A Fantastic Failure: Displaced Nationalism and the Intralingual Translation of Harry Potter

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British author J.K. Rowling's hugely successful Harry Potter novels have been translated into a variety of different languages including, most peculiarly, American English. Rather than urging cultural accommodation, American editor Arthur A. Levine altered diction and syntax within the American editions with the intention of ensuring "that an American child reading the books would have the same literary experience that a British kid would have."¹ Levine's comment reveals the fundamental problematic of his project: how could an American child possibly have "the same literary experience" as a British one when the Harry Potter texts are culturally – and originally, linguistically – British? To erase the specifically British linguistic elements of the texts is to overlook Rowling's nuanced constructions of cultural "difference,"² as Philip Nel posits in "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O': Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language." Taking up the relationship between form and content that Nel examines, my discussion expands upon the salient textual and cultural implications of his argument: namely, the notion that American English is replacing British English as the new standard and that Americanization interferes with and crudely appropriates the

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¹ Arthur A. Levine quoted in Daniel Radosh, "Why American Kids Don't Consider Harry Potter An Insufferable Prig," Radosh.Net. Online. <http://www.radosh.net/writing/potter.html> (accessed 13 April 2012). Radosh's article has been reprinted on his website and was originally published as "Ink" in *The New Yorker* (20 September 1999), 54.

² Philip Nel, "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O': Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language," *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, ed. Lana Whited (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 269.

national context of the original texts through the use of the fantasy genre. In doing so, the American edition both fetishizes and devalues Britain's cultural distinctness from the United States. I have chosen to narrow my focus to the first novel in the Harry Potter series since it was heavily edited in the United States. My intention in this paper is to theorize the linguistic and cultural implications of Americanization by treating Harry Potter as a case study that works to reveal the literary repercussions of American hegemony, the relationship between orthography and nationalism, and the subsequent imposition of protectionism on youth audiences.

The relationship between translation and the genre of children's fantasy literature informs why the American editors of the series would have chosen to alter the original texts, and helps to frame the historical precedents and anxieties that affect the reception of foreign children's books in the United States. In a two-part article in *The Horn Book Magazine*, Jane Whitehead reveals that children's literature is particularly vulnerable to alteration by American publishers. Whitehead's article includes excerpts of her conversations with several editors in England and the United States, and concludes that American editors are much "more interventionist than their British counterparts."³ At times, the statements that she includes from the American editors sound almost confessional; Dorothy Briley of Clarion Books admits, for example, "that it's often the parents who are embarrassed by not having an immediate explanation for a foreign word or expression. 'It's not that the children can't handle this,' she says."⁴ Whatever the reason, and Whitehead's article suggests several, children's books that contain "the merest whiff of 'Britishness'"⁵ are likely to fall prey to American isolationism as it is manifested in the publishing world.

Indeed, history has shown that the treatment of Harry Potter by the American publisher, Scholastic, is not an isolated incident. Another popular children's fantasy series, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, also suffered editorial changes in the United States. The first book in the series, *Northern Lights*, was published by Knopf Doubleday Inc. in 1995, but under the editorial direction of none other than Levine himself, then a Knopf employee, was renamed *The*

³ Jane Whitehead, "'This Is NOT What I Wrote!': The Americanization of British Children's Books-Part I," *The Horn Book Magazine* 72 (1996): 688.

⁴ Dorothy Briley quoted in Whitehead, "'This Is NOT What I Wrote!'- Part I," 689.

⁵ Whitehead, 688.

Golden Compass. Of course, there is a rich history of Anglo-American publishing practices that has seen many texts altered on both sides of the pond. A full recounting of that history lies beyond the scope of this paper, though I would be remiss not to acknowledge such texts as *The Clockwork Orange*, which was notoriously published in the United States without its final chapter upon the urging of the American editors. In the realm of children's literature, perhaps one of the most famous examples of differing editions is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the third book in C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series. Lewis originally made several changes to the manuscript before sending it off to his American editors. In a surprising twist, the editors of Harper Collins decided to ignore Lewis's changes entirely when they assumed the rights to the series in 1994, and reverted to the original British edition.⁶ Children's literature in the United States, according to Gillian Avery, has been a relatively self-sufficient genre from its colonial inception. Since the 1820s, she observes, "American children's books began to take their own course," one that was decidedly different from that of the Victorians, in part due to the differing attitudes towards childhood in the two countries. American texts tended to be "closely linked with the everyday world" while the British tradition was "strong on fantasy."⁷ This is not to say that Americans did not consume fantasy, and indeed Avery devotes a considerable amount of space to describing the American fondness for Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. However, Americans did not really produce much fantasy children's literature until the twentieth century. Levine's brash changes to both Rowling's and Pullman's novels continue a historical trend of Americans looking abroad for fantasy texts, yet his sense of authority over such texts signals a shift in the sociopolitical dynamics between the United States and Britain. As the American publishing industry, and its taste for fantasy literature, imported or otherwise, has risen, we have seen it flex its editorial muscles in erratic yet decisive ways.

The astute reader need not even open *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* to realize that the effects of the transatlantic translation are readily apparent and that even minor linguistic changes can result in radical discursive shifts. While the British edition, published by

⁶ Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 32.

⁷ Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2; 211.

