



*A review of*  
**The Order of  
Harry Potter:  
Literary Skill in  
the Hogwarts Epic**  
**Jane Carroll**

**L**aud them or loathe them, you cannot deny the cultural impact of the Harry Potter books. Potter-mania has grown exponentially since the release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997 and while Rowling is done with the Harry Potter books, serious academic work on the series is just beginning. *The Order of Harry Potter: Literary Skill in the Hogwarts Epic* responds to the growing need to analyse and understand the series, to trace its influence and impact. Manlove has produced several surveys of fantasy literature and here provides a detailed survey of the Harry Potter series. Over seven chapters he tackles issues such as theology, morality and human nature as well as exploring the reasons why Rowling's series has proved so popular.

This book raises interesting questions. That the development and growth of the series can be measured through a maturing sense of humour and an increasingly complex vocabulary is innovative and Manlove selects excellent examples to show how Rowling's work moves from the childishly scatological (troll bogies) to sophisticated irony (Ron's sepulchral witticisms). He also draws attention to some of the flaws in the text which are often overlooked: why does academically brilliant Hermione never express an interest in going to university (92)? If the defining characteristic of Slytherin students is their ambition, why on earth are Crabbe and Goyle sent to that particular house (88)? Perhaps most interestingly, Manlove argues for the Harry Potter series to be considered as Scottish books and identifies Harry's dualism as characteristic of Scottish literature. I would have liked to see more discussion of how Rowling's work relates, not only to the Scottish greats such as Doyle, MacDonald and Stevenson, but also to contemporary Scottish children's literature. Nevertheless, it is an innovative way to look at Rowling's work and one which opens new avenues of criticism.

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*The Order of Harry Potter* is somewhat unclear about its target audience. The book is unlikely to appeal to a scholarly audience – there is no bibliography or index and limited engagement with current criticism – but seems equally unlikely to attract fans. Large sections of the text are devoted to summaries which, assuming the ideal reader is a major enthusiast, quickly become superfluous. Manlove also makes puzzling references to texts such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Kafka's *The Penal Colony* (91) but does not explain how or why these European modernist texts should help us to understand a Scottish children's book. Similarly, Manlove suggests that the name of Rowling's arch-villainess Bellatrix derives from the Latin *meretrix* meaning 'whore' (123). Surely *Bellator*, 'war-like', or at a push *Belladonna* – to suggest she is poisonous – are far more obvious sources. A die-hard fan is also likely to be irritated by some of the errors in the book. For instance, Manlove identifies the scene when Voldemort drinks unicorn blood as the 'red' stage in an alchemical reading of *The Philosopher's Stone* (35), despite the fact that Rowling describes unicorn blood as silvery. A young reader, newly finished with *The Deathly Hallows* and eager for the next Potter fix, is more likely to turn to one of the existing critical guides to Rowling's fictional world<sup>1</sup> than to this book.

*The Order of Harry Potter* gives the impression of being hurriedly written – sharper editing could have caught some of the abstruse references and whittled down the summaries to manageable lengths. Manlove raises some interesting questions but ultimately fails to identify exactly what kind of reader he is inviting into the conversation.

Author: Colin Manlove.  
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### References

- <sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Schaffer, *Exploring Harry Potter*, 2000; Philip Nel, *J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Novels: A Reader's Guide*, 2001; Lana A. Whited, *The Ivory Tower And Harry Potter: Perspectives On A Literary Phenomenon*, 2002.