Everlasting Love, For Better or Worse

Devotion within the Harry Potter Series

Throughout the late 90’s and into the twenty-first century, debate has run rapid over the questionable themes, morality, and overall influence of J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Numerous scholars and fanatics have deconstructed, analyzed, and criticized each book and film in order to determine any underlying messages or subconscious context that could be the driving factors of the series’ popularity and sparked temporary controversy. It is within my opinion the underlying message in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series centers itself on the importance of love. Themes of friendship, loyalty, sacrificial death, and compassion guide our antagonist on his emotional progression and development of individual values over the span of seven years. In this paper I will focus on the importance love plays within the overall plot, discuss the four Greek types of love that are evident throughout the series as a whole, and demonstrate Voldemort’s constant disregard of emotion ultimately lends itself to his defeat.

In the Ancient Greek language, there are four distinct words that are used to describe and categorize love; agápe, éros, philia, and storge. Each of these words encompasses various intensities of emotional attachment, but is often found to be interchangeable within literary interpretation. Used to describe both cultural and scientific phenomenon within philosophy, religion, and obviously literature, these words have contributed to the deconstruction of a general concept and the categorization of the range of a single emotion.
Agápe, being the most commonly used out of the four, expresses both a general affection and a deeper sense of true love. Often times, this word is used to describe a parent’s love for their child and the sacrificial love that corresponds with such a bond. In the Bible, Christians use agape to express the unconditional, unfailing love of God. I find this to be the most prevalent and reoccurring form of love throughout the series. The sacrificial love of Lily and James Potter, along with Sirius Black, continually protect and strengthen Harry both physically and emotionally. Harry’s unnerving adoration of Albus Dumbledore, Draco’s reluctant assimilation into the Death Eaters in order to protect his family, and Neville’s final act of courage during the battle of Hogwarts all lend themselves to a deeper sense of devotion.

Éros expresses a more sensual form of love, but doesn’t necessarily focus upon the sexual nature that can be a part of a romantic relationship. While often used to describe marriage and intimate relationships, the central focus of éros is of the appreciation of an individual’s being and inner beauty. This type of love can be fairly versatile and encompasses themes from initial attraction and sexual desire to the transcendence of the spiritual compatibility of two individuals. A strong example of éros love within the series would be Severus Snape’s undying love for Lily Potter. Throughout his entire life, even after her rejection of his affections, Snape continues to love Lily deeply. The devotion to his unrequited love branches out to a sense of responsibility in regards to protecting her son; it is only at the end of the series we learn of his true intentions and why he has constantly been relevant to Harry’s continued wellbeing and a number of his successes. As Dumbledore questions Snape’s concern for Harry’s upbringing, he produces a patronum that resembles Lily’s animagus form. Upon seeing this, Dumbledore understands the root of his devotions, “After all this time?” “Always,” said Snape’ (DH, 687).
Philia love is best described as a dispassionate love; a feeling that focuses upon the individual’s loyalty to family and community. Though we are led to concentrate on Bellatrix LeStrange as a dark and twisted individual, we must look at her devotion to the Dark Lord as something less cruel; her willingness to sacrifice herself in order to fully serve her master and family could be considered philia love. As a member of The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, Bellatrix has been brought up in an environment in which Pure Blood supremacy is highly valued; her perspective of Voldemort’s endeavors reflects the system of morals instilled upon her as a child. Her tremendous loyalty is rewarded with power and trust from Dark Lord, and she is entrusted with one of his horcruxes. Bellatrix’s loyalties to her family contribute to her unabashed willingness to kill Sirius Black. Although they are cousins, Sirius has been ostracized from the family and has become an enemy to the cause.

