

Convergence and the Beast: A Canonical Crossover Affair

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Abstract In the digital age it has become almost impossible to view children's texts outside the context of the new media. This study will focus on three works of children's fiction, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by Newt Scamander/J.K. Rowling; and their respective adaptations, *Peter Rabbit*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. The article draws on contemporary theories of adaptation and the media, particularly the theory of 'convergence' and its impact on meaning-making in the production and reception of literary texts. It will take into account the cross-media and transmedia approach to analysing children's texts, as well as the crossover effect of adapting children's books into films. Particular attention is paid to the adaptation of still into moving imagery and its shifts in focalisation, providing evidence that the new media have made children's books accessible to a variety of audiences. Such examples display the contemporary complexity of children's storytelling and culture within and beyond the canon. Owing to the developments in digital media and technologies, which enable the realistic depiction of complex visual and fantastic elements that are characteristic of children's texts, in the new millennium children's literature has indeed become "everyone's business".

Keywords Adaptation. Picturebooks. Convergence. Crossover. Transmedia storytelling.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Picturebook to Screen: Focalisation and Meaning-Making. – 3 Case Study 1: Contemporary Intervention. – 4 Case Study 2: Aesthetic Transmutation. – 5 Case Study 3: Transmedia Elaboration. – 6 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

In 2006 Henry Jenkins proposed the term ‘convergence culture’ to characterise media trends in a global culture “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2). Although convergence is primarily concerned with and under the influence of media technologies, Jenkins argues that it also changes media industries, markets and audiences (15-16). In her 2009 study “Charlotte’s Website: Media Transformation and the Intertextual Web of Children’s Culture”, Cathlena Martin states that convergence is important for the study of children’s literature and adaptation because it reflects the state of popular contemporary children’s culture and also allows the scholarship “to grow with the expanding digital era” (86-7). Martin suggests that children’s texts have become a franchise that cannot be confined to one medium and that require a cross-media analysis for their cultural significance. At the same time, “children’s texts have increased and become an area of boundary crossing and blurred divisions” (86). Due to technological developments, adaptations and spin-offs of children’s texts are increasingly exhibiting crossover traits. This would mean that all age groups are invited to participate and share in the experience of a well-told children’s story.

According to Sandra Beckett (2017), ‘crossover’ as a literary term has referred to literary texts that “blur the borderline between children’s and adult literature”, which became common after the spectacular success of the Harry Potter series in the late nineties. However, adapting literary works has always had an immense impact on how literary texts were transposed into other formats to accommodate novel contexts and circumstances. In view of this, Máire Messenger Davies notes:

The issue of adaptation and translation from the literary text to the screen raises a number of questions about what is meant by contemporary ‘childhood’ and what is ‘suitable’ for children of different ages. This is in the context of the highly commercialized and expensive modes of production characteristic of film and TV, for which targeting age related audiences very precisely is seen as economically essential. Adaptation means not only translating from one medium to another, as in the case of books to film or television; it also means making stories from the past, or from other cultures, relevant to child readers and viewers. (2010, 139)

While Messenger Davies is concerned with adaptation and the construct of childhood, this study takes into account Robert Stam’s general view of adaptation as a “hybrid form” or a “meeting place of

different species" (2007, 3) and Linda Hutcheon's claim that adaptation is "a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary" (2006, 9). I wish to propose that adaptations in the twenty-first century take children's texts beyond the canon of children's literature and beyond the boundaries of children's culture. By taking a look at three case studies of contemporary adaptations of children's literature, I intend to discuss the process of adapting both the classic and contemporary literary works on screen in relation to their target audience. Although I am not suggesting that works for children have only ever been aimed at child audiences, it is my intent to show that developments in modern technologies have made them more accessible and desirable to a much wider one.

