



universität  
wien

# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Apparating from anonymity to fame: the celebrity and influence of J.K.Rowling“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna 2020

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

UA 066 844

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Master's degree programme Anglophone Literatures and  
Cultures

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. phil. habil. Nadja Gernalczik



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## I. Introduction

J. K. Rowling captured many hearts and minds with her stories. She unleashed a worldwide mania-turned-phenomenon when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was first published, in 1997. From that time onwards, J.K. Rowling rapidly acquired a unique, celebrity-status: she became a trans-medial celebrity initially due to the success of her series which was then followed by her control over her brands, and to an extensive, consciously controlled presence in the media. Throughout the years the established celebrity persona began to be attributed with notoriety which resulted in a reformation of her status as celebrity.

There are few people in Western communities who have not heard of J.K. Rowling. Even if the author's persona remains a mystery to them, there is probably a vague connection between the name and the enormous success of the Harry Potter series – which, because it has been translated to more than 60 languages, also acquired a fame of worldwide notice. Since the release of the books and especially since the release of the movie adaptations, she and her fame began to be talked about almost simultaneously. As Daniel Boorstin noted in 1961, a celebrity is someone who is famous for being famous. Rowling's rapid rise to fame is such a well-known fact that it also increased this fame to an extent. Gradually, the talk began to focus on her astonishingly quick rise to fame, and later on her statements that did not concern the wizarding world of her successful series anymore.

But who is J.K. Rowling? There is no annotated and authorized biography of hers so far, thus we, the public, may only know as much as there is on her website's About page – although there is an abundance of unauthorized biographies. The curious may find a not unusual type of biography on her website that tells them only a bit more of her background, than any sleeve: The English-born Joanne Rowling was always fond of reading and writing. While attempting to give

a scientific account of her success, McGreevy says in his article that there was a definite, though not deliberate preparation in the early stages of her life towards a creative career she follows now. (McGreevy, 35)

After seven books, eight movies, and an uncountable amount of paraphernalia, the series that launched her career had been drawing to a close. Nevertheless, the fame of Rowling did not seem to falter. One would attribute this possibly solely to the quality and influence of the *Harry Potter* series; however, there is more to the status than meets the eye.

In the first part of the thesis, I offer an overview of the definition for what makes someone a celebrity today, and explain how and why the definition should be updated to be applicable to contemporary celebrities. Celebrity studies is a relatively new field or research, and as far as I can assess, an ever-changing one, providing new viewpoints and techniques to examine the phenomenon of the celebrity and the culture surrounding it. Thus I do not seek to contrive a brand new definition, but rather to explain the differences between already existing ones. The aim is to amend them several viewpoints that are valid in contemporary celebrity culture, and by applying slight changes, define what celebrity means in the case of J.K. Rowling.

Rowling became a layered, and trans medial celebrity, in several senses. On one hand, she started out as a literary celebrity but quickly became a media celebrity as well. Especially after the publication of the final part of the series, the amount of articles, interviews and appearances have increased. On the other hand, she herself remained very active in her celebrity status. She is an active Twitter user, never denying her opinionated nature on current affairs. There is probably an even more curious phenomenon to be explored: she refuses to let go of her authority over the world she created, and in Pamela Ingleton's words, she “refuses to die” (Ingleton 177) possibly partially because of a worry that if she were to let go, the world built

with ardent work would fade too. She always finds something else to reveal about it, something consumable to create, intending to keep the interest alive around her first famous work and also around her fame, while also aiming to gain more profit. Based on her method of continuous revelations, Rowling believes herself as the author to be the sole source of canonical information, and thusly fans need to turn to her for information. However, as it is going to be discussed, audience, and especially fandom, is not to be ignored.

With the application of Actor-Network theory, the following chapters will map out the connections between aspects that constitute the mechanism that make a celebrity. This theory, developed by scientists Bruno LaTour, John Law, and Michel Callon, is rather a method of conducting a research that has connections between 'things' in its focus, and by pointing out these connections, the existence of new 'things' can be described (Dankert). Rowling's public persona offers a great object of analysis with its richness of points to connect, which are platforms and means of performance for her public persona. Furthermore, there is a recurring pattern of the pseudo-events and real events surrounding the persona, almost gyre-like returns to the creations connected to the Harry Potter universe. To examine this phenomenon, the theory is suitable as well.

It is safe to say that her career as a literary celebrity started at the publication of the first book of the Harry Potter series. According to Nicholas Tucker, although they may have made money quickly, such as Rowling did, no other contemporary writer had achieved such a wide ranged acceptance from critics and audience as well by the time of their first novel. (Tucker, 221) However, since 1997 her celebrity has gone through several changes, both in its nature, its platform of existence, and its scope. This change is due to the already explained trans medial nature of her celebrity, but also to her continuous control over her works and anything related to

her creations. These include not only the Harry Potter world, but also her own persona. Writing under a penname she created a “version” of her that is recognized as the author of the series. This persona moulded into a marketable brand alongside the series, and continued to be inseparable for a long time – also worth to note that she is reported about as J.K. Rowling, and she uses this name on public platforms as well.

Money plays an undeniable part in her celebrity status. According to James F. English and John Frow, she rises from among contemporary British literary celebrities in this aspect: she entered Forbes magazine's Billionaire rank (English 41), due to her success and well managed commerce of anything marketable within her brands. According to them, this method of branding the author is not unusual or new at all: writers attempted to perform as such since after World War II. (English 49) They also state that this action, however, is never only about commerce, but it is rather a close management of the public persona – which, as I mentioned before, Rowling does.

Although there is little chance of knowing the real person behind the public image, there are many layers that allow themselves to be examined. I believe that these layers have been built up through time, gradually expanding Rowling's celebrity figure and the scope of its influence with it. By examining how these layers have been built up and what connections are there between the actors of the Rowling brand, I expect to find out how she has been able to acquire her current status of celebrity that no other contemporary authors writing for the same target audience accomplished so far.

After exploring the mechanisms that lead to a celebrity state, the thesis is going to treat the topic of Rowling's audience. Their response and behaviour is much needed for the understanding of the celebrity state, and I argue that the role of audience is enormous in creating



the fame Rowling has now. Owed to the phenomenon of the Internet, the vast amount of articles, twitter posts, pictures, and videos are almost always offer possibility for leaving comments. Thus while examining a selection of performances of the public persona, it is also possible to analyse the response to the spell of J.K. Rowling.

Today, celebrity permeates our everyday lives in numerous ways. The industry creating the commodified celebrity affects our lives, our perception of reality, and our social behaviour, just to mention a few aspects. These can be ascribed to apparatus: a network of power and knowledge we are caught up in. Though there is always a larger apparatus working above the one we examine, the thesis is going to examine celebrity apparatus in connection with J.K Rowling, thus demonstrating the impact even literary celebrities are capable of.

## II. Literature overview

The field of research this thesis is based on is celebrity studies, a relatively new one among those historically established. However, there is a large amount of literature concerning the field, branching out and continuously evolving.

Because I aim to cover the basic understanding of celebrity studies and its pillar tenets, first and foremost I consulted Graeme Turner's *Understanding Celebrity*. This book was presented to me during the ring of lectures on celebrity studies at the University of Vienna in the winter semester of 2015. Primarily its introductory chapter was consulted because in my assessment it contains all relevant, basic ideas, definitions, and branches of the field of studies, and thus provides a fair starting point.

Nevertheless, the latest edition being of 2014, Turner's publication is not the most current. That is partially why David Giles's 2018 publication of *Twenty-first Century Celebrity: Fame in Digital Culture* is consulted – it virtually provides the framework for examining a contemporary celebrity. Giles references Turner's work quite often, but also compares its statements critically to contemporary times, thus highlighting relevant changes in the field. There are many case studies presented throughout the chapters, including those of Giles's own. The book references an abundance of topics relevant to my thesis, such as parasocial relationships in the celebrity context, audience-celebrity relationships, but most importantly, use of media in the current era, with special regards to Twitter.

Concerning media usage, it is going to be apparent that Rowling's conscious use of media can be found on Twitter. I expected to find close to zero studies concerning the social media site, but as it turns out, there are several inquiries already made in connection with its use

by celebrities, and to my fortune, *Celebrity Studies* journal offers quite a good amount of articles that in some way treat the topic. Many articles of many issues were consulted, but as it is a literary celebrity in the focal point of the thesis, Issue 4 of the 7<sup>th</sup> Volume of 2016 was consulted especially. Greg Myers's "Everyday oracles: authors on Twitter" provided to be most informative concerning the Twitter chapter. Although it does not take Rowling as subject, a general viewpoint concerning the tweeting habits of literary celebrities can be taken away from it.

Fortunately, audience is also a widely researched subject within celebrity studies, and the journal provided a good amount of articles to consult regarding the topic. Actual instances and examples for audience interactions examination were primarily gathered from the Internet, as it is the most prominent platform of occurrence and from where required information and reports can be acquired. There is an abundance of articles, tweets, blogs, posts, videos, and podcasts that offer ample examples and a proliferation of material containing information not only on Rowling but on her audience. For the aim of demonstrating real-life audience response on the discussed social media, YouTube videos containing reactions, and tweets of Rowling's followers are also going to be included.

As the aim of the thesis is to highlight not only the unique status of Rowling as a celebrity, but also the effect and influence that she has because of that, the concept of apparatus was applied and identified in the workings of the celebrity. Though the term apparatus was first used by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben provided an updated, discussed definition of it in his "What is an apparatus?" essay. Thus the framework for apparatus is partially based on this publication, and partially on that of Gilles Deleuze's "What is a dispositif?" The two works are

often cited together, in comparison and contrast to one another as they understand, analyse, and continue the line of thought of Foucault in different ways.

For an overarching method for examination, actor-network theory was used. Literature that was consulted for the understanding of it suggests manifold that this theory is best understood in application. Though at first glimpse, ANT may seem to be an easily defined theory, it is just as difficult to provide a unified definition for it as it is for celebrity. Annemarie Mol's article "Actor-Network Theory: sensitive terms and enduring tensions" is a summarising and clarifying article on the theory, and provided help in areas I struggled with grasping the concept.

### **III. Theory and method**

#### **1. Actor-Network Theory**

The use of this theoretical framework was suggested to me during a seminar. Due to the word ‘theory’ used in the name, initially, I expected to find an actual theory, with more or less clear-cut, well-defined terms, borders. As the reader is going to find out as well in this part, what I found in reality was rather, as Annemarie Mol put it, a “kaleidoscope” (261).

As Cressman states in the beginning of his article, Actor-Network theory “is notoriously difficult to summarize, define or explain” (1). As far as my experience is concerned, I can only agree with Cressman - initially I thought I understood the theory, and that it was a relatively easy one to use and define. However, during my research I found it less and less easy to apply what I understood to be ANT. Eventually it became clear that this theory has to be performed (ibid.) in order to understand how it works.

Nevertheless at least a brief introduction is due concerning ANT. The theory grew out of sociology and technology science; scientist Bruno Latour is often pointed out as the one who coined the term, however, the creation of ANT is rather an achievement of several other scientists along Latour as well, such as John Law, Michel Callon, Vololona Rabearisoa, Vicky Singleton, and many others. Since then, several articles have been written concerning the theory - this also proves that it is not an easy theory to use and apply to researches, as, according to Cressman, from its nascence it has been in need of further clarification, definition, and critique (ibid.). Not precisely in contrast, but Annemarie Mol regards this feature of the theory from a different viewpoint: she does not deny that it is difficult to clarify the edges of the theory; however, she states that should we consider ANT a theory, its aim is not to simplify, define the subject matter, but to enrich and discover more layers to it. This way of regarding ANT also

highlights what Mol finds to be the aim and focus of the theory, and what I decided to use this theory for in the thesis: “it helps to tell cases, draw contrasts, articulate silent layers, turn questions upside down, focus on the unexpected” (262). The focus thus is on the connection between elements, both human and non-human, through which entirely new entities are created that may or may not carry the features of the previously connected elements. Through these connections-interconnections, which have an effect on each other, networks are created. ANT proposes to study not only the elements that are connected but also the connections for the purpose of studying the created entity as well.

The theory identifies three concepts that compose the material of the study: the actor or actant that is the element; the connections that define how the actors relate and interact with each other; and the network that is compiled of the previously listed elements through their effect, influence on each other.

Actors are not rigid – they can be passive and active as well. Some academics feel the need to differentiate between them, however my understanding is that it is not the focal point of the theory, rather the action that they act out or they are enacted, and the resulting effect. (Mol, 255) There are 2 types of actors: intermediaries are the ones that usually do not have a changing effect on the whole system; and mediators are the ones that do. Considering ANT, analytically this may be the only differentiation between actants, otherwise they have to be considered to be on the same level. (Quist) Connections established between certain actors are not stable; the created entity is what it is because the actants that make it up are connected in a certain way. Were they connected any differently, the connections between the actants would not have the same result, the same created entity. (Dankert) As Mol explains it, the networks that the actors may be acting in or be enacted in can be of a “stable syntax, but it is also possible that their

ability to act is afforded to them by a context that is adaptable and varied, and behaves in a more fluid way.” (259) It is not a clear cut cause and effect line either: actors may not function the same way if their network dysfunctions, but they may do. (Mol, 258)

As already mentioned in the beginning of this section, ANT is difficult to define. During my research, one of the most influential articles I read was that of Annemarie Mol’s *Actor-Network Theory: sensitive terms and enduring tensions*. This article presents very clearly that ANT is not to be understood as a theory with stable, clear outlines, schemes, and grids to follow when applying, and not to be used as a theory to „...straighten, define, purify...” (Mol, 257) its subject. Accounting for each crucial term concerning the theory, Mol states that enrichment, of the already existing findings concerning this theory is the very aim of the theory. Thus, as unusual as it may be, the theory to be applied during this thesis does not have a strict set of rules – this makes it simultaneously easier and more difficult to work with.

Now, as I stated in the introduction, the celebrity persona of Rowling – such as any other persona – is built up of many different layers, which are interconnected, affect each other, and thus are actors acting in a network. The ‘hows and whys’ concerning the process of the creation of Rowling as a celebrity is going to be examined in the following chapters, taking into consideration the research being conducted within celebrity studies.

## **2. Concerning apparatus**

The title of this thesis can easily be misinterpreted if one is not familiar to a certain extent with the *Harry Potter* universe. My aim was to include a pun in the title that originates from the series, referring to a spell enabling a method of quick transport in the wizarding-world – by disappearing and reappearing at the desired place -, and thus referring to the rapid rise to fame of J.K Rowling. However, it can also be regarded as a hint at another concept: ‘apparatus’.

The originally French term *dispositif*, translated as *apparatus* was coined by Michel Foucault. According to Agamben, a later developer of the term, albeit Foucault never precisely defined the term (2), he meant to use is as one “to indicate the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body”. (Farell) Thus what is essentially the aim of the method according to Foucault is, simply put, to provide a possibility to examine the events that might take place in the formation of an apparatus. (Parsons) Foucault’s focus was mostly on historical, governmental, power-related networks and their workings.

When worded this way, there is an immediate connection to ANT, as they both concern themselves with network – though there is a difference between their aim and focus ANT enables and emphasizes the examination of the network in relation to what are included to create the network; while apparatus puts its focus on the inner workings of the network, how the connected elements affect each other. (Agamben 6)

In his discussion of the development of the term, Agamben provides us with a historical overview of how the term was created from an etymological point of view. One of the major changes Agamben then introduces to the Foucauldian notion is the separation of living and non-living entities of the apparatus. He summarizes his modification of the term the following way:

I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, discourses of living beings. (Agamben 14)

Comparing what apparatus means in his definition, it is clear that the network of the apparatus is a much more restricted one than that of ANT because only non-living can form an apparatus. This way the apparatus can be examined as part of the network that constructs Rowling. Apart from these two major categories, Agamben identifies a third one, the subject –



this overlaps in many instances with the substance that is the living entity. (ibid.) Today, everything can be a ‘victim’ of subjectification; “[t]he boundless growth of apparatuses in our time corresponds to the equally extreme proliferation of in processes of subjectification.” (Agamben 15)

Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of Foucault’s work is often compared to Agamben’s. As Legg identifies, what the essays agree on is that governing and regulation is inseparable from apparatus from a historical and etymological point of view. (131) They agree on the heterogeneity of the elements that create an apparatus, and I find that the sociological nature gains more emphasis in Deleuze’s understanding. In his essay, Deleuze identifies four dimensions to apparatus, or as he rather calls it, *dispositif*. They are presented as lines with a trajectory and direction, capable of changing and moulding into other ‘constellations’, broken up and mended together again. These are: visibility, enunciation, force, and subjectification. The most prominent line that intertwines with others, filling voids is the line of force, “acting as go-betweens seeing and saying and vice versa, acting as arrows which continually cross between words and things, constantly waging battle between them.” (Deleuze 160) The lines may not cross each other, go above and below each other, thus making up the apparatus of undefined borders.