Bloomsbury in 1997, is entitled *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the American Scholastic edition from 1998 alters the title to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. As Robert Scholes points out, "the original title makes the important connection between the world of Harry Potter and the word of the alchemists who were the precursors of modern scientific thinking. ... The word *Philosopher* in the English edition connects the magic stone to the actual history of human thought in a way that the word *Sorcerer* in the American edition does not."⁸ Scholes suggests that "some American marketing genius" must have realized that "sorcerer would sell a lot more books than philosophers."⁹ Surely the switch to "sorcerer" relates to the discursive function of witchcraft in the United States, a practice that has both captivated and repulsed the national audience since the days of Puritanism. The title of *The Sorcerer's Stone* invokes a particularly American history that would resonate with school children far more strongly than philosophy, a tradition whose history is less sensational.

The linguistic changes that appear in the American edition of the text at first glance appear minor, and yet their implications are far-reaching. I would urge us to consider how the cultural context of the narrative and the "imagined community" of the audience shifts according to the Americanization of spelling, diction and syntax. In an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* from 10 July 2000, Peter Gleick identifies "three kinds of substitutions" in *The Sorcerer's Stone*: changes in orthography, diction, and what he terms "metamorphoses of truly English experiences or objects into something different, but distinctly American: crumpets to English muffins, for example (a particularly odious change, in my opinion)."¹⁰ Nel observes, too, that Scholastic has altered idioms and phrases that fall within "three categories: words explained by their context, words that have a similar meaning in the States, and onomatopoeic words."¹¹ Nel offers a tremendous amount of textual evidence to support his claims, systematically addressing the "substitutions" that Gleick mentions and demonstrating how the text enacts certain changes. However, Rowling, who worked with Levine during the editorial process, dismisses the "changes," claiming that they "really were minimal." She raises the example of

⁸ Robert Scholes, *The Crafty Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 208-09.

⁹ Scholes, 2008-09.

¹⁰ Peter H. Gleick, "Harry Potter, Minus A Certain Flavour," *New York Times*, 10 July 2000, late edition (East Coast).

¹¹ Nel, "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O'?" 275.

the American edition's use of "sweater" instead of "jumper," joking that American children would have thought that male characters in the text were "wearing pinafore dresses," and that she "was more than happy to substitute 'sweater' to avoid that confusion!"¹² But does Scholastic actually believe that American children cannot infer the meaning of "Happy Christmas,"¹³ for example, which was changed to "Merry Christmas,"¹⁴ or the fact that "motorbike" (PS 16) might mean "motorcycle" (SS 14)? All of these examples point toward a subtle cultural re-orientation that is facilitated through linguistic change, and more specifically, a disturbing and unnecessary attempt to regulate the text according to the standards of American English.

The fact that foreign children's books are especially prone to intralingual translation in the United States suggests that the child becomes the site where linguistic regulatory practices seek to secure domination and control. Rather than encouraging linguistic pluralism, the American edition operates on the assumption that there exist corresponding words and objects across cultures, an assumption that flattens difference and that then produced a strange kind of solipsism throughout *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic routinely exchanges vocabulary and standardizes spelling according to American English. *The Sorcerer's Stone* drops the "u" from various words so that "rumours" (PS 13) become "rumors" (SS 10), for example, and "armor" (SS 129) replaces "armour" (PS 96). Sprinkling in American spelling amongst culturally British terms such as "chipolatas" (SS 203) and "blimey" (SS 79), Scholastic seems to be motivated less by a desire to completely Americanize the text linguistically than by the impulse to exercise control over the foreign. By changing the text on its most fundamental level, that of language, Levine disrupts the foreignness of the text and instead renders the text American through appropriation. Despite the fact that the setting remains British in the American edition, it is a fantastical Britain that is constructed by a cultural outsider. A tension emerges in the relationship between representation and the text's linguistic constituency. Beyond the obvious formal implications of translation, this move to shift the imagined audience simultaneously works to dictate what exactly it is that the audience imagines.

¹² J.K. Rowling quoted in Nel, "You Say 'Jelly,' I Say 'Jell-O'?" 274.

¹³ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 147. Hereafter cited as PS, with page numbers inserted in the text.

¹⁴ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Scholastic, 1997), 200. Hereafter cited as SS, with page numbers inserted in the text.

My review of the two editions reveals that the two manifest types of editorial changes in the text relate to orthography and diction. The additional categories that Gleick and Nel include might be seen as delineations of the types of diction that are vulnerable to alteration. Perhaps surprisingly, the syntax of the original text remains largely intact in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Consequently, the text preserves a distinctly English inflection, particularly in its dialogue, leaving the characters speaking American English at certain moments yet within a sentence whose structure is notably British. In one scene, Hagrid watches over the birth of a baby dragon, exclaiming, "Bless him, look, he knows his mummy" (PS 172). *The Sorcerer's Stone* replaces "mummy" with "mommy" (SS 235), leaving Hagrid, who speaks in heavy dialect, strangely invoking an Americanism for the familiar term. The preservation of common British syntax coupled with the Americanization of words produces an artificial hybridity that strips away the carefully constructed realism of portions of the text. The realism that exists in the British edition works to foreground the contrast between the normative world of the Muggles and the fantasy world that we encounter at Hogwarts. The emphasis on the material conditions in which the text situates the characters enables the reader to find commonality with the characters and to empathize with them as members of an "imagined community"¹⁵ that they can geographically locate, even if that community is not one of which they are themselves a part.

The anxiety over American children's – or more aptly, their parents' – inability to comprehend foreign words grows particularly nonsensical when we consider the contradiction that American audiences are expected to infer the relative meaning of neologisms in fantasy writing and yet paradoxically are presumed incapable of deciphering the British vernacular. Whitehead asks, "what assumptions are being made about the ability and willingness of American children to deal with cultural differences?"¹⁶ I would like to put some pressure on this question by asking, instead, what editorial moves are being made to *determine* the willingness of American children to deal with cultural differences? We might glean insight from the differentiation that Levine makes between fantasy and the vernacular in his editorial approach, one that Whitehead observes

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 5.

