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Fantasy, fallacy and allusion: reconceptualizing British landscapes through the

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Suzanne Speidel

The British Landscape, more than almost any other, save perhaps that

of the Netherlands, has been shaped by humans. The countryside is a

fabrication, an artifice, reinvented every so many years or

generations to match and mirror the latest currents in farming,

industry, road building or the rush of people to and from the city.

Even seemingly unchanged landscapes, like those of the Lake District,

are not exactly still. Once, before Wordsworth, the Lakes would have

been known to outsiders, if at all, as a place and topography too wild

by half. For the past 150 years they have been a playground, at first

for Romantic travellers in search of the 'sublime', and now for

trekkers, climbers and holiday-makers in motor homes and bright

sports and leisurewear. Nothing stays the same.[i]

This observation, by writer and architecture critic Jonathan Glancey, occurs

in the introduction to a book of photographs by John Davies, entitled *The British

Landscape*. Davies' volume contains images of cityscapes and of rural peaks and

crags, but it is dominated by what might be termed 'in-between-scapes' – that is

town edges marked by allotments, or countryside intersected by railways,

motorways, farm buildings, quarries, collieries and cooling towers. Davies'

photographs and Glancey's introduction reframe a familiar, received binary,

between the human-made urban on one hand, and the natural, untouched

countryside on the other. In Davies' photographs the urban, the industrial, the rural and the agricultural are knitted together, variations on built environments and 'fabrication.'

Within the British film industry and its critical reception, a rural/ urban dichotomy is strongly evident, particularly since two distinct genres – social realism and historical/ 'costume' drama – have traditionally been held up as synonymous with 'quality cinema'. The first of these – associated the documentary movement, for example, or with Ken Loach, war-time dramas and New-Wave, 'kitchen-sink' films – brings to mind the urban through its focus on social problems and working communities. The second genre – associated with biographical films as well as with literary adaptations – brings to mind the rural through its frequent focus on pre-industrial England and/ or the privileged, land-owning classes. Because of the dominance of these two genres an urban/ rural binary is ingrained in our cultural perception of British cinema, which is often seen as characterized by either grey, realist 'grit,' or nostalgic pastures green.

What both genres have in common is that they are defined by expectations of authenticity. That this is the case with social realism is clear, and the prevalence of the genre within British cinema has prompted Andrew Higson to define British film culture as 'profoundly mistrustful of anything other than a particular de-dramatised naturalistic form: 'style' becomes something which gets in the way of the message of the film.'[ii] With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that costume drama, also known as 'heritage' cinema, has been critiqued (most influentially by Higson) for the distorting nostalgia of its *mise-en-*

scène: Higson's study of heritage films of the 1980s and 1990s begins with the assertion that 'certain English costume dramas of the period seemed to articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged classes… in doing so an England that no longer existed seemed to be reinvented as something fondly remembered and desirable.'[iii] Yet even with heritage cinema, the presence of verisimilitude, at least, is assumed and valued, particularly in its emphasis on historical props, costumes and detail. The debates around heritage cinema, which grew out of the films and politics of 1980s and 1990s Britain, have been particularly polarized and polemical, with heritage cinema accused of nostalgia, conservatism and even Thatcherism on one hand, and defended as populist, feminist and progressive on the other. A key issue, which separates the genre's detractors from its defenders, is the degree to which authenticity and verisimilitude are assumed to be the films' aim, since it is in effect a failure to fulfill such presumed intentions, and a failure at the related aesthetic of realism, which are at the heart of accusations that the films idealize the past through pastoral imagery celebrating the land owned by the ruling elite.

This is made clear by Andy Medhurst's assertion that 'For every British film concerned with respectful, meticulous reconstruction of the past, there are a dozen more which treat history as a great big dressing up box, where a genteel commitment to period verisimilitude is discarded for the romping joys of frocking about.'[iv] Thus Medhurst cites 'the heaving cleavages and swished capes of Gainsborough and Hammer' as a direct, favorable contrast to 1980s costume drama. Ironically, advocates of heritage films also cite Gainsborough and Hammer, aligning period films with the extravagance and sexual daring of

melodrama and horror.[v] In these readings historical verisimilitude is not seen as a key preoccupation of the genre – rather historical, often pastoral, settings give license to sexual freedom and taboos because they signal a removal of contemporary institutions, prejudices and pressures.

If traditionally the two 'quality' genres within British cinema have been social realism and period drama, the films that are generally cited as the antithesis of these are associated with escapism and excess. Thus Higson laments the 'ossification' of the realist aesthetic because it 'represses the traditions of the gothic, the expressionist, the melodramatic, the "magic" realist.' The prejudice against these modes has now been extensively analyzed, particularly by the contributors to Charles Barr's *All Our Yesterdays* (1986).[vi] In fact Barr's landmark anthology was a key work in a tide of revisionism within the study of British films, which has in many ways reworked traditional, critical values of 'quality' cinema. Thus what Julian Petley has dubbed the 'lost continents' of fantasy, melodrama, horror and crime films within British cinema rapidly became its newfound land, and are now the staple ground of British Film Studies. At the same time the nature of critical revisionism inevitably also entrenches critical binaries, since the fantasy, extravagance and excess of Powell and Pressburger, for example, or Hammer horror and Gainsborough melodrama are thereby positioned in opposition to social realism and period drama; they are the 'unBritish,' British films, either because they are not set in the UK, or because lighting, colour palettes and landscapes inflect supposedly British environments with exotic 'otherness' and expressive excess.

