

Game Spirits in the American Youngsters Series—Take *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* as Examples

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The series of *Harry Potter* and the series of *The Hunger Games* are the most frequently mentioned children's and youngster's stories after *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Both of them are children's and youngster's favorite stories. All of them are about children's adventures. But because of the time and history, they represent different themes of the time. This research paper aims at analyzing the Game Spirits in the first two. The suspense and surprise, fantastic adventures and time interweaving are shown in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. And the unbelievable background, the lucky number, image of gamble, and the game against humanity are the Game Spirits in *The Hunger Games*. The purpose of this thesis is to help people better understand *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* in the aspect of Game Spirit. *Harry Potter* is the full of fantastic adventure while *The Hunger Game* is a story full of survival.

Keywords: Game Spirit, the Harry Potter series, children literature, suspense and surprise, adventures, suspense and surprise, J. K. Rowling

Introduction of the Game Spirit

Game Spirit is one of the primary aesthetic souls of children literature. It is also an important theoretical proposition which has been paid close attention to by many scholars in China. Game spirit is children's spirit, and soaks through children's life. Carrying original life-force, it is gradually influenced by postnatal culture, then shows course of children's life and growing up. GAO Xiao-hong (2003) summarized Game Spirit into three points on the base of the theory of well-known scholars such as Ban Ma: fantasy, liberty, and happiness. These three principles make complements to one another and belong to a union that has poured intense vitality into children literature (Ban, 1994).

Within several years, J. K. Rowling has written the Harry Potter series, consisting of seven books, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is the third book of the series. Because of the interesting and enchanting stories about Harry Potter in his years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter series are very popular among readers of all ages, especially teenagers. And there are a large number of Harry Potter fans who regard Harry as a hero of the magic world. The popularity of the Harry Potter series is mostly attributed to Game Spirit in the books, which gives readers endless imagination and shows them various experiences of the witchcrafts and wizardries.

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Game Spirit in the Plots Design of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

As the third book of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* continues to describe Harry's magic life in his third year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This year, one of the Prisoners of Azkaban called Sirius Black, who was believed to have betrayed Harry's parents and the most faithful supporter of the Dark Lord, broke out of the prison and arouse disturbance and anxiety in the Magic World. This book focuses on how Harry misunderstood his godfather Sirius and finally got the truth of his parents' deaths and saved Sirius from being rearrested. Although Game Spirit is shown through the characterization, the design of playful atmosphere, the arrangement of plots, and prolific use of language throughout the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* interprets Game Spirit in its plots design most clearly. J. K. Rowling tells stories in such intense rhythm and dramatic plots that readers hardly get rest during reading, let alone feeling bored. We can see the three principles of Game Spirit through the following aspects of the arrangement of plots in this book.

Full of Suspense and Surprise

Children are endowed with great curiosity which stimulates them to find out the reasons of the characters' unusual and suspicious behaviors and to discover the truth of the whole story. So they are inclined to immerge themselves into the interesting stories whose plots are full of suspense and surprise. They feel quite satisfied and excited when their minds go with the development of the uncanny plots. The plots are well-designed and the description of every detail serves as a clue of the truth of the stories that is uncovered later. The writer does not like to tell all the information at one time. Instead, she often refers to an incident with a lot of questions whose answers are given step by step or at the end of the book when all the riddles have convincing explaining. Thus "a considerable fan following has developed of people wanting to discover how the many loose ends and unfinished adventures in the book will finally be completed" (Irving, 2006, p. 35).

At the beginning of the book, the newspaper reported the escape of Sirius Black from the prison just one day right after the wizard newspaper, the Daily Prophet, showed the moving picture of the Weasleys in Egypt with Ron's pet rat Scabbers on his shoulder. "Scabbers had been looking ill before he met Crookshanks...ever since Ron's return from Egypt...since the time when Black had escaped..." (Rowling, p. 1998, p. 267). At first, we may take it as a coincidence, but when it comes to the climax of the story, we realize that the pet rat is the shape taken by a short man, Peter Pettigrew, who is the very criminal rather than Sirius. Sirius was the only one who knew Pettigrew was alive, so when he saw Peter in that picture he broke out of the prison and was after Peter. That was the exact reason why Scabber looked ill. Then Sirius realized that the rat was at Hogwarts with Harry and might threaten Harry's safety, and that is why he broke into Hogwarts and even into Harry's dormitory for several times, trying to kill Peter which was believed as efforts to kill Harry. All of these puzzles' mysterious veils were uncovered in the end.

