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Humanities and Theology

# **Mudbloods, Half-bloods and Pure-bloods**

**The issues of racism and race discrimination in J.K.**

**Rowling's *Harry Potter***

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## Introduction

‘And what would you say, Royal, to those listeners who reply that in these dangerous times, it should be “wizards first”?’ asked Lee. ‘I’d say that it’s one short step from “wizards first” to “pure-bloods first”, and then to “Death Eaters”,’ replied Kingsley. ‘We’re all human, aren’t we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving.’

- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (357)

In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the issues of racism and race discrimination are some of the most prominent amongst many political aspects such as the nature of war, human rights issues and authority problems. Throughout the seven books about the young wizard, it is the racial problem that takes the major part in the storyline. By introducing the issue of racism in a fantasy world, one might argue that Rowling creates a mirror to the real world with its history of, amongst other things, oppression of the African people and Jews. By applying the real world issue of racism in a fantasy world, she illuminates racial politics in a different way and by doing so it can be debated that she shows both the danger and the consequences of racial hatred and discrimination.

In the wizarding world, the issue of racism does not concern one's skin color or religion but instead focuses on the purity of one's wizard blood. The “classical” approach to the issues with ethnical racism does not play a prominent role to the plot; as Neil Mulholland argues in *The Psychology of Harry Potter: An Unauthorized Examination of the Boy Who Lived* (2010), Rowling has actually created an almost race-blind society where little emphasis is put on one's ethnic origin (Mulholland 233). Instead the focus lies on concepts like Mudblood, which is a word of insult for a witch or wizard with Muggle (i.e. non-magical) parents; half-blood, someone with both magical and non-magical close relatives; pure-blood, someone with only magical relatives; and squib, someone born by magical parents but who themselves lack the ability to perform magic. It is the tendency of some pure-blood witches and wizards' to praise the purity of wizard blood that the issue of racism in *Harry Potter* mainly revolves around. Draco and Lucius Malfoy are examples of superior pure-bloods, with admiration for pure breeding and with a racist attitude towards Muggles and Muggle-borns. They treat the latter like second-class citizens and do not believe that they should be allowed to be a part of the magical world, and this is a claim they are prepared to fight for.

Another thing that falls under the category of race discrimination is the slavery of the house-elves, and also the mistreatment of other magical creatures. These race issues

have slightly different approaches since other magical beings' living conditions are not something that the common wizard sees as a problem. The humour around the enslaved house-elves is something that has been debated since the comical way in which the elves are portrayed seems to make one fail to recognize house-elf slavery as an actual problem. This, according to some critics, puts Rowling in a rather difficult position since racial discrimination is such a relevant issue in *Harry Potter*. It is not a coincidence that the three main characters belong to different backgrounds. Growing up in the Muggle-world, Hermione provides an outside view on the ingrained house-elf slavery and manages to make at least Ron see that it is wrong.

Despite her blunder concerning the house-elves, Rowling still manages to give a poignant description of the consequences of racism. By applying a real world problem to a fantasy world, she manages to view the issues in a different way that hopefully teaches her reader the harm of judging people because of their heritage. Henceforth, abbreviations will be used when referring to the Harry Potter books, for example *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* will be referred to as P.S, and so forth.

## **Racism and Race Discrimination**

'Many of our oldest family trees become a little diseased over time,' he said, as Bellatrix gazed at him, breathless and imploring. 'You must prune yours, must you not, to keep it healthy? Cut away those parts that threaten the health of the rest.' 'Yes, my Lord,' whispered Bellatrix, and her eyes swam with tears of gratitude again. 'At the first chance!' 'You shall have it,' said Voldemort. 'And in your family, so in the world ... we shall cut away the canker that infects us until only those of the true blood remain ...'

- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (16-17)

It is important to sort out the actual definition of racism and from where it originates. According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* the term "racism" means "unfair treatment of people, or violence against them, because they belong to a different race from your own" and "the belief that some races of people are better than other races". The term "race discrimination" is defined in a similar way: "discrimination", according to *Longman* it means "the practice of treating one person or group differently from another in an unfair way" hence "race discrimination" means "treating someone unfairly because of their race". It was during the 1930's that the term "racism" came into being. Not surprisingly, this was in relation to the Nazis and their aim to make Germany, as Ali Rattansi puts it in his book *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, "judenrein, or 'clean of Jews'" (Rattansi 4). The Nazis claimed that

the Jews were a discernible race and because of that they felt like the Jews “posed a threat to the Aryan race to which authentic Germans supposedly belonged” (4). This, the Nazis felt were reason enough to take action. However, the Nazi aim to eliminate Jews during World War II is far from the only occurrence when it comes to “the very long history of anti-Semitism” (4). The term anti-Semitism was born during the 1870s by the German anti-Semite Wilhelm Marr. He invented the term to be used as a description of his “anti-Jewish movement” (5) called the “Anti-Semitic League”. Rattansi describes this movement as “a self-conscious racism that required that Jews be defined as a distinct race” (5). *The Longman Dictionary*’s definitions of racism and race discrimination correspond well with Marr’s and the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews. Below, the similarities between this fact of history and Rowling’s *Harry Potter* will be discussed.

