

On Harry Potter

parts made them cry. Great literature and great Truth should make us cry. I would say even good literature should be able to achieve this.

Harry Potter has fantasy and escapism, both of which appeal to readers of any age. However, the magic of his world is relatively ordinary. A spell for this, a wave of the wand for that. What adolescent (or adult, for that matter) wouldn't enjoy wielding such magic? However, true magic should be forceful; we should be in awe of it. The magic in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* should send a shiver down our spines. The Fairie Queen of Spenser; this is magic we cannot begin to control. In the Ring Trilogy, even the greatest of characters such as Galadriel are wise enough to refuse such power. Frodo destroys the Ring; Arthur returns Excaliber to the Lady of the Lake. What does Harry Potter relinquish? What is the real significance of this character? We should long for that time when the Hero was not just a cartoonish celebrity!

Perhaps technology is now "magic" enough so that children are comfortable in the world of Harry Potter, where nothing is really too dangerous (remember that everything happens at a school called Hogwarts) to make them shudder. The lost world of Mallory's *La Morte d'Arthur* and Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings in which the Hero must pay the highest price is not the world of Harry Potter.

If you haven't read the books, the first one will be enough to convince you that the series is mildly entertaining; a little humor, a little adventure, a little excitement. But that's the problem. There is only a little Truth.

The sadness of Frodo is profound in contrast to what is happening around him. "It is gone forever" he said, "and now all is dark and empty." The rest of the Shire is

being restored beautifully, and there is a great celebration in Party Field.

"Frodo dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour he had in his own country." And this is in great contrast to the respect Merry and Pippin are given.

"Also in the autumn there appeared a shadow of old troubles. 'What's the matter, Mr. Frodo?' said Sam. 'I am wounded,' he answered, 'wounded; it will never really heal.' Sam has married Rosie and little Elanor has been born, but Frodo is alone and suffering.

"But,' said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, 'I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done.' 'So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.'" And Frodo must say goodbye to his best friend and the land he loves.

The description of Frodo leaving is touching: "But to Sam the evening deepened to darkness as he stood at the Haven; and as he looked at the grey sea he saw only a shadow on the waters that was soon lost in the West. There still he stood far into the night, hearing only the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of them sank deep into his heart."

There is no such feeling of sorrow and loss in Harry Potter. He lives happily ever after with his family, loved and honored in his jolly little world. He and his friends are sending their children to Hogwarts, and his scar has not pained him for nineteen years.

I was asked for my two cents worth on the phenomenon of Harry Potter, and perhaps this will be of some use to you. I'm sure most of the parishioners here are aware that the novels have been condemned by Fr. Amorth, the chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome, and by Fr. Ripperger. That should be enough for my parishioners. But what about those who are not parishioners? If you bring up that the novels could be a path to possession, and that they have in fact been the path, for most youth this carries no weight because "It's not going to happen to me." So is there anything you could say to them?

Well, perhaps. What is received is received according to the mode of the receiver. So there might not be much you could say that would be effective, especially if you drop the exorcism bomb on the thing.

Or ethically, you could point out that using a bad means (magic) to a good end (the defeat of an evil tyrant) is never a good path for anyone to take, much less a Catholic. And this happens all the time in the novels (though I must say here that I have not read but a little of them, still, Potter's use of magic is the stuff of which the novels are made). Suppose you say something like this, and someone says "Oh yeah? What about Tolkien?" The argument about the use of magic in literature would be well worth having. It's a good question.

But let's just focus on the Potter series as literature for a moment. J.K. Rowling – the lady who wrote the Potter novels – is now a multi-millionaire who was once a welfare mother. She tapped into an existing market: adolescent literature that relies on conventions. But when we examine the conventions in Harry Potter, we see that she has used them for the purpose

of popularity and profit, and not of Truth.

We can find Truth in literature; it has endured for thousands of years. The conventional Romance, by which I mean the Hero and his Journey, is so ancient as to be prehistoric. The story of Oedipus, for example, is mirrored to a certain extent in the legends of Arthur, and Rowling uses elements of these existing legends. Like other heroes, Harry Potter is living with a family not his own, and he does not realize the importance of who he really is. He must find out who he is – a painful process – before he can realize his true destiny.

Think of who Arthur Pendragon becomes. His destiny is to save his world at the price of his own life. And if your opponent brings up Tolkein, then remind them that Frodo Baggins must lose his home and all that is dear to him, and was ready to lose his life. Both Arthur and Frodo accept their destinies knowing that they will not be a part of the world they save.

Now look at Harry Potter. He saves his school and his friends. The Enemy (Voldemort) is not the enemy of the World. In comparison to Sauron and Mordred, Voldemort seems too limited to be a true Enemy...and thus, Harry Potter cannot be a true Hero.

The conventions of the Journey, the Friend, the Magician, the Weapon, and the Lady are all found to a certain degree in Harry Potter. But where are the mystery and the majesty? Where is the Sacrifice? I wept at the Sacrifice of Arthur and Frodo when I read those as a youngster. And asking an English teacher about this, she said she did not weep as she read Harry Potter, nor did her students. They were rather confused when asked what