

## **CLASS AND RACIAL ALLEGORY IN J.K. ROWLING'S HARRY POTTER**

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**Abstract:** The Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, renowned for its impact on children's literature and entertainment, often conceals its profound political allegorical themes. This study delves into the intricate political allegory embedded within the series, emphasizing its reflection of enduring class and racial issues in British society. By examining the key characters, plot settings, and central themes, it becomes evident that Harry Potter is a narrative rich in political allegorical content. This is particularly manifest in the dynamics of the three distinct factions within the wizarding world. Beyond the overarching narrative, Rowling employs extensive symbolism throughout the series, further substantiating the presence of political allegory. Furthermore, the author's own life experiences, notably her involvement with Amnesty International, a human rights organization, deeply influence the political undertones of her work. This study underscores the intricate interplay of political allegory, drawing connections between Rowling's real-world activism and the fictional realm of Harry Potter.

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**Keywords:** Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, political allegory, class issues, racial themes, symbolism, Amnesty International, British society.

### **1. Introduction**

Harry Potter is a series of world-renowned children's literature written by British author J.K. Rowling, which has been widely acclaimed worldwide. There have been countless studies of Harry Potter, but perhaps because of its overly prominent children's literature and entertainment, the political allegory of Harry Potter has been relatively neglected. However, the main characters, the setting of the plot, and the central themes of Harry Potter are all strongly political allegorical, and clearly point to the long-standing class and racial issues in British society. This feature is particularly evident in the three opposing groups of the wizarding community in the Harry Potter books. A great deal of the textual detail in Harry Potter is strongly political and allegorical. This is reflected in the racial rivalry of wizards throughout the book, as well as the extensive descriptions of the ethnic backgrounds of the characters' families. In addition, Rowling's extensive use of symbolism in the writing process also makes the use of political allegory plausible and possible.

In addition to the strong political allegory in the details of the text, author Rowling's own work and life experiences as well as the political allegorical tradition of English literature also enhance the legitimacy of Harry Potter's political allegory. In her early years, Rowling worked for Amnesty International, a public interest organization that seeks to save politically persecuted people around the world, especially in totalitarian countries. Not only that, but Rowling herself cited the influence of that work experience on her writing of Harry Potter in an early interview. This is the influence of Rowling's own international political pro bono work on her work.

In addition, British literature has a long tradition of political fables, the most representative of which is George Orwell. His 1984 and Animal Farm are among the best examples of political fables in the world. Although Rowling has not explicitly stated this, it is easy to assume that Rowling, who loves literature and is widely read, may have been influenced by her native writers and their literary traditions.

Meanwhile, as Nazism was repeatedly mentioned in the Harry Potter study, Rowling took it upon herself to respond to it. "I wanted Harry to leave the world of Muggles and turn to face the exact same problem in the world of wizards. So the will to establish a hierarchy also exists in the latter world, with the addition of concepts like fanatical worship and racial purity that are obviously grossly wrong but are everywhere in the world."

The analysis of the political allegory in Harry Potter is not only conducive to the further study of the book, but also to the expansion of the boundaries of literary writing, especially children's literature, as well as to the recognition and understanding of the class and racial issues of social traditions from another perspective and the contemplation of solutions. Likewise, if there is indeed a trace of political allegory in Harry Potter, then it is not a bad way to educate children, equality and justice.

## **2. The first set of oppositions (the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters) and the political allegorical discussion of the novel's themes**

People often tease that "Harry Potter" is just a different way to fight the villain's story year after year, although this is just a joke, but it accurately points out the main plot of "Harry Potter". Harry Potter" throughout the series of seven books is indeed the main story of a Harry Potter triangle and Dumbledore as the leader of the righteous side and Voldemort led by the evil side of the Death Eaters to fight and eventually win. In literature, the main plot is always a reflection and visualization of the main idea, and "Harry Potter" is also in line with this literary tradition. The theme of Harry Potter is embedded in the struggle between good and evil.

The most common argument for the theme of Harry Potter is that love will conquer all, after all, the famous claim of Dumbledore, the head of the righteous side, is that "love can conquer all", while the evil side, the head of the Death Eaters, Voldemort, is a representative of the righteous love who refused to love and scorned love and eventually died. So the theme of "Harry Potter" is simply boiled down to the preaching of love, justice and goodness.

But the theme of the book is much more than simply preaching love, as long as the reader is willing to analyze it more deeply. The evil side, also known as the Death Eater camp, is much more than simply not believing in love, as a number of them, such as Snape, join the camp for the very reason that love is not an option. I think the Death Eaters can be used as a representative of those extremists in British society who overemphasize class and race, that is, the extreme upper class whites.