¹⁶ Whitehead, "'This Is NOT What I Wrote!' - Part 1," 688.

is common in the United States where editors are generally “more interventionist than their British counterparts.”¹⁷ The existence of various substitutions – “trash can” (SS 70) for “dust bin” (PS 55), “booger” (SS 104) for “bogies” (PS 130), or “chip bags” (SS 44) for “a packet of crisps” (PS 37) – are suggestive of Levine’s efforts to render the British world that the text depicts recognizable and accessible to the American child. Moreover, Levine’s tendency to edit British words yet to preserve Rowling’s neologisms raises the possibility that intralingual translation in this instance is driven by an American need to dominate within the linguistic realm of English. Because neologisms are, in a sense, idiosyncrasies produced by the author and interpreted subjectively, to a degree, by the reader, they remain relatively non-threatening as they carry no practical repercussions. Neologisms are exempt from the power dynamics that are inherent in language, with the exception of their ability to perform those dynamics in an abstracted realm.

Levine’s decision to substitute Americanisms for what he perceives as obscure words falsely presupposes an inherent textual meaning that must be re-configured across different cultures, when, in actuality, meaning is constructed through language and the subjective act of reading. Textual interpretation is idiosyncratic; to alter the diction of the text is to present a different text. Levine masks the desire to assert American control over the English language by suggesting that his editorial changes are simply an effort to clarify the text for the reader. Levine maintains that “a kid should be confused or challenged when the author wants the kid to be confused or challenged and not because of a difference of language,”¹⁸ yet his premise that he has access to the author’s intentions, or that any reader does, is not only problematic, it robs the text of its pedagogical potential. Levine’s exclusion of words that he deems difficult to the American child hinders the process by which readers are forced to encounter, through reading, words and concepts with which they are unfamiliar.

As we will see, Rowling expresses sociopolitical difference *through* language within the text, but it is also crucial to register the fact that difference is also constituted *by* language. The fact of difference in language is unavoidable, as Lawrence Venuti articulates in his

¹⁷ Whitehead, 689.

¹⁸ Arthur A. Levine quoted in Nel, 274.

theories of translation.¹⁹ Language itself is a form of difference, one that is connected to identity and subject-formation, and which we cannot divorce from its social context. The characters in the Harry Potter series are marked by their Britishness at the same time that they embody various socioeconomic subject positions in part through their use of language. In a generic sense, the changes to spelling and diction work to conceal the complex positionalities of the characters by interfering with the social realism of the text. More importantly, the Americanization of the text undermines the particularly British ways in which the characters represent their experiences through language and render those experiences meaningful. It is through language that subjects tend to position themselves in relation to the nation, and often how they “experience themselves as belonging to a nation.”²⁰ To a certain degree, all language is a deferral of meaning. Derrida argues, aptly I think, that “as a disseminating operation separated from presence (of Being) according to all its modifications, writing, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but does not exist.” Regardless of its evasiveness, however, language undeniably possesses a social function: “communicat[ion].”²¹ In other words, we cannot divorce language from its social context. Therefore, to exchange British phrases for American ones is not a move that grants the reader enhanced access to a supposed origin or pure form of meaning, but instead de-contextualizes, and then necessarily re-contextualizes, the phrase.

Intralingual translation inevitably relies on a false assumption of “similarity of form and meaning or of reception” when in reality “any such similarity is constructed on the basis of irreducible differences,”²² as Venuti reminds us. Translation can reductively eliminate the polyphony of a text by flattening dialects into a homogenous standard, and participates in a dangerous trend towards the standardization of English in literature. This trend undermines a potential appeal of the

¹⁹ Lawrence Venuti, “The Translator’s Unconscious,” *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, ed. Alessandra Riccardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 216.

²⁰ Katherine W. Jones, “‘I’ve Called ‘em Tom-ah-toes All My Life and I’m Not Going to Change!’: Maintaining Linguistic Control Over English Identity in the U.S,” *Social Forces* 79 (2001): 1064.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida: Basic Writings*, ed. Barry Stocker, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2007), 132. Derrida elaborates more fully on this idea of the social function of language in “Signature Event Context.”

²² Venuti, “The Translator’s Unconscious,” 216.

English language: it inclusivity. As English expands in usage around the globe, it is increasingly important that we embrace linguistic pluralism both within and beyond English. Since literature is, in essence, communication, it is especially important that linguistic plurality be accepted, expected and celebrated amongst editors and literary critics alike. To reduce the forms of English that are marketed to the American public, and particularly to children, is to deny that public the opportunity to access experiences that exist beyond the boundaries of its own nation. The heavy editing of children's books that occurs within the American publishing industry is particularly sad and ironic since children lack a rigid sense of standards, one reason why they are more open to fantasy.²³ Historically, America has had an ambivalent attitude toward fantasy, which the Puritans found distasteful.²⁴ While the British produced heaps of fantasy literature over the past several centuries, Americans have tended more toward realism, as Avery notes.²⁵ Ironically, we might view Levine's desire to translate the text as a gesture of realism that allows American children to read more literally, and yet it undermines itself by distorting the realist and fantastic significance of Rowling's words.

