

**“BAD BLOOD WILL OUT”: RACIAL PURITY IN *HARRY
POTTER* AND PARALLELS TO WORLD WAR II**

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DEDICATIONS

In the style of JK Rowling herself, the dedication of this thesis is split into seven ways:

To my beloved Dr. Richard Elia, for offering me hope during one of the darkest times in my life, renewing my love of literature, and helping me to realize where I truly belonged.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past almost twenty years, *Harry Potter* has delighted and enchanted children and adults alike, letting them fly on hippogriffs, fight mythological monsters, and triumph over evil alongside the boy wizard and his friends. More than just pure entertainment, however, JK Rowling's novel series teaches children valuable lessons about bravery, loyalty, love, and what it means to be a force for good in an otherwise dark and dangerous world. In her article "Harry Potter and Historical Consciousness," Ann Curthoys states in a succinct manner the impact of the series: "the Harry Potter novels are part of contemporary consciousness. They are not only popular reading for all ages and in many countries, but are also the focus of a burgeoning academic study of their themes and the reasons for their popularity" (8). To that end, it is imperative that the popularity of these novels is not understated; the seventh and final installment, originally released in July 2007, sold 8.3 million copies in the US in its first 24 hours alone (Rich 2007).

Far beyond the spells and dragons, *Harry Potter* delves into societal problems, both historical and contemporary, in a way that is understandable to children and allows them to see the nuances of situations that might otherwise be beyond their comprehension. It is the perfect vehicle to teach children that the world isn't all black and white and that a person is rarely purely good or purely evil.

One of the most prominent social themes in the series is that of racial purity, as discussed and demonstrated primarily through the conflict between those witches and wizards that come from all-magic families, and those that come from a non-magical

background; in other words, Purebloods and Muggle-Born. It is a highly complex issue, complicated further by the existence of those in between: the Halfbloods, descended from both Muggles and magic. Given that racial purity has been a cornerstone of many regimes, there are many connections that could be made between the *Potter* universe and our world in regards to this particular issue. However, it is the lack of emphasis on physical appearance, as Curthoys astutely observes, that suggests to the reader a closer connection to Nazi anti-Semitism during the World War II era (17). This thesis seeks to explore that theme and conflict, and how it is representative of the horrors of the same racial tension during World War II, specifically how Lord Voldemort is a Hitler-esque figure and his followers, known as Death Eaters, the Nazis. Additionally, this thesis endeavors to showcase that this theme and its real-world counterparts is just one of the many ways JK Rowling teaches young people about the nuances of the history of their world, and that the specific parallels employed serve to lay a foundation which readers can find familiarity in when learning about real-world historical events and issues. Although this position is not the only one a reader, whether critical or casual, can take when it comes to *Harry Potter*, this thesis assumes the view that these World War II references are the most accessible and impactful a young reader can be exposed to.

CHAPTER I: THE WIZARDING WORLD'S FAÇADE

“When a child first catches adults out – when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just – his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child’s world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing.”

– John Steinbeck,
East of Eden, 1952

During childhood, the world exists in very simple terms – black and white, good and evil; these dichotomies are absolute. Harry, the series’ protagonist and titular character, in spite of his abusive upbringing, is an extraordinarily kind and insightful child, but a child nonetheless. Initially, his views of the magical world and the people he meets in it are entirely without nuance, which is to be expected. The joy of a series that follows its characters’ journeys into adulthood is that the readers are allowed to grow alongside the characters. Their perceptions of the world morph and they leave behind that child-like naiveté almost in tandem with the young protagonists of the series. That *Harry Potter* is a phenomenon is a given, but it’s mere appeal as a fantasy series is not what has kept children and adults alike enchanted for the past nearly twenty years; there is something else that Rowling’s readers have found within this series that speaks to them. This compelling aspect is the sobering look in the proverbial mirror the series offers in

regards to our own world, with one specific reality in sharp focus: history will repeat itself, and this repetition is inevitable as long as the human race does not learn from its mistakes. This is something of a startling epiphany in childhood. These undeniably upsetting years are those in which an adolescent's worldview shifts and their once god-like heroes become all too human; seeing Harry – the reluctant “Chosen One” – going through the same crises can offer, in the least, consolation.

A perfect example of this shift concerns one of Harry's own heroes and mentors: Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts. Dumbledore is considered to be a paragon of virtue for much of the series; Harry practically idolizes him, despite the fact that he knows precious little about his mentor aside from his being a well-respected and powerful wizard. One of the most compelling storylines of the series culminates in the seventh and final installment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when Harry is forced to reconcile the man he thought he knew with the truths of his character. Faced with his hero's unsavory past (*Deathly Hallows* 355-357) and the realization that his mentor withheld information from him that, if disclosed, might have ended the Second Wizarding War sooner and Voldemort's reign of terror along with it, Harry struggles with feelings of confusion, betrayal, and anger over this apparent deception. It isn't until he learns the ultimate truth about his purpose in the fight against Voldemort and carries it out that Harry accepts everything that transpired.

