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FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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ARCHETYPAL LITERARY CRITICISM APPLIED ON J.K. ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER* BOOK SERIES, WITH A FOCUS ON NORTHROP FRYE'S VIEWS

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Апстракт: Во фокусот на архетипската литературна критичка теорија се универзални и повторливи слики, урнеци или мотиви кои претставуваат искуства својствени за луѓето. Многу литературни дела класифицирани како фикција споделуваат слични структури, иако имаат различни дејства, амбиент и ликови, иако припаѓаат на различни литературни жанрови. Архетипската литературна критичка теорија ги истражува овие сличности во структури и урнеи, а на тој начин обезбедува универзален пристап до литературата. Канаѓанскиот литературен критичар Нортроп Фрај го дефинира архетипот како симбол кој доволно често се повторува во литературата, за да стане препознатлив како елемент на нечие литературно искуство како целина. Архетипите се урнеци кои постојат во литературата како моќни алатки кои помагаат да се разбере едно литературно дело.

Романите од жанрот фантазија се секогаш одличен избор на симболи. Целта на овој есеј е да ги истражи страниците на серијата од седум романи од жанрот фантазија за Хари Потер, со цел да се направи обид да се најдат и препознаат архетипи кои би се вклопиле во описот на Нортроп Фрај за архетипска литература. Овој есеј ќе се обиде да ги идентификува оние елементи на романите кои се вклопуваат во архетипска улога.

Клучни зборови: *Хари Потер, Џ. К. Роулинг, архетип, архетипска литературна критичка теорија, Нортроп Фрај.*

Abstract: Archetypal literary theory is focused on universal and recurring images, patterns, or motifs representing typical human experiences. Many works of fiction share similar structures, despite having different plots, settings, and characters, and despite belonging to different genres. Archetypal literary theory explores these similarities in structures and patterns, thus providing a universalistic approach to literature. Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye defined the archetype as a symbol which recurs often enough in literature to become recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole. Archetypes as patterns that exist in literature are powerful tools that help understand a literary work.

Fantasy novels are always a great source of symbols. The purpose of this essay is to explore the pages of the Harry Potter series of seven fantasy novels in order to attempt to find and recognize archetypes which would fit in the description of archetypal literature that Northrop Frye gives. The focus is on characters, situations, plots and themes in the Harry Potter series which can be observed in terms of archetypes. This essay will try to identify those elements of the novels fit into an archetypal role.

Key words: *Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling, archetype, archetypal literary theory, Northrop Frye.*

1. Introduction

Archetypal literary theory is focused on images, symbols, and themes that are repeated in literature. Archetypes are specific patterns that occur in many unrelated literary works. The word “archetype” is derived from the Greek words “archos” which means “first” and “typos” which means “a mark”, thus it would be easy to conclude that an archetype is “the first mark”, i.e. an original model or a primary pattern.

Inherited ideas or ways of thinking generated by the experiences of the human race that exist in the unconscious of an individual. They are universal and recurring images, patterns, or motifs representing typical human experience that often appear in literature, art, fairy tales, myths, dreams, and rituals. They unite the conscious and the unconscious, helping to make an individual whole. (Dobie, 346)

Many works of fiction share similar structures, despite having different plots, settings, and characters, and despite belonging to different genres. Archetypal literary theory explores these similarities in structures and patterns, thus providing a universalistic approach to literature. One of the forefathers of archetypal criticism is the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, who first studied and established archetypes as expressions of human characteristics that are common to every culture in his work *Man and His Symbols*.

The archetype is a tendency to form [conscious] representations of a motif – representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern. There are, for instance, many representations of the motif of the hostile brethren, but the motif itself remains the same. (Jung, 58)

According to Jung, archetypes are primordial images, the psychic residue of repeated patterns of experience in our very ancient ancestors which, he maintained, survive in the “collective unconscious” of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature. (M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 2013).

Jung’s work served as the basis on which archetypal literary criticism is developed. The work of the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye theorized archetypal criticism in literary terms. Frye deals with archetypes in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, which consists of four essays. Archetypal literary criticism works well with works

that are highly symbolic. Frye focuses on the function of archetypes in literature, not on their origin and what psychological explanation there might be.

