From Cheerful Bedtime Story to Sad Christmas Film: How Medium, Mode, and Genre Reshape *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*

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**ABSTRACT** Despite a largely positive reception, the 2016 film adaptation of the widely popular and acclaimed picturebook *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury 1989) has also received criticism. A number of parents have even taken to the internet to share their experiences of children being very upset, and even crying. Indeed, the film has been deemed sadder and more depressing than the picturebook, particularly in relation to its treatment of the character of the bear. Using these critiques as a springboard, this paper argues that they are—in large part—caused by the change of medium and genre. Drawing from Klaus Kaindl’s mode—medium—genre taxonomy (Kaindl 2013), this paper investigates the changes in the medial, modal, and generic dimensions between the two works as being closely intertwined. In order to gain a better understanding of those dynamics, this paper will provide a thorough multimodal breakdown of one scene from the picturebook and the film (textual, visual, and aural modes), and examine how the new medium affordances, multimodal arrangement, and generic conventions reshape the work and its subsequent reception.

**KEYWORDS:** children’s literature, multimodality, adaptation, media, genre

**INTRODUCTION**

‘On Christmas Eve Channel 4 showed the TV adaptation of “We’re going on a bear hunt”. … It was a silly entertaining book for young kids so you would expect the TV adaptation to be fun? No, it was simply depressing and miserable’ (‘Change the ending’). This begins a petition on the website Change.org, urging the filmmakers to change the ending to the film adaptation of the widely acclaimed and popular picturebook *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury 1989). On paper, this simple tale recounting the outdoor adventure of a group of four children, a baby, and their dog should not necessarily prompt such heated reactions. In a few words and poetic watercolour illustrations, the picturebook shares a powerful message: that obstacles can be overcome (‘We can’t go over it, we can’t go under it, we’ve got to go through it!’). After almost three decades as a family favourite, it was adapted into a film in 2016 for Channel 4 (Harrison and Shaw). While the film was overall well-received by critics and parents alike, it was also the target of harsh criticism, as a number of parents reported their child being

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upset and even crying upon watching the film. The petition, therefore, in spite of its arguably limited reach, echoes the concerns that the treatment of the bear in the film was too sad and inappropriate for a young audience ('Customer reviews').

This article uses these audience reviews as a springboard to conduct a comparative analysis of the book and the film, with a view to understanding how meaning is made in children’s literature, and reshaped through adaptation practices. Drawing from Klaus Kaindl’s mode—medium—genre taxonomy (Kaindl 2013), I aim to demonstrate that the change of medium (from a book to a film), which coincides with a revision of the multimodal aspect of the story, and the change of genre (from a picturebook based on a folksong to a Christmas film) play a crucial role in the negative reception of the ending. As Linda Hutcheon points out, however, ‘[s]tories … do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genre). … There is … a wider communicative context’ to take into account (Hutcheon 26). A fourth dimension, namely ‘audience’, will therefore be added to the taxonomy. Indeed both the relationships between the agents involved (e.g. asymmetry between consumers and producers, dual addressee), and the communicative context of children’s literature (e.g. pedagogical setting, read-aloud session, bedtime story) are quite unique. In the case of the Bear Hunt, medial and generic shifts are interlaced with the issues of habit, nostalgia, and audience expectations, as the film came out almost three decades after the picturebook.

Book-to-film is the most discussed instance of adaptation in adaptation studies. However, ‘book’ generally refers to novels. Robyn McCallum laments that…

…film studies remain something of a Cinderella in the academic field of child and adolescent literature research. Likewise, texts produced for children and teenagers are late to arrive to the ballroom of film and adaptation studies, despite being a primary resource for film-makers since the early twentieth century.1 (McCallum 3)

This is a regrettable oversight, as she believes that ‘[t]he application of contemporary adaptation theory to children’s texts … has the capacity to articulate the complex relations between literary, film, television and other media texts, their young audiences and their cultural and ideological contexts’ (3).

