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The New Fairy Tale: Subverting Genre and Characterization in Diana Wynne-Jones *Howl’s Moving Castle* and its Film Adaptation

TFM Dissertation

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Abstract: Fairy tales are a staple in our lives, independently of our time or place of birth. All cultures have their own record of tales and myths that have been passed down for centuries and continue to be passed on even now, usually from the oldest to the youngest in the family. Their stories have specific structures, motifs and tropes that are easily recognizable, and that many authors in the latest decades have been playing with to subvert society's expectations of these traditional stories. The novel by English author Diana Wynne-Jones *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) follows the fairy tale tradition, with many familiar elements to the narrative. However, most of these elements are twisted by the author to abandon the traditional path, making the novel a fresh take on the classic tale. This dissertation will analyse the development of the novel's main characters, Sophie and Howl, to understand the way in which Jones' uses her characters to subvert the fairy tale tradition. Likewise, it will analyse the relationship between the novel and its animated adaptation, of the same title and directed by Hayao Miyazaki in 2004. The analysis aims to support my thesis that Jones and Miyazaki successfully subvert the fairy tale tradition, especially in regard to Sophie and Howl's characterization. For this purpose, the analysis will focus on Sophie's gradual increase of agency in the novel and on Howl's different character interpretations, together with his complex relationship with war in the film.

Keywords: *Howl's Moving Castle*, Diana Wynne-Jones, Hayao Miyazaki, fairy tale, fantasy, subversion, adaptation

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0. Introducing the Fairy Tale: From the Traditional Story to *Howl's Moving Castle*

"In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes" (Jones 1). Thus opens *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986), a fantasy children's novel[1] by British writer Diana Wynne Jones (1934-2011). Since the opening scene we are introduced into a fantastical world in which destiny seems to be preordained, and in which matters are set in a way that feels familiar, and yet strange at the same time. The book does not need to start with the well-known phrase 'once upon a time' for the readers to recognize familiar patterns: the unavoidable tragic destiny of the eldest of three children, the appearance of magical items such as seven-league boots, and even the idea of setting out on a journey to seek one's fortune; all of these remind us inevitably of those stories that we were told when we were children. At the same time, the clear enumeration of these elements shows a very conscious effort on the author's part to call the reader's attention to them. This familiarity continues to be present throughout the rest of the novel. Scenes, characters and even the happy ending all seem to want to remind the reader of the fairy stories they were told during their childhood. This same feeling, of nostalgia and familiarity, is translated to the film adaptation directed by Hayao Miyazaki and released in 2004. While differing in some aspects of the plot from the book, the film still retains that enchanting feeling that comes directly from Jones's use of the fairy tale tradition. The aim of this dissertation is to see in which ways these stories, novel and film, break

[1] Diana Wynne Jones is mostly referred to as an author of children's books, but her novels can be also categorized as young adult, and in some cases adult proper. Young adult (YA) novels usually characterize themselves for presenting characters in their teens and featuring coming-of-age topics. *Howl's Moving Castle* can also be referred to as a YA novel, but due to its fairy-tale structure and topics it is usually categorized as children's literature. This is only a way of stating that it is a novel that can be read independently of the reader's age.

with the fairy-tale tradition and manage to subvert the audience's expectations on the story and characters, managing to take us back into our memories while reworking some of these same traditional ideas.

Jones' books have been studied before by authors such as Mendlesohn, in her study *Diana Wynne Jones: Children's Literature and The Fantastic Tradition* (2005), or in collective volumes by various authors such as *Diana Wynne Jones: An Exciting and Exciting Wisdom*, edited by Rosenberg et al. in 2002. Her original use of the fantastic, her constant mix and blurring of boundaries between other genres, and her use of humour make her work an interesting topic of research. Yet, her writing career is so extensive that it becomes difficult to find particular research focused on only one of her books. *Howl's Moving Castle,* in specific, has been dealt with in articles such as Rudd's "Building Castles in the Air: (De)Construction in *Howl's Moving Castle*" (2010), and by other articles that work with the novel in conjunction with Miyazaki's adaptation, such as Kimmich's "Animating the Fantastic: Hayao Miyazaki's Adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*" (2007). The influence of the fairy tale genre in this book is remarked by several of the authors already mentioned, but rarely discussed in detail. Likewise, the novel and its adaptation are often dealt with separately, with those that mention both using one as a point of comparison to the other. With this dissertation I intend to bring more insight into how the fairy tale tradition plays an important part in Jones' subversive tendencies, specifically in how she builds her characters. At the same time, I wish to analyse it side by side to Miyazaki's portrayal of her same characters, understanding how both versions deal with this tradition.

Therefore, while the analysis of this dissertation will deal with both the novel and the film, it will be separated in two areas, each centring around one of the main characters of the story: Sophie and Howl. The first section of the dissertation intends to analyse

primarily Jones' novel, referencing Miyazaki's film for comparison purposes at specific points in the narrative. It will focus on analysing Jones' subversion of the self-conscious aspect of the novel's narrative, which are closely linked to Sophie's newfound agency and her role in the novel, together with the roles of the other women appearing throughout the story. More specifically, I will focus on how Jones subverts the ideas of female lack of agency and the figure of the evil witch, both ubiquitous in the fairy tale narrative. The second part of the analysis will revolve around Howl's character and his representation in the film, together with Miyazaki's original views of the story. In this part I will analyse how Miyazaki reworks Howl's character into a more normative figure in the fairy tale narrative, while adding additional moral elements to a story that use the fairy tale narrative as a recourse for breaking with the audience's familiarity.

As Todorov states, "for there to be a transgression, the norm must be apparent" (8). Thus, to begin the task of ascertaining up to which point this novel and its adaptation take inspiration from the fairy tale tradition, there needs to be an initial definition of the main characteristics that make this genre unique, as well as the meaning of the concept of subversion, to which I turn next.

0.1 Defining the Fairy Tale

Narrowing down the concept of 'fairy tale' is a difficult enterprise in and of itself. A common dictionary definition for the term, retrieved from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reads: "something resembling a fairy story in being magical, idealized, or extremely happy" (628). This is, of course, a very general definition. It does not give any information about the type of stories fairy tales are, and it is also wide enough that it can embrace all types of representation, from written stories and literature to audiovisual media. To get a deeper insight on the meaning of the words 'fairy tale', as well as its defining

characteristics, it is necessary to research the concept from an academic point of view, but this also entails difficulties. The genre of the fairy tale has been defined extensively, and yet there does not seem to be a general consensus on what is considered to be a fairy tale. Tolkien, who understands “fairy stories” as those that touch upon the land of Faerie, defends that he will not try to define the term because “it cannot be done” (16). Tatar mentions in the “Introduction” to the *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales* that the term “fairy tale” is actually a disservice to the genre, that is “often dismissed as an infantile confection” (4). The many forms of categorizing fairy tales and the incredibly extensive history of the genre, present in our lives since ancient times, are decisive factors that make the definition of this term such a difficult enterprise. However, to have a particular concept to compare to the analysed works, these following passages will strive to find some common ground in which to create a definite concept to work with.

One of the first elements that must be considered to define such an extensive and historical genre as is the fairy tale is the evolution that it has undergone throughout the centuries. The type of fairy tale which readers are used to today was not the original manifestation of the genre, but it still carries some of its initial topics and characteristics. The fairy tale as we know it comes from the oral tradition, more specifically from the stories commonly known as ‘wonder tales’, a particular style of folk tale. These stories were spread throughout Europe, and its content varied greatly depending on the society and the country where the specific stories were originated. Zipes, however, highlights a particular constant in this old genre that has later been adopted by the more contemporary fairy tale, which is the concept of the “miraculous transformation” (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* xvii). This transformation entails any kind of metamorphosis for the characters, ranging from physical to social: from the prince that transforms into a beast, to the stories in which the humble peasant finishes the story as a prince instead.

This idea of wondrous change is also useful to differentiate the fairy tale from other fantastic oral genres, such as myths or legends. Apart from the wondrous change, Zipes adds that wonder tales also characterized themselves by their happy endings, which is another trait that has passed on to the literary fairy tale. Therefore, the wondrous tale could be considered to be the most direct predecessor of what would later on become the written fairy tale, since at this time all stories were still spread orally, as it happened with the other folk tales.

It is important to make a distinction between what are considered the original 'folk tales' and the later developed 'literary fairy tales' (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 6). Mainly, there are two main factors to take into account that differentiate the two groups: folk tales are usually "anonymous and undatable," whereas literary fairy tales are frequently "signed and dated" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* xix). The genre of the literary fairy tale did not appear as such until the 17th century, when a group of mostly female writers, such as Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, or Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force[2], took an interest in the wondrous stories told through generations and started to cultivate and publish their own stories or adaptations, popularizing them in the French courts. These female writers named the genre, using the label *contes de fees*. However, as Tatar mentions in her "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, it would not be until 1749 that this label would be used in English as 'fairy tale', casually adopted by Horace Walpole, and later on more purposefully by Sarah Fielding in one of her stories, published on the same year: "The Princess Hebe: a Fairy Tale" (4). These tales were already more reflective of the

[2] Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville (1650/1651-1705). She originated the term "contes de fées" when she gave this name to her collection of stories. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780) wrote one of the most well-known versions of the famous tale "Beauty and the Beast". Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (1654-1724) wrote the earliest form of the story that the Grimm Brothers would later on adapt as Rapunzel, titled originally "Persinete."

society and the authors themselves, portraying different tones that ranged from moralizing to ironic. Charles Perrault (1628-1703) wrote his own tales during this time, a clear example of models of proper conduct for their contemporaneous society represented in the heroes and heroines of his stories. Some of the stories started to be targeted to children, but still the main audience for most of the tales were adults; the tales were used to show proper ways of conducting oneself or critiques for the society at the time. Mostly, the change from the oral folktale to the literary art form brought with it a sanitizing[3] of the traditional tales. The genre was instrumentalized to adapt to the current literary discourse of the time, adding the morals and values the writers desired their readers to adopt (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 3).

This moralizing and educational intention that the literary fairy tale acquired around the 17th century affected greatly the narratives and characters, becoming a defining trait of the genre. Zipes describes how Perrault gave both their male and female characters different characteristics matching the expectations of his society at the time. A woman in Perrault is usually "beautiful, polite, graceful, industrious and properly groomed and knows how to control herself at all times," whereas men are not "particularly good looking, but they all have remarkable minds, courage and deft manners," and "they are all ambitious and work their way up the social ladder" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 40-41). Although Zipes takes these characteristics directly from Perrault's stories, they can be generally applied to many protagonists in fairy tales. The stories in the Brothers Grimm's[4] compilations are posterior, the first edition dating from 1812, but

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[3] Perrault wrote his stories as a guide for people to know how they should behave and what society's standards were; his tales include a moral rhyme at the end, to make sure that the intention was transmitted to his readers. The Grimm Brothers published several editions of their work, and posterior revisions were adapted to make their stories more appealing to children, eliminating the more bawdy or violent scenes.

[4] Wilhelm Grimm (1876-1859) and Jacob Grimm (1785-1863). Their first collection of stories was published in 1812, with a second volume in 1815, titled *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*

still the stereotypes of the fairy tale protagonist are very similar to those of Perrault's. Zipes describes the heroes in the Grimm tales as "dashing, adventurous and courageous," while the heroines are described as "beautiful, passive and industrious" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* xvi). Although these characteristics can be applied to stories both targeted to children and adults, Bettelheim refers to children when he defines these traits as stylized: they are simple attributes that allow characters to become relatable. Thus, these stylized, stereotyped characters turn into role models for the children reading the tales (Bettelheim 10). But this need not only apply to children, for Perrault had similar intentions for his audience, and he wrote mostly for adults. In consequence, the socially acceptable heroes in fairy tales are a staple in the genre. It is because of this transformation of the fairy tale into a moralizing, didactic narrative that fairy tales were more permanently introduced into children's lives, starting in the 17th century (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* xxiii). It would not be until the 18th, however, that the genre would really become popular and a real didactic instrument in children's education. The growing rates of high and middle-class children's literacy and the rise of printing technology that allowed easier access to books with pictures were only some of the reasons that popularized the fairy tale genre for a younger audience, and fairy tales became a way to educate children in society's morals and political ideals (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 109). The validity of fairy tales as educational material would be constantly questioned, however, opening a long debate that would last especially throughout the 19th century.

