A Monstrous Queer in Heteronormative Waters: Using Queer Theory to Deconstruct the Representation of Voldemort's Body in the Harry Potter Series

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Abstract

Critical scholarship of the Harry Potter series of novels has developed significantly over the past twenty years. Despite a number of excellent critiques of the series' primary antagonist, Voldemort, very little critical attention has been given to the problematic ways in which his body is represented in the series. The central argument of this dissertation is that Voldemort's character can be read as representative of a mistrust of difference (expressed through pejorative depictions of his physical transformation) and a warning about the dangers of queerness. Utilising seminal contributions to queer theory, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which Voldemort's body might be said to exemplify an anti-queer representation of queerness. After reviewing critical responses to Voldemort's character – reflecting on the broad consensus that his primary function is to act as the evil foil to Harry's (heteronormative) hero – I problematise the reading of Voldemort as an archetypal patriarchal villain. I then deconstruct the various ways in which Voldemort's body and physical transformations are portrayed, arguing that he is, fundamentally, a queer straw man in the service of a traditionally heteronormative, anti-queer, series of children's books. I examine the journey of physical and psychological change that Tom Riddle undergoes in becoming Lord Voldemort, and I also undertake a close reading of his 'rebirth' in the fourth instalment, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. His cumulative transformations, and transgressions of biological and social norms, bring his status as 'human' into question. Ultimately, I argue, his queer body and queer desires lead to his inevitable punitive emasculation and annihilation at the series' end.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated primarily to not giving up. Ten years ago, I ignored encouragements and supportive advice and chose not to undertake a research degree, something I had very much wanted to do. I was unwell at the time, although I failed to acknowledge this fact for some years. I got better, thanks to the support and love of my friends. Two years ago, I decided I was ready to pick up and dust off an old dream. My special thanks to my friends and champions: Rachel Mundy, Ally Bird, David Griffith, Adrian Powney, Matt Myles-Brown, Antonia Parker Smith, and Marcus Paragpuri. For your belief, encouragement, and radical candour, I will always be grateful. Thanks also to my old teachers and mentors: Richard Luther, Claire Mates, and Trevor Kelk, for making me feel like I was onto something.

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My sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr Philippa Semper, for her incisive comments on drafts of this dissertation and for the kindness, patience, and encouragement she has given me along the way.

A note on primary textual references

Throughout this dissertation I refer to the texts in the Harry Potter series by their acronyms.

In chronological order, these are:

PS   *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

CoS   *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

PoA   *Harry Potter Prisoner of Azkaban*

GoF   *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

OoTP   *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

HBP   *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

DH   *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

These texts are referenced in full in the reference section (p.75).

Contents

Introduction

The Harry Potter Series of novels has sold more copies worldwide than any other (Scholastic, 2023). It is a global, record-breaking, phenomenon – a term often deployed as lazy hyperbole but which, in the case of the Potter series, is apt. The enduring popularity of the series is due in no small part to the established, global, Potter/Wizarding World[2] commercial franchise and an expanding corpus of creative work (such as the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), and the *Fantastic Beasts* film series, 2016-present). Additionally, series author J. K. Rowling remains in the public eye in the UK – but also worldwide – as an integral contributor to new and developing creative projects within the franchise, as a bestselling author of detective fiction writing under the pseudonym 'Robert Galbraith', and, more recently, as a self-styled social media commentator on the rights of trans people and her support of gender critical activism (see, for example, Shennan, 2020). Rowling's, in my view transphobic, public remarks prompted, at least in part, my own commitment to formulating

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[2] 'Wizarding World', formerly known as 'Pottermore', is the franchise's primary online marketing and promotional website: https://www.wizardingworld.com/

a new critical response to the series, in particular, to the representation and characterisation of the series' primary antagonist, Voldemort: the evil foil to Harry Potter's hero.

Whilst Voldemort's character, and his relationship to Harry, have been analysed in depth (as I will discuss in the literature review), very little critical attention has been given by 'Potter Studies' scholars to the problematic ways in which Voldemort's body is represented in the series. This dissertation demonstrates that representations of his body – as well as his bodily transformations, possession of other bodies and experiments in pursuit of immortality – are rich sources of analysis for understanding how the texts perceive the nature of 'evil'. Once excavated, these sites enable us to ask deeper questions about the politics of the novel, which are essentially heteronormative and follow many of the conservative patterns of children's (and fantasy) literature. Voldemort's body is the vehicle for his evil not just in terms of his physical actions, but also for the narratives constructed about good and evil in the texts. His body is (or becomes) unnatural, inhuman and queer.

The central argument of this dissertation is that Voldemort's character can be read as representative of a mistrust of difference (expressed through pejorative depictions of physical transformation) and a warning about the dangers of queerness. Utilising seminal contributions to queer theory, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which Voldemort might be read as an anti-queer representation of queerness. I adopt a deconstructive approach to analysing the representation of his body and appearance, and I highlight the possible implications of such a reading. I do not want to (and cannot) defend Voldemort's character (or acts); instead I seek to problematise its premise, if not altogether then at least in part. I will demonstrate the ways in which Voldemort can be read as the anti-queer's queer, that is, something to point to that is dangerous and threatening less because of the atrocious acts he commits, and more because of who he is, how he appears, and what he desires.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the question "why is Voldemort a murderous sociopath?" is less important than the question "why is the queer/strange/different one the murderous sociopath?". The answer this dissertation offers, based on that reading, is that Voldemort is a straw man embodying the threat to heteronormativity that queer bodies supposedly represent; he is an 'anti-natalist' who threatens stable sex and gender categories, even the stability of the category of human itself. It is against these threats, the texts imply, that the 'symbolic Child' (Mauk, 2017, p.136), Harry, must be protected at all costs. The desecration and destruction of Voldemort's body represents the destruction of the queer threat and the survival (indeed, flourishing) of the heteronormative, stable, middle-class life which many critics acknowledge is favoured within the texts (see Pesold, 2017; and Westman, 2002).

Queer has a pejorative history. To be described as queer was, at best, to be signified as odd and at worst to be condemned, smeared, or set apart. To assign the label queer was, and often still is, to pass sentence. As Judith Butler highlights in *Bodies that Matter*, the word 'queer' does not simply refer to non-conformity with traditional understandings of sexuality and gender, but rather has historically denoted 'an array of meanings associated with the deviation from normalcy' in general (2014, p.176) and 'has operated as [a] linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names' (2014, p.226).

Queer, as a pejorative description of a subject, can be aligned with Freud's theory of the uncanny which can be readily applied to Voldemort's character. For Freud the uncanny is 'related to what is frightening' (2001, p.219), it is 'the opposite of what is familiar' (p.220). Given that my method in this dissertation is to advance a reading of Voldemort as the embodiment of pejorative queerness by identifying and deconstructing the way his body is described in the texts, reading him as uncanny is a useful starting point. Freud asserts that

'man's attitude to death' is a factor which can determine the uncanny (p.243) and 'the re-animation of the dead [has] been represented as most uncanny' (p.246). Voldemort, who fears death and takes extraordinary steps to avoid it through physical transformation and murderous Dark Magic, is constructed to embody the uncanny in ways I will variously demonstrate.

In the next section I conduct a literature review positing the Harry Potter series within the field of children's literature before examining critical responses to Voldemort's character in Potter Studies scholarship. I identify the key focal points in the series, which include Voldemort's unambiguous positioning as 'evil' in the good versus evil binary that exist in the Potter texts. I then outline my methodology for this dissertation, which can be summarised as applying queer theory to the task of analysing and deconstructing the ways in which Voldemort's body can be read as pejoratively queer.

The dissertation is then in three chapters, in each of which I offer a reading of the representations of Voldemort's body and appearance at different points in his life to demonstrate the ways in which he might be said to represent a warning against the subliminal threat of queerness to a stable, heteronormative social order. Chapter one responds to claims that Voldemort can be read as an archetypal patriarchal villain. Whilst this is true at certain points in Voldemort's life, it is also highly contingent on two things: the way he is remembered as a (handsome, confident) boy; and, later on, his possession of other people's bodies when he is without a body of his own.

Chapter two identifies and critically examines Voldemort's period of physical transformation in the texts – queer transformation, as I see it – which marks his transition between two identities: Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort. His grotesque physical

transformation alters his identity and body and affects his emotional stability. I argue that Voldemort's pursuit of immortality can be read as representing queer desire, and this queer desire is framed as dangerous and destabilising to the heteronormative social order.

Finally, chapter three examines Voldemort's rebirth in *GoF* and the ways in which the episode can be said to render pejorative both the transgression of sex categories and the destabilisation of the category 'human'. My concluding argument is that Voldemort's pursuit of his dangerous queer desires leads first to a failure of intelligibility as a human subject and then to emasculation. Voldemort's transgressions are ultimately punished by the heteronormative saviour, Harry, with annihilation at the series' end.

Literature Review[3]

This literature review is in three parts: first, I provide a brief review of children's literature studies in order to position the Harry Potter series within that field; second, I review the key themes that have emerged to-date in analyses of Voldemort's character; third, I suggest ways that critical theories in sexuality and gender studies can enable a fruitful analysis of the representations of Voldemort's body in the texts.

Somebody Please Think of the Children

Seth Lerer, a leading scholar in children's literature, charts the influence of moral frameworks in children's literature from Puritanism in the eighteenth century, imperialism in the nineteenth century, to the nuclear family in the twentieth century (2008). He argues that

children's literature is 'distinctively pre-modern' in that it sustains 'the techniques of allegory, moral fable, romance, and symbolism' (2008, p.14). For Lerer, gatekeepers of children's literature are concerned primarily with 'audience and appropriateness' (p.8). Another eminent critic of children's literature, Jack Zipes, writes similarly that 'children's literature was never written for children' but rather it has acted as a means of moulding and manipulating the child reader to ensure they 'reproduce the structures of thinking and behaving that the writer represented' (1990, p.19). For Levy & Mendlesohn children's fiction 'is a thing for children, but not of them', it is 'primarily moralistic' and 'civic' (2016, p.11). They argue that both children's and fantasy fiction since the nineteenth century has become 'shaped by ideologies of confinement…restricted to the domestic sphere and to a narrow moral compass' (p.26), while Mills concurs that children's literature 'has always been a vehicle for transmitting values to young readers' (2014, p.1).

Sutherland (1985) offered the first real classification of political ideologies as they are expressed in literature for children: '(1) the politics of advocacy, (2) the politics of attack, and (3) the politics of assent' (1985, p.2). Advocacy champions a righteous cause, attack typically means delivering 'negative object lessons' with 'punishment' for the wrong-doer (p.4), and assent '*affirms* ideologies generally prevalent in the society', it is 'an author's passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalization of an established ideology' (p.7, italics in original). For Bettelheim, characters in children's literature are 'not ambivalent', but rather 'a person is either good or bad, nothing in between' (1976, p.9).

Many critics also consider not just what the texts *do*, but *how* children read them. Fisher (2014) argues that children and young adults will engage with characters first and critical readership second. Therefore, he argues, we should be encouraging children to maintain a 'healthy distance' from the texts they read in order to understand 'their

construction and methods of persuasion, their ways of making meaning' (2014, p.201). This aligns with Lerer's approach, that the task at hand for readers and critics 'is to recognise that texts are mutable – that meanings change' (2008, p.3). Developing critical distance is important because children are shaped by the stories they read (Mills, 2014), and most of these stories, as Reynolds explains, contain 'images of stable nuclear families with white, straightforwardly heterosexual parents who conformed to traditional gender roles' (2009, p.201).

To that end, critics increasingly highlight the need for inclusivity and greater representation in popular children's literature. For example, Stevenson (2009) and Vallone (2009) both provide useful analyses of how difference has been represented in children's literature. In addition, Norton (1999) delivers an excellent critique of the dominant logic of heteronormative sexual relationships and reproduction in children's literature and encourages the de-emphasis of this logic in favour of presenting diverse gender identities and ways of being. Queer-positive children's and young adult literature exists, as does a growing body of critical work which analyses it. For example, Kenneth Kidd's work on psychoanalysis and children's literature (2011) includes a queer analysis of *The Wizard of Oz* series, and his work, *Children's Literature as Critical Thought,* contains a thoughtful exploration of the possibility that 'some children's books can function as queer theory for kids' (2020). Jenkins and Cart (2018, p.225) provide an extensive bibliography of 'LGBTQ+ content' in young adult fiction since 1969, citing works including a number of works published at the same time as the Potter series (for example, Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* (2001), a novel dealing specifically with gay high school boys 'coming out' stories in the US). Lambda Literary (an influential US LGBTQ+ literary organisation) has also bestowed at least one literary award to

writers of children's and young adult literature at the Lambda Literary Awards since 1990 (Lambda Literary, 2023).

Other (queer-positive) worlds are, then, available for children and young adults reading literature. Furthermore, and in relation to the Potter series specifically, Kidd (2011a, p.186) highlights the proliferation of Potter-related fan-fiction imagining same-sex intimacy and queer life-making among core characters (e.g. between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy – see also Tosenberger (2008) for a detailed analysis of such fan-led writing). It is a desire to problematise the logic of heteronormativity and the suspicion toward queerness at play in the Potter series that drives my analysis of Voldemort's character in the Potter series.