This article, situated at the crossroad between adaptation studies and children’s literature studies, aims to account for the specificities of children’s literature in order to develop a suited method for the analysis of its adaptation(s), both as products and as processes.

For one, children’s books are characterized by their prominent visual component. Although the visual mode of the picturebook is different from that of the film due to the change of medium, picturebook-to-film adaptations work with an already existing visual dimension, while novel-to-film adaptations do not.

Another specificity is the length of picturebooks. In book-to-film adaptations, a lot of emphasis is put on the phenomenon of ‘condensation’, whereby the plot of the novel needs to be reduced in order to fit the format of a film. However, picturebooks tend to be fairly short and ‘require substantial additional content’ when they are adapted for the screen (Meeusen 486). In that respect, the adaptation of children’s literature is an ideal site for the study of adaptation as a process, as it ‘beg[s] the question of what
happens when such texts are transformed (486) and how the resulting product will—in Margaret Mackey’s words—‘direct users’ attention’ to different elements of the story (Mackey in Meeusen 487).

When adaptation is extended to include other media, however, the idea of ‘substantial additional content’ does not necessarily refer to quantity. A picturebook-to-plushy adaptation, for instance, does not provide a large quantity of additional material, but it does provide new and different material that completely reshapes the work and the audience’s engagement with it. Similarly, a film-to-activity book or a picturebook-to-popup book adaptation may not require substantial additions, but do reshape the work in ways that can be qualified as substantial. In that respect, multimodality proves a useful approach. Indeed, what I have described so far in so many words can be summarized as follows: when a product of children’s literature (in any medium) is adapted to another medium, its multimodal arrangement will be altered by the potentials and limitations of the new medium.

**METHODOLOGY**

This article, in the same vein as Jarrell Wright’s chapter on the film adaptation of *The Shining*, uses audience (in)fidelity claims as springboard for a study of modal and generic shifts in products of children’s literature. Medium and genre will be used in this analysis as complementary tools. Indeed ‘while the transposition of a narrative from a textual medium to the cinema might be able to explain the fact that the narrative has changed, the characteristics of cinema as a medium cannot explain why particular changes are made instead of others’ (Wright 180; my emphasis).

A third crucial element—and centrepiece of the framework—is multimodality. Speaking of Robert Stam’s ‘multi-track’ (Stam 2000) approach, Shannon Brownlee states that it ‘attends to the materials of expression of different media without drawing absolute lines between and among them. Media can share tracks, such as words, as well as the number of tracks by which they communicate’ (Brownlee 160). Stam’s multi-track approach shares an interesting resemblance with multimodality, which offers a framework to look at every product of children’s literature as a multimodal ensemble. The use and degree of use of each modal category vary depending on the medial product at hand, thus substituting the yes/no binary with a spectrum. For instance, novels do have a prominent textual dimension, but feature visual elements (e.g. covers, typography, layout, and author picture).

Multimodality, therefore, provides an approach of children’s literature that is mindful of the many ways in which it makes meaning. The concepts of ‘multimodality’ and ‘mode’ were developed by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in their seminal work *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (2001), and primarily used in the fields of social semiotics, systemic functional linguistics, and conversation analysis. Within the scope of this paper, I will be drawing from Carey Jewitt’s definition:

Multimodality … attends to the full repertoire of resources that people use to communicate and represent phenomena and experiences including speech, sound, gesture, gaze, body posture and movement, writing, image and so on. Thus language/talk is not the given starting
point or anchor for meaning. The use of these resources is understood as shaped by the social norms operating at the moment of making meaning, and influenced by the motivations and interests of people in a specific social context. (Jewitt 127)

