DOI: 10.4312/elope.4.1-2.69-80

Brigita Pavšič

Understanding Racism and Sexism in Harry Potter and Stuart Hall's Model of Three Reading Positions

Summary

In the *Harry Potter* book series there are several examples of sexist and racist stereotypes which can distort children's understanding of reality and thus cause them to adopt prejudices and inappropriate judgments. The reason for such strong impact on the young readers can be explained with the use of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model that suggests three reading positions and, as a result, three different ways of understanding one and the same text. The fact that oppositional reading, which allows the reader to asses the text critically, can only be adopted by educated and well-read readers explains why adult help is needed in directing the child reader towards a correct interpretation of such deficiencies of a text and offering a grounded explanation.

Key words: child readers, Hall's model, racism, sexism, stereotypes

Razumevanje rasizma in seksizma v Harryju Potterju in Hallov model treh vrst branja

Povzetek

V seriji *Harry Potter* je precej primerov seksističnih in rasističnih prikazov oseb in situacij. Ker je serija primarno namenjena otrokom in mladostnikom, so ti stereotipni prikazi lahko škodljivi, saj v neizkušenih otroških bralcih sprožajo predsodke in napačno razumevanje sveta. Zakaj neprimerna predstavitev teh tematik tako močno vpliva na otroke, lahko razložimo s Hallovim modelom treh vrst branja tekstov, ki istočasno tudi pojasni, zakaj imajo izobraženi odrasli bralci to odgovornost, da otroke osveščajo o napakah v besedilih in, če je mogoče, ponudijo utemeljene razlage in ustreznejše rešitve.

Ključne besede: Hallov model, otroški bralci, rasizem, seksizem, stereotipi

Understanding Racism and Sexism in Harry Potter and Stuart Hall's Model of Three Reading Positions

1. Introduction

The reviews *Harry Potter* has received since publication have not all been positive. The series has also raised many controversies. Among them, the most frequent are those concerning the racist and sexist portrayal of the characters in the books. The understanding and correct treatment of such problematic topics mostly depends on the reader's reading position. To explain these different interpretations of the text, Hall's model of three reading positions and its use will be presented. This will also help to show why such deficiencies of texts can be damaging for child readers, as well as how to prevent readers from overlooking them. The second part of the article will deal with the most common stereotypical portrayals and problematic issues in the *Harry Potter* series.

2. Hall's model of three reading positions

In his article "Encoding and decoding in the Television Discourse" from 1973, Stuart Hall develops the model of three reading positions (Stankovič 2002, 36). In his opinion the fact that the message was sent does not necessarily mean that it has also arrived at its destination; it is even less certain that it will be understood in the way the sender of the message predicted (ibid.). The public is not homogenous; rather, it consists of different groups of people who have very diverse experience and knowledge and who have significantly different relations towards dominant ideologies. But despite the fact that each individual understands the message in a slightly different manner, the fact that we live in similar if not the same cultures prevents major misunderstandings. "The television message is indeed polysemantic (it has several meanings), but it is not entirely pluralistic (it does not have infinite set of meanings)" (ibid., 37, my translation).

Hall divides the ways of interpretation of a text into three groups (Chandler 2001):

1. the dominant or hegemonic strategy: the reader understands the message and decodes it in terms of the reference-code in which it has been coded. This position is rare.

2. the negotiated strategy: it acknowledges the legitimacy of hegemonic definitions, but at the more restricted, situational level, it makes its own rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule by using particular and situated logics.

3. the oppositional code: the viewer understands the literal and the connotative inflection given by the discourse, but decodes the message in a contrary way as a result of their individual knowledge.

These strategies for interpreting of texts are not strictly detached. In everyday use they are interconnected and the boundaries between them are far from clear. Hall separated them for an easier insight into the intricate system of the understanding of texts.

