Universalism as a Factor in the Global Popularity of the Harry Potter Universe

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Abstract. One of the most interesting phenomena of the turn of the century is the rise of the Harry Potter culture. Irrespective of their race, ethnicity, nationality and religion, children and adults around the world feel they belong to the Wizarding World. What is it about these stories that makes them so translatable to other cultures? In this paper, I argue that the universalism of the Harry Potter stories is a factor in the rise of the Harry Potter culture. Even though race, ethnicity, nationality and religion are a part of the Harry Potter world, in the novels and films, they are never discussed explicitly. Their function is to paint a 'real world' backdrop of Britain at the turn of the century. To support my claims related to the presence of religion in Harry Potter novels, I analysed keywords in a context using digital tools *AVOBMAT* and *Voyant Tools*. I hypothesised that if words that have religious origins appear in the novels, they do not refer to a specific religious practice, rite or ritual. The words I examined are *pray*, *church*, *God*, *religion*, *Jesus* and *Christmas*.

Keywords: Harry Potter, religion, fantasy fiction, digital humanities, popular culture.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I argue that 'universalism' is an important factor in making the Harry Potter (HP hereafter) stories 'translatable' to various cultures and thus making it possible to produce the HP hype on a global level. In defining 'universalism,' I rely on the philosophical notion of 'universal' as a shared feature, attribute or quality (*Britannica*). For the purpose of this paper, I define 'universalism' as a characteristic (of HP novels) or a set of attributes in the novels that makes them understandable to readers of different cultures. Its opposite, 'particularism,' refers to a characteristic of something or a set of attributes that requires knowledge of a particular culture in order to be understood.

For example, a historical novel typically has characteristics of particularism. It engages the reader in learning about a specific set of cultural information related to a particular geography and a period. We could argue that a reader with better knowledge of the period can understand more aspects of the novel. Most fantasy novels would fall into the category of universalism, as they do not require a reader to know a particular aspect of culture in order to understand a novel. This is especially true for children and young adult literature because we do not expect children to possess complex knowledge about cultural dynamics. Although attributes that may fall under categories of universalism and particularism can be found in all literary works, suppressing particularism and thus increasing universalism, I argue, is an important characteristic of the style of writing of the HP novels.

Universalism in Harry Potter novels is present both on the level of the structure of the narrative as well as the style of writing. I draw on the Proppian analysis of the HP novels by Joel Hunter to point to universalist features on the

narrative level. I argue that the function of national, ethnic and religious attributes in the HP novels is to paint the "real world" backdrop of a low fantasy novel. These attributes do not play an important role in the plot of the novels. To support a part of my argument related to the presence/absence of words with religious origins, I searched keywords in context using *Voyant Tools* (Sinclair and Rockwell 2016) and *AVOBMAT* (*Analysis and Visualization of Bibliographic Metadata and Texts*; see Péter et al. 2020). My research results support the re-enchantment theory as proposed by Stark and Bainbridge (1985), Christopher Partridge (2004) and Jason Josephson-Storm (2017).

2. The irresistible rise

As Blake (2002, 3-5) notes, before him, the scholarly understanding of the HP hype was focused on the themes and topics that enchanted children all around the world while omitting the fact that even before its global popularity, HP novels won the hearts of children and adults in the UK. Blake (2002, 5-7) argues that the HP phenomenon was a part of the process of reimagining Englishness in the late 1990s. Drawing on Anderson's (2006) notion of the 'imagined community,' he shows how changes in the political status of the United Kingdom facilitated the need for rebranding Englishness. Here, he refers to the changes in the status of Northern Ireland and Great Britain in 1998 and a move towards greater autonomy of Scotland and Wales. The political image of the UK was loosening without an opportunity to reconstitute itself around the notion of England. "Politically, England does not exist," Blake (2002, 6) asserts.

In a New Historicist fashion, Blake sees HP novels as both a product of these historical events and as producing the new perception of England as an imagined community. On the one hand, HP novels are full of motives from the English past. Right at the beginning of the first novel (and the movie), Blake (2002, 7) notes that we find Harry and his aunt, uncle and cousin living in a new house but trying to make it look more traditional—"a very English way of living." On the other hand, he shows that due to the immigration of people in the 1950s, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a variety of expressions in music, painting and architecture influenced by this 'reverse colonisation.' HP novels incorporate this aspect of English culture by portraying Hogwarts as a multicultural space (14-15). So, the two elements of HP's success in the UK, according to Blake, are reimagining the past in the present and multiculturality. Like many other cultural products, Blake argues, HP was on the point of tackling present issues but also a part of the cultural rebranding of England.