This definition, and two of its core elements in particular, are useful in discussing my specific case study, but also children’s literature more broadly. First, it draws attention to the ‘full repertoire’ of meaning-making resources. The study of (children’s) literature has been dominated by an emphasis on text—both as a medium (printed books) and as a mode (words). However, the sprawling development of children’s literature franchises across a wide array of media suggest that the printed book as a medium no longer holds centre-stage. That is also true for the text as mode: the printed words are one of the many ways of making-meaning within a product of children’s literature. While I wholeheartedly support the argument that there is no such thing as a monomodal text (see Baldry and Thibault 2006; Gambier 2006; Gibbons 2012), the departure from text-centred approaches is particularly relevant when discussing children’s literature, as it notoriously makes use of a variety of resources to make meaning (text, illustrations, sounds, textures, smells, moveable parts, etc.). Moreover, a mode is only considered one if it is recognized as such in its context of use (Kress 54). This second point suggests that modes are context-dependent and culturally and historically situated (just like media), which shifts the focus from abstract entities to concrete and contextualized resources. This conception of language is rooted in Michael Halliday’s seminal works Language as Social Semiotic (1978) and An Introduction to Functional Grammar (1985), in which he emphasizes ‘that language should be interpreted “within a sociocultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms”’ (Halliday in Boria et al. 12; see also Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Adami and Kress 2014; Jewitt, Bezemer, and O’Halloran 2016).

In this article, I will, therefore, make use of modal categories that are relevant within the scope of children’s literature—here understood in the broad sense as ‘include[ing] virtually anything produced for the entertainment, exploitation, or enculturation of children’ (Hunt 3). I do not, therefore, claim those as universally applicable across the wide array of fields and subjects dealing with multimodality, but aim to outline an operational multimodal toolbox for the study of children’s literature.

Concretely speaking, Jewitt’s definition mentions potential resources used to make meaning (speech, sound, gesture, gaze, body posture and movement, writing, and image), albeit without placing them in broader modal categories. Drawing from Pérez-González’s audiovisual typology of core modes, their medial variants, and sub-modes (2014), Table 1 proposes an adapted version that is suitable for the study of products of children’s literature. Instead of the core modes that he proposes (image, text, and sound), I use the roughly corresponding modal categories outlined by Oittinen, Ketola, and Garavini (2017) in relation to products of children’s literature: visual, textual, and aural (203).

While Pérez-González suggests ‘image’ as one of the core modes and ‘static image’ and ‘dynamic image’ as medial variants, this distinction does not properly account for three-dimensional products of children’s literature (e.g. stuffed toys, amusement park rides, board game pieces, and live performance gestures). Other medial variants have,
therefore, been added (‘design’ and ‘gesture’). I also decided to list ‘voice’ in the aural category, and not as a medial variant of the textual mode, though I do consider it a ‘latent’ mode of the textual mode, i.e. a mode that is ‘potentially available whenever we encounter a sequence of written words’ (Tomalin 137). Pérez-González, drawing from Stöckl (2004), further distinguishes sub-modes, based on the media affordances, that is, ‘what all forms are capable of … and … the restrictions intrinsic to particular materials and organizing principles’ (Levine 10-1). For instance, sub-modes of the mode ‘voice’ include volume, pitch, intonation, tone, cadence, and timbre; sub-modes of the mode ‘dynamic images’ include perspective, style, composition, movement, character design, and camera movements.

Modes and sub-modes also have affordances, which are tied to their medial realization. Loudness, for example, can be achieved in a film using ‘volume’, a sub-mode of the mode ‘sound-effect’ (aural mode). A book would need to use ‘size’ to achieve a similar effect, a sub-mode of the mode ‘typography’ (textual mode). In Jewitt’s definition, for instance, ‘gesture’ and ‘image’ would be medial variants of the visual mode, and ‘speech’ and ‘sound’ would fall under the aural mode.

Drawing from Jacques Derrida and Lars Elleström, Klaus Kaindl developed the mode—medium—genre taxonomy in a similar effort to overcome ‘the language-centeredness of translation studies’ (Boria et al. 18) and approach translation ‘as a modal, medial, and generic practice’ (18). This claim, however, easily applies to adaptation. Kress and Van Leeuwen already discussed the relation between medium and genre in their theory of multimodal communication. As Kaindl points out: ‘[o]ne of the characteristics of [their] multimodality concept is that mode is seen not only with regard to its semiotic nature, but also as inseparably connected to the medium’ (2020, 55), which they define as ‘the material resources used in the production of semiotic products and events, including both the tools and the materials used’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 22).

