[Just as Britain tried to impose Western cultural ideals and behaviors in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, British adults try to impose adult cultural ideals of thought and behavior upon children. Just as colonial subjects were voiceless—their lives are described for us by Westerners, not by themselves—children are also voiceless, depending upon adults to describe their lives for them. I do not see this as any sort of evil conspiracy by adults, but as a natural response to civilize and assimilate the “other” of childhood into the “subject” of adulthood.

—M. Daphne Kutzer

Much of what children find intriguing is what lies beyond their borders—not only those metaphorical boundaries of license and socially sanctioned behavior, but also the geopolitical borders of the nation in which they reside. Overseas—including, in the case of nineteenth-century U. S. history, the space beyond the oceans of prairie claimed during the imperialist enterprise of Manifest Destiny—was a vast unknown, holding adventure and riches not available in the “civilized” homeland.

The wizarding world in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series has the potential to function as this overseas territory. Harry discovers that heart-racing escapades and treasures such as a substantial inheritance, Invisibility Cloak, and Marauder’s Map await him. After a journey out of London on the Hogwarts Express, he and the other students end up in a place where the rules of the non-magical world, especially those of their everyday domestic lives under the roofs of their parents and guardians, no longer apply. In addition, away from the “civilized” space of contemporary England where social mores construct all magical folk as Other and inherently evil, Harry finds belonging and safety in a colony where everyone has wizarding powers. Rowling employs a discourse of
difference—one that appears to embrace the landscape of the foreign and the situation of the outsider, heightening the books' appeal to children who remain outside of positions of power and agency in society.

Reading the Harry Potter novels for the first time, however, I was perturbed by the way that the postgraduate careers of Bill and Charlie Weasley after they leave Hogwarts seem to echo the British imperial enterprise. On several occasions, readers hear that Charlie works in Romania studying dragons, and Bill is employed by the Egyptian branch of Gringotts Wizarding Bank. The latter's official job title is Charm Breaker; he attempts to circumvent the spells that ancient Egyptian wizards put on tombs in order to discourage raiders. Responding to his mother's concern about his nonconventional appearance (i.e., long ponytail and earring), he states that no one at work cares how he dresses as long as he brings abundant treasure "home." In other words, Bill does not hold a tedious paperwork position in banking or relocate to a foreign territory for the supposed education and benefit of the local people. Rather, he participates in excavations and thrilling adventures that deplete an area of historical and cultural treasures for British wizard-world profit. In the exotic yet primitive locales of eastern Europe and northern Africa, the Weasley brothers are engaged in ventures that bring apparently superior European knowledge and experience to the "frontier"—developing areas of the world—and, more importantly, that bring its rewards back "home" to the heart of the empire.

Analogously, Sirius Black, Harry's unofficial guardian, on the run from the law in book IV for a murder he did not commit, sends correspondence to his godson by large, vividly colored tropical birds instead of by the conventional owl. The feathered messengers are "flashy" and cause Harry to think of palm fronds, sparkling sand, and places where he hopes Sirius is enjoying himself, places that evoke images of a Caribbean paradise. Later, arguing for the length of time it would take Harry's owl to bring a letter from Sirius, Hermione suggests that he could be in Africa. Both locations suggest the far reaches of the historical British Empire. For the escaped convict, trying to lose himself in these places cannot be a matter of appearances; as a white British man, Sirius will not readily blend into a predominantly black resident population. However, in the contemporary popular view of deserted Caribbean beaches, awaiting re"discovery" by harried tourists seeking surf and sun, or of the overgrown African jungle, Sirius will have no trouble disappearing without magic.

Magical Britain, and Hogwarts in particular, thus become the magical metropole, despite their initial resemblance to a foreign landscape of Otherness. Everywhere else subsequently falls into the category of "periphery." I am reminded of a 1986 lecture given at York University in Toronto, in which Barbadian writer George Lamming described his audience, consisting primarily of Caribbean immigrants, as an external frontier of the archipelago. In doing so, the author inverted the conventional framework in which Europeans considered colonial possessions to be "outposts on the periphery of their world—the white, rich, politically and technologically powerful metropolis of Europe and...
North America.” Unlike Lamming, Rowling seems to project a more traditional, nostalgic view of imperial Center and less-civilized Periphery in her Harry Potter series. Glancing over Elizabeth Schafer’s sourcebook, I note that the critic describes Hogwarts as located in the “protective isolation of Britain,” which “insulated Britain from the rest of tumultuous Europe and provided incubation for developing a culture rich in lore and steeped in tradition.” This romanticized interpretation fails to acknowledge Britain’s often brutal history and confirms my worst suspicions about how the Potter books might be read. Schafer’s idealistic view neglects the fact that on its way to becoming recognized as one of the most culturally advanced countries in the world, England was constantly involved in activities of colonial domination and exploitation.