The story about *Harry Potter* is not only a fantasy tale about magic and wizards. It is a story full of political aspects such as human rights issues, authority problems, the nature of war, and racism. These aspects are perhaps not obvious for a child (or adult) reader at a first glance. One might argue that by including political subjects in her fantasy world, Rowling mirrors the real world’s problems in a rather unobtrusive but clever way. By presenting “Voldemort’s campaign against “mudbloods”” (Horne 76), Jackie C. Horne argues in her article *Harry and the Other: Answering the Race Question in J.K Rowling’s Harry Potter* (2010), that Rowling is teaching Harry, his friends, and together with them the reader, the dangerous consequences of racism. Luisa Grijalva Maza states in her article *Deconstructing The Grand Narrative In Harry Potter: Inclusion/Exclusion And Discriminatory Policies In Fiction And Practice* (2012) that *Harry Potter* is: “not only for children or literary scholars but for political scientists and policy makers too” (Maza 426). Essays, articles and books have been written about this subject and the last one has in all probability not yet been written. In his article *Editor’s Introduction to the Symposium: Politics, Policy, and Harry Potter* (2012), David Mena Alemán claims that: “Several edited scholarly volumes have demonstrated exceptionally well that there are many reasons for taking the Potter books seriously in an academic setting, particularly when thinking about political questions” (Alemán 364). These writers all seem to agree: *Harry Potter* is much more than an easy read within the genre of children’s literature.

Another writer who has considered the subject of racism in the *Harry Potter* books is Bethany Barrett, who in her volume *The Politics of Harry Potter* (2012), argues that,

“the simultaneous power and danger of racial and genetic politics” is “perhaps the single most important political theme in Rowling's works” (Barrett 59). It is probably one of the most noticeable as well. The similarities between the treatment of the Mudbloods in the last book, and the Nazi treatment of the Jews during the 1930s are frightening. Another example is the slavery of the house-elves, which is a clear example of race discrimination and has been compared to the African-American enslavement in the Southern states of the United States in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by amongst other Susan Peppers Bates and Joshua Rust in their article *House-Elves, Hogwarts, And Friendship: Casting Away The Institutions Which Made Voldemort's Rise Possible* (2012). Also, the mistreatment of other magical creatures such as goblins, werewolves and giants adds to the subject of racism in subtle ways. While the Mudblood issue leads to open war between the wizards, the enslaved elves and isolated goblins scarcely make the common wizard lift an eyebrow. As will be discussed below, these different approaches to the seemingly similar racial issues are something that several critics have reacted to.

As Barratt points out, there are obviously greater differences between the different magical creatures and humans in the wizard world than there are between different humans in our real world (40). However, even if the comparison is between a fantasy world of magical beings and our real world of actual people, the political aspects are expressed in the same way. As mentioned before, the mirror Rowling holds to the real world's dark history reveals horrid resemblances. One of the most obvious parallels drawn is of course the one between Voldemort's racial ideology and that of Hitler. Even if there are many obvious similarities between these two men, there are also some differences worth keeping in mind. Hitler was chosen by the people of Germany in an approved election. Voldemort on the other hand, forces himself to power by violence and threats, and with only a few supporters, called Death Eaters by his side. Going back to the similarities, there are several. Hitler was, and Voldemort is obsessed with the idea of “right” and “wrong” races. For Hitler, a perfect race meant the so called “Aryan” race, with tall, blond and blue-eyed people. Voldemort's idea of the perfect race is not even slightly similar to that even if the underlying aim is the same. For him and his Death Eaters, it is the purity of one's wizard blood that equals perfection. The fact that neither Hitler did nor Voldemort does fit to their own ideas of a perfect race is highly ironic. Hitler, being short with brown hair, brown eyes and with a rumor of being part Jewish did not in any way fit with his own image of the “perfect”, Aryan race. Voldemort, who is a half-blood with a Muggle father, raised at a Muggle orphanage, and like Harry unaware of his

magical identity until the age of eleven has certainly not the pure wizard blood he values so highly. As “an interesting side-note”, Barrett comments on the fact that in order to hide his true identity, Hitler did some “mid-twentieth-century airbrushing” on his painted portraits to make him look blond and blue-eyed. Voldemort too, by lying to his Death Eaters about his true heritage lives in a lie, pretending to be something that he is not (73). As an explanation to this, Barrett argues that: “it is those who themselves feel part of potentially marginalized groups that are most keen to reify the differences that create “out-groups” of others. The more institutionalized this hierarchy, the more secure their position at the top is” (Barrett 72-73). This means that some sort of insecurity seems to lay as ground for Voldemort’s identity crisis, as it seems to have done with Hitler as well.

