

Whited, Lana A., Editor. The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

You Say "Jelly," I Say "Jell-O"?

Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language

Philip Nel

Many have criticized the decision by Arthur A. Levine of Scholastic to translate the Harry Potter books from British English into American English. The same month that *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* made its American debut, eleven-year-old Whitaker E. Cohen's letter to the *New Yorker* asserted that children "have large imaginations, and can usually figure out . . . what words mean from their context." When the fourth novel, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, was published, Peter H. Gleick's op-ed piece in the *New York Times* lamented the "devolution from English to 'American' English" and suggested that Scholastic's "Americanized" texts contribute to the "dumb[ing] down" of U.S. society. Later that year, Sukanta Chaudhuri's "Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language," published in the Malaysian newspaper *New Straits Times*, blamed "the global arrogance of the American" for this act of "cultural reappropriation" that, were it done to a "non-privileged" culture (such as Hindi), would be roundly criticized. For his part, Levine has said, "I wasn't trying to, quote, 'Americanize' them. What I was trying to do was translate, which is something different. I wanted to make sure that an American kid reading the book would have the same literary experience that a British kid would have."¹

This essay centers around acts of translation both literal and figurative, and the responses to them—not just the "toe-may-toe, toe-mah-toe" pronunciations suggested by the Ira Gershwin lyric, but the differences in cultural heritage and meaning obscured by editorial revisions. Were it possible to create "the same literary experience" for children from different countries, why would it be desirable? That this question does not occur to Levine reinforces Chaudhuri's point. As Martha Bedford, a self-described

1. Whitaker E. Cohen, "Hands Off Harry!" 16; Peter H. Gleick, "Harry Potter, Minus a Certain Flavour," A25; Sukanta Chaudhuri, "Harry Potter and the Transfiguration of Language," 5; Arthur A. Levine, quoted in Daniel Radosh, "Why American Kids Don't Consider Harry Potter an Insufferable Prig," 56.

"13-year-old English girl," wrote in response to Gleick's piece, "In England, we have American TV shows, American pop groups and American movies, yet the language is not changed to suit us. The spell-checks on our computers come in American English."² In addition to highlighting America's disproportionate influence on global culture and effacing some of the books' Britishness, Scholastic's "translations" result in changes in meaning. Not only is "English muffin" different from "crumpet," but *Sorcerer's Stone* also lacks the reference to alchemy implied by *Philosopher's Stone* in the title of the British edition published by Bloomsbury in 1997. As well as changing the title of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Levine, in collaboration with author J. K. Rowling, translated "sherbet lemon" to "lemon drop," "motorbike" to "motorcycle," "chips" to "fries," "jelly" to "Jell-O," "jacket potato" to "baked potato," "jumper" to "sweater," and "mum" to "mom" (though, at Rowling's insistence, "mum" was retained in later books). While the fourth Harry Potter novel has largely escaped the zeal of American translators, this subtle blurring of cultural distinctions continues in the Scholastic editions of books two and three.

As Bedford's letter indicates, these acts of translation have repercussions beyond the books themselves, highlighting Americans' blithe ignorance of important differences within British society, as well as Britons' anxieties about U.S. representations of themselves. Though no one has remarked on it, the *New York Times* Bestseller List (which has since banished the Potter books to a new "Children's Bestsellers" list) did something curious in its summaries of the first Potter book. When *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* first appeared on the list in December 1998, its description read, "A Scottish boy, neglected by his relatives, finds his fortune attending a school of witchcraft." A month and a half later, "Scottish" had quietly become "British." Though Scotland is indeed a part of Great Britain, one suspects that a Scotsman would notice the switch from "Scottish" to "British."³ Indicative of U.K. concerns, one reason that Steven Spielberg is not directing the planned Harry Potter films hinges upon translation: he planned some Americanization of the books. Rowling disapproved of his plans for the film, and he did not get the job. Both her disapproval and the widely misreported notion that "Spellotape" was translated as "Scotch tape" ("Spellotape" was retained by Scholastic, though "Sellotape" was not) illustrate the uneasiness over the power American companies have to shape the perception of British culture. That is, while all acts of translation can be read as acts of appropriation, the global marketing of Rowling's Potter series makes appropriation

particularly significant. As the series continues to grow in its market value and in its marketing (the second film is due out in November 2002), these issues will grow increasingly important. There are big bucks and cultural identities at stake, and the latter are more likely to get lost in the translation.

Translating British books for American audiences does not begin with Rowling's Potter series, and Scholastic's revisions must be evaluated in this context. As Chaudhuri reminds us, the original American editions of Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* removed "unflattering references to Americans" so that the novel's U.S. "sales might not suffer nor the box office" when Dickens undertook a reading tour of the States. However, the often extreme degree of American editors' revisions to children's literature in particular—as well as the assumptions behind these revisions—make analysis of Scholastic's revisions to Rowling especially significant. As Jane Whitehead points out in the first part of her thorough, two-part study of this subject, "This is NOT what I wrote!": The Americanization of British Children's Books" (1996), "The range of alterations made under the umbrella of Americanization is vast." These changes include: "Titles, setting, character names, . . . culturally specific allusions, . . . in addition to spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and idiom."⁴ Furthermore, the practice of making such alterations is so widespread that it usually passes without comment. For example, there has been little discussion of the fact that Knopf saw fit to publish *Northern Lights*, the first book of British author Philip Pullman's acclaimed *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000), under the title *The Golden Compass*. So, to some extent, the attention paid to Scholastic's translations of Rowling's series tells us more about the popularity of the Potter novels than about Levine's particular acts of translation. The books are, in this sense, a highly public example of a common editorial practice.

That said, though Scholastic's versions of the first three Potter novels are guilty of some degree of cultural imperialism, Levine has done a much more sensitive job than many of his peers. Whitehead, for example, cites Catherine and Laurence Anholt's *Tiddlers*, published in the United States by Candlewick Press as *Toddlers*. The line "I am sad, I am happy, I want Mum to change my nappy" becomes "I am sad, I am sweet, I can stand on my two feet," effecting so complete a change in meaning that the original British version virtually disappears under its heavy-handed American editor. While some American "translations" of British books go so far as to change radically the author's style and meaning, others take a "signposts" approach. "Children everywhere are keenly interested in, and ready to learn about, other children; and the odder, the better. The editor needs only to

2. Martha Bedford, Letter to the Editor, A30.

3. Bestsellers: Hardcover Fiction," December 27, 1998, and February 14, 1999.

4. Chaudhuri, "Transfiguration," 5; Jane Whitehead, "This Is NOT What I Wrote!": The Americanization of British Children's Books," part 1.

help with a few signposts,” observes Grace Hogarth in a 1965 issue of the *Horn Book*.⁵ In general, Levine’s goal seems to have been more of the “signposts” method, striving to locate key words and phrases that might confuse an American child, and then inventing a U.S. “equivalent.” To his credit, Levine actually worked with Rowling on the translation—a practice that not all editors follow. While their collaboration did not create a text irrevocably damaged by Americanization, the significance of Scholastic’s changes extends beyond signposts.

