Performative Heroes and Heroines

Examining the Subversion of Gender Norms in the Modern Fairy Tales *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust*

By Anita V. Mathisen

MA Thesis in English Literature 30 ECTS Credits

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine how the outdated notions of gender and gender norms have been used as tools to support various ideologies up through the years. The thesis will argue that the remnants of these ideologies can create a problematic image of gender roles for young readers in modern children's literature. To do this, the thesis will argue for subversion of these gender roles and fairy tale tropes through a feminist lens. The thesis will examine the characters of two popular modern fairy tales aimed at children and young adults: *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones and *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman. Both texts approach subversion in different ways, but both in ways that subverts and criticises traditional gender norms in fairy tale literature. *Howl's Moving Castle* does this by creating complex characters that metatextually criticizes both their roles in the novel and the genre itself. *Stardust* does the opposite, and creates characters that are simplistic in a way that parodies their gender representations, and ultimately shows the dark side of slavishly following your assigned role in society.

Ultimately, the thesis hopes to have proved that subversion creates an alternative that will lead to a greater diversity in how gender and characters are represented in fairy tale literature and children's literature. This is especially important in an age where more and more people choose to deviate from their traditional gender norms and representations.

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Table of Contents

1: Introduction & Theory

1.1: General Introduction

Everyone is familiar with the trope of the heroic knight come to save the princess from mortal peril. This trope is in fact so well-known in the western world that it has made its way into the English language as the expressions "knight in shining armour" and "damsel in distress". These tropes have become well known due to their origins in fairy tales – a genre that has had an enormous influence on our modern, western culture. It has also been characterized as a genre of ideology by fairy tale scholars such as Jack Zipes, meaning that "though seemingly universal, fairy tales serve a specific function in communicating the values and the various preoccupations of different nations." (Zipes, 2012, Introduction) This can similarly be said about children's literature, as it is a genre that has its origins as an educational genre aimed at children.

This thesis will expand these arguments that both fairy tale literature and children's literature have to a large degree been used as tools to support various ideologies. This is especially relevant in regard to gender norms and ideologies, which still have a prominent role in modern children's fairy tale and fantastical literature. The thesis will argue for the positives of subverting these gendered norms, as the strict gender roles we have seen in the history of modern western society have been experienced as restrictive and outdated in a world where gender is becoming more and more fluid with the greater understanding of identities that do not conform with biological sex. The thesis will also argue that media with strict and traditionalistic gender roles might in fact be damaging to young readers, who have less experience and might not be able to distinguish between texts that have such a gendered agenda and those that do not. This will be done by looking at the characters in two modern fairy tales that are aimed at children and young adults - *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones, and *Stardust* (1999) by Neil Gaiman.

Both texts illustrate how gender norms can be subverted, albeit in different ways. Diana Wynne Jones does this by creating complex characters that react to the patriarchal society in different ways - and by humorously commenting on common fairy tale tropes directly in the text. This leads to a more complex depiction of both character and themes, which ultimately challenges the gendered norms of the genre. Neil Gaiman is more subtle as he subverts the characters; instead of having explicit commentary in his text, he chooses to show, for example, the dangers of toxic masculinity and femininity by recreating the hyper

masculine and feminine characters as villains. Thematically, these stories are more focused on growing as a person, finding a family, and love, rather than wealth and might. In a society where productivity and success are seen as the greatest virtues, themes like these can offer alternative realities and truths for young readers. This could allow for stories with much more varied female and male characters, that more readers have a chance of identifying with and admiring, creating more positive role models.

Both texts deal with common fairy tale tropes like evil witches, finding true love, and going on an adventurous journey. Yet they deal with gender differently; Jones creates complex characters, who are very different from the often-one-dimensional characters that are usually seen in fairy tales. This creates characters that can grapple with gender and its effect on them in complex ways. Sophie and the Witch of The West are good examples of these kinds of characters, as they have both reacted to being the Other in different ways. Gaiman, on the other hand, has fewer complex characters, but characters that have certain characteristics greatly emphasized to show the ridiculousness of having to follow gender norms and roles. The witches are obsessed with maintaining youthful beauty, far beyond the point where this should be possible, and the princes go to extreme lengths to attain power. Following these traditional gender roles leaves women feeling trapped in roles they do not wish to fulfil, and men trapped in the role of suppressor. This is also not considering people who identify with neither gender that are left even more alienated by society. While subverting tropes in children's fairy tales will not solve this issue, it will offer younger readers an alternative to these roles, and a way forward where everyone can grow up knowing that following these roles is, in fact, not necessary. The thesis will argue that by creating these alternatives, Jones and Gaiman show that there is definitely something to be gained by refusing to fit into the stereotypes and roles that society determines for people based on sex and gender. It also causes the reader to think more critically about why society is trying to force them into a certain role – and that there are possibilities outside of this. Ultimately, both texts encourage being true to yourself, which is a valuable lesson for a young reader.

1.2: The Fairy Tale

Both texts that this thesis will examine are fantastical stories that borrow a great number of tropes and motifs from the fairy tale genre. Ruth B. Bottigheimer defines the fairy tale genre as a type of "magic tale", which are tales that contain magic. (Bottigheimer, p. 5-6) Bottigheimer goes on to point out that while fairy tale motifs are an important part of the

genre, they are not the most important ones. Instead, she defines the fairy tale as a tale where "the overall plot trajectory of individual tales in conjunction with those fairy tale elements brought together within a "compact narrative" (Bottigheimer, p. 9) is what defines the conventions of the genre. This is a simplification and does not go into exactly what these fairy tale elements are, but this will be established and examined below.

On a fundamental, structural level, there are two types of fairy tales: the restoration fairy tale, and the rise fairy tale. Whether a tale is a rise or restoration tale wholly depends on the type of main character, or hero, the story is about. A restoration tale is always about a "royal personage" (Bottigheimer, p. 10) that has somehow lost access to what is rightfully theirs – for example their home or fortune. To achieve this, they have to go through numerous trials, tests, or tasks, to show that they have a good character deserving of restoration. After fulfilling their quests, they gain a reward: "they marry royally and are restored to a throne, that is, they return to their just social, economic and political position." (Bottigheimer, p. 10) They are restored to their natural place in society – which does come with certain implications about people deserving power and wealth simply because they were born into it. *Stardust* is one such tale, but where the hero Tristan is a type of "lost prince" that does not know his heritage. Throughout the story, he has to prove himself so that he can "win" his unknown heritage – without even knowing that this is what he is doing.

In the rise fairy tales, the hero does not start their life socially at the top but is rather at the bottom of the social order. Through their trials and tribulations, they earn a better life by, for example, marrying the princess and inheriting her fortune and a kingdom. This is often achieved through the help of something magical that helps the hero to fulfil their quest. These tales sometimes have a "lengthening coda", or a second move, where "working out the secondary plot temporarily retards the achievement of the tale's ultimately happy ending" (Bottigheimer, p. 12) This second move is, simply put, the consequences of what the hero or heroine had to do in the first move of the story to gain their happy ending. But ultimately, this part always ends with the hero or heroine cleverly avoiding the consequences. Zipes points out that "Fairy tales are predicated on a human disposition to social action - to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs while we try to change and make ourselves fit for the world." (Zipes, 2012, Introduction). Ultimately, a fairy tale is about the human need to seek change and make the world a better place, whether it be explored through a rise or restoration tale. This is also true of the two texts with which this thesis will concern itself.

There are a number of folklorists who have analysed how these tales are built up, but this thesis will for the most part focus on the theory of Vladimir Propp to do so. In his work

The Morphology of the Folktale, he presents the many story beats that a tale consists of (for example the initial situation, complications, or beginning of second move), but also a list of all the possible story motifs that may take place during each beat, and their functions. These are, in essence, the building blocks of the fairy tale – the puzzle pieces that makes up the whole picture. The tales also have either one or two "moves", or "lengthening codas", (Propp) which also fits in with Bottigheimer's definitions of the fairy tale. While going through every single one of the story motifs is beyond the scope of this thesis, relevant motifs will be used during the analysis of the texts themselves later on. Motifs are more important when it comes to the analysis of a fairy tale than themes, according to Propp, as motifs are the building blocks that makes the theme: "A theme is a series of motifs. A motif develops into a theme." (Propp, p. 14) He also points out that "Themes vary: certain motifs make their way into themes, or else themes combine with one another." (Propp, p. 14) Some examples of the motifs are as follows: "a bride and a kingdom are awarded" (Propp, p. 63), "departure from home on a quest" (Propp, p. 97) and "the hero flies through the air" (Propp, p. 51) It is worth noting that these motifs do not only appear in fairy tales, but in a wide variety of other types of media as well. Zipes points out that "What we call folktale of fairy tale motifs are indeed ancient and appear in many pre-Christian epics, poems, myths, fables, histories, and religious narratives." (Zipes, 2001, p. 846-47) This shows how ingrained these motifs and tropes are in our western history and culture, and why they are still such an important storytelling element that is still in use to this day. They are, in essence, our cultural inheritance stretching back thousands of years.

