



**Theme of Deception: Appearance and Reality in J.K. Rowling's  
*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban***

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**Abstract**

*In the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling employs physical transformation of characters and achieves it through Animagus, Metamorphmagus, and Polyjuice Potion. These act well in disguising the witch or wizard in question. This paper discusses the various deceptive elements used in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Rowling uses the chief concept of Animagus to spin the mystery around the plot. Appearances are often deceptive, so are the characters in the novel. Appearance fogs the reality underneath it and the truth is revealed towards the end of the novel. This paper also throws light on various magical objects that cherish the plot with their deceiving nature.*

**Keywords:** *Harry Potter, Fantasy, Deception, Animagus, Transformation*

## Introduction

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Joanne Kathleen Rowling (1965- ) is a British novelist celebrated for her *Harry Potter* series. Popular among the children and grownups worldwide, she has won several awards and honors which includes the Locus Award (2000) for *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* under the Best Fantasy Novel category. The third novel in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* ignites several sparks in the plot that sets off exploding twists leading to major turns in the later novels.

## The Term, Fantasy

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Fantasy is a genre of fiction that uses magic and supernatural elements to create an imaginary world of its own where everything seems normal whereas the same setting would inspire awe and wonder in the real world. Clute and Grant define fantasy as a “self-coherent narrative” where a story which seems impossible in the real world is possible in the impossible world. It is often set in “another planet, or this earth projected into the future, or an imagined parallel universe” (Abrams, 278-279). *Harry Potter* series mainly takes place in the wizarding world and parts of it in the normal world. It looks like part of the wizarding world is overflowing into the normal one. Stableford claims that Geoffrey Chaucer the first known writer to work in a language akin to modern English used the word *fantasye* to refer “to strange and bizarre notions that have no basis in everyday experience”(xxxv). Fantasy literature employs several tropes like quest, magic, good vs. evil, the chosen one, mythical creatures and more.

## Vista of Deception in *Harry Potter* Series

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Magic in fantasy fiction is what a river is to an agricultural land. It enriches, livens up and sustains it. Set in a magical world, *Harry Potter* series is exuberant in its enchanting details. In the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant define the term disguise as the exception of Gender Disguise but more interesting possibilities of Transformation, Metamorphosis or Spells of Illusion. Throughout the series, Rowling has used deception as a tool to make the plot and characters more entrancing. She employs magical objects and concepts like the Invisibility Cloak, Polyjuice Potion, Disillusionment Charm, Transfiguration, Animagus, and Metamorphmagus to achieve the purpose. Masip et al. define the term deception as,

Deception is defined as the deliberate attempt, whether successful or not, to conceal, fabricate, and/or manipulate in any other way, factual and/or emotional information, by verbal and/or nonverbal means, in order to create or maintain in another or others a belief that the communicator himself or herself considers false. (147)

## Disguise is for Good?

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Disguise in most of the plays of Renaissance periods, particularly in the works of Shakespeare is Good. But it is turned to be a punishment or curse, if the magic wand is in the hands of wicked. The portrayal of two characters Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew takes a one hundred and eighty degree turn towards the end of the novel. The innocent is mistaken for guilty and vice versa. This major reversal in the characters takes place due to the disguise in the form of Animagus. Animagus refers to a witch or wizard who could transform into animals at their will. The Ministry of Magic keeps a record on witches and wizards who can turn into animals and their unique identity. It is a form of concealment or disguise which the wizards use when there is a high need for deception. Clute and Grant define the term Theriomorphy in their compilation *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, as the ability to change reversibly and repeatedly between human and animal form. Hence the wizard has that ability to change herself into an animal and vice-versa. The concept of Animagus is the life line of the third novel on which the plot development and twists mainly depend upon.