Up until now, I have briefly explained how the literary fairy tale is a genre that evolves constantly, and is therefore very difficult to limit or define. Bacchilega states that: "The

(*Children's and Household Tales*). These tales would be revised and adapted to be more suitable for younger readers at least seven times in later years.

concept of intertextuality is key to approaching fairy tales in a folklore and literature framework" (79). Tales need to be read in the context of their society, and their tellers, and in relation with other genres and media. While fairy tales are mostly composed of recurrent tropes, their meaning can and will be read differently depending on the social and political, and even the literary context. However, the recurrent topics gave way to formalists such as Propp or structuralists like Lévi-Strauss, that argued that there was a limited number of both stories and plots (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 61). Thus the formal classifications of the genre, such as the system of European tale types designed by Aarne in 1910, were later on revised and expanded by Thompson in 1928 and 1961 (Uther 7), and newly revised by Uther in 2004. Von Franz, for her part, considers fairy tales as the basic skeleton of other, more elaborate stories like myths or legends, comprised of a series of motifs and archetypes (Von Franz 25). So it could be said that fairy tales are generally considered in relation to other genres that help to shape and elaborate on their base stories[5]. This does not mean, however, that there is not a canon of stories that mostly create the general definition of what a person understands by a fairy tale. These stories are mostly the ones from authors such as the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault, who wrote folklore and oral tales into paper, and Andersen[6], who used the established literary tradition to make his own creative fairy-tales. Some examples of canonical tales are "Little Red Riding Hood", "Cinderella", or "The Ugly Duckling". These more well-known tales are usually the ones used as a reference when referring to the fairy tale tradition, setting a particular set of topics and motifs that are linked to the reader's minds

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[5] This is not to mean that fairy and folk tales are not worthy of study by themselves, however. There are multiple fields of studies that analyze the extensive corpus of tales, such as Propp or Lévi Strauss, mentioned above, or comparative studies of the different variations of the tales depending on their national characteristics.

[6] Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875). His most well-known tales include "The Little Mermaid", "The Snow Queen", "The Emperor's New Suit", "The Ugly Duckling" or "The Princess and the Pea". His first collection of tales was published in 1835 in Danish as *Eventyr, fortalte for børn* (Fairy Tales Told for Children).

to the idea of what a fairy tale entails. Despite the name, fairy tales are rarely about fairies themselves, but as the general definition stated, they do usually include magic and fantastical elements. Taking into account that their most direct predecessor was the wondrous tale, it can be safely stated that fairy tales mostly deal with magic and miracles. Transformation in all its forms is also a constant, usually related to the magic or miracles themselves. Thus, the stylization of characters, the topic of transformation and the dealing with magic could be considered constants in the fairy tale. However, there are still many features that make the fairy tale unique, and that should be reviewed as well. There are several scholars that have considered their own set of characteristics, that will be useful to consider for this dissertation.

In 1965, Lüthi made a general distinction of genres between the fairy tale, the realistic story, the saint's legend and the local legend (Lüthi 36), as a way of making a more accurate distinction than the one that generally separates the fairy tale and other myths and legends. Von Franz also points out that there are even more types of genres similar or familiar with the fairy tale, described by other schools of the genre, that separate the types into myth, legend, amusing story, animal story, trickster story, and the classical fairy tale (Von Franz 9). However, the reason why Lüthi in particular is useful in this study is because he sets a wide range of characteristics, while other scholars are more reticent to set too many particularities due to the variable and unpredictable nature of the genre. He separates between the style in which characters and events are written, the characteristics that usually make the fairy worlds unique, and the topics and motifs that usually dominate the genre. As such, he describes fairy tales as having a concise and precise language, free of unnecessary descriptions. Fairy tales rely mainly on facts and actions; they will usually tell that the princess lived in a tower, but will not usually give details about either, allowing the imagination of the reader to fill in any details. The

worlds are also usually harmonious and timeless; unlike local legends, that are usually rooted at a certain point in the past, fairy tales have a sense of timelessness, their stories going on in a vague moment that could have been from a thousand years back to the present time to the morning of the previous day. Characters, as has already been mentioned, are usually archetypal, representing a particular role or trait: the valiant hero, the helpless princess, the youngest brother, the clever cat. There are a set of categories in which people and objects fall into, so the magical objects will always help the hero accomplish their mission, and the evil witch will always be evil. Contrasts are also important, with good and evil in distinctly separate categories. Other dichotomies are also common, such as beautiful and ugly, rich and poor, etc. As such, it is customary to find stories in fairy tales in which the main character is a youngest son, or in which the third and youngest princess is the one considered the most beautiful, or in which the poorest shepherd becomes a prince by the end. Repetition is also important in fairy tales, with numbers like three, seven, twelve or a hundred being constants in the stories, and certain familiar tropes repeating themselves in many stories, such as the fixed roles of the characters mentioned above. Lüthi, however, mentions that these repetitions are ornamentations that always leave space for variations, and these variations are what gives birth to new variants of the stories.

While a bit vague, all of these characteristics considered by Lüthi can be considered to be part of the stories that form the fairy tale canon, being elements that most of them have in common. This does not mean that a story that is lacking any of these cannot be considered a fairy tale. As stated before, the genre of the fairy tale is really open and changes constantly throughout the times, so these characteristics should be used as a guide. Other authors, such as Marina Warner, also define the fairy tale through a series of unique characteristics. Warner gives a shorter list of tropes in her book *Once Upon a*

Time, many of which overlap with those of Lüthi's, such as the way in which fairy tales are constructed by language and built over recurrent motifs and images that strike recognition on the reader. She remarks, however, that fairy tales are mainly one dimensional: no one questions what happens in fairy tales, because they are fairy tales, and anything can happen. This one dimensionality, together with the usual happy ending that Warner also expressly points out, are traits that remain from back when the fairy tale was still the oral wonder tale, that continue to be a part of the core of what we consider a fairy tale. Warner also adds the idea that fairy tales are supposed to be both familiar (sharing motifs, plots, characters, etc., that are constantly recombined) and short. This last characteristic, however, can be debated; especially when it comes to the latest iterations of fairy tales appearing towards the 20th century, in which as Zipes expresses in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, there were authors that started to explore the concept of the fairy tale targeted to adults in longer novellas and even novels. While authors usually relied on the "formulaic form" of the fairy tale, these longer forms allowed for clever twists on the familiar genre (*The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* xxix).

0.2. The Subversive Fairy Tale

The concepts revised until now and the brief overview of the fairy tale as a genre hopefully form a clearer picture of what can be considered a fairy tale on today's canon, mainly formed by the stories of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, Charles Perrault and Andersen. Fairy tales are stories that are set in a timeless world, without a specific time (hence the initial famous phrase of 'Once upon a time', that is both so vague and so common in the genre). Characters are stylized: they are usually representative of a particular trait or trope, and they fall into familiar categories that dictate both their personalities and their roles in the stories (the evil witch, the beautiful princess, etc.).

There are not many descriptions and the genre mostly relies on actions, with certain motifs and numbers appearing continuously in the stories (three sisters, twelve peas, etc.). Furthermore, the stories characterize themselves mainly for the appearance and use of magical elements, both characters and objects. Creatures come in all forms and sizes, from witches to trolls to dwarfs; despite the name of the genre, the protagonists of the stories do not necessarily need to be fairies. Magical objects such as invisibility cloaks or seven league boots come directly from folklore, and it is not strange for animals to communicate with the characters and have a personality of their own (such as the Puss in Boots). These magical elements usually allow the heroes to prevail over evil, and their appearance is never questioned by anyone. The idea of transformation is also a constant, be it physical or social. In addition, fairy tales commonly have happy endings, since they are supposed to show hope and represent the fulfilment of society's wishes. Most of the fairy tales are considered to be short stories, although some of the original folk stories were longer. However, it is not uncommon to find fairy tales in longer format ever since the 20th century, when more authors started to experiment with the structure of the genre.

With the concept of fairy tale established, it is also important to look at what is considered a subversion of this genre. Again, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb 'subvert' as "undermine the power and authority of an established system or institution" (1777). In this case, the concept of subversion seems quite clear. For a story to be considered a subversion of a fairy tale it would need to take some characteristic elements of the traditional tales and tweak them in a way that will earn the author different results than the one in the original tales, undermining the authority of the already established canon. However, Tatar establishes that it is through subversion that tradition is preserved: "Tradition is, rather, preserved by constantly re-creating it" (3). Certainly,

its subversive tendencies are one of the reasons fairy tales remain so relevant to this day, despite the concept not being especially recent for the genre.

Zipes argues that subversion was already taking place towards the end of the 19th century, although it is towards the beginnings of the 20th that the 'canon' of the literary fairy tales is established. This canon, mentioned before and formed mainly by the classical stories of Grimm, Andersen and Perrault, is what mainly set the reference points for what we understand today as a fairy tale. The greatest resurgence of interest in the fairy tale genre and specifically in the experimentation to test its limits came in the second half of the 20th century, in which the fantastic genre in general had a new rise in popularity (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* xxx). The studies on fairy tale theory and folklore also had a significant rise around this time, with Lüthi publishing his book on the formality of fairy tales in 1965, Bruno Bettelheim writing *The Uses of Enchantment* in 1976, and Jack Zipes starting to publish the first of his multiple collections of essays around 1979. Marie-Louise von Franz's book *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* was also translated into English in 1970. Other writers such as Maria Tatar or Marina Warner wrote about the issue towards the latest years of the century, further reinforcing this ongoing discourse.

Thus, the reinventing of the fairy tale narrative became more popular around the latest half of the 20th century. A clear and well-known example is the collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), by Angela Carter, in which the author writes her own set of fairy tales based on the traditional stories by Perrault. Taking the familiar characters and scenarios from the French writer, she rewrites and reinvents these stories to give more protagonism and agency to the women protagonists, transforming the traditionally patriarchal discourse of the stories into a feminist one. To illustrate, in her story "The Werewolf" Carter subverts the traditionally story "Red Riding Hood" by making the

grandmother a werewolf. Little Red Riding Hood cuts the paw of a wolf when she is attacked in her grandmother's house, only to discover that the paw is in truth a hand, that she recognizes to be her grandmother's. Following Carter's example, there have been other compilations of stories that rewrite and subvert traditional tales. One of them is the anthology published by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling in 1993, grouping works of several contemporary fantasy authors such as Neil Gaiman or Tanith Lee, titled *Blood Red, Snow White*. An example from this anthology is the story "Troll Bridge", by Gaiman, a retelling of the tale "Three Billy Goats Gruff". In the original tale, a troll lurks under a bridge, waiting to eat whoever passes above it. The first two goats all ask him to wait for the last and bigger one, so it will not eat them, but the third is so big that it manages to kill the troll instead. In Gaiman's retelling a selfish boy goes to the bridge three times over the course of his life, asking the troll for an extension, until he finally allows the troll to take his life. The troll takes the now man's body and leaves, and the boy becomes the one stranded under the bridge, refusing to come out.

Other subversive and even satiric versions of the tales, such as *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* by author James Finn Garner (1994), appeared later. In this case, fairy tales are written in a way that is considered to be politically correct language, tackling all the current issues happening around the world and integrating them into the already well-known patterns of familiar stories. As an example, he rewrites the story of Hansel and Gretel by making the witch a social activist that the children decide to join when they are abandoned in the forest, only for her to be bribed by a large company later on. The subversive re-writing of fairy tales continues to be popular especially in the markets dedicated to children and young adults, in which series of novels such as *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer (2012-2015) continue to be successful. In this particular series, the traditionally medieval and magic setting of the fairy tale is challenged by

instead retelling the stories from a more futuristic point of view; the classic character Cinderella becomes a cyborg, and Rapunzel is stranded in a spatial station instead of a tower. These are just a few examples that show just how popular this topic is, especially in our contemporary society.