What I aim to do in this chapter is examine the Harry Potter novels from a postcolonial perspective. This framework does not mean to suggest, as the term postcolonial might indicate, that colonialism is dead and gone: theories can be used to interrogate the ways that the old colonial system has found its way back into society as neocolonialism, a revived push by dominant forces to maintain or reinvigorate their positions of social and cultural privilege. Postcolonial readings attempt to "rethink, recuperate, and reconstruct racial, ethnic, and cultural others that have been repressed, misrepresented, omitted, stereotyped, and violated by the imperial West with all its institutions and strategies for dominating the non-Western." Attributing this damage to the entire "imperial West" is a claim too broad to allow us to unravel the complexities of our current historical situation, or for us to adequately take into account Rowling’s definitively nondominant subject position as a woman and former welfare recipient. However, I hope that by engaging with children’s literature in the spirit of Xie’s definition, I can challenge traditional and Eurocentric ways of seeing that are both represented within the narratives and with which many of us have been trained to interpret texts.

I begin with the question of whether Rowling simply continues in the tradition of what Martin Green in Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire identifies as “the energizing myth” of imperialism. Popular children’s literature published during the height of Britain’s imperialist era “were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and ... they charged England’s will with energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule.” I argue that although the Potter series attempts to embrace ideas of global equality and multiculturalism, the stories actually reveal how difficult it is for contemporary British subjects such as Rowling to extricate themselves from the ideological legacies of their ancestors.

Through children’s literature, many European nations of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries instilled the imperialist and colonizing values of the adult population. As Patrick Brantlinger notes: “Much imperialist discourse was ... directed at a specifically adolescent audience, the future rulers of the world.” However, the ideology of imperialism, colonialism, and xenophobia is often encoded so deeply—both in the text itself and in our own perception of
the world—that it becomes almost invisible. Rowling’s novels seem particularly influenced by the British adventure story tradition, which promoted “civilized” values—resourcefulness, wits, ingenuity, and hierarchy headed by a legitimate democratic authority—and demonstrated their desirability in the wild territo­ries beyond England’s borders. Because imperialists often condemned the in­digenous peoples of Africa, India, and the Americas as wasteful of the incredible natural resources that lay around them, in imperialist literature, the empire and its agents are typically depicted as best for everyone concerned. In other words, when all behave according to the plan, the colonials gain the majority of capital but can be reassured that the indigenous peoples have had “their standard of liv­ing raised somewhat, and their moral natures raised quite a lot.”

The adventure story genre had its origins in Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Cru­soe (1719), frequently adapted for eighteenth-century children. In the spirit of this obviously imperialist text, with its European protagonist who civilizes both landscape and the Amerindian Friday, Johann David Wyss’s Swiss Family Robinson (originally published in Germany in 1812 but gaining a great deal of notoriety when translated into English) also featured nature tamed and con­trolled by humans.

Victorian-era literature includes G.A. Henty’s propa­ganda novels, featuring heroic young English boys: healthy, ultra-masculine, honest, and chivalrous. The values of imperialism were further supported by public school stories: tales of institutions where boys first learned what it took to be successful members of the colonial class and future leaders of the empire.

World War I marked the official start of the end of the British Empire, and children’s literature often provided the escape for a society whose borders appeared to be closing in. A. A. Milne’s Winne-the-Pooh (1926), published in the time between the wars, focuses on retreat from the harrowing experiences of the adult world, into the safety and purported innocence of childhood and childhood imagination, symbolized by the animals’ adventures in the Hundred Acre Wood.

In the post–World War II period, a surge of fantasy novels for children seemed to reflect the perspective of British citizens taking measure of the empire’s dwindling remains. Hunt and Sands note an increased number of British “animal fantasies,” such as Margery Sharp’s The Rescuers (1959), which patriotically emphasize the importance of remaining at “home” and staying true to one’s English-ness. The prominence of assimilationist themes appears to correspond with the increased flow of colonized subjects into Britain, searching for economic and educational opportunities: “When the story centers on an outsider coming to England, that character’s only hope for acceptance is to forget his or her past life and take on purely English ways.”

Assimilation­ist narratives include H. A. Rey’s Curious George (1941)—the monkey is taken out of the African jungle and only too happy to be brought to “civilization” and put into captivity in a zoo at the end of the book—and Michael Bond’s A Bear Called Paddington (1958), in which the bear from “Darkest Peru” (though the phrase also invokes Africa, the so-called Dark Continent) eventually sacrifices his native language and name in favor of the name of the London train station where he is found and the British family that adopts him.
In the last quarter of the twentieth century, children’s books emphasizing a powerful Britain, such as Susan Cooper’s 1970s series, *The Dark Is Rising*, can also be linked to the nation’s waning international influence. Without explicit reference to empire, Cooper’s narratives reveal a desire to return to past splendor and magnificence in order to defeat a Dark Lord. As Welsh and English characters work together toward victory, nostalgia for the faded glory of the empire replaces pride in contemporary imperial holdings. Hunt and Sands state of these moves toward introspection: “As Britain in reality grows less and less important in the world, British … fantasy delights in isolationism, tradition, and monoculturalism.”

