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Harry Potter and the Theory of Things

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HARRY POTTER AND THE THEORY OF THINGS

by

Erica Maitland Lange

A Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the boundaries between body and object in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, seven children's literature novels published between 1997 and 2007. Lord Voldemort, Rowling's villain, creates Horcruxes—objects that contain fragments of his soul—in order to ensure his immortality. As vessels for human soul, these objects rupture the boundaries between body and object and become “things.” Using contemporary thing theorists including John Plotz and materialists Jean Baudrillard and Walter Benjamin, I look at Voldemort's Horcruxes as transgressive, liminal, unclassifiable entities in the first chapter.

If objects can occupy the juncture between body and object, then bodies can as well. Dementors and Inferi, dark creatures that Rowling introduces throughout the series, live devoid of soul. Voldemort, too, becomes a thing as he splits his soul and creates Horcruxes. These soulless bodies are uncanny entities, provoking fear, revulsion, nausea, and the loss of language. In the second chapter, I use Sigmund Freud's theorization of the uncanny as well as literary critic Kelly Hurley to investigate how Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort exist as body-turned-object things at the juncture between life and death. As Voldemort increasingly invests his immaterial soul into material objects, he physically and spiritually degenerates, transforming from the young, handsome Tom Marvolo Riddle into the snake-like villain that murdered Harry's parents and countless others.

During his quest to find and destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes, Harry encounters a different type of object, the Deathly Hallows. Although similarly accessing boundaries

between body/object, life/death, and materiality/immateriality, the three Deathly Hallows do not transgress these boundaries. Through the Deathly Hallows, Rowling provides an alternative to thingification: objects that enable boundaries to fluctuate, but not breakdown. In the third chapter, I return to thing theorists, Baudrillard, and Benjamin to study how the Deathly Hallows resist thingification by not transgressing the boundaries between body and object.

Abbreviations

<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	<i>PS</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	<i>CoS</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	<i>PoA</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	<i>GoF</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	<i>OotP</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i>	<i>HBP</i>
<i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i>	<i>DH</i>

Introduction

The brainchild of British author J.K. Rowling, the *Harry Potter* series charts the adolescence of the titular bespectacled boy wizard as he develops friendships, struggles with homework, wins Quidditch matches, and attempts to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort and his followers. As the series progresses, both Harry and the reader learn more about the depths of Voldemort's villainy: he murdered Harry's parents among countless witches, wizards, and Muggles in an attempt to dominate British wizarding society and spread his pure-blood-mania. Voldemort's most sinister aim, however, is to become immortal. To this end, Voldemort creates Horcruxes, objects that protect a fragment of a witch's or wizard's soul. As receptacles for pieces of soul, Horcruxes become more than mere objects: they become bodies. In this thesis, I argue that bodies and material objects blend together in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, giving rise to a particular type of "thing." In the series, things are part-body/part-object entities, simultaneously more than inanimate object and less than human body. As Voldemort continues to mutilate his soul, he joins another category of thing: degenerate bodies that become objects precisely because they live devoid of soul. Things in the *Harry Potter* series are liminal and transgressive, occupying the boundaries between body/object as well as life/death—Horcruxes are born through death and Voldemort spiritually dies through his desire to eternally live.

This investigation, although interested in how Gothic elements may be used to express anxieties over boundary-pushing transgressions, is mainly concerned with things:

how the boundaries between body and object are crossed, and the resulting object-turned-body thing and body-turned-object thing. Both objects and bodies can become “thingified”—a term used by thing theorist Bill Brown—that is, corrupted somehow and transformed into a thing. Throughout this thesis, I will also use the term “thingification” to refer to the processes in which object and body become things (by being embodied with soul or by living devoid of soul, respectively). This analysis requires the use of thing theory, a relatively new critical discourse, but one whose ideas can be traced back to Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Baudrillard, among others. An extended quotation from John Plotz, a contemporary thing theorist, will help define what I mean by thing theory:

Defining what one even means by talking about *things* can rapidly become an arcane dispute, especially when waged by scholars quoting and counterquoting Heidegger’s chewy phenomenological account of the “thingness of things.” But ordinary language can provide some useful guidance here. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s original subtitle for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “The Man Who Was a Thing,” is meant to shock us far more than Uncle Tom’s merely being an object might... “Thing” is far better than any word at summing up imponderable, slightly creepy what-is-it-ness. “Thing” is the term of choice for the extreme cases when nouns otherwise fail us: witness the thingamagummy and the thingamabob.

Thing theory is at its best, therefore, when it focuses on this sense of failure, or partial failure, to name or to classify. Thing theory highlights,

or ought to highlight, approaches to the margins—of language, of cognition, of material substance. (“Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory” 109-110)

For my purposes, thing theory provides a framework to study the way objects and bodies approach and transgress the boundaries of their respective categories, becoming liminal, unclassifiable, and unnameable.

Brown’s *A Sense of Things* (2003), Elaine Freedgood’s *The Ideas in Things* (2006), and Plotz’s *Portable Property* (2008) are just a few recent examples of critical works that examine the role of material objects in British and American literature. *Things*, a collection of essays edited by Brown, covers topics ranging from the glove in Renaissance Europe to the emergence of photography and film. Much of contemporary thing theory, however, is concerned with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The essays in *The Secret Life of Things*, edited by Mark Blackwell, begin with the eighteenth-century “it-narrative,” “a type of prose fiction in which inanimate objects (coins, waistcoats, pins, corkscrews, coaches) or animals (dogs, fleas, cats, ponies) serve as the central characters. Sometimes these characters enjoy a consciousness—and thus a perspective—of their own; sometimes they are merely the narrative hubs around which other people’s stories accumulate” (10). Plotz, who makes a contribution to Blackwell’s volume, picks up this critical thread with nineteenth-century literature. According to Plotz, object narratives in the Victorian period become sentimental. While objects in eighteenth-century narratives “speak on and on at great length so as to proclaim a fundamental identity between their consciousness and their exchange value,” nineteenth-

century tales offer “passionate insistence that such objects contain hitherto undreamt of depths of personality. Alongside, though, runs an evident worry that just the opposite is the case—that such objects are no better than cold material, and that to waste human emotions on them is deluded, selfish, or sinful” (*Portable Property* 28). The *Harry Potter* series evinces similar anxieties over the appropriate valuation of objects: Harry cherishes such beloved possessions as his eleven-inch holly and phoenix feather wand and Nimbus Two Thousand racing-broom, and when he is forced to come to terms with their fragile materiality “he felt as though he’d lost one of his best friends” (*PoA* 137). Despite Harry’s closeness with his objects, however, he does not inappropriately value them the same way that Voldemort does. For Voldemort, Horcruxes are a literal extension of his existence.

So far, I have only discussed thing theory’s focus on objects. Brown extends the scope of thing theory further, writing that his book *A Sense of Things*, “concerns the slippage between *having* (possessing a particular object) and *being* (the identification of one’s self with that object). It is a book about the indeterminate ontology where things seem slightly human and humans seem slightly thing-like” (13). By arguing that humans may somehow metamorphose into things, Brown articulates a new avenue toward approaching thingification. Although Brown focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature, we can make a leap from this definition of thing theory to criticism of nineteenth-century Gothic texts. Since the main concern of Gothic literature is, according to Fred Botting, a “fascination with transgression and the anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries,” thing theory can help us examine the boundaries between

body and object in anxiety-ridden Gothic texts (2). Scholar Kelly Hurley does just this in *The Gothic Body*, a book that explores “the ruination of the human subject” in late-nineteenth-century British Gothic fiction (3). Although published several years before Plotz’s and Brown’s definitions of thing theory, Hurley’s text could be seen as a branch of thing theory nonetheless. In the first part of her book, titled “The Gothic Material World,” Hurley examines the “liminal, admixed, nauseating, abominable” human body in Gothic fiction “in relation to materialist science and philosophy of the later nineteenth century...Matter is no longer subordinate to form, because attempts to formally classify matter, such as the attempt to stabilize the meanings of ‘human identity,’ are provisional and stop-gap measures at best” (9). Hurley argues that, within the realm of the late-nineteenth-century Gothic, “bodies are without integrity or stability; they are instead composite and changeful. Nothing is left but Things: forms rent from within by their own heterogeneity, and always in the process of becoming-Other” (9). Hurley finds thingness at the heart of the Gothic, a preoccupation grounded in Victorian evolutionist (and devolutionist) discourses.

Hurley traces Gothic anxieties of devolution featured in late-nineteenth-century novels like Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1890) and H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) to Darwinian discourses of evolution and natural selection. According to Hurley, “The narrative of Darwinian evolution could be read as a supernaturalist or Gothic one: evolution theory described a bodily metamorphosis which, even though taking place over aeons and over multiple bodies, rendered the identity of the human body in a most basic sense – its distinctness from ‘the brute beasts’ –

unstable” (56). Regressing from a human to a thing can be thought of in terms of nineteenth-century fears of degeneration. In his work *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, William Greenslade offers key background to the progression of these regressive anxieties. Criminal anthropologists such as Cesare Lombroso postulated that physical appearance was an indicator of criminal behavior: the more ape-like in appearance someone was, the more criminal tendencies they were likely to display. Similarly, nineteenth-century biologists and racial theorists including Comte de Gobineau believed that criminality was hereditary and that “miscegenation and race-mingling would inevitably lead to degeneration” (Greenslade 22). For the Victorians, deformity without signaled deformity within. Rowling, writing one hundred years later, picks up this devolutionist discourse in her *Harry Potter* series. The process of thingification is tied to the process of degeneration: as Voldemort thingifies objects by transforming them into bodies, he thingifies himself, physically and spiritually deteriorating as a result of his crimes.

Since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in the United States) in 1997, the *Harry Potter* books have attracted popular acclaim and critical attention.¹ Children’s literature scholars including Amy Billone, Philip Nel, and Jack Zipes have interrogated the series in various, interesting ways. In her article “The Boy Who Lived: From Carroll’s Alice and Barrie’s Peter Pan to Rowling’s Harry Potter,” Billone places the *Harry Potter* series in

¹ For a discussion of the “translation” of the books from British English to American English, see Philip Nel’s “You say ‘Jelly,’ I say ‘Jell-O’? Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language” in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* edited by Lana A. Whited.

conversation with nineteenth-century children's literature and asks if "now, in the twenty-first century, we have expanded our conception of childhood so that girls participate as comfortably in fantasylands as boys do," finding that "gender may *still* prohibit girls from traveling to childhood dreamscapes" (179). Rather than offering a particular critical reading, Nel's *J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Novels: A Reader's Guide* provides an informative overview of Rowling's life, themes in the first four books, and the critical and media attention they have received. Zipes similarly investigates the success of the *Harry Potter* series in his book *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, but finds their popularity to be problematic. According to Zipes, the *Harry Potter* books are "easy and delightful to read, carefully manicured and packaged, and they sell extraordinarily well precisely because they are so cute and ordinary" (175). These and other scholars offer insightful (and perhaps controversial) claims, but none take the materialist approach that I do in this thesis.

While much *Harry Potter* criticism tends to focus on gender, race, or class identity, few critics have written on the significance of objects in the series, Rowling's interest in the body, or the series' use of Gothic elements.² One critic interested in

Rowling's use of the Gothic is Anne Hiebert Alton, who demonstrates the *Harry Potter*

² For analysis of Rowling's representation of gender, race, and class identity, see articles including Eliza T. Dresang's "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender" (*The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter*, edited by Lana A. Whited); Julia Park's "Class and Socioeconomic Identity in Harry Potter's England" and Ximena Gallardo-C. and C. Jason Smith's "Cinderfella: J.K. Rowling's Wily Web of Gender" (*Reading Harry Potter*, edited by Giselle Liza Anatol); and Elizabeth E. Heilman and Trevor Donaldson's "From Sexist to (sort-of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the Harry Potter Series" (*Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*, second edition, edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman).

series' participation in a wide variety of genres in her article "Playing the Genre Game: Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series." According to Alton, the Gothic elements in the series include ghosts and spirits; Hogwarts' dungeons, subterranean passages, hidden entrances, and secret rooms; unexpected and mysterious disappearances; supernatural creatures such as vampires, werewolves, and the zombie-like Inperi; as well as the "Gothic convention of the beautiful heroine suffering at the hands of the cruel villain" although "overall Rowling has shifted this convention onto Harry, as he is repeatedly attacked by Voldemort in various guises" (203). Other elements of horror include "Wormtail cutting off his own hand to resurrect Voldemort" in *Goblet of Fire* and "the repeated Jekyll and Hyde parameter" in the use of Polyjuice Potion throughout the series (203). Alton's analysis helps to place *Harry Potter* in conversation with other works that borrow from the Gothic tradition, as well as traditional Gothic texts themselves. The "Jekyll and Hyde parameter" that Alton sees with Polyjuice Potion can also be used to describe Tom Marvolo Riddle's physical transformation into the monstrous Lord Voldemort. Similarly, other creatures that can be described as gothically supernatural are the soul-sucking Dementors, part-body/part-object entities that I discuss in conjunction with Inperi and Voldemort in the second chapter. These creatures'/characters' associations with the Gothic allows for reading them in terms of anxiety over boundaries—particularly the boundaries between body and object and life and death.

Other critics interested in the Gothic in *Harry Potter* are June Cummins and Susanne Gruss. Cummins' article, "Hermione in the Bathroom: The Gothic, Menarche, and Female Development in the Harry Potter Series," investigates Hermione Granger's

development from bossy, undesirable girl to a dynamic, “genre-busting” woman (190). According to Cummins, this development takes place in the girls’ bathroom, a key location for many of the three main characters’ hijinks. Hermione is contrasted with the moping ghost Moaning Myrtle, who, unlike Hermione, “is *stuck* in the bathroom which is the very site of female development, and is *stuck* in a Gothic mode as a permanent ghost” (190). Gruss’ article “The Diffusion of Gothic Conventions in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003/2007),” on the other hand, is concerned with the use of Gothic elements in the fifth book/movie. Gruss examines many of the Gothic spaces within *Order of the Phoenix*, but the most compelling part of her analysis is her argument that Harry is at once a Gothic hero and a Gothic heroine. According to Gruss, “Harry becomes *both* the heroine of the female Gothic, who has to evade the corrupting influence of Lord Voldemort and fears for ‘her’ moral integrity, and the hero of the male Gothic, who teeters on the brink of madness and is morally ambiguous” (48). “The strongest element” of the Gothic in *Order of the Phoenix*, according to Gruss, “can be found in the characterization of Harry and his increasingly ominous relation to Voldemort, a relation that teems with references to the uncanny and the Gothic double” (49). As Gruss points out, it is in the fifth book that Harry’s psychic connection to Voldemort becomes stronger and more problematic. Harry’s mind is (femininely) penetrated while he (masculinely) begins to question his sanity, but “What is most frightening about the dreams for Harry is that he seems to have lost his identity—he and Voldemort...virtually become one” (49). Both of these analyses participate in the prevailing interest in gender in *Harry Potter* criticism, but they also demonstrate that

“gothic” readings of the series can help tease apart anxieties over boundaries in the books. While Cummins and Gruss are interested in the “limiting space[s]” of gender, I am interested in the limits between body and object as well as life and death. Gruss approaches the transgressive nature of the Horcruxes in her discussion of Harry and Voldemort: since Harry is one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes, he and Voldemort share an unstable relationship in which the boundaries between the two, at times, blur. In the first chapter, I investigate the psychic connection between Harry and Voldemort, a connection that exists precisely because Harry contains a fragment of Voldemort’s soul. Harry may not exactly be a thing, but he occupies a liminal boundary as a Horcrux nonetheless. Although Gruss limits her discussion of Gothic doubling to Harry/Voldemort, other doubles can be found in the relationships between Harry/Tom Riddle and Tom Riddle/Voldemort. The latter pairing exists because of Tom Riddle’s degeneration into Voldemort, an issue I explore in the second chapter.

One of the only scholars to apply a material analysis to *Harry Potter* is Virginia Zimmerman. Her article “Harry Potter and the Gift of Time” investigates the relationship between Harry and Voldemort and how each character values and utilizes objects related to his past. According to Zimmerman, “Harry proves himself able to make use of the past; ‘his’ complex relationship to his past evolves, while Voldemort’s remains static” (194). Unlike Voldemort, Harry uses traces, “remnants from the past that endure in the present,” in order to gain strength (194). Productive traces include Harry’s scar as well as his Patronus, which takes the form of a stag and connects him to his father. Voldemort, on the other hand, distorts traces: “A Horcrux is a distorted trace; though it is necessarily

an artifact of some sort, its purpose is not to force a connection to the past. Instead, it preserves a portion of a wizard's soul and protects him from the passage of time" (197). Voldemort rejects the past and shows little interest in traces once they are turned into Horcruxes. For Zimmerman, "If Voldemort becomes less human through fragmentation, then Harry becomes more human as he accumulates traces and, through them, magnifies his sense of self. Harry takes strength from traces of his family in the Mirror of Erised [and] in the gift of his father's Invisibility Cloak" (199). A crucial distinction between the two characters is the way they relate to and value objects from the past. Harry prizes particular objects, like the Invisibility Cloak, because they connect him to his past and his family. Conversely, Voldemort "murderously rejects the traces that connect him to family and to the past. He turns them into Horcruxes, receptacles for fragments of his own soul, rather than meaningful connectors to the past" (210). The suggestion that Voldemort becomes "less human through fragmentation" seems to echo nineteenth-century degeneration theory. Zimmerman, however, does not consider the body/object conjunction that is central to this thesis. As Voldemort creates Horcruxes to preserve his own existence, he wittingly creates object-turned-body things and unwittingly turns himself into a body-turned-object thing. Harry's Invisibility Cloak, on the other hand, escapes thingification because Harry cherishes it and preserves it. In the third chapter, I address how the cloak accesses boundaries between materiality and immateriality, and as one of the Deathly Hallows, boundaries between life and death, but manages to resist becoming a thing.

As Zimmerman demonstrates, part of Voldemort's villainy is his misuse of the past and abuse of objects. Ken Rothman's article "Hearts of Darkness: Voldemort and Iago, with a Little Help from Their Friends" further explores Voldemort as a villain. For Rothman, Voldemort's "fundamental evil, as we first observe it, is his will to control others, most often amplified by his joy (or lack of remorse) when he harms them" (204). Rothman argues that Rowling departs from an expected narrative of the loveless child seeking the love he/she never had, and instead offers a character who seeks dominance over others. "This departure from the love-seeking quest of the unloved can," according to Rothman, "be attributed in part to an unspecified compound of biological nature, choice, and fate or predestination" (204). Indeed, time and time again Voldemort seems to be beyond choice: both Dumbledore and Harry offer Voldemort the chance to achieve redemption through remorse, but Voldemort apparently "lacks the comprehension [of good]...that would enable choice" (205). In Rothman's analysis, one of Voldemort's most villainous traits is his inability to recognize the intrinsic worth of human beings. The various characters killed by Voldemort "lacked reality; they lacked value; they were experienced as objects. When Voldemort kills Snape, his regret is coldly calculative; he is losing a valued tool. When Voldemort orders Cedric Diggory's death, he does not name him, but uses a term from the factory floor, 'the spare.' In moral blindness, can one go no further?" (206). For Voldemort, humans are merely objects, "tools for his use" (206). Rothman's analysis shows how Voldemort's villainy arises from his mistreatment and misvaluation of objects as well as people/bodies. By treating people as mere objects, Voldemort classifies them as things. Snape and Cedric Diggory are not so undervalued by

other characters in the series, but other bodies, like Dementor victims, do become things in the eyes of wizarding society. Because Dementor victims are bodies that live devoid of soul, they are considered transgressive, unnatural things.

Thesis Structure

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus on Voldemort's Horcruxes and precisely how they transform from objects into things. While I analyze the concept of the Horcruxes as a whole, I look at Slytherin's locket as a case study in particular and, using Plotz as a base for a theoretical framework, argue that intersecting sentimental and fiscal values corrupt the locket, leaving it vulnerable to thingification. Part of the locket's corruption is its implication in a chain of theft and misappropriation, moving from one owner to the next until its value becomes eclipsed by inappropriate dealings. Voldemort violently murders a woman, Hepzibah Smith, in order to procure the locket, again demonstrating his proclivity for treating humans as mere objects. Voldemort views the locket as a literal extension of himself, imbuing it with a fragment of his soul—thus creating a thing.

In the second chapter, I look at Voldemort as a thing himself as well as other thingified bodies in the series. Using Hurley as well as Sigmund Freud, I investigate Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort, as degenerate, uncanny, and liminal entities that exist on the peripheries of body/object and life/death. Dementors, soulless creatures that suck the soul from their victims, and Inferi, corpses animated by a dark wizard, are bodies that

“live” devoid of soul and can be classified as things. Their sickening uncanniness repulses other characters in the *Harry Potter* series, characters that frequently cannot bring themselves to name the entity before them. Voldemort, on the other hand, begins as a handsome young man but transforms into a deformed monster through the process of mutilating his soul. Like many of his nineteenth-century Gothic forbears, Voldemort degenerates as a result of his boundary-pushing transgressions.

In the third chapter, I offer an alternative to thingification through the Deathly Hallows. On the surface, the function of the Deathly Hallows seems to be the same as Voldemort’s Horcruxes: they promise their owner mastery over death. Yet despite this similarity, the Deathly Hallows manage to resist becoming things. Using Baudrillard and other thing theorists, I look at how the Hallows offer a means through which we can explore thingification instead. The Hallows—the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak—access boundaries between body and object, life and death, and materiality and immateriality, yet retain their objectness because they are not transformed into bodies in the same way that Horcruxes are. Although the Hallows can be classified as liminal objects, they do not transgress boundaries—they do not become things.