The study will focus on three picture books with beasts in them, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901-02) by Beatrix Potter, *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001) by Newt Scamander/J.K. Rowling, and their respective adaptations, *Peter Rabbit* (2018; dir. Will Gluck), *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009; dir. Spike Jonze), and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016; dir. David Yates). Anthropomorphised animals have always been the staple of children's culture, from fables and fairy tales to modern fantasy. Maria Nikolajeva (2014, 43) claims that fantasy is especially prominent in children's literature, as opposed to that for adults. Likewise, picturebooks are a distinct genre of children's literature, corresponding to the sensory, visual, semiotic and conceptual properties of children's early development. An important aspect of adapting picturebooks is the transposition of still into moving imagery, and how pictures in both cases perform the aesthetic and stylistic function of telling a particular story. In other words, the aesthetic and narrative identity of the original poses a considerable challenge when adapting such a story into a motion picture. In the above-mentioned cases the adaptation has resulted in an entirely new aesthetic and narrative, principally due to the shifts in meaning-making and focalisation. These works have been selected for their significance and complexity of storytelling, both in text and picture, and on screen. The first book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, is the case of adapting a children's literature classic of the Golden Age to meet the demands of the twenty-first century audience. *Where the Wild Things Are* reflects the radical changes that occurred in children's literature in the mid-twentieth century that are further developed in the modern adaptation as well. Finally, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* as an example of contemporary transmedia storytelling opens up the possibility of discussing cross-media formats and multiple adaptations in the digital era.

2 Picturebook to Screen: Focalisation and Meaning-Making

In her seminal study *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within* (1976), Barbara Bader defines picturebooks as “text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page” (1). Both picturebook and film are a visual medium, with their own particularities in narrative and discourse. In both cases multiple focalisation, defined by Gérard Genette (1980) in the field of narratology as referring to distance, perspective and point of view, applies. This, naturally, changes depending on the medium and the complexity of storytelling. Broadly speaking, Genette (210) distinguished between ‘zero focalisation’ (the omniscient narrator), ‘internal focalisation’ (the narrator knows what the main protagonist knows) and ‘external focalisation’ (the narrator knows less than the main character). Furthermore, in terms of ‘focalisation’ and ‘viewpoint’ Gerald Prince (2003) specifies the omniscient viewpoint (zero focalisation), the first person viewpoint or “homodiegetic narrative with internal focalisation” (102), the third-person subjective viewpoint as a heterodiegetic narrative with internal focalisation, and the third-person objective viewpoint as external focalisation. Depending on the ‘where’ and ‘who’ (the character and the setting) of the story, the narrator can be ‘extradiegetic’ (the narrator is outside the story), ‘intradiegetic’ (the narrator is inside a story), ‘heterodiegetic’ (the narrator is not involved in the story), or ‘homodiegetic’ (the narrator is a character in the story), with some variations (Genette 1980, 228-45). In her study of picturebooks Smiljana Narančić Kovač (2015) discusses the picturebook as a medium that features two narrators: the visual and the verbal. Similarly, Peter Verstraten (2009) observes that film contains a visual and an audio narrator, each of those displaying their own focalisation and point of view. However, Narančić Kovač argues that films and/or comics use one (simultaneous or multiple) discourse to transmit a story, whereas a picturebook transmits the story twice, in parallel (122). On the other hand, reading a picturebook is in most cases a collaborative effort involving a child and an adult (68-70), which is often the case with the so-called ‘family film’¹ as well (Paik 2001, 9). Therefore, when analysing the literary originals and their adaptations, special attention needs to be given to meaning-making processes as well, including “ontology, epistemology, fictionality, referentiality,

¹ A term initially denoting children’s films which due to their unprofitability in the first half of the 20th century needed to change the scope of the audiences.

intentionality, and ideology” (Nikolajeva 2014, 1). Meaning-making is associated with the processes of production and reception of texts as well as the cognitive processes involved in responding to the given material. All of those aspects are closely tied to the context in which a text is being adapted. In present times media convergence provides an array of options for adapting a literary text because meanings and audiences are conflated in an attempt to create an all-inclusive and immersive experience. As Jenkins has observed:

Storytellers now think about storytelling in terms of creating openings for consumer participation [...] creating an interplay between the top-down force of corporate convergence and the bottom-up force of grass-roots convergence that is driving many of the changes we are observing in the media landscape. (2006, 175)

Jenkins’s conclusions about contemporary storytelling can certainly be applied to fantasy for children, which has more recently been transgressing the boundaries of children’s literature canon. It has been encouraging all types of readership participation and appealing to general audiences. Although this article will not take into consideration the direct audience participation, it will focus on the production and reception of products aimed at contemporary media consumers. Moreover, it will reflect on how the industry, markets and audiences change due to the demands of the cross-media landscape.

