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The Great Snape Debate 1

Peter Appelbaum
Arcadia University
appelbaum@arcadia.edu

Do you think Snape is a hero?

J.K. Rowling: Yes, I do; though a very flawed hero. An anti-hero, perhaps. He is not a particularly likeable man in many ways. He remains rather cruel, a bully, riddled with bitterness and insecurity — and yet he loved, and showed loyalty to that love and, ultimately, laid down his life because of it. That's pretty heroic!

John Nettleship, of Five Lanes, near Caerwent, was making a celebrity appearance at the Chepstow Bookshop, where J.K. Rowling is reputed to have visited as a teenager, in order to promote the launch of the seventh and final installment in the Harry Potter series. It has been said that the 67-year-old resembles the dastardly Severus Snape, Professor of Potions at Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft. As reported by Daniel Lombard (2007) of the South Wales Argus, that may not be the most flattering comparison - ruling his class with a rod of iron, Snape is not well-liked by the apprentice wizards. Far from taking offence, Mr. Nettleship is proud to have been an inspiration to a series that has sold 345 million copies around the world. "The first I knew was when a reporter from a national newspaper knocked on the door seven years ago and said: 'You're Professor Snape aren't you', said the former head of science.



**John Nettleship, Chemistry teacher
and possible inspiration for Potions
Master Severus Snape**

"I suppose I was quite strict as a teacher, but I said to my wife, 'she thinks I'm Professor Snape'. She said 'of course you are, but I didn't want to tell you'." Actually, J.K. Rowling does not like to discuss inspirations for her characters, and has not publicly stated that Mr. Nettleship was an inspiration (Wikipedia 2006). Yet, like many others, Mr. Nettleship is pleased to be associated with one of her characters. "Fortunately for me, quite a lot of people like Alan Rickman, who plays Snape in the films." Mr. Nettleship described his own lessons as "filled with lots of 'bang and smells' using chemistry kits but Joanne did not appear interested. I knew something was going on in her head but she would never say what. Her friends later

said she was inventing stories, and the Harry Potter stories must have come from these. Her mind was working on wizards all the time."



Borders bumper stickers hyping the Great Snape Debate

Eighth-grade teacher Strausser (2007) blogged about reserving her personal copy of the final book in February, six months before the book would be available. At the counter she had a choice of two bumper stickers. "I quickly snagged 'Snape is a very bad man'. But when I left the store I sat in my car and thought about it (yes I know, I really need a life) and then

quickly went back in and traded it in for 'Trust Snape'. Julia Lipman of flakmagazine intoned, "The way his stringy black hair moves jerkily into his eyes. You could watch it over and over again. All right, I could watch it over and over again. Because I've had a crush on Rickman's character, the invariably-described-as-sinister Potions teacher Severus Snape, ever since he first glared at the boy wizard on page 126 of 'Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone'." (Lipman 2007) Lipman says she is "not a lone wacko."

"There are many other wackos like me. Yahoo Groups alone hosts six Snape discussion groups, the largest of which comprises 398 members. Snape fan sites abound on the Web. But try finding a site devoted to, say, Hogwarts' eccentric elderly headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Not a one. That's because Snape is sexy. "

"I mean, you didn't think all those Snape fans were really just interested in discussing the curative properties of wormwood, did you? These women (and they are almost all women) rarely venture into the academic aspects of Snape's character. They've got other things on their minds. Like what he wears under those black robes. Whether he would ever permit a lover, in a moment of abandon, to shorten his first name to 'Sevvie'. Whether it's appropriate to write fan fiction in which he hooks up with 17-year-old students."



Actor Alan Rickman portraying Snape in the Harry Potter films

Like Strausser, I prepared for the seventh book by dwelling in "The Great Snape Debate." I purchased a book by Amy Berner, Orson Scott Card and Joyce Millman (2007) with just that title, a "Border's Exclusive," timed just right for those unable to wait any longer before immersing themselves in more Pottermania. This book is really two in one: a flip book that aimed to capture the market that had been constructed by previous media hype for the films and books. One side, "The Case for Snape's Innocence," is a collection of essays that support Snape as a good guy; flip the book over and you flip the argument; the same authors pen essays that make "The Case for Snape's Guilt." Is Snape Harry Potter's Friend? Is Snape Harry Potter's Foe? That was very much on most of our minds as we awaited the last book. Unlike my daughter, who prepared for each new book in the series by re-reading them all, starting from the first page of the first one, I took the opportunity to use The Great Snape Debate as a quick-prep "cliff's notes" version of the whole series. By the few weeks before the seventh book's unveiling, I had reduced the point of the series, like many others, to this very same pair of questions.

But aren't the books about Harry Potter? They all have his name in the title. That's true. On the surface, the books are about Harry, or, Harry and his friends. But, is Snape friend or foe? At the very least, Snape is important. Rowling would not be the first author to use the literary technique of naming books after one character while using the narrative to explore another. In the best tradition of Bildungsroman, we can go back to Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, often touted as originating the genre of a series that tells the tale of a young man's formative learning experiences. Wilhelm's Lehrjahre, his years of apprenticeship, also begin with someone else, in that case the actress Mariane, whom we later learn is loved by Wilhelm. These books have Wilhelm in their titles: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (years of apprenticeship, 1796/1980), Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre (years of travel, 1821/1980), originally published in various bundles of stories, poems, etc., and later organized typically into two volumes. By the end, we see that Wilhelm is the main character for the plot, but the story is really about the role that a team of adults plays in carefully orchestrating his apprenticeship into adulthood. The Harry Potter books fit a similar pattern to that of this first of the genre: a young man is led by a collection of hands higher than he can be aware of toward his destiny.

Harry has good adventures, as a good puppet should



Johann Wolfgang
Goethe

I claim that, like Goethe's classic, the surface story in the Harry Potter series is about the formal education and character formation of the person in the title, but that the underlying discussion is really more about the nature of the apprenticeship and those who make the decisions about the appropriate types of educational experiences. I have an inkling the 'Great Snape Debate' was so much a part of the fan and media hype because it has a connection to this underlying discussion.

Snape is above all a teacher and later Headmaster in these books. He is also a former or perhaps present follower of Voldemort. What is important about him in terms of the kind of teacher and Headmaster he is, in other words the underlying motivations for his actions in these roles and hence our interpretation of how well he performs as a teacher and headmaster, is in the end, deep down, the kind of man he is. Rowling answers this in the quote that opens this essay. He acts because of love, and therefore he is a hero. How this relationship based on love unfolds is initially the counterpoint to Harry's apprenticeship; later, the apprenticeship seems predetermined by fate while Snape's motivations and allegiances are still being developed. The kind of apprenticeship he orchestrates or to which he contributes can only be understood once we work our way through this debate. More crucially I maintain that his actions do not establish a philosophy of education, but instead help us to understand more fully the limitations of our own ability to determine the ideal apprenticeship of young adults.

