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“I Am an Old Woman”: Sophie’s Quest for Identity in Jones’s
Howl’s Moving Castle and Miyazaki’s 2004 Adaptation

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Abstract

This dissertation compares the representation of identity in the character of Sophie from Diana Wynne Jones's novel *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) and from Hayao Miyazaki's anime adaptation by the same title (2004). I aim to describe how the curse which turns Sophie into a ninety-year-old woman affects her agency over her identity. In particular, I concentrate on Sophie's curse as a liminal space that allows her to transgress the established boundaries and reclaim her identity. The analysis will take into consideration the differences in Sophie's performance in the hypotext and the hypertext, so as to observe how the changes in each text convey distinct messages. In the analysis, I apply the conventions of the fairy tale genre which both texts use to craft their stories, but I also approach the texts from the ideological perspectives of the third wave of feminism. With this theoretical framework, I intend to examine the ways in which the hypotext and the hypertext resort to the fairy tale tradition to establish certain expectations, and the extent to which either text applies notions such as genderisation and gender polarisation. The analysis shows that Sophie's progress of gaining agency over her process of self-construction is presented differently. Jones's novel depicts Sophie's curse as an opportunity for her to leave the discourses that used to constrain her performance of the self. Within the boundaries of the body of a ninety-year-old woman, she becomes the Other and, as she is put further into the margins of society, she gets rid of the expectations imposed on her. Thus, she gains control over her process of identity-building. On the other hand, Miyazaki's adaptation suggests a completely different source for Sophie's agency. By erasing Sophie's status as a witch and diminishing her process of self-discovery, Miyazaki presents Sophie's romantic love as the source of her power.

Keywords: identity, gender, liminality, third wave feminism, fairy tale

Resumen

Este trabajo compara la representación de la identidad del personaje de Sophie de la novela de Diana Wynne Jones *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) y de la adaptación de anime de Hayao Miyazaki (2004) que recibe el mismo título. Este trabajo pretende exponer cómo la maldición que convierte a Sophie en una mujer de noventa años afecta el poder que tiene ella sobre su propia identidad. En concreto, el trabajo se enfoca en la maldición de Sophie analizándola como un espacio liminal que le permite traspasar los límites que le han sido establecidos y reclamar así su identidad. El análisis considera las diferencias en la manera de actuar de Sophie en el hipotexto y el hipertexto, para observar así cómo esos cambios causan que cada texto transmita un mensaje distinto. En este análisis tengo en cuenta las convenciones del género literario de los cuentos de hadas a los que ambos textos recurren para construir sus historias, pero también abordo los textos desde la perspectiva ideológica de la tercera ola del feminismo. Con este marco teórico, la intención es examinar las maneras en las que el hipotexto y el hipertexto recurren a la tradición de los cuentos de hadas para establecer ciertas expectativas, y cómo cada texto aplica nociones tales como las de generización y polaridades de género. El análisis demuestra que el proceso por el que Sophie pasa para obtener poder sobre su construcción de identidad está presentado de manera distinta. La novela de Jones representa la maldición de Sophie como una oportunidad con la que poder huir del discurso que reprimía la representación de su identidad. Dentro de los límites del cuerpo de una señora de noventa años, Sophie se convierte en el Otro y, puesto que eso la lleva a los márgenes de la sociedad, logra librarse de las expectativas que le han sido impuestas. Por ello, Sophie gana el control sobre el proceso de creación de su identidad. En cambio, la adaptación de Miyazaki sugiere un origen del poder de Sophie totalmente diferente. Al eliminar los poderes mágicos de Sophie y reducir la importancia al proceso de descubrimiento propio, Miyazaki presenta el amor romántico de Sophie como fuente de su poder.

Palabras clave: identidad, género, liminalidad, tercera ola de feminismo, cuentos de hadas

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse the novel *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) and its film adaptation (2004) with regards to the representation of the main character's agency over her identity. The focus lies on Sophie and her curse, which transforms her into a ninety-year-old woman. This transformation is the driving force that fuels her personal and interpersonal conflicts. I argue that this curse enables the character to transgress the expected gendered roles imposed on her as well as to diverge from the motifs of fairy tales. In particular, I intend to examine how Sophie's curse affects her process of self-construction differently in the hypotext and the hypertext from a narrative, aesthetic, and discursive perspective by considering the physical and psychological depiction of the character. By taking into account the representation of gender in the fairy-tale tradition, alongside the ideologies of the third wave of feminism, I aim to prove that the novel and the film depict Sophie's quest for agency over her identity in two distinctly different ways.

Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) is one of her most well-known novels as a fantasy and children's book author (Mendlesohn xiii). One of the common motifs in Jones's novels is the traditional conflict between good and evil. In fact, since Jones's books are character driven, she explores these dichotomous struggles through her protagonists, who must face their own personal demons (Zipes 272). Her characters must learn to detach themselves from their prejudices in order to liberate themselves from the traditions and authorities that bring them harm, such as those determined by narrative conventions (Gascoyne 212). Jones challenges the fairy tale conventions by granting her protagonists magical powers, instead of having them helped by magical beings (Zipes 271).

