

**Armin Stefanović**

***The ‘Potter Formula’ Revised:  
How the New Age Facilitated the Success of the Harry Potter Franchise***

ORCID iD: 0009-0007-5241-7683

**Abstract:** In this paper, I investigate the possible reasons for the popularity of the Harry Potter franchise comprised of a series of books, movies, video games, theatre plays, TV series, merchandise and real-world attractions based on Joanne K Rowling’s fantasy novel series. While Andrew Blake explained the Potterverse’s appeal with the efficient representation of the English past, the commodification of British culture, and the global familiarity with English literature, I wish to suggest that the success of Harry Potter stories is related to the increased interest in New Age religiosity and lifestyle. As institutional religions increasingly lost control over the public sphere after the general disenchantment succeeding to the Second World War, the religious marketplace became more open to the Western esoteric traditions that the church and scientific institutions formerly suppressed. I explore how the early New Age movement philosophies developed from these changes, using the example of the first pilgrimage places, communities, and networks formed in Glastonbury, Findhorn, and Nottinghamshire in the 1960s. Characterized by individual spirituality, a free combination of religious beliefs and practices, and a loose relationship to religious authorities, New Age ideas quickly became a part of the mainstream culture throughout the 1980s. Although the New Age is difficult to document on the level of movements and institutions, its influence on cultural production is overwhelming. I argue that the New Age could flourish because favourable historical conditions prevailed for literary works and other media products that featured magical phenomena and became readily embraced by readers in the UK and the US, and then worldwide. Reinforced by American cinema’s marketing campaigns turning into a bestseller the Harry Potter franchise, Rowling’s Wizarding World company strategically stimulated the global Harry Potter hype by relying on commodified, simplified versions of new age beliefs.

**Keywords:** Harry Potter, New Age, fantasy fiction, magic, religion.

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Today there is no place in the world where people do not recognize Harry Potter, the hero of Joanne K. Rowling’s seven fantasy novels (1997-2007). Named after its protagonist, a young orphan, these novels follow the boy’s adventures as he discovers that he is a wizard accepted to one of the most prestigious schools for witches and wizards, Hogwarts. Each novel in the series describes the events of one of Harry’s school years. He enrolls at Hogwarts at the age of eleven and is due to graduate at the age of seventeen, which is considered the legal age for wizards. Harry and two of his Hogwarts classmates, Ron and Hermione, go on adventures and explore the hidden magical world. Even though they are protected at Hogwarts, they find out that the dark wizard who killed Harry’s parents when he was a baby plans to return, and with the guidance and help of their teachers, they learn how to defeat the ultimate evil Lord Voldemort. The *Harry Potter* novels (hereafter HP novels) start as children’s fantasy books, magical school stories and become progressively darker, introducing psychologically more challenging topics like death, torture, betrayal, and sacrifice, venturing into the realm of young adult literature. This Bildungsroman series follows Hogwarts students’ maturation, while it also tracks the cognitive development of many of its readers who read the first book as kids and finished the seventh as teenagers. In the end, to defeat the dark wizard, Harry

overcomes the darkness within him by learning to trust his friends and family and his own powers.

The HP universe is not just a series of books. The story about the lives and adventures of witches and wizards is also narrated via movie and video game adaptations (2001-2011). Additionally, Rowling wrote other books elaborating on the HP storyworld, including *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), *Quidditch Through the Ages* (2001), *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2008), *Hogwarts: An Incomplete and Unreliable Guide* (2026), *Short Stories from Hogwarts of Power, Politics and Pesky Poltergeists* (2016), and *Short Stories from Hogwarts of Heroism, Hardship and Dangerous Hobbies* (2016). In 2006 the first HP prequel movie in the *Fantastic Beasts* series was released, followed by two more in 2018 and 2022. In 2012, the interactive website *Pottermore* was presented to the public and was rebranded as *Wizarding World* in 2019 to offer additional information about the HP universe. In 2016, the *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* stage play premiered in London theatres. In 2023 a new video game, *Hogwarts Legacy* was released. In addition, the HP franchise has numerous attractions, parks, and resorts in Japan, the US, the UK, China, Australia, Poland, and Switzerland. In 2021 *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Tournament of Houses* quiz competition was released on TV.