In the Wilhelm Meister books, there is a secret society of puppet masters that Wilhelm discovers only at the end of the first book, made up of men who have been carefully monitoring and guiding his apprenticeship to manhood; in the second book, Wilhelm sends his son to a special educational province, where the youth is taught by peculiar methods that parallel Wilhelm's own continued journey into adulthood. In the Harry Potter series, Albus Dumbledore, Hagrid, Sirius Black, and the members of the Order of the Phoenix, all keep

similar tabs on Harry in the same way that the members of the Society of the Tower follow Wilhelm in his years of apprenticeship. Young wizards head to Hogwarts in the same way that Wilhelm's Felix heads to the Pedagogical Province. Removed from everyday life, teachers seem to educate more by personal example of how they live their lives than by wielding pedagogical skills. Much of the first part of this essay focuses on the education of young men, as the Harry Potter books enact a patriarchal tale of education and society in general. We will see that this is consistent with the genre of which the books are part. Later in the essay we can address some of these issues of gender. However, they are more fully elaborated in other essays in this book (See XXXX). In this particular essay we are more concerned with the implicit philosophy of education Rowling enacts through and beyond the patriarchy. I argue that a reading of these books does not definitively answer any pedagogical questions, but does something more important. Specifically in reference to The Great Snape Debate, I will explain how the books evoke a 'politics of aesthetics' that binds the apprenticeship of the individual with conceptions of the fairest and best way of life in the community. While Rowling has never once claimed to be masquerading as a philosopher of education or an advocate of a particular form of social organization, her books are at the least representations of the culture of which they are a part, a possible key to unlocking the mysteries of our assumptions and dreams. Other books in this tradition, such as Goethe's Wilhelm Meister series and Herman Hesse's The Glass Bead Game, have been located in the cultural history of European Fascism. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Emile was an overt philosophical treatise. Even if Rowling herself might one day disclaim any such motivation, there is no reason for readers not to use her work on their own to think through their own personal commitments and assumptions (Appelbaum 2007).

I begin with the patriarchal apprenticeship, and return to its links with politics toward the end of this essay. One aspect of the patriarchy common to this genre is the need for education to take place outside of the regular social sphere. For Rousseau (1762/1979), in his Emile, society is blamed for corrupting the naturally good human being. For Goethe, Wilhelm must leave his family and bourgeois society in order to learn from the land. Harry Potter unexpectedly receives a letter revealing that his currently miserable life is about to be transformed. Instead of living in a little box of a cupboard under the stairs, and suffering constant abuse from his Aunt, Uncle and cousin, he in fact is truly special. He is a wizard, with magical powers, and there is a secret community of others a lot like him. He can be part of something grand. At the opening of the series, Harry is whisked into a magical, wonderful world, the perfect society, where people can do what they want (magic), and every fantasy can be fulfilled – or is this really so? For one thing, the teachers, like most teachers in most worlds, are pretty bad. They are arbitrary, whimsical, and prone to teach more by example of character than through effective instructional methods. (This is my own normative judgment; yet part of the point I develop in this essay is that they need to be rather bad teachers in order for the students to do what the teachers do not teach, to seek out knowledge and skills on their own, and thus to experience educational adventures.) On the one hand, it seems like all we have to do is think diagonally to break out of our current materialism (Harry's cousin's surfeit of toys as grotesque weight might be a symbol of the spiritual death that results from materialism) and live outside the lines. Further into the books, we quickly realize that jumping out of the non-magical, 'muggle' world is not enough: the underlying questions still exist, rumbling

uncannily beyond our ability to know.

In Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead Game* (*Die Glassperlenspiel*, 1943/1970), we encounter another utopian Pedagogical Province, "Castalia." In this one, as in Goethe's and Rowling's, students learn more from teachers as examples of human beings than they do from clever instruction. Joseph Knecht, the main character, is a tool of Hesse's argument for teachers like the music master, whose superior intellect, deep comprehension of the interconnections of knowledge and emotion, and seemingly mystical universal enlightenment, and for emblematic educational leaders like Joseph Knecht, who leave the province for immersion in the worldly realm. Like the Headmaster and Professors of Hogwarts, who cannot help but participate in the serious battles between good and evil, Knecht slowly understands that the cultivation of young minds cannot continue to be carried out as if the outside world does not exist. This is the classic crisis of the Bildungsroman, and the paradox of a liberating pedagogy (Roosevelt 1980). At the heart of the matter is an age-old question about whether our lives are shaped primarily by external influences or by inner dispositions. We get mired in debates between nature and nurture, instinct and pedagogy, self and circumstance, not realizing that these debates circumscribe the possible ideas that we can muster for thinking about how a person becomes an adult through years of schooling, apprenticeship, and other learning experiences.

In Goethe's version, Wilhelm seeks out his own adventures, imagining that he is keeping them secret from his parents at home, writing his own script for a theatrical life in which he himself is both director and star. His father thinks he is learning how to conduct business. These trips are his education. But it's more complicated than that. In fact, while Wilhelm imagines his life to be like the puppet shows he created and obsessed about as a boy, what he is doing on these trips is more of an education than he suspects they were meant to provide. By the end of the first book it is revealed to him that the Society of the Tower has been behind the scenes all along. He has been their puppet in a grander show, even though every action felt as if it was carried out by his own free will, and specifically counter to the wishes of those who would oversee his life. In Hesse's version, Knecht only slowly comes to realize the fate that awaits him, as a member of the elitist leadership of the elite, despite numerous years of pursuing purely independent intellectual goals and concerns. Like Wilhelm, he only later understands how the music master had already recognized his fate when he met him as a small boy and recommended him for the Castalian Pedagogical Province. Knecht seems to pursue actions counter to this fate, such as writing his own poetry - something Castilians never do, carrying out debates with a guest student from the outside world, apprenticing himself to a Chinese hermit, befriending a monk in training, forming diplomatic ties with those outside the province by requesting that they teach him in ways contrary to the Castalian tradition, and so on. In the end, this is part of what makes him best suited to become the Master of the Glass Bead Game itself, the most esteemed of the masters in the province. Each teacher, in turn, apparently was like the puppet masters of Wilhelm's Tower, carefully grooming Knecht to make decisions of his own free will uniquely appropriate as preparation for serving the Order; what an ironic twist, given that the Order demands subservience of the individual to the good of the common intellect, seemingly in tension with Knecht's consistently independent choices.

In Rowling's version, Harry and his friends persistently concern themselves with adventures that appear to be a parallel education to

that provided by the curriculum of Hogwarts. I always imagined that each child likely has equivalent experiences. I suspected early on that we only know of the adventures of Harry, Ron and Hermione because the books are written from their perspective. I assumed that there were innumerable unwritten Wizarding books, where each child receives a letter telling them they are special and should go to Hogwarts. Once attending the school, each would suffer unbearable teaching from the staff in order to carry out concurrent world-saving adventures through which their genuine education would unfold. The classes are like the experiences Wilhelm Meister thinks he is expected to be having according to the business plans. The adventures are the real curriculum, observed and gently manipulated by a cadre of wise puppet masters. Otherwise, the education of the average student at Hogwarts seems fairly empty to me, lacking the significantly educational adventures that Harry, Ron and Hermione are lucky enough to experience.

