A Tale of Three Viewpoints: How Narrative Perspective is Used to Create Moral Ambiguity in Severus Snape Within a Postmodern Fantasy

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Abstract

Fantasy characters have traditionally been placed into a moral binary of good or evil. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series adheres to this convention through its central conflict between good and evil, and a moral framework defined by power, love, and choice. The character of Severus Snape is significant within *Potter's* representation of morality due to his ambiguity, and the way this complicates the series' understanding of morality. Snape's ambiguity is created through the relationship between focaliser, narrator and implied reader. The positioning of Harry Potter as the focaliser for the series' majority develops a consistent confusion around Snape's character, caused by the flaws in Harry's perspective that can be noticed by the implied reader. The narrative provides evidence that both contradicts and supports Harry's assessment of Snape, resulting in a complex ambiguity that deepens alongside the series. This is developed further by the periods in the narration where the focalising character temporarily shifts, deepening the space between the implied reader's and Harry's perspective. Snape's conclusion refuses a conclusive binary positioning, disrupting the series' otherwise fixed moral positioning, which contributes to *Potter's* success.

Key Words: Postmodern, Fantasy, Focalisation, Indeterminacy, Morality, Harry Potter

Preface / Acknowledgements

This thesis aims to explore the moral ambiguity of Severus Snape, the elusive Potions Master of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry within J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Through an investigation of close textual analysis, narrative viewpoints became increasingly important to consider when unpacking how such convincing moral ambiguity was created within this character. It felt equally important to consider Snape's effect on the series and the wider fantasy genre, particularly in how his morality pushes beyond a simple good or bad binary towards a more complex understanding of morality in our postmodern world.

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Chapter One

An Introduction to Morality in Fantasy

It is impossible to think of postmodern fantasy without considering J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. The fantasy genre has transformed significantly over time but consistently engages with morality through its many forms. Traditionally, this has followed a clear moral binary, a good versus evil narrative, that restricts fantasy characters to one or the other. The *Potter* series achieves its postmodern status partly by progressing beyond this moral binary towards the postmodern state of indeterminacy, with the controversial character of Severus Snape. Throughout the *Potter* series, Snape is carefully positioned as morally ambiguous, his mystery and complexity developing alongside the series. The narrative positioning of the title character, Harry Potter, as the primary focaliser of the series significantly influences Snape's ambiguity. This is achieved through their complex relationship and Harry's unreliability as a narrator. Harry's bias is contrasted against the remainder of the narration and the opinions of multiple other characters, causing doubt and mixed messaging for the implied reader as they follow Harry throughout the years. The conclusion of the series presents a redemption arc for Snape that leaves the implied reader in a state of indeterminacy, caused by the series' many contradictions. This is seen primarily in how Snape's behaviour defies expectations of morality, both in the series and the wider fantasy genre. Snape's position in the war between good and evil does not necessarily reflect his morality. This characterisation is an outlier within *Potter* and the wider fantasy genre, in which a character's morality traditionally aligns with their loyalties in their world's war. His character's experimentation with morality is the strongest example of how the *Potter* series progresses into postmodern fantasy, with its rejection of the traditional moral binary.

Fantasy has always been concerned with discussing morality, the conversation influenced by the cultural and sociopolitical views of the time. For a genre to span centuries, as fantasy has, adaptation is essential for survival. Historically, morality has been represented within a moral binary, confining fantasy characters to one of two options – good or evil. This

way of thinking of morality began developing into a more complex representation with the evolution into postmodern fantasy and indeterminacy in the late 20th century. Aliel Cunningham defines fantasy by what it accomplishes, stating, "virtually all fantasy stories have a moral language woven throughout them from beginning to end – whether implicitly or explicitly – identifying and revealing that which is good and evil, brave and cowardly, just and unjust, noble and treacherous" (113). The *Potter* series is an example of a postmodern fantasy that provides a 'moral language woven throughout from beginning to end,' one that seeks to blur the clear line between good and evil. It works towards a more complex portrayal of morality than the binary opposition seen in fairy tales. As Rosemary Jackson points out, the possibilities available to each fantasy text "are determined, in many ways, by the texts which have preceded it and whose characteristic features it repeats or repudiates" (5). Postmodern fantasy has taken elements from its past and built upon them, transforming these elements over time alongside society. The structure of *Potter* follows a world war between good and evil, a concept first seen by Tolkien and Lewis in the 20th century, though its characters present a murkier portrayal of good and evil that transcends binary opposites. Though this is not necessarily unique to *Potter*, its global success secures the importance in considering how and why its characters transcend these moral binaries, and to what effect.

Fantasy's history is filled with transformation and adaptation to societal values. It is widely understood that modern fantasy descends from traditional fairy tales. Modern children's fantasy began to take shape in the 16th century, where the fairy tale started to serve a new educational purpose for children. Farah Mendlesohn and Michael Levy pinpoint the beginning of this transition within the 16th century French Court, where fairy tale authors like Charles Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy found popularity amongst French nobility. During this time, the public's perception of children shifted. Childhood was seen as a "state of natural innocence, and therefore potentially corruptible" and it became increasingly important

to educate children on morality to prevent this corruption (Mendlesohn and Levy 17). The goal was what Mendlesohn and Levy call a "social indoctrination" (17). Literature's aim was to influence children's understanding of morality – to be moral is to think and behave in the way deemed acceptable by the societal values of the time. Fairy tales were intended as a guide to the proper way of life.

The 16th – 19th centuries saw fairy tales adapt to the societal and cultural changes of the time, particularly in France and Germany where the fairy tale was prominent. During this period, literacy transformed from an indicator of high social rank to a necessity to function in middle-class life. The Brothers Grimm in particular made a significant contribution to the re-working of traditional fairy tales to teach literacy to children. Mendlesohn and Levy state the fairy tale was aimed "as a clear trend to turn the fairy tale towards a discrete child audience" (23). This transformation spanned centuries, resulting in a collection of fairy tales for children in the 19th century that were "written in somewhat simpler language […] while at the same time reflecting the middle-class morality of their day" (23). The 19th century also saw the refinement of popular fantastical texts to exclude anything considered immoral or inappropriate for children. This can be seen in the re-writing of Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb in *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), who "toned down, rendered obscure or removed entirely" anything considered morally inappropriate for children (Mendlesohn and Levy 25). The moral views of 19th century Europe were heavily influenced by Christianity, reflected in the content of popular children's literature and fantasy. Fairy tales and children's literature have been shaped throughout the centuries to conform to the socially accepted moral view of the period. Fantasy continued to adapt as morality began to slowly move away from the strict binary of good or evil with the emergence of modernism.

The modernist period was a revolutionary artistic movement in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The movement was led by writers who aimed to "liberate themselves from the

constraints and polite conventions associated with Victorianism" (Ma 1139). Modernism is defined by experimentation, with writers taking the rules of genre and pushing their boundaries. In fantasy, this is seen most influentially through J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Maria Nikolajeva identifies the first shift in fantasy away from moral binaries in Lewis' *Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) which documents young Edmund's transformation from evil to good through a journey of redemption. Lewis became a prominent scholar in fantasy, alongside Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* series (1954 – 1955), in the latter half of the 20th century. Tolkien and Lewis crafted ideas within both their literary and scholarly work that defined modern fantasy, creating a vital transition point in fantasy's history. The extent to which Tolkien in particular shaped modern fantasy is such that Douglas Anderson, et al. state, "fantasy literature did not begin with Tolkien, though he developed it in such a manner that there exists almost a defining line between fantasy written before Tolkien and fantasy written afterward" (1). George Aichele identifies two distinct theories of fantasy that came to fruition in the 20th century because of Tolkien and Lewis' impact, both relating to escapism, "the former sees the fantastic escape [...] acceptable only as moral instruction for children – to teach people how to behave properly towards their superiors. The latter view defends the fantastic escape as offering a power of transformation" (324). Although there is significant debate regarding the purpose of fantasy, scholars tend to agree that the primary world influences the secondary, magical world – the primary world being reality, the author's world, which is shaped by its moral values.

Tolkien and Lewis had a profound impact on how the fantasy genre presents good and evil. Suzanne Rahn identifies the concept of 'imaginary wars' as the cause. An imaginary war is a war that exists within fiction which sees the major conflict of the story not between two individuals, but an ideological conflict within their society. The conflict is so large that it causes a physical war, and its characters are forced to pick a side. A character's morality is

then determined by which side of the war they support. Tolkien and Lewis rose to prominence in the aftermath of World War I and II, which saw war on a global scale for the first time, and its devastation was equally unprecedented. In both fantasy series, Tolkien and Lewis depict a large-scale war that no character can escape or avoid – the primary world of the author's reality clearly depicted in the secondary. Rahn describes the impact of this concept in fantasy, "the type of imaginary war they depict – a war of good against evil forces – once rare in children's fantasy, is now so universally familiar as to have become a cliché" (163). Its influence on Rowling's work is clear, as the series builds towards a war between good and evil, one that the protagonist, Harry, finds himself in the centre. After Tolkien and Lewis, these large-scale imaginary wars became a common method for how a fantasy world determines the morality of its characters. Their morality is decided by the side they support, and the consequences of their morality are more profound, as it impacts not only individual characters but the entire world they inhabit. York observes, "The ethics and moralities that were laid down by Tolkien and Lewis commanded fantasies following in their footsteps to adhere to the strict regime that had been previously established by the duo" (4), noting their influence in developing this formula that future fantasy authors would replicate.

Rahn emphasises that while Tolkien and Lewis depict these wars differently, they both exist within a moral binary of good battling evil. They both include an evil enemy, who is fighting for a change in their world for personal benefit, and a good side that will fight to prevent them from making that change a reality. Md. Selim Akhtar writes that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is "essentially the story of the struggle between the forces of Good and Evil, and each creature must choose for himself which side he wishes to support" (304). There is room for redemption and a change in allegiance; however, this can only be achieved with total redemption of character. The possibility of redemption certainly introduced a complexity not previously seen, but it is limited and does not allow for complexity within the

pre-established binaries. York notes that, “Tolkien and Lewis [paved] the road during the 1950s for the strong moral code in fantasy tales, with no room for morally ambiguous characters” (10). One must be completely bad or completely good, and to switch from one to the other involves an entire transformation of character. The idea that a character can support the side of good while themselves exhibiting evil qualities, or support the side of evil without themselves being evil, is not present in the fictional wars of Tolkien and Lewis.

Equally influential in the development of fantasy within the 20th century are the scholarly interventions of theorists Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson. Todorov explores the structure of a fantasy text, seeking to determine how it operates differently from other genres. Todorov’s work helped to define fantasy as its own genre within scholarly fields. Jackson’s work built upon Todorov’s by exploring the unconscious in fantasy, drawing on psychoanalysis. According to Jackson, “Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something stranger, unfamiliar and *apparently* ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (4). It is clear when reviewing the history of fantasy that the author’s own society is entirely relevant to the fantastical world they create. The transformation of morality within each period of fantasy’s history, from early fairy tales of moral instruction to imaginary wars depicting the consequences of ideological conflicts on a grand physical scale, demonstrates the influence each text’s society had in its creation. The gradual bending of the moral binary throughout the 20th and 21st centuries reflect Western society’s slow withdrawal from a religiously led life, which saw strict rules on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. York also comments on this transformation, stating “society itself had shifted away from the strong influences inculcated in the generations that fought and grew up during the time of the two world wars” (14). The 20th century saw a

progression towards a more fluid acceptance of moral behaviour, in ourselves, in each other, and in our fiction.

Reflecting this transition, a key contrast between modern fantasy and postmodern fantasy is the moral ambiguity of its characters. Postmodern fantasy emerged at the end of the 20th century. Elements of the postmodern literary movement of the late 20th century could be seen in popular fantasy texts produced after the 1960's. While modern fantasy developed the complexity between the traditional good or evil binary by allowing redemption, postmodern fantasy "goes considerably further in its ambiguity" (Nikolajeva 146). Nikolajeva explains that this loss of clear-cut morality of good *or* evil is present in both main characters and supporting characters; because "such characters often perform the roles of parental substitutes, their ambiguity undermines the sense of security that young protagonists normally feel from such figures" (146-47). Nikolajeva argues that this can be attributed to the "postmodern concept of indeterminacy" (147), defined by the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008) as "any element of a text that requires the reader to decide on its meaning" (Baldick 168). Julia Jordan explains indeterminacy as an "ambiguous term when applied to the literary text [...] we might assume it has contradictory meanings or multiple, equally weighted, possible interpretations, which the text does nothing to resolve" (268). *Potter* introduces indeterminacy with the character arc of Severus Snape. Snape is positioned as a morally ambiguous character throughout the series, and the conclusion avoids clarifying this ambiguity. This lack of conclusion produces an effect that Jordan describes as "something more than a refusal to decide between possibilities, but something more nebulous, a state that blocks choice altogether" (269). The refusal to align Snape with the side of good or evil creates a powerful element of indeterminacy within the series.

How Morality is Represented in the *Harry Potter* Series

The moral framework of *Potter's* characters is created through the concepts of love, choice, and power. Any immoral behaviour displayed is compared with whether they choose to act upon love. If they do, the text provides a forgiving representation of their morality. Due to the reliance on choice, to understand its moral code one must examine its characters. Structurally, the text follows the imaginary wars seen in the work of Tolkien and Lewis. There is a clear good and evil ideology presented, represented by two pivotal lead characters – Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort – which other characters eventually choose to align themselves with. The characters that reside on each of these sides, however, cannot themselves be so easily defined as good or evil based on the side they support. Their ability to love, and how much they pursue and abuse power, is just as vital to their morality as the side of the war they support.

Harry and Voldemort are the two extreme examples of good and evil respectively, acting as a guide for the rest of the characters to follow. They each represent one side of the imaginary war, the battle between good and evil. The protagonist, Harry, is the ultimate example of good, exclusively due to his ability to love. Kathleen McEvoy states, "In Rowling's world, it seems that the only prerequisite to heroism is the ability to love" (211). Harry is flawed, yet unwavering in his decision to protect those he loves. He is the antithesis of Voldemort, who chooses power above all. Harry never demonstrates a desire for power and is humble about his magical prowess. When it is suggested to him that he has innate magical power, he denies it, insisting his victories derive only from luck and help from others. He does not use his magical skill for personal gain, only defensively to save himself and those around him. Professor Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts and Harry's role model, informs him that this is what makes him a good person, one who would never fall victim to

the allure of power. He explains, “You have never been seduced by the Dark Arts [...] You are protected, in short, by your ability to love!” (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince* 476-77). Dumbledore’s assertion that his ability to love others is what protects him from ever being drawn to abuse his power, to become evil, reinforces the idea that goodness within *Potter* is defined by love, and a choice of how one uses their power in the name of love. This trait is so ingrained in Harry’s character that it is eventually used against him. The Death Eaters (Voldemort’s supporters) come to recognise the curse ‘expelliarmus’ as Harry’s signature, as this spell will disarm, not harm, his opponent. Using this curse in a battle betrays his identity to the Death Eaters, as only he uses it in combat. Yiyin Lee observes how “rather than making Harry into the most powerful wizard, Rowling highlights his feature of being valiant without resorting to violence” (77). He will not harm others when it can be avoided, even if they are on the side of evil. Lawrence Farris writes that it is Harry’s relationships that allows his goodness to grow. They state, “out of his long and deep familiarity with hurt and loss, Harry chooses not only to hear, but to share, other’s suffering as he journeys ever more surely towards compassion and love” (145). It is his choice to empathise with others, and act on his love for them that makes him the ultimate force of good in *Potter*.