The first important fairy tale motif is the protagonist/hero's call to adventure - the action or event that sets the hero onto their quest. For the protagonist, this event or action is key to their development. Joseph Campbell argues that "the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration-a rite, or moment, or spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth." (Campbell, p. 51) In *Stardust,* this call to adventure is when Victoria asks Tristran to get her the star, which propels him leave his village and enter the faerie realm. In *Howl's Moving Castle,* the call to adventure occurs when Sophie is cursed and turned into an old woman, which motivates her to leave the hat shop and set out on an adventure of her own, albeit this is a more of an escape from her situation than Tristran's situation is. The "dying and birth" that Campbell mention refers to the changes the protagonist will have to go through during their journey. These will be dramatic enough that they will go through a type of symbolic death, before being reborn as a new person – the hero is not supposed to be the same at the end of the journey. This leads to a "familiar life horizon [that]

has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand." (Campbell, p. 51) The aim of the hero's journey is to fundamentally change the hero into a new person – which also implies a better standing in life as well, as seen by the rise and restoration structures.

As mentioned earlier, the fairy tale is a genre that has been used to carry out ideological ideals. From the civilization process to Nazi Germany, these tales have been shaped and changed to teach their readers what an idealized version of the world should look like by creating a new world order within the tales themselves. When it comes to gender, these agendas often concern things such as marriage, and "Fairy tales written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intended to teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive to a marriage partner and to teach boys and girls appropriate gendered values and attitudes." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, p. 714) This is why it is important to read these tales critically, as many have a certain agenda that they want to promote. This is one of the many reasons why it became more common for the traditional hero to be a man - as men are the ones that are supposed to venture out into the world and discover and learn through adventuring, while the woman stays back to take care of the home. This view in itself is undeniably a political one. Zipes sums this up very concisely when he says that "Fairy tales are political. They help to form children's values and teach them to accept our society and their roles in it." (Zipes, 2012, p. 179) He also points out that this creates a society with a certain set of rules, and "Central to this society is the assumption that domination and submission are the natural basis of all our relationships." (Zipes, 2012, p. 179) As a genre often aimed at children, the politics inherent in these tales can have a negative effect on young children reading and internalizing these ideals. As they have less experience in life, or less of a horizon of expectations, they are more susceptible to internalizing the societal rules set forth by these tales. This makes it important to examine and analyse these biases, especially when it comes to the particular ways that gender is represented.

There were a number of key changes that took place in the fairy tale genre during the Middle Ages, and early capitalist period. The first is that the stories went from having a matrilineal structure to a patrilineal. The second, which Zipes argues, is that "the pattern of action that concerned maturation and integration was gradually recast into stress domination and wealth." (Zipes, 2012, p. 7) The goal was no longer to learn an important life lesson but was instead more about the "objects" you get for completing the quest or journey. The change from matrilineal to patrilineal also led to the strict gender roles that are the distinct feature of

these tales today - "the goddess became a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero" (Zipes, 2012, p. 7). The male, with ideals like "might makes right", (Zipes, 2012, p. 8) became the main focus instead. The fairy tale became patriarchalized - changed to fit into patriarchal ideals to better prepare children into conforming with this patriarchal world. These tropes are still alive and well today, with the most famous example being the fairy tale children's movies that Disney produces. These movies brought these older tales into a modern era and is arguably one of the most known examples of the fairy tale in modern culture. These films especially show how this genre is specifically aimed at children, and how the tales can further be changed to be more "child-friendly" to a modern audience.

This does not mean that all fairy tales have some sort of sinister agenda. On the contrary, there are many retellings and modern tales that subvert these tropes in a more progressive and feminist direction. This is a natural part of how fairy tales function, since "as long as there is discontent with the civilizing process, there will be fairy tales that will either project alternatives to the status quo or that will reconcile us to our social conventions and religious beliefs." (Zipes, 2012, Introduction). In short, when faced with societal discontent, people will either try to break free of these restraints or conform. This naturally leads to fairy tales that either enforce the already set societal conventions, like those concerning traditional gender norms and roles, or fairy tales that criticize and try to subvert these to show that there is another way. Yet, "writers may specifically seek to address juvenile audiences because they want to shape the rising generation by encouraging them to see things outside the norms of the dominant culture or to foster officially sanctioned new ways of thinking and behaving" (Reynolds, p. 35), meaning that not all fairy tales aim to continue with the status quo. *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust* are two examples of such texts that break away from the status quo. They both reinvent gender norms in unique ways, and (especially Gaiman) in ways that almost mock the societal gender norms found in particularly gendered fairy tales. And while it is important to analyse biases in fairy tales with clear ideological notions, it is also important to see how a possible alternative could appear, which is why this thesis chose texts of the latter variety.

1.3: Children's Literature

As mentioned above, there is a clear connection between the development of the literary fairy tale and the genre of children's literature. As this thesis is going to focus on one fairy tale aimed at children and one at young adults, it is worthwhile to examine how interconnected the

two genres really are, both in their historical development and in how both have had ideological messaging specifically aimed at children and teens.

Children's literature can be defined as "materials written to be read by children and young people, published by children's publishers, and stocked and shelved in the children's and/or young adult (YA) sections of libraries and bookshops." (Reynolds, p. 1) Yet this is an overly simplistic definition of the genre, aimed more at how children's and young adult novels have been, and continue to be, marketed towards a younger audience. As a genre, a better description would be:

> "usually shorter, they tend to favour an active rather than passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used; the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism [...]. Optimistic rather than depressive; language is child-oriented; plots are of a distinctive order; probability is often discarded; and one could go on endlessly talking of magic, fantasy, simplicity, and adventure." (McDowell in Reynolds, p. 26)

It is a genre that is mainly aimed at giving children a fun and easily digestible reading experience that works to keep them engaged in the story. Due to the less complex format, it would be easier to encourage certain ideological factors while still keeping the story fun and interesting for the readers. Yet today it is still a very much commercial genre, as we see Reynolds describe it as above.

Children's literature developed during the sixteenth century as a way to teach young children how they should properly inhabit and perform their future roles in society. These books were to teach them what the adults thought that they were supposed to know - or what they were not supposed to know. This literature was therefore created as a way to teach children certain truths. Yet there is also "some knowledge they need to be protected from and that children's literature exists exactly in order to exclude" (Nodelman, p. 158) This makes children's literature "both exclusionary *and* didactic." (Nodelman, p. 158) The purposes of this are many, but in short this might lead to the protection of the innocence of children while at the same time assuring that they learn how to act properly in society as they grow older. They do this through the characters of the novel. Hunt also points out this didactic quality: "It is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect ideology and, by extension, didacticism." (Hunt, p. 3) Hunt points out how all books will be influenced by the authors' ideologies, whether it be intentional or not, but that this is also something a young reader will be more susceptible to internalize. And often, young readers find that characters and stories

stay with them far into adulthood. A reason for this might be that "in children's fiction, the function of characters is closely connected with overall didactic purposes: characters are supposed to provide models and statue examples." (Nikolajeva, in Nodelman, p. 157) The characters are supposed to be the perfect representation for who a child might choose to look up to and use as a model. A female character, for instance, would be a natural character for a young girl to use as a model of desired behaviour. Similar to fairy tales, this can be used to reinforce gender roles in a society from a young age.

This led to a genre that was specifically marketed towards either boys or girls, and where parents had little choice but to conform to this marketing. In fact, "a defining characteristic of children's literature is that it intends to teach what it means for girls to be girls and boys to be boys." (Nodelman, p. 173) The goals of these books, as with the literary fairy tales like Perrault's - who specifically wrote fairy tales to teach children how to be good boys and girls in the seventeenth century - was to instruct the reader into accepting their gendered role in society. This led to books about adventures, exploration, and danger for boys, while girls were given stories in a domestic setting, with little to no dangerous situations. Nodelman summarizes it well: "Books about - and, therefore, people often assume, for - girls, tend to replicate the domestic settings and relationship intrigues of older texts like *Anne of Green Gables.*" (Nodelman, p. 173) This leads to a sort of colonization of the child whose goal it is to indoctrinate the child into the already existing societal standards of the time, whether they be good or bad. It does not leave room for the child to figure out other ways to exist, in a stage of development where this is crucial.

The function of children's literature is often to teach the reader what the adult writer assumes is important for the reader to know, whether this happens consciously or not. Nodelman argues that "Children's literature might be best characterized as that literature that works to colonize children by persuading them that they are as innocent and in need of adult control as adults would like them to believe." (Nodelman, p. 163) The issue is not just as simplistic as this, however. There is naturally children's literature that does the opposite of colonizing children, as Hunt points out, but that there is also discourse surrounding whether or not the politics of children's literature is a concern at all – since, as Hunt points out, that "books are an important influence" is a notion "that is, in it self, questionable." (Hunt, p. 164) (Meaning that problematic children's literature does not cause the reader great harm by reading it). If we consider that the reading of books does, in fact, influence the reader, and especially young readers, Hunt says there are two sides to the issue:

"One camp holds two basic unspoken premises: first that children can and should be protected, and secondly that anyone within the system may exercise restraint. The other is that any censorship is, *per se*, a bad thing, and all that can be done is to exercise a very local control over the reading of a child or group of children." (Hunt, p. 164)

This amounts to either censoring children's literature to fit more into what an adult considers appropriate for a child to read, or letting children read what they want. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to find an answer to this discourse, it is relevant when it comes to the discussion of gender and gender roles within children's literature. How important it is to incorporate good role models for children through their literature, or whether it is best to just not consider the education of children in this way through literature is a difficult question to answer, but one that bears examining. This thesis will assume that censorship in itself is negative, and that instead of limiting the content of children's literature, it is better to have a greater variety of literature for them to read so that problematic content has less of an impact.

