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Harry Potter and the Terrors of the Toilet

Toilets and toileting have been censored in almost all children's (as well as adults') books, with two exceptions: picture story books about toilet training and scatological books such as Raymond Briggs' picture story book, *Fungus the Bogeyman*, Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch's picture story book, *The story of the little mole who knew it was none of his business*, Paul Jennings' popular collections of disgusting stories and, more recently, Andy Griffiths' best-selling *The Day My Bum Went Psycho* and *Zombie Bums of Uranus*. Books such as these, typically with male protagonists and a wealth of anal jokes, are designed for the newly confident, independent reader, with their brief chapters, short simple sentences and vernacular prose. Once the next level of reading ability is reached, however, toileting suddenly becomes taboo. The child hero (of either gender) may eat and drink copiously during the course of a book-length adventure, but very rarely goes to the toilet, and almost never for the purposes for which a toilet is designed.

Toilets are still mentioned in these books, however, and they are given two main functions. For schoolboys, the toilet is a place where, it is rumoured, bullies force their victims' heads down the bowl and flush

water over them as a form of torture. This feared event almost never occurs: two exceptions can be found in Nicola Morgan's *Mondays Are Red* and Robert Westall's short story, "The Boys' Toilets." In Morgan's book, the bullies attack the first-person narrator, "dragging me into a cubicle and forcing my head into the toilet. As water flushed over my face I heard Paul say, 'Not as cute as his sister, but just as easy,' and they all laughed as I collapsed towards blackness." (98) Westall's story concerns a boy found dead in a school toilet, whose ghost obsessively re-enacts the torments of being attacked by the bullies who flush his head in the bowl.

It is just this kind of bullying that Dudley attempts to frighten Harry Potter about, when the Dursleys plan to send him

to Stonewall High, the local comprehensive. Dudley thought this was very funny.

'They stuff people's heads down the toilet first day at Stonewall,' he told Harry, 'want to come upstairs and practise?' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 28)¹

In uttering this threat, Dudley is acting in the great tradition of the Anglo-Saxon schoolboy story; further examples can be found in Chris Crutcher's *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (threat) and Neil Connelly's *St. Michael's Scales* (actual head down the toilet bowl).

The second main function of the toilet in literature for the older child concerns the schoolgirl. In this case, the girls' toilet becomes a place of refuge, where the victim can weep without being publicly shamed (though everyone seems to know what she is doing, and where). Sometimes her tears flow because of being bullied—but not by being physically assaulted and held down over the bowl while the toilet is flushed, as is the common threat for boys. Rather, for the weeping girl, the toilet is the optimal place to escape any bullies, and to cry without fear of reprisal. Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* exemplifies this, with the added twist that the weeper is herself a bully. In cubicles like this, tears are the only fluid acknowledged as discharging from the human body. Hermione's retreat to the girls' toilets to cry in private, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, can be placed in this tradition:

Hermione didn't turn up for the next class and wasn't seen all afternoon. On their way down to the Great Hall for the Hallowe'en feast, Harry and Ron overheard Parvati Patil telling her friend Lavender that Hermione was crying in the girls' toilets and wanted to be left alone. (*Philosopher's Stone*, 127)

Moaning Myrtle in the next volume also fits within this tradition, according to her ghost's account of the circumstances of her death in the toilet:

'I died in this very cubicle. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked and I was crying...' (*Chamber of Secrets*, 221)

In comparison, in the boys' version, no bodily fluids are mentionable except, occasionally, vomit. Usually the only fluid that flows in the boys' toilet comes from the cistern. The girl, in these stories, can be represented with at least one orifice (far away from those that discharge urine and faeces) leaking watery fluids, but the boy, while in some danger of drowning, is in no danger of betrayal from his own orifices. These boys' and girls' toilet tropes can thus be understood as systematically erasing the body's excretory processes, while displacing urination into the more mentionable flow of tears or flushing cisterns.

