**Modern English Literature**

**Introduction**

The interest, raised recently towards English language, the development of international relations on different levels has reasoned the desire to learn as much as possible about the country where this language originated as well as about its culture.

The literature is that magic key that opens the door of cognition of many sphere of human knowledge. It helps us to learn some interesting facts about t history, to know more about people's life in other countries. Sometimes, while reading a book, we can analyse actions of its' characters and it helps us to draw some certain conclusion. That’s why I find studying foreign literature is not only interesting, but also very useful.

**Literature of the 20th Century**

**The Twenties**

The period between 1917 and 1930 was a time when the crisis of the bourgeois world reached its highest point and revolutions took place in several countries: in Russia, in Germany and in Hungary.

The writers of this period tried to show how a new society might be built up. But many bourgeois writers who were opposed to revolutions saw nothing but chaos and anarchy before them. They explained this crisis as a failure of civilisation.

A symbolic method of writing had already started early in the 20th century. It was in the twenties, that there appeared writers who refused to acknowledge reality as such. They thought reality to be superficial – it was only a world of appearances. The cause of everything that happened,– that is what led to events – was the irrational, the unconscious and the mystical in man. These writers called the inner psychological process "the stream of consciousness" and based a new literary technique upon it.

The most important to use this new literary technique was James Joyce (1882-1941). He influenced many writers on both sides of Atlantic.

James Joyce, a native of Ireland, spent nearly all his life in voluntary exile. He could not live in his own country for it was enslaved by England. This fact may partly explain his pessimistic view on life, which is reflected in his work.

The portrayal of the steam of consciousness as a literary technique is particularly evident in his major novel Ulysses (1922). The task he set before himself was to present a day in ordinary life, as a miniature picture of the whole of human history.

Among the writers of short stories who used the realistic method were Katherine Mansfield and Somerset Maugham. Though the works of these writers differ very much in their artistic approach, their authors had one feature in common. To them the stability of the existing social and political order seemed unquestionable.

**The Thirties**

The second period in the development of English literature of the 20th century was the decade between 1930 and World War II.

The world economic crisis spread over the whole capitalist world in the beginning of the thirties. The Hunger March of the employed in 1933 was the most memorable event in Britain. The employed marched from Glasgow to London holding meetings in every town they passed.

In Germany Hitler came to power in 1933.

In 1936 the fascist mutiny of general Franco led to the Civil War in Spain. The struggle of the Spain people was supported by the democratic and anti-fascist forces all over the world. An International Brigade was formed, which fought side by side with the Spanish People's Army against the common enemy – fascism.

Many British intellectuals and workers joined the ranks of the International Brigade. Every one of them clearly realised that the struggle against fascism in Spain was at the same time a struggle for the freedom of their own country.

The Second World War broke out in 1939.

A new generation of realist writers, among them Richard Aldington, J.B. Priestley, A.J. Cronin and others appear on the literary scene.

An important event in the literary life of the thirties was the formation of a group of Marxist writers, poets and critics. Their leader was Ralph Fox (1900-1937). He came from a bourgeois family, was educated in Oxford University, but later broke away from his class. His ideas were formed by the Great October Socialist Revolution. In 1925 he joined the Communist Party. Being a journalist, historian and literary critic, Ralph Fox devoted all his activity to spreading Marxism and fighting the enemies of the British working class. When the Civil War in Spain broke out, Ralph Fox was one of the first to join the International Brigade. He was killed in action in January 1937.

Ralph Fox's main work is his book The novel and the people, published posthumously in 1937. The aim of the author was to show the decline of bourgeois art, and the novel in particular, together with the decline of the bourgeois in general. At the same time Ralph Fox sought to point out the way literature should develop in the future.

Ralph Fox considers that the novel reached its highest point in England in the 18th century. This was a time when the bourgeoisie was a progressive class, therefore Fox concludes that the optimistic view of the world expressed in the novels by Fielding is the best manifestation of the epic quality of the novel. Man in the novels of the Enlightenment is treated as a person who acts, who faces up to life.

Contrary to the active hero of the 18th century novel, the hero in the modern novel is an active figure, a passive creature. Fox speaks about 'death of hero'. He means that contemporary literature is not occupied with heroic characters. Psychological subjectivity, typical of Joyce and other authors, has nothing to do with the wide epic scene of social life described by great classics. Socialist Realism must put an end to this crisis of bourgeois literature, Fox says. It should bring forward a new man, a man who knows the laws of history and can become the master of his own life. Fox speaks of Georgi Dimitrov at the Leipzig trial as an example of such a new hero. The future belongs to the heroic element in life.