Similar arguments have been made against the consumption of fairy tales by children as the genre provides "the child with the 'knowledge that he is born into a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism and cowardice, good and evil.'" (Tucker, p. 95) This could be too disturbing for certain children, but ultimately just shows them the way of the darker sides of the world. Tucker also brings up Maria Montessori, an "Italian educationalist […] in revolt against the Froebel type of nursery education where exposure to fairy stories was considered an essential part of the kindergarten curriculum." (Tucker, p. 67) She is a perfect example of someone who was very much against letting children read anything resembling fairy tales, as "small children lack sufficient experience to be able to sort out fantasy from truth; early exposure to fairy-tales, therefore, may simply be confusing or even worse." (Tucker, p. 67-8) These two statements are contradictory in the way that one seems to say that it is a good thing that children learn and internalize from these stories, while the other considers it potentially dangerous. The ability of a child to distinguish between what is real or not will never be on par with that of an adult, yet it seems important to let children learn of these things through the rather safe activity of reading. Either way, there is no denying that children's literature has been used to indoctrinate and colonize children into accepting certain gendered roles in society, and it is necessary to examine this also through a feminist lens, even if the danger Montessori presents can seem exaggerated.

1.4: Feminist Theory

As this thesis will examine the issues of gender through a feminist lens, it is worthwhile to present some notable feminist theories that these examinations will build upon. Dualism has had a central role in many philosophical theories, which included feminism as well. It can be described as there being "two fundamental kinds or categories of things or principles." ("Dualism"). In feminism, and for de Beauvoir, this means that patriarchy has created a kind of society where the man is considered the most important and central part of society, while woman is considered an Other – meaning that she is lesser than the man. He is also transcendent, while she is immanent – meaning that he has the opportunity to transcend through invention and creativity, while a woman cannot. She is stagnant, immanent. (de Beauvoir, p. 63) A society consists of a wide range of similar opposite binaries - examples of these binaries being man/woman, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, cisgender/transgender and so on. In a society that functions in binaries, one end of the binary will always be less than and considered an Other. That is why we often end up with patriarchal societies, for instance, where the woman is considered less than the man. Simone de Beauvoir is the feminist critic who first established the term of the Other, where she examines the man/woman binary where the woman is the Other. She argues that "It is impossible to regard woman simply as a productive force: she is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object - an Other through which he seeks himself." (de Beauvoir, p. 59). This also means that for a man to be able to define himself properly, he has to define himself up against the woman. To be the dominant one with the power, he has to be more than someone else, or else he will have no group to be dominant over. This means that "since the powerful define their strength in relation to the less powerful, group's weakness, the less powerful must remain eternally and unavoidably weak" (Nodelman, p. 67) This theory is important to consider, as this thesis will analyse the representations of male and female characters, which will make it unavoidable not to consider power elements such as this.

Virginia Woolf argues the same in her work *A Room of One's Own* (1929), where she points out that "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size." (Woolf, p. 41) The Other is thus something lesser that the opposite of the Other can compare themselves up against. This binary can also be applied to the adult/child in children's literature - and how the adult is considered the 'better' of the two. Perry Reynolds points out how this is used as an argument that adult writers have a responsibility when it comes to writing for children. "When it comes to children's literature, the writer-reader relationship is not one of equals, as it is also

10

an adult-child relationship." (Reynolds, p. 113) She also points out that because of this, "it is undoubtedly the case that adults have frequently commandeered children's literature to disseminate information and inculcate values for a variety of purposes." (Reynolds, p. 113) These purposes can of course vary, and not all are necessarily there to influence young girls into becoming good housewives as older texts used to do. But it is important to be aware of the likelihood of these biases, whether they be purposeful or not. This is also why bending of norms and tropes, and subversion in general, can be such a positive thing in this type of literature.

Deborah Cogan Thacker points this out in her essay on subversion in postmodern stories for children; "The inequity of the relationship between the 'adult, knowing' author and the 'innocent, receptive' child, and the uneasy assumption that stories can be repositories of universal truths, are all involved in the discourses which surround art, culture and politics in this postmodern epoch." (Thacker & Webb, p. 139) This emphasises the inequality of the adult/child binary, and how the adult is considered the knowledgeable and the teacher, while the child is innocent and in need of guidance. This is similar to the man/woman binary, where women were considered to be innocent and, much like a child, in need of guidance and protection from the dangers of society, as they were considered an inferior "Other". This included the dangers of reading books that could be damaging to the woman's psyche - similar to how many argue the same when it comes to children's literature. Due to the didactic history of both fairy tales and children's literature, which in many cases can be experienced as a "controlling force" (Thacker & Webb, p. 143), subversion of stories like these can lead to stories that are both more enjoyable and not as controlling as they historically have been.

This ties in with how female and male characters have been depicted in both fairy tales and in children's literature. As both genres have influenced each other in a number of ways, the scope of this essay is to look at how the character archetypes function, and how they reflect on male and female character types. As established earlier in the introduction, literary fairy tales especially have a very strict formula when it comes to character archetypes. We could also argue that the characters perform a sort of gendered performance - showing the reader the ideal representation of a woman and man. Judith Butler has in particular discussed issues such as these in the field of feminist theory. According to Butler, gender is a performance that everyone learns from a young age through the way society presents gender through societal norms, representations in media, and in the way that children are raised. This is also something that can be done through fairy tales and children's literature, which as mentioned is often characterized by the genre's heavy focus on both character and marketing

to certain genders. Through these stories, one could, according to Butler, internalize some of these ideas of how gender is supposed to be "performed". (Butler, 1990)

De Beauvoir has similar ideas, though hers are more focused on the body and how the body is experienced. Her theory focuses on the gaze, and how both women and men act a certain way under the gaze of others and society – where others act as a certain check to make sure that everyone acts like they are supposed to do in civilized society. If one fails to do so, one will face judgment. She points out that this especially goes for women, and in particular when it comes to the way that women look:

> "Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words pretty and ugly; she soon knows that to be pleased is to be pretty as a picture; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales." (Qtd. In "Feminist Perspectives on the Body")

Women internalize these comments and ideals and start to consider themselves objects in the eyes of others – and eventually in the eyes of herself as well, which is, according to Beauvoir, the true tragedy of the female sex.

1.5: Outline of The Thesis

The thesis has main two chapters. The first chapter will deal with the female characters present in *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust.* Each section of this chapter will examine a specific gendered trope, along with the character or characters that this trope affects the most. It will argue that the rigidity of female gender roles are a detriment to women, and imposes outdated and unrealistic roles on women and female characters. The thesis will show this by examining the female characters of *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust*, which criticize traditional gender roles in different ways. Jones does this by imposing complexity on the characters, while Gaiman uses parodies. The second chapter will structurally function in much the same way, although it will instead deal with the male characters of the two works. The argument of this chapter is similar to the former, as it will argue that the rigid masculine ideals that men are encouraged to implement in their lives often leads to a masculine ideal that is impossible to achieve, and that can result in toxic masculinity. Much like with the female characters, Jones and Gaiman criticize this by making the character more complex and layered like in the case of Jones, or by parodying them like in the case of Gaiman. The goal of each chapter will be to examine in broad terms how these two genders are represented in fairy tale and children's literature, and how these two novels deal with these representations in their

subversion of the genres. By doing this, the thesis hopes to show the benefits of subverting these gender norms, and how this subversion ultimately is better than continuing to use outdated and conservative gender norms in literature aimed at children. In an age where the importance of defining identities on your own terms is being recognized (with for example the rise of trans rights and people on the nonbinary spectrum), it is doubly important to recognize the effect outdated gender norms can have on young readers.

2: The Feminine

2.1: Chapter Introduction

Angela Smith argues that feminism has changed the way that fairy tales have been told in recent years, and that even though this change is subtle it shows how the standing of men and women has changed ideologically in the recent decades. She points out that "Interest in ideology in children's fiction arises from the belief that such texts are culturally formative, and of vital importance educationally, intellectually, and socially." (Smith, p. 425). This is often due to childhood being considered the most impressionable age, due to children's lack of experience and wish to learn more about the world that they are living in. It is only natural for a child to do so. Smith goes on to argue that "in the case of texts written for children, there is even more of an attempt by the dominant voices to reinforce and naturalize mainstream views for those whom they see as its most impressionable members." (Smith, p. 426). This does still happen – the ideologization of children's literature is not just a thing of the past.

Fairy tales have a history of characters with very clear gendered archetypes and characteristics. Apart from the fact that this can lead to flat and uninteresting characters, it also leads to inaccurate representations of womanhood. Young readers will have little chance of knowing if these inaccurate representations show how real women really appear. Lissa Paul argued that this led to female characters that are incredibly passive: "Women play dead or doormats (as in 'Snow White', 'Cinderella', and 'Sleeping Beauty') or are severely mutilated (as in 'The Little Mermaid'). The move was on for female heroes (I'll use the term in preference to 'heroines' - who tend to wait around a lot)." (Paul, p. 120) This is particularly important for young girls and women, who might wish to see themselves in art and culture, but are instead presented with characters whose sole goal it is to find their "one true love" and get married - which is not a bad thing in itself, but this represents a more archaic goal of womanhood, and is not the only one that should be represented. We could say that "Children's fairy tales, which emphasize such things as women's passivity and beauty, are indeed gendered scripts and serve to legitimize and support the dominant gender system." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, p. 711), and that the representations of female beauty in fairy tales, and in particular children's fairy tales, lead to the upholding of this system. As Zipes succinctly summarized, "Beauty is an attribute for woman, just as intelligence is the attribute of man." (Zipes 2012, p. 41) Needless to say, reading stories that largely have this kind of messaging can leave the wrong impression on younger readers.