While some critics might posit that Levine's production of an American edition of Harry Potter contributes to linguistic plurality by providing an American adaptation, it is important to consider that *The Sorcerer's Stone* might newly represent *The Philosopher's Stone* but it hardly constitutes a thoughtful re-interpretation of the text. In the case of adaptation, intralingual translation is perfectly permissible, and might even enrich the audience's understanding of the original. A useful way to approach adaptation is through an ethics of translation. In his discussion of ethics, Venuti instructively draws on Freud in order to interpret the fact that "the verbal slips that reveal the workings of the unconscious may include omissions of key words and phrases" and how "the unconscious desire revealed in the omission was at once collective, possibly nationalist, clearly political."²⁶ I am

²³ My thanks are due here to Professor Deidre Baker for our productive discussion during the research stage of this article, and her insights into the broader context and concerns of children's fantasy literature.

²⁴ See Avery and Beverly Lyon Clark's *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) for detailed accounts of the historical differences between American and British Children's literature.

²⁵ Avery, *Behold the Child*, 211.

²⁶ Venuti, "The Translator's Unconscious," 234.

particularly interested in Venuti's theory of "difference"²⁷ because difference is what the Americanization of Harry Potter paradoxically both institutes and displaces. Venuti maintains that "the goal" of translation studies should be "the ultimately ethical one of developing methods of translation research and practice that describe, explain, and take responsibility for the differences that translation inevitably makes."²⁸ My fundamental concern with the Americanization of Harry Potter is the failure of the American edition to, in Venuti's words, "take responsibility" for the linguistic and cultural changes it enacts.

It is precisely this lack of self-reflexivity that prevents *The Sorcerer's Stone* from qualifying as an adaptation of *The Philosopher's Stone*. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon articulates a nuanced series of proposals of what might constitute an adaptation. Her project, seemingly, is not to construct a rigid definition of adaptations, but instead to destabilize the authority of the "original"²⁹ text and to push the boundaries of how we might think about the evolution of texts. Even though she points out that "not every adaptation is necessarily a remediation,"³⁰ a crucial premise of *A Theory of Adaptation* is the notion that "adaptation usually signals its identity overtly."³¹ Hutcheon's observation that, in "transcultural adaptations," "sometimes adapters purge an earlier text of elements their particular cultures in time or place might find difficult or controversial"³² is highly relevant and compelling. However, I find it difficult to classify *The Sorcerer's Stone* as an adaptation granted, that it was published within a year of *The Philosopher's Stone* and was meant to act as a substitution for, not a supplement, for the original British text for American audiences. Because the text is not an adaptation, the subject position and theoretical attitudes of the translator are necessarily situated at the foreground of any analysis of this act of intralingual translation. Since the American edition does not explicitly signify its own status as translation, it conceals its deviation from the original text. This is a reductive gesture that fails to promote linguistic plurality.

²⁷ Venuti, 237.

²⁸ Venuti, 216.

²⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), xii.

³⁰ Hutcheon, 170.

³¹ Hutcheon, 121.

³² Hutcheon, 147.

The homogenization of the American text is particularly frustrating due to the seemingly arbitrary nature of the editorial changes. The lack of intentionality on behalf of the editors grows evident less than fifty pages into *The Sorcerer's Stone*, as we realize that the text fails to impose a systematic shift to American English. Of course, it would be impossible to adapt the text entirely to an American context since the use of English place names firmly locates the characters in England. The characters pass back and forth between Hogwarts and the land of the Muggles (England). We discover that the Dursleys live in Surrey (SS 34), that Charlie Weasley "could have played [Quidditch] for England" (SS 170), and that the Muggles trade in "pence" (SS 200) and "pounds" (SS 76). Levine replaces words that he judges to be unintelligible to the American reader yet his tendency to intrude beyond the boundaries of intelligibility in pursuit of ease of reading sees him instituting words that are culturally familiar in place of words that are widely used outside of Britain but are, apparently, irritatingly foreign. "Mint humbugs" (PS 49) become "peppermint humbugs" (SS 62), as if such a minor clarification was necessary, while the British ice cream treat, "knickerbocker glory" (SS 26), remains included and unexplained. Even more disturbing are the ways in which by re-scripting the characters, *The Sorcerer's Stone* irreparably alters them. The Harry Potter of the original text is forced to wear a "jumper" with "bobbles" (PS 23) not a "sweater" with "puff balls" (SS 24); he eats "crumpets" (PS 146) not "English muffins" (SS 199) and plays "football" (PS 61) not "soccer" (SS 79). In certain instances a change in signifier does not exactly alter the sign it signifies, but at other times, as we see in the case of the crumpet, it erroneously does. Inconsistencies also run rampant. "The post" (PS 29) becomes "mail" (SS 33) in one scene in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, only for the translation to be reversed a few pages later when Dursley explains that there is "no post on Sundays" (SS 41). In other places, Levine introduces an Americanism in one chapter but maintains the British term in another. Instead of employing "crowd" instead of "lot" consistently throughout the text, Levine adheres to the term from *The Philosopher's Stone* in chapter three, which announces, "Dudley was the biggest and stupidest of the lot" (SS 31). Ironically, in this case "lot" does signify something quite close to "crowd."

