Playing with Fantasy:
How Diana Wynne Jones Pushes Back the Boundaries of the Genre

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies represent a paradigm shift for the genre of fantasy literature written for children. I suggest that this can be observed in her employment of a number of postmodern strategies that problematise notions of reality, and in her construction of subjectivity.

In order to fulfil this objective the study first establishes an appropriate critical discourse for examining her fantasies and concludes that they can best be understood in a postmodern framework. A representative selection of her texts is then discussed in the light of a number of postmodern characteristics.

In order to examine Jones' approach to subjectivity the study then goes on to establish a set of features that characterise the construction of subjectivity in children's fantasy. I then demonstrate the way in which the construction of subjectivity in her texts has changed from representing subjectivity as a homogeneous construct to a heterogeneous construct, thus creating a paradigm shift for the genre. The study concludes by examining the one area in which her fantasies still largely conform with traditional characteristics of the genre—that of gender.

Margaret Rumbold

Sydney, August 1995

I, Margaret Rumbold, certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university.

Signed: *Margaret Rumbold*

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Introduction

For well over 100 years novels in which elements of the fantastic are integral to the narrative have formed an important component in the body of literature written for children—literary fantasy[1] has become a major genre[2] in children's literature. Critics of children's literature like John Rowe Townsend have documented the revival of the folk and fairy tale in the mid-nineteenth century and its impact on writing of the time. He argues that what he calls "the age of fantasy in children's literature" began in the 1860s with the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's*

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[1] For the purposes of this study I am defining fantasy literature as those works of fiction which involve the introduction of supernatural elements into the 'real' world and/or the creation of worlds beyond the 'real' world. I am excluding that body of fiction known as science fiction because:

1 Science fiction deals with what could, given further scientific discovery take place. However far-fetched the science fiction, it works on the premise that science can extend the boundaries of what is presently thought to be feasible. Fantasy, on the other hand, deals with the supernatural, not with what could be scientifically possible fifty years hence.

2 Science fiction does not require the suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader that fantasy requires. Fantasy requires that the reader agree to the introduction of fantastic elements and be willing to accept them as fulfilling a function in the text. Science fiction simply requires the reader to accept the author's vision of the future.

[2] I have chosen to refer to fantasy literature as a genre for the sake of convenience even though fantasy is a broad category embracing a wide range of differing varieties of fantastic literature and it could be argued that fantasy literature comprises a number of separate genres.

Adventures in Wonderland and Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies.*(Townsend p.94) Subsequent exponents like George MacDonald and E. Nesbit (although they developed the genre in differing ways) firmly established literary fantasy as a genre.

After the initial flowering of the genre in the latter half of the nineteenth century it tended to languish in the period between the two world wars, although there were the exceptions of writers like Alison Uttley and John Masefield and, most importantly, J.R.R. Tolkien, with the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937. However, the genre was to flourish particularly after WWII (very much under the influence of Tolkien and those who followed his ideas about fantasy) and has continued to do so. Furthermore, writers of children's fantasy have written and spoken a great deal about their particular theories and beliefs about fantasy. A common thread in their discussions is the belief that fantasy literature (unlike the literature of realism, it is implied) has the capacity to deal with transcendent themes. Accordingly, the genre commands considerable respect among those who make decisions about books for children—teachers, librarians and parents.

However, as fantasy works written for children continue to roll off the presses, I believe it is important to be aware of the possible restrictions of the genre and to examine current children's fantasy to see how successfully it is developing the genre. Is it possible to experiment successfully with the genre and so continue to develop it? Do the characteristics of the genre allow its boundaries to be shifted? Since any attempt to answer this question by looking at all contemporary children's fantasy would be far beyond the scope of this

study I have chosen to focus on the writings of one exponent of the genre—the British writer, Diana Wynne Jones.

Any study of children's fantasy quickly reveals a dearth of criticism in the area. Most writing on the subject is limited to giving an historical account of the genre's development, to commentary on the concerns of some texts and to discussion of the capacity of fantasy to enrich the reader. If there is little of use written about the genre in general I have been able to discover even less written specifically about Diana Wynne Jones. There is one critical article which focuses on one of Diana Wynne Jones' novels—Cart and Cwiddir[3]; other articles I have found are simply book reviews or interviews with the author (Spraggs 1983 pp.17-22).

Two texts have proved particularly useful in stimulating my thinking about issues to do with children's fantasy: John Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* and Maria Nikolajeva's, *The Magic Code—The use of magical patterns in fantasy for children*. The final chapter of Stephens' book in which he compares Wynne Jones' *A Castle in the Air* and Lois Lowry's *A Summer to Die* proved helpful by stimulating my thinking about the restrictions which fantasy imposes (in contrast to a realist mode). Nikolajeva's examination of children's fantasy, which has only recently come to my attention, has also proved interesting for her brief comments on two of Diana Wynne Jones' texts—*Archer's Goon* and *Charmed Life* and particularly for her concluding chapter. In her conclusion she asserts that fantasy is not stagnating

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[3]Gillian Spraggs' 'True Dreams: The Fantasy Fiction of Diana Wynne Jones' uses *Cart and Cwidder*'s concern with the literary imagination and with experiences of displacement and alienation as a means of (briefly) commenting on six of Wynne Jones' other texts—*The Spellcoats, Dogsbody, The Homeward Bounders, Time of the Ghost, Charmed Life* and *Witch Week*.

but is undergoing creative change and development. "Whatever its detractors may say, fantasy has by no means stagnated, even if today, in the late '80s, we are witnessing its wake with inevitable pale imitations and epigony" (Nikolajeva p.117). It is her contention that "Texts like Jones' mark an evident paradigm shift in fantasy structure" (Nikolajeva p.117). This contention is precisely the burden of this thesis—that Jones' fantasies establish new literary paradigms within the genre. Maria Nikolajeva goes on to argue that character development has become of greater importance in fantasy and that it is in this area that she sees potential for the future of fantasy. "The development (of character) has gone towards a psychological depth, and emotional involvement. . . . later texts. . . have acquired every feature of the realist psychological novel besides possessing all the assets of the fantasy genre" (Nikolajeva pp.118-119).

While I concur with Nikolajeva's general conclusions about the future of fantasy I do not intend taking quite the same direction in examining Jones' fantasies. Her fantasies do not exhibit the type of complexity of character development that we observe in the later fantasies of Alan Garner or William Mayne. Rather, the direction of my argument in this study will be that Jones' fantasies mark a paradigm shift in their testing and bending of the boundaries of the genre to raise some of the key questions about identity and being. I will also be suggesting that the strategies which she employs, particularly in her later texts, owe much to the postmodern and that in fact her fantasy can best be understood in terms of the postmodern.

Even the casual reader first introduced to Wynne Jones' works quickly becomes aware that her fantasies differ markedly from most

other children's fantasies. With the possible exception of the four Dalemark novels, *Cart and Cwidder*, *Drowned Ammet*, *The Spellcoats* and *The Crown of Dalemark*, her works do not fit the category of "high fantasy" and defy other attempts at categorisation. Of course it is important to recognise that as a writer who has produced some twenty or more texts over a period spanning more than twenty years it is dangerous to discuss her work as one homogenous body. Nevertheless, while her writing has undoubtedly undergone changes (in the third chapter of this study I will examine her changing treatment of subjectivity in three texts) there are certain characteristics of her writing that can be observed in all her texts.

First, the predominant conflict in Diana Wynne Jones' fantasises is not so much that of good and evil as that of chaos and order. This is particularly evident in the Chrestomanci novels and even in her most recent work—*Hexwood*. Second, the magic of Jones' novels is rarely that associated with wizardry and mysticism as is the case in works like that of Susan Cooper's *Dark is Rising* series or Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*. Magic in Jones' writing is very often a matter of convoluted logical play. In *Power of Three* there is the suggestion that the magical art of shape shifting is really nothing more than a matter of perception dependent on the notion that we see what we expect to see. At times Jones' even uses magic in a carnivalesque and absurd manner to create self-consciously fantastic effects as is the case in *A Tale of Time City*.

Third, Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies are often preoccupied with a notion very much central to much fantasy literature—that of words of power. The idea of the "right" word that will prove the key to completing a quest is a common thread in fantasy literature and is perhaps most

clearly to be seen in Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* fantasies. Such a notion depends on the assumption that words have an immutable and a fixed meaning; Wynne Jones turns this idea on its head by playing with the meaning of words and revealing meaning as elusive. The closure of *Fire and Hemlock* makes use of this idea that words cannot be pinned to a single, fixed meaning.

Fourth, all of Jones' fantasies have a strong comic element and seem to exhibit a delight in placing characters in absurd and bizarre settings. Many of her parallel and secondary worlds have a carnivalesque atmosphere somewhat reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Fifth and finally, her fantasies include a blend of the "ordinary" elements of existence with the fantastic and I suspect this is where her fantasies often have an appeal for child readers—her writing does indicate an insight into the daily chaos of family life (even if the families represented are white, comfortably off middle class families).

However, while these are elements that fairly obviously set her fantasy apart from much fantasy written for children over the last twenty years, if we simply focus on the obvious differences we will fail to recognise their significance. Reviewers constantly refer to her innovative and inventive approach to the genre, to the comic elements of her writing, and to the entertaining value of her texts and certainly these contribute to her popularity as a writer. However, little attention has been paid to what I suggest is the underlying effect of her inventive play with the genre and her stretching of generic boundaries—that of raising and exploring questions about the nature of reality, identity and being.

It is a source of some puzzlement to me that to date her works have been largely ignored critically. Possibly, the playful nature of her writing acts as a blind to the questions she raises and to the relationship of her texts to the postmodern, although playfulness is a central characteristic of the postmodern. Furthermore, a number of critics have been quick to recognise the metafictive play and postmodern features in other genres in children's literature. While rigorous literary criticism of children's literature is still a relatively new discipline there has been a recognition of other texts for children which are breaking new ground, such as children's picture books. Geoff Moss' "'My teddy bear can fly": postmodernising the picture book' (Moss 1992) and David Lewis' 'The constructedness of Texts: Picture Books and the Metafictive' (Lewis 1990), as their titles imply, both set out to examine postmodern play in picture books. There is also greater critical awareness of realist texts for children (and adolescents) that exhibit postmodern features such as including a multiplicity of voices in the text.

I suspect that the reason Diana Wynne Jones has been largely ignored is that the postmodern play in her texts is effaced by traditional expectations of what fantasy should be. Because most critical expectations of the genre are still dominated by the idea that fantasy deals with transcendent realities critics simply see her texts as whimsical and "good fun" without perceiving the subtler implications of their playfulness.

In order to indicate the direction I will be taking in examining Wynne Jones' use of the genre to explore questions of the nature of reality, being and identity I will briefly outline the contents of each of my chapters. In Chapter 1 I seek to establish the basis for my argument that her fantasies resist categorisation in their use of the fantastic. Here I discuss the theories of fantasy commonly referred to under the label of "High fantasy", and then Todorov's, Jackson's and Hume's theories of fantasy. It is my contention that none of these critical approaches provide a satisfactory critical discourse for discussing Jones' texts. Rather, I suggest that her fantasies can best be understood (albeit with some exceptions) within the context of the postmodern. Her writings, while often still exhibiting underlying liberal humanist ideological assumptions, employ many postmodern strategies and in so doing hold up to question notions of what is "real" and "not real".

In Chapter 2 I focus on one particular postmodern strategy—that of metafiction—whereby the author comments on the nature of fantasy and on the blurred distinction between reality and fantasy. I suggest here that her metafictive strategy that focuses on the constructed nature of her fantasy serves also to subtly draw attention to the way in which "reality" is simply another social construct. The texts chosen for discussion are *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Air* and *The Homeward Bounders*, although if space permitted many other texts could have been referred to since the strategy is employed widely throughout the corpus. The climax to *Archer's Goon*, where Howard's father, Quentin, writes the resolution of the plot, is another particularly interesting example of self-reflexivity in Jones' writing which I have not had the space to deal with in this chapter.

Chapter 3 explores Jones' representation of subjectivity and the means by which she resists the possible restrictions of the genre in order to move from a unitary view of the self to a subtler representation of the dialogic nature of the self. I have suggested that it is possible to trace a change in her representation of subjectivity from a representation largely dependent on the established boundaries of the genre in *Power of Three* to a pushing back of the boundaries in *The Spellcoats* and *Hexwood*. The latter two texts employ strategies that question the liberal humanist notion of an homogeneous and completed self and suggest what tends to be a characteristically postmodern concept of the self—that is, as continually reconstructing itself in dialogue with other selves and with society. Once again, this questioning and exploring of the nature of subjectivity is not confined to these texts alone. Diana Wynne Jones explores subjectivity in other texts, most notably in *Time of the Ghost* and in *Fire and Hemlock*, but space has precluded a discussion of these texts in this context.

The first three chapters having explored Jones' shifting of the boundaries of fantasy, Chapter 4 (the concluding chapter) then examines the one area in which I believe her fantasies are still confined within the generic boundaries. Here I suggest that she has not significantly broken away from one of the restrictions of the genre in her representation of gender. I explore gender representation in three texts—*Dogsbody, The Magicians of Caprona* and *Fire and Hemlock*. By first suggesting a set of assumptions about the representation of women inherent to the genre and then examining the texts in the light of these I contend that, while Jones makes some attempts to resist the dictates of the genre, her representation of women still conforms to generic characteristics.

Finding an Appropriate Critical Discourse for Discussing Diana Wynne Jones' Children's Fantasy

To date, literary fantasy written for children has been largely discussed using three discoursal modes—a discourse focusing on the role of fantasy in child development, a discourse arising from the writings of J.R.R.Tolkien and C.S.Lewis on the nature of fantasy, and, growing out of this, a discourse which focuses on a notion of "High Fantasy".

Fantasy and Child Development

That discourse which focuses on the role of fantasy in child development is based on the premise that the impulse to fantasy is an innate characteristic of all children and closely linked with imaginative play. Such an approach is one which seems to have dogged the criticism of children's literature. The assumption is made that while literature written for adults stands on its own merits, that which is written for children must contribute to a child's emotional, moral, spiritual or mental development. This is a common mode of discourse in many texts designed for trainee teachers introducing them to the merits of children's literature. The central theme is the justification of literature for children on the basis that it is vital to their moral, spiritual and

mental development. Accordingly, in one such text, Glenys Smith is careful to establish a role for fantasy, in her chapter introducing children's literary fantasy, 'Inner Reality: The Nature of Fantasy' (Smith 1987 pp 259-270). In her discussion of the importance of fantasy she cites two writers who have asserted the centrality of fantasy to child development—the English educator, James Britton and the Russian critic Kornei Chukovsky.

In his essay, 'The Role of Fantasy' (Britton 1971), Britton suggests that play is an area of free activity that lies between the world beyond the child and the child's unique inner world. The child uses play as a means of relating the inner world with the demands of the outside world. By including literary fantasy as a part of the world of play Britton claims for it a role in helping children develop a harmony between their inner life and the world beyond them. Hence, fantasy fulfils the purpose of promoting emotional health and socialisation.

Chukovsky's argument is a little different. He believed fantasy for young children to be crucial to developing their capacity for creative thought, claiming that, "without imaginative fantasy there would be complete stagnation in both physics and chemistry..." (Chukovsky p.214). Here, fantasy is seen as preparing children for more demanding mental pursuits. It is interesting to note that Chukovsky assumes that children outgrow fantasy when they are about seven or eight and are beyond "fairy stories". Accordingly, in his developmental schema fantasy has no place beyond this stage in a child's development. However, much western fantasy is directed at far older readers, the mode being particularly popular amongst late primary and early high school age children.

Discourses such as these, which focus on the usefulness of fantasy, are of some value in that they offer some insight into the impulse to write fantastic literature for children and the attraction of fantasy for child readers. However, while such discourses may permit an examination of the psychological implications of fantasy texts they do not offer a means of discussing the texts as literary constructs.

The Tolkien Tradition

Lois Kuznets has pointed out that British and American critics (and not only critics of children's literature) have remained very much influenced by J.R.R Tolkien's and C.S. Lewis's critical theories and literary practice despite the developments in fantasy theory stemming from the work of Todorov (Kuznets p.19). At the heart of both Lewis's and Tolkien's critical theory is a belief in a transcendent reality which they sought to evoke.

When Lewis, in 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', defends fantasy against the charge that such works are escapist, he defends the longing for something other as "an askesis, a spiritual exercise" unlike the longing for worldly fortune and success (Lewis p.215). He maintains that this longing for "fairy land" is that which "...stirs and troubles him (the reader)(to his lifelong enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach and, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth" (Lewis p.215).

Similarly, Tolkien in his lecture, 'On Fairy Stories', in which he explains his theory of fantasy, argues that "successful" fantasy is about glimpsing transcendent truth, an underlying reality. "The peculiar quality of the "joy" in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a

sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth." (Tolkien p.62) Such views, closely related to both writers' Christian beliefs, have continued to influence thinking and writing about Fantasy written for children even though later writers have not necessarily shared their Christian convictions but have worked rather within liberal humanist assumptions.

Lois Kuznets argues that Tolkien's writing has gone on to become the standard setter for what has come to be referred to in Britain and the United States as "high fantasy" even though Tolkien never used this term. Kuznets identifies a series of features commonly regarded as identifying a work as being "high fantasy". It must exhibit the "marvellous" (supernatural powers are available and at work in an otherwise natural world), and must depend on the creation of a sustained, substantial and original fantasy world which forms the background for the clash of good and evil. Evil will ultimately be defeated, and the hero, while ordinary, will perform heroic acts in defeat of the evil forces. The structure is almost always that of a romance quest. Finally, there must be no suggestion that such events are psychic in origin, or the result of a dream-like state. As Kuznets sums up, "Any explanation for the marvelous other than the supernatural would automatically deprive the work of its high fantasy status" (Kuznets pp. 19-20).

While "high fantasy" is still a term used in some critical discourse, for the purposes of this study I am going to use a broader term, that of "serious fantasy", because it can include both "high fantasy" and other works that do not come within Kuznets's definition. This term also allows for developments that have taken place in fantasy written for

children since Tolkien delivered his lecture in 1939. "High fantasy" suggests a serious work. The very term implies a hierarchy and suggests that works so categorised are of greater moral value than other, by implication, more trivial works. But clearly there are other fantasies which cannot be categorised as "high fantasy" but are just as serious in intent. So, using a broader term removes somewhat pointless debates about what does and doesn't constitute "high". Furthermore, the use of such a term takes into account the fact that critical attention is largely paid to those works of fantasy which are regarded as having a "serious" purpose.

On this basis, I would suggest there are five other features which are always assumed in critical discourse as essentials for discussing and examining "serious fantasy". First, such works uphold the importance of moral virtues such as self-discipline and self-sacrifice, and highlight the dangers of greed and materialism (as epitomised in *The Lord of the Rings*). Second, the protagonist, in demonstrating these virtues and resisting the temptations of greed, becomes a unified subject, or in other words, achieves maturation and self-knowledge. The protagonist frequently fulfills a dual quest; he or she finds the talismanic object and in the process discovers him or herself. Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain* is a classic example of such a text.

Third, evil is always clearly identifiable, unambiguous and demands clear resolution (Swinfen p.91) and, as Lloyd Alexander maintains, "...good is ultimately stronger than evil, ... courage, justice, love and mercy actually function" (Alexander 1965 p.245). This echoes Tolkien's belief that all true fantasy should have a happy resolution in which good is seen to triumph. A variation on this (owing something to the

influence of Eastern thinking) occurs in the fantasises of Ursula Le Guin, and to some extent in those of Susan Cooper, whereby the balance between good and evil must be maintained. Fourth, there is a widespread belief that "serious fantasy" should help the reader better understand the real world. Ann Swinfen maintains that, "Fantasy...is not escapism but a method of approaching and evaluating the real world" (Swinfen p.230). She then goes on to claim that, "The fundamental purpose of serious fantasy is to comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it" (Swinfen p.231). Similarly, Lloyd Alexander claims that fantasy has something to say about the real world (Alexander 1966).

Finally, there is a belief that "serious fantasy" should evoke "wonder". C.N.Manlove defines fantasy as, "A fiction evoking wonder..." (Manlove 1975 p.7) and identifies "wonder" as being a central ingredient in fantasy. "Wonder", as Manlove comments in discussing his definition of fantasy, can mean simply astonishment at the marvellous or a "sense of 'meaning-in-the-mysterious' or even the numinous." (Manlove 1975 p.7) When used by many writers about children's fantasy, it is more often than not used to suggest the latter—an awareness and contemplation of transcendent truths.

Given these characteristics of this particular critical discourse on literary fantasy (which continues to be the dominant discourse in the area) how useful a tool is it for examining Diana Wynne Jones' literary fantasies? It is of minimal use because all these characteristics are based on the certainties of liberal humanism. While Diana Wynne Jones' texts are still very much Eurocentric, and are still based on the moral assumptions that accompany a liberal humanist stance, they are

subtly at variance with these assumptions in their playful use of the literary fantastic. They certainly do not meet the criteria for "high fantasy" and in many ways neither do they meet the criteria for serious fantasy.

First, Diana Wynne Jones' protagonists do not really develop moral virtues and make moral choices in the same clear cut way as takes place in, for instance, Lewis's *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* or Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Often they pit their intellects against their antagonists (as is the case in *Black Maria*), but they are not called to make moral choices, and nor are their successes based on their adherence to the virtues of self-discipline and self-sacrifice. Second, Wynne Jones' texts treat the maturation of the subject in an entirely different way as well. While the issue is a major preoccupation of many of her texts (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Spellcoats*, *The Time of the Ghost*) these texts challenge assumptions about the unity of the subject. This concern is taken up at length in Chapter 3 of this study.

Third, while there is certainly a conflict between good (order) and evil (chaos) in her works, evil is not conquered by the virtues of courage, love, and justice but rather by magic, which is largely sophisticated word play, often beating the evil forces at their own game. Fourth, while Wynne Jones' works do certainly offer comment on the real world, some of her texts play with real world assumptions, and seem more intent on commenting on the nature of fiction than in commenting on the nature of reality. This is particularly the case with texts like *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Castle in the Air* which tend to function as metafictive commentaries on the nature of literary fantasy.

Finally, despite Manlove's claim that "...there is a very definite and constant character to fantasy, and in nothing is it perhaps so markedly constant as in its devotion to wonder at created things, and its profound sense that that wonder is above almost everything a spiritual good not to be lost" (Manlove 1983 p.156), Wynne Jones' fantasy does not demonstrate this concern. This is because the fantastic elements in her fiction are not seen as somehow beyond nature. The fantastic worlds Wynne Jones creates take for granted supernatural elements. They are, within the terms of the text, not supernatural at all. There is no sense of the numinous, of a transcendent reality or of a contemplation of some central truth of existence to be discerned in her texts.

