

The Tri-Wizard Cup:

Alchemy and Transformation in *Harry Potter*

By Priscilla Hobbs, M.A.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has taken the world *en force*. The series of seven books have found fanatic popularity in all corners of the world driven by a rich story structure and archetypal symbolism. Harry's story follows the Campbellian model of the monomyth, which can be understood as an alchemical transformation of the hero from one state of being to another, typically into a stronger figure. Nestled in the middle of the series is an event that patterns this alchemical monomyth to reinforce the symbolism of Harry's transformation: The Tri-Wizard Tournament. An analysis of the Tri-Wizard Tournament both within its own context and the context of the entire series reveals an understanding of the alchemical symbolism communicated to the readership, providing a model for our own transformation through the one Harry Potter provides.

One of the amazing things about the *Harry Potter* series is that the stories are broad enough to respond to everyone's projection. I have participated in conversations with diverse discussions that include the deeper meaning of the series and specific symbols, speculation on how the series would end (prior to the release of *Deathly Hallows*), and analysis of the fan interactions with the content that have arisen because of the books, including short stories, music, and crafts. Every presenter, reader, scholar, and fan projects something different into the series,

and, therefore, pulls from them a variety of psychic resolutions. For example, fan fiction writers write alternative versions of the events, sometimes imagining themselves as an already established character or creating an avatar in a new character. Wizard rock musicians don the guise of a character and write music from that character's perspective, notably Harry and the Potters, Draco and the Malfoys and the Remus Lupins, among several others. The readers who interact in some fashion with the books re-enact the myth, owning and internalizing the material to experience a figurative heroic transformation in a world otherwise separated from myth. This "literary alchemy," to borrow a term often, if not erroneously, attributed to Potterologist and theologian, John Granger, allows the reader to undergo a personal alchemical journey without the chemicals and experiments.

The Tri-Wizard Tournament surrounds the plot of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the fourth book in the series. The previous three books introduce the magical world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and Harry's role as a hero. Orphaned as a baby, he is sent to live with his non-magical aunt and uncle who are supposed to protect him until he is old enough to re-enter the magical world. They treat him cruelly and give him no inclination of his heritage. Upon receiving his acceptance letter into Hogwarts, Harry rapidly learns that the evil Lord Voldemort, who was defeated when a killing curse rebounded off of Harry back onto him, killed his parents. Prior to *Goblet of Fire*, Harry has three encounters with Lord Voldemort. On two occasions, Voldemort is not corporeal and thus is easily defeated. On the third, Harry does not meet Voldemort directly, but instead engages an associate of Voldemort's who is responsible for betraying his parents' secret location. *Goblet of Fire* is the turning point in the series at which Harry loses his youthful innocence and must choose between his fate as a hero or face the

destruction of his home and friends to the newly corporeal Voldemort.

The book opens with the Quidditch World Cup, bringing wizards and witches together from all over Europe to celebrate Quidditch, the wizarding world's primary sport. In the revelry following the tournament, the Death Eaters, the minions of Lord Voldemort, attack the crowd, inciting new fear and excitement about the potential return of the Dark Lord. Into this environment, Harry Potter and his friends begin their fourth year of school. At the Welcoming Feast at the start of term, the school's headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, announces that Hogwarts will host the Tri-Wizard Tournament, a competition between the three wizarding schools of Europe – Hogwarts in England, Beauxbatons in France, and Durmstrang in Germany – meant to create fellowship among the schools. Historically, the Tri-Wizard Tournament has been marred by many accidents, including a fatality, and as such was not played for a century. Each school submits its top seventh-year students and a champion is selected from each school to compete. Harry's name is somehow magically added to the pool, and he is selected as a fourth champion. He is already considered a celebrity because of historical defeat of Voldemort as a child, and his selection is seen by the other students as an attempt by Harry to be the center of attention.

I will borrow the alchemical stages outlined by Johannes Fabricius in his modern alchemical treatment, *Alchemy*, to outline the literary alchemy inherent in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. The three events of the Tournament, or tasks, lend themselves to the three *coniunctios* Fabricius outlines, following a path from the awakening of adolescent love at the opening of the tournament to one of experience at its close. The three older champions represent the three stages Carl Jung outlines of the *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*. Harry, the relative rookie of the group, represents the *prima materia* inherent in the reader, who, as the alchemist, will

vicariously undergo the process through Harry to become a philosopher's stone.

