

BETTER AND HAPPIER AND FREER THAN BEFORE¹:
AGENCY AND SUBVERSION OF GENRE IN DIANA WYNNE JONES'S
HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE, CASTLE IN THE AIR, AND HOUSE OF MANY WAYS

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways* challenge and subvert the genres of fairy tale, *Arabian Nights* romance, and Victorian sensibility, respectively, and the ways in which the protagonist of each tale defies the constraints imposed by family and her or his own internal narrative to gain self-knowledge and agency. Jones's protagonists, Sophie, Abdullah, and Charmain, are initially stifled by cultural and familial expectations and by their own internalization of these norms. It is not until they are forced into circumstances far different from those they are used to that Sophie, Abdullah, and Charmain begin to question their beliefs about their own potential and about the world around them. During their adventures, they apply pre-existing skills and gain new practical abilities and knowledge, developing a stronger sense of identity, a surer command of language, and the ability to perceive truth amid pretense. Sophie, Abdullah, and Charmain subvert their own expectations and genres to gain agency. Jones uses wordplay and humour throughout her protagonists' journeys, and visually represents magic, creativity, and freedom through the use of colour, particularly blue and multi-coloured objects, and through flowers and gardens.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, and independent work by the author, Janet Elizabeth Robbins Eastwood.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

My parents, both keen readers, read stories to me before I was old enough to understand the concept of a book. I became a reader: to me it was perfectly normal to be so intent upon a narrative that I did not hear the call to come for dinner, to have character and plot details memorized to the *n*th degree, to enjoy reciting to myself (and anyone else who would listen) poems and songs and paragraphs from the stories I liked best.

The books I read were of a wide variety, from puzzle picturebooks to fairy tales to survival stories to quest narratives such as Brian Jacques' *Redwall* saga. I devoured stories set in modern North America, tales set in all regions of the globe, books about the past. I was introduced to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* because my Dad waved it in front of me and refused to tell me what a hobbit was. I reread my Mum's much-loved copy of *Pride and Prejudice* until I learned to appreciate Jane Austen's humour. Anything that any of my family had borrowed from the library and left in our enormous Library Book Box was fair game.

As I grew older and my friends either ceased reading for pleasure, or moved on from children's literature, I found that I was unwilling to abandon children's books and fairy tales. It was slightly embarrassing, perhaps, but I preferred children's books to the kinds of books I felt vaguely that I was supposed to move on to. The children's books didn't all have happy endings – some of them itched at me in the same dissatisfying way that certain fairy tales did – yet there was something about them that called me to reread them. The endings of Hans Christian Andersen's literary fairy tales, for example, bothered me; I felt it would be so easy to fix the pointless misery if I could only step in and make things right. I was fascinated by Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* without knowing why. And more and more, I found myself

seeking out fairy tales, fractured and otherwise. I wanted the original tales, as many different variants as I could find, and I wanted the stories reimagined as novels, whether seriously, as in Robin McKinley's books, or otherwise, as in Patricia C. Wrede's *The Enchanted Forest Chronicles* and Michael Buckley's *The Sisters Grimm*.

When I was admitted to the Master of Arts in Children's Literature Program at UBC I made the astonishing discovery that I was far from the only adult who preferred children's literature, and that children's literature was an acceptable avenue for academic inquiry. As I studied the history of children's literature and considered the books that had most shaped me, quest fantasy, with its pure-hearted heroic ideals, and fairy tales, with their peculiar characters and plots and slippery meanings, emerged as enduringly influential in forming my worldview. I chose to pursue what bewildered and bewitched me: the enduring popularity of fairy tales, their transmission into middle reader and novel form for children and young adults, and how the meanings of the tales shifted with each retelling.

Inspiration and Research Questions

Much to my amazement, many authors over the past decades have been doing exactly that: experimenting with fairy tales. How does the story change if the focal point is not Cinderella, but one of the Ugly Stepsisters? What happens if the Good Folk must pay a teind to hell during the reign of Mary Tudor, or if Janet's Tam Lin and Thomas the Rhymer are the same man living in modern England? What if Beauty and the Beast isn't quite so straight-forward a socializing tale? Scholars, naturally, have not been far behind in interpreting these retellings. I, also, was eager to delve into analyzing the strategies employed by authors and their results: what does the author consider the most essential parts of the fairy tale? Does the novel question or reinforce the worldview put forward by a particular tale? What *is* the worldview of a particular

tale, in cases where one source version can be found, which is not possible for most folk tales but can be managed for literary tales such as “Beauty and the Beast” and “The Little Mermaid.”

Most well-known fairy tales have been reimagined in a variety of media, from picturebooks to middle readers to young adult novels, and, in most cases, also as parodies. The stories that struck me most, however, were stories that used a tradition and called it into question from within. Three favourites were *Beauty: A Retelling of Beauty and the Beast* (1993) by Robin McKinley, *The Perilous Gard* (1993) by Elizabeth Marie Pope, and *Howl’s Moving Castle* (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones, all of them featuring female protagonists in their mid-teen years who leave home, triumph over opposing forces, and find their place in the world.

In *Beauty*, McKinley closely follows many details of the fairy tale: Beauty is the studious youngest of three sisters, she is close to her father, the Beast’s castle is magical with corridors that shift on Beauty, Beauty is compassionate and cares for the Beast although she doesn’t wish to marry him, and Beauty has true dreams. However, our protagonist’s name is Honour; “Beauty” is a nickname, and one she considers unapt as, like many teenagers, Beauty goes through an extended awkward phase where she is all angles and pimples. Her sisters, Grace and Hope, are loving rather than selfish, and Beauty has a happy home life, both before and after her father loses all his money. Beauty’s visit home is undertaken to deliver the news that Grace’s long-lost fiancé is alive, and her late return is not due to malicious scheming but to the affectionate pleas of all her family members. McKinley emphasizes the domestic as well as the fantastic. I was taken by the emphasis on Beauty’s love of learning and her stubbornness, and especially by the family dynamics.

In *The Perilous Gard* it is an elder sister, also well-read and intelligent, who suffers because of a mistake made by a family member; here, Kate’s naive younger sister, Alicia. Kate

Sutton is exiled to a remote castle and from there stumbles upon the existence of the Fairy Folk, who take her to be a slave. Kate obstinately clings to the little independence allowed her. She adjusts to hard work and grows in inner strength, and when her chance for freedom comes, risks it to save Christopher Heron, a fellow captive whom the Fairy Folk intend to sacrifice to renew the land. Kate uses her experience of the Fairy Folk, her knowledge of individual humans, and the scraps she has heard of the Tam Lin ballad to save herself and the people for whom she cares. It is Kate's character, with its seeming faults as well as virtues, that wins her freedom and garners honour from both human lords and the elven Lady in the Green.

The protagonist of *Howl's Moving Castle* is bookish Sophie Hatter who, certain that as the eldest of three she is doomed to fail, devotes her time to looking after and preparing her younger sisters for success. When she is aged sixty years by the Witch of the Waste, Sophie enters the service of the Wizard Howl, and promptly becomes something between a friend, grandmother, and domestic tyrant to the other inhabitants of the castle. In her old age, Sophie is bold about expressing her opinions and feelings. She saves her companions and the kingdom from the Witch and keeps Howl from going to the bad when she accepts that she is only doomed to failure if she lets herself believe that she is.

In all three stories, the protagonist is educated, intelligent, strong-willed, and devoted to her family. Beauty, Kate, and Sophie are forced into or undertake physical labour, whether domestic or outdoors, and all three use this to their advantage: Beauty finds satisfaction and a sense of belonging becoming 'one of the boys' in her village; Kate uses the opportunity to learn as much as she can about the Fairy Folk's habits and subterranean passages, figuring out how to travel the local tunnels without light and discovering where Christopher is caged; Sophie exerts control over the castle's inhabitants by taking control of the household, earning herself a home

and creating a new family at the same time. These three books use fairy tale traditions and function, in some ways, as fairy tales, yet they also challenge or call into question the expectations encoded in the fairy tale tradition. Each woman has or develops agency despite outside forces and internal(ized) pressures, and success comes as a result of what are often deemed faults, such as stubbornness, willingness to argue, and disobedience, as well as traditional virtues of hard work, co-operation, and obedience. I determined to examine middle-reader novels that are set within the fairy tale tradition and call it into question. Pope's *The Perilous Gard* is based on a folk ballad, however, and most other novels based on the "Tam Lin" story, notably *Tam Lin* by Pamela Dean and *An Earthly Knight* by Janet McNaughton, are for older readers. McKinley's "Beauty and the Beast" tale has been the focus of a number of studies (Hearne and DeVries 2000; Perry 2004), as has Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*. The latter's two companion novels, *Castle in the Air* and *House of Many Ways*, on the other hand, have received little academic attention. With this in mind, Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* series became the primary texts for this study.¹ The following questions frame the study:

- How do *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways* challenge and subvert the conventions of their respective genres? More specifically,
- Which conventions and genres do *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways* subvert, and to what effect?
- How do the protagonists of *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways* break through the constraints imposed by their genres, their families, and their own selves, to gain self-knowledge and agency?

¹ A full and detailed discussion of the rationale and criteria for the choice of the primary texts can be found in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Significance of the Study

The endurance and popularity of fairy tales and *Arabian Nights* argues that these traditions are part of powerful metanarratives within western culture, and therefore worthy of critical examination. To borrow Rosemary Jackson's words on literary fantasies, any text "is produced within, and determined by, its social context" (3). A text which resists the constraints of genre therefore indicates a shift, whether popular or scholarly, in the understanding of genre, or at the very least an increased rigidity in its application, which calls for examination. The creative subversion prevalent throughout Jones's stories has built her a reputation as an author who "takes her readers... step by step to self-awareness" (Baker 249). Although *Howl's Moving Castle* has received scholarly attention, very little critical analysis has been conducted of *Castle in the Air*, and a review of the literature has identified no scholarly studies on *House of Many Ways*. Since these three books form a series it seems reasonable to expect that certain themes might be carried and developed from book to book; however, no such examination has yet been undertaken.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze how Jones uses and disrupts conventions of genre to question the narrative and cultural expectations embedded within these conventions in *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air* and *House of Many Ways*. I will examine these novels separately and in conjunction for patterns and themes within and between the stories.

The opening paragraph of *Howl's Moving Castle* situates the story within the fairy tale tradition: "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 reach your fortunes” (9). The rest of the story draws on elements from and conventions of the fairy tale tradition, problematizing, subverting, and recreating this tradition (Rosenberg, 2002). The tale’s companion novels, *Castle in the Air* (1990), and *House of Many Ways*, (2008), although set in the same world, problematize different conventions, respectively that of *Arabian Nights* romance narratives and Victorian notions of respectability. This thesis examines how Jones uses and subverts these forms in *Howl’s Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways*. Specific attention is paid to the ways in which Jones’s protagonists initially accept and endure, then come to reject and transcend the limitations imposed by these forms, and to the journeys through which her protagonists develop and grow into their own persons, self-aware and capable of acting on their own behalf, as well as for the good of others.

Key Terms

Agency

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines agency as the “ability or capacity to act or exert power” (“Agency”). A character with agency is an agent, one who is able to choose her or his own actions and determine, whether to a small or great extent, the outcome of a situation and her or his own destiny. Characters with agency take action to work for their own best interest and for the best interests of those for whom they care.

Genre

Genre is a means of classifying literary works in order to understand them better by comparing works of similar styles; for example, poetry as distinct from short stories; fairy tales as different from heroic epics. Works within a genre have certain key features in common, although they also vary widely. As with symptoms of a disease, a literary work need not have all

the characteristic traits in order to belong to a genre; as Heath notes on the romance genre within *Arabian Nights*, “romances are not stories that fulfil generic definition completely, but those in which it predominates” (176). Genre is a descriptive tool useful for the reader, academic, and publishing business, not a prescription to be filled by the writer.

Subversion

The *OED* defines the verb “subvert” in a variety of ways: “To undermine without necessarily bringing down (an established authority, system, or institution); to attempt to achieve, esp. by covert action, the weakening or removal of (a government, political regime, etc.)” (def. 2c); “to turn (a person) away from a path or belief regarded as right or proper. Also in neutral or positive sense: to transform the beliefs or character of” (def. 3a); “to transform, change” (def. 3c); and most pertinently, “to challenge and undermine (a conventional idea, form, genre, etc.), esp. by using or presenting it in a new or unorthodox way” (def. 6). Fairy tales, both old and new, are often subversive.

Folk Tale

Folk tales are “oral narratives that circulate among the folk;” they are also “a specific set of tales, namely oral narratives that take place among the folk, that is, in a realistic setting with naturalistic details” (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 33). Tatar designates the former as *folk tales* and the latter as *folktales*. Folk tales were entertainment for adults and often full of sexual innuendo and violence. Characters are flat and static, and as Irwin observes of the *Arabian Nights*, “motivation is directly wedded to action. The despotic sultan kills because he is cruel; he is cruel because he kills” (226). Folk tales may have literary rather than oral narratives: literary fairy tales from France worked their way into German oral culture and, by the time the Grimm brothers collected their material, had become folk tales in Germany (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 15).

Fairy Tale (in the Western European Tradition)

Fairy tales may come from folk tales or from literary sources, and are “set in a fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural intervention are taken wholly for granted” (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 33). The princess in “The Goose Girl” speaks with the head of her dead horse and commands the wind as naturally as she would converse with her mother. Magic is common, although fairies are not necessarily present, and the protagonist may be of high or low birth.

Literary Fairy Tale

Literary fairy tales are fairy tales that can be accurately attributed to a specific author. These stories draw on motifs from the oral and fairy tale traditions and are created in a literary, or written, form. Literary fairy tales often offer pointed social commentary or moral advice to their audience. Madame d’Aulnoy, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde, and George MacDonald are prominent literary fairy tale authors.

Fractured Fairy Tale

Fractured fairy tales are reimagined fairy tales given radically different meanings by an author (and illustrator, where appropriate) through a change in the story such as focal character, plot events, and motivations. The individual and the struggles of being human are emphasized over the trial and reward or punishment sequence. Characters often have knowledge of the traditional story being changed, as in Sarah Mlynowski’s *Whatever After* series, where Abby and her younger brother, Jonah, travel through a magic mirror to different fairy tale stories and change each one, whether accidentally or on purpose, as in *Sink or Swim*, where they work to give the Little Mermaid a happier ending.

Motif

Motifs are the recurring large patterns in folk and fairy tales, such as the success of the youngest brother where his elder unworthy brothers fail; the oppression of the beautiful good daughter by her two ugly stepsisters; the wicked witch; the evil stepmother; animal helpers; and the recurrence of the number three.

Companion Story

Castle in the Air and *House of Many Ways* are marketed as sequels to *Howl's Moving Castle*, in that each is “a literary work that, although complete in itself, forms a continuation of a preceding one” (*OED* “sequel”). However, despite the recurring presence and importance of Howl, Sophie, and Calcifer in each story, these latter books can more accurately be defined as companion novels, as described by Johnson: “a companion novel is set in the same fictional world as a preceding work, but a new protagonist is introduced who either retells the original story or details a new one” (11). In *Castle in the Air*, Abdullah is the protagonist, and the setting, at least initially, is the Sultanate of Rashpuht; the kingdoms of Ingary, Strangia, and High Norland do not play a significant role for the first portion of the novel, nor do Sophie, Howl, and Calcifer. In *House of Many Ways*, Charmain is the protagonist, and the novel is set entirely in High Norland, with Sophie, Howl, and Calcifer not appearing as characters until late in the book.

Endings, Closed or Open

A closed or absolute ending leaves the protagonist and often supporting minor characters having gained, in the case of a happy ending, “as much happiness as would ever have been possible” (Johnson 100). Everything is resolved; loose ends are tied up. An open or indeterminate ending, on the other hand, offers potential for future conflict, change, and adventure. Characters retain agency and the future is unknown. Fairy tales typically have closed

endings: Cinderella marries the prince and lives happily ever after; Hansel and Gretel return to their father and the three of them live contentedly on the gold from the witch's house, the step-mother having died in the meantime.

Arabian Nights

Arabian Nights is a collection of tales, both from oral and literary sources, from the Middle East, ranging in origin and setting from Egypt to Baghdad to China. Like western European folk tales, the stories in *Arabian Nights* range from courtly tales to bawdy trickster stories, and reflect a diverse range of cultural values and mores. The frame tale of *Arabian Nights* is that of Scheherazade and the sultan. When the sultan discovers that his wife and his brother's wife are adulterous, he embarks on a campaign of revenge. Each day he marries a virgin, lies with her, and in the morning has her decapitated before she, too, can betray him. Scheherazade, the daughter of the sultan's vizier, volunteers to marry him. On their wedding night, however, purportedly for the benefit of her younger sister (or old slave), Scheherazade begins to tell a fabulous tale, cutting off her narrative at the tale's climactic moment. The sultan, curious, spares her life one day so that she can finish the tale, which she does, and promptly begins a new story, thus extending the span of her life (and that of all the maidens the sultan might be marrying) one day at a time. Within the frame narrative, tales are embedded within tales and the act of storytelling is of primary importance – characters live or die by their ability to tell stories – as are honour, cleverness, and the idea of fate or destiny.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two, which is divided into four sections, provides an overview of the literature which informs my reading of *Howl's Moving Castle* and its two companion books. Section one discusses the work of Diana Wynne Jones and specifically the ways in which she pushes the

boundaries between genres. Section two explores the literature on the defining characteristics of fairy tales. Section three focuses on modern fairy tales, and section four provides a brief history and characteristic traits of the Arabian Nights tales.

Chapter three outlines the methodology I use to interrogate the ways in which *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways* challenge and subvert the generic traditions of which they are a part. In this chapter I explain why I chose to conduct a close reading and the theoretical frameworks which form the lenses through which I explore my primary texts.

Chapters four, five, and six present my findings on *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air*, and *House of Many Ways*, respectively.

Chapter seven consists of further discussion, conclusions, limitations of this study, and possible areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Diana Wynne Jones

Diana Wynne Jones's books have won numerous accolades including, twice, the *Mythopoeic Award* (1996 and 1999 for *The Crown of Dalemark* and *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, respectively). Her contributions to the field of children's and fantasy literature were lauded in particular by Bristol University, which conferred upon Jones an honorary Doctor of Letters (2006), and by the World Fantasy Convention, which gave her the *World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement* (2007).

Jones has written over forty books since her first novel, *Changeover*, was published in 1970; the most recent, *The Islands of Chaldea* (2014), was completed after Jones's death in 2011 by her sister Ursula. Most of these books are for children; almost all are fiction. I hesitate to say "fantasy" only because Jones herself strongly dislikes the boundaries imposed by genre (Butler, "Interview" 166-167) and her books tend to cross and blur distinctions between genres.

This refusal to be constrained by "daft" conventions (Butler, "Interview" 166-167) is emphasized throughout Jones's oeuvre. Renewal, on personal, social, and generic levels, is a major recurring theme as characters seek "freedom from personal enslavement, from narrative determinism, from fixed forms" (Ang 285). Jones's books often feature young protagonists who are under the rule of some oppressive authority, whether that authority takes the form of a family member, a government, social expectations, or patterns of thought, and as these protagonists come to realize and rebel against the exploitative restraints placed upon them, provide a "constant interrogation of the use and abuse of power, political and personal" (Rosenberg, "Introduction" 2). Empowerment of the powerless is a related theme, as characters gain through

knowledge and understanding an unprecedented “freedom of choice” as well as the “responsibility to assist others” (Hill 52).

Butler describes “some of Jones’s most characteristic themes as a writer [as] moral change and moral ambiguity; the vulnerable and fractured nature of identity; and the use and meaning of magic” (*Four British Fantasists*, 234). Jones’s protagonists are often unintentionally implicit in evil-doing as a result of the machinations of corrupt authority figures. However, the greater struggle is not external but internal: characters must overcome their own impulses to cruelty, selfishness, or passivity, for example, before they can defeat the outside forces that attempt to enslave them. Jones’s main characters are fallible, and must learn to recognize villainy, which occurs within the protagonists as well as in antagonistic characters (Winters 79) before they can engage their powers, magical and otherwise, to resist evil. A number of Jones’s characters undergo physical transformation as well as mental and moral growth, and learn to determine their own identities separate from metanarratives as they reluctantly shuck off previous assumptions about themselves, others, and the way the world works (Webb 223).

The uses and abuses of language are another primary concern in Jones’s books. Characters who misunderstand or are unable – or unwilling – to use language effectively are weakened, while characters who learn to understand and communicate well are powerful, even if they have less magical ability than other characters (Kaplan 56, 58). Words are power. Jones employs metafiction and demonstrates “the instability of language” in her novels; characters find freedom through “willingness to accept alternative points of view and interpretations that explore the mercurial and multi-faceted possibilities of language” (Gascoyne 211) as they grow in understanding and competence and learn to question the words that shape themselves and others.

