

## **The Unfulfilled Fulfilled in the *Harry Potter* Series**

**Akanksha Bahukhand**

Research Scholar, Deptt. of English,  
H.N.B Garhwal University, Srinagar

**Abstract:**

*The Harry Potter series has been lauded AND CRITICISED for a plethora of reasons. The very fact that it made its nearly bankrupt author, J.K Rowling very popular and one of the richest ladies in Britain compels one to think that there must be a mysterious aesthetic content which lends the series its massive global appeal. Does she have a magic formula up her sleeves which seems to cater to so many and such a diverse readership/audience? Or could it be that we all are searching for a sense of fulfilment of some of our superficial or deep seated desires as a human race as a whole and as individuals with age and cultural differences as we flip through the pages of these books?The present paper attempts to analyse the adventures of the protagonist and his allies from the reader/audience point of view . It aims to find some of the most basic and catered- to fantasies, desires and drives of the reader repressed in his/her subconscious that find an expression in the quest of the protagonist. The paper shifts the focus from the quest of the Hero to the parallel aesthetic response in the heart of the reader.*

**Key Words:** *coming-of-age, formulaic, subconscious, fantasy, fantasies, repressed desires, archetypes, monomyth.*

Reference to this paper  
should be made as  
follows:

**Akanksha  
Bahukhand,**

*The Unfulfilled  
Fulfilled in the Harry  
Potter Series,*

Notions 2017, Vol.  
VIII, No.3, pp. 65-73  
Article No. 10 (N610)

Online available at:  
[http://anubooks.com/  
?page\\_id=34](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=34)

The record breaking sales statistics, fair share of praise and criticism and the presence of the 'Pottermania' in a lot of social and cultural spaces around us have turned Harry Potter into more of a "cultural phenomenon" (Dunn). For Jack Zipes, the appeal of the Harry Potter series is in its being "a hodgepodge of popular entertainments". He believes that if a work is conventional with a hint of unusual, adheres to the standards required by the mass media, and is popular and acceptable to the cultural hegemony, it is most likely to hit a home score. He further ascribes the phenomenal success of the series to its "formulaic" nature (Zipes 89-172). Rowling had intended to write a work which she would like to read herself as an adult. Rowling says, "I really wrote it for me. It was what I found funny and what I liked" (Shapiro 79). Because she did not have a target audience in mind her books tend to appeal to a variety of readers.

Just like Professor Utonium's experiment to create perfect little girls in Cartoon network's famous show "Powerpuff girls" where due to an accident he introduces "Chemical X" which then imparts all the three girls with super powers, Rowling also seems to have used a certain 'Chemical X' to her concoction of "sugar, spice and everything nice" (Powerpuff). Rowling's 'Chemical X' is composed of three elements which together make it very powerful. Also, there is a meticulous use of archetypes with certain interesting variations and twists which combined together make the *Harry Potter* books to its readers what they are to them.

Rowling has received a phenomenal response from the readers owing to her narrative art. John Granger opines, "It's the literary artistry that engages and transforms readers that is the real magic of the books" (Granger X). He further points out that there are certain "bizarre and less well-known devices and story scaffolding that Ms. Rowling uses, like literary alchemy and vision symbolism" (x) which contribute to the appeal along with the fact that "her artistry has its roots in the traditions of great writing" (xi). On being asked about the influences she had, Rowling explained that "Everything you've seen, experienced, read, or heard gets broken down like compost in your head and then your ideas grow out of that compost." (Xiii) To a reader the inspirations and influences may or may not matter. The reader finds herself enjoying the books with or without realizing her preference towards certain archetypes which have been used by writers over the ages as such or with their personal twists to it. Rowling seems to have mastered the art of adding her own special contemporary twist to the traditional archetypes in a way which is relatable for the readers. For instance, Use of a red steam engine train as 'Hogwarts Express' and not flying carpets or broomsticks to carry kids to school, is somehow more appealing not because it is something new, but, because she had a good storyline with an interesting

imagination strategically put together to achieve a beautiful scene of 'King's Cross Station' with parents sending off the young witches and wizards to 'Hogwarts Express' on platform '9 and 3/4'.

She invents 'Quidditch', a game for witches and wizards that is played on broomsticks and there are inter-house, inter-school and even world cups for it, thus making it more relatable to the contemporary scenario. She has a remarkable ability to choose the finest and most appropriate inspirations and archetypes from all over and then sewing them together in her style to make a great read. The reader enjoys the upbeat and jocular tone in the first few novels. Though, the last three get more serious, with the stakes rising for our protagonist. They have pockets of humor here and there and are a great read. The eighth addition to the saga being a script to a play doesn't give the same experience as a novel since it is a script to a play, and also because it brings down Harry from the pedestal of a hero; who due to his courage and goodness of heart had once saved the world; to that of an ordinary person in a mundane office routine having troubles understanding and making peace with his defiant teenage son. In *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Albus Severus who is stuck in the past and needs to send a message to his father in the future with the help of his father's baby blanket. Also, it is in this part that we realize, more than ever, that Harry succeeded in conquering Voldemort and surviving the war not only because of his well-directed will and courage but also because of the others who knowingly or unknowingly helped him in some way or the other. In the *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, if Neville hadn't killed Nagini, Harry wouldn't have defeated Voldemort and wouldn't have survived the war. Harry is not a super hero but his choices make him what he is. Similarly Draco's son, Scorpius turns out to be more of a loving and caring boy than anyone could expect a Malfoy to be. Readers may find themselves more in sync with the thinking and with certain prejudices that humans are born with the power to choose that makes all the difference. Thus the readers do enjoy the freshness of the 'fantastic' in the Potter series but at the same time they are also able to relate to the everyday feats, happiness, dilemmas and losses of the characters as humans.

