

Snape Loved Lily and Other Lies We Tell Ourselves

The status of Severus Snape as a hero in the Harry Potter series is intensely debated: while some scholars, like Maria Nikolajeva, support the textual portrayal of Snape as a heroic martyr whose sacrifice defines his goodness, others view him as abusive, emotionally repressed, and juvenile. In this essay, I will establish a widely accepted definition and expectations of a literary hero in fantasy literature using ideas from Joseph Campbell, Diana Wynne Jones, and Lori M. Campbell. Some qualities that will be addressed are a hero's innate talents, how he is viewed and treated by others in his community, his choices in the face of known danger, his internal honor code, and whether his actions are in the spirit of self-sacrifice. Then, I will juxtapose Snape's actions in the final two books of the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), to the pre-established definition of a hero, particularly arguing against Nikolajeva's stance that Snape is a tragic hero whose actions were influenced by a genuine care for Harry. This paper will also explore arguments from Peter Appelbaum's "The Great Snape Debate," where he argues that Snape is a confessor hero, and Kathleen McEvoy's "Heroism in the Margins," where she argues that Snape's heroic actions do not make him a likeable person. To conclude, it is important to note that I am not arguing that Snape is a villain, but, rather, I will propose that it is motive, rather than behavior, that ultimately defines a hero and argue that, while some of Snape's actions are, objectively, heroic, the motives behind his actions are actually toxic and dangerous, and characterized by a distinct lack of concern for Harry as human being, and, in short, that he should not be praised by the other characters in the series.