And so how do the Harry Potter novels fit into this tradition? Harry’s option of staying at home with the Dursleys is obviously a dire one. As I mentioned previously, it is easy to interpret Harry’s journey into the wizarding world as one into a thrilling and promising foreign space, separate from the metropole of Muggle England. Hogwarts and the surrounding magical community are a territory where the natives might be technologically primitive, but they are morally enlightened, friendly, respected and respectful, and powerful in many ways. As Kutzer notes of many fantasy works, authors expend a great deal of energy providing the specifics of local flora, fauna, native customs, and behavior. “There is a kind of ethnographic gloss to these books that suggests to the reader that foreign lands are not made-up fantasy lands, but real places that can provide real adventures, if only one can get to them.” Accordingly, Harry spends a great deal of time in the wizarding world learning about new plants and creatures, such as mandrakes, hippogriffs, and unicorns, and unfamiliar practices and customs—from the Sorting Hat procedure to how to send mail by Owl Post, travel by Floo powder, and de-gnome a garden.

Beneath this aspect of foreignness, however, lies the fact that the excursions to Hogwarts are not away from the homeland and to a symbolic colonial outpost, but rather journeys back to Harry’s true homespace. In the wizarding world he finds acceptance among people of his own magical kind. As he reaches his dormitory room on the first night back at school for his third year, he feels as if he is “home at last.” Thus, on one hand Rowling depicts Hogwarts and its environs as a space of difference, inhabited by the Other, and quite separate from the “real” and flawed British sphere; on the other hand, however, this sphere also serves as an accurate reflection of British reality. Because the wizarding world overlaps and intersects with the Muggle world, Harry is allowed to remain in the very heart of Britain as he supposedly travels to a foreign space, discovers himself, and is initiated into adulthood. British cultural centrist and isolationism are effectively maintained.

Rudyard Kipling’s fiction provides an interesting point of comparison with Rowling’s series. Both writers seem trapped as they attempt to negotiate the space between longings for empire and a recognition of its potential for destruction. The novel *Kim* (1901), for example, celebrates life in India, and the diversity of people, wildlife, and landscapes of the region, but it simultaneously...
praises the young protagonist’s induction into the British secret service—a collaboration that helps the British to rule India. Rowling appears to experience the same wavering desires between nostalgia for and opposition to neocolonial attitudes. When the Muggle groundskeeper at the Quidditch World Cup camp­site suspiciously asks Mr. Weasley if he is “foreign” and remarks that the grounds have been overrun,¹⁷ he gives voice to a conservative anti-immigrant sentiment that Rowling overtly writes against. The divergent attitudes of Ron and Hagrid and Harry and Hermione emphasize this point. Hagrid claims that the less one has do with foreigners, the happier one will be—“Yeh can’ trust any of ‘em”¹⁸—and Ron refuses to try the unfamiliar bouillabaisse at the Tour­nament welcome dinner. In contrast, Harry responds to Hagrid that Viktor Krum is “all right!,” and Hermione not only enjoys the French dish but develops a romantic relationship with Krum as well. Together, Harry and Hermione suggest that although the wizarding world can be more insular than the Muggle world in some ways, as the “next generation” of wizards and witches, they will encourage more tolerance and an international outlook.

This tolerance, however, seems linked to the rather banal versions of “multi­culturalism” that plague certain late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century communities: visions of “open-mindedness” to the Other function primarily on the level of the enjoyment and consumption of particular goods these foreigners have to offer, such as foods, film, music, and clothing. In spite of the progress that Rowling’s narrative ostensibly offers, it can be observed that the underlying discourse of her work supports many of the very ideas she tries to counter. Thus, although she inverts traditional binaries and blurs the lines between domestic and foreign, civilized and savage, because the magical world is located within Britain’s borders, the true center of intellectual, spiritual, and cultural enlightenment is not shifted out of the British realm.

Kipling’s The Jungle Books (1894–1895) provide ground for further compa­rison between the two authors’ sentimentality for certain aspects of imperialist ideology.¹⁹ Many of the stories in Kipling’s collection center on themes of invasion. In “Rikki-tikki-tavi,” for example, the cobras despise the British colonial family that has moved into the bungalow because the humans threaten the snakes’ dominion and the certainty that the snakes’ offspring will grow up healthy, strong, and in control. The reptilian antagonists plot for the time when “the garden will be our own again.”²⁰ Representative of India’s brown-skinned indigenous peoples, the black snakes are cast as evil, vicious, and dangerous, needing to be exterminated so that the white British colonizers can live peacefully in the land they have appropriated. For the imperialist plan to be success­ful, however, the white invaders require the native assistance embodied in the mongoose, Rikki-tikki-tavi. The mongoose hero calls the family “his,” and this loyalty essentially subverts “the natural animosity” between the species, situating the mongoose clearly and willingly on the side of the Europeans/humans.²¹ By the end of the tale, the borders of the colonized garden are secure: Rikki-tikki-tavi “kept that garden as a mongoose should keep it . . . till never a cobra dared show its head inside the walls.”²²
Rather than perpetuating traditional Christian concepts of serpents as evil, Rowling at first appears to contest Eurocentric norms. Hogwarts students initially shun Harry for being a Parselmouth. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, newspaper reporter Rita Skeeter’s twisted article about the “disturbed” Harry Potter quotes a member of the Dark Force Defense League, who intimates that others should be “highly suspicious” of anyone who can talk to snakes—creatures embodying the worst forces of Dark Magic and possessing a historical association with “evildoers.” Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge later reiterates the sentiment when he calls Harry’s trustworthiness into question specifically because the young wizard can converse with serpents. Rowling suggests here the irony of their bigotry. In the same way that witches are ostracized in the Muggle world for having the rare gift of being able to perform magic, members of wizarding society censure Harry for his linguistic gift. Rowling’s critique is clear in that Fudge is both prejudiced and a political coward, and Skeeter is detestably unethical. Harry, able to speak Parseltongue, has a link to the natural world, and, despite a demonstration of the ingenuity and resourcefulness highly regarded in early imperialist adventure stories, he chooses to employ this connection to commune with nature rather than to control and exploit it.