Before examining more fully the deleterious implications of the Scholastic translations, let us look at some of the benefits. In several senses, the Scholastic editions may represent Rowling’s final version of the manuscript and, as such, include changes that ought to be incorporated into future Bloomsbury editions as well. That is, considering that Rowling worked with Levine on the Scholastic editions, the discrepancies between the following scenes amount to something other than “Americanization.” In Bloomsbury’s *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, just after Ron and Harry find themselves blocked from entering platform nine and three quarters, Ron suggests flying the car, an act which, he insists, would not violate any wizarding laws. As he explains, “Even under-age wizards are allowed to use magic if it’s a real emergency, section nineteen or something of the Restriction of Thingy . . .” The next sentence registers Harry’s interest in the idea: “Harry’s feeling of panic turned suddenly to excitement.”⁶ In contrast, Scholastic’s edition inserts a brief debate in between Ron’s passionately vague justification and Harry’s excitement:

“But your Mum and Dad . . .” said Harry, pushing against the barrier again in the vain hope that it would give way. “How will they get home?”

“They don’t need the car!” said Ron impatiently. “They know how to Apparate! You know, just vanish and reappear at home! They only bother with Floo powder and the car because we’re all underage and we’re not allowed to Apparate yet. . . .”

Harry’s feeling of panic turned suddenly to excitement. (*Chamber of Secrets*, S 69)

Harry’s objection reinforces the notion that Harry is more mature and less likely to act on impulse than Ron is, but it also introduces the magical skill of Apparating. In chapter 9 of *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione lectures her fellow students on the impossibility of Apparating into Hogwarts, and *Goblet of Fire* offers a much fuller exploration of the ability to “just vanish and

5. Grace Hogarth, “Transatlantic Editing,” 520.

6. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Bloomsbury edition, 56. Subsequent references to the Harry Potter books will appear in the text with the designation “B” indicating the Bloomsbury or British edition and the designation “S” indicating the Scholastic or U.S. edition.

reappear,” as Ron puts it. If the Scholastic version does represent Rowling’s final version of this scene, then it cleverly anticipates a reader’s objection (how will Ron’s parents get home?) and subtly introduces another dimension of the wizarding world, preparing the reader for its return in future novels.

In the first Potter novel, revising a conversation between Ron and Dean Thomas also enhances the realism in Rowling’s fantasy world, doing so not through foreshadowing but by making more explicit the episteme in which the characters’ experiences are grounded. Earlier in the novel, Ron and his Muggle-raised schoolmate Dean argue over which sport is more exciting, Quidditch or football (“soccer” in the Scholastic edition)—Ron could not see the excitement of “a game with only one ball where no one was allowed to fly” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 107; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 144). A version of this debate emerges after the Slytherin team captain, Marcus Flint, fouls Harry during a Quidditch match (or “game” in Scholastic’s version):

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, “Send him off, ref! Red card!”

“This isn’t football, Dean,” Ron reminded him. “You can’t send people off in Quidditch—and what’s a red card?” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 138)

If the Bloomsbury edition alludes to the differences between Ron’s and Dean’s respective worlds, the Scholastic edition emphasizes these differences more clearly:

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, “Send him off, ref! Red card!”

“What are you talking about, Dean?” said Ron.

“Red card!” said Dean furiously. “In soccer you get shown the red card and you’re out of the game!”

“But this isn’t soccer, Dean,” Ron reminded him. (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 188)

A subtle change, perhaps, but it does make very clear the different life experiences that have shaped Ron and Dean. In Bloomsbury’s version, Ron’s immediate reply—“This isn’t football. You can’t send people off in Quidditch”—leaves open the possibility that Ron already knows that sending a player off the field is a sanction used in a football match. His question “what’s a red card?” could indicate merely a lack of awareness that the red card is the formal means for this sanction. However, in Scholastic’s version, *all* of Dean’s remark catches Ron by surprise. Instead of replying with a reminder that the two sports are governed by different rules, Ron asks, “What are you talking about, Dean?” Only after Dean explains how a red card works does Ron remind Dean of the discrepancy between Quidditch rules and soccer rules. Ironically, the American edition blurs somewhat the cultural specificity of Rowling’s original by changing “football” to “soccer,”

while at the same time making much clearer the specific cultural contrasts between the “Muggle” world and the wizarding one.

Generally and with the exception of once substituting Lupin’s name for Black’s in *Prisoner of Azkaban*,⁷ the Scholastic editions tend to correct errors published in the Bloomsbury editions, a change for which Levine and his fellow editors at Scholastic deserve credit. In the third chapter of Bloomsbury’s *Chamber of Secrets*, “Geoge groaned” (B 32); Scholastic’s *Chamber* fixes the typo, rendering the line as “George groaned” (S 35). Likewise, when Harry and Ron board the Hogwarts Express in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Bloomsbury’s version tells us that “Harry and Mr. Weasley led the way to the end of the train” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 58), which cannot be correct because in the very next sentence they “went back outside to say goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley.” Scholastic’s editors catch the error, replacing “Mr. Weasley” with “Ron,” so that “Harry and Ron” lead the way into the train, and the paragraph makes sense (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, S 72). In the first of the Potter novels, we learn that *A History of Magic* was written by Bathilda Bagshot (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 52; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 66); however, the Bloomsbury edition of *Azkaban* attributes authorship to Adalbert Waffling (B 7), while Scholastic remains consistent, identifying Bagshot as the author (S 1). These may seem like relatively minor details, but Scholastic deserves praise for its more careful editing and for the handsome design of the American editions. In any case, even if such details appear to be minor, readers are paying attention. In an online chat with Arthur Levine at *USA Today*’s web site, one reader actually asked, “In volume 3 page 1, why was the name of the author of History of Magic changed from Adalbert Waffling to Bathilda Bagshot?” Levine replied that Scholastic did, indeed, catch “a typographical error that (apparently) the British editors missed.”⁸

Readers can ask such detailed questions because the Potter books have drawn such a wide following: people are collecting different editions, reading the books many times over, and even publishing books on Rowling herself. There are more than a dozen books about Harry Potter, even though no one had heard of J. K. Rowling before June 1997.⁹ The series’ incredible

7. The passage “‘Then it’s time we offered you some proof,’ said Black. ‘You, boy—give me Peter. Now.’” (266) becomes “‘Then it’s time we offered you some proof,’ said Lupin. ‘You, boy—give me Peter, please. Now.’” in the Scholastic edition (362). The change from “Black” to “Lupin” appears to be an error because Lupin, who is familiar with Ron, addresses him as “Ron,” not “boy.” Black, who does not know Harry’s friend, is much more likely to address Ron impersonally as “boy.” Though Scholastic’s revision softens the command by including “please” before “now,” the line still sounds as if it should be spoken by Black and not Lupin.

8. “‘Harry Potter’: Arthur Levine.”

9. These books include: Sharon Moore’s *We Love Harry Potter!* (1999) and *Harry Potter, You’re the Best: A Tribute from Fans the World Over* (2001), Marc Shapiro’s *J. K.*

popularity renders its version of Britain *the* most widely known representation of that country at this point in history. Just as Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936; film, 1939) has provided people all over the world with an enduring (if inaccurate) image of the American South during and after the Civil War, the Harry Potter novels broadcast a version of late-twentieth-century Britain that has been absorbed by millions. To echo the claims of Karin Westman’s essay (elsewhere in this volume), though these novels are fantasy, the worlds of the Potter books—both magical and Muggle—directly respond to the England of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The cultural weight borne by Rowling’s novels amplifies the importance of their details, especially those details that have been “translated” into American English. Some have suggested that Scholastic’s editions merely provide “a vernacular that represent[s] the British nature of the novels” to make “Harry and Hogwarts seem . . . more realistic to readers in the United States who lack . . . awareness of boarding school and British culture.”¹⁰ However, replacing British vernacular with what Americans think of as British vernacular diminishes the novels’ realism. At times, when reading the Scholastic editions, the phrase “British simulacra”—and not “British vernacular”—more accurately describes the translations. For example, in *Philosopher’s Stone*, during the Christmas holidays, Harry and Ron sit by their common room fire, toasting “bread, crumpets, marshmallows” (146). In *Sorcerer’s Stone*, they sit by the fire, toasting “bread, English muffins, marshmallows” (199).¹¹ While “crumpets” and “English muffins” are related, they are not the same. A similarly inexact substitution occurs when Ron says that he will not “take any rubbish from Malfoy this year” in the British edition of *Azkaban* (B 64), but tells us he will not “take any crap from Malfoy this year” in the American version (S 80). You say “rubbish,” I say “crap”? Hardly. The greater degree of vulgarity in the word “crap” hits the reader with more force than “rubbish” does. Apart from being unnecessary (surely an American child would deduce that “crumpets” are food?) the

