

## Harry Potter Notes - Chapter 1

[http://www.classicspage.com/greek\\_harry\\_potter/commentary/chapter1.htm](http://www.classicspage.com/greek_harry_potter/commentary/chapter1.htm)

**Δούρσλειος καὶ ἡ γυνή** Dursley and his woman: in England a married woman often takes the name of her husband, preceded by the title Mrs (mistress)- the couple will be known as (for instance) Mr (master) and Mrs Dursley. Dursley appears to derive from the name of a pleasant country town in England - but it might also suggest other English words beginning with a similar sound (dull, dun, dour, durable, dust, dung).

**τῶν μυρσίνων** The street of the myrtles. The English like to call their streets drive, avenue, close - all evoking a grandeur that such roads seldom possess. In England, the Dursleys live in Privet Drive - privet being a dull evergreen clipped into neat hedges - the name also evoking "private" - what goes on behind the privet hedge being very personal to the English occupant ("an Englishman's home is his castle"). The picket fence traditionally performs a similar role in the USA. Myrtles in Greece are common, and - like privet - have neither attractive flowers nor foliage (although they smell better!)

**τρύπανα καὶ τέρετρα** Drills. This is an English pun - drills are used for boring holes - thus drill manufacture must be "boring" (ie annoyingly uninteresting) like Dursley himself. JKR equates the desire of the Dursleys to appear normal

to themselves with being boring to others. Their worst fear is that their neighbours might find out something "interesting" which could be used to gossip about them.

**λευκόθριξ:** the English often distinguish people by their hair colour (which differs markedly among them, unlike our uniform black in Greece). Those with blonde hair like the Dursley woman are often characterised as less intelligent.

**ἐπιτηρεῖν γεράνου δίκην** JKR has "craning". Most English people have never seen a crane (or an owl, as it appears soon), but use this verb for stretching out the neck in an inquisitive manner. In order to preserve their normality, the Dursleys must be continually checking the neighbours' activities: the Dursley woman - who is naturally **δολικαύχην** uses this endowment to peer over the wall "like a crane" at those next door.

**Δουδάλιος** Dudley: the Dursley son is named after a town in the English midlands - but it's probably intended to suggest the du- words (see Dursley above), with additional connotations of dud and dunce.

**Ποτήρες** Potters. The first mention of the name: in English a potter is one who makes pots or ceramics - Greek **κεραμεύς**. We know them well from our Potter's Quarter in Athens (**Κεραμεικός**)! But **ποτήρ** of course in Greek means "drinking vessel" (which would probably have been made by a Greek potter!) - an appropriate name

for one in whose life potions will play a large part. Lucian has the actual phrase **ποτήριον κεραμεοῦν** (pottery cup). Harry only drinks draughts of wisdom from it, of course.

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**τῇ ἡμέρᾳ** ... the first event in JKR's tale is not of course the birth of Harry, but this is felt to be the starting point of her essentially linear narrative. She doesn't start in Homeric fashion in mid-story (Odyssey) or near the end (Iliad) - her epic technique is the very basic "start at the beginning and carry on to the end" - this imparts an effectively simple childlike quality to the story-telling.

**κατὰ τὸ εἰωθός.** England is frequently thought of as fog-bound - compare Dickens' Great Expectations, for example. In fact the famed "peasoupers" which we Greeks imagine northern Europe to be enveloped by have been practically unknown there since the Clean Air Act of 1956.

**λαιμοδέτων.** Neck-binder - this is a "tie", an item of formal attire worn round the neck by office-workers and schoolchildren. It is often the only brightly-coloured thing (emblazoned perhaps with a cartoon character from a Walt Disney film) contrasting with the grey uniformity of a "suit". Dursley obviously owns several ties: he chooses his most unpleasant one (unpleasant to onlookers presumably, not himself!).

**βάθρον.** English babies are imprisoned in wooden "high chairs" very similar to the ceramic ones we use in Athens.



**γλαῦκα ... ξανθήν.** We don't have this type of owl in Greece. γλαῦξ is Athena's sacred bird, which they call here the Little Owl. The English bird is the Tawny Owl, larger and darker.

