

Freaks and Magic: The Freakification of Magical Creatures in *Harry Potter*

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The *Harry Potter* series has touched thousands of people around the world. Teaching lessons of humility, benevolence, friendship, and numerous other values, the series has shaped people's lives, particularly those of the children and young adults reading these novels as they

matured. While using the power of words to morally aid and guide readers, author of the seven-book series, J. K. Rowling, has also included social commentary about the hierarchal foundations of society. Right and wrong are directly addressed through the battles between Harry Potter and the antagonist, Lord Voldemort; however, more than black and white ideas of good and evil are featured within the novels. Rowling clearly critiques the wizarding world's hierarchy, which places witches and wizards in a superior position above other magical creatures. She describes the treatment of these creatures in a way comparable to the experiences of those who worked in freak shows of the nineteenth century, and, through these comparisons, Rowling critiques the treatment of both magical creatures and stigmatized people.

Each novel in the *Harry Potter* series corresponds with a year students spend at the wizarding school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At age eleven, Harry receives a letter inviting him to attend wizarding school for the next seven years. There, he befriends Ron Weasley, a pureblood from one of the kindest, yet least respected, wizarding families, and Hermione Granger, the most intelligent student in their year despite being born to non-magical parents. The trio navigate the hardships of school,

Abstract

By comparing the magical creatures within *Harry Potter* to the nineteenth-century freak show, the mistreatment and lack of concern for the basic rights of centaurs, giants, and house-elves are put into perspective due to the now-uneasy feeling many acquire when thinking of the exhibition of people as "freaks."

adolescence, and the rise of Lord Voldemort as he, for the second time, tries to conquer the wizarding world.

Through the experiences of Harry, readers are exposed to various magical creatures and the customs of wizards. Readers also gain an outsider's insight to the mistreatment of these creatures. Despite being a wizard, Harry is an outsider because he was not raised in the wizarding world. Lord Voldemort murdered his parents, and Harry's wizard-hating, non-magical aunt and uncle raised him. Despite attempts by Harry's relatives to keep all wizard knowledge from him, he follows the fate prophesized for him and continuously battles Lord Voldemort. The seventh novel follows Harry, Ron, and Hermione as they choose not to attend their final year of school but instead search for the way to defeat Lord Voldemort once and for all.

Through this seven-book series, obvious differences and distinctions between wizards and non-magical humans (or muggles, as the wizards say) are highlighted. However, a similarity between these two groups can be found in their othering of those who appear or act differently and their creation of a social hierarchy based upon this othering. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, real-world people with physical disabilities were placed on display both in traveling freak shows and local human exhibitions ("Appendix 14C"). These people were deemed different due to their physical appearances, much like magical creatures in comparison to wizards. In both the wizarding and muggle worlds, those who are physically different are either persecuted to the point of death or ostracized until they are no longer a part of society. Those who are considered "ideal" in both the wizarding and muggle worlds have achieved this status by shifting "perception...to claim the center" of the ideal spectrum "for themselves and banish others to the margins" (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 62-63).

By asserting their dominance in this way, wizards have achieved a position of complete superiority over other magical creatures. Part of this superiority is maintained through slanderous stories and malicious traditions passed down through families, a very important part of the wizarding world's social hierarchy. Power within the wizarding world is associated with the age of a family and whether the family is of pure wizarding blood. Just as pureblood wizards are more desirable among

wizards, the more “desirable” appearance of witches and wizards grants them superiority over other magical creatures.

The three types of magical creatures examined within this paper — giants, centaurs, and house-elves—all have physical character traits that immediately ostracize them within wizarding society: giants are too large, house-elves too small, and centaurs too animalistic. These three groups bear some semblance to wizards, but, by “having a human body differently configured, the monstrous body exists *beyond*” acceptance (Weinstock, “Freaks in Space” 328, emphasis original). Magical creatures are “at once the to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at” (Thomson, “Staring” 57). One is to note how different they are, but it is not acceptable to dwell on those differences for too long. Wizards, by creating an ideal image that can only be obtained by them, have created the less-than-ideal “in relation to what is human” (Weinstock, “Invisible Monsters” 275). Since wizards are still considered human, they have been able to create a permanent social hierarchy, based solely on physical characteristics, that places them in complete control at the top.

