

Judging a Book by its Cover:

Compelling New Orientations of Early 21st Century Fantasy Literature

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Roland Barthes claims that critics should not trouble themselves over what a text means before they can understand *how* it means.¹ What Barthes means by ‘text’ is, of course, the words, but there is mileage in treating the ‘how’ more loosely and applying it to how a ‘text’, in other words, a book, physically represents itself as an object. How does a book mean? The first answer must be that the designs on its covers interpret it before a (hoped for) reader even has time to settle into her seat, and that this visual interpretation may influence, as Gilbert Adair points out, the way in which that book is consumed.²

If book covers do have signifying potential, and books do demand to be judged by their covers, then it is manifest that, in the early part of the twenty-first century, there have been noteworthy developments in the world of British Fantasy literature. Namely, that the book covers of three major Fantasy series, His Dark Materials, Discworld and Harry Potter (authored, of course, by the three titans of British Fantasy, Philip Pullman, Terry Pratchett and J.K. Rowling), have not only been re-designed, but re-designed in almost identical ways.³ In Adairian terms, this re-designing is revelatory of an identical attempt to influence the way in which each writer is consumed, and this in turn, of course, begs the question as to exactly what the recommended form of consumption is.

This paper will describe how the ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ edition covers of each author differently construct the texts, and how the multiple signifiers present on the covers combine

¹ see Sturrock, John (1979) ‘Roland Barthes’. In: John Sturrock (ed.) *Structuralism and Since: From Levi Strauss to Derrida*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 58.

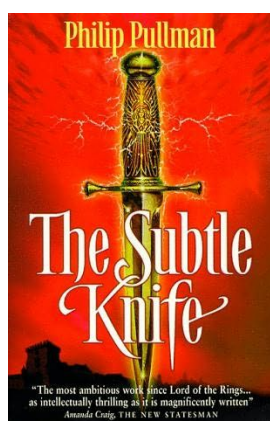
² Adair, Gilbert. (1992) *The Post-Modernist Always Rings Twice: Reflections on Culture in the 90s*. London: Fourth Estate, 46.

³ Those published in the United Kingdom, at least.

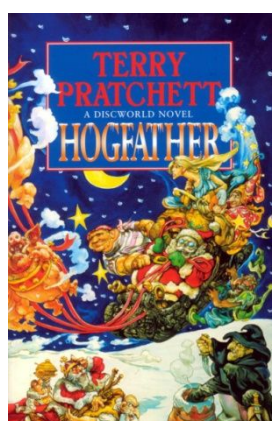
to encourage consumption of the texts in a particular way. I will argue that the re-packaging is not only significant because it suggests that there is a shift towards these particular Fantasy authors wishing their texts to be received more seriously, but also because it may be revelatory of how the generic ‘framing’ of Fantasy literature itself may also be shifting in the early years of the twenty-first century.

A cursory glance (see Figure 1 below) at the three pairs of book covers selected as representative of the re-design of each series, the Scholastic Point ‘standard’ (1998) and ‘adult’ (2001) editions of Philip Pullman’s *The Subtle Knife* (pair 1), the Corgi ‘old’ (1996) and ‘new’ (2006) editions of Terry Pratchett’s *Hogfather* (pair 2) and the Bloomsbury ‘children’s’ and ‘adult’ editions of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (both 2007) (pair 3) reveals that, while, in each pair, the ‘earlier’ editions differ markedly from their ‘later’ counterparts, when compared alongside each other as groups of ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ editions (groups A and B), those in each group, it is apparent, have much in common:⁴

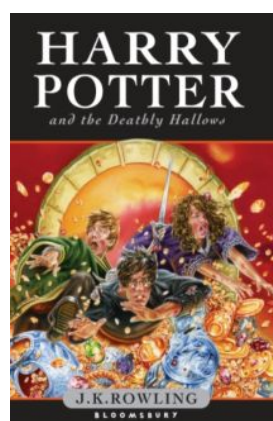
GROUP A (‘Earlier’)



Pair 1



Pair 2



Pair 3

⁴ Although differentiating between ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ editions is slightly misleading in the case of the *Deathly Hallows*’ covers (since the editions were released simultaneously), it can be considered justified on the grounds that the ‘adult’ cover editions for the Harry Potter septet did not begin to be released until 2001, four years after the publication of the first book in the series, and are thus a later concept.

