



**Linnæus University**

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Master's Thesis

# The enslavement of the House-Elves

*A comparative study on the depiction and the treatment of the house-elves in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels with an anti-racist focus on empathy in the EFL classroom*



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## Abstract

This essay explores the hierarchy amongst the characters in J.K Rowling's Harry Potter novels with a theoretical focus on Critical Race Theory. The representation of the house-elves will be examined in relation to racism and slavery, which will be compared to values that have been influential in the past and that still shape society today. The result reveals that racism and slavery is presented throughout the novels and has a distinct connection with the British Empire as well as with Great Britain today. Counter narratives exhibit a new truth that is unveiled through the stories of the house-elves and create better understanding regarding discrimination. A pedagogical analysis has in addition been conducted on the novels to enhance the counter narratives through empathy. The student will with the novels, receive different perspectives that can help them to develop their empathic abilities.

## Key Words

Counter Narrative, Critical Race Theory, Empathy, Harry Potter, House-elves, J.K Rowling, Racism, Slavery, the EFL Classroom

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# 1 Introduction

More than 20 years ago, Joanna K. Rowling released the first novel in the Harry Potter series with a magical world hidden behind the ordinary one. This series grew to a total of seven novels and it was estimated to have sold more than 500 million copies in 2018 and has been translated into 80 different languages worldwide (The Pottermore News Team). Throughout the series, the readers follow the young Harry Potter, as he is coming-of-age and attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. When the protagonist, Harry, enters the magical world, he stumbles upon different magical creatures with different features and traits that astonish him. In the second novel, Harry meets Dobby, a small creature with bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls and bat-like ears (Rowling *Chamber* 12). This is the first house-elf introduced in the series and he is a living being “bound to serve one house and one family forever” (Rowling *Chamber* 14). This means that a house-elf has to work for the appointed family without arguing as well as not receiving anything for their servitude. House-elves can only acquire freedom if they are presented with a gift from their master in the form of clothing, such as a sock (Rowling *Chamber* 187, 356-7).

In the novels, house-elves reappear on several occasions or are mentioned by other characters. When mentioned, there are often discussions about their working conditions as well as how others, mostly wizards and witches, treat them. One of the protagonists who usually talks about this is Hermione Granger, one of Harry’s closest friends. Both Harry and Hermione were raised outside of the magical community and encounter different aspects that they do not always agree with. One example is Hermione’s thoughts about the treatment of the elves that she compares with slavery. Some characters agree with her but most of them disagree (Rowling *Goblet* 154-155).

This essay will therefore investigate the fictional world of Harry Potter and the treatment of the house-elves in comparison to enslavement.

Throughout history, enslavement of people has existed in many civilizations where people have been treated as property to achieve other people's goals. During ancient times, enslavement occurred through conquering, war and pillaging. Captured slaves could therefore be anybody regardless of their cultural background or the color of their skin (Kenneth 1-2). In Europe, slavery started to disappear during the Medieval Period but this did not change Europeans' efforts to own other humans. As the Europeans started to colonize other parts of the world, the need for labor increased and they started to search for it elsewhere. During the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans began to buy slaves in Western Africa and brought them to the Americas, where they had to work under horrible circumstances (Kenneth 3). The British Empire was one of these conquerors and they enslaved a large number of people, whom they then sent to their colonies (Kenneth 2). However, slaves were only brought to the colonies that and never to Great Britain itself (Drescher 2). Analyzing the enslavement of house-elves in the Harry Potter novels will possibly create a better understanding of past societies, connected to how different people were treated due to the need for cheap labor in combination with the fact that people from conquered or colonized countries have other physical characteristics compared to Englishmen. This will also create a better understanding of norms and values that still exist today.

Despite the short time that the Harry Potter novels have existed, many studies have been written with various subjects and topics. Some of the subjects that the academic studies focus on are symbolism, morality, psychology, gender and discrimination. "Making a Muggle: A Study of Processes of Othering in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and how Teachers Can Use the Novels to Work with Issues of Ableism" (2016) by Robin Aronsson and "Using *Harry Potter* to Discuss Moral Values and

Equality in the English Language Classroom” (2013) by My Hildingson are two of many bachelor’s theses that have been written during the last five years. As for longer texts, there are *Reading Harry Potter Again: New Critical Essays* (2009), edited by Gizelle Liza Anatol, and Neil Mulholland’s book *The Psychology of Harry Potter: An Unauthorized Examination Of The Boy Who Lived* (2006). They all focus on one or several of the subjects mentioned above but use different theories and methods to analyze one or more novels. Even if the topic of slavery in connection to the house-elves has previously been studied, the focus in this essay is to bring forth a new perspective by using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as well as including how to implement it in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

CRT will be used in the essay to compare the position of house-elves with racism and enslavement as well as to investigate the relevance of using parts of these novels in the EFL classroom. CRT is a theory that was created during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has its origin in the US’ legal system (Dixson and Rousseau 9; Delgado and Stefancic “Bibliography” 461). As it is such a recent theory, there is not much literature focusing on CRT in education but some scholars have written about the subject and offer different recommendations that can be used for change both in practice and in policy. However, these are often only recommendations and not clear instructions on how to use them in different real situations. This makes it problematic as there are no specific guidelines to follow and teachers might be uncertain whether their actions towards the students are equal or not. Nevertheless, working together with and adapting to the students makes it possible to avoid such situations where they feel unequally treated, as the students themselves know when things are right or wrong (Dixson and Rousseau 23). One attempt to make CRT relevant in education has been to connect CRT with pedagogy, which focuses on analyzing the educational practice and finding what aspects contribute to inequalities in education (Zamudio et al. 91).

Due to the theory being rather new, the US society is usually the main topic of CRT sources and other countries have not yet been subjected to being studied through the lens of this theory. However, US mainstream culture derives from Northern European norms and values, which makes CRT justifiable to use in the present study as it aims to analyze the house-elves in the British novel series Harry Potter. Furthermore, the essay will also focus on the relevance of using these novels in the Swedish EFL classroom, which is possible as the CRT sources put emphasis on problems and situations that exist in Sweden as well.

The Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school states that the education provided should be structured to create the possibility of transferring fundamental democratic values to the students as well as highlight the importance of discussing different ethical perspectives. All school subjects are equally responsible to cover these features in order to give students many different perspectives and help them develop their own personal views (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 5-6). In the core contents of the Swedish syllabus for all three English courses taught in upper secondary school, the English subject should cover issues and news that are current as well as relatable to the students. It also states that all three courses should include a variety of literature and use a diversity of reading strategies that have different aims and purposes (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Syllabus" 3, 7, 11). One such purpose could be to help the students develop their empathic abilities, which the students should get the opportunity to improve throughout their education (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4). This is feasible to incorporate in the EFL classroom as long as the overarching aim is to focus on giving students the possibility to develop their all-round communicative skills (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Syllabus" 1). By reading passages from the novels and then discussing the content in connection to chosen topics, students will get the opportunity to develop their empathic abilities and their all-round communicative skills.

The primary aim of the essay is to analyze the treatment and the depiction of the house-elves in the Harry Potter novels through the lens of CRT. The essay will also include a pedagogical focus where the aim is to discuss the content of the novels in connection to the fundamental values. This will involve focusing on creating empathy towards the house-elves as a subjugated group, as well as discussing discrimination and inequality in connection to the elves. This thesis argues that Rowling's Harry Potter novels depict a magical world where the house-elves have a subjugated position in a reflection of social and cultural values prominent during the height of the British Empire notably including the idea that certain peoples are inferior to others. This is seen as a parallel to the fact that it is illegal to enslave humans in the magical world, however, it is still acceptable to own house-elves. Using the novels in the EFL classroom will provide students with the possibility to develop their empathic abilities and through discussing the situation of the house-elves; they may acquire better understanding about the subjects of discrimination and racism.

## 2 Critical Race Theory

Five out of the seven Harry Potter novels have been selected for this essay since they all refer to the house-elves, either in whole chapters or in smaller sections, such as paragraphs and even sentences. The remaining two novels only have very few or no references of the elves. The chosen novels are *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The essay will be based on a comparative and thematic analysis as it focuses on how the house-elves are treated as well as depicted in the five novels.