Despite the seriousness of the problems explored, Jones's books also contain a great deal of humour, which varies from "what might be called the carnivalesque... to the satirical or parodic" (Butler, "Interview" 169). Nor is the humour restricted to the events and characters; Rosenberg writes that the "humorous, compassionate voice is an important element of Jones's writing" ("Introduction" 1): Jones does not look down upon her readers or attempt to impose a moral lesson – indeed, such an authorial approach would run counter to the themes her books emphasize – but instead her books delight even as they offer "challenging ideas about people, society, power, desire, and growing up" ("Introduction" 1) from an empathic perspective.

Jones's career began during the second Golden Age of Children's Literature, a time in which writing for children slowly began gaining respectability and critical attention. Jones relates that when she first read J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* she felt:

[A] sense of release, because at that point I'd been very worried about writing fantasy at all, it was so much frowned upon. It's very difficult to get over to people nowadays how incredibly contemptuous people were of the whole idea of "making anything up." Even though all fiction is made up. (Butler, "Interview" 170)

Jones herself, like Tolkien (and C. S. Lewis, both of whom she studied under during her days at Oxford) proved to be a ground-breaking author, though less widely recognized than her professors. "The use of alternative history as the structural basis of a multiverse, since employed by Philip Pullman and others, is one of Jones's distinctive contributions to children's literature" (Butler, *Four British Fantasists* 69); although the idea of multiple universes had been explored in earlier science fiction novels for adults, Jones was the first to use (and popularize) the notion in a children's book (94). Unlike many fantasy authors, Jones's novels often begin in "Otherworlds"

and later visit “our” world briefly, rather than take the character (and readers) across the threshold from our world to the realm of the fantastic (Nikolajeva 26). Jones thus defamiliarizes the reader’s world and is able to more sharply “interrogat[e] the values and attitudes we take for granted” (Nikolajeva 26). Chrestomanci Castle, Jones’s magical boarding school, in some ways prefigures J. K. Rowling’s Hogwarts, as well, a similarity Charles de Lint picked up on in his review of the first three *Harry Potter* books (“Books to Look For”). However, in a comparison of the first four books in Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and Jones’s *Chrestomanci* series, Winters reveals that “whereas Rowling... raises serious questions about the external forces of good and evil, Jones... forces the reader to ponder the strange co-existence of the two within the human mind” (95), and concludes that “where Rowling is traditional, Jones is subversive” (79). Unlike most of her contemporaries in children’s fantasy during the 1970s, such as Alan Garner and Susan Cooper, Jones “regularly set her books in towns and cities, and in doing so... significantly contributed to the creation of urban fantasy (Charles de Lint and Neil Gaiman, for example, were amongst her early admirers)” (Butler, *Four British Fantasists* 125).

Gaiman and de Lint, both fantasists, children’s and adults authors, and immensely popular, are not alone. Robin McKinley, herself a well-known fantasy writer for children and young adults, has also described herself as “an instant and complete sloppy and slavish fan” (“fame. sort of.”) upon first reading one of Jones’s novels. More recently, author Megan Whalen Turner has professed her love for Jones’s stories and stated that “Diana got me published” (“Why”). Influence is a tricky thing to measure, but no less than four award-winning authors, Gaiman, de Lint, McKinley, and Turner, have spoken about their relationship with and admiration for Jones’s writing (as well as for her personally) and the impact she has had upon them.

While, unsurprisingly, Jones's books have gained in complexity since her early novels, which tended to be limited in scope and less daringly original than her later works, her writing remains focused on the potential within and ability of human beings to grow and surpass obstacles to develop that potential (Butler, *Four British Fantasists* 233). Jones is not, however, afraid to end her stories unhappily or on an ambiguous note, much as she is not afraid to depict the mixture of good and evil within characters. "Jones is never sentimental: she remains clear-sighted about people's complex motivations and weaknesses, and her endings, though generally happy, are never happily-ever-after – but she remains an essentially optimistic writer" (Butler, *Four British Fantasists* 233).

Fairy Tales

What defines a fairy tale has been debated for hundreds of years without being satisfactorily resolved, but a functional definition and brief background is necessary here. Magic is common in fairy tales, although fairies are not. Protagonists may be of high or humble birth, may be female or male, may be the youngest of three, seven, or thirteen siblings, an only child, or a twin, (very rarely the eldest sibling), may be orphaned, missing one parent, or may have two living parents, may be human or half-human or an unusually-sized human, may succeed through virtue or cunning, may suffer violence or dole it out, may lose or amass wealth – or both, in either order – and often (although not always) marry at the end of the tale. There is no definitive term that describes the sort of tales known generally as "fairy tales," nor are there universally accepted terms for the sources of these tales. Are they fairy tales, or are they folk tales? Perhaps wonder tales? Literary fairy tales? Book fairy tales? What we know as fairy tales from the Western European tradition (whether they contain fairies or not) comes from recorded folk tales

and from literary sources. In this paper I will use “fairy tales” to describe the genre that is a hybrid of folk tales and literary tales written using folk patterns.

Oral tales are “oral narratives that circulate among the folk;” they are also “a specific set of tales, namely oral narratives that take place among the folk, that is, in a realistic setting with naturalistic details” (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 33). These tales were told by adults to a primarily adult audience; children were likely present but the tales were not addressed to them in particular. Oral tales have no original source that can be traced; each retelling was shaped by the needs and preferences of the storyteller and audience. Eventually these tales were told to and recorded by interested educated parties such as the Grimm brothers.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm lived in a time of international tumult (1785-1863 and 1786-1859, respectively) and believed that true German identity could be found in countryside folk culture (Hallett and Karasek 4), to which end they collected German folk tales. However, the dividing line between folk and literary tale was more permeable than they imagined. French literary tales, that is, stories created in a literary form (designed primarily to be read rather than recited) by an individual author drawing on motifs from the oral and other literary traditions, from the previous century had worked their way into German folk culture and were repeated to the Grimm brothers.

Literary fairy tales had developed in the mid-seventeenth century in France, when educated French women, such as Marie-Catherine Baronne d’Aulnoy, began to adapt folk tales as a means of engaging in dialogue about the role of women. Aware of earlier Italian authors Giovanni Straparola and Giambattista Basile, who had “effectively used folktales and fairy tales to criticize so-called courtly behaviour, immorality, and arbitrary violence without suffering from papal or ducal censorship” (Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 22), the French *conteuses* admired and

formalized this literary form, which allowed them to offer alternative visions of what court life and interpersonal relations could, in their ideal forms, be. Charles Perrault was involved in these debates, although his tales were more conventionally restrictive of female characters (Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 41). These literary tales spread and were absorbed back into oral culture: in this way, literary fairy tales from France became part of German oral culture (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 15). There is no clear delineating line between an oral and a literary tale.

The line between “the folk” and the educated elite is also blurred. “Folk” is often taken to mean the common people, peasants, by whom “folk” stories were told. However, as Zipes argues, “people of all classes told all types of tales and absorbed them. ‘Folk’ must be understood as ‘inclusive’ not exclusive” (*Art of Subversion* 8). In the medieval and renaissance world, Zipes points out, the same stories were told in noble households and in village houses; Straparola and Basile wove folk tales into their literary narratives, which were picked up by the French authors and incorporated into their stories as well. In both cases the literary tales circulated at courtly levels and among lower social strata, and the use of “peasant” stories was evidently unremarkable (*Art of Subversion* 43).

However, where did these folk tales come from? The Grimms were convinced that folk tales were remnants of an original German mythology. In the nineteenth century this theory was expanded upon by what Röhrich calls the “mythological schools of thought” (359), which claimed that every major character in each folk tale was derived from or could be equated with the pagan Germanic (or, more broadly, Indo-European) gods, or with other cosmic phenomena. A king might stand for the sun, for instance, or a dragon for a thunderstorm (Röhrich 359).

Other scholars, also noting the prevalence of regional variations upon the same basic plot, sought to find the original source of the tales, reasoning that they must have come from one area

and spread. Theodor Benfey, one of these migration theorists, believed that folk tales came from India, and had been passed along by various peoples to the Western Europeans long ago (Röhrich 359). This argument was countered by other scholars, who found tales which had originated in other countries, including Ireland, Greece, and Egypt. Nor did India have an equivalent tale for each European story. Polygenesis was proposed: the idea that “simple plots could emerge in different places independently from each other” (Röhrich 360), and that as Max Lüthi argues, “recognizably similar folktales with the same motifs have been told in very different cultures all over the world because the tales express something fundamental about what it is to be human and live in the world – about universal experiences, struggles, and desires” (as summarized in de Vos and Altmann, *New Tales* 19).

This conviction has been picked up by psychoanalysts such as Bruno Bettelheim, whose influential *The Uses of Enchantment* analyzes popular folktales from a Freudian perspective and asserts that folk tales are narratives which convey the human wisdom necessary for children to overcome the Oedipal complex and reach self-realization (26, 39). This perspective has been sharply criticized by a number of scholars including Maria Tatar. Tatar points out that “just as every rewriting of a tale is an interpretation, so every interpretation is a rewriting” (*Off with Their Heads* xxvi). Bettelheim’s work ascribes villainy and suppressed negative desires to children in popular tales, demonstrating the “need to ignore adult evil” (xxiv) even in tales such as “Hansel and Gretel,” which features parents abandoning their children. Furthermore, Tatar charges, popular tales are popular for a reason which has nothing to do with children’s needs and everything to do with adult men selecting and publishing the tales which matched their beliefs on childhood and gender roles: tales with active women were edited out, as was scatological and sexual humour as the cultural construction of childhood (and gender roles) changed. As part of

this process of adaptation to make tales “suitable” for children, subversive and chaotic elements were removed while violence was heightened in the interests of creating didactic, cautionary literature intended to inculcate “correct” behaviour and morals in children through intimidation and emphasis on punishment for the disobedient, and reward for the obedient (*Off with Their Heads* 31, 49).

Jack Zipes takes a similar stance, albeit from a Marxist perspective, focusing on folk tales as a site of domination and resistance. In *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, Zipes emphasizes the utopian impulse within folk tales, which both encourage and question the status quo, and the socializing aspects of the canonical tales – “Snow White,” “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and other best-known tales, which tend towards passive female protagonists in need of rescue – preferred by male bourgeois editors, such as Perrault and the Grimm brothers. Zipes and others have also paid attention to the prevalence of similar motifs across the western European fairy tale tradition.

Motifs are the great patterns that recur in fairy tales. According to folklorist and typologist Stith Thompson, a motif is “the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition” (415, cited in de Vos and Altmann xii). Motifs include character types, such as the wicked witch, the handsome prince, the youngest child, and the haughty princess, items and beliefs such as a magic ring, the Wild Hunt, and the significance of three, and plot events, such as an encounter with an old man, a giant, or an animal in need of help. These motifs are so prevalent and powerful that associations, such as ugly stepsister and cruel stepmother do not need to be described or explained; upon hearing or reading “stepsister” or “stepmother” an audience immediately knows that such a woman is ugly and/or evil. When three brothers set out on a quest, the audience knows before anything happens that it is the despised youngest brother

who will succeed, that the dwarf or animal whom this brother helps will in turn provide advice, a magical token, or practical assistance without which victory is impossible.

Motifs provide a core for tales so that, although every oral and literary retelling is slightly different according to the context, interests, and ability of the teller and audience (de Vos and Altmann 5), the underlying story is immediately recognizable – “Cinderella,” for example. Variants of the “Cinderella” tale feature a virtuous and beautiful girl who is persecuted by her stepmother and stepsisters, is aided by a mother-substitute with supernatural powers (a doll, tree growing from her mother’s grave, an animal, or a fairy godmother), and who marries a powerful and handsome young man, despite the efforts of her step-relatives to secure the desirable man for a stepsister. Variants may include extended episodes; in a Chinese version the stepmother kills the Cinderella figure, who later is brought back to life and in turn kills (permanently) her murderer; but despite the “culturally specific details” (de Vos and Altmann 7) and the different names given to the protagonist, “Cinderella” tales share core elements – motifs – and are recognizable as the same basic story.

These motifs, however, are not absolute. In “Kate Crackernuts” (Lang 299-302) the less-beautiful daughter of an evil stepmother saves her step-sister, earns a fortune, and rescues a prince. Many other lesser-known tales have accordingly less-common motifs, because these tales (and thus the motifs therein) were not considered as valuable to culture by the forces that controlled production of printed (and therefore disseminated on a mass scale) tales and were therefore not passed on. Motifs, as conventionalized forms, are tools used to express dissenting ideas about social constructs and cultural and political situations; motifs are also sites for expressing dissent (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 11-15).

Modern Fairy Tales

The explosion of reworked canonical and brand-new literary fairy tales over the past few decades has had scholars, teachers, and other interested parties scrambling for a term to describe these stories. However, this flood of reworked and hard-to-define fairy tales is hardly a new phenomenon. “Modern” fairy tales perform generally the same function as the “original” fairy tales did – they question, problematize, and propose alternatives to contemporary social discourse around political and socio-cultural norms, particularly with regards to gender roles. In this sense, current fairy tales, whether original stories or re-envisioned canonical tales, are truer to the function of the fairy tale genre than the endless reprints of the fairy tale “canon” passed on to children without consideration of, much less challenge to, the embedded cultural norms and socializing intent of the tales. The French *conteuses* who formed the fairy tale genre did so as a means to present their own, often controversial, ideas about society and civility, particularly the abilities of women, relations between the sexes, and the ideal court. The seventeenth century German emphasis on proper bourgeois behaviour “fractured” fairy tales by re-forming them to perpetuate culturally determined ideals (Blackwell 163). Victorian England did the same. However, bowdlerized and socializing fairy tales have not gone unchallenged: at the end of the nineteenth century a number of British writers, including George MacDonald, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Andrew Lang, Oscar Wilde, Kenneth Grahame, and Edith Nesbit, reverted to the French model by crafting fairy tales with the intent of provoking readers to consider their world and its conventions more carefully (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 87), and were followed by writers of other nationalities, notably L. Frank Baum, who similarly expressed discontent with the world as it was and offered an alternative vision in his Oz series. Writers around the world in the present day have continued this tradition of querying power structures and social norms.

The past several decades have seen a wide variety of fairy tales published. Some are what Zipes calls transfigured tales, that is, they take a familiar tale and change it in order to alter its socializing effect and relativize its values (*Art of Subversion* 178). The tale may be told in first-person narrative from the traditional protagonist's perspective and fill in details, such as motivation, that are absent from the original. New fairy tales may conform to the traditional plot or may offer a completely alternative perspective on events and characters. The tale may be told from the perspective of the antagonist or a minor character, again giving a very different slant on the story. Often passive protagonists are given agency and action; in other cases, gender roles are switched. Multiple tales may be combined into one story, or one basic story expanded into a series. Authors also write new fairy tales, using "conventional fairy-tale structures and language in order to write their own unconventional, authentic, and unique fairy tales" (de Baubeta 144).

But what to call these tales? As with "traditional" fairy tales, there is no consensus. Every telling of an oral or literary tale is necessarily a "retelling," as no two storytellers, writers, translators, or editors present the story in quite the same way. "Revisionist" tales, a term used by feminist poets in the 1970s-1990s, is an apt description of contemporary versions which take a patriarchal tale and rework it to expose the tale's lack of neutrality and/or offer a feminist slant on the same basic story. However, "revisionist tales" assume that the "original" fairy tales are uniformly socializing tools of patriarchy. Although fairy tales have certainly been conscripted for this purpose, they have also been a site of resistance, as the *conteuses* and many later writers demonstrate (Weekes, "Fractured Fairytale – Terminology"). "Reversion" (Butler, "Fractured Fairytale – Terminology) more subtly suggests the return to explorative, rather than strictly conventional, fairy tales. "Fractured fairy tales" is also commonly used for retellings that are humorous (Hixon, "Fractured Fairytale – Terminology), although this statement is problematic,

since the humour in such tales (usually parody or satire) often arises from the subversion of conventional expectations, which in itself draws readers' attention to the expectations without necessarily challenging them. Betsy Herne has coined "revisioned," which fits particularly well for fairy tales that are retold from another character's perspective or present alternative motives for characters' behaviour; such tales are also called "redacted" (Yolen, "Fractured Fairytale – Terminology"). The terms "revisions of" or "revised" fairy tales have gained traction, as these terms include parodies and light-hearted works as well as more serious, often inter- and meta-textual stories which, "though still part of the folktale tradition... are more consciously reacting to the very tradition they belong to" (Doughty 11). De Vos and Altmann assert that the parody does not belong to the genre which it challenges (27); however, I disagree. As Weekes points out, "the literary fairy tale genre is, by nature, revisionist, with a strong tendency towards fracturing and remaking" ("Terminology"). In other words, playing with form and expectations is part of the fairy tale tradition in "a creative process of recreation" (Nicholson, "Fractured Fairytale – Terminology"). For this reason, I will use the term "fairy tale" as well as "revised fairy tale" to describe modern works that use and question fairy tale elements to address the fears, hopes, and social debates of their time and place.

History and Characteristics of Arabian Nights

The *Arabian Nights* (or *One Thousand and One Nights*) is a collection of tales from the Middle East, ranging in origin and setting from Egypt to Baghdad to China, which was first translated into French by Antoine Galland and published as a series between 1704 and 1717. Translations of Galland's work into German and English appeared shortly thereafter, as did many imitations. The stories in *Arabian Nights* range from courtly tales to bawdy trickster tales and reflect a diverse range of cultural values and mores.

The tale of Scheherazade and the Sultan Shahriyar frames the whole collection of *Arabian Nights*. When Shahriyar and his brother are betrayed by their wives, the former embarks on systemic murder: each night Shahriyar marries a virgin, lies with her, and in the morning has her decapitated. Shahriyar's vizier has a beautiful daughter, Scheherazade, who marries the sultan; however, on their wedding night, Scheherazade tells her husband a tale so marvellous that he spares her life for one day so that she can finish the story, which she has paused at the climactic moment. The next night, Scheherazade finishes the tale and promptly begins a new story, thus pushing off her death sentence day by day – or story by story. The tales embedded in this frame narrative often contain more embedded tales. Storytelling therefore is presented as an art of paramount importance; characters live or die by their ability to tell stories. Honour, cleverness, and acceptance of one's fate are desirable traits in the world of *Arabian Nights*.

A number of tales in Galland's version appear to be made up rather than taken from the manuscript which he had purchased and had ostensibly translated. In fact, Galland altered the tales significantly, as did later translators. Galland's text of *Arabian Nights* was immensely popular in the western world, inspiring emulators in Arabic studies, imitators hoping to make an easy profit, and frauds who translated tales from French back into Arabic (or invented them wholesale) in order to "discover" an original or "missing" tale from the collection (Mahdi 124), which despite its title, contained nowhere near the thousand and one tales implicitly promised. Many scholars, Galland included, considered the *Arabian Nights* to be a written collection of Arabian folktales. However, its history is more complicated.

Like the western fairy tale canon, *Arabian Nights*, or, to give the collection its Arabic name, *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, is made of a bewildering mixture of genuine folk tales and literary tales, neither of which can be easily extricated from the influence of the other. When the oral

tales were written down, they were altered to fit literary customs (Irwin 113), and written tales (whether of oral origin or not) cycled back into oral and lower-class culture. Unlike western fairy tales, many of which are rural in focus, the stories in *Arabian Nights* tend to centre on city life. The settings and protagonists are often urban, and the tales were collected and written by people who lived in cities (Irwin 121). Nor can the collection, unlike the Grimms' publications, be fixed to a particular date. Scholars in the late 1800s, comparing different manuscripts and fragments of tales, gradually arrived at the conclusion that the tales in *Arabian Nights* have "no single author, but were the work of many hands over a long period of time" (Irwin 34).

The oldest tales originated in India and Persia and were translated in the eighth century CE into Arabic under the title *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. Over the next two centuries, Arabic tales from Iraq and pre-existing, lengthy stories were incorporated. In the 12th century a number of less savoury tales featuring criminals and sex joined the collection in Egypt or Syria. From then to the 17th century stories were added and dropped, according to the region, and were altered to reflect modern customs "so that one finds references to guns, coffee-houses and tobacco in some stories which certainly pre-date the invention or discovery of those things" (Irwin 48). The *Arabian Nights* is both folkloric and literary; it is "an anonymous, slowly-evolving, composite work" (Irwin 62) and a piece that was written down and shaped by the preferences and literary styles of the people who recorded it on paper at different times and different places.

