

METAMORPHOSIS OF DEATH: FROM TRANSGRESSION TO SACRIFICE AS SEEN IN J.K. ROWLING'S HARRY POTTER SERIES

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ABSTRACT: 'Death, the very word clutches a gloomy image. Most often death does not follow a peaceful moment, it's always preceded by violence. It's seen as a social transgression. The researcher talks about Rowling's ability to explore the recurrence of death and violence as a thematic scheme in her famous series, 'Harry Potter'. This paper traces the ideology of death put forth by many prominent thinkers through-out the centuries. The protagonist Harry reached the pinnacle of purity due to the willing sacrifices committed by his loved ones, Whereas the antagonist Voldemort finds his end due to his distaste for death and want of eternal life. The focal point is that; even though this series is seen as a prodigious work, it has an underlying viewpoint on the concept of death which creates a profundity that Rowling wants us to learn from. Death is not malicious per se, it is a fragment of life.

KEYWORDS: Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, death, immortality, violence, sacrifice, deathly hallows
Abbreviations: HP: Harry Potter, Rowling: J.K. Rowling

I. INTRODUCTION:

"It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more." – Professor Dumbledore to HP (Jarrod1240). In HP and the Half-Blood Prince.

Death is deemed as the ceasing agent of life. It is a magnificent yet petrifying agent that drives men to the extremes. Death, the very word holds various distinctions of terror, darkness and peace in this society and its treatment differs from person to person in the world of literature. Some perceive it as a dark cloud that just swallows life at any given moment. Some perceive it as a saviour that frees them from the bonds of life and from the mortal struggles. The other, so-called spiritualists see it as a redeemer that gives them salvation from the karma of life and as the one that gives birth to the unconfined and unbound soul that can take them to be one with the omnipresent.

For centuries together great people have been fascinated with death, cause through a heroic death they attained everlasting glory. Many melancholic writers and poets have mused upon them. This glory was attained by the most prominent personalities in history. Plausibly the eminent and the most acclaimed living man in England is practically, not alive. HP forever has determined the so-called American inception of Britishness as exhaustive as Sherlock Holmes ever did as a fictional character. The concept of death as perceived by the chief character differs in both the stories. J.K. Rowling's experiments of war, violence and death changed certain patterns of experiences. These patterns help her in creating a vision of life which is recurrent in her series. Marcel Proust is stated to have said that, "[S]tyle for a writer, like colour for a painter, is a question not of technique but of vision." (LEDDY). This mental imagery naturally permeates various details on the texture of the author's penning style, which is comparable to the sentence paradigms, preferences of terms used along with the fanatical imageries that mirror various presence relating to several extremely private harrowing encounters.

II. TRANSGRESSION TO SACRIFICE:

In Rowling's HP series the theme of violence and death is eminent in showcasing its prominence from start to end. But the treatment of violence and death is eccentric yet normalized, something which can change the very dimension of the narration and story. According to Rowling herself, the major theme that levitates across the entire HP series is bereavement. Rowling once stated, "My books are largely about death. They open with the death of Harry's parents. There is Voldemort's obsession with conquering death and his quest for

immortality at any price, the goal of anyone with magic. I so understand why Voldemort wants to conquer death. We're all frightened of it." ("Themes from Harry Potter")

In many communities especially in this social setup, still death is shunned upon as a taboo topic, one which can't be discussed openly. People will be disregarded if they have the audacity of falling in love with death or its concept. He or she will be deemed mad or possessed. But centuries together poets, laureates and novelists like Keats, Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, Garcia Marquez, Margaret Atwood, and J.K. Rowling herself were and are infatuated with the concept of death. They see death as the next step of life, a leap of faith which paves way for the nectar of new life.

Life for Rowling is inseparable from death. The very first introduction scene in the series of HP is that of an orphaned Harry who is left at the care of his aunt and her family; who are against magic and the world of magic. We come to know the death of the Potters, the parents of Harry. The very novel starts with the theme of 'Death'. Harry's parents sacrificed their lives for the sake of their only child, the boy who was destined to do prodigious things, the boy who was fated to annihilate He-who-must-not-be-named, the protagonist Lord Voldemort and the wounding that HP had obtained since then; along with the scrutinising, ergo the death of his dear comrades to associates, had shattered him, unambiguously denoting his intimate concern intended towards them in addition with his lamenting progressions. Rowling's ability to explore death and violence in the most appropriate way possible is evident in this celebrated series of hers. The heroes accept death during their pursuit for the invigorating and inspiring ideals of life. Like the French Existentialists Rowling's hero finds himself on the edge of nothingness, the abyss of non-meaning-dying well is for Hemingway the corollary to living well, it is due to this impulse that HP decides to sacrifice himself as a sacrificial lamb for the welfare of the people in Hogwarts and to deliver them from the wrath and psychotic rage of Voldemort. Rowling has characterized a normal being like Harry who has reached the pinnacle of fame and purity due to the willing sacrifice made by his parents and friends and by Harry himself in the end. Here death is perceived as a pure form, a sacrifice, the very essence of salvation. This is evidence throughout the HP series. According to Rowling acceptance of one's or other's death plays a great part in fixating one's own destiny in play. The concurrent theme found in all the novels in the HP series is the acceptance of death and the metamorphosis of death from that of a transgression to that of a sacrifice. It's crystal clear that Death is marvellous and that it's not a cruel thing and definitely not something which one should be frightened of, but it's "Life 's Next big adventure" (Rowling).