3 Case Study 1: Contemporary Intervention

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was published privately by Beatrix Potter in 1901 and publically by Frederick Warne & Co. in 1902. At that time, it was the first modern picture storybook in which the illustrations and text complemented one another to tell a unified story (Tunnell, Jacobs 2008, 46). Both written and illustrated by Potter herself, since then it has become a beloved classic of children’s literature as, in the words of Linda Lear, “perfect marriage of word and image” (2007, 154-5). In *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*, Daniel Hahn claims that “Peter Rabbit images have been used for merchandise and spin-offs of every imaginable kind, from children’s plates to a Japanese roller-coaster” (2017, 568). Historically and ideologically the product of the Golden Age of children’s literature, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is the story of a mischievous, anthropomorphised child-like rabbit who sneaks into Mr. McGregor’s garden to steal his vegetables. The book describes a day-long adventure full of risk, suspense and thrill for the main protagonist. However, although the Golden Age introduced genuine child characters who were allowed to misbehave, granting the authors the permission to “entertain, rather than to patronise and

educate" (Hunt 2012), *Peter Rabbit* retains some of the didacticism of the ages past. As a cautionary tale, it ends with Peter not being "very well during the evening", after which his mother put him to bed and made him some camomile tea (Potter 2002, 67). As a result, the reader gets a distinct impression that such exploits better be avoided so as not to meet the fate of Peter Rabbit's father who ended up being "put in a pie" (11). The combination of text and illustrations in the book produces a dual and mutually complementary effect. The narrator is omniscient and objective with no particular emotional involvement (heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalisation), whereas the illustrations reveal the emotional intensity of internal focalisation. This is particularly evident in the scene in which Peter Rabbit is being trapped under the sieve (38), as reported by Margaret Mackey in *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit* (2002, 22-3). In other words, the anguish that is omitted in the narration is conveyed through imagery, making the readers infer their own conclusions about Peter's less than light-hearted plight.

The 2018 adaptation *Peter Rabbit* takes on a slightly different approach. The serene countryside idyll is disrupted in the very beginning when the Disneyfied birds singing the introductory song "Small as Your Dreams" are practically flattened by the rumbustious rascal Peter Rabbit (Gluck 2018, 00'00"41"-00'01"10"). The mischief in the film is not only celebrated, but almost glorified, as Peter Rabbit steals the vegetables and overtly mocks Mr. McGregor to amuse his family members (00'05"49"-00'06"25"). The talking animals, interpolated from different Beatrix Potter titles,² are created very realistically through computer generated imagery. As opposed to the picturebook and its gentle Victorian drawings, this story is a live-action feature in every sense of the word: it has action, instant gratification, and is marvellously trendy.³ More importantly, it has people in it. In other words, the director Will Gluck created a feature that may resonate with the generations of 'millennials'. This is most apparent in the decision to introduce the death of Mr. McGregor and, consequently, the brand new protagonists: his nephew Thomas McGregor and the charming neighbour Bea. The arrival of the young trendy control freak McGregor initiates a number of catastrophic conflicts, opportunities for all manner of rebellion, slapstick, but also

2 *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggly-Winkle* (1905), *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* (1906), *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (1908), *The Tale of Mr. Tod* (1912), and *The Tale of Pigling Bland* (1913).

