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The Impact of Preconceived Notions:

A Literary Study of Moral Complexity in the Harry
Potter Series

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Abstract

This essay examines the use of the character Harry Potter as focalizer in the Harry Potter series. The objective is to see how Harry's preconceived notions are caused by his inability to grasp moral complexity. The study is conducted by a close reading of the novels with the focus on the relationship between Harry and the character Severus Snape. The study is based on the theoretical foundation of narratology by Gérard Genette, as well as Wolfgang Iser's explanation of the implied reader. Many instances of interaction between Harry and Snape in the book series are dependent on Harry's viewpoint and his preconceived notions. Harry as the focalizer of the text affects the implied reader's given view of Snape, while the real reader sees other parts of his personality due to the independence from the focalizer's point-of-view. Snape's moral complexity shows by the choices he makes is the cause of the misconceptions held by Harry and the implied reader.

Key words: moral complexity, focalizer, narratology, preconceived notions, *Harry Potter*

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Introduction

The story of Harry Potter and the wizarding world has spellbound a generation of young readers. Children have dressed up as their favorite characters and gone to thousands of readings of the books by the author herself, J. K. Rowling (Gierzynski and Eddy 1). Over 500 million copies of the book series have sold since the publication of the first novel in 1997 (Wizarding world). So, what has made this book series so special? Is it the magical fairytale world so vividly described in the pages, or is it because of the characters that readers have come to love? One thing is for certain, there is something special about the Harry Potter story-world.

The story is a traditional fight between good and evil, where the good is represented by the protagonist and the evil by the antagonist, seen through the battle between Harry Potter and Voldemort throughout the series. The minor characters are either on the side of the protagonist or the antagonist. Although, when examining the books more carefully, one might see that there are characters who are not clearly on either the good or the bad side and whose actions might affect the story in immense ways.

Background

Previous research on the subject of Harry Potter has carried out several times. A study related to the subject of this essay is conducted by Anne Klaus, who studies the complexity of the genre of the Harry Potter series (22). She argues that, due to the description at the beginning of the first novel when the orphan Harry is taken away from his evil aunt to go to Hogwarts, it is a typical opening to a fairy-tale (23). When examining the characters of the story, Klaus argues that they differ from what is expected from a fairy-tale (25). Harry has many characteristics that “the traditional fairy-tale hero lacks” (Klaus 26), which she argues is due to the inner monologues the reader gains insight into (26). Klaus explains that many side characters that are portrayed as dynamic, do not contribute solely to either the good or the evil side in the story (28). Several characters in the Harry Potter series, for example Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape, are portrayed as not as good or evil as they were first described (Klaus 30). This character complexity, Klaus claims, is the reason for a multi-layered work that is hidden inside of a fairy-tale-like setting (32).

Morality

Göran Collste, professor of ethics, claims that the aim of morality is to guide human action towards taking responsibility for the way of living one's life (15). This, he argues, is shown through people's will to do good or bad in the world and those with a good sense of morality possess the ability of empathy, while those lacking morality do not (15). Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, professors of ethics, explain that particular moralities are decided by the moral decisions made in specific circumstances as well as the ethical attitudes of a certain society (3). Although there are differences in how societies decide their moral rules, there are rules of morality that Beauchamp and Childress argue to be universally acknowledged by people dedicated to morality, called common moralities, which concern murder, harming other people and preventing evil (3).

James Q. Wilson, professor of management, explains that moral senses can collide with each other under the pressure of making a decision (240). Therefore, there is a need of a delicate balance between the choices, which is explained as common sense (Wilson 240). Those who could be named "good people" are those who, according to Wilson, have the balance between these moral senses, contrary to having the best personality traits, which is a common misconception (240). A nice person expresses sympathy and is not judgmental towards other people, as well as having the self-control to prevent oneself from making drastic decisions, and always strives towards doing the right thing when under pressure (Wilson 240). Wilson concludes by saying that a good person is defined by living a life of balance instead of according to set rules (241). In contrast, Wilson argues that "a bad person" is the person who lacks sympathy and does not have the self-control needed to make good decisions in stressful situations (242). He continues by stating that a bad person also possesses an inner selfishness, which leads them to making decisions based solely on their own benefit from it (242). Moral complexity, Aristotle explains, is when a person is in-between a good and a bad person and is conflicted as to which path to choose and which choice to make (93).

