

# *The Cultural Complex in Harry Potter: Greek Culture and Hebrew Culture*

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**Keywords:** Harry Potter, Greek culture, Hebrew culture

**Abstract:** "Harry Potter" literary series written by J K Rowling, a female writer from British, has been popular all over the world since its publication, and has been widely praised. This series of novels has been translated into more than 60 languages and sold more than 200 million copies. It is no longer simply a literary work loved by readers, but has evolved into a cultural phenomenon. Combined literary characteristics and their rich connotation of the Greek culture with Hebrew, this article traces their origin from the name meaning of main characters and animals, mythological prototype, story plot and so on, and analyzes how they influence on "Harry Potter" literary series.

## 1. Introduction

Greek culture and Hebrew culture are the origin of Western civilization, which constitute almost all the European literature and art activities of the basic material and have a profound impact on later generations [1-2]. Ancient Greek culture is biased towards small life, advocating experiment and personal evidence, towards the material and natural environment, the origin of science and art, and encourages people to pursue desire; Hebrew culture is biased towards the great universe, advocating metaphysics and reasoning, and moving towards the spiritual and cultural environment, which is the precursor of religion and history and leads people to obey reason [3]. In fact, these two parts of Western culture, seemingly hostile to each other, are mutually remedial remedies. It is in the balance of these two extremes that Western culture continues to develop. To some extent, it can be said that the development of western culture is the their alternating dominance history.

"Harry Potter" as the debut novel of J. K. Rowling, a British female writer, who cut a figure and gained her reputation rapidly in the end of the 20th century, mainly describes the protagonist Harry Potter's seven years of learning life and adventure story in the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry [4-5]. As soon as the book was published, it became popular all over the world, and was made into a film, which won the number one many times. Why does a seemingly absurd children's book Harry Potter stand out in the 21st century literary world? At the same time, in exploring the "harry potter" series of best-selling secret, we found that the author had full inherited the literary creation and absorbed the essence of traditional western literature [6]. She made the Harry Potter series flash the light of the two cultures - the ancient Greek myth, the bible stories, the medieval legend... During writing, Rowling imagined extraordinarily, combined the magic world and the real world perfectly, together with the watertight plot design and endless suspense, so that a great

number of readers in different ages are fascinated, lingering in the magic world.

This article tries to analyze the Greek culture and Hebrew culture in their respective literature characteristics, and their rich connotation, and trace their origin from the name meaning of main characters and the animals in Harry Potter, myth prototype, the story plots and so on, to deepen the understanding of western culture source -- Greek culture and Hebrew culture.

## 2. Characteristics of Greek Culture

Greece is located in the Mediterranean Sea, where the climate is mild all the year round and the environment is comfortable and pleasant. Owing to growing up in this environment, the ancient Greeks did not feel the threat of nature from beginning and people in ancient Greek literature are free, unrestrained, independent and carnival, enjoying the individual standard consciousness of life. As mythology was the main feature of Greek culture, the stories of gods and legends of human heroes almost constituted all Greek myths. At the beginning, they were popularized by oral talking among people. With the development of civilization, ancient Greek poets such as Homer and Sappho recorded them in written form. Greek mythology embodies a strong humanity, which shows the liveliness and beauty of human nature and the positive thought of human freedom and optimism in the description of human's pursuit of the value of the world, the contradiction and struggle between human and destiny. Greek civilization has profound significance to Western culture, language and other aspects, which influences the direction of western writers and artists to absorb materials and the generation of inspiration. Marx said: "Greek mythology is not only the source of Greek art, but also its soil - Greek art is the premise of Greek mythology. That is, the natural and social forms themselves, which have been processed by an involuntary art through the imagination of the people. That's what Greek art is about." [7] Therefore, until now the infinite charm of Greek mythology itself still has a unique artistic expression, story and aesthetic value in the literary works of artists and writers.

## 3. Characteristics of Hebrew Culture

The Hebrews, who lived in the harsh desert and in exile for a long time, had been living in a state of deep concern and compassion since the beginning. It was difficult for them to think that they could use their wisdom to harness nature and make it the material for the welfare of mankind. Never mind that they want to be independent and free from each other, to spread out from the group to the rest of the world. What they want is for their community to fit in the universe and you fit in the group. Because of these, they sacrifice their small selves and devote to the universe and the large group. That is why they created the religious image of "God", to place their hopes. In the long course of history, Hebrews have widely accepted the influence of Mesopotamian culture and Egyptian culture, and created their own unique culture and excellent literature, becoming the inheritors of the excellent ancient literary heritage of West Asia and North Africa.