To argue for the success of the HP novels compared to other contemporaries like Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, Blake points to various sales and marketing strategies that were used to produce hype from the interest in the HP stories. He demonstrates how, in 1995, even before the Harry Potter books, the book market changed. The book sales focused on teenage and preteen consumers (Blake 2002, 71-93). Bookselling chains like Barnes & Noble and Borders relied on the mass production of books, setting cafeterias in bookshops, and linking reading with purchasing. Waterstones and Blackwell organised events, book signings and readings. Interaction with readers was also encouraged through internet

platforms such as Amazon. Blake (73-74) shows how HP publisher Bloomsbury Publishing followed all these trends. They had an e-magazine, Blumsburrymagazine.com, with a section devoted to Harry. He asserts that equating reading with purchasing was the key to creating the HP hype in the UK and the US.

To argue for spreading this hype globally, Blake claims that the pivotal role was the status of the English language and culture in the world. Due to the British colonies and relationship with Hollywood, Englishness, as a cultural product, became globally appealing. Thus, Harry Potter, as an English hero, much like Sherlock Holmes and James Bond before him, appeals to the global audience (Blake 2002, 90-91). To support his argument, he quotes an essay from a Polish student who claims that she became interested in the novels because it was popular in Britain (89). However, even in this isolated case, we do not find that she was interested in books because she recognised that Harry is English. She does, nevertheless, refer to aspects of British culture, like dormitories. But we have no reason to believe that she recognised dormitories as a part of British culture, Englishness, or that any reader would recognise Harry as a typical English suburban child.

3. The Proppian structural analysis

I agree with Blake's position that the popularity of the English language and culture facilitated the global success of HP stories due to the legacy of British colonisation commodifying English cultural products (Blake 2002, 90). However, his argument that Harry is English and therefore appealing to a global audience is the weakest point in Blake's argument. On the other hand, he briefly touches upon the two much more important factors in the global HP hype (before Warner Bros movies) but does not expand on them. He notes that the popularity of the HP stories is related to their similarity to folk tales, as well as to the fact that Harry is not Protestant (Blake 2002, 17, 93, 102). In his understanding of the relationship between HP novels and folk tales, Blake (17) notes that Harry is a literary universal, much like Cinderella and King Arthur. What he omits is that the connection of HP stories to folk stories is not only on the level of themes, topics and motives but also on the structural level of the narrative.

Following a Proppian model of structural analysis, Joel Hunter (2012, 5) conducted a survey to test whether there is any correlation between the aesthetic taste of the audience and the Proppian model. In the first part of his study, Hunter analysed seven HP novels using the Proppian structural method. Following Propp's proposal that folk tales have functions that appear in the established order, he detected these functions in HP novels and produced a model which shows to what extent each novel deviates from the Proppian structure; the measure that he called 'incongruity.' Here, he notes that we need to bear in mind that the measure is subjective; nevertheless, it facilitates comparison. He then extracted five propositions from Proppian laws and deduced two additional measures. The second one is related to features that became apparent when we take into consideration the relationship between the novels and the series of

novels as a whole. The third one is related to violations of the propositions (Hunter 2012, 15-20).

In the second part of his study, he conducted an online survey with students who completed the Harry Potter course in various colleges. The students were sorted into categories based on how many times they read the novels, and their task was to rank novels in the series from the least to the most aesthetically satisfying (from 1 to 7). The next step was to correlate the aesthetic satisfaction from the surveys related to each particular novel of the series to the three measures that reflect the extent to which each of the HP novels follows (or instead fails to follow) the Proppian narrative model (Hunter 2012, 5). He sums up his research in the following table (Table 1).

Measuring Unit	Least aesthetically satisfying books		Most aesthetically satisfying books	
	CS	OP	PA	DH
Incongruity	Very Low	Very High	Nil	Nil
Violation	4	3	0	1
Creative Exploitation	0	1	3	6

Table 1. Measures of concordance in the *Harry Potter* stories.

In the table, we can see that the two novels that received the highest aesthetic grades were *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (PA) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (DH), while *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (CS) and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (OP) received the lowest grades.

Hunter shows how the level of incongruity and violations of propositions are negatively correlated to aesthetic satisfaction, while creative exploitations of the functions are positively correlated. This leads him to conclude that the aesthetic satisfaction of readers is positively correlated to Propp's narrative structure (Hunter 2012, 21). In other words, the readers attributed more aesthetic satisfaction when the novels followed Propp's principles. Walter Burkert (1998, 58-59) calls this Proppian model "The Quest." Analysing the universality of The Quest, Burkert and Dissanayake argue that it points to our biological programming and is related to our biological needs and functions. Moreover, they argue that it reflects the most important features of our evolutionary development as a species (Burkert 1998, 58-59; Dissanayake 2012, 83).

