

MUGGLE RELIGIOUS STUDIES: IS SNAPE THE NEW JUDAS?

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
Of the James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

At Mercer University

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF DIVINITY

Atlanta, GA

2018

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children; Savannah, Ryann, and Sam Jam. May the three of you always dream big, always use your imaginations, and never stop striving for greatness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people that I must thank as this study comes to completion. I would like to give my heartfelt gratitude to the faculty at McAfee School of Theology for giving me the opportunity to pursue my Masters degree in a truly amazing environment. I always felt supported, championed, and encouraged during my three years on campus. I would especially like to thank Dr. Garber and Dr. Holmes for all the guidance and great advice they provided during this journey of thesis writing. I could not have completed the task without the pair of you and the constant assurance provided by your support and assistance. Dr. Garber, it has truly been a pleasure and I will be forever grateful to you for introducing me to the study of Bible and Popular culture. Dr. Holmes, thank you so much for offering your time and for being a shining example of the kind of teacher I aspire to be.

I would also like to extend my gratefulness to Dr. Nancy deClaissé-Walford. Your guidance, your patient listening, your compassionate responses, and your excellent standard of teaching will always be a special part of my time at McAfee. I have treasured every minute spent chatting, laughing, and even crying (just once) with you in your office. These moments carried me through the challenges and difficulties of pursuing a Masters degree as a returning adult student with all the responsibilities of parenting three children. Thank you Dr. “DCW,” you made this experience one I will always look back on fondly.

I would not have completed this degree without the support and love of my family either. I want to thank all three of my kids for being patient with their tired and overworked mother, for accepting the answer, “not right now, momma’s writing”, over and over for the last couple of years. I would like to thank my husband Sam for believing in me and for supporting my dreams, no matter how crazy or how big! I would finally like to thank my parents, Vanessa and J.V. Rush, for all the help they have provided regarding the kids these last few years. Without the two of you, this degree simply would not exist. I cannot thank you both enough for the tireless example of sacrificial love that you have provided for me and my family during this time.

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ABSTRACT

MUGGLE RELIGIOUS STUDIES: IS SNAPE THE NEW JUDAS?
Under the direction of DAVID G. GARBER, PhD.

The intersection of biblical texts with popular culture is endlessly fascinating and always changing as culture continues to provide new materials to discuss. It is the objective of this thesis to place two well known characters, one from the New Testament and one from popular literature, into dialogue with one another in order to see how they interact with and influence each other. The character of Judas from the Gospel of John will be placed into comparative conversation with the character of Severus Snape from J.K. Rowling's book series, *Harry Potter*. Reception History, with a brief section of Literary Criticism that considers characterization techniques, will be the methodological approach for this thesis study. The result of this study is to see how the character of Judas in Christian tradition has inspired and shaped the formation of the literary character of Snape, and to also consider how when seen in reverse, the character of Snape causes us to revisit our understanding of the character of Judas. The questions sparked by such a study encourage readers toward a deeper understanding of their personal theology and toward the pursuit of further explorations of Bible and Pop intersections.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Bible and Pop Culture Intersections

My love for books began at an early age. As a child I reveled in the magic of the world of *Narnia*.¹ I had mischievous adventures with *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*.² I sailed the seas with Max to an island inhabited by beasts in *Where the Wild Things Are*.³ I devoured books while other children played video games and sports. As I got older, I fed my imagination with the likes of J.R.R. Tolkien, Harper Lee, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, and Jules Verne. My love affair with books deepened with the release of J.K. Rowling's, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* in 1998.⁴ I eagerly awaited each additional installment and turned to the series time and time again, the familiar words never ceasing to bring me comfort and pleasure. The cultural impact of Rowling's book series exists on a global scale, with 450 million copies in print world wide. Such numbers do not do justice to the intense passion and utter devotion of the fans of the wizarding world, including myself. Midnight book releases, followed by all day binge reading is

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe: The Chronicles of Narnia* (United Kingdom: Geoffrey Bles Publishing, 1950).

² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Company, 1920).

³ Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

⁴ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Levine Books, 1998).

only a part of the phenomenon that is *Harry Potter*. Rowling gave readers all over the world a reason to read with enthusiasm again; she connected us across oceans and vast distances through her portrayal of a brave, sensitive, and slightly mischievous young orphan boy who stands for love, friendship, and loyalty in the face of evil. It is a beautiful story, one that inspired me as a teenager and continues to do so as a seminarian today.

There is not much scholarly work on the *Harry Potter* series, and approaching it as a basis for my thesis poses many challenges. Still, I press on because I see a correlation between the world of *Harry Potter* and the Christian faith. Rowling told interviewer Shawn Adler that to her “the religious parallels have always been obvious, but I never wanted to talk too openly about it because I thought it might show people, who just wanted the story, where we were going.”⁵ She held back from using any overtly obvious references to faith for the preservation of the story. Inevitably, those of us who are familiar with the story of Christ would have guessed at the ultimate triumph of Harry over evil. The progression of the story from book one to the final book seven shows the evolution of not only Harry but also the maturity of the readers. By the final installment, Rowling felt confident enough to creatively reveal her religious influences through the direct use of biblical scripture. Harry’s parents were murdered when he was just a baby, and they have written upon their graves scripture from 1 Corinthians 15:26, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”⁶ Astute readers will also recognize the inscription upon

⁵ Shawn Adler, “Harry Potter Author J.K. Rowling Opens Up About Books Christian Imagery,” Interview, 2007, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1572107/> (accessed November 10, 2016).

Dumbledore's sister's grave as the direct words of Jesus from Matthew 6:20, "Where your treasure is, will your heart be also."⁷ These two examples are only a mere glance at the many beautifully integrated references to the Christian faith within the series of books. Yet, despite this revelation, this book continues to be regarded by some faith organizations as "witchcraft" and anti-Christian. The problem is that many Christians are at home with the Bible but not comfortable with fiction; "inviting them to read other materials can provide for them new eyes and ears and, therefore, new experiences with the Bible."⁸ I seek to present a connection for others between the wizarding world and Christianity, and in doing so hopefully this book that I love will be enjoyed and engaged by the people I fellowship with. I believe the Christian reader can see their faith reflected in her work and such echoes reflect the strong presence of Christ in our culture.

Thesis Question

Rowling creates an enchanting world full of complex and multifaceted characters, yet one man stands apart as particularly fascinating. The Professor of Potions, Severus Snape, is an "amalgam of darkness and light."⁹ He is a man with divided emotions and loyalties, playing the roles of both adversary and protector. Rowling portrays Snape as a

⁶ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 2007), 328.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁸ Jamie Clark-Soles, "Teaching the Bible with Literature," in *Teaching the Bible: Through Popular Culture and the Arts*, ed. Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 242.

⁹ William Irwin and Gregory Bassham, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 56.

traitor, a noticeable parallel to the depiction of the biblical character of Judas throughout history. I will be posing the question, in what ways does Rowling's portrayal of Severus Snape resemble the depiction of Judas in Christian tradition, especially in the Gospel of John? I will explore this thesis question through three sub-questions. First, what are the particular ways in which J.K. Rowling characterizes Snape in *Harry Potter*? Second, what are the particular ways that the Gospel of John characterizes Judas? Third, in what ways might Rowling's characterization of Snape be influenced by the traditional interpretation of Judas, and how might her parallel alter the way we perceive Judas today? These questions provide insight into an example from popular culture as it is influenced by Christian tradition, and vice versa. Uncovering comparisons such as these is enriching to our spiritual journeys and the endeavor minds the gap between our faith and our social locations.

Historical Background

Essays and books abound pondering the underlying faith of the series by Rowling; all asking very deep questions of what some would simply dismiss as only children's books. Luke Bell writes, "the Christian faith speaks about what is most fundamental in the human condition. Good writing does the same, so it is to be expected that there is common ground."¹⁰ Rowling indeed provides good writing in which to find comparable ground with our faith. Scripture has consistently been a presence in popular media; "fiction, hymns, and poetry employing biblical themes have always made up a huge

¹⁰ Luke Bell, *Baptizing Harry Potter: A Christian Reading of J.K. Rowling* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010), 28.

portion of American Publishing.”¹¹ Audiences have always sought fiction inspired by the familiar Bible stories of our faith. This subtext allows readers and grand thinkers alike to ponder the depth of the meaning behind such traditional faith stories, to delve into the world of speculation without feeling the judgmental glare of the rigid traditionalists. The first important novel of this kind was William Ware’s *Julian: Or, Scenes in Judea*, written in 1865 “which described gospel events through the letters of its fictional protagonist.”¹² The Bible has also been the basis for visual arts, music, and film. All the various appropriations of scripture exhibit the permeation of faith throughout popular culture. Scholars today are beginning to advocate the use of comparative texts from popular culture to help “students to become critical and creative readers and thinkers.”¹³ This is not a dumbing down, but an opportunity to engage and analyze the Bible in the context of the various forms influenced by it. It becomes an informative and valuable intersection between faith and culture where non-traditional texts can attend to the gaps that have caused separation. Jamie Clark-Soles says that “both the Bible and other literature engage the great themes: truth, despair, sacrifice, hate, love, fear, questing, death, redemption, deceit, pain, joy, second chances, and human motivations.”¹⁴

¹¹ Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Guide to Ideas & Issues of the Bible: Popular Culture and Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 407.

