Potterliteracy: Cross-Media Narratives, Cultures and Grammars

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There is something Janus-faced about the Harry Potter novels. As Nicholas Tucker observes (1999), they look backwards in time to their sources in folktale and children's literature: to the orphan changeling stories of fairytale and of Frances Hodgson Burnett; to the magical characters and anthropomorphic animals of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature, from *The Princess and the Goblin* to *The Phoenix and the Carpet*; to the portals and parallel worlds of the *Chronicles of Narnia*; to boarding-school stories from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *Jennings Goes to School*; to the obsession with tuck in the post-war stories of Enid Blyton. On the other hand, as Tucker also points out, they are also rooted in the contemporary moment. Tucker's argument here is that they contain structures influenced, above all, by the images and practices of video-games. He cites, among other things, the arcade-like game of Quidditch; and the lists, maps and other means of puzzle-solving and game-survival that characterise the books.

The question of whether games influence books or the other way round is perhaps debatable in this case: Tolkien's stories also have maps, lists, puzzles and so on; *The Lord of the Rings* gave rise to one of the most popular of modern game-genres, the RPG (roleplaying game); and, as Marie-Laure Ryan observes (2001), some stories are ideally adapted to serve as the basis of games. In the same way, the Potter stories may be organised around the kinds of structures that make good games: quests, magical objects, helpers, monster opponents, a bounded fantasy world, a puzzle dynamic. However, Tucker's thesis is generally convincing, and, in the context of the film and computer game adaptations which form part of the AOL-Time-Warner franchise which has acquired the Potter rights, prompts some urgent questions for the teaching of literacy and literature. We can no longer afford to see literature as an entirely distinct mode and culture, with its own distinct literacy, as early studies of the relation between games and writing show (Beavis 2001, McClay 2002, Mackereth and Anderson 2000). The books have grown into a cross-media craze, in which children's engagement extends across novels, films, computer games, the internet, and a range of merchandise worthy of StarWars. We need to think, then, how different literacies come into play, how they connect, what they have in common. We also need to consider how these are located in the context of children's contemporary media cultures – the games they play, the films and TV programmes they watch, the comics they read. However, it is worth remembering that such cross-media cultures are not by any means a new phenomenon; Margaret Mackey (2001) compares the Potter franchise to the growth of Frank L Baum's Wizard of Oz series a hundred years ago, and its extensive (and lucrative) adaptation into plays, comic strips and trading cards.

This is an opportunity to think hard about the rhetorics of multiliteracy and media literacy. What exactly do these mean when we look at the detail, at the 'micro-level' of literacy (Buckingham 2003)? How does a particular image or narrative moment 'translate' across different media? If we expect children to learn about the notion of 'character' in literature or film, what does this mean in the context of a game? If they learn the category of 'verb' in language, how do we talk about this category in film? How is the 'verb' different in the interactive media of computer games? And how do these processes relate to macro-literacy, to the broader cultural experience of books, films and games within which such meanings are situated?

And what are these different formal structures representing? At the heart of this question, I want to place the question about the social purpose of Harry Potter for children, and the forms of agency the character represents. This question runs through the literature: is the figure of Harry Potter essentially like the fairytale proxy for the child, pleasurable because he offers at least a fantasy of power in a world run by adults (Black 2003)? Or is he more like the child hero of manga and animé (Japanese comic strips and animations), attractive because of his recuperation of techno-magic 'scavenged from an inherited Wasteland in a Romantic gesture of faith in humanity' (Appelbaum 2003)? And are these two figures in fact different versions of each other? Finally, what of the wistful appeal of the orphan changeling, a figure which runs from folktale through the history of Victorian, Edwardian and post-war children's literature (Tucker 1999)? Does this trope allow children to fantasise about (or exorcise) the death of a parent; or the betrayal of a guardian; or the idealised parent; or simply the pleasurable lack of parent figures altogether? A further question we might add, which does not appear in the literature, is: why might some children *not* like Harry Potter?

His appeal is not universal; and there is some evidence in the research reported on here of boys, especially beyond a certain age, becoming distinctly unhappy with what the character represents.

My approach in this article will be to look at one specific moment in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling 1998, Columbus 2002, Electronic Arts 2002) across book, game and film; and to integrate this analysis with observations and interviews with 11 and 12 year-old children in two schools in Cambridge and London, UK, in 2003 and 2004. This work forms a subset of two research projects in computer games at the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media in the Institute of Education, University of London. The first project is *Textuality in Videogames* (2001-3), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board in the UK, a study of roleplaying games. The second is *Making Games* (2003-7), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for Trade and Industry, a research and development project in partnership with Immersive Education Ltd to develop a games authoring software tool. While this article will draw generally on these projects, it will refer in most detail to an observation of a class of 11 year-olds playing the computer game of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in 2003; an interview with ten 12-13 year-olds in Cambridge (five boys, five girls) in 2004, specifically focusing on the episode analysed in this article; and an interview with one girl in London in 2004.

The analysis will draw on social semiotic and multimodal theory. In some respects, this will produce answers to questions about the literacies in play, both at micro-textual level and at a wider cultural level. It will also throw up questions, however. What kinds of literacy teaching would be needed to deal with this cross-media engagement? How might such pedagogies refer to traditions of children's literature, to children's contemporary media cultures, to forms of media and literacy education? I will return to these questions at the end of the article.