Retroactive prediction

By the end of the seventh book, this seems less than likely. Much to my own dissatisfaction, the Harry Potter story seems to simply be that: Only Harry, Ron and Hermione, and maybe a few other special youths, such as Neville Longbottom, are lucky enough to live the Bildungsroman by attaching their own lives to the adventures. The rest of the students at Hogwarts apparently merely suffer the mostly poor teaching as their education. (We will return to this theme with respect to Draco Malfoy, who I claim receives a parallel bildung-experience.) Yet this is a series of novels, not an educational utopia. We should not make the mistake of confusing characters in a mind experiment that conceives of a possible pedagogy with real people. The Bildungsroman genre typically only has a lead character who serves the purpose of demonstrating the kind of education that is possible, as a model for others in the world outside of the book. Consider Rousseau's Emile, where a single child is tutored first through removal from contact with society in order for his natural self to emerge unscathed. Rousseau meant this as a plea for a kind of education, and in turn for a kind of society made up of honest and talented people, not as the tale of the education of one child. The same with Wilhelm: Goethe does not mean for the apprenticeship years or the journey years to be merely superficial fables. They raise riddle-like questions about the nature and purposes of the puppet masters behind the scenes, enabling a young adult to make independent choices, experience risk and adventure, but also to eventually assume the role that fate has in store for him.

The complexity of a pedagogy that is designed to enable a person to be able to make the right choices contains the paradox of a pedagogue who is disobeyed. The teachers must be disobeyed in order to emphasize the autonomous choices of the apprentice; if the apprentice is simply taught to follow the master, then he or she has never consciously made the personal life-decision to make the correct choices. Hesse has Knecht violate the Order. He leaves the highly esteemed post of Glass Bead Game Master, in order to fully serve



Herman Hesse

the Order by solidifying connections with those outside, fulfilling the ultimate destiny that his name (German for servant) signifies. His last thoroughly independent decision is the purest subjection to the Order that he can provide: he is ready to risk his own life in order to

establish the personal relationship with the son of an aristocrat essential to the formation of this young man's character. Harry, too, makes the same sacrifice: He understands fully that he must embrace the need for his own death in order for his life to have its full value in service to the Wizarding world. Luckily for Harry, only the Voldemort horcrux within him dies.

This is why I was disappointed in the neat and tidy final installment and its implications that other students are not disobeying Hogwarts rules in order to receive their own education. The liberating education that cultivates eventual adherence to the reigning cultural ideology through disobedience makes it essential that the apprentice not take the advice of the overseer of the education (Roosevelt 1980). Trainers of teachers and educational policy-makers may not want to think about this. The cultivation of self-will as well as the ability of self-sacrifice for a greater good seems to demand that the apprentice dismiss the wisdom of the teacher. It is for this reason that we sometimes resort to manipulating the experience of free will from behind the 'scenes'. Actually, though, it's a little more complicated than that. If we are to learn from the Bildungsroman, we can take counsel from each of these books that the students' choices in disobeying the directions of the teachers, whether they are known to the student as teachers or not, are the 'right' choices. Wilhelm is healthier, taller, stronger and straighter than his friend Werner who has followed the 'correct' incorrect choices, as he should be, having had his apprenticeship supervised by the Society of the Tower. Knecht, too, can only be Glass Bead Game Master because of all of the incorrect choices he has made, and can only commit his final act of disobedience by leaving Castalia because it is the 'naturally' right decision, and thus, the final test of the correctness of his life-long apprenticeship. Looking back on the Harry Potter series from Snape's perspective of the final book, we see how hard Snape's job was: no matter how hard he tried to keep Potter out of danger, Harry kept making those 'wrong' decisions that put him in the midst of the most serious dangers. The paradox is, of course, that these were the 'right' decisions, and he made them thinking they were of his own free will.

This is a first hint at why we all needed to know more about Snape: his actions can be read with hindsight as at the heart of the paradox of a liberating education. Media blitz and fan hype were manifestations of 'retroactive prediction', a rhetorical tense common in geology and archaeology, where one projects into the past possible explanations for a present that would have then been the future. Retroactive prediction is a modernist reduction or displacement of rumination to explanation. If we can identify causes for what would be later developments, we presumably explain the how and why of these events. The identification of causes thus removes the possibility of other kinds of action, such as imagining alternatives. Yet, in the paradox of an education for self-will, the pedagogy contains within itself its own negation, which means that explanation and retroactive prediction cannot take place. We need something other than prescribed methods for an educational utopia. Snape represents this 'something'.

So what's a teacher to do?



Jean-Jacques
Rousseau

Rousseau is hired by a wealthy nobleman to stand in for the father, who should be performing the patriarchal act of education himself. But the tutor knows better, and can better remove the child from the real world until he is ready for re-entry. (It is the rural countryside away from town life for Wilhelm, the special and bizarre pedagogical province for Felix, Castalia outside of the rest of the world for Knecht, and Hogwarts for Harry.) Wilhelm does not assign the Society of the Tower to educate his own son, nor does he do the job himself. In fact, his own education is still incomplete; he needs to travel for a while before understanding his fate is to serve others as a doctor – a rather strange result in Goethe’s time for a man of his background. He instead sends Felix to a special pedagogical province. Wilhelm’s incorrect correct choices later make it possible for him to save his own son’s life with the medical skills he has acquired. Knecht, an orphan, is tossed off to Castalia, where people live and breathe school with no expectation that they return to the real world, except perhaps as a teacher. He leaves Castalia to become a teacher, yet, to emphasize the complexity of the paradox discussed above, it is only in the act of self-sacrifice that can he become a real teacher, and moreover only through his absence from the child’s life. Harry and his friends are always in and out of school and the Wizarding world, saving all humanity from Voldemort. So how do Harry and his friends get the education they need for entry into the adult community? Without Voldemort, they would not have any of the essential adventures. One could say the same thing for Wilhelm, who almost dies, caught in the middle of a Napoleonic battle. Or of Knecht, who literally dies for the sake of one spoiled rich kid at the end of his life.

We can use the comparison of Hesse’s Knecht and Goethe’s Wilhelm to help us understand Harry Potter, and subsequently to think about the role that Snape plays in Harry’s Bildungsroman. We are not here to work through the dense literary scholarship comparing these two characters (Halpert 1961). Suffice it say that there is a lot of it pointing out that Hesse’s Knecht appears at first passive, accepting his fate, while Goethe’s Wilhelm appears at first active, master of his own fate. By the end of each story, we can see that active and passive do not adequately illustrate the complexity of the relationships among pedagogy, apprenticeship, authority, autonomy, and duty. Knecht’s initial passivity leads him dramatically to the conclusion that, despite the illusion of one’s belief in freewill to guide one’s own destiny, one must have faith in his or her own powers of self-determination. Wilhelm’s initial exhilarating and irresponsible independence leads him amusingly to the passive acceptance of the role of the puppet masters in guiding him to his fate. Harry, we are told all along, is hardly passive: It is he who chooses Gryffindor House, despite a clear indication that he belongs in Slytherin. It is Harry who chooses, time after time, that he is not like Voldemort, even as there are so many reasons to worry that he is. Even in the end, when he knows that there is a piece of Voldemort within him, he chooses to die in order to have lived as Harry. Like Wilhelm and Knecht before him, Harry “chooses” to sacrifice himself to the causes to which those behind the scenes have committed him from the beginning, all along. The underlying message seems to be, ‘to abdicate one’s free will to the larger whole is the key to individual freedom’ as the ultimate form of self-will.

