

Maturing the Old: Sophie's Journey towards Self-Recognition in *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones

English and German Philology and Translation and Interpreting Department

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AUTHOR

BEATRIZ SAN JUAN GARCÍA

TUTOR

RAÚL MONTERO GILETE

Abstract

The proliferation of the Children's Literature novels by Diana Wynne Jones has converted her into a prominent figure in the fantastic genre. Although several scholars have researched diverse aspects of Jones's narratives, there may still be approaches to adopt. Thus, the aim of this dissertation is to analyse the book *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) by the abovementioned author and examine the protagonist Sophie's transition from having a self-imposed personality to finding her true identity. To that end, we will firstly examine the biography of the author. Secondly, we will briefly explain the categorisation of Fantasy, followed by a contextualisation of this literary genre in the second half of the 20th century in comparison with Jones's own standpoint as an avant-garde writer. Thirdly, we will focus on the aforesaid novel in relation to the importance of names, the opposition of fate and free will, and finally, Sophie's search of her original identity. Lastly, we will provide a summary of the main conclusions we have previously come to regarding the entire journey.

Key words: Fantasy, Children's Literature, loss, identity, Diana Wynne Jones.

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“Everyone has to trick him/herself into doing what they think is against their nature.”

Diana Wynne Jones

1. Introduction

The renowned author Neil Gaiman accurately described the authorial style of Diana Wynne Jones in the following words: “She makes you work as a reader. [...] You just [have] to be paying attention to everything she [has written], and to understand that if there [is] a word on the paper, it [is] there for a reason” (*Reflections* 6¹). This comment is directly observable in the novel entitled *Howl’s Moving Castle* that we will analyse in this dissertation.

Howl’s Moving Castle was originally published in New York in the second half of the 20th century. Despite the imposed rules in the fantastic genre at the time, Jones managed to maintain her avant-garde mindset on writing literature for children. She became the prolific author of more than forty books, all of which have had a positive response from scholars and readers. The successful novel *Howl’s Moving Castle* became the *Trilogy of Howl*, because it was expanded to *Castle in the Air* (1990) and *The House of Many Ways* (2008). The three books challenge the basis of Fantasy since they follow Jones’s own principles instead. As a result, some scholars such as Farah Mendlesohn or Charles Butler have researched different aspects of her narratives. Owing to the extent of the possible content to analyse, we will focus on the portrayal of Sophie as a round character. More explicitly, we will examine Sophie’s self-imposed identity as a hatter and the journey of transition she experiences: From losing –and consequently, grieving– that latter personality, to finding her inner identity instead.

The aim of this paper is to justify that Sophie cannot be happy until she fully uncovers her true self, which will be done by explaining the change towards maturity Sophie undergoes along the pages. We will firstly review the author’s biography since I believe it is fundamental to understand what shaped her writing style, and we will retrieve most of this information from Jones’s own book (see footnote 1) because it is the most revealing insight into her life. This style will be further analysed by the contextualisation of Jones’s literary period, so as to be conscious of the reasons for adopting her own writing

¹ *Reflections: On the magic of Writing* (2012) is a compilation of Jones’s speeches and essays, which includes two introductions by Neil Gaiman and Charles Butler. She converted these pieces of writing into a collection before her death in 2011. All biographical information appeared has been taken from the book, thus page numbers in brackets will serve as references if the matter has only been said once in her book.

principles. Thirdly, we will concentrate on *Howl's Moving Castle* and examine the abovementioned journey in three parts: The importance of names as a forecast of our thesis, Sophie's idea of fate as the background leading to her change; and finally, Sophie's search of identity by comparing her loss with Kübler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief. Lastly, we will provide a conclusion on this paper by summarizing the main aspects taken into consideration. We will follow the 8th version of the MLA referencing style used in literature papers.

2. Diana Wynne Jones

We would like to start this part of our analysis by presenting a quote that the Japanese producer Hayao Miyazaki conveyed in his film adaptation of the book *Howl's Moving Castle* by the prolific Children's Literature writer Diana Wynne Jones: "They say that the best blaze brightest, when circumstances are at their worst." (1:38:53)

We truly believe these words capture Jones's essence mainly because her authorial voice indeed awakened in the midst of several adverse circumstances. However, what has made of her an outmost influence within the speculative fiction genre is, among others, how subtly but precisely she conveyed the idea of empowerment at any difficult moment. As opposed to the first half of the 20th century –known for its overtly didactic and moralizer content– (*Reflections* 97), she regarded Fantasy as a tool to broaden our imagination since, as Jones points out in *Reflections: On the Magic of Writing* (2012): "It [imagination] means thinking things through, solving them, or hoping to do so, and being just distant enough to be able to laugh at things that are normally painful" (100). Let us revise her life closer in order to better understand her mindset.

Diana Wynne Jones was born the 16th of August in the 1934 London, England. As the first daughter of the educationalist marriage Richard Aneurin Jones and Marjorie Jackson, one would suppose she lived in a caring and intellectually rich environment. However, her childhood was far from ideal: Even if she encountered well-known classics such as Homer's *Iliad* (VIII BC) at an early age, and became impressively learned on Greek mythology (e.g.: *Tanglewood Tales* (1853)) and folktales (e.g.: all of Grimm's) (*Reflections* 52), this literary background was rather imposed to her by her selfish father. Such minimum expenditure on his three daughters is evident, for instance, once he bought a cheap collection of Ransome's works but only gave his three daughters one book to share each year (*Reflections* 162). As Diana Wynne Jones herself recounts, the parental

behaviour the adults of her nuclear family showed was completely neglectful, as Jones and her two sisters were “put to live in an unheated outhouse away across a yard [...] largely forgotten” (*Reflections* 92) and their clothes were retrieved from the orphanage, to name a few. Moreover, what her parents did care to deny their children was any range of books other than what Diana used to call “Goddy books” due to their manipulative and didactic content, books regarded as “Good for You”. Needless to say, these girls avoided those texts; so as the oldest sister Jones was, she began a new role as an imaginative storyteller in order to develop their imagination².