In the case of *Harry Potter*, the strategies for understanding the text could lead to the following results: a dominant-hegemonic strategy is most likely among readers (especially child readers) from Anglo-American culture and of middle class. The images in *Harry Potter* are closest to these readers. They are familiar to them, therefore, there is little likelihood they would doubt them. This is true for a variety of topics in these books, including issues as problematic as sexism and racism. Because of the innate denial or avoidance of such issues they appear as something normal or unworthy of any special attention. As a result, such themes do not rouse opposition in the readers.

The negotiated strategy is more likely among readers from different cultures: their local particularities and experience become more evident in their interpretation of texts relative to how distant their culture is from the Anglo-American society. These readers might question the scenes in the boarding school, the striving of the Dursleys to have a bigger house and a better car than their neighbours, the rivalry among the schoolfellows at Hogwarts, their desire to have a better and newer version of the flying broom, the theme of witchcraft, etc. With this strategy, the cultural differences between readers around the world become the most prominent. Through this the readers also become aware of different cultures and they learn about them, which enables them to understand different societies more easily. From the perspective of learning about cultures, this strategy is the most important as the dominant strategy is only possible with readers who already know the culture presented in the book because they belong to it. Therefore, they do not learn anything radically new about their own culture; while with the oppositional strategy the cultural differences are not as important as the social experience, knowledge, and education of the readers.

The third, oppositional, strategy is mostly present among educated readers. These readers can assess positive and negative aspects of a book, they can interpret them within the context, and they are also able to refuse them if they deem it necessary. There are few child readers who would be capable of this and, consequently, it is essential that they have teachers and parents to direct them and to teach them the right interpretation of the text, because children take this knowledge into adulthood and then forward it on in the same form they have received it.

Tammy Turner-Vorbeck summarizes Hall's opinion about how it appears as if the media (and through them the hegemonic ideology) only reflect reality while in truth they construct it. Hall agrees with Louis Althusser's supposition that mass media reproduce interpretations from ideas which are embedded in symbols and cultural practices in a manner that serves the interests of the ruling class. However, Hall also claims that the mass media allow ideological struggles. Turner-Vorbeck questions this:

> However, how much struggle is really possible when confronted with a capitalist marketing machine that seduces its public through normative messages consisting of comfortable, familiar images and the appearance of 'good, clean fun'? Is it realistic to believe that child culture can be a place of ideological struggle in the face of commodity fetishism? (Turner-Vorbeck 2003, 17)

Ideological struggle is questionable when we consider the influence of the marketing moves of the mega-corporations – especially in children's literature, since the corporations create values and project fabricated needs onto the consumers. In this way they rob the recipients of these messages of the standards for the assessment of the authenticity of these same messages. When we take into account that traditions are dying out and that traditional values are no longer valid or they are at least not classified in the same priority lists, individuals have considerable difficulty finding a base which would help them orientate themselves in the modern society of consumerism. Therefore, it seems it is also very difficult to take the oppositional stance in interpreting the texts as it is much easier to resign to the dominant or hegemonic strategy when we are being attacked from all sides with proofs that this is the *only* correct strategy.

The biggest problem with all this is that, with the dominant-hegemonic position, readers tend to interpret the presentations of certain troublesome issues as something normal and do not question their accuracy and justification. As mentioned, two such issues in the *Harry Potter* series are sexism and racism. With the dominant strategy of interpretation the reader will think it completely understandable that women do not occupy the leading positions and that they do not have important roles. All the female characters in the books are allegedly of secondary importance for the development of the story. McGonagall is only the Headmaster's assistant, Hermione is Harry's helper and she never takes on the leading role, Petunia Dursley and Molly Weasley are housekeepers, etc. This is quite a generalization of the situation in the books, but if the reading is superficial, it might well result in this kind of interpretation. It is therefore essential that parents and teachers warn children of these issues and, in places where they are wrongly presented, explain where the problem lies and what solution would be better.

