An Intercultural Study:
The Reception of J.K. Rowling's the *Harry Potter* Book Series in Iran

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Composition du jury

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Ce mémoire a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

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Résumé

Cette étude fait une incursion au sein du monde enchanté de Harry Potter, abordé tant sur le plan de l'intrigue que sur celui de l'édition en plusieurs tomes, pour explorer l'accueil qu'on lui a réservé en Iran. L'objectif est de montrer de quelle manière ce monde enchanté a su abattre certaines barrières culturelles en même temps qu'il en a renforcé d'autres. En Iran, Harry Potter est lu surtout en traduction, et certains aspects de l'intrigue ont été censurés ou adaptés au public cible, soit un lectorat composé tant d'adultes que d'enfants. J'examinerai la lecture et la réception différentes qu'on fait de la série Harry Potter en Iran et en Amérique du Nord, en comparant la façon dont la critique aborde la religion, la magie et la technologie qu'on y trouve, par exemple.

La série Harry Potter compte sept tomes et raconte les aventures d'un jeune sorcier qui lutte contre un personnage diabolique par l'étude de la magie. J'expliquerai, toutefois, que le roman ne se borne pas à parler de magie : il y est question de moralité, d'amitié, de sacrifice, d'estime de soi et de foi, entre autres valeurs sociales et littéraires qui concourent à faire de Harry le héros. De manière à mieux examiner le phénomène international de la « Pottermanie » d'un point de vue théorique, cette étude utilisera la théorie de la réception et des théories interculturelles dans l'analyse de l'accueil réservé à la série en Iran et en Amérique du Nord. En mettant l'accent sur le texte lui-même, à l'instar des théoriciens que la réception que sont Wolfgang Iser et Georges Poulet, j'expliquerai de quelle manière les lecteurs d'Harry Potter quittent le monde de leur quotidien pour s'engager dans celui du roman. De plus, en appliquant une théorie de la réception centrée sur le lecteur, telle que présentée par des auteurs comme Stanley Fish, j'analyserai le rôle que jouent, dans la lecture, les expériences de vie du lecteur et le contexte culturel qui est le sien. De manière à explorer plus avant l'influence qu'ont les communautés culturelles tant sur les lecteurs que sur les auteurs, cette étude fera intervenir des théories interculturelles et analysera l'importance des ressemblances et des différences culturelles.
dans la création et dans l'interprétation d'un texte. Généralement, on divise la théorie du « reader response » en trois grandes subdivisions. La première, l'école formaliste, est défendue surtout par des théoriciens tels que Wolfgang Iser et Georges Poulet qui considèrent que le texte est le facteur le plus important dans la transmission du message de l'auteur. Les formalistes affirment que les lecteurs sont des facteurs passifs qui quittent leur propre réalité et deviennent partie prenante du texte sitôt qu'ils commencent à lire. Quant à elle, l'école poststructuraliste de la théorie du « reader response » envisage les lecteurs comme le facteur principal entrant dans la compréhension du sens d'un texte. Ces théoriciens, dont Stanley Fish, considèrent que les lecteurs jouent le rôle principal dans l'acte de lecture et soutiennent que chacun possède sa réalité propre, réalité dont il ne peut tout bonnement faire abstraction durant la lecture. D'autres théoriciens encore, comme Jane P. Tompkins et Marilyn M. Cooper, affirment que texte et lecteur jouent un rôle tout aussi important l'un que l'autre dans le processus de lecture et qu'il faudrait prendre en considération les facteurs qui affectent les lecteurs et les écrivains dans leurs pratiques de lecture et d'écriture. Ainsi, cette étude traitera des facteurs interculturels qui peuvent affecter l'écriture et la lecture, soient-ils d'ordre religieux, social, littéraire ou historique, et qui varient en fonction du pays d'origine du lecteur. Pour examiner la réception interculturelle réservée à la série en Iran, j'en analyserai les traductions persanes ainsi que le rôle important que jouent les normes culturelles et la question de la censure dans l'activité de traduction en Iran.

Les aspects interculturels de la réception de la série me fascinent, moi qui ai grandi en Iran, où j’ai d’abord lu Harry Potter en traduction avant mon arrivée au Canada, où j’ai entrepris des études supérieures en littérature comparée et où j’ai continué à suivre la série et sa réception critique en anglais. L’accueil du roman au Canada a été comparable à celui qu’on lui a fait dans les autres pays occidentaux. Les particularités de la réception canadienne sont trop peu nombreuses pour justifier une étude qui ne se concentrerait que sur le Canada, sauf si l’on inclut
la question de la réception, au Québec, de la traduction en français. Cependant, comme il en sera
question de manière plus détaillée, les traductions destinées au Canada français sont réalisées en
France : je comparerai les stratégies de traduction des traducteurs français et iraniens.

Contrairement au Québec, où il n’y a actuellement aucune traduction en langue
vernaculaire de la série *Harry Potter* et où les lecteurs lisent des traductions réalisées par un
traducteur européen, les lecteurs iraniens peuvent choisir parmi un éventail de traductions pour
chacun des tomes. En raison de la censure qu’on retrouve en Iran, les traducteurs persans d’*Harry
Potter* doivent user des meilleures astuces pour adapter la série occidentale à une culture
islamique. Ce mémoire aborde les défis particuliers que pose la traduction de l’anglais au persan.
Il y sera aussi question de célèbres théoriciens comme Jeremy Munday, Lawrence Venuti,
Antoine Berman et Friedrich Schleiermacher, qui proposent différents procédés de traduction
permettant aux traducteurs français et persans de réaliser le transfert et de la dimension culturelle
et de la dimension littéraire de la série le plus fidèlement possible.

Je comparerai la réception des romans *Harry Potter* dans le contexte des sociétés nord-
américaines et de la société iranienne islamique en expliquant quels sont les aspects de la série
qui retiennent l’attention des critiques occidentaux et iraniens et la manière dont ces choix sont
le reflet de normes culturelles, de valeurs, de croyances et de tabous différents en ce qui a trait à
l’enfance et à la littérature jeunesse, particulièrement en matière de relations hommes-femmes et
de religion. Comme je l’expliquerai, la série a été condamnée par des chrétiens extrémistes en
Occident parce qu’elle ferait la promotion des sciences occultes. Ces critiques négatives affirment
que la série présente la magie comme étant amusante et inoffensive et qu’elle encouragerait donc
des pratiques sorcières qui semblent croire aux enfants qu’ils peuvent atteindre leurs buts grâce à la magie.
Étant donné que la magie fait davantage partie de la vie quotidienne en Iran, la série n’y a pas
essayé de critique à cet égard, mais a été parfois accusée de représenter un complot sioniste
destiné à miner la moralité des enfants. À l’opposé, des critiques positives tant en Occident qu’en Iran allèguent que la série fait la promotion de valeurs modernes et qu’elle enseigne la moralité en présentant des notions d’amour, de sacrifice, d’amitié, de famille et de découverte de soi.

**Mots-clés:** Harry Potter, Littérature de jeunesse, Littérature de jeunesse en Iran, J. K. Rowling, études interculturelles, l’Iran.
ABSTRACT

This study travels into the magical world of *Harry Potter* as both story and book series to explore its reception in Iran. The purpose of this study is to discover how the magical world of *Harry Potter* has broken down cultural boundaries and reinforced others, and has attracted many children and adults as readers in Iran, where it is read mostly through translated versions and where certain aspects of the story are censored or adapted for an Iranian audience. I will discuss how the *Harry Potter* series is read and received differently in Iran and North America by comparing critical responses, for example, to religion, magic, and technology in the series.

The *Harry Potter* series includes seven volumes and is about a wizard boy who struggles to defeat the most evil characters in the books by using magic. Nevertheless, I will discuss how the novel contains much more than only magic. It explores morality, friendship, sacrifice, self-esteem, and faith among many other literary and social values that help to construct Harry as a hero. To better understand the international popularity of “Pottermania” from a theoretical viewpoint, this study will employ reader-response and intercultural theories to analyze the reception of the series in Iran and North America. By using the text-oriented branch of reader-response theory, which is supported by theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Georges Poulet, I will explain how readers of the *Harry Potter* series leave their own world and engage in the world of the novel. Also, by applying the reader-centered school of reception theory, as argued by scholars such as Stanley Fish, I will discuss the role of the reader’s personal life experiences and cultural background in the reading process. In order to better explore the influence of cultural communities on both readers and writers, this study will explain intercultural theories and the importance of cultural similarities and differences in both producing and interpreting a text.

Generally, reader-response theory is divided into three major subdivisions. The first and
Formalist school of reader-response theory is mostly supported by theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Georges Poulet who refer to the text as the most important factor in conveying the message of the author. Formalists claim that in the reading process, readers are passive factors who leave their own world and become a part of the text as soon as they start reading. On the other hand, the post-structuralist branch of reader-response theory centers on readers as the main factors in understanding the meaning of a text. Theorists such as Stanley Fish, who put emphasis on readers as playing the leading role in the act of reading, argue that each individual has a world of his or her own that cannot be simply ignored during the act of reading. However, theorists such as Jane P. Tompkins and Marilyn M. Cooper state that both text and reader play equally important roles in the reading process and one should consider the factors that affect readers and writers in their acts of reading and writing. This study will also consider the cross-cultural factors that may affect the writing and reading processes. These factors include religious, social, literary, and historical issues which vary for readers from different countries. To discuss the intercultural reception of the series in Iran, I will analyze the Persian translations of the series as well as the important role of cultural norms and the issue of censorship in the process of translation in Iran.

I am very interested in the intercultural aspects of the reception of the book series as someone who grew up in Iran and first read *Harry Potter* in translation there, before moving to Canada where I undertook graduate studies in comparative literature and continued to follow the series and its critical reception in English. The reception of the novel in Canada is similar to that of most Western countries and there are not enough cultural specificities to warrant a study of Canadian reception alone, except for its French translations as part of the reception in Quebec. However, as I will study further, the translations for French Canada are done in France, so I will compare translation strategies of French and Iranian translators.
Contrary to Quebec, where there are currently no Quebeccois translations of the Harry Potter series and where readers read translations by a French translator from Europe, in Iran readers have several translations of each volume to choose from. As a result of the issue of censorship in Iran, Persian translators of Harry Potter have to find the best possible method in order to transfer the Western series into Persian for an Islamic culture. This thesis discusses the specific challenges of translating from English to Persian, but I will also refer to celebrated theorists such as Jeremy Munday, Lawrence Venuti, Antoine Berman, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who discuss different methods of translation, which enable French and Persian translators of the series to transfer both cultural and literal contexts in the most faithful way possible.

I will compare the reception of the Harry Potter novels in the context of North American societies and Islamic Iranian society by discussing which aspects of the series are more closely studied by Western and Iranian critics and how these choices reflect different cultural norms, values, beliefs, and taboos concerning childhood and children’s literature, especially in terms of gender relations and religion. As I will explain, the series has been condemned by extremist Christians in the West for prompting the dark arts and the occult. These negative critics claim that the series presents magic as fun and harmless, thus promoting sorcery and convincing children that they can use magic in order to reach their goals. Since magic is more a part of Iranian everyday culture, the series is not criticised for presenting magic in Iran, but it is marginally accused of being a Zionist plot aimed at destroying the morality of children. On the other hand, positive critics in both the West and Iran argue that the series promotes modern values and teaches morality by presenting the notions of love, sacrifice, friendship, family, and self discovery.
**Key words:** Harry Potter, children's literature, children's literature in Iran, J.K. Rowling, intercultural studies, Iran.
Introduction:

Reading *Harry Potter* in an Intercultural Context
In 1997, the first volume of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, was published in England. Almost a year later, the volume was republished under the title of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in the United States. Soon, the novel achieved a vast popularity and was published in most English-speaking countries such as Canada and Australia. It was also translated into dozens of different languages such as Persian, French, and Chinese (Heilman 3). Since then, many critics, among them Elizabeth E. Heilman, Daniel H. Nexon, Andrew Blake, John Granger, and Kim Becnel, have been studying the series from cultural, literary, and sociological perspectives. In this study, I will focus on the reception of the series in Iran in respect to issues of translation, gender values, censorship, and the representation of magic in the series.

In 1999, translated versions in Persian of the first three volumes of the *Harry Potter* series were published almost simultaneously in Iran. Before that time, the series was not very well-known in this country. However, *Harry Potter’s* quick reception in Tehran and other large cities of Iran encouraged Iranian publishers and translators to publish more copies of the series with a better quality of translation and copy. The issue of translation is important to a study of the reception of *Harry Potter* in Iran because most Iranian readers only have access to the translated versions in Persian, with only a minority reading the original in English. As a result, the Iranian responses are mainly to the translated text.

This study travels into the magical world of *Harry Potter* as both story and book series. As an Iranian reader of the series who moved to Canada in 2004, I provide an in-depth look at *Pottermania* from an intercultural point of view. As celebrated Iranian children’s author, poet, translator, and critic, Mostafa Rahmandoust, states in “The Iranian Professional Reader-Response Congress” (شمسی حرفه ای مطالعه شناسي) (بچه‌گانه نشست جامعه بررسی‌های شناسی), after publishing the *Harry Potter* series, editors
began a big competition that changed the Iranian book industry (112). Numerous Iranian academics and children’s literature experts, such as Rahmandoust and Houshang Moradi Kermani, have been studying the series from angles very similar to those of Western critics. However, few of them have focused on the intercultural aspect of the reception of the series in Iran.

The purpose of this study is to discover how the *Harry Potter* series has broken down some cultural boundaries and reinforced others, and has attracted many Iranian children and adults as readers. I heard about the series for the first time when I was accompanying my friends to the Annual International Book Exhibition of Tehran in the spring of 2000. I was simply passing a booth displaying the *Harry Potter* series when one of my friends picked up a volume enthusiastically and told us that it was very interesting. I ignored her and almost forgot about it until a few months later, when I was inspired by my teenage cousin, a big fan of *Harry Potter*. I then began reading the series during my vacation after the first year of university. Honestly, I was very disappointed after reading the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. As an adult fan of fantasy who has already read most internationally popular fantasy novels such as those by C.S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, and John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, I hoped to find something unique in *Harry Potter*. From a novel which was the best seller in most Western countries, such as England, Canada, and the United States, I expected a more interesting way of introducing magic. A flying motorcycle coming from the sky (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 11) sounded ridiculous to me, and a cat reading a map (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 2) resembled Carroll’s talking rabbit in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The first chapter of the first *Harry Potter* volume was overloaded with magic and was not that different from other fantasy novels I had read. However, when I continued reading the next chapters, I found that the volume was not
merely a fantasy novel full of magic; but it also included school stories, mystery-solving problems, exciting sports matches, severe teachers, good friends, cruel enemies, and many other interesting elements. Gradually, I got used to *Harry Potter*’s magical world and its identifiable characters. I was hooked by the mysterious adventures and became a fan of the series. While living in Iran, I always followed the news related to the *Harry Potter* series and the film adaptations by reading different newspapers and talking to other fans. By reading numerous Iranian articles about the series and hearing the Iranian national television news announcing the second volume as the bestselling children’s book in 2000, I had an overview of the series’ national popularity. Yet, having access to many different Persian translations of *Harry Potter*, I did not have much interest in reading the original English series until I moved to Canada in 2004.

Having the opportunity to read the series in English and following the news of its book history and film adaptation in a Western country helped me discover new notions of Western children’s literature that I had not noticed while living in Iran. I found some parts of the original version of the series had been changed in Persian translations. Most of the changes were around what were, and still are, known as Iranian cultural taboos, especially concerning certain gender issues such as girl’s clothing and close relationships between girls and boys. This kind of censorship made me more interested in finding other intercultural issues in Persian translations of *Harry Potter* to see whether they were censored or adapted. Moreover, I wondered if these changes influenced the reception of the series by Iranian children. I am very interested in the intercultural aspects of the reception of the book series as someone who grew up in Iran and first read *Harry Potter* in translation there, before moving to Canada where I undertook graduate studies in comparative literature and continued to follow the series and its critical reception in English. The reception of the novel in Canada is similar to that of most Western countries and
there are not enough cultural specificities to warrant a study of Canadian reception alone, except for its French translations as part of the reception in Quebec. However, as I will study further, the translations for French Canada are done in France, so I will compare translation strategies of French and Iranian translators.

In Canada, I read serious Western criticism on the magical world of the series for the first time. I had already seen historical British movies in which witches were sentenced to death. However, like most Iranian adults my age, I did not know that the use of magic was essentially a forbidden issue for fundamentalist Christians. To an Iranian immigrant from a highly superstitious cultural and traditional background, magic meant something different. As this study will reveal further, from an Iranian point of view, magic was related to fortunetellers and exorcists who wrote prescriptions in order to accomplish many good or evil purposes, such as solving marital problems, casting spells on someone, neutralizing jealous people’s “evil eyes,” or expelling evil spirits or “Jinn” from one’s life. These are supernatural creatures, like angels, that live in a parallel world to that of humans. In the Qur’an, Jinn are defined as being created from fire; they are from the same race as Satan, have free will, and can be either good or evil.

As a graduate student in Comparative Canadian Literature, I gained more knowledge on intercultural debates. Living in a largely secular country far away from my homeland gave me the chance to look back at Iranian culture and to investigate the main traditional and religious restrictions on Iranian children’s literature. Distance made materials quite difficult to get. To complete this study, I had many Persian translations of Harry Potter sent to me from Iran, along with several books related to my research, such as seven volumes of the History of Children’s Literature in Iran (نخستین ادبیات کودکان در ایران, 12+1: 13 Encyclopedic Entries on Talisman, Amulet, and Magic in Islamic Culture (تواریح + یک سبزه مقاله درباره خرافات، طلسم و جادو در فرهنگ ایران و اسلام), and The
I also received dozens of issues of *The Monthly Book of Children and Teenagers*, which is an important academic magazine on Children’s Literature in Iran. It is worth mentioning that apart from Afsaneh Najmabadi’s *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak’s “Authors and Authorities: Censorship and Literary Communication in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” which are both in English, all Iranian books and articles quoted in this study are originally written in Persian and I have often translated excerpts and quotations into English for this thesis.

**i) Iranian Children’s Literature**

Iranian children and young adults grow up in an Islamic society far from Western communities and without sufficient knowledge about Western countries to understand them. These young people are frequently told that most Western cultures are immoral due to their lack of suitable religious and ethical values. In “These Artificial Puppets,” Khosro Aghayari, a well-known Iranian children’s author and executive editor of *The Monthly Book of Children and Teenagers*, states that in the early years of their lives, Iranian children learn particular religious and political ideologies, which are interpreted for them by children’s books, cartoons, and movies (6). They learn to obey their parents and show respect to adults, elder siblings, and whoever is older in general. In Iran, there are many illustrated children’s books, which emphasize religious principles, such as praying, fasting, telling the truth, or helping the poor. Most of those books are biographies of prophets and Islamic holy characters whose ideologies play an important role in Iranian society. An example of such common stories is *The Creation of Adam and Eve*, an internationally-known narrative for children. However, besides religious and political-centered books, many other children’s books such as Iranian and international fairy
tales, adventure stories, and fantasies, are also published in Iran. Among Iranian books which are
everwritten for children and are not aimed specifically at teaching ideology, there is
Houshang Moradi Kermani’s *Stories of Majid*, which includes five volumes of thirty-seven short
stories published in the 1980s. Moradi Kermani is one of the most distinguished writers for
young people in Iran and has created many admired Iranian children’s books. Most of his works
are ironic social stories about working-class teenagers. He is read widely by both Iranian
children and adults and has received numerous Iranian awards including the Children’s Book
Council Award, and the Grand Prix of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children
and Young Adults in 1990. In an interview with *Hamshahri for Children and Teenagers* (همشیری
کودکان و نوجوان), Moradi Kermani confirms that most Iranian writers convey religious and political
ideologies in their works for children. According to him, the reason is that such writers are
mainly paid by specific governmental offices that wish to dictate particular doctrines (4). It is
worth mentioning that unlike most developed countries, there is no thriving book market in Iran.
Writing is not considered a job in Iran, and many unknown writers must pay publication fees in
order to have their works published. From my experience as an Iranian reader, one of the main
reasons for this difference in the book market is that Iran is a country that does not respect
copyright laws. Once a book is published, all rights are reserved for publishers and not for
writers. Even popular writers receive an agreed-upon amount once, before publishing their
books, and no matter how well their works sell, only the publishers receive the subsequent
profits. Furthermore, since readers have access to many illegal, free electronic or hard copies of
books, and they are not afraid of breaking copyright laws, only a few of them actually pay the
full price for their books.

Mohammad Mohammadi and Zohreh Ghaeni, the winners of the 2006 International
Sponsorship Grant from the Children's Literature Association, state in *The History of Children's Literature in Iran*, that children's literature in Iran goes back to 3000 years ago. It includes lullabies, folktales, and rhythmic fables (423). One of the oldest Iranian children's works is the poetic *Mouse and Cat*, written by popular Iranian poet and satirist, Ubayd Zakani, in the 14th century. Although this book is a political satire, it has usually been considered as a part of children's literature in Iran (88). We can also consider the well-known Iranian poet of late 16th and early 17th centuries, Sheikh Bahaei, who is also known as a scholar, philosopher, architect, mathematician, and astronomer. (The year 2009 is named after him by UNESCO). His works include poetic narratives which have always been included in Iranian school books (Mohammadi & Ghaeni 96). Among his books, are *Bread and Halva* (نان و حلو), *Bread and Cheese* (نان و پنیر), *Milk and Sugar* (شیر و شکر), and *Parrot Narrating* (خوبار نامه).

The translation of Iranian children's literature is divided into the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras. The second era includes translations from Greek, Sanskrit, and Arabic languages. Books such as *One Thousand and One Nights* (from Arabic) and *Kalila and Dimna* (from Sanskrit) were translated in that era and are considered as children's literature (Mohammadi & Ghaeni 434). Later, in the early 20th century, with the establishment of the Translation House (دارالترجمه), which was a state translation institution, translation for children entered the modern era. The Persian translation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the most popular translated Western novels of the post-Islamic period (Mohammadi & Ghaeni 438).

Generally, we consider Jules Verne's works and John Christopher's *The White Mountains* trilogy as the best received translated fantasies and science fiction in Iran (Sepidnameh 25). Among the recent Western fantasy novels, the *Harry Potter series*, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Astrid Lindgern's *The Brothers Lionheart* are the best sellers in Iran. All three
fantasies share the same theme of the fight between good and evil, as well as many magical creatures such as dwarves, giants, and dragons.

The *Harry Potter* series narrates seven school years in the life of Harry, an eleven-year-old orphan wizard boy who has miraculously survived the attack of the evil wizard, who killed his parents. Harry lives with his unkind aunt and uncle and knows nothing about his real identity before his eleventh birthday, when he receives mail from the school of Wizardry and Witchcraft of Hogwarts. He then enters the wizardry community where he is well-known because of the lightening-shaped scar on his forehead, caused by the dark wizard’s attack. In the school of wizardry, Harry finds a new family among his supporting friends, professors, and step-father. He also finds out that he has to fight Lord Voldemort, who has lost his body after failing to kill Harry, and has been using his fellows’ bodies ever since. Harry has to kill the dark wizard in order to secure the survival of the wizardry community and himself as well. As I will review in detail, later in this study, each book of the *Harry Potter* series covers a year at Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry where Harry and his friends, Ron and Hermione, are studying. They have to go through many struggles which get more life threatening at the end of each volume. By aging the characters, the series gets darker, and the struggles more dangerous. In the last two books, which are the darkest, some of the key characters die, and finally, at the end of the series, Harry has to kill the Dark Lord Voldemort or he will lose his own life. The opening chapter of each volume of the series shows Harry living with his cruel aunt and her family. Yet, readers know that he is the savior of the wizardry community. The first three volumes of the series are mostly devoted to introducing different characters and their backgrounds, revealing magical subjects and spells, featuring the childhood period at Hogwarts where students try to discover secrets of the wizardry world, explaining how Voldemort tries to come back to the physical
world by hunting or using different wizards, and proving the important role of Harry and his
friends in preventing the Dark Lord’s resurrection. The first book of the series, *Harry Potter and
the Philosopher’s Stone*, opens the story by giving information about Harry’s life. He goes to the
wizardry community and finds good friends, like Ron and Hermione, as well as rivals, such as
Draco Malfoy. Soon, the already exciting volume becomes even more exciting by revealing that
Voldemort is using one of his devoted servants’ bodies in order to acquire the Philosopher’s
Stone, which is believed to make one immortal. Nevertheless, the evil wizard fails to achieve his
goal, because Harry and his friends fight with him and make him disappear again at the end of
the volume.