The question is then posed as to who decided wizards are the elite. Why are wizards ideal and other magical creatures so easy to critique? According to the series, in the fourteenth century, wizards decided it was necessary to determine intelligent beings from “beasts.” A being, as determined by the wizarding government, The Ministry of Magic, is “any creature that has sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping those laws” (Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts* xix). Centaurs were aligned with wizards in the “beings” category while house-elves and giants were considered “beasts.” However, centaurs opted to change their classification due to how offensive it was to be compared to “hags and vampires” (Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts* xxiii).

While centaurs asked not to be considered beings, neither centaurs nor giants asked to be persecuted by wizards. In fact, many reject the giants and centaurs that attempt to integrate themselves into wizarding society. In contrast, house-elves welcome their inferior place in society. Only one can be found as an exception, and he is shunned by his fellow house-elves for seeking freedom and desiring freewill. However, the question of consent applies not only to magical creatures but also to those who performed

in freak shows. Some consented to their roles (Gerber 48) while others were purchased and considered the property of their manager (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 60, 72, 76-77). With the issue of consent, magical creatures within the wizarding world serve as the voice freak performers never had.

Centaurs are featured frequently within Greek mythology. Myths passed down describe centaurs as kind, but violent and unpredictable (Buxton 117). However, perhaps the most famous centaur, Chiron, is continuously spoken of with praise. Chiron taught and guided famous Greek heroes, such as Achilles and Jason. Being both “civilized” and “uncivilized,” Chiron was able to guide these heroes, and many others, through childhood into adulthood where they became great soldiers (Buxton 110). Chiron was able to accomplish teachings no man could, and, despite being from a partially wild species, he held a place of great respect during the height of Greek civilization.

Despite the respect and admiration Chiron achieved in the Greek world, wizards do not hold a similar regard toward centaurs. Centaurs consider themselves more intelligent than wizards, but they are kept at a distance due to their wild nature. In fact, despite the notion that centaurs are the more intelligent creatures, the text cites Law Fifteen B, a law that defines centaurs to be of only “near human intelligence” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 754). Based solely on the physical difference of centaurs in comparison to wizards, centaurs are considered less intelligent than the “ideal” or “perfect” specimen of nature, wizards. A law such as Law Fifteen B allows for the unjust superiority of wizards above centaurs, and it implies that centaurs lack the mental capacity to intellectually challenge wizards.

The lack of respect centaurs receive from wizards has led to tension and even hatred on the part of the centaurs. Centaurs do not appreciate being discriminated against, and they are not alone. Real-world laws discriminating against those who appear different have existed for centuries. Throughout human history, biases have created unfair ideals and unrealistic requirements for people to function within society. Those who did not meet these requirements were ostracized and considered lesser beings. During the eighteenth century, research was conducted to see if the deaf were “capable of reasoning” and, consequently, the Academy for the Deaf and the Dumb was opened in Scotland (“Appendix 14C”). Both centaurs in the wizarding world and the deaf in the eighteenth century were considered to be of “near

human intelligence,” and each group was compared to an unrealistic ideal, wizards and people who can hear, respectively. Eighteenth-century Europe did not see deaf people as fully capable members of society much like the wizarding world fails to see centaurs in the same way.

