



**IDENTITY AND RACISM IN
J.K.ROWLING'S
*HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS***



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Abstract :

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets by J.K.Rowling was published in London on 2 July 1998 by Bloomsbury. The book won high praise and awards from critics, young readers and the book industry. Many critics have noted that personal identity is a strong theme in the book and it addresses issues of racism through the treatment of non-magical, non-human and non-living characters. Tom Riddle's diary, which controls Ginny Weasley, is a warning about the dangers of opening of the chamber of secrets. A monster from the chamber petrifies anyone who comes in contact with it. This paper depicts parallel forms of racism directed against Muggles, half-blood and elves thus showing personal identity of Harry Potter in protecting the Hogwarts School.

Keywords : Personal Identity, Racism, Mudblood, Ominous Warning, petrify

RESEARCH PAPER :

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets is J.K.Rowling's second novel in the Harry Potter series. Though it is a world of wizards, the human weakness and continuous struggle for identity and the inhuman practices like racism that weakens the social coherence are in abundance in this novel.

Harry's second year begins with a new defense against the Dark Art teacher, Quidditch training, and the intensification of old rivalries. Harry Potter receives an ominous warning from a house-elf, Dobby that terrible things will happen if he returns to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry at the end of the summer. As mysterious words are daubed on the walls of school corridor, and series of threatening messages warn that the Chamber of Secrets has been opened and that the "heir of Slytherin" would kill all pupils who do not come from all-magical families. Harry and his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Grange investigate the attacks.

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* personal identity can be seen through tracing the failure of Lord Voldemort and the success of Harry Potter. Lord Voldemort is an evil wizard who murdered Harry's parents and was defeated by an infant Harry. Harry, who is ultimately able to forge a successful identity apart from his parents, Voldemort stunts his own identity formation growth by never fully moving beyond his parents orbit.

'Voldemort,' said Riddle softly, 'is my past, present and future, Harry Potter...'

He pulled Harry's wand from his pocket and began to trace it through the air, writing three shimmering words:

TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE;

then waved the wand once, and the letters of his name re-arranged themselves:

I AM LORD VOLDEMORT.

He whispered :

'It was a name I was already using at Hogwarts, to my most intimate friends only, of course. You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins runs the blood of Salazar Slytherin himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Harry. I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards

everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world! (231)

J.K.Rowling acknowledges that Voldemort is ‘someone who is incredibly power hungry Racist.’ Thus, Voldemort’s racism is relative to his desire for power.

Voldemort once again shows his desire to get rid of weaknesses. He himself is a half-blood, having a Muggle father and a witch mother, but he lies about this to pass himself off as pureblood. However, while still living under the name Tom Riddle, Voldemort brutally murdered his living Muggle relatives, in order to shield the fact that he is a half-blood. Perhaps, then, Voldemort’s followers are not aware of his questionable background. On the other hand, they may choose only to see the fact that he is a descendant of the great Salazar Slytherin, co-founder of Hogwarts and supporter of a pure-blood society. It is also possible that Voldemort uses the murder of his Muggle family as his way of “buying” status in a pure-blood society, viewing blood sacrifices as his payment a parallel to materialism that will be explored later. Voldemort further acknowledges the necessity of his father’s death saying ‘and I killed my father and see how useful he has relinquished his Muggle blood through their deaths’. As proof of his new status, Tom Riddle sheds his name and utilizes the pseudonym Lord Voldemort, solidifying his status among pure-blood wizards.

Anderson suggests that Voldemort immediately pushes away his identification with his parents. Voldemort’s attitude towards his “foul, common Muggle” father is extended to all muggles and amounts to racism against the non-wizarding world. In contrast, Harry throughout the novel idealizes his father, James Potter as a Patronus always protecting him. As Harry is plagued by dementors, disturbed hooded creatures that suck all happiness from a person until all that is left is person’s worst memories. The only known defense against a dementor is the Patrons charm. This charm creates a Patronus, a silvery creature that is a unique representation of the spell caster’s identity, which acts as a shield and can repel dementors protecting Harry. Elaine Ostry states that Rowling teaches a lesson that people should be judged ‘by their merits, actions and morals rather than their race.’ (49)