### **3. Celebrity studies**

Even if one has not read the *Harry Potter* series, I am convinced that one has quite possibly heard the name of J.K. Rowling, and can connect the name to the series of books which became a highly significant part of and influence on contemporary popular culture. The official site connected to the series released an article in 2018, among a sequence of articles celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US publication of the first book of the series, stating that more that

500 million books have been sold of the series so far worldwide which – according to their calculations – means that one in fifteen people must have at least one of the books of the series, printed or eBook format. The texts have been translated to more than 80 languages, thus they are highly accessible. (WizardingWorld, 2018) Starting out from these statements, one can already assume that, unequivocally, the fame of the series brought along the celebration of their author as well. But is that enough to say that J.K. Rowling is a celebrity?

### 3.1. Defining contemporary celebrity

What makes someone a celebrity? As it was mentioned in the introduction, concerning celebrity, there are numerous categorizations and definitions currently present and at use. None of these definitions can be said to be all encompassing. However, as scholars are trying to define an ever changing field of study under constant research and continuous broadening, as Driessens noted in his 2015 article “On epistemology and operationalization of celebrity”, acknowledgments are due to them, and the difficulty of the task they undertook cannot be held against them.

This field of studies is strongly connected to a context that is the current era in which one examines celebrity – and as times change, celebrity and its study changes with them. This context is closely connected to the scale of interest: how much interest does the given celebrity generate in the given context? Is it only local, confined to language or national boundaries? (Giles 17) In the introductory paragraph, the extent of the interest of the *Harry Potter* series was defined, but as I am going to argue later, this fame is inseparable from that of Rowling's.

Relating to this, opinions differ concerning when the field of study originated, and from when we can use the term ‘celebrity’. In *Understanding Celebrity*, Turner draws attention to the different opinion of scholars: there are those who agree with Braudy and Dyer that celebrity is

not a modern phenomenon; it originated in ancient times. However, due to the changing connotations of the term and the eras in which the term is applied, some academics along with Rojek and Schickel regard the phenomenon an entirely modern creation, and its nascence is tightly linked to the growth of mass media. Although not following the definition of the first side of the argument noted, in his book focusing on celebrity in the twenty-first century, Giles emphasizes that he does not use adjectives such as digital or online for describing contemporary celebrity, because they can be used for purposes of distinction between celebrities, “there is nothing uniquely ‘digital’ about twenty-first century *per-se*. Digitalization has become obligatory for all traditional celebrities.” (Giles 59) For the purpose of this thesis the focus is on the current, twenty-first century post-modern era celebrity. Accordingly, apart from the necessary introduction and recollection concerning the formation of the term and its definition, the thesis is going to discuss celebrity in the current era as context.

When we think about what is colloquially understood as ‘celebrity’, it still leaves us with a wide definition – though a good starting point – as it is used to define anyone from tabloid celebrities to royal families. What is common in them is their visibility through media, and a shared interest in their public and private lives, but they do not necessarily share an achievement to be famous for. (Turner 71)

Turner in *Understanding Celebrity*, and Giles in *Twenty-first Century Celebrity* (while referencing Turner) enumerate some of the ruling categorizations and definition of celebrity. These are by no means definite and all encompassing, but they are the best attempts at defining the phenomenon of celebrity – this search for the best definition is still in progress today. First of all, Giles mentions the difference between ‘fame’ and ‘celebrity’, and argues, although they can be applied interchangeably in many cases, they are essentially different terms: celebrity is from

the cultural realm, due to its massive connection to media, while fame is rather a sociological one. (Giles 6)

Turner starts out the introduction by stating two of the most universal features of contemporary celebrity: media visibility and the public's interest in their private rather than professional life. (Turner 3) These features are recurring in all definitions. Along with Turner, Giles discusses the correlation between mass media and celebrity; it is stated that although there are scholars who do not approve of regarding celebrity as just a phenomenon brought about by the proliferation of mass, especially electronic, media, Giles states that it is due to its widespread use and reach, an ideal environment exists for celebrity to bloom. (Giles 6) If we accept that celebrity would be present without the mass media, it is possible to discuss the phenomenon as sign and text at the same time, as Marshall did. (ibid.) This construction, drawing on Foucault, regards celebrity as a discourse, it does not place them in time and space, does not contextualize them, thus creating a possibility to examine, compare, and contrast celebrities from different eras and platforms of emergence. (ibid.) This method thus allows the research and the possible creation of a more universal definition for the phenomenon. The majority of the thesis is not going to be focused on this construction; however, to be able to examine the effect of Rowling, it is inevitable to consider her celebrity as discourse, and place it comparably in the line of literary celebrity.

Another major, but still rather vague feature of celebrity, Boorstin argues, is that they have a capacity to differentiate their personalities from others so that they are highlighted. (Giles 9) The public is identified as a sphere, in which this differentiation happens. According to Couldry's study, as Giles states, this distinguishing of the celebrity from 'ordinary people' is due to 'media rituals' – these create a context in which the distinction of celebrities seems like a

‘natural’ process. (ibid.) Giles also enumerates the definition of Geragthy, who argues that it is also important for the distinction of celebrities to take into account what they actually do, and that this deed can be talked about by the audience. These statements are both loose but focus on the differentiation of celebrities from non-celebrities – it is essential to have one and the other to define each other. Giles points out that Geragthy’s statement of the defining ‘lifestyle’ and talk going on outside the ‘sphere of work’ of the celebrity is complicated to apply to all contemporary celebrities. For example, considering YouTuber celebrities, who emerged on and from a new electronical platform, whose ‘sphere of work’ and ‘lifestyle’ are often the same, it becomes difficult to examine them as being only talked about due to only one or the other. (Giles 7) Nevertheless, the change in media landscape and the rise of social media modified the environment of “media rituals”, as boundaries that differentiate became blurred. (Giles 10)

While Turner’s account deals only partially with the following point of view for defining celebrity, Giles, having a close experience to it, treat the topic of celebrity as a lived experience. This constitutes both how celebrities experience their being categorized as celebrities, and how the audience perceives celebrity as performance. The first instance is a scarcely studied field yet, possibly mainly due to the fact that celebrities, in Giles’s words, “constitute a ‘hard-to-access’ elite”. (Giles 8) Rockwell and Giles published their study in 2009, identifying the basic elements of the experience of being a celebrity, including e.g.: feeling objectified or the satisfaction of the requirements of the ego, etc. Giles argues that these experience are due to the ‘talk’ that is the fundamental cause, means, and building block of celebrity. (ibid.) Turner treats the topic of audience as the consumers of celebrity: it was probably a well-established fact by the time of the publication of Giles’s book which deals with the subject – perhaps obviously – as one that is embedded in twenty-first century celebrity, and thus unfolding more layers to it. These layers are

majorly due to the rise of a new segment of media that is social media. Giles argues that it is essential to regard social media as media too, connecting it to the group of politicians who are using social media – such as the current president of the United States, Donald Trump. (Giles 11) Though it would be an exaggeration to state that Rowling has a similarly extensive reach of the public as the president, but it would also be a mistake to not account for her range of influence as celebrity.

To summarise and emphasize the main points of the working definition important for the thesis: considering Western societies in postmodern times, celebrity is an applicable term to a persona who, due to the report available via media concerning their own actions or that of third parties in connection with the persona, became the centre of public attention, and due them being transparent, this attention can permeate through to their private lives.

### 3.2. To be seen: importance of origin and media

Turner states that the majority of contemporary celebrity emerges from the entertainment industry (3); even though the last edition of Turner's *Understanding Celebrity* was first published in 2008, we can state that more than 10 years later this statement remains valid, and the situation did not change – not to mention that J.K. Rowling emerged from a part of that industry as well.

When asking the question 'What is celebrity?', Turner calls on three options, from different viewpoints, as answers: first, from popular media – which gives us reason to regard celebrity "as a symptom of worrying cultural shift" (Turner 4) from permanent values to temporary, sensational events; second, from those who consume the 'product' that is celebrity – and as we are all practically forced to consume celebrity; we tend to describe them as someone with a special quality that lead people's interest to gravitate towards them; and third, the most

intriguing option for this thesis, is the academic point of view: especially from cultural and media studies, celebrity is defined as a “product of a number of cultural and economic processes” (ibid.) For the purpose of studying celebrity, it is inevitable to regard it as a phenomenon produced by the media through various processes. This production also provides insight to the current operation of media (ibid.) – although the exact operation of media is not the focus of this thesis, it is going to be necessary to examine parts of the workings of media so that the actors and networks can be identified in the creation of the persona of J.K Rowling.

Giles’s 2018 publication, a rather current one, focuses substantially on how this century brought a never-before-seen change in media, production of celebrity, and audience:

[M]edia landscape changed beyond all recognition in the last two decades; these are mass global communication systems like none before, spawning their own cultures of fame, and generating ‘stars’ with, it is claimed, greater social influence over younger generations (...) (Giles 2)

Although in this section Giles’s aim is to highlight that there are different platforms for celebrities to emerge by and from in the twenty-first century, this statement is crucial to one of the most important factors in the current celebrity status of J.K. Rowling, that is a different platform of performance and production from which she originally emerged: the Internet, and more specifically, Twitter. The private self behind Rowling operates not only through the one pseudonym of Rowling but under another: Robert Galbraith as well – nevertheless, the majority of the interaction and relationship she has with her audience happens through J.K. Rowling - in fact, according to the official website of Galbraith, it is “a pseudonym of J.K. Rowling” (Robert Galbraith, About) – but more on that in later chapters. Turning back to Rowling, besides releasing occasional additional facts and stories of the *Harry Potter* universe, she communicates her ideas and thoughts ardently, on Twitter.

Some might put down social media platforms such as Twitter as only capable of

producing ‘micro’ celebrities – arguably, it was true in the wake of social media produced celebrities, such as the ‘webcam girl’, noted by both Turner and Giles. However, I agree with Giles in that as time passed and social media evolved in countless aspects – primarily considering that it stepped over the threshold (population reach over 10-20 per cent<sup>1</sup>) to be qualified as mass media (Giles 35) –, and contemporary celebrity are no longer in need of traditional media platforms (such as television and newspaper) to flourish into ‘major’ celebrities, in the full sense of the term – consider the possible international recognition of YouTubers, like PewDiePie<sup>2</sup>, whose follower, count is over thousands, for example. (Giles 34) Naturally, it is not the case with Rowling, and even though she has been mixing her platforms for performance, I find that this switching has not diminished her celebrity status – it only categorized Rowling into a different type of celebrity, and due to her performance, she is regarded rather more notorious than celebrated.

Although there are many examples for the new social media platform-uses among contemporary celebrity, for the purpose of this thesis one is singled out due to the sole usage of it by Rowling: and that is Twitter. Twitter is a site of the new millennium – the platform that initially started out as a microblogging site (Giles 28) has been a live site since 2007, and became widespread a year later. The brand’s self-description is the following: “Twitter is what’s happening in the world and what people are talking about right now” (Twitter, About) Once one becomes a user on Twitter one has the chance to gain followers and engage in social networking via text posts (Britannica) of a limited number of characters. This limitation can either be

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<sup>1</sup> Giles notes Valente’s finding from *Network models of the diffusion of innovations* of 1995, in connection with the Internet, according to which a medium can be defined as mass medium when “a critical level of adoption is reached in the population, typically between 10 and 20 per cent.” (28)

<sup>2</sup> See the channel of PewDiePie: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-IHJZR3Gqxm24\\_Vd\\_AJ5Yw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-IHJZR3Gqxm24_Vd_AJ5Yw)



regarded as a restriction or as a possibility; in 2017, the management of the site felt that a raise of character count is due, and doubled the original 140-character limit. The importance of this brevity of messages, as Giles points out, is that “through its limitations we have cultivated a new style interaction that has, in turn, opened other possibilities for social interaction.” (Giles 29) The effect of this seemingly small change of the word-count is yet to be discovered. (ibid.)

Giles also notes factually that different celebrities are produced by different media – as in their origin. (33) Evidently, what is common in this new platform and the platform of emergence of Rowling, is writing. Via this site, Rowling has a chance to communicate and connect with her audience, further form and modify the previously established persona, and stay relatively close to the spotlight – as statements from Twitter can go viral very fast, and reach other mediums (e.g. newspapers) – while using a comfortable communication system. This site also deserves attention among the others, because in contrast to Facebook – a ruling social media site of our age – it promotes a special kind of fame through the possibility of self-branding, while Facebook is rather restrictive in its structure. (Giles 36)

Not all celebrities use their options granted by the platforms the same way. Even their method of usage can differ: they can either operate the media outlet themselves or delegate it to an outside management. This fact can have significant effects in studies conducted on the subject; Giles notes a rather amusing finding that originated by this ‘misleading’: in 2015, Kehrberg published an article in *Celebrity Studies* stating that “social interaction between fans and celebrities on Twitter....is not in practice taking place” (Kehrberg 93) Giles’ critique of the statement is quite straightforward: Kehrberg probably chose Twitter users who do not use it in a way – unlike Rowling, or Giles’ example, Stephen Fry – that enables a reciprocal conversation, intermediating thoughts and opinions, not just advertising dates of releases and such general

information (Giles 51), and it follows that reciprocity was close to zero.

Myers too, points out that use of social media creates a possibility for the users to eliminate the intermediaries. This way, it is only them and not all types of reporters and hired publicists who would in a traditional sense mediate their image. (Myers 478) Thus, how celebrities, who chose to perform on platforms such as Twitter, decide to intermediate themselves through these media is worth considering, because it leads our attention to another major aspect of celebrity: audience. Because interaction via Twitter is more direct than ever before, celebrities identifiably have a love-hate relationship with the medium. As Giles's case studies show, evaluation of celebrities can change based on as much as a like placed on the 'wrong' post, or the blocking of a prevalent voice in the fan community behind the celebrity; so much so that even the previously mentioned pioneer Fry would delete his account under the pressure of harsh criticism tweeted at him. (Lee) Rowling has been the subject of such harsh criticism via Twitter – though not only through this medium; however, she is still present on the platform, and still tweets actively. It would also be interesting from a sociological point, to research the causes and the final point which leads to the cessation of an otherwise actively lead platform due to criticism in case of celebrities.

The current era has seen a slight change in media landscape that brought with itself the change in celebrity representation as well. Celebrities now have the almost obligatory option to participate in the recently emerged social media, and thus subject themselves to a closer audience.

### 3.3. Audience and the celebrity

Based on what was stated previously, it is evident now that audience is one of the fundamental requirements for celebrity; if there is no interest generated among them, there is no

celebrity to talk about. Giles argues that even though the works of Dyer and Marshall – due to their studies being rooted majorly in film studies, and maintaining a view of celebrities as signs to be interpreted – generated an attitude that regards celebrity and audience as two entirely separate entities, this stand has not been universal in celebrity studies, but treating celebrities from any other but a semiotic approach would have posed the risk of being regarded as unprofessional. Active participation of the audience in not just ‘listening’ to the performance, but taking part in the production as well has been apparent since the 1990s, however, it was dismissed by scholars. The changing media landscape and the emergence of reality TV shows, and later on, social media brought with itself – among other things – the inevitability of revisiting this viewpoint. (Giles 40)

Reality TV of the new millennium, often referred to by many scholars as a turning point in (re-)defining celebrity, brought changes in the field of studies: the phenomenon of the reality TV star from popular shows, such as *Big Brother*, highlighted the fact that achievement other than media visibility is possibly not even a requirement anymore for one to become a celebrity (Turner 3); and also shifted the attitude of the field from celebrities to be studies only as textual signs – established by film celebrity studies -, to celebrities as actual personalities. (Giles 40) Social media brought with itself the capability of content-generation possible for the audience as well. As Giles states, contemporary celebrity is obliged to live and perform in the digital media to remain categorized as such. (ibid.) Scholars cite a general view on the consumption of celebrity by the audience and that is a rather negative one: ‘trivialising’, ‘detrimental’, ‘negative’ are the most often used words to describe the effect this consumption has on culture, society, and the person. Nevertheless, it is undeniably clear that there is an effect that must be discussed. (Redmond 198) This effect can be examined from two sides: that of the celebrities and that of the

audience. As noted previously, studies conducted concerning the first side are fairly scant; however, the other side is relatively a widely studied subject in sociology, psychology, and cultural studies as well.

“Celebrity culture is very often drawn into moral panics about the values, beliefs and attitudes of society, with young people identified as particularly impressionable.” (Redmond 198) According to Redmond, this panic is largely due to a suspected manipulation and impressionability of the said group of the society, especially considering people in their teens and twenties. Influencers are usually of a similar age as their target audience, and their techniques of representation evokes ‘mirroring responses’ – and this is regarded as borderline manipulative, an attribute that is hardly considered positive.