## Deception, as a powerful tool in Fantasy

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In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Professor Lupin is introduced as the new Defence against Dark Arts teacher. Rowling portrays him as a werewolf which is one of the several tropes of fantasy literature. Clute and Grant coin a new term, werewolf for the shift which is not voluntary but seen as a Curse, a Bondage to the full moon and it brings on the wolf-shape, in their compilation, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, under the phrases shapeshifters and shapeshifting. Lupin is undermined based on his appearance. When he first boards the train, Harry, Ron and Hermione are surprised to see an adult aboard the Hogwarts Express. The first look of Lupin is described thus: “The stranger was wearing an extremely shabby set of wizard’s robes which has been darned in several places. He looked ill and exhausted. Though he seemed quite young, his light-brown hair was flecked with grey.” (HPPA, 78)

He has a “pallid profile” and “looks like one good hex would finish him off” (HPPA, 79). This is the first impression of Lupin based on his looks. He could barely pass off for a werewolf. This is how his looks deceive the onlookers. Malfoy, the archenemy of Harry, looks down on Lupin due to his tattered robes and dilapidated suitcase. Lupin falls ill under certain circumstances and he seems to earn the sympathy of his students and colleagues. Because of this weak appearance, no one seems to suspect him for a werewolf until Professor Snape sets an essay on werewolves and Hermione picks up the hints that Lupin falls ill before every full moon and his Boggart takes the shape of a moon.

Lupin acts as a starting point to several happenings like planting of the Whomping Willow, building of the tunnel leading to the Shrieking Shack and above all his friends becoming

Animagi. Lupin explains in his words, “That’s where all of this starts — with my becoming a werewolf. None of this could have happened if I hadn't been bitten... and if I hadn't been so foolhardy...” (HPPA, 374)

Lupin's friends were James Potter, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew. Lupin did not disclose his secret to his friends fearing that they might avoid him. But his friends did not fail to notice his disappearance once a month and they worked out the truth about Lupin themselves. In her book *Secrets, Lies and Children's Fiction*, Kerry Mallan says, “In sharing and receiving a secret, a different kind of feeling and responsibility is experienced. In disclosing a secret, there are consequences – a loss of trust, or a sense of relief. (213)

By knowing the secret of his transforming into a werewolf, Lupin’s friends did not avoid him rather they became Animagi which made Lupin's “transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my (his) life” (HPPA, 376). As Animagi they were able to keep him company during the transformation, as werewolves are dangerous only to humans and not animals.

This transformation of James, Sirius and Peter brings unexpected outcomes in the plot. James and Sirius turn into a stag and a dog respectively. Transforming into such large animals they were able to keep the werewolf is under check. Whereas Peter turned into rat, the smallest so that he could touch the knot on the trunk of the Whomping Willow so that the rest can slip into the tunnel beneath it. This small size of Peter turns out to be a curse later as he lives as a pet in the Weasley family for twelve years without getting noticed. This changeable appearance of Sirius and Peter led to the escape of the former from Azkaban and a safer hideout for the latter.

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Sirius is portrayed as an extremely dangerous murderer from the beginning. He is a wizard who suffers confinement at the wizard prison of Azkaban but it is surprising to see that even the Muggle (non-magical people) community is warned regarding his escape which shows him in an extremely bad light. Uncle Vernon who has no idea about Sirius judges him based on his appearance. “No need to tell *he's* no good’, snorted Uncle Vernon, staring over the top of his newspaper at the prisoner. ‘Look at the state of him the filthy lay about! Look at his hair!’” (HPPA, 18)

The guards of Azkaban are on lookout for Sirius. In the wizarding world the worst punishment that one gets for a crime is the Dementor's Kiss where the Dementors will suck out the soul of the victim which is worse than killing. In the normal world, the extreme form of punishment is hanging. When the wizarding world is waiting for Sirius to be caught and punished, Uncle Vernon who has not even a speck of idea about Sirius is so prejudiced by his looks that he exclaims that when will the law makers learn “that's hanging’s the only way to deal with these people?” (HPPA,18). In both the worlds no one is aware of the truth about Sirius. The magical community thinks that it was Sirius who killed twelve Muggles in broad daylight including one wizard who turns out to be Peter Pettigrew. The Muggle world thinks that he is a dangerous convict on the run. In both the cases, appearance has fogged the truth about Sirius and Peter.