The link between the three elements of Kaindl’s taxonomy are probably best articulated by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noel Thon in *Storyworld across Media* (2014), in which they argue that multimodality is a feature of both medium and genre:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal categories</th>
<th>Medial variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Static image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual</td>
<td>Static text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animated text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aural</td>
<td>Sound effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the one hand, multimodality is a feature of medium when the specific nature of the latter implies multiple types of signs; for instance, inherent to the medium of film is its inclusion of images, language, and music. On the other hand, multimodality is a feature of genre
when both monomodal and multimodal works are possible within the same genre (and of course within the same medium, since medium is a defining feature of genre). In this case, multimodality is an innovation with respect to a standard monomediaity that creates a new subgenre. (Ryan and Thon 10)

Not only does multimodality highlights the different meaning-making resources provided by each medium, it also draws attention to how every single resource is reshaped by the medium. As far as genre is concerned, combining more than one mode within a product allows to make a distinction between a monomodal and a multimodal product from the same medium. Ryan gives the example of ‘a musical composition that includes narration such as Sergei Prokofieff’s Peter and the Wolf as compared to a Beethoven symphony’ (10). I would argue that even among multimodal products from the same medium, different modal and sub-modal combinations allow for that same sub-generic distinction. Among children’s books, for instance, the genre of the picturebook emphasizes the prevalence of images; the sound book is a genre that is differentiated through its use of sound effects; and pop-up books foster a particular type of reader engagement through the use of moving and detachable parts.

While both genre and medium are underpinned and overarched by modes and their combinations, Marie-Laure Ryan makes a crucial distinction between them:

… we choose both the genre and the medium we work in. But we select media for their affordances, and we work around their limitations, trying to overcome them or to make them irrelevant. Genre, by contrast, purposefully uses limitations to channel expectations, optimize expression and facilitate communication. (Ryan 19)

An example from the Bear Hunt picturebook-to-film adaptation that highlights the interplay between medium and genre is the difference in length of the two media products. The picturebook is a traditional thirty-two-page format and would only last—as Michael Rosen jokingly acknowledges—for ‘about four minutes and 30 seconds’ (Heritage). However, the film is twenty-eight minutes long. While the change of medium explains why the filmmakers decided to add original scenes to the story, genre sheds light on why those original scenes explore the backstory of the characters, mostly by introducing new family members (parents and grandmother) and a sub-plot involving the passing of their grandfather.

The following sections explore how and why the medium and the genre of the Bear Hunt film have reshaped the work and—through a multimodal analysis of the final scene—why the film was experienced as sadder by the audience, to the point of leaving a part of it in tears. It should be noted that, although the picturebook-to-film adaptation of the Bear Hunt story appeared the most relevant example to which to apply my framework and methodology, it is designed to be more broadly applicable to the intermedial adaptation between any products of children’s literature.

CASE STUDY

Background and context
In the picturebook, the bear is mostly depicted as a threatening creature, although a closer inspection of the illustrations suggests otherwise: its facial expression is less and
less scary as it runs after the children and gently opens the gate in front of the house to come in. However, the children do not perceive these more gentle actions and run back home scared, eventually swearing never to go on a bear hunt again. Although the story could have ended there, the endpapers of the back cover reveal a slumped-shouldered bear with a bent head, walking along the beach towards its cave (‘bear beach scene’ hereafter)—a posture suggesting sadness and defeat.

