Symbols And Myths In Harry Potter

It is not a secret that the name Harry Potter has filled the world and children's literature with great interest and enthusiasm. This magical world is connected with the "real" world as many of its locations are in London. Things that take place in the magical world leave their impact on the "real" world also.

J. K. Rowling has created an incredible world of magic, a world full of amazing and magnificent symbols and once in it, you do not want to come out of it, thus, arousing profound interest and great enthusiasm in readers of all ages throughout the world. So one can state that it?s beyond doubt that J.K. Rowling?s Harry Potter books are one of the biggest surprises and successes in literature history.

There are many symbols in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. Symbols are found in all cultures. From Stone Age to the present, symbols accompany human development. They show as a part of human communication a concrete meaning, e.g. an owl is a bird hunting mice in the dark. But symbols often have contact with our psychic and spiritual world. They carry a deeper inner meaning. All the characters are symbols or personifications of aspects of the process, symbolically called, 'making the Philosopher's Stone'. Many symbols and ideas J.K. Rowling uses are alchemical. The best-known goals of the alchemists were the transmutation of common metals into gold (called chrysopoeia) or silver or the elixir of life, a remedy that supposedly would cure all diseases and prolong life indefinitely, and the discovery of a universal solvent. Although these were not the only uses for science, they were the ones most documented and well known. Starting with the middle ages, Arabic and European alchemists invested much effort in the search for the "philosopher's stone" a legendary substance that was believed to be an essential ingredient for either or both of these goals. The Philosopher's stone was believed to mystically amplify the user's knowledge of alchemy so much that anything was attainable (http://www.harrypotterforseekers.com/alchemy). In Harry Potter and Philosopher's Stone that is also the reason why the wicked Lord Voldermort wants to get hold of it, to continue his evil doings.

Harry Potter is full of symbols. All of these symbols, i.e. characters, mythical creatures, and many others make the book, Harry Potter and Philosopher's stone so rich and colorful. It is an ocean, if you dare to dive in to it you will come across all sorts of fascinating things, some of them can be explained and analyzed, while others are inexplicable. For example, Lily Potter, Harry's mother symbolizes immortality and divinity, because her name, Lily, is the name of a flower that is very pure, bright, and beautiful, and at the same time very fragile. James Potter, Harry's father, is a witch who can turn into a particular animal at will. His transformation into a stag is not by chance. Stag or deer is a symbol of purity, kindness and caring feature, devotion; all the qualities are found in James Potter (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animagusv). Lord Voldermort is the symbol of Satan, evil, and the power of immortality.

The primary difference between Harry and Voldemort is Harry's capacity to understand and feel love. Although Harry does not have his parents, he is still able to love their memory and develop close relationships with other characters, including Ron, Hermione, and Professor Dumbledore. Voldemort, on the other hand, views love as a weakness and so chooses to isolate himself from

those around him. Professor Quirrell does not love Voldemort but rather fears him, so his loyalty is far weaker than the bonds of friendship forged between Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Moreover, because Lord Voldemort did not comprehend the power of Lily Potter's love when he attempted to kill her son, Voldemort nearly destroyed himself with the killing curse meant for Harry. Voldemort will never be able to understand the strength of love and, though he will always be more powerful than Harry, Harry has the support and strength of the people he loves to help him defeat the Dark Lord.

The mirror of Erased is a magic mirror. The word “mirror” is derived from the Latin word Mirus, which means wonderful (Beahm George, Fact, Fiction, and Folklore in Harry Potter’s World, Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 2005, p.182). One can see in it what he/she most deeply desires to see. The name “Mirror of Erased” is a pun that means “Mirror of Desire”. Harry sees and experiences things that he most desires to see or have. What he sees and experiences is not reality, but only an illusion. That is why it is called a looking glass.

The mirror shows the greatest desire of the one looking into it upon the surface, often with them having achieved some goal or ambition. However, since each person is unique, only they can see it from their point of view. According to Dumbledore, the Mirror shows neither truth nor knowledge and has in fact gone mad from staring at it.

Hedwig is Harry Potter’s owl. As it is known birds of prey were used as methods of communication throughout the world. Here, two, birds-owls are used for this purpose. The owl was the emblem of Athens and as Athens was the center of learning and intelligence, the center of wisdom and great men, thus the owl became the symbol of intelligence and wisdom. Hedwig also symbolizes a faithful, wise, and loving friend. The white color of Hedwig also symbolizes purity and light which is exactly what Harry’s companion must be like.

J. K. Rowling uses universal symbols which are very ancient and resonate in the collective unconscious. Many of the symbols were used in the ancient civilizations which gave their ideas to our western world. They are of historical, mythical, magical origin. Some of them are of Greek origin, from Greek mythology; some are of Latin or Egyptian origin. Many of the symbols used in Harry Potter and Philosopher’s Stone can come across in other literary works by such famous writers as J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Graham, and many others.

