 11 to give a backdrop for the present-day terrorist threats that make up their plots, and the mixture becomes confusing, especially when footage of real events is combined with actors’ lines for dramatic effect. The projection of public anxiety onto these mediums only serves to increase the general anxiety, as, even though the audience knows that they are watching something fictional, the impression that there is an imminent terrorist threat remains. This led to a country that actually felt less safe under the remote threat of terrorism than it had during the more realistic threat proposed by the Cold War, despite the logical likelihood of either event –
“Paradoxically, many Americans felt psychologically safer, even “invincible,” under the threat of ‘mutual shared destruction’ and ‘nuclear winter’ than they currently do waiting for the next terrorist attack” (Stein 192). That such an attack was coming was more or less accepted – it was only a matter of when.

The subsequent war on Iraq “was unveiled with all the care of a Hollywood holiday release. ‘From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce a new product in August,’ said Andrew Card, the chief of staff, in late summer 2002, when asked why his boss had prolonged the raising of the curtain” (Didion xi). Such manipulation of the public mood has to be carefully planned out, in order to raise stress and anxiety levels to just the right level. Interestingly, there is a connection between the sort of discourse that achieves such a goal and the sort of ideologies that censors typically refer to. “Certainly, crisis and fear-based religious discourses are major components of protofascist rhetoric as are substantive appeals to fundamentalist Christianity” (Kelley 202). In appealing to these sorts of ideals, the government is able to strike a chord with a large percentage of the public, and so gain support for their actions on moral grounds, regardless of any other facts of the matter.

The high level of trauma created by such rhetoric opened a doorway for a new sort of Harry Potter novel. Rowling seemed prescient in her depiction of a new kind of evil in her fourth book, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, which was published in 2000. Most critics agree that this book is the turning point in the series in terms of darkness, both of thematic material and actual plot events. This is because the fourth book is the first in which readers actually see Death Eaters, not just a lone Voldemort, at work. It is also the first in which Voldemort fully returns to his physical form, which enables him to reinstate his band of followers. Similarly to the way in which America was suddenly faced with an enemy,
Voldemort transitions from a nebulous foe that is defeated each year just in time for the summer holidays, into a very tangible and menacing threat. *Goblet of Fire* shows how deeply and cleverly deceptive Voldemort’s followers can be, with the treacherous Barty Crouch posing as Mad-Eye Moody for nearly the entire book, of which the reader, like Harry, remains wholly ignorant until the final chapters. It is also the first time in the series in which a character is killed onscreen, with Cedric Diggory’s murder. It is also the first book to include torture, beginning with the Death Eaters torturing Muggles at the Quidditch World Cup and ending with Voldemort torturing Harry in a graveyard. All of these elements combine to create a tone that is vastly different from the previous three books.

However, the fifth book, and the first one published after September 11, 2001, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, is the first one to truly delve into the consequences of an inept government, as Cornelius Fudge refuses to acknowledge Voldemort’s return. It is interesting to note that, while Voldemort remained the primary villain, Rowling turned her focus to the Ministry of Magic (whose primary function should have been to protect citizens against Voldemort), and their response to Voldemort’s return. Rowling chose to focus on Fudge’s ineptitudes at the same time that the U.S. government was showing that their response to an act of evil would be a war in Iraq. It was this particular anxiety, that the government was not only incapable of protecting its citizens from terrorist threats, but also that it could not be entirely trusted, that played out across the pages of Rowling’s fifth book, in which Harry and Dumbledore are not only believed but are also publicly denounced by the government, leaving Harry and his friends to act as rebels against the Ministry in order to learn to protect themselves. The culminating battle actually takes place within the government building, and yet it is a battle in which government figures are significantly absent. Fudge only acknowledges the truth of
Voldemort’s return after Harry and his friends are nearly killed, and even then he blunders onto the scene, only half-aware of what has occurred. “Merlin’s beard – here – here! – in the Ministry of Magic! – great heavens above – it doesn’t seem possible – my word – how can this be?” (Order of the Phoenix 817). This trend continues through the end of the series. In the beginning of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, readers meet the Muggle Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, waiting on a call from “the President of a far distant country…wondering when the wretched man would call” (1). Though names of individuals and parties are deliberately absent, it is not hard to imagine that readers in 2005, the year in which Half-Blood Prince was published, would automatically fill in those blank spaces with the names of Tony Blair and George W. Bush.