In this confusingly well-trodden critical terrain, the overlooked, hybrid genre of the children's film offers a useful, fresh perspective. An overwhelming number of British and Anglo-American children's films of the last fifteen years fall into the genre of fantasy, and it is noticeable that children's fiction has sometimes been co-opted by revisionists seeking to promote the genres included in Petley's 'lost continent'. In *A New Heritage of Horror: the English Gothic Cinema*, David Pirie comments that children's fiction has 'at times seemed like a last refuge for fantasy in this country,'[vii] whilst also bemoaning the unremitting realist focus of the 1997 adult-selected books shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Carnegie Medal. However, he notes with pleasure that both prizes were awarded in the same month that Bloomsbury published J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, thereby signaling Rowling's seven books and their eight film adaptations as the triumphant resurrection of Britain's fantasy tradition.

The films adapted from the Harry Potter novels[viii] demonstrate how effectively children's cinema can blur critical boundaries. With their stories of good and evil wizards and witches, dragons, goblins, elves and so on, they belong clearly within the realm of fantasy fiction. They also evoke the Gothic: Harry's story of 'banishment' into a non-magical, or 'muggle,' world of misery and neglect, from which he returns to claim his castle (Hogwarts School), his vault of gold, and his place as the magical world's saviour, has strong Gothic connotations, resembling what Angela Wright dubs 'the classic Gothic plot motif' of, for example, Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1829) (which Wright summarizes as 'a wronged laird, raised as a merchant and a soldier, returns to

reclaim his ancestral home.'[ix]) In the film adaptations of Rowling's novels it is specifically through rural landscapes that the Harry Potter stories are rendered Gothic, through the wild, inhospitable mountains and forests that surround Hogwarts, as well as the spires, cliff-like towers, machicolations and the lake-side setting of the castle (which strongly resembles a French Gothic château.[x])

It is often the films' urban scenes that most obviously evoke heritage cinema, particularly the two magical London streets of Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley, which bring Charles Dickens to mind – more specifically they resemble the lively whimsicality of the etchings by long-term Dickens illustrator, Hablôt Knight Browne (or 'Phiz'), as well as the darker, more grotesque plates provided by George Cruikshank for *Oliver Twist* (1838).[xi] These visual references are likewise detectable in many film adaptations of Dickens's novels, ranging from British, film classics such as David Lean's *Oliver Twist* [1948] to more recent productions, such as Douglas McGrath's *Nicholas Nickleby* [2002].

The films' combined cast also evokes period drama, since it contains a high number of prestige, British actors, many of whom are stalwarts of the heritage genre: Helena Bonham Carter, Ralph Fiennes, Michael Gambon, Richard Griffiths, Gary Oldman, Alan Rickman, Fiona Shaw, Maggie Smith, Imelda Staunton and Emma Thompson all have recurring roles across the series (Kenneth Branagh, Jim Broadbent, Robert Hardy, John Hurt and Elizabeth Spriggs have smaller roles or appear in only one film). A similar approach to casting is evident in two other children's films I shall consider in this chapter, namely *Nanny McPhee* (Kirk Browne, 2005) and *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* (Susannah White, 2010),

inspired by Christianna Brand's Nurse Matilda books. Between them the films feature Ralph Fiennes, Colin Firth, Derek Jacobi, Maggie Smith, Imelda Staunton and Emma Thompson. The volume of prestige (often theatrically trained) performers in all these films and the ensemble (quasi-incestuous) casting practices are highly reminiscent of heritage cinema.

Children's cinema is of particular interest because it habitually breaks down other generic distinctions. Period drama spills over into fantasy and the Gothic without evoking the values and judgments of cultural capital so redolent in the notions of 'quality' cinema versus 'lost continents.' Social problems (childhood neglect, poverty, dysfunctional family life, war-time evacuation) also often merge into fantasy and escapism in ways not usually tolerated in British films aimed at adults. (As Higson observes, it is the realist aesthetic which is deemed 'responsible engaged cinema'[xii] in British film culture.) Children's cinema shares with children's literature the licence – even the requisite – to be at once didactic and playful. In her study of the illustration of children's books, Susan S. Meyer observes that in the nineteenth century the stories told to children underwent a change, in that whilst 'moral tales' persisted, 'something new was added: stories were written and illustrated specifically for children and were meant to be attractive and interesting, not simply to instruct or to keep them quiet, but also to entertain them.'[xiii] Of course we understand that the film industry overall seeks to entertain us, but it is the pleasure to be found in *pictures* which is particularly stressed in children's fiction: whilst the twentieth century saw the end to the nineteenth-century illustration boom brought about by the serialization of novels, it is significant that the practice continues

unabated in children's fiction. Children's cinema, therefore, is useful in circumventing the ingrained Puritanism which characterizes British film culture and criticism, and which is evident in the valorization of naturalism, social realism, and 'responsible' filmmaking, as well as in hostility towards the picturesque landscapes of heritage films.

