

Harry Potter & The Power of Love

Love is defined in the dictionary as “a deep, powerful, and indescribable emotion of attachment to, and affection for, another being or beings.” J.K. Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* novels, has become quite the reputable writer through the creation of a series that has attained a level of popularity, which facetiously rivals that of the Bible. The manner in which she presents the typical theme of good versus evil, through well thought out plot progression and powerful dialogue between characters, has led to a rather strong cult fan base. It is no mystery why each book is alluring. She skillfully captivates readers by incorporating positive morals and values with spellbinding action, which provokes emotional investment. This investment cannot be avoided by anyone who has found him or herself dedicated to the progression of the story. It is, in fact, the strong theme of *love* that sets the tone and direction of the series from the start.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone begins with Lord Voldemort, an evil wizard who craves nothing more than bragging rights as the most powerful sorcerer, traveling to the home of Lily and James Potter with the intention of killing their son while he is just a baby because of a prophecy. It revealed that Voldemort was fated to suffer defeat at the hands of Harry due to not knowing the power that this boy possessed. This leads him to believe that he needed to kill this newborn in order to fulfill the prophecy and eliminate the possibility of his defeat. However, Harry's mother used the oldest and strongest branch of magic known to the wizarding world that had the ability to withstand the lethal Avada Kedavra curse to protect him: love. By making the ultimate sacrifice of giving her life to save his, he survived this infamous curse and, thus, became known as the Boy Who Lived. The most astounding part of his survival was that no one had ever been subjected to the killing curse and lived to talk about it. Ironically, Harry Potter walked away that day with not only his life, but also a scratch on his forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt for protection against Voldemort if he ever returned.

The power of love is a recurring theme throughout the series that is exhibited in the strong bonds that are formed between characters and their actions that ensue because of these relationships. The bond between Harry, Ron, and Hermione is the foundation on which his will to fight back is built. He, being the only child of his deceased parents Lily and James, desired nothing more than to fill that void that had existed in his life since the day his parents were taken from him. Therefore, his friendship with them meant exceedingly more to him than that of a typical young wizard at Hogwarts because when the term had ended he had the unfortunate luck of returning to #4 Privet Drive, the home of the insensitive relatives, the Dursleys, whom agreed to take him in after the incident.

Still, with the lack of affection that he was shown while staying there, the bullying he put up with at Hogwarts, the sadness from not having his parents, and the fact that he had Voldemort and his followers trying to kill him, he did not let any of that taint his heart nor soul. Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster at Hogwarts, said it best when he explained to Harry, "You are protected, in short, by your ability to love! The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's! In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart, as pure as you were five years ago, when you looked into a mirror that reflected your heart's desire. Harry, do you have any idea how few wizards could see what you saw in that mirror?" (*Harry Potter & the Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling, Ch. 23, pg. 154). The fact is, what he saw in the mirror of Erised, a mirror that reveals the deepest and most desperate desire of one's heart, was his parents standing on either side of him smiling. This image, both visually and symbolically, meant that no matter the anger or frustration he felt in response to countless attempts on his life he still remained

sincere at heart with his one wish to have his parents back. Even after feeling tempted to use dark magic, he never lost touch of the truth that exists within him. The nest that Rowling creates for Harry to grow and remain motivated to fight against evil is established through the caring mentorship of Dumbledore, the hope restored within every witch and wizard after Voldemort disappeared, and of course, the aid of his closest friends.

The epitome of the strength of love is seen most clearly in the last book when the reader discovers that Severus Snape, a mean-spirited professor at Hogwarts whom up until this point is just excessively hard on Harry, was in love with Lily Potter and made a deal with Dumbledore out of his steadfast love for her. He implored the headmaster to hide the Potters in order to keep them safe from Voldemort and, in return, became one of Dumbledore's most trusted aides. In turn, he committed to ensuring that no one from either side, good or evil, found out that he was only appearing to do Voldemort's bidding while all along protecting Harry. The buildup to this unexpected discovery, which is only revealed in the last two hundred pages of the book, is easily the biggest twist of the whole series. Rowling intentionally created and presented Snape in a way that convinced readers he did not have Harry's best interest at heart. There were many who wanted to believe that Snape was not all bad, but his actions tended to say otherwise. There was never an indication from him that he had so much as an ounce of sensitivity rendering him capable of loving another human being as much as he did Lily Potter. Snape kept his word about ensuring the safety of her son until dying at the hands of Voldemort because his feelings for her were just that strong. Love blatantly became the one emotion motivating characters to go so far as to give their own lives to save the many that might be affected otherwise. This is further confirmed when Harry finally revealed himself to Voldemort during the Battle of Hogwarts after the lives of his closest and dearest friends have been claimed. Though, this is only after Voldemort temporarily called his forces off to publicly remind Harry that the lives that have been lost are because he has refused to face him himself. Tired from fighting and saddened by the friends he has lost, he confronted him in the Forbidden Forest and allowed him to use the killing curse on him in order to finally put an end to the war. This sacrifice is not in vain as Harry found himself in a peculiar place seemingly in-between life and death talking to a since then passed on Dumbledore who states,

“That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing. Nothing. That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.... If he could only have understood the precise and terrible power of that sacrifice, he would not, perhaps, have dared to touch your blood... But then, if he had been able to understand, he could not be Lord Voldemort, and might never have murdered at all... Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all those who live without love.”(*Harry Potter & The Deathly Hallows*, Rowling, Ch. 35,pg.710-22)

This final conclusive explanation singlehandedly explained the reason Harry survived that day as well as why Voldemort was never successful at killing him.