Continuing, Barrett claims that just like Hitler took the opportunity to play the role as a source of inspiration for the confused middle class of the German people, Voldemort does the same. With the aim to take over the wizard world and make it “pure”, he too takes on the role as leader for the pure-blood witches and wizards who had lost their power when Voldemort disappeared in connection to his failed attempt to kill Harry. The German people needed someone to blame for their loss in World War I, as do the pure-blood witches and wizards for the fall from their superior position after Voldemort’s disappearance. Hitler gladly took on the role as leader and manages to convince the German people that the Jews were to blame. Voldemort, acting “like a conventional political entrepreneur” (63) gathers his group of followers, blaming the Muggle-borns and “that champion of commoners, of Mudbloods and Muggles, Albus Dumbledore” (GoF 702) for their failures. Barrett continues in saying: “Just as Hitler skillfully used symbols of traditional German nationalism to lend legitimacy to his racial ideology, so Voldemort claims to be restoring old, traditional standards of magical behavior, selectivity, and empowerment that have been lost” (Barrett 63). This means that by creating a feeling of “familial closeness and pride” (63) for their groups of followers, Voldemort manages to put the blame for failure to a specific group, just like Hitler did: for Hitler it was the Jews, for Voldemort it is the Muggle-borns (Barrett 63). Horne reflects over how this might be possible:

Institutional oppression leads to personal enmity, enmity that can easily lead those who experience it to forget their knowledge of a larger institutional problem. It's easier to hate a specific individual than it is to hate a faceless institution; it is also easier to hate an entire racial group than it is to consider how racial oppression may have led that group to feel enmity toward yours (Horne 88).

As mentioned, this means that both Hitler skillfully did, and Voldemort does succeed in convincing their supporters that they should blame others for their inferior position in society. (Horne 88)

## **Mudbloods, half-bloods, pure-bloods and squibs**

'It's about the most insulting thing he could think of,' gasped Ron, coming back up. 'Mudblood's a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born - you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards - like Malfoy's family - who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood.'

- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (127)

Already when Harry is introduced to the wizarding world for the first time is he, and together with him the reader brought to an understanding that there might be an issue concerning racial ideology. The first hints about its existence are brought to the surface by the eleven-year-old Draco Malfoy in the first book;

'I really don't think they should let the other sort [Muggle-borns] in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families.' (PS 89)

Being born and raised by Death Eaters, young Malfoy works as a constant reminder throughout the seven books about the racial issue, and his little hints and nasty comments are a preparation for what is to come in the last book. Harry, who is born by magical parents but raised by his Muggle aunt and uncle, is unaware of the magical world and his role in it until his eleventh birthday. When encountering Malfoy for the first time, Harry knows nothing about the world he is about to enter or the political issues that lie underneath the surface. By referring to the Muggle-borns as "the other sort", Draco shows that some children in the wizard world are raised by their parents to separate humans from humans. This means that these children grow up with the belief that some wizards are better than others depending on their heritage. It is this general thought about the "other" that Voldemort eventually corroborate with his comeback. In their article *Wizards under Uncertainty: Cognitive Biases, Threat Assessment, and Misjudgment in Policy Making* (2012), Emma R. Norman and Rafael Delfin argue that "Voldemort's eventual comeback leaves one in no doubt that his blatant disregard for human life and the liberal values of freedom and equality is deeply offensive to the moral sensibilities of the magical general public and the reader" (Norman and Delfin 381). As Norman and Delfin say, it is clear that Voldemort shows no mercy when separating



humans from each other depending on where they come from. Further, Voldemort supporting parents teach their children this way of thinking. Hopefully, the way Rowling portrays Voldemort's lack of respect for human life, and also Draco's thoughts about "the other", will leave no reader unaffected.

First introduced in the second book, the word "Mudblood" will come to play a prominent part in the story about Harry Potter. Not surprisingly it is once again Draco Malfoy who introduces the word by calling Hermione a "filthy little Mudblood" (CoS 123). It is because of the reactions of other people that Harry realizes the horrible significances of the word. A Mudblood is, as mentioned before, a witch or wizard born by non-magical parents. As Ron says in the passage above, it is a word of insult and a really severe one as well.