3 A definite indicator of this is the soundtrack, featuring contemporary pop music achievements, such as "Feel It Still" (performed by Portugal. The Man), "Steal My Sunshine" (Len), or the latest remix of "We No Speak Americano" (performed by Yolanda Be Cool & DCUP); and much partying and clubbing that accompanies the musical background, generally appealing to young adults.

the promise of romance. Although this film contains the elements of many decades of 'family film' practice, there are segments in it where adults can get truly involved. This is evident in many layers of direct and indirect humour. A number of slapstick situations with objects being blown up, people being electrocuted, tons of surprised screaming, and a heap of Schadenfreude is designed to naturally appeal to younger audiences, but also adults who enjoy childish things. However, there is also a subtler and culturally conditioned indirect humour which appeals to adults only. One such example is when Thomas McGregor complains of his boss "promoting a flagrantly unqualified half-wit to a position of immense importance based purely on nepotism", to which his boss retorts that "[T]his is Great Britain. It's practically written in our charter" (00'16"04"-00'16"13"). Generally, the instances of jokingly referring to psychological trauma, 'finding a voice' and 'following your dreams' are dispersed throughout the movie. Likewise, the quiriness of the antagonists, such as Peter Rabbit's destruction of McGregor's house or the repeated breakdowns of Thomas McGregor, are hardly seen as flaws. The shifts in focalisation and discourse indicate that adults as the audience of this film do not simply fulfil the role of cinema chaperones. Accordingly, the voice-overs indicating zero and internal focalisation (the narrator and the protagonist) are done by adults; Peter Rabbit was voiced by James Corden and the voice of the heterodiegetic omniscient narrator was done by Margot Robbie. Although the narrator is expected to be an adult reader of the original picturebook, Peter and his siblings, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail, are presented as 'children' in the book. Yet, not a single child voice was retained in the film. For all those reasons, one is left under the impression that the rabbits have grown up, but managed at the same time to retain the patterns of their childhood behaviour.

Beatrix Potter's visual legacy is effectively evident only in the scenes with internal focalisation, in which we witness Bea's drawings of rabbits (i.e. animated Beatrix Potter's illustrations) used to tell the story of how Peter Rabbit lost his father (Gluck 2018, 00'08"01"-00'09"03"). The same technique is at work in the epilogue of the film to depict the happily-ever-after (01'20"50"-01'21"38"). What is apparently an homage to Beatrix Potter is used to primarily illustrate emotion and 'goodness' juxtaposed to the greed and recklessness that deeply affect the picture. In other words, the two picturebook narrators are reflected in the film as well, through the use of different media formats and multiple discourses. Even though this might not be a cautionary tale as Potter had imagined it, like most family films, this one contains a moral and a redemption. Upon Bea and the rabbits losing their homes, Peter Rabbit finally learns a lesson. Not surprisingly, the mischievous rabbit also acts as a matchmaker for Thomas and Bea, which is, in fact, the main focus

of the story (01'15"58"-01'16"03"). In many ways the simple tale of a countryside rabbit who experiences a day's adventure is suitably adapted to modern times. The twenty-first century rabbit overtakes McGregor's house, uses traps and explosives, rides in vehicles, forms relationships and deep bonds with humans, and even visits London. In the end Peter Rabbit is responsible for creating a state of the art, versatile family of modern-day 'hipsters', proving that nowadays the new media are commonly used to realistically depict fantastic concepts for adults, too. The combination of adult and childlike, in the film, supports the construct of 'kidulthood' (Barfield et al. 2010), proposed by sociologists in the first decade of the 21st century, and referring to generations of adults pursuing a childlike lifestyle (e.g. visible in the sale and purchase of toys for grown-up people on the market, the idea of 'perpetual childhood' and the 'kidulthood accessory kit' that denotes a childhood lifestyle). In this sense this adaptation is a contemporary 'intervention' into the original text written at the turn of the 20th century and depicting a dramatically different existence. The omniscient narrator and the mischievous rabbit remain at the heart of the story, yet the context is strikingly different. Interestingly enough, this trend stands in stark contrast to the Golden Age of children's literature when traditional fairy tales, which were initially created for adults (Zipes et al. 2005, 175), were gradually assimilated into children's culture. Nowadays, technology and the convergence of media seem to be injecting fantastic tales for children into modern mainstream culture.

