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Thematic Duality in J K Rowling's Series of Harry Potter

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1. Introduction

This research paper will focus on the most popular and highest grossing series ever written by J.K. Rowling containing seven novels which are named as below:

- 1) Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone
- 2) Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets
- 3) Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban
- 4) Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire
- 5) Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix
- 6) Harry Potter and The Half-blood Prince
- 7) Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows

This particular series has been studied in the light of Duality in this research paper.

1.1 An Overview of Harry Potter Series

Critics and scholars have labelled the Harry Potter series as fantasy, young-adult fiction, mystery, thriller and bildungsroman. Chiefly there are seven types of narratives can be found in the entire series. All types of narrative overlap one another in the entire series. Seven types of narratives found in the series are bildungsroman, school narrative, detective or mystery, adventure narrative, Kunstler roman, quest narrative and epic narrative.

Since the publication of the first book of series, the series have gained immense popularity, critical acclaim and commercial success across the globe. The whole series has been translated into 73 languages and as of May 2015, the books have sold more than 450 million copies worldwide. The final book of the series holds the record of the fastest-selling book ever with 11 million copies sold out in 24 hours in U.S. As Stephen King, the third highest earning author writing about J.K. Rowling that,



Rowling set out a sumptuous seven-course meal, carefully prepared, beautifully cooked, and lovingly served out. The kids and adults who fell in love with the series (I among them) savored every mouthful, from the appetizer (Sorcerer's Stone) to the dessert (Epilogue of Deathly Hallows 1)

The seven-book series has been turned into eight fantasy films. The series is distributed by Warner Bros. beginning with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in the year 2001 and culminating with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows- Part 2* in the year 2011. The box office collection of all the eight films is \$7.7 billion and the series occupies the stature of the third highest-grossing film series.

2. Thematic Duality in Harry Potter Series

There are seven books in the series. Name of every book starts with Harry Potter obviously as he is the protagonist. Along with the name of Harry Potter, title of each book has a dual aspect in it, e.g., Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Titles of the books suggest that the particular book roams around Harry Potter and the other mentioned phenomenon in the title.

The entire series is a game of two halves. The series depicts many dual aspects in it. If the series has a roaring lion of Gryffindor house, it has a slithering snake of Slytherin house. If it has Harry as a benevolent orphan, it has Tom Riddle as a cruel one. If it has Dobby, a free elf, it has devoted slaves like Winky and Kreacher. If it has Severus Snape, the unaffected good one amidst all the death-eaters, it has Dolores Umbridge with all her cunningness and deceptive personality. If the series includes Remus Lupin, an unlucky werewolf, it has merciless and beastly Fenrir Greyback. The series talks of Sirius Black and Dursely family as contradictory to one another as Harry's guardians. If readers see Dumbledore's pet Fawkes, the phoenix who heals the wound, they also see



Voldemort's snake, Nagini who kills people on her master's order. There are many minor dual aspects in the series. For example: curse and counter curse, first wizarding war and second wizarding war etc.

Thematic concerns of the series are different sets of opposites like life and death, faith and mistrust, significance and insignificance, ability and free will, love and hatred and the constant struggle between choosing the easier and choosing what is right. Albus Dumbledore's advice to Harry serves in revealing the theme of the series when he said, "... It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." (Rowling 352)

2.1 Life and Death

The theme of Life and Death is clearly the major theme of the series. The series starts with the death of Harry's parents and ends with the death of their murderer, Voldemort. The prophecy regarding the end of Voldemort reads,

"The one with the power to vanquish the - Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..." (Rowling 774)

The entire prophecy depicts the play of words which clearly indicate the support to the theme of Life and Death. Harry born when July died. The line from the prophecy 'neither can live while the other survives' provides prophecy regarding the necessity of death in order to live.

Deaths or the fear of dying affects almost every character of the story. More than 150 characters die in Harry Potter series but the martyrdom of Fred, Remus, Tonks, Dumbledore, Snape and many other members of the Order of Phoenix were for the sake of the lives of others. Death for the sake of others life is rendered throughout the series.