The humans of the wizarding world are, apart from the Mudbloods, divided into three other main groups; pure-bloods, half-bloods, and squibs. A pure-blood, for example Ron Weasley and Draco Malfoy, is a witch or wizard with only magical relatives; he or she therefore has "pure" magical blood. They are born and raised in the magical world and are therefore obviously familiar with its customs. A half-blood, Harry Potter for example, is someone with both magical and non-magical relatives. Having at least one magical parent, a half-blood is in most cases also brought up with the knowledge of the wizard world. There are however a few cases where the magical parent has kept his or her true identity from the other. Harry can in some cases be confused with a pure-blood since his parents were a witch and a wizard. However, since his mother was born by Muggles, he is recognized as a half-blood. A squib is a person born to magical parents but who themselves lack the ability to perform magic. This inability to do magic is a bit of a mystery in the wizard world. It seems that in earlier times, when Dumbledore and his brother Aberforth grew up for example, having a squib in the family was considered embarrassing, just like, as Barrett puts it "many disabilities were until recently, all over the world" (65). Despite their mysterious nature, the squibs play no prominent role in the Potter saga comparing to the other three groups. It does not seem like the squibs are treated as bad in the modern wizard world as they did in the old days. The fact that Argus Filch is allowed to remain as caretaker at Hogwarts after Voldemort's rise indicates that Voldemort does not consider squibs as badly as Muggle-borns. However, the fact that the Kwikspell Company exists with their easy-to-learn beginner's magic indicates that at least for the squibs themselves, it is not easy to be who they are.

It is some witches and wizards' attitude towards non-magical individuals that form the basis of Voldemort's pure-blood ideology. This attitude is wide-spread in the wizard world. Barrett says that "across the wizarding world, attitudes toward Muggles include egalitarianism, disregard, avid curiosity, paternalism, and outright hatred" (65). It is important to emphasize that far from all witches and wizards are under the impression that Muggles are less valuable as human beings than wizards are. Barrett divides the common witch and wizard into four main groups concerning their attitude towards Muggles. First there is the group that sees Muggles as equals but still as a separate group; they should be treated with respect but still be considered different since they do not possess the same abilities. Then there are those who do not consider Muggles at all, they think neither here nor there of them and do not care about events in the Muggle world. Next, there is the little group who, as Barrett puts it "are utterly fascinated by Muggles and quite admire them. But much of this fascination is based on a subconscious paternalism, and a sense of wonder at how Muggles get along without magic" (66). Arthur Weasley is of course an example of one with this attitude. His fascination with Muggle inventions puzzles many of his fellow wizards. Finally there are those witches and wizards that consider Muggles nothing more than animals and believe that they therefore should be treated as such. Barrett brings up the example of "Sirius's cousin [who] introduced a bill to make Muggle-hunting legal" (69). Not surprisingly, it is this last group that supports Voldemort and his anti Mudblood movement. They want to eliminate Muggle-borns and Muggles in the same way that Hitler and his Nazis wanted to eliminate Jews during the 1930s. Barrett claims that "it's this one idea—that some humans are less human than others—that might be the most dangerous in all of Voldemort's (or Hitler's) ideology" (Barrett 67). It is clear that it is the connection Muggle-borns have to the non-magical world that this group of wizards sees as a cause for hatred, or maybe as a threat to the magical world.

The racial issues concerning Mudbloods develop slowly throughout the course of the books. Starting with nasty comments and empty threats from Draco Malfoy in the first books (and of course with Slytherin founder Salazar Slytherin's Mudblood-killing basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets), it finally turns into an open witch-hunt in the final book. With Dumbledore dead, Voldemort takes over the entire Ministry of Magic and the wizarding laws quickly change. Malfoy's hollow threats and remarks turn into an acceptable reality. Barrett claims that "name-calling is hurtful, but more dangerous is making it official with the creation of the concept of Blood Status" (74), as Dolores Umbridge introduces "The Muggle-Born Registration Commission" which forces all Muggle-borns to register at the Ministry. She also

creates pamphlets with the catchwords “Mudbloods and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pure-Blood Society” (DH 205) to make more wizards aware of the “Mudblood problem”. All Muggle-borns are forced to an interrogation held by Umbridge at the Ministry. The muggle-borns are treated with no respect and as the passage underneath shows, Umbridge shows no mercy in her struggle for a pure-blood society:

‘This is your final warning,’ said Umbridge’s soft voice, magically magnified so that it sounded clearly over the man’s desperate screams. ‘If you struggle, you will be subjected to the Dementor’s kiss.’ The man’s scream subsided, but dry sobs echoed through the corridor. ‘Take him away,’ said Umbridge. (DH 212)

According to the new Ministry of Magic, whose general opinion is that only witches and wizards with pure blood are worthy of the gift of magic, Muggle-borns must have stolen their wands and therefore also their ability to perform magic since they are not “real” witches and wizards. Their wands, and with them their only chance to defend themselves are therefore taken away from them. Remus Lupin explains this new law to Harry, Hermione and Ron, who because of being on the run from the Ministry are unaware of the changed rules: “... unless you can prove that you have at least one close wizarding relative, you are now deemed to have obtained your magical power illegally and must suffer the punishment” (DH 173). Muggle-borns are being questioned, tortured, sent to prison and in some cases killed for being who they are. The message is clear: being Muggle-born is a disgrace to the world of magic and they should therefore be eliminated. Half-bloods are being accepted since the number of actual pure-blood families are so few that it would be impossible to eliminate the half-bloods as well if the purebloods want there to be anyone with magical blood left: “‘The Death Eaters can’t all be pure-blood, there aren’t enough pure-blood wizards left,’ said Hermione stubbornly. ‘I expect most of them are half-bloods pretending to be pure. It’s only Muggle-borns they hate [...]’” (HBP 227). Hermione is right. It seems that Voldemort is not the only one that tries to hide his true identity. Umbridge is another example of a witch who, by lying about how she received Salazar Slytherin’s medallion, lies about her true heritage. The demand to be of pure blood creates such desperation in the wizard society that people lies about where they come from. The fact that someone with such high authority like Umbridge lies as well, proves that the claim for a “pure” wizard society may have gone too far.