Sirius’ Animagus is a huge dog. It is this that kept Sirius alive at Azkaban. The Dementors at Azkaban suck the hope and happiness out of the prisoners and many over there die out of madness. But Sirius being convicted guilty for the crime which he did not commit is very much

crestfallen. So the Dementors were unable to feed on his happiness as he did not feel any. This kept his mind sane. Fudge describes his recent visit to Azkaban thus, “You know, most of the prisoners in there sit muttering to themselves in the dark, there’s no sense in them . . . but I was shocked at how *normal* Black seemed.” (HPPA, 221)

Everyone wonders how Sirius escaped from Azkaban despite the Dementors. He remained hidden for over a month so that “no one’s seen hide nor hair of him” (HPPA, 69). It was due to his Animagus he was able to do it. The sudden discovery that Peter is still alive had lit a fire in his head and it cleared his mind. Sirius tells how he was able to manage out of Azkaban, “. . . it was an obsession . . . but it gave me strength, it cleared my mind. . . . I slipped past them as a dog . . . it’s so much harder for them to sense animal emotions that they were confused . . .” (HPPA, 395) Mallan substantiates the use of deception thus, “. . . curiosity feeds our desire to know secrets, to find the truth, to use deception, cunning and whatever other means we can muster to reveal a lie, to save our lives, to shield a loved one, . . . (213) Sirius knowing Peter’s secret used the deception of Animagus and cunningly escaped from Azkaban to reveal the truth that Peter is not dead, thereby shielding his godson, Harry.

The conversation which the teachers and the Minister have over the tiny inn of Three Broomsticks brings the first picture of what happened to Sirius and why he was accused. Even though Harry heard about Sirius from other sources, it is over here he learns that Sirius and his father, James Potter were close friends at school and even later. “Potter trusted Black beyond all his other friends. Nothing changed when they left school. Black was best man when James married Lily. Then they named him godfather to Harry....” (HPPA, 216)

This comes as a great surprise to Harry. He is shocked to find that James made Sirius their Secret Keeper but the latter betrayed the Potters outright. Sirius tipped off the secret hideout to Voldemort which led to the death of James and Lily and the downfall of Voldemort. In reality, it was Peter who had betrayed the Potters and he has been spying them for more than a year.

Sirius who is innocent is described as ‘traitor’, ‘filthy, stinkin’ turncoat’, ‘the murderin’ traitor’, whereas Peter who is guilty is described as ‘little Peter Pettigrew’, ‘that fat little boy’, and ‘stupid boy... foolish boy’. According to eye-witnesses, Peter cornered Sirius and he shouted how could Black betray his own friends and before he could reach for the wand, Sirius blew him to thousands of bits. Fudge describes the scene telling that this single curse cast by Sirius created a crater in the middle of the street so deep that it cracked the sewers below. In reality it was Sirius who cornered Peter but Peter yelled for the whole street to hear that Sirius betrayed the Potters and with a wand at the back he blasted the entire street. Then he transformed into a rat and escaped through the sewers below. “‘Harry,’ said Lupin hurriedly, ‘don’t you see? All this time we’ve thought Sirius betrayed your parents, and Peter tracked him down – but it was the other way around, don’t you see? *Peter* betrayed your mother and father – Sirius tracked *Peter* down – ’” (HPPA, 387)

Peter who is the real culprit received the Order of Merlin, First Class for his bravery. But the innocent Sirius is imprisoned at Azkaban, a place swarming with the Dementors. The testimony made by the Muggles is what they thought they saw. Due to this false appearance, the

guilty enjoyed twelve years of safe hideout and the innocent with imprisonment. Peter lived in hiding due to his fear for having double-crossed Voldemort and his supporters. His need for “survival explains the why of the secrets and lies” and he used “deception as key survival strateg(y)ies, which may be necessary adaptive or transformative behaviour.”(Mallan,1)

Only towards the end of the novel, the true colours of Sirius and Peter are revealed. Everyone else is mistaken about them until the episode in the Shrieking Shack. Sirius’ forced entry into the Gryffindor tower and his attempt to kill Scabbers in the boy’s dormitory are seen as desperate attempts to kill Harry. In reality, Sirius was set out to kill Peter who is in the form of Ron’s pet rat Scabbers.

A major misleading factor in the novel is the prediction made by Professor Trelawney. It is believed that Sirius is a great supporter of Voldemort. Previously in a conversation, Fudge says, “. . . You-Know-Who alone and friendless is one thing . . . but give him back his most devoted servant, and I shudder to think how quickly he’ll rise again . . .” (HPPA, 221)

Based on this statement made by Fudge, Trelawney's prediction looks like it refers to Sirius Black through and through but it refers to Peter Pettigrew.