To this point, the Harry Potter stories are highly traditional in their treatment of the toilet, but they also use it as a site for heroic action and a threshold between worlds. It is specifically the girls' toilets that serve these functions, causing Ron and Harry some difficulty and embarrassment. The first of these heroic feats is the battle with the troll in *Philosopher's Stone*; another unpleasant girls' toilet is the entry point to the chamber of secrets. It affords a home to the aforementioned ghost of Moaning Myrtle (*Chamber of Secrets*) and a channel to the school lake in which she helps Harry to achieve one of the championship tasks (*Goblet of Fire*).

These far from traditional functions of the girls' toilet invite three different kinds of interpretation. The element of shame involved in boys' entry into the girls' toilets, and Hermione's deep shame when she transforms herself into a cat in the toilet cubicle, invite a sociological reading. A Freudian reading is also tenable, setting the books' toilet adventures in the context of toilet training and the anal stage of psychosexual development. A Kristevan reading of the toilet scenes in terms of abjection is also tenable, and this will be the major direction that this article will take. Kristevan theory of the abject is much more inclusive than Freudian theory of the anal stage in that it encompasses all kinds of bodily waste, including saliva, phlegm, snot, vaginal mucus, rheum, vomit, menstrual blood, urine and faeces, whereas Freudian theory has little to say about any of these wastes except faeces. Rowling's texts place more stress on the watery than the solid elements of bodily waste and, because of its inclusiveness, a Kristevan reading arguably offers the fullest of psychoanalytic readings of toilet matters in the *Harry Potter* series.

According to both Freud and Kristeva, bodily wastes are a source of great fascination for the young child. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud postulates an anal stage of psychosexual

development in which the young child derives sexual pleasure from holding back or expelling faeces: it is at this stage that the child learns to say no and first experiences a sense of power over its own bodily functions as well as over the mother as toilet-trainer. Kristeva re-theorises this anal stage to take account of the child's development of a sense of disgust, postulating a process that she terms "abjection". By abjecting, the child achieves a precarious sense of individual identity through creating a psychological distance between itself and its mother, developing a disgust for the mother's body which was once so closely united with its own. The child establishes a physical boundary between its body and that of the mother but cannot make its own body completely impermeable; for such things as food must go in and such things as urine must be expelled. Hence the Kristevan abject is that instability of boundary that forever threatens human beings (whether as child or adult) with loss of their sense of independent identity. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (*Powers of Horror*, 3)

Kristeva is talking here about the psychological process of maintaining oneself as a subject through differentiating oneself from "the place where I am not" by way of what is excreted, a differentiation that must eventually collapse into the abject decay of death.

The psychological mechanism of abjection, in Kristevan theory, thus accounts for the revulsion that adults and older children feel towards bodily fluids once they have been discharged from the body, as well as for all the revulsion and fear felt towards the processes of bodily decay. Disgust, a push of revulsion, is counterbalanced, according to Kristevan theory, by a strong pull towards regaining the lost paradise of complete union with the mother (not as a person, but rather as a psychological representation of bliss). The abject² is thus both horrifying and alluring; it is dangerous and compelling territory. Among contemporary books for older children and adults, none exemplifies this simultaneous horror and fascination, danger and compulsion of the abject, so well as Rowling's series of *Harry Potter* books.

Ron and Harry's fight with the troll in the toilet, in the first book, offers a clear example of the Kristevan abject in terms of both bodily waste

and the sickening prospect of death; in this episode the horrors of human waste prove far less speakable than those of imminent death. The “foul stench” that Harry and Ron detect is reminiscent of the “kind of public toilet no one seems to clean,” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 128) but this is as close as Rowling comes to the topic of excretion (unless Ron’s insult to the troll, ‘Oy, pea-brain,’ (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 129) is taken as a pun on “pea” and “pee”). The stench turns out to emanate not from the toilet but from the unwashed troll. The only bodily fluids actually discharged in this episode are Hermione’s tears and

what looked like lumpy grey glue.

‘Urgh troll bogies.’

