To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all, I thank my parents, who supported me throughout the entire process that led to this dissertation, including reading to me as a child, encouraging me in every academic and non-academic pursuit, and grounding me in the belief that I could do anything I set my mind to. Without them, I would not be Dr. Martin. And I am grateful to my sister, Tamara, and her husband, Phillip, for their letters, packages, shared books, and inspiration. I would not have pushed myself as hard without such an amazing big sister to compete with.

Additionally, this project could not have been completed without the guidance and help of Dr. Kenneth Kidd. He provides the perfect blend of criticism and encouragement, revision and hope. Moreover, I want to thank my committee members—Dr. John Cech, Dr. Greg Ulmer, and Dr. Barbara Pace—for providing feedback and support throughout this process.

I thank fellow kiddie litters, Julie Sinn Cassidy and Ramona Caponegro, for solidarity in our subject matter, and Rita Smith, for allowing me solace in the stacks of the Baldwin. And I thank two gaming ladies, Laurie Taylor and Lisa Dusenberry, for their passion and knowledge on all things digital. I thank the members of my dissertation seminar—Aaron Talbot, Joel Adams, and Mindy Cardozo—and editor friend Joi Tribble. Their deadlines, questions and critical eyes helped enhance drafts. And I appreciate my past English professors and teachers who all played a part—Dr. Julie Steward, Dr. Bryan Johnson, Dr. Rosemary Fisk, Dr. Charles Workman, Dr. Steven Eply, Dr. Nancy Witt, Mr. Jon Carter, Mrs. Vickie Margene, and the late Mrs. Jan Bolla. Each individual contribution aided my graduate school success.
I thank my ever present canine companion, Lit, who deserves an honorary doctorate. I especially thank my husband, Stephen Bennett, who reprised his role as my copy editor. His acute talent for words helped polish this document, and his helpful, loving presence made the last mile of this race easier.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>..........................................................</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................................</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 LOADING...AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONVERGENCE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN A DIGITAL AGE</td>
<td>..................................................................................................................</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 FROM PAGE TO CONSOLE: VIDEO GAME ADAPTATIONS OF “CLASSIC” CHILDREN’S TEXTS</td>
<td>..................................................................................................................</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 BOYS PLAY REAL WAR: VIDEO GAMES IN CHILDREN’S PRINT TEXTS</td>
<td>..................................................................................................................</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 PUZZLING GENDER: ADOLESCENT TECHNOLOGICAL FICTION FOR GIRLS</td>
<td>..................................................................................................................</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 INTEGRATED MEDIA: MINORITY FEMALES IN CHILDREN’S VIDEO GAMES</td>
<td>..................................................................................................................</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Children’s Literature and Cultural Studies .................................................. 15*
*Comparative Media Studies .............................................................................. 19*
*Video Game Studies .......................................................................................... 23*
*Project Overview ............................................................................................. 33*

*Rethinking Adaptation .................................................................................... 41*
*Alices ................................................................................................................ 45*
*Webs .................................................................................................................. 69*
*Present Day ....................................................................................................... 82*

*Board Games in Children’s Texts ................................................................. 93*
*Reality and War ............................................................................................... 101*
*Space and Power ............................................................................................. 113*

*Gaming Sidekicks ......................................................................................... 126*
*Instant Messaging and Blog Books ............................................................... 136*
*Nancy Drew: Media Sleuth .......................................................................... 141*
*Cathy’s Book: Just a Book? .......................................................................... 150*

*Rugrats: An Integrated Nursery .................................................................. 167*
*Character Race in Video Games ..................................................................... 175*
*Dora: Exploring New Ground ....................................................................... 177*
*Lilo & Stitch: Alien and Other ...................................................................... 182*
*Digital Media to Print Texts .......................................................................... 185*
6 CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND MEDIA: A POST SCRIPT ......................... 191
LIST OF REFERENCES .................................................................................. 197
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ............................................................................. 217
In analyzing the narrative connection and convergence between print literature and digital media under the specific genre of children’s print texts and video games, my study explores three spaces where media are converging and diverging, specifically focusing on “classic” print story adaptations, cultural assumptions transmitted across media, and textual and formal influences that produce transtexts. Using examples of transmedia story universes and technologically influenced texts, I engage narrative, gender, and race in relation to children’s playable narrative vis-à-vis video games, arguing for their impact and alteration of children’s print literature and vice versa.

Chapter 1 provides an introductory overview of digital and print convergence within the bounds of children’s literature. Chapter 2 studies the traditional responses to video games in relationship to children’s print texts: particularly adaptation and fidelity. Chapter 3 examines the reverse by studying how print texts incorporate gaming scenarios. Chapter 4 expands this discussion to transtexts and other technologically-influenced young adult fiction that engage multi-platform media, which showcases not only problematic kinds of convergence (consumerism without awareness) but also
advantageous kinds of representational gender politics. Chapter 5 extends the gender discussion to include race and returns to a discussion of story adaptation across media, but emphasizes form over fidelity. Because the convergence of print and digital media is still relatively new in children’s literature, seeing both the re-inscription of normative culture and also the radical potential for future texts provides a more accurate depiction of the emergent forces in children’s literature that will be of interest to future writers, educators, publishers, and readers.
CHAPTER 1
LOADING…AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONVERGENCE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN A DIGITAL AGE

In 1952, more than a decade and a half before the internet was brewing in the labs of the Pentagon’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), a little spider communicated through the simple lines of a web thread in E. B. White’s Charlotte’s Web. Two concise iconographic revisions of this tale motivate the title of this dissertation and afford preliminary examples of convergence between children’s print texts and digital media. The first image, created for the spring 2003 "It's her future" ad campaign by the Girl Scouts of the USA and the Ad Council, provides a visual example of intermediality whose goal is to foster more technologically literate girls. An African-American girl snuggles next to her teddy bear in the pink and white linens of her white iron bed. She is absorbed in a visually dominant, oversized book titled Charlotte’s Web Site. The title is, of course, not the original E.B. White title, but the cover has been recreated to match the layout of the source text and is illustrated in the style of Garth Williams. On the cover, Fern, Wilbur, and the other farm animals stare at Charlotte, who is displayed on a computer monitor. The Girl Scouts’ ad campaign asserts a revision of Charlotte’s Web, literally rewriting the print text to encourage girls’ interest in technology through a familiar source text.

Similarly, Mike Peters, known for his humorist revisions of fairy tale and literary characters, also incorporates a technologically inspired Charlotte into the revisionist repertoire of his Mother Goose and Grimm comic strip. His July 25, 2006 strip consists of a single panel depicting a small black spider dangling in front of a laptop, with a screen that reads, “Aug. 27 That @##?! pig is driving me crazy again…” (Peters). Positioned under a spider web in the bottom right corner of the frame, the caption reads,
“Charlotte’s weblog” (Peters). The comic strip revises a children’s classic by adding an adult tone and linking White’s story with online communication.

While I do address Charlotte’s Web in Chapter 2, it is the ideas presented in the intersection of a children’s print text with digital technology that spurred my study and its title, not a limiting focus on this one text. These examples of an appropriated and revised Charlotte’s Web briefly demonstrate three major developments in children’s literature: adaptation, transtexts, and transmedia storytelling. Children’s texts are transforming into a more intermediated convergent state—adaptations across media are the standard for many noteworthy texts, inclusion of technological elements in print texts is mainstream, and story universes are expanding to include multiple media.¹ These three areas of media convergence in children’s texts remain relatively new, but their sizable influence is altering how children’s texts are published and consumed. Specific media forms like video games are expanding, altering, commercializing, re-inscribing, re-enforcing and adapting children’s print texts in both normative and progressive ways. And technological influences alter the texts themselves, creating “‘transtexts’ or writing that combines elements from fixed print and different media” (Reynolds 155). My study examines the interplay between children’s media and print narratives to show how comparative media studies can elucidate and inform current scholarship about children’s literature in our digital age.

In analyzing the narrative connection and convergence between print literature and digital media under the specific genre of children’s print texts and video games, my study explores these three spaces where media are converging and diverging, specifically focusing on “classic” print story adaptations, cultural assumptions
transmitted across media, and textual and formal influences that produce transtexts. Using examples of transmedia story universes and technologically influenced texts, I engage narrative, gender, and race in relation to children’s playable narrative vis-à-vis video games, arguing for their impact and alteration of children’s print literature and vice versa. How digital media connects to and affects children’s print texts, both in traditional and progressive texts, is vital to our understanding of children’s literature, culture, and media consumption habits. Digital media is an important area of study particularly for children’s literature because it is affecting the writing, publishing, and marketing aspects of children’s literature. It is also extending the possibility of what we consider to be children’s texts.

Print and digital children’s texts converge and cross-pollinate through adaptation of story and discourse across media and by sharing and reinforcing aspects of cultural values such as gender and race. Print texts reinvent themselves and stay current by incorporating media specific themes and technology. For example, children’s cybercultural content presented in fictional literature can run the gamut of technological and science fictional genres, but it is also being included in more mainstream series. Futuristic fear of humans as consumerist cyborgs can be seen in works such as *Feed*, didactic tales of internet behavior comprise texts like *The Berenstain Bears Lost in Cyberspace*, and technological devices can help exploit other species as in the *Artemis Fowl* series. Structural changes are exhibited in books such as *TTYL* that use instant messaging to convey not only dialogue but also plot through a character’s IM’s. Narrative conventions can be as radical as a multimodal picture book like *Black and White*, which asks the reader to navigate multiple stories in proto-hypertextual fashion.
Or, the narrative can retrace established conventions with updated technology, such as *Heir Apparent*, which places a character inside a virtual reality game situation in a fashion reminiscent of *Jumanji* but with newer technology and more advanced games.

By raising questions of form and identity through intersections in old and new media, convergence is imperative for the study of children’s literature because it exemplifies the current moment in popular children’s culture and allows scholarship of children’s literature to grow with the expanding digital era. As children grow more proficient with increasingly sophisticated technology, children’s literature responds not only by adding contextual references to popular media, but also by adapting stories across multiple media and through re-inscribing the formal properties of some print texts’ discourse. Children’s literature is currently positioned in an intermediated convergence that has already become prevalent in children’s culture since children’s texts are not confined to one particular medium but are still progressing, or loading, as digital media expands.

Logistically, it seems the sharing between print and digital media results in advantages for both: traditional print media retains appeal to a modern popular audience by including cultural references to digital forms, and video games acquire the cultural capital of the literature they adapt in much the same way early film legitimized itself. Children’s print literature also provides source material and sets preconceived notions of story and narrative (among other influences) that video games have appropriated. We see this sharing in media adaptations and transtexts.

Additionally, the digital era is producing a textual shift where children interact with a new type of conglomerate story, one that is no longer limited to a single, printed text.
If a reader refers to a story, is she referring to one of the books, one of the films, one of the video games, or a myriad of other material goods? A story has become an amalgam of all of these types of texts to create a larger inclusive unit, thus creating a convergence of print and digital media to form larger texts, multimodal texts and story arches that encompass multiple media. This begins to fulfill André Bazin’s prophetic statement that the “critic of the year 2050 would find not a novel out of which a play and a film had been ‘made,’ but rather a single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic” (26). We are on the forefront of that movement now, but Bazin did not foresee a fourth art form—the video game.

To return to the Charlotte’s Web metaphor, a web of connections ensnares children’s culture, and since children’s literature is expanding, it is necessary for children’s literature studies to draw on interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies and film and media studies. Douglas Rushkoff (2006) states that our “youth population [is] intent on adapting to the coming cultural shift—a shift characterized by an increasing dependency on technology and media” (10). Scholars devoted to children’s literature and culture will benefit by joining the larger conversation regarding this cultural shift as the canon evolves. Because the convergence of print and digital media is still relatively new in children’s literature, seeing both the re-inscription of normative culture and also the radical potential for future texts provides a more accurate depiction of the emergent forces in children’s literature that will be of interest to future writers, educators, publishers, and readers.
Some children’s literature scholars have been especially concerned with digital media, particularly media literacy in children, and how children’s literature relates to the larger digital culture. Specifically dealing with children’s culture, Jeffrey Goldstein, David Buckingham, and Gilles Brougere explore convergence in their edited collection *Toys, Games and Media* (2004) and claim there is an “increasing convergence of toys, games, and media, both in the commercial marketplace and in children's daily loves. This convergence of media—print, television, film, computer games, toys, and collectibles—occurs almost seamlessly” (2). This overlapping, intertextual nature of children's culture has happened before now, but the mass prevalence is part of the larger scope of today's digital era. Because of the expanded media use by children, children’s texts have increased as an area of boundary crossings and blurred divisions.

Goldstein, Buckingham, and Brougere explain:

> Children's culture is now highly intertextual: Every 'text' (including commodities such as toys) effectively draws upon and feeds into every other text. When children play with Pokemon cards or toys, for example, they draw on knowledge and expertise they have derived from watching the TV shows and movies, or from playing the computer games: Each play event is a broader flow of events that crosses from one medium or 'platform' to another. This is play that involves…flexibility across different media and modes of communication. (2-3)

Similarly, Perry Nodelman argues that "the context in which children look at picture books and read novels…includes their encounters with video games, Barbie dolls, and Saturday morning cartoons. Toys, TV shows, and movies intended for children are the most immediate background of many children's responses to literature" (43). These larger consumer texts not only provide a way for children to look at their narrative texts, but they may also create a new way of interpretation. Margaret Mackey asserts that
“[c]hildren who have grown up with television, video, digital games, and the hyperlinked world of computer texts may indeed be using new protocols of narrative interpretation that are neither visible nor intuitively comprehensible to their elders” ("Did Elena Die" 52). I see these new protocols as one of convergence, whereby media forms—no longer categorized apart—interact and influence each other, and children must attain technological knowledge as part of navigating their narratives.

Mackey, who has been instrumental in media literacy studies, typically uses case studies, as in Literacies Across Media (2002), to receive feedback from children regarding their reading, viewing, and playing of media adaptations. Marsha Kinder has also been a major proponent of children’s media, providing a broad overview in her edited collection, Kid’s Media Culture (1999), and historically situating the discussion and arguing for seeing children as “actively collaborat[ing] in the production and negotiation of cultural meaning” in popular culture and media (26). The two essays dedicated to video games in Kinder’s collection also used a case study methodology similar to Mackey’s (Gilmour and Kafai). These firsthand accounts provide a strong report of the child user in regards to convergent media. While these case studies are very instructive, my focus is on the text, not the consumer.

While there is an increasing convergence in different childhood forms and consumer interaction, my focus is primarily on narrative texts that tell a story or have a narrative form, and not on material texts such as toys and collectibles. Instead of exploring vast cultural shifts and material goods, as other critics have done, this project looks at a more limited dynamic influence through video games and print literature in order to concentrate on the initial and perceived changes to these forms and the
narrative ramifications both reactionary and radical. Also, whereas these scholars explore a wide range of media, I limit forms to concentrate on print texts and video games with only a secondary inclusion of film, television, and social software, such as IMs and blogs, to provide context and establish cross-media patterns.

Some children’s literature scholars do limit their primary sources to only print texts. Eliza Dresang (1999) asserts that the digital age is radically changing children’s print literature. Her theory “identifies three types of changes occurring in contemporary literature for youth, all related to the connectivity, interactivity, and access of the digital world” and these three types are “changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries” (17). Although Dresang’s theory is an important milestone in viewing children’s literature through a digital world, she largely limits her discussion to picture books and only addresses primary children’s print texts.

The change in children’s literature extends past picture books, as Kimberly Reynolds discusses in Radical Children’s Literature (2007), whose focus is on “the way that children’s literature contributes to the social and aesthetical transformation of culture” (1).² In Chapter 8, “Back to the Future? New Forms and Formats in Juvenile Fiction,” Reynolds describes electronic fiction as the preferred digital medium, while also claiming that the electronic narrative form which will utilize the full potential of Information Technology (IT) has yet to be produced. She asserts that electronic fiction reverts back to standard print narrative forms and is conservative in story. And, except for rare instances, print children’s texts that discuss technology or cyberfiction tend to be largely anti-technology or at least cautionary against technology. Noga Applebaum also argues for an anti-technological bias, but she limits her sources to young adult
science fiction published from 1980 until now. My study is not motivated by a thematic analysis of technology, but by the use thereof to transmit, transform, and reinforce children’s stories. Yet Reynolds is correct to expect more forms as children’s literature continues to adapt to the changing technological climate.

After film and television, the most commonly discussed media for children’s narratives are electronic fiction and (the increasingly obsolete world of) CD-ROM’s. In the introduction to a special issue on children’s media in the Spring 1997 Children’s Literature Association Quarterly, Anne Morey claims that the articles “suggest the wide range of children’s texts ‘beyond the written word,’ as well as the wide range of critical approaches that we may take to such texts” (4). The articles address the following media forms: television, Hollywood films, educational films, and CD-ROM children’s stories. Matt Jackson’s article on the Living Books CD-ROM version of Arthur’s Teacher Trouble in this special issue critiques the medium’s conflation of computer with book: “No attempt is made to use this technology to foster creative thinking or to explore new methods of constructing a story” (35). Yet several years later with time to improve the software, Dorthy Clark’s (2006) conclusion differs after examining The Baby-sitters Club Friendship Kit CD-ROM, stating that it “attends to the properties of the digital medium” (352) and “fully exploits the properties of the new media” (354). However, this format, basically an enhanced book, largely presents the exact same material found in the textual series. Some point and click activities add interaction, but the involvement does not compare to the immersive interactivity provided by a video game.

Blatantly absent from the Quarterly’s special issue were video games. Perhaps that is because the special issue was for “children’s media of the twentieth century”
(Morey 2), and video games, though commercially available since the 1970’s, are viewed as a twenty-first century medium. Alternatively, authors tend to group video games under the larger context of digital media and consumer texts instead of addressing them individually. Yet their singular impact is great.

Culturally, we see the influence of video games and related technologies in our labeling of children. They are the children of the digital age, as Don Tapscott describes in Growing Up Digital (1998), and have been described en masse as the net generation, linking them inextricably to the Internet. Teenagers have also been labeled with the moniker screenagers (Rushkoff). In Consuming Youth (2002), Rob Latham uses the term cyberchild to portray today’s teenagers as cyborg machine of consumerism. But the term can also codify a lifestyle and mindset of wired or connected children. Either way the cyberchild prevails in multiple institutions, in play zones and study spaces, in tangible dwellings and fictional texts. And as children are thus described, so does their literature begin to adapt to the technological clime. Their bodies may not have been literally converted into part flesh, part machine, but their stories reflect the child subject into the machine and require the child agent to interact with digital media, formally or referentially. Adult readers may resist media adaptations, relying on the supremacy of print text as high art compared to ostensibly lowbrow video games, but consumer children no longer view print texts as the authoritative guide because they experience transmedia stories on a regular basis; cross-media adaptation has been de facto publishing practice their entire life.

Comparative Media Studies

Not only are children being defined through their use of digital technology, but their narrative texts both inspire and incorporate technological forms, such as video games.
Just as children’s literature is a subset of children’s culture, video games are a subset of digital media and much of the scholarship in comparative media studies can be applied to games as well. In *Remediation* (2000), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin posit that all media forms draw on their predecessors for remediation design options and that old media can be hypermediated through new media. Lev Manovich (2001) also historicizes old media in order to discuss new media, in part arguing that “new media represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computing and media technologies” (20).

Comparative media theorist Henry Jenkins has likewise produced useful discussions of media culture. He has analyzed media culture (*Convergence Culture* (2006)), edited a collection on changes in media (*Rethinking Media Change* with David Thorburn (2003)), and studied children’s culture, specifically the “child’s increasingly central role as consumer” (*The Children’s Culture Reader* (1998) 20). Jenkins asserts that the convergence of old and new media is changing culture. According to him, convergence consists of “technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture,” which can be understood “as an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship” specifically through transmedia storytelling, participatory culture, and marketing (*Convergence Culture* 282).

Jenkins by no means offers the only theoretical stance on media convergence, but his theory provides broad coverage. By contrast, some critics only study convergence between video games and films. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, who cite as their goal to explore past industry convergence in *ScreenPlay* (2002), limit their field of scope

Other critics refer to convergence, such as Mackey (1999), who expands on Phillip Pullman’s usage of the term “phase space” to describe the possibilities of a fictional story world whose boundaries “seem nebulous” because of the multiple forms it can exist in (“Playing in the Phase Space” 325). Phase space is a useful term since, as Mackey identifies, “the vocabulary for describing new hybrid forms of story that cross media boundaries…is surprisingly limited” (325). However, it limits the discussion to narrative story transmutations across media; it cannot account for narrative forms being combined into transtexts, as in print books that use an instant message format. Kinder and Jenkins also specifically examine transmedia intertextuality and transmedia storytelling by focusing on a narrative arc that transitions across multiple media as a smaller aspect of the larger convergence.

Additionally, critics across a variety of fields have examined new media adaptation and translation. Before Jenkins, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983) used “convergence of modes” to described the process of “blurring the lines between media” that he saw happening (23). Gerard Genette (1997) used the base term “mode,” describing a formal transposition as “transmodalization: i.e., any kind of alteration in the mode of presentation characterizing the hypotext” (277). This change in mode or modal transformation can be “intermodal (involving a shift from one mode to another)” (277). He explains this by a text going from narrative to dramatic, but this same sort of transformation can happen on more than a modal level and therefore can be applied to a formal level in transtexts, for example when there is a form or media shift in a story.
Postmodern literary critic N. Katherine Hayles (2005) explores the transformation of print text into electronic text, a process she specifically calls “media translation,” and groups under the larger concept of intermediation (89). Comparative studies theorist Emer O’Sullivan (2005) argues for comparative children’s literature to include translation studies, defining translation to include not only language but also new media. She uses the term “intermediality studies” and lists it as a one of nine constituent areas of comparative children’s literature, along with intertextuality studies, image studies, and comparative genre studies (13). While intermediation reflects my discussion of story adaptation across media, convergence better handles the idea of two media forms coming together in transtexts and provides a middle ground for discussing transmedia story universes. Also, it is the term children’s literature scholars such as Goldstein, Buckingham, and Brougere and Nodelman have selected for use. Therefore, intermediated convergence accurately summarizes and encompasses the range of issues I discuss.

Jenkins uses his convergent paradigm for understanding media change without limiting the audience. However, I focus specifically on children, in whose literature narrative convergence is exceedingly prevalent. Jenkins’s core claim is that convergence culture “represents a shift in the way we think about our relations to media” (22-23). Forms may shift and present new ways of thinking about old stories, but old assumptions about gender and other aspects of human subjectivity are still present. Convergence, for all of its progressive ideological changes in media culture, has not erased questions of identity and race and has heightened questions of narrative form. But it does acknowledge both the various differences in texts as they are transformed.
across media and allows each medium version to stay on equal evaluative footing with its source, discouraging the prioritization of one version over another.

Divergence has been the traditional approach in many studies—how films divert from the original text, what level of fidelity adaptations use, and how video games deviate from educational literacy. When convergence is referenced, divergence is implied. This binary construction may seem contradictory, but both forces are actively working in children’s culture, pulling and shaping the literary landscape. “Convergence does not mean ultimate stability, or unity,” de Sola Pool argues, “[i]t operates as a constant force for unification but always in dynamic tension with change” (53). This “dynamic tension with change” facilitates the unique spaces of narrative in children’s texts.

With change and convergence comes shifting aspects of power: power of the consumer, power dynamics between adult and child, and power of old media versus new media. Adolescent literature scholar Roberta Seelinger Trites identifies four institutions that adolescents deal with in regards to power—“politics, school, religion, and identity politics (including race, class, and gender)” (xii). In her estimation, “[v]irtually every YA novel depicts the adolescent in conflict with at least one of these types of institutions” (xii). Published in 2000, her study appeared before the peak of the ubiquitous home computer, but entertainment as an institution is on par with these in terms of influence. Video games can provide the player with both power and institutional conflict.

**Video Game Studies**

Digital media, particularly video games, provides a lens through which to analyze and expand the study of children’s print texts. Books and video games developed
technologically in different centuries and may seem as removed from each other as the printing press and the joystick. Children’s literature has had longer to develop into an accepted pastime that combines learning and fun, while video games have had a relatively short life span given their mass-market introduction in the 1970’s. In The Cute and the Cool, Gary Cross argues that most new forms of media, including books, radio, TV, and video games, are met with resistance and only gradually accepted by mainstream culture. Yet even with a similar history of response, books and video games are kept culturally distinct. However, the interplay between forms is increasing. Their consuming audience becomes more connected and multimodally dependent, which helps drive the progress, albeit with assistance from marketers.

Other critics have focused on larger comparative media or intertextual issues involving video games. For example, video games have been analyzed in relation to older media (novels and plays) by scholars like Janet Murray (1997) and Brenda Laurel (1991), and to other new media forms by scholars like Manovich and Bolter and Grusin, but few studies have examined the influence of video games on children’s literature and vice versa. To understand children’s culture, video games must be included in the dialogue. Filmmakers have been adapting literary works and drawing from literary sources since before sound was introduced; therefore, it should be no great surprise that video games also draw from literary sources. But America’s entertainment culture has started to shift from movies to video games with video game sales grossing more than Hollywood (U.S. Census Bureau). As of 2004, “[b]etween 1,200 and 2,000 games are produced each year,” and this number is escalating (Bogart 232). Since children’s literature is also a vast market with over 17,650 new children's and young adult titles
published in 2005 (“BIP” 4), the logical marketing step is to combine them. Especially since, as mass media analyst Leo Bogart claims, “[g]ames are played by 90 percent of children and occupy 10 percent of their leisure time” (233). Children are more likely to consume a text presented in multiple forms, thus the speed of convergence between these two markets enhance profitability and brand awareness.

Whether or not the prevalence of gaming spaces is read as an advantage or disadvantage, video games are now more pervasive than playgrounds and tree houses. Video game designer and scholar Ian Bogost links video games and children's culture, asserting that "videogames are perceived as a children's medium" and are thus considered trivial (vii). Many media scholars have disputed that video games are trivial, and slowly video games studies has been moved into the ivory tower. In regards to educational influence, James Paul Gee argues that video games teach learning and literacy. Bogost himself dispels the notion of video games as trivial and argues that through persuasion and influence video games provide a new form of rhetoric. As a form of rhetoric, I question games’ influence over children, specifically in regards to gender and racial representations. Video games are not trivial to the study of children’s culture as they are a major purveyor of children’s narratives, and they have a cultural, as well as pedagogical, value. Additionally, the influence is not one sided since some print children’s literature has appropriated digital influences back into its story content or structural form.

Video game studies remains linked to the study of other media. Video game theorists Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron assert that “many writings on video games, especially earlier ones, attempt to connect video games to other media, seeing
elements shared between them,” and to economically analyze beneficial endeavors like “the marketing and cross-franchising of video games” (11). Tom Panelas and Kinder, who wrote about adolescents and video games in the early 1980’s and 1990’s respectively, were aware of this connection and laid the groundwork for its discussion in terms of adolescents and children. In describing research theories for children and video games, Valerie Walkerdine asserts that "games need to be understood in relation to films, TV shows and other merchandising tie-ins" (241). These scholars saw the franchise crossover as an important area of study, not just the similarities between television, movies and video games. But it is the dynamic influence between video games and children’s print texts that elucidate the narratives children encounter in a more engaged, interactive immersive experience.

Video games, while primarily ludological, frequently contain narratives and narrative elements to help drive the game play. Play may be paramount to a successful video game, but the narrative can help structure the game and provide marketing tie-ins with a popular franchise. For example, even Disney is slowly catching on to this trend and in October 2006 released the first Disney Princesses video game, *Disney Princesses: Royal Adventure* for the Gameboy Advance. The narrative draws on traditional fairy tales that have been assimilated into the Disney empire and then combined for marketing purposes under the princess title. This strategy was successful, encouraging Disney to release two other Princess games for the DS and Wii. But there is a world of literature, Disneyfication texts and other, that can expand the burgeoning video game market.
The video game market itself helps aid this transition from children’s print texts into video games because of the availability and prevalence of gaming consoles. With the release at the end of 2006 of the Nintendo Wii console, the video game market has drastically expanded to include the entire family. Now families can spend time together playing video games because of the wide age range that a majority of Wii games accommodate. The simple Wii remote is not intimidating for previous non-gamers and the large quantity of minigames for this platform are easy to learn and play. Also, the handheld Nintendo DS (and now the DSi) provides a cheaper platform for children’s games since the DS retails for $129, versus the Wii at $199.\textsuperscript{7} Plus, DS games are typically shorter in game time because they are on a handheld, battery operated system rather than a plugged in console displaying on a television screen. With a shorter game time comes fewer developmental and design costs, a lower overhead, and a cheaper sticker price. Compared to the PlayStationPortable, the DS is a more inventive and creative platform with the dual screen layout of one touch screen and one standard viewing screen, plus microphone and wi-fi capabilities. The PSP may be graphically superior and able to play movies and music, but does not target the child audience as well. Nintendo has exceeded expectations for broadening the marketing demographic for video games, providing more opportunities for children’s texts to be adapted to video game format.

Children’s video games also thrive on the PC platform, especially edutainment games, the portmanteau combining education and entertainment (a.k.a learning through playing), because schools have computer labs. Nintendo is slowly working its way into the classroom, either in recess with active Wii games and \textit{DanceDanceRevolution}, or
through the Nintendo DS classroom, a new educational system that is being tested in Japan (Gantayat). But across platforms, a great many children’s texts from all eras are being transformed into video games, including older and ostensibly classic texts which seem particularly open to such transformation.

Nintendo has been the most proactive console in encouraging the gatekeepers of children and their literature—educators, librarians, and mothers—into accepting gaming.8 Librarians are becoming “cybrarians,” as Marilyn Johnson calls the new identity, and with this new technological inclusion are incorporating video games into their collections and activities. In 2004, The New York Times reported library systems holding video game parties to pull teenagers into the library. The librarians “matched the game play with reading material,” pairing, for example, the game Star Wars Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II with science fiction texts (Gnatek). As primary gatekeepers and purveyors of children’s literature, librarians hold tremendous influence in the reviewing, purchasing, and distribution of children’s books within public and school libraries. By providing video games in a public forum, librarians actively place video games in the hands of all children, not just those who can purchase them. Plus, their seal of approval makes it more acceptable for parents to buy or fund games. The library trend of video game acceptance and usage is growing. Michael Martinez reported about the 2008 Annual Conference for the American Library Association that “the ALA is urging video games as an activity and collection to the nation’s 9,000 public libraries so they can better connect with the hard-to-reach demographic of children, teen and college students in the digital age.” The conference, Martinez reports, “featured its first-ever gaming pavilion, sponsored by the Verizon Foundation, which gave the group $1 million
grant to develop a national model for library gaming.” The term library gaming may come as a shock to some, but the trend is on the rise, linking children’s print texts and digital games in a public space.

Just as librarians are slowly accepting video games (even if only for the initial draw of new patrons or as a lead-in to print texts), the American family unit uses video games as a family activity. Part of why the study of digital media, particularly video games, is so relevant at this cultural moment is because of the shift in family activity and the entering of games in private space. The modern American family’s entertainment has progressed from an oral culture of reading aloud to an aural culture of gathering around the radio to a visual culture of watching television to a digital cultural of playing video games together.

This family bonding though video games has been the crux of the Nintendo Wii marketing strategy. Commercial ads for the Nintendo Wii began in late 2006, right before the Wii was released in the United States in time for the Christmas season. Early Wii commercials typically featured two Asian men bringing a Wii into an American family’s home and introducing the whole family to the system and games, representing the Japanese company once again bringing new life to the American gaming market. The ad would conclude with everyone in the nuclear family playing and enjoying themselves. This marketing perspective of the video game console for the whole family has proved to be both accurate and popular.

Of course, the Wii is not Nintendo’s first attempt to win “the battle for the home,” as video game historian Steven Kent terms the shift in gaming locale (179). The cultural experience of family video gaming became prevalent as games moved from the arcade
into the home, as Atari, with their Video Computer System (VCS), tried to negotiate the
shift from coin-operated arcade games to home consoles in late 1977 (Kent 180). Nintendo made headway into the American home console market in 1985, when it released its first home gaming system: the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). The system revitalized gaming as a child and family friendly activity—bringing gaming into people’s homes, lives, and into children’s culture and media. With the release of the NES, gaming became widespread and situated itself firmly in public perception as a medium for children. Nintendo has been a force in video game marketing since the beginning, using magazines (Nintendo Power) and even movies (The Wizard, 1989) to market their wares. Though Nintendo has expanded its market to the entire family with the Wii console, when the NES was released its “primary target audience [was] boys, ages eight to eighteen” (Provenzo 11).

While boys were the first major group of players for Nintendo, a female demographic is becoming increasingly important as key consumers and caretakers. Just as librarians are key gatekeepers, so too are mothers. Gamers are targeting mothers, and the marketing is working, largely by introducing and involving mothers in gaming. For example, Nintendo ran several print ads where an individual told “My Wii Story.” In the March 2008 issue of Better Homes and Gardens, a magazine aimed at a 25-54 age female demographic, Nancy Ponthier tells her Wii story:

I’ve never been a fan of video games. But Wii is so interactive and gets everyone involved. We really like playing together as a family, so we quickly moved it from my son’s room to the living room. We even like making Mii characters together. They’re funny and we get a kick out of describing each other. I took a crack at making my own Mii. Then my kids told me it wasn’t ‘pretty enough’ and made it better. I thought that was sweet. They were just so happy I was interested in a video game. (211)
This story rests at the bottom half of the page while the top half is dominated by a picture of Nancy, Wii in hand, with her arm around her son. A strip of five smaller pictures divide the page and alternate between pictures of the family playing the Wii together and screen shots of Nancy’s Mii character. The family pictures start with the nuclear family, mother and son playing while father and daughter wait their turn on the couch, then move into two pictures of just mother and children, and then just mother and daughter playing. The son is still given prominence in association with playing video games by being selected for the half page shot, but the ad clearly presents the rhetoric of family togetherness.