This feeling of important change and the heroic spirit of the anti-fascist struggle found its outlet in the first place in the development of poetry. The trio of poets, Auden, Spender and Day Lewis, had in many ways inaugurated the new movement which sought to fuse poetry and politics. They stood out as representative figures, and on the whole they held this position till the year 1938. Then began the rapidly extending crisis of the movement. This group, usually known as the Oxford Poets, was very popular in its time. But the movement did not last long. A Marxist critic, Christopher Caudwell, in his book Illusion or Reality explains why the movement lost its popularity. "They often glorify the revolution as a kind of giant explosion which will blow up everything they feel to be hampering them. But they have no constructive theory – I mean as artists: they may as economists accept the economic categories of Socialism, but as artists they can not see the new forms and contents of an art which will replace bourgeois art."

**Post-War Literature**

After World War II there appeared young writers, who are ready to keep up the standard of wholesome optimism, and mature writers, who have passed through a certain creative crisis.

In the fifties there appears a very interesting trend in literature, the followers of which were called "The Angry Young Man". The post-war changes had given a chance to a large number of young from the more democratic layers of society to receive higher education at universities. But on graduating, these students found they had no prospects in life; unemployment had increased after the war.

There appeared works dealing with such characters, angry young men who were angry with everything and everybody, as no one was interested to learn what their ideas on life and society were. Outstanding writers of this trend were John Wain, Kingsley Amis and the dramatist John Osborne.

The sixties saw a new type of literature. The criticism was revealed in the "working-class novel" as it was called. These novels deal with characters coming from the working class. The best known writer of this trend is Alan Sillitoe. Much of post-war English literature is in the form of novels, and up to the present the novel remains the most popular literature genre in Britain. Contemporary English novelists are represented by several different trends.

Since sixties the literary life in Great Britain has developed greatly. The new time brings new heroes, new experience in theatrical life and poetry, new forms and standards in prosaic works. The specific feature of nowadays literature is the variety of genres and styles, which inrich the world's literature. Alongside with the realistic method the symbolic one takes place and develops further. On the one hand, the themes in the modern literary works concern more global problems: the Peace and the War, the environmental protection, the relations between the mankind and Universe. But on the other hand, the duties and the obligations of the individual man, the psychology of the human nature, the life's situations and the ways of solving the problems, the power and money have always been in the centre of public attention, that found its reflection in the newest English literature, too.

**The Angry Young Men**

Who are these widely discussed group known as the Angry Young Men? Although their name is not quite correct – they are not angry in the strict sense of the word, they are not all young and not all men – the members of this group have much in common. Most of these were of lower middle- class backgrounds.

The four best known are novelists Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine and playwright John Osborne. Although not all personally known to one another, they had in common an outspoken irreverence for the British class system and the pretensions of the aristocracy. Their heroes are usually young men from the so- called lower or lower middle class structure of English society. They strongly disapprove of the elitist universities, the Church of England, and the darkness of the working class life. Though in most cases they criticise not the essential class distinctions but the outwards signs of the Establishment such as the privileges that the top of society has retained from the times of feudalism.

Outside England the influence of the Angry Young Men has been felt mainly in plays by John Osborne. As Osborne has said of himself, "I want to make people feel, to give them a lesson of feeling, They can think afterwards".

As regards literary techniques, the Angry Young Men are conservatives. They look upon Kafka, Joyce and other modernist writers of the twenties as museum pieces. Their style is close to the straightforward narrative of most of 19th - century fiction. The Angry Young Men are not especially interested in the philosophical problems of men's existence. "The great questions I ask to myself", Kingsley Amis says, "are those like 'How am I going to pay the electric bill?' "

**Modern English Writers**

During the 1970's and early 1980's, such writers as Greene, Lessing and Le Carre continued to produce important novels. New writers also appeared. D. M. Thomas blended fiction with actual events and famous people in The White Hotel (1981).

John Fowles combined adventure and mystery in such novels as The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969), Muriel Spark's novels, such as The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) and The Only Problem (1984), are often comic but with disturbing undertones.

Perhaps the three leading English writers are graham Greene, Iris Murdoch and Agatha Christie, that is read and loved not only in her native country.

**Graham Greene**

Graham Greene is one of the most outstanding novelists of modern English literature. He is talented and sincere, but at the same time his world outlook is characterised by sharp contradictions.

Greene's novels deal with real life burning problems. His observations are concentrated on the actual details of poverty and misery. The author penetrates into weak spots in the capitalist world, does not try to find out the reasons for the evil he sees. Social conditions are shown only as a background to his novels. Neither does he try to comprehend the causes of spiritual crises experienced by his contemporaries. Decadent motives are to be found in his novels, though he does not lead the reader away from reality into the world of dreams and fantasy, and in most of novels he reveals the truth of life.