14

Laura Mulvey argues that "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance." (Boetticher in Mulvey, p. 236) The most important thing a female character, or a heroine, provides, is motivation for the male character. This usually takes two form; either the woman is the villain the hero has to defeat, or she is the love he will win at the end of his journey. In both *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones and *Stardust* (1999) by Neil Gaiman, we see heroines and female villains that either go against or along with this principle. To begin with, this section will consider how the heroine, beauty, and goodness go hand in hand, and how this interacts with Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. In particular, it is worth examining this in regard to Sophie Hatter and the Wicked Witch of the West from *Howl's Moving Castle,* and the Lilim, or witches, in *Stardust,* as these are all characters that interact with the concept of the male gaze in different ways. This chapter will thus argue that the way female characters are subverted in both *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust* provides a criticism of how female characters have been represented in fairy tales and children's literature, but in two very different ways. While Jones does this by creating more complex characters that can grapple with these concepts, Gaiman almost creates parodies of gender with his characters.

One of the most common and important characteristics of the good, female character in fairy tales is that she is beautiful - and this is the characteristic that has survived for decades and has thus ended up becoming one of the most important characteristics when it comes to gender representation of women. It is an ideal that all women are expected to follow. The feminine beauty ideal is defined as "the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, p. 711) This can be particularly problematic in the age of social media, where younger and younger girls are expected to conform to these beauty ideals. This can be enhanced and worsened by the way beauty is considered a force of goodness in female characters in fairy tales aimed at children and young adults, but also in all types of western media where beautiful women are the norm, and where ugly women often appear as evil or pathetic.

In their study, Lori Baker-Sperry & Liz Grauerholz's have examined the importance of the beauty ideal in Grimm's fairy tales, and how these ideals have survived over time. This study is important because it shows the big difference between characters described as beautiful or ugly in Grimm's fairy tales, and how this has survived in more modern types of

media, as the influence these tales still have is undeniable. There are two important points made in this study that are relevant here: there is a clear difference in how male and female characters are described physically, and there are clear differences between the descriptions of young and old women. The difference between old and young women is most striking, as it creates a hierarchy where women eventually lose their "most prized" possession, i.e. their beauty. According to their study (where numbers show percentage), "Of the tales that contain younger women, 57 percent described them as "pretty," "beautiful," or "the fairest," and on average there are 1.74 references to their beauty. By contrast, only 5.2 of tales that contain older women make reference to their beauty, with the average number or references to older women's beauty being 0.14." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, p. 718). Beauty is thus intrinsically connected to womanhood, but only to young womanhood. The study also shows that "31 percent of all stories associate beauty with goodness, and 17 percent associate ugliness with evil." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, p. 718). Other implications, although not as relevant to this thesis, show beauty as being connected with "whiteness and economic privilege", creating implications for both race and class and how these have been depicted in these types of tales. Beauty has also been described as a source of great danger, meaning that the beautiful must be protected at all cost lest she attracts danger. What we can conclude is that while beauty is a preferred characteristic among young women, it is also a sign of high class, desirability, and a sign that they need protection.

What this shows is the heavy emphasis on beauty as a source of something good in women, and particularly in younger women. This also demonstrates that this ultimately good quality in women is something that they all will eventually lose as they age. The connection between goodness and beauty also implies that "goodness" will also be lost with time. Due to this, older women often "come across 1) selfish, evil, or vain crones, 2) self-sacrificial women-saviors, and 3) ineffectual or demented grannies." (Henneberg, 2010) This leads to a set of very narrow types of old women, and with a very limited number of stories told about them. It seems that, preferably, they should not exist at all, and that "these stories eliminate women's old age by having heroines die in their prime" or "they resurrect female elders in terms with which no real woman could identify." (Henneberg, p. 126) While this is of course a negative type of representation for older women, it also shows younger girls and women that they have no good future - and that they will instead be forced to relate to tragic and grotesque caricatures of womanhood.

2.2: Age and Femininity

In *Howl's Moving Castle,* the heroine, Sophie, is described as being plain as a "little gray mouse," (Jones, p. 15) and someone who "reads a great deal" (Jones, p. 2) She is also the eldest of three sisters, and because she is the eldest daughter, Sophie has resigned herself to being her stepmother's hardworking assistant in the family hat shop. An elder child never has a grand fate or adventure that they have to depart on, and so she does not fight this notion. It is, after all, "quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes." (Jones, p. 1) She resigns herself to the typical role that a woman is supposed to have - to stay at home and take care of the home. In David Rudd's essay on deconstruction in *Howl's Moving Castle,* he points out how "Jones shows us how easy it is to become enslaved by the narrative conventions these tales represent, and to interpret our lived experience accordingly." (Rudd, p. 257) The novel works to show how Sophie, and other characters like her sisters, break free of these narrative rules and take their lives into their own hands. With Sophie Hatter being a "plain" woman as well, she is even denied love, while her younger sisters are destined to both love and good fortune. It is worth pointing out though that traditionally, it is the youngest sons that are promised this grand fate, while in this novel it is the younger sisters instead. It does not exclude Sophie from the notion that the eldest child is doomed to stay at home though.

Farah Mendlesohn argues that "The structure of *Howl's Moving Castle* reverses the usual tropes of quest fantasy: Sophie sets out to seek her fortune only when artificially aged; she struggles, not against other people's expectations but against her own." (Mendlesohn, p. 41) We see that Sophie is, in many ways, trapped by the rules of the genre – but she has ultimately convinced herself that these rules are very much real. What ultimately sets her free from this mindset is the curse cast on her by the Wicked Witch of the West. By losing her youth, she is able to break out of her earlier mindset of having to stay at home and take care of the shop and be a good, dutiful daughter. Instead, she is free to do as she wishes, and instantly embarks on a quest of her own. Her reasons for this are problematic though, as she thinks she will be rejected for her new appearance; for being old, and not the young, dutiful girl that she has always been. Because of her new appearance, she exiles herself to an uncertain future. Yet this leads her to accept herself fully, instead of forcing herself to follow the story of which she is an unwilling part. While Howl will be discussed more in the second half of this thesis, he works as an opposite to Sophie in many ways, but especially when it comes to accepting his place in the world he finds themselves in; "Sophie learns to reject the story line she has been handed, but Howl learns instead to accept the storyability of his life as expressed through the

John Donne poem." (Mendlesohn, p. 105-106) While Sophie has to learn not to rely on the story conventions that she let control her life, Howl has to accept the fact that he is part of a story in order to fully succeed.

The change in her due to the curse is striking, and she points this out as well: "As a girl, Sophie would have shrivelled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief." (Jones, p. 64) In a way, becoming old gives Sophie the chance to act on impulses beyond her reach as a young girl. She is freed from the societal gender norms that all young girls are trapped by, but by being old, she does not need to abide by these rules as old women are generally ignored by both art and society. She can be in disguise.

It is also worth examining the reasons for why she has trapped herself in the life that she has. The ways Sophie feels that she cannot is because of her internalized societal rules of how a girl is supposed to act in a fairy tale. We can also read Jones' work through the lens of gender theory to examine her depiction of Sophie, and in particular Simone de Beauvoir. According to de Beauvoir, a woman's life can be described as being "uniform and monotonous", yet with the transitions between the stages of life being "dangerously abrupt" (de Beauvoir, p. 547). She also points out how a "man grows old gradually, woman is suddenly deprived of her femininity; she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and the fertility which, in the view of society and her own, provide the justification for her existence and her opportunity for happiness. With no future, she still has about one half of her adult life to live." (de Beauvoir, p. 547) In a way, this is tragic, as the woman loses her most "important" characteristic - her attractiveness to the male sex. Without this attractiveness, the woman is doomed to live out the rest of her life in seeming obscurity. Yet, as we see with Sophie, becoming old leads to a sort of freedom where a woman can be free to do as she wishes. The woman is also released from the oppressive male gaze, making it easier to navigate the world. Yet this is a double-edged sword, as losing all attractiveness and beauty due to age is a traumatizing experience, as de Beauvoir describes it. She loses all of her value in the eyes of others.