Since the essay aims to analyze the depiction and the treatment of the house-elves, CRT will be used to frame the subject in order to better understand and interpret the society in the novels, as well as its connections to real life. CRT will help to limit the analysis in order to block out details and aspects that are less relevant while the most essential elements will be used to analyze the implications of the story of the house-elves (Zamudio et al. 2). In this chapter, relevant aspects and tools will be explained to bring forth the applicability they have for this study.

## 2.1 Critical Race Theory

In CRT, there are five features that most theorists agree are important; these features are “Race”, “History”, “Voice”, “Interpretation” and “Praxis” (Zamudio et al. 2-7). Only the first three of these concepts will be presented here because of their relevance to this essay. Primarily, “Race” is part of society’s central structure and has great impact on people, even though they might not be aware of it (Zamudio et al. 2). “Race” can be seen as both a cultural representation and a social structure that influences the way people are racially categorized in society (Omi and Winant qtd. in Ladson-Billing and Tate 50). In society today, an unawareness of “Race” and racism exists due to it being a criminal offense to discriminate someone on account of their cultural background or color of their skin as well as the belief that it no longer is a salient social problem (Zamudio et al. 3). Zamudio et al. explain that, in reality, it is the opposite of what people think, because racial inequalities can be found in many different sectors in society, such as the legal- and economical system. Furthermore, Zamudio et al. also argue that Western societies usually continue to advocate that their culture is superior and ideal in comparison to others, which in the end is the same as legitimizing and justifying racism (Zamudio et al. 2-3). The culture in the superior position is seen as “normal”, which makes it easier to be blind regarding problems and

issues connected to the “abnormal”, referring to the subjugated group (William qtd. in Dixson and Rousseau 16). Hence, it is easier to be in denial if you belong to the dominant group. Thus, CRT it demonstrates that all people are influenced by race whether they are aware of it or not. Therefore, it is better to be aware of the fact that this influence exists, instead of denying it, as it creates a chance to choose what action to take in different circumstances in order to avoid creating unequal situations.

Secondly, “History” focuses on racial inequalities that have occurred through colonization, whereby the world was divided into conquered and conquerors (Zamudio et al. 4). This can be seen as a sociohistorical process that created a categorization where racial differences became of importance, which led to an evolution in ruling supremacy (Omi and Winant qtd. in Ladson-Billing and Tate 50). This was the beginning of the creation of ideologies that were based upon laws and practices that made racial inequality possible. People of color have fought throughout history against racialization in order to shape their own identities as well as resist oppression and enslavement. This has been difficult, as the Western culture has had a very dominating position in the world due to imperialism, whose influence continues to be passed down from generation to generation. Schools were institutions used to uphold this unequal power relation and have therefore reproduced racial inequality to the next generation (Zamudio 4). In modern times, Western culture has had a dominating position and thus it is a vital aim of CRT to analyze in order to criticize the influence that the culture has on the world.

Lastly, “Voice”, refers to the story and who is telling it as well as who is not. CRT theorists engage in focusing on the stories told by minorities and the oppressed, while criticizing the stories of the dominators. Scholars of CRT argue that stories and voices of dominant groups deliberately create a superior identity in relation to minority groups to make it seem as something natural and part of society. One example of this is

that the oppressed can only blame themselves for the unequal conditions they live in, according to the people who have conquered (Zamudio et al. 5). Hence, criticizing the superior story leads to the production of a “counterstory”, the aim of which is to challenge and counteract the dominant story (Delgado “Storytelling” 2412). Who the narrator is might influence the reader differently, which makes it possible to create different interpretations. That is why CRT theorists want to focus on the minorities and give them the possibility to affect people with their stories and cultures.

### **2.1.1 The “Racial Contract”**

Magic is the underlying force in the novels, which in different ways has control over humans and non-humans as well as the actions that they take. The magical contract is therefore a central part of society in Harry Potter’s literacy universe and cannot easily be dissolved, thereby forcing the house-elves to follow their owners’ every order. In comparison, Charles W. Mills explains the existence of a political system, which has had an immense effect on the creation of the modern world (1). Mills’ system, the “Racial Contract” (RC), is part of the Social Contract (SC) tradition, which focuses on the establishment of civil societies and governments.

The founder of SC, Rousseau, states that all men are born equal and therefore have the right to be masters over their own lives (83). Even though people are free, there is still need for a governing power that can defend and protect all citizens through law and justice. However, the citizens should have the freedom to elect and choose whoever they deem worthy to govern them as well as reject that power if they prove otherwise (Rousseau 87-88). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slaves were born into slavery and freedom only regarded people who were part of the imperial country. Slaves were therefore not seen as part of the mainstream society and did not have the same rights as others (Rousseau 80).

RC refers to white supremacy/racism, a form of political domination, both of formal and informal rules, which only benefits a selected few. Mills argues that only white people benefit from RC, whereas people of color are suffering due to differential treatment, and do not acquire equal privileges (3). He explains that there are different views on the function of SC where one is a normative tool, the new, while the other is descriptive, the classic. He considers RC to be part of the classic view, as it does not only focus on the social justice and injustice but also explains the origin of society and its structure as well as connection to function and moral psychology (Mills 4-5). With this in mind, the RC functions as a conceptual bridge that connects two segregated areas that are part of the same society. On one side, there is political philosophy, the world of mainstream ethics, the Western culture as well as abstract discussions about justice and rights. On the other side, there are political thoughts concerning groups of oppression, colonialism, land rights, slavery as well as race and racism. Mills explains that the issues from each side do not interact with each other, as the first side only focus on problems and issues connected to the mainstream ethics and Western culture. He continues to explain that the opposing side might appear less important but he argues that it is rather the opposite, by which he means that it should be voiced more frequently in order to create a wider awareness of the existing inequality (Mills 4). Mills explains that the white population takes their benefits for granted and this is reflected in the Western culture through literature, education and norms. However, it is not seen as a political system by society and Mills' aim is to make a change in order to open people's eyes to something that is constantly present and affects everyone in society (1-2).

The difference between the contracts determined why RC was more beneficial to this essay. As SC argues that free people have the right to choose and reject who governs them, it differentiates from the magical contract. RC however, states that the white supremacy is the dominating form that controls the society but the people did not

choose it and they do not have the power to reject it. Both the magical and the racial contract have a similar hierarchy, where the dominant group usually acquires better living conditions in comparison to the subjugated group. In the Harry Potter novels, the house-elves are bound to their families through a magical contract, which makes the RC an analytical tool as it brings forth inequalities and subjugation. The magical contract, devised by Rowling, will be the overarching theme of the analysis because it has a large influence on the characterization of the house-elves and the actions they take to further the plot.

### **2.1.2 Slavery and Racism**

As previously stated, the house-elves are seen as property owned by wizards and witches and have to fulfill every task that is asked of them. The author paints a picture of a magical society that can be compared with structures and values that have existed in the past and still exist today. As the novels illustrate a magical society in Great Britain, the history of European slavery will be investigated in order to see how it has evolved through the years and will be compared to the house-elves.

Slavery was during ancient times a part of societies all over the world and appeared to be the natural order. Having many slaves symbolized status, as they were treated as goods sold and bought at markets (Drescher ix). Europe was not any different and change did not occur until Christianity spread throughout the continent. In Europe, during the Medieval Period, slavery was reduced drastically but did not vanish entirely. Instead, the Europeans found other ways to use humans as property, for example through bondage. This usually occurred when a master acquired apprentices and as long as they were in training, orders had to be followed (Walvin 13-15). During the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, people in rural areas throughout Europe started to resist the ownership and tried to establish their freedom from bondage. Many based their liberation in the

teachings of Christianity, where it stated that Christ's sacrifice freed humanity and through that, restored the original liberty (Drescher 9-10). When Europeans started to create colonies and enslaved people elsewhere, they had almost entirely dispensed with slavery throughout Christian Europe (Walvin 2, 13). However, Walvin also states that "the paradox remains that Europe saw the gradual securing of individual rights to ever more people in Europe at the very time that Europeans expanded and intensified slavery across vast tracts of the Americas" (15). Europeans turned away from slavery in Europe but instead acquired labor elsewhere, mainly from Africa. In order to legitimize this, Africans were reduced through racist ideas, to being objectified and were considered more as animals than humans. Thinking this way created the possibility to alienate and enslave Africans, which would mean that they did not belong to the same category as the Europeans and thus, would not follow the same Christian values (Walvin 2). In order to justify this oppression, an attitude, racism, started to evolve, which stayed reluctant long after slavery was abolished (Delgado "Story" 104).