The films' genre hybridity paradoxically redraws and reproduces previous screen renditions of British, rural landscapes: the British countryside is filtered through an array of visual allusions, which include cinematic references (such as to costume drama and other children's films), as well as the illustrated novel, the illustration of children's stories, and landscape paintings. In the case of the Nanny McPhee films landscapes take on an allusive, pastoral extremity which shades into garish artificiality, whilst in the Harry Potter series landscapes present us with a geographical and historical bricolage in which Britishness is mixed with north American and various European *mise-en-scène*, and the present day is set alongside Victorian, Elizabethan and medieval iconography. The films' presentation of rural Britain is at once unexpected but highly mimetic, which means that it provides fresh views and insights when it comes to landscape, whilst also serving to reframe and magnify the techniques of British cinema elsewhere.

The films I consider in this chapter are typical of many made in Britain today, in that they are classified as UK/US co-productions (unlike, for example, *The Secret Garden* [Anieska Holland, 1993], *101 Dalmations* and its sequel [Stephen Herek, 1996; Kevi Lima, 2000] whose funding and taxation mean that

they are officially US films). They were filmed and set in Britain, albeit in a

country which has a closeted magical side to it (this differentiates them from the

Chronicles of Narnia films, whose principal photography took place in New

Zealand, and whose setting is a fantasy world.) The Nanny McPhee and the Harry

Potter films feature British landscapes prominently and expressively, and the

global box-office phenomenon of the Harry Potter franchise means that these

films in particular constitute the most viewed images of the British countryside

produced in twenty-first-century cinema.

Nanny McPhee was adapted by Emma Thompson from Christianna Brand's

children's book, *Nurse Matilda*, the first of three stories about the Browne family

and their 'terribly, terribly naughty'[xiv] children, who require the care of the

magical Nurse Matilda in order to learn to be good. The film includes much that

is in the book, but changes Mr Browne (Colin Firth) into a widow, who must

remarry immediately on the orders of the family's wealthy Great-Aunt Adelaide

(Angela Landsbury). The film's story is already allusive and knowing when it

comes to children's fiction: the scullery maid, Evangeline (Kelly Macdonald),

learns to read with the aid of a book about a horrible stepmother; the children,

well-versed in such tales, are (rightly) convinced that their prospective

stepmother, Mrs. Quickly (Celia Imrie), will be cruel; and the film's ending is

signalled by Evangeline's prediction that the farm girl is secretly an 'educated'

lady, fit to marry the hero. The film also hints at fictional parallels: aerial shots

and swirling winds suggest that Nanny McPhee (Emma Thompson) flies to the

Browne's house, in the manner of Mary Poppins and Evangeline's careful diction,

after Aunt Adelaide has been tricked into adopting her, bring to mind Eliza Doolittle (paving the way for Evangeline's marriage to Mr Browne).

Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang is not based Christianna Brand's sequel *Nurse Matilda Goes to Town*. Instead the story is original to Emma Thompson's screenplay, and features Nanny McPhee helping the Green family, whose father is away fighting during the Second World War, and whose uncle is seeking to sell the family farm from under them in order to pay his gambling debts. (Nanny McPhee's magical qualities are stressed by the fact that she has not aged since the Victorian era of the first film).

The story is less knowing in its references to children's fiction than is the first film, though its central premise of the farm children and their city cousins, who must learn to like and help each other, draws on the British tradition of war-time evacuation stories (such as C. S. Lewis's Narnia books.) In the film the British countryside and its urban antithesis become key story motifs through the contrasts between the two sets of siblings, and this is signalled by the unfeasibly muddy farm yard (which ruins Cousin Celia's elegant, town clothes). Both films feature 'single' parents in financial difficulties, as opposed to the deluded, ineffectual parents of Brand's books (the children's behaviour thus emerging as responses to emotional and domestic crises) and these family structures signal further cinematic antecedents, specifically much-loved, British, children's film adaptations: in *Nanny McPhee* the motherless children in need of a maternal substitute evokes *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (Ken Hughes, 1968), whilst in *Nanny McPhee and Big Bang* the enforced absence of the father is reminiscent of *The*

Railway Children (Lionel Jeffries, 1970). The narratives offer a sly, leftwing message through Nanny McPhee's explanation (not present in the books) that she is a 'government nanny,' a mischievous reclaiming of the phrase 'nanny state,' as well as a condoning of a welfare system that supports families in need.

