

Mythmaking In Modern Literature: Harry Potter by J.K. Rolling

Saman Dizayi¹, and Belgin Bağlılar²

¹ Department of Translation Techniques, Erbil Administration Institute, Erbil Polytechnic University, Iraq

² Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Up to date myths are regarded as universal and enduring for their depicting human's understanding and knowledge. It presents clues and intimations to Man's origins of belief and life. Harry Potter, a series of storytelling written by J.K. Rolling, is a metaphoric presentation of myths and cultural background behind each one of them. This study investigates and explores how J.K. Rolling involves in origins of cultural textually while sharing mythological ideas in modern literature as a creative way to give new senses to each of them. With its unique demonstration, Harry Potter places an outstanding position in giving myth a new dimension and ties ancient with present via a new style of mythmaking in modern literature. The study conducts an analytic explanation of the importance of mythmaking to literature in general and specifically in Harry Potter. The findings that the study arrives at are that myths are true replications of cultures and societies, and Rolling's stories make new connection with the depth of human superficiality as well as it renders the possibility to revive mythological mentality in modern era.

1. Introduction

Mythmaking is the act of creating myths from the past times to demonstrate the natural events, rationalise spiritual theories, and social beliefs and customs. The term myth is originated from the Greek word mythos that refers to a story. Similar to the stories, the characters of the myths experience several events. The myth can be defined as the symbolic tales of the primordial times that revolves around the creation of the universe, known as cosmology and cosmogony (Childs, 2016). These tales can belong to either the human world or other worlds of super-human, heroic, or inhuman characters. Such tales may be associated with the rituals and beliefs of the people in the past and considered as their social values and traditions (Gikandi, 2018).

William Bascom in his article 'The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives' had defined myth at the classic level as the tales that are believed to be true and sacred in the distant past. According to Gregory Schrempp, myth is referred to as the vivid stories that articulate human origination and the cosmos (Schrempp, 2018). In the modern world, everyone is driving towards science, technology, and understanding the scientific reasons behind the happenings. All the individuals

* Corresponding author E-mail address: saman.dizayi@epu.edu.iq

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are on the paths towards success and power. This results in forgetting the actual reality of life and losing the culture and value regarding spirituality (Seymour-Smith, 2017).

The authors and storytellers of the modern world had realised this change in the life of the people and integrate the concept of myths and mythology in their literature to signify and structure the existing pieces of reality (Meehan, 2017). One of the well-known examples of such literature is the novel series of Harry Potter that contains several myths and legends. Whilst some of the references to such myths are very subtle, there are still many myths that are very obvious to the readers such as dragons, witches, etc. The purpose of this article is to highlight the use of mythmaking in the creation of the Harry Potter series (Johnson, 2017). The methodology used in paper is the Qualitative analysis to collect the appropriate information and relevance data .

2. Use of Myth in Modern Literature

During mythmaking, the author may create non-human characters such as supernatural beings, goddesses, etc. Myths may have the setting of the proto-world which is somewhat different from the real world (Johnson, 2017). The plot of the myth might be based on the interplay between the real world and proto-world or the previous world. Myths are based on the mystery of the unknown happening in the world. The concept of myth is to find the answers about ontological questions such as 'Why are we here?', 'Who are we?', or 'What is our purpose?' etc. Myths are the reflection of dualities of nature in the world such as light/dark and good/bad (Groves, 2017).

The integration of myth in the modern literature revolves around the main purpose of highlighting the classical tales of the past. Myth is considered as the main symbolic and significant values as it is the reflection of summarised experiences and the emotions that are connected with these experiences (Reeves, 2017). TS Eliot is known as the most well-known literature writer of the modern world. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot had shown a plethora of myths and mythical methods to emphasise the experiences and emotions related to fertility loss and deaths (Brown, 2016).

The myth of Fischer King is influenced by *The Golden Bough* and *from Ritual to Romance* that was written by JG Frazer and Jessie Weston respectively. The focus of Frazer and Weston were to use ancient fertility concepts to resolve the conflicts of modern perspectives and religious beliefs (White, 2015). Another example of myth in modern literature is the creation of mythical Odysseus in *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Leopold Bloom which is considered as the modern literature of the age narrates the existence of Odysseus in a sardonic heroic manner (Gikandi, 2018). A well-known poet WB Yeats, had made astrology, occult, and historical mythology that include the Great Wheel and the Gyres, the Phases of the Moon, etc. Through these myths, Yeats formed the lyrics of his extraordinary poems such as *Byzantium* and *The Second Coming* (Reeves, 2017). Also, well-known modern literature for children, *Harry Potter*, is filled with Greek and Latin culture and myths of the past age such as dragons, Padfoot, and the spells which are derived from Latin roots (Allen, 2016).