In the conclusion, I turn my attention to another type of “thing” within the *Harry Potter* series: commodities. In a thesis that investigates the boundaries between body and object, I would be remiss if I did not consider the boundaries between fictional objects within the text and the real-world objects spawned by the text. I consider the magical merchandise that populates the *Harry Potter* series as well as the numerous (and perhaps

equally magical) commodities that exist in our world, including the *Harry Potter* books themselves. The series and its spin-off commodities occupy a juncture between the material and the immaterial, reflecting Rowling's emphasis on liminal objects within her work.

Chapter One

The Thingified Object: Horcruxes

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth installment of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Albus Dumbledore takes Harry on a journey through Voldemort's past. Harry and Dumbledore travel back in time through memories, vaporous substances collected from various sources, in order to glean important clues about Voldemort's seeming immortality. Witnessing Dumbledore's first interaction with an eleven-year-old boy then known as Tom Marvolo Riddle, Harry learns that even at such a young age Riddle gleefully tormented the other children at his London orphanage. Using magic, Dumbledore uncovers stolen toys in Riddle's wardrobe and warns him that thievery is not tolerated at Hogwarts, Britain's school for witches and wizards. When the memory is over and Harry and Dumbledore return to the present, Dumbledore points out that "the young Tom Riddle liked to collect trophies. You saw the box of stolen articles he had hidden in his room. These were taken from victims of his bullying behavior, souvenirs, if you will, of particularly unpleasant bits of magic. Bear in mind this magpie-like tendency, for this, particularly, will be important later" (*HBP* 260). Through the course of the book, Harry discovers that Riddle's penchant for stealing objects, including mementos and coveted heirlooms, is integral to the secret of his indestructibility.

A particular memory from Professor Horace Slughorn holds the key to Riddle's mystery. The memory, which takes place during Riddle's adolescence at Hogwarts, again

reveals his propensity for cruelty and souvenir collecting: “Harry saw that [Riddle] was wearing [his grandfather’s] gold and black ring; he had already killed his father” (*HBP* 346). Riddle, incredulous at his mother’s inability to resist death, obsesses over immortality and questions Slughorn about Horcruxes, rare, dark magic that could ensure his perpetual existence. Slughorn explains that a Horcrux is “an object in which a person has concealed a part of their soul...Then, even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged. But, of course, existence in such form...Death would be preferable” (464-465). Riddle, greedy for knowledge, presses the visibly uncomfortable Slughorn for more information, asking how to split the soul. Slughorn attempts to evade the question, responding, “you must understand that the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature,” but ultimately discloses that the soul is split “By an act of evil – the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart” (465). With this revelation, Harry and Dumbledore deduce that Riddle’s most prized souvenirs, including the ring, became Horcruxes, part-object, part-body “things” imbued with living soul.

Unlike the objects stolen from children at the orphanage (as Dumbledore notes, “the mouth-organ was only ever a mouth-organ”), Voldemort’s part-object, part-body Horcruxes exist on the periphery of each category without really belonging to either (*HBP* 260). According to literary critic and thing theorist John Plotz, “in the emergent field of thing theory, objects or possessions turn into things only when they are located at troubling intersections between clear categories, thus defying ready classification”

(*Portable Property* 25). In other words, things emerge when there is a failure to name or to classify, a breakdown between ordinary categories and classifications. Originally lifeless material possessions, the Horcruxes become living vessels for Voldemort's soul—they become things. Plotz suggests that "'thing' is the term of choice for the extreme cases when nouns otherwise fail" (25). In the *Harry Potter* series, a thing is a transgressive entity at once material object and living body, crossing the boundary between both categories. That Rowling invented a new word, "Horcrux," demonstrates their unnameable, unclassifiable creepiness, "crux" suggesting meeting and intersection and "hor" invoking the horror of an object come alive.

No longer simply material possessions, the Horcruxes are extensions of Voldemort's existence. Depicted as "magpie-like" at the age of eleven, Voldemort continues to collect (perhaps "steal" would be a better word) objects as an adolescent and adult with the intention of turning them into Horcruxes. Significantly, Voldemort chooses "objects with a powerful magical history"—artifacts and heirlooms including a ring, a locket, a golden cup, a diadem, and a diary—as "worthy of the honour" of containing fragments of his soul (*HBP* 471).³ As precious, "priceless" property, these objects are problematically endowed with sentimental and fiscal value simultaneously. For Plotz, this intersection of sentiment and cash is the locus where thingification occurs. An object can either successfully circulate in financial or sentimental markets, but it cannot participate in both at once: "Thus, successful movement in the circle of cash money proves an object's inability to be a bearer of sentiment—and vice versa" (*Portable Property* 30).

³ The snake and Harry are exceptions and will be considered independently at the end of the chapter.

While objects are certainly compromised (and thus subject to improper use and exchange) when the barriers between cash and sentiment break down in the *Harry Potter* series, they do not become things until they are given a new kind of value, an ontological value that brings them to life and intimately ties them to the existence of a human being. In *Harry Potter*, thingification occurs at the juncture between body and object rather than sentiment and cash.

To investigate how Rowling transforms objects into things, I will consider one of Voldemort's Horcruxes from creation to destruction. I will focus on the story of Slytherin's locket, which progresses over the course of the last two books in the series, *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*. Treasured more than the life of his daughter by Voldemort's grandfather only to be stolen and sold by that daughter in a moment of desperation, the locket is initially invested with both sentimental and fiscal value. An apparently priceless heirloom once belonging to the Gaunt family, the locket's value is corrupted through inappropriate transaction, passing from one collection to another largely through thievery. As the locket circulates to new owners it accrues new values and meanings, both before and after its transformation from object to Horcrux. It is only after the locket passes into Voldemort's possession and is transformed into a Horcrux, however, that it takes on a life of its own. According to scholar Barbara M. Benedict, "objects can pervert the will, define the owner, and enact theft, violence, [and] loss of identity... They are absolute material: bodies without souls" (38-39). Benedict's discussion of objects in eighteenth-century it-narratives can be applied to the objects that become Voldemort's Horcruxes, with the exception that, after they become Horcruxes,

they are bodies with souls. Voldemort views his Horcruxes as literal extensions of his existence and signifiers of his identity, as bodies equally valuable as his own flesh. Once thingified, and thus violating the juncture between object and body, these possessions become possessors and, for Rowling, must be destroyed.

Heirlooms and Artifacts: The Intersection of Sentimental and Fiscal Value

The story of Slytherin's locket originates in Voldemort's maternal family, the Gaunts. After centuries of pure-blood inbreeding and extravagant spending, the Gaunts are deranged and destitute; the ring and the locket are the only items of value remaining in their possession. The name "Gaunt," evoking the adjective meaning lean and haggard, emphasizes the family's withered, wasted state. Even though his family is poverty stricken, Marvolo, Voldemort's grandfather, insists on retaining his family's keepsakes. In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard argues that when "blood, birth and titles of nobility have lost their ideological force, the task of signifying transcendence [falls] to material signs – to pieces of furniture, objects, jewellery and works of art" (84). For Marvolo, the ring and the locket are invaluable possessions, representing his family's once illustrious status in wizarding society. When Marvolo's son, Morfin, is implicated in crimes against Muggles, he uses these family relics as means of intimidation. Waving his ring in front of a law officer's face, Marvolo yells, "See this? Know what it is?...Centuries old it's been in our family, that's how far back we go, and pure-blood all

the way! Know how much I've been offered for this, with the Peverell coat of arms engraved on the stone?" (*HBP* 196).⁴ Acknowledging the ring's significant monetary value, Marvolo clings to it, as well as the locket, despite his family's poverty; Marvolo prioritizes these heirlooms because they, unlike his children, validate his family's pure-blood lineage.

Although demonstrating fanatical attachment to his prized possessions, Marvolo evinces little love or care for his own children, especially his daughter. When the officer, Bob Ogden, refuses to be sidetracked from administering justice, Marvolo responds by presenting him with the locket, nearly choking his daughter, Merope, in the process: "With a howl of rage, Gaunt ran towards his daughter. For a split second, Harry thought he was going to throttle her as his hand flew to her throat... 'See this?' he bellowed at Ogden, shaking the heavy gold locket at him, while Merope spluttered and gasped for breath" (*HBP* 196). Ogden expresses the concern for Merope that Marvolo lacks, dismayed at his apparent lack of interest in his daughter and preoccupation with family ancestry. While the Gaunt bloodline is all but spent, it remains alive in two family heirlooms that Marvolo "treasured just as much as his son, and rather more than his daughter" (201). Compared to the frail Merope and unbalanced Morfin, both the ring and the locket appear vital and important. Merope, with "lank and dull" hair and a "plain,

⁴ Antioch, Cadmus, and Ignotus Peverell are believed to be the creators of the Deathly Hallows—the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Cloak of Invisibility—and subjects of the wizarding legend "The Tale of the Three Brothers." Although the Peverell surname is extinct in the male line, two living descendents can be identified through family heirlooms: Voldemort and Harry Potter. Marvolo's ring, set with the Resurrection Stone, links Voldemort to Cadmus, while Harry's Invisibility Cloak connects him to Ignotus. I will address the Hallows in the third chapter.

pale” face “wish[es] for nothing more than to sink into the stone and vanish” as she watches the confrontation between her father and Ogden unfold (194, 195). Merope’s love for a handsome, wealthy Muggle could potentially revitalize the family, yet her father condemns her choice. For Marvolo, the continuation of the family line is in perpetual ownership of the ring and the locket, not any potential offspring.

Marvolo’s relationship with his family’s heirlooms demonstrates the intersection between sentimental and fiscal value described by Plotz. In *Portable Property*, Plotz examines similarly problematic confusions in Victorian novels including George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). For Mrs Tulliver, to see her possessions sold at auction is synonymous with losing her own identity: “Any object monogrammed with her initials or her family name seems an almost physically attached extension of herself” (*Portable Property* 8). Like Mrs Tulliver, Marvolo invests his family’s worth into “irreplaceable” heirlooms and he fiercely protects his family’s identity from circulation and exchange. Marvolo demonstrates a similar identification with his family’s heirlooms, yet it is the “seeming” extension of self here that is important. Marvolo’s valuation of the ring and the locket extends to problematically confusing their sentimental and fiscal values, and while he associates himself more strongly with these objects than with his own children, they are not literal extensions of his existence. Later, Voldemort identifies with his ancestry through the ring and the locket instead of his own blood relations. What differentiates Voldemort from Marvolo (and Mrs Tulliver) is his literal self-identification with objects. The ring and the locket are not only symbols of his ancestral identity, but also, as Horcruxes, material embodiments of his very soul.

Unlike her father, Merope demonstrates little interest in pure-blood status and family honor. In spite of her father's wrath, she enchants and marries the Muggle Tom Riddle, taking Slytherin's locket with her. Under Merope's ownership, the locket takes on new fiscal value and loses all sentimental value: what for Marvolo was a precious artifact becomes for his unloved daughter a worthless reminder of his abuse. Abandoned by Riddle and pregnant with his child, Merope sells the locket for a pittance to Borgin and Burkes, a shop specializing in sinister magical artifacts. "Happy to get ten Galleons for it," Merope symbolically rejects her magical heritage by selling one of her father's most prized possessions (*HBP* 245).⁵ By running away from her father and selling his locket, Merope distances herself from his problematic attachment to heirlooms. Yet Merope's valuation of the locket is equally disconcerting. As Plotz asserts, problems arise "When personal possessions are treated neither as heirlooms nor as relics, but simply as alienable bits of potential cash," and Merope's lack of sentimental attachment to the locket demonstrates her own alienation from both her family and wizarding society (*Portable Property* 9). Alienated and abused, Merope is largely adrift and likewise treats her possessions as liquid assets, as easily abandoned as she is. Merope has nothing in which to ground her identity, and she dies anonymous and alone in a London orphanage after giving birth to a son.⁶

⁵ A Galleon is the highest value coin in wizard currency and roughly the equivalent of £5 GBP.

⁶ Rowling draws striking parallels between Merope's story and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838). In Dickens' novel, Oliver is born in a workhouse and his mother dies in labor, leaving behind a ring and a locket. These items hold the secret to Oliver's parentage.

The sentimental and fiscal values associated with objects are not stable, but rather subject to change with each successive owner. Despite being seen as priceless and inalienable by Marvolo, the locket is still subject to circulation in markets both fiscal and sentimental. After the locket is sold by Merope and in the ownership of Caractacus Burke, it again becomes “near enough priceless” (*HBP* 245). Burke’s remark that “[Merope] didn’t seem to have any idea how much [the locket] was worth” belies its unfixed, ever-changing value (245). The intersection of cash and sentiment destabilizes the value of the locket, forcing it to change as it passes from owner to owner. Plotz argues that “cash and feeling...begin to look like antithetical versions of circulation” in the nineteenth century and “the very move to treat things as exchangeable within a cash economy...desecrates them” (*Portable Property* 30). The locket’s movement from treasured heirloom to exchangeable commodity corrupts it, making it increasingly vulnerable to inappropriate use and exchange. While the locket’s circulation within and between sentimental and fiscal economies complicates its value, it is not truly violated until it becomes one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes. Notably, intersecting values and inappropriate exchange similarly corrupt many of Voldemort’s other Horcruxes such as Marvolo’s ring, which Voldemort steals from his uncle. It is precisely this corruption that allows Voldemort to violate other people’s heirlooms as well as his own.

Inappropriate Exchange: Collecting and Thievery

For Rowling, collecting is a crucial component of one's relationship with objects, particularly heirlooms and artifacts. As priceless valuables, these objects seem made to be collected either for their historical or monetary value. Baudrillard argues that "It is impossible not to draw a comparison between the taste for antiques and the passion for collecting," and a collector's attachment to his objects derives from "the nostalgia for origins and the obsession with authenticity" (76). "Nostalgia," a word defined as the sentimental longing for the past, associates sentimental value with antiques while "authenticity" invests them with historical significance. Both sentimental and historical value, then, are conflated in the antique object. In his article "Fateful Attachments: On Collecting, Fidelity, and Lao She," Rey Chow overviews Walter Benjamin's notion of collecting, which constitutes a first type of collector, and contrasts it with a second type found in Chinese writer Lao She's work. The first kind "are members of an older society in which culture still means something pleasurable, something to be enjoyed or possessed for itself...By contrast, the second kind of collector is merely opportunistic...they collect not for the sake of the pleasure given by the objects but rather in order to make money" (367). In *Harry Potter*, this first type of collector is most notably characterized in Hepzibah Smith, a wealthy older woman who loves to collect priceless antiques, while the second type of collector is found in Mundungus Fletcher, a bumbling conman and peddler. Yet there is a third type of collector in *Harry Potter* that combines the attraction to historical value with the purposeful collecting of the mercenary—Voldemort.

According to Benjamin, “ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have with objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them” (67). This claim is particularly pertinent to Voldemort’s relationship with his Horcruxes: he literally lives within these objects.

As the first kind of collector, Hepzibah hoards objects of cultural and historical significance, yet she maintains a distanced relationship with her treasures. Fittingly, Voldemort (at this point, still known as Tom Riddle) is employed at Borgin and Burkes after graduating from Hogwarts, where his job is to “persuade people to part with their treasures,” and according to Dumbledore, he is “unusually gifted at doing this” (*HBP* 405). The elderly Hepzibah is one of his clients, and taken in by Riddle’s handsome face and charm, she decides to show him her two finest treasures: a small golden cup that once belonged to Helga Hufflepuff and Slytherin’s locket. Her belief that Tom will “appreciate [them] for [their] history, not how many Galleons” they are worth is indicative of how Hepzibah prioritizes historical over monetary value (407). As Benjamin’s type of collector, Hepzibah accumulates historical artifacts in order to own pieces of wizarding history. While the cup “has been handed down in [Hepzibah’s] family for years and years,” she “had to pay an arm and a leg” for the locket (408, 409). Hepzibah rationalizes her costly expenditure by telling Riddle, “I couldn’t let it pass, not a real treasure like that, had to have it for my collection” (409). Despite being “distantly descended” from Hufflepuff, Hepzibah lacks Marvolo’s fanatical attachment to familial ancestry (408). Rather, she keeps her treasures locked up in leather boxes and out of sight.

While Riddle is greedily preoccupied with Hepzibah's treasures, her desire to collect extends beyond lifeless artifacts to Tom himself. When Hepzibah shows him the cup, a "red gleam" appears in Riddle's "dark eyes. His greedy expression was curiously mirrored on Hepzibah's face, except that her tiny eyes were fixed upon Voldemort's handsome features" (*HBP* 408). Riddle is represented as an aesthetic object here, one that Hepzibah would love to add to her collection. Hepzibah hardly interacts with her treasured possessions, preferring to keep them hidden away "nice and safe" (408). Conversely, she relishes her appointments with Tom, prepping herself in the mirror for the handsome shop assistant. This objectification is crucial to Riddle's successful (legitimate) procurement of other people's possessions: he relies on his good looks and charm to wheedle Hepzibah's collection out of her for Borgin and Burkes, presenting her with flowers and affected compliments. Hepzibah allows her attraction to Tom to override her commitment to her collection, removing her prized possessions from their hiding places out of a desire to impress him. Riddle's interest, however, is insistently focused on her two most prized valuables. Hearing his mother's dismal tale repeated by Hepzibah, Riddle's eyes flash red again and "his knuckles whiten[ed] on the locket's chain" (409). Unlike Hepzibah, Riddle has an emotional investment in the locket; although he does not necessarily care for his mother or his family, the locket ties him to his ancestral heritage and validates his identity as the Heir of Slytherin, a connection similarly reinforced by the diary-Horcrux introduced in *Chamber of Secrets*. Riddle also steals the locket because he is humiliated by his mother and he wants to silence her story.

By taking the locket from Hepzibah and placing it in a hiding place of his own, he attempts to ensure that his mother's tale is never repeated again.

Contrasting the first type, the second type of collector is a mercenary that collects for economic profit. Bill Brown argues that collectors want to preserve their objects from the "fate of exchange," yet mercenary collectors collect for the sole purpose of re-entering objects into circulation (*A Sense of Things* 66). Notably, however, mercenary collectors accrue their goods through thievery in the *Harry Potter* series. Burke, for example, effectively steals the locket from Merope by offering her such a bad price for it. In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry realizes that the locket had been at his godfather's house and confronts conman Mundungus Fletcher for pilfering it among other valuable dark objects. The locket is subsequently "stolen" from Fletcher as a bribe: "bleedin' gave it away, di'n' I? No choice...I was selling in Diagon Alley an' she come up to me an' asks if I've got a license for trading in magical artefacts. Bleedin' snoop" (*DH* 182). That the locket refuses ordinary channels of exchange signifies its corrupted value. The "Ministry hag" Mundungus gave the locket to is the villainous Dolores Umbridge, who inappropriately uses the locket to boost her own pure-blood credentials, claiming that the "S" on the locket stands for Selwyn (182). Umbridge's valuation of the locket is practically arbitrary; the locket is not, of course, actually one of Umbridge's family heirlooms, and having paid no money for it, she has no fiscal attachment to it. Instead, the locket's transition into Umbridge's possession signifies her ability to intimidate and overpower "inferior" witches and wizards.

Thievery further corrupts and complicates the value of these problematic heirlooms. It is not merely the mercenary, however, who steals in *Harry Potter*. The objects themselves are seductive, making themselves vulnerable to theft—they practically beg to be taken. Benedict, in her discussion of thievery in Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), argues that “things possess a devilish power,” pulling would-be thieves “willlessly into action” (25). For Benedict, the theft of valuables signifies “temptation of wealth” yet this seduction is based on an object’s fungibility (26). One-of-a-kind family artifacts, however, are not fungible. In *Harry Potter*, they are all the more seductive because of their rarity and pricelessness. Benedict indicates that rings and locket, ordinarily “symbols of loving bonds,” become alienated loot when pilfered from their original owners (28). Indeed, after initially being stolen by Merope, the locket undergoes a seemingly endless chain of theft and misappropriation.⁷ Rowena Ravenclaw’s diadem, another Horcrux, shares a similarly complicated past, stolen by Rowena’s overshadowed daughter, Helena, who is subsequently murdered by her outraged lover. As Harry notes, “Tom Riddle would certainly have understood Helena Ravenclaw’s desire to possess fabulous objects to which she had little right” (*DH* 496).

In the *Harry Potter* series, the first type of collector purchases objects of historical significance and conceals them, while the second type of collector steals objects in order to sell them. Voldemort is a mixture of both, demonstrating the same passion for antiques as the first collector, with the same mercenary thievery of the second collector. What

⁷ 1) Stolen from Marvolo by Merope; 2) Stolen from Merope by Burke; 3) Stolen from Smith by Riddle; 4) Retrieved from its hiding place by Regulus Black; 5) Stolen from the Black home by Fletcher; 6) Stolen from Fletcher by Umbridge as a bribe; and 7) Stolen from Umbridge by Harry.

distinguishes Voldemort, however, is that he does not collect for financial gain but for his own self-preservation. Through his collection, Voldemort seeks to conquer death.