Despite the wild disparity in worldview, culture, and geographic location between the many tellers and recorders who created the tales, some themes, motifs, and techniques have been distinguished. Character and action are closely linked: almost as soon as a character trait is revealed it is manifested in a deed; a character's deeds reveal his or her traits (Todorov 228). Protagonists are often marked from birth for a glorious fate, which in order to achieve they must

endure loss of their status before it can be restored or increased; sometimes status is not lost as much as concealed, as characters disguise themselves to achieve some desired goal (Heath 199). What seems is not always what is, in the world of *Arabian Nights*.

Love is a major theme, although highly conventionalized in its expression (Farag 198); the sufferings undergone by lovers form a significant portion of the tales. Heroines in love tales are often more active than the men, sometimes dressing as men to reach a lover, to test his loyalty, or else to win a fortune or travel in comparative safety (Irwin 167, 171). In many instances the love stories are didactic: lovers who act honourably despite the contradictory impulses of passionate attachment are favoured by fate, who, often in the person of a dread ruler, removes the barriers between the two; while lovers who act dishonourably are severely punished. Acting with propriety and trusting to fate tend to resolve suffering, while attempts to disregard social standards in the single-minded pursuit of love end badly (Heath 187-189).

Fate or destiny, in fact, is one of the most powerful currents in the *Arabian Nights*. Although lovers go to great lengths, in many cases they are only (re)united because of the intervening power of fate, whether fate manifests as a djinn or through the judgement of a powerful human such as a sultan. One's fate cannot be avoided, however hard one tries; in fact, there are a number of tales in which the attempts of a character to avoid their destiny result in the unfolding of that very destiny. In some cases, events occur solely because they are predicted to occur: "a form of reverse causation operates... in which [knowledge of] the prophecy gives birth to what is prophesied" (Irwin 199).

If fate cannot be avoided, human-ordained laws and order can. The medieval Arab tales in particular pit cunning protagonists against their social superiors in a "celebration of artfulness or trickiness" (Irwin 144). The high moral standards demanded of lovers and other characters do

not apply here; those who are able to outwit their enemies by whatever means necessary carry the day. Women, thieves, and other untrustworthy characters are the heroes who triumph over those who are more powerful but less innovative than themselves.

The narrative devices used in *Arabian Nights* have benefited from both folktale and biblical studies. Pinault notes that the structure of the narrative in the Arabic manuscripts is carefully patterned to draw the audience's attention to important items and ideas within a tale. This arrangement of pattern emphasizes the theme or moral while adding to the audience's pleasure by allowing listeners or readers to discern the pattern and anticipate future events (22-23). "Leitwortstil" or "leading-words" also underline the theme throughout individual tales as words sharing a root are used repeatedly, modifying and drawing attention to the significance of that word and theme (Pinault 18). Characters and objects are occasionally described with great detail in what Pinault calls "dramatic visualization" (23), that is, describing a particular object or person so that an audience can picture it in their minds. Alternately, some characters and objects are barely described, but acquire significance through repeated casual mention or "repetitive designation" until they ultimately are revealed to have an important part in the resolution of the tale (Pinault 16). As with certain western fairy tales, knowing the true name grants immense power (Irwin 178-179).

However, although *Arabian Nights* contains folk tales and has a number of similarities to the western fairy tale tradition (including a rich interplay between oral and literary tales), and despite the profound influence *Arabian Nights* has had on western literature since its first translation into French, applying systems such as Propp's morphology or Aarne and Thompson's typology yields very limited results. *Arabian Nights* is not solely folk tales stitched together into a quilt by the thread and frame of Scheherazade's courage, but incorporates "long heroic epics,

wisdom literature, fables, cosmological fantasy, pornography, scatological jokes, mystical devotional tales, chronicles of low life, rhetorical debates and masses of poetry” (Irwin 2). A number of these forms – particularly the fables, scatological jokes, and devotional tales – have equivalents in western folklore. However, they come from disparate cultures and religious beliefs, and while comparison of the two would yield insight into both, lumping them together as though context was irrelevant does scholarship no service. Similarly, neither Aarne and Thompson’s typology nor Propp’s morphology was designed for tales from the folkloric cultures and history from which *Arabian Nights* was crafted (Irwin 218). *Arabian Nights* must be examined as its own creature, and not assumed to be a parallel to the western fairy tale tradition, despite similarities between the two.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodology

As is common in English literature studies, I chose to conduct a close reading of the texts. The close reading method emphasizes the meaning revealed by “carefully orchestrated and unified textual elements (for example, images, tropes, tones, and symbols),” (Leitch 3), rather than psychological interpretations of the text or comparisons to incidents and characters from its author’s life. Close reading relies on observation of the text, paying attention to “patterns and relationships” which allow the scholar “to develop an overall interpretation of the messages conveyed by the text” (Taylor 27). Contradictions within the text are viewed as “literary ambiguities, paradoxes, or ironies” (Leitch 3), and thus part of an intentional whole. My close reading was conducted of a purposive sample: I have long been interested in Jones’s works, and her *Sophie* and *Howl* books formed a natural grouping for a close reading.

Rationale for Primary Text Selections

Although tellers of oral tales seem to wield absolute power over the content and details of the stories they tell, “the successful retelling of a tale requires the narrator to take the measure of his listeners, anticipate their wishes, and veer away from what might offend their ears... Thus the teller of tales works in concert with his audience to create popular tales” (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 25). Each retelling emphasizes different aspects of any given tale so that the retelling fits the community’s mores and concerns. The same is true of interpretation: audiences and scholars interpret fairy tales in the light of their own culture and belief systems. How any community or individual retells or interprets a tale is likely to reveal more about that community or individual than it does about the tale itself, which is endlessly flexible. Constant examination of “tradition”

and “meaning” is therefore necessary. The resurgence in popularity of fairy tales and fairy tales re-imagined acts almost as a barometer of culture, and demands careful study.

Middle readers, a term which describes both books written for an audience between nine and twelve years of age, and that audience itself, is rich territory for authors and study. Children in this age category are just beginning to enter puberty and the teenage years. They are more independent than younger readers and capable of understanding more nuanced texts. Novels written for middle readers can explore the themes of identity, coming of age, and family problems without being devoured by the typical young adult emphasis on romance and sexuality. Middle reader stories, like fairy tales, often “concern themselves with family conflict” (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 52) which foreshadows other struggles, whether of personal (as in the middle reader) or national (as in the fairy tale) importance.

Many recent fairy tale retellings offer dramatically different meanings to a story by reframing it: the roles of hero and villain may be reversed and the ending changed, as in *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (Trivizas 1993); the tale may become metaphysical, as in *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner 2001); the focal character may be the Ugly Stepsister rather than Cinderella (Maguire 1999); fairy tale conventions as a whole may form the background for the world, as in *Dealing with Dragons* (Wrede 1990). Characters have agency and depth, and the narrative focus is upon the human condition rather than upon trials and reward or punishment. Fairy tale conventions, such as the beautiful, kind princess and the youngest of three as triumphant over older siblings, are called into question. Revised fairy tales, in short, are fairy tales recreated by a particular (post)modern community or communities, and reflect, as do all retellings, the hopes, beliefs, and fears of the source community and individual author-reteller.

Fairy tales, both old and new, are often subversive. Fairy tales close to the oral tradition can be subversive in that they present characters of lowly status who by wits, violence, and/or magic, triumph over more powerful characters, as in the case of “Clever Gretel” (Grimm and Grimm), which details how a cook eats two chickens, drinks fine wine, and avoids punishment by tricking her master and his guest. Clever Gretel here does not do what is right or proper but she gets what she wants and is lauded for it. Literary fairy tales, such as those written by the French *conteuses*, were often subversive by problematizing the norms and attempting to change the established authorities of their day, even as the authors and their dialogue around such norms were forced to a certain extent to conform to these cultural expectations. Fairy tale revisions can likewise be subversive when they problematize the fairy tale conventions that have come to be seen as canonical and “normal,” although these conventions represent a very limited and highly censored selection of the oral and literary tales. Subversion, in fact, could be seen as a defining feature of the fairy tale genre, which tends to seek change and transformation of unjust situations, and therefore modern subversive revisions, particularly those which question the norms of their culture as well as the perceived fairy tale conventions, are more properly fairy tales than the watered-down, moralizing, cutesy or Disney-esque stories that the genre is commonly imagined to be.

Criteria for Primary Text Selections

My criteria for selecting primary texts were as follows. First, each book must have fairy tale elements. Second, it must be a prose novel written within the last thirty years for readers between nine and twelve years of age. Third, it must be playful and subversive in the tradition of tales like the Grimms’ “Fledgling” and “Clever Gretel,” and Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” as well as serious in topic. Fourth, each book must be a complete story

in its own right; although the texts may be part of a series, they must also function as stand-alone novels. Furthermore, each book must be written in English, as I am not fluent in any other language and thus am not qualified to examine the effects of translation on the tales.

I considered a number of Robin McKinley's fairy tales, including *Spindle's End* (2000), which recreates the story of "Briar Rose," more commonly known as "Sleeping Beauty." However, McKinley's characters and intended audience tend to be older than nine to twelve year olds, particularly *Deerskin* (1993), and McKinley's novels tend to have a mystical element that does not quite fit the fairy tale tradition. Merrie Haskell's *The Princess Curse* (2011) fits all my criteria, but blends fairy tales with Greek and other mythologies, and enticing though the prospect was, I decided that analyzing *The Princess Curse* would likely end up emphasising the intriguing blend of mythologies rather than the use of fairy tale elements. *The Fairy Tale Detectives* (2007), the first book in Michael Buckley's *The Sisters Grimm* series had a balance of gender and fit the age group, but is primarily part of a series rather than a stand-alone novel, and I felt that the series expanded on the fairy tale canon rather than questioned its conventions. Patricia C. Wrede's *Enchanted Forest Chronicles* (*Dealing with Dragons*, 1990; *Searching for Dragons*, 1991; *Calling on Dragons*, 1993; and *Talking to Dragons*, 1985) play with and oppose fairy tale conventions and make brief reference to a number of specific tales, but secondary characters remain stereotyped, and the series is more playful than serious. Eventually I settled on Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986), *Castle in the Air* (1990), and *House of Many Ways* (2008).

Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* and companions are set in a fantastical, fairy tale-esque world, use and alter fairy tale norms, and/or play on specific tales, including "Cinderella," "Beauty and the Beast," and tales from *Arabian Nights*, as well as more general elements from

the tradition(s). These three books, which reach a middle reader audience, address fairy tale expectations and are a series so it seemed logical to examine them together.

Introduction to the Primary Texts

The setting for all three books is a semi-medieval alternative world where magic is real. Seven league boots, for instance, exist. Although each story takes place in the same world (*Howl's Moving Castle* also has passages which occur in "our" world), the bulk of each tale occurs in a different country. Each story has a different protagonist, although some minor characters appear in more than one story, and Sophie, Howl, and Calcifer, who are the central characters in *Howl's Moving Castle*, play an important role in all three.

Sophie, the protagonist of *Howl's Moving Castle*, is a young woman who believes firmly that, as the eldest of three sisters, she is doomed to failure in life. It takes a curse from a wicked witch to send Sophie off to seek her fortune. Sophie falls in with Howl, a vain and slippery wizard, and works as the cleaning lady of his moving castle, which is powered by Calcifer, a fire demon. Sophie discovers her own considerable magical ability, but it is not until she accepts that she is not fated to fail that she is able to defeat the witch and break the spells that are harming Calcifer, Howl, and herself.

In *Castle in the Air*, Abdullah is a carpet merchant who happens to meet the woman of his dreams: Flower-in-the-Night. When Flower-in-the-Night is kidnapped by a djinn, Abdullah sets off to rescue her. With a flying carpet, a sullen genie, a foreign soldier, and a cat and her kitten as unreliable allies, Abdullah suffers the adventures he had blissfully daydreamed of during slow days at his carpet stall. Abdullah uses shrewd observation, practical knowledge, and clever reasoning rather than feats of derring-do to rescue Flower-in-the-Night.

Charmaine finds herself in for rather more than she had expected when she house-sits for her wizard Great Uncle in *House of Many Ways*. Magic, although exciting and happily not at all respectable, is trickier than she had imagined. Charmaine befriends an enchanting dog and her Great Uncle's apprentice, Peter, whose spells always turn out wrong, deals with several magical creatures, and tries to save the kingdom from an impostor determined to bankrupt and usurp the throne. She also finds a career or two to her liking, which are immensely important and not at all proper for a young lady.

Chapter 4: “What Has That One-Woman Force of Chaos *Done* to These Spells?”: Disordered Fairy Tales in *Howl’s Moving Castle*

The opening paragraph of *Howl’s Moving Castle* situates the story in a land where all the best-known fairy tale traditions are real. “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” (9). The convention of the success of the unlikely victor is underlined in the following paragraph, which states that had the father of the protagonist, Sophie Hatter, been “a poor woodcutter” (9) rather than an upper middle class milliner, poverty might have “given [Sophie] some chance of success” (9) despite the crippling impediment of being the eldest of three. Fairy tale traditions are established as all-important in the world of the story; and yet they are also immediately turned on their heads.² Fairy tale motifs such as the setting, types of characters, magical objects, importance of names, and the use of threes, are altered; here I will focus on the specific fairy tales that are invoked and playfully modified in *Howl’s Moving Castle*: “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.”³

In “Cinderella,” Cinderella’s mother dies when Cinderella is very young, leaving her alone with a father who remarries, bringing home a woman who has two daughters of her own from a previous marriage. Sophie’s mother likewise dies when Sophie is two years old (9), but Sophie has a one year old sister Lettie, and her new step-mother, Fanny, has no children at the time of her marriage. Instead, Fanny gives birth to Martha, a half-sister to the other two girls.

² For a thorough examination of how Sophie’s family alludes to and breaks fairy tale norms, see Kaplan, Deborah, “This Book Will Prove the Following Ten Facts: Diana Wynne Jones and the World-Shaping Power of Language,” MACL thesis, Simmons College, 1999. Web. 3 April 2013. <<http://suberic.net/dwj/thesis/txt>>

³ “Baum’s most iconic work and the foundational novel for his series of fourteen books set within the Oz universe, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) is often considered the archetype for the American fairy tale form... *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is the prototypical American fairy tale” (Krstovic 1).

Cinderella's stepmother soon reveals herself to be a selfish and proud woman, who cannot stand her step-daughter because Cinderella is much more good and beautiful than either of her own two daughters. Cinderella's father fades from the story and does not appear after his marriage. Fanny, in contrast, "treat[s] all three girls with the same kindness and [does] not favour Martha in the least" (10). Sophie, Lettie, and Martha are not "Ugly Sisters, but... grew up very pretty indeed, though Lettie was the one everyone said was the most beautiful" (10). When Mr. Hatter dies and the hat shop is encumbered with debts, Fanny takes care to find good apprenticeships for all three girls: Lettie goes to learn pastry-making at Cesari's, which has "a name for treating their learners like kings and queens" (12); Martha is sent to "a long quiet apprenticeship" (13) studying magic under an old friend of Fanny's; and Sophie, "being the eldest" (14) is designated as the one who will "inherit the hat shop when [Fanny] retire[s]" (14) and thus is apprenticed to Fanny herself.⁴

Cinderella is persecuted and mocked by her step-mother and step-sisters: she is forced to serve her sisters, fix their clothes and do their hair. Sophie voluntarily looks after her sisters even before her father dies. When Lettie and Martha fight, Sophie "drag[s] them apart and mend[s] their clothes" (10), as she is "very deft with her needle" (10). After Mr. Hatter's death, Sophie indeed experiences working in the hat shop as drudgery, because she feels "isolated and a little dull" (15) without her sisters; the other hat shop employees are older and polite to the future heir.

⁴ In a subtle reversal of the usual fairy tale quest order, where the eldest sets out and fails, the middle sets out and fails, and finally the youngest leaves home and succeeds, here it is the youngest who sets out first, followed by the middle child, and the eldest who leaves home last. Sophie and Lettie, the eldest and middle daughters, both achieve their goals (or are a fair way into reaching them) by the end of the book: Sophie has been released from the curse, is a powerful witch, and has found a home, husband, and work that she likes; Lettie has advanced swiftly in her study of witchcraft, and is about to gain a new tutor (and future husband). Martha, the youngest, has the least ambition. Having long since set aside her childhood determination to become "disgustingly rich without having to marry anybody" (10), Martha wants to "get married and have ten children" (25). At the end of *Howl's Moving Castle*, Martha is still too young to marry (although she does have a sweetheart, Michael, to whom she is possibly engaged), nor is it revealed later in the series whether Martha ever does achieve her goal or not; neither Martha nor Michael appear in *Castle in the Air* (Michael is briefly mentioned but that is all) or in *House of Many Ways*. Sophie, the eldest, sets out last and succeeds first; Lettie, the middle child, sets out second and succeeds second; Martha sets out first and it is never known what becomes of her.

Sophie is exploited by Fanny, who does not pay Sophie for her hours of work, in contrast to Martha, who earns a decent wage (27). As in “Cinderella,” all the daughters are deeply discontented, but only two of them do anything about it. Whereas Cinderella’s step-sisters take out their unhappiness on Cinderella, Martha and Lettie secretly switch places with each other in order to acquire apprenticeships more suited to their tastes. Lettie and Martha are angry with Fanny on Sophie’s behalf (26) and worry about their sister rather than side with Fanny and exploit her. Sophie, like Cinderella, submits meekly to her step-mother and does the work she is told to do, despite her own misery. Fanny’s neglect of Sophie stems from unintentional misunderstanding and worry, not malice, and Fanny later regrets her errors (269, 271). Martha and Lettie also later correct their misinterpretations of Fanny’s behaviour, and all four Hatter women love each other deeply.

Cinderella’s prince comes looking for her, as Howl does, albeit in a wonky fashion; Howl comes “courting” Lettie to find out more about Sophie. Where Cinderella leaves home and domestic labour to enjoy a life of luxury with her prince, Sophie leaves home and seizes the opportunity that domestic labour provides: a temporary home that gives her a chance to have her curse lifted.⁵ Whereas Cinderella works submissively yet is unhappy with her position, Sophie uses domestic duties, primarily cleaning and cooking, as a means to gain a position in Howl’s household for her own ends, and turns this position into a means of gaining power and authority over the household.⁶ Michael, Howl’s apprentice, “accept[s] Sophie gloomily as a sort of natural disaster” (72) and Howl takes days to notice that the castle is cleaner (70, 73). Cinderella endures victimhood; Sophie inflicts her cleanliness on the others: “You’re a dreadfully nosy, horribly

⁵ In a case of mistaken identity (256), the Witch of the Waste curses Sophie (32), who is thereby aged sixty years and rendered unable to tell anybody of the curse (48).

⁶ For a semiotic analysis of *Howl’s Moving Castle*, including an analysis of Sophie’s housekeeping as subverting patriarchal power through and against stereotypes of feminine power, see David Rudd, “Building Castles in the Air: (De)Construction in *Howl’s Moving Castle*.”

bossy, appallingly clean old woman. Control yourself. You're victimising us all" (74) Howl declares when Sophie attempts to make inroads into his pigsty of a bedroom. Far from demanding her service, Howl finds it unnecessary; he refuses her offer of mending a torn sleeve with the comment "How you must love servitude!" (76) and a demonstration of his skill by magically restoring the cloth. Cleaning, in fact, is Sophie's excuse for exercising her curiosity and exorcising her anger at the Witch who cursed her (77); Sophie "really enjoy[s] herself" (69) scrubbing the castle and setting it in order.⁷ When Sophie and Howl contemplate their future at the end of the novel, Sophie is fully aware "that living happily ever after with Howl would be a great deal more eventful than any story made it sound" (301), and in contrast to Cinderella's blissful escape from work via marriage, there is no indication that Sophie will cease cleaning and cooking for the castle's inhabitants. Jane Yolen notes that:

Cinderella, until lately, has never been a passive dreamer waiting for rescue. The forerunners of the Ash-girl have all been hardy, active heroines who take their lives into their hands and work out their own salvations. (And not without a bit of finagling and vengeance to boot.) (37)

Having to work is not the problem; what matters is being able to choose what work one does. Cinderella has no power at home, so she leaves and gains a home (castle complete with prince) more to her liking. Sophie feels powerless at home, and when she reaches rock bottom (when she is cursed) she leaves, and finds a home (castle complete with wizard, fire demon, and wizard's apprentice) which she arranges to her liking.