However, the argument that dark magic, commonly referred to as the Dark Arts, is stronger than love was made on a consistent basis throughout the series as well. Readers are exposed to a world of dark magic that was unbeknown to many in the wizarding world. Rowling's descriptions of the spells, charms, and incantations that Voldemort alone is capable of conjuring painted a vivid picture of the evil that feeds dark magic. The imagery is so amazing that the extent of dark magic seamlessly rivaled that of conventional, legal magic. He went so far as to declare that there is no real distinction between good and evil; instead, it is the quest for power that the weak are not able to bear. This attitude made it painfully clear that he thirsted for the dangerously powerful magic that blurred the line between what is seemingly good and evil. He intended to do that which must be

done in order to proclaim himself the greatest sorcerer in the world. In his mind, there was plenty of other magic for him to be concerned about than some incantation powered by love. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, while Harry was held defenseless by a bewitched statue, Voldemort openly admitted that he lost his powers to love and, in turn, Harry was provided with the ultimate protection of not being able to be touched by him. He made a point to mock the scar upon Harry's forehead that had kept him from being able to touch him for so long because the use of dark magic and Harry's blood allowed for him to regain his physical form. This indeed meant that the magical barrier that was preventing him from touching Harry had been rendered useless because the same blood that ran through Harry's veins then ran through his as well. However, this same love that protected Harry through his mother's blood became the source of his vitality. Harry's survival proved that love was powerful, but the return of the Dark Lord (Voldemort) and his Death Eater regime honestly questioned its capacity to overcome such evil. Harry had assistance from friends and fellow wizards out of love and loyalty whereas Voldemort received help from many different magical beings out of the fear he provoked within the wizarding community and conniving deals he made. His reputation most certainly preceded him and did not truly serve as an accurate representation of who he was as a merciless wizard. He was very strategic in his approach to gaining the information he needed to achieve what had been deemed impossible by many: immortality. As a student at Hogwarts, he coaxed the professor who taught Potions, Horace Slughorn, to tell him about Horcruxes and their ability to make someone virtually immortal. Slughorn informed the young Tom Riddle, Voldemort's real name, that one had to split their soul and hide it in an object outside of the body, so that if attacked or destroyed they will not die because part of their soul remains earthbound and undamaged. Though only after he asked the key question of how to go about splitting one's soul did Slughorn go on to explain a certain piece of information that launched Voldemort's desire to kill. He elaborated that committing the ultimate act of evil, that being murder, rips the soul apart and makes it advantageous to encase the torn portion in an object. This told Voldemort exactly what he had to do in order to become immortal. And so, he began his tirade and, in turn, began splitting his soul into seven pieces, via seven different Horcruxes that were all protected by the darkest of magic, to ensure that he was unstoppable.

Voldemort did not completely die even after being hit by his own killing curse when it backfired on him. He was stripped of his physical form and for years was nothing more than a weak entity inhabiting snakes to hang on to his existence. In any case, he was still alive! This alone is alarming enough to cause readers to begin to second-guess the power of love that Rowling so beautifully illustrates through the touching friendships, sacrifices, and wizards who were willing to fight for Harry. No one believed Harry when he declared that Voldemort had returned because it sounded absurd especially since years had past without any sign of him at all. Therefore, his return almost attested that he was the greatest sorcerer of all time because it was as if the events that ensued sought readers to beg the question, "Was Harry Potter *really* going to die?" When the two wizards faced one another for the final time at the end of the last book, Voldemort still mocked love as the force being used to defeat him. He chastised Dumbledore's belief in this heartfelt emotion because, even with all the wisdom and skill he possessed, he was not able to conquer death himself. This added to the confidence he had in his ability to kill Harry despite the many unsuccessful attempts by his followers and, not to mention, him as well. This firm belief rouses deep hatred for him among readers because this exemplified his ruthlessness and absolute inability to love. However, it was an act of faith continuing to believe that Harry was indeed going to conquer this great evil through remaining pure at heart and compassionate in his actions because dark magic is depicted as being so dangerously powerful.

The power of love prevailed over evil because it is one of the hardest and strongest kinds of magic that can be used in wizardry. It is also easily the most mysterious because Harry's survival of

the killing curse was the first documented case. This is why it was nearly impossible for Voldemort to believe that he might be beaten. Dumbledore reminded Harry, "Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. (...) It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good." (*Harry Potter & The Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling, Ch. 13, p. 216) This is confirmation of the argument that Rowling makes through her writing that love has a profound effect on magic. Lily Potter's love for her son made her willing to die for him, and because of that sacrifice Harry was protected from the most powerful dark magic of all. Love was the only protection against the lure and power of the Dark Arts because of its need to be fueled by hateful emotions. What Voldemort did not have that Harry did was love in his heart. When he split his soul into seven pieces he destroyed what ounce of human compassion he might have truly had. The act of murdering several people without any feeling any remorse made him cold, heartless, and incapable of ever fathoming love. Furthermore, Harry discovered that his own capacity to love unconditionally was not a weakness but rather a strength. It is true that love sometimes demands hardship, but it is this very emotion that supplied Harry with the motivation, courage, and allies to fight evil. Loving relationships contributed profoundly to his understanding of life's true value. And for someone like Voldemort, who is full of hate, to understand love's complete magical properties was impossible because he never knew such a thing even once in his entire life. Therefore, Harry Potter emerged as victorious in his battle against the Dark Lord, Voldemort, because love gave him, an individual who had been saved by it, the power to defeat the greatest evil of all.