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* follows a similar theme and pictures Tom
Riddle’s (Lord Voldemort’s) attempt to be resurrected by seducing Ron’s younger sister, Ginny,
who opens the door to the Chamber of Secrets and lets the giant serpent Basilisk out in order to
help the Dark Lord. Again, with the help of Ron and Hermione, Harry goes into the chamber,
which is in fact a vast underground dungeon with many long and dark tunnels. There, he kills the
Basilisk, fights with Tom Riddle, and rescues Ginny. The atmosphere of the second novel is
much darker and scarier, but there are still no human deaths.

The third volume, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, introduces Harry’s
godfather, Sirius Black, who has recently fled from Azkaban Prison and is believed to be a traitor
that caused Harry’s parent to die at the hands of Voldemart Voldemort. However, at the end of
the story and during a fight with one of Death Eaters (Voldemort’s servants), readers find out
that guiltless Sirius has been denounced and jailed as a traitor by Death Eaters who did not want
him to support Harry. Gradually, as I will explain in the third chapter, the next volumes become
darker and more mature in content, and Rowling leads her readers into a world where they can
experience life-threatening struggles and the death of important characters.

This thesis is an exploratory intercultural journey to find out how the series is received in Iran. I will explore intercultural issues in the reception of the text in terms of values regarding childhood, gender construction, concepts of magic, and religious beliefs. I will also survey different contexts for producing children’s literature, as well as the mediation of translation. This thesis will illustrate the intercultural process of translating, marketing, consuming, and critiquing the *Harry Potter* series in Iran.

**ii) Reader-Response and Intercultural Theories**

To many people and critics, like Moradi Kermani and Saeed Matin, *Harry Potter* may seem to be simply a children’s book which is well accepted by readers for a short period of time but not worth studying. Yet, I will argue that the reception of an international best-seller includes important elements that make it appeal to readers from different nationalities. Readers from around the world have different historical backgrounds, cultural norms and ethical values. So, how can a “simple” book fulfill a range of expectations for various readers? What are their real expectations and in which way do they differ? To what extent do readers from different countries interpret the same meaning from the same work? Do they respond to the work in a similar way? Does the translation of a Western novel in Iran reflect different cultural expectations, some of which lead to censorship? In the first chapter of my thesis, I will try to find answers to these questions about the reception of the series in Iran with the help of reader-response and intercultural theories.

Rather than denoting a specific method or critical practice, reader-response criticism is a general term that refers to a number of different practices. Generally, reader-response theory is divided into three major subdivisions. The formalist school of reader-response theory, which is
mostly supported by theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Georges Poulet, refers to the text as the most important factor in conveying the messages of the author. Formalists claim that in the reading process, readers are passive factors who leave their own world and become a part of the text as soon as they start reading (Poulet 42-43; Iser, “The Reading Process” 54). On the other hand, the post-structuralist branch of reader-response theory centers on readers as the main factor in understanding the meaning of a text. Theorists, such as Stanley Eugene Fish, who put great emphasis on readers as playing a leading role in the act of reading argue that each individual has a world of his or her own that cannot be simply ignored during the act of reading. In fact, readers unconsciously use their own life experiences, and link them to different parts of the text, to understand the meaning (Fish, “Interpreting the Variorum” 177). However theorists such as Jane P. Tompkins, Marilyn M. Cooper, and Michael Holzman state that both text and reader play equally important roles in the reading process and one should consider the factors that affect readers and writers in their act of reading and writing. These theorists claim social factors play an important role in the way writers write and readers interpret a text.

The focus of reader-response criticism on the construction of a text originates in the branch of philosophy called Phenomenology, which deals with an understanding of how things appear. The philosopher-rhetorician, Walter J. Ong breaks new ground for thinking rhetorically about audience. In his leading article, “The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction,” he explains that as a result of phenomenological concepts, reader-response theory recognizes the reader as a necessary part in the author-text-reader relationship. It is the reader who continues a literary work, or in other words, a text is not completed until readers actualize it based on their own knowledge and experiences (9-21).

When we are reading a work for the first time, not only do we read words relatively,
waiting for images and concepts to show themselves, but we also put details together, fill in the
gaps and overcome uncertainties. Therefore, as Iranian theorist Hossein Eskandari explains,
writers should know whom they are writing for and that would help them better transmit their
intended message. While they imagine their audiences, authors have to consider different factors
such as age, sex, nationality, religion, and culture. Each of these elements may have significant
effects on the creation of a written work. Ignoring them can cause readers to misinterpret the
meaning, and therefore, the reception of the book will be less successful (Eskandari 101).

Reading a book in another language or in translation can be studied as intercultural
communication. As Marshall R. Singer states in Perception & Identity in Intercultural
Communication, we bring our own culturally-rooted view of the universe to our relationships
with other people (3). Obviously, individuals may have different views about life, mostly related
to the groups in which they have grown up. Hence, according to Singer, the majority of people’s
experiences and beliefs are conditioned by the culture to which they belong. Members of
different cultural groups are taught different values, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of judgment
“toward specific stimuli” (Singer 28).

Like Singer, other anthropologists and psychologists working on intercultural studies,
such as Harry C. Triandis and Young Yum Kim, explain that when members of different cultures
come into contact, the more they share in terms of cultural, social, and physical characteristics,
the better they get along with each other. In Culture and Social Behavior, Triandis states: “there
are many types of similarity: physical, age, sex, attitudes, abilities, social class, race, religion,
political, and so on. Each of these types of similarity can potentially lead to attraction and small
levels of social distance” (258).

Reading a book is a writer-reader-text triangle. If one is going to study the reception of a
work, she or he cannot ignore the cultural circumstances under which a specific volume is written; neither can he or she ignore the cultural background and contextual conditions under which it is read.

Studying both reader-response theory and intercultural studies provides me with interesting overlaps between these two branches of theory and gives me the opportunity to better develop my study of how the *Harry Potter* series is received in Iran. With the help of the two schools of theory, I will explore the cultural contexts under which Iranian children read the series and ask whether these contexts shape the reception of the volume in terms of how readers identify with characters, understand social relationships in the novels, and follow the general themes of the series.

iii) Reception in North America

Since this study is undertaken from an Iranian point of view, many Iranian cultural norms and taboos may simply be normalized and fail to be discussed by an Iranian citizen. However, studying different negative and positive non-Iranian critiques about *Harry Potter* highlight some important features of Iranian culture to me. Among these features, I can name the issue of magic, religious taboos, and the construction of childhood and gender in Iran.

The second chapter will draw more similarities and differences between Iranian and Western cultures in terms of religious restrictions, cultural norms, and book markets. By analyzing the reception of *Harry Potter* in North America, I will discuss which aspects of the series have been more closely studied by Western critics, and therefore, in finding out more about Western cultural norms, values, beliefs, and taboos, my study of the reception of the series in Iran is strengthened.

In order to better discuss the reception of *Harry Potter* in North America, this chapter is
divided into three sections: cultural, literary, and critical and social perspectives. The focus of this part of my study is on North American critics, including French and English-Canadian theorists and journalists. However, I will cite some British critics, such as Maria Nikolajeva, because of their relevance to my research on the reception of the series in English-speaking countries.

In *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, the American critic Elizabeth E. Heilman calls the new Harry Potter phenomenon “Pottermania,” and strongly criticizes multinational companies who are trying to make *Harry Potter* popular. “Warner Brothers” is one of the companies to which she refers, since it has the right to produce the *Harry Potter* movies and to advertise them. Heilman argues that we are making today’s children into consumers and that the *Harry Potter* series is an example of this. According to her, the series cannot attract children’s attention all by itself. There are many other issues such as advertisements that help explain its success and make children believe that the series is interesting and worth reading (1-10).

On the other hand, another American critic, a professor in education, Peter Appelbaum, takes into account the wizardry school of Hogwarts as one of the important reasons for *Harry Potter*’s success. In “Harry Potter’s World: Magic, Technoculture, and Becoming Human,” Appelbaum states that certainly, there is no wizardry school in our everyday world. Everything is exciting in Hogwarts, where there is all the magic that children wish to see and imagine. According to Appelbaum, magic acts differently in the world of the text than for readers’ lived reality. Within the text, magic is presented as an ancient technology in a new form which can solve all problems that science and technology cannot. However, the difference between the school inside the books, where Harry and his friends are studying, and schools outside the
volumes is that all students of Hogwarts learn magic and know that they will use it to solve their problems. Moreover, as Appelbaum writes, outside the series “the uses of school learning are remote at best, good for a promised future; inside the novel, kids use what they have learned immediately to solve life-threatening puzzles and to save the fate of the world as we know it” (44).

According to Appelbaum, another important aspect of the series is Harry’s self-knowledge. He passes through many phases to know who he is and what powers he has. All those phases lead him to a self-understanding that continually saves his life. Therefore, as Appelbaum discusses, the series contains what Michel Foucault calls a “technology of morality,” which is the transformation of self by one’s own powers and means, or with the help of others (44).

By studying the reception of *Harry Potter* in North America, one discovers that religious arguments are among the most popular challenges to the novel. Some Western fundamentalist Christian critics, such as Alison Lentini and Stephen Dollins, argue that the *Harry Potter* series is harmful to children because it presents disturbing dark issues of death, grief, and magic. According to such critics, by presenting these issues as harmless fun, the series persuades children to learn magic and the dark arts (Gish 263). In “Controversial Content in Children’s Literature: Is *Harry Potter* Harmful to Children?”, Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty quote Joseph Chambers as saying: “Without question I believe the *Harry Potter* series is a creation of hell helping prepare the younger generation to welcome biblical prophecies of demons and devils led by Lucifer himself” (qtd. in Taub & Servaty 55).

In “*Harry Potter*, A Return to the Romantic Hero,” British scholar and Professor of education at Cambridge University Maria Nikolajeva, defines the secret of *Harry Potter’s*
great success as its mix of different popular genres. In her opinion, the *Harry Potter* novels can be regarded as mystery novels, in which child protagonists are more powerful than adults and succeed in finding what the best detectives cannot (130-140). *Harry Potter*’s success could be partially because of its attempt to bring a romantic hero into children’s literature: he lost his parents when he was only one year old, and he grew into a teenager, unaware of his magical powers and the real reason for his parents’ death. He was transferred to another society where he was known as the survivor and where he was easily recognized by the scar on his forehead. Harry is not a god or the son of a god as in mystic or religious fictions, but he is rather a romantic hero (Nikolajeva 125-140).

In “Comedy, Conflict, and Community: Home and Family in *Harry Potter*,” scholars John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro discuss notions of home and family in *Harry Potter*. The last part of my second chapter will cover these issues more closely and will discover if they play an important role in the series’ reception by children in North America. Many critics argue that the series is a boarding school story, which is less about families than about a boarding school, dormitories, Christmas parties, teachers, sports and so on.

**iv) The Translation of the Series in Iran**

As I will discuss in the third chapter of this study, original copies of Western books are hard to find in Iran, due to political and religious concerns and censorship. Therefore, since most Iranian readers of the *Harry Potter* series read it in the Persian language (also known as Farsi, as I will explain in more detail in the chapter on translation), the quality of the translation plays an important role in their understanding of the text. Consequently, it is important to study different strategies of translation employed by Persian translators who have tried to adapt the translated versions to Iranian culture. For this part of the study, I will also use some examples of the French
translation of the series, that are pertinent to the reception of the series in Quebec in order to
better clarify translation techniques, and to highlight the role of Persian translators in the
reception of the series in Iran in comparison with the role of translators of the series into French.

Contrary to Quebec, where there are currently no Quebecois translations of the *Harry Potter* series and where readers read translations by the French translator Jean-François Ménard, in Iran there are forty-three publishers that publish Persian translations of the series (Anvari 127). Most of those publishers have a translator of their own, and some of them even have a group of translators, which means a different translator for each chapter (Anvari 128). It is clear that the translation of a book may be one of the most important factors in its success or failure in other countries. A good translation attracts readers and makes them interested in reading, while a bad one does the opposite. As an undergraduate student in English translation studies in Iran, I have seen many Iranian children who read the first volume of a translated series. However, as a result of poor translation, they lose interest in going on to read the next volumes. Yet, fortunately, readers have many different Persian translations of the *Harry Potter* series to choose among. Most of the Persian translations of the series have different titles, as well as different methods of translation. For example, a Persian reader has at least five titles to chose from for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The translation of the Persian titles of this volume into English are as follows: *Harry Potter and the Magic Stone, Harry Potter and the Kimia Stone* (in Iranian culture, Kimia is a magic stone which is believed to cure illnesses and to turn soil into gold), *Harry Potter and the Miracle Stone, Harry Potter and the Panacea*, and *Harry Potter and Panacea of Everlasting Life*. As we can see, each title offers different referents and their associated meaning may appeal to some readers and not to others, and therefore, they may affect the reception of the book in Iran.
In the third chapter of my thesis, and by using Arthur Henry Bleeck’s *A Concise Grammar of the Persian Language*, I will briefly describe the Persian language in terms of the alphabet and grammatical rules. This will help me to better analyze the mandatory changes made to the series by Iranian translators.

As I will discuss, Professor Anthony Pym, Spanish translator and researcher of translation and intercultural studies, states in *Translation and Text Transfer* that as a result of intercultural differences, most translated texts do not convey the exact messages of source texts. I will refer to celebrated translation scholars, such as Jeremy Munday, Lawrence Venuti, Jan Van Coillie, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who discuss different methods of translation which enable translators to transfer both cultural and literal contexts in the most faithful way possible. These translators question the two famous methods of “naturalizing,” which presumes the invisibility of the translator bring authors toward target readers, and “alienating,” or moving readers toward authors. Unlike Schleiermacher, who is an advocate of the “naturalizing” of translated texts (43), Venuti seems to agree with the “alienating,” approach or what he calls the “foreignization” method of translation (*Translator’s Invisibility* 20).

Subsequently, I will study the adaptations made in the Persian translations of the *Harry Potter* series, and how these adaptations affect the reception of the series in Iran. Translation scholars and lexicographer Jeremy Munday explains in *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, that making adaptations in a translation is somehow a rewriting of the source text. Considering TR’s (target reader’s) cultural values and norms, translators try to transfer the most familiar meanings and senses which are conveyed by source texts (119) or what Lawrence Venuti calls “domestication” (*Translator’s Invisibility* 20).

This chapter will cover different cultural and linguistic problems that have arisen in
translating the *Harry Potter* series, and how the French and Iranian translators have dealt with them. Analyzing several examples of Persian and French translations of the series will help clarify which techniques are more internationally applied by different translators. Certainly, the issue of censorship in Iran, which will also be discussed in this chapter, is an important factor in the translation of Western novels in this country, and it affects the methods of translation. By analyzing some of the most popular Persian translations of *Harry Potter*, I will present different types of censorship in Iran in terms of cultural, political, and religious taboos. This analysis will reveal the most important Iranian cultural beliefs and help us acquire a more complex view of how these intercultural differences have influenced Iranian publishers and readers (especially children) in their reading of *Harry Potter* in Iran.

v) Intercultural Reception in Iran

In the last chapter of this study, I will analyze negative and positive criticism of *Harry Potter* in Iran. I will also discuss some important aspects of the Iranian cultural context which may influence the reception of the series by Iranian readers. As in the second chapter, this chapter will focus upon the following perspectives: literary, cultural studies, and sociological.

There are many Iranian critics, like Moradi Kermani and Saeed Matin, who believe that the series owes its popularity to its wide range of marketing. However, Khosro Aghayari has a different idea. Although he does not deny the role of marketing, he says that it cannot be the only reason. In "These Artificial Puppets" (ان آدمکه‌ای مصنوعی), Aghayari refers to the issue of advertising in the Iranian book market and explains that there is no such thing as marketing a book in Iran in the same sense as in the British and American book markets (4). He states that the *Harry Potter* series has some notable characteristics, such as its use of a variety of genres and using ordinary children as protagonists, that distinguish it from other similar books, like *The
Lord of the Rings, which is a high fantasy.

Similar to Aghayari, Iranian critic Mohsen Neysari refers to the “special genre” of Harry Potter as one of the most important reasons for its success. In “Harry Potter: A Novel that Should Be Reviewed,” Neysari examines the series in terms of its variety of themes and genres. According to him, there is no single genre in Harry Potter, and we can find characteristics of satiric, dramatic, mythical, criminal, horror and fantasy stories (115).

Iranian writer, historian, and critic, Shokouh Haji Nasrollah, states in “Harry Potter and His Journey to Self-Knowledge,” that Harry Potter is a mythical fantasy that includes notions of fear and fun. She explains that there are three layers in the novel. The first, or secular, layer is the exterior one where the child is free from the control of school and adults to live among friends (and without parents). The second, or the medial layer shows Harry’s going back and forth between the real and the wizardry worlds. This is in fact his journey to his own soul, which leads him to self-knowledge. The last, or coming-of-age, layer is full of secrets that must be resolved, and the author uses many mythical and magical tools to make the atmosphere mysterious and dangerous (7-10).

In the last chapter of this thesis, I will also discuss Iranian cultural beliefs in terms of magic, magical creatures, and religious restrictions, as well as social and political taboos, especially as they pertain to gender. By reading about these beliefs and taboos, readers will better understand how the Harry Potter series is received in Iran by ordinary readers and by critics. As a result, they will also better comprehend the issue of censorship in Iran. Contrary to most Western countries where the series has been frequently condemned for presenting magic, Iranian religious leaders and critics largely ignore the negative aspects of magic. The final chapter will examine the issue of magic in Iran in terms of Islamic beliefs and explain why it is not
considered as taboo in Iranian culture as it is in Christian culture. Many Iranian citizens believe in religious magic as a powerful tool for solving physical, social, and mental problems. For instance, in “Prayer-Writing in Iran,” Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani explains that this kind of magic is known as “Prayer-writing” (دعاء نويسي" in Iran and refers to using verses of the Qur’an in order to perform magic (140). The cross-cultural issues of the series make it a challenge for critics who insist that such cross-cultural works are not easy for children to understand. The last chapter of my thesis indicates how Iranian readers cope with these intercultural differences and whether these differences change their reception of the series or not.
Chapter 1:
The Role of Reader-Response and Intercultural Theories in Understanding Reception
The meaning [readers] have is a consequence of their not being empty; for they include the making and revising of assumptions, [...], the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles.

(Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" 172)

Culture is the glue that binds groups together. Without cultural preferences people would have difficulty living together. Culture is what defines a human community, individuals and social organizations.

(De Mooij, Consumer Behavior and Culture 26)

Since a few years ago when I started studying the reception of the Harry Potter series, I have had to answer many questions regarding how readers of different genders, ages, and nationalities have received the novel. Have all readers responded to the volumes in the same way? Have they interpreted the same meaning and experienced the same feelings? Have they accepted or rejected the series for the same reasons? If the answer to these questions is positive, what is the secret behind this fantasy fiction which makes it appeal to most of its readers? If the answer is negative, which factors influence readers in their readings and lead them to different understandings of the same text? In order to find answers to these and other similar questions, I draw upon reader-response and intercultural studies, for they provide detailed explanation about the act of reading and factors which may influence this process.

1.1. The Author and the Reader as Two Poles of the Reading Process

According to David H. Richter, the author of The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and
Contemporary Trends, “interest in the reader is a late development in critical theory. As a topic for investigation, it has attracted each of the major schools of thought, from Marxism through structuralism and feminism to deconstruction” (931). Well-known critics, such as Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Georges Poulet, and Hans Robert Jauss, have been attracted to and had different approaches toward reader-response theory. Although this theory is usually divided into three branches, popular theorist and author Lois Tyson explains that reader-response theorists have two approaches in general. According to her, theorists such as Iser and Poulet claim that texts play the main role in the reading process and readers are passive factors who leave their own world and become a part of the text during the act of reading while other scholars like Fish and Ong argue that readers have a key role in understanding of literature.

i) Formalism: The Author as the Almighty

Among the known theorists who support the formalist point of view, or the primacy of the text, we can refer to Wolfgang Iser, who claims that a text is mainly the product of an author’s intention even though reading of a text involves the intention of the reader in order to be completed. According to Iser, the theme of a text is linked to readers’ expectations and guides their interpretation of the text. During this process, there are “indeterminacies” or “gaps” in the storyline that involve readers in the “world” of the text. Therefore, “understanding” occurs when the reader discovers the undefined signs of a text (Iser, Act of Reading 24-25). By reading about Iser’s position toward reader-response theory, one can understand that a good reading is one in which the main structures of the text are unchanged. These structures are indeed the essential meanings of a text and the way the author conveys them to the audience. According to Iser, it is “the text” which dominates the reading process by engaging readers and drawing them into its textual world. It does so by a textual “repertoire” that presents an internal progression of plot
that a reader can follow. These developing units and sentence structures produce a sequence of anticipations that involve readers in the story line and make them complete the textual meaning. (Iser, Act of Reading 93-111). Consequently, Iser explains, the literary work has two poles that he calls the artistic and the aesthetic: the first one is the author’s text, and the latter is the realization by the reader. “In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization, but must be situated somewhere between the two [...] Thus the gamut of theory stretches from Subjectivism, where it is felt that each person will recreate the work in his own way, to Absolution, where it is felt that an ideal standard has been revealed to which each work of art should conform” (Iser, Act of Reading 21-23).

According to Iser, readers should be able to fill in these gaps by using the information which is already given to them in the text. Readers have to collect what is given to them through the story and put it together like pieces of a puzzle in order to find answers to their uncertainties. Therefore, in the act of reading there is a movement from one literary unit to another and it is the reader who puts these units together in order to interpret their collective meaning. By doing so, the reader gets totally involved in the text and becomes a part of it.

Readers of the Harry Potter series face many such gaps and uncertainties that need to be completed and understood. There are quite a lot of codes and referents in the series that may not be familiar to readers. While reading Harry Potter, readers gain more and more imaginative experience, most of which is totally new to them. These experiences involve small pieces of information which may seem unimportant at first glance, but often turn out to be essential information that is key information to the whole storyline. However, since the series consists of seven long volumes full of mysteries and doubts, readers must keep in mind each and every minor detail. Indeed, this mystery-solving theme of the series is an important factor in its
success. As critics Anne Hiebert Alton, Ja’far Payvar and Haji Nasrollah explain, the series is a mosaic of different genres and themes, including mystery solving. These kinds of various themes are interesting for readers, especially children and teenagers, and encourage them to go on reading the novel in order to find answers to their questions. The *Harry Potter* books offer children a world full of unknowns to be known, and mysteries to be solved by the end of the story. Therefore, readers become a part of the texts by making the links between different aspects of the novels and by interpreting what the author is trying to convey. For instance, what happens in the zoo in the second chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* is one of the early important details which will turn out to play an important role in the overall series. In this scene, readers find out that Harry is able to talk to snakes, which may seem a minor factor in the series, but the more we proceed, the more we understand about wizards who can talk in snakes’ language which is called “Parseltongue” (J.K. Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 165). Little by little, Rowling reveals significant features of characters who can speak “Parseltongue.” Throughout the novels, we will discover that only a few wizards have been able to speak this particular tongue and most of them have been dark wizards, including Lord Voldemort.

Dobby, the house-elf, also initially seems to be an unimportant character introduced in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, but emerges as a key character that saves Harry’s life in the last volume. Therefore, I believe that relatively minor details in *Harry Potter* may help us complete the “gaps” and lead us to a better understanding of the meaning intended by the author.

Another major advocate of formalism, Georges Poulet, states in “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority,” that when we read a book, it is as if we encounter a human being. The difference is that the book lets us enter its world and shares its feelings with us. The book is no longer an object, “it has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin
to exist [...] there is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self” (42). To him, realizing a text is an “internal process” in which the text is the subjective factor and readers seem to be passive in the act of reading. As a result, the meaning of a text is not dependent on the reader. Nevertheless, by reading a literary work, the interiority of reader is hosted by the interiority of author (42-48).