As much as Sophie is a reversed Cinderella, that is, Sophie uses her domestic skills to gain power, instead of doing menial labour because she has been stripped of authority, the story

⁷ David Rudd observes that "Sophie clearly subverts the traditional fairy tale stereotype of meek and service domesticity (as represented by Cinderella or Snow White)" (262)

of “Beauty and the Beast” is played with and problematized even more strongly throughout *Howl’s Moving Castle*. Sophie “read[s] a great deal” and with her sisters studies at “the best school in town” (10), much as Beaumont’s Beauty “has been carefully tutored... and does a lot of reading in her spare time” (Hearne 18). Sophie’s sisters, like Beauty’s, are determined to be wealthy and successful (10).⁸ Sophie and Beauty both lose their mothers, and their fathers later loses their fortunes; when Sophie’s father dies, his hat shop is encumbered with “heavy debts” (12). Beauty and Sophie both freely choose to enter their respective castles; although neither woman accepts the alternative of not going to the castle, it is possible that each could have done differently – Beauty could have allowed her brothers to attempt to kill the Beast; Sophie could have stayed at home. And yet the terrible choice brings rewards: Beauty finds that her imprisonment in the Beast’s castle allows her to “[become] a relatively free human being” (Hearne 19), and Sophie finds her imprisonment in her own magically aged body an advantage: “As a girl, Sophie would have shrivelled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief” (66). Social norms do not weigh as heavily on Sophie in her old age, and she enjoys the freedom to be “a little mad... old women often were” (35). It is only as an old woman that Sophie allows herself to dare to seek her fortune and speak her mind; like Beauty, Sophie gains agency throughout the story. Beauty’s exasperating slowness to understand the advice given to her in dreams “not to trust too much to [her] eyes” (Lang 109) is made humorous as Sophie remains deaf to Calcifer’s refrain that Howl is “heartless” (49) because she takes it as a turn of phrase rather than a literal truth.

⁸ Sophie’s sisters, unlike Beauty’s, change their goals as they grow up, however. Lettie, who declares that she will marry a prince (10), later turns Prince Justin’s attentions to her as “cheek” (272), despite Justin’s manners, which are “smooth and courtly, even when he was annoyed” (272). It is suggested at the end of *Howl’s Moving Castle* that Lettie will begin a romantic relationship with the wizard Ben Sullivan, which is confirmed in *Castle in the Air*, in which the two are married, and Lettie is nine months pregnant.

Howl's very name suggests his Beastliness.⁹ Like the Beast, Howl was not born the way he is for most of the story, and needs to be rescued. Both are victims of misapplied magic: the Beast is turned from prince to Beast as a result of an evil spell, and Howl's own pity leads him to enter a contract-spell with Calcifer which, as they realize, "isn't doing either of [them] any good in the long run" (50). The Beast is rendered hideous (and in Beaumont's version, slow-witted) and therefore unlovable, and although the only outward evidence of Howl's affliction is that his eyes look like "glass-marble" (143), his bargain makes it impossible for him "to love anybody properly" (199).¹⁰ Howl collapses and nearly dies, but is rescued by Sophie, who leaves a family reunion for his sake, as the Beast is revived from a similar collapse by Beauty, who also leaves her family behind, and is later restored to them after she and the Beast are engaged; after Sophie and Howl defeat the Witch and her fire demon, Sophie is restored to her youth and her family similarly. Both the Beast and Howl are nearly destroyed, in part, by the woman's kindness: Beauty is persuaded to stay overlong with her family; and Sophie is kind to Miss Angorian, of whom she is jealous, which gives Miss Angorian (really the Witch's fire demon) access to the castle and to Calcifer. Much as Beauty is terrified of the Beast initially, Sophie "[shrinks] into a shop doorway and [tries] to hide" (21) from Howl the first time they meet. Even so, in this first alarming encounter, Sophie, like Beauty, converses with her monster and sees his kindness, and

⁹ "Howl" is the name the wizard adopts in Ingary; in his own world (our own) his name is Howell, a common Welsh name. "Howl" is both suitably unique, and a contraction of his original name.

¹⁰ Howl may not be telling the whole truth when he admits his inability to love to Sophie; Jones leaves this open to interpretation. Howl is certainly fickle, he woos a young woman until she falls for him, at which point he loses interest; yet he cares for his former teacher, Mrs. Pentstemmon, Michael, and Calcifer. Howl proves that he loves Sophie even before she breaks the contract between him and Calcifer, as his hasty departure to rescue her from the Witch without bothering to shave or adorn himself (290) with his habitual care proves (as Michael tells Sophie, and Calcifer agrees, "the day Howl forgets to [spend at least an hour in the bathroom in the morning before going courting] will be the day I believe he's really in love, and not before" 124). However, it is possible that his attachment was incomplete or that he was rendered unable to act upon it because of his contract and the Witch's curse, part of which made Howl unable to find a beautiful woman who would remain true to him. I would argue, even so, that although he may be unable to speak, Howl does love Sophie with his whole heart, because Calcifer, who has Howl's heart, also loves Sophie (albeit in a non-romantic manner), and as Michael opines on how Howl judges who to allow into the castle (and his intimate life), "I think he goes by Calcifer" (76).

although she is relieved when he leaves, she soon loses any fear of him (73), much as Beauty does. Beauty persuades her father to use the gold sent by the Beast to arrange marriages for her sisters, and Sophie watches over her sisters' love affairs from afar. Beauty's family believes that the Beast will devour her; Howl is rumoured to "suck the souls" or "[eat] the hearts" (12) from young girls. The Beast gives Beauty beautiful clothes and gardens to walk in; Howl buys Sophie elegant and expensive clothing (139-140) and moves his castle to the lush gardens at the edge of the Waste for her to enjoy (and sell flowers from). Howl arranges a family reunion for Sophie, as the Beast does for Beauty, although Sophie does not expect it and Howl has an ulterior (though noble) motive, and in the middle of the reunion, Sophie leaves to rescue Howl, as Beauty leaves her family for the Beast's sake.¹¹ In both cases, breaking the enchantment (or contract) leads to a happy ending.

On the other hand, there is also a strong argument for the reverse positions – Howl as Beauty and Sophie as Beast. Howl is, as Sophie recognizes on their first meeting, "a dashing specimen" (21), whose extraordinary physical appeal is emphasized throughout the story. In contrast, Sophie at seventy-eight years old¹² is acutely aware of her unattractiveness: she has "soft, leathery wrinkles," "large veins and knuckles like knobs," "skinny decrepit ankles" (32), "skinny old arms," and "wispy white hair" (64) – altogether an unlikely person for a young and handsome man to fall in love with. It is Beauty who saves the Beast, and Howl saves Sophie

¹¹ Sophie goes to rescue the woman she believes Howl loves, and falls into a trap, but the loving, self-sacrificing impulse behind Sophie's and Beauty's actions are the same.

¹² Calcifer asserts that the Witch's curse has aged Sophie by sixty years (48), and Sophie had last met Mrs. Fairfax "a year ago as a girl of seventeen" (116), which puts Sophie's age at seventy-eight. However, Calcifer also notes that there are two layers of spells on Sophie, the second of which originates from Sophie herself, as Howl says (much to Sophie's annoyance, 261). When asked her age, Sophie tells Mrs. Pentstemmon that she is ninety, "that being the first high number that came into her head" (164). Ninety would appear to be emblematic rather than factual; however, Sophie is a witch who causes things to happen as she tells them to, whether or not she intends it. Fanny later declares that Sophie "look[s] about ninety!" (269). It is possible that ninety is merely symbolic of all old age; it is equally possible that the Witch aged Sophie by sixty years, and that Sophie aged herself still further by an unknown amount which later coalesced into a specific amount (twelve years, bringing Sophie to ninety) when Sophie declared her age.

more than once, most notably when her heart “behave[s] badly” (110) and when she falls into the Witch’s trap, although in the latter case it must be admitted that Sophie manages fairly well by herself (289). More importantly, Howl fosters Sophie’s agency: in Wales, Howl “loses confidence... and his agency is diminished” (Mendlesohn 41), which Sophie reacts to by assuming “authority and dignity” (Mendlesohn 41) and rescuing Howl from his irate sister; in Ingary, Howl endangers his own life by telling Sophie the truth, that her belief that as the eldest she is doomed to failure is “garbage” (293). Howl’s family wants him to be more respectable, to value the things that they value, not a far cry from Beauty’s sisters scorning her for being unlike themselves (151-152). The Beast’s rough exterior conceals a heart of gold, as does Sophie’s, while Beauty must learn to look beyond surface appearances, as Howl does. Like the Beast, both Howl and Sophie are under spells. Sophie’s curse drastically alters her physical appearance, yet like Beauty, Sophie is beloved by everyone she meets (Calcifer, Michael, Mrs. Fairfax, Mrs. Pentstemmon, Princess Valeria, and the King). Howl’s handsome appearance remains largely unaffected, for it is his inward self that needs to grow, as Beauty learns, and yet Howl, like the Beast, needs someone else to rescue – and love – him. Many men love Beauty, just as many girls fall for Howl, but neither Howl nor Beauty return their affections. The Beast is (after his initial cruelty) very kind, and has sense rather than wit; Howl is intelligent and witty (although not terribly practical) and erratically kind. Howl and Sophie are, like Beauty (and the Beast, pre- and post-enchantment) intelligent, yet have peculiar blind spots, or stupidities. Sophie clings to her absurd belief that she must and will fail, despite all the evidence to the contrary,¹³ and Howl is

¹³ Mendlesohn notes that following the opening lines which declare the inevitable failure of the eldest of three children, *Howl’s Moving Castle* “is structured around the attempts of various people (her sisters, Mrs. Pendragon, Howl) to deny this aphorism and convince Sophie Hatter that her position in life is determined only by her talent and effort, opposed by the energy that Sophie puts into convincing herself that she can only fail. The structure of Howl’s Moving Castle reverses the usual tropes of quest fantasy: Sophie sets out to seek her fortune only when artificially aged; she struggles, not against other people’s expectations but against her own” (40-41). I would add to this that heroes descend to the Other/Underworld (or die), and although Howl (nearly) dies, Sophie’s journey into our

vain, and completely useless at managing money. In Beaumont's version, the Beast is always ready to marry Beauty – the tale revolves around Beauty's inner journey. Sophie and Howl both need to grow. Finally, on a light note, in "Beauty and the Beast," the Prince's unenchantment¹⁴ is celebrated by fireworks. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, fireworks start off the story as the town of Market Chipping celebrates May Day and the castle celebrates Michael's fifteenth birthday. In short, fireworks begin Sophie's adventures, and end Beauty's.

Howl's Moving Castle also references and reverses L. Frank Baum's American fairy tale *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Bar-Hillel points out that quite aside from the Witch of the Waste, an obvious joke on Baum's the Witch of the West, there are a number of "little homages to Oz scattered throughout" ("Howl's Moving Castle"), among them "the animated scarecrow, the dog companion, the journey to see a mysterious wizard" ("Howl's"). Sophie rights the upended scarecrow and talks life into it (34, 290), much as Dorothy's Scarecrow is "hung up on a pole, unable to move until Dorothy frees him" (Elms 10). Both are unable to complete the task they are charged with, and although Dorothy's Scarecrow never manages to keep crows out of the corn, Sophie's magical speech enables her scarecrow to continue finding his master. Dorothy's dog, Toto, has been with her from the beginning, whereas Sophie's dog is a bespelled man, actually parts of two men (233), who joins her mid-way through her adventures, yet in human form the dog-man was with Sophie when she first met the Witch. It is Toto who causes Dorothy's troubles with Miss Gulch, and the dog-man who provokes the Witch to curse Sophie (256). Bar-Hillel draws attention to the similarities between Dorothy's and Sophie's departure

world's Wales fits the quest description more accurately. Furthermore, and humourously, de Vos and Altmann note that "the hero's quest is often a spiral rather than a straight line" (18), which is literally what happens to Sophie throughout the story as Calcifer moves the castle in large circles around the countryside (98) – not to mention Sophie's zig-zag back-and-forth adventures in seven league boots.

¹⁴ I prefer the term *unenchantment* to *disenchantment*, because of the connotations of disillusionment and jadedness that disenchantment entails, whereas unenchantment is simply the lifting or removal of an enchantment.

from home. Both are “matter of fact and calm... with a mind to practicality” (Bar-Hillel, “Howl’s”): they consider their attire, collect a cover for their heads (sunbonnet for Dorothy, shawl for Sophie), pack a small amount of food for themselves, and lock the house door behind them before they set out. Yet there is one striking difference: “Dorothy has a blue-and-white dress, because she was previously described as the only spot of color in her grey surroundings. Sophie is just the opposite: the only patch of grey in the multi-coloured May Day celebrations of Market Chipping” (Bar-Hillel, “Howl’s”).

Howl takes on the roles of each of Dorothy’s companions in turn. Just as the Tin Man laments the fact that he has “no heart” (Baum 43) yet demonstrates considerable kindness, proving that his lack is not “a serious handicap but he thinks it is, because without it he feels he can’t love as other men do” (Elms 10), Howl is “awfully kind” (175) despite being literally heartless, and does love many people deeply, despite his failures in romance. The Lion is “in fine shape physically” (Elms 10) but “know[s] himself to be a coward” (Baum 51); Howl, who “used to fly up the wing for [his] university” (i.e. play rugby, 265) openly confesses his cowardice (292). The brainless Scarecrow is unable to keep crows from eating the corn (Baum 32), and Sophie erroneously concludes that Howl is equally useless, a so-called wizard with no magical ability (73). Finally, like the Wizard of Oz, who is in truth what Sophie believes Howl to be, a “humbug” (Baum 145) without a speck of magic, Howl understands the importance of showmanship and devotes a great deal of attention to his reputation and appearance (84, 126). The land of Oz is populated with powerful women, “the good witches of the North and South, the bad witches of the East and West, and Dorothy herself” (Elms 10), and the land of Ingary is inhabited by the intimidating Mrs. Pentstemmon, warm Mrs. Fairfax, lovely Lettie, the ambitious

Witch of the Waste, and Sophie.¹⁵ Most of the magic users in Ingary, in fact, appear to be female. Calcifer is not human, Howl and Ben Sullivan (the latter of which was defeated by the Witch and absent for almost the entire story) are from another world (ours; both are Welsh), and Michael is not terribly skilled: Sophie characterizes him as “a nice boy... but a bit helpless in a crisis” (89); Mrs. Pentstemmon more bluntly dismisses Michael as “[not] clever enough to cause [her] concern” (165). Baum’s early Oz stories returned Dorothy to Kansas, yet later in life “his critique of American socialization and values became so severe that he placed Dorothy [and her aunt and uncle] in permanent exile” (Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 131). Howl likewise abandons the respectable, middle-class life he is expected to lead in our world for a more dangerous, more exciting new life in Ingary. Like Dorothy, Howl occasionally returns to his Kansas, but these return visits are not happy nor are they of extended duration. Sophie also abandons a stable income and merchant life for a more adventuresome, less predictable future. Dorothy is reunited with Auntie Em and Uncle Henry, but not the farm, as later books in the series have all three leave Kansas to live in Oz forever; Sophie is reunited with her family but not with the hat shop. Fanny has sold the hat shop (271), and after the Witch of the Waste and her fire demon are defeated, Sophie does not pursue being a florist (ironically, a business she conducts out of the same building the hat shop once occupied). Instead, Sophie chooses the hard work and excitement of life with Howl and Calcifer in a moving castle.

Sophie’s situation, companions, and adventures echo “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” yet these fairy tales are not merely repeated but are playfully disordered and re-ordered in a way that calls attention to the fallacy of cleaving too closely to convention. Sophie is convinced that as the eldest of three, she is doomed to failure,

¹⁵ It is worth noting that Howl’s sister, Megan, who has no knowledge of Ingary or any world other than her own, is able to completely cow him by the force of her personality, although she has no magical ability (151-152).

yet her family situation does not entirely match that of the tradition she believes it follows. Sophie's family, loving and well-intentioned despite occasional misunderstandings and quarrels, stands as a more probable alternative to the assumption that step-mothers are always evil, step-sisters are always unkind and ugly, and that all the women of a house are rivals for the father's wealth and any suitor's hand. The popular perception of Cinderella as victim and domestic drudge is given a dose of reality (and of older, oral tradition) as Sophie uses her domestic abilities to spin a position for herself out of nothing and re-develops her indomitable personality to become a domestic, grandmotherly tyrant over the castle's inhabitants. The clearly drawn line between Beauty and Beast is delineated, then blurred as Sophie takes on the role of both Beauty and Beast, and Howl becomes both Beast and Beauty. There is no perfect prince awaiting unenchantment, no helpless, prize princess; both Beauty and Beast need to grow in maturity and strength, and both rescue themselves, at times, and rescue each other. The fairy tale references from Baum's "Oz" are the least altered, perhaps because this story features the least helpless protagonist and the most playful narrative. Dorothy enacts her own rescue and saves her companions without conforming to either a traditional hack-and-hew or lie-and-trick heroic mould. Elements of Dorothy's adventures appear in Sophie's, yet Dorothy does not need to be subverted in the way that the popular understanding of Cinderella as passive and Beauty as submissive do. This understanding of fairy tale convention, *Howl's Moving Castle* suggests, is a form of tyranny to be rebelled against, which Jones does by using its patterns and expectations in surprising ways, revealing the limitations this form of tradition enforces, as Sophie illustrates. For there is every proof that Sophie, like Cinderella, Beauty, and Dorothy, will achieve her goals, if only she will allow herself to believe that she is not like Miss Gulch or Cinderella and Beauty's step-sisters, destined to anything.

Chapter 5: “Which Concerns Marriage and Prophecy”: Fate, Romance, and Storytelling in *Arabian Nights* and *Castle in the Air*

Whereas *Howl’s Moving Castle* is firmly situated within the Western fairy tale tradition, *Castle in the Air* plays on *Arabian Nights*, as Abdullah, carpet merchant and Fate-crossed lover, travels northward from his home in Zanzib, capital city of the Middle Eastern-inspired Sultanates of Rashpuht (9), to rescue his beloved, Flower-in-the-Night, from the djinn who kidnapped her, at which he ultimately succeeds and is rewarded with marriage, land, and a position as Ambassador Extraordinary For The Realm of Ingary (282).¹⁶ Abdullah becomes a plaything who both amuses and opposes the djinn, Hasruel, as Hasruel arranges Abdullah’s adventures to live in the flesh his elaborate daydreams, thereby forcing (or allowing) Abdullah to grow up. *Castle in the Air* uses and parodies the *Arabian Nights* genre of romance in particular as Jones tale adopts and examines certain key elements within the *Arabian Nights* tradition, notably, belief in and characterization of Fate and the essential centrality and life-saving power of storytelling.

Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night’s (mis)adventures fit firmly within the pattern of the romance genre in *Arabian Nights*, as traced by Peter Heath, a pattern which Jones uses and destabilizes. The typical hero of a romance in *Arabian Nights* is handsome and of noble, or at least wealthy, family. Often the only son of his parents, he is marked out from birth by Fate for some special destiny (Heath 198). Initially inexperienced and possibly immature, the hero’s “social context, economic well-being, and even... personal identity are defined by the external determinant of parental presence” (Heath 198) until chance (or Fate) intervenes to remove

¹⁶ Abdullah is one of two such Ambassadors Extraordinary; the other is Flower-in-the-Night, Rashpuhti princess, whom Abdullah loves and whom he is eventually permitted by Fate to marry. Curiously, Abdullah’s journey from relative obscurity and comparatively lowly position in Rashpuht to lauded Ambassador in Ingary mimics the actual transformation of the best-known tales of *Arabian Nights* from the Middle East, where (at least in the 1800s) they was held in low esteem, to France and Western Europe via a manuscript obtained, translated and dramatically altered by Galland, which proved immediately and enduringly popular.

parental control from the hero's actions, often by the death of the hero's father. Jones's Abdullah is indeed "a decidedly handsome young man, in a thin, hawk-faced way" (10), born to a wealthy family, for his father owned a "large carpet emporium in the centre of the Bazaar" (9); however, far from being the doted child of his father's old age, Abdullah is a disappointment to his father, who leaves his emporium and most of his money to his first wife's relatives.¹⁷ Abdullah receives only sufficient funds "to buy and stock a modest booth in the north-west corner of the Bazaar" (9). At the time of Abdullah's birth a fortune teller prophesies that according to Fate's decree, as "a very young man, [Abdullah] will be raised above all others in this land" (53, original italics removed). In a humorous twist on the glamour of a romance hero's foretold destiny, Abdullah's father is so disappointed that Abdullah will not follow in his footsteps as a carpet merchant that he considers the gold he paid for this knowledge a waste (55), and leaves the bulk of his estate to relatives by marriage, rather than to his son. Ironically, for the two years that he supports himself by selling carpets, Abdullah proves himself to be a shrewd and able merchant. His small booth is well positioned (11), he is able to recognize quality carpets and sell them profitably (11), and he increases the quality of his stock to the point that he owns "at least two... which the Sultan himself would not have disdained for one of the smaller rooms of his palace" (14). However, despite his success, Abdullah is wholly defined as his father's son by his geographical setting in the Bazaar in Zanzib and social context as an unmarried carpet merchant; furthermore, with the possible exception of Jamal, who runs the next booth over, Abdullah has no friends, only business associates, and no family other than his father's first wife's relations, whom he detests. Abdullah is also defined by his father's economic well-being, for Abdullah's father seems to

¹⁷ Abdullah's father had two wives, the second of which was Abdullah's mother, and both of which predeceased him. Abdullah is, by inference, his father's only child, possibly born in his old age, as no sisters are mentioned, his father hopes for "other sons" (55) to follow him as carpet merchants, and his father dies two years before the story starts, at which time Abdullah is a young man of marriageable age living alone in his carpet booth (9-11).

have taught him their trade well. Even Abdullah's appearance declares his parentage, as he "look[s] very like the portrait of his father as a young man" (10). Abdullah's father's death and the new ownership of the carpet emporium literally force him out of his "geographical grounding" as he is "physically drawn out into the world" (Heath 199); yet unlike a romantic hero, Abdullah does not embark on great adventures but buys a booth from which to run a smaller business by himself. His father's authority is transferred to Abdullah's father's first wife's three relatives, who, much like Cinderella's stepmother, regularly "point out his failings" (11) and attempt to exploit him; in this case, by arranging his marriage with two girls "closely related to all three" (57) of them so that Abdullah's prophesied rise in fortune will be shared by them as well.

