

Harry potter and the human behind "lord voldemort"



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It is no secret that Lord Voldemort is the “big bad” of the Harry Potter Series; this is a fact that is established from the very first time he is introduced in the series. In *Sorcerer’s Stone* Hagrid reveals to Harry that his parents were murdered by a “wizard who went...bad. As bad as you could go,” which is the first time Harry hears about Voldemort (54). For all of the novels prior to *Half -Blood Prince*, that’s really the most anyone knows about Voldemort. It is widely known that he’s killed and tortured many in his crusade for power a, holds a prejudice against those who aren’t pure blood and that he is one of darkest wizards to live, which makes it easier for characters and readers alike to see him as this cruel soulless being—something less than human even. *Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince* is really the point in the series where readers and Harry get a to see Voldemort as something more than a dark wizard. As readers and Harry are exposed to more about Tom Riddle before he became Voldemort, suddenly he is a person with a past, hopes and attachments rather than some unfathomable being. Suddenly he is human. This new depiction of Voldemort demonstrates how the series has matured as it takes it’s villain and adds more to his identity; making him more of three dimensional character, not just a villain.

Prior to *Harry Potter and The Half-Prince*, descriptions of Voldemort paint him out to appear so unreal and inhuman, so much so that Harry was left speechless upon interacting with him for the first at the end of *Sorcerer’s Stone*: Harry would have screamed, but he couldn’t make a sound. Where there should have been the back of Quirrell’s head, there was face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake. (293)He is little more than a monster,

leaching off of someone. This is a notion that carries through to the next novel when the readers witness even the diary-bound memory of Voldemort committing monstrous acts including but not limited to trying to murder Ginny and Harry at the end of the novel (COS 307-319). Harry doesn't encounter him again until the fourth novel, Goblet of Fire, during which he still bears little resemblance to a human being in comparison to a monstrous being. They are in a graveyard, with Voldemort on the verge of full resurrection when Harry encounters him. Harry is so taken aback by how inhuman appears that his first instinct is once again, to scream, though it's muffled by cloth. Voldemort is essentially described as a creature, "hairless and scaly looking" and once more as having a "flat and snake like" face. Even post resurrection, he is still described as snake-like with skin "whiter than a skull" and hands resembling "pale spiders" (640-644). This further pushes the idea that he is very inhuman in his very nature and it's continuously reinforced, as this description of appearing "snake-like" is also presented in the following novel, Order of The Phoenix, moments before the face-off between Voldemort and Dumbledore (OOTP 612). Early on in the series, while conversing with Harry, Tom Riddle states that the dark wizard Voldemort is his "past, present, and future" (COS 313).

Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince in the point in the series where this is shown to be false, at least in part; while Voldemort may be a great and terrible wizard, he did not always exist, for Tom Riddle came before him and Tom Riddle is very evidently human. This is first shown through the very mundane circumstances surrounding his birth, as explained by Dumbledore. His father left his mother while she was pregnant with him because he didn't

love her (albeit he only thought so because of magic) and his mother died very shortly giving birth to him. While it would be fair for both readers and characters to assume Tom Riddle was born out of evil given his incredibly dark nature, the reality is that he was born to a woman who did not survive childbirth; this woman had nowhere to go and no one she could turn to, so she went to a nearby orphanage to give birth, there was nothing extraordinary about it—just tragic. Even the staff at the orphanage could see that she was to be pitied, with the caretaker Mrs. Cole admitting to Dumbledore that with Merope's baby, they "named him just as she'd said, it seemed so important to the poor girl"(266). *Half-Blood Prince* further serves to humanize Tom Riddle in that it parallels his deep desire, growing up, to know more about his parents, with that of Harry's.

When Harry first meets Hagrid in *Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling describes his voice as being "urgent" when he asks Hagrid what happened to his parents (54) and through the series, he continues to try to learn more about them. Tom Riddle is the same in that he also seeks information about his family the moment he is first introduced to the wizarding world. During his initial meeting with Dumbledore, he inquires about them, "...then, as though he could not suppress the question, as though it burst from him in spite of himself, he asked, " Was my father a wizard? He was called Tom Riddle too, they've told me" (75). Dumbledore reveals that through Hogwarts, Tom Riddle still continued to seek more information on his family: Those whom I could persuade to talk told me that Riddle was obsessed with his parentage. This is understandable, of course; he had grown up in an orphanage and naturally wished to know how he came to be there...he searched in vain for

some trace of Tom Riddle senior on the shields in the trophy room...in the summer of his sixteenth year, he left the orphanage to which he returned annually and set off to find his Gaunt relatives. (HBP 362-6363) This shows how deep his desire was to understand where he comes from, which is, as Dumbledore states, very understandable given he grew up an orphan. It is in deep contrast with the cold and uncaring versions of Voldemort prevalent in past novels. It shows that despite his cold demeanor, not even Tom Riddle is immune to the very humane desire and instinct to seek family and answers about one's past. This is shown as being especially true given that when he does find the Gaunt household, Rowling describes him as looking disappointed when he only finds his uncle, as he was clearly hoping for more and yet despite, he still takes the family ring when he leaves (HBP 634)

Through the Harry Potter Series, Voldemort is shown through his terrible actions, to be a seemingly one-dimensional villain. He typically appears more inhuman and monstrous, than human, but Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince humanizes him through the revelations about his past unrelated to his quest for power. The novel reveals his very mundane desire to seek out his family and their history and the very mundane circumstances of his birth and how he grew up prior to Hogwarts. It shows him growing up, as a person trying to figure out his past, rather than just the all-knowing evil wizard that he is known to be.

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