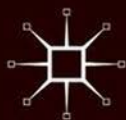


THE POLITICS OF
HARRY
POTTER

BETHANY BARRATT



THE POLITICS OF HARRY POTTER

Also by Bethany Barratt

Human Rights and Foreign Aid: For Love or Money?

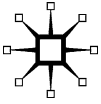
International Public Opinion on War: Evidence from the Iraq War and Beyond

Edited with Richard Sobel and Peter Furia

THE POLITICS OF HARRY POTTER

Bethany Barratt

palgrave
macmillan



THE POLITICS OF HARRY POTTER

Copyright © Bethany Barratt 2012.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2012 978-0-230-60851-1

All rights reserved.

First published in 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above
companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-0-230-60899-3 ISBN 978-1-137-01654-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137016546

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Barratt, Bethany.

The politics of Harry Potter / Bethany Barratt.
pages cm

1. Rowling, J. K.—Political and social views. 2. Politics in literature.
3. Political science. I. Title.

PR6068.O93Z5265 2012

823'.914—dc23

2012012546

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: October 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Transferred to Digital Printing in 2013

*For JKR and everyone who has arrived
at Hogwarts and felt they were home*

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
Todd Landman	
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
1 Introduction: Politics in the World of Harry Potter	1
2 “By Order of the Hogwarts High Inquisitor”: Bases of Authority	9
3 Azkaban: Discipline, Punishment, and Human Rights	27
4 Purebloods and Mudbloods: Race, Species, and Power	59
5 The DA (Dumbledore’s Army): Resistance from Below	85
6 Death Eaters and Dark Wizards: Terror and Counterterror	95
7 The Order of the Phoenix: Intelligence, Counterintelligence, and Secret Agencies	117
8 The Only One He Ever Feared: The Nature of War	133
9 Grunnings and Galleons: Materialism in the Wizarding and Muggle Worlds	147
10 Conclusion: Harry Potter in the Political World	157
<i>Notes</i>	163
<i>Bibliography</i>	167
<i>Index</i>	175

FOREWORD

Todd Landman

WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!

As a political scientist, magician, and father of three children who have grown up with Harry Potter, I welcome this book as a great addition to the academic literature on politics. I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Bethany for many years as we have both been heavily involved in the Human Rights Section of the American Political Science Association. Bethany and I discussed the book at these meetings, and I am pleased to see that it is finished. I applaud Bethany for both its boldness and its creativity.

As a university professor, I am always looking for ways to engage with my students. The typical cohort entering first year university courses today was born in 1995, six years after the end of the Cold War! These young people do not know much about Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, the Vietnam War, or even 12" vinyl records for that matter. But they do know about Harry Potter. Bethany has thus created a wonderful tool to grip the attention of "The Millennials" and their successors in a way that has not been done before.

Using magic as a metaphor, Bethany sees the parallel world of Harry Potter, and all that it contains, as a fantastic resource for students and curious readers to think more deeply about the world of politics. Ironically, through the mystical world of Harry Potter, Bethany demystifies politics and focuses on classic questions such as power, authority, punishment, fear of the "other," social mobilization, war, reasons of state, and the environment, among many others. Young readers will immediately identify with the themes that Bethany raises across the book's ten chapters, and they will gain a strong understanding of key concepts, theories, conflicts, and debates needed to comprehend the complex world of politics.

Hogwarts is a place dedicated to the study of magic with its own curriculum, faculty, and different subjects, all couched in the "public school" genre of literature borne of the British educational system:

uniforms, house emblems, ties, blazers, scarves, as well as a variant of cricket and football, which Rowling quaintly calls “quidditch.” The Potter world itself is a complete vision that includes a class system, the politics of identity, love and hate, good and evil, sin and redemption, and rivalry and power struggles. The fantasy creatures are archetypes relevant to the modern condition, and the interrelationships developed through the novels have direct bearing on the lives and political imagination of young people today.

The history of magic is no stranger to politics. Rowling’s fictional world is very much based on the history of the “scholar magicians,” such as Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, John Dee, Robert Fludd, and Sir Isaac Newton (described by John Maynard Keynes as the “last sorcerer” for his interest in alchemy at the end of his career). These and other scholar magicians navigated a dangerous path between science, religion, and politics from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries as they sought to make sense of the complexity of the universe through the application of math, logic, and mystical correspondences. The rise of capitalism and modernity, according to Max Weber, was a process of rationalization, secularization, and disenchantment. Potter revives the notion of enchantment and brings with it a set of parables and allegories that, Bethany shows, have contemporary political importance.

