



Concealment as a Tool of Deception: An Analysis of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

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Abstract

Deception is a pervasive theme in the *Harry Potter* series which J.K. Rowling depicts on diverse canvases in each novel. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, deception is exhibited through lies, trickery, concealment, pretence, and deceit. This paper aims at analyzing the predominant theme of concealment and the effects of secrecy upon the plot and the characters, punctuating the motives and intentions behind concealing. It identifies the ways in which concealment is handled by the good and evil characters and also throws light upon the magical objects that assist the characters in concealing themselves.

Key words: Deception, Concealment, Secrets, Chamber, Rowling, Tom Riddle

Introduction

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets is the second novel in the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. In this novel, Rowling introduces new characters and its plot events serve as a basis for the succeeding novels. In addition to themes like loyalty and friendship, deception is woven around the plot making the novel captivating. Rowling employs deception in its various forms like telling lies, withholding information, misleading, trickery and pretence. These elements make the plot very gripping. The secrets held by the characters are like chocolate chips in cookies which give a surprise treat to the readers' senses.

Fantasy novels are generally distant from the real world. *Harry Potter* novels are set in the wizarding world which is a world apart from the reality. In the magical world of *Harry Potter*, there is a constant rivalry between the good and the bad. This enmity toddlers in the first novel, takes off, soars in the succeeding ones and reaches the peak in the seventh novel. A plot which involves good and evil will have characters taking sides. Deception is an indispensable factor in such plots where the characters and their intentions are hidden from the opposite side so that they can have an upper hand and control over the happenings. In this novel, the characters conceal their intentions out of hesitation, fear and also for conspiring. There are also other reasons for lying and concealing like "fear, embarrassment, and playfulness, competitiveness, to save face or to do harm" (Mallan, 3). In *Harry*

Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, both the good and evil characters take up concealment as a tool of deception. The evil characters conceal their hideous side for malicious intentions whereas the good characters take up concealment for other harmless reasons like protecting others, finding the truth and helping other characters.

Conniving Through Concealment

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets holds characters with dark powers and evil intentions like Tom Riddle, Lucius Malfoy and Salazar Slytherin. According to Greene, “the best deceivers do everything they can, to cloak their roguish qualities”(22). Each of these characters masks their motives and intentions for selfish reasons.

After the first attack in pursuit of the opening of the Chamber, Hermione asks her History of Magic teacher, Professor Binns to tell her about the Chamber of Secrets. Professor Binns dismisses at once by telling that he deals with “facts” and “not myths and legends”(HPCS, 158). Hermione asserts that legends do have basis in facts. Professor Binns, the only ghost teacher in the Hogwarts faculty profile, tells the students that Hogwarts was founded by “the four greatest witches and wizards of the age” (HPCS, 158)- Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin with the intention to give magical education to all the students who possess magical powers. But then disagreements rose among them as Salazar Slytherin have insisted on admitting only students who come from magical families. Binns goes on saying thus,

‘Reliable historical sources tell us this much,’ he said, ‘but these honest facts have been obscured by the fanciful legend of the Chamber of Secrets. The story goes that Slytherin had built a hidden chamber in the castle, of which the other founders knew nothing.’ (HPCS, 159)

Slytherin has built a hidden chamber inside the castle concealing it from his fellow founders. He has sealed the chamber in such a way that only the heir of Slytherin will be able to open it and let loose the monster within to purge the school eliminating those who are unworthy to study magic. The chamber lies hidden for hundreds of years despite being searched for evidence by the most learned witches and wizards. Professor Binns says that “there is not a shred of evidence that Slytherin ever built so much as a secret broom cupboard!” (HPCS, 161). This explains that Slytherin has built a deviously clever plan in which no magic event in its highest form can open the chamber but only the heir of Slytherin will be able to open it as the heir will be a Parseltongue (the ability to talk to snakes) just like Slytherin himself. This is the reason why no one is able to hear the mysterious voice of the Basilisk in the castle and hence is unable to find the Chamber. Salazar Slytherin insidiously concealed a hidden chamber along with a dangerous creature with a cruel intention to eliminate the students who are born to non-magical parents. However this hateful intention of Salazar Slytherin is defeated by Harry through killing the Basilisk lurking within the chamber.