As far as Hayao Miyazaki's adaptation is concerned, not only has the medium changed, but also the creator's cultural background, as he is Japanese. Yet, Miyazaki is acquainted with the Western literary tradition, and has received much influence in particular from children's literature (Denison 67). The director sets his films in places that resemble Europe and classical Disney's films such as *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), since he is drawn by the sense of escapism the films' fantastic landscapes can conjure. While he also resorts to Japanese folklore and mythology in his works (Hernández-Pérez 305), Miyazaki is inclined to rely on a limited number of narrative and aesthetic tropes, such as the use of aeroplanes to portray movement, and female protagonists in love (Hernández-

Pérez 307). In fact, Miyazaki has portrayed *shōjo* ('young girls') characters in anime in such a distinctive way that, next to his rich fantastic worlds, the director is also best known for his memorable female characters (Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl* 152).

On the one hand, I aim to analyse the representation of Sophie's performance of gender before and after receiving her curse, for I consider her curse as a liminal, transitional time in her life. I will focus on this aspect of her process of characterisation since it will allow her to grow both in the physical and the psychological dimension, which will be reflected in the character's use of language. On the other hand, I will examine how the novel and the adaptation depict Sophie's agency differently. Whilst the former subverts the fairy-tale frame, the latter embraces it, the ultimate goal of the analysis being, indeed, to demonstrate that Jones and Miyazaki present different conceptions of Sophie's process of self-building, Jones emphasising the centrality of self-reliance, whilst Miyazaki on the centrality of romantic love.

In the analysis of the novel and its adaptation I have followed both a deductive and inductive methodology. I began my analysis applying an initial hypothesis based on my readings on Japanese and Western children's literature and fairy tales. The initial hypothesis had to be partially reformulated when I interpreted the results of the comparative analysis of the hypotext and hypertext, and reached conclusions based on how the aforementioned elements are portrayed. I will deploy concepts culled from Application, Film, Literary and Narrative Studies as means to frame the analysis of Sophie's performance of her identity and its differences in each medium.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The fairy tale tradition

2.1.1. The Western fairy tale tradition

In Europe, fairy tales emerged in the Middle Ages from the oral storytelling tradition and, as they began to be written down, a literary genre developed its own conventions, such as motifs and plots, many of which were borrowed from folklore (Zipes xvi): formulas like "once upon a time" and "happily ever after", or plotlines driven by a

young hero on a quest (Monin 511). Some of these common motifs are systematised in Vladimir Propp's seminal work on *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), in which the author presents thirty-one primary functions of the narrative conventions of the genre. These are the basic elements that should be present in fairy tales in order for the narration to continue. The constant presence of these functions provides the reader with a sense of familiarity (Monin 513).

According to Bettelheim, since their inception, fairy tales have served the purpose of transmitting teachings, such as the dichotomous relationship of good and evil, which becomes embodied, respectively, by the hero and the villain, and from which readers learn how they should behave morally (qtd. in Monin 516). Since fairy tales are part of the dominant discourse in a given culture, Parson remarks that “[they] are culturally specific and evolve according to the shifting values of a society” (137). Therefore, tales reproduce the ideologies of the hegemonic cultural forces, such as patriarchal constructions of gender. Furthermore, since the very first instances of literary fairy tales, female characters have been portrayed through the masculine gaze—Perrault and Andersen, among others—that seemed to ultimately cater to their fantasies (Parsons 136). An example of this are the many damsels in distress who need to be rescued by a man. On the contrary, powerful and independent women are portrayed as the ugly, wicked old villains who are regarded as undesirable. By doing so, fairy tales present another type of polarisation of good and evil, the ‘good’ women being those who are weak, submissive, and beautiful; the evil ones, those who do not fit into these categories. Consequently, only the women who are beautiful, docile, and take care of domestic life are rewarded with good fortune and live “happily ever after” (Fenglin 28), which consists in marrying the male hero or prince (Parsons 137). These messages, Fenglin argues, serve “to control the ‘threat’ brought by women to the patriarchal society, [so] female figures in most of the Grimm’s fairy tales, such as “Snow White”, “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty”, have rapidly been displayed in silent position” (26), becoming, thus, the ‘subaltern’, to use Gayatri Spivak’s term (83). This dichotomous depiction of women presents an essentialist view of that which a woman should or should not be like, and the consequences she will experience according to their performance. Fundamentally, these stories instruct women to act like the “good” models displayed in them to avoid the fate of the female “villains” who are depicted as monstrous. In fact, although folktales might present subversive discourses, Parsons assures that many fairy tales have been “edited and selected to reflect and

reproduce patriarchal values” (137). Zipes presents the notion of ‘contamination’ to refer to any sort of addition to a traditional tale, creating a revision of these tales which can be both progressive and conservative (Parsons 138).