He wiped it on the troll’s trousers. (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 130)

As with my previous examples, these mentionable bodily fluids come from the face, at a safe remove from the unspeakable, hidden orifices from which urine flows and faeces drop. According to Kristevan theory, however, all bodily fluids are abject when discharged from the body; thus the horror and fascination of this monster are attributable, in a Kristevan reading, to Harry’s struggle to free himself from the deathly embrace of the mother. Harry’s expression of disgust, “Urgh”, signals the abject, and the play on words in “troll bogies” equates monster (bogey=monster) with bodily discharge (bogey=snot). The prospect of death at the troll’s hands is conflated with the prospect of a disgusting taint from its smells and mucus; both death and bodily discharge gain their terror initially from the mother’s body.

A similar reading could be mounted for the episode in the second book where the children transform themselves with Polyjuice Potion in the girls’ toilets, Ron and Harry taking on the size and shape of Draco Malfoy’s gang, and Hermione inadvertently transforming herself into a cat. Harry and Ron are both fascinated and disgusted by their transformation into considerably larger, thickset figures. Much of their disgust can be attributed to the stupidity, greed and cruelty manifested by Goyle and Crabbe, the boys whose bodily shape they are now copying; following a Kristevan line of argument, part of their disgust can be attributed to their loss of identity: “So this is what it felt like, being Goyle. His large hands trembling...” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 162) Rowling’s descriptions of Goyle and Crabbe’s bodies suggest that they are further down the path of adolescent change than either Ron or Harry; thus part of the transformed boys’ disquiet can be understood as a response to the alarming aspects of puberty that challenge their familiar sense of self:

His shoulders stretched painfully...his robes ripped as his chest expanded like a barrel bursting its hoops; his feet were agony in shoes four sizes too small... (*loc cit*)

Hermione is in a far worse plight. The cat body into which she partially transforms, which can also be read symbolically as intimating puberty, offers a far scarier prospect of long-lasting loss of identity than Harry and Ron's transiently reshaped human bodies. Those black hairs that she longs to conceal, in a psychosexual reading, suggest the pubic and underarm hairs that mark the child's bodily development to puberty; Hermione's body can now be read as potentially maternal, a prospect from which she recoils. As such, it is a prime example of the horrors of abjection.

The episode in which Ron's wand backfires and gives him a stomach-full of slugs to vomit might also be read in terms of the Kristevan abject. Ron insults Draco Malfoy, saying, "Eat slugs!" (*Chamber of Secrets*, 76), a curse which gains its power from disgust. In this case, what should be outside the body (the slug) is to be ingested, and the slug's sliminess renders the prospect of this meal particularly disgusting. When Ron's curse is inadvertently carried out on his own person, he seems already to have eaten the slugs and must now endure a period of vomiting and burping them out again. Vomit is abject in that it is the expulsion of what should remain decently hidden within the digestive system (until expelled in the toilet in as sanitary and non-abject a manner as possible), and is particularly abject when performed in public, as with Ron. To vomit recognisable slugs, black and slimy, is perhaps even more abject than to vomit the more usual semi-digested contents of the stomach, as the throat and mouth are forced to revisit the disgusting texture of these creatures. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Ron urges Draco to "eat dung" (150), an equally abject variant on his more favoured, "eat slugs".

The man with two heads, Professor Quirrel, can also be read as an example of the Kristevan abject. His turban emanates a strange odour, although it never reaches the intensity of the troll's "foul stench". The revelation of a second, monstrous head hidden under this turban gains its sickening force, in a Kristevan reading, from Quirrel's loss of a separate identity—not just a loss of power or of independent will, but also of a distinct human body of his own. The wretched professor exists only to further the commands of his master Voldemort and to provide a physical base from which he can regrow. Voldemort keeps looking for other bodies and life-forces to share, perpetually trying to annul the separateness of his followers' and opponents' physical forms. Attempting to infiltrate the well-organised, well-disciplined Hogwarts, with its laws for the protection of students (in Kristevan terminology, this would be a manifestation of the symbolic order), Voldemort can be understood as the process of abjection incarnate. His servants are infantilised: Pettigrew is compared in book 3 to "an