Further, with the new laws and with the new commission come the so called Snatchers. These people receive payment from the Ministry for catching and bringing in Muggle-borns on the run: “they’re everywhere, gangs trying to earn gold by rounding up

Muggle-borns and blood traitors, there's a reward from the Ministry for everyone captured" (DH 311). This introduces another label concerning blood status as well: blood traitor. A blood traitor is a pure-blood (or half-blood?) who does not agree with the pure-blood ideology and is therefore considered a traitor to the pure race. The Weasley family is an example of what the new Ministry considers a blood traitor family, something that Ron confirms: "My whole family are blood traitors! That's as bad as Muggle-borns to Death Eaters!" (HBP 227). According to Barrett, Ron is right: "for those who care about Blood Status, seeing that others don't is offensive in the highest" (76). It therefore becomes criminal and accordingly punishable to sympathize with the Muggle-borns, and the accused blood traitors are forced on the run as well. Here as well, the claim for a pure wizard race proves to have gone too far when the people in power chases away and kills people belonging to their own idea of perfection. The question remains how Voldemort and his supporters imagine they can create an all-magic society when they at the same time want to eliminate the majority of the magical people.

### **The slavery of the house-elves**

'Dobby is always having to punish himself for something, sir. They lets Dobby get on with it, sir. Sometimes they reminds me to do extra punishments ...' 'But why don't you leave? Escape?' 'A house-elf must be set free, sir. And the family will never set Dobby free ... Dobby will serve the family until he dies, sir ...'

- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (20)

The race issues of the wizarding world do not end with the Mudblood-problem. Maybe the most prominent case of race discrimination is the slavery of the house-elves. Susan Peppers-Bates and Joshua Rust argue that Voldemort's "pure-blood ideology" does not come out of nowhere (112). Unlike the treatment of the Mudbloods, the enslavement of the house-elves seems to be an overlooked issue in the wizarding world. A house-elf is bound to his or her master, their lot in life is to obey and it is so deeply rooted that some of them, such as Winky for example, lose themselves completely when being set free. Another example is Kreacher of the Black family. His dying wish is to have his head nailed to the wall alongside of the former Black house-elves (the fact that there is a wall for his head to be nailed to should be evidence enough that there is a serious problem). This ingrained hierarchy in the wizard world ends up with house-elves identifying themselves more with their masters than with their own individual person. (Peppers-Bates and Rust)

Something else that is deeply rooted concerning this particular issue is the common wizard's attitude towards this problem. The Weasley family, with Ron as the most evident example, demonstrates that even the most kind-hearted wizards do not consider house-elf slavery a matter worth discussing. It is clear that the Weasley family, together with most wizards and witches growing up in the wizard world, is under the impression that being slaves is something that the house-elves want. One example is Gryffindor's ghost, Nearly Headless Nick's comment on Hermione's questions about the Hogwarts house-elves' working conditions: "'Sick leave and pensions?' he said, pushing his head back onto his shoulders and securing it once with his ruff. 'House-elves don't want sick leave and pensions!'" (GoF 202) Providing an outside view at the problem, Hermione's response is clear: "'Slave labor,' said Hermione, breathing hard through her nose. 'That's what made this dinner. Slave labor'" (GoF 202). However, when looking at how the house-elves act, this general attitude does not seem to be completely wrong. It seems like Dobby is the only elf that throughout the seven books shows any kind of will to be set free. This might be because he serves the horrible Malfoy family. However, Kreacher serves Sirius Black who treats him awfully and he still does not show any signs of wanting to leave. The question is why?

Horne claims that the description of the house-elf slavery "contains uncomfortable echoes of many of the stereotypes held by whites of the enslaved African-Americans" (80-81). She continues in saying that "simple, loyal, and childlike, happy to serve their betters, Rowling's house-elves speak in a patois closer to 1930s and 40s Hollywood misconceptions of "darker" dialect than to any actual African-American speech pattern" (81). This, she argues is a parallel to the comedy twentieth-century film makers created around "many [of the] black characters" (81). Even if Dobby is supposed to work as a role model for a free elf, the comedy around his character "proves more an object of humor ... than a model of what a free elf can accomplish" (81). Examples of this are Dobby's negotiations with Dumbledore concerning his salary for working at Hogwarts: "'Professor Dumbledore offered Dobby ten Galleons a week, and weekends off,' said Dobby, suddenly giving a little shiver, as though the prospect of so much leisure and riches was frightening, 'but Dobby beat him down, miss ... Dobby likes freedom, miss, but he isn't wanting too much, miss, he likes work better'" (GoF 415). Being content with one Galleon a week, Dobby somehow seems to feel that ten Galleons are too much for a house-elf, free or not. It might be argued that the comedy Rowling creates around Dobby and the other house-elves generates confusion since the subject actually is really serious.

