

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

*Charmed Life, Fire and
Hemlock, Nowhere,
Coraline:*

Role Models for Girls by Diana Wynne Jones and
Neil Gaiman

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November 2020



Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta		
Tekijä – Författare – Author Mervi Saarelainen		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title <i>Charmed Life, Fire and Hemlock, Neverwhere, Coraline: Role Models for Girls</i> by Diana Wynne Jones and Neil Gaiman		
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject Englantilainen filologia		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Pro Gradu	Aika – Datum – Month and year Marraskuu 2020	Sivumäärä– Sidoantal – Number of pages 71
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract Yhdistän tässä Pro Gradu -työssäni kirjallisuudentutkimuksen menetelmiä ja feminististä teoriaa. Primäärilähteinäni ovat neljä fantasiagenreen kuuluvaa kirjaa: Diana Wynne Jonesin <i>Charmed Life</i> (1977) ja <i>Fire and Hemlock</i> (1985) ja Neil Gaimanin <i>Neverwhere</i> (1996) ja <i>Coraline</i> (2002). Tutkin millaisia roolimalleja näissä kirjoissa esitetään tytöille. Esitän työssäni, että tasa-arvon edistämiseksi myös kulttuuristen esikuvien, kuten esimerkiksi lastenkirjallisuuden roolimallien tulisi olla monipuolisia ja vapautuneita ahtaista sukupuolinormeista. Teoreettisena lähtökohtanani on feministisen teorian esittävä kaksinapaisen vastakkainasettelun kyseenalaistaminen. Sen sijaan, että miehet perinteisesti nähdään edustavan älyä ja voimaa ja naisten tunteita ja heikkoutta, bipolaaristen dikotomioiden kyseenalaistaminen ehdottaa jyrkkien vastakohtien sijaan jatkumoa avuksi analysointiin. Feministisen kirjallisuudentutkimuksen taustaa vasten tarkastelen myös angloamerikkalaisen lastenkirjallisuuden historiaa ja analysoin tyttöjen ja naisten henkilöhahmoja valitsemisni teoksissa. Sovellan henkilöhahmoin erilaisia teorioita tyttöjen ja naisten sankaruudesta, joka saattaa erota huomattavasti poikien ja miesten sankaruudesta. Pyrinkin nostamaan esille arkipäivän sankaruuden, joka saattaa olla naisille tyypillisempää kuin miehille. Jotta henkilöhahmojen keskinäinen vertailu olisi helppoa, tutkin samoja ominaisuuksia jokaisen henkilöhahmon kohdalla, ja kerään löydökseni kahdeksaan taulukkoon, joissa luonnehdin tutkimieni henkilöhahmojen keskeisiä piirteitä. Primäärilähteittäni tyttö- ja naishahmot saattavat poiketa paljon perinteisestä lastenkirjallisuuden mallista, joka on usein kasvatuksellinen. Lisäksi monet tutkimistani henkilöhahmoista kyseenalaistavat toiminnallaan käsityksiä esimerkiksi lapsuuden viattomuudesta. Tutkimani henkilöhahmot ovat piirteiltään usein monipuolisia kokonaisuuksia, joissa saattaa olla perinteisesti niin hyvinä kuin pahoinakin pidettyjä luonteenpiirteitä. Tutkimieni henkilöhahmojen arvottaminen yksinkertaisesti hyväksi tai pahaksi on usein haasteellista. Eräs tärkeimmistä löydöistäni on ulkonäön merkittävyys. Ainoastaan yksi henkilöhamoista, Coraline, esitellään lukijoille ennemminkin ajattelijana ja tekijänä, sillä hänen ulkoista olemustaan ei ole juurikaan kommentoitu. Ehdotan, että Coraline on roolimallina erittäin inspiroiva, ja että hän saattaa olla tutkimistani hahmoista kaikkein modernein. Primäärilähteissäni on myös useita esimerkkejä naisten sankarillisuudesta. Nämä sankariteot saattavat olla perinteisiä urotekoja, kuten esimerkiksi maailman pelastaminen, tai arkipäiväisempää urheutta, kuten hädänalaisen lähimmäisen auttaminen. Pohdinnassani ehdotan jatkotutkimuksen aiheeksi etenkin Wynne Jonesin <i>Fire and Hemlock</i> -kirjaa, jonka eräät aiheet saattavat olla tällä hetkellä kyseenalaisia. Teoksen päähenkilö ystävystyy pikkutyttöä aikuisen miehen kanssa, ja tytön varttuessa heidän ystävyyttään voi kutsua jopa sukupolvien väliseksi flirtiksi, käyttäytymiseksi, joka on saattanut muuttaa merkitystään viime aikoina.		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Kirjallisuudentutkimus, sukupuolentutkimus, fantasia, Diana Wynne Jones, Neil Gaiman, tyttöjen roolimallit, sankaruus		
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited Keskustakampuksen kirjasto		
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information <i>Noidan veli, Tuli ja myrkkycatko, Neverwhere – maanalainen Lontoo, Coraline:</i> Diana Wynne Jonesin ja Neil Gaimanin roolimalleja tytöille		

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1 Introduction

In this thesis I combine literary studies with gender studies and focus especially on role models Diana Wynne Jones and Neil Gaiman present for girls. My primary sources are four fantasy novels: Wynne Jones's Charmed Life (1977) and Fire and Hemlock (1985), and Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere (1996) and Coraline (2002). I argue as well, that girls may have as their role models older women, so I also examine some adult figures in this paper. I explore the concept of heroism as well and discuss the female characters' behavior in terms of heroic deeds. ~~and~~ This thesis suggests that heroism may not be only killing dragons, because there may be enough demanding everyday missions to chores to do in order to survive instead of accomplishing impossible missions. If genders are conceived as binary opposites, masculinity can traditionally be linked with brain and brawn, and femininity understood as being emotional and weak. Restrictive gender norms may affect the concept of heroism as well, whose indicators are often traditionally deemed as masculine. I argue that these binary dichotomies may have a harmful impact also on the way literary characters are assessed in terms of role model status and heroism.

Thus, this paper argues that the role models in children's literature should be manifold, so that children's growth would not be restricted by traditional notions about gender. I suggest that an advisable next step to render gender norms more flexible in children's literature could be advancing awareness of female agency and assessing girls and women more often as superheroes. Many girls and women can be conceived as active subjects in the novels analysed for this thesis, and some of the characters even could be assessed as heroes. I argue as well that some of the prominent characters may be seen as subversive, when considering traditional descriptions of females.

I suggest that the topic of this thesis is important. I give reasons for my argument by presenting a summary of a report: "Despite decades of progress in closing the gender equality gap, close to nine out of 10 men and women around the world, hold some sort of bias against women" states the report of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in March 2020. Data for the report is collected from 75 countries, and the citizens of these countries form "more than 80 per cent of the global population". Prejudices can include beliefs that men are better than women in the fields of politics and economy, that men should rather have jobs than women in times of economic depression and nearly the third (28 per cent) of the respondents argue that a husband is allowed to use violent means against his wife. Achim Steiner from UNDP says

that “The work... must now evolve to address ... a deeply ingrained bias – among both men and women – against genuine equality”. For example, education and awareness raising are useful strategies for creating changes in discriminatory discourses (UN News 2020). This paper argues that if girls learn early that the world is as much theirs as male’s, it would be easier for them to involve themselves in the activities, such as political and economic that United Nations considers advisable for more females in order to advance equality.

Feminism has many targets, and presenting alternative circumstances is one of them. Ian Buchanan defines that feminist theory has

[A]t its core... four principal concerns, which are to (i) elucidate the origins and causes of gender inequality; (ii) explain the operation and persistence of this state of affairs; (iii) delineate effective strategies to either bring about full equality between sexes or at least ameliorate the effects of ongoing inequality; and (iv) imagine a world in which sexual inequality no longer exists (2010: 165)

According to him, the fourth concern “imagining the future has been parcelled out to creative writers, particularly those working in SF like Ursula LeGuin [sic] and Marge Piercy” (165). However, not only in the science fiction genre, but also in other literary genres authors can create more equal worlds.

The fantasy genre is a useful domain for representing thought experiments. According to Fabrizi “One of the most interesting aspects of fantasy literature is that it tends to ask the “big” questions of life...”, some of these being questions of “the nature of good and evil... heroism and the quality of one’s character” (2016: 1), which are relevant topics for my thesis. According to Robbins and Whitley, there can be detected “a growing trend in female protagonists who show strength and agency in the fantasy genre...” (2016: 93). Their article “From *Fledgling* to *Buffy*” states that many kinds of definitions can be made if fantasy and science fiction are compared (94). However, they present useful demarcations by Goldschlager and Eos, who suggest that these genres could be differentiated by fantasy’s inherent element of magic and science fiction’s exploitation of science and aspiration to “predict the future” (Goldschlager and Eos cited in Robbins and Whitley 2016: 94). According to Johnson-Olin, “Fairy tales act as sites of cultural fantasy while also serving as stages for authors and filmmakers to reimagine how our culture operates” (2016: 80). Thus, science fiction is not the only arena for alternative thought.

Alison Lurie writes that some works of children’s literature differ from educational narratives, which are often valued by adults. “These books... recommended – even celebrated

– daydreaming, disobedience, answering back, running away from home, and concealing one’s private thoughts and feelings from unsympathetic grown-ups” (1990: ix-x). Female agency can be found in children’s literature for example in Astrid Lindgren’s novels about *Pippi Longstocking*, which belong to the Scandinavian canon of children’s literature. Pippi has a bohemian, robust attitude to life. And in the English-speaking world there is Enid Blyton’s *The Famous Five* series with its central character, the tomboy George. However, the concept of the tomboy raises a question: is it possible for a female character to be a positive role model and a hero, while not being tomboyish at the same time?

This question is not easily answered, because it may be impossible to define feminine behaviour. According to Buchanan, cultural, historical, and geographical matters have an impact on how femininity is conceived and even how womanhood is outlined:

Femininity is generally portrayed as the weaker, lesser Other of masculinity...which supposes that all young girls actually want to be boys on some level... That femininity is a constrictive demand placed on women by society has been recognized by female writers throughout the ages... (2010: 164)

Thus, instead of trying to assess the characters’ degree of femininity, my target is to analyse the characters impartially. I apply in my thesis feminist criticism of bipolar dichotomies.

2 Background and analytical tools

In this chapter I introduce some of my most important secondary sources, each in its own subchapter, and converse with them about my primary sources. As mentioned in the introduction, my theoretical framework consists of literary studies and gender studies. There are feminist literary studies in great quantities, and feminist criticism is my main method, especially contesting bipolar dichotomies. For example, instead of conceiving genders as binary opposites they can be thought as a continuum, where individuals may actualise their genders more emancipatedly. When defined traditionally, females often are assigned with attributes such as emotional, weak, and passive, and males are depicted with features such as intellect, strength, and activity. Feminist criticism aims to criticise this tendency to create stark opposites; the theory suggests that the real world is much more complicated. Mary Eagleton argues that it is important to examine binary dichotomies: “How these oppositions are constructed, the meanings they contain, what is revealed or hidden by such opposition, how to separate these couples...” However, binary dichotomies do not only exist in word pairs, for example, high culture can be assessed better than popular culture. For feminism challenging binary dichotomies is a useful tool because it may maintain restrictive norms (1996: 146). For example, in *Charmed Life*, Gwendolen’s character can be assessed as strong, intelligent, and evil. However, Gwendolen’s personality could be analysed by traditional norms as weak and hysterical. As for Janet in the same novel, she has a lot of moral strength, but if she were defined by restrictive gender norms she could appear as a typical female, emotional and irrational. Again, I suggest that Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* is a brave and bright girl, instead of being an idiot who does not know what is good for her. Additionally, I find Polly’s archenemy Laurel as a woman with great power, and who is very cunning in securing her success, instead of being a weak female who has to have servants and slaves to do various favours for her. I argue that such blurrings of dichotomies is applicable in *Neverwhere* as well. For example, when Door wants to revenge the fate of her family, my analysis is that Door is rather courageous, proud, and having political understanding than being an over emotional, spoiled brat. And in *Coraline*, the protagonist can be defined even as a rather belligerent strategist, instead of responding only emotionally to panic.

However, considering that my primary sources are from four different decades, it might be a rewarding experiment to use different frameworks with the four novels, such as contemporary fashionable theories of the novels’ publication time. However, I suggest that challenging bipolar dichotomies is very applicable here, although I use assistance from other

thought structures as well. I have created eight tables for eight pairs of characters. Characterisations in the tables reflect my aim to crystallise the examples of the traits I find in the text. The purpose of my thesis is not to arrange a literary beauty contest in order to find out which one of the characters would be the Miss Role Model, as this would not befit my feminist approach. Rather, it presents individual characters, namely Gwendolen and Janet, Polly and Laurel, Nina and Fiona, Millie and Granny, Ivy and Joanna, Door and Jessica, Anaesthesia and Hunter, as well as Coraline and the other mother. However, I examine in the tables the characters with the same variables in order to assist comparisons between the figures. I argue that the traits I examine are relevant for my thesis, because they can be easily detected in every character. To begin with, I explore the external appearance of the individuals, after which I focus on their personal characteristics, attitudes, actions, targets, role-model status, degree of heroism, their outcome, and mottos. I find it remarkable that almost every character I am considering for this thesis is introduced to readers by their habitus, which I interpret as indicating the importance of the trait.

Only in the most recent novel, *Coraline*, a prominent female figure is not first introduced by her looks. Although Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is quite old, and not belonging to the sphere of literary studies, I find it useful for this paper. According to Andermahr et al. "In the 1970 film theorists adopted the term [gaze] for their theorization of spectatorship. Laura Mulvey's classic essay ... utilizes the concept to explore the power relations of looking and represents the cinematic gaze as inherently masculine" (1997: 102). Mulvey argues that in traditional Hollywood films women are seen "as passive objects subordinated to the male gaze" (Leitch 2001, 2179-2180). Thus, I find it quite easy to suggest that outer characteristics of females may be often deemed as more significant as their inner attributes. This may create a harmful paradox. Elina Reenkola writes about the importance of the inner space for females (2004: 7-9, 144-145, 2008: 35-43, 2014: 80-83). I argue that one of the most significant questions my thesis raises is why females are so insistently introduced, and perhaps even valued by their outer abilities, if their inner capabilities are so salient? I suggest that Neil Gaiman's decision to give details of Coraline's looks very late in the narrative is quite subversive and revealing as well – Coraline's inner capabilities are more relevant for the narrative than her outer characteristics.

My target is to connect this thesis to wider western history of children's literature and to examine if my primary sources have widened traditional boundaries of role models for girls. As aforementioned, the four novels come from four decades, and there have been many

upheavals in the time period. Thus, my intention is to look backwards as well, and to delineate what kind of instructions children's literature has in the past given to girls so that they would behave as girls should behave. There are plenty of writings about children's literature, for example Judy Simons's text, which gives temporal perspective to the issue.

2.1 Considering genders: About the past of Anglo-American children's literature

Judy Simons's article "Gender roles in children's fiction" (2009) discusses how gender related issues have developed in Anglo-American children's literature. She states that until quite recently, novels for children have often been categorized as stories for girls and stories for boys, as separate, different, and unequal. From the 18th century onwards "novels are full of strong, active boy characters, and much more submissive, domestic and introspective girls" (143). However, this division between boys and girls has also been contested: many characters have wanted to defy the simple categories, and some have succeeded. Simons gives as an example Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* novels, in which there is a tomboy George, whose real name is Georgina. Georgina wants to be called George, she wants to be a boy and she acts like a boy. According to Simons George is for many the most popular character of the *Famous Five* and she has become even "an iconic figure" (143). I suggest that George is a gender-bender, the word which denotes "a person who adopts an androgynous style of dress, hair, make-up, etc." (Hanks 1989: 631). Perhaps the impact of George on challenging traditional notions of girlhood might have been even stronger if there were not Anne as an opposite example in *Famous Five* series. I argue that Anne is built as a very traditional girl with her caring and cooking.