Racism is slavery's extended arm and therefore, it will be brought forward to emphasize the gap between the elves and the wizards. In CRT, there are different views on how to define racism and its use for the oppressors. The first view, realists, thinks of racism as a tool to create racial hierarchies that disfavor the oppressed while benefitting the oppressors. Members of the oppressors acquire privileges that include better jobs and schools, which create the best opportunities for a successful economic life. This view also finds words and attitudes important but those are not the vital points of racism and its influences (Delgado and Stefancic "Introduction" 17).

However, these features are more important when talking about the second view, idealists, in which thinking, discourses and mental categorization are influential when defining racism. In this camp, race is not a biological reality but instead a social construction that through ideas, unconscious feelings, images and words creates a

system of categories where people are sorted into different slots depending on their cultural background or the color of their skin. Usually people of color are placed at the bottom and, because of that, seen as less intelligent and less hardworking in comparison to other people (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 16-17).

The third view, materialists, focuses on racism as an alienation of conquered people to justify taking advantage of the population and their resources. Through these actions, the conquerors protect themselves from guilt and shame when exploiting people in subjugated positions. Materialists also think that the subjugated people are valued differently depending on whether they are an asset or not for white self-interest (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 17-18). All three views will be compared to the content of the novels in an attempt to provide different perspectives of how the house-elves are presented.

Other perspectives are Delgado’s two forms of legal racism, substantive and procedural, which during different times throughout history, have been part of society and influenced what judgment people of color receive in front of the law. On the one hand, the substantive form conveys that people of color are inferior to whites and are during such periods alienated to justify them serving the whites’ purposes (Delgado “Story” 104-105). On the other hand, the procedural form highlights and elevates the opportunity for equality but hides the results as it proves nothing has improved. In order to deal with the results, the legal system convinces itself that the changes have had meaning but makes sure the proof stays buried as racism stays the same (Delgado “Story” 105-106). Only the substantive racism will be brought forth in this essay, as the procedural does not correspond with the content of the novels.

All these different racist views and perspectives have in common that people of color are often seen as less valuable and are therefore less privileged in comparison to whites. There are situations where whites help and support people of color, which can

lead to beneficial circumstances for the subjugated group. However, Derrick Bell's interest convergence hypothesis states that the only time people of color acquire support from whites are when there is something to gain from assisting members of the subjugated group (Bell 22). Delgado agrees with Bell and explains that the hypothesis offers the possibility to understand mistreatment and hidden agendas in society ("Story" 104).

Racism, as stated above, often connects to involving two different groups where one is the oppressor whilst the other is the oppressed. However, there are also situations where people of the same racial group accept their subjugation and the belief that they are a burden for others in society. This is called internalized racism and people in those groups with such thoughts often acquire negative effects that can affect both their physical and psychological health (Hipolito-Delgado 319). In order to analyze how the house-elves are depicted and treated it is also important to focus on them as individuals as well as how they interact with other elves throughout the novels. Double-consciousness is also a term that can be used in the analysis of the house-elves as it focuses on inferior groups in an oppressive society and their internal struggle of seeing themselves through others' eyes (Du Bois 34). The house-elves are oppressed in the magical society and the magical contract stops them from seeing possibilities that can make greater changes in their situations. These terms might explain how the elves themselves feel about their position in the magical community and what they think about themselves.

## 2.2 CRT in the classroom

One of the aims for this essay is to analyze the relevance in using the house-elves as a theme to discuss slavery, racism and discrimination in the Swedish EFL classroom. As mentioned before, CRT has not been widely tested in Sweden and the



examples that are going to be used will mostly focus on US society and their school systems. The examples can still be used as guidelines when it comes to positive and negative actions that Swedish schools can take when working with slavery, racism and discrimination in the EFL classroom. It is nonetheless important to provide students with examples that are recent in history and more relatable to them. As the novels focus on British society, an example can be to bring up news regarding Great Britain with the possibility to compare it to the house-elves. The current event about the Windrush generation<sup>1</sup> can help the students to associate real life situations with the unfair treatment of the house-elves. It is also applicable to work with Great Britain as the Swedish syllabus states that the “students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (1).

Garrett Albert Duncan discusses in his article “Beyond Love” about students feeling mistreated by other students and employees in their school because of the color of their skin. The students that he interviewed felt that white pupils could break rules and it was not a big deal while if they themselves had done the same thing it would probably lead to their expulsion. The school also had a zero-tolerance policy that means that there should not be any exceptions regarding taking actions against mistreatment of any sort but the interviewed students’ reactions show that the school did not follow the policy as some students felt unequally treated (Duncan 135). Even though this situation was located in the US, Swedish schools need to prevent such situations by learning from

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<sup>1</sup> In Britain, there are people of Caribbean origin that have been accused of being illegal immigrants. The affected have been living legally in the country for decades but are not able to produce any proof about these circumstances. The people are part of the “Windrush generation” who migrated from different British colonies during the years 1948 to 1973 when Britain was in dire need to acquire labor that could help rebuild the country after World War II. Theresa May, the Prime Minister, has apologized for the embarrassing actions of her government, which now has reversed their decision (Pérez-Peña april; The Associated Press).

others' mistakes and avert students from feeling mistreated and discriminated due to their cultural background or color of their skin.

Swedish schools are supposed to prepare students for a future of lifelong learning and as time in school are limited, the choice of content is essential to give students knowledge and tools to become democratic citizens (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4). This is all according to the Education Act, which also stresses the importance of individual freedom and integrity. The education should also convey equality between all people despite gender, cultural background or appearances (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4-5, 10). In order for the students to understand and apply these fundamental values in real life, every person in school has to work together in order to create a safe and open environment where everyone feels accepted for who they are and not be treated differently because of their beliefs or appearances. This can only be achieved by working towards the elimination of all tendencies of discrimination and degrading treatment as well as confronting intolerance and xenophobia. The Swedish curriculum suggests that in order to prevent degrading treatment open discussions, active measures and knowledge should be used (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4, 10). If the students acquire the experience of acceptance, it might create the possibility to boost their self-esteem and give them the courage to express their thoughts and feelings about sensitive topics (Harmer 83). They can use these qualities later in life where and when discrimination and unequal treatment might occur and be able to stand against it. However, if the opposite happens and the students feel that they are unequally treated, it can instead lead to problems later in life when they stumble upon similar situations.

Students all over the world have their own experiences and cultural backgrounds when they enter the classroom, which in different ways influence how they act and interact with others. Their own experiences consist of knowledge, such as math, science and different languages but also real world experiences. These types of experiences are

acquired throughout people's lives and might consist of unequal treatment because of their membership in different social or cultural groups, which might affect how they interact with both the teacher and the other students when entering the classroom (Zamudio et al. 93-94). It is therefore important that teachers have this in mind because it might affect the students negatively if they feel that they are treated the same way inside of school as well as in their free time. However, it is also possible for the teacher to use this information as an advantage because they can use students' previous experiences when planning lessons, which could help to create an environment where everyone feels included and treated equally (Zamudio et al. 93-94). Due to immigration to Sweden, students today have a variety of different origins and cultural backgrounds, which makes it possible to implement the diversity of experiences that exist in the classroom.

Using literature might help students to emotionally distance themselves from sensitive topics, such as slavery and racism and make them more comfortable participating in discussions. Furthermore, the students might feasibly feel the courage to utter their opinions and thoughts inside the classroom, which can be challenging for some students. Since the students are adolescents, they might be struggling in search of their identity, which can affect their self-esteem. Thus, it is important to create opportunities where students feel that they can voice their opinions and that their thoughts are of worth to others (Harmer 84-85). The Swedish curriculum states that the schools should provide every student with encouragement and respect in order to emphasize that everyone has the right to their own opinion and personal view (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. 4). Therefore, the novels will be used as tools to help the students utter their opinions about the treatment of the house-elves.

Since the essay focuses on analyzing the house-elves, it is important that the reader experiences empathy, which refers to the ability to show concern for other

people's feelings and thoughts (Kidd and Castano 474). Empathy can help the students understand and relate to the elves inside the fictional world. Connected to the Swedish curriculum, in their education the students should have the opportunity to develop their empathic abilities in order to acquire better understanding about other people and their values (4). There are other perspectives in the Swedish curriculum that can help the students to acquire an anti-racist and anti-slavery view but in order to narrow the field, only empathy was selected for this essay. Moreover, empathy is appropriate to use in connection to CRT, voice and counter narratives, as the interaction between them makes it possible to create a deeper understanding of the house-elves, and might lead to the development of the students' empathic abilities.