2.1.2. Japanese fairy tales

Japanese mythology has often been confused with traditional fairy tales. Many of the latter are called *otogizōshi* (“companion tales”); they were written from the 14th to 17th centuries and were accompanied by illustrations. These stories were written to provide entertainment and fulfil didactic purposes, as they aimed to provide moral and religious teachings (Reider 3). Just like in other cultures, they have characteristic narrative formulas and motifs such as the “*mukashi mukashi*” phrase, meaning “long ago, long ago”. Just like in the Western tradition, Japanese fairy tales present elements, such as supernatural beings, which pertain to their culture: *oni*, similar to Western tradition’s ogres, *yokai*, spirits or goblins, and *kappa*, water sprites. Many tales also centre around the adventures of common people who enter the magical world. Despite their resemblance as far as some aspects are concerned, there are elements which set the Western tradition apart from the Japanese. Japanese fairy tales lack the quest motif but have complex emotional experiences. Additionally, when it comes to the tales’ ending, the Japanese tradition has “the tendency to separate male and female protagonists at the end, rather than unite them in the “happy ever after” conclusion familiar in the West” (Ellis 190). In fact, for Westerners, this type of ending can seem inconclusive, but Japanese people consider that the characters benefit from the learning acquired through the experience, so they regard them as happy endings because they “use tales to explore the way things are and how they ought to be” (Ellis 192).

Regarding the depiction of women, although they share similarities, the Japanese tradition can differ from the Western one. For instance, the female characters, even if they can be portrayed as vulnerable and in need of rescuing, are more prone to be independent, their actions sometimes even determining the destiny of the male protagonists (Napier, “Not Always Happily Ever After” 167). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there are fantastic motifs shared by both traditions, such as the theme of women disappearing after having transformed physically into a supernatural being, animal or tree (Çay 108). Kawai states that “the fact that beautiful women just vanish or die, leaving a deep feeling of sorrow, symbolizes completeness in the aesthetic dimension. It is the beauty of

completeness ... the state of imperfection is more beautiful than the state of perfection”, much like the Japanese philosophy of *kintsugi* (qtd. in Çay 111). Because of this, in the Japanese tradition, the infatuation of the man for the woman is usually driven by his love for her heart, not just her looks (Okuhara 193).

2.2. Third-wave feminism and its effect on fairy tale re-visions

Third-wave feminism arose in the decade of the 1980's, providing innovative and more inclusive perspectives to the movement (Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism” 183). This progress was motivated by some late second-wave feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Audre Lorde who opened a path for non-white women in feminism: they were the first ones to create a new discourse based on their criticisms towards feminism (Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism” 180). Thus, third wave feminism emerges from the inadequacies and incompleteness of the second wave. The rise of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, deconstructionism and postmodernism were essential for third-wavers to deconstruct their internalised racism and classism and to be able to create a movement for all women (Gilley 189).

One of the main issues from the second wave was its definition of what it is to be a woman. Consequently, a crucial focus of the third wave was to deconstruct the idea of “the essentialist woman”. They aimed to prove the difference between the definition of ‘Womanhood’ according to the dominant discourse, and the reality of women’s lives (Mann and Huffman 59). Third-wavers emphasised the importance of diversity, taking into account the differences in ethnicity, class and religion, for instance. According to Snyder-Hall, “third-wave feminism is pluralistic and begins with the assumptions that women do not share a common gender identity or set of experiences and that they often interpret similar experiences differently ... [therefore, it] accepts the reality that multiple definitions of feminism exist simultaneously” (“Third-Wave Feminism” 259). To present this diversity, as Weiner-Mahfuz affirms, many would write about their lives, reflecting on their upbringing as interracial or multicultural women to demonstrate how “the politics of race, class, and gender play out in people’s lives” (qtd. in Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism” 184). This focus on diversity presented contradictions, but it became essential for the third wave feminist works, since it helped to deconstruct essentialist notions. As Cathryn Bailey explains, “complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction can enrich our identities as individual feminists and the movement as a whole” (qtd. in

Renegar and Sowards 2). Performativity also becomes a crucial concept for third wave feminists for the representation of identity and the construct of gender.

Judith Butler defines gender as “discursive, relational and performative”, something that is enacted through time and by repetition of acts (qtd. in Schippers and Sapp 29). These continuous performances construct meaning and create different effects depending on one’s enactment, as “gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler 191). The concept of femininity and its performance pertains, therefore, to the discourse of gender, “a set of cultural or social ideals concerning what ... a woman should be” (Schippers and Sapp 29). However, femininity is not embodied only by people who are born as female; instead, the performance of the construct of gender is a bodily and relational performance which can be executed by anyone regardless of their sex. Despite this being available to anyone, femininity is placed subordinate to masculinity due to the unequal social construction sustained by the hegemonic discourse. Whilst second-wavers considered femininity to be an expression of subjugation, third-wavers reclaimed femininity and its potential for being reconstructed in subversive ways. This subversive performativity did not consist in making femininity masculine, but by embracing it as a strategy to present counter-hegemonic discourses. The use of these strategies is essential from the Foucauldian perspective of power since he considers that the technologies of power can “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (Foucault 18). Third wave feminists adopted this conceptualisation to explain the power dynamics and inequalities present in our society. According to Foucault, power is relational and dynamic, rather than a fixed object, and thus, different tactics or strategies are available for both men and women to benefit from it. Consequently, third-wavers consider that “reworking and/or deploying femininity rather than rejecting it is one effective strategy for undermining patriarchy” as this can aid to reclaim the power of femininity (Schippers and Sapp 32).