According to this text-centered school of reader-response theory, readers should forget themselves and their experiences in order to gain new experiences by reading a text. In fact, this is what Tompkins points out as “dying, in order that the text may live” (Tompkins, “An Introduction to Reader-Response” xv). Poulet explains that “whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an I, and yet the I which I pronounce is not myself [...] Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I. I am on loan to another [...] When I am absorbed in reading, a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me” (45).

This theory is rejected by many theorists, especially Stanley Fish. Still, it is applicable in studying the reception of the Harry Potter series in Iran and elsewhere in the world. As I briefly explained in the Introduction and will study more closely in the second and fourth chapters of this thesis, one of the main factors in Harry Potter’s success is its introduction of a new world to readers. By reading the novel, readers leave their own world and travel to Hogwarts with Harry and his friends. During the reading process, most readers of the series are absorbed into the new world which is being offered to them and become what Poulet calls “another I.” For instance, they then experience events that cannot be experienced in real life. As both Western and Iranian scholars, such as Peter Appelbaum, Elizabeth E. Heilman, and Mostafa Rahmandoust, state, presenting such innovative atmospheres and incidents for the reader to experience is one of the
strongest aspects of the series, which makes it appeal to different readers. It may be what makes
the series different from many other fantasy fictions in terms of creating a whole new world
where readers can experience both real and magical situations at the same time.

Quebecois journalist Marie-Ève Morasse refers to the unique world of Harry Potter and
writes about many teenagers and adults who have talked to her about their experience of
addiction in reading the series. According to Morasse, readers forget about their own world as
soon as they begin to read the series. For an instance, she refers to a fourteen-year-old boy who is
a big fan of Rowling’s fiction. The teenager says that Harry Potter is the last thing he always
thinks about before going to bed. His own room and bed are completely gone and he finds
himself in Hogwarts. He imagines that he is sleeping in a dormitory in the Gryffindor tower and
talks to Ron awhile (A7).

In “Ways of Reading Harry Potter: Multiple Stories for Multiple Reader Identities,”
Kathleen F. Malu refers to the “metaphor of addiction” and states that many young and adult
fans of Harry Potter are addicted to the series after reading the first chapters. Most readers of the
novel experience the same addiction which begins as soon as they enter the world of the story
and feel that “time stands still” while they are reading. Unconsciously, they become a part of the
text and everything else around them vanishes. They are no longer sure if they have entered the
world of Harry Potter or if he, Harry, has entered their world. Shaun Johnson, an adult fan of
the series and a graduate student in the teaching program at Washington State University,
testifies to being absorbed by the magical world of the wizard boy. In “The Harry Potter Craze:
From Skeptic to Addict,” Johnson writes: “after reading J. K. Rowling’s first installment, I knew
I was addicted. I could not for the life of me put it down [...] I began to use my imagination and
the barrier between fantasy and reality blurred. When reading in a public place, I felt as if I were
the only person left in the world and I wished I could borrow Harry’s invisibility cloak to disappear for awhile” (666-67).

Appelbaum, Heilman, Rahmandoust, and most theorists of children’s literature claim that another important element in the series’ success is that readers can easily identify with the main characters. According to these theorists, Harry Potter is a typical child who experiences new adventures and faces different needs of puberty. Consequently, since these needs are internationally the same, most young and teenage readers of the series feel close to Harry and consider him a hero (Nikolajeva 139; Elster 207). Here, one may argue that in Rowling’s fiction, Poulet’s “I” and “another I” can be regarded as two equally important poles in the act of reading. I would agree however that readers do not completely ignore their own identities and experiences, but bring them to their journey to the textual world. This interrelationship between the two “I”s leads us to other divisions within reader-response criticism which rely on both reader and writer in the reception of a text.

ii) Post-Structuralism: The Kingdom of the Reader

Reader-response criticism goes beyond formalism by presenting post-structuralism which knows readers as being the most important factor in reading process. In his highly influential article “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” Stanley Fish explains that it is not right to define the world of literature as an object. He disagrees with formalists’ defining of the literary work as if it were an object spread out before them (Fox 397). By following the formalist view, Fish argues, one may find essential patterns in the text she or he examines; but one fails to consider that the work is different to a reader who is reading the pages and being attracted or affected by textual images that appear and disappear as she or he proceeds to read. Here, contrary to Poulet, who claims that readers disappear in the act of reading, Fish states that
it is "the text" which disappears, and the reader "creates" meaning (Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" 177-83). The world of a text, he presumes, is a world created by words and is mostly built by readers as they perform grammatical actions and make interpretive decisions in understanding each sentence of the text. According to Fish, "The reader's activities are at the center of attention, where they are regarded, not as leading to meaning, but as having meaning. The meaning they have is a consequence of their not being empty; for they include the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgments, the coming to and abandoning of conclusion,[...], the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles" (Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" 172). For Fish, the reading process is not a component in the production of meaning but the component (Fox 399-404). The reading condition controls the text, which guides the mind of the reader but has no identity outside itself. So, the text can only provide potential meanings which are then actualized by readers. Readers then choose meanings that meet their interpretive strategies. In other words, there is no intention of a text, but "readers performing acts" that create meaning (Fish, Is There a Text? 11-14). We can realize that according to Fish, interpretive strategies give texts their shape and the meaning of a text is not separate from the reader's act of understanding (Fox 399-404).

By revealing the key role of readers in the act of reading, the postmodernist branch of reader-response theory leads us further in studying the reception of Harry Potter in Iran. It opens a new window through which we are able to have a more precise sense of readers who have an important role in interpreting the meaning of a text. In this approach, readers are no longer submissive parts of the reading process who forget their own selves once they begin reading a text. Rather, they are subjective factors with their own identities and use their past experiences in decoding messages in the text. Readers then create their own meaning and
interpret the message in their own way, which may vary from one reader to another.

While the fantasy world of *Harry Potter* may be new to many readers and no matter how different it is from their real world, readers cannot avoid mingling their own experiences of ordinary life with their new imaginative experiences of the wizardry world. Despite all his magical powers and fame, Harry is a boy like any ordinary child and is living in a society where there are rules to obey. Even though he is studying at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where he can learn magic, there are strict limits that he should respect as a student. Being a wizard or a witch does not mean being a superhuman and having endless freedom. It rather implies being an individual in an organized society with its own boundaries, where magic is used as means of technology and not as a tool for anarchy. Therefore, although readers live in another world and study at non-magical schools, they share many conditions with students at Hogwarts.

Harry and other characters presented in the novel are not different from ordinary people in terms of emotional and physical characteristics. They can get hurt, both physically and emotionally; they can be punished, scared, or depressed; they can fall in love and can feel happy or sad and lonely. In short, they share many experiences with readers and thus it is almost inevitable for readers to call upon their past experiences in their reading of this fiction. As most critics, such as Appelbaum, Malu, Hollie Anderson, and Rahmandoust, suggest, this wide range of shared interests, fears, needs, and life experiences is by no doubt another essential factor in the success of the series. In “Harry Is a Real Friend” (مری یک دوست واقعی است), Iranian high school student Niloufar Khatir writes about her own interpretation of the *Harry Potter* series. According to her essay, Khatir feels very close to Harry and his friends, for they have similar problems to teachers, parents and teenagers all over the world:
I, you, all of us sometimes feel that Harry is the only one who knows and understands our situation, because he is also experiencing it in his own life [...] I can easily pour my heart out before him and am sure that he can hear my voice. With Harry, I get happy, distressed, excited, or scared. I cry and laugh with him. I really love Harry; he is a true friend for me. Think a little bit more, and then you will realize that he is your friend too. He is a real friend for everyone. (27)

Here, the reader who is in the crucial period of puberty requires a real friend who has the same needs and life conditions. It is clear that as an Iranian teenager, Khatir has learned that mentioning puberty issues in public is a cultural taboo. Therefore, she is shy and cannot talk to her parents about her puberty needs and unanswered questions. By reading the series, she can be said to try to link her life experience to the world of the text in order to free herself from fear and loneliness, and satisfy curiosity. Like many other teenage readers of the novel, Khatir is looking for a way to express her wishes, break the rules, and disobey her parents and other adults who have imprisoned her in the jail of “do’s and don’t’s.”

This engagement with life experiences in reading *Harry Potter* is not only for teenagers and children, but adults can also relate their experiences and feelings to the textual world. As Malu explains, “in reading the *Harry Potter* series with a parent identity, readers may find this story further and further troubling, uplifting, and perhaps melodramatic” (86-87). In the story, Harry is an orphan boy who is living with his aunt’s unkind family. Parents who read about Harry’s hard times at his aunt’s house cannot stop thinking about what may happen to their own children.

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1 My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
children if they face the same situation. “The fear that such a fate may befall any child can easily leave parents, including parents in blended families, and guardians, with many, many sleepless nights!” (86).

iii) The Reader and the Author as Creators of Literary Meaning

By considering the afore-mentioned branches of reader-response theory, and my selected responses by readers, one sees that neither text nor reader has autonomy; they both mingle in the act of reading and cannot exist apart from one another. These theories introduce the main components of the reading process as author, text, and reader, which now bring us to another school of reader-response criticism that considers all three components equally essential. Theorists like Marilyn M. Cooper, Michael Holzman, Kenneth A. Bruffee, Hans Robert Jauss, and Walter J. Ong define the act of reading as a triangular process which consists of reader, text, and writer as its angles.

As Walter J. Ong suggests in his article “The Writer’s Audience Is Always Fiction,” in order to write a successful text, the first step that authors should take is to have an idea of their audience (9-21). To do so, authors can analyze different ways through which typical readers read a text. They can even go to some readers who are going to read their texts and talk to them directly.

In Writing as Social Action, Marilyn M. Cooper and Michael Holzman state that “whether the writer is urged to analyze or invent the audience, the audience is always considered to be a construct in the writer’s mind” (9). According to these scholars, writers are influenced by their historical, cultural, and social backgrounds and their texts are affected by these elements (6-7). In other words, “A writer’s language originates with the community to which he or she belongs” (Bruffee 784). Therefore, one can claim that thoughts come not from the individual, but
from the “vernacular language of that community” of which the author is a part (Bruffee 777).

By referring to this school of reader-response theory, popular Iranian author and children’s literature critic Shokouh Haji Nasrollah explains in “Harry Potter Is from British Dreams” (هاري بوتر من نابضات بريطانيا) that in order to analyze the structure of the Harry Potter series more deeply we have to know about British society and the cultural beliefs of its people. According to Haji Nasrollah, since British folklore contains a lot of magic and superstition, we can assume that the school of witchcraft and wizardry represents a magical form of England (39).

Like writers, readers are also influenced by their own historical, cultural and religious backgrounds and all of these factors affect their reading of a text. As Linda Flower writes in “The Construction of Purpose in Writing and Reading:” “the reader’s own goals, assumptions, and context play an enormous role in meaning making” (540). So, “It is perhaps not surprising that we structure information around our own purposes in reading and that we recall the ‘text’ we ourselves construct” (Flower 538).

Hans Robert Jauss defines a reader as a form of “energy formative of history” and suggests that the “reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by readers includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works they have already read. The obvious historical implication of readers will be sustained and enriched chains of reception from generation to generation” (Jauss 165). According to Jauss, there is no new text and every work we read evokes a memory of a work which we have already read. This memory may include some characters, allusions or even names. Therefore, in order to better interpret a text, readers link their own past experiences to what they are learning from the text. This way of experiencing new events is close to the way we gather information in our lives. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says in Phenomenology of
Perception:

We have the experience of a world, not understood as a system of relations which wholly determine each event, but as an open totality the synthesis of which is exhaustible [...] from the moment that experience— that is the opening on to our de facto world— is recognized as the beginning of knowledge, there is no longer any way of distinguishing a level of a priori truths and one of factual ones, what the world must necessarily be and what it actually is.

(255-56)

As readers of the series surely know by now, at the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Professor Dumbledore, who is one of the most important key characters of the series, is killed. While studying the reception of the *Harry Potter* books and before the last volume was released, I talked to many Iranian fans of the series in person, or on the internet, and also read what different people had written in various Persian *Harry Potter* fan clubs. By referring to their memories of fantasy fictions which they had already read, many readers of the series thought that Dumbledore was not really dead and would come back to life again. They remembered that some characters in other fantasies came back to life after death. As an example of such characters, we can mention Aslan, the lion in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, who is magically resurrected after he is murdered.

1.2. Authors from the Wizardry World, Readers from the Muggle World

As Wolfgang Iser writes in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, “it is presumed that the literary work is a form of communication, for it impinges upon the world, upon prevailing social structures, and upon existing literature” (ix). Since individuals are

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2 In the *Harry Potter* series, “muggle” refers to a person who is not a member of the wizardry community.
products of their cultural and social groupings and cannot be separated from their sociocultural environment (De Mooij 23-47), a book can be interpreted as a product of social and historical forces of a community group. As a result, members of the same community as the author can better understand the intended meaning of a text. It is clear that readers from other community groups are not able to conceive the same message, for they have different social and historical backgrounds. Accordingly, studying the reception of a book in a society other than where the text is originally produced can be analyzed as an intercultural study. Here, authors and readers are regarded as members of different cultural groups who are brought together by a text. Each of these different cultural groups, as Marshall R. Singer explains in *Perception & Identity in Intercultural Communication*, can “teach us its judgment toward specific stimuli; even more important, it teaches us an attitudinal framework through which we can evaluate new stimuli that reach our sensory receptors […] each group teaches its culture, its attitudes, values perceptions, and so on. That is precisely what makes intercultural communication so difficult. All of us believe that our values are the best ones to hold” (28-37).

Therefore, in order to better analyze the reception of a text, one should consider the cultural values of both reader and writer as members of similar or different social groups. As the scholar L.E. Sarbaugh defines it in *Intercultural Communication*, “culture” is a word used to group people who have the same values, common world views, behaviors, languages, religious beliefs, etc. According to Sarbaugh, culture can be divided into three aspects: the first and psychological one covers one’s beliefs, attitudes, values, concepts of self, and relationship with others. The second or sociological aspect deals with “the geographic arrangements which are developed by two or more persons; and the positions, roles and norms which have developed and are adhered to in relating to one another and meeting one’s survival needs” (2). The third aspect
is technological and contains all objects that are employed in obtaining shelter, water, food, health care, and other social needs (2-3). Each of these aspects includes a group of specific elements which is related to particular criteria. Yet one cannot claim that one aspect is completely separate from the other two, for although all three aspects are independent at some point, they are linked together and interdependent as a whole.

In studying the reception of the *Harry Potter* series in Iran, I believe that technological and sociological differences between Iran and Western countries such as Britain, Canada, and the United States are much less striking than psychological dissimilarities, or the historical background, religious beliefs, and linguistic structures. In other words, as Ronald Scollon discusses in *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*, understanding a culture’s ideologies or its socio socio-psychological aspects --including religions, attitudes, norms and values-- is one of the most important factors in intercultural communication (141).

As defined by one of the early U.S. researchers of values, M. Rokeach, in *The Nature of Human Values*, a value is “an enduring belief that one mode of conduct or end-state of existence is preferable to an opposing mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (5). So, a “value system” is “an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance [...] in a value system values are ordered in priority with respect to other values” (5). Analyzing values of different cultures is an essential step in studying intercultural communication. Contrary to an “attitude” which is a set of beliefs about a particular object or situation, a “value” points to “a single belief of a very specific kind” (De Mooij 24). These single beliefs are among the first concepts that a child learns unconsciously, but implicitly, and play the important role of guiding principles in individuals’ lives.
Another step in exploring different cultural ideologies is to discuss kinds of culture which are either collectivist or individualist. According to well-known social psychologist Harry C. Triandis, members of individualist cultures usually think about their own goals and benefits as a priority even if these advantages go against the goals and benefits of "important in-groups," like family members (165). Individualists are believed not to be emotionally attached to their in-groups. They rather "emphasize self-reliance, independence, pleasure, and the pursuit of happiness" (165). Members of collectivist cultures, on the other hand, "give priority to in-group goals" even if it means giving up their own will (Triandis 165). Collectivists often care about the outcomes of their actions for other members of their group. They share their belongings, feel "interdependent" with important in-group fellows, and are highly concerned about their personal and collective "integrity."

Western countries, including the United States, are believed to be individualistic, and Asian countries, especially Japan, are mostly known as having collectivist cultures (Triandis 165; Landy & Conte 34). In *In Search of Self in India and Japan: Toward a Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Alan Roland explains that in collectivist cultures, youth development is dependent upon the whole value systems of in-groups. The ideal development, thus, is to become similar to other members in terms of both physical appearance and cultural beliefs (89-140).

Therefore, to "become similar" to other in-groups means to respect both the ethical and physical values of the cultural group. As a member, one becomes a representative of religious and cultural beliefs of a society. A veiled Muslim woman, for instance, is known to belong to a Muslim community because she is wearing a veil which reveals her cultural beliefs. Consequently, I can consider one's physical appearance as the first cultural feature that she or he reveals. Members of the same group try to follow the same cultural values regarding the issue of
"body image" and "beauty", for the meaning of attractiveness varies in different cultures. Many cultures have definitions of physical beauty that are different from other cultures. For instance, Japanese people refer to large eyes and small mouths and chins as beautiful, while North Americans rate thin bodies as attractive (De Mooij 109-11). Afsaneh Najmabadi, the Iranian scholar and Professor of women’s studies of Harvard University, discusses some of the old Iranian cultural preferences of physical attractiveness in *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beard*. According to her, in the late nineteenth century in Iran fat women with moustaches were acknowledged as being beautiful (232-34). However, with the passing of time, many cultural preferences changed, and so did standards of beauty. In Iran today women who do not remove their facial hair are labeled as “ugly and masculine.” Moreover, the fever for cosmetic surgery is high among Iranian women and has become a factor in achieving beauty (232). In “For Me, Feminism is My Whole Life” (فeminism bray'd会上 خود زندگی است"), Iranian feminist Safura Nurbakhsh refers to changes in Iranian beauty standards:

The daughter of a friend of mine, a student in a good Tehran high school, came home bubbling with a report about the school, her class, and her teacher. Her teacher had said that Qajar women made themselves look like men. The daughter added: “and we saw their pictures, the women were really ugly […] they were very fat and had mustaches […] their own mustaches!” […] it transpired that Qajar women were fat and did not remove their facial hair. They did not do cosmetic surgery on their nose and face or anywhere else, so they looked like men. (141)

Consider an incident surrounding the *Harry Potter* movies as an example of cultural
beauty preferences and their differences between various cultures. I believe that in the movies, most of the actors and actresses who play the main characters are close to the images that many readers have imagined before watching the movie versions. However, there are still some characters who are completely different from their “textual description.” For instance, actors who play Harry Potter and his friends, Ron and Hermione, are very well accepted by most Iranian readers (Nouri Pour 27). Their looks and behavior are very much the same as we read in the novel. Nevertheless, the actor who plays the role of Harry’s godfather, Sirius Black, who is described in the series as a very handsome man, seems too ordinary and definitely not handsome from an Iranian reader’s/ viewer’s point of view. In Harry Potter and the Deathly Halows, we read: “Beside him was Sirius, Carelessly handsome, his slightly arrogant face so much younger and happier than Harry had ever seen it alive” (148).

Iranian people do not rate a man “very handsome” unless he is tall and has a beautiful masculine face (Nouri Pour 27). This beauty preference is applied on the cover of the Persian version of the third book, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, where we can see a tall man dressed in black skin-tight clothes. He has light layered shoulder-length hair that covers one of his mysterious eyes. This image of Sirius Black is what almost all Iranian readers expect, and that is why they are not happy with the movie version of Sirius who is far different from what they had imagined. Literary and film critic Rana Nouri Pour argues in “Azkaban Was Good, but…”:

> Although Gary Oldman, the actor of Sirius Black, plays his role perfectly, he is one of the weak points of the movie. In her novels, Rowling keeps on reminding us that Sirius had such a handsome face that even Azkaban and Dementors were not able to change it.
We also read that he looks innocent and kind. However, in the movie, we are disappointed by finding a non-attractive Sirius who cannot be our generous and handsome Sirius Black. (27)³

Besides following different criteria for physical beauty, Iranians follow cultural norms in their everyday lives. Generally, in a collectivist Asian country like Iran --where there are many religious, traditional, and social values, norms, or taboos--, teenagers learn different ideologies based on what they implicitly receive from their cultural in-groups. For these teenagers, concepts such as being polite and respectful to others (especially the elders), obeying parents, avoiding any trouble, and practising religious obligations have become rules which limit their freedom in many ways. Most Iranian teenagers have to deal with issues that may be unknown to Westerners. To a Canadian reader of Harry Potter, for example, reading about a school where both girls and boys are studying together is not such an interesting subject. It is because most Canadian students go to mixed schools; they attend mixed school parties, and dance and drink with their friends. For an Iranian teenager, on the other hand, these seemingly “normal” activities are an unbelievable fantasy. Iranian teenagers who have never experienced mixed schools have lots to dream about while reading Rowling’s fantasy. Girls have always been told not to befriend boys, not to attend mixed parties, not to drink alcohol and not to dance with the opposite sex. In one word, almost all inter-sexual relationships are considered as taboo in Iranian culture. The first place where young girls and boys can attend school together is university. However, even there, they have to follow the so-called religious rules and are watched by religious security agents who warn them if they explicitly break those regulations. In such a context, of course, reading about a school where both girls and boys sit together, eat together, do homework together or dance

³ My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
together is like going into an unknown world. For many Iranian teenagers who have learned that having any physical contact with the opposite sex is a taboo, and who secretly meet their boyfriends and girlfriends, reading about Hogwarts’ students hugging and kissing in front of everyone is a sweet, yet extremely rebellious dream. Yet, as I mentioned in the Introduction, and will further discuss in the third and fourth chapters, some of these cultural taboos are shifting.

However, while *Harry Potter* is being condemned by many Western Christians for its use of magic, almost all Iranian religious critics ignored it, mostly because, unlike taboos about having sexual relationships outside of marriage, believing in magic and practicing it are deeply rooted in Iranian culture. One can even claim that many clergies practice religious magic by using different verses of the Holy Qur’an. It may also sound unbelievable to Western readers that even some Iranian soccer teams are criticized for officially employing a wizard. However, to an Iranian citizen, this is not unbelievable, just ridiculous. For Iranian readers, reading about magic is not considered a taboo. Almost every Iranian child has experienced going to a “prayer writer” or buying a “nazir” which is an amulet stone against the evil eye (Marcais 128). So, from an Iranian point of view, magic oriented in the series presents the least danger for children and as long as religious and political oriented critics are concerned, they are mostly worried about Western “unethical” values which may be implicitly implied by such books. Yet, I can attest that this concern has decreased in comparison with twenty years ago when most Western books were banned due to political and religious reasons. In her best-seller, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, Iranian professor Azar Nafisi narrates her memories of reading forbidden Western books in the first years after the Islamic revolution in Iran. That period of the Islamic government can be referred to as the time when the Iranian book market experienced the strictest rules for publishing books, especially translated Western volumes which were largely perceived
as being against revolutionary values. As an example, Nafisi refers to reading F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* during one of her secret reading meetings with some of her students at her home. At the meeting, however, a fundamentalist colleague calls the book a product of “the world of Satan” and reminds them of the revolutionary values which are still respected by the government:

> All through this revolution we have talked about the fact that the West is our enemy, it is the Great Satan, not because of its military might, not because of its economic power, but because of its sinister assault on the very roots of our culture. What Imam [late Ayatollah Khomeini] calls cultural aggression. This I would call a rape of our culture […] and if you want to see cultural rape, you need go no further than this very book [*Gatsby*…] maybe during the reign of the corrupt Pahlavi regime adultery was the accepted norm […] but the values were such that adultery went unpunished. This book preaches illicit relations between a man and woman […] The good thing about this book is that it exposes the immortality and decadence of American society, but we have fought to rid ourselves of this trash and it is high time that such books be banned. (126-27)

Most of the issues which are mentioned by this extremist critic are now known as “cultural invasion” and almost all well-accepted Western books and movies are accused of being tools of this invasion. Therefore, these tools are not supposed to be accessible to children and teenagers until they are completely “cleansed of” any cultural irregularities in the Persian translated and
Regardless of the degree of adaptation and censorship of its Persian versions, the *Harry Potter* series still has many cultural and literary aspects which draw Iranian readers into its world. Since the needs of adolescence are more or less the same all over the world, Iranian teenagers are eager to break the rules, rebel against what their cultural in-groups make them to do, and try to have more freedom. As Marcel Danes writes in *My Son Is an Alien: A Cultural Portrait of Today’s Youth*, “The teenagers of today are no different from the teenagers of yesterday. They have their own fashions and music, and they continue to see themselves as distinct from adults. But there is one crucial difference though. In no other era has the tendency for lifestyle fads to pass quickly from the teen culture to the adult one been so strong” (13).