The heir of Slytherin Tom Riddle is the younger self of the chief antagonist, Lord Voldemort. He manifests himself through the diary which he wrote fifty years back during his fifth year at Hogwarts. The diary holds his “sixteen-year-old self in its pages” (HPCS, 329). Tom Riddle uses his memory in the diary and has “insidiously manipulated Ginny Weasley to open the chamber.” (Eccleshare, 78). Not until the penultimate novel *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, it is known that Lord Voldemort has split his soul and hidden them in seven different

objects called horcruxes. Riddle's diary is one such horcrux in which Voldemort has concealed a part of his soul.

Blake calls Tom Riddle "a phantom manifestation of Voldemort" (42). When speaking to Harry through the diary, Tom presents himself to be a normal student at Hogwarts who was present during the opening of the Chamber for the first time. He gives Harry the impression that he is reporting the disastrous events from the past, hiding the fact that he is responsible for those events. Tom claims that he has caught the person who has opened the chamber and is given Special Services award for his act of bravery.

Tom Riddle proposes to show the real culprit who has opened the Chamber of Secrets. He takes Harry into his memory where Harry sees a younger Hagrid fumbling with a very large box. Tom accuses Hagrid's obsession for petting monsters and how it has led to killing of a student. But Hagrid denies that the creature inside the box has not killed anyone. Tom blasts open the box and the creature scuttles past Harry. Tom fabricates the entire scenario to make Harry believe that it is Hagrid who has opened the Chamber of Secrets for the first time. But the reality is Tom Riddle is the one who has discovered the Chamber after five years of search at Hogwarts. He opens the Chamber unleashing the Basilisk which has ended up in killing a student. But he conceals this fact to gain Harry's trust and to lure him into the chamber. When Professor Dippet asks Tom whether he knows anything about the attacks, he immediately gives a no for an answer. This shows that Tom is not only hiding facts but also cooking up stories so that he can be safe. Tom conceals the truth so that he can stay back at Hogwarts rather than going back to the muggle orphanage. He also leaves behind his diary preserving his memory so that one day he "would be able to lead another in my [his] footsteps and finish Salazar Slytherin's noble work." (HPCS, 329). It can be ascertained that Tom Riddle conceals his motives for very selfish reasons.

Apart from being a deceitful character, he even covers up his real identity. Inside the chamber, Tom Riddle tells Harry that Voldemort is his "past, present and future" (HPCS, 331). He keeps his real identity concealed in the name 'Tom Marvolo Riddle' which he rearranges the letters as 'I am Lord Voldemort', the anagram of the former. Dumbledore speaks on Tom's identity thus

'Very few people know that Lord Voldemort was once called Tom Riddle. ...
Hardly anyone connected Lord Voldemort with the clever, handsome boy who
was once Head Boy here.' (HPCS, 347)

Tom Riddle deceives Professor Dippet and makes him believe that Hagrid is guilty. He also deceives Ginny by making her believe that she has a friend to confide. She pours out all her secrets to the diary believing that the person who wrote back is "sympathetic" and "kind" (HPCS, 327). Tom Riddle grows stronger and stronger by feeding on "her deepest fears, her darkest secrets" (HPCS, 327) and started to possess Ginny to do his bidding. It is Tom Riddle who has opened the Chamber for the second time through Ginny. The way for a successful deceit is guiding the person far enough down the wrong path, enveloping in enough smoke, and by the time the person realizes the real intentions, it will be too late (Greene, 16). Ginny realizes it too late and she tries to dispose it which falls into the hands of Harry. Harry is also lured into believing that Tom Riddle is just a student from the past. All these show that Voldemort is a Machiavellian antagonist who will go to any extent to accomplish his motives. Despite taking multifarious efforts to achieve his objectives, he is defeated by Harry in the chamber. Harry destroys a part of Lord Voldemort's soul

concealed in the diary, thereby weakening the antagonist. This also leads to prove Ginny innocent and totally wipes out the fear of the chamber and the Basilisk as they no longer exist anymore.