Howl's Moving Castle, I argue, belongs to this subversive fairy tale tradition. Published in 1986, it was written at the time in which the fairy tale was in its new renaissance, with new takes on this genre and the renewed interest of scholars in the topic. The novel tells the story of Sophie, a young girl eldest of three sisters that has resigned herself to a poor life due to being the eldest. However, one day she is turned into a ninety-year-old woman by the evil Witch of the Waste, and she is forced to flee her home and find refuge in the supposedly evil Howl's magic castle. In there she will discover that she is not as doomed as she had always thought herself to be, and will relearn how to be young despite her now old body. The film follows the same main storyline, only deviating towards the end, in which a war between two neighbouring nations takes centre stage in the film while it only remains as a possibility in the novel.

Jones' book shows many subversive tendencies. The underlying feminist message follows the ideas of Carter's revolutionary tales, while the longer length of the story allows for Jones to experiment with the traditional role of the hero and satirize the idea of endings fairy tales are so fond of. Howl is a perfect example of the subversive role of the fairy tale hero: he is presented as the complete opposite of what the traditional hero is supposed to be. Instead of industrious and brave, he declares himself a coward and is constantly trying to make Sophie do the tasks he is either too lazy or too scared to do himself. For instance, Howl convinces Sophie to pretend to be his mother and go in his place to see the king for whom he works, because he wanted to avoid doing a job that the king had demanded of him. The film makes his character more akin to the fairy-tale

tradition instead, by making him more noble and helping him find his bravery towards the end of the story. The ending of the novel also presents a unique view of the traditional happy ending that characterizes fairy-tale love stories such as “Snow White” or “Cinderella”. Instead of the impeccable couple that is promised to live “happily ever after”, the protagonist states clearly that she knows how “living happily ever after with Howl would be a great deal more eventful than any story made it sound” (Jones 427). This ending adds the element of doubt and complication to a traditionally simple ending, that is instead maintained as this traditionally unchallenged version in the film. Sophie admits that her and Howl have difficulties in their relationship: they argue constantly, and they do not see eye to eye in many issues. Still, she is determined to try and have her happy ending, even if she knows it will not be as perfect as the traditional happy ending usually is.

Nonetheless, the elements already discussed are not the only ones that can be analysed. Characteristics such as the stylization of characters are also challenged; not only with Howl, but also with many secondary characters. For example, the stereotypical figure of the evil stepmother also shows signs of subversion. In the novel, Sophie’s parents died, and the one taking care of her is her stepmother, Fanny. She is a young, beautiful woman, and her only real daughter is Martha, the youngest of the three sisters. Fanny is portrayed as selfish and vain, especially at the beginning of the novel, when she forces Sophie to work in the family business while she goes out shopping. However, she is ultimately shown as caring and kind, stating her worry for Sophie and her desperation to bring her back home. Similarly, her youngest sisters, one of which is a stepsister, love and worry for Sophie instead of resenting her. The sisters are also a perfect example of how the novel plays with the idea of pre-determined destinies and breaks with the fate that characters in fairy tales are usually chained with. The three sisters have specific roles

attached to themselves just for being born in that particular order: Sophie will never be successful, since she is the older; the middle sister, Lettie was also doomed to get a mainly mediocre life, so Fanny decides to send her to a place where she could met a man and create a family; and the youngest sister, Martha, will be the most successful, and is therefore sent away to become a mage apprentice and make important social connections. Their mother sets their lives with these destinies in mind; but Sophie discovers that her life is not doomed when she is forced to run away and meets Howl, learning about her talent for magic and finding happiness; and Martha and Lettie challenge their destinies by exchanging places, creating their own paths. Thus, there are many ways in which traditional ideas are challenged in the book, to which the film proves an interesting point of contrast.

Miyazaki's film was released eighteen years later from the book's first publishing, in 2004. The film is interesting especially because of the ways it differs from the book, giving the story a new life and, more significantly, a new meaning. The decisions taken when it comes to the film are significant to see which elements were retained and which were considered unnecessary, and whether these changes affect the perception of this story as a subversive fairy tale. Already mentioned above were some differences on the ending and Howl's characterization, but those are not the only changes introduced. In general terms, the development of the characters and the more feminist undertones that characterize the book take a step back to give more protagonism to the moral message of the story, related to the losses and the grief created through times of war. Although it loses some representation and familiar patterns, it brings the fairy tale tradition by different means, as for example the more stylized characters and the more traditionally happy ending it provides.

1. *Howl's Moving Castle*: The Novel and the Fairy Tale

1.1. Diana Wynne Jones and the Fairy Tale: A Brief Introduction

Diana Wynne Jones (1934-2011) was a very prolific author. She wrote more than forty novels during her lifetime, most of them considered children's or Young Adult's literature. Her stories constantly mixed humour and fantasy, in some cases even science fiction (as in *Hexwood*, 1993); this made them fast-paced and entertaining for the younger audiences, while still retaining a maturity that also made them enjoyable to older readers. It is thanks to her background as a heterogeneous writer that a novel such as the one dealt with in this dissertation, *Howl's Moving Castle,* is such an effectively subversive narrative. Jones manages to easily convey the feelings of familiarity of the fairy tale and its rigid structure, while still making the story original and ultimately subverting many of the fairy tale's most characteristic tropes.

It could even be argued that Jones' particular writing style, especially in *Howl's Moving Castle*, holds certain similarities to that of the traditional tales, even if this similarity was not initially planned. As Jones stated in an interview in 1993, she did not consciously choose the references her books draw from; as she expresses, her process was much more intuitive: "you get this kind of nucleus, it immediately attracts all the right things" (in Ridge 1), she declared, referring to the way in which she took an original idea and then developed it with the genre traits that better suited it, as is the case with the fairy-tale tradition in this particular novel. Mendlesohn claims that Jones mainly writes in a subgenre of fantasy she herself calls "liminal fantasy," characterized for blurring the boundaries between the real and the fantastical (Mendlesohn 136). This is a similar concept to that of Todorov's definition of fantasy, wherein fantasy lies in the hesitation between the marvellous and the uncanny, a concept I will expand more upon on the second part of this dissertation. The fantastic is treated in this type of story as something

ordinary, even mundane; just like no one questions how a humble miller managed to acquire a talking tomcat that he would later pass on to his son in “The Puss-in-Boots”, no one questions how Howl jumps constantly from his native, real-life Wales and back to Ingary through the magical, four-way door in his moving castle. This is an element that Jones shares with, or has inherited from, the traditional fairy tales: the trait known as one-dimensionality, as Warner names it (*Once Upon a Time* xxii). This characteristic implies that the fantastic and miraculous events happening throughout the stories are never questioned even though they happen in a seemingly extraordinary world. Things are perfectly normal for Sophie herself when she discovers that she is able to perform magic halfway through the novel, and she accepts the novelty as if it were an event that was always meant to be: “She had said Sophie was a witch. Oddly enough, Sophie accepted this without any trouble at all” (Jones 238). Jones even brings attention to Sophie’s passive attitude towards the surprising revelation by using the words “oddly enough,” directly calling out the reader that might wonder how such a big development is treated so naturally. It is an interesting resource that works really well in the novel, actively contributing to the familiarity that places this story well within the fairy tale tradition. Thus, Jones’ style complements the fairy-tale genre in a very effective way, further reinforcing its conventionalities and making the reader aware of the strangeness of certain tropes that are not usually questioned in the traditional stories.

However, Jones does not simply play with or even ignore the conventions of the fairy-tale genre; as Kimmich argues, “she destabilizes them, a strategy that is arguably more complex and interesting” (131). Jones goes beyond the simple subversion of the narrative to present a newer version of a centuries old genre as is the fairy tale, making the reader relax in a false sense of security by depicting a familiar structure, only to start destabilizing it as the story advances. A clear example is how female characters, while

still operating in a men-ruled world, gain agency and take full control of their own destinies; a feature that was not so common in traditional fairy tales, where women were not always given this agency. In Jones' novel, the traditionally evil character can be read as a victim of an oppressing society, and men become little more than pawns in a battle for agency between two assertive women. Even the perfect happy ending is problematized, with the main characters themselves admitting that their relationship is not going to be an easy one to manage: "Sophie knew living happily ever after with Howl would be a great deal more eventful than any story made it sound, though she was determined to try" (Jones 427). Jones does not completely rule out the tradition behind the fairy tale stories; rather, she presents an alternative reading that subverts many of its tropes and still manages to conserve these qualities that keep the story familiar for those that read it.

1.2. In Which Many Strong Women Decide to Change their Fates

Even though the fairy tale tradition is very difficult to define, as I have noted in the Introduction, there is no doubt that in reading the novel *Howl's Moving Castle* there is a feeling of familiarity in its tropes and structure. This is not only because of the tropes and archetypes that the novel adopts from this traditional genre, but also because of the singular elements that conform it and the self-referential function that some characters perform. As Mendlesohn argues, "Jones's work is simultaneously metafictive and an argument for the metafictive" (167), and Jones likes to constantly play with this idea throughout her novel. Sophie repeatedly mocks the conventions of the fairy tale narrative, a trait that distinguishes her from the other characters. This does not mean she is the only self-aware character; as Kimmich argues, most characters seem aware up to a certain degree of their fates: "not only does the narrative allude to the conventionality of its

folkloristic, fairy-tale ontology, but the characters also seem aware of these conventions" (129-130). However, Sophie is the one that constantly highlights most of these conventions, playing with both the story and the readers' expectations by relaying to them what should be happening and later on changing the course of the story for it to cater to her own needs. For example, as Sophie leaves her town behind and starts making her way up the hills, she has several encounters. The first one is with a scarecrow, and the second one is with a dog. As she continues walking, she says to herself: "There's two encounters, (…) and not a scrap of magical gratitude from either. (…) But I'm surely due to have a third encounter, magical or not. In fact, I insist on one" (41). Sophie is playing here with the knowledge that three is a special number in fairy tales, as Lüthi mentions in his study (53): three little piglets in "The Three Little Pigs;" three goats that cross the bridge in "Three Billy Goats Gruff;" three brothers that are turned into ravens in "The Three Ravens." Her own fate is supposedly cursed by being the eldest child of three, to which she even adds that "she was not even the child of a poor woodcutter[7], which might have given her some chance of success" (1). Furthermore, as Sophie advances, she does have a third encounter; this time, with the moving castle itself. There is, therefore, a conscious effort by Sophie to reference the fairy tale tradition in the novel, many times mocking its conventional nature. In this way, Jones calls attention to these familiar tropes and at the same time she establishes Sophie as a self-referential character, a trait that will become more relevant as the story advances.

[7] Jones seems to be referencing here the idea of how main characters in fairy tales are usually poor, with the story narrating how they manage to grow their fortune despite their humble upbringing, as is the case in tales such as "The Puss in Boots." This tale is the story of the son of a humble miller, that is left with nothing but a talking cat as his dad passes away. While he laments his fate at first, the cat ultimately makes him rich and helps him marry the princess. In a similar, ironic way, Sophie laments her fate as the daughter of a well-off hat merchant, that makes her unable to share the success of the poor merchant made rich in the traditional narratives.

