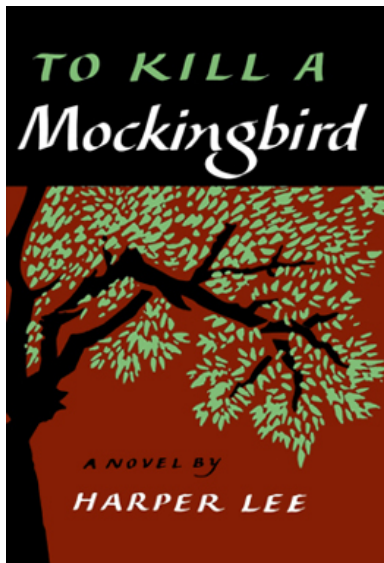


Five Literature Moments That Made Me Ugly Cry

For a year now on REO I have shared about how much I laugh and cry at fictional moments. Who doesn't like to feel deeply? Today is the fifth in this series, moments in literature that brought the ugly tears. Links to the others in this series can be found at the end of the article. Links to the books on Amazon are embedded in their titles. And please note that MAJOR spoilers will be revealed, so if you have not read a particular work and plan to, please skip it.

On to the list!



1. [To Kill A Mockingbird](#) (Harper Lee)

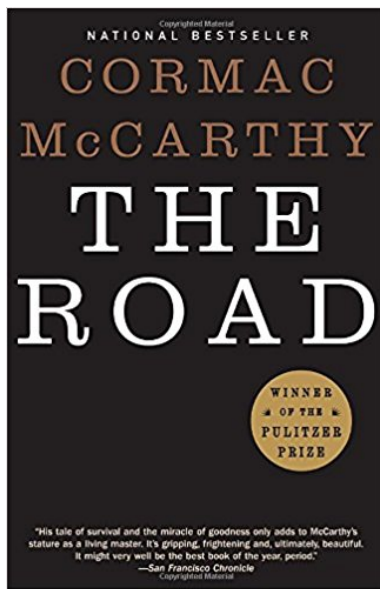
The Moment: Tom is Found Guilty

A jury never looks at a defendant it has convicted, and when this jury came in, not one of them looked at Tom Robinson. The foreman handed a piece of paper to Mr. Tate who handed it to the clerk who handed it to the judge.

I shut my eyes. Judge Taylor was polling the jury: "Guilty...guilty...guilty...guilty..." I peeked at Jem: his hands

were white from gripping the balcony rail, and his shoulders jerked as if each “guilty” was a separate stab between them.

Even knowing American history, I was foolish enough to believe that they may find Tom Robinson innocent. Atticus had argued so well. And I had seen “A Time To Kill” before I read this book, even though this movie came decades later. But I fooled myself. The moment was too much. It caused me to hate injustice real or fictional. Why don’t I hate it more?



2. [The Road](#) (Cormac McCarthy)

The Moment: The Father’s Last Words to His Son

“You said you wouldn’t ever leave me.”

“I know. I’m sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. You’re the best guy. You always were. If I’m not here, you can still talk to me. You can talk to me. And I’ll talk to you. You’ll see.”

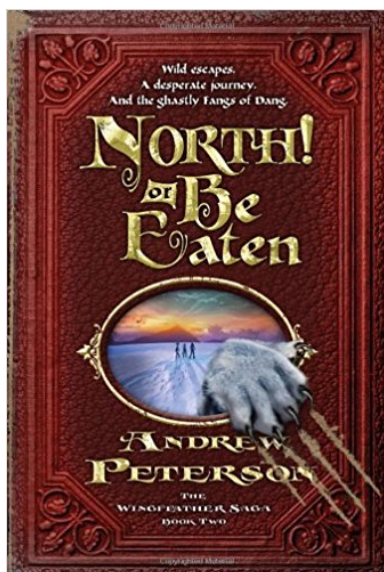
“Will I hear you?”

“Yes, you will. You have to make it like talk you imagine. And you’ll hear me.”

I listened to this on Audiobook and finished on a Sunday

morning very early while walking to church. The tears actually started before this part and continued until the very end of the book. The ending is incredible as well, with the boy finding a new protector and his family. But there was something special about the dialogue between the father and son throughout this story. I don't have kids, but I have an incredible father who would protect me until death. The dad here reminded me a little bit of mine in how simple of speech and blunt he was and in how he corrected his son.

Unlike three of the other books on this list, this one doesn't have an abundance of characters and geography in an elaborate fantasy world. Just two main protagonists in a crucial life relationship whose plight and conversations will rip your heart into a million pieces if you'll let them.



3. [North! Or Be Eaten](#) (Andrew Peterson, *The Wingfeather Saga Book 2*)

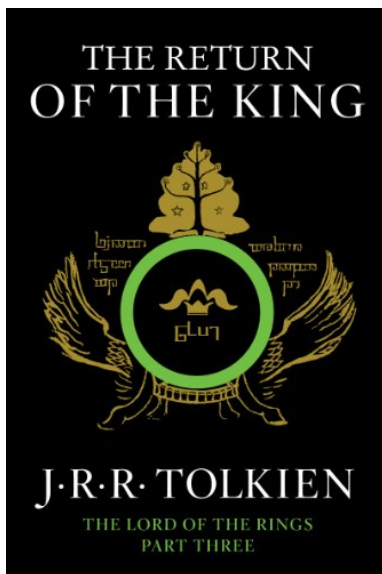
The Moment: Janner's First Night in the Coffin

"When he awoke again, he found that the box was not an awful dream but a black reality. He panicked again. He lay panting in the blackness, talking to himself praying aloud to the Maker, accusing, pleading, screaming things that, while no one could blame poor Janner for saying them, will not be repeated here."

And the Maker's answer was hollow silence.

Hours and hours passed. Janner wept again, a different weeping than before. These tears were not from fear but from weariness and a vast loneliness."

I have written honest words for REO a few times but I have never written about the darkest time in my life. Perhaps one day I will. Suffice it to say, I get what Janner went through above even though I was in a spiritual coffin and not a physical one. But our responses were the same. And so was God's. It was impossible for me to read this and not lose it. It is like Peterson had access to my own personal journal when he wrote this scene.