Voldemort represents the opposite of choosing love and is motivated entirely by a quest for power. He abuses the power of magic to harm those who stand in his way, exhibiting evil in the *Potter* universe. Voldemort believes in the superiority of wizards, that the ability to perform magic naturally affords wizards power over those who cannot – non-magical people for whom Rowling coined the term ‘muggles’. His quest for power is fought through an anti-muggle ideology that gains support from other wizards who believe in wizard superiority. Anti-muggle rhetoric is not unique to Voldemort. One of the oldest wizards in the world’s history, Salazar Slytherin, was famous for his anti-muggle beliefs, and refused to admit muggle-born students (magical students born to muggle parents) into Hogwarts School,

believing their blood to be impure. Gellert Grindelwald was another wizard prominent in the 1920's who came to power on a similar anti-muggle agenda, believing it was wizards' right to rule for the greater good of everyone. This ideology is embedded within Rowling's wizarding history, though Voldemort's quest for power is the most extreme form of muggle-hatred the wizarding world has seen. His prejudice is clear through the hate crimes committed on muggles, muggleborns, and 'blood traitors' (pure blood wizards who associate or sympathise with muggles). Voldemort's first murder was his muggle father and grandparents, whom he despised for their lack of magic ability, and at only 16, he murdered muggleborn Myrtle Warren. It is this ideology that makes up the evil side of the imaginary war. Anyone who supports Voldemort's cause – power over muggles for the eradication of muggles – is thus aligned with him. Christina Flotmann observes that for Voldemort, "a certain duality exists which equates his own evil deeds with power" (125). This is seen through Voldemort's claim, "there is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it" (Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone* 211). His decision to pursue ultimate power and use his magical ability to harm others represents evil in opposition to Harry's choice of love. These two characters align with opposite binaries – one motivated by love, the other by power.

While the series presents a predictable good versus evil storyline, represented by its two leading characters, the statement it makes on morality is more complex than it first appears. The imaginary war of good and evil provides a clear moral message, consistent with the conclusions of Tolkien and Lewis – evil must be fought, and good will always win. If you support the side of evil, you are evil. If you support the side of good, you are good. The *Potter* series adheres to this moral message but adds complexity by presenting characters whose allegiances are not a measure of their morality. In their thesis, Jolene Creighton states:

> Since the characters in this series are so multifaceted and complex, they cannot be easily shunted into strict categories […] the tension between good and evil cannot be

> accurately summarized through an unexamined reliance on the contention between Harry and Voldemort (21).

Potter's worldbuilding spans seven novels, and its characters are too high in number to name, yet they all struggle to some extent with morality, power, and choice – some in a very minor way, others to the extreme. The imaginary war of good and evil is defined by the contention between Harry and Voldemort. This contention is a disagreement on how magic should be used. Who a character supports in this war creates the divide. Creighton builds on this idea, stating, "the bifurcation between Harry's nobility and Voldemort's depravity [...] serve to reinforce the series' underlying focus on the opposition between good and evil" (13). As Creighton states, however, the series cannot be summarised through this contention alone. Within each of its characters lies an internal battle with power and choice, despite which side of the war they support. To truly understand the implications of morality that the series presents, one must look deeper into the character's choices for love and power. As McEvoy observes, "even the most extreme good and evil characters are presented in shades of grey, and the margins of the novels are filled with minor characters who reside all along the spectrum between the two extremes" (207). The most complex character who exemplifies this concept, who truly tests the limits of *Potter's* morality, is Severus Snape.

The complexity of *Potter's* characters makes their morality not a question of whether they support good or evil, but to what extent do they choose love over power? On the morality spectrum noted by McEvoy, the choice for power aligns with evil, and the choice for love aligns with good. Flotmann observes that "Rowling's focus on free will is strengthened by the fact that the readers are also presented with a character, Harry, who is entirely the opposite of Voldemort, who also had a bad childhood but who significantly does not turn evil" (133). Its emphasis on choice makes evil not a predetermined fate, but a state arrived at by free will. The reverse, that goodness is achieved by free will, is also true, and so then is

the possibility that one can change. Snape exemplifies this concept, as he is represented as morally ambiguous throughout the first six novels. Characters and readers alike are unable to determine his motivations. The question of where Snape's loyalty lies is developed throughout the entire series. The final two novels first confirm, then completely re-define his morality through one of the most renowned plot twists within postmodern fantasy so far. His redemption follows the series' assertion that choosing love over power makes one good, but his behaviours both prior to the series' beginning, and during the narrative, contradict this. This causes the revelation meant to clarify his position in the imaginary war to further complicate his morality, placing Snape in a state of postmodern indeterminacy. His relationship with love and power is unique amongst *Potter's* characters, causing him to stand out for his ambiguity. This is supported by the narrative's design, which presents this moral ambiguity to the reader through Harry's eyes. The effect of this is so powerful that even today, readers of *Potter* debate his morality.

Narrative Theory in *Potter*: The Focaliser, The Implied Reader, and The Narrator

The moral ambiguity of Snape relies upon the series being focalised through Harry's perspective. Harry's greatest flaw in his youth is his inability to view morality complexly, opting for black or white thinking that confines people to one of two boxes: good or evil. His greatest example of this is how he views Snape. Harry judges Snape as evil for the first six books of the series, despite contradicting evidence and characters who oppose his opinion. Only in adulthood, achieved in the final novel, does Harry grow to view morality as a complex spectrum, rather than a fixed binary. The third-person narrator creates enough space between the actual story and the focaliser's perspective of events for readers to notice the flaws in Harry's thinking, and the bias he presents when evaluating Snape as evil. This allows them to question and even disagree with the binary positioning Harry favours. At the same

time, Snape's behaviour is constantly contradictory. We see him acting on the side of good while simultaneously presenting characteristics of evil. Harry's reliability cannot always be trusted, yet neither can Snape, causing confusion for the implied reader. To see how moral the ambiguity of Snape was created through Harry's flawed view of morality, the relationship between the implied reader, the focaliser, and the third person narrator must be explored.

The term 'implied reader' was derived from Booth in his 1961 text *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Booth discusses the concept of an implied author and an implied reader, who exist as a construct for each side of the author-reader relationship. The implied author is who the reader imagines as they read. Booth explains, "the "implied author" chooses; consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (74-75). The implied reader is the imagined reader the author has in mind as they write. This is not the actual reader – it is impossible for them to know who will read their work. Rather, the implied reader is who the author writes *for,* their decisions crafted with this reader in mind. Booth explains how the implied reader can be identified, "the reader whom the implied author writes to can be found as much in the text's silences as in its overt appeals. What the author felt no need to mention tells us who he thinks we'll be – or hopes we'll be" (423). Within *Potter*, the implied reader has a significant role in determining how the morality of the characters is evaluated. The implied author has crafted the text for a reader who will judge their characters through the moral framework of the world of the text. In *Potter*, this world is a complex spectrum defined by decisions for one cause or the other, good versus evil, that allows redemption for choices made for love, and considers their behaviour outside of the imaginary war. It is the implied reader who can see things that Harry, as the focaliser, cannot.

The term 'focalisation' was coined by Gérard Genette and refers to the perspective through which the narrative is told. It is the selection of information about the story's world,

events, characters, and their emotions, that are revealed through whomever the narration is focalised through. The difference between narration and focalisation is understood by asking 'who speaks?' for narration, and 'who sees?' for focalisation. 'Who speaks' tells us who is relaying this information to the implied reader, while 'who sees' tells us who the narrator is getting their information from. Genette defined three types of focalisation – external, internal, and non-focalised narrative. External focalisation is told from the perspective of a single character, but the narration does not consider their internal view. Internal focalisation is told from the perspective of a single character, and the narrator knows the internal world of that character – their thoughts and feelings. Non-focalised narrative is derived from the concept of an omniscient narrator, who tells the story with a god-like perspective, and can see everything. It is not tied to only one character's point of view, though it remains external, outside the character's internal world. Genette's theory set the foundation for focalisation, which was then developed by Mieke Bal. Bal explains the difference between internal focalisation and non-focalised narrative by the preposition 'through'. When considering internal focalisation, the narrator looks *through* the character. With non-focalised narrative, the narrator is looking *on* to the character. The character does not see but is being seen. This is the distinction between focalisation types, as it is not the focalised character that has changed but the agent.

Bal defines the difference between external and internal focalisation through two different definitions of 'point of view'. The first definition being a "scene on which fastens one's gaze" (276) relating to external focalisation. The narrator fastens their gaze on a scene and sees it from the outside looking in. The second definition being a "particular opinion" (276), which relates to internal focalisation. The narrator sees the narrative through the particular opinion of their focalising character. This difference is crucial when *Potter* changes focalisation from internal to external. In *Potter*, the internal focalised character, or focaliser, is

Harry. Uri Margolin explains how "any individual act of focalisation is just one particular perspective on the story world, and is always fallible and often skewed, distorted or at least partial" (49). There are only a few times throughout all novels that focalisation shifts to internal focalisation through another character, or external focalisation. When this happens, the difference in how Snape is represented is very telling of how Harry's bias skews his representation when he is focalising the narrative. The series will be discussed with Harry as the focaliser unless stated otherwise, meaning the narrative is presented *through* the 'particular opinion' of Harry.

The difference between narrator and focaliser is the person *seeing* the story, versus the person *relaying* the story. There are different types of narration – first, second, and third – which use different perspectives and pronouns to signify each. *Potter* is told through the third person, meaning the narrator is not themselves a character. Focalisation is important when considering which character the narrator sees the story through, and how this influences the version of the story the implied reader receives. As *Potter* is written in third person with focalisation mostly through Harry, the implied reader receives Harry's version of events. This does not mean the narrator shares his thoughts and feelings, or that they try to convince the implied reader that his thoughts and feelings are appropriate or correct. The narrator presents these thoughts and opinions as they occur during the narrative but does so impartially, without comment. Margolin explains the effect of this relationship in the following passage:

> In narrative fiction, there is the assumption that one can know states of affairs *hors de toute focalisation,* fully and with absolute certainty, through the discourse of an impersonal anonymous narrating voice, usually in the third person past tense. Each individual take can thus be assessed relative to this full objective truth. And this in turn enables the reader to evaluate different takes regarding the same data, and also infer back from the nature of the take to the nature of the focaliser behind it. (49-50)

The third person narrator takes the truth of the situation as it relates to the focalised character and represents it to the implied reader without bias, allowing the implied reader to see the emotions and thoughts of the characters without necessarily agreeing with them. Each reader receives the same story through their own interpretation, as they process and form judgements about events, enabling them to assess the characters as they, too, respond to the situation. This distance between focalisation and narrator creates a unique relationship between narrator and implied reader when focalisation changes. This only occurs a handful of times throughout *Potter* and each time is significant. The relationship between these three things – narrator, focaliser, and implied reader – is important when considering how Snape is presented to the implied reader through the focalisation of Harry, and how this informs Snape's moral ambiguity throughout the series.

Chapter Two

The Creation of Snape's Moral Ambiguity

Snape is represented with conflicting information and biases, depending on who the implied reader believes as they read. Throughout the first six books of *Potter*, Harry represents Snape through a biased lens. This bias is caused by personal dislike and conflict from his experiences with Snape, and the experiences of those close to Harry. Due to this bias, Snape's redeeming actions are overlooked. Antonia Alfredsson argues that Harry is unable to grasp moral complexity. They observe how Harry bases his opinion of Snape on "preconceived notions" of evil and fails to "observe clues of Snape's will to do good and to help" (6). This demonstrates Harry's limitations as a focaliser for the implied reader, who cannot always trust Harry's judgement, and highlights his inability to view people as morally complex. This flaw is overcome with his transition to adulthood in the final novel, *The Deathly Hallows*, as Harry finally understands that people are more complex than the binary of good or evil allows. Dumbledore, and his relationship with both Snape and Harry, is used as a narrative tool to challenge Harry's view, and Harry's relationship with Snape, and with Dumbledore, is fundamental to how Snape's moral ambiguity is created.

Dumbledore is presented as the moral authority of the series, and consequently his perspective on Snape is important to how the focaliser, and the implied reader, are encouraged to interpret Snape's morality. Dumbledore is intelligent and powerful, credited for multiple discoveries and victories in wizarding history. He is established early on as the key figure of morality for the wizarding world, the ultimate example of good. He certainly is for Harry, who is fiercely loyal to him. This is significant because Dumbledore and Harry have opposing views on Snape's morality. Dumbledore is the character who most strongly disagrees with Harry's view that Snape is evil – Dumbledore has unwavering faith in Snape's loyalty to the side of good. We meet Dumbledore before we meet Harry, establishing his importance, as he delivers Harry to his aunt and uncle's house as an infant. He is described as follows:

> He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. (*Philosopher's Stone* 12)

His appearance gives a mystical impression, someone beyond the ordinary, even for a wizard. Emphasis on his age shows wisdom, though not fragility, which is countered by the youthful spark in his eyes. He is presented as distinguished, all-knowing, and mysterious. Alves explains that this "omnipresence" is a characteristic of the wizard archetype seen within literature, identified by "the capacity that Dumbledore has to know everything that is happening or is going to happen around him" (31). Dumbledore's characterisation is derived from these literary archetypes and is a predictable figure for any reader of fantasy, creating an expectation of immense power for his character. In his introduction, the implied reader is told he is the "only one […] Voldemort […] was frightened of" and is established as his moral opposite (*Philosopher's Stone* 14). Alves observes how "this nobility which Professor McGonagall talks about means that Dumbledore would not do anything to be more powerful, which sets him apart from Voldemort, who does anything he can to get more power" (24). His importance is established through his introduction to the implied reader as an authority in the wizarding world, who has just as much power as the villain but is motivated to use this for love, not personal gain, exemplifying the opposite of evil.

Dumbledore's opinion of what makes someone good is guided by his message of love, which encourages the implied reader to understand that the choice of love defines morality in *Potter.* Dumbledore expresses the importance of love to Harry for the first time at the conclusion of *The Philosopher's Stone* when Harry lays injured in the hospital wing. Harry had just defeated Voldemort, who had possessed Professor Quirrell (the Defence against the

Dark Arts professor). Harry asks Dumbledore why Quirrell could not touch him. Dumbledore answers, “Your mother died to save you [...] He didn’t realise that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark”, explaining that Lily’s (Harry’s mother) sacrifice for Harry, her love, provided him protection (*Philosopher’s Stone* 216). Harry and the implied reader learn this lesson from the wise, all-knowing headmaster, who repeatedly shares his “theory that [...] capacity for love and understanding can be more powerful than Voldemort’s destructive dark magic” (Lee 82). Creighton supports this through asserting that “love guards not only the lives of Rowling's protagonists, but also the integrity of their moral character” (44). Creighton argues that this is the function of love in the series. The value of love is preached by Dumbledore at every battle against evil, and due to this, he is the character whom the idea that love protects the integrity of one’s moral character derives from. The shift to darker times in the series occurs in the fourth novel when Cedric Diggory, a Hogwarts student, is murdered by a Death Eater, and Voldemort returns to human form. While addressing Hogwarts about the loss, Dumbledore says, “every guest in this Hall [...] will be welcomed back here [...] in the light of Lord Voldemort’s return, we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided” (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 627). His message is always to guide people towards love. Following the death of Sirius Black (Harry’s godfather) at the hands of the Death Eaters, Dumbledore repeats the value of love to Harry as he grieves, telling him, “the fact you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 726). Dumbledore is desperate to ensure that Harry and the implied reader understand love’s importance as a weapon against evil. Sonja Wendel also notes this function, stating, “love in the context of the Harry Potter series can be identified as one of the major qualities to separate good from evil” (2). Dumbledore’s role as the key spokesperson on the definition of morality for the series makes his opinion on other characters’ morality one of extreme importance.