In summary, her texts (particularly her later ones) are more preoccupied with uncertainties and with play than with the Christian or liberal humanist certainties that inform much critical discourse that has its origins in the writing of Lewis and Tolkien. There is little help to be had here.

Todorov's Theory of the Fantastic

In _The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,_ the structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov argued for a somewhat restricted definiton of the literary fantastic. He maintained that the literary fantastic is dependent on the hesitancy the reader and generally (though not always) the protagonist experience when confronted with an apparently supernatural event in a literary text. We must decide whether the event is the result of an illusion—in which case it has a natural explanation, or whether it is real—in which case it is the result of supernatural forces. Todorov defines the former as "the uncanny" and

the latter as "the marvelous". However, once that point of hesitancy is passed and we opt for either the uncanny or the marvelous we leave fantasy behind.

Hence, Todorov conceived of the literary fantastic as occupying the frontier between the uncanny and the marvelous rather than as an autonomous genre. This dividing line or frontier he referred to as "the pure fantastic". On this basis, very few texts are entirely fantastic. In fact Todorov states that the literary fantastic has had a brief life span of little over a century and claims that "...we find the last aesthetically satisfying examples of the genre in Maupassant's tales." (Todorov p. 166). Other texts exhibit the fantastic only partially until the point in the text where the reader, and possibly the hero, resolve their hesitancy. At this point they become either texts that can be defined as the fantastic uncanny or the fantastic marvelous, depending on how the hesitancy is resolved. At either extreme of the spectrum lie, on the one hand, texts which deal in the uncanny with no suggestion of the fantastic and, on the other, texts which deal in the supernatural with no suggestion of the fantastic.

On this basis, very few children's fantasies are examples of the pure fantastic and many sit at the marvelous end of the spectrum where neither the reader nor the protagonist experience any hesitancy in accepting the supernatural as the cause of events. Texts solely concerned with secondary worlds such as Tolkien's *Lord of The Rings* and Le Guin's *Earthsea Trilogy* tend to fall within this category, as do Victor Kelleher's secondary world fantasies.

Some of Diana Wynne Jones' texts fall within this category. Her Dalemark series involves a secondary world where the marvelous is

accepted, except for the last book in the series, *The Crown of Dalemark,* where the issue becomes a little more complex. Here the protagonist travels back in time (although the effect is almost one of moving from a primary to a secondary world except that it is really from a secondary to a sub-secondary world) and experiences, as does the reader, some initial hesitancy in accepting the supernatural as the explanation for events. *Power of Three* also falls within the category of the marvelous as does *Howl's Moving Castle, Castle in the Air, Charmed Life* and *The Magicians of Caprona.*

However, a number of Jones' texts fall within the category of the fantastic marvelous whereby there is an initial hesitation on the part of both reader and protagonist in accepting a supernatural explanation for events. In *Witch Week* the reader is uncertain for almost a page as to the nature of the world of the text. Because the action begins in a school classroom the reader initially thinks the world represented is the world as they know it, not a world in which witchcraft operates. Not until the reader learns that the school is for witch-orphans do they prepare to read a text in which they understand that the supernatural will affect events. Similarly, in *A Tale of Time City* both reader and protagonist are kept hesitating as to the explanation of events which go beyond the natural. In this case the reader accepts the supernatural explanation before the protagonist does.

The Lives of Christopher Chant has a clearer sense of hesitation between the uncanny and the marvelous because Christopher's initial supernatural experiences occur within dreams and so could very well be taken to have a natural explanation. For some way into the text both the reader and the protagonist are left hesitant. The world of the text,

which could initially be taken to be a representation of nineteenth century England, is gradually discerned as a secondary world, and Christopher's dreams are revealed as having a supernatural and not a natural explanation.

Two of Diana Wynne Jones' texts move closer towards Todorov's pure fantastic—*The Time of the Ghost* and *Fire and Hemlock*. Interestingly, they are the works which demonstrate the greatest concern with psychological development.[1] In *The Time of the Ghost* the reader (but not the protagonist) hesitates between an uncanny and a supernatural explanation which, while eventually resolved, is sustained for a large proportion of the text. Although we are told the protagonist is a ghost, the explanation could lie in the fact that she has been seriously injured in a road accident and her experiences could be the result of mental delusion resulting from trauma. Again, for a large part of *Fire and Hemlock* both the reader and the protagonist hesitate between understanding events as coincidence (the uncanny) or the working of the supernatural. This hesitancy is closely bound up with the protagonist's self-doubt and solipsistic view of the world. The point at which the protagonist accepts the events as the working of the supernatural coincides with the protagonist breaking away from a solipsistic understanding of the world.

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[1]Incidentally, Todorov's comments when discussing the marvelous give an interesting insight into what has often been cited as a failing in children's fantasy — the lack of depth of characterisation. He claims that the use of the supernatural coincides with those authors who "...seek above all to tell *stories*" (Todorov p.163) The supernatural or marvelous event provides the impetus, breaks the stability and allows for a narrative of action. Such operation of the supernatural does not allow for concern with psychological description and analysis.

However, while Jones' texts can be discussed to some extent using Todorov's discourse there appears little to be gained by this approach other than allocating the texts to categories. Apart from providing a tool for making some distinctions between the texts, the discourse takes us little further in analysing the texts as literary constructs.

Rosemary Jackson's Theory of the Fantastic

In Rosemary Jackson's Marxist critique, *Fantasy: The literature of Subversion*, she basically accepts Todorov's formula but seeks to examine the politics of the forms of the fantastic and pay greater attention to psychoanalysis (Jackson pp.6&7). She also suggests that the fantastic, rather than being a genre itself, can be defined as a mode which assumes different generic forms (Jackson p.35).

Jackson identifies English literary criticism as being, "...notoriously uncritical in its approach to works of fantasy..."(Jackson p.2). She is critical of the transcendentalist criticism of fantasy (such as that of Lewis and Tolkien) which sees fantasy literature as fulfilling a desire for a more complete and unified reality and which, she maintains, has become the dominant mode of reading fantasy literature. Her purpose is:

> ...to locate such a transcendentalist approach as part of a nostalgic, humanistic vision, of the same kind as those romance fictions produced by Lewis, Tolkien, T.H.White and other modern fabulists, all of whom look back to a lost moral and social hierarchy, which their fantasies attempt to recapture and revivify (Jackson p.2).

Jackson maintains that since the literary fantastic reveals disorder, madness and irrationality it is a subversive force in society and

consequently has been either marginalised or emasculated. It has been marginalised by the liberal humanist tradition of literary criticism because, in establishing a canon of "great" literature, those novelists who made use of fantastic elements, such as Dickens, Gogol or Dostoevsky, have a different status from Jane Austen, Henry James of George Eliot, whilst Gothic novelists have been largely neglected. On the other hand, it has also been emasculated by re-writing it to change its transgressive elements into transcendent elements—the elements of romance, magic and allegory.

She goes on to argue that those fantasies which focus on the "marvelous" are the ones to have been popularised and tolerated.

A creation of secondary worlds through religious myth, faery, science fiction, uses "legalized" methods - religion, magic, science - to establish other worlds, worlds which are compensatory, which fill up a lack, making up for an apprehension of actuality as disordered and insufficient. These fantasies transcend that actuality. Their romance base suggests that the universe is, ultimately, a self-regulating mechanism in which goodness, stability, order will eventually prevail. They serve to stabilise social order by minimising the need for human intervention in this benevolently organised cosmic mechanism (Jackson pp.173-174).

In her conclusion Jackson asserts that the modern fantastic, what by implication she seems to regard as the "truly" fantastic (unlike contemporary transcendent fantasies), is a subversive literature which "...aims at the dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient"(Jackson p.180). This literary fantastic makes no recourse to supernatural forces to bring about change or resolution or to compensate for dissatisfaction with the cultural order.

Such an understanding of the role of fantasy, while offering an interesting and timely critique of transcendentalist critical discourses, is of little relevance to most literary fantasy written for children because of the very nature of children's literature as a socialising tool. For better or for worse, most literature written for children (both realist and fantastic) is the product of a socialising objective (either conscious or unconcious). There are exceptions (take for instance Gary Crew's *Strange Objects* and Victor Kelleher's *Del Del*—fantasies leaning towards the uncanny) for which Jackson's theories would provide a very useful crtical discourse, particularly in the light of her discussion of the dis-integration of the subject. However, Wynne Jones' texts, with their clear dependence on magic and the supernatural, are too closely allied with the "marvelous" to fit Jackson's subversive model for the literary fantastic. Furthermore, Wynne Jones' texts, despite often bizarre play with the concepts of what is and isn't "real", are firmly rooted in Eurocentric, middle class, liberal humanist assumptions. The texts emphasise closure, the restoration of order in the face of chaos, and the sense that the universe is ultimately benign. Far from being transgressive, they are entirely supportive of the dominant ideology and, in being so, sit comfortably within the norm for most literature written for children.

Kathryn Hume's Theory of the Literary Fantastic

In *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* Kathryn Hume takes a somewhat different direction. Starting from the simple definiton of fantasy as "..any departure from consensus reality..." she abandons the purely oppositional concept of Mimesis versus Fantasy which has dogged western literary criticism. In the Preface to her work she explains her assumption thus:

Whereas other citics writing on fantasy try to identify it as a genre or mode, I have tried not to isolate fantasy from the rest of literature. It is truer to literary practice to admit that fantasy is not a separate or indeed a separable strain, but rather an impulse as significant as the mimetic impulse... (Hume p.xii).

She identifies four basic literary responses to reality. In the literature of illusion we are invited to escape reality, in the literature of vision to explore a different reality, and in the literature of revision to accept the author's moral explanation of reality. In the last category, the literature of disillusion, the author asserts that reality is unknowable. Hume contends that each of these responses can result in either mimetic or fantastic works and in so doing recognises the scope of the literary fantastic and the varied purposes for which authors choose to employ the mode.

Hume concludes her study with a discusson on the functions of fantasy, and in so doing seems to approach a transcendentalist position when she maintains that fantasy "...helps us envision possibilities that transcend the purely material world which we accept as quotidian reality" (Hume p.196). However, this differs from a Tolkienesque transcendentalism in that she seems to imply wider possibilities than those of simply conceiving of the universe as an ultimately benign one in which order will triumph over chaos. Rather, when she speaks of the material world being transcended by fantasy, she does not necessarily mean that that transcendance will involve the certainties which Tolkien assumed. Her use of the term "transcend" seems more to imply the exploration of possibilities beyond the purely rational, beyond that which can be perceived as concrete. She advocates an increasing

recognition of the fantastic impulse as one that brings freedom from the limitations of mimesis and rationalism.

With their emphasis on action and resolution and with their clear basis in a reality which, for all its fantastic elements, is much like our own, Diana Wynne Jones' texts have to be considered as examples of the literature of illusion. They cannot be understood in terms of the literature of vision because they offer no new interpretation of reality, and nor do they require the reader to see the world in a different way. The underlying assumptions of the texts are always those of the dominant ideology of western society and any alternative reality is judged as falling short of this reality; as being somehow strange and aberrant. In *The Lives of Christopher Chant* the alternative reality which "the Living Asheth" occupies is portrayed as cruel, exotic, probably unhealthy and certainly dangerous. We are given to understand that the Goddess will be far better off when she chooses to leave and go to boarding school. The middle eastern world which supplies much of the setting for *Castle in the Air* serves to provide exotic colour but is also represented as absurdly flamboyant and as inferior to British culture. Jones' texts are very much in the tradition of children's adventure literature where any variation on western society provides interest and excitement but is never allowed to provide a viable alternative reality.

However, despite their clear position as escapist fantasies when considered in the light of Kathryn Hume's critical discourse, there is more to Diana Wynne Jones' literary fantasies than simply categorising them as escapist. Once again, the discourse has proved inadequate in discussing these texts. They resist examination in a number of discoursal modes: that of the transcendent, that of Todorov, that of

Rosemary Jackson and that of Kathryn Hume. I believe a way forward is to examine the texts as fantasies which owe much to a postmodern mode of constructing reality. To control the scope of this discussion I will focus on one particular text, *A Tale of Time City*, (with occasional references to two other texts, *Witch Week* and *The Lives of Christopher Chant*) examining it in the light of discourse to do with the postmodern.

Reading Diana Wynne Jones' Literary Fantasies as Postmodern Texts

Any attempt to rigidly define the term "postmodern" will prove risky. The term resists definition. Brian McHale, a major critical exponent of postmodernism, has recently sought to correct any misapprehension that in his earlier work, *Postmodernist Fiction*, he was suggesting it were possible to attribute a rigid definition to postmodernism. His recent work, *Constructing Postmodernism*, seeks to acknowledge that his discourse is in fact simply another construction of reality and that there may well be other constructions. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, while recognising the term's resistance to definition, I would suggest there are a number of features which tend to be characteristic of the postmodern. Certainly, all may not be common to all postmodern texts or to wider postmodern culture, but they are features which are associated with postmodernism to varying degrees. I will examine *A Tale of Time City* in the light of five characteristics used to create fantastic effects: the use of heterotopias, eclecticism, labyrinthine spaces, the mixing of genres and codes, and ironic play. I have chosen to discuss other features central to postmodernism, namely the use of metafictive strategies and the dis-unity of the subject, at greater length in chapters two and three of this study.

Heterotopias

John Stephens has identified the use of heterotopias (which he defines as ..."spaces in which a number of possible orders of being or existence can coincide...") as a feature shared by children's fantasy and postmodernist fiction (Stephens 1992b p.52). In postmodernist fiction such heterotopias serve to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of reality. No one way of seeing has dominance; there are a whole range of ways of seeing and all are equally valid. The use of heterotopias is certainly very much characteristic of Wynne Jones' fantasies. Many of her texts involve a multiplicity of worlds which exist side by side and through which characters move. *The Homeward Bounders*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, and *The Lives of Christopher Chant* all involve multiple worlds which act as different representations of reality. However, Wynne Jones' texts exhibit some bizarre contradictions: on the one hand her texts exhibit characteristics of the postmodern but at the same time they retain ideological assumptions in opposition to those of postmodernism. Consequently, while her use of heterotopias sometimes serves to promote a view of reality as multi-faceted and to query some of the certainties of the western tradition, it is important to remember that liberal humanist assumptions still inform her texts. While there may be occasional implications of relativism, the dominant ideology remains assuredly Eurocentric.

One way in which Diana Wynne Jones uses the fantastic device of the heterotopia is as a strategy for exposing the constructed nature of our understanding of the past. In *A Tale of Time City* and in *Witch Week* historical periods (and their variants) are constructed as separate worlds existing side by side with each other. This represents our tendency to view the reality of the past as a series of watertight entities

which can be categorised, rather than as a shifting reality subject to a multiplicity of interpretations.

The first thing we notice in looking at *A Tale of Time City* is that the title of the novel alludes to Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. This 19th century text gives one popularised version of a period of history generally interpreted as a crucial time in European history, a time which, to use a popular expression, "changed the course of history". Similarly, Wynne Jones' text constructs a fictional event which has the potential to shake history, to change the future as it were. The allusion in the title thus serves to signal the text's concern with the ways in which we choose to represent the past and with the assumptions we make in so doing. In *A Tale of Time City* the different worlds are different periods in time all linked by one overarching and controlling world— Time City. Furthermore, all these separate worlds of time are situated in another "place" referred to as "history" which is represented as having a starting (the stone age) and finishing point (the depopulation). History is thus represented as something complete, an entity, a vast space comprising a series of places, that is times, in history. At the same time, history is moving from one "age" to another in a forward motion of causality and yet all ages exist at one and the same time within the entity known as "history". Furthermore, since the past can be altered, thus threatening the stability of other ages, it is the task of those in Time City outside this entity called history to control any threats to stability and to maintain events as they were/are.

Beyond history is Time City with its own history while still anchored and secured by a series of talismanic objects located in "history", and where time travels in reverse. This paradoxical world of the text, which

is both outside time and yet dependent on time, and which controls the events of time and yet is controlled by those events, gives it a confusing and absurd Chinese box quality. There is a sense in which the reader is being deliberately challenged to try to make sense of something that has little basis in reason. The effect of this fantastic element is to hold up to question our concepts of the past as unalterable and to question the authority of history as it has been constructed in the western tradition, that is, as a fixed entity. Given the western emphasis on understanding the past as the result of a series of causes and effects, such play with notions of causality in history exposes the absurdity of constructing history as something which can be neatly compartmentalised into clear sections. The very fact that the authorities in Time City work all the time to maintain history acts as a metaphor for our own constructing and protecting of history as a fixed entity. In this sense then, this multiplicity of worlds, this series of versions of reality serves to query some of the certainties on which we posit our understanding of our culture. The representation of the past as an entity comprising a series of related worlds highlights the inadequacy of our understanding of the past as some tangible item viewed in terms of a succession of neatly compartmentalised ages.

In *Witch Week* a multiplicity of worlds exist because, at different points in history where there could have been two possible outcomes, worlds split to accommodate these two outcomes. As one of the protagonists , Nirupam Singh explains:

> It is easiest to understand with battles. Both sides cannot win a battle, so each war makes two possible worlds, with a different side winning. Like the Battle of Waterloo. In our world Napoleon lost it, but another world at

once split off from ours, in which Napoleon won the battle (*Witch Week* pp. 171-172).

Here we have, in fictional form, the outworking of the notion that we construct the past according to our needs and aspirations. (Indeed, anyone visiting Napoleon's tomb could well believe that he did win the Battle of Waterloo.) These worlds which multiply to allow for different directions in history reflect a postmodern understanding of reality, where the past is always changing, and is not a fixed entity because our understanding of it changes according to who we are and according to our current needs.

However, if Diana Wynne Jones' heterotopias represent differing ways of viewing the past and reality it is important to note that there are hierarchies within these ways of seeing and of being. Some are better than others. As has already been pointed out, in *The Lives of Christopher Chant* being a girl in boarding school is preferable to being the Living Asheth. In *A Tale of Time City* Iceland, when first settled, is low in the order of ways of being, as is Ancient China—both are used as places of banishment for the villains. Despite her representation of a multiplicity of ways of seeing, the ideology which informs her texts is still liberal humanist and Eurocentric. In this sense, her texts play with postmodern strategies without ever seriously committing to a postmodern view of reality.

Eclecticism

Another feature of postmodern culture is that of eclecticism, the polyglot mixture that is so much a part of our multicultural society. Brian McHale draws attention to the polyglot nature of the linguistic texture of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, whereby the text is a

multilingual text, reflecting the character of the late Middle Ages in which the text is set (McHale pp. 153-154). While *A Tale of Time City* does not display linguistic polyphony—on the contrary the text is linguistically uniform—there are other evidences of differing world views which jostle with each other in a fantastic mix. The buildings in Time City combine the very old and the very new and represent every possible style of architecture. Crooked little stone houses and cobbled streets exist side by side with a moving marble stairway. Vivian's bedroom contains stone pillars like totem poles, embroidered canopies and Egyptian type carvings on stone walls. The tourists who visit Time City represent all possible ages and ways of being.

> Vivian had never seen so many peculiar clothes and strange hairstyles in her life. She heard strange languages too, jabbering all round her (*A Tale of Time City* p.43).

Similarly, the dress of the people of Time City is a curious mixture of the exotic (Jones' interpretation of Chinese clothes as pyjamas) and the futuristic and the Lee family wear pigtails and have slightly slanting eyes. While such a stereotypical reference to Chinese culture reveals Jones' Eurocentricity and an apparent ignorance of Chinese culture, it is also an aspect of the eclecticism which is central to the text.

Eclecticism can also be observed in the figure of Wilander. His limp and his name identify him as an eclectic mix of Weland (Wayland) the Smith, the Vulcan of Scandinavian mythology (or Wieland of the Germanic epics) and of Faber John.[2]

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[2] This eclectic mixing of mythical and legendary figures is a common feature of Diana Wynne Jones' writing and can be seen particularly in references to the

Elio's room is a further example of eclecticism. The room seems to operate as a storehouse for the flotsam and jetsam of the ages.

> The furniture in it was a wild mix of styles and colours and on top of every bit of furniture there were things. Vivian stared at a pink empty frame desk with a statue of Frankenstein's monster on it. Then her eyes shifted to a thing like a cakestand, loaded with clutter. The thing on the top shelf was a golden hat full of padlocks and marbles. Next shelf down was a jar labelled *Moon Dust (Titan)*. Her eyes went to a model spaceship hanging from the ceiling and then to a screen on the wall showing a cartoon film without the sound (*A Tale of Time City* pp.185-186).

This extract also touches on another feature of the text—its resistance to categorising as any particular fantastic genre and its embracing of a range of fantasy forms. Amongst this assortment are littered items from other fantasies. Frankenstein's monster appears along with the moon dust of science fiction, and the cartoon is that of *Snow White*.[3] These brief intertextual references to other fantasies combine with the use of another fantastic mode, that of time travel, to remind us that the text is a jumble of fantastic elements. The text cannot be nailed as belonging to any particular form of the fantastic. It is an eclectic mixture itself, just as Time City is a mixture of styles.

Time City operates as a metaphor on two levels: it is both a metaphor for the text and at the same time it is a metaphor for the

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wandering Jew and the Flying Dutchman in *The Homeward Bounders* and in the eclectic mix of Arthurian references in *Hexwood*.

[3]Interestingly, events in the text are often related to film. Vivian compares things that are happening to her as being like what one would expect to have happen in a film with, of course, the implication that film is yet another form of the fantastic. Film is also an appropriate referent for a text concerned with the re-visiting and the re-making of the past.

postmodern. The text constructs a series of realities which jostle with each other and which intermingle in Time City. In this sense, the text creates not so much a polyphony of voices but rather a polyphony of images. Interestingly, there is almost a sense in which Time City, in its function as a metaphor for postmodern culture, implies a criticism of aspects of the postmodern. An eclectic mix of cultures itself, it is sustained by, and draws on, both the past and the future but has little substance and life of its own. The world of Time City is running down (the city has very few children); it lacks purpose and engagement. The result of such a feature is the extraordinary situation whereby postmodern strategies are used to criticise the postmodern.