Research confirms that reading fictional stories helps people expand their emotional responses towards literature as well as compassion for the characters. This leads to the development of empathy, which can help to improve attitudes towards others as well as increasing social skills (Keen 99). In novels, characters usually have certain traits and features that the readers can identify with, such as names or feelings. These traits have to be familiar or realistic in order for the reader to create an empathic connection with the character, which leads to a better understanding of the individual. As the reader connects to the characters' traits and features, in order to get an empathic reaction it does not matter if it is a human or a non-human character (Keen 68). The house-elves in the novels are non-human characters that have names and other familiar traits, to which the students can relate. This creates the possibility to use the novels when working with empathy, which might help the students to understand not only others but also themselves in a different way. Every individual can perceive and interpret empathy differently and students might have values that do not intertwine with the democratic base that the Swedish education should focus on but their opinions should still be acknowledged. However, if it in some way indicates that degrading

treatment is acceptable, active measures need to be taken against it. Thus, CRT will be used to highlight the subdued position that the house-elves have in the novels and emphasize how the study can be incorporated in the EFL classroom to discuss and criticize discrimination toward groups in subjugated positions.

### 3 The House-elves in Harry Potter

Throughout the novels, there are hundreds of house-elves but only four of them are mentioned by name. Most of the elves that are not mentioned by name work in the kitchen at Hogwarts and do not enter the story until the fourth novel. Before that, it is not revealed who cooks the food, cleans the castle or brings the students the gifts that they receive for birthdays and Christmases (Rowling *Goblet* 154, 344; *Prince* 365). The house-elves whose names are cited in the novels are Dobby, Winky, Kreacher and Hokey. Dobby is the first house-elf that the reader is introduced to and he appears for the first time in the second novel. With the help of Harry, Dobby acquires his freedom when he receives a sock from Lucius Malfoy, his master, which leaves him forever grateful to the protagonist. The elf returns to the story several times throughout the series, and usually helps Harry with different obstacles that are sometimes crucial for his achievements (Rowling *Chamber* 12-13, 357; *Prince* 394; *Hallows* 379). Winky, the second house-elf in the story meets Harry during the Quidditch World Cup and serves the Crouch family. She is also a character that returns but is only mentioned in two novels. Winky is also a free elf but, unlike Dobby, she is very unhappy about her freedom and still thinks she belongs to her family (Rowling *Goblet* 83, 318, 453). Next in line is Kreacher, a very old house-elf that serves the Black family and who first appears in the fifth novel. Later in the last two novels, Kreacher is passed down to Harry after his godfather, Sirius Black, dies (Rowling *Order* 99; *Prince* 53). Hokey is

the last house-elf whose name is mentioned and she only appears within a memory where she serves the witch Hepzibah Smith (Rowling *Prince* 405).

### 3.1 The House-elves and the Magical contract

All house-elves in the novels are compelled through a magical contract to serve their family without complaining or contradicting their orders, which means that they have to implement their masters wishes whether they want to or not. This means that wizards and witches have the opportunity to use the house-elves to do their bidding, whether it is clean, tail someone or put themselves in dangerous situations. If the elves do not comply and try to struggle against accomplishing the tasks, the contract forces them to inflict damage upon themselves. Thus, the wizards and witches have, to a great extent, control over the house-elves and their actions, which puts the house-elves in a subjugated position. The magical contract is a central part of the novels' fictional universe and creates a hierarchy where some groups are seen as dominant while others are inferior. The RC discusses the same hierarchy, where whiteness is considered the ideal. This hierarchy is based on both formal and informal agreements that state which group one belongs to depending on the color of one's skin. People of color are seen as subpersons or are alienated and because of that placed in a subordinated position (Mills 11). Mills states, "it is a contract between those categorized as white over nonwhites, who are thus the objects rather than the subjects of the agreement" (12). The same agreements are situated in the novels where all the wizards and the witches have beneficial circumstances while the house-elves are on the opposite side.

One example is explained by Dobby when he tells Harry about the gruesome treatment he suffers at home, where it is both physical punishment and death threats that occur on a daily basis (Rowling *Chamber* 186-7). This is confirmed when Dobby arrives at Hogwarts with Lucius Malfoy, who in his anger kicks the house-elf even

though he is not the outlet of his rage (Rowling *Chamber* 355). Even though he is treated this way, his subdued position and the contract's agreement make it impossible for him to protest as long as he is bound by the contract. The physical violence is also a weapon that Lucius uses in order to subdue the elf and enforce his own position, in the same way as it is used in RC. The physical violence has two different reasons, where the first focuses on maintaining a hierarchy. The dominant group wants to continue having a higher status and uses brutality in order for the subpersons to accept their position. The second reason is to prevent rebellion, historically connected to slavery, with the purpose of opposing the possibility for a switch in governing control (Mills 83-85). Only the first of the two reasons is applicable to Dobby as he is always afraid of punishment from his masters, which makes him follow their every order. Dobby goes against the second reason and indirectly rebels against his master as he tries to follow his own desires. It states in RC that defying, hurting or killing someone of a dominant group is the crime of crimes and is often punishable by death (Mills 85). Dobby defies and attacks his masters both during and after his servitude yet manages most of the time to escape punishment. When Dobby finally wins his freedom through receiving a piece of clothing, Lucius becomes furious and prepares to attack Harry but the elf steps in between them and protects the protagonist by jinxing<sup>2</sup> his former master (Rowling *Chamber* 357). Straight after the magical contract has ended, Dobby has the possibility to choose his own actions and can therefore attack his former master. In the end, Dobby loses his life when he once more protects the protagonist and chooses to oppose his previous masters (Rowling *Hallows* 383-4). The elf tries to help the good side but he still ends up losing, on account of the agreements in RC, where the penalty for the crime of crimes is to pay with his life.

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<sup>2</sup> Jinxes are one category of magical spells that exist in the Harry Potter series.

The violence is also enforced through the contract as the house-elves develop the urge to physically punish themselves for failing to accomplish a task or hurting the reputation of the family they serve. Injuring the family's reputation might occur if they speak unpleasantly about the family or perhaps utter secrets meant for keeping. The novels feature both Dobby and Kreacher having to carry out the punishment of the contract while other elves only talk about it. Dobby puts himself through this when he tries to resist the Malfoys during his first visit to Harry, where the elf tries to tell the protagonist about the Chamber of Secrets. He wants to tell Harry who opened the Chamber last time as well as who was going to open it this time but as soon as he is close to revealing something he starts to hurt himself (Rowling *Chamber* 14-16, 187-9). The elf has been ordered not to reveal specific details about the chambers to others as well as he is sworn to keep his masters' secrets, and that is why he is forced to punish himself. A similar situation occurs to Kreacher when he receives one last task from Sirius' brother Regulus, who dies shortly after. The wizard is unaware that the task he has appointed to the elf is more or less impossible, as the amulet he is asked to destroy is almost indestructible. Kreacher tries to follow through with the task but continues to fail, which leads to him having to hurt himself (Rowling *Hallows* 161-163). Even though he tries to complete the impossible task, the elf still ends up suffering due to the outline of the contract.

Another example of the coercive power of the contract is Kreacher's recount of a past event, where he was ordered to do tasks that caused him pain and suffering. When Regulus was alive, he asked Kreacher to accompany Lord Voldemort to a cavern by the sea, where he is tortured, as the elf has to drink poison that inflicted agonizing pain. Even though he is suffering, the elf has to continue drinking the liquid in order to complete his task. He fulfills the task and can therefore return to his master, who was horrified when hearing Kreacher's story (Rowling *Hallows* 160). The contract makes it



impossible for the house-elf to oppose the orders, even though he is hurting and cannot do anything to abort the mission. It can be connected to both substantive racism and the materialist point of view, where Lord Voldemort alienates Kreacher in order to justify taking advantage of him (Delgado “Story” 104-105; Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 17-18). By depicting the gruesome treatment of Kreacher in such graphic detail, Rowling highlights how some wizards only see the house-elves as tools that they can use for their own agendas.