4. [The Return of the King](#) (J.R.R. Tolkien)

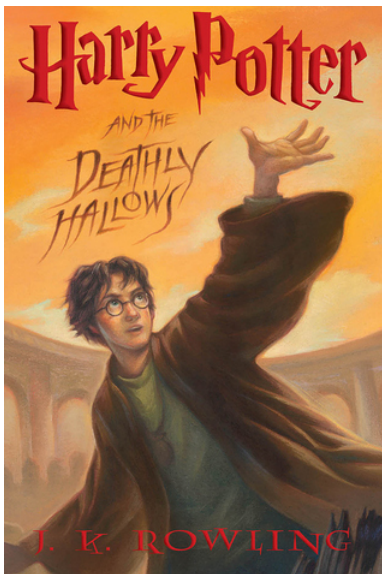
The Moment: Sam carries Frodo on Mount Doom

"Sam looked at him and wept in his heart, but no tears came to his dry and stinging eyes. 'I said I'd carry him if it broke my back,' he muttered, 'and I will!'"

"Come, Mr. Frodo!" he cried, "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you and it as well. So up you get! Come on, Mr. Frodo dear! Sam will give you a ride. Just tell him where to go and he'll go."

I recall the moment I first read this like it were five minutes ago. I was on a plane to a youth retreat in Florida. And I tried to hold it in, not wanting complete strangers to see me openly weeping. But I lost that battle. Sam's character was too much. What he did for Frodo the entire length of the series was heart-wrenching at every turn and at this moment the emotional dam burst and the tidal wave of tears overcame me. I could not read the rest of the chapter for a few minutes.

It's funny to me how the books and the movies caused me to cry at completely different parts.



5. [Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows](#) (J.K. Rowling)

The Moment: Dobby Dies and Harry Buries Him

“‘DOBBY!’

The elf swayed slightly, stars reflected in his wide, shining eyes. Together, he and Harry looked down at the silver hilt of the knife protruding from the elf's heaving chest.

‘No–no–HELP!’ Harry bellowed toward the cottage, toward the people moving there. ‘HELP!’

‘Dobby, no, don't die, don't die – ‘

The elves eyes found him, and his lips trembled with the effort to form words.

'Harry...Potter...'

And then with a little shudder the elf became quite still and his eyes were nothing more than great glassy orbs, sprinkled with light from the stars they could not see."

I remember being in my church's auditorium a little while after my ESL class ended, reading this. I was standing up against a wall and I slowly and subconsciously started crouching to the ground in disbelief. But I kept reading, and Harry offered to bury him:

"'I want to do it properly,' were the first words of which Harry was conscious of speaking. 'Not by magic. Have you got a spade?'

And shortly afterward he had set to work, alone, digging the grave in the place that Bill had shown him. He dug with a kind of fury, relishing the manual work, glorifying in the non-magic of it, for every drop of sweat felt like a gift to the elf who had saved their lives."

Floods of tears. I have never been impacted by a fictional moment like this one. It still wrecks my soul after about 10 readings of the books. I am weeping even as I type this. I'll never get over Dobby, my favorite hero in the book, simply because of how humble he was. And although I didn't catch this detail until about my third reading, it deserves to be mentioned:

"Harry wrapped the elf more snugly in his jacket. Ron sat on the edge of the grave and stripped off his shoes and socks, which he placed on the elf's bare feet."

Ron gave him his socks. To know Dobby is to know what a heart-shattering touch of genius this was by Rowling, to this

already tear-stained scene. My heart feels empty and full at the same time.

As always, we'd love for our readers to share their moments below.

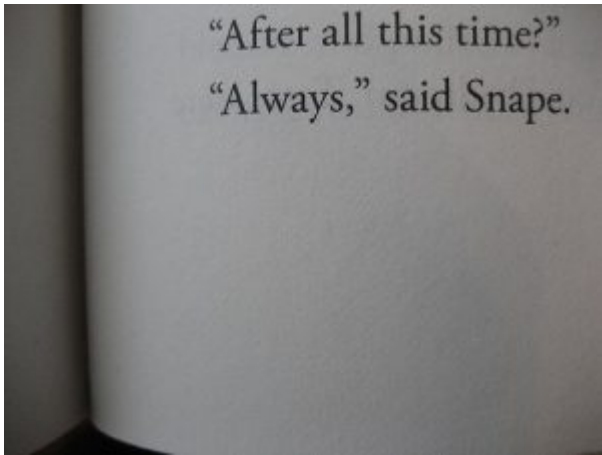
To read about Five Movie Moments That Made Me ROTFL go [here](#).

To read about Five Movie Moments That Made Me Ugly Cry, go [here](#).

To read about Five TV Moments That Made Me ROTFL, go [here](#).

To read about Five TV Moments That Made Me Ugly Cry, go [here](#).

Debating Snape



Recently, in an undisclosed location, the REO staff had a meeting. Present were Phill, Ben, Mike, Dave, Nathan, Mark and me. We ordered pizza and as the doorbell rang signifying its arrival, Phill rolled a die to see who would have to get it, counting off each of us seated at a round table as a number. I informed Phill that by casting the die he was then creating a world with six alternate timelines. One where each of us has to get the pizza when the die lands and seals our numerical fate.

In one of the timelines—let's call it **The Darkest Timeline**—things go berserk thanks to some terrible luck, a Norwegian troll doll and an Indiana Jones diorama. People get hurt. Things catch on fire. Apocalyptic chaos ensues.

Thankfully we don't live in that timeline, unless you get on Twitter where apparently everybody is in a perpetual state of cataclysm. But due to a Dreamatorium created and shared by Mike and me, Darkest Timeline Gowdy has a chance on occasion to interact with our timeline. Today, I, Regular Gowdy (RG) invite **Darkest Timeline Gowdy (DTG)** to my house to have a debate over one of the most controversial and complex figures in recent fantasy literature: Severus Snape.

RG: Thank you for joining me today. Nice goatee. Very Spock-

like in the Star Trek Original Series Season 2, Episode 4, "Mirror, Mirror".

DTG: Nerd.

RG: We're basically the same person.

DTG: I don't have a plush Dobby doll...

RG: It's a collectible!

DTG: It's a nerd doll. I bet you also own a wand from Universal.

RG: It chose me!

DTG [*Giving RG the same look Hermione gave Ron when he concluded that no one could feel all that Cho was feeling or "They'd explode"*]: I'm sure it did.

RG: It was made with a Phoenix feather! Give me a break. You're just as big a nerd as I am.

DTG: I love Harry Potter and Star Trek but nerds cite episodes and buy toys.

RG: Regardless, you know these works as well as I do.

DTG: I know more than you. Nerd.

RG: We will see about that. Our topic here today: Is Severus Snape more hero or villain? J.K. Rowling herself has said that Snape is all grey. You can't make him a saint or a devil. So our aim is not binary. We want to discuss what he was *more* of. I'll fire the opening salvo: Professor Snape is an extraordinarily written, gut-wrenching plot twist of a character. For 4000 pages, Rowling makes you hate him, before pulling the rug out from under us to reveal a remarkably intricate yet no doubt good-soul of a man who gave his life to help bring down the Dark Lord. His love for Lily is one of fiction's great tragedies, and yet he did not let it go to

waste, using it as inspiration the rest of his life to truly repent and join the anti-Voldemort movement. He is absolutely more hero.