The position of that scene in the paratext of the book is significant. Just like the front endpapers (which show the same beach at daytime, without the bear), the back endpapers can be disregarded or even go unnoticed by the readers, especially because the last page of the book (the children hiding under the covers, swearing never to go on a bear hunt again) functions very organically as an ending to the story. The adult reader can, therefore, decide to close the book, a shortcut provided by the materiality of the medium. Alternatively, their ‘power in the meaning-making process’, which usually ‘lies outside the immediate purview of the listening reader’ (Sutliff Sanders in Meeusen 488) allows them to comment on the scene and, for instance, provide metacommentary on the illustration in order to tone down its perceived gravitas. In the case of film, however, the adults are no longer positioned as storyteller, but rather as ‘viewer/listener of the story just like the child’ (Meeusen 489). This position of ‘co-viewer’ (489) means that they hold less power over the telling of the narrative.

Even though the film has been overall well-received (6.5/10 on IMDB and 4.7/5 on Amazon), some critics and parents pointed out that the film version of that final scene was too sad for the young audience. Jonathan Petre, for the Daily Mail, wrote: ‘The book […] is a cheery bedtime read but children were upset by the Channel 4 version which ended with a lonely bear staring at the moon with an expression of desperate longing’ (Petre). He then proceeds to relay the concerns of parents, who deemed the film inappropriate for young children. Those concerns are echoed by most negative reviews of the DVD on Amazon, which question the age appropriateness of the film, and its sad ending. Some reviewers call the treatment of the bear ‘cruel’, ‘too sad’, ‘crushingly sad’, ‘melancholic’, ‘depressing’, ‘mean’, and ‘terrible’ (‘Customer reviews’) and contrast it with the book that was deemed more ‘silly’ and ‘cheerful’ (‘Customer reviews’).

Arguably, however, the final scene should not have surprised parents who were familiar with the book, as it is directly adapted from an existing scene. This raises the question of what exactly caused them to be particularly outraged by the film version.

Change of medium
Both the book and the film present modes and sub-modes from the aural, visual, and textual categories, albeit with medial variants. The aural mode of the book, for instance, mostly consists in the sub-mode ‘voice’, while films also have ‘music’ and ‘sound effects’. In the bear beach scene specifically, however, the book only features the visual mode, while the film combines the visual and the aural modes. It is important to note that a higher number of modes and sub-modes does not necessarily mean that the effect conveyed by the scene (in this case melancholia, sadness) will be more powerful, as modes can work in combination or opposition. It does, however, provide more ways to make meaning and the possibility to strengthen the effect achieved by the scene.
A thorough breakdown of the scene in the book and in the film offers insight into the ways in which different media make meaning and—in this case—convey emotions through multimodal combinations. It is important to point out, however, that although a breakdown is a useful method to account for the resources used, it is also a somewhat artificial endeavour, as multimodal ensembles are always experienced as a whole rather than as a collection of separate entities. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the modal and sub-modal combinations in the bear beach scene in the book and Table 3 undertakes a similar breakdown for the corresponding scene in the film. Since Table 3 describes a sequence of actions and not a fixed image, it also highlights modal and sub-modal combinations. In that respect, a horizontal reading of Table 3 presents modes and sub-modes in isolation, while a vertical reading renders the combinations of modes and sub-modes at different key moments of the sequence.

The first obvious difference between the visual mode of the book and that of the film is that the former makes meaning through static images while the latter makes meaning through dynamic images. This affords the film medium a broader range of movements and actions within one particular scene, while actions, events, and emotions are encapsulated in one single image in the book. In it, sadness and melancholia are mostly achieved through the colour palette (dark and grim) and the bear’s posture (slouching, head bent), which Helen Oxenbury modelled after a friend of hers who had depression (Tims). The affordances of the film medium allow it to unfold—so to speak—that single image into a sequence of actions. Just like a single paper doll unfolds into a garland, the book bear slouching unfolds into the following sequence in the film: bear pauses; turns around; stands up on its back paws; looks towards the viewer; looks back up at the full moon; gets back on all-fours; walks towards the cave; walks inside the cave. This allows the bear to go through a series of postures (some facing the viewers) and facial