Based on their responses, Gamson identifies the following, analytically distinct types of audiences in his 1994 *Claims to Fame*, categorizing them according to reception, prioritization, and the level of awareness concerning the production of the celebrity image, and how they engage with it. These are: Traditional, Second-order traditional, Postmodernist, Game player – gossipier, and Game player – detective. (Gamson 146) The people who can be categorised as traditional audience are the “essentially a gullible one[s]” (Gamson 148); they regard celebrities as of a merited position, information concerning them from media is authentic, and “immerse themselves in the fantasy networks they offer them.” (Redmond 199) Meanwhile second-order types filter their news regarding celebrity as well as being aware of its staged nature to a certain level, but still enjoying the offered fantasy, believing that having a chance to get to know the ‘real self’ of the celebrity will tell the real celebrities from those who are not genuine. (Gamson 147) The third category including those of the postmodernist types, approach celebrity already with a critical attitude, being much aware of the workings and effects of the commodity and its

system; they are often highly interested in the hows and whys of the processes. The last two categories, the game players, share their disregard for celebrity prestige, and “use celebrities not as models or fantasies but as opportunities: to play freely with the issues they embody.” (Gamson 147-148)

I find that it is difficult to categorize a person to only one of the listed – as they serve, first and foremost, an analytical purpose. Nevertheless, they are helpful in identifying the relationship of the audience to the subject of the thesis, Rowling: there is also an apparatus that can be identified in celebrity commodification, and that is the relation between the emotional connection to a celebrity (be it reciprocal or one sided) and the celebrity commodity. (Redmond 201) Overall, I find that the current audience of Rowling, partially due to the merit of her books, has a critical attitude towards the concept of celebrity influence. However, for the apparatus to be effective – and based on the always updated, wide selection of merchandise concerning books, films, stage-plays, and Rowling herself – there has to be a part of the traditional audience among those who follow Rowling. Even those who criticise Rowling for deeds later to be discussed in this thesis, admit to succumbing to the apparatus, and enjoy commodities granted by the celebrity, for example, Seamus Gorman YouTuber’s video on Rowling’s decline, or Stephen Colbert’s snippet on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* demonstrate the ordinary audience and the celebrity audience as well.

#### 3.4. The parasocial relationship

Throughout the years, the relationship between celebrity and its audience went through a significant change mostly concerning the distance and distinction between the two sides. The rise of social media brought with itself a sense of narrowing the gap between the sides so much so that even crossing it is available today. As it is going to be discussed later, Rowling maintains a

close relationship with her audience, consciously through the use of Twitter and other means, attempting to enforce a positive evaluation of her. This attempt is first and foremost aimed at the fandom of Harry Potter, for positive response can be expected from them primarily.

Horton and Wohl coined the term in their psychology-focused article of 1956 “Mass communication and para-social interaction”, as they observed that “[o]ne of the striking characteristics of the new mass media – radio, television, and the movies – is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer.” (Horton) Though ‘new mass media’ means a different set of media today, the existence of parasocial interaction and relationship remains unchanged. Giles notes that it took some time until other fields of studies started to use the term and conduct research related to it. (Giles 42)

Unfortunately, when used concerning other fields, it is often used as a ‘pathologising’ concept to explain how relationships between audience and celebrities are formed and maintained. This application results from a notion – I find quite widespread in non-academic areas – that parasocial relationships are formed in place of real-life, face-to-face relationships – thus instead of the ones that are categorised commonly as ‘healthy’ or ‘normal’. (ibid.)

According to a widely cited study of Stever and Lawson of 2013, in which they studied the contents of a pool of celebrity tweets – Giles also notes this study as significant due to its presentation of various forms of communication via Twitter, while offering an overview concerning the use of Twitter in case of celebrities (51) –, there is a variety of aims for which celebrities use Twitter: they communicate with fans and other celebrities as well, about work, and personal topics too – and these may be topics that may not generally arise to be discussed on other media. (Stever 351) This provides the fans with parasocial interaction, that may lead to

parasocial relationship with the given celebrity, and that might result in a para-social attachment. (Stever 341) As the study states, these levels are of more importance to psychologists (ibid.), however, for the purpose of the thesis it is important to highlight that there are indeed levels to this means of communication that is going to be exemplified, and that it contains parasocial elements. The pressure of conditions generated by the current social and political state causes the breaking up and dissolution of the most basic human relations (e.g. the unit of family), and people experience a loss of community. The compensatory reaction to this loss, according to Turner, is the requirement of para-social relationships; these do not require the participants of the relationship to be socially close to each other. According to this analogy, celebrities fit ideally to this constructed parasocial community. Interestingly enough, by the time of the publishing of Turner's book, Giles notes that this notion has been disproved as the sole explanation by researchers of communication in 1985:

Rubin et al (1985) found that parasocial interaction did not actually correlate with scores on a scale of loneliness. The more usual interpretation is that parasocial relationships function as additional friendships, and media users seek out these figures because they resemble the friends they already have. (Giles 42)

Fans can use media in a way to generate relationships that they deem ideal, of their own will. (ibid.) Though this seemingly leads to the conclusion that parasocial relationships are inherently just an illusion, and indeed there are interesting findings: Hartmann and Goldhoorn, drawing on the previously mentioned study of Horton and Wohl, created a scale for Experience of Parasocial Interaction (EPSI), "to explore users' illusionary experience of being engaged in real social interaction with a TV performer during exposure..." (Harmann 1105) After screening a video recording, according to the rating of the participants on the scale, there were instances that shown how some participants believed to be part of a reciprocal interaction during the session, though without question it was only one-sided. (Giles 42) This finding could be taken as

cause to believe that parasocial relationships can be signs for something pathological. Many current social scientists, and workers of traditional media maintain a common standpoint that forms of online communication – including those via social media – can never offer real connection, just the illusion of it, thus it is essentially a fake experience. (Giles 45)

As I am going to argue in later chapters, the parasocial relationship fans have with Rowling is rather of this type, as initially fans of Rowling were of a relatively young age – due to her publication of a children’s book. As stated before, Twitter offers the chance for a more direct form of communication between celebrities and their audience. As Giles argues, “[f]or some authors, this kind of direct contact via social media is enough to sound the death knell for parasocial interaction.” (Giles 52) Nonetheless, I argue that the relationship between Rowling and her audience can be more than parasocial; even though it might not be a face-to-face relationship it is often reciprocal.

I find that the topic of parasocial relationship is in line with a finding stated in several studies: fascination with celebrities strongly resembles religion, or carries within itself religious features; the para-social experience further strengthens this parallel. Turner lists Frow and Rojek who both treated this similarity of celebrity and religion in their study. Rojek states that “celebrities offer peculiarly powerful affirmations of belonging, meaning in the midst of the lives of their audiences” (Turner 53) – for example’s sake, let us consider and compare the figure of Jesus Christ in Catholic Christianity and the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Barack Obama<sup>3</sup>. According to the Catholic belief, Jesus, the son of God came down to Earth to the salvation of *all* people – emphasis on the inclusivity. Though there can be other statements quoted concerning

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<sup>3</sup> I do not wish to compare these two figures for shock value – the aim is rather to draw a parallel between two distinct leading figures from different eras and contexts.



Jesus, I believe this is the strongest for comparative purposes, as this one already encompasses all Rojek stated concerning celebrities and religion. To draw the parallel, Obama is the first president of colour of the United States, which has a long and difficult history with regards to the acceptance of people of colour. As one of my peers stated in her master's thesis:

“...he is not only charismatic, but he also promises to change the world with slogans such as ‘yes, we can’ or ‘we are the ones we've been waiting for’. His speeches, his history as well as his powerful performances let audiences gain faith in the one who saves them.” (Todjeras 42)

Religion is especially interesting in case of Rowling – and not because of the Christian Church's opposition to her series of young adult's book. This finding is subject to further arguments: due to the different ways of how scholars treat celebrity, the parallel between religion and celebrity ends if the latter is not treated as an ‘innate’ or ‘natural’ quality, but as a product constructed by media. (Turner 6) Nevertheless, concerning Rowling, both viewpoint carry the possibility of fruitful examination: in early years, when the Harry Potter series begun its rise to fame, Rowling was practically regarded as ‘the god’ of the universe she created; her word was the word (see for example the Facebook page with 136 followers named “Harry Potter is my bible, and J.K. Rowling is my god”<sup>4</sup>, or to quote one of the articles to be addressed later on as well: “she was one of my heroes growing up” (Pritchard), or to quote Ginny Weasley from the notorious *A Very Potter Musical*: “Oh my Rowling!”<sup>5</sup> as a substitute for ‘Oh my God!’). I argue that in its essence, the reason for naming Rowling ‘god’ is different from, for example giving Elvis the same title. According to Turner's understanding based on Frow's findings, Elvis – an individual with star quality – may be titled ‘god’<sup>6</sup> due to immanent attributes. Rowling, on the other hand perhaps may be called ‘god’ because she indeed created something by herself, and

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/Harry-Potter-is-my-bible-and-JKRowling-is-my-god-253323718040260/>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Oh%20my%20Rowling>

continues to modify and expand her creation.

Celebrity worship is a term the application of which is problematic among scholars, Giles adds. On one hand this is due to the fact that some of them oppose to define fandom as 'quasi-religious'. (Giles 48) Fandom – a phenomenon to be elaborated on in later chapters – refers to a community that shares an interest in something they find to be quality, often with emotional attachment (Hills 274); this something can be practically anything that evokes in individual fans the need to communicate their enjoyment of the subject with someone else: an individual (fictional or real), texts, videogames, television shows, and so on. With the help of a subset of parasocial relationships identified by Rojek, it becomes possible to differentiate relationships between living and imaginary persons, and to examine them separately – it is important, because as Giles states, most of fan-studies are centred on texts and not personalities. (Giles 48)

Studies concerning fandom are often linked heavily to celebrity worship, not only in the colloquial understanding of the phenomenon. Scholars also tend to have an agenda to pathologise such behaviour and study celebrity worship decidedly as solely clinical. Giles notes the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) developed by Maltby, Ashe & Houran, and McCutcheon in 2001 – the aim of this scale was to provide a way to differentiate between pathological and non-pathological behaviour in fandom. Though the border for delineation between the two sides is yet to be discovered, studies that followed also identified a connection between diverse measures of pathological states and some personality related diversions and prominent presence of celebrity worshipping behaviour. (ibid.) The scale works the following way: “the CAS ask respondents to pick a ‘favourite’ and then rate a number of statements according to their agreement with each

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<sup>6</sup> Though as I recall, he was named 'king of rock and roll'.

item with regard to their favourite celebrity.” (Giles 49) Based on the results, the researchers identified three basic factors that can be accounted for the majority of the respondents’ answers. These were given terms and are the following, in order of dominance: entertainment-social, intense-personal, and borderline pathological. With the exclusion of the first one – and the most dominant – the second and third type gave way for concern among researchers because they seem to incline toward pathological states, and negative stereotypes attached to fandom – the members being delusional, obsessive, and distant socially, practically self-isolated – become emphasised and stated as facts. (ibid.)

As the phrase ‘celebrity worship’ carries religious undertones due to its word usage, it would seem logical that CAS, created for the examination of such worshipping behaviour, poses the examination questions in a way that religion is included as well. Unfortunately, it does not do so, and as Giles adds, it probably would have been more correct to not use ‘worship’ at all; however, his addition in the footnote is quite interesting: there is one study of 2001 by Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, and McCutcheon the findings of which could be interpreted that the two types of worships possibly share psychological roots, and that religious worship may be substituted in its function by celebrity worship. (Giles 50)

Fans have been historically placed lower on the hierarchical scale than the celebrities they worship – this assessment was cemented by seminal works of Marshall and Dyer rooting in the film industry, regarding celebrity as texts. Recent studies – such as the 2011 study of Marwick and Boyd “To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter” attempted to recontextualize this assessment, by noting the shift in the distance and delineation of celebrity and ordinary people. Previously, the agency of celebrities had to be interpreted indirectly using what traditional media outlets provided; now celebrities who are using the ‘new’ media may

offer the possibility of direct contact. (Giles 53)

I argue that the importance of the above described research and finding concerning fan studies and celebrity worship is significant concerning the fandom of *Harry Potter* and – inseparably – of Rowling. I reckon that in the first part of the years Rowling spent as celebrity, high level of fandom activity can be observed, which then included Rowling, having a rather positive assessment. Later on, as films rolled out and the hype around the series slowed down, the constructed nature and phoniness of Rowling's persona started to surface. As Giles states, though it may seem like it, not all parasocial relationships are positive, and even if they begin as such, they can take a turn for the negative any time – just as in the non-parasocial realm. (Giles 48) This change, along with the author/God and religion/celebrity is going to be discussed in later chapters.

### 3.5. Literary celebrity in the twenty-first century

As mentioned previously, Marshall emphasized the importance of distinguishing between celebrities considering the industry of their emergence. (Turner 17) Rowling has emerged as a distinct type of celebrity, and that is literary celebrity. Turner exemplifies Moran's work on distinctions: he states that though a distinct type, literary celebrity are also largely dependent on the same operating system as other types of celebrities, and do not have a separate space for themselves in case of their representative outlets in media. Connecting it to the previous discussions concerning media, it is important to note that Moran finds that publishing does not only work through a single media, but can use several others as well.

I argued about the following statements before, but the review of Moran uphold the argument. Based on the results of case studies including celebrity authors, he found that this type of celebrity cannot be separated from their work and the celebrity of their work. (Turner 18) "The

literary celebrity is at least partially produced by their own writing, as it intersects with other discourses produced through other textual forms.” (Turner 18) It is argued that in this respect, literary celebrities do not differ significantly from film stars, as ‘their work’ – though not exactly in the same sense as that of authors – also affects their career and evaluation by the public. Thus their differentiation may not be as crucial as for example that of the sport’s celebrity – due to it being factually meritocracy based. (Turner 19) Nevertheless, as Myers notes that since being an author has been regarded as something mysterious and distanced, curiosity concerning their private life is increased. As stated previously, stars of the film or television industry are also scrutinized for the discovery of their underlying, ‘true’ self; but the requirement towards authors to reveal the ordinary person behind that special authorial self “may be seen as compromising what has been seen as an essentially private practice” (Myers 478)

Fans of literary celebrity are interestingly of a different sort as well. They may regard themselves as not supporting a ‘celebrity’ but an ‘artist’, thus situating themselves on a culturally higher ground. This highlights the phenomenon of literary celebrity as problematic, because, as noted by multiple scholars, looking at it this way, the line that separates low and high culture is blurred. (Myers 477) Nevertheless, it is clear that literary celebrity operates with the same representational scheme and outlets, aiming to attract mass interest in the publication and inevitably in the author as well: literary festivals, publication parties, meet and greets, etc. are all part of the palette literary celebrity can gain visibility time. Literary fans “want to see their favourite author in the flesh in order to gain insight into what they are ‘really like’” (Turner 18) – now this may be a familiar phenomenon: consider the previously described Celebrity Attitude Scale, or Gamson’s categorizations of celebrity audiences. Additionally, as Myers points out: “[b]eing a celebrity is not the same as being a commercial success” (Myers 477) thus especially

in the light of the recent emergence of social media, celebrity should be regarded as rather a continuum (ibid.) to place the figures on.

It was noted before, but Myers also highlights, while to our advantage, exemplifying Rowling in his article to present the contrast between celebrities on Twitter:

[t]here are no authors in the list of the 100 most-followed accounts on Twitter (@jk\_rowling has about eight million followers; @katyperry has about 92 million) [...] Only a few novelists reach the levels of general celebrity where their faces are widely recognised, their every pronouncement is news, and they cannot walk down the street or go to the supermarket for milk without attracting attention (examples might be Ernest Hemingway, Salman Rushdie, J.K. Rowling, and recently George R.R. Martin). (Myers 477)

Maybe on this continuum, literary celebrities are not placed on the highest end – nevertheless, as touched upon previously, they also have a following community who would behave just as the fan of any other type of celebrity may do. Even though reading may be regarded as a solitary activity, Myers reminds us that the reader may be part of a social community by choosing to participate in book clubs, literary festivals, signings, and so (Myers 478) – many of which actions are heavily connected to the production of celebrity as commodity. It is through these activities that they attempt to discover the true self of the author, even if it only means that they have a chance at a fleeting, only couple of seconds long meeting.

This statement may also sound familiar – consider the above described audience behaviour by Gamson. Based on literature concerning literary celebrity it seems to me that, a ‘want’ from the side of the audience can definitely be generalised – the striving towards meeting them ‘in the flesh’ acquired a lot more emphasis – and it is possibly due to what was previously quoted from Myers: the author is regarded as mystical, distant, unable to be reached. (ibid.)