DTG: In my opinion, Snape...

RG: *Professor* Snape...

DTG: Calm down, nerd. Snape [pauses, gives RG the same condescending look as before] is a petulant child who happens to have adult responsibilities. He tortures innocent children because of grudges and house affiliation, plays mind games with them, and is the model of someone who abuses power with no sense of justice. Additionally, his love for Lily is vastly – VASTLY – overrated...

RG: Oh come on! You're telling me that you don't think "After all this time?" "Always" is one of the most beautifully sad exchanges ever? The way Snape felt about Lily was something completely relatable and hits you like a stomach punch. Everyone gets unrequited love.

DTG: He was in love with another man's wife and never moved on. That's not romantic; that's pathetic.

RG: But it was his motivation for doing good in the world!

DTG: I can separate actions and motivation. Some of his actions were admirable; the motivation was creepy and reeked of an adult living in his mom's basement scrolling Facebook pictures all day.

RG: He truly loved her. The movie interpretation of him crying over Lily's death, holding her body and losing it, that was tear-jerking to me.

DTG: That's not a hero, though. It's a sap to be pitied. He loved her but was a complete jerk to her son and most everyone else. He once tore a Potter family picture in half to keep Lily's half and left the other half with James and Harry. What

twisted narcissist does that to a happy family? That's selfish. What a loser!

RG: Well it's not like he ever tried to really break up the marriage.

DTG: As if he could. James was a stud and once Snape called Lily "mudblood" he had no chance. So he pined like a sniveling, unthinking beast.

RG: James wasn't innocent. If hadn't been so antagonizing to Snape at Hogwarts, maybe Snape would not have been so cruel to Harry.

DTG: I don't take that as an excuse for one second. I won't defend James completely, but Snape had decades to move on from that. And Harry, no matter how much he looked or acted like his dad, did not deserve such a vindictive spirit thrust at him, especially his first day in class.

RG: You don't buy that Snape wasn't apologizing to Harry for Lily's death with the first questions he asked him in the first book? You know, all that about asphodel and wormwood and bitterness and sorrow?

DTG: If that was Rowling's intention then I admit that is very cool. But you can apologize without being a bully at the same time. Which Snape was that whole scene, taunting Harry as a "celebrity" even though Harry had done literally nothing to earn that scorn besides be his father's son. And besides, way beyond the first day Snape is terrible to Harry and his friends. Remember when he gave Harry a zero for a simple misread of the instructions for the Draught of Peace while he ignored the poor work of several other students? That's petty and immature.

RG: But lest we forget, he also saved Harry's life his first year when Quirrell tried to kill him during his first Quidditch match. That's noble and heroic.

DTG: Barely. He did so at no risk to his own life or safety and with a small effort for a wizard of his pedigree. It was a good thing, but the insults and boorish behavior towards Harry far outweigh it.

RG: I don't think saving a person's life can be devalued quite that easily. He saved Harry's life out of a deal he made with Dumbledore, which proved he was truly a good guy and no longer a Death Eater. And much of what he did in this role as a spy, as a result, was at risk to his own safety and life. A true hero absolutely would use his skill at occlumency to deceive Voldemort, the greatest Legilimens of his time. You had to figure Snape knew at any moment Voldemort could figure him out. But he stayed exactly where Dumbledore put him. Perhaps that was part of why he played his role as a villain to Harry so believably.

DTG: The point about dealing with Voldemort may have some value but he still went overboard in his treatment of Harry and it was obvious that he did it because he hated James 10 to 20 years later. When he gave Harry detention for using *Sectumsempra* on Draco (which Harry deserved), he forced him to read James and Sirius's old detention notices. That was spiteful.

RG: *Sectumpsempra* is a good example of how Harry was far from innocent. Much of Snape's disdain for Harry was for being out of bounds at night and breaking school rules.

DTG: Yes, but you are comparing teenage Harry trying to accomplish noble and reasonable things in secret and under darkness with Snape, a grown man and a teacher, exacting revenge on a child shamelessly and in public.

RG: I hate to sound like Lupin talking to Harry, but it sounds like you are determined to hate Snape. You keep going back to his treatment of Harry when Snape was far more than that. You didn't even respond to my point about his use of occlumency on

You-Know-Who.

DTG: Only nerds say "You-Know-Who". Actually, Ron-type nerds say it. You're not cool enough to be a Hermione nerd. I said his sacrifice to risk Voldemort discovering him had value. But I'm not going to classify him a hero based on how skilled he is. There is zero doubt that Snape was one of the three most adroit wizards in the series, behind Voldemort and Dumbledore. But abilities do not make for a hero. Actions do.

RG: No argument there. I just happen to see his actions as a double-agent far more crucial to his character than his actions as Harry's teacher.

DTG: Snape as Harry's teacher is like 80% of Snape in the series. I bet the majority of Snape's spoken lines before the very end of Book 7 are insults to Potter or his friends.

RG: But that's the genius of the plot twist; she had to make us believe Snape was evil and the true heroism of Snape, in large part, goes unsaid in the series. Doesn't Jesus teach that it is right to do good without getting credit? Also, if everything we discover in "The Prince's Tale" chapter at the end of *The Deathly Hallows* was known ahead of time, it would destroy how incredible that chapter is. That chapter ravaged millions of fans in the profound and shocking way possible.

DTG: I don't know that I agree. I think spoiler type moments can be overvalued and that she could have told just as good a story, or perhaps better, with us knowing ahead of time what Snape really was. We sort of knew anyway. She just sacrificed hundreds of pages of character development for a "A-ha!!" moment. I'm not sure it could not work the other way.

RG: I completely disagree.

DTG: Exceptional counterargument.

RG: Well, I have Harry in my corner, calling Snape probably

the bravest man he ever knew.

DTG: From the *epilogue*. Barf.

RG: Well, can we at least agree that Alan Rickman's portrayal of Snape in the movies is immaculate and on the short list for greatest film interpretation of a character ever?

DTG: Yes, we can. Which reminds me, you realize *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie, right?

RG: Get out.



J.K. Rowling ✓
@jk_rowling

Been wondering how to mark
Snape's birthday without starting
an argument. Here's to him, the big
hero/bully. He really was the best/
worst.

09/01/2016, 13:07

The Five Turns 100: Remembering the First Five Fives

It started with Ben.

He had an idea to list Five Reasons Not to be Scared of the

Monsters Under Your Bed. It was an article to be released on a Friday when REO was just a few weeks old. And it was quite hilarious.