¹² *Ibid.*, 408.

¹³ Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray, “Introduction,” in *Teaching the Bible: Through Popular Culture and the Arts*. ed. Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 3.

¹⁴ Clark-Soles, “Teaching the Bible with Literature,” 242.

As for research supporting the Judas comparison section of this thesis, I will focus on the Gospel of John. I single his voice out among the gospel writers because I find space in his depiction of Judas that allows readers to ponder whether the disciple was more than a traitor. This is in great part due to the gospel writer's characterization techniques. R. Alan Culpepper was one of the first to look at "all the main characters in the gospel and ask questions about the means and effects of characterization."¹⁵ All that we can know for certain about a character is developed and described by the writer, and often they give us a limited picture. They choose to present or disregard particular traits as they orchestrate the emotions, settings, and impact of a story all through their characterization techniques. Culpepper suggests that the Fourth Gospel provides an excellent source of insight into these concepts of character development. John portrays individuals within his narrative as stereotypical defined character types, assigning certain moral or immoral tendencies to each character. He deliberately composes types to stand along side or apart from the central figure, "like the grain in wood, the interactions between the characters in John tend to run in one direction, that is, in response to Jesus."¹⁶ John's characterization of Judas is particularly limited, and it is this aspect of the gospel that will garner the most attention for this study.

¹⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), xi.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

Methodology and Details of the Study.

This thesis study embarks on a fairly new journey within the world of scholarly work, Reception History. This method of study is still in its beginnings, still finding its identity and defining its objectives. Reception history, with the help of such authors as Dan Clanton and Brennan Breed, is finding its way as a significant movement in biblical scholarship. This method explores all the different ways that people have received, approached, and used biblical texts throughout history. It gives credence to the many different interpretations people discern when reading the same text. Reception history brings forth multifaceted interpretations from our own backgrounds, our own social locations. It is a chance to let the biblical text live again; to let the familiar become strange once more. Reception history is how we try to make sense of the text; “the text itself is impotent until we realize its potential meaning and while we are engaged with it, we may be influenced by our interpretation.”¹⁷ This approach proves exceptionally useful as the method to explore the intersecting of popular culture and biblical texts. The occurrences and parallels of scripture in the *Harry Potter* story lend themselves easily to a method that delves into the connection between readers and text. I will consider how our reception of Judas throughout history has affected the way Rowling portrayed her “traitor” in her books. I will also look at how the reception of Snape possibly causes us to reconsider the traditional receptions of Judas. This method truly exhibits the

¹⁷ Margaret Davies, “Reader Response Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* ed. R.J. Coogins and J. L. Houlden (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 578.

“partnership between the author, the compiler, and the audience.”¹⁸ The reception of literature is not a passive action, but an active event for us as readers. After all, as Margaret Davies says “reading is a dangerous activity. It can change our perspective, stir our emotions, and provoke us to action.”¹⁹

While the main method for this work is Reception History, this study will also apply an element of Literary Criticism, particularly the exploration of characterization development within the *Harry Potter* text and the Gospel of John. The term *Characterization* originated in the fifteenth century with Aristotle’s classic work, *Poetics*.²⁰ Aristotle considered character to be one of the essential elements of drama, crucial to any story. Culpepper points out that “it is surprising that the art of characterization has not yielded more to analysis than it has.”²¹ Since Aristotle, critical study devoted to the development of characters is lacking, but contemporary studies are emerging with more regularity. The late American literary critic, Seymour Chatman, discussed characters as “autonomous beings with traits and personalities.”²² Other scholars see characters as simplistic plot functions, which does have merit when one

¹⁸ Randall C. Webber, “Reader Response Criticism,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 738.

¹⁹ Davies, “Reader Response Criticism”, 578.

²⁰ Aristotle. 2015. *Poetics*. Tustin, CA: Xist Classics, 2015. *eBook edition*.

²¹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of The Fourth Gospel*, 101.

²² Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1932), 119.

considers the brevity of development Judas receives in the Fourth Gospel. “Most of the characters appear on the literary stage only long enough to fulfill their role in the evangelist’s representation of Jesus and the responses to him.”²³ John’s gospel does not seem concerned with any extensive character development, leaving much of that susceptible to the reader’s interpretation. The constrained character description choices that are made in John have led readers to ponder the mysterious actions of Judas, and consider perhaps ulterior motives not defined by the writer.

Moving beyond a “flat” character approach, the English novelist E. M. Forster thought that “characters can be transparent,” meaning we can see them fully exposed.²⁴ Rowling’s characters are certainly much more than “flat”; we know them quite intimately as we read the series. Her devotion to each character’s development shows a commitment to bring forth an authentic experience to which every reader can relate. This close reading of characterization techniques from these two proposed sources will expose the existence of an intersection between popular culture and the biblical text; an intersection of value to our journey of faith and our development of a personal theology.

²³ Culpepper, *Anatomy of The Fourth Gospel*, 102.

²⁴ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 73.

Thesis Chapter Outline

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CHAPTER TWO

SEVERUS SNAPE

The Pop Culture British Invasion

There is no denying the phenomenon of *Harry Potter* in American culture. This series of books gives American readers exactly the type of story that satisfies our sense of adventure, as well as satiating the anglophiles that live within so many of us. In this second chapter, I will discuss a brief biography and background of the author, followed by an in-depth analysis of the *Harry Potter* text with particular attention to its characterization of the Potions professor, Severus Snape.

The Creator of the Wizarding World of Magic

J.K. Rowling was born July 31st in 1965; she shares this birthday with Harry in the *Harry Potter* book series. She was born in Gloucestershire, England and is a real life “rags to riches” success story. She had an extremely rough childhood, which is reflected in the abuse that Harry endures in the books. She moved beyond those tough times and was well educated as an adult. She studied French, Greek Mythology, and the Classics at the University of Exeter; all of which can be noticed within her writing as influences. Rowling was raised Catholic and attends the Church of Scotland today. Her education and her religious backgrounds are both evident in her writing, though she often refrains from sharing any personal revelations of theology. She is, however, known for speaking out about her beloved book series through social media platforms. Rowling is notorious for posting smart remarks and bold quips in reply to “cheeky” comments from

her fan base. Rowling, despite being a very introverted person, holds back very little of her passion when it comes to all things *Harry Potter*. While she has shared many insights on social media and in interviews about many of the characters, I find her comments about Severus Snape to be the most fascinating. In particular, she stated in an interview in 1999, that “everyone should keep their eye on Snape, I’ll just say that, because there’s more to him than meets the eye.”¹ Her teasing hints at Snape’s full value to the series were exactly the fuel readers needed to stay hooked and intrigued, and to begin to look closer at the character many had simply overlooked or dismissed. The appallingly rude and always awful Potions professor may be more complex than he appears, and readers would soon learn the truth of his character as told through a skillfully crafted journey of redemption.

The Characterization of Severus Snape

Of the many characters within the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, most would not select Potions professor Severus Snape as their favorite. Even those unfamiliar with the book series could tell you that the hero of the story is Harry. Upon reading the full series of books, one begins to see that this story has more than one hero. Harry would never have successfully faced the evils of Voldemort and his band of Death Eaters without the help and support of his friends. Many secondary characters play crucial roles in the fight for the collective good. Harry has a few professors in particular that aid him along his journey. Some in obvious ways, such as through private lessons with

¹ J.K. Rowling, Twitter post, November 27, 2015, 1:43 a.m., <http://twitter.com/jkrowling>.

headmaster Albus Dumbledore or professor Remus Lupin, both of whom provide Harry with skills and information to combat the villainous actions of Voldemort. Other characters contribute to Harry's success in less obvious ways; a reader must be paying close attention. This is especially true regarding Severus Snape; a truth that is very hard to see due primarily to the portrayal of his character by Rowling.

The characterization of Severus Snape by J.K. Rowling is complicated and yet it is beautifully cultivated. It seems at first that Snape is cast as the foil to Harry. Rowling portrays Snape as the ultimate dreaded teacher, the one professor whom all students fear and most of the staff avoids. His actions are often so abrasive, that it is difficult to imagine him capable of such things as loyalty and love. He is sarcastic and his unexplained bitterness is bracing. For the majority of first time readers, Snape is not a beloved character; he is in fact, despised by most readers. He is a constant source of difficulty for Harry and his friends. He treats the students unfairly, behaves pettily, and mocks everyone. While he seems to display outright dislike for nearly everyone he encounters, the reader will soon learn that Snape is more than the archetypal foil to the hero.

