

Dissertation- How the success of the Harry Potter films affected the style of young adult novels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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## **Abstract**

The success of Harry Potter meant that the serialization and style of how the young adult novel was written had to change. Young adult novels were becoming the benchmark for film studios to create family entertainment that could reach out to large audience and create more money for themselves, whilst also influencing the way in which the original source material would be written. Looking at how novels were written before Harry Potter, after and during it appears that authors were influenced by this success that Harry Potter had both in terms of the novel and the film adaptations. Both the authors of these Young adult novels and the film studios who produced the film adaptation changed their approaches after this success of Harry Potter.

## Introduction

Following the release of the *Harry Potter* franchise films in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, both cinema and novel form changed when targeting young adult audiences. The changes to both of these forms of entertainment are varied, yet are also influenced by one another. The success of the *Harry Potter* films lead many distribution companies in Hollywood to believe that there was a real target audience in young adults and that transforming already successful novels into films was a guaranteed success. In doing so this also lead many authors to write books in a form that could be easily transferable to cinema.

In 2001, the first *Harry Potter* film was released to a large welcome. The book was already a huge success, so adapting it into a film seemed like an obvious idea, however at the time it was seen as a massive risk. It would however symbolise a time of change in cinema as more and more novel series were being shown on screen in film form. *Harry Potter* coincided with the release of the first *Lord of The Rings* (2001) film, which would go on to be a successful trilogy and reinvent the books for a contemporary audience. The first *Harry Potter* film (2001) was released only a few years after the book was released and this can be seen as either a reaction by Hollywood to the success and popularity of the book, or it could be seen as a reaction to the news of a *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson 2001-3) being discussed at the time.

One of the key changes cinema made to the way in which the novel was published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was through its serialisation. Novels such as *Harry Potter* (1997) and the *Twilight* series (2005-8) were novels that were written originally to accommodate just readers. However, as time went by and their success grew, it became a more adaptable piece, one that could be made into a more profitable media, this media being cinema. Later *Harry Potter* books were written by JK Rowling with the intention of the stories being transferred to the screen and this like *Twilight* meant that the novels style was affected and that the writers were restrained in what they could and could not write depending on the preference of the distribution companies.

Following on from the trend that *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* set for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was apparent that the young adult fiction genre of novels was becoming a successful proposition for film distribution companies as they were easy to invest in, and easy to sell on the market to young audiences as a lot of the audiences already knew what they were going to the cinema to watch and already had strong bonds with the characters, meaning that the possibility of making these films into multiple film series was possible and profitable. However, it appeared that one of the earliest examples of this young adult novel being turned to film was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and would soon be the official trend setter for

this type of genre to rise. In 1973 the novel *I Know What you did Last Summer* by Lois Duncan was released and would later be transformed into a horror film in 1997. It was also one of the earliest examples of this genre of young adult novels turning over a massive profit and therefore led to other novels being transformed too. Post *Harry Potter* examples are more contemporary in the sense that they do not focus on the horror aspect which made *I Know What you did Last Summer* so successful for its time, it instead approaches the more childlike themes that *Harry Potter* possesses in its novels but also has the darker tones that respects the novel still. Examples of this in recent years are the film and book series like *Divergent* (2011) and the *Hunger Games* (2008-10). 'The film recombines Young Adult literary tropes with film conventions including those of science fiction. *Divergent* and other Young Adult dystopian films modify the potential for social critique associated with canonic dystopian fiction.' (Tedman 1).

## **Harry Potter Novel serialisation**

Following the release of the first four *Harry Potter* books (*Philosophers Stone* (1997), *Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) and *the Goblet of Fire* (2000)) the first films were released, and due to the success not only of the books but also the massive money made by the films, JK Rowling now wrote another book called *Order of the Phoenix* (2003) and so began the production of *Harry Potter* novels with the intention in the back of her mind that these novels would be made into films. With this thought of film adaptations in her mind this would surely have influenced her style when writing her novels compared to the first four novels that she had written. 'Now comes *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the leanest of the *Potter* movies, compressed from the longest of the books. Gone are subplots and Quidditch matches that only Rowling obsessives will miss, but gone as well are the details that might have made this outing more than a breakneck race to the finish line.' (Douthat 49).