oversized, balding baby cowering on the floor” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 274), and another of the Death-Eaters is more literally transformed into a monstrous baby at the climax of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Such a regression to a helpless infant, subject to a merciless invader of both body and psyche, is one of the worst threats posed to Harry and the wizarding world in general, but perhaps the greatest threat to Harry himself lies neither in Voldemort nor in his abjectly named Death-Eaters. Rather, it is to be found moaning in the girls’ toilets, part-way through the second book.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets begins with a series of toilet jokes, but does not get into full toilet modality until its second half. In the U-bend of a nasty, damp toilet lurks the ghost of Moaning Myrtle. At first she seems little more than a nuisance, confined to her toilet block; the worst that she can do, apparently, is to flood the corridor with water. She becomes arguably more of a menace to Harry than the Dark Lord himself: Voldemort is repelled or defeated in book after book, but Harry has no remedy for Myrtle’s advances. As he prepares the Polyjuice Potion in these dank toilets, Moaning Myrtle begins to make coy sexual propositions:

‘If you had died, you’d have been welcome to share my toilet,’ said Myrtle, blushing silver.

‘Urgh,’ said Ron, as they left the bathroom for the dark, deserted corridor outside. ‘Harry! I think Myrtle’s got *fond* of you.’ (*Chamber of Secrets*, 239–240)

“Urgh” here, as in the first book, indicates the abject. Apart from the perceived disgustingness of a girl’s sexual advances to a pre-pubescent boy, her invitation evokes the particular disgustingness of a girl who lives in the toilets, the horror of a ghost’s seeking intimate contact with the living, and the uneasy equation of death with the scatological. This is all Kristevan territory.

The toilet cubicle inhabited by Moaning Myrtle conceals the entry to the book’s eponymous Chamber of Secrets; but the room itself, with all its toilets and sinks and its resident ghost, could be understood as a chamber of secrets in its own right, as could Myrtle’s favourite cubicle. Myrtle functions as a monster in this chamber of secrets, as a holder of secrets and as a sexually aroused female. As such she herself embodies a chamber of secrets, unlikely ever to be willingly explored and penetrated by a male lover. The chamber of secrets, in this reading, is simultaneously the toilet, the murderer’s lair and the female body.

The abject horror felt by the boys towards Myrtle is the obverse of Harry’s fascination with his mother’s body in the first book, in the

Mirror of Erised episode. While Ron sees a potential future for himself in this mirror, which reveals one's heart's desire within its specular chamber of secrets, Harry is drawn to his lost past, to the ideal mother and father whom he cannot consciously remember. He longs for his mother's touch, available only as a visual image in the mirror, but capable of destroying his present and future in empty dreams. This mirror episode could be given a Lacanian interpretation in terms of the mirror phase, but in the Kristevan reading that I am pursuing here, Lily can be interpreted as the mother whose identity is indistinguishable from that of her baby, who is ever-loving and nurturing, and for whose total embrace he vainly hungers for the rest of his life, once out of the womb. But as the child begins to establish boundaries by way of abjection, this wholly nurturing mother becomes a danger to his newly attained and fragile sense of an independent identity. He is pulled towards her, but that pull is mortally dangerous. To look too much into the Mirror of Erised is to die psychologically, addicted to one's heart's desire; Kristeva speaks of the life-long attraction of that state of blissful union with the mother, an attraction against which abjection defends the psyche throughout adult life. In this sense, Lily embodies the desirable, fascinating aspect of the abjected mother, the ideal counterpart and opposite to the hateful abjected mother who more directly threatens the boy's existence with her attempts to invade his boundaries.

As the books proceed, Harry is forced to modify his belief in, and attachment to, the idealised father of his babyhood, and he finds the revelation that his father in some ways resembled the books' villains very hard to accept. While Rowling deals quite straightforwardly with the son's realisation that his father is not altogether ideal, as yet (up to the sixth book), she has not directly tackled Harry's idealisation of his mother; in fact, this ideal mothering is represented literally as his means to survive Voldemort's terrible threat. The most telling detail in this regard is the moment when Dumbledore explains to Harry just why Voldemort could not endure his touch, at the end of the first book:

'Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin.'
(*Philosopher's Stone*, 216)