## **Psychology and Alchemy**

Depth psychology has adopted alchemical symbolism because it provides a convenient historical collection of symbols and metaphors that can be linked with the process of individuation. The importance is placed not on the physical product of the work, but how the process manifests within the psyche. The product of the psychological alchemy is a rich philosopher's stone, a tangible boon of the Self that helps the alchemist transform and transcend his or her mortal nature. As applied to *Harry Potter*, Harry becomes the vessel for the readers, and his journey becomes the journey of the reader. This is not only the by-product of good writing, but also because Rowling intentionally utilized alchemical symbolism to enhance the reader's journey. Regardless of a readers' preferred character, his or her own psyche is stirred by Harry's world and adventures. Through the latter half of the series, the reader is carried from the *nigredo*, through the *rubedo* as Harry (and J.K. Rowling) likewise goes through these stages. The Tournament serves as an introduction foreshadowing the remaining books of the series. Harry, as the vessel, collects the readers' own projections, the substance of his or her own psychic *prima materia*. The symbolism does not need to be exact for us to see the parallels with classical alchemy.

## **Opening the Work: Selecting the Champions**

At the start of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, Hogwarts welcomes guests from the two other European schools of magic, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. Seventh year students are allowed to enter their name into the Goblet of Fire that will impartially choose the three champions, one from each school, to compete in the tournament. Somehow, Harry's name comes

out of the Goblet, which not only gives Hogwarts two champions but also makes the group of three into a group of four. Harry not only has to complete each task, but he also has to defeat the other champions, Cedric from Hogwarts, Fleur from Beauxbatons, and Viktor from Durmstrang, each of whom reflects some latent aspect of his personality. His final target is the Tri-Wizard Cup.

Both of these cups serve as incarnations of the Holy Grail in the book: the first encountered being the Goblet of Fire and the second the Tri-Wizard Cup to be awarded at the end of the tournament. Similar to the Grail's dream-like appearance in King Arthur's court, the Goblet of Fire is illusory and represents more the possibility of the coming adventure than the goal of the quest itself. The Holy Grail in alchemical terms is the quintessence, the pure essence of a substance that is a sort of divine fifth element that unites the four elements – fire, water, earth and air – into one pure form, the philosopher's stone. This aspect of the quest is crucial for the alchemist to awaken to his or her potential for spiritual immortality. This is the quest for the boon of the Self, with a capitalized "S" to distinguish the Self as a union with the divine, not simply an awakening of self-consciousness.

Fabricius compares this stage of the work to the awakening of adolescent love, the burning uncontrollable love at the heart of Grail romances (Fabricius 23). Harry and his peers, now fourteen, begin to experience the pangs of love this year, and have to come to terms with new feelings for the people with whom they live and study. Of the four champions, Fleur, who is part veela, is the embodiment of love. Veela in Rowling's world are beautiful sirens in the bodies of women who can bring men under their spell simply by walking into the room. Cedric is very popular among the girls for his Quidditch skills and his earthly qualities, the element associated

with his house, Hufflepuff. Finally, the third champion, Viktor, who remains isolated whenever possible, is uneasy about love and women. These three provide models to teach Harry how to control his own feelings as he copes with the new awakening of adolescent love, which provides an undercurrent to the Tournament and creates unnecessary tensions among his friends and allies.

### **First *Coniunctio*: The First Task**

The first task of the tournament is for the champions, armed only with a wand, to rescue a golden egg from a mother dragon. They are awarded points for the time and effectiveness it takes to complete the task. Harry draws the last dragon and is kept isolated until his turn so as to not get ideas from the other champions. Harry's dragon is particularly fierce, a Hungarian Horntail. His solution is to summon his broom from his dorm room and fly after the egg and dodge the dragon rather than fight her directly. This method draws upon his skills as a seeker in Quidditch, the magical sport in which he chases after a small golden ball, the Golden Snitch, flying on a broomstick while his teammates battle against the other team to score points. This task corresponds with the *nigredo* stage, because it involves fire and the blackening of the *prima*, something Harry narrowly avoids because of his flying skills.

The golden egg is an alchemical symbol of rebirth, and appears at the end of the first task to bring Harry out of the first task and thus the *nigredo* to guide him into the second task, the union with anima. "Retrieving the philosophical egg," according to Fabricius, "is therefore equivalent to reliving one's primal state, where subject and object are one..." (94). This references the stage of development prior to birth and a development of consciousness. The egg and its parallel sister symbol, the Golden Snitch, signify both an alchemical birth and a spiritual

death. The Snitch recurs throughout the books as the vessel of Harry's happiness. Each time he catches it, he grows a little more from a child to a true hero. At the end of the series, the Snitch becomes the vessel hidden in which is the Resurrection Stone, an enchanted stone that can resurrect images of people who have died. With it Harry resurrects his parents and godfather who walk with him as he goes to his death, and thus his final transformation through resurrection.