The construction of identity and gender discourse is also affected by space. According to Shands, feminist critical practice should aim at “deconstructing boundaries to extend women’s power and strive to subvert the concept of fixed space” (qtd. in Bonasera 4). The concept of liminality is essential to understand this. Liminal spaces, according to Van Gennep and Turner, refer to the “boundary zones between two spatial

areas or two segments of time” (qtd. in Bonasera 4); they accommodate rites of passage through which subjects undergo any kind of transformation. Liminality is often times represented symbolically by thresholds, mirrors, windows, and doors. Mirrors, in particular, have been analysed by Foucault. According to him, when subjects see their reflection in mirrors, they see their self fragmented. This correlates with the idea of the “doubling of the self”, that is, the “divergence between self-perception and the image of the self that is reproduced by the text” (Bonasera 9). This fragmentation of identities introduces themes of transformation and liminality since “the blurring of divisions and the crossing of thresholds result in the progressive blurring of the boundary between self and other, death and rebirth, or even male and female identity” (Bonasera 10). Therefore, third-wavers focused on metaphors related to the inhabiting of a space—such as fluid transitions, movable borders, thresholds, and open spaces—as a way to create subversive reworkings of gender identity, rejecting traditional and hegemonic dichotomies (Bonasera 3).

Alongside these revisions of femininity and space, many third-wavers started to analyse the representation of women in media, allowing them to reflect, deconstruct and sustain a critical stance on the meanings of popular culture (Renegar and Sowards 13). As Heywood and Drake state, “[they] take critical engagement with popular culture as a key to political struggle” (qtd. in Gilley 191). Due to this approach, they saw fairy tales as perpetrators of “a premeditated “trap” set up for women by patriarchy” (Fenglin 26). This notion, together with the influence of the poststructuralist feminist movement, propelled an increasing interest in revisions of fairy tales. Feminist revisions of fairy tales analyse and offer alternatives to the realities of women, “expanding the subject positions available to women and men” (Parsons 139) by exploring subjectivity, agency, voice, autonomy, and power. These stories, according to Sheldon Cashdan, “use a fairy-tale format to suggest ways in which stereotyped images of women—and men—can be reshaped through fantasy” (qtd. in Fenglin 32). In order to challenge traditional storylines and create alternative ones, writers have to “work ... within and against the dominant discourse” as it is challenging to write outside of the familiar patterns of discourse (Parsons 141). Whilst these traditional tales bestow all power onto the male hero, who often exerts it over o/Others, in feminist tales, the heroine gains power in order to acquire independence and leave the object position in which the hegemonic discourse places her. In fact, many feminist fairy tales are written autodiegetically, to highlight the fact that the

female protagonists have control over their own narrative. In these revisions, female characters embrace their feminine characteristics, reaching the subject position without feeling forced to devalue feminine attributes (Parsons 140).

Angela Carter and her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) constitute one of the most famous examples of feminist fairy tale revision aimed at denouncing the situation of women under the patriarchy. With her revisions, rather than simply retelling the stories, Carter *re-presents* and, thus, criticises traditional tales (Fenglin 27). Carter presents an objectified female character who fits into the fairy tale tradition to show “the inequality of the power structure under the patriarchal sphere and use the female object as a narrative strategy in order to awaken the readers’ awareness towards females being silenced and marginalised by the male-dominated society” (Fenglin 30). To prompt this awareness, Carter resorts to mirrors to provide a way for the heroine to look at her own reflection and see herself being objectified by the male gaze. This, then, leads to the “heroine’s self-recognition ... and the awakening of feminist consciousness” (Fenglin 31). Through this act of reflection, Carter allows the readers “to defamiliarize both their social life under the structure of patriarchy as well as the original Grimms’ fairy tales, in order to form a new conception about gender and female object through the transforming processes of the heroines’ feminist awakening” (Fenglin 33). As we shall see, Miyazaki and Jones, too, integrate mirrors to portray Sophie’s process of awakening and self-recognition which triggers the development of the story.

3. Analysis

With the first sentence of the novel, Jones introduces a fantastic world in which everything seems possible: “in the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three” (Jones 9). In doing so, the author is inviting the reader to transgress the boundaries of reality and enter a world imbued in fairy-tale fantasy. The opening sentence echoes the “once upon a time” of traditional tales and creates certain expectations with regards to plot and discourse. These expectations are further developed through the use of intertextual references to other works, such as John Donne’s poem “Song: Go and

Catch a Falling Star”,¹ which, in the hypotext, functions as a curse. As only the first stanza is present, the poem unravels into a new meaning. Indeed, Jones adds the lines “Decide what this is about / Write a second verse yourself” (127) to subvert the meaning of the lines quoted and turn into a curse or a challenge to change one’s self, as I will discuss later.

Expectations are also set for the characters. Sophie’s surname, Hatter, is a clear example of this: it functions as an epithet in that it reveals her occupation as a milliner, establishing the tone of fairy tales whose characters are defined by certain simple attributes, and perhaps even hinting at another possible intertextual reference to Lewis Carroll’s Mad Hatter. Furthermore, the opening sentence quoted above states that being the eldest of three is a misfortune as, within this diegetic world, “everyone knows [the elder sisters] are the one[s] who will fail first” (Jones 9) and Sophie is, indeed, the eldest. By crafting this expectation of Sophie’s failure in life early on in the narrative, Jones introduces dramatic irony, for the genre demands that the main character has a happy ending. In other words, the reader’s expectation is that Sophie be the exception to the rule. On the contrary, Sophie assumes that her fate will match the prophesy. This creates a tension between diegetic and metanarrative expectations that is reflected in both the character’s physical dimension and in her psychological sphere.