Not all magical creatures allow the biases against them to interfere with their relationship toward wizards. For a period of time, a centaur, Firenze, teaches divination to students at Hogwarts. Some students opt out of the course because they do not want a centaur for a professor. One reason for this could be their aforementioned classification as “beasts.” Another possible reason for a student’s discomfort with centaurs would be the wild appearance of centaurs and their foreignness due to physical ostracism. Centaurs live in the Forbidden Forest, a dangerous place where students are not only unwelcome but can also face punishment for entering (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 127). Without the ability to approach centaurs and learn more about them, it is impossible for students to understand or feel comfortable around creatures portrayed as dangerous, wild animals.

By teaching at Hogwarts, Firenze attempts to bridge the gap between centaurs and wizards. His appearance at Hogwarts is the first interaction most students have had with a centaur, and it shows these students that not all centaurs are wild and uncontrollable animals. As far as wizards are concerned, Firenze’s teaching methods are far from conventional, but he shows he is a compassionate creature hoping to aid his students in whatever way possible. He is exiled from his tribe for choosing to interact so closely with witches and wizards, but he educates these students on the true nature of centaurs, a lesson that could not otherwise have been learned by many.

While the lack of knowledge about centaurs and their physical separation from wizards is partially accredited to their arrogance and hatred of wizards, the physical difference of centaurs also clearly plays a role in this ostracism. Like humans with physical differences who performed in freak shows, centaurs are viewed as visual spectacles. Wizards, by placing themselves in a social hierarchy far above centaurs, have allowed for misconceptions about the supposedly “wild” behavior of centaurs to be considered truth. Even Hermione says she “never really liked horses” when discussing her disinterest in taking a class taught by Firenze (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 399). This is intended to be nothing more than a snide comment to upset one of her peers, but Hermione’s words say much about

how wizards feel in regards to centaurs. Hermione proves herself to be the most passionate and sensitive wizard when it comes to the needs of magical creatures; she even creates an organization to protect house-elves (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 224) and later works for the Department of Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures within the Ministry of Magic advocating for equal rights of all magical creatures (“J. K. Rowling”).

Hermione’s comment about Firenze is offensive and inappropriate, but it also shows she does not understand all the issues surrounding magical creatures. Spectators at freak shows did not see an issue with the performances, but, as science and medical understanding advanced, people began to realize how inappropriate freak shows were. The idea that “freaks” should not be allowed in public brought about the decline of freak shows and thus the medicalization of “freaks” in the 1940s (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 75, 78). However, the issue of staring did not dissipate. Despite having “freaks” locked away in asylums and hospitals, textual and visual media still created platforms to judge and other these people. As Hermione grows and becomes more educated, she learns that all magical creatures need aid and protection, not just house-elves. She advances her opinions and seeks to advance the opinions of others. Unfortunately, the medicalization of “freaks” failed to accomplish the same thing.

Giants, similar to centaurs, are seen as threatening to wizards, but there are vastly different reasons as to why each of these creatures are considered threatening. Giants are deemed a threat because of their size, strength, and irrational behavior while centaurs are threats due to their intelligence and blatant lack of concern for the opinions of wizards. Giants throughout human history tend to be depicted as villainous monsters that desire only to kill and obtain power, and this misconception flows through the wizarding world as well. The public opinion of giants is extremely negative, and this opinion supports the choice by wizards to place giants extremely low on the social hierarchy. Giants are ranked so low that their worth in comparison to wizards is never questioned, and, much like centaurs, their mistreatment never receives an advocate for change.

In fact, giants are questioned and judged negatively by Ron. Just as Hermione showed her lack of education and understanding in relation to centaurs, Ron shows he does not understand giants when he quickly and irrationally reacts to learning one of his friends, Hagrid, is a half-giant.

Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper and professor of the Care of Magical Creatures courses, proves himself to be perhaps the most compassionate and open-minded of the characters. He serves as a stark contrast to Ron's harsh words describing giants: "not very nice," "vicious," and "like trolls...they just like killing" (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 430).