Labyrinthine Spaces

Brian McHale, in discussing *The Name of The Rose* (with particular focus on the monastery library) identifies the use of "...paradoxical and labyrinthine spaces..." as a feature of postmodern texts (McHale p.157). While the texts are very different from each other, the multiple worlds of *A Tale Of Time City* and the confusing explanation of their existence seem to have some similarity to the labyrinthine qualities of *The Name of the Rose*. Despite the supposedly logical explanation of the fantastic events of the text, the effect is one of bewilderment and disorientation for the reader. While in some ways the explanation of time locks gives the text some internal logic, somewhat akin to science fiction, in other ways the world of the text has an irrational quality which defies logical analysis. McHale identifies the library as acting as a *mise en abyme*, mirroring the world of the text in *The Name of the Rose*. Similarly, although on nowhere near as complex a level, Perpetuum (again a library) acts as a *mise en abyme* in *A Tale of Time City*, reflecting the

bewildering and labyrinthine nature of the world of the text. Perpetuum, the name itself implying the circular and the unresolvable, is represented as based on a five sided construction and functions as a maze. At each five sided entry within the building flights of steps lead off in four different directions. Furthermore, Perpetuum disorients those within it.

> By the time they had reached an archway called CONFUCIUM, Vivian had realised that Time City was appearing around them at all sorts of strange angles. At CONFUCIUM, she saw the Gnomon tower in the distance sticking out sideways from under her feet and tried not to look. The stairs felt as if they were the right way up, even if they were not (*A Tale of Time City* pp. 124-125).

Perpetuum, itself a fantastic structure, acts as a mirror of the bewildering and fantastic nature of the text. Vivian's experience within Perpetuum is a reflection of her experience within Time City itself, and is also a reflection of the reader's experience in following the labyrinthine twists and turns of the text. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the children can find their way around Perpetuum, despite its maze-like qualities, and that the plot does have a very tidy resolution. Once again, we see the postmodern fantastic functioning side by side with other more conventional elements of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies, such as conventional resolution and closure.[4]

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[4] Closure in *A tale of Time City* and *The Homeward Bounders* does include some elements that could be said to be left unresolved. Vivian is never able to return home and neither is the narrator of *The Homeward Bounders*. However, the dominant element is nevertheless one of a resolution having been reached. The most obvious indeterminate endings and avoidance of closure occur in *Fire and Hemlock* and *The Spellcoats*.

Mixing Genres

Another strategy characteristic of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies is the mixing of genres. This doesn't occur in the way which we have come to expect with much recent children's literature whereby diary entries, letters, school reports and so on are used in the narrative, as is the case in Libby Gleeson's *Dodger,* for instance. Rather, Jones' fiction often tricks the reader into assuming that they are reading one generic form only to discover that generic forms are intermingling. *Witch Week* commences as if it were written in the genre of the school story, but gradually introduces fantastic elements while remaining a school story with a number of the accompanying characteristics. Thus the text uses many of the conventional elements of the school story: the school food is terrible, classes misbehave, pupils are bullied by other pupils, and teachers appear oblivious to what is going on around them. Such conventions of the school story genre appear side-by-side with such fantastic elements as multiple worlds, magic broomsticks and spells. The effect of this strategy is to blur the borders between fantastic texts and realistic texts, leaving the reader uncertain of where the real ends and the fantastic begins.

Similarly, *The Lives of Christopher Chant* combines what appears to be nineteenth century England with fantastic elements in a manner which leaves the reader confused for some time and which blurs the borders between fantasy and reality. This is different from the hesitancy that Todorov identifies. While readers are initially hesitant in concluding whether they are dealing with the marvelous or the uncanny, once the hesitancy is resolved the fantastic continues to blend with the ordinary to the point where even the real becomes fantastic. Another genre that blends with the fantastic elements in *The lives of Christopher Chant* is

that of the school story. Not only does Christopher go to boarding school but the Living Asheth's ambition is to move from her real (fantastic) world to what is, for her, the fantastic world of the school story. Gill Frith in her examination of the school story genre 'The Time of your life: the meaning of the school story' suggests that the genre does involve a fantastic element. In the school story girls are offered the prospect of escape from the demands of being female that puberty will bring. "The stories hold out the impossible Canute-like fantasy of a future in which the waves of time can be held back..." (Frith p.126). Such an understanding of what the school story genre represents reveals the Living Asheth's representation as desiring to escape from her world to the world of the school story as particularly telling. Remaining as the Living Asheth will mean her death (or what could be seen as the end of her pre-pubescent self) while escaping to boarding school will mean life in a state of perpetual girlhood.

By representing the Living Asheth's understanding of the world of the school story as a fantasy Jones makes the fantastic relative. What we are accustomed to think of as real may be no less fantastic than any of the multiplicity of worlds Christopher visits. It is this playing with and blending of fictional genres that places the texts within the realm of the postmodern fantastic where the very concept of fantasy is problematised. By implication, many of the novels playfully pose the question of what is fantastic and of how we are to distinguish between the fantastic and the real.

Playfulness and Irony

Finally, Diana Wynne Jones' texts are often ultimately playful in their use of the fantastic. Like many postmodern texts they are often

self-conscious, drawing attention to their fantastic elements and taking these to absurd extremes. The unreal is highlighted, the reader is not asked to suspend disbelief and to believe in the integrity of the secondary world in the sense that Tolkien requires of his fantasy. Rather, the fantastic nature of the text is being highlighted. In *A Tale of Time City* features like butter pies, the absurd clothes, empty-frame chairs and desks are all part of the playfulness of this fantasy. None of this is to be taken too seriously, but it is all intended to highlight the marvelous and the extravagant and to draw our attention to the fantastic nature of the text.

Accompanying her extravagant use of artefacts is an equally extravagant use of fantastic linguistic features which seem to be an end in themselves. Signifiers like chronons, temporons, Chronologue, and Amporic Cope have little or no significance other than as words. The fact that these signifiers are made up of recognisable morphemes leads the reader to expect that they may have meanings which exist in parallel with the signifieds of known English signifiers but any signifieds remain elusive and the reader is left uncertain. Similarly, the use of "universal Symbols" in Time City which have an indeterminate and at best arbitrary significance, is a further example of signifiers with no agreed signified. According to the narrative, Universal Symbols ". . .did not stand for letters, nor for whole words either. You had to fit the things the symbols *might* stand for together, and then try to make sense of them (*A Tale of Time City* p.127). The Symbols exist simply as linguistic extravagances that deny any attempts to attribute them with meaning. In other words, the fantastic signifiers, in being used to create fantastic effects, almost function as the signified as well.

A similar play takes place in the representation of ceremonies in Time City. The ceremonies, like the words, appear to have no significance outside themselves, they are rituals for the sake of having rituals, just as the Sempitern's extravagant ritual of searching has no real purpose other than to search. None of these actions represented has a purpose other than to highlight the fantastic and the bizarre nature of the text.

Finally, Jones' texts often depend on ironic twists revealing the reader's and the protagonists' misperceptions. The Time Ghost (as it transpires in the case of the Watcher of the Gold) in *A Tale of Time City* has previously been represented as frustrated in his quest of reaching the top of the stairs in time and returning the casket. The reader is led to infer that once the Time Ghost fulfills its quest Time City will be saved. However, ironically, in order to complete the quest to save Time City, the Time Ghost's quest should not be fulfilled. While the reader has previously been led to understand that his quest to return the casket will benefit Time City at the climax of the narrative he/she recognises that the Time Ghost's quest must not be fulfilled. A similar irony, whereby things often turn out to be exactly the opposite to what they seem, can be seen in *Witch Week* when it transpires that the Deputy Head, whose position means he should be opposed to witchcraft, is a witch himself. Pupils in the school have tried to conceal the fact that they are witches from Mr Wentworth while all the time he has been endeavouring to conceal his identity from them. Similarly, Miss Hodge, the most ardent exposer of witchcraft, is herself a witch who has used witchcraft to conceal her identity.

A further feature of Diana Wynne Jones' writings that links them with the postmodern is her use of metafictive strategies to highlight and to comment on the nature of fantasy and fiction and on the constructed nature of "reality". This feature will be explored in the next chapter of this study.

Conclusion

Looked at in one sense, Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies could simply be identified (as they mostly are) as inventive escapist fantasies. However, when they are examined in the light of postmodern critical discourse, they appear more complex and can be understood as taking children's fantasy down some different and more innovative paths than has previously been the case with fantasy classified as "serious". As I have suggested in my introduction, Jones' fantasies effect a paradigm shift by taking children's fantasy down a different path.

Metafictive Strategies in Diana Wynne Jones' Fantasy

Introduction

As I have heralded in the previous chapter, Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies make extensive use of metafictive strategies—in keeping with her fantasy being best understood in terms of the postmodern. Her use of these strategies serves as a means of drawing the reader's attention to the constructed nature of fantasy and fiction and to the broader issue of recognising "reality" as yet another social construct.

In 1992 an incident during the American Presidential campaign served to highlight the overlapping of constructed realities and fictive constructs that makes the dividing line between what is real and what is fiction increasingly problematic. In the course of the campaign, Vice President Dan Quayle criticised the television show character, Murphy Brown, from the show of the same name, for having a child outside the conventional family structure. It was the Vice-President's contention that the fictional construct of Murphy Brown endorsed the breakdown of traditional family life, including the importance of a father to a child's upbringing. He even suggested that such a programme had caused the Los Angeles riots.

Whatever one might think about Dan Quayle's defence of American traditional values (and, for that matter, whether such values ever existed) his basic premise was probably reasonable. Fictional constructs which gain such broad public acceptance do form an integral part of a culture and do reflect the dominant ideology. (Of course, the real debate centres on whether values are reflected or affected but this is not my concern here.) It is the events which followed Quayle's initial statement which raise the issues I want to examine.

When the programme returned to air following Quayle's criticism, a sleepless, but fictional, Brown just home from hospital having given birth to her child watches on TV as Quayle criticises her decision. Murphy Brown explodes, defending her decision by delivering a statement about the validity of non-traditional families. Meanwhile, as the show was broadcast, Dan Quayle watched in the company of a group of single mothers. He also wrote a letter to the baby (a fictional construct) and sent it a (real) gift.

Taking the incident at face value, it could appear to be little more than another bizarre episode in an American election campaign. But when a public figure like a Vice President takes a political campaign into the realms of fiction it serves to problematise where reality ends and fiction begins. Certainly, no one questions the existence of someone called Dan Quayle, or has difficulty distinguishing between him and a fictional construct like Murphy Brown. However, Dan Quayle's television appearance in an episode of Murphy Brown can serve to draw attention to the constructed nature of Quayle himself. In many ways he is a construct, just as Murphy Brown is a construct. Dan Quayle is constructed by himself, by his minders and by the media to meet the

requirements of the American political scene. Similarly, Murphy Brown is a construct of the media, constructed to meet popular expectations in the '90s. There is, therefore, a greater overlap between the fictive subjectivity of a Murphy Brown and the "real" subjectivity of Dan Quayle than might initially be supposed.

Even the "realities" that Quayle, on the one hand, and the defenders of Murphy Brown, on the other, argue for can be viewed simply as social constructs. Seen in this light, the ideology of the family that Quayle sought to defend is of no greater validity than the alternative view that the fictive character of Murphy Brown defends. That which we perceive as a reality can be understood as a construct, just as a television programme or a children's novel is a construct.

It is in the light of this blurring of the dividing line between reality (itself socially constructed) and fictive constructs that I propose to examine a particular postmodern feature of some of Diana Wynne Jones' texts—the use of metafictive strategies. A major characteristic of postmodernism is the employment of strategies that draw attention to the constructed nature of reality, thus encouraging resistance to the restrictive nature of such constructs. Such strategies, when employed in works of fiction have been described as metafictive—strategies which draw attention to a work's status as a fiction and to the way in which these fictions have been constructed. These features encourage the reader to observe how the fiction is working, consequently demanding that the reader think about the text as a text rather than subjecting the reader to the text.

What Metafictive Strategies Does Diana Wynne Jones Use?

In the course of this discussion I will examine three texts; *Howl's Moving Castle, Castle In the Air*, and *The Homeward Bounders* and will identify and discuss four metafictive strategies employed in these texts.

1 Focus on the Text as a Construct

In this section I will examine the way in which Diana Wynne Jones foregrounds the fact that the text is a construct, a re-presentation of reality. Further to this will be an exploration of the way in which, in so doing, she playfully introduces the problematic nature of reality. In my discussion I will particularly focus on *Castle in the Air* and *Homeward Bounders*.

Castle in the Air is a particularly playful text which makes extensive use of metafictive strategies. The title itself is metafictive and signifies three separate signifieds. First, it refers most obviously to the castle hijacked by Hasruel in the narrative. The picture on the cover of the hardback version and on the subsequent paperback portrays a castle floating amongst the clouds and so supports the most obvious significance of the title. The reader anticipates from this combination of title and picture a fantastic narrative featuring a floating castle.[1] However, the opening pages of the book introduce the second item which the title signifies, that being Abdullah's daydream whereby he imagines himself to be of noble birth. Here, the phrase "castle in the air" is given its popularly understood signification, that of a daydream, an

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[1] For readers who are aware that the text is a sequel to *Howl's Moving Castle* the title could prompt them to assume that the two castles are "the same" — as indeed they are, according to the narrative.

act of wishful thinking, and is used to signify specifically Abdullah's daydream.

So far, this is nothing particularly unusual, since children are accustomed to simple punning. However, the title has a third signified and that is the text itself. Now, of course this is normally accepted to be the case with any title of a fiction. In some senses a book's title can be seen to indicate the physical object in which the narrative to which the title refers is recorded. So, *A Tale of Two Cities* (for example), while referring to the nature of that particular narrative, may sometimes be understood to signify the physical object, the book, in which that narrative is recorded. However, in the case of *Castle in the Air* the title also functions as a direct reference to the fact that the narrative is a not simply a fictive construct but a fantastic construct (as well as giving an indication of the narrative content). The title draws attention to the text as a "castle in the air"—a fantastic construct—just as Abdullah's daydream, also built on fantastic elements, is seen to be a castle in the air. The opening pages support the title by exhibiting fantastic elements much like those of Abdullah's daydreams. The first paragraph locates the action with reference to fantastic place names like Ingary, Rashpuht and Zanzib and as the text progresses all manner of fantastic elements appear—a prophecy, a magic carpet, a genie, an evil djinn and a beautiful princess. Furthermore, Abdullah's daydream later becomes "reality" in the narrative so that his fantasy curls back on itself as it were—the fantasy *within* the text and the fantasy that *is* the text become one and the same. The effect of this strategy is to self-consciously call the reader's attention to the nature of the text as a

fantastic construct (in contrast to other fantasies which conceal themselves as constructs and assume text to be transparent).

Patricia Waugh writes that: "Contemporary metaficitional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense (that is, than modernism) that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh 1984 p.7). She goes on to suggest that the response of more and more novelists to this loss of a belief in an objective reality is to reject those conventions of fiction which are based on a positivist and empiricist world view. Conventions like those of the well-made plot, chronological sequence and the authoritative and omniscient author are being questioned and rejected by many contemporary novelists (Waugh 1984 p.7).

There are some writers of fiction for children and adolescents who reflect this postmodern trend quite clearly. Aidan Chambers' *Break Time* and Peter Hunt's *Backtrack* quite deliberately dispense with an authoritative narrator and, in so doing, highlight the subjective nature of reality. However, unlike these writers, Diana Wynne Jones retains the traditional conventions of the novel. The omniscient narrator is alive and well in *Castle in the Air*, and in no sense is there a departure from the well made and carefully resolved plot which has a clear chronological sequence. In what sense then, am I suggesting that the novel is metafictive?

Castle in the Air is metafictive in that the text is constantly making reference to what is real and not real and, by implication, reminding the reader that that which is stated to be real in the text is no more or less real than that which is stated to be unreal because they are both part of

a fictional construct. The entire text is effectively about constructing realities.

In summary, the plot involves the adventures of Abdullah, a young carpet seller from Zanzib who imagines himself to be the son of a prince kidnapped by the wicked bandit Kabul Aqba and found by a carpet merchant . When Abdullah buys a carpet which turns out to be magic his dreams become "real" and he has to rescue the princess he has imagined (along with a number of fellow captive princesses) from the castle in the air where they have been imprisoned by the djinn Hasruel. It is Hasruel who has made Abdullah's fantasies "reality", and in order to defeat him Abdullah must discover where Dalzel, Hasruel's brother, has hidden Hasruel's life. The comic fantastic nature of the fiction involves much play with the reader as she/he, like Abdullah, must unravel the puzzle posed by the text. But as well as this play, I would suggest that a central concern of the novel is with the elusive nature of reality and with the dilemma involved in trying to represent reality. *Castle in the Air* responds to and contributes to an understanding of reality as provisional and elusive rather than fixed, in a playful mood.

In my discussion of *Castle in the Air* I will concentrate on one instance of metafictive play with constructs of reality, that of Flower-in-the-Night's construction of men. Before meeting Abdullah, Flower-in-the-Night's knowledge of men is limited to her father and the man he is arranging for her to marry—the Prince of Ochinstan. Furthermore, she has been given to understand by her father that most men are beasts (presumably he and the Prince of Ochinstan are two of the few exceptions). As a result of her limited experience, and because she doesn't think him to be a beast, she refuses to believe that Abdullah is a

man because he does not fit the reality she has constructed. In an attempt to re-educate her, Abdullah arranges to produce pictures of a variety of men and returns with representations of one hundred and eighty nine different men. On viewing these representations, Flower-in-the-Night decides that Abdullah is the most handsome and that she will marry him. The incident is narrated with a high degree of narratorial control and is light hearted in its intent but nevertheless acts as a means of exploring the concept of the representation of reality and the construction of realities.

Flower-in-the-Night has initially constructed a definition of male on the basis of her father's and assigned husband's appearances and on her father's verbal representation. When she subsequently reconstructs her definition she does so on the basis of a number of (male) representations of men and the appearance of another man who has produced the representations. The discerning reader might well conclude that her construction could still be a little limited. Furthermore, Abdullah's representations of men borrow from other representations (the picture of a heroic and kingly man was drawn from a statue) and are also dependent on the inventive powers of the male artist he has employed.

When Abdullah gives his instructions for the portraits of a "representative" selection of men he himself is placing his own restrictive constructs on his request for representation. Furthermore, Abdullah, who constructs himself in terms of the conventions of fantasy, calls for representations that are dependent on conventions associated with the fantasy mode or genre.

Draw me kings and paupers, merchants and workmen, fat and thin, young and old, handsome and ugly, and also plain average. If some of these are kinds of men that you have never seen, I require you to invent them, oh paragon of the paintbrush (*Castle in the Air* p.25).

Abdullah's instructions are given in terms of sets of signs constructed within the notion that signification is constructed by oppositions. Hence, the representations are to be of "kings and paupers" or "fat and thin"—representations which rely on socially constructed signs which signify associated characteristics. "King" signifies physical beauty, wealth and bravery while in opposition "pauper" signifies physical deformity, poverty and often (although not always) laziness. In this sense, then, the drawings are simply to be representations of certain social constructs or representations of reality: in effect Abdullah is calling for representations of representations. When he goes on to require his artist to invent the ones he has not seen, the nature of the representation becomes even more problematic. When representation is to be subject to the inventive capacities of the representer the representation of reality becomes increasingly suspect. The portraits Flower in the Night receives are one person's construct of reality and a construct restricted by generic convention. When Flower in the Night, after studying all the portraits carefully, decides that Abdullah is the most handsome of them all, she is choosing to construct Abdullah's appearance on the basis of a comparison between his appearance and the representations of other men which she has been shown. What is real is being demonstrated as relative. Abdullah was not perceived as "handsome" until compared with the representations of other males, just as she does not seem to have perceived her father and the prince of Ochinstan as "ugly" until

comparing them with the representations. Of course, concepts of what constitutes "handsome" and what constitutes "ugly" are again constructions which differ between different societies and cultures, although Diana Wynne Jones appears to assume late twentieth century western ideals of physical beauty.

What we have in this deceptively simple and playful stretch of text is an exploration of the derivative and dependent ways in which realities are constructed and re-presented and the consequent unreliability of any attempt at representation. This is true also of Abdullah's daydreaming which is dependent on the generic convention of wrongfully displaced persons of noble birth but which is, at the same time, just as "real" as the text which purports to represent Abdullah's daydreams.

It is interesting to note that while the author is examining the ways in which realities are constructed she is (probably unconsciously) demonstrating her own ideological assumptions about reality. John Stephens has pointed out Diana Wynne Jones' ideological assumptions about desirable females (Stephens 1992a p.280). Similar assumptions can be seen in Abdullah's conversion from lavish orientalism to the virtues of the English country garden. Abdullah is constantly constructing and modifying his preferred versions of reality, even down to styles of garden. When he first imagines the garden surrounding the princess' palace it is an elaborate affair with marble courts and lavish fountains. This construct is based on absurdly exaggerated notions of oriental aesthetics and the author's intent is clearly playful. However, there are underlying ideological assumptions being made about the most desirable gardens. These, it is made clear, are not Abdullah's

initial constructions of elaborate fountains and statuary but are simpler and very English.

> "This is not the way a garden should be," he said angrily. "A garden should be natural-seeming, with wild sections including a large area of bluebells" (*Castle in the Air* p. 160).

Although Wynne Jones is playing with the subjective nature of reality it is, in this case at least, clear which version of reality she believes to be the more acceptable.

The Homeward Bounders also explores the provisional nature of reality but in a far less playful manner. A quest fantasy, it is narrated in the first person by Jamie who tells in retrospect his story of being condemned by "them" to walk the boundaries of a series of worlds, bound to hope that he will one day return home. He encounters other homeward bounders including Uquar, a Prometheus figure, and with them is able to destroy "their" power. However, as he is the only one no longer homeward bound he must remain outside all the worlds in order to maintain the reality of each world, thus preventing the draining of reality into one concentrated place.

Central to the novel is a concern with the subjective nature of reality, and consequently with the concept that there is no one reality but rather a multiplicity of realities. Each of the worlds represented in the fiction are only real to those who inhabit them. When former inhabitants (those condemned to leave their worlds and become homeward bounders) only remember the worlds which they have come from, this serves to drain these worlds of reality because, of course, one never remembers something as it really was—our memories construct

another reality. The basis of the fiction is the problematic nature of reality, given its dependency on individual constructions, and from this stems the major action of the novel: the imperialist demand by one dominant reality that other realities submit themselves to exploitation.

Uquar has revealed to the Gods before the action of the novel takes place that if one who is familiar with all the worlds should be placed outside all the worlds he will drain all the worlds of reality and thence all reality can be concentrated in the one "real" place. Because Uquar knows all the worlds his knowledge is exploited and he is chained outside the worlds, draining them of reality in order to maintain the one real place from where "they" can manipulate the other worlds. When Jamie is no longer bound to hope he is able to free Uquar and, in a sort of reversal of the Promethean myth, Uquar leads a rebellion against those who would keep the different worlds in subjection. The action of the novel is thus also grounded in the notion that there is a range of ways of perceiving and representing the world and that no one perception of what is real should be entitled to dominate another. This ideological construct (which is not necessarily upheld by the hidden agenda of the text insofar as "doing something about" the tyranny emanates from the clearly English Adam) is reflected in the novel's problematising of the representational function of language.