According to Baudrillard, “the fulfilment of the project of possession always means a succession or even a complete series of objects...but the last in the set is the person of the collector. Reciprocally, the person of the collector is constituted as such only if it replaces each item in the collection in turn” (86, 91). As a collector, Voldemort becomes a part of his collection; indeed, he could be considered his own eighth Horcrux. For Baudrillard, collecting “dispels anxiety about death” because the objects of a collection, as substitutions for their owner, defer their owner’s death (98). Significantly, Baudrillard points out that “The most active time for childhood collecting is apparently between the ages of seven and twelve,” around the same age as the young Tom Riddle from Dumbledore’s memory (87). Although, according to Baudrillard, the passion for collecting ceases in most individuals after puberty, Voldemort continues to collect throughout his adult life. If collectors “can never...get beyond a certain poverty and infantilism,” then Voldemort is stuck in perpetual adolescence (106).

Unlike many of the other thieves encountered in the series, Voldemort relies on murder to add to his collection. Believing the locket is rightfully his and unable to “resist an object so steeped in Hogwarts’ history,” Voldemort murders Hepzibah and steals both the locket and the cup (*HBP* 412). While Voldemort killed his paternal family for revenge, he murdered Hepzibah for gain: “He wanted those two fabulous trophies that poor, besotted old woman showed him. Just as he had once robbed the other children at his orphanage, just as he had stolen his uncle Morfin’s ring, so he ran off now with

Hepzibah's cup and locket" (411). These objects' already problematic values are further corrupted through theft and murder. According to Deidre Lynch, "The keepsake's narrative is a story of dispossession...[it] records loss as much as preservation...At the same time, paradoxically, it is also a story of possession of the most absolute, intimate kind" (73). As souvenirs of his misdeeds, Voldemort's Horcruxes record their history and the nefarious means through which he accrued them. It is important to note that death is implicated in all of Voldemort's Horcruxes, both before and after their transformation. According to Baudrillard, objects are the "*thing[s] with which we construct our mourning,*" and indeed, the ring and locket—objects that are associable with nineteenth-century mourning jewelry—signify both Voldemort's (flight from) death and the deaths of his victims (97). The ring and the locket, in particular, are linked to the deaths of Voldemort's paternal family and Hepzibah Smith, respectively, and can be seen as the mourning jewelry for these particular deaths.

Like Hepzibah, Voldemort hides his Horcruxes in order to protect them. Rather than merely protect his prized valuables, however, Voldemort devises Horcrux hiding places that maim or kill any would-be invader or Horcrux destroyer. The locket's hiding place is the most deadly and complex of all: hidden on an island in the middle of a subterranean lake, the trespasser must first pay a tribute of blood, cross Ineri-infested water, and then consume a potion intended to weaken the drinker in order to access it. Dumbledore is badly debilitated by drinking the potion in *Half-Blood Prince*, an effect that arguably leads to his inevitable death at the end of the book. In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover that Sirius Black's younger brother, Regulus, died

while swapping the locket-Horcrux with a fake. Kreacher, the Black family house elf, describes the event to Harry, Ron, and Hermione: Regulus “ordered – Kreacher to leave – without him. And he told Kreacher – to go home – and never to tell my mistress – what he had done – but to destroy – the first locket. And he drank – all the potion – and Kreacher swapped the lockets – and watched ... as Master Regulus ... dragged beneath the water ... and ...” (*DH* 162; ellipses in original). This distressing tale is clearly a difficult one for Kreacher to tell. According to Kreacher, Regulus was dragged into the water to become another zombie-like Inferi guarding the locket. Voldemort’s use of excessive protective enchantments and obstacles demonstrates just how much he wants to safeguard the locket. While other Horcruxes are similarly hidden—Voldemort hides the ring in the Gaunts’ shack and the diadem in Hogwarts’ Room of Requirement—the locket is the only object given such elaborate protection. In the locket’s case, anyone who dares to destroy it in life must guard it as an Inferi in death. Voldemort effectually silences the cave’s invaders and ensures that his mother’s story remains in the grave, a point demonstrated by the fact that Kreacher can barely tell Harry, Ron, and Hermione about what happened to Regulus.

Ontological Value and Thingification

Voldemort turns to objects, transforming them into Horcruxes, in order to safeguard his existence and prolong his life. While it is nigh impossible to achieve never-

ending life in the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort's Horcruxes make him "as close to immortal as any man can be" (*HBP* 470).⁸ Voldemort's collection of heirlooms and artifacts—the ring, the locket, the cup, the diadem, and his diary—all become Horcruxes. As Dumbledore indicates, "Lord Voldemort liked to collect trophies, and he preferred objects with a powerful magical history. His pride, his belief in his own superiority, his determination to carve for himself a startling place in magical history; these things suggest to me that Voldemort would have chosen his Horcruxes with some care" (471). These objects reinforce Voldemort's self-constructed identity as the most notorious wizard of all time. He does not merely identify *with* these objects, but sees his identity *in* them. Baudrillard argues that an owner's "gratification flows from the fact that possession depends, on the one hand, on the absolute singularity of each item, a singularity which puts that item on par with an animate being – indeed, fundamentally on par with the subject himself – and, on the other hand, on the possibility of a series, and hence an infinite play of substitutions" (86). Indeed, each Horcrux literally becomes an animate being and serves as a signifier for Voldemort's identity. Even the seemingly worthless diary proves that Voldemort is the Heir of Slytherin, linking him to the opening of the Chamber of Secrets. By tying his existence to the existence of his Horcruxes, Voldemort demonstrates a new, distorted relationship with his objects in which their very being is synonymous with his own being. Imbuing his Horcruxes with soul, Voldemort gives them an ontological value—he gives them a living existence.

⁸ While the Philosopher's Stone can be used to produce the Elixir of Life, which extends the drinker's life, the Elixir must be drunk regularly for all eternity for the drinker to be immortal.

While Slughorn emphatically denounces Horcruxes as unnatural, Voldemort is so intent upon becoming indestructible that he splits his soul not once, but several times. Pushing the boundaries of magic, Voldemort pushes the boundaries between body and object as well. Questioning Slughorn about how to create a Horcrux, Voldemort asks: “would one Horcrux be much use? Can you only split your soul once? Wouldn’t it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces?” (*HBP* 465-466). Voldemort reveals his intention of splitting his soul into seven pieces, creating six Horcruxes and leaving one fragment in his own body. Voldemort’s Horcruxes effectually become bodies, each one housing one-seventh (one-eighth, once we realize that Harry is also a Horcrux) of his soul. During an interview with Dumbledore for a teaching position at Hogwarts, Voldemort acknowledges his unprecedented level of Horcrux creation without revealing precisely what his “experiments” entail: “[Voldemort’s] eyes seemed to burn red. ‘I have experimented; I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed’” (415). Voldemort pushes the boundaries between body and object, confusing and corrupting the two in his pursuit of immortality. The Horcruxes, as part-object, part-body entities, undergo a process of thingification. They become transgressive entities, no longer object, but not quite body—they become things.

Rowling demonstrates that in order for an object to be invested with human life, there must be human death. While Voldemort appears unperturbed at the possibility of murdering several people, Slughorn is nonplussed by his interest in creating multiple Horcruxes: “‘Merlin’s beard, Tom!’ yelped Slughorn... ‘Isn’t it bad enough to think of killing one person?’” (*HBP* 466). Indeed, by the time this conversation between

Voldemort and Slughorn takes place, Voldemort had already murdered his father and paternal grandparents. Notably, Voldemort “reserved the process of making Horcruxes for particularly significant deaths” (473). The ring, for instance, became a Horcrux through the murders of his “filthy Muggle father’s” family, erasing his connection to any lowly, non-magical ancestry (*CoS* 231). These “significant deaths” further imbue the Horcruxes with meaning, connecting them to Voldemort’s victims almost as intimately as they are tied to Voldemort himself. Ironically, as Voldemort increasingly distances himself from meaningful human relation, his Horcruxes are relentless reminders of the human cost necessary to make them. Horcruxes must be born through death, further corrupting their already problematic value. Just as the Horcruxes cross the boundaries between object and body, they occupy a juncture between life and death. This unspeakable transgression, given unnatural life through unnatural death, reinforces the Horcruxes’ definition as things.

As part-object, part-body things, Voldemort’s Horcruxes have a literal life of their own. Voldemort’s boyhood diary, for example, interacts with Harry and Ginny Weasley in a manner unusual for magical objects or memories. Explaining his supposition to Harry, Dumbledore notes, “A mere memory starting to act and think for itself? A mere memory, sapping the life out of the girl into whose hands it had fallen? No, something much more sinister had lived inside the book ... a fragment of soul” (*HBP* 468; ellipsis in original). Interestingly, the diary is the only Horcrux capable of communicating Voldemort’s past at Hogwarts and materializing in his adolescent shape. According to Chow, “the books written by an author are...his most intimate possessions,” and, as a

diary, this Horcrux has perhaps the most intimate connection with Voldemort's true self (378). In *Chamber of Secrets*, the piece of soul living within the diary materializes in the form of an adolescent Tom Riddle: "A tall, black-haired boy was leaning against the nearest pillar, watching. He was strangely blurred around the edges, as though Harry was looking at him through a misted window" (*CoS* 227). Although not quite a corporeal form, this fragment of soul is alive enough to manifest itself in the shape of Tom Riddle's body. According to Hermione, "a Horcrux is the complete opposite of a human being... The fragment of soul inside it depends on its container, its enchanted body, for survival. It can't exist without it" (*DH* 90). This piece of soul's true body is the diary, and it is the diary that Harry attacks and destroys.

Slytherin's locket similarly betrays a juncture between body and object. In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry notices the life force inside the locket: "Was it his own blood pulsing through his veins that he could feel, or was it something beating inside the locket, like a tiny metal heart?" (*DH* 227). The locket here is represented as a body, complimenting Harry's pulsing blood with a tiny, albeit metal, heart. The locket is reactive and capable of sensing the presence of other Horcruxes as well as objects that could potentially destroy it. In the presence of Voldemort's snake-Horcrux, disguised as Bathilda Bagshot, "Harry became aware of the locket against his skin; the thing inside it that sometimes ticked or beat had woken; he could feel it pulsing through the cold gold" (274). The snake and the locket, in communion with each other and Voldemort himself, believe that they have successfully caught Harry in a trap. The locket beats faster and faster, betraying the fragment of soul's excitement. Later, sensing the presence of the

sword of Gryffindor, “[the locket] closed tight around [Harry’s] neck...the chain of the Horcrux had tightened and was slowly constricting his wind pipe” (301). The soul within animates the locket in order to kill Harry before he can reach the sword. Although not in the shape of a human body, the locket’s corporeality allows it to physically attack its would-be destroyers.

Like the diary, the locket becomes more corporeal when it is close to destruction. As Ron prepares to destroy the locket-Horcrux with the sword of Gryffindor, “the contents of the locket rattled like a trapped cockroach” (*DH* 305). Although sensing its imminent demise, the soul within cannot be destroyed unless the locket is opened. Closed, the locket protects the vulnerable fragment of soul inside; open, that fragment is exposed to attack. In its final moments, the locket demonstrates just how much Voldemort invested in it: “Behind both of the glass windows within blinked a living eye, dark and handsome as Tom Riddle’s eyes had been before he turned them scarlet and slit-pupilled” (305). Voldemort’s Horcruxes, particularly the locket and the diary, document the toll that murder and splitting the soul have taken on his body. It is at this point in the locket’s tale that it appears most transgressive and thing-like. Occupying the juncture between body and object, the locket combines materiality with organic form. One might expect the locket to contain photographs or portraits, but instead Harry and Ron find Riddle’s living eyes. Ron hesitates, and a voice issues from the locket as well as “the heads of Harry and Hermione, weirdly distorted” (306). The locket combines elements from Riddle’s pre-mutilated body with materializations of Harry and Hermione, fusing the three together in a horrific violation of object and body.

The Possessor Possessed

As living entities imbued with soul, Horcruxes feed on the life force of those who come into contact with them. Reversing the roles of possessor and possessed, Horcruxes transform their owners into objects and exert themselves as malevolent, transgressive things. In *Chamber of Secrets*, the fragment of soul inside Tom Riddle's diary possesses Ginny Weasley and forces her to unleash the Basilisk on unsuspecting students. Unlike the locket and other Horcruxes that Voldemort hides away and protects, "the diary had been intended as a weapon as much as a safeguard" (*HBP* 468). The materialization of Voldemort's soul, in the shape of Tom Riddle, explains to Harry: "Ginny poured out her soul to me, and her soul happened to be exactly what I wanted. I grew stronger and stronger on a diet of her deepest fears, her darkest secrets. I grew powerful... Powerful enough to start feeding Miss Weasley a few of *my* secrets, to start pouring a little of *my* soul back into *her*" (*CoS* 228).⁹ Ginny, viewing the diary as a friend and confidant, writes all of her "silly little troubles" into it, including her not-so-secret infatuation with Harry (228). The Horcrux uses Ginny's weaknesses for its own strength, feeding on the trust she put into the charming Riddle contained within the diary. In *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione explains a Horcrux's ability to possess a person: "While the magical container is still intact, the bit of soul inside it can flit in and out of someone if they get too close [emotionally] to the object" (91). The consequences of Ginny's predicament are dire: the

⁹ Rowling uses italics frequently throughout the *Harry Potter* series. In this passage and others that I quote from the series, I duplicate Rowling's use of italics. I also duplicate italics in my quotations from other critics.

longer Voldemort's soul possesses her, the closer she is to death. As the manifestation of Riddle explains, "there isn't much life left in her: she put too much into the diary, into me" (*CoS* 231). The thingness of the diary, its part-object, part-body existence, allows it to possess and consume Ginny's soul as if she were an object herself.

The locket has a similar affect on Harry, Ron, and Hermione in *Deathly Hallows*. As an object meant to be worn, the locket comes into physical contact with each of its possessors, affecting their bodies as well as their minds: "The moment it parted contact with Harry's skin he felt free and oddly light. He had not even realized that he was clammy or that there was a heavy weight pressing on his stomach, until both sensations lifted" (*DH* 235-236). Harry denies being possessed by the piece of soul inside the locket, yet it has an unmistakable impact on his physical and emotional wellbeing. While the locket may not control Harry, Ron, or Hermione in quite the same way that the diary possessed Ginny, it still exerts an overpowering influence on them. Voldemort's Horcruxes are strikingly similar to the One Ring in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). According to Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey, "the Ring is deadly dangerous to all its possessors: it will take them over, 'devour' them, 'possess' them" (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 114).¹⁰ Ron, worried about his family and unsure about Hermione's feelings for him, is affected the most out of the three. The locket preys

¹⁰ Although Rowling as acknowledged reading both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* (1937), she has never claimed that Tolkien's work greatly influenced her own. Since Tolkien is widely recognized as the progenitor of modern fantasy, however, it is difficult to imagine that Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is not in any way indebted to Tolkien. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Shippey states, "I do not think any modern writer of epic fantasy has managed to escape the mark of Tolkien, no matter how hard many of them have tried" (326). I will be drawing on parallels between Rowling's work and Tolkien's throughout this thesis, particularly in the second chapter.

upon Ron's insecurities and fears, ultimately causing him to abandon Harry and Hermione during their quest to discover and destroy the remaining Horcruxes. Like Ginny, Ron's mistaken belief that he is unloved makes him the most vulnerable to possession; during Ron's final confrontation with the locket, the piece of soul within proclaims: "*I have seen your heart, and it is mine*" (DH 306). Like the One Ring, Horcruxes are "on the one hand... a sort of psychic amplifier, magnifying the unconscious fears or selfishnesses of its owners, and on the other... sentient creature[s] with urges and powers of [their] own" (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 136). Both Ginny and Ron become objects possessed by Voldemort's Horcruxes, reversing the roles of possessor and possession.

Ron is ultimately able to overcome the Horcrux, demonstrating his ability to resist objectification. When Harry insists that Ron should destroy the locket with the sword of Gryffindor, he shrinks from the task, exclaiming, "that thing's bad for me... I can't handle it... it made me think stuff, stuff I was thinking anyway, but it made everything worse, I can't explain it... I can't do it Harry!" (DH 305). Ron's use of the word "thing" reinforces the locket's transgression of the boundaries between object and body. The eyes behind the locket's windows change from dark brown to gleaming red as it attempts to possess Ron once more. Harry, watching the confrontation between Ron and the piece of soul released from the locket, "thought he saw a trace of scarlet in [Ron's] eyes" (307). Red eyes betray the corrupting influence of the Horcrux, recalling the flashes of scarlet in Voldemort's eyes both when he first sees the cup and locket and when Dumbledore questions him about his boundary-pushing experiments. Distinctly unnatural for an eye

color, red shows Voldemort's (and Ron's) slippage from the possessing subject to the possessed object. Unlike Voldemort, Ron overcomes objectification and stabs the Horcrux. With its life extinguished, Riddle's eyes disappear and the locket becomes a mere object once more: "The thing that had lived in the Horcrux had vanished; torturing Ron had been its final act" (307).

Harry, Nagini, and Voldemort

Of Voldemort's six intended Horcruxes, one does not begin as an object:

Voldemort transforms his pet snake, Nagini, into a Horcrux through the murder of a Ministry official. Voldemort's connection to Nagini allows him to possess her, using her to infiltrate the Ministry of Magic and attack unsuspecting victims. As a Horcrux, the snake is able to possess Harry, or, more accurately, Harry possesses the snake. During a dream, Harry views an attack on Arthur Weasley, Ron's father, through the eyes of the snake: "[Harry's] body felt smooth, powerful and flexible...[he plunged] his fangs deeply into the man's flesh" (*OotP* 408). Harry wakes up from the dream and opens his eyes, claiming, "I was there, I saw it ... I *did* it" and "I was the snake" (410, 414; ellipsis in original). Harry and Nagini share a connection because they both house pieces of Voldemort's soul—Harry is also a Horcrux. For Harry, this connection is a double-edged sword: he can look into Voldemort's mind, but Voldemort can access his thoughts and emotions as well. Harry's telepathic connection with Voldemort echoes that between

Mina Harker and Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, aligning Harry with the vampirized Mina and Voldemort with the vampiric Dracula.¹¹ This time, Snape explains: "You seem to have visited the snake's mind because that was where the Dark Lord was at that particular moment... He was possessing the snake at the time and so you dreamed you were inside it, too" (470). Both Harry and the snake, already living entities, are complicated by their intimate connection with Voldemort's existence.

Harry is turned into an unintentional Horcrux when his mother, Lily Potter, sacrifices her life for him.¹² Dumbledore tells the twelve-year-old Harry that Voldemort transferred some of his powers into him the night of his parents' murders, leaving Harry to question, "Voldemort put a bit of himself in *me*?" (*CoS* 245). As interconnected Horcruxes, Nagini, Harry, and Voldemort are able to possess one another, flitting in and out of each other's minds. Voldemort, sensing but perhaps not understanding his connection with Harry, attempts to "force his way into [Harry's] mind" and "manipulate and misdirect [his] thoughts" (*OotP* 729). According to Dumbledore, "On those rare occasions when we had close contact, I thought I saw a shadow of him stir behind your eyes" (729-730). At times, the piece of Voldemort trapped inside Harry takes over, and

¹¹ There are a few other similarities between *Harry Potter* and *Dracula* in addition to Mina and Dracula's mental connection: 1) After Mina feeds from Dracula's blood, Van Helsing touches her forehead with a Communion wafer. The wafer burns her skin and leaves a bright red scar, prefiguring the lightning-bolt shaped scar on Harry's forehead. 2) Several times throughout the novel, Dracula's eyes flash burning red, much like Voldemort's do, when he is particularly angry or threatening.

¹² Voldemort and Harry share several similarities, including growing up as orphans. While Voldemort's mother loses the will to live and dies in childbirth, however, Harry's mother willingly sacrifices her life in an attempt to save him from Voldemort. Voldemort grows to resent his mother's weakness, but Harry reveres his parents' sacrifice. His mother's love magically protects him from Voldemort's wrath on many occasions.

Harry cannot control when and where he accesses Voldemort's mind. Most frequently, this access occurs while Harry is sleeping, his mind open and vulnerable. Harry often dreams of Voldemort, and these dreams provide him with essential clues about Voldemort's schemes and machinations. This connection is symbolized by Harry's lightning-shaped scar, left behind by Voldemort's rebounded killing curse. At times the scar serves as a portal into Voldemort's mind, prickling whenever he feels most violent and murderous.

As Susanne Gruss articulates in her article, "The Diffusion of Gothic Conventions in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003/2007)," Harry and Voldemort's problematic psychic connection allows for a reading of Gothic doubling between Harry and Voldemort. According to Gruss, "Gothic texts commonly characterize split masculinities, a trend that becomes most evident in late Victorian Gothic texts such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Gothic texts also stage the problematic distinction between self and monstrous Other" (41). Harry begins to see Voldemort's recent actions in his dreams in *Goblet of Fire*, allowing him to anticipate the plot against his life during the Triwizard Tournament, but his ability to perceive Voldemort's thoughts and feelings does not become clear until *Order of the Phoenix*. Notably, while Harry experiences his dreams in *Goblet of Fire* from a third-person perspective, he sees through the eyes of Nagini or Voldemort in *Order of the Phoenix* and throughout the rest of the series. From *Order of the Phoenix* on, the distinction between Harry, Voldemort, and Nagini is broken down completely in Harry's dreams—Harry finds himself in

another's body, but unable to control that body's actions. The doubling, or more precisely, tripling, between Harry, Voldemort, and Nagini is most evident after the attack on Arthur Weasley, when Harry feels himself possessed with a sudden hatred for Dumbledore and nearly loses control of his own body: "At once, Harry's scar burned white-hot, as though the old wound had burst open again – and unbidden, unwanted, but terrifyingly strong, there rose within Harry a hatred so powerful he felt, for that instant, he would like nothing better than to strike – to bite – to sink his fangs into the man before him" (*OotP* 419). While Harry finds himself in Nagini's body in his dream, a snake-like entity (presumably the piece of Voldemort's soul he contains, although possibly the piece of soul within Nagini or Voldemort himself) possesses him while he is awake. Harry does not merely want to attack Dumbledore, but to "bite" and "sink his fangs into" him like a snake, emphasizing the unstable connection between him, Voldemort, and Nagini.

