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### J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter*: A Study of Campbell's 'monomyth'

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#### Abstract

Life is always related with the metaphor of a journey, which involves attaining maturation through trials and tribulations. Myths from the past offer evidences of heroes undertaking such archetypal journey. The present paper endeavours to analyze J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series in the spectrum of Campbell's 'monomyth' structure and tries to elucidate how the bespectacled boy Harry fits into the frame of the hero's archetypal journey. Having become a global phenomenon, Rowling's books triggered a universal appraisal of acclamation and evidently sometimes scathing criticism too. Ever since its publication, it gave scope for countless research papers and dissertations globally. Structured as a seven tome series, each book depicts each year of Harry's life in the magical school of Wizardry, delineating his journey from innocence to maturation.

#### Full paper

Myths have been an integral part of man's life since time immemorial. Myths are often universal and hold uncompromising and perennial relevance to humanity. The mythological heroes are images not only for contemporary life, but also "the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes, and wisdom." (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 28) In the words of Joseph Campbell, myths have even psychological significance. Because mythology has to do with relating that psychological structure to the circumstances of objective life in the world today. It gives a clue. It's a signal system. The images of myth are not facts, they are metaphors; and the reference is to transcendence. (*The Road of Trials*, 43). The present paper endeavours to analyze J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series in the spectrum of Campbell's 'monomyth' structure and tries to elucidate how the bespectacled boy Harry fits into the frame of the hero's archetypal journey. Having become a global phenomenon, Rowling's books triggered a universal appraisal of acclamation and evidently sometimes scathing criticism too. Ever since its publication, it gave scope for countless research papers and dissertations globally. Structured as a seven tome series, each book depicts each year of Harry's life in the magical school of Wizardry, delineating his journey from innocence to maturation. A term coined by Joseph Campbell taking a cue from James Joyce's *Finnigan's Wake*, 'monomyth' meaning the hero's journey in simpler terms, refers to the common template of a category of tales that involves a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory and returns home. The Hero's journey is as important as emotional or psychological journey as it is physical. (Myth and the Movies, Stuart Voytilla) The Hero's actions and decisions in response to the Journey reveal his character. The main mythical feature of *Harry Potter* series is the archetypal journey of the hero, undertaken by Harry in each separate volume and the book as a whole. The crucial step in the journey is the overcoming of obstacles and the hero's confrontation with the arch villain, his undeniable destiny. 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 men. (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 4). The birth of the hero in the monomyth is one of great pedigree, surrounded by fabulous circumstances. It establishes and constitutes the entire monomyth cycle. In the series, Harry's birth is surrounded by such fabulous and mysterious circumstances. The opening of Book I presents Dumbledore and Prof. Mc Gonagall in the streets of Privet Drive, where Harry's maternal aunt Petunia and her husband Uncle Vernon live with their only bullying son Dudley. Harry, the boy with the lightning scar is blissfully sleeping in ignorance in the hands of Rubeus Hagrid, the Half-Giant who brings him safe away from the clutches of Voldemort who is intent on killing him. Harry, 'the boy who lived' is important in the magical world though he knows it not. The lightning scar bespeaks his shocking survival against You-Know-Who's Dark Arts. Like Odysseus's scar, Harry's mark is an insignia of courage, a reminder of survival in a flight and a foreteller of more such encounters in the future. He is marked out as the Chosen one destined to be the saviour of his men. The monomyth hero receives a call to adventure, by an external event that is almost forced on him. It is in the hero's limit to accept it willingly or reluctantly. The call sets the story rolling. Often delivered by the Herald archetype, the call to adventure can take a multitude of forms, including a message or announcement, a sudden storm. In Harry's case, Hagrid acts as the messenger of Hogwarts. When Harry turns eleven, numerous owls flock Harry's place trying to deliver a note- the call letter for Harry to take up lessons of Wizardry at Hogwarts. Uncle Vernon's efforts to forfeit Harry from reading the letter fails, when Hagrid smashes open, the refuge home amidst the stormy seas. The revelation comes nearly as a shock to Harry who has been made a victim of ignorance since childhood regarding his parents and his birth. The facts of his being the only child of the famous wizards Lily and James Potter, who had fallen a prey to Voldemort's killing curse 'Avada Kedavra' chills his nerve and all the more Aunt Petunia's camouflaging his identity bewilders him. He gets ready for the adventure though just being aware partially of his life's mysteries. The monomyth's hero is never alone in his journey of adventure. He is always secured under a protective shield in the person of a benign mentor or god-father like character. The benefactor in the hero's journey is often a wizard, a dwarf, a fairy god mother or an old man. This aspect is so common in all the fairy tales and fantasy stories that