This makes the fact that Sophie is for most parts of the story an old woman so unusual. She inhabits the role often reserved for a man and is also the most unusual candidate for a hero going out on a quest. What she goes on is a traditional quest, with the typical 'three encounters' or tests that the hero must pass to get help with his ultimate goal. Sophie is a protagonist who is very much aware of what kind of story it is that she is trapped in - in the beginning of the novel, she presents herself as the oldest of three daughters, making her "the

one who will fail first, and worst" (Jones, p. 1) if she ever set out to seek her fortune. When she actually is out seeking her fortune, she is also aware that this is what is happening. After having the two first encounters, she thinks; "I'm surely due to have a third encounter, magical or not." (Jones, p. 32) A protagonist being this aware of how the story functions makes the subversion of the genre so much more effective. While Sophie is painfully aware of the type of story she is in, her confidence and personality still suffers under the bindings of the genre. She cannot escape it, and so she resigns herself to the fate that a young, good girl is supposed to have in such a story. It is only when she is cursed that she thinks it appropriate to change her fate - as an old woman does not have a specific, set fate, she could do whatever it was that she wished to do. She is not the typical old woman that appears in fairy tales either - as they are usually either a wise old woman or a witch as mentioned above. Instead, old woman Sophie is described as being a "dreadfully nosy, horribly bossy, appallingly clean old woman." (Jones, p. 74) She is not cruel, but she is practically an annoyance, making her depart from the typical character archetype of the old woman. She refuses to be a proper, old woman. Instead, she is annoying and hardworking – very much the opposite of the evil crones of fairy tales.

Considering the importance of beauty and the roles a woman is expected to have in stories such as this, it is prudent to consider the presence of the male gaze as well, and how it can feel oppressive. While de Beauvoir's claims that the woman is oppressed by the high focus on her beauty, and especially by men, it can also be liberating to not have this focus, this *gaze*, aimed at oneself. Mulvey describes this male gaze as something that "projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.*" (Mulvey, p. 236) It is a masculine gaze that projects his desires onto the woman - making her as beautiful and desirable as possible in his eyes. While Mulvey's theory was meant for film, it can still be used for literature, and especially in a genre such as this where a woman's greatest power is beauty. It also creates "a binary opposition between a masculine spectator, the subject, and what we might call a feminine spectated, the object." (Parker, p. 169) The feminine woman becomes an object, only there to be beautiful and desirable for the male gaze. But, as we see in Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, this gaze is aimed at women in a specific age group. Older women are not the subject of the male gaze, but neither do they automatically become like the spectators. Instead, they are invisible.

Sophie manages to escape this gaze wholly by the way of her curse, and she feels safer and surer because of it. Wizard Howl does, in a way, represent this dangerous, oppressive male gaze in a way that makes Sophie and the other women of the story wary of him. The first description we get of him is that 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."* (Jones, p. 4) The first impression of him is a very dangerous one, and especially a threat towards young girls and women. Sophie's curse creates a barrier against this, and as she lives with him, she eventually figures out that he is not this type of character. Her age acts as a shield that makes her feel confident and safe enough to find this out though, which ultimately leads to them both figuring out each other's curses and falling for each other. Howl falling in love with someone who appears as an old woman, although it is revealed that he knows that she is under the curse, breaks this gaze completely. Mulvey points out that "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance." (Boetticher in Mulvey, p. 236.) Yet here we see that, due to her curse, Howl is forced to appreciate her for who she is, and not for how she appears. Due to this she also grows her self-confidence and becomes a self-assured woman on her own merits. Her looks or beauty have little to do with it, which provides the reader with an important message. Her character story seems to say that you can find value in yourself, and even love, without having to rely on your good looks.

To conclude, we see that ideals of beauty have been an important characteristic of female characters in fairy tales. Yet, the parallel between "goodness" and beauty can be damaging, especially as women age and lose their "beauty". Sophie is created to play with this notion – for large parts of the story, she is not beautiful at all, both when she appeared young and old. Yet, she still ended up finding herself, love, and confidence at the end of the story – showing the reader that beauty is not a necessary ingredient for this. She refuses to fit into any of the boxes that the story would usually apply to her, and thus Jones challenges the gendered ideologies of fairy tales through her depictions of Sophie.

2.3: Witches, Women and Villainy

Stardust approaches the dangers of romanticising beauty in a different way. While there are a number of villains in this story, this section will focus on the three sisters - the witches that are willing to do anything to acquire youth, and thus beauty, by taking the heart of the star,

Yvaine. By taking her heart, they are able to replenish their magic and thus become younger again. This makes them seemingly a trope of the typical variety of evil fairy tale crone, but they also function as a way to criticize the damaging desire for youth and beauty can have. Donna Lee Fields argues that the different character stereotypes in a fairy tale functions as a way of providing the reader with a fantasy they can insert themselves into, or as a way of scapegoating. The witch serves this latter purpose, and "we take joy in despising the witch [...], for we need a focal point, someone to blame, for our misfortunes, our miseries, the reason for our insecurities, for those little evils in our lives which we seem to have no control." (Fields, p. 265) Having an archetype like this that the reader is supposed to hate, can be crucial to the enjoyment of a story. Yet, it lacks nuance, as it is often a type of character that challenges the status quo. Wholly deciding on hating such a character without examining why can thus have negative consequences. We have to question why exactly old women are considered evil at first glance. Thus, it is important to challenge these conceptions, especially considering that the witch is often the only type of representation an older woman can get.

As demonstrated earlier, there is a greater focus on the body and how it appears when it comes to female characters. A female character can often be summed up by seeing if she is described as being ugly or pretty - and based on that, it can be guessed whether she will be a heroine or a villain. Jeana Jorgensen examines how women's bodies are described in a number of fairy tales. She points out that "Women's bodies are bounded by expectations of beauty, but often in non-specific ways, contributing to the double bind that constrains femininity and gender norms." (Jorgensen, p. 37) What a female character's body looks like has a direct correlation with what kind of character she will be, yet the parameters for this are never that clear, according to Jorgensen. This also affects how children will react to reading stories such as these, and she points out that "Laurence Talairach-Vielmas writes that "what we generally learn as children is that all princesses are beautiful and may even try to improve their beauty" (2007:5). Beauty is linked with not only success in fairy tales, but also character." (Jorgensen, p. 37) The fact that a female character needs to be beautiful both to have a good character, but also to succeed is problematic in many ways, especially if the child reading is not feminine or beautiful in the socially acceptable way. This is why "feminist scholars view beauty as a problem in and of itself in fairy tales" (Jorgensen, p. 38), and thus it is important to examine this and rethink how issues of gender are represented in fairy tales, and in particular those that are aimed at young children.

A witch that challenges these perceptions is for example the Witch of the Waste in *Howl's Moving Castle.* Her final appearance is not that of the old, evil crone, but rather she

appears "hugely tall and skinny now and her hair was fair, in a rope like pigtail over one bony shoulder. She wore a white dress." (Jones, p. 312) She appears as the opposite of an old crone - even wearing white, like a bride would. Her goal is to "amalgamate the best bits of three of them (Justin, Suliman, and Howl) to fashion just one decent male." (Rudd, p. 260) Instead of a witch, we are faced with a woman that has a broken heart. She is just a woman trying to find some justice for herself, even when her actions were not necessarily good. She is a woman tired of being victimized by all the men in her life, so she seeks to create a perfect man for herself instead. While her actions are bad, her motivations are not - in a way she is personally fighting against the oppressive force of the patriarchy and the male. This leads to a witch character that does not look like the traditional, evil witch character so common in fairy tales, but she does not act like one either. She is an insecure, yet powerful woman who only seeks to secure her own future by using her own power. Instead of waiting for the prince of her dreams, for her prince charming, she instead makes a Frankenstein version of one using three individual men. This creates a story where even the villain – the witch – is so tired of patriarchal structures that she goes to these lengths of finding happiness and the true love that every woman is supposed to find at the end of a fairy tale. The story seems to say that also she deserves to have the happily ever after ending, as she is also, like Sophie, a victim of the patriarchy. Her reactions to it were just more extreme, yet certainly something that many can emphasise with.

Stardust approaches this differently. All of the witches in Stardust appear as evil, selfish, and ugly crones. Especially the three sisters, the Lilim, are portrayed in a particularly unfavourable light. When we first see them, we see them described as old crones living in a small "foreboding" cottage in the woods. Here they appear as mostly normal old women – yet they have a magical mirror that shows a whole other house and women. In the mirror, everything is grander and more beautiful - and the crones appear as beautiful, young, decadent women, the exact opposite of how they appear in the cottage. When one crone does something, so does a woman in the mirror: "The crone in the rocking chair pulled herself to her feet. (In the mirror, a dark woman stretched and rose from her divan.)" (Gaiman, p. 52) The women in the mirror live an idealized version of the life the crones are living, both when considering their homes and their beauty. To go after the star, one of the crones use magic to turn into a young woman so that she might be better able to attain the stars heart. Her beauty is then very much desired, and "Her two sisters stared across her naked body hungrily. 'When I return with her heart, there will be years aplenty for all of us,' she said, eyeing her sisters' hairy chins and hollow eyes with disfavor." (Gaiman, p. 54) Their desire for youth and beauty

is very present, with the sister that got turned young instantly looking down on the sisters that remained old. Their ugly characteristics are also described in a masculine way - with for example the "hairy chins". They are the opposite of the feminine ideal.