4. Universalism as a feature of a style of writing

Universalism not only appears on the structural level of the HP novels but is also a feature of a style of writing. Here I use the term 'translatable universalism,' coined by Alan Strathern. Drawing on Assmann's (2010, 18-19) notion of the 'translatability' of polytheistic religions, Strathern (2019, 27) argues that even though gods of 'immanentist' religions are local, they are tied to particular cities, temples, landscapes and customs that are easily 'translatable' to other cultures. This allowed a form of flexibility to these religions that the Abrahamic religions did not have. Gods of 'immanentist' religions could become more local in a tribal environment, but more universal in spreading culture.[1] A god of death, war or thunder is easily translated to other cultures, even though he or she has distinct local features (Assmann 2010, 45-47). This cannot be said for 'transcendentalist' religions, such as Abrahamic ones, for example. As Assmann (19) puts it, "Jupiter cannot be translated to Yahweh."

National or ethnic attributes in the HP franchise are 'translatable' to those aspects of the various cultures of the world that a reader is familiar with. A typical British boarding school can be translated by combining concepts of school and home. Christmas festivity can be translated to any other celebration—free time to spend with friends and family, receive gifts and enjoy food. There is nothing about these attributes that would cause confusion, require further elaboration, and thus disturb the flow of the narrative. Contrary to what Blake argued, most kids around the world will not even recognise that at the beginning of the first novel, Harry's family has a very English style of living. They will easily translate aspects of Englishness into their own cultural code. This is mainly because national and ethnic attributes are not given as important elements of the narrative. Their function is simply to paint a 'real world' backdrop of the low fantasy world of the HP universe.

Another aspect of universalism as a writing style is reflected in the use of words with religious connotations in HP stories. Most importantly, throughout the HP novels, words that have religious origins do not describe religious belief or practice. Even facing certain death, Harry does not pray; he relies on magic—the stone of resurrection to communicate with his dead parents (Rowling 2007, 703). When Voldemort attacks Hogwarts, professors and students never call on God but use protective magics to form a shield around the castle and bring statues alive to defend the school (501-502). I use the term 'religion' in a narrow sense as an institutionalised tradition. The plot of the HP books is set in the United Kingdom, so the religious elements that I am exploring here come from the Christian religious tradition.

In the books, we learn about religion because of Christmas. However, in the HP universe, there is no mention of denominations, prayer or any other belief,

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[1] Strathern (2019, 27-106) defines religion with two opposing terms. 'Immanentism' designates those forms of religion where supernatural forces coexist with the believers. They are able to interact with them for their benefit. Most indigenous religions fall into this category. 'Transcendentalism,' on the other hand, designates forms of religion that rely on separating the world of believers and supernatural forces. Examples of these religions include Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.

rite or ritual that would directly imply religion. Here, I do not claim there is no religion in the HP universe. As a low fantasy, the HP world contains all aspects of the 'real world.' That is to say, it includes religions, nationalities and ethnicities. Nevertheless, these are given as cultural and geographical features and do not play a significant role in the plot. We can imagine that in magical schools elsewhere, students celebrate different holidays, religious or otherwise. But even in the celebration of Christmas in the HP novels, there is nothing explicitly religious. It is a period of a year, a school break or a festivity like any other.

5. A digital perspective

To test my arguments about the absence of words with religious connotations, I have created and cleaned a corpus of seven txt. format Harry Potter novels.[2] *AVOBMAT* lemmatised the novels (Péter et al. 2020). In the first search, I used *AVOBMAT*'s NGRAM option to create a chart related to the occurrences of the words *religion*, *pray*, *God*, *Jesus* and *church*. The results show that the words *religion* and *Jesus* are not mentioned even once in the entire HP corpus (or any other derivatives of these words). The search also reveals the words *pray*, *God* and *church* throughout the HP series.

Here, I used *Voyant Tools* to double-check my results. *Voyant Tools* is also helpful because it shows the number of occurrences of each derivative of the root of the word. For example, the root *pray* does not ever appear as the verb (*to*) *pray* but appears 12 times in the form of *praying*, *prayer* and *prayed* (Figure 1).

The results of the search are as follows:

o *pray* (12): *praying* (9), *prayer* (2), *prayed* (1)
o *god* (21): *god* (19), *god's* (2)[3]
o *church* (25): *church* (21), *churches* (1), *churchgoers* (1), *churchyard* (1), *churchyards* (1).

After the search revealed that the HP corpus contains the above-listed words, I used *AVOBMAT* and *Voyant Tools* to look up these words in context. After looking up each of these derivatives, I concluded that my hypothesis is confirmed—there is not even one case where a word is used to explicitly denote a specific religious tradition, a rite, ritual or belief.