**Life of Graham Greene**

Graham Greene was born in 1904. He was educated at an English School, the head-master of which was his father. His childhood was not at all happy; he describes this period of his life as "…something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way".

In 1922 Greene became a student of Balliol College, Oxford. At the age of twenty-two he became sub-editor on the staff of a newspaper The Nottingham Guardian. It was during this period that his first novel, The Man Within, was written. From 1930 onwards his work as a novelist has been steady and continuos. In 1940 he became literary editor of the spectator and the year following entered the Foreign Office. During World War II Greene spent some years in Africa. It had been his cherished desire from childhood to see that continent.

In 1944 he wrote for an anti-fascist journal which was illegally published in France.

**Literary Work**

Some bourgeois critics class Greene among the 'modernists'. They substantiate their classification by the fact that Greene's works, like those of modernists, are marked by disillusion, scepticism and despair, and that the themes employed by Greene and the modernists are much the same. These critics fail to understand the real nature of Greene's pessimism, which rests upon a deeply-rooted sympathy for mankind, a sympathy not to be found in the modernists.

Though Greene, like the modernists, deals with the problem of crime, his approach to it is quite different. Unlike the modernists, who are mostly interested in the description of the crime itself, Greene investigates the motives behind the crime. He gives a deep psychological analysis of his criminals by investigating the causes that led to murder.

According to his own words, Greene wants to make the reader sympathise with people who don't seem to deserve sympathy. The author tries to prove that a criminal may possess more human qualities, that is to say, may sometimes be better at the core, than many a respectable gentleman. He doesn't, however, always succeed in giving a truthful interpretation of the motives of the crime he deals with, though in his later works his approach to the subject becomes more realistic. He shows the corrupting influence of capitalist civilisation on human nature, and tries to prove that many of the bad qualities in a person are the natural result of cruel, inhuman conditions of life.

Though crime and murder, the problem of 'the dark man', motivate many of Greene' s works, the main theme of his novels is pity for man struggling in vain against all the evils of life; his longing for sympathy, love and friendship; his striving for happiness, which is inevitably doomed to failure.

In the thirties Greene's protest against human suffering brought him to Catholicism, but he did not become a true Catholic. His novels The Heart of the Matter, A Burn-Out Case, The Comedians and many others reject the dogmas of Catholicism, and his talented realistic descriptions are more convincing than his ideology and Philosophy.

In The Heart of the Matter, a true Catholic, Scobie, commits suicide when he becomes aware of the fact that the church cannot free people from suffering. For this idea the novel was condemned by the Vatican.

Greene is known as the author of two genres – psychological detective novels or 'entertainments', and ' serious novels', as he called them. The main theme of both genres is much the same (the problem of 'the dark man', deep concern for the fate of the common people. But in the 'serious novels' the inner world of the characters is more complex and the psychological analysis becomes deeper.

**Iris Murdoch**

Iris Murdoc has written novels, drama, phylosophical criticism, critical theory, poetry, a short story, a pamphlet, and a libretto or an opera based on her play The Servants and the Snow, but she is best knkown and the most successful as a philosopher and a novelist. Although she claimes not to be a phylosophical novelist and does not want to philosophy to intrude to openly into her novels, she is a Platonist whose aesthetics and view of man and iextricable, and moral phylosophy, arsthetics, and characterization are clearlyiterrelated in her novels.

Murdoch began to write prose in 1953. She soon became very popular with the English resders. All her novels Under the Net, The Flight from the Enchanter, The Sandcastle, The Unicorn, The Red and the Green, The Time of Angels, An Accidental Man, The Black Prince, and many others are characterized by the deep interest im phylosophycal problems and in the inner world of man. Iris Murdoch shows the loneliness and sufferings of the human being in the hostile world.

**Literary work.**

The complicity of Murdoch's style.

Iris Murdoch, was born in Dublin in 1919. She attended school in Bristol and studied philosophy at Cambridge, the two oldest universities in England. The for many years Murdoch was teaching philosophy at Oxford.

Early influences on her work include French writers and philosophers including Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Well, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Raymond Queneau, as well as Samuel Beckett. Her first novel Under the Net, a picaresque tale set in London and Paris, has extensive existential derivations, including the title, and she has said that this work was influenced by Beckett's Murthy and Queneau's Pierrot. However the novels soon move away from existentialism, for she does not believe that existentialism it regards man's inner life.

