FSP 101-09 – The Cultural Phenomenon of Harry Potter

Fall, 2007

Freshman Seminar Program

The College of New Jersey aims to educate students for citizenship in a modern democracy. Proceeding from the College’s mission and its “Guiding Principles for Academic Work,” liberal learning has three interdependent structural elements. The first speaks intellectual and scholarly growth characterized by students’ increasing ability to pose intellectually challenging questions, confront significant problems, and apply focused rigor in seeking promising resolutions. This element ensures that learners gain habits of mind necessary to study and understand human knowledge and how it applies to complex problems. The second element enables students to relate beliefs, values, and intellectual habits to their civic role in society. Such vision requires deep understandings of ways race, ethnicity, and gender have shaped local and global communities. The third element fosters familiarity with essential knowledge about broad sectors of human inquiry. Such familiarity enables students to be conversant in the broad range of intellectual discourse.

All first year TCNJ students take a content-based seminar introducing them to serious scholarship and the life of the mind. The First Seminar course (FSP) enables them to demonstrate fundamental dispositions and abilities to engage in academic inquiry. Sections are based on themes selected by each professor, designed to be intellectually stimulating and inclusive of students across all programs.

Course Number: FSP 10109
Instructor: Dr. Kathryne Speaker
Office: Forcina 312 – M-11:30-12:30; Th- 11:30-12:30
Office Phone: (609)771-2807 (voice mail)
Dept. Phone: (609)771-2308
Email: speaker@tcnj.edu, kms8@comcast.net

A. Purpose Statement

There is much debate about the literary merits of the Harry Potter series. This course investigates those debates and focuses on the novels as a cultural phenomenon. The books have become symbols in larger cultural battles about religious values, literacy and the role of children’s literature in shaping the next generation’s beliefs about gender, social class, race, imperialism, capitalism and spirituality. Students engage in discussions about complex cultural artifacts that affect ideology and about the ways we define literary merit within contemporary consumer contexts.
B. Course Description

Fantasy fiction gives the reader more than just the pleasure of escape through literature. It asks us to consider the challenge of growing in responsibility to self and society and offers the opportunity to discover how we could, should and would act in situations that threaten our values, our lives, and perhaps even our world. This class will examine the Harry Potter phenomenon by reading the novels themselves and excerpts from the works of Rowling's antecedents, influences and contemporaries. The works will be approached from a variety of critical perspectives and selected secondary sources will be consulted.

C. Prerequisites: None

D. Required Texts


Reserve Readings as indicated on the syllabus.

E. Course Requirements:

- Weekly preparation of all readings and assignments. Informed and knowledgeable participation in class discussions. Read everything, and come to class prepared to talk about what you have read. On the first day of class discussion for each assignment, you must have finished the reading and be ready to discuss it. This class will be based on discussion, so class participation is expected, and will count for 15% of your final grade.

- Reading knowledge of Beowulf, The Iliad, The Odyssey, King Arthur, Greek Mythology

- Two objective tests on the actual content of the Harry Potter series and on the reserve and supplemental readings that will deal with the literary influences, themes, mythology, censorship, race, ethnicity, religious controversy, etc. (15% each)

- Students will write two 3-5 page response reports that will demonstrate an understanding of the critical texts covered, synthesize the criticism with their interpretation of the literary texts, and/or outline a particular debate. Submit electronic and hard copy. These response reports may be the foundation of the longer seminar paper. Submit electronically. (15% each)
• Each student will participate in a group presentation based on research conducted on topics connecting the books themselves with the larger picture of what has been written about the series. These presentations will supplement the critical reading we do in class and should work to create a dialogue between the books and the criticism. Please refer to the presentation outline for further guidelines. (15%)

• Students will write a 10-12 page seminar paper due at the end of the semester, in which they apply literary and/or cultural theory to their own analysis of the Harry Potter books, products, and/or phenomenon. The presentations and/or response papers can serve as pre-writing for the seminar paper. The paper must be typed, error free and written in MLA style. It will be graded on the quality of the writing, the research conducted, the ability to apply theoretical concepts to a discussion of literature/culture, and on the student’s ability to use evidence to build a focused, arguable thesis. Please refer to grading rubric for detailed guidelines. Submit electronically. (20%)

Policies:

Please consult the section on “General Academic Policies and Procedures” in the undergraduate bulletin regarding standards of conduct, plagiarism, etc.