By representing this period of life, Rowling accompanies young readers in their solitary pursuit of maturity, regardless of their nationalities and cultures. However, the cultural values of Iranian and Western readers account for in some major similarities and differences in responding to the series. Reader-response and intercultural theories can help us better analyze these similarities and differences. These theories also help us realize whether particular cultural ideologies can guide readers in their act of reading, or if they merely help readers complete the gaps and understand the meaning. By discussing some specific Iranian and Western cultural taboos and values in the next chapters, we will be able to find out how *Harry Potter* is received in Iran and North America, especially Canada. We will also explore if Iranian and North American readers of the series respond to the novel in the same way, and if they like or dislike the volume for the same reasons.
Chapter 2:
The Critical Reception of the *Harry Potter* Series in the West
So, here is Satan’s plan: You whet the appetites of children who are confused and not quite grounded in family morals [...] and introduce them to Harry Potter [...] You then bolster their interest in these [occult] practices and instill in them the idea that there is no good or evil, only magic.

(Stephen Dollins, *Under the Spell of Harry Potter* 95-96)

Incredibly, Rowling has written an engaging and cogent parable about God’s judgment on the spiritual qualities of our lives and about our capacity for (or our despising of) love.

(John Granger, *How Harry Potter Cast His Spells* 134)

The *Harry Potter* series was created in England and no one imagined that it would become an international literary phenomenon. In 1995, J.K. Rowling finished writing *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and sent it to many publishers, but it was rejected. Publishers, who did not know what a great opportunity they were missing, believed that the work was too long and slow for children. However, Rowling did not get discouraged and continued sending her fiction to other publishers; finally, the fortunate British publisher Bloomsbury Press grabbed the chance and signed a contract with Rowling, who was a working single mother back then. This is how the bestselling series was introduced to the world in July 1997 and it became a phenomenon shortly after. In 1998, a small children’s book shop in Vancouver was the first place in Canada where the *Harry Potter* series was sold (Brousseau-Pouliot 1). Jamie Broadhurst, Vice-President of Raincoast marketing that publishes the series in Canada, confesses that the publishing house knew that *Harry Potter* would sell well, but no one had ever imagined
that one day it would sell millions of copies (qtd. in Brousseau-Pouliot 1).

By the summer of 2003, the *Harry Potter* books had sold more than 250 million copies in over 200 countries and 60 languages (Wohlberg 24). The fantasy of *Harry Potter* cast a summoning spell and brought together millions of children who spent most of their spare time playing computer games and watching television rather than reading. Since 1952 when White’s Charlotte’s Web made it onto the *New York Times* Best-Seller List, the books in the *Harry Potter* series have been the first children’s novels to be among the first three titles on the *Times’* Best-Seller List. Accordingly in 2001, *USA Today* declared that the series had made J.K. Rowling the world’s best-selling writer (Wohlberg 24-26). As a result, children’s literature, which had been in the margins for decades, gained more global attention and became a popular topic for critics in different fields.

However, the series is not approved by all readers and there are some extremist Christians (including critics, teachers, and parents) who condemn the content of the books for the ways they present magic and witchcraft. As a Muslim girl who grew up under religious and cultural restrictions in an Islamic country, I had not heard of a children’s book being a tool of Satan because it presented magic. Consequently, I found this negative critical view toward the series exaggerated. Although the number of Christians who criticize the *Harry Potter* books is small in comparison with the large number of religious *Pottermania* fans, the first part of this chapter will examine a satire of the religious reception in the West and extremist views themselves before taking on the more serious critics.

Nevertheless, many literary scholars such as Heilman, Killinger, Teare, and Ostling have been studying the reasons why children, who were believed not to be interested in reading books, are too interested in Harry and his adventures and enthusiastically follow the Potter books
regardless of their length and the complexity of the plots. According to these critics, the *Harry Potter* books "have transformed both the technologies of reading and the way we understand those technologies" (Teare 329). The novels have also encouraged a lot of adults to read and enjoy books intended for children. In “Les Pouvoirs cachés d’Harry Potter: Le sympathique apprenti magicien redonne le goût de la lecture aux enfants,” the Quebecois journalist Patrick Chauvette refers to the vast popularity of the series in Quebec and quotes a parent from Trois Rivières who accompanied her little daughter to buy the fourth book of the series. The mother states that the first time she started to read the fiction was when she read it with her daughter to make sure that she was able to read and understand that genre. However, immediately after reading a few pages, she was hooked by the magical world of the novel and continued to read the next volumes eagerly (Chauvette 25).

"Pottermania" or "Potter fever" is thus an international phenomenon among children, parents, and teachers; yet, it is a challenging subject for literary, social, and cultural critics. As a literary phenomenon, *Harry Potter* receives both positive and negative responses and is both praised and challenged by different critical communities. Dozens of books and articles have studied *Pottermania* around the world, but in this chapter I will review the most popular American, Canadian and British responses to the *Harry Potter* series, and especially in terms of its magical plot and hybrid genre.

2.1. Cultural and Religious Studies Perspectives

*i) Harry Potter: Presenting the Occult and Satanism*

The *Harry Potter* books are not admired by everyone and are on the top of the list of the one hundred most challenged books in the last two decades (Taub & Servaty 53) and on the
American Library Association’s list of one hundred books that parents strongly wished to remove from schools and libraries in the 1990s (Foerstel 186-188). According to fantasy critic and researcher, Colin Duriez, most critiques which condemn the series for prompting the dark arts and the occult emerged after an article in the well-known, online, satirical magazine, The Onion. The article claims that the best-selling literary phenomenon teaches satanic ideologies to children and encourages them to practice the occult and the dark art as tools of power (66-69). In North America, the Harry Potter novels have been on “the list of most frequently banned books” (Foerstel 180), and some parents and religious people wished them to be removed from the school and public libraries (Foerstel 180-191). In April 2000, for example, Toronto's Durham County School Board received many calls and letters from parents who complained about the use of the Potter Books at different schools and were worried that these books would open the door of Wicca to their innocent children. As a result, the board restricted the use of Harry Potter and decided to let teachers use the books in classrooms “only when all parents gave written consent” (Josey, “Durham Limits” B3; Šaric 8). According to a Canadian Scholar in children’s literature and cultural studies, Julia Šaric, this kind of response to parent’s objections towards the series “has created a debate about censorship in schools that in Ontario has not been equaled since Peterborough County’s removal of Margaret Laurence’s The Diviners in the late 1970s” (8).

Also in the United States, many schools and public libraries were forced to remove the series or put restrictions on its readers by asking for written consent from parents (Foerstel 186-88). Even a public library in Jacksonville, Florida, which refused to remove the books, was threatened with a lawsuit by the president of a religious rights organization in Orlando (Foerstel 186-88).

Fundamentalist Christians like Alison Lentini and Stephen Dollins strongly condemn the series for its explicit presentation of occult practices, which are forbidden in Christianity, and
insist that the *Potter* books should be banned. According to such Christians, this careless presenting of magic makes young readers interested in occult practices. As an example of Christian parents who believe that the books should be banned, Šaric also points to an Oshawa mother who reminds the audience of the danger of magic and claims that "witchcraft, sorcery, wizardry—any of that is the devil, it’s from Satan" (9).

As a response to Harry Potter fans who claim that most children’s books, like *Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings*, include magic and witchcraft, Christian critic Richard Abanes argues that there are some major differences between fantasies by C.S. Lewis and Rowling. In *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace behind the Magick* (sic), Abanes describes that Lewis’s “Christ in Theology” is seen in various characters, such as Aslan the Lion, but there is no direct association between the fiction and postmodern religion. However, according to Abanes, *Harry Potter* is directly associated with paganism. Abanes also defines the witch in Narnia as a figure of evil based on classic and widely accepted symbols of evil, whereas *Harry Potter*’s symbols are children who are linked to young readers (231-48). By this argument, Abanes refers to both good and evil child figures in the series, who fly on broomsticks and practise magic by casting spells and using specific magical tools which resemble classic witchcraft. As a result, in comparison with the *Narnia* series where the witch often uses her wand and performs the dark magic without using any other magical tools, wizards in *Harry Potter* are not simply symbols of evil and good. They are, indeed, images of classic witches who were historically condemned by Christians. Therefore, since the main characters of the series are young wizards, children can easily identify with them and, Abanes claims, are in danger of becoming interested in magic.

Ex-Wiccan Alison Lentini, who is a contributor to *Spiritual Counterfeits Journal*, strongly condemns the *Harry Potter* series. In “Harry Potter: Occult Cosmology and the
Corrupted Imagination,” Lentini argues that Rowling’s fiction is morally confusing. Good characters, like Harry, Ron, and Hermione, tend to unethical behavior, such as lying, cheating, stealing, or deception in order to achieve their own goals that are supposedly “good.” According to Lentini, Rowling does not empower adults to warn that disobedience and lying are wrong. On the contrary, these wrong acts are presented as necessary tools for accomplishing “good deeds” and “receiving rewards” (18-29).

As shown in the first part of the chapter, extremist Christians claim that the series promotes the occult and is thus against religious values and this has affected the popular reception of the series, leading to widespread calls for censorship and school bannings by parents. However, since 2001, many critics of children’s literature, theologians, and even pastors, such as John Granger, John Killinger, Francis Bridger, Gina Burkart, Connie Neal, and Samuel F. Parvin have begun defending the *Harry Potter* series and illustrating, as I will discuss in some detail below, its significant moral and Christian insights by publishing books based on the religious values which are believed to be promoted by the series.

As award-winning scholar in the field of literature and fantasy, Colin Duriez, refers to one of Rowling’s interviews in Canada to reveal that the main plot of the series is influenced by Christian values. Rowling talks about her spiritual beliefs and declares: “Yes, I am [a Christian]…. Which seems to offend the religious right far worse than if I said I thought there was no God. Every time I’ve been asked if I believed in God, I’ve said yes, because I do, but no one ever really has gone any more deeply into it than that, and I have to say that does suit me, because if I talk too freely about that I think the intelligent reader, whether 10 or 60, will be able to guess what’s coming in the books” (qtd. in Duriez 77-78). Here, Rowling reveals that her fiction is based on her spiritual beliefs, for she affirms that if she talks more about these beliefs,
her readers will be able to guess what happens in the following three volumes of the series - which were not yet released at the time of the interview.

John Killinger, a Congregationalist minister and a scholar in contemporary literature, disapproves of the objections of fundamentalist Christians. In God, the Devil, and Harry Potter: A Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels, he forcefully states that Rowling’s best-selling fiction will not have the least harm on children’s morals. Nevertheless, Killinger asserts, the Harry Potter series encourages young readers to follow the Christian values and teachings of Jesus. Moreover, he strongly criticizes Abanes’s highly negative arguments about the “mania,” and presenting “deceitful behavior” and breaking the rules as “a valuable tool for successful living.” Killinger states that “what conservative Christians often forget, however, is that Jesus, the founder of their religion, invariably exhibited a healthy disrespect for rules and regulations, especially when they were followed for their own sake or stood in the way of some worthy goal or achievement” (71).

John Granger, author of several volumes defending the Potter books against fundamentalist Christian critics, approves of Killinger’s statement and argues that magic and magical tools in a book are not forbidden by any religion. The majority of scriptures themselves, he states, contain topics of magic and occult practices. They all forbid practising magic, but never condemn reading texts with elements of the occult in them. “As there are witches, soothsayers, and possessed prophetesses in the Bible (almost all negatively portrayed), it would be more than odd if Holy Writ spoke against itself. If anything, the New Testament slams those who charge the righteous with sorcery” (Granger, Looking for God 3). According to Granger, the Bible forbids sorcery or invocational magic which is “calling in” the evil powers and spirits. This kind of magic is not presented in the Harry Potter series and even the most evil wizards are
never portrayed as practicing *invocational* magic. They cast spells and use magical wands and other particular instruments to achieve their goals, and this is what known as *incantational* wizardry (5-10) “that shows -in story form- our human thirst for reality beyond the physical world around us” (3-8).

In 2002, theologian and Pastor Francis Bridger published *A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld*, which explains the moral values and theology in the series. Bridger disagrees with the idea of *Harry Potter*’s promoting Satanism and occult practices and points out that the series presents significant aspects of social and familial relationships and human personalities and characters. He affirms that the Potter books are a powerful source for interpreting theology and Christian moralities such as loyalty, fidelity, honesty in its deepest form, trust, courage, and love. The actual secret behind Harry and his friends’ victory against evil is not magic and wizardry, but the “magical” power of their friendship, love, and goodness.

As many critics of children’s literature agree, *Harry Potter* is based on an ancient theme of epics and a Christian value which conveys an inherent human hope: that death can be defeated by love and that Christ allows us to be resurrected in the form of an afterlife after death (Granger, *Looking for God* 23-28). Again, we see in the novel that Harry survived the deathly spell, for his mother sacrifices her life in order to protect him and, thus, she provides Harry with a lifetime love which guards him through his entire life. As we read in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*:

> Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who
loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. (Rowling,

*Sorcerer’s Stone* 241)

As mentioned in the last chapter, most advocates of the formalist view of the reader-
response criticism, such as Iser, argue that writers are influenced by their own reading
experiences and the community to which they belong. This principle is true of Rowling’s fiction.
In her interviews, she affirms that she has known and admired C.S. Lewis’s *Narnia* series since
childhood (Duriez 64). As most fantasy readers may know, there are two important discourses
about magic in *Narnia*. The first one is the notion of “Deep Magic” which signifies the “moral
order” respected or disrespected by Narnians. The other and more important element is the
“Deeper Magic” which has a parallel with the Christian New Testament in terms of representing
the idea of “the deepest form of love, which brings to maturity and fulfils the older law” (Duriez
65-67). Therefore, we can argue that Rowling’s fiction also presents these two important
elements as the love of Harry’s mother, and later as Harry’s own love for his friends and his
willingness to sacrifice his life in order to save the wizardry community and his loved ones.

Supporters of the *Harry Potter* novel point to the fight between good and evil as another
important plot of the series which is also influenced by a religious ideology. Most of the time,
readers can easily recognize good and evil characters in *Harry Potter*, for there is much evidence
to this effect. Most of the evil characters like Lord Voldemort and his servants seem to be
members of an “individualist culture” which, as I discussed in the last chapter, is a group of
people consider their own goals and desires as more important than those which benefit the
whole society. As a result, these members perform evil activities to achieve their goals,
regardless of the catastrophic consequence that may seriously harm the rest of the wizardry
society and the muggle world. Normally, they do this without any prior thinking or making the
decision between right and wrong. Nor do they repent for the damages caused by their wrong deeds. On the other hand, good characters like Harry and his best friends seem to belong to a “collectivist culture” and care about other members of the society, as well as the outcomes of their decisions for the wizardry and muggle world. They carefully think about what they want to do and try to make a right decision which is beneficial for both the “individual” and other “in-group members” (Triandis 165). Yet, as humans, they may do the wrong thing; still, they feel guilty for what is done and try to make it up (Granger, Looking for God 20-25). Here, young readers have the opportunity to develop their understanding of good and evil and can better distinguish between right and wrong decisions thanks to the series. Readers of the Potter books also learn that they should consider the outcomes of their decisions and taking responsibility for possible consequences. By reading about good characters, like Harry, Ron, Hermione, and the most praised Dumbledore, who have certain failings and have made wrong decisions in their lives, readers also learn that almost everyone may make mistakes, but one has to try and find a way to mend the outcomes. In other words, this feeling of guilt and regret is the difference between good and evil. As Granger affirms, this definition of good and evil is one of the many spiritual aspects of the series which links it to the Christian teachings. By reading the series, young readers realize that there are always two sides: good and evil, right and wrong, love and hatred, self and society, etc. Like Harry, most children will understand that they should choose one side and that the right decision is to defend their souls against the “Dark Side” (Carpentier Brown 48-51). Throughout the series, Rowling gradually reveals that Harry is actually supposed to be a member of Slytherin (one of the four houses of Hogwarts); which is known as the origin of the darkest wizards such as Voldemort. However, in his very first night at Hogwarts and during the sorting ceremony, Harry insists on going to Gryffindor so eagerly that the “old sorting
hat” is finally convinced to announce him as a member of Gryffindor. Therefore, the narrator affirms that individuals are not entirely limited by their fates and that one can decide if he or she is going to follow the right way or take the wrong path. In other words, “it is one’s choices that determine one’s character for good or ill, not one’s makeup” (Duriez 63).

The *Harry Potter* series is also believed to have a dark atmosphere and to explicitly mention the notion of death. Some parents do not wish to explain such “dark” issues to their young children and believe that children do not have to face these notions when they are still very young. However, critics like Nancy Carpentier Brown, Deborah J. Taub, and Heather L. Servaty argue that death is a real part of life that everyone should face. Even children will know about it as a result of the death of their pet, a family member, or a relative; and parents have to help them deal with it. As Carpentier Brown writes in *The Mystery of Harry Potter: A Catholic Family Guide*, the books make us think about death as it is and to consider its importance. “Death isn’t passed over, glossed over or lost in the narrative: it is a main theme [...] Rowling does far more to help children deal with death than most authors” (48-52).

**ii) Magic, Technology, or the Magic of Technology?**

Besides scholars who study the series from a positive Christian point of view and try to convince the fundamentalist religious critics of the value of the series by pointing out its spiritual elements, there are other critics, such as Peter Appelbaum, Alan Jacobs, and Michael Ostling, who defend the series by discussing the issue of magic and its similarities to today’s technologies. These scholars go beyond the spiritual plot of the *Harry Potter* series and argue that the magic presented in Rowling’s fiction is in fact technology in a highly developed form. According to most literary critics like Duriez, the first scholar who discussed the similarity between the right use of magic in the wizardry world and the correct use of technology in the
“muggle” world is believed to be Alan Jacobs in 2000. In “Harry Potter’s Magic,” Jacobs states:

This history provides a key to understanding the role of magic in
Joanne Rowling’s books, for she begins by positing a
counterfactual history, a history in which magic was not a false and
incompetent discipline, but rather a means of controlling the
physical world at least as potent as experimental science. In *Harry
Potter’s* world, scientists think of magic in precisely the same way
they do in our world, but they are wrong. The counterfactual
"secondary world" that Rowling creates is one in which magic
simply works, and works as reliably, in the hands of a trained
wizard, as the technology that makes airplanes fly and refrigerators
chill the air—those products of applied science being, by the way,
sufficiently inscrutable to the people who use them that they might
as well be the products of wizardry. As Arthur C. Clarke once
wrote, "Any smoothly functioning technology gives the appearance
of magic. (35-38)

Canadian critic Kim Becnel agrees with this theory and suggests that we can compare our current
society with the wizardry world of *Harry Potter*. By doing so, we can see that in both societies
human beings try to control the world around them and make it more comfortable and safe. The
only difference is the method that different people use to achieve their goals (Becnel 5). In
“Harry Potter and the Disenchantment of the World,” Canadian scholar Michael Ostling, a
member of the Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, states that the
magic in the series cannot be, as Christians believe, harmful to children, for it is not real occult
magic. The magic of the books is absolutely “mechanical, and not occult” (4-16). It is true that
Harry and his friends cast spells, or turn themselves into other people and animals, but they do
not have any contact with the supernatural world (Ostling 5). The magic used in the series then
can be regarded as future technologies. As an instance, the very first magical instrument that the
series illustrates is a device used to turn all intended electronic lights off and on. It simply
reminds us of a more technical remote control, and not real magic. Many such devices used in
the series already exist in our own world by ordinary technology and it is not very hard to
imagine that many of the others will be invented sooner or later. Contrary to the magic which
was historically gained and performed through rituals, initiation, or the “transmission of
charismatic powers,” the students of Hogwarts gain magic by book-learning, homework,
practice, and regular tests. Therefore, one can claim that it is a skill and not power. Harry Potter
does not intend to provoke readers to use magic, but it reminds us that the times when people
believed in magic or practiced it are gone forever and will not return (Ostling 16).

Hence, regarding the important parallel between the notions of magic and technology in
the wizardry and real worlds, readers can assume that today’s technology may be even much
more dangerous to our societies than magic is to the wizardry world. Like magic, technology
should be also used under strict rules, or it will become an evil power. As we read in the series,
magic is used both for good purposes, such as improving medical services and ensuring the
security and development of the whole society, and for evil activities, such as killing and
torturing other members of the society in order for a specific group to gain more power. In the
“muggle” world similarly, everyone can notice that technology is used for both good and evil
purposes. Some people employ it to produce medical supplies in order to save millions of lives
and some people, on the other hand, use it to develop and produce weapons to kill millions of
people. So, it can lead the whole world to an era where our societies are ruled by technological devices and machines. In other words, like magic, technology has the potential to be used both for the sake of humanity or in order to enslave it.

Popular inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil mentions the creativity of Rowling's series and states that these imaginary stories are not impossible in the future. This author, who is involved in the field of technology, argues that magic in *Harry Potter* can be presented as a technological science, for wizards should gradually learn it, practice it, and apply it under rules and restrictions. In *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Kurzweil states:

One might object to this metaphor [of magic and technology] by pointing out that Hogwartian incantations are brief and therefore do not contain much information compared to, say, the code for a modern software program. But the essential methods of modern technology generally share the same brevity. The principles of operation of software advances such as speech recognition can be written in just a few pages of formulas [....] A story can be regarded as a meaningful pattern of information [....] This book [*Harry Potter*], then, is the story of the destiny of human-machine civilization, a destiny we have come to refer to as the Singularity.

(5)

2.2 Reader-Response and Interpretive Perspectives: The Journey to the Self

One of the most popular theories on the secret of *Harry Potter*'s success is about the similarity between the characters in the series and people in real life. Most readers can easily
identify with Harry, for he is like an ordinary boy who has so much in common with many children. Harry and his friends attend classes, experience jealousy, find friends and enemies, have difficulties in doing their homework, break rules, and behave as ordinary adolescents do all over the world. In other words, he is not perfect; he has his own weaknesses, but he manages to win in the end. Therefore, “if Harry, the orphan with bad hair and glasses, can make friends, win at Quidditch, be a favorite of the headmaster, overcome the school bully, and be the hero not just of his own life but of wildly successful books, there is hope for every young reader” (Grimes 105). Michael Ostling explains that regardless of where they are from, or what age they are, people always look for a gate to another world where they can experience events that cannot be experienced in the real world. Harry fulfills their search for something more than real. “He makes the extraordinary ordinary and therefore, familiar and unchallenging” (Ostling 16). Here, we can see that almost all branches of the reader-response theory are applicable. On the one hand, readers face a new fantasy world where they can experience different, exciting, yet dangerous incidents. With Harry, they leave the boring and unfair “muggle world” and dive into a pool of endless imagination and creativity. There, teenagers can risk their lives to fight for freedom, they can fly on a Hippogriff and go far away, they can ride a living stone chess horse and fight with real chess soldiers; in one word, they can experience the difference. Yet, on the other hand, they bring their old “self” with them to this journey; the old self with its own experiences, wishes, hopes, loves, regrets, and needs. They step into the classrooms of Hogwarts and experience or imagine an atmosphere similar to one in their past: there are friends sitting close together mocking their hated classmates, there are funny or cruel teachers, boring homework, hard detentions, and long sleepy courses. At Hogwarts, there is much that children and teenagers have experienced or wished for. Here, readers can meet teenagers with the same needs for freedom,
rebellion, and independence. In the first three volumes of the series, Rowling depicts pre-adolescence, a time in life that every adult remembers and every teenager experiences. Grown-ups enjoy reading *Harry Potter*, for they remember how it feels being an eleven-year-old pre-adolescent who is preparing to leave his or her childhood behind. Reading the books, readers forget their age and can easily imagine themselves in Harry’s place and experience puberty once again.

