HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)

CATEGORY 2A PROJECT WORK WRITTEN REPORT

Topic: An analysis of the juxtaposition between the "ego ideal" and the "abject" in the Harry

Potter Series

Slant: Literature

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1.0   Introductory Chapter

1.1   Background

Harry Potter is a British-American namesake film series based on the eponymous novels by author J. K. Rowling. The series is distributed by Warner Bros. and consists of eight fantasy films, beginning with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001) and culminating with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011) .I am choosing the film over the text to analyse as I will be incorporating Mise-en-scène Theory, which along with the cinematography and editing of a film, influences the verisimilitude or believability of a film in the eyes of its viewers (Connell, 2012), which will lead to a richer analysis of the characters. Every film in the series except *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) is among the 50 highest-grossing films of all time with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011) coming in at No. 8 with $1.34 billion. As of 2015, the Harry Potter series is the second-highest grossing film franchise of all time. Its eight films have grossed more than $7.7 billion worldwide, not to mention its nominations for 12 Academy Awards over the span of its eight-film series. These statistics show us the sheer success of the Harry Potter films, with its average of 299 million per film beating other fantasy film series such as the Chronicles of Narnia with an average of 179 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo).

According to Lacan, the "Ideal-I" is a collection of the perceived self-identification image (Lacan, 1988). The hero on-screen acts as the ideal-manifestation of ourselves by playing out the desires and fantasies in our unconscious (Allen, 1992) Also, the movie protagonist exemplifies our hidden desires in trying to attain this unsurmountable goal of being like the perfect image, and this thus aids in the identification process. (Allen, 1992) In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes of abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order...what does not respect borders, positions, rules"(Creed, 2002) . Hence, making use of psychoanalysis, this research paper will analyse the characters of the films, and how they fall under Lacan's " ego ideal" or Kristeva's "abject". Furthermore, some of the characters will possess both elements of Lacan's "Ideal-I" or Kristeva's "abject". Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the concept of the "Ideal-I" and the "abject" by using a new integrated framework in my paper.

1.2   Rationale

The Harry Potter films have achieved massive success and popularity since its start of in 2001. As of 2015, the Harry Potter series is the second-highest grossing film franchise of all time. Its eight films have grossed more than $7.7 billion worldwide, not to mention its nominations for 12 Academy Awards over the span of its eight-film series . The latest installment in the franchise, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2 [*2011*]*, even has

the fifth-biggest worldwide film opening since 2002 ($483,189,427), as well as being the 10th highest grossing film series of all time with 1.34 billion USD (Newsday, 2018). However, when it comes to character development throughout the films, a lot of research has been done about how the characters in the films are portrayed but my work is unique as it focuses on psychoanalysis and spectatorship theory to analyse the evolution of the "Ideal-I" and the "abject" in HP films . Thus, I will analyse the evolution of the concept of the "Ideal-I" and the "abject" by using a new integrated framework in my paper. This analysis will be conducted through a confluence of Psychoanalytic film theory, Spectatorship theory and Mise-en-scène theory.

1.3   Research Questions

1) How do the main protagonists and antagonists of the films approximate either Lacan's "Ideal-I"(Lacan, 1988) or Kristeva's "abject" (Creed, 2002) ?

2) How have these elements of the "Ideal-I' and "abject" evolved across the US to the UK as well as the 20th century to the 21st century.

1.4   Thesis Statement

This paper wishes to investigate the evolution of the protagonist and antagonist which possess either elements of Lacan's "Ideal-I" or Kristeva's "abject". Thus, this paper will be using an integrated framework comprising Kristeva's "abject" and Lacan's "Ideal-I" to understand how elements within the "abject" & "Ideal I" have evolved or been adapted across cultures and timeframes.

1.5   Scope of Research/Delimitation(s)

The scope of this research is limited to the analysis of three of the eight films in the Harry Potter series, which are *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001), Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2009), Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2 (2011)*. The three films are the highest grossing out of the eight films, with 317, 301, and 381 million respectively(Box office Mojo), as well as winning renowned awards such as the People's Choice Award for Favourite Movie. The immense popularity as well as critical acclaim garnered for these three films ensures that the portrayal of the "abject" and the "Ideal-I" are best portrayed in the main protagonists and antagonists. Thus this paper will focus on the analysis of the key protagonists and antagonists in the selected Harry Potter films, and will not delve into other concepts or themes in the films selected, unless related to the topic.