The British Muggle Prime Minister’s equivalent in the wizarding world, Cornelius Fudge, is depicted as a terrible leader, endangering the entire wizarding world just to save the face of his administration. In Goblet of Fire, upon hearing Harry’s story of Voldemort’s rebirth and the corresponding confession of Barty Crouch, Jr., Fudge has a dementor administer the Dementor’s Kiss to Crouch, in which the dementor sucked out his soul, leaving his body an empty shell. This meant that Crouch could not stand trial, thereby excluding the opportunity for the wizarding public to hear of Voldemort’s return from one of his closely devoted followers. When Dumbledore calls Fudge out on this mistake, Fudge says that they do not need Crouch’s testimony, as they already know why he committed murder – “He was a raving lunatic!” (Goblet 703). Fudge continues to question the legitimacy of Harry’s testimony, insinuating that he, too, is crazy, before being confronted with Snape’s very unambiguous Dark Mark, a sure proof sign that Voldemort had, indeed, returned. Rather than register fear at Voldemort’s return or even concern that a Hogwarts teacher has a Dark Mark on his arm, Fudge simply stares before saying,
“I don’t know what you and your staff are playing at, Dumbledore, but I have heard enough. I have no more to add. I will be in touch with you tomorrow, Dumbledore, to discuss the running of this school” (Goblet 710). Fudge decides to label everyone in front of him a lunatic rather than own up to the danger that is facing him.

The ineptitude of a bumbling government official is even clearer in Order of the Phoenix. Suddenly the government is not only negligent, but actively harmful. With the instatement of Dolores Umbridge at Hogwarts, the Ministry begins spying on the staff and students in order to report back to Fudge and changing the rules and curriculum to fit the official Ministry positions on the threat to the wizarding world. In many ways this is the opposite of what was occurring in the western world at the time – officials were amplifying the sense of danger, rather than denying it. However, the very fact that Fudge and Umbridge were so obviously in the wrong was a way of projecting the anxiety over the government’s abilities, similar to the way in which the existence of a clear-cut villain such as Voldemort soothed the need for an enemy. It can be difficult to know for certain if the government is lying to the citizens, or doing the right thing by entering in a war, when the only frame of reference is what the media chooses to dispense.

However, such ambiguities are removed when the people know for a fact that a certain danger does exist, and the government insists on covering it up. While the Patriot Act certainly caused some of the population to actively distrust the government, many citizens also firmly believed in its usefulness, and so the government could not gain status as a clear-cut enemy of the people. In that sense, Fudge is in a way the sort of government villain that the people needed – one whose poor decisions were obvious, and so could be openly distrusted enough that he could be forced to step down.
In this vein, the ending of Fudge’s governmental career is in itself a sort of readers’ wish fulfillment, since their own leaders could not be removed so easily. He admits to having lost his job in the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince*, and is replaced by the “lion-like” Scrimgeour. While Scrimgeour is not perfect, he is at the very least serious about the dangers Voldemort and his followers pose, and he dies refusing to give up information about Harry’s whereabouts, placing him firmly in the “good guy” category. By having him replace Fudge, readers are given the satisfaction of not only seeing one terrible leader removed, but also experiencing the hopefulness and relief that comes from having a good leader. Roberta Silva explains how reading this type of scenario might help a reader work through their anxieties. “Novels help them to learn how ‘to deal with existing personal problems’ and through them adolescents become able to extract, from their reading, suggestions that help them to face the fears of their life” (Silva 162). While Silva writes specifically about adolescents, the same theory can be applied to readers of all ages. Furthermore, adolescents, who are often less informed on political matters than their adult counterparts, benefit even more from fantasy examples, because reading about these sorts of situations in books makes it easier to identify and understand them in real life. In this case, the potential solutions to their problems are to first be able to easily identify bad leadership, and then to remove the current leader and replace him with a more competent one. Silva states, “Works of fiction offer an analogy with theory of mind processes employed in our interactions with real-life people and situations, and one amongst the many outcomes readers may derive from fiction is imaginative engagement with the strategies attributed to characters which enable them to deal with the challenges they are presented with” (161-162). Silva does not suggest that simply reading a book will enable the reader to immediately conquer their fears and be able to live anxiety-free, but that it will enable them to gain the insight necessary to deal with their deep-
rooted concerns. “In other words they do not propose a single and inescapable way out of these anxieties, but rather offer a set of tools with which the reader can develop a personal reflection that leads to the quest for his/her ‘passage’ to a safe shore” (Silva 171). This is important in the sense of a society’s generalized anxiety, because it necessitates a way to work through those issues that are being forced upon the population through media and government officials. “Hope and innocence in the face of political terror are ruthlessly destroyed” (Katz 204), and so people must find a way to regain both hope and the potential for innocence. In this *Harry Potter* succeeds, because it not only contains events that strongly mirror real world events, but it does so through the eyes of children, as they grow up and learn more about the world around them. Harry begins the series knowing absolutely nothing about the world of magic that he enters, and so readers who are learning to navigate both their personal lives and the world around them, are able to relate to him as he finds his way through life. Readers of *Harry Potter* learn mundane things such as navigating friendships and dating, but they also learn how to discern right from wrong, and even how to recognize the gray area in between that most people fall under. In addition to relating to Harry and his friends on this level, readers are also able to gain a grasp on the international turmoil that they are faced with every day. Even today, eight years after the last *Harry Potter* book has been published, the messages it contains about questioning governmental practices and fighting for truth and goodness are relevant to current events. It is through reading these books, and going through the processes of learning and understanding with Harry, that readers are able to work through their own traumas.