There are many similarities between the Death Eaters group and the extreme upper class whites that give us reason to doubt Rowling's deeper meaning of this image: first of all, both the Death Eaters group and the extreme upper class whites belong to the privileged class of society and have a strong sense of identification and maintenance of this class identity for themselves, while they adopt a contemptuous, even hostile attitude towards people who do not belong to their own class, viewing them as inferior "creatures", born to be exploited and enslaved. The Death Eaters' indiscriminate killing of non-pure-blooded wizards and the conflation of muggles (i.e., ordinary humans without magic) with inferior animals is the same attitude as that of the ultra-upper-class whites in Britain towards the proletariat, workers, and other lower-class people in terms of contempt, guilt-free exploitation and oppression, and the perception of other Third World people as uncivilized, inferior human beings. Only here in Rowling such

sensitive words as class and race are replaced by whether magic, whether pure blood, but the original meaning of the two is undeniably the same.

Second, the treatment of those outside their class by the Death Eaters is identical to that of the ultra-white upper class: repression by force, totalitarian rule, harsh class divisions, and the same slogan: "purge the unclean blood". It is easy to associate the Death Eaters with the former Hitlerian fascists and today's American imperialism. Rowling is familiar with the history of World War II fascism, and has expressed clear opposition to fascism and extreme racism, but in her work there is a villainous camp that is almost identical to the fascists, and the depiction of this camp even accounts for half of the writing, so we can reasonably speculate on the deeper meaning of Rowling's move.

This is especially true when combined with the existence of Rowling's setting of the justice side, the Order of the Phoenix, the deeper meaning of which becomes more apparent. If we analyze carefully, we will find similarities between the Phoenix Society as the righteous side and Amnesty International, where Rowling had stayed. They both belong to the government outside, because in Rowling's book the government of the magic world, that is, the Ministry of Magic is just an ornament, and the real world of the British government is indeed inefficient, the public trust is not high. So the task of saving the magic world fell on the head of the Phoenix Society, which can be described as a civil society organization. The members of the Phoenix Society, a symbol of justice, would not be concerned about the zero pay and sacrificed their lives to save the wizards and muggles who were under the bloody siege of the Death Eaters, just like the employees of Amnesty International who received a meager income but did their best to save the "fugitives" who were persecuted by totalitarian politics.

Harry Potter" the whole series of storyline, are centered around the struggle between the Order of the Phoenix camp and the Death Eaters camp, the main characters are invariably scattered in these two camps. It is easy to see that in order to find the real "Harry Potter" theme also need to look in these two opposing camps. I think we can find deeper thematic ideas than the simple one-size-fits-all understanding that goodness will triumph over justice and love will triumph over everything, rather than being limited by its children's literature and entertainment.

Using the theory of political allegory to speculate on her themes, Rowling, in addition to her proclamation of goodness and love, also expresses her criticism of totalitarian politics, class division and extreme racism, while encouraging everyone to resist, encouraging unity and cooperation between the upper and lower middle classes, whites and people of color, and her belief that the ultimate outcome of the resistance struggle must be victory.

### **3. A political allegorical discussion of the second set of oppositions in Harry Potter (pure-blood wizards vs. non-pure-blood wizards)**

In addition to the most obvious dichotomy of good versus evil between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters in Harry Potter, there is another set of dichotomies within wizardry, namely the dichotomy of pure-blooded wizards versus non-pure-blooded wizards. This opposition is also the root cause of the confrontation between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters, but the historical tradition of this group of oppositions is far longer and deeper than the previous group of oppositions. In addition, the author Rowling in this rivalry on the thought spent on the ink is not inferior to the previous group of rivalry. This shows the importance of this opposition.

In "Harry Potter" in the European wizards to learn the three major schools for Durmstrang, Boothbarton and the novel's main plot place: Hogwarts. Among them, Durmstrang is located in Germany, a gathering place for ultra-blooded wizards, accepting only pure-blooded wizards, and the extreme racism coupled with the geographical location of Germany makes it hard not to remind people of the black history of Germany during World War II. In

particular, Rowling set up the first wizard world to encourage the implementation of the plan to purify wizard blood that is to kill muggles, that is, non-pure-blooded wizards "Black Magic King" is a German: Gellert Grindelwald. This is also very reminiscent of the fascist Hitler of the last century. I think, as a literary fan from a country that attaches great importance to historical traditions, Rowling could not have set this background without its symbolic meaning, not to mention the use of a lot of symbolism in the book also increases the possibility that Rowling has an ulterior motive for this setting.