4 Case Study 2: Aesthetic Transmutation

The case of the *Wild Things* takes on a similar approach, but with stark differences in style and reception. When Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* came out in 1963, it was a radical departure from the representative products of its age. The book is commonly associated with the emergence of New Realism⁴ and problem novels, because "[s]ince its publication, children's books have reflected a much more radical desacralising and opening up of childhood to adult worldliness" (Ball 1997, 167). Likewise, children have been more "exposed to social-realist and problem texts that confront all manner of threats, anxieties and darkneses". The picturebook features a conflict between Max, an everychild who misbehaves, and his mother

⁴ The term was defined by Shelton L. Root, Jr. in "The New Realism - Some Personal Reflections" (1977) as "that fiction for young readers which addresses itself to personal problems and social issues heretofore considered taboo for fictional treatment by the general public" (19).

who sends him to bed “without eating anything” (Sendak 2013, [5]).⁵ What occurs in Max’s room as a result is a psychological fantasy that enables him to confront the feelings of anger and resentment. Sendak’s illustrations in the book accompany the textual story of Max sailing to the land of wild things by colourfully expanding the frame of illustration as Max’s room turns into a fantastic world, followed by the outrageously wild artistic portrayal of the beasts with their “terrible roars” and “terrible teeth” and “terrible eyes” and “terrible claws” ([17-18]). Although it won the 1964 Caldecott Medal for “The Most Distinguished Picture Book of the Year” (cover blurb), the book was met with mixed reception, particularly by parents who were concerned about the inappropriateness of the book, the fear and anxiety it might evoke in children, and the potential harm it may do to its readers (Rhedin 2003). However, the doubts and concerns of the public did not diminish the book’s enduring value and its status as a literary classic.

Spike Jonze’s film adaptation in 2009 was supported by Sendak as one of the producers, but Jonze developed an entirely different aesthetic and narrative technique. The camera which tracks the protagonist in the very beginning of the film becomes a witness and an intradiegetic narrator throughout. Max’s conflict is much deeper; he is a child with behavioural issues who experiences confrontations with his sister and her friends, his mother and her boyfriend, as well as general discomfort and anxiety in his surroundings. This is particularly evident in the scene in which his sister’s friends destroy his igloo (Jonze 2009, 00’03”50”-00’04”04”), or when his teacher discusses the detrimental extinction of the sun (00’09”22”-00’10”17”). Spike Jonze and Dave Eggers expanded Sendak’s ten-sentence story, which was reportedly based on his own experiences and perceptions of childhood, to create a detailed psychological account of a young boy’s inner struggle. As opposed to Sendak’s book in which Max is a younger child, in the film he is considerably older, of the age when tantrums and biting are no longer common or acceptable. To accommodate this intervention, Jonze also renounced the colourful animation that would have fit Sendak’s illustrations. Instead, he created a live-action feature that combines puppets, animatronics and computer-generated imagery. The beasts that are in fact large, heavy, bulging products of Jim Henson’s Creature Shop, dominate, shake and alter the landscape. Their presence is at the same time endearing and frightening, echoing Sendak’s “we’ll eat you up - we love you so!” (2013, [31]). However, as opposed to the collective character of the wild things in the book, in the film Jonze

⁵ In the 2013 edition the pages are not numbered, so the page numbers will be indicated according to manual count. The above quote is on page 5 from where the story begins.

and Eggers give each of them a personality and a name: Carol, KW, Ira, Judith, Alexander, Douglas, and the Bull. Soon enough, we begin to notice the parallels between the beasts and the people in Max's life, with Carol actually posing as Max's counterpart in the land of the wild things. Accordingly, one of the most memorable reviews of the movie reads:

Jonze unleashes his considerable creativity. The beasts are recognizable from Sendak's pages, but Jonze gives them names and distinct personalities that connect to aspects of Max's psyche and to the people he loves. Freud would adore this movie. They are vast, feathered, horned, clawed, beaked and definitely wild - irrational and dangerous, even when showing affection - and Jonze uses their threatening bulk as well as their capacity for cruelty to remind us that Max's taming of them is only temporary. For any child, it is near impossible to stay king of anything, even in fantasy. (Pols 2009)