Although honest, intelligent, and well written, the novels of Iris Murdoch nevertheless lack clear definition. Hers seems to be a talent for humour, but she appears unable to sustain it for more than a scene or a temporary interchange. Her first novel, Under the Net (1954), fits into the humorous pattern set by Kingsley Amis in Lucky Jim (1954) and John Wain in Hurry on Down (1953). Her Jack Donaghue of this novel is akin to Amis's Jim Dixon and Wain's Charles Lumley, in that he maintains his own kind of somewhat dubious integrity and tries to make his way without forsaking his dignity, and increasingly difficult accomplishment in a world which offers devilish rewards for loss of integrity and dignity.

Jake is angry middle-aged man who mocks society and its respectability. He moves playfully around law and order; he does small things on the sly- swims in the Thames at night, steals the performing dog, sneaks in and out of locked apartments, steals food. He is a puerile existence in which he remains "pure" even while carrying on his adolescent activities.

The dangers of this type of hero, indeed of this kind of novel, are apparent, for when the humour begins to run low, the entire piece becomes childish. In Lucky Jim, we saw that as the humorous invention lost vigor, the novel became enfeebled because it had nothing else to draw upon. In her first novel as well as in The Flight from the Enchanter (1956) and The Bell (1958), Miss Murdoch unfortunately was enable to sustain the humour, and the novels frequently decline into triviality.

Another danger that Miss Murdoch has not avoided is that of creating characters who are suitable only for the comic situations but for little else. When they must rise to a more serious response, their triteness precludes real change. This fault is especially true of the characters in The Flight from the Enchanter, a curious mixture of the frivolous and serious. The characters are keyed low for the comic passages but too low to permit any rise when the situation evidently demands it. The comic novel usually is receptive to a certain scattering of the seed, while a serious novel calls for intensity of characterisation and almost an entirely different tone. In her four novels Miss Murdoch falls between both camps; the result is that her novels fail to coalesce as either one or the other.

**Agatha Christie**

The woman who has become one of the most popular and prolific of all English detective novelists, Agatha Christie (1891-1976), largely, it would seem, by virtue of the skilfully engineered complexity of her plots.

Once, after reading in a magazine that she was that she was 'the world's most mysterious woman' , Agatha Christie complained to her agent: " What do they suggest I am! A Bank Robber or a Bank Robber's wife? I am an ordinary successful hard-working author – like any other author." Her success was not exactly ordinary. She produced nearly 90 novels and collections of stories in a lifetime that spanned 85 years. One of her plays, The Mousetrap, opened in London in 1952 and is still running.

**The Life and Creative Activity**

She refined and left a lasting imprint on the detective formula. An "Agatha Christie" became a shorthand description for an unadomed display of crime unmasked by perceptive and relentless logic. She dared readers to outwit her, and few resisted the challenge. Shortly after her death in 1976, one estimate put the world-wide sale of her books at 40 million copies. Given such glittering evidence and the clues provided by her fiction, a mystique was bound to develop around the one whodunit: Agatha the enchantress, the proper Englishman with a power to murder and create. When she insisted that the truth was far less exotic, armchair sleuths who had been trained by her books recognised a false lead when they saw one.

She was right, of course, as this biography, Agatha Christie, the first written with the blessings of Christie's heirs and estate, conclusively proves. Author Janet Morgan does a through job of getting the facts in the Christie case straight and on the record. But the story, even when demystified, seems almost as unbelievable as the guessing games it prompted.

Her childhood could have been written by Jane Austen. Agatha miller, beloved by her parents and an older sister and brother, grew up in an English seaside village surrounded by Edwardian privileges and leisure. Her American father lived off a trust fund that dwindled steadily, and his death when Agatha was eleven left family finances more unsteady. Still, breeding and manners meant as much as money, and the young woman, largely educated at home, moved in a circle of eligible bachelors. She turned down three proposals and took a flier instead. After a stormy courtship, she married Archie Christie, a dashing aviator with few expectations of living through World War I.

While he fought, his new bride stayed at home working in a hospital. Her sister suggested that Agatha who was both exhausted and bored during her free time, try to write the sort of detective novel they both enjoyed reading. She did, but by the time The Mysterious Affair at Styles appeared in print, the war was over and Agatha had a daughter and a husband, grounded at last, who seemed chiefly interested in making money and playing golf.

The year 1926 changed her prospects and her life. For one thing, she published The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, which caused a stir because it broke the rules of detective fiction: the narrator did it. Something more shocking followed. In December Agatha left her husband and child and disappeared for ten days, setting off a nation-wide search and a carnival of speculation. Morgan's recreation of this drama is meticulous, but it lacks, perhaps unavoidably, the tight resolution that Christie gave her invented plots.

