

# Heroic Archetype in Harry Potter Series

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This article provides an archetypal analysis of Harry Potter's self-completion at three heroic stages: departure, initiation, and return. Harry's experiences demonstrate his heroic traits: the infant exile and reaction to the call for adventures at the departure stage, a road of trials at the initiation stage, and freedom to live at the return stage, all contributing to his self-transcendence. During these periods, the defeat of Voldemort, the shadow archetype, and Harry's unconscious self, also plays an indispensable part in the development of his heroic identity.

*Keywords:* Harry Potter, Voldemort, heroic archetype, shadow archetype

## Introduction

Ever since the publication of Harry Potter series, the masterpiece of J. K. Rowling, it has aroused wide interest among literary critics. Although a huge number of academic studies have explored Harry the protagonist from different perspectives, rarely have scholars studied his self-formation with the archetypal theory. Therefore, this article will focus on Harry's self-transcendence by analyzing his life experience at three heroic stages, departure, initiation, and return. During these stages, the effect of the shadow archetype has also played an important role: Harry defeats Voldemort and embraces his own shadow, gaining impetus, and eventually establishing his heroic self.

### I. Hero's Departure—Infant Exile and Acceptance to Adventure

The hero's journey is a universal and classical story of personal development and transformation, which is full of adventure, hardships, and vicissitudes of life (Duffy, 2010, p. 6). To see the developments that make the hero who he is, the mythologist Joseph Campbell brings out three stages of the hero's journey in his work *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*. Campbell (1968, p. 28) concludes the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero as a fixed model: "a hero leaves his world of common day and ventures into a place of supernatural wonder. He encounters fabulous forces and wins the decisive victory. Then the hero returns from his adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man". One can see that the heroic traits are well-reflected in Harry Potter's magical adventure: Harry departs from the wizarding world at a very young age, accepts the call for adventure, succeeds in self-completing and self-growing, and brings peace and happiness to the wizarding world once again. As depicted in the book, the rite of passage is divided into three stages—departure, initiation, and return (Boll, 2011, p. 93).

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Like Vogler expresses (1985), the departure stage marks the beginning of a hero's quest in which the protagonist is characterized as someone who has suffered a certain form of loss or who perceives powers that the other members of his society detest. As Campbell puts it, at this stage, the hero often experiences the infant exile because of his extraordinary origin and accepts the call for adventure. Meanwhile, along the way of the departure, the hero often encounters a helper, usually a wise old man who functions as the protector to keep the new-born powers from harm (1968, p. 63). In the novel series, the supernatural aid comes from Albus Dumbledore, the schoolmaster of Hogwarts. As is depicted in the theory, during the departure process, the journey often starts with telling stories of babies born with extraordinary powers. In classic fairy tales, from Heracles of the Greek myths to father Abraham of popular Hebrew legend, heroes are born with the spontaneous creative power of the outside world. Heracles is the son of Zeus who was predicted to be the most powerful man of all. "When Abraham was born, the King is prosecuting male babies because of a prophecy that a man would stand out and overthrow his reign" (Campbell, 1968, p. 298). Just like Heracles or father Hebrew that was born with prophecy, when Harry was born, professor Sybill Trelawney predicted that "the boy who was born in a family that defeated Lord Voldemort three times at the end of July carries the power to kill the Dark Lord" (Rowling, 2003, p. 1108). Their prophetic birth is the start of their extraordinary life. And it was this prophecy that brought Harry and his family a fatal disaster—Lord Voldemort kills his parents and leaves a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Before Harry's returning to the wizarding world, Dumbledore sends him to his uncle's home, cutting off his connection with the wizarding world temporarily to protect him. That brings one important theme of the hero's experience brought out in Campbell's book, the infant exile of the destined hero.

