

The Seven Harry Potter Books as a Whole

The books' inner architecture is not the only remarkable feature of Harry Potter's modern legend. The whole itself bathes in a deeper symmetry and balance. It may be more easily seen by starting from the center: Book 3 to Book 5.

What unites the three books is the figure of Sirius. In Book 3 he is the man on the run, who needs to be vindicated. He introduces us to the foundations of the Order of the Phoenix, though indirectly. We see those who were to begin just friends and fellow students, James Potter and Lily Evans, Lupin, Sirius and even Snape, who are at the time of the story members of the Order of the Phoenix.

In Book 4 Sirius has become Harry's godfather. Harry has to complete a central ordeal of his initiation, which leads him outside the confines of the safety of the school to confront Voldemort completely on his own.

In Book 5 the Order becomes explicit: it is out in the open, even though it protects itself in secrecy. The opposition is no longer just the one between Dumbledore and Harry versus Voldemort. It is on one hand the Order of the Phoenix and on the other what could be called the Order of Voldemort, for now just his Death Eaters.

Sirius, whose life was at risk in Book 3 where he was rescued by Harry and Hermione, sacrifices himself and in so doing, furthers Harry's mission.

Books 2 and 6 form another delicate symmetry. In book 2 the biographies of Tom Riddle and Gilderoy Lockhart form a backdrop to the whole. Both these biographies deceive, they mislead Harry and Ginny. Both Riddle and Lockhart have the power to charm, one through his carefully cultivated persona and myth; the other through cunning calculation and constant deception. Lockhart in particular has the deeply grounded Hermione under his spell. She takes time to discover what for Ron and Harry is obvious.

In the sixth book a thread corresponds to the first two: the Half-Blood Prince's book of potions. In the journal we can retrace the Prince's odyssey that has led him to improve on the efficiency of potions. Through the Prince's research Harry is able to save Ron's life. But through the Prince's Sectusempra he places Draco's life in mortal danger, only to be relieved by the real-life and present Prince, Severus Snape. It's as if Harry has an accelerated Snape journey, one that could avoid him much later chagrin. Here the tables are turned. Hermione sees the danger of the potions book before Harry does. The figures of Tom Riddle and Voldemort deceive us into trusting them. In looking at Snape, Harry and the reader are completely deceived about his real intentions.

Though we only find this out later (seventh book) the real life of Severus Snape, is a reversal of Lockhart. Snape is the one who constantly appears as the villain. His pride led him to become a Death Eater and now a repented one. His love for Lily has formed a turning point; it awakened him to the full reality of the path he was

pursuing in support of Voldemort. It brought forth that power is not worth pursuing at any cost. In Snape the external shell of the villain reveals the beauty of a life turned around.

Lockhart is the teacher of Defense Against the Dark Arts, who cannot help his students muster real courage, much less do the work. Snape has always wanted to be that teacher, and this is what he becomes in book six. He would know how to defend himself against the Dark Arts, as only one knows who has been an insider.

Finally, though furthest one from the other, Books one and seven form a visible symmetry. Harry is first introduced to the reader as the one who has survived a curse by the most terrible magician in the world through the power of love of Lily, his mother. The magician carries horrible consequences of this deed in his own body. He is now seeking to secure the Sorcerer's Stone.

In book seven the Sorcerer's Stone reappears, though here it is also, or exclusively, called the Resurrection Stone. In book one Voldemort wants to acquire a new body. He is thwarted in the effort by Harry, who can use the Sorcerer's Stone with selfless intent. Voldemort will only succeed in book three, though he fails once more in killing Harry. In book seven Harry and Voldemort are once more brought together for the final battle in which one of the two will have to die.

Closely accompanying the odyssey of the stone are Harry's parents. Is it a coincidence that they appear in books one and seven? And always in times coinciding with Voldemort's attacks? In the first instance the Potters appear in the mirror of Erised. They are introduced to Harry and bring solace to the orphan child. A transformation occurs between the two extremes, in book four, the middle point of Harry's journey. Here Harry meets Voldemort at Godric Hollow. Just when everything seems lost Harry's and Voldemort's wands conjure up the dead and, most important among them, Lily and James Potter. It is they who enable Harry to rescue time from the Death Eaters and ensure his departure through the portkey. Finally, in the last book, James and Lily are summoned by the Resurrection Stone, but now they only need to offer reassurance. Harry has reached the maturity to understand that the dead accompany him. He just needs to remind himself if he doubts.

Voldemort has accomplished the most despicable acts of dark magic in the effort to ensure himself immortality. He made his way to it with one crime after another, and inflicting random cruelty every time his ego was even slightly bruised.

Harry has an advantage over Voldemort. He has pondered at length about the Deathly Hallows, which Voldemort cannot understand. Harry is like Ignotus Peverell, the one who contents himself with the Invisibility Cloak; he lets go of the search for the other Hallows and concentrates on the Horcruxes. When the time comes Harry can debilitate Voldemort's soul more and more, and therefore his body. The love his mother bore for him, of which we hear in book 1, has now matured in the love that leads Harry to sacrifice himself for his fellow students and teachers. Harry's love protects all those around him.