Grieving over the death of her mother and staggering under the burden of sorting out the state, the heroine learns from her husband that he is in love with another woman. She drives off one night, her abandoned car is discovered the next morning. Questions multiply. Is he seeking publicity, has she joined her lover, is she embarrassing her husband, or has she been murdered?

When she is discovered at a Yorkshire hotel, registered under the last name of the woman, Archie now wants to marry, Agatha Christie has nothing to say. Her biographer gives all the available details but suspends judgement: " There are moments in people's lives on which it is unwise, as well as impertinent, for an outsider to speculate, since it is impossible to be certain about what actually took place or how the participants felt about it."

Neither Miss Marple nor Hercule Poirot would accept such an alibi, but truth is messier than the fiction. Whatever may have happened to Christie in 1926, she recovered admirably. Two years after the divorce, while visiting friends on expedition in Iraq, she met Max Mallowan, an archaeologist nearly 14 years her junior. Eventually he proposed, fretting at the same time that she might find his line of work boring. She reassured him: " I adore corpses and stiffs." They lived happily ever after.

Morgan is candut about the weakness in her subject's work. Chrisries stories were ingenious but her writing is pedestrian. She intentionally offered stereotypes instead of rounded characters and grew annoyed when Poirot, her Belgian detective, began to assume a life of his own in the popular imagination. She once privately described him as 'an egocentric creep'. She constructed puzzles, not literature; she devoted what energies she could spare from a busy life to craft rather than art. To list real liabilities in this manner is, ultimately, to beg a question: why among so talented competitors in a small field, did Agatha triumph? Responsible biography can suggest but never prave the probable verdict: she was the best at what she chose to do.

Agatha Christie is one of the best known and most widely-read writers of all times. Her books have delighted readers over for more than half a century. She is the most widely-translated British author in the world in addition to her great success as a best-selling novelist, Agatha Christie also wrote the longest-running play in the history of modern theatre. The mousetrap and originally written as a radio play, It opened in London in 1952 and is still running today. She is also well-known for a number of other plays and dramatisation of her novels and short stories, and has written two books of poetry, six novels of romance under the pseudonym Marry Westmacott.

Agatha Christie's best-known works are: The Mysterious Affair at Styles, The ABC Murders, Crooked House, Murder in the Calais Coach, The Seven Dials Mystery and others.

Agatha Christie's novel The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is considered to be one of her best works. This novel brought the author success and fame thanks to its most original concept, non-traditional for detective novels. Roger Ackroyd, a rich and respected man, was going to marry Mrs. Ferrars, a widow. But a short time before their marriage Mrs. Ferrars committed suicide living a letter with Dr. Sheppard, the local doctor, but the conversation did not take place. Soon after coming back home Dr. Sheppard was informed by a telephone call that Roger Ackroyd had been found murdered. The whole story is narrated by Dr. Sheppard.

**Joanne Kathleen Rowling**

One of the most successful modern English writers is J.K. Rowling. She is known all over the world. Her books about Harry Potter, which are read by children of different countries and of different ages, have become the bestsellers.

“Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” is my favourite modern book. But most of my friends dislike it and the whole series. I wondered why? Then I noticed: those, who read the Russian version of the book, dislike it; those, who read it in English, like it very much. So, what’s the difference? I read the English version and decided to look through the Russian one. I discovered in it that there is only a paraphrase of events, The charm of the original book is missing. So the Russian version is only a ghost of the original.

J.K. Rowling has written a good book for children. I don’t think she expected it to become something great or important. She simply collected together all the attributes of a good book for kids, all the features, which modern children like. The characters are taken from the real life. These are people whom the writer remembers from her childhood.

Joanne was born in Chipping Sodbury General Hospital, which she thought was appropriate for someone, who collects funny names. Her sister, Di, was born just under two years later, and she was the person, whom Joanne told her first stories. The very first one was about a rabbit called Rabbit (Joanne was only six than). Rabbit got the measles and was visited by his friends, including a giant bee called Miss Bee. And ever since Rabbit and Miss Bee, Joanne has wanted to become a writer, though she rarely told anyone so. She was afraid people would tell her she didn’t have a hope. The family changed their place of living twice, while Joanne was growing up. The first move was from Yate (just outside Bristol). A gang of children including Joanne and her sister used to play together up and down their street in Winterbourne. Two of the gang members were a brother and a sister whose surname was Potter. Joanne always liked this name.