As the saying goes, all that glitters is not gold: this deceptive appearance of purity can be seen throughout the wizarding world with “institutional and cultural oppression inherent not only in Voldemort's rule, but within normal, everyday wizarding culture itself” (Horne 93). As Harry gets older and learns more about the magical world, this

purity becomes less and less convincing and we, the readers, can see this world for what it is: flawed, hypocritical, and dangerous. This oppression in ordinary magical culture is, in some ways, more damaging than Voldemort's out-and-out racism. Yes, Voldemort and his ilk are clearly the worst of the evils; however, those witches and wizards who condemn Pure-blood superiority, and yet promulgate the systemic oppression of house-elves, goblins, giants, and the like, should be held just as accountable for the blood on their hands. In some cases, said blood is just as literal as it is figurative: the house-elves are supposedly willingly enslaved by the wizard race and are sometimes horribly abused at the hands of their masters; Dobby is a prime example. As for the giants, after their involvement with Voldemort during the First Wizarding War (c. 1970 -1981), they were hunted down and either slaughtered or forced into hiding on the fringes of society by Aurors, the law enforcement officials of the magical world, by Ministry decree (*Order of the Phoenix*, 426-427).

Harry is understandably ignorant of the racial oppression that plagues the magical world, but he does not remain so for very long. He meets Draco Malfoy while out with the half-giant groundskeeper of Hogwarts, Hagrid, and Malfoy wastes no time in establishing himself as a Pureblood supremacist. Not only does he disparage Hagrid as a "savage," but he is quick to inform Harry that he didn't think the "other sort" should be allowed into Hogwarts, that "they should keep [magical education] in the old wizarding families" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 78). Interestingly enough, Draco, and later his father Lucius, are eerily representative of the Aryan race that Adolf Hitler so valued: pale and tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes.

These early interactions with Malfoy introduce Harry, and by extension the reader, to a much more common attitude amongst wizards and witches than Voldemort's murderous extremism, but one that is no less dangerous: the casual belief that non-Purebloods and other hybrid or non-human creatures, such as centaurs and werewolves, are second-class citizens. Most who hold these beliefs are otherwise good people who have no desire to hurt anyone; they simply are bigoted because that is the way they were raised to think. This way of thinking is seen not just among the less radical supremacists, but also in Ron Weasley, one of Harry's closest friends, and Ron's mother, Molly, among others. In one instance, Ron reacts with revulsion when Remus Lupin's lycanthropy is revealed in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (345). It is a commonly held belief in the magical world that werewolves are inherently evil and dangerous, which makes life difficult for those afflicted. Ron's reaction, while abhorrent, is the norm for those native to the magical community. In fact, Jackie Horne notes in her article "Harry and the Other" that throughout the series, Ron "embodies the naturalized beliefs of the wizarding culture, beliefs that dismiss any claims of institutional oppression as mere "complaining" and "lying"" (94).

Molly, on the other hand, is less forthcoming about her prejudices and young readers may miss the instances in which they come to light. Throughout the series, Molly and her husband Arthur are often amazed at "how many ways Muggles have found of getting along without magic" (*Chamber of Secrets* 43); they don't mean to be condescending, but they display a rather disturbing sense of paternalism towards Muggles. Molly is more dismissive of the place Muggle inventions have in the wizarding world than her husband, who is completely enamored with Muggles and their way of life,

once referring to the Muggle items that Arthur likes to tinker with as “rubbish” (*Chamber of Secrets* 39). Later in the series, she is seen to treat her son’s fiancé and her eventual daughter-in-law, Fleur, with little more than disdain and mistrust, assumedly because she is a quarter Veela, a siren-like creature and therefore, not fully human.

Through characters like Ron and Molly, Rowling makes an important distinction among the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys’ of the story – in having people on both sides display capacities for immense prejudice and immense love, she negates the traditional black-and-white dichotomy that is present in many other works of the fantasy genre. She does not shy away from the notion that a person can be fundamentally good and still have prejudices. A person can be bigoted unintentionally and without malevolence, and still do just as much damage as those with malice in their hearts. With the series trying to reflect our world as much as possible, it would have been senseless to have the good guys be infallible and the bad guys – Voldemort excluded – incapable of love. Neither side – the Light nor the Dark – are without vice and virtue and that, among many other characteristics, sets *Harry Potter* apart from the annals of fantasy literature and young adult literature as a genre.

