

GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN J. K. ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS*

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Abstract

Literature presents features of the age, people's psychology, influence and viewpoints. These features give rise to various forms of literature. Gothic fiction is one of the forms of novel based on rather different features. Use of gothic elements in text induces anxiety and frightening effects. Similarly, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels contain ample evidence of gothic fiction such as mystery, terror, incredible settings, prophesy, supernaturalism, visions, inexplicable events, overexcited emotions, etc. The paper analyses J. K. Rowling's novel Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets in relation to gothic elements in it. Therefore, it becomes appealing to unfold these gothic elements involved in the novel with respect to their cause and effect on the readers, settings, and characters.

Key Words: Gothic, J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter, Mystery, Incredible Setting, Terror

Introduction

Literature aims to educate, entertain, and capture people's imagination. Literature arouses various emotions with effect through the use of literary devices. It sometimes gives pleasure by creating pleasant mood in the text. It sometimes may generate fear by employing frightening settings and verbose. It produces anger for the depiction of wrong doings in the literary texts as well. We may experience sorrow for the character we relate to. We feel terrorized by the words of characters or by the depiction of the state of affair or settings. These emotions get stimulated on the basis of what kind of literature one reads or comes

across. Various forms of literature exist in the literary cannon such as poetry, drama, fiction. There are various subtypes of these major categories of literature. Poetry is subcategorized as epic, ballad, sonnets, dramatic monologues, elegy, etc. Drama is sub divided as tragedy, comedy and tragic comedy etc. Fiction or novel has various types such as [historical](#), picaresque, sentimental, gothic, psychological, novel of manners, epistolary, pastoral, apprenticeship, roman `a clef, antinovel, etc. Each of these forms of literature has its own characteristics which make it stand out from the other. Hence, these categories have been created. Each of these categories represents different characteristics, different sources of origin of the form, different thought process and so on. The origin of these categories is in the specific period of time, but their application into literary texts has surpassed the time frame as we may find reflection of characteristics of a particular text or the feature of a specific age into some other text irrespective of time and terrain. Authors have been influenced by some element of a definite age or the other author which gets replicated into his or her writing. More often, it is seen that the epics have a great influence on literature as the sources, in one way or the other are nothing but these epics for new texts. Similarly, we can find the literary texts based on the archetypes of old ones. Thus, literary genres are time free and they are used by writers liberally.

Gothic fiction is said to have originated with [Horace Walpole](#)'s successful novel [Castle of Otranto](#) (1765). The very form is called gothic because the idea for its composition has creatively been taken up from the [medieval](#) structures and wrecks; novels like these normally use the locale such as castles or monasteries equipped with subterranean ways, gloomy battlements, concealed panels, and trapdoors, etc. [Gothic novel](#) has the atmosphere of a mystery, turbulence, terrifying, full of insanity, rage, fallacy and the spirit of vengeance. To achieve this kind of milieu in literature, one has to make use of elements which aid to achieve this purpose. Gothic elements such as mystery can be employed by depicting suspicious activities which make settings indistinct. Terror can be shown by continuous feeling of insecurity or feeling of miss happening. Incredible settings include old mansion or the ruins of the castle with full of hidden passages and secret ways. In gothic fiction, characters continuously look for something to happen, or something is destined to happen. Lead character continuously experiences visions about something bad and unpleasant things. Inexplicable events can certainly be evident in such settings. Due to all these horrifying experiences, overexcited emotions are aroused. These elements in novels create an everlasting effect on the readers. Therefore, it becomes necessary to scrutinize these gothic elements in the novels in order to investigate the influence of these gothic elements. Therefore, the present paper studies gothic elements in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*.

