

Abstract:

Harry Potter and the Ill-Begotten Celebratory Sandwich: Misguided Activism in S.P.E.W.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire sees Hermione Granger, often called “the brightest witch of her age” as the founder of the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare. Her organization draws apathy at best and outright rejection at worst not only from fellow wizards and witches, but from house-elves themselves. This discussion considers the example she sets for social justice organizations and the role of privilege in activism, especially when that privilege acts as a barrier to liberation. I theorize that there are three particular elements that deeply affect her organization’s legitimacy and success: the refusal of elves to participate in Hermione’s liberation project, pity as a motivator for action, and the positionality of Hermione Granger as Muggle-born, wand-carrier, and self-styled ally. What sense can we make of her well-intentioned but ultimately misguided unsuccessful activism?