So, when will this essay actually get around to Snape? Here is the perfect opportunity, because at the heart of Snape’s character, we

learn in the seventh book, are the choices he made in contrast with his destiny. As a child conceived outside of love, according to J.K. Rowling (Bloomsbury webchat undated), Snape could never understand how power and trust cannot replace love. But he indeed makes the decision to override his insatiable passion for the dark arts in order to act on his love for Harry's mother, Lily Potter. Each of Snape's actions, however terrible they may have seemed from the beginning of the first book, are transformed in meaning by the scenes from his childhood that Harry sees in the pensieve after his death. Like Knecht before him, Snape must die so that his student, Harry, can truly be transformed by the relationship that this action creates between them. In contrast, Dumbledore, who appeared so 'good' in the first couple of books, has had, we finally learn, a constant battle with self-interest and power. Snape made his final commitment when he approached Dumbledore for help against Voldemort, a commitment that ran counter to one implied by his own childhood and apprenticeship. Dumbledore, however, doomed himself - even in the moments when the world was fighting Voldemort in an ultimate battle for survival - to risk everything for one last hope of uniting the Deathly Hallows and reaping the benefits. While Dumbledore mostly sat back and passively accepted his role at Hogwarts, Snape was the one who constantly and actively reconstructed his allegiances anew with each act of support for those united against Voldemort. So in the end, it is Snape who turns out to be the self-determined teacher, and Dumbledore the shallow cad.

When we first meet Snape, we receive a picture of a tyrannical and unpredictable teacher who may have talent with potions but has few social skills, and hardly any more pedagogical skills. By the end of the seventh book, if teachers in these pedagogical provinces teach not by method but by example then it is Snape who is the only teacher Harry has truly had the honor to have studied with. The hours of occlumency training with Snape in Order of the Phoenix, his fifth year, helped with some fundamental skills. But sacrificing one's life to save another, as Snape did in Deathly Hallows, is the one act that Harry must emulate if he is to save the world and himself from Voldemort. (It is interesting to note that Dumbledore too seemed to sacrifice his life, but we find out later that his death is due to his own tragic flaws, and not due to his moral choices as with Snape.) It is not his clearly superior talent with spells and the invention of new ones that makes Snape someone to be admired, but his choices to act in the name of love, even if, and especially if, no one but he knows this. But then again, any reader of the Bildungsroman already knew this: those from whom Wilhelm learns the most are those who are no longer alive at the end of the book; the ostensible teachers, the members of the society, have merely compiled memories for an archive of apprenticeships to be stored in the tower. The music master, Knecht's greatest teacher, lives out the end of his life in silent mystical bliss; his choice of death, equally active in its outward passivity, is what makes the strongest educational impact on Knecht. In Harry's case, from the moment he learned of the Wizarding world and his place within it, the question of his choices versus his destiny was directly at hand. For Snape, none of this is the case. Because he took hold of his destiny through his choices, rather than merely rising to the occasion like Harry, he seems to be the greater man, or should I say wizard. Perhaps this is why Snape was a teacher, and why it appears that Harry, in the final epilogue, is not: he simply is not up to the job. Or perhaps destiny had other purposes in mind for him.

Why were people so concerned with Snape's allegiances?

Most of the characters in the Potter books had parents or other adults who oversaw their maturation and education. Harry, the ostensible hero and orphan, has the Order of the Phoenix. Snape, on the other hand, seems single-handedly to be the one character who missed out on caring authority figures. His uniqueness signifies his role as symbol that developed through the course of the books. At first, we see him only through the eyes of the new students, as a nasty and suspicious teacher. He seems vindictive when it comes to Harry, seemingly using him to retaliate for the humiliation that Harry's father had forced him to suffer when they themselves were students. Hints that Snape is simultaneously rescuing Harry from life-threatening situations can be read as either attempts to serve Voldemort by saving the final death-wielding blow for his master, or perhaps as working for Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix. By the end of the last book, we have learned a great deal more about his life and motivations. We begin to see the possibility that his complicated relationship with Harry represents his intricate triple-agent status, working for both Voldemort and the Order, in order to ultimately work for the Order - although we do not know this for certain until very late in the story.



[Salvador Dali's Face of Severus Snape, Which May Be Used As A Potions Classroom](#)
 Based on [Face of Mae West, Which May Be Used As An Apartment](#)
 Image © 2004 [Red Scharlach](#)

Of course, this also represents the slow and progressive education of the narrator, another character who may or may not stand in for JK Rowling herself. This education of the narrator, too, is common to the Bildungsroman genre. Critics have noted, for example, that Wilhelm seems hardly transformed throughout his picaresque adventures, whereas Goethe's narrator demonstrates significant transformation over the course of time (Miles 1974). The changing image of Snape throughout the books can represent in straightforward fashion Harry's development over time, or it might indicate the changing understanding of the motivations and life choices that matter for the narrator. By the end of the fifth book, Order of the Phoenix, and into the sixth, the Half-Blood Prince, Snape matters more than he seemed to at first. Why?



[Singing Snape, Image © 2005 Laerry](#)

Part of this, I thought when I first proposed this essay, was due to the portrayal of Snape by Alan Rickman in the films. Whereas Snape in the books seems confusingly one-dimensional, Rickman-Snape from the start seems bewilderingly complicated. This may be a historical first: when before this have films and popular fan fiction triggered by a media blitz influenced later volumes in literature? But it is also the case that Rowling needed to establish the ambiguity of Snape in order to dramatize the role of love, commitments and self-determination that emerged as central themes of her larger story. It is

reported that Rickman did discuss the character with Rowling, and that he was one of the few actors to provide input (Lady Claudia undated). People noticed a transition in the character, so that the good-guy/bad-guy balance seemed to shift through Rickman toward

the good. Some viewers suggested this was because the books are told from Harry's point of view, whereas films by their very nature deliver a perspective that is outside of any one character and hence would be less Harry-biased. It may be that Rickman's discussions with Rowling gave him insight into the character that readers did not yet have, leading him to play Snape in a more nuanced way.

