

'Harry Potter' casts spell on entire generation



Anna Meier

The "Harry Potter" films have grossed just under \$2 billion at the movies, making it the most profitable international movie franchise ever. More than 400 million copies of the "Harry Potter" book series have been sold worldwide since the first book's release in 1999, also making it the most profitable series to date, according to a November article in the Boston Globe. The world has been relentlessly reading, watching and loving J.K. Rowling's creation for more than a decade, and at this point

in the game, it's almost impossible not to wonder why we care so very much about The Boy Who Lived.

I, for one, have been reading and rereading the books ever since I got my fourth-grade mitts on "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." Like some of you (hopefully), I spent more than a few hours of my childhood wondering if I really was a Muggle and hoping I would receive a Hogwarts admissions letter by owl. I did not live in a cupboard under the stairs but liked to pretend my life was as angst-ridden as Harry's so I could have an emotional outburst of magic one day.

I have only recently cooled my jets about HP, realizing this year that it was certainly not worth a tank of gas and a night of sleep to drive somewhere distant to see the midnight showing of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1." Yet there were girls in my class boasting about it the next day, recounting their trips to Moberly

or Columbia to see the movie 18 hours before the rest of America did.

In a number of my classes, someone always seems to find a way to work Harry Potter into a paper topic or class discussion. Not to mention, the local bars hosted a highly attended HP trivia night. It's almost ridiculous to be sitting in a bar listening to people aged 21 years and older shout out answers like, "It was Peter Pettigrew! I know it was!" or "Pygmy-puff!" But we eat it up nonetheless.

While I have loved the series and feel that each book is certainly a gem on my bookshelf, J. K. Rowling technically is not the best author of the 21st century. So the fact that the books are just extremely well-written probably is never going to come up as a reason for their success. This fact is actually sort of a credit to her, in a backhanded way, because she was able to create a phenomenon without being the most superb writer.

Many suggestions have been of-

fered about the reasoning behind this wizarding phenomenon. Some have said that the audience loves an orphan story, others say that we just can't turn away a classic story of good versus evil and still others posit that audiences like a rebel.

I think it's a combination of reasons that has drawn millions of people to this children's story. First, I think J. K. Rowling has created a well-rounded world with some of the same problems we face in our own small worlds. The wizarding realm has its own schools, political figures, newspaper, inequality issues and "terrorists" with a Dark Mark. As readers, we can tell you the names of the bars in Hogsmeade or the names of shops in Diagon Alley. It's a brilliantly woven world, discussed in a language that people like me, who are not quite up to reading Tolkien, can understand. Harry also runs the gamut of emotions throughout the books, toeing the line between outcast and celebrity.

One of the reasons for our love of

Harry quite possibly is beyond our control — the fact that media moguls have drawn on this well of success for years. We began reading the books when we were in grade school and waited for the release of the final book during high school. As college students, most of us are now anticipating the release of the final movie. We love suspense. Had all the books come out at once and then the movies rushed in right afterward, like "Twilight," we might have seen Potter as just a trend. Instead, he has become a lifelong pal who will be immensely difficult to part with.

In the end, there is no set answer as to why Harry Potter became one of the most enduring phenomena of our lifetimes, but I'm glad it did. If the series did one thing, it certainly made a lot of kids enjoy reading.

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AROUND THE QUAD

Why do you love Harry Potter?



"I've only read a few books, but I think our generation fell in love with the fantasy at a young age."

Abbey Meyer
freshman



"It is very nostalgic and a good story about friendship. I've seen all the movies and read all the books."

Lucas White
junior



"I've followed the story since 6th grade. I love all the adventure in them."

Rachel Satterlee
senior



"I do like Harry Potter. I think it is just a different story, and Rowling is a great author."

Michael Kosiek
senior

Society has forgotten dangers of gluttony



Molly Skyles

Eating competitions, holidays dedicated to food and restaurants serving portions bigger than your head — no wonder the U.S. has a problem with obesity. We need to learn bigger is not always better.

While bigger portions mean more bang for your buck, they also lead to obesity and numerous other health problems. I guess Americans forgot that gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins.

I recently went to a burger joint whose slogan was "Bigger IS Better." This disgusted me. With burger sizes ranging from five to 20 ounces, they take their slogan very seriously. If someone were to succeed in finishing the 20-ounce burger, their picture would be placed on the wall of fame and they would receive a t-shirt that acted as a ticket for a free drink. Great. Let's encourage people to stuff their faces. It's good to have to loosen your belt after every meal. And when you suffer from a heart attack at 35, hey, at least you will have something to be proud of.

