



The Immortality of Love and Self-Sacrifice in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series

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Abstract

J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series is the story of orphan boy, who is left in the care of the cruel Dursley family of 'Muggles' (non-magical people). On Harry's eleventh birthday, receives a letter from Hogwarts, a school for young wizards and witches. He get entry into other world of magic and mystery. At Hogwarts he meets his two closest friends - Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger and begins studying magic. Harry comes to know that his parents were not killed in car accident, but the evil Dark Lord Voldemort murdered them. Voldemort also attempted to kill Harry, but his attack rebounded on himself, severely crippling Voldemort's power. The first few books of the series develop the characters and set the stage in which Voldemort returns to power and regains a corporeal body. Voldemort begins a campaign to kill Harry Potter with the help of his 'Death Eaters' (evil wizards). The last three volumes deal with Harry's increasingly desperate battle against Voldemort. Though the world around him spins into chaos his fight remains steadfast. It is clearer that Harry must die, that in the end he will walk into Voldemort's presence and lay down his life for his friends for all his friends, all the students at Hogwarts, all their families and all the wizards and Muggles in the world. He will die in order that others may live. Thus, Harry's relationship with his mentor Dumbledore and the power of love helped Harry to defeat death.

Keywords: Muggles, Death Eaters, Hogwarts, Mentor, Killing curse, Goblet, Phoenix, Hallows.

Research Paper:

J.K.Rowling has depicted love and death as the two major themes in all over her series. At the very beginning of the *Harry Potter* series Harry's parents have died and the shadow of death hangs on him also, but spared. He also escapes death again at the close of the first two books *The Philosopher's Stone* and *The Chamber of Secrets* and the third book *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, is concerned with his pursuit by an escaped murderer. At the end of the fourth book *The Goblet of Fire*, a school friend is killed before his eyes and he himself barely escapes again. In the fifth book *The Order of the Phoenix*, he loses his newly regained godfather and in the sixth *The Half-Blood Prince*, even his great and seemingly indestructible mentor, Dumbledore. Thus, death is the constant visitor to Harry's world.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the trio- Harry, Ron and Hermione have successfully located and destroys the six Horcruxes, magical objects bearing fragments of Voldemort's essence. However, it becomes clear that the seventh Horcrux exists: Harry Potter himself. The curse that originally failed to kill Harry struck Voldemort instead, blasting away a piece of Voldemort's tainted essence... which in turn bonded to Harry.

While Harry lives, Voldemort cannot truly die. Harry is certainly not Christ himself, he is the books' "Christ figure", willingly enduring a sacrificial death in order to save others from evil. He chooses to lay down his own life to end the evil caused by another. Harry even observes: "I don't want anyone else to try to help. It's got to be like this. It's got to be me."

In Harry Potter series one of the most recurring themes is the sacrificial love of Harry's mother Lily, who died to protect her infant son. Voldemort's deadliest weapon, the "killing curse," rebounded when he used it against Harry, shattering the Dark Lord's power.

Voldemort cannot physically touch Harry due to the power of his mother's love in him. Later in the series (after the Dark Lord's return to power), Voldemort attempts to "possess" Harry but cannot due to the contrast between Harry's soul and his own. Harry's life is bounded by love while, Voldemort's life is centered around hatred.

'But why couldn't Quirrell touch me?'

'Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection for ever. It is in your skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.' (Rowling, 1997: 216).

Thiselton observes at one point in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* about value of love for Voldemort and express the truth:

"That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to understand. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped." (344)

Love also repeatedly motivates acts of self-sacrifice on the parts of the main characters. Primary characters are willing to suffer unbelievable loss for one another, even giving up their lives in order to do the right thing. The love between family members is celebrated as beautiful and noble, never something to be mocked and sneered.

Sacrificial love applies to the character of Severus Snape. Though, Snape is potions teacher at Hogwarts, he frequently appears to be antagonistic towards Harry. Throughout the series although, often intervenes to protect Harry during the darkest moments.