Sophie is, in fact, one of the most fully developed characters by the time the novel comes to an end, and despite her difficult beginning, she also becomes one of the more active characters in the novel. She starts the story as the perfect example of a repressed, powerless character. It can even be argued that she is supposed to be a representation of the traditional fairy tale protagonist, who, as Jorgensen writes, is often considered by feminist scholars "to be too passive, pretty, and domestic" (37). Sophie has resigned herself to her fate: continuing her late father's legacy at the family's hat shop. She works tirelessly while her stepmother lets her do all the heavy work: Sophie takes care of her two younger sisters, makes all the hats, and she tries to be nice to the customers, even though her naturally shy temper makes this difficult for her. Just like a typical heroine in a fairy tale, Sophie knows exactly what her place is and how she is supposed to act. She is quiet and discreet, and does not hold any ambitions for herself. As Jorgensen points out, "contentedly accepting one's fate" (38) is one of the key characteristics of feminine passivity in fairy tales, and Sophie embodies the concept perfectly. Furthermore, her forced contentment is made even more evident when it becomes obvious Sophie is struggling to maintain this passive, kind image. Sophie's temper constantly flares up, showing that she is actually a very temperamental, straightforward woman. When a customer comes to her complaining about one of their hats, Sophie answers: "If you're fool enough to wear that bonnet with a face like that, you wouldn't have the wit to spot the King himself if he came begging—if he hadn't turned to stone first just at the sight of you" (32). This already sets her apart from most of her fairy tale counterparts, and Jones will continue to subvert not only Sophie's image, but also the image of women and women's agency, as the novel progresses. The film, however, accentuates this initial side of her even further. While both the novel and the film have the same starting point, Sophie is a much more static presence in the movie: while her exterior appearance is constantly

changing from young to old following how she feels, she mostly remains a flat character. As Osmond mentions, “Sophie's appearance alters yet her identity remains fixed” (28). Her temper and strong attitude appear very sparingly in the film, if at all, and her constant arguments with Howl are almost inexistent. Miyazaki’s reading of Sophie’s character resembles much more closely the traditional image of the female heroine, highlighting her role as Howl’s saviour, and developing their relationship as a way for Howl to attain redemption. Therefore, to analyse her character I will be mostly referring to her novel iteration, where her growth is much superior.

Sophie’s growth, nevertheless, is very much limited by one main idea that stops all her capacity for progress: she is destined to be a failure due to having been born the eldest of three sisters, as fate dictates: “It is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes” (1). This prevalent idea of her uselessness and premature failure makes Sophie feel powerless, especially at the beginning of the novel. Her sister Martha remarks on it when Sophie goes to visit her at the pastry shop where she is employed: “You must do something about yourself, Sophie. (…) Lettie kept saying she didn’t know what would happen to you when we weren’t around to give you some self-respect. She was right to be worried” (29). The idea that she is bound to be a failure in life is so ingrained in her that every time Sophie fails at a task she immediately blames it on her supposed back luck due to being the eldest: “And she was within an ace of leaving the house and settling out to seek her fortune, until she remembered she was the eldest and there was no point” (31). Sophie is, then, limited by the idea of fate, or more specifically by the knowledge that her actions are limited by a superior authority; as Kaplan mentions, “Sophie believes that the world has an all-powerful author who decides what is and what is not permissible (…). Of course, there *is* an all-powerful author: Jones”

(63). This idea of a pre-ordained fate and limited actions is, nevertheless, constantly problematized by Sophie herself; despite her perceived limitations, she always pushes forward to try and make the best of all the situations she is presented with. When she realizes the Witch of the Waste has put her under a spell, she leaves her house and family behind and sets off to find someone that can help her, not wanting to make them worry on her behalf. Transformed outwardly into an old woman, she manages to find Howl's moving castle and make a pact with Calcifer, who seeks his own liberation, and starts a new life that allows her to be herself and leave her old manners behind. Howl, who simply accepts her presence in his home, constantly remarks how much Sophie influences the castle and the objects around them, foreshadowing her revelation as a powerful witch in the latter sections of the book, and making the reader suspect even more about her supposedly useless nature:

> "Oh, dear!" said Michael. "Howl, it was my fault!—"
> "Your fault? Garbage!" said Howl. "I can detect Sophie's hand a mile off. And there are several miles of this suit."
>
> (Jones 295)

As Kaplan continues to argue, "Sophie gains power when she learns to ignore what she believes that all-powerful author wants her to do" (63). The breaking point comes towards the end of the book, when her idea of her pre-ordained fate crumbles and she realizes she can overcome those limits she had always lived with. Howl is the one that gives voice to the fact that her mistakes are not caused by a mysterious force of nature, but by her own careless attitude:

> "I'm the eldest!' Sophie shrieked. "I'm a failure!"
> "Garbage!" Howl shouted. "You just never stop to think!"
>
> (Jones 416)

His words make both her and the reader conscious that her own actions are the ones affecting her life, and not her recurrent idea of her cursed fate as the eldest of three, thus breaking the idea of fate being a convention characters cannot escape. Thus, not only is

Sophie's meta-fictive attitude reflected in her growth towards an independent character, limited by the original author's hand; her attitude also demonstrates that those limits she considered to be binding could also be overcome once she realized she was strong and confident enough to do so.

Sophie's physical transformation into a ninety-year old woman is one of the major plot points in the novel. Believing that Sophie is her sister Lettie, and angry at her for getting Howl's attentions, the Witch of the Waste casts her this aging curse. It is at the beginning one of the reasons that seem to indicate that Sophie is indeed cursed with bad luck for being born the eldest, but later on this apparent bad luck becomes one of the defining factors that allows Sophie to leave behind her more passive attitude and start taking control of her own destiny. With Sophie's acute sense of failure and helplessness, it would have made sense that a spell such as this one would make her feel even worse and more self-conscious. Instead, the end result is the opposite. Sophie's unwillingness to make her family suffer for her condition is what finally forces her to leave and "seek out her fortune". She is forced to leave behind all that she knew to look for a new place to stay while she thinks how to recover, or remake, her own life. No longer a young girl, Sophie finds herself free of all the expectations that had been falling upon her because of her status in society. Whereas her youth and femininity made her susceptible to Wizard's Howl alleged evil spells before, now that she is no longer young Sophie finds herself brave enough to invade his home: "'Well, why not?' She said to her stick. 'Wizard Howl is not likely to want my soul for his collection. He only takes young girls'" (45). Liberated from all social constraints, Sophie becomes able to show her true stubborn, temperamental, "nosy" (97) self, slowly growing out of her frustration and her resignment to a dull life at the hat shop. In other words, Sophie goes beyond the role of a model of behaviour that women in fairy tales were often subjected too. Traits like kindness,

gentleness and submission were often idealized in the tales to be used as models for the young girls that read them, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sophie leaves these traits that she tried to endorse at the beginning of the novel behind to become her own character, someone that has overcome great difficulties in her life and yet come out victorious from the ordeal. She becomes another type of role model, one more in accordance with our current society.

However, Sophie's development goes beyond the subversion of the familiar traits of the fairy tale heroine. Her constant self-referential attitude takes on a new meaning when, later on in the novel, it is revealed that she is able to infuse objects with life just by talking to them. The question becomes then up to which point Sophie is not only influencing the people and objects around her, but the narrative of the story itself. As mentioned before, unlike the typical fairy-tale heroine, Sophie is the one that carries the weight of the action in the novel, and Sophie's capacity to talk life into items is what ultimately makes her such an influential character in the narrative. In fact, it is precisely in the two encounters described before, with the scarecrow and the dog, that Sophie manages to put another fairy-tale trope into motion, albeit unknowingly. Both the scarecrow and the dog have been victims of a metamorphosis caused by the Witch of the Waste. As Warner claims, metamorphosis is a common plot in fairy tales, and it differs from the metamorphosis in classical myths because victims are usually restored to their original forms, creating a moment of revelation for the characters in the story: "the restoration leads to recognition: when the beast guise falls away, the true prince appears" (*Once Upon a Time* 37). The dog is revealed to be a man by the middle of the book, a human composed of several bits of men that the Witch of the Waste cut into pieces and pasted together; later on he recovers his original form as Wizard Suliman. The scarecrow is revealed to be Prince Justin, the missing Prince of Ingary Howl is supposedly seeking,

whose body has been stolen by the Witch of the Waste. Sophie liberates the dog from the bush he had been trapped in at the beginning of the novel, and she talks life into the scarecrow, allowing him to move and communicate with other people. These apparently innocuous actions lead directly into the final resolution of the novel, since both characters give both Sophie and Howl the information they needed to finally find the Witch of the Waste, and become yet another way in which Sophie unwillingly influences the story.

In addition, Sophie does not only act as a passive receptor of agency that other characters bestow upon her. Through her actions, she starts personally guiding her own story, further making it her own and situating herself at the centre. In other words, it could be argued that Sophie stops being just a character in the story to partly become an author herself, albeit often unwillingly. Apart from the examples mentioned before, Sophie's actions greatly and constantly affect the course of the novel, and especially the curse that the Witch of the Waste cast over Howl, making it come true. Although Sophie was never a part of the main conflict between Howl and the Witch of the Waste, that arguably sets in motion the plot of the novel, her presence is so strong that she becomes the main agent carrying the story, creating the situations that make the plot advance. Furthermore, her unique skill for magic situates her in a very similar position to that of an author. Much as Jones herself, she creates life by means of her words. It is while she speaks to inanimate objects that she grants them life or other magical properties, such as when she inadvertently weaves a love spell into Howl's clothes, or when she makes the scarecrow run ten times faster: "Go away fast. Twice as fast, three times as fast, ten times as fast. *Go away*!" (366, original italics). Furthermore, her unique way of creating magic is what ultimately allows her to save both Calcifer and Howl at the end of the novel, by infusing life in Howl's heart, that through the novel is in Calcifer's possession:

> "Calcifer," Sophie said, "I shall have to break your contract. Will it kill you?"

> "It would if anyone else broke it," Calcifer said hoarsely. "That's why I asked you to do it. I could tell you could talk life into things. Look at what you did for the scarecrow and the skull."
>
> (Jones 421-422)

Not only that, but her previously described self-referential attitude also plays an important role in her establishment as a central writer of the narrative. When writing about language in Jones' work, Kaplan states: "Any character who tells stories has the potential to make that story come true, and any character who listens to stories has the potential to be shaped by the stories he or she hears" (Kaplan 53). Sophie's ability to recognize the conventions of the narrative around her, as well as her recognition of a superior entity limiting her movements, makes her able to identify and even modify the story narrative weaving around her. Sophie becomes, then, a parallel authorial presence to that of Jones; both in her awareness of the metafictional levels of the story and its parallels to the fairy tale, and in her ability to conduct the story through her own means.

Thus, Sophie shows a constant growth from a passive, resigned heroine to a woman that is full of agency and purpose, regaining all her will and strength with a spell that was supposedly meant to set her back. In this way, Sophie grows out of her fairy-tale constraints and becomes a full-fledged rounded character, able to guide the story forward in the lack of what is considered a strong, male lead in the traditional fairy-tale narrative. Furthermore, Sophie plays a crucial role by creating life, which in turns helps spin the story itself. It can be argued that Sophie stops being just another character in the story to be partly an author herself, establishing the limits and wilfully animating elements in the story, even if sometimes she does so unwillingly. However, Sophie is not the only character in the novel that seems aware of her limitations; most other characters, especially female characters, seem conscious of their pre-ordained endings. Nevertheless, one of Jones' writing strength relies on its characters, and while some character tropes appearing on the novel are familiar, the narrative subverts them in a way that makes the

reader think about these traditional conventions: the evil step-mother, Fanny; the evil Witch of the Waste as the main antagonist of the story; even Sophie herself as a subversion of a traditionally passive fairy-tale heroine. It is only as the story advances that the reader's perceptions of these characters changes, exposing the complex layers hidden beneath. The issue of villainy, for example, specifically female villains in fairy tales, is an idea that both Jones and Miyazaki will play with and subvert, albeit in completely different ways. Nevertheless, in the same way Sophie's role and subversive reading revolves around the idea of agency, so do the other female characters in the novel.

