Research Paper

Hybridity of Genre in the *Harry Potter* Series: A Select Study

Lashynna Duncan Marbaniang
PhD Scholar
North-Eastern Hill University, UmshingMawkynroh, Shillong – 793022
Meghalaya, India

***ABSTRACT:** The focus of this paper is on the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) and how it forms a hybrid genre of fantasy. The study utilizes Farah Mendlesohn's Rhetorics of Fantasy (2013) to elaborate on the various sub-categories of the genre of fantasy embedded within the series. The paper highlights the ever-evolving genre of children's literature through the Harry Potter series. It aims to elaborate on how the hybrid genre contributes to the enhancement of the narrative within the series. Analysis of the categories illustrates the richness of the hybrid genre.*
***KEYWORDS:** Hybrid/Cross Genre, Hybridity, Harry Potter, Children's Literature, Fantasy*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the paper is to illustrate and highlight how the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007)belongs to the hybrid genre of fantasy and how this contributes to the ever-evolving field of children's literature. The paper will begin by attempting to define and elaborate on hybrid/cross-genre, as it provides a brief history of children's fantasy literature and the *Harry Potter* series. It will then proceed to utilize Farah Mendlesohn's*Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2013) to analyze the fantastical characteristics embedded within the series,showing that it forms a hybrid genre.

A hybrid genre is a genre which describes art, literature, and music in which the elements from two or more genres are amalgamated. "Traditionally, genres (particularly literary genres) tended to be regarded as fixed forms, but contemporary theory emphasizes that both their forms and functions are dynamic" explains Daniel Chandler in *An Introduction to Genre Theory* (Chandler 3). The word hybrid connotes a mixing or blending which was formerly associated with biology, but Mikhail Bakhtin reassigned the term to relate to linguistics, literature, poetics and cultural theory. The term "hybrid" is immediately connected with having mixed features that are a blend of many aspects. The essential concepts of merging several genres to create a unique story are followed by hybrid or cross-genre theory. In *Hybrid Genres: Crossing Literature with Thinking and Experience*, Marko Juvan explains that hybrid genres are a "modern metamorphosis" reflecting the progress and changes in the literary field that increases the worth of creative work (Juvan 218).David Duff defines generic hybridization as "the process by which two or more genres combine to form a new genre or subgenre; or by which elements of two or more genres are combined in a single work" (Duff xiv). Mendlesohn refers to this as "The Irregulars" in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* when modalities of fantasy overlap but the mechanisms remain intact. It is critical to adhere to genre techniques in order to avoid creating a random, incoherent piece of work. Some may argue that because hybridity is actually a biological notion pertaining to genetics, it cannot be "transferrable to the humanities," and that it lacks "usefulness as a theoretical instrument" (Patterson 43). However, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, it is a natural and inevitable progression that occurs even within literature.

Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn invoke "changing ideas of childhood across three centuries…" to "consider the effect which the extension of childhood has had upon the writing and publishing of children's fiction" in *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (Levy and Mendlesohn 1). Over the period of three centuries, children's literature has passed through several developmental stages, most notably the transition from being stories presented to children to becoming stories for and about children. This led to an understanding of child psychology which encouraged more extraordinary creations of children's literature in the mid-1900s. This period, regarded as the Golden Age of children's fantasy, occurred through thirty years following World War II.

The emphasis of today's children's fantasy has moved dramatically to developing works that resonate with what children of this age desire. Rooted in the advancement of child psychology, children's fantasy fiction has now moved to carefully deal with urgent concerns such as despair, isolation, and loss, as well as positive themes such as friendship, overcoming hardships, empathy, and perseverance. A combination of them takes children down a realistic but comforting mode that caters to their young minds. One essential recurrent ingredient in the formula of children's fantasy is that youngsters are given adult-like duties without which the world will collapse. Placing the child at the centre of the issue instils a feeling of duty and worth, allowing the youngster to believe thatthey are capable of making a beneficial difference in whatever role they are given.