Fantastic Adventures Without Real Danger

Experiencing Adventures is the desire of the children of certain ages especially teenagers. Their tame lives are not able to offer them opportunities to experience a variety of exciting adventures by themselves; therefore they realize this desire by imagining themselves in certain circumstances. When playing games, watching TV or reading books, they feel as if they were the characters who were experiencing wonderful adventures. Many writers of children literature take advantage of this kind of children's psychology and create the imaginary circumstances of adventures to attract them so that children can have unforgettable and exciting experiences in

the fiction world with the characters. Even if the adventures are extremely dangerous and threaten the characters' lives, children do not get any real hurt indeed. So Game Spirit provides enormous room for children's imagination.

In the *Harry Potter* series, amazing and unbelievable things happen one after another.

The author devises a variety of thrilling plots. The young hero always found himself at a very dangerous point, but finally the author will release him out of it nonetheless. The author's organization of plots meets with the young readers' curiosity and their psychology. (WANG, 2006, p. 115)

In this book, readers can take the knight Bus and board the Hogwarts Express train with Harry as well as having some awful experiences with Dementors, who are in charge of guarding the prison and among the foulest creatures draining "peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them" (Rowling, 1998, p. 140). They can also fight with the Boggart, which is "a shape-shifter taking the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten" (Rowling, 1998, p. 101) the person it comes across, in the new class, Defense Against the Dark Arts. Besides, they can visit Hogsmeade, "the only entirely non-Muggle settlement in Britain" (Rowling, 1998, p. 61), with Harry through a secret passageway from his school under the Invisibility Cloak with the help of the Marauder's map which shows every detail of the Hogwarts castle and ground and has tiny moving dots labeled with names of the moving people. Moreover, they can witness Harry and Hermione save both Sirius Black and Buckbeak, a Hippogriff that is a Magical Creature and half horse, half bird.

Time Interweaving in the *Harry Potter*

In our common world, we are not able to surpass time, in other words, we cannot go back to the past and travel through the time tunnel into the future but can only cherish the present time. But based on the principles of Game Spirit, fancy and liberty, the characters in children literature can change the time by magic or using some magic tools. Thus, children can have experiences with the characters changing what have happened into good things with perfect endings or making up their mistakes in the imaginative world. This can complement their regret that human being cannot change time in common world.

In this book, Hermione borrowed a Time-Turner from Professor McGonagall because she had some lessons that were given at the same time. She turned it back so she could do hours over again and that was why she "had been doing several lessons at once" (Rowling, 1998, p. 290). In the end of the story, Dumbledore, the president of Hogwarts, implied Hermione to use it to go back the past to save both Sirius and Buckbeak. Although Hermione and Harry were not able to change the fact that Dark Lord's servant Peter "broke free and set out to rejoin his master" (Rowling, 1998, p. 238), they succeeded in helping Sirius escape the Dementors' Kiss, a kind of cruel punishment, and flee away with Buckbeak.

Game Spirit in *The Hunger Games*

The Hunger Games is a series of novels from the famous writer Suzanne Collins., who was born on August 10, 1986, in Hartford of Connecticut in America. She majored in drama and began taking up the creation of children's TV series program in 1991. What is more, some famous works including "Underland Chronicles" is also from her. "*The Hunger Games*" consists of three books, which are *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*. Although the first novel called *The Hunger Games*, it is different from the game spirit in the *Harry Potter*. The game spirits in *The Hunger Games* lies in the following elements of the novel.

The Unbelievable Background Creates the Playful Effect

The time after the great disaster in North America, there is a new country called Panem, consisting of 13 districts, which was built in ruins. The 13 districts want to beat down Capitol but failed. Capitol decides to let every district send one boy and one girl to take part in the Hunger Game—which only Capitol allows one of them to survive and be the winner of this game.

To Be the Lucky Number of the Main Hero and Heroine Became the Game Spirit of the Whole Story

Katniss, the main character of this book, is a girl from the 12 district. She won the hunger game with Peeta by using their intelligence in the first book, and in the second book she is forced to take part in the second time and she not only wins the game but also breaks the rules and the plot of Capitol. In the third one, the 13 district, whose people should have been destroyed thoroughly by Capitol, makes a revolution and successfully pulls down the government. Katniss thinks that the success would bring the peace and the happy life which most people want. However, the president of the revolution army decides to force the children of Capitol to take part in the Hunger Game as the revenge. Katniss realizes that no justice exists when the war begins, even the superman like she herself is just the tool of those politicians. Finally, she chooses to rebel the revolution army—shoots the president of the army to die.

