

HARRY POTTER'S QUEST IN THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

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Harry Potter began his education at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the first of seven projected novels: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. In that first novel, Harry was on a quest to find the Philosopher's Stone, which turns base metal into gold and produces an elixir of immortality. But his real quest in that novel, as in the succeeding books of the series, is for self-knowledge. In the second book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry continues his education and his quest for self-knowledge during his second year at Hogwarts.

In his second year, Harry learns, among other things, about the three marks of existence that the Buddha taught, namely (1) that life involves suffering, (2) that we have no enduring separate self, and (3) that everything is constantly changing or transforming. Indeed, transformation is the key theme of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

Harry has returned to Hogwarts School after the summer vacation only to discover that something is very much amiss. Daubed on a wall of the school are the words 'THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE'. The 'heir' is a descendant of Salazar Slytherin, one of the four founding Wizards of Hogwarts, the only one who believed that none but pure-blooded Wizards should be admitted as students. To ensure the eventual implementation of his belief, he created a secret chamber deep underground, a chamber that only his true heir, a descendant who shared his belief, could open. And in that secret chamber was concealed a secret monster - a Basilisk, which is a serpent whose look either kills or petrifies.

Harry's Second Quest

Harry's quest in the second book is to identify Salazar Slytherin's heir, to find the Chamber of Secrets, and to kill the killer Basilisk. All three of these - the heir, the Chamber, and the Basilisk - have symbolic meaning. Slytherin's heir is Carl Jung's Shadow archetype or Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Dweller on the Threshold. He is that aspect of ourselves, of our own past, that we must overcome when we enter the Path. The deep underground Chamber of Secrets is that part of our psyche housing our repressed urges, the skandhas that drag us down and backward. And the Basilisk, which kills and petrifies, is a negative energy opposing the upward thrust of life and evolution, or it is the separate and separative mind, the great slayer of the Real (as The Voice of the Silence calls it).

Everything represented by those three - the heir, the chamber, and the Basilisk - must be transformed if we are to continue on the Path of Self-discovery, the Path of Evolution. To transform those three and progress, Harry Potter learns about the Buddha's three marks of existence.

The Buddha's Three Marks of Existence

The first of those marks is that life involves pain or frustration. Harry experiences frustration throughout the novel, beginning with his misery during his summer vacation at the house of his Muggle relatives, where he was mistreated and isolated in every way - not even receiving letters from his school friends, because the house-elf Dobby was intercepting his mail (for what he thought was Harry's own good). From that point onward, the novel is a catalog of Harry's other frustrations and pains. Dobby's further efforts to protect Harry get him in trouble with his relatives, with the Wizard government, with the school authorities, and finally cause him to be battered by a rogue Bludger during a Quidditch game and to have the bones of his arm shattered. Harry has to suffer the unwelcome attention and unwanted patronage of Gilderoy Lockhart, a pseudo wizard. He is battered by the Whomping Willow tree when the car he and Ron are driving rams into it. He misses the delights of a Halloween party at Hogwarts and has to endure instead the tedium of a Deathday party for the ghost of Nearly Headless Nick. He is the victim of foul play and dirty tricks at a dueling club meeting. He has to endure the suspicion and dislike of most of his fellow students at Hogwarts, who believe he is the Heir of Slytherin. He is captured by Aragog, a giant spider, who wants to feed Harry to his brood of spider children. He has to battle the Basilisk without looking at it, because its look is death. And he has to overcome Tom Riddle, the deadly spirit of Voldemort as a boy. Those are only some of the frustrations and pains that Harry learns are inevitable in life because they are essential elements in the plot of life.

The second of the Buddha's marks of existence is the fact that there is no stable 'I' inside us. Harry learns about this mark particularly in his dealings with Tom Marvolo Riddle, who is the Heir of Slytherin and who was a student at Hogwarts fifty years earlier but grew up to be Lord Voldemort, the embodiment of evil forces. Harry has something of Voldemort or Tom Riddle in him. That theme continues in future novels, for in the fourth book of the series, something of Harry is absorbed by Voldemort, allowing the evil Wizard to achieve embodiment again. And when Harry first came to Hogwarts, the Sorting Hat (which assigns new students to their houses) wanted to put Harry into Slytherin House - which was the house of Tom Riddle or Voldemort. Harry does not know who or what he is.

At the center of his being, where the sense of 'I' should reside, there is a question mark. Harry is on a quest for self-discovery, and what he must discover is that there is no separate self to discover. There is only One Self in all of us, whether we are Harry Potter or the riddling Voldemort.

The third of the Buddha's marks of existence is that everything is ever changing - the theme of this novel, which is that all things transform. The novel has many examples of transformation, from the trivial to the momentous.