GROUP B ('Later')

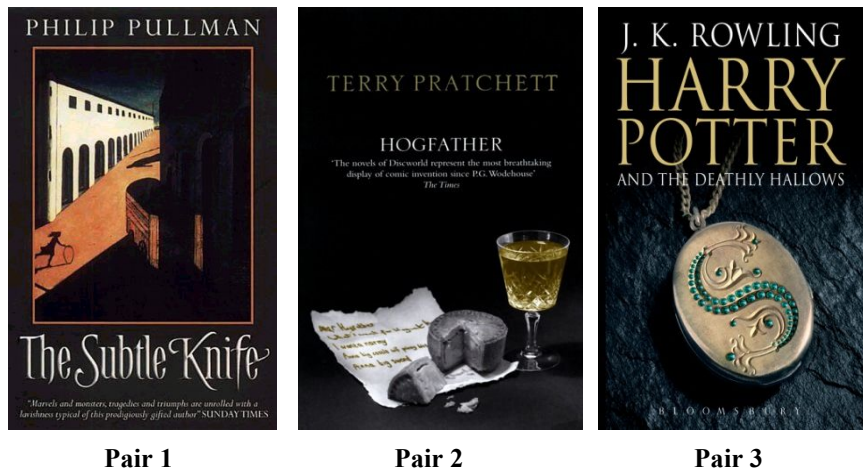


Figure 1: Comparison of ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ editions of books in the His Dark Materials, Discworld and Harry Potter series

Our first impressions tell us (of course) that the ‘earlier’ edition books look more fun and the ‘later’ ones more melancholy; yet, it is worth trying to reach beyond our immediate reactions. Exploring how this impression is gained will help unlock why the covers wish to convey this impression. For this, an analytical framework is required, and here, we turn to Gunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen’s, multimodal theory, an apparatus through which to approach visual grammar.⁵

This framework (to briefly explain) sees each distinct component of visual design (typography, colour, layout, image)⁶ as a semiotic mode that carries information. Combining to create layers of signification, the modes “mak[e] meaning in multiple articulations”,⁷ simultaneously realising an ideational function (in which a world is represented) and an interpersonal function (in which social interactions are enacted). There is nothing *essential* in the meanings produced by each mode: Each is a signifier whose “resources for meaning-

⁵ see Kress, Gunther and Theo Van Leeuwen (2002). *Multimodal Discourse – The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold.

⁶ Which, it must be emphasised, create meaning simultaneously on different levels.

⁷ Kress and Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse*, 2.

making are subject and part of social forces”.⁸ In other words, the modes and their meanings are entirely a matter of social practice, contingent to particular times and places.

Jumping, then, from the framework to its application, what follows is a brief description of the outstanding features of each mode on each of the covers (the ‘how’) followed by a commentary that attempts to bring the strands from the four different modes together (the ‘why’). In the ‘how’, I will look at pairs, while, in the ‘why’, I will compare groups.

Pair 1: *The Subtle Knife*

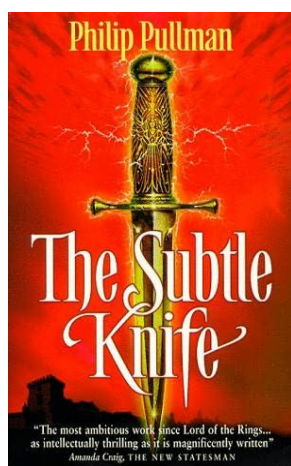


Figure 2

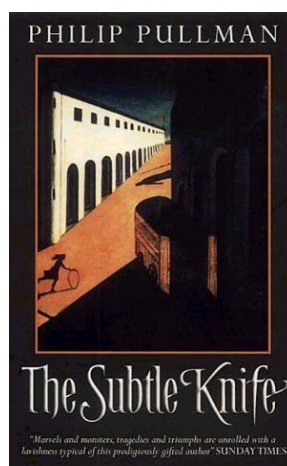


Figure 3

Starting, then, with the pair of covers for Pullman’s *The Subtle Knife*, in terms of the typographies used, subtle differences exist. Both typographies utilised for the words, ‘The Subtle Knife’, are somewhat like handwriting, with rather rounded curvature, some connectivity, downwards orientation and (particularly) extravagant flourishes. However, the key difference between the ‘earlier’ (see Figure 2⁹) and ‘later’ (see Figure 3¹⁰) editions is the extent of the downwards orientation on the ‘f’. In the ‘earlier’ edition, there is a clear example of what Van Leeuwen calls an experiential metaphor, where the typeface is

⁸ Kress and Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse*, 60.