The struggle of the Muggleborns within the wizarding community and the parallels to the horrific anti-Semitism of World War II therein are the predominant issues, but it is important to remember that these are not the only racially or socially charged struggles that the reader sees through Harry’s eyes. Rather, they are the ones that are easiest to decry, combat, and galvanize forces against, and therefore it is the evil most frequently alluded to. It is an incontrovertible evil that must be stopped, and, as Horne notes, it is far easier to rise against an enemy that is so clearly defined, as Voldemort and

his Death Eaters are, than it is to turn those efforts inward and engage one's own cultural conventions and deeply rooted dogmata (98).

In the coming chapters, the struggles and prejudices that Muggleborns face, and a portion of the history thereof will be discussed, as well as Voldemort's likeness to Adolf Hitler and additional parallels to World War II. By the end of this thesis, it is this writer's hope that those hitherto unfamiliar with these books might look at it not simply as a children's series, but as a complicated tale of a child born into a tenuous time of peace between two wars – something that too many people alive today can identify with – and as a reflection upon our own society and history.

CHAPTER II: THE ISSUE OF IDEOLOGY IN *HARRY POTTER*

“Misunderstanding...arising from ignorance breeds fear, and fear remains the greatest enemy of peace.”

- Lester B. Pearson

“The Four Faces of Peace,” 1957

The idea of racial purity is an area of tremendous contention in the wizarding world, obstructing those most elusive and sought after creatures – peace, understanding, and compromise – from finally quelling the millennia-old conflict between Pure-blood and Muggleborn witches and wizards. In canon, it’s been established that one of the founders of Hogwarts, Salazar Slytherin, thought that magical learning should be extended exclusively to purely magical families, as he “disliked those of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy” (*Chamber of Secrets* 150). Slytherin went so far as to house a Basilisk, which could only be controlled by a descendant of his own bloodline, in a hidden chamber below the school.

The purpose for this monster is explained in the second novel: “The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic” (*Chamber of Secrets* 151); in this case, “unworthy” refers to Muggleborns. Slytherin’s actions are inexcusable, but unfortunately, have historical basis. Having come up in the Middle Ages, he had no reason to trust Muggleborns; as Michael Bailey notes in his article “From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages,” for most of that period in history, “sorcery was generally regarded as suspicious at best, and often

criminal” (962). Slytherin had his reasons for fearing and mistrusting Muggles and their magical offspring. He lived during a time in which having magic could easily get you executed for heresy or witchcraft. Slytherin believed he couldn’t afford to trust said Muggles or Muggleborns and acted accordingly. Eventually the magical community as a whole pulled away from Muggles with the introduction of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy in 1692, which forbade any witch or wizard to perform magic in front of a Muggle, or otherwise make them aware of the existence of magic (*Chamber of Secrets* 20-21, *Order of the Phoenix* 26-27).

That being said, to take those historically-based beliefs and apply them in a modern-day situation, completely out of context, as Voldemort and his followers did, makes very little sense. During the events of the novels, which take place between 1981 and 2017, witches and wizards could no longer be executed at the hands of Muggles in the United Kingdom or mainland Europe for having magic. Speaking historically, outside of *Potter* canon, the last act of legislation in the United Kingdom that made witchcraft punishable by death was enacted in 1604 and repealed in 1735, with the introduction of subsequent legislation. The Witchcraft Act 1735 was then repealed in 1951 (“Witchcraft”).

By the time Voldemort rose to power, there was absolutely nothing to fear from Muggles and Muggleborn witches and wizards, at least on an institutional level. Most Muggles simply didn’t believe in magic and in fact would go out of their way to ignore it, even when “it’s staring them in the face” (*Chamber of Secrets* 38). Simply put, the mindset that saw Muggles as lesser and Muggleborns as impure depended on the fear and

ignorance of witches and wizards who never bothered to check if the Muggles were still a viable threat.

Quite apart from the magical extremists, Muggleborn witches and wizards face another, more benign, but no less harmful, prejudice from the rest of the wizarding world that sees them not as a threat, but simply unequal. The virulently hateful beliefs espoused by Voldemort and those “who thought [Voldemort] had the right idea about things” (*Order of the Phoenix* 112) seem to have led to the popularization of a slur: “Mudblood.” Within the magical world, the term “Mudblood” is highly offensive, on par with the racial epithets heard in the Muggle world. The reader is first introduced to this slur in *The Chamber of Secrets* when Draco Malfoy uses it against Hermione Granger, a Muggleborn witch (112).

Ron later explains the meaning behind the term and brings to light that disgusting mindset of superiority found in some witches and wizards and the hypocrisy of it all:

Mudblood’s a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born – you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards – like Malfoy’s family – who think they’re better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood . . . I mean, the rest of us know it doesn’t make any difference at all . . .

