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"Same-as-Difference": Narrative Transformations and Intersecting Cultures in Harry Potter

Kate Behr

Seven years after Rowling's tousle-headed, bespectacled student wizard first appeared in print, the Potter books still lead the best-seller lists.[1] The long-awaited fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix*, sold five million copies on its first day of sale and has been reviewed by thousands of Amazon readers (Kirkpatrick). What makes the Harry Potter books so readable and so popular?

Answers to this question, and critical approaches to the series, have been as varied as Rowling's audience is vast. Theories of child development have been applied to show how Harry Potter's story contains elements that appeal to young children and adolescents, which are recognized and appreciated by adults (Damour). Other critics, who locate the books within various genres, suggest that Rowling is tapping into—and transforming—established formulae (Steege, Stephens). Blending boarding school and fantasy, Rowling has created a character who has been identified as a "fairytale prince, a real boy and an archetypal hero" (Grimes, Pharr, Black). Rowling's handling of morality, technology, gender, class, status, and ethnicity have all been examined (Whited, Schanoes, Gallardo-C). Rowling's prose, too, has been considered, rejected, and defended (Bloom, Duffy). The common denominator, the starting point for

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all these critics, is Rowling's runaway success, and the common thread running through their analyses is "transformation." Familiar elements of our culture, language, class, authority, genre, are transformed through narrative, so that the ordinary becomes extraordinary (Natov, Lacoss). Transformation occurs not just at the level of plot and character, but also in Rowling's presentation of overlapping cultures that are similar yet different .This contributes greatly to what Roland Barthes called "La passion du sens"[2] or "the passion for meaning" as Peter Brooks translates it (Brooks 19). The passion for meaning drives a narrative, the "what happens next" hook, fueling the reader's need to know the whole story. In the case of the Harry series, I argue, it is not just the reader's desire to find out the sequence of events that powers the narrative, but also an appreciation, whether conscious or unconscious, of Rowling's narrative transformations.

Narrative transformations occur when the story changes, whether we use the phrase as part of a linguistic or psychoanalytic analysis. Psychoanalytically, narrative transformations do not so much change the desires or the facts as the participants' perceptions of relationships and their dynamics. Thus the plot (to borrow the Formalist distinction) remains the same but the narrative, the connecting flow, and thus the story presented to the reader/auditor is changed (usually for therapeutic effect). Todorov reaches similar conclusions in his essay on narrative transformations, though his work is focused on syntax rather than interpretation. For Todorov, a narrative transformation occurs when a predicate—a single action—is expanded, either simply, by adding an operator, or as a complex transformation, by grafting two predicates together (Todorov 225).[3] Just like the psychoanalytic understanding, the facts remain unchanged but are transformed by narrative, which changes the relationship between those core facts.

Such a shift in relationship creates "same-as-difference" and we see it occurring throughout the Harry Potter books. Core facts remain the same from first to last, but the reader's perceptions change as the stories and characters grow in complexity and acquire a history. Our understanding moves in a hermeneutic circle, as clues or references planted by Rowling in earlier books are only appreciated in the light of later events, usually moving from a mood of comic relief to one of tragic intensity. Polyjuice potion, for example, is comical in Book Two when the students use it—

Harry and Ron become the hulking bullies Crabb and Goyle, and Hermione accidentally gets a cat face—but an instrument of torture and potential agent of destruction when used by the fake Mad-Eye Moody in Book Four. However, Rowling does not just create comical effects only to undercut them by showing them in increasingly serious contexts, she also manipulates comic stereotypes and environments. Bathrooms are often ludicrous but unnerving in Rowling's magical world, places where children battle trolls, brew potions and prepare to fight evil. Moaning Myrtle, a spotty adolescent ghost who weepily haunts the second floor girls' bathroom, gives new meaning to the phrase "toilet humor," but her death is the key to the fearful confrontation at the end of that book. Remember the unnamed mystery room full of chamber pots that magically appeared one morning when Dumbledore had a full bladder? Harry did, and that funny anecdote eventually gave him the location for his unauthorized Defense Against the Dark Arts classes, a literal narrative transformation, and another example of a shift in understanding as the purpose of that room changes from light relief to serious intent.

Harry and the reader move together from wonder, innocence, and comedy, to fear, experience, and tragedy throughout the series. This is not decoration but a function of narrative. Narrative works within time and space: every story starts and finishes; every reader has to take time and turn pages to move from the beginning to the end. Innocence cannot be maintained unless a character has no concept of time or of cause and effect, and a reader, caught by the "passion for reading," is actively trying to lose his/her innocence. One example of how seemingly innocuous events or decisions accrue significance as the books develop is the choice of Harry's House. The Sorting Hat initially hesitates over whether to place him in heroic Gryffindor or ambitious Slytherin as Harry is potentially both brave and powerful. We don't begin to realize the significance of that choice until Harry agonizes over it in Book Two, marking the awakening of Harry's moral consciousness.