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[2] *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007).
[3] I did not show the following words because of their irrelevance: *godric, godric's, godfather, godfather's, godelot, godson*.
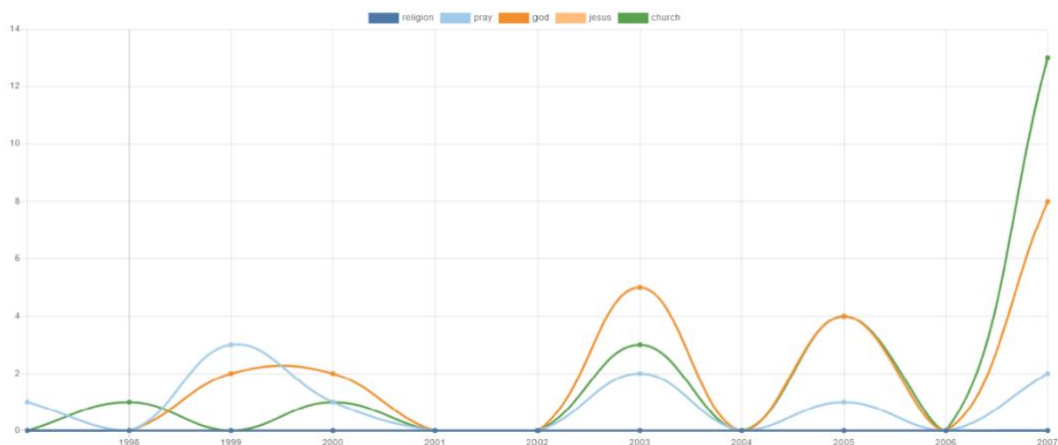
Figure 1. Religion, pray, God, Jesus, church.

5.1. Results: *God, pray* and *church*

When it comes to the word *God* and its derivatives (Figure 2), it is used as a phrase, most commonly as an exclamation to express the emotion of surprise, amusement, excitement, fear, etc.:

- "Thank God," shivered Ron as they were enveloped by warm, toffee-scented air (Rowling 2005, 245).
- My God, my father told me about it ages ago… heard it from Cornelius Fudge (Rowling 2000, 159).
- "My God — Diggory!" it whispered. "Dumbledore — he's dead!" (Rowling 2000, 571).
- "But why didn't you — oh my God — you should have said" (Rowling 2005, 99).
- "My God, what an eyesore!" (Rowling 2005, 209).

Figure 2. The word *God* in context.

The word *pray* is mostly used as a synonym for *hope* (Figure 3). The derivative *prayer* is used to describe the way someone is holding their hands or head:

- o "He stumbled forward and sat down on the bed again, staring at his hands, his head bowed as though in prayer" (Rowling 2005, 271).
- o "The Dumbledore in Harry's head smiled, surveying Harry over the tips of his fingers, pressed together as if in prayer" (Rowling 2007, 483).
- o "Harry swerved again as the serpent lunged at him; he soared upward and straight toward the place where, he prayed, the door stood open: Ron, Hermione, and Goyle had vanished; Malfoy was screaming and holding Harry so tightly it hurt" (Rowling 2007, 534).
- o "They edged toward the open door, mouths dry, praying the troll wasn't about to come out of it" (Rowling 1998, 174).
- o "Praying that the Dursleys were still fast asleep, Harry got down on his hands and knees and reached toward it" (Rowling 1999, 13).

Authors	Title	Publication year	Text
Joanne Rowling	Without title	1997	lock it in." "Good idea," said Ron nervously. They edged toward the open door, mouths dry, *praying* the troll wasn't about to come out of it. With one great leap, Harry managed to grab the key, slam
Joanne Rowling	Without title	1999	across the room. Harry followed it stealthily. The book was hiding in the dark space under his desk. *Praying* that the Dursleys were still fast asleep, Harry got down on his hands and knees and reached toward
Joanne Rowling	Without title	1999	and the Marauder's Map. Snape picked up the Zonko's bag. "Ron gave them to me," said Harry. *praying* he'd get a chance to tip Ron off before Snape saw him. "He — brought them back from Hogsmeade last
Joanne Rowling	Without title	1999	sentence. He shuffled forward on his knees, groveling, his hands clasped in front of him as though *praying*. "Sirius — it's me... it's Peter... your friend... you wouldn't..." Black kicked out and Pettigrew
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2000	He raised his wand. "Accio Firebolt!" he shouted. Harry waited, every fiber of him hoping, *praying*... If it hadn't worked... if it wasn't coming... He seemed to be looking at everything around him through
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2003	it! And if either of you ever —" "Hem, hem." Professor McGonagall closed her eyes as though *praying* for patience as she turned her face toward Professor Umbridge again. "Yes?" "I think they deserve
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2003	through the only door still open, the one through which the Death Eaters themselves had come. Inwardly *praying* that Neville would stay with Ron — find some way of releasing him — he ran a few feet into the new
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2005	find the right page; at last he located it and deciphered one cramped word underneath the spell: *Praying* that this was the counter-jinx, Harry thought Liberacorpus! with all his might. There was another
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	his head bowed, and his white hands folded over the Elder Wand in front of him. He might have been *praying*, or else counting silently in his mind, and Harry, standing still on the edge of the scene, thought

Figure 3. The word *praying* in context.