Commenting on the story of the success of the *Harry Potter* (HP) books and movies, Brown and Patterson (2010) call its author Joanne Rowling “(...) one of the richest and most influential women on the planet, with a personal fortune greater than the Queen of England” (543). Rowling managed to achieve something that was regarded by many as impossible, to become one of the wealthiest and most influential people on the planet simply by writing novels. Considering that she achieved this in a very short period of time, as a woman author of fantasy books for children, her success story is even more impressive. Brown and Patterson (2010) estimate that by 2006, the seven books in the HP series had sold 450 million copies worldwide and six HP movies were released, making \$5.4 billion at the global box office. At the same time, the HP franchise made cca. \$1 billion in merchandise, considering not only toys and DVDs but also theme parks like the one in Florida. Rowling's Wizarding World brand was in 2006 worth \$4 billion (543). *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* novel was published in 2007 and sold 15 million copies on the first day (BBC News). In 2011, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* movie premiered. This movie alone made over \$1.3 billion at the global box office (Box Office Mojo). In total, The Wizarding World, the company behind the HP brand, made over \$9.5 billion at the box office (The Numbers), over \$8 billion in book sales (Stewart 2016), and over \$7 billion in toys and merchandise (Grimmer et. Al. 2020). By 2011, Vogel (2015) estimated that the Wizarding World brand made \$3.9 billion in home entertainment and over \$1.5 billion in video games (184). In 2018, Pesce estimated the HP franchise's worth to be \$25 billion. The same figure was reached by Grimmer and his colleagues (Grimmer et. al. 2020). HP novels were translated into over 80 languages (Scott 2022, Pesce 2018).

How is it possible that in an age where teachers complain that students do not read but spend too much time on online social media platforms instead, children around the world are lining up to buy the new HP volume despite the considerable length of the literary work? In 2002, Andrew Blake published his book *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter*, the first scholarly attempt to tackle the question of how a book became the most translated and sold book in history in such a short time. According to Blake (2002), HP novels reflected the rebranding of English identity, what he calls ‘English past-in-present.’ This, together with the popularity of the English language and culture in the world due to British colonization and the commodification of British cultural products, according to Blake, explains the success of the

*HP* novels in the UK and the US, and its export to the world through the popularization of the 'Potter formula.' Blake's argument, therefore, is threefold. Firstly, Harry Potter is an English suburban orphan, representing the English past rebranded considering its multicultural present. Secondly, the 1990s saw a change in the book market industry, where British cultural products were commodified and aligned with the capitalist market. And thirdly, due to the status of the English language and culture in the world, books like *HP* were easily exported worldwide (Blake 2002).

In this paper, I revisit Blake's 'Potter formula' to argue that, although Blake's thesis does justice in explaining the initial popularity of *HP* books in the UK, it downplays an important aspect of the book – magic. Blake does note that due to the postmodernists' relativization of the authority of science and the church, magical practices flourished in the public sphere (2002, 100). However, he fails to recognize the extent to which magical culture attracted people to England from the 1960s until the turn of the millennium. This leads him to overestimate the role of rebranding the English national identity in the success of the *HP* novels. I will argue that the reason for the worldwide lure of the *HP* universe is not to be found in Harry's rebranded Englishness but in presenting magic in a New Age style – a religiosity and a lifestyle characterized by individual spirituality, a free combination of religious beliefs and practices, and a loose relationship to religious authorities. I argue that New Age, together with the continuous transmediation, and production of new content – movies, video games, real-life attractions, new books, a theatre play, a quiz show, interactive websites, and relentless marketing campaigns -- gives a more complete explanation of the global success of *HP* universe.

I define the New Age both in terms of religiosity and lifestyle. On the one hand, the New Age is a *Zeitgeist* that reflects the change in religiosity, a move from institutionalized to individualistic form of spirituality that we can trace from the 1960s when the first New Age communities emerged. In this sense, the New Age is a product of re-enchantment, a historical process of reemergence of magical culture in the public sphere after the Second World War (Asprem 2014, Hanegraaff 1996, Partridge 2004, Taylor 2007). More importantly, the New Age is also a style of living that favors individualism in creating a unique spiritual path by combining beliefs and practices from various religious traditions (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Prince and Riches 2000). Therefore, I see the spreading of the New Age as a cultural phenomenon, a marketable franchise, a style of living instead of just a religiosity. The *HP* books and later movies, I argue, fell into the fertile soil of cultures permeated with the New Age spirit.