I now believe there is more subtlety to this portrayal of Snape in both the books and the films. There are at least two kinds of Bildungsroman hero, according to David Miles (1974): the picaresque adventurer, who hardly changes while the narrator evolves; and the confessor, harkening back to Saint Augustine, who shifts the focus from the world without toward the world within. Goethe signifies his own awareness of this in Wilhelm's tale by incorporating an embedded confession from a person who later turns out to be the dead aunt of Wilhelm's maturer love, a character whose Bildung stands in stark contrast to Wilhelm's. Rowling incorporates a similar contrast between Harry and Snape. The flashbacks to Snape's childhood solidify Severus Snape as the confessor hero (over and above the titular, picaresque hero Harry) who is motivated and guided in his adult actions by the complex realization of what his love for Lily entails. The readers and filmgoers were not privy to these details before the final volume of the book series. Neither, we can suspect, was the narrator, who slowly through books six and seven shifts thematically by the gradual retreat toward the days of Snape's childhood; structurally by a turning toward forms dictated by the psychological time of memory toward autobiography, diary, and notebook; and, in terms of the way the narrator depicts the image of the hero, by the transformation of the 'picaro' into the 'confessor' (Snape sends the memories to Harry at just the appropriate time for these confessions to be revealed in the penseive). From Wilhelm through Josef Knecht to Harry Potter to Snape, the concept of the self shifts imperceptibly, from its status as an assumed postulate to the "retrospective hypothesis" which Miles applies from Samuel Beckett in his study of the Bildungsroman form. The confessor appears late in the Wilhelm story as well, as if Goethe prescribed the narrative location for the genre. In this context, the confessor hero, due to his increased attention to inner states of the self and his past, often merges with a figure of an artist; his therapeutic, cathartic act of confession actually frees him from the past by putting it into some concrete form. Snape is portrayed by fans as a singer of folksongs, words sung to well-known tunes (Marcius undated). In the series, he is revealed in book six to have been the artist of new potions and spells. So, while Harry might be the picaro, Snape is the confessor, and the narrator in turn has learned more from Snape than Harry. That would be a literal reduction of the hypothesis. More fully, Snape is finally freed from his past as a Death-eater by the confession of his memories in the penseive, which serve cathartically as a retroactive prediction.

Miles' discussion of twentieth century Bildungsroman form suggests that the hero in this form is shattered by authors such as Franz Kafka and Gunter Grass, with the implication that this genre is somewhat dead, signifying that we must begin anew. Interestingly, the Harry Potter books have more in common with the earlier works in this tradition, which lead the main character back into bourgeois society, as if nothing needs to change in the world. The epilogue, in fact, suggests that everything is as it was pre-Voldemort, with no need to think differently about one's life choices or commitments. Despite the allusions to social structure, the need to rethink the status of magical creatures and half-bloods within the Wizarding world, we are left

with a fairly conservative message that all has been set aright. Snape and Harry, as Wilhelm, Knecht and others before them, accept their place in the existing world rather than transform it. So the message of Snape's allegiances is finally clear: it mattered where he stood because it made a difference in whether the world could go on as before. Snape is a tool of an author who pretty much likes society as it is, despite its 'minor' faults.

Snape is also a symbol of the permeability of apparent boundaries between the real world and the utopian, pedagogical province. He flows between and through both Hogwarts and the world of Voldemort as a double and triple-agent. The ambiguity of his character places the paradox of pedagogy and Rowling's conservative statement of closure on the world as it is within another dilemma regarding education of the apprentice, that of the role of engagement with the real world. If schooling is an oasis away from the spoils of society, the question then is, how does one prepare the student for this world if he or she is not experiencing this world? Rousseau answered this question axiomatically in *Emile*: he declared that human beings are naturally good and will follow a natural pattern of growth and development that is the best preparation for acting in the 'real world' if they are placed in an unadulterated oasis. Goethe problematized this: Wilhelm can only experience an apprenticeship in places where he runs the risk of the real world, free from what he perceives as security and protection. While Wilhelm's world is gently controlled, he does risk death by war and other, lesser harms. This set up the need for the sequel, in which Wilhelm needs to find an education for his son, while also completing his own, unfinished education. As the product of one form of education, he needs to decide whether he would choose the same for his own son. In both books, the realities of the world bleed in and out of the plot, making it clear that regardless of the decision that is made, no form of education is completely removed from both the positives and negatives of society. Hesse confronted the question more crassly: He makes Castalia have a long and storied history as a pedagogical province, a utopia distinct from the rest of society. And we learn that Knecht, the servant of Castalia who made it possible for this history to last even longer, did so by recognizing the inappropriateness of this separation. What a conundrum.

Snape is at the heart of the same set of questions. Hogwarts is removed from the rest of the world, protected from danger by powerful spells. Students' needs to occasionally escape the claustrophobic atmosphere are released after the first year by carefully supervised trips to a small village nearby. But the oasis is shattered by goings-on related to Voldemort. The early rumblings are not enough to scare people yet. Later, parents are not even sure it is safe enough to send kids to school, as Hogwarts becomes a site of particular contestation. Snape, in his unique multiple-agent role, is both in and out. And, he is on the edge; he seemingly can go either way. He is liminal. He is the potions master, a standard part of the curriculum. But he also teaches Harry occlumency and legilimency, skills for the outside world, not for graduation from Hogwarts. While most of the teachers are caricatures whom we rarely see outside of their teacher role, Snape is clearly busy in the world as well.

Foils and Pedagogy

An interesting key to Snape's importance is his role as a teacher to both Harry, the main character, and Draco Malfoy, the foil for both plot and philosophy of education. Whereas Harry is our hero, Draco seems to be our anti-hero. We can compare the two, as if one is 'good' and the other is 'bad'. Snape is the only adult who serves as a teacher

through example for both characters. The Bildungsroman typically portrays a comparative 'friend' whose education differs and who therefore serves as a foil for the educational philosophy that is presented. Wilhelm's foil is named Werner. Werner is apprenticed for work in business by simply working with his father, as opposed to being sent off to find his own adventures. As mentioned, he seems to always make the 'correct' choices. But when Werner and Wilhelm meet later, the comparative descriptions of their physical appearance tell us "once again that health and growth come, not from obedience to external pressures, but from living according to one's natural tendencies and convictions." (Roosevelt: 117) Werner is struck by how much taller, stronger and straighter Wilhelm looks; the impression Werner made on Wilhelm was by no means so favorable. "The honest man seemed to have retrograded than advanced." The same sort of distinction can be made between Hess's Knecht and his foil, Plinio, who was a guest student from a wealthy family rather than a pure Castalian. His years of apprenticeship in the family business likewise turn him into a sadder and weaker man. This is in sharp contrast to his vibrant adolescence, where his very disobedience to the Order in publically debating its wisdom establishes the kind of successful apprenticeship that a utopian pedagogical province promises. It is only through reacquaintance with and tutoring from Knecht that he can slowly gain control over both his life and his well-being.

Draco is a slightly different foil because of the special role that Snape plays in his life, enabling him to also experience the essential adventures of self-determination that allow him to maintain a healthy and happy life. Like Wilhelm's puppet masters, and Knecht's elite authorities, Snape works behind the scenes to orchestrate Draco's free choices. Only after Draco does not kill Dumbledore as directed does Snape carry out his own vow to take the Headmaster's life. He stays true to the role of the paradoxical teacher. Surely he needed to be the person who killed Dumbledore; but he arrives at exactly the appropriate time to do this deed for Draco, making it possible for the young man to choose his own destiny. This very act of disobedience to Voldemort, whether carried out by moral strength or lack of courage, is crucial for his real education outside the classroom. His nod to Harry in the epilogue signals their common destinies; they are forever linked through Snape's actions. Hesse's Knecht died for only one child. Snape died for two.