In the case of the word *church*, the connotations are spatial (Figure 4). The church is always a place, a building. The word *churchgoers* refers to people going out of church:

- o "Harry looked around, worried, thinking of dementors, then realized that the carols had finished, that the chatter and flurry of churchgoers were fading away as they made their way back into the square" (Rowling 2007, 327).
- o "According to a clock on a nearby church, it was almost midnight" (Rowling 2005, 59).
- o "The Riddles were buried in the Little Hangleton churchyard, and their graves remained objects of curiosity for a while" (Rowling 2000, 4).
- o "I'm sure it is," said Hermione, her eyes upon the church. "They... they'll be in there, won't they? Your mum and dad? I can see the graveyard behind it" (Rowling 2007, 323).
- o *"He looked out over a valley blanketed in snow, distant church bells chiming through* the glittering silence" (Rowling 2007, 350).

Authors	Title	Publication year	Text
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2000	gone. They were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard; the black outline of a small **church** was visible beyond a large yew tree to their right. A hill rose above them to their left. Harry could
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2003	retired from public life after being struck in the ear by a turnip at a concert in Little Norton **Church** Hall nearly fifteen years ago. I recognized him the moment I saw his picture in the paper. Now, Stubby
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2003	far end... It too opened at his touch... And now he was in a dimly lit room as high and wide as a **church**, full of nothing but rows and rows of towering shelves, each laden with small, dusty, spun-glass
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2003	back at the door and pushed. It swung open. They were there, they had found the place: high as a **church** and full of nothing but towering shelves covered in small, dusty, glass orbs. They glimmered dully
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2005	He set off at a brisk pace, past an empty inn and a few houses. According to a clock on a nearby **church**, it was almost midnight. "So tell me, Harry," said Dumbledore. "Your scar... has it been hurting
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2005	Harry quickly. "Hermione Granger told me." "And she is quite right. We turn left again." The **church** clock chimed midnight behind them. Harry wondered why Dumbledore did not consider it rude to call
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2005	him: Neither can live while the other survives... Dumbledore had stopped walking, level with the **church** they had passed earlier. "This will do, Harry. If you will grasp my arm." Braced this time
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2005	them. Harry could see a village, undoubtedly Little Hangleton, nestled between two steep hills, its **church** and graveyard clearly visible. Across the valley, set on the opposite hillside, was a handsome manor
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	magical families, and this accounts, no doubt, for the stories of hauntings that have dogged the little **church** beside it for many centuries." "You and your parents aren't mentioned," Hermione said, closing
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	obscured by a windblown Christmas tree. There were several shops, a post office, a pub, and a little **church** whose stained-glass windows were glowing jewel-bright across the square. The snow here had become
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	and pop music as the pub door opened and closed; then they heard a carol start up inside the little **church**. "Harry, I think it's Christmas Eve!" said Hermione. "Is it?" He had lost track of the date;
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	date: they had not seen a newspaper for weeks. "I'm sure it is," said Hermione, her eyes upon the **church**. "They... they'll be in there, won't they? Your mum and dad? I can see the graveyard behind it."
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	his forehead... "C'mon," said Harry, when he had looked his fill, and they turned again toward the **church**. As they crossed the road, he glanced over his shoulder; the statue had turned back into the war
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	war memorial. The singing grew louder as they approached the **church**. It made Harry's throat constrict, it reminded him so forcefully of Hogwarts, of Peeves bellowing rude versions of carols from inside
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	open as quietly as possible and they edged through it. On either side of the slippery path to the **church** doors, the snow lay deep and untouched. They moved off through the snow, carving deep trenches behind
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	they walked around the building, keeping to the shadows beneath the brilliant windows. Behind the **church**, row upon row of snowy tombstones protruded from a blanket of pale blue that was flecked with dazzling
Joanne Rowling	Without title	2007	of churchgoers were fading away as they made their way back into the square. Somebody inside the **church** had just turned off the lights. Then Hermione's voice came out of the blackness for the third

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Figure 4. The word *church* in context.