**τὸ αὐτοκίνητον ὄχημα.** In England and elsewhere - even in Greece today - nearly everyone has a self-mobile personal chariot, called a car, or automobile - hence αὐτοκίνητον, a literal Greek translation of the Latin word.

**ἐπὶ τὴν ἀγοράν.** Towards the market-place. English cities don't really have an agora: their city-centres are filled with tall buildings, which contain "offices" (δίαίτια)- rooms where people "work". This work mainly consists of sitting in a chair and talking to people in other offices, using the "telephone". Men in offices must wear ties round their necks at all times (see note on λαιμοδέτης above).

**αἴλουρος** Our word for cat is of course always masculine gender, just as our bears are always feminine. This makes it all the more surprising for us when this particular cat turns out to be a

woman in disguise!

**πινάκιον γεωγραφικόν** This is what they call a map - a "picture describing the land". We don't have such things in Athens, as everyone who lives there knows where everything is - and a stranger will just have to keep asking. But although all their streets have names and all their houses have numbers, the English still have problems finding their way, and rely on these maps, rather than risk talking to a stranger! The Persians had something similar - but we all know how Cleomenes king of Sparta reacted when he saw one. When shown that a small space on the bronze tablet represented a journey of three months, he rightly listened to his daughter's advice and told the Persian envoy to get lost.

**τοὺς νέους...** Dursley will remind you of Strepsiades in Aristophanes' Clouds: belief that ostentatious clothing is an indication of the immorality of the wearer is still very prevalent!

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**πράσινον.** English writers often seem obsessed with the colours of objects in a way we Greeks find strange. They have a word "green" which corresponds to no word in our language - so sometimes it will be rendered by πράσινος (leek-coloured), or βατράχειος (frog-coloured), or χλωρός (pale greenish-yellow, like grass - grass in Greece that is!). But the colour seems part of what Dursley finds offensive about the clothes.

τῷ ἐνάτῳ ὀρόφῳ: the ninth storey. Many quite ordinary buildings in English cities are very high, and have more storeys than the Pharos at Alexandria!

**πρὸς τὴν φωταγωγόν** Windows in England are not just holes to let in the light! They have glass to keep out bad weather and can be opened (rarely) to admit sunshine. Those in offices are usually kept shut, and Dursley keeps his back to the window, because there is nothing to see outside except other office buildings. I admit that I am rather puzzled why the English have so many windows which they keep shut and cover up (with things called "blinds") so that they work for the most part by lamp light. Why have them at all?

**ἀγλαυκόπληκτος.** "Untroubled by owls". One of the surprisingly few hapax legomena in the work: this is one that "well-nightingaled" Aeschylus would have been proud of!

**ἀρίστου.** The English meals are extremely confusing. They eat a substantial meal soon after waking up called breakfast - where a cup of water and some of yesterday's bread would suit us. Then there is another large meal with sometimes several courses called "lunch" - our mid-morning ἄριστον is neither breakfast nor lunch!

**ἀρτόπωλιν:** the English like to eat large sweet sticky bread-based snacks between breakfast and lunch: such things were unknown then in Athens -

maybe a sesame-flavoured roll at most!

**Ἄρειος.** The English name Harry is a familiar form of Henry - once a very popular name for kings and princes (there is still a Prince Harry). The Greek equivalent - minus the asper - means "belonging to Ares". The hero of the book is very much a warrior, and his name seems more apt than the English! (Although JKR might well have had in mind the English warrior king, Shakespeare's Harry V.)

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**περὶ τῆς ἀδελφῆς** Because of the "telephone", a wife in England will still be able to communicate with her former family, and in fact will not regard herself as belonging to her husband's family after marriage the way we do. I find it very strange that Dursley's wife's sister - and her husband even - have a part to play in the story of his own family. I am used to our system where the wife has no further contact with her original family once she has left her father's house to get married. But then the English seem to lack all concept of the κύριος - Dursley's fear of his wife seems very strange indeed to us!

**Μύγαλος** "Muggle" - the first mention of this strange term, which seems to have no etymology in English. In Greek of course it means "field mouse", and is the word used by the people in the world of magic to refer to non-magical folk. Rather as we use the term βάρβαροι to refer to all non-Greeks. But I

quite like the idea of their scuttling around inconsequentially like lots of little mice!