Table 2: Modal and sub-modal combinations in the bear beach scene (book)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal category</th>
<th>Medial variant</th>
<th>Sub-modes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Static image</td>
<td>Technique</td>
<td>Watercolour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Colour palette</td>
<td>Dark, shades of black, grey, brown, blue, white, off-white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left side of double spread: lighter shades (illuminated by the moon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left side of double spread: darker shades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Character design</td>
<td>Bear standing on back paws, slumping, head bent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Bear walking from left to right (towards cave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Foreground: bear (right side double spread) walking on beach towards cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle ground: rocks, cave, sea (waves crashing onto shore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Background: sea, horizon, full moon (left side double spread)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Angle/perspective</td>
<td>Bear from three-quarter back</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Modal and sub-modal combinations in the bear beach scene (film)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal categories</th>
<th>Medial variant</th>
<th>Sub-modes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual Dynamic</td>
<td>image</td>
<td>Sequence of actions</td>
<td>Walks along beach, Stops, Turns around, Stands up, Looks towards viewers, Looks at moon, Back on all fours, Resumes walking, Goes inside cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movements (head)</td>
<td>Head down, Head up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial expressions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frowning sadly, /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movements (posture)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On all-fours, On back paws, On all-fours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character design (accessory)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grandpa’s scarf around neck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera movements</td>
<td>Travelling</td>
<td>Fixed shot, Zooms in, Zooms out, Fixed shot, Travelling, Fixed shot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour palette</td>
<td>Dark, almost monochromatic (light source: moon)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aural Music</td>
<td>Orchestration/instrumental</td>
<td>Slow and melancholic instrumental, Stops, /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices</td>
<td>Rosie sings ‘Me and you’ (original soundtrack)</td>
<td>Stops, /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound effects</td>
<td>Wind blowing, Waves crashing onto shore</td>
<td>High-pitched whistle, Waves crashing onto shore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
expressions, as the camera zooms in on its face, then zooms out as it disappears into the cave. Facial expressions are a straightforward way to show a character’s emotions. By only seeing the bear from the back, the book allowed room for interpretation. As Michael Rosen states: ‘Children see the bear here and say, “He only wanted to play”, or “He’s sad because he’s on his own.” They provide their own scenario’ (Heritage). While the bear is anthropomorphized in both the book and the film (it walks on back paws instead of all-fours), giving it human facial expressions drives the point home that he is, indeed, sad. The bear also sighs and its shoulders drop at some point in the sequence, which are two human indicators of sadness.

One other major difference, this time in in the character’s design, is that the bear in the film wears a scarf. The scarf in the film is associated with both domesticity (the dog also wears one) and family (the scarf that the bear wears belonged to the grandfather). This heightens the stakes of the last scene, as the rejection of the bear is no longer the rejection of the other, but that of the familiar (which is reinforced by its encounter with Rosie in the cave). The scarf also highlights that the bear feels connected to the family—it takes home a keepsake, which intensifies the impression that it is rejected on the basis of a fear that was unjustified.

Table 4 zooms in on the multimodal combinations within one part of the sequence to show how modes and sub-modes combine to strengthen the effect of one scene.

This scene combines several sub-modes of the visual mode ‘dynamic image’ and of the aural modes ‘music’, ‘sound effects’, and ‘voices’ (or lack thereof), to translate the back endpapers’ illustration of the book into a film scene. The film, therefore, combines more modes and sub-modes, which not only strengthens the sadness conveyed by the scene, but also makes it more explicit. While the book suggests that the children run away from a bear that may not be as hostile as they think, the film explicitly presents the bear as friendly and non-threatening. The film also humanizes the bear through facial expressions, posture, and character design, making its emotions recognizable to the child viewer, who is likely to empathize with him more intensely than in the book.