*‘The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever before. . . .’* (HPPA, 344)

Sirius was *chained* in Azkaban for twelve years and Peter has been *chained* within the Animagus. Peter is the devoted servant of Lord Voldemort and he helps him to his return in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Thus the prediction is misdirecting as it truly refers to Peter and not Sirius.

Apart from the characters there are other elements present in the novel like Boggart, the Grim, Marauder's Map, Sneakoscope, Crookshanks and Time-Turner to highlight the theme of deception. According to Guanio-Uluru, the concept of “shape-shifting has connotations of illusionism and deception” (122). Rowling introduces Boggart in the third novel which is a shape-shifter and a magical non-being which “can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most.” (HPPA, 140). Lupin introduces the Boggart to the students as a part of the Defence against the Dark Arts lesson. Harry is not allowed to face the Boggart in front of the whole class as Lupin apprehends that the Boggart might take the shape of Lord Voldemort whom Harry fears the most which might frighten the entire class. But Harry's fear is the Dementors. Harry collapses every time he confronts a Dementor. During a Quidditch match, Harry is surrounded by Dementors and he falls from a height of fifty feet. He is very desperate to take Anti-Dementor lessons from Lupin so that he can face a Dementor in case they mess with the chances of winning the next Quidditch match.

Lupin plans to use a Boggart to teach Anti-Dementor lessons. Harry is “merely glad that Lupin had found such a good substitute for a real Dementor.” (HPPA, 251). This practice with a fake Dementor helps Harry learn the Patronus Charm which even many qualified wizards have trouble with. The Patronus acts as a kind of shield between the conjurer and the Dementors hence

warding them off. Harry manages to produce silver wisps of smoke even if he could not produce a decent Patronus. It is this that saves Sirius and his own neck when hundreds of Dementors attack them towards the end of the novel. When the Dementors attack him and he is unable to shield himself, he sees a huge silvery animal coming towards him and driving back the Dementors. In the silvery light, he believes that he has seen his father which is impossible as he is dead. Only when Harry travels back in time he realises that it was he who produced a full-fledged Patronus. Thus the appearance cast by the Boggart helps Harry in the right time to face the Dementors.

The Grim is a “giant, spectral dog that haunts the churchyards!” (HPPA, 113). It is considered to be the worst omen of death. During the Divination class, the tea leaves reading of Harry looks like the Grim. Professor Trelawney is worried about this. Harry too finds it quite disturbing as he had seen something huge and black with gleaming eyes at Magnolia Crescent on the night he left his uncle's house. On a previous occasion he had seen a huge black dog on the front cover of the book named *Death Omens: What to Do When You Know the Worst Is Coming*. Even though Harry is not bothered about the Grim, it shakes his courage when he sees the silhouette of an enormous black dog during the Quidditch match. Later it turns out that what Harry saw at Magnolia Crescent and at the Quidditch match was Sirius' Animagus. Sirius explains it in his letter, “*I would also like to apologise for the fright I think I gave you, that night when you left your uncle's house. I had only hoped to get a glimpse of you before starting my journey north, but I think the sight of me alarmed you.*” (HPPA, 460)

The appearance of the Grim or what it was thought to be scared others but in reality it is Sirius who wanted to take a look at his godson. This conflict between appearance and reality takes place due to Sirius' Animagus which in turn is a form of concealment in itself.

Another object of clever concealment is the Marauder's Map which introduced in the third novel continues its journey throughout the series. The Marauder's Map looks like “a large, square, very worn piece of parchment with nothing written on it.” (HPPA, 201). But in reality it is a map of Hogwarts castle with its secret passages. It is like a modern day GPS tracking system, where each person is marked with tiny ink dot moving around labeled with their name. This map comes in handy to Harry to sneak out into Hogsmeade where he overhears the conversation about Sirius and Peter.