Simons stresses that George "must be seen in the context of orthodox gender conventions" – and children's literature have often followed those conventions. Simons mentions Edward Salmon, a literary critic, who wrote in 1886 that "Boys' literature of a sound kind ought to help build up men", and "Girls' literature ought to help build up women". However, there were exceptions of this canon: Simons observes that already in 1744 there were in John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Novel* letters "From Jack the Giant-Killer, to Little Master Tommy" and to "Pretty Miss Polly", that Simons notes "were identical save for the pronouns and words of address" (Salmon cited in Simons 2009, 144). However, in spite of the anomalies there can be detected quite restrictive tendencies in the history of children's literature.

Novels were often clearly targeted for boys or for girls. The stories were often educational, for example, girls were often taught to be proper girls. There were between 1850 and 1900 popular children's periodicals, magazines for boys, such as *Boy's Own Paper* (1855-1967), and magazines for girls, such as *Girl's Own Paper*, which was published 25 years later than the boys' counterpart, from 1880. The *Boy's Own Paper* valued traditional masculine behaviour, such as "adventure, service to the empire, science and sport", while the *Girl's Own Paper* "show a greater respect for authority and conformity. . . to adult control than those for boys; young women must learn to do as they are told and the naughtiness. . . is represented as a phase they must outgrow" (Simons 2009, 144-145). Considering this tradition, I suggest that Gwendolen's character in *Charmed Life* is quite a perfect antithesis to this educational tradition. Gwendolen is a wicked little girl, and she even escapes the consequences of her devilish deeds.

The Victorian era also had its own gender rebels in children's novels. Simons suggests that "it was not uncommon for authors to set up tensions between prescribed and desired gender roles", and as an example Simons gives Rudyard Kipling's *Captains Courageous* (1897). One of the themes of Kipling's novel was dissection of "proper" masculinity (146). Another example, which is still known today as an archetype, is the "boyish" girl, the tomboy, which was introduced then as well. According to Simons, one of the most famous tomboys of the literary world is Louisa May Alcott's creation Jo March in *Little Women* (1868). Simons even writes that Jo "became an emblem of independent girlhood". However, in the second novel of the series Jo becomes more conventional and does not pursue her authorial career (147). Nevertheless, Simons states that Alcott's *Little Women* valued female culture: women were managing their lives almost without men because of the wartime. Simons states that Alcott's writing had an impact on another kind of role model as well, namely the creative girl. Girls could find agency for example in art. This creativity flourished from the late Victorian era onwards (150). It seems that warfare does not have an influence only on technological inventions, but also on everything else, for example, on children's novels.

According to Simons, after the First World War, there can be seen some change in the gender roles in children's literature: girls were not anymore as restricted as before. Many authors took advantage of the friction between old-fashioned ideas about "proper female behaviour" and new chances characters had for self-expression. Simons mentions Noel Streatfeild's novel *Ballet Shoes* (1936), which tells about how women can survive in a "male-oriented society": it has even unmarried women as "strong role models" (151). However, after the Second World War gender roles became more traditional again, when men came back home.

According to Simons, this “led to a re-validation of traditional familial roles”. Then many novels served as an “emotional escape”, such as Lorna Hill’s series (1950s) about a ballet school: “theatrical narratives” provided a world in which children could express themselves more freely (152). I find it remarkable that economic needs may guide even cultural artefacts to certain destinations, in this case to educate girls according reactionary models to become homemakers instead of having professional careers of their own, in order to ensure that males would have enough jobs.

Today, Simons states that “brave, smart, resourceful girl protagonists are by no means unusual” in children’s literature. However, Simons adds that “Strong girl characters. . . like Hermione Granger in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter. . . are not necessarily allowed to upstage the male hero or the man they love”. And many children’s novels with conventional representations of gender are still popular, for example C. S. Lewis’s Narnia novels. Simons suggests that their popularity may come from this traditionality. Simons argues that “the modern disordering of gender” does not automatically induce children to realise their gender differently. Simons claims that children may want to “experiment with gender without the need to destabilise their real-life identities. . . young girls may always have enjoyed reading about tomboys, but they don’t want to grow up in that image” (156-157). However, I argue that girls are not any monolithic group, some may not even want to conform to traditions. I find it important that there are different kind of role models for girls, for example female superheroes, so that readers could experience that girls and women can be strong, active characters, in the role which was earlier reserved to boys and men. There are in *Charmed Life*, *Fire and Hemlock*, *Neverwhere*, and *Coraline* strong and active female characters, both young and old. For example, Gwendolen, although she is quite an unpleasant character, is extremely interested in power relations and wants to increase her authority, and her counterpart Janet is a modern, liberated girl. In *Fire and Hemlock* Polly seeks for adventures and wants to be a hero, and in *Neverwhere* Door is quite grand following the principle *noblesse oblige*. However, I suggest that the protagonist of *Coraline* may be assessed as the most modern heroine, not only because of her young age and the horrific circumstances she faces bravely, but also because her gender does not matter – I argue that Coraline could as well be a boy or somebody from the continuum of genders. However, I find Gaiman’s solution to define the hero of this narrative as a girl may be very inspiring for all the little Coralines of the world.

2.2 Feminist criticism: Multidimensional approach?

Lissa Paul suggests in her article “Enigma Variations: What Feminist theory Knows About Children’s Literature” (1987) that feminist theory is useful in analyzing children’s novels, because she sees women’s literature and children’s literature both as undervalued (149). Paul states that feminist approach gives voice to women and children. She writes about “difficulty being seen and heard is experienced by small protagonists” (153). Paul gives an example of how feminist criticism can bring forth characters from the background by suggesting that identity quest may be assessed as significant, as in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* from 1911 Mary is trying to find herself. Paul notices that in the end Mary is faded into background and Colin is foregrounded, and the “social order is restored” (158-159). I suggest that this concept of identity quest can be especially applied to Polly in *Fire and Hemlock*, because the narrative follows her growth from a little girl into a young woman. Polly wants to define herself by herself, which can be detected for example when she decides to improve her character.

Paul argues that “redemptive, feminist story is only possible in a society which at least accepts the premise that women’s stories are of value in and of themselves” (163). Paul points out problems that exist with a traditional hero’s quest in which he encounters dangers, fights, wins: “it is about turning boys into men, not girls into women, or children into people”. According to her a female quest differs from a male quest. As mentioned in the introduction, I suggest that everyday deeds and ordinary life, such as confronting social pressure may be as heroic as more typical missions, such as saving princesses or princes from monsters.

As mentioned above, Paul suggests that feminist criticism may be useful because it can apply aspects from many theories, depending on the focus of the analysis, such as gendered language or effects of economic circumstances (155-156). For the purposes of this paper, for example psychoanalytic literary theory could be helpful in analysing who the characters are, what they are actually doing, why they are doing what they are doing, when the damage is done to their souls, where are their mental sceneries leading them, how the outcome differs from the average, and so on. I suggest that these would be relevant questions with Gwendolen in *Charmed Life*. There are other characters as well who could be scrutinised along these lines, such as Polly’s antagonist Laurel and Polly’s poor mother Ivy in *Fire and Hemlock*, the career conscious Jessica in *Neverwhere* and the hellish other mother in *Coraline*. Another example with which psychoanalytic approach would be useful is a subtheme which can be detected in all my primary sources, parallel worlds. I suggest that some of these parallel dimensions could be interpreted even as characters, as in *Neverwhere*, and especially in *Coraline*, where the little

girl finds new spaces in her house. Not only the house is changing, but also her everyday world is transforming. Aforementioned Elina Reenkola's arguments about the significance of feminine inner space (2004: 7-9, 144-145, 2008: 35-43, 2014: 80-83), alongside the notion of a house as a symbol of selfhood (de Vries 1976: 263-264) could introduce new levels of the narrative, for example, Coraline's adventures may be interpreted as happening inside herself. Additionally, symbols may as well be worth analysing. For example, in *Neverwhere*, Hunter's character may be examined by the symbol of hunting. It means among other things "The hidden oneness between hunter and hunted [which] suggests our vulnerability to psychic factors that if they become compulsive may pursue and seize us, sometimes doing us in" (ARAS 2010: 462). I argue that this approach could open new viewpoints to Hunter's nature. She preys monsters, perhaps thereby becoming a monster herself. Hunter may even have to kill in order to feel alive.

Feminist criticism attempts to change the status quo, to rewrite and reinterpret, and pays attention to the physical, economic, and linguistic factors (Paul 1987: 150). Paul argues that women and children in literature usually must stay at home and their stories are about ordinary days in life. According to her feminist critics have re-interpreted these ordinary things as important and valuable (151). Paul suggests that trickery, such as deceit, fraud, and guile is the survival strategy of the powerless (153). Indeed, trickery is with magic and parallel worlds a shared subtheme in every novel I analyse.

2.3 Diana Wynne Jones on female heroism

Diana Wynne Jones's essay "The Heroic Ideal – A Personal Odyssey" (1989), which was first published in the academic journal *The Lion and the Unicorn* explicates the writing process of *Fire and Hemlock* and the many factors, such as classical heroes, which have inspired the author to create Polly, who aspires to become a heroine. Despite the fact that the essay analyses only one novel of my primary sources, I suggest that the text can be useful in exploring the main female characters in *Charmed Life*, *Neverwhere*, and *Coraline* as well.

Wynne Jones begins her essay with an observation she made as a child: "It was possible for a girl to be a hero". She had devoured at her childhood home several tales about deeds, which were mostly done by men. As a consequence, she deduced that the heroic career was a difficult occupation for girls. However, Scheherazade in *The Arabian Nights* was a female, which Wynne Jones "was delighted to find... maybe there was some hope" (420). Because of all the novels she had read she was certain about a hero's qualities.

First, there is a hero in a story that can be identified with (419-420). I find this quite instructive for this thesis, because I suggest that Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* and Coraline in *Coraline* are quite ordinary girls, which may assist readers to identify with them. Even more significantly, their outcome is positive. On the other hand, Gwendolen in *Charmed Life* and Hunter in *Neverwhere* may first seem to be quite impressive examples of female subjects, but as the narratives progress, their outcome is not at all honourable. Then, according to Wynne Jones, a hero is “brave, physically strong, never mean or vicious, and possessed of a code of honor that requires them to come to the aid of the weak or incompetent and the oppressed when no one else will” (420-421). I suggest that Janet in *Charmed Life*, Door in *Neverwhere*, and Coraline in *Coraline* may have some, but not all these characteristics. For example, Janet saves a fellow being from a miserable fate, Door has a sense of family honour, and Coraline frees captive souls. However, not all of them may be very strong physically and always very benign socially. Wynne Jones gives as a third example of heroes that they may also have supernatural beings as their guides or relatives. This supernatural asset connects the hero with the universe and gives importance for the hero’s deeds (421). Gwendolen in *Charmed Life* turns her brother’s violin into a cat, and Coraline has as her guide a real supernatural being, the cat who can speak. Wynne Jones also argues that the gods are interested in the hero’s deeds: the hero person cannot behave badly for fear of being punished (421). As I mentioned above, Gwendolen is not punished for her actions, on the contrary, and I argue that every character I scrutinise is guilty of some kind of bad behaviour. Finally, Wynne Jones lists one trait as the most important: a heroic person does not care if the mission seems doomed. Wynne Jones argues that if the hero dies, the death is “glorious and pathetic beyond the average”. However, she continues that these features may fit some heroic figures, but they do not characterise every hero, because there are plenty of tricksters, such as the Brave Little Tailor and many more in folktales. For example, there is Odysseus, a hero and a character who can resort to trickery as well (421). As mentioned above, trickery is often a necessary tool for the characters to continue their quests, or even survive.

Wynne Jones’s childhood reading program lead her into *Canterbury Tales*, in which Chaucer had had fun with his writing. The heroic business seemed after him not so serious. According to Wynne Jones Chaucer played with his tales, even “deflating the typical hero”. Wynne Jones even argues that for centuries it was a challenge to write a heroic tale; at least the author had to have an unheroic foundation, such as in *Candide*, or the story had to have a moral lesson, which could be applied to ordinary life, such as in Dickens’s novels. According to her,

trickster heroes became fashionable in the 20th century, such as Chandler's Philip Marlowe (424-425). Especially Nina, Polly's friend, acts often as a comic relief in *Fire and Hemlock*.

Wynne Jones's childhood experiences led her to assume that it seemed different with women: "[they] were a mess". Women were revengeful or passive. Proper ladies were good-natured, until circumstances might have had an impact on their characters. However, she encountered a female hero of Spenser, Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*. Wynne Jones writes that there were not many proper female heroes in her childhood: but Britomart "had a vision of her future lover and set out to do something about it as a hero should". Wynne Jones conceived from *The Faerie Queene* as well how Christianity had affected heroism by stressing the importance of sublime motives "a hero is guided by a god or gods. For God watches over everyone. . . every ordinary man or woman *could* be a hero" (emphasis original). As an adult Wynne Jones found "the heroic ideal" in children's literature; according to her children "live more in the heroic mode than the rest of humanity". However, Wynne Jones argues that children were quite conservative in 1970: boys did not want to read about female heroes; heroes were males and females were "wimps or bad" (423-428). This may well be the reason why the protagonist of *Charmed Life* is a boy, not a girl.

However, Wynne Jones started then to create female heroic characters as well as male heroes. In Polly's character Wynne Jones wanted to create somebody with whom everybody could identify; hence the name Polly from the Greek *poly*, which means for example many. She aimed to combine in *Fire and Hemlock* heroism with today's world. Her creation of Polly was inspired for example by the ballad "Tam Lin", which had a Britomartish heroine, Janet. Wynne Jones stresses that Janet "behaves throughout the story like a woman and not like a pseudo-man". The *Odyssey* inspired Wynne Jones as well when planning the structure of *Fire and Hemlock*. Penelope's trickery which matched her husband's cunning and the tale of the journey had an influence on *Fire and Hemlock*. However, the novel's journey is not of the Earth, but the adventure of the mind. Wynne Jones describes the love story of *Fire and Hemlock* as heroic; Polly saves Tom. Wynne Jones finds in Polly's story connections to Spenser's Britomart, the female hero who had greatly affected her in her childhood (428-429). As I suggested above with Coraline, also her journey can be defined as happening inside.

Wynne Jones writes that at the beginning of *Fire and Hemlock* an evil being has power over the protagonists, Polly, and Tom. Polly's first heroic deed is to free herself, and according to Wynne Jones this resembles Odysseus acting against the sirens. At first, Polly can be seen as

Penelope, home bound, but later Wynne Jones sees Polly as appropriating characteristics of Odysseus's son, Telemachus, when she encounters Tom and calls herself Hero. The naïve Telemachus role model is superseded by other heroes, such as “Gerda in *The Snow Queen*, Snow White, Britomart, St. George, Pierrot, Pandora, Andromeda, Janet from “Tam Lin”. Wynne Jones states that in *Fire and Hemlock* both Polly and Tom move along activity-passivity continuum and being both in the role of Odysseus (430-431). The hero's tragical mistake, curiosity, which occurs in *Fire and Hemlock* echoes many folktales, such as “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”. However, Polly can solve the situation with the help of a friend. According to Wynne Jones there can be detected parallelism in the end of the *Odyssey* and *Fire and Hemlock*, the home coming, “to a partnership and a personal relationship” (435-436, 438). I suggest that the curiosity mistake is made as well in *Coraline*, because after Coraline opened the closed door, evil forces began to conquer normality.

2.4 More arguments about female heroism: Lee R. Edwards

Lee R. Edwards writes in his article “The Labors of Psyche: Toward a Theory of Female Heroism” (1979) that women may be heroes; however, female heroes differ from males. Edwards argues that a male hero can act on his own, but female heroes cannot: Ophelia is not enough without her prince (35-36). However, there is in the history of children's literature a contradictory example, aforementioned Pippi, who not only manages on her own, but also is still a child.