In contrast, Hogwarts in England supports the principle of equality, treating wizards of all origins equally and the majority of wizards do not discriminate against Muggles. One of the most famous wizards is the White Wizard Dumbledore, a heroic figure who defeated the Dark Lord Grindelwald for peace in the wizarding world. This setting is reminiscent of the British victory against Germany in World War II and its leading figure Churchill. I believe that all this is not just a coincidence, not to mention that the British culture has always valued history and tradition.

In addition to the parts just mentioned, the identity of the novel's main characters also have traces of political allegory in their background settings. The first is the main character Harry Potter, as the savior of the wizarding world but grew up in the Muggle world, did not know the existence of magic until the age of eleven. And his parents are from a pureblood, a Muggle family, he symbolizes the integration and coexistence of two worlds, two classes and races, so the savior Harry Potter will not die, he is a symbol. The main trio of Hermione Granger Muggle, but is the best of all the students in the same grade, far better than those who are pure-blood noble Slytherin wizards, which is very ironic point, so Hermione can be seen as a rebel, a breakthrough, a class leapfrogger. The other main character is Ron Weasley, born in a pure-blood wizard family, but born pro-Muggle, defending Muggles, can also be seen as a rebel. And all three characters belong to Gryffindor, that is to say, they are all given the same status of Pathfinder by Rowling, and each symbolizes a different class race, Harry represents the fusion, Hermione is a class leaper, Ron is the so-called class rebel. Rowling can be said to have taken into account the identity of each kind of pioneer, and the historical changes in British society is indeed composed of these three kinds of people, so I think the identity of the protagonists can also be seen from the background of its political allegory.

Of course the identity of the villain Voldemort is set more wonderfully ironic, many researchers equate Voldemort with Hitler, while Jean-Claude Myrnel sees Voldemort as "an image of a person who gains power by deceiving souls and serves an imperialism. [1] His interpretation is certainly more brilliant. Voldemort comes from a mixed-blood wizard, but is an extremist pure-blood wizard theorist, leading a group of pure-blood wizards to kill other mixed-blood, muggle wizards. This is very ironic and dramatic point, but also a tragic point. This really has to remind us of the fascist Hitler, not purely Germanic, but under the banner of Germanic people due to other races to carry out inferior racial eradication program, massacre of other races. So I think Rowling's portrayal of Voldemort has elements borrowed from Hitler, which also reflects the political allegory of the novel.

Not only the protagonist so, Rowling also spent effort on the identity of the supporting characters set. Harry's mother is similar to Hermione, born muggle but very good, Harry's father is somewhat similar to Ron, born pureblood but advocates equality, they are the ultimate sacrifice for peace and justice, a symbol of the sacrificial efforts of the pioneer forefathers, and Harry's godfather Sirius is an uncompromising class rebel, he came from a traditional Slytherin pureblood conservative family, but determined to break with the family, entered Gryffindor, joined the Order of the Phoenix He was born in a traditional Slytherin conservative family, but resolutely broke

with his family, entered Gryffindor, joined the Order of the Phoenix, and fought for muggles and non-pure-blood wizards. The story is a typical political allegory, in which Rowling brings to light the class and racial struggles of the real world in the face of the wizard's struggle. And if the author did not want to convey something through this series of background settings, I think Rowling would not spend so much ink on the class and race background of these characters.

For pure-blooded wizards non-pure-blooded wizards, Rowling even went so far as to use a book, the second "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" to discuss. The main plot of the book is the trio of protagonists with Voldemort and his leadership of the allegedly pure-blooded wizards specializing in killing the non-pure-blooded Chamber of Secrets snake monster to fight. The origin of the Chamber of Secrets is a long-standing one, created by one of the founders of Hogwarts a thousand years ago, Slytherin, the founder of Slytherin House, who was an extremist bloodline and broke with the other three founders to leave. This shows the long history of the rivalry between pure-blooded and non-pure-blooded wizards, and in addition we can see the prophetic component of it. What happened a thousand years ago is repeated a thousand years later, and the end is strikingly similar to what happened a thousand years ago.

#### **4. Political allegorical discussion of the third set of oppositions (witches versus other races)**

In addition to the internal rivalry of wizards, there are also rivalries between wizards and other races in the novel, of which Rowling spent the most ink is the conflict between wizards and werewolves and domesticated elves.