Rowling rose to fame amidst the conditions of the changing media landscape: her publication of the *Harry Potter* series was still in progress when social media sites started to emerge and gain prominence, and by the premiere of the final instalment of the films, these

media were operating in full force. There are numerous interviews conducted with Rowling concerning not only the books but the films as well, inquiring about the work and the story, but also about Rowling herself. Launches and premieres of the next parts of the series always attracted huge attention, and even more when Rowling was present on such events. It has been noted several times in the thesis already that the distinction line has been blurred by the rise of social media between ordinary people and celebrities, but due to the original assessment of literary celebrity, the blurring of this line is more prominently noticeable.

Media has traditionally and inarguably been at the core of celebrity. Changes brought by social media affected celebrity in many ways from definition to commodity creation; its presence could not be dismissed anymore, as Giles humorously notes, “as a playground for wannabes and no-hopers” (Giles 70). Even if reluctantly, contemporary celebrity must participate in the ‘new’ for the status to remain. Use of social media can have numerous effects on audience and on the celebrity as well. It can change the way a certain celebrity is regarded and due to the possibility of direct contact, the celebrity-audience relationship can – and ultimately must – change. These changes result in the alteration of the force of the influence of different types of celebrities.

In my opinion, Rowling is an interesting example for this process in many aspects. She rose to fame at the beginning of the media ‘revolution’, and continued performing and growing as social media gained prominence. She then also succumbed to the inevitable and chose Twitter – and aside from an official personal website – Twitter only to perform on. In the following chapters the thesis is going to focus on how the celebrity status of Rowling came to be established, what moulded it into being, and as time passed how it evolved and morphed into its current assessment and status. This is going to involve noting turning points during her career, interviews and statements that affected her assessment by the audience, and most importantly the

effects of her own performance on Twitter.



## **IV. Not a waste of space: Rowling, the celebrity**

### **1. Introducing J.K. Rowling**

J.K Rowling is one of the writer pseudonyms of an white, cis-gender English woman writer, linked heavily to the creation of the famed Harry Potter universe – yes, a whole universe that might have started out with the writing of a series of seven books, but it continued to grow into films and merchandise, and numerous branches, eventually starting to function practically on its own. Nevertheless, the name of J.K Rowling is never forgotten; not particularly or solely because of the quality of her writing, or particular deeds including and apart from writing, but in a large part because she actively works on that the name stays near the spotlight.

This created persona has numerous links to the real-life person wearing its name – it is compounded of the real name of the author with the addition of a middle name - however, it must be kept in mind that it is very much a manufactured personality, and as it is, the subject of this thesis. Due to these links, the actions, public thoughts, and deeds of the person behind the name cannot be disregarded as they are carried out in the name of the persona, thusly the distinction between the two categories are significantly blurred.

#### **1.1. From Rags to Riches: Background**

Joanne Rowling was born in the 60s, and grew up on the Western side of Great-Britain, as the child of working parents. She lost her mother during her teenage years. She identifies as “your basic common-or-garden bookworm” (J.K. Rowling, About) – and being a writer when she grew up was a dream of hers. She attended college, lived in France and Portugal for a while, and worked for Amnesty International, has divorced her first husband, is currently mother to three children.

These information can be read about her on her official website, but it is widely quoted as basic information. What is even more widespread knowledge about her, is what can be called a “classic rags-to-riches story” (Shamsian): her rise to fame is awe inspiring. She went down in cultural history as a struggling single mom, whose livelihood was funded by the state, who faced multiple rejections from publishers when attempting to publish *Harry Potter and the Philosophers’ Stone*, and eventually rose to incredible fame on the back of the booming success of her first published book.

These type of zero-to-hero stories fascinate people in general, be it in fiction or real life, because that is a dream to be achieved; however, when it occurs to a flesh-and-blood person, that could have been them as well, it has a slightly more massive effect: it evokes admiration and fascination, but it also evokes jealousy and critique; but what is most important: it generates talk. In Braudy’s words, “the dream of fame in Western society has been inseparable from the idea of personal freedom” (Braudy 7). Freedom, though not an original American idea, has been in the core of the ‘American Dream’ – and that has been one of the fundamental elements of how contemporary celebrity is regarded now.

Though this story was not Rowling’s first, it was her first official publication, and it instantly became popular. I argue there is a connection between the fast success of the publication, and Rowling’s rise to fame. More importantly, this was the immediate point, when the achieved fame of Rowling as the author of the *Harry Potter* series took a step forward and turned into celebrity – because, as noted before, acquiring this knowledge about the author became the point when the attention turned from her actual achievements to her private life.

This celebrity status lasted – and not only because she published a whole series and created an abundant universe for merchandise and further opportunities. As a creator, she

remained in the half-shadows of production; generally speaking, always just close enough to the spotlight so as not to be forgotten – although at times stepping over. These action ensured that Rowling is still an international celebrity, spoken and heard about. In the following chapters changes in her status and the turning points are going to be discussed to eventually determine the current status of Rowling.

## 1.2. Rise to fame

As noted previously, Rowling virtually became famous overnight, and stories of how she became famous started circulating in a way she became instantly eligible to be categorized as a celebrity. Naturally, it is understandable that if someone who was definitely unknown previously becomes practically a household name in a rather short amount of time generates huge attention from the public, but because the book she wrote attracted worldwide attention soon, she also slid into the same large spotlight.

Even the conception of the idea of the character and story of Harry Potter is well-known, and cited along with the hardships she endured until her success: she had the idea sitting on a train from Manchester to London which was delayed, in 1990. Allegedly – but that is part of the charm of the story – her agent advised her against writing books for children, as it would not be a lucrative business. (Miller) The section of the manuscript she sent to publishers unsolicited had already been rejected as many as twelve or thirteen times, as varying sources cite, when a Bryony Evens, literary agent and office manager singled it out, and placed an order with Rowling for the full book. (ibid.) To present the gratitude Rowling has had for Evens, she gifted her a signed copy of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone – a first-edition book (not hundreds, but only 13 years old) that has been set to auction in March 2020, for an expected

90,000 GBP – a self-explaining example of the significance still assigned to the series.  
(Andrews)

The publishing right was eventually sold to Bloomsbury in 1996 – a relatively small, independent publishing company at that time – and printing started in the following year, but that resulted in a limited number of copies yet. Since then, Bloomsbury flourished and became a large, successful publisher, thanks to the continuing success of *Harry Potter* (Howard) – and Rowling.

A determining event can also be connected to the publication. Prior to publication, Rowling was advised to “change” her name – as she recalls in several interviews too, to be discussed later – so that it is not unappealing for boys, and the expected amount of readership is not affected. Accordingly, it may be stated that it was at that point when the writer’s public persona was created; yet genderless, yet unknown, yet with little significance to the target audience of children, waiting to be discovered later. No evidence was found concerning whether this choice of using a pseudonym was due to other factors as well, and as her original name – Joanne Rowling – was not changed beyond recognition, I find that she did not mean to hide from the public and attention.

Some sources indicate that the real recognition for Rowling and the series arrived when Scholastic, a large publisher, took to publishing the series in the United States in 1997. By that time rejection was nowhere to be found: many publishing companies over the Atlantic were in the race to acquire the right for publication. As Anelli, the webmistress of [LeakyCauldron.com](http://LeakyCauldron.com) recounts, the agent’s referencing of successful authors of fantasy and children literature, while

putting cinematic possibilities permanently won the interest of American publishers. The rights were auctioned off to the highest bidder. (Anelli 54)

Poverty is a recurring, overarching theme in *Harry Potter*, and to no surprise – being poor and in the mercy of state benefits, struggling to make ends meet, “probably as poor as you can go without being homeless in the UK” (UpgradeMe, 6:00-6:03) Rowling undoubtedly has first-hand experience. And it is indeed a formative experience: she is constantly asked about it in various interviews, even if the focus is at new publications of hers, interviewers tend to circle back to this starting point. This is a thematic interest of hers because of this personal experience, so much so that one of the main themes of other works of hers, such as *Casual Vacancy*, is poverty as well. (Becca, 1:25-1:32)

Rowling admits to feeling guilty about her wealth; the first larger amount of money she received was the American advance of publishing: this allowed her to step forward in her life by buying a house. The guilt she feels though she attempts to balance with the fact that she actually achieved something, and thus the earned wealth is rightful. (BBC, Paxman) According to a 2003 interview, prior to the publication of the 5<sup>th</sup> book, she was accounted to be richer than the Queen of England. Even though she gave large amounts of her earnings away to charity to the extent that she lost her billionaire status for some time, by 2019 she was back on the top spot of Forbes’s list of richest authors. Nevertheless, the series of books cannot be accounted for the majority of the revenue anymore: the theme parks, stage-play, and new films related to the universe of *Harry Potter* became more significant in this respect. (Forbes)

“There are books, and there is Harry Potter” (BBC, Paxman) states the transcript of a 2003 BBC interview with Rowling, demonstrating in a concise manner the significance of the

phenomenon from numerous aspects. The whole series was followed with a monumental, never-before-seen interest by the public and the media as well. As soon as 2000, there were already fan-sites popping up, such as Leaky Cauldron, disseminating news in a rather simple webpage form at that time (LeakyCauldron, About); soon these sites were followed by similarly fan made sites for fanfiction such as HarryPotterFanfiction.com<sup>7</sup>, and other fandom related, unofficial artworks, podcasts, such as PotterCast<sup>8</sup>, fan films such as *Voldemort: Origins of the Heir*<sup>9</sup>, and even theatrical installations such as *A Very Potter Musical* (which gained immense popularity in the fandom). These works gained prominence alongside the officially released creations and merchandise.

As the release of the final instalment of the series approached in 2007, the interest has reached new heights – as the story of Harry Potter, the boy with whom a generation grew up together, was coming to an end, it was anticipated by fans as a marker for an end of an era. The influence of the story on many aspects and levels is undeniable, even if we only assess the continuous growing of the brand. Rowling is often hailed as a “hero of literacy” (Harrison), the writer who ‘taught children to love reading again’ by press, interviewers, parents, teachers, and even the readers themselves. As an article in the Guardian notes prior to the publication of the 6<sup>th</sup> book that teachers in the United Kingdom found the *Harry Potter* books to be more effective with regards to the increase of reading appetite and abilities than the National Literacy Strategy. Smith also notes the book retailer Waterstone’s “Harry Potter Report and Survey” observed positive influences concerning the reading of the book among children, as more than half of the

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<sup>7</sup> See: <https://harrypotterfanfiction.com/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://pottercast.mischiefmedia.com/>

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6SZa5U8sIg>

participants reported that not only did reading a Harry Potter book made them want to read another one, but that it has helped them in the improvement of their reading skills. (Smith)

It may seem as an exaggeration but I agree that the effect that her publications have on contemporary literature for children is not matched by anything else; there may have been series for young adults – think about the *Twilight*-series and Stephenie Meyer – that have been compared to *Harry Potter*, and their writers to Rowling, but I argue that these comparisons were only based on points that on the long term did not age the same way, such as quick rise to fame, in-depth media coverage, immense hype and anticipation surrounding books and movies, and massive fandom with members of all ages, genders, nationalities, and so. However, the endurance of the fame of these ‘contestants’ seem to be fleeting, and they are mostly centred more prominently around the writings and less on the writers.

As an author, Rowling is compared many times to Roald Dahl, a highly celebrated writer of children’s literature. They share several attributes concerning their writing, even much so that certain elements of the Harry Potter series seems to be borrowed from stories of Dahl. (Johnston) It is argued that due to a larger audience reached by Rowling’s publication – on one hand, she explored more serious themes that could have attracted a more mature readership; on the other hand, Harry Potter is a coming-of age story of a young boy wizard; as the protagonist got older, so did the first readers of the story. All in all, her readership does not only contain children, but also their parents, and those adults who grew up reading *Harry Potter*. While Dahl’s books are also turned into movies, for some reason they are nowhere near as successful and popular as those of *Harry Potter*. (ibid.)

Success can be measured in many ways: money, value-retaining capability, audience-reach, film-adaptation requests, and so – but there is a quite amusing, though painful phenomenon that appeared after the release of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: Hogwarts headache. A paediatrician, Howard J. Bennett, M.D., noticed a recurring problem among his young patients: in other ways healthy children started to report headaches that lasted for long hours, or even days. He discovered that the link between all cases were that the patients were reading the latest instalment of the series; a book that has more than 760 pages - thus earning the place of the longest book in the series overall, but compared to the book published prior to it, there has been massive change concerning the lengths. As children read the book ardently and unstopably, they developed a dull, fluctuating headache. (Howard) Howard was later questioned concerning the publication and he stated that in no ways did he mean to criticise the publications of Rowling. (Stein)

This amusing medical finding shines light on not only a rather solid proof of the success of the books, but also concerning the volume of anticipation surrounding them. Even after the book-series was wholly published, fans were able to continue anticipation: the production of films followed the book series shortly, the first one coming out around the publication of the 4<sup>th</sup> instalment of the 7-book long series. Rowling has several other publications now, and according to her she always meant to publish more than just stories of Harry Potter. When the *Harry Potter* series ended, and Rowling wanted to continue her career as an author releasing books that had no connection to her successful series, anticipation and expectations were extremely high. This time she decided to use a pseudonym again, for quite different reasons than previously: Robert Galbraith was created to alleviate the pressure caused by her previous publications, and so that new publications are distinctly assessed and processed according to their own merit. (Robert



Galbraith, About) Even though Rowling virtually hid behind another identity, the hype and anticipation around Harry Potter for more to come that it did not take long for the press to reveal the secret. It was The Sunday Times that put an end to her “liberating experience” of writing under a pseudonym, reports the BBC. The unmasking happened around the time when the adaptation of the *Cormoran Strike* detective series of Galbraith was premiered on BBC. In the radio interview, Rowling admits to having a virtually internal argument, recalling the time BBC approached the agent of Galbraith – who was unsurprisingly the agent of Rowling as well – concerning how Galbraith should have act as a first-time author. (Norton, Rowling, 16:30-17:03)

As the premiere of the (then) very final *Harry Potter* film was in near sight. ABC channel shoot a documentary concerning Rowling and the final year of her life writing Harry Potter. *J.K. Rowling – A Year in a Life* attempts to offer insight into the life or Rowling – a quite intimate affair to promise. The documentary was produced with the approval of Rowling, and, contrary to the expectations provided by the title, it does not only recount a year of her life – it virtually recounts the turning points and most influential times of her life, much focused on the creation of the *Harry Potter* series. The fact that it is produced in coordination with Rowling, one must keep in mind that there are most certainly some underlying agendas. It contains several snippets of interviews conducted with her, many of those inquiring about her experience of success and fame. As noted in the first part of the thesis, celebrity as a lived experience is more often studied from the audience’s point of view, and rarely researched as the experience the celebrity as a person live through, thus it is increasingly interesting that Rowling speaks about her life as a celebrity and very often comparing and contrasting her current life to the one prior to the publication of *Harry Potter*.

She is asked quite often, almost in every longer, or more in-depth interviews whether she expected to become a famous writer. Prior to the publication of the – surprisingly – highly anticipated 5<sup>th</sup> book of the series, in a 2003 interview with BBC journalist Jeremy Paxman, she answered the following:

The fame thing is interesting because I never wanted to be famous, and I never dreamt I would be famous. You know, my fantasy of being a famous writer, and again there's a slight disconnect with reality which happens a lot with me. I imagined being a famous writer would be like being like Jane Austen. Being able to sit at home in the parsonage and your books would be very famous and occasionally you would correspond with the Prince of Wales's secretary. (BBC, Paxman)

She consistently answers the same content-wise, even in the following sentences concerning the negative experiences originating from being famous. “This level of fame must be both gratifying and terrifying. Did Rowling want to become famous?” (Slick 2, 3:36-3:42) asks the interviewer in *A Year in a Life*; Rowling’s answer this time is more on the serious note both in textual tone and the actual tone of her speech:

It never occurred to me in a million years, James, that people would search my dustbins, put a long-lens camera on me on the beach, you know (...) it never occurred to me that journalists would bang on the door of one of my oldest friends and offer her money to talk about me (...) it never occurred to me that my children would be scrutinized to see how spoilt they were cause their parent is famous. (Slick 2, 3:54-4:18)

Rowling in this interview snippet comments only on the negative side of being famous. Her answer paints a picture of the reality of celebrity as a commodity, whose worth is measured in visibility, information, and money. Some minutes later she also addresses one of the biggest fundamental elements of celebrity: the constructed, stage-y nature of celebrity. She confesses that when the spotlight is on her, playing the role of the celebrated writer does not come to her naturally. (Slick 2, 4:57-8)

Taking into account this and other interviews, depending on the interviewer's way of posing questions, it is clear that Rowling finds joy in being famous as well. As the documentary goes on she also comments on the brighter side of success: "The fun bits are when you get to talk to people who have read your books. That's always great." (Slick 2, 4:35-4:39) Another, rather humorous commenting on the same subject from the BBC interview:

Rowling: ...to have a total stranger walk up to you as you're walking around Safeways, and say a number of nice things that they might say about your work ... I mean of course you walk on with a bit more spring in your step. That's a very, very nice thing to happen. I just wish they wouldn't approach me when I'm buying you know...