Snape and Harry at Odds

Right from the beginning, Snape exposes his ill feelings towards the young hero Harry. In the first book Harry sees the professor from a far and Rowling describes Snape as having "greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and sallow skin," effectively placing him in

a category of dislike just by noting his unattractive appearance.² As Harry and Snape lock eyes across the Great Hall, the scar upon Harry's forehead (a result of the attempted murder of him by Lord Voldemort) begins to sear and the sense of foreboding and mystery begins. "The Pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off was the feeling Harry had gotten from the teacher's look --- a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all."³ His new Gryffindor friends tell Harry that Snape "knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts."⁴ This comment leads the reader and Harry to assume that this man is a dark wizard in some capacity. Harry continues to try and catch the gaze of Snape, but the professor never looks back and this only fuels Harry's curiosity and intrigue. For Harry, a boy with a propensity for trouble and adventure, Snape provides a thrilling challenge right from the start which will lead to all manners of mischief and bravery.

Their first speaking encounter comes in chapter eight of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which is aptly named "The Potions Master." The title alerts the reader to Snape's importance for Harry's journey, and we are not let down as the scene unfolds. The reader finds young Harry settling in at Hogwarts and attending his first classes in wizardry. The Potions classes ominously take place down in the dungeons; a cold and creepy locale to reflect the professor who fancies the dark arts. Snape takes this first meeting to set the tone and stage for their relationship; "Ah, yes," he said softly, "Harry

² J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Levine Books, 1998), 126.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Potter. Our new...celebrity.”⁵ This obvious jab is followed by snickers from the attending Slytherins and Harry notes that Snape’s “eyes were black like Hagrid’s, but they had none of Hagrid’s warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.”⁶ Again Rowling develops a very foreboding character image for Snape, clearly pointing the reader to his chilling and subversive ways. Snape embarrasses Harry in front his peers for his obvious lack of potions knowledge, and insults the class at large by calling them all “dunderheads.”⁷ Harry, who until his letter to Hogwarts arrived had no prior awareness of the wizarding world, was effectively humiliated and left wondering what the source of this deep seeded hatred could be.

After their first classroom encounter, Harry complains to his friend Hagrid. “But he seemed to really hate me.’ ‘Rubbish!’ Said Hagrid. ‘Why should he?’ Yet Harry couldn’t help thinking that Hagrid didn’t quite meet his eyes when he said that.”⁸ Author Lorrie Kim writes that “some of the most trusted adults in Harry’s life seem to recognize Snape’s tyranny but permit it to go unchecked.”⁹ It would seem others know something about Snape they are unwilling to divulge, and for Harry this only spurs his suspicions of the professor. Rowling provides for us, through this brief but painful encounter, a

⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁸ Ibid., 141.

⁹ Lorrie Kim, *Snape a Definitive Reading* (Perkin, IL: Story Spring Publishing, 2016), 278.

glimpse into a heavier and perhaps darker background for Snape. Rowling leaves us wondering exactly what the nature of this relationship between Harry and Snape will become, and is it significant?

The relationship between Harry and Snape goes on throughout most of the series unchanged. Encounters between them have only served to further their intense dislike and distrust of one another. They regard each other with open hostility, though Harry begrudgingly, must show respect to the professor as an authority figure. They move in parallel to one another, seeming to be on opposite sides of the moral, social, and ethical debates of the Wizarding World. It does appear that Snape has been written by Rowling to be the foil to Harry, to be nothing more than a plot device. As the story progresses, however, we begin to see their relationship develop in unexpected ways.

Harry and Snape's Changing Relationship

As Harry and Snape continue to interact in the story, a certain ambiguity to Snape's character is revealed. Often, and surprisingly, Snape behaves in ways contrary to his dark reputation. It turns out that Snape is capable of moments of selfless bravery. Many times Harry and his friends assume that Snape is acting in opposition to them and to Dumbledore, only to find out he is fighting for the side of good. In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry accuses Snape of trying to steal the protected stone only to find out that Snape is one of the stone's protectors. In book three, *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Snape's character is revealed even further. In this story Snape confronts Harry and his friends for withholding the location of a wanted criminal. Snape is outraged with their treachery but despite his anger he still puts their

safety before his own. This tense situation evolves into a confrontation between a werewolf and an *animagus* (a person transformed into an animal); a confrontation that Harry, Ron, and Hermione find themselves standing dangerously in the middle of.¹⁰ Snape must step between the students and danger, and he does so courageously and without hesitation.

In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, it is revealed that Snape was once a Death Eater. This only serves to further Harry's distrust in the professor, yet Snape is one of the three who turn up to save his life when a hidden agent of Voldemort tries to murder him. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Snape is a known and active member of the Death Eaters, yet he spends time tutoring Harry privately in occlumency (a magical way to seal the mind from others). Snape does this so that Harry can protect himself from the intrusion of Voldemort into Harry's innermost thoughts. The sixth and seventh books of the series will reveal even more of the truth of the complexity of Severus Snape, and will be discussed later in this chapter. Up to this point, Snape has become almost heroic; and while perhaps he is still not in their good graces, he has shown a depth of character that the reader had not expected from him. His story tells us that greatness is for everyone, not just those who always walk the path of righteousness. Through Snape's actions he "becomes not attractive, but *something*. Potent. Magnetic. He commands attention. When he is brave, he is almost beautiful."¹¹

¹⁰ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 1999), 338.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

This shift in the relationship between Harry and Snape provides interesting insight into the parts of Snape he had tried to keep hidden. As he begins to reveal the ambiguity of his character, the reader begins to see his importance to the story in a new way. When the reader finally is let in on his past in the final two books, we see he is as complex as Rowling promised he would be. He truly is more than the archetypal enemy of the hero, though he is no saint. It is overly generous to paint him in too fair of a light. He is still mean and horrible to almost everyone. Still, Snape proves to be the most convoluted of all of Rowling's characters. This is exhibited not just through his relationship with Harry, but also in his interactions with the headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. It is through his relationship with Dumbledore, that Snape becomes mistakenly known to Harry and the entire wizarding world as the ultimate traitor.

Snape and Dumbledore

Snape's relationship with Dumbledore throughout the series serves to reveal his true nature to the reader. Snape deflects affection from everyone, choosing only to expose his true self to Dumbledore. The headmaster of Hogwarts is the epitome of wisdom and he alone sees the depth of Severus Snape's character. Other professors, such as Alistair Moody, are never quite sure of Snape's allegiance. "Course Dumbledore trusts you, growled Moody. 'He's a trusting man, isn't he? Believes in second chances. But me — I say there are spots that don't come off, Snape.'"¹² While most are secure in trusting Dumbledore's judgment, Moody points out that Snape's past is not easily forgotten by

¹² J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 2000), 472.

those who fight for the side of good. So why does Dumbledore trust Snape so implicitly? As it is revealed in the final two books, Dumbledore knows much more about Snape's past than any other person in the wizarding world.

The single most impactful moment between Dumbledore and Snape occurs in the sixth book of the series, *Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince*. Readers were startled right from the start of this book to find Dumbledore himself fatally injured and relying upon Snape's wealth of healing knowledge to save his life. Snape's ability to slow the deadly poisoning of the headmaster's body, coupled with his vast capability of discretion, is vital to Dumbledore's mission. This injury, however, would prove a foreboding sign of things to come. Harry suspects through out this book that Snape is colluding with Draco Malfoy, one of Harry's peers and enemies, to fulfill some evil plot against the headmaster. Harry tries to warn Dumbledore repeatedly, only to be assured that elements were at play that he could not understand.

In the final chapters, the story takes one of its darkest turns. Dumbledore is faced with the threat of death that Harry had feared for him all along. In a heartbreaking moment where a hint of some deep connection between Snape and Dumbledore is revealed, Harry's world is turned on its head. Snape takes the life of the beloved headmaster, and casts his lifeless body from the highest tower of the school. The reader, along with the wizarding world, is never the same. Snape had been the most trusted of allies for Dumbledore, and the headmaster had gone to great lengths to assure Harry and the other professors that Snape was on their side. In one moment, Snape has gone from disliked and distrusted teacher to the biggest traitor of wizarding history.

Fortunately for the reader, we are privy to information regarding this pivotal moment, information that the young hero and the other professors are not aware of. Readers know that Snape takes Dumbledore's life to fulfill a promise to the headmaster. Dumbledore was dying from the poisoning, and his mission was to give Harry as much information to defeat Voldemort as he could before death finally came for him. All along, there was a plot on the headmaster's life, but it was not a plot formed by Snape. As it turned out, Voldemort had chosen Draco Malfoy to kill the headmaster. Snape had been trying to prevent this from happening. He begrudgingly agreed to the personal request of Dumbledore to take the life of the headmaster if he was in threat of dying at Draco's hand. The pair of them acted to prevent Draco from having to commit murder, and murder of an already dying man at that. But in withholding their plan, they set Harry up to only see the treachery of Snape's actions. The death of Dumbledore set in motion the final stages of Harry's journey, and in the final book of the series we get to see Snape with all his glorious ambiguity finally exposed. The Potions professor becomes much more than simply a traitor.