One of the followers of Lord Voldemort is Lucius Malfoy who is portrayed as a sly wizard. He is first seen at Borgin and Burkes, a shop which deals with dark artefacts. Lucius informs the shopkeeper Mr. Borgin that the Ministry of Magic is conducting raids and that there are a few items at his home that might “embarrass” him. So he asks Mr. Borgin to come to his house next day and collect the items. This shows that Lucius Malfoy likes to conceal certain items which would be seized by the Ministry if at all they find out. Mr. Borgin who is quite aware of the whereabouts of Lucius mutters thus,

... if the stories are true, you haven't sold me half of what's hidden in your manor... ' (HPCS, 56)

Lucius' son, Draco Malfoy while talking to the fake Crabbe and Goyle is deceived into believing that they are really his friends and discloses the information regarding the raid conducted at his house.

... 'Luckily, they didn't find much. Father's got some *very* valuable Dark Arts stuff. But luckily, we've got our own secret chamber under the drawing-room floor--' (HPCS, 237).

The events leading to the opening of the Chamber of Secrets is ignited by Lucius. Lord Voldemort has entrusted his diary with Lucius by telling him that the diary is enchanted to open the Chamber. Riphouse asserts that “Lucius Malfoy surreptitiously gave it to Ginny in hopes of discrediting Arthur and his Muggle Protection Act” (56). Lucius plants the diary into Ginny Weasley's cauldron during a row with Arthur Weasley. In the final chapter, Dobby hints Harry that it was Lucius who hid the diary in Ginny's cauldron. Lucius executes his plan so that he can kill three flies in one slap – open the Chamber fulfilling his master's wish, defame Arthur for his own daughter goes against his muggle protecting principles and evict Dumbledore from Hogwarts who could not stop the attacks. His plans succeed only partially leaving him irritated and disappointed. Lucius tricks Ginny by slipping the diary into her cauldron which leads to the uncanny events at Hogwarts. However Harry returns the diary to Lucius with his sock hidden in it which leads to Lucius losing his servant, Dobby as house-elves are freed once they are presented with clothes. Rowling has cleverly constructed the plot in such a way that concealment rebounds upon the evil character who uses the same device to deceive others.

Concealment Out of Fear

In this novel, Rowling introduces two non-human characters – Dobby, the house-elf and Aragog, the Acromantula. Both the characters know the details about the Chamber of Secrets but refuse to disclose the information even to persons whom they are close. The former holds back vital information for the fear of being punished by his master and the latter strictly refuses to reveal for it is forbidden to mention about it.

Dobby, the house-elf is under the servitude of the Malfoys. House-elves are supposed to do the bidding of their masters and not to disobey their orders. But Dobby secretly visits Harry on two instances to warn him that something bad is going to happen at Hogwarts. During the first visit at the Dursleys, Dobby warns Harry that he must not go back to Hogwarts and that “he will be in

mortal danger” (HPCS, 16) if he does so. Dobby does not disclose the information of who is plotting to make “most terrible things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” (HPCS, 16). Throughout the discourse, Dobby punishes himself by banging his head on the window, the wall and beating himself with Harry’s desk lamp. This can be seen as the way in which the house-elf punishes himself for revealing the information which he is not supposed to. However, Dobby keeps the information about the plotter, secret which intrigues the readers.

Dobby meets Harry for the second time in the Hospital Wing. This time he accidentally lets out that he was the one who sealed the entrance to the Hogwarts Express to stop Harry from going to Hogwarts, the one to tamper the Bludger hoping that Harry would be sent home if he is seriously injured. When the Chamber of Secrets is open and even when the professors believe that the Chamber of Secrets to be a myth, Dobby unwittingly spills out the information, realizes it and punishes himself for letting out the secret.