The infant exile appears frequently in legends. When reading the biography of many legendary heroes, one can find their childhood stories are quite similar. One example goes to Chandragupta, the founder of the Hindu Maurya dynasty, who had been abandoned in infancy and later adopted by a herdsman until a passing prince finds his unnatural powers and brings him back to the palace. The infant exile is to show the extraordinary powers of the destined heroes while endowing them with the first trial—knowing the darkness from either inward or outward. In *the Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (1968, p. 301) summarizes: "The child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity filled with extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace, ..., what he touches is darkness unexplored." After his parents being murdered by Voldemort, Harry has to go through his childhood in the discrimination and indifference of his uncle's family. As an orphan born with magical power, he faces dual pressures from both the inside and the outside world. At first, he doesn't know the truth of his parents' death, and he is puzzled with his ability to speak to snakes; but his nominal guardians never help him with his confusion, leaving him in a dark narrow cabinet instead.

When it comes to the factors that have been following and affecting the hero from the start to the end, the shadow archetype is of great significance to the hero's self-completion. The shadow archetype reveals the dark aspect of the personality (Jung, 1977, p. 269). It is often neglected for it is the extension of uncivilized desires, but it is indispensable as well. Therefore, the process of meeting with the shadow carries the same meaning as meeting with one's complete ego. In *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort is the shadow archetype that the dark reflection of Harry's desires for he is also an orphaned child and never feels evolved. As it turns out Harry also holds the shadow within him for Voldemort constitutes his unconscious self (Boll, 2011, p. 90). Also, the

similarities and mind-sharing between Harry and Voldemort terrify the young wizard and make him start to question himself.

The infant exile demonstrates the first negative influence of the shadow archetypes—from the outside, Voldemort is the direct contributor to his tragic childhood; from the inside, Harry begins to realize it is his terrifying and unusual power that alienates him from others and starts to question his true ego.

The departure stage illustrates the hero's setting out of his journey as well as the first meeting with the shadow, offering a general idea for readers to know the hero. It's a stage to identify with the hero's drives, urges, and problems. At the departure stage, Harry lives as an orphaned child with unusual powers, longing for love, and doubting himself. He's at the beginning stage of knowing and accepting his complete self. After ten years of obscurity, Harry receives admission to a world that's beyond imagination, the wizarding world, and starts his journey in Hogwarts. His entering Hogwarts signifies the conclusion of the childhood circle and the call for adventure, the first stage of the mythological journey.

## **II. Hero's Initiation—The Road of Trials**

Just as Vogler (1985) puts it, most stories of legendary heroes take us to a special world that is new and alien to its hero. Once the hero has gone through infant exile, he then steps into a special world where the adventure awaits, which often begins with the call for adventure. As a preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play, such beginning is usually seen as “a signal coming from the hero's destiny to turn his spiritual center from within the obscurity to a zone unknown” (Campbell, 1968, p. 75). In *Harry Potter* series, the unknown zone refers to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which is completely unknown to the world where Harry lives. On his eleventh birthday, Harry receives his admission to Hogwarts. Along with Hagrid, Harry enters the wizarding world and starts his life as a wizard. His decision of entering Hogwarts marks the hero's response to the call for adventure, opening his trial as the zone unknown. Like the Belly of the Whale, Hogwarts is filled with both treasure and danger. Harry starts his exciting journey as a wizard in Hogwarts. Being the boy who survived, Harry carries responsibilities and pressures heavier than his peers. His suffering starts when Voldemort killed his parents, extends as he grows up in the muggle's world, and continues in his days in the wizarding world. Every year in school, he has to face uncountable challenges, any of which is life-costing. Harry goes forth of his own volition to accomplish his adventure, but he would never make it without the benefit and guidance of his teachers and friends, or supernatural aid (Campbell, 1968, p. 63), another important element in the hero's journey, which is at first from his mother Lily and the schoolmaster of Hogwarts, Dumbledore. Lily saves her son's life at the cost of her own, leaving him the supernatural power of love while Dumbledore guides and encourages Harry to go forward. Such supernatural aid represents the protecting power of destiny, a promise that the peace of Paradise is not to be lost (Campbell, 1968, p. 66). When the hero responds to the call for adventure and follows courageously as the adventures unfold, he would always find the aid standing on his side.

