
What Lies Deep in the Unconscious: A Psychoanalytical Scrutiny of Harry Potter in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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ABSTRACT:

Since the inception of its epic journey, Joanne Katherine Rowling's Harry Potter series has come a long way to become a phenomenon in the domain of children's literature, intriguing readers and critics alike, raising questions regarding its nature, its viability for children, and sparking debates among scholars around the world over the social, cultural, political, and psychological subtexts in the series. The paper intends to address the issues of sexuality and desire in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter saga in the light of the psychoanalytical theories propounded by Sigmund Freud, focusing on the psychosexual development of Harry Potter in the series. The paper intends to unveil how his behavioural patterns and actions have, as their roots, the functioning of id, ego, and the superego, as well as how he copes up with unbearable impulses, or how he succumbs to them. The paper seeks to explore the oedipal anxieties and desires inherent in the protagonist of the story, delving deeper into his unconscious, digging up his past, analyzing how his position in the several social strata or structures, his families, both at Hogwarts and the Dursleys, that are again microcosms of the larger structure of the wizarding and the non-magical worlds, his education and upbringing have impacted the formation of his identity.

Keywords: *Psychosexual, Desire, Identity, Unconscious, Sexuality.*

To read J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is a journey—a journey beyond the narrow periphery of reality, to embark on a joyride into the realms of the fantasia, with wizards and witches with their magical wands the waving of which makes the impossible look easy and achievable, dangerous quests into the unknown, into places where dragons, chimeras, griffins, and werewolves are no longer the stuffs of myths and legends. Paradoxically, having magical

blood coursing through the veins of the characters in the world of Rowling does not make them anything else than human, and it is easily perceivable that the magical world operates on the same principles on which our world, the non-magical, mundane, ‘normal’ world runs. Their psychologies are in no way different from those of ours, and therefore, it will not be a sacrilege to subject the series to a psychological scrutiny, though definitely it will be an arduous task to see how desires are sublimated, or repressed, or denied, as in the words of Sigmund Freud himself:

When I set myself the task of bringing to light what human beings keep hidden within them, ...by what they say and what they show, I thought the task was a harder one than it really is. He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of mind is one which is quite possible to accomplish. (*Sigmund Freud*, 23)

When, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, we meet Harry for the first time, Rowling describes his protagonist as a malnourished boy of eleven, ill-treated by his only living relatives, a complete non-entity in the Dursley family:

Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley's, and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobby knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning. (*the Philosopher's Stone*, 14)

Therefore, from the very onset, we find him neglected and abused by his family. He is given a broom cupboard to use as a bedroom, hand-me-down dresses to wear, and leftovers to eat. He is treated no better than a dog that has strayed into the beautifully organized domestic domain of the Dursleys. He watches ruefully how his aunt Petunia spoils her son Dudley and turns often deaf ears to Harry's complaints against him. On the other hand, he is subject to

menial labour under constant threats of physical punishment, especially from his uncle Vernon Dursley, if he fails to carry out any task assigned to him. May be that is why he could fully understand the plight of Dobby the House-Elf and decides to help him gain his freedom from slavery, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In fact, Vernon Dursley, at one point of time blurts out that when they took Harry into their family, he thought of squeezing magic out of him—an act that has similarities with the threats of castration. Also, the Dursleys let Dudley bully him, which he does with relish. Therefore, if we consider Petunia as Harry's mother-substitute, we see that Harry's libidinal drives directed towards her, remain unsatisfied because of the fear of two physically greater rivals, Dudley and uncle Vernon. The only time the wall between Harry and Petunia seems to breach is when the Dursleys depart with the wizards to a safe hideout: "She stopped and looked back. For a moment Harry had the strangest feeling that she wanted to say something to him; she gave him an odd, tremulous look and seemed to teeter on the edge of speech, but, then, with a little jerk of her head, she bustled out of the room after her husband and son" (*the Deathly Hallows*, 40-41).