... ‘Dobby cannot let Harry Potter stay here now that history is to repeat itself, now that the Chamber of Secrets is open once more – ’

Dobby froze, horror-struck, then grabbed Harry’s water jug from his bedside table and cracked it over his own head,... (HPCS, 188)

Dobby who concealed the information first time, lets it out. Even though he is aware, he does not divulge who opened the Chamber last time. He keeps it a secret as he does not want to turn in the family whom he is serving. However, when Lucius Malfoy comes along with Dobby to meet Dumbledore, Dobby hints to Harry that it was Lucius who planted the diary into Ginny’s books. From this it can be ascertained that Dobby withholds information mainly out of fear towards his master and he feels guilty for letting slip some vital information. Even though it is highly difficult to disobey one’s master, Dobby risks to protect Harry by providing him warnings and preventing him from going to Hogwarts. Throughout Dobby manages to hide from his master that he has been warning Harry which he is forbidden to do. For this feat of Dobby, Harry frees him by tricking Lucius Malfoy. Dobby protects Harry through concealments and revelations; in turn he gets his reward of freedom through deception.

Another non-human character aware of the secrets of the Chamber is Aragog, a giant acromantula petted by Hagrid during his school years. He secretly keeps the spider in a large box which Tom Riddle discovers and turns him into be responsible for the attacks. Just because Hagrid raised a monster for a pet and kept it under hiding, he was unable to prove himself to be innocent. He was accused without any trial and was expelled from Hogwarts. Tom Riddle frames Hagrid for opening the chamber. Here Hagrid is falsely accused and takes the blame of suffering and irreparable consequences while Tom Riddle is appreciated for his efforts. However Harry discovers the truth when he meets Aragog.

Harry and Ron meet Aragog in the Forbidden Forest after getting hints from Hagrid to follow the spiders. They come to know from Aragog that he is not the beast concealed in the chamber and that Hagrid is innocent. Despite being grateful to Hagrid, Aragog has certain information that he refuses to disclose him. It might be due to the fear instilled upon their cluster. Just like the wizarding community fear calling Voldemort by his name, the spiders dread to speak the beast’s name.

‘We do not speak of it!’ said Aragog fiercely. ‘We do not name it! I never even told Hagrid the name of that dread creature, though he asked me, many times.’ (HPCS, 294)

It can be inferred that though Hagrid is protected, by raising Aragog, he refuses to tell the truth to him. Aragog calls Hagrid a “good friend and a good man” and his family has grown “all through Hagrid’s goodness...” (HPCS, 293) but Aragog withholds information.

Had either Dobby or Aragog revealed the information to Harry, then it would have saved all the troubles and the students being petrified. However it would not have made the plot very captivating which shows that secrets mystify the plot.

Objects of Concealment

In addition to the characters, there are objects present in the novel which assist the characters to conceal their identity and achieve their motives through deception. Characters on both good and evil sides possess certain objects which are deceptive in their qualities. However the intentions for using these objects vary with the characters.

Tom Riddle’s Diary

Tom Riddle’s Diary is one of the highly deceptive elements present in the novel. Harry and Ron first find it in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom floor where it lays “nondescript and soggy” (HPCS, 244). All the pages in the diary are blank. The conversation among the characters shows that they suspect the diary is hiding something.

‘Oooh, it might have hidden powers,’ said Hermione enthusiastically, taking the diary and looking at it closely.

‘If it has, it’s hiding them very well,’ said Ron. (HPCS, 245)

Hermione doubts it might be invisible ink and uses a spell but nothing happens. She even uses a Revealer but the pages stay put. This very well explains that Tom Riddle’s diary conceals something. On one occasion when Harry’s ink bottle smashes on his school books, this diary alone remains spotless. This intrigues Harry which leads him to find out how to communicate with it. Tom Riddle’s diary deceives the writer into believing it and that is how Ginny has poured all her secrets into it and finally gets possessed by it.