Morality and Children's Literature

Lena Kåreland claims that the genre of fantasy in children's literature often follows a pattern where the stories feature the main character, the protagonist, being transported to another world, much different from their own (78). In the new world, a villain, the antagonist, fights against the good to gain power over the citizens and soon, the protagonist, who is new to this world realizes that they play a big part in the mission of rescuing the world from evil (Kåreland 78). The story often ends with the protagonist becoming a hero after liberating the

people from the antagonist, and finally returning home (Kåreland 78). Examples of this are the Pevensie siblings in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C. S. Lewis) who go to Narnia to save the kingdom from the evil witch, and the boy Bo Vilhelm Olsson in *Mio, My Son* (Astrid Lindgren) who travels to Farawayland to defeat the evil knight Kato.

Kåreland explains that in children's literature, especially fantasy novels, there are often characters who are static, with stereotypical personality traits such as the princess who is altogether good, and the witch, troll or dragon who are evil with the sole intention of creating misery (138). Other characters, primarily the main character, are dynamic, with a backstory and a personal development throughout the story (Kåreland 138). Although many supporting characters in children's literature are static and do not have a thoroughly described background, Maria Nikolajeva explains that they are essential to the story in children's literature (161). This is due to the characters' support of the protagonist, or the antagonist, in order to help their respective sides "win" over the other (Nikolajeva 161).

Although the previously mentioned characteristics and storylines in children's literature are common, there are stories and characters that break these "stereotypes". Instead of fighting on either the good or the bad side, some characters perform actions which do not benefit any of the sides. An example of this type of character is Edmund in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis), where the white witch lures him in with Turkish Delight and promises that he will become a prince if he follows her. His decision to go with her could be argued to be based solely on his own loneliness and wish to be noticed (Will Vaus 28). Nikolajeva explains that some of the characters who break the stereotypes of children's literature develop from static to dynamic throughout the story (160). A character who plays a small part in the beginning of a story and is portrayed as flat, without personal information provided, sometimes develops into a round character whose background the reader learns more about and who comes to play a bigger part in the rest of the story (Nikolajeva 160-1).

In the Harry Potter series, Harry and Voldemort would be described as the most dynamic and static characters respectively, in accordance with the idea of children's literature stated by Kåreland (138). In the story, there are several characters who function as support for either Harry or Voldemort, with only brief background stories. However, there are characters who do not fit into the description of the evil or the good, due to an inconsistency in their behavior. An example of this type of character in the Harry Potter series is professor Severus Snape. Throughout the book series, this character develops from static to dynamic when Harry and

the reader find out more about his back story and the reason for the decisions he makes. One might see that he is fighting an inner battle of which side to be on, due to his struggles with moral dilemmas facing him from beginning to end of the series.

As a theoretical foundation for this study, the theory of narratology will be used. The theory is developed by Gérard Genette, and examines the different parts of a narrative, which Genette explains as “the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events” (25). One aspect within narratology is focalizer, which Genette describes as the perspective the story is viewed from (186). He continues by explaining that there are different types of focalization in texts depending on what point-of-view the story is seen from, as well as if the perspective changes throughout the text (187). If the story only relates what the characters say and do, and the reader learns everything as if they were among the characters, the focalization is external (Genette 190). The opposite of this, he states, is internal focalization where the reader gains access to what the characters think and feel, as if they were inside their heads. If the point-of-view is always of one person in a story, that character is the focalizer (189). Genette claims, however, that focalization could change throughout the story, where the reader enters different characters’ minds, which is called zero focalization (191).

In the Harry Potter series, time has a great impact on the structure of the story. Genette explains this aspect of narratology as the study of the relation between time and story (35). He argues that there are different ways of revealing the story without it being presented chronologically (47). Anachrony is a part of a text where the story moves away from the “present” explained by Genette as “the moment in the story when the narrative [is] interrupted to make room for the anachrony” (48). A type of anachrony, which Genette calls analepsis, is an instance in the past in relation to the first narrative (48). If the analepses show a time before the start of the first narrative, it is, according to Genette, external analepsis (49). An internal analepsis, Genette argues, is when the analepsis occurs after the start of the first narrative but acts as an explanation of earlier occurrences in the text (49). A mixed analepsis, is when what is presented takes place before, during and sometimes beyond the first narrative (Genette 48). Due to the function of the analepses in the Harry Potter series, the analepses that will be used in this study are internal and mixed.