For both films extensive sets were constructed in the English countryside, which contributes to their unfeasibly picturesque qualities. For *Nanny McPhee*, the Browne family's house and surrounding village were built in the grounds of Penn House, Buckinghamshire, near Pinewood Studios.[xv] For *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* the Greens' farm was constructed in the fields of Tilsey Farm, near Guilford, Surrey, the farmhouse, its outbuildings, garden and duck pond all the creation of production designer Simon Elliott.[xvi] The film opens with an aerial shot over English, wooded countryside and green fields, which descends towards the half-timbered Tudor farmhouse nestled in a gentle valley beside a field of golden barley. *Nanny McPhee* begins with even more overt images of quaint artifice, its gliding aerial shot descending to a redbrick, late-Victorian, Gothic-revival house, with its miscellany of pointed arches, steep gables, and pitched-roof porch. This eclecticism signals the house's film-set origins, particularly since it includes decidedly un-English elements, such as the front balcony, or gallery, which is reminiscent of American, vernacular adaptations of the Neo-Gothic (it brings to mind film and television American-Gothic set designs, such Norman Bates's house in *Psycho* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1960], as well as more playful renditions, such as the mansion *The Munsters* (television series, 1964–6)).

Brand's novels include naturalistic, black-and-white illustrations by her cousin, Edward Ardizzione. However, the Nanny McPhee films resemble more stylized traditions of children's book illustrations, such as nineteenth-century pastoral prints, as exemplified by writer-illustrators, Kate Greenaway and Randolph Caldecott.[xvii] *Nanny McPhee* seems particularly indebted to Greenaway's bucolic images of frisking animals and solemn little girls, which were both exaggerated (illustrator Edward Crane accused her of '[overdoing] the big bonnet,'[xviii]) and characterized by simple, flat shades produced by colour-washing a wood-block print.[xix] However, the garishness of the film creates a sense of Greenaway mischievously re-coloured, a notion that is made literal through Mrs. Quickly's brash tastes: her thatched cottage is pink; she dresses the children in maroon and green shepherdess outfits, and she has lambs dipped in maroon and yellow dye for her wedding day. When the wedding between Mrs Quickly and Mr Browne descends instead into a food fight with purple cake, green cream pies and pink meringues, the impression of a world re-coloured using a children's paint-box increases; Nanny McPhee's magical interference makes it snow in August, thereby 'restoring' Kate-Greenaway-esque, lacey whiteness to the rustic outfits, yet the effect is to heighten the artificiality further, since the silvery-white glow of the nuptials that follow constitutes yet another layer on top of multiple coats of colour.

In *Nanny McPhee and Big Bang* the countryside is also full of rich, incongruous colour: Nanny McPhee inspires teamwork in the warring cousins by making the escaped piglets fly and perform a synchronized swimming routine in pond-water turned azure-blue (the sequence is shot from above in the manner of

an Esther-Williams aquamusical.) The suggestion of England repainted occurs most noticeably when Celia mistakes an elegant, eighteenth-century mansion for her cousins' home. The house is Palladian in style, but its austere classicism is undercut because it has been painted pink. (In reality the property is Marble Hill House, in Twickenham, which is white, pink having been added with CGI.)[xx]

The film is full of images of rolling green meadows and fields of golden barley. The narrative's contrived qualities are emphasized when Nanny McPhee and the two oldest boys visit the War Office in London a bid to discover the fate of the Green children's father. This does not bring a dose war-time reality: Lord Nelson on top of his column doffs his hat, and festive-looking barrage balloons float over Battersea Power Station – one in the shape of a pig, alludes to both the flying piglets and the cover of the Pink Floyd album, *Animals* [1977] also photographed at Battersea Power Station. When the war reaches the Greens' rural idyll, it does so in the shape of a ticking, unexploded bomb, which fortuitously prevents Mrs Green signing away the deeds to the farm. Again the effect is comically artificial: the bomb stands nose down, cartoonishly large and incongruous amidst the rippling barley, a caricature of alien ills invading England's peaceful, pleasant lands.

Both films self-consciously signal the pictorial nature of their landscapes. At the end of *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang*, the two girls, Megs and Celia, diffuse the bomb, helped by Nanny McPhee's pet jackdaw, Mr Edelweiss. The bird, having consumed large quantities of explosive putty, gives a hurricane-inducing burp, which whips up all the barley into twinkling shapes in the sky,

before depositing the harvest in exquisitely arranged rows of grainstacks. The scene brings to mind a tradition of 'haymaking' landscape paintings, such as George Stubbs' 'Haymakers' and 'Reapers' (1783) and John Constable's 'A Hayfield at East Bergholt' (1812). Yet even these green, blue and gold, quintessentially English images are overlaid with associations from overseas: director Susannah White has stated that the scene was inspired by haystacks in Romania,[xxi] whilst the round, domed-topped stacks that punctuate the smaller piles most obviously evoke Claude Monet's 'Haystacks' series (1890-91). The resemblance to landscape painting foregrounds the pleasures of pictorial landscape, and – as with the Browne family's American Gothic house – the European quality of the haystacks heightens our sense of a fabricated, exaggeratedly playful composition.