Another example of philia love would be Dobby’s companionship with Harry Potter. As a house-elf, Dobby is bound to the Malfoy family and is intended to live in servitude throughout the entirety of his life. Unlike others in his species, Dobby’s loyalties seem to falter on occasion due to his ability to think for himself and to determine his need for freedom. Upon their first meeting, Harry presents this creature of supposedly lesser importance a kind of respect he has never encountered. As a result, Dobby finds himself befriending our antagonist based upon an overwhelming sense of virtuous gratitude. After Harry tricks Lucius Malfoy into presenting Dobby with one of his socks in Chamber of Secrets, the elf’s alliance is set and only strengthens over time. During the struggle at the Malfoy Manner in Deathly Hallows, Dobby helps to rescue Dean, Ollivander, and Luna as per Harry’s request and returns to attack Bellatrix with a chandelier. As they disapperate back to the Shell Cottage, Bellatrix throws a knife that hits and fatally wounds the house-elf; his death is a direct result of his dedication to Harry.
Storge seems to be the least used of the four loves as it focuses less upon a devotion or attraction and stems more from a general sense of acceptance. As a more common place expression of one’s emotions towards family or friends, it stems from a natural connection between individuals and has rarely been used from a literary perspective. From the beginning, Molly Weasley has accepted Harry as a member of her family. While she supports Harry’s endeavors and participates in the final battle for Hogwarts, her initial acceptance most likely stems from her motherly disposition. The majority of minor characters who associate with Harry throughout the series, such as the majority of Dumbledore’s Army, ally themselves with Potter based upon their casual friendships or loyalty to the preservation of Hogwarts against outside forces.

Regardless of the depth of one’s commitment, love remains to be an extremely powerful emotion that is heralded as a pure source of strength and stability in both magic and the common human experience. As with all things, there remains the opportunity for abuse and corruption. As argued by Gregory Brassham’s article _Love Potion No. 9½_, magic as the ability to be used to find unethical means to one’s desires. Through the use of potions and spells, total control of one’s emotions and physical conduct can be determined by a second party. The Imperious Curse, which is used by Voldemort and his followers on multiple occasions, is used to rob the victim of their will and is considered extremely dangerous; it is one of three unforgivable curses and is illegal to perform in any circumstance. Love potions, on the other hand, seem to have less of a social stigma in regards to the ethical use of magic.

In _Half Blood Prince_, Slughorn describes the dangers of using dangers of using magic to control another’s emotions, "Amortentia doesn’t really create love, of course. It is impossible to manufacture or imitate love. No, this will simply cause a powerful infatuation or obsession. It is
probably the most dangerous and powerful potion in this room -- oh yes," he said, nodding gravely at Malfoy and Nott, both of whom were smirking skeptically. "When you have seen as much of life as I have, you will not underestimate the power of obsessive love" (HBP, 177). Their sole purpose of existence is to manipulate the feelings and behavior of another human; they cause obsessive thoughts, intense excitement, and violent emotions that can strengthen over time. While there is an antidote to counteract the effects of the potion, its usage still remains to be unethical and can lead to disasters consequences.

Tom Riddle’s mother, Merope Gaunt, was a pure-blooded witch and direct descendant of Salazar Slytherin. Through the use of magic, most likely that of a powerful love potion, Merope enchants a wealthy Muggle and forces him to fall in love with her; he remains by her side until he is released from this enchantment. Tom Riddle Sr. leaves her shortly after she comes pregnant and Merope dies shortly after childbirth. Perhaps Merope’s misuse of magic, her manipulation of other’s through the illusion of love, set the path for Voldemort’s own manipulative behavior. From the moment of his conception, emotional manipulation has entangled the very essence of his being. Through his abandonment, Tom is forced to grow up in an equally cold and loveless environment in the Muggle orphanage in which he spends his first eleven years of life. While at Hogwarts, Tom begins researching his family origins and discovers he is an heir of Slytherin. By discovering his true heritage, Riddle finally may have discovered a sense of belonging; this would explain his sudden desire to continue Salazar’s quest for Pure Blood supremacy and the beginning of his thirst for power.