Beyond the male magi that serve as Rowling’s inspiration, history is replete with the politics of hate with respect to the prolonged persecution of women accused of being engaged in witchcraft. Across Europe the state engaged in direct persecution of women, torture for confessions, and capital punishment for those found guilty. Of course, most of the accused ended up being found guilty. I have a particular connection to this period as one of the most famous characters from this era, Matthew “The Witchfinder General” Hopkins, comes from Manningtree, a town just two miles from my village of East Bergholt in East Anglia. I was so inspired by this history that a segment of my magic stage show features the witch trials to raise awareness of the social injustice and violence committed against women during this period.

Politically, the height of the witch craze coincided with the English Civil War and the genesis of Thomas Hobbes’s monumental tome *The Leviathan*. Alongside the perennial questions about rationality, realism, and social contract theory raised in Hobbes, the theme of the “witch hunt” has also remained a popular topic in politics and literature. One need only think of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, an insightful parable for McCarthyism and the extreme suspicion cast on

many Americans as part of the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1950s. In *The Politics of Harry Potter*, Bethany shows us how Rowling explores similar themes and then shows us the connection between the persecution found in Potter and the “witch hunts” of the post-9/11 “War on Terror,” which have undermined fundamental rights commitments throughout the world and created rifts between and among many different ethnic and religious groups.

The book’s use of magic as metaphor also raises deeper questions about science, incremental gains in knowledge, and current debates surrounding the understanding of the mind. For example, Enlightenment thinking and the Cartesian dualism that lies at its heart are now being reconsidered through advances in quantum physics, which suggest that mind and body may not be as separate as Descartes first articulated through his well-known phrase “cogito ergo sum” (“I think therefore I am”). Magicians have long believed in the “nonduality” of mind and body, a theme that recurs throughout the Potter stories. It may be that science is catching up with this basic insight, and ongoing research in this area will have additional political implications for generations to come.

The philosophy of science and, more importantly, for this book, the philosophy of social science has been wracked with debates concerning the nature of knowledge, what is to be known, and how it is to be known. Navigating paths to “knowing the world” has had significant implications for the politics of political science itself. The discipline has experienced so-called “paradigm wars” between different approaches to studying politics and the different knowledge claims that they make about the political world. The curriculum at Hogwarts has similar tensions as the students take a wide range of courses, such as herbology, defense against the dark arts, spells and potions, transfigurations, etc. Students of politics are also presented with an equally wide array of subjects, such as political theory, international relations, comparative politics, American politics, and political analysis and statistics. Departments of political science are often rife with conflict between the professors associated with these different courses and the assumptions upon which their scholarly work is based. Gabriel Almond argued that political scientists were sitting at “separate tables,” and I wonder as I read Bethany’s book, who are the scholars sitting at the tables for Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin?

Beyond the paradigm wars, magic, science, and political science often concern themselves with that which is “unseen” or “unknown.” For example, in magic, the wizard changes things in the physical

world through incantations and willful concentration in the metaphysical world. In science, Newton's theory of gravity is based not on the observation of gravity itself, but of its effects. In political science, Steven Lukes argues that power can be observed (e.g., interpersonal violence, state repression, or interstate warfare) or unobserved (e.g., false consciousness of workers and the hidden "real" interests of those excluded). The notion of unseen forces found in Harry Potter is thus not some farfetched fictional construction or magical fantasy, but an idea that is very much at the heart of science, and more importantly, political science.

There is thus much to savor in this book, as Bethany explores the multiple allusions to key political themes found throughout the "great work" that is Harry Potter. Through her seven novels, Rowling has created an alternative world, a long and drawn-out morality play, and a valuable vehicle for framing and addressing perennial political questions. Like Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood (as well as C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Philip Pullman), J. K. Rowling uses her fictional world to address life's enduring questions with stark images, strong contrasts, dark themes, and powerful character development. It is clear from the passionate prose and thorough analysis that Bethany is both a huge fan and an adept interpreter of Rowling, as she deftly guides us through the political implications of the novels. She is also a seasoned educationalist, committed to finding a special path into the minds of young people so that they appreciate and grasp the importance of politics. The future of the world is in their hands, and it is our duty as educators to provide them with the tools to make sense of that world.

Bethany's special path for them, and for you, begins with Platform 9³/₄.

TODD LANDMAN
Professor of Government,
Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts,
and Associate of the Inner Magic Circle
with Silver Star

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would have been impossible without the good humor and support of a host of people, all of whom I have been very lucky to have in my court.