At the same time, however, Rowling relies on the discourse of imperialism in her use of snakes in the narrative. The word “Parseltongue” closely resembles the word “Parsee,” the name of a religious community in India concentrated in Bombay. For British readers, references to Parsees might unconsciously evoke images of fakirs and other mystics who perform feats of magic or endurance, such as charming snakes from baskets and walking on coals. As Kutzer notes, the political and cultural lives of India, the “jewel in the crown” of the British Empire, and England have been inextricably entwined since the end of the nineteenth century: “Indian words had become English words: jodhpurs, verandahs, pukka, and so forth.” I would therefore assert that Rowling depends upon the reader’s assumption of the exotic qualities of India—romantic associations with palm readers, snake charmers, and the like—to connect snakes to fear, particularly fear of the foreign. Just as the cobra antagonists in Kipling’s “Rikki-tikki-tavi” are “highly emblematic of India itself. … Visual shorthand for ‘the Orient,’” snakes in the Potter books symbolize inherent femaleness, seductiveness, duplicity, sensual excess, skulking silence, and, above all, danger. Victims of the basilisk in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* can be killed by the serpent’s stare; in *Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort must milk the female snake Nagini to build up his strength and malevolent powers. Voldemort himself possesses a flat, snakelike face, replete with red gleaming eyes before his transformation, and afterwards, a ghostly white visage with a nose as “flat as a snake’s” with slits for nostrils. Furthermore, Voldemort is strengthened by a ceremony that casts him as an anti-Christ—he is the “son” renewed, the “master” revived, and the foe “resurrected”; the end of the chapter ominously states that “Lord Voldemort had risen again”—effectively reinforcing traditional connections between snakes and Satan.
The anxiety over foreign invasion, far from being dispelled by a narrative that embraces difference, predominates in the Potter books. Danger typically comes from outside national borders. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, the three-headed dog, Fluffy, comes from a Greek; in *Chamber of Secrets*, Aragog the giant spider informs Harry and Ron that he, too, arrived from a distant territory. Hagrid found Aragog a mate and their family has grown exponentially in the Forbidden Forest, waiting for the human flesh on which they prey. The fear of immigrant entry, reproduction, and take-over seems evident in this subplot. Wizards and witches constantly worry about the threat of Muggles discovering and invading the magical realm; the antagonism against Muggle-borns stems, in part, from a distrust of their motives after years of persecution at the hands of the nonmagical. Looking for a location for the International Quidditch World Cup, the Ministry of Magic seeks arenas Muggles cannot penetrate and works for months setting up “anti-Muggle precautions” and repelling charms to ward off potential invaders. Voldemort threatens to assail people’s minds, hearts, and souls in an attempt to reestablish himself and come to power once again. The turbaned Professor Quirrell, who has been travelling in Albania, proves to be the weak link to national security in book I; easily manipulated by Voldemort, he brings the Dark Lord back to Britain and allows him to penetrate the halls of learning and protection. Similarly, in book IV, Bertha Jorkins holidays in Albania, which leads to her capture, torture for ministry knowledge, and murder, further intimating the perils of travelling abroad.

The motif of invasion and militarized borders grows most prominent in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Hogwarts is cast as a vast empire; it takes students ten minutes to walk to the top of the North Tower from the dining hall. Professor Trelawney remarks that she does not often descend from the tower into “the hustle and bustle” of the main buildings, suggesting a territory of diversity, with both rural and urban spaces. The students learn that powerful enchantments and spells prevent people from entering the castle by stealth or magically apparating, and the groundskeeper Filch knows all of the secret passages to keep guarded. The Marauder’s Map shows Harry the secret passages that lead to the village of Hogsmeade, including some of which Filch is unaware; however, these ways out also mean that there are ways back in, holding an important statement about the repercussions of the imperial enterprise: if explorers and adventurers leave the security of England and establish routes to the far reaches of the empire, these routes are left open for those members of foreign societies to negotiate their way back into England.