Further, Horne is not the only one that sees the resemblances between the institution of house-elves and African-American slavery. Peppers-Bates and Rust draw upon some examples from Malcolm X's portrayal of the so called "house Negro" (113). They claim that "this house-elf identification with "their" family at the expense of their own identity" can be compared to Malcolm X's "house Negro" portrayal where the slave "would say, 'What's the matter boss, we sick?'" (113). This last comment, "we sick", indicate that the slave, as Peppers-Bates and Rust puts it "identified with his master, more than his master identified with himself" (113). Finding it insulting and therefore refusing to collect the knitted clothes made and left out by Hermione, the Hogwarts house-elves can, according to Peppers-Bates and Rust be compared to the African-American slave described above. The identity of these elves is so deeply rooted in being servants of Hogwarts that they have forgotten about their own individuality (113). When Dobby tells Harry about how he now wants to get paid for his services "the house-elves all around the kitchen, who had been listening and watching with interest, all looked away at these words, as though Dobby had said something rude and embarrassing" (GoF 414). It is obvious, however wrong it might be, that at least the house-elves of Hogwarts do not want anything to do with salary, pensions and, independence.

Continuing, with Dobby being the only known elf that appreciates his freedom, Peppers-Bates and Rust say that the "different response to the offer of freedom" (114) is due to how the elf is treated by his or her master. An elf being treated well and with respect obviously finds it easier to connect with his or her master than an elf being treated badly (114). As mentioned before, Dobby is the Malfoy house-elf before being set free by Harry in the end of the second book. As the passage quoted in the beginning of this chapter indicates, when being a slave of the Malfoy household, Dobby was not treated well at all. This also leads us back to the question of Kreacher. Being treated with nothing close to respect by his master Sirius Black in the fifth book, he still does not seem keen to leave the Black residence. However, as a reader will find out in the last book, Kreacher actually was treated with both respect and kindness by at least one of the Blacks – Sirius' brother Regulus. Harry learns that Regulus Black scarified himself to save Kreacher's life in his attempt to destroy one of Voldemort's horcruxes. With this information at hand, the question marks around Kreacher disappear. The old house-elf also seems to eulogize his dead mistress, Mrs Black who, despite of what impression her horrible portrait may give, seems to have treated her elf relatively kindly. This might explain why Kreacher does not show any sign of wanting to leave despite of Sirius' bad treatment.

The treatment and slavery of the house-elves is according to many critics what laid the ground to the possibility of Voldemort's rise. Peppers-Bates and Rust claim that the "pre-existing institutions within Hogwarts and the Wizarding World set the stage for Voldemort's totalizing pure-blood utopia" (110). This means that in an already hierarchical society (which the wizard world is) it is not that hard to introduce a new ideology with similar aims. Further, Peppers-Bates and Rust argue that "institutional and structural discrimination occurs when a society's rules and conventions unjustly favor certain subgroups" (111) and they then continue by saying that "Voldemort's uprising would not have been possible had this great chain of magical being not already entrenched itself in the hearts of ordinary witches and wizards" (114). As the loving, caring and completely ordinary (wizard) Weasley family shows with their attitude towards house-elf enslavement, there is an already existing hierarchy in the wizard world with witches and wizards at the top and house-elves and other magical creatures at the bottom. This hierarchy is accepted by the Weasleys and the other ordinary citizens of the wizarding world. It might be argued that it is because of this already existing racial ideology that Voldemort succeeds with his take-over.

When Hermione, the only one that seems to think the treatment of the house-elves is as wrong as any other type of race discrimination, creates her house-elf rights movement S.P.E.W (The Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare) she looks closer at the issue. Through the library she finds out that the enslavement of the elves goes centuries back. Hermione cannot believe that this issue has not been given attention before and she sets clear aims for her new movement: "Our short term aims ... are to secure house-elves fair wages and working conditions. Our long-term aims include changing the law about non-wand use, and trying to get an elf into the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, because they're shockingly underrepresented" (GoF 247). Not being convinced of Rowling's intentions, Horne claims that "in her denigration of Hermione's activism, Rowling may be creating a critique of the social justice approach to antiracism work, similar to the accusations of multicultural antiracists who upbraid social justice antiracists for hijacking their issues for their own political ends" (86). She continues in saying that making Dobby gather all Hermione's home-knitted clothes himself "shows not only Rowling's deft hand with humor, but also her distrust of a social justice antiracism pedagogy empty of the more personal approach embraced by multicultural antiracism" (86). The name of Hermione's movement (S.P.E.W) is another humorous feature which might be a display of Rowling's mocking attitude towards "the social justice approach to antiracism work" (86).