Hebrew literature is a kind of religious literature, which is embodied in the Bible. The Bible reflects the evolution of the Hebrew nation society from the clan society to the slave society, and completely shows the social history of Israel and the Kingdom of the Jews from the establishment to the subjugation of the country for 1500 years, which has a profound influence on Western literature. As Victor Hugo said, "As the whole sea is salt, the whole Bible is poetry." [8] The main genres of the Bible are poetry and stories. Most of them sing the tragic songs of national disasters with clear thoughts and feelings of love and hate, and tell the aspirations of the whole nation in pure and fresh language. The poems, novels and dramas in the Bible provide the basic material and inspiration for the Western literature of later generations in the form and content of creation.

## **4. Analysis of Archetype of the Hebrew and Greek Literatures in Harry Potter**

### **4.1. Borrowed Names from Greek Mythology**

Ancient Greek and Roman mythology is an important part of European civilization and world civilization, as well as an important source of English names. Rowling often looked for inspiration from mythology when naming her characters, because she was heavily influenced by Greek culture.

#### **4.1.1. Hermione Granger**

In Greek mythology, Hermione, the daughter of Helen of Troy who was considered as the most beautiful woman in the world and Menelaus of Sparta who was a king of Mycenaean, is a symbol of wisdom. But she is often hated by the world, because she is more than intelligent and pride. Her story in Harry Potter is remarkably similar to the story behind her name. Hermione had a reputation for enjoying answering questions actively every class, and she soon became the most outstanding student in the whole grade at Hogwarts with her own unremitting efforts. In addition, she could always use her wisdom to help Harry head off a danger in the nick of time. Though she was assiduous in study, she was not so popular with her peers because of her pride.

#### **4.1.2. Minerva McGonagall**

Professor McGonagall, is the head of Gryffindor. "Minerva" originated from the name of the goddess of wisdom and courage in Roman mythology, that is, Athena in Greek mythology, which we are all familiar with. In mythology, although the Minerva is a wiser and braver, she is expressionless and unsmiling, which makes people feel awe. This is exactly the image of Professor McGonagall that Rowling showed us in her book. In the book, Professor McGonagall always wears her hair in a high bun, bright green robe and a very stiff expression.

#### **4.1.3. Narcissa Malfoy**

She is Draco Malfoy's mother. "Narcissa" originated from "Narcissus" in Greek mythology. Narcissus was a beautiful young man who sat by the water's edge all day because he fell in love with his own reflection in the water, and finally turned into a daffodil. Now, the word "narcissus" means "daffodil", and "narcissism" means "self-love." The author used this name to satirize the Malfoys' fancying themselves, their pride in their pureblood, and their contempt for everyone but themselves.

### **4.2. A legend of Mythical Beasts in Greek Mythology**

Many demigods in Greek and Roman mythology are similar to many animals in the magical world in Harry Potter. For example, in Greek mythology, there is a venomous dragon, Hydra (a snake with nine heads), Cerberus (the watchdog), Nessus (Remy Martin), etc., while in Harry Potter, there is a dog with three heads guarding the Philosopher's Stone, basilisk, eagle-headed horse-body monster, unicorn and so on.

Cerberus is a hellhound in Greek mythology. This dog has three heads, three pairs of ferocious eyes, and a dragon's tail on its lower part of the body. In addition, the fur on its head and back is full of coiled snakes. In order to save his wife from hell, Orpheus, the son of Apollo, the sun god, used the harp in his hand to make the hellhound fall asleep. While, Fluffy, the three-headed dog in Harry Potter, is described in the book as follows: "They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pair of

rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction ... "[9] Apart from the physical resemblance, this dog also likes music. As soon as he hears it, he will fall asleep.

The basilisk is another typical example, which has been lurking in the Gryffindor School. When people looks at it directly, it can turn them into stones only by glancing its eyes. This image is deeply rooted in ancient Greek mythology—the famous snake-haired banshee Medusa. She had long hair, in which snakes were hidden. Under her gaze, many unfortunate souls were petrified, and their limbs and bodies became stiff and unable to move.

### 4.3. The Analysis of Archetype

The archetype of heroes appeared repeatedly in the literary works of the past dynasties, who can give people hope and represent the spiritual aspirations of mankind. Yoseph Campbell, an American scholar, who wrote *A Thousand Faces of Heroes* which once summed up a unified pattern, that is, the theme of "the infant exile and return" in heroic mythology. The theme reappeared in Rowling's works: After his parents were killed, Harry, an orphan, was sent to his only relative's house and raised outside the magical world. This was an ancient magic to ensure his safety. After ten years of "exile", he received a message from the magical world and finally returned to where he belongs to.

