Fantastic Memes and Where to Find Them:

An Anthropological Perspective of *Harry Potter* Meme Culture and Digital Storytelling

Margaret-Ann Simonetta

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Dr. Lowell Brower

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"Harry — yer a wizard."
- Hagrid, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

For decades, the *Harry Potter* series has provided its global readers and cinema viewers with essential personal escapes through the imaginaries found within its printed form or on-screen milieu; demonstrating the series is more than just a handful of books or a visual narrative, it's a way of life. J. K. Rowling's hit series, which includes seven novels and eight feature films, chronicles a young boy's new and unique life in the wizarding world, all while supplying fans with an excess of breathtaking optics, roller coaster storylines, and a fantastical world unlike anything we live throughout our conventional Muggle reality. Withal, apart from these imagined elements, lies a world separate from the folio or the screen — a domain that does not exist in the wizarding realm, yet one that dominates the Muggle world and its relevancy to Potter… the *internet*. Since the fandom's inception in 1997, *Harry Potter* enthusiasts have transported their adoration of the series on page, to a subculture on webpage, by producing folkloristic videos, memes, and fanfics in an effort to expand the wizarding realm. Certainly, Potter memes have become a vital vernacular of the global fandom, including memetic frameworks such as comedy, parody, and digital folk networks that thrive on remixing J. K. Rowling's original narrative. By analyzing the three most popular Potter memes in alignment with scholarly folkloristic themes, it's evident the *Harry Potter* series and its evolution would be far less viral if digital storytelling was not an influence on the fandom. Indeed, in this modern world of Potter folklore, one has the unique freedom of following the Dark Lord while simultaneously surfing the Dark Web (a multimodal vernacular only true Potter fans could appreciate through today's viral culture)! Thus, these contemporary Potter memetics allow Rowling's tale to continue through the daily

eye of the fandom via these digital folk communities who preserve Potter's legacy online; underscoring the importance of this memetic culture within the fandom's past, present, and future traditions.

To illustrate one's reckoning of the term 'folklore' takes a bit of finesse, considering many attribute the idiom in line with myths, fables, and generational old wives' tales. Moreover, the general pop culture consensus encompassing internet memes or memetic motifs is also skewed with characterizations such as viral images rooted in humor and the digital 'like-button' used as a means of favored expression on nearly all social media platforms. However, folklore and memes work in tandem and are rooted in much more than sensational internet content. Author Alan Dundes (1980) of *Interpreting Folklore* succinctly describes the accurate meaning of the folkscape and its connection to our daily culture, as he attests,

> "The term "folk" can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share
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> at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could
>
> be a common occupation, language or religion – but what is important is that a
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> group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its
>
> own," (p. 6-7).

With this interpretation in mind, it's evident the *Harry Potter* fandom (on a micro and macro level) directly aligns with the folk-sphere; as the series has created innumerable commonalities across our globe's customs and traditions. Additionally, memetic conventions serve a greater purpose than merely being a likable photo or video shared online. They too are folk vernaculars working in a digital landscape in contrast to their historical beginnings via word-of-mouth. Limor Shifman (2015) of *Memes in Digital Culture*, perceives memes and their widespread

participation as, "pieces of *cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon,*" a folk theme that is unique to our modern digital storytelling methods (p. 19, emphasis in original). Thus, comparing the three most popular *Harry Potter* memes, with regard to their grander folk influence, is pivotal to consider when one recounts the globe's best-selling novel series of all time and its influence on online culture (Pottermore, Wizarding World, 2018). Familiar memes such as, 'You're a Wizard, Harry!'; 'Haggord / "You Dun it Nao Arry Porrer"; and 'Dumbledore Asked Calmly,' are undoubtably circulated across the Potter fandom and greater cybersphere, creating the perfect potions brew for online virally and modern folk practices.

Section 1: You're a Wizard, Harry!

Image: "You're a Wizard, Harry," Google, 2022.

"You're a Wizard, Harry!" is perhaps the most recognizable memetic photo circulated throughout the *Harry Potter* folk fandom. A still image, captured from the film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 2001, depicts Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, revealing to a young Harry Potter for the first time that he indeed is a wizard. On the report of *Know Your Meme*, a

popular website solely dedicated to viral content (including a meme's origins and global search-related activity), July 16, 2009, was the earliest known upload of the memetic on the website YouTube. "Following the viral spread of the parody, the scene gained notable popularity in remixes," writes *Know Your Meme,* as the site also alludes to the sequel misspelled motto, "Yer a wizard, Harry!" (para. 2). As a result of this, it's important to consider whether 'You're a Wizard, Harry' is simply a viral image or a meme; an argument Shifman (2014) discusses at length in *Memes in Digital Culture.* Shifman argues the chief distinction between viral content and Internet memes is their "variability," as the author goes on to say, "whereas the viral comprises *a single cultural unit* that propagates in many copies, an Internet meme *is always a collection of texts,*" (p. 56, emphasis in original). Assuredly, this image has an abundance of variations, specifically by means of modifying the text from 'You're a Wizard, Harry!' to "Yer a Wizard, Harry!' and other catchphrase modifications ("You're an X, Harry!) also known as "snowclones" as *Know Your Meme* articulates (para. 1).