Aragog the spider – cross-media narrative transformations

Towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry and Ron find the secret lair of the monstrous spider Aragog, deep in the forest. They suspect that the spider may be responsible for the sinister events happening in the school, in which children have been paralysed, and threats made of dire consequences obscurely related to the mysterious chamber of secrets. When Harry talks to the spider, she reveals that she is innocent, and gives a clue to the identity of the real culprit. When Harry thanks her and says he must be going, however, she urges her offspring to attack Harry and Ron. In the book and film, they are then rescued by the flying Ford Anglia car which we have met earlier in the story. In the game, something rather different happens.

I want to look at aspects of three main functions of this sequence across the three media. These three overarching functions are derived from social semiotic theory (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, 2001; Lemke 2002). First is their *representational* function – in particular, how they convey what in language is a series of transitive sequences. Transitivity is central to narrative – the grammatical representation of who does what to whom, who performs an action, who or what is the goal. Our expectations of a hero, for instance, are that they will play a large part in the transitivity structures of the narrative – the implied overall structure is that the hero will combat and overcome the villain, and this is, of course, the basic structure underlying all the Harry Potter novels. In this respect, transitivity is used as a general narrative category – but this general structure will also be reflected in the equivalent of sentence level in book, film and game, as will be shown later.

Second is their *organisational* function. In particular, how are these texts differently organised to allow certain routes through by readers, viewers, players?

The third function is the *orientational* (Lemke 2002) or *interactive* (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001), or *interpersonal* function (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) – how the text orients itself towards its audience; how it functions as a communication between social agents. In particular, in this case, there are three interesting questions in this respect. Firstly, how are we encouraged to position ourselves 'with' Harry – what Genette (1980) calls 'focalisation'? Secondly, how are we brought into an affective relation with the text – how does it function to excite its readers within the context of an episode of high dramatic importance? Thirdly, how does the text convince us of its authenticity, its credibility?

How does it create a claim of high modality, that aspect of language and other semiotic modes which makes truth-claims? How does this work in a fantasy narrative of this kind; and how does it work differently for different readers, spectators, players?

Finally, a word about the use of the interview material. My intention here is to regard the texts (book, game and film) and the talk of the children as one semiotic and cultural continuum, which can be analysed using the same framework. The children's engagement, response, interpretation will be viewed as a cultural and social process; but it will also be viewed as a semiotic transformation of the texts, and a transformation which implies the possibility of educational intervention.

Representation

In the book, this entire sequence is quite brief – less than half a page. Here it is in its entirety:

'Go?' said Aragog slowly. 'I think not....'

'But – but – '

'My sons and daughters do not harm Hagrid, on my command. But 1 cannot deny them fresh meat, when it wanders so willingly into our midst. Goodbye, friend of Hagrid.'

Harry spun around. Feet away, towering above him, was a solid wall of spiders, clicking, their many eyes gleaming in their ugly black heads....

Even as he reached for his wand, Harry knew it was no good, there were too many of them, but as he tried to stand, ready to die fighting, a loud, long note sounded, and a blaze of light flamed through the hollow.

Mr Weasley's car was thundering down the slope, headlamps glaring, its horn screeching, knocking spiders aside; several were thrown onto their backs, their endless legs waving in the air. The car screeched to a halt in front of Harry and Ron and the doors flew open.

'Get Fang!' Harry yelled, diving into the front seat; Ron seized the boarhound round the middle and threw him, yelping, into the back of the car. The doors slammed shut. Ron didn't touch the accelerator but the car didn't need him;

the engine roared and they were off, hitting more spiders. They sped up the slope, out of the hollow, and they were soon crashing through the forest, branches whipping the windows as the car wound its way cleverly through the widest gaps, following a path it obviously knew.

Harry looked sideways at Ron. His mouth was still open in the silent scream, but his eyes weren't popping any more.

'Are you OK?'

Ron stared straight ahead, unable to speak.

They smashed their way through the undergrowth, Fang howling loudly in the back seat, and Harry saw the wing mirror snap off as they squeezed past a large oak. After ten noisy, rocky minutes, the trees thinned, and Harry could again see patches of sky.

In terms of representation, we have expectations of Harry's performance as hero. The genre of the story, a fantasy quest narrative, would suggest that Harry will be performing most of the action. I have explored elsewhere how the protagonists of the narratives of popular culture operate through forms of external action (Burn & Schott 2004). In Walter Ong's terms (2002), they are 'heavy heroes', and 'agonistically toned', which is to say that they approach the problems of their quest through external action rather than internal psychological processes, like the warriors of the Homeric oral formulaic narratives.

It is remarkable, therefore, that in this sequence, Harry performs only four actions proper:

Harry spun round …

... he reached for his wand ...

... he tried to stand ...

... diving into the back seat ...

None of these actions accomplish the function of hero; those closest to the agonistic role of the hero, involving the weapon and the stand against the enemy, are markedly incomplete – *he reached for his wand*; *he tried to stand*. Both are about survival – they have no Goal, in narrative

terms, since they are reactive movements to Aragog's threat, which positions Harry as the Goal of the transitive narrative sequence here (if not strictly of the linguistic goal, which is the *wand)*.