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The '*Harry Potter*' series is, a parable about the danger of desiring immortality. Voldemort is obsessed with the concept of living forever, no matter what the cost. This dark desire leads him down the path of villainy, transforming by constructing the mentioned Horcruxes - but in order to do so, he must take a human life for creating every Horcrux. Dumbledore sharply critiques this empty attitude towards life: 'As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would chooses above all- the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them.'

In contrast, Harry and his friends are unafraid of their own mortality. When Harry confronts Voldemort and suffers death at the Dark Lord's hands, he awakens to find himself in a limbo-like state between life and death.

There he sees the mutilated soul of Lord Voldemort- an affirmation that souls are ultimately held accountable for their actions and that the material world is but the precursor to something more. Death is seen not as an end , but rather as a beginning. Dumbledore, the schoolmaster of Witchcraft and Wizardry at Hogwarts keeps a quest for Harry to defeat death: “It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more.”

During his journey to face Voldemort and die at the Dark Lord’s hands, Harry never questions Dumbledore’s authority or his command, but sincerely wrestles with issues of grief and loss.

For Harry, death isn’t the end as he is resurrected from the dead, defeats Voldemort once and saves the magical world. His death leads to salvation of countless others. Harry struggles with the quest that Dumbledore has left him: finding and destroying Voldemort’s horcruxes.

After Dumbledore’s untimely ‘death’ in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, a series of rumors begin to fly regarding Dumbledore, questioning his authority and his wisdom. These rumors are strikingly similar to arguments leveled by those antagonistic toward Christianity. ‘Snape killed him,’ said Harry. ‘I was there, I saw it. We arrived back on the Astronomy Tower because that’s where the Mark was... Dumbledore was ill, he was weak, but I think he realized it was a trap when we heard footsteps running up the stairs. He immobilized me, I couldn’t do anything, I was under the Invisibility Cloak and then Malfoy came through the door and disarmed him. (Rowling, 2005: 573)

In the closing pages of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Snape appears to be allied with Voldemort, lending credence to Harry’s longtime suspicions.

Professor Dumbledore impresses upon Harry that his “ability to love ‘ is “the only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort’s.” (Rowling, 2005: 23)

Ostry criticizes with the help of number of reflections on death.

“No spell can reawaken the dead.”

“Death is not to be feared.”

“To the well organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.” (Ostry, 2003)

The wise knows that death is not the end. Although Sirius has passed quite literally, in the story ‘beyond the veil’ Harry has a sense that within the mysterious veiled archway there are people hiding and whispering. His friend Luna Lovegood is sure that she will see her mother again. (Rowling, 2003: 35)

Thiselton criticized, that “loved one’s don’t die they remain in us forever.” (42)

Harry believes that he has seen his parents, but it was not so. After an earlier experience of his parents last moments, he tells to himself and learnt to distinguish wishful thinking from reality.

“They’re dead and listening to echoes of them won’t bring them back.

It does not dwell on dreams and forget to live.”

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us?

You think we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble?

Your father is alive in you, Harry and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him...You know, Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night....You found him inside yourself.” (1997: 22)

In contrast to Harry, there is self- styled Voldemort, the Dark Lord for immortality. Riddle’s background, fifty years before, was similar to Harry’s- an unloved childhood without parents. But Harry has grown up still capable of love, while Riddle has devoted himself to domination of others.

Professor Quirell through his spokes man declares that,

“There is no good and evil, there is only power and those too weak to seek it.”

Professor Quirell calls his followers “Death Eaters,” although there is no hint that he would share immortality with them. He boasts of having “gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality.” (2000: 33)

He has discovered how to split his soul in pieces and conceal each part in a Horcrux. Every tearing of his soul requires him to commit a murder, taking the life of someone else. To preserve his own life he must deal death to others. (2005: 23)

Voldemort and Dumbledore in the *Order of Phoenix*:

“You do not seek to kill me, Dumbledore? Called Voldemort....