"Conceived most simply, romance's pattern of action consists of three steps: an initial state of security, movement toward one or a series of trials, return to a state of security" (Heath 197). Abdullah's peace, or initial security, is interrupted only by his odious relatives at regular intervals, and then by his accidental meeting with Flower-in-the-Night. Like any proper *Arabian Nights* couple, Abdullah and Flower fall in love almost instantly¹⁸ (Farg 198) and enjoy the usual "short period of bliss... without too much effort" (Heath 196) granted to many lovers in *Arabian Nights*. Abdullah experiences life as "thoroughly dull and depressing" (30) when he is away from Flower-in-the-Night, and the deeds he does for her sake (buying portraits of men)

¹⁸ This typical reaction upon meeting the destined beloved is echoed more amusingly in the case of the old soldier (the bespelled Prince Justin of Ingary) and Princess Beatrice of Strangia. The soldier demands that one of the princesses agree to marry him. His reasons for choosing Princess Beatrice are not romantic, and Beatrice is initially incredulous – "You don't *mean* it... I'm not good looking or any of those things" (244). The soldier explains his reasoning: "I've always fancied a nice bossy, downright princess like you" (243), and "I can tell you'd back me up in whatever scam I got up to – and I bet you can darn socks too" (244), and once the match is agreed upon in earnest, they settle into love easily. "Princess Beatrice... seemed to have a lot to say to the soldier" (250), and when the soldier is revealed as Prince Justin, who had commanded the army that overran Strangia, Beatrice does not go back on her word, at which "the prince... looked up at her in the same [besotted] way that, as the soldier, he had looked at the kitten in his hat" (280).

start a rumour that he is mad (35). The couple plans to elope and begin a precarious¹⁹ happily-ever-after at which point “Fate... pulls the rug from under their feet” (Heath 196): first, Abdullah’s loosely-related relatives, who have assumed the authority of his father over him, intervene to enforce his marriage to their two nieces, which would part Flower-in-the-Night and Abdullah forever²⁰; and second the djinn Hasruel intervenes by kidnapping Flower-in-the-Night, which quite literally parts the two, seemingly and potentially forever.

Abdullah at this point enters into a series of trials, the second stage in *Arabian Nights* romances. He has lost Flower-in-the-Night when he had expected to elope with her; he is rapidly imprisoned and nearly executed by Flower-in-the-Night’s enraged father, who turns out to be not merely a wealthy man but the sultan; and though Abdullah escapes from prison he remains chained and a prisoner, this time of a group of bandits. At last he is “drawn out into the world” (Heath 199) and forced to struggle to be reunited with Flower-in-the-Night. As part of this struggle, Abdullah loses, and regains a threadbare magic carpet, negotiates with a genie who is sworn to do as much harm as possible with the one wish he is forced to grant a day, and gains a dubious ally in a veteran soldier whose country just lost a war. Not only is Abdullah forced from Zanzib, he is forced to far-off lands, both to find Flower-in-the-Night, and to escape the wrath of her father.

“*Nights* protagonists tend to suffer a loss or blurring of social status ... [sometimes] indicated by forms of disguise” (Heath 199). Abdullah begins his adventures as a successful

¹⁹ Abdullah soon realizes that Flower’s father is an extremely wealthy man who will not approve of their marriage and might take violent steps to oppose it; accordingly, he plans for the two of them to leave Zanzib, to which end he sells his carpets as quickly and profitably as possible. Abdullah sells “all his best carpets for nearly twice as much as he had paid for them. He reckoned that he now had enough ready money to keep Flower-in-the-Night in reasonable luxury for three months or so. After that, he hoped either that something else would turn up, or that the sweetness of her nature would reconcile her to poverty” (51) – not a very practical plan, although fittingly reckless and romantic.

²⁰ When Flower-in-the-Night learns that men may have more than one wife, but that women may have only one husband, she declares that this is “extremely unfair” (40) and that polygamous men are “greedy” (41). Abdullah realizes that if he allows himself to marry as his relatives wish, Flower-in-the-Night would refuse to marry him (59).

carpet merchant wearing his best clothes, recently bathed, shaved, and perfumed for his wedding (51). His clothes and general appearance almost immediately suffer, and continue to degrade from there. His jacket soon comes to look “like anything but his best one” (182), and when he and the old soldier are framed as robbers,²¹ they disguise themselves in stolen shirts as peasants (182). Abdullah’s clothes and outward standing in the world suffer until he is garbed only in a petticoat and his own loincloth as he briefly and incompletely cross-dresses (253) in a bid to defeat the djinn.²² Abdullah even represents himself as a courier for a witch (184) in order to account for the luxurious treatment the soldier insists the cats Midnight and Whippersnapper receive at the inns they patronize. The nobility of Abdullah’s quest, however, is repeatedly undercut by self-interest, both his own and others’. There are no instant oaths of brotherhood in his story; instead, while the princesses attempt to plan their escape, every male present²³ demands a reward for his help: the soldier wants a wife (242), Jamal wants a safe job for himself and his dog (245), Abdullah wants five minutes of private conversation with Flower-in-the-Night (246), and the genie wants freedom from his bottle (252). Abdullah and the soldier even suffer the indignity of being transformed into toads (154) when they attempt to reunite with Midnight and Whippersnapper without being arrested by the constables pursuing them.

Finally, Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night reach the third stage of romance and “return to security” (Heath 201). In a most unromantic manner, the battle in which they defeat Hasrue’s evil younger brother, Dalzel, is not described in glorious terms but as an unspeakably loud “madhouse” (260). They escape the realm of the djinn (277) and the true nature of all characters

²¹ Which, in fact, they are, although with justification – they rob the young men who attempt to murder and rob the soldier (119).

²² The soldier also disguises himself as a woman, slightly more successfully. “Cross-dressing features in a number of stories” (Irwin 171) in *Arabian Nights*. Both men and women adopt the clothes of the opposite sex, by men typically often to reach their beloved, by women sometimes for safety in travel or to earn a fortune and thus the beloved.

²³ With the exception of Morgan, who is less than a month old. Flower-in-the-Night observes that putting a price on one’s aid “must be a male characteristic” (252).

is exposed: Abdullah has proven his devotion; the genie is freed and revealed as the Wizard Howl; the cats Midnight and Whippersnapper have been untransformed into Sophie and her infant son, Morgan; the soldier regains his memory (and youth) to resume life as Prince Justin of Ingary; the carpet unravels into Calcifer; and Flower-in-the-Night and the twenty-nine other princesses are freed from captivity and returned to their homes – with the exception of Flower-in-the-Night, who creates a new home with Abdullah in Ingary. *Arabian Nights* protagonists are usually reunited with their families. However, Abdullah and Flower are better off without theirs, and so the reunion is cursorily performed: Abdullah has Hasrueel summon the two young women whom he was supposed to marry, and whom he marries to Dalzel instead; and the sultan reacts to Flower's marriage by shredding the magical messenger who delivered the news and threatening Abdullah's life if he returns to Zanzib (282). In neither case is there an actual meeting of kindred,²⁴ but as neither Abdullah nor Flower care for their relatives, they take the alternate route and "reestablish themselves" (Heath 201) in the geographic location and social contexts they have "developed in the course of their trials" (Heath 201). This is not as straightforward as it is in the *Arabian Nights* tales: although Abdullah climbs from merchant to Ambassador, Flower-in-the-Night loses social status by relinquishing her position as princess of Rashpuht. However, the

²⁴ Abdullah's father's first wife's relatives serve to parody absurdly fussy and thinly-stretched claims of kinship that exist only by social acknowledgement, rather than blood, marriage, or affection, and as the two nieces whom these relatives attempt to force Abdullah to marry are related to the three of them, rather than to him, it can be concluded that they are no more Abdullah's family than his father's first wife's relatives are. The language used to describe these relations further distances them from Abdullah: Hakim is "Abdullah's father's first wife's brother's son" (11), Fatima is "Abdullah's father's first wife's sister" (11) and Assif is "Abdullah's father's first wife's uncle's son" (12), language that mimics the jerky lines of an uncertain finger upon a genealogical map, rather than the easy use of "cousin," "aunt," and "uncle," which, despite their imprecision, would be surely be used if there was a real relationship between these persons and Abdullah. The two girls are the nieces of Fatima's niece (56). Further undermining any pretence at kinship is the fact that it is likely Hakim who leads the sultan's mercenaries to arrest Abdullah (65) the first time, and likely Assif who runs off to inform them upon Abdullah's escape (81) – unless this is merely evidence of Abdullah's detestation of his family.

losses are nominal. By abandoning her position and thereby her father, Flower-in-the-Night leaves luxury and ignorance²⁵ for a life of discovery and meaningful work.

But by their tales' ends protagonists are no longer defined by external criteria such as family, geographic location, or social context. It is they, through the experience of their trials, who have now established these aspects of their identities through their own decisions and qualifications. (Heath 202)

By the end of *Castle in the Air*, Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night have for all practical purposes no acknowledged family. Because of this, and out of gratitude for their involvement in rescuing the princesses,²⁶ the king of Ingary rewards them with the (newly created) posts of Ambassadors Extraordinary and the tasks of returning the princesses to their countries, making "trading alliances" (283), and making note of their travels along the way. At the completion of these tasks they are rewarded with land and "permission to build a palace" (285). Flower and Abdullah have created their own family, earned their social position, and gained a new and desirable geographic location. Like *Arabian Nights* lovers, they have been tested and not found wanting.

It is this testing, in fact, that makes up most of the book as Abdullah journeys from a daydreaming, inactive character who is unable to distinguish (day)dreams from reality to one who perceives things as they are and is mature enough to earn and deserve reunion with his beloved. Despite being a shrewd merchant, Abdullah very nearly deserves his father's disappointment in him: most of his focus is devoted to an "enormously detailed" (12) daydream in which he, "the long-lost son of a great prince" (10), was "kidnapped at the age of two by a

²⁵ Early in Flower-in-the-Night's acquaintance with Abdullah, she discovers "that her father had kept her ignorant of a number of important facts" (41). The sultan later states that although he kept Flower from seeing any man but himself, he gave her "the best of educations... [to ensure] she could sing and dance and make herself pleasing to a prince" (70-71); hardly a complete education. Flower-in-the-Night's penchant for reading appears to have developed independently.

²⁶ Also because Sophie and Howl talk the king into creating these posts (282).

villainous bandit called Kabul Aqba” (12), from whom he “escaped into the desert, where the carpet merchant [Abdullah’s actual father] found him” (28). Abdullah devotes a great deal of time and attention to his daydream, so that he knows exactly what Kabul Aqba looks like, can “picture every nightmare inch of the dry, thirsty, footsore journey he had made” (12) in the desert, and has imagined “in great detail the palace he had been kidnapped from” (13). Abdullah completely ignores the facts of life – his resemblance to his father, his father’s belief that “anyone who ventured beyond Zanzib must be mad” (12), and the improbability of a two year old first of all escaping a determined bandit, and secondly surviving in the desert. The daydream is a complete fantasy that reflects Abdullah’s desire for a better fate without putting any work into making it happen. When the story opens, Abdullah’s daydream focuses on the princess to whom he was engaged as an infant (13), who is naturally perfectly beautiful and who lives in a spectacular palace. Abdullah’s daydream, in fact, focuses more on the princess’s palace than on herself; she is an extension of the fantasy, rather than a person; Abdullah is essentially self-absorbed and unready for a real relationship with a real person. He imagines a beautiful bride; then his mind skitters away to a safe detail that needs working out, namely, the “magnificent gardens” (13) that “a good palace ought to have” (13).

When Abdullah finds himself in Flower-in-the-Night’s gardens,²⁷ he is absolutely certain that he is dreaming (23), in complete disregard of certain rather obvious clues that he is not. He sees lamps hanging in the trees and considers them a new and “very pleasing idea” (24). He wanders the gardens, marvelling at the flowers, for “he had never before had a dream that was anything like so beautiful” (24). Flower-in-the-Night appears, and her face is not as perfect as his dream princess’s; significantly, Flower-in-the-Night’s eyes are not “misty” but “[examine] his face keenly” (24).

²⁷ Abdullah buys a flying carpet; while he is asleep, the carpet carries Abdullah to Flower-in-the-Night’s garden.

At this point Abdullah begins to grow up, however minutely. He “hastily adjust[s] his [day]dream” (24) to match reality; that is, he revises his ideal princess to match Flower-in-the-Night. However, Abdullah is still immature; when Flower-in-the-Night asks him a question he disregards the fact that her voice is “the voice of a very definite person” (25) and reassures himself with the thought that “people always did ask strange things in dreams” (25). Abdullah even claims her as his creation by addressing her as “masterpiece of my imagination” (25), an address that seems to exalt Flower-in-the-Night’s status while simultaneously denying her autonomous and independent existence. Flower-in-the-Night, as an autonomous and independently existing person, overthrows Abdullah’s attempt to direct the conversation to his own (fictional) identity with her own preoccupation, that of trying to place him within her understanding of the world. Far from following some fantasy script, Abdullah is placed on the defensive by Flower-in-the-Night’s belief that he is a woman: he replies “hastily” (25) to her assertion that he is wearing a dress (actually his nightshirt); he “rather indignantly” (25) touches “the six hairs on his upper lip” (25) when she points out that he is too thin to be male and has almost no hair on his face; and he doffs his nightcap to counter her claim that men are bald by revealing “thick wavy hair” (25) of which he is proud. Unsurprisingly, Flower-in-the-Night is not persuaded, and wonders if Abdullah’s family had raised him “to believe a falsehood” (27), since he is not a beast, which her father claims “most men are” (27). Abdullah is unable to counter this without rudeness, and is reduced to silent admiration of her beauty and compassion (27).

The physical sensation of water and the scents of the garden cause Abdullah to realize that “this was a very real dream” (28), but he perseveres with his claim to be a prince (false) and a man (possibly false, since he is evidently not a mature male) against the mounting efforts of his

conscience and his common sense, which cause him increasing unease, although he still believes “that he [is] only dreaming” (28). Abdullah even provides himself with an excuse to return the next night by promising to bring Flower-in-the-Night pictures of many men so that she can see that “men come in every sort of size and shape” (29). Even in a dream, then, he maintains his manners and some sense of propriety; the most he can bring himself to confess to “his dream princess” (24) is to reply “shyly” (29) to her statement that he is “one of the nicest people” (29) she had ever met, that he feels the same about her. His sense of justice, meanwhile, begins to bud, although it remains small and self-centred: he begins to consider the practice of rich men keeping their female relatives “almost like prisoners inside their grand houses” (26) as “entirely unreasonable and not fair” (26-27), and further rationalizes his promise to return with portraits on the grounds that “it would be unfair to leave her in such a state of ignorance” (29), although he is aware that this is an excuse. However, Abdullah’s sudden concern for fairness springs primarily from his own interests – he finds it inconvenient that Flower-in-the-Night thinks him a woman, and that she who is so beautiful and (he imagines) his own dream girl should be betrothed to a prince she had never met.²⁸

Abdullah’s ability to determine reality from daydreams grows slowly. He realizes that Flower-in-the-Night was not a dream when he cannot find his nightcap, which he last remembers removing in her presence (32), but when he cannot discover the code word that makes the carpet fly he desperately concludes that the word is made-up, or foreign, or that Flower-in-the-Night is a dream (37). His sense of justice is similarly slow: he accepts as normal the legal status of polygyny, but is “shocked” (40) when Flower-in-the-Night asks if polyandry is likewise legal.

²⁸ Oddly, although Abdullah believes that he is dreaming, he never considers that the prince from Ochinstan to whom Flower is supposed to marry might be himself. Perhaps this is because of a buried awareness that this is not a dream – “dream or not, Abdullah had absolutely no doubt that he would be back tomorrow” (29), or perhaps it is because in his daydream, Abdullah’s homeland is “so far to the east that his country was unknown in Zanzib” (12), whereas Ochinstan is a specific and real country.

Although he regrets claiming to be a prince, he does not undeceive her.²⁹ It is Flower-in-the-Night who takes the initiative to avow that what her father thinks of their alliance is irrelevant, and that what matters is that they love each other. Her declaration stirs Abdullah from babbling excuses as to why they cannot marry (40) to ironing out the practical details of how they will marry (42). He also begins to admire Flower-in-the-Night for her intelligence as well as for her beauty until he is “dizzy with admiration for her logic” (43). It is not until Abdullah’s relatives attempt to arrange his marriage, however, that Abdullah comes to love Flower-in-the-Night for herself, and not merely as an extension or embodiment of his daydream. Confronted with two weeping prospective brides, “Abdullah was somewhat amazed to discover that he, really and truly, did love Flower-in-the-Night just as ardently as he had been telling himself he did – or more, because he now saw he respected her. He knew he would die without her” (59). Up until this point, Abdullah’s longing is self-absorbed and self-generated; here he acknowledges that Flower-in-the-Night is a person apart from him rather than a fantasy, and that she commands his respect, rather than being commanded by his desires. Flower-in-the-Night once again enables Abdullah to find a way out of an undesirable situation that had nearly overwhelmed him.

Abdullah’s trials begin in earnest after Flower-in-the-Night is kidnapped. After a night of misery, he is arrested and marched before the sultan,³⁰ promised a painful death, imprisoned, and rescued, albeit unintentionally,³¹ only to live out the rest of his daydream: the trek through a bandit-infested desert. Fleeing for his life first from the sultan’s mercenaries, then from a lone

²⁹ “Though he told himself that he had had every reason to believe he was dreaming when he told her [that he was a prince], this did not make him feel any better” (41). Abdullah here continues to deny that he knew, or should have known, that it was not a dream, as evidenced by his attempts to console himself that it was not his fault, and by his inability to accept this false comfort. Later, Abdullah “simply [cannot] imagine himself ever daring to tell her the truth” (76), and believes that for this he deserves a very nasty death.

³⁰ Which, however, gives Abdullah the opportunity to disagree with the sultan’s belief that “women do not count... therefore it is impossible to be unfair to them” (71).

³¹ It turns out that the magic word that activates the carpet is a snore. Jamal’s dog, napping on the carpet, snores and, as the dog’s dream apparently relives an occasion where Abdullah fed the dog, the carpet interprets that by carrying it to Abdullah in the prison; the carpet and any passengers it bears can pass through solid walls (77-78).

camel rider who plans to take the carpet and abandon the chain-bound Abdullah to die (82), Abdullah stumbles into the midst of a group of bandits, whose leader is “the absolute image of the villainous bandit of his daydream” (86), who is indeed named Kabul Aqba. Despite the absolute improbability of this occurring, Abdullah initially decides, and confirms to himself when the bandit acknowledges the name he had thought he had invented, that this was “one of those coincidences” (87). He subsequently escapes and finds out that his daydream had not taken into account the agony and practical difficulties of walking through the desert (98). Abdullah comes close to the truth with his declaration that: “It seems that Fate has decreed that I live through my entire daydream in reality” (98), yet even having spoken those words he does not understand that that is almost precisely what is happening. After one long day he naively believes that “his troubles [are] almost over” (99).