Then, Amy had the idea to try to do something similar the next Friday and thought it would great to keep it going. She told Phill, Phill told it to us and we loved it. And out of this, the REO Friday Five was born. We have tried every week on Friday the last two years to publish a list of five entries that have something in common. Some have been funny. Some have been deeply theological. Some have been sports-related. They all have been an expression of the DNA of Rambling Ever On. A few times we came up short ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) if you are curious) of a weekly Friday Five, but 97% of the time we have succeeded.

And today we celebrate our 100th effort at the Friday Five by looking back on the Five Fives that started it all. All the way back to January and February of 2016. These Five Fives are the pioneers so to speak of this longstanding REO tradition. And we appreciate them very much. And today we acknowledge them and reminisce about our beginnings and how each of these Fives foreshadowed what REO was going to be like, not just on Friday, but all the time. I mean, even the best sitcoms had good clip shows! – Gowdy Cannon

Ben Plunkett's "5 Reasons Not to Be Afraid of the Monster Under the Bed"

[5 Reasons Not to Be Afraid of the Monster Under the Bed](#)

This is what separates Rambling Ever On from other sites out there. Sure, we could spend all of our energy and time writing about spirituality and theology. Or, we could have article after article about music, movies, or current events. Frankly,

we aren't interested in limiting ourselves to that standard stuff.

Enter Ben Plunkett. If you have been reading REO for any time at all, you know Ben follows the beat of his own drummer. When others write about the latest political scandal Ben says, "Nope. Not for me." Instead, he delivers some new form of insane genius. Take our very first Five as the perfect example. Who else is going to write with any sense of intelligence or articulation about monsters under the bed? Ben brings wit, humor, and just a dash of absolute madness to his writing and we are all better off for it. The Five on REO got started right and we have Ben Plunkett to thank for that. It is a philosophy that has guided us ever since. – Phill Lytle

Amy Lytle's "Five Steps to Become the BEST Facebook Mother of All Time"

[*5 Steps to Become the BEST Facebook Mother of All Time*](#)

One of the things I appreciate about REO is the creative and appropriate use of sarcasm. It was the REO staff that convinced me that using irony this way can be an effective way to communicate and not always mean-spirited.

Our very second Five falls into this category. Amy's REO articles have been some of our best-performing articles based on the number of views and this one is no different. Because I think people appreciate the humorous take on the reality of how people use Facebook. We have seen many other articles follow suit, including a whole Five on trash talk, but this was the one that set the tone. Superbly done and still relevant (and probably will be for years to come), we are very proud of this entry into our annals. – Gowdy Cannon

Collaborative “Five Romantic Movies Even Men Can Love”

[Five Romantic Movies Even Men Can Love](#)

This was the first collaborative Five. Often, we come up with a topic that many of our contributors care about and we figure the best way to make those articles work is to make it a team effort. As REO is primarily a male-driven website, we knew that Valentines Day was not going to be high on our priority list. But, we did not want to completely ignore it, so we opted to write about movies with a strong romantic theme that even men might enjoy. It was a perfect fit for what we do and it was the first of many collaborative articles on REO. It was also the beginning of REO trying to make our reader’s lives better – something we continue to do even to this day. You’re welcome. – Phill Lytle

Gowdy Cannon’s “Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect On Real Life”

[Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect On Real Life](#)

This was the fourth Five and offered a look at some wise and biblical advice from the pages of the magnum opus of J.K. Rowling. The Harry Potter book series is a truly classic children’s fantasy line of literature. And it’s more than just the storyline itself that makes it great. Much more. It is multi-faceted and many-layered in its meaning and depth. It does not take a lot of study to show that there are actually quite a bit of Christian truths that can be gleaned from its pages. Mega-Potterite, Gowdy Cannon, has delved into its pages

many times. Here he lays out five great truths he has learned from Harry Potter (the book series not necessarily the character). In *Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect on Real Life* he does exactly that. He considers five very insightful quotes from various characters that taught him certain lessons about life in our real-life Muggle world. We learn from the faithful House Elf, Dobby, about greatness and goodness; from Harry's adoptive father, Sirius Black (in two quotes), about judging the true quality of a person and the true face of evil; from the great and inimitable wizard, Albus Dumbledore, on the surest way to wreak damage upon an individual: indifference and neglect; and from best friends Ron Weasley and Harry Potter on the nature of repentance and forgiveness.

– Ben Plunkett

Phill Lytle's "Five Words and Phrases That Need to Go Away"

[*Five Words and Phrases that need to go away.*](#)

I confess this is one of my favorite articles and one of the finest things we have done in my opinion. The content is exceptional on its own—clever and with a pulse on our culture's extremely odd popular jargon. To paraphrase Ben, I cotton especially to the one about "Loving On" people because in the American Church this gets said all time. And it keeps getting said even though Phill and others—including some popular comedians—have called it out. It's like a massive freight train of geeky Christianese. But Phill's take on it is the best I've seen. And the conversation about "it is what it is" makes me cry laughing. It's like a modernized Abbott and Costello routine.

But beyond the writing, the illustrations are LOL funny, so much that I've laughed while reading it for the 4th or 5th time. The simplicity of the way the searing logic is

presented...the faces of the “men”...the exploding head...it’s all gold.

I bet I’ve referenced this article in public as much or more than any other in REO history. And we reference it yet again today, as being a Five that let the world know how acute our web site’s humor was going to be. – Gowdy Cannon

500 + 63 Words or Less Reviews: The Deathly Hallows

It took me almost a year, but I have finally finished my first reading of the 7-book Harry Potter series and it has been quite the ride, one of the best literary adventures of my life. Over the course of my journey I have met wizards, witches, goblins, ghouls, werewolves, house elves, talking portraits, merpeople, centaurs, giants, dragons, and dementors. And this is only a portion of the beings Harry Potter has introduced me to.

While I still consider *The Half Blood Prince* the best book in the series for a variety of reasons, the *Deathly Hallows* is not far behind. It came across to me as the most realistic of the entire lot with its depiction of what a storybook “adventure” would probably be like. There would likely be a lot of wandering about and being unsure as to what to do. People would get irritated with each other, they would get bored with all the wandering around looking for something, and everyone involved would get disillusioned with the whole shebang in varying degrees and forms. Much like the adventure of life itself.

It was also a much different animal in that most of it did not

take place in Hogwarts but on the aforementioned climactic adventure. In my opinion, the personal drama that goes on between the three adventurers while the adventure slowly got going is not remotely detracting. In fact, this personal drama made up some of the best parts of the book. There was a heaping helping of meaty characterization to be had there by all three of them.