The choice of narrator in the Harry Potter series is of great significance for the present study. Therefore, Genette’s definition of narrator will be used. The narrator of a story, Genette

explains, is the person who is telling the story, which can be from various perspectives (245). Homodiegetic and heterodiegetic are when the narrator is a character of the story and someone outside of the story respectively (Genette 245). The omniscient narrator is a third-person perspective when the narrator is an outside voice who knows and sees more than the focalizer does (Genette 189).

The final theoretical concept to be used is the term implied reader, which is to be used while examining different readers' perception of the story. Implied reader, Wolfgang Iser describes, is a narrative construct to whom the text is directed, created by the author (xii). He explains this further by saying that the author writes a text with the assumption of the reader having the necessary prior knowledge, thoughts and attitudes to understand what is written (xii). Therefore, the implied reader is a construct made by the author and should not be identified as the real reader (Iser 34).

Since Harry Potter is the focalizer of the story, the reader sees and judges Severus Snape in accordance with Harry's thoughts and feelings. In the Harry Potter series, Rowling uses focalization as a way to emphasize moral complexity in order to demonstrate the effects of preconceived notions. Hence, the aim of this study is to analyze the character Severus Snape from the perspective of moral complexity to highlight how Snape's struggle with moral dilemmas is portrayed and how his complexity is the basis of Harry's, as well as the reader's, perception of him. The works to be examined are the seven novels in the Harry Potter series, where a close reading analysis of the character Severus Snape will be conducted. This analysis is meant to deepen and broaden the view of the portrayal of Severus Snape as well as to see how preconceived notions affect the perception of him.

Analysis

In the beginning of the Harry Potter series, there are several characters who are portrayed in a stereotypical manner, such as Albus Dumbledore who is the old and wise protector, and Draco Malfoy who is the evil bully. Another character who is portrayed as a stereotypical character is professor Severus Snape. The first time Snape is introduced to both Harry and the reader is during the welcoming feast as Harry and the other new students have just arrived at Hogwarts. When Harry looks at the teachers' table he sees "a teacher with greasy black hair, a

hooked nose and sallow skin” (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* 138)¹. This teacher, another student explains, is professor Snape. He is also described as having eyes that are “cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels” (*PS* 150). These descriptions of Snape’s appearance establish an image of him as a character who is rather repulsive and not very friendly. As Harry locks eyes with Snape when he sees him across the hall, he feels “a sharp, hot pain [shoot] across the scar on [his] forehead” (*PS* 138). Both Snape’s appearance and the pain in Harry’s scar give the impression that Snape is not to be trusted.

An additional example of the impression that Snape is the antagonist is during Harry and Snape’s first interaction. In potions class, Snape scolds Harry for not knowing the questions he is asked and takes points away from his house because of it. During the lesson, the following is concluded: “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” (*PS* 149). Due to Rowling using Harry as a focalizer, 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. It is also not just Harry who is imagining Snape being mean towards him, many of the other students are picked on by him, which is shown when “he swept around [...] criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like” (*PS* 152). Learning that Snape likes Malfoy, who is established as Harry’s enemy, causes further reason for Harry and the real reader to mistrust Snape at this point in the story. Since both Snape and Draco are portrayed as mean, the understanding of Snape’s relationships towards his students could be a contributing factor of Harry’s bad first impression of him.

There are occasions in the series when Harry fails to observe clues of Snape’s will to do good and to help Harry. As Snape tries to escape Hogwarts after killing Dumbledore, Snape could have killed Harry, but instead he chooses to block all spells Harry tries to cast. Snape also tries to teach Harry about what he does wrong and how to do it correctly. “Blocked again, and again, and again until you learn to [...] keep your mind closed” (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* 562)². This comment made by Snape is something that the real reader could take notice of in this instance, because of the understanding that Snape might not be against Harry. He, on the other hand, “[can] see Snape sneering” (*HBP* 562) when Snape blocks one

¹ Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *PS*.

² Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *HBP*.

of Harry's attempts to cast a spell. This is an example of how Harry sees what he thinks is right, without reflecting on, or noticing what Snape does and why. This is caused by the internal focalizer that is used in this instance. Harry tells the reader what to believe because he is the one who "shows" the reader what is happening. Therefore, Harry misses the opportunity to see Snape in another light, and the implied reader is misdirected, which could alter their perception of him.

Harry sometimes chooses not to see clues that Snape tries to do good, which is a reason for the perception of Snape given to the implied reader. Hence, when Harry learns from Dumbledore that Snape was not the person who tried to sabotage for Harry, he still perceives Snape as a bad person, which the implied reader is led to do as well. He concludes that when Snape "caught Harry's eye [he knew] at once that Snape's feelings towards him hadn't changed a jot" (*PS* 329). Even though it is explicitly explained that Snape made a nice gesture to Harry, the implied reader is not given the chance to see Snape as a good person due to Harry's negative comment. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, professor in literature, states that the perception the reader has of a character tends to remain for a long time and could be hard to adjust (122). Due to this, Harry does not change his mind about Snape's alliances, which impacts the implied reader as well. Contrarily, the real reader is possibly not affected by Harry's feelings, which leads to the opportunity of having another point-of-view of Snape than Harry. The real reader of the story might see this from the perspective that Snape has been on Harry's side through the whole novel but did not want to reveal that he was in order to keep Harry from doing something that would get him hurt or get killed by Voldemort.

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. It is revealed that:

"Sirius thought it would be — er — amusing, to tell Snape all he had to do was prod the knot on the tree trunk with a long stick, and he'd be able to get in after [Lupin]. Well, of course, Snape tried it — if he'd got as far as this house, he'd have met a fully grown werewolf" (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 261)³

This is told to Harry by Professor Remus Lupin, who Harry has grown very fond of during Lupin's time at Hogwarts as a professor. He tells Harry that Snape was almost killed by

³ Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *PA*

Sirius, with the help from Lupin, which Snape still hates them for. Sirius and Lupin are friends with Harry's father, which leads to him taking their side and defends them against Snape's insults. Because Harry trusts and likes Lupin, he believes what he says but cannot understand that James and his friends could be bullies. The implied reader would be led to agree with Harry that Snape is not someone to sympathize with, because they have only seen that Harry dislikes Snape regardless of what he does at this point in the story. If the novel would have shown Lupin telling this story from an additional perspective, the implied reader might be affected to conclude something else than Harry does. The real reader might see that there is a reason for Snape being angry with Sirius and Lupin, and that the point-of-view might not matter, because the real reader can take what they have learned earlier about Snape's character and conclude something different. The real reader might not have sympathized with Harry and his feelings for his father's friends, which leads to the impression that Harry's father and his friends might not have been very nice to Snape during their school years. The limitations of only seeing one perspective are that there is only one "voice" to listen to, which influences what the reader thinks and believes about the story.

The reason for why the perception of Snape is different between the implied and the real reader is because of the different reliance on Harry's views. These different viewpoints are the effect of Rowling using an omniscient narrator in the story. The implied reader is not led to see anything else than Harry does in the previously mentioned examples, while the real reader does have the opportunity to see other things, much because they are not tied to Harry's point of view. The real reader is able to question the limited view that is provided by using Harry as the focalizer. Therefore, the real reader does not follow everything Harry says and thinks and has the opportunity to make their own understanding of the situations. With the omniscient narrator, the view opens up to see other things that might not have been possible if the narrator was internal.

Snape's moral complexity causes a juxtaposition between the real reader's and Harry's perception of him. Harry finds out that Snape is part of both the Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix, but Dumbledore explains that Snape "is no more a Death Eater than [he] is" (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 513).⁴ Harry accepts Dumbledore's defense of Snape, which could be argued to be because of Harry's trust in him. The implied reader would also be influenced to embrace this explanation because Harry's reliance in Dumbledore's

⁴ Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *GF*.

judgement affects the reader's perception. The real reader might think the opposite, that Snape might not be a character who is all good. Because of Snape's past as a Death Eater, the real reader might see that there still could be some part of Snape that still is on Voldemort's side. The uncertainty of which side Snape is on is much due to his moral complexity, which shows by his battle between being the "good" or the "bad" person, as described by Wilson (240). The perception has been that Snape is evil, and if used to the typical fairy-tale story, he is "supposed" to stay evil. The effect of Rowling describing him as a more complex character than first is described is that the real reader might be confused by the sudden change and has to question who Snape really is. They might also have to question their own judgmental understanding of Snape and his actions, whether they have perceived him as bad or good earlier.