The same is true of racism. There have been several different explanations of the situation in *Harry Potter* because the books introduce different races in the muggle (i.e. non-wizarding) world as well as different races in the wizarding world. The readers encounter white people, African-Americans, Asians, and also giants, goblins, dwarfs, Veelas, and others. Some critics, like Elizabeth Heilman and Anne Gregory, are unsatisfied with the way some races are presented as superior in comparison to others (this is especially valid of the different races in the wizarding world), or with the fact that some races are ignored while others are in the foreground (as readers we only learn that some of the students are of African-American descent in the third and fourth book, while the main characters are white and are constantly in the centre of attention). It is (nearly) impossible to write a book which would represent all sexes, all races, and all religions equally. But all in all, it is worth calling the attention of children to such examples of would-be equality, as the fact that only those wizards who have lived their whole lives in the wizarding world are afraid of the giants because they have had this fear inured as children. On the other hand, Harry and Hermione do not fear them because they base their relationship towards Hagrid (a part-giant) only on their personal experience and therefore know that not all giants and part-giants are dangerous. Child readers have to be stimulated to think about these instances; only in this way can they come to understand the world and people, our prejudices and false notions themselves. With this (pro)active approach they will learn considerably more and later on in their lives they will be able to enhance their knowledge and forward it to others.

3. Examples of racism

In the essay "Images of the privileged Insider and Outcast Outsider" Elizabeth Heilman and Anne Gregory claim that *Harry Potter* incites racist thinking because it "suggests that it is perfectly acceptable to fear differences among people, and that there are differences that make certain people better than others. These portrayals of deep, biologically rooted difference can possibly serve to reinforce readers' notions of biological differences among races" (Heilman and Gregory 2003b, 253).

They further explain this by drawing attention to how the people and other magical creatures of mixed origins in the *Harry Potter* books are presented hierarchically. In their view, characters like Hagrid and Madame Maxime, who are part-giants, and Remus Lupin, who is a werewolf, are shown as outcast outsiders in comparison to wizards like Harry Potter, Dumbledore, and others. A slightly more acceptable combination is that of a Veela and a wizard as in the French student Fleur Delacour.

These claims are unfounded if we consider, when analyzing these examples, that the relation of the main protagonists towards these characters is rather different. When it comes to a child's understanding of the reality the *Harry Potter* books present, it is essential how that reality is seen by the protagonist with which the child identifies himself during reading. In *Harry Potter*, nothing shows that Harry and Hermione would have any kind of prejudice towards Hagrid, Lupin or anyone else exclusively because they are not pure blood wizards. On the contrary, Hermione as a child of two non-wizards, i.e. muggles, proves to be an excellent witch herself and has Harry's complete trust – and with that she also gains the readers' trust once they see that it is not always important to be from an old and well-off family and that the characteristics of an individual and their endeavours to do right are considerably more important.

This perspective gains even more prominence if we compare Hermione to Draco Malfoy, who is a descendant of one of the oldest pure blood wizard families. Spoilt, snobbish, and pompous Draco does not present himself to the readers in the most charming light. The way Ron immediately defends Hermione when Malfoy insults her by calling her 'mudblood' (one of the worst insults for a wizard who is of mixed descent) makes it obvious to the readers on whose side the 'good' characters are and which principles are the right ones. It is unlikely anyone would want to imitate Malfoy, particularly since most children identify themselves with one of the protagonists: Harry, Hermione, or Ron.

But even the three friends differ. When Ron discovers that Hagrid is a part-giant, his reaction is different from Harry and Hermione's. From his early age, Ron has been taught that giants are evil and dangerous; that (false) belief has always been present in the wizarding world. On the other hand, Harry and Hermione have grown up in the muggle world and have therefore never been taught such prejudices. By showing that the 'good' people, too, have prejudices Rowling shows

> that prejudice and hatred are not something that other people do. These are powerful beliefs embedded in the culture, which all of us absorb and know, even though we may not be conscious of ever having learned them. (Nel 2001, 45)

By making Ron react in a 'racist' way and by showing Harry's and Hermione's effort to convince him otherwise and explain the absurdity of such an attitude, Rowling deliberately draws attention to this problematic issue, but although the conclusion to this situation is pedagogic, it is not moralizing precisely because it is Ron who acts wrongly and not one of the corrupt characters.

