

# Hogwarts versus Svalbard: Cultures, Literacies and Game Adaptations of Children's Literature

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## Twin Titans

JK Rowling and Philip Pullman are twin giants of contemporary children's literature, whose works follow similar paths, yet invite stark contrasts. The same can be said of the wider constellation of media transformations surrounding them. In previous work, I have addressed the lack, in the research literature, of detailed analysis of the game texts and children's engagements with them, in respect of the Harry Potter adaptations. This chapter will build on previous research on the Harry Potter game adaptations (Burn, 2004, 2006), to consider selected episodes from the game of *The Golden Compass* (Shiny Entertainment, 2007), and the game of *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* (Electronic Arts, 2002). The argument of the chapter will be that the Rowling and Pullman phenomena are interesting at least partly because they confound conventional judgments of taste, categories of cultural value, notions of literacy, and indeed limiting conceptions of children's literature. It will explore how they might be seen as playful texts, in ways illuminated by the relatively recent medium of videogames, into which they have both been adapted; and it will ask how we need to rethink textuality, cultural value and the models of literacy associated with them in the light of such transformations.

Both sets of novels create plucky central characters, who can be seen as judicious mixtures of folk tale hero/ine and *Bildungsroman* protagonist (Burn, 2006). In respect of the former category, they slay their respective metaphorical giants, assisted by magical creatures, artefacts and innate heroic qualities. They are both chosen ones: Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived; Lyra Belacqua, the gifted reader of the alethiometer, possessed of a mysterious destiny, eventually to become Pullman's new Eve in the final novel of the trilogy. They are both fairy tale orphans, literally in Harry's case, apparently in Lyra's, wrenched from a parentage soaked in the aristocracy of magic, a significant part of their mission to uncover the mysteries of this lineage. Their stories follow the classic pattern of the *Bildungsroman*, summarized by Jerome Buckley as 'a convenient synonym for the novel of youth or apprenticeship' (Buckley, 1974:13). Expelled from their homes, they move through rites of passage into an early adulthood, leaving the innocence of childhood, discovering a kind of sexuality, rather obliquely in Harry's case, more explicitly in Lyra's.

If these textual and narrative features render the two series similar in important respects, their treatments in the world of media adaptation also bear some resemblances, though also

differences. The Rowling series, as is well-known, progressed through adaptation into a hugely-successful Warner film franchise, and thence into videogame adaptation and extensive merchandising, all subject to considerable control by JK Rowling. The Pullman series began its adaptation journey very differently, as a stage play with giant puppets at the National Theatre. The film adaptation of the first book, *Northern Lights*, under the name of *The Golden Compass*, was produced by New Line Cinema, who also produced the cross-platform videogame which followed. No film or game sequel has followed, the franchise dogged by religious objections (Heritage, 2009). However, a BBC series was been commissioned in 2016, for screening in 2017, again produced by New Line, with close involvement from Pullman.

Finally, both series have enjoyed the characteristic popular cultural accolade of fan fiction, inspiring creative extensions to and reimaginings of the narrative and the characters by devoted fans. These include fan activism deploying the Potter mythos (Jenkins, 2012), fan adaptations of Pullman's work (Mackey, 2012), and slash fiction, the imagining of explicit sexual relations between characters where such liaisons are either implied or non-existent in the source texts (eg Tosenberger, 2008). In the case of the Pullman novels, a popular trope is the relations between Mrs Coulter and Lord Asriel, resulting in the conception of Lyra (eg Oswhine, 2015).

In respect of the novels, a dominant preoccupation of adults, whether academics, educators or librarians, is the vexed question of cultural value. A pervasive discourse of distinctions runs through the transformations, commentary and public face of the two franchises, a discourse which produces a sense of Rowling's work as popular culture, and Pullman's as something more literary. Rowling is both castigated for her popular cultural qualities, notably by Harold Bloom (Bloom, 2000), and praised for them, notably by Stephen King (King, 2000). Meanwhile, Pullman fares rather better with the critics, who are generally enthusiastic about the invocations of Milton and Blake which suffuse the books, a good example being the collection of essays edited by Steven Barfield and Katharine Cox, which consider the literary, religious and dramatic implications of the books, the stage adaptation and the film (Barfield & Cox, 2011).