Women in fairy tales usually represented the extreme ends of the character spectrum. Since women were usually not the ones carrying the story forward, they often acted as either role models of goodness and kindness, or as the main villains of the story. Jorgensen conducted an interesting study in a corpus of 233 fairy tales, analysing the most commonly used terms relating to women. After concluding that the adjectives 'wicked' and 'evil' are associated with women 75 per cent of the time, she argues that "female figures in fairy tales, particularly those who are old (…), tend to take on either the roles of donor figure or of antagonists/villains" (Jorgensen 53). Warner also endorses this idea, stating that "females dominate fairytale evil" (*Once Upon a Time* 25). This is connected with the idea that women in fairy tales are usually passive; as Zipes stated, marriage is usually the ultimate goal for women, and men are what endow their lives with purpose (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 41). Thus, it can be stated that agency is another way in which the traditional narratives of the fairy tale can be challenged.

Jones uses female agency as a way of subverting the original narratives. Unlike what happens in fairy tales, women are the ones in her novel mainly taking the initiative, wanting to realize their dreams and ambitions, whereas men are the ones mostly following the flow of the events happening around them. Precisely, Rudd argues this in his essay by

specifying that, despite the fact that the novel portrays a patriarchal world, it is women who are portrayed as the wielders of agency: "Moreover, Fanny, alongside Mrs. Fairfax, Mrs. Penstemmon[8], and the Witch of the Waste, are all powerful females, repeatedly outwitting the males of the story" (260). Women are the ones that carry the weight of the action in the novel. While Howl and the Witch are the ones instigating the plot, Sophie becomes the main agent as the story advances, determining the course of the plot together with the Witch of the Waste. The Witch is the one that puts Sophie under the aging spell, which in turns allows Sophie to take control of her life, as established before. Furthermore, the Witch is also the one chasing Howl to realize her fantastic plan of creating the perfect King from the pieces of three different men, influencing the lives of all the other story characters in the process. Thus, although Howl might be the catalyst for many of these events happening, it is through Sophie and the Witch that the events develop, up until the point in which the plot becomes a personal struggle between the two of them, leaving Howl relegated to the side lines of the conflict. Although one-dimensional in appearance, the Witch of the Waste presents more much complexity than one would expect a fairy-tale villainess to portray.

The Witch of the Waste is most probably a reference to the Wicked Witch of the West in the famous novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (L. Frank Baum, 1900), which in time is a reference to the traditional archetypal character of the evil witch or fairy present in many fairy tales. Warner argues that evil in fairy tales is often represented by the figure of a woman (*Once Upon a Time* 25), which certainly aligns with the cartoonish characterization of the Witch and her demon in the novel. The issue of the one-dimensionality of the characters in fairy tales is one of the aspects that Jones' plays with

[8] Mrs. Fairfax is the witch Lettie is apprenticed to at the beginning of the book, described as a respectable woman with many contacts. Mrs. Penstemmon is a recognized witch that has allegedly taught many powerful witches and wizards, such as Howl and the Witch of the Waste. Mrs. Penstemmon is an ally in the novel, but will become one of the main antagonists in the film.

and subverts most intensely. The Witch of the Waste, in particular, can be deconstructed and read under a subversive lens; a lens that adds to the already existing complexity of the narrative yet another layer of difficulties, originating from the subversion of the idea of female villainy discussed above. As Rudd states, the portrayal of the characters in Jones' novel goes beyond "a straightforward reversal of fairy-tale stereotypes"(259); Jones' characterizations are nuanced, and that is what adds the extra layer of complexity to the task of analysing her characters. It is interesting to note, therefore, how both Howl and the Witch of the Waste are the two human characters that are described as "evil" at certain points of the novel, and how the story draws points of comparison between the two of them. Furthermore, the Witch of the Waste and her own fire demon, Miss Angorian, present an interesting point of contrast to Howl and Calcifer, creating a parallelism that is directly remarked by Mrs Pentstemmon in the novel itself: "My feeling is that he has gone the same way as the Witch of the Waste. (…) Howell has gifts in the same order as hers" (235). By comparing Howl to the Witch, Jones shows two possible outcomes for two similar characters that were once in similar circumstances, in this case remarking how Howl can either follow the respectable path to be considered "good" or continue in the path that Mrs. Pentstemmon considers will bring him down towards "evil," especially if he continues his frivolous practices. However, this comparison also indirectly remarks on the fact that the Witch of the Waste was not always considered as such, and, more importantly, was not always evil. Most of the time, the image of the Witch is mostly given to us through Sophie, who is angry at her because of the curse she cast over her. The Witch herself only appears as a character three times, so most of our information on her is handed down to us through Howl and Sophie, both of whom have been greatly affected by her actions. It is as the story advances that the reader learns that there is more to the Witch than that which the author wants the reader to believe. When

her plan is finally revealed, she appears more as a lonely, tired woman with crazy ideas rather than an evil, two-dimensional character. Her idea resides on creating a perfect human being from the different body parts of different males. The fact that she is trying to create a perfect male takes special relevance when we analyse the roles Jones gives to the male characters in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Males in the novel are mostly given supporting roles, with the exception of Howl and Calcifer (if Calcifer can be said to be male, given 'his' lack of embodiment, being a spirit). However, even in their supporting roles, they are not shown to be especially adept or especially clever, even more so when compared to the women in the story. Michael is Howl's young apprentice, and his role mainly relies on becoming Martha's love interest and Sophie's friend and companion through her adventures, continually requesting Sophie's help and opinion. Wizard Suliman and Prince Justin have become the Witch's victims, and Gaston, a man created from both of the parts that were left of the Witch's project, becomes Lettie's assistant. The King appears in a couple of scenes, but he needs his brother's help, Prince Justin, to deal with the approaching war. The more developed main male characters are Howl and Calcifer. Howl is described as a rather narcissistic, selfish man, that pursues women and then abandons them as soon as they fall in love with him; Calcifer even mentions him being "pretty useless at most things" (62). Indeed, Howl continually pushes the weight of the novel's plot towards Sophie, allowing her to do all the actions that he claims to be too cowardly to perform. Calcifer is a fire demon, asking for Sophie's help to break the contract that binds him to Howl, offering to break her curse in exchange. However, in the end the curse is implied to be taken off by Sophie herself, further advancing the idea that women are the ones with most agency in the novel. In conclusion, in this novel, men are the ones depicted as being overtly reliant on women,

and not the only way around. Not only are they more passive in their roles; they also actively endorse the novel's women with agency, as Howl continually does with Sophie.

Male characters in the novel are also represented in a less flattering way than females, and it can be argued that the Witch's perceived "evilness" is a direct result of her exhaustion at the men's irresponsible behaviour. The Witch's plan consists of, as Rudd mentions, trying to create "just one decent male" using the bits of three other different men (260): Howl, Wizard Suliman, and Prince Justin. This heavily suggests that the Witch has lost much of her faith in the male gender, reaching a breaking point with her experience with Howl. Howl himself remarks how he himself approached the Witch because she seemed to him "a very sad lady, very unloved" (145). The reason she put the curse on him was, in fact, because Howl treated her like he did all other women: making her fall in love with him only to abandon her at the last moment. Her misadventure with Howl is also the cause for Sophie's curse, when she enters the hat shop looking for Sophie's sister, Lettie. The Witch was jealous of Howl's attention towards her, but as she did not know Lettie or how she looked like, she cast the curse on Sophie instead. Therefore, it could be argued that Howl and his frivolous behaviour are the ones that caused Sophie's and his own curse in the first place, but it is still through his perspective that we are presented the character of the Witch, clearly meant for us to judge the Witch's evil actions. A pattern the readers will readily welcome and fall in, since evil witches are commonly women in traditional tales. Thus, Jones plays with the idea of this evil component being an innate trait often applied to women, while at the same time developing a narrative that also paints the Witch as a possible victim of society's norms and social conventions, that twists its inhabitants' personalities enough to cause crazy ideas like that of the Witch's.

The character of the Witch of the Waste as read by Hayao Miyazaki, the director of the animated adaptation, is also presented as a victim, albeit in a different way. While she is still presented as the main villain at the beginning of the film by setting the curse on Sophie, the tables revert when the Witch herself is exposed to another curse by Mrs. Pentstemmon, made the main villain in this version of the story. Mrs. Pentstemmon steals her magic, the same way she is trying to take the magic away from Howl. In doing so, the Witch reverses to her true physical and mental age, becoming a dependent old woman incapable of fending for herself, whom Sophie adopts into the little family they created in the moving castle. In this case, the Witch becomes a victim of the society around her: while in the novel it can be argued that her extreme behaviour is caused by a lack of fidelity and trust, especially from the male sex, in the film it is because of Mrs. Pentstemmon rigid policies against magic that she is robbed of her magic skills and, therefore, her identity. Thus, the Witch's evil nature is subverted in both versions of the story.

Fanny, much like the Witch of the Waste, presents a challenge on another stereotypical feminine figure in the traditional tales, the evil stepmother. Initially, Sophie sees no malice in Fanny's admittedly suspicious actions: she leaves Sophie alone the whole day at the shop, doing all the work while she goes for walks around the city, ignores many of Sophie's petitions and does not even give Sophie a wage for her hard work. Martha plants the doubt in Sophie's mind, stating that their diverse placements are Fanny's way to get rid of them: "You thought Mother meant it [Martha making her own fortune]. I did too, until Father died and I saw she was just trying to get rid of us" (26). This is not only a way of making Sophie aware of the circumstances, but the reader too: the similarities between the familiar trope of the evil-stepmother are made obvious, especially when Martha remarks about how Sophie is the one doing all the work in the

shop while Fanny spends the day walking around chatting with men. Much like the Witch of the Waste, Fanny is presented as someone Sophie should not be trusting, judging by her actions and the other character's opinions about her.

This idea of Fanny's villainy is challenged, however, towards the end of the novel. Fanny reappears in Howl's castle, together with Sophie's sisters, and explains how she married a rich man and sold the hat shop now that she did not need it to make a living and did not have Sophie to let it to. Her concern for Sophie can be argued to be genuine, as she immediately abandons pretences and accepts Sophie as she is:

> "Oh, good gracious, child, what's happened to you? You look about ninety! Have you been very ill?"
> And, to Sophie's surprise, Fanny threw aside her hat and her parasol and all of her grand manner and flung her arms round Sophie and wept."
> (Jones 380)

Fanny is also shown to know about Lettie and Martha exchanging places, and admits to her blaming herself for Sophie's disappearance. When she learns about Sophie's entanglement with Howl, she threatens to attack him with her parasol, thinking he is the one directly responsible for Sophie's state. Sophie finally admits that she might have been wrong in her judgement of Fanny's character: "She had taken Martha's view of Fanny, whole and entire, when she should have known Fanny better. She was ashamed" (382). Just as it happens with the Witch, both readers and Sophie find it incredibly easy to fall into the common conceptions and familiarity of these tropes, and Jones plays with that preconception to subvert these familiar images. However, Fanny is presented very differently in the animated version. Unlike the Witch, whose subversive traits remain in both versions, Fanny is adapted as the typical step-mother of the fairy-tale tradition. While she also visits Sophie towards the end of the film, her worry and happiness at finding her are much more evidently staged, and after the short visit she is shown to have been working for Mrs. Pentstemmon. While she looks sorry for her deeds, she does not seem to repent her actions, the film heavily implying she has been easily bribed with the

promise of money. So, while there is more of a consensus between the versions of both the film and the novel in relation to the Witch of the Waste, Fanny remains a different character in both interpretations, that present different iterations of a very stereotypical trope.

