

Welcome to the Weekly Vlog!

We just finished filming, editing, and posting the third of four videos for the Potter Pundit Summer School, the third in a week, so, yes, it's been a wild and wonderful week since we last chatted!

As usual, I remember things after the video is in the can that I wanted to say, should have said, planned to say but just forgot under the bright lights of this film studio in my living room. This last talk is on what Rowling gets from her three favorite writers – Austen, Colette, and Nabokov, three writers who couldn't be more different but have one thing in common.

They all write parodies, that is, send-ups or mockeries of particular types of writing, and a specific type of parody, one that Rowling has made her own. This kind of teasing or laughing at a genre is one in which, after the teasing is done, the author goes on to write a story that conforms to the genre rules and delivers a magnificent example of exactly the experience this kind of writing is meant to give, if with a particularly subversive twist. Oxford's Beatrice Groves, with whom we spoke this Thursday in a live webinar Q&A session, writes about this brilliantly in her *Literary Allusion in Harry Potter* chapter on Jane Austen and *Northanger Abbey*.

Anyway, if you haven't signed up for the Potter Pundits Summer School, your time is almost out. It's free, painless, quick, and gives you access to my talks and pile of downloadable pdfs, all of which come down when we shutter the school this week. Click the link below or just go to PotterPundits.com and sign in. You'll be taken straight to the third lecture, from which point you can get to the other talks.

What I forgot to say in the third talk that I wanted to be sure to mention was the irony of Rowling's laborious and fairly ugly attempts to distance herself from C. S. Lewis and his novels in light of her being, I think, primarily a writer of parody, or, more precisely perhaps, 'pastiche.' Lewis is too and at least as good an example as Austen, Colette, or Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov.

His *Space Trilogy*, for example, is made up of a three loving parodies and alchemical adaptations of an H. G. Well's science fiction thriller, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and a Charles Williams supernatural adventure. And could Rowling have read *The Magician's Nephew* and not picked up on it's being

a tribute to and re-fashioning of E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet*? I could see how she might not have liked how he overtly baptized the story and covertly turned it to a much more profound end with his 'Wood Between the Worlds,' but the artistry is a kind that becomes her signature.

So I'm glad I've said that out loud and off my chest. Now to the subject of this week's VLOG: What we proved in the Potter Pundits Summer School first week.

With literally hundreds of students from around the world – the US and Canada, of course, but all corners of the United Kingdom as well, Australia, Argentina, Germany, Norway, Russia, China – hello, friends in Shantou! – and one amateur Potter Pundit driving an eighteen wheeler across the United States on Rte 80 – in our virtual classroom, we have demonstrated and test-driven a platform for interactive learning that is affordable, convenient, and effective as possible.

In effect, we now know for sure that you can have the near equivalence of classroom, even tutorial learning with subject matter experts on the other side of the planet about your favorite subjects without having to empty your wallet and 401k to go back to school.

So What? This solves a major problem, right?

The Serious Harry Potter reader in my experience of talking with her – sorry, guys; Hermiones far outnumber Dumbledores among Potter-philes -- wants to know everything about the books; what they mean, why we love them, their inner workings and artistry.

But there's been no place to get interactive instruction, real back-and-forth with a living expert.

- Fan cons and academic conferences are too expensive for fans not living nearby and they're not organized in a way to present a coherent collection of ideas or for real conversations;
- School courses require being part of a larger 'major' or degree program that are not just about Potter and, even if they were, they are prohibitively expensive in terms of cash and time
- There is no access in books and critical materials to person with skills and answers to questions to help bring them together, to teach the

necessary skills to find your own way through new texts and old favorites.

So we'd love to know more but we're left behind if we didn't go to college or if we didn't major in English literature, and sadly as often as not, even if we did.

Which is crazy and sad, right? To be re-reading books and loving them but not coming to a greater understanding on your own. There is an understandable frustration of the injustice at seeming fated to be just a consumer of other people's insights and an unconscious consumer of entertaining stories, a person chained in Plato's Cave to watch the shadows others cast on the cave's uniplex screen or in your imagination.

I feel your pain! Vlogs are answers to questions from now on and here is the question I'm getting to in all this, one from a serious reader in Sydney, Australia, named Emma who isn't flying to Orlando or Dublin for a fan con, whose school didn't offer a Potter course, and has a full life she's not leaving, but who wants to up her game:

"Where do you recommend a non-academic person (i.e. no degrees or qualifications) start in order to become a serious Potter reader?" There are a lot of books and texts which you refer to in your podcast which a person without a university education will not have had the privileged to read (let alone study at any length). How does a person with a day job and no tertiary education shortcut themselves to a level where they can get more from the HP saga?"

Here's the thing. Emma's not weird in asking this question. It's more the rule among serious readers of Harry Potter than the exception. It would be a great and beautiful thing if we could study with Beatrice Groves at Oxford (no, she doesn't teach a section on Harry Potter) or with James Thomas at Pepperdine (he does – and it's great and over-filled minutes after registration stats every year). But we can't.

My frustration as writer and speaker is not that I'm not being paid enough. I'm the "Dean of HP scholars," working on my PhD at Swansea in Wales, and because I've sold more than 100,000 books and got a decades experience of public speaking under my belt at big venues, I'm paid \$1500

to \$2000 for hour long keynote talks at the best schools and biggest conferences.

What gets me is I cannot, there is just no way to communicate in a book or in an hour's talk what readers and writers want to know and deserve to know - the tools and rules of great writing so they can do this work as readers and writers themselves. In effect, I'm being paid top dollar to be making tuna fish sandwiches instead of showing eager fishermen how to bait a hook and cast a line.

Which is the answer to the 'So What?' of the Potter Pundits Summer School.

We have demonstrated and test-driven this past week a platform for interactive learning that is affordable, convenient, and effective as possible. You can study with me to learn artistry and meaning of Harry Potter and ask the questions to gain the skills to read at four levels yourself.

So what should Emma in Sydney do, fifteen hours ahead of Oklahoma City time? Well, she's already done the first thing or I wouldn't have her question.

The first thing you need to do is sign up for the Summer School – free, painless, easy and quick registration, that gets you into the three classes on literary alchemy, ring composition, and what Rowling gets from her three favorite writers, not to mention live webinars with Potter experts like Oxford's Beatrice Groves. You need to get in and experience this platform. It works!

Then, you look for an email from me on Tuesday for the last class in Potter Pundits Summer School in which I'm going to talk about Dante's Four Layer Cake, the big secret of reading and writing well. It's the most important talk and an essential frame of reference for reading the Greats and writing well yourself.

I'm also going to offer an opportunity then to study with me for seven weeks at the lecture, seminar, or tutorial level, a semester's worth of education in Rowling artistry and Potter Pundit magical reading skills. That opportunity is only going to be available for a few days because it's going to be limited to just a few students to ensure it's interactive. Those who join me will get

an in-depth and cutting edge understanding of the Hogwarts Saga, of course, and a really challenging stretch of their ideas about story.

This is a real chance for Emma and the serious readers like you and me who share her frustration in not having a way to overcome the rut of thinking, our current level of understanding and the tool chest we own, to get out of the habitual satisfaction with prevalent narratives that the Harry Potter stories themselves are designed to combat.

I'm offering an opportunity to escape the fate of being just a consumer of distracting stories and the imaginative clay that story tellers in books and film shape as they want.

Sign up for the Potter Pundits Summer School at the link below or by just going to PotterPundits.com and registering. See you there for the fourth and last Summer School class and the opportunity to take your reading game to a whole new height! Have a great week!