Placing Potter Studies in the context of Children's Literature

Critics of the Potter series are almost unequivocal in the view that the books have an unparalleled global reach in the children's (and adult) literature market. Some analyses focus on the perceived quality of J. K. Rowling's writing vis-à-vis other authors of children's fiction (for example, Pennington, 2002, p.93; and Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016, p.166). Others betray, frankly, a marked condescension. Virole, for example, writes '[h]ere's a work – we might as well call it that – antithetical to established literary values' (2004, p.371). Such responses are myopic and unhelpful precisely *because* the books *do* have a global reach. Regardless of one's opinion of their quality, we should critically analyse the texts and how they are interpreted (Zipes, 2001, p.172).

Other more useful studies focus on the influence of the texts on readers. Beach & Harden-Willner (2002) argue that readers identify strongly with Harry Potter as a character.

Das argues that children reading the series 'continue to introspect long after the act of reception' (2013, p.454), and that children seek 'inspirations for shaping' real life relationships (p.466). Doughty (2002) argues that Harry might be an ideal role model for boys. Writing as a dedicated admirer of the series, I am interested in what the texts do less well. Schoefer expresses it neatly when she writes that even while enjoying the texts we should critique them (2000, paragraph 13), particularly where they reinforce problematic or exclusive stereotypes and cultural norms in gender, (hetero)sexuality and race.

For Zipes, the Potter series represents 'part of the eternal return to the same', reinforcing rather than disrupting a cultural process 'by which we homogenize our children' (2001, p.188). Certainly, a critical consensus that the series is heteronormative, even anti-queer, is building in the Potter Studies literature. Whilst some critics, such as Bronski (2003), argue that the books invite a queer reading by viewing magic itself as a metaphor celebrating resistance to normativity, this argument is tenuous. Similarly, Gallardo-C & Smith's (2003) assertion that the approach to gender is radical is not supported by analysis of the texts. They argue erroneously, for example, that the series fits Kohl's requisites for radical children's literature (see Kohl, 2007). Instead, as Pesold highlights, 'sexuality appears to be only happening within marriage' and 'all relationships are heterosexual' (2017, p.222). Vestic writes that the texts 'preserve the privilege of heteronormativity' (2018, p.183), and argues that the 'central struggle' of the texts is 'between pronatalism and antinatalism' (p.173). Further, Mauk rightly highlights that 'queerness is relegated to the margins of the Potterverse' (2017, p.124), and also that the series is marked 'by those who had mothers who loved them and those who did not' (p.130).

The way queerness is omitted in the texts, but later added extra-textually by the author, also raises questions. An example is the character of Albus Dumbledore, and his extra-

textual 'outing' by author J. K. Rowling after the series had concluded (Cloud, 2007). As Hecke observes, 'it would not have made a difference [to] the story if Dumbledore was openly gay', or if any students at Hogwarts School identified as LGBTQ, 'but it would have made a huge difference in terms of the representation of a diverse society' (2017, p.200). Why 'out' a leading character extra-textually, making no reference to his gayness in seven books (four of which openly deal with questions of emerging (hetero)sexuality and intimacy)? Pugh & Wallace also note that 'heteronormative heroism ultimately squelches gender equality and sexual diversity' (2006, p.260). The series does not celebrate sexual or gender non-conformity but rather ignores or problematises it. Harry Potter is an 'archetypal' (masculine) hero (Grimes 2002, p.113) and Voldemort is the queer villain, and it is to Voldemort's character that I now turn.

Critical analysis of Voldemort's character in Potter Studies

My review of criticism relating to Voldemort's character is organised into three key areas, each with its own sub-themes: Voldemort's character in the context of an overarching textual narrative about good and evil; the troubling positioning of Voldemort's character in discussions about nature and nurture; and the under-explored but significant analysis of the various ways that Voldemort's body is represented.

1. Good and Evil

Blackford asserts that Voldemort 'is the antithesis of everything good and moral. No teaching can redeem this sort of evil' (2011, p.164). Fenske argues that Voldemort is 'the

personification of evil' and his fear of death 'deforms and mutilates him personally' (2006, p.178). Gallardo-C & Smith expand this reading of evil by asserting that Voldemort 'is not so much a "person" as an "idea" that penetrates secure homes full of love' (2009, p.103), while Smith & Smith contend that Voldemort 'becomes increasingly more evil and less human' throughout the series (2012, p.127). The representation of Voldemort as evil can be addressed along four themes, or dichotomies, in the texts, the first being choice and culpability.

Guanio-Uluru argues that in the Potter series 'a virtuous or vicious character is seen not as the product of circumstance or ability but of personal choice' (2015, p.110). Alghamdi is of the same view, arguing that the 'inevitability of evil action' is 'powerfully rejected, and individual choice affirmed' (2018, p.66), and the character of Albus Dumbledore is the primary advocate of the view that individual choice and agency determines all actions (see Blackford (2011, p.163); Fenske (2006, p.369)). This focus on choice betrays a neoliberal point of view, present throughout the texts, which forecloses any apportioning of blame onto institutions such as Hogwarts (boarding) School, its teachers, and the orphanage in which Voldemort grows up (his mother is the only one to receive any blame for her son's 'evil', as I will show).

The second theme relates to natural laws, that is, to upholding them rather than flouting them. Voldemort violates natural laws throughout the series, chiefly by seeking to 'avoid physical death' (Guanio-Uluru, 2015, p,97) and as such he is not worthy of compassion. Cohen points out that by splitting his soul in order to become immortal, Voldemort commits 'a horrifying transgression of the natural order', one which renders him 'uncanny, unearthly, inhuman' (2018, p.216). Martin argues that Voldemort's 'aberrant physical monstrosity' reveals 'the failure of magic in transcending humanity' (2017, p.1). In her view, the fundamental moral argument of the series is 'the need to accept death as part of human life'

(p.14). For Harrison, Harry Potter's character 'represents the universal humanist potential for heroism in the face of nonhuman evil embodied by…Voldemort' (2018, p.326).

The third theme is the ideological defence of normative notions of family against a (queer) rejection of family. While Gallardo-C & Smith (2009) argue that the texts are transgressive in their representations of gender, they concede, contradictorily, that heteronormativity wins out, thereby highlighting 'that the real quest of the main characters was to restore the traditional nuclear family' (p.104). Several critics invoke Edelman's *Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) to argue that those characters who start traditional families and who place themselves at the service of 'the symbolic child' (Mauk 2017, p.136; see also Vestic, 2018) are most handsomely rewarded in the texts, while those who do not are doomed. I will return to these critiques in the following chapters.

The fourth theme concerns conforming and not conforming to traditional norms of gender and sexuality. A number of critics have drawn attention to how Voldemort's masculinity (and his queerness) are represented; it is reasonable to say that his masculinity is contested. Martin invokes Bourdieu's theory of 'masculine domination' (2002) when describing Voldemort as 'a force of patriarchal destruction' (2020, p.218), while Cothran argues that Voldemort's connection with serpents in the texts represents the destructiveness of the patriarchy (2005, p.128). Smith & Smith, however, compellingly argue that Voldemort's character might be best read as 'asexual' because he refuses any call to participate in sexual reproduction and instead perverts the very notion of it by reproducing, or copying, himself (2012, p.131). I will return to Voldemort's masculinity in chapter one.

II. Nature vs. Nurture

The Potter texts reinforce problematic stereotypes about non-traditional families, and also appear to reinforce the concept of biological determinism. So too, it seems, do some critical analyses of the texts. Bassham (2010, p.73) argues that Voldemort's inability to love is unsurprising given that his father didn't love his mother (ignoring that Voldemort had never known either of them), and that Voldemort had 'learned' all of his mother's worst traits (p.76) – again, without having any real knowledge of her history until adolescence. A number of critics, though, examine what the texts tell us about Voldemort's history, trauma, parenting and relationships, in order to contextualise - and problematise - his representation as evil. Blackford explains that the 'evil child' is 'too complicated' for society to comprehend and thus Voldemort is represented as pathologically evil by other adult characters in the texts to absolve themselves of responsibility (2011, p.172).

Bell (2013) advances a compelling analysis of Voldemort's character and asks if his path could have been altered if the adults around him at Hogwarts School and his London orphanage were more supportive, loving and present. He compares Voldemort's character to teenage perpetrators of school shootings in the US, and he applies Durkheim's theory of 'anomie' (1972) and Bandura's model of 'moral disengagement' (1999) to Voldemort's circumstances in the texts. Bhattacharya argues that Voldemort is not inherently evil, but rather a product of 'the social relations which provide the context for the interpretation of his actions' (2012, paragraph 4). Similarly, Lacassagne highlights that Voldemort is 'deprived of any meaningful relationships [with] others, whereas Harry is conscious of being part of a society, a history' (2016, p.325), and Lis & Tuineag (2017) offer a hypothetical analysis of Voldemort developing anti-social personality disorder as a result of his experiences as a child. Washick (2009), meanwhile, considers the austere conditions of Voldemort's early life, to exemplify that of a Dickensian orphan.

When one explores the texts for environmental and psychological factors influencing Voldemort's 'moral disengagement', one reads only Dumbledore's privileged account and thus a whitewashing of both responsibility and culpability for Voldemort's care and moral education (Blackford, 2001, p.155). Harry is under constant surveillance and care from concerned father and mother figures, while Voldemort, by contrast, was largely left to his own devices as a child and occasionally punished by adults who otherwise paid him very little attention (see Carmeli, 2009). We further see, as Panos outlines (2009), that Harry is able to build significant psychological resilience as a result of the attention he receives from caring, loving adults, and one only has to examine the key conditions Panos outlines as necessary for resilience in children (p.172) to see that Voldemort doesn't develop any of them.

Overall, there is a broader issue here about representation. As Fenske explains, evil characters in children's fiction 'are usually weak and marginalised grown-ups with an unhappy childhood', and the texts do not place much emphasis on the idea that 'society creates its [own] enemies' (2006, p.366). The point of such analysis is not to justify Voldemort's behaviour in the texts, but to offer a critique of the society that helped to create the monster (Bell, 2013, p.63) and to identify alternative readings that ask us to question the ways in which evil is inscribed and represented in the texts.

III. (Monstrous) Bodies that Matter

The ways in which characters' bodies are represented in the Potter texts have not been critically explored in great detail. There are some examples of readings of bodies and physicality, and unsurprisingly these consider Voldemort to be of particular interest. Even so,

these analyses do not offer sustained examination of the bodies rendered in the texts, and my dissertation intends to offer precisely this kind of analysis of Voldemort's body.

Simmons applies the concept of 'protean selfhood' (citing Lifton, 1993) to an analysis of Harry Potter's character because it 'is driven by a sense of "fatherlessness and homelessness," which is often associated with changes in authority and mentorship' (Simmons, 2012, p.59). This analysis focuses primarily on Harry, and the ways in which he engages healthily with defining and re-defining himself in response to trauma and loss. As such, Voldemort's character provides a significant means of deepening understanding not only his own character but also that of the titular hero. Harry's protean self has moral and ethical limits, whilst Voldemort ultimately falls 'into the abyss of total non-subjectivity' (p.59). Voldemort, then, might usefully be analysed as a queer 'other' with a queer body – a body which becomes a textual signifier of anti-normativity and represents a mortal threat to the family, the child, the future, and the clear lines between life and death, good and evil.

There are two themes emerging from Potter Studies literature relating to representations of Voldemort's body which can be usefully expanded upon. First, his body acts as a signifier of evil and inhumanity. For Sehon, Voldemort's appearance is a metaphor for his emotional and moral decline. His soul is broken, and this affects his bodily appearance and his emotional range, though not his cognitive abilities (2010, p.16). Zimmerman concurs that as Voldemort splits his soul by making 'Horcruxes' (objects in which parts of the soul are concealed to enable rebirth after bodily destruction), 'he grows more and more snake-like. As he dehumanizes himself, Voldemort demonstrates how fragmenting one's self destroys that self' (2009, p.199), and this ultimately results in the destabilisation of his ontological identity (Batty, 2015, p.25).

Similarly, Harrison argues, the Potter series is 'a story about being "purely" human, and about how the androcentric and anthropocentric hero of Western culture comes into being' (2018, p.326). In this context, Voldemort is a foil, a 'dreaded persona' who 'is constructed in the popular imagination of the magical community', almost exclusively 'out of metonymy and memory' (Bhattacharya, 2012, paragraph 5; this view is also supported by Dorigato *et al.*, 2015, p.83). Fenske focuses on the ways in which Voldemort's appearance in the texts make him 'the personification of evil' (2006, p.178). Martin offers a useful analysis of Voldemort as a 'posthuman monster', arguing that Voldemort's character is representative of a 'monstrous' wish to overcome death, rather than of a 'posthuman' character with a 'monstrous' body (2017, p.16-18). However, she does not seek to problematise the ways in which readers might be signposted to view Voldemort's body as inherently monstrous and repulsive.

Second, Voldemort's bodily transformations – and physical transformation in the texts more generally – are represented as unstable, dangerous, and ugly, and are often intrinsically linked to the possession and/or violation of another's body. Voldemort's horcruxes are realisable only by murder, and he makes an armour for his body out of his soul (Gallardo-C & Smith, 2009, p.98). He loses human intelligibility (and aesthetic beauty) and assumes the form of a 'frail' child's body when not in an independent body sharing the body of another (Martin, 2017, p.4-7). Whether resembling a 'Homunculus' (Cohen, 2018, p.215), participating in a satanic rebirth 'ritual' (p.216), or possessing another person and resembling 'a monstrous hybrid' (Harrison, 2018, p.330), Voldemort's body is often in a grotesque state and undergoing what Wolosky describes as a series of 'ghoulish, incessant dyings' (2010, p.167).