A fantasy novel is always a great source of symbols. Historically speaking, literature has composed the majority of fantasy works. Many of the well-known and established archetypes effuse from historical chronicles, legends and myths. "There won't be a child in our world that won't know his name," J. K. Rowling correctly prophesied Harry Potter's immense popularity through the words of the character of Professor McGonagall in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to apply the archetypal literary theory to this series of fantasy novels. I have chosen to apply Northrop Frye's views in archetypal literary theory to the *Harry Potter* series of seven fantasy novels written by the British author J. K. Rowling.

2. The critical approach: Northrop Frye's views in archetypal literary criticism

Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye defined the archetype as a symbol which recurs often enough in literature to become recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole:

I give the name archetype [to] a typical or recurring image. I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. And as the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication. By the study of conventions and genres, it attempts to fit poems into the body of poetry as a whole. (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*: 99)

Frye explains that "archetypes are most easily studied in highly conventionalized literature: that is, for most part, naïve, primitive and popular literature." (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*: 104) He points out that archetypes are popular because they are recurring and vice versa, and thus they indicate to the culture they are a part of, but also can be spread throughout cultures:

The fact that the archetype is primarily a communicable symbol largely accounts for the ease with which ballads and folk tales and mimes travel through the world, like so many of their heroes, over all barriers of language and culture. We come back to the fact that literature most deeply influenced by the archetypal phase of symbolism impresses us as primitive and popular. (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*: 107-8)

Archetypes as patterns that exist in literature are powerful tools that help understand a literary work. According to Frye "The human cycle of birth, childhood and youth, growth and maturity, age, death and rebirth is the source of all literature" (Frye, *Fables of identity, studies in poetic mythology*: 29). Such is the case with

finding and recognizing archetypes in the *Harry Potter* series, which fit perfectly in the description of archetypal literature that Frye gives. The primitive myths and stories that cross “all barriers of language and culture” are ingrained in Rowling’s series of novels. The archetypes are alive and they provide Rowling’s characters and events with motivation and the characters with “character.” If it weren’t for the well-known archetypes, many of the characters in Rowling’s series would have little definition and no clear way to be fully understood. The villains would simply be villains and no one would know why. The heroes would be heroes, but for nothing more tangible than simply being called a hero. What would a hero or a villain even be without a standard from which to base one’s analysis?

3. Archetypes in the *Harry Potter* series

A standard and definitive list of archetypes does not exist. The variety and amount of archetypes depend on the source that is used. It is considered by many that archetypes fall into two major categories: characters and situations/symbols. It is easiest to understand them with the help of examples.

3.1. Situational Archetypes in the *Harry Potter* Series

Many situational archetypes have been used in the *Harry Potter* series, amongst which are the following: the Quest, the Task, the Journey, the Initiation, the Fall, the Battle between Good and Evil, the Un-healable Wound.

The Quest is an archetype that falls into the archetypal category of situations or symbols. It depicts what the Hero must accomplish in order to bring fertility back to the wasteland, usually a search for some talisman, which will restore peace, order, and normalcy to a troubled land. The search for Voldemort’s seven horcruxes in order to destroy them might be considered as a quest-within-a-quest, since Harry’s main quest is that for the ultimate liberalization of the magical world through Voldemort’s defeat.

‘Harry felt that nothing but action would assuage his feelings of guilt and grief and that he ought to set out on his mission to find and destroy Horcruxes as soon as possible.’ (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: 76)

The Task as an archetype is presented by the nearly superhuman feats the Hero must perform in order to accomplish his quest. In the *Harry Potter* book series, all the magical spells he casts during his search for horcruxes, but also placing some personal boundaries and discipline, can be considered as tasks.

According to the archetypal literary theory, the journey is a situational archetype that sends the Hero in search of some truth that will help save his kingdom. In the *Harry Potter* book series, the journey would be his attempts to discover the truth about his past, and the truth about his parents’ lives. By discovering that he is the ‘Chosen One’ because his mother, Lily, cast a sacrificial protection on him, Harry accepts the responsibility to fight Voldemort, even if that meant that he would lose his

life. Harry decides to risk his own life, because he knows he owes it to his deceased parents.