Near the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, Voldemort utilizes their mental connection to lure Harry into a trap, showing him a vision of his tortured godfather, Sirius Black. When Harry and Voldemort access each other's minds, the boundaries between the two disintegrate—it is difficult to differentiate between Harry's identity and Voldemort's. While in the Ministry of Magic, Voldemort possesses Harry's body and the two become entangled in one entity:

Then Harry's scar burst open and he knew he was dead: it was pain
beyond imagining, pain past endurance –

He was gone from the hall, he was locked in the coils of a creature
with red eyes, so tightly bound that Harry did not know where his body

ended and the creature's began: they were fused together, bound by pain, and there was no escape –

And when the creature spoke, it used Harry's mouth, so that in his agony he felt his jaw move. (*OotP* 719)

This fusion of Harry and Voldemort, imagined as the coils of a great snake, reinforces the interconnection between Harry, Voldemort, and Nagini—each contain a fragment of Voldemort's soul. Here, the boundaries between Harry and Voldemort are completely broken: it is impossible to tell where Harry ends and Voldemort begins. Gruss argues, “As Harry is afraid of *becoming* Voldemort (or Voldemort's weapon), his identity is fractured and he almost collapses – hero and monster threaten to become one, and although the Occlumency lessons are meant to help Harry redraw and stabilize his boundaries, he fails to do so until the end of the novel” (Gruss 50). Indeed, Harry's Occlumency lessons seem to amplify his mental connection with Voldemort. Gruss' analysis, however, does not take into account the fact that the boundaries between Harry's and Voldemort's identities are already unstable precisely because Harry is a Horcrux, a vessel for a piece of Voldemort's soul. Although Harry has not been thingified (his body is already a body, not an object-turned-body), he occupies a boundary between his own identity and Voldemort's nonetheless. As a vessel for Voldemort's soul, Harry's body is problematically interconnected to Voldemort as well as his other Horcruxes—he is part of a set of objects and entities that constitutes the identity “Voldemort” and prolongs Voldemort's life. As long as he contains a fragment of Voldemort's soul, Harry is an extension of Voldemort's existence. His body, and thus his identity and material

existence, is not completely his own until he expels the piece of Voldemort's soul in King's Cross station at the end of *Deathly Hallows*. Their doubling relationship is emphasized by their physical likeness, their orphaned childhoods, and their ability to speak to snakes. Even though Harry possesses a piece of Voldemort's soul, however, Voldemort cannot possess him without great damage to himself. Harry's one safeguard to define and protect his identity is love: "as Harry's heart filled with emotion, the creature's coils loosened, the pain was gone" (*OotP* 720). Interestingly, while emotion allows Horcruxes to possess their possessors, Harry's emotion prevents Voldemort from possessing him.

In this chapter, I have examined Voldemort's Horcruxes and defined them as object-turned-body things. By containing fragments of soul, Horcruxes rupture the boundaries between body and object and safeguard Voldemort's existence. For Voldemort, these objects are literal extensions of his identity; they are truly inalienable possessions. While Gaunt's ring is Voldemort's first Horcrux, Slytherin's locket most fully demonstrates the problematic valuations and exchanges that corrupt many of Voldemort's eventual Horcruxes. Most of Voldemort's Horcruxes are heirlooms and artifacts, simultaneously endowed with both fiscal and sentimental value. This intersection of value makes them vulnerable to inappropriate exchange, evidenced by the locket's participation in a seemingly endless chain of theft. It is not until the locket becomes a Horcrux, however, that it truly becomes a thing perverted by Voldemort's soul. As Rowling demonstrates, Horcruxes must be born through death. Their existence at the junctures between body/object and life/death, I argue, is what allows us to classify

them as liminal, transgressive things. Once thingified, the Horcruxes evince corporeality and sentience; although they are tied to Voldemort's existence, they become living things in and of themselves. As perverted possessions Horcruxes possess their possessors, reversing the roles of subject and object. Although Harry and Nagini are not necessarily thingified, their identities are compromised since, as Horcruxes, they are also components of Voldemort's existence and identity. In the next chapter, I will look at bodies that occupy the juncture between body and object and thus transform into things.

Chapter Two

The Thingified Body: Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry and Hermione travel to Godric's Hollow in order to visit Harry's parents' graves and find Bathilda Bagshot, an old friend of Dumbledore's who may hold the secret to locating the sword of Gryffindor. Inside Bathilda's unkempt and apparently untended home, "Thick dust crunched beneath their feet and Harry's nose detected, underneath the dank and mildewed smell, something worse, like meat gone bad" (*DH* 274). Undeterred by the foul stench and extreme dirtiness, Harry and Hermione attempt to question Bathilda; mysteriously, Bathilda appears to hear only Harry's questions and not Hermione's. Instead of answering Harry's questions, Bathilda closes her eyes and Harry's scar prickles, the locket violently twitches, and the room dissolves as a "high, cold voice" says, "*hold him!*" (277). Feeling uneasy and not wanting to take his eyes off Bathilda, Harry continues to press her about the location of the sword. Bathilda points him toward a shapeless heap in the corner, "And in the instant that he looked away...she moved weirdly: he saw it out of the corner of his eye; panic made him turn and horror paralysed him as he saw the old body collapsing and the great snake pouring from the place where her neck had been" (278). Nagini, the snake-Horcrux, emerges from Bathilda's body and strikes, sinking her teeth into Harry's arm. Trapped by Nagini's muscular body, Harry realizes that Voldemort is on his way.

In this startling and terrifying encounter, the boundaries between object and body breakdown completely. The piece of soul within Slytherin's locket, stimulated by the presence of another Horcrux, comes to life and exerts its unspeakable part-object, part-body existence, again becoming "the thing" (*DH* 274). Yet the locket is not the only thingified entity in this scene. Bathilda's body is transformed into an object, grotesquely worn like an article of clothing and animated by the snake. The smell of putrid flesh emanating from Bathilda's home gruesomely suggests that her body is dead and decaying, given life merely through dark magic. The dirt and stench of Bathilda's home, her ability to recognize Harry through his disguise, and her inability to understand Hermione's speech are all subtle indicators that something is not quite right. She is at once familiar and unfamiliar, and despite Harry's curiosity the reader cannot help but dread the trap Harry and Hermione are led into. When the snake emerges from a gaping neck—imagery evoking birth, but here a birth into death—we, like Harry, are paralyzed with horror. These sensations of fear are akin to Sigmund Freud's uncanny, that which "arouses dread and horror" and belongs to "that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (193, 195). The uncanny, according to Nicholas Royle, "involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced...it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar arising in a familiar context" and "has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality (1, 2). While Bathilda's presence in Godric's Hollow is expected and familiar,

the fact that she is actually a dead corpse animated by a snake is strange and unfamiliar. Bathilda is uncanny because her existence violates crucial binaries: she is both living and dead, body and object.

Nagini's possession of a corpse is a singular event where the thingification of an object (Horcrux creation) and the thingification of a body are brought together in the same place. In this chapter, I will consider other thingified bodies that blur the boundaries between life and death, body and object. Like Bathilda in *Deathly Hallows*, these bodies are uncanny and terrifying because of their liminality. In "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud argues that "Many people experience [the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" and attributes this feeling to our "primitive fear of the dead" (218, 219). That which is uncanny is *unheimlich*, literally meaning unhomely but also meaning "eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear" (199). In an etymological tracing of *heimlich*, Freud notes that "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*"—thus, that which is homely, friendly, and familiar may quickly become that which is unhomely, unfriendly, and unfamiliar (201). Notably, the extraordinarily uncanny episode of Nagini emerging from Bathilda's body occurs in Godric's Hollow, the location of Harry's original home. According to Freud, there is an element of a return to the mother, to the original home in the womb, tied to the uncanny: "This *unheimlich* place [female genitals], however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings... whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before',

we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body" (221-222). The mother's womb, "the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning" and was once *heimlich*, becomes the *unheimlich* (221). Freud also notes that, when represented in fiction, the feeling of uncanniness depends upon the reality depicted by the author in his or her work. Authors, according to Freud, have complete creative license to deviate from the realities of our world and create new worlds of their own. Readers must "accept his [or her] ruling in every case" (226). In the *Harry Potter* series, readers take their cues from Rowling's depictions and characters' responses. Certain apparitions that would be considered uncanny outside the realm of the books, the House Ghosts and Peeves the Poltergeist for instance, do not elicit the dread and horror of the uncanny from characters or readers. The focus of this chapter will be on the creatures and characters that are uncanny within the realm of the books: Dementors and their victims, Inferi, and Voldemort's degenerating body.

Existing at the junctures between life/death and body/object, Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort are monstrous because of their liminality. If an object morphs into a body by housing a human soul, then a body approaches objecthood when it lives devoid of soul. Dementors are dark creatures that feed from human happiness, leaving behind only depression and despair. Their most sinister weapon is the Dementors' Kiss, which they use to suck the soul from their victims. Dementors are neither living nor dead: they are soulless creatures that render their victims soulless as well.¹³ Inferi are dead bodies

¹³ Only witches and wizards can see Dementors while everyone can feel their effects. Dementors have a humanoid shape, but their body is completely covered by a hood and cloak. In the *Harry Potter* series, Dementors are used to guard the Azkaban prison.

reanimated by a dark wizard and their sole purpose is to serve their creator. Inferi constitute the living dead: the body is an object controlled by a spell.¹⁴ Lord Voldemort, too, transforms his body into an object as he tears apart his soul. Voldemort views the creation of Horcruxes as a one-way transaction, and he invests pieces of himself into his most prized possessions in order to ensure immortality. This process, however, exacts its toll on Voldemort and divests him of his humanity in exchange. Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort can be considered among the “interstitial creatures” that literary critic Kelly Hurley examines in her book *The Gothic Body* (24). Like the late-nineteenth-century monsters that Hurley considers (Count Dracula, for example), they “exist across multiple categories of being and conform cleanly to none of them” (24). As part-object, part-body entities, Dementors and Inferi, as well as Voldemort’s most mutilated shapes, are labeled things, demonstrating the “insufficiency of language to cope with and contain liminal phenomena” (29). They are uncanny abominations, eliciting horror from both characters and readers alike, a horror that frequently manifests itself in sickness and nausea. Like her nineteenth-century Gothic predecessors, Rowling demonstrates that the “‘proper’ somatic response” to body-turned-object things is “the sensation of disgust” (45). Yet while the decaying stench of the Dementor, the slimy skin of the Inferius, and the flayed flesh of Voldemort’s child-sized bodies in *Goblet of Fire* and *Deathly Hallows* excite disgust and nausea, they are also curiously compelling and captivating. Like Dracula, a

¹⁴ Voldemort uses an army of Inferi during the First Wizarding War and the Second Wizarding War. In *Half-Blood Prince*, a small army of Inferi is used to protect the locket-Horcrux.

monster both living and dead, a soulless threat, and abominable thing, Rowling's interstitial creatures and thingified bodies often induce both revulsion and fascination.

Describing our response to interstitial creatures in Gothic texts, critic John Paul Riquelme writes, "We do and do not recognize ourselves as we respond ambivalently to the new hybrid emerging in the narratives of these texts, a hybrid whose origin lies within us" (591). For Hurley, this ambivalence, combining both loathing and desire, signals the presence of Julia Kristeva's abjection in nineteenth-century Gothic texts. According to Hurley, abjection "describes the ambivalent status of a human subject who, on the one hand, labors to maintain (the illusion of) an autonomous and discrete self-identity...and who on the other hand welcomes the event or confrontation that breaches the boundaries of the ego and casts the self down into the vertiginous pleasures of indifferenciation" (4). In other words, abjection describes a subject that repeatedly violates itself, both averse to and longing for a loss of self-identity. For Hurley, "The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is positioned within precisely such an ambivalence: convulsed by nostalgia for the 'fully human' subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming" (4). In *Harry Potter*, however, interstitial creatures excite loathing but not desire or arousal. Objectified bodies may be both repelling and riveting, but no character wishes to become like one of them. Instead, the *Harry Potter* series seems to follow Riquelme's description of an experience at once familiar and unfamiliar, ourselves and not ourselves, and suggests the presence of the uncanny rather than abjection. The ambivalent responses of characters in *Harry Potter*, captivation and revulsion, illustrates

the experience of liminality: while recognizing the human origin of these dark creatures, characters—most frequently Harry himself—ultimately reject them as abominable things.

The monsters of nineteenth-century Gothic, like Inferi, Dementors, and Lord Voldemort, are liminal, interstitial entities, at once human-like yet not entirely human. Hurley defines an abhuman subject as a “not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other” (3-4). The prefix “ab-” simultaneously signals a movement away from a known condition and a movement towards a condition that is unknown and unspecified. “Ab-” also invokes Kristeva’s abjection. Since *Harry Potter* evinces the uncanny rather than abjection, I do not necessarily see abhuman subjects in Rowling’s work. It could be argued that Tom Riddle, who both constructs his identity as Lord Voldemort and deconstructs that identity by destroying his soul, is an abhuman subject. Yet for Hurley, “to embrace abjection is to experience *jouissance*”—physical pleasure, delight, and ecstasy (4). Riddle, however, is almost entirely asexual.¹⁵ There is no evidence that he derives sexual pleasure from creating Horcruxes and fracturing his identity. Instead, his actions are motivated by a quest for immortality; he certainly does not seek to destroy himself. Indeed, his main motivation is self-preservation. Because of his single-minded focus, Voldemort might perhaps be the most un-ambivalent character in the entire series. Rather than adopt Hurley’s term “the abhuman,” I will call Voldemort and other liminal figures unhuman

¹⁵ It is possible that Rowling shies away from sexually characterizing Voldemort, and thus not demonstrating abjection in her work, because children are the target audience of the *Harry Potter* series.

subjects.¹⁶ The prefix “un-” denotes absence of a particular quality and invokes the uncanny instead of abjection. As unhuman subjects, Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort excite revulsion, nausea, fear, and loathing, and their liminality places them beyond the sphere of language.

Dementors and Inferi

As one of the most terrifying and disturbing creatures in the *Harry Potter* series, Dementors demonstrate that monstrosity derives from blurring the boundaries between life and death as well as body and object. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Professor Lupin describes Dementors:

Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them...Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory, will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself – soulless and evil (140).

¹⁶ I would like to make a distinction between unhuman and nonhuman. While the *Harry Potter* series depicts many nonhuman creatures like house elves, centaurs, giants, and mermen among others, we are not supposed to view these characters as though they are beneath humans. Rather, Rowling demonstrates that these nonhuman species are to be treated humanely, with respect and dignity. An unhuman entity, however, is a being that we are supposed to be repulsed by, a somehow degenerate and mutilated being.

Rowling's use of alliteration, the repetition of "d" sounds, in this passage emphasizes the Dementors' sinister effects. They inhabit "dark" places, revel in "decay and despair," and "drain" happy feelings from their environment. Notably, like Tolkien's Ringwraiths, Dementors' "real weapon is psychological: they disarm their victims by striking them with fear and despair" ("Orcs, Wraiths, Wights: Tolkien's Images of Evil" 191). At the end of the passage, Lupin alludes to the Dementors' Kiss, a misleadingly benign name for the Dementors' most horrifying weapon. Described as a kiss, this term perverts pleasure and transforms sexuality into something violent and evil like the Dementors themselves. The suggestion that Dementors take pleasure in corrupting their victims through a kiss is perhaps the closest that Rowling comes to the abject.¹⁷ Dementors use the kiss to "reduce" their victims, bringing them down from a superior, whole state to one that is inferior and fractured. They are "among the foulest" precisely because they have no soul, and their victims become evil, unhuman creatures as well.¹⁸

Dementors transform their environment into one that is at once familiar and unfamiliar, devoid of "hope and happiness," and, as a result, terrifying. The Dementors' ability to render their environment uncanny emphasizes the uncanniness of their bodies. During the annual start-of-term train trip in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Dementors board the Hogwarts Express, plunging it into darkness and casting a penetrating chill over those onboard. In Harry's compartment, a "cloaked figure" emerges from the darkness with "its

¹⁷ Rowling also approaches the abject through werewolf Fenrir Greyback, a character who takes an almost sexual delight in ravaging children.

¹⁸ There is also a sense of contagion here. Like vampires and werewolves, who spread their "disease" by biting their victims, Dementors "infect" their victims through a kiss. As a disease, degeneration is imposed upon the victims of vampires, werewolves, and Dementors.

face...completely hidden beneath its hood” (*PoA* 65). The darkness, like the cloak, obscures the Dementor, but its humanoid shape gives it a familiar appearance—one might expect to find a human form underneath the cloak. Yet what Harry sees makes the Dementor unfamiliar: “Harry’s eyes darted downwards, and what he saw made his stomach contract. There was a hand protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, grayish, slimy-looking and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water” (65-66). While not much of the Dementor’s body can be seen, it is described as a dead, rotting corpse. The stench and appearance of death distances Dementors from familiarity, making them uncanny, fearsome, and disturbing. Soulless creatures with bodies half alive and half dead, Dementors force upon us the image of our own mortality.

Upon our very first introduction to the Dementor, Rowling emphasizes the inability of language to describe its liminality. On the Hogwarts Express, “the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it was trying to suck more than air from its surroundings” (*PoA* 66). While the cloak gives a Dementor shape, the unknown, unspecified entity is what lies underneath. The “rattling breath,” like a death rattle, reinforces the Dementor’s association with the dead. The Dementor causes Harry to pass out, and when he reawakens, he asks, “Where’s that – that thing?” and “What was that thing?” (66, 67). Professor Lupin finally gives the unknown entity a name, but even then Ron has trouble voicing it: “Well – that thing – the Dementor –” (67). The repetition of pauses throughout this exchange indicates the great difficulty that these characters have using language to describe what they have seen. Ron can barely bring himself to say “Dementor,” instead reverting to the use of the word

“thing.” This response is repeated in *Goblet of Fire*, when Professor McGonagall has trouble describing the kiss performed on Barty Crouch, Jr: “The moment that – that thing entered the room...it swooped down on Crouch and – and –” (610). Usually stoic and firm, McGonagall’s failure to speak is perhaps even more disturbing than the kiss itself. These characters’ inability to name the Dementors demonstrates their existence beyond the ordinary realms of understanding and classification

Significantly, the horror beneath the Dementor’s hood is not revealed until the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Rowling’s narrative strategy obfuscates the Dementor’s true appearance, allowing the suspense to build until the final few moments of the book. In “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” Ann Radcliffe distinguishes between terror (uncertainty and obscurity) and horror (graphic depiction): “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; and the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (315). In the *Harry Potter* series, however, like many nineteenth-century Gothic novels, the narrative’s uncertainty “contracts” the characters’ faculties and produces nausea instead of “expand[ing] the soul.” Terror, the uncertainty of what lies beneath the cloak and the sudden glimpse of a rotting hand, induces sickness. Horror, the final confrontation with and full realization of the monstrous, on the other hand, does “freeze” and “annihilate” the senses, causing paralysis as well as the inability to both move and speak. Time and again, characters cannot bring themselves to speak the horror of the Dementors: “Harry felt a chill in his stomach, as Professor McGonagall struggled to find the words to describe what had happened. He did not need her to finish her sentence” (*GoF* 610). According to Hurley,

“To assert that something is too horrible to be spoken of is the privileged utterance of the Gothic” (48). Although the *Harry Potter* novels may not be Gothic texts per se, the characters’ inability to speak of body-turned-object horrors illustrates their anxiety over the boundaries between body/object and life/death.

In his first interaction with a Dementor, Harry succumbs to sickness and passes out. Just as nineteenth-century Gothic novels dictate sickness as the proper response to unhumanness, Rowling, too, demonstrates that nausea is the expected and appropriate response to a Dementor. When Harry first sees the decayed-looking hand of the Dementor, his stomach contracts, and as the Dementor sucks the warmth from the compartment, his “eyes rolled up into his head. He couldn’t see. He was drowning in cold...He was being dragged downwards” (*PoA* 66). The imagery of drowning emphasizes the Dementor’s ability to reduce their victims to a lower state: the “terrible power” of the Dementors is that they “force their victim to relive the worst memories of their life, and drown, powerless, in their own despair” (*GoF* 191). When Harry comes to, he is out of his seat and on the floor, literally beneath his peers. According to Hurley, disgust is contagious and “the subject is compromised by its confrontation with a disgusting object, drawn into the field of its Thing-ness,” and, as a result, experiences nausea (45). Still on the ground, Harry “felt very sick; when he put up his hand to push his glasses back on, he felt cold sweat on his face” (*PoA* 66). The representation of nausea functions to make the reader nauseous as well, drawing us into Harry’s uncanny experience. Harry’s convulsive reaction—Ron tells him that he had “a fit” and “started twitching”—indicates the extent of disgust elicited by an unhuman subject (67). Harry is

dramatically reduced again when Dementors induce him to fall from his broom during a Quidditch match. An unknown voice remarks that Harry's fall "was the scariest thing [they'd] ever seen," causing Harry to wake-up in his hospital bed thinking, "Scariest ... the scariest thing ... hooded black figures ... cold ... screaming ..." (134; ellipses in original). Here, Harry's immediate association with the words "scariest thing" is the "hooded black figures" of the Dementors.