3.1. Sophie’s physical and psychological characterisation

At the beginning of the story, it is established that, despite Sophie being described as “very pretty indeed” (Jones 10), her low self-esteem affects her self-perception. When she looks in the mirror to try on a hat on which she has been working, she feels that “[it] made her look dreary. Like an old maid!” (Jones 19). Although not expressed verbally as harshly as in the hypotext, these insecurities also exist in Miyazaki’s adaptation as represented in figures 1, 2 and 3. In this scene, Sophie takes advantage of a moment of solitude to try the hat on and, for a very brief moment, she seems to be pleased with herself. Her performance changes seconds later as her reflection reminds Sophie of others’ perception of her. She immediately loses confidence and buries her head in the

¹ The poem complies a number of impossible things to do, such as catching a falling star and hearing a mermaid sing. With this, Donne states that even if one does and sees wonders pertaining to a world of fantasy, the one thing which will remain impossible is to find a woman true and fair, since the poet writes that “no where / lives a woman true, and fair” (qtd. in Jones 158).

hat. Sophie's performance is not the same when she is alone, acting by herself for herself, than when she becomes aware of others' perception of her. Societal pressure weighs on her, who is still unmarried and has no prospective suitors, which impact both her self-perception and the way she interacts with the outer and her inner world.



Figs. 1, 2 and 3. Sequence of screenshots from Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle* (00:03:50-00:03:53).

The feeling of inadequacy mostly derives from the fact that she is a young woman. In the same way that Sophie is supposed to be a failure because the genre conventions stipulate that it be so, the patriarchal society imagined in both the hypo- and the hypertext forces her to perform according to a polarised discursive construct of gender and to display a feminine conduct. These ideals dictate not only how she should be behaving and presenting herself to the world, but how she behaves and presents herself to herself too. Sophie's performance of the self is, therefore, always subjected to the double jeopardy of her opinion and that of the hegemonic power, the latter being conventionally embodied in the male gaze. Since women are placed in a subordinate position in the hierarchy of gender, they are objectified by those discursively constructed as subjects, *i.e.*, men. The effect of this objectification is noticeable when Sophie leaves the hat shop to visit one of her sisters. Sophie is scared to go due to all the dangers a young maid may encounter, one of them being to run into Howl the magician, who is rumoured to literally eat young women's hearts by taking advantage of his good looks to manipulate them. Despite this, Sophie convinces herself to "put a grey shawl over her grey dress" (Jones 20) and go. She

darts across town, thinking that she would thus avoid harassment. She even tries to hide and make herself as small as possible to avoid attention, but, as she approaches her destination, she finds “crowds of young men ... calling loud remarks and accosting girls” (Jones 21). Regardless of how much she tries to go unnoticed by shaping her performance accordingly, she, too, is accosted. In the same manner Sophie tries to avoid being perceived by those men, the performance of her identity is literally characterised by avoiding identification. Sophie only projects a small glimpse of her identity to the outer world and only lets out what society expects a young woman to be.

Everything changes when she receives the curse which turns her into a ninety-year-old woman. Immediately after being cursed by a witch, Sophie approaches the mirror once again to see “the face of a gaunt old woman, withered and brownish, surrounded by wispy white hair. Her own eyes, yellow and watery, stared out at her, looking rather tragic” (Jones 33). This description differs from the hypertext’s representation of old Sophie. In the adaptation as it can be seen in figure 4 Miyazaki gets rid of her wispy white hair and gaunt appearance to present Sophie with grey hair and a plump, hunched body. These elements emphasise the ugliness of old women according to twentieth and twenty-first century social standards.



Fig. 4. Sequence of screenshots from Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle* (00:12:16).

Despite these differences in Sophie’s representation, the mirror comes into play again in both texts and, with it, the Foucauldian concept of the doubling of the self, that is to say, of the fragmentation of identity between one’s self-perception and the views of others. This fragmentation is underscored not only because the reflection in the mirror represents the division of Sophie’s identity, but because the curse equally materialises the doubling of the self as she is both a young woman and a ninety-year-old one. This division of the self is further articulated by the mirror itself, as the latter consists of three different

mirrors, each one providing Sophie's reflection from different perspectives. These different points of view highlight the idea of her simultaneously inhabiting three different selves, her true self, her ninety-year-old self, and the self that is filtered through society's expectations. Yet, Sophie's identity was already fragmented, divided between her own self-perception as "an old maid" and the men's desire for her as a sexual object; the curse exacerbates a division of the self that already existed.

Miyazaki illustrates the reaction to this division by having Sophie look shocked and scared when she first sees at her own reflection. A night's sleep and a second mirror scene are going to be needed for Sophie to be able to look at herself and accept this new, fragmented version of herself, as it can be seen in smile budding on Sophie's face in figure 5.



Fig. 5. Frame of the third mirror scene from Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle* (00:14:06).