First example of how the books were perhaps more influenced by the release of the films than the films being influenced by the books was the length of which the books became. The *Harry Potter* books had progressively grown in size in terms of page count after every release. However none jumped quite as much as the *Order of the Phoenix* (2003) compared to *Goblet of Fire* (2000). As *Order of the Phoenix* (2003) was the first novel released since the first film adaptation, it is possible to analyze why the size of the books increased. One possibility is that the age of the reader was increasing with the books, so if you started reading them at a young age you were now old enough to tackle novels of a longer length. However this would only be valid for a small number of the population and therefore would not be ideal for a franchise that was looking to make as much money as possible. The most likely reason for this increase in novel size is perhaps that the novels were looking to branch to an older audience as the films had opened the eyes to the public of just what potential the *Harry Potter* franchise had not only for kids but for adults as well. As well as this it could also be a conscious choice by JK Rowling to include a more descriptive storyline and therefore need to increase the page count of her novel in order to demonstrate that the novel has been unchanged despite the success of the books and that the novels are still descriptive in their own way and have not been influenced by the films' successes.

One major and obvious point to acknowledge with the *Harry Potter* books and the films is something that's quite common in many young adult novel film adaptations. That is the splitting of one book into two parts in order to release two films and therefore make more money. The reason for making the film into two parts and not the novel are probably to do with the amount of money each of the industries make compared to one another as well as the obvious authenticity that an audience as readers get with a book compared to a

film, if a book was in two parts question marks would be raised as to the authenticity of the story and the influence that the novel has suffered from due to the success of the movies. Other examples of film production companies following this method post the Harry Potter movies are in series such as the *Twilight* saga where the episode of the franchise *Breaking Dawn* was transformed into two parts for its film adaptation release. Another glaring example which was perhaps the most influenced by this success that *Harry Potter* films had, was *The Hobbit* film adaptations (2012-14). *Lord of the Rings* was adapted in three parts similar to the books and how they were structured and the trilogy was given much praise because of this, however this was before the success of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* itself had become so implemented in production companies' minds that it had not yet fully influenced the industry. However *The Hobbit* adaptations were made into what many believe was an unnecessary trilogy, *The Hobbit* was a short novel by all accounts and was mainly aimed at a young adult audience, however director Peter Jackson believed that the films should be split into three parts, which of course the production companies were keen to do likewise as it would make them more money if the success of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* was anything to go by. They did make more money off splitting the film into three parts than if they had just released one movie however the critical responses to the films were a lot lower than that of *Lord of the Rings* which remained true to the primary source that it was based on, whilst *The Hobbit* had many extra scenes that were not even mentioned in the book, however some critics in fact support this approach taken by the film as it expands on what was missed in the original *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy as the adaptation missed parts from those books that were too detailed to fit into three feature films 'When people complain about the nearly three-hour length of the first installment of "The Hobbit" film trilogy because the source book is a slim 300 pages, they're forgetting that much of the story isn't from "The Hobbit" itself -- but expanded from the appendices to "The Lord of the Rings."' (Vineyard 1). The reason why *The Hobbit* was seen as a more shocking form of production greed was due to the fact that the book was written nearly a hundred years prior to the film's release and to change such primary material in order to milk as much money out of it as possible makes the *Hobbit* film adaptations more difficult to understand than those of the *Twilight* books which were perhaps written with a film adaptation in mind like the latter *Harry Potter* books, including *Deathly Hallows* (2009) which was also split into two parts to create more money for the production companies. This new found way of creating money for production companies is seen by many as just greed and is damaging the sanctity of the novels the films are based on and creating a sense that the novel form has changed since the success of *Harry Potter* due to them being written with making a film and therefore more money in mind rather than writing a story that is from the heart and is not messed with in order to spread to a wider audience and make more profit.