The Sorting Hat decision is not an isolated incident but illustrates a pattern; something incidental in an early book becomes complex, significant and central to the developing character or plot of a later one. Another good example of this is the question, posed at the end of Book One, which is transformed into the hidden mainspring for the action of Book Five. Harry asked Dumbledore why Voldemort targeted him as a baby, and the

long delayed answer to that question at the end of Book Five results in Dumbledore's revising and transforming his own narrative as he explains his faulty reasoning, his attempt to preserve Harry's innocence, which caused him to keep Harry dangerously in ignorance from year to year. Dumbledore begins his explanation/confession with a reference to a sign or mark that exemplifies the hermeneutic drive of narrative: Harry's scar. Initially, the scar is simply a lightning bolt mark on his forehead that identifies the "Boy Who Lived;" as the books progress, however, the scar becomes more and more important, more and more painful, recognized by Dumbledore and Harry as a barometer that registers Voldemort's anger and finally as a visible sign of the connection between Harry and the Dark Lord.[4] By the end of Book Five, knowing the answer to the question he posed in Book One, Harry is burdened: "An invisible barrier separated him from the rest of the world. He was—and he had always been—a marked man. It was just that he had never really understood what that meant" (*Phoenix* 856–7). Dumbledore's explanation, given as a narrative summarizing each year that Harry has spent at Hogwarts and decoding what seemed inexplicable or a lack of trust, simplifies the story while it removes Harry's innocence. The narrative moves onto a well worn track for fantasy literature; throughout the series, the fairytale pairing of Harry and Voldemort becomes more evident as M. Katherine Grimes observes (89–122). Initially, Harry was presented (and saw himself) as almost a random victim of Voldemort's evil, but as the narrative progresses and the connections/similarities increase, Harry's relationship with Voldemort is retold. In fairytale or fantasy, readers expect a close family connection between good and evil (Bettleheim), so the revelations at the end of Book Five satisfy readers' expectations with a retold, simplified narrative, while horribly confirming and complicating Harry's relationship to Voldemort. Now he knows he and Voldemort are locked in a predestined life-and-death struggle for "*NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES*" (*Phoenix* 841).

Things have become very dark indeed by the end of Book Five. However, not every impulse in the narrative moves from comic to serious, incidental to significant; sometimes Rowling deliberately reverses that movement, dispelling unthinking fear with calculated ridicule. The "Riddikulus" charm for neutralizing the boggart demonstrates in Book Three that fear can be defeated through a magical narrative transforma-

tion. When faced with a shape-shifting boggart, each person is confronted with his or her own worst fears; to repel that boggart each person has to dominate his or her fear and "force it to assume a shape that you find amusing" (*Prisoner* 134). In other words, the "Riddikulus" charm enables the individual concerned to change the context, to add details that change the relationship between the facts and the way that the onlooker perceives them. Professor Lupin's students have transformed their fears by creating complex predicates for them—we return to Todorov's narrative transformations. Laughter enables the students to achieve emotional distance, to free themselves from paralysis and to stop being victims.

More than the boggart is transformed within the text. Transformation is an integral part of the magical world;[5] indeed "Transfiguration" is a difficult subject that the students must study to pass an exam at Ordinary Wizarding Level. Several characters literally transform themselves from human to animal and back again within the story. Voluntary transformers are the animagi, who control their transformations, bear some physical mark corresponding to the animal or insect into which they transform and have to register their identifying characteristics with the Ministry of Magic. Most animagi reveal something of their characters through their given names and the animals they assume: Minerva McGonagall transforms into a stereotypical witches' tabby cat—prim, neat, unblinking, preternaturally knowing, and a hunter; Sirius Black becomes a huge black dog—dangerous and faithful; Peter Pettigrew becomes a rat—small, furtive, cowardly until backed into a corner, but then capable of violence; Rita Skeeter becomes a bug, eavesdropping on other people's secrets; and James Potter became a stag—king of the forest, noble and doomed. Remus Lupin, the benevolent werewolf, and therefore an involuntary transformer, is many people's favorite character. We perceive Lupin as kind, sensitive, and attuned to his students while in his human phase, but he is dangerous and untrustworthy during his Change. Not only is Lupin's character a touchstone within the narrative as the snobbish elements despise and distrust him while the "good" characters like and respect him, but the depth of Lupin's self-knowledge and the mixture of benevolence and brute violence in his character make him a model for Harry, who must also recognize, acknowledge and control the darker elements within himself.

