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1. Introduction

> I suppose we could go on here to distinguish between the sort of books that give prominence to one half of these opposed pairs [story and discourse], and the sort that favours the other; those where the story is more important than the words and those where the words are more important than the story. [...] I realised some time ago that I belong at the vulgar end of the literary spectrum. (Pullman, 2018: 32)

1   Philip Pullman, author of the acclaimed children's series *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), may comment on the status of his novels with humour, however, one cannot deny that YA and children's literature still suffers from stigmatization (Cart, 2016; Nilsen & Donelson, 2009). Furthermore, this stigmatization may also be more manifest regarding *speculative* YA or children's literature, which englobes fantasy and science-fiction. Narratology researcher Raphael Baroni observes the following:

> *Les images idéalisées d'un lecteur critique, privilégiant un rapport intellectualisé et distancé aux œuvres, et d'un auteur marquant son autonomie par rapport à la dimension marchande de ses créations, nous ont rendus aveugles à la valeur esthétique, mais également aux*

valeurs éthiques et adaptatives de cet arrachement à notre quotidien que nous offrent les récit immersifs et intrigants, trop rapidement repoussés dans les limbes où l'on range d'ordinaire les récits populaires. (2017: 14)[1]

2　Some adult readers may indeed consider themselves *emancipated* from the stories of their childhood, having outgrown fantasy, and reject it; now desiring to read or watch non-fiction exclusively. And yet, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, in spite of much scholarly criticism, has now gathered more than half a *billion* readers,[2] children and adults alike, and introduced millions of children—myself included—to the wonderful act of reading through the power of its *story*.

3　The novels by authors of speculative YA fiction are sometimes considered to lack style, literary value, or *any* kind of value, in the worst cases, because our academic enquiry, while it *is* giving it more and more attention (McGurl, 2009), rarely falls on the storytelling tools and techniques that authors deploy. A student of mine once came to me at the end of the semester and said: "I loved the creative writing class because, for once, at university, I was taught how to write literature instead of being told how I should read it." That comment has remained with me ever since and, as a writer myself and a creative writing teacher, I suggest a change of paradigm and attempt to shed light on knowledge gathered from published writers of fiction, departing from literary theory to enter the realm of *creative writing* theory. While this approach inevitably delves into hermeneutics, my aim is to look at the *stories* from the perspective of the creative mind, on the *other* end of interpretation. This article therefore considers that, beyond symbolism, stylistics and literary effects, the mechanics of storytelling have a lot to offer to us as researchers and to our students endeavouring to further their understanding of language and literature. As Baroni very eloquently observes: "*Savoir démonter l'horloge, c'est devenir, jusqu'à un certain point, maître du temps* [...]" (2017: 22).[3]

4　As Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics*: "Most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life" (2008: 9). Another word for the *structure of the incidents* is of course *plot* and, by extension, since plot is its architecture: *story*. In this article, I argue for the intrinsic *storytelling* value of children's books and YA literature through the scope of narratology and investigate the idea of microcosms within them, defining it as the moving horizon which takes characters as well as readers into different spheres of the narrative world the author has weaved.

5　I will use Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) as my main example but also bestselling speculative works of fiction of the last two decades within the YA genre.

2. Within the realm of fiction

6　The notion of *narrative world*, which I've used in my introduction, perhaps needs to be defined in relation to the commonly used term *diegesis*, which I elect not to use. The reason for that is the possible confusion that *diegesis* can create, as it can mean "the world in which a story happens" as well as the *act* of telling the story (as opposed to *mimesis*, the act of showing the story, the way theatre does, as theorized by Aristotle in his *Poetics*). Narratologist H. Porter Abbot states that: "More recently, diegesis [meaning the reality in which the events of the story take place] has been replaced by **narrative world** or **story-world**, both of which have the advantage of being clearer and unencumbered by another meaning" (2008: 75). When it comes to science-fiction and

fantasy, I would argue that *narrative world* is more fitting to do justice to the depth with which authors explore the rules of the imaginary macrocosms they invent. And, paradoxically, that same depth can be what causes those stories prejudice, as Laurent Bazin explains:

> *Sur le spectre générique d'appréhension des récits en fonction de leur degré de mimétisme, les œuvres affichant une porosité revendiquée avec le réel bénéficient plus volontiers de la légitimité culturelle, là où les fictions proposant des xénoencyclopédies imaginaires sont fréquemment reléguées au rang des paralittératures et autres cultures populaires.* (2019: 4)[4]

7   The term *worldbuilding*, in turn, is often used to describe the architectural elements and the laws of those narrative worlds by scholars and writers alike. In his 2019 storytelling Masterclass, Neil Gaiman—perhaps one of the most versatile contemporary British writers, who has worked on novels, TV scripts, short stories, movies, comic books and graphic novels—suggests the following:

> I think that the joy of worldbuilding in fiction is honestly the joy of getting to play God. [...] Some authors do it a little more invisibly than others. In the same way, as far as I'm concerned, all fiction is fantasy. It is all made up. [...] One thing that is very important for you to know, but not necessarily important for you to tell, is what the rules are. (2019)

8   While Gaiman refers to the *rules* of narrative worlds and speaks further of the wonderful freedom in the act of writing, he and other writers also evoke another set of rules—or rather *principles*—regarding storytelling itself. Of course, rules are not easily reconciled with the act of writing, or even creativity, as they are sometimes perceived as reductive or limiting. However, investigating narratology has led me to believe that, on the contrary, storytelling principles spark ideas and offer freedom to create rather than limitations; the same way that learning the notes on a guitar allows us to create harmonious music. Storytelling, like countless other forms of art, observes principles that one may bend, innovate with, adapt, modernize—but never break entirely.

