

## The Book that Changed Children's Literature

### Review of *Fenomén Harry Potter v Recepčných Súradniciach*

by Michal Vančo (Nitra: Enigma, 2009)

The book *Fenomén Harry Potter v Recepčných Súradniciach* (*The Function of the Reader in the Process of Harry Potter Reception*) found its way to my office on a sunny day in June. Disappointingly, it was not brought there by an owl. The timing, however, was perfect. Fans were waiting patiently for the world premiere of the latest Harry Potter film and the media were discussing life after *The Deathly Hallows*, said to be the last of the Harry Potter books.

In his well-researched book, Michal Vančo aims to trace the origins of and reasons behind the Harry Potter phenomenon. He seeks to do this by combining reception theory and interpretation, including the texts themselves as well as readers and their aesthetic experience (7). To analyse the texts Vančo creates a theoretical framework in which the category of *reader* plays an important role in the analysis of textual features.

Vančo begins his analysis by identifying the different genres J.K. Rowling has included into the mosaic of the Harry Potter series. Fantasy is seen as the definitive genre in the series (93). His detailed analysis of individual generic features along with a sizable number of examples from the books themselves help him foster his claim that critics who have classified the books as fairy tales are wrong, as this diminishes the aesthetic value of the books. He points out a number of genre elements that have influenced the popularity of the Harry Potter series.

In the second chapter, the writer discusses expressive categories which according to him influence the interpretation of the series by its readers. Relying on the theoretical work of F. Miko (1978), Vančo uses two categories: the action of expression and the horror of expression to categorize reader reception of the book series. By reading about setting, characters, conflicts and elements of horror, readers get a complex overview of all the categories which determine and shape the process of interpretation and simultaneously contribute to the success of the series.

In *The Function of the Reader in the Process of Harry Potter Reception*, the reader becomes active, playing an important role in the communicative process. Vančo argues that J.K. Rowling's success is caused by the fact that she managed to meet the expectations of her young readers (59-60) offering them interesting topics and characters that are easy to identify with. The reception of the Harry Potter books by adult readers is more complex; due to their experience they are able to decode the textual structures on a deeper level.

In the final chapter, Vančo talks about the Harry Potter series in a cultural-receptive context. While discussing the reception of the Harry Potter series by critics, the author devotes equal attention to both positive and negative critical reactions of scholars and discovers differences between European and Anglo-Saxon research methods.

This well-structured book offers the reader an insight into the generic structure of the Harry Potter series, explaining how the books work their magic on readers all around the world. Unfortunately, Vančo decided to publish his book in the Slovak language, isolating it within the borders of Slovakia. Undoubtedly, it would have been a better decision to publish the book in English as more scholars would get a chance to read it and to react to it.

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