Finally, Lettie and Martha also represent good examples of how the traditional female hero passivity is turned around in the story. Lettie and Martha, as well as Sophie herself, are also greatly conditioned by their status as young, unmarried women, and their fate is supposedly sealed since the beginning just because of the order in which they were born. Although Sophie is resigned to her tragic fate as the eldest child, Martha and Lettie are not as happy to content themselves which the cards that destiny has dealt them. Fanny is the one that, in this case, decides where her daughters should be depending on their station. Lettie, as the second sister, is sent to a famous pastry shop so she can meet a successful young man, marry and raise a family. Martha, as the youngest, is bound to be the most successful sister, and as such is sent on an apprenticeship with a lady mage, Mrs. Fairfax, so she can create a contact network and start making her own way in the world. This rigid predetermination is mocked at several points in the novel, remarked by the sisters themselves: "'It's not fair!' Lettie would shout. 'Why should Martha have the best of it just because she was born the youngest? I shall marry a prince, so there!' To which Martha always retorted that she would end up disgustingly rich without having to marry anybody" (3). However, the idea is not completely challenged until Sophie discovers her sisters' plot, by which they decide to swap each other's places to live the life they want to have, instead of the one they are forced to live. This life-changing decision also makes them resist the strains and expectations that are imposed upon them, showcasing their power of choice and giving them agency.

2. Miyazaki's Film Adaptation: A New Moral Tale

After the analysis of the novel in the first part of this dissertation, this section will mainly centre on the film by Hayao Miyazaki. I will especially focus on the themes Miyazaki enhanced from the original story, such as the war, and how he develops Howl's character comparing it to the way in which he is depicted in Jones' novel. Overall, both Miyazaki and Jones have very different ways of dealing with the topic of the fairy tale, and the tropes that Jones subverted are not necessarily presented in the same way in the adaptation; this is precisely what makes them interesting as a point of comparison and further analysis on the topic. Therefore, my main aim will be to elucidate up to which point we can consider Miyazaki's narrative subversive of the fairy tale genre, and how both Howl's character development and Miyazaki's new additions to the original story play an important role in in the answering of this question.

2.1. Miyazaki's Adaptation: A Different Take on the Subversion of the Fairy Tale

Adaptation is not an easy task. Usually, adaptations are not only made accountable for their entertaining value as independent creations, but they are also held in comparison with the original text usually as inferior versions. Someone that has read through a story will immediately look for all the similarities and familiar scenes of the text in the adaptation; be it visual, as in a film or in a TV series, or interactive, as could be with a videogame. In specific, most works contain an "essence" that is "extractable," in Stam's words, but the failure to recognize that a text can have multiple readings and interpretations of that essence causes the viewers to fall into what he calls the "fidelity discourse," the critique of the adaptation because it does not follow accurately enough the original story (Stam 15). Hutcheon further elaborates this idea, and states that adaptations are "a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It

is its own palimpsestic thing" (8-9). Thus, while it is often difficult to separate the adaptation from the base material, the new reading that an adaptation supposes is precisely what makes the adaptation a stand-alone work that can be analysed independently from the original work, because it supposes a unique interpretation of the original contents. This original reading can complete the original work, or expand it, or give it another, completely different meaning; in other words, the adaptation can create a completely different story that has no less value because of the way it differs from the original, even though many times it will be heavily criticized precisely because of its divergences from it. This personal and unique value of the adaptation as an independent text is the value I see in Miyazaki's homonymous film, released in 2004, and will consequently be the way I read the film: not simply as a reproduction of Jones' novel, but as a separate work that holds its own values and messages.

As noted, Miyazaki took Jones' novel as the basis to create his own personal version, with his imprint. He borrowed an underdeveloped plot thread of the novel, the developing war between Ingary and a neighbouring nation, Strangia, and made it the main thread that weaves the film's plot together. While Jones' novel laid the stress on the characters and their growth, Miyazaki attached more importance to the underlying pacifist message he wanted to convey, using the characters as a means to translate it to his audience. However, due to the original source he was working with and to Jones' external influences, his plot still shows interesting elements of the traditional fairy-tale Western narrative, with which he interacts differently than Jones in her novel. As such, both Jones and Miyazaki offer different perspectives on this topic, and a different realization of the same familiar topics and archetypes that is worth looking closely into.

Miyazaki and Jones have, because of their different upbringings and cultural backgrounds, very different visions of the fairy tale. While Jones seems to be purposefully

pulling away from this tradition, Miyazaki uses Jones' novel to adapt his own story and ideology into an already existing universe, which he decides to tweak to better fit his own imagery and symbolism, and to transmit his own message. He seems aware of many of the traditions integrated and subverted in the traditional story, since he changes many of the characters' traits to better accommodate the more traditional image that usually accompanies their archetype: Sophie's bluntness and bad-temper are lessened, Fanny becomes the stereotypical evil stepmother without the nuanced characterization she had in the novel, etc. Due to their different cultural environments, it could be safe to assume that both Jones and Miyazaki had different influences that shaped their work and world views, but there are indications that point at Miyazaki's full awareness of the Western fairy-tale tradition and some of its more classic stereotypes. In her brief biography, McCarthy mentions how Miyazaki joined a "children's literature research society" while he was in college, where he read many books that also included European texts. She continues to mention that "the young Miyazaki was exposed to a wide range of storytellers who used fantasy and legend in different ways," and many European authors also influenced "his views of storytelling and character development" (29-30). Therefore, Miyazaki was conscious of the Western fairy-tale tradition, which makes many of his decisions to evoke the fairy-tale nostalgia much more meaningful, especially since he evokes it in a completely different way from Jones. On the one hand, Jones constantly relies on the subversion of the traditional narratives to make her own new story based on familiar and well-known tropes. On the other hand, Miyazaki uses many of these traditional tropes to give a feeling of familiarity to a more contemporary topic such as war, integrating a social message that can be read as a criticism about our current society on an otherwise fantastic atmosphere. In this way, Miyazaki makes Jones's world his own, and creates his own interpretation of the characters to better serve the story he

wished to narrate. He creates a clash between the ideology and universe he imagines in his film, adding current themes and elements to a fairy-tale like world, with traditionally written character archetypes that bring a sense of familiarity to the reader. Therefore, to better understand the way in which Miyazaki makes his own subversion of the traditional Western fairy-tale narrative it is important to understand which themes of his work appear in this film, how he uses the fantastic genre and how he deals with some archetypical elements of the fairy-tale tradition.

While according to Mendlesohn, in "Jones's worlds the dividing line between magic and reality is deliberately blurred, unassailable by logic" (136), Miyazaki uses a different method to achieve this same result. Howl and Sophie do not travel to a defamiliarized Wales, but instead Ingary itself seems oddly reminiscent of the industrial-era England. In a way, Miyazaki's vision of Jones' world is much closer to Todorov's theory on fantasy and the uncanny, that Mendlesohn argues is not synonymous to Jones' narratives because the reader "expects the fantastic" (136), while Todorov sustains that the fantastic lies in the hesitation between the uncanny and the marvellous, the "hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). Miyazaki plays with the concept of confusion between reality and the fantastic, masterfully blending elements of real life with the imaginary world of Jones' fantasy. This is made clear since the beginning of the film, when we are shown several frames of Sophie's home in Market Chipping; the camara focuses on the steam train running through the city, together with a streetcar bursting with people. More of these curious technological improvements appear as the film advances and the war plot becomes more relevant: zeppelins, big and small, raid the sky; giant airships throw bombs and rockets to the population below; metal tanks run out from the city and into war. Jones keeps fantasy and reality separated by a neat little door with several exits, while Miyazaki

merges both, transcending the traditional fairy tale "harmonious" and "timeless" (Lüthi 53-57) setting to create a personal view that mixes both the harsh reality of war with this usually peaceful setting. Miyazaki seems aware up to a certain point about the familiarity of the scenes he describes, a familiarity he consciously chooses to disrupt with the introduction of alien elements. The result is a mixture of both the fantastic and the familiar that, while executed in a completely different way, still holds much of the original spirit of the novel in the breaking of the stablished norms, and allows Miyazaki to showcase one of his most prevalent themes throughout his work: war.

The topic of war is one of Miyazaki's usual preoccupations in his films. It appears in much of his work, usually depicted in a nihilistic, cynical view that expresses the horror they bring. Films such as *Grave of the Fireflies*, *Castle in the Sky*, or even *Princess Mononoke* deal with moral topics or situate their main characters in desperate positions due to the consequences of war or war-related conflicts, and *Howl's Moving Castle* is not an exception; in fact, Miyazaki himself expressed that it was a conscious decision on his part, expressing that the film was "profoundly affected" by the rage he felt about the (at the time) recently declared war of Iraq (in Gordon). His decision of including this subplot, barely developed in the novel, as a central topic in the film says much about Miyazaki's willingness to include significant themes in his work that make the film not only entertaining, but also moral tales; not much different as to how many fairy-tale authors, like Perrault, intended their tales to be read. The war becomes one of the main sources of moral complexity of the story, apart from being an excuse for Miyazaki to mix his fantasy world with actual, real world elements that disrupt the unfamiliarity of the fantastic I mentioned above. The war itself is not detailed in Jones' work, but this is probably because it is never considered an important element in the novel. Miyazaki, however, also decides not to give the viewer much information about the conflict. This decision makes

the viewer more conscious of the uselessness of the conflict, and ties in with Miyazaki's nihilistic approach to the topic. All of Miyazaki's decisions seem to stress the uselessness of armed conflicts, and the ease with which these can be resolved when people are willing to set their differences aside. Therefore, Miyazaki breaks the feelings of familiarity that fairy-tales are characterized for and that made Jones' novel so close to this narrative tradition. He adds real elements to disrupt the idealized setting, and makes the war the central topic of film, forgoing Jones' character-driven narrative for a more symbolic one.

While Miyazaki disrupts the setting in a way that sets him apart from Jones' narrative, he uses nonetheless some fairy-tale stereotypes that bring him closer to the fairy-tale tradition than Jones' own. The ending of the film, for instance, plays with the traditional ideas of the happy ending and the true love kiss. In this sense it differs from the novel, in which the happy ending is succinctly problematized by the challenging nature of the characters themselves: "Sophie knew that living happily ever after with Howl would be a good deal more eventful than any story made it sound, though she was determined to try" (Jones 427). At the end of the film, Sophie kisses the scarecrow to thank it for saving them from the fall down the cliff, after the moving castle has lost all its power and is unable to support their weight anymore. The scarecrow immediately changes into a beautiful-looking prince, who happens to be the Prince of the neighbouring country they had been at war with. The Witch of the Waste says in the film: "I know that spell. A kiss from your true love breaks it," to which the Prince answers: "That's right. And if it weren't for Sophie, I would've been a scarecrow for the rest of my life". However, Howl, who had been unconscious up until that moment, wakes up, and Sophie focuses her attention on him. The Witch scornfully tells him that "It seems like your true love is in love with someone else," and the Prince then decides to go back to his kingdom, putting a definitive stop to the conflict and solving the potential romantic conflict for

Sophie. With this scene, the film seems to be mocking the convention of love being a predestined matter sealed by a true love kiss; while the Prince is supposedly Sophie's true love, she has already fallen in love with Howl, and thus this traditional convention is no longer important for her and can be easily discarded. Thus, the film subverts the traditional idea of the true love kiss, together with the idea of predestined love.