5.2. Results: *Christmas*

In addition to these words, I explored the word *Christmas*. Again, I compared the results of *AVOBMAT* and *Voyant Tools*. Both tools show that the word appears 209 times in the corpus and is present in each of the HP novels: *Philosopher's Stone* (25), *Chamber of Secrets* (15), *Prisoner of Azkaban* (31), *Goblet of Fire* (30), *Order of the Phoenix* (51), *Half-Blood Prince* (32), *Deathly Hallows* (25). Graphs are normalised; *AVOBMAT* shows relative frequencies per year and *Voyant Tools* per book (Figures 5 and 6). In all cases, the word *Christmas* has a temporal meaning. It appears as a festival or a school break. There is no explicit description of a religious rite or ritual involved in the celebration of Christmas. The relationship with the Christian religious tradition is pushed to the background and given in a symbolic form related to decorations and singing.

- o "I'm warning you now, boy — any funny business, anything at all — and you'll be in that cupboard from now until Christmas" (Rowling 1998, 24).
- o "Harry had. Mrs. Weasley had sent him a scarlet sweater with the Gryffindor lion knitted on the front; also a dozen home-baked mince pies, some Christmas cake, and a box of nut brittle" (Rowling 1999b, 222).
- o "You told me at the Yule Ball a house-elf called Dobby had given you a Christmas present" (Rowling 2000, 677).
- o "'Well, we know what to get you next Christmas,' said Hermione brightly" (Rowling 2000, 546).

    o   "Now you've got to buy me a Christmas present, ha!" (Rowling 2000, 105).
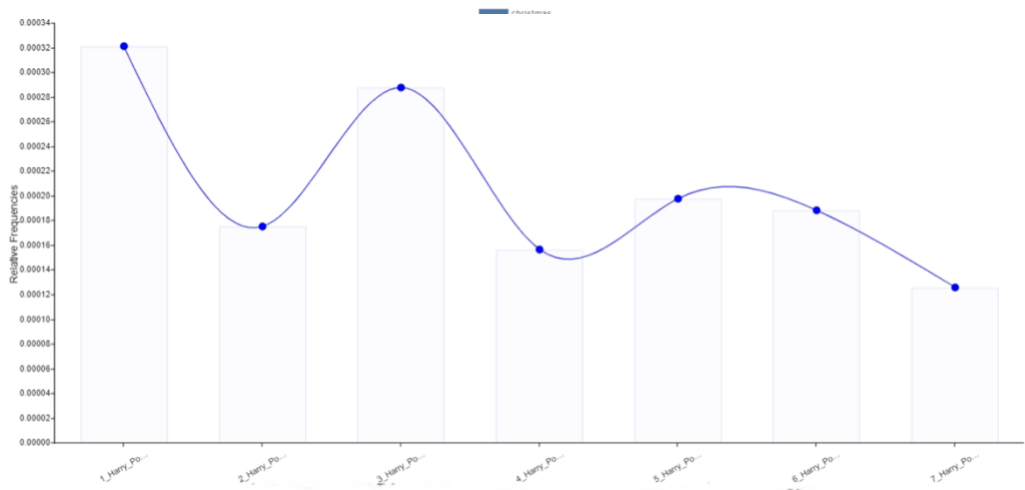
Figure 5. *AVOBMAT* (relative frequencies per year).
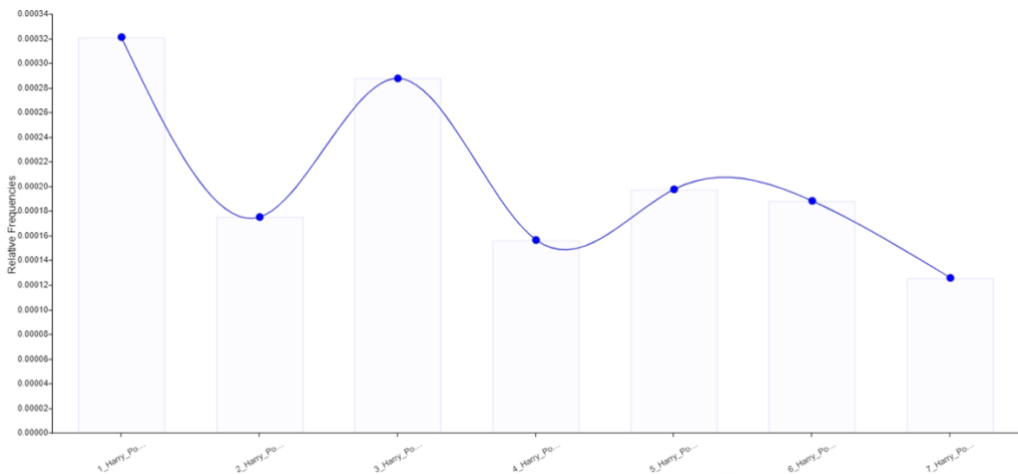
Figure 6. *Voyant Tools* (relative frequencies per book).

