



Virtual Random Musings

Clay Nelson © 5 April 2020

I don't know about you but during this time no one alive has ever experienced before it feels like the news changes every hour. Trying to keep up with the horror of the virus that shall not be named is exhausting, so last week I took time to escape into fantasy, my favourite literary genre. I binged watched all seven of the Harry Potter movies.

I was enchanted with Harry Potter's world from the very first book published 23 years ago. I eagerly awaited each new volume swallowing them whole in one sitting, not unlike Lord Voldemort's basilisk. That did become more difficult as the books grew longer, the longest being 870 pages. When the audio books came out I listened to them all. And of course I went to see all the films in the theatre. Considering my vocation I always appreciated this interchange in Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code:

"These books can't possibly compete with centuries of established history, especially when that history is endorsed by the ultimate bestseller of all time."

Faukman's eyes went wide. "Don't tell me Harry Potter is actually about the Holy Grail."

"I was referring to the Bible."

Faukman cringed. "I knew that."

No, while there are some shared similarities, Harry Potter is not about the Holy Grail. I see these three major themes:

Stephen King sees the major theme as confronting our fears, "This is depicted by the fact that the whole society in the series fears Voldemort. They fear even speaking his name, instead calling him You-know-who. They are only two people who do not fear Voldemort, and they are Harry Potter and Hogwarts's Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. Harry's lack of fear for the Dark Lord is symbolised by how he always takes his name when referring to him. While Dumbledore dies due to unpredictable consequences, Harry survives and finally vanquishes the Dark Lord. There were wizards and witches more skilled than Harry, but they failed to end Voldemort's reign as they feared him."

The second over-arching theme is captured in this moment in the last book: "Finally, the truth. Lying with his face pressed into the dusty carpet of the office where he had once thought he was

learning the secrets of victory, Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive."

JK Rowling observed, "My books are largely about death. They open with the death of Harry's parents. There is Voldemort's obsession with conquering death and his quest for immortality at any price, the goal of anyone with magic. I so understand why Voldemort wants to conquer death. We're all frightened of it."

However, throughout the series, it becomes clear that death is not something to fear, but "life's next big adventure," according to Rowling.

The third theme is expressed by Dumbledore when he tells Harry, *"... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever."*

Love is described as one of the only things which can conquer the Dark Arts and even death, evident in his mother's sacrifice. When she died to save her son, it created an ancient spell which protected Harry when he was hit with the killing curse and making him "The Boy who Lived". When Harry died to save his friends and allies at the final battle with Voldemort, his sacrifice saved them and made them untouchable to Voldemort's terrifying Death Eaters.

Love always plays a notable part in helping to tip the favour in the side of good. Harry's ability to love and be loved is a defining difference between him and Voldemort. Harry builds up friendships, a support system of friends that Voldemort could never hope to match.

BUT it is not always easy.

Exhausted by his battles with death, Harry has a tantie in Dumbledore's office:

"I DON'T CARE!" Harry yelled at them, snatching up a lunascope and throwing it into the fireplace. "I'VE HAD ENOUGH, I'VE SEEN ENOUGH, I WANT OUT, I WANT IT TO END, I DON'T CARE ANYMORE!"

"You do care," said Dumbledore. He had not flinched or made a single move to stop Harry demolishing his office. His expression was calm, almost detached. "You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it."

I find it interesting how life's circumstances change how we interpret our world and ourselves. As familiar as I am with the stories, viewing them through the lens of being locked down in a pandemic brought to light a couple of other sub-themes I had not identified before.

The first is the theme of denial. The whole wizardry world thought Voldemort was dead after his failure to kill the infant Harry. It was Harry who knew that was not true and said so. He had encountered Voldemort's weaker self as he sought to regain his former power. The Ministry of Magic declared Harry Public Enemy No. 1 and sought his arrest. Even his Hogwarts classmates looked at him askance. The media supported the Ministry earning him the enmity of the magical world.

It turned out that the escape I sought in the world of fantasy kicked me out back to reality. You could put an overlay of the entire Harry Potter corpus on top of our new reality and see little difference. Death, fear, denial, and blame flourish, but so does courage and most importantly love.

We are now going into breakout groups to share with one another how we are coping with our fears, where we find courage and how we have experienced love in what were unimaginable times.