one has heard of while growing as a child. When the hero responds to the call of adventure, he meets a mentor through whom he gains confidence, insight, advice, training or magical gifts to overcome the initial fear and face the threshold of adventure. The mentor again need not necessarily be a physical person always. It can even be a magical object imbued with powers or even a map that guides him. In Harry's world, the benefactors are numerous, not just one. There is Dumbledore at the outset, who is always a protective armour for Harry who comes as a novice to Hogwarts. Dumbledore provides learning opportunities and instills confidence in Harry even in desperate situations. He gives lessons of life- courage, compassion, and integrity. "He is the ageless guardian, the powerful patron who intervenes whenever required and thereby becomes the hero's unseen shield and companion in arms." (Mary Pharr, 61). Severus Snape is again a more complex but indirect mentor to Harry. He apparently seen vicious and dangerous to Harry's safety indeed is a true savior of Harry on so many occasions. He is the one who really rescues Harry during the Quidditch match, when Prof. Quirrell tries to jinx Harry's Broom with the magical spell whereas Harry and the bright witted Hermione too think the other way about the entire event seeing Snape murmuring some spell. Snape's dying moments are absolute revelation of his unconditional love for Lily, Harry's mother and eventually for Harry, his beloved's son. The memories he hands over to Harry is revelatory of his painful past and the malice he has endured in the hands of James and Sirius Black. Peter Appelbaum in his "The Great Snape Debate" defends Snape as the "one who steers Harry's actual Apprenticeship". Sirius Black is the Godfather to Harry, in the true sense of the term. Unlike Dumbledore, who is physically with Harry in all his ordeals, Sirius is always behind the screen, unnoticed. Initially having been in Azkaban Prison, Sirius is really out of Harry's life and more truly he is shown as ally- the real foe, the much feared one who is after Harry other than Lord Voldemort. The scenario at the time of Lily and James' death posits him as a traitor rather than a savior. Despite all these shadowy prejudices, he helps Harry by all possible means. He sends Harry the Thunderbolt, the flying broom of the latest kind, without even revealing his identity. And later on he hands over the Invisibility Cloak of James, as a valuable inheritance. He rightfully makes Harry the legal inheritor of his property and thereby proving his flawless loyalty to James Potter. "It has been fourteen years, and still not a day goes by that I don't miss your dad." (HPOP, 320). Crossing the Threshold plays another significant part in the monomyth's life. It may include sometimes even dangerous points. The ordinary world allows us to know the hero and identify with him before the Journey begins - his drives and problems while showing his unique characteristics and flaws. It is the Hero's home, the safe haven upon which the special world must be compared. The Hogwarts train and platform 9 ¾ is an interesting entry for Harry from ordinary world to the extraordinary. More interesting, is the contrast both the worlds offer. Lying parallel to each other, the Muggle world of London is a stark contrast to the magical world, that remains invisible to the normal world. "Every monomyth involves a problem or central dramatic question that disrupts the ordinary world. The hero must enter the special world to solve the problem, answer the dramatic question and return balance." (Myth and movies). Everything in Hogwarts is ruled by magic. Staircases move; portraits speak; foods are filled automatically on the plates. Harry had never imagined such a strange and splendid place... Harry looked upwards and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, 'It is bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*'. (HPPS 87). Most of the magical devices relate to the central idea of a Journey, or transformation or passage, to the experience of growing and changing, physically and mentally. The real development of the hero of monomyth is made possible by the series of ordeals, he undergoes in his journey towards maturation, during which he has to identify his enemies and come up with strategies to defeat them. The ordeals are a challenge to his inherent talent and also his ability to take a stand often the trials involve super human, super natural elements creating danger to the life of the hero. The Hero's successful evolution after each trial manifests his prowess. Mary Pharr says: "For Harry Potter, Hogwarts is a place of tests; some academic, some practical, and some moral. Many of these tests include adventure, danger and choice-heady stuff that forces Harry to grow up or fail... He must practice the skills that will let him face increasingly arduous trial. (58). Each ordeal that Harry undergoes is centered on some validation of the purpose of his life. It brings a step further advancement in his maturation process and nettles his disposition. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry is mysteriously put to danger, the target of doubt is Severus Snape, whereas in reality it is Prof. Quirrell, the intimidating spy to Voldemort. Each book of the series abounds in such risky ordeals for Harry to encounter (needs elaboration). The hero is always helped by a benign companion in his encounter with the malignant forces. Harry has not one but two pillars of staunch support in the persona of Hermione and Ron Weasley, who along with Harry form the victorious triumvirate. They provide their skills to enable the hero achieve success in his tasks. They bring him to maturity. Ron's part in assisting Harry is significant especially in Book I where he helps Harry by playing the Chess. Hermione always stands firm, encouraging Harry, intimating hints whenever needed acting as an intellectual problem solver. Harry is helped by superhuman characters too including Hagrid, Dobby, the House Elf, Aragog-the Giant Spider and even Hedwig, the owl. Each book in the series consummates with a conflicting fight between Harry and the forces of evil. The final battle is one in which Harry has to make a stance and the choice he makes will be the facilitating factor if the redemption for which he is destined. Harry's encounter with Voldemort is chilling as it is a clear indicator of life at stake for Harry, because if Voldemort has to be killed, Harry has to succumb to death being a horcrux himself. He is marked for death from beginning and there is no avoiding it. "Either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives". (HPOP 353). The hero of the monomyth nearly faces resurrection, his most dangerous encounter with death. The final ordeal is a kind of purgation; the hero is reborn with complete transformation from the lessons and insights he has faced in his journey. Only through death, can the hero be reborn, experiencing a resurrection that grants greater powers. Harry encounters death face to face and is resurrected in the true sense and comes back to face the final combat with a clear and sensible notion of what is to be done as a redeemer.

The final stage is the Return to home which implies the Hero's return as a saviour of the special world, where he is an indispensable part and to the everyday world as a Redeemer of mankind. Harry wards off the danger that gloms over the school of Hogwarts for years by killing Voldemort and heralds days of peace and harmony not only to the magical world he belongs, but also the muggle world where he grew up. Stories of universal appeal do necessarily have perennial life lessons to give to the reader and have intrinsic relativity to everyman's life. The life of Harry Potter offers an archetype of a hero possessing humanity and selflessness rooted with a deep sense of justice and the will to do good to his fellow men.

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