And there is the other big character of the book who wasn't even around for the vast majority of it. Although he died in *The Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore's presence is huge in the *Deathly Hallows*. In much of the book it is as though he were symbolic of the God of Scripture with Harry constantly questioning him and why he didn't explain this or that while he was alive. Whether or not Rowling really meant for this to be the case when she wrote it, I don't know, but the likeness is strong.

We also learn a lot about Dumbledore's personal backstory and that he wasn't perfect after all. Like everyone else, he had baggage, baggage that for him directed the course of the rest of his life. It is brilliant characterization of a character that had already left the world of our story.

The Deathly Hallows is a fitting culmination of all the preceding acts. And we take many a sad farewell (for the present) of Hermione, Ron, the other Weasleys, Lupin, Tonks, Mad Dog Moody, Luna, Neville, Hagrid, McGonagall, and many other unforgettable characters that have left on us a lasting impact. Oddly, though, the departure the most emotional to me, was the farewell of the Dursleys. Those Muggliest of all Muggles who treated Harry like so much trash for so long somehow managed to worm their way into my heart. I'll miss them.

That is the end of my 500WoL. Here is my personal ranking of

the seven books:

1. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
 2. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
 3. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
 4. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
 5. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
 6. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
 7. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
-

500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

It has been almost three weeks since I have finished [Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince](#). I have actually been nervous about this one and wanted to approach it with a respectable amount of honor as the most literarily well-rounded of the lot.

[Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince](#) clocks in at 652 pages, immediately setting the stage for the plot of the rest of the book during a cryptic meeting between Severus Snape and the Black sisters. It is during this encounter that Snape makes an unbreakable vow with Narcissa Malfoy in which he will be obligated to help her son, young Draco Malfoy, with a Voldemort-ordained task. The plot of the rest of the work flows from this Malfoy/Snape mission.

In essence, the book is really about Snape himself. This fact makes the mysterious naming of the book itself especially ingenious. If you have read this far into the article, you are passionate enough about the franchise to already be familiar

with the story. Assuming that is the case, it is in no way a SPOILER to say that Malfoy and Snape accomplish their mission, with Snape ending Dumbledore's life in the lightning-struck tower.

One of the very best and most fascinating characterizations in the entire franchise has been embodied in the person of the relatively rarely seen Dumbledore. But Rowling makes up for that rarity here and with much magnificence. There are too many amazing Dumbledore scenes to name. And then he goes out in high style with one of the best funerals of all time with even the merpeople and the centaurs showing up to pay him homage.

The central theme of this work was very clear and extremely well exemplified: love. Love is everywhere: Tonks and Lupin, Bill and Fleur, Ron and Hermione, Harry and Ginny, and, um, Ron's passing "thing" with Lavender Brown. Ron also has an unfortunate encounter with some love potion. To cap it all off, Dumbledore talks more deeply in *Half-Blood Prince* than in previous books concerning Voldemort's one true weakness, which is his inability to love, a "fault" that would be his undoing.

Although they have been present in every book, I have found that Rowling is getting better at the long stretches of "information relation." At this point, they feel like very natural points of the dialogue instead of contrived and stilted manifestos. It worked better than ever in *HBP*. In fact, I would say that the dialogue as a whole was one of the book's most winning points. The humor was especially strong. I don't think Rowling has given me as many belly laughs in any previous work. Although the examples are legion, the best humor, in my opinion, probably came by way of the person of Luna Lovegood.

The dialogue, the honed prose, the final glories of Dumbledore, the humor, the love, etc., etc., etc, and so forth. For these reasons, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood*

Prince has taken first place in the HP house of my heart.

500WoL: Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Are you tired of these *Harry Potter* reviews yet? Are you as fed up as the poor Sirius relegated to spending his days in a dilapidated old house that he loathes? Are you as fed up as Harry was for pretty much this whole book? Well, humor me for three more journey's into the magical world of Hogwarts, will you? I'll be upfront with you about something. While I thoroughly enjoyed most of *The Order of the Phoenix*, I do consider it the least among the five *Harry Potter* books I have now read. And I think it is a lesser work for three reasons.

First, it's too long. In my review for [The Goblet of Fire](#), I said that while I think smaller literary works are usually better because the author has honed it and taken out all or most of the fat, I do concede that long works can be great and also well-honed. The long *Goblet of Fire* is an example of this. With very few rough spots and fatty tissue, Rowling honed it to a sharp edge from beginning to end. *The Order of the Phoenix*, not so much. It was too long and too full of fat and fluff. Thus, it was a bit duller of edge. I think *Order of the Phoenix* would have been just fine and dandy with 100 to 150 less pages.

There are a couple of other lesser reasons I place this in a decided last place of these first five. Second, there is much less imaginative detail than in the preceding books. There is some, I know, but less. Loved the imaginative description of their cleaning the worn down 12 Grimmauld Place, the inherited

home of Sirius Black. But there weren't as many imaginative details after this. Way too little of the ghosts, too little candy and Quidditch and magic and wonder and the fat lady. The third reason was Harry's almost continual bad attitude throughout the book. It is totally realistic for a boy of his age and in his very problematic situation in life to experience such angst, I suppose. But it doesn't add to the enjoyment when a book's main protagonist is so unlikable most of the time.

Despite these bad things and despite my putting it at the bottom of the list, I absolutely do not consider this a bad work or that I have wasted my time. Thoroughly enjoyed it and you will too. Saying it is the worst doesn't seem right. Instead, lets say it is the least of the best. Plus, it contains several very key elements of the overall story and centaurs, giants, lots of intriguing side plots, and the sadistic Professor Umbridge. Not to mention the string of very authentically moving moments after about page 500. I consider these most touching moments in the series so far. But be warned: Here you're going to face dangers more ominous than O.W.L exams. So gird your minds, boys and girls, gird your minds. That is all.

J.K. Rowling, Chekhov's Gun and the Joys of Rereading

"Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there.[1.Valentine T. Bill (1987), *Chekhov: The Silent Voice*

of Freedom, Philosophical Library]" (Anton Chekhov)

(Editor's note: Major spoilers are included in this article. You have been warned.)

The only thing I have found more enjoyable than reading through the *Harry Potter* series is reading through it many times.

My reasons for reading it twice a year or so (with the intention of continuing to do so a minimum of once a year until I die) are legion and normal. I get just as many chills the fifth time I read Harry call for his Firebolt during the first task of the Triwizard Tournament as I did the first time I read it. I got just as emotional during Dobby's death and during Snape's final pensieve memories the last time I read as the first time.