Perhaps the most bizarre change in vocabulary revolves around the word "shan't." In the first chapter of *The Philosopher's Stone*, Mrs. Dursley brags that Dudley has "learnt a new word ('Shan't!')" (PS 10), a humorous statement that tellingly comments on both his lack

of intellectual capabilities and the fact that he is terribly spoiled. *The Sorcerer's Stone* exchanges "shan't" for "won't" (SS 6), ludicrously overstating Dudley's limited vocabulary. Curiously, "shan't" appears again in the original text, only Levine decides to leave the phrase unaltered in his edition. "Shan't say nothing if you don't say please" (SS 160), teases Peeves, a ghost who roams the halls of Hogwarts pestering the students. In this instance, "shan't" strengthens Peeves' association with Merry Old England, underscoring his cultural authenticity with the use of language that is seemingly antiquated. This gesture romanticizes England by locating it in a temporal past to which we no longer have access except through the realm of fantasy, a realm to which the English boarding school experience has arguably always belonged in the American imagination. In a sense, it is British culture itself that becomes the fantasy in *The Sorcerer's Stone* as the text indulges a long-standing tradition of American Anglophilia. Fantasy often contains a nostalgic dimension that figures as a "search for national origins," Tony Watkins suggests, as it works to "sustain myths of national identity, community and common heritage" about itself and encourages children to locate themselves within this community.³³ What is curious about nostalgia in Harry Potter is that it seemingly invokes a very different sense of national history in Britain than in the United States. While aspects of the text might indeed feel antiquated even to a British child, the world of the Muggles would generally appear intelligible. Yet the linguistic changes in the American edition suggest that Levine clearly struggled to differentiate between the real and the fantastical due to his status as cultural outsider. This fact is complicated by the reality that America does find its colonial origin in Britain, and Americans continue to maintain a complicated attitude to the UK, one that oscillates between a sense of affiliation and estrangement.

In the case of Harry Potter, Americanization haphazardly homogenizes nuanced discourses of difference and thus wipes away sociopolitical cultural critiques that operate within the original text. This critique persists in the American edition, but only in its most didactic form. The mangled dialogue of *The Sorcerer's Stone* prevents a nuanced reading and interferes with the reader's ability to make sophisticated connections between characters. As the diction that the

³³ Tony Watkins, "Reconstructing the Homeland: Loss and Hope in the English Landscape," in *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*, ed. Maria Nikolajeva (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 165-67.

characters employ changes, those characters assume a hybridity that destabilizes the symbolic functions that they serve in the original text. Social critique in *The Philosopher's Stone* is discursively reliant on an essentialist treatment of certain characters, who explicitly perform certain socioeconomic positions. Thus, when Mr. Dursley, the acerbic middle-class father who "couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes" (PS 8) and constantly "shuddered to think what the neighbours would say" (PS 7) about his sister-in-law (Harry's mother), refers to "*her lot*" (PS 7), he is referring to something far more insidious than the group of people with whom she socializes; he is, rather, locating Lilly Potter within a social type. The *OED* defines "lot" as both "that which is given to a person by fate or divine providence" and "a number of persons or things of the same kind." By flippantly changing "lot" to "crowd" (SS 7), Levine suggests instead that the Potters have gone awry out of deliberate choice as opposed to the fact that their social position represents their "destiny, fortune, or 'portion' in this life" (SS 7). Rather than heightening the implications of Dursley's dislike for people in foreign garb, the American edition positions Mrs. Potter simply as a nonconformist.

Rowling's inclusion of various dialects in the original texts also maintains a political function; the Irish character is differentiated from the English ones by his use of "mam" instead of "mum," for example, and yet in the American edition both characters say "mom" and the difference between their subject positions is violently erased. Intralingual translation literally re-configures the "imagined community" of Rowling's audience, displacing British nationalism in the text and foregrounding America's simultaneous fascination with and ideological rejection of all things British. British culture is foreign enough that it cannot, in the eyes of American editors, be easily acculturated at a child's level, and yet it is strangely culturally and linguistically proximal enough to America that, as Nel states, rather bluntly: "the distortions evident in translations of British children's books into American English prove that American definitions of multiculturalism do not include Great Britain."³⁴

Indeed, the textual inconsistencies of the American edition speak to Levine's inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality in the British context. He decisively includes "humbug" in his edition since he views it as "clearly a magical term," a treat that "should be

³⁴ Nel, 268.

imagined,”³⁵ a comment to which Daniel Radosh can only retort: “except it’s not. It’s a common triangular sucking candy.”³⁶ Levine’s differentiation between “magical” and vernacular terms here might be reconfigured as a differentiation between the unknown and the foreign, which in the case of fantasy literature evades conflation. What Levine’s differentiation overlooks is the fact that fantasy literature tends to work out problems of the familiar in an alternate realm. As a genre, children’s fantasy literature works to enable youth to develop their reading practices through making sense of the familiar. Yet the great irony of fantasy literature, of course, is that through the process of reading we quickly discover that what we deem foreign is in actuality often the familiar coded in slightly different terms. Fantasy’s reliance on a sophisticated economy of metaphors invites children to decipher imaginary objects and images that often find their analogues in human reality. As Karen Coats describes the genre: “we could say that children are thrown into a world they did not make and yet must make something of.”³⁷ The reading process, in this sense, mimics the process of child development and relies on the child’s cognitive capacities, even in instances of textual difficulty. At times this difficulty is even intentional, as it encourages youth readers to read actively and to make connections between the fantasy world and their own. These connections might draw attention to intellectually challenging or ethically fraught social problems that are more palatable when metaphorized. While fantasy might seem apolitical, childish, or generically narrow, it is “not so much a collection of marvels which diverts readers from ordinary human concerns,” as David Gooderham argues, “but a distinctive and fruitful way of speaking about just these concerns.”³⁸ What is particularly troubling about the linguistic changes between the two editions, when we consider them in light of the generic function of fantasy, is that linguistic changes undermine the cultural metaphors that occur in the original British edition, and

³⁵ Levine quoted in Radosh, “Why American Kids Don’t Consider Harry Potter An Insufferable Prig.”