However, while these ideas are mostly popular in the Disney iterations of the fairy-tales, the idea of the true love kiss is not actually present in the canon of written fairy tales. As established in the introduction, fairy tales are usually more oriented towards the idea of personal progress, and while love or marriage are often final objectives for the main characters, the idea of salvation through a true love kiss is mainly incidental. There are instances, such as in the Grimm's version of "Little Briar Rose," in which the prince wakes up the princess through a kiss; or in "The Snow Queen," in which the protagonist, Gerda, saves her best friend from freezing with a kiss. However, the idea of the true love kiss comes mostly from Disney's film adaptations of traditional fairy tales, and is therefore a later addition to the genre. Many of the Disney princesses' films that include a kiss as a way of salvation at the end of the film were not originally included in the traditional stories. Snow White awakens in her tale by the Brothers Grimm when a servant gets tired of carrying her coffin around for the prince and shoves her back, making her expel the poisoned apple: "'Why must we be plagued with so much work all because of a dead maiden?' On saying this he shoved Little Snow White's back with his hand, and out popped the nasty piece of apple that had been stuck in [her] throat, and she was once again alive." (177). In the original tale of "The Frog Prince," the prince only returns to his original appearance sleeping under the princess' pillow, after she told him that she would become "his sweetheart": "When she woke up the next morning, she thought the frog would hop off again. Instead, she saw a handsome young prince standing before her,

and he told her that he had been the bewitched frog and that she had saved him because she had promised to be his sweetheart" (Grimm 333). Even in Perrault's version of "Little Briar Rose," "The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods," the princess wakes up by herself after the time of the curse has passed, without the need of the prince's assistance: "Since the end of the enchantment had come, the Princess woke up" (Perrault 89). Therefore, this subversion of the trope is not acting towards the traditional fairy tale narrative, but towards a topic established later, mostly settled by Walt Disney's influence. In this sense, Miyazaki is subverting the expectations of the fairy-tale film tradition, more than he is subverting the traditional written fairy-tale tradition. Miyazaki's rendition of the fairy tale tropes seems much more influenced by its iterations in popular films, together with Jones' own influence, due to the adaptive nature of the film.

However, the most significant and possibly controversial changes that Miyazaki integrates in his film narrative are those related to Howl's characterization. Not only does Howl become the central character in the film, but many of his traits are also changed to better fit the role of hero Miyazaki wants Howl to represent; for that, the director modifies many of the subversive tendencies that Jones had integrated in his character in the first place. The characterization of Miyazaki's Howl is interesting especially when taken side by side with Jones', since both iterations contrapose and complement each other; the blending of the two versions has arguably created the Howl that has become such a well-loved character by both readers and viewers alike. Therefore, to better understand Miyazaki's intent and the message he wanted to transmit throughout his work, it is important to understand Howl's characterization and the changes that his personality underwent to make him a better-fitting hero to Miyazaki's pacifist role.

2.2. The Romanticization of a Hero: Howl and Miyazaki's Characterization

Howl, like many of Jones' characters, has several layers to him that both the readers and Sophie progressively discover. However, his motivations and personality seem to vary greatly in each version of his story. While Jones' character is deeply flawed and a supporting presence to Sophie's leading act, Miyazaki's Howl is presented as the more traditional image of the noble hero that is saved in the end because of a woman's redeeming love. Unlike the film version, Jones' Howl was not written to be an exemplary role model to follow. He has plenty of flaws that Sophie is constantly remarking on, and that lead to their relationship consisting of constant banter and petty arguments. Before meeting him, the readers only have the influx of Sophie's thoughts and the rumours she has heard about Howl to create their own opinions: "He was known to amuse himself by collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them. Or some people said he ate their hearts. He was an utterly cold-blooded and heartless wizard and no young girl was safe from him if he caught her on her own" (5). Sophie, however, soon learns that the gossip she had heard about Howl did not depict the whole truth:

> "What does Howl do to these poor females? I was told he ate their hearts and took their souls away."
> Michael laughed uncomfortably. "Then you must come from Market Chipping. Howl sent me down there to blacken his name when we first set up the castle. (…). It's only true in a manner of speaking."
> "Howl's very fickle," said Calcifer. "He's only interested until the girl falls in love with him. Then he can't be bothered with her."
> (Jones 111-112)

Howl's infamous villainy is soon debunked, but as the novel progresses and Sophie gets to know him better it becomes obvious that Howl, while not the monster the rumours made him out to be, is not an exemplary role model either. Howl is frivolous, vain and lazy and yet, he is still an incredibly popular character. Jones herself expressed her surprise at seeing his popularity, confessing that she constantly received letters and petitions from young women asking to marry Howl, and declaring that "as much as I love

him, he is the last person I would like to marry" (Jones "Extras" 2). Ironically, Howl's unlikable traits seem to be what makes him likable today. However, while his complexity as a character, his uniqueness and his flamboyant attitude are probably a great factor of why he is so widely loved, I argue that there is another factor that greatly influences Howl's favourable reception by the more recent readers of the novel: the fact that many new readers have been introduced to Jones' novel through Miyazaki's movie. While Jones' Howl is mostly a force of chaos, Miyazaki's Howl is much closer to the romantic hero. He is much more sympathetic, and shown to be suffering from real moral dilemmas instead of, as happens in the novel, dealing with the frivolous rejection of multiple women and with avoiding the King's jobs. It is interesting to consider, then, how Miyazaki takes Howl out of the book's context and works him into a very different character, much more in line with the traditional image of the hero that would appear in a traditional fairy-tale story.

While Sophie is the central character of the narrative in the novel, in his adaptation Miyazaki decides to put the stress on Howl as the main character around which the story and moral conflicts revolve. However, the novel writes the characters in a much more complex manner, presenting them as much clearer subversions of their traditional counterparts: as I have established in the first section, Sophie represents a big contrast to the stereotypical female character in the fairy tale tradition, while Jones' Howl represents a challenge to the traditional gender roles and expectations in male main characters. Howl's case is particularly evident, as he does not reunite many of the essential characteristics of the male heroes in traditional fairy tales. In fact, Howl represents just about the opposite of a key sentence Zipes uses to describe the male fairy-tale hero: "The male acts, the female waits" (*Fairy Tales and the Act of Subversion* 40). Male heroes are supposed to carry the narrative weight of the story, being courageous and adventurous to

overcome any and all difficulties that are thrown their way. As such, even in more female-focused stories like "Rapunzel," the prince is the one that actively carries forward the narrative, asking Rapunzel to let him up onto her tower and engaging in a relationship with her, getting her pregnant, and later on finding her again after she has already given birth to their twins. There are, of course exceptions to this rule. In her article "Female Tricksters as Double Agents", Tatar mentions the figure of the female trickster, using the examples of Scheherazade and Gretel as women that "operate using strategies both subversive and transformative in order to construct their own identities but also to effect social change" (46). However, while in "Hansel and Gretel" the girl herself is ultimately the one that manages to save herself and her brother from a difficult moment, men are still the ones that are expected to fight to protect the people and objects they love and treasure. While Gretel saves both of them from the evil witch (or fairy, depending on the version), Hansel is still the one that takes the initiative when they are abandoned by their parents, trying to cheer his sister up and keep her safe:

> Gretel thought, 'Now it's all over for me,' and began to weep pitiful tears. But Hansel spoke: 'Be quiet, Gretel. Don't get upset. I'll find a way to help us.'
> (Grimm 44)

Howl, however, does not stand for any of the traditional qualities of the fairy tale hero. He is not proactive, he is not humble, and he is certainly not brave. Furthermore, according to the numerous rumours surrounding Howl in Sophie's town, he is not even a good, honourable person, but a dark-hearted, seducing villain that steals the hearts of young girls. Despite all the rumours that surround Howl at the beginning of the novel, Sophie soon discovers that Howl does not perform many jobs or actions that could be considered evil; more specifically, he does not seem to perform many jobs at all. Much to Sophie's chagrin, he is constantly shown as trying to "slither out," in Sophie's words, of various tasks and jobs. Howl is unwilling to carry any extra responsibilities, preferring

to be left alone. In fact, when he suspects that the King may really want to appoint him Royal Wizard, he sends Sophie pretending to be his mother so she will 'blacken his name' for him. In the novel, not only does Howl subvert the trope of the active, knightly hero by refusing to assume any responsibilities, but he also prefers to pass on those responsibilities to the traditionally passive female figure, Sophie. This decision both gives more agency to Sophie and takes credibility away from his own character, characterizing the male hero in a way that mocks the traditional values forced upon them by the traditional fairy tale narrative. However, Miyazaki uses this same scene, with Howl asking Sophie to go the King in his stead, to show Howl as a more sympathetic character; while still a coward, he is willing to set his fears aside. By asking Sophie to go in his stead, he is giving himself a reason to be brave and force himself to save her when she is in danger. Howl not only carries Sophie out to safety after their difficult encounter with the palace witch Mrs. Pentstemmon, the film's main antagonist; he also uses himself as bait to help Sophie and the Witch of the Waste escape from Mrs. Pentstemmon, nobly putting himself in danger to save those he cares about. This is only one of the instances in which Howl's behaviour varies between the two versions, with him gradually becoming a figure closer to the traditional male saviour figure.

Howl's unconventionality, however, does not rely only on his personality. Howl is a wizard, and while magic is a constant in fairy tales, especially in those originally based on folk tales, it is habitually used as a means to advance the story or provide advantages to the main characters. As Warner explains: "classic fairy tales, deploying wonders and inspiring astonishment, depend on magic as causation" (*Once Upon a Time* 29). Howl, as a wizard that is actively capable of controlling magic, should therefore have the capacity and authority to control the narrative of his own tale. Yet, Howl subverts this expectation in both the novel and the film. In the novel Howl decides to pass on much of

this responsibility to Sophie as she constructs herself as a witch; her own magic holds much more importance than his. In the film, Howl seems to be the one mostly being controlled by magic, and not otherwise. Walsh considers magic in the film as "a metaphoric representation of the imagination, able to tap into the sublime that exists beyond the material realm" (181). Their commentary returns us to the concept of the marvellous and the uncanny that Todorov uses in his definition of the fantastic, underlying that Howl's magic touches upon the marvellous element that is mostly related to the fairy-tale tradition. Furthermore, magic in Miyazaki's adaptation is the cause for another fairy-tale related trope of the film: Howl's gradual metamorphosis into a horrific monster. Howl's abuse of his magic causes him to gradually take the shape of a crow-like beast he uses to face the enemies and dangers of the war, and therefore becomes a central point of the narrative. Metamorphosis is an integral part of many genres of legends and myth, and it also plays an important role in the fairy tale genre. Warner even declares that more than any other traits, "metamorphosis defines the fairy tale" (*From the Beast to the Blonde* xvi). "Beauty and the Beast" is an obvious example, and one that is closely linked to the topic of the film; but there are also instances of other stories such as "The Seven Ravens," or "The Frog Prince". However, as Todorov specifies: "What distinguishes the fairy tale is a certain kind of writing, not the status of the supernatural" (54). While the marvellous in Miyazaki's film might appear similar to that we can find in fairy tales, its writing and its narrative function differs greatly from this tradition. While Howl's use of magic still holds a close link to the fairy-tale tradition in the way it is written as a way of advancing the story and helping Howl overcome certain obstacles, Miyazaki also connects Howl's use of magic to the topic of war. Retrieving Walsh previous comment, in which they understand that "Magic is (…) depicted in *Howl's Moving Castle* as a metaphoric representation of the imagination" (181), it could be inferred that Howl's

gradual metamorphosis could be related to the way he pictures himself in his own imagination. Howl is aware that, in willingly entering the conflict, he is becoming part of the problem. He pictures himself as a monster, and thus he physically becomes that monster. Howl's magic, in this sense, works against him to punish him for his behaviour, acting as a judge of morality that was absent from Howl's previous iteration in the novel, and acting away from the function of magic in the fairy tale, which is seen as, in Lüthi's words, "light and effortless (…) the magical in the fairy tale is sublimated" (93). Magic is not a force that helps Howl overcome his shortcomings, but the cause for his demise. Furthermore, the use of magic in the film is greatly related to the scenes of war, linking the idea of magic to that of unnecessary violence. While it also appears in more positive instances, such as the scene in which they move houses, magic in the film is mostly surveyed in a negative light, a ticking bomb that will eventually turn Howl into the monster he pictures himself as. Magic in Miyazaki's film, therefore, becomes a way of representing Howl's conscience and the gravity of his actions, the ultimate judge of his character.