“He was more afraid than you were that night, Harry. You had accepted, even embraced, the possibility of death, something Lord Voldemort has never been able to do. Your courage won; your wand overpowered his. And in doing so, something happened between those wands, something that echoed the relationship between their masters (Rowling 581)

Voldemort has always feared of death and wanted to be master of death by living forever. Those who fear death, want to conquer it. He didn't understand that there are things which can cause more torment than death. The conversation regarding the issue between Dumbledore and Voldemort read thus:

“There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!” snarled Voldemort. “You are quite wrong,” said Dumbledore, still closing in upon Voldemort and speaking as lightly as though they were discussing the matter over drinks... “Indeed, your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness” (Rowling 749)

Theme of Life and Death is well depicted in the story of Remus Lupin, his wife Tonks and their son Teddy Lupin. Remus and Tonks both lose their lives in the second wizarding war. Before their death, Tonks gave birth to Teddy Lupin. The new arrival brought life in the lives of other members of the Order of Phoenix. When the news regarding Tonks' pregnancy reached to Harry, Ron and Hermione, their reactions are priceless. Lupin was disturbed regarding Tonks pregnancy as he was werewolf and was worried about contaminating the child with the same illness. Lines read thus:

“...Lupin said, with an air of forcing himself to admit something unpleasant. “Tonks is going to have a baby.” “Oh, how wonderful!” squealed Hermione. “Excellent!” said Ron enthusiastically. “Congratulations,” said Harry.” (Rowling 171)

But once the baby arrived, Lupin seemed absolutely happy about the new arrival. His entry at Shell-cottage is described thus.



“Lupin fell over the threshold. He was white-faced, wrapped in a traveling cloak, his graying hair windswept. He straightened up, looked around the room, making sure of who was there, then cried aloud, “It’s a boy! We’ve named him Ted, after Dora’s father!” Hermione shrieked. “Wha—? Tonks—Tonks has had the baby?” “Yes, yes, she’s had the baby!” shouted Lupin.” (Rowling 419)

Everybody who was present at the time of good news cheered the moment. In the gloomy shadow of death, news of a life brought delight and relief.

“All around the table came cries of delight, sighs of relief: Hermione and Fleur both squealed, “Congratulations!” and Ron said, “Blimey, a baby!” as if he had never heard of such a thing before. “Yes— yes— a boy,” said Lupin again, who seemed dazed by his own happiness.” (Rowling 419)

Harry and Lupin had a fight at Grimmauld Place but Teddy’s birth took away every grudge and misunderstanding away. When Lupin made Harry Teddy’s Godfather, Harry was overwhelmed by the decision. Lines read:

“He strode around the table and hugged Harry; the scene in the basement of Grimmauld Place might never have happened. “You’ll be godfather?” he said as he released Harry. “M—me?” stammered Harry. “You, yes, of course—”

“I can’t stay long, I must get back,” said Lupin, beaming around at them all: He looked years younger than Harry had ever seen him.” (Rowling 419)

Remus and Tonks brought a new life before their death. This turn of events shares its role in the prevalence of the theme of life and death in the series.

2.2 Love and Hatred

The theme of love and hatred shapes the story line of the series. Characters of Harry, Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Tom Riddle, Merope Gaunt, Remus



Lupin etc. have suffered a great deal of torture due to sheer hatred by some people in their life. Magical creatures like Dobby, Centaurs, Kreacher and Goblins also suffered hatred of witches and wizards. People who suffered hatred, when give love changed the entire story of their lives.

If Merope wasn't tortured by her brother and father, she would not have been attracted to a muggle man, Tom Riddle Sr. Birth of Voldemort is nothing but a result of a girl's desire to get love from someone by any means. Merope let the love potion work and made a muggle man fall for her.

Importance of love is celebrated over and over again by the character of Albus Dumbledore. In the final meeting of Dumbledore and Harry which took place in Limbo, Dumbledore's words show the importance of love. He advises Harry that, "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love." (Rowling 590)

After Professor Quirrell crumbles due to Harry's touch, Dumbledore told Harry about the real power of mother's love. The protection love provides to Harry and killed his enemy just with the touch of Harry. Dumbledore believes that love is the most powerful magic. He told Harry in the final chapter of the first book of the series that,

"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 forever. It is in your very skin. Quirell, 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 321)

Even the prophecy regarding Voldemort's death as talks about the power of love. Love is the only power which Voldemort doesn't care to possess and



Harry has that effortlessly. Lines from the prophecy are, "...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not..." (Rowling 774)

At the end of the fifth book of the series when Voldemort tries to possess Harry, Harry thought of dying and meeting his God father one more time. His heart filled with emotions, the power that Voldemort has always underestimated freed him instantly. Lines are:

"...death is nothing compared to this... And I'll see Sirius again... And as Harry's heart filled with emotion, the creature's coils loosened, the pain was gone; Harry was lying face down on the floor, his glasses gone, shivering as though he lay upon ice, not wood..." (Rowling 751)

2.3 Faith and Mistrust

Though there are many characters and incidents that showcase the duality of faith and mistrust but above all, the game of 'faith and mistrust' is played between Severus Snape and Lord Voldemort. Snape was believed to be the most devoted servant to Voldemort but in reality, he was the most abhorrent towards Voldemort amongst his other followers. Severus agreed to make an 'Unbreakable Vow' with Narcissa Malfoy and thus won Bellatrix's trust who had served as the bonding agent. The Unbreakable Vow is a spell where a witch or wizard makes an oath to another. If the terms of the oath are broken, the person who breaks it will die.