The Wii has become mainstream lingo in another magazine aimed at a similar female demographic, Redbook. In the May 2008 issue in a section on being a better parent, Redbook asked their readers “What’s your mom personality?” (Wright 268). After answering a series of questions and assigning point values to the answers, the mom type with the most points, i.e. the best mom type, was “The Wii Mom” who is described as the following:

Yep, just like the folks responsible for the addictive gaming system, you know that the real fun starts when you’re standing side by side with—not hovering over—your child. You’ve encouraged your kid to be an independent thinker from her very first homework assignment. ‘Wii Moms want very much for their children to stand on their own two feet,’ says Tammy Gold, [a psychotherapist and parent coach]. ‘And they have a strong sense of their own identity,’ which is why you set a great example for other on how to not lose yourself in the role of ‘Mom.’ Plus, granting your kids a little freedom means you get some too. Call it Mii time. Still, you’re always there for guidance; he knows you’re his biggest fan (276).

The second ranked mom type also pulled from digital culture, specifically IM, by being “The LOL Mom.”
It may or may not come as a surprise that Nintendo is trying to assimilate into the family unit by gaining the approval of mothers and including them in game play. Marketers learned in the fifties that the matriarch made the household purchases. And since women are still largely seen as the caretaker of children in a house (though this is shifting), it makes solid marketing sense to try and include both the monetary decision maker, the one who purchases items for the children, and the one who monitors the children’s free time. Besides, if a mom understands the joy of gaming, then she will allow her children to play. It is truly marketing genius that seeks to overcome the parental fears of video games (such as violence and other unsuitable material for children), as well as the technological fear of not understanding the controls and how to play (which Nintendo tired to address with the Wiimote design).

Child and family therapist Rebecca Tews researches the psychological effects of gaming on children and describes a possible scenario: “The player, a young woman of twenty…is joined in the battle by her mesmerized five-month-old infant. In the shadowy light, the baby girl’s eyes glow with dual images of the battle her mother is fighting. Her tiny hands wave in the air as they try to mimic her mother’s hand movements” (169). The time together gaming helps “unite mother and daughter in a unique bond of shared experience, emotion, and competition” (169). Gaming has become something that mothers can share with children of either gender, potentially building a familial bonding time around the cultural games of today just as families engaged over board games. Tews concludes, “[t]ime has shown that many of those who began playing in childhood continue to play as adults and to share the experience with their young children as soon
as they are old enough to play” (171). And Nintendo can now accommodate almost any age gamer, an impact that positively affects all gaming no matter what the console.

Video games are slowly being integrating into libraries and homes, largely thanks to the genius marketing and usability of the Wii and DS. Nintendo’s push for family acceptance has increased game awareness and motivated a higher visibility for games in children’s culture. But the video game market is also being embraced because of the material from which games are drawing their storylines. It is important to study the games themselves as adaptations of children’s texts, but it is also important to examine children’s literature that uses video games as a primary component and major plot device to not only examine how video games are being represented, but how video games affect the structure and story of the print text, as well as the ideologies transmitted across media.

**Project Overview**

This study explores the interplay between print and digital texts. Chapter 2, “From Page to Console: Video Game Adaptations of ‘Classic’ Children’s Texts,” explores video game adaptations of “classic” children’s stories, specifically focusing on *Alice in Wonderland* and *Charlotte’s Web* to approach questions of fidelity, intertextuality and convergence. Adaptation study has largely been under the purview of film studies with print to film adaptations, but the theory and practice is not confined to film. By placing a video game’s action within an already established narrative, “the game’s diegetic world is given a greater illusion of depth, and the player, as the story’s main character, is given motivation so that there is more at stake than if the game’s action were merely some random, meaningless exercise. Playing the game means participating in the story” (Wolf 101). The study of adaptations provides a critical and cultural context
through which to examine children’s texts. When a story is adapted across media it fundamentally changes because of the new medium. When translated into a video game, a children’s classic reaches a new market and reengages with popular culture, offering new opportunities for creative and critical engagement.

In addition to being adapted, stories can involve multiple media to produce transtexts. Chapters 3 and 4 address video games, and other digital media formats, integrated into print texts for children and adolescents. Just as some authors, such as Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, are said to write cinematic texts, or print texts that work with cinematic conventions such as camera angles (Spiegel), some children’s and young adults’ authors are being influenced by and draw on the popularity of digital media. In these examples, there is usually a structural or modal influence as opposed to just a thematic influence. “Boys Play Real War: Video Games in Children’s Print Texts” probes the inclusion of video game scenarios within print texts, especially for young adults, with a focus on war games, masculinity, and power in Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* and Terry Pratchett’s *Only You Can Save Mankind*.

Trites asserts, "[i]nvestigating the ways that [writers] employ aspects of narrative structure to manipulate the reader reveals much about the adolescent reader's potential empowerment and repression" (55). Video games are arguably a source and location of child empowerment siphoned from the entertainment industry and selectively set by writers into fiction. By manipulating video games as a narrative structure, transtexts can complicate the power of a child’s play space, even if it is a fictionalized space inside a print text, or a liminal space, and can thus alter or elucidate the adult/child power
dynamic. To provide a historical comparison, Chapter 3 also addresses books that rely on a board gaming scenario.

Chapter 4, “Puzzling Gender: Adolescent Technological Fiction for Girls” examines a wide range of contemporary novels and transtexts for teen girls published after 2002 that include not only game scenarios but also other textual incorporations of digital media such as IM and blogs. As video games become more common and technologies expand, girls slowly become a dominant readership of new media and are privileged with a new form of game in text, an alternate reality game (ARG). Using a survey of these texts, I argue for the progressive technological involvement in girls’ young adult fiction.

Evaluating these stories in Chapters 3 and 4 illustrates gender identity expectations since the majority of popular video games, and even computer technology in general, have been largely identified as male. As video game designer Sheri Graner Ray notes:

Many researchers believe that the concept of the computer as a ‘male’ object is reinforced in children at a very early age. Boys are more frequently given machine-type toys—including computers. They are encouraged to experiment with these machines and are more likely to receive formal computer training. ...Girls, on the other hand, are more often given software that is productivity- or education-oriented, but this software does not necessarily directly educate them in the computer’s technology. (3)

Video games are still largely confined to gender norms because boys are most often given traditional shooter and military formats, while girls are given participatory and communicative games. These demarcations are reflected in young adult fiction, but progressive strides are being made.

Continuing with a focus on female consumers, Chapter 5, “Integrated Media: Race in Children’s Video Games” explores the politics of racial representation in multiple
platform media for children, arguing that children’s video games often act as reinforcement for the games’ television and film counterparts and their racializing characteristics and features. In making the case for positive female minority leads in children's video games, I examine the games and franchises of *Rugrats*, *That’s So Raven*, *Dora the Explorer*, and *Lilo & Stitch*. The influx of games with a greater diversity of minority female characters has only been a recent phenomenon in game production—also since 2002—and holds a strong correlation with the medium of television.

Latham posits that “[c]ontemporary American youth culture can profitably be studied in terms of a dialectic of exploitation and empowerment rooted in youth's practices of consumption, practices that are enabled by and contained within specific technologies, primarily electronic ones (videogames, television, music videos, computer, etc.)” (4). Children’s culture is being inundated with video games assimilating children’s “classic” stories, altering children’s fiction, and revealing gender and racial identities to children. Video games need to be studied in respect to their interplay with children’s print texts to accurately account for their impact on children’s culture.

---

1 I use the broad term “children’s literature” and “children’s texts” to reference both genres of children’s and adolescent’s literature unless otherwise specified.

2 Reynolds is one of the children’s literature scholars from England, which seems to produce the most consistent group of children’s literature scholars writing about children’s literature and digital media. Specifically, the National Centre for Research in Children’s Literature (NCRCL) seems to be very progressive when addressing digital media.

3 See also David Bolt and Ray Crawford’s *Digital Divide*.

4 While there were computer games created in the late 1940's and afterwards, the first commercially produced and sold coin-operated video game and the first in home console were released in the early 1970's.
The U.S. Census Bureau projects for 2008 that videogames will surpass box office earnings by $1.71 per person per year. This is projected to increase to $4.59 in 2009 and $6.23 in 2010. However, it should be noted that this number was based on persons 12 and older.

There is a fierce argument among video game theorists as to whether video games should be discussed in terms of ludology or narratology, but my argument does not need to directly address that divide. See the first two sections (“Cyberdrama” and “Ludology”) in *First Person* edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan; Gonzalo Frasca’s "Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative"; and Nick Wadhams’ "Of Ludology and Narratology."

Originally the Wii sold for $249, but had a price drop three years after its release for the 2009 Christmas sales.

Nintendo helps change the acceptance level of video games and other console games are accepted by default. Nintendo’s influence has been monumental, but the first two games discussed in Chapter 2 are designed for the PC and PS2 respectively.

“The Video Computer System retailed for $199 and came with a cartridge called Combat” (Kent 183).

Ages 25-54 was the highest readership percentage age range, with 49.4 as the median woman reader’s age, as reported on Better Homes and Garden corporate website (http://www.meredith.com/mediakit/bhg/research_women.html).
CHAPTER 2
FROM PAGE TO CONSOLE: VIDEO GAME ADAPTATIONS OF “CLASSIC” CHILDREN’S TEXTS

Since children have been raised in a wired environment and are, in Marc Prensky’s words, “digital natives,” it should come as no surprise that children’s print texts are being assimilated into digital forms. They tend to transform through a fairly standard transmedia procedure: book to film to video game. There are exceptions, especially when television comes into the mix, but for the most part children’s print texts move to the silver screen and then to the computer or console, with each medium using its own language system to communicate with the reader/viewer/player. This transformation happens not only because children’s literature provides a rich heritage of stories, but also because of the current convergence with children’s stories.

Adaptations permeated children’s literature and film well before video games were invented. Children’s literature commonly retells stories gleaned from oral tradition and folk literature, as well as previously published stories. Hollywood has long mass produced adaptations of children’s novels, particularly during its infancy, as Douglas Street notes in the introduction to Children’s Novels and the Movies: “The history of the cinematic adaptation of the children’s novel is closely intertwined with the overall history of the movie industry, and some of cinema’s first reels drew on books for the young” (xix).\(^1\) As the movie industry matured, filmic adaptations based on literary sources did not slow down. Adaptation theorist Brian McFarlane quotes Morris Beja that, “since the inception of the Academy Awards in 1927-8, ‘more than three-fourths of the awards for “best picture” have gone to adaptations…[and that] the all-time box-office successes favour novels even more’” (8). In narrative forms with visual emphasis, from picture books to film, adaptations are standard. The simultaneous perpetuation and
transformation of texts has been happening for a while, and video games add yet another medium for these processes, increasing the playable interaction and audience marketing potential of texts.

Focusing on new media translation, Chapter 2 provides the most obvious connection between children's print media and digital media—adaptation—using video game versions of “classic” children’s books as a way to approach questions of fidelity, intertextuality, and convergence. Using iterations across multiple media is an economically feasible way to leverage a proven story through shared marketing and production. It can also be an advantageous means for creative license while playing with an established tale. Furthermore, transformations can capitalize on nostalgia or expand a franchise to a new audience.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) provide my primary source texts because of their canonical and popular status. As these examples suggest, employing popular, canonical texts illustrates that new media translation is not limited to newly published texts grounded in the marketing culture of franchise immediacy, and they invite more possibilities for interpretation and spin by simply being available longer. The texts by Carroll and White are distinct in their publishing time frame, but they can be used to draw parallels between cultural knowledge and multiple platforms of marketing presentation, while also historicizing the multiple iterations. The sample texts suggest certain patterns and raise interesting questions with their transformative model, such as questions of audience, and of textual fidelity and intertextuality.
The “Golden Age” of children’s books, a construction to delineate the popular and active era in Anglo-American children’s publishing that produced many “classic” children’s texts, provides a starting point with Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. The print texts of this era have undergone numerous adaptations before becoming video games, presumably needing no introduction to contemporary audiences, which in itself is a significant assumption. Because these texts and characters are so familiar over the years in their copious iterations, there is no need for a video game version to have a specific movie tie-in. In fact, there is no need for someone approaching the translated texts to have even read the source text, hence the freedom in adaptation. In examining aspects of the children’s literature canon, Deborah Stevenson asserts that “[e]ventually, a children’s literature classic masters being beloved without actually being read...you do not have to have read Alice, but you will be deemed culturally illiterate should you not acknowledge it as a children’s literature classic” (126). Beverly Lyon Clark represents this acknowledgement of Alice more hesitantly, only willing to assert that “children and adults may be familiar with Alice in the most generic sense, the sense that there was someone named Alice who went to a place called Wonderland or stepped through a looking glass” (154). This label of a children’s literature classic allows more leeway with the new variants because players may only be familiar with the mythos and not the source text.

The second “Golden Age,” a resurgence in literary merit, content and form of children’s publication stretching from the 1950’s to the early 1970’s, illustrates another scholarly constructed period that produced texts now considered “classic.” Some key books from this era, such as Charlotte’s Web and The Lion, the Witch, and the
Wardrobe, have now become video games; however, the games in this instance are first presented through a movie so as to introduce children to the characters their parents already recognize. Contemporary children may not be familiar with the source texts, but a movie tie-in widens the audience base.

The transformations of E.B. White’s Charlotte’s Web (1952) provide a way to approach questions of fidelity/infidelity within adaptation. Given the primary theme of death in White’s Charlotte’s Web, the video game presents a case study for narrative divergence because of the game’s lack of violence or character death. The game thus denies a major theme from the original print text and contradicts the normative stereotype of video games being equated with violence.

Rethinking Adaptation

Discussing cross-media adaptation is complex because of the mediating and narrative components that change when a story is adapted into another medium. A kernel of the narrative remains, yet at the same time the new version is a different story. Several scholarly disciplines provide useful ways of approaching this issue, but how does one discuss children’s books, which are being converted, adapted, and updated into new formats? These stories process quickly through multiple media, each becoming its own text that is independent yet still interdependent with the original.

Film scholars dedicate the most scholarship to adaptation theory through their analysis of fiction to film and vice versa. Adaptation usually places texts in a hierarchy of source text as original and adaptation as derivative, largely focusing on the fidelity of the adaptation to the original. George Bluestone’s 1957 Novels Into Film is regarded as the first significant academic analysis of film adaptation. While he states that movies “do not debase their literary sources; instead they ‘metamorphose’ novels into another
medium that has its own formal or narratological possibilities,” he ultimately believes in the supremacy of the literary source (qtd. in Naremore 6). Darlene Sadlier in “The Politics of Adaption” holds that, “[m]ost commentaries on literary adaptation in film are formalistic, preoccupied with issues of textual fidelity or with attempts to explain the difference between media” (190). It is difficult to move beyond this preoccupation with the formalistic because the nature of an adaptation is interwoven with questions of textual fidelity and media. To help shift the focus, but not completely dismiss the early film theory, adaptation theory is slowly shifting to questions of intertextuality.

In 1996, Brian McFarlane’s Novel to Film helped unsettle the primacy of fidelity in adaptation theory. Film adaptation studies have increasingly approached film as a series of intertexts, thus opening adaptation up to the notion of intertextuality, following James Naremore’s assertion that, “[t]he study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication” (15). “Inserting adaptation in the field of intertextuality,” Mireia Aragay argues in the introduction to Books in Motion, “has the effect of debunking the original/copy binary pair which lay at the basis of traditional adaptation studies” (25), thus removing the hierarchy between original and adaptation because nothing is truly original. Intertextuality broadens the scope of adaptation by placing the derivative text within its cultural moment and linking it to a web of other texts and influences. In “Beyond Fidelity: the Dialogics of Adaptation,” Robert Stam argues against fidelity and states that “the text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext” (57), and that “adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless
process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (66). This intertextual dialogue is particularly important to discussing the complexity of textual transformation across media.

As he argues for intertextuality, film theorist Pedro Javier Pardo García claims it helps “replace the classical conception of adaptation as a one-way relation running from text to film—and therefore, inevitably, characterized by fidelity or betrayal—by a dialogue involving many shades and nuances, and running in both directions” (239). Intertextuality can come from anywhere and everywhere, referencing, alluding to, and transforming texts from any medium, but what mass culture is experiencing in its reanimation of “classic” and established texts is not merely intertextuality. In tandem with adaptation and intertextuality, convergence provides a third approach to studying media transformation. Convergence opens us up to acknowledging both the various differences in texts as they are transformed across media while still allowing each media version to stay on equal evaluative footing with its source. Authors, producers, and directors are not simply making reference to other cultural works, be they movies, video games, or print texts, but through intertextuality, transmedia crossing, and convergence, they are redefining what those cultural works are. This is particularly true of children’s texts, a complex area of textual transformation across media, which can usefully employ these theoretical approaches.

Conceptually, adaptation studies began with questions of fidelity because fidelity is almost impossible to avoid when dealing with questions of adaptation. The source text and the adaptation are linked through characters, thematic issues, or narrative; hence comparison is natural. The problem with the fidelity question appears when one is
automatically seen as derivative, as less, because it is an adaptation. Completely focusing on the question of fidelity is not as useful as using the comparative analysis in conjunction with intertextuality and convergence. A comparison to the original informs my discussion of both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Charlotte’s Web* in which I am considering, in part, how the video game versions differ from the original print text, without implying the secondary text is second-rate. Ignoring the text’s connections to the source text would remove analytic possibilities in cases where the link to the source text drives the audience’s interest in the adaptation and its labeling as such.

Fidelity analysis in adaptation is quickly losing ground with critics such as Linda Hutcheon, who believes that “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary” (9). Reference books on children’s media such as *From Page to Screen* show the changing thoughts on fidelity by providing both an adaptation rating to “indicate how closely the film adaptation reflects its literary source” as well as a cinematic rating to “indicate the film’s strength independent of the book” (xiv). No necessary correlation between levels of fidelity and quality in adaptation exists.

To evaluate quality based on a text’s status as an adaption alone is problematic. As Thomas Leitch explains, of course the original book is better “because it is always better at being itself” (16). He adds, “[b]ut this reduction ad absurdum, which is true by definition, indicates just how trivial a claim we make when we argue that the book is better. Of course it’s better at being itself; so is the movie better at being itself; so is everything in the universe” (16). So, if one can eliminate the original-is-better bias and still look at the comparison, then the fidelity question, and consequently the infidelity
question, provides a fruitful way of looking at an adaptation, as my treatment of the video games American McGee’s Alice and Charlotte’s Web suggests. The comparison can be further enhanced by examining peripheral intertextual sources: influential media, marketing promotions, fan fiction, and other areas of participatory culture.

I prefer the term “source” or “source text” when discussing texts that have inspired other works. Original is problematic, specifically under the discussion of intertextuality since texts always draw on other texts and influences. Hutcheon helps qualify: “texts are said to be mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible, heard and silent; they are always already written and read. So, too, are adaptations, but with the added proviso that they are also acknowledged as adaptations of specific texts” (21). Another way of framing adaptation within intertextuality is that the “adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text” (Hutcheon 21). Because of the popular status of Carroll and White’s work, most readers of the adaptations are familiar with the source texts. The video games American McGee’s Alice and Charlotte’s Web are adaptations of specific texts, but they are also linked with previous adaptations of the source texts and other video games in their respective genres.

Alices

Scholars argue that the “Golden Age” of Anglo-American children’s literature runs approximately from 1865 to 1911, and that it provided some of the best-known English children’s stories, such as The Wind in the Willows, The Secret Garden, The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Peter Pan, and of course Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. On the American continent, writers such as L. Frank Baum, Louisa May Alcott, and Mark Twain were producing strong American fiction either specifically for children or later
appropriated by children. Most of these golden era texts have been adapted in numerous forms, especially to film, for as McFarlane asserts, “the fact is that the cinema has been more at home with novels from—or descended from—an earlier period” than from those of the current era (6). But it is not just any genre that cinema was drawn to in its beginnings, it was largely drawn to children’s novels. Street closely links the two:

By the close of our century’s second decade, while movies were still in their infancy, the neophyte filmgoer had already been treated to at least seven screen versions of Charles Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*, four helpings of *Alice in Wonderland* beginning with Cecil Hopworth’s 1903 print, three *Robinson Crusoes*, and three *David Copperfields*. … It is somehow fitting that the motion-picture industry in its own youth should turn for inspiration and development to the substantial literature of childhood. (xix-xx)

As Hollywood came into its own, the obsession with adaptations did not wither. Golden Age children’s literature texts are predominant in Hollywood’s own golden age in films such as Norman McLeod’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1933), and continued into Hollywood’s pre-World War II cinema with MGM’s *Wizard of Oz* (1939) (Street xx). These films have remained in popular culture as classics, just as the books have; moreover, the stories have retained their popularity, in part, by being transformed and updated into video games. Without adaptations, classics have the potential of obscurity. With adaptations, the source text remains in the public eye.

The Golden Age triumvirate of books—Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and James M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*—shows the most distinctive transformations from print version into digital media. All of these tales have gone through an intermediary stage of film and other forms of adaptation, so that multiple incarnations of each have maintained space in cultural consciousness. Even those who have never read the original print texts still know who Alice, Dorothy and Peter are. As Cathy Lynn Preston notes of fairy tales, they “exist as fragments…in
the nebulous realm that we might most simply identify as cultural knowledge” (210), and these children’s classics are recognizable through identifiable fragments (white rabbit, Wicked Witch of the West, lost boys) because of so many adaptations.

These three classics are easy to adapt to children’s video games because they fit the basic narrative criteria of most adventure games: they rely on a single hero or group of heroes, who work with several outside donors and helpers against a villain or group of villains, usually to save someone in need of rescue. These stories excel in presenting these basic narrative plots, as laid out by Joseph Campbell and explored in structural analysis by Vladímir Propp. The stories also exist within a multitude of revisions, such as the Disney version of Alice and Peter Pan and the MGM version of Oz, that make them part of cultural knowledge. These tales have also inspired diverse print variants as well. Widespread awareness of these tales makes them more immediately accessible for video game players. The prior knowledge of the texts and characters provide a schema that players use to read new versions.

Turning these print texts into video games revises the stories and characters to present new facets of the traditional tales and sometimes new tales altogether. In a video game, certain interpretations of the source text are already fixed by the game’s designer, but others are left to the player. For example, video games can create unique new viewable and executable worlds through which to examine, reinterpret, or exploit the traditional tales. Characters can become avatars for the player, and the story and setting can provide an examinable space to navigate. Examining the particular ways in which these characters have been translated into video games offers the opportunity to
analyze and revisit classic children’s literature characters and tales, to explore the new facets of the story, and perhaps to gain a deeper appreciation of the original.

*Alice* has been adapted numerous times, even during Carroll’s lifetime. When *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was adapted for the stage, Carroll, in an essay titled “*Alice on the Stage*” observed that his story “was written without the slightest idea that it would be so adapted” (190). But Carroll’s own text went through several stages of production, even adaptation: the oral story, the handwritten manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, and the Macmillan publication with John Tenniel’s illustrations. Outside adaptations followed quickly. Early responses to Carroll’s *Alice* have been anthologized by Carolyn Sigler in *Alternative Alices*, where she claims that the pre-1930 “imitations...all adapt the structures, motifs, and themes of the original *Alice* books and respond to the issues they raise” (xi). Sigler asserts that current adaptations of *Alice* “shift from imitating the *Alice* books to merely referring to details of the *Alice* mythos” (xvii). She denotes this by calling the former texts *Alice* imitations and the latter *Alice*-inspired works (xvi).

With such an overwhelming number of adaptations, Carroll not only staked his claim as the “originator” of *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, stating, “for at least I have not consciously borrowed them,” but also linked the stage adaptation to his own work calling the actors “a set of puppets that are virtually [my] own—the stage embodiments of [my] own dream-child” (“*Alice on the Stage*” 190). In the introduction to *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll again defends his original and links adaptations to his story: “I do not know if ‘Alice in Wonderland’ was an original story—I was, at least, no conscious imitator in writing it—but I do know that, since it came out, something like a dozen story-
books have appeared, on identically the same pattern” (qtd. in Sigler xviii). Pervasive adaptations should not have come as a surprise to a writer who himself adapts and parodies texts within *Alice*. Still, Carroll retains a hold in the *Alice* tales, but they have extended past his influence and name alone.

Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, first published in 1865, arguably has the widest reach into our culture of the three Golden Age texts and will thus be the text through which transformation is explored. Alice's story has been told many times, and as "character, text, and cultural concept" she has been referenced in locations as diverse as music videos and theme park rides (Brooker 201). Video games that transform the *Alice* story, such as *America McGee’s Alice*, exist not only against the backdrop of Carroll’s work, but also against a great many adaptations. As popular cultural critic Will Brooker described at length in *Alice’s Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture*, Alice has become a prominent icon in popular culture, no longer circumscribed by Dodgson’s black-and-white photographs of Alice Liddell and the pages illustrated with Tenniel's woodcuts. As Brooker notes: “the many faces of Alice as envisioned by Disney, Miller, Svankmajer, and others only make her more fascinating and vibrant” (201). Walt Disney, known for his animated features, creates a blonde cartoon Alice, while Jan Svankmajer’s surrealist visions involve a live Alice combined with stop-motion animated animals. Even iconic director Tim Burton aligned with Disney to create a live action and CGI version to release the most current mainstream *Alice* story to date. The many film techniques and image creations create distinct versions of *Alice*, largely following their proven directorial patterns and auteur tendencies.
After using Carroll’s work as a basis for the *Alice in Cartoonland* series, Walt Disney captured Alice in a full-length animated feature, transforming her into *Walt Disney’s Alice in Wonderland* (1951). But the film did not do as well as his previous four animated films and was considered one of Disney’s few box office flops. According to film historian Leonard Maltin, *Alice in Wonderland* did poorly because “critics resented Disney’s tampering with the Lewis Carroll classic” (*Of Mice and Magic* 73). The viewing audience comprised many adults who had read the book as a child and brought their own children to the movie, and apparently they resented it too. The poor box office results may be one reason why the Disney film has not eclipsed Carroll’s as the Alice. Yet, it is no surprise that Disney capitalized on the story with the release in 2000 of *Disney’s Alice in Wonderland* for the Game Boy Color.² This video game brought the 1951 Disney film to life, even using cut scenes from the movie. In this side-scrolling adventure, Alice encounters key characters and helps them find their lost items, and she finds magic mushrooms to alter her size. This game’s allegiance, as the title indicates, is primarily to Disney and not Carroll. Additionally, Disney collaborated with Square Enix to produce *Kingdom Hearts* (2002), which combined *Final Fantasy* and Disney characters and contained a game world based on Disney’s Wonderland.

In an attempt to restore Alice to the Disney canon, Disney revived her with the help of director Tim Burton for the 2010 movie and video games. Yet while the movie and video games retain the title of *Alice in Wonderland*, her character is almost overshadowed by the minor characters, especially the Mad Hatter, who is played by Johnny Depp in the movie. The movie is billed as a sequel since a 19 year old Alice returns to the Wonderland (now called Underland) of her youth, but it is more
consistently an intertextual amalgam of Carroll’s texts plus the previous Alice releases, particularly the 1985 TV version of *Alice in Wonderland*, combined with Burton’s stock actors including Depp and Helena Bontham Carter.

Released the same year as the first Disney video game, *American McGee’s Alice* (2000) revises the children’s tale into a dark and twisted journey that in many ways is closer to Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* than are Disney’s version. It is also closer to Carroll’s photographic depiction of confident children where he “frequently undermine[s] standard sentiments about the purity and simplicity of children” (Gubar 99). Likewise, McGee undermines the supposed purity of children’s literature by showing this aggressive version of Alice, one which Carroll would probably approve of based on Marah Gubar’s analysis of his photography featuring assertive young girls who gazed back at the camera. McGee’s reinterpretation of *Alice* into a mature video game revises its presence and sustainability in cultural knowledge, while keeping the spirit of an author who in *Alice* encourages “audience intervention” (Gubar 116). McGee’s text also shows the versatility and mutability of Carroll’s story to be adapted across time and discourse and ability to continue to engage audiences past childhood. By re-envisioning a more mature interpretation of *Alice*, the video game extends the audience’s age range. While adults can certainly enjoy Carroll’s *Alice*, McGee specifically designs his game for them.

McGee takes Carroll’s structure and creates an action-adventure video game with melee and ranged fighting. The player directs Alice through a dark Wonderland, with the assistance of a sleek, goth Cheshire Cat, in order to ultimately battle the Queen of Hearts. While most of the game involves combat, there are quite a few puzzles to solve.
along the way. Alice moves through a series of provinces finding toys, fighting enemies, solving puzzles, and killing bosses. Some have classified it as a horror action-adventure game; it was even re-released in a box set titled *Vault of Darkness* in 2004, which included such horror games as *Dracula Resurrection* and *Dungeon Keeper 2*. The game was created using the *Quake III Arena* engine, which no doubt helped it earn a spot on Gamespot's ten “best-looking” games poll of 2001 along with titles such as *Unreal, Half-Life, Unreal Tournament, Quake III Arena*, and *Myst* (King and Krzywinska 27, King 58). *America McGee's Alice* may have some players questioning which aspects are from Carroll and which are from McGee, thus potentially leading to a rereading of Carroll through the darker lens of McGee’s *Alice*.

Charles Herold, who reviewed the game for the *New York Times*, claims that *American McGee's Alice* “is not an adaptation of these books but a sequel to them” because Alice returns to Wonderland from the mental hospital in which she was placed after her parents died in a fire (G9). But the game is more transformation than pure sequel because it pulls from Carroll’s *Alice*, as well as popular culture idioms and medium-specific design alternatives, creating a new brand of *Alice*. For example, the final battle against the Queen of Hearts’ section is titled “Heart of Darkness,” linking the game with Joseph Conrad and encouraging imperialistic and post-colonial interpretations of the game and its minor characters, who are literally miners.

The various video games offer very different experiences, as defined in tone by the creator or director. No longer is it Lewis Carroll’s *Alice*; instead it is Walt Disney’s or American McGee’s. Each brand brings along with it certain qualities. Disney brings his empire’s history of successful feature length films that incorporate the cutting edge
technology of the time to produce family cartoons with animated visuals and catchy songs. McGee brings his quirky stylistic interpretations to the *Alice* world and his work from first person shooter games, like *Doom*, which helped popularize 3D immersive graphics.

Even without such notable names, versions of *Alice in Wonderland* have been studied as adapted texts. Children’s literature scholar Roderick McGillis, after comparing two film versions of Alice, *Alice in Wonderland* (1933) and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1972), concludes that “of the two films the one that works best is the least faithful, the most complex, and the most spirited” (27). Yet in regards to fidelity, neither game remains exactly faithful to Carroll’s text since they both pull scenes indiscriminately from *Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. Visually, Disney imitates Tenniel’s illustrations, but McGee seems more inspired by Carroll’s own drawings in *Alice’s Adventures under Ground*, the original handwritten manuscript book presented to Alice Liddell on which the published typeset Macmillan version with Tenniel’s illustrations was based. Each break with exact fidelity, as most adaptations that cross-media boundaries do, but McGillis’ qualification of the better film as complex and spirited is applicable to McGee. McGee provides gamers with a more involved and intricate game play by openly accepting an older Alice who has changed over the last century and presenting her to a mature gaming audience.

*Alice* is also successful as a video game because of Carroll’s adherence to a gaming structure, most famously his use of a chess game to structure the moves of his characters in *Through the Looking Glass*. Both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, as Walter De la Mare points out, "have a structural framework—in the
one playing cards, in the other a game of chess, the moves in which Dodgson afterwards punctiliously justified” (61). This very specific structural framework coming from Carroll, a mathematician and logician, helps make *Alice in Wonderland* portable to a gaming situation: *Through the Looking Glass* is already based on a rule bound situation of certain moves in the chess game, and computer programs must have parameters around which the code is built.

*American McGee’s Alice* begins, like most video games, with a cinematic opening cut scene that immediately sets up the relationship and expectation level between Carroll’s *Alice* and the game. An overhead long take scans the room showing Carrollian icons (clocks, playing cards, and a chess board) as well as black-and-white photographs of Alice, reminiscent of the photos Carroll himself took of Alice Liddell. The camera pans over a copy of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* lying open on the bed in Alice’s lap. The player hears voices, presumably members of the Mad Tea Party, waking up the Dormouse and asking the famous riddle, “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?” At this, a black cat, supposedly Dinah, wakes up and knocks over a gas hurricane lamp which sets the room ablaze. Here, McGee visually declares his transformation of *Alice*. The camera gives a close-up of a page from the book with the chapter title “Smoke and Fire.” This chapter is not in Carroll’s text, but the page has been recreated to match the layout of the source text and is illustrated in the style of Tenniel. A casual viewer may even assume that this is from the source text, but McGee is asserting his own revision of *Alice*, literally rewriting the print text to set up the game narrative.
As the fire burns, the same characters who were sharing riddles try to wake Alice to save her from the fire. The rest of the exposition is largely shown through black-and-white photographs and voiceovers of Alice’s parents telling her to get out of the house and save herself. She survives the fire, but her family dies. Time passes and an older Alice appears in a mental hospital, with bandages over her bleeding wrists and her spirit broken. In an act of kindness, a nurse places Alice’s old stuffed rabbit in her arms, the same rabbit that she was snuggled next to in bed the night of the fire. Alice turns to cuddle the rabbit, who looks up at her. The shock in Alice’s face is captured in a still frame, which becomes a black-and-white photograph of the moment. But the moment does not last: the camera cuts to an animated sequence of the stuffed rabbit falling down the rabbit hole. Also dropping down the hole is a pocket watch whose glass face has been broken, alluding to Carroll’s shattering of the reality of time and space. Alice then follows down the hole, landing at the bottom to begin the game.

The game play begins in the Village of the Doomed, in a mine shaft where Alice lands after her fall. The white rabbit greets her, saying, “Please don’t dawdle, Alice. We’re very late indeed!” and then immediately bounds away. Alice is not alone for long, as the Cheshire Cat approaches her and they converse:

“You’ve grown quite mangy, Cat, but your grin’s a comfort.”