Edwards has interpreted Apuleius's *Amor and Psyche* with the help from the Jungian scholar Erich Neumann's work. According to Edwards *Amor and Psyche* is a famous tale; it has inspired for example folklore. Its structure follows the lines of young lovers-obstacles-quest-triumph (36-38). Neumann argues that “*Amor and Psyche* is not simply about the development of the feminine but specifically about the maturation of the woman hero” (Neumann cited in Edwards 1979: 38). Edwards states that if we explain heroism by power alone, then we do not allow women heroic status. Edwards suggests that although the deeds of Psyche resemble the deeds of male heroes, we should concentrate in how Psyche's actions enlarge her psychological agency. Edwards uses the Jungian term individuation, “The balance between the conscious and unconscious forces. . . the struggle to achieve it is perhaps the final goal of personal heroism”. Edwards stresses that everybody can seek this harmony, hence there can exist female heroes as well (39). He adds, that because Psyche's actions are heroic deeds,

then “heroism itself is an asexual or omnisexual archetype. The fact that most representatives of this archetype or enactors of this pattern are male tells us a great deal about the values of our culture. . .” (44). Especially Wynne Jones’s *Fire and Hemlock* is a tale of physical and psychological maturation and personal growth. It is a *bildungsroman*, which according to Buchanan means a “development novel... A sub-genre of novel focusing on the personal development of the protagonist, usually from childhood through to adulthood” (2010: 58). Polly’s aspirations are to integrity and freedom, both for herself and her loved one, Tom. The deed demands from Polly psychological and symbolic insight. However, I suggest that in *Charmed Life* Gwendolen’s progression goes backwards; as the story progresses, Gwendolen regresses: instead of growing up she grows down, even more evil and selfish.

2.5 Heroine’s identity quest

In this subchapter I examine heroines and heroes in fantasy. As mentioned in the introduction, fantasy literature can be a great arena for imagination. As Fabrizi argues, the genre often examines grand themes, such as heroism (2016: 1). However, in spite of many possibilities the genre provides, according to McGarry and Ravipinto the hero often is male (2016: 14). They suggest in their article “In the Shadow of the Status Quo: The Forgotten in *The Lord of The Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*” that fantasy literature often yearns for reactionary values, such as “the old ways are inherently good, and that the power structures that are to be protected or restored are ultimately best for all people”. Minorities, such as women, may have only assistant functions in narratives. They even argue that these minorities “are the forgotten of modern fantasy, lost in the shadow of the status quo, made powerless and invisible by the very society they strive to protect”. As the heading indicates, they analyse especially J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings series* and George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire series* for their article. However, they argue that the same tendencies can be found in many works of fantasy. (2016: 13). As mentioned above, according to Paul the subject of heroism may be problematic if women are excluded, because female quests differ from male quests. Traditionally heroism contain victories and defeats, testing and establishing manhood, instead of describing personal growth (1990: 155-156, 163). Annis Pratt (1981) has suggested a five-phased heroine’s identity quest. As for the traditional hero, his journey is described by McGarry and Ravipinto (2016). In the following section I compare these delineations.

The first phase of the heroine’s quest is according to Pratt “Splitting off from family, husbands, lovers”. The quest in its beginning can contain challenging normativity with a look

into the inner self (Pratt 1981: 139). However, in traditional quests of a male hero “some source of disruption threatens to destabilize the land; it is up to hero (usually it is a ‘he’) to set things right and restore the order...” (Stross cited in McGarry and Ravipinto 2016: 13). In her essay on heroism, Diana Wynne Jones suggests as well that there is an accident at the beginning of the traditional heroic story, which renders the protagonist different from others and often he becomes even a target of mockery. However, this person accepts as his mission some dangerous deed (1989: 423). Pratt suggests that the second phase is where the heroine is helped begin her journey by something which is later revealed as having hidden powers, because it comes from the green-world. These helpers may be for example guides. Green-world is something “beloved” and it can build “a bridge to the wider universe” (Pratt 1981: 130, 139). On the other hand, “The hero may be of questionable parentage... In many cases, the hero is later revealed to be of noble or even royal lineage...” (McGarry and Ravipinto 2016: 14). Thus, the heroine seems to be a quite ordinary figure, who has magical help, whereas the male hero may be a quite extraordinary character. The third phase in Pratt’s theory is that the heroine may encounter another guide, who can assist with the social world, or can help fathom the unconscious. This guide is “the green-world lover... an ideal, nonpatriarchal lover” (Pratt 1981: 140). The male hero can have a guide as well, who is “often in the form of a protective elder” (McGarry and Ravipinto 2016: 14). I suggest that the guide may be a significant *topos* in tales of heroic deeds, because this is the only instance where these two theories converge. The fourth phase of the heroine’s journey is confrontational, with the past, for example, with the heroine’s parents. This can happen in the subconscious level (Pratt 1981: 140-141). However, here the male hero conquers the great evil (McGarry and Ravipinto 2016: 15). In the last phase of the heroine’s identity quest the “journey toward the unconscious” continues. This phase is crucial for her; she either perishes or survives by transformation. According to Pratt after this last experience it can be difficult for the heroine “to reintegrate fully into “normal” society” (1981: 139-143). However, the male hero’s journey ends “When evil is defeated and... there is no question what they must then do: restore the world to older, and thus better, ways” (McGarry and Ravipinto 2016: 17). I suggest on the basis of these theories, that quests can differ significantly, depending on who does the deed. As mentioned above, the importance of female inner space can be detected in Pratt’s delineation. However, I suggest that the significant differences between these phases may be even echoing binary dichotomies, according to which private spheres are feminine domains and public places masculine area. When comparing these phases to the primary sources of this thesis, perhaps the most surprising tool for the analysis is the end of

heroic journey. I suggest that in the four novels the finales may be ambiguous, not necessarily any happy endings.

3 Magical warfare, already in the 1970's: *Charmed Life*

In the following chapters I examine further the prominent female characters in the primary sources of this thesis. The next two chapters concentrate on the figures in Diana Wynne Jones's novels *Charmed Life* and *Fire and Hemlock*, and the two after that analyse the characters in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and *Coraline*.

My target is to define the traits of the characters on the basis of textual examples. In addition to the specific phrases I lift out in quotation, I also describe the plots in order to clarify the functions of the central characters for the narratives. As was mentioned above, I have also created tables in which I show how some of the characters share the same traits. The tables also clarify the comparisons and contrasts between different figures. Characterisations in the tables, as well as the subheadings, reflect my aim to crystallise the examples of the traits I find in the text.

The first novel by Diana Wynne Jones I examine is the oldest primary source I explore for this thesis. *Charmed Life* (first published in 1977, henceforth CL) is the first novel in her *Chrestomanci* series, which consists of seven works. I suggest that this first part is clearly a narrative is targeted at younger children, something that can be detected from its quite straightforward characterisation. However, I suggest that Wynne Jones trusts in the ability of even younger readers to conceive nuances in the characters she has created.

In *Charmed Life* the most prominent female characters are the girls Gwendolen Chant and Janet Chant, Gwendolen's counterpart from another world. The protagonist of this first part of the series is Eric Chant, also known by his nickname Cat, whose older sister, Gwendolen, is a witch. After these children's parents die, Gwendolen and Cat move to a castle which is ruled by mysterious Chrestomanci. There are parallel worlds in the story, so almost everybody in Cat's surrounding has several counterparts in other dimensions. Gwendolen is quite cunning in her witchery, and when she grows annoyed with the present world, she decides to move to another one, with the result that her outwardly identical double Janet materializes in Cat's world.

3.1 The bad one and the good one: Gwendolen and Janet

I suggest that Gwendolen is the "Drama Queen" of *Charmed Life*. She is the centre of the story, almost everything that happens there is initiated by her. I argue that Gwendolen is not any

typical specimen of girlhood, or even not a normal example of an emotional being. She is evil, greedy for power: she wants to rule all the worlds there are. However, Gwendolen is quite capable of taking care of herself and she shows with her example that girls can manage as well as anybody else, but her actions are perverted and subversive. I argue that the inspiration Gwendolen may give for girls is ambivalent. All these factors render her one of the most difficult characters to assess in terms of role models in this paper.

The counterpart Janet's inner attributes are different from Gwendolen's nature, and as they count as more ethical and acceptable, it is quite easy to compare the two girls. I suggest that these discrepancies create a subtheme for the story, the character versus the antonym character. Janet may be assessed as an educational example for girls because she is both ethical and emancipated, but what about Gwendolen?

Gwendolen and Janet are almost identical outwardly. They are both pretty: "a picture of a perfect little girl" (CL: 74). However, there their similarities end, and their juxtaposition is straightforward. Inwardly they differ significantly from each other. At the beginning of the story it may seem that Wynne Jones gives a quite one-dimensional characterisation of the girls: "Gwendolen looked after it critically. . . [she] gave a gurgle of pleasure. Cat was amazed at how wicked she looked" (119), while Janet "burst into tears. . . in spite of the confident way she talked, [she] clearly needed looking after" (134 -5). Thus, when the characters Gwendolen and Janet are first introduced to readers, their functions in the narrative are not yet settled and they develop along the story. However, at the end of the novel, it becomes evident that Gwendolen is bad, and Janet is good.

3.1.1 Gwendolen: Mirror mirror on the wall, who's the ruler of them all?

At the beginning of the novel Gwendolen may come across as an encouraging character for young female readers, as she is quite untraditional, active participant in the events: a girl who can manage on her own. At the beginning of the story she may be seen as a confident, gifted child, albeit very temperamental. Thus she can be seen, just as much as Janet, as an emancipated girl. However, as the narrative progresses, Gwendolen's picture becomes uglier, from the little diva to the archenemy of the story. Her accomplishments are not brave deeds, and in the end of the story she flees the consequences of her evil actions to another world. As was mentioned above, Judy Simons have argued in her article "Gender roles in children's fiction", that there have been often educational purposes in the history of children's literature, such as instilling moral codes in order to teach children to become proper citizens (2009: 144 – 145). I suggest

that if Gwendolen's outcome is educational, it may be instructive only in the negative sense, because a reader might learn from Gwendolen's example how not to behave if one wants to have friends. I argue that Wynne Jones's solution of letting Gwendolen escape to another dimension is quite subversive considering the didactic traditions in the genre. However, *Charmed Life* is the first novel of a series of works, and the Gwendolen character may reappear in the next parts. If she materialises again in the *Chrestomanci*'s world, it would be thrilling to analyse further her character, whether there are any changes in her nature, or is she ever punished. However, this is beyond my thesis, and for this paper I argue that Gwendolen is an evil little girl.

Thus, as a character, Gwendolen is very intriguing. Her attitude to her environment is marked by condescension, and all she wants to learn at school is witchcraft. Gwendolen's ways match her nature, and she could even be a psychopath: conscience does not bother her. Mairead Dolan presents in her article "Psychopathic personality in young people" (Dolan: 2004, 470) the Hare Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (after Forth et al, 2004), which classifies twenty different features which may be part of a psychopathic personality, and of those traits Gwendolen has at least ten, such as manipulation, an absence of regret and empathy, a parasitic lifestyle, poor anger control, impulsiveness, irresponsibility, and severe criminal behavior. Gwendolen's actions include theft and conspiracy, and she even plans her brother's murder in order to start a revolution in the magical world. Gwendolen's targets become clearer as the story unravels; at first, she can be seen as a caring older sister, and her disagreements with her brother Cat may be deemed as ordinary battle between siblings. However, at the beginning of the novel Cat reminisced that Gwendolen made him ill once: so the story suggests already at the beginning that Gwendolen may have sinister motives.

I argue that the more wicked Gwendolen becomes, the more difficult it is for readers to identify themselves with her. In spite of her empowerment, I assess that as a role model Gwendolen is negative. As for Gwendolen's heroic status, I suggest that it is at best ambivalent, and at worst negative.

3.1.2 Janet: Knowledge is might

As a character, Janet can be seen as a more encouraging inspiration than Gwendolen. Although there are many traits in her nature which can be assessed as traditionally feminine, her character reaches beyond strict gender roles. As suggested above, she is an emancipated girl. Janet does not necessarily value duties deemed traditionally suitable for females and she knows the

concept of “female bondage” (CL: 149). Janet can enjoy tomboyish pursuits as well, such as climbing trees. However, I argue that Janet’s strengths lie more in her inner abilities. In the end of *Charmed Life*, it is clear that she can act ethically, because Janet gives away her place in her own world to a poor fellow being. This example suggests that along moral fibre she has compassion in her nature as well.

Janet’s benign trait is one factor which renders her as more normal a character than Gwendolen. However, there are even more significant differences between the girls – most importantly, Janet is not a witch. Unfairly for her, she falls into the troubled situation Gwendolen’s evil behaviour has created. She comes from an environment which is much more like ours than Chrestomanci’s magical world. Janet talks about O Levels, cars, aeroplanes, and she notices that this new surrounding seems “old-fashioned” (149). Even the powers-that-be are different: in Janet’s dimension they have a George as their ruler, not a Charles as a king: this world is strange to her. Here Janet has difficulties even with clothes and does not know how to dress herself: the mess which petticoats, garters, boots, and dresses creates renders her helpless: she normally wears trousers. With this new older sister Cat’s role is reversed: instead being mastered by Gwendolen, he must teach Janet how to behave. When Janet replaces Gwendolen, she seems quite helpless and a burden to Cat: at first, she may not seem such a good-natured character as she really is. However, towards the end of the tale her status as an opposite to Gwendolen becomes evident.

While Gwendolen has the haughty attitude, which can be described as some kind of royal “We are not interested” orientation, Janet is especially keen on learning: “Janet was one of those people who are not happy unless they have an explanation for everything” (151). She persists in asking questions, in order to understand her new surroundings, in which she is genuinely interested: “Janet . . . knew a lot, about a lot of things” (141). In spite of the troubles Janet finds herself in, she is not discouraged. Unfortunately for Janet, the things she knows are to no avail in the new surroundings. However, she maintains her active and inquisitive attitude.

I suggest that as a role model Janet is encouraging. Furthermore, her ethical decisions render her heroic status as quite positive, in spite of her being not the protagonist of the story, but an assistant character. Her actions may not be as great a deed as saving the world, but rather an example of heroism that can be attained by ordinary people. At the end she decides to stay in Chrestomanci’s world and to adapt to the new family, environment, and dimension. I would argue that Janet’s modernity is mirrored, not only in the feminist thoughts that she has embraced

from the world that she comes from, but also in the way in which she is pictured as a moral agent.

Table 1, *Charmed Life*, the girls. In the tables I analyse the same traits in every character.

	Gwendolen Chant	Janet Chant
Looks	Sweet, innocent	Sweet, innocent
Character	Bad	Good
Attitude	Unimpressed, superior	Impressed, liberated
Actions	Theft, conspiracy, antipathy	Sharing, co-operation, empathy
Target	Enslavement	Enlightenment
Role model	Negative, difficult to identify with	Positive, emancipated, modern
Heroism	Negative	Ordinary, positive
Outcome	Flees consequences	Confronts consequences
Motto	"Veni, vidi, vici"	"Came, saw, understood"

4 Treacle and Brimstone, or rather *Fire and Hemlock*

In this chapter I examine the prominent female characters in Diana Wynne Jones's novel *Fire and Hemlock* (first published in 1985, henceforth FH). As above, first I introduce the novel and represent the plot. After the synopsis I present short comparisons between the three pairs of figures. Every character has her own section, where my target is to discuss the gathered examples. The traits I scrutinise are as in the above *Charmed Life* chapter, and again the characterisations I use here in the tables and the subheadings describe my own impressions. In this chapter I analyse first the protagonist Polly and her antagonist Laurel, then Polly's young friends Nina and Fiona, and finally I examine mother figures: first Millie from *Charmed Life* and Granny, Polly's grandmother, then Ivy, Polly's mother and Joanna, Polly's stepmother.

While Wynne Jones's *Charmed Life* is a fairy tale for younger children, the genre of her *Fire and Hemlock* is not as easily defined. The novel is more for young adults than for children. I suggest that in essence it is a *bildungsroman*, a development novel (Buchanan 2010: 58) because the story follows the protagonist's growth from childhood to the end of her teenage years. However, *Fire and Hemlock* contains both physical and psychological adventures as well as a love story, which add action and romance to this genre mixture.

At the beginning of the novel Polly Whittacker, a 19-year-old university student, suddenly notices that she has both ordinary and magical, hidden memories. Polly begins to recover the forgotten parts of her past: there was a funeral nine years ago, which she gatecrashed. There she became friends with an adult, Mr. Thomas Lynn. They start to invent stories about heroic deeds, and Polly even defines herself as a trainee hero. Their play of make-believe continues for years. However, as Polly grows and the friendship between her and Mr. Lynn develops, she conceives that something threatens them: the episodes they imagine become distortedly and dangerously real. Polly finds out that Mr. Lynn is enthralled by old magic, and she is the only one who can save him. In the process of clarifying the situation Polly resorts to magic, with the result that Mr. Lynn and the adventures they had together were erased from her mind. When Polly gains her memories back, she decides to save her friend.