In addition to provoking nausea and revulsion, Dementors also inspire fascination in their victims. Harry's susceptibility to the Dementors' effects—he hears his mother's dying screams and faints when a Dementor comes too close—leads him to request Patronus lessons from Professor Lupin. He holds back during these one-on-one training sessions, however, due to a secret wish to relive his worst memories and hear his mother's voice again. Harry's ambivalent response to the Dementors, his visceral nauseous reactions to their presence and desire to hear his mother's voice, could be seen as the return to the womb that Freud describes in association with the uncanny. The Dementors enable Harry to return to an infantine moment, to his mother, and perhaps even to the womb. During Patronus practices with Lupin, Harry allows his parents' final moments to replay inside his head because "these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a very small child" (*PoA* 180). Feeling guilty about his secret desire, Harry sternly reminds himself that they are dead and that "listening to echoes of them won't bring them back" (180). These echoes, however, enthrall Harry, and he only half-commits to correctly producing a Patronus that would break the Dementors' power over him. In this instance, the Dementors' uncanniness derives from their ability to

render the familiar—the mother’s voice—into the strange, terrifying, and unfamiliar. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the Dementors in these practice sessions are not real, but merely boggarts in disguise.¹⁹ Since the boggart-Dementor is weaker than a real Dementor, Harry may give in more readily because his life is not actually at stake. Similarly, with Lupin present as a backup, Harry knows that he is safe from any real harm. When faced with a veritable army of Dementors swooping in on him, Hermione, and his godfather Sirius Black, Harry is finally able to produce a corporeal Patronus and save their lives. Harry’s ability to repel the Dementors at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban* signifies his ultimate resistance to the Dementors’ fascinating enthrallment, as well as a resistance to returning to the mother, a reunion Harry realizes can never truly take place.

Unlike the ready and willing victims that Hurley describes in *The Gothic Body*, Harry and other characters are ultimately resistant to the threat of unhumanness. At the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry struggles to produce a Patronus that will protect him, Hermione, and Sirius; as he sinks to the ground, he gasps, “No – *no*...He’s innocent” (281). Desiring at first to protect an innocent man, Harry’s fight soon becomes one for his own survival. Rowling tells us that “he had to fight” and “they weren’t going to take him” (281). Just as the Dementors are about to perform their kiss, a gleaming stag charges at the Dementors and forces them to flee. What spurs Harry into action is not simply a basic instinct for survival, but a fear of being kissed and thus rendered unhuman. Lupin, describing the kiss to Harry, explains, “You can exist without your soul, you

¹⁹ A boggart is a shape-shifting creature that adopts the form of its victim’s worst fear. That Harry’s boggart takes the shape of a Dementor “suggests that what [he] fear[s] most of all is – fear” (*PoA* 117).

know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no chance at all of recovery. You'll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever ... lost" (183; ellipsis in original). While physiological functions remain intact, they only enable existence and not life. It is the soul that animates the body and makes it human. Without it, the body is a mere object, a thing. Describing Saruman in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Shippey writes, "Like a wraith, he has been effectively dead for many years" ("Orcs, Wraiths, Wights: Tolkien's Images of Evil" 192). Similarly, Dementor victims like Barty Crouch, Jr, are "effectively dead." Indeed, they are "worse than dead" because they have no soul and thus, no true life (*GoF* 610).

At the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry, as well as the reader, finally sees what lies beneath the Dementor's hood. It is at this moment, with its hood down, that the Dementor appears most uncanny and horrifying:

Where there should have been eyes, there was only thin, grey, scabbed skin, stretched blankly over empty sockets. But there was a mouth ... a gaping, shapeless hole, sucking the air with the sound of a death-rattle.

A paralysing terror filled Harry so that he couldn't move or speak.

His Patronus flickered and died. (*PoA* 281; ellipsis in original)

Harry's response foreshadows his reaction to Nagini emerging from Bathilda's body; as with Bathilda, Harry is paralyzed by fear. Dementors, like Tolkien's Ringwraiths, claim their victims by "paralysing the will" and "disarming all resistance"—their power is psychological fear and revulsion (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 125). Faced by "a thing so terrible as to resist or exceed language," Harry is struck dumb and his one source

of protection, his Patronus, vanishes into thin air (Hurley 13). The Dementor's face is uncanny because of its description in terms of what is familiar and human. There should be eyes in the sockets, but instead there is dead, decaying skin. What is described as a mouth is simply a hole. Familiar features—eye-sockets, mouth—are transformed into something unfamiliar and horrible. There is nothing “new or alien” about the Dementor, but rather “familiar and old-established” (Freud 217). But what is familiar has become deformed and deranged—demented.

The Dementor's body is repeatedly described as slimy and scabbed, emphasizing its thingness. For Hurley, the body's sliminess is indicative of its entrapment in the world of matter: “Nothing illustrates the Thing-ness of matter so admirably as slime. Nor can anything illustrate the Thing-ness of the human body so well as its sliminess, or propensity to become-slime” (34). The body's slimy fluids and substances “seep from the borders of the body, calling attention to the body's gross materiality” (34). Slime is liminal, existing at the borders of solid and liquid. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, slime is “essentially ambiguous because its fluidity exists in slow motion; there is a sticky thickness in its liquidity; it represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid—that is, the tendency of the indifferent in-itself, which is represented by the pure solid, to fix the liquidity, to absorb the for-itself which ought to dissolve it” (607). According to Hurley, “Sartre proposes a rough correspondence between the following binarisms: the ‘In-itself’ and the ‘For-itself,’ solid and liquid, matter and consciousness, passivity and activity. The latter term in each case is the privileged one: the human subject, enmeshed within...the material universe, must rise above it” (35). Slime, then, is

a threat to the human subject. If slime can break down the boundaries between liquid and solid, then it can also precipitate the collapse of other boundaries as well: life and death, body and object. The sliminess of the Dementor's body reinforces its liminality, its existence at the juncture between these two crucial binaries. The Dementor's sliminess, its scabby skin and "clammy hands," emphasizes the threat that Dementors pose to human subjectivity (*PoA* 281). Dementors, like slime, absorb souls and reduce their victims to a liminal state.

Inferi, introduced in *Half-Blood Prince*, similarly occupy a juncture between life/death, body/object. According to Dumbledore, Inferi are "Dead bodies that have been bewitched to do a Dark wizard's bidding. Inferi have not been seen for a long time, however, not since Voldemort was last powerful ... he killed enough people to make an army of them, of course" (*HBP* 63; ellipsis in original). When Dumbledore and Harry encounter an army of Inferi at the end of the book, they are first described merely as things. In the locket-Horcrux's hiding place, a subterranean lake, "something very large and pale erupt[s] out of the dark water" when Harry attempts to Summon the Horcrux (525). Harry, extremely startled, voices his fear of the unknown: "But we don't know what the thing was," and Dumbledore responds, "What the things *are*, you mean" (525). Dumbledore's tense shift indicates both the life-in-death of the Inferi as well as the fact that he is aware of the present danger he and Harry are in, but refuses to name the danger. Instead, the Inferi are merely "the things in the water" until Rowling tells us otherwise (527). Submerged underneath the lake, the Inferi are reminiscent of the corpses that reside in the Dead Marshes in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. According to Margaret

Sinex, “These corpses...lie suspended between life and death” and their candles, paradoxically burning above the water, “possess lethal alluring properties” and have a “paralyzing effect” on Frodo Baggins, the Ringbearer (99, 94, 99). Slow realization dawns on Harry when he sees a hand in the water. “A sick feeling rose in his throat,” and when he finally faces a dead corpse in the water, he exclaims, “There are bodies in here!” in a voice “much higher than usual and most unlike his own” (528, 529). The sickening thought of bodies in the water causes a change in Harry’s voice signaling the difficulty of speaking what he’s seen. His reaction almost exactly mirrors that of Frodo in the chapter “The Passage of the Marshes.” Like Frodo, who is “fascinate[d]...most intensely” by the corpses and candles, Harry is riveted by the sight of dead bodies in the water (Sinex 101).

When the Inferi finally emerge from the water, their corpse-like bodies are uncanny and terrifying. Rowling repeats the use of slime to describe Inferi: “A slimy white hand had gripped his wrist, and the creature to whom it belonged was pulling him, slowly, backwards across the rock...everywhere Harry looked, white heads and hands were emerging from the dark water, men and women and children” (*HBP* 537). These creatures are uncanny, appearing in familiar and gender-identifiable shapes but also unfamiliar, terrifying with pale, slimy skin and “sunken, sightless eyes” (537). The uncanniness of the eyeless Dementors and sightless Inferi is reinforced because of their association with (lack of) sight. Freud argues, “the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached...to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes” (205). The Inferi have no blood to spill, either; they cannot think, feel, or see. They are dead, but somehow strangely alive—a point emphasized by Dumbledore’s use of the present tense.

According to Freud, our “primitive fear of the dead” most likely “implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him” (219). The Inferius with a hold on Harry’s arm certainly seeks to take him back to the water. In this instance, the dead man is the enemy and he seeks to destroy Harry, to drag him down into the water where he will drown and become “one more dead guardian of a fragment of Voldemort’s shattered soul” (*HBP* 538).

Unwilling to become an Inferius himself, Harry fights back using the Full Body-Bind Curse, *Petrificus Totalus*, “struggling to cling on to the smooth, soaked surface of the island as he pointed his wand at the Inferius that had his arm” (*HBP* 538). This choice of spell is an interesting one here: Harry resists paralysis and paralyzes his unhuman enemy instead, using a spell designed for the body to restore the corpse to its natural state of rigidity. In spite of his vigorous resistance, Harry is overpowered by the Inferi and “he felt arms enclose him from behind, thin, fleshless arms cold as death, and his feet left the ground as they lifted him and began to carry him, slowly and surely, back to the water, and he knew there would be no release, that he would be drowned” (538). While the Dementors cause a sensation of drowning, the Inferi literally drown their victims in the lake. Overpowered and outnumbered, Harry gives into them and the realization that he will be reduced from human to unhuman, drowned but not dead. Rowling’s choice of name emphasizes the Inferi’s reduced state—their very name derives from “inferior” because they are beings less than human. Harry finally succumbs, yet not from a desire to become an Inferius himself but arguably because he does not have the tools to fight. While “Tolkien fashioned his unique mesmerizing corpse lights in the Marshes to

symbolize the temptation of suicide for the Ringbearer,” the Inferi offer no temptation to Harry (Sinex 93). Even though they may fascinate him, he does not want to join them. Rowling modifies the “cryptic ambiguities (e.g. the living dead, fire in water)” of Tolkien’s Mere of Dead Faces by offering fire as a shield rather than a tempting weapon (93). “Like many creatures that dwell in cold and darkness, [the Inferi] fear light and warmth,” and it is Dumbledore’s powerful fire that repels them (*HBP* 529). Unlike Tolkien, Rowling provides her characters with tools—Patronuses for Dementors, fire for Inferi—to defend against these dark, liminal creatures.

Voldemort

In the traditional Gothic narrative, transgression leads to degeneration. Novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* do not begin with a degenerate being; rather, the boundary-pushing villain (or anti-hero) degenerates as a result of his crimes. The same can be said for Voldemort, whose experiments with his own soul cause him to transform from the handsome Tom Riddle into a snake-like villain. Riddle’s narrative, like many of his Gothic predecessors, is the narrative of degeneration. According to Nils Clausson, “the typical plot of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic” is degeneration “from a higher to a lower state, from the well-formed, respectable, upper-class Dr. Jekyll to the bestial, murderous, lower-class Hyde” (357). The names Jekyll and Hyde here could be easily replaced with Tom Riddle

and Voldemort. Tom Riddle's new body, the body known and recognized as Lord Voldemort, is an uncanny one. It has humanoid shape, but its coloring and facial features are distinctly unhuman. Voldemort also shares an uncanny resemblance to Tolkien's Gollum, who "has so shrunken in spirit and degenerated physically and morally that only vestiges of hobbit nature remain...A material thing [the One Ring]—not a living being—is what he most cares for" (Rogers II and Underwood 128). The material things Voldemort cares about the most are his Horcruxes and he treats other characters as tools for his use. Voldemort, like Dementors and Ineri (and Gollum), is at once familiar and unfamiliar; he terrifies us, yet also fascinates us because there is so little of his humanity left. Much of the sixth book, *Half-Blood Prince*, is spent studying him and his motives, charting his progression—or more precisely, regression—from Tom Riddle to Lord Voldemort. In *Harry Potter*, Tom Riddle's crimes are numerous but his most sinister and transgressive are Horcrux creation and the attendant murders involved in the process. As Dumbledore tells us, Voldemort "tampered so ill-advisedly with the deepest laws of magic" (DH 570). These crimes ultimately lead to his physical and spiritual degeneration—his transformation into a thing.

Although Tom Riddle, described as "his handsome father in miniature," begins his career at Hogwarts with great promise, Rowling suggests that the potential for degeneration lies lurking within his character even as a child (HBP 252). He is popular among his peers, well liked by his professors, and, seeming to have learned from his earlier transgressions at the orphanage, does not get in trouble for thievery or bullying. Yet Rowling suggests that despite Riddle's outward show of conformity, there is

something sinister lurking underneath. While watching Dumbledore's memory of first meeting Riddle, Harry notices his reaction to discovering that he is a wizard: "[Riddle's] face was transfigured: there was a wild happiness upon it, yet for some reason it did not make him better-looking; on the contrary, his finely carved features seemed somehow rougher, his expression almost bestial" (254). Although he looks like his handsome father, Riddle inherits the mental instability of his mother's family, the Gaunts, an instability that manifests itself as a "bestial" inner-nature. The notion of something animalistic within the human subject resonates with nineteenth-century theories of degeneration, which proposed that if humans evolved from beasts, then they could just as easily devolve and "ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection" (Hurley 56). As characterized by Rowling, Riddle is akin to the beast people in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, "occupying a border identity midway between animality and humanity" (24). Riddle's "wild happiness" at learning that he has magical ability, and thus is special and unique among the children at the orphanage, stems from a desire for superiority. Yet while Riddle believes that being a wizard advances him above his fellow orphans, Rowling demonstrates that there is something lacking and deficient in Riddle's character. There is a suggestion that Riddle's degeneration is inevitable; even as a child, he is not entirely human but also partly animalistic.

Even though Riddle begins with a potential for degeneracy, it is his choice to create Horcruxes that initiates his process of degeneration and the genesis of two distinct identities: Tom Marvolo Riddle and Lord Voldemort. Rowling reinforces the image of

Riddle's animalistic inner-self in Professor Slughorn's suppressed memory about Horcruxes: "[Riddle] left, but not before Harry had glimpsed his face, which was full of that same wild happiness it had worn when he had first found out that he was a wizard, the sort of happiness that did not enhance his handsome features, but made them, somehow, less human" (*HBP* 466). Once again, it is Riddle's quest for supremacy that causes him to appear less than human. Like Jekyll and Dorian before him, Riddle strengthens what is degenerate within his own character as he embraces his dark side—here, through the use of dark magic. The opposition between Riddle's wholesome appearance and malevolent inner-nature could be considered an example of Gothic doubling. According to Riquelme, "The doubling characteristic of Gothic writing evokes the mixed, ambiguous, character of human experience, which holds the potential for both destructive and creative transformation" (591). As Riddle creates Horcruxes and an alter-ego known as Lord Voldemort, he simultaneously deconstructs the identity of Tom Marvolo Riddle, shamefully abandoned by his father and orphaned by his mother.²⁰ Riddle rejects what he finds to be weak in himself—his father's name, his mother's mortality—and instead nurtures his inner, evil self. Riddle's weaknesses, exorcised from the identity Lord Voldemort, are all ties to his humanity; he rejects the characteristics that make him human and he becomes less human as a result. The degeneration of Tom Riddle is directly linked to the creation of Horcruxes, objects in which he has invested his identity. Voldemort is like Gollum, who "comes to 'care for' and identify with one

²⁰ Significantly, the phrase "I am Lord Voldemort" is a fragmented and reworked version of "Tom Marvolo Riddle." Voldemort fragments his own name, taken from both his paternal and maternal family, to construct his new identity.

thing—the golden ring—that he calls by the same name he gives himself: ‘precious.’ Gollum’s life and outlook is...that of the materialist—a prisoner of ‘matter,’ his only point of reference [is] himself and his ring, which is a surrogate for himself” (Rogers II and Underwood 129). Interestingly, Tolkien similarly constructs doubles around Gollum’s identity: Slinker/Stinker as well as Sméagol/Gollum. For both Rowling and Tolkien, this doubling effect is precipitated by an identification with a material object; it is Voldemort’s (and Gollum’s) investment in materiality that forces his identity to fracture, resulting in the split identities of Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort as well as the seven soul-infused Horcruxes.

As a result of his boundary-pushing experiments, Riddle’s handsome face begins to deteriorate. At an unknown point between working for Borgin and Burkes after graduating and becoming the most notorious dark wizard of all time, Voldemort returns to Hogwarts and interviews for a teaching position. Harry watches Dumbledore’s memory of the interview, which records Voldemort’s body in an in-between stage:

Harry let out a hastily stifled gasp. Voldemort had entered the room. His features were not those Harry had seen emerge from the great stone cauldron almost two years before [in *Goblet of Fire*]; they were not as snakelike, the eyes were not yet scarlet, the face not yet masklike, and yet he 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 had a permanently bloody look, though the pupils were not yet the slits that Harry knew they would become. (*HBP* 413)

This representation lies between the two distinct entities Tom Riddle and Lord Voldemort. No longer handsome, yet not quite reptilian, Voldemort is merely “blurred” and “distorted.” Seen here, where he admits to conducting experiments that push the boundaries of magic, Voldemort’s body markedly displays the physical side effects of splitting his soul. At this stage of his transformation, Voldemort begins to appear uncanny. He is familiar and still recognizable as Tom Riddle, but also strangely unfamiliar; there is something not quite right with his appearance, emphasized by the “waxy features” and “bloody eyes.” Rowling’s description of Voldemort in this in-between stage reflects the descriptions of Dementors and Inferi: wax, a sticky substance, is indicative of slime and the emphasis on Voldemort’s bloodshot eyes brings to mind the eyeless Dementors and sightless Inferi.²¹ Sliminess and sightlessness, then, are the two most prevalent indicators of unhuman uncanniness.

Unlike the Dementors and Inferi, Voldemort’s body seems to exist on a continuum and manifests itself in various shapes and sizes throughout the series. This amorphousness in Voldemort’s existence could be considered “a slimy amorphousness” that “characterizes the human, who can be ‘reduced to the slime from which he came, and forced to put on the flesh of the reptile and the snake’” (Hurley 63). Rowling’s consistent description of Voldemort as “snakelike” not only evokes his bestial, animalistic inner-self

²¹ The emphasis on slime and sightlessness similarly connects Voldemort to his degenerated literary ancestor Gollum, who is described as a small, slimy creature and in terms of “Sight and blindness, both literal and metaphoric” (Rogers II and Underwood 127-128).

but also reinforces his indeterminate, ever-shifting existence.²² When we first encounter Voldemort in *Philosopher's Stone*, he is so weak that he must share another's body, a result of the rebounded killing curse: "I was ripped from my body, I was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost ... but still, I was alive" (*GoF* 566; ellipsis in original).

Rowling establishes Voldemort's identity as unfixed and multifarious, changing, disintegrating, and reforming as the need arises. In *Chamber of Secrets*, Harry meets the diary-Horcrux's preservation of sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle, and it is not until *Goblet of Fire* that we see Voldemort in his most notorious, sinister form: "Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils" (558). This version of Voldemort's body, described in terms of corpses and reptiles, not only demonstrates the damage to his body, but also reflects the damage to his soul. After splitting his soul into eight pieces, Voldemort is no longer fully human in either body or spirit. Before his return to a body in *Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort's lack of humanity is validated by Rubeus Hagrid when he remarks that that there is not "enough human left in [Voldemort] to die" (*PS* 46). Indeed, there is not even enough of Voldemort left to appear in a fully human form. He is so fractured and fragmented, both physically and spiritually, that he reforms and disintegrates in various bodies and reincarnations throughout the series.

²² In the *Harry Potter* series, many characters occupy a juncture between animality and humanity. Even though characters including the werewolf Remus Lupin and Animagus Minerva McGonagall transform into animals, they are not vilified or thingified in the same way that Voldemort is (except, perhaps, with the exception of werewolf Fenrir Greyback).

At two memorable points in the narrative, Voldemort's body appears most uncanny and thing-like. During a pivotal sequence at the end of *Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort is returned to his body through dark magic. But to return to one form means to leave another, and the shape Voldemort leaves is a disturbing, unidentifiable one:

It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone and revealed something ugly, slimy and blind – but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child, except that Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face – no child alive ever had a face like that – was flat and snake-like, with gleaming red eyes.