“And you’ve picked up a bit of an attitude. Still curious and willing to learn, I hope.”

“Wonderland’s become quite strange. How is one to find her way?”

This initial dialogue and the characters’ appearance set the tone of the game and place it in relation to Carroll’s Alice. The player is at once experiencing Alice through the Carroll story of a white rabbit who is late and the transformed version through the
dialogue and visual clues. Alice and Cat reference the passage of time, as well as the changes to Wonderland. The player is explicitly told not to expect the same Wonderland that Alice has visited previously, but a Wonderland that is “quite strange.” This is a Wonderland that the player has not encountered before, one that has ties to the original, albeit strange in its own right.

Being a largely visual medium, the video game illustrates a strange Wonderland and immediately gives the player clues as to the transformation of Alice not only through her dialogue, but also through her appearance. She is recognizable in a blue dress and white pinafore, but a skull fastens her bow in the back and her front is blood-splattered. She has exchanged Mary Jane shoes for knee-high boots and is usually depicted wielding a weapon. The Cheshire Cat has also been transformed over time. He still has a grin, but his teeth are blood-specked and rotting. He sports several decorative tattoos and an earring. His thin, mangy coat and visible ribs attest to the difficulties in Wonderland under the rule of the Queen of Hearts who harshly dictates life in Wonderland and enslaves its inhabitants. The Queen has discarded the croquet games of Carroll in favor of a more fully realized execution predilection and dictatorship role, and Alice must defeat her in a one-woman coup.

To navigate Wonderland, the player moves Alice through various levels where she meets friends and fights enemies. The actual game space (the worlds in which the levels are played) has a loose basis in Carroll. For example, Alice must swim through a pool of tears and traverse Wonderland woods. Throughout the game, McGee visually incorporates referential nods to Carroll. Situated beside the pool of tears is a statue of a weeping girl. In addition to the Alice statue, he includes a portrait of Charles Dodgson
hanging on a wall in the castle of the Pale Realm. McGee never lets the player forget where his inspiration comes from, but he does not allow the source text to restrict his creativity. Alternately, McGee could be forcing a comparison to Carroll by reminding the player of how different his version of Wonderland is. Either way, McGee keeps the economically advantageous tie-in to an established children’s classic while still creating a game that popularizes him as a designer.

While some cross-media revisions retain the same target audience, McGee capitalizes Alice’s cult status to provide a text for an older demographic, thus expanding the text’s primary audience. McGee freely picks and chooses what aspects of Carroll’s tale to incorporate; for he is designing a video game, not another children’s book. To effectively do this, he adds toys, creates new enemies, and includes many geographical locations that are not found in Carroll’s Wonderland. Some of the weapons are literally taken from the toy chest and converted to a darker purpose, for example, demon dice, jack-in-the-box bombs, and jacks of death. Playing cards can be flung one at a time as projectile weapons or thrown as a whole deck for a stronger attack. Alice can use a croquet mallet for a melee attack at close range, or she can launch croquet balls to attack from long range. One toy, the jabberwock eyestaff, is constructed during the game and has a thematic basis in Carroll but no exact match. Other weapons are not part of Carroll’s literary world at all, such as the ice wand and blunderbuss that McGee pulls from a larger gaming arsenal.

Alice must also fight new foes like Magma Man and the Centipede. The latter leads the Queen’s army, which consists of various ants and ladybugs. Additionally, bosses and enemies are pulled from the pages of Carroll and modified for the game. To
defeat the game, Alice must beat the Queen of Hearts in a final boss battle. Leading up to the final battle, Alice engages in mini skirmishes with Wonderland characters such as the Jabberwock, the Red King, the Duchess, and the Mad Hatter, all altered similarly to Alice and the Cheshire Cat. Other modified Carrollinian characters, such as card guards and red chess pieces, also join the battle against Alice. But she is helped by newcomers like the Mayor and various downtrodden miners who labor under the Queen’s rule. Some Wonderland characters, such as the Caterpillar, Gryphon, and white chess pieces, are friendly and provide assistance. Old friends like the Cheshire Cat and the White Rabbit help Alice find her way around Wonderland because of the new territories, such as the Land of Fire and Brimstone and the Fortress of Doors. The game carries the player through this altered Wonderland, referencing Carroll while also adding entirely new material. The balance of childish influence and adult fancy turns *Alice* into a video game geared toward adults. It is in this crossed boundary where we encounter the most creative transformations and double meanings, like using “Toys” instead of weapons with which to inflict damage on enemies.

*American McGee’s Alice* allows for a new audience to experience a transformed taste of Wonderland. It plays with the complexity of the audience question by drawing on a children’s text that can be read and enjoyed by both children and adults, and transforming it into a video game for adults. This is by no means an unusual occurrence. Children’s texts have been crossing boundaries from before their classification as such as authors engage in cross-writing. Historical border crossings include the ongoing debate between audience and purpose: is a book earmarked for a child or an adult audience? Does the book fulfill a didactic or an entertainment purpose
for children? These debates can carry over from print to electronic text. When asked in an interview if he believed the *Alice* books were really children’s books, McGee answered:

> Technically, no. But that’s not to say that I would withhold that book … from the hands of a child. … [T]he Alice books may have been written for and about a child, but at the same time they contained commentary on politics that I doubt any child would comprehend or enjoy. Part of the beauty of the writing is that it can simultaneously serve two very different functions, and do both well. (qtd. in Kramer 276)

Unlike the books, however, the video game does not have as flexible an audience given its Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating. Rated M for Mature, major retailers will only sell the game to youth seventeen years old and older. Quite clearly, *American McGee’s Alice* wants to capitalize on the adult undertones in Carroll’s *Alice* in order to cater to the primary video game audience of PC action-adventure games in 2000.

The relationship between adult and child, between actual audience and intended audience, is a common point of discussion for children’s literature. Jacqueline Rose argues that “children’s fiction is impossible” because the adult is always put first through “author, maker, giver” and the child second through “reader, product, receiver” (1-2). Perry Nodelman looks specifically at the case of *Alice*, pointing out story specifics that allow the adult reader to view the text not only as a children’s story but also as an illumination of adult knowledge and experience. He explains, “many adults now think of Alice as a children’s book unsuitable for children” because “[i]f Wonderland is the world, then the fact that Alice, a mere child, experiences it in all its unsettling and dangerous uncertainty flies in the face of conventional wisdom about the simplicity, safety, and delight of childhood” (41). Similarly, Carroll experimented with transforming his own text,
to exclusively target a child audience. Zohar Shavit describes Carroll’s attempt to remove all adult content in *The Nursery “Alice”:*

Carroll eliminated and deleted all the elements that he had elaborated in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in order to make sure that his text would appeal to adults as well: He completely changed the tone of the text, omitting all its satirical and parodical elements, renouncing his previous attempt to blur the relations between reality and fantasy, thus transforming *The Nursery Alice* into a simple fantasy story, based on the conventional model of the time. (91)

The clear cut distinctions eliminated the nuance and genius behind the *Alice* stories, reducing the text to an unsophisticated story. Needless to say, the original books, which exhibit Carroll’s playfulness toward reality and fantasy, time and space, size and proportion, provide the jumping off point for McGee’s *Alice.*

Many others beside McGee have been influenced by the beauty of Carroll’s text. In *Alice to the Lighthouse,* Juliet Dusinberre probes his influence on modern writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. In addition to looking at pre-1930 imitations of *Alice,* Sigler also explores Carroll’s influence on contemporary female writers, examining their intimate relationships with *Alice* through their transformations of it in poetry and prose. Alison Habens, the author of one such transformation— *Dreamhouse* (1996)—states, “In some places, the seamless joints between Carroll’s text and my own shows how profound the influence of childhood reading was on adult writing” (147). *American McGee’s Alice* shows a similar effect of childhood reading on adult game design.

McGee’s *Alice,* even though geared toward an adult audience, has been the most common *Alice* video game for critics to examine. Most critics choose to write about McGee’s *Alice* because there is no need to purchase new equipment since the game is played on a PC, and there is no real skill required because one can play the entire
game on god mode, a cheat setting where the player is invulnerable and cannot die. For example, both Brooker and Jan Susina in their respective monograph analyses of *Alice* address *American McGee’s Alice* and even other electronic versions, but neither mention *Kingdom Hearts*. The mature, dark Alice of *American McGee’s Alice* contrasts sharply with the Alice of Disney/Square Enix’s *Kingdom Hearts*, an E for Everyone game accessible to child and adult players. *Kingdom Hearts* requires specialized equipment (the PlayStation2 console) and lacks an invincible mode. One must play through the game, battling the bosses and acquiring the proper elements. Therefore, most attention and scholarship has focused on *American McGee’s Alice*, making it an important video game version of Carroll’s *Alice* even if it is not adapted for children, but *Kingdom Hearts* supplies an interesting and largely unexplored case study as well.

*Kingdom Hearts* provides an interactive experience within Wonderland, but at a reduced intensity compared to McGee’s *Alice* because Wonderland is only one of several playable worlds in the video game. But, it does provide an even stronger, multiplicitous reading of convergence. Video game scholar Mia Consalvo, in analyzing convergence in three Japanese video game companies, distinguishes between Western convergence and Eastern convergence. “[U]nlike in the American model,” which she defines based on Jenkin’s convergence as a “center-periphery” paradigm that revolves around a certain canon for a story’s universe, the Japanese model has “central characters or a theme or world [that] are created, then gradually filled in by various media products, none of which may take center stage” (Consalvo 137). *Kingdom Hearts* fulfills Consalvo’s Eastern version of convergence by being a member of the *Final Fantasy* world developed by Square Enix, the Japanese video game development
and production company. Consalvo explains that “Square Enix draws from elements of its business to expand the Final Fantasy universe, which has never featured a core text or storyline, but instead creates features and elements that make each iteration of Final Fantasy feel familiar” (137). While Kingdom Hearts does further the Final Fantasy franchise in the way Consalvo defines as Japanese, the game merges with a key American entertainment icon, Walt Disney, to provide the canon of stories. Thus, Kingdom Hearts blends Eastern and Western convergence.

Kingdom Hearts follows Sora, the main playable character, through various adventures in multiple worlds, where most of the worlds and some of the characters are based on Disney films. Some characters are based on Final Fantasy games, and the gameplay is typical of Final Fantasy action role-playing games (RPG). In the game, Sora teams with Goofy and Donald to travel through various Disney worlds, including Wonderland, battling the evil known as the Heartless.

But the connection to Alice begins before the characters arrive in Wonderland. The game begins with Sora questioning reality and then falling slowly down into a new world, much like Alice and the rabbit hole. He lands in the Snow White room, where the floor is covered in a stained glass homage to Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). After completing the necessary game questions, the glass shatters and Sora falls down to the Cinderella room, also complete with a stained glass Disney’s Cinderella (1950) floor. This continues through the tutorial levels until, after fighting a boss in the final tutorial, Sora wakes up and does not know if what he experienced was a dream or not. In addition to questioning reality, falling down into new worlds, and wondering if experiences were dreams, Sora is also an Alice character by traveling to
strange worlds in localized spaces. In both Carroll’s and Disney’s Wonderlands, the disparate settings Alice moves through are seemingly separate locals in the episodic tale. The scenes are not cohesive but individual oddities, and Alice moves from one to another while exploring Wonderland. Similarly, Sora moves from one Disney world to another.

The association with Alice is furthered by Wonderland being the first Disney world explored by Sora, Donald, and Goofy. Sora enters Wonderland, not surprisingly, by falling down a rabbit hole. Once there, the landscape and characters are visually based on Disney’s version of Wonderland as presented in the 1951 animated feature film. Originally, the Disney animated film was to be drawn in the style of Tenniel; however, bringing the Tenniel drawings to life was both impractical and not what Disney-lovers would expect. So the artists and animators consulted Tenniel’s work and came up with free translations of his characters, close enough to the originals to be identifiable, distinctive enough to be recognized as Disney creations. (Maltin *Disney Films* 102)

*Kingdom Hearts* takes a similar interpretive stance in plot and setting, but Sora interacts with the Disney versions of the characters Alice, the Queen of Hearts, the White Rabbit, and the Cheshire Cat.

Even though the character’s images mimic the Disney film, the game takes liberty to modify it by providing translations of settings in the same Disney tone. The first room in Wonderland, called the “Bizarre Room,” is a bedroom, presumably belonging to the White Rabbit, but with a small door and the talking doorknob from the Disney film. This room invokes Wonderland size changes as the player must drink potions to grow small. The second room is the “Queen’s Castle,” where the player interrupts court. Alice is on trial for trying to steal the Queen of Hearts’ heart, a crime which was really committed by the Heartless, the game’s villain. The robust Queen shakes her fists and screams “Off
with her head,” but Sora stalls the execution and seeks evidence of Alice’s innocence. Venturing to the “Lotus Forest,” the Cheshire Cat makes its appearance as a helper by telling the player that there are four pieces of evidence, three of which are easy to find. He encourages Sora to find all four for a big reward.

Deviating from Carroll’s storyline, the quest begins in the forest instead of the pool of tears and its beach. Some deviations are intertextual to other Disney games, like finding missing puppies from Disney’s *101 Dalmatians* in a side quest. Others are focused on the *Final Fantasy* RPG-style gameplay, like being given the magic ability of blizzard by the Cheshire Cat. Once the quest is completed and Sora has collected all four pieces of evidence—footprints, antennae, claw marks, stench—he returns to the trial. The player may talk to Alice while she is imprisoned, but she only answers questions with parodies of Carroll, saying things like, “I guess I’m a bit too curious for my own good.” Once the evidence is presented, the player fights the Queen’s card guards, during which time Alice is kidnapped.

Sora explores Wonderland to find Alice, where again the Disney/Carroll worlds and the *Final Fantasy* worlds converge. While visiting the “Tea Party Garden,” the player receives “unbirthday presents” of health and “munny” by sitting down at the tea party table. Inside the Hatter’s house, the Cheshire Cat provides more Carollinian links by quoting the final line of the poem “Jabberwocky,” “And the mome raths outgrabe,” as a warning of the final boss battle ahead. After fighting the final boss battle against a non-Wonderland character, Alice is still missing and Sora proceeds to the next world, “The Deep Jungle” with Tarzan.
Alice reappears near the end of the game in a position that seems to subvert Disney’s labeling system. Commericially, Alice has not been classified by Disney marketers as a Princess. Yet, in *Kingdom Hearts*, she becomes one of the Princesses of Heart along with Belle, Cinderella, Jasmine, Snow White, and Aurora. The Princesses are important because, if they were all to gather by a keyhole in the Grand Hall, darkness would enslave all worlds. *Kingdom Hearts* expands the Alice mythos, labels her as a Disney Princess, and constructs a new interpretation of an explorable Wonderland geared toward an E for Everyone audience.

The most current video game of *Alice*, based on the 2010 Tim Burton and Disney film, balances a youth and adult audience as an Everyone 10 and Up video game, so rated because of mild cartoon violence. This action-adventure game for the DS, Wii, and PC harmoniously adjusts to the family gaming atmosphere Nintendo has heavily marketed, making a game accessible to a broad range of ages. Unlike both *American McGee’s Alice* and *Kingdom Hearts*, *Alice in Wonderland* provides a two player cooperative mode, available on the Wii version. Like *American McGee’s Alice*, Alice has grown-up and is returning to a Wonderland ruled by the Queen of Hearts.

The game’s structure does continue in the gaming vein of Carroll, but instead of a chess match, the video game uses a jigsaw puzzle format, requiring the player to obtain puzzle-shaped pieces of the Oraculum map and literally put Wonderland, or Underland as it is referred to, together. Each puzzle piece corresponds to a section of the story and a part of the larger game map traditional to most adventure video games. Card imagery is also used since the locking shapes that connect each puzzle piece are either
a heart, spade, club, or diamond. For example, one must link two heart pieces together for the puzzles to fit and a door to open from one piece to the other.

While the movie and its games were billed as a sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, the DS game’s content does not support this assertion. It begins with the White Rabbit running by a lounging Alice, whose cartoonish rendering depicts a young child instead of the movie’s 19 year old protagonist. Alice follows him down the rabbit hole. Once she lands, she is seized by a black, thorny branch and hovers in the top screen. The player is immediately given play control as the White Rabbit to select a new game or a saved game using the bottom touch screen. While the cartoon visuals are cheerier than McGee’s dark Wonderland, the game still retains Burton’s sensibility with dark yet zany undertones.

Using the naming scheme developed in the movie, the player explores Underland through the characters of the White Rabbit (McTwisp), the Caterpillar (Absolem), the Cheshire Cat (Chessur), and the Mad Hatter. The requirement of playing four different minor characters provides the unique adaptation of this game version. The characters posses their own special abilities, and the player must effectively use all four to navigate Underland and complete objectives. For example, Chessur can make pieces of a bridge appear so that McTwisp can reverse time to reconstruct the bridge, making it passable for Alice. Alice herself is surprisingly limited: she is cast as a non-playable character that needs to be managed throughout the entire game, a far cry from the independent, adventuring Alice at the end of the movie. No longer is the game true to its title of *Alice in Wonderland*, but it distances Alice, requiring the player to babysit her while developing the minor characters.
Like the movie, the game combines aspects of Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, and selects the Queen of Hearts as Wonderland’s monarch, not the Red Chess Queen. In fact, all three versions of the *Alice* video games keep the Queen of Hearts as the antagonist. However, the final boss fight in the 2010 DS version is not with the Queen, as in *American McGee’s Alice*, but with the Jabberwocky. Nor is Alice the one to defeat the poetic monster. Even to the very end, the DS game will not allow the player to embody Alice. Instead, she screams, runs, and hides while the player relies on the Cheshire Cat to vanquish the Jabberwocky. Keeping the narrative in line with the movie, Alice is given credit for the victory when the battle is reported to the White Queen, but the action deviates, showing the marginal position of this Alice.

The lack of agency on Alice’s part provides the fresh adaptation that the newest version brings to the larger mythos. Alice has become a trivial character in the video games with limited attributes to make her identifiable as an Alice character. The game designers must have seen her as overdone since they focused on developing the minor character’s roles. Burton set the stage for this by casting the minor characters with charismatic actors, such as Johnny Depp as the Mad Hatter, while deciding to use a largely unknown actress for the part of Alice. The movie storyline empowers Alice while the video game versions push Alice out of the spotlight befitting the titular character and have the audience/player explore Underland with the host of, previously, minor characters.

Alice cannot be utterly Disneyfied though, having long since escaped from her bound pages and moved into a larger mythos.11 Because Alice has extended beyond
the original source and because of her numerous adaptations, she suits video game adaptations such as *American McGee’s Alice* and *Kingdom Hearts* that transforms stories into another genre. In addition, the most current video game capitalizes on the modern revisionist tendency to explore alternate endings or perspectives and minor characters more thoroughly. Today’s children may well be more heavily influenced by playing a video game than by reading a print text; therefore, video games are a valuable site of transformation for texts as our culture becomes more and more digitally based.

Video games like *American McGee’s Alice*, *Kingdom Hearts*, and *Alice in Wonderland* allow for a different interaction with a text through a graphical interface and by placing the protagonist as the playable character or avatar for the user. One downside is that because of a game’s parameters, only certain interpretations of a text are valid within the game space.

Video games, though they do involve learning, as Gee and Prensky have discussed, are still largely seen as an entertainment medium. Yet this spirit of entertainment melds well with the original intent of Wonderland. Along with other Golden Age books, *Alice in Wonderland* helped revolutionize children’s literature by transforming mundane material with a pedagogical focus into books meant more for enjoyment. Transferring Carroll’s *Alice* stories into well-designed, well-executed video games that are fun to play constitutes a high tribute to their original creator, whose goal was to amuse and entertain.

With so much attention and previous adaptations, it is no wonder that Alice stars in her own video games. This sort of transformation has also happened to other Golden Age characters like Peter and Dorothy, but on a smaller scale. No doubt, texts from
the Golden Age will continue to be mined for high-quality stories to reinvent and reintroduce to today’s children, but a transformative market is also available in stories published for the baby boomers.

**Webs**

Many children’s texts produced around the mid-century continue the tradition of the Golden Age. A pioneer in children’s publishing and reviewing, Zena Sutherland explains that “the great tradition of animal fantasy begun in *The Wind in the Willows* [is] followed by *Charlotte’s Web*” and that “the daft world of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* grew perceptibly zanier in the fantastic dreams of Dr. Seuss” (57). The explosion of interest in children’s books in the early twentieth century was followed by the second Golden Age consisting primarily of epic and animal fantasy. Starting in the 1940’s, the nation’s skyrocketing birth rates produced the baby boomers, who reached the ideal reading age for key mid-century children’s books.

E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) and C. S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) illustrate a trend in children’s texts written and published around the mid-century. Both books, one American and one British in authorship, were made into full-length animated features in the 70’s; then, again in 2005 and 2006, they were transformed into live action feature films with accompanying video games. By using remakes of children’s books, the movie industry could cut costs and capitalize on the ready-made market for its ancillary goods. Whereas *American McGee’s Alice* targets adults and *Kingdom Hearts* targets children, the remakes of *Charlotte’s Web* and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* target multiple viewing audiences: the adult who grew up reading the source text and the child who may not know the source. This
section focuses on *Charlotte’s Web* and its iterations, particularly the video game version.  

White’s awareness of adaptation began immediately after the book’s publication in 1952. Various people tried to secure the rights to handle the adaptation, including Disney Studios, but White was concerned about his work being adapted into film (Apseloff 174). He wrote in his letters that he did not want an adaptation to violate “the spirit and meaning of the story” and wanted “the chance to edit the script” (qtd. in Apseloff 172). According to Marilyn Apseloff, “many of White’s fears came to pass” when the animated film was released twenty-one years after the book was first published (175). Yet the film, which won a Genesis Award in 1998 for a classic feature film, was a success. Apseloff describes how the animated version of *Charlotte’s Web* “captures the spirit in part, but too often the cartoon intrudes” (180). She ultimately concludes:

> the film *Charlotte’s Web* can stand on its own as an entertaining, rather skillfully animated musical for children and adults, well voiced, with distinctive characters and some memorable songs and visual effects. It is when the adaptation is compared with the book and the book’s *intent* that its divergence from White’s work is realized. (Apseloff 181)

Her sentiments demonstrate the insufficiency of fidelity as the sole avenue of exploring adaptation.

White himself raised the concern of fidelity to source texts by questioning the ability to capture the spirit of *Charlotte’s Web* on film (Apseloff 171). Peter Neumeyer explains that “White wrote to one entrepreneur hoping to film the barnyard saga” and said, “I saw a spider spin the egg sac described in the story, and I wouldn’t trade the sight for all the animated chimpmunks [sic] in filmland” (Neumeyer xxix). Here, White, while showing his dislike for Disneyfication, is also describing a firsthand visual account
that he experienced and subsequently penned into the story through a textual rendering in descriptive narrative form, thus providing one level of transformation. Yet we must recognize that with the admission of his inspiration White acknowledges that the “spirit” has already gone through at least one layer: he has transformed the reality into a textual description. Moreover, White allowed Garth Williams to illustrate key moments, thus providing another transformation.

Indeed, Williams’ illustrations do more than just add pictures; they enhance the meaning of the story and work cooperatively with the written text to create an interplay of image and text that becomes the novel. For example, after the line “When she was finished ripping things out, her web looked something like this:” there is a line drawing of a web (White 92). This displays a visual interpretation of the intended meaning to White’s words in a similar way to how a film version would, only with a single image instead of 24 frames per second. Similarly, Neumeyer in The Annotated Charlotte’s Web comments on another picture of Charlotte’s web, now complete with the word “Terrific” in the center and Wilbur positioned underneath. He explains that “since White doesn’t describe the expression on Wilbur’s face, this illustration is testimonial to Williams’ own creative bent” (95). Each layer adds interpretation, and in the end, interpretations and adaptations were out of White’s hands.

For many years, the Newbery Honor-winning novel by White comprised the entirety of the story of Charlotte’s Web. Hanna-Barbera released the animated film in 1973, and a sequel in 2003, Charlotte’s Web 2: Wilbur’s Great Adventure, followed by the live action film in 2006, along with a video game for the Nintendo DS. These print and media versions converge to create a larger ur-text. In the mind of the consumer,
there may not be a clear division between original and adaptation, depending on which version the consumer was exposed to first. In *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen posits, “[t]he idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends, as Barthes argues, on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the ‘already written’ and the already read” (6). Though Allen (and Barthes) were speaking on a much larger scale, the principle applies to *Charlotte’s Web*. With the creation of film and video game versions of the story, modern audiences can now experience the narrative of “Charlotte's web” as a broader and more inclusive text than just the original printed novel. Each text builds on the central radial hub and adds additional threads, part and parcel of creating the larger web, or ur-text. Each new text links to the previous, but also remains its own text.

“Charlotte’s web,” the story, now consists of an amalgam of print, film, and digital sources that when combined, create a fabric of overlapping impressions that the reader labels as “Charlotte’s web.” Each of the media versions of “Charlotte's web” is *Charlotte’s Web*, yet each of them is also distinctly unique. In this instance, the print version chronologically came first and therefore most other versions look back to it as the source. Instead of simply being an adaptation or a rewriting of an original, a new media version of a text generates an additional primary text within that story’s scope, creating a type of convergence—transmedia storytelling—that expands the text’s scope. The new text can expand the storytelling boundaries, but can also have the affect of limiting the source text. Annotating *Charlotte’s Web*, Neumeyer notes:

This great American children’s novel has stood by itself without the aid of notes for over forty years. Certainly, it could continue to be read without. But if selected insights into the workshop of a thoroughly self-aware author enrich the reading for some … then this edition justifies its existence. (xviii)
This great work can also continue to be read without any awareness or recognition of the other media texts associated by name, but additional texts will enrich the reading for some. For others, a film or video game will be the only engagement of “Charlotte’s web” they ever have.

The film and media transformations of *Charlotte’s Web* exhibit the larger American cultural movement through technological shifts in film techniques from animated cells to computer-generated imagery (CGI). The animated feature film by Hanna-Barbera added a musical twist popular with the other cartoon powerhouse, Disney. The 70’s were a unique time because, while a legacy had died with Walt Disney in 1966, other cartoon production companies began to produce heavily. Film historian Maltin speculated that the 70’s witnessed a “cartoon renaissance” that “saw a remarkable proliferation of feature cartoons, from here and abroad, for every possible type of audience” (342). The closest Disney release to Hanna-Barbera’s *Charlotte’s Web* was also a children’s book adaptation, *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too* (1974), but it was an animated short.

The animated feature contributes to the overall story of “Charlotte’s web,” just as the live action film (with the aid of live animals and computer animators) brought *Charlotte’s Web* to life and introduced the story to a new generation. In 2006, with CGI graphics becoming more realistic and feasible, the cultural moment called for a live action remake. The year before, Hutch Parker, president of production at 20th Century Fox Film, claimed, “Even five years ago, we shot one or two movies a year with a significant number of effects. Today, 50 percent have significant effects. They’re a character in the movie” (qtd. in Thompson). *Charlotte’s Web* had the legacy of another
live action hit with a talking pig behind it—*Babe*. Winning the 1996 Oscar for Best Effects, *Babe* paved the way for a live action, barnyard family movie.

Fans of the novel *Charlotte’s Web* may be fearful of what an adaptation will do to the source text, particularly when the viewers and critics are adults who fondly remember the original book. Based on a poll, *Publishers Weekly* ranked *Charlotte’s Web* as the best children’s book written between 1930 and 1960 (12), and in 2001 they ranked it as one of the “all-time bestselling children’s books” with over a million and a half copies sold. With this sort of overwhelming acceptance and praise attached to the story, adaptations are going to receive a higher level of criticism than a story that has not been so revered. The general pattern among film reviews when the movie came out was to give a comparison to the book, which was typically described as revered, classic, and a perennial children’s favorite. One *Variety* film critic negatively reviewed the film in comparison to the book: “E.B. White’s book is *Charlotte’s Web* the classic; Paramount and Walden Media’s film is *Charlotte’s Web* the commodity” (McCarthy). While there is some truth in calling it a commodity, the film must be recognized as helping enhance the recognition of the novel, also a commodity. Largely, audiences are somewhat fearful of change, relying on nostalgia and disliking adaptations that illustrate the changing times. Video games released simultaneously with a film are often labeled as commodities, but they provide another medium through which the audience can experience the story universe.

A video game, ostensibly based on the 2006 film version of *Charlotte’s Web*, was released in November 2006 on several platforms (including the GameBoy Advance, the PC, the PlayStation2, and the Nintendo DS), thus illustrating the typical progression of
children’s classic texts from print to film to video game. Since the original children’s book was written well before today’s millennial generation was born, an unaccompanied release of the video game may not have had much name recognition with child consumers. Because the text’s original readership is not the video game target audience, the game needed to first be initiated through a movie in order to introduce children to the characters with whom their parents were already familiar. Thus the film becomes a pretext for the game.

Most video games that accompany the release of a live action film are largely dependent on that film because of shared graphics and a similar marketing plan; however, the Charlotte’s Web video game is not simply a playable version of the live-action film or the novel. Though it freely draws from both book and movie, the game reverts back to animated visuals and introduces a distinct narrative. Also, the DS version does not use Fern as the primary playable character. Using her may have exacerbated the gender divide, whereas playing as an animal is more gender neutral and opened the game to a wider audience. Fern as the avatar would have promoted the game’s classification as a girl game, thus limiting its selling range. In place of Fern, Wilbur is the main playable character.

The game starts with Chapter 3 of the book, returning, possibly unintentionally, to White’s first draft. Neumeyer writes that White originally intended “that chapter in praise of the barn to open the book” (xxix). Stills from the live action movie accompany the game’s narration: “I was born in a barn…just a plain old barn. But every barn needs a pig!” After this short cut scene, the adventure portion of the game begins with Wilbur waking up in “Level 1: Zuckerman’s Barn.” Here the player learns how to control Wilbur
through a short tutorial. Play then proceeds through sixteen levels from the barn to the 
state fair with Wilbur (and occasionally Templeton) collecting letters along the way. Just 
as the beginning of the game skips a section of the novel, it also concludes early, with 
“Level 16: Say Uncle” ending after Wilbur and Templeton find Charlotte’s egg sac at the 
state fair.

These game alterations change the experience of the novel significantly. Wilbur 
becomes active in saving his own life by helping to collect letters instead of being the 
passive recipient of Charlotte’s sacrifice. Fern appears primarily in the role of healer to 
pet Wilbur and increase his health, thus increasing the longevity of his game life. 
Charlotte emerges occasionally, but only to provide the player with hints and 
instructions. The player has somewhat displaced the roles of Fern and Charlotte in 
relation to Wilbur by combining both saving and nurturing aspects. The player is 
distanced from Charlotte because while the player can control Wilbur, Templeton, and 
to a lesser degree Fern, Charlotte can never be controlled. This same lack of agency 
from the titular character in Charlotte’s Web mirrors the 2010 DS version of Alice in 
Wonderland.

Besides the adventure game mode, the software also provides storybook mode 
and minigames. The storybook mode displays stills from the live action movie with an 
abbreviated and adapted version of the novel. It begins:

Wilbur was born the runt of the litter. Since Wilbur is not able to fend for 
himself, Mr. Arable decides to give him to his daughter, Fern. Fern loves 
Wilbur, and tends to his every need, including long walks. When Wilbur 
grows too old to stay in the Arable house, Fern gives him to her Uncle 
Zuckerman to take care of, on a great, big farm.
The story continues with a still picture from the movie in the upper screen and short text in the bottom screen, presenting the entire story, or rather the video game version of the story, in sixteen sentences.

Even though the game presents its own interpretation of the story in the various modes, being able to play *Charlotte’s Web* adds a new level of interaction with the story. The adventure mode is the most obvious form, but the minigames creatively adapt the story into puzzles that take themes or instances from the story and rework them into five minute playable segments. For instance, in one minigame, the player creates words out of a jumble of letters. In another, the player helps Templeton catch food droppings at the fair. Some games are based on games that Fern, Henry, and Avery may have played at the fair, like bumper cars and ring toss. Others are thematically linked to a barn as in “Bale Out” where the player maneuvers Wilbur through a hay bale maze. The PC version of the game added a game entitled “Petting Pen,” where players can care for Wilbur. In this instance there is no need for a visual avatar of Fern because the player cares for Wilbur directly, thus becoming a stand-in for her.

While the current strand of adaptation theory is pushing against the established debate of fidelity to the original text, the instances of infidelity prove noteworthy. Critics are largely concerned with how faithful a film or video game is to the original, but breeches in fidelity prove interesting, particularly with the video game *Charlotte’s Web*, which chooses to delete a central theme from the novel—death.

*Charlotte’s Web*, according to children’s literature pioneer Francelia Butler, is “[o]ne of the most notable treatments of death in children's literature” (85). Neumeyer claims it as “one of the first children’s books to deal seriously, without sentimentality or
condescension, with death” (xix). Animal death was part of White’s everyday life on his Maine farm from 1938 to 1944. He loved being in the barn and around animals, and death on a farm is inevitable. But this sort of raw reality is foreign to mainstream American children today. Their images of death are usually mediated through television, movies, and video games. Therefore, that the video game chose to retain the innocence of a childhood unmarred by thoughts or images of death by completely removing it (as well as violence) from both the narrative and the game play comments on the backlash of political and parental activism against media violence.

Because children are largely removed from natural death, educators and people connected to children are concerned with the type of death and violence that children are now experiencing, particularly through violent media.17 But the novel Charlotte’s Web is a story of life, death, salvation, and rebirth, all common themes presented in the novel. Instead of remaining faithful to a theme from the novel, the game sanitizes Charlotte’s Web, removing the emotional power of the novel. This may be an attempt from SEGA, the game’s publisher, to address recent political sensitivity over video game violence or to make sure parents would find the game acceptable for children.