Snape's Big Reveal

When the reader finally makes it to the last installment of the series, we come to understand Snape and Harry's relationship in a totally new light. Harry spends the majority of the final book engaging Snape, the Death Eaters, and Voldemort himself in battle. The time has finally come for good to face the encroaching threat of evil to the

wizarding world, and to deal with Voldemort once and for all. Many characters lose their lives in the ensuing fight, and Severus Snape is among them. He dies at the hands of Voldemort, and it is in his dying moments that Snape's entire character is revealed to Harry. His final act is one of a man in desperation to be known, a notion that Snape had run from his entire life. As he lies bleeding on the floor, Snape gives to Harry his most precious possession, his memories.

Harry watches the memories in the Pensieve as they tell the story of the Potions professor he had never truly understood.¹³ Snape met and fell in love with Harry's mother, Lily Evans, when he was nine years old. Lily would only ever regard him as a close friend, but their friendship carried on through five years of schooling. Lily met Harry's father, James Potter, at school and though she did not initially like him very much, she would later fall in love with him. Snape and James were at odds with one another right from the start, and when Lily chose James, Snape was forever altered. It was at this point that Snape began his journey on a darker path. He joined ranks with dark wizards and eventually became a Death Eater for Lord Voldemort. His life seemed consumed by hate and jealousy, and it was only a moment of spying for Voldemort that would change his course for good.

Snape overheard a prophecy that spoke of a young child who would be born and would bring the downfall of the Dark Lord. Snape carried this intel to his master, and to his horror it resulted in the murder of both James Potter and Snape's beloved Lily. Snape

¹³ The Pensieve is a magical object, a stone basin filled with a substance like liquid. The Pensieve is used to review a person's memories as if by video replay. This object is first introduced in the series in Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, p. 597.

was overcome with grief, and in his desperation he devoted himself to Albus Dumbledore and the side of good. He joined the Order of the Phoenix, the gathering of wizards and witches who fought against the Death Eaters and Voldemort, and also maintained his identity as a Death Eater under the advisement of Dumbledore. Snape became the greatest double agent the wizarding world would ever know. His love for Lily was the only redeeming quality Snape could hold on to, and despite his hate for James Potter and his guilt over Lily's death, it was this love that would create within him the desire to both protect and despise young Harry. It was also this love that would allow him to be an agent of good, while convincing the single most powerful dark wizard of all time, that he was also an agent of evil.

Knowing that love is the driving force behind Snape's actions, as rude and off-putting as he may be, Harry and the reader have newfound appreciation for the true character of Snape's hidden personality. Furthermore, it is revealed in Snape's memories the truth behind the death of Albus Dumbledore. Snape had only done what he was begged to do by the headmaster, and he had done it for selfless and brave reasons. Snape had compromised his own soul to save Draco and to exhibit his loyalty to Dumbledore. Everything that Harry had thought he knew about Snape changes with Snape's sacrificial death.

Severus Snape was not a traitor, and his life as well as his death had been in service to love. His actions may originate in guilt, but it is evident that his love for Lily is what keeps him going. Snape does what he must to preserve the life of the boy who belongs to the only person he has ever truly cared for. Rowling masterfully creates a

character that exemplifies the complexity of being human, of standing on the edge of right and wrong. Snape desperately grasps to hold himself level in two worlds simultaneously. He pulls off the “unspeakable under conditions that are unthinkable, accepting that his achievements will never be known.”¹⁴ He assumes a life that ensures he will be universally hated, and we as readers are witnesses to the underlying truth. Despite his choice to remain formidable to the end, after his death the wizarding world finally knew the truth of his loyalty and bravery.

Final Thoughts on Snape

I have shown how Rowling’s characterization creates a compelling story that is unique in its captivation of audiences around the world. Rowling creates characters that move upon a continuum of change and I have made an argument that Snape is the most pivotal character in the series. No character remains quite the same over the span of seven books, though some change much less than others. Snape, remarkably, provides the reader the biggest transformation. Rowling’s use of indirect characterization gives the reader insight into Snape’s motives and thoughts, but Rowling only allows this to shine through at the most opportune moments. She chooses to make Snape’s actions as impactful as possible, allowing the reader to ponder his significance to the story line at every step. Had he chosen to follow the path of darkness, the entire story would have fallen apart. Instead he is a fusion at all times of darkness and light, and the reader becomes more aware with every book that this character is key to Harry in some unknown way. Rowling says that “Snape is all grey. You cannot make him into a saint; he was vindictive and

¹⁴ Kim, *Snape: A Definitive Reading*, 107.

bullying. You cannot make him a devil; he died to save the wizarding world.”¹⁵ Snape may find a way to protect Harry, but it does not turn him into a hero. He is immensely brave, but remains as unpleasant and nasty as he has always been. Perhaps it is Snape’s hope that his sacrifice will absolve him of Lily’s death. It is a wonderful thought, the hope that love is capable of bringing about redemption. Snape’s emotions are certainly conflicted in his interactions with Harry, but no matter how much he seems to harbor hate, it does not negate his ability to love. In the end, Snape may be “profoundly good, profoundly evil, neither, and both.”¹⁶ And on that poignant note, I will move now to the characterization of the Gospel of John.

¹⁵ J.K. Rowling, Twitter post, November 27, 2015, 1:43 a.m., <http://twitter.com/jkrowling>.

¹⁶ Kim, *Snape: A Definitive Reading*, 115.

CHAPTER 3

JUDAS ISCARIOT

The Notorious Biblical Traitor

Judas Iscariot is known by many epithets; betrayer, traitor, culprit, murderer, liar, and devil are just a few of the negative titles he has carried throughout history. While the character of Judas may seem cut and dry, commentators and scholars continuously seek to answer the question, who is Judas Iscariot and what part did he play in the death of Jesus Christ? It is no secret that tradition places Judas firmly on the side of evil, but I propose that there is more to Judas than the scriptures and tradition lead us to believe. I will begin by giving a brief history of the name of Judas, followed by a brief mention of his various depictions in the synoptic gospels. I will then move to an introduction of the Gospel of John. This section will also include an exploration of the characterization techniques employed within the Fourth Gospel. I contend that it is more than a predilection to ambiguity and conspiracy that causes readers and scholars alike to see complexity within the figure of Judas, and I will attempt to find sufficient support for this belief within the text of John's gospel. I intend to argue that Judas has gotten a much worse reputation than he deserves, based on the actions and words recorded in the Gospel of John. Betrayer? Perhaps; maybe the truth is not as conclusive as it seems.

Who is Judas Iscariot? The name Judas is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Judah.¹ This was a very common name in Judaism and New Testament times; there were other members of Jesus' circle and family who bore the same name.² The addition of Iscariot was added to distinguish this Judas from other men sharing the same name. Iscariot may mean "a man from Karioth (southern Judea)," or it could even denote him as one of the "Sicarii Zealots."³ Judas was indeed from Judea, but there are those who hold to the Zealot theory. Albert Nicole, a minister of the Free Church in Switzerland and author of several books related to the New Testament, suggests that Judas being from Judea may place him with those enthusiastic, yet rebellious believers. Judea was ruled by the Romans and Judas would have known too well the oppression of their rule. As an outsider and charismatic Zealot, Nicole argues that Judas "was waiting for a deliverer perhaps more intently than the other disciples who were Galileans and under Herod Antipas."⁴ This would explain his willingness to join Jesus on his mission and perhaps explain his sometimes abrasive view points. Nicole suggests that Judas's desperate Messianic hopes made him "more an ardent patriot than a believer."⁵ Nicole might be reading too much into Judas, presuming to know his fears, loves, and true character, yet

¹ James M. Robinson, *Secrets of Judas: The Story of the Misunderstood Disciple and His Lost Gospel* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 24.

² Biblical examples of other men named "Judas" that were close to Jesus: John 14:22; Matt 13:55; Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13.

³ Robinson, *Secrets of Judas*, 35.

⁴ Albert Nicole, *Judas the Betrayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

this alternative origination theory is worth discussing. Opening up the enigma of Judas requires the consideration of various opinions and views, each bringing something new to the discussion. What scripture does tell us is that Judas is one of the original twelve disciples and his role is the group treasurer. Clearly that is very little information about a man who made quite a remarkable stamp on history. Judas is infamous for the betrayal of Jesus. Culpepper calls him the “paradigm of defection.”⁶ When you look up his name in the Oxford English dictionary, the definition that appears reads “a Judas is a person who betrays a friend or comrade.”⁷ How did his name come to signify treachery? The gospels leave his motives mostly unexplained, yet that has not stopped history from holding Judas up as the capstone example of falseness and betrayal.