³⁶ Daniel Radosh, “Why American Kids Don’t Consider Harry Potter An Insufferable Prig,” Radosh.Net. Online, <http://www.radosh.net/writing/potter.html> (accessed 21 March 2009).

³⁷ Karen Coats, “Fantasy,” *Routledge Companion to Children’s Literature*, ed. David Rudd (New York: Routledge, 2010), 75–76.

³⁸ David Gooderham, “Children’s Fantasy Literature: Toward an Anatomy,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 26 (1995): 173.

they do so in a way that is insensitive to this relationship between language and genre.

While a term such as “humbug” obviously carries little weight in this schema, other words that Levine has translated carry more severe implications. Rowling is particularly attentive to socioeconomic standing. For example, Ron Weasley, is mocked for his poverty and suspiciously Celtic origins. “My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford,” scoffs Draco Malfoy, the upper-crust boy who warns Harry to avoid “making friends with the wrong sort” (SS 108). Harry’s decision to stand up for Ron and to delight in the homemade Christmas presents that are to Ron a source of shame carries political implications. Merit and wizarding status triumph at Hogwarts. Gryffindor, the house to which Harry and the Weasleys belong, ultimately wins out over Draco’s house, Slytherin. Yet this reading of class in the text is contingent on the tension between the real and the fantastic, on one’s ability to literally *fantasize* one’s way out of oppressive conditions and to correct a sense of social injustice. Harry’s life before Hogwarts is unfair because he is neglected and abused by his relatives, but more importantly, we discover, because he belongs to a superior status. The notion of status that haunts the British class system finds no easy analogy in the United States. In his discussion of Jane Austen, Paul Delany encourages us to consider this axis of class and status within British literature. Certainly, social standing in the Harry Potter series is irreducible to the Marxist concept of class, and constantly informed by what the German sociologist Max Weber has termed “status.” Harry’s status is contingent on both his fortune and his heredity; he is entitled to his heroic position by virtue of his parentage, before he proves himself worthy. “Status groups form cultures of stability, exclusion, and distinction,” Delany reminds us, “and place great value on sheer length of tenure.”³⁹ Thus, Harry and Ron become fast friends, even though the Weasleys are not as flashy as the Malfoys. While Ron’s family might indeed be poor, they are also “pure blood” – in other words, they contain no Muggle blood – and enjoy a strong legacy and reputation within Hogwarts that is easily on par with the Malfoys, for instance. Draco relentlessly harasses Ron, yet we also know that the Weasleys “were clearly one of those old wizarding families the pale boy [Draco] in Diagon Alley had talked

³⁹ Paul Delany, “‘A Sort of Notch in the Donwell Estate’: Intersections of Status and Class in Emma,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12 (2000): 534.

about" (*PS* 75). This is not to say that class does not exist within the text, but rather that it must always be read in relation to status. For instance, Harry and Ron befriend Hermione, the daughter of two middle-class dentists, despite her lowly status as a Muggle. Yet Hermione eventually marries Ron, as the epilogue to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* tells us, a move that potentially detracts from the class critique of the first text by adhering to the traditional constraints of the British novel. The complex relationship between class and status in the text is peculiar to British culture and would be indecipherable to the average American.

One of the difficulties of Americanizing the text is that the British class system, always informed by status, simply does not translate into an American context. A perfect example of this impasse lies in the way the two different editions represent the British educational system. Even in American private schools, the British house system is a foreign concept. At Hogwarts, house affiliation is hereditary, and the different houses take on almost evolutionary quality as they are set apart by different traits into an implicit hierarchy; no one, for instance, is particularly vying to be placed into the congenial Hufflepuff. Yet even in its representation of the educational system of the Muggles, *The Sorcerer's Stone* falls short. Harry explains towards the beginning of the novel that Dudley will attend his uncle's *alma mater*, "Smeltings," the following year. "Harry, by contrast, is stuck at "the local comprehensive" (*PS* 28). In the American edition, "Smeltings" is dropped, and we are simply told that Dudley "had been accepted Uncle Vernon's old private school" whereas Harry would enroll at "Stonewall High, the local public school" (*SS* 32). These terms offer rough equivalents for English institutions, but the social distinctions that are invoked by the original terms disappear in the American context. What registers as particularly absurd is Levine's use of the term "public school." To the British reader, or even to an American reader familiar with the British school system, "public school" would invoke a highly particular and politically loaded English educational tradition. Also lost is the fun Rowling seems to be having with the name "Smeltings," which conjures the process of smelting, by which iron is extracted from ore: a reasonable analogy for the education of the thickheaded Dudley. Conversely, we easily recognize how misplaced Harry would be "stonewalled" at a public high school given his status. Hogwarts arguably takes up the model of the English public school and revises it so that suddenly the students who thrive are those who, like Harry and Ron, have faced financial

hardship or bullying. Accordingly, in the House system at Hogwarts, in which the houses regularly compete so that one house's downfall marks another's ascendancy, divisions of class and status are not simply erased at the school but are instead transformed within an elite but meritocratic environment. By altering the types of schools that Dudley and Harry attend, Levine corrupts the very system for which Hogwarts stands.