Dumbledore's word that Snape's allegiances have changed from the side of evil to the side of good is the only evidence provided that Snape's loyalties have changed. As the series progresses, Harry and the implied reader learn that Snape was once a Death Eater, but switched to the side of good before Voldemort was defeated the first time. It is through faith in Dumbledore's judgement alone that anyone on the side of good agrees to trust Snape. As Hermione points out, "Dumbledore trusts him […] And if we can't trust Dumbledore, we can't trust anyone" (*Order of the Phoenix* 490). The trust Dumbledore is given to determine other character's morality is enormous. Nova Dahlén writes, "His most important function in relation to Snape is being his main defender: Dumbledore's trust in Snape remains unshaken regardless of anything" (6). Harry's refusal to believe in Snape's reformed allegiance to the good side, despite all contrary evidence, to the extent of defying Dumbledore, is thus a huge point of contention for the implied reader. This is one of the key reasons for Snape's moral ambiguity. Alfredsson argues the implied reader is urged to agree with Harry's perspective and encouraged to understand this as truth. The suggestion, then, is that the implied reader is urged to believe, like Harry does, that Snape has not reformed his old ways and Dumbledore's faith in him is misguided. Alfredsson suggests that the actual reader can critically evaluate Harry's perspective as they progress through the series, stating, "the implied reader is not led to see anything else than Harry does [...] while the real reader does have the opportunity to see other things, much because they are not tied to Harry's point of view" (8). The suggestion, however, that the actual reader can see things the implied reader cannot is incorrect. The text was crafted with all contradictory evidence in place, and the implied reader has always had access to each text in its entirety. This includes Harry's perspective, the opinions of those who disagree with him, and the narrative facts of Snape's behaviour, providing a variety of evidence for good and evil traits. The implied reader is provided with multiple, often contradictory, reasons to both agree and disagree with Harry's perspective.

Alfredsson does not consider Dumbledore's influence as an important factor for the implied reader's ability to perceive the flaw in Harry's perspective. Dumbledore's word that he trusts Snape completely is fundamental to why his redemption is accepted and is therefore extremely important. Dumbledore's faith in Snape's loyalty never wanes. This is highlighted through a conversation between Harry and Dumbledore, where Harry expresses that he thinks Snape's claims of remorse for passing Voldemort key information is insincere, and Dumbledore is wrong to trust him. Dumbledore responds, "I believe it to be the greatest regret of his life and the reason that he returned [...] I trust Severus Snape completely" (*Half Blood Prince* 513). No matter how many times he is challenged by Harry, Dumbledore refuses to entertain the idea that his faith is misguided. This causes doubt in Harry's perspective. Harry relies on many wise people for advice who believe Dumbledore's word is to be trusted without question, such as Hermione Granger, Remus Lupin, and Arthur Weasley. This is seen in a conversation between Harry and Lupin in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* when Harry asks Lupin for his opinion on Snape. Lupin states, "It comes down to whether or not you trust Dumbledore's judgement. I do; therefore, I trust Severus", emphasising it is not Snape he trusts, but Dumbledore (*Half Blood Prince* 311). Harry does have reason to be suspicious of Snape – he was a former Death Eater and once supported Voldemort's ideology – but when Harry fails to convince Lupin to change his mind, he demonstrates the critical flaw in his judgement, asking "do you honestly like Snape?" (*Half Blood Prince* 312). Liking someone as a person is irrelevant to whether they are capable of evil, but Harry is blind to this. The implied reader, however, may not be. York observes how "Harry [refuses] to listen to anything other than his own instincts and bias against Snape" and is often proven wrong (69). Through the series, the implied reader witnesses Harry's perspective, the objections to this stance by others, the multiple times he is proven wrong, and the few times he is proven right. The implied reader is encouraged to critically evaluate Harry's perspective against this contradicting evidence, in

which Dumbledore's influence is vital. This critical evaluation is what makes Snape's moral ambiguity so significant throughout the series.

How Harry's Perspective Shapes Snape's Ambiguity in Book One, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

The moral ambiguity of Snape is created through contradicting evidence of both good and evil behaviour from Snape himself, and a combination of opposing perspectives of Snape's moral character from different characters within the series. The first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* establishes Snape as a villainous character through Snape's appearance and behaviour, resulting in Harry believing him to be entirely evil. Snape's physical description utilises stereotypical traits to portray him as such. Nikolajeva notes how "descriptions are frequently used stereotypically in literature, not least children's literature, to indicate inner qualities and alert reader's expectations" (194). Snape is described as "a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin" (*Philosopher's Stone* 94). He is consistently described in this unpleasant light and is frequently compared to a bat. Naomi Wood notes how "We, through Harry, see Snape as the comic book villain [...] these epithets initially appear to function [...] to identify the antagonist or protagonist unambiguously through physical appearance" (222). Snape is an expert in Potions and the Dark Arts (magic used for harm). Harry learns that Snape would prefer teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts over Potions, but Dumbledore will not allow it, "everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape" (*Philosopher's Stone* 94). His expertise, alongside being denied the teaching position, alludes to a past within the Dark Arts. Nikolajeva notes that "Snape is depicted in a manner that excludes positive anticipations [...] we are compelled to evaluate the character as a villain" (194). This first

impression of Snape allows Harry and the implied reader to assess him as a villain before either one has met him, establishing this expectation of his character.

Snape's treatment of Harry throughout the series is extremely poor, adding to the assumption that he is a villainous character. He demonstrates a consistent and seemingly unfounded dislike of Harry. This is seen during Harry's first lesson with Snape, confirming Harry and the implied reader's expectations. Nikolajeva notes how "the malicious behaviour towards the protagonist immediately establishes the reader's aversion" (195). An evil character in *Potter* is one who expresses prejudice towards others and abuses their power. Snape exhibits both traits here. The narrator prepares the implied reader for this, "at the start of term banquet, Harry had got the idea that Professor Snape disliked him. By the end of the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong. Snape didn't dislike Harry – he *hated* him" (*Philosopher's Stone* 101). This creates an expectation about Snape in the following scene through Harry's internal focalisation. As the implied reader continues to read, Harry is proven correct, developing trust in his perspective. Snape begins by taunting Harry for being a "*celebrity*" (*Philosopher's Stone* 101). After a short speech introducing the art of potion making, Snape singles Harry out with a question irrelevant to his speech. When Harry does not know the answer, Snape taunts him again, and continues to ask only Harry questions, ignoring other students attempting to answer. When Harry again cannot answer, he further mocks him for not "open[ing] a book before coming" and takes a point off Gryffindor (Harry's school house) for his "cheek" (*Philosopher's Stone* 102-103). Snape treats Harry as though he is a spoiled celebrity with an ego, when there is no evidence of Harry acting this way. This is indeed the first time Harry has ever met Snape. Harry can only conclude that Snape hates him, though neither he nor the implied reader know why. Alfredsson observes, "due to Rowling using Harry as a focaliser, the implied reader is deceived to believe that Snape is the enemy, because of his attitude towards Harry. Nevertheless, Harry's conclusion

that Snape hates him could equally be justified by the real reader because Snape's actions towards Harry can be seen as evil" (7). Snape's abuse of power and his prejudice against Harry confirms the assumptions made from his appearance and positions him as an antagonist.

The ambiguity of Snape's character is created by the way Harry incorrectly assumes Snape is responsible for evil, causing a discrepancy between Harry and the implied reader's perspective. When the plot of the novel is introduced – someone is trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone hidden within Hogwarts – Harry concludes immediately, with no evidence, that this someone is Snape. Hermione, a voice of reason, contradicts his logic, pointing out that "he's not very nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe" (*Philosopher's Stone* 135). Hermione identifies that Harry's opinion of Snape's capability for evil may be clouded by personal feelings, which is the first of many times Harry is told this. This is a valid observation which Harry dismisses. Harry continues to suspect Snape throughout the story, but his reasoning is founded upon assumptions and circumstantial evidence. At the novels' conclusion, however, Harry is provided concrete evidence that he was wrong – Snape is not the culprit. How Harry responds to this creates a split in perspective for the implied reader, as through this response a flaw in Harry's judgement is displayed, creating doubt in his reliability.

The conclusion of *The Philosopher's Stone* presents a plot twist integral to the presentation of Snape as morally ambiguous for the remainder of the series. Harry, convinced that Snape is the culprit, learns that it is not him but Professor Quirrell, who is working for Voldemort. He learns that Snape was trying to stop Quirrell and saved Harry's life when Quirrell tried to kill him. This twist defies the reader's expectations and causes the implied reader to re-consider their own assumptions and potential biases when it comes to evaluating Snape. He is presented through stereotypical villainous qualities, yet he has actively fought

against Voldemort's henchman. While mean to Harry in class, Snape also saved his life. These things are all true of Snape, causing a jarring combination of facts of his character that defy expectation. The presentation of Snape's good qualities asks the reader to re-evaluate their own biases that may have led them, as it did Harry, to jump to conclusions. While the implied reader may reflect on this, Harry does not. When he learns the truth, the narrator informs us that "Harry couldn't take it in. This couldn't be true, it couldn't" (*Philosopher's Stone* 209). Even with the evidence right in front of him, Harry clings to his original assumptions. Alfredsson observes how "Harry's will to see only one side of the story causes him to conclude what he wants to be the truth, instead of looking at it from another perspective before settling for an opinion" (7). Even after learning that Snape saved his life, Harry does not review his judgement that Snape is evil, an opinion that does not falter throughout the series despite multiple contradictions. Lee states, "Harry's misreading of Snape can be interpreted as the tragic outcome of insisting on viewing a person [...] in a partial/one dimensional way" (74). For the first time, a distinction between the implied reader and Harry's perspective is made. Snape is unable to be confidently confined to one side of a good or evil binary. His act of good, which contradicts everything we know about him prior, is the first of many discrepancies in Snape's morality. The good in Snape is not enough to persuade Harry to change his mind. However, the implied reader now has two perspectives to consider – Harry's focalisation, and the objective facts of Snape's actions.

The conclusion of *The Philosopher's Stone* creates a critical space between the implied reader and the focaliser, within which the flaws of Harry's binary view of morality can be identified and evaluated. This moment, where Harry's biggest flaw is presented to the implied reader – his inability to separate emotion from fact, allowing this to cloud his judgement – provides the implied reader with a choice. From this point onwards, the implied reader can continue reading the series through Harry's focalisation without question, or they

can take the space created between the implied reader and the focaliser to critically evaluate Harry's opinions. The conclusion of *Philosopher's Stone* is not the first time a major reveal regarding Snape defines the series going forward, but it is the last time the implied reader is blinded by Harry's focalisation. This transformation from villain to hero is the beginning of Snape's representation as morally ambiguous, which continues until the conclusion of *The Half Blood Prince.* It becomes clear throughout the series that although evidence is presented to Harry that Snape is on the side of good, Harry will not reflect on his opinion that Snape is evil. Nusaiba Imady writes that Harry "refuses to believe that Snape isn't the villain, despite being told by almost every adult that Snape is a person to be trusted, and Harry continues to defy evidence that demonstrates Snape consistently protects him" (204). This is caused by the binary view of morality that guides how Harry forms his judgement of others. Harry looks at people through a black and white lens and judges their morality on a simplistic binary of good or evil. He struggles to comprehend when people present differently to these expectations, and he cannot alter his thinking to accommodate for it. When someone does not present as Harry expects 'good' to look and act, he makes assumptions on what their beliefs must be. When Snape contradicts this assumption, being both unkind in his personal life, yet defiant against Voldemort, Harry cannot accept this juxtaposition. He continues to stick to his limited binary view and ignores any evidence that contradicts it. There is a wide range of evidence presented to the implied reader that both supports and contradicts Harry's assessment of Snape over the years, causing confusion for the implied reader when trying to assess Snape's morality for themselves.

Harry's dislike of Snape motivates his accusations of evil as we continue through the series, demonstrating to the implied reader that Harry has not learnt from his mistake the first time. We begin *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* with two key facts known of Snape; he was not stealing the stone, and he both bullied and protected Harry. This contradiction is

not lost on Harry, who wonders why Snape would save him when he thoroughly dislikes him. Harry does not use this to reflect on his opinion of Snape, however, and continues into his second year of Hogwarts assuming the worst of him. His first mention in the second novel reminds the implied reader that "Professor Severus Snape was Harry's least favourite teacher" (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 61). The dislike between teacher and student is strengthened throughout this novel, but there is no development in their relationship beyond this childlike back and forth. Harry, only 12 years old, has had his limited view of morality tested for the first time, and it is made clear that he has not grown in this regard. He remains motivated by personal feelings and allows them to take control of his judgement. This aspect of Harry's character is significantly developed as a flaw in the subsequent novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,* when he turns 13 and begins his teenage years.

Harry's Anger and Generational Bias in Book Three, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

The Prisoner of Azkaban develops Harry's anger and introduces a generational rivalry, strengthening Harry's fatal flaws that prevent him from seeing beyond his limited view of morality. Dahlén observes, "Snape's ambiguity relies much on the fact that he is kept at a certain distance from Harry and the reader, who both have to rely largely on guesswork" (5). Harry also relies on the faith he puts in his father's character, which he provides unconditionally without second thought. The implied reader has a more difficult job deciphering Snape's ambiguity, for they can separate Harry's focalisation from fact, yet empathise with his perspective. They can understand Harry's bias, and even agree with his argument, while also noticing its flaws. Harry's bias against Snape is made clear when Snape makes Professor Lupin (the new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor) a potion for his

health. When Snape brings this to Lupin, Harry instantly suspects Snape of foul play. Lupin thanks Snape for making the potion, who responds “not at all,” yet Harry reports a “look in his eye [he] didn’t like” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 118). Harry then accuses Snape of poisoning Lupin with no evidence, fuelled only by his dislike. He makes the same mistake he made in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, showing the implied reader that Harry has not changed over the last two years in this respect. This inability to learn from his mistakes reminds the implied reader that when it comes to Snape, Harry is an unreliable narrator, and they cannot entirely trust his judgement. They can consider his opinion and compare it against the rest of the information they are provided in the narrative. When done so critically, often Harry’s opinion is proven to be founded not in facts, but bias. This deepens Snape’s presentation as morally ambiguous, as the implied reader must contrast Harry’s biased representation against the narrative facts of Snape’s behaviour, which both support and contradict Harry’s theories at different times.