**THE TORTURE PARALLELS**
“Pain,” said Moody softly. “You don’t need thumbscrews or knives to torture someone if you can perform the Crucius Curse…That one was very popular once, too.” (Goblet of Fire 215)

In addition to enabling readers to work through their anxieties, both about the idea of Voldemort/terrorist figures out in the world, and about the untrustworthiness of a government that seeks the means to its own ends, the Harry Potter series allows readers to work through another issue that concerns modern society. Torture is a subject that many Americans might prefer to sweep under the rug of their consciousness rather than face head-on. However, the abundance of torture in Harry Potter, just like the untrustworthy government and headline-grabbing media, enables readers to tackle an issue that is complex in the sense that it is not limited to simply Death Eaters – the Ministry uses torture as well.

In “Of Marranos and Mudbloods,” Ruth Abrams compares the techniques used by the Death Eaters to those used by the Spanish Inquisition. Abrams points out how the aims of the torture are similar, in that it is not used to extract information, as might be commonly assumed, but rather is used simply as a means of breaking down the victim. The most common form of torture that is seen in the Harry Potter series is that of the Crucius Curse, which Harry first experiences in Goblet of Fire:

Voldemort moved slowly forward and turned to face Harry. He raised his wand.

‘Crucio!’ It was pain beyond anything Harry had ever experienced; his very bones were on fire; his head was surely splitting along his scar; his eyes were rolling madly in his head; he wanted it to end…To blackout…To die…And then it was gone. (Goblet of Fire 674)
When discussing what sort of weapon Voldemort could be after in the fifth book, Harry, having firsthand knowledge of the curse, states: “‘He’s got the Cruciatus Curse for causing pain,’” said Harry. ‘He doesn’t need anything more efficient than that’” (Order of the Phoenix 100).

Voldemort could have cut the series off at book four if he had only killed Harry at once instead of toying with him by torturing him. In fact, there was no reason for Voldemort to waste time by torturing Harry other than he wanted to show that he had power over Harry. As Abrams points out, “These weren’t creative or bloody or exciting tortures; they were simply things that hurt a lot and were frightening. Like Crucio and other Unforgivable Curses from the Potterverse, the point of using these tortures was – and is, when governments use them in the present – to break the will of the victim, not to harm him or her physically” (233). The fact that this was the purpose of the tortures is proven by the fact that, during the Inquisition, confessions that were given while under torture were considered invalid. Similarly, Voldemort and his Death Eaters use torture in order to punish or humiliate their victims, rather than to cause actual, lasting physical harm or to garner information. Rather than using a curse that causes lasting damage, as seen in battle scenes, or death, such as Avada Kedavra, they use the Cruciatus Curse to torture and play with their victims. Voldemort uses it on Harry in Goblet of Fire to humiliate him: “He was hanging limply in the ropes binding him to the headstone of Voldemort’s father, looking up into those bright red eyes through a kind of mist. The night was ringing with the sound of the Death Eaters’ laughter” (675-676). This trend is seen throughout the series - a notable example is Neville’s parents, who were tortured with the Cruciatus Curse to the point of insanity by Bellatrix Lestrange, Voldemort’s right-hand woman. Bellatrix’s proclivity for killing people is well documented throughout the series, so it can be taken for a fact that she would have both the
talent and inclination to kill the Longbottoms. However, by torturing them out of their minds, she and the other Death Eaters are able to continue to be amused by their state of being, as evidenced by the way they laugh about the Longbottoms throughout the books, and use that humiliation to further taunt their son, Neville.

