Naming That-Which-Must-Remain-Unnamed: *Harry Potter's* Battle Against Gender Inequality, Child Abuse, Racism, and Ostracism

MA Thesis
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Introduction

i. *Harry*'s Fame

This year, 2018, it has been almost twenty-one years since the publication of the first Harry

Potter novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and it has been ten since *Harry Potter*

and the Deathly Hallows came out. Ever since the series' publication until now the books

have been immensely popular with people from all over the world and from all ages. Both

Forbes and *The Telegraph* recognise that *Harry Potter* has broken all kinds of records,

ranging from fastest selling book to most copies sold in the category of fiction[1]. Moreover,

the series has been adapted to a very successful cinematic franchise and theme parks have

been built in London (England), Orlando (United States) and Osaka (Japan), amassing an

even greater audience. Since a few years, *Harry Potter* merchandise has also hit the market,

allowing fans to buy Hogwarts's costumes, wands, wizarding candy and many more products.

I myself bought *Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans* and a *Chocolate Frog* when I visited the

Harry Potter Studio Tour in London.

Responses to the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series are varied, with some applauding

the author and her series, while others criticise her for her handling of the fantasy genre. The

latter critics argue that the marketing of the books and Rowling's disregard for the classical

fantasy shows that she is only "mining for riches"[2][3]. I do not agree with this point of view for

several reasons, not in the least because Rowling spends a big portion of her earnings on

charities – even founding one of her own. My main reason for not agreeing with such

criticism, however, can be found in the books themselves; the books explore human

relationships, mainly familial relationships and friendship – how both, when healthy, are

based on selfless love. As Rowling shows in the depiction of Lily Potter's sacrifice for her

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[1] See Forbe's "The Most Powerful Female Entrepreneurs" and The Telegraph's "The Charts that Show How the
UK Loves Harry Potter."
[2] See Pennington, page 79.
[3] Chapter Two shall discuss in what ways *Harry Potter* deviates from classic fantasy.

son Harry – and James Potters's sacrifice for his wife and son – love cannot be selfish. Moreover, as I will show in Chapter 2, Rowling's series does not disregard the fantasy genre at all.

iii. Methodology

My aim is to analyse several ways in which *Harry Potter* reflects upon recognisable social issues, such as child abuse, sexism, racism and ostracism. The analyses will show that Rowling amassed her readership not just through clever content, but also through shrewd advertising and publishing. Moreover, this study will demonstrate that the fantasy genre, as well as elements of classical texts, are meant to influence the reader's thoughts on themes Rowling's series presents.

I will start by researching *Harry Potter'*s readership in Chapter 1. This chapter will chart the popularity of the series and how the Potter books accumulated their mixed readership. Next, Chapter 2 questions how Rowling's *Harry Potter* uses fantasy in order to remark on social issues, taking into account how other writers used fantasy before her. Chapter 3 will demonstrate that Harry, the titular character, confronts various moral dilemmas in a way that marks him out as combining aspects of Christ and the classical hero in his person. Lastly, in Chapter 4 I will present examples of the societal issues Rowling's Potter series discusses. In this chapter I will discuss child abuse, gender inequality, and racism and ostracism, for these are, sadly, still relevant in contemporary western society.

Chapter 1: Harry Potter's Senior Membership to the Book Club of Crossover Novels

Harry Potter is a very popular series in children's literature, having been sold all over the world in dozens of different languages. However, classifying the series as only belonging to the genre of children's literature poses a few problems. Despite the fact that many children's books deal with mature themes, books like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) by Eric Carle are not generally picked up by adults for some entertaining before-bed reading – unless, of course, they read it out to their children. Even books by Roald Dahl – with a lengthier and more "difficult" narrative, and more "grown-up" themes – do not score as highly when it comes to adults reading them for their own pleasure. Most grown-ups tend to stay within the adult scope of reading. However, many adults do seek out the *Harry Potter* series.

Rowling's Potter series is comprised of books that have crossed over from child audiences to adult ones, something Rachel Falconer, in her *The Crossover Novel* (2008) points out as peculiar. She explains that previously it had been more common for adult fiction to cross over to child audiences (11). It is for this reason that this chapter analyses those aspects of the *Harry Potter* series that may have had a hand in popularizing the books amongst adults, investigating not just the content of the series, but also its marketing and publishing strategies. Prior to my research I have conducted my own survey, asking fifty-five readers why they enjoyed the novels – also as adults[4].

Harry Potter: Children's Literature vs. Adult Literature. Or Both?

Mr Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. Mrs Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences,

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[4] See Appendix 1 for the survey questions and Appendix 2 for the results.

spying on the neighbours. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their

opinion there was no finer boy anywhere (*The Philosopher's Stone*, 7).

Thus reads the introduction of the first two characters in the Potter novels. Mr and Mrs

Dursley are Harry's aunt and uncle, tasked with his care after the death of his parents. This

description does not inspire positive responses, an impression that is confirmed when later in

the book the reader discovers just how mean, prideful and spiteful they are: "The Dursleys

often spoke about Harry [..] as though he wasn't there – or rather, as though he was something

very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug" (22). Apart from making clear that they

do not like Harry, the Dursleys are also abusive: they make Harry sleep in a cupboard under

the stairs, encourage bullying by Dudley and neglect to give him any positive attention.

Dudley is introduced later, when the narrator shifts to focus on Harry's thoughts and feelings:

"Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry often said that Dudley

looked like a pig in a wig" (21). Like his parents, Dudley is a bully, often taunting Harry with

his friends (23). It is no surprise then that both the narrator and Harry think so unfavourably

of them.

According to Perry Nodelman in his *The Hidden Adult* (2008), these introductions of

the Dursleys fit well in a children's book. He presents a survey of common characteristics of

children's literature. One characteristic concerns the inclusion of "childlike protagonists"

(77), such as Harry. Nodelman also claims that texts for children "tend to 'resonate' – to

imply more subtle complexities than they actually say" (77). For instance, very often people

with unkind characters have unkind appearances in children's books. In Dahl's *The Twits,* the

narrator explains that "[i]f a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And

when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier

and uglier" (7). Rowling uses this technique in this instance to illustrate how awful the

Dursleys are. However, she does not do so consistently, because not every character she

endows with an unfortunate appearance turns out to be evil. Severus Snape is one such character. Rowling's descriptive writing style is, according Nodelman, not in sync with the "simplicity of style" most authors use when writing children's books (8). This simple style, Nodelman observes, focuses more on action than description. The introduction of the Dursleys is highly descriptive, noting their weight, the length of their necks, and facial hair, and as Rowling does that with all characters, constructions (buildings, bridges, and rooms) places and situations, she differs from many other authors of children's literature.

However, Nodelman makes it clear that there really is only one way to truly define children's literature. Whether a work of fiction is for children or adults can be identified by "its intended audience" (3). As Bloomsbury Publishing initially published *Harry Potter* as a book intended for children, it stands to reason that the actual audience, therefore, were children. However, soon after the first book came out, adults began to take an interest in it as well. For this reason, *Harry Potter* can be classified as crossover fiction.

Both Sandra Beckett in her "Crossover" and Falconer discuss what crossover fiction is and how a book, film or series can be classified as such. Falconer explains that, as with children's fiction, there are no "shared characteristics" to define crossover fiction (27). Not all books that are read by children and adults alike share the same style, or kind of protagonists. Like children's fiction, crossovers are only truly definable by their audience: "[a]ny book, film or TV programme that appeals to both adults and children is a crossover title" (qtd. in Beckett, 58). However, rather than focusing on this label, I wish to discover how exactly the Potter series manages to appeal to an adult audience as well as to children.

Reasons for the Popularity of the Potter Series

A boy was sitting on top of the grey blankets, his legs stretched out in front of him, holding a book. There was no trace of the Gaunts in Tom Riddle's face. Merope had

got her dying wish: he was his handsome father in miniature, tall for eleven year olds, dark-haired and pale. (*The Half-Blood Prince,* 252).

Thus reads the description of Harry's greatest adversary when still a young boy, Lord Voldemort, formerly known as Tom Riddle. His description could not be more different from that of the Dursleys in the first book. In the course of six novels, the series seems to have stepped away from connecting a character's appearance to its character, for Tom Riddle is a handsome boy. However, as the reader knows, he will turn out to be pure evil – even before he dies for the first time after which he comes back physically mutilated. Of course, after his death and rebirth Voldemort's appearance matches his evil intentions better, but before that time he was an attractive young man. When Tom was roughly fifteen or sixteen years old he had, as Harry observes, a "most handsome face" (346). In a sense Rowling's writing style has thus changed, maybe even matured along with the series' readers and characters. As children grow up and mature, they no longer need someone's appearance to tell them whether they are good or evil. Instead, children turn to characters' actions to define their goodness.

This section presents several possible reasons for *Harry Potter'*s popularity among adult readers, starting with the themes of the series. Several individuals who took part in my survey argued that the themes the novels cover "are not just for children". Kalie Caetano, in her essay, agrees with this, but argues that the themes have matured exceptionally in the course of the novels. With regard to the theme of death she says: the "themes seem relatively subdued at the outset of the series, but gradually the emphasis on dying ratchets up" (113). In the first novel, death is still rather abstract. Harry is aware that a person who is dead is gone and remains but a memory, but he has never experienced the acute grief one feels when a loved one dies, and he has never seen someone die before. However, from *The Goblet of Fire* onwards death becomes more concrete, especially when Harry and Cedric suddenly find

themselves in a graveyard after winning the Triwizard Tournament. Cedric is killed and for

Harry death has never been closer:

> For a second that contained an eternity, Harry stared into Cedric's face, at his open
>
> grey eyes, black and expressionless as the windows of a deserted house, at his half-
>
> open mouth, which looked slightly surprised. And then, before Harry's mind had
>
> accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt
>
> himself being pulled to his feet (554).

In this chapter, Harry is confronted not only with the murder of a friendly rival, but also with

his own imminent death. And when he sees the spirits of his parents, and Cedric's, Harry –

and the reader – better grasp what death is.

