

Kevin is a very talented writer. He transcends beyond typical writing by avoiding stating everything explicitly. This allows him to make more profound connections within his subject, instead of writing a predictable text. Throughout the semester Kevin has brought in work that encompassing many different genres, which demonstrates his deep understanding of prose. He also taught me a new word each time we met; today I learned what 'verisimilitude' means.

~Nick Igl, Tutor

Class Tension in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

By Kevin Bachhuber

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, many Americans see parallels between the depiction and treatment of house elves and of the black slaves during America's pre-Civil War period. However, the struggle between Hermione as an abolitionist and the rest of the wizarding population as apathetic members of a slave-holding culture is much less consistent than the depiction of the Irish-British class between the Weasleys and the Malfoys.

The Weasley family is depicted as a fairly stereotypical Irish family. Although Christianity rarely appears in the *Harry Potter* series (at least at the direct level), Arthur and Molly Weasley's six children seem to imply that they follow the Irish Catholics' love for large families and disdain for contraceptives. Their physical appearance mirrors the stereotypical Irish appearance as well; the Weasleys are often described as light-skinned, red-haired, and freckled.

Furthermore, the Weasley family is a lower-income family than most in the series. Their school supplies are frequently secondhand, much to Ron's disgust. While Harry Potter can afford a new formal robe, Mrs. Weasley must purchase a secondhand, lace-covered one for her own son. And, although they are poor compared to Harry Potter, they are also fiercely independent.

By contrast, the Malfoys are depicted as an extremely old, wealthy family. *Forbes* magazine even places Lucius Malfoy at #12 in their 2006 "Forbes Fictional 15," with a net worth around \$1.3 billion. Physically, all of the Malfoys resemble the stereotypical English aristocratic family. Draco Malfoy is described as "a pale boy with a pointed face and white-blond hair" (Rowling, 100-101) who bears a striking resemblance to both of his parents. And, like their Anglican counterparts, the Malfoys have one child.

The Malfoys are frequently shown as obsessed with racial purity. Draco Malfoy's favorite insults towards Hermione Granger are about her Muggle heritage. He is not averse to using the term 'mudblood' (a racial slur in the *Harry Potter* universe). When Hagrid is revealed to be a half-giant, Draco Malfoy exults that parents won't want Hagrid to teach their children because "they'll be worried he'll eat their kids" (Rowling, 440). Likewise, the stereotypical British aristocratic family is absolutely obsessed with class and racial hierarchy.

Even their names provide some context for the Irish-English class tensions. The Malfoys' names are all consistent with the aristocratic ideal. 'Malfoy' itself translates as 'bad faith' in French. 'Draco' means 'dragon' in Latin, and Narcissa (Draco's mother) takes her name from the feminization of the Greek Narcissus, a man so vain he died staring at his own reflection. Lucius' name is probably an allusion to the legendary Emperor Lucius who fought King Arthur.

The frequent clashes between the Malfoys and the Weasleys echo real-world problems between the Irish Catholics and the British Anglicans. From their physical appearance to their economic status, each family encompasses a stereotype common in the British Isles. Living in America, we are insulated from their cultural conflicts. However, for Rowling (and her UK readers), terrorist acts committed in the name of separatism, and their repercussions, form a background litany of violence. By incorporating this conflict, Rowling adds a layer of verisimilitude that might not otherwise exist.

Works Cited

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