Joanne Rowling, the most celebrated novelist of fascinating Harry Potter Series is a British author, humanitarian, film producer, television producer and a screenwriter. She wrote under her pen names J. K. Rowling and Robert Galbraith. Initially, she was a struggling

single mom when she wrote her first book *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* (1997) and was rejected by all of her twelve publishers. The idea of Harry Potter and the wizarding world came to her mind when she was travelling a late train from Manchester to London. Her success as a writer of children fiction came with a little girl's demand of next chapter of her very first novel. Harry Potter Series are not the only books she wrote; she also wrote *The Casual Vacancy* (2012) her first novel for adults. She is also an author of the Cormoran Strike series under her pen name Robert Galbraith to make distinction from her other writings. The series became the best-selling book series in history. The Cormoran Strike series is a series of crime fiction, and the main character is shown solving murder cases. The Harry Potter books have already been translated into eighty languages and won numerous awards.

The novel *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* is J. K. Rowling's second novel in the Harry Potter series published in 1998. It's the second year of Harry Potter at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The well wishers of Harry Potter wanted to keep him out of the school somehow for his own good as the terrible things were going to happen in the school. Harry was determined to go to school, and the Weasley brothers free him from his uncle's house. Harry entered the school, but grave events took place one by one. The message "The chamber secrets has been opened. Enemies of the hair beware" (Rowling 138) was found written on the wall of the school. Harry hears unknown voice every now and then. The muggle born- the non magical folks are threatened to be killed. These terrorizing threats are found after attacks, consequently leaving the residents of the school petrified. Every time something bad happens, it's Harry, and his friends Ron and Hermione were found at the spot. All through the year, Harry and his friends [Ron](#) and [Hermione](#) try investigate the attacks. Finally, Harry and all others came to know who was behind these mysterious events. Throughout the novel, there is a strong evidence for gothic elements as it has mystery, terror, incredible settings, prophesy, supernaturalism, visions, inexplicable events, and overexcited emotions.

Gothic Elements in *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*

J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series has abundant evidence of gothic fiction. The novels are characterized by gothic aspects such as gothic setting, multifaceted plot, fear and anxiety on the part of characters, the language that evokes terror, mystery and panic. The gothic elements in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series novels can be pointed out meticulously to confirm that her Harry Potter Series novels are based on gothic structure. It is not practicable to analyse each novel of Harry Potter Series for gothic elements in them in this paper therefore, the second novel *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* has been taken up for study.

The Gothic Setting

To begin with, the title itself shows the gothic setting as it has *Chamber of Secrets* which is a feature of gothic fiction. The school has been found over a thousand years ago in a castle and it had many secret passages, trapdoors and other unknown entities. As gothic fiction is based on ancient settings with isolated castles and mysterious abbeys with hidden passages, underground cellars and secret rooms, the present novel has same gothic elements in it. The novel starts with Harry at his uncle's house at number four, Private Drive. Even at his uncle Vernon's house, Harry was under threat as they make him do every household job and provide him a little food. The family is at the breakfast table and uncle Vernon is warning Harry about hooting sound of Harry's owl. For Harry Potter, his uncle's house is a stranger's house. He misses Hogwarts which is more than a home for Harry. Mostly, the novel is set in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry but it has many other places which relate to the gothic setting. Rowling describes how Harry misses his school when he is at his uncle's house in the following words which clearly states the gothic setting of the novel.

“ He missed the castle, with its secret passageways and ghosts, his classes (though perhaps not Snape, the Potions master), the mail arriving by owl, eating banquets in the Great Hall, sleeping in his four-poster bed in the tower dormitory, visiting the gamekeeper, Hagrid, in his cabin next to the Forbidden Forest in the grounds, and, especially, Quidditch, the most popular sport in the wizarding world (six tall goal posts, four flying balls, and fourteen players on broomsticks)” (03).