Sixty percent of 300 surveyed chefs said they serve 12 ounce steaks or larger, according to a 2006 article in USA Today. The government's dietary guidelines recommend a serving of cooked meat be three ounces. And when it comes to pasta, most restaurants are serving one to two cups with a meal. A healthy serving is a half cup. This survey was conducted four years ago. I can't and don't want to imagine how the numbers have grown since then.

Just because a bigger portion is placed in front of you doesn't mean you are required to eat it all. However, we don't want to be wasteful. After all, there are children in third-world countries who would do anything for just a bite of your steak that is meant to feed a family of four. So what do we do? We eat it. We eat all of it. We eat until we can barely walk. We then go home and sleep because we are too full to do anything else. This is obesity, people — greasy,

gluttonous and deadly.

For most of the world, eating is something done to stay alive. In America, eating is a social event. Take Thanksgiving for example. I love turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and lots of pie. However, the day should not center completely around food. It's a day to give thanks, not a competition to see if Uncle Bob can out-eat Uncle Fred in a pie contest. Yeah, I'm thankful for food, but does that require me to get sick eating obscene amounts of it?

If restaurants and the holidays don't provide enough challenge for your gullet, there are the ever-popular and sickening eating competitions. A man in Las Vegas won \$3,000 for eating 43 meatballs in 10 minutes. In Texas, someone consumed 59 tamales in 12 minutes for a whopping \$3,500. And \$5,000 was awarded to someone in Florida who stuffed himself with more than five pounds of sour pickles. If that isn't enough to make you watch what you are stuffing your face with, these facts came from the MLE website, which stands for Major League Eating. There is an entire organization dedicated to helping people eat massive quantities of food. What has happened to America?

The media in this country aren't doing much to stop the rising obesity rate, either. The Travel Channel's "Man v. Food" tells people it's cool to consume your weight in food, and host Adam Richman even tells you where to go for the largest possible entrées. Richman recently consumed five pounds of nachos in Ann Arbor, Mich., and an 11 pound pizza in Atlanta. Why?

I simply don't see the appeal of eating this much. It can't do you much good. You can't possibly feel good afterward, either. I guess gluttony is the new hot fashion.

The fad diets tell you to eat more fruits and vegetables or not to drink soda, but healthy eating should simply be a matter of not overeating. Consuming a modestly-sized portion is a good start. Yeah, fast food isn't good for you, but I'd be a hypocrite to say you should stop eating it. Take baby steps, and remove words like supersize, grande and extra large from your ordering vocabulary.

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Flashy political speech dulls minds



Connor Riley

In this current period of American political disunion, watch any cable news show or read any political column and you will come across heavily emphasized words or phrases known as buzzwords. During the 2008 Presidential Election and in his past State of the Union Addresses, Barack Obama repeatedly used words like economy, financial meltdown and global warming. After the 9/11 attacks and until the end of his presidency, George W. Bush used the word freedom to the point that it lost all meaning and significance.

Lately, it seems like the phrase I hear most often from candidates and pundits is "Our Founding Fathers would..." followed by some logical fallacy, implying that the creators of this country would support their stance. This phrase is particularly frustrating because of the safety politicians seek by using it. Those who use this phrase before asserting their point of view expect immediate approval of whatever swill spews from their mouths.

The simple fact is that the Founding Fathers, intelligent as they were, would be as lost as children if you were suddenly to

drop them into today's political landscape. Everything would be unrecognizable. The size of the Federal and State governments, the role of the media in government, the size of the nation and the number and complexity of our domestic and foreign problems likely would leave Thomas Jefferson or James Madison dumbfounded.

The men who founded the nation aren't exactly here to dispute those who invoke their names, are they? Imagine if Jefferson's ghost were to show up every time a group of Tea Partiers used his name to back up their arguments. They would probably call him a socialist and start using Hamilton's name instead. Or visualize, if you can, Ben Franklin doing an interview with Keith Olbermann or Bill O'Reilly and calling them morons.