Caetano presents a sound argument, and the maturations of the novels' themes might

indeed account for the adult interest in the series. However, I think that the series has been

rife with mature themes right from the start. For instance, the first book already deals with

desire and the deep psychological consequences of wanting something more than anything

else. Harry finds the Mirror of Erised (desire), which shows him himself standing next to his

parents. He becomes fairly obsessed with this image and comes back several times to visit the

mirror again. When Professor Dumbledore discovers his interest in the mirror, he warns Harry

that the mirror

> 'shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts.
>
> […] However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted
>
> away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if
>
> what it shows is real or even possible. [..] It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget
>
> to live' (157).

In a nutshell, Dumbledore explains that love, or desire, if indulged too much, can turn into an

obsessions, which could impede ones life. Yet even though Dumbledore's approach is

pedagogical, he takes Harry's desire very seriously. Thus, the way the series presents its themes may have been a contributed factor to the books' popularity amongst adults.

Another factor that definitely played a large roll in introducing the series to grown-up readers is the way the series was advertised. Falconer claims that crossover fiction in general owes its existence mostly to TV-series and films (22). Through media like *Oprah's Book Club*, people are made aware of certain novels, while at the same time they hear from experts that the novels are worth reading. Rebekah Fitzsimmons agrees with this, but she also argues that *Harry Potter* owes most of its success to newspapers, in particular the "*New York Times Book Review* and its bestseller list" (80). The *New York Times* has been a household name for a long time now, meaning that many readers of the popular newspaper consider its opinion relevant. This also means that their best-seller list often influences book sales, cajoling their audience to buy such and such books. Many publishers seem to make use of this fact, as it is usually one of the first newspapers mentioned on book covers as well. In fact, looking at the dust jackets of my own *Harry Potter* copies, it is clear to me that Bloomsbury is aware how advertising by various news organizations helps promote the series. For instance, among the blurb in my copy of *The Philosopher's Stone*, the publishers quoted an excerpt from the *Daily Mail*: "Hooray for Harry Potter! … (Harry's) adventures are as funny as Roald Dahl's stories and as vivid as the Narnia books – and grown-ups seem to enjoy them as much as their children". Not only does this quote argue that the story is riveting, it also says that the book is an perfectly acceptable read for adults as well as children.

This excerpt from the *Daily Mail* is only one example of the publishers' smart marketing, which, I argue, also accounts for the way the series appealed to adults. Not only did Bloomsbury use the series' popularity in the bestseller lists, they also introduced adult covers for the novels. Both Nicholas Tucker and Sharon Black agree this was a smart move on Bloomsbury's part, because, as Tucker explains, the books no longer "immediately denote

'children's book' to casual onlookers" (233). Sharon Black builds on this observation and explains that the adult covers allowed "grown-ups [to] read them openly on public transportation" (540). However, Falconer is disinclined to agree with both Tucker and Black because "it remains to be proven that issuing an adult edition contributed in any substantial way to attracting new adult readers" (16). The adult covers may not have had a substantial effect, but it is difficult to deny that it did have some, especially since this public reading of the series probably also helped in promoting the books in a word of mouth fashion.

Another reason for *Harry Potter*'s popularity, I argue, is the time of the series' publication. The first three Potter books came out just before the end of the millennium (1997, 1998 and 1999 respectively). These years were marked by a universal uncertainty about what the future would hold and the consequences of all the new modern inventions introduced in these years. Tréza Rosado agrees and explains why this timeframe was beneficial to the series' fame: "While the world waited on the precipice of the new millennium, it waited in a state of hesitant anticipation; the Harry Potter series allowed its readers to process their disorientation with the unfamiliar through a comfortable distance of fantasy literature" (77). The fifth book in the series, *The Order of Phoenix*, helps in illustrating this argument. On September 11 2001, just after the start of the new millennium, the western world was shocked by the joint attack on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia. Two years later, J. K. Rowling released her fifth novel, in which the western world's terror was reflected by the re-emergence of Lord Voldemort and his followers. Just as in our world, witches and wizards across wizarding UK were terrified of what was coming next. In a sense, Voldemort and his Death Eaters, and the way Harry and his friends dealt with them, symbolises known terrorists and the way the free west hopes to defeat them.

Even more, the turn of the millennium caused another change that boosted *Harry Potter* and crossover fiction in general, namely the changing views on childhood and adulthood.

Falconer confirms that after 1997 it became popular for adults to be childish (32). She introduces the term 'infantilisation' and explains that adults became more interested in children's books because of the adult themes the genres present and because it became more fashionable to be youthful – or childlike (43). In a sense, like crossover fiction, which mixed literature for children with that for adults by way of adult themes, the changing views on childhood have brought childhood and adulthood closer together. Marah Gubar points out that nowadays "tiny girls [are] tarted up to perform in beauty contests and [are] invited to don miniscule bikinis and midriff-bearing tops in everyday life" (125). However, while children seem to grow up quicker, adults can enjoy their youth longer. For instance, it is now more acceptable for adults to also pursue "childish" activities. Many people continue to play computer games well into their adulthood, a development which is now supported by a whole market for adult video gaming. It is not so strange then, that in the book industry adults take an interest in more youthful fiction as well.

To conclude, it seems most likely that *Harry Potter*'s publishers were fortunate that they published when they did. People were turning to fiction – including children's fiction and crossover fiction – in order to cope with the changes the new millennium would undoubtedly bring. Also, because of the changing views on childhood and adulthood, people from all ages felt they could safely read the series without facing ridicule. What also undeniably helped promote the books among adult audiences was the fact that several bestseller lists promoted the series, assuring adults that the books would be relevant to read. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Rowling's series does not skirt the more "difficult" themes, like death and desire. The next chapter shall discuss the fantasy genre and how it helped Rowling reflect on the faults in western society.

Chapter 2: Harry Potter and the Fantastic Representation of Society

Harry Potter, as the previous chapter has shown, has a tremendous – and mixed – following all over the world. Through the themes the novels discuss, combined with advertising by various TV shows and newspapers, and with smart marketing and publishing, *Harry Potter* has managed to appeal to both children and adults. In this chapter I shall examine the way J. K. Rowling's Potter series questions and comments on the world inhabited by her readership, paying attention to the fantasy genre as the medium with which the text did so. To this end, I will first focus on the purpose of a fantasy story and give a brief description of the genre. Moreover, I will look closer at the magical world of *Harry Potter* in order to analyse certain fantasy features as well as the function of these features. Next, I will show that, although Rowling's series deviates somewhat from the formula of other well-known fantasy stories, the general purpose of the fantasy remains intact. At the end of the chapter I will argue that the fantasy genre of the Potter series allows the books to criticise society in a non-threatening way.

Fantasy's Roots

> It was on the corner of the street that [Mr Dursley] noticed the first sign of something
> peculiar – a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr Dursley didn't realise what he had
> seen – then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on
> the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight (*The Philosopher's Stone,*
> 8).

The reader's introduction to the magical world in *Harry Potter* is subtle, if not a little uncanny, because at first the reader cannot know for sure that the magic is real. However, with the introduction of Albus Dumbledore, the epitome of wizards with his "silver hair and beard […], long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground […] and his nose [which] was very long and crooked" (12), this issue is soon cleared up. Moreover, Dumbledore uses a

magical object, the "Put-Outer" in order to dim the streetlights outside Harry's aunt and uncle's house. It is therefore clear that Dumbledore knows of, and can use, magic as well. That the books contain fantasy elements is apparent.

I discussed in the previous chapter that Bloomsbury originally published the Potter series for children, but that adults, for various reasons, also became avid readers of the books. As I said, in this chapter I am more interested in the overall genre of the books and its functions. However, there are many genres within the fantasy, such as fairy-tales and myths. *Harry Potter* makes use of both of these, as I will show throughout this chapter.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary fantasy means: "a story or type of literature that describes situations that are very different from real life, usually involving magic". I do not completely agree with this definition, mostly because fantasy *does* describe real-world situations, even if it uses magic to do so. Both Margaret Hiley and Nodelman argue that fantasy utilizes real-world situations, or at least derive inspiration from them. For instance, Hiley explains that mythology, fantasy's forefather and also a subgenre of fantasy, "helps mankind come to terms with reality" (841). The Greeks in ancient times for instance, believed that gods and goddesses were responsible for various natural phenomena, such as death, rain, sunshine, volcanic eruptions, etc. In other words, their religion helped the Greeks come to terms with the world around them. Mythology is certainly present in the Potter series. Firenze, a centaur, is a mythological creature, half man and half horse. His purpose in the books is to save Harry from Voldemort and to teach him about unicorns and what Voldemort is doing with their blood. Even more than that, centaurs look to the stars and planets in order to understand what is happening in the world, or what will happen soon. For instance, in the first book Harry finds a creature (this turns out to be Voldemort) drinking the blood of a unicorn. Harry, like the reader, does not understand the purpose of such an act. Firenze's coming leads Harry to the answer: 'Do you not see that unicorn?' Firenze bellowed at Bane. 'Do you not

understand why it was killed? Or have the planets not let you in on that secret?" (*The Philosopher's Stone,* 188)[5]. This scene reveals that Voldemort is coming back and Firenze was key to this. In other words, Firenze, as a mythological creature, helps Harry and the reader make sense of what is happening in the story.

As I mentioned before, Nodelman also believes that fantasy makes use of real-world situations. He agrees with Hiley that mythology allows people to make sense of the world. However, he takes this a step further and explains why the same is true for fantasy. He presents the argument that "[f]antasy situations and characters […] are clearly not intended to mirror things actually in reality; but there are long-standing traditions of interpretation that allow readers to connect them to reality by reading them as allegoric or symbolic versions of the real thing" (16). Obviously in our world we do not have dragons, or wands, or brooms. However, we do have natural disasters such as wild fires, and machinated weapons, and also planes, cars and motorcycles, all things that can be represented through magical beings and objects.

Muggle vs. Magical Ways

'Three up…two across…' [Hagrid] muttered. 'Right, stand back, Harry.' He tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella. The brick he had touched quivered – it wriggled – in the middle, a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway on to a cobbled street which twisted and turned out of sight. 'Welcome,' said Hagrid, 'to Diagon Alley.' (*The Philosopher's Stone*, 56).

Diagon Alley is a shopping street in wizarding London, only accessible by magic. Once Harry has passed through this archway everything and almost everyone around him is magical. It is almost as if he completely leaves behind the "normal" world and enters another.

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[5] Bane is also a Centaur.