The word identity itself refers to continuity in a sense of self within a person and the word also refers to how that person is socially regarded. Voldemort is associated with a negative self-image and racism; Neville is associated with buying and its consequences; Hermione with gender issues and attitudes towards education; Ron

personifies questions of friendship, family and loyalty and Harry himself is mainly concerned with notions of identity, reasons and the consequences. The theme that reflects Lord Voldemort's racism is introduced more specifically when Draco Malfoy insults Hermione by calling her a Mudblood:

“No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood on spat.” (120)

The issue is not of skin color, but another form of ethnicity having to do with how many generations of magical ancestry you have. Ron explains the issue after trying to hit Malfoy with a curse that makes you belch slugs, unfortunately the spell backfired on Ron:

“Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born – You know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards-like Malfoy's family who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood.' ... dirty blood, see. Common blood. It's mad. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out.” (Rowling, 1998: 128)

There is a rank-scale of how “pure” you are with pure-blood as highest on the scale. Depending on the situation, being a half-blood is more or less considered acceptable. But the lowest on the scale, Mudblood, is not accepted at all. The only people care about this are Voldemort and his fellow Death Eaters. By only having people who are clearly identified as evil caring about purity of blood, Rowling makes sure every reader knows that racism is connected with evil. None of the characters defined as good care about others' parentage. Eccleshare makes relevant comments on the issue of this darker message in the books:

“There is a clear link, which develops throughout the series, between those who are racially prejudiced and those who are followers of Voldemort, the ‘Dark Lord’, part of whose darkness is a hatred of Muggles and those who, like himself, are of mixed blood-a hatred that is fuelled by his Muggle father's rejection of his witch mother before he was born and his subsequent upbringing in a Muggle orphanage.” (78)

J.K.Rowling acknowledges that Voldemort a power hungry Racist. Thus, Voldemort's racism is relative to his desire for power. Harry shows respect for non-human Dobby, a house elf and the ghost Nearly Headless Nick (125). Rowling explores the issue of race through a comic relief character named Nearly Headless

Nick. Nick is prohibited from joining the hoity-toity Headless Hunt by virtue of his being incompletely beheaded. Like Hermione Granger, both of whose parents are Muggles and Harry himself, whose mother, Lily, was Muggle-born, suffer the scorn of some Hogwarts classmates. Students in Slytherin, left Hogwarts sometimes after their founding because the school's other three founders, Godric Gryffindor, Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff, rejected his proposal to admit only the children of pure blood Wizarding families.

The Chambers of Secrets was opened fifty years previously by Tom Marvolo Riddle, also a "Mudblood." "Tom Marvolo Riddle" is, of course, an anagram of Lord Voldemort. Rowling neatly connects the dark theme of the Harry Potter saga with two subsequent chapters in *Harry Potter and the Chambers of Secrets*. In Chapter Seven, "Mudbloods and Murmurs", Draco Malfoy calls Hermione a "Mudblood," and Ron, whose own family is pure blood, explains to Harry why that term is a serious insult. In chapter Eight, "The Death day Party", Harry runs into Nick, who has just received his rejection from the Headless Hunt and on the same night, throws his Death day Party. Encounter words were written in blood on a wall:

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED.
ENEMIES OF HEIR, BEWARE (138).

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, examining of what makes a person who he or she is, as well as maintaining that Harry's identity is shaped by his decision rather than any aspect of his birth. There are two contrasting characters who try to conceal their true personalities. Riddle complicates Harry's struggle to understand himself by pointing out the similarities between them:

"Both half-bloods, orphans raised by Muggles, probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin." (124)

Elaine Ostry argues that Rowling uses a number of fairy tale elements to introduce radical elements but ultimately affirms the status quo. With regard to race, Elaine Ostry argues that this book raises the possibility of a pluralistic society with Harry as its champion but at the same time, Rowling suggests that Harry's heroism can ultimately be attributed to luck and status (being the son of famous parents) and not to the fact that his mother comes from a family of mixed-Muggle and magical-blood.

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