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore reluctantly agrees to have dementors stationed around the entrances to the Hogwarts grounds to protect the school from invasion by wizard Sirius Black, at this point a feared escaped convict. The anxiety of infiltration by those who are supposed to be protecting the frontier, however, also runs high: Dumbledore proclaims that no dementor will cross over into the castle while he is the headmaster. Once-strong borders are soon
revealed to be quite penetrable, however. When over one hundred dementors enter the Quidditch stadium during a match, Professor Lupin claims that the “restless” spirit of these guards had been swelling for some time. The phrase “the natives are restless” comes to mind, and the dementor attack on Harry after he learns the truth about his parents’ murder confirms the dread of the foreign as a force that can suck the soul out of the citizens of the empire. Similarly, after Black’s second break-in into the castle, an ominous-looking set of security trolls is hired to guard the entrance to Gryffindor Tower. They patrol the hallways in “a menacing group,” grunting instead of speaking in an identifiable (civilized?) language and comparing the size of their clubs. One cannot fail to recall the troll that found its way into Hogwarts in book I of the series and threatened the lives of the students and faculty.

In this way, rather than functioning as symbolic of the colonial territory, the school of magic comes to symbolize the imperial center that unenlightened foreigners threaten to infiltrate, leading to the obliteration of its people. Is it significant that Voldemort and his forces, like Kipling’s black snakes, are portrayed in terms of darkness, and to be “dark” is to be evil? Perhaps not. However, the ancient castle clearly stands as a beacon of safety for the side of good, and represents the longevity and stability of Britain’s history and civilization.

Hogsmeade, identified as “the only entirely non-Muggle settlement in Britain,” prides itself on the racial purity symbolized by the homogenous magical identity of its residents. The village inn is renowned as the headquarters for the 1612 Goblin Rebellion, reminding visitors of the goblins’ uneasy place in magical British history. Goblins of the present day have “dark, slanting eyes” and are described as quite clever, resonating with images of Asian peoples in popular discourse. Extremely self-assured, they are potentially dangerous but fair and trustworthy; they run Gringotts Bank and are polite to customers. Their refusal to assimilate completely (and “properly”?) after the rebellions is suggested by the presence of a Goblin Liaison Office at the Ministry of Magic, and the comment that their English isn’t very good. Similarly, the merpeople exist within Hogwarts’s boundaries, in the larger magical world that is contained within British borders, but they lead distinct lives, rarely interacting with magical humans. Apparently more primitive than wizards and witches, their rock paintings resemble prehistoric cave drawings, they carry spears, live in crude stone structures, and have no magical abilities.

Harry first encounters the merpeople during the Triwizard Tournament of book IV. This event, which serves as the framework for Goblet of Fire, is described as a seven-hundred-year-old tradition, established as a friendly competition between the three largest schools of magic. Its purpose is to lay the foundation of relationships between young wizards and witches of various nationalities. While the message of international camaraderie and cooperation is a positive one and emphasized throughout the story, it is quite noticeable that none of the schools represented comes from outside of the Eurasian continent. We know, for example, that there are schools in the Americas—Bill had
a pen-pal at a magic school in Brazil and Harry sees witches from The Salem Witches’ Institute at the World Cup. In spite of this, Africa, south and southeast Asia, Australia, North and South America are not merely Other at the tournament—they are invisible. The Others in Goblet of Fire are foreign, but still European: students of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. Rowling’s novels do little to alter the Western notion that “outlying regions of the world have no life, history, or culture to speak of, no independence or integrity worth representing without the West.”

Madame Maxime, Beauxbatons’s headmistress, attires herself in black satin, dresses her hair in a simple yet elegant knot, and wears sparkling opals on her neck and fingers. Her students speak French, dress in expensive silks, and have well-cultivated tastes in cuisine and the arts. The Durmstrang students, on the opposite end of the spectrum, wear cloaks made of a shaggy, matted fur, suggesting an emphasis on function over fashion and a more primitive nature. Impressed by the starry black ceiling of the Great Hall and the golden plates and goblets on which they are served, they seem awed by the refined culture of Hogwarts, situated as more civilized than their own. Nonetheless, they remain silent and stoic, exhibiting tremendous endurance for both their cruelly demanding headmaster and coach—intimating the notoriously exacting trainers of world-renown athletes from Eastern bloc nations—and the harsh winter climate, suggesting their East German-Slavic-Russian connections.

In using these characterizations to emphasize the differences among the rivals, Rowling succeeds in perpetuating certain national and ethnic stereotypes against the British wizards’ competitors. While they are cultured and fashionable, the Beauxbaton students are also haughty and snobbish. Fleur Delacoeur laughs derisively at Dumbledore’s wish for a comfortable extended visit; she claims Hogwarts delicacies are “too heavy,” the furnishings gauche, and musical accompaniments plodding. And although readers eventually come to trust Viktor Krum, he and the rest of the Durmstrang team appear vaguely sinister for most of the novel. Durmstrang pupils learn the Dark Arts as a part of their formal education, and the school does not admit Muggle-borns. Headmaster Karkaroff, a former Voldemort supporter, constantly threatens to withdraw his students from the tournament and accuses Hogwarts and the British ministry of political treachery and corruption in order to manipulate his own champion’s success.