First, and foremost, to Jo Rowling, for the gift of all that is the magical world.*

Infinite gratitude to Anthony Wahl, my commissioning editor at Palgrave, for seeing the possibilities in this project way back in 2007 when I first proposed it. Boundless gratitude also goes to him, Robyn Curtis, and Matthew Kopel for not giving up on it (or me) when its preparation took longer than expected. Other wonderful Palgrave staff, Richard Bellis and Desiree Brown, have been kind, patient, and generous in shepherding it through its final phases, as has Deepa John of Newgen.

I am also grateful for the insightful, thorough, and good humored comments of two anonymous reviewers who read over my initial proposal to Palgrave. They gave me much to think about, and because life had other plans for me than writing this book, I had over four years to think about it. Thus, they influenced the way the work evolved as I eagerly completed my journey with Harry “to the very end,” and as the release of the final films kept my imagination stoked and the cauldron-fire burning.

Three other colleagues kept Harry in my mind even when he wasn’t in my writing schedule. Todd Landman, Professor of Government and Director of the Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution at the University of Essex, is truly a magician in every sense of the word. He has all the intellect, skill, and accomplishment of a top-flight human rights researcher and methodologist who works on the most serious of issues without taking himself too seriously. Lynn Weiner, my dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at Roosevelt University, has asked me about this project at least once a month for three years, with an infectious enthusiasm that has, magically, never flagged. My colleague Gina Buccola is also my friend, confidant, surrogate sister, and sidekick in most of my more ridiculous adventures, including those in

the magical world. Would I have stood outside the largest bookstore in Europe on the night *Deathly Hallows* was released without her? Maybe. But it would have been lots less fun. The fact that this project is every bit as much fun now as it was when I first conceived of it is due in no small part to my Potterphile friends like Therese Boling and Candy Peterson.

I've also benefitted from the tireless and enthusiastic work of two wonderful research assistants, Katy Komarchuk and Nela Taskovska, who were supported, respectively, the Roosevelt University Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program and the Joseph Loundy Human Rights Project.

Joseph Loundy is my partner in that project, and, while this book is only partially related to human rights, my work with Joe on undergraduate human rights education over the last four years has been one of the most enriching and engaging things I do, and has helped keep me grounded in the lessons in justice that Rowling offers us.

Finally, thanks and love to my partner, Lou.

* All pages referring to the Potter series mentioned in the book are taken from hardbound US (Scholastic) editions.

CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION: POLITICS IN THE WORLD OF HARRY POTTER

Finding a place where you finally belong—that is what it was for many of us, entering the wizarding world, as much as it must have been for Harry. Here was a place where not only were the freaks accepted, but prized for the very things that made them outcasts from Muggle life. J. K. Rowling gave us a world in which all the rules that made Muggle life difficult seemed turned on their head. As A.O. Scott put it, “You grow up in a hostile world governed by codes and norms that seem nonsensical to you, and you discover at a certain age that there are people like you—what’s more there’s a whole subculture with its own codes and norms right alongside . . . yet strangely invisible to it” (cited in Nel 63).

But like Harry, we soon found that things were not so simple. The wizarding world is every bit as complicated as the Muggle world, and every bit as dangerous. Power still matters, and there is, just as in our world, a continual conflict between those who most value power and those who most value justice. While the ethnic and racial conflicts that plague so many Muggle polities do not seem to exist, they are replaced by distinctions equally arbitrary and equally capable of driving people to utmost enmity. The existence of nonhuman magical creatures complicates these categories, and the ideas of civil and human rights still further. When humans or other magical creatures are disempowered in Harry’s world, as in ours, they may have to take highly unconventional measures to protect the safety and well-being of themselves and those they love. And these conflicts can, as in our world, all too easily lead to war—war that can be fought economically, politically, militarily, and magically. So, in fact, those of us who have

grown up with Harry have grown up in a magical world that is no less political than our own.

There's an irony, then, that so many people who first met Harry as children, and grew up beside him, are so apathetic about the political aspects of the Muggle world. In the United States, people aged 18–35 are the ones least likely to vote and least likely to express an interest in politics—even though they are the ones who are likely to live the longest with the consequences of any political decision! Moreover, those decisions are still the ones that are most likely to affect their present and future worlds.

To those of us lucky enough to make a life studying politics, such apathy is completely counterintuitive. When we ask young people to explain their apathy, the reason given more often than any other is that they do not feel they understand much about politics, and, moreover, that political issues are so complicated they feel they are unlikely to be *able* to understand it.

But if you're someone who has grown up with Harry, you understand all too well the hateful ideology that the Malfoys and Umbridge live by, you know by heart Hermione's arguments about the treatment of house-elves, and you know the key alliances that develop as events unfold toward the final standoff. In fact, you understand dozens of the most important themes in political science and history—you might just not know it!