Harry's growth is another narrative transformation affecting the reader's perception of present and past events. Identified with Harry, the

reader initially found every wizard technique astounding, and his/her attention, like Harry's, was drawn to the details of the marvelous wizarding world. Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Owl Post, Howlers, and photographs that move, captivated eleven year-old Harry and his readers. By Book Five, however, the details are neither as frequent nor as absorbing, and the reader's attention has been shifted from Harry's environment to Harry himself as he transforms from a wide-eyed, trusting schoolboy to a suspicious, angry adolescent. M. Katherine Gimes indicates how this aspect of character development makes a direct appeal to an adolescent and young adult audience, who see Harry as a "real boy" who no longer thinks solely in black and white terms—good parents do not have to be dead, and bad ones are not necessarily step- or surrogate parents as is the case in fairy tales (Whited 100).[6] Thus, things are no longer black and white for Harry: in the earlier books, his father and his father's friends are heroes of whom Harry is rightfully proud and whom he is quick to defend. "For nearly five years, the thought of his father had been a source of comfort, of inspiration" (*Phoenix* 653). But, when Harry peeks at Snape's painful memories in Book Five, Rowling suggests another, uncomfortable, interpretation of Harry's personal narrative—one that casts Harry's father as a conceited bully and the hated Snape as a victim (*Phoenix* 644–50). Even Sirius's judgment, unquestioned since Harry accepted his innocence in Book Three, is clearly flawed, and Harry, just as impulsive, shares the same flaws. In Book Five, Harry is forced to reevaluate his cherished ideas about his heroic father and godfather, and the readers must themselves doubt (or at least revise) their judgments, not just of James and Sirius, but also of the trustworthiness of the narrative (Schanoes 131–2).

Two characters in particular modify this element of Harry's personal narrative in Book Five: Hermione and Dumbledore. From the beginning of the series, Hermione Granger was presented as the know-it-all source of knowledge, first to offer an answer in every class, known to be "always top in everything" (*Chamber* 93). During Books Four and Five she becomes the boys' source of knowledge in other areas as well. She explains the emotions underlying Cho Chang's behavior, to Harry and Ron's utter astonishment: "A slightly stunned silence greeted the end of this speech, then Ron said, 'One person can't feel all that at once, they'd explode'"(*Phoenix* 459). Hermione is established as an authority, not just on magic, and facts, but also on people and relationships. "'You should

write a book,' Ron told Hermione as he cut up his potatoes, 'translating mad things girls do so boys can understand them'" (*Phoenix* 573). She consistently modifies the reader's perceptions of people and things, acting as the rational, balanced voice opposing Harry's anger, suggesting alternative understandings of people, relationships and facts. Hermione's view of Sirius echoes Molly Weasley's: both sound a note of caution that neither Harry nor Sirius accepts. Molly accuses Sirius of treating Harry as though he were his father, Sirius's best friend and partner in mischief (*Phoenix* 89); Hermione tells Harry and Ron that she thinks that part of Sirius wanted Harry to be expelled so that they could be outcasts together; Sirius, she says, has been very lonely (*Phoenix* 159). Harry could not understand why Sirius should not treat him or view him as his best friend returned rather than that best friend's child. Rowling points out via Molly and Hermione that by doing this Sirius is not thinking of Harry's best interests—as a parental figure should. Some doubts are established for the reader and begin to transform the narrative, helping to make the later revelation of Sirius and James's schoolboy arrogance and cruelty credible.

Dumbledore, who helps to revise/transform Harry's personal narrative via his explanation at the end of Book Five is another who is himself transformed in the course of this book. Though the prophecy is the factual secret that powers the action of Book Five, Harry's relationships with his fathers are the emotional dynamo.[7] His relationships with all his fathers shift during Book Five: he entertains doubts about James, the idealized father whom he has never known but whom he strongly resembles; he loses his godfather and has to hear some (to Harry) unpalatable truths about his character; and, for most of Book Five he thinks he has lost Dumbledore's affection and regard. From the first book, Dumbledore was presented to the reader and to Harry as immensely wise, the one wizard whose powers rivaled Voldemort's, and consequently the only one who could stand against him—the last line of defense. Dumbledore is an archetype of the Wise Wizard, not just to Harry but to the wizarding world as a whole. Although not present for the successive confrontations with Voldemort from book to book, Dumbledore was nonetheless consistently present symbolically, protecting Harry providentially. In Book One, Harry reflects: "I think he [Dumbledore] knows more or less everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help" (*Stone* 302). Dum-