1.6   Significance of Research/Usefulness
Hence, making use of psychoanalysis, this research paper will analyse the characters of the films, and how they fall under Lacan's "Ideal-I" or Kristeva's "abject". Furthermore,

some of the characters will possess both elements of Lacan's "Ideal-I" or Kristeva's "abject". Thus, this paper will focus on the elements of Lacan's "Ideal-I" and Kristeva's "abject" that signal an evolution across timeframes and cultures.

1.7   Limitations

This research paper is only an examination of the characters portrayed in a largely successful fantasy series. Thus, observations and statements made may not be applicable to films outside the genre of fantasy, much less other films inside of the fantasy genre. Also, the Harry Potter films are all Hollywood Movies, and thus embody western ideals and values. As such, the findings derived from the research within these movies are limited to that of western societies. The derivations of the this paper may not account for the research done for fantasy film in Asian societies. Also, the sprouting of US hegemony has been seen to be dominant influences in Southeast Asia and Africa, thus this justifies an in-depth study of these films (Harvard Political Review, 2017). such a strange comment.

2.0   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

In this paper, we will look at the films through the lens of Psychoanalytic film theory , and focusing on the concept of Kristeva's 'abject" to look at the main antagonist of the films . I will also look at the films through the lens of Spectatorship Theory, and focus on the concept of Lacan's "Ideal-I" to look at the main protagonists of the films . I will also be incorporating Mise-en-scène theory into my analysis, so as to show how characters are portrayed with auditory and visual perception, enhancing how the characters are portrayed.

2.2   Psychoanalytic Film Theory

Psychoanalytic Film Theory consists of two notable waves. The first wave occured in the early 1970s, where Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey [1975] separately explored aspects of the "gaze" in the cinema, Metz stressing the viewer's identification with the camera's vision(Lapsley, Westlake, 1988, pp.82-84), - an identification largely "constructed" by the film itself - and Mulvey the fetishistic aspects of (especially) the male viewer's regard for the onscreen female body(Lapsley, Westlake, 1988, p.93). The second wave associated with Jacqueline Rose emphasised the search for the missing object of desire on the part of the spectator: in Elisabeth Cowie's words, "the pleasure of fantasy lies in the setting out, not in the having of the objects" (Lapsley, 2018, pp.77-78).

In this paper, we will be looking at the concept of the "abject" in Psychoanalytic film theory. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes of abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules"(Creed, 2002). Thus, I will look at how the antagonists in the films possess elements of the "abject', and how this has been evolved across different timeframes and cultures.

2.3   Spectatorship Theory

Spectatorship Theory refers to the relationship between a film's text and a spectator's experience (Ellsworth, 1997). Spectatorship theory is related to Psychoanalysis and I will look at the concept of Lacan's "mirror stage" as well as the "Oedipus Complex" . In Freudian terms, "desire" (the expression of lack) is a natural human response stemming from the Oedipus Complex. This complex is thought to emerge soon after a baby recognizes him/herself as an individual. According to Lacan's theory, this recognition occurs between the ages of approximately six and eighteen months, and may be termed the process of "*identification*" (Lacan, 2014,). This 'process' is commonly referred to as the 'Mirror Stage' and involves the baby recognizing him/herself as an "*I*". This means that the baby becomes aware of him/herself as an individual (and therefore separate from others). The importance of this identification 'process' is, as maintained by Lacan's theory, that it "situates the agency known as the ego" (Lacan, 2014).

According to Lacan, the "Ideal-I" is a collection of the perceived self-identification image (Lacan, 1988). The hero on-screen acts as the ideal-manifestation of ourselves by playing out the desires and fantasies in our unconscious (Allen, 1992). In a hero, we see our repressed desires being played out and mobilised, causing us to inadvertently brand the character as a hero. Thus, we can bring in the concept of the "mirror stage" as well, and the spectator of the film can "identify" with the hero.

2.4   Mise-en-scène Theory

When applied to the cinema, mise-en-scène refers to everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement—composition, sets, props, actors, costumes, and lighting (Bordwell, 2004). It can influence the verisimilitude or believability of a film in the eyes of its viewers (Connell, 2012). The various elements of design help express a film's vision by generating a sense of time and space, as well as setting a mood, and sometimes suggesting a character's state of mind (Barsam, Monoham, Gocsik, 2010). It also includes the composition, which consists of the positioning and movement of actors, as well as objects, in the shot (Barsam, Monoham, Gocsik, 2010).