In several ways, the barrier Rowling creates between the normal world and the magical world, along with her presentation of witches, wizards and magical objects, are very familiar to most readers. For instance, in C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) – another very well-know fantasy novel for children, the normal world is separated from Narnia by a wardrobe. In other words, in both *Harry Potter* and *The Lion* the separation between the worlds is tangible and physically complete. One must go through the barrier, leave behind everything they know, and enter a new world. However, I argue that Rowling's use of the fantasy genre deviates somewhat from traditional use of the genre in that she, for example, constructs not only a physical separation between the non-magical and magical worlds, but also explains to the readers why such a separation is necessary, therefore leaving no doubt about place the magical communities' has within the constructed world. In the next section I will show how Rowling's use of the fantasy differs from other fantasy texts such as *The Lion* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). However, I will argue that the overall purpose of fantasy is retained in the Potter books.

By way of a start I will examine the typical plot line of fantasy stories to discover how *Harry Potter* relates to the tradition. Maria Nikolajeva explains that in most fairy-tales, a subgenre of fantasy, "the hero leaves home, meets helpers and opponents, goes through trials, performs a task, and returns home having gained some form of wealth" (140). To confirm that this is the general plotline of fairy-tales, I consult two very well known fantasy novels. In *The Lion,* the four Pevensie children step through a wardrobe, a move which brings them to another land: Narnia. Once there, they meet both friends (Mr Tumnus, Aslan, Mr and Mrs Beaver etc.) and foes (the White Witch and her followers). The children's mission, according to the Narnians, is to free Narnia from the witch and the eternal winter she has caused. Once the Pevensie children have grown up, they find their way home and once there, they become children again. But the knowledge which Narnia, and Aslan in particular, has imparted to

them stays with them and is used in the next book in the series: *Prince Caspian* (1951). In *The Lord of the Rings* the fellowship has to leave the safe lands they live in and travel all the way to Mordor so that Frodo can throw away the ring that threatens the safety of every free person in Middle-Earth. On their journey, the Fellowship of the Ring, like the Pevensie children, meet friends as well as opponents, and every member of the group goes through some kind of personal growth: Gimli and Legolas let go of the hatred their people have against each other, Sam learns what it means to stay true to oneself, Frodo discovers what a burden the ring is and that true friendship should be valued above all else, Merry and Pippin realise that there is more to life than jokes and having a good time, etc.

Similar to the characters in Tolkien's and Lewis's books, in *Harry Potter* Harry leaves home, makes new friends, encounters enemies, and returns having learned some valuable lessons. Voldemort is his biggest adversary, threatening's his life and the lives of others numerous times in the course of seventeen years. Voldemort's aim during the First Wizarding War was to kill Harry. Even though he succeeded in murdering Harry's parents, he did not manage to kill the then infant Harry. In Harry's first year at Hogwarts Voldemort, using Professor Quirrell as a human vehicle, attempts to murder him again. During Harry's second year, the piece of Voldemort's soul that was placed into the diary becomes active, and again tries to kill Harry. In *The Goblet of Fire* Voldemort is resurrected and his first plan of action is, once more, to end Harry's life. Harry and Voldemort have another life-threatening standoff in *The Order of the Phoenix* and in the last book, *The Deathly Hallows*. In all of the books, Harry has to fight, or overcome a great obstacle, near the end of the novel, just before the school year is over. And every time the school year is over Harry has to go back to his aunt and uncle, bringing with him new knowledge about life, love, friendship, and more practical knowledge about the magical world. So far, *Harry Potter* fits in well within the fantasy tradition that most readers of the genre are familiar with.

Next, I would like to discuss how *Harry Potter'*s fantasy world differs from that in Tolkien and Lewis's novels. I do so by looking at the three conditions of the fantasy genre as presented by Tzvetan Todorov in his *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Todorov argues that there are three conditions to the fantasy genre:

> First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations (33).

Arguably, the three conditions mentioned by Todorov are present in both *Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, *Harry Potter* does not conform to these conditions. For example, the first has no place in the Potter series. As I mentioned before, there are physical boundaries separating the Muggle world from the wizarding one, such as the brick wall Harry has to go through for his first visit to Diagon Alley. However, there are other non-physical barriers as well to ensure that the non-magical folk will never learn of witches and wizards. The wizarding world relies heavily on the Statute of Secrecy, as we find out several times throughout the novels. For instance, when Harry saves himself and Dudley from Dementors he receives a missive from the Ministry of Magic: "As you have already received an official warning for a previous offence under Section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlock's Statute of Secrecy, we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic" (*Order of the Phoenix,* 30). In short, the first requirement has no place in the Potter books as the narrator continually insists on this

separation between worlds. By the same token, there is not much room for hesitation on the readers' part when it comes to matters of magic, nor on the part of the characters themselves. Not even Hermione and Harry, who both come from Muggle homes, have difficulty adapting to this new world. Nor the Dursleys, who, even though they do not fully grasp the full magnitude of the magical world, or indeed magic itself, know that magic is real, potentially dangerous and something they ought to avoid.

The third condition also does not apply to the Potter novels. Suman Gupta, in *Re-Reading Harry Potter*, explains that *Harry Potter* is full of allegorical allusions, making sure the reader might see connections between the books' magical world and our own (57). For instance, the mistreatment of House-Elves is a clear representation of the slavery we have known – and sadly still know – in our world. What is moreover interesting to note, is that Nodelman, Hiley and Todorov do not agree on the latter's third condition. Whereas Todorov claims that readers of fantasy should reject allegorical readings of such texts, Nodelman and Hiley argue that many readers have approached fantasy text in precisely this allegorical way (16). I agree with Nodelman and Hiley on this point, which will become most apparent in Chapter Four, where I will discuss the representation of slavery and other real-world issues in the Potter books.

In short, *Harry Potter* is filled with magic, mythological beings, and fairy-tale tropes, which allows the series a place in the fantasy genre. However, the series deviates from other well-known fantasy books. Whereas in *Narnia* the children continually question magical objects or beings, the characters in *Harry Potter* – even those who come from non-magical backgrounds – have accepted magic for what it is, because they are accustomed to a clear separation between the magical world and the non-magical world. Nevertheless, the main purpose of the fantasy genre is fulfilled in them. As is signalled by Gupta, the books do reflect

problems we experience, or have experienced, by way of allegories and symbolism, which,

according to Nodelman and Hiley, is one of the most important purposes of the fantasy genre.

Chapter 3: Harry Potter and the Moral Compass of Heroes

In the previous chapter I have explained the purpose of the fantasy genre. What I found is that fantasy is commonly used to review society. In this chapter I will take one step further, examining how the *Harry Potter* series represents its hero, and the moral values he – and other characters – represent. This chapter focuses on Harry, the choices he makes, and how those choices are perceived by other characters in the novels. I will compare Harry to two great literary figures – the epic hero (Heracles in particular) and Jesus Christ – in order to discover his purpose within the story and how he might influence and inspire the readers.

I argue that Harry greatly resembles these two types of classical heroes in order to speak to the readers' moral understanding of the story. To do so I will start with a brief explanation of what an epic hero is and what their role was within literature. Next, I will compare Harry's traits to those of the epic hero in order to see how they overlap. After this, I will provide a concise description of the heroic profile of Jesus Christ and his role within the Christian faith. Then, lastly, I will compare Harry to Christ to see how he is modelled after the biblical hero.

Harrycles

The Ancient Greeks invented the epic hero, regaling people with tales of strong figures who, no matter the cost, fought for glory and more likely than not died when still young and perfect[6]. Figures like Heracles, Achilles and Odysseus have been admired within, and outside of, the literary culture for nearly 3000 years. Karl Galinsky explains how these figures earned the title "epic heroes" and what their purpose was within literature. According to Galinsky most of the classical hero's traits are not fixed. However, some can be found in all epic heroes. Galinsky notes that the one criterion they must all adhere to is that they have at least one talent with which they are able to outshine all others. They must moreover use this talent

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[6] See Miller, page. 4.

in pursuit of honour. Otherwise, Galinsky argues, "[t]he traditional range of [the epic hero's] qualities was varied and complex enough to be susceptible to ever new interpretations and thus to assure the hero's survival and popularity" (2). For this reason, some heroes were incredibly strong (like Heracles) while others were extremely skilled warriors (such as Achilles) or very wise (like Theseus). Moreover, Heracles has another trait that is fundamental to him. Specifically, he is "the hero with the inherent capacity to break out of an established pattern and to have a choice open to him" (6). According to Galinsky, this specific trait is what made Heracles so popular to the public and what helped him survive in literature throughout all these centuries. Also, this trait is what allowed him to change in every adaptation made of him.

Mary Pharr likewise elaborates on the traits of the epic hero, and she points out three more features she feels are characteristic. First she argues that "[e]pic heroism requires as much knowledge of sacrifice and ambiguity as it does of triumph and certainty" (11); next she points out that "[n]o epic hero escapes physical and emotional anguish" (16); lastly she notes that "[e]pic protagonists always have a degree of isolation thrust upon them with their power" (17). In my analysis below I will show in what ways Harry does – and perhaps does not – fit into the descriptions of the epic hero as provided by Galinsky and Pharr.

Moreover, Galinsky justifies the presence of the epic hero in literature as follows: "[e]very generation needs heroes and symbolic figures to embody its ideals and emotions" (Foreword). On a similar note, Amanda Cain observes that the epic (hero) "is attractive to readers because they […] are threatened by contemporary dangers and injustices, and they yearn for a yet-to-come hero who will […] save an imperilled world" (180). Throughout the ages, then, epic heroes have changed to fulfil the needs of a particular generation in various cultures. Heracles, too, has been subjected to many new adaptations in the course of time. In some versions, he has been a benevolent hero who stood up for common men, while in others

he came across as having more brawn than brain. The epic hero does not just represent the will of society, but he gives hope to those who hear the stories and he inspires the audience as well. For who would not want to be like his hero? And indeed, heroes still seem to be an enormously important part of our culture.

As mentioned, Galinsky, amongst others, describes the traits of the epic hero and why they were – and still are – so prevalent in literary culture. His account of the modern re-creation of the epic hero supports my argument that Harry is the textbook adaptation of the epic hero. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, it was fortuitous that Rowling published when she did, because the upcoming millennium made people fear the changes the future would bring. Some groups were afraid the world would end, others were afraid of computers and the changes these electronics would bring to our society. The heroic type, represented by Harry, played into these uncertainties and was therefore very welcome to the reader.