### ***The 'Potter Formula'***

To understand what made *HP* books irresistible, Blake (2002) sheds light on historical processes that led to its emergence. Blake argues that the initial popularity of *HP* books can be explained by three interrelated factors: (1) Arousing nostalgia by re-presenting iconic cultural products from the English past, (2) the commodification of British culture, and (3) exploiting the popularity of English literature and culture in the world, which is the result of British colonization. He points out significant historical changes in the 1998 United Kingdom. There was a move towards political autonomy in the case of Wales and Scotland and in the case of Ireland. However, for England, Blake notes, no such changes have occurred. Hence, he concludes, "Politically, England does not exist. The imagined center of the UK has begun to lose its periphery, without gaining a legal identity of its own (...)" (2002, 6). Blake reads the *HP* novels as a part of an attempt to return to the past and rebrand the new English present. Victorian London, new houses that are trying to look like country cottages, and

Highlands boarding school are just some of the examples of this antiquation from the HP universe (2002, 7). This rebranding, however, does not simply mean a return to the past but reshaping the past considering the new multicultural English present. Due to the immigration of the Commonwealth into British cities in the 1950s, the English present is changed by the contact with other cultures. New artistic waves were emerging already in the 1970s. Among others, Blake notes Bhangra, the Anglo-Asian pop genre, the Bally Sangoo sung in Hindi, and North Indian forms of jazz (2002, 15).

For Blake, Harry is a product and an agent of the project of rebranding Englishness. Harry is living in a typical English suburb, immersed in the English past. “Harry Potter isn’t just part of Hewison’s museum culture; he is a revolutionary, a symbolic figure of the past-in-future England which is in desperate need of such symbols” (15-16). He goes to Hogwarts, English past-in-present – a magical multicultural place without technology. Blake interprets Hogwarts as a mixture of post-nineteenth-century writings and present concerns and attitudes – representing past mixed with present is a trademark of what he calls the ‘Potter formula.’ This style is not only related to *HP* novels. The viral American TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was Harry’s contemporary. Blake notes that in *Buffy* too, historical references (the past) are mixed with new feminist attitudes (the present). Therefore, he suggests that due to the propagation of the English language and culture in the world, which is the product of British imperialism, the ‘Potter formula’ – English past rebranded considering contemporary issues was easy to sell to the world as a commodity.

For him, the fact that Harry is an English suburban child is the main factor in spreading the HP hype from the UK to the US and worldwide. The goal of British imperialism was to establish the English language in British and American colonies. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English Literature became an academic category. Blake sees the relationship between Hollywood and British fiction as a 20<sup>th</sup>-century continuation of this project. Harry is not the first, but the third British character in line to win the hearts of the world after Sherlock Holmes and James Bond (2002, 91). Both Harry’s predecessors followed a very similar model. They began their journey addressing the contemporary crisis. Holmes stories were published in 1887, just after the public found out about Jack the Ripper. Bond from the 1950s is an agent who risks his life to spy for Britain, a contrast to members of the British establishment like Burgess, Maclean, Philby, and Blunt who were seen as traitors. Stories about Holmes and Bond were then rebranded for the global market. In the 1960s Bond became a father-figure who saved the world from capitalism, global threats, and organized crime. Selling Bond merchandise started during these decades, including expensive cars, and repackaging DVDs for Christmas (Blake 2002, 92-93).

To show why it was so essential to commodify Englishness, Blake draws attention to the political changes in 1997 England. This year marks the beginning of Harry’s and Buffy’s story, as well as the election of the New Labour Party to power (2002, 22-23). Blake does not read this political change as a new party’s constitution but as an attempt to modernize Britain by presenting the party as a reinvention of the Labour party that existed for a century. For him, the HP hype is a reflection of political, historical, and cultural changes in Britain at the end of the twentieth century: “New Labour needed a magical transformation, and they found it in Harry Potter” (2002, 24-26). At the time, the New Labour party faced issues with education and reading. In many schools, teachers and children reported increased interest in reading because of the *HP* novels. Citing a speech by Tony Blair about the importance of creativity and artistic imagination, Blake reads the political program of insistence on culture and creativity to motivate people to do (creative) work in the ‘cultural industry’ and stabilize the economy (2002, 51). The introduction of *HP* books to schools, therefore, can be seen as a

tactic to motivate children to read. But also, it was a part of a more elaborate strategy to rebrand British cultural products for exports in the contemporary capitalist marketplace, reorient the country's economy toward culture, and solve financial issues the Labor party was facing.