For the mother to be forever present "in your very skin" reads as the absolute ideal of pre-abject union between mother and child, powerful enough to render Harry immune to Voldemort's attempt to master him physically—but the mother's mark, however lovingly intended, also

infiltrates Harry's body without his consent.³ The opposition between these two interventions in Harry's individuality, the one life-giving, the other seeking to kill him, finely represents the simultaneous lure and horror of the Kristevan abject. As in most other fantasy texts, it is easy to spot the revulsion-inducing abject in the *Harry Potter* novels. Representing the ideal, life-giving mother as an abject threat is a much more subtle aspect of these novels. In a more comic vein, the lure and horror of the abject can also be detected in the infinite varieties of the Every Flavour Bean, their consumer never certain whether the taste will be delicious (chocolate, perhaps, or peppermint) or disgusting (earwax, perhaps, or snot).

In *The Goblet of Fire*, Rowling sets up yet another chamber of secrets with explicit mention of toilet matters, when Dumbledore speaks of a time when he "took a wrong turn on the way to the bathroom":

[I] found myself in a beautifully proportioned room I have never seen before, containing a rather magnificent collection of chamber pots. When I went back to investigate it more closely, I discovered that the room had vanished. (*Goblet of Fire*, 363)

The next volume reveals this room to be a chamber where wizards can find what they most need, if only they know the secret of how to locate it. The "chamber of secrets", in Dumbledore's quest for the bathroom, holds the desired and magnificent chamber pot. This episode, too, can be read as reflecting the simultaneous disgustingness and desirability of the abject.

The eponymous chamber of secrets in the second book is the hiding place of the dreaded basilisk. A Freudian reading of this monster can readily be mounted in terms of the phallic stage or alternatively in terms of the anal phallus, that solid lump of faeces that, Freud claims, is experienced by the child as sexually pleasurable and an indicator of potency in the course of excretion. In a Kristevan reading of this same material, the basilisk can be understood as excretory abject, sliding along inside the damp, slimy pipes and emerging in an attempt to destroy its victims. Similarly, Moaning Myrtle becomes an abject threat that might at any moment emerge from tap or toilet. Her favourite haunt in the second book is the toilet in which she died, but in the fourth book she becomes more mobile and might emerge from any tap or toilet. Like the basilisk, she is in command of the school's plumbing system. As such, her threat to Harry modernises the typical water-torture threat in the English schoolboy-story tradition, replacing the male bully with a voyeuristically aggressive female character. Harry has no defence against this threat, unless he were to refuse to use toilet or tap, shower or bath. In certain

respects, then, Myrtle is far less easy for him to deal with than Lord Voldemort.

Moaning Myrtle's invitation to Harry to join her in the toilet can be understood as reviving infantile fears that something horrible might come up out of the toilet and draw down the unwary person sitting there; the toilet might reverse its flow and assault the body, helpless in its abject need to excrete. Myrtle, like the basilisk, can be construed as a mobile, murderous piece of shit. As Kristeva remarks at the start of *Powers of Horror*, in the passage that I have already quoted, it is excrement and death that will eventually prevail. While the basilisk is successfully killed, Myrtle as ghost cannot be killed.

Rowling jokingly articulates the terrors of the faecal monster re-emerging from the toilet in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*:

'Anti Muggle pranksters,' said Mr. Weasley, frowning. 'We had two last week, one in Wimbledon, one in Elephant and Castle. Muggles are pulling the flush and instead of everything disappearing well, you can imagine.' (*Order of the Phoenix*, 123)

In this joke, the toilet has been personified as a body that vomits what should be discreetly digested. The bodily wastes that should, in the law-bound world of the symbolic order, be disposed of via a one-way sewage system, keep coming back. Similarly, Harry taunts Dudley with the prospect of a vomiting toilet when Dudley has taunted him with the prospect of school bullies who

'stuff people's heads down the toilet first day at Stonewall...want to come upstairs and practise?'