One of the traits Galinsky mentions concerns a talent with which the hero outshines everyone else. Harry has such a talent, arguably even more than one. In the *Philosopher's Stone* it becomes clear that Harry is an exceptional flyer when Ron remarks on Harry being made seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch team: "'But first-years never – you must be the youngest house player in about-' '- a century,' said Harry" (113). He gets to utilise this talent several times during his school career: once in the first book to catch a key that brings him to Professor Quirrell and Voldemort, and once in the fourth instalment when he needs it to fight a dragon during the Triwizard Tournament. Another of his exceptional talents is his ability to be unconditionally loyal to those he loves. It is this talent, along with various others, that is inherent to Harry's heroic nature. In the *Deathly Hallows* Harry finds out from a conversation between Professors Snape and Dumbledore that to save everyone from Voldemort, he has to die (551). Harry's reaction to this news shows how deep his loyalties run: "Harry would not

let anyone else die for him now that he had discovered that it was in his power to stop it"
(555). Even though Harry is deeply afraid when he walks to his own death, his resolve is great
and he embraces his fate with all the dignity he can muster. After Harry is hit by Voldemort's
fatal curse, Dumbledore presents Harry with the choice to either join his family in death or to
go back and continue his fight against Voldemort (578). Freedom of choice is another trait
Galinsky deems to be fundamental to the epic hero; does the hero pick the easy road or the
hard one? Harry, in accordance with his courage and his willingness to risk everything to save
the world, chooses to go back and finish his fight against Voldemort.

Pharr, as mentioned, also presents some characteristics all epic heroes share: they know
what it is like to triumph as well as to fail, they have felt emotional and physical pain, and
they are somewhat isolated from everyone else. I argue that these characteristics apply to
Harry as well. In every book he somehow conquers evil. Yet in several instances Harry pays
the price for such a victory, and feels as if he has failed despite his victories. When in the
Goblet of Fire Cedric Diggory dies, Harry is grief-stricken and inconsolable:

> 'Harry, let go of him,' he heard Fudge's voice say, and he felt fingers trying to prise
> him from Cedric's limp body, but Harry wouldn't let him go. Then Dumbledore's face,
> which was still blurred and misted, came closer. 'Harry, you can't help him now. It's
> over. Let go.' 'He wanted me to bring him back,' Harry muttered – it seemed important
> to explain this. 'He wanted me to bring him back to his parents…' (583).

When Cedric dies, Harry does not only feel a sense of failure, but his emotional pain is
apparent as well. The last feature Pharr mentions – the isolation thrust upon the hero – is
clearly present in the series, but perhaps most of all in the *Order of the Phoenix*. Because
Harry's peers will not believe him when he speaks of Voldemort's return, Harry is ostracized
and spends most his fifth year on his own. Isolation prevails moreover in the last book, as

Harry feels forced to leave his friends behind when he goes into the Forbidden Forest to die

by Voldemort's hand:

> Ron and Hermione seemed a long way away, in a far-off country; he felt as though he
> had parted from them long ago. There would be no goodbyes and no explanations, he
> was determined of that. This was a journey they could not take together, and the
> attempts they would make to stop him would waste valuable time (556).

In Harry's mind this part of the battle, the one in which he must die, is something he must

undergo alone.

Lastly, I would like to, briefly, touch upon the gender of the epic hero, which is

essentially male. I have already discussed Heracles, but most other epic heroes seem to be

male as well. For instance, Achilles, Hector, Odysseus, Aeneas, or Beowulf and King Arthur

are all men. Harry's gender falls in line with this stereotypical casting of epic heroes.

However, since the last decade or so this tradition has changed within children's and young

adult literature. Cassandra Clare with *The City of Bones* (2007), Suzanne Collins with *The

Hunger Games* (2008), Veronica Roth with *Divergent* (2011), and many other authors present

young women who, like the epic hero, posses the power, the will and the courage to make a

difference in their respective worlds.

The Second Saviour

Another character who has survived the passing of time is Jesus Christ. He is the central

character in the best-selling non-fiction text of all time: the Bible[7], or rather in the New

Testament. The Bible, as one of the main religious texts, has great authority when it comes to

morality among Christians. The Ten Commandments alone already teach several valuable

lessons, such as to honour one's parents and never to harm others (Exodus, 20.12-13). Jesus

Christ, as we can see in Matthew 22:35-40, shows what the greatest law is: first, to love God

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[7] See the *Best-selling Book of Non-Fiction* in the Guinness World Records.

and second, to love others as much as you love yourself. The second part of this law is central to *Harry Potter*: when the world, or society, is in danger, your own life is worth giving up to help it.

Christ's main role according to the bible, as the Messiah, was to save all of humanity by sacrificing himself. Most Christians believe that Christ died so that people may be granted a chance of entering heaven after they pass: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter, 3.18). For this reason, Christians regard him as The Saviour. Even those who do not embrace the Christian faith recognise Christ as a known figure and literary hero.

Harry is like the holy saviour in many ways. Vandana Saxena argues that "Rowling's series projects its boy hero as the savior of the magical world, an adolescent who challenges the established norms and conventions; he is the savior and the scapegoat whose sacrifice is the necessary condition for the survival of humankind" (69). Harry's willingness to die for everyone else is what shows the moral core of his character, the same moral core that Christ shows when he willingly dies for people's sins. Saxena continues as follows:

> Harry, like Christ, embodies otherness — in being a miracle child, in being an
> outsider, in being a hero who defends and protects the weak as well as nurtures and
> cares for them. But above all, he is the savior like Christ who upsets the erstwhile
> authorities by voicing the concerns of the weak, the sinners and the outcasts (77).

Thus, Christ, according to St. Luke, made it a point to help outcasts and sinners because they were the ones most in need of it:

> And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of
> publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees
> murmured against the disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and

sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick (*The Bible: Authorized King James Version,* Luke. 5.29-31).

Harry, like Christ, seems to shun the status quo, especially when he denies Draco Malfoy his offer of friendship. Instead Harry turns to Ron Weasley, who is notoriously poor, a condition Draco has no qualms about pointing out:

> 'I'd be careful if I were you, Potter,' [Draco] said slowly. 'Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either. You hang around with riff-raff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid and it'll rub off on you' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 81).

Harry completely disregards Draco's advice, and like Jesus befriends "outcasts" such as a Muggleborn, a house-elf, and various other magical creatures whom people like the Malfoys consider unclean and lesser beings. For instance, Remus Lupin, a werewolf and also Harry's teacher, is ostracized for something he cannot help: he was turned into a werewolf when he was a very young child. Harry is furious when Lupin tells Harry of his circumstance and how society regards people like him:

> 'That was the final straw for Severus. I think he – er – *accidentally* let slip that I am a werewolf this morning at breakfast.' 'You're not just leaving because of that!' said Harry. Lupin smiled wryly. 'This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents – they will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry.' […] 'You're the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we've ever had!' said Harry. 'Don't go!' (*The Prisoner of Azkaban*, 309).

Harry is shown to surround himself with social outcasts, and he sees in them qualities that society will not see because they cannot look past the surface. It is for these people Harry fights and is willing to die. Unfortunately, just as Christ was crucified for his convictions, Harry also makes enemies because of his beliefs.

In this chapter I have linked Harry to the epic hero and Christ in order to explore some central characteristics of his personality. As an epic hero, he is likely to inspire his fans – which we have seen are many all over the world – to be like him. As a modern Christ-figure, Harry makes, or usually does make, morally sound decisions, and when he does something wrong the novels clearly registers that. For instance, in *The Half-Blood Prince,* Harry uses a spell he has never heard of on Draco Malfoy, thus seriously endangering Draco's life. Harry feels great remorse for this transgression and his peers' reactions emphasize that what he did was wrong: "He could feel Ginny's eyes on him now, but did not want to meet them; he did not want to see disappointment or anger there" (495).

According to Cain "[t]he successive adventures initiate and hone the practical capacities of the heroes and, one might assume, the readers" (179). The readers of the Potter books learn and grow alongside Harry – his decisions become our own. The books inspire us and they encourage discussion. They urge us to become more critical about our society now but also about societies in times past. We learn by reading – and the *Harry Potter* series contributes greatly to that.

In my Chapters One, Two and Three I have discussed the immense popularity of the books. I have also explained that the books have been read by all manner of people from all ages. Moreover, I have clarified how Rowling's work comments on society, how it aims to expose the faults in it. Lastly, I have shown that Harry is the main agent who is destined to bring about a change in the magical world and more importantly, in our own. In the next chapter I shall discuss several social evils that the *Harry Potter* series tackles.

Chapter 4: Social Issues in Harry Potter

'As the Dark Lord becomes even 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?' 'We do!' said Hermione. […] 'We protest!

And I'm hunted quite as much as any goblin or elf, Griphook! I'm a Mudblood!'

'Don't call yourself –' Ron muttered. 'Why shouldn't I? said Hermione. 'Mudblood,

and proud of it! (*Deathly Hallows,* 395).

As the above quote demonstrates, the *Harry Potter* series shows that normativity, or the aim

to fit into the existing order, is not in itself a goal worthy of appreciation. By this philosophy

the series continuously shows us how society errs – especially in regards to minorities – and

how, when working together, groups of people are able to right society's wrongs.

In this part of my thesis I examine the ways in which society falls short according to

Harry Potter. I turned to the current news in order to discover what injustices prevail in our

western society. One of the first injustices I feel is still very relevant has to do with gender.

Donald Trump, the President of the United States, talks in a very degrading way about

women. His "Grab them by the pussy" comes to mind[8]. One of the leading men in our world

verbally debases women, setting the example that this is apparently okay. However, women

have been seen as lesser than men throughout most of history. For example, a woman is, on

average, paid less than a man for the exact same job. Such is the case in America[9], the UK[10]

and the Netherlands[11]. I argue that Rowling's novels dispute the idea that women are socially

or economically less than men. As a matter of fact, the novels present women as being equally

worthy as men, as is signalled by George Weasley: "size is no guarantee for power,' said

George. 'Look at Ginny.' 'What d'you mean?' said Harry. 'You've never been on the

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[8] See Putman.
[9] See Sonam Sheth and Skye Gould.
[10] See Graham Ruddick and Jamie Grierson.
[11] See "Waarom zijn er beloningsverschillen m/v?"

receiving end of one of her Bat-Bogey Hexes, have you?'" (*Order of the Phoenix,* 94).