While it is clear that the U.S. government uses torture, there continues to be a debate about whether or not such use is justified. Those who are in favor of the practice often state that it is being done for national security, and cite their belief that, in the case of such things as terrorism and national security risks, the ends justify the means. However, confessions given under torture are not admitted as evidence by a U.S. court. The U.S. actually goes a step further than the Spanish Inquisition did, because in 2009, a judge “concluded that uncoerced statements taken in U.S. government interrogations at Guantanamo were unreliable, because the detainee had previously experienced torture. The Spanish Inquisition’s loophole has thus been closed in U.S. law – once the interrogators have used torture, have intentionally inflicted physical and emotional pain, the testimony of the prisoner is no longer reliable” (Abrams 233-234). And so, if torture cannot truly be used as a means to information, it becomes painfully obvious that the only real reason to torture people is to cause them psychological trauma and humiliation. In that sense, the actions of the Death Eaters serves as a painful reflection of the actions of our own government. The truth of this is depicted on the pages, in a way that is impossible to argue with, which both opens the eyes of readers to the truth about torture, and enables them to undergo the same processes that are used to work through traumatic events to better understand their own thoughts on the subject.

It would be a simple matter of condemning the Death Eaters if they were the only ones in the series to use torture, but Umbridge is also guilty of torturing people, even if not necessarily
with the Cruciatus Curse. She forces students to write lines with a special quill that cuts into their hand as they write, using their blood as the ink as a regular part of the detentions she assigns. It is worth noting that she, too, uses torture to punish and humiliate, rather than seek information. When she is trying to learn the location of Sirius Black, she abandons her usual cruel tactics in favor of plying Harry with tea and truth serum. This serves to support the idea that torture is used for its own sake, rather than truly to gather information, because, as this scene shows, if a witch or wizard truly wants to know something, they have much more reliable means to gather information than to hurt someone until they speak. As Abrams discusses, “It seems strange that Rowling chose to show her wizarding characters torturing others by using the most pedestrian Muggle methods – beatings and stabbings – when she also created magical means of coercing people and violating their human rights” (235). Not only is truth serum readily enough available that it appears in the books multiple times (with Umbridge, Snape, and Dumbledore), but it is also shown that some wizards, such as Snape, Bellatrix, and Voldemort, have the ability to look into a person’s mind, meaning that they would have no reason for any form of coercion, other than to simply ask a question and wait for the answer to appear in the person’s mind. Despite this power, Voldemort does torture Ollivander in Deathly Hallows in order to discover the secret of the Elder Wand, and Bellatrix tortures Hermione in an attempt to find out how the trio had come by the sword of Godric Gryffindor. Despite this, these moments seem to occur only in moments of extreme rage, which lends credence to the idea that they are exerting their power over their captives more than actually expecting results, whether they are doing so consciously or not. It is clear that magical methods would be far more useful in terms of actually gaining something, whether it be information or cooperativeness, than torturing the person.
Forcing someone to use these curses is also, in itself, a form of torture, adding to the amusement of the torturer. In *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort forces Draco to administer the Cruciatius Curse to a Death Eater who has displeased him. “‘Draco, give Rowle another taste of our displeasure…Do it, or feel my wrath yourself!’” (*Deathly Hallows* 174). It is widely known amongst the wizards that Draco is being used to punish his parents, and so since he is not the one who is being subjected to the curse, it must be assumed that to be forced to perform the curse must in itself be a form of punishment. Draco certainly is an unwilling participant in the entire operation – he refuses to name Harry, Ron, and Hermione when they are captured by Fenrir Greyback, despite the fact that he knows very well who they are and what their capture would mean to his family and Voldemort. This tactic of punishing people by forcing them to hurt others is also seen when the Carrows force students to practice the Cruciatius Curse on other students, and Neville gets into trouble for refusing to perform the curse on first-years. If the very act of performing the torture is itself another form of torture, then that solidifies torture’s role as more of a psychologically symbolic nature than of a physical or informative one.