Rowling: *The Wizard behind Harry Potter* (2000), Lindsey Fraser’s *Telling Tales: An Interview with J. K. Rowling* (2000, published in America as *Conversations with J. K. Rowling*, 2001), Elizabeth D. Schafer’s *Exploring Harry Potter* (2000), Ben Buchanan’s *My Year with Harry Potter: How I Discovered My Own Magical World* (2001), Richard Abanes’s *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace behind the Magick* (2001), Bill Adler’s *Kids’ Letters to Harry Potter: An Unauthorized Collection* (2001), David Colbert’s *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter* (2001), Allan Zola Kronzek and Elizabeth Kronzek’s *The Sorcerer’s Companion: A Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter* (2001), Sean Smith’s *J. K. Rowling: A Biography* (2001), and my own *J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Novels: A Reader’s Guide* (2001).

10. Schafer, *Exploring Harry Potter*, 214.

11. *Ibid.* Schafer’s claim that “Harry consumes crumpets in both British and American editions” may apply to the second, third, and fourth Potter novels, but it clearly does not apply to the first one.

substitutions of “English muffin” for “crumpet” and “crap” for “rubbish” offer subtle misrepresentations of British language that, over the course of several novels, enact a kind of stealthy vandalism on the source texts.

The distortions evident in translations of British children’s books into American English prove that American definitions of multiculturalism do not include Great Britain. As Whitehead notes in the second part of her article, “Many British authors” whose texts have been heavily revised for an American market “feel that, in spite of lip service to multiculturalism, American children are being overprotected from exposure to different cultures.” She reminds us that reviewers and librarians rightly insist that Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans be represented accurately, preserving the ethnic and cultural specificity of each group. However, this same standard does not apply to the peoples of Britain, a nation as ethnically diverse as—but quite different from—the United States. Chaudhuri correctly points out that where translators of Indian works once would have Anglicized the material, now they would carefully preserve “each artifact of Indian culture.” Yet, she says, “the rules of the game apparently change when the source culture is British and the recipient culture American.” Though Scholastic did try to preserve much of the “British-ness” of the Potter series in the translations of the first three novels, the American publisher nonetheless illustrates the double standard delineated by both Whitehead and Chaudhuri.¹²

The words “pitch” and “field” exemplify the ramifications of this double standard. Significantly and unfortunately, the change from “Quidditch pitch” to “Quidditch field” is one of the few terms altered not only in the first three books but also in *Goblet of Fire*, a novel that otherwise remains largely true to its original version. In addition to providing the consonance of “Quidditch pitch” and the internal rhyme in a phrase such as “the Snitch was glittering way above the pitch,” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 193, S 261), the word “pitch” links the wizards’ sport to a very British sport—cricket, also played upon a pitch. Quidditch clearly refers to sports other than cricket, of course: the fans’ devotion parallels that of English football fans, and Harry himself first compares Quidditch to “basketball on broomsticks” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 124; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 167). However, cricket is clearly one of the sporting referents here. That “cricket pitch” and “Quidditch pitch” share the same number of syllables rhythmically reinforces the connection between the two sports, as do the many jokes about how long Quidditch matches can last. The longest cricket test matches have lasted for more than a week, and Rowling comically exaggerates this length

12. Whitehead, “‘This Is NOT What I Wrote,’” part 2; Chaudhuri, “Transfiguration,” 5.

of time even further. In *Philosopher’s Stone*, Gryffindor captain Oliver Wood tells Harry that Quidditch “can go on for ages,” and that “the record is three months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 125; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 169). The words “Quidditch field” reduce the sense of connection with cricket provided by “Quidditch pitch” and remove the poetry of the latter phrase.

Though “pitch” turns to “field” in all of the Potter books, the first three novels undergo more “translation” than the last, the first undergoing the most of all. As a result, during its transformation to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* loses the most in translation. The almost total disappearance of the word “Mum” is a case in point, illustrating how acts of translation efface cultural specificity. Although Hagrid still says “Mum” in the Scholastic edition, the Weasleys’ and others’ “Mum” changes to “Mom” and Seamus Finnegan’s “Mam” becomes “Mom” as well. This sort of inconsistent substitution distorts the dialect and, in so doing, the cultural differences and similarities that characterize the world of these characters. As a child of Irish descent, Seamus should be allowed to tell American readers, “Me dad’s a Muggle. Mam didn’t tell him she was a witch ’til after they were married” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 93) instead of “Me dad’s a Muggle. Mom didn’t tell him she was a witch ’til after they were married” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 125). Furthermore, the word “Mam” reminds us of the distinction between his style of speech and the styles of Ron, Hagrid, and the rest (all of whom use “Mum”). Compounding the effects of this inconsistency, “Mum” remains “Mum” in the American versions of the second, third, and fourth novels, suggesting to American readers either that Hagrid’s dialect has begun to rub off on the Weasleys or, worse, that linguistic signs of difference do not matter.

But they do. Rowling deploys signs of social and cultural difference both to value their positive qualities *and* to argue against hierarchies based on such differences. As her use of dialect and of names such as “Pavarti Patil” and “Cho Chang” suggest, Rowling is aware that Britain contains a mix of many cultures. However, Rowling investigates the prejudices that develop and create hierarchies of difference through a mixture of fantasy and realism. Her critique of racism and bigotry resides in rifts between witches and Muggles, in Salazar Slytherin’s belief that only children from “Pureblood” wizarding families should be allowed to attend Hogwarts, and in the reaction to Malfoy calling Hermione a “filthy little mudblood” (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 86, S 112). Issues of social and economic class emerge more realistically, class prejudice represented by the Malfoys’ condescending attitude toward the Weasleys and a hilarious parody of conspicuous consumption exemplified by the nouveau riche Dursleys. If in these examples difference becomes a basis for discrimination, in others difference is celebrated—as

in Mr. Weasley's delight in all things Muggle or in the linguistic richness conveyed by the variety of speech patterns the characters use. To blur these differences through Americanization is to diminish both the aesthetic enjoyment and political critiques of the novels.

Lucius Malfoy's disdain for Muggles and for the poor represents an important dimension of Rowling's political message—a message subtly altered (though by no means lost) in Scholastic's translation. When Lucius Malfoy engineers Headmaster Albus Dumbledore's suspension from Hogwarts during a time of crisis, Hagrid protests, "Take him away, an' the Muggle-borns won't stand a chance! There'll be killin's next!" (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 195). Mocking Hagrid, Mr. Malfoy says he is sure that Dumbledore's "successor will manage to prevent any—ah—'killin's'" (B 195). The scene enhances our dislike of Malfoy's snobbery and of his many prejudices. A crucial element in this portrait of Lucius Malfoy is his snide imitation of Hagrid. However, Scholastic's version changes Hagrid's word from "killin's" to "killin'" (*Chamber of Secrets*, S 263), which, in turn, smudges Lucius Malfoy's cruel mimicry of Hagrid: Malfoy says "'killin's'" in the British edition and "*killins*" in the American one. Though the match between British words is exact, the connection between American words is inexact—if he is teasing Hagrid, then Mr. Malfoy should say "*killin*" just as Hagrid did. Translation is, of course, an inexact science, but one wonders why Scholastic felt it necessary to modify the dialect in the first place. It is, after all, *dialect*.