An example of when Snape's moral complexity causes further contrast between what the implied reader is led to perceive and what the real reader's view of Snape is, occurs when Dumbledore explains to Harry that Snape tried to help him not to reveal the whereabouts of Sirius to Dolores Umbridge. Harry is in such a furious state that "he felt a savage pleasure for blaming Snape" (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* 734)⁵ for the death of Sirius Black. This reaction, and Harry's mourning of Sirius' death, cause the implied reader to sympathize with Harry without considering that Snape made a potentially dangerous decision to help Harry from getting into trouble. When reading about his anger from his point-of-view, the reader gains an understanding of him in a way that could easily block other perceptions of the situation. H. Porter Abbott, professor in English, explains that "focalizing can contribute richly to how we think and feel as we read" (74). This statement translates to the implied reader being influenced to take Harry's side because he is the focalizer for the most part of the text. The implied reader has been required to take part in Harry's point-of-view enough to share Harry's feelings, which makes it expected for them to sympathize. The real reader's perception, on the other hand, can change because of the revelation that Snape helped Harry, and lead to them seeing the complexity of Snape as a character. The real reader might not sympathize with Harry the same way the implied reader is supposed to, which could make the realization about Snape easier to see. When learning that Snape tried to help Harry, the real reader can see beyond Harry's anger and instead see that Snape might have a will to do good.

⁵ Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *OP*.

Snape's inner conflict, caused by seeing Harry's parents James and Lily when he looks at Harry, can be understood as a reason for Snape's moral complexity. It is explained that Snape thinks "he has [Lily's] eyes, precisely her eyes" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* ⁶ 544), which he sees every time he looks into Harry's eyes. Snape also tells Harry:

'How extraordinarily like your father you are, Potter,' Snape said suddenly, his eyes glinting. 'He too was exceedingly arrogant. A small amount of talent on the Quidditch field made him think he was a cut above the rest of us too. Strutting around the place with his friends and admirers... The resemblance between you is uncanny.' (*PA* 209)

The real reader can infer that Snape struggles with his moral decisions concerning Harry because of the resemblance with both his father and mother. As it could be understood from the real reader's perspective that Snape, for as long as he has known him, might have struggled with his view of Harry, the real reader could conclude different things. They could either sympathize with him and justify why Snape had acted cruelly towards Harry, or they could see from the perspective that even though Snape was bullied and heartbroken, he did wrong by bullying an innocent student. The implied reader might be affected to become supportive of Snape because of this, as this revelation could be argued to be an influence for Harry's future acceptance of Snape's actions. As it is not explicitly explained in the text what Harry forgives Snape for, this cannot be established from the text.

The negative portrayal of Snape, which has earlier been established, causes Harry, and possibly the reader as well, to have preconceived notions about Snape. This shows when Harry misinterprets Snape's actions as bad when they instead are meant to be good. Voldemort returns as he has taken over the body of the new professor in Defense against the dark arts, Professor Quirrell, in order to obtain the philosopher's stone. Dumbledore understands that professor Quirrell is not as innocent as he seems, and Dumbledore orders Snape to "keep an eye on Quirrell, won't you?" (*DH* 545). Although, because Harry and his friends think Snape is evil, they misinterpret Snape as trying to sabotage for Harry. This misunderstanding is projected to the implied reader as well, with support from Rimmon-Kenan's suggestion that "information and attitudes presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light" (120). The effect of Rowling constructing the text this way is that the reader is confused about Snape's intentions and whether he is good or bad. This confusion is an example of a reaction to a morally complex

⁶ Hereafter, the novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by J. K. Rowling will be referred to as *DH*.

character, as this type of character does things that go against what people expect from them (Wilson 240).