II. HYBRIDITY IN THE *HARRY POTTER* SERIES

When *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was released in 1997, it sparked a widespread interest in both children's and adults' interests. Readers excitedly immersed themselves in each book, devouring each narrative, as each new sequel to the series was released. From a basic daydream to the sophisticated setup of accessing a virtual world, fantasy exists in everyone's awareness. The urge to encounter and understand the unknown fuels our attraction to the imagined. The unknown might be scientific (thus forming science fiction) or it can address everyday issues through thematic inclusion into storytelling. It naturally falls under the fantasy genre, but this research aims to demonstrate that the *Harry Potter* series is a hybrid genre of fantasy. To substantiate this point, the use of Farah Mendlesohn's critical tools provided in her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* will be employed to elaborate on how the*Harry Potter* series is an amalgamation of the sub-genres of fantasy.The *Harry Potter* series may appear to be solely a high/heroic fantasy yet diving further into the series' construction and growth reveals an evolving blend of fantasy sub-genres. Using Farah Mendlesohn's "critical tools" in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, it is possible to conduct a comprehensive examination of the nature of the series fantastical components (Mendlesohn xiii).

Mendlesohn wrote *Rhetorics of Fantasy* with the intent of providing an understanding of the "*construction* of the genre" where she provides "critical tools for further analysis" (Mendlesohn xiii). Mendlesohn segregates the four categories of fantasy into the *portal-quest* fantasy, the *intrusive* fantasy, the *immersive* fantasy, and the *liminal* fantasy. Mendlesohn concludes by adding the *irregulars* which is the term defined for a hybrid genre in this paper. *Rhetorics of Fantasy* describes these categories which are "determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world" (Mendlesohn xiv). In the portal-quest fantasy, a character journeys from one world to another. The primary world is abandoned to explore an unknown secondary world via a portal. Mendlesohn adds that "modern quest and portal fantasies rely upon similar narrative strategies because each assume the same two movements: transition and exploration" in this type of fantasy (Mendlesohn 2). The immersive fantasy, characterised by John Clute as a "fantasy of thinning", is the beginning of the collapse of magic within the land owing to a tremendous force. It is situated in a secondary world with no relation to the primary world, where the characters are entirely at home. The protagonist sets out to find a solution to the approaching disaster. The intrusion fantasy is when the supernatural or fantastic disrupts the familiar reality, it creates threat and conflict. This is where the fantastic "disrupts normality and his to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (Mendlesohn115). The liminal fantasy is looking for a definition that is similar to its qualities. When the various categories are fused to produce a hybrid/cross-genre, the irregulars occur, indicating the growth of the amalgamation of the elements of the various categories.

Harry Potter's adventures undoubtedly begin as a portal-quest fantasy as he embarks on the Hogwarts Express towards the fantastic secondary world. Before elaborating on the portal-quest characteristics, it is crucial to mention that the novel begins as an intrusion fantasy which will be discussed further along in the paper. Aspects to be discussed include the development of the portals which Harry Potter, the protagonist, must go through to enter the secondary world. The intrigue lies in that as the series develops so do the portals which Harry must enter through. Portal-quest fantasies follow an "entry, transition and negotiation" paradigm in which the protagonist has an ongoing wordless discourse with the environment as his connection with the fantastic deepens and where the process of familiarization unfolds (Mendlesohn 2).

The development of the portals signifies the development of Harry's negotiation of the secondary world as well as his individual development. It begins with Platform 9 ¾ in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* where we meet a young and naïve Harry, innocent and in awe of the newfound secondary world. This portal signifies the innocence of childhood, the simplicity associated with childhood and the lack of knowledge of the world beyond. The second novel of the series *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* finds Harry barred from entering through Platform 9 ¾ by the house-elf Dobby and left to use the enchanted flying car of the father of Ronald Weasley(his best friend) to enter the secondary world. The necessary step of flying a car beyond the sphere of parental supervision marks the beginning of Harry's journey towards adolescence. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is where Harry charges out of the house of the Dursleys (his adoptive family) after witnessing them bad-mouthing his deceased parents. On performing underage magic, Harry storms

out of the house and is taken aboard the Knight Bus - "an emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard" - which is his portal to the secondary world (Rowling 1999 30). This defiance of authority foreshadows the upcoming defiance against the Ministry of Magic. Harry's assertion of his beliefs and standing up for them represents the beginning of his recognition of the flaws in the system and his stand for justice.