'No thanks,' said Harry. 'The poor toilet's never had anything as horrible as your head down it it might be sick.' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 28)

Myrtle's toilet can be considered just such a regurgitating toilet, never finally flushing her away, although sometimes she is caught unawares by a visitor to the cubicle:

'Myrtle...what lives in the lake, apart from the giant squid?'
'Oh, all sorts,' she said. 'I sometimes go down there...sometimes don't have any choice, if someone flushes my toilet when I'm not expecting it ...'
Trying not to think about Moaning Myrtle zooming down a pipe to the lake with the contents of a toilet ...' (*Goblet of Fire*, 403)

Ron, Harry and Lockhart find themselves in a similar position to the basilisk and Moaning Myrtle when they descend into the secret

chamber of the second book located beneath the school's sewage pipes:

It was like rushing down an endless, slimy, dark slide...the pipe levelled out, and he shot out of the end with a wet thud, landing on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel, large enough to stand in. Lockhart was getting to his feet a little way away, covered in slime and white as a ghost. (*Chamber of Secrets*, 223)

This description suggests not only the ghostly Myrtle and the waste matters that travel down the sewage pipes from a toilet but also the interior of the human body. The tunnel is reminiscent of the intestines, an “endless, slimy, dark slide” with the anus as the orifice from which faeces “shot out of the end with a wet thud”. Such a reading puts Ron, Harry and the slimy Lockhart in the role of faeces. In this context, Peeves’ mockery of Harry as “potty wee Potter” (*Chamber of Secrets*, 151) takes on more insulting meanings than those of insanity and smallness of build: Harry is associated here with toilet training (the potty) and micturation (wee). While Harry and Ron are only temporarily associated with faeces and urine, the Malfoys, Voldemort’s principal supporters in the respectable wizarding world, are frequently said to be “slimy” and they too have their own secret chamber, at home, where they hide equipment used in the Dark Arts. Indeed, the entire wizarding House of Slytherin to which all the Malfoys have belonged at Hogwarts, is associated with toilets and sewage pipes by way of the basilisk that comes “slithering” out of the Slytherin statue’s mouth. (*Chamber of Secrets*, 234)

Read in terms of Kristevan abjection, then, the Harry Potter novels reveal a close kinship between Harry and his wizard-world enemies, a kinship that Voldemort wants to exploit and Harry to repudiate. In general, Voldemort wants to dissolve identity, as he almost succeeds in assimilating Ginny:

So 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, far more powerful than little Miss Weasley. Powerful enough to start feeding Miss Weasley a few of *my* secrets, to start pouring a little of *my* soul back into *her*... (*Chamber of Secrets*, 228)

In a Kristevan reading, entering the chamber of secrets is a temporary abjection for Harry, and an almost permanent abjection and loss of separate identity for Ginny, while Voldemort, the Soul-Eater *par excellence*, is the process of abjection incarnate. Voldemort’s many chambers of secrets can be read as versions of the regurgitating toilet; even the Goblet of Fire, tampered with by a supporter of Voldemort, is just such a regurgitator, vomiting what should never have been put

there. It remains to be seen, in the final volume of the series, whether Hermione's SPEW club will add to the list of vomiting items at Hogwarts; so far, Hermione has been largely exempt from the toilet associations that permeate Harry's dealings with the Dark Lord. For Harry, the abject manifests itself in horror and disgust, especially in association with toilets, an association ingeniously varied by Rowling from book to book: there remains one more volume to come, Harry's last chance for a conclusive triumph over the terrors of the toilet.

Notes

1. This quotation, like all others from the *Harry Potter* books in this paper, was taken from the British edition.
2. Kristevan theory is unduly complicated by her use of the terms "abject" and "abjection" to cover both the disgusting items that the subject differentiates itself from and the process of differentiation.
3. The idea of the mother's presence in Harry's skin could also be given a slightly different Kristevan reading in the context of Kristeva's book on melancholia and depression, *Black Sun*. Here Kristeva speaks of the "melancholy cannibalistic imagination [as] a repudiation of the loss's reality and of death as well" (12) as well as the unmentionability of the lost Thing. This comment suggests a reading of Voldemort's unmentionability in the wizard world as due not so much to fear, the explanation usually given, as to his abject maternal function in the books.

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