The mirror is an interesting aspect of this scene, especially when we consider that the beautiful and ideal world is what can be seen in the mirror, and not the opposite. It is not clear whether "only the peasant cottage in the woods was real, or if, somewhere, the Lilim lived in a black hall, with a fountain in the shape of a mermaid playing in the courtyard of stars, none knew for certain, and none but the Lilim could say." (Gaiman, p. 52) Based on this, we can then assume that the mirror world is a type of idealized reality that the crones dream of and imagine themselves to be like. In a way, they use the mirror to gaze at what they have been and could be again - desiring their youths' beauty and putting it on a grand pedestal. The mirror world creates this idealized, perfect reality that the crones can imagine themselves to still be in. It is therefore their hunger for this youthful beauty that sets them on their quest to take the star Yvaine's heart. In the 2007 film adaptation with the same name, the mirror plays an important role as the witch Lamia uses this mirror to communicate with her sisters throughout the plot. Susan Cahill points out how the mirror is used in the novel as a gendered representation of the female, and that the mirror is an "instrument of vanity, is both a female tool of communication and constant reminder of Lamia's degenerating beauty throughout the film." (Cahill, p. 60) By looking in the mirror, and by gazing at herself in the mirror, Lamia becomes more and more conscious of how her beauty is falling away yet again. This is reminiscent of how mirrors are used more commonly by girls and women today - examining and despairing over completely normal signs of aging. It shows how all women are almost expected to criticize themselves in mirrors in this way, and how they are expected to cover up these signs of aging or by trying to keep their youthful beauty intact.

This can be problematic in some ways. Their chase to gain beauty and youth can be seen as a commentary on how older women are seemingly forced by society to pursue youth and beauty no matter how old they are. This can often end up being a very damaging pursuit for the women themselves, as we see with the witches. Yet their stories do not have a happy ending, and all of the old women and/or witches in *Stardust* have a rather miserable end to their respective story arcs. This leads to an "often echo[ed] conservative impulse to erase and destroy the older, and often more powerful, women in favour of youth and beauty." (Cahill, p. 59) Youth and beauty will, ultimately, end up defeating and destroying the old and powerful. This creates another type of binary, between old and young women. The dynamic between Yvaine and the Lilim sisters exemplifies this; because by taking the heart of Yvaine, and

ultimately killing her, the witches take her youth and beauty as their own, creating this dynamic where women fight each other to be the "fairest of them all". In the film adaptation *Stardust* (2007), the climax is a fight between these witches and Tristan coming to save Yvaine. The height of this climax happens when Yvaine starts shining like a star, and thus kills the last witch with her brilliance. Thus, in the film, she brings an end to the last witch with her beauty. The Lilim witches show how negatively the male gaze can affect women and shows through the evil witch character how far someone might be willing to go to have their youth and beauty restored to them. They are trapped in this mindset and refuse to acknowledge how they really appear - and they gaze at themselves as young and beautiful through the mirror, ultimately objectifying themselves by way of the male gaze. Ultimately, this is a mindset that is difficult to break through, and the Lilim sisters arguably do not.

In the end of the novel, we see the Lilim sister that was tasked with fetching the heart of the star appear "shrunk by age and time to little bigger than a child, held onto a stick as tall and bent as herself with palsied and swollen-knuckled hands." (Gaiman, p. 188), talking to Yvaine about the quest she was tasked with. She is sickly and old, and so crooked that she is practically the size of a child - her life cycle has made a full circle. She goes on to tell the star that "'If ever you get to be my age,' said the old woman, 'you will know all there is to know about regrets, and you will know that one more, here or there, will make no difference in the long run.'" (Gaiman, p. 189) This shows perhaps how she might be regretting her search for beauty, and how it is needless in the end. There is a reconciliation in the end between the star and the witch, between young and old, as "The star leaned down, then, and kissed the old woman on her wizened cheek, feeling the rough hairs on it scrape her soft lips." (Gaiman, p. 190) It is apparent that while the witches seem to have lost this battle, it is perhaps the start of a sort of reconciliation between the young and the old.

As stated previously, Gaiman subvert gender by creating caricatures of his characters. The witches are an especially apparent example of this, as they are the definition of feminine characters that have gone too far in their search for beauty and youth. The irony lies in the fact that although they are on a search for beauty, they are not good. Instead, they are the biggest villains of the story – clearly showing that 'goodness' and beauty do not go hand in hand. By depicting the witches in this way, the story really points out how damaging toxic femininity can be, while also showing that women's search for youth and beauty will never end – as aging is an inevitable and natural part of life.

2.4: Damsels in Distress

This last section of the chapter will discuss the tropes of the fairy tale heroine, or the damsel in distress. Alongside the hero, the heroine is the most important character in a fairy tale – yet, she often ends up in a passive role where she does little. In particular, this section will focus on the star Yvaine, but also a Miss Victoria Forrester, both characters from *Stardust*. The star Yvaine would at first glance fit perfectly into the damsel in distress trope. She is a beautiful, seemingly young woman; she is harmed from falling from the sky, making her vulnerable; and she is Tristan's eventual love interest. She is also a victim that is, ironically, kidnapped by the hero himself. According to Propp, the only characters that kidnap are villainous characters, as part of the story beat "The villain abducts a person" (Propp, p. 31); "A dragon kidnaps the tsar's daughter (…); a witch kidnaps a boy (…); older brothers abduct the bride of a younger brother (…)." (Propp, p. 31) This demonstrates several things: the one being kidnapped is, for the most part, a young woman, or a daughter, and the one doing the kidnapping is always a villain. While this section will not talk much about Tristan, he is both the kidnapper and the hero of this story, turning Propp's rule on its head. It is also worth pointing out that the kidnapped victim is supposed to be rescued by the hero himself – but in this story, that gets complicated because the kidnapper is the hero. This does make Yvaine a good candidate to examine how the character archetype of 'damsel in distress' appears, and how it can be subverted. It is also worth mentioning another 'damsel' in need of rescuing, which is Prince Justin in *Howl's Moving Castle.* For all intents and purposes, he should technically be a hero as he is the Prince – instead, he is a victim sorely in need of rescuing, and functions in much the same was as a kidnapped princess would. By assigning him this role, Jones shows that a male character can be in need of rescue as well.

While the depictions of female bodies in fairy tales are problematic, the depictions of personality and general purpose in life might, arguably, be even more so. The inherently feminine traits can be summed up like this; "beauty, goodness, passivity, dependence, and an affinity for the domestic sphere." (Jorgensen, p. 38) These are the characteristics for the perfect wife, essentially. A male character would traditionally have the exact opposite characteristics - making him a good candidate to rescue the passive and dependent woman in trouble. What we get in *Stardust* is something very different. The hero of the story, Tristan Thorn, goes out beyond the mysterious faerie world beyond the Wall that separates his village from this magical place. He does so because he has promised his love - the beautiful Miss Victoria Forrester - a star in exchange for her hand in marriage. What he does not expect to

find is that the stars appear as beautiful women in this faerie land - yet this does not stop him, as he instead decides to kidnap her to bring her to Victoria.

Yvaine is not the typical passive feminine heroine. When she first appears in the story, she has recently been knocked down from the sky, rendering her hurt and helpless. The first thing she does when Tristan meets her is to lob mud at him, and she appears like this; "Her eyes were red and raw. Her hair was so fair it was almost white, her dress was of blue silk which shimmered in the candlelight. She glittered as she sat there." (Gaiman, p. 81) Most of what we can glean from this is that she has been crying, and that she is literally as fair as a star. She even glitters. This makes her appear as the traditionally beautiful fairy tale heroine. As "one would expect female protagonists' bodies in fairy tales to display the following traits: they must be beautiful; their beauty includes Western stereotypical attributes like white skin and blonde hair; their bodies are passive, pliant, and patient; and their beauty correlates positively with other features such as kindness." (Jorgensen, p. 38), we see that at least when it comes to looks, Yvaine fits in with this narrative rather well. Her attitude on the other hand, differs greatly from the typical fairy tale heroines. She is stubborn, verbally abusive, short-tempered, and very difficult to deal with for Tristan. If it were not for the magical chain binding them together, it would have been practically impossible for him to manage to travel with her at all. In this way, she bends the expectations of the reader, who might have expected a beautiful, benevolent star character instead. Bottigheimer points out that in Grimm's tales, female characters that were considered "Strong or 'speaking' [...] were defined as 'wicked.'" (Bottigheimer in Haase, p. 38) Often, such characters were also punished for this "wickedness". Yvaine is, on the other hand, rewarded at the end of the novel, even if this reward is bittersweet. Although, as discussed in the former sections, the witches are actually considered wicked in this story, and they are punished for their desires.

This is one among many things that adds to the sense of realism in this fairy tale story. Tristan is not, for example, some sort of fairy tale character - he is first and foremost a young man that comes from a simple English village. And while he does turn out to be a fairy tale prince later in the story, he did grow up without this knowledge in an ordinary village. The realism is especially apparent through his first love, Miss Victoria Forrester. While she is young and described as the "most beautiful girl in the British Isles." (Gaiman, p. 29) Yet she lives firmly in the real world, and ultimately ends up marrying an old gentleman that can secure her a safe and stable future. She is not able to entertain Tristan's adventurous fairy tale notions for long, even if she does jokingly send him on a quest to secure her the star. When he incredulously asks her if she means it, she replies "I mean it as much as you mean all your

fancy words of rubies and gold and opium," (Gaiman, p. 38) which is not serious at all. She is fully in the real world and going on quests to secure someone's love like Tristan wants to attempt does not fit into her realistic narrative. She is treated as a sort of trophy by Tristan, and as the "prize" he will get for successfully acquiring and bringing her the star. But although this is a standard questing narrative for a fairy tale, the story itself does not treat it as a good thing. The first creature that Tristan encounters, and that he travels with for a while, tells him that "'I'd tell her to go shove her face in the pig pen, and go out and find another one who'll kiss you without askin' for the earth." (Gaiman, p. 62) Ultimately, the story seems to say that there is no point in having to pay for love in the way that Tristan is trying to do. Either you love someone, or you do not, and bringing them a star to prove this love is not a healthy way of doing it, even if doing it is the traditional way to win love in fairy tales.