On the subject of possession, Taliaferro argues that Voldemort is a parasite 'on the blood and limbs of others' (2010, p.239), and Voldemort's transformations represent an

'inversion', creating an unnatural 'process of moving from death to life' (p.231). Simmons notes that the texts are concerned with upholding 'firm ego boundaries', which Voldemort, as the evil character, destroys (2012, p.64). Transformation is permitted without consequence in the texts only if it is culturally accepted and socially intelligible – usually to protect children and the magical community at large, as I will explore in chapter two.

Summary

Primarily, critical analysis of the Harry Potter series draws attention to the narrative focus on good and evil, and often places the series in the context of a traditional moral quest in which the hero restores an implied moral order. Issues relating to gender and sexuality in the series are raised and there are a number of compelling contributions to the field which seek to challenge perceived heteronormativity in the texts. An increasing number of scholarly contributions are engaging in an analysis of Voldemort's character, but few have thoroughly or systematically sought to problematise how his character is represented.

My review of the literature highlights that, broadly, scholars agree that the Potter texts reinforce traditional (predominantly British) cultural stereotypes and prejudices. Acknowledging this, one can carve a path towards analysing not just the ways in which Voldemort's body and his physical transformations play a driving role in signifying evil and moral turpitude in the series, but also how his body might be read as representing a form of pejorative queerness in the service of heteronormativity. A critical response to the texts that is informed by queer theory is also essential because their heteronormative position is so entrenched. When we centre an analysis of Voldemort's body and physicality, it is possible to draw on critical theories of queerness, sexuality, and gender to effectively identify and de-

construct heteronormative bias in the texts. It is to this task that I now turn as I outline my

methodology in the next section.

Methodology: Queering Voldemort

In the chapters that follow I read Voldemort's as queer with reference to his body,

appearance, and behaviour. To do so, I argue, is to identify the foundations for the evilness

he signifies in the texts. First, however, it is necessary to outline a method for a subversive

reading of Voldemort's character and for using his body as a site for analysis in the texts. My

method in this dissertation is to apply seminal contributions in queer theory to the task of

deconstructing the representation of Voldemort's character.

As I have shown in the literature review, Potter Studies scholarship has highlighted

how the texts reinforce heteronormativity by signalling a mistrust towards non-conformity

(and physical transformation), and by constructing a tension between pro-natalism (good)

and anti-natalism (bad); or more simply, those who are and are not on the side of "the

children". However, there remains significant scope to apply critical theories of sexuality and gender to disrupt the hetero-orthodoxy that underpins the Potter texts and to use them to problematise, and reject the premise of, the representation of Voldemort's character and his body.

Queer theory offers a valuable set of tools to dismantle those pejorative definitions of queerness that I argue underpin the representation of Voldemort's character, opening up possibilities for scrutiny, and problematising what (and who) might be defined or described as 'queer'. The 'queer' to which contemporary queer theory refers is that which challenges 'normative knowledges and identities' (Sullivan, 2003, p.44), which includes pejorative representations of queerness. It acknowledges the constructedness of sex and gender (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1990, p.27) and in some cases concerns itself directly with the deconstruction of gender. In Chapter one I examine a specific response to Voldemort's character in the Potter Studies literature in which Martin (2020) describes Voldemort's character as an archetypal, patriarchal villain and invokes Bourdieu's theory of 'masculine domination' (2002). With reference to Bourdieu's work, I will demonstrate that categorising Voldemort in this way is problematic with particular reference to the ways in which he possesses the bodies of others.

In chapter two, I explore the possibility that J. K. Rowling's trans exclusionary public utterances (see, for example, Shennan, 2020) open another potential line of enquiry into the representation of Voldemort's physical transformations. Stryker's seminal contribution to trans* theory, 'performing transgender rage', is useful here if we consider Voldemort's body as queer in the context of its ultimate 'unlivability' (1994, p.249). Also relevant is Kristeva's theory of abjection, in which she identifies the abject as '[i]maginary uncanniness and real threat' (1982, p.4). Like the trans body, in the eyes of those who see trans bodies as a threat,

the abject 'disturbs identity, system, order' and 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva, 1982, p.4). Voldemort, and his body, perform a similar function in the Potter texts, and rather than being a celebration of difference his body is deployed as the signifier that he is evil and not to be trusted. He embodies the abject, that which 'is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles' (Kristeva, 1982, p.4); that which 'designates "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life' (Butler, 2014, p.3).

Continuing with provocations, in chapter three I read Voldemort as a monstrous drag performer imitating human corporeality. Butler, arguably the leading poststructuralist queer theorist, argues in *Gender Trouble* that gender is essentially performative and seeks to establish 'as political the very terms through which identity is articulated' (Butler, 2002, p.189). She also argues that language 'refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested' (p.184), and in *Bodies that Matter* that '"queering" works as the exposure within language' which 'disrupts the repressive surface of language' (2014, p.176) and 'upsets and exposes passing' (p.177). It is possible to read Voldemort's character as an example of what Butler calls '[t]he production of the unsymbolizable, the unspeakable, the illegible', which 'is also always a strategy of social abjection' (2014, p.190).

We can also further utilise contributions such as Vestic's (2018) theory that Voldemort is an anti-natalist at war with pro-natalists throughout the Potter series as a possible explanation for the pejorative representation of Voldemort's body and appearance in the series. Reading Voldemort's character as a threat to children – which Edelman (2001) argues is *the* fundamental incitement to resist queerness – Voldemort might be best viewed as the ideological casualty in a series that disavows queer ways of living, rejecting the possibility of what Halberstamm calls 'queer time and place' (2005). Resistant to 'a middle-class logic of

reproductive temporality' (p.4), Voldemort can be said to embody a threat 'to the [heteronormative] institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction' (p.1).

In these ways, queer theory offers a method for us to better understand the premise of Voldemort's character (evil) and the representations of his body (queer and grotesque) and challenge that representation on the grounds that he is sent up as an anti-queer straw figure in the service of protecting children against subversive and dangerous lifestyles. Acknowledging this, we can then problematise it.

Chapter 1

Voldemort and Masculine Domination

In this chapter I respond to assertions in Potter Studies literature that Voldemort can be read as an aggressively masculine, patriarchal villain (see Grimes, 2002, p.113; Gallardo & Smith, 2009, p.97). Most notably, Martin (2020, p.218) refers to Voldemort as 'a force of patriarchal destruction' and cites Bourdieu's theory of masculine domination (2001) as a framework for analysing Voldemort's character. I argue here that Voldemort can be read as exemplifying aspects of masculine domination only at certain times in his life, most clearly when he is an orphan boy dominating other children at his orphanage and when he is a handsome, charming teenager at Hogwarts. After his transformation into the monstrously queer Lord Voldemort

(the subject of subsequent chapters), his capacity to dominate others through displays of overt masculinity diminishes, or at least changes. The longer he fails to conform to heteronormative and pro-natalist logic, the more monstrous his body and physical appearance becomes. As Lord Voldemort, he is represented as physically and emotionally weak at various points in the novel, where he dominates others through fear and coercion. This is in sharp contrast to the image of the effortlessly charming and commanding Tom Riddle. To identify this distinction is to create space to read Voldemort's body as (anti-)queer.

This is particularly the case during the period when he is without a body after first attacking Harry, his curse rebounding and ripping him from his body, leaving him hiding as a spirit in the forest, waiting for an opportunity to regain physical form (*CoS*, p.346; *PoA*, p.6). His capacity to embody aspects of masculine domination becomes contingent upon a parasitic attachment to – or invasion of – another person's body, or else it is a thing of the past, a memory of a handsome man who was once able to manipulate others through charm and an attractive male physical presence. It is therefore problematic to say that Voldemort's character offers a straightforward example of physical, masculine dominance or aggression given that his masculinity is contingent upon memories of him and that, as Lord Voldemort, he is not a straightforwardly human or stable, corporeal subject. The effect of this remembered, borrowed, and impermanent physicality is to undermine the reading of Voldemort as aggressively masculine, and with it the reading of his character as an exemplar of masculine domination. He becomes, instead, a queer figure, lacking intelligibility and corporeality on his own terms.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'masculine domination' is indebted to poststructuralist theories highlighting gender identities and gender 'performances' as social constructs. It

seeks to explain how the historical system of dominance by men in human society was established as fundamental to the natural social order. This order, Bourdieu asserts, has been established through 'the long collective labour' of making a social construct 'appear as the grounding in nature of the arbitrary division which underlies both reality and the representation of reality' (Bourdieu, 2001, p.3).

Bourdieu argues that '[t]he social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality' (2001, p.11). As such, any '*biological* difference between the *sexes*, i.e. between the male and female bodies, and, in particular, the *anatomical* difference between the sex organs, can thus appear as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the *genders*' (2001, p.11, emphasis in original). For Bourdieu, '[t]he strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification…The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded' (2001, p.9).

In the orphanage where he grew up, Tom Riddle is remembered as being secretive, violent, and controlling. Unless one is to read this as a critique of masculine domination, he does not exemplify it in these memories. Bourdieu developed the concept to describe a system of power in which 'the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural' (2001, p.1). He refers to a 'symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims' (p.1). Tom's carers at the orphanage describe him as 'odd', other children are 'scared' of him and he leaves them emotionally scarred, 'never quite right afterwards' (*HBP*, p.221). This is not entirely consistent with the subtle exertion of power and the acquiescence to that power that a system of masculine domination commands. Riddle is othered at the orphanage, he is certainly powerful, but he does not seem to be at the centre of a system of power that actively enables

and permits him to exert control. There is rather a failure of power by the orphanage in effectively modifying his behaviour and supporting him to reflect and change (for an excellent critique of how systems of care fail Tom Riddle, see Bell, 2013).

At Hogwarts, however, he is remembered by Professor Slughorn as exuding an aristocratic charm and confidence which certainly exemplifies aspects of masculine domination. He is clearly adored by friends who would later follow him under the Death Eaters' banner. Embarrassingly, Slughorn was also clearly very fond of him (*HBP*, p.404). Here his friends, and also Slughorn, are complicit in 'the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation' (Bordieu, 2001, p.5), and Voldemort is unambiguously at its centre. When Slughorn tells Voldemort, against his professional judgement, how to advance his quest for immortality by making a Horcrux (*HBP*, pp.405-7), he is bowing to the 'strength of the masculine order' which 'dispenses with justification' (Bourdieu, 2001, p.9). Tom Riddle is a handsome, confident, and highly intelligent boy who gets what he wants by manipulating people at Hogwarts in exactly the way boys like him are *supposed* to.

Slughorn's memory of him is almost alluring, but it is mere memory. It portrays Tom Riddle as always already *of* the past, never of the present or future. It is instead Lord Voldemort who is always looming over the present and this has the effect of consigning Tom Riddle irrevocably to the past, and with it Voldemort's unambiguous exemplification of masculine domination. Any possibility of Voldemort becoming an alluring villain (Martin, 2017, p.5), which seems possible in Slughorn's memory of him, is foreclosed by Voldemort's grotesque physical transformation (Fenske, 2006, p.178) and his failure to assume the expected role of a man. Bourdieu contends that '[m]anliness' and 'virility' are indistinguishable 'from physical virility, in particular through the attestations of sexual

potency' which include 'deflowering the bride, abundant male offspring' – these are the expectations of a ''real' man' (2001, p.12). Any argument that Voldemort is a participant in the system of masculine domination, and that he embodies a patriarchal villain, is weakened in this context.

The dominance he exerts, or attempts to exert, over the bodies of others as Lord Voldemort, on the other hand, relies on chance or luck, and it is a means to an end either to obtain a body when he is without one or to manipulate an outcome that he couldn't achieve in or through his own body. Three examples of Voldemort inserting himself into the minds and bodies of others are especially pertinent here: in relation to Professor Quirrell in *PS*, Ginny Weasley in *CoS*, and Harry in *OotP.*

In *PS,* Voldemort's possession of Professor Quirrell breaks down Quirrell's identity and independence by controlling his behaviour and modifying his physical body. Harry discovers a frightened Quirrell 'whimpering' whilst talking to someone Harry can neither see nor hear and believes that Quirrell is being threatened. Quirrell seems to acquiesce before exiting the classroom, 'straightening his turban', looking 'pale' and 'as though he was about to cry' (p.245). It is later revealed that he is sharing his body with Voldemort, who has taken the form of a face protruding out of the back of Quirrell's head. Hidden from view behind the problematic turban, Voldemort provides instructions, applying increasing force upon Quirrell to do what is required to return him into an independent body of his own. During this process, Quirrell's body has become, effectively, Voldemort's body; his agency is diminished.

It is important that even when lacking the independent, immortal body he desperately desires, Voldemort dominates Quirrell, bending him to his will. His spirit is superior; he is stronger, more wilful and more magically gifted than Quirrell (Simmons, 2012, p.64). Quirrell sees Voldemort as his master, and whilst it is unclear how Voldemort first entered into this

body-sharing arrangement with Quirrell, Quirrell has apparently agreed to oblige him. It is very clear from their exchanges that it is Voldemort who holds the power and can dominate and control Quirrell. Harry confronts Quirrell and thwarts his attempts to obtain the Philosopher's Stone – a magical artefact that can facilitate immortality – which would restore Voldemort to a body of his own, although how it would do this is never explained.[4] During a struggle with Harry, Quirrell acts on Voldemort's instructions even when doing so causes him great physical pain (p.294). In this way, Voldemort's wandering spirit might be said to exemplify masculine domination, as he is shown first reinforcing – and then capitalising on – the weaknesses of a magically inferior being for his own gain.