After Petunia, it is Molly Weasley who comes closest to replace Harry's mother. I have mentioned Petunia because being Harry's maternal aunt she is naturally expected to be a surrogate mother to Harry. Throughout the series we see Molly being extremely attentive towards Harry's needs, the way Petunia cares for Dudley. She, as a matter of fact, seems more caring and loving towards Harry than her own children. I wonder if that is because Harry is famous, and that she has always wanted to be acknowledged for taking care of him like his mother and have a share in his glory. I know that this argument may infuriate some of the avid fans of the series, but does she show such tenderness to the Weasley twins or even Ron? Is it only pity for Harry as he is an orphan? In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the horcrux echoes Ron's unconscious which believes his mother to prefer over him, by looking deep into his feelings. This may be discarded as Ron's imagination, but obviously he has seen how Harry is lavishly showered with attention from his mother. Sigmund Freud, in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, argues that the mother holds for the child can also border on sexual desire:

A mother's love for the infant as she suckles and cares for is something far more profound than her later affection for the growing child. It is the nature of a completely satisfying love-

relation, which not only fulfils every mental wish but also every physical need; and if it represents one of the forms of attainable human happiness, that is in no little measure due to the possibility it offers of satisfying, without reproach, wishful impulses which have long been repressed and which must be called perverse. (*Sigmund Freud*, 51-52)

Therefore, Molly Weasley's desire for Harry may be because of the fact that she is always infatuated with powerful and famous people, like the celebrated author, Gilderoy Lockhart for whom she has always nursed a soft spot. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, when her husband, Arthur Weasley has a heated argument with Lucius Malfoy, she warns him: "You be careful, Arthur. The family's trouble, don't go biting off more than you can chew" (*the Chamber of Secrets*, 47), to which he snaps back: "So you don't think I'm a match for Lucius Malfoy" (*the Chamber of Secrets*, 47)? What I have noticed that there is always a tendency in her to impose herself in the role of Harry's mother and undermine everybody else's affection and concern for him. When Sirius, Harry's godfather, tries to explain to Harry the modus operandi of the Order of the Phoenix, she gets impatient and forbids him to tell Harry more than he must know, despite the obvious fact that Harry has dealt with greater risks before, and that it is Sirius who is his guardian. In order to stop Sirius from giving Harry some classified information regarding the order, and to assert her presence in Harry's life, she accuses Sirius of being a reckless godfather who treats Harry as if he is Harry's father and his best friend, James, and not a young boy. She goes on until Lupin reminds her pointedly that she is not the only one who cares for Harry. When Harry is given a choice in this matter, he chooses to listen to Sirius. He feels inwardly guilty as she has said that he is as good as any of her sons. Harry's desire for her attention is reciprocated, but at the same time he feels impatient with her 'mollycoddling'. Molly Weasley's animosity towards Hermione is triggered when in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rita Skeeter, a journalist, spreads rumours about Hermione being an opportunist seductress of Harry. Her desire to be closest to Harry is sublimated by her visible concern for him. There are numerous other instances when Molly Weasley appears inclined to keep treating Harry like a child. Even in the face of imminent danger, she feels it safer to conceal certain truths from him, like Sirius's escape from Azkaban, hardly heeding the fact that Harry must not be caught off guard by a mass-murderer.