Paxman: Loo roll?

Rowling: Items of a questionable nature, exactly. Always, always. Never when you're in the fresh fruit and veg section. Never. (BBC, Paxman)

This provides us further relevancy concerning her yearning to communicate, keep in contact with her audience, and disperse her ideas – and as the following chapter is going to demonstrate, leads to a choice of platform for performance that complies with this need.

In summary, I find that the discussed documentary-type of film creates an atmosphere in which the audience develops empathy toward Rowling, and reinforces admiration towards her due to the struggles presented that she had to face. This is a manipulating apparatus – the way this interview is cut and endorsed with soundtrack, the majority of the interview questions asked from Rowling are posed in a way that the given answers all describe her as incredibly relatable, as 'one-of-us'. This is present in many of her interviews noted, but naturally it is most apparent in the one that is the most constructed, has the least requirement for improvisation, and is the most perfect for the image formation of the literary celebrity. We get a glimpse behind the very scenes of the sacred activity of the celebrity and that is the creation of the text – and this action further reduces the distance between the literary celebrity and its audience.

### 1.3. An inescapable audience: fandom

Everything and everyone can have fans today. Fandoms have been around since the 19<sup>th</sup> century; from a cultural and historical point of view, fandom-culture originated from literature: we can talk about fans gathering together in a common interest in case of Doyle's fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, protesting against his fictional death - but as the use of other media spread it inevitably led to the formation of media fandoms, such as that of the famous *Star Trek* series. (Hills 274) Fandoms have gone through several shifts until arriving at their contemporary state – just as celebrity has done. Due to similarities in their nature, these shifts during the decades resemble greatly.

Nevertheless, the term 'fandom' is a lot easier to define than celebrity, with only several additional viewpoints to consider: it is the gathering of loyal supporters, or fans, of an imaginary subject which they consume on a regular basis. There is always emotional connection to the subject. As Hills recounts, some scholars regard fandom as an inherently productive phenomenon, nurturing the subject further; and as an experience of community, and belonging. (ibid.) These communities concern themselves with the collection, categorization, mapping, and compiling of all information concerning the subject.

Hills summarizes the definition of fandom applicable to both types as follows:

“[F]ans display a tendency to create their own paratextual realms (Gray, 2010) around the canonical texts making up imaginary worlds (that is, the officially produced and endorsed versions of a media franchise) as well as frequently acting as “paratextual completists” (Hills, 2015: 65) in relation to the cataloguing/collecting of any given imaginary world's transmedia extensions and branded merchandise.” (Hills 274)

The above description is very true for the Harry Potter fandom, which, due its mixed nature (both literary and media fandom), can be regarded as one of several unique creations, such as Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* series. They are not only similar in their mixed-media existence; resulting from this multimedia presence, they share prospective longevity and effect

on culture as well. (Hills 275) I share a personal experience concerning fandom culture, and especially with that of the Harry Potter universe. Even today I am a regular consumer of the subject, and enjoy the ‘refining’ works of the fandom, from fan-fiction to Tumblr-memes. The vitality of the fandom can possibly be accounted for by the comparatively short time of its existence (consider the previously mentioned work of Tolkien, for example). Though this literary/ media fandom phenomenon is not exceptional (again, think of Tolkien, but probably more so of Doyle’s work), the subject of the Harry Potter fandom is more unique due to its original author who plays a significant part in not only the original creation, but their afterlife, thus coming into a special contact with not only the subject, but with its fandom.

As stated several times during this thesis, the fame and celebrity of creation and the creator can hardly be separated in the case of Rowling, as literary celebrity and its work is always considered together. Due to this, the affiliation of the audience, and the consequent fan-base becomes questionable. I argue that there is no such distinct category as ‘Rowling fandom’, but I reckon that it is possibly imbedded in and intertwined – or, at least used to be – with the Harry Potter fandom. Though the magnitude of interest might have been larger initially: her post-*Harry Potter* publications were very much anticipated, people would line up before a studio where she would be interviewed just to let her know how she ‘changed lives’ with her writing. (Becca, 3:41-3:47)

The importance of this connection is because Rowling seems to be unable to let go of her successful creation, and it evokes a strong reaction from the members of the fandom. As presented in the Twitter chapter, Rowling keeps in contact with her audience in a comparably frequent basis. But through this action Rowling has taken steps that resulted in the change of the way she was perceived, and as a consequence it greatly affected her celebrity, so much so as she

became and Internet meme.

As discussed by Vanderhoof, the already present gap between Rowling and her audience, due to her celebrity status, became magnified from other social aspects as well, after the publication of the final book of the Harry Potter series, regarding social status, age, gender, nationality, and all the subsequent differences. Based on articles, tweets, YouTube videos and other types of posts found during research, the discovery of this gap shocked the avid fanbase, and the growing confusion surrounding the revelation of the writer behind the beloved series evoked anger and disappointment towards Rowling.

Unfortunately, this constant meddling with the created universe has been having a negative reception for a long time now. Initially, Rowling's additional snippets of information and complementary stories have been welcome with joy. In retrospect –and also, speaking of personal experience – this joy came from a frustration, due to the high emotional connection to the subject. As part of the generation that grew up waiting for the release of the forthcoming part of the *Harry Potter* series, the anticipatory period always seemed too long. This eventually resulted in “fan-made time” (Gwynne), during which the discourse among fans turned into speculation, gossiping, and pre-imagining how the subject would unfold in the anticipated instalment. (Hills 276)

For a long time, whatever Rowling published or revealed, even post-publication, was deemed instantly canonical. Unfortunately, as it is going to be discussed later in more detail, she seems to have stepped over the line, and fans no longer welcome additional information on the Harry Potter universe. Her authority seems to falter with regards to Harry Potter, and based on her actions, she does not want to let go. The Internet fans, to deal with the frustration caused by

the disappointment in a ‘hero’, apart from open criticism, turned to the use of memes<sup>10</sup>.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a meme is “an idea, image, video, etc. that is spread very quickly on the internet” (Cambridge Dictionary). It seems to me that this definition lacks the substance of what a meme really is, because in my understanding, meme’s inherently have a humorous aspect as well. Rowling herself thusly became a meme, representing the ‘creator’s inability to let go’, and its use is widespread in numerous platforms.

#### 1.4. Sacred, unparalleled, but ultimately disappointing: life and status after *Harry Potter*

Religious connections can already be made in one’s head: as noted in the first part of the thesis, celebrity worship is found to possess the same roots psychologically as religious worship. (Giles 50) Literary celebrity especially, has been historically regarded as a character placed above, working in a different sphere than that of the ‘normal’ celebrity, and ordinary people, thus distanced and mysterious. This already resembles the basic features assigned generally to gods of different religions. As the celebrity of Rowling originates from the literary field, she already started out with a distinct celebrity status – but this is not the sole delineation of hers from the rest of celebrity.

If we regard Rowling as more than a ‘simple writer’, as an author, there are long term consequences to that categorization, resulting in a major conflict between the author, the persona, and their shared audience. Nevertheless, staying in the religious context for now, historically speaking different religions, such as Islam or Christianity, regard the respective god the author of ‘The Book’ of the religion. Following this analogy and considering the previously stated audience reactions, it is easy to see Rowling’s god-like reception in the creation of a whole imaginary universe. However, as an author of the new millennium, the ground-breaking notion

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<sup>10</sup> See an assorted selection of examples: <https://screenrant.com/harry-potter-jk-rowling-canon-changes-memes/>

of the death of the author by Roland Barthes is an interesting one to examine. Barthes's notion, in a narrow understanding, concerns the way one might approach literary analysis: how much do we need to know about the author and its intent concerning the meaning of the text they produced? "The removal of the Author [...] utterly transforms the modern text (or - which is the same thing - the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent)" (Barthes 145) Barthes eliminates the notion of 'author' altogether, and replaces it with 'scriptor' so that his stance on the topic is rather clear: the only meaning-maker is the reader; every text is made sense of at the time of their enunciation and authorial intent is rendered non-essential.

Barthes findings can be applied to a wider context as well: humanity. Texts surrounds us in our everyday life waiting to be interpreted; however in too many cases one still looks for authorial intent to decipher the sign encountered. As one does not often ponder about the intent of the installer of a stop-sign, according to Barthes, readers should not be swayed from their interpretation of the text by the flesh and blood writer of that text. (Seymour) This evaluation does not mean that the opinions of an author is not relevant, but there is no more significance to it than that of any other readers'.

There is a harsh contrast between what is expected of Rowling as a celebrity author – allowance to the fans to spend even more time in the imaginary wizarding world by producing more and more stories and details – and what she is simultaneously harshly criticized about – oversharing and unwanted control over the evolving of her works. The result of this dichotomy inflicted on Rowling is negative: it is virtually impossible to adhere to any of the two sides and maintain the status of the author intact.



Should this not be enough to establish that there are elements in her celebrity status that are heavily permeated by religious tones, her charity-related actions and deeds finalise it. “[O]ffering support for global charities has become both practically part of the contemporary celebrity job description and a hallmark of the established star.” (Littler 238) For an acceptable image, charity is virtually almost as much of a must-do action as performing on some type of social media. Littler notes that, for example, when the Beckham family moved to the United States, they were publicly advised by traditional media to turn from advertising consumer goods to attending charity events to raise their profiles as celebrities. (ibid.) However, as it is basically an obligatory performance expected of the celebrity, it is scoffed at, and treated with sarcasm. As Littler’s article describes, celebrity and charity are intimately linked together by media representation, and can have significant effects on the visibility and evaluation of each other. There is a fine line between what the audience regards as authentic charitable deeds and what may be labelled as fake, a ‘charidee’. Indisputably, engaging in charity works, as they aspire to spread awareness to the broadest audience possible, offer an almost unmissable chance for the celebrity persona for promotion. Because of the possible two-faced nature of celebrity charity, it is often difficult to differentiate between deeds that are executed for purely commercial aims, and those truly carried out of sympathy, compassion, and care. However, the star who is ‘damaged’ in its own way has a higher chance to be considered as truly empathetic to the suffering of those in need of charity. This even renders the fact that celebrities are part of the wide network of politics and hierarchical relations that are responsible for the misfortunes and suffering almost irrelevant to the audience. (Littler 242)

Rowling herself can be linked to numerous charitable acts and foundations. To the best of my knowledge, all of the causes she endorses and acts upon have some personal links to her

experiences. One of the first charitable actions she took after becoming famous and wealthy was the founding of Children's High Level Group in 2005 together with Baroness Emma Nicholson. This group turned into Lumos - named after one of the spells used in *Harry Potter* for conjuring light – “dedicated to working towards ending the systematic institutionalisation of children worldwide.” (Lumos, About) Light-bringing is the mission statement of the foundation: shedding light on the problem, and to bring light into the life of children. She has been an outspoken advocate concerning the subject of orphanages affecting children's futures in a negative way, aiming to eliminate orphanages altogether, such as it is visible in interviews, for example on Today, with Matt Lauer. (TODAY, 2013)

One of the many causes she endorses is concerning children's welfare. She was appointed as the first ambassador of Gingerbread, a national charity of Great Britain founded in 1918, working to help single parent families. Currently, she is president of the organisation, and with other celebrities they “help [them] raise the profile of Gingerbread in order to reach and support more single parent families.” (Gingerbread, History) Aiding this cause roots in Rowling's personal history with being a single parent herself; she openly discusses the experience as demonstrated by several interview appearances, and for example a written confession on the Gingerbread official site as well<sup>11</sup>.

When she turned 45, she donated money to the University of Edinburgh for the foundation of the Anne Rowling Clinic in 2010, commemorating her late mother who passed away due to complications of multiple sclerosis – the founding event of 2013 was significant, as much as Princess Anne attended it herself. (ARC, History)

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<sup>11</sup>See: <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/community/stories/i-prouder-years-single-mother-part-life/>

The above enlisted are just a couple of the exemplary causes she endorses greatly; nevertheless it is apparent by these few already that in Rowling's case, though celebrity charity inevitably leads to greater visibility on behalf of both the cause and the supporter, the motives of support are mainly due to personal experience. As a result, though her charities appear in the news and her name is usually presented there as anchor<sup>12</sup>, there is hardly any criticism of 'charidee', according to my research she never appeared on any media outlet labelled as a phony. She is even more hailed by the media as selfless after reportedly losing her billionaire status due to the large amount of donations she executed to various institutions and causes<sup>13</sup>.

## **2. Media (re)presentation**

As demonstrated in the first part of the thesis, media and celebrity are heavily interconnected. Traditionally, in modern media, the only chance celebrities had for the conveying of their image was to be represented by traditional media: radio broadcasts, television programmes, newspapers, and so. Currently, media platforms are evolved to a level where celebrities can – or should we say, inevitably must – 'take matters into their hands' and present themselves on social media. (Giles 81)

Considering literary celebrity, as they are dependent and intertwined with their work, close management of the persona is inevitable. As Spiers states, "[i]f public appearances are not carefully managed, the authorial body may become as exposed as the sticking plaster revealed on the Queen Mother's ankle when bestowing Drabble with her royal honour." (Spiers 578) The body is valuable because it is the one that produces the work which is celebrated. Spiers here exemplifies the case of George R.R. Martin, around who the hype and pressure for delivering the

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<sup>12</sup>See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-48988791>

next, highly anticipated part of *Game of Thrones* the tension between representation and work is palpable. (ibid.) As it is going to be visible through the following chapter, Rowling encountered a situation similar to the example: she has been under enormous pressure for publication, and the need for a way of the presentation of the persona to show what was intended exactly

## 2.1. Interviews with the author

It has been a long journey from ecclesiastical confession to evolve to celebrity interview, however, as King describes it in his article, the two ends are historically connected to each other. What has usually been the content of private conversations, interviews as a journalistic genre became public, and discussed by the public, by the introduction of a third party to the process: the audience. Due to it being virtually overseen, interviews can be regarded as hermeneutic of a physical event occurring between interviewer and interviewee, attempting to present in their own, presumably actively controlled image of the celebrity by scripting. The result of this setting, aided by the popular usage of indirect speech, is control and advantage on the interviewer's side to communicate the event in a way that suits their interests. (King 120)

The premiere media coverage for authors is via the traditional way of being interviewed by someone from most probably a media outlet as a journal, or broadcasting channel. As noted in an interview with talk show host Jonathan Ross, Rowling does not grant a lot of interviews (FNJS, 1:01-1:04), and thusly media outlets account for the ones she grants as special. Fortunately, due to hype and abundance of events connected to which interviews can be asked, counting the release of 7 books and 8 movies the least – by today, there are many of interviews conducted with Rowling. The majority of them are focusing on the upcoming next instalment of

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<sup>13</sup>See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/45432474>

*Harry Potter*. But besides inquiries concerning the works, many questions are posed to Rowling concerning her own life: many aims at her experience as a celebrity and a lot of at the behind-the-scenes works as an author.

Based on the evidence provided by written and recorded interviews, Rowling happily discloses and presents the audience the behind the scenes of the life of an author, and offers maybe even more than a sneak peek into the mystical writing process. First things first however, in 2001, a clarification was required. There has been so many information in circulation concerning the persona, that Rowling felt it was time to set some of them right. Together with BBC, an hour-long documentary film, aired as a Christmas special on the television channel, filled with snippets of interviews and scenes from the then only Harry Potter movie released, titled *Harry Potter and Me*. It sequentially moves up to the date of the documentary, cleansing the record of the “lot of rubbish” (Rowling, BBC 2:03-04) that has been written so far. Unequivocally with the title, the documentary focuses on Rowling and her relationship with the story of Harry Potter, noting sources of inspiration, times of life she wrote certain chapters, and many other, maybe ordinary aspects of authorship, which are indeed interesting for the audience.

According to her, talking about how she works has been liberating, and conclusively, after all these years of secrecy and dodging questions about her work, the publication of the final instalment of *Harry Potter* brought her a sense of release. There is an interesting recorded video with her, an interview conducted by Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who plays the character of the protagonist Harry Potter in the film series – the interview, titled *A Conversation between Daniel Radcliffe and J.K. Rowling* is an extra feature of the BluRay release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. The interview indeed is executed in a conversational way, however it can still be identified as an interview both concerning Radcliffe and Rowling, but still rather

focusing on Rowling. In the focus of the interview stands the creation of characters and contrasting them to those realised in the films, the experience of fame for both participants, and Rowling's involvement and experiences concerning the adaptation of her books into films. Radcliffe remembers how Rowling who used to visit the set quite often initially, let the production have more and more freedom as she became more certain that her work is in good hands.