Magic and fantasy allow the writer a flight of fantasy much to the delight of the readers. The magic element imparts to the situations, characters and scenes an awe, but the journey is essentially of the growth of the characters. In the *Potter* series the solutions to major problems are not a working of the wand and don't come from magic and power but from the strength of characters and the choices made by them. The entire series is more about growing up, learning and facing challenges in life as a human being and reconciling with losses even permanent ones like death. The

smooth blend between the fantasy and reality allows the reader to connect better with the magic in a relatable manner where some problems click as similar to ours in some fashion or at some level. Everyone might not relate to Harry's misery as an orphan but the use of 'Orphan' as an archetype successfully brings forth the underlying sentiment of being unwanted, unappreciated, longing to belong somewhere or just wanting to be loved by others; sentiments that can strike a chord with the reader in varying degrees depending upon the reader's sensitivity.

Since archetypes appeal to our conscious and sub-conscious at an individual level based on our personal experiences as individuals and as a race on a whole, the use of archetypes in a literary work gives the reader a sense of familiarity which is interesting and enjoyable to her. The reader therefore responds to the hero's journey which is rich with a variety of archetypal characters, situations and symbolisms. A hero too can have many variations as an archetype like a warrior, romantic hero and many more. Maria Nikolajeva points out that Harry as a hero, who is not a God or God's son, does not fall in the category of a 'genuine mythic hero' according to Northrop Frye's typology and rather gets the status of a romantic hero which appeals to most of the readers (Nikolajeva 226). Talking about a hero's journey Joseph Campbell observes,

*Whether a hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained. If one or another of the basic elements of the archetypal pattern is omitted from a given fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth, it is bound to be somehow or other implied (Campbell 30).*

He further explains that there are three stages in the journey of the hero of the monomyth. These stages present, in the form of one "composite adventure, the tales of a number of world's symbolic carriers of the destiny of Everyman." (28). Harry's journey as a hero, in the seven series novels, is analyzed with respect to these stages in the table below.

## **Stages of a Heroes journey**

## **Harry Potter Series**

### **Stage 1: Separation or Departure•**

**“Refusal of the Call”•**

**“ The Call to Adventure”•**

**“Supernatural Aid”•**

**“The Crossing of the First  
Threshold”•**

**“The Belly of the Whale”•**

Harry turns eleven and his magic starts to show much to the dismay of Dursleys who try to keep him away from getting to know about his true self. Then Hagrid turns up at the island hut with Harry’s Birthday cake and reveals to him that he is a wizard. Harry is hesitant and finds it difficult to believe. Once he accepts that he is a wizard Hagrid takes him to Diagon Alley to shop for his school necessities. He later finds himself in Hogwarts where he meets his Mentor, Dumbledore. On that very day he is made to wear the ceremonious sorting hat and he gets sorted into Gryffindor and this marks his journey into the new world, with new rules and new friends.

### **Stage 2: The trials and victories of initiation•**

**“The Road of Trials”•**

**“The Meeting with the Goddess”•**

**“Woman as Temptress”•**

**“Atonement with the Father”•**

**“Apotheosis”•**

**“The Ultimate Boon”**

At Hogwarts he faces many trials. He goes through a lot of hardship like a normal teenager struggling with his studies, friendships, romantic interests etc. and struggles and latter succeeds in fighting his greatest enemy and saving his people. With each book/movie he comes closer to his quest to finish lord Voldemort and restore peace. While perusing his journey Harry has some near death experiences and has some narrow escapes .Harry and his friends along with all those against Voldemort prepare for a final battle with the Dark lord.

**Stage 3: The return and reintegration with society**

- **“Refusal of the Return”**
- **“The Magic Flight”**
- **“Rescue from Without”**
- **“The Crossing of the Return Threshold”**
- **“Master of the Two Worlds”**
- **“Freedom to Live”**

Harry along with Ron and Hermione travel from one place to another in search of the horcruxes. They manage to destroy the horcruxes, the last one being Harry himself where he comes back to life by sheer will power. The death of Voldemort and the fall of his supporters comes as a major relief to the wizarding world. Peace and order return back to the wizarding world.