III. METAMORPHOSIS OF DEATH:

The readers fail to notice the bigger picture drawn by Rowling. They tend to think HP series as a fantasiser's glee, but the works of Rowling also precisely establishes a heart-rendering augmented theme that is like the theme of King Lear, then what's been admitted by most of the professors of English. This theme of death is which forms the core of the HP wizarding world built by Rowling which speaks explicitly to a ubiquitous mortal reality. Death's apparently immense in HP. It starts the principal struggle of the novel's successions; the bereavement heightens with each manuscript; death generates the device by which Harry can overthrow Voldemort; and death settles the battle at last cause Voldemort's demise is nothing but the death of battle itself. Death persists all over the series, but repetition is not adequate to establish a theme.

Like the great thinkers Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, Rowling too emphasis the tremendous status of the individual as the solitary genuine vivacious creature of existence. As the rest of the existentialist philosophers, the prospect for a verdict is offered at an ostentatious predicament, which in the case of Rowling is produced by confronting death and violence. All the protagonists go through the experience of violence and death in one form or another. Death is the uncritical infringement agent of all hitches found in life. Death is a self-determining cure for all disasters in life. According to Rowling, death is something beautiful, something which can cause a series of changes. For her it's a gift and contains in-depth meaning than what people perceive it as. Death becomes beautiful and powerful with acceptance. Voldemort denies death and can't except it, hence he leads a cursed life, whereas Harry comes in terms with death and accepts it whole heartedly and that's one of the main reasons for Harry's triumphant end. It's as if he's blessed by death itself. This theme of death plays an important role in the last two novels of the HP series, 'The Deathly Hallows'. The readers come to know about the deathly hallows which consists of an elder wand, an invisible cloak, and the resurrection stone, which when combined becomes the most indestructible power on the face of this universe. The story is about how the Peverell brothers cheated death by using their magic power and insight while crossing the river guarded by Death himself. Death was angry with the brothers but it was cunning. So, Death tricked them in to believing that it was offering them a wish each. It gave the older brother the elder-wand, the wand with the utmost force in this universe. It gave the middle brother the philosopher's stone, which can bring back the dead to life. "The youngest brother was the humblest and also the wisest of the brothers, and he did not trust Death. So he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death,

most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility.” (“The Tale of the Three Brothers’ by J.K. Rowling - Free Download PDF”)

But the first-brother was murdered, besides the middle one committed suicide within a day of possessing the cursed gift. Both mocked Death and Death mocked back right at them. But the last brother hid from Death’s eyes by hiding under the invisible cloak and he always kept an eye on Death. He lived till a ripe old age and he removed his cloak when he thought it was his time. He wasn’t afraid of Death. He was in peace with it. Death was genuinely in awe of him and received him like an old friend. This proves that if we are at peace with the idea of death, we can win over anything else. The owner who owns all the three will become ‘the master of death’, that was the main reason why Voldemort was in search of the deathly hallows. He could never possess them truly and especially not all the three at the same time, because he tried mocking at death by cheating it. On the other hand, Harry just like his forefather could befriend Death, because he was not afraid of death and was willing to die for the sake of his friends. Even the most complicated, shady character in HP series, Professor Severus Snape was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of Harry who was the child of Lily Potter, his one and only friend and his secret crush. He acted as if he hated Harry but he was his secret guardian, a secret which Professor Dumbledore himself never knew along with the fact that Snape was still in love with Lily who’s dead for 15 years and that was his sole reason for joining Voldemort’s army of Death Eaters. Dumbledore was shocked to know that Snape was still in love with Lily after all these years. “Dumbledore watched her fly away, and as her silvery glow faded he turned back to Snape, and his eyes were full of tears. "After all this time?" "Always," said Snape.” (goodreads)

With an expression of torment on his face, Severus retorts “Always”, which means he has loved her constantly. He loved her as a kid, a youth, and will do so forever, even after her death. This is how death metamorphized from something grave, a villainy of sorts to that of a beautiful nature, an embodiment of love and sacrifice.

IV. CONCLUSION:

From the very first novel ‘HP and the Philosopher’s Stone’ to that of ‘The Deathly Hallows’, J. K. Rowling has kept the story line quite gripping with the involvement of death. Her treatment of death and the other mortality themes is what distinguished her work from that of regular children’s literature or fiction. The recurrent theme of death is what pushed HP series in to a critically acclaimed work of literature. Rowling has changed the very meaning of death through her HP series. Death is seen on both sides. The good sacrificed their lives for the sake of the greater good and safety of their loved ones and friends, whereas the evil death eaters just perished in vain. Throughout her novels’, death is celebrated as a quintessence of purity. It’s seen as a vanquisher of evil and a friend of goodness. The antagonist, Voldemort’s incapability to feel pain or love, put together with his distaste for death and want of eternal life, strapped his pursuit for immortality. Contrast to what we perceive it’s Voldemort who is afraid of death even though he resembles death and his name carries the exact meaning, when translated from French is refers to ‘flight from death’ and not bringer of death. Various facets of his iconography equate him to the image of the Grimm Reaper, who is the bringer of death according to legends. But contrary to his stance, Voldemort flees death but Harry faces death eye to eye, fearless and brave filled with light and love. Harry's dexterity of death, his disposition to accede demise, in addition to his sagacity of love besides the sacrifices done which were proposed for the sake of his mates is what empowers HP to ultimately destroy Lord Voldemort. This very fear of death, an inevitable end to life, is what killed Voldemort in the end. which creates a profundity which the author Rowling desires us to acquire from. Death’s not malicious per se, it’s a fragment of life, and pursuing love along with friendship is more considerable and vital than just perturbing about death.

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