Throughout the series, women are shown to hold great power, and indeed in some cases men are quite dependent on them. For instance, Harry would not have been able to fight Voldemort without Hermione at his side.

Next, I noticed (in the Netherlands at least) the recurring questions surrounding child abuse. Not too long ago there was a documentary on TV in which the difficulty of determining child abuse was explained[12]. Moreover, a group called Team-KIM started a campaign that argues for the importance of teaching children, teachers and social workers how to recognize abuse[13]. I found that *Harry Potter* also deals with the subject. The titular hero, as the reader learns, lives with his aunt, uncle and cousin, all of whom are neglective and abusive. I will focus on how this child neglect and abuse is handled in the series.

Lastly, I am concerned about racism and ostracism. I come from a small community, het Westland, and the majority of the people who live here support Geert Wilders in his quest to eradicate Islam from Dutch soil. As a result there are separate communities in my village: the Dutch community, and the foreign community. The hate towards Islam has grown exceptionally over the last two decades and has also spread – as I have noticed from the situation in my home town – to other minorities, such as Polish migrant workers. I argue that *Harry Potter* is also concerned about racism and ostracism, it is essentially at the core of the story as the very war centres around blood-purity. Hermione, for instance, actively wants to make people aware of the plight of the house-elves:

> 'You know, house-elves get a *very* raw deal!' said Hermione indignantly. 'It's slavery,
> that's what it is! That Mr Crouch made her [Winky] go up to the top of the stadium,
> and she was terrified, and he's got her bewitched so she can't even run when they start
> trampling tents! Why doesn't anyone *do* something about it?' (*Goblet of Fire,* 112).

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[12] See *KRO-NCRV's* "2Doc: Pijnlijk Bewijs."
[13] See Gordijn Josselin's "Had ik toen maar geweten dat het kindermishandeling was."

Hence, this is the last issue I will discuss in this chapter, focussing on how magical society regards lycanthropes, Muggle-borns and house-elves, in other words, the minorities.

4.1: Harry Potter and the Gender Scales

The various stages of the feminist movement are pivotal moments in history which resulted in many changes socially, politically and economically. Women struggled for their rights to get proper schooling, jobs, property, and even a say over their own bodies. This movement, marked by three distinctive waves, has sparked controversy and many debates amongst all layers of society, including artists and scholars. Feminism was, and still is, a hot topic within politics, amongst philosophers as well as authors of fiction. The *Harry Potter* series, I argue, plays into gender struggles as it continually shows that men and women are equal in power, intelligence and importance. In this section I shall begin by recounting the role of women in several western literary traditions, such as the fairy-tale and the erotic triangle. Next, my analysis will show that the Potter series deviates from these classisal gender roles.

Portrayal of Women in Western Literary Traditions

Since the emergence of their discipline, philosophers have been very focused on the differences between men and women. In his Politics Aristotle, for example, formulated a clear distinction between male and female bodies, with a combined focus on women's role in society and how they are biologically wired to behave. Aristotle argued that men are rational and strong creatures, born to be natural leaders and superior to women, while he deemd women to be irrational, emotional and born to serve their more superior male counterpart[14]. Many literary authors, other philosophers and society have adopted this view – even to this day.

In literary traditions such as fairy tales and the classical erotic triangle this ideology, according to which women are inferior to men, is often followed to the letter. Women, if they

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[14] See Smith, page 467.

play a more substantial role in the story, serve to help the male protagonist. In fairy-tales, for example, women can only have two roles. These roles have been studied by Michele Fry, who explains that women are either "evil stepmother[s]" antagonising a beautiful young girl, or "the beautiful but helpless girl who needs the help of the handsome prince" (164). For instance, both Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella are passive women who need the help of their princes to escape tyranny or even to survive. Especially Sleeping Beauty is a good example of the passive woman waiting to be rescued by a man, as she has been silenced completely, literally sleeping until her prince kisses her awake.

Another reading of gender roles that is relevant to my analysis is the classical reading of the erotic triangle. Rachel Armstrong describes the roles of women in classical literature and compares them to Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*. The ideology she discusses certainly fits the Potter books, as "the Golden Trio" is made up of the three major characters: Harry, Ron and Hermione. Armstrong explains that the erotic triangle portrays the story of two men fighting over one passive woman (236). Helen of Troy in *The Iliad* is one such woman who is fought over by two men with little agency of her own.

However, the passivity of the woman is not the most important feature of an erotic triangle. Eve Sedgwick explains that in an erotic triangle "the bond between rivals […] [in an erotic triangle is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (qtd. in Armstrong, 236). In *The Iliad* Helen's infidelity is the reason used by Sparta (Menelaus) to attack Troy (Paris). However, it is the struggle between Sparta and Troy that moves to the foreground of this epic tale, and Helen becomes a peripheral character, even though she is characteristically blamed for the entire disaster.

The Golden Trio as the Erotic Triangle

In this section I will argue that the Golden Trio in the Potter series does not fit either of the stereotypes described above: the gender roles in the fairy-tale or the erotic triangle. According to the principle of the erotic triangle, Hermione should have been a background character, fuelling Harry and Ron's relationship. In this way Hermione would have been reduced to a flat character, only useful as a focal point for the men's sexual frustration. Furthermore, the novels then should have focused on the relationship between Harry and his best friend Ron.

Instead, the Potter series dismisses this gendered stereotype and takes a completely different approach. Hermione, from the start, refuses to be ignored. Indeed, when Hermione meets Harry and Ron she does not bat her eyelashes at them, nor is she particularly welcoming. Instead, she challenges them academically: "Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it then" (*Philosopher's Stone*, 79). In this way Hermione is presented as a scholar, a curious young woman who is not afraid to open her mouth to challenge others.

Another aspect of the classical erotic triangle and of the role of women in fairy-tales that Hermione does not conform to is that the women are portrayed as silent, passive observers. This is never the case with Hermione. In fact, on several occasions – especially during Severus Snape's classes – she is continually asked to remain silent, a feat that she hardly ever manages: "'That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,' said Snape coolly. 'Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.'" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 129). Furthermore, in the classical erotic triangle and in the fairy-tale, the woman is very often reduced to her physical appearance. Hermione is not. In fact, during Hermione's introduction the focus is not on her looks at all: "She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth" (*Philosopher's Stone*, 79). In this way, the text again emphasizes that Hermione's has a voice.

On the other hand, there are those who might argue that Hermione is sometimes pictured as a damsel in the distress, and as such a stereotypical woman. For instance, in *The Philosopher's Stone* Hermione gets stuck in the girls' bathroom alongside a very dangerous mountain troll. In this chapter Hermione's life is in danger, and it is Harry and Ron who save her. It is important to note a few things, however. Firstly, she would not have been put in that position had it not been for Harry and Ron, who unknowingly locked the troll into the bathroom with her. In this way, the charming princes of the tale are transformed into bumbling eleven-year-olds who have no clue what they are doing. Secondly, in this scene Hermione is not a stage prop who lets the men do all the talking. She does in fact take control of the conversation between the children and professors Snape and McGonagall:

> 'Please, Professor McGonagall – they were looking for me.' 'Miss Granger!'
> Hermione managed to get to her feet at last. 'I went looking for the troll
> because I – I thought I could deal with it on my own – you know, because
> I've read all about them.' Ron dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, telling a
> downright lie to a teacher? (131).

Armstrong agrees that "Hermione, after being saved by the boys, rejects the damsel in distress stereotype" (241). Moreover, she also notes that even though this situation is stereotypical, Hermione's "actions within this context are not" (241). Here then, Rowling subverts conventional gender roles.

Moreover, in *The Chamber of Secrets* Hermione is petrified and falls, like Sleeping Beauty, into a very deep slumber. However, Hermione is far from useless, waiting for either Harry or Ron to wake her up. It is in fact Hermione who plays an integral part in keeping the school open and making it safe once more. For, without the note stuck inside her petrified hand Harry would never have figured out that the enemy was a Basilisk, a giant and very dangerous snake. Even in sleep, Hermione still has a voice.

Is *Harry Potter* a Feminist Text?

To what extent are Rowling's fantasy novels influenced by the reality of the women's movement? It might be interesting to note that Rowling was born during the second feminist wave and that the first novel was published in 1997, and that the last – *The Deathly Hallows*– came out in 2007. Historically, these novels were released during the third feminist wave and during its aftermath. This third wave garnered a lot of critique, even by feminists from earlier waves. Their main point of critique was that young women used their feminine attributes – by enhancing them with either make-up or tight-fitting clothes – to express themselves. I argue that the novels do not criticise pretty girls conscious about the way they look, as long as they are not limited to just their looks.

Hermione, for instance, is quite pretty, as we learn in *The Goblet of Fire* (360), but is not at all focussed on her appearance. She likes to prove her worth by learning and verbally sparring with others about subjects that interest her. Moreover, Hermione continuously fights for equality – not just between the sexes, but also between people from different social backgrounds, between people with a different pedigree, and even between people and magical creatures. She fights for the repressed house-elves and is initially ridiculed for this. Yet we see how her words influence those around her. Even Ron – who really does not understand her efforts to free the house-elves – eventually changes his mind. Furthermore, in the books there seems to be a general dislike of women who focus too much on what other people think of them physically. For instance, both Hermione and Harry dislike Lavender Brown, whose biggest ambition in life seems to be getting and keeping a boyfriend, as is seen in the excerpt below in which Harry and Lavender have a conversation about Ron:

> 'Look, why don't you talk to Ron about all this?' Harry asked, after a particularly long interrogation from Lavender that took in everything from precisely what Ron had said about her new dress robes to whether or not Harry thought that Ron considered his

relationship with Lavender to be 'serious'. […] '[Hermione] didn't talk to [Ron] for weeks after he started going out with me! But I suppose she wants to make up with him now he's all *interesting*…' 'Would you call getting poisoned being interesting?' asked Harry. (*The Half-Blood Prince*, 384).

Brown's thoughtless words and Harry's reaction show that the reader is not to take her seriously.