During a scenario in the Hogwarts kitchen, Harry asks if the house-elves have the possibility to utter their opinions about their masters, whereas Dobby answers “tis part of the house-elf’s enslavement, sir. We keeps their secrets and our silence, sir, we upholds the family’s honour, and we never speaks ill of them” (Rowling *Goblet* 321). This example emphasizes the magical contract as a silencer where the elves do not have the possibility to utter secrets or in some way hurt their masters’ reputation, even though they might not agree with the circumstances. Through the contract, wizards and witches create a superior identity where their opinions and ideas are seen as the natural, while the house-elves’ opinion is less valued and should not be voiced (Delgado “Storytelling” 2412). The same goes for Winky, who is a very loyal elf and even after she is freed she still protects her family’s reputation and secrets. Hermione tries to unfold some information about Winky’s previous master but the elf only replies, “Winky keeps her master’s secrets. . .” (Rowling *Goblet* 323). Though both elves are free, they still act as if they are owned. In comparison to Winky, Dobby is quite happy about his freedom, however he still struggles with different actions that, in some way, could betray his old masters’ trust or reputation. The elf tries to denigrate his former masters and proclaim that they are dark and bad wizards and since Harry has met Dobby before he notices that the elf is starting to act strange. The protagonist acts fast and catches Dobby right before he is about to jump into the fireplace (Rowling *Goblet* 322).

Even though Dobby is a free elf, he still has the urge to punish himself when he has done something “wrong”. These are examples of what Du Bois calls double-consciousness as the house-elves struggle with internal conflicts that together with the magical contract can result in them hurting themselves. The house-elves are inferior as well as oppressed in the society they live in where they, for the most part see themselves through the eyes of the dominant group (Du Bois 34). However, the urge to hurt themselves does not intertwine with double-consciousness but can still be a physical interpretation of the term that the author has included in the novels.

The house-elves’ subdued position is also featured when Harry inherits Kreacher from Sirius. The elf was already unhappy with Sirius as his master but his misery increases when he obtains his new owner for the reason that he would prefer to serve Bellatrix, Sirius’s cousin (Rowling *Prince* 54). Even though he is miserable, Kreacher still addresses the protagonist as “master” and the magical contract forces him to follow Harry’s orders. When Harry orders Kreacher to tail Draco Malfoy, who is related to Bellatrix, he shows his discontent by trying to think of a loophole where it is possible to reveal himself to Draco. However, Harry is very thorough and makes sure that it is not possible for Kreacher to announce his presence (Rowling *Prince* 395). The elf tries to find opportunities where he can follow his own desires instead of Harry’s wishes but once again he is compelled by the magical contract to do what he has been told. This example demonstrates traits and features from the realist point of view, whereas Harry is oppressing Kreacher, as he does not have the opportunity to act on his own desires (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 17).

The realist view can also be traced to when the house-elves are ordered by their masters to lie, even though the elves do not agree with the lies. An example of this appears in Hokey’s memory, where Hephzibah asks the house-elf if her appearance is lovely. Hokey concurs with her master but Harry thinks that it is part of her contract to

lie when she answers this question, as he does not agree (Rowling *Prince* 406). Because of her subjugated position, Hokey does not contradict Hepzibah and answers with a lie as ordered. Similar to Kreacher, the magical contract prevents Hokey from expressing her opinion and is therefore placed in an oppressed position. Realists would see this as racism, due to the fact that Harry and Hepzibah create a racial hierarchy where they gain from the outcome, while the elves do not have the same privileges. Harry and Hepzibah might not be aware of the consequences of their actions and that it can be seen as racism, which advocates that their culture is superior. This leads to different forms of inequalities against the house-elves that can contribute to legitimizing racism against the elves (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 17).

### **3.1.1 The enslavement of the house-elves**

The magical contract creates a dominant relationship between the wizards and the house-elves, where one example is reflected in the novels through the word use of “master” and “servant”. Wizards, witches and house-elves use these two titles throughout the novels, which mark the house-elves’ subjugated position. Winky experiences this when she becomes a free elf due to disobeying her master’s orders during an event where she runs away from danger. Hermione confronts Mr. Crouch and asks why the elf is being punished for being afraid. He answers: “I have no use for a house-elf who disobeys me.’ [I] have no use for a servant who forgets what is due to her master and to her master’s reputation” (Rowling *Goblet* 118). A couple of days after Mr. Crouch has freed Winky, Hermione utters her disapproval of how the elf was treated and is countered by Percy Weasley, who states that “a high-ranking Ministry official like Mr. Crouch deserves unswerving obedience from his servants-” (Rowling *Goblets* 130). Through the materialist point of view, both statements qualify as racism whereas Mr. Crouch and Percy express that Winky is only of worth if she obeys orders

and only does what is demanded of her (Delgado and Stefancic “Introduction” 17-18). The Wizards think that by putting her self-preservation first, Winky loses her value as a servant and is therefore no longer of use.

Examples where the house-elves use the word “master” are, Winky, as she addresses all the members of the family she serves with that title, and Dobby, who uses it when he is speaking about his previous owners (Rowling *Goblet* 321-2, 453). However, Kreacher is the only house-elf who uses both the titles master and servant when referring to the relationship between the house-elves and their owners. Kreacher uses the first title when he explains that “the house-elf’s highest law is his master’s bidding” (Rowling *Hallows* 161). The elf uses the word to explain that his life’s purpose is to serve a master and to feature the control that the contract has over him. The word servant is used by Kreacher, when uttering that he “[w]ould much rather be the servant of the Malfoy boy” (Rowling *Prince* 395). Through the use of the titles, the elves recognize the dominant group’s culture as their own and accepts that they are inferior and are a burden for the magical society if they do not comply (Hipolito-Delgado 319).

In the novels, the words slavery and enslavement are not commonly used but do occur on some occasions and is then often connected to two characters, Hermione and Dobby. Of the two characters, Hermione uses these terms most throughout the novels as she expresses her discontent about the elves’ unequal circumstances. This is particularly visible during the fourth novel, whereas it is the first time that she encounters the elves herself. As mentioned before, Hermione is frustrated about how Mr. Crouch treats Winky but people still defend the wizard. During two of these situations, people states that Winky is his servant and should therefore act that way, whereas Hermione counters that it is slavery and that the elf is a slave (Rowling *Goblet* 106, 130-1). The witch reacts the same way when she finds out that Hogwarts kitchen is being run by hundreds of house-elves, where she shouts “’Slave labour’, ‘That’s what made this dinner. Slave

labour” (Rowling *Goblet* 155). In both examples, Hermione wants to emphasize the unfair treatment that the house-elves receive in the magical community, where her opinions are a reflection of the non-magical community’s values and culture. Many of the other characters disagree with Hermione’s thoughts and ideas, even though slavery is forbidden in the magical world. In order to justify these circumstances, the magical community probably has similar thoughts about the house-elves as Europeans had about the idea of bondage during the Medieval Period. As slavery was starting to disappear, bondage was a solution to continue having the possibility to own other people (Walvin 13-15). However, the elves are nevertheless treated as if they are inferior living beings, which is similar to how Europeans behaved against Africans.

When it comes to humans in the novels, many characters accentuate that it is a horrible crime to steal someone's freedom. The magical world consists of different spells, where three are described as unforgivable curses that if used “[on a fellow human being is enough to earn a life sentence in Azkaban” (Rowling *Goblet* 183). One of these three is called the Imperius curse that has the effect to take control of someone’s mind and therefore creates the possibility to enslave someone against their will (Rowling *Goblet* 179). Both the contract and the spell are enforced through magic but only the curse is forbidden as it can be used on humans. Even though the elves are deprived of their freedom and are put in a situation where they do not have the opportunity to choose their own fate, no one will have to answer for the measures taken towards the elves.

Dobby, however, only uses the word enslavement during two different occasions throughout the novels and both times, it is to explain conditions in connection to the elves. One of them has previously been mentioned in this essay, where Dobby wants to explain to Harry and his friends about the elves keeping their master secrets and protecting their reputation (Rowling *Goblet* 321). The second example, concerns

Dobby's clothing where he is dressed in an old pillowcase. Harry asks Dobby about his clothing and the elf answers: "'Tis a mark of the house-elf's enslavement, sir. Dobby can only be freed if his masters present him with clothes, sir. The family is careful not to pass Dobby even a sock, sir, for then he would be free to leave their house for ever'" (Rowling *Chamber* 187). In the second example, Dobby explains that the clothing is related to the enslavement of elves, since an elf with their own clothes is no longer enslaved. The author continues to emphasize the meaning of clothing by describing other elves' appearance in the novels.

