

I rediscovered Harry Potter at age 18, and found I needed him more than ever

A year on from Harry Potter and the Cursed Child's West End opening, [Oscar Bentley](#) reminisces on the place Harry Potter holds in his - and our - childhoods

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Image: Richard Cooke

I said goodbye to *Harry Potter* in 2011, at age 13. The screen faded to black at the close of *Deathly Hallows Part 2*, John Williams timeless and tear inducing 'Leaving Hogwarts' played out, and Harry and I parted company. He'd reached the end of his story. I grew up. The age of *Game of Thrones* and Netflix was about to begin (coupled with a new obsession with Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy). I left Harry behind.

In this new era, early 2014 however did offer Harry a fleeting reprise, with a visit to 'The Making of Harry Potter' Studio Tour. As the vast doors to The Great Hall swung open, I was grinning uncontrollably and unstopably, in complete and utter bliss. That's how Harry makes me feel. Yet after this day, Harry shrunk back into the shadows. Until 2016.

Harry Potter was my childhood. One of my earliest memories is of standing in a never-ending queue to see *Chamber of Secrets* in 2002, aged 4. I remember watching the first two films on VHS (this was the early noughties after all). And then, when I was old enough, Harry introduced me to the (wizards) world of reading, and the magic books held. Thanks to Harry, my childhood dream was to be a writer, and he

was the catalyst for my hours spent typing away at my own fantasy novel at the local library.

As time ticked away, so did Harry, along with my childhood dreams of being a writer. And it wasn't until the week leading up to the 31st July 2016 that the magic really began to capture me again. In retrospect, after feeling surprisingly little hype for the release of *Cursed Child*, it then suddenly dawned upon me that in just a few short days, I was going to be able to discover an entirely new Harry Potter book. It was 2007 all over again.

It wasn't just the fact there was new Harry Potter, *Cursed Child's* release also came at a curious time for me. I was moving away to university imminently, "officially" leaving childhood behind and beginning to make my own way in the world. And in reading *Cursed Child*, I was plunged head first back into the wizarding world that I spent so much of my childhood in. It didn't matter that I felt I had outgrown reading; this was Harry, and the child in me would do anything for Harry. I'd stopped reading because the magic of books died for me, they no longer held my attention, my mind would wander. But Harry had me hooked, and I plunged back into the series from the beginning all over again. Harry rescued the warmth of literature for me, just when it had almost been cast almost irretrievably into the cold.

And then, one afternoon last summer reading *Prisoner of Azkaban*, it hit me. All my nerves and apprehensions about moving to university and leaving childhood behind were forgotten when I was in Harry's world - because, as a child, it was my world. I'd been channelling my crisis of identity - child, or adult; boy, or man? - into Harry. I was clinging onto childhood, unexpectedly scared of growing up. I suddenly favoured the smaller, childlike affairs of the earlier novels to the escalation including the entire wizarding world in the later novels. At the beginning, Harry is closer to the age I was when I found him. At the end, Harry is almost the age I was last summer. With all my repressed fears about growing up abruptly surfacing, maybe it would have been more apt if I'd become obsessed with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, with all the latent themes on that subject matter it contains. Yet Narnia wasn't my childhood. Harry was.

It's also fascinating to be able to examine Rowling's work from an older perspective. Her writing certainly matures as she goes on and gains confidence (imagine my horror at beginning to re-read *Philosopher's Stone*, aged 18, at seeing the words 'our story starts' on the opening page). Rowling affords herself more luxury as she progresses, not reaching Hogwarts until page 150-ish in *Goblet of Fire* - that's almost three quarters the length of *Philosopher's Stone*.

The lighter, fun films of Chris Columbus I also began to find more enjoyable than the later instalments. I wholeheartedly do not care that *Half-Blood Prince* is the only film in the series the Academy nominated for Best Cinematography - give me the warm light of Columbus' romps over the so-dark-you-can-hardly-see-them frames of Yates' second film any day. Oh, and apologies to Michael Gambon, but I can confirm that Richard Harris was in fact Professor Albus Dumbledore, who had somehow managed to briefly escape his duties as Hogwarts headmaster in order to portray himself on film, as opposed to Gambon, a man simply hired to do the job (that's not to say he wasn't good at the job though).

Despite *Cursed Child* being my doorway back into Harry's world, I still had mixed feelings, the key one being that it didn't actually come from Rowling's pen herself, although I constantly internally argued that, as a stage play, it doesn't need to have done; the films were scripted by screenwriter Steve Kloves after all. And while I thoroughly enjoyed the script's plot, adult Harry I found slightly worrying; partly because I found his characterisation unsettling, and partly because having grown up with him, adult Harry means that I must now be an adult too (though *Cursed Child* Harry's 37+ years was still a stark difference to my then 18). If I were Rowling, I wouldn't have brought Harry back. There's always a danger with revivals years on. I'd have wanted Harry to stay eternal as the boy wizard, not the civil servant.

And yet, without *Cursed Child*, I'm not sure that I'd have found Harry again, at a time when I (and lots of my age cohort, many of whom grew up with Harry) needed him more than ever. As a child he helped me to escape, but on the cusp of adulthood he showed me how to continue, while simultaneously allowing my childhood a swansong; one final lap, before the push into adulthood. As I said, if I were Rowling, I wouldn't

have resurrected Harry. But in this instance, I have the arguably joyful position of not being Rowling, but instead being me.

And as me, I sure am glad Harry is back.



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