Hogwarts’s position on the ethical high ground, with its students and teachers of superior character, shines through further when Dumbledore invites all of the foreign pupils back to Hogwarts at any time they wish to visit. He urges bonds of friendship and trust in order to successfully defeat Voldemort: cultural and linguistic differences are “nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.” The British school promotes international goodwill, the inspiration for the battle against evil, and stands as the emblem of enlightened thought.

The obvious question: what would be the result of this policy of open borders? Amongst conventional children’s adventure stories, non-European cultures
are established as the inferior Other, and non-white, non-European characters who are central to the plots are either well-assimilated into the mainstream or comic in their attempts to blend in. The position of the students of color in their Hogwarts surroundings is therefore telling as to Rowling’s conception of multiculturalism. While most discussions of race and racism in the novels operate on a symbolic level, analyzing Rowling’s representation of metaphorical Others in the human wizarding world, including Muggle-borns, giants, trolls, and house-elves, I would like to explore the depiction of literal Otherness in the predominantly white, British environs of Hogwarts.\footnote{Cho Chang, the Patil twins, Dean Thomas, Lee Jordan, and Angelina Johnson reveal that a diversity of races and ethnicities are represented at Harry Potter’s school. Cho Chang’s name suggests that she is Chinese; Parvati and Padma Patil’s names similarly point to South Asian identity. During the first-year sorting, Dean is described as “a Black boy even taller than Ron,”\footnote{Goblet of Fire, Rowling describes Angelina as the “tall black girl” who plays one of the Chasers on Gryffindor’s Quidditch team.} and, while not a definitive racial marker, Lee Jordan’s dreadlocks hint at possible African-Jamaican ancestry. In Goblet of Fire, Rowling describes Angelina as the “tall black girl” who plays one of the Chasers on Gryffindor’s Quidditch team.\footnote{When Fred and George spot Lee Jordan in Diagon Alley in book II, for instance, his race goes unmentioned; he is simply “their friend,” and, throughout the series, their partner in mischief and the spirited commentator of the Hogwarts Quidditch matches. Likewise, no physical description accompanies the introduction or numerous subsequent mentions of Dean Thomas in book II or in book III, where he is identified only as one of Harry’s “fellow Gryffindors,” “good with a quill,” and the only one bold enough to hope for a vampire as the next Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. It is somewhat of a surprise to learn in book IV, after three novels and over thirteen hundred pages of text, that Angelina is of African descent. This lack of specificity is quite remarkable when compared to the repetition of the most striking physical features of most of the white characters, whether they are central to the plots of each novel or simply familiar faces among the student body. Neville Longbottom is consistently described as round-faced in each book of the series; Seamus Finnigan’s sandy-colored hair is often highlighted; Professor Snape’s hooked nose, long,}

Noticeably, however, the inclusion of people of color does not mean the inclusion of any representation of ethnic difference and cultural practices. Parvati’s and Cho’s ethnicities are evident in their names, but only in their names. And while all of the students mentioned might be visually apparent to the characters within the fictional storyline, their visual difference for the reader quickly disappears and their racial identities fade into the background. In a world where white people are the dominant social group, whiteness becomes the “default” for unmentioned race; it is interpreted as the norm and assumed when unstated. Rowling thus finds herself in an ideological bind—while she perhaps attempts to display a “colorblind” society where everyone is distinguished solely by magical ability, she makes it supremely easy for the reader to forget (or ignore) the multiethnic surroundings that she initially seeks to establish.

When Fred and George spot Lee Jordan in Diagon Alley in book II, for instance, his race goes unmentioned; he is simply “their friend,” and, throughout the series, their partner in mischief and the spirited commentator of the Hogwarts Quidditch matches. Likewise, no physical description accompanies the introduction or numerous subsequent mentions of Dean Thomas in book II or in book III, where he is identified only as one of Harry’s “fellow Gryffindors,” “good with a quill,” and the only one bold enough to hope for a vampire as the next Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. It is somewhat of a surprise to learn in book IV, after three novels and over thirteen hundred pages of text, that Angelina is of African descent. This lack of specificity is quite remarkable when compared to the repetition of the most striking physical features of most of the white characters, whether they are central to the plots of each novel or simply familiar faces among the student body. Neville Longbottom is consistently described as round-faced in each book of the series; Seamus Finnigan’s sandy-colored hair is often highlighted; Professor Snape’s hooked nose, long,
greasy black hair, and crooked yellow teeth come up time and time again. Mad-Eye Moody’s introduction includes wonderfully sharp details about his scarred face, nose with a missing chunk of flesh, grizzled mane of grey hair, and the beady dark eye paired with the rolling magical blue one. On Ron’s first appearance in the series, his bodily characteristics are carefully enumerated: “He was tall, thin, and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet, and a long nose.” The same is true of Hermione: she has “lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.” The Weasleys’ “flaming” red hair and freckles continue to be a site of grounding for the reader, and much is made of the size of Hermione’s teeth and the wooliness of her hair throughout the series, as well as her tanned skin after a summer vacation in France. And, perhaps most obviously, references to Harry Potter’s frail build, green eyes, unruly black hair, and the lightning-bolt scar all work to heighten the reader’s identification with the protagonist, and simultaneously reveal how being physically unusual can be admirable.

