

ENG 260

Spring 2021

Dr. Angela Fulk

Class notes—Week of Apr. 26, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Chapters 7-12

The first thing that happens to Harry and his new classmates when they arrive at Hogwarts is being sorted into their school Houses. Clearly, this is an important annual ceremony at the school. As we saw, each House is made up of students who have similar characteristics. Students live separately by House and attend classes with the others from their House. There is a year-long competition to see which House will win the "House Cup" by accumulating the most points; this encourages rivalry between the House quidditch teams as well as in most other areas of school life. Clearly, the idea of the Houses is to give the children a sense of belonging, and the competition between Houses is designed to make them want to excel in behavior, classes, sports, etc. Do you think that the House system is successful, or does it encourage feuds between students like the one between Harry and Malfoy?

Rowling is blending several genres to create this series of novels. They are usually classified as fantasy, and of course that applies, but notice that the plot is constructed like that of a mystery novel, as well. What is in the mysterious package Hagrid is helping Dumbledore to conceal? Who is trying to steal it? Can Harry and his friends stop this from happening? The other genre she's working with is something called the "school story." These were popular for a century or more in Great Britain, where upper-class children were traditionally sent away to what we would call "boarding schools" to be educated.

Rowling continues to play with mythological tradition. The three-headed dog "Fluffy" is derived from ancient Greek myths about a three-headed dog named Cerberus who guarded the gates of the Underworld. Hence, the joke that Hagrid bought him from "a Greek chappie" down at the pub (192). As far as I'm aware, the Mirror of Erised is her own invention. (Read the inscription on the mirror backward to understand what it does.)