'He could no longer control his own trembling. It was not, after all, so easy to die. Every second he breathed, the smell of the grass, the cool air on his face, was so precious: to think that people had years and years, time to waste, so much time it dragged, and he was clinging to each second. At the same time he thought that he would not be able to go on, and knew that he must.' (ibid, 559)

The Initiation is an archetype that represents the adolescent coming into his maturity with new awareness and problems. The initiation in the *Harry Potter* books would be the Hogwarts acceptance letter and Harry's experience in the magical school.

The Fall is the descent from a higher to a lower state of being, usually as a punishment for transgression. It also involves the loss of innocence. For Harry, the Fall would not be connected to a material aspect, as much as a malaise caused by life's injustice. Albus Dumbledore's death can be considered as the Fall, since it crushes the positions of the Order of the Phoenix and also faces Harry with a new cruelty of the world and the bitter taste of injustice.

The battle between Good and Evil is obviously a battle between two primal forces. Mankind shows eternal optimism in the continual portrayal of good triumphing over evil despite great odds. Such is the case in the battle between Harry and Voldemort, and furthermore the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters.

'Ron, You-Know-Who and his followers sent the Dark Mark into the air whenever they killed,' said Mr Weasley. 'The terror it inspired ... you have no idea, you're too young. Just picture coming home, and finding the Dark Mark hovering over your house, and knowing what you're about to find inside ...' Mr Weasley winced. 'Everyone's worst fear ... the very worst ...' (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: 127)

The Un-healable Wound is another strong situational archetype that is presented in the *Harry Potter* book series by the scar on Harry's forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt, which is a result of the failed murder attempt by Voldemort. "The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could remember..." (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: 20) The Un-healable Wound as an archetype is either a physical or psychological wound that cannot be fully healed. The wound symbolizes a loss of innocence. Harry's scar on intervals caused him great pain. Whenever Voldemort was close, or whenever he was in danger from the Dark Lord or his followers, the Death Eaters, his scar burned terribly.

Of the many symbolic archetypes that have been used in the *Harry Potter* book series, these come to front: Light vs. Darkness, Supernatural Intervention, and the Magic Weapon. The symbolic archetype of Light vs. Darkness usually depicts Light as a proposer of hope, renewal, or intellectual illumination; Darkness implies the

unknown, ignorance, or despair. Dumbledore's constant efforts to educate young wizards and disseminate knowledge is diametrically opposed to Voldemort's attempts to segregate the magical world and put strict boundaries between magical and non-magical human beings, i.e. Muggles.

The symbolic archetype of Supernatural Intervention is basically an intervention by spiritual beings on the side of the hero or sometimes against him. A Supernatural Intervention in the *Harry Potter* book series would be the sudden appearance of a Patronus in the form of a silvery stag that saves Harry's life and shows him the way.

'He saw it lower its head and charge at the swarming Dementors ... now it was galloping around and around the black shapes on the ground, and the Dementors were falling back, scattering, retreating into the darkness ... they were gone. The Patronus turned. It was cantering back towards Harry across the still surface of the water. It wasn't a horse. It wasn't a unicorn, either. It was a stag.' (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: 300)

The weapon the hero needs in order to complete his quest is represented by the symbolic archetype also known as The Magic Weapon. The Magic Weapon for Harry would be the Elder Wand, i.e. the most powerful wand that has ever existed, able to perform feats of magic that would normally be considered impossible, such as mending another wand damaged beyond normal magical repair. The Elder Wand was in Harry's possession when the young wizard succeeded to terminally defeat Voldemort.

3.2. Character Archetypes in the Harry Potter Series

Besides the situational archetypes, J.K. Rowling employs character archetypes as well. In order to fully understand them, one must explore them. For instance, Harry's relationship with Albus Dumbledore, Harry's mentor and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, would seem less important and less strong than it truly is without looking at it in a scrutinizing fashion. The list of character archetypes in the book series is varied, but consists partially of the Hero, the Initiates, the Mentor-Pupil Relationships, the Hunting Group of Companions, the Friendly Beast, the Shadow, the Evil Figure with Ultimately Good Intentions, the Wise Old Man, the Devil, the Scapegoat, the Trickster, and the Outcast. All of these will be discussed later, as well as a few others which play more minor roles in humanity's psyches and literature's more prolific characters.