This feature of the passage in the book is recalled very clearly by one of the girls in the Cambridge interview:

IONA: *He uses [his wand] in the book, he uses it for the Lumos spell, and then I remember they say, 'He was prepared to fight to the death', 'cos when they're surrounded he said, 'He drew out his wand and he was prepared to fight to the death, even if, even if he drew his wand he knew there were too many' or something, and, um, I don't think he actually cast a spell but he got his wand out* [waves hand clasping imaginary wand].

This clearly replays, lexicogrammatically and gesturally, the representational structures of the book, with minimal changes. It is also an interpretative transformation, in which the clause 'I don't think he actually cast a spell', suggests that she is keenly aware of the surprising lack of action here.

The grammar of the text suggests that the real hero of the episode is a *deus ex machina*, the Ford Anglia, which is responsible for the sounding of 'a loud, long note' and the flaming of 'a blaze of light', which *thunders* down the slope, *knocks* spiders out of the way, *slams* its own doors shut, *accelerates* away with complete autonomy, and winds 'cleverly' through the forest, the adverb neatly anthropomorphizing the vehicle.

In fact, the car is so heroic and decisive in its actions that it completely outdoes the spiders also, which do very little in this sequence other than clicking and gleaming in a threatening manner, and getting knocked over by the Ford Anglia.

Three of the children recall this very clearly:

OGEDEI: *I thought – yeah – the car comes along – it honks or something – and then – the spiders get scared away by the light – and er –*

IONA: *– and he bowls over some of the really big spiders – it like smashes into them, and there's a mass of hairy legs or something, like long hairy spidery legs….*

ALI: *I remember that they, um, the car, um, bowls over a few spiders that are trying to stop the car, so it just kind of jump – makes them jump out of the way.*

Again, their interpretation clearly underlines the representational structures which present the car as the heroic actor of the sequence.

Perhaps this analysis of action is not so surprising. Aragog and the spiders are, in a sense, not real enemies but a diversion, a smaller obstacle in the path of the main quest and its attendant villain, a composite of force of nature, the basilisk, and evil magic, Voldemort. In this respect, the structure resembles the hierarchy of opponents in action adventure computer games, where end-of-level boss monsters may hold you up for a while, but the big battle is reserved for the boss at the end of the last level. However, such hierarchies are arguably inherited from older forms of narrative. Tolkien's stories have similarly escalating episodic conflicts which lead up to a final confrontation, in *The Hobbit* with the dragon, in *Lord of the Rings* with Sauron. Indeed, Aragog is suspiciously similar to one of Tolkien's minor 'bosses', Shelob the spider. The children reveal specific kinds of knowledge of such characters, three of them naming Shelob as a similar kind of character to Aragog, for instance, when asked to make a comparison between the *Chamber of Secrets* and other books or films.

Another explanation for Harry's relative inaction might be that he is generally, at least in the first two books, a mixture of action and vulnerability. He is certainly constructed as brave, kind, self-sacrificing and the bearer of powerful magic. But he depends heavily on magic helpers, such as Dobby the house-elf and Fawkes the phoenix, on friends who are equally brave, like Ron, or cleverer, like Hermione; and on the good adults, in particular Dumbledore. If he is, then, a typical fairytale representative or proxy for the child, the courageous small person against the giant threat, then a winning component of this construct is his vulnerability. Certainly, his appeal for children is rooted, for some critics, in his similarity to the protagonists of European folktale (Black 2003, Tucker 1999). We might add that the narrative function of folktale protagonists is structurally related to

> Young people seem to be perfectly at ease in moving from one to the other, and to have internalised thoroughly the different generic understandings on which they are built.

the function of helpers of one kind or another, in that the protagonists belong to character-clusters whose members are mutually dependent, as Propp's morphology of the folktale demonstrated (1970).

When asked to compare Harry to other characters in books, films or games, three of the children in the group named Frodo as a similar character, which suggests an awareness of a hero-character as marked by his vulnerability and need for helpers as by his courage. One boy, Stephen, mentions that if Harry is similar to Frodo, then Ron is like Samwise Gamgee. Josie, from the London school, also mentions Frodo as the comparison which is most obvious to her, and when asked why, the characteristic she selects is that Harry and Frodo 'are always coming to harm'.

However, Harry's vulnerability was not seen by all the children as positive. One boy, Ogedei, clearly perceived him as annoyingly weak, and compared him to the Orcs in *Lord of the Rings*, because he was 'irritating'. This may be part of a tendency for boys to distance themselves from Harry's 'goodness', subverting it by demands for violence or toughness. In the observation of 11 year-olds from the previous year, a number of boys in the class of thirty expressed forms of ironic subversion of Harry. Iona explains Harry's inability to kill the spiders in the book as evidence of the 'goodness' the character has to maintain, to which Ogedei responds with another dismissive remark about his weakness:

IONA: *If he killed spiders in the movie everybody wouldn't like him because he'd be a coldblooded killer. You have to keep Harry Potter as nice as possible.*

OGEDEI: *Yeah but Harry Potter's like sad, he's just like such a little, um, um, he's like a teacher's pet, he's just running around doing this stuff. …*

I'd like it if he could get better spells –

IONA: *Like Avrakedavra, a killing spell?*

OGEDEI: *No, like flame, like a flamethrower* [laughs].