The thing seemed almost helpless...Harry saw the look of revulsion on Wormtail's weak, pale face in the firelight as he carried the creature to the rim of the cauldron. (*GoF* 555-556)

“Thing” is repeated here four times in relation to Voldemort: “the thing,” “something,” and “anything.” Even though Harry and the reader share a sneaking suspicion that this entity is indeed Voldemort, he remains unnamed until he issues from the cauldron with “the face that had haunted [Harry's] nightmares for three years” (558). Voldemort is uncannily familiar and unfamiliar, appearing in the shape of a child but “less like a child” than anything Harry has ever seen before. Here, Voldemort is described as a “raw,” underdeveloped fetus before his rebirth and the cauldron serves as a vessel for regeneration, a womb. This attempt to return to the womb, however, is a frightening and

disturbing one. In this shape, Voldemort's uncanniness derives from the *unheimlich* compulsion to return to the mother, the original home. As an uncanny, unhuman being, Voldemort resists and exceeds language; mutilated beyond all recognition, Voldemort is a mere thing. At arguably his lowest point, Voldemort is compared to the insects that live under stones and rocks, signaling his regression to the most primitive forms of life. Significantly, he is like something "slimy and blind," evoking his amorphousness and connecting him to the unhuman Dementors and Inferi. With slimy, scaly skin and a "snake-like" face, Voldemort similarly induces nausea; Wormtail wears a "look of revulsion," visibly repulsed by the thing in his arms. Yet Voldemort exerts a powerful pull on Wormtail and Harry's attention. As Wormtail completes the dark magic that reincarnates Voldemort, Harry watches, disgusted yet spellbound with horror.

Voldemort's fetal body is used as an ingredient in the potion that regenerates him, blurring the boundaries between body and object and emphasizing his thingness in this scene. Ironically, however, Voldemort is regenerated into a degenerate being. Wormtail, Voldemort's witless assistant, "lowered the creature into the cauldron; there was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface; Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud" (*GoF* 556). Here, Voldemort is merely "the creature," and the "hiss" issued from the cauldron prefigures the snake-like entity that will soon emerge. The chapter in which this resurrection scene takes place, "Flesh Blood and Bone," is fittingly named after the rest of the ingredients in this stew: "*Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son*"; "*Flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive your master*"; and "*B-blood of the enemy ... forcibly taken ... you will ... resurrect your foe*"

(556; ellipses in original). Genetic material from Voldemort's father, servant (Wormtail), and enemy (Harry) are converted into objects, tools he uses to regenerate his body. The use of the words "renew," "revive," and "resurrect" in this incantation all signal Voldemort's intended goal, the regeneration of his body, emphasized by the repetition of "r" sounds. Harry, Voldemort's mortal enemy, is allowed to live because he is essential to Voldemort's rebirth. Cedric Diggory, on the other hand, is murdered by Wormtail when Voldemort's "high, cold voice" commands "*Kill the spare*" (553). Voldemort's language here demonstrates the way he values other human beings: as valueless objects to be discarded at will. Harry inwardly begs for Voldemort's fetal body to have drowned, "But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron" (557-558). Voldemort's body is literally born anew within the cauldron; in this scene, he uncannily gives birth to himself. But his new, regenerated body is a degenerate one: "His hands were like large, pale spiders; his long white fingers caressed his own chest, his arms, his face; the red eyes, whose pupils were slits, like a cat's, gleamed still more brightly through the darkness" (559). Again, Rowling describes Voldemort in terms of insects and animals, emphasizing his regression from human to something less than human.

At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort again appears in a similarly thing-like form. This time, however, the thing-body is a manifestation of his soul. After Voldemort uses the killing curse on Harry for the second time, Harry wakes up in a portal between

this world and the next, a mental projection of King's Cross station. As Harry takes in his surroundings, he hears "thumping and whimpering" from somewhere nearby:

He recoiled. He had spotted the thing that was making the noises. It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath.

He was afraid of it. Small and fragile and wounded though it was, he did not want to approach it...it repulsed him. (*DH* 566)

While Harry is blemishless, reflecting the purity of his own soul, Voldemort is mutilated and repulsing. This embodiment of Voldemort's soul is remarkably similar to his body-between-bodies in *Goblet of Fire*: the "raw" and "flayed" skin evokes ooze and slime, and, again, it is child-like in size, evoking the *unheimlich* return to the mother, a return that can never take place. In this instance, Voldemort's small stature is indicative of his spiritual decay. Having torn his soul into eight pieces, Voldemort mutilated it beyond recognition. This piece, the one attached to Harry, is an uncanny, disgusting thing, an "it" and "something that is beyond either [Dumbledore's or Harry's] help" (567). This time, Harry turns away from Voldemort's uncanny body and toward Dumbledore instead—it no longer fascinates him, it no longer controls his attention. Instead, Dumbledore and Harry leave Voldemort's soul to "eternal unbounded agony" (Rothman 205). While Harry and Dumbledore's souls are both "whole," Voldemort's has reaped the rewards of murder and Horcrux creation (*DH* 567). His soul, like his body, has been reduced to a mere thing.

In both *Goblet of Fire* and *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort's child-sized body reflects his literal degeneration, his devolution from a man to a thing. Hurley argues that "To be a Thing is to inhabit a body having no recognizable or definite form, but it is unmistakably to inhabit a *material* body" (31). While the immateriality of the King's Cross scene may be problematic, Dumbledore insists that Harry's vision is real. On a spiritual plane, Voldemort's existence is still a degenerated one. Voldemort's thingness in both the material and immaterial worlds emphasizes his physical and spiritual regression. In *Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort's body is an object devoid of a whole soul, used as an ingredient in the potion that returns him to his form as Lord Voldemort. In *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort's soul is an object "stuffed out of sight" devoid of a whole body. Each manifestation mirrors the other and reflects the damage inflicted by years of evil. Voldemort's pursuit of immortality does not go unpunished: the existence that he preserves is a fragmented, degenerated one. That his appearance in both of these scenes is slimy and revolting is indicative of his uncanniness; Voldemort is described as a perverted infant, child-like in shape but less like a child than anything we could imagine. By irrevocably tying his existence to his Horcruxes, Voldemort ensures that he, like them, exists as a mere thing.

Indeed, Voldemort's degenerate existence is amplified by his construction of a new identity, a new name he "knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak" (*CoS* 231). However, as Dumbledore rightly tells us, "Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself" (*PS* 216). The loss of language exhibited by many characters in the face of Dementors, Inferi, and even Lord Voldemort himself, is indicative of the fear they

inspire. That Voldemort is frequently referred to as “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” “You-Know-Who,” and “the Dark Lord” demonstrates just how much he is feared by the wizarding community—he is even once called “Lord – Thingy” by Cornelius Fudge (*OotP* 745). While Voldemort attempts to control wizarding society through fear, Dumbledore suggests that Voldemort himself is ruled by fear: “There is nothing to be feared from a body, Harry, any more than there is anything to be feared from the darkness. Lord Voldemort, who secretly fears both, disagrees” (*HBP* 529). Voldemort “fears the dead. He does not love” (*DH* 577). Voldemort, who fears the body, the darkness, and the dead, attempts to overcome material existence and live immortally. By focusing on the material, however, Voldemort neglects his immaterial soul and fragments it to shreds. Rowling’s work, like Tolkien’s (and many late-nineteenth-century novelists’), demonstrates that “a strictly material conception of life involve[s] darkness, misery, degeneracy, and death in dreadful forms” (Rogers II and Underwood 130). Rowling punishes Voldemort’s materialist view of life by depicting him as degenerate and unhuman. By mutilating his soul, Voldemort transforms his body into an object—he transforms himself into a thing.

In this chapter, I have looked at body-turned-object things: Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort. Dementors and Inferi, dark creatures that live devoid of soul, are unhuman entities that exist at the junctures of body/object and life/death. They are uncanny beings, associated with death, corpses, soullessness, sightlessness, and slime. As such, they induce fear, revulsion, and nausea in their victims—as well as a kind of morbid fascination. Their humanoid yet defiled bodies are simultaneously familiar and

unfamiliar, rendering them uncanny, unhuman creatures. Voldemort, too, is an unhuman entity. His body degenerates from the young, handsome Tom Riddle to the snake-like Voldemort as he continues to mutilate his soul and create Horcruxes. Voldemort, like late-nineteenth-century Gothic villains, degenerates as a result of his crimes.

Significantly, Voldemort degenerates into a thing. By intimately linking objects to his own existence, Voldemort transforms his own body into an object. Voldemort is uncanny as well, characterized in terms of slime, corpses, insects, animals, and in his most thing-like forms, a fetus. Although Voldemort successfully regenerates his degenerate body, there can be no legitimate return to the original home. As liminal, transgressive, uncanny entities, Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort exist beyond the sphere of language; they render their victims incapable of speech, and are merely referred to as “things.” In the next chapter, I will consider other objects that, while liminal, are not transgressive: the Deathly Hallows. The Hallows, in my reading, manage to negotiate boundaries and resist thingification.

Chapter Three

Resisting Thingification: The Deathly Hallows

At Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour's wedding, Harry, Ron, and Hermione encounter a strange symbol "like a triangular eye" worn by family friend Xenophilius Lovegood on a necklace (*DH* 177). Viktor Krum identifies this symbol as the mark of Gellert Grindelwald, a notorious dark wizard who terrorized Europe during the early twentieth century. Later, Hermione discovers the same symbol drawn into Dumbledore's copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* and again on the tombstone of Ignotus Peverell in the graveyard at Godric's Hollow. Hermione decides to get answers from Xenophilius when she spots the symbol again in a letter sent from Dumbledore to Grindelwald reprinted in *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*. Xenophilius reveals that the inexplicable symbol is the sign of the Deathly Hallows, three magical objects from Beedle's "The Tale of the Three Brothers." In the tale, Death devises three gifts, one for each brother: an "unbeatable" wand of elder, a stone to resurrect the dead, and a cloak of invisibility. When Hermione asks if the Peverell family has anything to do with the Hallows, Xenophilius responds, "the three brothers in the story were actually the three Peverell brothers, Antioch, Cadmus and Ignotus...they were the original owners of the Hallows" (335). Although the story does not once mention the words "Deathly Hallows," Xenophilius insists that "the ancient story refers to three objects, or Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death" (333).

The function of the Deathly Hallows—the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak—seems to be the same as Voldemort’s Horcruxes: to conquer death. Just as Voldemort collects the heirlooms and artifacts that he turns into Horcruxes, the presumptive “master of death” must collect all three Deathly Hallows. According to Jean Baudrillard, “There are profound affinities between [the taste for antiques and the passion for collecting], and in both we find the same narcissistic regression, the same way of suppressing time, the same imaginary mastery of birth and death” (76). For Baudrillard, a quest for objects constitutes a quest for origins and a quest to defeat time. However, the promise of the Hallows is, like the promise of the Horcruxes, a false one. Despite the similarities between Hallows and Horcruxes, Rowling creates one vital distinction between how these objects work to achieve their ends: while Voldemort must fragment himself to create a Horcrux (and the Horcruxes themselves are disbursed throughout Great Britain), the Deathly Hallows must be united. The Deathly Hallows operate through wholeness while the Horcruxes operate through fragmentation, a distinction that renders them less problematic than Horcruxes. Although a decision to collect Hallows is still dangerous, it is not as evil as the decision to create Horcruxes.

The Deathly Hallows, like many of Voldemort’s Horcruxes, are antique objects. Their mythical origins in “The Tale of the Three Brothers” partially conceal, yet also partially reveal their identities as the three objects created by the Peverell brothers. According to Baudrillard, “antiques partake of ‘legend’, because they are defined first and foremost by their mythical quality, by their coefficient of authenticity” (80). The very name “Hallow” reinforces the significance of authenticity: deriving from a verb meaning

to make or honor as holy, the Hallows are revered by those who believe in their existence. The wand, the stone, and the cloak can each be traced back to their mythic creation in Beedle's tale; their identities are grounded in belonging to the unique, un-reproducible set of objects called "Deathly Hallows." Rowling makes another differentiation between the Horcruxes and the Hallows that allows them to provide a productive alternative to thingification: unlike the Horcruxes, which are born through human death, the Hallows, according to their mythological origins, were born through the evasion of death—through the continuation of life. Even though many characters do not seem aware of the existence of the Hallows, Rowling suggests that this knowledge of origins is important to the appropriate use of the objects. Voldemort, for example, desires to possess the Elder Wand because of its fame as an "unbeatable" weapon, but does not know it is one of the Hallows. Voldemort's unawareness of the Hallows is further demonstrated by the fact that he transforms the Resurrection Stone, the stone set in Gaunt's ring, into a Horcrux. Voldemort's ignorance of these objects' origins, the fact that they are indeed Hallows, could be read as indicative of his quest to obliterate his own origins. Although Harry is at first unaware of the Hallows, he is able to recognize their existence and authenticity once he learns about them from Xenophilius. Harry's knowledge of these objects, and his acknowledgement of their unreliability and the dangerous temptations they pose, arguably allows him to use them carefully and productively at the end of *Deathly Hallows*.

In the first chapter, I argue that Voldemort's objects become things when they transgress the boundaries between body and object—when they become Horcruxes.

While the Deathly Hallows each have peculiar and interesting relationships with the body, they are not object-bodies themselves the same way that Horcruxes are and do not fit the strict definition of “thing” I have been using. Instead, Rowling presents objects that have a more ambiguous relationship with the body and can be either productive or destructive depending on how they are used. The wand, for example, has been used violently throughout much of its bloody history, but has been tamed under the benign ownership of Albus Dumbledore. The stone is similarly complicated: it can either be inappropriately used to call back those who are at peace or appropriately used to enable self-sacrifice. The cloak, an object that disguises the body, seems to be the only non-problematic Hallow. When used incorrectly, the cloak reveals an apparently disembodied head or hand, but these apparitions are mostly comical and not frighteningly uncanny. Although Harry uses the cloak to disobey school rules and wander around Hogwarts at night, the cloak is never used malevolently or as a weapon, but rather as a protective shield. Unlike Voldemort’s Horcruxes, which violate the boundaries between body and object as well as life and death, the Hallows access and negotiate the boundaries between body/object, life/death, and materiality/immateriality. By challenging (but not transgressing) these boundaries, the Deathly Hallows represent an alternative to thingification—the objects themselves are not things. Indeed, the Hallows resist thingification precisely because they cause boundaries to fluctuate but not breakdown.

The Elder Wand

So the oldest brother, who was a combative man, asked for a wand more powerful than any in existence: a wand that must always win duels for its owner, a wand worthy of a wizard who had conquered Death! So Death crossed to an elder tree on the banks of the river, fashioned a wand from a branch that hung there, and gave it to the oldest brother. (DH 331)

The first Deathly Hallow, occasionally referred to as the “Deathstick” or the “Wand of Destiny,” is arguably the most dangerous and well known among the three. Passed from owner to owner through theft and murder, its bloody history renders it remarkably similar to Voldemort’s Horcruxes. Although the wand occupies a liminal zone between body and object, it does not transgress those boundaries like Horcruxes do—unlike the Horcruxes, the wand is not a thing. Wands can be thought of as an extension of the body, forming a symbiotic learning relationship with their owner. In the *Harry Potter* series, wands appear to possess a certain amount of sentience; according to British wandmaker Ollivander, “it’s really the wand that chooses the wizard” (*PS* 63). Explaining how wands may switch allegiances, Ollivander remarks, “The best results, however, must always come where there is the strongest affinity between wizard and wand. These connections are complex. An initial attraction, and then a mutual quest for experience, the wand learning from the wizard, the wizard from the wand...but the conquered wand will usually bend its will to its new master” (*DH* 399). Unlike Horcruxes, which are a sinister mutation of body and object, wands are instruments

through which wizards channel their magic and, like other tools including broomsticks and eyeglasses, become productive extensions of the body. Wands enhance the body, but do not presume to *be* a body. While wands do possess a sentience of their own, this allows them to form a mutually beneficial relationship with their master. Conversely, Horcruxes exert Voldemort's inflexible will over those who contact them, such as Ginny and Ron Weasley. While Voldemort has imbued objects with his own soul, thus investing them with sentience and life that transgresses the boundaries between body and object, wands occupy this juncture productively as part of their very nature. Indeed, Ollivander "talk[s] about wands like they've got feelings...like they can think for themselves" (399). A wand's sentience, unlike a Horcrux's, is not depicted as transgressive or dangerous. Instead of becoming a part-object/part-body thing, the Elder Wand, like other wands, retains its objecthood.

Among other wands, the Elder Wand has a particularly intimate association with death. Like several of the objects Voldemort uses to create Horcruxes, the wand instigates murder—frequently, the wand itself executes the killings. Discussing elder as a wand wood in general, Ollivander remarks: "The rarest wand wood of all, and reputed to be deeply unlucky, the elder wand is trickier to master than any other. It contains powerful magic, but scorns to remain with any owner who is not the superior of his or her company" (*Pottermore*). Although the Elder Wand's previous master does not necessarily need to be killed by its new one, Voldemort and every other "combative" wizard who has sought the wand seems to have missed this nuance of wandlore. Because of the wand's reputation as "unbeatable," it has inspired many murderous and power-

hungry wizards to claim it for themselves, at one point chronicled as a “moste wicked and subtle friend...who knows ways of magick moste evile” (*The Tales of Beedle the Bard* 102-103).²³ That the wand is described as knowing evil magic itself emphasizes its agency and sentience. Significantly, the Elder Wand possesses a unique core: Thestral tail hair, “a powerful and tricky substance that can be mastered only by a witch or wizard capable of facing death” (*J.K. Rowling Official Website*). Threstrals, winged beasts that look like skeletal, black horses, can only be seen by those who have witnessed and come to terms with death. While Thestrals are dangerous creatures, however, they are friendly and almost affectionate when tamed, suggesting that the Elder Wand itself is not inherently evil but has been trained in evil by its previous owners. Regardless, the wand’s very power derives from a mastery over the concept of death and mortality. Voldemort, who is incapable of coming to terms with his own mortality, is particularly ill-suited to own and master the Elder Wand.

In “The Tale of the Three Brothers,” a thief steals the Elder Wand from the first brother and slits his throat. While the mythic beginnings of the wand may not necessarily reflect the wand’s true origins, thievery is deeply embedded in the wand’s history. Through Voldemort’s quest to possess the wand—he is convinced that the Elder Wand is the only weapon that will work against Harry’s holly and phoenix feather wand—Harry learns that one of its most recent owners was the wandmaker Gregorovitch. Accessing Voldemort’s thoughts, Harry witnesses Gregorovitch’s memory of an unknown thief stealing the Elder Wand from his workshop. For much of the seventh volume, Gellert

²³ In *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Dumbledore tells us, “No witch has ever claimed to own the Elder Wand. Make of that what you will” (106).

Grindelwald, the boy in the memory, is known only as “the thief.” The use of this epithet emphasizes that Grindelwald’s ownership of the wand is considered illegitimate, yet because of the nature of elder the wand transfers its allegiance to its new owner. As Ollivander notes, “it takes a remarkable wizard to keep the elder wand for any length of time” (*Pottermore*). The ownership of elder wands is characterized as transient; the wand naturally moves from owner to owner by whatever means necessary. In the wand’s case, thievery becomes a legitimate method of procurement. While the thievery of Voldemort’s eventual Horcruxes is nearly always problematic and corrupting, thievery of wands is slightly more complicated and, at times, valid. Harry, for instance, takes Draco Malfoy’s hawthorn wand by force and wins its loyalty while Ron, who disarmed Bellatrix Lestrange, does not win the loyalty of her “Unyielding” walnut one (*DH* 399). Wands, then, are more flexible objects that seem resilient to corruption—their ability to switch allegiance depends almost entirely on the wand wood. While walnut may be “unyielding,” elder will serve its new master if it believes it has been won; the Elder Wand itself is aware of who has taken it and where its allegiances truly lie. When Voldemort retrieves the Elder Wand from Dumbledore’s tomb, for instance, “a shower of sparks flew from its tip, sparkling over the corpse of its last owner, ready to serve a new master at last,” however Voldemort mistakenly believes that the Elder Wand is ready to serve *him* (405). On the contrary, the wand is ready to serve its proper owner: Draco Malfoy.²⁴ Since Voldemort has not stolen the wand from its current owner, he has not

²⁴ Draco Malfoy unwittingly becomes the master of the Elder Wand when he uses *Expelliarmus* to disarm Dumbledore in *Half-Blood Prince*. When Harry takes Draco’s wand in *Deathly Hallows*, the Elder Wand becomes loyal to Harry. Voldemort, however,

earned its loyalty.²⁵ Wands' flexible natures allow them to resist the corruption wrought by the problematic and intersecting values that plague Voldemort's eventual Horcruxes. Unlike objects including Slytherin's locket and Gaunt's ring, which absorb new values and meanings as they travel from owner to owner and are made vulnerable to corruption, wands are better able to retain their inherent identity and loyalty. If they do switch their allegiance, that decision is their own.

Grindelwald, like Voldemort, desires the wand because of its power; both mistakenly believe that the wand will make them all-powerful. Unlike Voldemort, however, Grindelwald also wants the wand because it is one of the Deathly Hallows. For Grindelwald, the wand, as both a magical instrument and an antique, combines Baudrillard's "myth of power" and "myth of origins" into one object (82). According to Baudrillard, "What 'underdeveloped' people want from the object is an image of the Father as *Power*...what nostalgic 'civilized' people want is the image of the Father signifying *birth* and value...The 'underdeveloped' fetishize power by means of the technical object... 'civilized' people, for their part, fetishize birth and authenticity by means of the mythological object" (82). The implication here is that Voldemort, who is unaware that the wand is a Hallow and therefore does not value it as an antique, is "underdeveloped" because he only wants the wand for power. Voldemort expresses his desire for power early in the series, telling an eleven-year-old Harry, "There is no good

believes that the wand is loyal to Snape and has him gruesomely killed in order to gain power over the wand.