The opening of the novel immediately grapples with death: “Where’s Papa going with that ax?” (White 1). Depending on how much a child has been coached on the book, or if he or she has seen the movie and already know the plot, this opening question could induce a slight anxiety. Axes are more common in horror movies than around the house. In the story, because she “was only eight,” Fern does not link her father and his ax with immediate danger, violence or death, and thus asks her question casually, in the way of one who sees her father with an ax on a regular basis (1). It is
not until her mother gently breaks the news to Fern that her father is going to “do away” with a runt pig that Fern becomes agitated (1). Because she grew up on a farm, Fern understands the euphemism and translates it for the reader into the harsh reality that her father is going to kill the runt (1). As Mr. Arable’s intentions are disclosed, White uses the tension of the imminent slaughter to hook the reader and drive the action forward. Nodelman argues that Chapters 1 and 2 are a shorter version of the entire novel: “White prepares readers for the complexities that follow by presenting a simpler, more easily identified with, more wish-fulfilling version of the same story” (“Text” 125).

Violence is again implied with the introduction of Fern’s ten year old brother Avery: “He was heavily armed—an air rifle in one hand, a wooden dagger in the other” (White 4). To the reader in the fifties, this might be an acceptable sight for a boy of his age, but Avery may seem a violent child to modern day readers forbidden to play with air rifles by city laws. While looking at gender and mothering in *Charlotte’s Web*, Lucy Rollin questions, “do the characters of the ‘heavily armed’ Avery, the ax-carrying Mr. Arable, and the devouring Templeton reflect women's fear of men's potential for violence?” (51). Possibly, but the potential violence is always averted.

Though Wilbur is temporarily spared, the threat returns throughout the entire novel, propelling the action and keeping readers wondering if he is going to be slaughtered. Only when Wilbur is finally safe does Charlotte die. Hers is a peaceful, yet heartbreaking, death not associated with any violence, but presented as the natural conclusion to life. Yet this conclusion is not the end. There is renewal in the spring as Charlotte’s children are born and three decide to stay with Wilbur, providing a happy ending to the cyclical tale of life, death, and rebirth.
Not only does the written text present a tension of violence and death, but also the first two illustrations visually increase this tone. The escalating emotions during the conversation between Fern and her mother are further amplified by Garth Williams’ drawing of Fern struggling with the ax in her father’s hands (White 2). In the next illustration, the reader is visually introduced to Avery, who is holding his rifle and clutching a knife (5). By the third illustration, peace resumes as illustrated by a maternal scene of Fern cradling Wilbur in her arms and feeding him a bottle. He has become “her infant” and through motherly love, death has been diverted (6). No other illustration in the text contains manmade weapons. In a later picture, Avery tries to capture Charlotte by knocking her into a box with a stick, but the actual image carries a comedic tone by showing Avery landing on his head with his feet up in the air (White 73). The violence is thwarted by the stench of a rotten goose egg that bursts open when he falls.

Compared to Chapter 1 in the novel, the video game version of Charlotte’s Web contains no killing, violence, or death. Something so central to the novel—death—is completely removed from the video game. In adventure mode, Wilbur is never in fear of dying at the hands of Fern’s father, Mr. Zuckerman or the player. Wilbur does have to evade Lurvy in one segment of the game, but as in the book’s Chapter 3 “Escape,” there is no immediate threat. The lack of a threatened or real death is potentially problematic because it trivializes and denies death.

Not only is death thematically avoided, but also logistically. Even if a player tries to kill Wilbur by letting him drown in a water obstacle, he cannot really die. He squirms comically, his health bar drops to zero, and the game restarts at the most recent check point to give the player yet another chance. No matter how many times Wilbur runs out
of health, the game always restarts with new lives for Wilbur. Given the target age range for the game, this could be a mechanism for keeping young children from becoming frustrated with the game play. The adventure mode of Charlotte’s Web deflates the politically charged notion of video game violence by purposefully avoiding it and betraying a key theme of the novel.

In storybook mode, the game glosses over Wilbur’s potential fate by euphemistically stating, “Learning that Wilbur is destined to become a holiday ham, Charlotte tries to save his life by letting everyone know, he’s ‘Some Pig.’” After this, Wilbur’s fate is never mentioned again. Also, his first brush with death is deleted so that the humane Mr. Arable “decides to give him to his daughter, Fern” instead of Fern having to plead for Wilbur’s life.

In addition to avoiding death, the video game also deletes the life cycle with rebirth. The adventure mode ends at the fair and does not continue back to the barn. The storybook mode goes one episode further, “When Wilbur comes home, he watches Charlotte’s babies hatch and fly away.” Both modes effectively delete the cycle of life by sanitizing the story through the removal of death and rebirth, providing cultural commentary on the topics sanctioned for today’s children regardless of the source text.

As is the case with Charlotte’s Web, if a book has become a revered classic, most readers will compare the film and video game on the basis of fidelity. Throughout the history of adaptation studies, questions of fidelity to the original source have overwhelmed the theoretical conversation by asking whether the movie faithfully represents the source, leading to a strong critique on points of departure from the source text. With current trends of releasing movies and games based on popular
children’s books, the fidelity question is at its nadir. However, sometimes points of infidelity prove the most interesting, especially in the convergent web of intertexts.

As with texts like *Charlotte’s Web* and *Alice in Wonderland*, movie and game producers will still mine older children’s texts for promising adaptations, but the current children’s book market is at an all-time high of publishing and tie-ins, largely because of a boy wizard’s influence on the market.

**Present Day**

Marketing tie-ins with books are not new to this century. Children’s book publisher John Newberry sold *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in 1744 with a ball for boys and a pincushion for girls. Carroll endorsed “marketing schemes for authorized *Alice* merchandise such as…a Wonderland Postage-Stamp Case, and a biscuit tin decorated with characters from *Through the Looking-Glass*” (Sigler xvii). And in film, what began in earnest with the merchandizing tie-ins of movies in the 1970’s has become standard practice today. Cook notes that “by the 1990s, merchandizing had risen from the category of ancillary income to become an important studio revenue stream, and all of the majors operated large consumer-product divisions” (51). Just as the rising prominence of cinema precipitated the creation of academic film departments in the 1960s and 70s, so too has the prevalence of video games, CGI, and digital camera equipment led to the creation of digital media studies, as Thomas Doherty chronicles. Additionally, this technological transition from celluloid to CGI, from analog to digital impacts the ease and lowers the cost of transitioning a movie into a video game.

Present day texts, like Lemony Snicket’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, are attuned to the multiple media facets that make for greater marketing potential. In these instances, producers purchase the rights to the
book relatively quickly and the movie and video game are typically released together, sometimes with the overview of the book’s author guiding the transformation along the way. Because of the immediacy, there has been no time in these present day texts for numerous independent adaptations to form; instead, they are usually the result of accelerated marketing complete with material tie-ins.

With present day publications the book, movie, and video game are all released in close proximity to each other; thus, there is a greater comparison between the texts. The discussion of fidelity in adaptation is true of present day texts, particularly when there is a widely read source text that is being adapted into another form. *His Dark Materials* provides an example for present day incarnations, and it is especially suitable because of its almost immediate jump to classic status. The first book in the series has been adapted into a movie and a video game. And the present day texts tend to be part of a trilogy or series that continues the characters longer than a single volume. Plus, each has additional add-ons to further franchise the titles. Other popular texts that fit this model are *Harry Potter* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. In these instances the source text is popular and the snare of fidelity captures the discussion largely because of the book’s popularity and the substantial reading culture behind the texts before the adaptation.

But fidelity does not always result in the strongest adaptation possible. Deborah Carmell and Imelda Whelehan use *Harry Potter* as an example to prove that “a commitment to fidelity (in response to the perceived demands of readers/viewers) compromises the processes of adaptation” (37). But what the video game adaptations do is provide a new level through which to experience the storyline. For example, in the
game *The Golden Compass*, the action begins in the frozen North with the three main playable characters: Iorek Byrnison, the armored bear; Lyra, the child heroine; and Pantalaimon (or Pan), her daemon. To an audience familiar with either the book or the movie, this seems a giant leap, but, the narrative jump is an effective one because the frozen North provides a great tutorial for the game: the player can immediately jump into the action as Lyra and Pan to ride Iorek on their first mission while Iorek fends off wolves. Restructuring the story narrative is effective because of the learning time a player needs to experience and master the controls of the game. Once the player completes the first goal and finds the boy, the game goes back in time two months, back to Oxford where the story begins afresh. Here the player is limited to Lyra and Pan, and the game play roughly follows the novel while allowing the player to immerse herself into the story by controlling Lyra’s actions and Pan's form changes.

Consumers may purchase a game based on their interest in the book or the movie, but gamers will only continue to play the game if it has made an effective transition from the narrative story to the ludic game. As the popularity of a children’s book increases or the hype over the movie escalates, audiences become more demanding of quality games to accompany the other media. For now, the bulk of video game transformations rest on the shoulders of contemporary authors willing to sell the rights of their children’s text to the entertainment industry. But, as the movie industry of the 1970’s illustrated, when economic times become tough, producers will look to any popular text to recycle whether it was written one, fifty, or a hundred and fifty years ago.

Disney will provide a salient example in the fall of 2010 with the release of *Epic Mickey*, a video game for the Wii updating Mickey Mouse’s image. In *The New York
Times, Brooks Barnes reports, “Disney executives are treading carefully, and trying to keep a low profile, as they discuss how much they dare tweak one of the most durable characters in pop culture history to induce new generations of texting, tech-savvy children to embrace him” (A1). And while Disney may worry about changing the American icon, they proceed in order to retain his place and his marketing power with young children. Barnes confirms that Mickey’s “static nature has resulted in a generation of Americans — the one that grew up with Nickelodeon and Pixar — that knows him, but may not love him” (A1). Disney’s video game forays have so far only resulted in “successful spinoff titles,” (A1) which seems appropriate since adaptation is a foundation for the Disney enterprise.

Other media companies are approaching the market differently. Simon & Schuster, in a new arrangement with the Gotham Group, indicate a new trend to increase profits based on multiple media releases. The New York Times reported that “in exchange for a percentage of revenues, Simon & Schuster may agree to publish a book long before it is written, based on an assurance from the Gotham Group that it has Hollywood potential” (Bosman). Instead of books driving film adaptations, potential films will be driving the book market: “Under the new arrangement, when the Gotham Group has a possible film project it can turn to Simon & Schuster and promise a percentage of its revenues…if the publisher agrees to turn it into a book” (Bosman). While the traditional progression of children’s story adaptations has gone from book to movie to video game, this may become a thing of the past as Hollywood gains more clout. Yet this is unsettling in many ways. While the link between children’s digital media and print media is strong, having the book market depend primarily on sales could limit the quality
of literature. If nothing else, it will limit the form and structure of printed tales to ones that translate from digital media well, deleting potentially radical works of children’s literature or unique narrative experimentation in favor of episodic action stories. Or, that the stipulation to translate into media might evoke narrative experimentation as we will see in Chapter 4 with *Cathy’s Book*. Both help and hindrance are possible.

Additionally, movie producers are looking at toys for inspiration, providing an intermediate merchandising tie-in. According to Universal Pictures Chairman Marc Shmuger, “Brands are the new stars” (qtd. in Fritz). Ben Fritz reports for the *Los Angeles Times* that “[m]ovie studio development slates are rapidly filling up with projects based on well-known toys and games” including one “based on the classic video game Asteroids.” Universal Pictures also has a deal to develop movies based on multiple Hasbro Inc. products (Fritz). With these developments, the focus is again on increased avenues of play to enhance marketing security. Children can purchase and play with the stuffed characters and then purchase and play with the characters through a video game. Both forms of play increase the popularity of the franchise and ticket sales are mostly guaranteed since the marketing campaign is already underway with the original product.

Children’s publishing seems to be headed in a very connected, transmedia direction where a novel may not always be the source text. This is a serious and complex issue that will only escalate, and adaptation, intertextuality, and convergence will help scholars navigate the transmedia texts this trend produces. Yet, story adaptations are just one of the ways through which digital media affects the children’s
literature market and vice versa. Chapter 3 will explore another area of convergence that re-inscribes a video game through a fictional print text’s structure and plot.

1 Street’s 1983 edited collection views well-known children’s novels from 1857 to 1973 and explores their filmic adaptations.

2 There was one *Alice in Wonderland* game before this, produced for the Commodore 64.

3 On American McGee’s personal webpage and blog, he cites either Sarah Michelle Gellar or Universal Pictures as owning the film rights to *American McGee’s Alice* (http://www.americanmcgee.com). The production schedule is unclear, but there may be a movie version in the near future. Also, Electronic Arts announced in February of 2009 that there will be a follow-up to *American McGee’s Alice*. The working title is *The Return of American McGee’s Alice* and no release date has been set (http://investor.ea.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=366638).

4 Brooker provides a chapter-length walk-thru of the video game *American McGee’s Alice* and detailed fan site responses (229-263).

5 The white pinafore has two pockets in front, just like Tenniel’s illustrations, but on each is a symbol. The cover art on the box depicts the astrological symbol for Neptune and Jupiter on the pockets with Alice wearing an Omega necklace. In the game itself, the symbols are different and have not been deciphered to my satisfaction. The necklace changes from an Omega to an A.

6 Beddor’s *The Looking Glass Wars* has several similarities such characters being forced to work in a mine and the weapons of Hatter Madigan may have been influenced by McGee’s *Alice*.

7 McGee selects the Queen of Hearts from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to represent the final villain yet he deletes the Red Queen from *Through the Looking Glass* while still including the Red King and other chess pieces as enemies.

8 We see this sort of return to a childlike Alice in another video game, *Alice in Vivaldi’s Four Seasons: The Music Game*, a game of musical puzzles and riddles that uses Alice to teach children about Vivaldi and to help train their musical ear.

9 Maynard, McKnight, and Keady’s “Children’s Classics in the Electronic Medium” present other electronic versions of Carroll, but they do not address video games.

10 The sequel to *Kingdom Hearts*, *Kingdom Hearts 2*, does not include Wonderland. However, there is an interim Game Boy Advance release, *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, which takes place between the first and second *Kingdom Hearts* and does contain Wonderland.

11 The creators of the educational software *Alice* also saw benefits in using a Carroll’s *Alice* to teach computer programming. *Alice 2.0* is designed for high school and college age students and *Storytelling Alice* is geared toward middle school children (Alice.org).

12 Laurie Taylor and I explore in-depth the transformation of *Peter Pan* into the video game realm and survey various video game versions using *Peter Pan* in “Playing in Neverland.”

13 *Charlotte’s Web* was selected because of its female protagonist and because of personal preference, but *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* could have easily been the focus of this section as well. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* mirrors the released adaptations of *Charlotte’s Web*. Other children’s texts published around this time period have also had an older movie adaptation revised into a new film
and complemented with a video game. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory came out in the early sixties and does not have an animated film, but does have one film version in the seventies and then a recent remake and video game. The Hobbit was published in the late thirties, but has an animated film in the seventies and a video game in the eighties before the wildly popular Lord of the Rings live action films and video games were produced.

14 The animated feature film produced in the 70’s marks the text’s first venture into filmic adaptation. Historically, the 60’s and 70’s comprise the inception and creation of academic film departments, who used adaptation as a key theoretical discussion because of their rise from English literature departments across college campuses. But the discussion of adaptation was occurring before universities formally acknowledged the study of film with Bluestone’s Novels into Film (1957). Also, during the seventies a resurgence of remakes occurred as the motion picture industry historically modified. Cinema scholar Lester Friedman examines the changes in his introduction to American Cinema of the 1970s citing studio financial trouble, low film attendance, and the advent of the VCR as altering the face of Hollywood. Additionally, this decade saw an “important development in the business of marketing motion pictures, the merchandising tie-in” which included “ancillary goods ranging from sound-track albums and novelizations to children’s toys and action figures, from embossed clothing and fast food products to pins and posters” (Friedman 4). In his study of the decade in film, David Cook also notes that one of the industry trends was marketing and merchandising: “merchandising became an industry unto itself, and tie-in produce marketing began to drive the conception and selling of motion pictures rather than vice versa” (51).

15 The game is available on other platforms, including the GameBoy Advance, the PC, and the PlayStation 2, but I reviewed the DS version.

16 This progression is slowly changing due to available technology and familiarity with video games. For example, Disney’s Prince of Persia (2010) is a live-action film based on the popular video game. While this has been done before with titles such as Tomb Raider, Doom, and Resident Evil, the progression from video game to movie with a child audience is rare.

17 See Handbook of Children, Culture, and Violence for a full discussion of this topic.
CHAPTER 3
BOYS PLAY REAL WAR: VIDEO GAMES IN CHILDREN’S PRINT TEXTS

Whereas Chapter 2 focused on print texts adapted into video games, Chapter 3 examines video games integrated into print texts. By examining seemingly disparate narrative discourses in Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* (1985) and Terry Pratchett’s *Only You Can Save Mankind* (1992), I investigate how a video game structure operates within an adolescent or children’s book, which lead to questions of war and power linked to the male protagonist. We also see this type of media convergence with books that rely on a gaming scenario such as a board game, which I will discuss through the works of Chris Van Allsburg, William Sleator, and M.T. Anderson.

Chapters 3 and 4 are organized by the medium integrated into the print text, which in turn reveals and reinforces a stereotypical gender divide. Chapter 3 examines video games within children’s literature and the boy protagonist player. Chapter 4 will examine gaming and the female sidekick, and it will also examine communication media such as emails, instant messages and blogs within children’s literature alongside the girl protagonist raconteur. This gender divide provides a prominent demarcation between types of digital technology integrated in the texts and illuminates certain gender assumptions. While some exceptions occur, the major trend follows a division that reinforces a constructed gender divide where boys use technology to play war and girls play the role of helper or sidekick and build social relationships by technological communication means. This approach acknowledges specific allusions to technology in the story narratives and in one text recognizes the impact of embedding a distinct medium’s framework into another form. Instead of one medium being remediated into
another form, the two forms remain separate and distinguishable in the texts I examine, yet are converged for a cohesive effect.

Incorporating a video game into a print text provides a readymade structure, a marketable link with popular culture; more importantly, it provides the child protagonist a space through which to gain power and agency. In both Card’s *Ender’s Game* and Pratchett’s *Only You Can Save Mankind*, video games are the primary element through which the protagonist matures. The convergence of child and machine via a video game intertwines major tenets of young adult fiction as laid out by Trites, including power, growth, and institutional interaction. In particular, texts that incorporate video games do so with a male protagonist who experiences growth and maturation through this digital medium and has the help of a female sidekick.

Because this section discusses a print text with a game discourse inside the narrative, I refer back to Chatman’s *Story and Discourse*, which explains the two components of narrative, a story and a discourse, as the what and the how (19). In examining a video game in a traditional book structure, two discourses are combined, resulting in double hows. Yet even before the video game discourse is added, the “how” of discourse “divides into two subcomponents, the narrative form itself—the structure of narrative transmission—and its manifestation—its appearance in a specific materializing medium” (22). Chatman offhandedly assumes that “naturally, the medium influences the transmission, but it is important for theory to distinguish the two” (22). Yet it is even more important to note when another medium, a video game, has been embedded within a print medium because it maximizes the difference between Chatman’s two subcomponents. The effect would be different if the discourse
manifestation were cinematic; if so, then a literal embedding of a visual video game could occur, such as in the movie *The Last Starfighter* (1984) or *Tron* (1982). But because the texts are print, a greater dissonance occurs, which highlights the digital discourse.

To complicate the discussion of narrative even further, while the larger narrative’s framework surrounds the video game, the video game retains its own story with which the print story’s characters become involved, thus creating an interaction between the print story’s and the video game’s existents.\(^2\) The video game’s story is subsumed to help create the overall narrative of the book. The effect of this interlaced story and discourse creates multiple levels within the narrative, thus providing a story within a story, but in an untraditional framework because the two stories are from different media. These novels do not visually represent the story-space and discourse-space in the way that audiences experience real life video games. However, it is useful to think about the game’s spatial existence as separate from the story world even though boundaries are distorted, allowing the games to become liminal spaces. While the protagonist must initially wait to enter the game space, the blurring of game and reality immediately begins with the books’ titles. For Pratchett, the title of the text and the title of the video game is the same, drawing on the concurrent narrative that both produce. Using the video game title as the book title textually solidifies the two entwined stories and discourses. For Card, the title describes a generic game, which can apply to the multiple games the title character plays, producing a broader titular range.

The texts that I discuss could be classified as digital bildungsromans, which add a technological element that reflects the current trend of children’s culture to the
traditional coming of age story.³ It showcases a distinct technological passage of power or media literacy that the protagonist must learn in order to grow and literally level up. While digital bildungsromans may not fundamentally change the pattern of the traditional bildungsroman, it shows the universality of the novel type to incorporate cultural innovations and changes. In these digital bildungsroman texts, a child’s growth cannot come to fruition until he has passed through, used, and mastered digital technology. The final steps of mastery usually entail leaving the gaming technology behind as a thing of childhood play. The textual child cannot mature completely until technological knowledge has been mastered, which typically leads to a fulfillment of the game being won. He might gain technological awareness and prowess to come of age, which sometimes results in discarding or refusing the game after mastery has occurred. In these texts, there does not seem to be any sense in which learning the game and winning go against development or maturation; instead the games provide a space of learning and even power.

To aid the character’s growth and to help bridge the transition between the child and adult worlds, the interface is deleted in the sample texts so that the boundary between a character’s reality and the game blurs. Reality is called into question, just as the lines between child and adult are crossed through the child’s involvement in battle warfare and gaming. These digital bildungsroman texts use video games to examine play, war and childhood in a virtual space—one alternate to the character’s reality—in which the child protagonist can mature seemingly free of excessive adult control.

The addition of the technological aspect of growing up illuminates key factors that link these texts in theme and content, thus creating a larger statement about the
perceptions of video game play and children. Card and Pratchett use military and
shooter video games to provide a conquerable quest, each containing lessons of
learning, power, maturity and masculinity. Additionally, characters are empowered
through game play, which is restricted to a military or warlike battle within the video
game, often with adult manipulation. While video games are a relatively new medium,
authors have employed this type of gaming narrative framework before with board
games.4 Similar to the children’s texts that use board games as a structuring element,
an obscuring of reality happens as a child character moves between the game world
and the world outside the game.

**Board Games in Children’s Texts**

As Steven Malliet and Gust de Meyer correctly observe in “The History of Video
Games,” a forerunner to the video game was “the tradition of board games and
children’s games such as hide and seek or cops and robbers, in which (part of) reality is
represented in a simplified, iconic way, and players are expected to use their
imagination to play their part in this world” (24). Therefore, a similar type of game play
can occur since they are both rule-bound games inserted into a work of fiction that the
protagonist, or player character, must play and win. Gaming, from puzzles to video
games, has been viewed by critics as a way of learning power and teaching ideologies,
such as national identity and imperialism. For example, Meg Norcia adroitly explores
Victorian gaming through the lens of teaching British imperialism in her articles “Playing
Empire” and “Puzzling Empire”. In a similar vein, Christopher Douglas argues that the
popular video game series *Sid Meier’s Civilization III* promotes US Imperialism and
American ideology. And these ideologies and others can be present in fictional texts
that incorporate games too.
As Chapter 2 explained, even a text like Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* uses the structure and discourse of a chess board. Like Carroll, Card and Pratchett, Van Allsburg, Sleator, and Anderson use games as a structuring element in their works where the games function to create learning spaces, and liminal spaces, in which the textual child can explore adult/child boundaries. This type of game narrative is not to be confused with works that include a physical board game with the book, such as Mo Willems’ *Time to Say Please!*, Phillip Pullman’s *Once Upon a Time in the North*, or *Little Lit: Folklore & Fairy Tale Funnies* edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly. These texts have a physical board game that the reader can play independent of reading the story. By contrast, Van Allsburg, Sleator, and Anderson all effectively use board games as a narrative device within a print text to provide structure, drive plot, heighten suspense, and impact characters’ lives.

Van Allsburg’s 1982 Caldecott Award winning picture book *Jumanji* depicts a game gone awry, as does its sequel *Zathura* (2002). Both picture books are vividly illustrated with Van Allsburg’s haunting works that adds a strong visual component to the reader’s experience. Like *Zathura*, Sleator’s *Interstellar Pig* (1984) incorporates outer space, but it uses a board game to provide a simulacrum representing a real game happening throughout the cosmos; the other players are actually aliens. In the sequel, *Parasite Pig* (published in 2002, the same year as *Zathura*), the protagonist Barney is still playing the same board game. He thinks it has been rendered harmless until a new player reveals himself to be an alien who sets the game in motion again. Moving from science fiction to fantasy, M.T. Anderson’s *The Game of Sunken Places* (2004) forces two teens to fight for their survival in a board game that replicates their
physical surroundings and provides spaces for them to move in their physical world.\(^5\) These final stories go beyond *Jumanji* and *Zathura* not only because they are novels instead of pictures books, but because the stakes of the game are higher: not only are the characters’ lives at stake, but they are also playing for an entire exiled race of creatures in *The Game of Sunken Places* and for the salvation of the Earth in *Interstellar Pig*.\(^6\)

Each author interweaves his text’s narrative with the rule-bound medium of a board game, letting the reader ‘play’ along as the characters move through the game. Even though these texts were written in different decades, for different reading levels, and in different genres, the game narrative structure provides several similarities. Each book (except the sequel *Parasite Pig*) is named for the title of the board game being played, placing immediate prominence on the game aspect. Within the story, characters find or are introduced to the board game. Each book provides a description of the board game that the characters are playing, giving a realistic physical presence to the game. Each game also has specific rules that players must abide by, even if these rules are not divulged upfront. Next, the board comes alive and draws the predominately male characters into the game. Inside the game world, player characters deduce the game has powers to affect their real lives. Finally, each game was created by an adult or some adult-like life form that is older than the player character. Likewise, each book was written, edited, and published by adults older than the presumed target audience. These parallel age gradients restrict potential boundary crossings and limit areas of growth and learning.
In his classic study of the play-element in culture, Johan Huizinga defines a game as “a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary' life” (28). Every game in all five primary texts, whether board or video game, ceases being a voluntary activity to their characters at some point, usually because of a life-threatening situation where the fictional game becomes real to the characters playing it. When the game ceases to be a voluntary activity, thus no longer a game, the difference from ordinary life is erased and imaginary becomes real. When games start to have consequences, they become more apropos to real life, i.e. adult life, helping children learn to deal with various situations so that they can then manifest those learned lessons in real life, providing didactic lessons of teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving skills. Thus the games highlight and reinforce skills valued by our culture. Just as Norcia argues that Victorian games taught social and political mores, one might suppose that these authors use the guise of games to provide a print form of edutainment. But the books go beyond simple lessons and confer a more complex and limiting situation for the child player.

*Jumanji* frames some of the larger questions these books evoke in regards to reality and child participation. In “How Picture Books Mean,” Peter Neumeyer argues that Van Allsburg teaches the reality of the imagination and his books “declare that Imagination is 'real,' that the world in the mind, including the child's world of fantasy, is actual, true, even tangible” (2). While not all of the texts would claim the imaginary is real, they do blur the two worlds together in the gaming situations. The games become
real: either in physical substance or in the children’s mind. The specific aspects of reality evoked by the texts do not change the outcome. Either form of reality establishes the problem that once the game is won, the text reverts back to the status quo, the game play becomes voluntary and the child’s world is stabilized. This return to normalcy after the game’s conclusion questions both the child’s learning and growth during the game, as well as the child’s agency apart from adult control within the game space.

Natalie Babbitt finds Van Allsburg’s works akin to Dr. Seuss’ *The Cat in the Hat* (1957). Both share a plot, she explains, where “something, or someone, comes into the life of a child or two left alone by adults for a few hours, and causes unbelievable havoc, all of which miraculously vanishes before the adults return” (qtd. in Chaston 17). While her comparison is somewhat accurate, in none of these books do the child players’ problems miraculously vanish on their own—the child must actively play the game in order to restore order. Granted, the game play is more simplistic in *Jumanji*, where players only draw cards and move spaces, than in *The Game of Sunken Places*, where players must answer riddles and solve problems while moving around the game board. But it still remains the goal of the child player to eliminate any obstacle and win the game, and it is only through the player’s active engagement with the game that it can end. Goldstein, Buckingham, and Brougere argue that, "[c]ontemporary children's culture depends not on passive consumption, but on the energetic activity of the child" (3). None of the games provide passive entertainment for the child protagonists; instead, they exhibit active pursuits in collaboration with a friend or a sibling.
While *Jumanji* exhibits active participation, Sleator and Anderson’s works grant the child players more active learning situations and increased agency. This may be especially true in the young adult novel examples because their characters are closer to reaching adult status, whereas in *Jumanji* the game play is limited and the game board more restrictive and authoritative. The board games in the YA novels provide a medium of exploration for the child player and makes available experiences for growth within the gaming scenario. It seems that the authors use game play to instruct characters and readers under the guise of fun, a technique educational psychologist Otto Weininger advocates. Game play is an essential part of a child’s activity because “play facilitates the cognitive growth of the child by permitting him and encouraging him to do rather than being done to or being told what to do” (Weininger 45). The catalyst for character action, a game that has come alive as in these five texts, creates a space where the child character has freedom of choice within the bounds of the adult’s game. Once inside a game, the character can make choices that would not have been possible or true to form outside of the game. For example, in *Parasite Pig*, the sixteen year old male protagonist Barney maims and kills alien opponents in the game, and the game acts as a controlled space or medium without real world consequences. The games also instruct and educate the player characters as they must solve problems and riddles, and use quick thinking to defend their lives.

The layers of media (game in a print text) show slippage between the childhood world of playing and learning and the adult world of creating and controlling. One may assume that moving closer to adulthood would be the reward for effectively finishing the childhood game, which is how Jyotsna Kapur explains the 1995 film version of *Jumanji*. 
He claims that the narrative “immensely empowers children” (137) and that the game “becomes a metaphor for the incomplete business of childhood fears and anxieties; likewise, finishing the game is imperative to becoming effective adults” (138). Yet the child player never really ceases being under adult authority, even though he does gain more freedom within the game than he otherwise would have had. Still, the player characters in the books seem to leave the game not much better than when they started. Instead of gaining adulthood, this reversal to childhood after the foray into the game world complicates the notion of learning and growth through gaming. After the game concludes, the child player must return to his daily life, going back to the childhood responsibility of school. Adult responsibilities, if bestowed to the winner, are somewhat superficial. For instance, in *Parasite Pig*, Barney’s parents force him to get an after school job and join the ranks of working adults. At the end of the sequel, they force him to quit so he can spend more time on his school work, thus taking away even the small adult responsibility he had.

Since the young players are not accepted as adults, a tension between the parent and child exists in these texts; in addition, there is also a tension between the fictional adult designer of the game and the non-adult player character. In *The Game of Sunken Places*, two thirteen year old boy protagonists play a game conceived by ruling adult aliens, created by an older human cousin, and facilitated by an android facsimile of a sixty-year-old man. The boys, Gregory and Brian, compete in the contrived game in order to determine which of two alien species wins a war. Their match is one in a series of twenty that determine the territorial battle between the aliens. Brian, the winner, is charged with constructing the next match in the series and is promoted to the role of
creator/designer. However, he is told, “the next round will be yours to invent, when you choose. Future years, that kind of thing. Give it a rest for a while” (Anderson 254). Although imparted with adult responsibilities and promoted from player to designer, the new role is implicitly reserved for when he comes of age.

While educational psychologists see cognitive and social learning benefits through game play, the children in the texts, after their expedition into the gaming world, must return to childhood and once again be under adult control and rule. So did they ever leave adult control? Even though games are sometimes seen as children’s toys, particularly board games, the games in these novels are adult constructs just as the novels themselves are showcasing a third tension between child and adult. In the real world, rigidity exists between child reader and adult author, which encases the narrative world relationships between child protagonist versus parent and child player versus adult designer.

The idea of constructs re-opens the question of reality. If the games are only in the child’s mind, is the only world he can envision one of adult rules? One would assume that imagination would try to immediately remove adult restrictions. But if the game is real as the texts imply, then why do the trials and learning not have more impact on the child player after the game concludes? An initial interpretation may view these texts as liberating for children, yet the adult is still always in control. The authors, while giving a broad sense of freedom and agency to the child during the game, nulls the freedom after the game, thus making the living board game function just like an everyday board game—as a medium to imaginarily explore actions and consequences but within a protective rule-bound space. The authors had the opportunity for a radical departure of
childhood limitations with the real games, but they ultimately subvert this opportunity. The games do promote a space of learning and agency for the child player to some degree, but the authors tend to negate that experience by largely returning the child to the same position after the game ends. Many children’s literature scholars rightly question Rose’s assessment of the impossibility of children's fiction; in these instances, however, it appears that not only is the fictional text under adult authorial control, but even the space specifically demarcated for children's exploration is ultimately under adult control as well.

**Reality and War**

These questions of learning and child agency capitalize on a child’s pastime, board games, to structure and aid their narrative. Similar questions arise in print texts that integrate a video game discourse. Like board games, a video game provides a rule-bound play space for characters to navigate. In a review of *The Game of Sunken Places*, Deborah Stevenson finds strong similarities to video games, saying “the plotting recalls the narrative computer games of the 1980s such as Zork, with dramatic episodes strung together, requiring occasional returns to earlier stages to acquire pieces of equipment that have suddenly proven vital” (5). Even similar settings arise since, other than *Jumanji*, the sample game texts all have themes that involve outer space and alien life forms. The differences between board game texts and video game texts stem from interface, militaristic influence, and treatment of reality.

As arcade video games were gaining popularity in the late 1970’s, Card developed a provocative use of gaming within a print text. *Ender’s Game* provides multiple game settings and platforms, including the game room, the mind game, the battleroom, and the simulator, and combines these multiple play modalities with a military focus and
adult concealment of real world outcomes. The novel centers on the attempt of Earth’s army to defeat an alien species, which Ender Wiggin, a pre-pubescent boy, and his army of children accomplish through the use of military and strategy simulation games. Whereas other texts use games as a means to experience a more adult reality, *Ender’s Game* uniquely employs the game to camouflage reality for the child players. Card provides a game space through which his child protagonist can mature by acquiring practical military skills and affect real world outcomes behind the façade of game play. The other texts allow for children to recognize the difference between the game world and the world outside of the game, yet none of their games have the direness of Ender’s. Here the blurring of reality and game is too pronounced, and the adult control consumes the children’s daily existence.