Missed quizzes, tests, scheduled presentations, or late assignment may NOT be made up without a doctor’s certificate or documented university approval (i.e. participation in intercollegiate athletic events, mandated conference attendance, or genuine family emergency). Tests are scheduled a the beginning of the semester. Please note the dates and write them in ink on your calendar.

All books that are assigned for reading are available o the college library, both on reserve and in the circulating collection. The novels are also available in the TCNJ bookstore for purchase.

Grade Distribution

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| Aug. 30th (Thurs.) | Introduction and Overview of Course Syllabus  
Syllabus and Course Requirements  
Initial Discussion – J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and Cultural Literacy | Harry Potter Series                    |
| Sept. 3rd (Mon.)    | Labor Day – No Class                                                            | Harry Potter Series                        |
| Sept. 6th (Thurs.)   | Fantasy Literature-History Structure of the Harry Potter novels                  | Harry Potter Series                        |
| Sept. 10th (Mon.)    | Film – Harry Potter Media Culture                                                | Harry Potter Series                        |
| Sept. 17th (Mon.)    | The Archetypal Hero  
| Sept. 24th (Mon.)    | Examples and Connections to Harry Potter  
<p>| Sept. 27th (Thurs.)   | Influences – Myth and Legend                                                     |                                               |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date (Day)</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Materials</th>
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| Oct. 1st  (Mon.) | Influences, continued ....  
| Oct. 4th  (Thurs.) | Greek Myth, Legend, and Symbol in *Harry Potter*  
The Iliad  
The Odyssey  
| Oct. 8th  (Mon.) | Myth and Legend continued  
**Presentation 3** |  |
| Oct. 11th (Thurs.) | Prejudice Introduction  
**Paper #1**  
| Oct. 15th  (Mon.) | Prejudice, continued | Submit electronic copy of Paper #1 |
| Oct. 18th  (Thurs.) | **Test One – Books 1 ~ 4** |  |
| Oct. 22nd  (Mon.) | Fall Break – No Class |  |
| Oct. 25th  (Thurs.) | Gender and the charge of Sexism  
**Presentation 4** |  |
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<td>Nov. 12th (Mon.)</td>
<td>Paper #2</td>
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<td>Peer Review</td>
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<td>Nov. 19th (Mon.)</td>
<td>Test Two Books 5 ~ 7</td>
<td>Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Religion, Fan Culture and Censorship</td>
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<td>Nov. 22nd (Thurs.)</td>
<td>Thanksgiving – No Class</td>
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<td>Nov. 26th (Mon.)</td>
<td>Choice – Moral Development</td>
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<td>Presentation 6</td>
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<td>Nov. 29th (Thurs.)</td>
<td>Thoughts, Conclusions.....</td>
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<td>Dec. 3rd (Mon.)</td>
<td>Paper Presentations –</td>
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<td>Dec. 6th (Thurs.)</td>
<td>Paper Presentations –</td>
<td>Submit electronic and hardcopy of final Research Paper</td>
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<td>Author’s Chair</td>
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The Cultural Phenomenon of Harry Potter  
FSP 101-09  
Presentation Descriptions

Each presentation should be approximately 45-50 minutes in length, utilize multimedia, include a handout outline of the material covered, and provoke class discussion and/or participation. Each group presentation is scheduled to coincide with that particular topic in class discussion. Please refer to the grading rubric for goals and grading criteria.

Presentation One:
The archetypal hero appears in all religions, mythologies and epics in the world. He is an expression of our personal and collective unconscious, as theorized by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. All archetypal heroes share certain characteristics. Review the characteristics of the “hero” as discussed in class and consider:

- Hero as Warrior – a near god-like hero faces physical challenges and external enemies
- Hero as Lover – a pure love motivates hero to complete his quest
- Hero as Scapegoat – hero suffers for the sake of others
- Transcendent Hero - the hero of tragedy whose fatal flaw brings about this downfall, but not without achieving some transforming realization or wisdom
- Romantic/Gothic Hero – hero with a dark side
- Proto-feminist Hero – female heroes

Give examples from other works of literature and media of each of these types of heroes and discuss Harry as a complicated example of archetypal hero based on these heroic archetypes. Use examples from the Harry Potter series as well examine where Harry falls in the spectrum of different archetypal heroes.