⁹ Pullman, Philip (1997) *The Subtle Knife*. London: Scholastic Point.

¹⁰ Pullman, Philip (2001) *The Subtle Knife* (Adult Edition). London: Scholastic Point.

constructed to represent something else.¹¹ In this case, the sharp downward stroke of the ‘f’ is certainly meant to evoke and reproduce the ‘knife’ that it is part of as a word. In the ‘later’ edition, however, no such reference appears intended with the ‘f’ simply cohering with the letters around it. With regard to ‘Philip Pullman’, the typography on the ‘earlier’ edition, is very similar to that used for ‘The Subtle Knife’, though we might note that the ‘h’ is different and that it is perhaps less like handwriting due to the lack of flourish. Despite this, it stands in contrast to the highly print-like typography employed for ‘Philip Pullman’ in the ‘later’ edition.

Concerning the colours employed, the most striking differences between the two covers are those of saturation and modulation. The colours used for the cover of the ‘earlier’ edition are much more highly saturated and unmodulated than those of the ‘later’ edition, with its subdued, sombre and subtly modulated colours. It could also be added that the bright yellow colour of the typeface employed for the author’s name, ‘Philip Pullman’, in the ‘earlier’ edition of *The Subtle Knife* adds to the sense of exploding colours on this cover.

In terms of the layout, the most important feature is the relative prominence given to the title and the author. On the ‘earlier’ edition cover of *The Subtle Knife*, the title of the book seems more prominent than the name of the author due to its size, central positioning and the fact that the line of the illustrated knife seems to draw the eye in that direction. Relevant too is the fact that the author’s name is not so bold, since the yellow of the typeface does not stand out strongly against the red background. On the ‘later’ edition cover, by contrast, the author’s name is actually more prominent than the title. Although the typeface used for ‘Philip Pullman’ is slightly smaller than that used for ‘The Subtle Knife’, its sizeable capital letters give it enough prominence to make it the starting point for the eye (which will tend to ‘read’ from top to bottom unless given reason to do otherwise, as is the case in the ‘earlier’

¹¹ Van Leeuwen, Theo (2006) ‘Towards a Semiotics of Typography’. *Information Design Journal*. 14.2., 146-7.

edition). Continuing with the question of layout, some importance might also be attached to the various frames that are employed. While the ‘later’ edition of *The Subtle Knife* has clear separation of word and image created by a strong frame for the painting, in the ‘earlier’ edition, the illustrated knife seems to pierce through the words of the title.

Moving (finally) on to the images that are put to use, one key point of difference is the use of an illustration in the ‘earlier’ edition cover, compared to the (framed) oil painting present on that of the ‘later’ edition. The illustration on the ‘earlier’ edition depicts the (talismanic) knife that is the subject of the novel; crackling with energy, it seems to erupt out of the cover towards the viewer. A contextual link with the novel is also given in this edition by the angel inscribed into the hilt of the knife and the tower in the bottom left hand corner (for the knife that is central to the story is intimately linked to the Torre degli Angeli). By comparison, the painting on the ‘later’ edition is more ambiguous. It could be taken as a representation of the strange and haunted city of Cittàgazze (in which the knife is discovered) but, of course, the painting, Giorgio de Chirico’s *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street* (1914), has no original connection with the novel whatsoever.