4.1 Polly and Laurel: Another goodie and another baddie

I suggest that children do not just perceive other children as role models, but also adult characters can play this part. Thus, while Gwendolyn and Janet are presented as opposite models in *Charmed Life*, in *Fire and Hemlock*, I consider another pair of opposites: the

protagonist Polly Whittacker, and her adult adversary, Mrs. Eudora Mabel Lorelei Perry Lynn, better known by the name Laurel. On the outside, both Polly and Laurel are beautiful, and at the beginning of the tale Polly is even “an extremely pretty little girl” (FH: 8). Wynne Jones’s solution to describe Laurel through the eyes of a growing girl is exciting, as Polly’s observation matures with her. When Polly, at the age of ten, first sees Laurel, she thinks that the lady is “plump and quite pretty” (32), at fourteen she finds Laurel “beautiful... young and slender too” (288-289), and a year later the woman is “staggeringly, heart-rendingly beautiful” (365). However, already at the beginning of the novel, Laurel is described as threatening as well, her hair does not have any colour, and her eyes seem to be empty. As with Gwendolen and Janet in *Charmed Life*, Polly’s and Laurel’s parallelism is only of a superficial quality. While Polly is an aspiring heroine, Laurel is a dangerous older woman, and even a stepmother, the role which is often reserved for the wicked in traditional fairy tales.

4.1.1 Polly: Thy shall be liberated

As a contrast to *Charmed Life*’s quite one-dimensional description of Gwendolen and Janet, Polly is as a character quite multifaceted. She can be both good and evil: she is brave and idealistic, but she trespasses, resorts to stealing, as well as fights. As mentioned above, her life has traits which can be traditionally deemed masculine, feminine, or a mixture of both. Polly plays football with boys, joins a sports club, acts quite independently, gets head lice *and* becomes interested in her looks. She can be defiant, ashamed of her lack of heroism, and proud. Wynne Jones builds Polly as a versatile character which is more complex than the characters in *Charmed Life*. Additionally, Polly is the protagonist of the novel, so it seems quite natural the author has concentrated more on her character than Gwendolen’s or Janet’s.

Polly’s attitude to life can be described as daring; she is always prepared for engaging in adventures, and besides her adolescent escapades she is courageous when she explores her past, examines the present, and makes plans for the future. I suggest that the time dimension is essential in the novel; the narrative follows Polly’s life from her childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, the tale begins with Polly finding out that she has counterfeited memories, and she prepares herself to redeem the damage she has done in the past. Polly is an active agent, who survives many difficult situations which demand physical and psychological strength. She wants to perfect her outer and inner abilities throughout the story as well. In Polly’s character Wynne Jones has generated an entity, body and soul, and the suggestion that they both can be improved is intriguing. As mentioned above, Lissa Paul suggests that trickery is typical for

heroines (1987: 153) and resorting to cheating is one of Polly's strategies. I argue that one example of Polly's inner resources is that she can knowingly do wrong in order to gain rightful results.

However, more often Polly thinks that "Heroes have to be honourable", and to be a hero is her target (FH: 105). Polly declares to Thomas Lynn that she wants to "be a hero too" and is "going into training from now on" (88). She calls herself a "learner hero" (21) and tells herself to behave according to this ideal. It is quite remarkable that Polly as a little girl defines her aim in life as a process and a journey which demands constant vigilance: heroism is not something that could be turned on or off, but something that needs striving for, which can be seen as very enlightened thinking for a child.

I argue that as a role model Polly is positive in spite of her scheming. Polly is an active girl who does not run away from challenges. Polly's agency is corporeal and mental, and her solutions to problems may come with a great personal cost. However, she is not afraid to sacrifice her comfort. I suggest that her heroic status is positive as well: at the beginning of the novel Polly's deeds are quite adventurous, but later she understands that heroism can be many-sided, it can also be doing the right thing in spite of embarrassment it may cause. Thomas Lynn introduces this new attitude to bravery: "You have to learn not to notice how silly you feel" (132). Polly learns this lesson well, and at the end of the novel she decides not to let shame prevent her fulfilling the final deed. This is the same topic which emerges in *Charmed Life* with Janet: some everyday acts may be deemed heroic, such as being brave in spite of the fear one feels. As mentioned in the previous chapter, also maturing and identity quests can be conceived as deeds (Paul 1987: 159). Aforementioned time dimension in *Fire and Hemlock* is detectable in this aspect as well, because one of the novel's subthemes is Polly's growth from a little girl into a young woman.

At the end of the story it is not clear what will happen to Polly and Mr. Thomas Lynn in the future; they may find a way to circumvent Laurel's orders. Polly conceives in their final showdown with Laurel that "[T]he only way to win is to lose" (FH: 407). To rescue Thomas Polly must abandon him. However, this last deed of Polly is not necessarily about surrendering, it can also be interpreted as an emancipating act: in the process she frees not only him, but also herself. Polly liberates Thomas Lynn from Laurel's thrall and herself from her childhood infatuation, which is appropriate for a modern heroine.

4.1.2 Laurel: www.laurel-spider.com

Laurel is built as a more one-dimensional character than Polly: she is evil. Wynne Jones does not clarify Laurel's background: the reader does not know why she is what she is and how she had gained her powers, and she is simply defined as "frightening... undying" (33, 365). Polly does not meet her many times, but her presence can be often felt as a threatening undercurrent.

Laurel seduces "young... handsome... musical" (377) men, and she and her companion then steal those young men's lives. She is like a malevolent spider: she is the centre of her world, and those who entangle in her web are in danger. She is like a personified warning of trusting too much in appearance, because in spite of giving an impression of being sweet her true nature is perilous. Laurel's means are magic, charm and delegation. This grand lady acts only when it is imperative and lets her assistants to do the rest. Her aims are to live and rule her universe forever. As a role model Laurel can be deemed as negative, and a quite traditionally built bad woman, despite the fantasy setting. I argue that Laurel's figure has banal traits because of her one-sided characterization: only wickedness and nothing but wickedness. As to her heroic status, it is definitely negative. Laurel's fate resembles Gwendolen's outcome in *Charmed Life*: the evil female continues her life unpunished, which is a significant twist in a fairy tale. As suggested above with Gwendolen's character, Laurel may give only negative inspiration, how not to lead one's life. However, *Fire and Hemlock* does not end with the happily-ever-after-solution, but rather with a sense of foreboding: despite Thomas Lynn is saved, there will be in the future other young men who will entangle in Laurel's web. I argue that the symbol of the spider describes Laurel quite accurately:

Believed to be 300 million years old, spider embodies the ancient soul of existence reverberating with creativity and predation... Images of her terrors are reinforced by... the female's habitual devouring of the typically smaller male after mating (ARAS 2010: 220)

I suggest that Laurel's function in *Fire and Hemlock* is not only to be the protagonist's archenemy, because it can be argued that the fantasy world of the narrative originates with her, circles around her, and continues its existence because of her.

Table 2, *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly and Laurel

	Polly	Laurel
Looks	Sweet	Sweet, dangerous
Character	Multifaceted	One dimensionalish, evil
Attitude	Daring	Possesive, parasitic

Actions	Special moral codes	Magic, seduction, network
Target	Self-improvement	Immortality
Role model	Untraditional, positive	Quite traditional, negative
Heroism?	Positive	Negative
Outcome	Liberation	Conquering
Motto	"Been there, done deeds"	"Come inside, said the spider..."

4.2 More contrasting characters: Polly's friends

Polly has two near friends: Nina Carrington and Fiona Perks. Nina and Fiona can be seen as completing each other, even as each other's counterparts. Nina is at first big and fat, later voluptuous, and gaudy all the time, sometimes green-haired, while Fiona is athletic and quite unadorned. Nina is a daring, conspicuous character, who often threatens to end the friendship, while Fiona is discreet and a friend in distress. There can be detected parallelism to *Charmed Life*, in which Gwendolen and Janet are spectacularly different.

4.2.1 Nina: Avant-garde is my middle name

Nina is like a force of nature, and her looks match her mindset: she is expansive, wild, and loud. Nina is adventurous and easily bored as well, and she relieves her restlessness by new crazes, which she arouses by using her agitative tendencies. Nina wants to be noticed, and Polly, for example, is sure that this tornado-like friend demanded the leading role in their school play. As a role model for readers I find Nina as encouraging, because she enjoys her life, expresses herself freely, chases boys... Nina can be seen also as a comic relief of *Fire and Hemlock* because of all the peculiar situations she creates, for example, when her false eyelashes "slithered down inside her new glasses during Biology and fell off onto a dissected frog" (259). There is something grand in her attitude towards inevitable blunders of life, she does not take them too seriously.

4.2.2 Fiona: My middle name is sarcasm

Fiona is a discreet figure. However, Nina is such an extravagant person that almost everybody else seems to be temperate when juxtaposed with her. However, Fiona can be a quite complex and surprising character, whose sarcasm may mask her inner turmoil. Fiona's actions are usually more measured than Nina's, they may even seem a little ascetic; they contain for example incisive rhetoric, observation, and intellect. At first, Fiona may give quite introvert and reserved impression.

However, Fiona and Polly invent *slodging*, a children's game of planning violent acts on public buildings, which includes trespassing and stealthy behavior, such as spying. After the period of their secret agent days, at the age of fifteen Fiona fled to Germany after a businessman. Four years later, Fiona still argued that if that Hans had adored her the way Thomas adored Polly, she would "have taken handcuffs with me to Germany to make sure he couldn't send me home without coming as well" (353). Fiona's target in life is not easy to define, because she is an assistant character and the story does not concentrate on her person, but her teenage escapade can be seen as indicating that not only intellectual challenges, but also emotions are significant for her.

While Polly and Nina's relationship waxes and wanes, Polly and Fiona's friendship lasts once it begins. Fiona is sensible and determined: she is one of the few reliable people in Polly's life. They even share a flat when they both end up in Oxbridge. I suggest that as a role model she is positive, a good example of the importance of friends.

Table 3, *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly's friends

	Nina Carrington	Fiona Perks
Looks	Flourishing	Athletic
Character	Expansive	Complex, surprising
Attitude	Adventurous, easily bored	Sarcastic
Actions	Enthusiasm	Variable, considerate-spontaneous
Target	To be experienced	To experience
Role model	Invigorating, positive	Soothing, positive
Heroism?	Assistant character	Assistant character
Outcome	Gains followers	Oxbridge
Motto	"To be is to be"	"Don't judge a book by its cover"

4.3 Mothers: The Good

In *Charmed Life* and *Fire and Hemlock* one does not have to be a biological mother in order to act as a proper parent, and in *Fire and Hemlock* it also becomes evident that a mother and a stepmother can act irresponsibly. There are in the both novels important older female characters, who could be considered as mother-figures, because of their caring attitude towards the children, or because of their positions in the lives of the younger ones. There can be detected contrasts between the characters, again: these women can be defined good, as Millie Chrestomanci and Granny, better known as Mrs. Whittaker, in *Charmed Life* and *Fire and*

Hemlock, respectively, or bad, as Ivy and Joanna in *Fire and Hemlock*. I analyse first the good mother-figures, Millie and Granny.

The ladies differ in looks and personality: Millie is quite plain and very benign, and Granny has a majestic, sarcastic air. However, they both are similar in their protective approach towards the children in their care. As to Granny, Wynne Jones builds her as a determined old lady, who may become belligerent in order to get what she wants. Again, the characterization is more one-dimensional in *Charmed Life* than in *Fire and Hemlock*: Millie is mostly good, while Granny has even contradictory traits.

4.3.1 Millie: Motherhood is a state of mind

In *Charmed Life* Mr. Chrestomanci and his wife, Millie, become foster parents for the orphaned Gwendolen and Cat. Millie is “a plump lady with a mild face. . . one of the most ordinary ladies they had ever seen” (CL: 45-46). Millie is a very good-natured, loving and motherly character. She even usually manages to be friendly towards Gwendolen, whom almost everybody else hates. She often acts with the purpose of restoring harmony, and everybody’s wellbeing is important to her. For example, when Cat and Janet try to run away from the castle, Millie hurries after them:

She looked much more homely than usual, because her skirts were looped up for driving and she was wearing stout shoes and an old hat. . . When she reached Janet and Cat, she flung an arm round each of them and hugged them so hard and thankfully that Cat nearly fell over. “You poor darlings! Another time you get unhappy, you must come and tell me at *once!* . . . Now, please, please come back. I’ve got a surprise waiting for you at the Castle” (194, emphasis original)

She may be conceived as an archetype of a mother, and as a role model she is encouraging. Her heroic status is not so easy to define, because she is an assistant character, but at the end of the novel it becomes apparent that she is a powerful witch: “We can’t do anything more without Millie” (254), as a witch says in the final showdown, which Gwendolen and her cronies have created. My description of Millie may seem like a picture of an old hippie, because I have stressed her positive ideas about life: happiness, freedom, peace, love... but these targets are characteristic to her, and at the end of the novel she and her fellow beings can enjoy these aspects of existence again.

4.3.2 Granny: One’s got to do what one’s got to do

Granny in *Fire and Hemlock* is the most secure person in Polly's life. Granny looks "small but royal" (FH: 204) and she has a quite sarcastic way to express her opinions. Granny often saves Polly from troubled situations, for example, when Polly's parents quarrel and push her "back and forth" between them, using her "like a shield or a hostage":

In the midst of it the back door banged without anybody but Polly noticing. Granny was there, upright as the Queen Mother and stiff with anger, and taking everyone's attention, even though she was only a head taller than Polly. "Polly's coming with me. . . until you've had your shout out. I'm not taking sides, and it doesn't matter to me what you settle, but Polly's not coming back until you have. Get your things, Polly" (94)

Granny is a determined old lady, who may become belligerent: "She sailed out, like a small upright army of one, to do battle with offices and banks and solicitors. She got her way too" (267). Compared to Millie, Granny is more complex as a character. While Millie may give an impression of a tree hugger, her targets being peace and love for everybody, Granny is quite stereotypical in her Britishness, her sense of humour is sarcastic, she is strict and proper; she knows her duty.

Table 4, *Charmed Life* and *Fire and Hemlock*, mother figures: Millie and Granny

	Millie, Mrs. Chrestomanci	Granny
Looks	Large, ordinary	Little, ordinary
Character	Easy-going	Pedantic
Attitude	Nurturing	Imperious
Actions	Honey	Vinegar
Target	Happiness-freedom	Decency
Role model	Positive	Positive
Heroism?	Assistant character, positive	Assistant character, positive
Outcome	Peace and love	Good conscience
Motto	"Mother Nature"	"Stiff upper lip"

4.4 ...and the Bad and Irresponsible

Ivy, Polly's biological mother, and Joanna Renton, the new girlfriend of Polly's father, represent bad mother figures in *Fire and Hemlock*. I suggest that the characters' actions even threaten to demolish the mother myth. Ivy has had a hard life, and her troubles have had an influence on her habitus, while Joanna looks remarkably successful on the outside. However, in spite of their differences in their looks, they both can chillingly be alike in their behaviour towards Polly. If Ivy and Joanna are placed in the continuum between damaging – nurturing

approach, I suggest that they are quite damaging and opposites of abovementioned Millie and Granny. However, I argue that these bad characters may have other shared features as well. There can be detected some kind of parallelism in Ivy's and Joanna's mental structure, with the difference that Ivy's obsessions are manifested in a more untraditional way than Joanna's compulsions: Ivy's lot is bitter and lonely, but Joanna is very proper and clean, she seem to manage well.