bledore, of course, was there at the end to save Harry from Quirrell. In Book Two Dumbledore supplied Harry with Fawkes the phoenix and Godric Gryffindor's sword even though he himself had been removed from office; in Book Three he provided the hint that allowed Hermione and Harry to use the timeturner to save Buckbeak and Sirius; and in Book Four he saved Harry from the fake Mad-Eye Moody. The pattern is slightly different in Book Five. Dumbledore certainly saves Harry at the beginning, outsmarting Fudge and his minions in the kangaroo court, but he is no longer regarded as a sage within the wizarding world, which has taken away his Order of Merlin, his Chairmanship of the International Confederation of Wizards, and his position as Chief Warlock on the Wizengamot. Dumbledore has lost prestige, and throughout Book Five he is disturbingly absent, first emotionally distant and then physically absent. Harry has to deal with unpleasant Professor Umbridge on his own. Even though Dumbledore is still Headmaster when Umbridge is terrorizing the Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Harry won't go to him. "He was not going to go to Dumbledore for help when Dumbledore had not spoken to him since last June" (*Phoenix* 273). Dumbledore has reasons for maintaining his distance, just as he had reasons for leaving Harry to ten years of misery at the Dursleys, but all Harry, and therefore his readers, can perceive is abandonment and betrayal. The most painful confrontation in Book Five is not, unlike earlier books, between Harry and Voldemort, but between Harry and Dumbledore. Harry is bereft and angry and Dumbledore "hatefully calm" as he talks about Harry's suffering, suffering that Harry does not want to acknowledge because he cannot face the source—Sirius's death. Rowling emphasizes that Harry sees Dumbledore's age, his tiredness, and his frailty in this moment: "he felt even angrier that Dumbledore was showing signs of weakness. He had no business being weak when Harry wanted to rage and storm at him" (*Phoenix* 834). Wanting to escape the human burden of emotional pain, Harry does not want Dumbledore to be human either. He wants a "superparent," a tower of strength that he can batter himself against and be sheltered by. Rowling makes Dumbledore dismantle that final childish protection, when he retells the Harry/Voldemort conflicts from his point of view, completing the transformation of Harry's narrative as he reveals his own motives and answers questions.

As the narrative continues, it becomes harder for Harry (and consequently for the reader) to distinguish good wizards from evil ones. "Same-

as-Difference" is particularly apt when considering the clashes between good and evil, as good and evil often reveal themselves through different actions or reactions to the same situations. From the first, good wizards, like the Weasleys and Dumbledore, stand for tolerance and treat other creatures, as well as Muggles, decently, although questions have been raised about Rowling's handling of the house elves and the issue of slavery (Ostry, Carey). Hagrid even takes this to extremes by treating monsters as pets. Evil wizards, headed by Lord Voldemort, detest Muggles, are intolerant and treat all creatures as slaves. Harry's battles against Voldemort, which are repeated and intensified in each book, offer more moments of narrative transformation and "same-as-difference" as Voldemort becomes more powerful each time. Voldemort himself experiences more than one kind of transformation: he is literally transformed from book to book: beginning as something with a half-life, merged with the back of Quirrell's head, he is a potent memory of young Tom Riddle in Book Two, and is hideously reborn in Book Four. He has also transformed his own narrative by changing his name and persona from Tom Malvolo Riddle to Lord Voldemort to "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named." Harry defeats all of these personae, but their clashes become more complicated as Harry's resemblances to Voldemort multiply and his moral awareness becomes more sophisticated. The reader increasingly feels that characters operating on the "good" side are neither necessarily attractive nor kind. According to Veronica L. Schanoes, Rowling deliberately subverts the reader's expectations in order to force her readers to think beyond Harry's conventional character assessment. Rowling makes the reader see, Shanoes asserts, that there is a moral difference between hatred and evil: Snape is a sworn enemy from Book One, but Dumbledore trusts him and he saves Harry's life on more than one occasion (132). Furthermore, the saga of Dolores Umbridge in Book Five demonstrates that not all sadistic, intolerant villains are Death Eaters.