The two other female characters in the story that are not considered villainous are Tristan's mother and the star Yvaine. In the end, he does marry Yvaine, and while she does break with certain stereotypes pertaining to the heroine in a fairy tale, she does not break this one. It is fully possible to read her as "merely as a love object for Tristan and object to be devoured by Lamia and her sisters" (Cahill, p. 63), as she ultimately does end up marrying Tristan and becoming queen of his kingdom. Throughout the novel, she also tends to get into trouble and in need of rescue. Yet, eventually they both end up travelling together on adventures. She does not stay at home while her hero goes out onto adventures alone, but instead they both leave together. In the film, it is Yvaine that defeats the last witch by using her abilities as a star to do so. "The sight of Yvaine's shining body proves finally fatal for Lamia, and, in a sense, the exposure to the image of the youthful body is her destruction." (Cahill, p. 62) Beauty and youth ultimately win here; and kill the grotesque and old. In the novel, the confrontation between Lamia and Yvaine is much more mundane. They simply talk - which shows that the "evil" does not necessarily needs to be defeated by a great show of power. Instead, Yvaine tells the witch that she has lost; that Yvaine has already given her heart away. In a way, this can be considered a very feminine way of defeating an opponent – there is no death or show of force, but a rather mundane conversation instead.

This is similar to how Sophie is treated by her story. She is not heroic in the grand, violent male way either, but is, like Yvaine, more feminine than masculine. Like Sophie, Yvaine is non-violent, but verbally she lets Tristan know when she does not approve of his behaviour (as Sophie does with Howl).

> "Sophie is subversive of fairy tale orthodoxy in one other key way, too, in that she moves towards the hearth rather than away from it. However, in doing so, she also

moves into the driving-seat of the story, thus relocating the tradition of the fairy tale in its historical context as predominantly a female art form (Warner 12-25), before its subsequent appropriation by male tellers." (Rudd, p. 262)

She is a wholly female character that avoids the pitfall of being a male hero in a woman's skin. Instead, Jones has created a complex, female heroine that subverts many of the female characteristics, yet she also retains many of them too. It is alright to have feminine characteristics as a woman – but she also points out the importance of letting these characters also be complex women with a complicated relationship towards their gender and place in a patriarchal society.

The subversion of the heroine is an important aspect of modern fairy tale and children's stories, as the heroine is often the only female character archetype that is not some sort of evil old crone. Yet, she often appears as a passive character that only waits on the hero to come rescue her – she is a damsel in distress. *Stardust* subverts this trope by creating a very feminine character that is very much not passive, and that even fights back against the hero every step of the way. She is not willing to let him take control of her narrative. Sophie, in a similar fashion, gains full control of her narrative and refuses to let the apparent hero Howl control her. Both end up being heroines that take charge of their own destinies – and because of this, both have stories that end happily, teaching young readers that they can do the same.

2.5: Conclusion

To summarize what has been stated so far, we can say that "The concept of gender is so deeply rooted in human awareness that the extent to which it conditions social expectations and emotional reactions long went unrecognized." (Bottigheimer in Haase, p. 38) That is why examining some of these social consequences are so important - especially in literature aimed at children. One of the biggest issues of children's literature and fairy tale stories for children have been that it is a kind of socializing literature that aims to colonize the readers into accepting certain roles and notions in society, and in particular gender roles; by for example connecting beauty and goodness to each other, but also to the female characters of these stories. The fact that ugliness is thus equal to evil and villainy teaches the readers that to be a good woman means that you have to be beautiful.

For male characters this is not as important a distinction, and there is significantly less focus on how their bodies do or do not appear in these stories. In *Howl's Moving Castle* the main heroine is either young but rather plain, or old and ugly, which breaks completely with this tradition of having beautiful, young heroines. *Stardust* does something similar by also

breaking with these norms, although more from a personality-wise perspective, since the star Yvaine is traditionally beautiful and feminine, yet she is also rude, short-tempered and strong-willed. Breaking with these norms is important, and these stories show an alternative to "perpetuate the misunderstandings that now celebrate what were personifications of oppressors; we accept, to our own determinant, the representation of seemingly bi-dimensional figures with no other purpose than to entertain." (Fields, p. 265) While these stories are entertaining, it is important to examine how they can affect gender representations with out-dated notions.

This chapter has only focused on the female characters and femininity, while the next section of the thesis will focus on male characters and masculinity. Both Gaiman and Jones are among the many author's that "have used the fairy-tale genre to engage with and uproot patriarchal representations of femininity and sexuality. The fairy tale thus offers a potent space in which to negotiate questions of gender and gendered representations." (Cahill, p. 58) While it is female characters that have gotten the short end of the stick most often, it is also worth looking at how masculinity affects the male characters of these stories as well, and how only having these traditionally masculine traits can be a negative experience too. It is also worth examining characters like for example Howl, who exhibits both female and masculine characteristics.

3. The Masculine

3:1: Chapter Introduction

Since the key theoretical angle of this thesis is feminist theory, it made sense for the first chapter to focus on the female characters in *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman and *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones. The second chapter will look at the other end of the binary, and deal with the male characters of these two novels. This chapter will thus examine how the typical male characteristics are subverted, and in particular the more modern, western notions of masculinity. While feminism has had a great focus on female characters due to women often being represented negatively, and in such a way that negatively affects the already underrepresented and oppressed women, it is also important to take a look at the other side of the equation. Although feminists have been retelling fairy tales for decades, many male authors have also wished to redefine the masculine through fairy tale retellings.

Brian Attebery argues this, and points out that the fairy tale is a "particularly feminine form" (Attebery, p. 314), as there are few men that read fairy tales at all; "I have been told by students that 'Girls read fairy tales. Boys don't.'" Kay F. Stone, writing in 1985, came to much the same conclusion: that, in contrast with girls' intense encounters, 'Many males, questioned informally, could not even remember if they had ever read fairy tales'" (Attebery, p. 314). Yet, it is impossible to conclude that absolutely no men at all read fairy tales, and that they too do not wish to see some subversion of the form from a male perspective, as men also experience being forced into a certain role due to patriarchal standards. Attebery goes on to argue that there are three anxieties these types of tales can awaken in male readers; "The first embodies anxiety about failing to live up to the model; the second, fear of taking on its worst features; and the third, an alternative beau ideal." (Attebery, p. 316) The male experience of these tales is no less complex than the female one, and these anxieties can very well be experienced by younger male readers as well. These fears are interesting when compared to their female counterparts; while men fear "failing to live up to the model" (Attebery, p. 136), otherwise known as the heroic ideal, women have the fear of actually living up to their respective tropes and models. Both share the second fear, as neither want to be a monstrous, villainous character, even if these monstrous villainous characters appear in vastly different ways, as we see in *Stardust.* The third is also thought of in opposites – as women are expected to be the beauty of the tale, the hero is often described as either ugly or unremarkable when it comes to his appearance. Appearing as a "beau", to be considered as both male and beautiful,

would be a disruption in the typical tropes. Pointing back to the study at the beginning of the previous chapter, we saw how little male characters are referred to by looks compared to women, so a desire to be described in such a way seems natural, particularly when beauty is considered a virtue.

The male is also the opposite of the Other of the woman. He is the One, the one at the top of the food-chain of society, and most importantly he is the oppressor of most other groups. He is the ideal, and he is the standard that everyone else is compared up against. This is especially concerning the white heterosexual, and able-bodied man. It was a biological reality. It was with theorists like Simone de Beauvoir that this perception started to change, leading to the separation of sex and gender in modern feminist theory. Because of this, "contemporary feminist theory usually sees gender as the constructed product of culture rather than the natural, inevitable product of biology and anatomy." (Parker, p. 159) This led to the notion that a person's gendered acts are more based on how they were brought up, and not on actual biological realities. Men are not naturally more intelligent and active, and women are not more naturally nurturing and passive simply due to their biological realities. Gender can thus be expressed in a wide variety of ways that is not related to sex. Yet, these old notions of what is purely male, or female, still persist. Alex Hobbs, a masculinity theorist, points out that there are two types of men that can be seen in today's cultural landscape: "the New Man and the Retributive Man" (Rutherford in Hobbs, p. 384). Both of these types of man are on each end of a spectrum, where the retributive man represents the "traditional masculine qualities but amplified to hypermasculinity", while the new man is more "emotionally open and nurturing" and a "consumer"'. (Hobbs, p. 384) He goes on to argue that these are both a kind of response to feminism, and a way of fighting off feminism's influence on masculinity and men. Yet, he goes on to argue, is that this just provides one more alternative to how masculinity can appear and does not leave much room for nuance on either side of this "male" spectrum.

