

[**HARDCOVER:** UK]

Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble

J.K. Rowling's 'The Tales of Beedle the Bard' keep the magic of Harry Potter alive

BY **COLETTE BANCROFT**

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, ST PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

Harry Potter isn't a character in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, but that familiar name, with its lightning-bolt "P," takes pride of place atop the book's cover.

As it should. J.K. Rowling's latest addition to the Potter canon, published Thursday, doesn't feature new adventures at Hogwarts, but it expands the magical universe she created in her seven enormously popular novels in intriguing new ways.

Potter fans will of course have heard of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. The book, a collection of five fairy tales for wizarding children, played a crucial role in the final novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

In that book, a very old copy of *Tales* was bequeathed by Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore to Hermione Granger, and, ever the girl to do her homework, she spent much of the novel puzzling out the significance of one fable, *The Tale of the Three Brothers* research that helped Harry defeat the evil Lord Voldemort.

The wizard Beedle purportedly wrote the five stories down in the 15th century, but don't fear any struggle with their language in this book, a modern translation "from the ancient runes by Hermione Granger," as the title page advises.

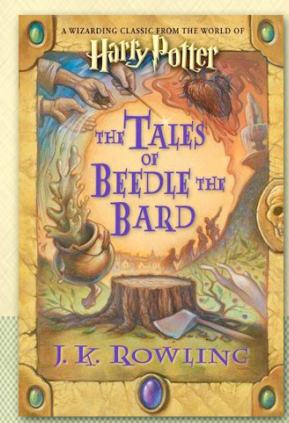
Once again, Rowling demonstrates her mastery of folklore and how it works. Where the novels are expansive, packed with characters and plot lines and all the paraphernalia of an alternate universe, the stories are spare and focused, none as long as 20 pages.

There are some differences between wizarding fables and the Muggle kind (Muggles being nonmagical people), as Rowling points out in her introduction. For example, "Beedle's witches are much more active in seeking their fortunes than our fairy-tale heroines ... witches who take their fates into their own hands, rather than taking a prolonged nap or waiting for someone to return a lost shoe."

But, like all genuine folk tales not the sanitized, safe, boring modern versions these stories bristle with everything from bodily fluids (*The Wizard and the Hopping Pot*) to bloody murder (*The Warlock's Hairy Heart*).

And like all fables, they have moral points to make, and their recurring themes are universal: humanity's struggles with prejudice, power and death. Hating others for their race, creed, whom they choose to marry inevitably turns and poisons those who hate; power always puts those who crave it in peril; death, no matter how strong one's magical powers, is final.

Publication Notes



THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD

BY J.K. ROWLING

111 PAGES

CHILDREN'S HIGH LEVEL GROUP/SCHOLASTIC

Tales didn't exist outside the pages of *Hallows* until Rowling created seven hand-written, illustrated copies of it last year. Richly bound and garnished with jewels, six of them became gifts to her friends.

The seventh copy was auctioned to benefit the Children's High Level Group, a charity for kids that Rowling co-founded (www.chlg.org/). Amazon paid a cool US\$4 million for that copy, and it became clear the little book had a mission.

So now it's in bookstores, in a first US printing of 3.5 million copies (a modest number for a Rowling book).

There are no real jewels on its cover, but the stories and Professor Dumbledore's commentaries on them are little gems.

The commentaries, the introduction tells us, were a surprising discovery "among the many papers that Dumbledore left in his will to the Hogwarts Archives."

It's a pleasure to hear the old wizard's voice again. He writes of *The Wizard and the Hopping Pot*, "A simple and heartwarming fable, one might think in which case, one would reveal oneself to be an innocent nincompoop."