(Picture of the Castle: *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*. A Warner Bros. Pictures: 2002)

Ron Weasley and his brothers rescued Harry from Dursley's house, and he was taken to Ron's house. From there they were going to buy new books for their second year at school,

so they had to go to Diagon Alley. They used floo powder and fireplace to go to Diagon Alley. Out of nervousness, Harry mispronounced the name Diagon Alley, and he reached Borgin and Burkes' shop in Knockturn Alley which is described as he was in the stone fireplace of a big, dimly lit wizard's shop and it had nothing which was written in the Hogwarts school list. There was a glass case that had a shrunken hand on a cushion, a bloodstained set of cards, and a staring glass eye. Evil-looking masks gazed downward from the walls, a variety of human bones rest upon the counter, and corroded, pointed tools hung from the ceiling (Rowling 42). This description of the place suits the gothic setting and Harry come to know that he was surely not in Diagon Alley. When he got out of the shop holding his broken glasses to his face, Harry gazed around. He had appeared into a grimy alleyway that appeared to be made up completely of shops dedicated to the Dark Arts (Rowling 53). It was a place with full of frightening things such as "nasty window display of shrunken heads and, two doors down, a large cage was alive with gigantic black spiders. Two shabby-looking wizards were watching him from the shadow of a doorway, muttering to each other" (Rowling 53). On one sign board, Harry read Knockturn Alley which he never heard of.



(Picture of Knockturn Alley: *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*. A Warner Bros. Pictures: 2002)

When Harry reached at the Diagon Alley, he went to Gringotts Bank to make a withdrawal to buy new school stuff. He reached to his vault to take money out using a small cart driven by goblins that took him into an underground tunnel. This clearly gives an idea of the gothic place which has secret underground passageways.

After shopping at Diagon Alley, all were ready to aboard the Hogwarts Express but somehow Harry and Ron couldn't get on to platform. Therefore, they flew Ron's father's enchanted car to Hogwarts where they were caught by Professor Snape. He called Professor McGonagall, head of Gryffindor house to decide punishment to Harry and Ron for breaking

the rule of underage magic. After the decision of Harry and Ron's detention, they went to Gryffindor Tower. The way to Gryffindor Tower was full of muttering portraits & creaking suit armors. There was a passage where a secret entrance to Gryffindor Tower was hidden behind an oil painting of a fat lady. This portrayal of the school evidently relates to that of gothic scenery as the entrance to the Gryffindor tower was through a secret entrance.

The castle also had a ghost called Nearly Headless Nick lingering in the school premises all the time. When Harry was conversing with Nearly Headless Nick, Argus Filch's cat came by Harry's feet. Nick asked Harry to come to his deathday party and Harry accepted. On the day of Halloween, Harry unwillingly went to Nearly Headless Nick's deathday party, and the atmosphere of the party was more suitable to the gothic setting. "These were long, thin, jet-black tapers, all burning bright blue, casting a dim, ghostly light even over their own living faces. The temperature dropped with every step they took. As Harry shivered and drew his robes tightly around him, he heard what sounded like a thousand fingernails scraping an enormous blackboard" (Rowling 131).

Harry, Ron and Hermione decided to search for a clue if at all The Chamber of Secrets really existed and they visited the spot where Filch's cat was found. They recalled that there was water on the floor that came from an out of order girls' bathroom which again has been described as: "It was the gloomiest, most depressing bathroom Harry had ever set foot in. Under a large, cracked, and spotted mirror were a row of chipped sinks. The floor was damp and reflected the dull light given off by the stubs of a few candles, burning low in their holders; the wooden doors to the stalls were flaking and scratched and one of them was dangling off its hinges" (Rowling 155).



(Picture of Girls' Out of Order Bathroom: *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*. A Warner Bros. Pictures: 2002)

Looking at the attacks and no trace of the attacker, Professor Lockhart decided to train the students if they face any grave situation. Thus, he started a dueling club. In the dueling club session, Harry and Malfoy were facing each other to defend themselves against one another. Malfoy casted a spell that created a furious snake and Harry tried to tell the snake not to attack Justin Finch-Fletchley in snake language without recognizing it. Thence, everybody thought that Harry was the heir of Slytherin. Harry started looking for Justin to tell him that he did not tell that snake to attack. To find Justin, "Harry stamped up the stairs and turned along another corridor, which was particularly dark; the torches had been extinguished by a strong, icy draft that was blowing through a loose windowpane" (Rowling 202).

