

EXTENDED ESSAY

ENGLISH B HL

How is narrative perspective used to present transformation of a character

“How does J.K. Rowling use narrative perspective to present the transformation of Severus Snape across The Half-Blood Prince and The Deathly Hallows?”

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Introduction

Character transformation in storytelling is one of the most efficient ways to keep the reader in suspense. It is mostly used to show a character's development through their experiences or to make a contrast within the character. Most of the time, writers use this technique evidently to show the change of a character over time. On the other hand, it can also be postponed and then revealed at the end of the book. In J.K. Rowling's series, Harry Potter, character transformation is used to show the transformation of Severus Snape.

The wizarding world offers readers a fiction where a lot of characters symbolize the concepts of "good" and "evil". In the series, Rowling distinguishes these concepts mainly through the characters' choices. The choices that characters have made since childhood indicate their future appearance, shaping their own path on which concept they are closer to. Moreover, this situation indicates the morality of the characters. However, Rowling creates a moral ambiguity while portraying some of the characters. This creates uncertainty in the reader's mind, as it is unclear and hard to understand if the characters are morally "good" or "evil". The absence of a clear distinction between the two concepts is a result of the characters' backstories.

Furthermore, Rowling creates a complex moral landscape by the actions and the choices of the characters. Rowling highlights this issue mostly through the character of Severus Snape. In the series, Severus Snape's character is the embodiment of duality: hero and villain. Rowling creates a prominent conflict in Snape's character in the books "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" and "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows". In the Half-Blood Prince, Rowling mentions Snape as a professor, described as a cruel, sarcastic and antagonistic character. On the other hand, despite being introduced to the reader as an antagonist in the series, Rowling creates a conflict in the last book. In Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Rowling reveals Snape's

moral ambiguity and redemption through unreliable perspective, foreshadowing and by adding moral and ethical criticism and other literary techniques.

To explore the transformation of Severus Snape across *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, I will conduct a literary analysis of these two novels by J.K. Rowling. Some important characters and some key points related to the research question will be mentioned. Moreover, I'll mention narrative structure and some literary techniques from the parts that I've underlined while reading the book. Additionally, I will analyze the character and show the character transformation by comparing two books. Next, I will focus on the literature and how the author reveals the character transformation. I will apply critical thinking to support my thesis and I'll briefly summarize my points by also mentioning the comparative literature.

General Introduction of Severus Snape

Rowling introduces Snape to the reader by describing his physical appearance and his interest in the Dark Arts in the book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. "Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape"(Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone* 134). Rowling uses visual imagery to craft Snape's initial appearance, employing specific physical traits to immediately bias the reader's perception and establish a darker, more antagonistic persona. By shaping the reader's perception, J.K. Rowling creates a delay in Snape's character reveal. Severus Snape is a professor at Hogwarts, a person with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin. This description is provided from Harry's perspective, which implies the negative bias he has for Snape. His curiosity for Dark Arts is also mentioned in the *Half-Blood Prince*, "Hadn't it been widely known for years that Dumbledore did not trust him to do that?"(Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 156) Snape is portrayed as vindictive and antagonistic as he is mistrusted.

In Harry's first class with Snape, Snape humiliates and bullies Harry by insulting his fame. Rowling introduces Snape through Harry's limited perspective, painting him as a sarcastic and antagonistic figure. "He had loathed Snape from their first encounter." (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 151) Besides, Snape not only underestimates Harry but also acts the same way toward the other people. "The new one looks weak." (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 151). In this sentence, Snape tries to make Tonks feel weak and inadequate by referring to her patronus. These early depictions establish a lasting impression of Snape as hostile and unsympathetic.

In the series, Snape's antagonistic character is mostly shown by his appearance as head of the Slytherin House. Owing to his competitive personality, Snape stands out by reinforcing rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin students and his derogatory attitude towards them. As he is the head of Slytherin, he tries to get the House Cup award that the house with the most points gets at the end of the year, by taking points from Gryffindor students. "That would surely have earned her twenty points for Gryffindor from any reasonable teacher, thought Harry bitterly, but which Snape ignored." (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 168) Snape ignores the achievements of the Gryffindor students and does not appreciate their skills. From Snape's actions, it is emphasized that he behaves selfishly and in ways that serve his own interests, which is an indicator that he is a morally bad person.

