

## **Nomination Speech**

“If there’s anything which fills a child’s head with nonsense, it’s that silly imagination!” In Hans Christian Andersen’s story ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’, this is what the tiresome civil servant disapprovingly says, when the student explains to Little Ida that the only reason her poor flowers droop during daytime is quite simply that they’re exhausted. After all, they have just returned from dancing all night at a wonderful castle gala!

There can be little doubt as to where Hans Christian Andersen’s heart lay. He treated the world of childhood imagination seriously, and spun fairytales of a magical universe, wherein child and adult could meet eye to eye. First published in 1835, his fairytales opened a new door for the literary world, which led to a respect for childhood fantasy.

Hans Christian Andersen’s stories have become part of the way we look at the world today. After all, everyone knows that only a true princess is the one so refined as to feel the pea buried deep under layers of bedding. And of course the ugly duckling grows into a beautiful swan! Because that is how the story goes.

Today, a whole generation has grown up with Harry Potter, and it is simply taken for granted that the tiresome Civil Servant in ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’ is a typical ‘Muggle’. He is the pedestrian human bereft of magical abilities, who cares not for fairytale or fantasy. A Real Life Really Boring Guy.

One of the many qualities which make you, J.K. Rowling, a genuinely extraordinary writer, is that you do not pretend that the world we live in is plain sailing. Even a wizard, a chosen one, experiences times of crisis, injustice and hurdles. Challenges which require courage, friendship and love to overcome. When your readers identify themselves with Harry Potter, they become heroes, all the while keeping hold of any challenges facing them in real life. Their own life. In fact it can be said that the Harry Potter books arm young readers with the emotional and mental capacity to deal with very real life dilemmas such as faith, loyalty, integrity and the need to stand up against evil for what is just and right.

The realm of fantasy and fiction is also the realm of possibility. And unlike the 'real world', there are no constraints. Truly good stories remind us, that there is always something to discover if we open our eyes. There are worlds beyond this world. When you read a good story, you are naturally provided with the opportunity to understand how other living beings think, feel and experience. It lets us see the world through their eyes. Because we identify. Because in perfect safety, we can see how it is to be someone quite else. And this is not only incredibly exciting - it is also educational and worthwhile.

I wonder how many children – and grown ups for that matter – have not tried to put themselves in Harry Potter's shoes? How many haven't dreaded the kiss of the Dementor capable of sucking out your soul leaving nothing but an empty shell. Who has not mourned Dumbledore's death; or marvelled at 'The Mirror of Erised' that reveals the deepest and most desperate desires of our hearts in its quiet reflection; and who hasn't dreamed to take part in a banquet at Hogwarts under the floating candles; or joining in a Quidditch match; or laughed at the pranks of the Weasley twins?

The Harry Potter world is a genuine universe which readers can fully lose themselves in. And on top of that, from within this incredible universe, we can even look out onto our own world: the world of the Muggles. What a fantastic narrative angle! It makes it possible for us, through a different lens, to contemplate the limitations of the world which we call the real world – that boring place where schools do not deem to teach magic, potions or Defence Against The Dark Arts, or have conversations with portraits hanging on the walls, or taste Bertie Botts Every Flavour Beans.

As part of the preparation for this speech, I watched a documentary about you, where the journalist also took you back to the rented flat in Edinburgh where you had completed the first book 'Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone'. You are visibly moved when you step into the flat and look around, ten years after you left it, then a struggling single mother on welfare, now a world famous writer. And you say, as if to yourself, "I feel I really became myself here. This is where I turned my life around." And then you add, "I didn't know then that there would be a fairytale ending...",

Perhaps this is your greatest achievement, that your own life has exceeded your wildest expectations. That you have broken all imaginable boundaries of what we usually expect to achieve in this world. That you believed in your own potential, and permitted yourself to pursue your dreams in spite of the odds stacked against you. In this way too, you have inspired millions of children and adults - not least myself - to reach out for our dreams, and our full potential. For this is how we humans are. We draw on each other's example. We are one another's role model - if you can do it, then perhaps we can as well. If you achieve success, there is hope that we too can find success. And over and above the seven wonderful books about Harry Potter, this is the greatest gift you have passed on to us - your devoted readers. In having confidence in your inner flame, you have thrown a clear and strong light over children and adults around the world. You have inspired us with courage and motivation to dare to believe in our own unique potential.

For this achievement, for this shining light, for your incredible work, for our love for Harry, Hermione and Ron and all the other wonderful creatures that leap out from your imagination, we would like to award you with the Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award 2010, and we thank you. You inspire us to reach for the stars.

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