Two other descriptions that highlight the enslavement of elves are when Harry during separate occasions, meets Winky and Kreacher for the first time. As mentioned before, Harry meets Winky for the first time during the Quidditch World Cup. Here Winky is wearing a tea towel that she drapes like a toga and is almost fully dressed in comparison to Kreacher, who, during his first meeting with Harry, only wears a dirty rag that he uses as a loincloth (Rowling *Goblet* 83; Rowling *Order* 98). In all these examples, the clothing has a very important function as it emphasizes the inferior position that the house-elves are in. Realists would, because of the clothing see this as racist since the house-elves' clothing can be seen as a byproduct of the wizards' creation of hierarchy. The elves would therefore not add to them having a less successful economical life (Delgado and Stefancic "Introduction" 17). When Harry meets Dobby for the first time after the elf has received his freedom, the clothing of the elf accentuates the change. Dobby is then "'[ ] wearing a tea cosy for a hat, on which he had pinned a number of bright badges; a tie patterned with horseshoes over a bare chest, a pair of what looked like children's football shorts, and odd socks'" (Rowling *Goblet* 317). Even though the elf's choice of clothing might seem weird to Harry and the readers, it is still his own choice to wear them as he now acquires wage and can therefore provide for himself (Rowling *Goblet* 323). It is possible that the author makes

a conscious decision to present Dobby with the possibility to select and change his clothing in order to display how slavery and racism can appear in smaller details, which might go unnoticed by the readers.

Feeling sympathy for Dobby is probably more common among readers as the elf is treated as an object and exploited by the Malfoys. Dobby is not the only house-elf that is being treated ill in the series, whereas Sirius treats Kreacher with similar actions. In order to legitimize the enslavement, both Dobby and Kreacher are objectified by their masters and are almost treated as animals, whose only job is to obey. In comparison to reality the author can display, through the objectification, how Europeans treated enslaved Africans in the past. By depicting the house-elves as a different species in relation to the magical contract, they are not allowed to take part of the same rules and do not receive the same privileges as the wizards and the witches. Europeans used the same methods when alienating Africans in order not to categorize them as equals and could therefore enslave them, as they did not follow the same Christian values (Walvin 2).

Harry displays his discontent regarding the enslavement of the elves by freeing Dobby but when he inherits his own house-elf, he ends up using him the same way as every other elf-owner. However, the difference between the two elves is that Dobby usually is depicted as a gentle soul that tries to help the good side while Kreacher is described with features connected to evil. Due to his actions, Harry reflects false empathy as he does not treat Kreacher the same way as Dobby and he does not grant the elf freedom after inheriting him. False empathy transpires when a member of a dominant group assumes that he or she identifies with the inferior group, “[]but in fact is doing so only in a slight, superficial way” (Delgado qtd. in Dixson and Rousseau). Since Dobby is a character that is easier to feel compassion for, he is viewed as an unfortunate and underprivileged living being (Duncan qtd. in Dixson and Rousseau).

Kreacher holds the same conditions but since he is depicted as evil he does not receive the same compassion from Harry, which might justify the treatment of the elf in the eyes of the protagonist and the readers. In the last novel, Hermione tells Harry to treat Kreacher more kindly, which quickly reflects upon the elf's personality that changes from sulky to gentle (Rowling *Hallows* 164-5). After the elf's personality changes, the relationship becomes more beneficial for both Kreacher and Harry, as the elf feels the affection while the protagonist receives a more helpful servant (Rowling *Hallows* 184, 186-7, 191, 194). The actions can be connected to Bell's interest convergence hypothesis, which states that the dominant group only helps inferior groups if they have something to gain from the outcome (Bell 22). Even though Harry probably has good intentions when he changes his attitude towards the elf he still benefits from the transformation as the elf does chores without complaining or opposing the protagonist (Rowling *Hallows* 184, 186-7, 191, 194).

“House-elves don't want sick leave or pensions!” Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor, utters these words as he thinks that the house-elves do not want improved working conditions (Rowling *Goblet* 154). Nick's statement emphasizes that he has no insight about the elves in his governing position and assumes that the house-elves do not want any change even though he is not certain about his claim. He thinks that he knows what the house-elves want and puts the blame on the elves for being in their unequal position (Zamudio et al. 5). Nick is not the only character who has similar thoughts about the elves, where another example is Hagrid who states that it is part of their nature to serve witches and wizards. He also argues that freeing the house-elves would be unkind because they like to work and would be insulted if they were to acquire payment. When Hermione counters by mentioning Dobby and his happiness about being free, Hagrid says: ““Yeah, well, yeh get weirdos in every breed. I'm not sayin' there isn't the odd elf who'd take freedom, but yeh'll never persuade most of 'em



ter do it – no, nothin’ doin’, Hermione” (Rowling *Goblet* 223). Both Nick and Hagrid become blind regarding the subjugated group’s problems, as they are part of the superior group. It might not be a conscious decision, but they make it seem as their culture is the “normal”, while the elves and their culture is seen as the “abnormal” and are therefore not taken into consideration (William qtd. in Dixson and Rousseau 16).

Many characters in the novels share the same thoughts as Nick and Hagrid, which places the house-elves in a subjugated position and becomes a conflict that Duncan calls a *différend* (Duncan 134). This regards two or more social groups where at least one of them is subjugated. The members of the dominant groups do not comprehend, marginalize or they choose to dismiss expressed opinions from the subjugated group, who becomes powerless. If this continues, it becomes an oppression of the subjugated groups, where the members suffer wrongs because of disputes and lose the ability to express their own terms in socially recognized ways (Duncan 134). The house-elves are in such a position, as the majority does not have the opportunity to express their own opinions and thoughts.

Throughout the novels, it is not only the dominant group, wizards and witches, who put the house-elves in the inferior position but the house-elves themselves undermine their own ability to express their thoughts and opinions as well as their own position in the magical society. During an incident in the kitchen at Hogwarts, one house-elf expresses an apology to Harry and his friends where he says that house-elves do not have the right to be unhappy when there is work to do for their masters. Again, Hermione steps in and argues for their equal right to acquire wages and vacation, which makes the elves both scared and mad. They quickly shove all three out the door and say goodbye (Rowling *Goblet* 454). During this situation, the house-elves unintentionally experience fear when the norms are challenged and, instead of using this opportunity to acquire equal rights, they resist and push it away. This is also revealed when Harry

meets Winky for the first time and he asks how Dobby is doing. She replies that Harry's help in freeing Dobby might not have been a favor but instead a hindrance as he now is looking for work where he can acquire both wage and vacation. She thinks that Dobby should stop acting different and instead revert to normal as a house-elf that serves a family without any benefits. For Winky, it is ridiculous for a house-elf to acquire wage or to have fun as they are only supposed to serve their family (Rowling *Goblet* 83-84).

Both the examples above show that the dominant group's norms and culture affect the house-elves in the sense that they have internalized them as their own. This means that the house-elves accept that they are in a subjugated position and should therefore only focus on pleasing their masters, where they should continue working as long as there is something that needs to be done in order to be of worth and have a purpose. What the house-elves are portraying in these examples is internalized racism, whereas they accept their position in society and are against changing anything (Hipolito-Delgado 319). The internalized racism incurs how the house-elves act when confronted about the opportunity for change, which is projected through stress and where they try to push away the possibility for improvement. The stressfulness becomes a negative psychological effect that pushes the elves to protect the dominant group's opinions and continue to see themselves as unequal in comparison to the wizards and witches (Hipolito-Delgado 320). Instead of trying to see other alternatives, many house-elves become frightened and try to avoid gaining opportunities and possibilities of change.

### 3.2 "I am not a house-elf"

Magic is very dangerous if not controlled, which is why all wizards first have to learn to master it in school before using it outside of Hogwarts. Hence, underage wizards may not use magic unless they are in mortal danger (Rowling *Chamber* 8;

*Order* 58). Instead, all underage wizards have to live “normal lives” without the use of magic and many of the students are quite unhappy about these circumstances. Ron displays resentment towards the rules by comparing himself to the house-elves, which usually happens while cleaning or doing other house chores that he feels is beneath him (Rowling *Order* 146; *Hallows* 91). Phrasing it this way, Ron positions himself as superior to the chores and the house-elves, since he believes that the elves are more suited for such tasks. Comparing this with the different forms of racism places Ron on the side of substantive racism whereas he indicates that the house-elves are inferior and should therefore do chores fitting their position (Delgado “Story” 104-105). During one of these incidents, he also expresses that he feels like a house-elf but without the satisfaction of working (Rowling *Hallows* 91), which can also be connected to the substantive racism as it entails that non-whites find happiness in working for others (Delgado 105). Even though Ron is not aware of his actions, he still expresses racist thoughts that emphasize prejudice.