Judas in the Synoptic Gospels

Ultimately, any discussion of Judas, once you establish the most basic information, delves into the controversy of his actions. Since we do not know much about him, speculation abounds as to his intentions and agendas. Turning to the source of the scriptures only proves to provide us with conflicting pictures. Each gospel account portrays Judas in a unique way. American Scholar James M. Robinson, who claims to write from an outsider’s perspective, says that the “Gospels were recorded in such a way as to convey the evangelizing point they had in mind.”⁸ In his writings about Judas, which include a brief survey of each gospel, Robinson attempts to find truth in the

⁶ Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 148.

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Judas.”

comparisons while allowing the texts to speak individually. According to him, the way each evangelist handles Judas does not result in him being quite as horrible as tradition compels us to believe. “To be sure, they do not in any sense of the word vindicate him,” but they offer up insight and explore a complexity to Judas that has been lacking.⁹ Mark’s gospel leaves no one untouched by mediocrity and disappointment, all twelve disciples are called out as lazy deserters (Mark 14:27, Mark 14:37 – 41). Judas fits right in with this crew, and he does not seem much worse than any of them in terms of loyalty to Jesus. Mark seems to imply that Jesus’s death fulfills scripture and that Judas simply fills a role. Robinson says, within the Gospel of Mark, “Judas is at best a party to the crime.”¹⁰ Matthew’s gospel feasibly gives us a report of remorse, with Judas trying to return the money (Matt 27:4) and then hanging himself (Matt 27:5). In distinction to both Mark and Matthew, the Gospel of Luke portrays Judas as being possessed by the devil (Luke 22). Regardless of the differences among the synoptic gospel stories, each one introduces Judas as if his story is over before it has even been told. Yet, as Robinson notes, it is the Gospel of John that “bears most of the responsibility for discrediting Judas completely”, and it is to this gospel this study now turns.¹¹

⁸ Robinson, *The Secrets of Judas*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

The Fourth Gospel and Characterization

The Gospel of John will be the basis for this study, and it is within this scripture that I find more questions than answers about the character of Judas. The Gospel of John is one of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament, appearing fourth traditionally after the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Culpepper argues that the plot in John is different than the synoptic gospels and shows obvious signs of conscious calculation; the entire story revolves around Jesus and his mission to reveal the Father to all who would accept and believe in him. The work of Culpepper is considered by many scholars to be a cornerstone for Johannine research and writing. His work with the Fourth Gospel is not unprecedented, but his approach is unique in that “no one else has shown such eclectic thoroughness in the use of modern narratological techniques.”¹² Culpepper builds upon Aristotle’s basic ideas about the representation of characters within a story and invites further study of the Fourth Gospel as a unique example of characterization.

The Distinctive Voice of the Gospel of John

Upon reading the Gospel of John, one notices that it is quite different from the synoptic gospels. John’s voice is distinctive from his gospel counterparts, and this has much to do with John’s characterization techniques. Joining the work of Culpepper are many popular ideas about the type of characterization found within the Gospel of John. According to William Wright, the characterization technique employed in the Fourth Gospel is typical of Greco-Roman writing.¹³ Wright makes a connection between the

¹² Culpepper, *Anatomy of The Fourth Gospel*, vi.

New Testament and modern literature by pointing out that modern writing explains a character through “personality viewpoint,” meaning without judging; that is to say, the character is portrayed in a neutral way.¹⁴ In contrast, Greco-Roman writing employs “character viewpoint,” which places a character in a predetermined ethical framework as a moral agent or type.¹⁵ Separating a character’s moral evaluation from their presentation of person was not a normal practice for Greco-Roman writers. “A character is thus defined by the moral quality of words and actions,” and their behaviors have a coherent flow that coincides with their set moral type.¹⁶ Since a character is type-casted, we can expect certain behaviors of certain kinds of people. The narrator voice in John sets up characters in this way, so that when they act or speak, we see the cohesion in their type and behavior.

The Gospel of John establishes the narrator’s voice from the beginning, and it serves as the implied voice of the author. This narrator guides us through the narrative of Jesus, introducing characters and plots, all the while shaping our impressions of the story. “From the beginning the narrator shares his omniscient vantage point with the reader.”¹⁷ We are invited into the story, and through our insider perspective, we know more than the characters know at any given moment. Each time Jesus encounters a person, the

¹³ William M. Wright, “Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71 (2009): 544.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 545.

¹⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 19.

interaction serves the plot. Whether it is Nicodemus or one of the disciples, the reader has insider knowledge thanks to the voice of the narrator, and we know that the person is missing the revelation of the true identity of Jesus.¹⁸ James L. Resseguie writes that “biblical narratives are written to persuade the implied reader to adopt a perspective that is in line with the narrative’s norms, values, and beliefs.”¹⁹ We are maneuvered to a certain response regarding characters, and when it comes to the Gospel of John, it is not hard to pick up on the intentions of the author. Comments, insights, and information are all strategically distributed as the gospel progresses. It is easy to feel led to certain conclusions about characters, giving them little passing thought. We get very little illumination however, of what is happening from the character’s perspective. The narrator does their thinking and interpreting. I contend that the “insider” information we have been dealt in the Gospel of John is actually quite limited and shallow, and I suggest that the result of a closer study of this gospel is to see that the characters seem somewhat flat and undeveloped.

Characterization Challenged

All of this discussion about Greek literature and Johannine characterization supports the work of Culpepper and other like-minded scholars, who consider the gospel lacking in character development and complexity. It is worth noting that Cornelius

¹⁸ Plot development in John’s gospel becomes a matter of how people do or do not recognize the identity of Jesus. Readers are privy to this ironic dialogue, and the danger is that we begin to think that we would have acted differently instead of seeing ourselves in their failures.

¹⁹James L. Resseguie, “Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (London: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2013), 5.

Bennema challenges this approach to the characterization in the Fourth Gospel. Bennema claims that character is the “neglected child of literary theory”, and that upon further consideration the “bible’s sparse portrayal of character in fact creates a scope for a variety of possible interpretations of human individuality.”²⁰ He argues that modern fiction and ancient literature differ in emphasis, not kind, and that characters in ancient Greek literature “are supposedly consistent ethical types that lack personality or individuality.”²¹ Aristotle may have believed that character was an unchanging quality of a person’s nature, but Bennema believes “it is better to speak of degrees of characterization along a continuum.”²² Even Culpepper admits that Aristotle’s teachings and techniques offered “little assistance in the task of understanding how characters are shaped and how they function.”²³ I find Bennema’s argument compelling, especially when applied to the Gospel of John.

The Fourth Gospel may seem to be driving readers to a certain conclusion, but the unspoken perspective of Judas leaves the interpretation of his actions and motives open for speculation. The narrator of John provides a characterization of Judas that, on the surface, appears one-dimensional. Yet it can be argued that Judas, as a human being, is complex and capable of a full array of human emotions. This view of Judas can be revealed when one reads between the lines, or tries to see beyond the lens of the narrator.

²⁰ Cornelis Bennema, “A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature,” *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 376.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Culpepper, *Anatomy of The Fourth Gospel*, 101.

Still, this is an area to tread carefully, as it can become all too easy to rewrite scripture. The objective should be to shed light on new ideas and possibilities, and to discuss the potential that is embedded within the characterization technique of the gospel writer. All this being said, whether one agrees with Bennema, Aristotle, or Culpepper, it is amazing to consider how memorable some biblical characters are, given how little they are formally portrayed and developed in scripture.

A Survey of Judas Within the Gospel of John

I have examined a close reading of the Gospel of John and its limited characterization. I will now examine how this limited characterization applies to the portrayal of Judas and how this approach leaves room for speculative interpretation of the notoriously famous disciple. The evidence of limited character development of Judas in the Fourth Gospel is easily discernable to readers. Characters embody a role, and the narrator makes it clear how they fulfill that role. Judas is introduced as the traitor type, and quite interestingly he does not act nor speak in John until chapter 12. Despite his limited speech and action, he is established as a traitor in both the story, as well as the minds of the reader.²⁴ This is thanks to the constant clarifications provided by the narrator.²⁵ Judas is the perfect example of an archetype and of how “Johannine characters

²⁴ In John 6:64, Judas is not named, but we know this is of whom the narrator speaks because we know the story. Even if you did not know he was talking about Judas, you realize someone is going to betray him. Someone will fill that archetypal role and when they are named we will think of them as only fulfilling this role. We may not give them any further thought if we trust the narrator.