When Diana Wynne Jones was five years old, the Second World War had just begun and her world was turned upside down. Her previously healthy neighbours started showing mad behaviours, for example some used to “dance in the street” or crush ceramics (*Reflections* 161-162). Due to that war’s life-threatening conditions, she moved to her preacher grandfather’s house in Wales³. However, she returned home because several family members were also interested in escaping war. Jones was then transferred to a house in Lake District, although it was still unsafe owing to a German pilot hiding in the mountains nearby (*Reflections* 75). This house had several John Ruskin paper designs, some of which Jones carelessly drew on due to a lack of school supplies. She realized writers were not machines when her new well-known neighbours Arthur Ransome and Bellatrix Potter complained about them as children (*Reflections* 75). In 1942, the eight-year-old Jones decided she wanted to be a writer and told so to her parents, who laughed at her because of her severe dyslexia. Nevertheless, she maintained this idea and progressively trained herself, until some four years later she wrote her first “ten-exercise book-long narrative” (*Reflections* 70) to feed the three sisters’ imagination. What Jones deduced from this handicapped experience was the need to have a clear mind-frame of the events before writing.

Diana Wynne Jones’s father once exchanged her sister’s doll’s house for three lessons of Greek for Diana. But eventually, it was her autodidactic instruction which resulted in her acceptance to university in Oxford. She was an undergraduate student of

² The three sisters became writers, which could be due to this book deprivation and their consequent literary thirst.

³ This biographical information could be directly related to *Howl’s Moving Castle*, since Howl also has Welsh roots and one of the castle’s doors leads to a house in Wales, where his disagreeable family lives. He visits them sometimes but always goes back home.

both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Albeit the former “hated lecturing [...] and giving his thoughts away” by refusing to address his students (*Reflections* 17), Jones was unmistakably interested in his style. Not only did she realize Tolkien relied on real sceneries for his works –the Oxfordian landscape, for instance– (*Reflections* 18) but she also concluded that she should benefit from her knowledge, so that her narrative would transmit authenticity even in imaginary worlds. As Jones indicated: “by writing of things which were home to him [Tolkien], he contrives to give the reader a sense of home and security too” (*Reflections* 18). Contrarily, the latter “pear-shaped man [...] with a rolling voice” named C. S. Lewis had a wide audience. Although he used theology, Jones could identify with his retrieval of knowledge from sources such as mythology and texts from the Middle Ages. She therefore acquired the notion that clarity is also essential to portray diverse thinking and emotions, instead of solely to the development of events: “you can invoke the whole range of human thought and feeling by beginning from one simple, clear scene” (*Reflections* 35).

Jones married the medievalist John Burrow and had three children. She started writing to be published in the sixties; a period which Jones believed had a shortage of funny and entertaining books both for children and their parents. So she took her childhood’s storyteller role and professionalized it. Once she was already a famous author, she used to visit schools so as to deliver speeches, even though they did not usually “repay” her entirely (*Reflections* 165). Nonetheless, there was one time that did favour Jones: She went to the Midlands to talk in a town hall and a young boy suggested her to write a book entitled “The Moving Castle”. Jones wrote it down so that the idea would develop in her imagination. Unfortunately, when she was finally working on that book, she was unable to find the boy’s details to contact him. Despite this, in 1986 she published a book called *Howl’s Moving Castle* and acknowledged him on the first page. This memory is the perfect example of Jones’s original literary practice: She never plans but lets a book find itself until the first draft. Jones explained it in the following words:

A book, for me, is ready to be written when all the conflated elements of the initial idea come together to produce three things. First, [...] a sort of flavour that has to start on the first page and will dictate the tone and style and the words used, as well as the sort of action to take place. [...] The second factor [is that] [...] I know how the story begins and how it ends, and [...] in great detail, at least two scenes from somewhere in the middle. [...] And I deliberately do not ask more [...] so that the book has room to

keep its flavour and pursue its own logic. The third factor is [...] that a book shouts to me that it is ready and needs to be written NOW. (*Reflections* 68)

This was a fruitful method which enabled Jones to write more than forty books before her death in 2011. Additionally, it rewarded her various times with the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize (1978) (*Reflections* 33), two Mythopoeic Awards (1996, 1999), and a World Fantasy Award for a life's achievement in 2007 (Sfadb 2015).

3. Context: Fantasy Literature

3.1. Categorisation of Fantasy

I believe it is important to examine the literary genre at hand in order to understand its connection to a specific author. Thus, we will now delve into the classification of Fantasy so that we can relate it to Jones's own conceptions of writing afterwards. *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*⁴ (1997) adequately defines "Fantasy" as the following:

A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms. (n.p.)

Despite its apparent simplicity, this explanation of Fantasy conveys deep meaning of what the genre actually represents. These measured words allude to two types of fantasies: It can either be located in our world but have unimaginable courses of action according to our reason, or in a completely visionary world which follows its own plausible laws. However, the classification of Fantasy has evolved into at least four types, although the number may vary among different scholars.

According to Russell's study in *Literature for Children: A Short Introduction* (2014), the first concurred kind is known as "Animal Fantasy" and refers to a fantastic world where we can recognize human traits in animals, such as the competence to feel, reason or talk (209). One example of this is *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Grahame⁵. His second type of Fantasy is "Toy Fantasy" (210), which also appears in Montero's

⁴ Diana Wynne Jones was a contributor to the writing of this encyclopaedia, along with Gaiman or Langford, among others.