When discussing the first *Harry Potter* film adaptation (Columbus 2001), 'The attention to include 'everything' in the film adaptation of the book is analysed to show how this ultimately throws what is 'left' out into even sharper relief. Extraordinarily, what is left out is the cinematic dimensions of the novel- most essentially, the novel's appropriation of Star Wars, which has been argued to be a defining text in contemporary popular cinema.' (Cartmell 37) is it perhaps coincidence that the *Harry Potter* films seem to increase in critical

acclaim as the series progresses, it could even be down to the child actors maturing into better ones. However it seems that the films do less of what Cartmell discusses as the series progresses and instead add in aspects of the *Harry Potter* story that are not therefore mentioned in the novels to increase its stature as a cinematic piece rather than a film adapted from a novel. There has been plenty of examples throughout cinema to suggest that filmmakers are encouraged to journey from the literary material in order to make the film more suitable for cinema goers. One prime example is the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* whereas mentioned before missed a lot of the novel out in order to make the film a more well-rounded piece of cinema, and therefore adding these extra sections into *The Hobbit* meant that critically *The Hobbit* became a weaker trilogy on the whole. Despite the unwelcomed criticism of the first few films of *Harry Potter* it did not change the way studios would adapt books to films in Young Adult genre, as the earlier *Potter* films attracted the fans more so than the wider audience, and this was something that studios still found to be important, so Young Adult film adaptations still remain very close to the primary source in order to draw in the fans and keep them happy. 'Film reviewers today are largely unconcerned as to whether a film adaptation is 'faithful' to its literary source, in the sense of attention to detail and inclusiveness. Rather than what is left out, more attention is cast on what is added, it is the additions, not the deletions to the source that are largely responsible for an adaptations box office and critical success'. (Cartmell 39)

'While the Harry Potter novels are full of references to books and reading, they sculpturally adhere to the rules of classical Hollywood.' (Whelehan 41)

### **Novel post Harry Potter and Philosophers Stone adaptation**

The novel to film adaptations that have followed the success of *Harry Potter* have all fallen into the same category as films that aim to demonstrate every detail it possibly can in a feature length film to credit the novel. These film adaptations in modern cinema try and convey all that is good about the book and try to stay as true to the plot and the storyline as possible and very rarely make changes with any character or remove or add characters to the film adaptation. However sometimes the film tries to remain too close to the text in the novel and ends up naturally distancing itself and therefore is seen as a failure by some of the audience who expected a much closer adapted version of the film in accordance to the novel 'Discussion of the First Harry Potter adaptation, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's (Philosopher's) Stone (2001), as an adaptation which paradoxically undermines itself by aiming at a faithful replication of the source text' (Aragay 20). For the films which have been converted from young adult novels distributed after the success of *Harry Potter* they remain very true to the source material in order to compliment the readers who travel to the cinema to watch their favorite novels being adapted to the screen. Whilst however trying to convey to those who have not read the book how the plot and storyline ensues to the audience who may not have either read the book or even heard of it. This approach taken in the first *Harry Potter* (2001) adaptation is also similar in the approach taken by the film studio that adapted the first *Twilight* film, 'The *Twilight* films are exceptionally literary in the sense that they prize the spoken or written word over the visual effect. The first person narration that is such a distinctive feature of the novels is retained in the first two films in the form of Bella's voiceover or email, despite films typical avoidance of first person visual narration.' (Morey 11) This was perhaps down to the success of the first *Harry Potter* film as it encouraged an audience to watch the film because of its promise to stay close to the original source material. As the book of *Twilight* was already a success it was guaranteed to make a lot at the box office in movie form, however keeping the audience interested enough and keeping the fans happy to watch the future film adaptations of the series was down to its competence in bringing to life the literary material in the most respectable form to the novel as possible.

This point is further exemplified by the argument that because the novels are targeted at a younger audience than parents or adults, it means that the audience are more likely to want to reread or watch the same material over again because of their enjoyment of it being much stronger than the enjoyment that adults or older people get from the medium. 'A particular hazard with books like Ms. Meyer's — or like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels — is that younger readers, unlike their more jaded elders, tend to like their stories just so, with as little variation as possible. And as any adult who has ever read



bedtime stories to children understands, when youngsters really go for a story, they'll insist on hearing it again and again, which is why movies aimed at children, tweens and teenagers can have such a huge payoff for producers and distributors. Two words: repeat business.' (Rafferty 2).