In the hypotext, however, despite this sudden change, she "was quite calm, because it was what she expected to see" (Jones 33). She states that "this is much more like [she] really [is]" (Jones 33). The fact that her new image is more in line with her self-perception implies that Sophie has lived and performed her identity as a marginalised woman prior to this, underscoring the fact, as a young maid, her self was split between her objective beauty and her subjective perception as an "old maid". That her body now matches her self-perception is, at least, an improvement on her previous state of fragmentation. As she is about to leave the shop after being cursed, "she hobbled to collect her shawl, and wrapped it over her head and shoulders, as old women did" (Jones 33). Yet, Sophie had done exactly the same thing when she had visited her sister. Thus, besides depicting Sophie's division of her identity, the reflection of the mirror and Sophie's curse create a new space for her, a liminal one, in which to perform and redefine her identity.

This liminal space is characterised by Otherness. Not only is she a woman, which places her in the category of Other, but she is also old and, thus, not desirable anymore according to society's standards. According to Pearsall, as women age, they undergo what is considered to be a "crisis in femininity" which leads to the double marginalisation caused by both sexism and ageism (qtd. in Miquel-Baldellou 96). Consequently, she is placed further into society's margins, which not only affects once again the way in which she interacts with the world, but also the way in which others treat and perceive her. Once she looks like a ninety-year-old woman, Sophie is not harassed anymore, neither physically nor verbally; she is able to walk around the town fearlessly, at a leisurely pace. Men even offer to help her now, calling her "mother" (Jones 37). Yet, because of her appearance as an old woman, many suspect that she is a witch. This assumption is rooted into the demonisation of old women, in what Sontag presents as the "horror felt at aging female flesh installed deep in this culture, a demonology of women that has been crystallised in such mythic caricatures as the vixen, the virago, the vamp, and the witch" (37). This is a common motif in fairy tales, as the image of an old woman is often turned into a source of fear, into the villain of the story. Despite these negative connotations, Sophie actually turns out to be a witch in the hypotext. Although she is not aware of it until halfway through the story, Sophie's magical powers help her gain agency and rewrite her fate after she leaves Ingary, parting on a quest for the discovery of her potential and of her true self. Jones presents Sophie as an old witch to subvert the fairy tale frame as well as to challenge the demonisation of this figure in fairy tales. Interestingly, this power of hers is erased in Miyazaki's adaptation. The only witches in the film adaptation are portrayed as either tyrannical or downright evil, and constructed in opposition to the main character.

Throughout her quest, Sophie undergoes a clear psychological change. At the beginning of the story, her identity is defined by the discourse with which she is presented by society: the idea of her being the eldest sister and, thus, having no chance of finding good fortune. At this stage, her identity is characterised by her solitude and silences. These become particularly noticeable due to Jones's choice to have a heterodiegetic narrator present the story through Sophie's focalisation, which prevents Sophie from being in control of the narrative discourse. In Miyazaki's adaptation, it is the contrast with the noises of the city and the music in the soundtrack that makes her silences even more conspicuous. Her belief in the eldest sibling's fate prevents her from letting her voice be

heard except to talk to inanimate objects, such as the hats, or to her peers, her own sisters. She assumes that there is no point in even trying, thus reproducing and yielding to the established discourse, burying her voice, alongside her chances of seeking her fortune. This discourse delimits how much she reveals about herself and how she performs in front of others. The only moment in which young Sophie's true identity is shown besides very briefly in the aforementioned first mirror scene is when she gets angry, just moments before receiving her curse. In that state, Sophie snaps at a customer and calls her "fool enough [for wanting] to wear [a] bonnet with a face like that" (Jones 30). Yet, "it troubled her to realise how very enjoyable it had been" (Jones 30) to speak her mind and perform like that, without having to act appropriately according to others' expectations. This moment functions as a foreshadowing of the change in Sophie's performance when she becomes a ninety-year-old woman.

Sophie's transformation into an old woman eventually forces her to leave Ingary. This leads to her stumbling across Howl's moving castle and meeting the infamous magician who feeds off young girl's hearts. Old Sophie, however, is no longer afraid of him, as she is sure that he will not do anything to one who is neither young nor beautiful. In fact, Sophie crosses the threshold of Howl's moving castle as an entrance to another liminal space, a space of self-construction that she makes into her new home while she looks for a cure to her curse. The liminality of this new space is literally materialised by the magical door of the castle since it functions as a portal and, thus, distorts spatial boundaries, connecting different places. It is in this liminal space that Sophie spends the majority of her time now, working as a housekeeper, progressively freeing her real identity within the distorted boundaries of the castle. In fact, Sophie has left her reserved, quiet self in Ingary. In this new environment, and even though she performs her role within the limits established by her appearance of a ninety-year-old woman, Sophie lets her voice be heard. This sudden change stems from her double position as Other: since she is not a young woman anymore, she does not have to comply with certain constraining expectations. Paradoxically, her position as a housekeeper coupled with her aged appearance bestow her with unexpected self-confidence. She now does not hesitate to say what she thinks out loud, going as far as to openly criticise her master the magician—"Drat the man!" (Jones 194). Furthermore, Jones presents Sophie quarrelling with Howl more than once. Sophie's headstrong and blunt attitude surprises both the reader and herself. She is aware that "as a girl, [she] would have shrivelled with embarrassment at

the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief” (Jones 66). She is relieved in that she does not care whether or not she complies with one of the most oppressive ideals imposed on her: that a strong character is not feminine. That only now she reveals her character to be strong underscores how constraining the identity she used to perform was.