This behaviour can be read in the light of Bourdieu's assertions about possession and control as features of masculine domination in sexual relationships. Whilst there are no direct or overt references to sexual abuse in the Potter series, it is possible to read Voldemort's domination of Quirrell in this context. Bourdieu writes:

> If the sexual relation appears as a social relation of domination, this is because it is constructed through the fundamental principle of division between the active male and the passive female and because this principle creates, organises, expresses and directs…male desire as the desire for possession, eroticised domination (2001, p.21).

The potential for a reading of a relationship of homosexual domination is more compelling if one considers the physiology of the relationship between Voldemort and Quirrell. Physically, one might safely assume that Voldemort is weak, or at least has the appearance of lacking

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[4] The Stone assists the production of an elixir that will make the drinker immortal as long as they continue to have a supply of it.

physical integrity whilst not inhabiting a body. As merely a face within a head that is not his own, he seems to lack the necessary capacity to dominate someone physically. What he does seem to retain, though, is the ability to dominate psychologically and the ability to perform powerful magic from within another's body. This suggests that Voldemort has the capacity to perform magic through his spirit or soul, which would seem to contradict the general principle in the series that the performance of magic (for humans at least) requires some level of physicality, most often expressed through the use of a wand.

Quirrell describes himself as young and naïve when he first met Voldemort: 'a foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was…there is only power, and those too weak to seek it' (*PS*, pp.291-2). Voldemort's interactions with Quirrell express the operations of such power in terms of masculine domination; Voldemort can be said to penetrate Quirrell both psychologically and physically. Penetration, Bourdieu asserts, 'especially when performed on a man, is one of the affirmations of the *libido dominandi* that is never entirely absent from the masculine libido, and in some societies in history, 'homosexual possession is conceived as a manifestation of 'power', an act of domination…in order to assert superiority by 'feminising' the other' (2001, p.21). Whilst the penetration does not, in and of itself, seem to be an act of homosexual desire in this instance – but rather a means to an end for Voldemort to reassert himself as a physical being – it is nonetheless an assertion of his own strength, both actual and potential.

In *CoS*, the reader is confronted with an even more disturbing act of domination in which a piece of Voldemort's soul residing as a Horcrux inside his school diary begins to infiltrate the consciousness of eleven-year-old Ginny Weasley, grooming her to direct the Basilisk toward acts of violence against other students at Hogwarts (Smith & Smith, 2012, p.129). Similarly to his possession of Quirrell, Voldemort's motive, or in this case the motive

of his soul fragment, seems to be to return to a body of its own. Whilst Ginny does not seem to be physically possessed in the way that Quirrell was, the piece of Voldemort's soul in the diary appears to groom Ginny for the purpose of helping it to return to a body.

Ginny finds the diary without knowing that it is a Horcrux, and she begins to write in it and use it as a confessional-style diary of her own. The soul fragment becomes stronger as a result of this interaction until it is able to assume the form of a memory of 16-year-old Tom Riddle outside of the diary. This Memory/Horcrux Riddle is traditionally good-looking, assured, confident, even arrogant. As a 'tall, black-haired boy' (*CoS*, p.324), Riddle appears next to Harry in the Chamber of Secrets as he tries to revive an unconscious Ginny. Satiated 'on a diet of [Ginny's] deepest fears, her darkest secrets' (p.327), he has gained her trust over a number of months and slowly brought her under his control by preying on her vulnerability and naivety. By doing so, Riddle tells Harry, 'I grew powerful, far more powerful than little miss Weasley. Powerful enough…to start pouring a little of *my* soul back into *her*' (p.327, emphasis in text).

In a disturbing parallel with the practice of victim-blaming often directed towards victims of sexual violence, Riddle suggests that Ginny is in this position (unconscious, depleted) 'because she opened her heart and spilled all her secrets to an invisible stranger' (p.326). He initially commands the situation in the Chamber, taking Harry's wand and commanding a Basilisk (a giant serpent with a fatal stare) to attack Harry, but not before boasting to Harry about how he fed on Ginny's thoughts and feelings – on her life energy – to make himself stronger and incapacitate her in the process. He explains his strategy of seduction and manipulation: 'I was sympathetic, I was kind. Ginny simply *loved* me' (p.326).

Ginny is portrayed as physically and mentally weaker than Riddle, given that he has been able to manipulate her in order to control her and take from her what he needs, but

also as weaker than Harry. As Blackford argues, 'Tom admits that he used Ginny, so that he could get to Harry. Ginny is literally unconscious in the chamber and therefore merely an object 'between men'' (2011, p.168). In this way, there are two aspects of domination, one between boys and one between boy and girl. Memory/Horcrux Riddle imposing his will through the diary acts like a sexual predator (with Ginny - see Blackford, 2011, p.166), and a male mentor (with Harry) in order to manipulate and subdue them both.

The Memory/Horcrux Riddle that appears in *CoS* therefore represents another example of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of masculine domination. Since the publication of *CoS*, both the proliferation and awareness of online abuse against children makes these interactions in the texts seem particularly prescient. Riddle assumes a position of (masculine) dominance and control, representing what Bourdieu would refer to as the person 'on top', 'active' against a 'passive' (2001, p.19) recipient. Both Harry and Ginny are passive in their relationships with Riddle-in-the-diary in the beginning, only to become either more mistrustful (Ginny) or curious (Harry) about the diary's true nature as the relationship continues.

Harry's mind, body and soul are connected with Voldemort's at a number of points. Towards the end of *DH*, Dumbledore remarks that Harry and Voldemort had become joined 'together more securely than ever two wizards were joined' (*DH*, p.580). Here I want to draw attention specifically to the psychological impact of the connection that Harry experiences in the earlier texts – that is to say, when Voldemort is the more dominant force in the connection. In *OotP*, Harry discovers that he has some level of shared consciousness with Voldemort, although at this point, he believes that he has no agency in the situation. Instead, he believes that he is being possessed by Voldemort and forced to do his bidding and is

reminded of the way in which 'the snakelike face of Voldemort had once forced itself out of the back of Professor Quirrell's head' (*OotP*, p.455).

Having made this assumption about Voldemort's power to control him, he 'felt dirty, contaminated, as though he were carrying some deadly germ' (p.455). He believes that he has become a weapon that other people need protection against and he isolates himself from his friends and comrades in the Order of the Phoenix, becoming paranoid that they also see him as dangerous: '[h]e supposed none of them would want him there any more, now that they knew what was inside of him' (p.459). It is Ginny who disabuses Harry of any notion that he is being possessed, which helps him to heal in one respect, and marks the basis on which he and Dumbledore explore the nature of the connection in subsequent texts. Ginny sternly reminds him that she knows what it is like to be possessed (p.462). She explains that when Horcrux/Memory Riddle possessed her, 'I couldn't remember what I'd been doing for hours at a time. I'd find myself somewhere and not know how I got there' (p.462).

Whilst Quirrell was possessed voluntarily or with little resistance by Voldemort, Ginny was not. Harry does not have another being manifesting itself out of the back of his head nor does he lose agency in his actions. Instead, he has a connection into Voldemort's mind that we later learn exists because a fragment of Voldemort's soul has resided in Harry since Voldemort's attack on him as a baby. Until Harry understands this connection properly in *DH*, it continues to cause him distress and a feeling of being dominated by Voldemort, particularly after Voldemort uses the connection to lure Harry to the Ministry of Magic at the end of *OotP* (p.671).

The similarities between Ginny's, Harry's and Quirrell's experiences of intra-bodily connection with Voldemort, whilst not necessarily obvious beyond the fact of the connection itself, are quite stark. When Voldemort preys on their bodies, Quirrell is a naïve young man,

Ginny is a naïve young girl, and Harry is a relatively naïve young boy. Each of them is vulnerable in their own way, and arguably easier to dominate as a result. Quirrell has a nervous disposition and a speech impediment which, it is hinted, began after he went travelling (*PS*, p.70), and we later learn this is also when he met Voldemort. Ginny is new to Hogwarts, in the shadow of her older siblings, and navigating perhaps her first romantic feelings (for Harry). Harry, meanwhile, is penetrated by Voldemort at multiple points: first – as we eventually learn – when a piece of Voldemort's soul latches onto Harry's when he attacks Harry as a baby; second, when he orders Harry's arm to be penetrated with a knife for his blood so that Harry's blood might also run through Voldemort's body and grant him protection in *GoF*; and third, when he enters and manipulates Harry's mind in *OotP*.

Unlike with Quirrell and Ginny, though, Voldemort is unable to completely dominate Harry's body or his will. One such example is in *GoF*, where Voldemort uses magic to force Harry to bow to him: 'Harry felt his spine curve as though a huge, invisible hand was bending him ruthlessly forwards' (p.556). While Harry is initially bound by this magical show of force, he eventually resists the second time Voldemort compels him to do as he says, yelling '"I WON'T"', psychologically and physically breaking himself out of the Imperious Curse that Voldemort holds him under (p.557). This example demonstrates that Voldemort's domination of others increasingly relies on his ability to infiltrate their bodies and minds, rather than beating them in open combat, something he is less able to do as the monstrous and depleted adult, Lord Voldemort, than when he was Tom Riddle the child.

Once he has reassumed a body of his own through a Dark Magic ritual, his attempts to exert ultimate dominance over Harry by killing him are repeatedly thwarted as Harry escapes him time and again, usually after Voldemort makes grand proclamations about his superior abilities. For example, in *GoF* Voldemort says: 'I am now going to prove my power by

killing him, here and now, in front of you all…He will be allowed to fight, and you will be left in no doubt which of us is the stronger' (*GoF*, p.553). Harry, of course, survives, and his ability to resist and ultimately overcome Voldemort increases significantly in the final text as Voldemort's body, soul, and identity become less and less intelligible and Harry becomes increasingly assured and emboldened by his reassuring heteronormativity. This is something I will discuss in more detail in chapter three.

The Dark Mark and Metaphors of Institutional Power

Bell argues that 'Voldemort is not about *personal* power; he is about *institutional* power' and is 'more concerned with becoming the centre of a power structure' (2013, p.58, emphasis in original). Whilst the latter definitely holds true, I am not convinced that Voldemort does not seek personal power. Rather, my reading is that by the time he is in a position to overthrow state architecture, he is too monstrous, to be the public face of the regime of terror that he leads and so he cannot perform that function, instead operating in the shadows through political and social proxies. I concur with Fenske, who argues that Voldemort's core aim is seeking power in the service of achieving immortality (2006, p.180). His rise and fall might be read as a metaphor for Totalitarian regimes which rise and fall 'disguised in their march to power' (Lacassagne, 2016, p.332), but such a reading threatens to foreclose other interpretations which focus on how Voldemort's identity is represented and what might be drawn from that. It limits the possibilities for interpreting the signs and symbols present in the texts.

For instance, Voldemort's followers, the Death Eaters, cast a 'Dark Mark' into the sky when they commit murder. It takes the form of 'a colossal skull, composed of what looked

like emerald stars, with a serpent protruding from its mouth like a tongue' (*GoF*, p.109). This image is arresting: green, the colour of the wicked witches in the Wizard of Oz and in Western folklore more generally; the skull, a sign of death and a body decayed – Voldemort's greatest fear for himself; and a serpent 'protruding', suggestive, animating the skull and presumably without the tongue's restricted movement, free to roam and strike. It epitomises the uncanny. It is also burned into the arms of the Death Eaters as Snape, a former Death Eater, explains as a means of 'summoning us to him', compelling them into his presence (*GoF*, p.596).

Therefore, reading this symbol of allegiance to Voldemort as solely a fascist symbol (akin, say, to the Nazi Swastika) is limiting. Vestic argues that Voldemort attempts 'to create a queer space' with and among the Death Eaters (2018, p.178), which ultimately fails where heteronormative spaces and communities succeed. If it is a 'queer space', it is also a deeply problematic, unpleasant one. The Death Eaters do not wear the mark stitched onto their sleeves, the Mark is a permanent mark upon their skin, as a farmer might brand an animal, to denote a level of ownership by Voldemort over their lives.

This is another example of the way in which Voldemort's ability to dominate others is so often contingent upon him imposing a physical mechanism of control on the bodies of others, whether through possession, magic, or this example of magic initiated by touch, suggesting a permanent physical connection between him and his followers. This branding of his followers might even seem necessary to Voldemort given that so many of them have physical reactions of fear and revulsion in his presence after his 're-birth' in *GoF* (p.544-5). Unable to establish the kind of natural social order that Bourdieu highlights is typical of masculine domination, Voldemort is instead the head of a queer regime that is always already failing and whose followers are always hoping to get away from him. In the next chapter, I

look specifically at the period of transition and (queer) transformation in which Tom Riddle becomes Lord Voldemort.