Unfortunately, Hermione and a girl from Ravenclaw were attacked later on. Harry & Ron decided to visit Hagrid and ask about it, but at the same moment Hagrid was taken to Azkaban Prison by Cornelius Fudge the Minister of Magic. Hagrid suggested Harry and Ron to follow the spiders to seek the truth. Subsequently, they went into the forbidden forest. The forest was dark, terrifying with full of unknown dreadful creatures which is why it was called forbidden. "The darkness seemed to be pressing on their eyeballs as they stood, terrified, waiting. There was a strange rumbling noise and then silence" (Rowling 273, 274).

Harry found a piece of parchment in Hermione's hand which described the monster. Harry and Ron went to moaning Myrtle to ask her how she died and she told that she saw two big yellow eyes right there at the sink. Harry examined the copper tap and found a tiny snake engraved on it. Ron suggested him to say something in snake language, and Harry tried to speak something in snake language. Suddenly, the sink sank and a big round opening came into view which led to the chamber of secrets. The big pipe had many smaller pipes branching off. It seemed that they may have reached a mile below the school castle, and it was terrifying place to be in. "The tunnel was so dark that they could only see a little distance ahead. Their shadows on the wet walls looked monstrous in the wandlight" (Rowling 302). The chamber was full of animal's bones, and Harry couldn't imagine what may have happened with Ginny who was taken in the chamber by the monster. Harry, Ron and Professor Lockhart were there in the chamber; Professor Lockhart attacked Ron and snatched his wand. He was planning to perform a memory charm so that Harry and Ron forget everything, but Ron's Spellotaped wand backfired and Professor Lockhart lost his memory. Harry forwarded alone in the chamber which had "the tunnel turned and turned again. Every nerve in Harry's body was tingling unpleasantly. He wanted the tunnel to end, yet dreaded what he'd find when it did. And then, at last, as he crept around yet another bend, he saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds" (Rowling 304).

When Harry entered the chamber, "He was standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that

filled the place” (Rowling 305). Thus, the novel has many places which clearly relate to that of the gothic setting.



(Picture of the Chamber of Secrets: *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*. A Warner Bros. Pictures: 2002)

Complex plots

The novel has many terrifying plots. From the beginning, Harry was told to stay at home because there was a murderous plot under development against him if he goes to Hogwarts. Dobby came to Harry to tell this to him. Harry was under a kind of house arrest at uncle Vernon's house as Vernon put bars on his window to stop him from being run away. When Harry's uncle had some important guests for dinner, he was asked to behave like even he doesn't exist but Harry had a visitor called Dobby, a house-elf, to warn him that he must not return to Hogwarts as there is a dangerous plot against him. This became the source for horror as someone was making terrible things happen to Harry. To stop Harry from returning to Hogwarts, Dobby made Harry do something that made his uncle angry and his uncle put him in house arrest. Ron Weasley and his brothers came to rescue Harry. Ignoring Dobby, Harry went to Ron's house and from there he went to Hogwarts. Dobby also closed the barriers when Harry & Ron tried to get on to the platform to catch Hogwarts Express. This made Harry and Ron fly Ron's father's enchanted car to Hogwarts. When they flew the car to Hogwarts, they hit The Whomping Willow which tried to hit back but they saved themselves.

Another terrifying instance happened when Harry was serving detention helping Professor Lockhart answering his fan mail as imposed by Professor McGonagall for driving enchanted car through the tree. While helping Professor Lockhart in his office, Harry heard a voice which seemed very dreadful, mysterious and as described by Rowling “a voice to chill the bone marrow, a voice of breathtaking, ice-cold venom” (120). It created a fearful image

as if something really bad was going to happen. Even Harry couldn't believe that he heard the voice.

