

APPLYING TO HOGWARTS

May 2012



Alchemy Text, 1591

Michael R. Lynn

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing to apply to teach history at Hogwarts.

Professor Binns, the History of Magic professor, lacks vitality in his teaching. True, he *is* a ghost and dead which may explain to some degree, why his teaching style is so deadly dull but Professor Binns has a “droning voice that [is] almost guaranteed to cause severe drowsiness.”

Even as your recent graduates such as Ronald Weasley and Harry Potter “scribbled down

names and dates,” they saw their history class as “the dullest subject on their schedule” and “the most boring subject ever devised by Wizard-kind.” Is it any surprise that when OWL exams were given both Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley only managed D’s (for Dreadful)?

History is too important to leave to a ghost.

If you have any doubts about the importance of history, you only need look at the work of some of your recent alumni, such as Hermione Granger. Ms. Granger

has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of history by using it time and time again to save both the wizarding world and that of the Muggles.

When Professor Binns stated that a historian “deals in facts...not myths and legends,” Ms. Granger eagerly took up this challenge. She has spent, as all historians must, a great deal of her time in the library. Hogwarts needs more students trained like Ms. Granger!

Ms. Granger’s historical understanding is subtle enough that she recognized, while still



Nicholas Flamel, 19th century image, Public Domain

Heinrich Khunrath. Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, 1595, Wikimedia



young, that official histories may be biased. I'd like to follow up on her discovery that books dealing with the history of Hogwarts omit mentioning the large number of house elves who work there. Surely, it is time for your students to learn about revisionist history and to begin to question the history of some of our more worrisome traditions and practices. Perhaps we can learn from the Muggles' history here as they have led the way in this regard.

I was impressed that Ms. Granger brought along on her many quests not only the requisite number of potions and cauldrons but also a substantial library of historical reference books. If I replace Professor Binns, I will ensure that in the future all wizards, and perhaps even some Muggles, bring history books on all their expeditions.

I'd also like to follow up on the late Professor Dumbledore's tutorials with Mr. Potter by creating similar classes for new students. In those tutorials, both Professor Dumbledore and Mr. Potter delved into the history of Voldemort's origins combining both oral histories with visits to historical

locations---an excellent technique and one I will adopt as a professor.

As we move forward in this new age, we must understand the roots and history of our relationships with house elves, goblins, werewolves, ghosts, and giants. This understanding is crucial if future wizard leaders are to forge alliances and work to prevent war.

Finally, any class I teach would discuss the overlap between Muggle and wizarding history. We wizards are all too familiar with the works of Nicholas Flamel (c. 1330-1418, C.M.E. [Common Muggle Era]) and Paracelsus (1493-1541, C.M.E.).

Although the Muggles remain somewhat clueless about the importance of alchemy, many Muggles were once aware that Nicholas Flamel had made the Philosopher's Stone which changes metal into gold and that he had achieved immortality. Oddly, this knowledge of Flamel's extraordinary achievements has faded over time in the Muggle world, a clear indication that true histories can be lost while myths and legends come to replace facts.

Paracelsus (Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) is particularly interesting as he merged the traditions of the Muggle world with our understanding of magic. Like the best scholars, Paracelsus challenged the educational establishment and its reliance on ancient authorities. One Muggle scholar even claims that for Paracelsus and his followers, “chemistry” (similar to our alchemy) “became a basis for explaining both macrocosmic and microcosmic phenomena.”

As these two simple examples demonstrate, history remains too important to leave it to ghosts teaching about dull facts and dates.

I hope the new headmaster at Hogwarts will consider my application.

Yours,

Michael R. Lynn

Michael R. Lynn is a Professor of History at Purdue University, North Central. He writes frequently on French culture and history as well as the history of science and magic.