3. Mythmaking in Modern Literature: Harry Potter

In modern literature, mythmaking plays an important part in various aspects. Mythmaking or mythology reminds the people about their heritage and past cultures and traditions. Mythmaking serves as a foundation for recognising religious practices and beliefs. The concept of good and bad is the part of every religion and beliefs in both the ancient and modern world. Myths are usually based on the duality of nature and the war between good and evil or dark

and light. These myths portray the events of an individual's life and the difficulties that the character has to face whilst determining choosing between good and evil. The experiences reflect on the personal morals and values that shape the individual and help in winning the battle against the evil (Reeves, 2017). Due to Joseph Campbell, myths stipulate direction, instructing younger generation concerning their personal being and offer models for their life. Nevertheless, 'the models must be appropriate to the time in which they are living' (Campbell, 11) Thus, this paper follows the mythological, anthropological background of Harry Potter series as a literary text and interprets the linkage between them and modern life, since the struggle of good and bad still one of the obvious human aspects.

Even in the Harry Potter series, Harry had to go through struggles and got hurt to defeat the evil Voldemort. However, he was able to do so because of his good heart, selfless nature, and caring personality. Integration of myths in modern literature provides a lesson that with determination, hard work, and good morals, one can achieve anything in life (Johnson, 2017). These values and beliefs help the individual in staying firm in failure and continuing the hard work for the accomplishment of goals. Another example is Saint George and the Dragon in which George needed virtues and morals to defeat the dragon who was the evil based on Christian representation. This story was derived from the Faerie Queene which was written by Sir Edmund Spenser (Allen, 2016).

Harry Potter is the novel series of the fantasy genre, written by J.K. Rowling, which narrates the life story of the boy named Harry Potter and his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger who are the students at the magical school known as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The series is considered as the most read books besides the Bible (Groves, 2017). The author had used many mythical creatures in her books such as witch, wizards, ghosts, and werewolves, shaggy dogs, giants, dragons and vampires. With the progression of the series, J.K. Rowling had drawn the events and experiences that an individual face in reality and integrates a magical twist in it to capture young minds. It is considered that the novel is based on Greek, Latin, and Roman mythology (White, 2015). The main character of the novel, Harry, was born on 31st July 1980. This date in Christianity is used for Celtic Zodiac which is a Holly sign. It is suggested that people with this sign are born leaders, daring, and most importantly possess caring nature. These traits are clearly expressed in Harry's personality throughout the series. Also, there was a clear link of this Celtic Sign with the character which is revealed when the wandmaker tells Harry that his wand was made of a special wood which is 'holly' (Meehan, 2017).

There was a character of a man named Sirius Black who could transform into a black dog which was his Animagus. Sirius is also the godfather of Harry and played the role of his protector in the novel before he was killed whilst saving Harry and his friends. In Britain, several legends are linked with the myths of magical black dogs. According to these legends, these dogs watch churchyards and may appear magically beside people who are walking alone to protect them in their journey (Johnson, 2017). In one of the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, there was an event where a potion was brewed in the cauldron to restore Voldemort's body. This potion required the flesh of a willing servant, blood is drawn from the enemy forcefully, and the father's bone. This event of restoration potion was similar to the Greek mythology of Medea. Medea was a sorceress who made powerful potion because of her magic. She had succeeded in resurrecting (restoring) a human that she had brewed in her 'cauldron' similar to the restoration event (Moosavinia, 2018). Centaurs are one of the focused creatures in the novel who are known for their fine divination skills. These centaurs are represented as half man and half horse figure with bows. In astrology, the Zodiac sign, Sagittarius is derived from a constellation. These Sagittarius constellations are also represented similar to the centaur in the

astrology with pulling back a bow as well. This is the most visible link that the author made with the astrological myth (Childs, 2016).

The characters of Death Eaters had played a major role in this novel series also and are recognised by their famous Dark Mark which was permanently given them by Voldemort. This event was inspired by the Middle Age Superstition related to the devil mark. According to the legends, the followers of the devil are marked by a dark sign as a pact between them and the devil. This myth is the Voldemort's version of Dark Mark which is the devil or evil character in the series (Seymour-Smith, 2017). Hermione Granger is well-loved amongst the teens for her intelligence and wit. The character is derived from Greek mythology named as Hermes. Hermes was a female messenger of Greek gods and possessed the traits such as quick-thinking, wit, the god of eloquence. Such traits were also shown in Hermione of the novel (Gikandi, 2018).

Harry and his friends used to visit a well-known ice-cream shop in the Diagon Alley which was owned by Florean Fortescue. Florean Fortescue had helped Harry in the History of Magic homework regarding witch-burning. There was a historical witch-hunter, Sir John Fortescue who had enforced British witchcraft laws 1563 to burn the witches (Brown, 2016).

One of the fascinating mythmaking in Harry Potter is the three-headed dog, Fluffy. In the first series of the novel, the dog used to guard the sacred stone which was hidden in the forbidden corridor. There are many Greek myths about the many headed dogs such as Hydra and Cerberus that guards the Underworld and devour those who try to leave. According to one myth about the Greek hero, Orpheus used music to lull the three-headed dog to sleep. In the series, Harry also used music to calm the beast to sleep (Gikandi, 2018). In the series, there is a creature who was half-horse and half-eagle named as Hippogriff. There was a legend of god Apollo which is often presented in art and has the same structure as the Hippogriff in Harry Potter (Johnson, 2017).