Preservation of the original texts may provide only a subtle emphasis to Rowling's moral themes, but offers a great opportunity for children in the United States to learn about children in Britain. The fourth book in the series is the first to explore this chance for a painless introduction to selected aspects of British life and language. Either because the manuscript arrived too late for Scholastic's editors to edit it thoroughly or because the American publisher has come to realize the vast potential for mistranslating, *Goblet of Fire* arrived in the United States looking more like its British version than any other book so far. Perhaps reflecting a change in approach, Linda Ward Beech's Scholastic Literature Guide for *Goblet of Fire* even makes reference to the differences between British and American English—unlike Scholastic's guides for the first three, which do not. It includes a worksheet titled "Learning English," which explains, "Harry and his friends speak English, but they don't always use the same words Americans do." On the left-hand side of the page, the exercise prints twelve different "British" words, the majority of which *were* translated in Scholastic editions of the first three novels but remained in British English for *Goblet of Fire*; on the right, the sheet lists American terms for each. The instructions advise the student to "Match each word Harry uses to the one(s) you

would say." These words include "mum," "fortnight," "dustbin," "crisps," and "queue" in one column and "mother," "two weeks," "garbage can," "potato chips," and "line" in the other. While the match for "mum" really should be "mom" (as Scholastic itself translated the word in the first Potter novel), the exercise shows the educational possibilities of leaving British children's books untranslated. Referring to American publishers' tendency to translate English books for an American market, author Mary Hoffman asks, "Why shouldn't children know there are other countries where things are done differently?" Though this and the other three Scholastic Literature Guides each include a "vocabulary" list, only this particular guide reminds us that "Like many good writers, J. K. Rowling does not 'write down' to her readers, but expects them to work at comprehending the words she uses."¹³ Were the editors to apply this principle to the act of translation, the first three readers' guides—and the Scholastic editions of the first three Potter books—would be better for it, and American children would have the opportunity to learn more about a culture and language different than their own.

Inasmuch as the very idea of translations may stem from a certain arrogance on the part of American publishers, Americans need exactly this sort of education. As Peter H. Gleick argues, "By protecting our children from an occasional misunderstanding or a trip to the dictionary, we are pretending that other cultures are, or should be, the same as ours. By insisting that everything be Americanized, we dumb down our own society rather than enrich it." The effect of such dumbing down is to give offense (albeit unintentionally). When Stephen Spielberg was entertaining the idea of directing the first Potter film, the British press reported that he planned to change "Hogwarts School" to "Hogwarts High," cast the American actor Haley Joel Osment as the title character, and give Harry a blonde cheerleader girlfriend. One article critical of this idea concluded by satirically imagining an Americanized Harry Potter: "'Howdy,' drawled Harry Potter, and pulled off his Stetson." While these reports of the director's intentions may or may not be true, Rowling did talk to Spielberg and was not pleased with the degree of control he wanted; in the end, Chris Columbus, who pledged fidelity to Rowling's vision and offered to make her executive producer, got the job. As Steve Norris, head of the British Film Commission, puts it, "Harry Potter is something that is weirdly about us. It's culturally British and the thought of it being made anywhere but here sent shudders down everyone's spines. It's like taking *Catcher in the Rye* and setting it

13. Linda Ward Beech, *Scholastic Literature Guide: Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling, 22; Hoffman quoted in Whitehead, "This Is NOT What I Wrote," part 2.

in Liverpool.”¹⁴ Comments such as these exemplify why Americans should develop an awareness of cultures other than their own. It is, apparently, very difficult for some Americans to recognize that what appears to be a minor change (Hogwarts High?) can provoke great offense.

Discussing the Americanized books, Chaudhuri suspects that a “more insidious motive behind the spelling change . . . is the global arrogance of the American.” Multinational capitalism, in which U.S. corporations play a central role, amplify this perceived arrogance. Britons receive plenty of American culture that has not been Anglicized, but the economic imperative of selling to the vast American market gives U.S. publishers the belief that they have license to Americanize British texts. A telling example of such Americanization occurs in the U.S. edition of British writer Jacqueline Wilson’s *Double Act* (1998): eager to get money for a trip to a London audition, Ruby sells her china doll for “\$30,” only to realize that it was worth much more, when her twin sister’s “doll went for \$900.”¹⁵ The publisher’s presentation of these figures in dollars rather than pounds highlights the fact that American dollars motivate these translations. Having invented a monetary system unique to the wizarding world (“Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle”), the Potter books evade any such currency translations (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 58; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 75). However, while Scholastic’s layout, design, and artwork do make the U.S. editions look more appealing than Bloomsbury’s, they also emphasize these books as products, designed for public consumption. While there is no way to extricate a book—much less a cultural phenomenon such as the Harry Potter books—from its status as product, Scholastic tends to emphasize commodity more than Bloomsbury does. In Bloomsbury’s first Harry Potter book, the characters eat “jelly” for dessert, but in Scholastic’s, they eat “Jell-O” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 93; *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 125). The change from “jelly” to “Jell-O” emphasizes the product name over the food itself: “Jell-O” is not just flavored gelatin, but a specific brand of flavored gelatin. Even when the item in question is purely imaginary, Scholastic is more likely to capitalize its name, an alteration which suggests a brand name instead of just a generic, commonplace item. Harry eating a big “stack of cauldron cakes” differs from Harry eating a big “stack of Cauldron Cakes” because the capital letters in the latter emphasize Cauldron Cakes’ status as product (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 63, S 79). Similarly, changing a “grow-your-own-warts kit” (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 150) to a “Grow-Your-Own-Warts kit”

14. Gleick, “Harry Potter, Minus a Certain Flavour”; “Spielberg Plans to Put Harry on the Big Screen”; Adam Sherwin and Grace Bradberry, “Harry Potter Gets the Hollywood Treatment”; Gregg Kilday, “Potter Training,” 47–48; Norris quoted in Gareth McLean, “Hogwarts and All.”

15. Chaudhuri, “Transfiguration,” 5; Jacqueline Wilson, *Double Act*, 166.

(*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 204) makes this novelty item appear more as a branded, marketed novelty item.

Even more than its proclivity for capital letters, Scholastic’s use of fonts expresses a greater emphasis on commerce. In Bloomsbury’s edition of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the card advertising the Firebolt in Quality Quidditch Supplies does not look markedly different from the text surrounding. The words “THE FIREBOLT” appear centered, italicized, in capitals; below them, the description has been indented and italicized, too—but the font’s style and size remain the same (B 43). In contrast, Scholastic’s edition not only indents but also gives “THE FIREBOLT” its own logo and prints the advertisement’s text in sleek, narrow capital letters that look like they may have been generated by a computer (S 51). It looks exactly like a tag one might see in a store. Without changing anything, we could snip this description from the novel, attach it to a broom, and place it in a display window. In addition to advertising the Firebolt, Scholastic’s book jackets all bear Harry Potter’s name in a font that, complete with its lightning-bolt “P,” can only be described as a logo. Indeed, the font has become the logo, appearing in this format on Warner Brothers’ film and even on the British audio cassettes for *Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Goblet of Fire*—notable, because neither the British books nor the first three audio cassettes use Scholastic’s “Harry Potter” logo. (They use the more ordinary block capitals that appear on Bloomsbury’s books.) In Scholastic’s version, “Harry Potter” and “THE FIREBOLT” appear as brand names, corporate logos ready to be transferred onto T-shirts and trading cards.