Representation and language—it's just not cricket

I have discussed the way in which the stretch of text in *Castle in the Air* dealing with the pictorial representation of men demonstrates the problematic nature of representation. Following from this I will examine a stretch of text from *The Homeward Bounders* which highlights a

related issue in representation, that is, the dependence of perception on language.

When, in the course of the narrative, Jamie and Joris are forced to take part in what any reader familiar with the game will recognise as cricket they are completely at a loss as to how to function in the game because they lack the linguistic means of giving the game any significance. Furthermore, not only does their lack of the appropriate language disempower them, leaving them open to exploitation by those who are initiated into the language of the game, it alters their perception of the game. Does the game only exist when it is encoded in particular terms? Is it cricket? Is it any less cricket when explained without the traditional terms?

If, as has been suggested, any attempt to represent reality results in creating a reality, Jamie's account of the game of cricket makes an entirely different game. Jamie refers to the objects which the reader familiar with cricket would understand to be the wickets, as "two sets of three little sticks stuck in the ground some way apart". The terms used make the game recognisable, but they also change the nature of the game. Using the signifier "sticks" which implies fragile and insignificant objects and adding the modifier "little" alters the event being described. The choice of the verb "stuck", which implies randomness rather than design, to describe the placement of the sticks adds further to the representation of the game as something other than cricket. Jamie does use the signifier "ball" to refer to the object which is thrown at him, although he modifies this by referring to it after it has been bowled as being, "as hard as a bullet". Joris takes Jamie's modifying phrase further by using a totally different signifier for the signified and referring

to it as a "stone". This modifying phrase and different signifier add to the way in which the language used to represent the event effectively re-constructs the event. The game when perceived and represented from Jamie's point of view becomes an attack by those who have the linguistic upper hand on those whose failure to read the signs disempowers them. The representation of the game as a form of attack continues throughout the account with references to the ball being "thrown at him" and to him being "left quite undefended".

What I am suggesting here is that the linguistic choices the author has made in representing Jamie's representation of the game demonstrate the way in which we use language to construct realities. In this sense, as Patricia Waugh has suggested, the relation between fiction and reality becomes problematic (Waugh p.4). If, in the very act of using language to represent, we are constructing rather than representing, where does fiction end and reality begin? The reader's attention is being drawn once again to the constructed nature of the text and to the way in which, concurrently, realities are constructed. Not only is the text as a construct being focussed on, but the implication of the account of the cricket match is to demonstrate the way in which we ourselves perceive different realities.

There is one final way in which *The Homeward Bounders* is so constructed as to draw attention to itself as a fiction and this is the strategy whereby each of the worlds represents a fictional genre which is derived from some aspect of our known world taken to extremes. Each world, too, is subject to an author's dictates and manipulation. The authors are referred to as "them" and are also represented as the gods, owing much to the Classical Greek tradition of the gods who determined

and played with the fates of mortals. In representing a series of worlds as different fictional genres, Wynne Jones is also making a further comment on the ways in which we choose to represent reality by focussing on and enlarging particular features of our world.

Jamie, as a homeward bounder, moves through a series of different worlds, some of which are referred to specifically. Those specifically referred to are:

- a primitive herding society (twice);

- a mining society;

- a world containing the mythical figures of The Flying Dutchman and Uquar\Prometheus;

- Helen's world where everyone must live in fortresses;

- a cannibal world;

- a carnival world, known as Creema di Leema, where everyone is perpetually happy if somewhat tipsy;

- a world which appears to be a perpetual WW1 (and which appears to be one of a sequence of wars, the eighth of which is the aftermath of a nuclear war);

- Jamie's world one hundred years later;

- Uquar's rock;

- "Their" Real Place.

As Jamie moves through each of these worlds he becomes an image for the reader as she\he decodes the text, for Jamie, like any reader, must read the signs within each world in order to "read" the worlds and break "Their" tyranny. Each world is like a separate fiction with its own conventions and with a focus on one particular facet of our known world, almost to the point where each world is a self-conscious caricature of one particular feature of our own world. In the primitive

herding world, cattle assume central importance—there were sixteen words for cow. In the mining world Jamie suffers all the discomforts associated with mining and has no option apart from mining. The cannibal world duly conforms to generic expectations and involves a jungle, a village (but with somewhat non-generic houses), cannibal pots and the fattening-up feast complete with naive victim. Jamie, with comic effect, is a great deal slower to "read the signs" than the reader in this particular world. The generic characteristics are clues it would be hard for the reader to fail to read.

It is in the world of mythical characters that it is most important that Jamie read the signs, for it is to be expected of this genre that it will embody transcendent meaning in some way.[2] It is in this world that the key to the homeward bounders' entrapment lies, and Uquar, mythical Promethean figure, is bound (as is to be expected in the genre) to remain silent regarding his plight. All the worlds, then, act as separate fictions within Jamie's fiction. The reader who observes Jamie "reading" these fictions is being asked to recognise the fictive nature of the entire text. At one stage Jamie comments,

> For a while after that, I went around seeing all the worlds as nothing more than coloured lights on a wall. They are turning the wheel and lighting the lights, and all we get is the reflections, no more real than that (*The Homeward Bounders* p.30).

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[2] Jamie, as the "hero" of this quest fantasy, must pass the test of recognising and understanding what is required of him in order to fulfill his quest to destroy "their" power. Similarly, Uquar himself, as a secondary heroic figure, must pass the test of remaining silent.

Jamie's description of the worlds being the result of devices used to create the illusion of reality by those who claim the monopoly on what is real, is a reminder to the reader of the constructed nature of all fictions. Further, to read a fiction without recognising this, can leave the reader trapped and, as it were, subject to the text. As Jamie goes on to say,

> But when you get into a new world, it's as solid as granite and glass can make it, and the sky shuts you in just as if there was no way through (*The Homeward Bounders* p.31).

It is surely no accident that central to Jamie's growth as a subject is that he resist the temptation to become absorbed in any of the worlds and stands outside all of them. He can visit and move from one to the other but will not invest any one of them with a greater degree of reality than another. He is really an image for the reader who has learned to read the signs and move through a text always alert to the directing hand of the author and never mistaking the reflections for the lights. Finally, the reader is reminded that what has been said need not be believed, the reader has a choice and it is probably to the narrator's advantage that he be disbelieved. The reader is left with a curious metafictive logical twist whereby a refusal to believe and a consequent acknowledgment of the fictional nature of the text will aid in controlling the fictional "them". A healthy dose of scepticism is always a useful antidote to the influence of those who claim a monopoly on reality.

Of course, to return to the opening discussion in this chapter on the the Dan Quayle/Murphy Brown incident, such a commentary on the nature of fictional constructs also serves as a commentary on the way constructs of reality are imposed upon us by those who claim to have the monopoly on reality in the "real" world. The constructed worlds

through which Jamie moves which seem so real and which hold their inhabitants in subjection, are no different to the fictive construct which is *Murphy Brown* or to the "real" construct that is Dan Quayle. The postmodern use of textual devices that punch holes in constructs reminds us that fiction is a construction and that much that is claimed to be "real" is also a social construction to which we can be held subject.

2   The Author as Manipulator of Events

The second metafictive strategy which Diana Wynne Jones uses in her fiction is that of focussing attention on the function of the author as the creator of the text. This strategy is one which is particularly a feature of *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Castle in the Air*. In these two texts the author employs three devices to place focus on the author as director of action: chapter headings which summarise and anticipate coming action, a character who performs the role of author, and a computer game which, when played, affects the action.

Chapter headings

The chapter headings of both *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Castle in the Air* all give a summary of the action to come—a practice borrowed from precursors of the novel such as Thomas Deloney's *History of John Winchcombe*, and from earlier novels such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and then later in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Twenty out of the twenty one chapter headings in *Howl's Moving Castle* commence with the prepositional phrase "in which": the first chapter is called "In which Sophie talks to hats", the second "In which Sophie is compelled to seek her fortune" and so on. The fifth chapter, which does not

conform to this pattern, refers to the contents of the chapter by the prepositional phrase "of washing".[3] In *Castle in the Air* fourteen of its twenty one chapter headings commence with the prepositional phrase "in which" and Chapter eighteen follows the pattern of Chapter five in *Howl's Moving Castle*. This suggestion that the events are somehow contained in the chapter is a further metafictive device focussing again on the text itself. In other words, the reader is being reminded that this ostensible reported action exists simply as words on a page and is ordered into segments of text known as chapters. Furthermore, the chapter headings draw the reader's attention to the structured nature of the text and, in anticipating the action within the chapters, reminds the reader that the author is initiating, ordering, directing, controlling and resolving events. The device also serves to suggest that the one event can be given two different representations: one representation is given in the summary title and another in an extended telling. Once again, the reader is reminded that the representation is not an event itself but a representation of events.

The remaining six chapters in *Castle in the Air* all begin with the relative pronoun "which" referring to the chapter, and then attribute an action to the chapter (with the exception of Chapter four where it would appear that the author is concealing herself and suggesting that the text itself is doing the telling). Chapters five and fourteen "tell", Chapter six "shows", and Chapter seven "introduces". These chapter headings draw attention to what is a common reading (and teaching, "what does

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[3] This use of prepositional phrases in chapter headings probably evokes the first metafictive novel *Tristram Shandy* where the heading within Book V Chapter 1 is 'Upon Whiskers'.

this passage tell us about. . ?") assumption about texts and serve to remind the reader that the text (including chapter headings and divisions) is a construct. In other words, the headings are a self-conscious device deliberately designed to focus the reader on the author's control of the text right down to the carefully and uniformly structured chapter headings.

The author within the text

John Stephens has discussed the way in which Hasruel, the djinn in *Castle in the Air,* takes on a role which corresponds to that of the author of a fiction (Stephens 1992a p.276). It is Hasruel who gives substance to Abdullah's fantasies, who directs the action and finally plots his own defeat. However, Abdullah himself plays some authorial role because he sets in motion the fantasy which Hasruel manipulates. The effect of Hasruel's role in plotting the rescue of the kidnapped princesses by manipulating Abdullah's responses is to throw attention on the constructed nature of the plot. Cause and effect are seen not as a reflection of the way in which we have come to expect the "real world" to operate, but as something carefully engineered. Further to this is the nature of Hasruel as deceiver and concealer. He takes the role of the author who, for the purposes of suspense, surprise and sustained interest, so structures his tale as to deceive and confuse the reader. As John Stephens points out, Hasruel's acts of concealment and their eventual discovery by Abdullah become a metaphor for the reading of the book (Stephens 1992a p.276). Hasruel's role within the narrative is then a commentary on the text in which he appears, for Hasruel himself is only the result of Wynne Jones' choices in structuring the fiction. It is her object to play games with her readers, to mislead while leaving

obscure clues and yet to entice readers to keep reading. Her decision to represent Hasruel as an author of tricks and delusions acts as a metafictive device to draw attention to the ways in which the work has been constructed.

The text as computer game

The two strategies I have discussed so far have clearly pointed to the identity of the author as the controlling figure who manipulates and determines the nature of the text. The third strategy I wish to examine is a feature which receives only the briefest attention in *Howl's Moving Castle* and yet which is interesting to note because it suggests that the text is a game with rules which can be negotiated. Even though this does not draw attention to the author as such, it does nevertheless point to the text's essential constructedness and, by implication, to the constructor. When the magician Howl, along with Sophie and Michael, visits his sister in Wales he gives his nephew, Neil, and his friend a computer game. As they commence playing, it becomes immediately obvious to the reader that the game is the same as the text, meaning that the two protagonists start to play a game of which they must be a part. The effect of this frame-breaking device is to shift the reader's perspective so that the text becomes something to be negotiated by the reader just as the events represented in the text must be negotiated by *the protagonists. Furthermore, Howl, in producing the game, is* accorded some awareness of the fact that he is a participant in a narrative. In this sense, he momentarily steps outside the frame of the narrative to offer, as it were, a very brief acknowledgment of the constructed nature of the text and to take the role of author in offering the readers (the two boys) another version of the narrative in the form of

a computer game[4]. The implication is that he as a protagonist has stepped outside the frame of the narrative, has reflected on the narrative in which he appears and has perceived it as a fictional construct. In other words, he momentarily becomes both reader, author and protagonist. The metafictive effect is emphasised further when Sophie, watching the boys begin the game, is puzzled by the familiar nature of the opening directions which she hears them reading:

> You are in an enchanted castle with four doors. Each opens on a different dimension. In Dimension One the castle is moving constantly and may arrive at a hazard at any time... (*Howl's Moving Castle* p.104).

She has overheard a narrative which directly mirrors her own circumstances: someone seems to be in control of her story. The point is not pursued and is, as I have said, only accorded the briefest attention but it does demonstrate again metafictive play with the notion of authorial control.

3   Playing with Conventions—"Now if I wasn't doomed to failure because of my position in the family..."

In *Howl's Moving Castle* Diana Wynne Jones makes use of fairy tale conventions but plays with these by having the focalising character, Sophie, fully conscious of the restraints imposed on her by the generic conventions of the text in which she appears and complaining about them. This metafictive strategy, whereby characters within a text display

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[4] The computer game in *Howl's Moving Castle* serves a similar purpose to the computer games in *The Homeward Bounders* and in *Hexwood* (see Chapter 3). In all three instances the game image draws the reader's attention to the notion that events within a fiction are ordered and constructed by a controlling author and that subjects are subjected to the dictates of genre.

a self-conscious knowledge of the requirements of a particular genre, has been explored in a number of re-versions of fairy tales, one of the most successful of which is Allan Ahlberg's *Ten in a Bed*. In this text the wicked witch seeks to reconstruct herself and the Frog Prince searches in vain for an obliging princess. However, the metafictive play in *Howl's Moving Castle* serves as a strategy to underpin one of the concerns of the text, that of not being subject to the conventional expectations, and of being able to think things through and take action despite the dictates of convention.

In the opening lines of the narrative there are clear signals given that the text is one which follows certain generic features we have come to expect and to associate with fairy tales. The conventional term used to describe a location in a fairy tale is used in the opening words "In the land of Ingary" and the associations of this means of locating action are reinforced by the reference to magical objects such as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility. However, the main clause with which the sentence concludes draws attention to the generic convention regarding the eldest of three children and this is reinforced by the following sentence which reminds the readers of the failure which the conventions impose on such children. In drawing attention to these generic conventions the author is signalling that the text will continue to play with the generic conventions of the fairy tale throughout the text and that such metafictive play will inform the direction of the text.

Diana Wynne Jones also draws attention to the generic conventions of fairy tales by breaking the frame on occasions and including features which are out of place in the genre. It is hardly customary for a wizard to attend Rugby Club reunions let alone return from one very much the

worse for wear. Nor is it customary for a wizard to bemoan the fact that whenever he goes to Wales he comes back with a cold. Later, when Howl visits his sister in Wales in search of the second part of the Donne poem and receives a somewhat frosty welcome, he comments sarcastically "There's a welcome in the valleys!" (*Howl's Moving Castle* p.103). Each of these intertextual references draw attention to a conventional assumption about Wales just as the intertextual references to fairy tales draw attention to the generic conventions of the tales. Just as it is assumed that witches must be wicked, so it is assumed that the Welsh are obsessed by Rugby, that it is always cold and wet in Wales and that Harry Secombe's rendition of the song holds true. In drawing our attention to other ways in which generic assumptions work she is (as well as creating comic effect by means of the frame break) broadening her metafictive play.

Throughout the narrative there are repeated references to a whole series of fairy tale motifs and the narrative takes on the pattern of a cinderella story with the death of the father, the apparent treachery of the stepmother and Sophie's reduction to a kitchen drudge and subsequent marriage to a handsome prince (or at least wizard). However, it is not simply the omniscient narrator who draws attention to the conventions of the genre. Sophie herself, as the focalising character in the narrative, also comments on her limitations as a result of the conventional restrictions of the text in which she finds herself. In other words, as a generically (and also, socially) constructed subject she is denied agency. As a construct trapped within the fiction she displays a consciousness of her fictional status and of her limited options. Sophie's knowledge of her limited prospects in life comes, we are told, from having read a great deal, and furthermore, the text requires that

the reader have a similar acquaintance with fairy tale texts in order to understand why Sophie believes herself to be "doomed to failure".

Margaret Mackey's discussion of the Ahlberg text which I referred to above looks at the way in which the metafictive play in the text serves as a means of exploring and highlighting the characteristics of the fairy tale genre and the whole act of making narrative, by playing with the behaviour which young children often exhibit when being read to. In so doing, the text raises a number of issues, among them being the relationship between narrator and narratee, re-versions of fairy tales, point of view and authorial control of texts (Mackey 1990). However, the metafictional play in the Ahlberg text differs in intent from that of *Howl's Moving Castle*. Here, the play serves to underline the major concern of the fiction, that of Sophie's need to recognise that she can act effectively. The conventions which Sophie blames for her failures act as a metaphor for Sophie's sense of inadequacy (something which is also reflected in her becoming an old woman whereby her physical appearance is not so much the result of a spell as the result of her sense of failure). In other words, in drawing the reader's attention to the generic conventions the author has made them work as an image for the fears and excuses of the subject as she tries to explain her failure.

When Howl and Sophie are blown back to the castle from their encounter with the Witch of the Waste, Sophie seeks to excuse her mistake in being deceived by the witch by claiming the restrictions of the conventions, but Howl points out that she need not be a failure at all if she were to think about what is happening and make her own decisions (that is, assume agency).

"I'm the eldest!" Sophie shrieked. "I'm a failure"

"Garbage!" Howl shouted. "You just never stop to think!" (*Howl's Moving Castle* p.205).

The conventional expectations and demands of such a genre are broken in that Sophie, eldest of three, does succeed. Of course the conventions are also always in the control of the author. In this case, the author plays with the conventions and controls and foregrounds them as a means of focussing on the subject's growth in accepting responsibility for her failings and recognising the ability to succeed as coming from herself rather than being the result of external determining forces.

The same strategy is seen on a micro-level when the reader must, in order to decode the puzzle of the text, break away from a conventional understanding of the phrase "Heartless Howl" and re-read it. When Howl is first introduced in the narrative he is represented in the following manner.

> ...he was known to amuse himself by collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them. Or some people said he ate their hearts. He was an utterly cold-blooded and heartless wizard and no young girl was safe from him if he caught her on her own (*Howl's Moving Castle* p.3).

In linking the adjective "heartless" with the phrase "cold-blooded" to describe Howl, along with other details about Howl's wickedness, the reader is directed to understand the description of Howl as "heartless" in a figurative sense, thus suggesting he is a ruthless and unfeeling character, which is the conventional understanding of the term when used in fairy tales. As well as this, the phrases, "sucking the souls" and "ate their hearts" allow an interplay between the literal and the figurative. These phrases can be understood at a crude literal level but

also carry an intertwining of figurative implications related to Howl's emotional, romantic, sexual and psychological impact on young girls, particularly when the phrases are combined with the cliché "no young girl was safe from him". The effect is to construct a site where there are two possible referents (in neither case literal) for "heartless": that of being physically without a heart (a figurative expression because Howl's heart is mislaid rather than non-existent) and that of a refusal to feel empathy with the sufferings of others.

When the reader defies the conventional understanding of the word and thinks for her\himself about its literal meaning he\she has come close to understanding the puzzle of the text. Howl is heartless (although still not literally) having given his heart to Calcifer the fire demon in order to secure his services.

4   Playing with Words—"It's only true in a manner of speaking"

The fourth metafictive strategy which Diana Wynne Jones employs is that of playing with slippage in the meaning of signifiers whereby the one signifier may refer to more than one signified. Words, as the basis of verbal representation, form the foundation of any fiction and in seeking to effect a verbal construct any author is dependent on the use of signifiers. The author's play with slippage between signifier and signified highlights the problematic nature of language rather than simply assuming (as is the case with much literature written for children) that the link between a signifier and its signified is straightforward and hence that the transmission of meaning is a simple process.

It would be impossible (and somewhat pointless) to enumerate all the instances of such play. I have, in my earlier discussion on the

strategy of focussing on the text as a construct, examined instances of such play with the range of constructions which can be placed on the title *Castle in the Air* and, in discussing play with convention, I have discussed the two possible signifieds for the one signifier "heartless Howl". All Jones' fiction makes consistent use of what we commonly call puns, and frequently the resolution of her plots lies in an understanding of a pun (as is the case with *Howl's Moving Castle*). I have chosen to discuss one instance from *Howl's Moving Castle* because this particular instance involves an entire stretch of text normally understood to have one significance but given a different significance when placed in another context.

At a point approximately halfway through the narrative Howl's apprentice Michael asks Sophie for help with a spell.

> Michael eagerly thrust a strange, slightly shiny paper into her hand
> Sophie read:
>
> "Go and catch a falling star,
> Get with child a mandrake root
> Tell me where all past years are,
> Or who cleft the devil's foot.
> Teach me to hear the mermaids singing
> Or to keep off envy's stinging,
> And find
> What wind
> Serves to advance an honest mind
> Decide what this is about
> Write a second verse yourself" (*Howl's Moving Castle* pp.86-87).

The reader has already been notified from the text immediately preceding this extract that Michael is having trouble with a spell and so

is prepared to accept the words on the paper for what Michael claims them to be. However, even if they are not aware that the "spell" is actually the first verse of John Donne's *Song*, they are likely to recognise the words as being arranged in poetic form and so be ready for them to have more than the significance Michael has attributed it. The very fact that we are told that Michael is finding the meaning hard to establish prepares the reader for a stretch of text that problematises the transmission of meaning. Furthermore, the verse has been removed from its normal context twice. Not only does it appear in a fantasy as a spell, it has arrived there in the form of a poor photocopy with a teacher's instruction at the bottom. Hence, it is both a segment of a poem, a spell and a homework exercise depending on the context in which it appears. The teacher's instructions (all too characteristic of the teaching of literature in schools) themselves problematise the transmission of meaning by asking the students to decide "what this is about". At a later stage in the text when Howl is in search of the rest of the poem, he is casually informed by his nephew's friend that the text is about submarines.