4.4.1 Ivy: Everybody is against me

Ivy has so many problems that she is not capable of being a decent mother; Polly has to learn too early to be quite independent. Sometimes Ivy's and Polly's roles are oddly reversed: Ivy forgets their supper, and Polly fetches take-away food; the mother complains about her marriage to her daughter, and Polly hopes that "she would begin honoured soon that Mum was confiding in her" (FH: 90). Ivy is very eager to shift her mental burdens to anybody else's shoulders, and she was disappointed, is disappointed, and will constantly be disappointed in her life, because she drives everyone away with her unrealistic demands and theories about conspiracies against herself. This mother even banishes her twelve-year-old daughter from her home:

"Tell all the lies you like in your own mind. . . It's when you tell them to me that it matters. You've been secretive with me. You've destroyed my happiness with David [the lodger-boyfriend]. You've made him secretive too. I can't have it, Polly. You'll have to leave" (220)

Ivy's priorities are her own happiness and her own wellbeing, but unfortunately for her, she is unable to be satisfied with everything she already has obtained. As a parent Ivy is quite indifferent, and she becomes gradually more and more disturbed, even developing all-males-deceive-me-mania: "I'm sitting here a bundle of nerves, with the new lodger starting deceiving me already. . . I only asked for a little happiness. . . but he's being so secretive..." (330). I suggest that as a role model Ivy is poor, with the many denotations of the word. And as a mother figure she is untraditional because of her indifference. Additionally, I argue that her heroic status is negative because she wants to be saved, not to do the deed herself.

4.4.2 Joanna: We do it my way

Unlike Ivy, Joanna looks healthy on the outside. Polly's new stepmother-to-be is so keen on maintaining order in her home that Polly is not very welcome there either, although the child has not a place in which to stay, let alone a place she could call home. "Yes I like to keep things nice. . . Reg wants a cat, but I've told him we can't. Cats make almost as much mess as children

do” (229). Joanna is calm, cool, polite, and seems to be peculiarly emotionless. Finally, Polly finds out that her father had not informed Joanna about the nature of the visit; he had just hoped that Joanna would want Polly to live with them. However, Joanna sends Polly away “almost eagerly” (234). As with Ivy, I suggest that Joanna’s status both as a role model and a heroine is negative.

Table 5, *Fire and Hemlock*, mother figures: Ivy and Joanna

	Ivy	Joanna Renton
Looks	Slowly deteriorating	Immaculate
Character	Dependent	Self-absorbed
Attitude	Demanding	Perseverance, precise
Actions	Emotional extortion	Constant control
Target	Association	Perfection
Role model	Untraditional, negative	Negative
Heroism?	Assistant character, negative	Assistant character, negative
Outcome	Sad and lonely end	Antiseptic
Motto	"I, me, mine"	"OCD means to order, control, disinfect"

5 The long days' journey into darkness: *Neverwhere*

As in the previous chapters, this part of my thesis considers more comprehensively the prominent female characters in my primary sources. I examine in this chapter Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (first published in 1996, henceforth NW). The traits under observation here are the same as with Wynne Jones's two novels. As above, my method of analysis is the same as well: I refer to the texts proper and then discuss the details, finally representing my impressions in the tables.

As a novel, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* is targeted to an older audience than Diana Wynne Jones's two works. Richard Mayhew, the male protagonist in *Neverwhere*, is an adult, and the narrative's atmosphere is more demanding for readers than the settings portrayed in *Charmed Life* and *Fire and Hemlock*, or even *Coraline*, being often graphic in its descriptions. However, I find the novel relevant for my thesis, because it contains remarkable female characters, as in my other primary sources. These figures are Door, a teenaged blue-blooded girl, who can be easily juxtaposed with Jessica Bartram, Richard's earthly girlfriend, and Anaesthesia and Hunter. Door, Anaesthesia, and Hunter are residents of a fantasy dimension and Jessica Bartram lives in a humdrum business city.

This city is London. I argue that it is portrayed almost as a character in *Neverwhere*. "Cities have personalities... genders, names and nicknames... Cities sleep and wake" (ARAS 2010: 614). This London could be even allowed a feminine pronoun, because in some usage of the English language states can be called as *she* (Silk et al 2005: 133). I suggest that the fantasy London can be seen as a state, with its own laws, for example, I-owe-you-a-favour system and its own regime, such as "baronies and fiefdoms" (NW: 101). However, in this chapter I consider this symbolic idea of the scenery as an annotation, albeit worth mentioning. I suggest that London plays an auxiliary role backgrounding the narrative. However, in the next novel, *Coraline*, the environment is more foregrounded, because it is more limited, and the protagonist is a child who tries to survive near impossible circumstances. I argue that in *Coraline* the narrative's setting is more total than in *Neverwhere*'s London.

The fantasy London exists on the rooftops, in the middle of everyday life, and, most importantly, underneath. Readers familiar with London may encounter many surprises, for example, when the name of Blackfriars underground station refers to real Black Friars. There are many layers of the London in this novel, and the subtheme of parallel worlds is one factor which connects *Neverwhere* to *Charmed Life*, *Fire and Hemlock*, and *Coraline*. The terms I use for this London are *Above* and *Below*, and for her inhabitants *Abover* and *Belower*. For example,

Jessica Bartram as an *Above*, who cannot receive anything from the parallel city's hidden dimensions, which are invisible for ordinary Londoners.

However, when Door flees from her persecutors the presumed *Above* Richard sees her and helps her, entangling himself in adventures in this secret city. Rescuing Door means that he cannot continue his life as he is used to: the ordinary London starts to repel Richard and he has to join Door's retinue, in which everybody has different interests: Door wants to revenge her family's murder, some want to pay back past favours and Richard wants his former life back. I suggest that the atmosphere in *Neverwhere* is dystopian, which trait can be detected in the characters as well. The *Below* London is not any welfare city, and its message could well be "every woman for herself". Thus, I also analyse how the characters survive in the demanding circumstances.

5.1 Door and Jessica

I suggest that Door and Jessica do not have almost any similar traits. First, seen through the protagonist's eyes, Door seems to need Soup, Soap and Salvation. Despite being blue-blooded, and poetic by her features, she is pictured, at the beginning of the narrative as an un-person, whom most people may not want to notice, namely wounded, dirty, and bloody; somebody about whom it is easy to assume that she may be drunk and homeless. It is as if Door is a personified failure of the system, of which the propers do not want to be reminded. However, her visible qualities are soon revealed as striking. I argue that as the narrative progresses, Door's looks begin to increasingly indicate her other capabilities as well. On the other hand, first Jessica Bartram seems to be very proper and in control of everything, "beautiful... and... certainly going somewhere" (NW: 12). However, Jessica's characterisation suggests quite early that she may not be as awesome inside as outside, the progress which is in sharp contrast with Door's character's development.

5.1.1 Door: The girl with kaleidoscope eyes

When compared to the other characters in this thesis, Door is by far the most fairy-like built figure. However, in spite of her mystical looks, the Lady Door is with her survival instinct a true *Below*, I argue that her ethereal air is heavily contrasted with the fact that the novel's world seems, at least at the beginning, to be almost like our own. I suggest that Door's habitus functions almost like a synthesis of the novel's atmosphere: a violated fairy tale, or a perverted saga.

First impressions may be misleading, especially in *Neverwhere*. In spite of Door's quite sordid entrée into Richard's world, he soon notices her eyes, which are mentioned so many times in the narrative that it is practically impossible to ignore the effect: "And her eyes... [Richard] could not tell what colour her eyes were. They were not blue, nor green, nor brown, nor grey; they reminded him of fire opals: there were burning greens and blues and even reds and yellows that vanished and glinted as she moved" (40). Indeed: those eyes can flash, be green and blue and flame, and can even seem as if they belong to a pixie. Secondly, the rest of her face is noteworthy as well: it is pale, but most importantly, it is described as an "elfin face" (84). Thirdly, these features can act together to make an impression, as in "Fire-opal-coloured eyes... from a pale, elfin face" (124) and "a small elfin girl with huge, opal-coloured eyes staring at him urgently from a heart-shaped, pale face" (137). However, as a reminder, her initial appearance is mostly defined by shoes with which one can run and kick groins and a "battered brown leather jacket" (362), and the rest is a mixture of

[O]dd clothes, dirty velvets, muddy lace, rips and holes through which other layers and styles could be seen. She looked... as if she'd done a midnight raid on the History of Fashion section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and was still wearing everything she'd taken (30)

I suggest that Door wears some kind of modern armour, which protects both her body and soul, the armour being practical and tough, as well as rendering her semi-invisible: a camouflage of a city-warrior.

Door could be defined as an obsessed person, fuelled by vendetta. Admittedly, Lady Door wants to revenge the death of her family, but when inquired about her motives, she reflects: "Vengeance?... Yes. That was what my father said. But I just want to understand what happened, and to protect myself. My family had no enemies" (165). I suggest that she is more righteous than possessed. For example, Door feels guilty for the turmoil she has created for Richard and she decides to include him in their retinue, in spite of the dangers this novice-*Below* presents to their quest. However, her nature guides her not only in private matters, such as personal responsibility, but also in politics. Door states that the power-seeking methods and targets of the novel's archvillain are shameful: "But millions of people were killed" (337); I argue that for Door right and wrong are not just vague concepts, which can be exploited when one can afford it. On the contrary, they function as guidelines.

In order to survive Door must be quite brave and pragmatic: when Richard told her hesitantly that "I, um, found you on the pavement. There was rather a lot of blood", she consoled

him by saying “Most of the blood was someone else’s” (31). Before Richard has gained more information about Door, he mused “her skin was very white, now some of the dirt and blood had been removed... Maybe she’d been in prison, although she looked a bit too young for that...Perhaps... she was mad” (41). Door does not relinquish battles lightly; in crises she can resort to her willpower: for example, when cornered by enemies

[Door] pulled whatever she could find deep inside her soul, from all the pain, and the hurt, and the fear. She was spent, burnt out, and utterly exhausted. She had nowhere to go, no power left, no time. “If it’s the last door I open... Somewhere... anywhere... *safe*” and then she thought, wildly “*Somebody*” (23, emphases original)

And she escapes, and crashes into Richard’s life. However, Door has not only perseverance, but also assertiveness in her nature. When the retinue had an audience with the Earl in Earl’s Court, the Lady of the narrative revealed a glimpse of her inner strength: “Door fixed the Earl with her look... the room fell quiet whenever she spoke” (163). However, this confidence of hers may not stem only from her personal characteristics, but they also might be the result from the privileges her family has been entitled.

Lady Door trusts her heritage: in Earl’s Court she

[S]tepped forward. She held her head up high, suddenly seeming taller and more at ease than Richard had previously seen her, and she said, “We seek an audience with His Grace the Earl... I am the Lady Door... The Lord Portico was my father” ... When she stood before the Earl’s wooden chair she curtseyed (158)

I suggest that one of her assets is that she knows how to behave, be it obeying the various protocols of London, such as favours, and debts, or resorting to violence. Door has other kind of skills as well, whether inherited or educated to master, because she is a cosmopolitan, understands several languages, such as pigeon and rat; and these pigeons and rats with whom she communicates form part of her network. And then there is the most important gift: “My family. We’re openers. It’s our Talent” (179). However, my suggestions about her privileged roots do not necessarily mean that Door would be regarding herself as entitled to everything, using any actions that are possible, because as I mentioned above there can be detected moral fibre in her character. I argue that this moral trait can be seen throughout the novel in her character, and especially at the end of it when Door tells Richard about her future plans: “there’s a lot of sorting out to do in London Below. And there’s only me to do it. My father wanted to unite London Below... I suppose I ought to try to finish what he started” (363): it is as if honour for her is not only a matter of personal equilibrium, but also of wider wellbeing.

As a character Door is round. Forster presents in 1927 the adjectives flat and round in his definition of characters, flat meaning figures which “are constructed round a single idea or quality” (1985: 67) and round is the attribute for “more highly organized... [characters which] are capable of surprising in a convincing way” (78). Her nature is quite multifaceted, having various attributes, sometimes even contradictory ones at the same time. Door can be weak and strong, as when escaping from her persecutors at the beginning of the novel. Or she may be conciliatory and arrogant, as when arguing with de Carabas: “Don’t patronize me... And I think I can decide who comes with us. You *are* working for me, aren’t you? Or is it the other way around?” (NW: 136, emphasis original). Therefore, positive as a role model, and a real heroine, because she does what heroes traditionally do: saves the world. She sends the demonic characters into another dimension by using trickery, which is according to Lissa Paul one of the assets with which brain can overcome brawn (1987: 153). However, in spite of having revenged her family’s murder, she has many things left to do; personal and political quests: to find her sister and make peace, so there is not any stagnant happily-ever-after ending for the novel, but a dynamic, open one.

5.1.2 Jessica: Don’t you know who I am?

As I suggested above, first impressions may be misleading. I argue that this is true with Ms. Jessica Bartram’s characterisation. Jessica is Richard’s girlfriend at the beginning of this fairy-tale. In the subheading I have written for her section I have aimed to crystallise the impression she makes; she is a snob, and obviously confident of her place in society. However, Ms. Bartram wants still more, which is quite befitting her antagonist function in the novel. When considering the elements with which Jessica’s character is built, she seems to be very materialistic, and advancing her career is her main target, in spite of her donations to charity. For example, if she encounters people needing help, she may dismiss them as losers, and hurry away to use new business opportunities to her benefit. Her inner displeasure becomes clear almost immediately with her introduction to the narrative, when “Jessica saw in Richard an enormous amount of potential, which, properly harnessed by the right woman, would have made him the perfect matrimonial accessory” (NW: 12). Jessica aims to edify her boyfriend by demanding him to read the right novels, such as “*A Hundred and Twenty-Five Habits of Successful Men*” (12, emphasis original). Richard, in turn, describes her as good-looking, resourceful, and demanding, suggesting that: “in the future... they would make her Prime Minister, or Queen, or God” (13). Thus, her attitude could be characterised as strategy-wise, and this war-like state of mind is once more noticeable, in connection with the novels she recommends for her fiancé

to read in order to educate himself, for example, self-help books about “how to run a business like a military campaign” (12). Later in the novel she is in charge of an important event, and despite her nervousness, it may not be a very unpleasant task for her after all, if only everything would go smoothly for the important guests... I argue that Jessica can be assessed as an embodiment of the first wave feminism, which often suggests that females can do whatever males do, in spite of physiological differences. For example, when Rosemarie Tong analyses works of John Stuart Mill, she presents that

[Mill suggests] that all the differences claimed to exist between men and women are differences of average. No one who knows anything about human history... can argue that *all* men are stronger and smarter than *all* women. That the average woman cannot do something that the average man can does not justify a law or taboo that bars all women from attempting that something (1992: 20, emphases original)

Jessica Bartram does work in the world of business and public and her actions are often ambitious and unemotional, and she seems to manage well in areas that can be traditionally assessed quite masculine.

As a novelist’s creation, Jessica is a flat character. As mentioned above, Forster defined a flat character as “constructed round a single idea or quality” (1985: 67). Jessica merely assists the storyline. I suggest that her figure acts as a background to Door, Anaesthesia, Hunter, and the London *Below*, and, together with the banal traits of Jessica’s nature she is in sharp contrast with the different moral codes and desired outcomes of *Neverwhere*. In the light of this, Jessica Bartram could be viewed merely as a social climber. However, I argue that she is a very necessary figure in the novel: the purpose for including her in the narrative is to juxtapose an everyday, albeit posh worldview with the novel’s dystopian one.

Jessica’s pettiness can be detected, for example, when Richard’s journey to the *below* is about to begin, Jessica dumps him: “You embarrassed me very deeply last night... I have no intention of returning the ring” (NW: 38). However, towards the end of the novel, when Richard has conquered his place in the above world again, and even had a promotion, Jessica wants to renew their engagement. I argue that her role model status is negative, although she is a picture of a successful businessperson. When the ethos of this novel and the directions she has chosen for her life are compared, Jessica does not seem to be an inspiring figure; she can be assessed as a character who pursues values that can be deemed quite unimportant in extreme times, of which the London *Below* is an example. Survival, loyalty, a concrete *quid pro quo* is essential

to the Gaiman's entropy. As to Ms. Bartram's heroism, I suggest that it is negative, because she is ostentatiously concerned of her own status, and nothing but her own status.

Table 6, *Neverwhere*, Door and Jessica

	Door	Jessica Bartram
Looks	Otherworldly, street credibility	Beautiful businessmachine
Character	Idealistic	Materialistic
Attitude	Plucky	Marshalling
Actions	Special skills, status	Bossing and fussing
Target	Honour	Grand success
Role model	Untraditional-ish, positive	Social climber, negative
Heroism?	Positive, saves her world	Negative, self-centred
Outcome	Fulfills her legacy	Careerwoman
Motto	"Noblesse oblige"	"Freaks are not in control"

5.2 Anaesthesia and Hunter

Anaesthesia is a loser and Hunter is a winner, or so it seems when these characters are introduced. Anaesthesia creeps into the narrative gradually, as only a somebody from the crowd, and as a someone who is later depicted quite scarcely, which emphasises her image as a nobody. Hunter, on the other hand, is represented as if she could be the fulfillment of fantasies; at the first sight, everything about her is quite perfect. However, their roles develop along the narrative, and it might be that Anaesthesia is more important for the story than she first appears to be.

