

**Fantasies of Adolescence:
Networks of Subversion and Containment in the Novels of
J.K. Rowling**

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Fantasies of Adolescence: Networks of Subversion and Containment in the Novels of J. K. Rowling” being submitted by Vandana Saxena to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi for the award of the degree of “**Doctor of Philosophy**”, is a record of the authentic research work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance and in conformity with the rules and regulations of IIT.

She has fulfilled all the requirements for the submission of this thesis which has, in my opinion, reached the required standard fulfilling the requirements for the degree.

The material contained in this thesis has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any other degree.

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Abstract

The present research focuses on the dynamics of subversion and containment in Young Adult fantasy literature through a detailed study of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. The study explores the limits of the formulaic structure of fantasy literature and examines the impulse of subversion and resistance contained within the formula that resonates with the experience of adolescence. Further, the study explores fantastic narratives as an amalgam of various cultural models of growth, especially for young boys. The study analyzes how fantastic texts like Rowling's series problematize the notions of 'growth', 'adolescence', 'real' and 'normal' to highlight the incoherencies and gaps that mark the narratives of growth and development even as they follow the teleology on an overt level.

The texts chosen for the study – the seven books of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have been phenomenally popular for over a decade. The text offers a suitable case for Young Adult fantasy fiction. The formulaic structure and accompanying marketing blitzkrieg are integral strategies of remedial literature designed to lure reluctant adolescent readers. The seven book series itself follows the pattern of growth where, with the growth of the protagonist and the reader, each book also grows in complexity. The series also brings together a variety of popular genres of Young Adult fiction including the hero myth, fantasy, school story, adventure fiction and revenge drama. Through a detailed analysis of the series the study juxtaposes adolescent subversion with the attempts of cultural containment.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: the first chapter explores the hero monomyth that has been central to the narratives of fantasy. The tightly knit structural pattern of the hero myth portrays the process of ego formation and therefore has been a crucial narrative of growth. This chapter explores the possibilities of resistance contained within the structure of the hero myth.

The second chapter focuses on the figure of a schoolboy and his fantastic counterpart, the apprentice wizard. In the school story, a popular genre of Young Adult literature, the figure of a schoolboy and the space of a school emerge as means to project the cultural, racial and gender ideologies prevalent at the time. Concepts of citizenship and nationalism have been central to the genre. The chapter examines the extent to which magic and fantasy queers these concerns and the extent to which cultural ideologies retain their hold on the processes of growth.

The final chapter of the study examines the fantastic narrative of adolescent growth as it is patterned on the scriptural narrative of the saviour. The chapter examines the Christian subtext of Western fantasy and its textualization in contemporary fantasy. The chapter also focuses on the figure of a child saviour and the desire to be saved by a child.

The methodology used for this study is a close reading of the texts against the theoretical background of fantasy, adolescence, psychoanalytic and culture criticism and boyhood and gender studies.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract----- i -- ii

Introduction----- 1-52

Chapter 1

The Hero----- 53-106

Chapter 2

The Schoolboy----- 107-153

Chapter 3

The Saviour----- 154-203

Conclusion----- 204-224

Bibliography ----- 225-270

List of Abbreviations

References to the *Potter* books are abbreviated in the thesis as below; publication details of the books appear in the Bibliography

<i>PS</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>
<i>CoS</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>
<i>PoA</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>
<i>GoF</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>
<i>OotP</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>
<i>HBP</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i>
<i>DH</i>	–	<i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i>