⁵ Diana Wynne Jones was allowed to read the book but prohibited the chapter called "Piper at the Gates of Dawn" because of her mother's belief that it would affect her.

research (117); and involves a cherished toy becoming alive and able to talk, for instance *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883) by Collodi. The following kind is “The Enchanted Journey” (Russell 212), but the latter was also mentioned as “Magical Lands” by Montero (121). It comprises a character that begins a journey from their real world to a fantastic one, although the definition’s aforesaid unimaginable actions can only occur once they have entered this peculiar setting. Mendlesohn uses the term “portal-quest” to refer to this category (*Rhetorics* 15), of which *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by Baum is a suitable example. The next is probably the most studied and exploited type, known as “Epic Fantasy” (Russell 212), which contains a character’s search of some kind with a purpose in mind: To defeat the evil. Here we can find J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), a trilogy which caused Tolkien heavy criticism at first but which finally made of it a role model literature. Tolkien’s influence was so powerful that his characteristics became a set of fantastic rules. Diana Wynne Jones portrayed this closed subgenre in an ironic book entitled *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996). Montero also alludes in his thesis to Russell’s “Eccentric Characters and Tall Tales”, which requires a character from our real world to have magical powers (118), for instance *Pippi Longstocking* (1945). Contrarily, we can find the “Supernatural and Time-Shift Fantasy” (Russell 214) where ghosts in the former, or other supernatural elements in the latter, may be involved in the developing of the story, for example J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1998). If we follow Mendlesohn’s categorisation, this first book of the saga could also be considered to be an intrusive Fantasy due to fantastic elements entering and influencing the real world (*Rhetorics* 98), such as Dobby the elf’s visit to Harry Potter. However, Mendlesohn argues at the same time that there is another category, “Immersive Fantasy”, where the narrative directly occurs in an alternative world (*Rhetorics* 16). Through the main character we can discover how it functions, but since its readers are treated as part of that world, its peculiarities are shown rather than explained. *Howl’s Moving Castle* could be considered an immersive Fantasy, although Jones’s literature is hard to categorise. Lastly, “Science Fiction” uses real scientific principles and theories instead of magic in order to imagine a situation where they could be used (Russell 215), such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818).

3.2. Rules and criticism

As I have previously pointed out, Diana Wynne Jones's biography is essential to understand her overall mindset. Some life passages we have seen, for instance Jones's rejection of moralizer books, serve as examples of her nonconformist attitude towards life. Moreover, these rebellious ideas against external authorities would become so established that they influenced her literature as well. Jones's style projects a revolutionary originality that has led to other writers perceiving and commenting on it. Among others, Butler reasonably described Jones as "one of the most thoroughly transgressive writers around" (*Reflections* 10) and Rahn stated that Jones "sends seismic quivers through the foundations" (Mendlesohn's *Children's Literature* 13).

Since the late 1960s, Diana Wynne Jones has been made aware of several rules of Fantasy as a genre. However, she held some strong opinions about that type of literature and, thus, decided to use her own principles instead. One instance of such a divergent mentality was a speech in which she recalled Prometheus's statement from her book *The Homeward Bounders* (1981) that says: "there are no rules, only principles and natural laws" (*Reflections* 66). Let us revise those rules and how she justified her adjustments.

According to Jones, the Victorian tendency to write improving narratives was still a considerable influence from the 1970s to the 1990s (*Reflections* 6), although it is also popular nowadays. As Gaiman aptly summarizes, the popularity among publishers and instructors resided in "books in which the circumstances of the protagonist were, as much as possible, the circumstances of the readers, in the kind of fiction that was considered Good For You" (*Reflections* 6). Conversely, Jones opposed to this trend so that her books would focus on Fantasy as an enjoyable experience without being constantly reminded of one's issues. However, they still reflect a degree of realism so that, as we have previously quoted, the reader can use their imagination to fix things and be "distant enough to be able to laugh at them" (*Reflections* 100). One clear example of this is the fire demon Calcifer in *Howl's Moving Castle*, which does not allegorise neither the protagonist's nor the reader's inside demons. This idea is also disclosed by Le Guin in Beagle's *The Secret History of Fantasy* (2010), when she explains that "rational inexplicability and avoidance of point-to-point symbolism do not automatically imply moral irresponsibility or social irrelevance" (359). Le Guin also mentions that those who interpret everything by omitting their fantastic elements think "the spell is a spell only if it works immediately to heal or reveal" (Butler 360). Nevertheless, through my analysis of *Howl's Moving Castle*, we will see how magic

was imposed to Sophie, but she will indeed not learn she has magic until she finds who she is. Therefore, the protagonist will progressively follow her journey in an alternative world without using magic herself. Jones's realism resides in these insights into life.

Secondly, Jones recalls that cross-fertilisation in terms of genres was not perceived as appropriate for adolescent and adult literature (*Reflections* 63). Tolkien's influence on the "Heroic Quest" was expanded to "Immersive Fantasy" as well. In fact, Fantasy acquired some traits which became necessary for the genre afterwards. Consequently, editors would critique books with both Science Fiction and Fantasy characteristics, since those texts defied the critics' knowledge. For instance, one of Jones's editors pointed out that one of her books was not "like any adult speculative fiction [they] have ever read" because Jones was using those two aforesaid genres together (*Reflections* 30-31). In Jones's words, the issue is that "what people have found in previous stories are being used to govern what should be in future ones" (*Reflections* 66). Despite this burden, Children's Fantasy was the only category which allowed mixed features, and as in Butler's words Jones refused to be "confined in any generic box" (*Reflections* 8), she wrote diverse genres and modified others. Jones's alternative worlds, such as those in *Chestomanci's* books or her "strange loop" in *Hexwood* (*Reflections* 8), defy the complexity of imagination in comparison to various well-known authors, for example C. S. Lewis's works.