In Rowling's works, we see, obviously, Harry as the Hero, or at least as the first Hero. His mentor Albus Dumbledore leads him throughout the series as a mentor and father figure, but in the penultimate sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore is murdered by Severus Snape (who is throughout the novels played to be a Devilish character, but really stands on more common ground with Tricksters) and becomes the Scapegoat. To understand these archetypes and their meanings in literature, one must be provided with working definitions.

Harry, as the Hero, comes from multiple instances of what makes an archetypal Hero, which is: birth from unusual circumstances (because his mother was a Muggle or a witch from a non-magical family); an early escape from attempts to murder him (which is precisely what happens when Lord Voldemort murders his parents and fails to kill infant Harry); and it is also said that the Hero must go on a Journey during which the Hero must answer complex riddles, retrieve a sacred or powerful artefact, or do battle with superhuman creatures for the purpose of saving someone else (which, as has already been stated, happens to dictate just what Harry does throughout the novels, especially in the sixth novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when Dumbledore puts him on the quest for Lord Voldemort's seven horcruxes).

Albus Dumbledore fits into multiple archetypes: the Father and the Wise Old Man who offers guidance and advice to the young Hero. As the series progresses to its latest volume, Dumbledore takes on an additional role when he is murdered by Severus Snape: that of the Scapegoat. The Scapegoat is an archetypal character who becomes the sacrificial victim who is put to death in order to remove the guilt of the people and restore their welfare and health.

'Snape gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face. 'Severus ... please ...' Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore. 'Avada Kedavra!' A jet of green light shot from the end of Snape's wand and hit Dumbledore squarely in the chest.' (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*: 556)

By fulfilling all three archetypal roles, Dumbledore is the most important and influential person in Harry's life. Like many Wise Old Men, it is foreshadowed that Albus will be back to guide young Harry, but through a trance-like dream Harry experiences after Voldemort's second attempt to kill him. "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: 579) Even though Dumbledore may be physically dead, his influence will remain by guiding the Hero after his death to his destiny of defeating the man who killed both his parents and his Father.

There are various other archetypes that Rowling has spread liberally throughout the *Harry Potter* series. The most prevalent to the outcome of the story are those of the Outcast, the Devil, and the Trickster. The Outcast, represented in the novels by Voldemort, is a character who is thrown out of the community as punishment for a crime against it. The fate of the outcast is to wander about for eternity. This exemplifies Voldemort's character, but he alters the archetype slightly. Instead of being outcast by the community, he forces their hand and becomes an Outcast of his own volition. His exile of eternal wandering is self-imposed, as he searches for immortality by any means possible, fulfilling the role of wandering about for eternity.

This is not to say that Voldemort is not a Devil as well. He certainly has done Harry enough wrongs through the years by murdering his family and friends, whether it is directly like his parents or Cedric Diggory or by means of someone simply following

his orders like when Snape kills Dumbledore. The Devil as an archetype plays against the Hero. One would, on first inspection, think that Voldemort would be the main occupant of this archetype, but in reality, he does not present more than a looming threat for Harry for the first half of the series, and even later on, he still maintains his threat through symbols and word of mouth more than physical intimidation. The Devil is overtaken by the group of magical fanatics who call themselves the Death Eaters and are led by Voldemort, but not Voldemort as a single person.

The Malfoy family - Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco - plays the role of the antagonist, as much as there is a single one in the series, by constantly being wherever they need to be in order to make Harry's life more difficult. They personify the principle of evil that intrudes in the life of a character to tempt and to destroy him. Though the Devil in the very strictest archetypal stories tempts by offering the Hero wealth and fame, the Malfoys tempt Harry with negative reinforcement; if he doesn't do what he knows is right, he will become like them, precisely that which he despises and works against, even though the Sorting Hat in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* speaks highly of Harry's true nature, which could be the real Devil in the novels. The Sorting Hat's mention that Slytherin would help Harry on the way to greatness can be taken as quite the opposite of what would happen if he were to be put in Gryffindor. Slytherin is the house at Hogwarts to which his arch-nemesis Lord Voldemort belonged, as well as his current impediment, Draco Malfoy, both of whom are cunning and talented with greatness, yet do not possess the heart and good will that Harry is said to hold. The only reason that he was sorted into Gryffindor by the Sorting Hat was because he asked not to go to Slytherin, not because his nature was similar to those who were naturally sorted there; his nature was that of Slytherin, but he had been pushed from that house, and ironically toward the one from which Dumbledore hailed, by his choice of friends. Dumbledore himself told Harry in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* that his abilities were slytherinesque, even when he called him later a "true Gryffindor".

'Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue ... resourcefulness ... determination ... a certain disregard for rules,' he added, his moustache quivering again. 'Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.' 'It only put me in Gryffindor,' said Harry in a defeated voice, 'because I asked not to go in Slytherin ...' 'Exactly,' said Dumbledore, beaming once more. 'Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.' (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: 245)

The thought that he could possess Slytherin's prized qualities haunts Harry throughout the novels, yet his will and steadfast determination prevent him from doing anything that would be considered typical of a Slytherin member.

Throughout the latest novel in the series, Harry and Dumbledore share a relationship that mirrors that of a father and a son. Though Harry and Dumbledore share no biological relation, their bond gives them the same strength as someone of the respective biological lineage. Dumbledore goes through novels one through five as a Father to Harry, giving him advice as he moves along, but never really influencing him in more than making the question "What would Dumbledore do?" a sort of a moral compass for Harry.

The Trickster is a difficult archetype to hammer out and nail down. The Trickster's role is to hamper the Hero's progress. Severus Snape does this throughout the series. As the series begins, Snape is seen as a professor who will stop at nothing to make Harry's life miserable. "Snape and Harry's mutual enmity had been absolute from the moment Harry had set foot in Hogwarts." (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: 212) As the series progresses, we see their relationship mature into one where Severus sometimes helps Harry out a little in order to place a larger roadblock in his way. As *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* come into publication, we see Snape getting ever closer to Harry during tutoring sessions Dumbledore himself sanctioned. He is finally being forced into placing the largest roadblock he has yet placed in the young wizard's way: murdering Albus Dumbledore.

There are other archetypes in the novels that Rowling touches on with various characters, but never fleshes them out past the "stock" of their archetypes. As loving as she is toward Harry and her own children, Mrs. Weasley is little more than the Good Mother archetype. Hermione Granger, for the first three novels at least, plays little more for the story's movement than simply being a stock Virgin. She is innocent and naïve, helping her friends selflessly with her knowledge gained from a lack of a social life outside her protective circle. Cho Chang, Harry's love interest for the novels *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is a modified Temptress. She never really acts as though she will let Harry in, and when he bumbles over himself in Hogsmeade village in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, she embarrasses him publicly, emasculating him as though she were a succubus, a hell-spawned temptress. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore finally takes a more hands-on approach to tutoring Harry and leads him on the way to finding Voldemort's horcruxes - magical artefacts that hold a portion of the owner's soul. The first six novels have really just been leading into this quest. This quest will end up taking Harry from Hogwarts, which happened toward the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. We can see how much his final task from Dumbledore means to him by his not returning to the place he calls home in order to finish it. It is obvious that archetypes provide a solid basis for establishing the main frame of the *Harry Potter* series, though they are not the single guiding principle that defines it.

4. Conclusion

Characters, situations, plots and themes in the *Harry Potter* series can be observed in terms of archetypes. However, even though they fit snugly into an archetypical role, one cannot say that the characters and situations in Rowling's book series are simply their archetypes and nothing more. Their motivations play on one another, and the bonds she weaves between them with her storytelling make the world rich and alive. Harry and his friends and acquaintances are more than fictional people made up by a lady in a Scottish café. They live and breathe on the page. They act and react and interact with each other and their surroundings and the circumstances that J.K. Rowling puts in place for them. However, it is with the help of archetypes that the reader can rest easily knowing that Harry Potter's world of witches and wizards is in good hands and that the narrative discourse will allow for the characters to let their story unfold with their archetypical personalities and motivations in control.

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