Pair 2: *Hogfather*

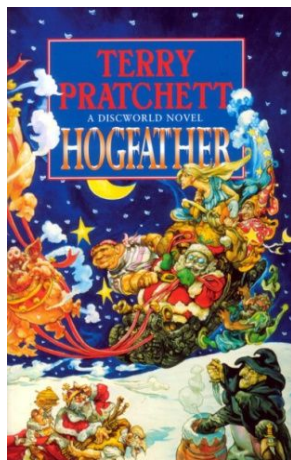


Figure 4

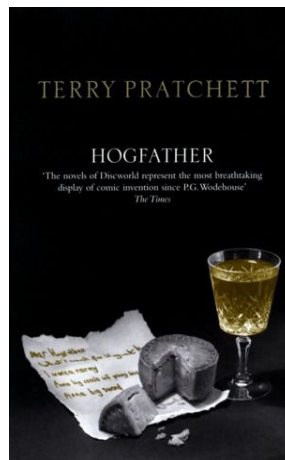


Figure 5

Similar contrasts can be found on the covers for Pratchett's *Hogfather*. As regards typography, though the typeface used for the title, 'Hogfather', on the 'earlier' edition (see Figure 4¹²) has a number of features that suggest printing, the slight irregularity and connectivity make it more like handwriting than the same word on the 'later' edition (see Figure 5¹³). The key feature is the formation of snow and ice on the letters, which is another example of an experiential metaphor (these winter features that appear in the text are the background to the Hogfather being an imaginatively reconstituted Father Christmas).

In the matter of the colours employed, the same contrast in terms of saturation and modulation as in the case of the *Subtle Knife* covers may be noted (with the addition that the red and orange of the typefaces used on the 'earlier' edition contribute to the absolute riot of colour), while, in terms of layout, both the 'earlier' and 'later' editions give (marginal) prominence to the author over the title (though it should be noted that this is more pronounced in the 'later' edition, where the author's name not only comes first but is also presented in larger lettering). With regard to frames, the illustration on the 'earlier' edition cover (again) clearly intrudes into the frame wherein we find the title and author's name (with clouds intruding on the left and right sides and golden hair intruding in the bottom right-hand corner).

In reference to the images presented, Josh Kirby's orgy of action in the 'earlier' edition cover differs sharply with the stasis of the 'later' edition cover. Though the illustration used for the 'earlier' edition does not show a particular scene from the novel, it attempts to provide context by seeming to roll all of its scenes into one. It also offers personal points of identification with a number of the novel's characters (Death, Susan, Albert and Banjo are all present) as they burst from right to left across the field of vision. The (digitally-mastered) photograph used for the cover of the 'later' edition, by contrast, depicts (context-

¹² Pratchett, Terry (1996) *Hogfather*. London: Corgi.

¹³ Pratchett, Terry (2006) *Hogfather*. London: Corgi.

free) talismanic objects (though, of course, this being Pratchett, they are comedy talismanic objects).

Pair 3: *The Deathly Hallows*

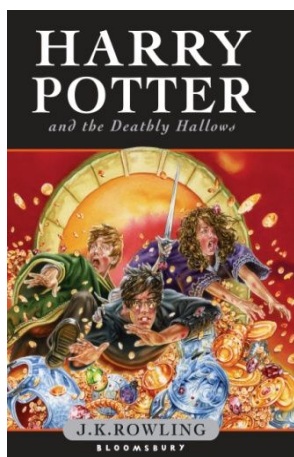


Figure 6

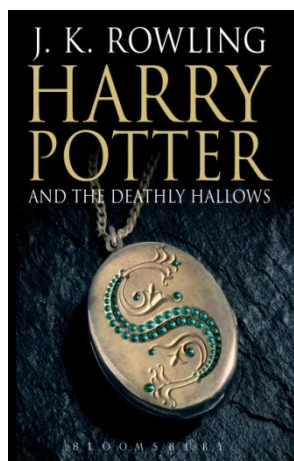


Figure 7

Finally, moving on to the covers of Rowling's *The Deathly Hallows*, we seem to be in a rather repetitive mode. In relation to the typographies used, there is (once more) a contrast between the print-type typography of the 'later' edition (see Figure 7¹⁴) script used for 'Deathly Hallows' and the 'handwritten' typography of the 'earlier' edition (see Figure 6¹⁵) (with its slope to the right, curves and flourish), while, regarding the colours, exactly the same differences between 'earlier' and 'later' editions as seen in the two cases above should be noted (bright, saturated, unmodulated colours versus those which are sombre, simple unsaturated and modulated).

As far as layout is concerned, one key difference is that greater prominence (by some margin) is given to the name of the author in the 'later' edition. In the case of the 'earlier' edition, in fact, the typeface for 'J.K. Rowling' is extremely small and relegated to the bottom of the page. Noteworthy also is that, although 'Harry Potter' dominates each cover, the

¹⁴ Rowling, J.K. (2007) *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Adult Edition). London: Bloomsbury.