Furthermore, Rowling describes Snape throughout the books as a selfish, intimidating and compelling person. To add on, he has an extreme loyalty to the Slytherin House and the belief in blood purity. Slytherin House is known for its values: cunning, ambition, resourcefulness, selfishness, strategy and determination. As Snape appears as the head of Slytherin and was educated there while he was a student, he is also associated with the values of Slytherin. As the Head of the Slytherin House, he defends and protects his students at all costs. He shows favouritism and gives second chances to Slytherin students, while he does not respect students from the other houses. Moreover, he especially mistreats the students who are "Half-blood" and

“Mudblood”. Which is a behaviour that is associated with Slytherin, as it is considered elite to be a pureblood. On account of Slytherin House being considered as closely related to the dark side and having raised a lot of dark wizards, this reinforces Snape’s antagonistic character portrayal in the series.

By painting Snape as an angry villain initially, Rowling gives herself a strong starting point. She generally shapes Snape’s character by using Harry’s perspective and by combining his demeanour. Yet, she still gives a mysterious tone to Snape’s character, which keeps the reader in suspense. This makes the later revelation in *The Deathly Hallows* that he’s a complex hero with a secret much more powerful and surprising for the reader.

Snape’s Portrayal in the Half-Blood Prince

In the *Half-Blood Prince*, Snape appears to be aligned with both Dumbledore and Voldemort. Therefore, his loyalty is constantly questioned by his actions towards both sides. Also, his portrayal of the Half-Blood Prince deepens his backstory in the series and highlights his character. At the end of the book, Rowling creates a huge betrayal of Snape as he kills Dumbledore. Rowling shows this betrayal to create even more tension between Harry and Snape. As Dumbledore and Harry were so close, the death of Dumbledore affected Harry’s perspective towards Snape negatively. Thus, Rowling not only shapes Harry’s but also the reader’s antagonism toward Snape. As well as transforming Snape into an evil character rather than a morally ambiguous one. From the reader's perspective, Snape ended up as the villain and the betrayer.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Snape first appears in the scene where Narcissa and Bellatrix come to want a favour from him. During their conversations, Narcissa mentions “You are the Dark Lord's favourite ...” (Rowling 38). This quote shows Snape’s faithfulness towards the Dark Lord. Furthermore, as it is evident that Snape has earned Voldemort’s trust,

he appears to be committed to the Dark Side. “The Dark Lord’s word is law.”(Rowling 37) By showing Snape’s loyalty towards Voldemort, Rowling gives the impression that he is closer to being the villain. To add on, in the chapter Spinner’s End, Narcissa informs Snape about a mission that has been given to Draco by Voldemort. Then she begs Snape to make the unbreakable vow to protect Draco at all costs. This scene further reinforces that Rowling shapes Snape’s reputation as untrustworthy and mysterious, highlighting the ambiguity in his character rather than creating certainty. As Rowling uses third-person narrative, readers judge Snape through his actions but not his inner motivations.

Moreover, in the upcoming chapters, Rowling uses third-person narrative from Harry’s perspective to emphasize Snape’s behaviour. In this way, Rowling manages to manipulate the reader’s bias and makes them question Snape’s moral complexity. Snape is shown to be distant and sarcastic towards Harry and often acts like he has a personal motivation to punish him. “Nice of you to turn up, Potter, although you have evidently decided that wearing of school robes would detract from your appearance.”(Rowling 150). From Harry’s perspective, Snape is shown as an irritating and antagonistic person. Snape’s hostility towards Harry is evident as he always humiliates and belittles his abilities. “He is mediocre to the last degree, though as obnoxious and self-satisfied as was his father before him.”(Rowling 36) In this quote, Snape refers to Harry’s father, James Potter, while he was talking about Harry. His mention of James Potter and calling him obnoxious and self-satisfied shows he has a problem more with James rather than Harry himself. This recurring antagonism not only builds tension but also foreshadows Snape’s deeper motivations, which are later unveiled in *The Deathly Hallows*, revealing a more complex moral character.