During the BBC interview with Paxman, she was still in the middle of the writing process, as the story was only halfway told. There was continuous pressure on her brought about by speculation and showers of questions concerning certain developments expected to happen in the next instalment. She admits to being very secretive and protective of the developments of the story – according to her it is only to keep the magic of the books intact for those who have yet to read it. Nevertheless, she allows the viewers to take a look at the process of creation, presenting the grid-plans, and scraps of paper she uses for work, while discussing her method of writing. Allowing a media outlet as significant as BBC to look behind the scenes and convey the experience to the audience offered great visibility and de-mystification of the writer. As Lawson marks in his article in *The Guardian*, this particular interview is special in its own way. The choice of Rowling and her team to grant the only interview prior publication to Paxman and BBC was speculated about, and deemed to be a bold choice. (Lawson)

However, there have been rather bothersome experience with media intruding into the authorial territory without permission – at least that is how it is communicated through media. In a radio podcast interview with BBC's Graham Norton (a well-known talk-show host), she admitted to put on the pseudonym of Robert Galbraith as to publish without being 'herself': "I'd always wanted to write crime and I wanted to not do it with any fanfare, so I submitted the

manuscript anonymously, and it was all great and I even enjoyed getting rejection letters again. It was fantastic, it was just like it used to be.” (Norton, 15:08-15:21) She notes that despite her fame, she has managed to live her life ‘unnoticed’ – according to her, it is mostly due to her being an average-sized woman, which helps her blend into the crowd. (Press Association)

By now, Rowling concluded in several instances that she has, more or less, closed the Harry Potter chapter of her writing career, though it is one of the hardest deeds she has ever had to do. When she eventually did, however, whenever she received inquiries about how final the final book of the series is – and she got asked this a lot of times - she always left the door slightly open. Let us consider her 2010 interview with Oprah Winfrey. Early in the interview – as it is the cause for the interview – Oprah asks about Rowling’s feelings concerning the completion of her successful series:

Rowling: I kept – It was a bereavement. It was. It was a bereavement. It was huge. I think one way – although I knew it was coming we all know that the people we love are mortal – we are mortal. We know it’s going to end. You cannot prepare yourself for it. So even though I always knew it would be seven books – that was it. I knew how it was going to end. When it ended I was in a slight state of shock.

Winfrey: What did you do when you finished?

Rowling: Well, initially I was elated but then there came a point – I cried as I’ve only ever cried once before in my life and that was when my mother died. It was uncontrollable and I’m *not* a big crier. You know – I cry, but I’m not someone who can sort of keep crying going. You know what I mean? Some people can – do floods for hours. I’ve never – only twice in my life have I done that. For seventeen years I’d had that – through very tumultuous times in my personal life and I – I’d always had that. And if it was an escape for all these children you can imagine what it would have been for me. And it was not just the world. It was the discipline of working and it was the structure it gave to my life and I knew I’d still be writing but I had to mourn Harry.

(...)

Winfrey: But you know what happens ‘ever after’.

Rowling: Yeah, I do. I couldn’t stop. I don’t think you can when you’ve been that involved with the characters for that long. It’s still all in there. They’re all in my head still. I mean I could write – I could – I could definitely write an eighth, ninth, tenth – I could – easily.

Winfrey: Will you?

Rowling: I’m not going to say I won’t. I don’t think I will. I loved writing those books. I loved writing it. So, I feel I am done but you never know.” (Oprah, 4:40-6:58)

King states that there are two types of so-called celebrity confession television: demotic and celebrity shows. This interview is conducted in the framework of the latter one, as a special episode of Oprah. These highlighted celebrity interviews “present a smoother, less striated spectacle of talk, and the ongoing interaction is marked by tactics for the felicitous management of intimacy at a distance or para-social interaction.” (King 122) The writer’s point of view is understandable, relatable, and seems very human. They are intimate, abundant with references to personal feelings, and reveal a deep connection between the work and the author. As this is a recorded video interview, the audience has the chance to hear the voice, watch the facial expressions, and experience the feeling of peeking into the private thoughts and emotions of Rowling. Situated in across a respected television host Oprah Winfrey, who happens to share a history of hardships prior to her success with Rowling, the whole conversation is elevated. As Burt notes in her list of best interviews conducted with Rowling, “feels increasingly like a discussion rather than simply an interview.” (Burt) These type of interviews are created including elements of production that ensure an affirmative response from the audience concerning the presented celebrity persona. In contrast to demotic talk shows, where confessions are steered allegedly spontaneously by the interviewer and the reaction of the audience present at recording, these talks are under heavy control. Their intricately scripted contents contain revelations and confessions in a way that the persona is positively promoted. (King 122-123)

I argue that this is the case with Rowling’s interview – as she just presumably finished and closed a major part of her life as the actively writing author of an immensely successful series, the continuous existence of her persona needed to be established and affirmed while a separation had to be signed from her previous work. The interview thus stands as a summary of her career and persona so far, and as a sign for the opening of the new chapter. According to



King, this is exactly why such interviews may be conducted: although for the audience, these interviews carry with themselves the possibility of getting to know the true person of the celebrity, in reality, the confessions pronounced during these events never serve the redeeming of the private self. Subsequently, image-management of the public persona, especially at crucial times of success and failure, is what can be identified at the core. (King 123)

In a later interview of 2012 on CBS, she recites her answer given to Winfrey, but adds that she has “no plans” (Becca 1:04-1:05) to return to the story of *Harry Potter*, because she believes that “Harry’s story is pretty much done”.(Becca 1:06-1:09) Without recounting the numerous instances in which the same question was posed, eventually it can be concluded that the door back to the *Harry Potter* universe was very much open. I find it quite understandable that as an author it is difficult to separate from a work one has been working on for more than 10 years, as she admitted many times. Rowling experienced fame and success along with wealth that admittedly brought a change of lifestyle for her. As stated previously, the audience of interviews anticipates an insight to who the genuine person is. Rowling betrayed this illusion of the interview when nine years since the publication of the last book part, and five years after the premiere of the last part of the film series, she returned to the Harry Potter universe with two productions at a similar time.

This betrayal was fondly anticipated by fans who longed for a return to the beloved universe. Anticipation practically became a core building block in case of the Harry Potter fandom throughout the years of waiting for the sequels to be published, and film versions to be produced. The anticipation-theme is a recurring one during interviews – many of the times fans had to wait for the next parts, due to personal reasons of Rowling. Due to her status as celebrity and as author, the audience tends to disregard the fact that there is a human being behind the

persona. As concluded in her interview with Paxman, by the time of finishing the 4<sup>th</sup> instalment of the series, she became regarded as ‘public property’. (BBC, Paxman)

Drawing on silent notes on public property concerning the body of the author: as previously noted, from the industry’s point of view, the significance of the flesh and blood body of an author is purely from the content creation perspective. As Rowling is a woman author and has been established as someone the audience looks up to, can be regarded as a role model for aspiring writers. As later stated, her endorsement of fanfiction further strengthens the notion of role model. Though interest is invested in her private life as author, as contemporary media works, it would not be surprising to encounter an article concerning a dress she wore to some of the premieres; and indeed there are some, using the body of the author for commercial purposes<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, I could find no interviews with Rowling in which tabloid topics such as fashion are discussed. The only times such topics are vaguely mentioned are in connection with her celebrity; in a 2012, practically inquisitorial interview given to The Guardian, among other topics she is asked on whether she ever had to use disguise in public. She reveals that the only time she ever did that to avoid recognition was the time she bought her wedding dress.

In conclusion, as presented in the chapter, even if selectively, Rowling grants interviews on diverse platforms in diverse media, from those considered highbrow to morning show and talk shows, and does not shy away from performing.

## 2.2. The battleground of Twitter

The blogging social media site is ardently used by Rowling even today. She joined in

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<sup>14</sup> See: “JK Rowling wearing David Morris Tassel Set to the Fantastic Beasts 2 Premiere”. David Morris. Retrieved from: <https://www.davidmorris.com/jk-rowling-wearing-david-morris-tassel-set-to-the-fantastic-beasts-2-premiere/> or “Is This J.K. Rowling’s Favorite Jeweler?”. The Daily Beast. 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/is-this-jk-rowlings-favorite-jeweler>

2009 according to her profile, and has a wide circle of 14,5 million followers – and although she is rather behind the most followed account, which is that of the previously mentioned, former president of the United States, Barack Obama, with 115,1 million followers, it is still quite an impressive number. There is no evidence found on whether it is operated by herself or a publicist, but I personally am convinced that it is indeed Rowling doing the posting, and not someone in her name – although the fact that she writes under a pseudonym creates a perfect innuendo for that. Also, as stated in the first part of the thesis, usage of social media enables celebrities to skip the traditional intermediaries, and do the mediation of their self themselves. (Myers 478) The referencing of Obama is by no coincidence: as Giles notes, Twitter played a seminal role in his successful 2008 presidential campaign thus stepping up to be assessed as a valuable and practically fundamental in public persona management (Giles 81)

Twitter is a site of possibility: virtually any kind of thoughts or enouncements can be tweeted, the one doing the tweeting be an ordinary person or a celebrity, and there is no difference in this sense between them. Regarding it from this way, Rowling is no different from any of the tweeters either; she tweets about numerous everyday, ordinary topics and happenings, such as for example:

- her dreams:

@jk\_rowling: Had the most elaborate nightmare of my life last night: a hammer-wielding serial killer, a female scientist working on a Coronavirus vaccine & many sub-plots, one involving rescuing an ape from a window ledge. In a break between gruesome killings, I took @EmmaWatson out to lunch. (@jk\_rowling, 12:17 PM, 20 April 2020)

- admiration for her husband:

@jk\_rowling: Flowers and jewellery are lovely, but marry the man who reassures you in a calm, compassionate voice that you're not a useless lump of meaningless flesh just because you can't make your fucking printer work. (@jk\_rowling, 18:16 PM, 15 April 2020)

- pictures and notes on her dogs:

@jk\_rowling: Morning. Here are my dogs demonstrating the energy and alertness for which the

West Highland Terrier is famed. (@jk\_rowling, 10:58 AM, 2 April 2020)

On one hand, Rowling thus uses Twitter as any ordinary person does, tweeting about topics the users on Twitter generally tweet about. She retweets world news she finds important – such as tweets of NHS concerning updates on the COVID-19 pandemic –, sarcastic jokes – one of the current latest also concerning the pandemic –, funny animal videos, filling out tests that tell you about your personality, and so. Nevertheless, as Myers point out, an author's demand for attention is always going to be validated by them being the writers of certain books, and this fact is what will make otherwise ordinary posts – such as the types listed before – be worth the additional attention of fans. (Myers 478)

Ever since joining the site, Rowling has been vocal about several serious matters, including current politics, LGBTQ+ related debates, women's rights, and so. Rowling is frequently praised by people on several online platforms and modes for her use of Twitter, especially for the great number of witty comebacks. There is an abundance of articles<sup>15</sup> that collect some of her most impressive retorts of the so called 'internet trolls'. The majority of these tweets are concerning her work – but mostly the *Harry Potter* series –, other tweets are simply attacks on her celebrity persona. Many of them have amusement value, but some are debateable, and implicate a hailstorm of articles, comments, and discussion on the Internet, and sometimes in traditional media as well after going viral.

Tweets concerning the *Harry Potter* series are in abundance. There has been no in-depth quantitative research done, for a general overview of the contents of the tweets of Rowling, I looked at what she tweeted between 1<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2020. Due to a pandemic being in progress at the time of the writing of the thesis the majority of the tweets touch upon the subject

of the pandemic of COVID-19, many of them in a humorous way, most of them somehow connected to the *Harry Potter* series.

As it was noted previously as well, Twitter, as one of the most popular social media platforms, plays a part in the blurring of the barriers between the audience and the celebrity. It is not only due to the para-social relationship the audience can have with celebrities who perform on social media, but also due to the fact that it poses a challenge to celebrity structure established in traditional media: every single member starts off with zero followers at registration – and this is a common ground for the audience and celebrities as well. (Giles 37)

I often referred to Myer's article in which he describes his study of authors use of Twitter – unfortunately, Rowling did not make the cut during the selection process because Myers found that she did not post tweets often enough to be included. (Myers 480) He examined the Twitter corpus of ten authors, concerning their style, stances taken, keywords used and shared, and many other aspects. One of the most interesting sections of the study was the examination of instances when fans tweeted authors, waiting for a response from them, as this occurs quite often with Rowling as well, based on her Twitter feed. "Some of this attention may give the author a satisfying feeling of connection to an audience, while others may be almost bullying. Authors are caught up in a stream of social media attention whether they participate or not." (Myers 486) This statement suggests clearly that authors who use social media may not use it voluntarily – if understood this way, I disagree with it, for it is also possible not to register to any of these social media platforms and thus be free of participation. However, if it is understood solely with regards to attention, it is indeed true, not just because celebrities can always be the victim of the

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. <https://ruinmyweek.com/entertainment/jk-rowling-twitter-replies/>; or [https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-jk-rowling-twitter-comebacks/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=organic](https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-jk-rowling-twitter-comebacks/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic)

paparazzi-type of celebrity sighting and instant posting of it on social media. (ibid.)

Marshall identified three modes for the presentation of the celebrity self in 2010: there is the traditionally established mode of celebrities that is the ‘public self’, followed by the ‘private public self’ which differs from the first one in terms of additional, behind the scenes information providing, the contents of which are selected with care; and the third one that is the ‘transgressive intimate self’. The last one is distinct from the first two with respect to intimate material poured into the public self without precaution. (Marshall 45) As Giles state, the latter mode of presentation virtually became the norm over the years, and the first two modes do not perform well in the currently established Twitter environment.

From the small research of March 2020, containing 63 of her tweets, it is apparent that she keeps in contact with fans, answering their tweets – the most, 28 tweets out of all – and retweeting the ones that she deems worthy, interesting, or debatable – 20 tweets of all. The findings are summarized in the below tables.

<b>Amount of tweets of March 2020 according to type - @jk_rowling</b>	
<b>Type of tweet</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Original tweets	8
Retweets	20
Answers	28
Chain of tweets as answers	7
<b>SUM</b>	<b>63</b>

Table 1.

Topics of tweets of March 2020 - @jk_rowling (with overlaps)	
Topics of tweets of March 2020	Amount
COVID-19	24
Harry Potter/ Wizarding World	21
Animals	8
Personal	6
General communication	6
Mental health	3
News	3
Writing	3
Humour	1

Table 2.

She answered the tweets of people, not just Potterheads – the name of the members of the fandom –, asking her to say a few uplifting words, for example a fan account tweeted the following:

@PotterheadClub: Here is a photo of the special event that was made at the premiere of fantastic beasts , Mexico is full of Harry Potter fans, but sometimes we are ignored as the huff, @jk\_rowling Jo could you send a message to our country in these dark times, please? (Mexican flag emoji) (@PotterheadClub, 20:22 PM, 28 March 2020)

To which Rowling answered the following:

@jk\_rowling: I love Mexico! I was there with my family a couple of years ago. Stay safe, Mexican Potterheads (two hearts emoji) (Mexican flag emoji) (@jk\_rowling, 20:27 PM, 28 March, 2020)

This instance is rather less creative and witty than that of the majority of her tweets. For another example for fan interaction – I propose that the below conversation presents the general tweeting style of Rowling well:

@Astro\_Akram: I am trying to write a novel in this free time at home. Any advice (smiling face emoji)? (@Astro\_Akram, 11:11 PM, 26 March, 2020)

@jk\_rowling: “There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.” - Somerset Maugham (@jk\_rowling, 11:12 PM, 26 March, 2020)

Concerning topics I narrowed them down to nine altogether, as presented in Table 2.:

COVID-19, Harry Potter, animals, personal matters, general communication, mental health,

news, writing, and humour. Unsurprisingly the topic with the most tweets currently is that of the current pandemic situation, but it is present in many different modes.

But let us examine the above noted two separate fan interactions from a different point of view. Both started with fans tweeting a question/ request towards Rowling, both aiming at her presumed wisdom – a presumption that is generated by the reception of the *Harry Potter* series. There is a power given willingly in the hand of Rowling by the fans when contacted directly: she can either ignore them, reply negatively, or reply positively. Myers makes a valid point based on previous research: even in case of having less followers than Rowling, it is indeed quite difficult to retweet or reply to all contacts that are made in hope to reach her and get her attention. (Myers 479) Still, by engaging in this type of contact, the audience becomes subject to the apparatus that, depending on the emotional involvement of the recipient of Rowling's answer, may have smaller or larger effects on them.

Regarding mode of communication, Rowling fits more into the second category of 'private public' persona presentation. Just as what interviews she accepts, she carefully chooses the bits of her life that she shares – such as her dogs – to maintain the sense of being 'real'.