Another rule which was prevailing in the fantastic literary world was to explicitly tell the age of the characters. This may be related to the thought that Fantasy was for children, notion which Hartwell located to have been developing since the second half of the 19th century (Beagle 366). Additionally, many people of the first half of the 20th century –for instance Jones's grandfather– were certain that Fantasy and imagination could be harmful for one's psychological growth, owing to their assumption that children needed to be capable of facing an "unpleasant" adulthood (*Reflections* 87). This age issue was highlighted by the publishing of books such as C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, whose characters Peter and Susan grow older and can no longer enter that alternative world. This saga, along with many others (see *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* by Carroll; or Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904)), conveys the idea that people are only allowed to read Fantasy until they reach or surpass adolescence. Jones was against this mentality and consequently against specifying the age, a position she justified by saying that one can feel like a "fool" if as a mature person, they could see themselves in a younger character (*Reflections* 87).

Therefore, her principle was that omitting the age can express universality regardless of one's stage in life.

Lastly, there was a requirement that adults had to be portrayed as perfect. This may be connected to the previous idea of the time that adulthood meant leaving imagination behind due to Fantasy's supposed immaturity. Adults who could have flaws were preferred to be bad, and therefore not role-models. As Jones recalls, these imperfect adults who did wrong "had to be killed at the end of the book even if all they had done was purloin the family silver" (*Reflections* 87). Nevertheless, Jones's choice was to provide her fantastic books with plausible characters, whose behaviour could even be reproachable at times without ending their lives. Her books show how to deal with diverse people and situations without losing the fantastic element⁶.

As we have commented on, the English Fantasy from the 1960s onwards functioned according to several rules. Still, there were avant-garde authors who regarded these laws as avoidable suggestions and wrote in line with their own principles. Diana Wynne Jones is a distinct example of this insubordination, although others such as Joan Aiken or Susan Cooper (*Reflections* 63) have also influenced the fantastic advancements we can now perceive in the 21st century.

4. *Howl's Moving Castle*

Diana Wynne Jones is considered to be one of the most prolific authors of Children's Literature in Great Britain. Despite a number of critics she received for trying to innovate the fantastic genre at the beginning, she managed to publish one book per year, each with a favourable response from readers and scholars. Her book *Howl's Moving Castle* was adapted into a film by the well-known Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki in 2004. As we have explained beforehand, some fantasists do not intend to allegorise their narratives. However, Jones believed that "everything is there for a reason" (*Reflections* 6), so we will analyse the book without eliminating the fantastic from it because it plays an essential role to the story.

⁶ The characters in *Howl's Moving Castle* depict Jones's principle, since they show their flaws even if they are almost adults. For instance, Howl overreacts when his hair is tainted another colour.

The book revolves around a just-came-of-age girl named Sophie Hatter, who lives with her two sisters –Lettie and Martha– and step-mother in Market Chipping. This town is part of a whole alternative world in which magic is present. When Sophie’s father dies, her step-mother Fanny finds apprenticeships for them because she cannot deal with all expenses. However, Sophie will inherit the family’s hat shop, so she is told to stay home learning the trade. The action begins with the Witch of the Waste visiting the shop and mistakenly casting a spell on her. Consequently, Sophie is transformed into an old woman and leaves home to seek her fortune. Later on, she decides to enter Wizard Howl’s castle without permission –although he is thought to steal the hearts of girls– and becomes the cleaning lady. There she meets Howl, his apprentice Michael as well as his fire demon Calcifer. Sophie negotiates a bargain with Calcifer, which means Sophie will have to break the contract the fire demon is under, and the latter will break her spell, both before it is too late. Yet, as usually happens with magic, Sophie and Calcifer cannot tell the other what caused their situations unless they already have some information. In the end, Sophie discovers she is the one who can remove both bewitchments.

4.1. Importance of names

A common characteristic among mythologies is the meaning of names as a key to understand the whole narrative, since names provide information about the main characters even before the action starts. We know Diana Wynne Jones read literature classics such as Homer’s *Iliad* (VIII BC), as well as that she studied Greek before university (c.f. 2). Therefore, it would be reasonable to say that Jones’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* conveys this influence through its characters. For instance, the surname “Pendragon” alludes to King Arthur’s own surname, thus showing us the influence of previous literature on the book.

At the “III International Conference of the Inklings and the Western Imagination” (2017) by the University of the Basque Country, Dr. Eduardo Segura explained that names give each individual their identity, which is why some characters prefer not to say it to others so as not to lose a part of themselves. In Fantasy, it is crucial to be careful because unimagined creatures or magical entities could take advantage of it. In fact, Segura concisely analysed that “spell” means giving something a voice, so that “being under a spell” owing to some sort of curse implies becoming less of his/her essence, since the ability to express one’s voice has been compromised. This notion can be seen each time a character is bewitched and cannot tell others about their situation. Although he exemplified

it with Bilbo and the dragon Smaug's conversation⁷, it could also be directly applied to Jones's characters. In the book, Sophie learns that Howl is called different names depending on the area: "Haven't you noticed that he's Sorcerer Jenkin in Porthaven, and Wizard Pendragon in Kingsbury, as well as Horrible Howl in the castle?" (*Howl's Moving Castle* 112⁸). As Howl is always breaking hearts, he does not want to share his real identity. Nevertheless, he rejects the Witch of the Waste and consequently, the Witch curses him. One needs to be sure of themselves before inventing new identities, which is a trait Sophie lacks. As opposed to Howl, Sophie prefers to give her name to others: "I get by quite well with a plain name" (*Howl* 227). These words may not actually convey self-esteem but rather an insecurity and loneliness Sophie refuses to admit. This is observable when Howl alludes to the *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* by responding to Sophie: "We can't all be Mad Hatters" (*Howl* 227). The connection between Sophie and the Mad Hatter is not only evident in that they share the surname; but also owing to their expression of a negative self-image which is perceivable along the pages, mostly when they hide their low self-satisfaction behind their trades as hat sellers.