Once he accepts the adventure's announcement and meets with the supernatural aid, the hero would step into the second process of his adventure. He would face “a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. In myth-adventure, this is the crucial part for it has pictured a place of miraculous challenges and ordeals” (Campbell, 1968, p. 89). In *Harry Potter* series, Harry has also gone through countless trials each year in Hogwarts—finding the sorcerer's stone, defeating the giant snake in the

secret chamber, finding the truth about his parents' death, winning the Triwizard Tournament, facing Lord Voldemort and destroying all the Horcruxes—including himself. Harry has to realize that he is the last Horcrux created by accident—Lily's protection splits Voldemort's soul into pieces, and one of them enters Harry's body. To kill Lord Voldemort once and for all, Harry has no choice but to destroy himself, facing the instinctive fear—death, which is the ultimate theme of his adventure. In his attempt to defeat the Dark Lord, Harry has witnessed countless death and sacrifice of his comrades. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when Harry witnesses Dumbledore's death, he knows the true meaning of dying with dignity. Dumbledore's death not only shows Harry's loss of his best mentor but also shows the importance of sacrificing in the battle to defeat evil (Rowling, 2005, p. 691). Harry sees that meaningful death can save others' life, choosing to sacrifice himself in the meeting with Voldemort. He's hit by Voldemort's killing curse, which destroys the fragment of Voldemort's soul hidden inside him. "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" (Frye, 1990, p. 83). Instead of dying, Harry enters the world between life and death, continuing his trial in another space.

Entering the unknown zone is a theme frequently appeared in heroic legends. In heroic legends, the world is portrayed as a leviathan, a giant sea-monster while humans are denizens of his belly. Northrop Fryer concludes the hero's adventure in leviathan: The hero enters the center of the leviathan, kills it, and free the denizens. The leviathan "represents both the fallen world and the life-giving sea; if he represents death, and the hero has to enter his body of death, the hero has to die. And if the hero's adventure is completed, then the resurrection of the hero awaits" (Campbell, 1990, p. 190). Fryer believes that romance is a threefold structure, containing death, disappearance, and revival (1990, p. 270). For Harry, his defeating Voldemort in the final book of the series is exactly a modern romance. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, after witnessing Dumbledore's death, the young wizard sets off on a mission with his closest friends of finding and destroying Horcruxes (Rowling, 2007, p. 187). He is approaching the center of the chaos, the belly of leviathan. To defeat the Dark Lord once and for all, Harry chooses to sacrifice himself and disappears into the midway between life and death. The courageous wizard finally makes his revival, nevertheless facing all the pain and fear of losing his loved ones. His choice indicates the ultimate awakening of his fate and mission. After seventeen years, the boy who once lived in loneliness and lowness finally grows into an independent and strong-minded man. His initiation stage shows not only the hero's defeating the evil, but also his getting rid of the shadow inside him by breaking the soul part of Voldemort.

The initiation stage is the climax of the hero's story, exhibiting his taking advantage of the shadow archetype both inside and outside. Internally, Harry grows with part of Voldemort's soul inside him, making him share some of the unusual abilities of the Dark Lord, even part of his mind. Then several similarities are found between him and the Dark Lord, making Harry fearful about knowing his ego. However, accepting the ego means one should accept those flaws instead of escaping from them, realizing that the good and the bad make the whole of oneself. When Harry realizes the origin of his unusual talent is the power-transition of Voldemort's unsuccessful killing curse, he accepts his ability and makes use of it. Externally, the shadow archetypes in *Harry Potter* series carry dual influence on Harry during his trials in becoming a hero: Voldemort tries with every effort in eliminating Harry, persecuting and slaughtering anyone close to him. Harry grows under the pain, growing from

it and finally managing to defeat the Dark Lord. In the process of Harry's growth, Voldemort stimulates the hero's fighting will from the other side

### III. Hero's Return—Freedom to Live

In the archetypal journey of the hero, once the hero has "handed his life over to destiny and let go of earlier fears" (Boll, 2011, p. 99), he is ready for his "final meeting with his antagonist as he enters the stage of climax and catharsis" (Jung, 1959, p. 116). Therefore, he enters the unknown zone and returns from the death-like land, carrying with him the knowledge that will ensure his victory. At the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, with great courage and the resolution in defeating Lord Voldemort, Harry returns to Hogwarts, stepping into the last phase of the hero's journey, "return". All the previous steps now serve to prepare and complete the person for this stage (Rahman, 2014, p. 50). In the final fight between Harry and Voldemort, the Dark Lord is killed by his curse rebounded. Harry Potter brings the possibility of peace to the wizarding world, finishes his mission as a hero, and rejoins the wizarding world as an Auror, the dark-wizard hunter.