Chapter 2

Transition and Transformation

In the light of the appearance of J. K. Rowling's transphobic remarks online (see Shennan, 2020), it is impossible to dismiss a retrospective reading of aspects of Voldemort's character as representative of a deep discomfort with, and rejection of, queer bodies and queer lives. It is not, of course, possible to say that Voldemort is a transphobic representation of a trans body or life – there is no explicit evidence of this in the texts or in Rowling's public utterances. It is, however, possible to read his character as one who is constructed around a narrative of deviance and the building of a queer appearance which mirrors his 'evilness'; one who is queer in the sense of being uncanny, someone who rejects – actively seeks to disrupt –

heteronormative, neoliberal values (family, marriage, a stable job). Smith & Smith argue that Voldemort enters a 'transitional phase' (2012, p.133) in the Potter texts which charts a series of changes from the boy, Tom Riddle with an intact soul, into monstrous adult Lord Voldemort. in this chapter I argue that the process of magical transformation and experimentation with Dark Magic represents a period of inherently queer transition and transformation. This transformation grotesquely alters his identity, physical appearance, and behaviour, and marks him both as a deviant from social norms and as the primary threat to the safety of children and families in the texts.

Uncanny transformations in the Potter texts

As I have already asserted, I do not seek to defend the indefensible where Voldemort's character is concerned. That his character is murderous, cruel and deeply prejudiced is not in doubt in this dissertation. What I do seek, however, is a deeper level of scrutiny about the terms of reference for his evilness and the ways in which that evilness is scaffolded. I argue that it is scaffolded using tools that are problematic, and this is evident in the representations of Voldemort's body and identity when he begins to shed the skin of Tom Riddle. As mentioned in the literature review, the Potter texts in general convey mistrust of any physical transformation that is not seen as either biologically or magically natural (p.14; see Martin, 2020 and Cohen, 2018). Guanio-Uluru notes that '[t]he pattern of double identities and deceptive appearances' exists in the texts 'on a symbolic level, through the prominence of the archetype of the shape-shifter; an archetype commonly associated with Satan, daemons and shadows' (2015, p.125). Some examples in the texts of physical transformations being represented in these terms include unregistered and therefore unsanctioned Animagi,

werewolves, Boggarts (shapeshifting magical creatures that take the form of a person's worst fear), and experimental/Dark Magic.

Acceptable forms of transformation include the natural process of ageing, although interestingly, Hermione Granger is not condemned for undergoing cosmetic surgery to make her teeth smaller (*GoF*, p.342). Also acceptable is the development of certain magical/biological trends in magical families, such as Metamorphmagi (wizards and witches such as Nymphadora Tonks who naturally develop the ability to change their facial features at will). Tonks is a public servant, working for the Ministry of Magic as a Dark wizard catcher (*OotP*, p.48). Her ability to change her features naturally can therefore be seen as an important tool in her armoury to keep the Magical community safe, and she also has a default appearance, that is, an ability to re-assume a recognisable form when she is not working undercover.

More ambivalent are the Animagi: those who develop, through learning and practice, the magical skill of transforming into an animal alias. Animagi are regulated by the Ministry of Magic and required to register their status for monitoring purposes (*PoA*, p.351), which might suggest that transforming into an animal is potentially bad or dangerous, but permissible if used correctly. It is also worth noting that transformation is assumed not to be permanent. For much of *PoA*, Sirius Black, an unregistered Animagus, presents as an apparently aggressive dog that is also mistakenly marked out as a 'Death Omen' known as a 'Grim' (*PoA*, p.107). For the majority of that novel, the reader is led to believe that Sirius betrayed Harry's parents and murdered their friend.

We learn at the end of the novel, when Sirius has transformed back into a man, that it was actually the 'murdered' friend, Peter Pettigrew, who framed Sirius for his death after betraying Harry's parents (*PoA*, p.374). While the world believed him murdered, Pettigrew

lived as Ron Weasley's pet rat, using his status as another unregistered Animagus to conceal his identity. Sirius, therefore, uses his ability to transform as a disguise, one which continues to be valuable in later novels in order to protect Harry. Pettigrew, on the other hand, lived in rat form to perpetrate a fraud. Both, however, use their animal form to evade capture by the authorities, and this creates a level of moral ambiguity for both characters which links back to their status as *unregistered* Animagi.

Werewolves, such as the vicious Fenrir Greyback, are mostly followers of Voldemort and represented as a 'breed of villains who enjoy cruelty' (Pesold, 2017, p.240). Pugh & Wallace (2006, p.268) argue that Werewolves cannot 'serve as suitable figures of queerness' because 'lycanthropy cannot be imagined as a positive force', families 'would not choose to have a werewolf in their households' because they are a threat to the family, and to children specifically. I take issue with this analysis insofar as I am not convinced that werewolves *cannot*, or even *should* not, be represented positively. Broadly speaking, they are represented as much-maligned, dangerous monsters in television, literature and film, but this is not to say that they must be represented in this way. However, with the exception of the character, Remis Lupin – whom I will discuss in a moment – the Potter series largely reinforces negative representations of werewolves as blood-hungry, dangerous, and, in the case of Greyback, overcome with perverted, monstrous desires. With Greyback, Vestic argues that 'Rowling does not only denigrate the oppressed queer figure of the werewolf to pederasty, but also connects his '"urges" to murder' (2018, p.171). Pugh & Wallace similarly identify Greyback as a pederast who 'delights in…preying on children' (2006, p.268).

Remus Lupin, a teacher and mentor of Harry's, is revealed as a werewolf in *PoA*. As far as one can see, Lupin is the only 'good' werewolf – an exception to the rule. He is sanctioned because he manages his 'condition' effectively and takes active steps not to harm others. He

also, like Sirius, forms a key part of Harry's protection team at various points in the series. Whilst he suffers poverty ('his robes were more patched and shabbier than ever', *OotP*, p.43) and considerable discrimination ('parents…will not want a werewolf teaching their children', *PoA*, p.423), he is broadly a sanctioned deviant. Dumbledore allows him to teach at Hogwarts and he plays a role in Harry's protection against Voldemort. He is himself protected by the Wolfsbane Potion, which acts to reduce his aggressive, beastly urges: '[i]t makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform' (*PoA*, p.352).

PoA offers a further illustration of this broadly negative association with transformations that are deemed to be unnatural and troubling. When tackling Boggarts in a Defence Against the Dark Arts class, the reader is informed that the most effective defence against a Boggart is laughter, and students in the class are encouraged to imagine their worst fear in an amusing situation and then laugh it into disappearance. A Boggart is constantly transforming in response to the deepest fear of person closest to it and has no ultimately recognisable shape of its own (*PoA*, p.133). It is unsanctioned (the primary goal of the class is to get rid of the Boggart (*PoA*, p.138)) and it does not have a 'natural' form like the Matamorphmagi or Animagi, therefore it is perhaps the ultimate example of the negative connotations ascribed to transformation in the texts. When a number of people stand close together, it is forced to transform repeatedly until someone casts the spell '*Riddikulus'* and laughs at it, causing it to disappear (*PoA*, p.133-4). This extends the negative connotation: from the point at which one can recognise its form as 'ridiculous', one can nullify its threat.

Experimental magic, such as Polyjuice Potion (where the drinker places in the potion a hair of the person they wish to transform into), is a specific example of the risks both to personal safety and the safety of others that physical transformation brings in the texts. In

CoS, Harry, Ron and Hermione make the potion in order to spy on Draco Malfoy, whom they believe has opened the Chamber of Secrets and unleashed its monster on Hogwarts. While making the potion using instructions from a book, Harry notices that the page is 'decorated with drawings of people halfway through transforming into other people' and 'sincerely hoped the artist had imagined the looks of intense pain on their faces' (*CoS*, p.173). The potion is also used by the Death Eater Barty Crouch Jnr in *GoF* to trick Harry and Dumbledore into believing that he is Dumbledore's old friend and Dark wizard catcher, Alastor Moody, in order to deliver Harry to Voldemort (*GoF*, p.573-4). The transgression by Crouch Jnr is particularly bad because he uses it permanently for a year to steal Moody's identity whilst also enslaving him. Again, there is a suggestion here that permanent transformation that involves a change in identity is what makes this transgression particularly troubling. Crouch's punishment, incidentally, is to have his soul sucked out through his mouth (*GoF*, p.591).

I have described these episodes to place the representation of Tom Riddle's transformation into Lord Voldemort in the wider context of the texts. His decision to experiment with magic portrayed as 'Dark', and the depiction of his physical transformation as queer in the sense of it alluding to the uncanny, is largely consistent with the broader representation of 'unnatural' transformation and 'shapeshifting' in the texts. I will now explore that transformation in more detail.

Tom Riddle's transition to Lord Voldemort

Voldemort undergoes a period of radical and, I argue, queer change. In *CoS* we learn via Dumbledore that Voldemort underwent 'dangerous, magical transformations' earlier in his life to the point that he became 'barely recognisable' (*CoS*, p.347). In *HBP* and *DH* we are able

to place this transformation in the chronology of the Potter texts somewhere between his last years at Hogwarts (when he is around 15-17 years old) and a point after leaving Hogwarts but before losing his body in his attack on baby Harry. Roughly calculated, that is a period of between 35 and 40 years. During this period of transition, the texts document an irreversible, ongoing change in Voldemort's personal identity, his physical appearance, and his emotions.

These changes can be read as interconnected and demonstrative of a queer turn in Voldemort's character toward his unnatural pursuit of immortality by creating a series of Horcruxes, which are fragments of his soul encased in inanimate, but often personally or magically significant, objects. This transformation from a mortal to an immortal body also expresses a rejection of love, procreation, and the nuclear family. It is during this period that he makes the transition from human to monster. In the sections that follow, I examine these changes to Voldemort's identity, bodily appearance, and emotions and highlight the ways in which his queer transformation is represented as a mirror to his depravity. Before this, however, I want to specifically examine the nature of Horcruxes vis-à-vis their transformational effects on Voldemort's physical body.

Horcruxes are highly significant both to the representation of Voldemort's character and the series' central plot. I do not intend to undertake a philosophical analysis of Horcruxes and Rowling's representation of the soul in the texts; this has been done well elsewhere (Guanio-Uluru, 2015; and Sehon, 2010). I am interested instead in the specific effects of their magic on Voldemort's body. In *HBP* Professor Slughorn explains that 'a Horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul' (*HBP*, p.406) so that 'even if one's body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged' (p.406). Slughorn adds that to create a Horcrux requires murder, 'the supreme

act of evil', which rips the soul apart (p.406). The person wishing to create a Horcrux can then encase the fragment in an object via a spell (p.406), and the process of doing this seems to cause the transformation of the murderer's physical body.

As mentioned in the literature review (p.13), critics are agreed that Voldemort's pursuit of immortality is represented as unnatural. Horcruxes can be said to act as a vehicle for the message that seeking to use magic to defeat death is unnatural and undesirable, and that the consequences of doing so are dire. Martin argues that 'Rowling borrows from Gothic…the convention of showing in the villain's face and body the effects of his malignity', contending further that 'this is a jaded convention which is now being contested' (2020, p.218). While it is never made clear how the making of a Horcrux causes physical transformation, it is clear that it does (Martin, 2017, p.4), and the grotesqueness of the transformation can be read as the narrative punishment for that act.

Voldemort encases six fragments of his soul in magical heirlooms and artefacts, including a locket, a diary, a cup, a tiara, and within the body (or soul?) of his snake companion, Nagini. He also unwittingly deposits a seventh fragment of his soul within Harry when he attacks Harry and the curse rebounds upon him. It is not obvious what each individual Horcrux does to Voldemort's physiology and psyche, only that the cumulative end product of creating six Horcruxes is a monstrously altered physical appearance that causes children to run away at the sight of him (*DH*, p.280) and results in a dangerously unstable existence. Hermione draws attention to the fact that ripping the soul makes it inherently unstable (*DH*, p.82). However, all murderers in the texts are not physically grotesque or subject to transformation, which suggests that it is the act of creating Horcruxes rather than the act of murder that causes the transformation.

Likewise, when Voldemort is without a body to possess or call his own (which he is for at least eleven years), there is no certainty in the form he takes (Martin, 2017, p.6). He is described in *GoF* as having been 'reduced to something barely alive' (p.17), as 'less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost' (p.549). This representation, an undefined type of malevolent force, defies categorisation but suggests that Voldemort remains sentient without a body and can continue to undertake particular actions, such as possessing another's body. This, in turn, seems to offer a further indication that Voldemort's magical transformations have made him something other than human. It is not clear what his corporeal state is at this point, which creates a challenge for the reader in how to comprehend him. There is no stable corporeal figure to hold in the mind's eye and it is left to reader interpretation; he seems to consist only of his soul. As a child reading the series, I imagined Voldemort as a swirling black mist, which is similar to his portrayal at points in the film adaptations of the series (as in the aftermath of the battle for the Stone, see Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone, 2001, 02:08:00 – 02:08:25). Visualising him in this way signifies that he is as monstrous without a body as he is with one.

Rowling composes a narrative of deviance around the pursuit of immortality and the Horcrux is tenuous as a plot device. This mechanism that causes the body to transform in a grotesque way is not merely uncanny, it is also threatening and therefore abject, the reader is invited to see in the Horcrux 'defilement, taboo' and 'sin' (Kristeva, p.48, emphasis removed). Yet the reasons why only murder and obscure Dark Magic can lay the path for scientific progress in the quest for prolonging life is never addressed. Guanio-Uluru's assessment that 'the chief ambition of evil in the series is to avoid physical death' (2015, p.97) supports the reading that seeking immortality is unethical and explains why it falls within the realms of Dark Magic in the series (or the realm of rare, morally ambiguous, experimental

magic in the case of the Philosopher's Stone). This would also seem to explain the symbolic

nature of the changes to Voldemort's appearance: we can read it as a caution against, or

narrative punishment for, altering the self and pursuing ends deemed to be selfish and

unnatural.