Both children seem to recognise that goodness is an essential feature of the character, but they value it differently. If

Harry Potter provides raw material for children's fantasy play, it may be that for some children it is a kind of play that is too safe, too regulated ('teacher's pet'), too close to the ordered form of play Caillois calls 'ludus' (2001), and Sutton-Smith (2001) calls the 'progressive rhetoric' of play, easily incorporated into the moral and socialising frameworks of education. Ogedei, like many boys of his age, is looking for something altogether more subversive and anarchic, his gleeful proposal of the flamethrower closer to the chaotic and dangerous forms of play represented by Caillois's 'paidea', or chaotic play, and Sutton-Smith's rhetoric of play as Fate, a more ancient, adult understanding of play, predating the rational orderliness of Enlightenment formulations.

The Aragog sequence in the film displays subtle differences in the representation of Harry. Although we see him from a high camera angle during the conversation with Aragog, emphasising his vulnerability and the spider's giant size, in subsequent shots the angle is much lower, so that he appears as a much stronger figure. There is no evidence in the interview of the children noticing that the film represents him as more powerful, however. The only person to mention the camera is Sam, who cites the moment when 'the camera moves' to reveal a mass of spiders slowly descending on Harry and Ron as the moment which made him jump most. His reconstruction of this filmic structure relates, then, to Harry as victim rather than Harry as hero.

In the film, Harry's actions are presented as decisive and powerful – he uses his wand, which does effectively knock over a number of spiders; he directs Ron in various ways; he saves Ron from falling out of the car. However, the children do not remember these actions; asked several times whether Harry uses his wand in the film, they insist that he doesn't. Again, their memory is of the character as victim.

Furthermore, the sequence is extended at greater length than the one in the book, which, as we have seen, occupies only half a page or so. The narrative temporality in the book is a mixture of telling detail ('Harry saw the wing mirror snap off as they squeezed past a large oak') and what the narratologist Gerard Genette called ellipsis (1980), in which the time of the story is squeezed into much briefer passages of narrative ('After ten noisy, rocky minutes'). In the film,

> An interesting question that Burns doesn't foreground is what the young people in the study see as the relationship between the three different versions.

the reverse happens – these ten minutes are played out more fully, and the more they are extended, the more the spiders become credible enemies, and the more Harry becomes a powerful hero. Indeed, he and Ron are constructed in this sequence in ways that are comparable to last-stand heroes in other movies: the series of temporary triumphs against the spiders, succeeded by a moment of ambiguous silence, and then by the dawning horror of more massed ranks of the enemy coming over the next ridge, are typical cycles of suspense and resolution in many action movies. The Potter generation will have learnt such cinematic conventions from Frodo and the Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy; or Anakin Skywalker and Queen Amidala against the cloned warriors in *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*; or Sam Neill facing growing numbers of dinosaurs in the *Jurassic Park* franchise.

Penny, in Cambridge, clearly recognises these peaks and troughs:

PENNY: *There's a bit where they're in the car, and you think they've escaped, 'cos Aragog's kind of, held back, and the, and the, and there's a couple of smaller spiders running round, and then suddenly there's a huge spider which just JUMPS* [violent forward thrust of right hand] *onto the back of the car* [same hand on forehead]*, and even if, even if the spider itself isn't that scary, it's kind of, it just kind of makes you do that* [demonstrates jump with face and hands]*, 'cos you think they've kind of got away*.

Another semiotic mode film employs is speech. While Harry has most of the speech, as in the book, Ron says very little, but pulls the comically-terrified face that has become something of a trademark of the actor, acts under Harry's direction, and offers moral support. However, he is given one extra line in the film, and it is significant enough to be remembered by Iona, who speaks it with a convincing mimicry of Ron's comic expression: 'Can we panic now?' In these specific ways, as in general, he is constructed as the loyal but not-quite-so-bright sidekick. As we have seen, Sam points out that if Harry is like Frodo, then 'Ron's like Samwise Gamgee'. Josie, in London, also makes the comparison between Ron and Sam, and extends the comparison to point out that, just as Frodo is supported by the fellowship of the Ring, Harry is supported by his friends, as well as adults such as Dumbledore, whom Josie compares to Gandalf.

More generally, the speech of the books and films is perceived quite differently by different children. For Iona, part of the appeal of the texts is that the characters speak like those in her world: the teachers speak like her own teachers. For Josie, entirely the opposite is true – the appeal is that the characters and their school are nothing like her own, but are an ideal she can fantasise about.

The game represents a marked shift. In representational terms, Harry's actions are quite different from book or film. At the end of the cut scene (a pre-rendered animation which presents the conversation with Aragog), Harry has to fight the spiders, cut the masses of web that hold Aragog aloft, and then fight Aragog herself as she descends. He cuts the web and attacks the spider by casting the Rictusempra spell (left mouse button); and evades the attacks of Aragog and her children by running (arrow keys) and jumping (control key). These actions are effectively the verb-stock of the game-grammar – we have control over six actions Harry can perform (four directions of movement, spell-casting, and jumping). In narrative terms, this might seem profoundly impoverished, but in game terms, it is entirely normal to work with a 'restricted language' (Halliday 1989), and the pleasure lies in the skill of the player to deploy these resources well to meet the challenge of the game. Furthermore, while we and the protagonist-avatar can only perform six actions, the sense of agency is hugely increased (the avatar is the player's representative in the game-world, from a Sanskrit term referring to the descent of a god to earth). While there are more (but not many more) verbs in the equivalent passage in the novel, they represent Harry effectively as Goal in this scene, as we have seen. In the game, we only need to be able to run and cast spells in order to defeat the giant spider. This narrative, then, becomes a very different kind of narrative, in which the transitivity sequence of the book and film is effectively reversed, or at least, rebalanced, so that Harry becomes Actor, Aragog Goal, and vice versa, the balance depending on the skill of the player.