How did Ron form these opinions of giants that vary so drastically from the one giant he knows? His opinions were most likely formed through stories he heard as a child. Giants are more severely separated from wizards than centaurs. While centaurs live in the Forbidden Forest just off of Hogwarts' grounds, giants no longer live in Britain but "abroad... in mountains" (Rowling *Goblet of Fire* 430). By having them located so far from wizarding civilization, there is no evidence all giants are not violent creatures. They stem from "dark regions of uncertain danger," and the only evidence of their interaction with society comes from stories passed down through generations (Cohen 19). These stories even affect the opinions of people, such as Ron, who are generally good.

As one can see through Ron's misconceptions, the ostracism of magical creatures simplifies the process of othering these creatures. Similar to the idea of ostracizing whole groups, people who work in freak shows are never portrayed as from a nearby location. If these people were local, they would seem less odd and far less extraordinary. The distant homelands of people in freak shows make them more "exotic" and interesting. Describing people in freak shows as "from an undefined and strictly non-British region of elsewhere" not only makes them seem physically different but also makes them appear to be representatives of a whole land of people, a whole land of potential "freaks" (Ferguson 245). With the homelands of these "freaks" being so far away, no one could know if there were a whole group of people in this specific location who looked and behaved differently. Freaks and giants are both judged because there is no evidence to contradict the stories about their heritage and nature that the audience and wizards are told.

Hagrid serves to contrast all that readers learn about giants, but it is important to note Hagrid himself is only a half-giant, born of a giantess and wizard (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 427-428). He exhibits the physical features of giants, such as height and size, but, since he is only a half-giant, he is considered small for someone of giant heritage. Both his small stature and "unwavering loyalty and goodness" sever "Hagrid from his lineage and the

past actions of his race” (Strimel 48). While he might be a half-giant, he is the “antithesis” of what many giants represent in wizarding society (Strimel 49).

However, despite Hagrid’s visual appearance giving way to his giant heritage, news of his heritage is still considered worthy of a newspaper headline. In a slanderous article describing Hagrid as a reckless professor with little care for his students and his mother as one of the cruelest giants to fight alongside Lord Voldemort, the popular wizarding paper, *The Daily Prophet*, tells the community of Hagrid’s true racial heritage (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 439). This changed the public perception of Hagrid. While some students were not comfortable with his teaching methods prior to the article, many become more outspoken after learning of Hagrid’s heritage.

While Hagrid wished to stay out of the headlines and not draw attention, managers and owners of people in freak shows thrived off of headlines and talk of their exhibits. Many “freaks” were given stage names including “King,” “Queen,” and “General” in order to draw attention to the performer. In addition to these titles, some performers changed their homelands and names to sound more European. Performers who were advertised in a prestigious manner typically boasted of their sophisticated language skills and their interactions with various members of royalty (Bogdan 29-30).

The other way that freak shows drew attention to performers was by presenting them as “savages.” An example would be the Aztec Children, a brother and sister from Central America who suffered from microcephaly, a disease categorized by “abnormal smallness of the head” and “incomplete brain development” (“Microcephaly”). They received their fame due to their racial lineage, much like Hagrid. Central America was “exotic” enough to spark interest among audience members, and, like many freakshow performers, their foreignness was played upon through their odd dress. Their dress was also a part of the international newspaper headlines that appeared when a wedding was staged for them in Russia (“Marriage of the ‘Aztec Children’”). News of their marriage made the Aztec Children an even larger sensation and surely brought them more fame and attention than they previous had acquired.

Like the Aztec Children, Hagrid was very young when he first gained attention of the wizards around him. Unfortunately, much like the *Daily*

Prophet article, this attention was not positive. As a student at Hogwarts, he was expelled for supposedly opening the Chamber of Secrets, home to a basilisk, a reptilian creature that was used to kill and injure muggle-born witches and wizards (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 246-248). Evidence against Hagrid is not provided within the text. In fact, all information about the Chamber of Secrets points to nearly anyone besides Hagrid as the mastermind behind the attacks. The reader is made aware that one can only control the basilisk by speaking Parseltongue, the language of snakes, and a language understood mainly by those who are heir to the founder of one of the Hogwarts houses, Salazar Slytherin (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 197).