Rowling makes a strong move towards encouraging multiculturalism, especially with her messages condemning the bigotry of both normative Muggles like the Dursleys, pure-blood witches and wizards who scorn “Mudbloods,” and all magical folk who assume the natural inferiority of house-elves and fear and persecute giants and werewolves. On a more literal level, Hogwarts enrolls several students of color, who are mentioned numerous times throughout the books, and many of the couples at the Yule Ball during Harry’s fourth year at Hogwarts are interracial—Cedric and Cho, Fred and Angelina, Ron and Padma, and Harry and Parvati. All suggest the integration of people of various races at the school and the hope for tolerance among people of the larger magical community. At the same time, however, Rowling undermines this reading; to date, the novels portray not integration and acceptance, but the complete assimilation of Dean, Lee, Angelina, Parvati, Padma, and Cho into the all-white landscape of Hogwarts students and teachers. In stressing a liberal humanist message of “we are all the same beneath the surface” and asserting that race and ethnicity should not be important in judging another person, Rowling’s text conveys the message that race and ethnicity are not important for those who experience life from this position—hardly true of late twentieth/early twenty-first century Britain, Canada, the United States, or much of the rest of the world.

One possibility for why racial identity cannot be mentioned in Rowling’s texts is that the works wobble between seeking a way out of the imperialist agenda and experiencing a certain nostalgia for the safety and security attributed to the empire. In order to perpetuate the notion that her characters of color are “true Brits” and belong to the national landscape, they must symbolically disappear from this landscape—visually, if not physically. My concern lies in how this translates for young readers: just beneath the surface, the novels propose that in order to be accepted, popular, and successful, one’s differences must be ignored. And, although the existence of differences may be a reality,
acknowledging these differences is taboo. As postcolonial critic Shaobo Xie proclaims, “commonality must not be exaggerated as a license for eliminating cultural or social specificity. ... The imperialism of the same has reigned for over two thousand years; it provides the dominant discourse or social group with power to dominate and control difference.”

The literature of most anglophone, or English-speaking, countries has been strongly influenced by the British Empire. As Jean Webb notes, during their formative years, the colonies (including America) were economically unable to produce their own children’s books. These materials were imported from the industrial powerhouse of England, “and therefore the ideological forces derived from imperialist England were also carried along.” In our current era of so-called globalization, it is interesting to note that while approximately 70 percent of children’s books in France have been translated into French from other languages—predominantly English—less than 1 percent of books published in English are translations. British (and U.S.) texts still dominate the market throughout the English-speaking Caribbean and Africa as well. All of these figures have tremendous implications for the cultural, political, and social ideas that get spread throughout the world. Because literature can so readily be wielded as a weapon of assimilation, we must understand the imperialist ideology encoded within—especially when it is ensconced in the discourse of postcolonial resistance, proposing to support the position of the minority—and contest it within our daily lives.

NOTES


3. Ibid., 150.


7. Quoted in M. Daphne Kutzer, Empire’s Children, 66.


10. The same is true of R. M. Ballantyne’s The Coral Island (1858). As Kutzer lays forth, the novel also clearly instructs readers in what traits are to be esteemed in the
colonizer: Avatea, the Samoan woman whom the cannibals plan to sacrifice, provides the young British hero Jack with the chance to prove his chivalry and manhood without the risk of marriage, domesticity, or, as Kutzer fails to mention, miscegenation.

11. At the same time, as Kutzer maintains, the narrative contains a submerged concern over trouble cropping up throughout the empire. Labor rebellions and demands for political independence and social equality are domesticated in Pooh: tigers, kangaroos, and elephants—symbolic of colonial territories and dominions—are all stuffed animals for children.


13. Jean de Brunhoff's The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant (1931) also fits the trend: at its conclusion, Babar is made king of his herd because he has been to the city, wears fancy clothes, and drives an impressive car. The adoption of European culture and ostensibly "civilized" ways seems to serve as evidence of his superiority and right to rule.


15. Kutzer, Empire's Children, 2.


18. Ibid., 563.


20. Ibid., 102. Interestingly enough, Kipling's snakes are called Nag and Nagina; Voldemort's snake in book IV is called Nagini.

21. Kutzer, Empire's Children, 26, emphasis added. Similarly, in the Mowgli stories, Mowgli serves as an intruder in the jungle, but one welcomed by the "good" natives/animals. Mowgli's Mother Wolf confesses to him: "child of man, I loved thee more than ever I loved my cubs." Kipling, Jungle Books, 29.