In “In Medias Res: Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress” Marry Pharr refers to the progress of the *Harry Potter* stories as an important factor in Harry’s development toward self-knowledge (54). He is a hero for almost all children who wish to be strong and able to help the world and therefore, “although only a boy, Harry walks in a line that extends for thousands of years and through numerous narrative structures, a line including figures as seemingly disparate as Gilgamesh” (54-55). As a young child, Harry does not know anything about his real identity and potential; however, as he gets older, he suddenly finds out about another world where he is a known as a hero. Moreover, he learns that he has to sacrifice many things for the sake of other members of the society. With his readers, Harry grows up through the series: he leaves the ignorance he once had at Dursley’s behind him and learns about his powers; gradually, he forgets his old fears and habits; passes and fails many academic, practical and moral tests; and becomes a brave wizard boy who is supposed to save the world. He is a hero not because he has magical power, but because he decides to stay in the battle of good and evil and fight for his beliefs. His character progresses in every volume.

At the end of each installment, Harry is a stronger boy with more experience, which teaches readers that life is not easy; there are a lot of struggles to face on the road of success and Harry proves that one can achieve one’s goal by practicing self-confidence (Grimes 106). He
passes through many stages to learn who he is and which powers he has. All these stages lead him to a self-understanding which continually saves his life. Therefore, the novel contains what Michel Foucault calls “technologies of the self” which signifies the transformation of the self through one’s own powers or with the help of others (Foucault 16-20). In *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, David Baggett and Shawn Klein state that as Harry goes on through different struggles and experiences various situations, he gradually develops the maturity, knowledge, and skills which he needs for a happy life as a wizard. He tries very hard to achieve his goals and defeat the evil wizards and each of his successes strengthens his self-confidence and makes him ready for the next struggle. Even his failures help him learn how to correct his mistakes and use them as valuable experiences (37). Therefore, together with Harry, young readers make serious decisions, face different struggles, and cope with difficulties. They read about the skinny orphan boy who finds out about his real powers and becomes a strong young hero. Rowling teaches her audience that one’s self is the most powerful magical tool and that Harry and everyone else can acquire self-knowledge by learning about his or her own capabilities through different quests. Note that these are very individualist or Western goals compared to more collective concerns. By making important decisions, discovering one’s fears, having self-esteem, and sacrificing the good in order to have the better, the reader who identifies with Harry gradually learns to look for his or her inner magical powers and, therefore, relies on his or her “self” in difficult times.

2.3. **Literary Perspectives: The Hero, Myth, and Genre**

In *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, well-known scholar and children’s literature critic, Jack Zipes argues that
critics and authors of children’s literature should not ignore the broad popularity of the *Harry Potter* series as a simple children’s book. Nevertheless, scholars from all over the world should analyze the books carefully, for the “success of the *Harry Potter* books are so great and reflects certain troubling sociocultural trends that we must try to evaluate the phenomenon” (171-75). Yet, one may wonder what the exact meaning of the phenomenon is in Western societies. According to Zipes, a phenomenon is something “conventional,” unusual, widely accepted, or condemned, valuable to everyone’s attention. It should meet the standards of the mass media and the cultural industry because “it is impossible to be a phenomenon without conforming to conventionality” (171-75). As a negative critic of the series, Zipes admits that the underlying humor of the text is an interesting aspect, but according to him the series is nothing special and owes an enormous part of its popularity to commercial technologies. Elizabeth E. Heilman, the well-known American critic and the editor of *Harry Potter’s World*, agrees with Zipes and asserts that the series cannot attract children’s attention all by itself. Nevertheless, there are many more external issues, such as media and advertizing companies, which help its success and make children believe that the series is interesting and worth reading. Here it is suggested that children read to be included not only in an imaginative world where they identify with characters, but also in a media event.

Due to the popularity of the series in Canada, many writers of children’s literature in Quebec are not happy. They are disappointed with Quebec publishing houses, arguing that after the release of the French version of *Harry Potter*, their novels have been rejected by many publishers. Isa-Belle Granger, who has written a long novel about an orphan boy wizard, states that publishers have rejected her manuscript. They told her that the *Harry Potter* series already existed in the same genre, and that her manuscript was not good enough to compete with it (qtd.
in Lessard 8). On the other hand, Anne-Marie Villeneuve, who works for the publishing house, Québec Amérique, believes that if children can learn different moral lessons from Harry, authors can also learn many literary lessons from the series. She also admits that the wide reception of Harry Potter has had certain effects on Québec Amérique and that Quebecois authors should try to create authentic, interesting texts like Harry Potter, but not imitate them (qtd. in Lavoie D1).

Besides the spiritual context of the series, Harry Potter is believed to owe its success also to its specific genre. According to Duriez, a reason for the popularity of the series among both children and adults all over the world is its set of different genres that appeal to more audiences with different tastes. These genres include school stories, the bildungsroman, the series, fantasy and fairy tale, and the mystery and adventure story, each of which have their own important role in children’s literature (95-96).

Anne Hiebert Alton argues in “Generic Fusion and the Mosaic of Harry Potter,” that J.K. Rowling has incorporated a huge number of genres in her novel. Genres such as popular (pulp) fiction, mystery, gothic and horror stories, detective fiction, school story, sport story, book series, fantasy, adventure, quest romance, and myth. Rowling has mixed all these genres into a large mosaic that makes the series popular, and leads to the ways in which the series conveys literary meanings as well (157). By studying the genres in this way, we find that Rowling has created something new and as Alton states:

A generic mosaic made up of numerous individual pieces combined
in a way that allows them to keep their original shape while
constantly changing their significance. The way in which these
pieces operate varies and changes depending on the generic tags
being interpreted at any given time by any particular reader. (159)
We can also consider Harry Potter as a romantic hero in the light of his childhood; as English science fiction and fantasy writer Michael Moorcock points out, “almost all romantic heroes and heroines are wounded children” (81). Harry’s hard life in the cupboard at the Dursleys’, his loneliness and his cruel relatives make him a perfect romantic hero. Therefore, as Maria Nikolajeva discusses in “A Return to the Romantic Hero,” Harry Potter’s success could be partially because of its attempt to bring a romantic hero into contemporary children’s literature. He lost his parents when he was only one year old and grows to a teenager unaware of his magical powers and his parent’s real cause of death. He is then transferred to another society where he is popular and could be easily recognized by the scar on his forehead. Although he is not a god or the son of a god as in mystic fiction, he can be considered as a romantic hero (Nikolajeva 132-36). Yet, the series can be best known as a fantasy, for it has most of the characteristics of a fantasy. It “includes a journey or quest, skills to be mastered, opportunities for teamwork, evil adversaries, and points of character to be explored” (Sullivan 34).

Katherine M. Grimes states that the series’ success among children and adults is because Harry is both a “bigger-than-life hero and a true-to-life boy, just as the books are both magical and realistic.” (90). Every reader can identify with him and enjoy the fiction: children enjoy it as a fairy tale full of magical creatures and incidents, young adolescents feel close to Harry and read about the same coming-of-age that all teenagers experience, and adults look into the world of youngsters by reading the series. In other words, Harry Potter is a fairy tale prince for children, a real boy for adolescents, and an “archetypal hero for adults” (90). By reading the series, young readers are satisfied to see that younger people are not ignored in the wizardry world; on the contrary, they have the most important roles in solving problems and saving the whole society. Moreover, evil adults are punished in this highly-desired world. In fact, “these
children [readers] look forward to the day when everyone notices that they are special, like Cinderella and Harry Potter [...] they also hope their mistakes will not result in drastic punishment in the meantime [...] The Harry Potter series vicariously provides children with these pleasures and reassurances” (Grimes 98-99).

Among the values that are presented by the Harry Potter books is the issue of community and society as an important factor in the whole storyline. As mentioned by critics like Granger, Whited, and Duriez, readers of the series learn that they should feel responsible for other members of society and that major achievements are gained with the help of different members of a group and not by only one person.

The kind of family and home found in the Harry Potter books is mostly at Hogwarts, where the meaning and notion of family and home is more complex than in the outer world. There, members of a family are not bound together by blood, but by loyalty. From the very first moment of entering Hogwarts, Harry learns that he will be chosen as a member of one of the four houses and that he should be loyal to his House; his House is in fact his family and he is supposed to do his best to improve its reputation. Harry’s connection to Ron and Hermione, as well as his House is obvious through the series: They care about each other, for they need each other. Their small community of three friends is like a small family in a larger community which is their House and no matter how dangerous or how many rules they have to break, they will do anything to help each other. This kind of protection exists among all students of the same House as well. They always try to help the others in order to make their House the best.

Of course, Rowling is not trying to show Hogwarts as a utopia. She spends more space in the text representing a model of our world and the vital role of home and family in the lives of young people. As we read in the series, Harry’s connection to Ron, Hermione, and their House
makes him break away from his home at the Dursleys’. Yet, Rowling tries to show that contracts that hold a family together are very important for an individual and lead to support from other members of the family. In a family in the wizardry world, for example, breaking the family covenants would lead to serious and unpleasant results. Even the Dark Lord Voldemort, who is the most powerful wizard, needs a family and since he has none, he calls his devoted fellows a true family, for they are loyal to him. As for the true family of Voldemort, it is more about loyalty, trust and unity of purpose than about blood connection (Kornfeld and Protho 187-203).

Besides broken families and cruel relatives, Rowling presents many helpful and kind parents and guardians who provide support for their children. Harry receives real physical and psychological support from many people who have no blood connection to him. Among them, we can consider Hagrid, Dumbledore, Sirius Black, and the Weasleys. But the most important family love for Harry is the protection that his mother provides him with by sacrificing her life. The protection and support that a family gives to its members connect them and support young people when they leave home to find their own way. In the Harry Potter series, the author shows young readers the importance of home and family for young adults finding their place in the world.

The Harry Potter series, then, provides its readers with a positive set of values which are needed in order to lead adolescents to a better life. As Perry Glazer writes in “The Surprising Trouble with Harry,” “children need more than a set of virtues to emulate, values to choose, rules to obey, or even some higher form of reasoning to attain. They long to be part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. And that’s why children want to read Harry Potter” (13). Harry Potter books appeal to “both” children and adults, for they “both satisfy and support our God-implanted longing to resist evil and serve the good. Can we reasonably ask anything more for our
entertainment?” (Granger, Looking for God 22).
Chapter 3:

Translating a Western Novel in an Islamic Country
A foreign text is rewritten in domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles, and this results in the production of textual effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language and culture.

(Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia.” 485)

Translation is the “trial of the foreign.” [....] It establishes a relationship between the self-same (Propre) and the foreign by aiming to open up the foreign work to us in its utter foreignness.

(Antoine Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign.” 276)

The translation of Western children’s books has a long history in Iran and can be divided into two different eras: before and after Islam (the changing of the Iranian official religion from Zoroastrianism to Islam at the end of the Sassanid Empire in 644). Before Islam, many books from China, India, and Greece were translated into ancient Persian (Pahlavi). After the emergence of Islam in Iran, more Western books were translated into Pahlavi and the source languages of most popular translated works were Arabic, Turkish, French, Italian, and English (Mohammadi & Ghaeni 433-88). One of the first translated children’s books after Islam, for example, was Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* which was published as a series in a newspaper in 1910. During the 1920’s and 1940’s the translation of children’s literature became more popular in Iran and translators considered it as a possible career. At the same time, in the 1940’s, the translation of fantasy became popular and numerous English and French Western fantasies, such as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and Jules Verne’s *From the Earth to The Moon*, were translated into Persian (495-527).
Generally, works by Jules Verne, Hans Christian Andersen, John Christopher, and Astrid Lindgren are among the most translated and well accepted Western fantasies in Iran (495-54).

As I explained in the Introduction and the first chapter and will further discuss in the next chapter, Iranian children are used to reading novels and stories which contain mostly religious, ethical or politically motivated messages. From the earliest years of our lives, we are often told that Westerners are suffering from the lack of proper religious and moral values and we learn that Western governments try to interfere in Iran’s national and international affairs. Teachers and religious leaders always repeat that we have to be respectful to members of other cultural and religious groups. Yet, they also remind children, teenagers, and even adults, not to be affected by Western cultures. Nevertheless, as an Iranian adult, I can confirm that these “do’s and don’ts” seem to have the opposite effect and make Iranian children more curious about Western societies. Therefore, it is no wonder that translated Western books have been always good alternatives for people who wish to explore the unknown (or at least everything related to the West) and to increase their intercultural knowledge. Moreover, as Moradi Kermani argues, translated Western novels lead readers to a whole new world where there are not the same implied political or religious ideologies (5). Moreover, translators usually choose to render international best-sellers and the classics of world literature. This can be considered another important reason why Persian translations of Western works are much more successful than original Persian novels in Iran. Tandis publications, for example, decided to translate and publish *Harry Potter* in Iran when the third volume of the series was already released and known as a best-seller in the West. The publisher was sure that the fantasy would also be successful in Iran.

However, I can confirm that some Persian translations of Western novels are adapted to Iranian culture in ways that change their initial novelty and makes them seem similar to
Iranian novels. Yet most readers do not notice many of these adaptations, for they do not have access to original copies and cannot compare the two versions. While living and studying in Iran as an undergraduate student in English translation studies, I needed to read several English novels. I managed to buy many of them, but not in the original form. Most are censored and republished by Iranian publishers who have not purchased the copyright. Even the original copies are censored simply by using black or white markers. Agents of the Censorship Office censor words, phrases, paragraphs, and images by coloring them in black or white and making sure that readers are not able to see them. Most of those original copies are available at the Annual International Book Exhibition of Tehran, where I could buy international bestsellers for high prices, for I had to pay in Dollars which was much more expensive than when I paid in Rial (Iranian money). However, like most other banned goods and texts, I could still find some original uncensored copies on the black market. But I preferred not to take the risk. Later in 2004 when I moved to Canada and started to read original uncensored books, including *Harry Potter*, I realized that Iranian readers of the Persian translated versions do not interpret the same meaning as readers of the source texts.

During my stay in Canada, I have talked to many Canadian and international scholars about *Harry Potter* and the issue of censorship. However, most of those people, especially Westerners, are not familiar with the process of censorship in Iran; some of my friends are even surprised to know that Rowling’s fiction is censored due to its minor gender issues. For this reason, it is of great importance to give a short introduction to the concept of censorship in Iran and different factors that may have a direct or indirect influence on it.
3.1. Censorship in Iran

Censorship is not a new issue in Iran and its history goes back to over a hundred years ago when Naser al-Din Shah (a King in the Qajar era) found out about the censorship of newspapers and books in Europe and decided to apply the same strategy for newspapers and foreign books in Iran. After his time, censorship became tougher or easier, depending on the political and religious leadership of the country. In the era of monarchy, censorship was mostly applied for political purposes and many religious and political books, such as those of the popular Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati, were labelled “forbidden.” The penalty for having such books could be life imprisonment, torture, or even death. It is worth mentioning that not all religious books were subject to censorship, but mostly those which tried to provoke people by reminding them of Islamic laws and proving that the government did not respect those values. However, non-political writers were freer to express their feelings in terms of romantic emotions and sexual desires (Karimi-Hakkak 320-337). To be more specific, in the last fifteen years of the monarchy, Iran experienced the emergence of sexually explicit art works including novels, short stories, paintings, poems, lyrics, drama, and movies.

Many such works are still available on the Iranian black market and almost everyone has access to most pre-revolutionary\(^1\) music albums and movies. There are even original copies of old journals and newspapers which are quite interesting, especially for younger people who have not experienced such freedom.

After the revolution and according to the 24\(^{th}\) principle of The Basic Law of Iran, censorship is not legal and all people are supposed to have the right to free expression. This principle states that people can freely declare their ideas provided they do not insult, disgrace, or

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\(^1\) In Iran, the terms pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary respectively refer to the Monarchic era and after the Islamic revolution.
accuse others. Literary and nonliterary works should not depict obscene acts and should not be in opposition to the religious, cultural, and political beliefs of Islamic society (Bahar 11-20).

In Iran today, however, before being published, all books including poetry collections, short stories, novels, and autobiographies have to be reviewed by the Censorship Department of the Ministry of Culture and Guidance due to the belief that censorship is required to protect religious and cultural values. There, each book is studied carefully. If any words, phrases, paragraphs, or chapters are in contrast with the religious, political, and cultural beliefs of the nation, they will be changed or omitted. In general, gender issues and political concepts are the most important factors which may change the degree of censorship applied to a book. (Karimi-Hakkak 320-337).

Due to their mostly imaginative plots, Western fantasies may belong to the group of translated books which have the least changes made to their content. For instance, *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* or *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are almost unchanged in their Persian versions. These books have some cultural differences that may sound unfamiliar to Iranian young readers. Yet, they are considered as harmless and good books which improve children’s imagination and creativity. In Lewis’s fictions, we can even see some explicitly educational parts. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for instance, we read: “She immediately stepped into the wardrobe... leaving the door open, of course, because she knew that it is very foolish to shut oneself into any wardrobe” (3). As most fantasy readers know, one of the protagonists of the novel (and later, all four protagonists), goes into a wardrobe and suddenly finds herself in the magical world of Narnia. Lewis knows that by reading this novel, many children may want to go into wardrobes and check if they can find a way to Narnia. Therefore, he warns children not to shut the door. Obviously, such novels are the least likely to
be victims of censorship in Iran.

As I explained in the Introduction, the first three volumes of the Harry Potter series mostly cover issues related to the world of children and magic. They picture young Harry and his friends who try to solve problems and prove they are important. In some parts, it is mentioned that Harry is interested in a beautiful Chinese girl, but there is no physical contact between the two and thus no, or very little, censorship is applied to the books. Nevertheless, with the aging of the characters, the next four volumes gradually get darker and more mature in terms of presenting romantic relationships and physical love. The fourth volume, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, for instance, is the first book in the series that involves issues related to early adolescence and puberty. In this volume, Harry is chosen to compete with adolescent wizards and witches in the Triwizard Tournament which takes place at Hogwarts and involves difficult tasks designed to evaluate three chosen students in different ways: magical skill, honesty, daring, intelligence, ability to cope with danger, and wizardry knowledge. The book involves adolescent issues such as choosing a partner for the Yule Ball and dancing at the party. It is also the first volume which presents the issue of death by narrating the resurrection of Voldemort, who kills one of the competitors and tries to kill Harry during the wizardry dual, but fails for the second time. This book can be regarded as a pioneer for the last three volumes of the series, which are very dark and involve the death of many key characters, such as Harry’s godfather. The fifth volume, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, begins with the attack of Dementors (scary guards of Azkaban prison) on Harry and his cousin, Dudley, in the muggle world. It continues with replacing Dumbledore, the powerful head of Hogwarts, with Dolores Umbridge, who tries to ignore the horrible truth of the Dark Lord’s resurrection. The book covers activities of the order of the phoenix, a group of trusted wizards and witches who support Harry and Dumbledore.
and who try to find a way to defeat Voldemort and his servants. In this book, Harry experiences both happiness and misery: he kisses the girl he loves and, at the end of the novel, he loses his supportive and beloved godfather. Finally, the last two installments picture the wizardry society’s attempt to defeat Voldemort, who is back in power, and involve the most painful deaths, including the death of Dumbledore, as well as the most controversial gender issues and love scenes. These final four volumes contain many parts which are considered to be cultural taboos in Iran. Therefore, Persian translators need to render such parts in a way that conveys the original message and protects the text from being banned by the censorship office.

Since Iran does not respect international copyright law, after the great success of the series, more than twenty-four translators began retranslating the series for different publishing houses. Soon, a competition began among publishers and translators over who would publish each new volume first. Some publishers even hired groups of translators in order to speed up the translation process. The contest between Iranian translators resulted in many poor translations of the *Harry Potter* books in the Iranian book market. After the release of each volume in the West, Iranian fans of the series were so excited that they would read the first available Persian translations, regardless of their quality. In June 2007, and in collaboration with several amateur translators, an Iranian *Harry Potter* web page succeeded in finishing and presenting the first Persian version of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* only five days after its original release in the West (Lahordi 24-25).

Iranian translators have to cope with many difficulties which arise in translating a work. Some of these difficulties are common to every translation process, but linguistic differences between Farsi and English, including alphabets, vowels, verb conjugations, and sentence structures, make the situation even more difficult. In order to better explain these differences, it
is worth giving a brief description of the Persian language which is the first language of more than twenty-seven million people in Iran, and as a second language by more than forty million Iranians. Persian, known also as Parsi or Farsi, is a member of the Indo-Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages (Mohammadi & Ghaeni 342). Farsi is also spoken by people in Afghanistan and Tajikistan and is respectively known as Dari and Tajik. Since Iran was under the control of Muslim kings for many years, the Persian language adopted many Arabic words and verbs. Yet, in the Qajar dynasty (1779-1925), Iranian kings developed their relationships with the Western countries, especially with France, and the French language became the “language of prestige” which was learnt and spoken by members of elite families. Also, in the Pahlavi period (1925-1979), especially in the last ten years before the Islamic revolution in 1979, the use of French words became a symbol of being educated and open minded. That is why there are many borrowed French words such as “merci”, “laboratoire”, “refuse”, “manteau”, and “meuble” in Persian.

Persian is written from right to left and the alphabet is similar to that of the Arabic language, except for the letters “g, ch, p, j” which do not exist in Arabic. Contrary to what many Westerners think, Persian words are not designed as symbols (like Chinese characters). Nevertheless, there are thirty-two letters and six vowels that form millions of Persian words. As linguist Arthur Henry Bleeck explains in *A Concise Grammar of the Persian Language*: “all the letters of the Persian alphabet are consonants; for although “i” and “u” often perform the part of vowels, that term is properly confined to the three characters, “o”, “a”, and “é”; the first of which is represented by a small oblique stroke over the letter, thus ⟨⟩, the second by a similar stroke under the letter, ⟨⟩, and the third by a small curve like a comma ⟨⟩” (7). There is no gender in Persian grammar, even in verb conjugations (he or she/ his or her), and it makes the translation
process more difficult for Iranian translators.

In addition to main structural linguistic differences, there are other dissimilarities that translators have to deal with. Indeed, a text is not only a combination of phrases, but also a way to transfer a specific message to specific readers. Translators are trusted messengers who have to transfer these messages to target readers.

3.2. Translators and Methods of Translation

What is translation? Is it transferring a meaning from a foreign language into a target language? Or is it only conveying a message from one person to another in the same or different languages? What happens to cultural aspects which are being conveyed by the author? Should the translator transfer them as well? Or should he or she simply ignore them? What if those cultural values have an important role in the text? These are frequent questions that arise through the translation process and translators have to find answers for them. They have to know if the source text has a literal value or a deep meaning which should be conveyed by the text; they should know if specific names have a particular meaning and a role in the whole text. In general, translators have to discover the deepest layers of the text and then reproduce the literary product into the target language. Hence, as Northrop Frye writes in his foreword to Dialogue sur la traduction, translation is a form of criticism, because translators need a deep understanding of the whole text and should be able to recreate their interpretation of the work (11).

As explained by most reader-response theorists, such as Iser, Redish, and Ong, any written work is a product of a particular cultural community and conveys specific cultural messages that ideally should be available to readers. On the other hand, as theorists like Fish and Flower state, a reader’s comprehension of a text has a direct relationship with his or her own
cultural beliefs. Thus, translation is in fact both an intercultural and an "interlingual" process, for it works with two different "linguistic systems" which are set in two different cultures. The difficulties of the translation activity "vary proportionately with the degree of distance between the languages and the cultures involved" (Bandia 55). Consequently, according to Lawrence Venuti, the best translation method should:

  
  still turn to cultural theory in order to assess the significance of the data, to analyze the norms. Norms may be in the first instance linguistic or literary, but they will also include a diverse range of domestic values, beliefs, and social representations which carry ideological force in serving the interests of specific groups. And they are always housed in the social institutions where translations are produced and enlisted in cultural and political agendas. (The Scandals of Translation 29)

Therefore, the job of a translator is not only to find equivalents for foreign words, but also to introduce new values, beliefs, and norms to a group of readers who already have their own values and taboos. In order to create a good translation, the translator needs to be familiar with both the ST (source text) and TT (target text) cultures. Only in this way can he or she understand the hidden cultural messages of the ST. Here, the translator has the "alternative of either preserving the original function of the source text in its culture [...] or changing the function to adapt to specified needs in the target culture" (Snell-Hornby, Turns of Translation 52).