These historical and political changes affected the book market. Bookselling chains like Barnes & Noble and Borders relied on the mass production of books, setting up cafeterias in bookshops, and linking reading with purchasing other leisure time products. Waterstones and Blackwell organized events, book signings, and readings. Interaction with readers was also encouraged through internet platforms such as Amazon. Bloomsbury Publishing, the publisher of the *HP* books, followed all these trends. They had an e-magazine, *Blumsburrymagazine.com*, with a section devoted to Harry. Another significant change in the book market is the focus on teenage and preteen consumers. Statistics that Blake mentions to support his argument say that "At the beginning 1990s it was estimated that Americans under 12 spent around \$9 billion per year and influenced family decisions on the spending of another \$135 billion" (2002, 77). In 2000, he adds, the numbers were higher, with direct costs of \$30 billion and indirect ones of \$300 billion. Consumerism, Blake argues, is encouraged on the internet or television, but now, with these political changes, it is also learned in school. The relationship between schools and the market changed in such a way that it was easier to target children by various marketing companies (2002, 73-78). With the intrusion of consumerist capitalism into all pores of society, reading and purchasing became interrelated. Bloomsbury Publishing and Scholastics, the *HP* book publishers in the UK and the US, are excellent case studies of the employment of marketing strategies. Selling DVDs, toys, sweets, and other items with HP designs was the primary strategy for attracting children's attention. Adults and young adults were also targets of their campaigns, with book covers different from those for children. The new bookstores offered coffee and pastries for adults. Harry's face suddenly started appearing on all kinds of products, even on Coca-Cola cans (79). Blake argues that rebranding Englishness and the magic of consumerist capitalism propelled the *HP* hype in the UK and the US. To argue for the book's global success, he points out the worldwide appeal of British cultural products (89).

### ***Enter the New Age***

Blake's 'Potter formula' is an interesting take on analyzing the popularity of the *HP* franchise, especially in the early stages of its development, when the hype was mostly about the books and merchandise that accompanied them. Blake excels in situating the lure of *HP* novels within the political, economic, and cultural context of Great Britain. In a new historicist fashion, he convincingly interprets *HP* novels as both a product and an agent of rebranding English identity. He shows how the novels captured the attention of the New Labor party and were used, together with other British cultural products, to rejuvenate the declining economy. However, Blake's argument fails to explain why the *HP* franchise spread quickly worldwide. Moreover, he acknowledges that *HP* books were published in the context of the changing religious field in Europe and American colonies where the crisis of faith and rationality resulted in the weakening of the influence of Christianity and science in the public sphere and consequently the emergence of a magical culture that these institutions suppressed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (2002, 101). However, compared to the rebranded English identity, the alignment between *HP* novels and reemerging magical culture for Blake is incidental. In revising Blake's 'Potter formula' I argue that it is not Harry's Englishness or heroism that sells the *HP* novels, but the plurality and diversity of Rowling's characters. And, finally, it is not just transmediation, but an elaborate marketing strategy that followed all the media trends and

relentless publishing of new content for almost thirty years that together account for the global success of the HP universe.

The most significant impact of the New Age was on the UK and the US, which eventually happened to be simultaneously the two most significant consumers of HP products. On the one hand, I argue that the *HP* novels received immediate attention because they emerged within cultures where the New Age was widespread, the UK and the US. On the other hand, I expand the definition of the New Age as discourse, proposed by Wood (2007), arguing that the New Age is a lifestyle that resonates with *HP* novels. The New Age is a type of spirituality that encourages a free combination of beliefs, practices, and values from multiple religious traditions and a rejection of a single authority (Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1996). With the advent of the internet and the possibility to easily search for religious content and freely combine beliefs and practices to create one's spiritual path, this often results in appropriating the most exciting ideas from various religious traditions and replacing them with new ones without a serious commitment. York (2001) criticizes the New Age, calling it "(...) an outgrowth of liberal Western capitalism" (364). New Age seekers explore the religious field almost without boundaries, at times switching from Paganism to Druidism in a day. Without a formalized religious structure, authority, and code, the New Age often becomes a ride through a theme park.

The New Age is an umbrella term used by scholarship as a denominator for a variety of religious beliefs and practices, among others meditation, healing, positive thinking, mind-body-spirit techniques, interest in a horoscope, and crystals that emerged in the public sphere after the Second World War as a counterculture (Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1996, Sutcliffe 2003). Hanegraaff argues that the beginnings of this religious counterculture movement can be found in the UK in 1950s UFO cults that were drawing on former Theosophists like Alice Bailey. On the other hand, during the 1970s and 1980s, the New Age grew into a diverse body of beliefs and practices like Neopaganism, New Age science, New Age healing, growth movement, and Channeling (Hanegraaff 1996, 103). Heelas adds esoteric Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Druidism, Mayan, Native Indian traditions, meditations, Wicca, Shamanism, and various forms of positive thinking (1996, 1). The 'New Age' concept was criticized because of its vagueness since it does not refer to a particular group, institution, or set of beliefs. Sutcliffe (2003) argues that the New Age is not a movement nor a religion. Moreover, groups and individuals subsumed under this term do not identify themselves as 'New Agers' (2003, 24, 3).