²⁵ John 6:64 and 6:71 are examples of narrator’s clarification and establishment of Judas’ character and moral type.

embody a dominant trait that is intended by the evangelist to represent a certain type of faith response to Jesus.”²⁶ Christopher Skinner suggests that this is done so readers feel challenged to consider whether they would emulate this “type” or reject it, with Christian readers basing their decision on the reaction from Jesus to the actions or words of the “type.”

Judas arrives on the scene in John 6:64, yet he is not named explicitly, only as a notation added by the narrator to one who would betray Jesus.²⁷ This is an obvious example of the narrator’s control over how the reader perceives Judas, and he repeats this characterization of Judas over and over again in the scriptures.²⁸ This knowledge maintained by the narrator must come from retrospection. Culpepper charges that in most of the narrative, “memory and scripture are blended and re-interpreted.”²⁹ It is as if the reader can see the mind of the author, as communicated by added commentary, to explain the actions of characters such as Judas. Readers must remember that “no narrator can be absolutely impartial.”³⁰ They will prejudice readers to or away from certain characters by

²⁶ Christopher W. Skinner, “Introduction,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (London: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2013), xx.

²⁷ John 6:64, Our knowledge of whom the narrator is speaking comes from tradition and from familiarity with the story of the gospels. In truth, Judas has not been mentioned by name up to this point, nor has he done anything to deserve his betrayer epithet thus far.

²⁸ Examples of John characterizing Judas: John 6:71; John 12:4; John 13:2; John 18:2.

²⁹ Culpepper, *Anatomy of The Fourth Gospel*, 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

their claims. John 6:71 calls Judas by name, and it repeats the tag line of “the one who will betray.” Still, Judas has yet to speak any recorded words, and he has yet to perform any actions. We know him as a betrayer, because that is how the narrator wishes us to see him.

Judas finally speaks in John 12:4, though it is prefaced again by the narrator’s note that he will be the betrayer. Judas asks a question of Jesus about why an ointment is being used instead of sold; not an illogical question given how the disciples had been living thus far. They had left everything of value behind to follow Jesus, and what they did have they shared amongst themselves and with the poor. It was unusual for anyone to use something as valuable as this pure ointment in their group, and Judas poses a question about this action. The question seems innocent, but given that we have been prepped by the narrator to know Judas as a betrayer, the reader possibly finds the question from Judas to be rude. The narrator further clarifies Judas’ question as being due to greed (John 12:6), we are not to think that he is anything more than rotten to the core. This is an important differentiation and separation being made on the part of the narrator.

Usually when a character questions Jesus, a reader can simply shake their heads at their denseness. Our insider information allows us to see the truth, we do not get angry with their questions because we know it is a misunderstanding. The reaction is different with Judas. Why? Because the narrator has slanted our feelings towards him perhaps? He is only asking a question, but he is accused of thievery for it (with no evidence to support such a claim). Jesus gives him an explanation, and the reader can only wonder, if Judas was a known thief, why did Jesus not reprimand him at this moment? Furthermore, why

was this known thief sitting at the table with Jesus and the disciples in verse 13:2? The scripture reads that “the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas” to betray Jesus. Now the reader is led to believe that Judas has dealings directly with the devil; that is certainly escalating things. Again, the reader must puzzle over why Jesus would allow Judas at the table, if he was not only a thief but possessed by the devil as well?

It would seem, based on the evidence in the Fourth Gospel text, that if Jesus wanted to change the course of Judas’ actions or his role he would have. John 13:3 says that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands. He knows what is coming, and he controls the situation. Jesus washes all the disciples feet in an intentional and meaningful act of servanthood.³¹ Jesus notes that despite this ceremonial cleansing, not everyone is clean. In John 13:18, Jesus says again not everyone is clean, but that he knows whom he has chosen and in doing so, scripture will be fulfilled.³² This is curious because the reader has been told that Judas is in collusion with the devil, but now it seems that Jesus has a hand in the actions of Judas as well? Jesus says the one who will betray him is the one who takes the bread from him, and then Jesus gives the bread to Judas.³³ Jesus had recently spent time explaining that he was the “bread of life”, and in this moment we have Jesus handing over bread in a symbolic reversal.³⁴ Jesus, the “bread

³¹ John 13:3-11. The story of Jesus washing the feet of the Disciples.

³² John 13:10 says “Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you.”

³³ John 13:26. “It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.”

of life”, hands Judas a piece of bread that could be described theatrically as the “bread of death”. It would appear to some readers as though they both are in agreement with what must happen following this exchange. “Depending on whether we listen to the author or his text, Judas is a traitor or a confidant, a murderer or the man who prepares the way of eternal life, child of the devil or friend of Jesus, carrier of the bread of death or carrier of the ark of the covenant.”³⁵

Final Thoughts on Judas and the Gospel of John

Taking into consideration the evidence supplied thus far, it is arguable that this limited, narrator provided role for Judas in the Gospel of John is nothing more than a slant. It feels too one sided. Where is Judas’ voice in the Gospel? The text shares nothing of Judas’ thoughts or motives. The characters of the biblical text can be more than archetypes. They were after all, humans, with all the complexity that that truth entails. When reading the Fourth Gospel, and seeing how firmly Judas is placed in the role of the betrayer, readers such as myself question whether or not Judas might not be filling the role of a scape goat instead of a traitor? Theodore Wardlaw notably writes “if we had been there back in the days when the story of Jesus was making its way purposefully

³⁴ In John 6:33, 35; John 6:48; and John 6:5 Jesus explains that he is the actual “bread of life”, he is their substance and sustenance for survival. This theme of “bread” gets a paralleled reversal in the interaction between Jesus and Judas. Jesus, the “bread of life”, hands over bread to Judas which essentially signals the acceptance of the death to come. Essentially the “bread of life” gives the “bread of death.”

³⁵ Patrick Chatelion Counet, “Judas, the Disciple Who Was Known to the High Priest: A Deconstruction of the Betrayal Based on John 18:15,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67 (2011): 7.

toward the cross, we would have noticed, I think, the beginning of a smear campaign being done on Judas.”³⁶

A crucially important question comes to the forefront as this argument progresses, which asks can one man truly be blamed for the death of Jesus Christ? Did not all the disciples have a part to play in the death of their leader? They all ignored his repeated warnings that his death was imminent, they each turned their backs on him in his moment of need. And what about the role of the authorities of the day, do they carry no blame either? Could blaming a possessed Judas be traditions way of passing the blame, to absolve humankind of any guilt? Wardlaw would agree, he writes that “the more unforgiven and unforgivable we make him, the safer and cleaner we are.”³⁷ The Gospel of John, along with the synoptic gospels, seems to paint a picture of a traitor that is so unanimous in its portrayal one cannot help but question their motivations. When so much of these gospel accounts are different, how is this one element the same? Maybe because it is the church’s attempt to clear their name, or maybe because Judas is actually the betrayer tradition tells us he is. Questions of this sort are not easily avoided or answered. Perhaps the truth is that they cannot be answered in a way that removes all doubt from every reader’s interpretation. It is this doubt, created through a limited characterization in the Fourth Gospel, that lingers and invites readers and theologians alike to speculate on the true role of Judas in the handing over and death of Jesus Christ.

³⁶ Theodore Wardlaw, “Has Judas Died for Our Sins?” *Journal for Preachers* 40 (Spring, 2017): 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4
TEXTS IN CONVERSATION

Echoes and Parallels

This chapter will now delve into the ways in which the biblical text and the popular culture text that has thus far been examined, intersect and dialogue with one another. Our culture is shaped by a heritage rooted in the Christian Bible, and writers move and create in that space both consciously and unconsciously. Studies such as this prove that the Bible is “unexpectedly adaptable to unfamiliar landscapes and can spread to unpredictable places and survive and reproduce there.”¹ Finding echoes of the Bible in the medium of literature is a fascinating formula for experiencing the scriptures in a fresh new light. For those not as familiar with the biblical text, finding similarities and adaptations of scripture in literature can provide “a sense of connection with the biblical text and a confidence that they can derive something from it.”²

I suggest that Rowling’s portrayal of Snape borrows the thematic traitor archetype of Judas from The Gospel of John. I also believe that our interpretation of Judas is thus affected by Rowling’s paralleled adaptation. However, while the two characters share

¹ Hugh S. Pyper, *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies: Unchained Bible: Cultural Appropriations of Biblical Texts* (London: Bloomsburg Publishing PLC, 2014), 2.

² Jamie Clark-Soles, “Teaching the Bible with Literature,” in *Teaching the Bible: Through Popular Culture and the Arts*, ed. Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 243.

similarities, they experience different developmental arcs. One is propelled towards redemption and one appears firmly stuck in damnation. That being established, the first objective for this chapter is to consider the ways author J.K. Rowling's characterization of Severus Snape might be influenced by the traditional interpretation of Judas. This will be approached through the lens of the Reception History method. The second objective of this chapter is to consider how Rowling's parallel traitor depiction might alter the way we perceive Judas today. This will be a matter of reversing the hermeneutical approach, and will explore the aspect of popular cultures effect on traditional interpretations.