Some things are better when I reread, such as the final battle between Harry and Voldemort, which is so rich in detail it had my head spinning the first time. I needed several times to grasp it all. Sometimes I just miss details until I reread, as I didn't note until about my third reading that Ron put his socks on Dobby's feet before they buried him, a detail so touching and impacting I cannot believe I missed it the first times.

But on that note, there is one thing that stands out about *Harry Potter* than causes me to adore rereading beyond the typical reasons. They call it "Chekhov's Gun" and J.K. Rowling was a master at introducing seemingly minor plot devices in passing that turn out to be hugely significant hundreds and sometimes thousands of pages later. Some were major their first appearance but even then their magnitude after the gun goes off blows me away as I reread.

I am pretty much the opposite of someone like Sherlock Holmes; I don't notice detail immediately and that actually helps to get lost in stories while reading and watching TV and movies. Plot twists and fired guns catch me completely off guard. Which is a glorious feeling. And Rowling was a magician at these things for over 4000 pages. I remember during my first reading my wife told me: "Rowling doesn't introduce anything by accident. It all has a purpose."

And while her plot twists are already legendary, and as they are so well covered, I want to focus on these Chekhov's Guns, which is trope of a different color. There are many and I'll mention several but not nearly all. These are more or less my favorites after having been through the series several times (note I may have some minor details wrong on these and if I do I welcome correction):

The Vanishing Cabinet(s)

First mentioned in Book 2 when Harry hid in the one in Borgin and Burkes after he ended up in Knockturn Alley by mistake. The Hogwarts twin is mentioned that same book when Harry is in Filch's office for getting in trouble for spreading mud on the floor. They become a bigger yet still minor part of Book 5 when the Weasley twins trap Slytherin Montague in the one at school, where as a result he realizes there are two and that they connect. And that becomes the basis for how Draco uses them to help kill Dumbledore in Book 6. Amazing.

The Necklace at Borgin and Burkes

In the very same scene on page 52 of *Chamber*, Draco notices the poisonous necklace that he eventually uses in Book 6 to try to kill Dumbledore, but instead nearly kills Katie Bell.

The Hand of Glory

Yet again first mentioned in Book 2 when Draco sees it in B&B (how insignificant these details—in such a short scene—seem at the time!) Then, early on in Book 6, Ron mentions that Draco has a HoG. And it becomes a crucial part of how he foils Harry's friends from stopping him in the climactic scene.

The Tiara on the Mannequin

This one and the next one win for “Most random, easy-to-overlook-while-reading detail that becomes monumental later on”. In Book 6 when Snape has Harry trapped for using the Half Blood Prince's potions book, Harry hides in in the Room of Hidden things and marks its location by noting it is next to a bust with a wig and tiara. Finding that Tiara is as crucial to anything in Book 7, as it was a horcrux.

[Not quite as cool but still on topic is that halfway through Book 7 Luna casually mentions the “lost diadem of Ravenclaw” in passing and her father was wearing a (sort of) replica.]

The Locket at 12 Grimmauld Place

The mention of the locket is so brief in Book 5 when they are cleaning the Order's Headquarters that I've twice read the book looking for its mention and still missed it. It's so brief and camouflaged by a million other details on the page that only the most brilliant, hyper observant people likely remembered it the first time through when Hermione recalls it in Book 7. What a gun to go off in the last book! Covering pages and pages and chapters and chapters of finding the locket, stealing it back, carrying it around and then finally destroying it. And think of all that happens in those pages:

the break into the Ministry, Ron leaving, Ron coming back, the doe, the sword, etc.

Dumbledore's Broken Nose

3,500 pages or so between gun appearance (the very first appearance of Dumbledore in the first book mentions his nose) and gun going off (Rita Skeeter publishes that Aberforth punched Albus coffinside at Ariana's funeral). Incredible!

Aberforth and Goats

Not as crucial to the plot but quite hilarious: In *Goblet* Dumbledore references his brother getting in trouble for illegal charms on a goat. In the next book, Harry notices that the Hog's Head smells like goats (and that the barkeep looks strangely familiar). In the final book, we find out Aberforth is the barman for the Hog's Head. So clever!

Dumbledore's Prophecy About Wormtail

As Harry bemoans letting Wormtail go free at the end of Book 3, Dumbledore assures him one day he will be grateful he did so. And in Book 7, thousands of pages later, Wormtail's mercy in return helps them escape certain death.

Dumbledore and Snape's Argument

In Book 6 Hagrid lets it slip that they were arguing so Harry thinks it's a reason to not trust Snape. Book 7 clears up that they argued about whether Snape would kill Dumbledore.

Dumbledore references the Room of Requirement

In Book 4 at the Yule Ball, Dumbledore casually claims he found a secret room to use the bathroom when he needed it most. In Books 5 and 7 that very room, the “Come and Go Room” (or “Room of Requirement”), becomes the room for the Hogwarts anti-Voldemort movement. Thank you, Dobby. And sadly, in Book 6 it is used to plot the eventual death of Dumbledore.

The Diary

This is a huge gun shown in Book 2 (marvel at the moment towards the beginning of the book when they are going to King’s Cross and Ginny forgets the diary at home and they have to go back and get it) that goes off at the end of that book. But even more impressively, it goes off again in as it ends up being deemed a horcrux in Book 6.

Marvelo Gaunt’s Ring

Another major gun first mentioned in Book 6 in a pensieve memory, it is so significant that it turns out to be a Hallow *and* a Horcrux by Book 7.

Why is he the “Bloody” Baron?

Book 1 mentions the Bloody Baron is covered in blood and even asks why he is covered in blood. We don’t get the answer for nearly 4,000 pages. Stunning!

Harry’s Scar Prickling

This one is very early, less than halfway through the very

first book and of course we think it has to do with Snape. But we learn quickly that it does not. And it goes off over and over, Rowling adding layer upon layer to why Harry and Voldemort are connected. So while not as obscure as many others, I mention it because amazingly, the final firing of the gun (and the richest detail) isn't until the penultimate chapter, at King's Cross in Book 7. We find out that Harry was the horcrux Voldemort never intended to make. This makes reading about the first prickling of his scar in the Great Hall his first day in Book 1 so much more meaningful. And speaking of this...

Dumbledore Tells Harry (Essentially) That He is a Horcrux...in Book Two

This is probably my favorite of all. Read this dialogue, with the end of Book 7 in mind:

"You can speak Parseltongue, Harry," said Dumbledore calmly, "because Lord Voldemort can speak Parseltongue. Unless I'm much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do I'm sure."

"Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?" Harry said, thunderstruck.

"It certainly seems so."

Mind. Blown.

Did I miss some you consider your favorites? Let us know below!