Actually, the vow was to protect Draco even at the cost of Snape's own life. Snape didn't find it problematic to protect a teen-ager who has been mentally and emotionally tortured by the Dark Lord. Bellatrix and Narcissa took Snape's willingness to make an Unbreakable Vow as Snape's dedication towards Dark Lord and his fellow Death Eaters. He protected Malfoy, killed Dumbledore, won trust of many and the Dark Lord himself and played the game of faith and mistrust secretly and wonderfully that Voldemort wasn't aware about Snape playing a double agent even after he killed Snape.



Another character whom readers remember for the theme of faith and mistrust is Peter Pettigrew. He betrayed Lily and James Potter and sold their lives to Voldemort. Then he conspired and blamed Sirius Black for murders of Lily, James and his own. He transformed himself in a rat and vanished from the wizarding world.

2.4 Quest and Triumph

The entire series seems a saga of quest and triumph. Every major and many minor character's story is a story of quest and triumph. Harry's quest of bringing an end to Voldemort's realm and the remarkable triumph, Ron's quest to become as successful as his elder brothers and his triumph, Hermione's quest for being accepted in wizarding community and her triumph, Dobby's quest for freedom and ultimately achieving the freedom he has always desired, Dumbledore's quest for the self-approval and being a successful mentor and his triumph when Harry appreciated him in the Limbo scene. Severus's quest for protecting his love- Lily Evans's son and his triumph, Neville's quest for matching with his parents' talents in wizardry and his phenomenal triumph when he raises voice against Voldemort and kills his snake, Nagini.

2.5 Acceptance and Rejection

Muggle-born like Hermione and Dean Thomas, elves, goblins and other magical creatures like centaurs and half-giants are shown struggling to get accepted in the wizarding world. Rigid pure blood wizards consider themselves superior just because of their 'so called' blood purity.

Rejection plays a vital role in making some elves and goblins hate wizards. For thousands of years, witches and wizards have ill-treated other magical creatures and have underestimated their kind if magic. When Kreacher betrayed Sirius, Dumbledore was not angry about Kreacher's betrayal. He knew that Sirius had never behaved in an appropriate manner with Kreacher so none can expect Kreacher to be loyal to Sirius. Dumbledore explains to Harry that,



“I warned Sirius when we adopted twelve Grimmauld Place as our Headquarters that Kreacher must be treated with kindness and respect. I also told him that Kreacher could be dangerous to us. I do not think Sinus took me very seriously, or that he ever saw Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as a human’s.” (Rowling 766)

Though goblins, centaurs and elves are considered less privileged but they don’t require wands to perform magic. It’s the magic of Kreacher that revealed the filthiest side of Voldemort to Regulus Black. It’s the magic of Dobby who saved the lives of the trio along with Luna, Dean, Griphook and Mr. Olivander.

Thus, rejection has brought disasters and acceptance has always brought loyalty and friendship.

2.6 Hallows and Horcrux Duality

The final installation of the series is all about Hallows versus Horcrux Duality. In order to be the master of death, there are only two ways possible: To create Horcrux or to gather all the three Deathly Hallows. Though wizards have failed to become master of death in adopting any of the ways. The real master of death is the one who doesn’t have any fear of death. Death doesn’t matter to him. Harry is called ‘Master of Death’ by Dumbledore.