**νᾶπυ βλέπων** "looking mustard". The English "look daggers".

**εἰς τὸν ἀνδρῶνα:** into the men's quarters. Dursley is not really the κύριος in his own οἶκος, and thus there isn't really an ἀνδρῶν as we have in our houses in Athens, a room from which the women were excluded. I think, though, that he would have liked to have had one!

**περὶ τὰ τῆς ἡμέρας πεπραγμένα:** the News. Because there isn't a real agora, the English don't get their news at first hand as we do. Instead they buy a "newspaper" or watch a box with a window in it (called a television see note below), which tells them what's been going on. Dursley likes the news, because it's always about other people somewhere else, and reassures him as to his normalness. Tonight, though, he is in for a shock.

**τοῦ ἀναγνώστου:** the newsreader. Such people in England are famous and well paid. In Greece an ἀναγνώστης would just be my slave who reads to me. In England, although they seem to read their newspapers and books silently (a very strange idea to us Greeks!), they need a reader to give them their news on television - most weird!

**τοῦ μετεωρολογικοῦ:** the weather forecaster. Unlike the

news, which normally confirms to Dursley that his life is utterly normal, the "weather forecast" is something he watches most avidly on television. Apparently it is very important to the English to know what type of rain will be falling the next day.

**ἐτηλεφώνουν** ...  
**τηλεορώντων:** far-speaking, far-watching. The English much prefer to experience life from afar, and they have eagerly adopted our τηλε- prefix.

**τὴν ἑορτὴν τὴν τοῦ Πυριφάτου:** "the feast of the one slain by fire". In England every November, they celebrate a festival where they burn an effigy of Guido Fawkes, a man who hundreds of years ago tried to remove the government by non-democratic means. Such is the devotion which the English have to our great Athenian invention!

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**πρὸς τὸν πρὸ τῆς οἰκίας κήπον :** "at the front garden". British homes in the suburbs pride themselves on their tiny gardens between their hedges and the house. It seems to be a vestigial token of the country estate or castle which an Englishman imagines his home to be.

**εἰς εὐνὴν :** It will surprise you to learn that the man and his wife habitually share the same bed in the same room: there are no separate men's and women's quarters in a British house! How very inconvenient this must be when returning late from a

symposium!

**δίοπτρα μηνοειδή** : half-moon spectacles. This is a device consisting of two small bits of glass held together by wire. The wearer is able to see more clearly - of all the modern inventions this is probably the most useful, I think. (Apart from sliced bread)

**ἄλβος Διμπλόδωρος** : albus is Latin for λευκός, no doubt a suitable name for an old man with white hair. It would have seemed less appropriate when he was a young man! All English have at least two names - the first is personal, the last is the family name or surname - much less useful than our system of identifying a man by his own name, his father's and where he comes from. Διμπλόδωρος would mean "he to whom double gifts are given" - like our Pandora, she to whom all gifts are given.

**ἐν θυλακίῳ** : in his pocket - which is what the moderns call a sort of cloth purse attached to one's garment. They are indeed very useful places to carry small items, but would be difficult to accommodate in one of our tunics: English women find the same problem, and carry their personal items in a bag, like we do. Oddly, the English men do not carry a ληκύθιον : it is a mystery to me how they manage all day without a personal supply of olive-oil.

**ἀναπτῆριον**. A small device which can miraculously generate fire. The moderns use it to light small paper tubes containing a drug, which supposedly calms them, but in

fact causes death. This fact is generally known, but many people still continue to "smoke". Possibly they regard it as a patriotic duty, as a large part of the substantial cost of these items goes directly to the government in tax. Generally the modern governments are very happy to take away your money in tax - in Athens it would seem outrageous if anyone besides foreigners and prostitutes were to have to pay any. The joke here is that Dumbledore's "lighter" actually makes lights go out by use of magic. He calls it his σβεντήριον, which is a word we have in Greek for a putter-outer, though no magic is involved in snuffing a candle!