“Above such brutality, are you? We both know that there are other ways of destroying a man, Tom”

Dumbledore said calmly.... “Merely taking your life would not satisfy me, I admit”

“There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!” snarled Voldemort.

“You are quite wrong,” said Dumbledore...

“Indeed, your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness.” (2003: 36)

John Killinger suggested that Harry would eventually “die like Christ.” If there was any doubt about Harry’s being created in the image of Christ, it is surely dispelled in *The Deathly Hallows* volume, where he is repeatedly called “the Chosen One.” And indeed, in the final novel, he does. He dies voluntarily, as Christ did, literally presenting himself to Voldemort for execution.

Harry learns that what is worse than death is the betrayal of love, he escaped death because his parents and especially his mother, were prepared to die for him. He was always Voldemort’s victim. His father, James, was killed trying to give his mother time to escape with her child. His mother, Lily, was even given the chance to stand aside and be spared. She preferred to protect him and her love at the cost of her life gave Harry the protection that turned the Dark Lord’s curse against himself, robbing him of most of his powers for twelve years.

Rowling depicted human love of several kinds in the series. The love of parents for children, of husband and wives and of those who will marry one day, the love of friends, any among them may require to sacrifice. When Peter Pettigrew, the friend of James and Lily Potter, seeks to excuse himself on the grounds that Voldemort would have killed him, Sirius tells him,

“THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!

....DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS,

AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU !” (1997: 19)

Rowling depicts human love with insight, wit and affection. The friendship of Sirius and Lupin and James for Pettigrew would have demanded their self-sacrifice rather than betrayal. Petunia Dursley and Narcissa Malfoy love their sons Dudley and Draco, in their own way.

The growing attraction between Ron and Hermione is one of the principal sub-plots of the series. Neither Harry nor Ron like Hermione much, but they come to accept her when they have to rescue her.

Rowling says;

“from that moment on, Hermione Granger became their friend.

There are some things you can’t share without ending up liking each other...”

Hermione's integrity, loyalty and wisdom will enable them to survive greater trials over the years. Harry has friendship with Hermione. But, at the close of *The Half-Blood Prince* Harry recognizes that his love for Ginny and hers for him is not only his strength, but potentially his weakness. If Voldemort discovers how much Ginny means to Harry, he will attempt to paralyse Harry by threatening her. Ginny may not care about the danger to herself, but she sees the point. They resolve to hide their relationship entirely while Harry goes on his quest to defeat Voldemort. An important element in the series shows that Harry has been saved from the start by love, the love of his mother.

Dumbledore has told him of the power of love:

“There is a room in the Department of Mysteries that is kept locked at all times. It contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than the forces of nature. It is the most mysterious of the many subjects for study that reside there. It is the power held within that room that you possess in such quantities and which Voldemort has not at all. That power took you to save Sirius tonight. That power also saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests. In the end, it mattered not that you could not close your mind. It was your heart that saved you.” (2003: 37)

Voldemort had argued with Dumbledore: The mysteries studied include Thought, Time and Death. What is more wonderful and terrible?

“The old argument,” he said softly. “But nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncement that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore.”

“Perhaps you have been looking in the *wrong* places,” suggested Dumbledore.

Dumbledore's words to Harry at the end of *The Philosopher's Stone*:

“If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love.

He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark.

Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give some protection for ever.” (1997: 17)

The uncommon skill and power Harry has is the ability to love. Dumbledore, assures him that this is, in fact, a great and remarkable thing. ‘Love is strong as death, passion hard as the grave....it blazes out like fire.’ These Biblical words remind us of Rowling's repeated allusion to the ‘hard, blazing look’ on Ginny's face, first as she throws herself at him after the Quidditch triumph and then again after Dumbledore's funeral. She meets Harry's gaze and he knows that they understand each other perfectly.

Lastly, after thousand pages of the novel and explication love can save you from death. Thus, J. K. Rowling implements immortal themes - love, friendship, self-sacrifice, death and the life that defeats death. Thus, *Harry Potter* series creates an immortal theme of life for the modern youth generation.

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