6. Harry Potter re-enchanting the world

I argue that pushing religion to the background made it possible for readers around the world to engage with HP novels and feel that they belong to the HP universe. This argument, however, should not be confused with the claim that religion is absent in the HP novels. As a low fantasy, the world of HP contains all religions, ethnicities and nationalities present in the real world. We encounter elements of Christian religious tradition like a celebration of Christmas, quotes from the Bible, resurrection parables and others. However, these do not play a

significant role in the plot. Moreover, a reader who misses noticing them will not have problems understanding the storyline.

I am also aware of the scholarship that understands the HP universe in relation to the Christian religious tradition and points out Christian allegories, allusions, parables and symbolism. In arguing for universalism, I do not reject their findings. However, the fact that these allusions are not apparent and that they need to be identified and argued for, only strengthens my argument that religion is pushed to the background of the HP universe. In most of the examples that are elicited by advocates of Christian interpretation of the HP novels, Christian elements are given in a symbolic and allegorical manner (Granger 2006; Groves 2017; Strand 2019).

The example that is often evoked by those who argue that Christianity plays an important role in the HP series is the scene in *Deathly Hallows* when Harry and Hermione visit Godric's Hollow to find the grave of Harry's parents. There are many elements from the Christian tradition in that scene: Christmas, carols, church, churchyard and two quotes from the New Testament inscribed in tombstones (Rowling 2007, 328). But what is Harry's and Hermione's reaction to this setting? If not for carols, they would even forget that it is Christmas (Rowling 2007, 328). Upon reading the inscription on the tomb of his parents: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," Harry's first impression is: "Isn't that a Death Eater idea? Why is that there?" (328). It is Hermione who recognises that these words refer to a life after death. But this idea provides no comfort for Harry: "But they were not living, thought Harry: They were gone. The empty words could not disguise the fact that his parents' moldering remains lay beneath snow and stone, indifferent, unknowing" (328).

Groves (2017, 61) interprets this scene differently. She only comments on Hermione's understanding of the quote, omitting Harry's comments. Instead of an argument, she relies on the *argumentum ab auctoritate*: "Rowling has placed great emphasis on these two quotations (which are the only direct biblical quotations in Harry Potter) saying that 'they almost epitomise the whole series' (2007g)." However, the emphasis that an author places on the quotation is of no importance when interpreting her works. Moreover, Groves completely neglects the fact that Rowling said that they are the only biblical quotations in seven volumes. Is it uncommon to find a quotation from the Bible on a tombstone, or people singing carols and going to church during Christmas in England, I wonder?

In the opening of her chapter, to support her claims, Groves (2017, 60) notes that Christianity is an important aspect of Rowling's life and that she openly stated that HP novels are full of Christian parallels, falling once more into authority fallacy. The religiosity of an author or his or her opinion about the novel is of little importance and does not replace an argument. In her interpretation of the two epigrams to the *Deathly Hallows*, Groves (61) focuses her attention on the quotations written by William Penn, a Christian religious thinker, but completely omits the ancient Greek one, written by Aeschylus. If a conclusion is to be drawn from these quotations it should be the one related to universal human truths that stem from different cultures and religions, and not one religion in particular.

It is important, however, to say that I do not reject the Christian interpretation of the HP series. British culture, which is to say architecture, literature, morality

and art, reflects many intertextual relationships with Christian spirituality. In that sense, an interesting view on HP novels is offered by Strand (2019, 12):

> As in Tolkien's Middle-earth, there is no mention of God or religion in the series. But there is a transcendent power that hovers over characters and events, giving them meaning and motive for doing good. That power is love. Magic in Harry Potter is at its best and most powerful when it is at the service of love, for Christians know that 'God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him' (1 John 4:16).

Strand's perspective is informed by works of John Granger, who at the turn of the century argued for understanding the HP universe in relation to Christian spirituality. Granger (2006, 9) asserts that because HP books challenge a materialistic worldview, they are not advocating occult practices, but a spiritual life. By understanding HP novels in relation to the culture and tradition that it is rooted in, Granger (13) argues against the exclusively secular view of the books and interprets HP novels as a part of the Christian spiritual tradition of England.

My argument, however, does not support exclusively Christian nor exclusively secular reading of HP novels. What I am concerned with is not the question if religion is present in the HP universe or not, but what the function of words that come from religious tradition in HP novels is. And so, the results of my research show that searched words do not refer to a specific religious practice; their function is only to paint the real-world backdrop of the United Kingdom in which the plot is set. Based on this finding, I argue that this made it easy for children and adults from around the world to connect with novels and to develop a feeling of belonging to this magical world.