The use of Latinate words reinforces the mystery and magic of Harry Potter’s world, and thus stirs readers’ curiosity and interest. Generally speaking, words of Latin and French origin are words of science, religion, and official communication, and they help to create the effect of coolness, dignity, and intellectual distance. Apart from Latinate words, to add more mystery and dignity to this novel, French words are also used.

Also, an important role is attached to the combination of the youths? real world with the fantastic and mystic world. The youths find their real experiences at school, with parents, friends, and enemies combined with a realm of witchcraft, symbols superhuman skills, and dangerous adventures. Harry's saga has begun, dealing with the aftermath of death — his parents. The boy character's life story had its gestation in his literary 'mother's' struggles to deal with the progressively fatal disease of her own mother. Imagination had been fostered, values learned and natural abilities encouraged; until, with a verdant flash of light, the handsome 11-year-old with glasses broke from the mist and 'simply strolled into (Joanne Rowling's) mind, fully formed.'

A boy who didn't know that he was a wizard until he received acceptance to wizarding school; and, whose personal story of dealing with death and adversity, simply must be told! Harry, as the boy would be known, began the life 'inflicted' upon him in the home of his abusive step-parents, the Dursleys. The self-serving arrogance and lust for power, of a man he had never met, had created an orphan and defined Harry's life for the next seventeen years — if not forever.

The initial capturing of Harry's story consumed Rowling's efforts and possibly provided moments of respite from her own struggles. She admits that Harry's initial 'death scene' had been written in a somewhat 'cavalier fashion,' and despairs that she had never told her mother about her new 'imaginary friend.' Within six months, Rowling's mother had died, and she could now tell by experience, just how 'superficial' her depiction had been. The subsequent blossoming of the wizarding world into print occurred within the context of her admitted 'struggling with religious belief,' and the effects of losing her mother. It is in the viewing of Harry's life and the world in this context, which gives his story its most poignancy. His scar came from his mother’s selfless sacrifice motivated by love. The Mirror of Erased, which 'shows a person's deepest desire,' revealed to Harry the vision of the author, to see her own mother again. Then, the mirror was followed by Hagrid's 'photo album' which enabled his continued relationship with deceased loved ones he could barely remember. Harry's life was filled with loss and Rowling said that in order to keep her feelings about the story in perspective, before writing anything else, she had to write an 'epilogue,' which could remind her where the characters would end.

Wizardry in Harry's world is considered 'typically atypical.' When he is 'home' he is a 'freak'; but, when at his 'other home' he, magically, is nothing special — if only it weren't for Voldemort's decisions. There are the rings, and swords of magical nature, and spells with incantations which seem hauntingly familiar like they might be true. Wizarding ability in Harry's world does seem to have some, undisclosed, genetic relationship and therefore occurs in families. Not surprisingly, parents with the endowment, and who have undergone maturation into wizards, find educational and experiential opportunities for their offspring who are similarly endowed. There is incomplete gene penetrance, however, and spontaneous mutations are not unheard of, or uncommon. It is unfortunate, but these natural phenomena are facilitated with labels. The terms 'squib' and ‘muggle-born’ were coined to describe the two mentioned conditions, respectively. Such labels, along with 'muggle' (non-magic folk) are used by people, like Lucius and Draco Malfoy, to whom it matters, and express their prejudices. To them, like Hitler's Nazis, a muggle-born is as bad as a muggle and even one non-magic grandparent makes you 'half-blood.' The shape of a person’s nose seems to indicate the level of 'wizardry' in a person's family tree. Dumbledore's is described as long and pointy, Harry's as 'pointy but not as much as his father's.' Hermione's is short- being muggle-born; Ron's quite pointy- being pure-blood. Occasionally Rowling uses the description of 'a long pointy nose' in a pejorative sense to connote 'pure-blooded and probably bigoted.

Nowadays, this is the most vivid example of modern fantasy. The funny thing is that J.K. Rowling, the most popular living fantasy writer, as she herself claims, does not even like fantasy novels(Grossman, Lev New York Times, July 15, 2005). She realized she had written a fantasy novel only after the first book was published. Rowling has never finished The Lord of the Rings and has not even read C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia, which her books are compared to a lot. Most fantasy stories are based on an ideal, romanticized, pseudo feudal world, with knights and ladies, traditional elves, etc. Rowling’s books are not like that. They take place in the 1990s, in modern England, where there are cars, telephones, and play stations around.

Rowling’s England is divided into two completely different, though intimately connected realities. Even more, the division may be considered merely between social classes, between “perfectly normal” (in this case mean and selfish Muggles) and “beyond normal” (wizards and witches).

The books follow a strict formula. Each of them is a description of one full year at school (except the 7th book, in which Harry, Ron, and Hermione spent most of their time away from Hogwarts), including its usual routine-difficult essays, unsympathetic teachers, and collisions with other pupils. This can be considered to be a part of boarding school genre, having some similarities with Thomas Hughes’s Brown’s Schooldays or even Stephen King’s mystery tales. In addition, they are constructed in the manner of Sherlock Holmes-style mystery adventure; the books have a number of clues hidden in the narrative, leading eventually to the revelation of the secret.