Abdullah’s advent into Ingary and new troubles allow him some perspective on his former life in Zanzib. Although Abdullah continually errs in his estimation of the old soldier and in the number of difficulties that he must overcome to reach Flower-in-the-Night, he begins to understand the realities of his old life. Expecting pursuit by angry locals, Abdullah realizes that “his father’s first wife’s relatives had been pursuing him ever since his father died” (122); when he feels that he is at the bottom of the pecking order (beneath the genie, the soldier, Midnight, and Whippersnapper, with Whippersnapper at the top) he perceives that “things had been exactly the same way with his father’s first wife’s relations” (158). He remains frustratingly slow to trust his senses, however, and like many *Arabian Nights* characters, is “constantly brought up short on [his] assumptions of reality [as] veils of illusion are continuously lowered and then drawn away” (Heath 185). When Abdullah and the soldier conjure Hasrael, who explains that he knew Abdullah’s daydream and deliberately made him live some of it for his own amusement and

because he tries to make “appropriate adventures befall each suitor” (174) of the princesses Hasrueel is forced to kidnap, “Abdullah could have sworn that the djinn’s great gold-brown eyes slanted towards the soldier” (174). This ought to make it obvious that the soldier is more than what he appears, particularly as Abdullah himself is a commoner who pretended to be a prince, and therefore the soldier could be (and in fact is) the reverse, a prince pretending to be a commoner. Abdullah already knows that the soldier is neither what he looks like nor what he says he is: utterly dishonest in appearance as he sleeps, the soldier looks wholly innocent when awake, passes himself off as a bore and a fool, and claims that he was given a bounty after the Strangian army was defeated; in fact, he is cunning and earns his money through trickery. Abdullah has heard a Royal Wizard declare that the soldier looks familiar (200) and has witnessed the soldier’s extraordinary skill at making other people do his will; he expresses surprise that the soldier had not “[risen] to command” (166), yet the soldier’s true identity as Prince Justin still surprises him. Abdullah is remarkably slow to consider that reality is not as he understands it.

Abdullah, in fact, has a history of seeing without perceiving. He sees the castle night after night in the clouds (75, 127, 158-159) yet does not consider that it might be real.³² Hasrueel’s face, both as the man who sold Abdullah the magic carpet and as the bandit Kabul Aqba, is noteworthy for its sneers, an expression it appears “particularly well designed to do” (87). The genie’s eyes, Abdullah notes one morning, look “almost like human eyes” (159) and the genie repeatedly hints that he is in as much of a quandary as Abdullah is, that he doesn’t deserve imprisonment (103), that the genie’s bottle is enchanted (155), and that the genie wants his

³² This is a literary technique Jones borrows from *Arabian Nights*, known as repetitive designation, which utilizes “repeated references to some character or object which appears insignificant when first mentioned but which reappears later to intrude suddenly on the narrative. At the moment of the initial designation the given object seems unimportant and the reference is casual and incidental. Later in the story, however, the object is brought forward once more and proves to play an important role” (Pinault 16).

freedom (155, 161). Abdullah fails to piece these clues together. Even after Midnight becomes Sophie, whose castle and husband were stolen by Hasruel, Abdullah does not bother to wonder why Midnight was consistently unable to sense the genie, despite her considerable magical abilities (210, 271). In the romance tales of *Arabian Nights*, protagonists endure trials in “a world where the line separating nature and supernature, reality and illusion, is not so much indistinguishable as irrelevant. The keynote of this world is that things are not usually as they seem” (Heath 200). In Abdullah’s case, whether his problems are orchestrated by Hasruel or by Fate or by sheer bad luck is ultimately irrelevant. In any case, he needs to overcome the obstacles that keep him from Flower-in-the-Night and, in order to do so, and *through* doing so, he learns to see beyond his own immature understanding of the world. He learns to perceive.

One way in which Abdullah’s maturing perspective is demonstrated is through the amendments he makes to his daydream. Originally the gardens Abdullah imagined for his and his princess’ respective palaces were bejeweled, ornate, and very formal. During his adventures Abdullah alters this vision to dream of sharing with Flower-in-the-Night a cottage surrounded by fields of bluebells, which Abdullah describes as “the floor of heaven” (149). When Abdullah sees the metal-and-jewel gardens he had once preferred made real, he angrily declares that “a garden should be natural-seeming, with wild sections” (219-220). Abdullah’s embrace of the natural and simple is genuine and permanent by the story’s end, when, although he and Flower are allowed to build a palace they choose to inhabit a “modest” (285) house with a thatched roof,³³ and tend to “gardens [that] soon became one of the wonders of the land” (285).³⁴

³³ The thatched roof also emphasizes the couple’s integration into Ingary. When Abdullah first arrives, he is unfavourably impressed by buildings “made of wood and white-painted plaster” with roofs “made of tightly packed grass;” he compares it to “the poorest of poor dwellings in Zanzib” and believes that he has arrived in “a wretched place” (all passages 104).

³⁴ It is worth noting that “the more elaborate stories of the [*Arabian Nights*] are careful in depicting the setting of the scenery... the [*Arabian Nights* tales] favour gardens as the meeting place of the lovers” (von Grunebaum 146).

Before he can reach this happy ending, however, Abdullah must become an active character. In Ingary he passes through an intermediary state where he laments his loss (127) and begins to understand his past more clearly; when he and Sophie enter the realm of the djinn Abdullah matures further. His knowledge of Flower-in-the-Night increases as he is forced to wrap his head around the idea that she could throw a temper tantrum (although she was a child at the time, 228) and face her coolness when she is uncertain of the depth of his attachment to her (248). He admits that contrary to his daydream's exclusive focus on physical appearance and his conviction that strong-mindedness was an undesirable trait in a young woman, Flower-in-the-Night's swiftness at learning and strong-mindedness are essential pieces of her excellence (240). Finally, fuelled by the knowledge that Flower-in-the-Night does love him, Abdullah takes charge of the escape plans, and, not on his own, but as part of a focused group of allies, albeit odd allies (thirty princesses, one witch and her infant son, an old soldier, a magic carpet, a genie, Jamal and his dog, and Abdullah himself), defeats Dalzel and makes peace with Hasrueel. As an active character with a mature and empathetic, rather than self-absorbed perspective, Abdullah finds that he can correctly understand Hasrueel (274) and Howl and Calcifer (280-281).

Abdullah's journey from self-absorbed daydreamer to lover and man of action, however, like any lover's trials in *Arabian Nights*, is overseen and orchestrated by Fate, which in *Castle in the Air* is embodied and problematized by the djinn Hasrueel. In *Arabian Nights*, Fate "watches over everything and meticulously arranges it all" (Irwin 197), becoming in effect "a leading character" (Irwin 198) who, in fact, is embodied to a limited extent by those with absolute power. A sultan, for instance, may act as Fate or as Fate's instrument when circumstance or his dictates part two lovers; when the lovers' trials come to a climax and all seems lost the sultan

Gardens figure largely in *Castle in the Air*, although they also are mentioned several times in *Howl's Moving Castle* and *House of Many Ways*.

may, if the lovers have behaved correctly according to both honour and love, choose to grant them life and happiness instead of death. Flower-in-the-Night's father, in contrast, is thwarted by Fate, as Fate acts in and through Hasrueel. Hasrueel, as the embodiment or at the very least the instrument of Fate, sets in motion almost all of the major events: he sells Abdullah the magic carpet that takes him to Flower-in-the-Night; he kidnaps Flower-in-the-Night, thus prompting Abdullah to search for her; he provides Abdullah with a genie; he forces Abdullah to live (and reconsider) his daydreams by assuming the appearance of Kabul Aqba; he interferes to repay Prince Justin and Howl for wrongly using magic to win a war. In *Arabian Nights*, Fate both gives generously and requires that the recipients of these gifts such as love or magical objects "grow up and begin to rely on themselves. It is because they become prepared to strive and suffer to achieve their ends that Fate provides the help... necessary for them to succeed" (Heath 201), which is precisely what Hasrueel does for and to Abdullah. Fate continually tests and refines lovers via worldly trials. Hasrueel, however, is also subject to Fate in that he also is a character being wronged and manipulated by someone who has power over him: his half-brother Dalzel.³⁵ Inasmuch as Hasrueel arranges Abdullah's and Justin's trials out of amusement, he also acts to encourage them to find the princesses and defeat Dalzel. Hasrueel considerably reminds Abdullah that should they reach the castle, Hasrueel "is [his] brother's slave and [will be] forced to act against [Abdullah]" (175). Hasrueel considers Abdullah and Justin unlikely to succeed (171), Abdullah because of his low birth (173), and Justin because he does not want to marry the princess he seeks (282). In a particularly lovely parallel, just as Hasrueel's machinations give

³⁵ Dalzel never, however rises to perform the role of Fate. Dalzel has the chance to take on that role when Abdullah pleads for mercy on the grounds that he has trespassed out of love for Flower-in-the-Night, yet fails. Whereas in a traditional *Arabian Nights* tale, the offended ruler (the embodiment of Fate) in whose power the lovers find themselves would consider their great love and be moved to show mercy, Dalzel's reaction is incomprehension, not pity: "Dalzel rubbed his chin in a perplexed way. 'Love?' he said. 'No, I can't say I understand love. I can't understand how *anything* could make someone put themselves in your position, mortal" (256).

Abdullah (and Justin) the opportunity to break free from the largely self-imposed limitations of his former life,³⁶ Abdullah's and Justin's efforts give Hasrueel the chance to escape from Dalzel's hold on him, which is the product of Hasrueel's own foolishness.³⁷ Hasrueel, both slave and devoted brother to Dalzel, nevertheless makes his bid for freedom when Abdullah and companions launch their attack. Abdullah perceives correctly that "Hasrueel could have flung the soldier, not to speak of himself and Flower-in-the-Night, to the ends of the earth if he had wanted to" (266-267) yet he held back, hoping that despite the chaos and seeming futility of their efforts, Abdullah would be able to locate Hasrueel's life. Even then, Hasrueel's troubles are not over: as a Good Djinn forced to do evil by Dalzel, he finds that he enjoyed the mischief he caused, rendering him unable to return to his former life³⁸ and uncertain of where to go. It is Wizard Howl who tells Hasrueel of the existence of "many hundreds of other worlds" (275) and shows him how to travel between them. Amusingly, Abdullah's trials and happiness depend to a large degree on Hasrueel, whose hope of release depends to a certain degree on Abdullah, who has been given Howl, whom Hasrueel has imprisoned as a punishment, and yet it is Howl who ultimately frees Hasrueel.

Prophecies, another manifestation of Fate, also take a hand in the outcome. However, the prophecies concerning Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night³⁹ come true not because they attempt to avoid their destinies, as many *Arabian Nights* characters do, nor solely because of the predictions themselves, but because various characters know and accept these destinies, and

³⁶ Although in Zanzib there was no possibility for Abdullah to marry a princess. Even so, his daydreams replaced action. In sharp contrast to the hero self of his fantasy, Abdullah does not so much as stand up to his bullying relatives.

³⁷ Djinn remove their lives from their bodies and conceal them for safety. When Hasrueel taught Dalzel how to hide his life, Hasrueel revealed where his own was hidden, despite knowing his brother's Evil nature. Dalzel immediately stole and rehid Hasrueel's life, effectively making his elder brother his slave. (172).

³⁸ Much like Abdullah, who cannot return to Zanzib due to the sultan and Prince Justin, who cannot return to Ingary permanently due to conquering Strangia (and later, falling in love with Princess Beatrice).

³⁹ Abdullah is foretold to leave the carpet trade two years after his father's death and to be "raised above all others in this land" (55); Flower-in-the-Night is predicted to marry the first man she sees, apart from her father (70).

work *with* them. In *Arabian Nights*, characters who attempt to avoid their fate unwittingly cause it to occur; even the act of reading fate provokes it: “a form of reverse causation operates... in which the prophecy gives birth to what is prophesied” (Irwin 199). The sultan, who has raised Flower-in-the-Night apart from men so that he can turn her fate to his advantage by allowing her to meet a prince with whom the sultan wishes to form an alliance, does not execute Abdullah solely because he knows that it is no use to defy Fate: since Flower-in-the-Night will marry the first man she meets (Abdullah), the sultan decides that he must instead allow Abdullah to live until Flower-in-the-Night is rescued, then execute Abdullah, before he can resume his original plan (72). This unwilling clemency is what keeps Abdullah alive until he is rescued by the carpet and Jamal’s dog, and allows him to fulfil the prophecy by marrying Flower-in-the-Night. Abdullah again turns this prophecy to his advantage by using it against the genie who wishes to turn him into a toad; the genie knows that he “can’t go against” (136) the prophecy and therefore doesn’t try.

The prophecy concerning Abdullah is more open to interpretation. As Hasrueel notes, “raised above all others in the land” is “highly ambiguous” (173). Abdullah’s relatives interpret this to mean that the sultan will elevate Abdullah to a position of power (57). The sultan could also fulfil the prophecy in a more literal manner, as Abdullah recognizes, by “impaling [him] upon a forty-foot stake and then loosing vultures to eat bits off [him]” (73) as a form of execution. Precisely how this prophecy is fulfilled is never made explicit in the text: although Abdullah ascends to the realm of the djinns, so does Flower-in-the-Night, who also comes from Rashpuht; the prophecy could be fulfilled by Abdullah’s travels on the magic carpet within Rashpuht’s borders, or even by his marriage to Flower-in-the-Night, since it is unlikely that any

other person of lowly birth would ever marry a princess of Rashpuht, and thus be raised to the same degree.

The dissemination of knowledge, of personal story, as demonstrated in the prophecies regarding Flower-in-the-Night and Abdullah, plays a significant role in *Castle in the Air*. In *Arabian Nights*, characters frequently relate their tales to other characters. Storytelling is “the mainspring of all action” (Todorov 233) and “narrative equals life” (Todorov 233). Characters who tell stories well live and prosper; those who cannot tell stories well are killed. Stories are used “to postpone or avert [the threat of] violence” (Pinault 10). *Castle in the Air*, far more than *Howl’s Moving Castle* or *House of Many Ways*, contains passages where one character or another tells his or her story, or parts of it. Abdullah relates his daydream history to Flower-in-the-Night at their first meeting, and she relates a limited amount of her life to Abdullah.

Abdullah tells some of his story to the sultan and avoids execution only because he relates the significant detail that he had not yet married Flower-in-the-Night. The sultan then relates the prophecy concerning Flower-in-the-Night’s marriage and his own reasons for rearing her as he had to Abdullah, who derives comfort and determination from this knowledge, although he also realizes that the sultan could very easily fulfil both prophecies without granting Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night a long and happy marriage. After Abdullah saves the soldier’s life, the soldier relates his (fictional) history to Abdullah, who in return deliberately conceals large portions of his own story. Together they wrestle with Hasrueel, who then peaceably tells them a large portion of his tale, which explains much of Abdullah’s past adventures and informs their future decisions. Abdullah is not given the opportunity to tell his story to Sophie’s sister, Lettie, and her Royal Wizard husband, which causes Abdullah to fulfil Hasrueel’s prophecy that he would help the djinn steal the princess of Ingary. Sophie tells part of her tale, which initiates the

rush back to the soldier and the discovery that he, the genie, and Morgan are gone. During Abdullah and Sophie's ascent on the carpet to the realm of the djinn, Sophie is so terrified of heights that she and Abdullah keep themselves from panicking and falling by telling more of their respective stories. Finally, following more wrestling, Hasruel relates the rest of his and Dalzel's tales to the victors.

Kaplan and other scholars have noted that Jones's works emphasize the power of language and storytelling. Through the constantly told, often-revised personal narratives of *Castle in the Air* and in the ways in which hearers react to these tales, the text argues that "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). This is demonstrated not only in various characters' reactions to the prophecies, but in its opposite, examples of poor communication. Sophie and Howl argue so long that they are unable to resist Hasruel when he steals their castle (198). As a result, Sophie is unable to perceive Howl, and Howl is unable to speak to Sophie until they are rescued by Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night, who have learned to communicate well. Storytelling – and more, the ability to determine truth from lies within stories – is framed as an essential skill. Ironically, and in contrast to the *Arabian Nights* emphasis on honour, almost every oath made is broken, where Abdullah's lies tend to come true.⁴⁰ However, Abdullah's skill at storytelling is nearly magical. He pretends to be a

⁴⁰ During his escape from the bandits, Abdullah "vow[s] to give up drinking wine and [swears] never to look at a grain of sand again" (99). In the morning, of course, he finds himself in the desert as before, surrounded by sand, and before setting off he drinks "a final swig of the hateful wine" (100). In *Ingary* Abdullah accepts a glass of wine from a servant (191), and when he and Sophie soar to the castle they see the desert far below (211). He pretends to have taken an oath not to marry until after the prophecy concerning him has come true (59), and this false oath holds true. He tells the soldier (falsely) that an angel in a vision told him that if the soldier helps him find Flower-in-the-Night, the soldier will be rewarded with a princess himself (130), which also comes true. The two times that Abdullah tells the truth under oath, his truthfulness has no positive effect: the sultan does not believe that Abdullah truly does not know where Flower-in-the-Night is (68), and the fact that Abdullah has not kissed Flower-in-the-Night (70) causes her to believe that he does not love her. The verity or falseness of Abdullah's final vow – not to promise the soldier anything else (138) remains unknown – he does not promise the soldier anything else in the text,

prince, and his imagined adventures are made real; during these adventures he calls himself a “mighty magician” (87), and although he is lying, Abdullah accidentally speaks the truth both in that encounter, when he pretends that the bottle contains a dangerous genie (which it does) (89), and later when he reassures Sophie that the carpet “circle[s] to gain height” (210) – again, Abdullah believes that he is lying, and discovers that he is telling the truth. Jones explicitly compares Abdullah’s non-magical storytelling ability with Sophie’s conversational magic when Abdullah witnesses Sophie casting a spell and is surprised to find that “it was not much different from his own way of persuading the carpet to move” (213). In *Arabian Nights* and *Castle in the Air*, storytelling and deliberate use of language are in themselves magic.

Castle in the Air adopts and adapts the romance genre from *Arabian Nights* and emphasizes the trials of the lovers as formative. Abdullah begins as a daydreamer enraptured with the idea of love who must learn to accept that Flower-in-the-Night is her own person and not an extension of his fantasy, learn to distinguish between dreams and reality, correctly perceive the nature of other characters and events, and change his ideals before he, as a transformed and active person, is capable of achieving his dreams and reuniting with Flower-in-the-Night. The djinn Hasrueel plays the role of Fate in orchestrating many of the trials endured by Abdullah as well as lending him aid, yet Hasrueel is also a prisoner in need of rescue by the very humans whose lives he disrupts and disorders. Prophecy, another tool of Fate, directs events also, through characters’ reactions to prophecies, such as the sultan’s attempts to control the foretold outcome for his own benefit; and the very knowledge of prophecies causes characters to fulfil them. Prophecy therefore serves as a part of storytelling, or revealing one’s own story to gain the sympathy or aid of other characters. Storytelling, which in *Arabian Nights* is linked strongly with

but given their continued association, it is probable that he would, in the future. Howl’s oath that whoever unstoppers the cork in his bottle will suffer is fulfilled (90) and then undone (162) when the angel-bandits are turned into toads and back again. Finally, the sultan’s threats against Abdullah remain unfulfilled (73, 282)

survival, in *Castle in the Air* is also associated with magic and language: Abdullah's use of language, reason, and his increasing perception are compared to the ability of a powerful and strong-minded witch, although Abdullah has no magical ability himself.

Chapter 6: *The Boke of Palimpsest: Revelation and Rewriting in House of Many Ways*

In *House of Many Ways*, the Sophie and Howl book that most directly features books and the written word, the protagonist, Charmain Baker, finds with great enthusiasm a book of spells on her Great-Great Uncle William's desk, called *The Boke of Palimpsest*. Charmain ignores the note from Great Uncle William⁴¹ which advises that the *Boke* is "too powerful and too advanced" (33) for Charmain, and proceeds to cast a spell, or rather, several, for *The Boke of Palimpsest* has a mind of its own. Charmain unknowingly cobbles together parts from at least eight spells,⁴² all of which, like prophecies, unfold and play a role in the events that follow. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, a palimpsest is "a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing" (Def. n. 2a.). A palimpsest is therefore not only a document which replaces a work formerly inscribed, of which traces, whether minute or clearly visible, may be discerned, but a record of the social or personal value placed on a document which was originally considered worth writing, and later was scraped off in favour of a new manuscript. The *OED* further defines palimpsest as "a thing likened to a writing surface, esp. in having been reused or

⁴¹ William, the Wizard Norland, is Charmain's "Great-Great Uncle-by-Marriage" (33), as he is uncle to Sempronia, who married Ned (now deceased), who was uncle to Charmain's father (34). William is thus not a blood relative to Charmain. Throughout the text, the first "Great" is omitted from Sempronia and William's titles; Charmain addresses the latter as "Aunt Sempronia" and the former as "Great Uncle William." I shall follow suit.