Presentation Two:
In each Harry Potter book readers can find comparisons/literary allusions to traditional fairytales, myths and legends. For instance, the dog Fluffy who guards the trapdoor at Hogwarts resembles Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the underworld in Greek Mythology. Harry could be compared to King Arthur – both are orphaned boys who are raised by foster parents, and each is unaware of his true background but slowly begins to understand it. Find and present the links, double meanings, or original stories connected to each of the following and feel free to add to the list: Hermione, Dumbledore, Rubeus Hagrid, The Malfoy Family- Lucious, Narcissa and Draco, the Veela, Voldemort, Wizengamot, Kelpie, Grindylows, Parvati, Parvati, Remus Lupin, Firenze, Sphinx, Paracelsus, Flamel, Minerva McGonagall, Ministry of Magic, Centaurs, Basilisk and Nagini.

Do not just define the name or term but give a background of how and why J.K. Rowling chose to use it in that particular way in addition to a discussion of the origin.
Presentation Three
An important message throughout the Harry Potter series has to do with respect for differences and those who are different.

"Every guest in this Hall," said Dumbledore, and his eyes lingered upon the Durmstrang students, "will be welcomed back here at any time, should they wish to come. I say to you all, once again, - in the light of Voldemort’s return, we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided. Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open." (GF 37)

In spite of Dumbledore’s wish for equality and unity, a caste system is well established in the books. Wizards and Witches are better than Muggles and Mudbloods; Giants are outcasts; and House-elves are considered to be sub-human. Discuss the various types of prejudice in the series including but not limited to:

- Prejudice against Muggles
- Prejudice against Mudbloods
- Prejudice against other races
- Ethnic or gender prejudice
- Individuals’ prejudice

Identify specific incidents in the books that speak to the various types of prejudice discussed. Draw connections to global issues prevalent in the news today and consider what J.K Rowling’s point might be in addressing such prejudice in the series.

Presentation Four
Discuss the use of gender and whether a feminist perspective exists in the Harry Potter series. Hermione, both as a name and a persona, has raised considerable interest among literary critics and the public in general. Reviewers, literary critics as well as other readers have pondered the question of gender representation in Harry Potter. Does sexism exist in the story? What is the significance of Hermione Granger’s name? J.K. Rowling has said ...

"I was writing the books for six months, before I stopped and thought: Well, he’s a boy. How did that happen? Why is he a boy? Why isn’t she Harriet? And number one, it was too late, Harry was too real by then for me to try and put him in a dress. That wasn’t going to work. And then there was Hermione – and Hermione is an indispensable part of the books and how the adventures happen. And she is so much me that I felt no guilt about keeping the hero who had walked into my head. You know, it was uncontrived. It wasn’t conscious. That’s how he happened. So I kept him that way."

Analyze Hermione’s character and the roles of the other female characters in the series. Be certain to differentiate between a caricature and a stereotype in your presentation.

Presentation Five
Religious debates have been central to the ongoing discussions about the Harry Potter series. Many conservative Christian parents have led vigorous crusades to have the books banned from schools and libraries. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family organization
opposes the novels on its website. Conservative Christian writer Richard Abanes assembles several arguments about the series – blasting its supposed ties to the occult and to new age philosophy, assailing Harry and his friends for the way they break rules and insisting that “the books clearly present far too much moral subjectivity and patently unbiblical actions to be of any ethical value.” On the other side of the argument many critics denounce the detractors of the Harry Potter series as wrong and contend that the stories are in fact narratives of robust faith and morality, entirely worthy of children’s time. As with any debate there are always two sides. Explore and articulate both sides of the debate with evidence from the novels. Is there more proof of one viewpoint or the other? Why or why not?

**Presentation Six**

Although it may seem that Harry is pre-ordained to be a great wizard, (as a result of merely surviving the attack by Voldemort he is labeled a great wizard) he also acts of his own free will and at times must make difficult choices. Find instances of change through choice in Harry’s character. For example, Harry becomes angriest when taunted about his parents’ death; however by Book Three, when he faces Peter, the person who led Voldemort to his parents, he stops Lupin and Black from killing Peter, saying, “I don’t reckon my Dad would’ve wanted them to become killers – just for you (PA376). In Book Four, when Harry could have claimed the Triwizard cup, he instead offers to share it with Cedric. Locate examples in each novel where the choices Harry makes display increasing maturity. What other characters in literature might also be faced with these types of moral choices? Some authors to explore (and who are among those authors who influenced J.K. Rowling) include but are not limited to: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Thomas Hughes, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, O Henry, Agatha Christie and Franklin W. Dixon.