Fig. 1. Hayao Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle*

Kimmich argues that "Jones' characters are (…) domesticated in Miyazaki's film, and, as a result, they are stripped of some of its ambiguity" (129). While this holds true for Sophie, with her character becoming more of a secondary back-up to Howl's more

central presence, Howl's case is a bit different. He becomes less ambiguous, but I would argue that he also gains new characteristics that do not exist in the book, and that make him a complex character on his own right. Howl is still vain, but he becomes much more concerned with the events happening around him than he is in the novel. In the novel, he admits at the end to having been looking for the disappeared Wizard Suliman on his own way for a long time, but in the film he is constantly shown disappearing into a black dimension that the viewers soon discover leads him directly to the war, where he takes an active role in fighting against the warring forces. He does not care about sides: he just hates the conflict itself, as Miyazaki cleverly illustrates when Sophie sees him attacking an airship and asks him whether they are from the enemy nation, and his only answer is "What difference does it make?" Howl's personality acquires new dimensions as he is shown taking a personal approach to the conflict. He fights as a way of imposing himself against the cruelties of war, which makes Howl's character much more conscious of the situation they are living than his novel's counterpart, who appears all the more frivolous for it. It is an approach that speaks about Miyazaki's practice of sending particular messages through his films; topics such as the importance of taking care of the world around us, as in *Princess Mononoke*, or the futility of war, as it appears in *Howl's Moving Castle*. Howl becomes a tool for Miyazaki to express his own ideas about war and explore the moral conflict that comes from fighting in it. His moral convictions become a central part to his character, and Sophie's own growth as a character depends on Howl's actions and the gradual downward spiral of his mental state, greatly related to his monstruous transformation into a giant, one-legged crow.

The position that Howl represents in regards to the conflict is not surprising either, taking into consideration Miyazaki's previous works and his view of war as a senseless conflict, as I discussed previously. Osmond argues that "Howl's pure-hearted anti-war

stance is presented as nihilism with no alternative as he fights forces from each side and becomes the worst terror of all" (31). Howl is a very representative character of Miyazaki's anti-war narrative; a hero that is forced to fight uselessly at a war, a fight that makes him gradually lose his humanity and become the literal monster he fights as. While well-intentioned in his will to finish the conflict, he is unable to do so. Moreover, as discussed before, the fight is making him become a monster himself. Miyazaki compares Howl to other wizards that have turned into monsters to fight for the King, as Howl himself explains, when he admits that he was attacked by "those of my own kind," in his words, while attacking some of the warring airplanes. When Calcifer asks him about it, he elaborates, declaring that "some mad wizards that turned into monsters for the king" were the ones to attack him. The difference Miyazaki seems to establish between Howl and those wizards is that Howl is conscious he is gradually turning into a monster by means of fighting in the war. The other mages have either given in to corruption, or are mindless pawns of authority figures, having ultimately been consumed by their rage and desire to escalate the social ladder. Howl is saved of following this same path by Sophie, as he starts to realize that fighting without real motivation to do so is what caused the conflict in the first place, and that he should fight to protect those he cares for. Osmond goes on to mention that "the emphasis is on showing Miyazaki's hero-avatar at a macho dead-end" (31). The evolution of Howl's feelings and character throughout the film leave behind the ideas of violence and stubbornness being the solution to conflicts, instead remarking on the uselessness of combating violence with more violence, that only contributes to the conflict. Only when Howl starts fighting to protect Sophie and the new family he finds in Markl, the Witch of the Waste and the dog that they adopt, he will be able to put a final stop to the armed conflict in a traditional happy ending. The war becomes, then, both the most important metaphor in the film and a way for Howl to prove

himself as a better person. It will allow Howl to become the ultimate saviour of both Sophie and the rest of the characters, showing the impact of overcoming one's fears and being conscious of the consequences of one's behaviour.

In overcoming his fears and understanding the impact of the war on himself and the rest of the world Howl also becomes a much more responsible and noble figure than he is in the original novel. Howl, as read by Miyazaki, is much closer to the male hero in fairy tales. Despite still being vain, Howl is presented more as a Byronic figure than as the lazy and frivolous description he is given in the original work. Howl is actively fighting against the warring forces in Ingary, even though he knows that the strain might make him become a monster. His attachment to Sophie helps him overcome his reckless attitude, and he even states that with Sophie there, he now has something to fight for. This becomes obvious the moment in which bombs are threatening to disrupt their newfound home back in Sophie's old shop, and Howl decides to fight directly against the bombs to protect the house from collapsing. This is an evolution of the previous scene in which Howl rescues Sophie from a situation he himself created; in this case, he is willing to sacrifice himself to protect Sophie from the devastation occasioned by war. His ability to overcome many of his fears and weaknesses at the end of the film heavily differentiates him from his novel iteration, in which Howl's flaws continue to be a constant throughout the series. Therefore, in the film Howl is meant to be seen as more of a model figure, someone that we can easily look up to because of his capacity for growth and self-improvement. Not only that, but the noble qualities that Miyazaki attributes to him, such as his willingness to sacrifice himself for others, make his Howl become a character that is much closer to the original iterations of the fairy-tale main character.

Moreover, Miyazaki does not only concern himself with the idea of morality in war and how it affects the people forced to live through it, but he also greatly emphasizes

the importance of family. As Wu mentions, "in foregrounding the family, Miyazaki addresses a universal yearning for a secure home" (196). The story starts with only Howl, Calcifer and Michael, called Markl in the adaptation, living together in the castle. Howl is a distant presence, not usually present at the house. Once Sophie joins the household, however, Howl gradually becomes more involved with the protection of the castle and the people inhabiting it, starting to see its value as a space he wants to keep safe from any harm that could come to it. The inhabitants keep increasing, too. Sophie decides to take care of the by then incapacitated Witch of the Waste, and then the dog that Mrs. Pentstemmon sent to spy on them also decides to stay in their new family. As Wu adds, it is "through Sophie's efforts as an agent inside the castle and Howl's protection outside (…) [that] the idea of home and alternative kinship, are rendered complete during the course of narrative" (196). Their gender roles, despite the subversion in the passing of agency from Howl to Sophie in the novel, become a conventional representation of a heteronormative family in the film. Even despite Howl's unique situation and personality he is the one that keeps the house and its inhabitants safe, taking on the traditional role of protector, while Sophie is the one caring for the people inside and doing most of the house's chores. This further reinforces the idea that, despite the film's symbolic message, the traditional roles are much more present in the adaptation than they are in Jones' original work, in which Howl and Sophie constantly shared the weight of the story and the protection of their loved ones.

Another interesting change to take into account in the adaptation is the lack of metafictional elements, which Kimmich argues "removes its subversive dimension" (137). The door to Howl's castle leads to four different places in the novel, signalled by four different colours. The black colour, which Howl insists on keeping a secret until he is finally forced to reveal it to Sophie and Michael, leads to 20th century contemporaneous

Wales. Jones' uses this feature to defamiliarize the reader's world, making it strange through Sophie's eyes, as she does not recognize many of the everyday elements that any person in this world would easily be able to identify. In this way, Sophie is not the only one taking part of the metafictional aspect of the novel analysed in the previous section of this work. Howl also becomes an unwilling participant, mostly because of his identity as a real-life Welsh man in a fairy-tale like world, that has actually grown up in our world and even written a PhD on charms as spells:

> "Miss Angorian," said Howl, "(…), you must know I wrote my doctoral thesis on charms and spells. You look as if you suspect me of working black magic! I assure you, I never worked any kind of spell in my life."
> Sophie could not stop herself making a small snort at this blatant lie.
>
> (Jones 218)

This information makes Howl an even stranger character in the context of the narrative, since he becomes a literal stranger coming from a completely different world, a real person stepping into a fairy-tale world and making his own place in it. In the film, however, this distinct dimension to his character is lost. The colour black in the castle's door does not lead to Wales, but directly towards the battlefield where Howl fights against the warships invading Ingary. Instead of focusing on the strangeness of Howl's hybrid character, the film makes him much more involved with the fantasy world: Howl is not a person coming from another world, but instead someone that is actively fighting to stop the war ravaging the only world he knows.

In conclusion, Howl's downward progression, both physically as a beast and mentally as he fights against the consequences of war, make him a more relatable, romantic hero than his novel counterpart. In the film, Howl suffers inwardly from an unending conflict that threatens to put his life at risk, and it is Sophie who ultimately helps him to step out of this spiral and give him a chance at redemption. In this sense, Howl also relates to the romantic notions of some particular fairy tales in which the female protagonist redeems the main male character because of her love and acceptance, such as

in the famous story of "Beauty and the Beast." Sophie's support and her being in danger is what motivates him to face his fear of Mrs. Pentstemmon, who wants to strip him off his magic due to Howl's rebellious nature, and in return Sophie will be the one to return Howl's heart, that the demon Calcifer had been holding due to their pact, back to its rightful owner. In the film, Howl shows himself capable of progress and advancement, accepting Sophie's attentions and selflessly risking his own life to save her in more than one instance. Unlike Jones' character, who remains a flawed individual until the end, Miyazaki takes his subversive character and reworks him so he is closer to the normative canon, transforming him into a noble hero that is willing to fight and die to protect those he cares about.

3. Conclusions

All in all, while Jones' novel has many subversive tendencies that could be carefully analysed, one of the most interesting ones is the way in which the traditional passive role of the female heroine has been turned around. In the novel, women are given the agency while men play mostly secondary and supporting roles, the story centring around Sophie and her development as a character as she leaves behind her fears and preconceptions to embrace the strong, stubborn woman she really is. She makes the story her own, despite being thrown in it inadvertently, and continues to assert herself in a narrative that was mostly traditionally masculine. The one-dimensionality of the villainess in fairy tales also becomes a much complex process, with the villains becoming more nuanced figures that the author uses to play with the reader's expectations, making the reader judge them easily basing off their limited perspective on the conflicts and the traditional narratives present in their minds. An exercise in self-analysis, contrasting to the more traditional framing that the adaptation by Miyazaki supposes, sacrificing much of the character's development to bring out the more warlike aspects of the story to tell a completely different message.

Miyazaki manages to take Jones' original story and make his own unique interpretation of it, using plot threads that do not have a big impact in the novel and making them central to the plot. Unlike Jones' clearly subversive character arcs, Miyazaki puts more attention in the symbolism and moral values of his story, twisting the characters into a more normative version of the fairy tale narrative. Howl becomes a much more likeable character, and he recovers the agency that the novel attributed to Sophie. Instead of playing with the characters' subversion, Miyazaki plays with the feelings of familiarity of the fairy tale narrative and atmosphere to integrate real-life elements that will make his audience think and reflect about some contemporary topics, such as war. Therefore, the

fairy-tale narrative is, for him, a medium through which he can express ideas and morals to his audience.

Both instances of the story use the fairy tale narrative for different purposes, but the genre's influence over their work is clear. Even without dealing with specific tales, Jones and Miyazaki manage to play with enough elements that prove that the fairy tale narrative can be adapted and incorporated in works that do not necessarily categorize as such at first glance. This adaptability of the genre and its capacity to evolve with the recent trends is both what keeps the fairy tale relevant in our current literature and what spurs current authors to change it to make it more fitting to our current narratives. This way, the familiar narratives are both a nostalgic resource and an interesting medium to break this familiarity of the stories, that allow many possibilities to the writers to create a well-known, but at the same time completely innovative story. Therefore, the play with tradition and the new elements that subvert these ideas renovate the genre at the same time that they keep it alive, a testament that the fairy tale has always been, and will continue to be, an essential part to our narratives.

The influence of the fairy-tale on this story can still be extended further to other areas of the book, such as Sophie's constant self-referential attitudes, briefly discussed in the first section, or the inclusion of fairy-tale like elements such as the seven league boots. The topics this dissertation dealt with can also be analysed only in regards to the film or the novel, focusing more on the specific details of each of the story's versions. Future research on this topic can also give more focus to feminist theory in the case of Jones' novel, linking the subversive tendencies of the book to the increasing feminist subversive fairy tales appearing towards the end of the 20th century, such as Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*.

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