3. Narratological magnetism and conflict as storytelling principles

9   "Conflict", American playwright Lajos Egri asserts, "is the heartbeat of all writing. [...] Conflict is that titanic atomic energy whereby one explosion creates a chain of explosions" (1972: 193). While Egri speaks about theatre, I would argue that this notion not only applies to literature as well but to *fiction* itself, as a *universal* storytelling principle. My belief is that readers are much less likely to invest their time and interest in a story devoid of conflict. In the same manner, I wonder whether they would empathize and identify with characters who aren't faced with some form of the inevitable adversity that *they* face in their lives. Beyond techniques that a storyteller can use when creating narrative worlds, Gaiman addresses this issue in his masterclass as follows:

> Everything is driven by want, and everything is driven by need, and everything is driven by characters wanting different things, and those different things colliding. And every moment that one character wants something and another character wants something mutually exclusive, and they collide, every time that happens, you have a story. (2019)

10   The word *collide* therefore meets Egri's *conflict* and brings precision to the notion, which is also echoed by James Scott Bell, who focuses on the reader's perspective:

> The reason behind [a reader's interest] is confrontation. Opposition from characters and outside forces brings your story fully to life. If your Lead [character] moves toward his objective without anything in his way, we deprive readers of what they secretly want: worry. Readers want to fret about the Lead, keeping an intense emotional involvement all the way through the novel. (2004: 12)

11   Of course, the concept of narrative conflict—or confrontation—mustn't be reductive, which leads me to question the exclusive use of the longstanding literary term of *antagonist.* Conflict, as an essential component of story, can take many forms and examples of *non-human* sources of conflict can be found in speculative works of fiction, within and *outside* the realm of YA literature and children's literature. To cite but one, in Stephen King's novel *11.22.63* (2011), the main character, Jake Epping, attempts time travel in order to save President Kennedy and change History. And, while the presumed murderer, Harvey Lee Oswald, can be seen as an antagonist and a source of conflict, it is *time* itself that becomes an immaterial enemy in its attempt to resist change and protect its integrity.

12   In her storytelling guide, *Hugo Award* winner Ursula K. Le Guin also nuances this idea:

> Modernist manuals of writing often conflate story with conflict. This reductionism reflects a culture that inflates aggression and competition while cultivating ignorance of other behavioral options. No narrative of any complexity can be built on or reduced to a single element. Conflict is one kind of behavior.
> There are others, equally important in any human life, such as relating, finding, losing, bearing, discovering, parting, changing. Change is the universal aspect of all these sources of story. Story is something moving, something happening, something or somebody changing. (2015: 123)

13   *Change*, as Le Guin explains, is indeed another essential component of story and I would agree that *story* cannot be *reduced* to conflict. However, the different notions or themes that Le Guin evokes—relating, losing, discovering, parting or changing—do entail a power dynamic or a shift and the pain involved in those processes as well as our ability to overcome them and move forward. All in all, they trigger—whether it be internal or external—some form of conflict.

14   One would also be mistaken in interpreting conflict as being only *physical.* In that perspective, Bell's use of the term "opposition" in his 2004 book, *Plot and Structure* (2004: 56), seems more encompassing in order to describe human as well as non-human antagonists *and* internal as well as external sources of conflict. One of the interesting dynamics, that we may know as readers/spectators without necessarily being consciously *aware* of it, is the essential imbalance of power between the main protagonists and the opposition. Bell suggests that, in any story, the opposition must be a superior force compared to the protagonist—or, at the very least, possess the same amount of power. Would we even read Tolkien's epic fantasy if Frodo could defeat Sauron and his armies when the story begins? Would we root for Harry Potter if Rowling's young orphan could vanquish Lord Voldemort right away? What if Katniss Everdeen had enough power to overthrow Panem's Government immediately in Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series? Would the *Odyssey* itself have any storytelling value if Ulysses were on an equal footing with Poseidon and the other Olympian Gods…? As Hitchcock adequately put it: "The more successful the villain, the more successful the picture" (Truffaut, Hitchcock & Scott, 2005: 153). Therefore, beyond any considerations of backstory or psychological depth, part of the villain's success is their ability to be a worthy enough obstacle to the protagonist. Once more, in that same imitative manner, a superior source of opposition in fiction mimics life and its

obstacles we must overcome, contributing to the reader's conscious or unconscious "horizon of expectation" (Jauss, 1978).

15   The notion of conflict in storytelling is also where creative writing theory meets literary theory in the field of narratology. Abbot, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, seems to agree on its universal nature and brings us to our main concern: "If, with its immense rhetorical resources, narrative is an instrument of power, it is often *about* power as well. This is because, in almost every narrative of any interest, there is a conflict in which power is at stake. You might say that **conflict structures narrative**" (Porter Abbott, 2008: 55; my emphasis in bold).