At age six, Ender leaves his family to become a student in Battle School, an outer space military academy that is a training and recruitment center headed by Colonel Graff. He uses the importance of war games to describe what school will be like to young Ender:

> All the boys are organized into armies. Day after day, in zero gravity, there are mock battles. Nobody gets hurt, but winning and losing matter. … It’s like playing buggers and astronauts—except that you have weapons that work, and fellow soldiers fighting beside you, and your whole future and the future of the human race depends on how well you learn, how well you fight. (Card 24)

For the students, the games are pretend and fun, even though they constitute preparation for future military careers. For the teachers and officers, the games are “merely a training exercise” as well, but their importance far outdistances a regular game (80). They believe the future of the human race depends on the games fought in
the battleroom, and they push their students accordingly while hiding the immediacy of
the need.

The battleroom is the nexus of Battle School. Steffen Hantke explores three
stages of significance for the battleroom, with the second interpretation fitting the theory
of gaming in the novel: “we learn that the Battle Room is in fact a technological
simulation of outer space, not unlike a video game which integrates the player’s specific
tasks into a concrete narrative or thematic background” (504). Yet in his analysis,
Hantke continues to focus on the soldier’s body, thus concluding that “Card’s Battle
Room is a technological extension of the soldier’s body, which is contained, enclosed,
and enveloped by it. The boundaries between the body and its technological
environment are blurred” (505). In this instance, the interface has not been broken to
supply a blurring between reality and the game; the environment and purpose of Battle
School provides this slippage. While the battleroom does offer an immersive gaming
environment, the singular soldier is not the decisive control in the room, rather it is the
team unification among individual children within a play army. Ender, whose gaming
ability and military strategy empower him within the battleroom, eventually leads this
army.

Military strategy video games are akin to what Ender encounters in the battleroom.
In “The Subject and Power,” Michel Foucault links war and games through a threefold
meaning of strategy to designate means, manner, and procedures: “[t]hese three
meanings come together in situations of confrontation—war or games—where the
objective is to act upon an adversary in such a manner as to render the struggle
impossible for him” (224-225). War and game collide in the space of the battleroom,
empowering Ender to repeatedly complete this objective. He becomes the most
decorated war hero on Earth and in space by defeating the alien army to the point of
annihilation, all while assuming that he is playing a mere simulation game.

While the multiple games in the text can be dangerous given their military
purposes, the actual game play is supposedly a simulation of reality. *Ender’s Game’s*
parallel novel, *Ender’s Shadow* (1999), provides an alternative reading by reversing this
illusion of reality created and maintained by adults and allowing Bean, Ender’s youngest
team member, the freedom to comprehend the consequences of his game play actions.
Through these two texts, Card presents an interwoven narrative of overlapping realities
revolving around a central nucleus—Ender’s game(s)—through which it is possible to
explore play of private and collective games and reality as presented to and
comprehended by children within a context of games.

In his final battle at Battle School against two armies in the battleroom as
described in *Ender’s Game*, Bean tries to dismiss the importance of the situation by
commenting, “It’s only a game” (Card 216). But Ender reacts angrily:

“It stopped being a game when they threw away the rules.”

“So throw ‘em away, too.”

Ender grinned. “OK. Why not.” (216)

Here, the children are not fully aware of the blurring between the game world and the
outside world because everything revolves around the game. Yet because they
recognize the game’s limitations, they gain power and can make their own rules.

To Ender, as to most of the children, the game was just that—a game. All four
gaming platforms of Battle and Command School retain the deceitful illusion that they
are simply games, further enabling Ender to win at all costs. The adult masterminds
keep him in his childhood state, while requiring adult action from him by concealing the reality of what Ender has been lead to believe is a game. School administrators indoctrinate Ender with the fictitious gaming scenario from his initial days at Battle School.

During his first experience in the battleroom, Ender worries about hurting someone with the gun. His launch mate Alai replies, “It can’t be too dangerous, or they wouldn’t give these guns to kids” (Card 60). This assumption concerning the protection of children and the divide between adult and child worlds keeps Ender from realizing the reality and import of the games. Even when Ender recognizes that the adults will not protect him when a fellow student, Bonzo, attacks him, he gets up and plays a final battlegame that same day. This comprehension that “there was no help for him…no one would save him” delays his transfer to Command School for a few months, but Ender eventually gets back in the game, completely believing that it is still just a game (212).

In Command School, Ender’s acceptance of the simulator as only a game is a necessity. As the pivotal gaming platform for the novel, the simulator combined lesson from the other games into usable skills that allow Ender to wield power and orchestrate a monumental victory through a video game. The simulator was to Ender, “the most perfect videogame he had ever played” (Card 258). In the game, a holographic display allows for an exhibition of the fighters, with different colors distinguishing friendly and enemy ships. The game even regains its joyful, playful aspects once his old friends and platoon leaders join him in the simulator game: “It was pleasure; it was play” (274). Because it is game play, Ender never comprehends the reality of the situation, until the
last battle against the buggers at their home planet. He even questions the adults’ attitude about the game, thinking, “It was funny. The adults taking all this so seriously, and the children playing along, playing along, believing it too until suddenly the adults went too far, tried too hard, and the children could see through their game” (293). Yet Ender is not referring to being able to see the reality of the situation: he can only see that the adults are not playing by the rules. When the adults break the rules, the game becomes more serious to Ender, but it is still a game. Not until Mazer informs Ender that he has just won the Third Invasion against the buggers does Ender think: “Real. Not a game” (297).

The enormity of the situation hits Ender and Graff explains, “Of course we tricked you into it. That’s the whole point. …It had to be a trick or you couldn’t have done it” (Card 298). This type of trickery may seem cruel to the modern reader, but the genre of science fiction itself provides a removed sense of time and space with which modern issues can be addressed in a non-threatening manner. The type of adult control and use of play presented in *Ender’s Game* is not limited to science fiction; many of the pedagogical stances of the teachers at Battle School can be found in educational curricula and current military recruiting techniques. Moreover, *Ender’s Game* showcases the subtext of adult power that was thinly veiled in the board game books.

In addition to the overlapping game and story space and the blurring of game and reality, war intertwines the story’s larger narrative. The convergence of adult war and childhood play can be viewed via video game play. In examining virtual war in children’s texts, Andrew Butler combines computer games and war: “The computer game and the war become linked in a number of ways, firstly because computer games
might be thought to generate aggression and hatred or, alternatively, the games
trivialize war so that it appears to be merely a game” (175). Yet, war is becoming linked
with video games outside the confines of fictional texts. The military’s use of games also
present in children’s fiction and their use of games to conduct training and recruiting in
reality parallels the multiple discourses present in the children’s text. It also parallels the
ambiguity of reality and games that happens sometimes with war.

Somewhat ironically, Jenkins discusses military brand extension: “In 1997, the
National Research Council, acting as an adviser to the U.S. Defense Department,
issued its own version for convergence culture, which they called ‘Modeling and
Simulation: Linking Entertainment and Defense’” (74). The executive summary of the
report outlined the military’s current investment in video games:

Already, the U.S. Marine Corps is evaluating commercial computer games
for training purposes, the Army is considering use of game machines as
personal training units, and members of the Air National Guard are
evaluating the use of commercial flight simulator programs to supplement
standard training regimens. (National Research Council 3)

Five years later, the video game America’s Army was released by the United States
government as a recruiting tool to become a mainstay of what is now termed
“militainment,” the portmanteau combining military and entertainment. Militainment,
while a relatively new term, is not a new concept in children’s play. Many children used
to experience their first connection with war during childhood games, but, in a
comparative study of fourth graders between 1985 and 2002, Gisela Wagener-Spohring
found that computer games now dominate their first experiences with war.

The military angle of Ender’s Game is probably its most explored aspect with
regard to games. Tim Blackmore effectively argues that Ender’s Game is a “critique of
the late twentieth-century military paradigm” by examining Ender’s transformation from
civilian to warrior (124). However, the militant aspects of life that Ender must face are always concealed in the form of a game, which makes Card’s cautionary tale combining of military training and video games prophetic.⁹ Reporter Amy Harmon investigated the realistic video games used to train United States soldiers. In her article “More Than Just a Game, But How Close to Reality?” she quotes the director of the Army’s simulation technology center in Orlando, Florida, Michael Macedonia saying, “Ender's Game has had a lot of influence on our thinking” (G1). His center “plans to build a virtual Afghanistan that could host hundreds of thousands of networked computers” (G1). Harmon’s article is not an isolated investigation. In “Doom Goes to War,” Rob Riddell looks at the military transition and use of video games from Doom to Marine Doom and Quake to Battlesight Zero.

Militainment is becoming prominent in today’s culture and was paramount in Ender’s experiences. Battles and wars far beyond the pretend game of soldier create the strongest correlation with Ender and gaming. While war games are taken to extremes as Ender matures, they begin as a simple game of essentially cowboys and Indians. Astronauts and buggers is the make-believe war game of children on Earth during Ender’s childhood. Ender’s father even encourages these types of games: “Better to play the war games, and have a better chance of surviving when the buggers come again” (Card 11). Ender’s father understands that linking games and war could provide a pathway of power and survival for Ender as he grows up.

Within the text, military games provide tension and a bridge between a child’s entertainment medium, video games, and an adult political institution, the military. Video games provide the platform for crossing from child games to adult games,
effectively linking the two cultures and giving the child the tools and power through which to enter the adult realm. The bond between video games and war link power and maturation through children’s agency and control of a video game. While children may be powerless when it comes to real war, video games and simulated wars grant empowerment.

Pratchett explicitly makes this connection in his 2004 introduction to *Only You Can Save Mankind*: “On your computer: games that looked like war. On your TV: a war that looked like a game. If you weren’t careful, you could get confused…” (xii). A confusion Pratchett underscores by setting the narrative of *Only You Can Save Mankind* against the Gulf War and having the protagonist, Johnny Maxwell, watch news broadcasts that visually look like his video games. Additionally, Johnny learns from the television interviews that the soldiers grew up playing video games. In examining virtual war and the Gulf War alongside children’s texts such as *Only You Can Save Mankind*, Butler concludes that, “the interconnecting phenomena of the computer shoot-’em-up and the representation of the Gulf War have transformed our notion of war into that of a game” (182), highlighting the blurring between war and games.

Pratchett continues blurring lines, using the format of the video game within a book to question reality. *Only You Can Save Mankind* depicts twelve-year-old Johnny playing a first-person shooter when the line between computer game-space and real space blurs and he enters into the game to save an alien race from other human gamers. Chapter 1 in *Only You Can Save Mankind* begins only after we read the video game introduction:

The Mighty ScreeWee Empire is poised to attach Earth! Our battleships have been destroyed in a sneak raid! Nothing can stand between Earth and
the terrible vengeance of the ScreeWee! But there is one starship left…and out of the mists of time comes one warrior, one fighter who is the last hope of civilization! YOU! YOU are the Savior of Civilization. You are all that stands between your world and certain oblivion. You are the Last Hope. ONLY YOU CAN SAVE MANKIND! Action-packed with new features! Just like the Real Thing! Full-color sounds and slam-vector graphics! (3)

Typical legalese and small print of fictional copyrights conclude the page. Additionally, the book’s half-title page is displayed twice, once before the title page and once directly before the video game introduction text. The half-title is both the title of the book and the title of the video game, but given its position on the page before the video game introduction, one can assume that the second half-title page is to be read as the video game title screen. The book lacks a colophon, but the half-title page and the video game introduction page use a typography reminiscent of old block computer fonts that is distinct from the story’s text. A fictional video game is confined within the text, but also separate by being reminiscent of *Space Invaders*, a video game that readers could potentially play.

Following this video game introduction, Chapter 1, “The Hero with a Thousand Extra Lives,” alludes to Joseph Campbell’s scholarship. This title links the main character to a mythological hero and typifies his story as a hero’s journey with an archetypal helper. It also provides weight to the idea of reading the text through the discourse of another medium because Campbell’s comparative mythology in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* contends that human stories illuminate universal themes despite being framed in the motifs of particular cultures. Pratchett frames his story in the digital age with a video game set in outer space, but the story contains the ever present coming of age journey.
Not only does the book begin with the video game before moving into the story, it also ends with screenshots from the conclusion of the video game. The last paginated page contains a screen shot, and the text describes what is happening in the video game:

The Border hung in the sky. Huge white letters, thousands of miles high. They spelled: [GAME OVER] And the fleet roared past. Tankers, battleships, fighters...they soared and rolled, their shadows streaking across the letters as ship after ship escaped, forever. (207)

A black box simulating a screenshot contains the text “GAME OVER,” which is printed in the video game font. The last page of the book contains no folio and only displays a black box to represent a screen shot with “NEW GAME ( Y/N ) ?” in white text. The book literally and metaphorically begins and ends with the game play. The video game story and discourse reside outside of the text story and discourse, but remain a part of the book’s narrative providing a transtextual, multi-media example of convergence within a children’s book.

Once past the game’s opening screen, the story slowly shifts into the video game space through three levels of interaction for a smooth transition into the video game world. Chapter 1 begins with a description of Johnny playing the video game, providing a third person point of view and a detailed description of game play, including sound effects. This imparts a normalcy for the first level that is shattered when the aliens message Johnny, “We wish to talk” (6). The second level of contact between the ScreeWee aliens and Johnny happens only through computer mediation as they text message back and forth. Readers are privy to life on the ScreeWee spaceship before Johnny reaches the third level of interaction when he fully enters the game space.
Johnny and the video game world converge completely in the third and final level when the interface is disturbed. According to Mark Wolf and Bernard Perron’s introduction to *The Video Game Theory Reader*:

The interface occurs at the boundary between the player and the video game itself, and can include such things as the screen, speakers (and microphones), input devices (such as a keyboard, mouse, joystick, trak-ball, paddles, steering wheels, light guns, etc.)…which invite player activity and allow it to occur. (15)

Once the interface dissolves, Johnny fully enters the video game. Pratchett illustrates complete immersion by focusing on sensory details such as smell: “That’s what the computer games couldn’t give you: the smell of space. It had its own kind of smell, like a machine’s armpit” (37). Johnny goes in and out of the video game world several times, usually waking on a starship, the vehicle he would have controlled if he were playing the video game instead of being in the game. The final time he returns to the game world, he and his friend Kirsty must save the ScreeWee Captain from her mutinous first officer, restore order, and then transport the ScreeWee past the game battle zone to a safe place. He and Kirsty accomplish their goal to save the ScreeWee species before Johnny wakes up, taking life lessons from the video game, even to the point of extrapolating the game language and applying its tagline to his life. Johnny ponders life outside the video game, “You might never win, but at least you could try. If not you, who else?” (206).

Butler examines *Only You Can Save Mankind* and *Space Demons* along with two other children’s texts, *Virtual Wars* and *Gulf*, to draw connections between virtual war, the Gulf War, and responses of empathy and alterity. While he acknowledges that the characters enter a game, he stresses the aspects of Other and other: “A virtual war is one that is played, and the consequences to others—collateral damage, friendly fire
(both terms that neutralize empathy we may feel for the victims and antagonism we may feel for the perpetrators)—are ignored or downplayed” (Butler 182). Yet he seems to miss the point that the games and the war are not virtual, even though he wrestles with Baudrillard’s notion of the Gulf War. There are consequences to the player/character and the enemy/Other. Since Johnny can see the effects of war (as opposed to Ender who assumes the effects are virtual), Pratchett creates a more critical stance of violence and the military by giving Johnny the power of empathy and the choice not to fight.¹¹

Once Johnny decides to save the aliens, the video game effects are seen in the world outside of the game, in the story. The alien enemy are absent in other characters’ copies of the video game *Only You Can Save Mankind* because Johnny moves them out of the video game realm and across the border into their homeland.¹² The video game played in the text is not meant to be a virtual reality game, one that immerses the player into a 3D space, because it follows traditional computer game formats that separate the player with an interface.¹³ Some stories do take a child into a virtual reality game, one of which will be discussed later in Chapter 4, but this is not the same as being transplanted into a standard first-person shooter computer game. Johnny should not be able to enter *Only You Can Save Mankind*.

Card provides one of the earliest and most well known examples of video games being incorporated into a children’s text. Pratchett compliments Card’s military critique by actively situating his text in the events of a contemporary war. Both of these texts caution against and critique war, but they also offer a play space of power.

**Space and Power**

Similar to the depictions in Card and Pratchett, the virtual environments of video games are still largely seen as a play space for children. Some criticize this evolution
from physical to digital play because it limits the spaces to the programmatic restraints of the game (Provenzo “Electronically Mediated Playscapes”). Others laud the trend, particularly because it offers additional play spaces to children who do not have effective access to the outdoors. Jenkins concurs:

> Video games constitute virtual play spaces which allow home-bound children like my son to extend their reach, to explore, manipulate, and interact with a more diverse range of imaginary places than constitute the often drab, predictable, and overly-familiar spaces of their everyday lives. (263)

In this play space, video games provide an arena of power and control for children outside of a world dominated by adults. Nintendo touted this with a 1980’s slogan—“Now you're playing with power!” Even the Nintendo fan magazine, *Nintendo Power*, latches on to the agency the child attains when wielding a controller or a mouse.

A video game space comprises a place where children gain control of their virtual spaces within certain boundaries. The player wins or loses a game based on his ability, work and effort, thus reaping the benefits of the victory. In the cycle of winning and losing, players gain a degree of ownership and control over their virtual spaces and avatars, sometimes becoming warriors and sometimes becoming saviors. Rushkoff argues:

> Playing video games moves a child from a passive receiver, to an active 'cheater,' to a fully realized programmer. By extension, the video game player learns that this same approach might be used in almost any of life's arenas. You begin by passively responding to the existing rules. Then you learn how these rules were constructed so that you might exploit them. Finally, you are elevated to the role of a master, capable of creating the games that others play. (129)

We see this progression in the video games’ reality of the texts’ characters, such as Johnny, where the game skills or lessons are translated into their personal life outside of the game. Since the aspect of power within a game space impedes on reality, the
power produced in video game play can be transferred to a character and retold in a children’s book.

Usually power is granted and governed by an adult, contained in knowledge and wisdom that a master passes on to an apprentice or a parent passes on to a child. Trites claims that, "[w]isdom is, by its very nature, the province of adulthood; children learn from adults because adults often do know more than adolescents," (79) but in the instance of technology, particularly video games, this wisdom is overturned and causes consternation to adults. Trites continues that "the discursive practice of employing a wise adult to guide a confused adolescent is so commonplace in adolescent literature that it is practically invisible even to many trained readers," (80) but texts that use video games displace adults as a resource for technical knowledge. Currently, children are on the technologically advanced side of the “digital divide” by having grown up with technology and perceiving it as part of life, not a new complication to be mastered.

However, adults can manipulate a child’s technological knowledge for their own purposes, particularly in a military context as in the movie *Toys* (1992) or in *Ender’s Game*. In the latter, the teachers at Battle School use their young charges’ age and inexperience to their advantage. They cajole children into tactical training by pretending it is play, and because the children are still so young, their ability to decipher political reality is not yet fully developed, and they must rely on adult discretion. However, some discerning students are adept enough to see another perspective, such as Dirk, who as a voice of reason helps provide perspective for Ender:

It’s the teachers, they’re the enemy. They get us to fight each other, to hate each other. The game is everything. Win win win. It amounts to nothing. …Children can lose sometimes, and nobody cares. Children aren’t in
armies, they aren’t commanders, they don’t rule over forty other kids. (Card 108)

But Ender is still a child and a child is exactly what the military needed. Mazer Rackham, the commander of the previous bugger war explains this explicit need of a child to Ender:

   And it had to be a child, Ender. ...You were faster than me. Better than me. I was too old and cautious. Any decent person who knows what warfare is can never go into battle with a whole heart. But you didn’t know. We made sure you didn’t know. You were reckless and brilliant and young. (298)

Mazer, Graff, and all the other adults around Ender knew why they needed a child, but kept that reason secret from the children.

   Battle School capitalizes on the child's desire for play, particularly play that imitates grown-ups. Dirk understands this principle of Battle School that “[w]e really are trying to be adults” (Card 109). And the children in Battle School do play very hard at being soldiers and commanders, understanding to a limited degree adults’ power. In Ender's Shadow, only Bean fully realizes the extent: “That, really, was the key. Everything the children did here was shaped by the adults” (98). The adults craft and control the children’s reality. For Battle School there is a marked difference between how the teachers viewed the game and how the students viewed the game. In Ender's Game, Ender confides to Bean that in reality the teachers need the students more than they are willing to acknowledge and it all revolves around the game: “Because most boys in this school think the game is important for itself, but it isn’t. It's only important because it helps them find kids who might grow up to be real commanders, in the real war” (197). The teachers have a marked agenda and the adult imprint on the children’s lives in Battle School is true for children in general. Jenkins explains that “[c]hildren’s culture is shaped by adult agendas and expectations” (“Introduction” 26). No matter if it
is school or games or by the military or by an author, adults will impact the play of children to some degree. This dynamic is also present in books that include board games.

Yet there are certain spaces that children can use in play that become their own private spaces. Battle School not only provided an opportunity for children to play as adults, but it also provided the space in which to conduct this play. For Battle School this location was the battleroom. In *Gardens and Their Meaning*, Dora Williams aptly combines these concepts into a brief, yet provocative phrase: “Space with power” (1). And while Williams was specifically referring to the pedagogical tool of school gardens, space with power is exactly what the game space provides. The battleroom is play space where children retain the power. Once inside the chamber they control the “play frame,” or the constructed game play (Bretherton 209). They are empowered by the adults, yet within the confines of the room/game, it is the children that are in control.

In that space, adults are either obsolete or forced to gain power over children by other means. In *Ender’s Game* the adults accept that they need a child to play the simulation game and thus must wield power over Ender not with any additional technical knowledge, but by withholding knowledge. Through the military simulation game, authorities in *Ender’s Game* use children to destroy an alien species without the children’s knowledge, thus keeping reality hidden from the children and keeping the façade of game play intact.

The adults may try and control the children’s reality and grant them play space, but the adults can neither control the actual games in the battleroom, nor can they control the mind game, a VR simulation Ender encounters when he first arrives at Battle
School. The mind game works through Ender's deepest, even subconscious fears and emotions. When Ender is drawn too far into the mind game, Colonel Graff has to explain the game to assuage fears that Ender is in danger: “The mind game is a relationship between the child and the computer. Together they create stories. The stories are true, in the sense that they reflect the reality of the child's life” (Card 121). In this relationship the child becomes the author of the game, the same as when the interface is disturbed and the child enters a video game, thus gaining control over the game.

Rose theorizes that, “[c]hildren’s fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver),” (1-2) but adding a video game into children’s fiction complicates this power dynamic, even though adults make and control the games. This source of power does not overturn the authorial power, but provides another avenue with which to acquire knowledge outside of an adult. However, because the adult is providing the means of power, video game or fictional text, the power relationship outlined by Foucault is upheld. He states:

a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (220)

Ender’s Game, Only You Can Save Mankind, as well as several of the board game books, employ children, particularly boys, in collaborative play and simulated military warfare to create empowerment via gaming. The works revolve around a boy protagonist as captain or leader, who experiences a transition in reality through a video game. Additionally, all of the main male characters experience a coming of age through
power in authority and leadership revolving around their participation with video games and how the game play puts them in leadership, i.e. adult, roles with their peers/friends. Provenzo correctly argues in *Video Kids* that “video games are neither a neutral nor a trivial technology. Instead, like other media, they represent important intellectual and social systems that are redefining the symbolic underpinnings of our culture” (33). The video games act as a catalyst for coming of age to gain adult qualities through military simulation and bridges child cultural institutions so that the child can gain power and knowledge. It is as Ender concludes: “The classes were valuable, but the real education was the game” (Card 259).

This education is largely targeted toward boys, and both Card and Pratchett call attention to gendering through their critique of the game/war scenario. The male protagonists are not only in a power struggle with adults, but also with the opposite gender. Video games have been largely perceived of as a male dominated activity; it was, after all, a *GameBOY* with which children of both sexes played. This phenomenon stems from the cultural stigma of computers being recognized as “a boys’ toy” (Cassell and Jenkins 13) and this recognition has seeped into the print texts revolved around the video game medium.

As video games become more accepted in the household and are linked to brain games, cooperative play, and even exergaming, the militaristic mode of Card’s novel seems dated, while Pratchett’s text seems historically situated since it was specifically “written during the Gulf War,” as Pratchett explains in a 2004 introduction to the reprinted text (xii). More recent examples that use video games in print novels are less likely to emphasize military indoctrination. It seems that the military is finally wising up to
the scenario of *Ender’s Game* while missing or rejecting Card’s clear critique, even as more recent book-games such as Pratchett’s have offered alternative scenarios of empowerment that involve empathy and cooperation.\textsuperscript{15} Later in the Ender series, Card explores these emotions and virtues through Ender, but they are not related to games. Newer books/games seem more utopian and play out a different kind of narrative scenario. Chapter 4 will discuss these newer forms, as well the changing scenarios of empowerment linked with female protagonists.

---

\textsuperscript{1} This is further complicated by the argument among video game theorists as to whether video games should be discussed in terms of ludology or narratology, but my argument does not need to directly address that divide. See Nick Wadhams’ “Of Ludology and Narratology” and G. Frasca’s “Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative” for a further summary.

\textsuperscript{2} Existentes are defined by Chatman as characters and setting or items of setting (19).

\textsuperscript{3} Trites makes a strict distinction between Entwicklungsroman and Bildungsroman. I use the broader meaning of bildungsroman that popularly encompasses both terms; see Todd Kontje’s *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*.

\textsuperscript{4} For a historical discussion of early board game books, see Lisa Dusenberry’s forthcoming dissertation.

\textsuperscript{5} This book by Anderson has not received the critical attention of *Thirsty* and *Feed*. Similarly, Sleator is usually discussed for *The House of Stairs* or *Fingers*.

\textsuperscript{6} I combine Anderson and Sleator here for thematic narrative results, but the two have been joined together before. In *Twice-Told: Original Stories Inspired by Original Art* edited by Scott Hunt, they both wrote stories based on a piece of original art, which depicted a cake on a table.

\textsuperscript{7} There are instances of books that put the child/adolescent as creator, such as Caroline Cooney’s *The Girl Who Invented Romance*. In it, the protagonist invents a board game called Romance for her sociology class centered on romance and drawing from her personal experience.

\textsuperscript{8} Card uses the phrasing “the Battle Room” in his introduction to the Author’s Definitive Edition. However, “battleroom” is used throughout the actual text to refer to the location of the team battles within Battle School.

\textsuperscript{9} Even death is concealed from Ender to continue the game.

\textsuperscript{10} This same convergence of reality and game world happens in Gillian Rubinstein’s *Space Demons*. Twelve-year-old Andrew becomes obsessed with a new computer game, which he and his friends (Ben,
Elaine, and Mario) literally shoot themselves into. The computer game is filled with menacing space warrior demons that feed off hate.

11 Card waits until other books in the series, but ultimately grants Ender empathy and pacifism.

12 In *Space Demons* the result could be defined as more psychological since the characters that have entered the video game begin seeing the shadowy black space demons in the real world and reacting to them, even to the point of yelling out during math class.

13 Johnathan Rand’s *Virtual Vampires of Vermont* provides a more pronounced and mechanical interface break by allowing the main character not only to enter the video game world, but also the inner workings of his computer motherboard. Mike, an eleven-year-old aspiring computer repairman, recounts through first person narrative his spiraling slide down the same levels of interface meltdown that Johnny experiences. The video game, *Return of the Vampire*, begins with an introductory screen but Mike never has the opportunity to play the game before the vampire, Ivan, begins communicating with him through text messages displayed on the monitor. When Mike does not respond, Ivan literally breaks the interface wall, reaches out of the monitor, and pulls Mike and his neighbor Hayley into the game. Once inside the game, Mike and Hayley must play by the game’s rules, not subverting the goal as Johnny does. Additionally, they must battle not only the game enemies (vampire bats, deranged cats, robotic wolves, and mutant vampires), but also computer virus worms which further blur the game with the real world. To win the game, they must both defeat the enemies and also travel inside the mechanical workings of the computer to repair its wiring. By completing this two-fold task, Mike gains a greater understanding about the inner workings of a computer, furthers his life aspirations of becoming a computer designer, and surpasses his father’s technical knowledge. The literal vampire-cyborg of *Return of the Vampire* acts not as a metaphor of youth consumption such as Rob Latham discusses, but as a quest guide to help Mike develop skills, complete a specific task, and become a hero by saving Ivan’s game world Virtuality.


15 Books like Connor Kostick’s *Epic* and *Saga* use a larger virtual environment, usually connected to virtual reality games that provide a strong metaphor for our wired society and hints at potential gaming technology to come.
CHAPTER 4
PUZZLING GENDER: ADOLESCENT TECHNOLOGICAL FICTION FOR GIRLS

In Chapter 3, I examined print novels that use games to further the male protagonist’s growth, usually through a storyline of war and battle. Texts such as Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* (1985) and Terry Pratchett’s *Only You Can Save Mankind* (1992) present a starting point as some of the first young adult novels to address video games as a major thematic and formal element. After re-examining these texts for their gendered discussion of female sidekicks, Chapter 4 provides a current context for girls and gaming. I focus on contemporary YA novels specifically marketed toward girls and published after 2002 that include video game or technologically influenced content, such as blogs, instant messages, virtual worlds, virtual reality games and alternate reality games. Using a survey of these texts, I argue for the progressive technological involvement in young adult texts for females since early examples. The books that portray digital technology enact performances of gender norms just as the actual technology does, but there is potential for innovative change in content, form, and influence.

Yet not everyone sees these texts as worthy of study. In Chapter 8, “Back to the Future? New Forms and Formats in Juvenile Fiction,” Kimberly Reynolds dismisses texts that use email, blog, or IM form. She does not refer to them in Chapter 8, but links to an endnote that explains why she does not think they are worthy to address:

> There are several books written in the form of email correspondence, but while these attempt to make the printed text look like messages on a computer screen, they otherwise progress like other novels written in the form of correspondence of journal entries. There is little in the way of stylistic innovation. (Reynolds 192)
She seems to see it as a hindrance that they “call attention to the supposed medium in which the communication is taking place” (192). Yet the text’s story development may not be the point. The stylistic innovation is incorporating a medium with which girl readers are familiar and can produce themselves. A blog in book form can be a way of empowering teen readers by using a technical format that they are accustomed to and that can encourage them to creatively compose or write an online journal.

Similarly, reading about strong female protagonists who are comfortable with computers and video games can encourage technical interest in readers. Since females have been historically underrepresented in technological fields, female characters that display positive characteristics of computer literacy and gaming comfort might help inspire readers. For example, I address Nancy Drew as a role model character whose story is presented in both print texts and video games. She encompasses traditional gender roles in some of her texts and progressive gender roles in others, thus providing a transition for readers from the traditional into the more progressive.

In addition to being influential and empowering to an audience, technology such as video games and virtual reality can provide a fantastic trope for authors. But unlike other tropes, they also provide current popular culture connections to adolescent’s daily communications and entertainment. After looking primarily at the structure of texts like William Sleator’s *Rewind* and Vivian Vande Velde’s *Heir Apparent*, Allison Waller asserts that “[i]nstead of directly comparing the structure of young adult novels and hyperfiction or computer games, it might be more useful to suggest hypertext and games act as a further fantastic trope that authors use to explore the adolescent experience” (181). It is not only a trope that can be used to present larger ideological
situations, but also a real-world presence. Waller concludes that, with the exception of Lesley Howarth’s *Ultraviolet* and Aidan Chambers’ *Breaktime*, the majority of texts of this kind “present adolescence in conflict with technology,” largely because of biases of adult writers (185). However, she anticipates this to change “as cyber-literate members of the Net Generation begin writing their own versions of adolescence” (185). While a majority of books do pit adolescence against technology or use technological themes and content didactically, not all adult authors are cyber-illiterate or pejorative.

Some texts have surpassed a warning tone and are innovative or encouraging with incorporating technology. Instead of using technology as a plot device or trope, Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman’s *Cathy’s Book* (2006) uses technology as a means of communicating in a multimodal fashion. As a progressive text, it is difficult to specifically classify *Cathy’s Book*. The story itself falls under the genre of young adult fantastic realism, as defined by Waller, and the *New York Times* best seller list ranked it under the category of chapter book. However, the text is not fully contained by these labels, and it could be categorically defined as part of an Alternate Reality Game (ARG).

In looking at general digital influences on children’s book, Eliza Dresang uses the rhizome as an analogy for her concept of radical change. Based on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, a metaphorical root system of links and connections, this idea aptly fits the inexact convergence of print texts impacted by digital content or forms, which pick and choose their technological connections yet are still informed by the traditions of print narrative. In her theory of radical change in books for youth, Dresang "identifies three types of changes occurring in contemporary literature for youth, all related to the connectivity, interactivity, and access of the digital world,"
that are changing perspectives, boundaries, and forms/formats (17). She labels these changes as radical, a term that Reynolds also adopts, yet in *The Hidden Adult*, Perry Nodelman questions whether or not the books Dresang discusses “actually represent a radical departure from the conventional markers of children’s literature” (277) and posits that texts of today and “texts of the past can be read as both representing radical change and possessing the generic characteristics of children’s literature” (278). For example, *Cathy’s Book* does present one of Nodelman’s typical constructs of children’s literature (namely, the opposing spectrums of innocence and knowledge) by pitting Cathy against a band of immortal adult characters. So while *Cathy’s Book* may not be radical in narrative content and may still hold to conventions of established children’s and young adult literature, it is certainly innovative in its extra-textual and meta-textual content, which turns the book into something more participatory and multi-media than a girl’s lost diary. Additionally, it illustrates the potential for future technologically convergent texts.