Although Mary Pols manages to convincingly make relevant observations about the film, the final remark in the above-quoted review is oversimplified. The somber mood, as well as the indie soundtrack by Karen O and Carter Burwell create an atmosphere more suitable for a young adult picture than a children's movie. Finally, one gets the impression not of escape, but of maturation. In other words, it is possible to conclude that Max has reconciled his conflicting emotions and is ready to return and recognise the benefits of childhood, but not for long. Whereas the picturebook presents an episode from a younger child's life in which Max "achieves a healthy identity" after imagining himself into "an older state, a state of supposed maturity in which he will not be subject to an older person's arbitrary power" (Jones 1989, 122-3), the movie represents this developmental transition with all its imperfections.

Both the book and the movie depict Max transforming "his room (the scene of his punishment) into the land of wild things (the scene of his power)" (Paul 1990, 151). However, in the book Max never encounters his mother in person when he returns, whilst in the movie she is there waiting for him, showing all the anguish of losing a child, albeit temporarily. In the book Max escapes figuratively, whereas in the movie he is "physically" gone, exploring and taking risks on the brink of adolescence. The fact that the aesthetic and narrative approach to the movie at the script level significantly affected the story has caused very mixed responses, much like the book in its early stages. The reviews from both professionals and parents reveal that although everyone expected a children's movie, the adaptation in many cases did not appeal to children at all. The director himself, however, claims that the main goal "wasn't to make a children's

movie”, but a movie “about childhood” (Thompson 2009). Therefore, after the movie’s release Eggers wrote a full-length novel called *The Wild Things* (2009), based on the screenplay and reportedly at Sendak’s request (Eggers 2010, 284), which was specifically marketed as an “all-ages novel” (“The Wild Things”). Therefore, Max’s story has over the decades evolved into a complex narrative of childhood and growing up, delivered in multiple formats and from various points of view. Such approaches are in accordance with the converging media environments where authorship and reception are frequently subject to change. Considering the fact that Sendak’s original was a children’s book, yet one of the forerunners of the young adult literature era, its adaptation has appropriately altered the original, making it an aesthetic and ideological ‘transmutation’ of Sendak’s picturebook. In other words, the adaptation has remained true to its predecessor in content and intentionality, but dramatically different in its scope, depth and format. Although the adaptation of *Where the Wild Things Are* has not generated much success with general audiences (like *Peter Rabbit*), it polarised both the critics and the viewers as an intriguing and powerful achievement in cinematography and a unique crossover depiction of Sendak’s tale for children.

5 Case Study 3: Transmedia Elaboration

Although the first two examples are of children’s books crossing over into the realm of adulthood, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is a work of children’s literature and an artefact which had already crossed over. A prime example of convergence, *Fantastic Beasts* was originally a Hogwarts textbook which made its first appearance in the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Essentially, it is defined as “Newt Scamander’s compendium of magical creatures” (Rowling 2019), and is a required reading for Hogwarts students and a guide for wizarding households. In its structure it resembles Medieval bestiaries, or the first picture/textbook for children, *Orbis Pictus* (1658) by John Amos Comenius. After being repeatedly mentioned in the series (first time in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 1997), the book was published independently in 2001, along with the textbook *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and so became part of the transmedia Harry Potter inter- and hypertextual ‘web’ of products (Flegar 2015, 177). Since then, the textbook with short and often humorous descriptions of fantastic beasts, accompanied by Rowling’s illustrations, has undergone several transformations. The entries in the textbook (with illustrations of individual creatures) appear as follows:

GNOME

M.O.M. Classification: XX

The gnome is a common garden pest found throughout northern Europe and North America. It may reach a foot in height, with a disproportionately large head, and hard, bony feet. The gnome can be expelled from the garden by swinging it in circles until dizzy and then dropping it over the garden wall. Alternatively a Jarvey may be used, though many wizards nowadays find this method of gnome-control too brutal. (Scamander, Rowling 2017, 34)