⁴² Charmain intends to cast A Spell for Flying (44). While she gathers the requisite ingredients and follows the helpfully numbered stages, *The Boke of Palimpsest* "lazily and slyly" (46) leafs over its own pages. Charmain ends up unintentionally incorporating parts from A Spell to Find Hidden Treasure, A Spell for Personal Protection, A Spell to Increase Magical Power, A Spell to Become Invisible, A Spell to Start a Fire, A Spell to Bend Objects to the Will, and A Spell to Make a Wish Come True (45-49). All of these spells happen or come true during Charmain's subsequent adventures. One further note: although the *Boke* turns to the page for A Spell to Increase Magical Power (47), Charmain does not actually follow any steps from this page, and the *Boke* turns to another page before she notices. Whether Charmain's magical power is actually increased or not is therefore unclear. However, three spells that Charmain sees in the *Boke* yet does not cast – A Spell to Tell Friend From Foe, A Spell to Enlarge the Mind, and A Spell to Find a Handsome Prince (38, 44) – also are enacted during Charmain's adventures, suggesting that the *Boke* does not require human intention or action to confer its spells upon its "adopted" (324) magic-user.

altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record (Def. n. 2b.). A palimpsest is thus a symbol of revelation and rewriting, which are the two key concerns of *House of Many Ways*, and which are explored on a social level through characters' concern with respectability, on an interpersonal level as layers of concealment are stripped away to reveal their true natures, and on an individual level, as Charmain applies what she has observed or made to learn to herself.

The opening chapter of *House of Many Ways* foregrounds Charmain's highly respectable upbringing, and her parents' attitudes towards magic and their daughter. Magic, to Mrs. Baker, is "not quite nice" (9), something to be spoken of only in lowered voices. In their highly respectable end of town, magic is so "vulgar" (17) that it is not taught in school, and as the Bakers "never [allow] Charmain to do anything that [is] not utterly respectable" (11), Charmain "[knows] not the first thing about magic" (17). Charmain, in fact, is "tired of her respectable school and *very* tired of living at home, with her mother treating her as if Charmain were a tigress no one was sure was tame, and her father forbidding her to do things because they were not nice, or not safe, or not usual" (13). Mrs. and Mr. Baker emerge as over protective parents and Charmain as an overly sheltered child who is tired of the nest. As Aunt Sempronia points out, Charmain has been given the best of everything and has "never had to do anything for [herself] in her life" (16); however, this is not a tenable situation. The Bakers are indulgent parents, yet come across as afraid of what their daughter might do if she were unconstrained by rules and proper behaviour.⁴³ Over-refined and constrictive definitions of what is proper and what is not are grounded in a lack of trust and in a consequent need to control others, which

⁴³ For readers with knowledge of Jones's resistance to genre conventions, it is difficult not to read Charmain's situation as an analogy for literary genre constraints, a false *carte blanche* ("write anything you like, dear, so long as it conforms to our rules"), as well as a parody of parents who mean well, but who are so smothering in their attentions that the child either grows up entirely dependent, or rebels and flies to the opposite extreme of behaviour.

manifests as a tension between the outer appearance, or surface level, and the true reality, which is hidden. This tension is demonstrated by Charmain's interpretations of her parents' parting words to her when she sets off to house-sit for Great Uncle William. Despite the Bakers' loving behaviour, Charmain does not take her parents' words at face value:

Mrs. Baker had embraced Charmain and said, "I know I can trust you, dear, to be good and tidy and considerate."

That's a lie, Charmain thought. She doesn't trust me an inch.

Then Charmain's father hurried up to peck a kiss on Charmain's cheek. "We know you'll not let us down, Charmain," he said.

That's another lie, Charmain thought. You know I will.

"And we'll miss you, my love," her mother said, nearly in tears.

That may not be a lie! Charmain thought, in some surprise. (15-16)

Fittingly, it is the Bakers' "I know" statements that Charmain recognizes as false, which parallels Charmain's subsequent discovery that she herself actually knows very little. Due to her highly respectable upbringing, Charmain does not know how to wash dishes (25, 109, 117), do laundry (30, 232-235), make tea (73), or cook (168, 220), never having done any of these things.⁴⁴

Charmain realizes that she has "led a much too sheltered life" (30) but initially considers this a good thing (31) when she considers the physical toll these chores take.⁴⁵ Peter, who soon arrives expecting to become Great Uncle William's apprentice, however, is disgusted by Charmain's ignorance. "Why is it respectable not to know how to do things?" (109) he demands, and drags Charmain into washing dishes (116-118) and clothes (232-236) with him. Although Charmain

⁴⁴ Charmain also has "never thought about gardening in her life" (57) and does not know how to swim (175).

⁴⁵ Charmain knows that her mother's washerwoman has "red hands and [a] mauve face" (31). When Charmain is eventually made to wash dishes, she is "horrified" (118) at the sight of her red and wrinkled hands, declaring her fear that "she must be ill... [with] a horrible skin disease" (119).

resents Peter for this, she also fiercely defends her budding understanding that she must do things for herself: when Peter tidies her room, she nearly cries with fury and says in a rage: “I was just beginning to learn that if I drop something on the floor it *stays* dropped unless I pick it up, and if I make a mess I have to clear it away because it doesn’t go by itself... You’re as bad as my mother!... Don’t spoil my learning process!” (186-187) Respectability, Charmain finds, is nearly synonymous with uselessness, and she is not interested in being either.

Respectability constrains not only actions but thoughts. When Timminz, the kobold chief, appears in the living room during morning tea with Aunt Sempronia and Charmain’s mother, Charmain is unable to explain the situation clearly: Charmain “began to despair of getting her mother to understand. She’s not stupid, she just never lets her mind out, [Charmain] thought” (98). Later Charmain re-evaluates her resentment of Peter’s opinion of her ignorance, and realizes that although she is neither lazy nor stupid, she has “not bothered to look round the edges of Mother’s way of doing things” (176). Charmain’s mother is the character most concerned with respectability.⁴⁶ Charmain’s father had previously appeared united in opinion with his wife, yet Charmain discovers that he is a magic user and believes that his daughter does “need to know some of those [practical] things... Respectable or not” (220). Aunt Sempronia,

⁴⁶ Peter’s mother, Matilda, follows a parallel path to Mrs. Baker. Although Matilda is a witch and does not subscribe to Berenice Baker’s notions of propriety, the two mothers with the best of intentions fetter their respective children in similar ways. Berenice aims to raise Charmain to be respectable and normal, insulating her daughter from any form of work, with the result that Charmain does not know how to look after herself in practical ways, although Charmain’s magic does “exactly what [she] mean[s] it do” (290) however patchwork her method. Matilda aims to raise Peter safe from the lubbock, to which end she puts “the strongest possible” (322) magical protections upon him and, as a single mother with a magical-disaster-prone son, becomes extremely efficient. The result is that although Peter is competent at most household tasks, he cannot tell left from right or perform even basic spells properly: “his method is always perfect, but the spell always misfires” (290). Much as Berenice’s respectability leaves little room for Charmain’s growth and happiness, Matilda’s terrifying efficiency renders her unable to appreciate the unusual, creative methods Peter invents to allow him to overcome his difficulty (see 288 for Charmain’s defence of Peter). Ultimately, both Charmain and Peter literally leave their mothers’ homes for good (326) in order to continue to grow. Efficiency, although an admirable trait, is, like respectability, not an end in itself.

though respectable, is a witch (104) who cares more that Charmain learn “to look after herself” (16) than for propriety.⁴⁷

Respectability and its opposites, magic and creativity, are visually portrayed through the use or lack of colour, particularly the colour blue. In the early portion of the novel, blue appears almost exclusively in descriptions of the sky, of mountains, or of hazy distances, all as far-off and unreachable (13, 32, 52, for instance) as Charmain’s dream of working in the king’s library. When Charmain leaves her respectable home for a wizard’s house, begins practicing magic, and dares to begin living her dream, colour enters her life, most particularly blue, the colour of magic. The kobolds⁴⁸ are blue-skinned and blue-clad (104), and Calcifer, who as a fire demon has extremely powerful magic, appears as “a blue teardrop of flame” (294). Although the king and Princess Hilda have little magical power, the king’s “kindly, crinkled old blue eyes” (133), indicate his elf blood (193), for the elves also favour blue, as the sled they commission the kobolds to build is painted with blue flowers (267) and filled with blue cushions (313). Sophie’s eyes are “blue-green” and her dress “peacock blue” (146), Howl’s eyes and clothing are described with his every appearance as blue (see 149, for example),⁴⁹ and their son Morgan’s

⁴⁷ Aunt Sempronia is a witch much like Mrs. Pentstemmon from *Howl’s Moving Castle*, who evidently cares for appearances (she dresses elegantly in silk, for instance, and has servants) without being ruled by them. Aunt Sempronia uses social pressure to arrange for Charmain to look after Great Uncle William’s house because from her perspective, Charmain “never has her nose out of a book, never does a hand’s turn in the house and is treated like a sacred object by both of her parents. It will do her *good* to do something normal for a change” (11).

⁴⁸ Kobolds are creatures from German folklore roughly equivalent to the brownie, who works in secret in old houses and can only be paid by a dish of milk left out overnight. The *OED* defines kobold as “a familiar spirit, haunting houses and rendering services to the inmates, but often of a tricky disposition” and “an underground spirit haunting mines or caves” (Def. n. a. and b.). Jones appears to combine these two: the kobolds in *House of Many Ways* attend to special houses such as Great Uncle William’s and Castle Joie; when angered they withdraw their services and make daily chores difficult for the human residents (106); they live in caves (268) and grottos (270); and the gardener Rollo, at least, is paid “a pink of milk nightly” (58), although Rollo (unlike the other kobolds) is greedy for more (58, 251).

⁴⁹ I am at a loss, however, how to account for Howl’s change in eye colour. In *Howl’s Moving Castle*, his eyes are green, not blue (58); in fact, Sophie notes that Howl’s sister, Megan, looks much like him but with blue eyes (147). Howl changes his hair colour, clothing, and even his form in *Howl’s Moving Castle* yet there is no indication that it is possible to change his eye colour. Either Howl has found a magical means of doing so, or this is a continuity error. If the latter, it is not alone. Calcifer is described in *Howl’s Moving Castle* and *House of Many Ways* as teardrop-shaped (297 and 260, respectively), yet in *Castle in the Air* he appears as “an upside-down teardrop” (276). In *Castle*

clothes are likewise blue (149). Even Peter, whose magic Great Uncle William considers unremarkable (191), wears an old blue suit (167), which may foreshadow the revelation of his royal (and thus part elfin) heritage. Even Charmain, whose physical appearance is mentioned very little,⁵⁰ gains colour: when she copies a royal genealogy, working for both the king and for Sophie at once, her forefinger is dyed blue with ink (212).

Blue is the colour of magic, and colour as a whole is used to indicate vibrant life, in contrast to the dull shades of respectability. Charmain, who is weary of respectability, is drawn by the houses in the old areas of town, which are “tall and colourful and so different from one another” (17), which raise in her the hope that house-sitting “might prove to be interesting” (18). She notices books with “coloured jackets” (32) in Great Uncle William’s study, and when Charmain blissfully gathers flowers, she chooses a variety of shades and types (50), although unsurprisingly “tiny blue trumpets” (50) appeal to her the most. “Colourful” is always a positive description in *House of Many Ways*. Colourlessness, in contrast, indicates not only respectability, but constraint and concealment. Charmain is weary of living in her parents’ house, where she has a “frilly white bedroom” with a “nice desk” (12), the very blandness of which suits respectable notions of a young girl’s taste but indicates nothing of Charmain as a person. Unlike the cheery blues of Sophie’s clothing, Charmain’s mother’s dress is “most respectable in grey, with shining white collar and cuffs” (91). Charmain sees Peter’s failed spells as grey blobs (160). The most sinister character is known only as “the colourless gentleman,” the king’s steward (180). He is “so quiet and colourless that Charmain [forgets] what he look[s] like as soon as she [takes] her eyes off him” (147) and even the king cannot recall his name (180). This character’s very

in the Air, Abdullah’s country is Rashpuht; in *House of Many Ways* this nation is called Rajpuht (131, 181). This may be a deliberate choice, however, much as in Rashpuht, Ingary is called Ochinstan (280).

⁵⁰ Charmain is “thin-faced and ginger haired” (219); aside from that, her physical appearance is largely left to the imagination.

colourlessness is a disguise for his true nature: despite his respectable demeanour and clothes of “colourless grey silk” (243), he is a lubbockin who, with Crown Prince Ludovic, also a lubbockin (243) is stealing the king’s gold (279) and plans to take over High Norland on behalf of their parent, the lubbock.⁵¹ Colourlessness is not a virtue but a threat to life and freedom.

Respectability, in contrast, sees colour as a threat. This idea is presented in typical Jones fashion in its reverse. The kobolds, whom respectable Mrs. Baker finds shocking, are themselves respectable in their own way: but where for Mrs. Baker muted shades are *de rigueur*, the kobolds have quite a different idea of what is appropriate. Great Uncle William’s hydrangea bushes, which bear flowers of many colours, defy category and are seen as a threat: not only does it produce blue flowers, which the kobolds consider “the correct and reasonable colour for flowers to be” (106), but also pink, green, and white blossoms on the same bush, which they abhor as “disgusting and incorrect” (106). What Mrs. Baker would deem respectable is “disgraceful” (107) to the kobolds; the kobolds value respectability yet are alarming and improper (98) by Mrs. Baker’s standards. Notions of what is normal and correct hinder understanding.

Jones reiterates the contrast between appearances and norms, and reality in a scene where Charmain spies upon Crown Prince Ludovic and the colourless gentlemen as they supervise the kobolds of Castel Joie. The kobolds, whose blue skin has faded to grey-green with ill health and abuse, are carrying gold stolen from the king to Ludovic’s Castel (279). The colourless

⁵¹ The closest word I could find to lubbock or lubbockin is “lubber,” which according to the *OED* is possibly derived from *lobeor*, an Old French word meaning “swindler, parasite” or *lober* “to deceive, sponge upon, mock.” A lubber is “a big, clumsy, stupid fellow; esp. one who lives in idleness, a lout” (Def. 1a.). Lubber-grasshopper is “a name for two large-bodied clumsy insects of the U.S.” (“Lubber” compounds). In a bestiary Charmain finds in Great Uncle William’s library, a lubbock “is a purple-hued insectile being of any size from grasshopper to larger than human” (86) that reproduces parasitically by laying its eggs in humans; when the offspring is born the human host almost always dies. A lubbockin is “the offspring of a LUBBOCK *qv* and a human female” (86). Lubbockins “invariably have purple eyes” (87); otherwise, they generally appear human but “are almost invariably evil” (87). The lubbock in *House of Many Ways* plans to take over High Norland: it lays eggs in Great Uncle William (238) and intends to kill its offspring, Crown Prince Ludovic, after Ludovic assumes the throne (280). Crown Prince Ludovic and the colourless gentleman are casually cruel (279), selfish (225), and indolent except in their plots; even then, most of the work is done by others under their command, such as kobolds and other lubbockins.

gentleman notes that this is the very last of the gold, to which Ludovic replies that they will “have to think of some other way to get money, then. Castel Joie is so dashed expensive to run” (279-280). Ludovic’s primary aim, evidently, is to keep up appearances in Castel Joie, the image of the “perfect palace” (278). Excessive attention to outward appearances, whether castles or respectability, drains the life from what is real and true.⁵²

Part of Charmain’s journey is learning to see people as they really are – not an easy task when so many around her are concealing their true natures. Initially, Charmain depends on external sources: she searches the many letters addressed to Great Uncle William to be sure that Peter is who he claims to be, for instance (70). Similarly, although Charmain has suspected Aunt Sempronia of being a witch for years, she does not take this idea seriously until Peter asserts this claim (103). Charmain’s growing awareness of hidden reality is demonstrated by her instinctive shudder when she meets the colourless gentleman’s eyes (179), although she does not understand her reaction until she sees his and Ludovic’s purple eyes (243) and realizes that they are lubbockins.

Learning to see beyond the surface is not a trivial skill; when both friend and foe are concealed, Charmain has to choose whom to trust based not only on external circumstances but on her own judgement. When Howl and Sophie ask Charmain for help, for instance, Howl’s disguise as an irritating six-year-old named Twinkle causes Charmain concern: “could you trust someone who looked like a little boy and obviously wasn’t quite?” (213) True, Sophie had been invited by Princess Hilda, but Twinkle was clearly not what he seemed. Similarly, Charmain

⁵² Again, it is difficult not to read this as a commentary on genre. Castel Joie, “the pride of High Norland,” looks like “a small storybook palace – one that had many small pointed towers with little blue roofs” (278), a description that reminds me strongly of the iconic Disney castle. Charmain is “slightly ashamed to realize that it was the building she always thought of when any book she was reading mentioned a palace” (278), much as repeated conventions come to stand for story, rather than the unique way each story approaches and modifies these conventions. Genre is descriptive, not prescriptive.

hears of Great Uncle William's alarm at her acquaintance with a fire demon, as they are "very dangerous beings" (192). Physically, both Twinkle and Prince Ludovic are clad in white and blue (278)⁵³ and both conceal their identities.⁵⁴ However, both are unable to hide who and what they are in totality: Twinkle is associated with Sophie, who reassures her husband of her trust in Charmain (204), and whose "friendly smile" (213) convinces Charmain that it is safe to trust the unusual family that they, Morgan, and Calcifer comprise. When Charmain and Peter face a threat that only a fire demon can resolve (239), Charmain does not hesitate to seek Calcifer, worries about his apparent death (260), and is "almost too delighted to speak" (294) when she meets him alive. Ludovic gives himself away through his behaviour, which inspires enmity: he tears down a narrow street in his carriage regardless of the safety of others (224), is known to the common people as intolerant of criticism (225-226), and greets Charmain with derision (241-242).

There are numerous other deceptions throughout the narrative. The colourless gentleman is not Ludovic's only fellow lubbockin, although he is the most important among Ludovic's allies; the singularly ineffective nursery-maid assigned to watch Morgan and Twinkle is in fact a lubbockin, as is Ludovic's "assistant" (i.e. mistress, 242), as they reveal when they attempt to kidnap Morgan (297). The king's cousins' children are not the "bad lots" (229) they are widely reputed to be; rather, the only bad one is Ludovic, who murdered and defamed the others (320). Waif is not merely a small and charming dog, but the missing Elfgift possessing "the power to keep the King safe and the whole country with him" (321). Even the royal palace's famed golden roof, which everyone knows is only tin bespelled to look like gold, conceals a wealth of gold

⁵³ The king himself has a white beard to go with his blue eyes (133) and Great Uncle William similarly has blue eyes and "silvery hair" (20); blue and white in combination may suggest power.

⁵⁴ Amusingly, even their hair is a disguise of sorts: Ludovic wears a "beautifully curled" (307) wig to conceal his "smooth, bald and purple head" (307), and Howl's hair falls in "improbably beautiful flaxen curls" (312) that are, as Charmain critically observes, "perhaps a little unreal" (312).

ingots. As Twinkle says, “Everyone knowth the roof ithn’t really gold, tho nobody thinkth of looking for the gold [there]” (305).

The golden roof is not the novel’s only pun. Charmain’s own name is transformed through mishearing into Charming, which is initially a source of irony. Timminz, the kobold chief, addresses her as Charming, which Charmain enjoys (105) and shortly thereafter disproves the accuracy of when she tactlessly loses her temper (107) and fails to resolve what ought to have been an easily ended dispute (108). The king’s “old, old serving man” (130), the butler Sims, likewise misinterprets Charmain as Charming, and in this case the appellation is better suited to Sims, who is particularly kind to Charmain both initially when she is nervous and babbling (131) and thereafter. The king’s cook, Jamal, likewise addresses Charmain as Charming, which more accurately describes Waif’s behaviour to Jamal’s dog during that scene (143). Princess Hilda’s use of Charming when Charmain “rescues” Twinkle off the golden roof is apt only when Charmain’s conduct is contrasted with the din made by Morgan and Twinkle and the dogs (205). The elf who comes bearing news of Great Uncle William and the lubbock eggs that had made him ill outrages the truth less with his use of Charming, as Charmain is warm and concerned about Great Uncle William’s health (238), and Charmain really is Charming in contrast to Ludovic when she is introduced him.⁵⁵ When Charmain asks Calcifer for help (247) she does merit the name: she seeks magical assistance, is concerned for others, not herself, and politely does not complain when Calcifer’s method of killing the lubbock kills many flowers as well (255). By the time Howl addresses Charmain as Charming, the term is fitting: Charmain is a

⁵⁵ Sim introduces Charmain as “Lady Charming” (242). I suspect that his elevation of her status is a small rebellion against Ludovic, as at the same event Sims elevates the fire demon to the knighthood as “Sir Calcifer” (241), a rank Calcifer nowhere else is indicated as having and which Charmain certainly does not possess.

magic-user holding an enchanting dog⁵⁶ (323). Although at first the use of Charming is ironic, Charmain gradually grows into it, and its accuracy is affirmed⁵⁷ when she is revealed as having been adopted by the *Boke of Palimpsest* (324), which “gives a person freedom to use all the magics of earth, air, fire and water” (290) and by the Elfgift (an enchanting dog)⁵⁸ as its Guardian (324), and therefore becomes Wizard Norland’s apprentice in the study of magic, spells, and charms.