Doubt in Harry’s judgement is further created by the development of Harry’s anger in *The Prisoner of Azkaban,* which is shown as a developing flaw rather than a strength. Harry’s anger in the two preceding novels is presented as motivation to do the brave and heroic thing. In *The Chamber of Secrets,* it is his anger at Professor Lockhart’s fraudulence that allows Harry to stand up to him. After Harry disarms Lockhart, the narrator notes that “Harry was pleased to see that he was shaking” (*Chamber of Secrets* 221). His anger overrides any caution, motivating him to act against dangerous people without fear. In the third novel, however, this develops into a flaw. Harry’s anger begins to control him and almost erupts from him against his will. When his critical Aunt Marge turns her commentary from Harry to his parents, Harry becomes so furious that he is “shaking all over. He had never felt so angry in his life” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 27). His anger is so beyond his control that he causes Aunt Marge to swell like a balloon unintentionally. It is normal for very young wizards to perform

accidental magic before they learn to control this at school, but Harry is 13 at this stage and is two years into his magical education. Unintentional magic of this proportion at his age indicates the alarming extent that anger is taking control of Harry's life. Anger again erupts from Harry unwillingly in a conversation with Snape, who is criticising Harry's father, James. Harry has never yelled at Snape before, but on this occasion, he cannot help but respond aggressively, "'SHUT UP!' Harry was suddenly on his feet. Rage such as he had not felt since his last night in Privet Drive was thundering through him" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 210). Again, his rage takes over, physically and verbally, and he "didn't care that Snape's face had gone rigid, the black eyes flashing dangerously" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 210). His anger is triggered by his loyalty to his loved ones, particularly to his parents. His disregard for the consequences demonstrates how he is unable to think of anything beyond the emotion he feels in the moment. This is dangerous, as it causes Harry to ignore the consequences of his actions and lose control of the situation. It is one of the reasons why when he meets two of his dad's best friends, he instantly extends to them his loyalty and rage in their defence, causing him to inherit their hatred of Snape from their own experiences.

The inheritance of a generational rivalry to Harry's already strained relationship with Snape results in Harry's dislike to develop so severely, he is unable to separate his emotions from fact when making critical decisions. The implied reader can observe how Harry's already skewed judgement is influenced by his loyalty to Sirius and his father, James. This, combined with his increasing anger, causes Harry to develop an extreme bias in his judgement of Snape's character. The generational rivalry is introduced through two new characters, Sirius (a prisoner on the run) and Professor Lupin. Harry and the implied reader learn that Sirius and Lupin were close friends with James at school. James and Sirius in particular hated Snape, who hated them in equal measure. Harry, who has never known his father but has always felt proud of him, embraces Sirius as his godfather. His loyalty to his

father and Sirius results in Harry's blind trust in their judgement. Once Harry learns that Sirius and James hated Snape at school, his loyalty causes him to immediately support them in this rivalry. He assumes Sirius and James' hatred of Snape was created through a similar circumstance of his own – Snape attacked them first, and they responded defensively. This causes him to inherit these same feelings out of loyalty to his loved ones. Already mistrusting of Snape, Harry considers the enmity between Snape, his father and Sirius the final straw for Snape's credibility. When Snape interacts with Sirius in the novel, in the present, Harry's feelings of loyalty to Sirius develop into anger and hatred for Snape, with Harry calling him "pathetic" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 265). Snape's behaviour towards Sirius confirms for Harry what he has always suspected of Snape, and for the first time, invites the implied reader to consider that Harry may not be entirely wrong in his perception of Snape as someone capable of evil.

The behaviour the implied reader witnesses from Snape in his interactions with Sirius is the first piece of convincing evidence presented that Snape is capable of evil, causing further confusion in their own assessment of Snape. Prior to this, all evidence presented of evil is either reliant on stereotypes or ultimately proven to be incorrect. In this instance, however, Snape's malicious behaviour demonstrates he is willing to cause harm to someone he does not like, further contributing to his moral ambiguity. Snape attempts to report Sirius to the Dementors (magical creatures who guard Azkaban, the wizard prison) without providing him the chance to prove his innocence, which would result in Sirius receiving 'the dementor's kiss' (a 'kiss' from a Dementor causes the recipient to lose their soul, a fate worse than death). Harry and Hermione plead with Snape to give Sirius the chance to explain himself, without success. Harry observes "there was a mad glint in Snape's eye […] He seemed beyond reason" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 264). Snape's behaviour here, which is fuelled by hatred and a long-held grudge, proves him to be capable of something more sinister than

petty abuse of power in the classroom. While Harry assumes Snape is capable of evil, this is the first piece of genuine evidence presented that supports his theory. His behaviour is particularly concerning because Sirius is innocent. This did not matter to Snape. His grudge against Sirius was strong enough for him to want to see Sirius suffer. This presents a character who is not interested in justice nor fairness, but vengeance. His desperation for Sirius' punishment, refusing to hear a version of events that contradicts his preferred outcome, further shows he is motivated by emotion with no regard for the truth. In this way, Harry and Snape are quite similar. Even Hermione, a voice of reason who frequently challenges Harry's judgement of Snape, notices how his hatred fuelled his behaviour here, observing, "he hates Sirius [...] All because of some stupid trick Sirius played on him" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 287). Rowling contrasts Harry's opinion of Snape with that of other characters to provide the implied reader with multiple perspectives to consider; however, in this instance, Hermione agrees with him. This, alongside the facts of Snape's behaviour, develops Snape's moral ambiguity into more complex territory.

The events in this novel have a significant impact on both Harry's and the implied reader's perception of Snape's morality. Harry and Snape's dislike for one another deepens, developing from a teacher/student mutual disrespect to a much more personal conflict. Sirius is now unable to clear his name of guilt and must live in hiding, causing devastating consequences for Harry, whose chance to live with his godfather, instead of his abusive caregivers, is gone. Harry thus inherits his father and Sirius' hatred for Snape, adding this to their already strained relationship. Once Harry makes his judgement of someone, he will not entertain contradictory evidence. This is not exclusive to people he dislikes, but people he loves as well. McEvoy writes, "Harry's most prominent, and dangerous, flaw is his anger, though his hubris and self-righteousness is problematic too" (209). This is what causes Harry to have such a blind spot of hatred towards Snape. His inheritance of a generational rivalry

prevents him from being able to reflect on new evidence presented later that Snape is on the side of good.

The implied reader, too, is impacted, as they are presented with yet another contradiction in Snape's morality. They learn he is both capable of saving Harry from harm and causing harm to others. While Harry ignores the first part of this contradiction, the implied reader can see both. His behaviour is inconsistent, causing another instance in which two contradictory things can be true of a person. This good or bad binary does not work for Snape, who has a foot in both holds, making it difficult to define him as one or the other. If Snape does not like someone, he does not hesitate to hurt them. So why then does Snape hurt Sirius, and even Lupin, but save Harry, for whom he has expressed nothing but contempt? Emma Östberg argues that "Harry's judgment is clouded by his personal feelings toward Snape and a parallel can be drawn here to the reader, whose attachment to Harry may cause an unwarranted belief in taking Harry's view as always being a neutral and correct one" (14). The relationship between the implied reader and focaliser progresses into something more complex in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* than initially presented in books one and two. The implied reader is provided contradicting information that threatens trust in Harry's view, while also supporting it, and develops Harry's bias of Snape to higher stakes with the introduction of a generational rivalry. This all contributes to the development of Snape's morality, which becomes murkier and messier as the series progresses.

The Re-Introduction of the Imaginary War in Book Four, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

The fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* introduces the imaginary war of good and evil with the re-birth of Voldemort, providing an overarching external projection of morality to consider. This introduces the external projection of support each character is

forced to eventually provide – support of Harry, or Voldemort, one or the other, never both or neither. The novel is a lot darker for this reason, and "evolves in tone, style and content" (Lee, 74). Until now Voldemort was assumed dead, and Harry lived in a post-war society. The *Goblet of Fire* sees Voldemort return, and the following novels prepare for war. This shift in tone, narrative, and complexity is also seen in Snape, as we learn who he was before he became the Potions Master. As the imaginary wars made popular by Tolkien and Lewis in the modernist period come to full fruition, we learn Snape's role and how this contributes to his moral ambiguity on a larger scale. Previously, the scale of Snape's morality was reduced to Harry's focalisation and their relationship. There was nothing bigger to compare it to, having confirmed in *The Philosopher's Stone* that Snape was not working for Voldemort. With the re-introduction of the imaginary war, Snape's moral ambiguity is evaluated against the larger war between good and evil.

Evil and what this practically looks like is introduced in the first chapter of *The Goblet of Fire,* which, significantly, is the first time Harry's focalisation is broken since the beginning of the series. This provides the implied reader with an alternative perspective and reminds them Harry's view is only one moving part of a much larger story. Instead of Harry's point of view, the implied reader learns a small piece of Voldemort's past and what he is doing in the present. Focalisation is through a caretaker named Frank, who wakes to a noise in the house he cares for. Frank finds two men in the house, one called Wormtail, who calls the other "My Lord" (*Goblet of Fire* 12). Frank does not know them, but the implied reader does, and the events between the conclusion of the novel prior and now becomes clear. Wormtail (Peter Pettigrew) has found Voldemort and is nursing him back to health. Frank overhears a plan to kidnap Harry but is discovered and murdered, and the chapter ends. In chapter two, focalisation is back through Harry, who has awoken from a dream where Voldemort and Wormtail plan his murder, then murder an old man. This change in

focalisation allows the narrator to inform the implied reader of exclusive information. Only the implied reader knows that Harry's dream was real. This relationship between narrator and implied reader that excludes the focaliser is a technique Rowling uses only a handful of times throughout the series. This provides the implied reader with valuable knowledge of the evil side of the imaginary war, knowledge that the focaliser, residing on the opposite side, cannot access. As they watch the story unfold through Harry's focalisation, they are aware there is a separate plot occurring they cannot currently see, that Harry is ignorant to, creating further critical space between the implied reader and the focaliser. Dahlén emphasises "the importance of Snape's position as an independent character and not just a character in relation to Harry" (4). Due to this change in focalisation, and the relationship between the implied reader and narrator that develops as a result, the implied reader can see Harry in a similar way. He is one moving part in the story, rather than the entire story, which helps them detach from his bias when forming conclusions.

The bias that Harry developed against Snape in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* can be observed in the way he comments on Snape's behaviour throughout *The Goblet of Fire.* His bias is embedded into every observation he makes about Snape, no matter what he is doing. This is a change from the previous novels, where Harry only assumed the worst of Snape when there was a mystery presented, and the culprit was unknown, or Snape was acting in a way that was genuinely malicious. Now, his every interaction is represented through Harry in a negative light, demonstrating how after the events of *The Prisoner of Azkaban,* Harry's opinion of Snape is beyond rational judgement. This can be seen through the comments Harry makes throughout the novel regarding Snape's teaching. At the beginning of the year, Harry notices the increase in workload from all his teachers. He observes, "Professor Bins [...] had them writing weekly essays [...] Professor Snape was forcing them to research antidotes [...] he hinted that he might be poisoning one of them before Christmas to see if

their antidote worked [...] Professor Flitwick had asked them to read three extra books in preparation for their lesson" (*Goblet of Fire* 206). The difference in verbs to describe each teacher is telling. While Bins 'had them' and Flitwick 'asked,' Snape 'forced'. Each professor is doing their job, but only Snape's instruction is portrayed negatively.

This is echoed later in the novel, demonstrating that Harry has not reflected on his bias. This is seen when Harry notes, "Professors McGonagall and Moody kept them working until the very last second of their classes […] and Snape, […] staring nastily around at them all […] informed them that he would be testing them on poison antidotes during the last lesson of the term" (*Goblet of Fire* 342). McGonagall and Moody, too, keep their classes working until the 'last second' but they are not criticised. The commentary on Snape is influenced by Harry's dislike, who describes Snape as 'nasty' for testing them on their antidotes, even though, as seen above, Snape informed them at the start of the year that this was the plan. Hermione points out that this criticism is unfair, stating, "you're not exactly straining yourself, though, are you?" (*Goblet of Fire* 342). Again, Hermione acts as a voice of reason, pointing out his bias and lack of effort to study. This is one of many times where Harry's version of events is contradicted, observed by Wood, "Harry's [...] mental processes are continuously revealed to be inadequate either by Hermione or the outcome of the narration" (221). Harry's response to Snape's behaviour is understandable, but the implied reader can see that it causes him to associate anything Snape does as unfair, whether it is or not. This bias means Harry is unable to put aside his hatred for Snape when evaluating his actions, and the judgements he forms of him as a result. This is inconsequential when evaluating him for giving them homework but becomes problematic when evaluating his role in the imaginary war of good and evil in the following two novels.

The Goblet of Fire confirms for the first time that Snape was previously associated with Voldemort, something Harry has only ever assumed, developing Snape as a character

who has experienced a redemption arc. Harry learns that Snape was a Death Eater but turned double agent for 'The Order of the Phoenix' (Dumbledore's army of resistance against Voldemort) before Voldemort's downfall. It is on Dumbledore's word alone that Snape was cleared of being a Death Eater. Although people ultimately put their faith in Dumbledore's decision to trust Snape, it is done hesitantly. This is exemplified by Hermione, who states, "Dumbledore's not stupid. He was right to trust Hagrid and Professor Lupin, even though loads of people wouldn't have given them jobs, so why shouldn't he be right about Snape?" (*Goblet of Fire* 417). Faith in Dumbledore's judgement, not Snape's actions, sometimes despite Snape's actions, is why he is accepted by The Order. Even Sirius, who is perhaps the only character who hates Snape more than Harry, considers, "there's still the fact that Dumbledore trusts Snape" (*Goblet of Fire* 461). Dumbledore is again asserted as the moral authority in the wizarding world. Wizards older and wiser than Harry will not question his judgement. This also places Snape's character as one who has previously achieved redemption. Like Edmund in the *Narnia Chronicles*, Snape transforms from evil to good. Unlike Edmund, the implied reader does not witness Snape's transition and must place their trust in Dumbledore's word.

The lack of visibility the implied reader has for Snape's redemption begs the natural question, what caused his redemption? And why does Dumbledore believe it? The implied reader, like Harry and indeed the rest of the characters, are forced to take Dumbledore's word, as only he knows. Alongside this, Snape's general behaviour does not conform to what one would expect from the side of good. The implied reader can consider that Snape did act against Voldemort in *The Philosopher's Stone,* though Harry's bias prevents him from acknowledging this. The re-introduction of the imaginary war in *The Goblet of Fire* causes a shift in the moral debate of Snape for the implied reader. This transition from personal dislike of his character to a debate on whether he is fighting for or against evil personified, raises the

stakes of Snape's morality. The implied reader must now critically evaluate Harry's bias, Dumbledore's faith, Snape's redemption in the past, and his behaviour in the present when trying to determine his morality. These contradicting parts work together to cause confusion, contradiction, and uncertainty when attempting to come to a definitive conclusion.

