



A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels

Books Reviewed:

[A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels](#) [1]

Issue:

[137](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

While adult Potter enthusiasts are waiting for the fifth book, they might fill in the time with this guide from Julia Eccleshare. It offers surveys of the Potter world, an examination of its sources and antecedents, and a look at its social and political values. Eccleshare is even-handed with praise and misgiving. The misgivings are mainly about the conservative aspects of the stories, particularly the portrayal of female characters. On the positive side, she stresses Rowling's endorsement of fair play, family values and education. In particular, discussing the relationship of Muggles and Wizards, she makes an interesting argument about Rowling as an advocate of racial and cultural tolerance. Eccleshare labours under the severe, and absurd, handicap of being prevented (by Warner Bros?) from quoting from the books themselves. This involves her in a lot of unfortunately necessary paraphrase. I have no idea what this prohibition is supposed to achieve, or what fate awaits any of us who have the temerity to quote a line in print or to write Harry Potter without the little TM sitting on his shoulder. But I have tremendous admiration for a critic who, in the face of such hamstringing, retains her poise and delivers a balanced verdict. Eccleshare recognises at the outset that the success of the first books was more due to the real excitement of children and peer group recommendation than to publishing hype, and she is more aware than many other critics that the four books already published show interesting developments in Rowling's preoccupations. In terms of literary judgement, it would be hard to disagree with her assessment that, while Rowling's themes and characters are broadly derivative, she is immensely ingenious and invariably sure-footed in deploying them. The Harry Potter books, whatever else they are, are funny, inventive, exciting and entertaining.

Running Order:

75

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