Solidarity is also shown through Hermione's attempts to free the house elves who have to work for their masters without getting paid. Hermione founds a club which is supposed to help the elves to freedom and to inform them of their rights. This theme has been largely present in the fifth book in the story about Dobby and Winky, but it has not been completely developed yet as Hermione so far has not been very successful, partly because the elves themselves do not want to be freed. Perhaps Rowling will dedicate a few more words to this theme in the last book in the series.[1]

Racism is also shown through Voldemort's likeness to Hitler – the main common feature being Voldemort's 'impure' origin. Lord Voldemort comes from a mixed marriage: his mother was a witch, his father a muggle who left her when he discovered who she really was. Merope was already pregnant and she died at childbirth. Lord Voldemort or Tom Marvolo Riddle spent his childhood in an orphanage. Despite his mixed origin, or maybe because of it, he is obsessed with pure blood. If it were possible he would erase all mudbloods; this was also the reason for his killing his father's second family – he tried to erase all traces of his origin (Rowling 2005, chapter 17). Similarly, Hitler tried to promote an Arian race, although he did not even remotely resemble the ideal projected by the Nazis, neither in his physical appearance nor in his heritage.

Philip Nel develops the connection with the Second World War even further. Not only did Dumbledore defeat the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945 when the Second World War ended; Nel also claims there is another association: "When it seems as though a new war may be beginning near the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Dumbledore delivers several rousing speeches with distinctly Churchillian cadences" (Nel 2001, 44). Nel's commentary refers to the part of Dumbledore's speech where he says:

> Lord Voldemort's gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open. (Rowling 2000, 605)

4. Examples of sexism

The second issue Elizabeth Heilman addresses in another of her essays, "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches", is sexism. She claims that "the *Harry Potter* books feature females in secondary positions of power and authority and replicate some of the most demeaning, yet familiar, cultural

1 At the time this article was written the seventh book had not yet appeared.

stereotypes for both males and females" (Heilman 2003a, 222). She begins the explanation of her theory by listing the number of female and male pupils at Hogwarts: there are 29 girls mentioned and 35 boys. But all important characters are males: Harry, Ron, Dumbledore, Malfoy, Black, Pettigrew, Lord Voldemort and others. Even among the Death Eaters, the evil followers of Voldemort, there is only one woman, Bellatrix Lestrange. Most of the irritating, but not evil adult characters, are female: Mrs. Figg, Professor Trelawney, Rita Skeeter, and Aunt Petunia. "Within the Ministry of Magic, the seat of power, all of the ministers are male except for Bertha Jorkins, who is described as gossipy and absentminded" (ibid., 223). This is true of the first four books. Book five, however, features a female among the aurors, the wizarding police who are after the Dark wizards, Tonks Nymphadora. Additionally, there is also the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones, and the senior undersecretary to the Minister for Magic, Dolores Umbridge, who is later, for a short time, also installed as Headmistress of Hogwarts.

"Males are represented more often, but they are also depicted as wiser, braver, more powerful, and more fun than females" (ibid.). Female powerlessness is most evident in the portrayal of Hermione, who often shows signs of fear. As an example Heilman cites the attack of the mountain troll when the boys have to save Hermione because she is merely crouching helplessly under the sink and screaming (Rowling 1999, 132). Heilman argues, somewhat inaccurately, that Hermione is supposed to be exceptionally intelligent, but not brave or daring. Further, her knowledge is only of use to the boys while she does not know how to use it or cannot use it. This can be explained through the understanding of Harry Potter as a mythic hero. Both Hermione and Ron are only helping Harry since he is the principal protagonist of the story (Nikolajeva 2003, 127). Although Heilman draws attention to such instances as the Polyjuice Potion which helps the boys to sneak into the Slytherin House, it does not work on Hermione so she has to stay behind; or when Hermione becomes 'petrified' but still manages to aid Harry and Ron with the help of a note in her hand which reveals the secret of Salazar's successor. It is important to stress that in the final battle Harry always fights alone because Ron also fails half way. This happens at the end of each book: in *The Philosopher's Stone* Ron sacrifices himself on the chessboard and Harry confronts Squirrel alone; in *The Chamber of Secrets* the ceiling of the tunnel collapses and Ron remains trapped; in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* Hermione helps Harry rescue Black and Buckbeak while Ron rests injured in the infirmary; in *The Goblet of Fire* Harry confronts Lord Voldemort while Ron and Hermione watch the competition from the stands for the spectators; in *The Order of Phoenix* Harry has several helpers, among them Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Neville, and Luna; in the sixth book, *The Half-Blood Prince*, Ron and Hermione stay at Hogwarts while Harry joins Dumbledore in his search for a part of Lord Voldemort's soul.
Another proof of Hermione's bravery and daring is the scene in *The Chamber of Secrets* when she tries to convince the boys they should make the Polyjuice Potion:

> Hermione shut the book with a snap.
> "Well, if you two are going to chicken out, fine," she said. There were bright pink patches on her cheeks and her eyes were brighter than usual. "I don't want to break rules, you know. I think threatening Muggle-borns is far worse than brewing up a difficult potion. But if

> you don't want to find out if it's Malfoy, I'll go straight to Madam Pince now and hand the book back in …"
> "I never thought I'd see the day when you'd be persuading us to break rules," said Ron. (Rowling 1998, 125)

Additionally, there are occasions in the series when male characters are scared (including Harry) and they even cry, although Heilman claims this is not true (Heilman 2003a, 225). The first example is Professor Gilderoy Lockhart:

> White-faced and wandless, Lockhart approached the opening.
> "Boys," he said, his voice feeble. "Boys, what good will it do?"
> Harry jabbed him in the back with his wand. Lockhart slid his legs into the pipe.
> "I really don't think -" he started to say, but Ron gave him a push, and he slid out of sight. (Rowling 1998, 223).

Another is Professor Flitwick who starts crying in the same book when he finds out the monster has abducted Ginny Weasley (Rowling 1998, 217). And although Heilman says it would be unimaginable for Dumbledore to react as emotionally as Professor McGonagall reacts in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Heilman 2003a, 225) that is exactly what happens in *The Half-Blood Prince*:

> Dumbledore opened his mouth to speak and then closed it again. Behind Harry, Fawkes the phoenix let out a low, soft, musical cry. To Harry's intense embarrassment, he suddenly realized that Dumbledore's bright blue eyes looked rather watery, and stared hastily at his own knees. When Dumbledore spoke, however, his voice was quite steady.
> "I am very touched, Harry." (Rowling 2005, 334-5)

On the other hand, it is Harry's "stupid bravery" that solves all the problems. Here Heilman contradicts her own statement of male characters being depicted as wiser (Heilman 2003a, 223). It is true, however, that in comparison to Hermione's intelligence, prudence, and diligence, male characters, Ron and Harry in particular, could be seen as typically 'dumb' males who are only interested in sports (Quidditch), and the newest models of sports cars (in this case the flying brooms) and who try to solve problems by running their heads against a brick wall. If we read the books with this kind of understanding we can come across many instances of stereotypical portrayals. But as already mentioned there are also situations and examples which deny the stereotypes. It all depends on the perspective we assume while reading the books.

Heilman gives another example. In Quidditch, the goals scored by girls do not count much since the most important and the fastest ball is the snitch and the players chasing it are usually boys. The only female seeker is Cho Chang who, instead of searching for the snitch herself, trails Harry (ibid., 226). In *The Order of Phoenix* and *The Half-Blood Prince* Ginny Weasley proves to be a very competent seeker when she substitutes for Harry when Dolores Umbridge forbids him to play Quidditch and later when he has to help Snape as a punishment. The concept of naturally competitive men is supposedly further reinforced by the fact that all the captains are

male (ibid.). In *The Order of Phoenix* Angelina Johnson becomes the captain of the Gryffindor team and she proves to be very competent considering the fact that three of the players in her team are forbidden to play and so she has to find substitutes for them and win the game – a task in which she ultimately succeeds.