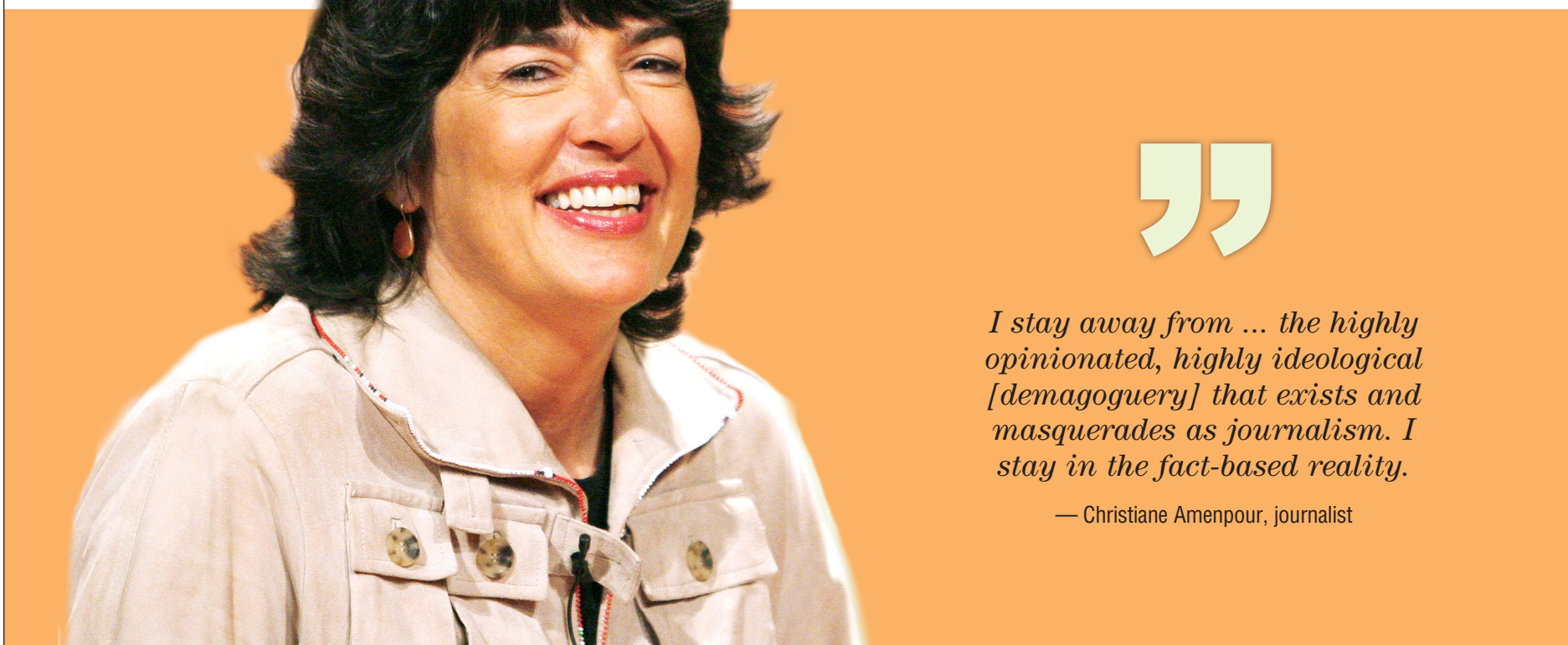
He reminisces about an ill-fated dramatic production of *The Fountain of Fair Fortune*, comments witheringly on those who rewrite or censor fairy tales to "protect" children and ruminates on the nature of love.

He is also shockingly disingenuous in his commentary on *The Tale of the Three Brothers*, which played that critical role in *Hallows* a discrepancy that will no doubt have dedicated Potterites racing to re-read the books, heat up the message boards and solve a new mystery.

SUNDAY PROFILE

CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour.

PHOTO: REUTERS



”

I stay away from ... the highly opinionated, highly ideological [demagoguery] that exists and masquerades as journalism. I stay in the fact-based reality.

— Christiane Amanpour, journalist

Going on guts

CNN's top reporter has spent nearly 20 years telling stories from all over the world but now, as she prepares for a new show, she has the biggest global story on her doorstep

BY **SUZANNE GOLDENBERG**

STAFF REPORTER

It is another morning when Barack Obama — still not officially president — is offering assurances that he can lead America out of the economic crisis, and Christiane Amanpour glances over her shoulder at the television in her New York office. For a television reporter who came to personify a world in crisis in the 1990s, covering the first Gulf war, Bosnia, Rwanda, Haiti, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan for CNN, the reflex is understandable. The world's economic meltdown is undeniably the story of our age.

But something is not right. "To me, this is a major global emergency, but somehow I don't feel it in my gut," Amanpour says, and plunges her hands into her belly in a mock seppuku. It is an astonishing admission for a reporter who, for nearly 20 years, has been known for bringing a sense of heart to some of the most horrifying situations on the planet.

It would be all too easy to attribute Amanpour's sense of detachment from the economic crisis to her elevated status at CNN, where she rates a light-filled office with a fine view of Manhattan while less famous colleagues toil away in the windowless newsroom. Nearly two decades of frontline reporting and serious-minded documentaries, have moved Amanpour from the world of working journalist to one more usually occupied by celebrities and public saints. Her interviews are arranged by teams of publicists who flinch when she utters a single swearword.

Or perhaps that sense of dislocation could be down to Amanpour finding the big story on her own doorstep after years of trying to make viewers care about the misery of people in far-flung parts of the world. She moved to New York City earlier this year, the first time she has lived in the US in nearly 20 years — and will be putting down roots by hosting her own show.