We might pair any two characters in a book and consider them as foils. Why not Harry and Hermione instead of Harry and Draco? Both names begin with H, and a common r-vowel-sound, perhaps indicating an underlying connection. My choice of Draco is indicated by the common role that Snape plays in both of their apprenticeships, and raises the fact that both are young men. Indeed, this genre plays out the patriarchal obsession with men's roles in the training of men, whether in the time of Goethe or Rowling. During a ceremonial episode of Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre, Wilhelm is initiated into the secrets of the tower society, meets his father, and is confirmed in the paternity of his own son. Barbara Becker-Cantarino (1993) places this scene at the center of a patriarchal tale through which the trials and tribulations all happen and are resolved in a 'natural order' that substantiates the Fatherland. All situations that conflict with this order and all characters that threaten or question this seemingly benign, natural patriarchy have been delegated to the past through this ritual. Each Harry Potter book has its own scene of initiation, during which Harry is privy to previous secrets about his own and others' pasts. Indeed, the entire tale is one of being initiated into a world that one never knew of before, from the moment Harry

receives his letter. These scenes, too, serve a similar service to patriarchy. However, the ones that are most relevant to our current discussion are those that involve Snape. In the fifth book, *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry looks in the pensive and learns that his father was not the hero he had imagined. James Potter is teasing Snape, and it is clear that this is not the only time. Snape gets angry and tells Harry to leave and never come back. Did he not want Harry to see this memory merely because it was embarrassing? It seems more plausible that more occlumency lessons would enable Harry to learn too many secrets too soon in his apprenticeship. The anger could have been a mask for concern. Indeed, Harry's demonstration at this point of being able to bounce Snape's spell back might have been the real indicator that the lessons had been successful. He was able to both successfully bounce the spell, and to do so in a moment of defiance; both were likely Snape's objectives as the teacher. Meanwhile, Harry is allowed to learn that Snape has always had a genuine talent for potions, setting the stage for Harry to trust Snape in the future as a talented wizard. The sixth book is an entire allegory of Snape the secret hero. Was it really by chance that Harry was able to use Snape's old copy of the Potions textbook? This seems doubtful. Rather, the text is one more special gift in a line of secret treasures, from the invisibility cloak to the marauder's map to the sword of Gryffindor, and finally the deathly hallows.

For most of the story, Snape must keep his identity as behind-the-scenes puppet master from his apprentice. These scenes that reveal information about Snape, however, also tell a tale of Lily Potter, a symbol of love, but also a symbol of woman. Lily as a woman is a love interest, and a mother. Like Hermione, she is supposedly a very talented student. However, in patriarchy this is a mere side interest.

Considering the existing lay and academic discussions of patriarchy in literature and real life, it is a bit surprising to find contemporary novels like the Harry Potter books perpetuating the normativity of pedagogy that serves the apprenticeship of the male individual to leave a happy and productive life. Wizards seem to live in a perpetual 1950s society, where women can be smarter but serve mostly to support men's general welfare and well-being. Fans looked forward to the long-awaited kiss between Ron and Hermione, but few can explain why Hermione would ever really be attracted to Ron. McGonagall is a grown-up Hermione who chose the spinster life of a teacher over the homemaker's life of Mrs. Weasley. Snape figures in this patriarchal reproduction as well. It is his love for Lily that is the node of all plot trajectories, including his relationships to Harry, Dumbledore, and Voldemort. Patriarchy is maintained by this key figure's use of a woman on a pedestal as his moral compass. The absent mother is further central to the Bildungsroman. It enables a father or other male figure to bond with the apprentice, and through this bonding to identify those virtues that matter most. It might be love, as Rowling declares in many interviews. It might be honesty, constancy, or anything else. But in patriarchy certain virtues rise above the others. When the father sends his son into an apprenticeship, those that matter are revealed. Wilhelm Meister is persuaded by a man he trusts that his son should receive a limited, technical, and thus genuine education. In the tale we are discussing, Harry tries on a variety of these male authority figures, and ends his education by sending his own son off to Hogwarts, declaring that Snape "was probably the bravest man I ever knew."

Our final consideration of Snape addresses his role in Harry's education from the perspective that the acculturation or Bildung of an individual models a political process. In this sense, the pairing needs to shift from Harry and Draco to Harry and the Wizarding world. And the final point of my discussion of the Great Snape Debate is that Snape claimed so much attention precisely because of his parallel roles in the bringing forth of both members in this pair. For both Harry and for the Wizarding world, Snape was the master teacher, analogous to the Tower Society member observing and manipulating behind the scenes. He established this relationship and hence preserved the existence of Hogwarts –

Rowling's 'pedagogical province' into the future through his self-sacrifice, in the same way that Josef Knecht saved Castalia in the distant future of Hesse's time. This connection is not as far-fetched as it might at first seem. Since at least Plato's Republic and Homer's Iliad, people have been linking the education of an individual with the evolution of a community, and using one as the metaphor for the other. Politics as theater provided a model for public rhetoric (Chytry 1989). The analogies that I have been considering between Harry Potter and his predecessors within the tradition of the Bildungsroman lead us in this direction as well, because Goethe was directly concerned with this very fundamental

identification of the individual and the community, culture, or nation. He worked closely with Friedrich Schiller, famous among other things for his letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man (1794/2004), on a common 'aesthetic agenda'. Schiller's letters advocated the creation of a progressively improved society via an appropriate education of each individual within the community. Reacting to the disappointing outcomes of the French Revolution, especially the bloodshed and terrors that followed, he was depressed by the lack of superior morality present in the revolutionary order; his plan was to elevate the moral character of a people by first touching their souls with beauty. Hence politics and aesthetics were in this vision inextricably linked. The teacher and the state-builder were both master craftsmen; both the oversight of apprenticeship and the bringing forth of a better society required that these practices be conceived as artwork. And both the adult member of society and the society itself were 'organic bodies' that emerge through design.

It is reasonable in this context to read Goethe's novels as his own treatise on this connection. Indeed, Marc Redfield (1996) does precisely this, and notes that the Wanderjahre has routinely been received as a political discourse. In fact, it specifically moves as a work of literature from the adventures and inward reflections of the individual toward action on the world. This movement from the internal and theory to practice and political utopia is a narrative of Bildung, which Redfield describes as "the elaboration of a notion of art as techne, in the course of which aesthetics emerges as a highly effective, and profoundly unstable, political force" (17). In the context of Harry Potter, whether Hogwarts and his apprenticeship has led him to be the perfect member of the fairest society, or whether Voldemort wins in the end, either outcome might claim as the victor to be the utopia. Snape, as a member of Slytherin House, whose members have a reputation for siding with power and the probable winners in conflicts, has his hand in each potential Utopia. That is, as a particularly smart Slytherin, he can see the potential in each, and has the wisdom to make sure he has a hand in every conceivable



Depiction of Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in Weimar, Germany

outcome. The question of Voldemort is painted as a moral question, but it might be understood as a political one, the production or formation of the polis, the fairest and best life. Who can say which is the utopia, with or without Voldemort? Since we have through the seventh book, we know which outcome the narrator comes to think is best.