After briefly establishing the background of disparity between girls and technology by using Card and Pratchett’s gender stereotypes as illustrations, I will address the stylistically innovative texts Reynolds ignores, such as Robynn Clairday’s *Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer: [A Blog]* (2005), followed by an analysis of *Nancy Drew* and continuing with a discussion of *Heir Apparent* to segue into *Cathy’s Book*. These texts gain cultural importance because women’s lack of presence in the Information Technology (IT) field, both in the professional and gaming spheres, is pervasive and troublesome. These types of texts can add encouragement and model behavior that other organizations are also trying to highlight. From colleges trying to bolster their
undergraduate female numbers in computer sciences to the Girl Scouts trying to encourage participation and familiarity with technology among girls, various organizations have studied and supported female involvement with computers and technology.

Chapter 1 of Women and Information Technology: Research on Underrepresentation (2006) focuses solely on girls but unfortunately not in an optimistic light. After conducting a literature review of girls and IT, Lecia Barker and William Aspray conclude, "[t]here is clear evidence that most games are designed for and bought by boys and young men, and that the content is often violent and reinforces sexual stereotypes." (40). They neglect the increasing margin of either crossover games or games designed for and purchased by girls; however, Barker and Aspray do correctly assert that “[c]omputer games are widely regarded as a way for a child to become familiar and gain confidence with computers,” (46) which are why many see girl gaming as an integral step in IT development, even when it is only encountered in a fictional form.

**Gaming Sidekicks**

A good deal of video game research involving a child audience is concerned with question of gender and gendered play. While some texts do present positive change, others perpetuate gender stereotypes. The girl gaming movement has been accumulating speed, but the older print texts that incorporate video games tended to relegate the female characters to the lesser role of sidekick, reiterating that the perceived gender divisions in video games carry over into print texts centered on gaming. The female as nurturer or helpmate is featured prominently in older print texts, such as by Card and Pratchett, in which characters become part of a video game. I
want to re-examine the texts analyzed in Chapter 3 with respect to their gender politics. This will provide a case study of gender stereotypes for girls and gaming. The rest of Chapter 4 then explores reactions to these stereotypes in the current children’s and adolescent market to females in the form of female protagonists interacting with technology. These older texts provide a background to discuss the changing role of digital media influence in regards to girl readers, and they provide a comparison for print texts using digital influences that avoid relegating girls to the role of sidekick.

In both Card’s and Pratchett’s novels, a female stands alongside the male player but exhibits inferior skills. In *Ender’s Game*, there are two central female characters who both act as sidekick and helpmate to Ender: Valentine Wiggin, Ender’s sister, and Petra Arkanian, Ender’s colleague and subordinate in battle school. Each one, though strong intellectually and skilled in her respective tasks, is emotionally stereotyped and provides nurturing to Ender.

All of the Wiggin children are exceptional, but they vary in temperament. The Wiggin’s first child, Peter, is too violent, with little regard for life, and is considered “one of the most ruthless and unreliable human beings,” with “the soul of a jackal” (Card 122, 228). The authorities instruct the Wiggin family to have a female second child, Valentine, who they hope will not be as cold-hearted. Unfortunately, the homogametic sex retains too much compassion for a military leader and Valentine is “rejected for Battle School because she was too pacific, too conciliatory, and above all, too empathic” (228). Her emotional state is viewed as a weakness, and the government authorizes the Wiggins to have a third child, a male, Ender.
Since Valentine is scripted with traditional female emotions, she slips naturally into a nurturing mother role for her little brother. Valentine provides for his emotional needs, and she also physically protects him from Peter’s abuse. She is the sister who loves him, his one weakness, and she is the one who continues in the series to travel with him even three thousand years in the future, long after Peter has died. Card’s sequel, *Speaker for the Dead*, illustrates the co-dependent sibling relationship between Ender and Valentine and examines more closely their interaction and dependence after they leave childhood behind, evolving it to a more nuanced relationship.

Once Ender leaves Valentine for battle school, the only other female character of note in the text is Petra, who also fulfills a mothering role for Ender. She befriends and teaches him, taking him under her wing to provide one-on-one instruction. But her character illustrates the negative view of women in war games. There are no females in Ender’s launch group; he does not encounter a girl until he moves to his first Army where he meets Petra. She introduces herself to Ender as “[t]he only girl in Salamander Army. With more balls than anybody else in the room,” (75) showing her need to identify with her compatriots and placing power in the masculine through her clichéd reference. However, Petra is quickly put in her feminine place by her fellow soldiers: “‘Mother Petra she talking,’ said one of the boys, ‘she talking, she talking.’ Another chimed in. ‘Shit talking, shit talking, shit talking!’” (75). Given Petra’s status as an outcast in Salamander Army, “shit talking” is not read as an affirmation of her interaction with Ender, but rather the derogatory term “shit” replaces “she” providing the army’s opinion of their only female member.
Petra is ostracized verbally and physically. To Ender, “Petra still looked like a boy” in her prepubescent form, but the boys are commanded not to go naked around her (81). Petra may look like a boy, but the male soldiers are poignantly aware of her difference. In the parallel novel *Ender’s Shadow*, Bean and Petra discuss gender, leadership and skill. Bean admits to being “the only one of these boys who ever chose to have a girl as his commander,” to which Petra retorts, “I got over the fact that I’m a girl long ago” (412). Bean has the last word:

But they didn’t. And you know they didn’t. You know that it bothers them all the time, that you’re not really one of the guys. They’re your friends, sure, at least Dirk is, but they all like you. At the same time, there were what, a dozen girls in the whole school? And except for you, none of them were really topflight soldiers. (412)

Petra is the exception to the gender rule in the case of her skill as a soldier. However, she is still gendered female by her link to young children and her physical and mental frailty in the final battle.

Women and children have commonly been linked by a position of marginality. Petra’s state of inferiority as female is further solidified by being linked to Ender, the youngest and smallest army member, who, compared to the rest of the army, is a child. The commander of the Salamander Army, Bonzo Madrid, links Petra and Ender through their weakness: gender and age respectively. Bonzo considers Petra a bane to the army and now laments Ender’s addition: “To one trial, we now add another” (76-77). Petra even makes this same connection for Ender to try and win his friendship: “‘I’m a girl,’ she said, ‘and you’re a pissant of a six-year-old. We have so much in common, why don’t we be friends?’” (79). Her dialogue is sarcastic in tone but not intent. She befriends Ender and follows him through battle school into the final battle against the buggers as one of his platoon leaders.
Petra is only a “trial” or hardship to the army because of her gender; she is a skilled soldier and the best sharpshooter in Salamander. She is included as a toon leader in the final battle that Ender commands against the buggers, and labeled one of the “best students Ender had fought with or fought against” and one of the students that Ender “trusted in Battle School” (274). She is strong, but she is also the first leader under Ender who mentally cracks, unable to take the pressure of the battle or the responsibility of the war. In the final battles against real buggers, she is the first of the child commanders who cannot handle the physical and mental demands of battle simulation. After she messes up, she is absent for several battles, coming back a weaker and slower leader on whom Ender cannot rely. The male leaders’ stamina outlasts hers, providing a commentary on the place of women in battle.

Her position as female soldier and her breakdown is explained further in *Ender's Shadow*. Bean recognizes Petra’s perfectionist tendencies and describes heranguishing over every mistake she makes, losing sleep, and growing more and more fatigued. Since *Ender’s Game* is written from Ender’s perspective, he does not see Petra’s failure in an intimate way. He is removed from all his commanders and only has radio contact with them. Bean, however, watches Petra’s downfall culminate into her falling asleep at the helm in the middle of a battle. Her squadron occupied the core position, and when she fell asleep her team suffered heavy losses and almost lost the battle, mentally breaking her and physically removing her from command for several days. When she returns to battle, nothing crucial is ever assigned to her again.

Possibly to offset this weakness, Petra once again assumes a caring, mothering role when the final bugger battle is over and Ender and the leaders have recouped and
regrouped. The leaders come into Ender’s room to congratulate him. It is Petra who physically reaches out with a reassuring hand hold and kiss on the cheek, and it is Petra who furnishes the clever joke that concludes the squadron’s time together. While she may be linked at points with weakness and negative feminine traits, Card does not discount her contribution to the team and uses her feminine caring as a proxy for the sisterly love of Valentine back on Earth. At the end of the book, Valentine reunites with Ender in space, having bargained Ender’s life from Peter. Both women make significant contributions, but their contributions are usually in the form of a helpmate or support for Ender, the hero and focus of the text.²

In Only You Can Save Mankind, Pratchett introduces us to the girl sidekick by having the main character play into the stereotype of the perceived oxymoronic girl-gamer: “You didn’t often get girls in J&J Software” (48). Johnny follows up his observation with a flashback, linking the presence of a girl in a video game store to his mother:

Once, quite a long time ago, during a bit of time she’d set aside for parenting, Johnny’s mother had tried playing a game. It had been quite a simple one—you had to shoot asteroids and flying saucers and things. It had been embarrassing. It had been amazing that the flying saucers had even bothered to shoot back. More likely they should have parked and all the aliens could have looked out of the windows and made rude noises. Women didn’t have a clue. (48-49)

It is clear that the boy characters do not expect girls to be gamers, and when they find out that the aliens in the video game are all female, they play on gender stereotypes:

“she’s the Captain,” said Johnny.

“A woman in charge?” said Yo-less.

“No wonder the aliens always lose,” said Wobbler. “You should see the side of my mum’s car.”
“Um. She can hear you, I think. Don’t use sexist language,” said Johnny. (91)

After hearing this conversation, the female alien Captain asks Johnny to explain what “sexist” is. Johnny replies:

It just means you should treat people as people and, you know … not just assume girls can’t do stuff. We got a talk about it at school. There’s lots of stuff most girls can’t do, but you’ve got to pretend they can, so that more of them will. That’s all of it, really. (96)

Insightfully the Captain replies, “Presumably there’s, uh, stuff boys can’t do?” to which Johnny retorts, “Oh yeah. But that’s just girls’ stuff.” (96). Johnny’s assumptions about female gamers and his attitude about the inferiority of girls’ stuff set the tone for the later interaction between him and Kirsty, the female anomaly present in J&J Software. But before fully introducing Kirsty, who is identified as somewhat alien by her presence in a software store, the text focuses on the other female alien, the ScreeWee Captain, and her soldiers.

The Captain is not an anomaly on her ship since all of the ScreeWee soldiers are women, except the mutinous Gunnery Officer. The ScreeWee Captain explains to Johnny that all of the soldiers are women because in their culture women are more inclined to fight than men. While this may seem like an attempt at including some female liberation into the story, the rationale for why ScreeWee women are the warriors is because they had to fight to protect their breeding ground. The violence is linked to motherhood and is thus domesticated through the rationale, turning the ScreeWee warriors into an embodiment of the monstrous-feminine. The idea of woman as alien/Other seems particularly salient in this example when linked to the 1979 movie Alien and its sequels.³
The link to the movie *Alien* is not only through the female ScreeWee aliens: Kirsty, the girl gamer in the text, plays under the avatar name Sigourney. She presents a strong female gamer, particularly at the beginning of the text, but also falls under the same fault of Weaver in *Alien*—they both embody the acceptable woman. While Kirsty is a good player, her dialogue provides stock feminist lines about men resenting female power and berates her mother for a lack of ambition because she got married at age twenty (143-44, 149). She is competitive and has a winner’s complex, and it is her need to help other women that convinces her to aid the ScreeWee Captain—as a “matter of principle” (144).

After Kirsty enters the video game, her moniker changes to Sigourney. Once Sigourney boards the alien ship, where she has some measure of control over the details and setting, she begins imagining the ship as if it were the ship from *Alien*:

> There was something different about the corridor: Before, it had been gray metal, only interesting if you really liked looking at nuts and bolts. But now it was darker, with more curves; the walls glistened, and dripped menace. Dripped something, anyway. … Now steam was dribbling from somewhere, making the floor misty and wet. (163-164)

While Sigourney plays a role of female action hero, wanting to shoot aliens, it is Johnny who ultimately saves the fleet. When the male Gunnery Officer attacks them, Sigourney, who has been tough in demeanor and full of bravado, freezes and cannot fire her gun. Johnny steps up and fires his gun at the threatening ScreeWee, killing the alien enemy and once again saving the day. After the fight, Johnny commands the ships while Sigourney is left tending sick ScreeWee and administering first aid.

In *Only You Can Save Mankind*, even though Kirsty plays video games and breaches the interface to enter the video game world with Johnny, she turns out to be an ineffective player whose most worthwhile contribution is administering first aid and
suggesting an escape capsule. In *Ender’s Game*, Petra and Valentine, while a talented soldier and writer respectively, give nurturing and support to Ender. Each girl plays the role of sidekick.

In these older texts, girls are not player one but a sidekick, even though the “honor of having thought up the first graphically controlled adventure game goes to a woman, Roberta Williams,” who created *King’s Quest* in 1983 (Malliet and Meyer 36). Yet even before PC adventure games were published, arcade game designers considered gender issues. In an interview, Toru Iwatani explains his impetus for designing *Pac-Man* (1980):

> At that time, as you will recall, there were many games associated with killing creatures from outer space. I was interested in developing a game for the female game enthusiast. Rather than developing the character first, I started out with the concept of eating and focused on the Japanese word ‘taberu,’ which means ‘to eat’. (qtd. in Kent 141)

Iwatani demarcates killing in shooter games like *Space Invaders* (1978) as a male-oriented action, thus following similar logic to what we see in *Ender’s Game* and *Only You Can Save Mankind*. He deems video games that have domestic and social implications of food and eating as an acceptable female-friendly game. Of course, *Pac-Man* was played by both males and females, becoming a cultural icon of the 80’s, but the developer’s mindset shows a specific design decision in regards to gender. This bias persists even though forty percent of all game players are women (Entertainment Software Association).

Addressing girls’ perspectives on computer culture in 2000, the American Association of University Women Commission on Technology, Gender, and Teacher Education reported, “girls are engaged with the world, while boys are engaged with computers” (8). This stereotype endures, but the AAUW Commission, co-chaired by
Sherry Turkle, believes, “computer culture would do well to catch up with the girls” (ix). To do this, we “need a more inclusive computer culture that embraces multiple interests and backgrounds and that reflects the current ubiquity of technology in all aspects of life” (x). This type of computer culture is being explored and produced on several different fronts, including theoretical criticism, industry studies, and popular culture texts.

One of the most influential theoretical collections on girls and gaming is the edited collection *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* (1998). This text presents gender differences in gaming, game design, and play spaces, and also focuses specifically on girls in regards to play strategies and software design. Ten years later, the edited collection *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat* revises these topics and also presents new perspectives on gender concerns. Software designer and researcher Brenda Laurel, a contributor to both volumes, addresses the state of gaming for girls over the ten year period between books. In an interview in the original *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat*, she describes her part in creating the company Purple Moon to specifically target software design and production for girls by combining theoretical foundations with real life market research (Glos and Goldin).

Purple Moon launched its website and two CD-ROM games in 1997: *Rockett’s New School* and *Secret Paths in the Forest*. Both were geared toward social and emotional exploration either in school or in an inner fantasy life for girls, but critics attacked the games for stereotypically representing girls as being more socially and emotionally oriented instead of action oriented. In *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat*, Laurel discusses Purple Moon’s demise and illustrates some of the challenges facing the girl gaming market. Purple Moon, while popular with girls, did not exceed investors’
expectations and was thus terminated. Laurel believes “one of the main reasons why the video-game business has been so horribly stunted in its growth is that it has been unwilling to look beyond itself to its audience” (28). As a girl gaming audience grows, those girls will move into positions to positively impact the field for other women. Positive strides are being made, but this is still an area of needed growth and print texts can help.

**Instant Messaging and Blog Books**

One way to help integrate computer culture into girls’ lives is through books that include computer references and emulate social media technology. Novels that rely on online simulation games, virtual reality games or alternate reality games, while more prominent for girls than ones that use traditional video games, are not as commonly marketed to girls as twenty-first century diary or epistolary texts. Epistolary novels, which gained popular in the eighteenth century with texts such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, have not been discarded over the years; they have only changed their form to match their audience and the current forms of communication. Similarly, novels in the form of diaries, while still popular, have expanded to include online journals among their numbers. In books that use blogs, text messaging and email, the technological medium usually replaces the narrator and assumes the role of transmitting information to the reader, thus changing the structure of the texts. Whether in small chunks or complete works, in non-fiction or fantasy, YA novels are being impacted by digital media, and for female readership this digital media is usually in the form of online journals and instant messages that convey first person intimate thoughts.

Some may conclude that incorporating these technological forms into a book is a cheap imitative way to seduce tech-savvy tweens and teens to purchase a particular
book, and sometimes it is. Noga Applebaum correctly asserts that “as publishers have realized, computers exert a powerful allure for children and teenagers, who are technology’s most avid fans” (252). She concludes that “[f]or this reason, images of monitors and Internet jargon increasingly appear on the covers of children’s books, even when their content is only remotely related to IT” (252). And while there probably is a marketing bandwagon for technology gimmicks, authors and publishers have successfully used influences from popular culture as a way to attract adolescent readers to newly released texts, such as current adolescent fiction that has been inspired by popular digital media. Some books devote their entire form to a technological medium or modify their narrative to specific parameters in order to fulfill the prescribed technology.

New media can impact an older medium, such as a print text, as shown through transtexts books that incorporate Instant Messaging (IM) and blogs. In these examples, print media is appropriating digital media in a reverse role of remediation, as defined by Bolter and Gruisin. New media is affecting print texts for young adult readers by expanding the range of narrative media that authors can use and is producing a YA fiction niche market. More and more YA books are incorporating technology into their format or storyline but not in such a fully realized storyline or immersive way as in Vivian Vande Velde’s Heir Apparent (2002) or Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman Cathy’s Book (2006), which will be discussed later. Some texts, like Ann Brashares’ Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants (2001), which used letters in the first book as a means of communication between the four girl protagonists, becomes more technically savvy in the subsequent texts. The second book in the series, The Second Summer of the
Sisterhood (2003), incorporates Instant Messages and emails alongside traditional snail mail letters within the print novel. It even highlights multi-generational usage of technology with the tech-savvy Grecian grandmother.

Additionally, several YA novels for girls use email, text messaging, and blogs consistently within a print text. The sampling of books that incorporate digital technology with female protagonists illuminates gender issues and stereotypes. The female protagonists in most YA novels use technology for communication instead of playing a video game, creating a more progressively technological text that still associates girls with social aspects. This mix of technological inclusion and communication can be seen as both conforming to gender stereotypes and also presenting a positive interaction with technology. Just as Barker and Aspray asserted that boys gain technological aptitude through computer games, girls not comfortable with gaming can gain technological comfort through these multimodal texts. While some texts just conform to gender norms, the more progressive and open-ended texts successfully update and complicate the communication stereotype. The majority of these texts use an epistolary form of media, conveying personal messages or intimate dialogue with its media crossover.

The trend of including blogs in books for adolescents began in 2004, and focused on girl protagonists. Kristyn Dunnion’s Mosh Pit, a Canadian young adult fiction text that explores teenage lesbian punk culture, includes fourteen blog entries intertwined with the rest of the narrative. In 2005, whole print texts that used blogs as the narrative structure become available, such as Robynn Clairday’s Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer: [A Blog], and books with blogs have continued being published each year in growing numbers. Blogging has become a popular insert in young adult fiction as an
emulation of how current teenagers write and communicate their life narratives. But incorporating a blog into a print text is not a one size fits all convergence. Whether the blog functions as a plot device or the specific narrative structure depends on the individual text. For instance, Clairday’s *Confessions* fully utilizes blog format, whereas Shanna Norris’ *Something to Blog About* (2008) begins with a blog and then intersperses traditional narrative prose between blog posts. Similarly, Alyson Noel’s *Kiss & Blog* (2007) does not fully succumb to the blog format, but it has a character begin a blog part way through the novel. The final two texts both delineate their form by including “A Novel” in the title on the front cover but not on the title page. With any level of inclusion, these books seek to relate to their teen audience through digital media.

Through Purple Moon, Laurel wanted to “meet girls where they were, in the realities of their own lives.” (“Notes” 25). Books such as Clairday’s *Confessions* do just that. In *Confessions*, each message board contains three or four comments from various girls reading the protagonist’s, Genesis, blog online. They replicate reader’s reactions and provide feedback for the day’s blog, as well as post questions for Genesis to answer or clarify. These comments provide a secondary narration or meta-narrative on Genesis’s first person blog entries, thus simulating the participatory culture of convergence in a fictional text. The blog format also gives an increased sense of realism and real time interaction because of the comment interaction following blog posts. In a way, it replicates Laurel’s *Rockett* game series which presents social choices and allows the player to select responses. In *Confessions*, different responses are provided and the reader ‘selects’ that option by identifying with a particular commentary.
While *Confessions* presents the entire narrative in blog or comment format, some texts allow characters to use blogs in conjunction with traditional prose narrative. In *Something to Blog About*, the blog acts as a character monologue that follows each individual chapter and reflects on what has happened or anticipates what will happen. In addition to the blog format, the text also includes instant messages, albeit somewhat unrealistically because of its correct punctuation and capitalization. Having a blog as part of a character’s outlet can provide a realistic use of online media.

Another realistic use of media is the inclusion of Instant Messaging (IM) as a way for characters to communicate. While a blog seems easier to maintain within a print narrative because of its mode of recounting information, books that use IM seem confined by the form. But this confinement provides a creative spark for author Lauren Myracle, creator of the popular *ttyl* series. In addition to whimsical screen names, Myracle uses typographical elements such as color and font to distinguish each of her three female protagonists. Sheryl Rinkol reviews *ttfn* positively: “The language, abbreviations, and slang of a teen audience perfectly set the tone for this novel. Myracle successfully connects with her teen readers by having them e-mail her new abbreviations and slang for instant messaging. This makes for an effective and realistic read” (317). This realism in young adult fiction helps keep girl readers connected to characters, especially when they can identify with the characters through their own use of technology.

Unlike *Only You Can Save Mankind*, *Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer* and Myracle’s *ttyl* (2004) do not use a video game discourse. Instead, they translate and adapt common online modes of communication—blogs and IM’s—into fictional print
texts. These texts can also provide a gateway for women into computer culture by providing a comfort level with aspects of computer usage other than gaming.

**Nancy Drew: Media Sleuth**

Another technological gateway for females is emulation of a loved character, such as the wholesome American girl icon Nancy Drew, who promotes computer involvement for girls. According to *The 101 Most Influential People Who Never Lived*, Nancy Drew is listed as the 62nd most influential fictional, mythic, or legendary character in America. As a long-running series begun in the 1930’s by the Stratemeyer syndicate under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene, *Nancy Drew* has been continually remade and rewritten with the current times. The character of Nancy Drew may not have changed significantly in her didactic tone and moral code, but her presentation across media and some of her recent gaming situations, both in print and in actual video games, place her firmly in the current gaming culture for girls that has progressive implications in both form and content. Additionally, she provides a transitional phase by retaining gender roles in some of her texts, while also providing more progressive female roles in others.

Given the serial nature of Nancy Drew and her multi-author development, she provides a strong character base for a transmedia story universe. As a series, the continuing story of Nancy Drew has been told in print texts, movies, and video games. Recalling Dresang's usage of the rhizome, Jane Newland asserts that series fiction can break down linear progression of a story and present a rhizomic reading (148). This reading negates the need for a chronological reading and opens the reader up to interacting with the series at any interval (148). Thus, Nancy proves to be excessively portable across media since she is devised to enact episodic adventures that are largely disconnected from one another but still part of the *Nancy Drew* story universe.
Her titles include countless print texts, over twenty games for the PC, several Nintendo DS games, and one Wii game, making her one of the most established female video game characters for girls. Computer games and print converge in three of her recently released print texts that focus on an online virtual world and simulation game. The *Nancy Drew Girl Detective* series released the “Identity Mystery Trilogy,” updating her stories for a modern tween audience of girl readers and gamers where Nancy must use both real and virtual clues to unravel her mysteries. *Secret Identity* (2008), *Identity Theft* (2009), and *Identity Revealed* (2009) cover debated areas of online simulation games—bullying, hate speech, and security—through a game called *BetterLife*. In the trilogy’s first volume, Nancy has never heard of *BetterLife*, even though the virtual world is quite popular in River Heights. Before the books proselytize against negative gaming scenarios, Nancy must first learn how to play the virtual simulation game. She is instructed by a middle school girl: “You create a character—it can look like you or not—and you give it a name. Basically you play your character, living in this alternate world and interacting with all kinds of other virtual people” (20). The fictional *BetterLife* is similar to the actual *Second Life*, as obvious by the play on the title.

The game and the rest of Nancy’s world converge when personal attacks are made by the unknown antagonist against Shannon, a middle school girl, both in the game world and in the real world, creating the mystery for Nancy to solve. For example, Shannon’s avatar SassyGirl48, is attacked in the game when someone paints the word loser on her virtual house. But the next day at school, Shannon’s locker is also painted with the word loser across the front. What started in the online game world bleeds into the rest of the novel.
To help solve her latest case, the bullying of Shannon both in the virtual realm and in real life, Nancy creates an avatar, VirtualNancy, with the help of her tech-savvy, female friend George. *BetterLife* is a new experience for Nancy and one she does not fully comprehend at first, asking, “So to socialize, you sit alone in your room and type on a computer?” (20). She encounters a breakdown of the game model as defined by video game theorist Jesper Juul. He defines “the classic game model” as derived of three parts: “the game itself, the player’s relation to the game, and the relation between playing and the rest of the world,” asserting that video games “are a combination of rules and fiction” (197). The fictional world interacts, encourages, and responds to the rules of the game. What Nancy encounters is a fictional world whose rules she does not comprehend or understand. In this way, Nancy could be a role model for girls who do not understand online or game rules. By reading about her overcoming technological ignorance, a female reader may gain courage to pursue a video game. And the endpapers of the print text advertise a good place to start—the *Nancy Drew* games for the PC and DS.

Personally, Nancy has difficulty engaging in the player act of world building and has no prior game conventions on which to draw experience. Her perceived rules of the game do not fit with the social interactions established in the game by the majority of the players. For example, in the game VirtualNancy asks GuitarLvr15, another avatar, “What’s ur real name?” (*Secret Identity* 59). GuitarLvr15 replies “My name is GuitarLvr15” (59). Nancy presses the issue and gets blocked from any other private conversation with GuitarLvr15, who avoids her for the rest of the novel. Nancy’s lack of gaming etiquette blocks this avatar as a potential source of clues.
Before playing *BetterLife*, Nancy’s voice is that of a warning adult, espousing stereotypical and somewhat uninformed views of games. However the reality is that online simulation and role playing games life *Second Life* are played by millions of people and are being explored for their educational value. For example, Christine Lagorio reported in *The New York Times* that colleges and universities have set up campuses in *Second Life* to aid distance learning and online education. And, one of the major publications in the English field, *PMLA*, ran an article by Steven Jones which explores how the virtual world of *Second Life* can be used with textual studies. Jones concludes his article (which ran under the journal’s “Changing Profession” section) by stating: “video games offer humanists serious models for potential networked events of their own—embodied, intermediated, and out in the world” (272). While Nancy does not verbally confirm this conclusion, her story does.

Nancy’s experiences in the first novel as VirtualNancy evolve over the course of the trilogy until she is quite attached to her avatar. Even though the trilogy does have its share of heavy-handed preaching moments, Nancy’s view of *BetterLife* changes. After *BetterLife* is shut down at the end of the third book because the owners are using the game for blackmail, Nancy reminisces that she “missed Virtual Nancy from time to time” (*Identity Revealed* 198). And, Nancy admits to occasionally dressing like her avatar in a blue sweater and khakis, which makes her feel empowered. She states, “Whenever I wore them, I felt a little, well, virtual—capable of more than your average Nancy Drew,” a similar feeling to what Johnny experiences when he adopts the video game tagline as his motto in *Only You Can Save Mankind* (198). Though Nancy does not move on to become a computer genius and serious gamer like George, the game
impacts her and provides a unique outlet in which to solve her cases. Thus, she embodies her avatar and uses game networks in the world outside of the game.

The drive towards improved technological texts for girls continues into video games made for girls like the *Nancy Drew* games made by HerInteractive, a company geared specifically to girls similar in scope and mission to Purple Moon. Female gamers are normally subjugated to social games, simple games, or games dealing with everyday—almost household or domestic—life, like *The SIMS*. This can be positive and negative. Critics like Laurel might argue that the availability of these games is a good thing because they reflect the type of play in which women/girls are allegedly interested. With the explicit purpose to encourage girls in new media, the *Nancy Drew* adventure games occasionally frame themselves through domestic roles, which could be a problematic gender representation, but they also present strong investigative mysteries and puzzle games.

Released right before the “Identity Mystery Trilogy” books, three *Nancy Drew* games, each for a different platform, provide an overview of gameplay style and content that HerInteractive has deemed most appropriate for female gamers. *The Creature of Kapu Cave* (2006) for the PC is the fifteenth *Nancy Drew* video game produced by HerInteractive. *Nancy Drew: The White Wolf of Icicle Creek*, available on both the PC (2007) and the Wii (2008), is the 16th in the game series. Then, with the release of *Nancy Drew: The Deadly Secret of Olde World Park* (2007), the series became available on the Nintendo DS. Changing gaming platforms gives each game different abilities and audiences. Each one provides new opportunities for players to experience the series differently, but the games have fundamental similarities.
Each game revolves around one large mystery and a series of incidents that Nancy must solve. In *Creature*, Nancy takes an exotic, non-domestic role when she flies to the island of Hawaii to work with Dr. Quigley Kim, a famous entomologist. Using a cell phone, a task list, and a GPS system as her primary tools, Nancy must solve several mysteries on the island. More traditionally, *White Wolf* focuses more on domestic skills while trying to solve the accidents that have been happening at the Icicle Creek Lodge. As Nancy, the player becomes the Lodge’s new maid and cook, with access to all of the guests’ rooms. In *Deadly Secret*, Nancy must solve several mysterious incidents revolving around River Height’s new theme park. As Nancy, the player solves all of these mysteries helping several other people along the way, with the resolve of win happening when the criminal is exposed. The *Nancy* games provide a mix of traditional and non-traditional roles for Nancy as she solves her cases.

In each game, the player as Nancy must go about solving the mystery by different in-game experiences, minigames and puzzles. To aid in the various investigations, players choose from a selection of predetermined dialogue to converse with other characters. Each different retort gleans a unique response. And while interrogating witnesses is an integral part of the games, one must complete various puzzles to progress in all of the games. In *Creature* these include tasks such as making an Aloha necklace, deciphering lock combinations, and other logic puzzles. As the maid in *White Wolf*, the player makes the beds and collects the laundry. As the cook, the player has to cook meals, remembering who wants what condiments on their hamburger, which serves as a mini-memory game. There is also a driving game with a snowmobile and a minesweeper type game where one must mark weak spots on the frozen pond. In
*Deadly Secret*, Nancy has to interrogate suspects and other characters. Sometimes people are willing to talk, but when they are not, the player must coerce them by completing minigames that improve the character's mood and loosen their tongue. Puzzles are also present in this game, but they seem more time sensitive. For example, in a tense moment during the game, Nancy must save the park by disarming a bomb. Being a game for the DS, the player uses the stylus and touch pad to stop electricity from running through the wires and thus disables the bomb.

Also, the setting and characters of each game change. Interestingly, *Creature* has Nancy team up with the Hardy Boys, and players can switch between Nancy, Frank and Joe to solve two parallel mysteries in Hawaii. Adding playable male characters reinforce equal gender roles as Frank and Joe perform the same role as Nancy. However, the Hardy Boys are not included in the Canadian setting for *White Wolf*, and Nancy solves the mystery alone. In *Deadly Secret*, Nancy returns to River Heights and reunites with her best friends Bess and George, who both make appearances in the game but are not playable characters. They stay true to the characters presented in the print series as George assists with a computer question and Bess needs help finding a dress. Ned also makes appearances, but largely acts as a chauffeur.

Even though the Hardy Boys are part of the *Creature* game, HerInteractive, as their name implies, is dedicated to designing high-quality adventure games for women and girls. And they have largely succeeded. The *Nancy Drew* PC game series has won seventeen Parents' Choice gold awards, which is given by a non-profit reviewer of children’s media and toys to those texts who “are judged as the highest quality, most appealing products in their genre. Criteria for judgments include the highest production
standards, universal human values and a unique, individual quality that pushes the product a notch above others” (Parent’s Choice). To relate to the female audience, the games provide a diverse but not action-oriented gaming experience where logic instead of twitch skills is needed with a blend of traditionally and non-traditionally gendered titles. To provide communication aspects, the games simulate social interaction through interrogation and conversation with other characters. The *Nancy Drew* franchise may provide didactic warnings against computer dilemmas, but it still explores gaming issues and produces quality games for girls providing a nice transitional space into gaming for girls.

And, the storylines are an integral part of the games, leaning heavily on narrative to drive the game forward. In fact, the *Nancy Drew* video games largely read like mystery novels with additional games that the player must complete in order to solve the mystery, which is even advertised in the booklet for the DS game. Conversely, some adolescent novels read like games in the sense that they provide detail gameplay from a character’s perspective. Similar to how the *Nancy Drew* “Identity Mystery Trilogy” describes the virtual world of *BetterLife*, Vivian Vande Velde’s *Heir Apparent* (2002) describes playing through a virtual reality game with a female protagonist. Just as simulation and virtual world games that replicate domestic situations, such as *The Sims* or *Second Life*, are popular with females and doll play is generally culturally approved of for girls as a teaching tool for actions in womanhood, virtual reality games can provide acceptable role-playing and imitation of everyday and domestic situations. Thus, games like *BetterLife* can provide acceptable role-playing and imitation of everyday and domestic situations. Yet whereas Nancy Drew played a simulated reality
game with a computer generated avatar that has comparable games in real life, virtual reality games are largely science fiction at present and are not mass produced for entertainment yet. Virtual reality games immerse the player in an interactive 3D environment that simulates sensory reality through the use of a headset or goggles and gloves, usually with head and hand tracking. Current adolescent fiction has been using virtual reality games with female protagonists, but this sort of intentional full-body, full-character immersion can present the same gendered player stigma as video games. For example, Vande Velde’s text focuses on problem solving skills instead of military scenarios, which, as we saw with Card and Pratchett, is demarcated or ear-marked for boys.