5.2.1 Anaesthesia: A straw girl

Anaesthesia's journey in *Neverwhere* is short and quite heartbreaking; she comes from darkness and disappears in the night. When Richard is led underground, he sees "Small fires... Shadowy people stood by the flames" (71), then he notices that "a thin, bedraggled girl in her late teens" (80) is about to steal his bag. Then the narrative allows for her a new article: "The thin girl... had a large, water-stained red button pinned to her ragged clothes, of the sort that comes attached to birthday cards. It said, in yellow letters, *I am 11*" (81, emphasis original). When Richard asks her name, it is as if she is surprised that somebody would be interested in her existence: "[she] hesitated. Then she half-smiled, and said something that sounded a lot like Anaesthesia" (82). In spite of her visit into the narrative is like a whispered mention in a subordinate clause, I suggest that Anaesthesia's picture is quite multifaceted.

Anaesthesia can be aggressive and timid, sometimes even at the same time: “Now Anaesthesia stepped between Richard and Varney. She was less than half his size, but she glared at the big man and bared her teeth, and she hissed like an angry rat at bay. Varney took a step backwards...” (106): Anaesthesia shoos the terrible man away. However, she argues afterwards “I’m not really brave... I’m still scared of the bridge” (106). However, soon Anaesthesia defends the unpleasant mission she has been forced to accept to undergo and asserts her authority in the Below world: “I’m his guardian, said Anaesthesia, truculently” (107). She is street wise as well. When Anaesthesia guided Richard towards Door and her retinue

[Anaesthesia] pressed him against the wall, suddenly, and clamped a filthy hand over his mouth. Then she blew out the candle... People walked past them... “Who were they?” asked Richard... “It dun’t matter,” she said. “Then what makes you think that they wouldn’t have been pleased to see us?” ... She looked at him rather sadly, like a mother trying to explain to an infant that, yes *this* flame was hot, too. *All* flames were hot... “Come on”, she said. “I know a shortcut” (88-89, emphases original)

It is a moot point whether her persistence of how to proceed in extreme situations is inborn or a result of learning from previous experiences, and the issue is even a political bone of contention.

I suggest that her means to manage to go on is her faithfulness to the protocol of her substitute family. When Richard, unbeknownst about the powers-that-be in London below called the rat a rat, “The thin girl actually squeaked... “Ratty!” said the girl in something between a squeak and a horrified swallow” (81). However, the narrative progresses along not only with her citizenry in the Underworld, but also with her insight of how to go on, day in, day out. In terms of life goals, Anaesthesia just wants to continue her feeble existence, without any greater plans for her future, career, or saving for a rainy day. She actually comes from the world which Richard knows:

“There was me and Mum and the twins...but she got a bit funny in the head...an’ I had to go and stay with my aunt. She was living with this bloke... He used to hurt me. Do other stuff... [My aunt] Said I was lying. Said she’d have the police on me... So I run away. It was my birthday...I slept on the streets...I was only eleven... Then I got really sick... When I come to, I was in London Below. The rats had found me” (91-92)

Thus, she secures her place in this new world by obeying her superiors. Her masters are first and foremost the rats; secondly the Lord Rat-speaker; thirdly the tribe conventions: she has become a rat-speaker, a rat-girl: “We do stuff for them” (88). I suggest that these examples define Anaesthesia’s position in the hierarchy, as being among the lowliest. Anaesthesia can

even be interpreted as a person, who in order to stay alive deletes her own will; she does what she is told to do.

However, I find Anaesthesia as a role model surprisingly positive. In spite of everything horrible she has faced her character has become very resilient. I argue that it is not surprising that she may come across as having a defeatist attitude, as when Richard asks if she could go back to the world above: “You can’t. It’s one or the other. Nobody ever gets both” (92). However, after Anaesthesia is ordered on the frightening mission of guiding Richard, she still manages to act towards him amicably. Later Richard even describes Anaesthesia as his friend. I argue that the way she behaves indicates her inner soundness and strength.

As for Anaesthesia’s status as a heroine I suggest that her deeds are examples of ordinary heroism; she does not save any kingdoms, but she helps Richard. The only kind of dragons she kills are immaterial: her fears. I argue that the abovementioned axiom in *Fire and Hemlock* “You have to learn not to notice how silly you feel” (FH: 132) is valid here as well, with the difference that Anaesthesia hardly can socially afford such luxuries as embarrassment or shame anymore: I argue that she is far beyond that kind of normal conduct. However, slightly modified the quotation above could be Anaesthesia’s guideline, for example, “You have to learn to act in spite all the dreads you may face”.

After Anaesthesia has disappeared Richard tries to find out what has happened to her. With Door as his translator he asks a rat called Miss Whiskers

“Um. Hello... Look, there was one of your rat-speaker people, a girl named Anaesthesia. She was taking me to the market. We were crossing the bridge in the dark, and she just never made it across” ... The rat interrupted him... “the rats do not blame you for the loss. Your guide was... taken by the night... as tribute” ... “Sometimes they come back...” said Door (NW: 178)

I suggest that this comment of Miss Whiskers corroborates my earlier characterisation of Anaesthesia as the least possible thing, disposable: she was sacrificed “as tribute” (178), as a kind of protection money. However, in spite of Anaesthesia’s seemingly low status in the narrative, she acts as a guide and she even arms Richard with a talisman. The rat-girl had a little treasure, a necklace made of quartz beads. After the night has swallowed Anaesthesia, Richard treasures what is left from her:

A handful of irregular quartz beads... Richard picked one up... He held the quartz bead so tightly it hurt his hand, thinking of the pride with which she had shown it to him, of how fond he had become of her in the handful of hours that he had known her... Richard stood there in the darkness for a few pounding

heartbeats, then he placed the quartz bead gently into the pocket of his jeans (110-111)

When Richard is almost failing to perform the deed ordered for him, he is ostracised, a social embarrassment, and he sees posters on the walls of the underground station:

END IT ALL was one of them.

PUT YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR MISERY.

BE A MAN – DO YOURSELF IN.

HAVE A FATAL ACCIDENT TODAY. (260)

However, he finds a part of Anaesthesia's treasure, a quartz bead in his pocket. And through that jewel Anaesthesia says "Richard. Hold on" ... "[And Richard] nodded, and put the bead back into his pocket. And he stood on the platform and waited for the train to come in" (260-261). We humans are social animals, and therefore social pressure, like contempt and kill-yourself-messages are among the most horrible things one can have in life. With the help from Anaesthesia, Richard survived and accomplished the almost impossible mission, "the Ordeal of the Key" (242). Then Richard, who had the newly gained heroic status placed the obtained Key "into his pocket, next to the small quartz bead, and together they left that place" (263). I suggest that is a beautiful tribute to the rat-girl.

5.2.2 Hunter: Absolutely Fabulous

Hunter is represented as a sex-bomb, seen through the eyes and inclinations of Richard, who is a young heterosexual male: from her voice to her poise, is "cream... honey... caramel..." (106-107), staggeringly beautiful, and "her smile would have stopped a revolution" (126). Before Richard knows her name, he calls her "The leather woman", perhaps because of her attire, which consists of "dappled leather clothes, mottled in shades of grey and brown" (107), and when he asks her occupation she answers casually "I sell personal physical services... I rent my body" (114). At this point of the narrative what she hunts is not defined – although I find that with the previous quotations it is also suggested that she may be a prostitute, potentially satisfying needs of even kinkier customers. Hunter's looks suggest that she can look after herself, with her wanderer's first-aid kit: a bag, a staff, and a very visible knife, which even add the impression of a Lady Domina. When Door is seeking a bodyguard, and Hunter conquers the front runner with her skills in violence, her name is asked: "I'm called Hunter", she said. Nobody said anything. Then Door said, hesitantly, "*The Hunter?*" "That's right," said Hunter, and she brushed the dust of the floor from her leather leggings. "I'm back" (128, emphasis

original). When Richard, a stranger in this *Below* world asks about Hunter's motives, she recites as if it is her mantra:

I fought in the sewers beneath New York with the great blind white alligator-king. He was thirty feet long, fat from sewage and fierce in battle. And I bested him, and I killed him. His eyes were like huge pearls in the darkness... I fought the bear that stalked the city beneath Berlin. He had killed a thousand men, and his claws were stained brown and black from the dried blood of a hundred years, but he fell to me. He whispered words in a human tongue as he died... There was a black tiger in the undercity of Calcutta. A man-eater, brilliant and bitter, the size of a small elephant. A tiger is a worthy adversary. I took him with my bare hands... And I shall slay the Beast of London... I will kill him, or I will die in the attempt (235-236)

Hunter even defines herself "As an expert in the termination of bodily functions" (218): preying is her main business line. However, I suggest that Hunter suffers from monomania. Hunting can symbolise "affinity, even a secret identification, between predator and prey, and reversals in which one becomes the other..." (ARAS 2010: 462). Indeed, finally Hunter is killed by the monster in her last pursuit.

However, in spite of her omnipotence, there can be detected some scars in her armour: She cannot enter the London *Above*, as she has been cursed somehow. When Hunter confessed that she must stay *Below* "It was as if she were admitting to having some socially embarrassing disease" (NW: 179-180). Finally, it becomes evident that Hunter betrays Door and those her loyal to her because she will be receiving a weapon as a reward with which "She looked more alive than he [Richard] had ever seen her; more beautiful, and more dangerous... I have bigger game to kill" (314). I argue that as a role model Hunter may be even counterproductive, because of the absolute way she is portrayed. She is the most beautiful, the most cunning, the woman *par excellence*, who can conquer males in their own games; a female who has a mission in her life. I argue that the first wave feminism, which I mention above with Jessica, is applicable here as well. Hunter can be assessed as Ms. First Wave, because she struggles in the hard world and her assets are ambition and strength: Hunter can do whatever males can do. However, when she falls from her plinth, the descent hurts, because it becomes clear that she is not the paragon that she seemed to be, but a possessed being: "I did a bad thing... I did a very bad thing. Because I wanted to be the one to kill the Beast. Because I needed the spear" (328). However, Hunter dies in a way that becomes her name, in the midst of a battle with the Beast. As she lies dying, she calls forth the Beast to attack again:

"Hey. Big boy? Where are you?... Come on, you bastard... Are you scared? ... Now – Richard. Strike! Under and up! ... You killed the Beast... So now you're

the greatest hunter in London Below. The Warrior...Is there still a knife in my hand? ... Take the knife... She's always looked after me. Clean my blood off her, though... a hunter always looks after her weapons" (329-330)

This excerpt suggests that Hunter's heroic status is quite precarious because of her self-indulgent tendencies. However, instead of assessing Hunter as some kind of Judas, her "Grand Dying" may render the final judgement of her towards mercy: "I did a bad thing... And now I make amends" (328). She is a picture of an extreme being, who, as a kind of a workaholic, has only one direction in life. I suggest that when she dies, Hunter forwards her obsessions by giving Richard her knife, which I find to be a subtle device that the author uses to make this narrative a type of a never-ending story.

Table 7, *Neverwhere*, Anaesthesia and Hunter

	Anaesthesia , a rat-speaker	Hunter , the Legend
Looks	Neglected	Cartoonish, sex-bomb, perfect
Character	Deprived	Super-everything, cool to boot, almost flawless
Attitude	Beaten, but untrodden	Professional, laconic
Actions	Obedience	Physicality, insuperability
Target	Survival	To be true to her name
Role model	Guide, surprisingly positive	Exaggerated, obsessive: dangerous
Heroism?	Everyday heroism	Ambivalent
Outcome	Oblivion?	Discontent, unfinished lifework, death
Motto	"Beggars can't be choosers"	"Hunter by name, Hunter by nature"

6 Blacker Shade of Dark: *Coraline*

To explore, understand, and even theorize: I argue that these verbs indicate Coraline's attitude to life, the universe and everything accurately, and these interests befit well for a heroine. Neil Gaiman writes in the preface for *Coraline* (first published in 2002, henceforth CO) that the writing of this novel has two phases; at first, beginning the story for the then five-year-old daughter Holly in England, then finishing it later for his "youngest daughter, Maddy" in America (CO: xv). I suggested above with *Neverwhere* that the city of London which the novel presents could be interpreted as one of the narrative's characters; I argue that with *Coraline* as well the same approach to the different worlds may be valid. Initially, the protagonist lives in a quite ordinary environment. However, Coraline finds that she can move from this real world to the other side of their house, and there the other world begins to change into something horrific: "the trees becoming cruder and less treelike... very approximate, like the idea of trees...pale nothingness..." (70-71). However, not only the outside world is changing, but also Coraline's home and their house. The house is a powerful symbol, and I suggest that its transformation is a significant subtheme. According to de Vries, a house can among other things symbolise "the human body... especially the female, maternal body..." (1976: 263-264). Additionally, Cooper suggests that "a house symbolises feminine, protective power" (1984: 17). This feminine power exists for example, in "our earliest home... the maternal womb". And in dreams houses can represent human mind (ARAS 2010: 556). As mentioned above, Reenkola argues that inner space has a significant meaning to feminine psychology (2004: 7-9, 144-145, 2008: 35-43, 2014: 80-83). I suggest that considering the house as a symbol and as a female inner space renders the narrative quite threatening to crucial dimensions of femininity. However, at the end, the worlds are restored to their old selves – or so it seems – which I argue is a proper chilling end for a horror story.

During the summertime Coraline, a schoolgirl, entertains herself by researching her surroundings, both material and immaterial, these being their house, their garden, culture, as well as human nature. Coraline's reconnaissance in their house lead her to find a door that does not obey the idea of doors; it does not give entrance: it opens to a wall of bricks. However, Coraline, prompted by boredom, manages to enter beyond the obstacle, and she finds a parallel world, with its peculiar elements, almost but not quite like the ones in her own world. There she, an adventurer at heart, finds her other mother and her other father, who are almost but not

quite like her own parents; instead of eyes they have “big black buttons” – and here the horror begins.

Initially this other mother tries to mesmerize Coraline to stay in the other world by treats, then by threats, then by mental and corporeal violence. Thus, the other mother has made Coraline’s own world disappear, step by step: her parents, everyday normality... with the result that the heroine of this novel starts to fight back, step by step, liberating her parents, her world, and a couple of stolen souls as well. I suggest that by saving her present, she at the same time saves her past and future as well, because the other mother’s tendencies are parasitical; it is as if the other mother acts in order to relieve her emptiness by stealing memories, souls, and chances to go on living one’s life.

The perverted world is not the only sign of disgust in the narrative, because there is a smaller *topos* as well – spider! Coraline is not interested in spiders – and I suggest that the motif of spiders directs this narrative from everyday to anti-everyday, to some kind of “un-day”. At the beginning of the novel Coraline lets the readers know that spiders are quite repulsive, and later, in the midst of her adventures, this creature appears again: “The theater was derelict and abandoned. Chairs were broken on the floor, and old, dusty spiderwebs draped the walls and hung from the rotten wood and the decomposing velvet hangings” (CO: 97). Additionally, the other mother locks Coraline inside a closet, and there “A spider scuttled over the back over her hand and she choked back a shriek” (79), as if imprisonment were not terrible enough. While Coraline is continuing with her second quest, she is confronted by “some kind of a sac, like a spider’s egg case” (99). Additionally, when Coraline’s third quest is about to begin, she finds “a dead spider the size of a small cat” (106). Coraline even describes the other mother’s hue to “very pale, the color of a spider’s belly” (126). When Coraline has rescued the stolen souls, she notices that one of the rescued children has clothes which “seemed to be spider’s webs” (140), which can be interpreted as a foreboding sign that the horror has not ended.