The description of the photocopy is itself an exercise in the dependence of meaning on context as well as a metafictive pointer to the way in which a text operates as more than just the sum of its parts. A text operates within a context and the text itself changes according to the context in which it appears. By representing the letters as grey and blurred and by referring to, "grey blurs, like retreating stormclouds, round all the edges" in the context of spells and magic, mystery and possible danger are implied. However, at the same time, when this description is read with reference to the appearance of a poor quality photocopy, the description has a far more prosaic significance. Thus,

the meaning which might be attributed to this stretch of text becomes dependent on the context in which the text appears and on the assumptions the reader makes about the text.

When Sophie and Michael seek to interpret the spell, the reader is being asked to consider the problematic nature of language as a stable means of conveying meaning. Michael and Sophie attempt to understand the text, interpreting each line as a riddle (although Sophie has come closer to the original meaning of the text when she suggests that it sounds like a list of impossible things to do). Diana Wynne Jones finally attributes her own significance to the text so that each seemingly impossible task is fulfilled by the action, thus making it a prophetic statement, solely because of the context in which it occurs. The effect of this is to draw attention to the way in which the connection between words used and the meaning ascribed to those words shifts according to context. The reader is being asked to focus on the language that forms the text. Language is not used simply as a transparent medium to encode a narrative while its problematic qualities are ignored.

A further strategy Jones employs to focus the reader's attention on language is that of giving the one signified a number of signifiers. In *Castle in the Air* many of the characters change shape and appearance and so are denoted by different signifiers at different times (even though the reader is initially unaware of this). The magic carpet is referred to by a series of signifiers—mat, carpet, floorcovering—but is also revealed later in the narrative to be Calcifer, the fire demon. Sophie and her child become a mother cat and its kitten, and Howl, it transpires, is the genie. Almost until the end of the text Abdullah has known the genie as "the genie" but, with the resolution of the plot, he regains his previous

persona and is known as the Royal Wizard Howl. Effectively, given the fact that a fiction is entirely dependent on verbal representation, the one signified has been allocated a change of signifier. Abdullah still recognises the character he referred to as the genie but speculates on whether his change of name makes him different.

> The Royal Wizard Howl was a younger man than the Wizard Suliman, and a good deal more elegant. He was richly dressed in a suit of mauve satin, against which his hair showed a rather improbable shade of yellow. Abdullah stared at the wizard's light eyes in the wizard's bony face. He had seen those eyes clearly one early morning. He felt he should have guessed. He felt himself altogether in an awkward position. He had used the genie. He felt he knew the genie very well. Did that mean he also knew the wizard? Or not? (_Castle in the Air_ pp.197-98).

The change of signifier is made quite clear by reference to "the wizard's light eyes in the wizard's bony face" but at the same time Abdullah's reflection and the two references to the genie makes his previous identity clear and serves to link the two. The question Abdullah asks himself is, having known the genie does he know Howl? By implication, a question about language and representation is being posed: does a different signifier make a different signified? Subsequent action suggests that a different signifier does not make another signified.

> Howl turned towards Abdullah. "I feel I got to know you rather well," he said. They looked at one another awkwardly. "Do you know me?" Howl asked.

> Abdullah bowed. "At least as well as you know me." (_Castle in the Air_ p.205).

This resolution may answer the specific question which Abdullah asks and confirm that two different signifiers can denote the one signified, but the very asking of the question foregrounds the difficulties inherent in verbal representation and focuses attention on the process of fictional representation. Moving from using the signifier "genie" to that of "Wizard Howl" must alter the reader's understanding of the character signified. Although both are associated with the performance of magical feats there are some important differences in the ideas associated with each. "Genie" carries associations of being enslaved and under the control of another, while "Wizard" is associated with being in control and having power. Thus the change in signifier must alter what is signified. After all, the entire fiction is a verbal construct dependent for all its action, events and characterisation on the words which, as it were, make things happen.

In Conclusion

In my first chapter I have suggested that Diana Wynne Jones' fantasy can best be understood as postmodern fantasy which pushes beyond the conventions of the genre and effects a paradigm shift in the genre. Similarly, her use of metafictive strategies that call attention to texts as constructs and to realities as constructs again identifies her fantasy as postmodern and as resisting the conventional restraints of the fantastic genre or mode. In the following chapter I examine the ways in which her construction of subjectivity breaks away from generic conventions with a postmodern treatment of the subject.

Taking the Subject Further

Introduction

A predominant concern in almost all literature written for children (be it of the fantastic or realist mode) is that of the growth and development of the self or subject. This concern is so widely acknowledged that such a statement is almost a truism. Nevertheless, it is on this assumption that much discussion of children's literature continues to be based. In western culture, based on liberal humanist assumptions about the centrality of the individual, literary texts written for children continue to be judged on how successfully they represent the growth of the self. Texts considered to be successful are then often valorised for their potential to somehow assist readers in their own self growth. Hence the approval given such current writers as Katherine Paterson and Cynthia Voigt.

There are, of course, different preoccupations and directions in the way in which this growth of the self is represented. Some texts exhibit a preoccupation with the growth of the self as an autonomous being, whereby the emphasis is on the self's growth to separation and distinction from others, most frequently from family. Here, the emphasis is on discovering the distinctive self, on finding the unique identity of the self. At other times, texts seem written to reassure readers by representing the growth to maturity of an "ugly duckling" who starts

from a position of ignominy but whose inherent qualities lead to their being acknowledged as having worth. (Such a representation of self-growth is very much characteristic of an American democratic ethos and can be seen, not only in fiction written for children, but in films like Disney's *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*.)

However, I am suggesting that such approaches to representing the self can lend themselves to a somewhat limiting and simplistic representation of subjectivity. What I intend exploring in this chapter is a distinction in Diana Wynne Jones' fiction between those texts that represent the subject as an enclosed and complete being and those that represent the subject as continually re-negotiating itself within changing cultural contexts. It is, of course, important to recognise the short comings of attempts to label differing modes of representing subjectivity. Such attempts tend to come unstuck as texts resist categorisation. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to describe the representation of subjectivity as autonomous as owing much to a western liberal-humanist tradition, and in turn to describe a less enclosed and more heterogeneous model of subjectivity as owing something to postmodern cultural theory. Certain of Jones' more sophisticated texts appear to reflect a postmodern understanding of the subject and to use this understanding as a means of representing self-growth as a complex and ongoing process rather than as a process which has a clearly delineated beginning and ending. In this sense I hope to demonstrate further the influence of post-modern thought on Jones' fiction.

In this discussion I will be assuming that common everyday observation confirms the popular assumption that each person exists as

an individual entity, but with the proviso that that individual entity constructs itself by continually negotiating and renegotiating itself within a social context. In this sense the subject can be seen as singular but nevertheless shifting, and always in a process of change. Paul Smith in *Discerning the Subject* early in his discussion makes it clear that:

> None of us lives without reference to an imaginary singularity which we call our "self".. . . However, the singular is not necessarily to be conceived of as a unity:... (Smith 1988 p.6).

So the subject is never enclosed and complete, but rather is always in the process of coming into being. John Stephens contends that:

> ...the subject exists as an individual, but that existence is within a dialectical relationship within sociality. The subject has a singular existence in its self picturations and the stories it can tell about itself, but these self-constituting moments are just that—moments of interpretation within the social relations which produce the subject and which the subject helps to produce (Stephens 1992a p.47).

Such a representation of the subject as a heterogeneous rather than a unitary entity also has implications for representing self-growth as a growth to inter-subjectivity. Those attempts to represent the self that ignore the dialogic nature of the subject tend to promote a notion that there is a fixed entity which the self must discover. Once this selfhood is discovered (generally as the result of one or a series of cathartic events) the subject is represented as complete (and so is the text or the series). In such a representation the supremacy of the individual is valorised, while "the other" is cast in the role of assistant in this process of self-discovery.

However, when self growth is represented as a move from a position of solipsism (whereby the self perceives the other solely as that other affects its needs and interests) to a position of inter-subjectivity (whereby the self recognises its position in the world as separate from the other and yet nevertheless interdependent with the other) there is a shift from the predominance of western individualist assumptions. Such representation acknowledges the dialogic nature of the self, allows for contradiction within the self and resists the notion of an enclosed, self-contained and autonomous self. Hence, a natural accompaniment to any examination of the influence of postmodern thought on Diana Wynne Jones' representation of subjectivity must be a discussion of the subject's growth to inter-subjectivity in a selection of her texts.

In examining the way in which self-growth is represented in Jones' fiction it is important to remember certain characteristics of the fantastic mode which set it apart from that of realism and which tend to restrict the portrayal of subjectivity to little more than a simplistic one. Common to the representation of the growth of the subject in much fantasy literature is a set of assumptions about the self constructed as the central character. First, despite initial appearances to the contrary, this self has a unique individuality to discover which places it apart from (and often makes it superior to) other selves. Second, this individuality is constituted by the discovery of certain magical attributes or objects which may only be used by the chosen individual. Third, the self's growth is often determined by virtue of birth or magical powers. Finally, this self is then destined to exercise agency on behalf of others, by virtue of its superior attributes.

It would seem that these generic characteristics, which can be seen across even such otherwise divergent texts as Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy and Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*, place restrictions which are hard to resist. It is my intention to examine the ways in which some of Wynne Jones' fiction resists such a mode of representation, at least to some extent, by using features associated with a postmodern view of subjectivity.

First, I intend comparing the treatment of the growth of the subject in *Power of Three* and *The Spellcoats*. These texts have certain common features and concerns but differ considerably in the way in which the growth of the focalising characters is represented. I hope to be able to demonstrate in *The Spellcoats* a shift from the manner of representing subjectivity that tends to be characteristic of the genre. I will then examine Wynne Jones' most recent work, *Hexwood*, in order to explore further ways in which her texts resist the generic characteristics of representing subjectivity.

My approach is to start from the four assumptions about the self that I have identified which tend to characterise the representation of the subject in fantasy. In discussing the extent to which the nominated texts resist these assumptions I will focus on four strategies employed in the texts that undergird the notion of the shifting nature of the subject constantly in process of constructing itself in interaction with both social and cultural discourses and other subjects.

- Closure—open, ambivalent endings reflect the shifting nature of the subject

- The narrative—the construction of the narrative reflects the subject constructing and reconstructing itself as it tells stories about itself and brings itself into being over and over again

- Play with multiple signifiers—the use of multiple signifiers indicating the one signified suggests the multiple nature, and shifting character, of the signified

- Intertextuality—texts are in a dialogic relationship, changing in significance when juxtaposed with each other. This acts as an image for the interplay that takes place between subjects and social discourses in forming individual consciousness. In other words, the text itself is dependent on other texts and social and cultural discourses in order for it to be constructed, just as the individual subject cannot construct itself in isolation and is dependent on a plethora of social interactions.

Of course these four strategies are not evenly employed across all the texts and consequently some strategies will receive greater attention than others depending on the text being discussed.

Diana Wynne Jones' early text *Power of Three* makes an interesting contrast with *The Spellcoats* (second in the *Dalemark* quartet). The two texts have much in common. They are both preoccupied with the way in which subjects construct and reconstruct themselves and each other and in this sense they both differ from the way in which the subject is generally treated in fantasy literature. Both texts take as their subject matter a crisis in the protagonist's community when opposing groups misconstruct each other and hold each other subject to these misconstructions. In both texts the ensuing quest to see the opposing groups reconcile differences and recognise a commonality of need and purpose is coupled with the protagonists' growth as subjects with agency. Furthermore, both texts use features characteristic of the genre to represent self growth. However, despite these similarities there are significant differences between the two texts.

Power of Three—the Subject Remains Subject to Genre Dictates

Construction of the focalising subject in *Power of Three* conforms to the first assumption that characterises the construction of subjectivity in fantasy literature—despite initial appearances to the contrary, the self has a unique individuality to discover which sets it apart from other selves. From the point at which the focalising character, Gair, first enters the narrative at his birth the reader is given to understand that Gair is somehow set apart.

> Gest (his father) looked and was rather startled. Gair was dark and pale, like Adara, and stared solemnly up at Gest with big grey eyes. "Why doesn't he smile?" said Gest.
>
> "They don't at first ," said Adara. "Even Ayna didn't."
>
> "I expect you're right," said Gest. All the same, he remained a little awed by the strange solemn baby, even when Gair was old enough to smile (*Power of Three* p.39).

Gair's appearance—"dark and pale" and "with big grey eyes"—suggests mystery and physical frailty. The use of the adverb, "solemnly" to describe the child's stare and its subsequent reinforcement by the use of the adjective "solemn" to describe the baby, serve to indicate perception and reflection commonly associated with physical frailty in fantastic literature. (In contrast, a robust appearance coupled with being blond is associated with physical daring and action and a limited ability to perceive and reflect.) The implication in this description of Gair is that he is to be understood as set apart and that he has a unique individuality not immediately obvious but awaiting discovery.

As the narrative progresses we are told on several occasions that Gair has a sense of inadequacy, of being ordinary and of little worth. But at the same time we are also conscious of a sub-text created by the very fact that attention is being drawn to Gair's sense of inadequacy, and which alerts us to anticipate that he will prove to be very much the opposite. Such an anticipation is further justified by the reported opinion of the other occupants of Garholt that Gair is extraordinary, and by his tendency to separate himself from the others and sit thinking on the windowsill.

Second, Gair's individuality is confirmed when he discovers his gift of Sight Unasked. The gift both confirms our reading of the sub-text and confirms Gair as one who stands apart from all others. The narrative emphasises that his gift sets him apart, and must be understood alone. When Gair and his siblings are in the Giants' house his Gift makes him sense there is something wrong that is disrupting relations and that hangs like a curse over the family.

> Gair felt a sense of triumph, because he had connected the pulsing of the house with Brenda's talk of flooding from the first. The pulsing depression weighed on him harder as soon as he thought of it, and, as he had in Garholt, he found himself bracing to resist it. And the more he resisted, the harder the feeling pressed. After a second or so of fierce, private battle, Gair realised it was trying to tell him something else. He was scared....he was too frightened himself to do anything but try to ignore his own Gift. The trouble with Sight Unasked was that it was a Gift so rare that there was nobody alive who knew enough about it to help Gair come to terms with it. He knew he would have to do it on his own. It was a very lonely feeling (*Power of Three* p. 141).

The self is constructed here as a lone individual bereft of the opportunity to form itself in interaction with others. However, at the same time there is something of a shift away from an autonomous self in the construction of Gair. When the omniscient narrator reports an internal dialogue within the self as Gair resists and eventually learns to accept his internal voice (the Gift), there is some concession to a dialogic representation of the self, albeit to a very limited extent. However, such a construction of the subject is represented simply as a stage on the journey of the self to become a unitary subject.

Third, Gair's individuality (determined by his possession of a unique gift) is the result of his birth—he is the Chief's elder son. It is characteristic of the genre that the elder son of the King/Chief/Lord will be uniquely gifted in order for him to eventually take the place of his father. Gair's subjectivity is represented as first the discovery of his pre-determined status and his individuality and then the gradual acceptance of them. Hence there is no sense in which the self grows in any way other than that determined by the generic requirements. Furthermore, the genre requires that Gair's construction as a subject ultimately results in his being represented as an enclosed and autonomous self, complete and able to properly fulfil his role. In other words, the nature of the genre pre-determines and restricts the nature of the subject represented. As the narrative reaches its climax Gair is represented (in this speech attributed to his father, Gest) in such a way as to indicate that he is complete and has achieved the selfhood he is destined to achieve by virtue of his position as the Chief's son:

...I'll tell you he has more worth in his little finger than all the boys in Garholt together. He's already famous for his wisdom. If you doubt his

courage, think of the way he and the giant came here alone. And he has the gift of sight unasked (*Power of Three* pp.255-256).

Gest's speech signals to the reader that he has at last recognised his son's worth and, in resolving the previous misunderstanding between father and son, brings the narrative towards closure.

It is also interesting to note that Gair's subjectivity is represented as setting him apart from and superior to his peers. He is thus equipped to fulfil the fourth assumption of the construction of selfhood in fantasy—Gair's attributes qualify him to exercise agency on both his behalf and on the behalf of others for whom he has a responsibility. Gair's quest to prevent the flooding of the valley on behalf of his own people, the Lymen, and on behalf of the other occupants of the valley, the Dorig and the Giants, is fulfilled when he exercises the qualities that he alone possesses. It is his gift of sight unasked that helps him identify the nature of the curse, it is his initiative which takes him and Gerald to the Dorig and it is his act of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation that lifts the curse.

Although a central concern of the text is that of recognising the selfhood of others and a commonality of interest the text does not really construct Gair as moving from a position of solipsism to one of intersubjectivity. Rather, the sons who occupy the equivalent of his position—Gerald among the Giants and Hafny among the Dorig—are constructed as extensions of Gair. He sees himself in them and is able to recognise their selfhood only in the sense that their experiences mirror his own. Gair does not construct himself in dialogue with his prototypes, they simply serve to affirm his selfhood. The three characters are effectively not three separate subjects but the one

subject appearing in three separate guises. Hence one significance of the title in its implication that the three selves combine to make one effective power.

The text also constructs Gair's subjectivity by constructing an oppositional figure—Orban—who manifests qualities diametrically opposed to those of Gair. Gair is quiet and thoughtful while Orban is brash and aggressive, Gair is brave while Orban is cowardly and so on. This means of constructing the subjectivity of the protagonist, very common to the genre, again denies a move from solipsism to intersubjectivity. Here the subject is not in a dialogic relationship with the other but rather is in an oppositional relationship whereby ultimately the one superior subject will be vindicated at the expense of the other.

The subject is constructed within the restrictions of the generic conventions to take on a leadership role. Consequently, Gair's subjectivity is not constructed as interdependent but as a unique and enclosed individuality, with qualities that place him at the pinnacle of a hierarchy and that equip him to act on behalf of those who are beneath him and dependent on him. In this sense then, I would suggest that ironically Gair as a subject is in effect denied agency, since he remains subject to the requirements of the genre.

In keeping with the way in which the text largely conforms to the standard pattern of fantasy *Power of Three* does not really use any of the strategies I will discuss in relation to the two other texts to be examined in this chapter. The text's closure is not in the least ambivalent, reflecting the fact that Gair's subjectivity is represented as an enclosed entity, homogeneous and without ambiguity. A strong

authorial presence carefully constructs and interprets Gair throughout the text, directing the reader's construction of the subject by relaying and clarifying his thoughts. While the subject is represented as narrating himself, first constructing himself as worthless, his apotheosis leads him to a revised narrative whereby his subjectivity is constructed as resolved and complete. Furthermore, there is no play with multiple signifiers for the one signified which is a predominant feature of *The Spellcoats*.

Finally, while the text (like any text) draws on a number of intertextual references (the fairy tale notion of giants, the Christian notion of Christ's appeasing sacrificial death, and legends of bargaining with fairies) the intertextuality is not used as a strategy. Certainly, intertextual references such as these serve to demonstrate the interdependence of all texts. *Power of Three* (as is the case with any literary text) does not stand in isolation; it depends on a host of pre-existing literary and social discourses. However, given the nature of the text's unitary approach to constructing subjectivity, in this case the intertextual references cannot be viewed as a deliberate strategy for reflecting the interplay of subjects and social discourses which forms subjectivity.

However, while the representation of subjectivity in *Power of Three* is still very much restricted by the dictates of the genre there is one feature of the text which anticipates the resistance seen in the Jones texts I will discuss later. Contrary to generic convention *Power of Three*'s predominant concern is not that of an evil force that must be overcome by the forces of good. The narrative initially acts to align the reader with Gair and his people, subsequently identified by the negative signifier of

"Lymen", against those who we are given to understand are the enemy—the Dorig and the Giants (although the opening chapter establishes guilt on the part of the Lymen). But, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that those groups constructed as "the other" are simply held subject to misperception. The Dorig choose to construct the Lymen according to their prejudices and vice versa and the Giants are held subject to the constructions of both Dorig and Lymen while the Giants deny Dorig and Lymen an existence. Hence, the only evil is that of subjecting the other to a false construct. Once misperceptions are corrected and subjects are no longer held subject to the constructs other subjects choose to place on them there is no enemy.

While this is very much a concern one would expect in a text based on liberal humanist assumptions it also has implications for reading a text that drifts towards postmodern notions of the arbitrary nature of any attempt to represent. The effect is to draw the reader's attention to the arbitrary and unreliable ways in which subjectivity can be constructed. By implication then, it has the effect of requiring the reader to interrogate the text, not necessarily accepting those constructs which immediately present themselves. I hasten to add that such implications are merely hinted at and are of significance in the light of developments in other texts by Wynne Jones. Here, the text's closure makes it clear that misunderstandings are rectified and a recognition of commonality achieved and that the narrative's resolution is reliable. In other words, the overall tenor of the text is not suggesting that attempts at reliable representation are arbitrary and doomed to failure.

The Spellcoats—the Subject Shakes Off Generic Dictates

The Spellcoats, although published only three years later than *Power of Three*, resists the generic restrictions on the way in which subjectivity is constructed in two major ways. First, the text employs a strategy more often associated with realist fiction, that of a first person narrative, and second, the text uses strategies associated with postmodern texts—a narrative technique which sees the subject constructing and reconstructing itself, ambiguous closure and play with multiple signifiers to suggest the heterogeneous nature of subjectivity. Given the underlying direction of this chapter it is my intention to focus on the text's employment of postmodern strategies in constructing subjectivity, although there is a sense in which the very combination of the first person narrative with fantasy is in itself an indication of a postmodern playfulness with generic convention.

When considered in the light of the four assumptions underlying the construction of the subject in fantasy literature *The Spellcoats* conforms to all of them on initial consideration. The first person narrator, Tanaqui, is represented as having a unique individuality to discover which places her apart from others. This individuality is constituted by her discovery that she can weave magic, that this ability is determined by her birth, and that she is destined to use her powers on behalf of others in order to defeat the evil mage Kankredin. However, despite the presence of these generic assumptions which still underlie the construction of subjectivity in this text, subjectivities are not represented as complete and enclosed entities but rather as series of selves that shift in a dialogic relationship with other selves and with social setting.

Narrative Strategies to Develop the Sense of a Shifting Subject

One of the strategies employed by the text to produce this effect is a narrative strategy whereby the narrating subject tells stories about itself and so constructs and reconstructs itself, renegotiating itself in the light of changing circumstances. The text takes the form of a first person narrative by the focalising character, Tanaqui, who narrates a journey she and her family are forced to take; a journey which also acts as a metaphor for her journey of self discovery. Tanaqui is represented as having to negotiate a position as a subject in a setting of upheaval and confusion—a setting fairly common to texts which focus on the self negotiating a position within society. Her country is at war, her parents dead, she does not know her mother's identity, Gull—her brother—appears almost catatonic, and she and her siblings are mistrusted by their fellow villagers and forced from their home. Their journey down the river to the sea culminates in an encounter with the evil mage Kankredin who ensnares souls or effectively denies the subjectivities of others. At the beginning of her narrative she has returned to her village and seeks to tell her story (woven into a rug coat) in an attempt to construct a subjectivity for herself so that she can resist Kankredin, the essence of whose evil lies in his denial of the subjectivities of others and in his desire to bind and restrict subjects rather than allowing them to shift and change.