Slytherin house is home to prideful witches and wizards who are “cunning” and “use any means to achieve their ends” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 118). Those within Slytherin house have “a thirst to prove” themselves and desire “greatness” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 121). While Hagrid might wish to prove himself innocent and a loyal friend, Slytherin house is a place where he clearly does not belong. Rowling has since announced that Hagrid was sorted into Gryffindor house (“Barnes and Noble”), a house filled with “the brave at heart,” so there are no direct ties between him and anyone in the line of Salazar Slytherin (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone* 118).

When accused, Hagrid does not have the opportunity to undergo a trial, which, even for wizards, is atypical. This blatant disregard for Hagrid’s rights, education, and well-being serves as evidence of prejudice for his giant heritage. The prejudice did not end once Hagrid lost any chance at receiving a wizarding education. Nearly fifty years later, the Chamber of Secrets was again open, and Hagrid was, for the second time, convicted of a crime not supported by evidence. Once again, he did not face trial. Instead, he was locked away in the wizarding prison, Azkaban (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 261-262).

Hagrid’s treatment is clear commentary on the flaws of the justice system in relation to those who are different. Readers are forced to question the morals of the wizarding world upon the realization that the idea of “innocent until proven guilty” is nonexistent here. It is much easier for wizards to choose a scapegoat rather than face the unusual concept that someone who is physically different might also be morally good. By admitting Hagrid’s innocence, the wizards would have to recognize that not all giants are violent murderers. The wizarding world would have to

acknowledge evidence supporting witches and wizards being just as capable, if not more so, than giants when it comes to murder. Giants, no longer ostracized due to the end of malicious rumors and stereotypes about them, would be accepted into society as evil witches and wizards were slowly thrown out. This acceptance of giants would cause a rift within the clearly fragile social hierarchy wizards have built around themselves.

In contrast to the freak performers and managers who falsified information to gain attention, some people opt to lie in order to stay out of the limelight. Hagrid is the most notable giant within the *Harry Potter* series, but he is not the only giant mentioned. Madame Maxime is the headmistress at the French wizarding school, Beauxbatons Academy of Magic. Like Hagrid, Madame Maxime is a half-giantess. She never admits to it within the series, and, when Hagrid inquires, she becomes incredibly offended. Rather than disclosing her heritage, she claims to “ave big bones” (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 429).

Madame Maxime clearly fears losing all she has obtained due to her heritage. If the wizarding world learned of her giantess nature, she would risk losing her position as headmistress due to the fear and hatred wizards have toward giants. Unlike Hagrid, she has managed to overcome stereotypes throughout her life and prove herself as a powerful witch. However, as is evident by the inclusion of only negative descriptions of giants, her reputation holds no standing when compared to her heritage. For Madam Maxime, being a spectacle will not generate popularity and intrigue but rather hatred and ridicule. It is in her own best interest to lie about who she is rather than openly advertise herself and her heritage.

In stark contrast to giants and centaurs, readers continuously encounter house-elves who genuinely *enjoy* their position and apparent enslavement within wizarding society. When describing her role in life, Winky, formerly employed by the Crouch family, says, “house-elves does what they is told” (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 99). She later admits to being “properly ashamed of being free” and not having a master to directly and obediently serve (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 379). While house-elves live alongside their masters, living adjacent to wizards is far from equality. Contracted to lifelong servitude, which, if not freed, is passed down unto their children, house-elves live in the cupboards or basements of their masters, so they are always available to serve and please in whatever way

necessary (Kellner 368).