By the end of Book Five it is clear that the narrative is not fixed but fluid, constantly transforming. Dumbledore's revelations about the Prophecy underline a theme that has been unobtrusively present since Book Two. The prophecy indicated that a wizard boy, born at the end of July, whose parents were both in the Order of the Phoenix and had barely escaped Voldemort three times, would have the power to vanquish the Dark Lord. Dumbledore reveals that these criteria applied to Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom. *Either* boy could have been Voldemort's opponent but Voldemort chose

Harry—and marked him with the scar. "He saw himself in you before he had ever seen you, and in marking you with that scar, he did not kill you, as he intended, but gave you powers and a future, which have fitted you to escape him not once, but four times so far" (*Phoenix* 842). Voldemort chose the boy most like himself—most nearly the same, yet different. This is not news to the reader who has already read Tom Riddle's comments on the likeness between Harry and himself in Book Two: neither is a pureblood wizard, both can speak to snakes, both were raised by Muggles, both have black hair. These likenesses trouble Harry. Dumbledore's explanation anticipates the longer revelations in Book Five and emphasizes the power of choice, which is a central theme of the series. Harry resembles Voldemort partly because Voldemort inadvertently recreated some of his own powers in him, making them similar. However, Dumbledore says, Harry "is *very different* [Rowling's emphasis] from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (*Chamber* 333). Dumbledore reiterates this idea in Book Four when he comments on young Barty Crouch, "see what that man chose to make of his life!" (*Goblet* 708) and in his exhortation to the students when he tells them of Cedric's death:

> "Remember Cedric. Remember, if the time should come when you have to make a choice between what is right and what is easy, remember what happened to a boy who was good, and kind, and brave, because he strayed across the path of Lord Voldemort." (*Goblet* 724)

Choices shape narrative, and Dumbledore's words suggest that narrative can also shape choices. Harry's choice in Book One, when he begged the Hat to put him in Gryffindor, was for courage over ambition, reasserting himself, although he did not know it, as Voldemort's enemy. Voldemort's earlier choice created Harry as his own opponent, and in that choice he set this particular narrative in motion.

As we have seen, transformation is a function of narrative, evident in the way that plot and characters evolve across the series, but "same-as-difference" is also apparent in Rowling's conception of her magical world as two overlapping cultures that are similar but different. Our mundane "muggle" world is transformed through Rowling's narrative as she presents our culture afresh to us, her readers, twice over: once as a version of

"our" reality, which appears strange and rather limited when seen through the eyes of the wizarding Weasley family—"Mum's got a second cousin who's an accountant, but we don't talk about him" (*Stone* 99); and once more as the wizarding world itself, which is our culture defamiliarized, transformed and enchanted.

Like Brooks, who follows Lacan, I argue that the power of the narrative exists in the interplay between Signifier and signified; unlike Brooks, however, I apply Lacan's interpretation of Saussure's algorithm to the cultures represented in the text rather than to language (Brooks 54). In Lacan's interpretation, the bar dividing Signifier (or word or language) and signified (or concept) indicates repression, the inaccessibility of the true signified (Lacan).[8] Therefore language, the chain of signifiers, is constantly underpinned by a meaning that it can never quite articulate, but which is always pressing close to the surface.

When applied to the two cultures presented in the Harry books, this algorithm elegantly describes the relationship between Muggle and wizard worlds—M/w.[9] Our mundane, Muggle world is the Signifier—recognizable as everything apparent on the surface and also the controlling, defining language, but, below (and sometimes alongside) it is the signified wizard world, which exists largely in the gaps in Muggle perceptions. Though there are witches, wizards and other magical creatures living all over the British Isles, they do so imperceptibly. Large magical sites like Diagon Alley, Platform 9 ¾, Hogwarts and Hogsmead don't appear on Muggle radar. As Harry observes: "The people hurrying by didn't glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all" (*Stone* 68). Mr Weasley explains the phenomenon in Book Four: "Muggle Repelling Charms on every inch of it. Every time Muggles have got anywhere near here all year, they've suddenly remembered urgent appointments and had to dash away again" (*Goblet* 95–6). Rowling's wizard world is a shadow world, an underground, almost a conspiracy, given that some Muggles are aware of it, which exists in the gaps of the "real."[10]

If we extend the analogy between Signifier and signified, Muggle and wizard worlds, we find that the dynamic force powering the narrative is not the gap between words and meanings as Brooks would have it—though that is nicely demonstrated in the playfulness of Dumbledore's opening address to the students: "Before we begin our banquet, I would

like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" (*Stone* 123). Instead, the meaningful gap is the one across which the two worlds co-exist and interact, which Rowling describes in Book Five as "the great invisible wall that divided the relentlessly non-magical world of Privet Drive and the world beyond" (*Phoenix* 37).The wizard world exists only in relation to the "real" world, echoing/mirroring all its customs and discourse, and thus reflects our Muggle world back to us, the Muggle readers—the same yet different.