It’s a disgusting thing to call someone . . . Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It’s ridiculous. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn’t married Muggles, we’d’ve died out. (*Chamber of Secrets* 115-116)

What happened in the magical community is a type of ethnic othering that saw the oppressed group (Muggleborn witches and wizards) start off as a minority but eventually lead to the new majority (Halfbloods) because of concerns of extinction. Pureblood supremacists are, in fact, in the minority of the wizarding population, but most come from ancient and well-established magical bloodlines, and are therefore nearly untouchable. Many of Voldemort's followers avoided prison sentences by remaining silent about their involvement with the tyrant and the extent of their ideologies; claiming they were under an enchantment and therefore not responsible for their actions; and bribery of certain government officials, further protecting themselves from the possibility of punitive measures. Once the Second Wizarding War breaks out, and the so-called former Death Eaters are called to action, avoiding punishment becomes much more difficult. The end result is that not only do the all-too-influential few avoid facing the consequences of their harmful actions and beliefs but also the systematic inequality can never be adequately addressed for fear of ruffling those important and 'most ancient' feathers.

Furthermore, with the exception of perhaps Albus Dumbledore, those who oppose Voldemort and his followers do so not because they are proponents of Muggle equality, but because, as Farah Mendlesohn suggests, there is an innate "understanding that Muggles are a naturally inferior species to be protected and cared for" ("Crowning the King" 177). She takes this idea even further with the notion that the sole reason these particular witches and wizards view Muggles as needing protection and care is because they occasionally produce magical children of a Hermione-esque caliber (177).

Mendlesohn also asserts that Rowling makes an effort to avoid ideology in her works and instead is rooted in “a distinctively English liberalism that is marked...by its insistence that it is not ideological by only “fair”” (159) but I disagree. Rowling may not have employed a distinct ideological message as authors of the same genre have done before her, but this is not because she is avoiding a message altogether. Rather, I would argue, Rowling attempts to introduce the intricacies of ideologies through dynamic characters without allowing her personal views to come into the equation. If these attempts seem heavy-handed, it is only because they are introductory notions directed at children, to help them better understand the world they live in.

This argument is one echoed by Jann Lacoss in her essay “Of Magicals and Muggles: Revulsions and Reversals at Hogwarts” (2002): she maintains that the target audience are children that have reached the age in which they learn social norms and acceptable behavior, and these children do so often by engaging with taboo topics, such as “violence and murder” and “the very nature of evil” (67). A point upon which Lacoss and I agree is her assertion that the canon world of *Harry Potter* approaches these taboo topics in ways that are easily accessible to children and, contrary to what Mendlesohn argues, Rowling “draws distinctions between good and evil and presents very negative events in relatively nonthreatening ways” (Lacoss 68). She goes onto clarify this statement: “Potter fans see the consequences of senseless murders by vicariously experiencing the emotions felt by Harry and others who have been influenced by Voldemort’s actions...Rowling allows an open discussion of evil by having characters confront it on a regular basis and even by naming it” (68).

By avoiding the glorification of violent acts and instead showing the aftermath of them, Rowling leaves her young readers with a vital lesson: that harmful ideologies are not simply ideas or opinions, and are especially not so when those ideologies imply or state the desire to do real harm to real people. Once those ideologies are put to action, anyone propagating them is inherently culpable.

It is seeing the consequences of such ideologies – the overvaluing of blood purity, for example and the multiple wars it leads to – that teaches adolescents in a relatively non-threatening way the dangers of letting blind emotions cloud one’s judgment, especially when those emotions are instilled by figures with their own ulterior motives or concerns. In this way, readers see both the hatred towards Muggleborns that Voldemort encouraged and the overinflated sense of control and safety exhibited by Cornelius Fudge, a character who will be explored in the next chapter, are equally damaging, if with differing direct outcomes.

In the next chapter, the series’ parallels to World War II will be explored in closer detail as one of the methods JK Rowling employs when reflecting upon and teaching about the events of our world. Some of these parallels include comparisons between Adolf Hitler and Voldemort, as well as a minor character Gellert Grindelwald; references hidden in the name and aspects of a fictional prison; and the rather insidious attempts made by certain political figures, both real and fictional, to discredit their perceived opponents.

CHAPTER III: MAGICAL EXTREMISM AND PARALLELS TO WORLD

WAR II

“There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it...”

- JK Rowling

The Sorcerer’s Stone, 1997

He promoted the subjugation of those thought to be inferior and the elevation of those thought to be of a superior origin; he idolized that which he was not; he played on people’s fear and anger and gave them a scapegoat, someone to blame; he was arrogant, frighteningly persuasive, paranoid, and inspired fear and disgust in equal measure; he was “a figure seeking absolute power” (Curthoys 16); he is seen as the personification of evil itself.