Despite living alongside witches and wizards, house-elves do not live an enjoyable life. Most live in dirty, cramped, and dark spaces, and they do not own anything. Possessions would show an equal status to wizards, and that is the opposite of what is desired for most house-elves. In addition to not owning any possessions, house-elves also do not have traditional clothing; they gather cast-aside linens and wear these instead. House-elves gather these articles of clothing over time so they have something suitable to wear, even if many would consider clothing and linens that were thrown away to be far from suitable. Dobby wore only an old pillowcase, Winky and the Hogwarts elves tea towels, and Kreacher a rag (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 12, *Goblet of Fire* 97, 376, *Order of the Phoenix* 107). When a master gives their house-elf an article of clothing, it is considered a sign of freedom. The house-elf is no longer employed and is free to do as he or she wishes.

The idea of having only non-traditional clothing is also present within freak shows. Saartje Baartman, better known by her performance name of “The Hottentot Venus,” was considered a freak due to the foreignness of her non-Western body, particularly her buttocks and genitalia. To exemplify how different her body was from the Western idea of “normal,” she would wear only small, tight-fitting clothing while on stage. This allowed for the audience to better gaze at her body and see she truly was a “freak” (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 72). Both Baartman and the house-elves were forced to wear negligible amounts of clothing in order to further other them and make it obvious how little they mattered in comparison to the audience and wizards, respectively.

Not only are house-elves denied proper clothing and suitable living conditions, but they are also verbally and physically abused. The most obvious example is Dobby’s struggles within *Chamber of Secrets*. Serving the Malfoys, a family known for greed, hatred, and pride, Dobby is continuously beaten and mistreated by his master, Lucius Malfoy (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 334-337). Dobby is also forced to physically punish himself whenever he speaks ill of his masters or fails to directly follow the orders of the Malfoys. When Dobby warns Harry of the imminent danger at Hogwarts, he both circumvents a direct order and puts himself in a position where he spoke ill of the Malfoys. As punishment, he beats his head against the window, bashes a lamp against his head, and states that he would later shut

his ears in the oven doors (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* 14-17).

Winky, the only female house-elf encountered in the novels, is also verbally abused when she is released from her duties as the house-elf for the Crouch family. When her master, Barty Crouch, Sr., fires her, she cries and begs to remain employed (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 138). To most house-elves, being freed is considered shameful and a sign they have failed to accomplish their assigned tasks. Many house-elves believe they exist solely to serve, and being free shows they have failed at their reason for existence. Winky, shamed and filled with self-hatred due to her supposed failures, takes up drinking butterbeer, a popular wizarding beverage, rather than accepting her life without employment. While butterbeer has a very low alcohol content, it is enough to quickly intoxicate house-elves (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 536).

Dobby, in an effort to help Winky and potentially cease her self-medication, aids her in obtaining a job at Hogwarts. Once she is again an employed house-elf, Dobby thought Winky would find her way again and return to the happy elf she once was. Instead of recovering, Winky continues to drink and often fails to do any of the tasks she is assigned to complete. She wears various articles of clothing and sits on a stool drinking her butterbeer (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 536). Having been enslaved her whole life, Winky held no identity outside of her duties to the Crouch family. After losing her position as the family's house-elf, Winky lost all sense of identity. Without the family who so carelessly cast her aside, she was not able to find a purpose in life. Her new position at Hogwarts was not even able to bring her satisfaction because her existence revolved around another, now nonexistent, employer.

The third house-elf readers are introduced to in the series, Kreacher, is also abused. Sirius Black, Kreacher's master and Harry's godfather, is verbally abrasive toward his house-elf. The readers are led to believe this is due to Sirius' lack of respect for his deceased family members whom Kreacher idolizes and views as his "true" masters. No matter what the reasoning behind Sirius's verbal abuse of Kreacher is, it is not acceptable. Sirius, typically portrayed as a kind and caring man despite his desire to avenge the death of Harry's parents, does not see Kreacher as an equal, and, because of this, he does not hesitate to yell at or banish Kreacher from his sights (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 110). Being raised in the wizarding world

by a pureblooded family, Sirius never saw any reason to consider house-elves equals or respectable members of society. Dumbledore himself took note of this and said Sirius never “saw Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as a human’s” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 832).