16   What I investigate here is therefore a particular component of story within children's books and YA fiction that integrates with this structuring power of conflict and creates a constantly moving storytelling horizon and the magnetism that holds the story together. First, I find it relevant to rely on Bell's notion of "adhesive" (2004: 87), which he uses as a noun and defines as a polarizing force linking the main protagonists and the opposition and the inability of the protagonists to *withdraw* from the antagonizing relationship with the opposition. Once more, one easily finds relevant examples across genres and media to demonstrate the universality of this principle, which can take many shapes. The principle applies in romance literature, for instance, when the characters' feelings serve as *adhesive*, or narrative magnetism: what prevents the lovers from exiting conflict is their love, unrequited love, obsession or desire for each other. The narrative cohesion of the horror genre also rests on this principle, whether it be the classic works of Gothic fiction such as *Dracula* (Stoker, 1897), popular horror novels like *The Shining* (King, 1977) or modern genre-bending horror movies such as *Get Out* (Peele, 2017). In each of those horror stories, the adhesive solidifies and becomes concrete. It is the closed—or relatively closed—nature of the environment where the characters evolve that guarantees narrative tension and coherence. The reason why the protagonists can't exit the conflict and escape the killer, monster or creature is that they cannot *physically* exit their immediate environment, or, should they be given an opportunity to do so, because a different form of adhesive comes into play—such as the desire to help another character who cannot escape, a desire for vengeance or an obstacle preventing them from escaping completely. The existence of that defined space, whether it be as small as a bedroom or as large as a country, is what guarantees the coherence and cohesion of the story within the narrative world. And it is this metaphorical adhesive made physical that leads me to investigate the notion of *microcosms* within children's books and YA fiction.

4. Investigating conflict, narrative magnetism and the microcosm: a case study of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series

17   Rowling's heptalogy is without a doubt one of the biggest literary successes of the turn of the century and continues to inspire many writers of children's books and YA fiction today, many of whom were readers of the *Harry Potter* series as children or young adults themselves. Rowling's work, which spans over more than four thousand pages, offers a wide array of narratological mechanisms and phenomena and, as such, constitutes a unique narrative unit available for study. "The Potter books single-handedly ushered in a new era of speculative fiction, which became the most important trend of the first

decade of the 21st century", writes Michael Cart in his overview of the genre: *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (2016: 8). Regarding Rowling's series, Cart also adds: "The final three titles are clearly young adult novels. Thus, the changes that *Harry Potter* visited on publishing impacted not only children's books but YA ones, as well" (2016: 118).

18   If we first look at narratological adhesive in a less physical dimension in the series, the principle is minutely elaborated by Rowling as the story unfolds. First, the adhesive comes from the opposition: from Voldemort killing Harry's parents and attempting to kill Harry himself for reasons yet unknown. As he is being targeted by his enemy, Harry —as a young boy—cannot escape the conflict. Rowling then reinforces the principle in book five, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), when she includes a prophecy within the story:

> "THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD APPROACHES... BORN TO THOSE WHO HAVE THRICE DEFIED HIM, BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES... AND THE DARK LORD WILL MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE WILL HAVE POWER THE DARK LORD KNOWS NOT... AND EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER FOR **NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES**... THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD WILL BE BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES..." (851)

19   My emphasis in bold is the core of the adhesive here, since we learn that the prophecy is the reason why Voldemort targeted Harry and his family the night that the story begins in the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). Here, I must elaborate on the character of Voldemort in order to fully understand how the adhesive operates through his characterization and his fear of death.

20   Voldemort's words are a first indication of his beliefs: "'There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!' snarled Voldemort" (*Harry Potter and the Order of The Phoenix*, 2003: 814). The sixth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), then allows Rowling to go in depth into the genesis and the psychological make-up of her villain, through a series of past events which Harry is able to witness through magic. Thus, we learn that, like Harry, Voldemort—then named *Tom Riddle*—is an orphan, whose non-wizard father abandoned him before he was born and whose mother died in childbirth. Rowling then writes a conversation between Dumbledore and the child Voldemort, in which the latter says: "'My mother can't have been magic, or she wouldn't have died'" (*Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, 2005: 275). While this sentence is very short and not elaborated upon, I believe it constitutes the pillar of the character's psychological characterization, which a brief interdisciplinary incursion into cognitive psychology allows me to demonstrate.

21   The notion that interests me in regard to this aspect of characterization is that of *core belief*, developed by Aaron Beck within the frame of cognitive behavioural therapy:

> Beginning in childhood, people develop certain ideas about themselves, other people, and their world. Their most central, or core beliefs, are enduring understandings so fundamental and deep that they often do not articulate them, even to themselves. The person regards these ideas as absolute truths—just the way things "are". (1987: 37)

22   In other words, cognitive behavioural therapy aims at identifying an individual's core beliefs, which are sometimes called *dysfunctional thoughts* as well (Edgmon, 2016; Gautam, Tripathi, Deshmukh & Gaur, 2020). These beliefs can be born of trauma, of

certain specific events or of the most random of conversations and can influence the way that the individual perceives themselves and the world around them.

23 Rowling has admitted during several interviews that she had suffered from clinical depression in the past and she speaks of depression as being characterized for her as "a numbness, a coldness and an inability to believe that you'll feel happy again or that you could feel light-hearted again".[5] I could not ascertain that this particular type of therapy is familiar to the author. However, it seems fair to assume that she both drew from her own experience and is sufficiently aware of human psychology to have imparted that level of depth into her characters. In turn, in the *Harry Potter* series, the creatures she imagined called "dementors" are the embodiment of depression, which she describes with very similar terms:

> "Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. [...] Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself...soul-less and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. [...]" (Rowling, *Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban*, 1999: 187)

24 Back to Rowling's villain, the child Voldemort, who associates magic with being all-powerful and therefore immortal, is the one who deduces that his mother can't have possessed magic because she died. This is a logical assumption (for the character, of course) which leads him to seek immortality and shatter his soul in doing so, as Rowling reveals throughout the series. Voldemort's dysfunctional core belief is none other than: magic and power provide an escape from death.