What the hero gains from his return is "freedom to live", the nature and function of the ultimate boon (Campbell, 1968, p. 210). It is exactly the very reason for the hero's journey. The hero has successfully won for himself a world filled with positive values. Here's what Simpson and Coombes (2001) illustrate the hero's gaining the freedom to live:

The world is now my oyster. I know that what I have set my sights on can be accomplished and I am surrounded by positive values. The learning strategies the lecturers introduced us to were wonderful and are working well in other parts of my life. The understanding I gained about myself from the reflective sessions will lead me into my future with renewed confidence. (Simpson & Coombes, 2001, pp. 164-177)

The freedom to live carries two characteristics: Being acknowledged by the world as a vehicle of cosmic change and living in the known world without anxiety (Palumbo, 2014, p. 174). After the battle, Harry is eventually transformed into a new state, emerging from battle as a hero and a stronger person. As a reward, Harry attains the freedom to live because he can now continue his life in the wizarding world with his loved ones. He gains his happiness by setting up a family. In the final book's epilogue, Harry marries Ginny and becomes the father of three children. Moreover, he has earned the freedom to live because the wizarding world acknowledges him as the savior of his time, which proves that Harry is the vehicle of cosmic change, a hero that brings the ultimate boon to the world. With the wizarding world existing in peace, the hero lives happily ever after with his family and friends.

The return stage marks the victory of the hero's final battle with the shadow archetype as well as the completion of his self. He returns from the land between life and death. He will have grown as a person, learned many things, faced many terrible dangers and even death but now looks forward to the start of a new life. Upon reaching the final stage, Harry has accomplished his resurrection and brought with him the elixir of his journey—the key to defeating the Dark Lord. He becomes the Savior who brings peace and fresh hope to the wizarding world. It is also at the return stage that he achieved his self-completion.

Whether the shadow becomes one's enemy or friend depends on one's attitude towards it. The proper relationship between self and the shadow brings the person with a wider field of consciousness as well as innovation and vitality. The stage of getting along with one's own shadow can be seen as the shadow integration,

which leads to greater integrity of one's self. However, just as Feng Yaoxian describes, "the integration of self and shadow is realized in constant conflicts", while "the self-completion is realized after the final confrontation with the shadow" (2012, p. 317). At the return stage, the completion of Harry's identity is completed from two perspectives: On the one hand, Harry has already accepted his similarities with the Dark Lord. He has faced up to his shadow, thus embracing his ego as a whole. The meeting with the shadow inside Harry has made him grow from a fearful kid who questions his true identity to a hero that treats the shadow inside him properly, thus empowering him to fight for justice, even at the cost of his life; on the other hand, in the final combat with the shadow archetype, the hero has won the fight and achieved the completeness of his soul once again with Voldemort's soul part destroyed by his curse. Therefore, in the return stage, the hero manages to complete his self, based on the hero's adventures.

### Conclusion

From the analysis above, it is concluded that Harry behaves as an archetypal hero who achieves his self-completion through three stages of heroic traits: Departure, initiation, and return. Harry reacts to the call for adventure, overcomes countless trials with courage and determination, forgoes his own life for the greater good, defeating Voldemort and becoming the defender of justice. In the process of his road of trials, he has managed to complete his ego and has gradually grown from a miserable little boy into a hero. Meanwhile, during the course of Harry's transcendence, the shadow archetype also shows a significant influence on the heroic archetype: Voldemort makes the hero grow in pain, and thus acts as a driving force from the opposite side. Harry's defeating Voldemort marks his victory over the negative influence of the shadow archetype, thus symbolizing the achievement of his self-completion.

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