Reception History Approach

Reception History is accurately defined by John Sawyer as being the "history of our culture's dialogue with its own sacred texts."³ The biblical texts appear hidden in plain sight in film, art, music, and literature. These various mediums and their adaptations of the biblical texts can be an enriching intersection for secular as well as Christian audiences. Still, it fundamentally requires a need for critical engagement by both parties. "How people have interpreted, and been influenced by a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what is originally meant."⁴ This type of study must be carefully approached because it can create a suspicion of interpretation that leads one down a slippery slope of textual upheaval, but it could potentially rehabilitate

³ Mark Edwards, *John*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 308.

⁴ John Sawyer, "Series Editors Preface," in *Blackwell Bible Commentaries*, ed. John Sawyer and Christopher Rowland (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), x.

curiosity and fascination for the biblical text. For this study, understanding and acknowledging the nuanced biblical influences of J.K. Rowling helps us to see the connections that may exist and to pull insight for better understanding of her characterizations.

Snape Formed by Tradition

Rowling's portrayal of Severus Snape is a marvelous example of an author's unique ability to develop a character of almost perfect ambiguity. Snape is a beastly and deplorable man who underneath his slimy surface harbors an inestimable capacity for love and the potential for immeasurable bravery and sacrifice. He is first cast as the formidable character foil to the story's young hero, and is swiftly moved into the role of traitor due to the ruthlessness of his actions. Yet Snape, as it has been revealed, was no traitor. He assumed a thankless life that guaranteed he would never claim the role of hero, but he does shine in his hidden role of protector and champion for young Harry. He is a vastly interesting character of contradictory extremes. Despite Snape's arc back to redemption, his momentary role as the traitor is a time of notable importance. It calls for an examination of the way readers understand a character that fulfills this role, and I propose that that understanding is influenced greatly by the traditional interpretation of Judas.

Rowling has never shared any explicit theological beliefs with her fans, yet that does not mean that the symbols, stories, and characters of *Harry Potter* are not in many ways influenced by biblical traditions. Traditionally Judas has been known only as the ultimate traitor, and his namesake has permeated our culture in many ways. We find

examples of Judas-like characters in many mediums of popular culture, and Snape is a prime example. If you consider how Rowling sets up his awful personality and his repulsive appearance, Snape is a first-class candidate to become the stories traitor character. The Gospel of John sets up Judas quite the same way, slowly building up to the movement when the disciple makes his move towards the moment of ultimate betrayal. The Fourth Gospel names the disciple repeatedly as the betrayer, many times before even divulging his actual name. When both Snape and Judas arrive at those pivotal moments with their respective leaders, it comes as no surprise to the readers or the other characters, that they are capable of such unbelievable acts.

Parallel Characters

Other similarities in the two stories are also quite striking. Snape is among Dumbledore's most trusted allies, quite similar to Judas being one of Jesus' Disciples. Dumbledore knows exactly who Snape is; all his secrets, his regrets, and the truth of his character. The headmaster understands that Snape only acts out of selfish love for Lily Evans. Despite knowing all this about Snape, Dumbledore never sends him away. Snape is never fired or asked to leave his position at the school. Dumbledore keeps him close, and keeps him directly involved in the battle against evil. Even when others question Snape's loyalty and his motives, Dumbledore refuses to turn Snape away. In an almost exact parallel, Judas is known completely by Jesus. Jesus knows his heart, his secrets, and the truth of his character. Jesus knows all that Judas has done and will do, yet he never sends him away. Jesus never turns Judas out of the group of disciples, he keeps him close as he does the others. Jesus keeps Judas directly involved in the battle against evil by

continuing to teach him the ways of being a true believer and by caring for his physical and spiritual well being as he does the other disciples. When the other disciples question the motives of Judas and imply he is a selfish thief, Jesus still regards him as one of his closest companions.⁵ Dumbledore and Jesus both know these men better than anyone else will ever know them, they challenge them to be better men but they accept who they are. Upon recognizing these similarities, it becomes difficult to deny any biblical influence upon Rowling's characterization of Severus Snape. These two characters seem too comparable to be completely unrelated, and the dynamic of Snape being influenced by Judas opens up questions of how Judas is then influenced by Snape.

Alternate Approach to Hermeneutics

Snape is very much like Judas, an opinion that has been well established thus far. After looking at how Rowling developed her character with obvious resemblance to Judas, the conversation then widens to consider how we might re-evaluate the actions of Judas. This is done through a "reversal of the hermeneutical flow", as first described by theologian Larry Kreitzer in the 1990's. His work aims to illuminate both the New Testament texts as well as facets of contemporary culture through a cross-disciplinary approach to study.⁶ This discipline seeks to explore how cultural mediums do not simply illustrate theology, they contribute to theology as well. His idea encapsulates Merleau-

⁵ John 12:1-7.

⁶ Larry J. Kreitzer, *The New Testament in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 19.

Ponty's concept of a backward flow of time, the belief that time flows two-directionally both forward and backward.⁷ This concept is adapted into Krietzer's theories for the relationship amongst popular culture mediums and the Bible. If we approach hermeneutics with a concept of duality of direction, we are able to "reverse the flow of influence within the hermeneutical process and examine select New Testament passages or themes in the light of some of the enduring expressions of our own culture, namely great literary works and their film adaptations."⁸

Many other scholars have picked up on the work started by Merleau-Ponty and Krietzer, and have developed a well known theory of interpretation for films and literature in particular. Robert K. Johnston builds directly upon Krietzer and suggests that conversations about God are increasingly taking place outside of the church, and the church is not even aware they are being left out.⁹ It is important for the church to realize that people are seeking spirituality, but in their hostility to the institution of the church, they turn to other sources for dialogue. Johnston proposes that "if religious ideas or experience can be put into an irreverent or interesting package, so much the better."¹⁰ These packages spark conversations that invite moments of faith revelation or formation,

⁷ Glen Mavis, *Merleau-Ponty and the Backward Flow of Time: The Reversibility of Temporality and the Temporality of Reversibility*, ed. Shaun Gallagher and Thomas Busch (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 53.

⁸ Krietzer, *The New Testament in Fiction and Film*, 19.

⁹ Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2006), 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

and that at least is worth devoting attention to. Like Johnston, scholars Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor also work within the frames of a reversed flow. These two writers read the Bible “through the grid of pop culture, what scholars call reversing the hermeneutical flow. We construct our theology through a pop cultural matrix, allowing popular culture to speak for itself before we apply biblical interpretation.”¹¹

It would be remiss of this study, however, not to acknowledge the criticism that exists of this interpretational technique. William Romanowski and Jennifer VanderHiede are just a couple of the scholars that challenge the validity of reversing the flow of hermeneutics. They consider the major flaw to this approach to be an exaggeration of the “degree to which viewers and readers are conscious of their own theological beliefs and are active in affirming them in their encounter with culture.” I would agree with the notion that most readers do not truly have a grasp on their own theological beliefs, but then I would move to suggest that this is a problem that this reversal technique can directly speak to. I would argue that if popular culture can bring the biblical text into the forefront of conversations, then greater grasp of theological standpoints can be gained through the dialogue. I think that the challenge to a reverse hermeneutics originates in an elitist assumption about the inferiority of popular culture studies to more traditional academic studies. I stand firmly upon the belief that “popular culture not only influences biblical interpretation but also opens up new perspectives and challenges and confronts

¹¹ Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 10.

the conventional, stylized hermeneutical frameworks of the ‘industry’ of the academic study of biblical texts.”¹²

Judas Revisited

Now that the alternate hermeneutics technique has been thoroughly discussed, it is now time to see how Judas is thus affected by reversing the flow. The similarities between Snape and Judas that have been established lead us to ask certain questions of our interpretations of both men. Snape is not a good guy. He is mean, vindictive, callous, and selfish; so much so that his subversive actions for the greater good are almost completely unbelievable when they come to light. In paralleled fashion, Judas is cast from the beginning to end of the Gospel of John as the betrayer, and every action and the sparse words of the disciple are construed to be not only corrupt, but shockingly demonic in nature. Despite all of this evidence, neither men were sent away. The reader cannot help but wonder why not? When we read Snape’s story, the question that comes to mind is whether or not Dumbledore allowed Snape to stay at Hogwarts because he could use the professor? Was it because he needed him to set in motion the end of evil’s reign? Reversing the flow of these questions onto the biblical text results in much the same line of questioning. Did Jesus allow Judas to stay, knowing he has betrayal in his heart, because he could use the disciple? Was it because he needed him to set in motion the end of evil’s reign? Furthermore, are both of these men seen as traitors because they have evil and hatred inside of them, or because they were chosen to fulfill a role no one else could?