The Development of Harry's Generational Bias in Book Five, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Harry's bias in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is developed further as Snape and Sirius reunite, re-igniting their hatred for each other and, in turn, fuelling Harry's hatred for Snape. Within this novel, Harry's biggest flaws increase in frequency and intensity, consistently influencing his behaviour, not just with enemies but with friends. With Sirius' death, Harry's bias against Snape is decisively tipped beyond return. Sirius' position as a prisoner in his own home enhances Harry's loyalty to Sirius, and his hatred of Snape, who consistently taunts Sirius for his inability to help The Order. The impact of this can be seen in their Occlumency lessons (resistance to mind control), the only time Harry and Snape are alone together within the novel. These lessons are intense and personal; Snape breaks into Harry's mind, teaching him to resist. Harry's interpretation of Snape's demeanour, intentions, and feelings during these lessons are constantly negative. Snape is described as lapsing into a "nasty silence", "spitting", "snarling", and acting "cold and unconcerned" (*Order of the Phoenix* 470-71). The imagery presents someone angry, distant, and indifferent to Harry and the situation. Wood describes the effect of this, "Neither do Snape's verbal tags encourage thinking of him gently: his lips "curl" or "sneer", he "snaps", "spits", and when he smiles, it is always "nastily" or "coldly"; when he speaks it's "icily". Since we see Snape only through Harry's eyes through the first five books of the series, we see him at his ugliest" (222). If one

were to remove the verbal tags, and consider only the dialogue, Snape's answers are fair and rational. Harry's private lessons with Snape are the fairest teaching from Snape the implied reader has seen, for he is certainly biased and unkind during his normal Potions lessons. It appears that at the beginning of their Occlumency lessons together, Snape has been able to put his hatred for Harry aside in favour of something more important, the imaginary war of good and evil, while Harry has not.

Snape's behaviour during these lessons when viewed in isolation, without the influence of these verbal tags, presents a different character to the one Harry describes. Snape answers Harry's every question, which no one else has done. Snape does add unnecessary comments that dig at Harry, "the mind is a complex and many-layered thing, Potter – or, at least, most minds are" (*Order of the Phoenix* 469). Much of this explanation, however, is presented neutrally and clearly:

> The usual rules do not seem to apply with you, Potter. The curse that failed to kill you seems to have forged some kind of connection between you and the Dark Lord. The evidence suggests that at times, when your mind is most relaxed and vulnerable – when you are asleep, for instance – you are sharing the Dark Lord's thoughts and emotions. The Headmaster thinks it inadvisable for this to continue. He wishes me to teach you how to close your mind to the Dark Lord. (*Order of the Phoenix* 469)

Even Harry can acknowledge he is "at last […] getting to this bottom of this business" (*Order of the Phoenix* 470). There is nothing in the explanation provided above to suggest that Snape is indifferent to Harry's situation like he assumes. Snape attempts to make Harry understand the urgency of the situation, which he ignores, suggesting that it is Harry who is unconcerned. Snape also provides clear and rational instructions on what Harry needs to do. He states, "I am about to attempt to break into your mind [...] I have been told that you have already shown

aptitude at resisting the Imperius Curse. You will find that similar powers are needed for this [...] brace yourself, now" (*Order of the Phoenix* 470). Not only does Snape provide clear instruction, but he also compliments Harry's skill at resisting mind control and warns him to 'brace himself' in preparation. This is a significant contrast to Snape's normal teaching methods, showing how seriously he is taking these lessons.

This is a side of Snape the implied reader has not witnessed before, and it demonstrates his capabilities as an educator when he is not letting his bias impact his teaching. Through Harry's focalisation, this representation is influenced by Harry's determination to see the worst. Hilary Justice observes that the *Potter* series is "told almost exclusively from a single, limited and unreliable point of view" (232). Harry's focalisation in this novel regarding Snape is the most extreme this unreliability has yet been, supported by Alfredsson, who writes, "Harry sees what he thinks is right, without reflecting on, or noticing what Snape does and why" (7). The clear distinction between what Snape is saying and doing, and Harry's negative interpretation, can be seen in the following exchange:

> 'Clear your mind, Potter,' said Snape's cold voice. "Let go of all emotion…'
>
> But Harry's anger at Snape continued to pound through his veins like venom. Let go of his anger? He could as easily detach his legs…
>
> 'You're not doing it, Potter… You will need more discipline than this… Focus, now […] Let's go again… on the count of three… one – two – three – *Legilimens!'*
>
> (*Order of the Phoenix* 473)

His actions when relayed by the narrator demonstrate that, while Snape enjoys making snide remarks at Harry's expense, he is also teaching Harry about what is happening to him and the skill of Occlumency to the best of his ability. The implied reader can notice the two facts presented by the narrator, and that Harry will only acknowledge one. Snape demonstrates

patience, encouragement, and clear instruction to Harry here. It is rare to see Snape communicating with Harry in this way, which makes it so noticeable to the implied reader. It is clear from this passage that it is Harry's inability to calm down, let go of his anger, overcome his biases, and focus on the task at hand that is hindering his progress.

Harry's anger intensifies in *The Order of the Phoenix,* developing the foundation laid in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* – Harry's anger is transforming from a strength to a fatal flaw. This has a disastrous impact on Harry in the novel's conclusion that implements an irreversible change in his perception of Snape. His lack of control over his anger prevents him from committing to his Occlumency homework, spending his time "focusing instead on how much he loathed the pair of them [Snape and another professor of Hogwarts]" which "merely increased his sense of grumbling resentment" (*Order of the Phoenix* 509). Snape has warned Harry the danger he is in by not practising Occlumency, but he does not heed his advice; his emotions are in control. Harry knows he should be trying to implement Occlumency to stop his dreams, but "felt so consumed with curiosity [...] that he could not help feeling annoyed with Ron [for waking him up]" (509). His judgement is clouded by his feelings which overtake all rationality, sensibility, and caution. This is part of what makes Harry a heroic character and the ultimate example of 'good' within the series – he plunges in headfirst to save the day, with no regard for his own safety. In this novel, as the threat of the imaginary war grows larger than ever, this trait turns fatal.

His disregard for safety in favour of his exploding emotions means Harry has no ability to see the bigger picture, focusing his energy on his personal hatred instead of the imaginary war and its increasing threat. This is presented clearly during his lessons, where Harry is entirely focused on his emotions, "Harry looked back at Snape, hating him […] he had not meant to say it; it had burst out of him in temper" (*Order of the Phoenix* 520-21). Snape does taunt Harry, and the implied reader can see how Harry's anger in these moments

is understandable. Yet, Snape points out what the implied reader can also see, “Perhaps you actually enjoy having these visions and dreams, Potter [...] You are not working hard enough!” (*Order of the Phoenix* 521-23). Though his delivery only makes matters worse, he is also completely right. Harry is not working towards improving his Occlumency skill at all and does not take the warnings of even Dumbledore seriously, who “doesn’t want [him] to have dreams about that corridor at all” (*Order of the Phoenix* 489). His disregard for his own safety, and the safety of others, creates a hero whose growing flaws are hindering his ability to do his heroic duty, calling his judgement into question, particularly as Harry is completely ignorant to his own short-sightedness.

A window of opportunity for Harry to develop his limited perspective on morality is opened when Harry learns of ‘Snape’s Worst Memory’. Harry has no ability to comprehend that someone can demonstrate behaviour that aligns with both good and evil. For him, people can only be one or the other. As Snape, in his view, is within the evil category, any evidence of good is ignored. This also leads him to believe that people he takes as wholeheartedly good, like Sirius and James, could never behave contradictory to this. His view of morality exists entirely in binaries, which is tested in this scene. During their lessons, Snape takes a memory from his consciousness and places it into the Pensieve (a device that allows you to view memories). During one lesson when Snape leaves, Harry emotions once again override his judgement. He “thought of Cho’s anger, of Malfoy’s jeering face […] a reckless daring seized over him”, and he looks into the Pensieve (*Order of the Phoenix* 564). Harry witnesses James and Sirius relentlessly bully Snape. When Lily questions why they were doing this, James responds, “it’s more the fact he exists” (*Order of the Phoenix* 570). Harry’s moral perspective is challenged beyond his own denial, and he begins to question his understanding. He reflects, “he knew exactly how Snape had felt […] his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him” (*Order of the Phoenix* 573). Harry previously had the

opportunity to reflect on this in the *Prisoner of Azkaban.* Snape asked Harry if he knew the truth about a conflict between him and James, and Harry "bit his lip. He didn't know what had happened and didn't want to admit it" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 210). Harry has always assumed the best of James, and the worst of Snape, despite his own lack of knowledge on the details of their relationship. Harry's moral judgement of Snape relies heavily on his loyalty to Sirius and his father, and the bias he developed in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* was caused by this loyalty. Harry demonstrates in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* a self-awareness of his bias, and an intentional refusal to question it. His hatred for Snape, in his view, is justified by the understanding that Snape deserved any negative behaviour from Sirius and James, and their dislike of him was warranted. This perspective is challenged here for a second time, and this time, he has not only Snape's word, but undeniable evidence that Snape's word was the truth.

This memory contradicts every assumption he has made that his father was entirely good, and that Snape is entirely bad, and therefore calls his understanding of morality into question. Wood describes the effect of this on Harry, stating, "feeling sympathy with his enemies muddies the clarity of Harry's otherwise strong binary loyalties and suggests that his moral universe might need to be complicated" (227). Harry is on the verge of having this realisation here. This memory also provides clarity for the implied reader, who learns the cause of Snape's hatred. Before this, our perspective was limited to Harry's focalisation and Sirius' version of events. The implied reader is shown Snape's perspective for the first time, and it is illuminating. Östberg writes, "this chapter was the first time the reader had something from Snape's student years revealed to them and perhaps started to understand that his character had a lot more depth that it initially seemed" (11). The flaws in Harry's blind loyalty are highlighted in how Harry, and perhaps the implied reader, never once considered that Snape's hatred of Sirius and James could be justified.

This moment provides a small glimpse into the past of a character always kept in the shadows, developing his complexity. The implied reader can sympathise with Snape and begin to understand where his hatred of Harry is founded. At the same time, however, the implied reader can also observe how Snape chooses to deal with the humiliation of Harry seeing these memories. He refuses to continue with their Occlumency lessons, yelling for Harry to "get out, get out, I don't want to see you in this office ever again!" (*Order of the Phoenix* 572). The nerve Harry touches is too deep of a wound for him to rise above for the sake of something more important. Like Harry, he is unable to put his hatred aside for the greater good, and like Harry, his emotions override his judgement. A side of good was shown in Snape through his efforts to teach Harry Occlumency, which is now contradicted by his bad traits, the very same traits as Harry. This suggests that the binaries of good or bad, how Harry views the world, are too simplistic. Harry is the ultimate hero, and Snape is one of his strongest antagonists throughout the series, yet here their behaviour is very similar. For the implied reader, this is a crucial point in their understanding of Snape's complexity and a revision of Harry's reliability as a judge of morality. For Harry, this window of opportunity for development is decisively shut before any true reflection can occur when Sirius dies, showing that Harry has once again failed to learn this lesson about thinking of morality in binaries.

Sirius' death is a significant turning point for Harry's perspective on Snape and consequently his perspective on morality. Harry dreams of Voldemort torturing Sirius at the Ministry for Magic (the magical government), and rushes to rescue him. He does not consider this may be a trap; the very thing Snape warned him of and the reason why learning Occlumency was so important. When he arrives at the Ministry of Magic, the Death Eaters, not Sirius, are waiting for him. Snape informs The Order, and they, including Sirius, launch a rescue mission, resulting in Sirius' death. This is devastating for Harry, who believes it was

"all his fault" (*Order of the Phoenix* 723). The effects of not taking Occlumency seriously and letting his emotions override his focus is felt by the cruellest consequence. Harry, still blinded by emotion, does not learn from this.

Harry continues to make the same mistake by blaming Snape for Sirius' death. He criticises Snape for "sneer[ing]" when he gave him a coded message that Sirius was captured (*Order of the Phoenix* 734). Dumbledore explains how Snape alerted The Order immediately and is responsible for The Order's rescue mission, but Harry "disregarded this" demonstrating his failure to acknowledge the truth of the situation, allowing his bias to control the narrative (*Order of the Phoenix* 734). Once again, Harry also fails to acknowledge evidence of Snape acting on the side of good. Harry considers Snape responsible for Sirius leaving safety to rescue Harry, because he "goaded Sirius about staying in the house – he made out Sirius was a coward" (*Order of the Phoenix* 734). During the novel, Sirius, still on the run, was not able to leave the house to do work for The Order, for fear of being captured. Snape would frequently taunt him for this, suggesting he enjoyed staying safe inside, while everyone else risked their lives to help The Order. The implied reader can see the situation more objectively and consider multiple factors that suggest Snape is not to blame for Sirius' death at all. Sirius is reckless and impulsive. Harry himself observes this at the beginning of the novel, "it was quite galling to be told not to be rash by a man who had served twelve years in the wizard prison" (*Order of the Phoenix* 14). Sirius was fiercely protective of Harry, and it was only on Dumbledore's orders that he, bitterly and resentfully, remained in hiding. It is near impossible for the implied reader to believe Sirius would have ever stayed home when Harry was in such danger. Harry on some level is aware of this, but allowing his emotions to override his judgement is easier than reflecting that he may have been wrong. He once again demonstrates that he has not learnt from his mistakes, and as the series progresses into darker territory, so too do the consequences of his flaws.

Harry's failure to reflect on this growing flaw provides the implied reader with a critical point of reflection when it comes to evaluating Snape's morality for themselves. The narrator reports that Harry "felt a savage pleasure in blaming Snape" (*Order of the Phoenix* 734). The impact of Sirius' death prevents Harry from seeing beyond his bias, whereas the implied reader can consider that this 'savage pleasure' is a result of Harry projecting his grief. The narrator informs the implied reader of Harry's internal thoughts and feelings, but they do not manipulate the representation, presenting Harry's internal world alongside the external world he is interpreting. One might consider that Harry blames Snape immediately after the event, when his grief is overwhelming, and he may reconsider when he has processed his loss. Harry, however, continues to blame Snape through the aftermath. Sirius' death is the decisive factor that stops any ability Harry had to separate feelings from fact and prevent his emotions from guiding his judgement. This is highlighted when he sees Snape for the first time after Sirius' death, "at the sight of him Harry felt a great rush of hatred […] whatever Dumbledore said, he would never forgive Snape [...] never" (*Order of the Phoenix* 750). His hatred is so overwhelming that he disregards even Dumbledore's opinion. Alfredsson states, "the limitation of only seeing one perspective is that there is only one "voice" to listen to, which influences what the reader thinks and believes about the story" (8). The importance of Harry ignoring Dumbledore on this is crucial, as the implied reader does not have only one 'voice' to listen to on this matter.