Set Design	Amplify character emotion or the dominant mood, which has physical, social, psychological, emotional, economic and cultural significance in film (Barsam, Monoham, Gocsik, 2010)
Lighting	Affects the way colors are rendered, both in terms of hue and depth, and can focus attention on particular elements of the composition. Highlights, for example, call attention to shapes and textures, while

	shadows often conceal things, creating a sense of mystery or fear(Barsam, Monoham, Gocsik, 2010)
Composition	Unbalanced composition can be used to emphasize certain elements of a film that the director wishes to be given particular attention to. This tool works because audiences are more inclined to pay attention to something off balance, as it may seem abnormal. Where the director places a character can also vary depending on the importance of the role

Thus, Mise-en-scene theory will be used to see how the camera effects and directing of scenes can be used to create certain effects as well as enhance characteristics of the characters throughout the films, thus allowing them to better fit into the "Ideal-I" or the "abject".

3.0   Methodology

Combining these three theories, I will form a integrated framework that will allow me to analyse the main protagonists and antagonists in the films. Psychoanalytic Film Theory will be used to look at the "abject" (Creed, 2002) in the main antagonists, while Spectatorship Theory will be used to look at the "Ideal-I" (Lacan, 1988) portrayed in the main antagonists in the film. Mise-en-scene theory will be used to show how how the camera effects and directing of scenes can be used to create certain effects as well as enhance characteristics of the characters throughout the films, thus allowing them to better fit into the "Ideal-I" or the "abject". This framework will be used to show how these elements of the "Ideal-I' and "abject" evolved across different timeframes and cultures, such as from the US to the UK as well as from the 1970s to the 2000s.
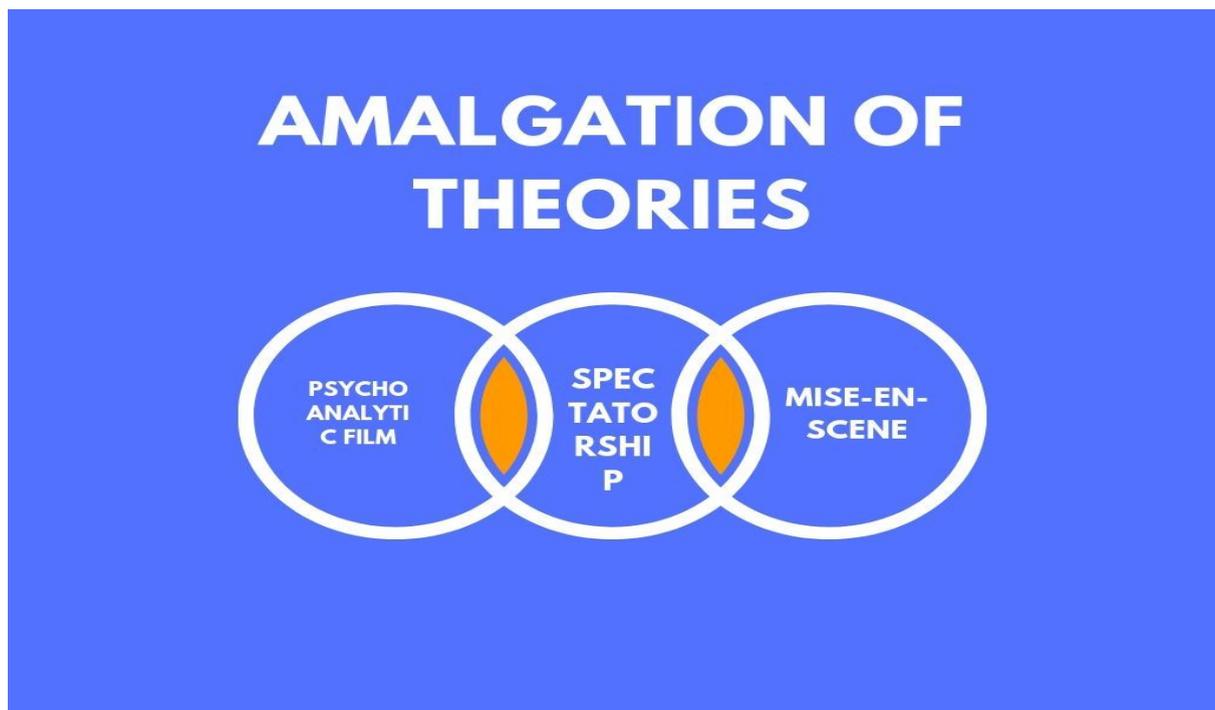
4.0   Results and Analysis