Transformation - Theme of This Novel

1. At the beginning of Harry's second year at school, he and his friend Ron miss the train to Hogwarts, and so travel there instead in a Muggle car, a Ford Anglia, that has been enchanted by Ron's father so that it can fly. The car has been transformed by magic. Thus Harry's new school year begins with the aid of a transformation.
2. Dobby is a house-elf in the service of the cruel and wicked Lucius Malfoy. House-elves are perpetually indentured servants, whose only reason for existing is to serve their masters. They wear pillowcases for clothing and can be freed only if the master gives them an article of proper clothing. Dobby is devoted to Harry because the infant Harry's defeat of the wicked Wizard Voldemort made life better for all innocent creatures in the world. Dobby therefore wants to protect Harry from harm and nearly kills him in the process, but finally Harry manages to free Dobby by tricking the house-elf's master into tossing away an old sock, which Dobby catches, thereby being transformed from a slave into a free elf.
3. Before the identity of the Heir of Slytherin becomes known, Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione form a plan to test their theory that the heir is Draco Malfoy, the son of Lucius (Dobby's cruel master). The plan, devised by the clever Hermione, is to concoct a Polyjuice Potion, which will transform whoever drinks it into the appearance of a different person. Harry and Ron are to transform into two of Draco's henchmen, Crabbe and Goyle, and thereby discover whether Draco is Slytherin's heir. They do so transform and discover that Draco is not the Heir of Slytherin. Poor Hermione, however, makes a mistake and transforms into a mixed shape of a human girl and a cat and has to be untransformed in the school's infirmary.
4. The letters of the name 'Tom Marvolo Riddle', the true Heir of Slytherin are reordered into an anagram: 'I am Lord Voldemort'. Thus the two names are transformations of each other. And more significantly, the school boy Tom Riddle transforms into the archevil Wizard Voldemort.
5. The Basilisk, which is hidden in the Chamber of Secrets, is a symbol of negative transformation because it kills or petrifies its victim; that is, the evil serpent transforms its victim into a lifeless state. The Basilisk is thus an appropriate agent of Voldemort, whose French name (vol de mort) means 'flight of death'. The Basilisk, however, is contrasted with another fabulous creature of opposite symbolism - the Phoenix.
6. Harry in his battle against the Basilisk is assisted by a Phoenix, which is a symbol of positive transformation. The Phoenix is a bird that lives a very long time, but when the end of its life approaches, the Phoenix does not die. Instead, the bird bursts into flames, which consume its body. From the ashes arises a new baby Phoenix - the old bird reborn. The Phoenix is thus a symbol of death and resurrection, of regeneration, or of transformation into a new life.
7. The climactic transformation in the book, however, is one that actually occurred long before its story began, indeed even before the first book, but which we learn about only near the end of the second novel. When Harry is in the Chamber of Secrets, the specter of Tom Riddle speaks with him and comments: 'there are strange likenesses between us, Harry Potter.... Both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths [Wizards who can talk with serpents] to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike'. The similarities between Tom Riddle and Harry Potter are due to an early exchange between Voldemort (Tom Riddle grown up) and the infant Harry. When Voldemort tried to kill Harry as a baby, he failed because of the shield of love with which Harry's mother had surrounded her

son. Instead, Voldemort's magic curse was reflected back on him, destroying his body and limiting his powers. In the process, some of Voldemort's powers passed over into Harry's infant body. Those powers, in being transferred from Voldemort to Harry, caused Harry to become in some sense a transformation of Voldemort, good transformed out of evil.

'Tom Riddle' is appropriate as Voldemort's real name. For he, as well as his name, is a riddle-like evil itself. Some evil appears to be consciously and deliberately so, but how that can be is a riddle - the riddle of evil. This riddle has obsessed human beings from ancient times. It is the subject of the biblical Book of Job, of John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, of C. S. Lewis's book *The Problem of Pain*. The riddle, briefly, is how evil can exist in a world created by a good God or according to a divine Plan. The riddle of evil seems to be a major theme of the whole Harry Potter series. In addition, the name 'Tom' is short for 'Thomas', and the name 'Thomas' means 'a twin'. Tom Riddle or Voldemort and Harry Potter are twins, as Tom's comment about their likeness suggests. They are twins as transformations of each other, the one evil and the other good. In that, they are parallel to the Basilisk and the Phoenix, another pair of twins, also representing the transformations of death and life, involution and evolution.

All the transformations in the novel are, however, only little examples of the greatest transformation of all. The greatest transformation is that of the One Self, which transforms itself into the multitudinous creation - into Harry, Voldemort, you, me, and everything. But it does not stop there. For the multitudinous creation - Harry, Voldemort, you, me, and everything - is in the process of transforming itself back into the One Self. And that is the ultimate Secret in the Chamber of our hearts.

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