The rationalization behind the American translation of the text suggests that American English seeks to represent itself as a universally accessible language, one with the authority to impose itself upon other Englishes and yet which operates under a guise of neutrality. A comment by Susan Pearson, then with the American publisher Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, underscores the persistency with which certain American publishers attempt to position themselves linguistically as the norm. Pearson claims, "leaving in Britishisms adds an unnecessary level of confusion and detracts from a story's universality."⁴⁰ My response to this statement would be, "unnecessary" for whom? Pearson clumsily attempts to position American diction as "universa[l]," yet universal in this context actually signals American. This slippage between "American" and "universal" reveals a perhaps subconscious but nevertheless troubling agenda that undergirds American editorial interventions into foreign children's literature, and suggests that there is more to the textual changes than heightening the pleasure of reading. By shrouding Americanization in a discourse of "universality," American marketers treat British English as obscure and anachronistic. Braj Kachru's insight into American English from nearly thirty years ago remains relevant today: those who couch their argument that American English is "slowly becoming today's world language" in the reasoning that it contains an inherent "simplicity and sophistication" fail to account for the more sinister reality that "what actually happens is that language and power work together" and thus "American English is accepted for its power and superiority which America as a nation has acquired."⁴¹ The permeation of American English in "English-using speech communit[ies]"⁴² is a direct effect of American hegemony. Thus, it is no surprise that Whitehead's review

⁴⁰ Susan Pearson quoted in Whitehead "Part 1," 689.

⁴¹ Braj B. Kachru, "American English and Other Englishes," in *Language in the USA*, ed. Charles A. Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 40.

⁴² Kachru, 22.

of transatlantic publishing practices acknowledges the “perception that the cultural accommodations are all one-sided.”⁴³

Whitehead describes how American publishers can be extremely wary about foreign children’s literature and yet, paradoxically, “reviewers and librarians in the U.S. hold publishers to very high standards of accuracy and specificity in the depiction of [various] ethnic groups.” American publishers have even lambasted texts over “details as small as showing the wrong kind of foliage for a particular geographical or historical setting.”⁴⁴ This attention to detail concerning American texts falls flat when it comes to nuanced portrayals of foreign contexts, a fact that can be attributed to American isolationism and its lack of interest in other countries. The “systematic homogenization of American children,” Jack Zipes warns us, is a pervasive problem within American culture more broadly. This homogenization, driven by market forces and cultural conservatism, works to “undermine [children’s] capacity to develop a sense of morality and ethics.”⁴⁵ We live in an era that congratulates itself for its increased tolerance of social difference, and yet the corporatization of children’s literature, as Zipes points out, “thrives on homogenization and convention.”⁴⁶ Global conglomerates own the vast majority of major publishing houses, while the American industry is dominated by the “Big Six” (Random House, Penguin Putnam, HarperCollins, Holtzbrinck, Time Warner, and Simon & Schuster). While Scholastic technically falls outside of this group, its international scope, and its presence as the major publisher of youth literature and educational materials, render it equally corporate. The company, which contains eighteen imprints, including Arthur A. Levine Books, is a household name in North America due to its annual school book fairs. It remains typically corporate in its opaque refusal to account for both how and when Levine bought the rights to *The Philosopher’s Stone* (though we know he purchased it for USD \$105,000), as well as the decisions behind their visual marketing of the text.⁴⁷ As Diana Patterson suggests, Scholastic Americanized the image of Harry Potter on the book cover, in which he dons a Superman cap and jeans, because “the idea of

⁴³ Whitehead, “‘This is Not What I Wrote!’-Part II,” 33.

⁴⁴ Whitehead, “‘This is Not What I Wrote!’- Part I,” 692.

⁴⁵ Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

⁴⁶ Zipes, 48.

⁴⁷ Diana Patterson, “J.K. Rowling and Harry Potter: Publishing, But Not As We Know It,” *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society* 1 (2006): 11-19.

children wearing robes, clearly medieval in concept, would not help mitigate the debt of nearly \$100,000.” What’s worse, since Warner Brothers purchased the image rights in 1998, the Americanized image is the one that has spread globally.⁴⁸

Interestingly, Scholastic was less heavy-handed in its translation of later volumes of the Harry Potter series, for reasons that are unclear. Of the seven texts in the series, *The Philosopher’s Stone* is the only one whose title was changed. While Scholastic continued to Americanize the six ensuing novels, the editorial process remained erratic. A more comprehensive study of the evolution of Levine’s editorial practices over the course of the Harry Potter series might take up the effects of the increasing popularity of the texts on transatlantic publishing practices. For instance, *The New York Times* created a bestseller list for children’s literature in 2000 after *The Sorcerer’s Stone* had enjoyed over a year at the top of its fiction list. This move signaled a new milestone in the booming business that the genre has enjoyed since it became increasingly corporatized in the second half of the twentieth century. Scholastic’s editorial approach to *The Sorcerer’s Stone* appears consistent with the contemporary practices that Whitehead delineates. Still, is difficult to conceive of highbrow, canonical texts succumbing to Americanization. Gleick jests, “would we sit back and let publishers rewrite Charles Dickens or Shakespeare?”⁴⁹ His comment highlights the role of both genre and audience in the translation of *The Philosopher’s Stone*. The fact that children’s literature is often heavily edited suggests that editors are more concerned with content than they are with form. Children are also less equipped to understand the effects of translation on their readings of the text, if they are even aware that the text has been edited. Intralingual translation depends on synonymy, yet as Roman Jakobson articulates, “synonymy, as a rule, is not complete equivalence.”⁵⁰ Scholastic’s decision to apply liberal changes to *The Sorcerer’s Stone* assumes that children will be unfazed by its awkward stabs at replacing a Britishism with its inexact American equivalent. Few American children would be able to articulate the effects of these changes, particularly if they have been sheltered from cultural and linguistic pluralism. While children may indeed be less opinionated about linguistic standards

⁴⁸ Patterson, 13–15.