¹⁵ Rowling, J.K. (2007) *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury.

particular instalment, ‘The Deathly Hallows’ is far more prominent in the ‘later’ edition (to the extent that these words in the ‘earlier’ edition are rather hard to read). It can also be observed that, in the ‘earlier’ edition, the frame at the top of the cover (within which the series and book title are given) has been (slightly) breached.

Apropos of the images (to conclude), the ‘earlier’ edition cover (again) uses illustrations while the ‘later’ edition is a (digitally-enhanced) photograph. The former establishes context by illustrating a scene taken from the novel (the escape from the vault in Gringott’s Bank), which secures a contact with the central protagonists of the novel (Harry Potter, himself, and his two closest friends, Ron and Hermione). It is, moreover, an image bursting with energy and movement. The ‘later’ edition cover, by contrast, depicts a static, mysterious locket (what could be inside?), which, though one of the talismanic objects from the novel, is apparently context-free.

* * *

How to explain the disparities between the ‘earlier’ edition covers and the ‘later’ ones? In order to furnish ourselves with an answer to this question, the first task is to account for how the information carried through the semiotic modes (typography, colour, layout and image) seeks to visually represent the qualities of the texts, guiding the viewer as to the content of what is represented, and the second to account for how it seeks to interpret the text and project “the relationship between the producer of a (complex) sign and the recipient of that sign”.¹⁶ In the first, in other words, the covers will be addressed through Kress and Van Leeuwen’s ideational function, and, in the second, through their interpersonal function.

¹⁶ Kress and Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse*, 42.

It is, in point of fact, slightly misleading to talk about a ‘first’ and ‘second’ for the reason that the ideational and interpersonal functions are actually interconnected and thus work to carry their information loads simultaneously; yet, for purposes of clarity in this paper, it seems best to deal with each in turn. What follows, then, is an explication of the ideational qualities suggested by the ‘earlier’ edition covers proceeded by a suggestion as to how these may be parlayed into interpersonal terms before the procedure is repeated with the ‘later’ edition covers.

The ‘earlier’ edition covers to begin with, then, intimate the ideational qualities of (1) action/adventure/heroism and (2) magic/the supernatural:

1. action/adventure/heroism

The bright, saturated, unmodulated colours are suggestive of (children’s) picture books or comics; that each is illustrated also connects us to this form of literature as does the depiction of a (comic-book type) hero on two of the covers. Complementing this is the presence of standard adventure tropes: Each of the illustrated images contains a sword or knife, and pirates (on *Hogfather*) and a treasure trove (on the *Deathly Hallows*) are also represented.

The covers are, moreover, characterised by (heroic) action. In two cases, action scenes taken directly from the novel in which the heroes perform their mighty deeds are presented: On the *Deathly Hallows* cover, the image is of the heroes bursting out (almost) on top of the viewer as they escape from a vault having performed a daring robbery (a key scene from the novel), while, on the *Hogfather* cover, there is an image of Death’s sleigh whizzing through the air as he heroically attempts to stand in for the Hogfather and ensure that all the children receive their presents (the most significant component in a portmanteau of scenes compressed into a blur of activity). Action is also implied on the *Subtle Knife* cover. At first glance, the image appears to be just a stationary knife, yet the energy crackling from it lends it an

uncanny motion: It is as if the knife is alive, primed and readying itself for use (by the heroic Will, custodian of its powers).

2. magic/the supernatural

The experiential metaphors noted on two of the covers (the ‘f’ represented as a knife and the letters of ‘Hogfather’ dissolving into snow) seem to stage a collapse of the symbolic into reality, a collapse of words into things. In some sense, then, the experiential metaphors attempt to manifest the magic of these texts. The collapse of boundaries is also (arguably) implied by the encroachment of the image into the frame which contains the symbolic on the covers of the *Deathly Hallows* and *Hogfather*, and also by the way in which the illustrated knife seems to pierce through the words of the title on the *Subtle Knife* cover. More obviously, the uncannily alive knife on the *Subtle Knife* cover and the image on the *Hogfather* cover that depicts Death dressed as Father Christmas driving a sleigh pulled by hogs (pigs might fly!) also evoke a world that transcends our own physical norms.