25 Having explored this idea, the adhesive that Rowling deploys is first made inextricable on the side of the opposition. As Voldemort fears death more than anything, Harry and the prophecy about neither of them being able to live while the other survives makes the boy's death an absolute necessity for the villain. Then, as the series progresses, Rowling further cements this principle on Harry's side, who was until then rather passive in the dynamic:

> "But, sir," said Harry, making valiant efforts not to sound argumentative, "it all comes to the same thing, doesn't it? I've got to try and kill him, or—"
> "Got to?" said Dumbledore. "Of course you've got to! But not because of the prophecy! Because you, yourself, will never rest until you've tried! We both know it! Imagine, please, just for a moment, that you had never heard that prophecy! How would you feel about Voldemort now? Think!"
> Harry watched Dumbledore striding up and down in front of him, and thought. He thought of his mother, his father, and Sirius. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat.
> "**I'd want him finished,**" said Harry quietly. "**And I'd want to do it.**" (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 2005: 511–512; my emphasis in bold)

26 In this passage, Rowling first places the emphasis on the idea of vengeance, which drives Harry's antagonism. Then, in the next and final novel, she writes:

> "[Dumbledore] left me a job."
> "Did he now?" said Aberforth. "Nice job, I hope? Pleasant? Easy? Sort of thing you'd expect an unqualified wizard kid to be able to do without overstretching themselves?"
> Ron gave a rather grim laugh. Hermione was looking strained.
> "I—it's not easy, no," said Harry. "But I've got to—"

"'Got to'? Why 'got to'? He's dead, isn't he?" said Aberforth roughly. "Let it go, boy,
before you follow him! Save yourself!"
"I can't."
"Why not?"
[…]
"I can't leave," said Harry. "I've got a job—"
(*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007: 561–562)

27   Here, Harry has been given the opportunity to flee the conflict and hide from Voldemort. However, the characterization built on courage and determination that Rowling has developed for Harry over the previous six books prevents him from running away. Beyond his desire to exert vengeance on his parents' killer, Harry is now moved by both the desire to protect the people he cares about from Voldemort but also the loyalty he's developed for his late professor and father figure, Albus Dumbledore. Therefore, Harry is no longer passive in the antagonistic relationship, no longer its object but its subject, in the philosophical sense. Rowling has managed to *cement* the adhesive, to *polarize* it from both sides, and it can only be resolved by the ultimate conflict, carrying the story to its climax and its end.

28   However, before developing all the characterization elements that allow her to create adhesive in her narrative, Rowling creates the power dynamics and the coherence of her story via the creation of microcosms. Placing Harry at the epicentre of the story, one can identify the narrative *spheres* or *microcosms* in which he evolves and the way that the author uses conflict at every level to carry the story forward through an always expanding horizon (which is both metaphorical and geographical).

29   The very first microcosm in which Harry appears at the beginning of every novel is his adoptive home: the Dursleys' house, in which the Dursleys themselves represent the opposition. In the first novel, Harry's uncle is the one preventing him from opening the letters informing Harry of his belonging to the magical world. In the second one, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998), Vernon Dursley is once more the opposing force when he adds bars to Harry's bedroom so that he may not escape and return to Hogwarts. In the same manner, in the third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999), the Dursleys refuse to sign the permission form that Harry requires to visit a wizarding village and the negotiations result in Harry losing his temper and entering a conflict with his uncle's sister. The same pattern repeats for books four, five, six and seven when, each time, Harry enters some form of conflict with his adoptive family before leaving the home sphere, transitioning via his train journey into the next, and entering the sphere represented by the wizarding school: Hogwarts.

30   In that second sphere that constitutes the main microcosm—or *world within the world*—in which most events of the first six novels occur, Harry systematically encounters conflict emanating from different sources. But it is worth noting that, at that level, Voldemort—while being the main and most threatening source of opposition—is *not* the most immediate opposing force. Within Hogwarts, Rowling makes sure to create recurring sources of conflict that she can use and reuse throughout the novels. The game of "quidditch", mainly, and the antagonism that it generates within the four houses of Hogwarts, is a recurring narrative tool for conflict throughout the first six novels. The characters of Draco Malfoy and Severus Snape, who both appear in the first book of the series and bear ill feelings towards Harry, are not (for the most part) direct, mortal threats. But the antagonism that Rowling feeds between them and Harry ensures conflict from book one to book seven whenever the characters inevitably

collide within the school. Then, for every book, Rowling introduces a singular force of opposition within Hogwarts, which is always linked to Voldemort, although the latter remains physically exterior to the sphere of Hogwarts until the seventh book (if one ignores his ethereal presence in book one). The different forces of opposition can be summarized succinctly:

- In book one, the opposition is the mysterious character trying to obtain the philosopher's stone, which happens to be a disguised, disincarnate Voldemort.
- In book two, it is the creature hiding in the "Chamber of Secrets" that threatens Harry, a creature indirectly controlled by Voldemort through a magical remnant of his younger self.
- In book three, Rowling uses a red-herring to lure the reader into believing that the threat is Sirius Black, while the real enemy—Peter Pettigrew—has been hiding in plain sight since book one and is revealed to be a Voldemort supporter.
- In book four, the trials of the "Tri-Wizard Tournament" and the challenges that Harry must face in it constitute the opposing force—a tournament he was enrolled in by yet another Voldemort supporter so Harry could be led into a trap resulting in the rebirth of the villain.
- In book five, a shift can be observed. As Voldemort has returned, he becomes a constant threat yet remains outside the sphere of Hogwarts because of Albus Dumbledore's protection over Harry and the school. Rowling therefore deploys two other forms of opposition. Firstly, within Hogwarts, the character of Dolores Umbridge is the embodiment of the intrusion of politics in school affairs. Secondly, within Harry's very *mind*, Voldemort becomes a force that plagues his dreams and manipulates him.
- In book six—which might be the least confrontational of the series—it is Draco Malfoy, who rises to the status of threat because Harry suspects him of planning to help Voldemort from inside Hogwarts. Moreover, the presence of Voldemort is constantly reminded to the reader as Harry explores the past of the antagonist.
- Finally, in the seventh book, the sphere of Hogwarts is left aside until the last seven chapters and Harry travels England seeking to destroy Voldemort's tethers to life. Voldemort and all his followers therefore become the main source of opposition.

31   Here is a tentative visual representation of those microcosms:
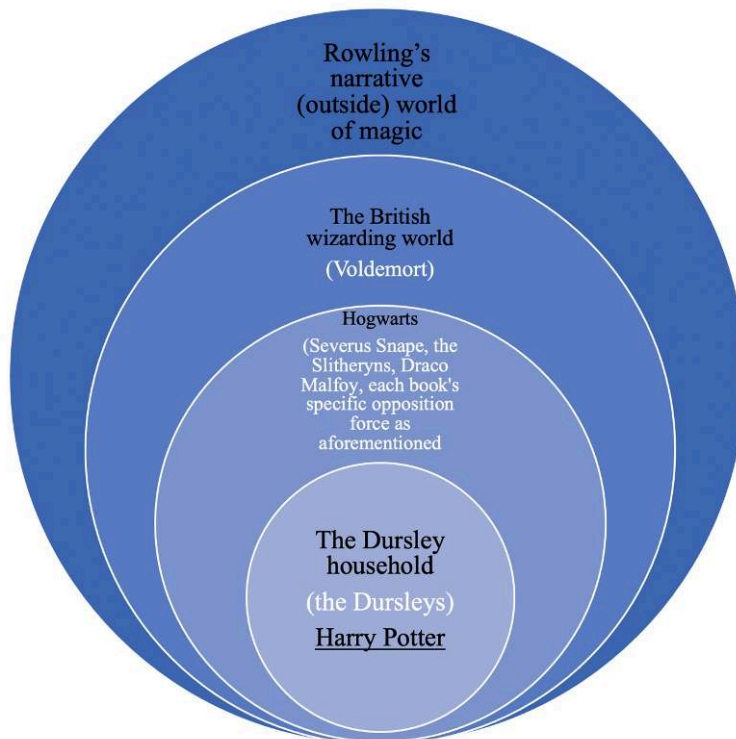
32   In the above diagram—with the character of Harry Potter at its origin—each microcosm is represented as a circle encompassing the smaller ones. As one can observe, each is defined by the physical or geographical area it corresponds to (in black) and contains the sources of conflict that evolve at the level of that microcosm (in white). If we focus on the largest microcosm, which I've entitled "Rowling's narrative (outside) world of magic", it corresponds to the microcosm that the entire series is based on: the imaginary secret presence of magic within a world aiming to mimic the world of the reader—which, in a way, becomes a *macrocosm*. We therefore observe how the horizon of Harry's world expands and contracts as Rowling reveals the mechanics of her narrative world and takes him through its different spheres.

33   If I were to add yet another encompassing circle to this diagram, it would be the imaginary representation of our real world. The second largest circle is entitled "the *British* wizarding world" because, while Britain is where the vast majority of the story takes place, Rowling does venture outside that microcosm throughout the series to enter her wider narrative world. In the fourth book, for instance, Hogwarts receives wizard visitors from Hungary and France, and the Quidditch world cup, which takes place in the first ten chapters, features wizard characters from all over the world. Moreover, Rowling's extension of the Harry Potter narrative world—in the *Fantastic Beasts* movie franchise (Yates, 2016)—is an in-depth journey and a horizon expansion into the largest microcosm above. The author indeed explores the worldbuilding features of her narrative world across space, as the first two movies take place respectively in the United States of America and Paris, France, and across *time*, since the story unfolds in the late 1920s, and ties it to the events of the original *Harry Potter* series.