The wrangle over literary merit is complicated in relation to children's literature, not least by the fact that distinctions proposed by literary critics represent a very different engagement with fiction from the engagement of children, as Michael Rosen points out emphatically (Rosen, 1992).

The opinions of children remain a seriously under-researched area in this field, as do the opinions of teachers and librarians. An article reporting an empirical study of teachers' opinions of the quality of fiction for adolescents is revealing in respect of Rowling and Pullman (Hopper, 2006). It acknowledges the argument for the value of popular fiction, the importance of children's tastes and the problems of canonicity. Yet it cannot avoid distinctions of literary merit by teachers and librarians which produce several references to Pullman's work, including a recommendation of a pack of teaching materials and three

citations in the References; while Rowling's work is mentioned nowhere in the article, an omission which seems astonishing given the size and impact of the Potter phenomenon.

This chapter will return to these kinds of distinction, not least because they appear very different from the point of view of transmedia adaptation.

The media franchises have received rather less academic attention than the novels. There is some work on the Potter cross-media franchise (Mackey, 2001; Appelbaum, 2003), but little detailed analytical work on how exactly the stories are transmuted across different media, with a few exceptions, such as a detailed analysis of the game of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Gunder, 2004); and multimodal analyses of book, film and game of *The Chamber of Secrets* (Burn & Parker, 2003; Burn, 2004; 2006). More recently, Margaret Mackey has looked across the breadth of the Pullman adaptations, considering transformations across book, film, game, merchandise and fan fiction (Mackey, 2012). This is a welcome, even-handed evaluation of the work of the reader, broadly conceived, from the 'cognitive and emotional effort' of imagining a literary fictional world (p 115), through the different sensory engagements with film and theatre, to the ergodic actions (Aarseth, 1997) demanded by the game and the inventiveness of fanfiction authors.

The following sections will look at the relationship between literature and play, moving on to consider episodes from two games: *The Golden Compass* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

### **Playful literature, literary games**

A conundrum of literature-into-game adaptation is that in many cases, it can appear that the literary text itself has been designed to be the perfect videogame, even though the biographies of the authors tell us that this is impossible. The obvious example is Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which gave rise to an entire genre of role-playing games (RPG), first as table-top Dungeons and Dragons, then as digital games following two distinct trajectories in Japan and the USA/Europe (Carr et al, 2006), and finally as a wide range of mediaeval-themed online RPGs such as *Skyrim*, the fifth instalment in *The Elder Scrolls* series (Bethesda, 2011). One answer to the conundrum is that games thrive on archaic forms of narrative in their structure, designed as it is around the algorithms of the game engine and the programmed repeatable behaviours of character, combat, quest and mission, similar in many ways to the oral-formulaic structures of ancient poem-narratives. Like these pre-modern texts, games are ideally suited to fantasy content, where quests, potions, puzzles, and magical resolutions suit the programmed nature of the narrative, and the appetites of player communities for transmedia fantasy. By the same token, the 'heavy hero' qualities discerned by Walter Ong in his account of the 'psychodynamics' of oral narrative (2002) work well in videogames, and in contemporary popular film and television. Protagonists with a few memorable qualities, agonistic in their inclination to solve problems through external action rather than internal angst, suit videogame design well, where action can be readily modelled and programmed (Burn & Schott, 2004).

Lyra and Harry are more complicated entities, however. As noted above, many of their qualities belong to the Bildungsroman tradition. They undergo certain forms of psychological development, we are party to their thoughts and emotions through the narrative focalisation implemented by their authors, and they operate through strategy, cunning, planning, negotiation of social relationships and friendships, as much as they do by action.

However, they also operate by the mechanisms of folk tale: Harry's wand, spells, cloak of invisibility; Lyra's daemon, alethiometer and armoured bear, buttressing the child protagonist against the power of the adult world. By the same token, these are game-devices-in-waiting. The affordances of formulaic folk tale entities, eminently programmable in the algorithms of game engines, provide the satisfying balance of ludic structure and narrative structure which adventure games and RPGs seek (Carr et al, 2006).