Those qualities could describe both Voldemort, known to his followers as “The Dark Lord,” and the most universally reviled figure of the 20th century, Adolf Hitler. Voldemort, by design, is Hitler-esque, and although he never reached the same level of mass genocide that his real-world parallel did, it was not for lack of trying. Just as the anger of the German people allowed Hitler to rise to power, the Pureblood supremacists’ fear of being overrun by those of mixed or Muggle blood, as well as the centuries-old obsession with purity, allowed for both of Voldemort’s reigns of terror.

In her essay “Specters of Thatcherism” (2002), which focuses on the materialism seen in both the magical and Muggle worlds in post-Thatcher Britain, Karin Westman maintains that viewing the *Potter* series exclusively through a nostalgic lens diminishes

the impact of the inherent similarities to modern culture and the close detail that brings the series to such vibrant life (327). She does not deny the connections to the instability and destruction resulting from the years preceding World War II and the war itself, but places less importance on it than on the modern implications. While this is a perfectly valid viewpoint, the connections to the World War II and to Hitler's regime and slaughter of the Jewish people cannot be overlooked or understated simply in favor of the colors of modernity and the materialism of the late 20th century. These connections are carefully built up over the course of seven intricately-crafted novels, but, as Curthoys notes, they are not truly clear until the final installment, when Voldemort's regime is at full power (7-8).

Delving further, there are many more, perhaps less obvious references to the Nazi regime beyond Voldemort's ideological, genocidal resemblance to Hitler. A secondary character, Gellert Grindelwald – Voldemort's predecessor, in a way – was much like Hitler in that he dominated Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and adopted an ancient symbol with overall harmless connotations for his own propagandistic purposes: the Deathly Hallows sigil. The sigil refers to three thought-to-be mythical, extraordinarily powerful magical items: the Elder Wand, The Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak. The Elder Wand was meant to be ultra-powerful and undefeatable; the Resurrection Stone could recall the spirits of loved ones from beyond the grave; and the Invisibility Cloak granted its wearer the ability to hide themselves completely from their enemies. According to legend, having all three Hallows in their possession would make one the master of Death (*Deathly Hallows* 410). Grindelwald appropriated this symbol, not only because of the power associated with it, but also because he searched for the

Hallows, believing he would have been invincible if he possessed all three. Hitler, of course, appropriated the swastika, a motif used for at least five thousand years before it became the symbol of Nazi Germany, which originally simply meant “good fortune” or “well-being” (“History of the Swastika”).

Grindelwald formed a friendship with Albus Dumbledore in their youth and the two made plans to gain enough power to establish a new world order in which witches and wizards could come out of the shadows and reign supreme over Muggles. When this friendship ended, Grindelwald struck out on his own and rose to frightening power, posing a global threat, while Dumbledore rededicated his life to fighting for the rights of Muggleborns and protection of Muggles, perhaps in an effort to make up for the follies of his youth. According to extended writings by JK Rowling (*Fantastic Beasts*, 1-2, 41) concerns over Grindelwald extended even to America, indicating that in some ways he was more dangerous, if less blatantly homicidal, than even Voldemort. Out of fear towards Dumbledore, Grindelwald never extended his campaign to the United Kingdom.

Dumbledore later confronted his former friend and in 1945 put an end to Grindelwald’s efforts. Fans and critics alike should make no mistake: that Grindelwald was defeated by Albus Dumbledore – a Churchill-esque figure in the fight against extremism – the same year the Nazi regime was dismantled is not a coincidence by any means. After his defeat, Grindelwald was imprisoned in the institution he himself originally built to incarcerate his fallen enemies and captured Muggles, Nurmengard (*Deathly Hallows* 360).

If the name Nurmengard strikes a familiar chord, it is because it bears much resemblance to that of Nuremberg, the German city best known as the location of the

Nuremberg Trials, a series of military tribunals responsible for trying some of the most prominent members of the Third Reich. The first and most well known of the trials, which Norman Birkett, one of the British judges, called “the greatest trial in history” (Marrus 563) was held between November 20, 1945 and October 1, 1946 and dealt with twenty-four indictments of some of the most prominent political and military Nazi leaders (“The Nuremberg Trials”), including Hermann Goering, Hitler’s designated heir, who committed suicide in his prison cell shortly before his death sentence was scheduled to be carried out (“Hermann Goering”), following in his leader’s footsteps. Two others escaped trial: Gustav Krupp was deemed medically unfit to stand trial (“Gustav Krupp”) and Robert Ley committed suicide before the proceedings began (“Robert Ley”).