Further, it seems like the wizards and witches of the magical world do not consider the enslavement of the elves as a problem comparable to the Mudblood/pure-blood issue. If this is because elves are not human and therefore not considered as precious is a question one might ask. The issue is however a clear case of discrimination based on race and is no doubt comparable to the Mudblood oppression. Horne continues in arguing that:

Rowling's depiction of the elves as a race that loves being enslaved may also be an attempt at humor. Yet this depiction places her in a difficult double bind as the series progressively increases its focus on its antiracist themes – how can you argue on one hand that Mudbloods should be granted the same rights as pure-blood wizards, but suggest on the other that another sentient race is, by nature, servile to another? (86)

One might argue that the humor Rowling creates around the house-elves and their enslavement diverts one's attention from the seeing the actual problem. This results in that Rowling's antiracist arguments fail slightly when it comes to the case of the enslaved elves. Horne claims that lack of "references to S.P.E.W." (86) in the fifth book, and that they in the two last books completely vanish, make it seem like Rowling started to "realize the corner she had backed herself into" (86). As the next chapter will discuss, the reappearance of the goblin Griphook in the last book has been argued to be Rowling's attempt to redeem her sidestep concerning the house-elf issue. (Horne)

## **The mistreatment of other magical creatures**

'The right to carry a wand,' said the goblin quietly, 'has long been contested between wizards and goblins.' 'Well, goblins can do magic without wands,' said Ron. 'That is immaterial! Wizards refuse to share their secrets of wandlore with other magical beings, they deny us the possibility of extending our powers!'

- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (395)

When looking further at how the magical society of *Harry Potter's* world treats their fellow creatures, it becomes fairly clear that the house-elves are not the only ones that are being neglected. Rowling's fantasy world is the home of many strange creatures. To name a few, there are werewolves, giants, centaurs, merpeople, veelas, trolls, and goblins. The statue in the great hall of the Ministry of Magic shows clearly that an insalubrious hierarchy existed in the wizarding world even before Voldemort's take over. Changing the appearance of the statue is the first act of change that Voldemort and his Death Eaters make, and it is therefore fairly clear that this statue manifests the ideal of the Ministry and the wizard world. When finished with his changes, Voldemort's statue takes the shape of "a witch and a wizard sitting on



ornately carved thrones” (DH 198). Looking closer “Harry realised that what he has thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans” (DH 199). These “carved humans” working as thrones are of course Muggles. However, looking closer at what the statue looked like before Voldemort's changes, the differences are actually not that great; “tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and the wizard” (OotP 144). Peppers-Bates and Rust argue that the limits of an already existing discriminating ideology have been “simply pushed to an extreme the prejudice already represented in the original ... statue” (112). Further, this means that even if the old statue does not discriminate Muggles and Muggle-borns, it does certainly not show “a vision of equality” (Peppers-Bates and Rust 112).

Just as she divided “ordinary” witches and wizards into four groups concerning their attitudes towards Muggles, Barrett also divides them into groups concerning their thoughts about other magical creatures. On the one hand, there are those who believe that all magical beings should have equal rights (since some have the same abilities) but that they should still be seen as separate since they belong to a different species. On the other hand, there are the ones who according to Barrett are in majority, who do not consider any kind of other “creature” human at all (78). Barrett claims that it is almost always “fear that drives the most vicious oppression of other magical creatures” (79) and one might argue that it is the lack of knowledge of the “other” that evokes this fear. Barrett continues in saying that this kind of attitude towards the “other” brings the danger of “the assumption that behavioral traits are ingrained in the “nature” of certain kinds of creatures” (78). This obviously creates a dangerous problem since this kind of thinking suggest that these “behavioral traits” are genetic and therefore inheritable from one relative to another, meaning that they are “present in all member of the group” (78). This means that if one person of a specific species is to do something wrong, all the other ones are to suffer the punishment as well. This, as Barrett also points to, leads us again back to Nazi Germany and the isolation of the Jews. The Nazis had scientists stating that Jews were by nature “genetically and therefore immutably, greedy, dirty, and dishonest” (79). This led to it becoming legal to discriminate and mistreat the Jewish people. Similar events can be seen in the story about Harry Potter as well. One example is Lupin, who in the third book, after being revealed as being a werewolf feels forced to resign his post as professor at Hogwarts since having a werewolf teaching children is not acceptable. Barrett also gives the example of Madam Maxime in the fourth book who is accused of

cheating with the votes in the Triwizard Tournament because she is a half-giant. Hagrid, being a half-breed as well, is because of his heritage questioned in his role as professor in Care of Magical Creatures.