Gibbons discusses the symbolism of the phoenix in the Potter series, highlighting that

the 'myth of the phoenix' represents 'cultural renewal, resurrection, and the cycle of death'

(2006, p.85), stressing the differences between the phoenix's perpetual life cycle and

Voldemort's pursuit of immortality. The phoenix – with its symbolic representation of life,

death and renewal – exemplifies a form of sanctioned transformation because it is biologically

natural for them be reborn. When viewed against Voldemort's unnatural transformation, he

is 'the ultimate corrupter, willing to destroy purity…even to have a half-life, a mere chance at

rebirth and immortality' (Gibbons, 2006, p.88). Fawkes, Dumbledore's pet phoenix, protects

children and fights monsters (see *CoS*, p.336). Rebirth is unambiguously part of his nature.

Horcruxes are 'a reversal of the natural…order' (Gibbons, 2006, p.88), and Voldemort kills

children and deploys monsters in the service of pursuing immortality.

Gibbons' discussion of the topic also seems to advocate that the pursuit of longer life

is unethical, arguing that 'Western society is utterly youth-driven. Obsessed with staying

younger longer and compelled to maintain the appearance of youth even when the essence

of it has gone' (2006, p.89). The suggestion here is that people 'may have more in common

with Voldemort than they might like to believe' (p.89). Yet must this be an indictment, in and

of itself? There is a sense in which living an immortal life would be the ultimate expression of

the queer time and queer space that Halberstam describes. Hallab, writing on vampires in

Western culture, argues that the 'vampire stands for the impossible 'what if': 'what if I do not

have to die'' (2009, p.49); indeed, she states that it is a natural human desire to avoid death

(p.65). Hallab also quotes Jamieson's essay 'Longevity as Class Struggle', in which he criticises 'the insistence of so many writers on the subject [of immortality] that it would be evil to live forever, that true human existence requires a consent to mortality' (quoted in Hallab, 2009, p.31). Voldemort is not afforded narrative agency in the series to explore the magic/science of immortal life in a way that is progressive rather than destructive. Instead, as Taliaferro notes, Voldemort is constructed as a character who 'spreads death by clinging to life' (2010, p.231). The result is that he undergoes a change of identity which further renders him an outsider, a physical transformation that repulses everyone around him, and an emotional transformation that categorises him as unstable.

Identity transition

The transition period in Voldemort's life sees him decisively reject his family name (Riddle) and his father's first name (Tom). He does, however, replace his full name – Tom Marvolo Riddle – with an anagram of that name: 'I am Lord Voldemort' (*CoS*, p.331), which in itself can be read as a metaphor for fragmentation. After leaving Hogwarts, Voldemort makes clear that he wishes to be known by this new name. Dumbledore shares with Harry a memory of Voldemort a few years after he leaves Hogwarts in which Voldemort says: 'they do not call me "Tom" anymore', and when he begins to say his preferred name, Dumbledore cuts him off and replies 'to me, I'm afraid, you will always be Tom Riddle' (*HBP*, p.362). This represents

an example both of Voldemort's desire to change his identity and an unwillingness from a former senior teacher and caregiver to accept this; thus, the possibility for discussion and understanding is foreclosed.

Since Voldemort clearly inhabits his new name and rejects the name 'Tom Riddle', it is not too much of a stretch to compare Dumbledore's refusal to the practice of 'deadnaming', a term that Sinclair-Palm describes as 'calling a trans person by their birth name after they have adopted a new name' (2017, p.5). Dumbledore does this with Voldemort at a number of different points. As uncomfortable as it might seem to consider things from Voldemort's perspective, it is useful to consider the comparison in this context specifically: '[t]rans youth often describe their birth name(s) as only part of their past, and yet those names often arise in their life in unanticipated and unwelcome ways' (2017, p.5). Voldemort was abandoned by his father and grew up in an orphanage, so it is not surprising that the name is unwelcome. Yet the texts offer little sympathy for Voldemort and his character is developed in such a way that to give sympathy would feel somewhat perverse.

This period of transition also marks the point in his life during which Voldemort begins committing murder, presumably to the end of creating Horcruxes in order to achieve immortality. This is clearly on Tom Riddle's mind in his later years at Hogwarts given that he presses Professor Slughorn on how many Horcruxes a person could make in theory: '[c]an you only split your soul once? Wouldn't it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces…isn't seven the most powerfully magical number' (*HBP*, p.407). This demonstrates that he has already thought a great deal about the practicalities of this kind of magic and committing murder seems to begin the period of transition from the young Tom Riddle into the murderous adult Lord Voldemort.

At the end of *CoS*, Dumbledore offers Harry an interesting insight into Voldemort's process of transformation as he sees it, saying: '[h]ardly anyone connected Lord Voldemort with the clever, handsome boy who was once Head Boy here' (CoS, p.347). Here Dumbledore distinguishes between two people, and two bodies: Tom Riddle, the handsome boy; Lord Voldemort, the grotesque adult. This is one of several points in the texts where the reader might note that as Voldemort becomes more and more evil, he also becomes more physically wretched and monstrous. During his period of transition, Voldemort begins to inhabit what Oswald – writing of the monster, Grendel, in *Beowulf* – describes as 'the borderlands', a space denoting both social isolation and 'the murky boundaries between the human and the non-human' (2010, p.70).

This process of physical change is documented in Dumbledore's memories in *HBP*. Whilst working in a shop specialising in Dark artefacts shortly after leaving Hogwarts, Voldemort is still described as 'handsome Tom Riddle', but the reader can observe the subtle changes that marked Voldemort's period of physical transition. When visiting a wealthy, elderly woman who owns two antiques which belonged to two Hogwarts founders (which Voldemort will later turn into Horcruxes), he is described in Dumbledore's memory as having 'a red gleam in his dark eyes' (*HBP*, p.357). In the memory in which Dumbledore receives Voldemort in his office, we are given Harry's perspective on his progressively altered appearance:

> [h]e was no longer handsome Tom Riddle. It was as though his features had been
> burned and blurred; they were waxy and oddly distorted, and the whites of the

eyes now had a permanently bloody look, though the pupils were not yet the slits

Harry knew they would become…and his face was as pale as the snow glistening

on his shoulders (*HBP*, p.361).

Here we have specific reference to lack. Voldemort is no longer 'handsome', and his physicality is diminished by the adjectives 'burned' and 'blurred'; he has arrived in a middle space between Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort, between man and monster. As Fenske highlights, 'the once handsome man becomes a mutilated villain' (2006, p.178).

As Oswald notes, 'excessive bodies transgress codes of gender and merit acts of erasure designed to delimit their threats to established social patters of sex, gender and sexuality' (2010, p.113). Voldemort becomes what Tyler, writing on monstrosity in popular culture, describes as a 'moral monster', his 'imperfect nature' demonstrated by the fact that he 'acts on these deviant impulses' (2008, p.124), not just to murder, but to damage his soul and transform his physical appearance. He comes to embody what Halberstamm describes as 'foreign physiognom[y]' (2018, p.110); he is unnaturally pale, unnaturally tall, has red eyes and resembles a serpent, it is a non-reversible shift to animal form. To re-purpose Halberstamm's analysis for the Potter texts, Rowling might be said to have made monstrosity 'a physical condition' (p.110), and I argue that this can be read as a punishment for his 'non-reproductive sexuality' (p.112) if we read his transformation as a rejection of, or resistance to, heteronormative, neoliberal ideas.

Extending this idea further, we might read Voldemort's transformation as a warning against physical transformation and a challenge to trans bodies. At the very least, it is possible to read this period of transition in Voldemort's life as the starting point for his physical appearance distorting and becoming grotesque as his actions become more and more evil. Furthermore, this transition weakens his position in heteronormative society, and he

becomes less credible as a human, male subject. Post-transformation, Voldemort describes himself as 'much, much more than a man' (*GoF*, p.12). Whilst this is a boastful proclamation of belief in his own power and transcendency, for the reader it is a chilling nod to his fundamental lack of intelligibility as a human man; and his intelligibility decreases the more he engages with Dark Magic and magical transformation.

Emotional Stability

Tom Riddle's transformation into Lord Voldemort is also characterised by a change in his emotional stability, something that becomes more marked the more physically and emotionally damaged he becomes (Smith & Smith, 2012, p,132). His transition is marked by increasingly irrational behaviour and an inability to conceal or control his emotions as effectively as he did when he was Tom Riddle. He displays a lack of emotional control when Dumbledore refuses his request to allow him to teach at Hogwarts. In this moment, Voldemort 'looked less like Tom Riddle than ever, his features thick with rage' (HBP, p.365), he loses his composure and is unable to mask his anger in the way that Tom Riddle – it is insinuated – might have done. This lack of emotional control becomes a core feature of Voldemort's behaviour in the texts as his body and soul become increasingly unstable.

As shown in the previous chapter, as a child, and before his magical transformation, Tom Riddle's character is more representative of a will towards masculine domination. Riddle was more emotionally controlled and effectively able to conceal his violent and aggressive behaviour. Whilst his reputation at the orphanage is clearly impacted by his behaviour – he is found, at the least, to be a thief – he suffers no consequences for more insidious and violent acts that cannot be definitively attributed to him or even be proven to have happened. For

instance, another child's rabbit is hung from the rafters at the orphanage (*HBP*, p.221) and it is implied that an assault of some kind is perpetrated on a girl and a boy in a cave during an orphanage trip to the seaside (*HBP*, p.222). He exudes cold detachment until Dumbledore goads him into an emotional response by appearing to set fire to all of Riddle's possessions in order to force him to admit that he has stolen items from other children at the orphanage, but he otherwise escapes punishment.

As he transforms into the wretched Lord Voldemort, he is no longer able to convince that he is neither evil nor unstable, for his evil, his difference, is made plain in both his appearance and his behaviour. Through the Dark magical process of splitting his soul and transforming his body, Voldemort moves to the margins inhabited by society's monsters, namely, those living queer lives. Stryker (1994) and Koch-Rein (2019) offer readings of the life of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as comparable to that of a trans person's lived experience. Koch-Rein argues that it is possible to 'see the transgender figure in the monster', and notes that Shelley's monster 'is made and not born' which 'resonates with conflicts about authenticity surrounding transgender claims to gender and the surgically modified body' (2019, p.49). Whilst Voldemort transforms himself and acts of his own will in the texts to change his nature and experiment with magic – and is thus not like Frankenstein's monster in this regard – Rowling has nonetheless chosen a destructive path for her transforming, ultimately self-mutilating, antagonist. Susan Stryker's writing on her personal experience of what she terms 'transgender rage' is also interesting here:

> the transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It
> is a technological construction…I find a deep affinity between myself as a
> transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the
> monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of

my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I struggle to exist (1994, p.238).

If we replaced the word 'transsexual' with 'transformed', and the word medical with 'magical' in Stryker's quote, we might just as easily be writing about Voldemort. His transformation is a threefold, interconnected thing, altering his identity, his physical appearance, and his emotional behaviour. His transformation is a transition, from an unambiguous, male boy (Tom Riddle), to a queer, monstrous being who seems to exist on a spectrum between human and animal (Lord Voldemort), a being with a fragmented soul whose life's work is the pursuit of twin queer desires: to achieve immortality for himself and to contrive to kill a child whom he believes stands in the way of that goal.

Voldemort's period of transformation ends when he attacks baby Harry and his curse rebounds, destroying his body and leaving him searching for alternatives. In the next chapter, I examine the ways in which Voldemort, with his soul irreparably fragmented, is only able to exist again in a body of his own when that body is created by queer (unnatural) means, defying biological processes of sexual reproduction and human physiological development. Voldemort's new body can be read as an increasingly unstable and unintelligible drag performance by a being whose status as a human subject is now contestable. This performance, in turn, becomes incrementally more untenable until Voldemort – with his queer identity, body, and fragmented soul – is finally destroyed.

Chapter 3

Sex, Drag, and Emasculation

In chapter one, I argued against the critical assertion that Voldemort's character exemplifies

masculine domination. His character instead exhibits attributes of masculine domination in

two situations: when he is a child (before his physical transformation); and when he is without a body of his own and needs to possess that of another in order to achieve physical intelligibility. These conditions problematise the claim that Voldemort is an archetypal, patriarchal villain and opens up possibilities for reading his character as pejoratively queer. As a result of Voldemort's complex, dangerous period of magical transformation (highlighted in chapter two), he transitions from a handsome, dark-haired boy with aristocratic charm into an apparently hairless, skeletal creature with unnaturally pale skin, serpentine facial features and red eyes. His body has taken on a queer physical appearance to mirror his queer desire for immortality, which he pursues by committing murder and splitting his soul.

In this chapter I examine Voldemort's return to an independent body, with a close analysis of his 'rebirth' in *GoF.* I offer a case for reading Voldemort's rebirth ritual as a pejorative representation of queerness portrayed through the subversion of biological sex roles in the ritual. After this rebirth, and as a result of the cumulative impact of his various transformations, Voldemort's status as human is in question as his body becomes even more unstable. I argue that his character at this point can provocatively be read as a drag performance – that is to say, an unintelligible creature masquerading as human (poorly). I also argue that the texts signpost the reader to regard Voldemort's body as queer not just through its grotesque appearance, but also through an implied pattern of queered gender expressions. All of this ultimately leads to a failure of what I call 'magical virility', whereby Voldemort's magic and his body fail him and he is destroyed by Harry, who has become more powerful than him by virtue of his close adherence to pro-natalist, heteronormative, and neoliberal ideals.