> To everyone else my story will look like a particularly fine and curious rugcoat. But it is for myself that I am weaving it. I shall understand our journey better when I have set it out (*The Spellcoats* p.33).

On this basis the reader could expect that when Tanaqui had completed her coat she would be represented as a complete and

enclosed entity with her story told. However, the text is ordered in two sections referred to as The First Coat and The Second Coat and, at the conclusion of the first section when Tanaqui has finished her coat, she is not represented as a unified entity but rather as one who is still trying to negotiate an identity in a set of bewildering circumstances:

> I am now at the back hem of my rugcoat. All I have space to say is that we are at a stand. Gull is still a clay figure. Robin is ill. I am afraid she will die. I sit with her in the old mill across from Shelling, with no help from my gloomy brothers. Even if Robin were well enough for us to run away, Zwitt would have us killed if he found us on our own. It is a bad thing to wish to run away from our own King, but I wish I could. Instead, all I can do is weave, and hope for understanding. The meaning of our journey is now in this rugcoat. I am Tanaqui and I end my weaving (*The Spellcoats* pp.152-153).

Here, despite the subject's assertion of a separate and autonomous selfhood by naming herself, her subjectivity is also represented as being in dialogue with her siblings and with her surroundings and does not stand separate and independent from them. The fact that her brother Gull is denied his selfhood and that her sister Robin remains ill impinges on Tanaqui's construction of herself. Although Tanaqui is constructed by the text as the focalising character, her subjectivity does not stand alone, but is bound up with other subjectivities. The self is represented as interdependent with other subjects and cannot construct itself in isolation from the events that surround it.

The second section—The Second Coat—represents Tanaqui telling another story about herself. Her first narrative is insufficient, and she must re-tell herself, choosing to recount events previously ignored and giving greater prominence to some than to others. In this sense Tanaqui

is not represented as one autonomous subject, but rather as a subject who can be constructed in a variety of ways in any number of narratives. Furthermore, Tanaqui is represented as reading her own story after she has woven it into her first coat. In other words, the subject is represented as reconstructing her own narrative about herself by the act of reviewing and reinterpreting her previous narrative. This revision and reinterpretation then informs and directs her second narrative.

The act of ordering and of telling stories about oneself is the means by which all subjects constitute themselves—over and over again. When Tanaqui's subjectivity is constructed by the text as an incomplete (and never completed) process the text moves away from the characteristic construction of subjectivity in fantasy as a complete entity.

Ambivalent Closure as a Strategy for Highlighting the Heterogeneous Nature of the Subject

The second strategy which the text uses is that of an ambivalent closure to reflect the shifting, incomplete nature of the subject. As Tanaqui's narrative draws to a climax and she looks to complete her weaving in order to defeat Kankredin, she receives a vision from her grandfather—the One.[1] In her vision the One rises up, tipping up and re-shaping the landscape and destroying Kankredin and all his mages. Tanaqui must then weave the vision to bring it into being but her

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[1] The text's representation of Tanaqui's weaving/telling her story as completed in dialogue with her grandfather (and with her mother) is a further demonstration of the text's representation of the self as constructing itself in dialogue with other selves.

narrative concludes with an element of uncertainty. On the one hand she claims that: "This vision I have woven with Cenblith's thread, knowing it will come to be" (*The Spellcoats* p.276). But in the final sentences of her narrative a note of uncertainty is introduced.

> It is time to finish my weaving and take my second coat through the River of Souls to put it on the One. Then I will come back to see if my vision has come to pass. And if I have failed, I shall go back to the River of Souls for the third and last time (*The Spellcoats* p. 276).

This ambivalent and inconclusive end to Tanaqui's narrative (Will the vision become a reality? What does she mean when she speaks of going back to the River of Souls for the third and last time?) reflects the text's construction of Tanaqui as a shifting subject. With her journey never fully resolved there is a sense in which her subjectivity is left incomplete.

Tanaqui is constructed and reconstructed by the text in a variety of ways: as simply another resident of the village of Shelling, an outcast, a "heathen", a powerful mage, and, finally as a daughter of one of the "Undying". At the conclusion of her narrative she remains a heterogeneous mix of selves and hovers on the verge of shifting again as she anticipates her shift into a selfhood like that of her brother Gull and her mother. Even as the telling of herself draws to a close there is the implication that the telling and the re-telling will go on.

It is precisely this feature of re-telling and reinterpreting which the closure of the text (as opposed to the closure of Tanaqui's narrative) suggests. The "Final Note", purporting to be written to accompany the Spellcoats (now denoting the coats Tanaqui wove rather than the title of the novel) where they are displayed as antiquities, re-interprets

Tanaqui. The text constructs an authoritative voice (belonging to the "Keeper of Antiquities" in a museum) to re-tell and effectively reconstruct the subject. But, in effect it acts to further reinforce the notion that subjectivity shifts and reshapes and cannot be regarded as enclosed and complete. In the speculative tone common to academic discourse the writer suggests a number of possible identities for the Weaver of the Spellcoats (the narrator) but does not reach a definitive conclusion as to her identity:

> The weaver herself has been identified with the Lake Lady, the Fates, and with the Southern cult-figure of Libby Beer, but not satisfactorily. The witch Cennoreth is the most likely possibility. She is frequently called the Weaver of Spells. A drawback is that, like Gann, she figures only in stories told in the South. However, the name Cennoreth—which is a Southern form: the (unrecorded) Northern form would be Kanarthi—can be interpreted as River Daughter (Cenn-oreth), although another interpretation would make it Woman of the North (Cen-Noreth) (*The Spellcoats* p.278).

This voice, which distances itself from the first person narrative in time and persona but is still integral to the text, suggests that the narrator could be one of a number of legendary figures. The subject is left drifting between a series of possible identities or, can be seen as possibly composed of all the identities depending on the perspective from which the subject is observed.

Furthermore, we are given to understand that the narrative is a translation and that "certain obscurities in the text have been amended to avoid confusing the reader" (*The Spellcoats* pp. 277-278). Here the reader is reminded that the voice of any subject is funnelled through amendments and interpretations, and is constructed by others and by

itself in an attempt to give it a cohesion which it doesn't really possess. Again, the text works to query and ultimately deny a unitary, enclosed subject. Similarly, when the speaker in the "Final Note" speculates that the landscape may have changed the reader could be intended to infer that Tanaqui's vision was fulfilled but is nevertheless left uncertain so that an unambiguous closure is ultimately denied.

It is also important to observe that, while the bulk of the text consists of one voice, with the introduction of a second speaker the text itself ceases to be a homogeneous entity. The text undergoes a shift in register; the nature of the syntax alters and the tone shifts from the personal and informal to the impersonal and the formal. The heterogeneous nature of the text as it reaches closure serves to undergird the text's construction of subjectivity as ultimately multifaceted and constantly shifting.

The Use of Multiple Signifiers to Reflect the Heterogeneous Nature of the Subject

The other strategy which the The Spellcoats uses to indicate the shifting nature of the self is that of employing multiple signifiers to refer to the one signified. The strategy can be observed most particularly in relation to the text's construction of "the One". (Although, as I have discussed in the preceding section, at the conclusion of the text in the "Final Note" several signifiers are suggested for the first person narrator in the text who has referred to herself throughout her narrative as Tanaqui.) At the beginning of the narrative "the One" is the signifier used to refer to one of the three household gods or "undying"— inanimate objects that sit in niches by the hearth. The other two are referred to as "the Lady", and "the Young One". As the narrative

progresses it transpires that the undying take this form because they have been bound or held in subjection. Throughout the narrative, the One is referred to on different occasions by different signifiers—Adon, Amil, Oreth, the Old Man and grandfather. It is at the point in the narrative when "the One" is unbound that he is referred to by all his names at once. The effect is to construct subjectivity as multi-faceted, as defying the restriction imposed by any one signifier. Conversely, attempts to represent subjectivity by means of one all-encompassing signifier are seen as a denial of agency to the subject, as holding the subject in subjection.[2]

Hexwood

Power of Three is an example of a work of fantasy in which subjectivity is constructed according to the restrictions the genre imposes. *The Spellcoats*, while in some senses subject to generic restrictions on the construction of subjectivity, shows clear signs of resistance. Diana Wynne Jones' most recent children's fantasy, *Hexwood* (1993), exhibits a number of postmodern features as it playfully explores the nature of subjectivity and the means by which the fantasy genre or mode constructs subjects.

On a superficial examination of the text it could be viewed as conforming to the four characteristics of the subject that inform much of fantasy literature. However, on further examination these

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[2] The use of multiple signifiers in *The Spellcoats* and in *Hexwood* of course also serves the metafictive purpose of focussing the reader's attention on language as I have discussed in relation to her use of multiple signifiers in *Castle in the* Air in Chapter 2. However, I would suggest that in the two former texts the play with multiple signifiers serves more to highlight issues to do with the nature of subjectivity.

characteristics, while certainly present, are undermined and contradicted by other features of the text. In fact, I would suggest that the text deliberately evokes these characteristics in order to deconstruct them. Subjects in the text are represented as having a unique individuality to discover; early in the text "the Boy", and "the Servant" are anonymous figures represented as devoid of identities and in search of them and the subject constructed as Ann at the beginning of the text later discovers her "true self" as Vierran. Similarly, The Servant/Mordion must undergo a process of acknowledging memories and expunging guilt for his past, thus uncovering a previously forgotten identity. However, despite these features, the subjectivities of these characters are constructed as disjointed and dispersed and not as autonomous entities. "The Boy", as he is first referred to in the text, is given a series of identities under a plethora of signifiers and so is referred to as Hume and then ultimately identified severally as Merlin/Martellian/Wolf/the Prisoner. Furthermore, as the narrative progresses, the text constructs Hume as shifting back and forth in age, hence problematising the notion of a linear self-growth that is integral to the genre. Mordion's subjectivity is also constructed as that of a dispersed and heterogeneous self. When, towards the conclusion of the narrative, he is reconstructed in the form of a dragon he is represented as a series of connected but separate points.

> He was for a long time stretched out along the black interstellar spaces of himself, sliding from point to agonising point (*Hexwood* p.243).

The text employs the image of a series of separate points to refer to the individual memories which Mordion finds himself painfully having to confront. But, represented as shifting from one memory to the next,

there is also a sense in which the memories are in effect a series of selves. Certainly, these selves are linked by the one overarching selfhood identified as "he" but nevertheless this "he" does not consist of an autonomous entity but shifts (or slides) between selves.

When viewed in the light of the second and third means of constructing subjectivity characteristic of the genre, the text appears to follow generic conventions in its construction of subjectivity by rendering it dependent upon the discovery of certain distinctive attributes dependent on birth. All those subjects who exercise agency in the resolution of the action are set apart by virtue of their supernatural mental powers which they possess as a result of their birth—they are descended from the ruling class known as "the Reigners". However, there is one point at which the text queries its own generic convention. Hume is initially constructed as believing that he has been born (or created by Mordion) in order to fight a dragon, and yet, as the narrative progresses the text reconstructs Hume as Martellian/Merlin. In effect, his previous construction as finding selfhood in fulfilling a destiny as a dragon fighter is undermined when the text turns the tables on him and reconstructs him as a particularly inadequate fighter of dragons. In this sense the text both resists and draws attention to the generic convention of the gifted subject destined to fulfil a pre-ordained role.

When examining the text in the light of the fourth assumption—that the self uses its unique attributes to exercise agency on its own behalf and on behalf of others—a subtle variation on the generic convention can be observed. Certainly, the convention is observed in that a group of subjects use the supernatural attributes they possess as a result of their birth in order to defeat the Reigners and take on the role

themselves, restoring order and justice. However, no one subject is a heroic figure complete in itself. The central group of subjects named as the future Reigners—Vierran, Mordion, Martellian, Sir Artegal and Fitela Wolfson—are constructed by the text in a dialogic relationship. Each subject is represented as constructing itself in interaction with the voices of the four others which it hears inside its head. When Vierran for a time loses contact with the voices and then later recovers them the text represents her selfhood as dependent on this dialogic relationship with other selves. Furthermore, the recovery of the voices is linked with her hearing her own voice speaking to her when the text represents her as a subject consisting of more than one self rather than as a unified self.

> "Vierran. This is Vierran speaking. Vierran to myself. This is at least the second time I've sat in the inn bedroom despairing and I'm beginning to not quite believe in it. If it happens again, this is to let me know there's something going on."…
>
> Four soundless voices fell into her head. It was like getting back the greater part of herself (*Hexwood* p.196).

Here, the subject is represented as being in dialogue with herself as well as being in dialogic relationship with others with whom she is interdependent and who play an integral part in her construction of herself. The concept of selfhood is not disputed but it cannot construct itself without negotiation with other selves. Vierran without the voices is not herself. In other words, Vierran's subjectivity is represented not as an enclosed, unitary entity that stands alone but as a heterogeneous construct, that reshapes and renegotiates itself as it engages in dialogue with other selves and with itself. Consequently, the convention of the self discovery and consequent attainment of agency of the one subject

who can then act on behalf of others is broken. Instead, subjects gain agency as they recognise their intersubjectivity.

Textual Strategies that Undermine the Notion of a Homogeneous Subject

As is the case with much of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasy the text plays games, deliberately misleading and confusing the reader. Identities become confused, are sometimes interchangeable and even merge, linear causality and sequence disappear and intertextual references abound. While the text does not employ an ambivalent closure as we observed in *The Spellcoats* (on the contrary, closure is unambivalent and complete) there are other features associated with postmodern fiction that undergird the notion of a heterogeneous subject.

Multiple Signifiers

The use of multiple signifiers for the one signified subject is employed in *Hexwood* to an even greater extent than in *The Spellcoats*, with the effect that selfhood remains essentially enigmatic (at times arbitrary) and cannot be nailed down. The instances of shifts of signifier are so numerous that it is impossible (and pointless) to list them all; almost every character is attributed a different signifier (some have multiple signifiers) from the one they begin with, at some point in the narrative.

The signifiers used for Hume are an interesting example to examine because here the multiplicity of signifiers is linked particularly with an overlapping and interweaving of subjectivities. When Hume first appears in the narrative in the second chapter of Part One he is simply referred

to as "a boy" and then subsequently by the singular masculine pronoun or "the boy". It is not until he encounters Yam that he is given the signifier "Hume" referring to his humanity. He is constructed as knowing nothing, not even who he is himself. Later in the narrative (although presumably earlier in chronological terms) he is formed by Mordion when he combines his blood with that of Ann.[3]. Hence, the text constructs Hume as a newly created subject who has been created by Mordion with the specific purpose of destroying the Reigners and who must gain self-knowledge in order to fulfil this quest. However, when in the closure of the text he is revealed as Martellian/Merlin/the Prisoner, the nature of his subjectivity is suddenly ambiguous. It is not simply that two supposedly separate subjects have slid into one (as is the case with Ann/Vierran) but that the two overlap and merge despite apparent contradictions. How can Hume, who the text constructs on the one hand as newly formed, be one with Merlin/Martellian who has been imprisoned for centuries? Such arbitrary and unpredictable play with concepts of a unitary subject serves to problematise the firmly held tenet that a text constructs subjects to follow a pattern of linear growth until they are somehow constructed as complete.

Intertextuality and Intersubjectivity

Jeremy Hawthorn distinguishes between transtextuality, where the relation between texts is a more straightforward process, and intertextuality which indicates, "...a more diffuse penetration of the

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[3]This episode, hedged about with various references to sexual attraction and to Ann's sense of being vulnerable and sexually exposed to the more experienced and older Mordion, is effectively a means of fulfilling Reigner One's plans to breed from them while avoiding any references to sexual union.

individual text by memories, echoes, transformations, of other texts"
(Hawthorn 1992 p.85). This description of the working of intertextuality
is a particularly apt description of the way in which the Arthurian
legend, computer games and role playing games are evoked in *Hexwood*.
The Arthurian legend, along with the other items associated with quest
fantasy, is evoked as a vague half conscious memory for the reader. A
castle, a sword in a stone, the numerous characters who people the
legends are evoked with all the associated ideas that their evocation
conveys. But any attempt to make systematic connections between the
evoked text(s) and the text itself is a largely fruitless exercise—
sometimes connections are clear and sometimes they are not. The
Morgan la Trey of *Hexwood* evokes memories of deceit and scheming but
otherwise does not replicate her punned namesake in the Arthurian
legend. Rather, the intertextual references work in dialogue with the
text to create general expectations associated with fantasy, and to
trigger memories and ideas associated with quest fantasy and role
playing. It is this construction of the text in dialogue with other texts
which underpins the predominant mode of representing subjectivity in
the text—as interdependent with other subjectivities and as existing in
a dialogic relationship with them. Just as the subjects who play a
central role in the text construct themselves in dialogue with each
other, so the text itself is constructed in dialogue with Arthurian legend
and the broader tradition of quest fantasy.

Intertextuality as a Self-reflexive Means of Examining Generic Constructions of Subjectivity

The text's intertextual references also serve as a commentary on the
generic restrictions placed on the subject which can deny its autonomy
and reveal it as a victim of external forces. Central to the text is a

construct referred to as the Bannus who is understood to play the role of controlling author, and to whom all other subjects, it transpires, have been subject.[4] When the Bannus' identity merges with that of Yam (a reference to the Old Testament deity's description of himself as "I am") his godlike control of all events identifies him all the more closely as a figure who exercises authorial control. Just as all subjects in any text are constructs of the author and subject to the roles ordained for them, so the Bannus makes subjects captive to the dictates of the notion of fantasy that forms the intertext. Hence, as the Reigners arrive on earth and are absorbed into dictated roles in the Arthurian quest fantasy being played out by the Bannus, they become subject to the dictates of a genre and are denied subjectivity. Reigner Two is forced to adopt the role of the King with the unhealing wound, Reigner One to become the dragon and so on. They are, as it were, taken captive and held subject to the dictates of all those half-remembered fantasy motifs which are often only lightly touched on but which penetrate and inform the text.

At one point in the narrative, Sir Harrisoun, who originally believed himself to be in control of the role playing game/narrative, protests his lost of agency and tries to break out of the dictates of the genre and regain control:

> Then, as far as everyone else in the hall could see, Sir Harrisoun appeared to go mad. He shook his fist at the ceiling. "You there!" he shouted. "Yes, you! You just stop this! All I did was ask you for a role-playing game. You never warned me I'd be pitched into it for real! And I asked you for hobbits

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[4] The Bannus is possibly the first cyborg to feature in a work written for children. Cyborgs (the word is derived from a combination of "cyb(ernetic)" and "org(anism)" and refers to a human being with certain physiological processes aided or controlled by mechanical or electronic devices) are very much characteristic of postmodern writing.

on a grail quest, and not one hobbit have I seen! Do you hear me?" He
stared at the ceiling for a while. When nothing happened, he shook both
fists upwards. "I ORDER you to stop!" he yelled. His voice cracked high,
almost into a scream....He glared round the hall. "And you're all figments!"
he said. "My figments. You can just carry on playing by yourselves. I've
had enough" (*Hexwood* pp.255-256).

But of course, even his protest is simply the author's construct,
designed to draw our attention to the subject's lack of agency and
subjection to the dictates of the genre. The text is making a self-reflexive
commentary on the nature of the genre and the restrictions it places on
subjectivity. Despite Sir Harrisoun's claims to the contrary, he is
subject to the dictates of the genre and is ultimately destroyed by them.

However, there are other occasions on which the text subscribes to
the autonomy of the individual. Earlier in the narrative Ann is
represented as speculating on her own agency in conversation with
Mordion and Yam. Mordion asks:

> "What conclusion do you think the machine is trying to make us arrive
> at?"
>
> "I have no idea," said Yam. "It could be that the people deciding are not us.
> We are possibly only actors in someone else's scenes."
>
> "Not me," said Ann. "I'm important. I'm me..." (*Hexwood* p.67).

Yam goes on to say that "Nothing can make either a person or a
machine do things which it is not in their natures to do" (*Hexwood*
p.67).

Here we have a familiar aspect of Diana Wynne Jones' texts. While
on the one hand they exhibit obvious postmodern features, on the other
hand they continue to subscribe to a concept of the self as self-

determining and autonomous. However, it is these very contradictions that add to her eclectic and ambivalent representation of subjectivity in this most recent text.

Conclusion

Power of Three represents subjectivity in a manner dictated by the assumptions that underpin the genre. The result is the representation of the subject as an autonomous, self-determining and complete entity. *The Spellcoats* stretches the limits of the genre to represent subjectivity in more complex terms as autonomous but as heterogeneous and constantly renegotiating itself depending on its circumstances. *Hexwood*, by its highly self reflexive nature, exposes and comments on the dictates of genre, revealing the subject as being at the mercy of generic roles imposed by the author. However, in tandem with this mode of representation the subject is also represented as shifting, multi-faceted and indeterminate. The very fact that the text itself exposes the genre's dictates allows the text greater freedom in its modes of representation and constructs what is ultimately an ambiguous, enigmatic and contradictory representation of subjectivity. In other words, the very exposure of the determining nature of generic roles means that they can be played with and undermined, just as the text undermines the solemn motif of the unhealing wound and reconstructs it as no more than a bruise on a hypochondriac, caused by the flat of a wooden sword. Postmodern play in *Hexwood* allows the representation of subjectivity to shake off generic dictates in order to experiment with different modes of representation. Thus, subjects are, at different points in the text, represented as victims of the arbitrary dictates of a

controlling author, as multi-faceted and indeterminate figures and as constructing themselves in dialogic relationship with other subjects.

Gender Representation as an Ideological Construct

My chief concern in this examination of a selection of Diana Wynne Jones' writings is to explore the way in which she pushes back the boundaries and restrictions of the literary fantastic in order to play with questions about selfhood and the nature of reality. As I have already suggested, this pushing back of the boundaries associated with the genre employs a number of strategies and shares a number of the preoccupations associated with postmodernism. Since a major preoccupation of the postmodern is that of exposing the constructed nature of ideological assumptions, I have chosen in this final chapter to explore how successfully Jones' writings break away from the ideological constructs that are so integral to the genre. Does she push back the boundaries of fantasy in this arena as successfully as she has in her treatment of subjectivity and the nature of reality? I will focus particularly on her representation of gender.