Similarly *Nanny McPhee* contains a moment when Aunt Adelaide's carriage drives off into a misty sunset, after which an iris effect and a dissolve to a stained-glass window make it appear as if the carriage is a lead decoration within the coloured glass. This emphasizes the graphic properties of the sunset and the carriage's silhouette, whilst the iris and the window draw our attention to the framing of the landscape. In both films the landscape is at once exaggerated and distilled, the narrative coming to rest at carefully composed, idyllic moments within rural lives and rhythms (the bringing in of harvest, the setting of the sun). The films are richly allusive throughout, and in their exuberant, mimetic artificiality they place particular emphasis on the 'reproduced' element of landscape composition.

The Harry Potter series shares with the Nanny McPhee films an allusive eclecticism, freely mixing visual and literary references. Whilst the Nanny McPhee films confine most settings and location shooting to the Home Counties (identified by Higson as the preferred setting for heritage films[xxii]), the Harry Potter films cover a lot more of the British Isles, with much of the series shot on location in Scotland and the north of England. This again links the films to Gothic traditions, since the wild inhospitality necessary for the expounding of Gothic themes is not so readily available in the more populated south of the country. Neither the books nor the films specify the exact location of Hogwarts School, a geographical evasion which in itself has Gothic antecedents, as Wright notes in her study of 'Scottish Gothic' (for example, Scott sets *Waverley* (1814) in 'the northern part of the island.'[xxiii]) In the films, Scottish-Highland and northern-English grandeur abound. In *The Philosopher's Stone* Quidditch practice takes place against the Norman exterior of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland; in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* a full moon glows eerily over the misty the crags of Glencoe; in *The Goblet of Fire* Harry battles a dragon at Steall Falls, Glen Nevis; and repeatedly in the series the Hogwarts Express crosses the magnificent Glenfinnan Viaduct in Lochaber to take the children school.[xxiv]

These rural landscapes have the effect of rendering northern, and especially Scottish, topography as the magical 'other,' especially when they are set against the 'muggle' world, often signalled by recognizable, especially London, landmarks (such as the Houses of Parliament, the Millennium Bridge and Shaftesbury Avenue.) At the same time, the lack of geographic specificity

helps to shift our aesthetic experience of the United Kingdom as a whole dramatically northwards, subsuming Englishness (and the traditionally dominant setting of the south east of England) into the spectacular, sublime topographies of Scotland and northern England. (The filming processes enact this literally, swallowing up interior and school-ground locations shot in southern England – such as the University of Oxford's Divinity School and the cloisters of New College – inside the uncompromising walls of Hogwarts Castle.)

The exterior of Hogwarts was shot by combining real-life locations with shots of an enormous model[xxv] and CGI. The castle and its moods are highly changeable, and Hogwart's assortment of structures (towers, spires, cloisters, cathedral-like halls and flying buttresses) is exacerbated by repeated not-quite matches between real-life, closer, location shots and the CGI and scale-model renditions. The cumulative representations of eight films also add new elements (such as a wooden, roofed bridge and a stone viaduct which provide entry into the castle in the later films) and as alter previously existing topography (such as the route down to Hagrid's hut).

These inconsistencies add to the mystical quality of the landscape, while specific changes increase the sense of the sublime as the films progress. For example, the transplantation of Hagrid's hut from its filming location in Black Park, Buckinghamshire for the first two films to Glencoe in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* provides a sharp contrast between the elevation of the school and steep, rocky valley into which the children venture when they leave the premises. Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn point out the origins of the word 'sublime'

('a conjunction of two Latin terms, the preposition *sub*, meaning below or up to and the noun *limen*, meaning limit, boundary or threshold'), arguing that the concept encompasses a 'sense of striving or pushing upwards against an overbearing force.'[xxvi] In art that connotes the sublime, views upwards and landscapes that elevate towards the heavens are a recurring motif – for example, Claude Lorrain's Baroque 'Landscape with the nymph Egeria and Numa' (1669) (in which Rome is seen to the right of the frame high above Lake Nemi and the Temple of Diana) or Thomas Seddon's Victorian 'Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat from the Hill of Evil Counsel' (1854) (where Jerusalem is perched to the left on a steep, rocky hilltop). The closing shots of *The Philosopher's Stone* and *The Order of the Phoenix* are constructed similarly to these sublime landscapes, the camera rising or tilting to encompass, in the first film Hogsmeade station in the foreground and Hogwarts (its spires partly enveloped in mist) to the left of the screen, and in the fifth film, the forest and lake in the foreground and Hogwarts (below billowing clouds) rising up behind to the right.