Additionally, after Grindelwald was defeated, the inmates of Nurmengard were released and the tyrant himself became the sole prisoner of the fortress. This is perhaps a reference to Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy, who from 1966 to his death in 1987 was the sole prisoner of Spandau Prison (Manvell and Fraenkel 189). One of the final and perhaps one of the most haunting resemblances between Nurmengard and Nazi Germany is the stone carving above the entrance to the fictional prison that reads: “For The Greater Good” (*Deathly Hallows* 360). Given that Grindelwald was perpetrating the notion of wizarding supremacy over Muggles, the connotation of the carving is that their imprisonment in Nurmengard, and indeed the entire notion of wizard dominance over Muggles, is for their own good. This is a sinister reference to the infamous sign above Auschwitz’s entrance: “Arbeit Macht Frei,” meaning “Work Makes You Free.”

Prior to Voldemort’s takeover of the Ministry of Magic in 1997 (*Deathly Hallows* 159), supremacists had to confine their prejudice against Muggleborns to their innermost

thoughts. To publicly reveal themselves as Death Eaters during the fifteen years leading up to Voldemort's return would have been tantamount to suicide; they would have been arrested and tried as war criminals, and either sentenced to life imprisonment or executed, much like the Nazi leaders were after the fall of the Third Reich. Post-coup, however, Voldemort had control of the government through the manipulation of a puppet and the systemic racism of the magical world was put on full display through the efforts of various agencies and offices. One such effort was the Muggleborn Registration Commission, whose public purpose was to require all Muggleborn witches and wizards to register with the Ministry. This could be considered as merely suspicious if the Ministry were not under Voldemort's rule; but with the tyrant in charge, it can be seen as nothing less than a terrifying display of power and prejudice. Even the Death Eaters had little to fear from publicly participating in the more radical efforts once Voldemort had the power of the Ministry under his control; Remus Lupin explains this development to Harry in the simplest of terms, "they've got the power to perform brutal spells without fear of identification or arrest" (*Deathly Hallows* 206-207).

The Muggleborns who complied with the government and registered, unaware of the change in regime, were then interrogated as to how they came to possess magical abilities and secrets, based on the false claim from the Department of Mysteries that "magic can only be passed from person to person when Wizards reproduce" (*Deathly Hallows* 209). This was little more than horrifying trap disguised in red tape; inevitably, the Muggleborns who were interrogated were found to be guilty of theft and sentenced to prison.

The Muggleborns who tried to evade this new Commission, having seen it for what it was, became the target of bounty hunters known as Snatchers. Although the aim of these Snatchers was simply to capture the fugitive Muggleborns, some were killed in their attempt to flee. Although the Muggleborns were not forced to wear any identifying patches, such as the infamous pink triangle used to denote homosexuality or the yellow Star of David, the wary reader could not and should not overlook the similarities between the Muggleborn Registration Commission and the anti-Semitic legislative efforts of the Nazi party, as well as the parallels between the Snatchers and the Gestapo.

As history knows all too well, among the many who stood and fought against Adolf Hitler in WWII, one leader stood out from the rest: Winston Churchill. Thus, within the *Potter* universe – where Voldemort and Grindelwald each represent different aspects of Hitler – the Churchill role is filled by none other than the one wizard each tyrant feared above all others: Albus Dumbledore. While Dumbledore can hardly be presented as saintly, despite the idolization Harry bestows upon him in early years, he remains a well-known force for freedom and tolerance amidst the centuries-old bigotry. Though he never held political office or ever expressed the desire to, Dumbledore is the trusted wartime commander, the leader of the resistance, a dangerous enemy, and powerful ally; all qualities he shares with Churchill.

Dumbledore and Churchill both were regarded as frustratingly enigmatic and secretive, which is hardly shocking, given their positions as leaders in their respective wars, but Dumbledore has one advantage that Churchill never did: he was an effective leader in peacetime. The actual Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, would often ask Dumbledore for political advice in his early days of office (*Order of the Phoenix* 94).

Two scenes in particular stand out when viewing Dumbledore through the Churchill-esque lens, both of which can be found in *The Goblet of Fire*. The first features the Headmaster of Hogwarts arguing with the Minister of Magic over the legitimacy of Voldemort's rebirth, as witnessed by Harry Potter. Fudge stubbornly refuses the possibility – when in truth, it has already happened – that Voldemort could have returned, while Dumbledore calmly lays out what steps Fudge should take to minimize the fallout of the tyrant's return down the line. Had Fudge been more reasonable or less prone to baseless pride, he might have taken Dumbledore's advice and be remembered as “one of the bravest and greatest Ministers of Magic we have ever known” (708), which arguably Winston Churchill was in the real world. This is the first time, and one of the relatively few instances, where Dumbledore is shown to behave like the wartime general he truly was and it should be noted that he chose to step into the role of advisor first instead of striking out on his own. It was only after Fudge refused point-blank to acknowledge Voldemort's return that Dumbledore acted as he saw fit (*Goblet of Fire* 709) and deliberately and quite publicly contradicted the Ministry's chosen narrative.