Starting in mid-next year, she will have a nightly half-hour slot on CNN International. A one-hour version will be shown on weekends on the US version of

CNN. The program does not yet have an official start date, title, or even a format, although Amanpour says she will still travel for the show. "I am not going to sit back and not be a reporter."

That will be reassuring for many Americans who see Amanpour as their personal jolt of reality, a face synonymous with the reporting of serious events: war, disaster, famine, AIDS.

With the rich timbre of her voice and her accent — Amanpour has an Iranian father and grew up in Tehran and London — when the CNN journalist arrived on screen, she was decidedly different from the journalists Americans were used to seeing on television. She was a woman, for a start, and not a bland Midwestern blonde. She was the first big star to come out of CNN, which she joined in 1983 soon after graduating from college.

For many Americans, Amanpour's arrival at a story wearing her take on the 1970s foreign correspondent safari suit — a boxy jacket with two large pockets over the chest — in itself still signifies what in CNN billing is known as "a major news event."

Now Amanpour is 50. She has a son, who is eight, and a husband, James Rubin.

Motherhood made Amanpour more conscious of the risks of her job — but it didn't stop her. Now when she goes out on a story, it's with a little prayer. "I've said: 'Please God, please God, let me get through this, I'll never do this again,'" she says. "And then I do it again."

But while Amanpour was moving from one big story to the next, journalism changed. For her, as for many of her generation who covered the war in Bosnia, no story since has ever come close. "The world really mattered," she says. "I got the story in the A block of our news for day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year and in the end so did people at ABC, CBS, NBC. So did people at the BBC. Our news environment was more open to this kind of storytelling back then and in the end it made a difference — and once Srebrenica happened it was a massacre



Christiane Amanpour, left, CNN's chief international correspondent, her husband James Rubin and their son.

PHOTO: AFP

too far and our Western governments ... finally got their act together and did something about it," she says. "But they might not have done if we were not reporting it."

For Amanpour, those days are gone. "I think the type of storytelling doesn't exist any more. It just doesn't." The unrolling of the economic crisis on our television screens is arid and flat, she says. "There is a lot of jargon, there is no storytelling. I want to see the pictures of what is going on. I want to see the people. Storytelling is as simple as that."

The notion of US power has also changed. In Bosnia, she was criticized by some fellow journalists for crossing journalistic lines in blaming the Serbs for the conflict and pressing for international intervention to end the war. Now the very notion that the US, as a superpower, has a duty and an obligation to intervene in times of human catastrophe, has been discredited by the war in Iraq. Meanwhile, US newspapers have been

decimated by a plunge in advertising revenues, and journalist lay-offs.

All of that has affected storytelling, as has the rise of the Internet, which Amanpour sees as a leading culprit in the dying practice of serious journalism.

At a time when most members of the media are desperate to show their Web 2.0 smarts, Amanpour is defiantly unconcerned. She does not use a BlackBerry. She hardly ever blogs. She does not Facebook. She is not even sure what Twitter is. "It's a quality of life issue. I am a communicator. I need to talk to people," she says.

It is hard to imagine Amanpour doing Britney Spears, or the soft-focus morning chatshow circuit. She is also a rarity in the hyperventilating world of US cable television. "I stay away from commentary and I stay away from ideology. All this stuff that we have seen marching into the space of fact-based news over the last several years, the highly opinionated, highly ideological [demagoguery] that exists and masquerades as journalism. I draw a line and I stay in the fact-based reality," she says.

Despite this Amanpour has been upfront in criticizing US media for their insularity, and for not devoting enough space to foreign news. She also has a sensibility that is closer to that of journalists in Britain and continental Europe. "Objectivity is not treating each side equally, not drawing a false moral equivalence," she says. "It's covering all sides, giving all sides a hearing but not necessarily drawing false conclusions because if you do that in these kinds of situations, in my view, you're an accomplice."

Amanpour hopes to continue with the kind of journalism she has been doing — and if that doesn't work she is prepared to find another way. "I am 50 years old now and I strongly believe in second acts. I don't quite yet know what mine is," she says. "I don't know whether there will be a post-TV. The one thing I do know is that I ain't going to be dragging some carcass around the world beyond its sell-by date."