Furthermore, according to Heilman, the girls behave 'girlish' even during sports when Angelina, Katie, and Alicia start to giggle when they find out they will compete against Cedric Diggory, a tall, handsome boy (ibid.). Harry proves that girls are not the only ones sensitive to the opposite sex. When playing against Cho he is not willing to use the same methods as against Malfoy.

> Harry accelerated, eyes fixed on the speck of gold ahead – but just then, Cho appeared out of thin air, blocking him!
> "HARRY, THIS IS NO TIME TO BE A GENTLEMAN!" Wood roared, as Harry swerved to avoid a collision. "KNOCK HER OFF HER BROOM IF YOU HAVE TO!" (Rowling 1999, 217)

Heilman claims the female characters are presented in groups, their traits are schematic and sometimes they are completely hazy (ibid., 227). Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell, and Alicia Spinnet form one group, Parvati and Padma Patil and Lavender Brown the second, and the third consists of Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode. But in the same manner there are also groups among the male students: Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle (although Malfoy as Harry's antagonist is presented in greater detail); Colin and Dennis Creevey; Fred and George Weasley and Lee Jordan and finally Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas.

Ginny Weasley is "the archetypal girl and is presented as deeply passive, weak, and receptive. She has a crush on Harry, which disables her" (Heilman 2003a, 230). Ginny corresponds to this description only in the beginning when the readers get to know her for the first time in *The Chamber of Secrets*. Through the following books she develops as a character and matures. In *The Chamber of Secrets* Lord Voldemort uses her and Heilman interprets this as proof of her helplessness. This experience, however, does not show her weak character, rather, it shows her maturity in the ability to learn from such an unpleasant event.

> "I didn't want anyone to talk to me," said Harry, who was feeling more and more nettled.
> "Well, that was a bit stupid of you," said Ginny angrily, "seeing as you don't know anyone but me who's been possessed by You-Know-Who, and I can tell you how it feels." (Rowling 2003, 441)

Ginny no longer falls silent in Harry's presence. Instead, she tells him directly that he is acting stupidly and she even explains to him what it is like if Lord Voldemort possesses one. She also very successfully replaces Harry as a seeker in the Gryffindor Quidditch team. During the school year she falls in love with a classmate as she has long forgotten her crush on Harry, but she breaks up with the boy at the end of the school year when she realizes he values winning in Quidditch more than her. In the sixth book she shows determination and maturity, especially in comparison

to the quiet and shy person she was three years ago. First she takes Harry's side when he is confronted by Hermione, although she is her friend:

> "Give it a rest, Hermione!" said Ginny, and Harry was so amazed, so grateful, he looked up. "By the sound of it Malfoy was trying to use an Unforgivable Curse, you should be glad Harry had something good up his sleeve!"
> /…/
> "Oh, don't start acting as though you understand Quidditch," snapped Ginny, "you'll only embarrass yourself." (Rowling 2005, 496)

And then she calmly accepts Harry's decision to end things between them:

> "But you've been too busy saving the wizarding world," said Ginny, half-laughing. "Well … I can't say I'm surprised. I knew this would happen in the end. I knew you wouldn't be happy unless you were hunting Voldemort. Maybe that's why I like you so much." (Rowling 2005, 603)

Beside Harry and Dumbledore she is also the only character in the books who is not afraid to pronounce Voldemort's name aloud.

Although not all of Heilman's arguments are valid,[2] it is indisputably true that repeating one and the same negative stereotype influences the readers, especially the young ones who are very susceptible to the messages their favourite books are relating. In *The Half-Blood Prince* Rowling made a step forward in regard to this issue by showing how Ginny developed and by making McGonagall replace Dumbledore as Headmistress after his death.

Sexism and racism, however, are not the only questionable issues in the series when interpreted with the dominant strategy. As an example, John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro claim that the presentation of family and the relations between family members is also problematic, especially the presentation of families in the muggle world. They suggest that by "relying on stereotypical family roles and relationships to give us a few laughs, Rowling risks reifying family roles and relationships in the minds of her young readers, creating instead a troubling vision of home and family" (Kornfeld and Prothro 2003, 189).