Initially, the textbook evolved from the fictional artefact in the Harry Potter series to the metafictional first edition, accompanied by doodles of Harry Potter and Ron Weasley. It is currently included in the Hogwarts Library Boxed Set (2017), and is a lavishly illustrated picturebook edition with artwork by Olivia Lomenech Gill (2017). This is all owing to the fact that, in 2016, J.K. Rowling wrote the original screenplay for the film adaptation of the same name, drawing on the textbook. The adaptation is a prequel to the Harry Potter series and is set in 1926 in New York City. The wizarding world in the U.S. is the extension of its British counterpart, with terms such as No-Maj to British Muggle, the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA) to the Ministry of Magic (M.O.M.), or the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to the British Hogwarts. The magizoologist Newt Scamander, signed as the author of the first edition (and its narrator) becomes the main protagonist in the film adaptation. The film is about fantastic beasts, and “writing a book about magical creatures [...] a guide to help people understand why we should be protecting these creatures instead of killing them” (Yates 2016, 00’16”47”-00’16”56”). Even more so, however, it is about adult wizards fighting evil forces, such as the dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald or the warped creature and parasite, the Obscurus. The various versions of *Fantastic Beasts* as a fictional guide in the context of the Harry Potter narrative and as a growing universe of its own are what Jenkins (2011) defines as “transmedia storytelling” where “integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”).

In this way, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* developed over time as a *mise en abyme* text,⁶ a spin-off, an adaptation, a prequel and a sequel. The shift in not only focalisation, but genre and format

⁶ Signifying “a representation or narrative segment, which is embedded within a larger narrative, and which reflects, reproduces, or mirrors an aspect of the larger primary narrative” (McCallum 1996, 404-5).

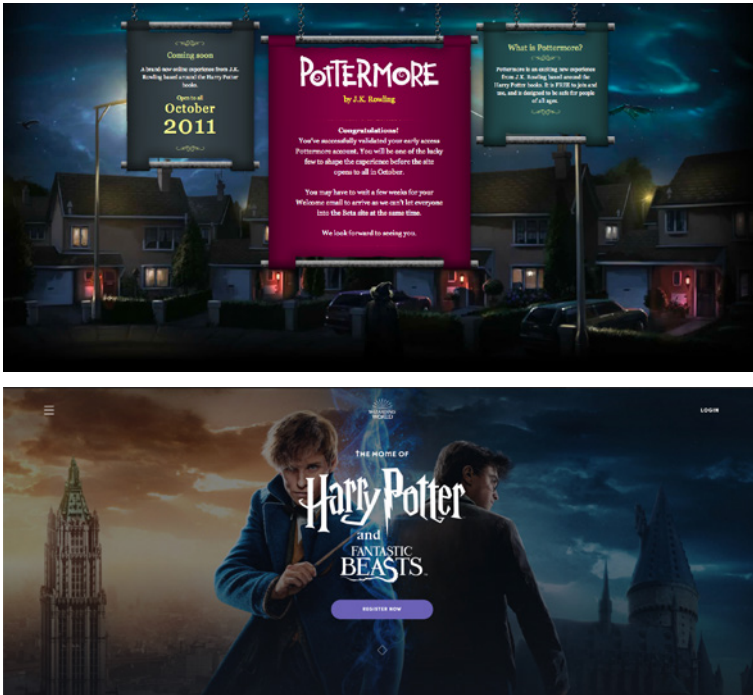


Figure 1 Rowling, *Pottermore / Wizarding World*. 2011/2012-2019. Screenshot of the first *Pottermore* interface in 2011/2012 and the *Wizarding World* (formerly *Pottermore*) user interface at <https://www.wizardingworld.com/> in October 2019, the first using illustrations and animated design generally more appealing to a younger audience, and the latest featuring Newt Scamander and Harry Potter as portrayed in the film adaptations. *Wizarding World Digital*, 2019 (available in the public domain)