[**SOFTCOVER:** HONG KONG]

Republican China rewritten

'The Age of Openness' is Frank Dikotter's fresh perspective on an era more commonly portrayed as a catastrophic interlude in China's history

BY **BRADLEY WINTERTON**

CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

For some time now the historian Frank Dikotter has been arguing that the Republican Period in China, far from being a bleak era characterized by weak governance, rampant warlords and foreign domination, was also, despite its real woes, a time of considerable promise and no small achievement. This of course is good news here in Taiwan, officially designated as being a continuation of the Republic of China founded on the fall of the emperors in 1912.

A major implication of what Dikotter argues is that the current push by Beijing to make China a globalized society is nothing new. Rather than breaking with a long tradition of being closed to the outside world, what the current leadership is actually doing is returning to the direction in which China was headed between 1912 and 1949, but which was abandoned when Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and the Communists took over.

In fact there's a lot of evidence that China had for centuries been remarkably open to the rest of the world, and the concept of a "closed" society was largely a fabrication of foreigners who wanted to prize it open still further, especially in the field of trade concessions.

Dikotter, though remaining Professor of the Modern History of China at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), is now based at the University of Hong Kong. His argument in favor of the Republican era as a time of increasing openness and internationalism, not to mention reform, has been mainly presented in two books, *Crime, Punishment and the Prison in Modern China* (2002) and *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (2007).

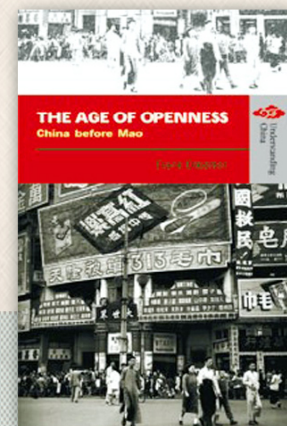
The advantage of this new, shorter book, part of Hong Kong University Press' Understanding China series, is that it pulls together his main conclusions and adds to them chapters on other aspects of

Republican China, treated here by him for the first time. As a result, this book is a polemical overview of his essential position on the era, and as such attractive for those who might not have time to get to grips with his more detailed, specialist treatments.

Dikotter enters the fray with all guns blazing. What's the point, he asks, of assembling more and more evidence supporting pre-existing assumptions? Far more useful is to go to the archives with an open mind and see what's there, and what it tells us.

It could be argued, of course, that Dikotter too has an axe to grind — that saying that Republican China was full of promise, and this was all destroyed by the Communists, is as much a political platform as arguing the opposite, that China prior to 1949 was impoverished, corrupt and helpless and that the Communists saved the day. He's at pains, though, to avoid this accusation, and often refers to the disasters

Publication Notes



THE AGE OF OPENNESS: CHINA BEFORE MAO

BY FRANK DIKOTTER

131 PAGES

HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

that befell China during the period in question. "The point of this book," he writes, "is not to provide exhaustive evidence for this view [i.e., that the Republican era was open, diverse and so on], but to avoid bland consensus, provoke critical thought and encourage readers to think creatively."

The old view, then, was that China from 1912 to 1949 was autocratic, militarized, inward-looking and frequently starving. No, says Dikotter. Politically it was, for a time at least, more democratic than many comparable countries in Europe (and almost everywhere else in Asia), less militarized per head of the population than might be supposed, with considerable stability and continuity in local government even if the central government was weak, and with a remarkably international perspective.

What Dikotter is in favor of is prosperity at a grass-roots level, human rights, political pluralism, representative institutions and

constitutional government. What he's against is the Marxist view — still popular with many university-based historians even when the rest of the world has turned its back on it — that violent revolution can bring equality, happiness and prosperity, and is the only answer to the manifest evils of capitalism.

Other positive features of Republican China the author points to are the establishment of Shanghai as the Hollywood of Asia, and also as its effective jazz capital, the steady increase in farmers' incomes between 1870 and the early 1930s, widespread religious diversity and toleration, the surprisingly global perspective of education even in remote areas, and the increasing availability and popularity of Western foods (diversification again). All these contrast strongly with the situation that developed after 1949.

Particularly important in this account is the international perspective of the elites — respected Chinese jurists working

in international organizations, some 40,000 students going abroad to study annually, and the cosmopolitan mind-set introduced to China by foreigners working in the International Settlements.

The greatest effect of this small book, assuming it gets published in a Chinese-language edition, will be in China itself. There the decadence of the Republican era is holy writ, but this author likes nothing so much as opening minds.

I once interviewed Frank Dikotter, and afterwards walked through Taipei's Ximen District with him. It was a Saturday evening and, as he looked at the youthful crowd and the mass of merchandise on offer, he said smiling, "Now this is what I really approve of!"

He's known to be working now on another topic, this time inside the Mao era. There's reason to think, therefore, that *The Age of Openness* may be his last word, for the time being at least, on Republican China.