However, two other characters that express awareness about their statements are the goblins Gornuk and Griphook, who are on the run from the Ministry of Magic. They explain that they refused to do appointed assignments and tasks, which led to the goblins feeling threatened. When questioned what they were asked to do, Gornuk replies that it was “Duties ill-befitting the dignity of my race” and adds, “I am not a house-elf”. Griphook agrees with his fellow companion, without reacting to the insulting comment (Rowling *Hallows* 244). The goblins feel that the ministry has placed them in an inferior position as if they were slaves. Instead of only explaining their dilemma, they choose to advocate their superiority in comparison to the house-elves. Though there is a difference in awareness between these two scenarios, they both belong in substantive racism as well as expressing traits and features of the idealist point of view. Through the words and thoughts, a social construction is created that

together forms a categorical system, where those who are seen as inferior, the house-elves, are placed at the bottom (Delgado and Stefancic 16-17) Their actions lead to them advocating that the cultures of both goblins, witches and wizards are superior in comparison to the house-elves (Zamudio et al. 2-3).

### 3.3 Freedom of expression

When analyzing a story it is important to think about the narrator as the content can be altered depending on who is narrating. In the novels, the focus is mainly on the focalization of the wizards and witches while others, such as the house-elves, have a subordinate part and do not acquire the same amount of space to tell their story. However, the elves' narratives are equally important as it can give another perspective to the story. By making an analysis from the house-elves' point of view, it brings forth what CRT scholars call "counterstories" or counter narratives, which, as mentioned earlier, has the function to counteract and criticize the dominant stories (Delgado "Storytelling" 2412; Dixson and Rousseau 11). It is important, as the story is not only a tale but also a way to understand and make sense of the world through different lenses (Zamudio et al. 124).

The majority of the house-elves in the novels does not have the opportunity to utter their own opinions or are not even mentioned by name. These nameless elves do not have their own voices and are therefore mostly silent throughout the series, while only a selected few have the opportunity to express themselves. Even though these few receive this opportunity, the nameless elves only focus on the dominant group's values and norms, where they see themselves as lesser beings in the magical society (Delgado "Storytelling" 2412). In comparison to the four elves mentioned by name, two of them, Winky and Hokey, follow the same values and norms as the nameless elves. The other

two, Dobby and Kreacher, counter the norms during different occasions by acting or speaking out due to dissatisfaction concerning their mistreatment.

Between the two house-elves, Dobby is the only one who, from the beginning discloses signs of struggling against the treatment of the house-elves. One of the reasons could be the way he is treated by his masters, who hurts him both physically and mentally during his time as their servant. Dobby uses both his words and his actions to display his discontent about the circumstances and follow his own beliefs in hope that he is helping the good side. It can be spotted during Harry's and Dobby's first meeting, where the elf demonstrates his resistance against the dominant norms by appearing in the protagonist's room without permission. Dobby knows that it will lead to him having to punish himself but he believes that it is worth it if the mission is accomplished (Rowling *Chamber* 14, 16). Through his action, he defies his masters and therefore counteracts the norms but by following his beliefs and give them authority to challenge the dominant story, leads to him providing a counterstory (Dixson and Rousseau 11).

Dobby returns several times in the novels and continues to counteract the norms of the magical society to fulfill his own desires and beliefs. This usually interconnects with Harry's success, as the elf is forever grateful to have received his freedom with the help of the protagonist. One example is when Harry wants Draco Malfoy followed but when he calls for Kreacher, Dobby appears simultaneously. Harry asks both elves to do the assignment, where Kreacher is forced to follow Harry's orders but Dobby has the possibility to decide himself, which he instantly accepts even though it is one of his former masters (Rowling *Prince* 394-5). In the second example, he also makes the decision to help Harry but this time the protagonist is in trouble. Dobby helps Harry to escape the basement of the Malfoy manor as well as helps the protagonist and his friends to escape the premises (Rowling *Hallows* 378-80). They cannot leave without resistance, which leads to Dobby attacking his previous masters in order to protect

Harry. They all succeed to escape but as a final act, Bellatrix throws a silver dagger towards the escaping group, which buries itself into Dobby's chest. The elf dies shortly after but says with his terminal breath "Harry. . . Potter. . ." (Rowling *Hallows* 383-5). The examples display how Dobby chooses to counteract the dominant norms by going against his previous master and follows his own beliefs (Delgado "Storytelling" 2412). Even though he loses his life, it is his own choice to protect Harry and in doing so entailing his story, a narrative that counters the dominant story.

Before Kreacher's personality change, his only focus was the values and ideas of his previous masters, which often were connected to evil. The elf's deeds never counteracted the dominant norms, which became applicable after the change. One example occurs during the final battle where Kreacher decides to help his new master by inciting the other house-elves on Hogwarts to join him in the battle against evil. When the elves come running from the kitchen, Kreacher shouts "Fight! Fight! Fight for my master, defender of house-elves! Fight the Dark Lord, in the name of brave Regulus! Fight!" (Rowling *Hallows* 588). In the example, Kreacher counteracts the dominant norms by both acting against it and speaking against it (Delgado "Storytelling" 2412). Since they are fighting against evil, it is as if Kreacher fights his past and therefore counters the norms that previously controlled him. Kreacher's rallying of the other house-elves can be interpreted in different ways where one is that Kreacher works for his master and therefore interacts with the dominant norms. However, the Dark Lord can be a symbol for slavery and unequal treatment and as the elves are confronting the injustice, they additionally break the imaginative shackles that have been created by the same dominant norms.

During several occasions, Hermione defends the house-elves and expresses her discontent about the elves' working conditions as well as how wizards and witches treat them. She becomes one of the voices of the elves and in doing so counters the dominant

story. Even though she is not a house-elf, her opinions qualify as a counter narrative on account of her wanting the elves to gain equal standards with similar privileges. Due to her opinions, she usually ends up arguing with other characters who state that change is not necessary, as everyone is satisfied with the circumstances. As the house-elves do not have much space to utter their opinions in the novels, Hermione works as a spokesperson for their struggle. Hermione is, as mentioned before, often speaking about the unfair treatment of the house-elves and that they are treated as slaves. The witch does not only stand up for the elves verbally but she also decides to create a group, whose main mission is to protest against inequality and unfair treatment of the house-elves. The group's name is the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare that is shortened to S.P.E.W (Rowling *Goblet* 188). Hermione tries to recruit members but as many are influenced by the magical society's culture and values, only a few decide to join, for the more part because they want her to stop asking (Rowling *Goblet* 189, 201). Nonetheless, Hermione continues with her resistance and through these actions opposes the norms that currently are dominant in the magical community. In connection to CRT, Hermione's voice becomes a interrogating narrative as she seeks to find the truth to why the elves are treated this way, while the others who disagree with her use the justifying narrative to uphold their living conditions and prevent change. Zamudio et al. explains that it becomes a war between narratives, where the justifying side wants to keep the status quo while the interrogative side wants to change it (124).

## 4 Bringing the House-elves into the classroom

Due to the limited scope of this investigation, some aspects of the analysis have been left out in order to focus on the information that can be used as tools in order to prevent injustice and unequal treatment in the classroom. To implement RC in the

classroom can be problematic, as it brings forth the existence of a division of people in society and would unconsciously be incorporated in the classroom, which would categorizes the students depending on their ethnicity. It is therefore important to focus on uniting the students in order to avoid segmentation and instead work on collective goals where the aim is to establish justice and equality in the classroom.

The curriculum and the syllabus are policy documents that together with CRT will be used to analyze the relevance of working with the novels and the house-elves inside the classroom, which will be connected to aspects that have been brought up in the analysis. The classroom is a place where it is important to create the possibility for all students to prepare for a future of lifelong learning. According to the Education Act, it should both concern knowledge and the fundamental democratic values that the Swedish society is based on as well as stressing the importance of individual freedom and integrity (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4). It is therefore important that the education consists of topics, such as racism, slavery and discrimination even though they can be seen as problematic to bring up in the classroom. The novels can help the students to distance themselves from the sensitive topics and thus make it easier since they will discuss the unequal treatment of the house-elves.