Three men and a baby: Rebirth and transgressing sex categories in GoF

Voldemort has two 'rebirths' in *GoF*, both of which result in changes to his physical form. First, from an apparently formless spirit he assumes the terrifying physical likeness of an infant child. Second, he transforms out of this weak, dependent physicality and assumes the terrifying physical likeness of an adult man. The chapter 'Flesh, Blood and Bone' (p.535), in which the latter takes place in *GoF,* offers rich rewards for an analysis of the representation of queerness as pejorative in the Potter texts. A close reading reveals the threat posed by a queer life and a queer body to the heteronormative social order. A Dark magical ritual (Martin, 2017, p.6) is performed using various body parts or fluids from three males (two men and one boy), the infant-like Voldemort is dumped into a cauldron full of boiling water, the three 'samples' from the men are added to the cauldron, words are chanted, and out steps adult-like Voldemort, with full, independent physical capabilities.

At the start of 'Flesh, Blood and Bone' Voldemort has a child-like physicality (*GoF*, p.538). Any similarities with a child or an infant, though, relate merely to Voldemort's size and physical capability. His appearance is deeply disturbing: 'It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone, and revealed something ugly, slimy and blind – but worse, a hundred times worse' (p.538). Distance is placed between what a child is and what this creature is: 'Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black (p.538). Readers are primed to see Voldemort in the guise of a child in order to make clear that he couldn't be further from what their expectations of a child might be. Children are not slimy unless they are new born; when one flips over a stone one expects to find worms and crawling things. The image created here is one of startling otherness, a monstrous body which represents a 'gross failure to approximate to corporeal norms' (Shildrick, 2002, p.12).

Voldemort resembles a child as a result of his extreme experiments with Dark Magic, but this is a child in physical form only. The imbalance of a powerful adult consciousness in a childlike body creates a powerful sense of the uncanny. Voldemort is fully conscious and in possession of his intellect and magical powers, issuing instructions to his servant, Wormtail, throughout the chapter (e.g. '*Kill the spare'*, p.536, italicised in text). Indeed, *GoF* begins with Voldemort killing a man whilst assuming this form (p.13). We learn later that this body is an interim, 'rudimentary' vessel that has been generated by a combination of: 'a spell or two of my own invention…a little help from my dear Nagini…a potion concocted from unicorn blood' and he was 'soon returned to an almost human form' (p.552). Again, there is a clear invitation here for the reader to respond with revulsion to the idea of being sustained by snake milk (snakes do not produce milk), the blood of an innocent magical creature, as well as by invented (and thus unsanctioned) magic.

It is an abject state brought on by abject methods, and 'abjection', write Koenig-Woodyard *et al.*, 'elicits a human reaction of horror and fear' (2018, p.12). The portrayal of a human subject sustaining themselves in this way, they argue, repeatedly transgressing the natural line between life and death, might induce a kind of 'cosmic terror' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.335). Although Bakhtin refers to cosmic terror as that which highlights the 'impotence' of human kind 'in the presence of nature' (p.336), it might also include fear of 'the collapse of social order' (Koenig-Woodyard 2018, p.14). In this case, natural barriers and borders have been breached by Voldemort in a way previously unseen in the magical world, which allow Voldemort to regenerate from a formless state. This in turn, might be said to confront the reader with 'the fear of the immeasurable' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.335), an aspect of cosmic terror, inviting them to disavow him as a threat to the social order.

Whilst the reader might be confronted with the immeasurable in Voldemort, any notion that he might also be 'infinitely powerful' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.335) is undermined by the fact that he remains weak and dependent in this child-like state. He seems to require almost constant care from Wormtail: 'how am I to survive without you, when I need feeding every few hours?' (p.8). Despite his capacity to terrify, his power is fragile. He requires a perverse form of maternal care involving frequent provision of things he is unable to obtain for himself in order to sustain him in this interim state. This parody of the mother-child relationship – a troubling, queer, model of care – emphasises Voldemort's experiences as a child without the love of a mother and thereby also supports the series' ongoing commitment to heteronormative models of parental care.

In 'Flesh, Blood and Bone', Voldemort's ultimate goal of regaining full adult physical form is realised. The site of the ritual, and the way in which it is framed, signals a troubling subversion of the norms of human conception and natural body development. Harry sees 'a gigantic snake slithering through the grass, circling the headstone where he was tied' (p.538) and 'a stone cauldron…full of what seemed to be water' which was 'slopping around…larger than any cauldron Harry had ever used; a great stone belly large enough for a full-grown man to sit in' (p.538). The cauldron is one of several images of artificial wombs and 'mock pregnanc[ies]' (Vestic, 2018, p.177) constructed in the texts. In this case the largeness, and thus the strangeness of the cauldron/womb is emphasised through repetition – 'larger', 'great' 'enough for a full-grown man' – while 'stone' reinforces the artificiality of the cauldron as a womb. It is a queer artefact being engaged for a queer purpose, to provide the gestation space for a magically-assisted rebirth in which no mother (or woman) participates. Wormtail plays a dual role here: in conducting the ritual, he also takes on the role of midwife, guiding

the 'frail' Voldemort through the journey of rebirth. As the donator of a body part, deemed essential in Voldemort's rebirth, he also plays the role of one of the three 'fathers' in the rebirthing ritual.

Furthermore, Voldemort's mother died giving birth to him (see *GoF*, p.544), which invokes an image of trauma associated with the womb and an insinuation of his mother's inadequacy (see *HBP*, p.227, where Tom Riddle says that his mother 'can't have been magic, or she wouldn't have died'). Harry's mother, on the other hand, died saving him, invoking courage, maternal power, and safety. Voldemort's mother is an entirely absent figure in his life, whilst the phallic snake is a recurring motif, here 'slithering' about and guarding the ritual site with the cauldron at its centre, foreshadowing the conception of a 'new' Voldemort.

There is a theme of a non-consensual yielding of body parts and fluid in the ritual. First, bone dust taken from Voldemort's father's grave is added to the cauldron by Wormtail along with the incantation '*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son*' (*GoF*, p.539, italicised in text). Voldemort's father, who Voldemort murdered (see p.543), cannot give his consent and it is unlikely that he would do so were he able. Next, Wormtail cuts off his own hand and adds this to the cauldron: '*Flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive – your master*' (p.539, italicised in text). Wormtail's words are at odds with his feelings and he could be said to be acting under duress. Unsurprisingly, he is 'frightened beyond his wits' and is 'whimpering' (p.539), and there is a sense that whatever he might say, he may, like Harry, privately be hoping that the ritual is unsuccessful. Finally, Harry is forced to provide his blood for the magical ritual to restore Voldemort: '*B-blood of the enemy…forcibly taken…you will…resurrect your foe*' (p.540, italicised in text). Harry has been transported to the ritual site against his will, dragged along and then tied to a headstone and

gagged (p.537). He 'could do nothing to prevent it' as he feels the point of a dagger 'penetrate the crook of his right arm' (p.540).

The strangeness of the entire ritual is striking, and the premise requires an extraordinary suspension of disbelief even for children's fantasy. A macabre process of transubstantiation is initiated whereby the bone of a dead man, the flesh of a living man, and the blood of an innocent boy are mixed together under an incantation, aided by fire, water, and a false womb, to turn a child-like creature with little physical strength into an adult-like creature with apparently normal human strength. By means of the ritual, this evil creature is reborn of three fathers, all unwilling: one is acting under duress (although he professes willing), one is dead, and one is a child.

The 'rebirth' thus constitutes the latest in a line of violations of natural law. The process reinforces Voldemort's inherent queerness. Queer by circumstance, he is conceived in a non-consensual marriage, 'abandoned' by his parents, raised in an orphanage, not properly guided at school. Queer by choice, he pursues immortality, changes identity, rejects heteronormative family life, refuses to die, and is reborn to three men via Dark Magic. The ritual disrupts norms of biological sex and intercourse and produces something evil and threatening. As Smith & Smith argue, Voldemort's priority is reproducing himself to avoid death, rather than producing offspring:

> Voldemort's acts of reproduction are unlike those of other humans: he does not direct sexual desire toward another person and he does not seek the generation of a person with a distinct, although related soul. The egoism of Voldemort will not allow him to join himself with another person in the act of reproduction—his

reproduction must be asexual, rather than sexual, and thus magical, rather than biological (2012, p.131).[5]

It is in this way that Voldemort is 'a compelling figure of queerness' (Vestic, 2018, p.174), but it is a pejorative queerness; as he carves out 'an alternative to the heteronormative way of life' he is marked 'as worse than a 'usual evil'' (p.182). The ritual is about as clear a signal as the reader is given of Voldemort trespassing norms. The making of a new/alternative body to the one he was born with (the first time) is not something he should 'naturally' have been able to do, and the manner in which he achieves this body invites fear and disgust.

Voldemort's drag performance

Immediately after Voldemort's rebirth, the reader is given a description of the figure Harry sees before him: '[w]hiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils' (*GoF*, p.541); '[h]is hands were like large, pale spiders' his eyes are red, gleaming 'like a cat's', his pupils 'like slits' (*GoF*, p.542). Whilst Voldemort has, presumably, assumed the appearance he held immediately before he first fell 13 years previously, this is the first time that the reader is given a detailed description of what someone sees when they look directly at him post-transformation. The description is of a face more animal than human, or of something more sinister and other-worldly. Harrison claims that the Potter 'corpus' can be seen as 'posthumanist in the way it frequently disrupts any stable sense of the "human" as an ontological category' (2018, p.327), but this is problematic.

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[5] The stage play, *The Cursed Child* (2016) problematizes this reading for the franchise, but the reading is unproblematic when simply considering the original series of *Potter* novels.

Whilst Harrison is correct that 'animals, humans and objects frequently morph and blend into one another' (p.327) this ignores the clear line between sanctioned and unsanctioned transformations in the texts, and the pejorative depiction of unsanctioned (unnatural) transformation.

I argue instead that Voldemort is presented to us a pejorative drag performance, whereby he comes to imitate a human he can no longer claim to be. His status as a human is in question given that his intelligibility as a human subject has been blurred and warped. His transgressive, queer body invites the reader to question his humanity through these references to his animalistic appearance; they are even invited to question his intelligibility as a sexed subject after his bizarre regeneration in the rebirthing ritual. Writing specifically on gender, Butler argues that 'drag' might be viewed as a subversive, self-aware performance or act of imitation that 'implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (2002, p.175, emphasis removed from original).

The subversive *possibility* of drag is to expose the ways in which social structures, such as masculine domination for example, rely upon and reinforce the performance of gender as something natural, fixed, and biologically determined (Butler, 2002, p.xxii). However, the term 'may well be used in the service of both the denaturalisation and the reidealisation of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms' and it might at best be seen as 'a site of certain ambivalence' in which one is 'implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes' (Butler, 2014, p.125). In my reading of Voldemort's character, drag does not offer the possibility of liberation through the exposure of performativity; rather, it consigns Voldemort to the category of unacceptable, unsanctioned queerness that is exposed through his grotesque appearance. His queer transformations, his rebirth, and his resulting appearance mark a failure to pass as human and mark him as abject.

Having first fragmented and then decanted his soul into containers, Voldemort forgets what it means to be human, which is perhaps best exemplified by his failure to notice that the fragments are being hunted and destroyed (*DH*, p.447). His accumulation of transgressions and violations distance him from the rest of humanity (beyond the 'usual evil' (*HBP*, p409)), and he becomes unable to 'pass' as a normal man in magical society. Despite his magical power, he is destined to operate in the shadows (*DH*, p.361) until he is destroyed. He is exposed by Harry as an imitation of a human adult when Harry tells Dumbledore and other members of the Order what he saw in the graveyard during Voldemort's rebirth. When read in this way, Voldemort's character can be seen to reinforce the cultural supremacy of heteronormative identity and the undesirability of queer desire (immortality, ambivalence towards the nuclear family) by marking him as queer through his appearance and exposing him as a monster imitating a man. His character is punished for pursuing his version of what Halberstamm refers to as 'imaginative life schedules' (2005, p.1): the radical possibility of different ways of living that are opened up by imagining (and celebrating) queer time and queer space.

Beyond this inducement to question Voldemort's intelligibility and human corporeality, there is also a subtle, gendered, pattern to the words and phrases used to describe Voldemort after he has undergone magical transformation, but in particular after he is reborn in *GoF*. The reader is first introduced to Voldemort via a vague memory of Harry's, one in which he recalls a 'high, cold…laugh' (*PS,* p.55). This is the only real piece of information we are given about Voldemort's physical appearance for much of *PS*. The repetition in the later texts of some variation of 'high, cold laugh' when referring to Voldemort represents overt signalling. Fenske highlights Rowling's use of 'evaluating adjectives' in the texts, observing that these serve to 'guide her readers' sympathies' (2006, p.151), and asserts that

the adjectives used to describe how Voldemort uses his voice to express emotion serve to make him sound 'menacing' (p.179).

Yet it is unclear what is menacing about a high-pitched voice, or what character and tone render it 'cold'. I suggest that this description rather conveys that the way Voldemort expresses himself is unmanly and thus, queer and threatening to heteronormative expectations of gendered behaviour. When a young, physically untransformed Tom Riddle produces a high, cold laugh in *CoS*, the reader is informed that it doesn't 'suit him' (p.326). At this point Tom is presenting as an attractive, teenaged male, and the claim of a mismatch confirms that the laugh has associations that run counter to conventional masculinity.

