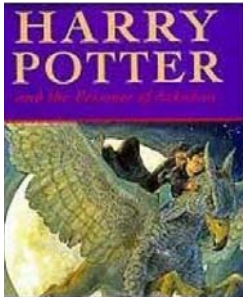




The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Response to “Harry Potter” article



In the last issue of “The Burning Bush,” an article on the ominous influence of the “Harry Potter” novels was carried.

The article began: “A growing interest in sorcery and witchcraft, generated by the Harry Potter stories, has prompted an Australian university to launch a special course open to the public. The 12-week course at Adelaide University will explore the witchdoctors of Africa, shamans from the Amazon and Zambezi valleys, witches from the 16th century and others who practise magic rituals.” The article continued with a quotation from the Australian press. “The public course in Australia will be led by anthropologist Dr Kingsley Garbett, who has recently retired from Adelaide University.” “Witches, sorcerers, magicians and shamans are credited universally with extraordinary powers to kill or cure, to bring rain, to make crops grow and often to foresee the future,” said Dr Garbett. “People credited with such ritual powers are often poor, politically weak and, frequently, women.” “These factors prompted many questions, said Dr Garbett. “How do the politically weak and marginal come to be credited with such extraordinary powers?” “How do they justify and protect their powers against the sceptical and the curious?” “These questions and more will be answered during the course,” he said.

Our comments were simple! We give an extract. “Dr. Garbett is, of course, speaking garbage! Doubtless it will sound intellectual and “high-falutin” but it’s garbage just the same! If there were those who possessed such “extraordinary powers” as to make it rain, make crops grow, foretell the weather, as Dr. Garbett claims, then I should think a lot of national governments would be queuing up for their services!”

Since the publication of the article on the “The Burning Bush” internet site, we have received the following e-mail from Dr. Garbett.

Dear Editor, Whoever wrote the piece on Harry Potter and my course cannot understand English. I wrote: “Witches, sorcerers, magicians and shamans are credited universally with extraordinary powers to kill or cure, to bring rain, to make crops grow and often to foresee the future,” said Dr Garbett. “People credited with such ritual powers are often poor, politically weak and, frequently, women.” “Credited with” is a synonym for “are believed to have”(OD). I nowhere stated that I, personally, believe witches, sorcerers, shamans, etc. have such powers although the people among whom they live may fervently believe that they do. However, you are mistaken if you believe that members of contemporary governments do not consult astrologers and mediums (among others). There are well documented cases of this.

With kind regards,

Kingsley Garbett Managing Editor, Social Analysis, Visiting Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Adelaide, Adelaide 5005.

We replied to Dr. Garbett as follows



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Dear Dr. Garbett,

Is it not rather harsh to say of the writer of the article “Warnings about ‘Harry Potter’ novels vindicated”, who incidentally was myself, that I do not understand English simply because a slightly differing meaning was put on the words, “credited with” used by you? If I substitute your alternative phrase, we end up with “Witches, sorcerers, magicians and shamans are believed universally to have extraordinary powers to kill or cure, to bring rain, to make crops grow and often to foresee the future.”

In the light of either form of your statement, can you really fault anyone for believing that amongst the universe of those who believe that such powers are possessed by these witches, sorcerers etc., would be the one making the assertion? I think not. I can readily believe that there are “members of contemporary governments” who consult everything from chicken innards to tea leaves but that is very different from governments consulting them. After all, we all know that members of national governments have been exposed as having engaged in criminal activities, but we would be wrong to claim that such criminal activity was the policy of the government to which these criminals belong. I am happy to print your comments in the next issue of “The Burning Bush” along with this response. Yours faithfully,

Ivan Foster. (Editor).

There has been no further correspondence from Dr. Garbett!

Since publication, the following e-mail was received from Dr. Garbett.

Dear Rev. Foster,

Do publish our correspondence but please add the following, which is most important.

The course, therefore, is not at all about the teaching of the practice of witchcraft, as many have supposed, which would be absurd in the context of modern academic anthropology. It is about the anthropological problems of how the beliefs in such alleged powers and the practices of witchcraft, sorcery and shamanism are sustained in the face of contradicting evidence and why such alleged powers tend to be accorded to the secularly marginal, particularly women.

Your readers may care to consult the web site for the course at lorde.arts.adelaide.edu.au/magic <http://lorde.arts.adelaide.edu.au> for more enlightenment about what the course is actually about.

With kind regards,

Kingsley Garbett.

Our Reply

Dear Dr. Garbett,

I am afraid I have already gone to press with our paper edition of “The Burning Bush” but I



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will add the contents of your e-mail to my internet version which I hope to mount this weekend.

Yours faithfully,

Ivan Foster.