Harry Potter and the Specular Selves: the Life and After-life of the Image

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Doctor of Philosophy (English)

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Elizabeth Kinder
Abstract

This thesis examines the “specular selves” of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter sequence. The specular self is a term I employ to describe a form of the double that is, thanks to the magical technology of the sequence, able to exist independently of the original subject in visual or specular form. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate that this form of the visual not only saturates each novel but is, in fact, central to the overall sequence.

In investigating Rowling’s diverse depictions of the specular I employ an ekphrastic analysis that reveals significant variations in the evolving representation and function of the specular selves. From enchanted portraits to magical incarnations, a various range of specular entities influences the narrative progression, character development, and ideological worldview of the series in fascinating and often unexpected ways. I argue that Rowling’s narrative is dependent upon these specular entities from the very first novel, and I examine their ongoing evolution, growing significance, and increasing complexity as the sequence unfolds. In Chapter One I focus on the enchanted portraits and moving pictures of the wizarding world, revealing the importance of the specular to Rowling’s sequence and its centrality to narrative progression. In Chapter Two, I examine how specular technology in the form of magical mirrors provides an extra level of depth to the idea of the specular while working as crucial instruments of character revelation. Chapter Three considers Horcruxes as a form of specularity unique to the Harry Potter sequence. These specular selves bestow immortality on their creator, and, because they threaten to breach the boundaries between specular and corporeal, they are the most malignant and parasitic forms of specularity depicted in the sequence. Linking narrative progression with character revelation, Rowling’s Horcruxes provide vital
insights into the nature of life, death and the after-life, and in doing so work to establish
the moral and ideological world view of the novels. Finally, in Chapter Four I examine
the magical incarnations and mechanisms that invert variations of the specular self
explored in the first three chapters. These incarnations continuously transgress the
boundaries I explore in my first three chapters between the specular and corporeal, life
and death. The visual entities examined in this chapter paradoxically challenge and
reinforce the binary logic of the sequence’s moral worldview, while subverting narrative
expectations and providing startling character reversals as the sequence reaches its
conclusion.
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