It might be argued that the goblins are one of the species that have been treated most unfairly (after the house-elves of course) by the humans of the magical world. Being the ones that run the wizarding bank Gringotts, the goblins clearly have a higher status than the enslaved house-elves. Like Horne puts it, they obviously “interact” (89) with the humans in contrast to for example the centaurs who consider human interaction a disgrace for their own species (Horne). The goblin that Harry, and with him the reader, gets to know the best is the one named Griphook. Griphook is first introduced in the first book when he guides Harry and Hagrid to Harry’s vault inside Gringotts. He reappears again in the last book, where, after being saved from Bellatrix and the Malfoys by Dobby the house-elf, he helps Harry, Ron and Hermione with finding one of Voldemort’s horcruxes. His reappearance is according to Horne “Rowling’s attempt to rethink her earlier satirical dismissal of the social justice approach to antiracism” (88). She continues in saying that “Rowling begins to take more seriously the idea that racism can be defined not simply as individual, personal acts of prejudice, but also as cultural and institutional structures and policies that create advantages for dominant group members and disadvantage for people (or creatures) from subordinated groups” (Horne 88). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the absence of references to S.P.E.W. appears to indicate that Horne might be right.

Being barely awake during Professor Binns’s History of Magic lessons, it is not until he meets Griphook for the second time that Harry actually learns the truth about goblins and their history. Horne writes that “goblins, unlike house-elves, have not taken kindly to the assumption that humans are by nature at the top of the hierarchy of sentient magical creatures” (89). This is proven as a correct fact when the students of Hogwarts are lectured on the “goblin rebellion” in their history classes (PoA). It is not that hard to figure out what the “goblin rebellion” means, even if Rowling gives little information about the subject. Again, Horne speculates on the matter: “... a careful reader, particularly one schooled in a social justice approach to antiracism, can piece together an explanation: the wizarding world excluded goblins from the privileges it accorded itself” (90). This, one might argue is reason enough to protest. As the passage quoted at the start of this chapter indicates, goblins have no right to possess a wand; a situation which they obviously feel is unjust. What Griphook says

is highly relevant to the subject of race discrimination. As proven above in the chapter about the enslaved house-elves, there was a hierarchy in the wizarding world long before Voldemort's pure-blood utopia. The humans of the wizarding world are clearly not willing to "share their secrets" concerning magic with the other magical creatures even if some of these are just as intelligent. When Harry tries to mediate between Ron and Griphook, saying that it is not "about wizards versus goblins or any other sort of magical creature ..." (DH 395) anymore, Griphook says: "But it is, it is about precisely that! As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set still more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?" (395). Horne says that Griphook's answer is the first in all of the seven books that lets "a member of an oppressed racial group [...] speak against institutionally-based wizardly oppression, rather than against a specific wizard gone bad" (93). This might be argued to be Rowling's comeback from the confusion around the comical house-elf enslavement.

When asked by Harry if Griphook is telling the truth about the sword of Gryffindor (that is, that it was stolen from the goblins by Godric Gryffindor), Hermione for once does not have an answer: "I don't know," she said hopelessly. "Wizarding history often skates over what the wizards have done to other magical races ..." (DH 409). This proves that the children of the wizard world are not taught in school about the mistreatment of other magical beings. This in turns means that they grow up believing that enslaving house-elves is acceptable, that the right to carry a wand is something that the goblins do not deserve, that werewolves are dangerous all the time, and that trolls and giants are foul and stupid. This creates a vicious circle and this clear case of race discrimination will not stop until the children of the wizard world are taught otherwise.

## **Conclusion**

"You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so called purity of blood. You fail to recognise that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!"

- *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (768)

From the deeply rooted house-elf slavery to Voldemort's pure-blood utopia and goblin isolation, the racial issues of Rowling's story about young wizard Harry Potter can be found in every corner. The issues of racism and race discrimination in the wizarding world at least try to teach the reader of the Potter saga the consequences of racial hatred. As mentioned before,

Rowling mirrors the history of the real world's racial problems in her fantasy world of wizards. By creating the concepts of Mudbloods and halfbloods, enslaved elves, and mistreated magical creatures she reflects issues comparable to the hatred of the Jews in Nazi Germany, and the African-American enslavement in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Even if some writers have pointed out Rowling's failing antiracist arguments concerning the house-elf enslavement, she manages to reach a turning point towards the end. It might also be argued that she shows that it is not always a question about good and evil. The fact that there already is a long existing hierarchy in the wizard world before Voldemort's rise shows that sometimes it is necessary for someone from the outside to view the problem to be able to actually see it. Being born in the Muggle-world and therefore an outside observer, Hermione's role as fighter for elf-rights makes the reader, and hopefully other wizards aware of the issue. Owing to the obscurity in the end of book seven that the situation changed concerning the issue of elf enslavement, one can only hope that actions were taken later on. Nevertheless, Ron's remark to his daughter in the very end of the last book ("Granddad Weasley would never forgive you if you married a pure-blood" (DH 605)) indicates that the situation at least changes for the better concerning the Muggle-born discrimination.

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