For novel to film adaptations before *Harry Potter* it was a lot more acceptable for the filmmakers to adapt almost their own style on the novel, sometimes this would mean changing a character, a personality, or even a whole bulk of the storyline or plot. For example, distancing from Young Adult novels, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) was famously so far away from the original source material written by Stephen King that King himself was unhappy that Kubrick had manipulated his novel to his very own whim. Other novels like *Jurassic Park* (1993) also differed from that of the original material as Spielberg moved away from the original plotline to create a story that was more adaptable for the screen. This approach nowadays after the success of *Harry Potter* and the aim to remain as close to the source material as possible for filmmakers means that novels are perhaps being written in more simple terms and the plot is perhaps written so that it is an easy transition from the page to the screen. At the same time it is also influencing filmmakers who now need to remain close to the source material when creating scenes and as a result, the films may actually be suffering in quality as they try and remain tight to the novel as appose to exploring how the novel faltered and how the film can help change it to make it more critically successful, even if that means angering the fans of the novel and therefore losing money because of it. However in contemporary cinema, particularly since the success of the *Harry Potter* adaptations, it has become a period of serialization and franchising films to make as much money as possible and suffering critical success as a result.

A major change that the *Harry Potter* novels inspired, was the genre of crossover fiction to which the ideas and characters in the plot of the story are from all different stories from history, for example mixing the likes of wizards and magic with the three headed dog in the first novel or in the *Twilight* series where they mix Vampires and Werewolves who otherwise had not interacted in fiction beforehand, especially in a romantic setting. 'Children's fiction undertook a meteoric rise in popularity and critical esteem among adult readers over the decade 1997-2007. JK Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series (1997-2007) is often seen as the catalyst' (Falconer 87) this is in reference to Falconer's own essay on how crossover fiction had become common place in not only Young Adult novels but now adult novels too, and this could be down to the popularity of the films that these novels inspired and has since become a common theme in modern cinema as comic book movies appear to be providing a massive number of characters crossing over from each other's films.

Nowadays cinema is driven by family entertainment, it is an essential genre in the media to make as much profit as possible by targeting a film at as many people as possible. One company that takes advantage of this more than any other and is very successful with it is Disney. Disney have the rights to Marvel and in doing so can continuously make more superhero films to rival the company owned by Warner Brothers, DC comics. Both of these use material that has been published to create film franchises that are almost guaranteed success because they are basing their films on an idea that is already well known to the

audience who wish to see it. This recent rise in Disney purchasing products that are a guaranteed success could actually be influenced by the success its rival Warner Bros. had with the likes of *Harry Potter* just a decade or so before this rise in franchising took place in Disney with the likes of Marvel and more recently *Star Wars*.

### **Pre Noughties novel and film**

In 1973 the novel by Lois Duncan called 'I know what you did last summer' was published and two decades later the film adaptation followed. This was categorized in the genre of Young Adult, but was more of a thriller than that of other Young Adult novels mentioned in this research. Therefore the difference in genres between this and the other works makes the subject of this less valid, however in terms of the process of which the novel is turned into a film and is later given a sequel is relevant to the how the novel form has changed since the adaptations of the *Harry Potter* movies and the success of them along with success of other Young Adult novel-film adaptations after it. Novels such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* and *Divergent* where all written and soon followed up with film adaptations, with *Harry Potter* it was only five years between the release of the first novel and the release of the first film, whilst with *Twilight* it was just three years and *Divergent* was less than three years, meaning that production companies where becoming more desperate to release these Young Adult novel film adaptations as soon as possible as there was a demand for this type

of genre to be released as it was making the most profit. One series of film adaptations that argue this would be *Lord of the Rings* as this was written years before, however the films were released in synch with one another. The release of 'I know what you did last summer' which was both novel and film-wise well before Harry Potter's film releases, is an intriguing angle to look at when analyzing these book to film adaptations, as the film was released more than two whole decades after the novel was published suggesting that film production companies were not as quick to react and release film adaptations, as they were unsure of the success that these films would have due to the success of the book, and *Harry Potter* appeared to be the spring board for these Young Adult fiction novels becoming a more trusted method of making money for these companies. Despite this however the novel was made into a film and that was before the success of Harry Potter despite it taking a while to be adapted, the film would then have a follow up sequel that was not based on a book. The sequels were released post Harry Potter and is another suggestion of the change in approach that film production companies had in that they were willing to create scripts without using the primary sources to make money from films that they could almost guarantee success due to the previous films profits.