It is worth noting, however, that it is not only skill that is in question here, but aspects of the social contexts in which the

game is played. Annie admits that she was killed twice by Aragog, and then asked her sister to complete the level, so that the agency of the character in the game narrative was affected not only by the player's skill but by the help she was able to summon. In my case, as a player, I arrived at this sequence with insufficient health, since I had not collected enough magic potions along the way. After being killed by Aragog several times, I found a cheat on the internet which allowed me to edit a program file in the game to give me full health, so that I could complete the level. However, the ideal way to balance the power of the avatar against the boss enemy would have been tactical, as Ogedei pointed out in the interview. He was the only member of the group who argued the need for tactics in fighting bosses. The implication here, then, is that his level of game literacy was greater than either mine or Annie's, though both of us reached for legitimate support mechanisms common in game culture: peers and cheats.

However, other children in the group are aware of the differences in agency in the game, and how this relates to the ludic aspects of the game as well as to its narrative. Annie is very clear about the differences in action between the game and the book or film:

ALI: *In the book and the film you just kind of, you talk to Aragog and then you jump in the car and you have to get away as quickly as you can, but in this one you actually have to do something.*

Iona makes the point that you have specific goals in the game:

IONA: *In the game, you actually have to actually play as well, and they change it quite a lot as well, don't they, I mean it's difficult, you actually have to have goals, like Annie said, you have to actually shoot the web, and, um, it's just very different, because, I mean, you can't really imagine Harry and Ron sort of trying to poke their wands in Aragog's eyes or something.*

This game-grammar – a limited stock of actions, but operated by the player – is reflected by the language of the box of the game, which says, on the back, 'Dare to return to Hogwarts! Be Harry Potter in the Chamber of Secrets!' These imperatives in effect invite the player to become the protagonist in some sense. In what sense exactly is worth

considering – we certainly adopt the 'agonistic' function of the hero (Ong 2002), fighting his fight; and as we have seen, this function is much more strongly developed in the game than in the book or film. On the one hand, it can be seen as a return to the bolder, simpler structures of folktale narratives, in which two-dimensional heroes, unencumbered by psychology, battle external forces. On the other hand, it can be seen as a cultural (and technical) connection with fighting games, such as third-person shooters, generic elements of which this game contains.

The 'heavy heroes' of oral narrative can also be related to the protagonists of popular narratives in film, television and animé. In the case of Harry Potter, this derivation is configured in quite specific ways. Harry the game character learns his power, literally – he acquires the necessary spells for later challenges by attending lessons in the game's version of Hogwarts – while we, the player, simultaneously acquire the skill to deploy the spells. In game culture and technology, this is completely to be expected, and follows the pattern of 'training levels' in other games, such as *Tomb Raider 4* (Eidos 1999), in which the 16 year-old Lara Croft and her player are simultaneously taught their tomb-raiding skills by Professor von Croy (for an analysis of the learning processes in this sequence, see Gee 2003). However, this kind of learning also reminds us of how the heroes of popular film acquire and learn to use their powers – an example likely to be familiar to the Potter generation is the instruction of the young Luke Skywalker by Yoda and Obi-wan Kenobi in the skills of Jedi knighthood in *Star Wars*.

At the same time, this trope has its equivalent in fantasy children's literature – we might think of the Wart being instructed by Merlin in *The Sword in the Stone*, or (more similar to Harry Potter), the apprentice wizardry of Ged at the School for Wizards on Roke island in Ursula le Guin's *Wizard of Earthsea* trilogy.

Organisation
An important principle at stake here is the notion of 'reading path' (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). This is the route the reader will take through the text, a route partly determined by the textual organisation specific to the communicative modes in play. So the book of Harry Potter will be read sequentially, insofar as reading is a time-based activity

> Perhaps most urgent of all is sensible research into how our subjectivity is being constructed and reconstructed by the ways in which we shift between endlessly proliferating texts in diverse media.

and print follows a linear progression. However, as it is also a spatial medium, and as the reader has control over the time and spatial dimensions of the book, the story can be skipped, read out of sequence (the end before the beginning, for instance), and so on. The film is more resolutely time-based in ways that, at least in the cinema, the spectator cannot vary; although viewers of the DVD can fast forward, freeze frame, and select 'chapters' in ways closely analogous to the book. The reading path in the game is a very different matter. Lemke (2002) distinguishes between the *trajectory* of hypertexts (the route implied more or less strongly by the text) and *traversal* (the route actually chosen by the reader). In the case of this game, then, there is a strong trajectory across the major blocks of narrative and gameplay. Where there is more room for different traversals by players the game is quite specific. In between the major narrative events and challenges, the player has a kind of free time. This can be used to wander around Hogwarts, exploring, picking up extra resources (there are a number of rewards hidden around the castle and grounds); to play Quidditch; or to challenge characters to duels.