Nazi symbol
Schutzstaffel (SS)
symbol, drawing the
connection between
Voldemort and
Heinrich Himmler's
police forces

More to the point, this thematic investigation of the Bildungsroman makes more sense when we think about Rowling's interest in exploring Fascism and racist ideologies in the Harry Potter books. Nazi Germany is a clear model for the interest of many wizards in preserving the 'pureblood' character of the Wizarding world. It is surely no accident that Harry carries the thunderbolt symbol on his forehead, the same symbol worn by Nazi SS soldiers, nor that Hermione introduces a movement to challenge the existing second-class status of 'magical creatures'. Given that the aesthetic politics of the Romantics has been identified repeatedly by scholars as critical to the evolving German consciousness of nationhood and history (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990), any parable that evokes similar themes is bound to connect in some way to the literature that can be linked to such a consciousness. The Bildungsroman genre is not inherently fascist and racist; but a novel of apprenticeship to adulthood that explores themes of fascism and racism will undoubtedly share common motifs with those early works upon which fascist and racist ideologies have been crafted. My claim is that Snape helps to focus our attention on these issues mainly by requiring us to think about the debate regarding his allegiances. Snape's moral character determines whether the world is fundamentally good or bad, or in this case, welcoming of diversity or fascist in its racist ideologies.

When Redfield refers to *techne*, he is noting that the political is a plastic art, fiction in the strictest sense. To say that the political is a plastic art in no way means that the polis is an artificial or conventional formation, but that the political belongs to the sphere of what Aristotle named *techne*. The state is artwork; the community itself is in essence organic; and this organic accomplishment finds itself in the *techne* of art. This might explain to readers of Wilhelm's *Lehrjahre* why his experiences with a wandering theater company could be good preparation for his later role in society. Presumably there is a fundamental, deep aesthetic connection between the crafter of the stage performance and the crafter of a state. Indeed, the members of the Tower Society have moved from crafting apprenticeship in the first book to establishing utopian communities in the second. Their earlier work was apparently a warm-up for this latter statecraft. The struggle for the kind of Wizarding world that will emerge in the land of Harry Potter also requires statesmanship, just as an artist or craftsman can only do his or her job by using appropriate skills and crafts. Voldemort and Dumbledore are sculpting the fate of the world through Snape as a tool; but at the same time, Snape is sculpting the fate of his world as well, and Dumbledore and Voldemort are his tools. We can say that Snape was the best craftsman of them all. In the case of the French Revolution, the new order was far bloodier than the old one. Snape placed himself all along in a position to influence the new order regardless of who is in charge. He knew better than to destroy Voldemort himself; better would be for him to be toppled by a collection of youth rising up against him. In arranging his own death, Snape secures a more

lasting and satisfying outcome.

Lacoue-Labarthe (1990) defines *techne* more precisely as the surplus of nature, through which nature 'deciphers' and presents itself. In this sense, *techne* in the context of political organicity is the surplus necessary for a society to present and recognize itself. The implication is that art has a political function of deciphering the organic emergence of the community and therefore of making it possible for the community to recognize itself as a community. Most simply, we can apply this to Harry Potter and say that, as a work of art, this collection of novels serves to (re)present society to itself, so that we within this society can better know what we accept as true and natural. I worked within this form of criticism in my contribution to the first volume of *Harry Potter's World*. I suggested that the popularity of the books was consistent with their role as cultural products that reflect a postmodern era of emerging sociopolitical realities and the provisional nature of knowledge. Hence the idea that these books 'belong' to us because we live in 'Harry Potter's world'. More relevant to this discussion is Snape as political artist, to which I alluded above in his role as the confessor hero. As the only character to win the trust of both Dumbledore and Voldemort, both the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters, he is able to sculpt the outcome he himself designs. While Snape looks suspicious to Harry from the start, he is watching over him and protecting him as early as a quidditch match in the first year. It is Snape who kills Dumbledore, at the Headmaster's own request, making it possible for Snape himself to seem to be the rightful owner of the Elder Wand; this directs Voldemort's attention to Snape, away from Harry and Draco. It is Snape who artfully waits to kill Dumbledore after Draco has already disarmed Dumbledore, so that Draco can in fact be the true secret owner of the wand, and also appear to have tried to kill Dumbledore as directed. This critical staging of the owner of the Elder Wand makes it probable that Harry will be able to disarm Draco later, becoming the owner of the wand. He also waits for Draco to choose not to kill Dumbledore, so that Draco's apprenticeship can take the correct turn. Finally, Snape artfully releases his memories to Harry at just the time he deems appropriate, so that Harry can know his true motivations, understand that Snape sent the doe Patronus, and fully comprehend the fact that Harry himself is a horcrux. Looking back, who could believe that Harry would be able to steal a peek at Snape's worst memory back when they are involved in the occlumency lessons? Surely Snape, who can deceive a wizard as powerful as Voldemort, would only intentionally let Harry learn this first lesson, more important than the occlumency, about his parents and their relationship to Snape. It is Snape who has orchestrated most everything that makes a difference in the ultimate unraveling of Voldemort.

The struggle of the Death Eaters is based on the identification of the nation with a single member of that nation. Voldemort and Voldemort's life are made synonymous with the life of the Wizarding world. Comparisons with Fascist Germany and the identification of the nation with a single leader are overt here. The claims of the Death Eaters (and the fears of all others) that Voldemort's ascendancy is fated grow out of this common slippage from politics as organic to politics as biologic. Lacoue-Labarthe's point - that racism is "primarily, fundamentally, an aestheticism" (69) - helps one appreciate the degree to which aesthetics, in the most general sense, shaped both the official culture and the ideological energy of Nazism, less in Hitler's or his party's relation-philistine at best-to the arts per se than in their understanding of politics as the community's

autoproduction in and through the spectacle of a 'natural destiny'. Rowling recreates this historical moment as allegory. The political thus becomes the production of itself as the total work of art, and thus also becomes, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Redfield have argued, a violent ideologization of the absolute, self-creating Subject of the metaphysical tradition, a subject that purports to embody itself in "an immediate and absolutely 'natural' essence: that of blood and race" (Redfield: 16-17). Rowling couldn't have been more skilled at translating these themes into contemporary literature. Such interpretations of the self-creating subject, personified here by Voldemort, represent an effort to discover non-reductive relations between twentieth-century fascism and a Western tradition for which the historical fascist regimes had, to be sure, utter contempt, but in the absence of which they are also inconceivable. The aesthetic politics of the Bildungsroman can thus be understood as necessarily embedded in Harry Potter's world as well.