⁴⁹ Gleick, “Harry Potter, Minus A Certain Flavour.”

⁵⁰ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 261.

than adults, they also possess less developed vocabularies. In fact, they are very much in the process of developing their vocabularies, which is likely why American editors are invested in the national flavour of the linguistic economy of any text that falls into the hands of children within their society. The vast majority of the British editors that Whitehead interviews strongly perceive transatlantic “cultural accommodations” to be “all one-sided.”⁵¹ Authors in Britain meet with increasing “pressure to conform to the needs of the mighty U.S. market” while American writers enjoy a privileged position within the United States, whose publishing industry, in terms of children’s literature, is largely self-sustaining.⁵² American children may lose out on the riveting sense of adventure that foreign texts supply by nature of their foreignness, but the publishing world prioritizes marketplace concerns over pedagogical ones and in the case of foreign children’s books, it seems to have a clear sense of which products will sell and which will fail to do so.

It ultimately proves difficult to undertake a comprehensive analysis of American editorial practices in relation to Harry Potter given Levine’s evasiveness regarding his editorial process. An examination of how *The Philosopher’s Stone* and *The Sorcerer’s Stone* function in relationship to one another reveals the discursive importance of vocabulary and orthography, and the cultural and pedagogical implications of translation. Children’s literature in America is familiarized. Even when a text displays cultural differences, familiarity remains in the sense that those cultural differences tend to be distinctly American. Perhaps most troubling about Levine’s appropriation of *The Philosopher’s Stone* is the ambiguity surrounding his understanding of the fact that “language and culture” are “most intimately (and obviously) interrelated on the levels of semantics.”⁵³ On the one hand, the erratic linguistic changes seem to convey a flippant disregard for the cultural function of language, yet on the other, they might actually signal a crafty exploitation of the relationship of language and culture. Through language, *The Sorcerer’s Stone* manages to re-signify the social landscape of the text so that it is hybrid and fantastical at best, but nevertheless divorced from its Britishness. While the text might still feel authentically English to

⁵¹ Whitehead, “‘This Is NOT What I Wrote!’-Part II,” 33.

⁵² Whitehead, 31.

⁵³ Juliane House, “Universality Versus Cultural Specificity in Translation,” *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, ed. Alessandra Riccardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95.

the foreign reader, there is a perverse irony to the fact that certain Americanisms in *The Sorcerer's Stone* would render bits of the text illegible to British children, despite the fact that the American edition maintains a British setting. If the Harry Potter text cannot resist editorial intervention despite its widespread popularity, then one shudders to think about the vulnerability of more obscure texts by lesser-known authors to Americanization.

This conflict over translation ultimately boils down to a tension between “cultural specificity” and “cultural universalism.”⁵⁴ The problem with the premise that *The Philosopher's Stone* is a text that should be universally accessible is that it is text that is highly culturally specific despite the fact that it is a fantasy, or perhaps *because* it is a fantasy. Fantasy allows the author to critically examine her own culture in a socially acceptable realm. This is not to say that American children cannot imaginatively participate in the world of the text. Rather, engagement with the text should ideally lead young readers of all nationalities to reflect upon their own subject positions and to stretch the limits of their own experiences through language. Ironically, it is through engagement with varieties of English that English-speaking American children could most poignantly realize their own American-ness. And if the discomfort of American editors with this arrangement is the way in which British texts situate American culture as the Other rather as the norm, than that is all the more reason why those British texts should remain intact. What *The Philosopher's Stone* ultimately suggests is that self-reflection on the particularity of one's own experience inevitably results in a greater understanding of one's interconnectedness with the whole of humanity. The editors at Scholastic might want to consider this schema, and to leave well enough alone.

SOMMAIRE

Les romans d'Harry Potter de l'auteur britannique J.K. Rowling, lesquels ont connu un retentissant succès, ont été traduits en plusieurs langues, notamment l'anglo-américain. En mettant l'accent sur le premier roman largement diffusé, *The Philosopher's Stone*, réédité aux États-Unis sous le titre *The Sorcerer's Stone* par la firme Arthur A. Levine, cet article veut démontrer que la version américaine

⁵⁴ House, 107.

gomme de façon problématique certaines spécificités culturelles du *Philosopher's Stone* en substituant les américanismes aux expressions britanniques. Ces changements linguistiques révèlent la prépondérance généralisée et croissante des deux conglomerats américain et anglais dans le domaine de l'édition et isolent de son contexte le contenu national du texte original en minimisant en quelque sorte la culture britannique au profit de l'américaine. *The Sorcerer's Stone* confirme la troublante inconséquence d'un jeune lectorat américain présumément apte à saisir dans leurs nuances relatives des néologismes propres à la littérature fantastique, mais qui, en revanche, se montre paradoxalement incapable de décoder la langue vernaculaire parlée par les Britanniques. Étant donné que l'anglais devient de plus en plus normalisé, il incombe de considérer la valeur littéraire des dialectes et autres régionalismes de cette langue afin d'assurer le pluralisme linguistique et culturel. Les romans d'Harry Potter soulèvent des questions fascinantes sur les pratiques contemporaines se rapportant à la littérature de jeunesse de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique et le rôle de la traduction qui se fait à l'intérieur d'une même langue à la merci de l'influence américaine.