### Table 4: Portion of the modal and sub-modal combinations in the bear beach scene (film)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Medial variants</th>
<th>Sub-modes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Dynamic image</td>
<td>Sequence of actions</td>
<td>Looks towards viewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movement (head)</td>
<td>Lowers head + shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facial expression</td>
<td>Frowning sadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movement (posture)</td>
<td>On back paws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Character design (accessory)</td>
<td>Grandpa’s scarf around neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Camera movement</td>
<td>Zooms in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Illustrations (colour palette)</td>
<td>Dark, almost monochromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(light source: moon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aural</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Orchestration/instrumental</td>
<td>Instrumental stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voices</td>
<td>Rosie’s singing stops</td>
<td>Bear sighs/grunts</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sound effects</td>
<td>High-pitched whistle</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wave crashing onto shore</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Change of genre

Generic conventions help shed light on why a given storyworld is expanded in the way(s) it is. In this case, why the filmmakers put a particular emphasis on family in its most joyous, but also its most sorrowful form. The film, however, clashes not only with the generic conventions of Christmas films, but also with those of prior iterations of the Bear Hunt storyworld, thus prompting negative reactions.

Before it was made into a picturebook set in the English countryside, the Bear Hunt story was an American folk song that circulated around scout camps in the 1970s. Since the text of the book stayed very close to the lyrics of the song, it has retained its musical and rhythmic qualities, which lays the emphasis on the performative dimension of the story. It also kept the collective protagonist (‘We are going on a bear hunt’), thus focusing on the collective and external experience of going on a bear hunt. The story can be read at two levels: as the outdoor adventure of a group of unsupervised children, or as a metaphor for overcoming hardship. In both cases, the master plot structure (home-away-home), is the central element of the story.

The crucial difference of genre between the book and the film, however, is that the film was and still is advertised and broadcasted as a Christmas film. Despite the substantial production of new Christmas-themed books aimed at children produced each year (Giddens 86), classics—through the force of nostalgia and the carefully curated expansion of commercially successful franchises—still hold an important place in the Christmas tradition (91). It is not surprising, therefore, that part of the ‘new’ production of Christmas films borrows from those classics, which is the case of the Bear Hunt film.

With its book-like aesthetic and freshly added cast of characters, it follows in the snowy footsteps of Raymond Brigg’s 1978 The Snowman,5 which reappears ‘in its 1982 television adaptation every year’ (89). The Bear Hunt film has been broadcast on Christmas Eve every year since 2016, thus effectively creating new with the old and re-establishing the bear hunt as a classic, both in book and film format. This is not, however, without consequence, as such ‘cold’ adaptations, i.e. adaptations that were made long after their source material came out (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 12), bring about the added issues of nostalgia and long-standing expectations from parents who have been familiar with the story since their childhood.

While the book does not contain any Christmas-related elements, the film was adapted in a way that does. It features Christmas lights, and maintains the seasonal shift brought about by the snowstorm, which only serves as one of the obstacles in the otherwise set in the summer book. The biggest change, however, is the addition of the family and the more prominent place of the home, which are core elements of such films (Arnold 3; Rosenwarne 228).

Genre, therefore, plays an essential role in explaining certain decisions made in the intermedial adaptation process. It also shapes the audience’s expectations towards the film’s content and context. Indeed, Christmas movies are expected to feature family (values) prominently, but are also meant to be watched as a family. Some reviews pointing at the sadder tone of the film explicitly tie it to its genre. One of them states:

The cartoon ends up being rather melancholy [sic] as it turns to the concept of loss and grief, the children’s grandpa having recently died. It also turns to loneliness as the bear is alone and
without a friend as he wanders back into his cave. Maybe small kids could end up being less than enchanted over Christmas due to a misjudged ending. (‘Customer reviews’)