How, then, in terms of Kress and Van Leeuwen’s interpersonal function, do the ideational qualities of the ‘earlier’ edition texts (action, adventure, heroism, magic, the supernatural) evoked by the choices of typography, colour, image and layout on the covers also simultaneously interpret how the texts are to be consumed by the viewer (potential reader)? The suggested mode of consumption could perhaps (using the same technique as Kress and Van Leeuwen) be paraphrased as follows:

These are stories that will entertain you. You will be drawn into a state of child-like excitement by their action, adventure, heroism, magic and supernatural goings on. They are stories that you will be drawn into personally. You will identify and sympathise with the (hero) protagonists.

It is worth expanding a little at this point on the important role played by the typography in interpreting the books as accessible and personally engaging. Van Leeuwen notes that the meaning potential of irregular, sloping, connected (as opposed to regular, upright, disconnected) typefaces is primarily connotative, “based on the meanings and values we associate with handwriting” (as opposed to printing).¹⁷ The presence of such ‘handwritten’ typefaces on each of the three ‘earlier’ edition covers suggests, if we follow Van Leeuwen, two connotations. The first, less important one, is informality (‘this is a light read; something for you when you are off-duty’), and the second, more important one, is personability, in the sense of personal connection: ‘You will connect with this book’.

In line with the sense that these covers promote a sense of connection with the viewer, it might also be added by way of final comment that, in the case of the *Deathly Hallows*, the fact that the general series title, ‘Harry Potter’, dominates over the particular instalment, ‘The Deathly Hallows’, to the extent that the latter is barely legible, suggests that establishing contact with this homely-sounding character is of much greater importance than the particular undertakings of the character in that particular story.

* * *

Turning to the ‘later’ edition covers, the ideational qualities suggested are: (1) seriousness; (2) quality; (3) mystery/secretiveness/depth/complexity.

1. seriousness

This is conveyed firstly through the sombre, simple colours and the lack of saturation in those parts where colour is included (compare, for example, the gold on the ‘earlier’ Hogfather

¹⁷ Kress and Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse*, 148.

cover with that of the ‘later’). Additionally, the print-type typeface on each of the covers (upright, fairly angular, regular, disconnected), with the exception of script for the ‘The Subtle Knife’ on the ‘later’ edition of this book, can be considered as connoting a certain formality.

2. quality

On the *Deathly Hallows* and *Hogfather* covers, this is indicated through the gold lettering used in the scripts for ‘The Deathly Hallows’ and ‘Terry Pratchett’ respectively. The (relative) prominence of the (well-known) author’s name on each of the covers is, in addition, a kind of guarantee of the quality of the book. Finally, the reproduction of a ‘real’ work of art on the *Subtle Knife* cover, one by a high-brow Modernist artist no less, also carries with it the suggestion of worth.

3. mystery/secretiveness/depth/complexity

This is especially pronounced on the *Subtle Knife* cover, as the (Surrealist) painting chosen as the image to represent the book evades easy interpretation. What, we are invited to ask, can it possibly mean? Implicit to the answer, even as it escapes simple understanding, is that it is certainly something complex, threatening and adult.

The Deathly Hallows cover also suggests a certain mystery since a locket has been chosen as the represented talismanic object. What exactly, we are invited to query, is lurking within? There is also an element of intrigue regarding the image on the *Hogfather* cover. What, the cover bids us ask, is the precise reason for the co-location of these disparate objects? Perhaps, given that the three still-life objects placed against a dark background seem to evoke the 16th and 17th century ‘vanitas’ genre of painting (in which consumables were

often depicted in still life to suggest the brevity of human existence), there is even the suggestion of something *ominously* tantalising here.

Moving on to how the ideational qualities of the covers interconnect with the interpersonal qualities to simultaneously interpret the texts, let us again follow the procedure of suggesting a paraphrase:

These books will impress and improve you because they are books of merit that deal with serious subjects. These books are also not straightforward. You will be fascinated by their enigmatic nature, the deliberate ambiguity of their discourse, their depth.

If Bennett and Royle's view that "the question 'What is literature?' can be considered as synonymous with the question 'What is a secret?'"¹⁸ can be accepted, then the covers' decisive interpretation of the texts could be paraphrased as:

These books should be appreciated as *literature*.