In the following chapters, Snape tries to help Draco stay out of trouble as he has made an unbreakable vow to Narcissa. “I’m his Head of House, and I shall decide how hard, or otherwise, to be.” (Rowling 98) Since Draco has been caught due to his suspicious actions,

Snape immediately protects him and does not let him get a detention. After that, Harry overhears the conversation between Snape and Draco while they argue about Draco's mission. During the conversation, Snape says that he has been acting through all this time "Where do you think I would have been all these years, if I had not known how to act?" (Rowling 300) which is an indicator that he has been serving the Dark Lord for years while making an effort to hide it from other wizards, especially Dumbledore. Therefore, Rowling reinforces tension by mentioning Snape's duplicity and double life. This chapter reflects Snape's protective actions towards Draco through Harry's perspective. As a result, readers perceive Snape as Harry does, which makes his real intentions hidden. So, his protective actions remain ambiguous and open to interpretation.

Moreover, after overhearing the conversation, Harry's thoughts about Snape being a betrayer and a Death-Eater strengthen even more. "And why was Snape looking at Malfoy as though both angry and... was it possible?... a little afraid?" (Rowling 297) As Rowling uses visual imagery to describe Snape's facial expressions, it makes Harry get suspicious of Snape as he notices his fear. Snape's fear creates tension because it shows that Draco's mission is far more dangerous than it seems, as Rowling mentions Snape's emotions. Since Snape was portrayed as cold, dominant and emotionally impenetrable, fear was not an emotion Harry had associated with Snape. Thus, this extract briefly challenges Snape's established image as it reveals a hidden layer in his character. "*Yes, Snape was offering to help him!*" said Harry (Rowling 302). This quote is an interpretation of Harry, not real facts. If Harry had interpreted these events differently, the bias towards Snape would also be different. Rowling's usage of italics indicates that she was aiming to highlight that Snape is unreliable and a betrayer. Unveiling a character transformation of Snape from morally ambiguous to evil. In general, Rowling builds a villainous portrayal of Snape by embedding narrative clues throughout the book, guiding the reader's bias.

In most parts of the book, Dumbledore's trust for Snape has been shown in multiple ways. This carries an important role for the sustainability of Snape's moral ambiguity in the book. While Harry was trying to convince Mr Weasley and Lupin that Snape is a potential Death-Eater, they both refused to believe him, owing to Dumbledore's ideas. "Dumbledore trusts Severus, and that ought to be good enough for all of us." (Rowling 309) As Dumbledore trusts Snape, the other members of the Order also tend to share the same opinion with him. This situation keeps the reader questioning why the most powerful characters, such as Dumbledore, remain persistent about relying on Snape. Besides, Rowling creates a moral dilemma due to Snape's constant portrayal as both the protagonist and the antagonist. "Luckily, Professor Snape was able to do enough to prevent a rapid spread of the curse-"(Rowling 241). As seen in this quote, Rowling challenges Harry's perspective by showing Dumbledore's unwavering trust in Snape. This is an indicator that Snape's transformation could have been portrayed differently if he were seen from another character's bias.

In addition, Rowling reveals Snape's villainous character by showing stronger clues by the end of the book. "It was Snape who had overheard the prophecy."(Rowling 499) This is the reveal that the prophecy, which caused Harry's parents to die, was carried to Voldemort by Snape. It is both a supporting point for Snape's double agent role and a way to raise Harry's hatred for Snape. After showing this event from Harry's perspective, Rowling includes other characters' biases to show even stronger evidence. "He's a double-agent, you stupid old man, he isn't working for you, you just think he is!"(Rowling 538) When Draco arrives to kill Dumbledore, he reveals Snape's double agency. By eventually revealing Snape's disguised mission from a different perspective, Rowling creates certainty, preventing interpretation of the reader.

Furthermore, by Draco and Dumbledore's dialogue in the chapter Lightning-Struck Tower, Rowling indicates that Dumbledore was mistaken for trusting Snape, which destroys the

sustainability of Snape's moral ambiguity for the reader. At the end of the chapter Snape finally shows up: "Snape gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face." (Rowling 545) Rowling expresses Snape's emotions by visual imagery, which truly highlights the events as they happened, not through Harry's interpretation. So this time Snape's actions are not misunderstood, which increases the reliability of the storytelling. Besides, Rowling transforms Snape's moral dilemma into antagonism by showing him kill Dumbledore. This makes a complete shift in Snape's character, who was portrayed as a compelling person, to a murderer.