Multiple people contradict Harry's conclusions, and Dumbledore is the most compelling, demonstrating the extent Sirius' death has pushed his bias. Though Harry is at least partially aware of his bias, this does not convince him to challenge his own thinking, preferring to hold onto anger. Dumbledore himself notes this flaw in Harry when he comments, "I was afraid your hot head might dominate your good heart" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 577). The implied reader can observe and reflect on these factors within the narrative

that contradict Harry's bias, creating the critical space between themselves and the focaliser that creates such contradiction in Snape's characterisation. The conclusion of *The Order of the Phoenix* leaves the implied reader with Harry's bias at its most unreasonable. This, alongside Snape's quick action in alerting The Order to Harry's danger and causing their rescue mission, provides an array of evidence that Snape's loyalties are with the side of good, the most we have seen from him since *The Philosopher's Stone.* The question of whether he can be trusted as fully redeemed appears to be learning towards the affirmative, providing more conclusive evidence than ever before. This is contradicted immediately in the opening chapter of *The Half Blood Prince*, creating an effect of utter uncertainty moving forward at a time where the story appeared to be providing a conclusive representation of Snape as good, reminding the implied reader that the morality of Snape cannot be so easily defined. The moral binary that Harry clings to is insufficient to explain his character.

Snape's Role as Double Agent in Book Six, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*

The opening of *The Half Blood Prince* changes focalisation and consequently presents the implied reader with a version of Snape entirely free of Harry's bias, adding the most complex layers to Snape yet seen. Within the first two chapters, the implied reader witnesses the magical world outside Harry's point of view. The implied reader witnesses first-hand that Snape's job for The Order is to act as a spy within Voldemort's ranks. The second chapter of *The Half Blood Prince* is one of the few examples of external focalisation, which follows Death Eaters Narcissa and Bellatrix to Snape's home. The narrator presents what happens but offers no internal focalisation through the three characters present, meaning the implied reader is not provided any one character's interpretation of the scene, or access to their

thoughts and feelings. Sukriti Sharma describes the effects of this change, “The narrator omits to describe what exactly is going on in Snape’s mind [...] Due to the lack of adequate information the misdirection is made possible” (27-28). The implied reader has an outside seat, witnessing without access to the internal focalisation required to make conclusive meaning.

The absence of Harry’s focalisation when representing Snape highlights his depth, and how Harry’s representation is not omniscient. There is some consistency seen in the descriptors of his dialogue; ‘silkily’, ‘lazily’, and ‘sneering’ all make an appearance. A side of Snape never represented through Harry is also seen. He is calm in conflict, so unaffected he is almost amused, and he explains without insult. This is seen through new descriptors used in his delivery, which have never been used through Harry’s focalisation. Snape is observed speaking “in a bored voice” and “calmly” while an emotional response is so rare that when he does provide one, the narrator notes how he “[betrays] a hint of impatience for the first time” (*Half Blood Prince* 32-33). Snape is verbally attacked by Bellatrix yet remains unprovoked. His facial expressions are described as “blank, unreadable” and his eyes only as “black” (*Half Blood Prince* 40). This is a stark contrast to Harry’s interpretation of Snape’s expressions, which are always provided with an unfavourable description, and Harry’s interpretation of their meaning, full of hatred, arrogance, and malicious intent. This provides clarity only in the knowledge that Snape is much more than he appears through Harry’s limited view. The implied reader does not know which representation of Snape is the truth, causing further ambiguity in his character.

The implied reader’s view of Snape through external focalisation in this chapter also presents a version of Snape who is on the side of evil, creating reason to doubt that Snape’s redemption from evil to good is legitimate. The implied reader witnesses Snape in his role as double agent, and he is very convincing. They learn how Snape re-gained Voldemort’s trust

after appearing to side with Dumbledore in the years Voldemort was gone. He asks a thought-provoking question of Bellatrix, who doubts he is really on Voldemort's side, asking "do you really think that, had I not been able to give satisfactory answers, I would be sitting here talking to you?" (*Half Blood Prince* 31). While Dumbledore trusts Snape's redemption is genuine, the implied reader hears a compelling story of Snape's loyalty to Voldemort and deception of Dumbledore, adding more evidence against Snape to consider. Is Snape a talented actor, or is this the true story? Only Snape knows, and due to the use of external focalisation, the implied reader has no access to his mind. Nikolajeva observes, "just as Snape must act in front of the teachers and students at Hogwarts, he must feign in front of the Death Eaters [...] if anything, this compels the reader to believe that Snape runs the Dark side's errands" (203). His loyalty is tested when Narcissa requests he make 'the Unbreakable Vow' to assist Draco in the task Voldemort has given him. Snape obliges. The implied reader does not yet know what this is, but it is presented as very serious, "'Certainly, Narcissa, I shall make the Unbreakable Vow' […] Bellatrix's mouth fell open" (*Half Blood Prince* 40). The implied reader later learns that the Unbreakable Vow will result in death for the one who breaks it. This is the ultimate proof of Snape's loyalty, but to whom is unknown – is his loyalty to his role as double agent, or to the Death Eaters? With this different perspective, the narrator and implied reader's relationship develops – they know information Harry does not – placing the implied reader in a unique position in the story. Bearing witness to Snape when on the side of evil during such a detrimental conversation, where an alternative truth is presented, gives them another reason to doubt Snape's redemption, for they do not know if this is Snape in his truth, or Snape undercover.

The events in *The Order of the Phoenix* cemented in Harry a hatred for Snape beyond repair that causes his representation of Snape in *The Half Blood Prince* to be entirely distorted. This bias is on full display for the implied reader, who can see how this impacts

Harry's judgement and question his reliability. At every mention of Snape, the narrator describes Harry's intense emotional response, "he recognised, with a rush of pure loathing, the uptilt hooked nose and long, black, greasy hair of Severus Snape" (*Half Blood Prince* 152). Harry's focalisation reminds the implied reader of Snape's unflattering features, presenting him unsympathetically, and acknowledges that this representation is influenced by the 'loathing' Harry feels towards him. He is determined to think the worst of Snape, and he is contradicted by others who do not share his bias, seen through Hermione in the following passage:

> 'What's Dumbledore playing at, anyway, letting him teach Defence? Did you hear him talking about the Dark Arts? He loves them! All that *unfixed, indestructible* stuff.'
>
> 'Well,' said Hermione, 'I thought he sounded a bit like you.'
>
> 'Like *me?'* (*Half Blood Prince* 171-72)

Hermione observes that Snape and Harry have yet something else in common. Snape's point echoes a similar message Harry preached when teaching Defence to his peers, "you said it was just you and your brains and your guts – well, wasn't that what Snape was saying?" (*Half Blood Prince* 172). Harry is so determined to interpret Snape's words to confirm his bias that he ignores the fact that he and Snape share this opinion. Hermione is constantly employed to rebut Harry's biases, providing the implied reader with an alternative line of thinking. Östberg writes how "Hermione's change of heart [about Snape] should not go unnoticed [...] Hermione historically is the one who is the most knowledgeable and sensible, it gives a pause for thought" (13). Hermione's stark observation here demonstrates just how severe Harry's bias has become.

That Snape and Harry are more alike than Harry can, or is willing to notice is significant, as it demonstrates that Harry's black or white thinking of morality does not work.

As he considers himself good, and Snape evil, he cannot fathom any reality in which they have any similarities. This is untrue – they have moments where they are remarkably similar in their stubbornness, and here in their perspective on the Dark Arts. Mary Pharr writes that "if Snape's petty meanness suggests the limits of conversion, Harry's childish fantasies suggest his own youthful immaturity [...] still a juvenile, Harry cannot assimilate everything with equal facility" (59). The implied reader is reminded that Harry clings to his binary thinking even when challenged, for this is all his current experience allows. He is unable to grasp the idea that people are more complex than this way of thinking. Harry's bias is so extreme that he is aware of it but refuses to change. This is noted when the narrator describes how Harry reflected on his conclusion that Snape is "probably" to blame for Sirius' death over the summer holidays despite Dumbledore's advice, and "clung to this notion, because it enabled him to blame Snape" (*Half Blood Prince* 153). He is determined to see a version of events where the truth is what he wants it to be, despite minimal evidence, disagreement from others, and even an element of self-awareness. Harry knows his logic is flawed here but does not care. In this moment, Harry's behaviour is reminiscent of Snape's attitude towards Sirius in *The Prisoner of Azkaban.* His preference to blame Snape though he knows this is not accurate demonstrates he can act outside the margins of what makes a good character – hating someone for something he knows they did not do demonstrates aggression and a disregard for truth and fairness – yet Harry is far from evil. That he can have these flaws in moral judgement here and still be an incredibly good character for whom evil is not a possibility is further evidence for a conclusion on morality that Harry is incapable of seeing. Confining someone to a binary definition of all good or all evil is not a reflection of their reality – this is true of Harry, and of Snape.

Harry's bias is observed by Lupin, who, as best friend of James and Sirius, is the one character who shares Harry's grief, demonstrating an alternative view of the same situation

from someone who *can* understand that morality is not as black or white as Harry believes. Harry demonstrates his bias when he once again refuses to acknowledge Snape acting on the side of good. Lupin explains his reasons for trusting Snape, stating, "I do not forget that during the year I taught at Hogwarts, Severus made the Wolfsbane Potion for me every month, made it perfectly" (*Half Blood Prince* 312). Harry ignores this, immediately protesting, "but he "accidentally" let it slip that you're a werewolf, so you had to leave!" Lupin shrugs this off, "we both know he wanted my job, but he could have wreaked much worse damage on me by tampering with the Potion." Harry still refuses to acknowledge this, opting to instead theorise on why he didn't compromise the potion, suggesting he "didn't dare mess with the Potion with Dumbledore watching." At this point, Lupin points out what Harry is aware of but continues to base his judgements upon – his generational bias, "you are determined to hate him, Harry [...] and I understand, with James as your father, with Sirius as your godfather, you have inherited an old prejudice" (*Half Blood Prince* 312). This is significant from Lupin, who too lost Sirius and James, suffered from Snape's prejudice, and witnessed first-hand their school rivalry. Yet, he can remain impartial when judging Snape's loyalties, because he can understand that they are not connected.

The stark contrast between him and Harry in this moment demonstrates how intensely Harry has allowed his emotions to lead his judgements. Pharr writes, "what clinches the heroic nature of the Potter series is its adherence to the complexity of Harry's moral development" (62). If the series is the story of Harry's development from a young boy with a simplistic worldview to a heroic man, whose heroism is defined by moral complexity, then *The Half Blood Prince* is the breaking point before he is forced to re-evaluate. When Harry's bias against Snape is at its most extreme, the implied reader is provided with multiple perspectives to consider, and they are all equally convincing. This includes the exclusive side of Snape provided to the implied reader at the start of the novel as a double agent. Megan

York observes the effect of the constant contradiction Snape is placed in throughout the series, commenting that without it, "the realization of just how ambiguous Snape is would not have had the strong impact it does [at the series end]" (70). This constant conflicting information denies the implied reader the ability to form a decisive conclusion on Snape's morality.

The answer to where Snape's loyalties lie appears to be provided in the conclusion of *The Half Blood Prince*, when Snape kills Dumbledore, creating a shock ending that temporarily aligns the implied reader with Harry's perspective. Draco's mission was to murder Dumbledore, and he has been failing all year. The implied reader knows Snape has made the unbreakable vow to commit the murder himself should Draco fail, which is exactly what happens. Snape's allegiance to Voldemort is thus publicly declared, and Harry, the implied reader, and both sides of the war move into the final novel with Snape's loyalties confirmed. All arguments for trusting Snape were dependent on Dumbledore's word. With his murder, all who relied on Dumbledore's judgement no longer have this as a defence. The wise, authority figures like Hermione, Lupin, and Arthur, who acted as a voice of reason against Harry's bias, retract their defence of him. Lupin, who so ardently defended Snape to Harry earlier, now regards him with an "uncharacteristically harsh" tone (*Half Blood Prince* 574). All the reasons that gave the implied reader cause to doubt Harry are destroyed, and the conclusion that Snape is evil is shared by everyone.

The implied reader, previously overwhelmed with contradictory evidence, now has no reason to doubt Harry's conclusion, and the final novel is told with this presented as fact. Harry's bias now seems to be nothing but truth, a sudden change that seems too easy an answer for the amount of work gone into opposing it. Justice describes the effects of this cliffhanger as a reader who did not yet have the answers provided in *The Deathly Hallows*, "To them [readers who did not have to wait two years for the final novel's release] Snape

won’t be as large nor his ambiguity as compelling, and thus their curiosity, their motivation won’t have had time to intensify to the point where they start re-reading, reading backwards, and doing [...] literary detective work” (231-38). The effect of six novels of ambiguity developed through careful narrative positioning and contradiction left readers desperate to know the truth of Snape’s morality, unable to trust this decisive conclusion.

Chapter Three

Snape's Redemption and its Impact on his Morality

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows concludes Snape's character arc by providing Harry and the implied reader with the knowledge that allowed Dumbledore to trust Snape's redemption was genuine. With this new knowledge – the truth – the implied reader can form their own answer to the question, 'is Snape good or evil?' This question caused much debate in the *Potter* fandom and critical field prior to and after the publication of *The Deathly Hallows.* Mary Whitney, et al. conducted a study before the series was even finished. Different age demographics were interviewed to determine their response to characters. The results of the study noted that "Professor Snape was clearly the most controversial of the characters examined" and "there was no consensus within the groups on many of the questions asked" (7). The consensus amongst scholars is that there is no clear-cut answer to the question of which category Snape belongs to. Many conclude that, while Snape is nasty towards Harry, saving his life makes him heroic. Nikolajeva writes that "for the sophisticated reader [...] Snape presents a considerably higher-standing hero" (204), while McEvoy claims Snape "ultimately proves to be a hero" underneath the heading *Morally Ambiguous Villains*, perfectly embodying the statement made in the same paragraph, that Snape "occupies a weird middle group in the series" (211). Snape's past allows Harry and the implied reader to determine their opinion of his moral character and, as evidenced in the debate seen in the fandom and critical field of *Potter*, they do not always agree.

This reveal changes Harry's opinion of Snape dramatically. The boy who constantly accused Snape of evil, a belief that could not be swayed by even the most powerful moral authority, changed his mind once he discovered the secret Dumbledore had kept for 17 years. This, of course, was love. Love is fundamental to morality in *Potter*, the pivotal factor that determines one's capability for goodness. The revelation that Snape is not only capable of love, but changed his entire life for love, thus changes Harry's perception so dramatically that he named his son after him, calling Snape "the bravest man I ever knew" (*Deathly Hallows*

607). Here lies the most convincing evidence that morality in the *Potter* series is determined by love and power, these two concepts pivoting the axis of the moral binary. By dedicating his life to love, Snape relinquished all power, and in Harry's eyes, achieves redemption.

The Life and Lies of Severus Snape

Snape's backstory is pivotal to understanding how Harry and the implied reader determine their final judgement of his morality. Before Snape dies, he provides Harry with a range of memories. These memories confirm that, despite appearances, his true loyalties were to Dumbledore, not Voldemort. Through these memories, Snape shows Harry key moments of his life from his perspective. He shows Harry that he was prejudice against muggles and muggleborns since childhood, with one exception: Lily Evans, a girl in his neighbourhood with whom he developed a close friendship. Though Snape grew to love Lily, his prejudice did not change and only strengthened when he befriended other students who shared these views. Together they bullied muggleborn students to Lily's disgust, who expressed how she did not "understand how [he] can be friends with them" (*Deathly Hallows* 541). Despite their differing values, they remained friends for their first five years at Hogwarts until a fateful event referred to as 'Snape's Worst Memory', where Snape is harassed by James and Sirius, and Lily comes to his defence. Humiliated, Snape exclaims, "I don't need help from filthy little mudbloods like her!" (*Order of the Phoenix* 571). With this, Snape and Lily's friendship ended, and Snape joined Voldemort after leaving Hogwarts. Snape's prejudice, his friendship with Lily, and how it came to end, are crucial to how and why his allegiances changed from Voldemort to Dumbledore, and why Dumbledore trusted his redemption.

