

Harry potter and the commodity fetishism

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Amalia Rodrigues Film Survey Prompt 1 Harry Potter & the Commodity

Fetishism There are few things in this world that manage to seep into every crevice our lives as humans; the air we breathe, the people we interact with, and in our contemporary culture, the buying and selling of commodities. The masses have adopted a “give the people what they want” attitude that results in the commodification of everything thinkable. “Even as a negation of that social purposiveness which is spreading through the market, [art’s] freedom remains essentially bound up with the premise of a commodity economy” (Adorno & Horkheimer 1238).

There may have been a time when art was an escape from the domination of commerce, when people created things motivated by passion and emotion rather than by the prospect of dollar signs; no longer does that time exist. In film, the studio system has become a monopoly, and the structure of films, a formula. Though some would argue that there are a myriad of genres that give variety to the industry, Adorno and Horkheimer would counter that a menu is still not a choice, and that the monopolization of the film industry takes away from a world of choices and freedoms.

The industry has morphed into a total administration of art, undoubtedly integrating our pleasure in the theater with the machinery of global media firms. A textbook example is the franchise of the Harry Potter films, which more than most any series of films, proliferates the sins of hyper commercialism. A commodity is defined as something that has use value, or utility, by satisfying a particular need or desire, created to be exchanged for a profit.

It must have some sort of utility, or it will not be desired by a prospective buyer. “ So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labor” (Marx 1). This could be virtually anything, being that everything today has a price put on it by society. We are constructed through our relationship with and use of commodities in our everyday lives.

As a people, we have become obsessed with the commodities we surround ourselves with, constructing our identities through the material goods that inhabit us. Commodity fetishism replaces relationships between people with relationships between humans and objects. The eruption of the Harry Potter phenomenon occurred in the late nineties and has only flourished since. The author of the series, J. K. Rowling, created a world that nobody had seen before, a world of magic. This world, along with the lovable characters involved, are what our society seamlessly bought into.

The masses fell in love with Harry, Ron, and Hermione, leaving them vulnerable to the impending commercial goods that the media conglomerates would soon overwhelmingly develop. And, no doubt, the Potter-inspired merchandise began to flow like lava as the movies were produced one by one, each one more successful than the next. Mindlessly, readers and viewers were sucked in by the new world of witchcraft and wizardry that leaves ceaseless possibilities for immense revenue. To quote Adorno and Horkheimer, “ The culture perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.

The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu” (Adorno & Horkheimer 1230). When adopting the premise of Harry Potter from words in a book to the big motion-picture screen, the film makers undoubtedly had dollar signs flashing in their pupils.

Such a fantastically huge foundation was built and the only direction to move was up. Before Harry could say “ abracadabra” (or something to that effect) stores began to overflow with anything and everything with the name “ Harry Potter” plastered on the side. Hats, mugs, T-shirts, video games, costumes, the signature round glasses, not one item from the series has gone unnoticed by the conglomerates who are so devoted to squeezing every ounce of profit out of poor Harry’s wand.

Even the earwax jellybeans that Dumbledore so foolishly consumes out of his bag of “ Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans” are readily available at your local superstore. There is simply no escaping the pure immensity that is the Potter revolution. Children are hosting Harry Potter themed birthday parties, adults are tattooing the dark mark on their bodies, college students are starting quidditch teams and tournaments, and families are taking road trips to the newly developed “ Harry Potter World” in Universal Studios.

This latest installment of the Harry Potter craze allows fans to live in the world they see on screen, drink butter beer, and purchase wands from Olivander’s; all of this for the low, low price of a hefty wad of cash straight into the pockets of the already multi-billion dollar industry. And yet,

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somehow our society does not mind being conned into purchasing such unnecessary yet desirable items, directly depicting the idea of commodity fetishism. Massive consumerism based on obsessions drawn from movies and franchises such as Harry Potter happen day to day, year to year, generation to generation.

It has become so naturalized in our society to buy into our every impulse of consumer products that we cannot help but be blinded by our desires for such vain items. In a way, we, as consumers, are being exploited similarly to the way that house elves like Dobby are exploited in the Harry Potter series. We are born into our exploitation, and in some ways seem to enjoy it, as the elves seem to enjoy their dirty work. As a population, we can only hope to be as lucky as Dobby, to find a sock in an old diary, and be set free from manipulation.