In these images the sublime constitutes a tranquil or celebratory evocation of nature, typified in art by John Martin's Romantic depiction of 'The Plains of Heaven,' [1851-3] (included in his *Last Judgement Triptych: The Apocalyptic Sublime in the Age of Spectacle*), with its gentle undulations and clouds, soaring mountains and serene waters. Elsewhere in the films the sublime emerges, as Riding and Llewellyn put it, 'as expressions of awe, dread and terror,' whereby the magnificence of nature and landscape imbues a corollary sense of human insignificance or despair. From *The Prisoner of Azkaban* onwards the *mise-en-scène* becomes increasingly dark, composed predominantly of blues, greens and

greys, or else shrouded (even enveloped) in blackness. The third film also introduces the reaper-like dementors, who bring icy darkness with them and do in fact instil despair in their human prey. As Harry frantically defends his unconscious godfather, Sirius, from swarming dementors on the stony shorefront of the frozen lake, the mood is reminiscent of the other two paintings in Martin's triptych, namely *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851–3) and *The Last Judgement* (1853), with their thunderous clouds and damned souls falling into the abyss.

Throughout the series Hogwarts and its environs evoke the Gothic –both the horror and the fairytale ends of the spectrum. The castle itself mingles the French medieval chateaux with Scottish Baronial architecture, although its most obvious antecedents are in fact Disney castles, as exemplified in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (William Cottrell et al. 1937) *Cinderella* (Clyde Geronimi et al. 1950) and *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) – as well as Disney's theme parks. These are at once elaborate and simplified structures, emphasizing the outlines of pointed spires and unfeasibly tall, narrow towers.

The films' allusiveness again mixes Britishness with pastiches that are distinctly non-British. In *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Order of the Phoenix* the village of Hogsmeade looks exaggeratedly Germanic: its snow-covered houses with enormous, steep gables and spear-like chimneys are reminiscent of illustrations of *The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, such as those by Arthur Rackham (1909),[xxvii] as well as German Expressionist embellishments of this tradition, such as the house of inventor Rotwang in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*

(1927). These references are made explicit in *The Deathly Hallows: Part 1* when Hermione (Emma Watson) narrates the Deathly-Hallows fairy tale, 'The Tale of the Three Brothers.' This is simultaneously shown in animation, using computer-generated 'puppets' that strongly resemble Rackham's wood-block-print, black, silhouette figures (such as those of 'The Golden Goose.'[xxviii]) The effect of this animated interlude is to emphasize Expressionist and fairy-tale *mise-en-scène* elsewhere in the film, such as the steeple tower where Grindelwald is imprisoned, and the Lovegoods' black, lopsided house. Thus British ruralness exists within a multi-layered, transnational intertextuality, which magnifies and complicates the treatment of landscape, mixing the familiar and the alien, the actual with the exotically fictional.

Although the landscape is pictorial in its grandeur and pastiche, this is combined with non-pictorial properties, which are distinct to cinema, such as the films' high degree of camera mobility. This is more marked in the later films, in the wake of groundbreaking CGI in Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy, which brought to main-stream films a soaring, diving, circling cinematography more readily associated with computer games. In *The Order of the Phoenix* the camera races low over the lake, before almost skimming tree-tops in a careering upwards crane, then ascends high over the quadrangle where children are milling after the Christmas holidays. Such shots owe something to tourist-industry, television advertising (and may themselves be an influence on Scotland's National Tourism Organization's current 'Visit Scotland' campaign), though their computer-enhanced speed and agility also produce non-naturalistic, sometimes vertigo-inducing effects. The films' aerial shots also invest the British

Isles with an artificial sense of scale: *The Chamber of Secret* opens with the camera at cloud level, before it descends to show a vast suburban sprawl, filling almost the entire screen with row upon row of identical houses. This heightens the distinction between the rural magnificence of the magical world and the stifling conventionality of Harry's muggle relatives. Yet, the effect is also startling, retaining the UK's familiar, modest, tightly packed housing, whilst imbuing the country itself with a US sense of proportion.

The Harry Potter films also knit together a whole array of historically based, visual allusions, making for striking, sometimes incongruous juxtapositions. Set in contemporary times, they place today's fashions, streets, transport and technology alongside Dickensian dress, Tudor houses, fairy-tale villages, pagan monuments, collegiate quadrangles, candle-lit banquets, a medieval castle and a steam train. From *The Prisoner of Azkaban* onwards the steep route down to Hagrid's hut is lined with huge, henge-like stones, whilst the round hut itself has a primitive, Pictish quality. In *The Goblet of Fire* the Quidditch World Cup Stadium looks like a brand-new Olympic venue, whilst the tents beside it resemble a battle encampment from the War of the Roses – just as the flags and banners of the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch suggest a medieval jousting tournament. In the final film, after the 'Battle of Hogwarts,' close-scale shots of the ruined castle bring to mind bomb-ravaged Europe in 1945.