The name of the protagonist, Sophie Hatter, is significant to understand the journey she will embark on. Firstly, the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2017) says "Sophie" comes from the Greek word "Sophia", which could be translated as "wisdom" nowadays. Since Sophie has always been resigned to the hat trade, she has felt unable to develop her identity as someone other than a secluded hatter. Hence, the wisdom she will acquire throughout the book is knowledge about her and how to mature, which is our object of discussion. Secondly, the surname "Hatter" is associated with that first notion about Sophie's journey due to the symbolisation of "hats" and "heads" we will proceed to explain. The head of a person could be considered to be the top of the body, as if it were someone's ruling part in charge of everything connected to it. An example of this in current English is the noun phrase "the head of the department". Therefore, if an individual is hesitant about themselves and their strength, they will usually try to hide this insecurity somehow. In Sophie's case, this is clear every time she wears a hat herself "she tried each one on as she finished it" (*Howl* 15); or, for instance, when Howl modifies Donne's poem "The Sun

⁷ It is an extract from *The Hobbit* (1937) by J. R. R. Tolkien, where Smaug asks Bilbo who he is, to which Bilbo replies with riddles in order to avoid revealing his identity.

⁸ All references in brackets will now refer to pages in the novel *Howl's Moving Castle*, unless otherwise stated. The reference from the book will then appear as the shortened form *Howl*, while Jones's compilation will still be referenced as *Reflections*.

Rising” (1633) and describes her as “Busy old fool, unruly Sophie” (*Howl* 198). That is, Sophie unknowingly disguises her inside power and personality because she is unaware of them. The Witch of the Waste will indeed use this covered insecurity against Sophie by exposing it through a spell to transform her into an old lady, because the Witch uses “something that exists anyway and [turns] it round to a curse” (*Howl* 225).

Conversely, Wizard Howl is an indispensable character because he plays the role of a foil within the story. He is substantially Sophie’s opposite in order to highlight her traits as a person, so that Sophie can then discover herself by comparing both their behaviours. The narrative indicates that Howl’s name is actually a shortened form of “Howell”, which comes from his Scottish family (*Howl* 235). According to the Internet Surname Database (2007), “Howell” derives from the Scottish word “Hywel”, which would currently be “eminent” or “prominent”. On that account, Howl is someone who loves being conspicuous and the centre of attention, whereas Sophie is lengthily quite introverted and wants to pass unnoticed. Additionally, his shortened name “Howl” may also refer to the sound an animal, for instance a wolf, would make. As we will readily explain, this can forecast the consequence of longing power: Losing oneself and becoming a beast.

Through the previous analysis, we can state that Sophie’s journey will consist in discovering her identity and her hidden power. To this end, Sophie also encounters the Witch of the Waste, a character whose name Jones could have created by combining “the Wicked Witch of the West” from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) with the loaded word “waste”. The aforesaid wordplay conveys deep meaning about the relevance of this character in Sophie’s quest: Baum’s witch wants control so she looks for the silver shoes which will increase her magical powers. Similarly, Jones’s witch seeks to become empowered so she catches a falling star⁹ in order to strengthen her magic with the demon’s. However, this contract between a human and a demon eventually ruins the witch, because the fire demon progressively steals her identity. It would follow that the word “waste” as part of the name was an example of the consequences of that avarice towards life. Sophie will therefore learn she needs to accept herself, so that her unhappiness does not bring about her downfall. In fact, Sophie will rather avoid magic and

⁹ Falling stars die the moment they reach the ground, which is why they could agree to a human contract so as to live longer. This means they (e.g: Calcifer) will take the human’s heart to become fire demons, and thus they will be directly linked to the human they have bargained with (*Howl* 237).

act like any other human, and even when she finally discovers she has magical powers within herself, she will still act cautiously.

Ultimately, it is also through words like “moving castle” that we can identify the theme of one’s self-discovery. Castles have been related to the mind numerous times, for instance in Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), where there is a duality of available and locked rooms signifying one’s secrets and accessible information. In *Howl’s Moving Castle*, there is a moment when Howl’s castle fuses with Sophie’s house, which apart from showing how magic works, it may portray Sophie’s understanding of Howl’s behaviour as hers too: “They went through and out into the yard Sophie had known all her life. It was only half the size now, because Howl’s yard from the moving castle took up one side of it” (*Howl* 326). The appearance of windows could also reinforce the idea of becoming capable of changing, since light can come through the room. However, progress requires time to get accustomed to, which is detectable when Sophie sees the improved room and the narrator explains that “it made Sophie feel odder still when she realized that Howl’s window did not look out onto the things she saw now” (*Howl* 326). Thus, Jones’s choice to use the word “moving” may be linked with Sophie laboriously releasing herself from insecurities to find her identity, by settling down in the castle. In order to move forward, Sophie needs to understand how her thoughts in the past have affected her: “But she could not deny that something had been wrong ever since the moving castle moved, or even before that. And it seemed to tie up with the way Sophie seemed so mysteriously unable to face either of her sisters” (*Howl* 364). We will forthwith approach this idea of Sophie’s pessimistic mentality towards her future as the reason why she cannot progress in her journey.

4.2. Fate or free will

In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes. (1)

Jones’s authorial rebellion is evident in these first lines of *Howl’s Moving Castle*, since she uses “the beginning formula in a fairy tale only to challenge it afterwards” (Yavas 31). In other words, the introduction contextualises that even in a fantastic world where everything is possible, such as becoming invisible; one’s fate may be determined by birth. In fact, it would appear there is a rule in Ingary by which all eldest children are bound to a future

they will dislike. However, we can gradually note that it is only Sophie who thinks in that manner. Let us clarify this latter idea by analysing Sophie's standpoint.