¹² Philip Culbertson and Elaine M. Wainwright, eds. *The Bible in/and Popular Culture a Creative Encounter* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 71.

Answers to these questions are not as simple as one might think, but one thing is clear. Whether the title of traitor is truly deserved or not, these men have been left forever marred in their respective histories.

When a reader begins considering such questions, the conversation turns in many directions but the mystery of Judas' actions remains. One direction is to suggest that these men are not traitors, but obedient servants. Snape was asked to do the unthinkable, the illogical, knowing that it would cost him his reputation and his very life. Reversing the flow brings the same question to Judas, and it can be surmised that he too was asked to do the unthinkable by Jesus when he accepted the bread and was told to go do what he had to do. We do not know the conversations or possible agreements between Jesus and Judas because the gospels do not recount such things, but the missing pieces intrigue readers and cause us to ponder the nature of their relationship and actions. This line of thinking causes us to consider that there might be similar threads connecting the two texts. The popular culture account does influence the way we perceive Judas' actions and his relationship with Jesus, and because of this the biblical character of Judas is thus revisited and re-evaluated thanks to the literary character of Snape. The two texts in dialogue bring to light a discussion of possibilities for the motives of Judas that may not have existed for readers without the introduction of popular culture adaptations in the realm of biblical studies.

This exercise in interpretation can help us to “discover something fresh and new about the scriptures themselves.”¹³ This revisiting of the character must be done with a certain amount of care, so as not to completely fabricate new “truths” about a biblical text. Judas’ character is not totally rehabbed by the idea of Snape’s redemption in the *Harry Potter* text. The Gospel of John’s account of his story cannot be discounted and replaced with a new telling. That is not the goal. The goal is discussion and dialogue of possibilities, which in their happening reinvigorate a passion for the biblical text and the development of a personal theology. Scholar Anthony Swindell points out the danger that arises if we do not tread the idea of reverse hermeneutics and the afore mentioned Reception History carefully. These approaches have “the strength of avoiding imposing pre-packaged or domesticating religious themes on the text, but may instead allow, perhaps more disturbing theologies to emerge.”¹⁴ What a person believes about Judas does not have to fundamentally change after reading a popular culture adaptation. The idea is to put the texts into relation to one another so as to see how they intersect and how they differ, to see how both tradition and contemporary culture speaks to both examples.

Final Thoughts On the Texts in Conversation

This chapter has explored the various ways that the characterizations of Snape and Judas interact with one another. “The Bible continues to have effects on contemporary

¹³ Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark (Cultural Exegesis): Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 42.

¹⁴ Anthony C. Swindell, *How Contemporary Novelists Rewrite Stories from the Bible: The Interpretation of Scripture in Literature* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 144.

culture in ways that often surprise, and sometimes dismay both religious and secular groups.”¹⁵ The church and scholarship may never fully support endeavors such as this paper presents, but to ignore the way culture adapts the Bible is to live completely removed from reality. How can a church or scholar be authentic and relevant if they are out of touch with what culture is saying about religion, faith, and scripture? If culture is willing to dialogue, ought not the church and scholars meet them at the intersection? It can be tricky to navigate Reception History and reverse flow approaches, but they are both beneficial to a more conscious engagement with the biblical text of our heritage as it is found abounding in various popular culture mediums.

¹⁵ Pypers, *The Unchained Bible*, 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This thesis endeavored to highlight the intersection of a popular culture text along with a biblical text in order to explore the ways in which Rowling's portrayal of Severus Snape resembled and caused us to revisit the depiction of Judas in Christian tradition, especially in the Gospel of John. Chapter one set up the study by establishing the flow of the work and the methods that would be applied. This introductory chapter also strived to explain why the *Harry Potter* series of books is ripe with potential for biblical studies that engage popular culture adaptations. The second and third chapters of this study explored the ways that both the Rowling text and the Gospel of John employed characterization within their work. The fourth and final chapter takes the reader into the world of Reception History and introduces the idea of a reverse hermeneutics.

Implications of the Study

The implications of the study were brought forward as each chapter explored the source at hand, developed a background for the work through a defined method, and then discussed the uniqueness of each text's characterization. The result is to see the ambiguity of Snape clearly in Rowling's writing, and to see a limited character development of Judas in the Fourth Gospel that leaves room for speculative discussion. The biblical text has clearly had an effect on Rowling's character development of Snape, evidenced by the similarities discussed in chapter four. It is truly interesting to ponder the way her writing pushes us to reconsider the character and story of Judas. This intersection causes us to

bring questions to the biblical text that we may never have thought to ask. It also sheds new light on the current of popular culture, enabling us to see that it is deeply and richly influenced by the traditions of our Christian religion. The dialogue between the two texts has provided a richness of exchange for both scholars of the biblical texts and devoted followers of popular culture.

An Exploration in Reception History

This study embarked upon new territory for most scholars through its engagement of Reception History, an area of study that calls for pioneers to find new approaches of study in order to address the wealth of valuable popular culture sources. The Bible speaks loudly and clearly in all sorts of expressions of popular culture. It is time we acknowledge and engage these mediums in order to forge new frontiers that breathe life into traditional biblical study. Literature ranks highly among these valuable mediums and appears to be an endless resource for study. The art and profession of writing remains firmly and fundamentally significant to our culture, there is always a new book to read and a new story to be told. The field of study that has been created around the intersection of the Bible and popular culture is fertile ground for any student who finds themselves intrigued. Scholar Roger Lundin stresses the importance of literature as he “seeks to keep alive a sense of delight by anchoring our search for wisdom in personal experience and the infinite play of possibilities that literature opens before us.”¹ The power of language

¹ Roger Lundin, *Beginning with the Word: Modern Literature and the Question of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2014), 2.

creates compelling connections between authors and readers, and this is a truth that stands as authentically with our past as it does with our present and future. The culmination of this study is to present the remarkable ways in which the ancient words of our Christian Bible are brought forward in newness and freshness of life in the robust and dynamic language of popular culture literature.

Areas for Further Study

This study also brought forth further areas of possible research and investigation. An in-depth look into extra-biblical sources such as the Gospel of Judas and other gnostic sources would certainly add to the reconsideration of the character of Judas. There are countless sources that explore the character of Judas available today, and it would be valuable to further study those sources to gain a greater picture of the person of Judas. Craig Koester calls Judas “one of the most haunting figures in the Fourth Gospel, his shadowy appearances are woven as a dark thread into the fabric of the story, and his character has several dimensions.”² Clearly, Judas is a wealth of mystery and intrigue for a student of biblical studies.

From the popular culture stand point, it would also be worthwhile to go further in depth with Rowling’s text and look closer at her other fascinating characters. Biblical links have been made in regard to Harry and Dumbledore that I find very interesting and these links could add thought-provoking dimensions to a future study in the intersection of popular culture and the Bible. Furthermore, it is compelling to consider the obsession

² Craig K. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2003), 73.

our current culture has with the “anti-hero” and to ponder whether or not, in relation to Judas, we are seeking a deeper understanding and revelation of his humanity because our culture has conditioned us to sympathize with even the most deplorable leading characters. Do we impose our impatience with the stock characterization of Judas upon the text in order to render him blameless? Or, perhaps the simplicity of the Fourth Gospel cannot hold the attention span of modern readers? It is evident that this study gives rise to countless questions surrounding our motivations as interpreters of the Bible and our influences as consumers of popular culture. The conversations that are provoked are evidence of an authentic curiosity that does not fear the authority of tradition and always seeks to push the boundaries of investigation.

Closing Thoughts

I will bring this study to its finality by addressing the question of whether or not a theological reading of *Harry Potter* is appropriate, a question I have been asked many times. I would argue that it most certainly is. The story of *Harry Potter* addresses many of the same issues that theology does: good versus evil; deep, authentic relationships; making moral decisions; issues of loyalty, hope, promise, sacrifice, and redemption; life and death. These issues and the discussion of them within a popular culture text, becomes a valuable way to open a theologically illuminated dialogue. The words of theologian Douglas John Hall express the point that I am endeavoring to make, which is that Christians must be open to see the possibilities within culturally significant literature and other such platforms:

To be a Christian theologian is, surely, to open oneself— or more accurately, to find oneself being opened — to everything: every testimony to transcendence, every thought and experience of the species, every wonder of the natural order, every reminiscence of the history of the planet, every work of art or literature, every motion picture, every object of beauty and pathos — everything under the sun, and the sun too! Nothing is excluded a priori, nothing forbidden, nothing foreign.³

When we are open to the potential entrenched within a fictional text such as *Harry Potter*, our faith has the possibility of being stretched, renewed, and developed. This is my foundation for exploring the wizarding world and its characters in dialogue with biblical scriptures.

³ Douglas John Hall, *Bound and Free: A Theologian's Journey* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 26.

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