

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child
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Discussion of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series may seem a little out of place in *Limina*, a journal dedicated to exploring subjects on the margins of academic culture. Since it began publication in 1997, the series has sat firmly in the pop culture zeitgeist, selling upwards of 400 million copies worldwide. Often credited with making reading "cool" again, it is the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series that also makes it a unique, liminal phenomenon: no single literary character has ever inspired such ongoing investment from readers, who continue to immerse themselves in Harry's world and rabidly consume new material, now released through a dedicated platform called *Pottermore*, almost ten years after the series ended. With the latest literary installment in the series, a two-part play entitled *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Rowling further cements *Potter* as a global literary phenomenon.

Currently in its first run at the Palace Theatre on London's West End, *Cursed Child* was not penned by Rowling alone – the script, also published globally in July 2016, is based on an original idea by J.K. Rowling, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany, and has been adapted for the stage by Jack Thorne. Although filled with the thematic hallmarks of Rowling's writing, Thorne's influence on the script does not go unnoticed. The wizarding world of *Cursed Child* has a faster pace and is more closely tied to the contemporary Muggle world, making reference to the current no sugar dietary trend, for example. While the original series relied heavily on allusions to English history and literary traditions, particularly the school-story genre, *Cursed Child* jumps between settings and is no longer grounded within the halls of Hogwarts. Consequently, the magical world of the stage feels smaller, a setting better suited to the performance medium, and also to the play's main storyline. *Cursed Child* focuses on Albus Potter's relationship with his father Harry, and the pressures placed on their bond by Harry's fame and continued work with the Ministry of Magic. Rather than life inside Hogwarts, it is familial relationships and Albus' unlikely friendship with Scorpius Malfoy that instead take centre stage in this work.

However, it is in the narrative itself that the *Cursed Child* script falls flat. A flimsy time-travelling storyline robs the narrative of the same rich setting of the original series, and stronger characterization – particularly of Albus, and his relationship with Harry – is required to fill the void left by Hogwarts. Luckily, the *Cursed Child* moniker is also applicable to the character of Scorpius, a new addition to the *Potter* universe, whose comedic timing and complexity adds additional depth to the clunky script. Anthony Boyle, who currently plays Scorpius on stage, gives a genuinely hilarious and emotive performance. Nevertheless, at times the *Cursed Child* script has the feel of fan fiction, willed to life by fans and, in this instance, lacking the same depth and magic that made the release of each new book so exciting.

Still, the *Harry Potter* series has always been more famed for its messages of love and friendship than the quality of writing. Placing these minor criticisms aside,

when performed the play is a joy for both old and newcomers to the *Potter* world. In the flurry of post-premiere reviews, the play has been called a 'stand alone' and "major" work in its own right. Currently sold out until December 2017, if you are lucky enough to procure tickets to the show, they may set you back as much as \$220 AUD for both parts. However, it is more than worth it. Thorne's script is brought to life by director Tiffany, and produced by Sonia Friedman Productions, Colin Callender, and Harry Potter Theatrical Productions. The sets, transitions, lighting and visual effects were enthralling, and the structure of the play make it more than a show – it is an experience, not a book. Divided into four sections, each part is staged to end on a spectacular note that can only leave audiences wanting more. One scene, for example, uses the theatre walls to reveal the play's biggest secret before taking a two-hour break between sessions.

For lifelong fans of the series, seeing *Cursed Child* is an experience akin to receiving a Hogwarts acceptance letter – for a day, you are privy to all the magic and wonder of the wizarding world. If you can get tickets to consecutive performances, for one day, it *is* your world – *Cursed Child* is an immersive experience, produced to be viewed rather than simply read. However, I am hesitant to describe the staging in too much detail as I am sworn by Rowling to #KeepTheSecrets. This hash-tag has been regularly trending on Twitter since *Cursed Child* went into previews in June. Now that the script is released, Rowling continues to urge audiences to maintain the secrecy around the staging of the play, a request that is more than a clever ploy to keep demand for tickets high. Ticket holders are given a badge, and later sent a video message from the author herself, asking that they keep the surprises of the play to themselves. While she is sure to be cashing in on these secrets, I will do as she asks, because there is no denying that Rowling adores her fans, and that this play is for them.

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