Furthermore, saying "the Founding Fathers" groups all of these men together, implying that they agreed on everything and would therefore all agree that the candidate referring to them is correct. Nothing could be further from the truth. These men all held very different views, and quite a few made some questionable political and moral decisions during their careers. Consider, for example, that four of the first five presidents owned slaves. It's not how we like to think of our national heroes, is it? They were great political thinkers, but they still were human and not infallible.

The popular use of "the Founding Fathers" as a crutch during a debate is a personal pet peeve, but I criticize the practice with the

purpose of drawing attention to the use of popular phrases and words in general. People who use these words intend to highlight problems or potential threats without presenting a plan to deal with them. It sounds much more impressive to say the word "meltdown" and present a vague and optimistic solution than to say, "The economy kind of sucks right now... and... uh... we should create jobs and stuff."

By frequently using loaded words, politicians and pundits exploit one of our most basic modes of learning: repetition. Repetition fosters mimicking, causing people to replicate whatever they might hear without fully understanding. When Glenn Beck calls Obama a socialist three times per broadcast, his regular listeners will instinctively associate Barack Obama with socialism. It's very simple, and judging by the deep political rift in our country, it works quite effectively.

To combat these tactics, citizens need to actually educate themselves by reading about the facts behind issues, not just the opinions of an exclusive group of millionaires who have little in common with the people they claim to represent. People need to stop falling for exhausted rhetoric and start demanding real discussion because we need to concentrate on reality, not more flashy words.

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Cinema has become predictable and unoriginal



Nicola Fish

Two weeks ago, Disney released "Tangled," the latest addition to its Disney-princess line of movies. The merchandising that accompanied this release suggests it is expected to take its place with the likes of "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty" as one of the classic Disney movies.

This didn't surprise me or anyone, really. We are becoming used to the predictability of cinema. I doubt anyone will be shocked to see the latest "Twilight" movie greeted with the same level of hysteria the rest of the franchise

has experienced. I assume, too, that people will flock to see "The Hangover 2," line up for the final installment of Harry Potter and rush to see "Cars 2."

Call me cynical, but isn't cinema becoming a bit too obvious? It seems like lately every film leaves itself room to make a sequel or just replicates a previous movie. I'm not going to lie and say I didn't enjoy the movies I mentioned at the beginning, but I did experience more than a little bit of déjà vu while watching them. There's the comic relief character, the hero, the romantic interest, the "quirky" character and the perilous situations where you never really fear for the characters.

Looking beyond the sequels and series movies, new movie offerings are slim. Listing the storylines of recent movies, you become even more aware of the repetition. The stories being told at the movies this weekend include a young girl moving to Los Angeles to achieve

her dream of being a singer, a guy trying to save the world from destruction and a revenge movie — not exactly original. Although the movie industry has seen an increase in profits, attendance is at an all time low, according to BBC News. People are heading to the cinema to forget their troubles and disengage with reality. While their lives can be unpredictable, seeing a predictable storyline makes the audience feel comfortable.

True, the purpose of movies is to separate us from reality, but they're also supposed to make us think. Originally, performances of theatre — and later movies — were created to make us think. They were supposed to show the wrongs of society, how we can improve as people and change the way we think and view things. There still are movies that try to do this, of course. Recent examples include "The Hurt Locker," which showed the harsh realities of war, "Slumdog Millionaire,"

which exposed the difficulties of living in poverty and based on real-life tales like "Milk" and "The Blind Side." Using Oscar winners as examples of high-quality movies is an easy way out, though. My point is not that movies have to be as serious as these. I just want them to be something new.

Movies should only be released if they are an improvement or are completely different than what has come before. Recent movies that have experienced acclaim for this reason are movies like "Inception" and "Kickass," which explored new ideas and didn't follow the standard expectations of their genre. Even sequels can achieve this. "Toy Story 3" met and surpassed many fans' expectations because it didn't just repeat the same storyline. Something that "Shrek 3" should have taken note of because, despite its high box office takings, it was universally panned. However, the fact that "Shrek 3" made money proves the point that

people will see something just because they've seen something similar before. It is up to the moviemakers not to exploit this point, as it leads to disappointment and unmemorable movies. The problem with making a repetitive movie is that no one remembers it. The reason why "Inception" experienced success was because people kept talking about it, which caused more people to go see it.

So next time you head to the movies, think about what you're choosing. By going to see the latest predictable romantic comedy, you're sending the message that it's okay for movies to recycle storylines. As long as there's an audience, there's no need to do anything differently.

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