In these and other ways, the books can be said to be playful texts, which aspire to the condition of games, a claim which can be made of children's fantasy literature in general. When we consider familiar cultural extensions of the franchises, we can expand this claim somewhat. Merchandise surrounding bestselling texts, especially ones followed by a film adaptation, might be perceived as a crass commercialisation from the viewpoint of, for example, the Marxist critique of Disneyfication offered by Jack Zipes (1995, 2012). By contrast, positive readings of media culture and audience agency are to be found in Chris Richards' account of a young girl's engagement with Disney's Little Mermaid which allows for the performative exploration of gendered identity (Richards, 1995). The present study might consider how dressing up as Harry, in the Gryffindor cloak and scarf, a lightning bolt transfer, plastic spectacles, a wand, and a stuffed Hedwig, allows the child to inhabit the role, to dramatise it, perhaps with friends, perhaps at school book days or at fancy dress parties. Such activity enters the realm of play Roger Caillois termed 'mimicry' (1958/2001): in effect, roleplay, realised in myriad forms in all cultures, including in the virtual embodiment of videogame avatars (Burn, 2014).

Textual adaptations in the context of convergence culture and transmedia narrative will extend, then, to children's own adaptations combining the found resources of playground, home and their own bodies with those provided by commercial media. This is part of the context in which videogame adaptations are located. The following analysis will explore what transformations occur in the videogame versions, and how they expand the textual offer to the reader/viewer/player, asking what kinds of resources for cultural engagement they provide; and what models of literacy would be adequate to such engagement.

### **From literature to game I: cunning, combat and magic in *The Golden Compass***

*The Golden Compass* is an action adventure game released on all platforms, drawing on both the book and the film. The analysis here focuses on Lyra's encounter with Iofur Raknison, king of the armoured bears in Svalbard.

In the novel, Lyra faces Iofur with four advantages: her wits, her daemon, Pan, the alethiometer, and Iorek. Like Odysseus, she succeeds by cunning, lies and persuasiveness: rhetorical weapons styled in the vernacular of the tomboy and street urchin characteristics

Pullman creates in the dialogue. The alethiometer provides the strength of knowledge, which although quasi-scientific in its workings, confers a mystical, soothsaying character on Lyra. Pan operates as a second self and an extension of Lyra's body. Iorek Byrnison, the armoured bear, whom she commands with a debt of gratitude, provides the physical strength required for the agonistic function of what Ong terms the 'heavy hero' of oral narrative (2002), and, like Pan, functions almost as an extension of her narrative role.

The game adapts these qualities into game mechanics. The most straightforward of these is a shifting point of view in which the player moves between Lyra, Pan and Iorek, playing with their respective qualities or weapons. In each point of view, the player's health meter changes to represent the appropriate character. In narrative terms, the focalisation set up by the videogame operates more specifically than focalisation in the novel. It is not simply a question of the reader's closeness to the character in question, or even through whose eyes they see. The point of view is structured by the game screen: we are positioned fixedly behind the character; the health meter represents the character; the game controls produce different movements, actions and on-screen consequences.

Pan and Iorek function as interchangeable ludic consciousnesses and virtual embodiments. Both offer an extension of Lyra's virtual body, Pan allowing her to swing across spaces to navigate difficult territory, Iorek allowing her to gallop through the icy wastes of Svalbard, swiping wolves and witches who threaten their progress. Both serve as proxy actors for the child protagonist, supplementing her powers, rescuing her from situations in which her physical power would fail her. Lyra survives partly by her own wits and skill, partly by the might and magic of her fantastic aides.

To this extent, the games can be said to strengthen the folk tale elements of the narrative. Indeed, such an effect might be expected. Games, like oral narrative, are made up of formulaic structures. They may seem very different; but a game character, a bundle of media databases animated by the algorithms and rule systems of the game, is not so different from a character in oral narrative, except that the databases there are made up of linguistic tropes and repeatable clusters, and the algorithm is narrative and in some cases prosodic. To put it simply, games are good at formulaic narratives in the sense that they are programmed entities: folk tale is what they do well, specifically Ong's psychodynamics of oral narrative, such as redundancy, 'heavy heroes' built of a few memorable traits and an agonistic approach to narrative obstacles (Ong, 2002; Burn and Schott, 2004).