Findhorn community in Scotland is one of the first New Age communities in the world, founded by Eileen Caddy in 1962. She arrived in Glastonbury in 1953 with Peter Caddy and Sheena Govan (Draper 2004, 188). The story of the founding of this community begins in Glastonbury (Somerset, England) (Gallagher 2014, 188). Glastonbury is a pilgrimage place where a variety of spiritualities coexist: "(...) paganism, ceremonial magic, Buddhism, Druidism, Sai Baba, yoga, neo-shamanism and myriads of established and not so established complementary and alternative healing and medicine traditions" (Draper 2004, 145). This place is known for its 'spiritual properties' which are described in many stories about Glastonbury; one of them mentions Jesus visiting this place. These stories are the reason why so many Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hinduists, Janes, members of other religions, as well as those who identify as spiritual or non-religious come and visit this place. With so many religious communities in a small place, a sense of universalism has formed to find a common ground between them. Members of all religions participate in events organized by members of other faiths. One of the memorable events described by Draper was Rumi's whirling Dervishes event (2004, 154-155). The popularity of Glastonbury, the adjacency of religious

practices, and the movement of visitors from one event to the next, allow us to regard Glastonbury as the cradle of the New Age.

At the turn of the century the term 'New Age' became pejorative and meaningless. This is a consequence of criticism the New Age withstood as a form of easy, fast, market-oriented religiosity. Its counterculture elements, the optimism towards coming of a better age, and the desire to form a community are absent in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There are no individuals or groups that identify as 'New Agers.' The New Age seemed to have disappeared on the level of a label or a group and dispersed into a culture of individualistic religiosity – a lifestyle. As Hammer (2001) puts it "(...) the New Age appears to have metamorphosed from a vaguely coherent network into a form of collective behavior (74). This is what makes the New Age difficult to document historically. However, the aspects of the New Age were very much alive and widespread in the UK and the US public, even though they were not labeled 'New Age.' This becomes evident when we examine cultural production at the turn of the century (Hammer 2001, 74-75). The case of *HP* hype is one of the most vocal examples.

### ***Harry Potter: The New Age Style***

The New Age is a paradigm shift in the approach to religion – its beliefs, traditions, practices, norms, and authorities. This change is important for our understanding of the immediate attention *HP* books have received. With the church losing its grip over the public space, New Age ideas gained popularity, especially among generations who were looking for sources of spirituality but were reluctant to conform to a single authority, rules, and discipline of religious traditions. Even in the first New Age communities and networks, authorities are multiple and loose, there is no institution, and members freely choose from the range of beliefs and practices. During and after the 1980s, when the New Age came out of these communities and became a global phenomenon, it further escaped scholarly attempts at capturing it with a coherent definition. The multiplicity of forms that it takes only have in common an individualistic approach to a spiritual path and a free combination of beliefs, practices, and authorities that one deems conducive to one's spiritual path. This led Prince and Riches to define the New Age as a lifestyle (2000, 5). In other words, even though at the turn of the millennium we do not find individuals and groups that identify with the 'New Age' label, what we do find is a change in a lifestyle where one uses and combines beliefs and practices of a variety of religious traditions to produce his unique spiritual path. One can, for example, believe in reincarnation and karma, pray to Jesus Christ, and meditate with the sound of shamanistic drumming and the smell of incense to achieve a positive change.

The New Age emerged in the UK, but it almost simultaneously spread in the US and then across Europe and the world. So, it is no wonder that a book published in 1997 in which a boy goes to a special school to learn magic was readily embraced in countries where the New Age was born and grew. Therefore, it is not Englishness that together with present attitudes produces the 'Potter formula' – it is magic, packaged in a New Age style. In the example of the Halliwell sisters from *Charmed*, Lyra from *His Dark Materials*, and Buffy from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, magic, demons, vampires, and witches are mixed with feminist attitudes of empowerment of women. In these TV series, women are agents who not only protect themselves but save the world. Harry, much like his peers, is also a child of the New Age – a boy unbounded by a religious tradition, who does not conform to any form of religious authority, never prays, and does not go to church. But he is interested in the world of the supernatural and endeavors to learn magic and create his unique path. At Hogwarts, students have common core subjects: Astronomy, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, History of Magic, Potions, and Transfiguration. But by mastering these skills, some students

become more interested in one aspect of magic, while others find other spells to better fit their talents. What is more, when they arrive at Hogwarts students are sorted into the four great houses: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin which match their character and intentions. But even then, they are not determined by their house, and they can freely explore the wizarding world and strive to improve those aspects of magic that they feel inclined to.