The second notable scene is that contradiction, during the traditional End of the Year feast in front of the entire student body and faculty of Hogwarts, many of whom would go on to fight against Voldemort's forces during the final battle in *The Deathly Hallows*. Dumbledore eulogizes Cedric Diggory, whose murder effectively triggers the beginning of the Second Wizarding War, and essentially breaks ties with the Ministry in this section of his speech:

“Cedric Diggory was murdered by Lord Voldemort.”

A panicked whisper swept the Great Hall. People were staring at Dumbledore in disbelief, in horror. He looked perfectly calm as he watched them mutter themselves into silence.

“The Ministry of Magic,” Dumbledore continued, “does not wish me to tell you this. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so – either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies...” (*Goblet of Fire* 722)

In this speech, which could easily be likened to one a general gives his troops before battle, Dumbledore exemplifies the boldness and the bravery of an experienced military leader, the likes of which Churchill displayed both prior to and after his ascension to the office of Prime Minister. In it, he emphasizes the importance of trust, understanding, and the ties of friendship - the ties that bind, so to speak – in the face of the “discord and enmity” Voldemort spreads (723). “Differences of habit,” he goes on to say, “and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open” (723). Rather similar to this speech are the remarks Churchill made at the House of Commons on September 3rd, 1939 at the outbreak of World War II:

[Our repeated efforts for peace...all have been faithful and sincere.] This is of the highest moral value...at the present time, because the wholehearted concurrence of scores of millions of men and women, whose

co-operation is indispensable and whose comradeship and brotherhood are indispensable, is the only foundation upon which the trial and tribulation of modern war can be endured and surmounted...

The familiar characterizations and references extend far beyond Dumbledore and Voldemort, however; Cornelius Fudge is also based off a WWII-era leader, although one who became rather infamous for his bungling of the Nazi threat: Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain, in his desperation to avoid another large-scale conflict, favored appeasement as a method of dealing with Hitler and the growing Nazi threat. Because of these policies, Chamberlain's name has become synonymous with cowardice, but one might wonder if this is an entirely fair characterization. While Chamberlain wasn't strong enough to lead Britain into an unprecedentedly destructive war, he was the elected leader of a nation still greatly weakened from World War I. Churchill, on the other hand, with his bold strategies and uncompromising stances, was exactly the type of man Britain needed to win the war, but Chamberlain's desperate stalling gave Britain's forces enough time to gather their strength for the coming battles.

Chamberlain was not completely ignorant of the growing threat, but the same cannot be said of his magical counterpart. Cornelius Fudge absolutely refused to believe for even a moment that Voldemort had returned out of primitive fear. This fear warped his mind until he was able to convince himself that Dumbledore was lying in order to get the magical world rallied behind their fearless wartime general and gain enough power to overthrow Fudge as Minister (*Order of the Phoenix* 93-94). Indulging these delusions led Fudge to use his influence at *The Daily Prophet*, the magical world's national newspaper,

to discredit both Dumbledore and Harry, who witnessed Voldemort's rebirth. This smear campaign, which painted Dumbledore as a senile warmonger and Harry as an attention-seeking liar, came at the same time that the Ministry was pressuring *The Daily Prophet* not to report any of Dumbledore's "rumormongering" (*Order of the Phoenix* 94). The two campaigns left the Wizarding World at large oblivious to the coming threat, which made them easier targets for Voldemort to capture or control (*Order of the Phoenix* 94-95).

Perhaps Chamberlain himself did not directly engage in smear campaigns against politicians such as Churchill, but Sir George Joseph Ball, a close associate and political adviser to Chamberlain, most certainly did. A master of espionage, Ball used his MI5 intelligence training to acquire and transform a weekly publication, *Truth*, into a "keen advocate of the national government and of Neville Chamberlain in particular" and a print vehicle for anything that could discredit Chamberlain's political enemies (Cockett 135). Frighteningly, *Truth* became more and more pro-German and pro-Italian as Chamberlain sought a peaceful settlement with Hitler and Mussolini. Alongside this bizarre praise came the denigration of Chamberlain's enemies, which only increased in frequency and intensity after the Prime Minister's appeasement policies were shredded with the March 1939 invasion of Prague (Cockett 135-136).