Robert Sutherland has suggested a "..classification for the ways in which inherent ideologies are expressed: (1) the politics of advocacy, (2) the politics of attack, and (3) the politics of assent" (Sutherland p.143-157). In his subsequent elaboration on these three manifestations of ideological positions in literature he describes the politics of advocacy as the open espousal of a point of view on the part of the writer, and the

politics of attack as the result of the writer's amusement, outrage, or contempt for something which runs counter to their ideological position. The politics of assent he defines as that which affirms ideologies already present in society and which informs the text as a result of the author's passive acceptance of an established ideology which is thus unconsciously transmitted in the text.

Peter Hollindale, in his discussion of ideology and children's literature, makes the same point when he refers to "..the individual writer's unexamined assumptions" (Hollindale p.12) and claims that, "As soon as these are admitted to be relevant, it becomes impossible to confine ideology to a writer's conscious intentions or articulated messages, and necessary to accept that all children's literature is inescapably didactic" (Hollindale p.12). However, Hollindale takes the examination of ideology in children's literature further when he goes on to assert that a text will also be the product, not simply of the individual author, but of the world in which the author lives:

> To accept the point one has only to recognise the rarity of occasions when a writer manages to recolour the meaning of a single word: almost all the time we are the acquiescent prisoners of other people's meanings. As a rule, writers for children are transmitters not of themselves uniquely, but of the worlds they share (Hollindale 1988 p.15).

Given this understanding of the transmission of ideology, I intend examining Diana Wynne Jones' deliberate attempts to represent gender in modes which break away from traditional generic patterns of gender representation—her advocacy of changed perceptions of gendered roles—in order to assess their effectiveness. In making such an assessment I will examine two questions which will be crucial to her

success or failure. First, has she managed to break, or at least bend the generic gender determinants of the quest fantasy novel? Second, what unconscious, unexamined ideological assumptions about gendered roles inform her texts, and what impact do these have on any attempts to construct gender differently?

Gender Determination by Genre

It is widely understood that the genre within which Diana Wynne Jones writes, that of quest fantasy, has had, and continues to have, despite the efforts of some more recent writers, certain inbuilt determinants of gender representation. Furthermore, the genre reflects the ideological assumptions of its time, sometimes quite deliberately, and sometimes unconsciously. Accordingly, the genre which is (as I have already suggested) rooted in humanist assumptions tends to construct gender roles traditionally.

In her paper focusing on the generic determination of gender representation in Patricia Wrightson's Wirrun trilogy, Lesley Jenkins maintains that in the quest novel, "The concept of male dominance is of paramount important (sic) to the function of the plot and is the reinforced norm in the quest. The female's minor, assisting role bars her from ever being significantly heroic" (Jenkins p.26). [1] Mary Harris Veeder, in her paper on Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence,

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[1] Jenkins' analysis of gender representation in Wrightson's trilogy is a very thorough and perceptive exploration of the way in which the trilogy represents a phallocentric society but she does appear to contradict herself by on the one hand asserting the literary impossibility of a female hero and at the end of the paper making a plea for change. "Women writers have to alter their fundamental ideological perceptions of what constitutes gender-identification in the quest novel in an attempt to subvert not only societal stereotypes, but their own acquiescence to such a limiting view of what culturally constitutes female" (Jenkins pp.38-39).

identifies similar features. She demonstrates the marginalising of females (and children) and the elevating of dominant adult males as sources of authority. The received wisdom and supposed universal truth of the world represented is seen in terms of a binary opposition between male and female forming the basis of a patriarchy. Consequently, females are represented as dependent, passive and inadequate, and at best play supportive and enabling roles (Veeder pp.11-16).

Is it possible then to break out of the generic determinants when representing male and female in quest fantasy texts? Do attempts to move away from gender stereotypes and represent a female hero simply result in a traditional male hero allocated a female name and physical attributes? Is it possible to represent gender in ways other than in terms of a binary opposition? Anna E. Altmann maintains that it is possible, and, in her paper discussing Robin McKinley's *The Hero And the Crown*, defends it against the accusation that the writer has simply "welded brass tits on armour" in order to create a female hero (Altmann pp.143-156). In her defence she suggests that McKinley is reclaiming the heroic quest for women and that:

> The quest is not a masculine exercise of force that involves putting on armor. Rather it is a process of stripping off the armor of the identity we have constructed for ourselves out of how we look, how we act, from whom we were born, and how we are valued....The heroic quest is a fundamental human reality that women as well as men live and express (Altmann p.150).

In seeing the quest as a metaphor for the search for the essential self Altmann is giving expression to a humanist view of the nature of selfhood common to much twentieth century fantasy. In this context

Pauline Johnson's recent plea that feminism remember the "truly emancipatory dimension" of modern humanism is pertinent (Johnson p.4). In her recent publication, *Feminism as Radical Humanism* Johnson argues that modern humanism should not be dismissed as many feminists today have tended to do because they maintain it is tainted by patriarchal assumptions. Johnson's affirmation of the cultural values inherent in modern humanism and of their importance for nurturing feminist thought gives weight to Altmann's argument. Altmann's suggestion that the quest need not be conceived of in terms of force and dominance, but rather in terms of the laying down of arms and the breaking out of gendered stereotypes, does provide a possible way of constructing the quest novel which allows for different ways' of representing gender. Furthermore, it is a means of conceiving the quest that, while resisting certain patriarchal assumptions, still owes much to modern humanism.

To what extent then, does Diana Wynne Jones break away from heroic quests as constructed by the patriarchal assumptions underlying the genre? For the purpose of this discussion I am suggesting that by "female hero" Jones means the central character of the text who initiates those actions which bring about the resolution of the plot. She will play the role of subject rather than that of the object. Further, a female hero will exhibit strength and independence and her representation will challenge stereotypical assumptions about gender roles.

In discussing *Fire and Hemlock* Diana Wynne Jones states her intention of creating a female hero. "But a desire was growing in me to have a real female hero, one with whom all girls could identify…" (Jones

1989 p.134). In talking about her intentions she suggests that with changing social patterns it has become increasingly possible to create female heroes without alienating her male readers and so partly explains her move to create female heroes as being dependent on a perceived social change. This in itself suggests an assumption that male oriented society must signal permission in the form of male acceptance before such texts could be published. The fact that the converse was not a problem—that girls simply had to accept texts and identify with a male hero (albeit reluctantly)—is a further reminder of the presiding assumptions about gendered behaviour. Female readers are expected to concur with texts wherein males initiate action, male readers are assumed to object to texts wherein females initiate action. Females meekly accept, males assertively object! Furthermore, female readers have been socialised into accepting texts in which their fictional counterparts take the back seat while the male hero saves the world, with their occasional assistance, while the converse has only recently been asked of male readers.

Accordingly, Jones refers to the female focalisers in both *The Spellcoats* and *The Time of the Ghost* and talks about sneaking in a female hero in *Dogsbody* by telling the story from a dog's point of view. However, if her intent is to create women as initiators of action rather than objects or at best assistants, there are limitations imposed by the patriarchal assumptions encoded into the genre in which she chooses to write. In *Feminist Fictions* Anne Cranny-Francis examines feminist attempts to write generic texts. She draws attention to the difficulty of overcoming the patriarchal discourses encoded within the generic conventions and the tendency of these to subvert the writer's intent. She points out that "...the process of analysing the feminist revision of

genre fiction is a complex one, and feminist generic texts are not simply texts which tell stories in which women are given roles usually taken by men" (Cranny-Francis p.206).

It is important to make it clear that at no time does Jones claim to be undertaking anything as radical as an attempt to write feminist fiction. There is a vast difference between wanting to create strong female characters and writing feminist fiction. However, Cranny-Francis' point, that texts which allocate women roles traditionally given to men are not necessarily feminist texts, is also true for texts which are simply seeking, as are those of Diana Wynne Jones, to create less stereotyped views of women. Creating generic texts which break away from limited views of women means paying attention to far more than the roles allocated to them. It means recognising the assumptions about women which are coded into the genre and consciously working against them.

Diana Wynne Jones does indicate some awareness of the need to do more than simply insert a female into a male role. In discussing *Fire and Hemlock* she claims to be creating a hero who is not simply a pseudo-man, a female playing a male role (Wynne Jones 1989 p. 135). However, her texts reflect certain gender stereotypes, both as a result of the nature of the genre(s) from which the texts are constructed and of her subconscious (presumably) assent to expectations of gendered behaviour.

In order to proceed with this discussion I will establish the patriarchal discourses[2] which are coded (through language and narrative structure) into the quest fantasy genre and then examine each of these to establish the extent to which they determine the representation of gender within a selection of her texts. Clearly, it would be absurd to bundle all her texts together and suggest that they all exhibit the same characteristics in their construction of gendered roles. To do so would be to ignore the fact that changing social norms unconsciously inform the ideology of the text. *Wilkins' Tooth*, first published in 1973, is informed by very different social assumptions to those informing *Black Maria*, written in the late 1980s. Consequently, I will discuss two earlier texts, *Dogsbody* and *The Magicians of Caprona*, and a later text, *Fire and Hemlock*.

There are five patriarchal discourses which can be found encoded in heroic quest fantasy. Different discourses may receive greater or lesser prominence in different texts but all are crucial to the workings of the genre and determine the way in which gender is constructed.

- Power rests in male authority structures. Accordingly, characteristics associated with males in heroic quest fantasy are power based. Males are represented as: strong (both physically and mentally), adventurous, possessing initiative, physically attractive (in height, colouring and physique) and high in social standing. Women are constructed in terms of a binary opposition to these characteristics. They are represented as physically weaker and often, at least by implication, mentally weaker. They will be timid and retiring, staying in the background to nurture

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[2] Here, I am using discourse in the sense of a set of assumptions and beliefs that are used to order and represent experience by means of interlinked meanings and signs. In this sense the term is very closely related to ideology.

and support rather than initiating action. They must be physically attractive but diminutive and demurely pretty rather than seductively beautiful. (Or, in the case of older women, they must be serenely beautiful and maternal.) Finally, they may be of low social standing, but deserving by virtue of moral and physical worth, and may well turn out to have lost their rightful social position which is restored by the male (for example Cinderella and Snow White).

- Women are subject to this male based structuring of authority and prosper and enjoy privileges in direct relation to the degree to which they are prepared to accept such a structure. Conversely, those who assert themselves against it will eventually be destroyed.

- Women who assert themselves against the patriarchy and initiate actions on their own behalf are represented as morally suspect. Their construction as evil and destructive is supported by representing them either as physically repellent, as is the case in the simpler representation of witches in traditional fairy stories, or as suspiciously and dangerously attractive, as is the case with Jadis and the White Witch in C.S. Lewis' *Narnian Chronicles*. The latter figures are often represented as beautiful in a manner that transgresses social norms of beauty. Thus, where blond hair, fair skin and muted colours in clothing are represented as the social norm, darker skin and hair and exotic clothes are used to signal an "evil beauty". Often, these two sets of characteristics are linked; when revealed "for what they really are" women represented as seductively and transgressively attractive undergo a transformation and become old and ugly. Sometimes, they may even take on the form of a feared animal such as a snake. The implication is that their moral character is revealed in their physical appearance.

- Women who do not conform to the norms of the patriarchy are often represented as comical and absurd.

- Women are in some circumstances allowed to exist outside the parameters of the male authority and can thus take initiatives and affect action without being morally suspect. In order to do

so they must be elderly and single and they must offer succour and advice to either male or female protagonists. Their advice will always be supportive of the patriarchy, and will often be on the basis that they are repositories of the received patriarchal wisdom.

Power Rests in Male Based Authority Structures with Accompanying Opposed Male and Female Characteristics

Dogsbody involves the displacement of the dog star, Sirius, from his rightful position of power in the heavens to a position of dependency on earth as a puppy, rescued and cared for by Kathleen. It is an interesting text to examine because Wynne Jones believed she was creating a female hero. On the contrary, Kathleen is constructed in the role of the female oppositional foil to the male Sirius. Furthermore, in order to succour and protect Sirius (as a dog) Kathleen subordinates herself to Duffie—an action that ennables Sirius to be restored to his rightful position as an authoritative male. The fact that Sirius is a dog is no disguise for his role as initiating male and readers never lose sight of his male being.

The world from which Sirius has been banished is one which is based on patriarchal assumptions. The opening pages of the text are dominated by the discussions of the male judges who must decide what punishment should be meted out to Sirius for accidentally causing the death of one of his fellows—Castor. The decision to banish him is based on male power to do so.

Sirius' arrival on earth, while displacing him from his rightful and accustomed position of power, places him in another patriarchal society. His adoption by Kathleen, who is herself displaced and unjustly treated, could mean that the two are equals in their subject positions.

But at no time does the patriarchal discourse underlying the narrative allow for this. Sirius' maleness and consequent attributes place him in the role of protector and defender of the female. Where he has come from, all authority has been invested in male attributes and it has been his role to protect his female companion who, as a female, is constructed oppositionally to be "small, exquisite and pearly" (*Dogsbody* p.2). Once he learns of his companion's treachery, Sirius sees Kathleen as her replacement. He is stronger and cleverer than her while she is gentle and vulnerable. In the closing paragraph of the novel there is the prospect that Kathleen may one day become Sirius' new Companion by becoming a "luminary" and filling the small white untenanted sphere that circles him (*Dogsbody* p.202).

Similarly, while still on earth Sirius sees in the family's female cat, Tibbles, a substitute for his companion. She is small and white while Sirius, being large and strong and cleverer becomes her protector.

Kathleen is constructed oppositionally as weak, submissive, nurturing, gentle and long suffering. When she rescues Sirius from drowning, a stretch of text describes the conversation between Kathleen and her male cousins. While the text does not at first ascribe gender differentiations in the dialogue by giving the characters names, they are *to be found in the language used to describe the voices* and in the nature of the dialogue itself.

> A shrill voice spoke strange words near Sirius. "Oh eughky! There's a dead puppy in the rushes!"
>
> "Don't touch it!" said a voice rather older and rougher. And a third voice, gentle and lilting, said, "Let me see!"
>
> "Don't touch it, Kathleen!" said the second voice (*Dogsbody* p.10).

When Kathleen picks up the puppy regardless of her companion's protests she still meets with objections.

"It isn't dead! It's alive! Poor thing it's frozen!"

"Someone tried to drown it," said the shrillest voice.

"Throw it back in," said the second voice. "It's too small to lap. It'll die anyway" (*Dogsbody* p.10).

Sirius is the focalising character in the narrative. His banishment is represented as perceived through him and similarly the reader is introduced to the children through Sirius' perceptions of their voices. However, the ways in which the voices are represented serves to encode opposed gender characteristics. Apparently, dogs also have very clearly defined gender expectations.

Both the tagging of the voices and the content of the dialogue serve to construct the gender of the speakers in oppositional terms. The first voice is referred to as shrill—suggesting indeterminate gender, most probably that of a pre-pubescent child. Shrill suggests excitable, foolish and somewhat undiscerning and is supported by the content of the statement it modifies with the use of a childish slang term "eughky". The second voice, when tagged as "rather older and rougher" is immediately identifiable as being intended to belong to an older boy. Here, the statement is not an observation, as is the first, but a command suggesting knowledge and authority. The third voice is tagged in complete opposition to the second, as "gentle and lilting" and, appropriately, contains a plea. Thus the subjected female participant in the dialogue is identified. We do not need the response of the second voice's command directly addressed to "Kathleen" to know that the third voice belongs to a female. A similar pattern follows (although the tagging

is dispensed with) when the argument consists of the opposing of an expression of sympathy and a desire to nurture on the part of Kathleen, and, once again, the command of authority suggesting superior knowledge and a refusal to engage in sentiment, on the part of the older boy.

In *Fire and Hemlock* and *The Magicians of Caprona*, a patriarchal discourse is embedded in the texts by reverse. By constructing male characters who are weak and who are failures in their designated roles Jones is indicating the characteristics males should exhibit. "True masculinity" is being signalled in the text by its absence.

Fire and Hemlock is an exceedingly rich text and, in its scope, by far the most ambitious of Diana Wynne Jones' works. The major concern of the text is an exploration of the development of a female subject—Polly—and so it is a particularly interesting text to examine for the ways in which gender is constructed. One of the major signalling devices is the construction of maleness through reversal. The text is populated with males who the reader is positioned, by patriarchal discourses, to perceive as failures. Polly's father is represented as subject to the demands of his wife, Ivy, and then of his girlfriend, Joanna, and a failure as a father. Underlying such a representation is a set of assumptions—a social discourse—about what a man should be like. In a patriarchal society the predominant social discourse is one that assumes that men should be assertive and provide for and protect their children (particularly their female children). Similarly, Ivy's "lodgers", David Bragge and Ken, are represented as ineffectual, foolish and physically unattractive. The fact that the text links these characteristics with their failure to "manage" women is a further signal of the text's

construction of gender in oppositional terms—men should be strong and effectual and never subject to women who, in turn, are happiest when guided and protected by men. Morton Leroy is a further example of an ineffectual male. Although he is constructed as the would-be villain and presumably a powerful figure he is ultimately, despite his threats to Polly, represented as a failure as a male since, like Polly's father, he is represented as subject to and dependent on a woman—in this case Laurel.

While the text has as its central concern Polly's subjectivity, it is also very much bound up in Tom Lyn's construction as a male. The text is dependent on patriarchal notions of male resistance to female control. When Polly first meets Thomas Lyn at the funeral at Hunsdon House he is just beginning to resist the control which Laurel has exercised over him—a resistance which Polly is to promote. The text constructs Polly to approve strength and independence on the part of men. When Mr Lyn apologises for having imposed his ideas on Polly about her hair she responds,

> "I do wish you'd stop agreeing all the time! No wonder people bully you!" (*Fire and Hemlock* p.30).

As Thomas Lyn increasingly frees himself from Laurel he becomes Polly's guide, protector, educator and instructor. By the time Polly remembers him and secures his final release he is constructed with all the signs of male success according to the patriarchal discourses informing the text. He has taken risks and been successful, being Britain's most prominent cellist. As well as this, he is well read and intelligent, physically strong, tall and good looking! Polly's achievements

are complementary: she is constructed as soft hearted, compliant and pretty while suitably, but not too intrusively, intelligent.

In *The Magicians of Caprona* (a text with strong intertextual connections to *Romeo and Juliet*) two warring families must unite in order to thwart the designs of the Duchess of Caprona. The Duke is represented as weak, foolish and childlike. The implication in the text is that he has been bewitched by the Duchess, so that she can gain control of the kingdom. In representing the failed duke thus the patriarchal discourse is once more encoded into the narrative by a reverse process. The dukedom is under threat because the male in charge is not exhibiting those qualities which, according to the discourse of patriarchy, characterise masculinity. Although the efforts of both a male and female child prove instrumental in restoring the duke and destroying the duchess it is the powerful (male) Anglophile, Chrestomanci, who restores order. It is Chrestomanci who carries the knowledge about the city and it is Chrestomanci who delivers the warning to the Petrocchis and the Montanas to live in peace.

It is also worth briefly noting the construction of female gender characteristics in *The Magicians of Caprona*. While, in the world represented by the text, women may demonstrate ability with spell making and may even choose who to marry, such characteristics are represented against a backdrop of patriarchal assumptions. When Rosa is represented as being "very sarcastic and independent" about the discussion of who she should marry, the text, by interpreting and remarking on her response in terms which suggest rebellion, is signalling that this is transgressive female behaviour which should be

humoured rather than taken seriously. The underlying tone of the narrative comment is one of amused tolerance.

Angelica (Petrocchi) and Tonino (Montana) are (in some senses) attributed equal roles in the text in their representation as failures in the art of spell making but the inadvertent saviours of the city. In their apparently equal part in this endeavour the text could be understood to be breaking away from attributing opposing gender characteristics. However, two factors nullify their apparent equality. First, Tonino acts as focaliser in the text, leaving Angelica to be mediated through his eyes. Second, given that Angelica's strength with spells is characterised as intuitive and erratic, while Tonino can, by logic, use the spells of others to his own advantage, the text is still signalling oppositional gendered characteristics. This appears to be one of the difficulties with texts from this genre which seek to break away from the gendered norms informed by patriarchal discourse. Even when women are allocated characteristics of strength and initiative (as with Angelica) they come linked with gendered concepts—like intuition and impulsiveness. In other words, in constructing strong females underlying ideological assumptions still have a way of intruding. Similarly, when men are allocated characteristics of self-doubt and hesitancy (as with Tonino) they come linked with extra intelligence and insight. It is an appropriate irony that the text's ideological assumptions are anticipated in the cover illustration for the Beaver paperback edition where an oppositional construction of gender is signalled. Tonino is represented as slightly taller than Angelica and gazing outwards while Angelica is represented with downcast eyes.

Prettiness as Submission

Women are subject to male based authority and are privileged according to the degree to which they submit and display the characteristics which are linked with submissiveness. Female subjection is dependent on the allocation of binary characteristics on a gendered basis discussed in the previous section. One of the most important of these is prettiness, as this signals a number of related characteristics which may not necessarily be verbalised but are understood in the genre. Furthermore, readers are positioned to collude with this objectification of women, and to understand that women constructed with characteristics in opposition to those of men, and hence subject to them, can expect to be ultimately rewarded for supporting the system.

Kathleen, in *Dogsbody,* initiates no part in the action other than that of initially rescuing and protecting Sirius when a puppy, an act instrumental in restoring him to his rightful male position. She remains submissive to Basil's teasing, to abuse from the local thugs for being Irish, and to abuse from Duffie (who, while female, is constructed as aberrant). Her submission is rewarded by Sirius' protection which she receives in return for having rescued him. She is also rewarded by Mr Duffield, who grants her, in a moment of magnanimity, the huge sum of fifty pence a week to help her feed Sirius. Her effusive thanks and soft-hearted refraining from suggesting that the sum is inadequate serve again to construct her as a submissive female.

She is further rewarded when, after her failure to cook the Christmas turkey properly, Mr Duffield buys her a new dress.

"If you want your turkey properly cooked," said Mr Duffield, "you might consider cooking it yourself." As soon as the shops opened again, he took Kathleen out and bought her a new dress. Kathleen was delighted. The dress was a bright blue which matched her eyes. Sirius thought she looked enchanting in it (*Dogsbody* p.62).

The act of buying the dress for Kathleen serves a triple narrative purpose. It further signals Duffie's construction as an aberrant, wicked woman (I shall discuss aberrant women in the third section of the chapter), and signals Kathleen as pretty and deserving for her long-suffering. The use of the word "enchanting" to describe her appearance serves to develop her construction as a Cinderella figure who, we are intended to understand, will one day be vindicated. Thirdly, she receives male recognition and approval for her prettiness and accompanying linked attributes. Kathleen is thus constructed through generic conventions as supportive of, and in return, protected by the patriarchal construction embedded in the genre.