However, a different kind of transformation is produced by the game mechanics representing Lyra's cunning and the alethiometer. The former is represented by a screen mode which challenges the player to succeed in a series of mini-games in order to secure an effective lie, a certainty that Lyra's next statement will be believed by the character facing her (Figure 1). While the mini-games bear no lexical relation to the statement, being a generic series of catching, matching and avoiding games, rather like embedded Space Invaders or Pac-man games, they do emphasise qualities of skill and quick-wittedness which are appropriate for Lyra's behaviour in a more general sense. Also, they remind us that, in her ingenious lies to the adults of Jordan College and Bolvangar alike, she is playing games with the adults. In this

sense, the literary text anticipates the game, enacting the dangerous game of deceit Lyra plays with Iofur Raknison, a game formalised in the videogame mechanics. Such ludic structures have an origin in folk tale, as in Stith Thompson's index of deception motifs (see Dundes, 1997).



**FIGURE 1 : Deception mini-game in The Golden Compass**

The function of the alethiometer in the game is again a mechanic translating a feature of the novel. Lyra uses it in the novel to convince the bear-king, Iofur Raknison, that she is Iorek Byrnison's daemon – so ironically the truth-device is used for deception in the interests of the protagonist's progress towards her goal, and indeed as a defining feature of her character, Lyra Silvertongue. In the book, the account of the alethiometer's use at this point is extremely brief: the elaborate learning process presented earlier in the story has now become a simple asking of questions. The first question posed by Iofur Raknison as a test is that she tell him the first creature he had killed. The process is conducted in two short sentences:

What was the first creature he had killed?

The answer came: Iofur's own father.

In the game, the player must collect symbol meanings, and these can only be deployed in the alethiometer sequence if the player has successfully collected them, and thus 'knows' them. The alethiometer then displays the three symbols required to answer the question, and the player uses the game controls to move the device's hands to each symbol in turn, triggering the answer to the question (Fig 2). In this case, the symbols produced by the alethiometer are Death (an hourglass), The Masculine (Wild Man), and Sin (an Apple). The player must successfully turn the hands of the alethiometer to these symbols to find the answer:

The first creature King Ragnar ever killed was his own father. Ragnar had been alone on the ice as a young bear, and had come across a solitary bear. They had quarrelled and fought, and Ragnar had killed him.

It is clear that various processes of expansion and contraction, elaboration and reduction, are happening in this series of transformations, and it cuts both ways. The novel elaborates the dialogue, the representation of the protagonist's emotion, and the description of action; it contracts the process of consulting the alethiometer. The game does the reverse – contracting the dialogue, expanding the alethiometer's function. How might we account for such transformations?

A multimodal analysis suggests some answers. Games are multimodal assemblages incorporating the representational modes of language (spoken and written), visual design, animated dramatic action, virtual embodiment, music and sound, and the 'orchestrating' mode of rules and computer code (Burn, 2016). Here, we can observe that the language of the dialogue is stripped back to the elements needed to correspond to the ludic interchange between the player's avatar, Lyra, and the NPC (non-player character) Ragnar. However, the transition to game has also involved transduction from printed dialogue to dramatic voice acting, in Dakota Blue Richards' performance for the game of the role she played in the film. The affordances of tonal contour, timbre and dynamics of pace and volume extend the semiotic reach of the printed dialogue, just as they do in the film, adding affective charge. The visual design, meanwhile, adds detail: the richness of Ragnar's palace, the fur of his body, the movement of Lyra's hair. Meanwhile, in the mini-games determining the success of Lyra's deception and her use of the alethiometer, the modality of the game shifts from a 'naturalistic modality' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 160), resembling the dramatised action of films and animation, to a 'technological modality', a screen of information and icons. This modality is the furthest the game goes from book and film, the least naturalistic, the closest to the modality of arcade games which are the antecedents of these mini-puzzles. In this modality, the expansion of the detailed procedures of the game represent an amplification of the ludic process only briefly hinted at in the corresponding part of the novel.