In Harry's and the reader's eyes, Snape becomes a murderer and a betrayer. "Snape, the man he now hated as much as he hated Voldemort himself-" (Rowling 552) Later, Harry's feelings towards Snape turned into hatred, which increases the dramatic tension between Snape and Harry. Not only that, but also the revelation of Snape being the Half-Blood Prince helps his character transformation by enriching his backstory. "It was I who invented them- I, the Half-Blood Prince!" (Rowling 552) Rowling reveals a hidden layer in Snape as she reveals his secret identity. Since the Half-Blood Prince was assumed to be a dark wizard, Snape also got associated with the same values. "*Lord Voldemort - the Half Blood Prince* – how could Dumbledore have missed-?" (Rowling 581) To add on, by this sentence the similarities of Voldemort and Snape were highlighted. They were both described as aiming to frighten people and gain authority by using the Dark Arts. By the comparison of Snape and Voldemort, Rowling manipulates the reader's bias to portray Snape's villainous character.

However, the fact that Snape's inner thoughts were still hidden should not be reckoned without. Also, by considering that the events were reflected in Harry's limited third-person narrative. Throughout the book, Rowling portrays a transformation of Snape, from morally ambiguous to a villain, through Harry's eyes. The book only focuses on Snape's actions, rather than focusing on his perspective and the reasons under his actions. Even though showing

evidence to support Severus Snape's evil character, Rowling still leaves unanswered questions, which are later revealed in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

The Character Revelation of Severus Snape in the Deathly Hallows

The dramatic shift in *The Deathly Hallows* occurs within the 'Prince's Tale,' where the narrative exposes Snape's true duality. This revelation fundamentally transforms the character's function in the series, recasting him from a perceived villain into a selfless, tragic hero. In the book, Rowling transforms Snape by shifting the narrative from Harry's limited third-person perspective into Snape's. As a starting point, Rowling retains the previous portrayal of Snape by showing him serving Voldemort. "My Lord, the Order of the Phoenix intends to move Harry Potter from his current place of safety..."(Rowling 13) As Rowling maintains Snape's cruel, vindictive and antagonistic character, she manages to sustain the dramatic tone.

Moreover, in the chapter Elder Wand, Rowling mentions Snape's and Voldemort's dialogue. In the chapter, Harry and Hermione overhears the dialogue which is about Voldemort's wand. "You killed Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the Elder Wand cannot be truly mine."(Rowling 598) In this extract, Voldemort explains to Snape why his wand can not work properly as long as Snape stays alive. Therefore, Voldemort makes his snake, Nagini, attack Snape and leaves him bleeding to death. "Something more than blood was leaking from Snape." (Rowling 599) To add on, the thing described as "Silvery blue, neither gas nor liquid" is a memory that Snape is about to share with Harry. As soon as Harry notices this, the mysterious tone of the narrative intensifies. After getting the memory, Snape holds Harry and says his last words, "Look... at...me..."(Rowling 599). While it is not obvious at the moment, Snape's last words to Harry mean a lot about his emotions for Lily Potter.

The unclear foreshadowing of Snape's character transformation is done by Harry's limited perspective before Snape's death. "The green eyes found the black."(Rowling 599) In this

sentence, Rowling uses visual imagery to focus on Harry and Snape's eye contact rather than creating a dialogue. The scene foreshadows Snape's inner motivations and character transformation as the "green eyes" are a symbol of Lily's eyes. Even though Harry can not understand the symbolism, the readers can interpret it from the references "You have your mom's eyes" throughout the series. Meanwhile, in the book, Snape's duality hasn't been revealed yet, so this scene creates dramatic irony by highlighting the unsaid things about Snape. This scene maintains its dramatic tension until Rowling exposes Snape's role as a "tragic hero".