The first is the racial antagonism between wizards and werewolves, although in the novel this antagonism is between the races, but I think the real social problems that Rowling wants to reflect are indeed within the UK, that is, within the race. Unlike the racial conflict between domesticated pixies and wizards, werewolves are more like real-life projections of AIDS and other infectious diseases in the wizarding community. Rowling seems to be concerned about this dichotomy, and spent a lot of ink on this conflict in the third book, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, where it is carefully discussed. The new teacher of Harry's third year Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Remus Lupin, is a werewolf, and he leaves his post at the end of the novel because of the discrimination he suffered because of his werewolf status. The reason why the conflict between wizards and werewolves is more like the AIDS epidemic is because the werewolves themselves were once wizards, except for the full moon, they are usually no different from ordinary wizards. The identity of the werewolf wizard's victims increases the similarity between them and the real-life infectious disease patients. The werewolf wizards in the novel, such as Remus Lupin, have difficulties in enrolling in school, finding employment, and making friends and falling in love due to this status, which is the same as the plight of infectious disease patients in the real world. And Rowling gives us a solution to such problems through the friendship she arranges for Lupin, the appearance of werewolf poison potion, etc. Rowling's portrayal of this tragic character is also a reminder that we should look at these victims with fair-mindedness, normalcy and compassion, rather than just rejecting and avoiding them.

With the werewolves and wizards of the antagonism is different, wizards and domesticated pixies between the antagonism can be said to be completely relegated to the race issue. Because the house elf is a group of wizards together with about the way the existence of subjugation, and Rowling in the late through Hermione's rescue of the house elf to express their thinking. The house elf is a magical ability is not inferior to the wizard, but because of the contract and have to ancestral exploitation by the wizard enslavement by the violent domesticated magical creatures, which in my opinion is Rowling to the first world countries led by the United Kingdom to the third world countries to colonize, exploit the irony and resistance, and at the end of the second part of the novel, the

pure-blooded wizard Malfoy family house elf Dobby's regained freedom is undoubtedly The climax of this rebellion. Likewise, if we think a little deeper or a little more radical, we can even associate the house elf with the second sex of society, that is, women, who are also subordinate to the patriarchal society, have the ability but are trapped in the family, and the majority of the group is still obsessed, which are similar to the situation of the house elf.

## 5. Conclusion

After further study and analysis of the text of Harry Potter, instead of being blinded by the surface of its children's literature, we can see a strong political allegory in its works. Rowling can be said to have taken the two mainstream antagonisms of British society: class antagonism and racial antagonism, and visualized them in a political allegorical way as these three groups of antagonisms in the wizarding world, and presented them to the fullest extent. The confrontation between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters symbolizes the struggle between the progressive and conservative forces, the forces of good and the forces of evil; the struggle between pure-blooded and non-pure-blooded wizards symbolizes the confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Britain; the confrontation between werewolves and wizards symbolizes the plight of infectious disease patients in society; the confrontation between domestic elves and wizards symbolizes the racial and national confrontation between first-world countries and third-world countries.

And Rowling also through this symbolic conflict and confrontation to the real world to provide a possible direction of thinking and problem solving. The most important point is to unite to resist, we can clearly see all the activities of the anti-evil forces, whether it is the confrontation between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters or the early confrontation between the group led by Dumbledore and the generation of the Dark Lord Grindelwald, all because of the reliance on the power of various classes and races to succeed. This also tells us that in real life, want to solve the problem of class and racial rivalry only rely on the bottom of the people themselves demonstrations and petitions is far from enough, to enjoy the social welfare of the upper class and the middle class social backbone also need to participate in it, and the bottom of the people together. This is because the meaning of this is much more than helping the lower class to improve their living standards, it is also about the health and development of society.

In addition to this, Rowling brings us to think about the transparency and fairness of education. In order to break the class solidification and racial superiority theory, fair education has a crucial role to play. All the changes in the novel sprouted in Hogwarts, and many movements in real life were born in schools. Only by allowing children of different classes and races to have the right to enjoy the same education, and selecting students according to their learning ability rather than money or skin color, will the barriers between class and race have the possibility of being broken down.

In addition to the struggle for unity and the justice and transparency of education, Rowling has made many detailed and profound reflections on such issues in the novel. In the process of completing this dissertation, I have also had the privilege of reading the interpretations of Harry Potter by experts in different fields, covering a wide range of fields even including political science [2], philosophy [3], religion [4], law [5], history, etc. Among them, I was particularly inspired by the study of Harry Potter by the French scholar Damien Bridorno from the perspective of history [6]. I think the fact that it has attracted so many outstanding experts from different fields to write articles or even publish books on it is also a side reflection that Harry Potter is actually much more than a children's novel.

This set of books, which has been considered as children's literature, deserves to be read carefully again and again from different perspectives, and I believe it will definitely bring us new thoughts.

In summary, the argument that Rowling's novel Harry Potter is extremely political and allegorical is highly probable and reasonable.

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