500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire

The Harry Potter books have been climbing in page length ever since *The Sorcerer's Stone*. The biggest gulf is between *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and the present book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Like the massive fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which I will review at a later date), the 734-page *The Goblet of Fire* is a veritable Monster Book of Monsters. I freely admit that I am a very slow reader and that it would normally take me six months to read a book this size. It says a heaping helping about it that I finished it in just over a month.

I'll go ahead and say it: The first 145 pages are a masterpiece, with the Weasley's reigning supreme. I could have spent the entire book with that family—especially Mr. Weasley. His encounter with the Dursley's in the fourth chapter (“Back to the Burrow”) is one of the funniest incidences...ever. But this is not the only reason these pages are awesome. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section: The dark opening with Voldemort and Pettigrew; the Dursley and Weasley encounter; the International Quidditch Cup; and the debacle with and introduction to the Death Eaters. Yeah, for this bit Rowling surely summoned the superhuman writing powers.

But like Superman, Rowling has her kryptonite: tedious information relation. What makes it especially ridiculous in Goblet of Fire is that it is done this time by Lord Voldemort, making him come across like the stereotypical villain who has to reveal his whole long story so the hero has time to foil his plans. That is pretty much exactly what happens here. While I loved the scene, it was kind of ruined with Voldemort makes his tedious rant: "First I blah, blah, blah" then I "blah, blah, blah" then "This really long thing happened" and "blah, blah, blah, etc., Mwahahahaha!" All of this leaving Harry ample time to formulate and carries out his escape plan.

I more often go in for the view that with works of writing less is more. The writers of smaller works have successfully honed their craft, cutting out all fat of any kind. This certainly does not mean that a longer work *can't* be great. *The Goblet of Fire* is a perfect example of this happening. Rowling is one of those authors who absolutely needs room to spread her creative wings and shows that more can really be more. The abundance of space here not only allows her to completely flesh out the central Triwizard Tournament plot but also to flesh out more amazing side plots than you can shake a stick (or wand) at.

But like all of the preceding books, the fault I mentioned was still far, far outweighed by the greatness. In part because of the first 145 pages, but also *almost* every single paragraph, character, and plotline of the following 589 following pages, this is definitely my favorite of these first four classics.

500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

First of all, poor, poor Aunt Marge. How the blazes was she to know Harry was a powerful wizard in training? Why did no one tell her before she made such a huge mistake. Such a horrible thing as being all blown up should never happen to such a kindly, good-natured soul. Kidding. Totally deserved it. Anyway, although I do wish there had been a much greater appearance by the ghosts, this was probably on par with the second book but not as good as the first. There were many other interesting new plot points, characters, and creatures. These are a few of my favorite things: Professor Lupin, time travel (I'm a sucker for time travel), and the Dementors.

For so many reasons my respect for Rowling's creative genius has been bolstered by each of these three books. There were a lot of ingenious, creative touches in this current work. The Dementors as the embodiment of depression: Genius. I have read that as she was writing this book she began treatment for severe depression and that the Dementors were a direct inspiration of this. And the obvious cure to make you feel all better: Chocolate! Madame Pomphrey apparently keeps lots of it on hand, probably taking a nip now and then herself—for medicinal purposes, you understand.

Most of the dialogue in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is really good. However, there are two pretty sizeable dialogue wastelands in this one. Both are awkward portions of relating a lot of information. The first occurs in the middle of the book. Harry overhears Cornelius Fudge, Minerva McGonagall, Filius Flitwick, and Rubeus Hagrid while they are hanging out at a bar in Hogsmeade. First of all, maybe it's just me but these four don't seem like they would hang out at

a bar with each other. It just seemed awkward. Second, the dialogue of this portion seemed longer than it really was because it was not that well written. Same thing for another overlong dialogue wasteland toward the end of the book when Lupin, Sirius, Harry, Ron, and Hermione have another overlong and awkward “information-relating” conversation. While the information related in both was crucial to the plot, I wish Rowling had done it less awkwardly. Rowling is a superior author in many ways, but she is not J.R.R. Tolkien who can get away with this (See “The Council of Elrond,” a chapter in Fellowship of the Ring which is almost entirely a long conversation of massive “information-relation”).

Where Rowling particularly shines to me is the many small passing details like Harry’s mirror reflection talking back to him or the giant squid propelling itself dreamily across the surface of the lake or Dumbledore addressing Dereck, a first year student, at a Christmas party, causing him to turn bright red. These are only three examples of what Rowling does best: Imaginative and insightful detail. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is rife with them. And thus, Rowling achieves another timeless victory.

“An American Muggle in London”: Our Geek Trip of a Lifetime

“London is the great beehive of Christendom...she swarms with people of all ages, natures, sexes, callings...she seems to be a glutton, for she desires always to be full.” [Donald Lupton]

“London, Baby!!!” [Joey Tribbiani]

Oh, England...what a country! Besides being the home of countless ancestors to people of the United States (and historically a weird conglomeration of family and countrymen turned war enemies), it has given people all over the globe worlds and worlds of fantasy and fiction that have created metropolis populations of geekdom. Shakespeare, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Who, Downton Abbey, et al, all in some way consider or considered England their home. And while America has given us countless works of fiction in literature, TV and movies to enjoy, the best and most refined contributions (in my opinion) come from the homeland.

If Only We Got Our Tickets By Owl

I don't geek out over too many things but I do for *Harry Potter*. Introduced to me by my wife less than three years ago, I've already been through the entire 4100-page (U.S. version count) book series 7 times and the movies several times each. And when I learned in late 2015 there was a new story being added called *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, in play form and only showing in London, I woke up at an ungodly hour in Chicago one Thursday morning to get in a cyber line to purchase tickets. The earliest tickets I could get were January 2017. And after buying the tickets, for the next 14 months my wife and I planned our journey to London which would be the first time for both of us.



Hermione bails Harry Out – Again

I speak to this next part not to complain but to brag on my wife. Other than winter and snow, the most mundane and monotonous part of life I loathe the most is actually traveling. Doesn't matter if it's plane, train, bus, or car, getting from point A to point B has caused me more frustration than I can quantify due to road work, rain, snow, delays, cramped spaces, etc. It makes me feel utterly helpless. So after we had a problem-free flight from Chicago to London via British Airways on Wednesday night/Thursday morning, I was pumped that this trip would be free of all that.

Then we got on our coach bus to go from the airport to our hotel, which I'd booked on Expedia. Turned out, the bus only went downtown, not to our hotel. The fine print said this, but if you did not know London's transit terminology there was no way to know. So there we were, in downtown London, miles away from our hotel, in a place we'd never been before.