Even though the focus on communication skills reinforces traditional gender roles, having a female protagonist actively participate in a virtual reality game in a YA novel is a progressive step. In *Heir Apparent*, the fourteen-year-old female protagonist Giannine Bellisario plays a total immersion, virtual reality game, also called Heir Apparent. But before selecting the game she asks the receptionist “Heir Apparent for girls as well as boys?” showcasing the pervasive audience for games in an arcade (10). She makes her game selection on two criteria: that there are really good-looking guys in the promotion and that there is not only one set of winning criteria. While the former is just aesthetic appeal for Giannine, the latter provides a rationale for presumably why the game is acceptable and enjoyable to a girl protagonist. The game has multiple correct ways of playing and is not limited to a rigid skill set.

In the game Heir Apparent, the king has died and the player is named next in line for the throne. Using puzzle-solving and interpersonal skills, Giannine must stay alive
long enough to be crowned Queen. Through the game, she essentially plays a complex version of house. She manages her castle estate, pays her guards’ wages, keeps her step-siblings from mutiny, and tries to keep peace between the royal councilors. While there is some violence, the game does not revolve around war. It is dependent on the player’s communication with the other computer generated players and her persuasive techniques to ally them to her. This may be because the distance of historical fantasy allows for a more progressive agenda than a contemporary game setting. Heir Apparent is a game of personal and emotional manipulation, not a game of soldier tactics; Giannine’s dependence on problem solving and communication skills illustrates why publishers assume this type of text works for a female audience. It is akin not to the boy protagonist video game texts but to texts that incorporate communication technology over gaming technology. The skills that Giannine uses are not hand-eye coordination or soldier warfare, but those of a princess handling her subjects and avoiding war. They are skills of interpersonal communication.

*Cathy’s Book: Just a Book?*

While Giannine enters the game in *Heir Apparent*, the reader can be involved with a game through *Cathy’s Book*. *Cathy’s Book* does not have a specific digital media component incorporated into its print text, but it functions as an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) through additional material packaged with the book: artifacts such as notes and letters that contain live phone numbers and website URL’s the reader can visit to uncover the extended meanings of the text. The book and its sequels are groundbreaking media in their own right, closely akin to the video game print texts for males in its gaming construct. *Cathy’s Book* exceeds the marketing fad by producing an
intriguing stand-alone text that has added benefit, and pushes the boundaries of a children’s text.

In a Gamasutra article, Adrian Hon discusses ARGs as being “complex and involving ‘alternate reality’ storylines that takes place not only on the Internet, but through every conceivable media including phone calls, newspapers, radio, television, movies, and real life actors.” The genre can best be described as a “game-story hybrid” (Szulborski 60) or as argn.com expresses:

an obsession-inspired genre that blends real-life treasure hunting, interactive storytelling, video games, and online community….These games are an intensely complicated series of puzzles involving coded Web sites, real-world clues from newspaper advertisements, phone calls in the middle of the night from game characters, and more. That blend of real-world activities and a dramatic storyline has proven irresistible to many. (qtd. in Gosney xvi)

Two of those who could not resist are Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman, co-creators of Cathy’s Book. Both authors have a substantial history with creating and designing ARG’s, as well as writing fiction. Stewart was lead writer and puppet master for The Beast, which is generally considered the first major ARG and was used to promote Steven Spielberg’s 2001 film A.I. Weisman was Creative Director for Microsoft's entertainment division and founded the company that designed The Beast and served as lead designer. In an interview, author Sean Stewart defines Cathy’s Book: “The book is designed to be very much an ARG-lite. It isn’t the Beast; we have always set the goal that a reader who does nothing except read the text of the novel should have a great experience.” And while the novel does make for a great reading experience, the story extends to a layered, multi-media experience. ARG-lite is a fitting name given that Cathy’s Book can be taken as a stand-alone YA novel but is richer explored as an ARG. Cathy’s Book does not go to the extremes of some ARGs, but it does bring the alternate
reality storyline to a YA novel and involve every reader in a game, whether consciously or unconsciously, through its fully multimodal text.

*Cathy’s Book* does not specifically pull a technological medium into its print text framework, but it is revolutionary in other ways that relate to digital media. It offers digital connections, displays both connectivity and interactivity in an adolescent fiction that is anchored as a print text, and becomes more as the story exceeds the print pages. *Cathy’s Book* and its sequels, *Cathy’s Key* and *Cathy’s Ring*, begin with a standard girl’s diary format but break the narrative page binding and create interactions outside of the print text. *Cathy’s Book* author Stewart pairs with Weisman, who designed the websites and paraphernalia, and illustrator Cathy Brigg to create not only a print journal, but a whole alternate reality with tangible verification, website traces, and aural evidence to make the print text come alive. A prolific ARG writer, Stewart describes the *Cathy’s Book* on his website as, “a multi-media, illustrated YA novel, with websites, message boards, and phone numbers, bringing to life a teen girl's daily journal of mysterious events covering Chinese mythology, biotech misdeeds, and immortal thugs.” *Cathy’s Book* is doing something interesting in its form, its larger construction and in its communication technique, even introducing an iPhone app in 2010. While not explicitly technological, *Cathy’s Book* is an ARG that uses technology to transmit its story through transmedia publishing.

“An alternate reality game normally begins,” according to Dave Szulborski, creator of several independent ARGs, “with a rabbit hole, so named because it presents an opening into another world, much like the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*” (47). He continues, “Quite often, the rabbit hole takes the form of a plea
for help on an Internet message board or in an e-mail someone receives. At the very least it will be a description of some strange or dangerous situation someone has found himself or herself in” (48). The cover of Cathy’s Book becomes the rabbit hole by providing a phone number in case the book is found. The back cover instructs Emma, and by proxy the reader, to “Look at everything in my book. Call the phone numbers. Check out the websites,” after her plea that this evidence is “in case something happens and I DON’T come back” (back cover). After being instructed to “call the phone numbers,” a reader may assume that the number on the cover is a typical 555 number given out as a fictitious number, but they would be wrong. Calling the number reaches Cathy’s voice mail on her cell phone. Insightful readers can discover access codes with which to hear Cathy’s messages and gain further clues about the storyline, thus hearing additional information not found in the text. Also, the iPhone app creates another layer of immediacy and interaction.

Still, this novel may not look more than just a typical YA teenage diary along the lines of Phoebe Gloeckner’s The Diary of a Teenage Girl or Jeff Kinney’s Diary of a Wimpy Kid, with their blend of personal journal and cartoon illustrations. At first, a reader may view Cathy’s Book as a typical YA text with extra-textual artifacts provided as tangible samples in the inside cover pocket. Only with prior exposure to ARG’s or additional research would a reader recognize or connect the text to an ARG. Adolescent fiction has culled from popular culture before with texts that use IM or blogs as a framework. But Cathy’s Book is a radical departure because the book can be taken alone as a YA text or can function as an artifact within a larger game context, a piece of a larger puzzle. Most ARG’s revolve around a conspiracy theory or mystery, thus
providing the impetus for clues to be gathered, layers to be uncovered, and the game to be played. *Cathy’s Book* is layered into a detective fiction with a mystery to be solved. In this way it is similar to *Nancy Drew*, but more edgy and less domestic.

The book also includes webpages and other online forums for readers to browse. Authors have seen the need to market their work online with webpages and author blogs, but this is different than continuing the fictitious world of the text into other media. In the story for example, Cathy’s best friend Emma is a Chinese-American cell phone junkie and wants to start her own cell phone company one day after she completes a degree at MIT. This idea is extended out of the book and onto the internet through the webpage [www.doubletalkwireless.com](http://www.doubletalkwireless.com), which on its homepage states that it is “the future home of Double Talk wireless, a company focused on bringing affordable communications to mainland China.” Digging further into the webpage, one will discover forums about the book and personal pages for the book’s protagonists. Another website is for a fortune teller, a fictional character in the text that has a web presence.5

Additionally, several characters in the text have MySpace and Facebook pages as if they were real people. To show the level of fan play, Cathy Vickers has over 2,000 friends on Facebook.6 Perhaps if *Cathy’s Book* stopped at just having a Facebook page and MySpace page, then one could write it off as a mere marketing ploy by the publisher’s PR department or a fan’s enthusiasm. However, *Cathy’s Book* goes beyond a surface online presence of the story’s characters and builds mystery and extra narrative into the equation, building a complex example of transmedia storytelling. For example, marginalia comments direct the reader into action to develop the story further.
Yet several critics question the online interaction. In *The Guardian*, Linda Jones questions what she sees as just a marketing technique of fictional characters that are now on Facebook and Twitter. She concludes:

> We expect a book to tell the story and not that it will be continued across some latest technical wizardry on the whims of marketing people. When we hand over our cash to pay for the latest bestseller we are investing in what is in our hands at that very moment, not some nebulous future journey plotted through cyberspace.

A lot of people read for escape, to dive into a fictional world and experience life and emotions through the character’s eyes. Why should that immersive process stop with the final page? With *Cathy’s Book* it can stop with the final page, or for more interested readers or explorers, it can continue online. This continuity has been common by retelling a story in a different medium, i.e. book to film, but with *Cathy’s Book*, the online presence enhances and furthers the story instead of retelling it.

Jones continues, “Or perhaps it's now inevitable that we should also expect to hook up to a character's various social media accounts, getting updates by the month, day, hour or minute. But, really, why should we care?” If an author has not made us care about his or her fictional characters, then the book probably is not worth recommending to a friend. But good authors make us care, and for readers that want more interaction with the characters in *Cathy’s Book*, it is possible. Possible to hear their voices, touch their artifacts, and visit their webpages. Note that there is a marked difference between authors creating online content for their books and fans creating online presences or fan fiction. Even teachers are encouraging fan fiction using Facebook to enhance literature by having students create pages for fictional characters (Davis). But having an author create additional content related to a text and having fans write additional material are two separate categories.
In an interview, Jackie Kerr asked Stewart “How far beyond the book does the narrative extend? Obviously, there’s the Doubletalk Wireless site, the MySpace pages, etc. Is there more to the story out there to find? Puzzles leading to more content not contained within the book’s physical text?” He responds:

there is indeed extra story hidden outside the edges of the book. There is, for instance, an entire scene that was left out of the book but exists on a cell phone message, that tells what happens to a pair of characters that disappear offstage in the book. There is a great deal of information about the many faces of Victor, Cathy’s mysterious boyfriend, including one narrative thread that is for me among the most moving things in the book. That story plays out entirely in a series of handwritten letters you can discover in the book’s evidence pack and in the archives on the doubletalkwireless site. I also wrote a short piece for Victor’s AOL page last week that I am pretty happy with. And there is a clue embedded about the Shocking Plot Twist to come in Book Two, of course. So, as with any ARG, the audience that enjoys doing a little research will find that they know more about Cathy’s world than she does herself…and have a few things to SPEC [speculate] about in terms of What Is To Come.

The skills required to read and explore Cathy’s Book are not twitch skills that require quick reflexes and hand/eye coordination; rather, readers must employ problem solving skills with multiple communication media and the immersion of oneself in a fictional environment. This type of game play is akin to the skill set needed in Heir Apparent, but Giannine’s is a virtual reality game. Additionally, this type of gameplay opens up opportunities and avenues for girls not seen in traditional board games targeted to adolescent girls. Jennifer Scanlon examines board games for adolescent girls and discovers that usually these games “invite girls to enter the consumer marketplace by encouraging players to use products such as clothing and make-up to enhance their looks [or] visiting stores like The Gap and Benetton, trying to outbuy the competition” (185). Cathy’s Book does have its commercial moments, which led Meg Swaine to categorize Cathy’s Book as a productized ARG, as opposed to a promotional
or grass roots ARG. This means that instead of promoting a product like the *Beast* did for Spielberg’s movie, “a product is connected directly with the game itself” (Swaine 19-20). Yet every book’s goal is to sell, and really the products of *Cathy’s Book* are the books in the series.

Consumerism in YA and children’s literature usually involves blatant merchandizing, franchises, and multiple media adaptations, but *Cathy’s Book* subtly integrates consumerist YA culture into the story. CoverGirl references were substituted for the original Clinique references once Proctor and Gamble backed the novel, and they are located primarily in drawings and seem seamless with the book. Only once does the actual text mention a commercial reference. This brand name dropping pales in comparison to general chik lit popular fiction such as the *Gossip Girl* series, but it seemed to garner the most attention by the press. Motoko Rich in his article, “Product Placement Deals Make Leap From Film to Books” in *The New York Times* interviews the authors, publisher, and Cover Girl affiliates. He quotes David Steinberger, president and chief executive of Perseus, the publisher, as saying, “There’s a risk in putting so much emphasis on the Cover Girl relationship that it comes across as a crass commercial project. But it’s not.” For ARG’s especially, the mixing of product and game seems commonplace, and in *Cathy’s Book* the few references seem to just provide another layer to the reality. Since CoverGirl holds a similar cache to Clinique, it seems wise of the authors to make this minor adjustment to help market their own product—the book.

In the book, the brand names are passing references and do not saturate the text. Nor is the object of the game to purchase CoverGirl products. Granted, this could not
be the object because ARG’s are unique among games because there is no final win: the player/reader is not competing for a particular goal. An ARG, while sometimes used for commercial and marketing ploys, is really a game platform designed to enable readers to delve into a fictional world and discover more about the world and its characters. We see this type of investigative gaming with Nancy Drew, but Cathy’s Book presents an emerging form of game play into the emerging realm of the female adolescent readership of immersive stories in the print text market.

Cathy’s Book, while inventive for YA fiction, is also significant in the ARG world. In a feature article on ARGNet Jackie Kerr asks Stewart, “Were you able to do anything with this project, because of its hybrid nature, that you haven’t been able to do when working on ARGs, or in writing your previous novels?” He responds:

Obviously the cross-media storytelling that is fundamental to ARGs is not something I’ve had the chance to mess with in a book before. Conversely, what the book brings is a certain *permanence* to the ARG experience. … The relative permanence of the book means that, for those of us interested in ARGs, we have a thing we can point to and say, ‘Start here!’ knowing that the barrier to entry is low (get a book from a bookstore or library) and that they can have a pretty good experience even if they come to it a year after launch.

Cathy’s Book could be a catalyst for leading more adolescent girls into both the online gaming scene and into more ARG experiences.

The key feature of an ARG, its collective and communicative experience, links the gaming scenario with the digital forms utilized by previously discussed transtext books. ARGs would not have been possible before the Internet because they are dependent on players sharing knowledge and pooling resources and codes. It is a collective game reliant on a community and communication. Since Cathy’s Book is an ARG-lite, the
community is not imperative to game play as with other ARGs, but there is still a thriving community through forums, Facebook, and online discussion.

Print books that incorporate digital media can help address concerns of girls’ computer culture. Books like Confessions may not weaken gender stereotypes, but they can introduce girls to a creative expository outlet. Similarly, the Nancy Drew franchise may provide didactic warnings against computer dilemmas, but it still explores gaming issues and can provide a nice transition into quality games for girls. Most progressively, texts like Cathy’s Book help to bring the print world up to date with the feminist surge in gaming. While female protagonists are still relegated to the position of sidekick in print texts that use traditional first person shooter video games as a narrative medium, even video games themselves are starting to become more female friendly.

In an age where prominent academic publishers, such as the University of Michigan Press, are shifting from traditional print operation to digital distribution, more and more books will have significant online presences (Jaschik). Cathy’s Book, while one of the first, is not currently alone in its complex relationship with online presence and consumerism. Supporting it is a larger trend in YA literature to treat its audience not just as a readership pool, but also as a consumer base, fan club, and gaming community. Cathy’s Book is just the start in this digitally convergent YA experience. Since Cathy’s Book was published transmedia stories are becoming more common with texts such as Skeleton Creek and The Amanda Project. Other books like Scholastic’s 39 Clues series incorporate an amalgam of print text, cards, games and online services into one massive mystery for children to read and participate in. And vooks, which blend “text and video into a single, complete story,” are not yet targeted specifically for youth,
but Simon & Schuster will explore that market soon enough (“Introducing the Vook”).

The publishing world will see more and more technologically influenced texts.

Just as publishers will continue to include technological influences, video games will continue to garner mass market appeal and increased sales. Chapter 5 will continue the gender discussion by returning to video games. It will specifically look at video games for girls, particularly minority girls, focusing on the continued positive advances that the video game market is having for this audience.

---

1 For one discussion of feminism and childhood, see Beverly Lyon Clark’s Chapter 1 in Kiddie Lit. Also, an earlier source, Firestone’s The Dialectic of Sex.

2 As in Card’s work, Johnathan Rand’s American Chillers #13: Virtual Vampires of Vermont sets up a gender dynamic with a sibling pair. The main character, Mike, an eleven-year-old, has a seven-year-old sister Jenny. While Mike’s hobby revolves around computers, Jenny’s dialogue and action focus around her Barbie doll. After this initial but brief gender demarcation, Virtual Vampires does a decent job of including a female sidekick. Part of this integration stems from the fact that the text is in a series and has a mixed audience. All of the books in the series contain both male and female protagonists and it would seem strange to focus solely on a boy this late in the series. The female sidekick, Hayley Winthrop, is literally the girl next door. Her character seems to function as a way to express fear, doubt, and questions that the child reader would also express to the main character. She is the encourager and the helper, but lacks the problem solving and technical skills of Mike, who fixes the computer and saves the day. Hayley never completes a task in the computer game, but she does help provide direction about the correct course of action. Her suggestions are useful, but the execution is left up to Mike. She has one damsel-in-distress moment when Mike must rescue her from a mutated vampire who has grabbed her, but the text does try to keep the playing field fairly equal between the two characters. However, the main task that Hayley takes initiative on is cleaning. Someone has spilled soda pop into the motherboard of the computer, making the game go haywire. Once Mike and Hayley successfully make it through the video game, they physically enter the inner workings of the computer and discover the “jelly-like goop” (132). Hayley commences cleaning up the goop and finds the resources with which to clean it up. But once the cleaning is complete, Mike is once again the problem solver and hero. He discovers the computer’s faulty wiring, reconnects the wiring, and ultimately saves the day. Virtual Vampires does not provide a strict commentary on the supposed superiority of males with computer game play. It attempts to keep Hayley involved in each new level of the game and on the surface does a very good job. Only the subtle nuances of passive versus active and sidekick versus savior put Hayley in her helper role. Terry Pratchett’s Only You Can Save Mankind’s gender portrayals do not contain as much subtlety as Virtual Vampires.

3 Cynthia Freeland in “Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films” interrogates gender ideologies in horror films and finds that “[e]ven in a film with a strong heroine like Alien, any feminist point is qualified by the monstrousness of the alien mother, the objectification of Sigourney Weaver in her underwear, and her character Ripley’s forced assumption of a maternal role” (742). Freeland acknowledges Barbara Creed, who explores the monstrous-feminine of the archaic mother in Alien.
Laurel proceeded to write *Utopian Entrepreneur* (2001) regarding the failure of Purple Moon, which is excerpted in *Beyond Barbie*.

Interaction with fictional character is not new, but by giving characters an online presence that mimics the way social communities interact provides more consistent and instant accessibility.

This statistic is as of June 2010.
Children’s exposure to digital media crosses boundaries to include multiple formats, such as television, video games, and social networking sites. As discussed in Chapter 4, this exposure can be present in print texts and can facilitate a cultural ideology such as gender. In addition to gender, media can also influence notions of racial norms, particularly through multiplatform reinforcement. Significantly, many spin-off video games can reiterate the social constructs of a television show or movie that children regularly watch because they are another medium through which the story universe is explored. Additionally, video games transfer racial conceptions that are reinforced through the player’s identification with and control of a primary avatar. Recent video games for children present a surprisingly affirmative view of racial diversity, particularly for minority females.

Games with minority female characters are a new phenomenon in game production since 2002. A study conducted in 2001 by Children Now, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children, concluded that video games “ignore women and people of color and reinforce racial and gender stereotypes” (27). When games do show racial diversity, “they often incorporate stereotyped images and roles for people of color” (27). Similarly, “not only are females severely under-represented, they are generally cast in either insignificant or stereotyped roles” (27). After this study concluded, games began appearing on the market that changes these results. The games that I examine are largely targeted toward young female players by presenting a minority female in an active role, thus these games begin to negate the negative report from the 2001 research in regards to both race and gender. Children’s games are
progressing quickly in terms of balancing the stereotypical portrayal of race and gender; they are more inclusive than adult games and have even integrated racial characters at a faster pace than children’s print texts.

Chapter 5 analyzes four transmedia franchises for children that have expanded from one medium to another and present affirmative examples of race by providing main female minority characters. The franchises’ games illustrate progressive strides that the entertainment media is making for minority viewers. Rugrats, which came out on Nickelodeon in 1991, started the trend in children’s cartoon media to cast female minorities in key roles. Nickelodeon then premiered Dora the Explorer, a show for younger viewers, on Nick Jr. in 2000. Disney followed up two years later with the theatrical release of Lilo & Stitch, followed shortly after by the television series That’s So Raven. As one can see from the different corporate producers, it is not just one company representing diverse racial presentations in children’s programming, but it is a movement by the key purveyors of children’s entertainment, particularly entertainment for young children.

With most media coverage focused on violence and sexism in adult video games, E for Everyone games marketed toward children have been largely overlooked as constructive examples even though they tend to provide helpful role models. In arguing for positive female minority leads that span children’s multiple media platforms, I specifically examine wholesome female minority leads in Rugrats, That’s So Raven, Dora the Explorer, and Lilo & Stitch, focusing on the video games and the manner in which they reinforce their respective franchise counterparts in television, film, and print. These kid’s games, predominantly for the PC and Nintendo systems, provide affirmative
racial diversity, particularly for minority girls, which is notably absent in older games. For instance, the most popular adult female leading lady, Lara Croft, is denied primary titular credit in the long running *Tomb Raider* series. The title refers to her function instead of her name, and her exaggerated sexual profile has been linked to reinforcing sexism in video games. Nintendo’s leading lady, Princess Peach Toadstool, was similarly denied until she received her own title game in 2006, despite first appearing as a playable character in *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988). Neither the British Lara nor the blonde Princess promotes racial awareness, and it is debatable whether they are even positive role model characters for girl gamers. In the games I examine, though, minority women gain prominence and power, usually as a titular character, and promote ethnic and racial awareness.

Video games are integrally linked to other popular cultural media and frequently create media crossovers. Kinder insists that one cannot talk about transmedia franchises without discussing video games. Wolf and Perron classify this transmedia crossover as working both ways, with video games now becoming a source material for other media, such as television and movies (6). In children’s games, however, this phenomenon is limited, with television acting as the pilot project that catalyzes film and video game and internet production to create “multiplatform entertainment” (Jenkins 105). Television has spread out, refusing to stay confined to its box, expanding series out into other media. This is true for most of the titles that I discuss including *Rugrats*, *That’s So Raven*, and *Dora the Explorer*. All of the video games that I address stem from television with the exception of the Disney film *Lilo & Stitch*, which started as a film, but quickly added a television series.
Chapter 2 addressed print sources adapted into video games and how fidelity was retained or altered. In Chapter 5, the transference of a visual episodic narrative (television) into another visual narrative form (video games) blurs questions of fidelity to the source because of TV’s serial nature. It also heightens intertextual connections and the sense of convergence as the series then produce visually dependent print texts. Additionally, television provides a different sort of transference from the other forms that have been discussed because a visual medium, TV, is shifting to another visual medium, video games. Certain games may be traceable to certain source episodes, but in general an exact source text is difficult to find because of extended situations presented in a daily or weekly television series. It would be absurd to try and claim that the pilot episode is the “original” of the series and everything else is an adaptation, yet episodes and seasons are identifiable. Looking at an episodic series that does not contains a solitary source links the series more strongly with ideas of convergence and provides an easily portable story or character universe, as we saw with Nancy Drew.

Television is not only a source for video games, it also drives children’s internet viewing habits and online activities. Of different entertainment options, “[t]elevision holds the tightest connection to the Internet in the children’s minds,” asserts Ellen Seiter after conducting a case study for four years in an elementary school in southern California. This connection “is reflected in their favorite sites, which largely correspond to television channels (Disney, Fox Kids, Kids WB, Nick, and MTV) or to programs (Rug Rats [sic], Charmed, Digimon, Dragonball Z, X-Men, and Worldwide Wrestling Federation)” (95). Most television shows now provide websites with games for viewers to play, thus integrating gaming even more readily than purchasing console spin-off
games. Other than adult reality shows, this multiple media connection of online participatory interaction seems most prevalent in children’s texts with online activities for television shows. It helps cinch their connection to video games and keeps their audiences’ attention and brand loyalty.

Jenkins claims “that convergence culture represents a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media, that we are making that shift first through our relations with popular culture, but that the skills we acquire through play” (Convergence 22-23) and children’s relations to media keeps becoming more intimate and pervasive with multi-media franchises. “The entertainment industry,” according to Bolter and Grusin, “defines repurposing as pouring a familiar content into another media form” the purpose of which “is not to replace the earlier forms, to which the company may own the rights, but rather to spread the content over as many markets as possible” (68). If you have a child who is watching Rugrats in the morning, grabs her Rugrats backpack to go to school and then eats a Kraft Rugrats Shapes Macaroni and Cheese Dinner that night, the company has “literally engage[d] all of the child’s senses” (68). This manifestation of convergence is standard with children’s media and is growing in intensity.

Television and video games are also linked in another critical way. Cross describes popular criticism at the dawn of television: “In the 1950s and 1960s, the debate over the sheltering of children from television violence followed the deeply rutted tracks of radio and comics, but it became more intense because of the visual appeal of TV programs and eventually aggressive TV marketing of the cool” (175). These debates used the same rhetoric of concern for television viewing that reactionaries currently apply to children’s video game habits. In a study of television as a means of
socialization, particularly of the minority child, Gordon L. Berry and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan try to go beyond the popular debate on “the relationship between the exposure to violent programming and subsequent aggressive behavior” and move on to other socialization functions of television, “including its impact on identity formation, self-esteem, cognitive development, moral development, and cultural awareness” (3). Taking their lead, I am interested in the portrayal of racial awareness as presented in franchises for children and strengthened through transmedia reinforcement of video games and print texts.

**Rugrats: An Integrated Nursery**

*Rugrats* provides successful examples of racial blending in various formats including television, movies, video games and books. The series is notable for its lengthy program history, its use of multiple female minority characters, and its racial diversity as presented through the setting of an integrated nursery and a mixed-race family. Viewers have previously encountered an integrated nursery in Jim Henson’s *Muppet Babies* television series, which featured a mixture of animals (pig, frog, bear, dog, etc.). While this species diversity helped pave the way for a show like the *Rugrats*, it was not until the main characters were actually human that racial integration was manifest. Audiences and critics responded to the television series, awarding it several Daytime Emmy and Kids’ Choice awards. *Rugrats*’ addition of minority females in integral roles was progressive for a children’s series.

The series and games diverge from a conventional one-race cast and show a functional mixed-race family and an independent African-American three-year-old character. Susanna "Susie" Yvonne Carmichael, the wise African-American in the group, role models for the other children in the series and proves a foil to the tyrannical
Angelica. Kimberly "Kimi" Watanabe-Finster, the bold Asian baby of the nursery, has an older Caucasian brother as a result of a mixed marriage. But neither Susie nor Kimi are original Rugrats. The show started in 1991 with only four main children: Tommy, Chuckie, Phil, and Lil. However, the neighborhood grew and thus the nursery expanded to be more racially inclusive. Susie was added relatively quickly in “Meet the Carmichaels,” which aired in 1993. Kimi was introduced in *Rugrats in Paris: The Movie* (2000), and she become a regular on the show with the airing of “Finsterella,” thus giving the red-headed Chuckie an Asian mother and sister. Kimi also adds international presence because she and her mother met the Rugrats gang in Paris. But she does more than add token diversity. By birth, Kimi is a citizen of Japan, and the show leverages this to add an international pastiche by exploring Japanese customs (as in “Finsterella” when everyone removes their shoes upon entering the house) and heritage (as in “Memoirs of a Finster” when Kimi researches her family tree). While Kimi’s mother, Kira Watanabe, was also added late in the series, there is a strong resemblance between her and a nameless guest at the Pickle’s residence in the pilot episode, thus suggesting the producers had a mixed-race cast in mind from the show’s conception.

Even though the show did not start with a heterogeneous group, it has melded into a broader sample of American diversity with two strong minority female characters and a mixed-race family. Additionally, the dichotomy of bratty Angelica and wise Susie provide a racial opposition, even if it is schematic. Angelica, the white character, oppresses the other children as the villain, while Susie, the black character, provides advice and help as the friend and role model to the other children. Susie can usually
best Angelica, which provides a unique power structure in the nursery. Susie also possesses skills that neither Angelica nor the younger Rugrats have such as being able to speak several languages. While Angelica and Susie are same-aged foils for each other, the younger Kimi is joined with Susie by their mutual courage against Angelica’s tyranny. They are also visually linked through their hair-dos, both sporting a three part braid or ponytail while Angelica dons a typical pigtail. Susie and Kimi help provide admirable female minority presence in the nursery. Lil, an original Rugrats, is also female, but she is so closely identified with her male twin (finishing his sentences even) that it complicates her gender portrayal.

The show not only provides a situation to teach children about racial diversity through friends and family, but it also takes certain episodes and devotes them to a positive awareness of race and culture. For example, one television episode titled “A Rugrats Kwanzaa” has Susie and the Carmichaels learning about and celebrating Kwanzaa. In researching children and their dealings with being “other,” Owain Jones asserts that Rugrats, “throws up a nice take on the otherness of childhood” (174). While Jones deals more with children as other compared to adults, his statement remains true for otherness as race, which Rugrats positively positions in their franchise.

The affirmative multiracial relations of the characters penetrate the franchise through television, movies, and video games. The Rugrats video games series includes over fifteen titles, including one exclusive to mobile phones. One of the first games, Rugrats: The Movie, gives, as the title implies, children a chance to replay the first Rugrats movie. Another, Rugrats: Royal Ransom, begins with the viewer/player watching a television set, illustrating the Rugrats’ integral link with multiple media. The
beginning cut scene of the game is framed in a rectangular box and fades from black into replicated television static and then into a short animated scene. This same static closes the scene as the “tv” turns off and the game begins. Even as a video game, the franchise gives a self-referential nod to its origin as a television series.

Also within *Rugrats: Royal Ransom*, the player can choose to play as any of the Rugrat characters, flipping between them with the push of one button. Having this flexibility to choose one’s character out of an ensemble is a benefit for games with a large cast. Unlike most games with this type of party play feature, all of the *Rugrats* characters have the same abilities. For example, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Peter fights with a manly sword, but Susan fights with a bow and arrow or throws snowballs, which keeps her away from the heat of battle. However, in *Royal Ransom*, Tommy cannot jump higher than Kimi, and Phil cannot throw better than Lil. Gamers may play as a minority female without penalty or restriction to a stereotyped fighting style. Each character is equally talented and any may be used to storm the castle/play house and beat Angelica.

Though characters having identical ability could be read as an erasure to diversity, *Rugrats* keeps enough diversity in its story and characters to overcome this argument. Several years before home video game consoles, Ruth Kearney Carlson understood that children can learn valuable intercultural relations by role playing other ethnic groups: “Intergroup relations can be fostered through reading, discussing, and role playing episodes which help to eliminate prejudices and avoid negative stereotyping of ethnic groups” (15). Video games can provide this kind of role playing environment with a racially diverse cast of avatars from which to choose.
The Rugrats franchise has also sold computers, not just computer games. For the Christmas sales of 1999, Gateway and Nickelodeon partnered to produce the Gateway Astro PC Rugrats Edition computer. The package deal included five Rugrats software titles and Rugrats accessories. Gateway’s president and chief operating officer at the time, Jeff Weitzen, promoted his product to the edutainment market: “Kids love the Nickelodeon characters and they love the magic of computers. Combine the two and you’ve got kids having fun while learning” (“Nickelodeon and Gateway”). Jeff Dunn, the chief operating officer of Nickelodeon, is quoted saying, "Gateway recognizes the power of the Nickelodeon brand and the power of kids influence on computer buying decisions. Through this extensive alliance—our most significant licensing partnership to date—Gateway joins us in putting kids first by creating a product line that not only appeals to kids, but empowers them” (“Nickelodeon and Gateway”). And Rugrats did empower children to be more technologically savvy so that they could play the Rugrats video games while at the same time inspiring them to be more racially accepting.

The Rugrats and shows like it link to the freedom and empowerment of media in a way similar to Ender’s battleroom. “Cyberspace offers a new space,” Walkerdine argues in “Children in Cyberspace,” “one in which rational play may be offered without the fears attached to public space and indeed without undue interference from adults: it is adult-free, unknown and unsupervised” (236). Video games provide a model of childhood similar to the freedom the Rugrats experience as they wander off on their own unsupervised adventure, usually because Grandpa Lou has fallen asleep. They are a space of power for children, allowing children to gain control of their virtual space within certain boundaries. For some children, this is the only space of control they have. A
child wins or loses a game based on her ability and effort, thus gaining a degree of ownership and control over the virtual space in a way they may not be allowed to in the real world. Similarly, the Rugrats have control over their world when the adults are not paying attention, which comprises most of the episode time and provides power for all Rugrats involved no matter what their race.

The theme of child empowerment and racial acceptance is maintained through the Rugrats series and continues with its spin-off All Grown Up!, which is set ten years after Rugrats. Susie continues to be a strong character, taking on responsibility such as babysitting, reaching high popularity status as a seventh grader, and blossoming into a strong singer. Kimi also portrays an independent girl who is becoming friends with Susie. Both are featured prominently on the cover of the All Grown Up: Express Yourself GBA game cover along with Angelica.