When she was nine, the family moved to Tutshill near Chepstow in the Forest of Dean. Living in a place like this, in the countryside, has always been her parents’ dream, both being Londoners. Joanne and her sister spent most of the time watching unsupervised across fields and along the river Wye. The only fly in the ointment was the fact that the girl hated her new school. It was a very small, very old-fashioned place where the roll-top desks still had ink-wells. Joanne was quiet, freckly, short-sighted and rubbish at sports (once she broke her arm playing netball). Her favourite subject by far was English, but she quite liked languages too. Joanne used to tell her equally quiet and studious friends long serial stories at lunch- times. They usually involved them as all doing heroic and daring deeds they certainly wouldn’t have done in real life they were all too swotty.

Joanne K. Rowling wrote a lot in her teens, but she never showed any of it to her friends, except for funny stories that again featured them all in thinly disguised characters. After the school Joanne went straight to Exeter University, where she studied French. This was a big mistake, as she had listened too hard to her parents, who thought languages would lead to a great career as a bilingual secretary. But the one thing Joanne liked about her job is that she was able to type up stories on the computer when no-one was looking. She was never paying much attention in meetings because she was usually scribbling bits of her latest stories in the margins of the pad, or choosing excellent names for characters.

When Joanne was twenty six she gave up on offices completely and went abroad to teach English as a Foreign Language. “My students used to make jokes about my name; it was like being back to Winterbourne, except that the Poruguese children said ‘Rolling Stone’ instead of rolling pin”, - says Joanne. She loved teaching English and as she worked afternoons and evenings, she had mornings free for writing. This was particularly good news as Miss Rowling started her third novel. The new book was about a boy who found out he was a wizard and was sent off to Wizard school. When Joanne came back from Portugal half a suitcase was full of papers covered with stories about Harry Potter. She came to live in Edinburgh with a very small daughter a set herself a headline: “I would finish the Harry Potter novel before starting work as a French teacher, and try to get it published”. It was finished the year after finishing a book before a publisher bought it. ”The moment when I found out that Harry would be published was one of the best in my life”, - says the author. By this time she was working as a French teacher. A few months later ‘Harry’ was taken for publication in Britain, an American publisher bought the rights for enough money to unable Joanne to give up teaching and write full time – her life’s ambition.

A single mother living in Edinburgh, Scotland, Rowling became an international literary sensation in 1999, when the first three instalments of her Harry Potter children’s book series took over the top three slots in the New York Times best-seller list after achieving similar success in her native United Kingdom. The phenomenal response to Rowling’s books culminated in July 2000, when the fourth volume in the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, became the fastest-selling book in history. Rowling now one of Britain’s richest women, plans a total of seven books, each chronicling a year in the life of Harry Potter, a young wizard, and this motley band of cohorts at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardy.

J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels begin when the orphaned British 10-year-old discovers he has a magical heritage and enters Hogwarts School to learn how to be a wizard. With each book, Harry and his classmates age a year, and with each year the record-breaking success of the series grows. In September 1999, Harry Potter even made the cover of Time magazine, which called the phenomenon "one of the most bizarre and surreal in the annals of publishing." When the movie of Rowling's first book opened in the fall of 2001, it took in a then record-shattering $90.3 million in its first weekend.

As Richard Bernstein said in The New York Times, the Harry Potter stories are fairly conventional, and "not nearly as brilliant or literary as, say, The Hobbit or the Alice in Wonderland books." The explanation for their popularity, he suggests, can be found in Bruno Bettelheim's classic study of children's literature, The Uses of Enchantment. The essence of Bettelheim's theory is that children live with greater terrors than most adults can understand, and that the classic fairy tales help express that terror while showing a way to a better future. In effect, J. K. Rowling's novels fill a basic need for children everywhere and for the child in every adult.

That seems quite sound. But there is also the fact that Rowling has a degree of whimsicality not to be found in Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, or her other antecedents. She is much closer to L. Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz series in that regard. And she has a sense of humor tuned to her era. Thus, Harry's school supplies include "one plain pointed hat (black) for day wear." Mail at the school is delivered by owls of different sizes, including "tiny scops owls (‘Local Deliveries Only')." And exams at Hogwarts include practical tests, like making a pineapple tap-dance across a desk and turning a mouse into a snuffbox, "with points given for how pretty the snuffbox was, but taken away if it had whiskers."

As if the books weren't enough, the success of the first two Harry Potter movies has created an instant and undoubtedly quite durable "franchise." One can only hope that the sly wit, the charm, and the childlike wonder of Rowling's books won't get lost to the evils of commercialism. On the other hand, with Coca-Cola alone paying $150 million for the exclusive global marketing rights to the first movie, one might as well go wish upon a star. As Business Week put it, it's "Harry Potter and the Tower of Profits."