The fact that marketing motivated Scholastic’s translation calls attention to the type of “branding” described above. And yet if Scholastic’s books are more commercial, they are also more appealing to hold and to read. In addition to Mary GrandPré’s illustrations, David Saylor’s art direction has resulted in a much cleaner layout and design than Bloomsbury’s: the spacing of the text on the page makes Scholastic’s easier on the eyes; its different fonts make news articles look more like actual clippings from the *Daily Prophet* and render personal letters in script intended to suggest the handwriting of the character (Bloomsbury’s editions merely indent and italicize). Indeed, Hagrid’s letter communicating the failure of Buckbeak’s appeal includes smudgy tear-stains to emphasize his grief (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, S 291, B 215). Furthermore, if we are to evaluate these changes in terms of marketing, then it must be noted that Rowling herself agreed to a name change to get the books sold. To appeal to boys who (it was thought) might not want to read a book written by a woman, Bloomsbury encouraged her to use two initials and her surname on *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* instead of her given name, Joanne Rowling. When Bloomsbury asked for a middle initial, Joanne adopted K for Kathleen, her

favorite grandmother's name. As Rowling has said, "I would have let them call me Enid Snodgrass if they published the book."¹⁶

Just as Rowling's agreement to abbreviate her name makes good business sense, one can certainly understand Levine's desire to protect his investment. As he explains, in 1997 he bid one hundred thousand dollars for a new manuscript by an unknown author. "It's a scary thing when you keep bidding and the stakes keep getting higher and higher," he admits. Though his company supported him, paying that much for the first Potter novel was "a great risk. If people believe in you and you flop, then you walk out on the plank and plunge."¹⁷ Since a lot of capital and potentially his own job was riding on the success of what would be retitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it would be surprising if he did not follow the industry practice of "translating" British works into American English. The fault is not so much with Levine himself, who did what he felt he needed to do; rather, it is with the practice itself and with the effect of such decisions. In essence, the issue of translating British English to American English represents just the latest skirmish in the adversarial relationship between art and commerce.

Though capital motivates its changes, Scholastic tends to frame the issue of translation more in terms of audience than of marketing; the failure to distinguish between the two illustrates the fact that "translation" and "marketing" are indistinguishable from a business perspective, but quite different from a reader's perspective. Levine explains 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." Citing the translation of "jumper" to "sweater," Rowling echoes her editor's explanation. She says, "If I'd left that as it is in the British edition, Harry, Ron and Fred would have all been wearing pinafore dresses as far as the American readers are concerned, and I was more than happy to substitute 'sweater' to avoid that confusion!" Rowling then concludes, "The changes really were minimal."¹⁸ Despite Rowling's and Levine's statements to the contrary, it is difficult to accept the idea that these changes were minimal and that they were made merely to make the books comprehensible to children living in the United States. Certainly, marketing seems a more plausible motive for changing even British spellings to American ones because, really, why would this alteration be necessary? Though an American copy editor might change "pyjamas" to "pajamas," "colour" to "color," "grey" to "gray," "realise" to "realize," "apologise" to "apologize," and "Defence Against the Dark

Arts" to "Defense Against the Dark Arts," these spellings could have been retained without confusion. The novel is a British novel, written by a native of Great Britain: she ought to be allowed to spell according to the conventions of British English. These are, after all, very British books. The only American characters in all four novels are "a group of middle-aged American witches" who, in *Goblet of Fire*, sit "gossiping happily beneath a spangled banner stretched between their tents which read: *The Salem Witches' Institute*" (B 76, S 82). It seems only fair that novels largely indifferent to the existence of the United States should retain a language that reflects this sensibility.

Spelling aside, many altered words and phrases could be understood without having been changed. Generally speaking, these items fall into three categories: words explained by their context, words that have a similar meaning in the States, and onomatopoeic words. Of those easily explained by the context in which they occur, Scholastic's translators devote a surprising amount of energy to words associated with bodily functions. In *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry pulls his wand out of the unconscious troll's nose, the wand now "covered in what looked like lumpy grey glue." His response is: "Urgh—troll bogies" (130). The phrase "lumpy grey glue" ("lumpy gray glue" in Scholastic's), the wand's recent removal from a nose, and the similarity between "bogies" and "boogers" combine to convey the idea that "bogies" can only be a British word for "snot" or "boogers." Yet Scholastic persuades Harry to say, "Urgh—troll boogers" instead (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 177). Most American children would love to learn a new word for "booger." Indeed, when Rupert Grint (the actor who plays Ron Weasley in the Potter films) explained that Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans include the flavors "buttered toast, bogie, [and] vomit," "Today Show" co-host Katie Couric was herself quite pleased to learn that "bogie" was "the British way of saying booger."¹⁹ In any case, the British "bogie" is so close to the American term that it is difficult to imagine any resultant confusion.

Working tirelessly to ensure that young American readers do not grow befuddled by British toilets, Scholastic's editors make the following largely unnecessary changes. Just before Harry and Ron meet Moaning Myrtle, Bloomsbury's Hermione explains that this ghost "haunts the girls' toilet on the first floor." The result, she says, is that the toilet has "been out of order all year because [Myrtle] keeps having tantrums and flooding the place." Generally, Hermione avoids this lavatory because "it's awful trying to go to the loo with her wailing at you" (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 101). In the American edition, Hermione explains that Myrtle "haunts one of the toilets in the girls' bathroom" on that floor and tells us that "it's awful trying to

16. Rowling, reading and question-and-answer session at the National Press Club.

17. Arthur A. Levine with Doreen Carvajal, "Why I Paid So Much," C14.

18. Levine quoted in Radosh, "American Kids," 56; Rowling quoted in Fraser, *Telling Tales*, 31.

19. *Behind the Magic of Harry Potter*.

have a pee with her wailing at you" (*Chamber of Secrets*, S 132–33). Though all other text remains the same, any moderately intelligent American child should not need the expressions "go to the loo" and "toilet" translated into "have a pee" and "bathroom." The context makes the meanings adequately clear. Later in *Chamber of Secrets*, the Scholastic editions spend a great deal of time transforming "cubicles" into "stalls" and even the "cistern of the toilet" into the "tank of the toilet" (B 118, 124, 138, 118; S 155, 164, 183, 158). While Professor McGonagall might award Scholastic top marks in transfiguration, such alterations seem rather gratuitous.