4.1   *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001),* the opening scene shows Harry, the main protagonist, getting rudely awakened by his aunt, Aunt Petunia, in his "bedroom" which is literally the cupboard under the stairs. Harry is then shown to be wearing clothes obviously too baggy for him as he proceeds to make breakfast for Dudley, his cousin, who is treated like a prince with almost 38 presents just for his birthday. This opening scene very clearly juxtaposes Harry against his own cousin Dudley, and we see a drastic difference. Harry is treated almost as if he is the slave of the house and is forced to do chores and even physically abused by Uncle Vernon, as seen in a later scene. This is completely different from what the "Ideal-I" that spectators want to identify with, and Harry is instead someone that the spectators do not identify with.

Throughout the movie, Harry is seen to grow from being the opposite of the spectator's "Ideal-I" to having some heroic moments in the film, making the spectator identify with him then. One notable example would be in the wizard sport "Quidditch". Harry not only breaks a record for being the youngest seeker in a hundred years, he even helps his team to secure a victory for their house. In this scenario, Harry is exuding a sense of heroic strength, being more skillful than the older and more experienced players on the field. Thus, the spectator will view these traits as exemplary and ideal, thus identifying with Harry as the "Ideal-I".

Hermione and Ronald, Harry's best friends, also approximate the "Ideal-I" at the climax of the movie. When the trio enter the trapdoor, it is thanks to Hermionie's sheer intelligence and wit that allows for them to advance past the first few stages of the challenges. Ron later uses his skill in chess to help Harry advance to the last challenge, and in doing so sacrifices himself and gets seriously injured. Both Hermione and Ron's acts were vital for Harry to face Voldemort at the end.

In the climax of the movie, when Harry is face to face with Voldemort, we see Harry ultimately portraying the "Ideal-I". Mise-en-scène theory comes into play here, with the set design focused on Harry having no escape while being faced with a wizard of much higher skill level and experience than him. This creates a sense of impossibility and helplessness, but Harry still manages to defeat him in the end with his bravery and love as well as moral righteousness all help him to be portrayed as ideal, and spectators deem his traits as exemplary and identify with him most at this part of the movie.

The "abject" is mostly shown through Voldemort in this film. In one scene, Harry is required to go into the forbidden forest with several of his schoolmates to help Hagrid, the gatekeeper, in locating a unicorn. As Harry and Malfoy find the unicorn together, they see a hooded figure seemingly devouring the body of a lifeless unicorn in front of them. It is later revealed to us that that hooded figure is Voldemort, who is using unicorn's blood to sustain his incredibly weakened spirit. This shows "the corpse, whole and mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood…" (Creed, 2002). This shows how the work of abjection is being portrayed through the hooded figure, thus becoming the abject in the film.

In the climax of the movie, where Harry is face to face with Voldemort, we see that Voldemort has actually latched himself to the back of the head of Professor Quirrell. This shows the "abject body", which is "the body which has lost its form and integrity"(Creed, 2002). This is because Voldemort is actually sharing the body with a mortal human, and thus "crosses the border between the clean and proper body"(Creed, 2002).

4.2   *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2009)*

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2009),* we see that in this film Harry, who is the main protagonist, is not the main portrayer of the "Ideal-I". In fact, Harry has little to no portrayal of any heroism or ideal traits throughout the entirety of this film. It is a pretty dark film in the sense that the antagonists triumphed over the protagonists this time, which is the opposite of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001)*.

Harry actually actually did not portray any ideal qualities throughout the film, and in fact was pretty helpless as a protagonist. When Dumbledore brings Harry to a cave to find one of Voldemort's horcruxes, which is an object containing a fragment of a soul, Harry was completely helpless. When Dumbledore had to drink a dangerous potion for Harry to retrieve the horcrux, Harry was unable to even provide water for Dumbledore to drink. When they were surrounded by Inferi, who are living corpses, it was Dumbledore who had to occupy the position of the "Ideal-I" as he miraculously mustered up strength to fend off the Inferi while Harry just sat there helpless. Dumbledore was showed tremendous amounts of strength as he fought off the Inferi while already heavily weakened by the potion, thus displaying these ideal traits of strength and allowing the spectators to identify with him.