“You are the true master of death, because the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying.” (Rowling 589)

He asks Harry whether he is better than Voldemort as he too wanted to conquer death. As a reply to his question Harry answers,

“Not the way he did,” said Harry. After all his anger at Dumbledore, how odd it was to sit here, beneath the high, vaulted ceiling, and defend Dumbledore from himself. “Hallows, not Horcruxes.” “Hallows,” mumbled Dumbledore, “not Horcruxes. Precisely” (Rowling 583)



When Dumbledore was in his teens and was under the influence of Gillert Gridelwand, he went for Hallows. When Voldemort in his teens wanted to be master of death, he chose to make Horcruxes. Gathering Hallows is shown a less violent act comparing to making Horcruxes by killing. Dumbledore explains to Harry that how Harry ended with all the three hallows even without searching them desperately. He elaborates to Harry,

“Maybe a man in a million could unite the Hallows, Harry. I was fit only to possess the meanest one of them, the least extraordinary. I was fit to own the Elder Wand, and not to boast of it, and not to kill with it. I was permitted to tame and to use it, because I took it, not for gain, but to save others from it. “But the Cloak, I took out of vain curiosity, and so it could never have worked for me as it works for you, its true owner. The stone I would have used in an attempt to drag back those who are at peace, rather than to enable my self-sacrifice, as you did. You are the worthy possessor of the Hallows.” (Rowling 588)

Voldemort never cared about Hallows much because he didn't want anybody to come alive with the help of resurrection stone nor he wanted to hide himself under invisibility clock as he possesses powerful magic to hide himself from any mortal danger. He required only one hallow and that is the Elder Wand as his wand failed in killing Harry.

Conclusion

It is so obvious that the story talks about good and evil. What fascinates the readers the most is good in evil characters and evil in good characters.

Towering character of Albus Dumbledore has shown crying and weeping in the sixth installment of the series. The lines read thus:

Dumbledore began to cower as though invisible tortures surrounded him; his flailing hand almost knocked the refilled goblet from Harry's trembling hands as



he moaned, ‘Don’t hurt them, please, please, its my fault, hurt me instead...’
(Rowling 476)

Dumbledore during his teenage was a believer of the idea of ‘wizards over non-magical people’. He believed that the idea would serve as ‘greater good’ for both-wizards and muggles. He was fascinated and became friends with Gellert Grindelward who was also a teenager at that time, became the darkest of wizards of his time. Their friendship turned nasty and ended in dual between them, death of his younger sister Aliana and life-long disturbed relation with his brother Abaforth. Such sudden and shocking turn of events have changed Dumbledore from within and he left the idea of ‘greater good’ and voluntarily stayed away from power. Dumbledore was aware about his weakness, the other and hidden aspect of him and that is power. He himself says that,

“Well, Grindelwald fled, as anyone but I could have predicted. He vanished, with his plans for seizing power, and his schemes for Muggle torture, and his dreams of the Deathly Hallows, dreams in which I had encouraged him and helped him. He ran, while I was left to bury my sister, and learn to live with my guilt and my terrible grief, the price of my shame. “Years passed. There were rumors about him. They said he had procured a wand of immense power. I, meanwhile, was offered the post of Minister of Magic, not once, but several times. Naturally, I refused. I had learned that I was not to be trusted with power.” (Rowling 586)

Love existed in Severus Snape even though he has spent half of his life in the presence of Death Eaters. He was in love with Lily Potter so he could produce patronus which takes shape of a doe similar to Lily’s patronus. Love in Severus Snape kept him on a brighter side and stopped him from being a death eater and a murderer. It was love within him that has helped Harry, Ron and Hermione in the forest in the final book. Snape’s patronus guided Harry to sword of Gryffindor which helped the trio in the journey of destructing Horcruxes. Nobody but Dumbledore has always believed in Severus Snape because he knew that love for Lily exists in Snape which will make him save Harry and friends.



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Mercy existed in Peter Pettigrew and the proof is shown in the chapter named Malfoy Manor in the final instalment of the book. A slightest impulse of mercy in Peter Pettigrew caused his own death as his master, Lord Voldemort always knew that Pettigrew has some mercy towards Harry as he was Pettigrew's friend's son, so Voldemort has gifted Pettigrew such a magical arm which is able to kill Pettigrew if he doesn't follow his master's order. Thus, it can be seen that mercy existed in Pettigrew even before it took a shape in a kind action.

Longbottom has been sketched in a caricaturist way. He was shown having lack of courage in earlier books of the series. As the story line moves further, Neville shows immense courage and in the final instalment of the series, Neville kills Nagini, Voldemort's giant serpent and his only surviving Horcrux. Magic existed in Ariana and Merope Gaunt but the circumstances were unfavourable for both of them. Even though people around them considered them to be squibs, they had magic in them.

The entire series hails duality. Varieties of thematic dualities are included in order to show and celebrate the opposites in the world. Characters, situations and relations of the novel series can be comprehended in a better way by the contrast made by the author.



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