The timbre of Voldemort's laugh is the subject of another memory (or nightmare) that Harry has about him in *PoA*, here described as 'shrill' (p.179). This quality to Voldemort's voice is evident when he is frustrated or when he is losing control, usually in the form of a 'shriek' (e.g. *GoF,* p.559 & 563). In this regard it might be read as a display of weakness; a lapse in expected male behaviour during which he becomes hysterical (and thus inappropriately feminine). The words 'shriek' or 'shrieked' appears twenty-eight times in *GoF*. In each case, the character shrieking is invariably one of the following: a group of girls shrieking in the presence of boys (p.327); a female character such as Aunt Petunia or Professor McGonagall attempting to assert authority in a situation that is becoming out of control (p.38 & 173 respectively), or Mrs Weasley shrieking at her unruly sons, Fred and George (p.59); or an animal or super/non-human creature such as the Veela (p.95), who are creatures with clear similarities to the mythical Ancient Greek harpy. The only men who shriek in the texts are evil, weak, or have lost control (Voldemort, Cornelius Fudge, and Snape respectively) and face emasculation in front of an audience. These subtle, gendered, references foreshadow

Voldemort's ultimate emasculation at the hands of Harry, who becomes a superior man during *DH*.

Emasculation and annihilation: the loss of magical virility and the destruction of the experimental queer body

The final period of Voldemort's life can be read as signalling a fairly straightforward failure of masculinity, but it can also be read as delivering narrative punishment for the transgression of norms and the pursuit of queer desires. Both readings are emasculating and othering; they invite focus on inadequacy and queerness respectively. The failure of Voldemort's Dark Magic is also a failure of magic *per se*, because Harry's victory over Voldemort is not a victory based upon his superior magical skill, but rather his superior heteronormative credentials. Similarly, the failure of Voldemort's Dark Magic results in a failure of his body and his audacious experimentation with dangerous and unnatural transformations.

During the course of *DH*, Voldemort is emasculated by what I term a loss of 'magical virility'. The failure of Voldemort's magic enables his subsequent destruction, with Harry ascending to the role of 'heteronormative hero' that Pugh & Wallace describe. Virility is often implied by symbols of physical power in fantasy writing and the medieval texts upon which they draw; Oswald writes of the 'virility' and the 'masculinity of the sword' (2010, p.99) in *Beowulf* to describe Beowulf's 'trouble with swords' and unstable 'phallic authority' (p.97). In the magical environment of the Potter series, the focus of power and its associated symbolism shift to the wand, and it is significant that Voldemort has trouble with wands undermining his phallic authority.

There are examples of this throughout the novel, with various wands failing in some way for Voldemort and preventing him from exerting power over others. At the beginning of

DH, Voldemort recognises that he cannot use his own wand to kill Harry because of the connection shared by their two wands (p.6). However, he is equally unsuccessful in using Lucius Malfoy's wand to kill Harry, not because of he lacks magical power but because of an unexpected protection that his own soul fragment in Harry creates. These issues represent the impotence of magical power in the face of powers Voldemort doesn't understand (p.607), and they also show him both actually and metaphorically in conflict with parts of himself.

His repeated failure to kill Harry ignites in Voldemort an obsession over the wand he believes he needs to achieve this, a similar 'fetishizing' (Alghamadi, 2018, p.72) of objects to his focus on Horcruxes as the means to secure his immortality. Thus, the struggle between them is discussed explicitly in terms of the potential strength of their wands: Harry is told that Voldemort 'seeks another, more powerful, wand, as the only way to conquer yours' (*DH*, p.404). The Elder Wand is introduced as this wand, though it is not clear how the potential of the wand interacts with the magical ability of the caster; instead, the text sets up a series of situations in which the wand can only be mastered by having been forcibly taken, or won, from the person to whom it previously owed allegiance. Voldemort is willing to kill Severus Snape, whom he believes is one of his most trusted followers, in order to appropriate its power. Yet some complex plot twists and Harry's own tendency to defeat others by taking their wands mean that the Elder Wand owes its allegiance to Harry, and therefore this 'conviction that the Elder wand would guarantee his supremacy' actually costs Voldemort his life (*Dorigato et al*, 2015, p.85).

This might be read as a sign that Voldemort continued to put his faith in the wrong things for wrong, queer ends, but it also shows his unwillingness to acknowledge the limitations of magic (Bhattacharya, 2012, para 13). Pursuing immortality and rejecting a conventional lifestyle leaves him with a euphemistic wand trouble. For Grimes, 'the phallic

imagery' of both Voldemort's and Harry's battles with wands 'is inescapable' (2002, p.113); while Carmeli equates the Elder Wand to 'a mark of Lacan's imaginary Phallus – a fiction of inconceivable power' (2009, p.28). At the end of *DH,* Harry's righteous ownership of the Elder Wand – which he has never held or cast – means that the balance of power transfers unassailably to him.

This shift is also visible in a change in the power dynamic inherent within the psychic connection between Voldemort and Harry. In earlier novels, Voldemort 'haunted' Harry's dreams (*GoF*, p.541) and is able to manipulate his mind with devastating consequences, as when he plants a false vision in Harry's mind in *OotP* (p.719-20). This is reversed in *DH*, with Harry now able to penetrate Voldemort's mind at will: 'He closed his eyes…and at once, the screams and the bangs and all the discordant sounds of the battle were drowned' (*DH*, p.523). Harry exudes control and purpose here; Voldemort's consciousness has always been present in the background, but for the first time Harry can choose the exact moment and terms of penetration. Voldemort is not only powerless to prevent it; he is unaware that Harry has entered his mind.

Earlier in the novel, there is an obliquely sexual reference to Harry having 'pulled out of Voldemort's mind' with 'enormous effort' and 'sweat pouring from his face' (p.471). 'Pulled out' suggests dominance and control which one might associate with the active partner in sexual penetration. The 'effort' and 'sweat' suggests that the act of pulling out is not easy, but Harry is beginning to master and consolidate his power over Voldemort; Voldemort is recast as the passive, submissive partner. This emasculation of Voldemort manifests as an inability to hold power over others and force their submission to his magical will by the end of the novel: 'Voldemort's silencing charms seemed unable to hold' (p.598). It sets up the final

battle, during which Harry explains that his willingness to sacrifice himself for his friends means that Voldemort can no longer harm them (p.604).

Voldemort's emasculation encompasses the failure of his Dark Magic, exposing it as a failed queer strategy for seeking omnipotence and immortality. The extent of this failure is made visible in physical form when Dumbledore and Harry encounter a desperate version of Voldemort in the ethereal afterlife version of King's Cross station. Voldemort appears without any agency as he 'flapped, flailed and struggled' (*DH*, p.576); he is 'a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking', who 'lay shuddering under a seat…unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath' (*DH*, p.577). According to Cohen, his body resembles a 'homunculus', an 'unnatural travesty of a human baby' representing 'arrested spiritual development and stunted moral growth', while Harry is 'human, whole, and complete' (2018, p.215). Despite Harry's instinct to assist the creature, 'it repulsed him' (*DH*, p.577), and Dumbledore tells him 'there is no help possible' (p.579).

This exchange establishes that the desperate creature is beyond help but does not establish exactly why; there may also be an implication that he does not 'deserve' help. Bhattacharya suggests that while Harry's 'celebrity status as a 'hero' is predicated upon his comfortingly identifiable mediocrity and conformity to social norm[s], Voldemort's radical, defiant testing of the limits of the Dark Arts to attain personal fame and glory' is cast as 'deviance' (2012, paragraph 13). Voldemort's portrayal as helpless and suffering is a demonstration that his deviance is now being punished. As Rothman explains, he is an 'infinitely suffering splinter of his former self, in a private hell of his own engineering' (2011, p.205).

One of the most provocative readings of Voldemort's character is Wolosky's assertion that Voldemort, in this state, represents 'the maimed, abandoned miscarriage of Voldemort's

fragmented soul, an unbirth – almost an abortion – yet also a revelation' of his depravity (2010, p.168). This sets it up as both the mirror and the retribution for the unnatural 'birth' that Voldemort underwent in order to regain a corporeal body; it is a punishment for his audacity in forcing himself into an unnatural, constructed physical form. For Guanio-Uluru, it demonstrates that 'the ultimate distinction between Harry and Voldemort, and thereby between good and evil, is visible in the soul: Voldemort's degenerated soul is fragmented and Harry's healthy soul is whole' (2015, p.115). However, it might also be understood as the most extreme expression of how the series portrays moral choices in physical terms, representing debased morality as a reversion to some kind of monstrous childhood.

Ultimately, it can be argued that the Potter series constructs queer spaces with queer characters simply to disavow them. Voldemort is depicted as 'a person incapable of knowing, recognising, [and] choosing good' (Rothman 2011, p.208); any insinuation that his soul can be healed or 'redeemed' is entirely foreclosed by Dumbledore ('you cannot help'), perhaps because Horcruxes are themselves 'unnatural acts of reproduction' (Smith & Smith, 2012, p.131). Guanio-Uluru asks why Voldemort's soul cannot be redeemed, arguing that '[t]he view that a damaged soul ought to be destroyed rather than assisted to heal and evolve seems particularly odd' (2015, p.120). I would respond that the possibility of healing would create either the possibility of legitimising queer characters or would require queer characters to conform; both possibilities seem untenable in the texts. The only possible outcome for a character who has transgressed social and ethical norms so grievously is annihilation.

As has already been noted, Harry can be read symbolically as what Edelman's describes as the 'invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity' (2001, p.2-3) within normative political discourse. He is endangered by Voldemort's queer moral threat and, as mentioned, a number

of contributions to the Potter Studies literature make this connection. According to Mauk, Harry is continuing 'his mother's quest to protect the next generation' and this quest is thus presented 'as a biological imperative' (p.136). Vestic, whose readings of Voldemort's character are particularly suggestive, argues that 'queer space ... is the space occupied by the villains', and the series' 'pronatalistic politics construct the villain(s) as antinatalist(s) and deny them a valid political 'queer space'' (2018, p.170). The heteronormative politics of the novel relies upon our being able to '*figure* the undoing of civil society' (Edelman, 2001, p.17, emphasis in original). Voldemort, with his grotesque, queer body which mirrors his queer desires, is the foil to Harry's heteronormative hero – 'the brave middle-class boy-hero who saves the day' (Park, 2003, p.187). The series ends with Voldemort's destruction in a battle with Harry in front of a large audience cheering Harry on. Light (represented by Harry) replaces darkness (represented by Voldemort) and Voldemort's body is laid separately and away from others killed at the Battle of Hogwarts (*DH*, p.609). Whilst one might read this as an act of respect for the families of his victims, another response is that even in death Voldemort's lifeless, decaying body is a contaminating presence. It represents such a grizzly monument to the obscenity of its own physical alteration and transgression of social norms that it must be separated one final time from the bodies of others. The straw man lies waiting to be burned, the odds having been stacked against him from the start; his function is fulfilled, a cautionary tale against the audacious threat and abject horror of queer life.

Conclusion

An increasing number of studies of Voldemort's now exist, but few have attempted to systematically review existing criticism of his character for the specific task of problematising his body and physiology in the context of their explicit queerness. In this dissertation, I have sought to undertake this task. Exploring first the ways in which Voldemort does and does not represent a patriarchal villain who exemplifies aspects of masculine domination, I have demonstrated that his capacity for masculine dominance is contingent on memories of who he was in the past. When Tom Riddle becomes Lord Voldemort, that is to say when he has created Horcruxes through murder, his capacity for dominance diminishes and becomes contingent on possessing the bodies of others. In chapter two I explored Voldemort's physical transformation in detail and identified the ways in which Voldemort's choice to pursue immortality by creating Horcruxes queered his identity and body, and also made him more emotionally unstable. In chapter three I examined the ways in which Voldemort's rebirth could be read as subverting natural biological processes, and how his cumulative biological transgressions are ultimately punished by emasculation and annihilation.

The intention throughout has been to apply queer theory and key existing contributions to Potter Studies scholarship on Voldemort's character to the task of identifying and deconstructing the ways in which his body can be said to be queer, and what the implications of this might be. As I have outlined, the Potter texts are among the most widely read works of children's literature in the world today. Whilst one's expectation of contemporary children's literature need not necessarily be a catch-all celebration of alternative (queer) ways of living, it is important to invite and interrogate diverse readings of these texts. This dissertation was written from a minority (queer) perspective and is unashamedly political (queer) in its approach to analysing the representation of perhaps the most recognisable contemporary literary villain in the world. Representation matters, and if

queer children are not to have queer role models, one hopes they might at least be spared pejorative queers.

This dissertation could easily have extended into a doctoral thesis. The possibilities of a queer reading of Voldemort – his body and soul – as a rebuke to queer desires have only expanded as I sought to contain them. A thorough examination of Voldemort's character under this frame of reference vis-à-vis other villains in contemporary children's literature and even popular adult literature more broadly would be a welcome area for further analysis, and perhaps this dissertation offers a stepping stone towards that deeper level of contextuality. Whilst Voldemort has been considered alongside other villains more generally (for example, see Rothman, 2011), I took the decision not to explore this in more detail. Instead I took the view that the loss of an intertextual analysis is the gain of a deeper consideration of Voldemort's body and creating the premise for a queer reading, one which I have argued is much needed. The overall effect, I hope, is to have brought together the key critical observations about how Voldemort's character is represented with a deeper examination of how his body is portrayed using queer theory as the tool to advance this examination.

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