A further mode to consider is that of virtual embodiment, incorporating movement, voice and other audiovisual representations of embodied agency. In this respect the virtual body of the avatar functions as an apparatus for the normal processes of focalisation as we are familiar with it in narratological theory (Genette, 1980). It determines who we are connected with in the game, from whose perspective we 'see' the events, whose thoughts we hear. However, games go further in fusing what social semiotic theory describes as the 'represented participant' and the 'interactive participant' – in more familiar terms, the character and the reader/player (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In the sequence which follows Lyra's meeting with Iofur, the player is cast in the role of Iorek, as he engages in single combat with the bear-king.

In the fight with Iofur (re-named Ragnar in the game), a major confrontation with an enemy character (in narrative terms), and a powerful end-of-level boss (in ludic terms), the actions available to the player include slashing and blocking moves and biting actions, all executed

with the controls of the respective console or the PC keyboard. The attack moves are: High Bite, Mid-Slash, Low Belly Slash, and Body Slam. Figure 2 shows the player executing a low belly slash. In the case of the Nintendo Wii, the Wii's two controllers, the Wii-mote and nunchuk, are waved, involving a dynamic, gestural engagement more akin to dramatic action than the pressing of keys on the PC keyboard.



**FIGURE 2: The player executes a low belly slash as Iorek.**

Such actions may seem reductive and sparse compared to the language of the book. A good example is the sentence describing Iorek's final, decisive blow:

Like a wave that has been building its strength over a thousand miles of ocean, and which makes little stir in the deep water, but which when it reaches the shallows rears itself up high in the sky, terrifying the shore-dwellers, before crashing down on the land with irresistible power – so Iorek Byrnison rose up against Iofur, exploding upwards from his firm footing on the dry rock and slashing with a ferocious left hand at the exposed jaw of Iofur. (Pullman, 1995: 353)

It may seem to the casual observer – more so to the devoted bibliophile – that the quality of detail in this extended simile makes a wave of a nunchuk or a PS3 button press absurdly inadequate. The reply to such an objection lies in the nature of the player's engagement. The controls by this time will be invisible, and the player's cognitive and affective engagement will be invested in what I have referred to elsewhere as the 'semiotic amplification' (Burn and Parker, 2003) of these apparently reductive actions: the audiovisual representations on the screen triggered by the player's action, so that they *feel* as if they are, at this moment, Iorek. Such investment, played out through game controls, interface and the feedback loop between these and the screen animation and sound, constitutes the roleplay into which the player enters.



As in the previous sequence, the procedural nature of the game mechanics may seem to contrast sharply with the quality of Pullman's prose; yet echoes of the oral-formulaic appear at critical moments. This sentence, for example, describes the battle between Iorek and Iofur:

Iron clashed on iron, teeth crashed on teeth, breath roared harshly, feet thundered on the hard-packed ground. (Pullman, 1995: 352)

This is not the language of Blake or Milton, but is closer to the Beowulf-poet in its Germanic lexis, its redundancy, its alliteration, its balanced clauses. The agency of body-weapons, armour and teeth, and the onomatopoeic action verbs, *clashed*, *crashed*, *thundered*, *roared*, conduct the agonistic narrative function of the focalised character here, just as the biting and slashing mechanics do in the game. The differences are the multimodal expansion of the text in audiovisual media; and most importantly, the translation of these verbs into the feedback loop of player action. In terms of the audience's cognitive-affective engagement, the imagined projection of reader response becomes ludic action, ergodic engagement, as Mackey notes (2012: 120).

The nature of such an experience must remain largely speculative until the research can include examples of actual play, to determine the extent to which the game does in fact provide the experience of 'being' Lyra or Iorek, and what this might mean to a fan, or to a casual reader (or indeed a casual player). The following section, then, will draw on a study of a Harry Potter game which included interviews with young players.