The moment Harry comes to the definite conclusion that Snape is bad is when he kills Dumbledore in the astronomy tower. Harry had, as long as he had known Dumbledore, seen him as a father-figure, which made Snape's deed a horrible betrayal to Harry. As Snape enters the tower to kill Dumbledore, Harry sees "revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of [Snape's] face" (*HBP* 556). What Harry sees is only based on his limited view, which could be seen as a result of the preconceived notions about Snape that he has built up over the years of knowing him. Harry does not know that Snape has promised Dumbledore to kill him when the moment comes, to give Dumbledore a "quick, painless exit" (*DH* 548). This means that what Harry sees in Snape's expression is only what he wants to see. Because the reader is not given an additional perspective of this moment, which could give another impression of the situation, the perception given merely shows that Snape is a traitor to Dumbledore and to Harry.

Harry's preconceived notions about Snape as an enemy are later replaced by an understanding of how complex Snape is. A moment when Harry sees, and the implied reader is led to see, a reason for Snape's moral complexity is when he sees Snape's memory of being bullied by Harry's father when he was younger. He empathizes with Snape because he also knows how it feels to be "humiliated in the middle of a circle of onlookers" (*OP* 573), but at the same time he is conflicted with which side to be on because his "wonderful" (*OP* 575) father was the bully. Before this exposure of Snape's background, there has not been much chance for either Harry or the implied reader to sympathize with him. Snape has been portrayed as an ambiguous character, while Harry's father has been portrayed as a good person, but due to this revelation, the portrayal is shifted to be the opposite. The revelation of the characters being different from what they first have been described as changes the view of the story and the characters from being viewed as black or white to being more complex. The implied reader is led to understand the relationship between Harry's father and Snape, which changes the view of Snape's character to be more understandable. The implied reader is now intended to question what they have understood before, which up to this point almost solely has been Harry's perspective and his view of everyone else. The timing of, and the way Snape's bullying is being revealed at this time in the story has a big influence on Harry's impression and therefore the impression of Snape presented to the implied reader. Harry understands, and the implied reader is led to understand, what Snape has gone through by seeing first-hand

what happened to Snape in school. The point-of-view is not anyone else's but Snape's, which might be why Harry at this point trusts Snape's hints about being bullied. The real reader might have understood and sympathized with Snape earlier, much because of them not being affected by Harry's perception. The real reader might have gained a view of Snape as good from the clues provided, which are mentioned earlier in the analysis.

Because the focalizer, Harry, finds out about Snape's allegiance to Dumbledore in the end of the last novel, the final perception of Snape projected to the implied reader changes abruptly. Since Abbott argues that "by their actions do we know them" (131), the implied reader and Harry have been given an understanding of how to think of Snape, but as Harry learns about Snape's backstory, the reader understands the moral complexity of Snape as a character. Snape protected Harry on several occasions when Harry thought and the implied reader was led to think that he was against Harry. As Harry sees that Snape was working with Dumbledore, he concludes that, after all, Snape was on the good side, trying to help him instead of working against him. The revelations Harry experiences turn his perception around completely, as he previously had thought so badly about Snape's actions, when they instead were for the good. Because of Snape's complexity, Harry's perception of him has different explanations. One is that Snape's moral complexity causes confusion of whether he is good or bad, which Harry could turn into a frustration about what to believe. The other explanation could be that Harry judges too quickly, on the grounds that Snape has been bullying him. The real reader might also see that Snape did have good sides and nice intentions, but depending on the earlier perception of Snape, this revelation might not come as a shock for them. Snape had on several occasions showed glimpses of good moral decisions, which Harry missed, and the implied reader was led to miss, but the real reader might have noticed, such as Snape teaching Harry about spells as he escapes Hogwarts.

An instance when Harry and the reader develop their understanding of Snape's moral complexity is when Harry finds out that Snape was the reason his parents died. Harry's reaction to hearing this is fury towards Dumbledore, and Harry cannot understand that Dumbledore had "let [Snape] teach [at Hogwarts] and [...] told Voldemort to go after [Harry's] mum and dad" (*HBP* 512). The effect of this is confusion for the implied reader about who to trust, which is caused by Harry, much due to his anger towards Dumbledore. Snape's moral complexity is a reason for the confusion of whether he is someone to trust or not. The reason for Snape's choice of telling Voldemort could be due to his will to be trusted by Voldemort, but he regrets this when he has realized the consequences of his actions.