On his return from the second jaunt to Hogsmeade, Harry is caught red-handed by Professor Snape. He asks him to turn out his pockets and finds the “spare bit of parchment” (HPPA, 304). Snape is suspicious that it is not just an old piece of parchment and is heavily insulted by it when he asks the map to reveal itself. Snape thinks that it is full of Dark Magic and summons Lupin who says that it is merely a piece of parchment which insults whomsoever tries to read it. The appearance of the map deceives Snape.

The Marauder's Map never lies and it defies all concealments like Invisibility Cloak, Polyjuice Potion and Animagus. It is due to this reason Lupin finds that Peter is alive. “Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter’, said Lupin, nodding. ‘I believed it myself – until I saw the map tonight. Because the Marauder's Map never lies ... Peter's alive. Ron's holding him, Harry.”

(HPPA, 373) Even though the map deceives its appearance, it never conceals the truth. This map plays a very significant role in taking the plot to the next levels.

The most underestimated magical object in the novel is Pocket Sneakoscope. It is a Dark Detector which takes its place for the first time in this novel. It is sent as a gift to Harry by Ron. It looks like a glass spinning top which is supposed to light up and spin when there is someone untrustworthy around it. Throughout the novel, the Pocket Sneakoscope is mistaken as it seems to light up and whirl for no apparent reason or for false reasons. As the characters are unaware that Scabbers is not just a rat but an Animagus they think that the Pocket Sneakoscope is out of order and it should be checked for any glitch. It has been detecting deceit from the beginning but it is mistaken to be an unreliable item.

The live counterpart of the Pocket Sneakoscope is Hermione's cat Crookshanks. From the first encounter Crookshanks chases Scabbers and Ron is highly irritated by the cat. Scabbers quivers and runs for life every time. The rat seems to grow weak and lose its colour for which Ron gives the reason that it is due to the cat constantly threatening him and chasing him. But the truth is Scabbers has been “. . . losing weight ever since he heard Sirius was on the loose again . . .” (HPPA, 386). Like the Pocket Sneakoscope, Crookshanks is mistaken, for all cats chase rats. But in reality, he realised Peter straight away for what he is. Though it appears that Crookshanks is a normal cat which chases rat, in reality it is an intelligent one which spotted the traitor spot on.

### **The Time-Turner, as a Tool of Deception**

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Another magical object that performed deception at a higher level is the Time-Turner. It is a timepiece that is used to travel back in time. During the third year, Hermione takes up more subjects than Harry and Ron but she manages to cope up with it. She disappears and re-appears all of a sudden leaving Harry and Ron surprised. The mystery is not known until the last chapter. Hermione used the Time-Turner throughout the year to catch up with her classes. Dumbledore requests her to use it to save more than one innocent life on the night when Sirius is caught. She uses the device to go back in time and change the events. On the eve of the execution of Buckbeak the hippogriff, after the execution party witnesses the tethered Buckbeak, Harry and Hermione untie him and pull him into the woods. Once the party returns after signing the papers, finds that Buckbeak is gone.

Similarly Sirius who is locked up in Flitwick's office is made to escape by the Time-Turner. Chaos ensues in the castle once they find Sirius has escaped. Thus the characters are betrayed by their own eyes who saw Buckbeak and Sirius moments ago were gone and thus two innocent lives are saved. It is a deception which Hermione achieves by going back in time using Time-Turner.

Rowling has skillfully juggled with characters and elements that make the theme of deception stand in the forefront. Guanio-Uluru observes it thus, “The moral rhetoric of Harry Potter involves a denial that appearance can be a reliable guide to moral truth. The narrative abounds in characters whose moral allegiance is ‘contradicted’ by their physicality. . . (229)



Rowling's device of Animagus brings out the appearance and reality in characters which "serves the thematic purpose of stressing that it is not until people's true motives (as well as their true identities) are disclosed that one can judge the value of their behaviour, . . ." (Guanio-Uluru 124). It can be concluded that the outer looks of characters have both its advantages and disadvantages. The magical objects and other elements help the characters to untie the twists in the plot thereby opening a new canvas for the successive novels.

### Conclusion

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This is an attempt of having a kaleidoscopic view at disguise, deception or transformation in the works of fantasy, where magic plays a vital role. However, the volume is thick, the transformation triggers the imagination and anxiety of the readers to move on, till the last page.

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