### **From literature to game II: spells, strategy and player culture in *The Chamber of Secrets***

The game of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* was released on all platforms, and combined a strong narrative trajectory in which the player is drawn inexorably through the main events of book and film, with side games (notably the arcade-style adaptation of Quidditch), puzzles, collecting challenges which unlock features and provide rewards, and set-piece end of level battles against powerful 'boss' enemies, game transformations of giant opponents in the novel and film.

The research project on which this section draws took account both of the multimodal adaptations of Rowling's novel in film and videogame, as well as reports of play by eight 12-year-olds who had read the book, seen the film and played the game (Burn 2004).

The study focuses on a sequence which depicts the confrontation between Harry and the giant spider Aragog, who, like Iofur/Ragnar functions as a powerful opponent in narrative terms, and an end-of-level boss in ludic terms.

While I have argued above that Pullman's prose owes something to the muscularity of archaic, Germanic narrative as well as the more obvious modern literary influences more commonly noted, Rowling's style is arguably even closer to oral narrative. In this respect, the distinction here is not only between adult and children's literature, but between the aesthetics of popular and 'literary' fiction, with Rowling's prose located firmly in the former category, and Pullman's at least partially in the latter. Though this results, as we have seen, in

unfavourable critical judgments for Rowling, her prose derives its dynamic from a different lineage: not Blake and Milton, but folk tale (witches, dragons, shape-shifters, magic mirrors), superhero film fantasy (flying cars, cloaks of invisibility), irreverent comicstrip (grotesque relatives, wacky potions, exaggerated bullies). Its style conforms in many ways to Stephen King's robust defence of popular fiction (King, 2000b) in its general lack of markers of high literary style:

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. (Chamber of Secrets, p 207)

In certain ways, the language bears out the claim that Rowling's stories are close relatives to oral narrative. Sentence boundaries give way to the flow of clauses, the more important information unit in speech, memorably described by Michael Halliday:

The complexity of the written language is its density of substance, solid like that of a diamond formed under pressure. By contrast, the complexity of spoken language is its intricacy of movement, liquid like that of a rapidly running river (Halliday, 1985: 87)

Furthermore, Rowling's prose, like the more ludic aspect of Pullman's, displays a predominance of Anglo-Saxon vocabulary here. Elsewhere in this episode, the affective quality of the prose is created partly by verbs which are again predominantly Anglo-Saxon in origin, representing extreme or intensified sensory experience: *flamed, thundering, screeching, knocking, yelled, seized, slammed, crashed, howling*.

In this sense, Rowling's prose is ludic: a style suited to the agonistic quality of the protagonists of oral narrative by the same token invokes the agonistic dimension of games identified by Caillois (1958/2001). If young people engage in the ludic mimicry of the Potter mythos, then they also enjoy the combat around which the whole sequence of novels is organised: the perennial struggle between Harry and Voldemort.

The confrontation with Aragog is a side mission, but is structured like the battle between player and end-of-level boss nonetheless. However, the remarkable difference between the book and the game is that Harry barely fights in this sequence in the novel, only performing five actions:

*Harry spun round*

*... he reached for his wand ...*

*... he tried to stand ...*

*... diving into the back seat ...*

*They smashed their way through the undergrowth.*

An explanation of Harry's passivity here may be that Aragog's function in the wider narrative structure of the book is as, a smaller obstacle en route to the final confrontation with Voldemort and the basilisk. . This progression of increasingly powerful enemies resembles the hierarchy of opponents in action adventure games and RPGs: end-of-level boss monsters delay the player briefly, but the end of the last level features the battle with the main boss. In RPGs, such hierarchies are demonstrably derived from older forms of narrative, in particular Tolkien's, which themselves derive from archaic narrative, and Beowulf in particular (Carr et al, 2006).

The game is markedly different. The player, as Harry, has to cut the masses of web suspending the platform on which Aragog stands, so that the spider sinks into a pit, defeated. He cuts the web and attacks the spider using the Rictusempra spell (left mouse button); and evades the attacks of Aragog and an ever-multiplying host of small spiders 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. This narrative of the game, then, effectively reverses the transitivity sequence of the novel, enhancing the agency of the protagonist.