Campbell also summed up the adventures of mythical heroes as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man " [10] This passage corresponds to a variety of heroic adventures with strong generality. Harry Potter, the hero, is experiencing a series of adventures. With his perseverance, he has contributed to his own growth and improvement. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Philosophy Stone*, the main thread is the quest for the immortal philosopher's stone. Harry worked his way out of difficulties in the underground classroom, defeated the three-headed dog and Professor Quirrell possessed by Voldemort and finally successfully protected the philosophy stone.

For example, the pursuit of immortality in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is the main line in the book. Harry went through a series of mechanisms in the underground classroom. He defeated the Sandu Dog and hit Professor Rocky, who dressed up with Voldemort, to protect the Sorcerer's Stone. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber*, a series of suspense and decryption processes around Tom's diary of Secrets are the main line of routine and pursuit. Finally, Harry entered Slytherin's secret room, killed the snake monster in the secret room, destroyed Voldemort's diary, saved Ginny, and prevented Voldemort's resurrection again. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry learned the story of his parents' betrayal, summoned a guardian spirit to defend against the dementor and saved Sirius Black. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry passed many tests and won the top three trophies, but was used to revive Voldemort. Harry successfully escaped from Voldemort's claws and brought back his classmate Cedrick's body and the news of Voldemort's resurrection. In *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Harry defeated the dead body led by Dumbledore and got Voldemort's horcrux. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron and Hermione left the Hogwarts to search for the Horcruxes and finally killed Voldemort [11]. Harry has been growing through these kinds of events and proving himself constantly.

## 5. The Origin of Christian Culture

Under the background of Christian culture, the Bible has a profound influence on European writers of all ages. There are many similarities between the Bible and Harry Potter. The contrast between the magic world and the Muggle world metaphor the opposition between heaven and hell.

Harry Potter represents Jesus Christ in the magical world, while Voldemort represents the Satan, who is evil and dark. The story reflects the correspondence between life and death, light and darkness, justice and evil. Harry's progress in the struggle against Voldemort is accompanied by suffering and torture, which undoubtedly corresponds to the suffering archetype of Jesus in the Bible.

The Bible takes depravity and salvation as the theme. When human beings confront difficulties, they instinctively hope for the appearance of the savior, guide them out of the difficulties, and bring them light and hope. So the "savior" prototype comes into being, and Harry is the embodiment of the suffering theme and the savior prototype. Harry, the ill-fated little boy, his parents were killed by Voldemort shortly after he was born. When he came to this world, he had a lightning-shaped scar on his head, which was a hint of original sin. This scar often hurts at a critical moment to remind him of the reality that he is in a difficult situation, so that he can face the future more calmly and work harder to redeem his original sin. Harry was chased by his cousin Dursley all day long at the Dursleys' house before he was ten years old. He lived in a dark and narrow bowl kitchen full of spiders under the stairs. From the age of 11, his young shoulder also shouldered the responsibility of surpassing his peers. Every fight against Voldemort had to go through a cruel test and face death. Such a young man who grew up suffering a lot embodies people's hope for salvation and carries the archetypal image of the savior. This act of redemption is, to some extent, the translation and interpretation of the Bible story that Jesus Christ was willing to be nailed to the cross to atone for human sin.

The Bible advocates the philosophy of love. The theme of love runs through the whole Bible. The power of love is the most essential and clear link between Harry Potter and the archetype of Christ. Everything Jesus did stems from his love and compassion for people. Jesus Christ overcame sin and death with selfless love. In the novel, Lily Evans' selfless maternal love made her sacrifice herself and save Harry. And the strong love enabled Harry's patron saint to drive the dementor away from the godfather and cousin at the critical moment when they seized their souls. In the struggle with the devil leader Voldemort, Harry gradually understood that it was not hatred, but the power of love - love for relatives, love for friends, love for life, love for the world, was the real power to defeat Voldemort completely. Just as Jesus destroyed Satan with love, saved mankind, and endowed the world with bright hope.

## 6. Conclusions

Archetypal critics believe that the most basic literary archetype is myth, and that different kinds of literature are just the continuation and evolution of myth. Frye said that the basic mode of archetype is myth, and myth is the archetype of all other modes. Heidegger even said that human beings can only find their own homes in mythology. The inheritance of archetypes reflects the traditional power of literature. It is precisely because of its profound archetypal characteristics of Greek and Greek cultures that Harry Potter has transcended its own spiritual connotation and cultural significance. Rowling used the ancient myth to compile a new myth for us. When we re-examine this novel, we can see more vivid characters and more reasonable character activities. The artistic conception is deep and the aftertaste is endless. It seems that the huge spiritual energy that human beings have accumulated for a long time since ancient times is condensed, and its emotional content is enough to shock the deepest part of our hearts.

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