Despite old Sophie’s strong personality being present in both Jones and Miyazaki’s works, it is more prominent in the former, as in the latter, she becomes more and more subdued as the story unravels. In Jones’s work, Howl exhausts and irritates Sophie so much that she considers leaving on several occasions: “this ... was where *she* slithered out. She was leaving ... She had had enough of Howl” (Jones 107). This statement reflects Sophie’s independence and agency over her own choices: if she stays, she does so for her own sake. On the contrary, in Miyazaki’s work, old Sophie starts as a strong character, but her voice gets progressively quieter as she falls in love with Howl, softly mumbling complaints, but still accommodating his narcissistic needs and capricious wants. In fact, the only time she considers leaving is when Howl snaps out at her and accuses her of having ruined his looks. In the midst of what can only be defined as adolescent temper tantrum, Howl dramatically proclaims that he sees no point in living once Sophie’s decluttering of his bathroom has deprived him of his favourite hair dye. One would expect this to be the reason why Sophie considers leaving; yet, Sophie overlooks Howl’s outrageous lack of maturity, focusing, instead, on the importance of good looks: “Fine! So, you think you've got it bad? I've never once been beautiful in my entire life! I've had enough of this place!” (00:47:25-00:47:35). Thus, while Jones depicts Sophie as someone who is gaining independence and is not afraid of being outspoken, Miyazaki’s Sophie only talks back when her desire to be beautiful is triggered. Even so, she ends up returning to the castle moments later to take care of Howl as if she were his mother. This shows the importance Miyazaki gives to conventional beauty in the film, in contrast with Jones’s emphasis on Sophie’s power and agency.

3.2. Diverging messages: Jones's agency vs. Miyazaki's *amor vincit omnia*²

The hypotext and the hypertext make their differences evident from the beginning. While Jones's Sophie resents her lack of agency over her own life, Miyazaki's seems to indicate that her main issue is her self-esteem. On the one hand, both the hypotext and the hypertext have in common the fact that the pressure to be beautiful is lifted once she is turned into an old woman as it allows her to be liberated from the expectations that come with being a young woman within the system. On the other hand, the love story between Sophie and Howl becomes decidedly more significant in the hypertext.

This is established as soon as Howl is introduced on screen. He helps young Sophie to escape from two men who are harassing her in the street, thus tapping into the traditional trope of the damsel in distress rescued by a knight in shining armour. Later on, Sophie recounts what has happened to her sister, looking flattered and dreamy. This concerns her sister, since she suspects that Howl might have "eaten Sophie's heart". Sophie reassures her that there is nothing to worry about because the magician is only after young beauties, implying that since she is not beautiful, she is safe. However, Sophie continues to appear distracted, which suggests that she is infatuated with Howl. Although she seems to not be aware of it, this is going to shape her experience of her curse.

When Sophie begins her quest, she has the same appearance as in figures 4 and 5; as the film progresses, her appearance shifts between youth and old age, sometimes making her look like a venerable grandmother, sometimes like a middle-aged woman, sometimes a young beauty. This variation in her aspect is determined by her growing love for Howl. This is particularly clear in the scene shown in figures 6, 7, 8, and 9:

² This expression comes from Virgil, the Roman poet, and it can be found in his work *Bucolica*. The original phrase is '*omnia vincit amor*', and it translates to "love conquers all". This expression, which presents love as the power capable of achieving anything, has been widely represented in the arts. This trope has been long established since its inception and it can be still found in the Western literary canon (Rosengren).



Figs. 6, 7, 8 and 9. Sequence of screenshots from Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle* (01:03:48-01:03:59).

In this sequence, Miyazaki presents Sophie's rejuvenation as she talks fondly of Howl, defending him before the king's representative. However, figure 9 shows her sudden return to the appearance of an old woman when she is told that she is in love with Howl. Miyazaki represents Sophie's love for Howl as the cure for her curse, for talking about him makes her look younger once again. It is only when she is confronted with the idea of her being in love with Howl that she falls once again under the effects of the curse. When she expresses her fondness for him, she is being vulnerable and returns to her original self, but when this is mentioned, she changes into her old self, as if it extended a cloak of protection over her vulnerability. Indeed, as the film progresses, Sophie keeps rejuvenating. This process, however, is not triggered by any agency she may gain by her own means, but by Sophie's growing love for Howl, which seems to be equated to power. Therefore, the more Sophie acknowledges that she is in love with Howl, the more power she gains. This is emphasised at the end of the film, when, following the fairy tale convention, the story comes to a resolution with the long-expected kiss between Sophie and Howl. It is then that Sophie restores her appearance as a young woman, except for her hair, which stays silver. Miyazaki's choice of not restoring Sophie's appearance completely is reminiscent of the Japanese fairy tale tradition, since the remains of her curse reflect her journey and the teachings of her experience. Yet, in the best tradition of western fairy tales, the cure to all her troubles is romantic love. Consequently, Sophie's

power is reduced to her ability to love, at the same time that Sophie's identity is reduced to the nurturing role traditionally associated with femininity. On the contrary, Howl is depicted as powerful because he is a magician, presenting an imbalance in their relationship, as if the best Sophie could aspire to be was to end up in a romantic relationship with a powerful man, in accordance to patriarchal discourse.