Snape's moral complexity is a big reason for both Harry as well as the reader's reoccurring confusion about who he is. This confusion is a buildup made by Rowling which has the effect of making the revelation of Snape's background and intentions a grand revelation towards the end of the story.

Rowling waits until the very end of the last novel to reveal Snape's true alliances in order to force the reader to rethink everything that has been presented to them. Rimmon-Kenan explains that "by the end of the reading process, the reader usually will have reached a 'finalized hypothesis', an overall meaning which makes sense of the text as a whole" (121). Because the revelation of Snape's true nature by the very end of the series, the implied reader, and perhaps also the real reader, has been incited to reach a "finalized hypothesis" about Snape and his character. The revelation turns many opinions around, and they come to see him as a hero instead of the antagonist he has been seen as during the first six novels. This revelation might come as a surprise to the reader, as analepses sometimes fill a gap the reader does not find a need to fill before the analepsis occurs (Rimmon-Kenan 48). This argument is applicable to the Harry Potter series because the gap is already believed to be filled, as the reader already has concluded that Snape is evil, due to the build-up from the first to the sixth novel.

Although Snape is seen as an antagonist and a static character in the beginning of the series, he develops into a character whose backstory is explained and who has a reason for his actions and decisions in life. Rowling confuses the reader into believing that he is bad by describing him with the typical appearance of a villain in children's fairytale, as explained by Nikolajeva (160), and then alters the reader's perception by showing the heroic deeds he did. She makes Harry and the reader rethink and question their preconceived notions about Snape, whose character through the series has been shown in the light of an antagonist. The explanation of Snape's moral complexity lies within the answers Harry receives when seeing his memories. Most of Snape's decisions are based on dilemmas between doing what is right and what is easy. He makes several decisions in order to help or protect someone, some of which are revealed to be very dangerous tasks.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to examine Snape's moral complexity from the perspective of Harry Potter in order to demonstrate preconceived notions present in the text. Due to Harry

being the focalizer, the implied reader is led to see what he sees which causes the intended perception to be from one perspective throughout the story. Harry's lack of awareness of what happens around him causes him and the implied reader to miss important parts that could reveal the "true" character of Snape. The effect of Rowling's portrayal of Snape is confusion about which side he is on. He starts as a typical villain, but soon Harry and the reader realize that there is more to him than they first expected. Snape's moral complexity is a reason for Harry's confusion about what side Snape is on, which causes Harry, and thus the implied reader, to have presumptions about Snape that turn out to be incorrect.

The revelations about Snape's true intentions cause both confusion to Harry and the implied reader, as well as an understanding of why Snape did deeds which were questioned earlier. The timing of when these deeds occur plays an immense part in how they are received by Harry. He often needs the background information in order to believe what he sees and hears. As Snape's background is revealed, his moral complexity is shown, and Harry and the implied reader are influenced to see that he had to make hard decisions during his life in order to help Harry and stay loyal to Dumbledore. The change of assumptions made by Harry and the implied reader is the effect of the timing of Snape's exposure.

The real reader might have started reading the novels with the mindset that Harry is an unreliable focalizer because of his young age and his habit of not seeing the bigger picture. Therefore, the real reader might instead try to see beyond his thoughts and look for other point-of-views. This enables the real reader to see clues to Snape's true allegiances and intentions before Harry and the implied reader. Preconceived notions about who Snape is might not apply to the real reader, because they can see parts of Snape's personality that are not visible to Harry or the implied reader.

The story begins with Harry seeing Snape as the villain, which establishes his negative attitude towards Snape, and consequently leads to the establishing of a view for the implied reader. As the narrative progresses, more and more of Snape's complexity is revealed to Harry and the implied reader, from both memories and retellings of important incidents in Snape's life. The revelations cause a complete reconsideration in viewpoint of who Snape is and arguably it changes the course of the whole story. By the observations made of Harry as focalizer, it is evident that having preconceived notions causes a person to see what they think they see, instead of trying to see the cause of a deed or a favor from a different point-of-view before judging a person.

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