²⁵ Voldemort once again demonstrates his disregard for human life by violating the sacred space of Dumbledore's tomb. That the wand is retrieved from a grave further illustrates its association with death.

and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it" (*PS* 211). Six years later, Voldemort lacks the ability to overpower Harry's wand, and his obsession with the Elder Wand demonstrates that "whatever it is that man lacks is invested in the object" (Baudrillard 82). For Voldemort, the Elder Wand symbolizes his final chance to defeat his enemy. Although it could be argued that Grindelwald merely wants power as well, his fascination with uniting the Deathly Hallows could be seen as an attempt to authenticate that power, to ground it in mythology and thus legitimize himself as the "invincible" master of death (*DH* 574). Ultimately, the Elder Wand does not give Voldemort power because he has not earned its loyalty. Voldemort cannot violate the wand and force it to do his bidding, as he can with his Horcruxes. Rather, the wand resists Voldemort as well as thingification.

The Resurrection Stone

Then the second brother, who was an arrogant man, decided that he wanted to humiliate Death still further, and asked for the power to recall others from Death. So Death picked up a stone from the riverbank and gave it to the second brother, and told him that the stone would have the power to bring back the dead. (DH 331)

The second Deathly Hallow, the Resurrection Stone, hides in plain sight for much of the sixth book. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, it is revealed that the stone set in Marvolo Gaunt's ring, one of Voldemort's Horcruxes, is in fact the Resurrection

Stone. Over time, the stone's true identity is forgotten. Just as "arrogant" as the second brother in the tale, Gaunt mistakes the sign of the Deathly Hallows engraved on the stone for the Peverell coat of arms and cherishes the ring as a symbol of family prestige and pureblood heritage. Later, as a Horcrux, the ring becomes a vessel for a piece of Voldemort's soul—the ring becomes a thing. The Resurrection Stone itself becomes lost in these layers of problematic meanings. Baudrillard argues that "Every object thus has two functions – to be put to use and to be possessed," yet Horcruxes, as corrupted objects, are only capable of serving one of these functions, to be possessed (86). Dumbledore discovers this when he finds the ring in Gaunt's shack and, forgetting that it is a Horcrux, attempts to use it to resurrect his family: "I picked it up, and I put it on, and for a second I imagined that I was about to see Ariana, and my mother, and my father, and to tell them how very, very sorry I was" (*DH* 576). Instead of seeing his family, however, Dumbledore receives a fatal curse; as a Horcrux, the stone cannot be put to its proper use. When Dumbledore destroys the Horcrux and releases the stone from its setting, it is provided with a kind of rebirth and can be put to use for its intended function. No longer serving as a Horcrux, the stone is no longer a thing but an object once more.

The stone's ability to resurrect the dead allows it to access the boundaries between life and death—in a sense, the stone is able to create things. Barbara M. Benedict argues, "Things and ghosts seem opposites: the first all material form, the second all immaterial spirit. Both things and ghosts, however, lie on the margins of form and formlessness, materiality and meaning: things metaphorically connote the soulless body, ghosts the bodiless soul, and both express the problem of finding selfhood in the

nexus of spirit and form” (19). Although my definition of “thing” diverges from Benedict’s—I argue that an object-turned-body thing has both a body and a soul—the “pale imitations” generated by the stone can be seen as bodiless souls (*DH* 346).²⁶ The beings generated by the stone have immaterial bodies that do not belong in the material world. Like Dumbledore, who “would have used [the stone] in an attempt to drag back those who are at peace,” the second brother uses the stone to recall a girl he once hoped to marry (577). Brought back from the dead, the second brother’s lost love was “*sad and cold, separated from him as by a veil. Though she had returned to the mortal world, she did not truly belong there and suffered*” (332). As the tale demonstrates, the dead do not belong in the world of the living; the second brother’s fiancée cannot exist “in the nexus of spirit and form.” The second brother, “*driven mad with hopeless longing, killed himself so as to truly join her*” (332). In the tale, the stone becomes a weapon used by Death to lure victims into suicide. Rowling makes a distinction between proper and improper use of the stone’s ability to resurrect the dead: when used inappropriately, the stone violates the boundaries between life and death, forcing the dead to live in a realm where they do not truly belong. As with Dementors and Inferi, Rowling illustrates that the world of the

²⁶ In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling differentiates between various kinds of ghosts and spirits. The House Ghosts—Nearly Headless Nick (Gryffindor), the Fat Friar (Hufflepuff), the Bloody Baron (Slytherin), and the Grey Lady (Ravenclaw)—are described as “Pearly-white and slightly transparent” (*PS* 86). They can speak, glide through walls and all other material substances, “almost” taste food, and cry (*CoS* 102). When characters are touched by ghosts, they feel as though they’ve “just plunged into a bucket of ice cold water” (*PS* 91). They seem to have a certain amount of materiality, because Moaning Myrtle displaces water whenever she enters and exits a toilet. Peeves the Poltergeist, on the other hand, has the material capability of interacting with objects, frequently throwing various missiles at students and professors alike. The spirits conjured by the Resurrection Stone are described as more material than ghosts, yet less material than solid flesh.

dead and the world of the living are not meant to coincide. The second brother's lost love is "tantalizingly both present and absent," inspiring a sense of loss rather than fulfillment (*The Tales of Beedle the Bard* 99). The result of this violation is the death, or more precisely, suicide, of the stone's owner.

Conversely, Harry uses the Resurrection Stone appropriately to recall his deceased loved ones—Lily Potter, James Potter, Sirius Black, and Remus Lupin—in what he believes to be the final moments of his own life: "They were neither ghosts nor truly flesh, he could see that. They resembled most closely the Riddle that had escaped from the diary, so long ago, and had been memory made nearly solid. Less substantial than living bodies, but much more than ghosts, they moved towards him, and on each face there was the same loving smile" (*DH* 560). Interestingly, these immaterial bodies are directly compared to the manifestation of Voldemort's soul released by the diary-Horcrux. They are less solid than flesh but more substantial than spirit, occupying a liminal zone somewhere between life and death. Unlike the soul within the diary, however, which seeks to overstep the boundaries between life and death and return to the world of the living, the beings generated by the stone exist at the juncture between life and death for a moment and then return to the world where they belong, the world of the dead. The stone cannot really bring people back from the dead, only temporarily recreate their essence. Described with "loving smile[s]" on their faces, it is difficult to classify these entities as uncanny. They do not generate fear and revulsion like the Dementors or Inferi, but rather love and strength. Unlike the "sad and cold" fiancée, Harry's loved ones are "a part of [him]...Invisible to anyone else...their presence was his courage" (561).

These beings are not truly transgressive things: they have no real body but are not objects either, and their ability to cross the boundary between this world and the next is only momentary. These beings could be called inverse-things: uncategorical entities that do not rupture boundaries, but allow boundaries to fluctuate.

It is ironic that the Resurrection Stone is Voldemort's inheritance from Cadmus Peverell because there is no one that he wants to bring back from the dead. Having spent his adolescence distancing himself from both his maternal and paternal family, Voldemort has no deceased loved ones whom he would like to see. According to Virginia Zimmerman, "For him, the stone is only a Horcrux, an object meant to defeat time" (197). This objective, to defeat time, is precisely the "suppression of time" that Baudrillard discusses in relation to the proclivity for antiques (75). Baudrillard argues, "The problem of time is a fundamental aspect of collecting. As Maurice Rheims says: 'A phenomenon that often goes hand in hand with the passion for collecting is the loss of any sense of the present time'" (95). Voldemort, who utilizes his objects in an attempt to defeat death, attempts to overcome time and thus displaces his Horcruxes beyond time. Because Voldemort devalues his past and immediate ancestors, he "is particularly ill-suited to recognize that the stone is the Resurrection Stone of legend" (Zimmerman 197). When Harry inherits the stone from Dumbledore, it once again finds a place in time. Dumbledore hides the stone in Harry's first captured Snitch, which displays the cryptic clue "*I open at the close*" (DH 599). Harry comes to understand that "the close" is a reference to the final moments of his life; when he whispers to the Snitch "I am about to die," it opens and reveals the stone (599). The stone is given a very precise moment in

time: the time of Harry's death. Unlike Voldemort, Harry values the stone because of its ability to recall those who are dead. Harry does not use the stone to defeat time, as Voldemort attempts to do with his Horcruxes, but to access the past in the present.

The Invisibility Cloak

And then Death asked the third and youngest brother what he would like. The youngest brother was the humblest and also the wisest of the brothers, and he did not trust Death. So he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility. (DH 331)

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry finds a mysterious package among his other Christmas gifts. As Harry unwraps it, "Something fluid and silvery grey" falls to the floor along with an unsigned note, which reads:

Your father left this in my possession before he died.

It is time it was returned to you.

Use it well. (PS 148)

Ron identifies the "shining, silvery cloth" as an Invisibility Cloak, admiringly stating that "they're really rare, and *really* valuable" and that he'd "give *anything* for one" (148).

Knowing nothing about the rarity and value of Invisibility Cloaks in the magical world,

Harry's response is much more emotional: he wonders who sent him the cloak and if it really had once belonged to his father. Ron and Harry's reactions are markedly different: while Ron focuses on the fiscal value culturally invested in the cloak, Harry is preoccupied with his family's relationship with the heirloom. These two opposing views of the cloak constitute a separation of the conflated valuations of heirlooms and artifacts described by John Plotz in *Portable Property* and demonstrated by Voldemort's grandfather, Marvolo Gaunt. Unlike the ring and the locket, which are problematically used to reinforce social status, the cloak is a purely sentimental object. Like the heirlooms Plotz describes in nineteenth-century literature, the cloak is "unexchangeable but also irreplaceable" because it is a one-of-a-kind item of familial significance (*Portable Property* 32). The cloak is Harry's most prized possession, and he values it primarily because of its connection to his father.

It is notable that of all the heirlooms and artifacts in the *Harry Potter* series, the cloak is one of the few, if not the only, to remain with its proper owner through the end of the seventh volume. The cloak is Harry's birthright, having "traveled down through the ages, father to son, mother to daughter, right down to Ignotus [Peverell's] last living descendent" (*DH* 572). In "Unpacking My Library," Walter Benjamin argues, "inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection. For a collector's attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner's feeling of responsibility of an heir, and the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility" (66). Dumbledore's directive, that Harry "use [the cloak] well," summarizes the heir's responsibility to his family's heirlooms. Unlike Voldemort, who views the ring and the

locket as his rightful property more for their cultural value than for their associations with his maternal family, Harry prizes the cloak because it had once belonged to his father: “His father’s ... this had been his father’s. He let the material flow over his hands, smoother than silk, light as air. *Use it well*, the note had said” (*PS* 150; ellipsis in original). Harry decides to use the cloak to wander Hogwarts’ corridors at night, unwittingly using it for the same purposes as his equally mischievous and adventurous father. Wondering whether or not to include Ron in this adventure, Harry decides “that this time – the first time – he wanted to use it alone” (151). Notably, it is during Harry’s first adventure with the cloak that he discovers the Mirror of Erised and sees his parents for the first time since their deaths. Like objects in eighteenth-century sentimental novels which are “particularly valued because they are surrogates for particular persons,” the cloak becomes a stand-in for Harry’s father and takes part in nearly all of Harry’s adventures on and off Hogwarts’ campus (Lynch 63).

Unlike the stone, which causes apparitions to appear, the cloak makes the body disappear—although the body is still material and present, it appears to be immaterial and absent. The cloak does not create anything, but rather conceals what is already there. According to Xenophilius, the Invisibility Cloak of legend “really and truly renders the wearer completely invisible, and endures eternally, giving constant and impenetrable concealment no matter what spells are cast at it” (*DH* 333). Like the eighteenth-century objects that Benedict studies, the cloak allows for “a self beyond physical confines that can appear and vanish,” however not “with ominous consequences to the individual’s fate” (19). The “humble” and “wise” third brother of the tale receives the only gift that

cannot be used as a weapon—the wand can be used to conjure curses and the stone lures its victims into suicide—but actually protects the wearer from Death. The cloak is the least problematic of the three Deathly Hallows, the one least capable of misuse. As a garment, the cloak can be donned and doffed at will, making it the most controllable and predictable of the Hallows. If there is a “struggle between humans having power over things, and things having power over humans,” then the cloak is an object decidedly in the power of its human owner (Benedict 20). Interestingly, the cloak, a material object, must be worn to appear immaterial. The cloak reveals itself as the Cloak of Invisibility when it conceals the body. Although the cloak obscures, it does not actually change the body. At times when the cloak accidentally slips or falls from the body to reveal a floating head or other body part, it reveals that the body underneath remains unaltered by the use of the cloak. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, for instance, the cloak slips while Harry plays a prank on Malfoy and his cohorts, Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy is startled, yelling “AAARGH” when he sees Harry’s head and running away, but Ron and the reader are in on the joke (*PoA* 207). Harry receives a slap on the wrist for being off-campus without permission; even while invisible, his body was physically in Hogsmeade. Thus, the cloak merely changes how the body is perceived, not how and where the body actually is. Although existing at the juncture of the material and the immaterial, the cloak ultimately resists thingification because it does not fundamentally alter the body and transgress the boundaries between body and object.

Although Harry does accumulate all three of the Hallows by the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the only object that he decides to keep is the cloak.²⁷ Dumbledore's portrait responds to Harry's decision, stating, "But of course, Harry, it is yours forever, until you pass it on!" (DH 599). Harry's relationship with the cloak is purely sentimental, akin to sentimental it-narratives whose "fictions often measure well-being by...assessing people's ability to hold on to their prized possessions" (Lynch 64). While Harry has at times misplaced or lost the cloak over the course of the series, it always finds its way back to him. Harry proves to be a good owner through his ability to maintain possession of the cloak, an object that will presumably be handed down to one of his three children, James Sirius, Albus Severus, or Lily Luna. The cloak will be passed down and Ignotus Peverell's bloodline will continue, while the wand and the stone are put to rest and the bloodlines of Antioch and Cadmus Peverell have died out. This result is foreshadowed by "The Tale of the Three Brothers" itself, in which the first two brothers die childless while the third brother hides from death for many years until he "*finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility and gave it to his son. And then he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, equals, they departed this life*" (DH 332). Rather than seeking immortality through objects, both the third brother and Harry conquer death through reproduction. In the tale, the third brother knows that Death will claim him as soon as he removes the cloak. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard discusses the cycle of birth and death invested in objects: "the object represents our own death, but that death is transcended (symbolically) by virtue of the fact that we *possess*

²⁷ Harry drops the stone in the forest after he uses it to summon Lily, James, Sirius, and Remus, and he returns the wand to Dumbledore's grave.

the object” (97). While the third brother possesses the cloak, he is able to evade death but at the same time the cloak is a reminder of death’s inevitability. Significantly, the cloak does not presume to defeat death, but merely to delay it. While the cloak may occupy the boundary between life and death, Voldemort’s Horcruxes violate this boundary because they are intended to ensure immortality.

The Master of Death

During their conversation with Xenophilius, Harry, Ron, and Hermione make interesting decisions about which Deathly Hallow they would most like to have. Their choices reveal their priorities and motivations at this point in the narrative, approximately halfway through the seventh volume. According to Hermione, “it’s obvious which gift is best, which one you’d choose...The three of them spoke at the same time: Hermione said, ‘the Cloak,’ Ron said, ‘the wand,’ and Harry said, ‘the stone’” (*DH* 336). Hermione, the most logical of the three, is most like the “humble” and “wise” third brother in the tale. Since Hermione believes that “Wands are only as powerful as the people who use them,” the Elder Wand has no allure for her (337). She does not understand the attraction to the Resurrection Stone either, showing concern for Harry over his desire to be reunited with his family; Harry “had scared her with his talk of living with dead people” (346). Ron, on the other hand, would choose the “unbeatable” Elder Wand, illustrating the feelings of inadequacy that the locket-Horcrux preys upon earlier in the book. According to Ron,

“you wouldn’t need to be invisible if you had the wand,” a statement that ignores the fact that most—if not all—of the Elder Wand’s owners have been overpowered by a presumptive usurper (336). Harry’s choice, the Resurrection Stone, is not surprising given his desire for family, evident since his interaction with the Mirror of Erised in *Philosopher’s Stone*. The mirror, which shows the heart’s true desire, shows Harry with his parents as well as his extended family. By the end of the series, Harry overcomes his desire for the stone and decides to keep only the cloak. Harry recognizes that it would be inappropriate to force his family into the world of the living, to treat them as objects that can be conjured and controlled at will. The cloak, on the other hand, has particular sentimental value. Lynn Festa, in her article “The Moral Ends of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Object Narratives,” argues that “objects are *not* interchangeable in...children’s narratives: in their sentimental particularity, they are entitled to loving care and enduring patronage” (310). The cloak is one such object: by rejecting the stone and keeping the cloak, Harry recognizes it as his rightful property, as an object that deserves “care” and “patronage.”

When Harry, Ron, and Hermione first learn of the Deathly Hallows, Hermione immediately dismisses the tale, claiming, “It’s just a morality tale...A story about how humans are frightened of death” (*DH* 336, 346). Baudrillard would perhaps agree with Hermione, arguing that “it is precisely this irreversible movement from birth towards death that objects help us to cope with,” but “it should be clear that we are not here promoting any spontaneous mythology according to which man somehow extends his life or survives his death by means of the objects he possesses” (96). Although Voldemort

invests his soul into his Horcruxes in order to ensure immortality, this method fails by the end of the series. His Horcruxes are still destructible, and once they have been destroyed Voldemort becomes destructible as well. A quest to pursue the Hallows in order to become the “master of death” also proves problematic; although Harry qualifies Dumbledore’s adolescent obsession with the Hallows as “Hallows, not Horcruxes,” the intended goal is still the same (*DH* 571). Dumbledore states that only “a man in a million could unite the Hallows” and explains why he could never be able to safely possess them:

I was fit only to possess the meanest of them, the least extraordinary. I was fit to own the Elder Wand, and not to boast of it, and not to kill with it. I was permitted to tame and use it, because I took it, not for gain, but to save others from it.

‘But the Cloak, I took out of vain curiosity, and so it could never have worked for me as it works for you, its true owner. The stone I would have used in an attempt to drag back those who are at peace, rather than to enable my self-sacrifice, as you did. You are the worthy possessor of the Hallows.’ (576-577)

In this passage, Dumbledore lays out all of the wrong reasons to seek the Deathly Hallows. Wizards who seek the Elder Wand “for gain” are ultimately corrupted and betrayed by its power. The cloak, if used “out of vain curiosity,” would not provide the full extent of its magical protection. Similarly, the stone should be used to “enable self-sacrifice,” not to unnecessarily force the dead into a realm where they do not belong. Implicit in all of these wrong reasons is a certain arrogance, a mistaken belief that these

dangerous and powerful objects can be controlled. Rowling demonstrates that there are some objects, the Hallows in particular, that are difficult to control if not completely uncontrollable. Festa argues, “If the primary fault of the humans in eighteenth-century narratives is the overvaluation of worldly goods, the besetting sin in the later versions is the undervaluing of one’s possessions: the failure to be a responsible caretaker” (310). Voldemort in particular demonstrates the human failings described in eighteenth-century object narratives. When too much significance is placed on an object, especially an object that presumes to defeat death or lend its owner unconquerable power, that object ultimately fails or betrays its owner. Unlike Voldemort, both Grindelwald and Dumbledore learn this lesson by the ends of their lives.²⁸ Harry, on the other hand, seems to straddle this line between overvaluation and undervaluation.

Harry demonstrates a similar susceptibility to the alluring promise of conquering death early in *Deathly Hallows*. Unsure of his ability to find and destroy Voldemort’s remaining Horcruxes, Harry wonders if the Hallows are his key to survival: “And he saw himself, possessor of the Hallows, facing Voldemort, whose Horcruxes were no match . . . *neither can live while the other survives* . . . was this the answer? Hallows versus Horcruxes? Was there a way, after all, to ensure that he was the one who triumphed? If he were the master of the Deathly Hallows, would he be safe?” (*DH* 348; ellipses in original). Harry becomes obsessed with the Hallows and allows his preoccupation with determining their whereabouts to overshadow his search for the Horcruxes. The thought of possessing all three Hallows gives Harry a sense of security: “He felt armed in

²⁸ Grindelwald shows remorse for his actions by refusing to tell Voldemort where the Elder Wand is. Voldemort murders him for his lack of cooperation.

certainty, in his belief in the Hallows, as if the mere idea of possessing them was giving him protection, and he felt joyous as he turned back to [Ron and Hermione]” (349). Hermione and Ron, however, are resistant to Harry’s desire to claim the Hallows for his own. Rowling demonstrates that Harry’s insistent preoccupation with the Hallows is unhealthy: “Harry’s belief in and longing for the Hallows consumed him so much that he felt quite isolated from the other two and their obsession with the Horcruxes” (353). Of course, it is Harry who is really obsessed with the Hallows; his overvaluation of the Hallows causes him to temporarily undervalue the importance of destroying the Horcruxes. Like Frodo Baggins in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Harry’s mission is “an anti-quest, whose goal is not to find or regain something but to reject and destroy something,” namely, Horcruxes (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 114). Although Harry is momentarily derailed by a sudden interest in the Hallows, he regains focus on his goal to find and destroy Voldemort’s remaining Horcruxes. In order for him to become a “responsible caretaker” and the worthy possessor of the Hallows, Harry must learn where to place his trust. For Rowling, that trust must not be placed in objects.