Another, more cunning piece of wordplay is *The Boke of Palimpsest*, a book of spells with a mind of its own. “Boke” suggests its homonym “book,” and yet the *OED* defines boke not as an outdated spelling of book but as a verb meaning “to thrust or push out; to butt, to poke” (“Boke”). This is precisely what the *Boke* does to Charmain, who is attracted by the prospect of trying magic. Charmain believes she is casting A Spell for Flying, yet the *Boke* turns its pages so that she unknowingly casts in part at least seven more spells (44-49), all of which are revealed to come true over the course of the narrative.⁵⁹ *The Boke of Palimpsest* does not merely present Charmain with the means of revealing what is concealed, but pushes her (“boke”) into doing

⁵⁶ According to the Peter’s mother, Princess Matilda the Witch of Montalbino, “enchanting dogs are quite rare and very magical” (289). Waif is not only an enchanting dog but also the Elfgift, a dog given long ago by the elves to their relation, the king of High Norland, for the protection and prosperity of his person and realm. Being the Elfgift seems to be a trait that “certain dogs inherit” (324). Throughout the narrative, Waif magically opens doors (41, 58, 67, 125, 127, 264, 308) in a literal enactment of what she does figuratively for Charmain by adopting her.

⁵⁷ Which does not lessen the humour. It should be noted that Charmain never introduces herself as Charming, and the narrator refers to her as Charmain throughout the text.

⁵⁸ Charmain’s charm is amusingly accentuated (and the revelation of Waif’s identity is foreshadowed) by repetition of similar descriptions: the king’s smile is “enchanting” (135); Wizard Melicot was paid by a long-ago king “for the enchanting” (140) of the Mansion roof; a lady-in-waiting calls Morgan “a charming little boy” (148) and Charmain thinks of Twinkle as “a truly enchanting child” (150); and Howl gives “dazzlingly apologetic” (319) and “scintillating smiles” (320).

⁵⁹ Charmain Increases her Magical Power by exercising it; she Bends Objects to her Will by subduing the recalcitrant pipes (161); she Starts a Fire (or several, 47, 235, 290); she goes Flying over a cliff (55); is not harmed by the lubbock or lubbockins or anything else (A Spell for Personal Protection); plays a role in Finding and making public the discovery of Hidden Treasure – stolen gold (279), long-lost gold (304), and the Elfgift (323); she is effectively Invisible when she spies on the lubbockins (278); and her Wish Comes True when she becomes both wizard’s apprentice (thus leaving home) and Librarian-Archivist to the Royal Library (325). Charmain also leans to Tell Friend From Foe, Enlarges her Mind, and Finds a Handsome Prince (or two: Ludovic and Peter).

so.⁶⁰ “Palimpsest” is a verb as well as a noun. Instead of existing only as a thing on which writing has been inscribed, erased, and rewritten, *The Boke of Palimpsest* is an actor with the ability to create palimpsests, “to write again on... after the original writing has been effaced; to overwrite (an earlier text” (“Palimpsest,” v.). The *Boke* makes Charmain into a palimpsest as her adventures – made possible, in part, through its mischievous page turns – erase her respectable upbringing and replace it with new knowledge and new ways of living.^{61 62}

One of the new ways of living that Charmain struggles with most is with being kind. One of Charmain’s first lines in *House of Many Ways* is the declaration to her mother: “You know I’m not kind” (12). Her reaction to Peter’s expectation that she will wash dishes is to wonder why she would, since she was not the one who had dirtied them (112). Respectability and focus on outward appearances have done nothing to create inward virtue. However, magic and exposure to unusual circumstances widen Charmain’s mind (and heart): when the king praises her intelligence, she realizes that he has not praised her compassion. “I may be clever, she thought, quite sadly, but I’m not in the least kind or sympathetic. I think I may even be hard-hearted. Look at the way I treat Peter” (183). The contrast between the king’s warmth and her own selfishness inspires Charmain to be kinder (184), although she believes that trying persons, such as children and Rollo, would make kindness impossible (185). Unsurprisingly, the first thing she does is yell at Peter (186) despite “meaning to be kind to [him]” (187), and after they quarrel, even a friendly tone requires Charmain to “striv[e] mightily” (187). However, she

⁶⁰ Charmain finds the *Boke*’s spells “hard to resist” (44) and later admits that “it did make [her] do spells out of it” (325), thus suggesting that the *Boke* has agency, or at the very least, influence, which it exercised over Charmain.

⁶¹ It is also possible to see Charmain as a palimpsest being recovered rather than created, as an innately creative and magical person whose uniqueness has been partially erased by the confines of respectability, and whose original text is brought out and re-inked. This perspective, however, does not take into account the very real limitations that her upbringing has placed on Charmain, and how wholly new, exciting, and beyond her imaginings Charmain’s adventures and eventual role as wizard’s apprentice, Elgift Guardian, and part-time Librarian-Archivist is.

⁶² This does not take away from Charmain’s agency; rather, I see the *Boke of Palimpsest* as encouraging and enabling Charmain much in the manner that characters like Peter, who pushes Charmain to learn household chores, and the king, who inspires Charmain to be kind, do.

perseveres, apologizes, and manages tact if not actual kindness (189-190, 193, 195). Charmain finds that panic over Twinkle's apparent peril causes her to "[forget] all the unkind thought she had had about children" (197). She takes care to make amends to a boy she offends (223) and is appalled by Ludovic's selfishness (225). Charmain's greatest break with her former behaviour is amply demonstrated on three occasions. First, when Charmain tells Rollo that the lubbock laid its eggs in him, he screams and noisily laments his doom. The other kobolds are so disgusted by his behaviour that they do not move to help or comfort him, finding his "display" (273) more revolting than the prospect of his imminent death. Charmain considers this "so unfair" that "she [cannot] help feeling truly sorry for Rollo" (273). Although Rollo has acted in conspiracy with the lubbockin, Charmain tells Timminz that the elves could save Rollo's life (274).⁶³ Secondly, Charmain feels compassion for the kobolds of Castel Joie and is infuriated by Timminz's inaction: "it never occurred to you to help them without being asked, did it? Charmain thought" (281). In this instance Charmain tactfully does not criticize the kobold chief, but determines to inform the king about Ludovic and the kobolds. In the third and final instance, when the lubbockins have been defeated and Charmain believes she will have to go home to respectable life again, she recognizes her own attitude despite feeling left out. "I know I'm being quite unreasonable, she thought. I'm just the same as I always was" (315). Charmain is not exactly as she was. She returns Peter's less-than-flattering assessments of her with her own of him (316) and insists that what she really wants to do is work in the Royal Library (325); however as a whole she has become open-minded and kinder than before, and has become aware of her own limitations – and of how much she needs to learn (326). The revelation of her flaws prompts Charmain to rewrite her own character.

⁶³ To do Timminz justice, once he is convinced of this fact, he immediately decides that the kobold community as a whole will pay for the cost of the elves' attentions to Rollo (274).

In summary, *House of Many Ways* is, like *The Boko of Palimpsest*, concerned with revelation and rewriting. Focus on outward appearances, or respectability, is exposed as a limited mode of existence which creates tension between what seems and what really is. This tension, which is characterized by a lack of trust, is detrimental to inner reality and the development of actual virtue and useful, necessary skills. Charmain, for instance, has been raised so respectably that she is incompetent at household chores; worse, she is selfish and unkind. When Charmain begins to grow beyond the limits imposed by respectable behaviour, she realizes the confines respectability has placed not only on her actions but on her thoughts, as amply demonstrated by her mother. Prompted and aided by *The Boko of Palimpsest*, as well as by Peter and other characters, Charmain learns to see others as they really are, and chooses to trust those she determines are worthy: Sophie, although she is largely unknown to Charmain; Calcifer, despite his dangerous nature; and Howl, despite his absurd masquerade as a six year old prodigy called Twinkle. Charmain also penetrates the disguises of the sinister colourless gentleman and Crown Prince Ludovic, and develops agency – and kindness – through her adventures. Magic and creativity are visually contrasted with respectability through the use of colour: many-coloured buildings and flowers are presented as lively and lovely, while pale colours and colourlessness are drab and sinister. Varying shades of blue, the colour of magic, become almost omnipresent as characters' concealed natures are revealed and as Charmain reinscribes her character and situation.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion and Conclusions

The goal of this close reading analysis was to examine the ways in which Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air* and *House of Many Ways* challenge the conventions of genre; which genres are subverted; and how the protagonists of these novels overcome the constraints imposed by their genres, their families, and their own selves to develop discernment, self-knowledge, and agency. The novels begin by establishing the setting and genre of the narrative, undermining expectations of such settings and genres⁶⁴ even as they are presented. Social norms, family, and the protagonists themselves conspire to limit the potential of the protagonists, who however competent in their respective positions⁶⁵ are nevertheless vaguely dissatisfied. However, it is not until external powers force the protagonists into action that they begin to question circumstances and their own acceptance of norms and expectations. Gradually, Jones's protagonists begin to see things and people as they are rather than as they seem to be. It is this process of growing up that confers agency on the protagonist, as they gain practical knowledge and skills, a sense of identity,⁶⁶ and command of language. Language is a thematic concern in Jones's stories,⁶⁷ manifesting in books, in personal story, in cultural myths, as well as through the ability to persuade, to apply tact, and to gain power through the correct use of language and intent or will. Sophie, Abdullah, and Charmain begin their narratives as victims

⁶⁴ For an excellent analysis of how Jones subverts genre to rebel against constraints and infuse new life into fantasy, see Ang, Susan, "Dogmata, Catastrophe, and the Renaissance of Fantasy in Diana Wynne Jones." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34.3 (2010): 284-302. Web. 26 July 2013.

⁶⁵ Sophie is good at trimming hats and enjoys it (*Howl's Moving Castle* 15), Abdullah is a remarkably successful carpet merchant and enjoys life, with the exception of each month's visit from his relatives (*Castle in the Air* 11), and even the bored and unhappy Charmain is able to avoid chores in favour of reading and eating (*House of Many Ways* 10-11).

⁶⁶ For an examination of language, identity, and seeming/reality in another of Jones's books, see Webb, Caroline, "'False Pretences' and the 'Real Show': Identity, Performance, and the Nature of Fiction in *Conrad's Fate*." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 21.1 (2010): 221-232. ProQuest LLC. Web. 28 July 2013.

⁶⁷ See Gascoyne, Debbie, "'Why Don't You Be A Tiger?': The Performative, Transformative, and Creative Power of the Word in the Universes of Diana Wynne Jones." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 21.2 (2010): 210-220. ProQuest LLC. Web. 28 July 2013.

of language, devoid of agency and lacking the ability to discriminate between what merely seems and what truly is. Through (mis)adventures they gain discernment, perception, and agency, emerging as powerful human beings who have been transformed and who transform the world around them. In keeping with the emphasis on language and transformation, wordplay is a source of humour and revelation in each story. Colour is also prevalent in all three tales, particularly the colour blue. Sophie dons a “demure,” “staid grey dress” (18) to work in the hat shop. The colour does not suit Sophie (18, 299), who is neither demure nor staid, and who is not cut out for a quiet merchant life. Abdullah’s daydreams are more colourful than his mundane life as a carpet merchant, literally as well as figuratively (see 12, for example), and Charmain’s narrative makes explicit the evils of colourlessness in contrast to the liveliness of many hues. Flowers, those embodiments of colour and life, are likewise present: Sophie admires Mrs. Fairfax’s gardens (115) and is “delighted” (232) when the moving castle relocates beside “truly marvellous” (232) beds of flowers on the edge of the Waste. Abdullah adjusts his ideal gardens from visions of gold and jewels to natural flowers once he is exposed to the sultan’s “heaven-like” (24) gardens and comes to admire bluebells. Abdullah’s and Flower-in-the-Night’s cottage is dwarfed by the beauty of their gardens, which become “one of the wonders of the land” (285), in large part due to the “bluebell wood that grew bluebells all the year round” (285). Charmain is “astonished” (50) by the beauty of tiny mountain flowers, and Great Uncle William’s multi-coloured hydrangea blossoms become a point of contention between Charmain and the kobolds.

Despite these common themes and concerns, the books and their protagonists are very different. Sophie, who believes the books she reads, is the most self-limited of the three. Social customs and family curtail her options yet also attempt to make Sophie realize that her beliefs about herself are untrue. Fanny, for instance, takes it for granted that it is only fair for Sophie, the

eldest, to inherit the hat shop, and that Sophie wants to inherit the hat shop. When Fanny later learns that Sophie was miserable, she blames herself (269). Sophie's sisters, Martha and Lettie, want better for Sophie than a life as a milliner, yet do not see a way out (26). It is primarily Sophie's blind acceptance of the (fairy tale conventions in) books she has read (10) that fetter her mind and thus her actions. Although she is unhappy and lonely without her sisters, Sophie believes that change is impossible.

Abdullah, on the other hand, is fairly content with his life. His development is stunted largely by his indolence, his self-absorption, and by his relatives. He prefers to dwell in idle daydreams in which his every desire is fulfilled on the basis of his birth rather than work; he is an armchair adventurer who obeys the relatives he detests despite the looseness of their connection.

Charmain, like Abdullah, finds her life curtailed by the demands of her parents for respectable behaviour, yet it is her internalization of these social norms that cause her the most trouble. Charmain knows she does not want to be like her mother, yet does not understand how deeply her own perspective and expectations have been shaped by her upbringing until she is forced to face her incompetence by the domestic and (ironically) magically-inept Peter. Unlike Sophie and Abdullah, Charmain does not have any particular practical skill, and is not in love; in fact, *House of Many Ways* has the most open ending, as befits the youngest protagonist of the Sophie and Howl books: rather than settle into marriage, as had Sophie and Howl, Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night, Charmain begins her magical apprenticeship, acknowledging that she isn't "house trained yet" (326).

A different genre is subverted in each tale. Sophie plays the role of Cinderella and Dorothy, as well as Beauty to Howl's Beast, and Beast to Howl's Beauty, as fairy tale motifs are

invoked only to be revised. Sophie's family situation, however much it might echo Cinderella's and Beauty's, is not theirs. Sophie and her sisters are close, despite childhood squabbles, and are attached to their step-mother, Fanny, who loves them. Sophie is not forced into domestic drudgery; she cleans Howl's castle entirely against the wishes of Howl's apprentice, Michael, and the fire demon Calcifer (68) and establishes herself both as an authority and as a member of the odd family that inhabits the castle. Jones blurs the lines between fairy tale protagonist and supporting characters as Sophie and Howl fit into multiple roles as they grow and rescue themselves and each other.

Abdullah, whose story is set in an *Arabian Nights* romance genre, falls far short of the standard noble prince. Although Abdullah is handsome and is prophesied to rise above all others, he does not eagerly step out from his father's shadow but must be pushed into action. Here again Jones destabilizes generic norms by using a recognizable pattern, yet altering the pattern just enough to call the whole convention into question. Abdullah undergoes trials in order to be reunited with his beloved, as would any worthy *Arabian Nights* suitor, yet Abdullah's trials do not so much prove him worthy of his beloved as make him worthy and capable of love for an independent, intelligent human being. Fate is not an all-powerful force in *Castle in the Air* but a fellow sufferer in need of rescue, although that rescue can only come through defeat, as Hasruel's machinations are a result of his enslavement to his brother Dalzel.⁶⁸

The genre that Charmain's adventures call into question is not so much a literary genre but a social one. Charmain has been raised by parents who adhere to Victorian middle class notions of respectability; *House of Many Ways* plays with Victorian sensibility:⁶⁹ the emphasis on outward appearance; concern over what others think; maintenance of a good name; style over

⁶⁸ Hasruel manipulates events for Abdullah and other suitors in the hope that one of them would be able to defeat Dalzel, who has concealed Hasruel's life and thus enslaved him.

⁶⁹As, for example, Oscar Wilde does in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

substance; hypocrisy; and knowing one's place in society. Charmain's parents raise her according to the norms of this sensibility, with which Charmain is utterly bored. Her father is exposed as having a secret life – not an affair, as the Victorians might have expected, but he uses magic in his baking, and teaches his apprentices to do the same. Both good and evil characters conceal their intentions and their physical natures in a comical demonstration of style over substance. Charmain learns to be useful, which her upbringing has not taught her to be, and finds her precise place in society with two royally-mandated careers, neither usual for a young lady.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As this study examined three books, I was not able to examine each to the depth that I would have liked. I chose to focus on the subversion of genre (fairy tale, *Arabian Nights* romance and Victorian sensibility) and the protagonists' emerging agency, which necessarily excluded other avenues of interest, such as the treatment of fat characters⁷⁰ and the questions of colonialism and appropriation which the use of *Arabian Nights* in *Castle in the Air* demands, nor did I adopt the postcolonial perspective which such an analysis would require.⁷¹ Any examination of the many significant names (personal and place)⁷² or the violence⁷³ juxtaposed with intelligent stratagems and humour at the climax of each tale would require more space than this project allows. Although I analyzed fairy tale references in *Howl's Moving Castle* and use of genre in each book, I was also unable to examine the extensive literary allusions with which

⁷⁰ The nieces in *Castle in the Air* and the nursemaid in *House of Many Ways*.

⁷¹ The final confrontation between Howl and Ludovic in *House of Many Ways* also contains highly colonial overtones, as Howl's words "Only language a lubbockin understands... Had enough, Ludy old boy? (311) after he punches the prince are very suggestive of a British gentleman dealing with 'the natives.' This approach is uncharacteristic of Howl, and begs for further investigation.

⁷² Almost all the royal names in *House of Many Ways*, for example, are related to war and battle.

⁷³ Sophie bespells her stick to attack Miss Angorian, Abdullah and his allies wrestle with the djinni, and dogs kill the lubbockins.

Jones crammed this series,⁷⁴ or the treatment (and invention) of magical non-human beings. As this study concerned itself only with three books, a comparison to the rest of Jones's oeuvre could not be undertaken, particularly in the use of colour, attitudes toward books and reading, the role of confidence in successfully casting spells, setting, and the protagonists' growth as they learn to perceive themselves, other characters, and situations correctly, and gain agency. Many of Jones's books also feature bending dimensions of time and space on a broader scale than Howl's castle, the realm of the djinn, and Great Uncle William's house offer; a comparison of the dimensions in this series to, for example, the multiverse of *Deep Secret* and the Chrestomanci series, and play with time in *The Merlin Conspiracy*, *Hexwood*, and *The Crown of Dalemark*. Finally, I had initially planned to analyze the construction of gender and gender roles⁷⁵ in the Sophie and Howl books, but realised that this was not feasible if I wished to do more than a cursory examination of genre, agency, and gender. Where my study reaches its limits I hope future scholars will find their starting points, and explore what I could not.

⁷⁴ To name but a few, *Howl's Moving Castle* makes mention of or allusion to Tolkien's elf city Rivendell (146); John Donne's poems "Song" (127 and onward) and "The Sun Rising" (142); Hamlet (145 and 229-230); *Alice in Wonderland* (162); and several characters' names are drawn from Arthurian legends. Perhaps the most surprising reference is to C. S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in *House of Many Ways*, when Waif grows drastically. Charmain and Peter disagree on whether Waif is the size of an elephant or the size of a carthorse (71-72), which is precisely how Lucy describes Aslan (Lewis 111-112).

⁷⁵ I was and am also very interested in delving into the striking similarities between certain lead male characters in Jones's novels: between Howl (*Howl's Moving Castle*), the Guardian of the Silver Casket (*A Tale of Time City*), Mordion (*Hexwood*), and Wild Robert (*Wild Robert*); between Anthony Green (*Aunt Maria*), the Guardian of the Iron Casket (*A Tale of Time City*), and the scarecrow-Ben-Sullivan-Prince-Justin-Percival (*Howl's Moving Castle*); and between the minor characters Quentin Sykes (*Archer's Goon*) and Derek Mallory (*Deep Secret*).

Endnotes

¹ This title is a paraphrase of a line in *House of Many Ways*: “Charmain... went up the steps to the Mansion door, feeling suddenly that life was very much better and happier and freer than it had seemed before” (295).

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