The effect wizards have on house-elves is not merely a location on a societal hierarchy, and the same can be said for freakshow performers. As is exhibited by the treatment of Dobby, Winky, and Kreacher, house-elves are physically, mentally, and emotionally affected by the treatment their masters give them. Despite living lives of servitude, house-elves are sentient beings that require care and comfort. Abuse destroys a house-elf just the same as it destroys any other person or creature. While freakshow performers are performers, it does not mean they do not deserve respect, admiration, and care. Not all performers are abused or mistreated, but the audiences who gawk at them every day far from respect them. Just like the neglect of house-elves can destroy who they are, the neglect of people can be detrimental. The inability for wizards and humans to see this shows how truly self-absorbed many are.

A wizard’s lack of respect for house-elves does not end after abusing them. For the Black family, house-elves are considered a way to show their status as a pureblood family and as objects of décor. Upon the death of a house-elf, the Black family has the house-elf’s head mounted. These heads line the halls of the family’s home (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 61). This practice has a very obvious freak element to it, similar to the exhibition of deceased children or stuffed oddities. Julia Pastrana, famous for her unusual physical appearance and sometimes compared to a bear (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 75), was stuffed, along with her infant son, post mortem to be displayed and admired for their physical differences. In the case of Julia Pastrana, she was seen as a way for her husband/manager to make a profit even after losing her performance abilities (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 77). With house-elves, mounting the heads of the deceased served no monetary purpose but showed pre-existing power and wealth as well as a long line of pureblood heritage. The mounted house-elves served as a symbol of status as well as decorative conversation pieces.

Despite intensive evidence showing how poorly house-elves are treated, not all suffer abuse through their masters. The house-elves working at Hogwarts live in the dungeons, but it is because the kitchens are located

there. No evidence is provided of abuse, and the employment of house-elves through Hogwarts started so they would have a good, safe place to work (“Transcript”). House-elves at Hogwarts, along with working in the kitchens, clean the common rooms of the various houses (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 385).

While the house-elves at Hogwarts have living conditions and masters much kinder than many other elves, they are still considered enslaved. These elves are bound to work for Hogwarts until their death or freedom—whichever comes first. Hermione strives to change the working conditions of all house-elves. Being a student, her first focus is Hogwarts. She creates Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.) in an attempt to radicalize the house-elves and show both them and wizards that the wizarding world needs to change and appreciate house-elves more. One of her goals is to free all the house-elves, so they can then be employed by Hogwarts in the traditional sense: a salary, vacation, and reasonable living conditions (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 224-225).

House-elves are similar to some freak performers in the sense that both are exploited due to their lack of life experience. Charles Stratton, or “General Tom Thumb,” became a very successful and wealthy “midget” due to his work in the freak show. He was able to buy lavish things, wear fine clothes, and travel the world—all things he would not have been able to accomplish while living with his family rather than in a freak show. However, the question needs to be posed as to what Stratton lost. Entering the freak show as a child, he never had another life (Gerber 50-51). Much like house-elves, Stratton was never truly given a choice as to how he wanted to live his life. He might not have felt as if he was suffering, just as house-elves think they live satisfying lives, but, without knowing what it is like living a life outside of the freak show or outside of servitude, it can never be known if Stratton or the house-elves would prefer a different type of life.

By creating an organization to benefit house-elves rather than giants or centaurs, Hermione shows she sees the differences in oppression these creatures face. Giants and centaurs recognize they are being wronged and denied fair treatment. This is evident through Hagrid’s experiences and the hatred centaurs feel toward wizards. However, house-elves feel they are doing what they were meant to do. They consent to their enslavement, but they do not realize a different type of life is available to them. In a sense,

house-elves have been brainwashed to believe there is nothing more to life other than servitude.