If Scholastic's obsessions over "bogies," "toilets," and "the loo" cause a reader to question the editors' sanity, chances are that Britons and Americans will use different words to express this sentiment. Nonetheless, "mad," "barking," and "barking mad" might have remained unchanged in the American editions of the Potter novels because context provides sufficient clues to the words' meanings. After Harry repeats Dumbledore's observation that "to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure," Ron says, "I always said he was off his rocker," while looking "quite impressed at how mad his hero was." Moments later, Ron says "proudly" that "Dumbledore's barking, all right" (*Philosopher's Stone*, 218, 219). Though Scholastic changes "mad" to "crazy" and "barking" to "off his rocker," the original version leaves little confusion about the ideas conveyed (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 302). Throughout the Potter novels, Scholastic seems quite concerned about readers misinterpreting these terms. The U.S. edition of *Prisoner of Azkaban* alone changes "Harry had a mad urge to knock the goblet out of his hands" to "Harry had a crazy urge to knock the goblet out of his hands"; "He's barking mad" to "He's a complete lunatic"; "Are you mad?" to "Are you insane?"; and "I know it sounds mad" to "I know it sounds crazy" (B 118, S 157; B 125, S 167; B 278, S 379; B 298, S 407). Yet, in each case, the context in which the word or phrase occurs leaves no doubt about its intended meaning. Despite Scholastic's claim that it was not trying to "Americanize" the Potter books and Rowling's dismissal of the notion that Scholastic has translated the books into American, it is rather difficult to interpret these changes in any other way.²⁰

The novels' slang offers, perhaps, the best arguments for and against Scholastic's methods of translation. As vocabulary very specific to a culture, slang words might be most apt to confuse American children; yet, as eleven-year-old Whitaker Cohen argues, children can figure out "what words mean from their context. There's no need for imitation slang."²¹ In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Knight Bus conductor Stan Shunpike remarks

20. Fraser, *Telling Tales*, 31.

21. Cohen, "Hands Off Harry!"

that "little 'Arry Potter put paid to You-Know-'Oo," American readers will glean that "put paid" must be near to "routed": the books return to this central incident of Harry's life with such frequency that almost any verb could appear there and we would understand (B 34). However, Scholastic forgoes Stan's colorful colloquialism, giving us instead: "little 'Arry Potter got the better of You-Know-'Oo" (S 39). When debunking the Grim as a foolish superstition, Hermione uses a lively phrase that likewise does not appear in the novel's American edition. Ron tells her, "Grims scare the living daylight out of most wizards," and she wisely replies, "There you are then . . . They see the Grim and die of fright. The Grim's not an omen, it's the cause of death! And Harry's still with us because he's not stupid enough to see one and think, right, well, I'd better pop my clogs then!" (B 85). Given Hermione's argument that gullible wizards would "die of fright," her phrase "pop my clogs" could only mean something close to "die." Not trusting American readers to figure this out for themselves, Scholastic alters the line to "right, well, I'd better kick the bucket then!" (S 110). Even the word "Cracking," which any viewer of Nick Park's popular *Wallace and Gromit* films will recognize instantly, gets replaced. Fred calls Oliver Wood a "Cracking Keeper" in Bloomsbury's edition of *Chamber of Secrets* but a "Spanking Good Keeper" in Scholastic's (B 109, S 144).²² Though some children might find "Spanking Good" more comprehensible than "Cracking," Scholastic's "imitation slang" seems rather needless. All of these examples feel more like American simulations of British slang than the authentic vernacular, closer to "Americanization" than to "translation."

The most gratuitous translations, however, are those for which the British original is as easily understood as the American "equivalent," regardless of the context in which it appears, such as the changes from "motorbike" to "motorcycle," "holidays" to "vacation" (or "break"), "brilliant" to "excellent" (or "fantastic"), "rubbish" to "lousy" (or "crap" or "bad"). For instance, Scholastic appears to believe that Rowling's use of the word "great" to emphasize size or intensity represents a linguistic difference significant enough to warrant alteration. So, recalling a painful childhood memory in the American edition, Ron remembers his brother transforming his teddy bear into a "great big filthy spider" instead of the "dirty great spider" described in the British version (*Chamber of Secrets*, S 155, B 117). Likewise,

22. Another phrase, needlessly translated: Seamus's congratulatory remark, "Good on you, Harry!" becomes "Good for you, Harry!" (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, B 194, S 263). Similarly, near the end of *Chamber of Secrets*, Peeves is "bouncing along the corridor in tearing spirits, laughing his head off," but in Scholastic's he is "bouncing along the corridor in boisterous good spirits, laughing his head off" (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, B 304, S 417). Because each word arrives following "bouncing," "tearing" seems as easily understood as "boisterous good."

Ron calls Hermione's cat a "big stupid furball" in Scholastic's *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but a "stupid great furball" in Bloomsbury's (S 226, B 168). When sandwiched between "dirty" and "spider" or between "stupid" and "furball," the word "great" can only be read as amplifying its peers: Ron clearly does not like the spider, and nor does he admire the "furball." Just as "great" clearly has negative connotations in the preceding phrases, so does "rubbish" in the following ones. There is no need for Harry to worry that he will be "lousy at" his new subjects in Scholastic's edition when he fears that he will be "rubbish at" them in Bloomsbury's edition (*Chamber of Secrets*, S 252, B 187). Similarly, Ron's accusation that Hermione dismisses Divination as "guesswork" only because she does not like being "bad at something" does not have quite the same ring as his claim that she dislikes being "rubbish at something" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, S 111, B 85). Perhaps tacitly acknowledging that even an American child would understand the meaning of the word "rubbish," Scholastic does not change Hermione's retort that their Divination lesson "was absolute rubbish" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B85, S 111). Other similarly needless changes include the following. In *Chamber of Secrets*, "washing-up in the sink" turns into "dishes in the sink" (B 31, S 34). In all of the first three novels, "Brilliant!" becomes "Excellent!" or another substitute word, rendering a line like "You were brilliant, Fawkes" as "You were fantastic, Fawkes" (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 31, S34; B 46, S 53; B 236, S 321). Scholastic also changes "Happy Christmas!" to "Merry Christmas!"; "it looked like it ends up in Hogsmeade" to "it looked like it was heading for Hogsmeade"; and "he'd better skip pudding and escape" to "he'd better skip dessert and escape" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 149, S 201; B 247, S 336; B 25, S 26).

Scholastic may have begun to recognize the superfluity of such alterations, because some words that were translated in earlier books are either not changed or not as consistently changed in later ones. In the first novel, "motorbike" becomes "motorcycle," but the U.S. edition of the third novel retains "motorbike" when Hagrid recalls Sirius Black turning up "on that flyin' motorbike he used to ride" (*Philosopher's Stone*, 16, 17, 19, 24; *Sorcerer's Stone*, 14, 16, 19, 25; *Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 153, S 206). Likewise, though the line "Harry didn't fancy his shepherd's pie" changes to "Harry didn't enjoy his shepherd's pie" in the American *Chamber of Secrets*, the verb "fancy" remains in the line "eat whatever he fancied" from *Prisoner of Azkaban* (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 91, S 119; *Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 42, S 49). And, as has been remarked earlier, *Goblet of Fire* largely abstains from changing British words into American ones.

Of all the unusual alterations to Rowling's British language, the most groundless are changes to onomatopoeic words. The verb "to splutter," for instance, sounds like rapid, confused speech, perhaps punctuated by

droplets of spittle; merely saying the word "splutter" could produce the sensation of spluttering. Inexplicably, Scholastic drops the "l," changing the word to "sputter." "Neville's small splutter of terror" becomes "Neville's small sputter of terror" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 101, S 133). After Harry reads the Kwikspell brochure, Mr. Filch "spluttered" a question at Harry, but "sputtered" this same question in Scholastic's edition (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 98, S 128). Emphasizing the baseless nature of these changes, both "splutter" and "sputter" appear in *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1989) as American words with slightly different meanings. The connotations of "sputter" include an angrier tone and the possibility for flying food particles, both of which "splutter" lacks. Should these changes seem needless, then so will dropping the "r" from "urgh." When Harry, Ron, and Hermione are reading "famous cases of marauding beasts" to help prepare Buckbeak's defense, they momentarily appear to have found something useful, "but the Hippogriff was convicted—urgh, look what they did to it" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 164). Bloomsbury generally capitalizes names of magical creatures where Scholastic does not, but beyond the minor change of "H" to "h" in "Hippogriff," the American edition also substitutes the word "ugh" for the word "urgh" (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, S 222). Both words sound guttural—they are grunts, expressing aversion to the treatment of the Hippogriff (or "hippogriff"). For that matter, both recall the sort of sound effect one might find in a comic book. Translating sound effects is a bit much.