Until now I have focused mainly on Hermione. In the remaining paragraphs of this section I will discuss a few other characters, namely Ginny Weasley, Minerva McGonagall and Bellatrix Lestrange. I have chosen these three because they are important to Harry's emotional growth, and therefore, important to the series; Ginny is Harry's love interest, Minerva is a strict motherly figure and teaches Harry at school, and Bellatrix blurs the line between good and evil for him. Also, all three women disregard classical gender roles.

Ginny is known as a beautiful red-head and her looks are definitely important to her, as is made clear during Bill's wedding in *The Deathly Hallows*: "'Yes, my tiara sets off the whole thing nicely,' said Auntie Muriel in a rather carrying whisper. 'But I must say, Ginevra's dress is far too low-cut.' Ginny glanced round, grinning, winked at Harry, then quickly faced the front again" (121). In this quote it becomes clear that Ginny is proud to be a woman and likes to show it, especially to entice Harry. However, she is much more than just a girly-girl. She transcends the boundaries of traditional womanhood by playing Quidditch – that even though it has mixed teams, is prominently a sport for men – and playing it well. She is, moreover, very powerful magically as her Bat-Bogey hex is unparalleled. Ginny is pretty and feminine, but she is also strong and interested in things that are not considered feminine. For instance, Ginny is one of the select few who has been invited to join professor Slughorn's exclusive Slug Club. He created this club to bring together powerful or influential youth. Harry remarks that Ginny is one of the few members of the club invited because of her

magical prowess (*The Half-Blood Prince,* 138). Slughorn confirms this when he warns one other student to "not cross her!" (139).

Minerva and Bellatrix are as different as two people can be[15]. One represents goodness and the other evil. Yet, they both conform to feminist ideologies, as they do not allow themselves to be defined by their gender. Minerva might be the recognizable strict schoolmistress, but she also ascends to a very powerful position in the wizarding world, assuming the role of Hogwarts' headmistress after Snape dies. Moreover, she is a mother figure to Harry and many of her other students. Finally, she is also successful in her professional life. Like most modern women, she manages to be a 'mother' and have a good career. Bellatrix, for her part, may be serving a male megalomaniac, but her own powers are grand enough to make people shiver in fear. Her role is that of the most important Death Eater, with a lot of responsibilities of her own. She is in fact, after Voldemort, the most feared and powerful dark witch in the entire wizarding world. Arguably, after Voldemort, she is Harry's biggest antagonist, as she is responsible for the death of his godfather. In short, Ginny, professor Minerva and Bellatrix also show that they are not inferior to men.

In this section I have shown how the benefits of feminism, particularly the second feminist wave, are reflected in the Potter series. In the next section I will show how racism is portrayed.

4.2: Harry Potter and the Cupboard under the Stairs

In this section I specifically pay attention to how society, as a people and as a government, responds to children who are evidentially abused or neglected by their guardians. This is an issue, Rowling said in the documentary *A Year in the Life Of: J. K. Rowling*, that she has had personal experience with and that is therefore important for her to discuss. In 2005 she even founded the charity *Lumos* to promote the wellbeing of children worldwide – she works with

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[15] Their names alone already denote how powerful these two women are. Bellatrix's name means female warrior. Minerva was the ancient Roman Goddess of Wisdom.

many other charities that work for the welfare of children as well[16]. In this chapter I will focus on Harry Potter, Severus Snape, and Draco Malfoy, as they were all abused and/ or neglected (by their guardians) during their childhood and also because the abuse affected them all differently. I will not only pay attention to the ways they were abused, but focus more specifically on how both Muggle society and wizarding society respond to child abuse.

Bruises and Mean Words

It is difficult to determine when children are being abused, because they do not always bear scars or bruises as proof. Abuse is versatile and comes in many forms, both physical and psychological. We are asked to keep our eyes open to identify children who have a tough time at home. Teachers, doctors, and others who work with children carry most of the responsibility to find such children and report them to the police and child protective services. However, there is a certain hesitance when it comes to reporting assumed abuse. Alison R. Van Haeringen, Mark Dadds and Kenneth L. Armstrong describe in their article where this hesitance comes from. They explain that child abuse is not always reported because those who suspect are not always sure and because they have no faith in the system in place that aids abused children (160). As a result, there are children who spend their entire childhood in a dangerous and damaging environment.

How does one recognize child abuse? Child Welfare Information Gateway, in their pamphlet "What is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognize the Signs and Symptoms", explains how child abuse can be identified with the use of clear and concise bullet points. As the list is fairly long, I will only discuss the ones I have found to be most clearly present in Rowling's novels. The first sign of child abuse, according to this pamphlet, is that the child will show "sudden changes in behaviour or school performance" (5). In *Half-Blood Prince* Draco Malfoy does not seem to care too much about his academics anymore, which is

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[16] Gingerbread (an organization which helps one-parent families) and Comic Relief (an anti-poverty fundraiser).

uncharacteristic of him as he takes pride in his accomplishments and social status. He

moreover loses weight and Harry once finds him crying in the girl's lavatory (488).

The pamphlet continues by noting that a child is neglected when he or she "[l]acks

medical care or dental care, immunizations, or glasses" when they are in need of them (7).

Harry certainly does not want for glasses, as they – along with his lightning scar – are an

iconic part of his appearance. However, he continually has to mend his glasses with tape and

spells because his aunt and uncle will not spend money to buy him new ones. Moreover, *The*

Philosopher's Stone makes clear it that his aunt and uncle deprive him of food on occasion

(26), that he has to sleep in a cupboard underneath the stairs (20), and that his clothes are

always too big and used to belong to Dudley (23). The Weasley children, one might argue,

show similar signs of neglect; they wear hand-me-down clothes and use second-hand school

supplies. However, what the Weasleys lack in money, they make up for in love and

friendship. They even send Harry a gift for Christmas, a "Weasley jumper", starting a near

adoption process that continues throughout the series (*The Philosopher's Stone,* 147). In fact,

Harry would much rather live with them than with his aunt and uncle, who only send him a

"fifty-pence piece" (ibid).

Ministry of Magic's Rule over Hogwarts

I have already shown in what ways Harry experiences child abuse at the hands of the

Dursleys. I will now continue by explaining how Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy suffer a

similar fate, and also how the government reacts to their abuse. In this, I want to argue that

Hogwarts is closely affiliated with the wizarding government. I do so because in our world it

is the government which by law dictates that child abuse is wrong and they also decide on the

corresponding punishment.

The Order of the Phoenix shows how involved the Ministry of Magic is in the running

of Hogwarts. In order to discredit Harry and professor Dumbledore after they claim

Voldermort has returned, the ministry sends Dolores Umbridge to slowly but surely take over the reins of the school. As an envoy of the Ministry, Umbridge starts the school year by claiming that the magical community "must move forward […] into a new era of openness, effectiveness and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what ought to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited" (193). What this means, as Hermione explains to Harry and Ron, is that "the Ministry's interfering at Hogwarts" (193). This interference goes so far that it even allows the Minister of Magic to appoint Hogwarts' Headmasters and Headmistresses, as happens when Dumbledore is fired and Umbridge is given his place (550).

How the Government Fails Abused Kids in *Harry Potter*

At school Harry unknowingly meets a kindred spirit in Severus Snape, who, as far as the reader knows, may not have been abused, but who has certainly been neglected by those who should have taken care of him. Snape, we learn, was withdrawn in his youth, with only one true friend: Lily, Harry's mother (*Order of the Phoenix*, 570)[17]. In the final book, in the chapter titled "The Prince's Tale", Harry sifts through Snape's memories. From these memories we can determine the extent of Snape's neglect throughout his childhood. Harry observes the following when he sees young Severus for the first time:

> Two girls were swinging backwards and forwards, and a skinny boy was watching them from behind a clump of bushes. His black hair was overlong and his clothes were so mismatched that it looked deliberate: too-short jeans, a shabby, overlarge coat that might have belonged to a grown man, an odd smock-like shirt (532).

So far, the neglect is questionable. Perhaps Snape's parents, like the Weaslys, are unable to afford better clothes. That does not necessarily mean that they neglect their task to take proper care of him. However, later we also get a glimpse of young Severus's home life:

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[17] In this particular chapter, the Marauders (James Potter and his friends) publically bully Snape. There are several witnesses, including Snape's Slytherin "friends"; however, Lily is the only one who stands up for him, and we can therefore conclude that she is his only true friend.

'How are things at your house?' Lily asked. A little crease appeared between his eyes.

'Fine,' he said. 'They're not arguing anymore?' 'Oh, yes, they're arguing,' said

Snape. […] 'But it won't be that long and I'll be gone.' 'Doesn't your Dad like

magic?' 'He doesn't like anything, much' (535).

The atmosphere at his house is tense, a situation Snape is apparently well accustomed to. He cannot wait to escape to Hogwarts. During his stay at the wizarding school, he either manages to hide his home situation really well, or no one with the power to help does so.

Draco Malfoy, to all intents and purposes, seems to bear a charmed life: his parents are insanely rich, he is a pureblood, fairly popular and incredibly arrogant. However, beneath that successful outward appearance a darker reality lies hidden. Throughout his entire life Draco has felt the pressure of living up to the Malfoy name, constantly seeking the approval of his father, who comes across as stern and not so willing to bestow his approval that easily. During the summer between his fifth and sixth year, Voldemort moves into Malfoy Manor and Draco's life changes drastically for the worse. He is pressured to get the Dark Mark – a tattoo all elite followers of Voldemort (the Death Eaters) wear to recognize one another – and is moreover tasked with the assignment to kill his headmaster (*The Half-Blood Prince,* 522). The added stress of his new home life causes emotional, physical and mental anxiety. This becomes most clear when Harry finds Draco in the girl's bathroom where he has been visibly crying:

'No one can help me,' said Malfoy [to Myrtle]. His whole body was shaking. 'I can't

do it… I can't… it won't work… and unless I do it soon… he says he'll kill me…'

And Harry realized, with a shock so huge it seemed to root him to the spot, that

Malfoy was crying (488).

Draco's parents are powerless to stop all this from happening and at school no one, apart from Severus Snape, seems to be willing to help him (549). However, Draco, not knowing who he can trust, is unwilling to accept the help offered by his Potions Professor.