**FIGURE 3: The player as Harry shooting the web in *The Chamber of Secrets* game.**

The novel – indeed, the whole sequence of novels – balances the necessary vulnerability of the protagonist required by the Bildungsroman against the magical agency which is characteristic of the folk tale hero. The former displays vulnerability in the interests of the plot trajectory and the growth of the character. The latter displays power in the interests of the agonistic function of the folk-tale protagonist, who in effect never grows but endlessly repeats his satisfying victory. Rowling has created, in effect, two Harry Potters: one who changes, develops, grows from child to adult, satisfying the young reader’s aspirations to future maturity; and one who, like Jack the Giant-Killer, is perpetually locked in combat with Voldemort, satisfying the perennial audience fantasy of the small person in an adult world. It is this latter folk tale incarnation which the game is best suited to develop and amplify, translating the agonistic features of the folk tale hero into the agonistic game mechanics of spells, power and health economies.

In all this, the question of cultural value remains elusive. In relation to the book it is partly addressed by the arguments above: by the vindication of popular fiction articulated by Stephen King, and applied to Rowling; and by the argument that Rowling’s work continues features of folk tale, to which judgments of canonicity are hardly relevant. However, it is much less clear how judgments of cultural value might extend to the media adaptations. Perhaps the most productive move here is to shift the focus of attention from the intrinsic features of the texts to the judgments of the audience: in effect, to adopt Bourdieu’s model of the judgment of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). It may be that this begs the question of the relationship between cultural value and textual design; but it does at least respond to Michael Rosen’s argument that the valuations of critics and adults in general have very little to do with those of children.

In this spirit, then, we can note that the game of *The Chamber of Secrets* is often cited by fans as among the best of the series adapted as part of the Warner franchise. A comment by the online fan ‘Luna’ gives an indication of its appeal:

I just loved how this game opened up Hogwarts to you and the world you’re in, it felt like you were playing ‘Grand Theft Potter’, you could fly anywhere on your broomstick, there were a lot of collectibles to find and it had a lot of Zelda like elements to it for unlocking spells to go to different areas and simple RPG elements as well. (<http://www.fimfiction.net/story/149263/10/luna-reviews-the-harry-potter-video-game-series/ranking>, retrieved 16.12.2016).

This comment reveals a dramatic, virtually-embodied engagement with the modality of the game, an interest in the ludic mechanisms which the game engineers from literary tropes in the book, and a ‘ludic literacy’ (Buckingham and Burn, 2007) connecting the game with her experience of Grand Theft Auto and the roleplaying game (RPG) genre. The perception by this fan of RPG elements is significant. RPG protagonists are notable for the development of the avatar, who grows through the course of the game, acquiring assets, powers, weapons, and other qualities as they move through the levels (Carr et al, 2006). In this respect, while Rowling manages the growth of her hero in respect of the Bildungsroman, as noted above, she also manages his growth in ways immediately recognisable from the point of view of

RPG structure. He acquires increasingly powerful and diverse spells, magical aids such as the cloak of invisibility, magical forms of transport such as the Ford Anglia, the Hippogriff and the broomsticks, and weapons in the form of wands. In this way, then, her work prefigures specific ludic structures in videogames.

The value of the game was recognised in different ways by the children participating in the research project. It was defended by some. Ali, for example, recognises the increased agency of the game player-character:

ALI: I've played the computer game version and I don't remember it that well, but I'm pretty sure that when the spider jumps up, or something, um, yeah, jumps up or something, you have to hit the cobweb underneath it till that breaks and the spider falls through .... 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.

She also makes a judgment about difficulty:

AB: To go back to the Aragog thing: is it easy?

ALI: No, cos the spider, I'm pretty sure that the spider, I'm pretty sure he lunges at you every now and then, you have to keep on running round the web so he, so that when he jumps forward to try and bite you, that you get out the way.

AB: And when you played this, did you kill the spider or did you get killed?

ALI: I think I had to try it a couple of times before I gave up and told my sister to do it for me, but I did try it several times.

This judgment is ambivalent – but the recognition of challenge in a game can be positive. Later in the interview, in response to a question about whether they feel they become Harry Potter, Ali replies:

ALI: It's kind of like someone who's inside Harry's head, um, spectating everything that's happening, and they know what he's feeling, and they know what he's seeing, and they, and they don't know anything else, it's like a little person sitting inside his head and listening to his thoughts and feelings.