The ideas of torture and censorship to go hand-in-hand. On the one hand, there is the idea of torture being associated with interrogation, although it has been proven that the results of the interrogation is not the true goal of those sessions. Rather, it seems that those who have the power to perform torture are also those who have the power to keep secrets. The Muggle-born Registration Committee, for example, is in charge of both the interrogation of suspected Muggle-borns, but also for the creation of propaganda that furthers the Death Eaters’ agenda. In both the Wizarding world and in the real world, there is a definite connection between conservative politics and torture, as well as with censorship. There is, as has been mentioned, a religious connection, as people in both arenas look to religion to back up their points and provide
themselves with a cloak of morality. Perhaps another connection lies in a fundamental desire to take control of problems, and work them out straight on, which often results in conflict, rather than less-violent or controversial approaches to dilemmas. The desire to censor is the desire to do away with, rather than accept and yet choose not to partake in, or to allow but encourage their own personal families to pass by, or to accept and read and have an open conversation about the topic. In this sense the majority of American society is at fault, because the topic of torture so infrequently comes up. “We allow these practices to continue because we don’t see the danger that they will create a society in which populations are permanently suspect because of their national or regional origins. We also don’t think they are that bad. After all, we aren’t really drowning people or breaking their bones – these are practices that leave no marks” (Abrams 240). And yet, just as surely as Draco Malfoy is being tortured by Voldemort, and yet is physically fine, the U.S. government is actively tearing people apart from the inside out. It should not matter whether or not they are guilty of some crime, because torture is not the judicially-approved punishment for any crime. The argument that it is used to garner information is equally invalid, since it has been proven that not only is it illegal to use information that has been gathered through torture, but also that such information is not trustworthy. In ignoring this topic, we are essentially using the same arguments that censors use – if people are using torture for moral reasons, it must be okay, and so to allow any mention of amoral reasons is to open up to immorality. It must be assumed that a person who is accepting of torture is also accepting of censorship, because both involve a complete erasure of a topic in the name of righteousness.

In addition to reflecting the actions of their real-life counterparts, the inclusion of techniques regarding censorship, torture, and media and government manipulation within the
texts serves as a way to both critique and reflect on their use in real life. It is easy for people, particularly children and young adults, who might not have a complete understanding of what is being done by the government in the name of security to read about things such as the Cruciatius Curse and make that connection between it and the word torture, which is often vaguely tossed about in the media, without much detail or specific reasoning behind its use. Once that connection is made, it becomes easier for readers to see torture for what it is, without the obscurity that plagues it in much of the cliché media. In this sense, it works much in the same way that reading these fantasy battles helps people to work through trauma. It enables readers to take a step outside of their personal environment and think critically about the world they live in.

CONCLUSION

Much of art and literature comes about through a need for society to express the anxieties of the world, and in the case of Harry Potter, that means war, censorship, and everything that goes with it. Much as in the real world, the conflicts surrounding these topics turn out to be complex, for, as Sirius tells Harry, “the world isn’t split into good people and Death Eaters” (Order of the Phoenix 302). The middle ground is filled with people who, much like Umbridge, try to censor the information that is being consumed by children, and who truly believe that they are doing that for the children’s own best interests. By including such gray areas in the books, it allows readers to work through the complexities of life, including censorship, in a way that is lacking in a story that depicts good and evil as strictly opposites, with no middle ground.