as well, has taken the story from a children's library textbook to a culturally diverse adaptation for adults (presumably those who grew up reading *Harry Potter*). In view of this, the adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts* is a transmedia 'elaboration' of the fantastic universe; it expands the secondary story of the imaginary world and makes it the primary one, within a different era, continent and age. Whereas the third person omniscient narrator of the textbook is used to introduce generations of wizarding children to their own world's fantastic beasts, in the film the camera eye it is used for the purpose of external focalisation of an astounded observer, or an 'outsider' to the magical secondary world. The viewer may identify with the character of Jacob Kowalski, who accidentally finds himself with/in Scamander's suitcase, proclaiming, "Newt. I don't think I'm dreaming [...] I ain't got the brains to make this up" (00'41"04"-00'41"10"). Like Kowalski, we are allowed inside the 'insider' culture of the wizarding world in which people ('Muggles' and 'No-Majs', readers and fans) of all ages

are invited. This example has solidified the crossover label already attached to the Harry Potter universe. Hahn claims that “Rowling’s UK publisher, Bloomsbury, capitalised on this crossover interest by releasing the series in adult-friendly jacket designs in parallel with the children’s editions” (2017, 266). Similarly, the *Pottermore* and more recently *Wizarding World* interface has since its public launch in 2012 become progressively more adult oriented [fig. 1].

In *Fantastic Beasts* the opulent use of computer generated imagery enables the beasts to exist beyond the pages of a reference book as a narrative segment with illustrations in it. The magical creatures such as the Niffler, Occamy or Thunderbird appear as supporting characters in the movie with as much humour as in the descriptions, allowing the adult viewer to step outside their mundane existence, their dead-end job, or the bleakness of their landscape. Newt Scamander, his sidekicks, and his suitcase packed with an enchanted world from which occasionally a creature escapes to disrupt the everyday No-Maj existence represent much slapstick and mischief, but also serious grown-up magic and the pursuit of justice that often is missing in today’s modern world. Although the fantastic secondary world of Harry Potter has from the beginning appealed to diverse readership, the film adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts* is very specifically targeted towards (young) adults. Such practices are apparently affected by media convergence which blurs the boundaries of genre, audience, and canon.

6 Conclusion

Based on the three popular examples of picturebook adaptation to film, it is evident that media convergence has taken children’s picturebooks with beasts in them beyond the intended readership. Although adults are generally involved in the process of reading picturebooks and are often present when children watch family movies (one of the reasons why the narrative levels are so readily apparent, and especially the levels of humour), the twenty-first century adaptations frequently take children’s stories beyond the canon of children’s literature. Within the convergence culture of the new millennium, children’s culture has exhibited tendencies to cross over into mainstream culture where it is received by diverse audiences. Some of the conclusions might be that we have come to view, ponder, own and accept childhood beyond the marginalised tag of children’s products because convergence is an all-inclusive and encompassing practice (except when high production and copyright

are concerned).⁷ Other possibilities are escapism, as fantasy is often favoured by the audiences during times of crisis,⁸ or radical creativity, given the fact that fantastic concepts pose a challenge to film-makers. The shifts in narrative and focalisation, genre, and even format, point to different levels of meaning-making that take place in the processing of the visual and verbal material in contemporary media practices. Twenty-first century film adaptations often engage with fantastic content and exhibit crossover tendencies, much like their scientific counterparts in nature, ‘mutation’ or ‘crossover adaptation’. As such they are similar to the talking, fantastic, bulging beasts that one cannot contain in a suitcase or the confines of a category, genre or a historical era. As we continue to participate in the convergence of the media, it is not necessarily children’s culture that may undergo significant changes, but the ‘high culture’ of adulthood. Apparently, the “wild rumpus” of children’s culture has already begun.

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⁷ See Jenkins 2006, ch. “Why Heather Can Read”.

⁸ There is evidence, for example, that fantasy and science fiction genres flourished after World War II (see Hollindale, Sutherland 1995).

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