Though there are no instances of it being acknowledged and answered to by Rowling in the examined 1-month term, she is sometimes the victim of celebrity bashing too. The term was first used by Johansson in 2006, and refers to an online phenomenon of submitting negative critique directly towards a celebrity. Its emergence can be ascribed to those journalists who publish news concerning celebrities in a rather sordid tone and way. (Ouverin) A 2018 study conducted by Ouverin, De Backer, and Vanderbosch focused on bystander behaviour and bashing identified patterns concerning the types of bashings, emphasizing three distinct type of appearances, all of which were directed towards celebrities: accusation of being an



attention-seeker; causing drama in connection with events that are deemed unworthy of the level of attention given by the celebrity; and accusing the celebrity of being obsessively money-focused in each of their actions and enunciations. (ibid)

Connecting the facts, though Rowling is subject to bashing, she is widely praised for her way of handling ‘bashers’ or ‘trolls’, as the internet lingo defines them. “If you decide to go up against J.K. Rowling on Twitter, you will almost certainly lose” (Haysom) says a 2015 article recounting 24 times Rowling “was a total badass on Twitter<sup>16</sup>”. (ibid.) Several of the noted tweets of the article would deserve attention, but for example’s sake, here is one that is relatable and quite clear-cut. In a short thread she defends the body of Serena Williams:

@diegtristan tweeted the following as a response to a previous twitter:  
@diegtristan: @jk\_rowling @hansmollman ironic then that main reason for her success is that she is built like a man (@diegtristan8, 14:55 PM, 11 July, 2015)  
To which Rowling then replied the below ‘burn’<sup>17</sup>:

@jk\_rowling: @diegtristan8 "she is built like a man". Yeah, my husband looks just like this in a dress. You're an idiot. [attached pictures of Serena Williams in a dress] (@jk\_rowling, 17:10 PM, 11 July, 2015)  
I find that, being familiar with her style of tweeting, this type of answer is very characteristic of her, though she may be more subtle in the majority of the instances.

Rowling has had action on twitter several times that were eventually included in the news, where prestigious online counterpart of newspapers, such as Time <sup>18</sup>or Business Insider <sup>19</sup>reported on Twitter activity. One of the most notable of these actions is political: she openly

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<sup>16</sup> See: <https://mashable.com/2015/07/31/jk-rowling-badass-tweets/?europa=true>

<sup>17</sup> See definition: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=burn>

<sup>18</sup> See eg.:Locker, Melissa: J.K. Rowling Mimics Trump's Style With Her Latest Takedown, 20.08.2018.  
<https://time.com/5371492/j-k-rowling-trump-tweet/>

<sup>19</sup> See eg.:Baker, Sinead. „JK Rowling is mocking Trump for making a spelling error in a tweet boasting about his writing prowess”. 04.07.2018.  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/jk-rowling-mock-trump-misspelling-twitter-pore-over-2018-7>

criticises Donald Trump. The president is commonly known to use Twitter for dispersing his statements in his unique style that is similar to how his speeches are constructed. According to some of the audience of these tweets, Rowling seems to be one of the most fitting personas to comment on Trump's tweets, however, many attack her on ground of not even being American.

Myers notes that the existence and possibilities of social media has resulted in both easement and difficulties for celebrities concerning presentation and communication with their audience. Due to the Internet being a constantly present phenomenon, celebrities on social media seem to be treated as "constantly on tap". (Myers 489) Further limitation is lifted as interaction without words is possible there too, with the distribution of likes on posts. It is an easy action to do so, and as the previously mentioned study of Stever & Hughes found, the function of 'favouriting' is preferred by celebrities greatly. (Giles 89)

Twitter is not a safe place for tweeters. Contrary to Instagram, there is no option for going private and only reveal thoughts to a selected few (although it is possible to block certain individuals) – but considering the credo of Twitter, a decision of this sort would be illogical. Rowling demonstrates the use of Twitter for sounding even contradictory opinions for her followers; and some of them do not slip away, unnoticed by traditional media.

One of such examples is the reaction the following tweet received after posting:

@jk\_rowling: Dress however you please.

Call yourself whatever you like.

Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you.

Live your best life in peace and security.

But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya  
#ThisIsNotADrill (@jk\_rowling, 14:27 PM, 19.12.2019)

The tweet was posted in support of a researcher at a think tank Center for Global Development, named Maya Forstater, who was fired from her job after tweeting several thoughts that were found transphobic. In 2018, a series of messages through Twitter and Slack (Aviles) by

Forstater unveiled her basic opposition towards people's right to identify their genders themselves by the proposal of modifications concerning the 2004 Gender Recognition Act of the United Kingdom. Forstater filed a complaint concerning the circumstances of losing her job, but it was met with no sympathy: the rule of the judge was eventually against the complaint of Forstater, reasoning that she "is absolutist in her view of sex and it is a core component of her belief that she will refer to a person by the sex she considered appropriate even if it violates their dignity and/or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment." (ABC)

Rowling's tweet of support sparked immediate response from the LGBTQ+ community – a community that she is supposed to be a supporter of, based on her previous statements. Unfortunately for Rowling, this was not the first time she was accused of transphobia, thus the magnitude of the reaction was vast. It all started with as small an action as liking a tweet that was posted in promotion of a publication relating to the then hyped and widespread #MeToo movement, concerning the relation between transgender women and rape culture. The response at that time too, was quite massive; an article on Medium by Charl Landsberg (who identifies as transgender) summarizes the core of the problem the following way: "I wish I could explain to you why a famous, powerful, and rich person's share of this violent rhetoric has impact and is not insignificant. Even the author of the article bragged about it." (Landsberg)

Rowling later on made another 'misstep', later identified by her representative as an accidental swipe on the like button: again, she supported a tweet in which trans women were referred to as "men in dresses". As previously, this deed was met with the same level of criticism. (Vanderhoof) Compared to these two instances, the previously cited tweet of 2019 seems to be a conscious taking of stance. Rowling is often praised for her support of the

LGBTQ+ community, however, it seems that she is just as equally criticised for statements that evidence the contrary. In a Los Angeles Times article by Mazzacane summarizes the disillusionment in a person considered to be a role model in general due to her ideas conveyed in her works:

I know the difference between who someone is and the person we want them to be — though that recognition can still cause an ache. The connection we form with fiction and the way it shapes us is a strange thing. Reconciling the truth of Rowling's reality to what she has meant to me was hard, snatching away the thing that made me feel I belonged when I was most vulnerable. (Mazzacane)

The debate surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, as a current, almost 'hip' topic on social media, could not have been missed by Rowling – even more so that her reportedly favourite character of the *Harry Potter* series, headmaster Dumbledore, has been revealed to be gay post-publication by her, at a station of her book tour of 2007, in Carnegie Hall, New York. (Elliott) Elliott reports on the event the following way, demonstrating the atmosphere well:

Finally able to talk freely about the end of a series that had been so long-anticipated, she left nothing out. The big revelation of the night came when she was asked if Dumbledore had ever found love. With a sigh, she seemed on the verge of saying no, but then revealed, "my truthful answer to you... I always thought of Dumbledore as gay." After a collective gasp, the audience roared with applause. Rowling was clearly astonished by the positive reaction and exclaimed, "if I'd known it would make you so happy, I would have announced it years ago!" (Elliott)

Among other revelations, this stirred the fandom the most. Reception of the additional information she provided concerning the series – then with an existing demand for more – was positive. However, concerning the statements of the thesis this far, the unfortunate foreshadowing of what followed may be apparent; Elliott unknowingly but accurately describes it: "It was clear that no matter how "bereaved" she felt when she finished writing *Deathly Hallows*, she loved talking freely about it to so many dedicated fans. After being careful and secretive for so long, she now went above and beyond what anyone had expected." (Elliott)

Several of her previously idolising fans would say that by setting herself free in this

respect she stepped over a line. In her oversharing venture, she started to incorporate elements that were quickly discovered by fans as with a baiting, promotional purpose. In later years, especially after the premiere of the second part of *Fantastic Beasts*, Dumbledore's outing received a different lighting, and reception turned to the negative. In the BluRay release of the film, one of the specials added is a track of Rowling's commentary. During the track, she notes that "Dumbledore had an 'incredibly intense' 'love' relationship with Grindelwald, adding that she believes that 'there is a sexual dimension to this relationship.'" (Dockray)

Fans – who are established, avid in-depth readers and analysers of the series – found neither textual nor cinematographic evidence for the character's sexuality; there is no other hinting at their romantic relationship anywhere than the word of Rowling. This lead to the conclusion and accusation of Rowling using the revelation as a media ploy, labelled queer-baiting. The technique entails the conscious hinting at LGBTQ+ topics being treated in the content of the commodity for purely the purpose of gaining audience and consequently, money. (Ritschel)

Users of Twitter were quick to note the discrepancy to Rowling, so much so as she did not keep quiet about the criticism:

@jk\_rowling: Being sent abuse about an interview that didn't involve me, about a screenplay I wrote but which none of the angry people have read, which is part of a five-movie series that's only one instalment in, is obviously tons of fun, but you know what's even \*more\* fun? [GIF of a man pressing the mute button on a controller] @jk\_rowling, 22:22, 31.01.2018.

The above explained events and their Twitter history show a varied use of the platform by the persona, ensuring her constant visibility through media, even if not in the preferred way. Though it is perfect for instant, short promotion of new books, films, and other ventures, in summary it did not resulted in the continuation of the elevated evaluation of Rowling among her audience.

### 3. Closer but distanced: relationship with the audience

Throughout this section audience reaction from not critically acclaimed sources will be used predominantly, because I aim to highlight the relationship of Rowling with her ‘ordinary’ audience, while demonstrating the critical, active work of fandom.

An article published on Vanity Fair by Vanderhoof provides a clear summary of the situation. Rowling has been hailed as an idol, a hero for children in general, but especially by those with certain difficulties in their life. Her series of Harry Potter brought solace for these readers. Vanderhoof also points out that the majority of the discrepancy between Rowling and her audience is most apparent in the case of young American readers, because there is a huge gap in status:

Rowling is also in a different place than her young American fans: She’s a 54-year-old, extremely wealthy woman in the U.K., where mainstream feminism is often far less accepting of trans people than in the United States. Rowling’s tweets about the 2019 general election suggest that she’s an avid reader of the center-left press, where anti-trans arguments are relatively common. Her views may be a disappointment to the generations of Americans who regard her series of books as a source of moral education, but perhaps not a surprise. (Vanderhoof)

Though the difference is evident, the platform is shared, and if Twitter is for everyone, both sides can voice their thoughts. However, there is a social hierarchy challenged due to loss of illusion concerning a childhood idol, and levels are evened out with regards to the ethical and political reservations. There has been no mention of the political inclination and of Rowling, and its importance so far, however, her vocality about her stance has been present since the publication of the first book of the *Harry Potter* series. As Vanderhoof states, the books themselves have their own political influence – one that could not have been separated from that of the celebrity due to the amount of time the story was still under progress. But how can a series of book intended for children have such political influence? A case study of Ashley Hinck is exemplary concerning the extent of the impact the *Harry Potter* story is capable of having: she

examined the way fandom activity can inspire civic activity through the working of The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA).

For the HPA, the Harry Potter story operates as a public engagement keystone, opening up possibilities for fans to see themselves not only as fans, but also as public subjects. It is through the deployment of a public engagement keystone that the HPA is able to transform the Harry Potter Alliance members into an emerging public. The HPA draws on Harry Potter as a public engagement keystone by first orienting the Harry Potter fan to Darfur activism, then using the Harry Potter story as a lens, and next pushing fans to take action because of intense identification. (Hinck)

Hinck's case study present just one of the many examples of how the Harry Potter story branched out without the control of Rowling. The phenomenon of attempting – and in my opinion, succeeding – in escaping the enduring omnipresence of Rowling, hovering above the story protectively, is rooted in between the times of publications. Sometimes as much as three years have passed without a following chapter. As noted previously, these years were not spent waiting patiently by fans: anticipation was at heights, from where it must have been distilled into creation other than just speculation and theories.

Vanderhoof's article summarizes the current problems the fandom has with Rowling while identifying their roots as well. Although Rowling's series undeniably had an impact on a generation and their pop culture, the influenced audience became active and creative on their own, to the magnitude where began to almost parallel the impact of Rowling. (Vanderhoof) Thusly, a curious sense of knowing the creation more in depth than the author herself started to unfold in the fandom of Harry Potter. This phenomenon was mainly due to the anticipatory periods spent between the publications; the vehemence the books were practically devoured with as soon as one could get their hands on it indicate an amount of excitement – which was further enhanced by media workings, such as late night publication parties – that is hard to channel. Although Rowling published books with more and more words in them, the appetite of fans could not have been satisfied after a point.

Scholars define fan works as ‘transformative’ works, because this way “their legal status as non-copyright infringing, and creatively changing imaginary worlds rather than merely copying them.” (Hills 276) Unfortunately for fans, some authors did not approve of fanworks on a legal basis. Anne Rice notoriously <sup>20</sup>went after those who used her characters; an explicit message on her official site reads:

**IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM ANNE ON "FAN FICTION"**

Anne has posted the following message regarding fan fiction: "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes." (AR, Messages)

According to an elaborate examination of the phenomenon by YouTuber Sara Z, in the era the existence of fanfiction became inescapable for authors, Rowling’s approach of the subject was exemplary and has had long term effects on the evaluation of fanfiction. Rowling, aware of the existence of fan works – which, based on Anne Rice’s attitude towards the subject may be regarded as challenging her authority as well – reportedly endorsed these activities, becoming one of the first authors who publicly acknowledged and approved of such texts. In face of a general rejective reception from authors, Rowling was hailed as hero for her endorsement. According to a 2004 report of BBC, “The spokesman for the Christopher Little literary agency said:

JK Rowling's reaction is that she is very flattered by the fact there is such great interest in her Harry Potter series and that people take the time to write their own stories. Her concern would be to make sure that it remains a non-commercial activity to ensure fans are not exploited and it is not being published in the strict sense of traditional print publishing.’

Besides support, a concern towards possible issues with legal breaching is traceable.

Apparently, though showing support, Rowling had reservations as well. Tapping the potential for

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<sup>20</sup>As the Internet has a reaction to everything, here is an interesting additional information: Rice is labelled the “terrorist of fanfiction”. See: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Anne%20Rice>



continuous visibility without the abandonment of Harry Potter and virtually participating in similar activities to the fandom, Pottermore came to life in 2012, just as the film series was nearing the end of the storyline as well. Content was created by Rowling herself, thus fans could enjoy the continuation and elaboration of the beloved wizarding world from the original source. Sims notes that throughout its life the site never truly found its purpose: design and content changes were following one another, leading to the minimising the content in connection with the original purpose of the site.

Eventually Pottermore came to an end as it were: in a joint venture with Warner Bros., the owner of the film rights to the Harry Potter series, a new site named Wizarding World Digital was launched. (Sims) In its self-description, the aim of the site is to build an official, digital hub for the fans of the *Harry Potter* universe – which by 2019 incorporated not only the book and film series of Harry Potter, but a new series of films set in the same universe, *Fantastic Beasts and How to Find Them*, (WizardingWorld, About) but also new games, new books, and anything else that may come. (Sims) A note on their about page places a direct address concerning the acknowledging of the existence of fans which further shows the magnitude of especially the Harry Potter fandom. Lindsey summarizes the problem Rowling and her partners face in this silent battle with the fans:

Once a franchise is established ... the challenge shifts to problems with managing the brand, which includes elements of the imaginary world ... In managing the brand, the owners of a franchise must walk a tightrope between actively engaging consumers and fans, on the one hand, and retaining the authenticity of the universe and preventing the dilution of its distinctive qualities, on the other. As the power of the franchise is based upon the recognizably distinctive features of the imaginary world, control of this world becomes a key site of struggle between content owners and audiences. (Lindsey 57)

By current times, the growing sense of discontent can be traced in the fandom. As previously mentioned, even after finishing the series Rowling constantly returned from being ‘dead’ as an author. Despite being praised for letting children experience and enhance their

imagination to a great extent aided by the wondrous world presented in the *Harry Potter* series, after a certain amount of post-publication revelation, the additional details started to feel limiting and restrictive. Even more so considering the vibrant, active fandom behind today.