In this novel, Suzanne, the writer of this book, uses the first person perspective to describe how the Katniss to fight for her destiny. Through this novel, I can see how the main character gets struggling between the choice of love and friendship, forgiveness and revenge, justice and evil.

The Image of gamble in *The Hunger Games*

Sometimes, we banter that life is just like a game. We go through ups and downs and struggle to win it. In the fiction, written by Suzanne Collins. Life is just like a gamble, a play to the residents living in Panem, which is a nation in an unidentified future time period after the destruction of North America.

As punishment for a previous rebellion against the Capitol, every year one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 from each district are selected at random and forced to participate in the Hunger Games, a televised event in which the participants, or “tributes”, must fight to the death in a dangerous outdoor arena until only one remains. The fiction is about the experience how a 16-year-old girl Katniss from District 12 who volunteers for the games in place of her younger sister, Primrose wins the game and survives.

Domination, survival, and humanity are three elements combined to make the fiction full of profound thought. Under the cruel and dark control, government forces people to surrender while there will never yield to governors just like what Katniss has said, “I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can’t own” (Suzanne, 1991, p. 233).

Facing troubles, the desire for survival always can work wonders: It makes people fall in love; it makes people brave enough to stand up for the chance of living; and it also makes people join together to win the games. When the game makers suddenly reverse the rule, Peeta and Katniss both threaten suicide in hope that the game makers would rather have two winners than none. Maybe Katniss was not sure whether that feeling is love or not, but the truth is that readers will definitely be touched.

A Game Against Humanity

In the games, those girls and boys had to kill others to keep himself or herself alive—because there was only one person allowed to survive. The whole game was filled with cruelty and danger. It was the time to test

the skills, the intelligence, and the willpower. In a forest which was controlled by the Capitol, everyone had to face their uncertain fate. Katniss made the best of her wisdom and arrow skill running in the forest back and forth. She experienced enemies' chase and some natural dangers. With the help of her only two friends, she finally became the winner of the game. However, the horrible experience would be engraved on her mind. She wanted to forget the nightmare. The hunger game is a game against people's humanity which could die away easily for the fight of their own life. And that is the weakness of human being.

Conclusion

By now Harry Potter has become a household name and the *Harry Potter* series have done great contributions to the children literature. The author J. K. Rowling knows a lot of magic that brings stories to life as well as young readers' Game Spirit so that readers especially children are easy to be allured by the exotic and fictional setting where they can freely go on their imagination. As some critics has pointed:

Author J. K. Rowling has developed an intensely likable hero and put his adventures on paper with a free-and-easy style that mixes high adventure with light drama and low-key comedy. The books manage to walk the literary tightrope of never taking themselves too seriously while avoiding the easy pitfall of self-parody. (Berardinelli, 2001, p. 213)

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Game Spirit penetrates the arrangement of plots. Firstly, Ms. Rowling has adopted two important artistic means, suspense and surprise, to create the reading atmosphere which agrees with readers' psychology thus making them receive aesthetic feeling and joy while reading between the lines. Secondly, the fantastic schoolboy adventures cater to children's special taste. The stories are filled with strained, stimulating, and thrilling atmosphere, which excites the young readers and makes them hold their breath as stories go on. Thirdly, time interweaving adds to such kind of magic and amazing things which seem impossible in our common world.

No one could deny the fact that Ms. Rowling's creation is witty, thought-provoking, entertaining, and expands the children's imagination. The plots of the stories are exciting and packed with surprises, delights of the imagination that few readers will fail to be enchanted. Game Spirit is shown between lines. The great success of *Harry Potter* series provides children literature in the 21st century with tremendous beneficial enlightenment that the excellent works with Game spirit are full of vitality.

On the other hand the game spirit in *The Hunger Games* is more bloody and brutal. The characters are facing death at any time and a bloom fly high in the sky represent one of the sacrifices died. It is a dangerous game which cannot be followed. For the whole games, it is more designed and controlled by the dominators. Put all the two series together, they fit the children's literature for games, but *Harry Potter* is with more suspense and fantastic adventure without danger, but *The Hunger Games* is the game with domination, survival, and humanity.

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