As we have read in the biographical section, Jones was against characters with obvious issues the reader could identify with (e.g.: being poor, neglected or coloured). Therefore, the story of *Howl's Moving Castle* does not portray directly relatable characters but rather indirect traits we can perceive. An instance of this is Howl's apprentice Michael, who is mentioned only once to be black: "he was a tall, dark boy" (*Howl* 54). Nevertheless, these characteristics are part of a wider context so that her narration is not reduced to a specific issue, by providing a range of key ideas which come together in the end. Sophie is probably the most representative example of Jones's viewpoint: Sophie is a girl who never had major problems because her well-to-do family could afford to "[send] them to the best school in town" (*Howl* 2). Such is the stability Sophie lived in since birth, that she realised a secured future was waiting for her once inherited the hat shop. However, she then discards any idea about selling the shop and following her dreams, which could be due to the respect she feels towards her father. Thus, she resigns herself to this fixed future from an early age by constantly inhibiting her desires, which can be seen when the narrator says that Sophie "very soon realized how little a chance she had of an interesting future. It was a disappointment to her, but she was still happy enough" (*Howl* 2).

Thus, the problem was originated in her mind and is accentuated by the fact that she is highly adept at trimming hats, some of which become trendy: "You're a genius with hats and clothes, and Mother knows it! You sealed your fate when you made Lettie that outfit last May Day" (*Howl* 27). Everyone around Sophie knows she does an exquisite job, so they do not doubt she would profitably conduct the family business. Indeed, Sophie's thoughts are supported when her father dies and her step-mother decides that the girls ought to learn a trade, owing to their sudden financial instability: "The only way I can see to keep the business going and take care of the three of you is to see you all settled in a promising apprenticeship somewhere. [...] So this is what I've decided" (*Howl* 6). Promising as it might sound for the three daughters, Sophie is the one who is told to stay home for the sake of the trade. From this moment on, Sophie will slowly suppress her ambition and consequently her inner self, until she only knows how to be a hatter. This process leads to anger at times, a feeling that impulses her to leave home and seek her fortune. Yet, the sense of responsibility Sophie has been developing deprives her of

another future. Sophie's own imposition of a fate that displeases her is observable when she asks herself "what made me think I wanted life to be interesting? [...] I'd be far too scared. It comes of being the eldest of three." (*Howl* 18); or when "she was within an ace of leaving the house and setting out to seek her fortune, until she remembered she was the eldest and there was no point" (*Howl* 31).

As a consequence of this self-restraint, Sophie feels "resigned to the hat trade" (*Howl* 8). Her daily life revolves around the shop, and she becomes an introverted young girl owing to the excessive amount of time she spends alone indoors. Although Sophie tries to hide this resignation that eclipses her identity, her sisters are aware of it and remark that even their mother "knows how dutiful you are. She knows you have this thing about being a failure because you're only the eldest" (*Howl* 27). When the Witch of the Waste visits Sophie's shop and casts a spell on her, she takes advantage of Sophie's buried identity by using Sophie's self-imposed fate against her. That is, the Witch's magic consists in "using something that exists anyway and turning it round to a curse" (*Howl* 225), so Sophie would not have been bewitched had she been happy and brave enough to reject that fate. Since the Witch exposes Sophie's inner thoughts, Sophie is turned into an old lady because she is obsessed with being the eldest. We can then conclude that Sophie's fate is in fact a self-dictated suppression of free will, instead of an external enforced destiny as happens in other narratives, for instance Greek mythologies.

4.3. Search of self-identity

We have previously analysed Sophie's loaded name as well as her obsession with fate, which we could interpret as signs of our object of discussion: Sophie's change towards maturity. Thus, it is important that we now examine how Sophie manages her new future, since I state that Sophie cannot be happy until she fully uncovers her true self. Indeed, this thesis is generally supported by Webb's (2010) following words:

A number of Jones's characters undergo physical transformation as well as mental and moral growth, and learn to determine their own identities separate from metanarratives as they reluctantly shuck off previous assumptions about themselves, others, and the way the world works. (223)

This new future can only derive in happiness if Sophie is strong enough to face each change in her life, which would finally result in Sophie recognizing herself. In fact, the process of finding Sophie's inner self could be compared to the common stages of grief. We use the verb "find" because the identity Sophie had when she was born diminished through time and was then eclipsed by another as a hatter, one that she caused by her self-induced responsibilities (c.f. 4.2.). As Sophie is unaware of that primary identity, we will focus on how she copes with the loss of her second identity as a hatter due to the bewitchment. Having been divested of her hatter self; she will try to embrace her new disguise as an elderly woman, but will find that first and original identity instead.

Thus, we will discuss Sophie's development by relating the abovementioned loss of her identity as a hatter to Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2014) stages of (i) denial, (ii) anger, (iii) bargaining, (iv) depression and (v) acceptance¹⁰. It must be said that Sophie would be unfamiliar with these levels, as opposed to a person who knowingly moves forward. This is due to the abstract essence of an "identity", while grieving patients normally lose a physical person. It is also important to explain that the stages of grief can indeed happen in a different order in each person, as well as that one does not need to complete all levels to heal. Sophie is one example of this latter remark, since she does not undergo the first "denial" stage.

The moment of Sophie's transformation into an old lady has already been narrated, so we will delve into her journey once the abovementioned "physical transformation" is concluded and the action has been triggered. The distorted self-image Sophie had continuously observed beforehand –"Sophie felt as if the past months of sitting and sewing had turned her into an old woman or a semi-invalid" (*Howl* 17)– may be the reason why Sophie's reaction shows conformation instead of the logical surprise when someone is bewitched: "'Don't worry, old thing,' Sophie said to the face. 'You look quite healthy. Besides, this is much more like you really are'" (*Howl* 36). Sophie appears to accept her transformation because as an insecure person, once she has lost her built identity as a hatter, she needs a new one behind which she can hide. Hence, as this character had done beforehand with her trade, she will try to acquire a new personality as an elderly woman,

¹⁰ We will constantly refer to *Howl's Moving Castle*, thus numbered quotations in brackets will allude to that book. We will give the author's name if there is any other reference to comment on, for instance Kübler-Ross and Kessler.

asking to be called “Old Sophie” (*Howl* 53) and, for instance, forgetting about her fear of dogs (*Howl* 39).