After leaving the deathday party of Nearly Headless Nick, Harry, Ron and Hermione headed towards The Great Hall when Harry heard the same mysterious & deathly voice which he heard in Lockhart's office. It was full of horror as Rowling describes it: "The voice was growing fainter. Harry was sure it was moving away — moving upward. A mixture of fear and excitement gripped him as he stared at the dark ceiling; how could it be moving upward? Was it a phantom, to whom stone ceilings didn't matter? (137)." As they moved in the direction of the voice, they found Filch's cat Mrs. Norris hung to a torch bracket in petrified condition. Everyone gathered on the scene and Harry, Ron & Hermione were blamed for the situation. A few days later, Hermione couldn't help herself and asked Professor Binns about The Chamber of Secrets. Professor Binns told them the whole story, and the atmosphere in the class became cold. In the Quidditch match, Dobby set a bludger on Harry so that Harry, out of fear, may leave the school but it did not happen. Harry was hospitalized when a bludger hit Harry on his elbow. Dobby came to visit Harry in the hospital & told him that the chamber of secrets has been opened before. There, Harry came to know that another student has been attacked.

So far, there have been two attacks and there was no trace of the attacker. The next attack took place on Justin Finch-Fletchley who was from non magical family. Mr. Filch caught Harry lurking around Justin's body, and he was taken to Dumbledore's office but Dumbledore did not believe that Harry attacked the students. After a few days, Harry found Tom Riddle's diary in moaning Myrtle's bathroom. It was a set up for Harry and Tom Riddle showed Harry what he wanted Harry to see. On the account of Tom Riddle's diary, Harry came to know that Hagrid was the person who opened the chamber of secrets fifty years ago and consequently Hagrid was taken to Azkaban. Meanwhile, Mr. Malfoy got all the twelve governors' signature on Dumbledore's suspension order. Hagrid suggested Harry and Ron to follow the spiders for seeking the truth. When they reached deep in the forbidden forest, they found Aragog, the spider that Hagrid used to look after. Aragog told them that it was not Hagrid who opened the chamber of secrets. While leaving the forbidden forest, Harry and Ron were attacked by the spiders but they escaped safely.

The school was about to send all the students home when they come to know that a student is taken in the chamber of secrets by the monster. It was Ron's sister Ginny who was taken by the monster. Harry and Ron went to Professor Lockhart who was bestowed with the responsibility to deal with the matter and bring Ginny back, but Professor Lockhart tried to run away. Harry and Ron forced Professor Lockhart to enter the chamber of secrets. In the chamber, Harry found out that it was Tom Riddle who opened the chamber of secrets through Ginny. Harry had to fight the Basilisk in the chamber and save Ginny. He also destroyed the diary which made these events happen.

The Characters

The novel includes many evidences which clearly relate to the gothic fiction characters. There are house elves such as Dobby, a tree which is called The Whomping Willow that struck its branches to attack Harry and Ron when they flew the car through it. There is a terrible voice of the monster that could only be heard by Harry, and it made Harry uneasy. There are ghosts in the novel Moaning Myrtle, Sir Nicolas and a spirit called Peeves who wonder around the school every now and then. The muggle-born were threatened to be killed by the mysterious voice and the heir of Slytherin. Hermione, who is a muggle-born and heroine of the novel, was threatened by Draco Malfoy that the next would be her to die. Ginny, Ron's sister was taken in the chamber by the monster and there Harry met the villain of the novel Tom Riddle who is none other than Lord Voldemort. He tried to kill Harry, but Harry received help from Dumbledore. Harry killed the basilisk and destroyed Tom Riddle's diary with which Tom Riddle also vanished.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that J. K. Rowling's novel *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* shows us clearly that it has gothic elements in it. The novel is set in an old castle which is Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. There are many places which give feeling of fear and mystery. As suggested by the title, the castle has a chamber of secrets. The action takes place in and around the school. The novel is evident of atmosphere of mystery and suspense as Harry heard voice of the monster. No one came to know who attacked the students until Harry saved Ginny from the monster in the chamber. The novelist has constantly used the suitable vocabulary set to create and sustain the ambiance of the gothic. Using the right words maintained the feel of the gothic appropriately. There is an atmosphere of mystery, fear, terror, and sorrow. Characters feel the mystery, haste and anger. All these evidence picturize an appropriate gothic novel.

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