The verb "to scarper" aurally recalls the verbs "to skitter," "to scamper," and (arguably) "to clamber," but means "to flee suddenly, especially without having paid one's bills." To my ears, the verb "scarper" sounds a good deal like the act of "scarpering." Scholastic always substitutes a different word—sometimes, "scamper," sometimes "run"—but never uses "scarper." In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when fleeing Crookshanks, Scabbers "scarpered for the door" in Bloomsbury's version but "scampered for the door" in Scholastic's (B 49, S 60). Later in that same novel, while describing Sirius Black apparently about to attack him, Ron says, "Then I yelled, and he [Black] scarpered," a line which Scholastic changes to "Then I yelled, and he [Black] scampered." A moment later, Ron asks Harry, "Why did he scarper?" in the British edition, but "Why did he run?" in the American (B 200, S 270). As well as losing the onomatopoeia of "scarper," "scamper" loses the shadier connotations of the verb ("especially without having paid one's bills"). Given that Scabbers is in fact Wormtail and that Black appears to be a homicidal villain, the verb "scarper" conveys more of these sinister qualities. By contrast, "scamper" sounds more playful, less dark.

Other delightfully British words that transmogrify into less delightful American ones include "wonky," "bobbles," "treacle-thick," and "grass"

(as a verb). Some “wonky brass scales” become “lopsided brass scales,” and a “revolting old jumper of Dudley’s (brown with orange bobbles)” transforms into a “revolting old sweater of Dudley’s (brown with orange puff balls)” — though the “jumper” is not onomatopoeic, the “bobbles” are (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 48, S 58; *Philosopher’s Stone*, 23, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 24). In his office, Dumbledore sits in a “high-backed chair” which metamorphoses into a “high chair” in America, but the two are not really the same: a “high-backed chair” belongs in an office, but a “high chair” belongs in a kitchen, holding a toddler (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 156, S 208). The Polyjuice Potion is “treacle-thick” in Britain, but “glutinous” in the States, though it is difficult to see how “glutinous” would be easier to understand than “treacle-thick” (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 161, S 215). Suspicious of Tom Riddle’s accusation that Hagrid opened the Chamber of Secrets fifty years ago, Ron asks, “Who asked him to grass on Hagrid, anyway?”; Scholastic changes “grass” to “squeal” (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 185, S 250). These changes can only be considered Americanization, because they lose the novels’ flavor (or flavour) without providing any appreciable help to an American reader.

Many of these changes result in a concurrent loss of poetry, diminishing the liveliness and vividness of Rowling’s original. When Percy’s “lumpy jumper” becomes a “lumpy sweater,” we lose the rhyme and the phrase becomes more ordinary (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 149, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 202). Likewise, the Knight Bus “scattering bushes and bollards, telephone boxes and trees” loses consonance and its poetic rhythms when it becomes a Knight Bus “scattering bushes and wastebaskets, telephone booths and trees” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 35, S 41). The word “bollards” bumps merrily into its neighbor words “bushes” and “boxes,” while the combination of this last word’s soft “x” and “s” sounds meshes smoothly with “trees.” In Scholastic’s edition, however, the word “booths” sends the tongue up to the roof of the mouth, and “wastebaskets,” without that initial “b” but with an extra syllable, doesn’t fit as neatly with its colleagues. Some of the language’s color and vitality move away, as in the change from “off they went, crocodile fashion” to “off they marched,” banishing the visual metaphor (*Chamber of Secrets*, B 198, S 267). And a “packet of crisps” couples a crunchy, hard “ck” in “packet” with the “cr” in crisps, reminding one of the contents of that packet. In contrast, a “bag of chips” not only lacks the British sound of “packet of crisps” but replaces that crisp phrase with a soggy one (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 37, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 44).

Translating words may also result in a loss of puns, as in the changes from “Sellotape” to “Scotch tape” and “dustbins” to “trash cans.” Many have noted that with Scotch tape instead of Sellotape, American readers of Scholastic’s editions will miss the pun on “Spellotape,” which is used to

repair wands. “Dustbin,” however, has not received any comment. Though *Goblet of Fire* leaves the word “dustbin” as is, the first three Potter novels tend to replace “dustbins” with “trash cans.” Hagrid’s hands are the “size of dustbin lids” in the U.K., but the “size of trash can lids” in the U.S. (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 16, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 14). Similarly, moving a brick in the wall “above the dustbin” opens the way into Diagon Alley in Bloomsbury’s editions; this same brick is “above the trash can” in Scholastic’s (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 55, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 71; *Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 42, S 50). “Dustbins” also appear as the abbreviated “bins” in the British editions, but turn into “trash cans” in the American ones, depriving American readers of the pun in Professor Binns’ name (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 32, S 36). That is, giving the name “Binns” to the boring ghost who teaches History of Magic seems a humorous way of implying that his classes are “rubbish.”

Beyond the loss of poetry are shifts in meaning that appear inconsequential, but turn out to be important. The line-by-line textual comparison necessary for a study such as this one highlights Rowling’s careful attention to every nuance of plotting, detail, and language. Sirius Black, the minor character whose motorbike Hagrid rides in the first chapter of the first book, becomes a central character in the third, a fact which may exemplify for most readers Rowling’s careful plotting. However, language helps to create this tightly woven narrative, too. Dumbledore’s affection for “sherbet lemons,” the “Muggle sweet” for which he admits a fondness in *Philosopher’s Stone*, turns out to be the password to his office in *Chamber of Secrets*; so, when Harry urgently needs to reach Dumbledore in *Goblet of Fire*, he tries “sherbet lemon” again as a possible password (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 13, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 10; *Chamber of Secrets*, B 152, S 204; *Goblet of Fire*, B 483, S 557). Yet, in the Scholastic editions of *Philosopher’s Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets*, “sherbet lemon” becomes “lemon drop”: Dumbledore claims “lemon drops” as a favored sweet in *Sorcerer’s Stone*, and “lemon drop” admits Harry to Dumbledore’s office in *Chamber of Secrets* (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 10; *Chamber of Secrets*, S 204). Yet, in Scholastic’s *Goblet of Fire*, “sherbet lemon” remains unchanged, which might confuse the careful reader of the American versions of the novels. As Dumbledore says in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, “the consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, B 311, S 426). His comment aptly describes the perils of such transatlantic translating: in novels as intricately plotted as these, every detail counts, and small changes can turn out to have larger, unforeseen consequences in the larger scope of the narrative.

Similar, likely unintended shifts in the meaning can slyly direct the reader’s sympathies in directions different from the original, British edition. In chapter 20 of Bloomsbury’s *Prisoner of Azkaban*, “Sirius Black” is called “Sirius”

instead of “Black,” as he had been called during the rest of the novel; using his first name signals his new status as a sympathetic character. However, in chapter 20 of Scholastic’s *Prisoner of Azkaban*, “Black” is almost *always* used, placing the character at a greater emotional distance. Although both editions favor “Sirius” over “Black” in chapter 22, the change in Scholastic’s earlier chapter suggests that our sympathy toward Sirius Black should develop not after Harry, Ron, and Hermione have learned the truth of his innocence (chapter 20), but instead after he has escaped (chapter 22). Taken individually, these changes may appear insignificant: after all, a small percentage of words were changed and, in this sense, the alterations could be described as relatively minor. However, the cumulative effect is a pervasive if subtle dulling of Rowling’s original language. Losing puns, poetry, onomatopoeia, and some of the very “British-ness” of the author’s style is a form of transfiguration. Just as the ability to transfigure oneself allows Minerva McGonagall to transform into a cat, so Scholastic’s translations transform the original content of the books. As the cat’s eyes resemble Professor McGonagall’s spectacled eyes, the American books resemble the British ones; however, something of the original disappears in the process.