Most family relations in the *Harry Potter* books are supposedly presented as situation comedy, as conventional, superficial, and predictable relations that are far from representative of the diversity and complexity of a modern family. The family members are shown one-dimensionally; the parents are dull in comparison to their smart, sharp children, boys are constantly breaking the rules, which endangers the image of the family in the wider society, both fathers (Weasley and Dursley) are bread-winners, the mothers take care of the home and family (ibid., 189–90).

2 This also results from the fact that the last three books were published after Heilman first published her article. The three books are essential for the understanding of Ginny Weasley's development and the rise of other female characters to the positions of power.

As a different example, Kornfeld and Prothro state a different kind of family in the wizarding world where its members are not relatives, instead, they are connected through friendship and trust. These extended families are the individual houses at Hogwarts which offer shelter to their members. But even in this society there is rivalry present among the four families which is being stimulated even by the teachers and the Headmaster. In the Triwizard Tournament in *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry Potter and Cedric Diggory are prepared to cooperate and they grab the Cup simultaneously. As a result, Cedric dies and that evokes the disquieting notion that working together does not pay off (ibid., 196). Kornfeld and Prothro suggest that through this Rowling shows a plausible portrayal of how people live and work together. However, the competition between houses at Hogwarts leads to conflicts and alienations which is understood to be normal and ordinary by all characters.

5. Conclusion

Hall's encoding/decoding model of three reading positions and all of the above examples illustrate the essence of the problem which, according to Ana Maria Machado, is the following: "Literature without ideology does not exist and therefore the question of which literature is ideologically faultless is essentially wrong. It is much more appropriate to ask: How we should read" (Machado 1995, 101, my translation). It is therefore important that we teach children, who lack experience and education and are thus incapable of assuming the oppositional strategy of interpretation of texts, to read and interpret critically. In this way we provide them with the basis on which they will later be capable of detecting questionable and faulty statements and notions in books (and everyday life) and they will be able to accept or refute them at their own discretion.

Bibliography

Chandler, D. 2001. *Semiotics for Beginners: Encoding/Decoding*. http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem08c.html. (accessed January 2007).

Hall, Stuart. 1980 [1973]. Encoding/decoding. In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79.* Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, ed. S. Hall et al. 128–38. London: Hutchinson.

Heilman, E. E. 2003a. Blue Wizards and Pink Witches. In *Harry Potter's World*, ed. E. E. Heilman, 221–39. New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Heilman, E. E. and A. E. Gregory. 2003b. Images of the Privileged Insider and Outcast Outsider. In *Harry Potter's World*, ed. E. E. Heilman, 241–61. New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Kornfeld, J. and L. Prothro. 2003. Comedy, Conflict, and Community: Home and Family in Harry Potter. In *Harry Potter's World*, ed. E. E. Heilman, 187–202. New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Machado, A. M. 1995. Ideologija in mladinska književnost. Trans: M. Kordigel. *Otrok in knjiga*. 22/39–40: 100–1.

Nel, P. 2001. *Harry Potter Novels – A Readers' Guide*. New York, London: Continuum.

Nikolajeva, M. 2003. Harry Potter – A Return to the Romantic Hero. In *Harry Potter's World*, ed. E. E. Heilman, 125–41. New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Rowling, J. K. 1998. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury.

– – –. 2000. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury.

– – –. 2005. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury.

– – –. 2002. *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury.

– – –. 1997. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury.

– – –. 1999. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury.

Stankovič, P. 2002. Kulturne študije: pregled zgodovine, teorij in metod. In *Cooltura – uvod v kulturne študije*, ed. A. Debeljak and P. Stankovič, 11–70. Ljubljana: Študentska založba.

Turner-Vorbeck, T. 2003. Pottermania: Good, Clean Fun or Cultural Hegemony? In *Harry Potter's World*, ed. E. E. Heilman, 13–24. New York, London: RoutledgeFalmer.