After questioning Ollivander about the Elder Wand in the *Deathly Hallows* chapter “The Wandmaker,” Harry makes an important decision to pursue the Horcruxes rather than the Hallows. Harry chooses not to race Voldemort to the Elder Wand, but to follow through with the mission Dumbledore left him: “Dumbledore didn’t want me to have [the wand]. He didn’t want me to take it. He wanted me to get the Horcruxes” (*DH* 404). Rather than start collecting the Deathly Hallows for himself, Harry chooses to destroy another collection, Voldemort’s collection of Horcruxes. Baudrillard, discussing

collecting as a means of escape, argues “[an object] is a dog of which nothing remains but faithfulness... That is why regression of this kind is so easy, why people so readily practise this form of ‘retreat’... The ‘retreat’ involved here really is a regression, and the passion mobilized is a passion for flight” (90). Voldemort—whose name can be translated as “flight from death”—flees from death through collecting objects. Harry’s choice not to collect, his choice not to retreat from his inevitable death, allows him to possess the Deathly Hallows productively at the end of *Deathly Hallows*. Dumbledore discusses his motives with Harry in the world-between-worlds at King’s Cross, reinforcing this reading:

‘I am afraid I counted on Miss Granger to slow you up, Harry. I was afraid that your hot head might dominate your good heart. I was scared that, if presented outright with the facts about those tempting objects, you might seize the Hallows as I did, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons. If you laid hands on them, I wanted you to possess them safely. You are the true master of death, because the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying.’ (*DH* 577)

Dumbledore, who had succumbed to the temptation of the Hallows and “sought a way to conquer death,” understands the danger they pose when possessed “for the wrong reasons” (571). Harry’s decision to destroy Voldemort and his Horcruxes rather than ensure his own survival is precisely what allows him to become the “true master of death.” It is important to note that Harry *accumulates* the Deathly Hallows precisely

because he has chosen not to *collect* them. Harry becomes the proper owner of the Hallows, and thus the “master of death,” because he has chosen to embrace his death and he uses the objects to enable his own self-sacrifice. Arguably, it is not Harry’s ownership of the Hallows at the end of the seventh volume that ensures his survival, making the Hallows as ineffective as the Horcruxes. Dumbledore explains the continuing magical protection provided by his mother’s sacrifice: “[Voldemort] took your blood and rebuilt his living body with it! Your blood in his veins, Harry, Lily’s protection inside both of you! He tethered you to life while he lives!” (568). Harry is able to return to the living world from King’s Cross station because his mother’s sacrifice lives on in Voldemort’s body, not because he possesses all three of the Deathly Hallows.

By the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry learns not to overvalue and underestimate the power of the Hallows. Dumbledore’s portrait calls Harry’s decision to drop the stone in the Forbidden Forest “A wise and courageous decision, but no less than I would have expected of you” (*DH* 599). Harry is similarly disenchanted with the wand’s power and troubled by Hermione and Ron’s awe: “Harry held up the Elder Wand, and Ron and Hermione looked at it with a reverence that, even in his befuddled and sleep-deprived state, Harry did not like to see” (599). While acknowledging the wand’s power, Harry decides he does not want it, stating that the “wand’s more trouble than it’s worth...And quite honestly...I’ve had enough trouble for a lifetime” (600). Instead, he uses it to fix his holly and phoenix feather wand and promises to put it back in Dumbledore’s tomb. Harry’s choices effectually end the power of both of these objects. Indeed, this seems to be Harry’s aim since he asks Dumbledore’s

portrait, “If I die a natural death like Ignotus, its power will be broken won’t it? The previous master will never have been defeated. That’ll be the end of it” (600). Although it could be argued that the wand’s power may never truly be broken—Harry, in his career as an Auror, may be overpowered or disarmed by another wizard—the point is that Harry has learned not to put too much faith into his worldly possessions. This passage contains another realization: Harry, eventually, will die. Although Harry has overcome his mortal enemy, he is not invulnerable to a natural death. The stone and the wand have each been laid to rest, and so too will Harry. According to Festa, “object narratives in particular are meant to incite the reader to reflect on his or her own mortality, the transience of the material world to which person and thing alike belong” and “remind [the reader] that humans, like things, are subject to material erosion and death” (312-313). Significantly, because the Hallows are not transgressive things, they do not need to be destroyed. The wand and the stone are still allowed to exist, albeit lost and hidden. Even though these objects present temptations to witches and wizards who would presume to defeat death, they are not abominable creations like Voldemort’s Horcruxes—they are not things.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Deathly Hallows offer a continued exploration of thingification by accessing—but not transgressing—the boundaries between body/object, life/death, and material/immaterial. As objects intended to defeat death, their purpose appears to be the same as Voldemort’s Horcruxes. Yet Rowling demonstrates that, unlike the Horcruxes, each Hallow can be used productively to negotiate boundaries. The Elder Wand, as a sentient object, accesses boundaries between body and object, but is not inherently evil and is in fact “tamed” by Dumbledore.

Voldemort is unable to corrupt the wand because it remains loyal to its proper owner; since Voldemort did not win the wand from its previous owner, he cannot bend it to his will. Once released from the ring-Horcrux, the Resurrection Stone negotiates boundaries between life and death, and is used productively by Harry to recall his loved ones from the dead. The “pale imitations” generated by the stone do not rupture the boundaries between life and death, but cross them momentarily in order to provide Harry with protection instead. Harry has a similarly positive relationship with the Invisibility Cloak, an object that exists at the juncture of the material and the immaterial. Harry cherishes the cloak because of its association with his father, investing it with purely sentimental value and allowing it to remain uncorrupted by the problematic confusion of sentimental and fiscal values. Ultimately, Harry learns not to place too much faith in these objects—he rejects the notion of becoming “master of death” through material possessions. His decision to destroy the Horcruxes rather than pursue the Hallows allows him to use them productively at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

Materiality Within and Without *Harry Potter*

To conclude this thesis about things and the permeable boundaries between body and object, I will turn my attention to one final category of things: commodities. While commodities may seem tangential to the topic of this thesis, I will demonstrate that there is a permeable boundary between the fictional objects within the series and the real-world objects inspired by the series. I have analyzed objects (Horcruxes) and bodies (Dementors, Inferi, and Voldemort) that exist at the junctures between object/body and life/death, blurring and transgressing these boundaries and giving rise to a certain type of thing—entities that are liminal, transgressive, unclassifiable, and unnameable. As objects and bodies become perverted and corrupted, they undergo a process of thingification: objects transform into bodies and bodies devolve into objects. The resulting creations, object-turned-body and body-turned-object things, are fearsome and abominable. In the third chapter, I offer the Deathly Hallows as Rowling's alternative to thingification. As objects meant to defeat death, they are at first strikingly similar to Voldemort's Horcruxes. Yet their ability to access and negotiate boundaries—between body/object (the Elder Wand), life/death (the Resurrection Stone), and materiality/immateriality (the Invisibility Cloak)—without transgressing these boundaries allows them to resist becoming things. In this conclusion, I will look at how the *Harry Potter* books, as commodities themselves, occupy a juncture between the material and the immaterial, a position that reflects Rowling's focus on liminal objects within the series itself. As part of

her realization of an entire wizarding world, Rowling populates her novels with a plethora of objects and commodities. Nearly each book begins with a trip to the shopping mecca of British wizarding society, Diagon Alley. With the massive success of Rowling's seven-part series, many of the objects that wizards can buy within the books have become commodities that would-be wizards can buy in the "real" world—the immaterial has become material. Indeed, the books are precious commodities themselves, gobbled up by avid fans at midnight release parties and now re-released in special collector's sets.

Rowling introduces both Harry and the reader to the magical world of wizarding commodities in the fifth chapter of *Philosopher's Stone*, "Diagon Alley." After Hagrid informs Harry that he is a wizard and has been enrolled at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, he presents him with a list of required books and equipment. Harry wonders if all these items can be purchased in London, to which Hagrid responds, "If yeh know where to go" (*PS* 53). Hagrid leads Harry to the Leaky Cauldron and then into Diagon Alley, the heart of British magical commerce, which cuts "diagonally" through Muggle London: "Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He turned his head in every direction as they walked up the street, trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping" (56). Harry is overwhelmed by all that he sees in his first glimpse of commodities in the wizarding world. He doesn't quite know where to look, and Rowling mentions a wide assortment of products: owls, brooms, "telescopes and strange silver instruments," "barrels of bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of books, quills and rolls of parchment, potion

bottles, [and] globes of the moon” (56). While extraordinary and magical to us, as well as Harry, these objects are mundane commodities for those in the wizarding world. Unlike Voldemort’s Horcruxes and the Deathly Hallows, which are unique, irreplaceable artifacts, these objects are fungible and intended for economic exchange.

Throughout the series, Rowling expands the number of shops in Diagon Alley and introduces new commodities and shopping locales as well. Between Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions, Flourish and Blotts, Ollivanders, Quality Quidditch Supplies, and Gringotts Wizarding Bank, witches and wizards can access their gold and purchase nearly everything they need in Diagon Alley.²⁹ There is Knockturn Alley for those with an interest in dark magic (where Borgin and Burkes is located), and hungry students can purchase sweets such as Chocolate Frogs and Pumpkin Pasties from the tea trolley on the Hogwarts Express. When Harry and Hermione attend the Quidditch World Cup with the Weasleys in *Goblet of Fire*, they are awed by the hats, scarves, singing flags, tiny model broomsticks, and “collectible figures of famous players, which strolled across the palm of your hand, preening themselves” (85). These collectible figurines objectify the body by transforming it into a commodity, yet this transformation remains distanced from the thingification of bodies discussed in chapter two. In this instance, the body of popular Quidditch player Viktor Krum is reproduced, but not defiled—Viktor’s original body remains intact and untampered with. Like the Chocolate Frogs, which literally spring to life when they are released from their packaging, these action figures occupy a gray area

²⁹ Currency in the wizarding world is comprised of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts. One Galleon is equal to 17 Sickles or 493 Knuts.

between body and object. As commodities, however, these objects are not intended to transgress boundaries but are for entertainment and consumption.

The vast array of products for sale demonstrates that even in the wizarding world, nearly everything can be turned into a commodity. In his book *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, Thomas Richards writes, “the commodity became and has remained the one subject of mass culture, the centerpiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead center of the modern world” (1). In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, weekend outings in the village of Hogsmeade are introduced as a reward for third-year students. On these weekends, students gleefully visit such establishments as Honeydukes and Zonko’s Joke Shop: at Honeydukes “There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable,” and at Zonko’s “There were jokes and tricks to fulfill even Fred and George’s wildest dreams” (*PoA* 147, 205). Richards’ statement that “In the mid-nineteenth century the commodity...literally came alive” is certainly true of commodities in the wizarding world (2). Even though the very magical nature of wizarding products imbues them with a certain amount of life, they are not “things” like Horcruxes nor do they approach thinghood like the Deathly Hallows. Rather, they are merely commodities that exist for the sole purpose of buying and selling. But because they are fanciful, fantasy creations, they come alive in ways that our commodities do not.

In addition to the capitalist economy of wizarding society, Rowling also presents the Weasley twins, Fred and George, as business entrepreneurs with their start-up, Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. What begins as a mail-order business operated out of their bedroom becomes a full-blown shop in Diagon Alley after Harry invests his Triwizard

Tournament winnings into the twins' business. According to Ginny, "all they want to do is open a joke-shop" (*GoF* 52). Rowling introduces Fred and George's business initiative in *Goblet of Fire*, describing their various inventions including Ton-Tongue Toffees, Canary Creams, and Skiving Snackboxes. The twins' candies all have intriguing effects on the body: Ton-Tongue Toffees trigger swelling of the chewer's tongue, Canary Creams transform the consumer into a canary, and Skiving Snackboxes cause the eater to get sick so he or she can skive off class. The bodily changes produced by these confections are intended to be only momentary, however, and not permanent. Although the twins pursue questionable business practices by testing their new products on first-year students, Fred and George are largely portrayed as ambitious and successful business owners. Their experiments, unlike Voldemort's, are not destructive or murderous in intent. Indeed, they emphatically defend themselves against Hermione's reprimands by claiming, "We're not going to make [the students] ill, we've already tested them all on ourselves, this is just to see if everyone reacts the same" (*OotP* 229). The twins' products, while also blurring boundaries between body and object, are not considered transgressive within the series (except perhaps by Hermione).

Integral to the Weasley twins' success is their knowledge of their consumer base, Hogwarts students, and their eye for flare and spectacle. According to Richards, one of the factors contributing to the rise of commodities in Victorian England was spectacle: "the spectacle of the [Great] Exhibition elevated the commodity above the mundane act of exchange and created a coherent representational universe for commodities...spectacle exalted the ordinary by means of the extraordinary, the small by means of the large, the

real by means of the unreal” (4). Fred and George certainly know how to use spectacle to their advantage in *Order of the Phoenix*, unleashing all of their Weasleys’ Wildfire Whizbangs and a Portable Swamp on the halls of Hogwarts in protest against the tyrannical rule of Dolores Umbridge but also as a form of advertisement for their products and their new premises in Diagon Alley. When Harry, Ron, and Hermione visit Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes for the first time, they experience spectacle once again:

Set against the dull, poster muffled shop fronts around them, Fred and George’s windows hit the eye like a firework display. Casual passers-by were looking back over their shoulders at the windows, and a few rather stunned-looking people had actually come to a halt, transfixed. The left-hand window was dazzlingly full of an assortment of goods that revolved, popped, flashed, bounced and shrieked; Harry’s eyes began to water just looking at it. (*HBP* 113)

While several shops in Diagon Alley have closed due to Voldemort’s return, Fred and George’s business is massively successful. Their shop is “packed with customers” drawn in by the spectacular window display (113). Although many of the commodities in *Harry Potter* could be considered spectacular, Fred and George’s products are eye-catching even for those in the wizarding world. Their creativity and business acumen is demonstrated by their range of products, which includes gag gifts, fireworks, love potions, and defensive objects. Fred and George receive massive orders from the Ministry of Magic for their Shield Hats, Cloaks, and Gloves, objects that defend the wearer with a powerful Shield Charm. These products protect the body, materially engaging with it in a

useful manner. The menagerie of magically animated commodities within the *Harry Potter* series demonstrates that not all permutations of body and object are transgressive.

Since the publication of *Philosopher's Stone* in 1997, the series has generated large quantities of spin-off merchandise that can be purchased in stores or online all over the world. Hundreds—if not thousands—of various products have been created around the *Harry Potter* book series as well as the hugely successful eight-part movie franchise produced by Warner Bros. Pictures.³⁰ The massive media hype and public excitement accompanying the release of each successive volume has been termed “Pottermania,” demonstrating the enormous, and perhaps unprecedented, success and cultural influence of the *Harry Potter* series; the spectacle surrounding each book release and movie premier put Fred and George to shame. In *Capital*, Marx writes:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour....But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. (435)

There is no doubt that the series satisfies human wants (or else it would not be so popular) and it is the product of human labor—mostly Rowling’s labor, but also the labor

³⁰ As of April 2012, *Harry Potter* is the highest-grossing film series of all time.

of her editors, publicists, marketers, and everyone else who helped catapult the series to fame. There may not be anything mysterious about the *Harry Potter* series, but the books certainly are “something transcendent,” evidenced by their massive success and commercialization. We cannot ignore the fact that the books themselves are commodities, bought and sold across the globe. Having been translated into 67 languages around the world, the books continue to be re-released in collector’s editions and boxed sets. For fans, the books are precious pieces of property—perhaps problematically endowed with sentimental and fiscal value simultaneously like Gaunt’s ring and Slytherin’s locket. Although the books cannot be transformed into Horcruxes, they have become iconic pieces of cultural significance. Someday, they might even become artifacts displayed in a museum.

All of the tie-in *Harry Potter* products allow consumers to engage with Rowling’s immaterial world through the material. From wizard wear, candy, wands, stuffed toys, video games, LEGO sets, and stationary (to name only a few) to Rowling’s *Quidditch Through the Ages*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, it is impossible to escape the commodification of the *Harry Potter* series. In 2010, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park opened in the Universal Orlando Resort, allowing fans of the books and movies to physically immerse themselves in the *Harry Potter* universe. The park includes recreations of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade, where visitors can make purchases at Dervish and Banges, Filch’s Emporium of Confiscated Goods, Honeydukes, the Owl Post, Zonko’s Joke Shop, and Ollivander’s Wand Shop. Although taking liberties with characters and establishments from the books, these

attractions take Rowling's immaterial creations and transform them into material objects. For those who have not yet visited the theme park, the readily accessible WBSshop.com allows fans to buy nearly any kind of product imaginable—a quick visit to the homepage of their online *Harry Potter* storefront shows t-shirts, iPhone cases, mugs, House cardigans, a “collectible” Marauder's Map, Hermione's Time-Turner, and more. Such products allow readers of the series to engage with *Harry Potter* on a material level, not simply through the words on the page. Even though the *Harry Potter* wands sold in stores world-wide may not have unicorn hair, dragon heartstring, or phoenix feather cores, they are still magical to those who own them. These recreations of the commodities in *Harry Potter* provide fans with a material engagement with the series. When fans can munch on Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans (produced by candy company Jelly Belly) as they read about Harry and Ron doing the same on the Hogwarts Express, the material has truly collided with the immaterial. Similarly, the ability to wear officially licensed House robes and wield wands allows fans to feel like they are a part of the world in the books—or that the world of the books does indeed exist in the “real” world.³¹

The revenue accrued by the *Harry Potter* series continues to grow and shows no sign of slowing down. Now, the books have an accompanying online experience recently launched by Rowling called *Pottermore*. Through *Pottermore*, users can engage with scenes from each book chapter as a student at Hogwarts, fulfilling many fans' dreams: to have a wand from Ollivanders and a House to call their own. But perhaps the most

³¹ That WBSshop.com sells Hogwarts acceptance letters and many college students participate in Quidditch teams at their schools further demonstrates fans' desires to bring the world of the books to life.

important aspect of *Pottermore* is that it is the only official place to purchase e-books of the series. Headlined as “the exclusive home of the Harry Potter eBooks,” *Pottermore* also sells hardbacks, paperbacks, and audio books as well (*Pottermore*). Fans can finally take the entire *Harry Potter* series with them on the go on their e-readers. While many fans probably own at least one piece of *Harry Potter* merchandise, the books themselves will perhaps always be the most important objects to own, either physically or digitally. Like Harry’s broomsticks, a well-worn copy of one of the *Harry Potter* books feels like a friend. For many readers, a copy of the book may have been a gift—a gift that is now particularly cherished as a favorite book given by a particular person (my American copy of *Chamber of Secrets*, for example, was a twelfth birthday gift inscribed by my grandmother).³² Regardless of how *Harry Potter* readers acquired their books, there is no doubt that the series has experienced a remarkable and unprecedented amount of commercialization. The books themselves are commodities, physical entities of varying sentimental and fiscal value. Although it was perhaps not Rowling’s intention for her many commodities within the books to become commodities without the books, the series’ popularity and ability to make money has allowed it to blend the material with the immaterial. Warner Bros., Hasbro, LEGO, and all the other companies that now produce items associated with the *Harry Potter* series literally bring Rowling’s imagination to life. While it may be difficult to say whether these items benefit or hurt the books, the wide array of material products certainly augment the reader’s experience of the

³² While gifts are important in the *Harry Potter* series, a discussion of gifts and giving is beyond the scope of this project.

wizarding world. Either way, that the books, as commodities, occupy a juncture between the material and the immaterial reflects the significance placed on objects within the text.

Whether a Horcrux, a Hallow, or merely a commodity, objects within and without *Harry Potter* are freighted with meaning. While most run-of-the-mill commodities are largely invested with only fiscal value, some commodities—like Harry’s broomsticks and the *Harry Potter* books themselves—possess sentimental value as well. Heirlooms and artifacts, including the objects that become Voldemort’s Horcruxes, are the most problematically endowed with both fiscal and sentimental value, resulting in their vulnerability to inappropriate exchange and corruption. When Voldemort imbues his objects with pieces of soul, thus creating Horcruxes, he transforms them into things. Although many objects within the *Harry Potter* series come to life through magic, as I have demonstrated in this conclusion, none are transgressive in the same sense that Voldemort’s Horcruxes are. Horcruxes violate the boundaries between body and object because they are objects literally transformed into bodies. Voldemort’s body, as well as Dementors and Inferi, are equally transgressive because they mutate into objects. In addition to these thingified entities, Rowling populates the entire *Harry Potter* universe with magical objects and commodities—indeed, there are actually very few “things” in *Harry Potter* compared to all of the goods, products, gifts, and other items that appear throughout the series. Rowling’s emphasis on material objects in the series reflects our own emphasis on objects outside the series, a point demonstrated by all of the *Harry Potter* merchandise that exists in our world. While the many objects and commodities within *Harry Potter* could be a thesis topic in and of itself, this thesis has focused on

those objects that are considered transgressive and dangerous within the text. That the texts themselves blur the boundaries between the material and the immaterial is a significant result of their success and popularity.

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