Despite all of Scholastic’s changes to the texts, one suspects that, ultimately, the Potter books may leave a larger imprint on American language and culture than Scholastic’s translations have left on Britain’s. True, American expressions do emerge in the original versions of Rowling’s novels, such as “Potter for President” and “dream team,” implying that an unacknowledged American presence has seeped into the books (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 136, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 184; *Chamber of Secrets*, B 143, S 191). However, the “Potterisms” cropping up in U.S. media suggest the degree to which Rowling’s Potter series has influenced American speech. *New York Times* op-ed columnist Gail Collins, an unabashed fan of Harry Potter, wrote in April of 2000 that “Mrs. Clinton as a candidate is Hermione Granger. She wants to sign up for all the courses, and if there’s a scheduling conflict, she’ll replicate.” On a day when Collins’s column began with a reference to Harry Potter (“An Ode to July”), Thomas L. Friedman’s piece on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process—which appeared on the same page—bore the title “Lebanon and the Goblet of Fire.” Solidifying Rowling’s hold on the op-ed page, Maureen Dowd wrote in an October 2000 column, “On the whole, the president has been patient about Al Gore casting him as Lord Voldemort, the Harry Potter villain who inspires such fear that no one dares speak his name.” However, she concluded, “Voldemort has not disappeared from the Harry Potter novels simply because no one will say his name.” Implying that Harry Potter’s influence on American English extends well beyond the *Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* devoted a front-page story to the phenomenon in October of 2000, noting that *Newsday*

“called sprinter Michael Johnson a ‘muggle’ for flaming out of the Olympic 200-meter trials” and that the *Chicago Daily Herald* compared an NBC Olympics commentator to Dementors, presumably because he “suck[ed] the joy out of people.” More recently, Simon Ammann, who won two gold medals in the 2002 Winter Olympics, was described as a “20-year-old Swiss jumper who looks and flies like Harry Potter.” Of greater interest may be the *Wall Street Journal*’s contention that “Potterisms are moving into the everyday language of work, politics and romance, where they are offering the series’ millions of fans a new insiders’ short hand for all manner of good and evil.” The piece told of a music major who chants “Expecto Patronum” before her piano recitals, an employee of an insurance company referring to an unpleasant executive as “Draco Malfoy,” and a person referring to a location she couldn’t find as “platform 9 3/4.”²³

As the creative force behind a cultural phenomenon, Rowling may have the last laugh on her American translators, but she would be the exception to the rule. Unless the Potter novels, as a visible example of a pervasive but largely invisible practice, persuade U.S. publishers to end their custom of translating British books into American English, this damaging practice will continue. If readers follow Gleick’s example and buy British editions of British books, then perhaps American publishers will get the message: since profit motivates their translations, lost profit may also halt their translations. Certainly, the process of writing this article has persuaded me to buy British versions of British books henceforth. Perhaps others, too, will come to realize that we cannot trust American publishers to deliver a copy of the book that the author wrote. It may cost more to order a book from England, but American readers should have access to the same text of British books that a British reader does. And, more than that, awareness of national and cultural differences expands the reader’s knowledge of the world. To know that “trolley”—another word changed by Scholastic—denotes “cart” may be a small addition to a person’s linguistic repertoire, but it is worth knowing. Learning different words for the same object enriches our understanding of language; to suggest otherwise is to insult the intelligence of children and young adults. Indeed, learning from our differences is one of the premises upon which multicultural curricula are based.

Translating British English to American English effaces differences, creates distortions, and can introduce meanings unintended by author or translator. Discussing the hazards of translating Rowling’s “fantasy milieu,”

23. Gail Collins, “Rudy’s Identity Crisis,” A31; Gail Collins, “An Ode to July,” A31; Thomas Friedman, “Lebanon and the Goblet of Fire,” A31; Maureen Dowd, “Dare Speak His Name,” 15; Matthew Rose and Emily Nelson, “Potter Cognoscenti All Know a Muggle When They See One,” A1; “Swiss Whiz Kid Does It Again: Ammann Wins Second Gold in Ski Jump.”

Daniel Radosh calls attention to the varieties of sweets sold at Honeydukes. He writes, "Levine pointed out that when a candy store is stocked with Fizzing Whizzbees, Pepper Imps, and Cockroach Clusters it's supposed to sound exotic, and replacing these sweets with M&M's and Tootsie Rolls would be out of the question." Levine told Radosh that he decided to leave "humbugs" as is because "'Humbug' is clearly a magical term. . . . It's something that should be imagined." Yet Radosh concludes, "Except it's not. It's a common triangular sucking candy." Considering the amount of work involved in translating such long and intricate novels, Radosh's kicker may seem a bit unfair. However, the decision to translate books that, let's face it, do not need translating causes unforeseen and unnecessary problems. In highlighting these problems, Radosh gets at the heart of the matter: any act of translation bears within it the cultural assumptions of the translator, and these assumptions will distort the original in ways that the translator may not fully realize. As Ann Flowers, a reviewer for *The Horn Book* and a children's librarian for three decades, has said of Americanization: "If it's good enough, it'll come through. If it's not, it's not worth fiddling with."²⁴ Exactly. Let's call the whole thing off.

24. Radosh, "American Kids," 56; Whitehead, "This Is NOT What I Wrote," Part 2.

Harry Potter and the Tower of Babel

Translating the Magic

Nancy K. Jentsch

Since their appearance in 1997, the Harry Potter books in English have spread their charms to readers across the globe. It follows that persons not able to understand the original English version make up a large enough market for publishers to consider producing translations. In fact, according to the *Christian Science Monitor* of July 6, 2000, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books have been translated into forty languages. The stage and state of Pottermania, though, vary greatly by country. Whereas German readers counted the days until the publication of the fourth book on October 14, 2000, and could already order book five as early as August 2000, readers in the People's Republic of China were not officially introduced to the young sorcerer until October 12, 2000. Thailand welcomed the first Harry Potter book in its native language in July 2000, and the Czech Republic awaited the printing of the second book in Czech in fall 2000.¹

Each translator involved with these books has been faced with the normal challenges of the occupation, but also with a number of unique situations. For example, the Harry Potter series contains many words newly coined for the books by their author. Though this is not uncommon in children's fantasy literature, translating such words does present unusual difficulties. Elizabeth Devereaux is reported to have said that the Harry Potter books in general are easier to translate than other children's literature that is much more concerned with language, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.² I would argue, nonetheless, that the translator of the Harry Potter series has a unique challenge in the genre, that is, to portray a setting and its people that are a world apart from ours, and at the same time located due north of London. This prompted Hilal Sezgin of the *Frankfurter*

1. Kim Campbell, "The Whole World Is Wild about *Harry*," 1; "Harry Potter zaubert auch in China"; "Translation of *Harry Potter* Becomes Bestseller in Thailand"; "Harry Potter a Kùmen mudrc," 7.

2. Campbell, "Whole World."