* * *

So what has the above exercise accomplished? The first point of significance suggested by the analysis is that consideration of the conditions of production of the physical book-as-object certainly merits a place in any account of a (textual) text. How, to come full circle back to Barthes, does a book mean? We have seen in the case of these books that they first 'mean' as physical objects, ones that begin to tell the story of what they mean on their covers. Identical books-as-text can be represented through complex multimodal signifiers as different

¹⁸ Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royle (2009) *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (4th edition). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 271.

books-as-object (a ‘book-as-page-turner’, or a ‘book-as-literature’). A single book-as-text can be either fun or serious, entertaining or solemn, a vivid surface of restless action or a place of enigmatic depth for the reader to explore.

To say this is to repeat Adair’s assertion introduced at the beginning of this paper: The design of a book cover will induce readers to consume the text of the book in a particular way. Adair is not, of course, the only critic to have made such a claim and it is worth pointing out that the above analysis utilising Kress and Van Leeuwen’s multimodal theory could be construed as an extension and particularly detailed exemplification of one aspect of Gérard Genette’s notion of ‘the paratext’,¹⁹ which describes the apparatus of material cues (a book’s size and format, its binding, the cut of its pages, its use of graphic material and so on) intended to ensure that particular books are received in particular ways. The analysis above, in fact, beautifully illustrates how the ideas of the theoreticians may be put into practice, suggesting general reasons in turn why such accounts are important. Yet, it is paramount also not to neglect an explanation of why this *particular* account is important. How does this account help us understand why the publishers of these particular books choose to represent a single book-as-text as radically differing books-as-objects? And what can be inferred from the fact that this account shows that it is covers of books within a particular genre being changed in suggestively similar ways at a particular place and time? These, of course, are much harder questions to answer.

One explanation, of course, could be that the differing covers are simply exercises in marketing designed to make the books appeal to as wide an audience as possible (obvious in the case of *The Deathly Hallows* and *The Subtle Knife* where the ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ editions

¹⁹ see Genette, Gérard (1997) *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (trans. Jane E. Lewin). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

are available simultaneously).²⁰ Covers that each attract a distinct (or overlapping) audience will ensure maximised sales after all. Is it, then, just a question of base profit? Clearly, to a degree, the answer must be ‘yes’, yet the explanation that each of the books instanced above has been re-branded for *purely* commercial purposes does not quite, I think, tell the whole story.

The redesigning of the book covers could also be construed as significant because it suggests something about the attitude of the authors discussed to their work and, more broadly, something about the evolution of the Fantasy genre (at least in the United Kingdom) over the last fifteen or so years. Leaving marketing issues to one side, it seems fair to read the ‘later’ covers as symptomatic of these Fantasy authors’ (in particular) and Fantasy literature’s (in general) bid for a certain amount of literary respectability.

Thinking of the authors, the increasing load of critical attention that the Discworld, His Dark Materials and Harry Potter series have attracted in the early part of the twenty-first century, and, indeed, the recent appearance of these texts on school and university curricula, have resulted in a climate, I suspect, where Pratchett, Pullman and Rowling are no longer content to be seen as mere entertainers, purveyors of ‘escapist’ nonsense.²¹ Their books have begun to be treated as ‘serious’, so why should they not wish, in turn, to present them as such?

Of course, the above claim is in the realm of speculation since I have no direct evidence to support it. None of the authors has commented directly on this topic, and attempts to discuss the book covers with the respective publishers met with failure as they were not willing to discuss the motivations behind the changes or their trade ‘secrets’. There is only the evidence of the covers; yet, of course, the evidence of what we can see is

²⁰ In the case of the *Hogfather* covers, the ‘later’ edition replaced the ‘earlier’ edition for a time, but recently (2013) another cover has been released which is remarkably similar to the ‘earlier’ cover analysed in this paper, which is now (early in 2015 as I write) available simultaneously with the ‘later’ edition cover.