Tom Riddle’s memory is concealed within the diary so the diary acts like a character by itself. Through the diary, Riddle speaks, manipulates and possesses Ginny to do his bidding. Ginny’s father Arthur Weasley gives a smart caution thus,

... Never trust anything that can think for itself *if you can’t see where it keeps its brain...* (HPCS, 348)

In the wizarding world where there are eccentric objects, Arthur’s caveat stresses that anything that can think for itself but conceals its brain is dangerous. This type of concealment is perilous as the innocent looking diary holds a part of Lord Voldemort’s soul which possesses Ginny who put her trust in it, making her to open the chamber, petrifying the students and ultimately luring Harry into the chamber. A harmless object in the hands of an evil character turns out to be a

malevolent one. Inside the chamber, Harry pierces the Basilisk fang through the diary which destroys the part of Voldemort's soul hidden in it. Tom Riddle and his concealed self in the diary enhance the theme of concealment.

Polyjuice Potion

It is a potion that makes the drinker assume the physical appearance of someone else provided that they have added a part of them like hair or nails before consuming it. Rowling introduces the Polyjuice Potion in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. It is used in the successive books for its deceptive properties. The consumer of the potion will be able to accomplish the deeds which one intends to do without being suspected. However this may fail under some unusual circumstances.

Hermione, who reprimands Harry and Ron for breaking the rules, goes to the extent to get signature from Professor Lockhart by stealth to gain entry into the Restricted Section and even purloins ingredients from Professor Snape's cupboard. This shows that Hermione is desperate to know the truth takes stealth and concealment as her tactics. Hermione concocts the potion secretly in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. It is a very secluded place where no one enters as it bears an Out of Order sign. However, Hermione, Ron and Harry find their place there. Hermione successfully brews the potion but due to her miscalculation she partially transforms into a cat and is admitted in the hospital wing until her complete recovery.

By drinking the Polyjuice Potion, Harry and Ron turn into Draco's cronies – Goyle and Crabbe. Under the concealment, they meet Draco with the expectations to hear from the horse's mouth regarding the chamber of secrets. To their disappointment, they come to know that Draco is not the Heir of Slytherin. But Draco reveals key information that there is a hidden chamber below their manor where his father has hidden the dark artefacts. Draco is the archenemy of Harry but thinking that he is his friend Goyle, he reveals certain vital information which might ruin his father's reputation. Here Draco is deceived due to the concealment and he reveals the truth. Unlike Tom Riddle's diary the Polyjuice Potion is not intended to harm others but it is consumed by the characters to find the truth. By consuming Polyjuice Potion the characters undergo an uncomfortable transformation but it does not pose any serious harm to other characters.

Invisibility Cloak

Invisibility Cloak is a garment that makes the wearer invisible to others. This silvery cloak is passed on to Harry from his father James Potter. It is a magical object that assists in concealment. After Hermione is petrified, Harry and Ron decide to meet Hagrid to know the truth. Due to the continuous attacks, the students are not allowed outside their dormitories after the school hours. But Harry and Ron sneak into the school grounds under the Invisibility Cloak. Using the Invisibility Cloak "was their only chance of sneaking out of the school to visit Hagrid without anyone knowing about it." (HPCS,273-74). Ron and Harry's concealment under the Invisibility Cloak goes unnoticed and the persons inside Hagrid's hut carry out their conversation not detecting their presence. However it is hinted that Dumbledore might know that they are hidden under the Cloak. Here the characters use this cloak under pressing situations to find the truth and not for any evil intentions. It was because of their concealed presence Harry and Ron come to know about Dumbledore's claim on loyalty, Hagrid's hint to follow the spiders which help them to survive the situation.

Conclusion

It can be inferred that concealment is used by the characters to accomplish their intentions and fulfill their motives. Some concealment brings about positive effects whereas the secrecy of others brings impending doom on themselves and the other characters. Though it has a negative connotation, Rowling uses concealment as a tool of deception wielded by both good and evil characters. It can be seen that the good characters take up the tool to protect others, to find the truth which backfires on them under certain occasions. On the other hand, the evil characters take up concealment primarily to gain through harming others but their intentions rarely do succeed. Rowling has crafted the evil characters to hide their motives and intentions through concealment and the good characters to achieve their intentions through the same. Thus Rowling has successfully managed to use concealment as a tool of deception which is essential to keep the plot enthralling and errorless.

Abbreviation

HPCS - *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

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