23. One able to speak with snakes.


25. Ibid., 706.

26. Kutzer, Empire's Children, 68.

27. Ibid., 26.


30. Rowling, Goblet of Fire, 640.

31. Ibid., 643.

32. Ibid., 641.

33. Ibid., 642.

34. Ibid., 643, emphasis added.

38. Quirrell’s turban connects a specific cultural item of clothing with the dangers of concealment, further suggesting xenophobia and a deceptive nature in Arabic people.
40. Guards from Azkaban Prison who absorb all positive feelings and memories from their human captives.
42. Ibid., 187.
43. Ibid., 270.
44. Ibid., 76.
46. One might also assume the same of the other continents, although this is more of a long shot, since they are represented in sports at the World Cup but not explicitly in an academic context: Bartemius Crouch speaks of organizing portkey magical transports over five continents, Harry sees three African wizards in the campground, and the Ugandan team beats Wales in one of the matches. Notably, Britain has not hosted the Quidditch World Cup in thirty years, suggesting the decline of the nation’s preeminence in the international world. During the finals, England falls to Transylvania in a shockingly bad performance, Wales loses to Uganda, and Scotland is soundly defeated by Luxembourg. We see here the symbolic end to the British dynasty, and a dynamic described by C. L. R James in his influential *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), which analyzes the role of cricket in the former colonies.
49. Ibid., 723.
50. Schafer’s discussion of race, for example, focuses almost exclusively on the question of Mudbloods and Muggles in the narratives: she identifies racism as central to the plot of book II, but speaks of it only in terms of castes and pedigrees.
53. Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 55, 151, and 429, respectively. In the last case, perhaps this hope arises because he understands the position of being the Other?
55. Certain physical traits work to bias the reader towards particular characters, and later reveal the danger of falling for beauty that is only skin deep. However, it seems that the lesson does not extend to the characters whose appearance violates accepted gender roles. Most notably, although Madame Maxime is incredibly large, she is still established as perfectly feminine: she wears elegant satin dresses, elaborate jewelry, dances gracefully, and styles her hair tastefully. In contrast, Rita Skeeter’s curls stand rigid on her head and appear quite odd on her “heavy-jawed face.” Although she has long fingernails, they resemble daggers; her fingers are thick and her large hands are “mannish” with an astonishingly powerful (i.e., manly) grip. Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 307 and 303, respectively. The journalist’s masculinity ties in disturbingly with her antagonistic and untrustworthy nature.
In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Professor Lupin serves as a racialized Other; he has been “passing” for human at Hogwarts in order to achieve acceptance in the same way that people of African descent have long passed for white in European-dominated societies. Late in the text, Ron avoids Lupin’s touch, gasping, “Get away from me, werewolf!” Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 345. He uses “werewolf” much like a racial slur, exhibiting the socially indoctrinated fear of difference. During the course of writing this essay, I came to think of Lupin’s identity less in terms of its racial significance and more in terms of the discourse of disease, and AIDS in particular. He was bitten as a child, when there was no cure; he recalls hiding his diagnosis upon entering school because other parents would not want their children “exposed” to him. Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 353. Lupin’s primary concern when he forgets to take his potion after capturing Pettigrew is to escape into the Forbidden Forest and then resign because he can’t risk infecting others. The language is that of immunity, contagion, the threat of infection, and social ignorance about disease transmission.

Dean calls the twins “the best-looking girls” in their school class, but he has asked neither one to the dance. Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 411. Is anything to be made of the fact that all the female students in the list of interracial couples are of color, while all the male students mentioned are white? Might this apparent pattern be tied to the old necessity of preserving the purity of white womanhood? Hunt argues that Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), and Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) “chart aspects of the decline of empire (corruption, instability, and resistance) without necessarily damaging the central ideas of white male supremacy.” Peter Hunt, *Children’s Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 260. Perhaps the same is true of *Goblet of Fire*; the boys are cast as varying models of desirability.

Rowling’s depiction of certain creatures further subverts her more overt antiracist message. The mandrakes in book II are raised for wizard use—to be cut up and stewed for the revival of the petrified victims of the basilisk. Although these anthropomorphic plants wail like babies and mature to party like teenagers, their harvest and essential death for wizard consumption is portrayed as for the good of Hogwarts’s empire. In a similar vein, the small, leathery gnomes, with their large, knobby, bald heads “exactly like a potato”—though not explicitly brown—are characterized by Ron as “not too bright.” As he hurls one twenty feet out of his family’s garden, it lands with a thud, and he claims: “It doesn’t hurt them. …” Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 37. How does Ron know that the creatures experience no pain? I am reminded of the rhetoric supporting the extensions of the empire: “Whatever the actual reasons behind imperial conquests—be they mercenary, missionary, or military—there is a need to justify, if not idealize, one’s often brutal actions in the pursuit of empire. One way of justifying one’s actions is to demonize the native population.” Kutzer, *Empire’s Children*, 4-5. Rowling softens her portrayal of the antagonism between garden gnomes and wizards in *Goblet of Fire*, where a gnome, running from Hermione’s cat, giggles maniacally as it escapes.

Xie, “Rethinking the Identity,” 9.