Penny explains some of the differences in structure, from the reader's and player's point of view:

PENNY: *Well, sometimes, well with Harry, well with the book, you'll be, you're just you're just reading it and everything just falls into place , whereas in the game you have to walk around quite a lot and sort of make sure you find so you know what to do, what the next step is and sometimes you have to maybe talk to a character so you can find out where you're meant to go next, but it's not like one things leads after another and you're just automatically transported to the next bit you have to complete.*

In ideal terms, it might seem that the player has the power to 'write' the story – but of course, there are limits, and a series of tradeoffs between the need to maintain a relatively fixed narrative structure which will replicate the story of the book and film, and the need to offer the player some control over the sequence of events. In this game, then, the most fixed element of narrative representation is the cut scenes, which are very frequent, and which contain all the backstory, all the dialogue scenes, and all the denouements or conclusions to each level. The next level up is the order of events. The levels are organised around four challenges, to acquire the spells necessary to accomplish essential moves through the narrative. The order of these challenges is fixed, as is the order of narrative events which Harry must act in, such as the raid on the Slytherin common-room, disguised as Crabbe and Goyle, or the duel with Malfoy, or the battle with Aragog, or the final battle with the basilisk.

The question of choice provokes an argument among the children. Ogedei is fairly dismissive of the game, arguing that players have very little choice, and that much of the game is pre-determined, while Iona argues that there is real choice, though she does not give specific examples. In some respects, this may reflect the different perceptions of experienced and less experienced players. Iona and Annie, who both claim there is choice, are relatively inexperienced, and have been attracted to the game through its association with the Potter franchise. Ogedei is a committed gamer, as we know from earlier research with his group, and can compare the experience of this game with a wide range of others (here, for instance, he compares fighting Aragog with the tactics you need to fight one of the monsters in the first *Lord of the Rings* game). The less experienced players are more likely to be impressed by the appearance of choice than those who have played with different game systems and have a more varied experience of what choice might mean.

So reading path, or traversal, is central to literacy but specific to different modes and media. In the case of the game, to read the choices on offer tactically, as Ogedei does, is to know how the game is likely to develop, to read predictively in ways analogous to the predictive skills of reading print, though for different reasons. Myrtle, from the London school, also points out how the Harry Potter games can be explored in quite specific ways if you know what you are looking for: her example is the Wizard cards that are buried around the game, which will provide payoffs later if you have collected enough. Again, this is a tactical challenge, quite distinct from the narrative drive of the game, and an example of how a game-literate player will explore the game-world differently from one who is not so experienced.

Orientation

The *orientational function* of the sequence in the book is unsurprising, in many ways. Harry is effectively *focalised* (Genette 1980) – he appears as the subject of more clauses than Ron, he is foregrounded in the first part of the passage, when Ron is not mentioned at all; he utters three lines of dialogue, whereas Ron doesn't speak; we are party to his thoughts ('Harry knew it was no good'); and we see through his eyes at the end: 'Harry could again see patches of sky.' These focalising devices are consistent with the rest of the book, indeed all the books, and offer us a position close to the protagonist.

The affective quality of the passage is created, again, partly by verbs, which often represent extreme or intensified sensory experience: *flamed, thundering, screeching, knocking, yelled, seized, slammed, crashed, howling*. It is also created by the pace of the narrative, especially by strings of short clauses built around these intensive verbs. It is these verbs which are recalled by the children as they select what is significant about this passage, Iona and Annie turning 'knocking' into 'bowled', and Ogedei turning the 'screeching' of the car's horn into 'honking'.

However, it is also created, perhaps, by the knowledge of Harry's plight, and the explicit threat of death, which is quite differently managed in the game, and arguably not explicitly present at all in the film. This relates in two ways to the overall representation of death in the books. On the one hand, death has always been a threat, from Harry's near-escapes from Voldemort, to the much-publicised death of a character in *The Order of the Phoenix*, which turned out in the end to be the death of Sirius Black, a kind of second orphaning for Harry, to whom Sirius had become a substitute father. On the other hand, the death of Harry's parents is a running theme in the book, and they appear as mournful ghostly presences at regular intervals. The children show some awareness of death in the books. Iona, as we have seen, recalls Harry's readiness to 'fight to the death'. Annie predicts that the series of books will end with a death. And Iona goes on to suggest that it will either be the death of Harry or of a friend, so that there can be some grief but then a recovery. Josie, in London, also predicts that in the last book, 'Harry's going to die to save everyone'. However, how children engage with this increasingly sensitive area of the books and films raises interesting questions for future research.

Finally, the modality of the piece. In this case, 'modality' refers specifically to the 'truth-claim' made by the text, rather than to other aspects of modality in functional grammar. This depends partly on the location of this sequence in a wider world whose reality has already been produced as a set of shared beliefs between the text, the genre, the tradition of fantasy and fairytale, and its readers, past and present. In this world, it is not the existence of giant spiders that will lower the modality, in other words, reduce the truth-claim, of the text. Rather, it will be how well such fantasy structures are rendered that will raise the modality. In this respect, the sensory detail invested in the fantasy elements is important: the clicking sound of the spiders and the gleaming of their eyes, or the intense effects of the verbs representing the action of the flying Ford Anglia. In this respect, the intense fascination for children of magic is important – a fantasy technology empowering the child. This is the appeal of Appelbaum's gundam child (2003); and Josie, in London, is emphatic that magic is the appeal of the books for children: 'Kids are supposed to like magic'.