Although Christmas films are not necessarily cheerful throughout, they are nonetheless generally characterized by a happy ending: as Lauren Rosewarne argues, ‘there is “an implicit agreement between moviegoers and moviemakers: scare us with kids in peril, and then comfort us with kids in safety,” and Christmas narratives achieve this with families near universally getting their happy ending’ (Schager in Rosewarne 205). This is precisely what makes them appealing. As Jeremy Arnold argues: ‘We … adore them for their buoyant endings. Knowing they end happily is not a spoiler but part of the appeal. It’s what we want and expect at Christmastime’ (Arnold 1). Circling back to Ryan’s point about genre ‘purposefully us[ing] limitations to channel expectations … and facilitat[ing] communication’ (Ryan 19), the audience’s resistance—or even rejection—of the film ending hints at a breach of the generic contract and ensuing expectations. Indeed, the Bear Hunt ending does not bring comfort to its audience. Instead of alleviating the feeling of grief by including the bear into the Christmas celebration, for instance, the film adds a sense of sadness and rejection as the bear walks back to its cave alone and Rosie laments both the loss of the bear and the loss of her grandfather.

This section demonstrated how genre not only sheds light on why certain choices are made when a product of children’s literature is intermedially adapted, but also the way in which it shapes the audience’s expectations. The change of medium prompted an expansion of the storyworld in a way that—in keeping with the generic conventions of the Christmas film—foregrounds family. However, the previous iterations of the Bear Hunt (focusing on a plot about hardship and obstacles) combined with the new theme of family, led to discussing its sadder side, namely loss and grief. In that medial and generic context, the multimodal arrangement of the bear beach scene embraces those themes and reinforces the overall sad and sorrowful tone of the story.

CONCLUSION

(In)fidelity rhetoric is commonly used by audience members and professional critics alike as a shared and intuitive language to highlight what elements of the work drew their attention, whether it be positively or negatively. This article is interested in (in)fidelity claims insofar as they function as the tip of the iceberg, a signpost of the complexity that lies beneath the surface of products of children’s literature. Indeed, they are a useful starting point to disentangle the intricate relations between generic conventions, medial affordances, multimodal combinations, and context of reception (agents and settings). This last aspect is particularly important in the context of children’s literature, as both its production and reception processes present specificities that ought to be taken into account. Those processes will also—more often than not—be coloured by nostalgia, as the expansion of franchises of children’s literature happens over decades, even centuries.

Although the Bear Hunt story is a limited case study, I argue that its study provides a method for a bottom-up analysis of products of children’s literature that can easily be applied to any intermedial adaptation, regardless of the media and genres involved. Where audience members point at the drastic change of tone in a film, they might point at the gameplay and graphics of a video game, the design of a plushy, or the
atmosphere of an amusement park ride. By discussing the interplay between genre and medium in relation to children’s literature, and by placing those in the broader frame of multimodality, I aim to provide the tools to analyse the deeper inner workings of meaning-making resources in a given medial and generic context. Ultimately, the goal is to gain a better understanding of what happens to children’s literature—and even literature in general—when it is adapted.

ENDNOTES

1 McCallum acknowledges that fairy tales—especially when adapted by Disney—are prominently discussed by adaptation studies scholar, but regrets how little other works of children literature are.

2 Stam nonetheless still refers to books as ‘single-track’ medium, arguing that novels are ‘uniquely verbal’ (Stam 56).

3 All the reviews cited in this article concern the treatment of the bear (unless explicitly stated otherwise) and are from people who have read and enjoyed the book.

4 The relationships between the visual and the verbal, for instance, have been theorized extensively. Nodelman (1988) speaks of a ‘combative relationship’ (Painter, Martin, and Unsworth 5); Schwarcz (1982) proposes ‘congruency’ and ‘deviation’ (5); Agosto (1999) speaks of ‘parallel storytelling’ and ‘interdependent storytelling’ (5–6); and Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) developed a five-way classification, ranging from “symmetrical” books […], “complementary” ones […], “expanding/enhancing” books […], “counterpointing” books […] and “sylleptic” versions […]’ (6).

5 The parallel between The Snowman and the Bear Hunt films does not end there. Joanna Harrison worked on both films, as well as on the Snowman sequel The Snowman and the Snowdog (2012). All three were produced by Channel 4.

6 I borrow the term ‘cold’ from translation studies, which discuss ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ translations (Vanderschelden 9).

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