Thus, through Shifman's opinion on viral vs. meme, 'You're a Wizard, Harry!' falls into the author's Founder-based meme category which emphasizes the meme's popularity through its distribution and user involvement as "one (often viral) photo" that many relate to by means of "modifying the text" (Table 1, p. 59). These memetic modes of fandom participation can also be viewed as creative play founded by the principals of a community's established phrasal verbiage, images, and performative expressions commonly associated with the *Harry Potter* fandom (Milner, 2016, p. 217). Aside from the Egalitarian nature of the meme's circulation, the phrase 'You're a Wizard, Harry!' has spawned into an utterance commonly heard throughout the fandom, as Potter enthusiasts have a corky way of imitating Hagrid's thick English accent and

performing Harry's stunned facial reaction thereupon. Therefore, 'You're a Wizard, Harry!' plays

a much larger role in the fandom than its original Hollywood roots; creating a new digital

storyline around Hagrid and his famous first appearance.

Section 2: Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer

Image: "Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer," Google, 2022.

'Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer' is a comical, yet lowbrow nickname given to

Hagrid and originally taken from the 2001 *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* PlayStation 1

video game. In its zenith, these Potter-themed PlayStation video games were a major franchise

success and a solid target for memetic creations such as Haggord, which soared in popularity

years later in the mid-2010s. While the origin of the still image is unknown, the deliberately

misspelled caption "began to grow in popularity in late 2016 as a relatable character," and found

its largest fame on Instagram in 2017 (Know Your Meme, 2022, para. 2). Shifman (2014) argues

that memetic success needs "humor, flawed masculinity, and simplicity" (among other key

factors) to gain cyber popularity, as the author goes on to say, "bad texts make good memes," (p.

85). For this reason, **'Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer'** is a solid illustration of a successful

multimodality meme that dually enables fandom creativity and consistent conversations around

the meme and subsequent remixes. Exhibited on *Know Your Meme* is an example of the

mimetic's high arousal variability from a 2016 tweet by Twitter user @Glock_Lesnar who used

Haggord's image with the caption, "I feel like PS1 Hagrid all the time lately & I don't know how

to fix it"— a **'Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer'** derivative which gained prime popularity

during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic (para. 4).

Image: @Glock_Lesnar, Twitter, 2016.

Additionally, the belief that social communities have relationships with memetic content is a

motif scholars within the concentration of folklore routinely discuss; specifically on the notion of

a meme's form, content, and stance. Shifman (2014) proposes a memetic's relationship to stance

(how a person positions themselves in relation to the meme) is when "users can decide to imitate

a certain position they find appealing," through performance, a theme akin to @Glock_Lesnar's

viral and relatable Haggord remix (p. 22). Above all, 'Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer' is a fandom favorite for the sheer humor behind every Egalitarian piece Haggord has spawned to be. From its choppy, misspelled caption to the pixilated plump character, 'Haggord: You Dun It Nao Arry Porrer' has stood the ultimate test of memetic fame through its online hybridity and evolving participatory culture.
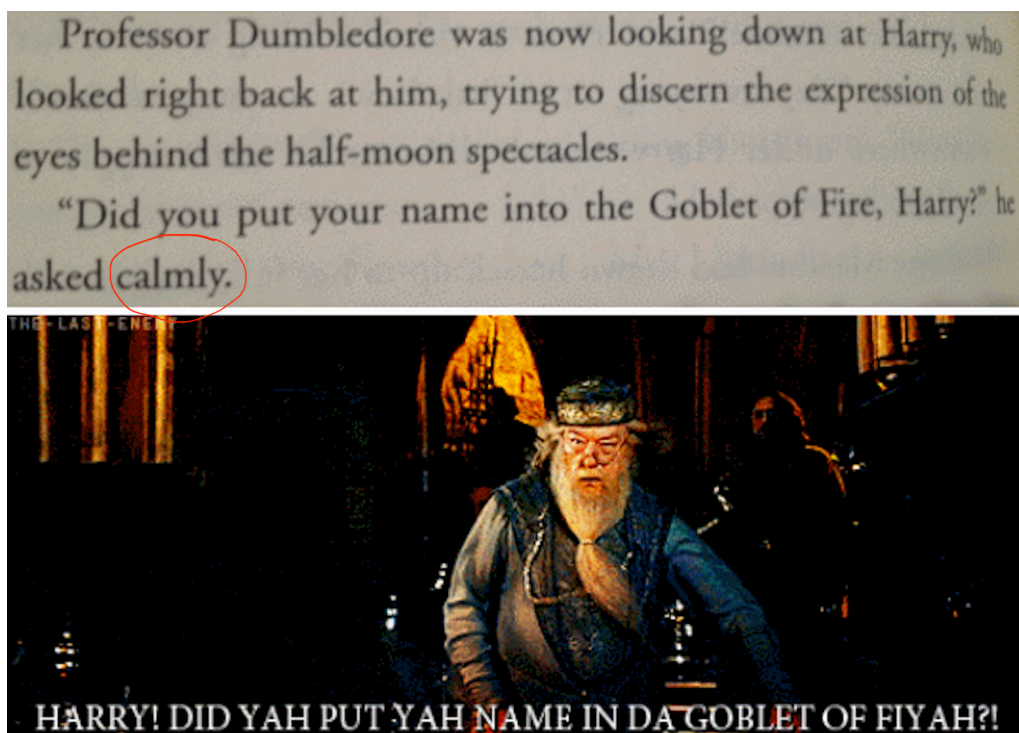
Section 3: Dumbledore Asked Calmly