Naturally, as Winston Churchill, a vocal critic of appeasement, became Britain's answer to Adolf Hitler, Chamberlain saw him as a political threat. In turn, *Truth*, with Ball at the helm, "began a sustained attack on Churchill and his credentials as a potential cabinet minister or war leader" (Crockett 137) These attacks only worsened when Churchill became first lord of admiralty in Chamberlain's government, and as Crockett

writes, although it cannot be stated for certain whether Chamberlain instructed Ball to launch these attacks, given his close relationship with the spymaster, he could have put a stop to them if he so wished (137). As a last parallel, both Fudge (*Half Blood Prince* 15) and Chamberlain (Smart 273-278) resigned amidst public pressure after their respective mistakes in office regarding the proved too much to forgive.

All of the parallels to World War II and Nazi Germany that JK Rowling placed in her work are compelling and cannot be overlooked, although care must be taken to avoid misunderstanding their purpose. Rowling did not implement them as a way of equating her fictional conflict with the genocide that will forever mar the face of history, but rather as a way of laying the foundation for the young readers' comprehension of the much more complex political and ideological causes of World War II, or at least one aspect of them. Also, one might argue that Rowling's creation of Hitler-esque villains was not to influence her readers' view of them as dangerous, delusional monsters, but rather to give them a reference point as a way to foster understanding that Adolf Hitler was far worse than anyone with magical abilities could be. Where Voldemort and Grindelwald failed in their overall missions, Hitler succeeded in nearly eradicating an entire race of people from the earth: by 1945, two out of every three European Jews had been killed, with the Jewish death toll in the Holocaust reaching six million ("Jewish Population").

In crafting the prejudicial society of the Wizarding World, the Death Eaters, and Voldemort himself with such specific parallels in mind, Rowling successfully created a terrifying villain that was sure to remain in her readers' minds long after they closed the books, due as much to his familiarity as his actions and beliefs. More than this, however, Rowling designed her fictional world - where arguably magic makes anything possible -

in such a manner that readers would later be able to look back on Voldemort as the epitome of evil within it, and be unable to do anything but realize that all of it pales in comparison to the horrors of the Holocaust and the atrocities Hitler perpetrated. Once examined, the careful comparisons and references, integral parts of the series' power, put into perspective for younger readers the impact World War II had on modern society as well as lead to comprehension of its historical significance. Additionally, those same comparisons pave the way for understanding the grave consequences of extremist political ideologies and beliefs, especially when thought is put to action.

CONCLUSION

The *Harry Potter* saga is filled as much with fantastical imagery and heroic characters as vital lessons that emphasize the importance of bravery and kindness in the face of extreme cruelty, and warn of the inherent dangers of hubris and blind hatred. It encourages young readers to think for themselves rather than allow themselves to be cowed by authority, both malignant and benign. As this thesis has demonstrated, the canon *Potter* universe is one not unlike our own: filled with complex cultural intricacies and institutional failings. The numerous parallels to World War II amidst the theme of racial purity can hardly be denied, nor should they be. The theme itself is one that resonates deeply with today's society, perhaps most especially with those who are coming of age in the middle of events that history has seen far too many times; and the parallels force into our minds a reminder of an era that witnessed the worst humanity had to offer, which we must never be allowed to forget, so that we may heed the warnings of the past should the same circumstances develop. It is the accessibility and historical importance of the source events which make the parallels, and by extension, the overall theme so worthy of analysis.

It is fundamentally important that literature – especially children's and young adult fiction - speak to the world around us, both as an escape and as a reflection. Casting a critical light, even through a magical lens as JK Rowling has, on our society and our history is only one of the many ways that we can learn from our past and avoid the same mistakes in the future. In some ways, fantasy elements serve to better achieve these goals, as they allow readers to see the truth of a given historical or cultural situation without

feeling persecuted for their place in it, which lends itself to better objective comprehension, even in the early stages of learning. This is an area in which *Potter* shines; it presents the horrors of the Holocaust on a much smaller and, to an extent, less intense scale and cuts to the heart of the matter where ideology is concerned, which grants young readers a foundation, of which they may be unaware, for further learning down the road.

The true beauty of the *Potter* series is that it does not force any interpretations on its audience. It offers not any one single concrete analysis of detail or theme, but rather the opportunity to look a little closer, entirely of the reader's own volition. Perhaps Ann Curthoys encompassed this sentiment best when she claimed that the novels are to contemporary consciousness as mythology was to the Ancient Greeks, in that they permit "interpretation and re-interpretation of humanity's profoundest dilemmas" (10). Naturally, it is only when the reader delves into the inner workings of the series that they can delight in the intricate nature of this literary phenomenon in all its glory and color. Until then, the series is much like the world through a young child's eyes: black and white.

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