In fact, a notable portrayer of the "Ideal-I" is actually Ron. Ron had tried out for the position of keeper on his Quidditch team. When he first started out, he was extremely nervous and had no confidence with himself. Before his first game, he was so nervous that he told Harry he was resigning after the game. However, the scene showed Harry apparently adding a special potion "Felix Felicis" which was described as "liquid luck" into Ron's drink. Immediately after drinking it, Ron became extremely confident and told Harry "we have a game to win". Later, Ron goes on to be the saviour of the team, displaying tremondous amounts of skill. It is later revealed that Harry in fact didn't use any of his liquid luck potion, and that it was through Ron's own skill that caused them to win the match. The traits shown by Ron are deemed to be ideal by the spectators, and thus Ron becomes the "Ideal-I" and the spectators identify with him.

However, portrayals of the "abject" were few in this film. For example, the Inferi were perfect examples of this. The Inferi were basically living corpses, controlled by a wizard to do his or her bidding. This follows Creed's description of the image of abjection, which is "the corpse, whole and mutilated". There were very few portrayals of the "abject" in this film.

4.3   *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows-Part 2 (2011)*

The "Ideal-I" is best portrayed by Harry in this movie. Harry's slowly breaks down Voldemort's immortality, by hunting and destroying all his Horcruxes one by one. Through this, Harry experiences a lot of difficulty and challenges while trying to procure the Horcruxes, and even faced troubles when trying to destroy them. Harry's diligence as well as willpower to fight against Voldemort in what seemed like an impossible task, and eventually managed to defeat him. This shows all of Harry's ideal traits being exemplified and the spectators identify with him the most in the climax of the movie when he defeats Voldemort.
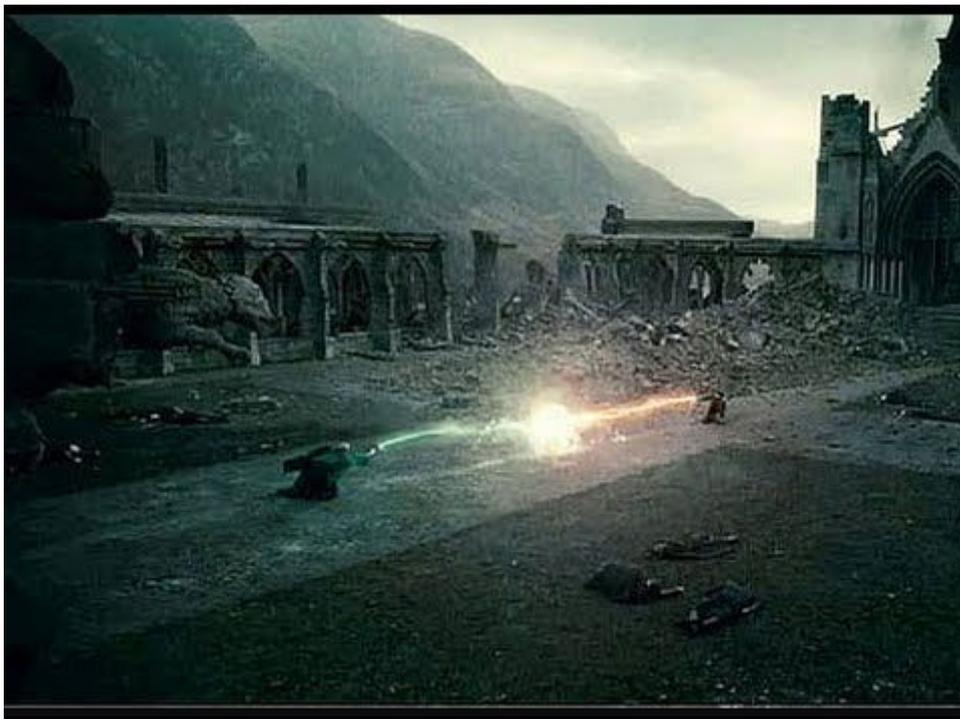
The "abject" is portrayed by Voldemort here, and is especially noticeable in the final scene. As he is disarmed by Harry after all his horcruxes are destroyed, his skin begins to peel off in an eerie manner as his face is frozen in shock and disbelief. This gives spectators a very chilling feeling as it is an unnatural way to die, and there is no background music during this scene which only enhances the eeriness of his death.

5.0   Conclusion

In conclusion, the abject still refers to Kristeva's insights and has not changed much. The "Ideal-I" still follows Lacan's theory, where the ideal traits of the heroes are exemplfied and can be identified with by the audience.

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