Accordingly, the Harry Potter series contains both cultural and linguistic messages that should be translated into the target language (TL). Here, translators encounter a new world full
of magical creatures, strange invented words, names that are hard to pronounce, poems, poetic riddles, and different cultural occasions. Translators have to understand the intention of the author and decide which translation method can help them better render the text and transfer the message. As Anthony Pym states in *Translation and Text Transfer*, translators are indeed communicators between cultures. They should try to improve the target text and make it acceptable by target readers (TR). Pym explains that since author and translator are not from the same cultural backgrounds, it is almost impossible to convey the same cultural messages to readers in the target language. Some of the cultural concepts of the source text (ST) are spontaneously changed in translation and therefore the text does not have the same meaning for both source readers and target audience. Therefore, translators can improve the interpretation of the target readers by carefully choosing the best translation techniques.

In general, translation approaches are divided into three different categories. The first category is a word-for-word or literal translation which is a source-text-oriented method. Translators who decide to employ this strategy try to find equivalents for each word and often ignore the deep meaning of the text. Another method is the sense-for-sense or free translation which means to read the text, understand the general meaning, and reproduce it in the target language. Finally, the faithful translation is a combination of both free and literal methods. It respects both the meaning and form of the source text and tries to be loyal to the source text (Munday 17-24). Therefore, to create a balanced translation, Antoine Berman states, meaning and form should be regarded as one (*Les Tours de Babel* 60).

In his leading article “On the Different Methods of Translating,” well-known German theologian and translation scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher argues that since literal, faithful, or even free translations do not fully transmit both cultural and textual messages of a ST, translators
should follow a method which brings TT readers close to ST writer and his or her intentions (38-39). Translators, then, should convey to the TT readers the same implication of the ST as readers of the ST would imply. According to Schleiermacher, translators can move the ST author toward TT readers by “naturalizing” of the ST, on the one hand, or moving the TT readers towards the ST author by “alienating” them on the other hand (43). However, in *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Venuti criticizes the strategy of the translators’ entire invisibility and the total naturalness of the target text which he refers to as the “domestication” of the ST (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 20). Referring to alienating, Schleiermacher’s ideal method of translation, as “Foreignization” or moving TT readers toward the ST author, Venuti insists on keeping the foreign atmosphere in the translated texts. Antoine Berman is also an advocate of the “alienating” method and argues that readers of a translated work should feel the strangeness of the text (“Translation and the Trials” 276). According to him: “translation is the ‘trial of the foreign.’ But in a double sense. In the first place, it establishes a relationship between the self-Same (*Propre*) and the foreign by aiming to open up the foreign work to us in its utter foreignness [....] In the second place, translation is a trial for the foreign as well, since the foreign work is uprooted from its own *language-ground* (*sol-de-langue)*” (“Translation and the Trials” 276).

Still, the translation of children’s books is different. Children are not patient or educated enough to remember difficult foreign names or discover deep cultural messages. They need to read books which are easier and less strange. As a result, translation for children requires some degree of domestication because of ST’s and TT’s cultural differences and norms. Translators should decide which cultural aspects can be comprehended by children and which ones may make the translated text weird and unacceptable (Desmidt 86). As Newmark explains in *Approaches to Translation*:  

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If the SL [Source Language] text is entirely bound up with the culture of the SL community-a novel or a historical piece or a description attempting to characterize a place or custom of local character- the translator has to decide whether or not the reader requires, or is entitled to, supplementary information and explanation. (21)

Consequently, translation for children is even more challenging, for the translated book should appeal to both adults and children. Choosing a book for children is often a duty of parents who make a decision whether a particular book is good for their children or harmful. Moreover, one can never ignore the important role of the censoring agents in Iran who decide which books are worth reading in the first place. Obviously, if they believe that a book or a translation is not appropriate for Iranian children, no child may have the chance to read it. Here, Iranian translators play the most important role in transferring the ST into the TT which is guaranteed to be accepted by the censoring agents and parents, on the one hand, and by children and teenagers on the other.

3.3. Translating *Harry Potter* into the Persian Language

As explained earlier, Iranian children grow up in a country with many ethical, political, and religious norms that are different from Western norms. Therefore, Persian translators must consider these norms in translating a text. Due to its numerous invented names and magic spells, the *Harry Potter* series can be regarded as one of the most challenging Western fantasies to translate into Persian. Although there are more than fifty translators who have transferred chapters or whole books of *Harry Potter* into the Persian language, my focus is
mostly on Vida Eslamieh, the only Iranian translator who has officially purchased the right to translate the series into Persian. Moreover, she is the first translator who translated the series into Persian and her invented Persian equivalents for Rowling’s invented words were adopted by many other Persian translators later. Her fluent, easily readable, yet faithful translations encouraged many Iranian children to continue to read all books in the series and made Eslamieh the most popular and favourite translator of the series in Iran (Mohammadi “My Daughter Hates Harry Potter” 6-7).

To better analyze the Persian version of the Harry Potter series and the translation methods used by the translators, I will also use some examples of the French translation of the series. Explaining how Eslamieh and Jean-François Ménard have coped with different problems which arise in translating the series will reveal certain cultural and linguistic adaptations that both the Persian and the French translators have made.

Contrary to Quebecois children who have only one French version of the series, Iranian children have to go through a decision-making process due to the multiplicity of translated Persian versions of the same book. They are confused by several different Persian titles and book covers for the same novel. For Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, they have at least five alternatives: Harry Potter and the Magic Stone (Vida Eslamieh/Saeed Kebriayi/Nasim Azizi/Hamideh Ashkan Najand/Sayeh Houmayeh/Sedigheh Fakhar Ebrahimi/Iran Ali Pour), Harry Potter and the Kimia Stone (Mojdeh Abdollahi/Baharak Ryahi Pour), Harry Potter and the Miracle Stone (Flor Talebi), and Harry Potter and Panacea of Everlasting Life (Mohammad Ghesa). Here, we can find that almost all of the Iranian translators decide to stay loyal to the ST title and employ a literal method of translation. They try to find Persian equivalents for “the

2. Not a group translation; each of the mentioned translators have published their own versions. These titles are my own translations from Persian.
Philosopher's Stone.” This title indicates the genre and the theme of the book. By reading the
original title, readers can instantly realize that the novel is about a boy and a particular
mysterious stone. Consequently, Iranian translators decide to create the same impression in the
TT by using equivalents for the “Philosopher’s Stone.” It is necessary to mention that in Persian
grammar, there are no possessive case letters like “s” in English. Instead, the vowel “é” is
pronounced at end of the possessive. The same rule is used for adjectives. For instance, one of
the Persian equivalents for the word “philosopher” is “ostad” (“امستاد”), and for “stone” is
“sang” (“سنگ”). Since in the Persian language, adjectives and possessions are used before the
noun, the Persian title in literal translation reads: “Sang-é-Ostad” (“Stone Philosopher”) (“سنگ
امستاد”). This title makes an ambiguous impression for Persian readers who are not sure whether
the stone is a philosopher, or if it belongs to the philosopher. As a result, by regarding the theme
of the volume, the Persian translators omit the word “philosopher” and choose a word that
explains the particular stone in the best way. Both the Persian translated and the original titles
convey that the novel is a fantasy about a boy and a certain stone. Yet, they reveal nothing more
about the wizardry community which plays a leading role throughout the series.

Nonetheless, Jean-Francois Ménard, the French translator of the series, seems to feel that
the original ST title of the first book does not imply the magical atmosphere of the story.
Therefore, he decides to focus on the wizardry school where almost all the wizardry adventures
happen. He, then, rewrites the title as Harry Potter à l’école des sorciers, which immediately
implies the main theme of the volume and leaves little to the imagination. Furthermore, the cover
of the French version pictures three teenagers (two boys and a girl) dressed in wizard’s clothing.
The image exposes all details that readers should know: an intelligent-looking girl holding
books, who portrays Hermione, the well-mannered and intelligent friend of Harry; a smiling boy
who is helping Harry hold the cage of his white owl corresponds to cool Ron Weasley, who is always with Harry; and finally, a boy in the center, who is wearing round glasses and holding a wand in one hand and a cage in the other, which reveals that he is the leading hero, Harry, the one with the wand: the power. Moreover, a large castle with four towers and the silhouette of a witch flying on a broomstick in the background completes the outline. The cover of Eslamieh’s version of the first volume, on the other hand, pictures a boy in his early teens who is wearing ordinary clothing and is flying on a broomstick. The cover also portrays a big house, an angel of death, a black owl, and lightning which conveys a sense of horror. This image, then, implies that the book is about an ordinary teenage boy who is (or becomes) a wizard and experiences scary situations.

Another issue that both French and Persian translators of Harry Potter have had to deal with are names of characters, objects, and locations. As Jan Van Coillie argues in “Character Names in Translation: A Functional Approach,” some names only identify different characters or locations in a book, but there are also names that have specific meanings in the ST. Translators of children’s books have to keep in mind that foreign names, which are often hard to pronounce in the TL, have an alienating effect on readers, especially children. Young readers may have difficulty in identifying with characters who have foreign names (Coillie 125). Therefore, translators may decide to either change these names with names in the TT language which convey the same meanings, or keep them unchanged. In reading the French version of the series, we can see that Ménard tries to “naturalize” (or “domesticate”) some of the names in order to make the translation more French. For instance, in the French translation, “Slytherin” becomes “Serpentard,” which reminds us of the sign of the house: a serpent. It also evokes the rare and dark ability to talk with snakes which can be possessed only by Slytherin members.

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3 Hogwarts is divided to four Houses: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff.
As discussed previously, since vowels are not written in Persian books (except in books for elementary school students), knowing the correct pronunciation of foreign names is usually difficult for readers. Sometimes, it is even difficult to find out the gender of a character, of the name is not familiar. Moreover, there only two Persian equivalents of “it and its” (او یا اش (‘)) for all English personal and possessive pronouns (he, she, it, his, her, him, hers, its). For example, the phrases “she took her book/ he took his book/ she took his book/ he took her book” are all translated to “it took its book,” (او یا اش را برداشت. (‘)) which does not reveal the gender of the subject. However, it is very rare to see an Iranian translator change foreign names into domestic ones. Instead, they usually footnote the original names in English with or without further explanations about their meaning. The Harry Potter series includes both ordinary and invented English names. Here, Iranian translators can be divided into two groups: those who translate the invented names by made-up names in Persian and those who keep the apparently meaningless invented ST names and magic spells. Vida Eslamieh employs both domesticating and alienating strategies in translating the names. Contrary to Ménard, Eslamieh does not translate ordinary names of characters and main locations and, in a few cases, applies minor spelling changes in order to make the names easier to pronounce and remember for Iranian readers. The name “Hermione”, for instance, becomes “Heryon” in Eslamieh’s version. However, she translates most of the invented names of the ST into invented Persian names which have similar effects. One of the many other invented names of series is the word “Muggle”: a name used by wizards to mention all non-wizard people. Eslamieh Translates it to “Mashang” (مشنگ”) which is an informal nickname used for labelling ignorant people (Eslamieh, Philosopher’s Stone 106). Also Ménard, employs the same translation method for translating the invented names and uses the word “Moldu” for “Muggle”. Nevertheless, other Iranian translators of the fiction do not
translate the word and simply borrow the equivalent that Eslamieh uses. "Dementors" is another important invented word in the series which refers to soulless, ghost-like creatures that suck peoples’ happiness and, as their name implies, make people crazy and hopeless (Rowling, *Azkaban* 69). Both Ménard and Eslamieh decide that the meaning of the name is more important than the name itself and, therefore, translate it to names in TT languages. Eslamieh mixes two Persian words “crazy” and “maker” (دیوانه، and ماس) and invents the new word “Crazymaker” (دیوانه ماس) which mean a creature that drives other people mad. Ménard, on the other hand, does not invent a word but uses "Le traqueur" (Ménard *Azkaban* 3), which means a hunter and conveys the image of someone (or something) who is going to track and hunt people, but does not express that the hunter drives his victims crazy. However, other Iranian translators, such as Parto Eshragh, use the original word in their translations which makes the book sound foreign and strange.

The *Harry Potter* series also involves many imaginary magical objects with strange invented names which are mostly very hard to pronounce for Persian readers. These names are repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel and may discourage readers (especially young readers). In the last two volumes of the series, for instance, Rowling presents a very important new magical object called “Horcrux” which is related to Dark Magic and is used by the Dark Lord to hide parts of his soul and give him immortality. Horcruxes can be anything, even animals (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 463). This word can be extremely hard to pronounce when it is written in the Persian alphabet and reads “Hrcruks” (هرکروکس). To better describe the level of complexity, it is worth remembering that the vowels “é, á, and o” are not written in Persian books and thus, each consonant letter can possess any of the vowels. Therefore, the word “Hrcruks” can have a lot of possible pronunciations, such as “Horécérukés”, “Horacérukás”, 

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“Hérocárukés”, etc. Therefore, since the magical device is a key object in the last two volumes of the series, Eslamieh decides to invent a Persian word which defines it in the most similar way. She mixes two Persian words “Jan” (جان) that means soul and “Pich” (پیچ) that means “Turn” and makes up the new word “Jan Pich” (جان پیچ) or “Soulturn”). The invented Persian means an object which wraps around the soul. However, other Persian translators of the book use the same ST word, which causes their readers to be confused about the correct pronunciation. Also, Ménard uses the original word “Horcrux” which is less difficult to pronounce in French than in Persian, and reflects standard French word formation.

In Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Lord Voldemort reveals his real name, “Tom Marvolo Riddle,” to Harry. He uses the letters of his name to create “I am Lord Voldemort” (Rowling, Chamber of Secrets 231). Since Lord Voldemort is a key character in the story and most Iranians are familiar with the meaning of “lord”, no Persian translators rendered it into Persian words. In Eslamieh’s version, we can see that she even uses the English letters in order to better indicate the process of changing “TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE” to “I AM LORD VOLDEMORT” (Eslamieh, Chamber of Secrets 245). However, Ménard removes the important word “Lord” and uses the name “TOM ELVIS JEDUSOR” which enables him to translate the phrase into the French sentence “JE SUIS VOLDEMORT” (Ménard, Chambre des Secrets 252). By ignoring “lord”, Ménard excludes the sense of powerfulness of which Voldemort is so proud. But Persian readers get the impression that “Lord Voldemort” or “Dark Lord” is someone particularly influential.

Since Lord Voldemort is the most dangerous and cruel wizard in the series, the wizardry community never mentions his name and refers to him as “He who must not be named” or “you-know-who.” Most of the Iranian translators literally translate the terms into Persian. Ménard
uses literal equivalents as well and renders the terms into *Celui-Don't-Le-Nom-Ne-Doit-Pas-Être-Prononcé* and *Vous savez qui*. Eslamieh, on the other hand, translates the two terms into the single popular Persian phrase “Don’t call his name,” which was first used in an Iranian children’s movie in 1989 and became a popular term to refer to undesirable people.

In the following tables, we can see more examples of linguistic problems which arise in translating *Harry Potter* and how Iranian and French translators have dealt with them.

**Table 1.** The French and Persian Translations of the title of the Second volume:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English title</th>
<th><em>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French translation (trans. Jean-François Ménard)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter et la Chambre des Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Vida Eslamieh)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Mysterious Hole</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Fereydoun Ghazi Nejad Pirsayi &amp; Nasim Azizi)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Room of Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Hamideh Ashkan Najand)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Hall of Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Sedigheh Fakhar Ebrahimi)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Hall of Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Parto Eshragh)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Hall of Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Baharak Ryahi Pour)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Mysterious Crypt</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Mohammad Ghesas &amp; Asghar Androudi)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and Room of Secrets</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** The French and Persian Translations of the title of the Third volume:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The English title</th>
<th><em>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Jean-François Ménard)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter et l’ordre du Phénix</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Vida Eslamieh)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Circle of the Phoenix</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Parto Eshragh)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Organization of the Phoenix</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian translation (trans. Sousan Razeghi)</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Council of the Phoenix</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Words</td>
<td>Muggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Moldu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Mashang مشنگ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. The French and Persian translations of different names, words, and spells:
The Harry Potter series contains some intended grammatical mistakes and as André Lefevere states in Translating Literature, translators have to find a way to match these errors with grammatical mistakes in their own language (Lefevere 35). Dobby, for example, is a house elf in the series and does not follow English grammatical rules: “Dobby is a house elf, sir […] they lets Dobby get on with it, sir. Sometimes they reminds me to do extra punishment…” (Rowling, Chamber of Secrets 16). Since Persian grammatical rules are very different from those of English, Eslamieh decides to employ a word-for-word method of translation and successfully conveys the sense of strangeness to readers. Nevertheless, in the French version of the volume, there are no grammatical mistakes and the only evident difference between Dobby and other characters is that he uses short sentences.

Other important terms in Harry Potter are different magical spells, charms, and curses which are frequently used by the wizardry community. Most of these spells have Latin roots: “Aparicium” for instance, which is a charm that makes the invisible ink appear, is derived from the Latin word “appareo” which means to appear (Ganji, Half-Blood Prince 71). In her translation of the fourth book, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Eslamieh translated spells into Persian, but she was widely criticized by many critics and readers. Readers preferred the Latin spells which made them feel the peculiarity and the unknown magical power of the charm.
They enjoyed the feeling of not knowing what a spell is going to do. The light spell “Lumos”, for instance, was translated to “Be light” (روشن شو”) which made the text very naturalized and did not convey the sense of foreignness.

In addition to linguistic differences that make the *Harry Potter* series a challenging translation project, Iranian translators have to deal with significant cultural differences as well. In the *Harry Potter* series, there are two issues of concern to the verification agents of the Censorship Office. The first one includes gender issues, such as the relationship between boys and girls, and the second one is the mention of alcoholic drinks. Therefore, Persian translators must employ domesticating strategies and adapt their translations to cultural norms. For instance, in the Yule Ball (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*), Parvati murmurs: “Come on! [...] We’re supposed to dance!” (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 365). This phrase is concerned as containing gender issues and cannot be accepted either in a children’s book, or in an adults’ book in Iran. Therefore, Persian translators try to “domesticate” it in a way which applies the least possible changes. Eslamieh’s version reads: “Come on Harry, we have to begin the party.” Later in the party, everyone is dancing with his or her partner, but it is changed to “walking and talking” in translation (Eslamieh, *Goblet of Fire* 380-93). However, the kissing scene of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is omitted in the Persian translations. And the part when Ron asks Harry: “Are you that bad at kissing?” is changed to: “Is it so terrible to be intimate with you?”

Since characters are maturing in the last volumes of the series, Farsi translators have to change more sentences and details in order to get publishing permission. Most of the changes have been applied to the last two volumes, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and *Harry

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4 These citations are my own translation from the Persian version of the series.
*Potter and the Deathly Hallows.* In the seventh chapter of the last volume, when Ginny gave Harry his birthday present and "she was kissing him as she had never kissed him before, and Harry was kissing her back, it was blissful oblivion, better than Firewhisky; she was the only real thing in the world, Ginny, the feel of her, one hand on her back and one in her long, sweet-smelling hair" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 99). Eslamieh translates this part in a way that immediately reveals what really happens in the original version: "'It is the positive side I have been looking for.' Ginny murmured and then, gave him her present with such a kindness that Harry had never experienced before; Harry was also expressing much kindness to her and what a delightful unconsciousness it was; warmer than any hot drinks. Ginny was the only real thing in the world, she, and her lovely present, it was only her presence and the smell of her long hair..." (Eslamieh, *Deathly Hallows* 142). Expressions such as "expressing kindness" and "with much kindness" are seldom used in Persian and, by putting them in the romantic context, Eslamieh successfully pictures a love scene. I can also confirm that by reading this part, almost every Iranian reader can immediately guess that Ginny kisses Harry. My conversations with several Iranian *Harry Potter* fans, who only read the Persian versions, prove that they find Eslamieh’s method of translation a very intelligent way to adapt the ST to the TT.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* Iranian readers read more such adapted sections. For instance, in Chapter Fourteen, the original version reads: "they found themselves looking at Dean and Ginny, who were locked in a close embrace and kissing fiercely as if glued together"(Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 268). Eslamieh’s translation is: "they found themselves in front of Dean and Ginny, who were talking warmly" (Eslamieh, *Half-Blood Prince* 379). Although this part is less apparent in terms of revealing the original romantic parts, readers can

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5 & 6 These parts are my own translations from Persian.
still interpret the general message that is conveyed: Dean and Ginny are now in a romantic relationship.

There are more than fifty sections, including phrases and words, which are changed in the Persian versions of *Harry Potter*. For example, "boy friend" is changed to "fiancé," "let’s dance" to "let’s go," "they had vanished in the dark" to "they had gone," or "Ron’s drunk uncle" to "Ron’s uncle." In the French version, on the other hand, the English words are translated into their French equivalents and are not changed.

As I mentioned, Iran does not respect copyright law and Iranian national television channels usually show Persian translations of the most recent films from the West. However, all of these movies are censored before being presented to the audience. Due to its great popularity in Iran, most of the *Harry Potter* movies are translated and shown on Iranian national television shortly after their original release in the West. Scenes which relate to parties are mostly omitted or cut down to very short parts, because most female characters are wearing dresses which do not cover their whole body. Therefore, I can attest that that the *Harry Potter* movies are even more censored than the book series itself. The cultural ministry of Iran believes that the audio-visual media are more dangerous than books, because there are more people who watch television than read books. In addition to so-called "sexual" scenes, sections which include the drinking of alcohol are also changed in the Persian translations, for drinking alcohol is another issue which is forbidden in Iran.

Note that Esalamieh employs all three (word-for-word, free, and faithful) approaches to translation in rendering the *Harry Potter* series into the Persian language and culture. In some cases, she has no other choice but to change the phrases and words in order to create a text which conveys less cultural foreignness and guarantees that it will be accepted by the Censorship.
Office. This kind of translation is somehow a rewriting of the source text: the translator tries to transfer the similar meaning and sense considering her or his own cultural values and norms including ethical, social and linguistic norms. The translated text should suit cultural and religious norms of the target readers and as Venuti says in “Translation, Community, Utopia:”

Yet an ethics that counters the domesticating effects of the inscription can only be formulated and practiced primarily in domestic terms, in domestic dialects, registers, discourses and styles. And this means that the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text can only be signalled indirectly, by their displacement in the translation, through a domestic difference introduced into values and institutions at home. (483)
Chapter 4:

The Critical Reception of the *Harry Potter* Series in Iran
Rowling’s fiction is creative, magical, and mysterious. She [Rowling] motivates children to use their imagination and engage them in the world of the novel. Rowling is a genius who creates an identifiable magical world full of what children and teenagers wish for. The *Harry Potter* series is a mosaic of many interesting themes; Rowling is a magician.

(Nasiriha, “The Guest of Children’s Imagination” 103-4)\(^1\)

As a magical fantasy, *Harry Potter* is certainly a phenomenon in Iran and also a hero for teenagers, adolescents, and even adults. This is evidenced in the “spin-off” products such as Persian *Harry Potter* web pages and products related to the series. Moreover, the original copies of the last volume of the *Harry Potter* series were the first ever to be released in Iran at the same time as in most other countries. In fact, for the first time after the Islamic revolution, the early copies of a book were sold before being reviewed by experts of the Censorship Office (Foroutan & Jabbari 10-13; Esbati 21-23).