In orientational terms, the film realises similar meanings in visual terms. Harry is, again, focalised – we are close to him visually throughout the sequence; and again, he has a larger proportion of the action than Ron. We are connected through frequent close-ups, over-the-shoulder shots that locate him in the foreground with his back to us and the spiders in the background, and, perhaps most importantly, through our familiarity with the audiovisual representation of the character, and our memory of his prominence earlier in the film, and in the previous film.

The affective structure of the sequence is also different from the book. It is structured, as we have seen, round a series of false resolutions and shock attacks, so that the affective aspect of the battle with the spiders is organised as a series of peaks and troughs, rather than a constant level thrill. This structure is generically typical of modern thrillers and horror films, which organise high moments of conflict as, effectively, roller-coasters. As we have seen, Penny recalls this sequence vividly; and her gestures represent the violent thrust of the image of the spider from the text, followed

by the hand on the brow to show the shocked response of the viewer. Annie agrees that this moment made her jump, but adds an important qualifier: that what made her jump more is a kid who screamed behind her in the cinema, reminding us that the communal viewing experience in part creates its own affective climate.

In terms of modality, there are some similarities between book and film. Again, the truth-claim made by the fantasy elements is grounded in an intense sensory modality (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996), with both visual and auditory details of the spiders and the Flying Ford Anglia powerfully enhanced. Fantasy needs to be more real than real to be credible – to achieve the hyperreality Kress and van Leeuwen argue is characteristic of the sensory modality. However, there are also differences. Film must realise more fully aspects of representation which language need only sketch. Important examples of this here are Harry's face and physical presence, realised as Daniel Radcliffe. This, as a semiotic syntagm, or string of signs, makes its truth-claim partly through signifiers derived from the book (the black hair, green eyes and scar), and partly on the replication of the features of the actor already successfully established as 'Harry Potter' in the first film.

The children mention other details. Iona remarks on the trees in the film:

IONA: *I thought it was good because the trees looked really kind of real and quite sort of haunty* [laughs] *– is the only way I can think to describe it, they were really tall and absolutely huge, and they spinned, and imagine being chased by little hairy things, and very big hairy things as well!* [laughing]

The two adjectives used to describe the trees here emphasise the complexity of modality judgments made by viewers. On the one hand, the credibility of a textual detail is judged by its versimilitude (*real*); on the other hand, by its truth to the fantasy genre (*haunty*).

It seems clear that a high modality will depend on the function of Harry as the folktale protagonist: Harry is believable and convincing for some of these children because of his mixture of bravery and vulnerability. However, there is also a tissue of cultural references to the popular narratives of contemporary cinema and television

which has the general effect of heightening the agency of the protagonist and the modality of the film in general. The frequent references made by the children to *The Lord of the Rings* recognise some of these references, and Iona makes explicit how the similarity of Harry to Frodo revolves around a particular set of characteristics: 'They're both plagued by honour'. However, the modality judgments made by the children will depend on what genre in particular the film is judged against. While the girls in particular are comparing it with fantasy films, Ogedei is thinking of horror films, in which context he finds Harry Potter wanting:

OGEDEI: *I didn't find anything at all scary! It's only a PG!*

IONA: *Are you saying if it's an 18 you'd find it scary?*

OGEDEI: *I prefer, like, really scary movies, like, er, Friday the something, no wait, I haven't seen that one, but I've seen the* Jason X *film, which isn't really scary, but it's really bloody, really disgusting.*

IONA: *What about* Sleepy Hollow*?*

OGEDEI: *Yeah, that's – no, not scary! That's for little kids!*

While the film's modality depends partly on its fidelity to the book, then, in a different sense, it depends on its truth to its genre, or its 'presentational' modality (van Leeuwen 1999).

In the game, again there is a dramatic difference. If Harry's repertoire of actions has much greater power than in the book or the film, we are no longer addressed as spectators who simply sit and watch these actions unfold. Rather, we are addressed in the ludic equivalent of the second person – you must fight the spider, you must be Harry Potter.

If game has an equivalent of focalisation, then it is even more strongly built around the figure of Harry. Since he alone is constructed as the player's avatar, we are addressed by the game as if we are Harry. An implication of this is that we are more distant from the subordinate agencies of Ron and Hermione. In the book and film, their agency is essentially the same as Harry's – it is a sequence of actions

which we observe from the outside. In the game, we play Harry, but cannot play Ron or Hermione – an absolute distinction. In the third game, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, this structure has been differently designed – we play Harry, Ron and Hermione in turn, which offers a quite different set of resources for our imaginative engagement with the game and the narrative.

The children are quite specific about how the game locates them. Three of them say, when asked if they feel they become Harry Potter, that they don't; they observe him from the outside, and manipulate him. Two of them argue that they would feel more like Harry if it was a first person game and they could 'look out through his eyes' (Jake). However, Josie (in London) feels quite different:

JOSIE: *You're controlling it, really, and it's actually like you're there, and you're the one that's doing it, you're Harry Potter.*

There are no representations of Harry's emotions during the conflict, as there are in both book and film. If anyone feels these, it is the player, who feels considerable anxiety as the spiders attack, as the huge Aragog looms up and threatens to overwhelm us, as the insistent call 'Bite him, my children!' repeats through the sequence.