Indeed, Coraline has a final showdown with the monster mother, and she defeats the creature by resorting to trickery. As mentioned above, according to Lissa Paul, trickery, such as deceit, fraud, and guile is the survival strategy of the powerless (1987: 153). Trickery along with magic and parallel worlds, and even worlds which are about to fall apart, are shared subthemes in every novel I analyse in this thesis. As I argue above, the narrative in *Coraline* is scary. However, Coraline meets guides and obtains talismans, and the fact that she does not have to fight for her world all alone seems a comforting solution. Aforementioned Annis Pratt’s

theory defines five typical phases of heroines' deeds, and in the second one, as Pratt beautifully writes "the hero is helped to cross the threshold of her adventure" (1981: 139). The various forms of assistance are also a common subtheme in the primary sources in this thesis.

6.1 Coraline and the other mother

Again I introduce two contrasting figures. Coraline and the other mother are grandly different from each other, beginning with their outer attributes: with Coraline's character they are not detailed, but the other mother's looks are quite expressively documented. First, the other mother's external existence looks almost, but not quite Coraline's mother: only paler, slighter, and "her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp... Her eyes were big black buttons" (26). As the narrative becomes more and more horrid, so does the picture of the other mother along it; it begins with the other mother wanting Coraline to look like herself, to have buttons for eyes. Then "The other mother smiled, showing a full set of teeth, and each of the teeth was a tiny bit too long... The other mother's wet-looking black hair drifted around her head, like the tentacles of a creature in the deep ocean" (59-60). However, I suggest that Coraline and the other mother differ even more from each other because Coraline is young and the other mother is old, and Coraline is little and the other mother is large, which aggravates the unequal starting point of the narrative.

6.1.1 Coraline Jones: The explorer and exorcist

As I mentioned above, Neil Gaiman's builds Coraline as a character by her thoughts and actions rather than by her looks, which suggests that Coraline's inner capabilities are more relevant for the narrative than her outer characteristics. Usually the characters I analyse in this thesis are introduced to readers by their looks, and I suggest that this tendency to make the female characters recognisable primarily by their appearances indicates the significance of the trait. Thus, I argue that Gaiman's solution to emphasise Coraline's inner attributes is quite subversive. As I mentioned above when discussing traditions in children's literature, in the 18th century began the trend to define quite often boys with their physical and psychological abilities, such as brawn and brains – "strong, active" – and girls by their decorativeness, often as "submissive, domestic and introspective" (Simons 2010: 143). However, Coraline is an exception; it is even slightly difficult to define her outer self. Coraline's age is not defined, but there are some clues to this enigma: she can read, goes to school, and knows how to use a word-processing program. She may have longish hair: while walking in their garden on a foggy day

“The hair over her eyes was limp and wet” (CO: 13). In spite of the novel being narrated by a third person, the experiences are Coraline’s, seen through her eyes, as when she looks in a mirror she sees “a girl who was small for her age” (93). After Coraline has taken the conclusive step – crossing this little girl’s Rubicon – and has again entered the other mother’s regime in order to save her parents, she sees herself in the mirror: “ a young girl ... who looked like she had recently been crying but whose eyes were real eyes, not black buttons...” (59). Coraline’s smallness is mentioned twice, and at the end of the novel she looks into a mirror and sees “her own pale face staring back at her, looking sleepy and serious” (145). I suggest that Gaiman gives details of Coraline’s looks quite economically. However, when he builds the heroine’s mental character, he uses words quite profusely.

Coraline seems to have very sound cognitive assets; she is curious, observant, and intelligent. Curiosity is a sign of her lively mind, as she is very eager to find out about everything around her, like the blocked door. In the narrative the following scenario is described:

[Coraline] got a chair and pushed it over to the kitchen door. She climbed onto the chair and reached up. She got down, then got a broom from the broom cupboard. She climbed back on the chair again and reached up with the broom. *Chink*. She climbed down from the chair and picked up the keys (23-24, emphasis original)

Her powers of observation are astonishing, and she can put the results into words as well; when Coraline is trying to escape into her own world, she tricks the other mother to open the door by flattering her antagonist’s superiority and hiding her own intentions at the same time: “I know where they have to be... They are behind that door... Why don’t you open it?” ... “It was her only way home, she knew. But it all depended on the other mother’s needing to gloat, needing not only to win but to show that she had won” (128). Coraline’s brightness is also detectable in her deductions, as when the other mother suddenly disappears: “She preferred the other mother to have a location: if she were nowhere, then she could be anywhere... it is always easier to be afraid of something you cannot see” (93). I suggest that this female hero, who wants to increase her knowledge, is a quite perfect picture of a scholar.

And I argue that Coraline seems to have very sound emotional assets as well, because she is brave, compassionate, polite, and assertive as well. Coraline’s braveness is one of the main themes of the novel; the little girl can act in impossible circumstances, for example, when Coraline dares the other mother: “You like games... That’s what I’ve been told... Wouldn’t you be happier if you won me, fair and square?... If I lose I’ll stay here with you forever and I’ll let

you love me... And I'll let you sew your buttons into my eyes" (89). And she is compassionate as well, even for one of her tormentors, which suggests that she is surprisingly mature and unprejudiced: in the midst of her deeds the other mother lures Coraline into a trap, where she finds a something, which turns out to be the other father:

[T]he thing was pale and swollen like a grub, with thin sticklike arms and feet. It had almost no features on its face, which had puffed and swollen like risen bread dough. The thing had two large black buttons where its eyes should have been... *Monstrous*, thought Coraline, *but also miserable*... "Poor thing", she said. "I bet she made you come down here as a punishment... I'm so sorry" (108-109, emphases original)

Coraline seems to understand the thin line between politeness and rudeness, because she can be very assertive. From the beginning of the novel to its end, she keeps on correcting the neighbours who constantly call her Caroline: "No... I asked you not to call me Caroline. It's Coraline" (2). In their everyday family life Coraline is independent and outspoken:

Coraline was disgusted. "Daddy... you've made a *recipe* again" ...Then she went to the freezer and got out some microwave chips and a microwave minipizza... "You know I don't like recipes" she told her father, while her dinner went around and around and the little red numbers on the microwave oven counted down to zero (7-8, emphasis original)

Coraline's sense of integrity relates to her physical state as well. For example, when the other mother tries to caress her hair, Coraline forbids it: "Don't do that" (42). The other parents avert the topic from this unwelcome physical approach to the more neutral area of "how are you?", and then, when encouraged by Coraline's "It's much more interesting than at home" (43), announce that Coraline could stay with them forever, if only she would let the other mother change her eyes:

[O]n the kitchen table was a spool of black cotton, and a long silver needle, and, beside them, two large black buttons. "I don't think so," said Coraline. "Oh, but we want you to," said her other mother. "We want you to stay. And it's just a little thing" ... Coraline knew that when grown-ups told you something wouldn't hurt it almost always did... "I'm going now," said Coraline (43-44)

I suggest that Coraline is individual and independent as a person, not depending on somebody else's expectations. As I argued above she is astonishingly mature for a child, as with the aforementioned horrid encounter with the other father: "Well...at least you didn't jump out at me" (108): this comment puts well into words her sarcastic abilities; Coraline is able to maintain distance between herself and the horrors she faces.

The novel begins with exploratory results: “Coraline discovered the door a little while after they moved into the house” (1), and if this novel would be bludgeoned into one word, I suggest that it would be *exploration*; the word which is so frequently employed in its many forms that I use it in the subheading as well. She even insists in dangerous circumstances: “I’m an explorer” (13, 113). The ability to research the world does appear not only in distinct examples she collects, as when Coraline studies her environment, but in actions as well, which describe her interests, as when Coraline is put into a closet for punishment:

Somewhere inside her Coraline could feel a huge sob welling up. And then she stopped it, before it came out. She took a deep breath and let it go. She put out her hands to touch the space in which she was imprisoned... One wall was glass... running her hands over every surface that she could reach, feeling for doorknobs or switches or concealed catches... and found nothing (79)

Coraline’s abilities to gather facts help her draw conclusions, as she later says in the cupboard that “She [the other mother] won’t keep me in the dark forever... She brought me here to play games... I’m not much of a challenge here in the dark” (84-85). As for Coraline’s theoretical work, I suggest that when she is planning where to find her parents and the lost children, she has a hypothesis of the other world: “There was no point... in exploring the garden and the grounds: they didn’t exist; they weren’t real... All that was real was the house itself” (91-92), which was a valid assessment of the situation.

Coraline is thus presented as the picture of a scholar. She does not avoid practical work, and she is interested in collecting results by herself as well, not only relying on facts presented by others. And Coraline often wants to do her discoveries by herself: “There was also a well... Miss Spink and Miss Forcible made a point of telling Coraline how dangerous the well was, and they warned her to be sure she kept away from it. So Coraline set off to explore for it, so that she knew where it was, to keep away from it properly...” (3). However, her resources are not only academic, because she can maneuver as well: Coraline can resort to trickery, as many other female role models presented in this thesis. For example, in order to coax information from the other mother, Coraline says “Everyone knows that a soul is the same size as a beach ball” ... She was hoping the other mother would say something like “Nonsense, they’re the size of ripe onions” ... but the other mother simply smiled...” (92). Another, and even better example of her cunning is at the end of the novel, when Coraline deceives the other mother to open the door to the real world:

The other mother ... pulled open the door, revealing a corridor behind it, dark and empty. “You’re wrong! You *don’t* know where your parents are, do you?”

... “Now... you’re going to stay here for ever and always” ... “No”, said Coraline... And, hard as she could, she threw the black cat toward the other mother. It yowled and landed on the other mother’s head, claws flailing, teeth bared, fierce and angry... Coraline ran for the door (129, emphasis original)

The cat Coraline throws at the other mother is one indicator of her helpers, or guides, as aforementioned Annis Pratt’s theory calls them (1981: 139). She is not alone in her quest as she has many helpers, which involve fellow creatures, along with special objects. I examine these helpers more in the following paragraph.

“*Don’t go through the door*” (CO: 14, emphasis original) warn the pet mice, whom one of Coraline’s neighbours keeps. These mice are Coraline’s first guides. After this mice’s message Coraline meets somebody, who is more informative: “Good afternoon,” said the cat... “It was sensible of you to bring protection. I’d hang on it, if I were you” (33, 36). Although it is not explicitly defined what the cat means with these words, I suggest that the helper here is the talisman which the other neighbour gives to Coraline. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible foresee dangers in tea leaves in Coraline’s cup, with the result that Miss Spink gives Coraline the magical object, saying “It might help... They’re good for bad things, sometimes” (19). It is a stone, which has a hole: one can look through it. Indeed, the talisman is useful. For example, when Coraline began her search for the stolen souls and looked through this magical tool she noticed that “something glinted on the floor, something the color of an ember in a nursery fireplace” (95). Guided by the light she finds the first soul she is about to rescue. Another kind of talisman is the key to the barred door; the key which opens the door to the real world beyond. Coraline succeeds to seize it from the other mother, the key which she “hung around her neck... and hid the key under her T-shirt” (138), as for safekeeping. This key plays a crucial role in the final fight between Coraline and the other mother. First, Coraline lures the other mother to appear by ostentatious key dangling, secondly announcing to her neighbours that the key is “part of my game” (154), finishing the temptation with another decoy key wagging. Coraline’s stratagem is successful; what is left of the other mother tries to steal the key with the result that she is expelled from the real world. Coraline has even more intangible assistance. The children, whose souls the other mother has stolen, helped Coraline use the stone talisman. When Coraline was quarantined in the closet she heard a whisper “Look through the stone” (85). Additionally, in the penultimate battle when she tries to force the door closed:

Shut! she thought. Then she said, out loud, “Come on, *please*.” And she felt the door begin to move, to pull closed, to give against the phantom wind. Suddenly she was aware of other people in the corridor with her... “Help me, please, she said... The other people in the corridor – three children, two adults – were

somehow too insubstantial to touch the door. But their hands closed about hers, as she pulled on the big iron door handle, and suddenly she felt strong (131-132, emphases original)

I suggest that the thing which she finally drives away is possessive. This is due to the fact that one of Coraline's phantom friends says: "She stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark" (82). Hence the use of the concept of exorcism is vital, which is also the reason for using it in the subheading of this section.

However, in spite of the pompous word *exorcism* I use above, I suggest that Coraline's aims in life seem to be quite ordinary for a child and involve having enough nourishment for body and soul. I have not found any instances of grandiosity in the novel. However, I do suggest that Coraline has a very lively mind, a statement I give reasons for with the examples of her explorations, be they imagined or real. For example, "[Coraline] was daydreaming that she was exploring the Arctic, or the Amazon rain forest, or Darkest Africa..." (65). In the other mother's world while wandering outside, Coraline finds herself in a peculiar fog, which creates some kind of an un-place. It was as if she "was walking into nothing. *I'm an explorer*, thought Coraline to herself. *And I need all the ways out of here that I can get. So I shall keep walking*" (70 – 71, emphases original). Coraline seems to enjoy mental stimulation as well. When Miss Spink and Miss Forcible warn Coraline of impending disaster, she thinks that danger may lead to adventures. And when Coraline met the other mother for the first time and was invited to play with her rats, Coraline "was quite looking forward to it. This was turning out to be a very interesting day after all" (27-28). After she succeeded to escape the other mother's world into her real world, Coraline stated that "Nothing... had ever been so *interesting*" (135, emphasis original). Naturally, she wants to have her normal life back, to save her parents, and to liberate lost souls at the same time, but I argue that the examples above indicate Coraline's characteristic need for mental incentives.

I suggest that aforementioned examples of Coraline's life may even encourage readers to learn new things and to be persistent. For example, when "her mother had taken the training wheels off Coraline's bicycle... with all the cuts and scrapes (her knees had had scabs on top of scabs) she had had a feeling of achievement. She was learning something, doing something she had not known how to do" (120). I find the word *achievement* worth stressing when discussing Coraline's wish for information. In spite of the difficulties one may face when endeavouring to achieve something that is not easy at the beginning of a process, later, as one

masters the skill, such as reading and writing, the sense of accomplishment may be far greater than when one does simpler things. Thus, I argue that as a role model, Coraline is incredibly positive.

My assessment of Coraline's role model status easily justifies me to interpret her heroic status as positive. However, this argument is not only based on previous descriptions of her character and actions, but also on an anecdote Coraline tells her friend, the cat, about herself and her father, when they accidentally disturbed the peace of a wasp nest:

“Coraline – run away. Up to the hill. Now!” ... “And while I was running up the hill, my dad stayed and got stung, to give me time to run away. His glasses had fallen off when he ran... And he said that wasn't brave of him... just standing there and being stung... It wasn't brave because he wasn't scared: it was the only thing he could do. But going back again to get his glasses, when he knew the wasps were there, when he was really scared. *That* was brave... Because... when you're scared but you still do it anyway, *that's* brave” (55-57, emphases original)

After this story, the cat asks quite calmly, if this is the reason why Coraline returns to the other mother's world: in order to rescue her parents, as some kind of *quid pro quo*: “Because your father once saved you from wasps?”. Coraline dismisses this comment as “silly... I'm going back for them because they are my parents. And if they noticed I was gone I'm sure they would do the same for me” (57). Indeed, Coraline often acts in spite of fears and horrors, as when she is defying the other parents: “You don't frighten me... I want my parents back” (59). Additionally, at the beginning of the final battle between Coraline's real world and the other mother's world, Coraline was “dangling and swinging the black key on its piece of string as she walked... She tried to whistle, but nothing happened, so she sang out loud instead... and her voice hardly trembled at all...” (154-155). I suggest that when discussing heroism, the quotes above which indicate actions in spite of fear may be as great as deeds which are done with unflinching bravery, or, to put it boldly, even more impressive.

Coraline reestablishes the equilibrium of this novel; she challenges the other mother: “How do I know you'll keep your word?” asked Coraline. “I swear it, said the other mother. I swear it on my own mother's grave” (90-91). However, when Coraline asked if the mother of the other mother is really buried, she had as an answer “Oh yes... I put her in there myself. And when I found her trying to crawl out, I put her back” (91). After this Coraline demands that the other mother should endanger something else, and the other mother promises “My right hand... I swear on that” (90 – 91). And it seemed, for a while, that Coraline had restored everything in order. The door dividing the parallel worlds is closed.