Image: "Dumbledore Asked Calmly," Google, 2022.

'Dumbledore Asked Calmly,' with an alias of 'Did You Put Your Name in the Goblet of Fire,' refers to a cinematic rogue Dumbledore in comparison to his mild-mannered character within the *Harry Potter* novels. Classified as 'Copypasta' (internet slang for a meme that has a block of text copy and pasted onto the image as a form of circulating a specific impression), the above text taken from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* clearly indicates Dumbledore's soft

demeanor during a moment of panic within the novel (*Know Your Meme,* 2022, para. 1).

However, pasted below the book's text is a pictorial of the cinematic version of Dumbledore

(played by Michael Gambon), who took it upon himself to overact the scene and its original

intention, thus creating one of the most talked about Potter discrepancies of all time. Successive

to the release of the film, the scene "quickly gained notoriety in the *Harry Potter* fandom, with

parodies, tributes, and remixes posted online in the following years," writes *Know Your Meme*

next to a highlight of this memetic (2022, para. 3). As stated by the website, this specific remix

was posted to Tumblr by user 'The-Last-Enemy' on December 28, 2011, and adorned an all-caps,

misspelled caption which immediately went viral on most social platforms (2022, para. 5). In

fact, akin to the spiraling memetic scene, 'Dumbledore Asked Calmly' spun its own means of

participatory culture through its humorous discrepancy and has become a widely circulated

Potter memetic for over one decade.

Above all, what makes 'Dumbledore Asked Calmly' a viral success isn't merely its

humor and fandom involvement, it's the prestige that enwraps this memetic and what it

symbolizes to the overarching fandom. Shifman (2014) argues a viral's prestige relates solely to

the "users' knowledge of the content's source," and goes on to say, "the more famous the author

is, the more likely people are to spread the piece," (p. 69). It is hard for one to deny the power of

J. K. Rowling, both in a literary and cinematic sense, and in agreement with Shifman's views, the

popularity of the Potter franchise catapults its networked participation to a new viral level. Thus,

the fandom's intense knowledge of the *Goblet of Fire* content is enough to solidify 'Dumbledore

Asked Calmly's' prestige in memetic studies, alongside its obvious forms of humor, provoked

high-arousal emotions, and simplistic packaging for all to understand the absurdity of such

discrepancy from page to screen. Milner (2018) attests that a meme's "resonance is central to its

memetic reappropriation," and affirms an image's "humor and wit" are the values that

participants use to play with such pictorials (p. 219). Indeed, because of the nature of play

encompassing 'Dumbledore Asked Calmly,' this once viral pictorial has grown to be a Founder-

based Meme over the last decade, as The-Last-Enemy's remix is undoubtedly the most popular

version of 'Did You Put Your Name in the Goblet of Fire.' From the text's humble beginnings to

its current raging trope, 'Dumbledore Asked Calmly' is a fine example of the humor that may

ensue when one blends fandom participation and memetic 'copypasta' into one viral.

A thoughtful analysis of *Harry Potter* memetics would conclude that the study of folklore

and network participation within the Potter fandom are integral to anthropological fandom

studies and modern media folk vernaculars. The memetics described in this thesis thrive on their

digital communities and continually serve the broader *Harry Potter* fandom with dynamic

creativity and artistic communication that are central to folklore interpretation. At its core, the

study of folklore is one's comprehension of storytelling, and while the veteran modes of mouth-

to-ear narration have seen a downfall in contemporary culture, one could argue the age of

storytelling is just beginning by means of online viral methods. Akin to the memes described in

this thesis, every memetic has a past, present, and future story waiting to be discovered and

shared with a digital community. By associating *Harry Potter's* cyber folk practices in

conjunction with these scholarly structures, a continued examination of folklore and memetics

within the fandom will only strengthen Potter's digital communities and shared experiences

online through the satire to which Potter fans have come accustomed to over the decades. Thus,

'Fantastic Memes and Where to Find Them' is a *Harry Potter* remix in itself, adding to the

lengthy list of Potter memetics circulated for wizards and Muggles alike.

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