The sales record of the series in Iran is an example of its wide reception in the country: the last volume, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, alone, sold seven hundred original English copies and two hundred thousand Persian translated copies (Foroutan & Jabbari 10-13; Esbati 21-23). This number may sound unremarkable to Western readers, but in comparison to other Persian or translated novels which normally sell less than fifty thousand copies in Iran, it is a great success (Foroutan & Jabbari 10-13; Esbati 21-23). As I explained before, the book market is not taken seriously in Iran due to a general disregard for copyright law, which makes illegal copies of books available at very low prices. Furthermore, Iranian teenagers do not spend much time reading non-academic books. The most important reason is that students should get

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\(^1\) My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
ready for the major university entrance exam, which covers all courses given in high school and pre-university. By passing this exam they are able to enter university and since only one-third of competitors are accepted annually by both private and free public universities, succeeding in the exam is no doubt one of the important goals of many Iranian teenagers. As of the very first year of high school many schools give additional courses on problem solving and multiple choice tests. Moreover, many parents enroll their teenagers in different academic institutions in order to prepare them for the stiff competition which takes place after pre-university. Thus, it is no surprise that most parents do not like their children to read fantasy novels instead of academic books in their spare time.

*Harry Potter* merchandise is very popular in Iran, especially in Tehran and other large cities. Images of Harry Potter were first printed on stationery and school stuff such as pencils, notebooks, and bags. Those products sold well and children, teenagers, and even young adults showed great interest in them. Therefore, other companies tried to manufacture more products with images of Harry Potter on them. Many such goods were of very poor quality; however, children and teenagers bought them eagerly regardless. Today, anyone who visits Iranian shops can find traces of *Pottermania* everywhere: in ordinary markets in small towns, these traces are mostly notebooks, T-shirts, school bags, pens or other cheap products which are decorated by photos of the *Harry Potter* movie actors. Young readers who live in the capital have better opportunities to find hints of their favorite hero on whatever they like. In big malls of northern Tehran, wealthy people can buy *Harry Potter* accessories such as robes, cloaks, pointed hats, wands, round glasses, Gryffindor uniforms, and even Nimbus 2000 broom sticks. Also in the major furniture mall of Tehran, there are different sorts of bedroom furniture made and decorated like those in the series (Mir 11). In a mall in northern Tehran, there is even a café shop which is
named “Edinburgh” in honor of the location of the Nicolson café shop, which is claimed to be the place where Rowling wrote the first volume of the *Harry Potter* series.

Also, by a simple search on the internet, one can easily find thousands of the Persian *Harry Potter* fan web pages and professional websites which update their information on the *Harry Potter* books and movies daily. Among those Web pages, I can refer to *Jadoogaran.org* which is one of the most popular Iranian fan webpages of the series and means “Wizards.org”. This web page provides readers with hundreds of articles, books, photos and videos about *Harry Potter*. An interesting part of the web site is the story-telling branch where tens of thousands of members who have not given up their interest in the series continue experiencing Harry Potter’s adventures by writing new chapters and books which cover exciting fights between Harry and Voldemort (Mir 15).

Many Iranian critics and authors of children’s literature have studied the series from different perspectives and tried to discover the secrets of its success. *Why Harry Potter?* What is so special about this skinny orphan wizard boy who has become a hero for readers? What do Iranian readers have in common with Harry? Have Iranian children chosen to read this novel of their own will or they have been under the influence of other factors, such as the media and advertisements? In short, what is *Harry Potter* all about and who is this Harry who has enchanted Iranian Readers regardless of their cultural differences?

### 4.1. Cultural and Religious Studies Perspectives

Like all popular Western books released in Iran, such as the Narnia series, the *Harry Potter* series has its own advocates and opponents. While religious opponents in many Western
countries have attacked *Harry Potter* because of its use of magic, most Iranian religious leaders and scholars completely ignored the series. The main reason may be the issue of magic in Iran where there are still many modern witches, such as fortune tellers or religious predictors, who practice magic. Another reason might be the relatively few bans on magic in Islamic societies. Some Islamic laws, such as the prohibition of drinking alcohol and having sexual relations with someone other than one’s wife or husband, are explicitly mentioned as forbidden in the Qur’an and breaking these laws leads to punishment. In comparison with such strict laws, the use of magic is a minor subject which is usually disregarded by religious leaders. In the Qur’an, there are usually certain punishments for disrespecting some rules. However, although some Arabic groups attribute a few punitive traditions to Prophet Muhammad and cite that the penalty for sorcery is death, the Qur’an presents no particular punishment for practicing sorcery. Yet, the magic which is performed by seeking the help of demons is mentioned as an act of blasphemy in the Qur’an. Thus, the holy book says in Chapter two, verse 101-102:

> And when there cometh unto them a messenger from Allah, confirming that which they possess, a party of those who have received the Scripture fling the Scripture of Allah threw behind their backs as if they knew not. And [they] followed what which the devils falsely related against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon disbelieved not; but the devils disbelieved, teaching mankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels in Babel, Hârût and Mânût. Nor did they (the two angels) teach it to anyone till they had said: We are only a temptation, therefore disbelieve not (in the guidance of Allah). And from these two (angels) people learn that
by which they cause division between man and wife, but they
injure thereby no-one save by Allah's leave. And they learn that
which harmeth them and profiteth them not. And surely they do
know that he who trafficketh therein will have no (happy) portion
in the Hereafter; and surely evil is the price for which they sell their
souls, if they but knew. (2:101-2)

As we see, these verses condemn practicing magic and refer to it as an act of evil, yet no
particular punishment is presented for witches. It is also believed that Islam condemns even the
horoscope, or reading one's palm to predict the future. This prohibition, however, is not directly
stated in the Qur'an, but is based on the parts which state that no one knows the future or the
unseen except God almighty and even Muhammad does not know the unseen. Only God is the
knower of the unseen and the manifest (6:73) and the holder of the keys of the unseen (6:59).
Nevertheless, since acts of magic and fortune telling belonged to old Iranian culture and have not
been directly stated as Haraaam, as prohibited in Islam, Iranian people and religious figures do
not refer to them as forbidden (unlike the Christian preoccupation with sorcery and the black arts
which surfaced in Western reviews of Harry Potter). Moreover, many Iranians use the Qur'an
itself to foretell the future and call it as Istikharah, which literary means to ask a question from a
knowledgeable religious person. This act is usually done by a hermit who randomly opens the
Holy book and reads it; contents of the opened page are then used to answer the question by
"yes" or "no" and "good" or "bad."

As many people may know, before the rise of Islam at the end of the Sassanid Empire in
644, Iranians were a Zoroastrian nation who believed in Ahura Mazda, the Great God, and
cherished fire. They practiced religious ceremonies which were in some ways similar to those of
witches and, as stated by Carnoy, magic and religion are not as mixed together in any other cultures as they are in Zoroastrianism ("Magic in Iranian Culture" 33). Even after turning towards Islam, Iranians did not give up their old traditional ceremonies or their belief in the holiness of fire. Although the real root and meaning of most of these ceremonies are long forgotten, Iranians still practice some of them. In everyday life, Iranian children often hear stories about magic: for example, a sick child who is taken to a fortuneteller instead of a doctor and scary stories about jinn-hunted people and places.

By scrutinizing North American critiques of *Harry Potter*, as I did in the second chapter, one can see similarities and differences between Western and Iranian ideologies in terms of magic. Even though magic is a universal human concept, there are cultural differences in attitudes toward magic. As Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe states in *The Stolen Lightening: The Social Theory of Magic*, we can find magic in almost every culture. He claims that witches are real: "They are everywhere, in every era, in almost every society. For these are 'real social facts'" (1-17). According to O'Keefe, magic is divided into many schools, the most important of which are medical magic, black magic, ceremonial magic, religious magic, and magic cults and sects (1-17). We can see most of these provinces of magic in *Harry Potter*, and by studying the real concept of each, we find that they are not exactly the same. O'Keefe points out that medical magic and magic cults and sects, are kinds of magic which were and are usually practiced by witchdoctors and diviners. They met patients and told them that their illnesses were caused by a ghost, a witch, or a natural source. Then they gave their clients some spells or magical objects against the cause or told them what to do in order to get cured (5).

Regardless of the Islamic culture of Iranian society, magic is, no doubt, one of the most important superstitious traditional beliefs among many Iranians. Generally, there are two kinds
of occult beliefs in Iran. The first one is that of Islamic magic and the belief in people who claim to have special divine powers to cure illness, solve problems, and remove or revoke dark magic including jinn hunting. Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani, a celebrated Iranian scholar and Professor of religious studies at Harvard University, explains that this kind of magic is known as “Prayer-writing” (دعاء نبي) in Iran (140). Legal religious sorcerers or hermits who are known as “prayer writers” usually use parts of the Qur’an as magical charms which have to be pronounced and repeated in certain ways (140-43). This kind of religious magic consists of various practices including blowing on a drink or food after reading a verse of the Qur’an and giving it to those who have problems; reading certain chapters or verses of the Qur’an in specific times and locations in order to fulfill a particular wish; or wearing verses of the Qur’an which are written on pieces of animal skins or leather (140-43). According to Mahdavi Damghani, this school of magic is very much tied to “religious magic” in Iran, and people who practise it are apparently pious individuals. Prayer writers usually prescribe their “prayers” to clients who are suffering from illnesses. Clients are told to put the written verse in a glass of water or tea for a few seconds, until the ink is washed away. Then, they should remove the paper and swallow the drink (142).

The second belief is in traditional magic, which is older than the religious form. People who practice this type of magic are fortunetellers and witches who use magical objects and spells for both dark and good purposes. In order to fulfill their clients’ wishes, these witches mostly seek help from supernatural creatures like Jinn and ghosts (142-43). They also use different kinds of charms and objects which must be spelled, eaten or used under specific circumstances. However, having belief in Jinn is a shared subject in both Islamic and traditional magic, for these creatures are very important in Iranian and Islamic cultures and are also mentioned in the
Qur’an.

Therefore, in a nation like Iran which is deeply rooted in superstitious beliefs and the occult, publishing books about magic is no particular issue for religious people. In “Theosophy or Magic? Depends on Your Nationality,” Iranian critic Payam Foroutan refers to the meaning of magic in the Iranian culture and states that it is totally different from what Westerners consider as practicing magic. According to Foroutan, if ordinary Iranian citizens see or read about images of an old white bearded man flying in sky, walking on water, or predicting the future, they think of a Gnostic hermit who has undergone difficult mortification. They would not imagine that the old man could be a wizard sent by Evil. But what if it happened to people in Britain or France? The old man would be seen as a wizard or evil creature (30-34). Foroutan discusses the important role of theosophy in Iranian culture and literature and states that it is not a surprising set of beliefs for most Iranians. The Harry Potter series is, thus very close to Eastern theosophical beliefs. In fact, Harry and his friends journey through difficult levels to gain the philosopher’s stone is similar to that of theosophical training levels which have to be passed in order to reveal the real meaning of life for humans (30-34).

i) Harry Potter: A Zionist Plot and a Cultural Crusade?

Most negative Iranian critics of the series, such as Sa’id Mostaghasi, Ali Asghar Sa’adati, and Saeed Matin condemn its ideological implications and accuse Harry Potter of being a Western project which promotes certain Western political values and beliefs. As for most popular Western “creations,” including fashion, movies, and books, which are well accepted by the public in Iran, Iranian officials blame Harry Potter for being a tool of cultural invasion. This judgment can be explained by the Iranian political situation and beliefs. According to reader-
response theorists such as Fish, Flower, and Tompkins the meaning of a text varies for readers with different cultural expectations. The meaning depends to a large extent on the communities to which writers and readers belong, for these communities construct one’s beliefs, values and ideologies. Thus, even in the same culture, readers may interpret different meanings from a particular text.

As an Iranian citizen, I can attest that, as a result of cultural and political changes after the Islamic revolution in 1978, Iranian officials mostly blamed Israel and the West (especially the United States and the UK) for interfering in Iranian national affairs. These countries are repeatedly represented as cultural aggressors who are going to change our culture and make Iran one of their colonies. Therefore, *Harry Potter*, a Western best-seller which has no competitor in the Iranian book market, is explained as being no better than a Western neo-colonial project. Furthermore, the series is made into film versions by the Warner Brothers Film Company which is known by most Iranian critics as a Jewish company, for its founders are believed to be Jewish, hence further suspicions about the involvement of Israel.

Weeks before releasing the last volume of the series *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Iranian reformist magazines, such as *Soroush for Children and Youngsters* (دنیای تصویر), *The World of Image* (DVD و نوجوان سروش), widely began advertising it in Iran. Finally, the beloved fantasy was sold in a few bookstores, such as Bayan-e-Salis, in Tehran at the same time as in the UK. Since there is a time difference between London and Tehran, *Harry Potter* was released at 2:30 A.M. in Iran, where no shops are allowed to be open after midnight (Matin 3). Contrary to most Western countries where *Harry Potter* fans enjoyed book-launching ceremonies, people who were gathering to buy their favorite novel in Tehran tried to talk quietly in order not to disturb neighborhoods in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, some extremist
political and religious magazines and people began criticizing this "Westernizing" act. In "Under the Pretext of Harry Potter's Simultaneous Release in Iran: It's Great that We Finally Left Seclusion!" Saeed Matin reminds the public about the publishing process and book censorship in Iran and points out that even in the annual International Book exhibition of Tehran, all international books are always reviewed by experts (4). Calling Warner Brothers a Zionist company, Matin addresses the cultural minister of Iran and states that they should have reviewed the books which are supported by Zionists before allowing our teenagers to read them. Pointing his finger at every related governmental and personal organization which played a role in this "unpleasant incident," Matin also severely criticizes Tehran's municipal police for giving permission to the Bayan-e-Salis book store for being open after midnight and releasing the suspect series (5). "It is unbelievable," Matin states, "that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs did not find it necessary to check the content of the book. There may be unfavorable or improper phrases and words which are against our cultural values and can mislead our teenagers’ minds" (5). He then claims that even some Western critics consider the series to be a Zionist project and confirm that billions of dollars have been spent for its success. Referring to The Da Vinci Code as a good source of evidence for his claim, Matin explains that in the banned book, Harry Potter is mentioned as an example of Zion Abbey's efforts to revive Zionist goals in people's minds (4). Therefore, according to this fundamentalist critic, "How could we let our children read the original copy of this mind wrecker which is considered by many critics as a destroying bomb for children's souls? This fiction constructs a supernatural hero who cannot be found in the real world and therefore, makes young readers disappointed and hopeless" (4).

Razieh Tojjar agrees with Matin in "Harry Potter: Conspiracy or Accident?" (هاری پاتر: توطئه است یا اتفاق؟). This Iranian writer of the Iran and Iraq war, and their "holy defense" stories, 2

2 My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
simply ignores the attraction of the *Harry Potter* books and claims that its popularity is a result of a long-term Western project which is trying to mentally colonize Eastern children and teenagers. To fulfill this goal, Tojjar continues, the backing of advertising companies is essential.

In December 2008, the Iranian National News Channel IRNN aired a highly critical program which tried to reveal the dark and evil side of *Harry Potter* in order to prove that the best-seller was indeed a wolf in sheep’s clothing. In the documentary, which shows several dark scenes of the *Harry Potter* movies, many Iranian extremist critics, such as Sa’adati, Mehdi Goljan, and Mostaghasi, study the series from different points of view and conclude that the fiction is part of a “cultural crusade” which is going to persuade teenagers to join the Zionists. Iranian film critic Sa’id Mostaghasi states that the series pictures witchcraft which originates in the Kabbalah. To support this claim, one Iranian expert in the religious media Ali Asghar Sa’adati argues that:

[The Zionists] are trying to convince the viewers that because there is no easy way to distance oneself from witchcraft, Satan, and the like, it is better to... they are saying indirectly: “Join us.” I call this a “cultural Crusader war,” a crusade in which the cultural aspect is currently stronger than the military aspect. Their [Western] military expedition is currently in Afghanistan and Iraq, while their cultural expedition consists of these [*Harry Potter*] films and DVDs, which are passed around from one to another throughout the world, including in our country and the Middle East. ("Zionist Plot") \(^3\)

Also Mehdi Goljan, an Iranian university lecturer claims, the series reflects many Jewish beliefs such as the idea of being the chosen race. As one can read early on in the *Harry Potter* volumes,

\(^3\) My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
members of the wizardry community believe that they are superior to ordinary non-wizards or “muggles” due to their magical powers. These critics believe that propaganda for purity of blood and race, which is one of the principles of global Zionism, is clearly pictured in the fiction and is more emphasized in the second *Harry Potter* film. Therefore, “if we add this [*Harry Potter* film] to the other pieces of the puzzle—the beliefs depicted in the other propaganda and political products of the Zonio-Hollywoodists—the Satanic features of this inhumane movement will become more evident” (“Zionist Plot”).

Moreover, in the wizardry community, those who are pure-blooded claim to be more honorable and powerful than those who are rooted in a mixed family of both wizards and muggles. According to Goljan, the series conveys the important notion of the End of Days and the belief that Jewish people are the saviors. “As we know,” he states “throughout the history of the Jewish people, according to the views of global Zionism, the issue of world domination is a basic principle, of utmost importance.” Moreover, Mostaghasi compares Harry to the promised Messiah who is going to fight evil, who is Lord Voldemort in the series.

However, as an Iranian Muslim reader of the series, I can attest that what these extremist critics have concluded is highly affected by political beliefs. The evidence they present in support of their claims can be linked to other ideologies and beliefs. The coming of the promised Messiah, for instance, is a universal belief which can be found in most religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Followers of these religions believe that a savior will come to rescue good people by defeating evil powers. Therefore, one can claim that Harry is a symbol for all religions and not only for Christianity or Judaism; he is the promised rescuer who protects humanity against dark characters. As proof, I can refer to Harry’s origins as a half-blood wizard.

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4 My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
who turns out to be the savior of both the Wizardry and the muggle worlds. He, therefore, can belong to any culture and religion.

Other Iranian negative critics, such as former executive editor of Keyhan for Children, Amir Hossein Fardi and children’s author Mohammad Reza Shams, are less pessimistic than the extremist critics and do not approve of the “Western project” idea. According to them, Rowling’s fiction is not an evil project trying to spread specific beliefs, but only an ordinary novel which has not even the initial potential for being widely accepted. In fact, according to them, the series owes the main part of its success to media and advertising companies which are trying to make the skinny wizard boy a new hero for children and teenagers who need such a model to follow (18).

**ii) Harry Potter: A Modern Model for Children and Teenagers**

Many other Iranian literary critics and scholars in the field of children’s literature, such as Mostafa Rahmandoust, Zahra Esbati, Nik’khah Azad, Ja’far Payvar, and Shohreh Kaedi, also reject “unfair” responses to the series and try to prove that Rowling’s fantasy can be analyzed from positive points of view instead. Iranian children’s writer Nik’khah Azad refers to the series as a model for authors all over the world and argues that most Iranian children’s authors have forgotten to write not only for a specific group of children, but for all of them (qtd. in Nili 17). As mentioned before, the Iranian book market is not as profitable as it is in most developed countries, and so most Iranian authors have to gain grants from governmental organizations to make a living. In such cases, writers are not free to choose their preferred subjects and must write what the organizations ask them instead. So, since those organizations belong to the government, they mostly approve the themes which contain either religious and spiritual, or
political and patriarchal messages. Obviously, such books are not addressed to all children, but only to those who are from religious families and are interested in religious plots. In other words, most Iranian writers are not paid by readers but by the government.

Generally, one can divide Iranian children’s books into four groups. The first group involves stories about children who lived in the pre-revolution period. Writers of these books usually try to present the era as dark and cruel. Characters of such books are either very pitiless people who belong to the non-revolutionary population and use violence against children and women, or extremely kind-hearted people who belong to revolutionary groups and respect everyone. By reading these books, children learn to hate the monarchical period and like the current leading government. Writers of such novels want to convey that, contrary to cruel unbelievers, faithful people are well-mannered and caring. The second group of books consists of a lot of children’s books written about the Iran and Iraq war period and its consequences. Characters of these books are mainly patriotic young boys who run away from their schools in an attempt to go to battlefields in order to defend their beloved country. The majority of writers who create these books are men who have participated in the Iran and Iraq war (which are known as the “holy defense years”). They try to narrate what happened in those years and believe that today’s children have to know the true price of freedom: that children their age were martyred to save the country. Thus, children should know that they owe their freedom to tens of thousands of adults and children who lost their lives in the battlefields or in Iraqi bombardments. Iranian elementary school books contain several tales about patriotic children. For instance, every Iranian child knows “Hossein Fahmideh,” the teenage hero who sacrificed his life to protect the country against the invasion of the Iraqi army.

Finally, the third and fourth groups of Iranian children’s books include short novels and
fairy tales, most of which interpret ethical and social values such as being polite, obeying parents, telling the truth, and avoiding ill-mannered friends. The interesting point about Iranian fairy tales is the important role of witches, giants and magical creatures such as elves and angels. Children’s books in Iran are mostly published by the governmental Society of Cultural Training for Children and Teenagers, which publishes both Iranian and Persian translated Western novels and categorizes them into five age groups. These groups begin with the pre-school years and end with the last years of high school.

Among the popular genres in Iran, one can name fantasy, mystery, and horror as the favorites among children and young adults (Salemi 10). Books for children and teenagers are not popular among Iranian adults, but it is different with the reception of the Harry Potter series. The fiction was apparently originally intended to be read as children’s literature, but today we can see that there is actually no age limit for Pottermania. Children, teenagers, and adults read and enjoy the novel in their own way. In the beginning of its publication in Iran, Harry Potter was well accepted mostly by teenagers, but it was soon popular among younger children and adults as well.

Also, another popular Iranian children’s writer and poet Mostafa Rahmandoust, whose works are published in school books, states that due to a lack of interesting books and popularity of computers, Iranian children and teenagers mostly prefer to spend their spare time playing computer games and watching television. Like children in many countries, even in schools, students talk about the latest digital games and TV shows and are not much interested in books. Nevertheless, thanks to Rowling’s highly imaginative, yet familiar school fantasy, Iranian students have found a new subject to talk about (“Supporters” 3). The same children, who hardly did their homework, are now reading long novels and even writing their own fantasy books.
Thus, it cannot be only the effect of publicity; the *Harry Potter* series has truly changed the reading preferences and strategies of many and made Iranian children believe that there are some good books out there which are worth reading. Contrary to the majority of Iranian novels which explicitly convey particular political and religious messages, the series improves children’s sense of self-knowledge and provides them with new models for being brave and surviving difficulties. In “Harry Potter and Our Children” ("هری پاتر و کودکان ما"), Zahra Esbati agrees with Rahmandoust and states that the series addresses favorite common subjects for both teenagers and their parents who may live in completely different worlds (Esbati 21). She then refers to the highly binary atmosphere of the fiction and writes that although characters and locations in *Harry Potter* are more identifiable and natural to Western children, Rowling has created a world full of imagination and excitement which is interesting for almost all children (21). The wizardry world presented in the novel is both strange and ordinary at the same time. One can call it strange because it is full of unbelievable and unpredictable creatures, objects, and events. Yet it is also ordinary, for the behavior of its people and their relationships to each other are similar to the behavior of people in the real world. In *Harry Potter*, wizardry and the real world are blended as evidenced by the title of the very first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*: Harry, an ordinary name, is used beside the exotic “Philosopher’s Stone” (Sharif 15). Although the worlds of *Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings* share many elements and creatures with *Harry Potter*, the latter uses all those old magical themes, such as presenting demons, elves, and wizards, in a new world which is parallel to today’s modern world. In the *Narnia* stories, for instance, the characters leave the real world and go to the magical world of Narnia which is isolated and has less in common with modern societies than does Harry Potter’s world. By reading these novels, readers escape the real word and almost forget about it.
However, Harry is a teenage boy living in an ordinary house in London in this historical era, not far back ago (Esbat15). Of course, he travels to the wizardry world, but even there, he is not isolated from muggles’ society. Readers can find traces of technology and the modern world in several parts of *Harry Potter*; they read about wizards who are in contact with ordinary people and even use their instruments in private. For example, Ron’s father, Mr. Weasley, a pure-blood wizard who works for the Ministry of Magic, is introduced as a technology-lover who is very much interested in muggles’ goods and collects non-magical items such as telephones, cars, and even radios. Rowling connects the real and unreal worlds so skillfully that she makes it believable for readers. An alley, for example, is a real and known place in almost every culture, but “the Diagon alley,” the wizardry downtown full of wizards and witchcrafts, is not. In other words, as mentioned earlier, as of the very first chapters of the series, Rowling presents magical places or subjects in ways that remind readers that these places and items are not absolutely isolated from the real world. The author goes back and forth between the real and wizardry worlds. At the end of each volume, Harry has to go back to the Dursleys and spend the whole summer with them in the “real world” and that is one of the major ways that Rowling keeps the balance between reality and magic. By featuring the real and the wizardry worlds together, Rowling tries to imply that the magical world actually exists in our own world, but we insist on ignoring it. “Muggles,” or non-wizard people in *Harry Potter*, are indeed those people in the real world who are not brave enough to face supernatural events, and try to disregard them. However, even those muggles are eager to experience the unknown and feel the excitement, strangeness, and novelty of the unknown.