PEOPLE’S ATTITUDE TO HARRY POTTER NOVELS

Almost as soon as Barry Cunningham met J. K. Rowling in 1996, the first-time author was talking about what she wanted to do next. And next and next. Cunningham, editorial director at Bloomsbury Children's Books in London, had recently agreed to publish Rowling's initial effort, an overlong children's novel about an aspiring wizard. "At our first meeting," he recalls, "before we finished the first course in the restaurant, we had one of those conversations that you remember years later."

"How do you feel about sequels?" Rowling asked Cunningham.

"When a first novelist says that to an editor," he says now, "you're always slightly worried."

Cunningham pointed out that the first book hadn't even been published yet, but Rowling replied that she had seven books in mind. "She was obviously bursting to say it," he says. "And what convinced me that we were on the right track is that she knew what Harry was going to do every successive year of his life until he left school."

That intricacy is at the heart of what has turned into the biggest book story bridging the millennia. Rowling's wizard Harry Potter and his elaborately complete world have become, in three short years, ubiquitous, breaking through every conceivable barrier.

In the London Underground recent Saturday afternoon, a small boy exclaimed to his brother, "Look, it's Harry Potter," upon spying a reader (me) several decades his senior reading one of the books. We spent the next five minutes discussing the relative merits of the series' first and second books. Later, I tried to recall the last time I'd had a literary exchange with strangers on the tube, let alone junior strangers. The answer was never.

Rowling's success has turned nonreaders into Harry addicts, and Potter books have taken the top three spots in The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and USA Today adult bestseller lists. Forbes magazine's Celebrity 100 list places Joanne Kathleen Rowling (35 this July) as the 24th-highest celebrity earner in the world, wedged between Michael Jordan and Cher at $40 million earned in the past year. Around the world, her books have sold 30 million copies and have been translated into 35 languages. Sophisticated French students and Japanese women alike can't get enough of the budding wizard, who wasn't even on the scene until 1997. And in a world where one might say the highest form of flattery is a lawsuit, Rowling has earned that, too.

"Her great achievement is not to overdraw or overdescribe the characters," says Stephen Fry, the actor-writer-comedian and all-around Renaissance man who won the task of reading the first book when the British version went to audio. Fry was meticulous in familiarizing himself with the text. "I have to confess that I first read it to prepare for reading it aloud," he says. "So I started off paying attention to how the characters would sound. By about page three, I had forgotten all that and was having too much fun reading."

Jamie Jauncey, children's author and chairman of the Scottish Arts Council's children's book awards, believes that the series could have been written at any time in the past 60 years, with its timeless themes of magic and good versus evil. In addition, there is its always-popular anti-adult stance, pitting the Hogwarts children against the unimaginative adult world outside. "She has done what Roald Dahl does," says Jauncey. Like the author of Fantastic Mr. Fox and James and the Giant Peach, Rowling never betrays any sense of being an adult writing down to children. "She steps into the children's shoes as she writes," he says. But most of all, "the story just bursts onto the page with sheer, raw imaginative power."

That's what comes up again and again. "So imaginative." "Original." "Surprising." "Made me laugh out loud." Even Kevin Casey, the lawyer handling a recent suit filed against Rowling, which claims she's not so original after all, says his family loves the books. "Have you read them?" he asks. "They're great."

Rowling's first three books tell the story of ten-year-old orphan Harry Potter, who lives with his dull, smug Muggle (nonmagical) relatives, the Dursleys, until he is informed he is a wizard and is whisked off to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry becomes a year older in each successive book and endures all manner of adventures alongside his chums, bookish Hermione Granger and plucky Ron Weasley, while they all learn magic. Reader after reader acknowledges that the series, deceptively simple in summary, offers a density of detail and characterization --- along with the complex balance of good and evil and darkness and wit, and the pace of the plots -- that makes it thoroughly addictive. Gavin Wallace, acting literature officer for the Scottish Arts Council, recalls the launch event for book one's Braille edition. "[Rowling] talked to all the kids," he says, and made an empathetic connection with them. "I think she really understands how their imaginations work."

As tends to be the case with overnight successes, Rowling's own story has its fair share of hardship and hard work. Without her determination and penchant for unusual names -- such as "Hogwarts" and "Muggles" -- she might well still be temping in an office or teaching French, still scribbling down stories but reading them to an audience of just two: her daughter, Jessica, and her sister, Di. Rowling's talent and luck, along with the encouragement and imagination of a dedicated cluster of people in London and Edinburgh, Scotland, allowed Harry Potter to end up charming the world into getting out its collective torch and reading under the bedsheets (as Harry himself is wont to do).