34   The case of *Fantastic Beasts* is an interesting phenomenon, which I interpret as the writer developing a deeper understanding of a world of her own making. While Rowling doesn't mention any historical names in the *Harry Potter* series, real geographical and

political elements can be found—the city of London (in the first novel), the county of Surrey (in the second novel) or the Prime Minister (in the sixth novel)—creating the illusion for the reader that the story happens in a world that, while imaginary, is similar to our own. Following that logic, one could assume that the historical events of her narrative world are the same as ours and one of the questions arising is: how could two world wars (and more specifically the horrors of WWII) have happened if people can do magic? The absence of any reference to the two world wars in the *Harry Potter* series could be interpreted as Rowling leaving that detail of History aside on purpose, for fear that they be incoherent with her narrative world. However, the *Fantastic Beast* movies, scripted by Rowling, explicitly explore the two world wars and the main character, Newt Scamander, openly says that he was a wizard soldier:

> Newt Scamander:
> You fought in the war?
> Jacob Kowalski:
> Of course I fought in the war. Everyone fought in the war. You didn't fight in the war?
> Newt Scamander:
> I worked mostly with dragons. Ukrainian Ironbellies. Eastern Front.
> (*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, Yates, 2016: 00:48'–00:49')

35 We therefore observe an author breaking the limits of her initial microcosm after exploring her narrative world for more than a decade and entering in a participative relationship with the millions of readers asking questions and writing fanfiction. Rowling expands the horizon of her world further and envisions more complex and far-reaching rules while maintaining the architecture and the coherence of her narrative world. Furthermore, while she perhaps hadn't conceived the reconciliation of historical events with her narrative world *yet* when writing the *Harry Potter* series, the following dialogue from the sixth *Harry Potter* novel—which occurs between England's Prime Minister and the Minister of magic—suggests to me that Rowling *had* considered the issue:

> The Prime Minister gazed hopelessly at the pair of them for a moment, then the words he had fought to suppress all evening burst from him at last.
> "But for heaven's sake — you're *wizards*! You can do *magic*! Surely you can sort out — well — *anything*!"
> Scrimgeour turned slowly on the spot and exchanged an incredulous look with Fudge, who really did manage a smile this time as he said kindly, "The trouble is, the other side can do magic too, Prime Minister." (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 2005: 18)

5. The "worlds within worlds" in bestselling speculative YA fiction

36 Bearing Rowling's story and its mechanics in mind, the observation at the genesis of this article was one I made studying several speculative YA novels published between the year 2000 and 2019—namely, the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth (2011), the *Ember in the Ashes* series by Sabaa Tahir (2015) and Collins's *Hunger Games* series (2008–2010), all *New York Times* bestsellers at the time of publication—which all contain those narrative microcosms.

37 In Tahir's novel, which is part of the plethora of diverse books in YA entering the NYT bestseller list from 2015 onwards (see Cart, 2016), the academy of "Blackcliff"

constitutes the microcosm within the author's narrative world, where the two main characters, Elias and Laia, face adversity. Even before addressing the issue of microcosms, the adhesive I mentioned earlier can be easily observed. In the first book of the series, the main antagonist is Keris Veturia, the cruel Commandant of the military academy, and both main characters are linked to her by the author's careful orchestration. Laia, whose brother was abducted by the authorities, has no choice but to pose as a slave and become the Commandant's servant at the request of the Resistance, with whom she bargains for help to free her brother in exchange for her spying. Elias is none other than the Commandant's son and, as a soldier of the Empire, he is placed under her direct authority. "Blackcliff Academy" therefore becomes the microcosm that neither of the main protagonists can escape—Laia being a slave and Elias a soldier. The author then proceeds to a similar expansion of that horizon when the two characters escape the academy together at the end of the first book and travel her wider narrative world.

38   In the *Hunger Games* series (Collins, 2008–2010), the two microcosms are of course the arena of the games, in which the characters spend most of the first novel, and the wider geographical space that is *Panem*, Collins's post-apocalyptic version of the United States of America. Similarly to what I discussed regarding Rowling's work, Collins charts an expansion of her microcosms and the different sources of conflict within them. In the first book, while the Capitol and its oppressive government are already established as the opposition to Katniss and the other citizens of Panem, the protagonist's most immediate antagonists are the other young "tributes" against whom she's pitted in the mortal games (Cato, Marvel, Glimmer, etc.). The second and third book then take Katniss *outside* the microcosm of the games and President Snow as well as his armies become a more direct source of conflict. Once again, the principle of adhesive can be observed: after her sacrifice in order to protect her sister from certain death in the Hunger Games, Katniss cannot escape her fate and is *bound* to collide with her adversaries if she is to survive.

39   Roth's series, *Divergent* (2011), also constitutes an interesting example, as the author creates very distinct spheres around her character: Tris. After the character's decision to join the "Dauntless" faction—who, in Roth's narrative world, are the members of society in charge of protecting the city—Tris becomes an "initiate" and the first novel mostly features the young woman evolving in the Dauntless underground headquarters, which forms the main microcosm. Within that sphere, the other initiates against whom she competes are the immediate opposition (the characters of Drew, Molly and, most importantly, Peter, who will remain an antagonist throughout the trilogy). If we widen the scope, within the Dauntless, Eric—their young, brutal leader— has direct authority over Tris, even if they rarely interact. Eric represents the link between Tris's immediate opponents and the opposition *external* to the headquarters: the faction of the Erudite. The third microcosm is the city where the first two novels take place, which is revealed to be a post-apocalyptic Chicago. At that level, the Erudite faction and their leader—Jeanine Matthews—are the highest threat, as they're planning a political coup to take control of the city's government. Roth's trilogy therefore also explores her microcosm through her character's journey and expands it further. In the second book, Tris visits the other factions—the Candor and the Amity—to finally exit the city. Lastly, in the third book, as the origin of her post-apocalyptic world is revealed, Roth sends her character into the outside world where she must face the people who secretly control everything happening in Chicago and their leader, David.