While other participants felt less close to the player-character, she seemed to position herself much closer, as a kind of guiding consciousness for the avatar, which is interesting both as a description of focalisation in a videogame, and as an indicator of her positive valuation of the game.

By contrast, a boy in the group, Ochirbat, was dismissive of the game, describing it as 'lame', and going on to say:

OCHIRBAT: 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 –

ILANA: Like Avada kedavra, or something, a killing spell?

OCHIRBAT: No, like flame, like a flamethrower *[laughs]*

Though this looks like a deliberate provocation of those in the group who defend the Potter stories, it appears that he has two motives for his critique of the game. One is a general dislike of the Harry Potter character, who seems increasingly to represent a form of masculinity he wishes to distance himself from: too good, a 'teacher's pet'. The other is a specific judgment about the game itself. The apparently irreverent remark about the need for better spells, like a flamethrower, is made humorously, but also derives from his extensive experience of videogames. An earlier interview had revealed his experience of the *Resident Evil* series, in which the player does indeed acquire and use flamethrowers to defeat zombies. In some ways, then, his judgment of the Chamber of Secrets is that it fails to satisfy requirements for a satisfactory shooting game, judged by the standards of the genre.

Across the group of eight participating in this interview, there were many indications of what might count as an expanded form of literacy. They demonstrated understandings of how the agency of the characters changed across book and game; of how point of view, conventionally understood as first and third person in literature lessons, become something different in relation to games; of intertextuality – how elements of Rowling's text were indebted to other texts, one girl citing Arthur Ransome's *Pigeon Post* as a source for Harry's owl, Hedwig; a boy noting the similarity between Aragorn and Tolkien's giant spider, Shelob; yet another boy suggesting that Harry and Ron's friendship resembled the loyalty of Sam Gamgee for Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*.

### **Narrative anatomies, multimodal literacies**

To look across the texts of these towering figures of children's literature, and then to look across from literature to game, and from game to child-player, suggests three conclusions.

Firstly, while the critical literature has emphasised, even exaggerated, conventional literary judgements of differences between the two, they may be more similar than is often suspected. The architecture of their imaginary worlds, the narrative trajectories of their protagonists, elements of their prose which most strongly deploy the legacy of oral narrative, all indicate their ludic nature, prefiguring specific aspects of games.

Secondly, the connection made in this chapter between oral narrative and the procedurality of videogames suggests why the games are not simply an adaptation of the books, but cast a new light on their ludic qualities. Rather than viewing them as commercial spinoffs, or as a regrettable descent into a debased form of media, we might consider a kind of conversation between game and book. One version of such a conversation is, of course, the design process of the videogames: the evolution of the alethiometer mini-games, for example, and the collection of the symbols from the book. Another is the critical conversation of the literary critic, who, rather than following the conventional trajectory of adaptation from one form to

another, might consider a dialogic process in which the bones of the narratives are partially disarticulated by the videogame and offered for re-articulation by the critical or analyst.

Thirdly, this kind of process of anatomy can also describe the extended forms of cultural engagement practised by readers, fans, and player communities. They too disarticulate the texts, refashioning disguises, adaptive fictions, play strategies and myriad forms of roleplay. In the narrower world of education, this process goes by the name of 'literacy'. But the kinds of anatomising beloved of literature curricula the world over, with their metaphor-hunting, reductions of narrative to setting/character/plot, and their canonical systems of cultural value, are not adequate to these wider cultural processes, nor do they do justice to these two authors, especially Rowling. Literature curricula need multimodal models of literacy to do justice to transmedia narrative and remix culture; the related art forms of literature, film, drama, and videogame need to be connected in pedagogy as they are in the worlds of children and young people (Burn & Durran, 2007). Meanwhile, the heritage models of culture which applaud the debt of Pullman to Milton and Blake while remaining blind to his debt to popular culture, while agonising over Rowling's literary merit, need to accommodate the energy of the popular aesthetic, and its growing importance in the digital practices of contemporary life.

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