Harry, Draco and Severus go to Hogwarts, one of the most famous public places in the magical world. Yet hardly anyone makes an attempt to improve their situation or is even aware of their abuse. Not even professor Dumbledore bothers to step in, even though he is most assuredly aware of what their home lives are like. This becomes clear in the very first novel when Harry receives his first Hogwarts letter. The very address shows that Dumbledore knows of Harry's less-than-stellar living conditions: "*Mr H. Potter/ The Cupboard under the stairs/ 4 Privet Drive*" (30). In fact, there is another teacher who knows that Mr and Mrs Dursley are not the nicest people. Professor McGonagall, also in the first book, points out that Harry cannot "live *here*", and is shocked by the Dursleys' behaviour (15). However, Dumbledore has made his decision and McGonagall chooses to trust that he knows best, not putting up any further struggle.

In the case of Draco Malfoy, the series also makes clear that even though Dumbledore is aware of Draco's impossible task and consequent mental turmoil, he chooses not to discuss this with Draco himself. He instead turns to Snape: "'I refer to the plan Lord Voldemort is revolving around me. His plan to have the poor Malfoy boy murder me'" (*Deathly Hallows,* 547). Dumbledore acknowledges that he knows of Draco's predicament. Yet he waits until it is too late to discuss the situation with Draco (549). By then Draco is a full-fledged Death Eater and in the midst of the upcoming war. Since Hogwarts is a boarding school, the teachers have the responsibility to look after their students' physical as well as emotional welfare. The four Heads of House and the Headmaster hold great responsibility in this respect[18]. Sadly,

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[18] Hogwarts has four houses in which students can be placed (Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin). Each house has its own Head, a teacher who was once sorted into this house as well. It is the Head who has most authority over the students in his or her house. They have access to the common room and acts as a surrogate parent.

neither the Heads, nor the Headmaster succeed in taking these children away from their abusive homes.

In the private sphere, abused children can fall through the cracks as well, as there is less outside supervision in the home, especially when children are home schooled and therefore can rarely benefit from social security. However, the Potter series shows that when there is social control it can benefit the abused child greatly. For instance, Merope Gaunt, Voldemort's mother, lives with two tyrants – her father and brother – who suppress and abuse her in nearly every way imaginable. Bob Ogden, a member of the wizarding law enforcement, discovers the horrible environment in which Merope is forced to grow up. Mr Ogden initially reproaches the Gaunt family on the charges of unauthorized magic use in front of Muggles, but soon realizes that Merope's brother and father show more criminal behaviour, mainly in their verbal abuse of Merope. Both her brother and father are convicted for their violent actions and finally Merope is freed (*The Half-Blood Prince,* 200). However, as Merope is left without any guidance or help from the Ministry, she makes one bad decision after another, ultimately her dying and leaving behind a new-born baby-boy.

Lastly I would like to discuss this baby. Tom Riddle, or Voldemort, grows up in a London orphanage during the late 1920s, the 1930s and the early 1940s as a result of his mother's death. Historically, it has come to light that children were often treated quite badly in orphanages during this time[19]. Dumbledore visits young Voldemort in the orphanage, seeing for himself the atmosphere of the place. Nevertheless, Voldemort is sent back there every summer until he becomes magically of age at seventeen. The Ministry of Magic does not (seem to) have a system in place for magical children like Tom Riddle and Harry Potter, who find themselves bereft of their parents, to protect orphans and put them in safe homes.

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[19] See Higginbotham.

As in the real world, the magical world of *Harry Potter* thus seems to have holes in its system for protecting children from abusive and neglective caregivers. In any case, a child has to be lucky for a person of authority to discovers its misery and act on its discovery, as is made clear with the Gaunt case. Even then it seems as if no aftercare is provided, making sure these traumatized children have to figure out a new way to survive on their own. In other words, the series brings to light what could happen to children when they are left without help from the government or society.

4.3: Harry Potter and the Prosecution and Social Exclusion of the 'Other'

Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, woman and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards. 'Muggles,' whispered Hermione. 'In their rightful place.' (*The Deathly Hallows,* 199).

So far I have discussed how the role of women and child abuse is represented in the Potter series. In this section I will focus on racism and ostracism, because, as the quote from above shows, they are both integral to the story and to the Wizarding War. I will investigate how the 'other' mixes with the rest of society (or not so) in the wizarding world. In this, I will focus on blood-status[20] and magical species; more specifically, I will look at how Hermione, who is Muggle-born, at Remus Lupin, who is a werewolf, and at Dobby, who is a house-elf, are treated. Next, I will link their situation to forms of racism and ostracism that exist – or have existed – in our world.

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[20] In the magical world, people are distinguished by their blood-status. Most powerful and influential witches and witches in the books are purebloods (the Malfoys, the Weasleys, the Blacks, etc.). They are called purebloods because their lineage shows that they have only magical ancestors. Those with Muggle ancestors are called Muggle-borns, or Mudbloods, which is a racial slur (Hermione, Dean Thomas, etc.). A mix between the two results in Half-bloods (Harry, Dumbledore, Voldemort, etc.).

Let me start by presenting what racism and ostracism are according to the

Encyclopaedia Britannica. The encyclopaedia states that racism is:

> any action, practice, or belief that reflects the racial worldview—the ideology that
>
> humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races";
>
> […] and that some races are innately superior to others. Since the late 20th century the
>
> notion of biological race has been recognized as a cultural invention, entirely without
>
> scientific basis.

Interesting to note is that in the Potter series, racism against Muggle-borns is also not

supported any scientific enquiry. Instead, the racism in *Harry Potter* is founded on tradition

and the fear that Muggle-borns may endanger the secret magical world[21]. *The Longman*

Dictionary of Contemporary English (2012) mentions that in ostracizing someone, "[people]

refuse to accept them as a member of the group" (1235). What happened in Europe during the

Second World War is an extreme case of ostracism and racism directed at the Jewish

community. As I mentioned before, it seems as if, in the western world at least, anti-Semitism

has since then made room for Islamophobia.

"Be the Change You Want to See in the World"

The stance of Rowling's texts in regards to racism and ostracism is two-fold; the texts address

racism and ostracism on a collective scale and on an individual one. Jackie C. Horne observes

that "the Harry Potter books are deeply invested in teaching the protagonists (and through

them, their readers) how to confront, eradicate, and ameliorate racism through its depiction of

the racism that underlies Voldemort's campaign against 'Mudbloods'" (76). The text does so

in the same way that it did in regards to child abuse and neglect; graphically and to the point,

with the result that the reader learns from the characters' mistakes and triumphs. Hermione,

for instance, shows the importance of standing up for the rights of house-elves. According to

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[21] This is made clear in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, a 2016 film set in the same magical world as *Harry Potter*. The film explores the danger of magical exposure in the Muggle world, in which wizards argue that No-Majes (American for Muggles) pose a real threat to magic folk.

her, they should have as many rights as any other sapient beings. However, while the Wizarding War starts because of Voldemort's ambitions, the mistreatment of Muggle-borns, magical creatures and werewolves has always been ingrained in wizarding society. Even good characters sometimes struggle to let go of old prejudices, as can bee seen when Ron finds out that Hagrid is part-giant:

> Harry prompted Ron. 'What's wrong with giants?' 'Well, they're…they're…' Ron struggled for words, 'not very nice,' he finished lamely. 'Who cares?' Harry said. 'There's nothing wrong with Hagrid! 'I know there isn't, but…blimey, no wonder he keeps it quiet,' Ron said […]. 'But what's it matter if his mother was a giantess?' said Harry. 'Well…no one who knows him will care, 'cos they'll know he's not dangerous,' said Ron, slowly. 'But…Harry, they're just vicious, giants. It's like Hagrid said, it's in their natures, they're just like trolls…they just like killing, everyone knows that.' (*Goblet of Fire*, 374).

Readers usually identify with the protagonists of a story, which makes this moment so important. Of course, with the introduction of Grawp in *The Order of the Phoenix*, we also learn that Ron is wrong[22]. Brigita Pavšič, agrees with my assessment that racism is handles as a cultural issue in the Potter world, and that no one is exempt from having racist thoughts. She says, "[b]y making Ron react in a 'racist' way and by showing Harry's and Hermione's efforts to convince him otherwise […], Rowling deliberately draws attention to this problematic issue" (74). Not only does the text ask its readers to look at society, but also at ourselves and the way we treat those who are differen. Change, after all, starts within ourselves. In this, Rowling's texts closely follow Mahatma Ghandi's philosophy: "Be the change you want to see in the world".

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[22] Hagrid's half brother and a full giant. Grawp is very kind, if a little ignorant.

Wizarding Racism

Just as in our primary world, racism plays a big role in the wizarding world. Racism and ostracism are what divides the light side (Harry's side) from the dark side (Voldemort's). This is brought to our attention in *The Chamber of Secrets* first when Draco Malfoy calls Hermione a "filthy little Mudblood" (86), and next through the treatment of Dobby, the house-elf bound to serve the Malfoy family. Despite the fact that until that moment the reader has never encountered the word "Mudblood" before, it is immediately made clear that it is a racist slur.

The hate against Muggle-borns, Muggles and magical creatures comes to a head in the *Deathly Hallows*. With the introduction of the Muggle-born Registration Commission, the Ministry forces every witch and wizard to attest to his or her blood-purity. Those with questionable lineage are prosecuted by the Commission and hunted down by Snatchers when they attempt to flee. When Harry, Ron and Hermione, disguised as Ministry employees, sneak into the interrogation room to steal the locket horcrux[23], they witness an interrogation, and the cruelty, first hand. Umbridge, the awful Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher of their fifth year at Hogwarts, shows the extendt of her evil character during this interrogation: "'This is your final warning,' said Umbridge's soft voice, magically magnified so that so that it sounded clearly over the man's desperate screams. 'If you struggle, you will be subjected to the Dementor's kiss.'" (*The Deathly Hallows*, 212)[24]. The prosecution of the Muggle-borns shows some distinct similarities to the prosecution of Jewish citizens in Europe during the Second World War. According to BBC's *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005), a documentary on the Jewish Genocide, the Nazis were as meticulous in their hunt for the

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[23] Harry, Hermione and Ron hunt down Voldemort's horcruxes in order to destroy them. Voldemort houses parts of his soul in these horcruxes, which makes him immortal.