Wizard institutions are absurd versions of our own. The Ministry of Magic, with its many Departments (Magical Sports and Games, Magical Law Enforcement, Control of Magical Creatures), headed by the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge dressed in—what else?—a pinstriped cloak, satirizes the workings of bureaucracy, especially the British Civil Service, and Percy Weasley's fussy obsession with his first report for his department, International Magical Cooperation, on standardizing the thickness of cauldron bottoms, recalls the many dicta handed down by the EU. Even the rites of passage are familiar: like many young Muggles trying to pass the driving test, young wizards like Charley Weasley often fail their first attempt at the Apparition license: "Charlie had to take the test twice. . . . He failed the first time. Apparated five miles south of where he meant to, right on top of some poor old dear doing her shopping" (*Goblet* 57). Thus, mundane elements of life—bureaucracy, tradition, becoming independently mobile—are renewed when re-presented via the wizard world.[11]

Popular discourse in the wizard world is also borrowed from our Muggle experiences. Consider, for example, Rita Skeeter, investigative witch and muckraker for the *Daily Prophet*, whose "Quick-Quotes Quill" reinterprets words spoken and unspoken to create a tabloid story in turgid journalese:

> Frowning, he avoided her gaze and looked down at words the quill had just written: *Tears fill those startling green eyes as our conversation turns to the parents he can barely remember.*
>
> "I have NOT got tears in my eyes!" said Harry loudly. (*Goblet* 306)

As well as mirroring Muggle journalese, Rowling here further demonstrates a capacity for narrative transformation that Todorov would have

recognized. "He can hardly remember his parents" is effortless transformed by Rita's "Quick-Quotes Quill" into something far more marketable.

The Quidditch World Cup is another occasion where Rowling adapts elements and discourse from Muggle popular sports, soccer in the UK, and transforms them into something that is "same-as-difference." Harry initially makes sense of Quidditch by describing it as basketball on broomsticks. As Quidditch is a team game played on broomsticks, fifty feet in the air, seven players to a side, three scoring hoops at either end and four balls, we can appreciate Harry's analogy while seeing how unalike the two games actually are. However, the two worlds parallel each other in the discussion between fans in the run up to the World Cup (Ireland versus Bulgaria) which sounds wonderfully familiar, and unfortunately reflects England's record in every soccer World Cup since the late sixties:

> "Went down to Transylvania, three hundred and ninety to ten," said Charlie gloomily. "Shocking performance. And Wales lost to Uganda, and Scotland was slaughtered by Luxembourg." (*Goblet* 63)

The Quidditch World Cup is also an occasion when we see actual contact between Muggles and Wizards.

Although infrequent, as the greater part of the narrative focuses on Harry's life in the magical world, there are actual encounters between the two groups in every book. Like other elements in the narrative, the earliest encounters are comic: the terribly suburban, unimaginative, uncreative Dursleys know about wizards (unlike most of the Muggle population) and loathe them, regarding them as freaks, aberrations, what they call "that sort." Characters like the Dursleys might also use this language, a compound of fear and disgust, to refer to gypsies, blacks, communists, homosexuals, or bohemians. In their dealings with what they obviously regard as a foreign and lesser, but sinister, culture the Dursleys are always the victims: the whole family is driven to spend the night on an uninhabited rock in the middle of the ocean; porky Dudley's greed earns him a pig's tail in Book One and a four-foot-long engorged tongue in Book Four; and nasty Aunt Marge is inflated to gigantic proportions in Book Three. In the Dursleys' case, the magical punishment nearly always fits the unmagical

crime with comic almost cartoon-like effects, which can be remedied by the "Accidental Magical Reversal Squad" or other Ministry of Magic officials. Later Muggle victims are not as lucky.

Muggle-baiting is almost a sport with wizards (codified into bureaucracy as there is a Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office where Mr. Weasley works). Most of it is on the level of simple practical jokes like the shrinking keys that make Muggles think they've mislaid them, or a biting kettle, or a tea set that upsets tea on anyone using it. Even these relatively good-natured jokes demonstrate that wizards regard Muggles as an inferior cultural group. Mr. Weasley takes the baiting seriously, "Muggle-baiting might strike some wizards as funny, but it's an expression of something much deeper and nastier" (*Phoenix* 153). Even before Book Five, however, Rowling shows us wizards treating Muggles much as the colonialists treated the natives. Intolerance, snobbery and ethnic hatred—all commonplaces of our Muggle world—are reproduced inside the Harry Potter Series via wizard-muggle relations along socio-economic lines. The impoverished Weasleys are tolerant while the upper-class Malfoys are rabidly anti-muggle. Young Draco freely uses the insult "mudblood" about Muggle student witches and wizards at Hogwarts. The plot of Book Two is based on prejudices against Muggles that go back a thousand years to the founding of the school. Encounters between wizards and Muggles during and after the Quidditch World Cup show all aspects of wizard-muggle relations—comic, uncomprehending, and cruel. Mr. Roberts, the farmer renting out his fields, is comical, baffled by his weird visitors, who keep trying to pay him with sackfuls of gold coins. The description of the wizards trying to blend, wearing, in one case, a poncho and a kilt, and in another an elderly lady's flannel nightdress, is also humorous, but it's not funny at all when the Death Eaters capture the terrified Roberts family:

> High above them, floating along in midair, four struggling figures were being contorted into grotesque shapes. It was as though the masked wizards on the ground were puppeteers, and the people above them were marionettes operated by invisible strings . . . Two of the figures were very small. (*Goblet* 120)

As Ron says "That's sick" (*Goblet* 120).

It is not just cruelty and class/ethnic hatred that Rowling highlights via the wizarding world, there are other destructive ways in which the magical world is, unfortunately, more similar than different to our own. That power corrupts is a continual theme throughout the series—another type of transformation. Initially, Hagrid describes Cornelius Fudge as a "bungler" who "pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning asking for advice" (*Stone* 65). He is a figure of fun in his pinstriped cloak, fussy but surprisingly kind when he reassures Harry about the consequences of inflating his aunt in Book Three, and decently horrified that the dementors would even consider administering the Kiss to a student at the end of that book. By the end of Book Four, however, Fudge has changed:

> He had always thought of Fudge as a kindly figure, a little blustering, a little pompous, but essentially good natured. But now a short, angry wizard stood before him, refusing, point-blank to accept the prospect of disruption in his comfortable and ordered world. (*Goblet* 707)

The man who trusted Dumbledore implicitly in the early books is now furiously rejecting an unpalatable truth, and by Book Five has become an enemy as it is easier for him, as he thinks, to protect his position/status by fighting Harry and Dumbledore than it is to accept Voldemort's return and fight him. Dumbledore tells Fudge in Book Four that he is blinded by his admiration for power and for his own office, and Fudge demonstrates this in the following book, not only by trying to arrest Dumbledore (and failing) but also by his reluctance to accept the truth at the end, even while standing in the wrecked foyer of the Ministry of Magic after a battle in which Voldemort has been seen by others. The narrative transformation that has taken place is not a volte face in character (as one might see in a soap opera, for instance, where characters are adapted to a constantly changing plot) but rather that Harry perceives elements of Fudge's personality, apparent but understated in the early books, become stronger and dominate him. Power and status have eroded the kindly Fudge, leaving naked ambition and fear behind to control his reactions to a crisis.

Though Cornelius Fudge is the obvious figurehead who is corrupted by his admiration for power and status, Rowling also shows the process at work in young Percy Weasley. Percy, who admires rules and regulations,

puts all his faith in them and in those who represent them. This leads him to turn on his family, rejecting his parents when they believe Dumbledore, and to work with the Ministry in attempting to assert control over Hogwarts. All the characters Percy admires—Mr. Crouch, the Minister of Magic, and Dolores Umbridge—are not only the most ridiculed within the magical world but are also amongst the most "Muggle." Mr. Crouch, the head of International Magical Cooperation, is the only person Harry meets at the Quidditch World Cup who could be mistaken for a Muggle bank manager: "Harry doubted even Uncle Vernon would have spotted him for what he was" (*Goblet* 90). Mr. Crouch's obsessive adherence to rules and regulations is not amusing, like his acolyte, Percy Weasley's, but frighteningly harsh. Like Fudge and Mr. Crouch, Dolores Umbridge too is corrupted by power, maneuvering more and more of it into her hands via the Ministry decrees, and becoming more vicious, eventually using one of the "unforgiveable" curses. All of these characters initially seem comic (Fudge's clothes, Percy's admiration, Dolores's hairstyle and fluffy cardigan) but, as Harry's (and our) understanding deepens, their comic exteriors become frightening correlations of the dangerous obsessions within.