In Jones's work, on the contrary, her agency does not sprout from her love towards Howl. Instead, Sophie is an actual witch with powers of her own, as she is able to "bring life to [the] things" (Jones 168) to which she talks. Her magical powers are present from the beginning of the novel, and they shape her own and others' actions. When she is working in the hat shop, for instance, she "flatter[s] the hats a bit" (Jones 17) and gives them certain attributes that determine what type of customer is going to acquire those hats. Sophie also casts a spell on the walking stick she carries as an old woman. Because she talks to it many times, she obviously turns it into "a magical wand" (Jones 168) which complies with her demands. It is when she learns about her status as a witch that Sophie gets agency over the power of her language. This not only influences Howl's destiny on several occasions, but also the romantic resolution between Sophie and Howl. When Donne's verses of "Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star" come true at the end of the novel, Sophie finds herself holding Howl's heart in her hands. This is because when Howl was young he caught a falling star which forced him to make a deal with it. This converted his heart into Calcifer, the shooting star which later became a fire demon in possession of Howl's heart. The resolution of the poem leads to the end of this deal, which puts his heart at risk since Calcifer lived in the hearth of the castle, not in Howl's chest. Sophie, then, has to restore his heart and make it work again. She resorts to her magic by speaking to Howl's heart and this obeys to her. Thus, Jones shows Sophie's witchcraft as capable of saving a life, whilst she also represents their romantic love by depicting Howl's heart in her hands. Just as Sophie challenges the discourse she was presented with when she becomes a ninety-year-old woman, her character subverts the original message in Donne's poem. By adding "Decide what this is about / write a second verse yourself" (Jones 127) to the verses, Jones challenges the idea of what a fair woman is according to the hegemonic discourse with Sophie's character, underlining the power to rewrite and rework the established discourse. Therefore, whilst the fairy-tale tradition would place her in the role of the villain, old Sophie fulfils the role of the heroine who obtains her happy ending. Thus, Jones reclaims the character of the witch to challenge the

monstrification of this figure, using her power as her means to leave the object position in which she was placed at the beginning.

It follows that what started as a curse becomes a space for her to find and create her own identity, being so comfortable in the freedom this grants her that Howl tells her the following: “I had several goes at taking [the curse] off you when you weren’t looking. But nothing seems to work ... I came to the conclusion that you liked being in disguise ... It must be, since you’re doing it yourself” (Jones 261). Thus, although Sophie is turned into an old woman and is, therefore, marginalised for it, she does not want nor needs to be saved. In fact, prior to Howl’s statement, Sophie exclaims “curse everyone! ... I’ve done with the lot of you! ... I *am* an old woman” (Jones 258). She reclaims this identity, as she has found agency within the liminality of the body of a ninety-year-old woman, and resorts obviously to her magical powers to maintain that appearance. Although the novel, just like the film, does finish with her returning to her young self as expected in the fairy tale genre, she does not care about her appearance being restored, as she has already found her power and identity within that old self.

4. Conclusion

The agency Sophie gains with the curse is represented differently in the hypotext and hypertext. While in the hypotext she displays what appears to be her full agency, performing her identity according to her ideas and needs, in the hypertext she is still affected by others’ expectations, in this case, Howl’s. Indeed, she does not fight his power over her and the verticalization of their relationship because she falls in love with him. This romantic resolution, which is present in both texts, is anticipated by the fairy tale frame. Despite their shared ending, the analysis of the hypotext and the hypertext shows the messages conveyed in the two texts diverge significantly. In Miyazaki’s adaptation, the director erases both Sophie’s assertive voice and witchcraft as her source of power. By doing so, the story is pushed even further into the fairy tale tradition, and Sophie’s agency is diminished: instead of becoming a powerful lead character on her own, she is reduced to fulfilling the role of the damsel in distress and gains her agency ‘thanks’ to her love for Howl. Thus, the director presents a relationship in which power dynamics lack balance since Sophie complies with Howl’s unreasonable requests and acts according to

his needs. Therefore, in the hypertext, Sophie does not gain agency *per se*, as her power is reduced to her ability to love *a man*. Miyazaki perpetuates the fairy tale convention that stipulates that “happily ever after” begins and ends with a relationship with the male hero.

On the other hand, in Jones’s version, Sophie and Howl fall in love after both of them are able to perform their identity freely within the liminality that the space of the castle and her curse offers them, each being individuals with equal power. Whilst Miyazaki offers a small glimpse into Sophie’s agency which is, then, subdued by the romantic plot, Jones presents the awakening of Sophie and her quest for identity, challenging both the prophecy with which she was presented and the traditional fairy tale motifs. This is further emphasised by Jones’s subversion of the motif of the evil witch. The author transforms this figure into a source of power from which Sophie can gain agency over her own identity. This shows the influence of the third wave feminist movement in Jones’s text, as Sophie becomes in control of her own narrative. Just as the feminist fairy-tale revisions that emerged during this wave, in the hypotext Sophie finds her voice and autonomy through her curse and witchcraft. During her quest, she obtains control over her own discourse, and this enables her to reach the subject position, as well as to perform her identity and femininity without external pressures. This is no longer characterised by her intention to fit into the hegemonic discourse’s construct of femininity. Within the body of a ninety-year-old woman, Sophie performs her personal version of femininity, rejecting the simplistic construct imposed by the hegemonic discourse.

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