Dobby realizes there is more to life than blindly serving a wizard. Appreciating the employment conditions Hermione tries to advocate for through S.P.E.W., Dobby opts to seek employment at Hogwarts. He is rejected by many of the house-elves because it is considered unacceptable for house-elves to seek payment or reward for their services: the idea is that a house-elf should willingly serve his or her master without objection. Dobby's unwillingness to serve Hogwarts without pay is seen as a character flaw on his part (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 98, 379, 381, 538-539). The other house-elves frown on this because "they are totally incapable of rebellion, even in thought" (Morris 352). Since they have always been enslaved and serve for life, they know and understand no other life. The house-elves cannot see the flaw in their logic, and, because of this, they cannot escape the never-ending cycle of servitude within which they are trapped. They fail to realize that freedom and thus freewill is what allows them to truly consent to serving wizards. Until they obtain both these things, house-elves are nothing more than slaves.

Some may ask why those who performed in freak shows opted to do so. House-elves offer modern audiences an interesting comparison to freak performers and allow for a level of understanding not otherwise available to those who were not alive during the height of the freak show. While within a freak show, the performer needed to continuously please the audience, no matter what the price might be. People like Charles Stratton performed because they knew no other life. Others performed because the other choices they had in life were worse than being a "freak." One such person would be Otis "the Frogman" Jordan, a man born without arms. Throughout his life, he was unable to financially support himself. One day, when a carnival came to town, he did the classic trick of men without arms: "the survival skill of rolling, lighting, and smoking a cigarette, all with his lips." This trick gained him a job and financial stability, a comfort he had never before enjoyed (Gerber 48). For Jordan, consenting to being a "freak" was his only way to survive. He did not do it because he knew no other life but rather because he had lived another type of life and suffered for it. Dobby can be seen as comparable to Jordan because both were able to enter employment and make choices freely rather than feeling trapped.

While S.P.E.W. was far from as productive or accepted as Hermione might have liked, it does jar the reader and bring questions of societal issues to the forefront of the reader's mind. Up until this point, no one in the series questioned whether magical creatures should be treated differently. While S.P.E.W.'s focus is the welfare of house-elves, the original name for the organization was Stop the Outrageous Abuse of Our Fellow Magical Creatures and Campaign for a Change in Their Legal Status (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 224). This title, and later the headline for S.P.E.W.'s manifesto, implies Hermione's concern for all magical creatures, not just house-elves.

S.P.E.W., more specifically shown through its original title, forces readers and wizards alike to question the societal restraints and standards of the wizarding world. Hermione recognizes the unjust treatment of magical creatures, and, as Harry matures, he too becomes "aware of the hidden prejudices of wizard society" (Hall 78). Despite being the hero of the series, Harry himself is bullied and ostracized while at Hogwarts. It is through the alienation between him and the other students that Harry realizes magical creatures are treated unjustly. His own experiences allow for Harry to understand and relate to the rejected creatures of the wizarding world (Hall 78). This is evident even in the case of Kreacher. Within the final novel, Harry shows the house-elf kindness by waiting for Kreacher to calm down, asking the house-elf to take his time in talking to him, saying "please," and gifting Kreacher a necklace that belonged to one of his former owners (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 173-174). Despite Harry's lack of respect for Kreacher, he learned through his own personal experiences that every living thing deserves to be treated properly, even untrustworthy house-elves.

Through characters such as Hermione, Dumbledore, and, later, Harry himself, Rowling calls for the reader to critique witches and wizards. While it is not initially evident, the wizarding world is filled with prejudice toward other magical creatures. Characters that readers grow to love are ostracized and mistreated due to their physical and racial differences—differences that, in a society that credits itself for extreme intelligence and sophistication, should not be considered character flaws. Rowling clearly opposes the wizarding world for its self-righteous social hierarchy, and she aims to educate and inform readers as to the underlying prejudices within not only the wizarding society but the real-world society as well. As Dumbledore said, "we have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 834).

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