However, there still was something scary in Coraline's world: "Five-footed, crimson-nailed, the color of bone. It was the other mother's right hand. It wanted the black key" (145). Soon the form of the hand emerges again, this time in tea leaves in Coraline's cup. Additionally, Hamish, the dog of Misses Spink and Forcible is horrified and wounded by something. After this tea-and-Hamish-episode Coraline decides that she must add the final correcting touch to the situation, and she starts scheming. I suggest that the finale between Coraline and the other mother is quite paradoxical, referring to my earlier argument about Coraline not having any grandiose tendencies, because the result is that she saves everything. At the end of the novel, after her adventures, Coraline reflects that "Normally, on the night before the first day of the term... [she] was apprehensive and nervous. But, she realized, there was nothing left about school that could scare her anymore" (159). I therefore suggest that Coraline has managed to turn the horrors she has confronted into victories, either great or small.

6.1.2 The other mother: Silence of the lambs for children

Coraline looked at her own reflection in a mirror, in an empty corridor, and suddenly "A hand touched her shoulder... The other mother stared down at Coraline with big black button eyes" (74-75). I argue that this clearly alludes to vampires, which do not have any use for mirrors, and that this allegory of vampires befits the picture of the other mother. She punishes Coraline for being disobedient and executes the retribution by imprisonment in a closet. After she released Coraline "The other mother looked healthier than before: there was a little blush to her cheeks, and her hair was wriggling like lazy snakes on a warm day. Her black button eyes seemed as if they had been freshly polished" (87), as if tormenting a minor was invigorating even to her looks, as it were some kind of psychological blood sucking. Furthermore, eyes can symbolise "the windows of the soul" (ARAS 2010: 564), and the other mother's eyes are mutilated. Thus, I suggest that it is quite characteristic for the other mother to say to Coraline with respect to the imprisonment "For your own good. Because I love you. To teach you manners ... You may come out when you've learned some manners... And when you're ready to be a loving daughter" (77). I suggest that a banality, such as "This hurts more me than you" would complete her excuses.

When Coraline is about to escape the other mother's world, she notices that "The other mother did not look anything at all like her own mother... [She] was huge—her head almost brushed the ceiling—and very pale, the color of a spider's belly. Her hair writhed and twined about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives..." (126). I suggest that her infernal looks

are completed by the fundamental wrongness of her being; after the cat has wounded the other mother “Blood ran from the cuts on her white face—not red blood but a deep, tarry black stuff” (129). As mentioned above, I suggest that the solutions Gaiman has made with descriptions of Coraline’s and the other mother’s looks are quite extraordinary; there are hardly any comments on Coraline’s appearance, and the other mother’s visage is quite explicitly hellish.

I suggest that in the other mother’s case her looks do not lie, but rather they complete her character. She is evil, greedy, possessive, horrible, and a bad loser. The aforementioned Coraline’s imprisonment is one example of her evilness. This closet-training has a bad reputation as a disciplinary method in literature, for example in Stephen King’s *Carrie*, first published in 1974 (2011: 56–57, 94–96, 208–210) and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* saga, for example, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, first published in 1997 (2004: 26, 42, 66, 331–332). As for her greediness and possessiveness, she collects treasures, and treasures for her are real people. The aforementioned phantom children are not enough for her; she wants more: “she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the other mother’s button eyes, Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more” (104). The other mother embodies horror: “She carefully picked out a particularly large and black beetle, pulled off its legs... and popped the beetle into her mouth. She crunched it happily” (76). The other mother’s tendencies to play unfair games is testified by one of her creatures, the thing in the cellar, formerly known as the other father: “She’s not best pleased... You’ve put her quite out of sorts. And when she gets out of sorts, she takes it out on everybody else. It’s her way” (109). Although the aforementioned examples are mostly related to the fantasy genre, I suggest that some of them can be criticized in everyday terms as well, as with the examples of the other mother wanting to mutilate Coraline’s eyes. I argue that with this example Gaiman shows great psychological insight when creating the other mother as some kind of stereotype of a dependent parent, who would not allow independence and integrity for their offspring; the parent needing the child to become a picture of themselves.

I suggest that the other mother’s attitude was at first seductive, with delicious food, interesting pets and toys and “windup angels that fluttered around the bedroom like startled sparrows; books with pictures that writhed and crawled and shimmered; little dinosaur skulls that chattered their teeth as she passed” (28), secondly real *divide et impera*, when she showed Coraline her parents, as if in a film, chattering cheerily about the easiness of childless life: “Now we can do all the things we always wanted to do, like go abroad, but were prevented from doing by having a little daughter” (60), then coercive, as with the closet episode. I find the other

mother's attitude quite unfair with her foods and things, as if she is urging her victims want to stay in her world, and then afterwards, if they complained, she could dismiss reclamations with some kind of "Well... this is just what you wanted".

This *seduction* is easily paired with *persuasion*, which is according to my interpretation one of the other mother's main devices: "We're here... we're ready to love you and play with you and feed you and make your life interesting" (58). The last word of this quotation leads to other means available for the other mother: magic, which may be hardly surprising, when analysing a fantasy novel. The other mother has gained somehow information about Coraline's interests, and employs the knowledge with a pinch of travesty-wise caring, as when she releases Coraline from the closet: "You needed to be taught a lesson, but we temper our justice with mercy here... Cheese omelette. Your favorite" (87-88). However, the other mother has many other assets as well, for example, rats as assistants. Coraline's friend, the black cat explains that "the rats in this place are all spies for her. She uses them as her eyes and hands..." (73): I suggest that these servants of the other mother render her character even uglier, because as presented above, heroines often have guides (Pratt 1981: 139-143), but this antagonist has rodents as spies. The other mother's magic is quite overwhelming; for example, she has an influence on her whole world: "her voice did not just come from her mouth. It came from the mist, and the fog, and the house, and the sky... You know that I love you" (CO: 104). I suggest that along with the narrative's progress to the horror, the other mother's deeds grow nastier.

It is questionable whether the other mother has a life of her own: it is as if her existence is built on a weak ground. She does say that she wishes to have a family, albeit with the addition "For ever and always" (44), which is another example of her possessiveness, and I argue of some kind of codependency. Her queendom should stay hermetic thus she is afraid of foreign influence, which might be brought by intruders. Coraline tells her friend, the cat that "she's fixing all the gates and the doors... to keep you out..." and the cool cat answers "She may *try*" (73, emphasis original). The other mother calls the cat *vermin*, and from her point of view this definition is accurate, because the cat helps Coraline escape the other mother's world, which may be the beginning of her queendom's collapse. One of the closeted children says "A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be..." and the other recites "Hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow" (84), which renders the children's fate even sadder. I suggest that the latter quotation echoes the famous last speech of King Lear; "Never, never, never, never, never!" (Shakespeare 2012: 1339): quite appropriate for a children's tragedy. Additionally, I argue that this repetition of *hollow* may not only describe the children's existence, but it also may depict the other mother's

nature, which is parasitic; as one of the lost children says: “She kept us, and she fed on us, until now we’ve nothing left of ourselves, only snakeskins and spider husks” (CO, 83). One of the laws of physics reflects well my interpretation of the other mother’s aims in: “Nature abhors a vacuum”; *ergo*, the emptiness must be filled, and in this case with somebody else’s lives.

As for the other mother’s role model status and heroism, I suggest that they could be defined by terms of photography: with *negative* as “showing an image that, in black-and-white photography, has a reversal of tones” (Hanks 1989: 1029), in contrast to Coraline’s *positive* as an “image whose colours or tones correspond to those of the original subject” (1989: 1197). Of course more usual denotations of these words are valid here as well, but I suggest that this quite total juxtaposition could be useful. The other mother is Coraline’s antagonist, but the approach I suggest renders the character of the other mother even more dreadful: even the other mother’s picture is reversed. I find the other mother as a role model a bad example and her heroic status damaging, beyond zero; something with which adults can frighten naughty children. I argue that the other mother’s nature is an antithesis to Coraline’s character.

Perhaps the other mother is nulled and voided at the end of the novel. As mentioned above, the other mother likes games, albeit she plays unfairly. So Coraline suggests a game: if she wins, she and her parents and the souls of the closet children will be free. However, Coraline insists that the other mother would keep her promise through something: “My right hand” said the other mother, holding it up. She wagged the long fingers slowly, displaying the clawlike nails. “I swear on that”” (CO, 91). This predator’s hand is an important motif, because towards the end of the novel the other mother’s evil spirit continues its existence in her hand, which

[C]licked and scuttled ... running crablike on its too-many tapping, clicking, scurrying feet... A white hand with crimson fingernails leapt from the window ledge onto a drainpipe and was immediately out of sight. There were deep gouges in the glass on the other side of the window... The hand, running high on its fingertips... stood there for a moment, like a crab tasting the air, and then it made one triumphant, nail-clacking leap... (145, 150, 156)

Coraline does lure the hand, which represents the other mother in the real world, into the abyss of their well (157). However, according to the cat the other mother’s home has existed for a long time, and whether she “Made it, found it—what’s the difference?” (73). The greater part of the other mother was forced to stay in her own side of the door, only the aforementioned hand entered Coraline’s world. However, the hand fell into the well holding the key to the dividing door, so there might be something waiting there, beyond the ordinary.

Table 8, *Coraline*, Coraline and the other mother

	Coraline , the protagonist	the other mother , the antagonist
Looks	Ordinary?	Continuum from horror-ish to sheer horror
Character	Intelligent, independent	Infernal
Attitude	Inquisitive	Insistent
Actions	Field work; action	Persuasion, magic
Target	Avoid boredom	parasitical
Role model	Positive	Negative
Heroism?	Positive	Negative
Outcome	Saving the world, growing	Definitely maybe deleted
Motto	“Astonish, stimulate, surprise me!”	“It lets the buttons on, or it gets the closet again”

7 Conclusion

George Orwell writes that “All issues are political issues...” (2013: 15) in his *Politics and the English Language*, first published in 1945, and the famous slogan of the second wave feminism in 1970 was “personal is political” (Selden et al 2017: 114). I agree with those declarations. My thesis is political as well. I argue that it matters how female characters are built in children’s literature, as well as how they are represented in other arenas. Women constitute “one half of the human species...” (2010: 45) as Mary Wollstonecraft, one of our pioneer feminists declares in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in 1792. I suggest that if girls and women are encouraged only to stay decorative, it is quite easy for them to enter the never-ending beauty contest. On the other hand, if there are examples of females who are independent agents, it may be easier for us to imagine more multifaceted careers than being “the toy of man, his rattle”, in Mary Wollstonecraft’s words (2010: 65). As for the feminist slogan about personal being political as well, I remember well some topics from my girlhood years. There were statements that a married woman should take her husband’s surname, or that a woman could not be a priest, or marital rape should not be criminalised. Fortunately, I found better kinds of guidelines than those reactionary principles. As mentioned above, there are subversive female characters in the history of children’s literature, for example Pippi by the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren.

Sanna Marin, the current Prime Minister of Finland gave a speech in the United Nations’ General Assembly hall on the 6th of March 2020, on the International Women’s Day. I suggest that some of her statements can be connected to the themes of this thesis: “I want to pay tribute to all strong women politicians and leaders. . . who have pioneered in advancing the rights of women and girls. Without their hard work and without role models, I would not stand before you today” (Valtioneuvosto 2020). Even though she may refer only to the powers that be, I suggest that the role models she mentions can be cultural as well, as in literature. Perhaps growing girls would rather immerse themselves in political programs of Gwendolen in *Charmed Life* or Door in *Neverwhere* than collect inspiration from Margaret Thatcher’s memoirs? Or rather have Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* as their paragon than Angela Merkel? Or perhaps Coraline’s curiosity in *Coraline* is more significant than Marie Curie’s?

Literature can give readers various points of view, and empathising with characters’ fates may present new ways to consider one’s own real-life narratives and targets. Along with emotional insights, I argue that readers may nourish their brains in cognitive aspects as well, through learning by characters’ examples how to conduct one’s life, and even how not to

conduct one's life. I argue that for those of us who have not had perfect circumstances to grow up in, these role models can be crucial for understanding various possibilities in life, such as realising gender beyond constrictive traditions. As Prime Minister Marin continues in her speech, "realizing gender equality and inclusion will free us all from the stereotypes that restrict us and set limits on what we can be and achieve" (Valtioneuvosto 2020). While my main focus in this thesis has been on the role models, such harmful stereotypes are also discussed in my paper.

As I mentioned above, feminist literary studies can use many theories, depending on the focus of the analysis, such as gendered language or effects of economic circumstances (Paul 1987: 155-156). For example, it could be rewarding to use psychoanalytic approach for characters such as Gwendolen and Hunter; why is that girl so devilish and does that woman have to kill in order to feel alive? Or apply Marxist literary theory to analyse further Door and Anaesthesia. For example, is Door entitled to revenge the wrongs because of her aristocratic background? Or does the doubled oppression Anaesthesia suffers from, first because of her gender, and second because of her low social status render her disposable? However, my main starting point is feminist criticism. The theory suggests rather a continuum than bipolar dichotomies (Eagleton 1996: 146). The continuum can exist, for example, between genders and qualities, questioning assumptions of stark opposites. Instead of assessing females as weak and emotional, and males strong and smart, there is a possibility to see beyond restrictions. Additionally, "the notion of authority or truth", which is often challenged in poststructuralism and postmodernism can be useful for feminist thought (Selden et al 2017: 114). However, theoretical frameworks may not be solely responsible for questioning truths. Alison Lurie argues that "Time and social change mute the revolutionary message of some children's classics". She suggests that today Jo March, one prominent character in Louisa Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), may not be as shocking with her bohemian lifestyle anymore (Lurie 1990: 13). I suggest that there is in *Fire and Hemlock* another example how time and social change may alter some messages. However, I argue that this time the message – concerning the relationship with adult men and young girls – is not muted by time, but on the contrary is made louder than it was before.

The subtheme of romance emerges often in *Fire and Hemlock*. However, there are some instances in the story which insinuate that adult males may be interested in young girls in an inappropriate way, although not necessarily sexually. When Polly is nineteen, she reminisces Mr. Bragge's behaviour towards her when she was a little girl, and she notices that he might

have been a little too friendly (FH: 335). At the end of the novel Polly accuses Thomas of using her: “You took me over as a child to save your own skin” (409). When the girls are fifteen, Polly receives a letter from her adult friends, with the post scriptum “Ed says bring a friend of yours for him. He loves blind dates” (293). Along with the slodging, this is another topic which may be deemed controversial today. Fortunately, there are in the novel adults who consider the girls’ young age and try to protect them against unwanted attention. For example, Granny is concerned about Polly and Thomas’s relationship, and along with that particular anxiety goes her fear of strange men advancing young girls. I suggest that flirting between generations and games of city guerilla wars may have today different messages. Our world has changed from the time of the first publication of *Fire and Hemlock* (1985), and if the novel were written today, it might handle aforementioned topics differently. If I could recommend a subject for further papers, it would be the lost innocence of love and war in *Fire and Hemlock*.

Another subject for further studies could be to scrutinise how the male figures are treated in the four novels. Because my thesis concerns female characters, it is beyond this paper to examine how boys and men are built as characters in *Charmed Life*, *Fire and Hemlock*, *Neverwhere*, and *Coraline*. However, it could be educational to analyse boys and men by the same traits as I examine girls and women, perhaps the most significant question being if males are introduced for readers primarily by their looks.

I suggest that this thesis could have many visual forms. The first one is linear, describing the continuum often suggested by feminist criticism, denying stark opposites and emphasising the fluidity of many characteristics. However, a diamond could be a very practical outline in respect of this paper: out of a single question grows a larger analysis, in order to grow a smaller argument. Or, alternatively, a circle, in which my thesis starts with the novel for children, *Charmed Life*, then expanding its view to the narrative for younger adults in *Fire and Hemlock*, then moving on for the more matured readers in *Neverwhere*, and finally, returning to *Coraline*, which is a fantasy-horror for younger ones. However, I suggest for my thesis the visual form of the spiral. Its origin is in the past, perhaps forgotten, because of oral traditions of storytelling. Furthermore, its future cannot be prophesied. I also hope that this thesis broadens the spiral in the academic sense. As mentioned above, the concept of children’s literature is quite new, but I assume that the sphere of the genre and academic studies of it may expand, because our world has grown smaller, more multicultural, and hopefully more tolerant for different voices and role models.

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