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**ἡ σοφίστρια Μαγονωγαλέα** : Professor McGonagall . In Greece female professors are very rare, so you may not have heard this word before! Her name is a combination of μάγος (magician, wizard) and νωγάλεα (sweeties: see γλύκυσμα below), which I think you will find suits her very well!

**Δαίδαλος** seems to be lacking all the intelligence of his mythological namesake, despite his surname - Δίγλωττος (he of the two tongues) which would suggest a man of supreme cunning.

**γλύκυσμα** : the British love sweet things so much that "sweet" has become a noun. A sweet is something that even a σοφιστής like Prof Dumbledore is not embarrassed to be seen

constantly sucking. Imagine Socrates or Plato doing this! But perhaps we are fortunate that sugar was not discovered in our day - our descendants in Athens are every bit as bad - they have special shops called ζαχαροπλαστεία which sell only sticky cakes and other sickly confections.

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**Φολιδομορτός** : Voldemort, the unsayable name for the unspeakable enemy of Harry. You will see that in Greek it suggests snakes, which constantly symbolise the evil one in Harry Potter, as in most post-Christian mythology (they do not revere and respect snakes as we do in Greece). The name derives from φολίς, a reptile's scale, as well as being connected with a very great number of our words for fate, doom and death.

**Πομφρεία** (also called Πομφόλυξ) Madam Pomphrey is the matron at Hogwarts. Her name suggests blisters as well as bubbles - she is what they call in England a bubbly personality who is also a nurse!

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**ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί** : the English, and even the magical world here, do not believe in Zeus. However, many of them frequently swear by the Christian god whom they obviously do not believe in either.

**ὠρολόγιον** : in Athens we have only one clock for the whole city, our famous κλεψύδρα in the agora. We are relaxed about

time, and savour each moment of the day. In England everyone has a tiny clock (not water-powered of course!) attached to a wrist or on a chain in a "pocket" (see note on θυλάκιον p6). The English are always frightened about being late, and never have time to enjoy the moment! The professor's "watch" (presumably so called because the English are a nation of clock-watchers) is very different from a normal one - it is more like a "grandfather" clock in miniature.

**Ἄγριώδης** : Hagrid's name in Greek suggests a wild unkempt thing which of course he is! (Greek ἄγριος)

**τηθίδα** You may never have heard this word for your mother's sister (you have probably never even seen your mother's sister). But in England both mother's and father's sisters are known as "aunties" and are normally treated with great respect in the family.

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**Αἶτναῖος** "the size of Mount

Etna". The English have many many words for big. We have just one, really: μέγας, or μέγιστος if it is very big. So to cope with the English love of exaggeration - things that are just big to us are gigantic, mammoth, huge, enormous, vast, jumbo-sized, astronomical, - Etna-sized, which Aristophanes uses to describe the very big dung beetle in *Peace*, is used for Hagrid's motorbike. Like the dung beetle it also soars dangerously in the sky! I suppose it is difficult for us Greeks to imagine anything bigger than Mt Etna in Sicily.

**αὐτοκίνητος δίκυκλος** : "self-propelled two-wheeler". What is now called a motorbike or motorcycle. The English have a strange word "bicycle" for a two-wheeled vehicle which they ride like a mechanical donkey. Why not dicycle?

**πρὸς τοὺς λυχνεῶνας** : In Lucian's tale "A True Story" (which is guaranteed by the author to contain not a single word of truth) there is a land where lamps live on posts. In England such things actually

exist, and are called - unsurprisingly - lamp-posts.

**τὰ πρὸς γάλα ληκύθια** : "milk bottles". When this book was written (in 1997) it was normal for milk to be left outside each house in small bottles in the early morning by a "milkman". The empty bottles from yesterday were collected at the same time. Most English children are not aware that milk is extracted from sheep or goats, and find Book 8 of the *Odyssey* quite difficult to understand. Such is the pace of change, though, that most families now buy it more cheaply from the Hyperagora, and so avoid their milk being stolen from their doorstep by the poor people. The obsession with drinking an animal's baby food is more difficult to understand, especially as milk is tasteless until it has been allowed to stand for at least a few days. Odysseus was right to have been suspicious of the milk-drinker Polyphemos. In Greece thank Bacchus we drink only wine or water.