After Snape's death, Rowling finally shows Snape's character transformation. The transformation is done by shifting the narrative perspective from Harry's third-person limited to Snape's third-person limited perspective aligned with Harry. For the first time, Rowling allows the reader to see the events from Snape's perspective. Thus, Snape gets to express himself directly without getting judged by Harry. By showing the reader Snape's memories, Rowling exposes Snape's heroic and protective character. "I am not such a coward." (Rowling 619) Snape suddenly turns into a brave and loyal character rather than being vindictive and cruel. "It's a miracle you managed to return here!" Snape sounded furious. (Rowling 620) This sentence proves that Snape is loyal and protective of Dumbledore, as his sound is described as furious. Therefore, it is understood that the misconceptions about Snape were due to the wrong narrative perspective.

Furthermore, Snape's duality is exposed through his dialogues with Dumbledore. "I have your word that you will do all in your power to protect the students of Hogwarts?" (Rowling 621) Snape promises to Dumbledore that he will protect the students at all costs, which contrasts with his antagonism. This situation redefines the moral ambiguity of Snape as he accepts responsibility for the students. Besides, Rowling transforms Snape's evil character by clarifying the biggest factor of his antagonism. "*You* must kill me." (Rowling 621) This sentence shows the extreme trust and responsibility Dumbledore puts in Snape. Dumbledore sacrifices his life

to help Snape continue acting as a double agent and to earn Voldemort's trust. Thus, this sentence is a turning point in Snape's portrayal. Despite being portrayed as a betrayer and a murderer, readers later learn that it was planned to cover up Snape's real intentions. In this case, Snape does sacrifice his reputation and soul to help Dumbledore. Although knowing that he will be hated by others, he accepts Dumbledore's plan to save the students.

In addition, Rowling highlights Snape's and Lily Potter's relationship, which is the most important factor in Snape's character transformation. "I have spied for you, and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter's son safe." (Rowling 626) Rowling reveals that Snape has been serving Dumbledore because of his love for Lily. The motivation for his loyalty to Dumbledore was because of the remorse and guilt he felt for Lily's death. This highlights that Snape's love for Lily has turned into a lifelong obsession. Nevertheless, Snape turned this obsession into moral courage, which makes him a real hero. "I wish... I wish *I were* dead..."(Rowling 617) Also, by the usage of italics in the sentence, it is obvious that Snape would sell his soul just to protect Lily.

Rowling also uses symbolism, the Silver Doe, to show Snape's love for Lily. Since Snape has the same patronus as Lily, this symbolism shows the depth of his emotions. After learning about this situation, Harry and the readers perceive Snape as a more emotionally complex person. The emotional depth in Severus Snape's character transforms him into a self-sacrificing and brave person from Harry's perspective. Overall, when Harry noticed that Snape had an intense love for Lily, his villainous perseverance of Snape changed into a heroic one. Severus Snape is not just a broken lover, but he is a man who turns his pain into a lifelong sacrifice.

Conclusion

Severus Snape is a character who is portrayed as morally ambiguous and vindictive at the Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, written by J.K. Rowling. Rowling introduces Snape as an

antagonist as well as creating some moral suspense over his character. She uses manipulation over the reader's perspective to sustain Snape's cruel portrayal. Rowling manages to retain dramatic tension by never revealing Snape's inner motivations and by keeping his character mysterious, thereby withholding his backstory. Some techniques such as narrative perspective, foreshadowing and literary devices are used to enrich Snape's character.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Snape is portrayed as a betrayer and a murderer. Despite being suspicious and the perfect fit for being the evil character, Snape's morality is constantly questioned due to Dumbledore's trust. Throughout the book, Rowling gives readers some clues that foreshadow Snape's hidden layer. Rowling shapes the reader's bias by using the third-person narrative from Harry's perspective. At the end of the book, Rowling creates a huge betrayal of Snape and reveals his secret identity, transforming him into a murderer.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Rowling sustains Snape's antagonism by showing his loyalty for Voldemort. Yet, at the Prince's Tale chapter Rowling makes a huge plot twist where she reveals Snape's real motivations. Rowling reveals Snape's duality and heroism by shifting the narrative perspective. After revealing Snape's love for Lily, Rowling turns him into a brave and a self-sacrificing hero. In conclusion, Rowling transforms Severus Snape's character from a murderer into a tragic hero, by changing the narrative perspective.

Bibliography

- *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*