This historical bricolage matches the stories' generic hybridity: as well as Gothic motifs such as lost inheritance and murdered parents, the novels pose mysteries and scatter clues, in the manner of detective fiction, present quests for

the three young heroes, as in epic poetry, and show us Harry's maturation into adulthood, evoking the Bildungsroman. Lord Voldemort's valorizing of 'pure blood' also lends political, dystopian dimensions to the fiction: as 'muggles' and 'mudbloods' face persecution, imprisonment, or even murder under the auspices of the 'Muggle-Born Registration Commission'[xxix] it becomes clear that this is in fact a parable for children about the horrors of modern totalitarianism and ethnic cleansing.

Whilst the films have employed dystopian iconography previously (such as the banner depicting the Minister of Magic in *The Order of the Phoenix*, reminiscent of Stalinism – and also *Citizen Kane* [Orson Welles, 1941]), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* extends this to its depiction of the country at large. Harry, Ron and Hermione (Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint and Emma Watson), in hiding and in search of Voldemort's magical 'Horcruxes', walk across fields as sinister smoke trails from enemy 'Death Eaters' shoot across the sky above them; they wander through a burnt out caravan park (reminiscent of *Mad Max* [George Miller, 1979]), along mud flats under the Severn Bridge, and between cooling towers (whilst on the soundtrack the voice of a resistance radio station reads a list of 'missing witches and wizards.') In this film 'fabricated' rural landscapes, as in those found in John Davies' photographs, are very much in evidence in the form of such 'in-between' lands. This is suggestive of the work of Iain Sinclair, particularly since our three heroes walk through normally non-pedestrian spaces, in montages reminiscent of the interminable transience of Sinclair's and Chistopher Petit's *London Orbital* (2002).

Elsewhere in the film the teenagers travel around the country using magical 'apparition' (they walk when Ron's injury prevents this), materializing in Shaftsbury Avenue or Hogsmeade, and escaping just as abruptly to precarious, rural sanctuaries, such as the Forest of Dean. Since enemies can also 'apparate,' any sense of the countryside as magically safe is undermined, and at times rural landscapes look primordial or alien (as when Harry and Hermione camp on a vast 'shelf' of jig-saw-like, fragmented rocks – the 'limestone pavement' at Malham Cove, North Yorkshire). The film is characterized by generic uncertainty, partly through the inclusion of liminal fringe-lands instead of a reliance on a rural/ urban binary, and partly because the act of 'apparition' repeatedly re- and dislocates the story, so that the narrative takes on the form of a road movie without travel. The irresolution of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I* is also exacerbated by its aerial shots (particularly those filmed directly from above, rendering topography difficult to fathom), which take on the quality of a dispassionate survey of Britain on the brink of ruin. In this film, therefore, historical eclecticism extends into a nightmare vision of a dystopian, even apocalyptic, national future.

Landscape in the Harry Potter films sometimes evokes a mood that is close to Freud's notion of the uncanny. Whilst the films' fantasy genre seems to lessen its claim to the uncanny (because its alien properties can be accounted for within the realm of the fiction), it is rendered both familiar and strange through generic hybridity: the films' affinities to period drama are rendered startling through their modern-day setting and vice-versa, and their transnational intertextuality is rendered strange through its Britishness and vice-versa. Similarly, what

Robert Stam terms 'concretization'[xxx] (whereby film adaptation makes visible what novels describe) also makes extraordinary the experience of *seeing* the (familiar) world of Rowling's fiction within film-industry, generic contexts. For example, in *The Deathly Hallows: Part 2* contemporary teenagers engage in explosive 'shoot-outs' with wooden wands against the backdrop of a medieval, Gothic castle. These scenes may be 'natural' to Rowling's diegesis, but they also curiously incongruous within the generic conventions of cinema.

All the films I discuss in this chapter make flagrant use of pastiche. The notion of pastiche has been put forward previously in defence of heritage cinema,[xxxi] by arguing that the genre displays, not slavish *re*construction of period authenticity, but the constructed nature of traditions, ideologies and authority. What children's period films show us is how pastiche also functions as 'illustration,' with the allusive artificiality of many shots imbuing the image with extradiegetic emphasis not dissimilar to an illustrative plate or print within a book. The allusions are often transnational and pan-historical, evoking neither period detail nor Britishness, but rather eclectic, recognizable, intertextual images of 'ruralness' (such as the country house, the Gothic castle, the farm yard, or the harvest), which serve to augment stories through their connotative meanings and previous representations. This technique is in fact frequently employed in heritage cinema: in Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), for example, lengthy tracking shots show us that the home of the Bennet sisters is surrounded by a moat, bringing a fairy-tale quality to Longbourn, which is itself transformed into a castle, or perhaps an island of maidens, on which an

assortment of princes land, in order to prove their worth. In Roman Polanski's

Tess (1979), meanwhile, fields of golden corn and dappled sunshine evoke the

Romanticism of J. M. W. Turner, yet, as with Turner, brush-stroke-like swirls of

grey cloud and darkness quickly transform innocent warmth into brooding

environments that threaten tragedy. In such moments, landscapes are co-opted

into the symbolic with both childlike, literal boldness and allusive, figurative

complexity. This suggest that the analogy of the book illustration - with its

connotations of embellishment - may be a more useful one for our understanding

of heritage films than are the realist values associated with British, quality

cinema.