I was on zero sleep from the overnight flight. My brain was dead and I was half-delirious, angry and very disoriented. And my wife, who is very much like Hermione, stepped up! Using technology in a way I could not, she got us from the bus station to the London Underground and then figured out how to get us from the Underground HQ to our hotel. It was amazing. I was ashamed that my 15 years of big city living didn't help me

to lead us in that moment, but I am proud of my wife for not letting a transportation issue ruin the beginning of our trip.

On With the Show This Is It!

The play was two acts over the course of two nights, the first one being a few hours after we finally got to our hotel. Even though we were exhausted and jet lagged, the first act blew us away (see a review at the end of this article). And I knew we were in for the trip of a lifetime.

The following day (Friday), we obviously wanted to do some sightseeing during the day before the second part of the play that night, and I really wanted to geek it up. So I was determined that our first stop would be King's Cross, Platform 9 3/4, since it is such a big deal in the Harry Potter books.

Man was that fun! The London Underground has enshrined the fictitious platform stop into a full-on tourist attraction with a cart halfway through the wall at the stop (as though entering it by magic, per the books) and enthusiastic employees there to give you a wand to hold, a Hogwarts house colored scarf (Gryffindor for me, although I may be realizing I am indeed a Slytherin) to wear, and a professional to take a picture of you entering the platform with the cart as if you were Harry himself. This is a major tourist attraction and there was a roller coaster type line and wait time to do it. Totally worth it. I'll be telling my kids about it and hopefully they will get to do it one day, maybe when they are 11 (wink, wink).



After the picture they led you into shop with outrageously priced but super cool HP merchandise. I've wanted a plush Dobby for a long time and this was the place to get it. My wife and I are both frugal so there are few things I can tell you about how much I adore Dobby than I spent 28£ (about \$37) to buy one. I love me some Dobby!

There are other minor Harry Potter real London references that I wanted to see (Millennium Bridge, Tottenham Court Road) and I would have been satisfied with just that since this was a geek trip for me, but my wife being a good teacher and wise woman guided us to see the best of London. And I'm glad she did. It would have been foolish to go all that way and not to have seen Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, the Borough Market, London Bridge, the rebuilt Globe theater and so much more with our own eyes. (Although I did channel my inner Swanson to say, "Ooh, a clock. We don't have one of those in America.")



In addition to the sites, we adored the food (fish and chips, mate) and the accents. I could listen to English people talk all day! Living in Chicago, I also appreciated all the cultures that were there, many of them visiting like we were (I assume). We regularly heard conversations in French, Polish, Russian and languages I didn't recognize. I even got to hear Spanish spoken with an British accent! My mind and heart were dancing like Chris Farley singing Flashdance with mud all over him. Try to imagine Minerva McGonagall saying "compadre." Go ahead, do it! Hilarious, right?

For Better, For Worse, When at Home, When Abroad

I'm not writing this just to tell you what we did but why we did it. I confess that I fall prey to wanting to use social media for self-promotion but this trip wasn't about that at all. When I decided to buy these tickets I had one thing in mind: my marriage, and more specifically, my wife.

I am not wise in and of myself, but I think I know wisdom when I hear it. And many people have told me to consider investing gifts to my wife as experiences more than things. And this was an attempt at that. Other than Dobby (which I bought for myself) and a couple of magnets, we came back with nothing we didn't bring. But we have memories for a lifetime.

I really never guessed way back in the Spring of 2014 when

Kayla was explaining to me her philosophy of studying by saying "I'm pretty much Hermione Granger" that this would be the start of something that we would bond over. Harry Potter has deepened our relationship and to get to go to the place that inspired it and was home to the play of its 8th story was unforgettable.

I want to give my thoughts on *The Cursed Child*. Do not read further if you do not want it spoiled for you.

Review of "The Cursed Child" (Major Spoilers)

I confess I have mixed feelings about this addition to the Harry Potter canon. It was riveting to see more added to this world, but it was weird in the same way that it is weird to go back to the house I grew up in and finding my parents have added new rooms or knocked down walls and combined rooms or have redone the bathroom. They didn't really change anything per se but they involved so much of the original story from new angles it twisted my heart and mind. I'll break my thoughts into the Good and the Bad.

The Good

- Draco Malfoy's son Scorpius (played by Anthony Boyle) was funny, endearing, and the star of the show to me. Well done. I cannot believe a next generation story features a Malfoy upstaging a Potter, but it happened.
- Draco's story arc is more defined than how Rowling left it at the end of TDH, including the Epilogue. I suppose she didn't want to make Draco into a complex hero like Snape, nor an utter villain. But it left me wanting more of what became of his life. This beyond fulfilled that

and I loved that he is more or less a “good guy” 20 years later on good terms with our three heroes. If you recall in the books several times he expressed that he wished Hermione would be killed, and was willing for Katie Bell and Ron to die to kill Dumbledore, among other sins. He is almost entirely repentant from that life.

- Having 40-year old Harry watch his parents die was heart-shattering. Tears on top of tears.
- The Palace Theater spares no expense on special effects and I was blown away by how they accomplished “magic” in play form. Polyjuice potion, casting Patronuses (or is it ‘Potroni’?), etc. were all done so well I could not believe I was watching something live.
- The scene with Harry and Dumbledore. IN-TENSE. Every HP story needs one. They explored things about that relationship hereunto unexplored. Enthralling.

The Bad

- Albus Potter was, sadly, quite bland. Especially next to Scorpius, his best friend. I didn’t connect with him at all, which is so odd since I have never connected to a fictional character the way I connect to Harry.
- On that note, the conflict between Harry and Albus was missing something. There wasn’t much depth to their story and naming this play after Albus feels wrong. He wasn’t “cursed” to me and the story about him and his father was upstaged by other things. I really thought this would be an emotional subplot about a boy living in his father’s shadow but it swung and missed on that note. Albus just felt like a whiner, not a victim.
- They relied too much on time travel to work in the original story. I know they did that to hook in Potterheads everywhere to a deeper emotional level but it came off as lazy to me. I think they should have tried to develop (as best they could in a four-hour

play) character depth of new characters and old in the true 19 to 22 years later setting. I felt pulled in too many directions and too many plots were cut off too quickly (namely the alternate universe where Harry was dead).

- They could not help this, but too many characters were hurt by not having something close to their movie counterparts play them, especially Hagrid and Snape. I also didn't like Dumbledore but I don't like the movie Dumbledores either.
- The primary villain leaves a lot to be desired. The offspring of Bellatrix and Voldemort should be beyond terrifying. She wasn't.

I could go on but that's a lot. Do not get me wrong; I loved the play and I'm only as critical as I am because I love the series so much. If you have questions, comments or reactions to any of this, especially the play review, comment below!