In contrast to the passive Christian attitude of waiting for Jesus to come and bring about the Kingdom of Heaven, the early New Age takes an active role in manifesting this brave new world (Hanegraaff 1996, 102). When it became obvious that the age of peace and harmony was not coming, the New Age discourse changed. Instead of talking about bringing about equality and harmony through transforming the world, the focus shifted to transforming the Self. The New Age does not imply the rejection of religious practices but assumes acceptance of those beliefs and practices that one finds empowering. Whether they are Wicca spells, yoga, meditation, Christian prayer, shamanistic journey, Nordic drumming, chanting, incense, or tarot, one feels entitled to the freedom to choose and combine elements from various religious traditions and transform them to fit his unique style. This is exactly what students at Hogwarts do. They venture to the magical school and discover a variety of magical practices, spells, and creatures.

In the HP universe, magic is hidden. This invites the reader to explore the wizarding world together with its heroes. As Asprem (2017) notes, the world of HP reveals

(...) that the disappearance of magic may have been more apparent than real. In Harry Potter's universe, magic was not eradicated once and for all; instead, it evacuated into a separate "wizarding world," hidden from the disenchanted "Muggle world." We may be stuck in the Muggle world, but somewhere in the shadows there is a portal to a place where magic is still very much alive. (27)

This captures the spirit of the New Age. As Hanegraaff (1996) and Wood (2007) pointed out, the New Age emerges from the magical milieu rooted in a secularized culture, not Christianity. New Age is marked by incredulity towards accessing the divine through religious authority. Therefore, one lives his life in a modern secular culture, but occasionally engages in meditation, yoga, prayer, Wicca spells, Nordic and Native American drumming, and shamanistic rituals, to experience a world that waits hidden, not in the afterlife, but just around the corner – the fantastic and magical.

This is also true from the narratological perspective – In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, together with Harry, the reader is guided by the narrator in his discovery of a world of magic and a school where one can learn it. We follow our hero as he finds Platform 9¾ at King's Cross Station and boards the Hogwarts Express. The reader, just like Harry, discovers that magic exists and ventures to explore this shiny new world. What is more, we find out that magic has always been there, just around the corner. At Hogwarts, students learn magical spells and abilities, not even once considering that they should not engage with magic because of their religious background. But the HP universe is not without religion. Hogwarts students celebrate Christmas and in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, we find two quotes from Bible on tombstones in Godrick Hallow. These elements notwithstanding, religion does not play an important role in the plot. They are just a cultural background of the UK. There is nothing particularly religious about the Christmas celebration. Harry and Hermione do not pray in the graveyard scene. The passive attitude of waiting for a savior is replaced by an active attitude of using magic to protect oneself. Before the Battle of Hogwarts, the professors did not protect themselves with the Our Father prayer. Instead, in the book version, Flitwick



casts the *Protego Horribilis* charm (Rowling 2007, 501). In the movie version, Flitwick, Molly, and Slughorn cast “*Protego Maxima, Fianto Duri, Repello Inimicum*” (Yates, 2011). Moreover, in the HP universe, wizards develop those aspects of magic they are inclined to. They can always learn new spells and improve their abilities. Just like the New Age, magic in the HP universe is practical and individual. Not only students can combine spells to create a unique dueling style, but those more talented can also create new spells. For example, as a student, Severus Snape invented many spells, including *Levicorpus* and *Sectum Sempra*.

Just like the approach to religious beliefs and practices in the New Age, the description of the system of magic in the HP universe is vague. Except for the names of subjects at Hogwarts, we do not get an understanding of where magic comes from and how it works. The reader simply accepts the fact that some people have magic and that wands amplify their magical abilities. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, when Harry buys a wand, Olivander tells him “The wand chooses the wizard” (Rowling 1998, 85). But why is it that the wand chooses the wizard and not the other way around and how does a wand choose a wizard, we never find out. The reader is also introduced to the differentiation between dark and light magic but there is no explanation of what makes a spell dark magic. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Barty Crouch Junior masked as Alastor Moody, demonstrated to students of Hogwarts the three unforgivable curses Imperius, Cruciatus, and Avada Kedavra (Rowling 2000, 211-215). But neither he nor the narrator explain why these curses are dark magic. He just tells students that they are illegal and that whoever uses these three curses ends up in Azkaban prison. Why is, for example, the *Gubraithian Fire* that Dumbledore casts to repel the inferi in *Harry Potter and Half-Blood Prince* a charm and the *Fiendfire* from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* a curse, or a dark charm? Both are fire spells that cause devastating effects. Why is *Protego Diabolica*, introduced in *Fantastic Beasts: Crimes of Grindelwald*, a dark charm even though its use is in protecting the caster? In the movie version of the Battle of Hogwarts, we see that the protection charm over Hogwarts also has devastating effects on those who try to physically penetrate it. My point here is that the HP universe does not offer the reader a comprehensive understanding of magic, its types, and its classifications.