(Campbell 28)

So the *Harry Potter* books “in the guise of a story like Harry Potter’s, ... see the mythic truths again through new eyes”(Garrett 33). Yet another major contributing factor to the success of the Harry Potter books, is the use of multiple genres in the books. John Granger points out that “there are at least ten different types of stories being told in the Harry Potter novels.”(Granger 4) Explaining this further, he states that the “books are a gathering together of schoolboy stories, hero’s journey epics, alchemical drama, manners-and-morals fiction, satire, gothic romance, detective mysteries, adventure tales, coming-of-age novels, and Christian fantasy.”(Granger 4) On Rowling’s skillful handling of so many genres Anne Hiebert Alton observes:

*Rather than creating a hodgepodge with no recognizable or specific pattern, Rowling has fused these genres into a larger mosaic, which enhances reader’s expectations and the ways in which the series conveys literary meaning. (Alton 200)*

According to Alton notes Harry Potter novels have some characteristics of Pulp fiction and a Bildungsroman (Alton 199-223). Kornfeld and Prothro observe that the “transformational journey- which all young people must take to discover who they are and where they fit in the world, to create their own version of home out of the strangeness they encounter when they are “away”- forms the basis of much young adult, coming-of-age literature”(Kornfeld and Prothro 121). The *Harry Potter* series also follows the same trend. Many in our times have experienced the thrill of growing up along with Harry Potter and have often wished to receive a letter from Hogwarts after every summer vacation. Children and teenagers readily relate to the books with respect to their age and school life. They get an opportunity to enjoy the

mysteries as the plot progresses and live their fantasies of ‘boarding school adventures’, ‘romance’, ‘magical quests’ etc. through the eyes and actions of their hero and his allies”(Nikolajeva 226) Readers, both young and adult, may find some of their repressed desires getting an outlet of expression and fulfillment through the achievements and actions of our hero, his friends, and other characters and also in the manner of facing and handling of familiar situations. For instance a simple action of standing up to a school bully and saving oneself or being saved by some friend deeply satisfying at a personal or a moral level. He/She might feel encouraged to fight for himself/herself in real life.

Rowling does not try to do any moral policing but tries to hint at the good and bad, right and wrong by giving us examples of the choices made and consequences faced by her characters. Also, even though the books have been accused of promoting occult and witchcraft, Rowling’s message and underlying sentiment is deeply Christian. Depending upon the readers sensibility and sensitivity both young and adults may enjoy these books and find sense of fulfillment of some of their fantasies and desires through the series. In the words of Greg Garret, “we might say that the Harry Potter books matter because of their artful telling—and retelling—of powerful and potent stories about human life.”(Garrett 7) To sum up, it can be said that J.K Rowling managed to give her readers an ‘all-you-can-eat’ buffet with a delightful variety to choose from and enjoy in the form of the *Harry Potter* series.

### **References**

Alton, Annie Hiebert. “Playing the Genre Game: Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series.” *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, 2nd ed. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, **2009. 199-223.** Print.

Alton, Annie Hiebert. “Playing the Genre Game: Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series.” *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, 2nd ed. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, **2009. 199-223.** Print.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Novato: Joseph Campbell Foundation, **2008. 30.** Print. **Bollingen Series XVII.**

*The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Novato: Joseph Campbell Foundation, **2008. 28.** Print. Bollingen Series XVII.

Caroline, Dunn. *The cultural phenomenon of Harry Potter*. The Stanford Daily, **24 Oct. 2016. Web. 17 Aug. 2017.** <<http://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/10/24/the-cultural-phenomenon-of-harry-potter/>>.

Garret, Greg. *One Fine Potion: The literary Magic of Harry Potter*, Texas: Baylor University Press, **2010.7.** Print.

One Fine Potion: *The literary Magic of Harry Potter*, Texas: Baylor University Press, **2010. 33**. Print.

Granger, John. Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009. x**. Print.

Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009. x**. Print.

Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009. xi**. Print.

Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009. xiii**. Print.

Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009.4**. Print.

Harry Potter's Bookshelf: *The Great Books Behind The Hogwarts Adventures*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, **2009.4**. Print.

"Harry Potter and Me." *BBC Christmas Special*. BBC Television. London, **28 Dec. 2001**. Web. Transcribed. <<http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2001/1201-bbc-hpandme.htm>>.

Kornfeld, John, and Laurie Prothro. "Comedy, Quest, and Community Home and Family in Harry Potter." *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, 2nd edn, Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, **2009. 121-136**. Print.

Nikolajeva, Maria. "Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children's Literature." *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, 2nd ed. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, **2009. 225-241**. Print.

"Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children's Literature." *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, 2nd ed. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, **2009. 225-241**. Print.

Shapiro, Marc. *J.K Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, **2003. 79**. Print.

*The Powerpuff Girls Movie*. Dir. Craig McCracken. Warner Bros. Pictures, **2002**. Film.

Zipser, Jack. "The Phenomenon of Harry Potter, or Why All the Talk?" *The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*.

New York and London: Routledge, **2001. 89-172.** Print.

Zipes, Jack. *Sticks and stones. The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature* from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter. New York: Routledge, **2001.** Print.