### **The Second *Coniunctio*: The Second Task**

The second task first requires the solving of a riddle, encased in the golden egg, but spoken by a Mermaid, meaning that the only way to understand it is to listen to the message under water. Harry has to take a bath with the golden egg, which sings a song describing the second task, to find something that was taken from each champion and hidden at the bottom of the Black Lake near the school's castle. That Harry has to sink underwater to hear the egg's message is a manifestation of the return to the primal state. He must first sink into the waters of the unconscious to move into the next stage of his development. The task is for the champions to rescue the person most important to them at Hogwarts at that time. Harry discovers that he has to rescue his "Weasley," meaning his best friend Ron Weasley. With a little gillyweed, a plant that enables him to breathe and swim underwater without assistance, he swims into the Mermaid Kingdom of the Lake and finds four people enchanted: his two best friends, the girl he likes, and one other girl. The mermaids prevent him from taking someone other than his designated target. Harry waits to make sure everyone is safely rescued, at the risk of exceeding the time limit and failing the task.

The water of the lake holds its own philosophical symbolism. As the depth psychological



symbol for the unconscious, Harry's plunge into the depths during this task offers both the opportunity to reach into himself while simultaneously cleansing his essence in preparation for the upcoming tasks. According to Jung, "the philosophical water is the stone or the *prima materia* itself; but at the same time, it is also its solvent..." (235). Plunging into the lake allows Harry to transition from the *nigredo* into the *albedo* by being cured and cleansed of the darkness of the *nigredo*. He returns from this task prepared for the union with anima.

The mermaid is a mythical manifestation of anima, a beautiful woman who lives underwater, with the tail of a sea serpent or snake. Similarly, the presence of mermen and the Mer-King suggests a similar manifestation of animus energies. Harry's encounter with the merpeople, beyond the song in the egg, has an air of hostility: He wants to rescue all of his friends, but they prevent him from doing so because of the rules of the tournament. In line with English fairy tale traditions, Rowling's merpeople are also not beautiful. This shows Harry, and the reader, that the union with anima can be met with hostility if he does not recognize her wishes. He does not, nor should he, yield to her completely, but he learns to compromise with her: he stands aside to wait to see if the other champions arrive, then rushes in to rescue the remaining girl in addition to his "Weasley" when Fleur fails to arrive. The Mer-King informs Dumbledore of Harry's heroism, for which he is awarded extra points.

### **Third *Coniunctio*: The Third Task**

The third task marks the turning point of the rising action of the series. Harry has to navigate a maze to the Tri-Wizard Cup. A maze differs from a labyrinth in that the maze may have several paths to its final place, whereas a labyrinth has just one. The maze has obstructions

at its crossroads that are meant not only to distract the champions, but also to eliminate them. Harry encounters a sphinx, a boggart, and a magical orb that turns him upside down. At the center of the maze is the Tri-Wizard Cup, the second Holy Grail. The Tri-Wizard Cup is enchanted into a portkey, which is a magical device that transports anyone to another place. The Cup transports Harry and Cedric, because they touch it at the same time, to a graveyard. In the graveyard, he witnesses not only the death of his co-champion and classmate, Cedric, but also the return of his arch-nemesis, Lord Voldemort.

Cedric's death foreshadows that of Harry's own at the end of the series, from which Harry will rise as a complete essence, like the alchemical figure Mercurius, free from all links with Voldemort. Like Mercurius, Harry is "metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites" (Jung 295). Harry's role as the hero is to unite all the houses of Hogwarts and any other enemy of Voldemort to fight against Voldemort's dominating abuse of magical power. Harry loses his innocence to Cedric's death, hardening him for the upcoming events. The "Grail" then brings him to the spiritual awakening in the form of introduction to the darker side of evil.

### **A Jungian Perspective**

Carl Jung cites the four primary steps of the work as the *nigredo*, *albedo*, *citritas*, and *rubedo*, with the *citritas* being dropped in later alchemical texts. This is because the object of the work, the psyche, has to move from a state of impurity to purity until finally becoming a new substance altogether, an actualized Self. The three tri-wizard champions other than Harry represent for him these three stages. Viktor is his shadow and *nigredo*, Fleur his anima and

*albedo*, and Cedric his projection and *rubedo*.