Consider the following diagram, designed similarly to the one we explored regarding the *Harry Potter* series:
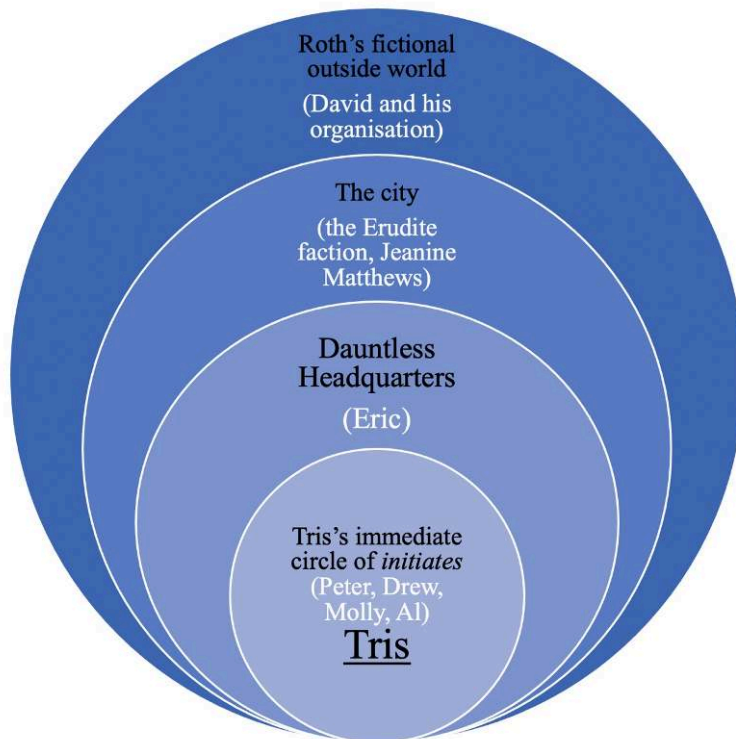
40   Once more, we can observe how each microcosm contains the next and its level of opposition, allowing Roth to reveal the rules of her narrative world gradually as her character journeys through it, pushing the horizon of the story further and further, *and* promising conflict throughout the story.

6. Discussion

41   There are many examples of microcosms in children's books and YA literature that I could mention, such as Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011), *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2014), or *The Darkest Minds* (Bracken, 2018). In each novel, we would find those microcosms and this "Russian doll effect" that articulates different levels of opposition. It is also interesting to venture outside of YA literature while remaining within the realm of speculative fiction and observe a similar phenomenon in novels that have become pillars of the science-fiction genre. In Orwell's *1984* (1949), the microcosm spans over what used to be London, Great Britain, and is now part of "Oceania". And, while Orwell describes succinctly the other "superstates" he creates in his narrative world as being similar totalitarian regimes, the story does not take us outside of Winston's immediate environment. Instead, we explore the ramifications of *Big Brother*'s totalitarian regime. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) explores how a fertility crisis and a religious coup d'état have transformed the United States of America into the theocratic nation of "Gilead". But, apart from rare details about other nations, we do not know how the rest of the author's narrative world is dealing with such a catastrophic situation. In the same manner as Rowling expanding the horizon of her narrative world, *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series (Miller, 2017–) pushes that horizon beyond the scope of the original novel and

tells the audience more about what is happening outside the geographical area of Gilead.

42   My argument is evidently not to point out *fallacies* or *loose ends* in mentioning the absence of those details in Atwood's and Orwell's novels. On the contrary, having observed its mechanics and narratological effects in the *Harry Potter* series and other novels, the presence of microcosms in speculative fiction appears to be an extremely efficient storytelling tool from a creative theory perspective and its benefits are twofold.

43   Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, microcosms—in speculative fiction as well as in fiction in general—allow the writer to create and then *maintain* the narratological magnetism that operates between the main characters and the opposition; what Bell defines as the *adhesive.* Within a clearly defined space, characters who have reasons to enter into conflict are bound to do so and that very conflict will naturally bring rhythm to the story and move it from one stage to the next, allowing its characters to collide and change in the face of adversity as we, readers, do in life.

44   Secondly, microcosms facilitate the process of worldbuilding, which is particularly difficult in science-fiction and fantasy narrative worlds, as they bend and break realism and the laws of nature and physics. As a matter of fact, the smaller the microcosm, the easier it is to design its rules and laws coherently, because a wider geographical—or *geopolitical*—space will multiply the details and the amount of knowledge that a writer must possess to describe a world coherently. If any given writer were to imagine a story where every seventeen-year-old teenager in the world suddenly developed telekinetic powers, it would be easy—or rather *easier*—for that writer, as a native of their own country, to imagine the way an imaginary version of said country would react to such an event; based on its customs, laws, history, social life, school system, etc. Imagining how the same event would be handled by *other* countries whose cultures are entirely foreign to that writer constitutes another challenge entirely. Indeed, it would require detailed knowledge about their culture and their history for the story to hold any kind of coherence. Of course, obtaining that knowledge in our modern *digital* day and age is not at all impossible, but creating a microcosm would be a tremendously effective tool to narrow the amount of coherent details that the author would have to establish.