As we follow Harry, Ron, and Hermione in their adventures, we learn new spells, find new magical objects, and meet new fantastic creatures. *HP* novels and movies bombard its readers with the novel shiny magical things. To name a few, the Cloak of Invisibility was introduced in *Philosopher’s Stone* together with wands, brooms, and chocolate frogs, the Chamber and Basilisk are in the center of the *Chamber of Secrets* storyline, and the Marauder’s Map and time turners were introduced in *Prisoner of Azkaban*. But this is true not only on a micro-level of the novels but also on the macro-level of the transmediation and commodification (see Kérchy 2018) of the HP universe. From 1997 when the first book was published, the HP franchise followed all the media trends – in addition to seven novels Rowling published additional books, movie and video game adaptations were created, followed by the *Pottermore* (later *Wizarding World*) interactive website, and then new *Fantastic Beast* movies. At the same time, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* theatre play premiered in London. In recent years, the Harry Potter quiz show and *Harry Potter Reunion* were published. The Harry Potter TV series is planned for 2025. The HP marketing campaign ensured worldwide sales of HP toys and merchandise, relentlessly producing new wands and character figures. The HP attractions like the Hogwarts train, theme parks, escape rooms, and movie sets are now a global phenomenon. And so, it is not just transmediation, but following all the digital and media trends, from books to movies and video games. With the increasing popularity of the internet and the possibility of owning a computer emerged the *Pottermore*. The *Fantastic Beasts* movies and *The Cursed Child* play attracted viewers, the former by promising them to return to the past when Dumbledore and Grindelwald were young and the latter by taking

them into the future when Harry's children go to Hogwarts and Voldemort returns. The micro-perspective of presenting magic, magical creatures, and items in a New Age style and macro-perspective of transmediating the HP universe to follow all the digital and media trends, made the HP story so attractive to children and adults around the world for almost thirty years.

The parallel between Harry Potter and the New Age becomes obvious as the reader gets more and more novel content, but none of it requires venturing into an in-depth analysis. Just like in Glastonbury, where you can meditate in the morning, go and see whirling dervishes in the afternoon, and take part in shamanistic rituals in the evening, without burdening yourself with the history of these practices or committing to its authorities, the HP universe also offers magic primarily as diverse and fun. Rooted in the secularized culture, magic is devoid of any religious authority. It is an inner capacity to be developed individually. Moreover, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist children can enjoy it alike. Even though students must spend years learning magic, especially the difficult spells, the reader is not troubled by details about how a wizard progresses in learning a difficult spell. Even in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Harry attempts to learn the Patronus charm, we do not learn what it is that makes this charm difficult. "For a thirteen-year-old wizard, even an indistinct Patronus is a huge achievement," Remus explains (246). From him, we learn that the wizard must think of a happy memory, wave his wand, and say *Expecto patronum* (Rowling 1999b, 238). But what is it exactly that makes the spell difficult and how Harry manages to master it, we never find out. Just like in the New Age, one does not have to commit to learning the whole system of Hinduism or Buddhism to believe in reincarnation and karma, in the HP universe the reader does not commit to learning the system of magic. With a "willing suspension of disbelief" just accepts that the spell does what it does and moves on to the next one.

Another parallel between New Age and HP is that the magic in *HP* novels and movies is transformative, individualistic, and practical. By learning magic, students create their unique path. This is what makes the world of HP so interesting – not the Englishness of its main character but the diversity of its characters. Students learn magic to be able to defend themselves and defeat Voldemort. In the New Age, one freely combines religious practices to empower oneself, to experience the transcendental, and to use this empowerment in everyday life. This is why New Age was aligned with the self-help culture of the 1980s. In the *HP* novels, Harry is the protagonist and often the focalized of the narrative, and it is with him and mostly through his perspective that we discover the wizarding world. He is a boy whose parents were killed when he was a baby. In the attempt to kill him, a part of Voldemort's soul became a part of Harry. From that moment Harry carries evil within him and wrestles with the trauma of losing his parents. As we follow Harry on his journey, we learn that to defeat Voldemort, Harry must come to terms with his traumatic past and defeat the evil within him. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Snape teaches Harry Occlumency, a magical skill that protects the caster's mind from access or influence. But it is in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, that Harry accepts death and loss and therefore is able to get rid of the part of Voldemort that lived inside him.