The eclectic, stylized qualities of the landscapes I have analyzed do not

excite debate, largely because the films themselves are scarcely taken seriously

in the critical circles that have spent decades contesting the aesthetics and

ideologies of British period drama. What contemporary children's cinema

suggests is how peculiarly puritanical British film culture remains; British film

criticism is not yet tolerant of home-grown, visual pleasure or indeed excessive

genre hybridity, and heritage cinema is still struggling with critical strictures

which seem unwilling to allow it be, or do, more than one thing at once. Perhaps

a change is afoot: certainly Vidal Belen's study of the figural in period film

constitutes a welcome break from old, entrenched positions.[xxxii] Children's films

enjoy a status at once overlooked and privileged in British cinema, granted

expressive freedom because they are 'just for children.' Of course a great many

adults have watched, and enjoyed the films I discuss here. It is difficult to classify

them as lost continents, though they are perhaps the unacknowledged

'playgrounds,' the happy sightseer's destination, in the depiction of British

landscapes on film.

i Jonathan Glancey, 'Introduction' to John Davies, *The British Landscape* (London: Chris Boot: 2006), pp. 5-7

ii Andrew Higson, 'Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film': The Documentary-Realist Tradition in Charles Barr (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years Of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986) pp. 72-94, p. 76

iii Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 12

iv Andy Medhurst, 'Dressing the Part,' in Ginette Vincendeau (ed) *Film/ Literature/ Heritage* (London: BFI, 2001), pp. 11-14, p. 11

v See for example Claire Monk, 'Sexuality and Heritage,' in *Sight and Sound*, 5, 10 (1995), 32-4. Films supporting this line of argument tend towards progressive sexual politics as regards homosexuality or female sexuality, such as *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987), *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992), *Carrington* (Christopher Hampton, 1995) and *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997). More recent examples might include *The Duchess* (Saul Dibb, 2008), *Anna Karenina* (Joe Wight, 2012), as well as television dramas such as the BBC's *Life in Squares* (2015).

vi Charles Barr (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years Of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986) pp. 72-94, p. 76

vii David Pirie, *A New Heritage of Horror: the English Gothic Cinema* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2008) p. 13

viii *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Chris Columbus, 2002) *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Mike Newell, 2005), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (David Yates, 2007), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (David Yates, 2009), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (David Yates, 2010), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (David Yates, 2011)

ix Angela Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' in Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 73-82, p. 78

x See Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (Eighteenth Edition; London: Athlone Press, University of London, 1975) p. 613

xi See David Bland, *The Illustration of Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) p. 72 and John Harthan, *The History of the Illustrated Book* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981) p. 201.

xii Andrew Higson, 1986, p 77

xiii Susan E. Meyer, *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrations* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983) p. 13

xiv Christianna Brand, *The Collected Tales of Nurse Matilda* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007; first published 1967), p. 9

xv see http://www.pennhouse.org.uk/filming/filming.htm (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xvi see '*Nanny MacPhee* 2: Behind the scenes,' http://www.wildaboutmovies.com/behind_the_scenes/NannyMcPhee2-BEHINDTHESCENES.php (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xvii Greenaway's work includes *Under the Window* (1879) and *Marigold Garden* (1886). Caldecott's work includes *The House that Jack Built* (1878) and *The Frog Would A-Wooing Go* (1883). See Meyer pp. 109-125 and pp. 95-107

xviii Cited in Meyer, p. 114

xix See Meyer, pp. 94-9 and pp. 109-15. See also Bland, p. 131.

xx See http://visitinghousesandgardens.wordpress.com/2013/03/10/marble-hill-house-tea-and-twittering-in-twickenham/ (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xxi See '*Nanny MacPhee* 2: Behind the scenes,' http://www.wildaboutmovies.com/behind_the_scenes/NannyMcPhee2-BEHINDTHESCENES.php (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xxii See Higson (2003), p. 26

xxiii Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814); cited in Wright, p. 77.

xxiv See http://www.movie-locations.com/movies/h/harry_potter1.html#.UbnVXhxFF2c (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xxv See http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/en/tour/hogwarts-castle-model (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xxvi Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn, 'British Art and the Sublime,' http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418 (last accessed 19 September 2013)

xxvii See, for example, 'Rumpelstiltskin,' in *Grimm's Fairy Tales: Twenty Stories*, illustrated by Arthur Rackham *(London: Heineman, 1973)*, pp. 39-43, p. 42

xxviii See 'The Golden Goose,' in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, pp. 22-28

xxix J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007) p. 206

xxx Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation* (London: Althone, 2000), pp. 54-76, p. 68

xxxi Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-21

xxxii Belén Vidal, *Figuring the Past: Period Film and the Mannerist Aesthetic* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012)