Racism is a concept that can have many different perspectives, such as substantive racism or the realist point of view, and can vary depending on people's values and cultural background (Delgado and Stefancic "Introduction" 17; Delgado "Story" 104-105). It is important to bring forth various aspects in order to help the students understand that racist acts can be both visible for their eyes as well as hidden in the background. Sweden today is a multicultural society where students have different experiences that they bring into the EFL classroom. Some of the students might have experienced treatment, similar to how the house-elves are treated in the novels, while others are unaware of the racist acts, as they never have encountered those (Zamudio et



al. 93-94). Since students have many different experiences, it is crucial that everyone inside the classroom work together in order to create an open and safe environment, where no one feels discriminated because of their gender, cultural background or appearance (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4-5, 10). Working with the novels using the critical lens of CRT can therefore benefit the active measures that Swedish schools should take in order to eliminate all tendencies of discrimination, such as intolerance and xenophobia (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4, 10). Furthermore, with the house-elves as an example, it will be possible to discuss the topic of racism, where people with similar experiences can join the conversation without calling attention to themselves, while people with less or no experiences can receive better understanding about what can be seen as racist actions.

One way to increase student motivation can be to present the relevance of using different material in the classroom, which in this case are the novels. As the novels are situated in Great Britain it can be applicable to include a historical viewpoint where past values of European origin can help students to understand what the author is trying to convey through her work. It is also applicable as the Swedish syllabus states that all English courses in upper secondary school should create the opportunity for the students to gain more knowledge about English speaking countries, which includes their cultural features, living conditions and social issues (1). The historical perspective can be connected to slavery and, with its close connection to racism, it is relevant for the Swedish students to create a better understanding of the past in order to comprehend the present in a wider sense. The house-elves will therefore both be an example of how Europeans alienated Africans in order to justify enslaving them as well as using the justification of bondage in order to continue owning people throughout Europe during the Medieval Period (Walvin 2, 13-15). Furthermore, it is possible to focus on the Swedish society by connecting the discussions about slavery, racism and discrimination

to immigration and the variety of different cultures that live in Sweden today, which has become a major topic in the country. While discussing these subjects, it is important to emphasize that xenophobia and intolerance are unacceptable in the classroom (Natl. Ag. F. ED. "Curriculum" 4).

After the students have received a historical background concerning European thoughts and ideas about slavery and racism, it can be problematic to connect the concepts to the present without current situations that have similar traits and features. Recent articles concerning the treatment of the Windrush generation can therefore be compared to both the historical background and the novels, in order to emphasize that similar treatment occurs today. Due to the fact that the Caribbean immigrants are accused of being in Great Britain illegally creates the possibility to compare the situation with the novels, as both the house-elves and the immigrants go through treatments that are alike, regarding their value in the community. It can now seem as if the government wants to deport the immigrants due to them thinking that the society no longer gains anything from their presence (Pérez-Peña april; The Associated Press). The house-elves are treated the same way, where they can be disposed of if they lose their worth, either by not following orders or by acting on their own emotions. Another relevant aspect is the fact that Sweden today has many immigrants, which might help the students to connect the articles and the novels to the Swedish society, which can lead to deeper and more effective discussions in the EFL classroom.

Swedish schools should treat every student with respect and encouragement to emphasize that everyone's opinions and personal views are accepted and valuable (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. "Curriculum" 4). For the students it can be vital that they feel acceptance, as they are adolescents and might be struggling to find their identity, which can have great effect on their self-esteem (Harmer 84). Students' self-esteem can be a cause to whether or not they have the courage to express their opinions and ideas when discussing

different topics in the classroom, which makes it important for the teacher to create an environment where the students feel acceptance and that their voice is of worth (Harmer 83, 85). Focusing on the stories of the house-elves can therefore help students feel acknowledged, as CRT presents the importance of alternative perspectives regarding different events (Zamudio et al. 5). By presenting perspectives of minorities and that not only the dominant story is of worth, it can display that it is acceptable for the students to utter their thoughts and opinions inside the classroom.

Another function of using CRT and the stories of the house-elves is that they provide a counter narrative, which is to “challenge the dominant group’s accepted truth” (Zamudio et al. 5). Counter narratives can therefore provide the students with the understanding that having an open mind and seeing things from different perspectives can create a wider comprehension about both events and literature. It can lead to the realization that one does not need to be as everyone else and to instead stand up for one’s opinions.

It is stated in the Swedish curriculum that students should gain the opportunity to develop their empathic abilities, which can help them create better understanding of other people’s living situations and their values (4). As empathy focuses on displaying concern for others’ feelings and thoughts, discussing the house-elves will feature whether or not the students have the ability to understand the characters’ perspectives (Kidd and Castano 474). A problematic aspect could be that the students do not display empathic abilities due to either having difficulties feeling for other people or not having received the possibility to develop their abilities. If this occurs, it is important that the students get the opportunity to expand their emotional response, which, as research confirms, can be developed through reading a variety of fictional stories (Keen 99). Even though some students might dislike reading, it is important to empathize that it is

beneficial, not only for their empathic abilities but for their imagination and their social skills (Keen 99).

Another approach is to guide the students by displaying what aspects can help in creating the empathic connection with the characters, such as familiar traits and features. In connection to the house-elves, Dobby would be a great example as he is a round character that demonstrates emotions that the students might find both realistic and familiar, even though he is not depicted as a human (Keen 68). If the students still find it hard to empathize, Hermione might be an option, as she is a human who dares to stand up against the dominant norms and help the subjugated group.

Empathy can be shown towards the less fortunate characters but also towards those who praise the dominant position as the students might have values and thoughts that intertwine with theirs. These students' thoughts and opinions should still be acknowledged as long as they do not express or indicate that degrading treatment is acceptable. One example could be that a student states that wizards have the right to do whatever they want with their house-elf, including physical punishment, because they are part of their property. If this would occur in the classroom, the democratic values have to be raised in order to educate the student instead of putting the blame on them. CRT can possibly present an alternative where the students can encounter a variety of counter narratives that can get through to the students on another level and help them to perceive the world from a new perspective.

## 5 Conclusion

In this Master's thesis, the aim was to investigate the house-elves and use CRT to unfold how they were presented and treated in the Harry Potter novels. By focusing on empathy towards the house-elves as the subjugated group, the fundamental values

were the focus of the pedagogical aim in order to comprehend how injustice was portrayed in the literature. CRT was also used to investigate the structures of subjugation and demonstrate the importance of engaging with the thoughts and opinions of minorities as they counteract the dominant stories.

The analysis shows that in accordance with the racial contract, the dominant group of wizards and witches will keep its power as long as there is a possibility to gain from subjugating house-elves. By mistreating the house-elves physically, mentally and by oppressing them through magic, the elves are robbed of the strength to rebel against the slavery regime. It is reflected through the history of the British Empire as both their social and cultural values are transformed into magical ammunition that is used on the house-elves, whereas humans go untouched. Racism is always going to be an outcome when the wizards and witches interact with the house-elves, as the gap between them is too wide and will not be filled by instances of appreciation and understanding from the dominant group. The house-elves have to be susceptible in order to advocate change and without the ability to do so, the action will go untouched. The effect of counter narratives contributes to negate the ideology of dominant group and brings forth the alternative truth of the house-elves and the reason why they are suffering. The ideal counter narrative is presented through Hermione as she counteracts the dominant group, which she belongs to, in order to proclaim the superior governance in the magical society. For future studies, it would be interesting to conduct a similar analysis but on other minority groups in the novels. Example could be either goblins or centaurs as they are depicted in several of the novels and can therefore provide other counter narratives.

When sensitive topics appear in the classroom, it can be problematic for the students to discuss as they are incused by their experiences but by neutralizing the themes with literature, it becomes more approachable. By shifting the practicing empathy to the elves, the topics become more manageable and the emotional connection

continues to grow. It can sometimes be hard to unveil empathy towards different characters, where counter narratives can work as a transition to disclose feelings. The students will possibly gather the tools to perceive injustices in life and feel motivation and determination to prevent ill-treatment equal to the ones the elves endure.

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