I wrote this book because not only have I loved growing up with Harry (ok, I grew up a little late!), but also because I thought Potterphiles would be excellent partners in a conversation about the ways the political world is just as exciting—and also just as comprehensible—as Harry's is. It's just that many of us who make our living studying politics have an uncanny knack for making it seem highly complicated—and even more boring. Nothing could be farther from the truth! I hope that viewing politics from the other side of the Leaky Cauldron will convince you of that as well.

The other conviction I hope you'll take away is one that is central to Jo Rowling's perspective, even if she usually gets Dumbledore to say it. It is this: no matter how large or how complicated a problem seems, an individual's choices can matter. As Dumbledore puts it: "*It is not what we are born, but the choices we make that define us.*" Rowling herself has said this statement is one of the most important in the books. It's only with this attitude that we will be able to make politics a tool to save, rather than destroy, the Muggle world.

A few further words about what this book is and is not. First, I'm a politics geek, not a literary analyst, and I do not pretend to have

the skill set to analyze her works in the same way a literary analyst would. What can a political scientist bring to the study of a literary phenomenon? Daniel Nexon and Iver Neuman, in the introduction to *Harry Potter and International Relations*, answer this way: “Comparative expertise in political processes: how world politics and international political economy function, how actors legitimate foreign and economic policy, what constraints and opportunities cultural resources create for political action, the dynamics of transnational national movements, and so on” (Nexon and Neumann 9). For me, the “and so on” includes primarily the study of international human rights protection and promotion (*Human Rights and Foreign Aid: For Love or Money?*, 2007, *Human Rights Since 9/11: A Sourcebook*, forthcoming), with a smattering of public opinion (*Public Opinion and International Intervention: Lessons from the Iraq War*, 2012) and comparative history.

Second, while we certainly know something about Rowling’s political sympathies from her public statements, charitable work, and past employment with Amnesty International, I don’t assume in most cases that she’s *intentionally* making an argument for a particular party or policy.

What I do seek to do is give the interested reader, who has seen how political issues have affected the battle in the magical world, an appreciation of how much they have (perhaps unconsciously) learned about not only current political issues, but also major themes in political philosophy, law, and history. Most importantly, if you have “stuck with Harry until the very end,” you have also incorporated some valuable lessons that, if acted upon by all of Rowling’s readers, could make the world a far, far better place.

When I began this project in the summer of 2007, there were already several works that gave serious consideration to social and political issues in Rowling’s work, such as Neuman and Nexon’s *Harry Potter and International Relations* (highly recommended, with several good case studies of the way that Harry’s reception indicates important differences across political cultures), and several of the essays collected in the first editions of Giselle Anatol’s *Reading Harry Potter* and Elizabeth Heilman’s *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*. Since the release of *Hallows*, several other works have also considered political themes in Rowling’s work, most notably the second editions of Anatol’s and Heilman’s collections, Nancy Reagin’s *Harry Potter and History*, Thomas and Snyder’s *The Law and Harry Potter*, and, perhaps most directly, Dedria Bryfonski’s collection *Political Issues in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series*, which provides short, snappy synopses of several political themes as they appear in the works. And of

course, several more general works include political discussions as part of their scope. These include Andrew Blake's *The Irresistable Rise of Harry Potter*, Philip Nel's *JK Rowling's Harry Potter Novels*, and Travis Prinzi's *Harry Potter and Imagination*.

I specifically exclude an extensive discussion of one major topic from my analyses: that of gender. Gender roles and relations are a crucial aspect of wizarding society, and Rowling's treatment of them has been heavily debated and skilfully treated by many insightful scholars such as Ruthann Mayes-Elma and Casey Cothran. While certainly gender is often seen in the Muggle world as the appropriate terrain of legislation, and therefore appropriate for inclusion in this book, I believed that a chapter on gender relations was likely to range far beyond what's conventionally understood to be political, and was likely to necessitate going beyond the planned extent of this book. Since such thoughtful consideration has been given to gender issues by other authors, I do not include a separate chapter on gender politics.

Over the last several years, when I've described this project to friends in other academic fields, one of the most common responses I've gotten has been this: "Is there a politics of Harry Potter?" As the series has unfolded, that question has become rarer, but it is still natural to question Rowling's intentionality.

Rowling has, in fact, characterized the books as "a prolonged argument for tolerance, a prolonged plea for an end to bigotry . . . and I think it's a very healthy message to pass on to younger people that you should question authority and you should not assume that the establishment or the press tells you all of the truth" (cited in Granger 2009: 159). That's a lot to bite off, but I think many of us, if we think about it, have definitely taken just those lessons away from our time with Harry. Keith Olbermann claims Rowling told him "The parallels between the Ministry of Magic and its false sense of omniscience and the conduct of the American and British governments were no inferences. She had put them there" (Granger 2009: 154). If she did, it would certainly be consistent with her assertion that the books "preach[ed] against throughout . . . bigotry, violence, struggles for power, no matter what." And she has also said that she has written for "obsessives" like so many of us in the academy, who would worry every nugget for the full richness of its meaning (Granger 2009:150).