The children are clear that the emotional experience of playing the game is quite different. When asked if they feel like Harry Potter, they say no; Iona says that 'in the adrenalin thrill' of the game, you don't have time to worry about Harry's feelings. Of course, this observation registers a different kind of affective engagement with the excitement of the game.

The modality of the game, like the film, depends on two dimensions – its fidelity to the original (though this might now be seen as either book or film); and its fidelity to its genre, in this case action adventure games. Josie finds the game authentic because it allows her to be Harry Potter in certain specific, exciting ways: she mentions the ability to do spells, to jump, to play Quidditch, to fly on broomsticks. These make the games compelling, even if aspects of them disappoint – she mentions the quality of the graphics in the Gameboy Advance version of *The Chamber of Secrets*, for instance.

Media literacy: multimodal or mode-specific?
It is clear, then, that in related but rather different ways, all three versions of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* construct a child-hero with whom readers, viewers and players can empathise, as a vulnerable but courageous opponent of assorted monsters, adults, and metaphors for fear of the dark, an admirable character for some of the children, 'plagued by honour', but for others, a 'teacher's pet', too good to be really interesting. These are the kinds of meaning which children construct, and which connect with their changing understanding of the place of children in the world, the possibilities of contesting adult power on the one hand but looking to it for protection on the other, the importance of friendship and the culture of their age group.

If Harry Potter does reach back to traditional themes and tropes of children's literature and folktale, but also derives some of its substance from the images of the present day (or Rowling's youth), then in some way the children seem aware of this in indistinct ways. Iona's phrase 'plagued with honour' strongly implies an awareness of literary traditions and idioms; while Josie argues that the important thing about Harry Potter is the magic: 'Kids are supposed to like magic'. This idea cannot exist without a cultural experience of magic as an element in children's narrative, and what it offers by way of solution to the problems of real life, or as the kind of glamorous alternative Josie enjoys.

However, while the job of the critic may be to dig out the provenance of the narratives, the job of the reader, viewer and player is to engage transformatively with book, film and game. The most marked feature of the children's intertextual awareness, unsurprisingly, is their relation of Harry Potter to other texts current in their popular cultures, in particular *The Lord of the Rings*. For some of them, this is a literacy centred on book and film, a comparison of character types and narrative themes. For others, in particular Ogedei, it is a literacy centred on games, where the salient comparisons are playing tactics and boss monsters.

But the question of literacy also requires an account of the different systems of signification children engage with across these media, and how meanings are made both within each medium and across the different media. At one level, there is a detailed understanding and interpretation of how

The advent of new media has provided many areas for research.

these different texts work at a micro-level – what particular words or phrases mean in the book, what particular images or sounds mean in the film, what particular actions mean in the game. At the whole-text level, there are interpretations and understandings of narrative, of character, of theme, and of game-structure. At a wider cultural level, there are comparisons, evaluations, connections being made on the basis of generic similarities, narrative similarities, formal similarities, thematic similarities.

But more, these understandings and interpretations run across different modes and media. English teachers have been familiar with comparisons of film and book for a long time, though arguably it is less common to find work of this kind which really exploits the grammars of language and film at a detailed level as well as the usual broader attention to character and plot. However, games raise a number of different questions, which these students' discussion emphasises. How, in these three different media, are such functions as point-of-view, location, narrative action, narrative temporality, narrative space, system of address, emotion, reader/viewer/player engagement, to be understood and mediated in the English classroom?

We should avoid the risk of simply homogenising representational structures and their attendant literacies across these media, however. Ogedei's argument about the need for tactics in fighting boss monsters, or Iona's point about the goals of the game, make it clear that game-literacy is different from print and moving image literacy in spite of sharing certain representational structures. Similarly, Penny's observations about the temporal structure of the film make it clear that this works very differently from the book. If we are to recognise and build on these literacies, we must take account of media-specific features as well as ones which operate across and between modes and media. We also need to recognise the transformative work of the users of these texts. How they connect them with their everyday lives will vary dramatically, as Iona and Josie's opposing perceptions of the similarity of Hogwarts to their own schools shows. How they experience the interactivity of the game will also vary, so that for the children in Cambridge, the Harry-avatar was more of a puppet, whereas for Josie, it felt as if she was there, was 'being' Harry. How they judge their 'presentational modality' will also vary, depending

on the structures of taste and value in which they locate them, as Ogedei's low opinion of the film compared to his experience of the horror genre demonstrates.

The 'grammar' of media literacy needs to be considered in tandem with the cultures of these media. We have always attended to children's literature in English because it is a living part of their culture, part of a pattern of engagement with powerful fictions that begins with fairytale, and which inducts them into frameworks for making sense of their world, morally, affectively, imaginatively. Traditional valuations of print literacy and culture are likely to be suspicious of newer media, especially games. However, enthusiasts of children digital cultures are quite likely to reverse this valuation, representing the culture of the cyberkid as a rupture with older technologies and communicative practices. What the present study suggests is that we need also to look for continuities. The Potter phenomenon demands a cross-media literacy, attentive to both general principles and to media-specific features; but it also demands a historical depth and continuity, a literacy which, like the Potter novels, is Janus-faced.

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