Little Box, Political Bigwig

My purpose in placing Rowling in the context of Goethe, Hesse and other authors of the German Bildungsroman genre is not to claim that she is the Goethe of our times, although she may very well be. Rather, I want to note that the Harry Potter stories, in the books, films, fan writing, and media hype, have become a prominent feature of a transnational Bildung of our own, and therefore that we should consider the implications of a global community that uses these stories to make sense of the connections between education and the polis. We can also use our readings of these books to craft our own theories of apprenticeship and aesthetics (Appelbaum 2007). The craft of schooling is not as critical to the Bildung enterprise as the ways that the 'teachers' of our youth, more broadly conceived, in and out of school, teach by example. Most crucial are the opportunities given our youth to disobey their authorities in order to have essential educational adventures. The moral of Rowling's series might be a significantly conservative one, which aims to reproduce a culture rather than transform it, as if we already live in a present utopia. In this world-view, all is set aright in the end, if we follow our instincts rather than our authority figures - but only if these authority figures are manipulating our free will from behind the scenes, like Wilhelm's puppet masters. Otherwise, the only liberating pedagogy that can be conceived appears to us as arbitrary and uncontrollable, given that the best chance of success is when our youth do not heed our advice. The key moment is when we reveal our own true motives to our youth, establishing in this act the meaning of our relationships with them. (The pivotal scenes of resolution in each Bildungsroman convey this point. The timing of initiation into the society of the tower for Wilhelm, Knecht's confrontation with the Directorate of the Order, Snape's memories released at his death - each validates the free agency of the youth but purposefully guarantees that the motivations of the masters are in the long term more powerful educationally than the disobedience of the apprentices.)

Training of educators currently focuses worldwide on scientifically predetermined methods for producing facility with skills. School tends to reduce techne to recipe. Roosevelt's point in writing about Goethe back in 1980 was that we might be better served by allowing youth to act on their earnest openness to experience. "For without openness to experience, without the ability to take life and those around one seriously; above all, without the capacity to embrace that which is important to one's self - is any education possible?" (121) To redirect our attention towards the opportunities that youth have for

adventure outside of classrooms would be a massive cultural shift. What we find happening instead is the passive acceptance that such opportunities cannot be created by those adults who work with our youth. Read this way, works like Harry Potter reinforce stereotypes of bad teachers aloof to what youth do on their own. Such readings miss the careful oversight behind the scenes that enables adventure to be both dangerous and important, both life-threatening and adventurous enough. At the same time, the paradox remains: if we embrace the message, our culture does not change, because this kind of apprenticeship returns each apprentice to the place for which they were destined rather than transforming our community into a utopian polis. In other words, this reading opens us to the limits of our own consciousness: to heed the message would require a significant cultural transformation of which we are not able to conceive; at the same time, even if we did heed this message, the newly enacted pedagogy would be fundamentally conservative anyway, returning us to the constant reproduction of our culture rather than a truly revolutionary *techne*.

The Great Snape Debate leads us to the centrality of these issues in the light of aesthetic politics. It is not that Rowling necessarily advocates a conservative aesthetic politics of social reproduction, but that the conflation of the political with key political figures, such as a mass revolutionary movement with Voldemort as its figurehead, manifests itself in such a politics of aesthetics. From this perspective, the Great Snape Debate is an opportunity for opening ourselves to the understanding of these complex issues, rather than a tool for making decisions about the right pedagogy that can move society in the perfect direction. The link between the fantasy of such a rhetorical tool and the fascist ideologies of aestheticism is made more tangible: Voldemort's apprentices are true fanatics. We run the risk of applying moral lessons from literature, as if they are a technology for decision-making. Characters and artifacts are turned into symbols with deeper meanings. Here we can ironically learn a lesson from the story of Wilhelm Meister. In his *Wanderjahre*, there is a rather amusing fable of a small box that is missing its key. The box is an overt symbol for the concept of symbol itself. Thinking through this fable might help us consider Snape as well, who through most of the books in the Harry Potter series was himself a box missing its key. We could never see inside. In the Wilhelm story, the value of the box lies in the fact that the key is missing. Of course, the key is found, but in his rush to solve the mystery, Wilhelm's son breaks the key into pieces trying to open the box. The little box thus serves to represent the concept of symbol itself, as a gathering of little pieces, and as something which can never truly be opened. The power of Snape lies in his equally symbolic role. Despite the obvious allegorical narrative of Voldemort as the fragmented key, unable to be pieced together, Voldemort is more the foil in this case. It is Snape whom we can never really see inside of and who remains the enigma forever. Like the little box in Wilhelm Meister's *Wanderjahre*, Snape enframes what we can't know, both about him personally as a character, and about pedagogy, the unfolding and results of which we also cannot know.

In the Wilhelm story, Redfield explains, the contents of the little box remain a mystery, but we do learn something else: a skilled craftsman can in fact unlock a symbol, and that one of the secrets to being a skilled craftsman is the skill of keeping secrets secret. In the wake of the misguided attempt to unlock the secrets of the little box, to possess its meaning, a jeweler demonstrates that the two pieces of the key are magnetic; he quickly opens the box, but then swiftly shuts it again, intoning the dictum that such a mystery should never be

stirred. How many readers continue to use the first descriptions of Snape, the narrator's and Harry's perspectives, as a mean and scary teacher, as Daniel Lombard of the South Wales Argus did (before he had a chance to read the seventh and final book)? The Great Snape Debate was about the confusion of this description. All the outward signs of bad guy were doubly readable as cover for his status as good guy - which, in the debate, might have been a further cover for his tasks as a bad guy. Only the best teacher teaching by example rather than method could have orchestrated such a complexity. The Harry Potter Filks website (Marcius undated) splits its Snape pages horcrux-wise into two parts: "The (Relatively) Benign Years (Books One-Five)", and "The (Arguably) Malignant Years (Book Six and Beyond)". I am very fond of the appropriately ambiguous and permeable, parenthetical titles.

Snape, I claim, is both the mysterious box and the jeweler. He is the box because of his remaining a mystery despite the key he provided, the memories in the pensieve. They gave us a peek but did not let us stir.

And he is the jeweler, because he summoned forth the magic that became techne, fundamentally linked to the unknowability of the symbol. Following the politics of aesthetics, a symbol's mélange of secrecy, techne, and formal totalization acquires political clout through the valorization of a pragmatic aesthetic.

Yet Snape was also a master craftsman of the polis. He could not have been trusted unless he was also a very bad man. The fundamental question is whether he could be the bad guy he needed to be due to a natural essence, or whether he crafted himself like an actor on the stage. The debate enframes a mystery we can't answer. By sacrificing his life he enables the mystery to live forever, opening us to the unanswerable. As Heidegger once said with respect to techne, the recognition of the ineffectuality of a political or social response leads both to move away from the call for a violent recapturing of a primordial techne, and to suggest instead that within the enframing lies an opportunity to once again experience the disclosure of a sense of limitation (Tabachnik 2006). The power of The Great Snape Debate is that it allows us to understand how neither bumper sticker gets it right, how both sides of the Snape Debate book need to be there: the existence of the debate itself represents the important questions of apprenticeship and their relation to the artful vision of the fairest and best life.



Opening the box does not solve the mystery; we are instead confronted with the enframing that helps us see our own limitations

Endnotes

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