However, Kathleen is not simply objectified in terms of the story level of the text. Her subject position in the household is mediated through Sirius and, in so constructing Kathleen's persona, the narrative structure makes her subject to Sirius' representation. Accordingly, because the text is so constructed as to place Sirius as focaliser, the reader is positioned to observe and empathise with Kathleen's position from Sirius' paternalist perspective. The narrative rarely represents Kathleen unless she is observed by Sirius. The reader is thus positioned to understand it to be Sirius' role to protect her, rather than to expect that she would initiate action. Even her act of defiance in destroying Duffie's pots does little to forward the plot—it is on Sirius' initiative that she is taken to Miss Smith's house.

Polly (the focalising character in *Fire and Hemlock*) is represented in a more complex fashion and one which, at the conclusion of the text, does suggest a subtle break with the gendered expectations which are dominant earlier in the text. I will first discuss the factors which signal Polly's construction as a female whose gender characteristics are determined by the generic restrictions of the text—those characteristics which locate her as subject to patriarchal authority and approval.

Throughout the text, Polly is objectified by references to her prettiness, long blond hair and soft-hearted, compliant nature. Within the generic characteristics of quest fantasy, prettiness always signals compliance and helplessness. Prettiness carries with it a linked set of characteristics including most importantly, innocence, youth, submissiveness, and kindness.[3] Thomas Lyn is constructed as the responsive foil, obsessed by her blondness (signifying innocence and purity) and giving it value by his approval.[4] When Polly allows her blonde hair to become untidy she realises, after washing it, what an important asset it is because it is valued by a man.

> Her head ached worse than it had done with two black eyes. But she was rewarded by having a cloud of silver-fair hair, as clean as it was bright. She saw why Mr Lyn had called it lovely now. She was rather careful about combing it after that (*Fire and Hemlock* p.90).

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[3] Of course it is important to note that Polly's representation conforms with a more general discourse of femininity and not one limited to the discourse of quest fantasy. Her representation would not be out of place in many "realist" texts.

[4] Marina Warner, in her exploration of what she calls "the language of hair", comments on the significance of blondeness in fairy tale and folk-lore. She points out that fair hair and is associated with the Christian symbolism of lightness and that "although blondeness's most enduring associations are with beauty, with love and nubility, with erotic attraction, with value and fertility, its luminosity made it also the traditional colour of virgins' hair" (Warner pp.366-367).

She earlier resists having her hair cut, opting rather to undergo the painful process of combing it, because she knows her long hair to be approved by Thomas Lyn. Prettiness may be costly and may involve effort but such efforts are worthwhile because they are rewarded by male approval.

Polly's sexual development is also constructed in ways which objectify her. The text constructs her acquisition of adult sexual characteristics not in reference to herself as an entity but in reference to her desire to please Thomas Lyn and to gain male approval generally. In fact the text represents this patriarchally oriented construction of female sexual development as "natural". Each female character's sexual development is represented as being validated by their achievement of developmental norms which are gauged by the extent to which males show an interest. Polly, in gaining the approval of a good looking older man, is accredited added value. In constructing female sexual development thus Diana Wynne Jones gives assent to a set of patriarchal discourses which construct women as subject to men.

The text also reinforces submission, and its set of accompanying attributes, as the pattern for female success by positioning the reader to disapprove of Polly's brief attempt to construct her heroic persona by adopting characteristics gendered as male. The results of playing football, fighting, not washing her hair (and getting head lice!) are that she is no longer pretty!

> She saw a wild, gawky figure in a dress three sizes too small. Under the wrong-length frill of skirt were two thin legs with a scab on each knobby knee. Round the scabs the knees were gray. The hands dangling out of the too short sleeves were gray, too. The wild tails of her hair were not quite gray, but they were drab somehow and rather like snakes, and the face

among the snakes had a sulky look, even though the sulky look was just breaking up into tears (*Fire and Hemlock* p.88).

Polly's observation of her mirrored image is represented to the reader by means of Polly's reported reaction. However, the narrator, while still using Polly as focaliser, gives a commentary on her appearance, thereby positioning the reader to share Polly's shock. While we supposedly see through Polly's eyes, the narrator instructs us in how to interpret what we see. Ascribing to her the attributes wild, gawky, and thin places her outside the generic requirements for an approved woman. Scabs, gray knees and hair like snakes are generic signals of aberrant females who have defied the patriarchal order. An obvious intertext is that of the Greek myth of Medusa. Lastly, in describing her face as having a sulky look, the reader is being positioned to understand that, in failing to conform to the attributes required of her sex, Polly has really been miserable. Breaking away from gendered expectations carries a heavy penalty. Such a failing is understood, given the generic codes of gendered attributes, to destroy her ability to function acceptably in society. However, this is only an aberrant stage and Polly returns to accepted gendered codes of behaviour.

Fire and Hemlock makes use of a large number of intertexts which, due to their own encoding with patriarchal assumptions, function as further enforcers of the generic construction of gender. One such intertext is that of the myth of Cupid and Psyche and its later variant, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*. The reader's attention is drawn to the intertext in that a copy of *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* is given to Polly by Thomas Lyn and a summary of the story is given by the narrator through Polly. Her subsequent action of spying on Thomas Lyn

and, as a result losing him, then mirrors that of the intertext. Polly pays the price of failing to listen to male warnings and of asserting herself against the male hegemony. In using this text as an intertext Diana Wynne Jones is drawing on a body of discourse which represents women as foolishly curious and prone not to listen to the voice of male reason.

Furthermore, the intertext embodies a moral injunction which has as its basis the assumption that male warnings must be taken seriously and that a failure to do so will prove disastrous. This is reaffirmed in dialogue with the text. When Polly reads the story she is represented as despising the girl and as considering that she deserves her trouble.

> The girl had only herself to blame for her troubles. And she cries so much. Polly despised her (*Fire and Hemlock* p.151).

In constructing her thus, the justice of a series of patriarchal assumptions, including the "naturalness" of male superior wisdom and right to command, are encoded in the text. These are further enforced when Polly herself repeats the mistake by spying on Tom and Laurel despite Tom's covert warning in giving her the text. It is interesting to note that in the stretch of text describing this event Polly is given attributes signalling her as an aberrant female. The words "glee", "chuckle", "furtive", and "hard triumph", generically associated with witchcraft, also serve to signal her act as one of disobedience and rebellion against male hegemony.

However, despite the patriarchal discourses which inform *Fire and Hemlock,* I suggest that in the text's closure these discourses are overturned and that Polly ceases to be a figure objectified by the text

when her initiatives break from those of the received patriarchal wisdom. When Polly recalls the mistake which made her forget Thomas Lyn and recognises what the ballads *Tam Lin* and *Thomas the Rhymer* tell her about him, she sets out, in the role of Janet, to grasp and not let go. The text continues, in dialogue with the intertexts referred to, to embody patriarchal discourses. But in her conflict with Laurel the text breaks away from generic conventions and, accordingly, from the patriarchal discourses which inform such conventions. Polly does not defeat Laurel by virtue of soft-heartedness and patient, faithful endurance. She defeats her by recognising Laurel's logic, using logic to undermine it, and by abandoning the characteristics which encode the generic constructs of virtuous women. She ceases to be obliging and recognises, and is critical of, Tom's failings, with the result that Tom's physical strength and will (signified by the horse, since he had thought it into being) is nullified.

The very fact that the closure is somewhat enigmatic contributes to the breaking of generically coded expectations about gender representation. The nature of quest fantasy tends to exclude closure which is in any sense ambiguous and so, in defying one generic determinant, the way is left open for a break from gender determinants. In the *Coda* Polly is positioned to stand looking down at Tom while he looks up towards her, reflecting the fact that it is Polly who explains the logical resolution. Thus the patriarchal hegemony is overturned, Polly guides Tom to his feet, and they stand equal.

The narrative's climax focuses on the use of "Nowhere" as a metaphor for hope and of "Nothing" as a metaphor for spiritual death. When Polly realises that acting to save Tom will jeopardise Seb's

existence she is forced to make a choice between the two and as she listens to the performance of the Dumas Quartet she reflects on the music.

> She found her mind dwelling on Nowhere, as she and Tom used to imagine it. You slipped between Here and Now to the hidden Now and Here-as Laurel had once told another Tom, there was that bonny path in the middle-but you did not necessarily leave the world. Here was a place where the quartet was grinding out dissonances. There was a lovely tune beginning to emerge from it. Two sides to Nowhere, Polly thought. One really was a dead end. The other was the void that lay before you when you were making up something new out of ideas no one else had quite had before. That's a discovery I must do something about, Polly thought... (*Fire and Hemlock* p.326).

Polly must go nowhere. Nowhere could mean a dead end, confusion and loss and a place of nothingness as it is for Mr Leroy when he reaches what is "Truly the dead end of nowhere" (p. 334). But for Polly it is venturing forward with new ideas, with a new creative energy, with the hope that a way can be found and that there are fresh directions to take. With a play on words and logical progression she and Tom realise that if they cannot meet anywhere then they must be able to meet Nowhere, which is, in the terms of the text, the best position from which to begin a relationship.

By resolving Tom's and Polly's dilemma and defeating Laurel by the logic of a childhood game the author has broken away from the common pattern of fiction dealing with adolescent growth to understanding. Polly has changed, but her wisdom and understanding are rooted in an understanding of her past and the resolution of her dilemma lies in the significance of a child's game of make believe. The resolution finally depends on constructing reality by playing with words.

Beauty and Ugliness as Subversion

Within the conventions of the genre women may resist the patriarchal hegemony but are never successful and frequently suffer for their efforts. Those women who assert themselves against patriarchal norms and who seek power for themselves are signalled in the genre by two different sets of physical attributes—exceptional beauty and ugliness. On the one hand, women who seek to subvert the patriarchy are frequently signalled by their great beauty because this attribute is often generically linked with a set of characteristics to do with moral qualities which signal villainous, subversive intent. Thus, extreme beauty frequently signals cold-heartedness, vanity, ruthlessness, deceitfulness and a seductive attraction which will destroy the male.

On the other hand, women who attempt to subvert the patriarchy may be signalled by being attributed characteristics at the opposite end of the spectrum—they will be represented as physically repellent. Such aberrant ugliness carries linked moral characteristics, just as does aberrant beauty. Thus, women who are represented as ugly can be assumed to be treacherous, vicious, ruthless and vindictive. The two opposing physical attributes which signal subversive women, although superficially dissimilar, are linked in that they are both attributes which suggest an aberration from what is assumed to be "normal" and "natural". The generic conventions assume it to be abnormal for women to be exceptionally beautiful just as it is abnormal for women to be particularly ugly, and hence either attribute signals that the woman must be suspect. As I have mentioned in my opening discussion, these two sets of characteristics can be linked and the seductively and transgressively attractive woman may become old and ugly when her character is revealed.

Furthermore, the generic convention of the objectification of aberrant women means that they denied a voice in the narrative. Their motivation for their actions is either dismissed as being invalid and inadmissable in narrative comment, or their statements are mediated through the voice of the narrator or through that of the protagonist. The result of such narrative structuring is that the reader is positioned to perceive their actions through the perceptions of those characters whom the narrative constructs as supporting the patriarchal assumptions of the text.

Diana Wynne Jones' fantasy is very much informed by the genre's tendency to objectify aberrant females and to signal them as such by attributing them with unusual beauty. In both *Dogsbody* and *Fire and Hemlock,* male power is threatened by beautiful women. Sirius has lost his position as the result of a devious plot on the part of his beautiful female companion but she is given no voice in the narrative. Instead the reader is told *about* her via Sirius. Hence, the reader is initially told that she is beautiful and that Sirius loves and trusts her. However, the reader is not informed (and neither does Sirius realise) until some way into the narrative that she is a subversive figure. When Sirius is searching for the "zoi", the object that will prove his innocence, he is suddenly shocked to discover his companion:

> There was another woman standing there, a more elegantly dressed one. She was small, and she had extraordinary dead white hair falling smoothly to her shoulders. Despite that, she seemed young. Her face was dead white too, with cheekbones and eyes that, ever so slightly, slanted upward. That made her both striking and beautiful (*Dogsbody* p.125-26).

With the knowledge gained from his time spent on earth Sirius now recognises his companion as the text constructs her and her exclamation on seeing Sirius is represented (through Sirius as focaliser) as vicious and even nastier than Duffie's mode of speech.

There are a number of attributes by which the Companion is signalled as a threat in this extract. Elegance of dress, smoothly falling hair, white hair and a white face suggest a contrived and unnatural appearance, particularly when they are linked with a surprising youthfulness. The repeated adjective "dead", modifying hair and face, add to the construction of the Companion as an aberrant and evil figure. Similarly, her representation as having slanting eyes and cheekbones exemplifies another attribute sometimes used in the genre to signal aberrance—alien racial characteristics. Finally, the use of "extraordinary" and "striking" signal her as unnatural, aberrant and therefore dangerous.

The Duchess, in *The Magicians of Caprona,* is constructed in a similar manner: she is objectified by the text, is denied a voice and her aberrance is signalled by a number of "unnatural" attributes including "...a statue-pale face, almost waxy,..."(*The Magicians of Caprona* p.31). Once again, Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock* is objectified and constructed in terms which signal her as aberrant and dangerous. Her attributes of pale hair, and pale unfeeling eyes are very similar to the descriptions of other dangerously beautiful women.

However, Laurel is a somewhat more adventurous construct because the conventional attributes I have referred to are linked with other attributes more commonly associated with the demure submissiveness attributed to those female constructs who accept

traditional gendered differentiation. When Polly intrudes on Hunsdon House and steals the photograph of Tom as a boy, Laurel's room is described thus:

> There was a real four poster bed in here, on a white fluffy carpet. The faint shine of the bed's curtains, the frills at the top and the quilt across it suggested dark pinkish satin. Polly took her glove off to touch it and it was satin. She put the glove on again because this room was cold...She knew this was Laurel's room. It was a big dimness, with rosebuds on the walls, a soft rosy carpet under the bed's white fluffy one, silken chairs (*Fire and Hemlock* p.127).

The connection of such conventionally "feminine" items as whiteness, frills, satin, fluffiness and rosebuds with the coldness of the aberrant woman, Laurel, is interesting because it is a deliberate working against the ideas those qualities are assumed to convey in the generic conventions. Such attributes conventionally signal submissiveness and acceptance of patriarchal authority. Here, they are almost humorously foregrounded, with their use signalling that attributes need not always be signs to other linked qualities. Furthermore, the very profusion of signs of submissiveness acts as a device signalling subversion. While the text is certainly still largely dependent on conventional generic means of constructing gender this strategy is an interesting inversion of generically determined construction of gender. In using such a strategy Jones seems to be demonstrating a greater awareness of the signals characteristic of the genre's determination of gender. In playing with them thus the text breaks free, just a little, of the constraints imposed by the genre. However, of course, this very play is dependent on the generic conventions.

Foolish Women

Diana Wynne Jones tends not to signal aberrant women by the use of characteristics associated with physical repulsiveness. Rather, she constructs some women characters as not so much malevolent and subversive in their resistance to patriarchal norms but as foolish and absurd. In doing so she makes use of other descriptors of behaviour considered to be unusual in "normal" society. While these may often be used to create a "contemporary feel" to her fantasy, and serve to introduce a comic element to her texts, they reveal her unconscious assent to a variety of mainstream social mores. (Such characters are still constructed in a way which means that they are objectified by the narrative.) In order to examine this feature of her texts I shall look briefly at three female characters constructed as aberrant—Duffie, from *Dogsbody*, and Joanna and Ivy, from *Fire and Hemlock*.

Duffie is cast very much in the mould of the ugly sisters— particularly appropriate in the light of the fact that Kathleen is a Cinderella figure. The narrative constructs her as large and having a cold and sarcastic voice. Furthermore, while her speech is frequently reported, the narrative maintains her as a figure mediated through Sirius' hostile perceptions. Her occupation of making pots is also used as a means of signalling her as an absurd figure. The narrative implies that it is an occupation of marginal importance, of interest only to other foolish women. Duffie should really be looking after the family properly rather than forcing Kathleen to do the housework. When Kathleen destroys Duffie's pots the narrative effectively signals approval of her action when Miss Smith (signalled as a benevolent woman) describes them as "quite the most hideous things in town". Most importantly, she is signalled as a foolishly aberrant figure because, despite her shrew-

like characteristics and constant threats, she has no real power and no means of gaining it. She is still subject to the patriarchal assumption that Mr Duffield will make decisions.

> "That creature—" began Duffie.
>
> The thunderous voice cut in rumbling peaceably. "Now, now. You've had your say, Duffie. And I say a house isn't complete without a dog."...
>
> Sirius gathered that he was safe. What the thunderous voice said in this place, the other people obeyed (*Dogsbody* p.16).

Joanna is a female construct familiar to the genre—a stepmother. However, although she is constructed as preferring not to look after her step daughter, she is attributed with characteristics signalling her as an absurd and marginal construct rather than a malevolent one. In constructing her as vegetarian, obsessively neat and disliking cats and children she is signalled as suspect. Such a construct is dependent on ideological assumptions about "normality". By signalling Joanna as aberrant the reader must concur that it is "normal" to accept cats and children and the attendant mess, and to eat meat. Ivy is a further aberrant female. Her construction as a devotee of pop psychology, along with her name which acts as a commentary on her representation as a "clinging" and possessive figure, both serve to signal her as foolish and absurd.[5] Like Joanna, she is a marginal rather than a malevolent construct.

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[5] She also acts as an oppositional construct to Polly who the text constructs as having to avoid the dangers of accepting Ivy's construction of femininity and committing becoming a "clinging" female.

Age, Singleness and Power

The generic conventions allow elderly, single women to have power. These women tend to occupy roles something like that of the fairy tale fairy godmother. However, their power is to be used as a means of supporting those figures necessary to sustaining the patriarchal assumptions of the text.

Granny (*Fire and Hemlock*) and Miss Smith (*Dogsbody*) are two such female constructs. Granny rescues Polly from neglect, provides her with physical nurture and protection, resists bureaucratic interference and acts as Polly's guide and adviser. Similarly, Miss Smith rescues Kathleen from neglect, resists any bureaucratic objections and protects and nurtures her. Diana Wynne Jones' ideological assumptions become apparent in her construction of both characters as teachers—those who pass on social norms and hence support the status quo. Miss Smith, in having taught every male in town is also represented as having authority in the patriarchy and furthermore can be assumed to have passed on and nurtured the patriarchal status quo.

Conclusions

Diana Wynne Jones, while in many ways constructing innovative fantasy texts, has not, on the whole, managed to resist the constraints which the genre imposes on the representation of gender. Furthermore, her work is informed by a sub-conscious assent to the dominant roles of men which is not there simply because of the genre in which she is working. Her texts assume male authority, and if men fail to adopt an authoritative role they are represented as weak and inadequate. Her attempts to create a female hero do not succeed at all in *Dogsbody* and

although Angelica and Polly are more successful constructs they are still limited successes for the reasons I have explained.

While the closure of *Fire and Hemlock* gives an inkling of a break from generic determination, it is restricted by the degree to which the bulk of the text is influenced by generic determinants and unconscious assumptions about gender distinctions. In her attempt to create strong women Diana Wynne Jones has probably come closest to this with her construction of Polly's Granny and Miss Smith. But then again, such figures are generic constructs with a long tradition in the genre. Must we conclude that the only way to construct self-reliant, powerful women within the constraints of the genre is to make them retired, single or widowed teachers?

Conclusion

A superficial examination of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies could lead a reader to view them simply as, in the words of one reviewer, "wildly original fantasies". (Cart) Of course, such a response is perfectly valid. Jones' works are wildly and startlingly original in that they take fantasy in a very different direction from that established by Tolkien and those writers influenced by him such as Alexander and Cooper. However, the object of this study has been to move beyond this perception of obvious differences of her texts and to examine the implications of these differences. In doing so my aim has been twofold. First, I have sought to put the case for a recognition that her texts explore more profound questions than is generally acknowledged in the attention her work has received to date. While reviewers have acknowledged the surface concerns of her texts, they have been slow to recognise the more profound and subtle explorations of the nature of subjectivity and reality which undergird her texts, particularly her later texts. Second, I have sought to place her fantasy writing in a generic context and to explore the way in which her generic play creates a paradigm shift for the genre.

Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies are intriguing texts because, just as they often resist the dictates of the genre so they also resist critical dictates and categorisation. While a postmodern critical discourse certainly seems to provide the most useful means of examining them

critically they contain internal contradictions and hence I am not suggesting the texts can be tied down to one exclusive and restrictive approach. In contradiction to the postmodern play of her fantasies there is an underlying ideology in all of them that affirms a Eurocentric, liberal humanist view of the world. It is here that the curious contradiction of her fantasies lies. On the one hand, her use of postmodern play serves to imply the relativism, the ambivalence, the self-conscious doubt and hesitancy which are so much a part of the postmodern. On the other hand, the texts still carry an undercurrent of cheerful liberal humanist certainty about the nature of society and the individual. However, it is possible to view this very ambivalence and eclecticism as itself an indication of the influence of the postmodern on Jones' texts. Since her texts, in a curious fashion, effectively combine underlying liberal-humanist assumptions with the relativist notions of the postmodern there is a sense in which the texts function even more as curious hybrids where ideological certainties and the problematising of these same certainties overlap. By their very contradictions they can be said to epitomise the postmodern.

In the Conclusions to her study of children's fantasy Maria Nikolajeva suggests that in contemporary fantasy:

> Primitive variables .which were meant to create a sense of security, stability of the world, immutability of the identity, the certainty of a "happy ending" have given way to uncertainty, instability, duality, hesitation. Nothing is taken for granted, nothing is, positivistically, acknowledged as the utmost reality. ...There may be more than one reality and more than one truth" (Nikolajeva p.116).

Such a description of the direction that contemporary fantasy has taken sits well with Jones' texts. Her fantasies abound with playful uncertainties and hesitations about the nature of reality and of identity and celebrate the dualities that are so much a part of the latter half of the twentieth century. However, while her fantasies explore and problematise notions of reality and notions of the autonomous nature of the self they always do so within an implied understanding that workable realities can be negotiated.

Diana Wynne Jones' adventurous and experimental play with the fantasy genre has achieved a paradigm shift. By taking the genre into new and intriguing territory Jones has developed new possibilities for the genre and injected it with a renewed vigour. It is my hope that other writers of fantasy will recognise and experiment with the possibilities opened up by this paradigm shift.

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