Rowling's continuous, seemingly random meddling and modifying, "incessantly tweaking the story" (Sarah Z 21:47), virtually self-editing her works post-publication. The overall criticism she receives contains several different elements: first of all the question of authority. As noted before, Rowling refuses let go of her authority, leave her work stand for itself and let the audience execute the meaning-making; to recount besides the already noted problems with the outing of a character as gay, there is also the problem of werewolves<sup>21</sup>, which she allegedly intended to be a metaphor for HIV patients; and many other revelations that are deemed plainly just strange and unnecessary<sup>22</sup>, adding no quality to the established universe of Harry Potter. She was criticized in this respect for a long time, but as Sara Z among others points out, the premiere of *Fantastic Beast* brought with itself a permanent criticism concerning these revelations. Rowling generally defends herself on Twitter stating many times either that what are noted as 'new' revelations are recycled from previous interviews and statements, or that she intended for the content of the revelation to be a way it is realised later on (such as the Nagini-issue<sup>23</sup>). Sara Z also summarises the issue of Rowling versus fans:

J.K Rowling's relationship to her fan community is a deeply complex and varying one; on one hand she was the most important figures in normalising fan fiction and transformative works, [...] on the other hand her recent work with the series seems to actively discourage people from generating their own interpretations from what's

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<sup>21</sup> See:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/jk-rowling-harry-potter-theory-debunked-remus-lupin-aids-david-thewlis-a7235751.html>

<sup>22</sup> For a representative fan video of the problem, see.: Johnson, Gus. „J.K.Rowling manapság” on <https://youtu.be/LKxpwIKRQ2U>

<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.insider.com/fantastic-beast-nagini-casting-claudia-kim-problematic-2018-9>

available. (Sara Z 34:19 -34:40)

Second of all stands the also previously noted baiting ploy: she tries to make her books be more inclusive so that they may gain more attention. Apart from using topics already under debate, she receives critique for misusing her own works this way. There is an incredible amount of memes that sprang out of only this aspect of her; such as the following tweet of the Sevilla football club, exemplified here to demonstrate the widespread nature:

@SevillaFC\_ENG: No one:

JK Rowling: Dumbledore was a massive Sevilla fan (@SevillaFC\_ENG, 19:15, 18.03.2019.)

Following the comment of YouTuber Seamus Gorman, if a football club, an entity situated far away from the writer Rowling, uses the meme of Rowling, then there is something really wrong with the actions of Rowling.

In summary, the Twitter presence of Rowling, though her attention is constantly sought by her followers, is shadowed over by problematic messages from the persona. Based on my observations, from an audience relationship and media use point of view, there are two types of evaluations currently present concerning Rowling: on one hand, she is still regarded as the author of the Harry Potter series, and there is a sense of eternal gratitude and pedestalled attitude towards her. On the other hand, she is openly criticised for everything that is noted as a mistake by the audience, for there is greater visibility granted by the platform. However, the audience is not clearly divided on the subject: there are some who would condemn Rowling for certain enunciations, but would protect her or praise her on others due to her cemented status as the author of the *Harry Potter* series.

#### **4. Celebrity apparatus**

Celebrity in itself is a large apparatus, and we are all subject to it. It permeates our everyday life, many times unnoticed. It is part of the even larger apparatus of media. It operates

through visibility and enunciation, and those subject to the apparatus have virtually no control over them. Television, news, and now the Internet form and mould our actions and thoughts, governing them in the direction of their want, based on knowledge of the human psyche, utilising the power gained by it.

The system of celebrity, according to Marshall, concerns itself with cultural identity and individuality. (185) The effect of the system is not homogenous to all types of celebrities, and emphasis varies greatly among them. As political celebrity is cornered around rational rhetoric, celebrities from the entertainment industry revolve around emotions. However, even entertainment industry celebrities are arranged around particular characteristics. (Marshall 186) Literary celebrity thusly, though shares the main points of visibility and interest of the audience, relies on the mystification of the production of the artistic work it produces.

Rowling has an enormous apparatus now that she is connected not only to the series of books, but the subsequent afterlife of the universe she created. Even initially she had a great set of people around her who helped her, as articles recount. But besides her personal team of celebrity brand apparatus, she has large publishers such as Scholastic and the entertainment juggernaut Warner Bros, constituting the media apparatus that connects to her persona as well.

The current apparatus works well without any special action required from Rowling, she is placed in the system both as a result and an element with power; for example, she is not needed to market any sort of merchandise the brand may come up with – a fact that she is very content with. However, she still does have a certain amount of control over decisions (that include merchandise as well).

#### 4.1. Emotional apparatus

Based on the above discussion, let us consider the underlying apparatus of celebrity:

emotions. After all, it comes as no surprise that evoking them, forming them, manipulating them are practically part of the core of celebrity and its creation (Redmond 57):

All the sub-sets of emotion, from love, anger, surprise and sadness, are made manifest through the way celebrities enter people's lives. We cry with and for them. They dance in our dreams. They occupy the spaces of event spectacle calling forth our emotions to receive and exalt them. Celebrities register as key moments in biographical and memorial exchanges where fans and consumers story and remember through the event moments they help shaped. The emotion of celebrity matches or catches the emotional encounters people go through, providing the meta-context for love, romance, heartache and desire. People live emotional lives in and through the emotions of celebrity culture. (Redmond 58)

The consumption of celebrity commodity is based on an emotional connection with the given celebrity, which is further enhanced by the celebrity's level of accessibility: "the appeal is one based on transformatory identification and the imagined relationship the reader has with the star." (Redmond 202) As Agamben was quoted previously, apparatus cannot be actively used by living beings, they are subject to it. However, the presence of the apparatus has been discovered by media, and is expected to work in favour of its aims; one of which is the production of celebrity.

As presented in the previous chapters, there is an intense connection between Rowling and her audience; due to her status as a literary celebrity, the fame of her work can hardly be separated from the fame of the persona, and thusly the audience of the celebrity is shared. A significant emotional attachment can be examined in case of Rowling's notably wide-ranged audience due to the success and effect of *Harry Potter* series on popular culture.

Rowling, as a literary celebrity has influence over the emotions of her audience. Naturally, all books of a certain quality would invoke emotions from the reader. But Rowling's influence concerning sentiments do not stop at the end of the pages and movies. Though there have been no general commercial products advertised by Rowling (so far), naturally, she endorses her own creation. As noted in previous examples, this strategy resulted in the

emergence of a more negative reception of her, for during her operations to promote and keep alive the extensive commercial structure that has grown out of her writings, it is evident that she stepped over an imaginary line. Counting too much on the emotional attachment of her audience to the subject, she overshared and demonstrated her inability to let go of her creation.

The apparatus thus has gone through a slight modification now affecting her persona as well. By continuing to act the way she does on platforms of her choice she fosters not only the positive but the negative emotions of her otherwise loyal fans. I argue that though there may be negative emotional responses towards her – and this time Rowling only, because the *Harry Potter* series is placed in a more or less ‘victimised’ position, as something ‘abused’. Based on previously noted articles, YouTube videos, or fanzines, the audience – fans and those who do not categorize themselves as fans at all – currently separated the Harry Potter series and Rowling, and they are no longer evaluated together.

As stated previously, Rowling turned into ‘public property’ in the eyes of her audience and this brought with itself through a mixture of allowances from social media a heightened criticism and judgment towards her, forgetting in the majority of the time the human limitations behind the mystified, elevated persona. She is also caught up by celebrity apparatus, experiencing the positive and negative effect it has on private and public life as well. The Vanity Fair article by Vanderhoof offers insight to a current feeling of a generation, whose ‘childhood is ruined’ by Rowling’s continuous meddling: should she have never joined Twitter, she could have been remained in the idol status. (Vanderhoof)

#### 4.2. Celebrity capital

Drawing on Bordieu’s definition of capital which can be converted, Driessens applies the term celebrity capital as exchangeable for economic, social, symbolic, and political capital as

well. (555) The capital of the celebrity is determined by many aspects, all of them noted previously, such as visibility, resource, favourability, and so. Driessens notes that this capital of the celebrity “can be a means of power in many fields today. Although it is often produced within the cultural industries, reducing it to a commodity might be somewhat limited and it accentuates its economic rather than its symbolic value.” (Driessens 550)

Celebrity has been a formative phenomenon for a long time: it plays a part in social cohesiveness and especially, but not inclusively, in identity formation during youth. As Marshall points out, the phenomenon has essentially been used as a meaning-maker device applied on the social world. (51) The power of influence celebrity can demonstrate on its audience is due to the defined qualities of the phenomenon: visibility through media, and public interest; but it is important to note the inherent quality sometimes lost in current definitions of celebrity, charisma. (Marshall 54) Though some, newly emerged celebrity figures may not have this attribute, many do, and based on the articles and audience reactions consulted for the purpose of the thesis, Rowling is, or at least, has been, charismatic enough to be listened to.

Simply put, capital is power. The more capital a celebrity acquires through the diverse modes of the industry, the more power it can possibly gain. One of the most axiomatic and self-explanatory examples is that of Donald Trump, the current president of the United States. His constant acquisition of celebrity capital eventually offered the possibility of a political career where Trump managed – with an enormous set of apparatus around him – to conquer the top of a political hierarchy. According to my research, Rowling has no intentions of starting a political career, however her political enunciations have a different weight than that of ordinary people. Despite her decrease in capital due to loss of favourability, due to the magnitude and influence she had and her work still has, whatever she announces via reported or direct ways, will be taken

as considerable.

## **5. The Network of J.K. Rowling**

The celebrity of Rowling is not a simple one. It has been through several different phases, influenced by origin, the reception of her persona, relationship with the audience, and media representation – and the network she is compiled of has changed along with it. All actors are influencing each other, acquiring more or less prominence throughout the transformation of the persona.

It is strange to map out what a persona is built up from, because it is difficult to think about Rowling not as a human being but a consciously built representation of one, a human-pseudo event of Boorstin: a celebrity. Thusly, the first node that must be identified is an unknown one, the real person behind the persona. Rowling is the creation of the connection of layers and elements. In the first phase of her existence, a large amount of work had to be put into the formation of the persona, for the media apparatus subjected it to an evaluation that was not deemed beneficent. With her creation, the *Harry Potter* stories, they are mutually embedded in each other's network. During this phase, interviews and controlled documentaries can be placed in the network as actors, alongside celebrity industry-related events, such as publishing tours, publication events, book signings and so. The Rowling then was a positively evaluated author of a children's book series.

The next phase of the persona is signified by the inclusion of another media in the repertoire: the adaptation of the book into a film franchise. Rowling thusly was subject to larger visibility, and though the frequency of granted interviews did not increase, she attended more public events, such as movie premieres. It was during this phase, that due to the massive change in her monetary status, she became able to support charitable issues of her own choice. If



personas can be rated this way, I find that this phase of Rowling signifies her at her peak performance and best evaluation. Hailed as ‘literacy hero’, many looked up to her with gratitude. The brand of Harry Potter was further amended by theme parks and merchandise, and as transitional works were approved by Rowling, they further elevated the recognition of her and Harry Potter as well.

The third constellation, though actors have been constantly added to the network, is the start of the decline of positive evaluation by the audience. Audience, as an actor is still in the network, but has to be considered with a changed connotation. Although criticism has been part of the life of Rowling, it started to gain prominence. This is in one part due to her joining social media, which as discussed before, granted a chance for different types of communication. Though she still actively strives toward control, she cannot control the whole Internet, thus there will always be actors out of her control that still need to be considered. Because actors cannot be distinguished from each other by significance, *Harry Potter* and other publications, such as *Casual Vacancy*, or the *Cormoran Strike* series have to be noted at the same level.

I find that this last network is the current one, the actors have not much changed in the latest years significantly. As Latour’s famous gunman example – there has to be a gun and a man to form the network that is the gunman (Latour 31-32) -, thus the actor-network of Rowling is comprised of the above enumerated actors. As the thesis demonstrated, the actors of the network, though there has been no replacement, they have been continuously amended, thus enriching the network. Connections between them carried effects they had on each other (consider the Twitter activity of Rowling and the audience response). Considering her history so far, it is certain that the actor-network of the persona will go through further modifications and definitive changes.

## V. Conclusion

One encounters celebrity every day, even if unwillingly. As we are surrounded by media in the twenty-first century, the premiere platform of celebrity, the presence and influence are inescapable. We are subject to its apparatus and the way our society and culture is formed in its existence is massively dependent on it. The phenomenon of *Harry Potter* is often cited as never-before-seen: and indeed, the attention towards the story of The Boy Who Lived made its impact on not only popular culture, but on our everyday lives, from who we support in political referendums through how we assess social connections to what we may buy in the stores.

Rowling, the consciously manufactured celebrity persona, as the writer of the *Harry Potter* series is virtually inseparable from her creation. For a time her influence was head to head with that of *Harry Potter*, as reasonably she is accounted for the ideas presented in the books. Initially, the formation of the persona was largely dependent on traditional media. When she was placed in a greater spotlight due to the new trans medial presence of the story of Harry Potter in the means of a film series, she and her apparatus took control of the brand of Rowling as well.

There is a saying the bad publicity is still publicity. I find it very much applicable to the case of Rowling. Based on my research and evaluation, she will probably never cease to be present in the public, and will always possibly come up with something that may have shock value for the sake of visibility.

Theatrical secrecy and reinforcement of authorial intent permeate her celebrity persona as of today. She started out as a celebrated first-time author, whose life story along with her publication immediately gained attention. As far as her reach at the time was –which became quite wide in the beginning already – she has had control in areas concerned with her established brand and its representation. Throughout the years of activity, her evaluation changed due to

greater media visibility and unfaltering attention of audience. She was watched more closely due to the allowances of the emergent social media sites, in which she consciously started to participate and perform.

Even though she gladly performed in a way that let audiences peek behind the curtains of her mysterious work process, and endorsed those who followed her footsteps in writing through a sort of imitation, transitional works, she has refused to let her authority be challenged. Unfortunately, she did so in a reinforcing manner that audience reaction turned to unfavourable. However, even if long-time fans and critics unite in voicing their criticism towards the performance of Rowling, the brand that she built up around her operates undisturbed. Fans are still enthusiastic about the original series and will immerse themselves in the commodities offered by both Harry Potter and Rowling. From mugs through theme parks, from a chance to meet Rowling to circulating quotations from her writing will be present for a long time.

Rowling's reception has not turned entirely to the negative: her attitude in certain serious matters – such as political elections, or social issues as the treatment of transgender people – is noted not only on social media but also on major traditional media outlets. The representational range of Rowling may make us ponder concerning the volume of her influence on her audience, as the chances of encountering her name, post-publication, and not in relation with her works are still quite significant.

This shines light on a matter with a larger scope of significance: even though the general positive reception is faltering, her direct and indirect influence through her works does not seem to do so. It raises the question for further research on how we regard the effect of celebrity even if the status of the given persona went through changes, and how we may be aware of the consequences concerning impressionable audiences.

Word count: 28.043

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Twitter: 4, 7, 8, 9, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 34, 36, 38, 52, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 83, 84, 87, 90

## **Abstrakt**

Die Berühmtheit ist in unserem Alltagsleben anwesend, sie kann es manchmal sogar unbemerkt beeinflussen. Um die Wirkung, die sie ausübt, besser zu verstehen, hat sich die vorliegende Diplomarbeit zum Ziel gesetzt, den Apparat und das Netzwerk der Berühmtheit aufgrund von J. K. Rowlings Berühmtheitsstatus zu analysieren. Nachdem zahlreiche Definitionen der Berühmtheit, auf die literarische Berühmtheit fokussiert, bzw. deren Präsentation und Repräsentation in der Media, mit besonderer Hinsicht auf die Social Media, unter die Lupe genommen wurden, werden auch die Merkmale bestimmt, die die Grundlage der Berühmtheit bilden und die Definitionen verbinden. Diese gemeinsamen Merkmale sind: Sichtbarkeit im Media und die Antwort des Publikums; im Bezug auf Rowling können diese Aspekte auf Twitter und auf Fandom beobachtet werden. Während der relativ kurzen Zeit von Rowlings Berühmtheit von 1997 bis heute veränderte sich ihre Berühmtheit vor allem wegen der Veränderung der Beurteilung, die durch Rowlings Anwesenheit in der Media verursacht wurde. Obwohl ihr Berühmtheitsstatus sich veränderte, wurde sie, dank ihres ständig wachsenden Publikums und ihrer Anwesenheit in der Media, kombiniert mit dem Warten, das niemals endet, und trotz der ernsten Kritik des Publikums, nicht unsicher. Die Bestandteile von Rowlings gegenwärtiger Persönlichkeit werden mithilfe von ANT erkundet, wobei auch der Apparat von Rowlings Einfluss betont wird.

## **Abstract**

Celebrity is present in our everyday life, affecting it sometimes unnoticed. To better understand the effect it may have, the thesis sets out to discover the network and apparatus a celebrity can have through the examination of the celebrity status of J.K. Rowling. After recounting the numerous definitions of celebrity with an overall focus on contemporary literary celebrity, and its (re)presentation in media, with special regards to social media, the core, overarching features of celebrity are defined. The shared features of all definitions are: media visibility and audience response, and concerning Rowling, the most prevalent of these aspects are observed via Twitter and Fandom. During the relatively short trajectory of her celebrity status from 1997 until today, Rowling's celebrity went through a transformation that is in large part due to the change in her evaluation based on media performance. However, even if her status as celebrity changed, due to her ever-widening audience and continuous media presence, combined with the never-ceasing anticipation, despite serious audience criticism, it has not faltered. The building blocks of her current persona using ANT are going to be discovered while highlighting the apparatus behind the influence of Rowling.