And so, through magic, love, and friendship, our hero, from a small orphan living in a cupboard, transforms himself into a powerful wizard and saves the world. This transformative aspect of magic is further emphasized by the juxtaposition of love and power. Just like in the Star Wars universe (whose popularity also aligns with the New Age) where we have Jedi and Sith, or another *Harry's* contemporary, the TV series *Charmed* where we have good witches and white lighters and bad warlocks and demons, in *HP* novels good witches and wizards transform themselves through the selfless use of magic while the bad ones use dark magic to dominate others. But following Harry's example, full transformation is only possible through

the magic of love, selfless sacrifice, and friendship. As I discussed earlier, the New Age emerged from the Theosophical belief in the coming of the Age of Aquarius in the 1950s and the 1960s, an age that will bring about equality, peace, and prosperity. Although in the 1970s and the 1980s, the coming of the New Age was absent in the New Age discourse, it was replaced by the transformation on the individual level – a transformation of the Self. This is why the New Age was dispersed in the self-help discourse in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. In the New Age, just like at Hogwarts, one can pick and choose from a variety of magical/spiritual practices to create his individualistic magical/spiritual path.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I revised Blake's 'Potter formula' that focused on rebranding the English past concerning new cultural changes. Blake saw *HP* books as products and agents of cultural, economic, and political changes in the UK at the end of the millennium – the emerging national sentiments, politics of the New Labor party, reorienting economy towards cultural production, and the change in the book market industry. Rebranding the English past, together with changes in book sales that sold books with different covers for children and adults and offered toys and sweets in bookstores, the commodification of British cultural products, and marketing campaigns, according to Blake explains the lure of the *HP* books in the UK and the US. To argue for the worldwide appeal of these books, Blake points out the popularity of the English language and culture in the world and the universality of issues that *HP* novels tackle. Although I think that Blake's account of the popularity of *HP* novels holds until today, I have argued that he puts too strong an emphasis on the rebranding of the English past. It is quite plausible that elements of the English past aligned with cultural, historical, and political changes in the UK. However, it is unlikely that these elements attracted many readers worldwide. Other British hero examples Blake mentions are Sherlock Holmes and James Bond. In these cases, also, it is not Englishness that sells these heroes but the other way around – the popularity of these heroes sells the Englishness.

I have argued that magic presented in a New Age style sells *HP* books. I presented the changes in the religious field in the UK and the US from the 1960s until the turn of the millennium to show that the book about magic published in 1997 would be readily embraced by readers in these cultural settings. It is not just *HP* books but several other contemporary stories about magic and the supernatural like TV series *Buffy* and *Charmed* and Pullman's *His Dark Materials* novels. As Partridge showed, after the Second World War, the occult emerged in the public sphere and slowly made its way to the mainstream media. This is, in his account, a part of the secularization and the re-enchantment processes. What I endeavored to show is how these processes crystallized in places like Glastonbury, which acted as a melting pot of religious ideas that resulted in the emergence of the New Age. The fact that the New Age originated in the UK but almost immediately spread to the US speaks about the demand for supernatural content that is not filtered through and bound by religious institutions. The *HP* novels and movies, I argue, have fulfilled that demand.

The New Age implies a free combination of religious beliefs and practices to create a unique spiritual path. This often results in a shallow understanding and a lack of serious commitment to beliefs and practices one picks up in the religious marketplace. In the spirit of capitalism, one moves from one to the next religious practice to find the one that works the best for him and his spiritual transformation. But what 'works the best' is often that which is most exotic, catchy, and attention-grabbing. I have argued that a parallel can be drawn between the New Age attitude toward spirituality and the attitude toward magic in *HP* novels and movies. The reader is introduced to a diversity of characters from which he can choose his favorite one.

The system of magic is described vaguely so that the reader does not have to bother with learning how it works but is all the time bombarded with new spells, magical items, and fantastic beasts. Finally, following Harry's story, we find magic is a practical tool to be used for self-empowerment and transformation – the hallmarks of the New Age.

If we add this to Blake's 'Potter formula' we get a more complete account of the popularity of the HP universe. But why did Rowling's novels capture global attention among other contemporary stories about magic like Pullman's *His Dark Materials*? The answer is not simply transmediation. As I showed, Pullman's novels were also adapted into movies, theatre plays, and TV series. The key is in transmediation which followed all the digital and marketing trends and published new HP content for almost thirty years, creating an avalanche effect. The turning point was the Warner Bros movies starting in 2001. But the HP franchise did not stop there. After that, there were videogames, websites like *Pottermore* and *Wizarding World*, amusement parks, *Fantastic Beasts* movies, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* play, *Hogwarts Tournament of Houses*, *Hogwarts Legacy* videogame, and soon a new HP TV series will stream. These are all media products signed by Rowling and the Wizarding World franchise. They also sell various other commodities and tours with the HP brand. So, it is magic wrapped in the spirit of the New Age, the transmediation of the HP universe, relentless marketing campaigns, and commodification of HP products (wands, toys, robes, chocolate frogs) that set the HP universe apart from other cultural products.

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