It is fair to say that the quality of films produced have also been influenced by this novel serialization that has become more relevant in contemporary cinema. The quality of films produced from novels in contemporary cinema are certainly not as highly regarded as films from past decades. In the list of the 100 greatest films of all time by critics from around the world, very few contemporary films made it into the list due to the lack of quality perhaps of the filmmaking but also the primary source that the film was based upon. However in contemporary cinema, the more successful filmmakers of this generation, such as Quentin Tarantino appear to take the approach of writing the script for their own films and not basing the film off any sort of novel.

In terms of successful films being based off novels, it appears cinema has gone full circle at the box office. This might be in part to the success of the *Harry Potter* film adaptations and the *Lord of the Rings* film adaptations. In the 60s and 70s of cinema, most successful films were based off books, both critically and at the box office. These days however the films seem to be more successful at the box office than critically. In the 60s and early 70s of cinema, the highest grossing films were *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1939) and then *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972) and then *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975), all of which based off successful novels and therefore were seen as guaranteed successes for the film production companies. However with *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) being such a success from an original screenplay written by George Lucas himself and not having any influence on it by novels, it caused a change in cinema. Then there was *E.T* in the 80s and this trend of successful blockbusters stemming from screenplays as appose to novels lasted up to *Titanic's* (Cameron 1999) release based off a screenplay and made it the highest grossing film of all time at that moment. However soon after this film the *Harry Potter* adaptations were released and the success of *Harry Potter's* films collectively made it at one point the highest grossing film franchise of all time and still remains the highest grossing per film. This caused the up rise in Young Adult novels being written and adapted into films and therefore increased cinema's frequency in using primary sources such as novels and now very

commonly comic books in order to guarantee success for the film production companies. So cinema has gone full circle and very rarely do films make it successful unless adapted from an original source and this appears to be down to the influence and success of the *Harry Potter* films in the early noughties.

It is not just the novel adaptations that have been influenced by this serialization of cinema since the success of the *Harry Potter* film franchise. It is family films in general, very rare is a successful family film not then developed into more films from screenplays. Disney are the biggest contemporary culprits of this franchising that takes advantage of a successful model and constantly churns it to make more profit. Whether it be classic Disney films remade or given very late sequels as a guaranteed form of economic success, or the growing company, Pixar. It is easy to see that Disney long with other family based media production companies are really taking advantage of this serialization that *Harry Potter* was so successful at. *Harry Potter* was not the first film franchise of course, but it was the most successful, and it was also a family one and was one of the first family franchises to be a constant success since *Star Wars* (1977-present) and *Toy Story* (1996-present) which had enjoyed success from two films in the 1990s, however these both stem from original screenplays and not novels. Due to this it could be argued that the rise in family films that are based off novels and comics nowadays is due directly to the influence and success of the *Harry Potter* adaptations.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, it is possible to see the link between the ways the Young Adult novel is serialized since the turn of the millennium. Whether or not is all down to the influence of Harry Potter and the success of its adaptations at the box office, it is certainly a debate to be had and not many critics would blame authors for having one eye on a potential film adaptation for their novels after seeing the success Harry Potter had. However in this work it is also clear that it is not just the influence of Harry Potter on these Young Adult novels, but perhaps novels written well before Rowling put pen to paper and even the adaptations of Lord of the Rings could be argued to have held greater significance for future writers who were seeing their novels being adapted to screen.

Overall the influence *Harry Potter* has had, not only on the Young Adult novel form but also the way books are adapted to films, is massive. Film production companies are beginning to find inspiration for film franchises through novels when there was a time that original screenplays were the main source of cinematic material for family films. Films have become serialized in different ways since the turn of the millennium and this is arguably down to the success of the *Harry Potter* novels and the films that followed. Due to the success of these film adaptations more and more authors are writing novels in a similar genre to *Harry Potter* in ways in which the novel can be easily adapted to film release and therefore encourage production companies to take a risk and squeeze as much money out of the idea as possible. As well production companies are now encouraged to base films of original source material such as novels and comics when aiming at a Young Adult audience as it seems to guarantee success in contemporary cinema.

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