Although the wizarding world seems to be the shadowside of the Muggle, mimicking its concerns, bureaucratic structure and weaknesses, it is actually represented as *more* concrete than the culture whose discourse, traditions and customs it mirrors. Superficially, it appears otherwise, as Wizards are totally unmechanized, using spells where Muggles use technology (for light, heat, cooking, heavy lifting, transportation, etc.). Interestingly, though, intangibles in the Muggle world are made real in a wizarding context. This too demonstrates the Signifier/signified relationship. Where the Signifier, Muggle money, has virtual rather than intrinsic value—only the word exists; Wizard money, the signified, is made of precious metal and has real value. Similarly where Muggle photographs capture one moment and are static thereafter; Wizard photographs capture a moment and give it psuedo-life so that figures move, wander off, get bored, wave, interact with each other and so on. Muggle memories are evanescent, transitory Signifiers; Wizard memories, the signified, can be physically captured and stored in a pensieve for later sifting and retrieval. Also wizard memories captured in books can have a life of their own like Tom Riddle's fifty-year-old diary. Even your dreams can become real: the magical Mirror of Erised can show you your innermost heart's desire even if you can't articulate it yourself.

Punishments, too, can take on an awful life: Dolores Umbridge's version of writing lines literally engraves her message into the body of the culprit. In each case, the Muggle signifier is nothing but a word, while the wizarding world, the shadow world, acts as the signified, supplying the full concept, a fullness that Muggle language can only hint at.

Language transforms as part of narrative. In the Harry series, transformation is the key and the core. We have seen it operating on several levels: at the level of genre, it is part of the structure of individual books and of the series; at the level of language, it shows itself in Rowling's use of contemporary discourse, in the invented/adapted language of the spells and names of the wizarding world, as well as in the many controversial 'translations' of her books (Nel, Jentsch); at the level of culture, it is evident that the magical devices and social mores of the wizards are reflections/ transformations of our own. Almost every critical appraisal of Rowling's work deals with transformation in some way: critics who deal with social/cultural issues evident in the books, such as gender roles, class status, or slavery, are dealing with Rowling's handling, Rowling's transformations, of contemporary issues; critics who examine her work in relation to existing genres are examining how has she used and transformed the conventions of the school story, or children's literature, or myth, or fantasy; and those critics who dislike Rowling's work are often criticizing her for not transforming her material effectively enough in their eyes to merit her enormous sales, or not transforming it in a manner they deem acceptable (Bloom, Safire). In all cases, transformation is a given: whether stated or not, transformation is what the reader expects, what the narrative does and what narrative is.

J.K. Rowling has pulled off a neat balancing act. She presents us with two worlds, which are really one, so that in our delighted exploration of Harry Potter's magical world we are continually brought back to the absurdities and prejudices of our own. Like Harry encountering the black-haired, orphaned Tom Riddle, the young Lord Voldemort, we meet the stranger face to face and find that he is us, transformed by narrative.

Notes

1. As of June 13, 2004, two of the Harry Potter books are in the top ten, best-selling books on the *New York Times* Children's Chapter Books list, and *The Prisoner of Azkaban* has been on the paperback top ten list for 135 weeks (more than two years!).

2. Barthes's phrase occurs in the 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative.'

3. E.g. 'X commits a crime' might be transformed into 'X intends to commit a crime' or 'X must commit a crime'. The important thing for the single transformation is that only one predicate is involved—when two are used, the transformation is complex. Todorov gives the example. 'X kills his mother' and transforms it into a complex predicate: 'X thinks he has killed his mother.' Note that the transformation ceases when the two predicates are separate and not dependent.

4. For a discussion on the cultural significance of Harry Potter's scar, see Maggie Macary. "What About Harry Potter's Scar?" Online. *Myth And Culture*. Accessed 10/5/2004. *http://www.mythandculture.com/cultural/harrypotter.html*

5. Cf. Elaine Ostry: "Hogwarts exemplifies the concept of transformation as well as other-worldliness, as everything is in flux at this magical school" (90).

6. Grimes also points out that some readers began reading the Harry Potter saga at age ten or thereabouts and have been growing up at approximately the same rate as Harry himself; thus, Harry's development parallels theirs.

7. For a discussion on the father figures in the Harry Potter series, see Amanda Cockrell. "Harry Potter and the Secret Password" (23–26).

8. Lacan never actually says that the bar equals repression; however he does comment on the relationship between the two, the sliding of the signified beneath the signifer and finds that language works as metaphor.

9. Note that M and W mirror each other.

10. More Muggles than the Dursleys and other relatives of witches and wizards know about the wizarding world: in Book Three, Cornelius Fudge officially informed the British Prime Minister of Sirius Black's real identity (*Prisoner* 38).

11. Jann Lacoss comes to the same conclusions, but sees the relationship between wizard and muggle worlds as a series of reversals, rather than transformations, reinforcing the norm by presenting a version of it enhanced by magic (77/8).

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