

INKLINGS SYMPOSIUM 2023

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Death and Immortality: Reading *The Bible* and the *Harry Potter* Series

The obsession with death and pondering on the numerous ways to overcome it have been integral themes of literature, be it *Dr. Faustus* or *Harry Potter*. In most narratives, obsession with immortality is portrayed to be an undesirable trait, as it has connotations of the desire to be equal to God. This is even true in Eastern religions and schools of thought, where mythological characters who desire to be immortal often meet their fatal hubris in these thoughts.

However, a mere defiance shown towards the natural order of things, and thereby challenging the divine right is not the only theme found in these narratives. On closer inspection, one can try to read a subversion of Biblical ideas in the downfall of Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series. Lord Voldemort, whose greatest obsession lies in the concept of immortality, is only believing the Biblical verse, "Death is the wages of sin", when he expects the karmic retribution of death for his actions. To escape the inevitable, he tries to divide his soul into seven pieces or horcruxes, eerily similar to Dr. Faustus. It should also be taken into account that the glory of Jesus is revealed when "he is risen". This can be juxtaposed to the event of the rise of Lord Voldemort in *The Goblet of Fire*, with the anointing of blood.

Death is a pervasive presence in the *Harry Potter* series, where the protagonist loses many of his favorite human beings to death including his parents, godfather Sirius, pet owl Hedwig, Dobby, Dumbledore, and Lupin. In fact, with each subsequent volume, the series gets more poignant, in terms of losing the readers' endearing characters to death.

When Harry expresses his feelings of disillusionment at this aspect, headmaster Dumbledore says, "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love." A strong recurrent theme of the series is laid down in these lines. Lord Voldemort has his hamartia in accepting the ecclesiastical notion that there could be nothing worse than death, which is the punishment for sin. However, it is repeatedly debunked through multiple characters in the series, including himself.

I purpose to write a paper on the subversion of Biblical ideas of philosophy in the *Harry Potter* series, particularly in relation to ideas of death and immortality.

Athira Mohan has a PhD in Children's literature, which is centred around the politics of imperialism in the indigenous children's literatures of India and Canada, at Pondicherry University, India. She is a recipient of the Indo-Canadian Shastri fellowship for the year 2019, and has worked as a research fellow at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. During her stay at USASK, she has worked closely with experts in indigenous children's literature, and had worked extensively on Canadian curricula and the government policies towards reconciliation. She has published four papers in various national and international journals, and her interests include Children's literature, postcolonialism, and food studies. She is currently based in Stuttgart, Germany.