In fact, Wolusky argues that the "most prominent allegory in Harry Potter, noted by Rowling and many others, is a political one" (Wolusky 34). Carey goes on to say that At the heart of the books . . . is one message in particular: the promotion of political participation for young people (Carey in Anatol 2009: 159). In fact Rowling nods to

political satire throughout—many have speculated that Crookshanks was named for George Cruikshanks, a well-known Victorian political satirist. And *Time* magazine has called the books “a 4100-page treatise on tolerance” (Granger 2009:150).

The rest of the book proceeds as follows.

Chapter 2, “By Order of the Hogwarts High Inquisitor: Bases of Authority,” examines the bases of authority in Harry’s world and ours. The oldest question in political theory is the basis of authority. In the wizarding world, a variety of bases of authority are set against each other. Jo Rowling asks readers to consider the relative legitimacy of each, inviting us to consider the most basic rationale for the establishment of government. The series, like Muggle history, locates sovereignty and legitimacy variously in

1. sheer power,
2. wealth,
3. heredity,
4. wisdom,
5. meritocracy, and
6. the will of the people.

We also explore the importance of the control of information (and the role of the media more specifically) in both reflecting and manipulating public opinion (as decried, for instance, by Noam Chomsky [1988]), as demonstrated by the effectiveness of the newspapers the *Daily Prophet* and the *Quibbler* in spreading information and disinformation. We consider whether and to what extent the media can act as an independent voice, and I consider the conditions under which it is most likely to be used as a tool by those who can control it. We also explore the impact of fear on the relationship between government and governed.

Chapter 3, “Azkaban: Discipline, Punishment and Human Rights,” unpacks the processes of justice and punishment in the *Potter* series through an examination of the legal processes of the wizarding world, primarily from the perspective of universal human rights. We consider the role of torture and interrogation, the importance of due process, the presumption of innocence, the uses of evidence, the unequal status of some beings before the law, and the rules of sentencing. We then explore Rowling’s portrayal of slavery through the treatment of house-elves, as well as the nature of Hermione’s human rights activism through the Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare. Parallels in the Muggle world include the suspension of habeas corpus and free

speech during wartime in the United States and Britain, the USA-Patriot Act, the evolution of due process in Western political thought (including through US Supreme Court decisions such as *Gideon v. Palko*), and the evolving consensus about the universal nature of human rights and the attendant universal jurisdiction of international law.

Chapter 4, “Purebloods and Mudbloods: Race, Species, and Power,” lays bare the central role of racial and genetic politics in the world of Harry Potter. I suggest a typology of wizard attitudes toward Muggles and Muggle-born, and document forms of discrimination by “pure blood” wizards against Muggles and Muggle-born. The uses and abuses of difference and ways that we socially create the “Other” are explored. We then examine the bases, nature and meaning of the “species-ism” that pervades wizarding attitudes and actions, as well as the state’s treatment of other kinds of magical creatures, including giants, werewolves, house-elves, merpeople, and centaurs. Examining these aspects of Harry’s world and comparing them to ours provide new ways of understanding concepts such as tolerance, equality, racial violence, pseudoscientific race theory, and civil rights. Parallels in the Muggle world include Nazism, the Christian Identity Movement, the civil rights movement, and “orientalist” arguments in Western political discourse.

We then consider how those most socially and politically disempowered in society can reclaim rights and agency from an illegitimate government. Chapter 5, “The DA (Dumbledore’s Army): Resistance from Below,” reveals the role of resistance and mobilization among disempowered groups in society from the perspectives of social movement theory and collective action scholarship, to determine what the DA’s experiences teach us about collective action, and vice versa. We explore how knowledge suppression can be used as a tool of political repression, examine the recruitment strategies of the DA and the punishments for defection, discuss the role of mobilization in creating community, and consider the survival strategies of dissident groups, including Muggle precursors like the American civil rights movement, the Irish Republican Army, and the Black Panthers.

When political goals are pursued through violent means meant to influence a wider audience, the state faces difficult choices between order and liberty. Chapter 6, “Death eaters and Dark Wizards: Terror and Counterterror,” examines aspects of Harry’s world that are emblematic of what has been called the “garrison state.” A garrison state is one in which continuous and ill-defined external threats have