In the fourth novel of the series *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* Harry uses two modes of entering into the secondary world, the first using the Floo Network- a means of transportation in which a wizard or witch goes from one location to another by using Floo Powder and mentioning the intended destination. This mode of transportation is provided and monitored by the Ministry of Magic making it an official mode of transportation. Harry is then introduced to a "portkey" which is an enchanted object used to teleport a person to any desired destination. Harry begins his adventure in this series with the portkey and concludes his adventure as well by completing the Triwizard Tournament through the portkey provided. Unfortunately, the portkey brought along with him a murdered Cedric Diggory and the morbid news of the return of Lord Voldemort (the dark wizard who murdered his parents). This phase of the portal-quest is where Harry's adventure and challenges turn dark and represent the arrival of the harsh truth about his parent's death, foreshadowing the upcoming battles he must face against himself and Voldemort. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is met with a set of witches and wizards who arrive to take Harry to Grimmauld Place, the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix, a secret society of witches and wizards who stand in opposition to Lord Voldemort. The location of the headquarters is within the primary world and must be entered with a password provided by the Secret Keeper. This forms the next portal Harry must cross to bring him closer to his path of defiance against the Ministry of Magic soon to be infiltrated by Voldemort. This portal signifies how his destiny impacts both primary as well as secondary worlds.

When we arrive at *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry is personally picked up by Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and the most powerful wizard. Harry experiences his first apparition with Dumbledore, which is a form of magical teleportation from one place to another. Apparition is performed by advanced witches and wizards and brings Harry to his next phase of independence. Dumbledore embarks on the hunt to find Voldemort's Horcruxes, which are objects which conceal part of a witch or wizard's soul contained therein through dark magic. Finally, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, we meet a grieving Harry in mourning at the loss of Dumbledore. He is greeted by several members of the Order of the Phoenix who all drink Polyjuice Potion to severally transform into Harry as they all depart for the safe house, The Burrow. The Death Eaters, Voldemort's faithful followers, await Harry's departure and lives are lost, some are wounded, and Harry is faced with the guilt and dilemma of putting others at risk. Harry's mode of entering the secondary world is met with loss and despair together with strength and resilience which signify the upcoming battle as well as Harry's arrival into adulthood. The various portals and modes of entering into the secondary world coincide with Harry's maturity and development, also revealing bits and pieces of his past life of which he was unaware. These portals in a sense represent Harry's rites of passage into adulthood and maturity.

The next category which will be discussed is how the *Harry Potter* series begins as an intrusion fantasy. When the supernatural or fantastic disrupts the familiar reality, it creates threat and conflict which go to form the intrusion fantasy. The intrusion fantasy "disrupts normality and is to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (Mendlesohn115).

The intrusion fantasy uses the form of the club story – the unquestioned tale – to construct consensus reality, then renders the walls of the world-story translucent… the intrusion fantasy demands belief… requires faith in the *sub*-surface, the sense that there is always something lurking (Mendlesohn 116).

As previously mentioned, intrusion fantasy with its gothic elements happens when the fantastic intrudes onto a pre-existing mundane reality, producing a sense of fear. According to Mendlesohn, the "thinning in" intrusion fantasy predictably follows a pattern or rhythm involving a cycle of suspension and release, delay and increase, reluctance, and remorselessness. The fantasy goes from being denied to being accepted. This type of fantasy, presented in a demotic voice, begins low and quiet, typically in the distance, but gradually rising in presence. The key terms used in the chapter are latency, escalation, intimacy and seduction. Latency of "impending action" or the "sense that there is always something lurking" is utilised to produce a stop or slowing down of the pace of the fantastic, creating tension that is ultimately relieved by escalation (Mendlesohn 116). This quickens the pace at which the fantastic approaches until it becomes palpable. To achieve the intended result, the two approaches work in tandem. Mendlesohn explains that "intrusion fantasy is a fantasy of the aural" implying that it is more reliant on sounds than on the visual, which portal-quest fancies are more prone to (Mendlesohn 117).