In “*Harry Potter: A Subject for Conversation*” ("هي پاتر، موضوعی برای بحث"), Iranian writer Seyyed Morteza Mortezayi states that we are living in a world where nothing seems to be
impossible. Events such as leaving the Earth and exploring other planets, which were
unbelievable not very long ago, are now plausible to everyone. In a world where technology is
developing exponentially and almost everything can be explained by science and analyzed by
logic, however, we often do not have the chance to imagine different metaphysical experiences.
The *Harry Potter* series gives us the opportunity to leave this scientific world and travel to the
wonderland where we can experience novelties and be a hero. Indeed, this is one of the most
important factors accounting for the popularity of the series among both children and adults.
According to Mortezayi, everything is possible in the wizardry world and even in the most
hopeless situations, help will always come from where one never imagines: the Gryffindor
Sward emerges from inside an old sorting hat; a phoenix arrives from nowhere; a mermaid
rushes from behind the underwater plants; a silver doe runs from the woods; and even the most
disliked professor who is believed to be the enemy turns out to be a powerful rescuer. No matter
how old we are or where we live, we all need hope and Rowling gives us what we are looking
for (14-23).

According to Iranian critics such as Foroutan and Jabbari, another element that makes
young readers more engaged in the world of the series is the presenting of the school as the main
location where most incidents happen. The series depicts many school activities, Quidditch
matches, and mysteries which are interesting for most children. As Sama Foroutan and Madjid
Jabbari suggest, stories which mainly take place in schools have always been interesting for
children and teenagers. By reading such novels, children feel more secure and less disappointed
with their own school work. At Hogwarts, students have their own space; they are left usually
unwatched by parents or teachers after classes; they are free to sit and have a chat with their
friends for hours, and can go to bed late. Like most muggle students, the children of Hogwarts
tend to break school rules. They disobey adults by going to the forbidden forest, searching isolated classrooms, or doing prohibited activities such as using the “invisibility cloak” and wandering in corridors after midnight (10-13).

No matter in which country they live and at which school they study, students all over the world share a lot of experiences, so *Harry Potter* as a school narrative has universal appeal. All students have favorite teachers or disliked ones; they have good loyal friends and nasty spying classmates; they have the tendency to disobey adults and feel independent. They should respect rules and receive punishment if they ignore the regulations. Exams, homework, and detentions are no doubt familiar to all teenagers even if they are living on different continents (Foroutan & Jabbari 10). Rowling surely knows that teenagers enjoy reading about young adults who spend their time together without being spied on by grownups (Kaedi, “Travel to Hogwarts” 30). In fact, as Rahmandoust explains, *Harry Potter* is the story of an ordinary child in an ordinary school; this ordinary school is different only because it provides the ordinary child with specific magical tools for having adventures (“Magic Is Not Too Important” 23-25). By reading about Harry, an ordinary school boy, readers realize that Harry Potter is not at all a perfect hero who never does anything wrong. Although he seems obedient and pitiful when he is with the Dursleys, he takes revenge on them whenever and however he can. Like any other teenager, Harry may make mistakes. He may make wrong decisions and take incorrect paths which lead him into unknown and dangerous situations. In some parts of the novel, he even makes us doubt if he really belongs to the good wizards (Kaedi, “Travel to Hogwarts” 32). All these mistakes reveal that Harry Potter is not an extraordinary boy, nor a superhero. He is someone, ironically enough, like every other teenager.
4.2. Literary, Critical, and Sociological Perspectives

As most critics and scholars in Iran, such as Kaedi, Haji Nasrollah, and Neysari, agree that a secret to *Harry Potter*’s success is its use of genre. Although the series is mostly known as a fantasy, by reading all the volumes, one can find characteristics of other genres such as myth, comedy, and horror, as well.

In “Magic Is Not Too Important” (جادو خیلی مهم نیست)، Rahmandoust states that *Harry Potter* is full of breathtaking incidents and mysterious situations. The fiction belongs to different genres such as school narratives, fantasy, horror stories, comedy, myth, and epic. In such a novel, most readers can find their favorite subjects. Like old mythical heroes, Harry is an abandoned orphan boy going into a wizardry community where he is a brave hero, known by everyone. Yet, he cannot be classified as a mythical hero, for he is not perfect and makes mistakes in even the most crucial points. This is what Rahmandoust identifies as the main factor in the series’ success: to put an ordinary child in an extraordinarily mysterious situation (24). As a result, children can easily identify with him; because he is a child like them who can fulfill their wishes by using his magical power (23).

In “Presenting Myths from Other Countries Is Not to Ignore Ours” (قبول اسطوره های دیگر به معنی ترک اسطوره های خودمان نیست), Vida Eslamieh writes that Rowling uses myths from different countries. In the series, one can find Iranian mythical creatures such as the Phoenix that has the magical power to cure injuries. So, children who are not patient enough to read long poetic Iranian epics can enjoy the same kind of atmosphere by reading *Harry Potter* (35). As a hero presented in a children’s mythical fantasy, Harry is not an ideal child who does everything right and can cope with his struggles all by himself. Nevertheless, his best friends Ron and Hermione are always with him to solve different problems. Without Hermione’s vast
knowledge of most magical objects, creatures, spells, and places, Harry is not able to survive
dangers and find solutions for his troubles. Also Ron, with his fine physical strength and comic
mentality, is a great help (Nazem & Aligholi 26). Throughout the stories, we read that Ron and
Hermione always help Harry to find solutions to his problems. In the last volume, for instance,
they risk their lives and stay with Harry in dangerous situations. By reading the series, children
find out that without the help of his loyal companions, Harry is not able to defeat Voldemort and
save the wizardry society.

In “Harry Potter: The Healing Novel” (پیامدهای دندانگرمی کتاب هری پاتر) Iranian children’s writer
Ja’far Payvar states that Harry Potter is not only a mythical fantasy, but is also an educational
psychological novel for all age groups, especially for children and teenagers. The fiction is based
on the life of a young hero who faces unknown dangers. The author creates an active,
experienced, and sociable young hero out of a skinny, inexperienced, weak boy. The first
installments of the novel picture Harry’s miserable situation in his aunt’s house. Later, Harry
enters the magical world and finds out that he has an important, yet dangerous, position in the
wizardry society. Rowling narrates how Harry tries to face and overcome problems and dangers
instead of primarily trying to make readers feel pity for him. The audience witnesses Harry’s
experiences and his discovery of his inner powers, and are motivated to follow what the hero
does. The reader stays with Harry, not because he is a handsome perfect hero, but because he is a
typical teenager who tries to be strong and self-confident. Together with him, one learns to face
difficulties instead of running away from them. The teenager learns, grows up, and becomes
purged through Harry (74-76).

Exploring the magical world of Harry Potter, the young reader learns how to control his
or her will by using magic which can indeed mean one’s inner power. Here, the fundamental
psychological point, as Payvar calls it, is the hope for better days. Harry endures the annoying life with the Dursleys, for he knows that he will go back to Hogwarts and his friends by the end of summer. By featuring Harry in this situation in the beginning and at the end of all volumes, Rowling teaches the audience that they will experience both easy and difficult times in their lives and that they can better tolerate hard situations thanks to hanging on to hope (Payvar 77).

In general, as most Iranian critics of the series agree that the role of the magical world of *Harry Potter* is to give young Harry the opportunity to heal his wounded soul, and all the other wizards and magical creations such as monsters, elves, and ghosts help him in this quest. During the story, Harry is going to purge himself and to discover his own powers, especially the magical security that his mother gave him by sacrificing her own life. As a result, the series motivates the reader to be useful for humanity by presenting Harry’s attempt to destroy the dark wizard and protect the wizardry and real worlds forever. Therefore, regardless of his cultural differences from Iranian readers, Harry has universal appeal and can be considered as a representation of the fantasies of a real child who may be living in any country. He can be a black boy living in an African tribe who wishes to discover the outer world; he can be an orphan Indian girl who is ignored by others and wishes to find a place where she is accepted and loved; or he can be an Iranian teenager who is bounded by cultural beliefs and wishes to break all the restrictions which prevent him from discovering new worlds and experiencing the unknown.

In the case of the reception of the *Harry Potter* series in Iran, then, as discussed by post-structuralist advocates of reader-response theory, it is indeed the reader who makes the meaning of a text by connecting it to his or her own cultural context and life experience. As Iranian reader-response theorist Hossein Eskandari states: “Each text has three layers: the exterior one is the primary message and meaning that the text is going to convey to its readers, the second layer
is the reader who asks questions and the text that provides answers to them. Finally, the last and most important layer is the one in which both the question and the answer are left for the reader, and it is the reader who shapes the meaning of the text” (102-4).\(^5\)

\(^5\) My own translation: this citation is originally written in Persian.
Conclusion
The purpose of this study was to analyze *Harry Potter*, the best-seller Western children’s fiction, from an Iranian point of view and to open a window through which one can look at the novel’s intercultural journey into Iran. By exploring the world of *Harry Potter* as a story and series and focusing on the reasons for its success in North America and Iran, I have attempted to reveal the Iranian cultural beliefs that have influenced the reception of the novel in that country.

In comparison to Iranian children’s books and Persian translations of other Western novels, which have not been successful during the last decade, the reception of the *Harry Potter* series by a large group of Iranian readers, including children and teenagers, has made it a cultural phenomenon in the country. *Pottermania* proves that Iranian children, who mostly prefer to spend their free time playing computer games and watching television, are not to blame for their lack of interest in reading books. Due to strict censorship, Iranian children and teenagers have difficulty finding literary works which are worth reading and interesting enough to replace cyberspace and satellite television. From my experience growing up in Iran, I can confirm that young Iranian readers are tired of books which try to reproduce particular religious and political ideologies. As I explained in the introductory overview and in the fourth chapter, most Iranian children’s writers are paid by governmental organizations to convey certain beliefs in their novels. Notions of sacrifice, patriotism, family love, respectfulness, and politeness are among many concepts that Iranian children learn in early years of their lives. However, due to having access to the internet and satellite channels, Iranian children and teenagers, who are now in communication with the Western world, find the highly regulated Iranian books less interesting than Western novels which are widely advertised on the internet and in the Western media. Although Islamic Iranian culture does not share many social values with Western culture, the reception of *Harry Potter* reveals that Iranian children and teenagers share interests and values
with Western children.

In the first chapter, I focused on reader-response and intercultural theories in order to be able to analyze the factors that play an important role in the general popularity of *Harry Potter*. As I explained, reader-response theory can be divided into three branches. The first branch, known as formalism, focuses on the text and suggests that readers have a passive role in the reading process. Advocates of this text-oriented branch argue that as soon as readers begin to read a book, they leave their own world including their memories, and experiences. They then become a part of a book which is guided by the written text. Although this theory minimizes the role of the reader in the act of reading, I draw from it to study the reasons for *Harry Potter’s* success in Iran. As most Western and Iranian critics agree, an important element in the series which makes it appeal to a lot of readers is the presentation of a new world where characters experience endless excitement. Rowling leads her readers to the wizardry world and makes them leave their own world behind. During their reading of the series, many readers experience a sense of addiction: by reading the first installment of the novel, readers feel as if they are drawn into the world of the story by powerful invisible hands. They are absorbed in the novel and feel as if it is the real world.

Yet the “formalism” school of reader-response theory gives a duty to readers and argues that readers are engaged in the reading process by making connections between parts of the text in order to interpret the meaning. In other words, information given in different sections of a text is like pieces of a puzzle which should be found and put together in the correct order to reveal the meaning. Readers of *Harry Potter* should keep in mind all the details which are presented throughout the seven volumes, for this information turns out to play a vital role in the storyline.

Nevertheless, the second school of reader-response theory, or the “post-structuralist”
model, is reader-oriented and sees the reader as the most important factor in understanding the meaning of a text. Advocates of this branch criticize the formalist’s idea of the subjectivity of the text and argue that readers belong to a community and, thus, they are influenced by ideologies of the other members of the community. Moreover, each reader has a world of his or her own which cannot be left behind. This world is composed of one’s beliefs, historical and cultural backgrounds, experiences, interests, and fears. In a word, the world of a reader is indeed one’s “self.” Therefore, in the act of reading, readers bring their “selves” with them and read in the context of their own worlds. They read the text and interpret the meaning by linking the messages of the text to their own life experiences. In fact, the meaning of a text is not within the text but is made in the relationship between the text and the reader.

Accordingly, as confirmed by many critics and readers, the sense of “sameness” that young readers experience is consistent in the post-structuralist school of reader-response, for although most parts of the fiction take place in the wizardry world, which is unknown and new, the main characters are ordinary children. As a result, young readers can easily identify with them and follow the story. They read about students at Hogwarts who attend classes, do homework, and break the rules; just like any ordinary student. Harry Potter’s world depicts the promised Utopia for children who wish to be free from different social and cultural regulation and want to be important.

The third school of reader-response theory, however, criticizes both the formalist and post-structuralist schools of reader-response and argues that reading is a triangular process which has three equally important components: the reader, the writer, and the text. According to this branch of reader-response theory, both reader and writer are influenced by their cultural, social, historical, and political backgrounds. As a result, they use these values in writing or
understanding a text. Consequently, readers who share cultural backgrounds with authors are more likely to interpret the intended message of the text than readers who are from different cultural contexts. In reading *Harry Potter*, for instance, Iranian readers are faced with scenes and images which go against their cultural values. Attending mixed schools and dancing with the opposite sex, for example, are accepted in the cultural community of the Western author and are not unusual concepts, but they are considered taboos in the Iranian cultural context and may cause Iranian readers to feel like the outsiders.

Since cultural issues are proven to play an important role in the act of reading, I focused on culture in the second part of the first chapter. Culture is a notion which covers different beliefs, values, norms, and ideologies of a certain community. Members of the same community learn cultural norms and expectations from their early years.

Therefore, in analyzing a text, one should study the reader’s and writer’s cultural beliefs, for example beauty preferences, individualist versus collectivist priorities, or gender roles. As a result, in the first, third, and last chapters, I also explained Iranian cultural restrictions which are caused by religious beliefs of the in-group and may influence the reception of a text. Most of these restrictions are related to gender issues and are seriously scrutinized by the Iranian government who tries to make sure that no one ignores the regulations. Accordingly, the Iranian Censorship Office controls all publications by granting or withholding permission to publish, which is a necessity for publishing a text.

The second chapter of the study analyzed the reception of the *Harry Potter* series in the West from three points of view. In the first part of the chapter I reviewed ideas about the series through the lense of culture and religion. The *Harry Potter* series presents a magical world parallel to the real world and narrates the life of a wizard boy who becomes a hero. Because of
their cultural and religious beliefs, some fundamentalist Christians condemn the series because of its use of magic and argue that the novel promotes sorcery. According to these negative critics, Rowling’s fiction is the evil tool of Satan who tries to enter the innocent world of children. However, positive critics and scholars try to prove that the Harry Potter books are not only harmless, but also educational and contain some Christian discourses and values as well. The series conveys notions of love, sacrifice, community, family, and friendship which are mentioned in Christianity and teach children to fight against evil. Moreover, some critics compare the magic presented in the series to technology and argue that the series pictures magic as a kind of developed technology which needs to be learned, practiced, and carefully performed.

Western critics also analyze the series from reader-response and interpretive perspectives and suggest that Harry Potter is popular because readers are able to identify with him. Harry is an ordinary boy: he feels happiness, joy, pain, fear, and anger; he falls in love, gets hurt, and tries to overcome his difficulties. He is even pitiful, because he is an orphan and treated as an outsider by his aunt’s cruel family. Ordinary children can better identify with Harry than with a perfect, powerful, rich hero who has no weaknesses or vulnerabilities. Moreover, the ordinary boy as a protagonist experiences new atmospheres and situations that most teenagers wish for. Harry Potter as fantasy and escape is a way to another world, where readers can experience events that they cannot face in the real world.

Western critics also mention Harry’s self-knowledge and self-care as other positive features of the novel. Harry passes many levels to know who he is and what powers he has; all these levels lead him to the self-understanding that finally saves his life. By reading the series, young readers learn to face their difficulties and try to solve their problems by having belief in their own powers.
In the second chapter, I also discussed different ideas from a literary point of view. Many Western critics argue that the series is popular because of its mixed genre. Harry moves from where he used to live with his aunt's unkind family to a magical world where he can use magic and can have magical tools. He also has some helpers who come to help him when his magical knowledge seems inadequate. Fantasy appears more in the series; it involves some quests and ties the novel to traditional forms of both adventure and quest romance. The books contain all of the important elements of adventure tales. They focus on a noble-natured hero who is put into dangerous adventures and, during all his ordeals, has loyal companions and helpers with him. Finally, the tale concludes with the hero’s return to his true home. Thus, by reading *Harry Potter*, we can search for signs of all fantasy, pulp fiction, school story, sport story, horror story, and mystery story. By studying the genres in this way, we find out that Rowling has created a mosaic of genres or a hybrid genre which appeals to many readers.

Certainly, Persian translations of the *Harry Potter* books play an important role in their popularity in Iran. Indeed, the history of the popularity of Persian translations of Western children’s books in Iran goes back to more than sixty years ago when Farsi translations of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* were published as series in Iranian newspapers.

As I explained in the third and fourth chapters of this study, to have a publishing license in Iran, every book must be approved by the Iranian Censorship Office who carefully reviews the content of the text and indicates the parts that should be changed or removed. The censoring agents usually look for political and gender issues which are among the most censored concepts in Iran.

Censorship has a long history in Iran and started in the Qajar era when newspapers were
mostly censored. During the last decades of the monarchy regime, Iranian writers experienced unlimited freedom in writing about gender issues. In those years, political and some religious works which provoked people against the regime were subject to censorship. Nevertheless, after the Islamic revolution in 1979, gender issues became one of the most banned concepts in Iranian literature.

As long as *Harry Potter* was considered a children’s series it was not perceived as treating gender issues. However, by presenting the period of puberty and its needs, the last four volumes of the series became more mature in content and made the translation process even more difficult for the Iranian translators. Since translation brings a foreign text into a target language and cultural context, translators must decide whether to transfer the cultural messages of the original text to the TL, or to adapt them to the target cultural context of the TL. As discussed by reader-response theorists, each text is a product of a cultural community and conveys particular values, norms, and ideologies. By adopting word-for-word, free, or faithful approaches to translation, the translator can transfer, change, or remove the cultural “foreignness.” Some theorists suggest that it is better to employ “domestication” or a “naturalizing” strategy in translating culture. Nevertheless, other theorists argue that the translated text has to include foreignness and, therefore, it is best to apply “foreignization” or an “alienating” method which conveys the foreign cultural aspects. However, the alienating method is generally used in translating the *Harry Potter* series in Iran, because, as I mentioned, the Censorship Office removes the parts which seem to violate Iranian cultural norms. Therefore, Vida Eslamieh, (the only official and most popular translator of the series in Iran) employs both “domestication” and “foreignization” methods in her translations and tries to be as faithful to the SL as possible. For instance, she rarely removes the kissing scenes but changes them to similar
scenes instead: kissing becomes "to be intimate" or "expressing kindness" in Eslamieh's versions.

Beside cultural differences, Chapter Three of this study also covered linguistic difficulties (including invented names and spells) of the series and the way the French and the Persian translators cope with them. As I compared, Ménard (the French translator) applies more domestication and translates most of the invented and non-invented names into French in order to create a text which sounds less foreign to readers. Eslamieh, on the other hand, employs both foreignizing and domesticating methods by keeping the names of most characters and translating the invented names. As a result, her translations of the novel convey the sense of foreignness yet read fluently and meaningfully at the same time.

The reception of the Harry Potter series by Iranian children and teenagers made critics and researchers interested in discovering the reasons for this popularity. In the second chapter, I explained some Iranian cultural values, norms, and taboos such as the issue of magic, which is accepted as a normal part of life by members of the Iranian cultural community, and can be said to account for why many Iranian people believe in magic as a miraculous power which can overcome most difficulties. As a result, wizards, who are mostly known as hermits, "prayer writers," and fortunetellers, have a lot of clients who are willing to pay large amounts of money in order to solve their problems. Especially in smaller cities and rural areas, traditional people believe in "prayer writers" even more than physicians. These religious and traditional wizards prescribe different objects and spells and are believed to be able to make contact with ghosts and Jinn. As I discussed in the last chapter, these kinds of magic and magical creatures are presented in the series by picturing the importance of magical cures, fortune tellers and supernatural creatures. Consequently, the magic presented in Harry Potter is not highly criticized by religious

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1 Note that in Persian, "to be intimate" means to be close friends in terms of friendly, and not sexual, relationships.
In the last chapter, I reviewed the popularity of the series in Iran from cultural, religious, literary, critical, and sociological angles. On the basic of cultural and religious perspectives in Iran, the Harry Potter series has not been criticized for presenting magic as it has been as in the West. The most negative critiques of the novel accuse it of being a Zionist plot which is going to ruin children’s morality. Extremists who support this claim argue that the popularity of the books is not a natural phenomenon, but that Zionist organizations have invested millions of dollars to guarantee this success. They criticize scholars and teachers who approve of the series, and assume that Harry Potter is a clear example of cultural invasion by the West and Zionists.

However, positive Iranian critics of the series do not agree with the extremists. They state that the Harry Potter series is different from other children’s books, for, as we can see, its audience is not limited to children and includes all age groups. As I discussed in the fourth chapter, most Iranian children’s books try to convey certain political and religious messages. The majority of recent books for young adults are either about the Iran and Iraq war or Islamic subjects. As a result, teenagers are not interested in reading them.

Like Western critics, Iranian critics mention the creativity of the novel as one of its secrets of success. Harry Potter depicts a new world where children and teenagers can experience the unknown. This atmosphere of novelty is a major characteristic of fantasy. Yet one can find many differences between most works of fantasy and the Harry Potter books. In many works of fantasy, there are no limits and heroes can do everything. But in the Harry Potter world, there are restrictions which are revealed one after another. In the series, the imagination is reality itself. In other words, everything looks real in the novels. Characters of the books are ordinary students and there are no super heroes.
*Harry Potter* is appealing to young adults because it explores the period of maturity when teenagers are standing between the worlds of childhood and adulthood. By presenting this period, Rowling accompanies young readers in the solitude of their maturation. Harry and his friends are identifiable heroes who break the rules and experience events that young readers wish for. Harry is an ordinary teenager who faces dangerous situations, fights against evil, solves many difficult problems, and survives many ordeals. In the series, this is the child hero who saves humanity and all the adults.

According to the Iranian critics of the series, it seems that Rowling is familiar with the psychology of children. She knows that their world is not similar to the adults’ routine world of values and laws. The world of children is full of different fixed values and laws and each day has lots of new and interesting subjects to teach them. Rowling knows this happy and energetic world very well and, thus, she is able to write for most children. She recognizes children’s mental, psychological, and emotional needs.

There is much more research to be done in this field, for the *Harry Potter* books and their Persian translations reveal many aspects of Iranian and Western cultures. Each subject that I discussed (including reader-response theories, intercultural studies, translation methods, Iranian cultural beliefs, the construction of childhood, censorship, magic, and gender issues) opened a windows onto whole new fields of study which would benefit from closer readings of each text in the series in its original version and its many translations into Persian. Looking at the reception of the series through Iranian lens is only a beginning towards understanding the intercultural journey of *Harry Potter* into Iranian culture.
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