45   While I have already mentioned Rowling's example with her expansion of the *Harry Potter* narrative world, many others come to mind and allow us to see how writers or screenwriters often *start* in a microcosm which they are later able to expand beyond the original horizon of their story. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) is of course an expansion of the narrative world created in *The Hobbit* (1937), in which one of the founding fathers of fantasy explores, maybe not the *microcosm*, but rather the *macrocosm* he created. Suzanne Collins has recently published a prequel to *The Hunger Games* series, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020), which explores the history of her own narrative world and the microcosm of Panem sixty years prior to the events of the original series, thereby expanding that horizon *backwards* through time. Not unlike popular culture in general, at its core, YA fiction responds to popular demand and echoes with its readers'/audience's desire to explore further the worlds created by writers and screenwriters.

46   From a creative perspective, the French *Oulipians*, such as Raymond Queneau or Georges Perec, choose to see constraint in writing as creative freedom rather than limitation, as the "circus in which they may display their virtuosity" (Benabou,

1983: 40). Following that reasoning, and while it can appear paradoxical, my observation is that the constraints brought by microcosms in stories and the conflict they generate actually create *more* story within them. The rhythm they provoke and sustain allows stories to captivate and, more importantly, to *hold* our attention and the all-so-solicited attention of modern day young readers, as those worlds expand and contract, giving breath to stories and creating horizons that readers crave to reach and go beyond.

47 Earlier in this article, I mentioned the idea of storytelling *principles* and, while microcosms are a narratological *technique* rather than a principle, I believe they draw our attention to aspects of storytelling that *are* principles. The reason why Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and the bestselling YA novels of the last two decades have attracted millions of adult readers is that, no matter how old we are, there is nothing more compelling than a good story. Investigating YA fiction and children's books, which boldly give prominence to storytelling, therefore offers us an opportunity to further our understanding of that experience, of that desire to reach ever-expanding horizons of the imagination that, even as adults, we long to explore.

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NOTES

1. "The idealised representations of a critical reader, preferring an intellectualised and distanced relationship to a work of fiction, and of an author claiming their autonomy in relation to the commercial dimension of their work, have blinded us to the aesthetic value but also to the ethical and adaptative values of this *uprooting* from our everyday life that immersive and intriguing narratives offer. These narratives are all too quickly rebuffed into the limbo that popular narratives are usually relegated to." (My translation from French)
2. <www.wizardingworld.com/news/500-million-harry-potter-books-have-now-been-sold-worldwide>.
3. "Knowing how to take the clock apart is, to a certain extent, to become master of time […]." (My translation from French)
4. "On the generic spectrum of how narratives are considered according to their degree of mimicry, works of fiction displaying a claimed porosity with reality are more likely to benefit from cultural legitimacy, whereas works of fiction offering imaginary xenoencyclopedias are frequently discarded as paraliterature or popular culture." (My translation from French)
5. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtrnccQ6Dgo>.

ABSTRACTS

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* heptalogy (1997–2007), which spans over more than four thousand pages, offers a wide array of narratological mechanisms and phenomena and, as such, constitutes a unique narrative object for the study of storytelling. Its interest also lies in its hybridity, as the series hovers between children's literature and *Young Adult* literature. In this article, I give voice to the knowledge and know-how of published writers of fiction, sometimes departing from literary theory to enter the realm of *creative writing* theory in an interdisciplinary manner. My aim is to look at the *story* from the perspective of the creative mind, operating under the principle that, beyond symbolism, stylistics and literary effects, the mechanics of storytelling in middle-grade and young adult fiction have a lot to offer us, as researchers, and our students endeavouring to further their understanding of language and literature.
Through a hands-on narratological analysis, I argue for the intrinsic storytelling value of Rowling's series through the scope of narratology, focusing on coherence within imaginary narrative worlds, and I investigate the idea of *microcosms*, which not only generate the conflict that constitutes part of the reader's conscious or unconscious horizon of expectations but also shapes the ever-expanding geographical horizon which takes both characters and readers into different spheres of the narrative world the author has weaved.

L'heptalogie *Harry Potter* de J. K. Rowling (1997-2007), qui s'étend sur plus de quatre mille pages, offre un large éventail de mécanismes et de phénomènes narratologiques et, à ce titre, constitue un objet narratif unique pour l'étude de la narration. Son intérêt réside également dans son hybridité, puisque la série oscille entre la littérature jeunesse et la littérature *Young Adult*. Dans cet article, nous donnons la parole aux savoirs et au savoir-faire des auteurs et autrices de fiction

publiés, en nous éloignant parfois de la théorie littéraire pour entrer dans le champ de la théorie de la *création littéraire* de manière interdisciplinaire. Notre objectif est d'examiner l'histoire du point de vue de l'esprit créatif, en partant du principe que, au-delà du symbolisme, de la stylistique et des effets littéraires, les mécanismes de la narration dans les romans pour jeunes adultes ont beaucoup à nous offrir en tant que chercheurs et à offrir à nos étudiants qui s'efforcent d'approfondir leur compréhension de la langue et de la littérature.

Par le biais d'une analyse narratologique pratique, nous défendons la valeur narrative intrinsèque de la saga de Rowling dans le cadre de la narratologie, en nous concentrant sur la cohérence au sein des mondes narratifs imaginaires, et étudions l'idée de microcosmes, qui non seulement génèrent le conflit qui fait partie de l'horizon d'attente conscient ou inconscient des lecteurs et lectrices, mais façonnent également l'horizon géographique en constante expansion qui entraîne les personnages et les lecteurs et lectrices dans différentes sphères du monde narratif que l'autrice a tissé.

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