Harry never directly defeats Viktor in the events other than by always earning more points than him, but Viktor's role is more widely spread. Viktor is Harry's impure matter. He is a star seeker in Quidditch and is a professional player while still in school. He is adored because of his celebrity, rather than for his own merit, which makes him like Harry. But Viktor is also moody and depressed. He acts as though he is forced to compete in the tournament to exploit his celebrity rather than for the benefit of associating with other schools. Harry turns into Viktor behaviorally in the next book of the series, *Order of the Phoenix*, becoming moody and depressed. Viktor, then, offers the model for Harry's *nigredo*, the blackening of the substance or a period of depression, which he then lives out in *Order of the Phoenix*.

Fleur models Harry's anima with which he must unite in order for their divine union to produce the new substance. Upon her arrival at Hogwarts, Fleur refuses to acknowledge Harry and his friends, even disregards him as "just a boy" and thus not worthy of competing in the tournament. During the second task, Harry stays at the rescue point in the Mermaid City to see if Fleur will arrive to rescue her target, her little sister. Once he realizes she will not, he rescues the little girl himself. After his heroic effort, even though nothing would have actually happened to her, Fleur becomes Harry's friend and is forever grateful for his kindness towards her sister. Harry's union with anima, his *albedo*, is eventually played out in *Half-blood Prince*, when Harry finally unites with his anima, Ron's sister, Ginny Weasley.

For his *rubedo*, Harry enters the maze in search for the Holy Grail, the Tri-Wizard Cup. He is tested through various encounters with magical beings and objects in addition to dead ends and wrong turns, and finally coming to the cup at the same time as his fellow Hogwarts

champion, Cedric. They take the cup at the same time and are transported to the graveyard where Cedric is killed and Harry witnesses Voldemort's rebirth as a *homunculus*, and they battle. These events are paralleled in the final book of the series, *Deathly Hallows* as Harry and his friends journey all over England on the search for pieces of Voldemort's soul encased in Horcruxes. They find all but two of them and they return to Hogwarts to locate the others. Consequently, Voldemort attacks the school, Harry sacrifices himself, and then is resurrected. Blood is shed, Voldemort dies, and Harry's transformation is complete. He then comes together with Ginny, the union between the red queen and white king, and their union produces three children, one of whom is singled out by Rowling in the Epilogue as being the ultimate result of Harry's transformation. This boy, Albus Severus, is named for the two Hogwarts figures that shaped Harry's development: Albus Dumbledore, school's headmaster, and Severus Snape, rival of his father's who secretly loved Harry's mother his entire life.

Although the Tri-Wizard Tournament is meant to be an alchemical microcosm at the middle of the series, it still maintains its function as the turning point in the series. Although its goal is to be a complete transformative cycle, the unexpected portkey arrests this transformation, slowing the process to fuel the remaining three books. Harry witnesses events at the graveyard that provide him with the necessary tools for the remaining task: 1. The death of Cedric is the ultimate death of innocence for Harry, and he is fully initiated into a category of maturity that sets him further apart from his peers. This is symbolized in *Order of the Phoenix* by Harry's new ability to see the thestrals, four-legged, horse-like, dinosaur-looking creatures that pull the carriages and the students from the Hogwarts Express train station to the castle. Only those who have witnessed death can see them. 2. The resurrection of Lord Voldemort, in the manner of a

*homunculus*, created from chemicals and magic, not by a true conjunction between anima and the alchemist. His body is as distorted as his soul, corrupted by evil and the breaking apart it has suffered as a result of murder and making horcruxes, vessels for encasing pieces of a soul to gain immortality, a dark magical alchemy. Because of these two factors, the remaining three books of the series throw Harry into a more involved alchemical process, as his own development shifts from the earthy “below” aspects to those of “above,” of enlightenment.

J.K. Rowling created an opus through her *Harry Potter* series that acts as a representative of a modern myth. The transformation suggested in the books can be enacted in the conscious “real” world by following Harry’s alchemical model. That the fan community has taken command of the books and subsequent manifestations of the works demonstrates the integrity of the works. Some readers have come of age alongside Harry, and others turn to his adventures as guidance through a difficult period of life. The adventures can be analyzed through the disciplines of literary criticism, the mythological hero’s journey, the psychological individuation process, and even as an alchemical work. The end of the work is marked by the chemical wedding, the union of the substances into a new entity, the philosopher’s stone, marked by the marriage between Harry and Ginny and their son Albus Severus. Achieving this boon, this psychic Self, has long been the quest of those seeking a way to make sense of their place in the universe. The alchemical process offers an approach that unites the languages of divinity, psychology, and science to speak the language of myth. Literary alchemy provides as much of a gateway into the mind as does following an alchemical text through a chemical experiment, allowing the doorways of transformation to be open to those who seek them, even to those who do not intentionally drop their names into the Goblet of Fire.



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