²¹ Though, of course, market forces dictate that they still do want to appeal to the Fantasy-as-escapism, and, indeed the children’s markets, hence the exercise in keeping one’s options open that we have been describing!

ultimately more compelling than what anyone could actually say about them. The codes on these covers are not, after all, so secret; they are precisely designed to be cracked by anyone who picks up the book in a shop or sees it online because they have to, like all cultural artefacts, “appeal to consensual knowledge”.²² In terms of these changes being actually the wishes of the authors themselves, moreover, it seems inconceivable that any of them, famous and powerful as they are, would not have personally approved such a drastic re-setting of the codes that represent their work. What, then, for the future? Is it possible that, in times to come and in line with these authors’ ambitions, we will see (say) a Scholastic Classics edition of *The Subtle Knife* complete with a learned introduction by some great critic of the future? Will there at some point be an Oxford World Classics *Hogfather*? A Penguin Classics *The Deathly Hallows*? Why not? Such changes have happened before – the pulp fiction of one age may easily segue into the great literature of another.

This brings us nicely onto the final point. That these books do not simply yearn to be literature, but are beginning to represent themselves as such marks, I think, a sea-change. It is a ‘sea-change’ because the evidence of the covers suggests that Pratchett, Pullman and Rowling seem not just to be demanding that their books be taken seriously as literature but that Fantasy literature itself, that most reviled of genres, also be taken in earnest.

If it is true that the pulp fiction of one age may easily segue into the great literature of another, it is also true that such shifts are often accompanied by a shift in generic labels. The (popular) ‘thrillers’, ‘horror’ stories or ‘cartoons’ of one age may become the (more elitist) ‘noir’, ‘Gothic’ or ‘graphic novels’ of another. Generic labelling *matters*, and this is why publishers will often, when aiming a given book-as-text at a more sophisticated audience, accompany the re-packaging of the book-as-object with a textual change of genre category. In the covers below, given as a typical instance of what often occurs, Penguin have re-packaged

²² Frow, John (2015) *Genre: The New Critical Idiom*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 103.

an identical book-as-text, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, from a (popular) story into a (classic, literary) example of fin de siècle fiction (see Figures 8²³ and 9²⁴ below) in a way highly similar to the re-packagings analysed in this paper; yet, a glance at the back covers shows that , in terms of textual labelling, the former is placed in Penguin's 'horror' genre while the latter has been re-categorised in its 'Gothic' section:

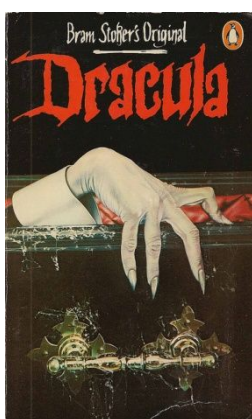


Figure 8

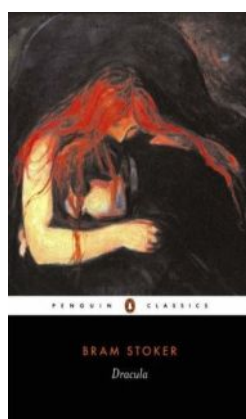


Figure 9

In relation to the three sets of book-covers analysed in this paper, such re-labellings raise a question: Namely, if, as the example suggests, both re-branding of the codes on the cover *and* generic re-labelling are required for a text to segue from 'popular' stories into generically more appealing 'classic' literature, why is it that a similar re-labelling does not occur in the case of the book covers examined in this paper? A glance at the back cover of each of the 'later' edition covers shows that each is still textually labelled, as on the 'earlier' edition covers, as being in the Fantasy genre. To re-frame the question, why is it that each of the 'later' cover books is *not* attempting to *not be* a Fantasy book in contrast to the Penguin Classics version of *Dracula*, which most certainly *is* 'pretending' not to be a mere horror story?

²³ Stoker, Bram (1979) *Dracula*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

²⁴ Stoker, Bram (2003) *Dracula*. London: Penguin Classics.

I admit that this is in the realm of speculation again, but the only answer that seems plausible to me is that each of the ‘later’ covers is an attempt not just to re-frame the particular book in question, but also an attempt to re-frame generally what a Fantasy book actually is. What we seem to find here, in other words, is an attempt not just to “effect a compelling pre-orientation”²⁵ of each work, but also to compel the reader towards a *new* expectation of the kind of thing of which this particular work is an example. And perhaps, after all, this is not so surprising given that each of Pullman, Pullman and Rowling is not just a well-known Fantasy author, but also *unashamedly* and *unequivocally* a Fantasy author: ‘Fantasy’ for these three is ultimately a label that does not need to be recuperated from snobbish condescension because, for them, Fantasy ‘literature’ *is* already literature.

²⁵ Frow. *Genre*, 114.

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