While Rugrats and All Grown Up! supply superlative examples of children’s texts that present race in a positive light across media, there are other narratives on the market that also provide strong roles for minority females, such as the African-American female lead on the Disney Channel, Raven-Symoné. Raven won television viewing audiences over as cute Olivia Kendall on the Cosby Show from 1989 to 1992, and now has her own series, That’s So Raven, which began in 2002. As part of the Cosby Show, a trend-breaker television program because it presented “a different view of blacks in situation comedies by breaking previously held stereotypes,” Raven was a member of a ground breaking moment in sitcom history (Merritt 92). The Cosby Show ranked first in the Neilson ratings for five consecutive seasons with viewers of all races tuning in and won two Emmys and three Golden Globe Awards. As Olivia, Raven
reached a diverse public. In That’s So Raven, Raven has a smaller target market than the Cosby Show, but has garnered a strong following. In 2007, That’s So Raven became the longest running Disney Channel original series, breaking 100 episodes, and was also the first Disney Channel show to produce a spin-off (“Trivia”). Whereas a franchise like Rugrats is targeted to a diverse market of children of both sexes and of multiple races and can reach a large child audience, Raven provides a more tangible role model because of her personal celebrity identity and titular role. Instead of being a drawn or computer generated character, she is a well-known actress who even uses her given name in the series title.

This popular series turned video game has multiple releases for various platforms, such as That’s So Raven and That’s So Raven: Psychic on the Scene. That’s So Raven for the GameBoy Advance is a side-scrolling action-adventure game based on episodes from the series and incorporates Raven’s psychic ability as the impetus for action. The game situates itself as ideally suited for girls not only because of the female protagonist, but also because of her weapons. The avatar swings a purse to fend off flying objects and sprays perfume to ward off enemies. While the game may employ gender stereotyping by assuming all girls own these items, these weapons are accessible, or at least familiar, to American girls and thus present a more realistic, relatable gameplay for girls. Psychic on the Scene is a point-and-click for the DS. It includes gendered material like being able to change Raven’s attire, but the player’s choice of clothing actually impacts the gameplay instead of just being a side amusement. Raven must dress the part to snoop and solve the mystery of who is sabotaging the local theatre. The game also added a fashion mode so that players can
create their own clothing patterns. A reviewer on IGN.com gave the game high praise, calling it “a licensed game done well” (Thomas). The Raven games break the traditional role of black females as secondary, passive characters by creating an African-American title character. The games studied in the Children Now research found that the “games especially created for young children featured only white characters” and that in all of the games studied, “most African-American females were non-action characters” (22). That’s So Raven has helped give minority girls fun and accessible games.

Raven has also contributed to another predominantly African-American television show and video game. In the episode “Seven Days of Kwanzaa,” of The Proud Family, a Disney television series aired in 2001 about an African-American family whose 14-year-old daughter Penny comprises the focus of the episodes, Raven supplies the voice of an angel named Stephanie. Raven promotes an African-American awareness even when the movie or television show is not explicitly about race. For instance, in The Princess Diaries 2, she plays Asana, an African princess in traditional dress. While the television show of The Proud Family came out a year before That’s So Raven, the live action sitcom beat the animated series to the video game market. But both series’ games provided something that the market had not released before—an active African-American girl as the main character.

As Raven has gained popularity, her games have expanded from GameBoy Advance to the Nintendo DS. Dora the Explorer, a Nick Jr. series, has also branched out and has titles available for the PS2, the Wii, and the PC. Platform diversity is important because the more platforms a game can produce versions for, the more marketing and sales potential there is to spread the game around to different audiences.
The more a game is recognized and played, the more potential for its inclusion in research and reviews. When games like *Raven* and *Dora* expand from Nintendo handhelds to more ‘adult’ consoles, it helps broaden their reception and counteract the negative perception about race and gender that has been placed on video games.

**Character Race in Video Games**

While these games provide players with a prebuilt avatar, many games enable players to create their own. This construction of a virtual identity or a cyborg has been discussed in terms of race (Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman; Nakamura) and gender identity (Haraway; Turkle), but having a choice in the identity of your character is quite distinct from playing a pre-set character. The question of virtual identity construction by the player is not applicable to the video games such as *Raven* and *Dora the Explorer*, whose defined title characters cannot be modified. One cannot make Raven into a white character; she remains an African-American in appearance and heritage. When companies foist a premade character onto players, they create or present a socially and commercially constructed view of race, whereas the freedom to create an avatar allows for a more open interpretation of race.

Restricted identities in these games create a progressive representation of race for children, which may be contrary to the idea that a creative and individualized avatar fosters a more radical gaming experience. A study of individually crafted avatars requires a discussion of personal and perceived racial identity, such as that in *Race in Cyberspace*, *Cybertypes*, and similar texts. What scholars have neglected, however, is the positive implications of constructed character identities for children’s games. A set avatar and title character provides a socially constructed view of race that is mass marketed to child consumers.
There are quite a few games on the market for children that affirm racial diversity and provide games for minority girls with strong female lead characters. Yet while there have been several video games released for children that exhibit positive racial characters instead of negative stereotyping or games that lack racial diversity, more such games are needed. Educators, sociologists, and organizations like Children Now look more at the effect of video games on adolescents and children, and as E games’ sales escalate attention will be more broadly fixed on this category. But it is helpful to briefly address scholarly research of race on games marketed to adults.

Adult video games that use racial lead characters other than white or Caucasian have been compared with old time minstrel theatre. David Leonard’s work on video games, particularly on *Grand Theft Auto III* and sports games, describes white players controlling black avatars as racial cross-dressing or a form of blackface. Similarly, Jeffrey A. Ow and Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu separately analyze Asian otherness in *Shadow Warrior* and its main character Lo Wang. Ow describes “digitized yellowface” as “the new makeup of the millennium” (55). Without specifically privileging one race, Lisa Nakamura uses the term “identity tourism” to describe online recreational passing when a player of one race uses an avatar of another race. Leonard, Ow, and Shiu independently develop and explore the negative racial stereotyping and the use of race in video games using specific games as examples of larger trends; Nakamura explores online social and gaming spaces such as graphic chat rooms, MUD’s, MOO’s, and MMPOG’s [sic] that use visual avatars. These scholars provide a sampling for the discussion of race and video games where players are assumed as white and race is other.
While Leonard, Ow, and Shiu address male players in the minstrel performance, Thomas Foster examines the inverse perspective, viewing cyberspace as “available to women and African-Americans only through mimicry or cross-identification with the supposedly more universal position of white men,” which he characterizes as the “adoption of a full-body ‘prosthesis’” (138). Foster also addresses blackface in terms of the cyborg in *Deathlok*, a comic, as the major thrust of his article, but it is this statement linking online gender and racial passing that helps situate these two groups together as under identified technological users. If women and minorities are both underrepresented, it follows that minority females in particular are the most underrepresented. And even more so underage minority females, since children are considered “other” by their very nature of not being adults. Yet while this has historically been true of video games, the children’s market is beginning to redefine this position with characters such as *Dora the Explorer*.

**Dora: Exploring New Ground**

The majority of research and discussions on race and identity in cyberspace or video games focuses on either the Black/White dynamic or on Asian as Other. Yet the representation and negotiation of Spanish and Latino characters also needs to be addressed. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* created a raging backlash from Cubans and Haitians because of its racial slurs and was hotly debated in terms of race, but offering sharp contrast is *Dora the Explorer*, which provides a positive model for young Latinas. Not only is Dora a Latina main character, but her show and games teach Spanish language skills and appreciation of Latino culture. She not only models an affirmative racial perspective, but educates viewers and players on her race and culture. *The Proud Family* and *Rugrats* each had an episode on Kwanzaa, but Dora actively lives
and portrays her cultural and racial heritage. By actively portraying her Latina heritage, she reduces chances of being merely a token racial character, and by teaching others about her ethnicity, she expands their racial and cultural awareness while broadening the positive racial content of video games in general. According to Children Now, “not one of the 1716 characters in this study were Latina;” this means that Dora, whose first game premiered in 2002, is radically breaking new ground for the video game market (22). Dora, unlike Kimi or Susie, dominates her show and is central to every episode and game. Dora cannot be marginalized or left out of episodes like Kimi or Susie can, thus giving her a privileged seat of power. In this way, Dora and Raven have more obvious power in their shows, while Kimi and Susie provide diversity in an ensemble cast.

Yet all of these female characters have the potential to reach other ethnicities in their own way. “In addition to adult mediators and young readers, ethnic children’s literature is often targeted both to insider and outsider groups,” Katharine Capshaw Smith states in the introduction to the MELUS special issue on multi-ethnic children’s literature (4). She asserts, “[i]f part of its agenda is didactic in advancing revivified version of history and identity, texts often consciously address both the ethnic child reader and those in other populations” (4). This inclusive nature is not only true for ethnic children’s literature, but also for video games that include a non-white title character. As Dora exemplifies, “texts often encourage cross-cultural amity and understanding as a means to dispel prejudice” (Smith 4). Because of their quality game play for young children and because of their brand extensions into multiple media for
marketing in the franchises discussed, the games reach a diverse ethnic population of children in their target age range.

Dora largely uses language as a way to cross cultural barriers. Smith explains: "Just as adult ethnic writing incorporates oral traditions and folklore, children's texts also frequently spotlight orality, but they also exploit issues of language acquisition since their subjects and readers are consciously grappling with the gap between oral child culture and learning written languages (6). Dora speaks both English and Spanish. While she primarily uses English, her Spanish is not always translated and thus is not relegated as the second language that must be explained. She also encourages her audience to repeat her Spanish phrases, reinforcing vocabulary skills. Even though Spanish is not used as frequently as English, it is used unapologetically and helps raise non-Spanish speaking children to a higher comfort level in hearing and understanding the language.

In language and performance, Dora provides an educational but not isolating mix of cultures. According to Carlson, "Authors of books designed for the primary age child are particularly prone to emphasize differences rather than similarities between persons (7). By creating a complimenting combination, Dora neither emphasizes difference nor accepts an acculturated stance, thus welcoming minority viewers/players while also providing a Latina character to affirm and create a sense of identity with Latina children.

Dora is an adventurous seven-year-old who greets preschoolers with "¡Hola!" and invites them to join her and her monkey Boots on an interactive adventure through television or video game. The term "interactive" can be quite loaded, but with Dora
episodes there are quite a few interactive segments with the audience. As with a lot of programming for young children, Dora and her friends speak directly into the television screen to ask the viewer a question and then pause for the answer. This is a common trope in children’s television, but *Dora* adds a technical dimension by having a touch screen and a map that guides Dora on her adventure and gives her help. Additionally, the show uses a blue cursor arrow to click on links or icons.

The opening credits to the television show zooms in from a live action set of a children’s room onto a computer screen where Dora and friends are characters navigating a simple computer game. This is a reversal of the *Rugrats* video game which begins by viewing a television screen. The computer game opening of the *Dora* television episodes immediately situate Dora in an online realm. Because of the opening, a blue cursor arrow that acts as a secondary character and navigational tool does not seem out of place in the television show. The cursor seems invisible to the characters as a non-diegetic tool, and it functions sometimes as a pointer to select an object from a line-up, most often though it works as a computer cursor by clicking and selecting an object or icon. Since the show begins with a first-person view up to the computer screen, the viewer is the natural player. Thus, the viewer is the implied user and manipulator of the mouse. This role is enhanced because the cursor will point to an object after Dora has asked the viewer where something is. For example, Dora will ask, “Do you see a lake?” and in the pause for the viewer to answer, the blue arrow will click on the lake and highlight it.

The television show is reminiscent of a side-scrolling adventure game scattered with puzzles, a game that is introduced in the opening credits on the computer screen.
The end credits reinforce this computer mode by using the cursor to click and pull down the final credits. Because of the way the television show situates itself as a game narrative, children should find it an easy cross-over to then actually play one of Dora’s numerous games that closely model the television show format.

Just as the *Rugrats* graduated into a spin-off situated around an older cast, so too has Dora. Tween Dora, or Dora 2.0, was revealed in 2009 to concerned parents questioning if the revamped young lady was too sexualized. But the controversy cooled and the line now includes not only Dora dolls, but also Dora’s Explorer Girls Naiya, Emma, Kate and Alana alone or in classroom playsets to simulate their middle school experience. The Girls show a diverse ethnic range from Emma, an African-American, to Naiya, whose heritage is Mayan. The doll line is relevant because as Dora aged, she also became more technologically savvy. The Dora Links doll connects to a PC through a USB cable so a child can make alterations to her doll online, such as changing the eye color, hair length and jewelry. Then, her personal doll adjusts to fit the online specifications. The doll also provides access to doralinks.com, an online interactive world for the older Dora and her friends. On the site, “girls can explore, play games, customize and—most importantly—solve mysteries with Dora and her friends!” (“Learn about Links”). Dora goes a step beyond Nancy Drew’s sleuthing print texts and video games to include an online bilingual world of mystery solving. Dora has effectively capitalized on a market of computer confident children whose world of playing with dolls rarely includes only a physical form, but must also have interactive and online elements to stay relevant.
Another franchise trying to stay relevant is Disney’s *Lilo & Stitch*, which combines minority and alien for children’s entertainment. The 2002 Disney animated movie *Lilo & Stitch* revolves around the idea of being alien, whether that is a non-human extra-terrestrial or a minority girl socially alienated from other people. The protagonist Lilo is visually other, a native of Hawaii with dark skin and dark hair. She provides a model for girls, not only minority girls, but any girl that feels alienated.

Lilo, the young girl who adopts the extra-terrestrial Stitch from the animal shelter, struggles with destructive behavior and a lack of belonging. She grapples with violent behavior towards other girls her age and is in turn left friendless and alone. The audience watches as she kneels andprays for a friend after seeing a falling star, which is really Stitch’s crash landing. Her sense of loss becomes paramount when the welfare agent, Cobra Bubbles, attempts to take her from her older sister, Nani. Disney alters the single biological parent family of their typical animations to create a fractured, non-traditional family. After the death of their parents, Lilo is left in her older sister Nani’s care. After a fight with her sister, Lilo asks, “We’re from a broken family, aren’t we?”

The most important moral and message of the film is family and belonging, illustrated visually by a picture book version of Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Ugly Duckling*. Belonging to a family means believing in “ohana.” “Ohana means family, and family means nobody gets left behind, or forgotten” becomes a family mantra that binds the sisters and Stitch together to battle all odds, both from the government and from outer space. By the end of their trials, their original three-member family incorporates an extended family of both humans and aliens. In his article, Mark Warschauer explores the use of Hawaiian language in relationship to race and identity. He argues that
language, particularly Hawaiian, is a way for a group of people to keep their identity. While he does not reference *Lilo & Stitch*, his argument applies to the animated movie and its other spin-offs. It is the one Hawaiian word, *ohana*, which constructs the identity for Lilo’s family, even their racial and ethnic identity.

Several cinematic choices including location, soundtrack, and minor characters, further emphasize the theme of alien. While the idea for the setting came from a vacation to Hawaii by director/writer Chris Sanders, the location of Hawaii raises more questions about other and alien/racial separation. Hawaii, as the 50th and last state added to the union in 1959, is physically set apart or alien from the rest of the U.S. It represents an exotic minority other. Though not a contiguous state, Hawaii is somewhat forced to accept our American lifestyle by its annexation. However, it does not have the same historical roots of population expansion as the continental states nor the same patterns of immigration. Warschauer states:

Hawai’i is an excellent example of the demographic process of globalization, with high degrees of influx and intermarriage among people of European, Polynesian, and Asian descent. Together with smaller numbers of African Americans and Latin Americans, Hawai’i is one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world. The first U.S. state with a majority nonwhite population, Hawai’i represents the demographic future of the rest of the United States. (158)

Thus, *Lilo & Stitch* provides a strong example of racial and ethnic diversity. While Lilo does not show the explicit racial diversity of a mixed family as in the *Rugrats*, she culturally displays a racially diverse heritage of multi-generations, accentuated by her incorporation of and the importance placed on the Hawaiian language in the movie. Lilo does not try to teach us Hawaiian as Dora tries to teach us Spanish, but she is subtly embracing the importance of her heritage and its ability to keep her family together through the reminder of their native language and customs.
The communication methods of Hawaii include more than oral language. “Hawaiians have traditionally passed on knowledge through a variety of media, including chanting [and] hula,” practices in which both Lilo and her sister engage (Warschauer 163). Just as the Rugrats aired an episode on Kwanzaa to present African traditions, so too does Lilo & Stitch illustrate the native traditions of the Hawaiian people. Through language and tradition, Lilo & Stitch briefly acculturate the Disney viewing audience to another race and culture while at the same time presenting the message to minority females that alienation happens to everyone, and with familial and friendly support one can find an affinity group in society.

The closing frames of the film display various family photographs taken at key holidays: Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays and vacations. The pictures include shots of the extended family, which consists of Dr. Jubma, Stitch’s alien creator; Pleakley, an alien expert on Earth; and Cobra Bubbles, the social worker and ex-CIA agent whose last assignment was Roswell, 1973. Every major cast member eventually intermingles between human and alien, creating harmonious friendships where no one is alienated except the fat, white American tourists Lilo takes pictures of as spectacles, creating an ironic moment of reverse racism where the norm is ostracized and mocked.

The first Lilo & Stitch video game was based on the movie; the sequel video game, Lilo & Stitch 2: Hamsteviel Havoc is based on the Disney Channel television program Lilo & Stitch. Both games provide players with the opportunity to play as either Lilo or Stitch, but most gamers will prefer Stitch because he has the capacity for more moves. Whereas Kimi and Susie possess the same game play possibilities as Chuckie and Phil in Rugrats: The Royal Ransom, giving Stitch more capabilities places Lilo at a
disadvantage and marginalizes her. She is even further marginalized to the point of elimination in the video game *Disney’s Stitch: Experiment 626*, designed as a prequel to the movie *Lilo & Stitch*. While Stitch is a big draw and has even been given his own video game, the representation of another minority female in television, movies, and games is appreciated, particularly since this main character struggles with life-like alienation, loneliness, and familial problems.

The character of Stitch conveys a tangential point in terms of race and children's texts. Video games for children that use either animals or non-humans as avatar characters seemingly circumvent racial stereotypes. Yet race is still prevalent, though masked, and alludes to conventional fables where animals are used in human stead for didactic purposes. Animated animals that are supposedly non-racial produce a projected ethnicity and include such characters found in *Madagascar* and *Shark Tales*. Also, the use of magical and otherworldly creatures such as aliens and elves in children’s video games also try to circumvent race. However, racialization is enhanced through racial voice acting for animated characters and through colorization as other for evil bosses or villainous characters. But the non-stereotypical racial examples featuring human characters are escalating.

**Digital Media to Print Texts**

To come full circle, I want to move from video games, television, and movies back to print texts. In regards to race, digital media for children is progressing in much the same manner that its literary predecessors did—one inclusive step at a time. Children's literature scholars have published extensively on race, addressing ethnic groups around the globe. Nancy Larrick questioned “The All-White World of Children’s Books” in 1965, when the integrated classroom did not spur more integrated publications of children’s
According to Larrick, “Of the 5,206 children’s trade books launched by the sixty-three publishers” from 1962 to 1964, “only 349 include one or more Negroes” (2). According to statistics gathered by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, of the approximately 5,000 books published in 2005, 149 were about African/African Americans, 34 were about American Indians, 64 were about Asian Pacific/Asian Pacific Americans, and 76 were about Latinos. Statistically, these numbers have only marginally increased from the 60’s, encouraged in part by awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award, the Américas Award, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, which recognize and encourage diversity in print literature.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center began keeping statistics in 1985 on books by African-American authors and then added other races nine years later. The largest focus of scholarship has revolved around African-American children’s literature: Donnarae MacCann’s *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature* addresses the 1830's to the 1900's while Kate Capshaw Smith's *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* focuses on the 1910's to the 1950's. Michelle Martin brings us to the present day in *Brown Gold* by showing the evolution of African American children’s picture books from 1845-2002. But even as the publishing of African-American characters prospered, “positive portrayals of black characters were still much more limited for young readers than they were for adults” (Martin 39). By contrast, young adult video game players receive more inclusive titles. Where Martin leaves off in 2002 is where the video games featuring minority female lead characters pick up, reversing the trend identified by Children Now. It took over a century from the traditional Golden Age
of children’s books for the Golden Age of African-American picture books, as Martin calls the current market, to emerge. Print texts based on Rugrats, Raven, Dora, and Lilo & Stitch can help improve the Cooperative Children's Book Center's statistics.

While children's classic texts may evolve from print to movie to video game, the intermediated entertainment world of brand marketing is adjusting to capitalize on popularity and immediacy. As Chapter 2 concluded, instead of future books driving the production of adaptations, potential toys, films, and television series may drive the book market. This is certainly the case in the four franchises discussed in Chapter 5. Even though each of the brands was conceived for television or movies, they have now all spawned book series. Raven, through the Disney Press, has junior novels or chapter books with each volume based on two episodes. To secure its TV link, color stills from the episodes are placed in the middle of each text. The other series market to their viewing demographic with easy reader picture books. Dora and Rugrats have books that correspond to particular episodes, but they also have original story line books. Interestingly, libraries usually shelve all three of these series under their title, not an author, further showing the importance of the brand. Lilo & Stitch titles are generally catalogued under Disney, highlighting the cachet as a Disney feature movie versus a television series.

The print texts condense episodes into easy to read chunks, abbreviating twenty-two to thirty minutes of air time into a twenty-two to thirty page picture book. Dora’s picture books follow the same interactive style that her television show uses. For example, Dora’s Backpack is based on the episode or teleplay from season two, “Dora’s Backpack Adventure.” The unpaginated text begins just as the episode: “¡Hola! I'm
Dora,” and continues by asking questions for the audience to answer, such as “What do you think the answer is?” Dora includes the video game trope of navigational maps from her episode in the book, showing viewers/readers where the story is going. And, as in her episode, she prompts reader to repeat words, instructing them to “Say, ‘Map!’” or asking, “Can you say, ‘abre’?” Some of her books, such as Little Star, even include the blue cursor arrow her show appropriated from computer culture. Since computer culture is so strong in the series, it is a natural progression to have a CD-ROM game of episodes in addition to longer console video games. Backpack Adventure for the PC or Mac provides an adventure mode to play through the story, or a freeplay map mode. As an edutainment title, each level tests children’s skills, such as color and number recognition, problem solving, and, of course, Spanish language, reinforcing agendas from the series.

The Rugrats also incorporates specific episodes into picture books, such as The Rugrats’ First Kwanzaa which is based on season six’s “A Rugrats Kwanzaa.” The print text provides the added benefit of textual verification for a reader to see and spell the Swahili words such as mkeka and kinara. Plus the book ends with an explanatory “What is Kwanzaa?” page elaborating on the holiday’s traditions. One stylistic choice the books take is to keep the language of the nursery babies, incorrect grammar and all. But language is crucial to the series, heavily relying on malapropisms and misunderstanding for humor. With the print texts, readers can visually identify the differences in words, such as in Oh, Brother! where malapropisms abound in this original tale (David). For example, Didi calls her son Dil adorable, but Dil’s brother, Tommy, mistakes the term and wants to be a doorbell (David). In addition to the picture
books using and playing with language in fairly sophisticated ways (when not obscured by baby talk), the texts can also be visually stimulating.

Since the texts are based on a visual medium, the authors can assume a child readership familiar with visual literacy, if only because of the hours trained in front of the television. Therefore, it is no surprise that a *Rugrats*’ stand-a-lone picture book like *Christmas in the City* uses the illustrations in the story to create action outside of the verbal text (Richards). Illustrator Jim Durk uses the symbiotic relationship between text and images to create what Nodelman calls an ironic relationship, where “the pictures show us what the words to do not tell (*Words* 222). For example, while in New York City, Chuckie tries to find Santa. He leaves the other children to Tommy’s consternation:

> Tommy turned around and saw that Chuckie was gone.

> “Where’s Chuckie?” he asked.

> “Oh, he went to find Santa,” Angelica said, snickering. “He said he’d be okay.” (Richards)

In the background of this two page spread, Chuckie is shown in five framed panels of department window displays creating what Joseph Schwarcz calls a “continuous narrative” (qtd. in Nodelman 166), where the same character, Chuckie, progresses across the page in multiple depictions. The first frame shows him falling into the Christmas window display. He is subsequently hit with a hammer by an elf, drowned in North Pole snow, and wrapped by another elf. Finally he knocks over a fake Santa mannequin and escapes. He mutters “I’m okay, I’m okay,” playing off Angelica’s comment. The next page begins, “Finally Chuckie found his way back outside,” which is visually confirmed with him returned to the gang.
Books add just one more entry into each of the series. By having such a transmedia presence, the franchises become prominent storylines in children’s culture. With easy accessibility to characters and reinforcement across media formats, it is important to provide viewers with diverse races instead of a homogenized cast inconsistent with our current globally connected world. *Rugrats*, *Raven*, *Dora*, and *Lilo & Stitch* provide a sampling of video games and story lines with constructive female minority leads. Within the children’s market as a whole one can see shifts. Even Barbie has started to integrate with a cast of multicultural characters in her video game titles, though the significance is hotly debated. For every minority female role on the market, there are countless traditional middle-class American white title character leads such as *Lizzie McGuire* and *Kim Possible*. However, a mixture is good and a healthy balance is best for reaching a wide spectrum of girl consumers. Providing games of any sort for girls of any race is a huge step in the industry. Hopefully this trend will continue and diverse girl role models will enliven the TVs, game systems and book shelves of young girls everywhere.

---

1 Since children are viewed as the most impressionable in terms of identity formation, I focus on children’s franchises for elementary age and below.

2 The naming of the “Nickelodeon” channel itself presents a nod to a media convergence with the name meaning different forms of entertainment media from a player piano, a jukebox, an early theater, and now a children’s entertainment cable channel.

3 Kimi is inclusive in another diverse way. The voice actor for Kimi, Dionne Quan, is legally blind and the *Rugrats’* producers have to translate the script to Braille for her to read it.
CHAPTER 6
CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND MEDIA: A POST SCRIPT

How do video games, computers, and the internet impact children? Parents, teachers, politicians, and many others have proposed everything from weight gain to grammar loss. However, a culture is ostensibly shaped by its stories: without understanding digital media’s effect on print texts we cannot trace the larger implications for children themselves, since their consumption of these texts provides limited spaces of power that may alter the process of identity formation and cognitive development. This study links the established children’s print media to new media and demands exploration beyond adaptation into other areas of convergence. To illuminate these connections, this study enumerated the points of convergence for print and digital literature, particularly focusing on how they are used to transmit gender and racial ideologies to children, and argued that, although adaptation is the most commonly discussed facet, transtexts and transmedia storytelling are also imperative to our understanding.

One goal of this study was to push beyond the traditional questions asked of video games when compared to print texts and contend that the landscape of children’s texts is changing with our digital age. In particular, these newer forms are salient to a female consumer base, which my study revealed by analyzing adapted “classic” texts with female protagonists, social media fiction geared toward girl readers, and transmedia franchises involving minority females. Given the historically overwhelming male influence on video games, the strides toward including females since 2002 have been immense. Some changes are reactionary, yet many are progressive. Convergence phenomena will only continue to increase as digital texts remediate both print texts and
narratives from television, film, and toy culture. And, I predict video games and children’s print literature will continue to converge and cross-pollinate, producing innovative texts for future child consumers.

My own research contains many uncharted avenues. For instance, the texts discussed in Chapter 4 that present multi-modal interactions are primarily mysteries. This narrative format seems especially conducive to presenting transmedia texts, but is it the only genre through which to engage a reader? Does a vook or an ARG-lite necessitate hooking the reader into solving a mystery in order to provide an impetus to follow the story across media? One theory is that question asking makes it easier for an author to force interaction. By contrast, transtexts are self-contained and do not need this.

Another potential line of exploration concerns the digital bildungsroman. The divide between the bookspace, the playspace, and the child is potentially bridged with the digital bildungsroman. In Chapter 3, I explore texts that use this idea, but it could be elaborated to encompass the larger movement of technological convergence with text, technology, and child. Not only are characters required to acquire media literacy and technological skills, but so too is the child reader in order to fully navigate texts like Cathy’s Book and 39 Clues.

Even learning or knowledge acquisition has been revised because of the technological influence. Schools are incorporating smart boards in the classroom, furnishing laptops to students, and using web pages to organize educational materials. Additionally, educator Andrew Churches has updated Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy to “address the new objectives presented by the emergence and integration of Information
and Communication Technologies into the classroom and the lives of our students” by adding digital additions such as blogging or podcasting to the highest thinking skill, creating.¹ Digital technology is part of the cognitive process and schools have begun altering their methods accordingly. Of course, formal education is not the only interaction that children and adolescent’s experience with digital learning and acculturation. Their education may technologically be behind their entertainment media, depending on the school system funding and the teacher’s expertise. Yet in school or not, the texts from Chapter 3 provide a metaphorical model for what children are experiencing, while the texts from Chapter 4 and 5 exemplify this experience.

The print texts I discuss as digital bildungsromans could also be explored further in terms of power and gender. Interestingly, the male gamer has his power restricted and his agency ultimately denied, yet the female communicator has her power restored and gains agency as a potential author/creator/player. This could potentially translate on to the child reader. Children are playing with more power, which could help focus the discussion of the child reader navigating her personal digital bildungsroman through transmedia stories. This could also elucidate the digital impact on identity formation.

At the time of this writing, I have just returned from the annual International Children’s Literature Association Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, whose theme for 2010 was Children’s Literature and Media. Despite bringing together a large number of children’s literature scholars to discuss media-related issues with children’s literature, the topic of video games was mostly overlooked with only a handful of presenters squarely addressing this medium. Those who did, including Lisa Dusenberry, Gretchen Papazian, Nathan Garrelts, and Sean Printz, will be the scholars to watch in the future.
When others did mention video games, they were relegated to a list of commodities alongside films, plays, trading cards, and internet sites.

This neglect of video games by children’s literature scholars, as we saw back at the conference and in the special media issue of the *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, may have diverse roots. Children’s literature scholars may not have the skill, equipment, time, or desire to play the games in order to study them. This is why several studies (Kinder, Murray) involve a scholar’s/parent’s observation of their child or a case study of viewing children (Mackey). The adult scholar may have to develop new analytical, creative, and physical twitch skills in order to analyze the game text, which may break comfort zones. Also, whereas a children’s book may take one hour to seven hours to read a role-playing video game usually takes ten to forty hours. It is a daunting area of study, but children’s literature already encompasses visual narratives in print and film, and so we should similarly be able to approach video games.

So what is the state of the field and how can children’s literature begin to incorporate the study of video games? Near the end of the conference, media literacy scholar Margaret Mackey gave the Francelia Butler lecture. In her presentation “The Case of Flat Rectangles: Children’s Literature on Page and Screen,” she explains that we, as children’s literature scholars, librarians, and educators, are trying to figure out ways to make headway in this giant social experiment of the rectangles (page, screen, monitor, t.v., Kindle, etc.). She identified four major categories for analyses: hybridity, porousness, slippery, and unfinished. Yet, as with other scholars, she still has to ask where these changes are leading us. She ended her presentation not with an answer, but with a direction: “What are our new priorities?” Mackey believes we need to
“explore/interrogate the bookspace; strive to understand, value, and critique the playspace; investigate and enhance student vernacular learning; experiment with the new spaces; and consider our own vernacular understanding.” As my research has shown, the most interesting avenue of investigation to me is the intersection between the bookspace and the playspace, which Mackey takes from Diane Sekeres to mean the branded, multimodal, fictional universe.

To remain timely, children’s literature scholarship and histories will need to add updated technologies in addition to discussing print texts. Radical Change and Applebaum’s article in Modern Children’s Literature look specifically at how children’s books reflect digital-age connections, but they do this without ever looking at any digital medium, focusing solely on handheld print texts. Seminal theoretical collections like Understanding Children’s Literature have not added chapters on children’s media. Historical accounts of children’s literature like Children’s Literature: An Illustrated History also neglect digital texts. Histories sometimes branch outside of print texts to include references to toys and artifacts of material children’s culture, but the global market of children’s digital texts is strikingly absent. This is particularly a glaring absence because of the overlaps between the narrative and formal devices/purposes that print and digital media have in common.

More children’s’ literature scholars might be engaged if they studied the interplay between video games and print texts, drawing on the familiarity of the known to approach the unknown. Widely known, existing tools—such as multi-modal analysis and play theory—may also be leveraged, particularly since games focus on play and feature a strong image-text narrative, akin to picture books. Showing these connections was
one reason my study focused on convergence between children’s print texts and video games. Hopefully more studies will follow.

---

¹ Bloom’s Taxonomy was updated in the 1990’s by Bloom’s former student Lorin Anderson. Churches then built on Anderson’s updated Bloom’s Taxonomy.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Alice in Wonderland. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske. Walt Disney Productions, 1951. DVD.


*The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Dir. Andrew Adamson. Walt Disney Pictures, 2005. Film.


The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Dir. Bill Melendez, 1979. Film.


Moss, Joyce and George Wilson, eds. *From Page to Screen: Children's and Young Adult Books on Film and Video*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1992. Print.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Growing up on a demonstration farm in Pelham, Alabama, Cathlena Martin identifies with Fern in Charlotte’s Web. After an amazing childhood full of animals and books, she graduated from Briarwood Christian High School in 1997, where she received an excellent foundation in English literature. She then attended Samford University, and, after a bit of momentary insanity as an accounting major, graduated in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Bachelor of Science in education. Motivated by her passion for children’s literature, she attended the University of Florida for graduate school. Here, she broadened her study of children’s literature to include the fields of graphic novels and video games. In 2007, she was fortunate enough to re-connect with and marry her high school sweetheart, move back to Birmingham, AL, and begin teaching Communication Arts at Samford University. Sometimes an idyllic fairy tale occurs in real life.