There are also references from the Christianity religion in the novel as the journey of Harry had shown that he willingly sacrificed himself in the Battle of the Hogwarts. Harry had represented the journey of Jesus Christ in which to save his people, he had willingly sacrificed himself. Even the famous phrase which was embedded in the tombstones of Lilly and James Potter is the verse in the Bible (Groves, 2017). Veela, the most stunning women in Harry Potter, was derived from the legends and myths of Central Europe. According to this legend, Veelas are the most beautiful young ladies but they appear to hide their real selves behind this beauty. Similarly, Harry Potter's Veela is known to turn into a nasty and horrifying creature when angered (Groves, 2017). Sybil Trelawney, the Divination Professor in the Harry Potter, was known to make predictions which nobody used to believe. It was mentioned in the novel that Sybil was descendent of the Cassandra Trelawney who was a well-known Seer of the past. Cassandra Trelawney was the legend of Greek mythology which has the gift of seeing the future (Meehan, 2017). The mandrake plants which was appeared in the second series of Harry Potter are considered to be derived from the Middle Ages. These plants which looked like human face was considered to contain human spirits by the Middle Age people. Besides, it was also believed that these plants can feel their spirits' pain, hence, they screamed in agony (Brown, 2016). The famous Philosopher's stone is the legend from Western Alchemy. The creator of the stone in Harry Potter was Nicolas Flamel. Flamel was a real legend in the history who had lived a very long life. According to many people, Flamel had revealed the secrets of alchemy which had given him the knowledge to create this stone. In Harry Potter, the stone was served for the same purpose and played a major part in the novel (Childs, 2016).

There were several stories where a special kind of mirror had been the centre of attention for the readers such as the Snow Queen. Some legends revolve around the magic of these

enchanted mirrors. According to a myth, Narcissus had wasted his life by looking at his reflection and falling in love with himself. In Harry Potter, Harry was also warned about the Mirror of Erised that men had wasted away due to this erised (Seymour-Smith, 2017). There was also a reference of Greek mythology in the novel series of Harry Potter in which one of Harry's friend, Hermione, had charmed fake galleons with Protean Charm. These galleons were used as a source of secret communication. There was a Greek myth of Proteus who was capable of transfiguring quickly to hide from the people (Reeves, 2017).

J.K. Rowling had excessively used ancient mythology in the making of the Harry Potter series. The novel is full of ancient references that are parts of the cultures and religions. The names of the spells in the magical world are originated from the Greek and Roman mythology, Greek culture, and Latin language (Childs, 2016). The spell 'Lumos' and 'Aguamenti' was derived from Latin roots 'lumen' and 'aqua' which means light and water respectively. The use of such Latin roots helps recognise the root of the Latin language and its importance in the culture. Also, the series has contributed several words that have become part of modern literature as well. For example, the word 'muggle' has now considered a part of the American Dictionary for non-magical beings (Groves, 2017). Minerva McGonagall, the Hogwarts's Professor was created from Roman mythology, Athena, who was the goddess of wisdom. McGonagall was portrayed as an intellectual and skilful personality throughout the series. This has contributed to reminding the good traits and qualities of the ancient characters in the mythology. Most of the modern literature is based on science or technology which has become a part of the fantasy world. The education of literature based on the modern world has put a hurdle in teaching classic literature. However, the Harry Potter series focus on the ancient Roman and Greek age and their history and language. This novel is a milestone that provides a gateway to classic literature through ancient mythology (Seymour-Smith, 2017).

Conclusively, though the novel is categorised for the children's literature and teen fiction, it contains real-life events but with the twist of magic. This has attracted readers of every age group and increased the importance of modern children literature as well. In the novel, the character of Harry was an alone orphan boy, however, he was able to achieve his goals due to sheer determination and the support of his friends. This signifies the importance of social relationships in life which is necessary for the absence of family. Harry Potter has won many hearts by highlighting that to find the place amongst people, relationships and personal values are necessary rather than only living for one-self. This literature is very influential for the youth in determining the right path even in odds with good morals and self-beliefs (Moosavinia, 2018). As it is explained, J.K. Rowling in Harry Potter has been utilized many universal concepts that myths carried them within various stories and themes in a way that have been accepted widely among different modern societies. Thus, Modern literature as constructs the very successful works from deriving its components from the depth of mythology, it presents them a live to surprise contemporary readers with vigorous fantasies to entertain and teach at the same time and Harry Potter is an outstanding sample.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the integration of ancient myth and legends in the literature is very necessary to recognise the value of ancient languages and cultures. This myth helps in remembering the famous ancient tales that have valuable lessons for the readers. These myths reflect different experiences and emotions that the individual encounter and highlights the importance of such experiences in life. Harry Potter series is very important literature in the modern world. This novel is the foundation of classic myths and legends which is the part of the ancient world. Harry Potter has added a plethora of ancient words and cultures in modern

literature. The novel has contributed to highlighting the importance of heritage and the beliefs that are the bridge between the past and modern world. Harry Potter has been well-known for showing the impressiveness of ancient languages and its use in modern literature. Furthermore, it contributes to giving important life lessons to the readers, besides its presentation of a modern kind of literature derived from ancient belief, fantasies and mythology.

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