As an amalgamation of the many categories, the *Harry Potter* series generates both an auditory and visual text, suggesting that the vocabulary employed to express the fantastic is descriptive of landscapes and surroundings as well as the aural essence of the events. It gradually progresses from explaining the views of the

entrance into the primary world to finally expanding on the dark gothic components that create a dangerous environment in the series. A perfect example of this is in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, where we witness Harry meeting his first dementor. To begin with, the term aural refers to the sense of hearing, and in intrusion fantasy, the language must emit sound to achieve the gothic impact. These sounds trigger a sense of a shiver down the spine, with the eerie lurking around the corner and creating a sense of fear and angst true to intrusion fantasy. The screaming, belonging to Harry's mother, is later revealed to be a subconscious recollection of Voldemort's attack on his parents and the shrill voice of none other than the wicked Voldemort.

> For Harry knew whom that screaming voice belonged to now. He had heard her words, heard them over and over again during the night hours… When the dementors approached him, he heard the last moments of his mother's life, her attempts to protect him… and Voldemort's laughter before he murdered her… Harry dozed fitfully, sinking into dreams full of clammy, rotted hands and petrified pleading, jerking awake only to dwell again on the sound of his mother's voice (Rowling1999 138).

For Harry, the threat escalates externally, first with Voldemort's attempted assassination in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and then with the advent of the Dementors in the third instalment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* The appearance of the Dementors in the series marks the beginning of the Gothic style in the subsequent episodes. The Dementors are intriguing in terms of latency and escalation since they produce both exterior and interior intrusion. Dementors are dark creatures who feed on human delight, replacing it with a sense of sadness and depression while physically paralyzing and freezing the body with terror. Because of his terrible history, Harry's susceptibility to this type of internal demonic infiltration is significantly heightened. His first meeting with the dementors, aboard the Hogwarts Express, might be regarded as his worst brush with them

> thing beneath the hood… drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it was trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings. An intense cold swept over them all… the cold went deeper than his skin. It was inside his chest, it was inside his very heart… He was drowning in cold… He was being dragged downwards… And then, from far away, he heard screaming, terrified, pleading screams (Rowling1999 66).

The arrival of the dementors constructs a 'shiver up the spine' rhetoric and an internal threat. This eventually leads to the revelation of a greater internal threat lurking between Lord Voldemort's unconscious mind and Harry's subconscious. In the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the escalation begins when Harry is shown resisting Voldemort's unconscious entrance into his head, and the bounds of the threat finally invade his own personal space - his subconscious. As Harry battles and struggles to overcome external and internal struggles, the escalation progresses to finally arrive at a calm once again. Latency and escalation here provide an enticing read for the reader and keep the protagonist in a position of angst which is a key feature of intrusion fantasy.This angst is required for the protagonist to gain insights into the world that only he and the reader can understand. The angst leaves the protagonist to "make himself a lack of Being in order that Being may be there; this is to say that man must – not in a single flash of inspiration but continually – since he alone determines the values by which he lives… but rather must be constantly making himself' (Barnes 42)" (Mendlesohn 126).

The final category which will be discussed is immersive fantasy. The immersive fantasy, "functions as a complete world… impervious to external influence" where both the protagonist and reader share and belong to the world (Mendlesohn 59). The existence of threat is revealed at the end of the first novel in the series. Although Voldemort poses a threat to Harry throughout the first three novels, it is not until the conclusion of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when Voldemort enters full physical form, that the thinning begins. However, Harry's allegations concerning Voldemort's return are merely seen as an orphaned youngster seeking attention, and this, along with the denial, particularly by the magical government, continues until the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* The fantasy of thinning begins only at the start of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* when Death Eaters assault all the participants of the Quidditch World Cup, which is notable owing to the diversity of Quidditch lovers present from all corners of the magical universe. The evolution of the antagonism and thinning proceed parallel to one other, each representing the condition of things for Harry and Voldemort. The more Voldemort infiltrates and contaminates the world with his infectious presence, bringing chaos and decay, the more Harry is cast as an outsider. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,* articles are filled with Harry portrayed as "The Chosen One," but once again this is received with mixed emotions, just as must the news of Voldemort's return (Rowling 2005 42). At this point in the series, the world-building has developed extensively to "create something that can be existed" which leads to the reader adapting to the world in which the fantastic now seems ordinary (Mendlesohn 71).Voldemort inadvertently destroys a Horcrux he was not even aware he made at the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, which is destroyed when he