Christopher Little, an agent for heavyweight writers such as Simon Singh, (Fermat's Enigma) and Janet Gleeson (The Arcanum), was the first person outside Rowling's circle of friends and family to spot her potential, even though he'd never been involved with children's fiction before. Rowling, typically, tried Little because she liked his name, sending him the first few chapters of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone in 1995. The typewritten pages found themselves perched on top of the pile of dozens of unsolicited manuscripts Little received most weeks.

He read her submission quickly and took only three days to take her on as a client; she was so thrilled, she read his reply eight times. Little had spoken to the new Bloomsbury Children's Book department at the 1995 Frankfurt Book Fair and knew they were looking for something special. "And Harry Potter was different," he says. Different and long. Most children's books are less than 40,000 words long; Philosopher's Stone was at least 65,000.

Cunningham, the editorial director starting the Bloomsbury children's list, saw the manuscript when it arrived from Little in June 1996. "There it was," he says, "a complete world with everything worked out and everything working, a world you could enter into as a child and lose yourself within." Cunningham needed Rowling and Harry to cast their spell over his colleagues. So he handed over the manuscript to Rosamund de la Hey, children's marketing manager.

She, too, was gripped. "It made me laugh out loud and stay up all night reading it," she says. The next day she and a colleague spent all afternoon making copies of the manuscript, stuffing them with Smarties candies and tying a ribbon around each one. These packages were delivered to the company directors whose support would be needed to buy the book. They adored it, and Cunningham bought it the following day.

An impediment to Rowling's sequel strategy was that, despite signing with Bloomsbury, she literally had no money. Fortunately, in early 1997 she received an £8,000 ($13,000) grant from the Scottish Arts Council, which considers children's fiction as important as adult literature. (Rowling's application was graded with exceptionally high marks, according to Wallace: A, A, A-, B+, A-).

Meanwhile, editorial discussions were proceeding about the first book: Should it be so long, and should it be illustrated throughout? The length of the book was reduced only slightly, finally, but Cunningham initially considered sticking with the convention of providing illustration.

"But Joanne felt from the beginning -- and I certainly agreed after I'd chatted to her -- that everybody wanted to have their own Harry in their mind," he says. Similarly, they talked about the cover. Neither wanted an adult fantasy image, so they chose a fun children's cover. Interestingly, every country has its own look for Harry Potter. Rowling's favorite covers come from the Netherlands, where you don't actually see Harry's face. In Britain, an additional "adult version" was released to assuage the concerns of the series' self-conscious older readers.

It was when the American audience embraced Harry Potter that the entire phenomenon went over the top. In the first weekend of British publication last summer, for instance, 20,000 copies of book three, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, reportedly were imported to the States via the Internet; and in its first two weeks of official U.S. publication in fall 1999, it sold half a million copies. Overall U.S. sales for Rowling's books are now approaching 20 million -- total. Everyone, Little says, was shocked by the speed and scale of the books' success. "I thought it would be big, but not that big," he says now. "I mean, there's never been anything bigger than this."

MY ATTITUDE TO HARRY POTER NOVELS

Harry Potter is now the most famous boy in the world. Children of all the countries admire him and hos adventures. It seems almost impossible to imagine a world without the Harry Potter novels. Not only did these books -- which chronicle the education of boy wizard Harry Potter -- become a worldwide phenomenon, they encouraged kids (and adults) in the video age to drop everything in favor of an unlikely object of obsession: books. While the fun of fantasy might be its otherworldliness, its power lies is the truths it reveals about the real world. So the magical world of Harry Potter, a world of flying cars and dragons, unicorns and magic potions, invisibility cloaks and evil powers, becomes real as readers discover truths about bravery, loyalty, choice, and the power of love. We believe in Harry because of his human qualities, especially his human frailties.

While reading the stories I found some realy wize quotetions.

"The truth. It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution." (The Sorcerer's Stone)

"...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever." (The Sorcerer's Stone)

"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends." (The Sorcerer's Stone)

"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." (The Chamber of Secrets)

"You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no ... anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just—exist. As an empty shell." (The Prisoner of Azkaban)

"You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble?....You know, Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night....You found him inside yourself." (The Prisoner of Azkaban)

"Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery." (The Goblet of Fire, page 680)

"You place too much importance...on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!" (The Goblet of Fire, page 708)

So as you see the books are realy worthy of reading. They would interest not only children, but also adults. Furthermore they are easy to read and to my mind in the nearest future The Harry Potter novels will even included in the list of literature in schools.

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