We see another modification in the usual transition of grief by means of the second and third stages, which seem to have been interchanged. Once Sophie is an elderly woman, she walks towards and occupies Howl’s castle, since Howl is the only wizard she knows who could undo the spell. Sophie retrieves the trait of courage from her original identity because she decides to enter the place even if both Howl’s reputation and castle terrify everyone: “Chill breathed off these blocks as she got closer, but that failed to frighten Sophie at all” (*Howl* 47). Sophie reaches the third level by pretending to control her life, and as the name indicates, she indeed bargains once she is inside. This stage is known for wishing to go back in time and to restore one’s life before the loss (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 17), which Sophie does by staying there: “Suppose I didn’t go until Howl gets back? Wizards can lift spells, I suppose” (*Howl* 57). The level can also “take sometimes the form of a temporary truce” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 17), and as it is narrated, Sophie negotiates with the fire demon Calcifer to break each other’s spell in “only about a month” (*Howl* 62).

Nevertheless, we have previously clarified that it is not the Witch’s imposed magic but Sophie’s inner thoughts which have activated the journey towards self-recognition. Sophie then enters the second stage, an anger which according to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, “does not have to be logical or valid. You may be angry that you didn’t see this coming, and when you did, nothing could stop it” (11). These ideas are in concordance with Sophie because when she sees the necessary effort to acquire that new elderly identity, she transmits fury towards the Witch for having supposedly stolen her comfortable identity as a hatter: “She was very angry indeed with the Witch of the Waste for doing this to her, hugely, enormously angry” (*Howl* 65). At this level, we discover the first effect of Howl as a foil in Sophie when she recognises herself in Howl’s attitude. Howl is unhesitant and directly asks Sophie why she is there, to which she responds likewise: “‘I came because I’m your new cleaning lady, of course.’ [...] ‘Who says you are?’ ‘I do, [...] I can clean the dirt from this place even if I can’t clean you from your wickedness, young man’” (*Howl* 75). Sophie learns she is, in truth, an “outspoken woman” (*Howl* 77) and she finds “a great relief” (*Howl* 83) that she can express herself without fear. Sophie also hears she is stubborn through Michael and Calcifer’s complaints about her cleaning method (*Howl* 87). Moreover, Sophie’s anger leads her to accuse Howl of being “a slitherer-outer” for

“[slithering] away from anything [he does not] like” (*Howl* 99). These words conform a decisive moment owing to their resemblance to Sophie’s lifelong behaviour: She would rather avoid any conflict so she became a hatter instead of seeking her fortune. We can perceive a change in Sophie’s consciousness about her true self when Howl focalises that same avoidance issue on her, by ironically remarking afterwards: “How you must love servitude!” (*Howl* 99). Soon after Sophie’s self-awareness, she experiences fear of the unknown. In fact, there is a scarecrow which follows Sophie on her journey, and it seems to appear every time she moves closer to her true identity. The characteristics we have just explained about her personality cause the scarecrow to “[give] Sophie a terrible fright” (*Howl* 132). Howl points out some of Sophie’s recent traits are quite uncontrolled, for example her outspokenness, as a way to urge her to mature and discipline herself: “Rude as well as a bully, aren’t you?” (*Howl* 114). The scarecrow appears anew and Sophie’s reaction is to give “a faint squawk of terror” (*Howl* 148).

This stage lasts long although Sophie’s anger increases and diminishes according to the moment. Sophie can only move forward and continue identifying personal characteristics, which does frequently with Howl’s help. When Howl is in the garden of “RIVENDELL” –here Jones reinforces her authorial essence by alluding to Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*–, he calls Sophie “Mrs. Nose” since she at last represents her name and wants to know everything. Howl’s continued mirroring behaviour has two other crucial points: Firstly when Sophie reprimands him by saying “some people [...] are thoroughly self-centered” (*Howl* 226), and secondly, “people who run away from everything deserve every cold they get” (*Howl* 268). Lastly, she is taught not to seek power because it “results in a fatal flaw and begins a slow decline to evil” (*Howl* 235). Apparently, this happened to the Witch and now Howl, who needs to solve John Donne’s “Song” (*Howl* 219) before the curse transforms him into a beast because he “[went] and [caught] a falling star” (*Howl* 176).

We discover Sophie has indeed matured due to her rejection to return to her previous life when Howl asks her what to sell in their shop: “Sophie had found she had had enough of hats to last a lifetime. ‘Not hats’” (*Howl* 287). Sophie should be happy since she lives with Howl, runs a flower shop and is surrounded by tranquillity. However, one’s mind is always working and, thus, it bothers Sophie: “They had moved. It felt the same, but different, quite confusingly” (*Howl* 321). As usually happens when someone

approaches their goals, there is a disruption in one's journey by feeling tiredness and defeat. Butler explains that change is one of Jones's "most characteristic themes" by showing "the vulnerable and fractured nature of identity" (234). By this time, Sophie has recently entered the fourth stage of loss named "depression" by Kübler-Ross and Kessler. The fact that "her old home [is] giving her mixed feelings" (*Howl* 327) and that none of her previous acquaintances know that the old woman is indeed Sophie destabilises her supposed peace. This situation leads Sophie to reflect a regression in her journey and "she [becomes] known as Aunt Jenkins" (*Howl* 333) instead of Howl's mother. Additionally, she retrieves the past habit of excluding herself from the outer life "she was left on her own in the shop more and more often" (*Howl* 335) and talking to non-humans. As she had done with hats, she [talks] to flowers a lot" (*Howl* 335). Once more, she tries to deceive herself to think she is happier than ever but "something was wrong, and Sophie could not understand what" (*Howl* 335). She strives to identify the source of her unhappiness, but the reason is that her inner self has not been entirely uncovered.