Typically, the people who censor for religious reasons are often the same ones who support the right wing politicians – in Harry Potter’s world, those who would approve of the
censoring of information about Voldemort would be the same as those who follow the Ministry of Magic. Indeed, that is how it plays out in the books. Perhaps it is because these individuals support a type of authority that is powerful and makes definable rules for how people should live. Such an arrangement might be attractive because it gives people clear rules to follow, and starkly outlines what is right and wrong, making both life and pointing out wrongdoers easy. It seems unlikely that people are being coerced into supporting something such as censorship, as they could just as easily (and, quite often, more easily) choose to take the easier route of not contesting something. The sort of strict interpretations of scripture and the absolute adherence to authority that caused the earliest forms of censorship show a determination of people to view the world in black and white, right and wrong, governed by very decisive and easy to understand rules. This mindset is the same that would support a government in the name of respecting authority, no matter what that government might be doing. The attitude of simply going along with the tide is seen in both the Wizarding world and in the real world, in which people self-censor in order to avoid being ostracized, such as when Xenophilius Lovegood begins writing articles against Harry, and any time an American felt compelled to keep in a joke or a comment that might be construed as rude or unpatriotic. In turn, the tradition of politicians making up the rules as they go along in order to get what they want is one that continues to this day. Much in the same way that religious leaders once changed the definition of witchcraft to suit their needs, politicians in 21st century America have done such things as had the APA change the definition of torture so that they could act as they pleased in Guantanamo Bay. The deliberate fear-mongering that took place after 9/11, in a purposeful move to create panic among the people in order to garner support for the government’s increased surveillance and other actions in the name of counterterrorism is reminiscent of the same hysteria that was propagated to turn people against
witches, or Jews during the Spanish Inquisition, or Irish during the famine. History, in short, repeats itself.

All of this, even the censorship against the books themselves, is reflected back to the reader throughout the Harry Potter series. By showing these very real issues to the reader within the pages, it allows the reader to look at the issues from an outside perspective, and perhaps make some sense of them. Readers can recognize themselves in the story, and see their country in the way the Ministry of Magic is ruling the wizarding world. They can see the looming threat of terrorism in Death Eaters and self-serving politicians in Dolores Umbridge. They can even see their friends who are not allowed to read Harry Potter in characters such as Seamus Finnegan and Marietta Edgecomb, whose parents do not allow them to read pro-Harry/Dumbledore articles, or be involved in anything that Harry is involved with. Harry’s world is one that helps people, not just children, navigate the world of depression, and fights with friends, and first dates, but also of family values and death and politics. It’s an introduction to the world, with all of the great and terrible things it contains, and it ends with the best reminder of all, which is that all will be well.

It is interesting, of course, that the same group of people who supported the fear-mongering type tactics that followed 9/11 would be against something that depicts a very real, frightening enemy. And yet there can be no denying that their counterparts in the books are not the people who rise up to fight the evil, as censors believe themselves to be doing, but rather those who sit by and either deny all existence of a problem, as the Dursleys do, or actively harm children and their education by instating a teacher such as Umbridge. Perhaps it is their very refusal to recognize themselves in the pages of the books that causes them to fear the books’ power. As far as refusing to see literature as a facet of the truth of real life, rather than as simply
something fictional and therefore completely made up, historically the more conservative authors have also been more likely to place straightforward, factual texts ahead of fiction. When discussing this conflict that the conservative right has faced, Michael Kimmage states:

The challenge, for conservatives, has been to sponsor literature as a living branch of contemporary culture. The conservative emphasis on precedent and experience, the ant-utopian cast of the conservative mind, leads conservative authors to autobiography, to a nonfiction reckoning with the dilemmas of history, politics, and the self. The literary imagination thrives on the left, where utopia has long been at home. (949)

Essentially, the drive to live by established rules that causes conservatives to follow a government regardless of their actions, and to support that same government even when they are known to be torturing people, is the same drive that causes them to censor books based on the texts’ presumed lack of adherence to religious principles. It is important to note that liberals are just as capable of censorship, depending on the subject matter. A censor simply does as they see fit according to their personal morals. In this sense, it is no wonder that Harry Potter fell under criticism, because it violates that very basic rule of censorship – it encourages children to live in a world of magic. However, it is that very magic that creates an opening for the opposite side of the spectrum, because a fantasy novel allows readers to look at very real issues surrounding their own world and investigate those issues in a safe space. One way to account for its massive popularity is to see that, for most readers, Harry Potter came at a time in history when it was needed most, because it filled the void of real conversation about the events affecting society. Harry Potter then provides yet another layer of opportunity for introspection, by including the very topic of censorship to which it was subjected. It is clear that reactions to Rowling’s series, both negative and positive, come from a place of extreme feeling and need to understand the
world, whether that is by strictly following a world view, or by seeking further understanding and acceptance.
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