Snape's love for Lily was the sole reason Snape's allegiances changed, confirming that his redemption follows the series rules of morality – one can be redeemed if they choose love over power. Snape's change in allegiance occurred at the age of 20, when he overheard a

prophecy about Voldemort and "the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord" (*Order of the Phoenix* 741). When Voldemort decided this prophecy was referring to Lily's son, Snape informs Dumbledore, begging him to protect Lily, and in return, Snape agrees to do "anything" (*Deathly Hallows* 544). Snape makes his final choice for love, a choice which Dahlén observes "seems to incorporate some kind of sacrifice" (9). Snape's sacrifice is power – his entire life from this point on is in service to Dumbledore, every action and choice instructed by him. Any personal ambition is sacrificed in dedication to his new role. This is the secret Dumbledore kept for 17 years, which allowed him to trust Snape so confidently.

Absolute confirmation of Snape's loyalties is provided when Snape's memories show Dumbledore's murder was planned between them. Dumbledore, who had been cursed and would die within the year, requested Snape kill him to spare Draco from devastation, and "to help an old man avoid pain and humiliation" (*Deathly Hallows* 548). Once this is confirmed his loyalties are clear, for it was Dumbledore's murder that allowed focaliser and implied reader to land, temporarily united, on the conclusion that Snape was evil. This final memory is the conclusive piece of evidence required to trust that Snape's memories are the truth. Snape is also seen helping Harry destroy Horcruxes (segments of Voldemort's soul) throughout *The Deathly Hallows*, without which he would not have been able to destroy Voldemort. These memories prove that Snape had been helping Harry on his quest to kill Voldemort – supporting the side of good in the imaginary war. They also prove that it was only the love Snape had for Lily that motivated him to join the fight against evil. This secures him on the side of good in the eyes of the focaliser, despite his personal feelings, due to the transformation into adulthood Harry experiences within *The Deathly Hallows.*

Harry's Transformation into Adulthood in Book Seven, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

The first chapter of *The Deathly Hallows* presents Snape without Harry's focalisation for the final time, highlighting how ambiguous Snape truly is. Chapter one is told through external focalisation, where the implied reader witnesses the other side of the war. Again, the implied reader is provided exclusive information on Snape's life as a Death Eater that the focaliser does not see. The descriptors historically associated with Snape through Harry's focalisation are, significantly, absent, "Snape nodded, but did not elaborate [...] Snape, however, looked calmly [...] Snape was smiling [...] Snape raised his eyes to the upside-down face" (*Deathly Hallows* 11-17). There is no sneering or snarling, his smile is not nasty or twisted, his eyes are not glittery, malicious, or cold. This, like *The Half Blood Prince* when Snape was presented through external focalisation, is a different Snape to the one Harry describes. He is calm, confident but quiet, not speaking unless spoken to, but entirely unafraid. This gives the implied reader, who has just witnessed him murder Dumbledore, another layer of his character to consider. This appears to be, for the very first time, Snape in his truth. The absence of descriptors is rare and significant in the opening chapter. Before they enter the final journey of *Potter*, the implied reader is first reminded that they do not know anything for sure when it comes to Snape, and that Harry's perspective is not necessarily the truth. This sets the tone of the rest of the novel, which uproots Harry's entire understanding of the world and forces him to mature. The implied reader is invited to do the same here with how Snape is portrayed, for his representation is almost unrecognisable – a jarring reminder that Snape is entirely obscured.

The implied reader is reminded of Harry's bias in the beginning of *The Deathly Hallows,* showcasing that Harry's flaws and his black and white thinking on morality are all still true of his character. This is important for the implied reader to remember, as Harry has

just seemingly been proven correct when Snape killed Dumbledore, which may overshadow Harry's previous unreliability. This is presented through a newspaper article about Snape, who has now been appointed Headmaster of Hogwarts, "Potter later gave evidence against Severus Snape, a man against whom he has a notorious grudge" (*Deathly Hallows* 29). While the implied reader here has every reason to agree with Harry, it is important for them to remember his bias exists, and he has a very limited view on morality. The reason becomes clear as the narrative continues, for everything Harry thought of morality is challenged. Forced into hiding early in the story, Harry's transition into adulthood is instantaneous. He goes from living with the loving Weasleys to scraping forests for berries and stealing to survive, with only Ron and Hermione's help. His support from adults is cut off, forcing him to solve problems alone.

Part of his transition is learning new information about his idol, Dumbledore, which challenges his perspective significantly. Lee writes, "Harry's growth [...] becomes more pronounced when he detaches himself from Dumbledore's influence" (78). Harry has always shown a blind loyalty to Dumbledore, similar to the fierce loyalty he extended to Sirius and James, despite them being near strangers. After Dumbledore's death, Harry learns Dumbledore was once power hungry and strived for wizard domination over muggles, something he was always so against when Harry knew him. Dumbledore was a young genius who plotted to unite The Deathly Hallows (three objects that provided the uniter ultimate power) and ignite a revolution to propel himself and Grindelwald into power, causing the death of Dumbledore's younger sister. Dahlén notes his plans were "not entirely unlike the riot planned by Voldemort" (8). Harry's belief that Dumbledore knew all is shattered, and the pedestal Harry placed him on crumbles. His understanding of morality is heavily influenced by his faith in Dumbledore, so learning that he was not always the example of goodness he assumed forces Harry to re-evaluate everything he thought he knew of morality. Significantly,

his ideas that one can be only good or only evil is challenged, as Dumbledore's morality proves to be more complicated than Harry's limited perspective can allow for.

The internal struggle Harry experiences due to this sees him transition into adulthood with a newfound understanding of morality. When he first learns of information that contradicts his perception of Dumbledore, Harry struggles to accept that he cannot be placed decisively on the side of good. This is largely because he has used this to justify his perspective of morality, which guides his judgement and evaluation of others, "Some inner certainty had crashed down inside him [...] He had trusted Dumbledore, believed him the embodiment of goodness and wisdom. It was all ashes: how much more could he lose?" (*Deathly Hallows* 293). The loss Harry feels forces him to finally reflect on this way of thinking, learning the lesson he has had multiple opportunities to learn throughout the series but continuously failed to do. Léa Boichard and Adeline Terry note how "Dumbledore is one of the [author's] most efficient tools in their manipulation […] he has been shown as an omniscient and omnipotent character, trusted both by Harry and by the reader, which makes the revelation of his manipulation all the more hurtful to them both" (11). Through this painful revelation, Harry is forced to re-evaluate his moral worldview.

A different Harry emerges as his perspective on morality shifts. This Harry is much less reactive. He does not let his emotions overtake his judgement, controls his anger, and can review others without letting bias or judgement impact his conclusions. Lee observes how the news that Dumbledore was once morally grey "complicate[s] Harry's moral judgement and influences his life values" (73). Only through accepting that even his highest level of authority's morality can be flawed, transformative, and complicated, can he finally understand that his binary view of thinking does not accurately capture one's morality. Room must be made for growth, context, mistakes, and learning when evaluating. The impact this change has on Harry is enormous, as observed by Cathy Colton, "another change through which

Harry progresses is from being largely a person of action to being someone who's also a thinker. An intellect develops, and the series ends with a much more thoughtful and wise Harry than we had in the beginning" (249). This shift – thinking of others as more complex than just good or evil – is ultimately what leads him to defeat Voldemort. His growth allowed him to view Voldemort as a complex human being, and through this new lens he could put the pieces together, "Harry understood, and yet he did not understand. His instinct was telling him one thing, his brain quite another" (*Deathly Hallows* 391). This reveal about Dumbledore is integral to Harry's transition to adulthood, so that when Harry learns the truth about Snape, he can, finally, evaluate it without bias influencing his conclusions.

When Harry first sees Snape in *The Deathly Hallows,* familiar indicators are used to remind the implied reader of Harry's intense hatred toward him. Harry has undergone an extreme transformation in perspective and maturity in front of the implied reader, who has watched him grow throughout the novel. This maturity does not yet extend towards Snape. The narrator reports, when he first sees Snape, "Hatred boiled up in Harry at the sight of him." Harry comments on how he forgot Snape's "greasy black hair", and how his "black eyes" had a "dead, cold look" (*Deathly Hallows* 480). The emphasis on his physical unattractiveness is significant, as these are the same stereotypical features that Harry focused on in his first year at Hogwarts, causing him to incorrectly conclude that Snape was the villain. Despite Harry's growth in *The Deathly Hallows* before now, the return of these familiar identifiers allows the implied reader to observe that Harry still harbours his youthful, biased perspective when it comes to Snape. It is notable, then, that once he knows the truth, Harry provides no commentary on Snape's character.

Harry's growth in the series' conclusion can be observed most convincingly through his absence of opinion on Snape after he views his memories. He speaks of Snape to Voldemort in their final battle neutrally, presenting only what he knows to be true, "Snape

was Dumbledore's […] from the moment you started hunting down my mother" (*Deathly Hallows* 593). This shift in Harry, who has never passed up an opportunity to speak negatively of Snape, demonstrates how Harry's perception of morality has dramatically altered. As Lee observes, "Harry comes to acknowledge that he, blinded by his own dislike, has exceedingly misunderstood Snape" (81). Harry's growth results in him no longer passing judgement upon morality, for he understands now that it is much more complex than he previously knew. This is noted by York, who comments that "one of the best take-aways from Snape is the lesson of passing judgment on a character" (69). Learning the truth about both Dumbledore and Snape forced Harry to learn this lesson, as his views on morality were entirely broken apart. Lisa Damour describes Snape and Dumbledore as "the two adults with whom Harry maintains the most intense and intensely conflicted relationships" (6). Putting Harry's view of morality back together involved him being able to re-assess his relationships to each of these men, understanding that they cannot be placed in fixed boxes. Once he has this realisation, Harry could "reassess Dumbledore as a fallible human being with his own periods of weakness" leading him to understand that morality shifts and grows overtime, and mistakes are unavoidable (Lee 78). What matters, what to judge their redemption on, is if their choices later reflect that they have learnt from these mistakes. Wayne Booth stated the implied reader is found "as much in the text's silences as in its overt appeals. What the author felt no need to mention" (423). The absence of commentary from Harry on Snape's morality after the fact, remembering Harry in his youth never passed up the opportunity to present his opinion with no doubts, demonstrates both Harry's growth, and faith that the implied reader has learnt this lesson alongside him.

Chapter Four

Severus Snape's Significance in Postmodern Fantasy and Conclusions

Severus Snape remains one of the most elusive figures in postmodern fantasy. The series' conclusion on his character prompts only more questions, resulting in a significant amount of criticism dedicated to exploring this topic. Snape's impact on the fantasy genre is evident in how the contradiction within his character leads to further discussion on what it truly means to be moral. This refusal to conform to a binary perspective of morality shows how postmodern fantasy has moved away from its modernist beginnings, opening exciting possibilities for the inevitable transformation fantasy awaits in its future. It is also noted that Snape's impact on postmodern fantasy is significant, but not revolutionary, and there are limitations to its effect. Acknowledging this, the experimentation with morality within Snape's character contributed to *Potter's* success. The absence of comment on Snape's morality from Harry at the novels' conclusion re-affirms the *Potter* series' overall stance on morality – whether characters good or bad is too simplistic of a question. The question, instead, is to what extent do they choose love over power? This is supported by Joan Acocella, who argues the fundamental question presented about power is, "is it reconcilable with goodness?" (77). The series' conclusion on Snape formulates a message seven books in the making, rejecting the trope fantasy has historically presented – the choice can only be good *or* evil.

Snape's Impact on the *Potter* Series as a Postmodern Fantasy

The representation of morality within Snape is what Nikolajeva describes as "especially gratifying" (193) because of his dynamic between the two pivotal concepts that define morality in *Potter*. Love denies Snape any power to choose the life he naturally desires, the life of a Death Eater. Power is relinquished due to love that is almost against his will, a love for a mudblood, someone he despises. The implied reader can see the power Snape has sacrificed in the name of love. He gave up his ambition of a life in the Dark Arts,

resigned to teach Potions instead of his true passion, and his every decision once he pledged his services to Dumbledore was made for him. Nikolajeva observes how Snape "acts once again on Dumbledore's orders [...] ignorant of what the sword is needed for since he is still not initiated into Dumbledore's scheme" (203), showing how Snape was denied even the power of knowledge, kept in the dark about Dumbledore's reasoning behind his directions. For 17 years, Snape was Dumbledore's blind servant, even committing murder upon his request, with no agency. He did not know the master plan and was not provided reasons for why he needed to do what Dumbledore ordered – he just obeyed blindly. For him to choose love, he consequently lost all power.

The only place in Snape's life that allowed him any power was within his classroom, and it is not a coincidence that in this space, Snape is his most malicious. His abuse of his power, the dread he instils within students, the favouritism he displays for his own house, and the unfair punishments he inflicts on Gryffindor students are why Harry suspects him of evil in the first place. Dahlén notes that, in this regard, Snape is similar to Voldemort, "Voldemort rules his subjects by terror, a strategy similar to Snape's way of gaining respect from his students" (10). In the only space Snape has any true power, not directed or observed by Dumbledore, his worst attributes are on full display. Lynsey Kamine describes how Snape "allowed love to consume him, causing him to make decisions and sacrifices uncharacteristic of his actual attitudes" (1). Can Snape's true nature, the person he chooses to be when he has full control, be ignored due to his choice to follow Dumbledore's orders?

Snape's decision to change allegiances was done for love, but it was love of an entirely selfish nature. It is true that Snape made the choice to switch sides to save Lily, but it is also true the only reason Lily needed saving was because he chose to tell Voldemort of the prophecy. It is only when he realised *he* would suffer as a result that his allegiances changed, something Dumbledore notices too. When Snape confides that he asked Voldemort to spare

Lily in exchange for killing Harry and James, Dumbledore exclaims, “You disgust me [...] You do not care, then, about the deaths of her husband and child? They can die, as long as you have what you want?” (*Deathly Hallows* 543-44). His selfish reason for switching sides is important when evaluating if what he has done for redemption is enough to consider him good. He did not follow the path of redemption because he had a change in ideology, but because he stood to lose something. His choice to relinquish power for love, and its implications for how *Potter* views good and evil through choice, like everything else about him, is entirely paradoxical.

Postmodern fantasy is concerned with pushing the boundaries of its predecessors, and *Potter* certainly achieves this effect with Snape’s conclusion. Jordan describes the state of indeterminacy, a postmodern concept, as “something more than a refusal to decide between possibilities, but something more nebulous, a state that blocks choice altogether” (269). Most interestingly, the ‘state that blocks choice altogether’ is a state that Snape’s morality is left in. *The Deathly Hallows* provides answers to the questions fans were desperate for, and yet when it comes to Snape, he prompts *more* questions. This is observed by Nikolajeva, who states “This enigmatic character has been discussed thoroughly by criticism, yet there certainly remain more aspects to explore” (195). Snape’s conclusion is consistent with the only sure thing his character has provided readers for seven books – it is ambiguous. The state he is left in prevents the implied reader from being able to decide conclusively where he stands, particularly when evaluating his actions against the series’ own rules of morality.

