

The Archetypes in Harry Potter Series

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Harry Potter is a popular series written by J.K Rowling. The series is the story about a young wizard, Harry Potter, whose destiny is to defeat the evil wizard, Voldemort, who killed his parents. Readers can enjoy the series by following the heroic journey of Harry Potter. Through many challenges and tasks, Harry seems to be depicted as an archetypal hero. Although the settings, themes, characters may be totally different, archetypal heroes still share common characteristics. Also, Joseph Campbell has summarized the normal process of heroic journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 30)

This can also be applied to the analysis of the main character, Harry Potter. He is a born wizard with outstanding magical ability. However, in order to protect him from the forces of evil, he was sent to live with his uncle, aunt and cousin as a normal person. Afterwards, he confronted a turning point – getting into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry – and began his journey to fight against Voldemort. After being depreciated by his relatives for a long time, he gradually retrieved his courage and dignity through his heroic journey. And eventually, he defeated Voldemort, winning the decisive victory.

From the aspect of the heroic journey, Harry Potter conforms to the qualification of being an archetypal hero; however, when it comes to the characteristics he possesses, it seems that Harry Potter is a little bit different from typical archetypal hero.

According to *Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children's Literature* written by Maria Nikolajeva, many characters in children's literature tend to stick to one dimension and are quite boring; however, in Harry Potter series, there are some complicated elements that make Harry Potter become a very interesting character, with a mix of "*the heroic and the everyday*" (Nikolajeva 225), somehow different from the so-called archetypal hero. Harry tends to show emotions of sympathy and compassion, as well as vulnerability. On the other hand, J.K Rowling has also stated that Harry's character flaws include anger and impulsiveness; however, Harry is also innately honorable.

Nikolajeva goes on to say that Harry Potter deviates from the archetypal hero narrative because Harry Potter is a product of the twenty-first century:

He appears as a reaction to a long chain of ironic characters that show ambiguity in their concepts of good and evil, transgress gender, and exhibit other tokens of the postmodern aesthetics.

In other words, Nikolajeva holds the position that because Harry Potter is not totally good or totally evil; based on Frye's interpretation of the archetypal hero, he does not

fit into the archetypal frame of the hero or the villain.

According to Northrop Frye's *Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths*; there are three forms of myth in literature. The first one, undisplaced myth, are two contrasting worlds of gods and demons that are undesirable and desirable. The second one, romantic, which fits Harry Potter the best, and it usually places "*implicit mythical patterns*" (Frye 139) in the world associated with our own experience. The third form, realism, emphasizes content rather than shape of the story. Frye also divides the myths into several genres: the romantic, the tragic, the comic and the iron or satiric (Frye 162) and I think Harry Potter should be discussed in the context of the myth of romance as a romantic hero.

The Romantic hero is a literary archetype referring to a character that rejects established norms and conventions, has been rejected by society, and has the self as the center of his or her own existence. The Romantic hero is often the protagonist in the literary work and there is a primary focus on the character's thoughts rather than his or her actions.

In Harry Potter, Voldemort transforms into a man with a snake-like face as his power grows, which would put Harry Potter somewhere in between romance and undisplaced myth. Nikolajeva claims that the circumstances surrounding Harry's childhood makes him a perfect archetypal hero, but not a "genuine mythic hero"

(Nikolajeva 226).

The Harry Potter figure has all the necessary components of the romantic hero. There are mystical circumstances around his birth, he is dislocated and oppressed and suddenly given unlimited power. His innocence and intrinsic benevolence make him superior to the evil – adult – forces. He bears the mark of the chosen on his forehead, and he is worshiped in the wizard community as the future savior (Nikolajeva 226).

It is said that the romantic heroes tend to dislike and distrust the human being and all human nature. However, in Harry Potter series, Harry has many mentors and pals who keep him company on his heroic journey to fight against the evil force – Voldemort.

Although he was despised by his relatives, he gets to know what his task is and obtains a chance to know himself better.

Furthermore, some said that the archetype of romantic hero is always courageous, strong and victorious. Harry Potter has possessed many of these traits; however, he also has other traits which are not that heroic – he is filled with doubt, jealousy, and he is also lonely even he is accompanied by his friends. In the first novel of the series, Harry doubts himself when Hagrid tells him that he is a wizard. “‘Hagrid’, he said quietly, ‘I think you must have made a mistake. I don’t think I can be a wizard’”

(Rowling 47). Harry’s childhood had never let him feel that he was special, so it made him humble and would feel compassion and sympathy for others, unlike the archetypal hero.

In Frye's essay, he states that in romance "*everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy*" (Frye 187) and thus the hero and the villain are characterized by totally different features.

The hero has positive traits, such as "spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" and the villain is surrounded by all these stereotypically negative features – "winter, darkness confusion, sterility, moribund life." (Frye 187-188)

The hero is supposed to be a pure being – strong, kind, courageous, reliable and always tough. As Nikolajeva states, Harry has many of the traits that would make him an archetypal hero. These traits are not only the background of Harry's childhood but also how he eventually transforms into a dominant leader. The process can very clearly be seen in the series and viewed as a parallel to the archetypal hero's journey. Namely, as previously mentioned, the first step of the journey, according to Campbell, begins with the call to adventure, which is the moment when Harry Potter is invited to attend Hogwarts. Then the whole series, which has seven novels, represent the trials and challenges Harry has to overcome in order to be courageous and victorious since his destiny is to defeat the evil force – Voldemort so that he can save both the worlds of the Wizarding and the Muggle (a person who lacks any sort of magical ability and was not born into the magical world).

Harry Potter may be described as the archetypal hero because of the heroic

journey he has experienced; nevertheless, it is the traits that he possesses that separate him from the archetype of hero. Harry Potter is a multi-dimensional and complex character, so he cannot just be seen as a simple archetype, and also, he is unlike the typical one.

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