Pushing religion in the background of the HP novels and especially movies, I argue, is related to the process of re-enchantment. Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 1-2) posit that secularization is not a single event like Weber (2004) considered it, but a recurring process through which established religions become 'thiswordly' and thus cannot satisfy the needs of their followers for 'otherworldliness.' In this way, secularisation inspires new forms of religiosity. Drawing on Stark and Bainbridge, Partridge (2004, 45) argues that modernity brings about a cultural shift characterised by the return of the magical culture, not just as a form of counterculture but also as part of the mainstream. A similar, albeit Foucauldian, perspective on the process of secularisation, secularisation as disenchantment and re-enchantment, is offered by Jason Jopherson-Smith (2017, 303-304), who deconstructs modernity as a "distinct and original tradition" by undermining one of its main pillars—disenchantment. He argues that scholars have often completely overlooked very rich and vibrant traditions of spiritualist and magical movements in Europe to produce what he calls the "myth of disenchantment."

The results of my research are in line with the above-mentioned considerations of secularisation as a change in modes of religiosity. While (institutionalised) religion is pushed into the background of the Harry Potter novels, magic is presented as a natural force that heroes practice on a daily basis in order to be able to defeat the villain. Young wizards and witches go to school, where they learn how to use spells, make potions and interact with fantastic beasts.

McAvan (2012) shows how many aspects of popular culture, movies, novels and series like *Matrix*, *Da Vinci Code*, *Buffy*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* facilitate a type of spirituality on the boundary between sacred and profane, which she dubs as "the postmodern sacred." Stemming from the New Age milieu, although produced mostly for entertainment, these movies, novels and video games are loaded with spiritual signifiers from various myths and religious traditions (6).[4] Her findings are important as they point out that in postmodern art, the boundary between spirituality, magic and religion is blurred. Even in Granger's and Strand's Christian interpretations of HP novels, magic is spirituality, and God is love (Granger 2006, 13; Strand 2019, 12).

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I showed how Blake's thesis on how Harry's Englishness played a key role in the global popularity of HP books only partially explains the HP lure (Blake 2002, 90-91). Moreover, I argued that universalism is another factor that we need to consider when answering the question of what made HP books attractive and translatable to various cultures. I presented the research results of Joel Hunter (2012) to show that universalism can be analyzed even on the structural level of the HP stories. To tackle universalism on the level of the style of writing, I hypothesised that in the HP universe, words with religious, ethnic and national connotations appear only to paint the 'real-world' of Britain at the turn of the century. However, the nationality, ethnicity, and religiosity of characters do not significantly impact the plot of the HP novels.

To test the part of my thesis related to religion, I used the digital tools *AVOBMAT* and *Voyant Tools*. I claimed that the function of words that have religious origins in HP novels is not to express the religiosity of characters. The words I examined are *pray*, *church*, *God*, *religion*, *Jesus* and *Christmas*. Two of those, *Jesus* and *religion*, do not appear even once. Other searched words appear throughout the novels, but not in relation to a religious practice. Their most common functions are:

- o spatial (*church*), a place, an object (e.g., "Behind the church").
- o temporal (*Christmas*), time, a period in the year (e.g., "We must finish it before Christmas").
- o expressive (*God*), an expression of emotion (e.g., "Oh my God!").
- o synonym (*pray*), synonymous with *hope* (e.g., "Pray he does not find you").

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4 The New Age (New Age Religion, New Age Spirituality, Alternative Spirituality, Alternative Religion, etc.) is an umbrella term that serves as a denominator for various beliefs and practices. For Hanegraaff (1997) and Heelas (1996), these include Neo-Paganism, channeling, and healing, esoteric aspects of religions, Druidism, Mayan and Native Indian traditions, Wicca, Shamanism and various forms of positive thinking, meditation, healing, positive thinking, mind-body-spirit techniques, interest in a horoscope and crystals (Hanegraaff 1997, 103; Heelas 1996, 1). Sutcliffe (2003, 208) argues that there was never any group that would fit into the "New Age" category. It is a "hopelessly vague" category, to cite Matthew Wood (2007, 70).

In other words, a church is a building like any other. And although there are people going to church, the characters that we follow throughout the seven novels never do so. Not even once, despite all the troubles, do we find someone going to church to pray. They do not call on God. The name of Jesus is never mentioned.

I defined religion in a narrow sense, as an institution, a tradition or a denomination. As the plot of the story is set in the United Kingdom, where the majority is Christian, I have searched for words that come from the Christian religious tradition. What I found is that when words that have origins in religious traditions appear, their function is not to describe religion or denomination, their beliefs, rites or rituals. A reader, therefore, encounters religion only in an allegorical and intertextual manner if s/he looks for Christian symbolism, which is a part of the cultural heritage of the United Kingdom. Universalism in HP novels and movies made it possible for readers around the world from various ethnic, national and religious backgrounds to 'translate' features of the HP world to their cultural code to effortlessly understand it, relate to it and develop a sense of belonging.

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