Snape’s decision to alter his path, not because his beliefs changed, but because the woman he loved was at risk, demonstrates a character who lives in the middle of the morality spectrum. Snape acted for love, the ultimate good, but not out of a change in prejudice, the ultimate evil. The decision that transformed Snape’s life is wrought with contradiction. The question of Severus Snape is divisive in the reception of *Potter* and ignites further questions

about our understanding of morality. It is significant how he can never be placed comfortably in one category. Though Harry accepts Snape on the side of good because of his ability to choose love, the implied reader is free to decide for themselves what side of the moral binary he falls onto, or if he can fall into one side at all. This contradiction gives the *Potter* series an element of postmodern fantasy that, while not entirely subverting the genre, pushes the discussion of what it means to be moral into new territory.

Snape's Redemption Arc

Snape's redemption arc is particularly notable because Snape, unlike Tolkien and Lewis' characters, does not want redemption. He does not seek forgiveness and actively discourages the truth from being shared. Snape did not switch sides due to a change in prejudice, or a desire to be good, or to be seen as good. He changed sides for one reason only, presented as a power beyond his control that he is almost victim to. His love, and then grief, for Lily controls his every move. Snape held no regret for the actions that placed him in the evil category. He was not remorseful of his anti-muggle beliefs that led him to lose the friendship of Lily, the woman he would spend the rest of his life living for. This is evident by his choice to join Voldemort when he left school, supporting the movement that put Lily, as a muggleborn, in extreme danger. He was not remorseful for bullying countless students while in a position of power. Snape held a grudge against Harry since his birth for his father's wrongdoings and was happy to sacrifice Harry to save Lily's life. He was determined for no one to know what he had done for Harry *because* it was James' son he was protecting. As noted by Kamine, "Snape abhors [Harry] because he represents the love Lily holds for another, less formidable man" (1). He was unable to forgive and took his resentment out on people entirely innocent of the crime. None of these traits align with the understanding of

good within the series. He showed Harry the truth because Dumbledore required Snape to tell Harry about his connection with Voldemort, and the only way for Snape to gain Harry's trust enough for him to listen was to reveal that he was on Dumbledore's side. Like everything else in Snape's life, this decision to share the good within him was done on Dumbledore's orders and demonstrates that Snape had no desire to be redeemed.

Nikolajeva argues that Snape's hatred of Harry was entirely fabricated, an act to protect him from Voldemort's supporters realising Snape cared for him after all. However, when examining the evidence, this analysis does not hold true of his character. They state, "if, as is more likely and is confirmed in the last volume, he sees in Harry the image of his deceased love, then the endless evil looks, petty remarks and more obvious bullying are parts of the excruciating disguise Snape is carrying" (195). When looking closely at his behaviour throughout the series, Snape's actions represent a man who was his most authentic during his time as a teacher, when Dumbledore was not directing his actions, and it is in this space that he is his most evil. Snape bullied not only Harry, but everyone not in his own house. His bullying of Neville, a vulnerable target, and Hermione, a muggleborn, are particularly cruel, and Harry is warned of Snape's reputation in his first year by others, who tell him "I've heard Snape can turn very nasty" (*Philosopher's Stone* 104). This confirms that Snape's bullying is not an act he is putting on for Harry's sake.

The way Snape talks about Harry to Dumbledore when they are alone demonstrates his true feelings towards Harry. When talking privately with Dumbledore, the only person he could remove his 'excruciating disguise' for, Snape describes Harry as "'mediocre, arrogant as his father, a determined rule-breaker, delighted to find himself famous, attention-seeking and impertinent'" (*Deathly Hallows* 545). His prejudice for Harry as James' son is so clear that Dumbledore points out his bias, "you see what you expect to see, Severus [...] Other

teachers report that the boy is modest, likable" (*Deathly Hallows* 545). In his final moments, he chose to remind Harry, twice, that he did not do any of this for him, but for Lily. Dumbledore asks if Snape cares for Harry, to which Snape angrily protests, "For *him?*" (*Deathly Hallows* 551). He then produces a patronus charm, which takes the form of a doe, the same as Lily, to show Dumbledore it is Lily, not Harry, that he cares for. Snape did not need to include this in his final memories to Harry – it has no relevance to what Dumbledore needed Harry to know – but did so anyway to ensure Harry understood that Snape did not do this for him, but for Lily. This demonstrates that Snape's hatred of Harry was not an act. Snape's dedication to protect the life of a person he hates represents a moral complexity not always evident in fantasy texts.

Snape's lack of ability to acknowledge how his actions impacted Harry shows that he has not made any growth in his morality outside of the imaginary war. His ability to be placed on the side of good lies with the actions dictated by another for the greater good of the imaginary war, but when it comes to moral behaviour in his personal life, Snape falls short. In his final moments, Snape continues to hold a grudge against Harry that he did not earn, for the actions of his father, who died before Harry was two years old. Terri Brown-Joyce points out how his "loathing for James undoubtedly overshadows his supposed love of Lily" (1). His love did not outweigh his resentment, and yet it is this love that tethers his hold to the side of good. Kamine argues that "love has led Snape to a life full of regret and spite which deteriorates him" (1). Snape's choice of love is almost no choice at all, near a burden, which contradicts his instincts, beliefs, and nature. Nikolajeva notes, "Snape has all reasons to detest [James'] son, while he simultaneously has all motives to love Lily's son. Snape's feelings towards Harry are highly ambivalent" (195). That Snape loved Lily so much he gave up his life to protect her son yet has such hatred towards him, and did enough 'good' to earn his

redemption but didn't want anyone to know that he protected James', not Lily's, son, makes it near impossible to conclusively determine his morality.

While Snape may have earned redemption, he certainly did not want it, especially not from Harry. This is significant as Harry was the person whose life was the most impacted by his actions. He did not consider himself someone who required redemption from the person who lost more than him when Voldemort murdered Lily, for Harry lost his parents, his home, and his entire life. Snape could not let go of his resentment enough to even consider him an independent person, seeing him only as an extension of James. Snape's "remorse" for the "greatest regret of his life" is entirely selfish, he is remorseful for what he lost and nothing more (*Half Blood Prince* 513). His inability to let go of his resentment against James or humble himself enough to even acknowledge the devastating pain and life-changing consequences his actions caused Harry, let alone seek redemption for it, is a mark of his utter selfishness. The juxtaposition between Snape's acts of good in the imaginary war, and his acts of evil within his personal life, is the most convincing evidence for why his outward support of the imaginary war cannot be trusted as a true reflection of his morality.

The Limitations of Snape's Moral Ambiguity

The moral ambiguity represented within Snape, originally a villain who comes to earn redemption while simultaneously rejecting and contradicting it, is a relatively new phenomenon within the fantasy genre. Tolkien's impact within fantasy saw the rise of the 'switching sides' trope for its characters during the modernist period. A villain redeemed or a hero corrupted is a recurring character arc for the modern fantasy reader and historically is a clear-cut switch – all good to all bad or vice versa. The ending of Snape's arc presents a rarity in fantasy for this familiar storyline, due to the character's own attitude towards his

redemption, and the constant contradictions found within it. While an achievement in genre, it has its limitations. Isolating this experiment of moral ambiguity to only one main character does not defy convention enough to be considered truly unique.

Snape's experimentation with moral complexity is not replicated in other important characters, limiting its effect. Within the cast, there are a range of minor characters who challenge expectations of morality – Percy Weasley and Peter Pettigrew, who betray their loved ones for power; Draco Malfoy, who was raised to be a Death Eater but failed; Petunia Dursley, whose prejudice against wizards was born from jealously. Yet, of the series main characters, only Snape and Dumbledore are morally ambiguous. The remainder of Harry's regular teachers are exclusively good, fighting for their students' and opposing Voldemort at every turn. As observed by Dahlén, "The teachers of Hogwarts decide to start the war at the school as a cover up of Harry's return, although they risk their lives in doing so" (13). Even Slughorn, the one regular teacher who crosses this line, ultimately proves heroic. Harry's school friends are always against Voldemort, willing to fight and die for the cause. Of the main trio, Hermione, Ron and Harry, there are clear flaws, but no threats of evil. At no point does the implied reader truly worry for the trio's beliefs and loyalties. Their behaviour within their personal relationships presents characters who care deeply about their world and everyone in it, even those they don't like. Marthe Dahlin argues, of Harry, that "the reader inherently knows that Harry represents the moral good, and his story is one of moving towards the ultimate sacrifice for good, rather than a story of fighting evil inside" (46). His commitment to the imaginary war is never doubted. Snape's experimentation in moral ambiguity within a main character is powerful, but it is also isolated, an outlier within the main cast.

The discussion of moral ambiguity is also argued for Dumbledore; however, his redemption follows that of Tolkien and Lewis' modernist characters, who reflect on their past

behaviour and yearn for redemption from their peers. Dumbledore's attitude towards his own moral greyness follows the traditional arc of regret, self-realisation, and acceptance from others as good. He spent the better part of his adult life making amends for his youthful mistakes, living with "guilt [...] terrible grief, the price of [his] shame" (*Deathly Hallows* 575). He dedicated his career to ensuring he did not abuse any power he was given, confiding in Harry that he "was offered the post of Minister for Magic, not once, but several times" but he "had learned that [he] was not to be trusted with power" (*Deathly Hallows* 575). It is this regret Dumbledore expresses that allows Harry to forgive him, "Harry looked up at the old man and smiled; he could not help himself. How could he remain angry with Dumbledore now?" (*Deathly Hallows* 577). Dumbledore's redemption arc is familiar in fantasy, and as Harry's mentor, his redemption means a lot more to Harry than Snape's. The revelation of Snape's true allegiances provides Harry with an important lesson in judging morality through a black and white lens, exposing his flaws, but it does not *change* him. Harry had multiple opportunities for growth in response to Snape throughout the series and he failed to learn his lesson each time. It is Dumbledore's moral complexities that push Harry to mature his views, making him question his understanding of the world and the people within it. While the questions surrounding moral ambiguity raised by Snape's character are thought-provoking, it does not have a significant emotional impact on Harry, limiting its effect.

Snape's Contribution to the Success of the *Potter* Series

Snape's moral ambiguity plays a key role in *Potter's* subversion of genre, which is one of the reasons for its global success. Vandana Saxena argues that the moral growth of both the series itself, and its protagonist, throughout its progression is "unique […] as the protagonist and reader grow, the books grow in complexity – what seemed like a

straightforward struggle between good and evil becomes a means to reflect on […] changing power equations and moral relativism" (11). Snape's role in this reflection is critical, as it is through both his and Dumbledore's confrontation of Harry's own belief system, and their own relationship with love and power that fuels their ambiguity, which allows for such reflection. This is why York describes Snape as a "one-of-a-kind example of good and evil characteristics at play in a heroic fantasy novel" (69), who exceeds even Dumbledore's moral crises through his refusal to confirm to the expectations of a villain redeemed. Pharr writes the belief in love is "the emotional resonance – but not, perhaps its postmodern appeal. Curiously, that appeal may stem, in part at least, from the books' refusal to face certain difficult questions straight on" (15). Snape's morality is one of the biggest questions the series refuses to present with clarity. Throughout the series, his moral ambiguity continued to develop into deeper and darker territory, leaving the reader just as perplexed as Harry, perhaps more so, by its conclusion. The appeal of the *Potter* series stems from its indeterminacy. Pharr concludes that the series ending leaves the reader in a paradox, "The connection of the Potter books to this postmodern paradox [...] may be part of the reason why [Rowing's] works have held so much appeal in our muddled, Muggle world" (22). Indeed, the more the reader reads, then re-reads, then reads backwards, performing the 'detective work' mentioned by Justice when she was left waiting between books six and seven, desperate for "what [she] wanted, *The Book of Severus Snape"* (223), the more the reader invests in a story whose appeal is found in its lack of answers. This is, undoubtedly, why fans remain, still, dedicated to what Peter Appelbaum calls *The Great Snape Debate.*

Snape's redemption arc also influences the series protagonist and his journey to become a hero. A very familiar narrative in fantasy, the journey of a postmodern hero that Harry embarks on is assisted by Snape's ambiguity, helping to shape a new, postmodern hero emerging in postmodern fantasy texts. Drew Chappell notes that to become a postmodern

hero, Harry must move away from a "traditional set of binary oppositions [...] the comfortable 'certainties' of modernist discourse" (283). They attribute this to how, as Harry grows, he learns the reality that clear, binary choices are not to be found. Instead, he finds "subtleties and uncertainty [...] the simple binary of good/evil does not fully explain [Snape's] motivations" (283-84). Harry's transition into adulthood and acceptance of this moral complexity, growing out of simple binary thinking, is a mark of *Potter's* postmodern nature within its depiction of heroism. The impact of this transition would not be possible without the bias he presents throughout the series towards Snape, exemplifying most clearly his outdated binary views, noticeable to the implied reader when these views are contradicted, proven wrong, and eventually change. Farris writes, "the harsh experiences of his own mistakes raise [the question of love and power's relationship] for him as he journeys into moral maturity" (17). Without such an enticing character to assist in displaying the flaws of his binary thinking – a character who simultaneously confirms and rejects it – the postmodern lesson Harry learns at the novel's conclusion may go unnoticed. Chappell concludes their paper with the observation, "the Harry Potter series suggests to young readers that they can embrace qualities of a postmodern childhood – ambiguity, complexity – rather than accept binaries promoted and constructed in traditional literature" (293). This lesson, evident through Dumbledore in the final novel only, cannot be achieved without the consistent ambiguity of Snape throughout the series. His character is one of the fundamental ingredients for *Potter's* success as a postmodern fantasy.

The moral ambiguity of Snape's characterisation is responsible for division in the series readership, making him one of the most compelling characters in postmodern fantasy. Fans and critics are drawn to the in-answerable question of where Snape belongs on the moral binary fantasy is known for. The inability to come to a definitive conclusion is one of the features that secures the *Potter* series as postmodern, and pushes the boundaries of genre

towards indeterminacy, opening exciting opportunities for fantasy's future as it inevitably transforms throughout time. This moral ambiguity was created by careful narrative positioning of the focaliser, the narrator, and the implied reader, a tale of three viewpoints that developed alongside the series. Throughout the years, as the tone, themes, and plots became increasingly more complex, so thus did the relationship between these three pivotal perspectives, and so consequently did the moral ambiguity of Snape in the series conclusion. The series focaliser concluded for himself his final thoughts on the morality of Snape, and the implied reader was invited to make their own meaning, a challenge that critics and fans continue to enthusiastically debate. The inability to form a conclusive opinion regarding Severus Snape's morality contributes to the global success of the *Harry Potter* series, enabling its readers to enjoy the frustration and excitement of a character that defies generic conventions, and requires readers to accept that the question of good or evil might never be conclusively answered.

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