Harry experiences his first relationship with Cho Chang. Although Harry has known and fancied her for years, it is in his fourth year at Hogwarts when he becomes aware of his longings for Cho. He asks her to be her partner at the Yule Ball and is politely turned down as she has already chosen Cedric Diggory as her partner. His desires get thwarted by Diggory whom he has so far liked, and admired. The boy whom he previously thought to have been more like a champion than himself, and of whom he was hardly ever jealous, becomes suddenly a rival. For Harry, Cedric becomes just a pretty boy with a bird's brain. Despite warming up to him and being distraught by his death, Harry's envy for Cedric's charisma never really leaves him. The fact that Cho actually chose Cedric over him hangs heavy on his mind even after Cedric's death, and after he and Cho becomes romantically involved with each other a year after Cedric's death. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* when Cho wants to talk to him regarding Cedric's death, Harry gets irritated and refuses to talk about him. In another occasion, when they kiss each other, Harry realizes that she has been crying. He assumes quite childishly that may be he is not competent enough. Also, he has to endure slights on his personal appearance when with Cho, from a group of Slytherins which obviously hurts his self-esteem, making him think that Cho was better off with Cedric: "Urgh, Chang, I don't think much of your taste...at least Diggory was good-looking" (*the Order of the Phoenix*, 614). At Madam Puddifoot's tea-shop, Harry watches Roger Davies kissing his girlfriend, with apprehension, feeling that Davies is setting a standard with which Cho may wish him to compete, and as if to confirm his fears, she informs Harry that she turned down Davies when he asked her out on a date. Harry interprets this to be Cho's consideration of him as an option, second to Roger Davies. The desire for the mother, according to Sigmund Freud, is diverted to other girls as the ego ideal prohibits the realization of the id. But despite that, a man looks for the qualities he admires in his mother, in his beloved. Harry's relationship with Cho does not last as she does not have qualities which Lily, Harry's mother, had—bravery, kindness, and a deep understanding of the human nature. Cho not only rages against Hermione after suspecting her to be the centre of affection for Harry, but also supports her friend, Marietta, who betrays every member of the secret group formed within Hogwarts, Dumbledore's Army, to Dolores Umbridge. She obviously lacks Hermione's patience and Ginny's strength, and Harry soon gets disillusioned with her.

Harry meets Ginny Weasley for the first time at the King's Cross station. They meet again when a year later, Harry visits The Burrow in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. We are told from the very beginning that Ginny fancies Harry. On the other hand, Harry seems to be oblivious truth, or he may simply have been indifferent. It is not until his sixth year at Hogwarts, he realizes that he is romantically inclined towards Ginny, a feeling that triggers when he comes across Ginny and Dean kissing at a deserted corridor and immediately wants to tear Dean limb from limb. He tries sublimation by trying hard to assume that his feelings for Ginny are simply older brotherly. In his dreams he sees himself replacing Dean in the act of kissing Ginny. After getting into a relationship with her, he ends it soon as he knows that the path ahead of him is dangerous. A boy, being jealous of his father, actually tries to emulate him, and imbibe his qualities, so that he can take his place in his mother's affections. Harry does what his father, James Potter had done, that his, shield his family against danger, even at the cost of his own life and happiness. He ends the relationship to shield Ginny from any harm or disappointment. He never really gets out of it. He kisses Ginny on his seventeenth birthday, gets angry when Krum praises her beauty, and feels uncomfortable when he overhears Ginny's ex-boyfriend Dean expressing concern for her. At the wedding of Fleur and Bill, he imagines Ginny to be married to a tall, faceless man, and is overwhelmed with sadness. He sees the shadow of Molly Weasley in Ginny's eyes and is stunned by the likeness. With Ginny, ends Harry's search to find a mother-substitute.

William Wordsworth, in his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude* (1805) speaks about the happiness and contentment of an infant at her mother's breast:

No outcast he, bewildered and depress'd;

Along his infant veins are interfused

The gravitation and the filial bond

Of nature, that connects him with the world. (*The Prelude*, lines, 263-66)

Not only Harry's, but also the behaviors, attitudes, outlooks, and tastes of all the characters in the Harry Potter series are rooted in the presence or the absence of the mother-figure in their

lives. The series becomes a quest for love, and it is love, sexual or asexual, and the capability to love which defines their identities. Harry's messiah complex, Ron's volatile and insecure temperament, Voldemort's cruelty and narcissism, and Severus Snape's jealousies, all are deeply rooted in the role their mothers have played in their lives, as Sigmund Freud in his letter to Wilhelm Fliess emphasized on the universality of his notion of the Oedipus complex:

A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my own case too [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and now I consider it a universal event in early childhood...if this is so, we can understand the gripping power of Oedipus Rex...the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. (*Sigmund Freud*, 48)

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