Jones strongly points out that Sophie was "downright miserable" (*Howl* 342), an idea that Sophie reinforces by referring to her relapse: "Look at me! I set out to seek my fortune and I end up exactly where I started, and old as the hills still!" (*Howl* 342). Furthermore, Sophie compares herself with Miss Angorian (*Howl* 349) in order to lower her own self-esteem, because owning a negative self-image is what Sophie used to do. However, since she is not the same person as before, unveiled traits –such as her outspokenness– refuse to be forgotten and thus, Sophie reacts by openly getting angry: "Be daffodils! Be daffodils!" she croaked" (*Howl* 349). The emotion rises when Howl demands to know why Sophie hid the fact that their rescued dog is a man, to which she replies: "Good. Sophie felt like a fight. 'You could have noticed for yourself'" (*Howl* 353). These words convey deep resentment due to Howl's unawareness of Sophie's spell. The possibility of being an old woman for the rest of Sophie's short life scares her, and we can perceive it through the descriptive words "a sudden familiar uneasiness swept over her" (*Howl* 365), which hint at the scarecrow again. The intensity of the situation is such that Howl admits having tried to break her spell several times without success. Besides, Howl finally confronts Sophie's identity crisis by saying: "I came to the conclusion that you like being in disguise. [...] It must be, since you are doing it yourself" (*Howl* 369), which substantiates our notion that Sophie is a victim of herself, instead of being the Witch's fault. Having heard Howl's words, Sophie feels "ashamed" (*Howl* 382) once she processes

them. Sophie has matured while being old and now understands people's diverse attitudes towards life. In fact, Sophie acknowledges that her step-mother was not imposing her fate but was rather offering Sophie the right to inherit the shop, thus the step-mother was obliged to renounce to her dreams as well (*Howl* 383). This is the end of the depression stage, and although Sophie is uncertain of her next move, she arrives to the last level: Acceptance.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler state that this fifth level's healing "looks like remembering, recollecting and reorganizing" (25). In Jones's book, Sophie stares at the scarecrow and remembers a fear that is now "not so frightening after all" (*Howl* 394). Nevertheless, she still blames herself for certain actions she has taken "This is my fault! [...] I have a genius for doing things wrong!" (*Howl* 398). We discern that Sophie cannot avoid facing the last step because when she goes to encounter the Witch, the narrator indicates that "of course the entrance vanished as soon as she was through" (*Howl* 402). This is the last time Sophie is scared of change, "very scared indeed. She had made a mess of things now" (*Howl* 406). However, the moment Sophie inclines towards complaining about her fate "I'm the eldest! [...] I'm a failure!" (*Howl* 416), *Howl* shouts at her to clarify: "Garbage! [...] You just never stop to think!" (*Howl* 416). It seems that Sophie needed to hear she is better than her own self-image, thus the scarecrow disappeared as well (*Howl* 425). Sophie has at last uncovered her true identity, so she will be "happily ever after" (*Howl* 427) because she is psychologically and physically herself: "'Sophie,' said Martha, 'the spell's off you!'" (*Howl* 428).

Through all these stages, Sophie is able to get accustomed to her new inner self by slowly recognizing traits of her real personality. Thus, the "maturity" we allude to is internal and personal, a change which requires time and dedication. The title of this dissertation implies that same process: We say "Maturing the Old" because Sophie indeed starts to mature once she has been bewitched into an elderly woman. On the other hand, "recognition" mainly suggests that Sophie's journey is to identify traits of herself with which she can finally find her long hidden identity; but it also points to Sophie acknowledging her value as a person. Overall, *Howl's Moving Castle* provides an admirable representation of what it means to be in line with ourselves by deciding our own fate.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have studied and analysed the novel *Howl's Moving Castle*, written by Diana Wynne Jones in the second half of the 20th century. The first part has been focused on Jones's life as a mean to understand that it has deeply influenced the aforesaid novel; and we can indeed distinguish, among others, her knowledge of literature classics in one of Howl's surnames –Pendragon– referring to King Arthur. Her life has also been examined so that we can connect Jones's inclination towards Greek in the protagonist's name. We have then reviewed the restrictive literary context of Fantasy at the time in order to justify the rebellious authorial essence of Jones, by comparing the genre's rules with her own principles as a writer. The major one to be highlighted is Jones's refusal to portray characters with obvious problems the reader could identify with, such as being poor. This is mainly owing to Jones's perception of Fantasy as a tool to delight in reading and develop the imagination, instead of being directly reminded of one's issues. We have later on proceeded to research Sophie's journey in three parts: Primarily, the importance of names by exploring their origins as well as relevance within the story, and we have concluded that Sophie's is a forecast of her future change. Secondly, we have reasoned that Sophie's self-restraining viewpoint of her fate leads to reject any possibility of having her own free will. Thirdly, we have discussed Sophie's journey towards self-recognition by explaining that Sophie covered her true identity and built herself one as a hatter. Thus, we have analysed how the loss of that second identity directs Sophie to find her original self, by comparing her loss to Kübler-Ross and Kessler's following stages of grief: (i) denial, (ii) anger, (iii) bargaining, (iv) depression and (v) acceptance.

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to justify that Sophie cannot feel complete happiness until she discovers her original identity, which we have done throughout the whole paper. I strongly believe Diana Wynne Jones to be one of the most prominent authors within the fantastic genre. Since one can always find new aspects to research in her novels, I would suggest a comparison between Sophie's journey of recognition in *Howl's Moving Castle* and another of Jones's female characters, so as to see if the author has a recurrent trait. This writer has transmitted such depth to the meaning of identity, magical or not, that not only would her narratives appear enjoyable for children and adults, but they would also be useful for any person without a clear direction in life or interested in the field of individual behaviour.

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