attempts to murder Harry again, resulting in his downfall. Harry demonstrates to Voldemort the weaknesses in his scheme and how everything he thought was working in his favour - from Dumbledore's death to the ultimate Horcrux - was in fact working against him. With the last spell cast, "Tom Riddle hit the floor with a mundane finality… Voldemort was dead, killed by his own rebounding curse" (Rowling 2007 596). Using Voldemort's birth name represents the end of Voldemort's withering dominion over the land; it illustrates defeat of the threat, bringing back renewal and restoration in the land.

III. CONCLUSION

Hybridity is a fundamental component of human civilization that pervades many aspects, including technology, culture, race, academia, and many others. Life, as it progresses, produces hybrids, since influences from the past are constantly necessary to build evolved concepts.The hybrid/cross-genre combines two or more genres to create a unique and engaging combination for the readers. Mendlesohn refers to hybrid genres as Irregulars, which serve to "open up new lines of inquiry and to lay down new challenges" by crossing beyond structured forms (Mendlesohn 246).However, much as a chemist produces a formula for a specific goal, the genre-mixing must be carefully developed to provide an intelligible rather than overpowering story.The *Harry Potter* series transitions and changes across categories of intrusion fantasy, portal-quest fantasy and immersive fantasy forming the irregular; "style changes to accommodate the shift" (Mendlesohn 246).It contributes to the ever-evolving genre of children's fantasy by providing an intriguing read for children and adults alike. It takes the reader on a leisurely journey through the weird in all of its manifestations, providing broad intellectual and aesthetic exposure. Genre merging necessitates considerable planning to create something distinct but relatable. Anything new that arises is always the result of cultural, sociopolitical, economic, and environmental factors that reflect and represent the times.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources
[1]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Bloomsbury, 1997.
[2]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Bloomsbury, 1998.
[3]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Bloomsbury, 1999.
[4]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.
[5]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix*. Bloomsbury, 2003.
[6]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Bloomsbury, 2005.
[7]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.
[8]. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Bloomsbury, 2007.

Secondary Sources
[9]. Chandler, Daniel (1997): 'An Introduction to Genre Theory' [WWW document] URL
http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre.html. 10 January 2021. Accessed 10 December 2022.
[10]. Clute, John. *Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997) – Thinning*.
http://sfencyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=thinning. Accessed 5 December 2022.
[11]. Duff, David. Modern Genre Theory. Taylor & Francis, 2014.
[12]. Gates, Pamela S., et al. Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults. Scarecrow Press, 2003.
[13]. Höfel, Anne-Kathrin. "Current Developments at the Intersection of Fantasy Fiction and British Children's Literature." Diss. Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2010.
[14]. Hybrid Genres / L'Hybridité Des Genres. Brill, 2018.
[15]. Juvan, Marko. "Hibridnižanri: Študije o križancihizkustva, mišljenja in literature (Hybrid Genres: Crossing Literature with Thinking and Experience." *LudLiteratura*. January 2017.
[16]. Kent, Thomas. Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Perception in the Study of Narrative Texts. Bucknell University Press, 1986.
[17]. Landon, Brooks. "A Cultural History of a Hybrid Genre." *Science Fiction Studies*, edited by Roger Luckhurst, vol. 33, no. 1, SF-TH Inc, 2006, pp. 161–73. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4241415. Accessed 8 December 2022.
[18]. Levy, Michael, and Farah Mendlesohn. *Children's Fantasy Literature An Introduction*. Kindle ed., Cambridge UP, 2016, 282.
[19]. Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy,* Kindle ed., Wesleyan University Press, 2014.
[20]. Patterson, Jeremy. "Gaston Miron: From Hybrid Genres to Hybrid Identities" (pg. 41 – 55).