Although he surrounds himself with followers who are devoted to completing his will, Voldemort never expresses his love or loyalty to those who serve him and remains a selfish, power-hungry tyrant. Voldemort continually relies on those he ensnares through his efficient
utilization of leadership skills and powerful sense of persuasion, but never reciprocates any form of affection. The utter lack of respect for the wellbeing of any given individual is clearly a reflection of Riddle’s inability to trust caused by his abandonment and the utter void of an emotional spectrum that would’ve been learned in the earliest stages of adolescence through basic life experiences. There are times we find Voldemort mocking the vulnerability caused by emotional devotion. As Harry faces the embodiment of Tom Riddle’s youth in the Chamber of Secrets, Riddle demonstrates his view of manipulation as a skill and literally laughs at Ginny’s naïve devotion; "I was sympathetic, I was kind. Ginny simply loved me. No one’s ever understood me like you, Tom ... I’m so glad I’ve got this diary to confide in ... It’s like a friend I can carry around in my pocket..." Riddle laughed, a high, cold laugh that didn’t suit him. It made the hairs stand up on the back of Harry’s neck. "If I say it myself, Harry, I’ve always been able to charm the people I needed" (CoS, 228).

Tom Riddle, throughout the entirety of his life, never seems to have experienced any form of love or compassion. Born of the twisted lust brought forth from his mother’s insecurities and abuse of magic, control is all he has ever known or desired. Unlike the family support provided throughout Harry’s childhood, Tom Riddle received nothing more than the basic necessities of survival. While Harry was born into a family built on love and warmth, Tom was born into a lonely place of sadness. Harry may have had a less than enjoyable upbringing during his first eleven years of life with the Dursley’s, he was provided for and experienced some semblance of a loving family structure. The Dursley’s could have very well have refused the infant Potter and continued to support their own child, but they took in their nephew and raised him. While they obviously valued Dudley over Harry, and undoubtedly neglected to express amount of love for the boys, Harry still had a basis for the concept of love and family.
In Anne Collin Smith’s article *Harry Potter, Radical Feminism, and the Power of Love*, Harry’s empathy is alluded to as a major asset in the battle against Voldemort. Smith describes Harry’s compassion as more or less a form of unconscious leverage as ‘love is not wielded as a weapon; it simply overwhelms evil by its very existence’ (2010). From the beginning, Rowling provides us with a clear and decisive message of the power of love. As Dumbledore spoke with Harry in the Hospital Wing after his encounter with Quirrell and Voldemort in the dungeon at the end of Sorcerer’s Stone, we are provided with not only an explanation of Harry’s survival, but also a bit of foreshadowing for Voldemort’s inability to comprehend the true source of his final demise. "Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever" (SS, 216). Without experiencing love, Voldemort will never understand the depth of the emotion or how far mankind will go to fight to protect those in which they truly care for.

As supported by Smith’s view of obsession with domination and control, Voldemort continually overlooks even the most obvious strength behind genuine devotion due to his ignorance to deep, emotional connections found within humanity. In a final act of compassion, Harry attempts to redeem and save Voldemort who fails to understand his plea as a form of aided salvation. While Voldemort had the opportunity to experience the power of forgiveness and love, he is blinded by his inability to comprehend any emotion beyond hate and his thirst for power, and had ultimately defeated himself as he tore apart his very self. Once again we find Dumbledore expressing to Harry the great power of love and its ability overcome all things, “…it contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human
intelligence, than forces of nature. It is also, perhaps, the most mysterious of the many subjects
for study that reside there. It is the power held within that room that you possess in such
quantities and which Voldemort has not at all. ...It was your heart that saved you” (OOTP, 843-
44).

In the end, love conquers evil just as light overtakes the dark. Without a doubt, I believe
J. K. Rowling intended to express not only the importance of love in the face of opposition, but
the underlining necessity of emotion within the human condition. All emotion has the ability to
bring us strength or weakness, but without the presence of emotion we aren’t exactly human. As
we view Voldemort’s character as an emotionless, soulless being, it becomes increasingly easy
to simply view him as a monster. He is, without the ability to understand or express compassion,
less than human.
Works Cited


<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_words_for_love>
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