[24] The Dementor's kiss, is according to Remus Lupin worse than death (*Prisoner of Azkaban,* 183). A Dementor sucks out the soul of his victim, physically keeping the victim alive, but without a mind or feelings of his own.

Jewish people, as the Ministry of Magic is in its search for Muggle-borns and their sympathizers.

In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, we are introduced to another form of racism. Remus Lupin becomes the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher and in the course of the book, Harry and the reader find out that he is a werewolf. Harry, who grew up in the Muggle world, does not understand the consequences of being a werewolf in wizarding society, nor does the reader. Roslyn Weaver, in her article, addresses what Rowling's texts might teach the reader with Remus's situation: "His being a werewolf is a metaphor for people's reactions to illness and disability" (qtd. in Weaver, 72). One illness which generated similar reactions from general society that comes to mind, is HIV/ AIDS. People who suffered from this disease were for a long time treated by others as lepers. News articles from the 1980s show the media calling HIV the "gay virus" or the "gay plague"[25]. In the case of HIV it was ignorance that caused one person to ostracise another, because HIV is not at all like a plague. We cannot contract HIV by simple touch or sharing the same air as someone who has it, which is how the plague spreads and can kill thousands rapidly. With the proper information, not only is HIV now managed, but it could also have prevented a lot of fear targeted at those who live with the illness.

In *Harry Potter* we see the same level of ignorance as we have seen during the 1980s in our world. Lycanthropy can, like HIV, be managed with potions or other methods that prevent the ostracisation of werewolves (Weaver, 73). Sadly, the magical government does not see this as an option and instead oppresses werewolves and forces them to be listed on a register. As a result it is very difficult for werewolves to find and keep jobs, or even friends. The magical government does not offer any help by providing werewolves with anonymity or by distributing the potion that enables the sufferer to remain mentally human during the

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[25] See "HIV Treatment from the 1980's to today" on *Youtube*.

change. When Lupin is discovered to be a werewolf, he finds that he must leave Hogwarts as he is sure that parents will complain if he stays (*The Prisoner of Azkaban,* 309). Harry does not understand why parents would protest. Lupin has, after all, never hurt any of his students and he is "the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher [they]'ve ever had" (309). Harry's argument shows that, even though Lupin has contracted this horrible illness, he can still be a functioning member of society. In short, it is wrong of the magical community to shun werewolves and other minorities just because the general populace is (often) unjustifiably afraid of them.

Even though Harry is furious with how Lupin and others like him are treated, Lupin himself seems resigned to his situation. He does not seem willing to fight the racism and ostracism he is subjected to on a daily basis. In fact, fear prevents him from doing so and from going after what he wants; a family. He keeps rejecting Nymphadora Tonks, a much younger witch who is also a member the Order of the Phoenix[26], who takes an immediate fancy to him. After he gives in, marries her, and conceives a child with her, he is filled with panic and regret. He tells Harry: "'Don't you understand what I've done to my wife and my unborn child? I should never have married her, I've made her an outcast!'" (*The Deathly Hallows*, 175). Harry sets him straight and Lupin goes home feeling better. Later in the novel it is clear that Lupin's fear has turned to pride when he announces the birth of his son: "'Yes – yes – a boy,' said Lupin, who seemed dazed by his own happiness" (415).

Lastly, I would like to touch upon house-elves. They, like Hermione and Remus, belong to a minority and are ostracized by regular society. However, they differ from Muggle-borns and most other magical creature in one aspect; their position as slaves. As we can see with Dobby – a house-elf formerly owned by the Malfoys and freed by Harry in *The Chamber of Secrets* – besides being used as house slaves, a lot of house-elves are subjected to verbal

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[26] An organization founded to fight Voldemort and his supporters.

and physical abuse on a daily basis[27]. Sadly, there seem to be no laws in the wizarding world that prevent this abuse, as house-elves are seen as property. *Pottermore*, a website founded by J. K. Rowling, discusses the Potter books and explains that house-elves are "[l]oyal magical creatures bound to their owners as servants for life". A house-elf has to follows its master's every command, even if that means it has to punish itself or put its life at risk (*Goblet of Fire,* 112). It is obvious that house-elves are the slaves of the wizarding world, and have been for a long time. In fact, wizards and witches have had house-elves as slaves for so long that they think the house-elves love their position in society: "'Hermione – open your ears,' said Ron loudly. 'They. Like. It. They *like* being enslaved!'" (198). And in some cases it does seem to be that way. When Hermione starts her S.P.E.W campaign to free the elves, the elves are wary to be around her[28]. But Dobby shows that house-elves can thrive outside of slavery. Harry agrees that they are treated extremely unfairly and he makes a point to call the attention to Dobby's status as a free elf, especially after Dobby has died and he engraves his headstone with the inscription: "*Here lies Dobby, a Free Elf*" (*The Deathly Hallows*, 389).

In short, Rowling's series show how society, and every person individually, are guilty of ostracizing people and having racist thoughts. The text does so by illustrating how minority groups are treated and emphasizing that even good people are guilty of this evil. The text offers an alternative through Harry and Hermione, who do not understand how Muggle-borns and magical creatures can be treated so abominably.

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[27] The house-elves who work at Hogwarts are not abused (at least during professor Dumbledore's tenure), though they are not paid for their work there either.
[28] The Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare.

Conclusion

I set out this thesis with the main intent to discover how much of our primary world Rowling

adopted in her *Harry Potter* novels, and whether she did so in order to comment on how

society errs. In my process of answering this question I started out, in Chapter 1, by

investigating the series' popularity. I answered the question of how the Potter series amassed

its massive readership. The series' popularity is relevant to this thesis because it shows how

many people – from all ages – may be influenced by Rowling's books. What accounts for

such a mixed readership, I found are: first, the adult themes of the novel; second, the

marketing strategy of publishing separate adult-respectable publications; third, the media

attention the novels enjoyed from newspapers and, even more, from the film adaptations.

Finally, during the time of publication people showed a tendency to escape their uncertain

reality in books, which made the Potter series even more attractive to adult readers, especially

because the titular hero keeps succeeding despite all his setbacks. These strategies assisted in

boosting the books' popularity until they became the most-sold book series of fiction of all

times.

Next, in Chapter 2 I explored how Rowling's Potter fantasy series presents our

western society's social issues by examining the fantasy genre. What I discovered was that

fantasy has a history of being utilized to make sense of the world around us. Myths, the

forefather of the fantasy genre, were used by previous societies to shine a light on societal

phenomena or natural mysteries. Rowling's particular use of the fantasy genre, which

includes mythical creatures and fairy-tale tropes, allows the books to comment on society's

shortcomings from a safe distance, as the books projects our (recognizable) problems on a

magical world and not on our own.

Following Chapter 2, I explored the purpose and the history of the epic hero and Jesus

Christ in Chapter 3. In this I paid particular attention to how Harry is a representation, or a

rewriting, of both of them. Both Christ and the epic hero enjoy adoration from their respective audiences because they both make self-sacrificing decisions that save others. I found that because Harry is both a rewriting of the classical hero and of Christ, Rowling's series lends him a great deal of moral authority.

In Chapter 4, I explored those shortcomings the Potter books discuss in regards to western society. First, I discussed gender inequality. The Potter series addresses this problem by showing how strong female characters actually are – just as strong as, if not stronger, than male characters. I discovered this by comparing Hermione to the traditional fairy-tale woman and by looking at what her role is within the erotic triangle. The books present Hermione as the epitome of the strong, modern woman, ready to defend herself and those she loves. Not only can Hermione not be silenced, even as she is immerged in a magically induced slumber; she is moreover just as integral to the story as Harry and Ron are. As such, *Harry Potter* disparages the typical gender roles found in traditional literature, and in society.

Next, I discussed the problem of child abuse. The novels present several child characters that suffer from domestic abuse and/or neglect. These characters – I discussed Harry, Draco, Severus, Merope Gaunt, and Tom Riddle – illustrate what could happen when a child is not saved from its damaging situation. As Harry finds a family in his friends, he becomes a successful adult, just like Draco. Severus, on the other hand, never finds true friends after he loses Lily. As a result, he becomes a recluse. And Merope, without proper help from the government or counseling, finds that she cannot be a part of society any longer.

Lastly, Chapter 4 considered racism and ostracism. Clearly the Potter books are centered on a war againts racism, ostracism and hate. I have shown that the morally good characters man the light side; those who do not believe in blood-prejudice or racism towards magical creatures. Those who are bigoted are part of the dark side: Voldemort, Death Eaters, Snatchers and other followers. What I have found is that Voldemort's campaign is based on

cultural doxa, rather than science, something we have seen in our own history as well. Moreover, it is again the neglect of the magical government that facilitates the hate and the ostracism of minority groups.

To conclude, I have argued that J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, through its unorthodox use of the fantasy genre, of the classical hero figure and the Christ figure hero, pinpoints and examines some crucial faults in our society. I have chosen to discuss child abuse, gender inequality, racism and ostracism because they are still prevalent in western society today. I hope that in the future new theses will be written that enhance my argument. For instance, this research could be expanded to include other issues. Moreover, it might also be interesting to discover whether *Harry Potter* has left a mark on children's literature and/ or adult literature, and if so, in what ways the series has done so.

Let me end by saying that every era has need of fictions to help people shape and orient their lives, especially when they are young. *Harry Potter*, I believe, serves this function admirably. Sadly, if history has taught us anything, it seems unlikely that all the Voldemorts of our world will ever be vanquished once and for all. Harry's ongoing struggle against injustice will therefore appeal well into the twenty-first century.

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions

1. How old are you?

2. How did you learn of the Harry Potter book(s)?

3. How old were you when you first read the novel(s)?

4. Have you read them again since? When was the last time you read them (what age)?

5. Are there themes you discovered as an adult that you hadn't as a kid?

6. How invested would you say you are in the Harry Potter universe? Do you keep up with Potter news? Visit any of the theme parks?

7. Does everyone in your family enjoy the books?

8. Would you say the novels are only for children? If not, please explain why not.

Appendix 2 – Survey Result Chart

Age Groups	Number of Participants	Notice More after Re-reading	Agree to Mixed Readership
10 – 15	16	0	14
15 – 20	3	0	2
20 – 30	20	16	20
30 – 40	4	1	3
40 – 50	5	1	4
50 – 60	5	2	4
60+	2	0	1

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