He is also the holder of what Mulvey refers to as the gaze, described above. By making the male the holder of this gaze, we are all forced into accepting him as the main character, or a focaliser. Since Mulvey's theory mostly pertains to films, it is still applicable to for example literature, where readers are given insight into a character's mind. She points out that "An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure" (Mulvey, p. 236) and that the "male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification." (Mulvey, p. 236) This means that most stories are told from the perspective of the active male, who makes decisions and makes the plot move forward. The female on the

other hand is passive; only there to be gazed at or act as motivation for the male. While this has of course changed somewhat in recent decades, it is still experienced as a problem by many female consumers of media. It is worth mentioning that this applies for the most part to white women. In Bell Hooks reply to Mulvey's essay, she points out that this gaze "denies the 'body' of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is 'white'". (Hooks, p. 272) The desirable beautiful woman of the male gaze is thus very much a white woman.

As we see, it is also necessary with diverse and nuanced representations of male characters in literature as well. Hobbs points out that:

> "Victor Jeleniewski Seidler suggests that even those thought to represent the patriarchal stronghold – White, middle-class men – may also suffer; he writes, '[as] men we can feel trapped into living out ideals that are not of our own making. It can be as if we have betrayed an inner knowledge of ourselves, in order to prove when we were still young boys that we could be 'man enough'" (Hobbs, p. 384)

This shows a clear unhappiness that men can end up feeling due to the roles they are also forced into occupying. While men are not oppressed in the ways of gender, they can be in various other ways that can make performing masculinity to an acceptable degree difficult – as for example many homosexual and gender non-conforming men have experienced.

While patriarchal systems do benefit men, they also leave them boxed into an ideal with little room for appearing different. Especially feminine traits in a man are considered undesirable, as it is negative to be comparable to those who are considered the Other. By examining the typical "male" characteristics that fairy tales and children's literature promotes, it will be possible to break free of these limiting gender norms. The rest of the chapter will go into deeper detail regarding how the male characters in the novels *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust* are presented, and how they function with regard to the feminine-masculine dichotomy in fairy tale stories. To begin with, this thesis will discuss Tristran Thorn from *Stardust*, as he is a character that at first appears to be a traditional hero embarking on a hero's journey. Although it quickly becomes apparent that he is not a typical or traditional "good" hero that is embarking on a quest, he still functions in much the same way; and in particular at the end of the story, where he gets the traditional hero's quest ending by being rewarded for his bravery. The rest of the chapter will deal with Wizard Howl from *Howl's Moving Castle* and his apparent femininity, but also the prince's in both stories that all fall on different ends of the feminine-masculine spectrum. While the princes in *Howl's Moving Castle* are very much a type of "damsel in distress" that need rescuing, the ones in *Stardust* are

hypermasculine in a way that leads to all of their dooms. This, much like the witches in *Stardust,* underlines the impossibility of living up to these gendered ideals.

3:2: The Hero

This section will deal with the hero's journey, with a particular focus on the character Tristran Thorn from *Stardust.* A hero's journey is a journey where the hero must deal with a number of challenges to prove his worth and strength. Often, he must defeat something or someone to succeed in his quest – by either relying on his wit or on his strength and battle prowess. Campbell explains that the hero is a type of opposite to "the tyrant", or more commonly referred to as "the villain". The Hero's goal, his quest and destiny, is to defeat this tyrant. Thus, "Wherever he (the tyrant) sets his hand there is a cry [...]: a cry for the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence, will liberate the land." (Campbell, p. 16) He is, quite literally, the opposite of evil - he is pure good. After he does his deed, he "is to return to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed." (Campbell, p. 20) To be a hero is, in a way, to die – the hero will have to change, to be figuratively reborn into someone new to fulfil his journey. He simply cannot remain the same after going through everything that he has to. When he returns to "us" transformed, he will receive glory and power, often in the forms of riches and power - and often, even a wife, if the hero is male. Gail Carriger similarly sums this up rather humorously by describing a hero's journey as a story about an "Increasingly isolated protagonist stomps around prodding evil with pointy bits, eventually fatally prods baddie, gains glory and honour." (Carrier, p. 4) It is a journey where the hero grows into his own power and learns to defeat whoever – or what–ever, needs to be defeated. If we look at the opposite end of the spectrum, she claims that a heroine's journey is different in that it involves a greater group of people that cooperate to help each other, and the heroine, to defeat whatever needs to be defeated. She describes this as a story where an "increasingly networked protagonist strides around with good friends, prodding them and others onto victory, together." (Carrier, p. 4) As we see, this is a direct contrast to the hero's journey. A hero needs to learn to be strong by himself, while a heroine becomes strong through the connections she makes along the way.

The hero's journey is common in fairy tales in particular, a genre that is full of "stock" characters that fit into certain archetypes. The Hero is thus a very important archetypal character and is for the most part the main character and the one that ends up defeating the "evil" of the tale. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to examine some of the structural aspects of stories like these, by way of Propp. According to Propp, "a tale usually begins with some

sort of initial situation." (Propp, p. 25) This initial situation is important, as its function is to present the story and the characters to the reader. He also points out that this initial situation is an "important morphological element" (Propp, p. 25) whose purpose it is to present the hero through a "mention of his name or indication of his status." (Propp, p. 25) According to Propp the hero is thus the most central character to the story, and it is important to present him already in the initial situation. Yet *Stardust* does not start with a presentation of Tristran Thorn, but instead of his father. This initial situation, or introductory chapter, ends with the conception of Tristran and eventual arrival at his father's door nine months later. This also shows that while this novel is a children's fairy tale, it also depicts adult themes like sexuality. Tristran is not a child that was conceived in some fairy tale like fashion involving storks and cabbage patches, but a child that was conceived through sex, and even if this is a fairy story, it does not shy away from that.

Tristran's story is a traditional hero's quest - or questing narrative. It starts with what Propp calls an "inciting incident", or Campbell a "call to adventure". Campbell has in great detail analysed and structured out the heroic character, which naturally involves the hero's quest. According to Campbell, "the "call to adventure" - signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown." (Campbell, p. 58) We see this clearly in *Stardust* as well - Tristran's call to adventure is a challenge of the girl he wants to marry, and the "zone unknown" he is thus forced to enter is the faerie land on the other side of the Wall. His "inciting incident" or "call to adventure" is most likely the moment where Victoria tells him "'If you bring me that star,' said Victoria, 'the one that just fell, not another star, then I'll kiss you. Who knows what else I might do.'" (Gaiman, p. 37-38) This is said jokingly, as she has been refusing him this whole scene. This does not stop Tristran accepting this quest, this challenge, as he is taking her completely seriously. When he asks her if she is serious, her reply is "I mean it as much as you mean all your fancy words of rubies and gold and opium," (Gaiman, p. 38) She thinks going out on an adventure to win treasure for your beloved is ridiculous - and not something that actually happens in the real world that she is inhabiting. Tristran, on the other hand, is part "real" and part magical - as his mother comes from the faerie world beyond the wall. For Tristran, fairy tales and fairy tale norms are very much real. According to Paula Brown, this leads to a miscommunication between the two, where "Victoria's perspective is that anyone but a ninny must realize that the agreement is a joke. Tristran, however, attains a Don Quixote-like stature in his deeply rooted belief in chivalry as well as the promises and contracts associated with professions of love." (Brown, p. 222) He is a naive hero - one that

does not understand how the "real" world functions. Even if he has not travelled to the faerie world yet, it is clear that it is where he belongs, and so he follows its rules; even though he has never set foot there himself.

This does get treated as ridiculous, and a creature he meets at the beginning of his journey tells him as much. He says, "So, there's some young lady. Has she sent you here to seek your fortune? That used to be very popular. You'd get young fellers wanderin' all over, looking for the hoard of gold that some poor wyrm or ogre had taken absolute centuries to accumulate." (Gaiman, p. 62) Intertextually, this refers to fairy tales many have grown up reading about; stories where the hero does these deeply heroic and dangerous things for a maiden. The creature goes on to say however; "'I'd tell her to go shove her face in the pig pen and go out and find another one who'll kiss you without askin' for the earth." (Gaiman, p. 62), pointing out how ridiculous a quest such as this really is. If she really did love him, he need not prove it by bringing her a star. This makes Tristran a hero that is not taken seriously by his own story at first, which makes it particularly amusing that he is actually in a very real and dangerous fairy tale world.

At the start of the novel, Tristran is many ways the opposite of a hero, and must instead learn to grow up and become a hero as the story progresses. Interestingly enough, we do not even see most of his story, as he and the star travel together for a number of years before settling down to fulfil their "happily ever after" ending. He does start out as a very inconsiderate, villainous kidnapper when he forces Yvaine to walk countless miles on a broken foot. She could have appeared as the perfect damsel in distress in this story - she has lost her home, she is lost, she is vulnerable and in pain - but instead of being rescued, Tristran chains her up and kidnaps her. These are not the actions of a heroic character. How a heroic character is supposed to act like in a tale such as this though, is not easy to discern through only looking at Tristran as an example.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth century there was a noticeable shift in what was socially acceptable behaviour, which changed how male and female characters were described in literature such as this. Zipes points out that:

> "Restriction and revulsion toward frank sexual behavior replaced open acceptance of sexual and bodily functions. The roles of males and females became more rigidly defined: men became more closely associated with reason, temperance, activism, and sovereign order; females became more identified with irrationality, whimsy, passivity, and subversive deviance." (Zipes, 2012, p. 48)

As he points out, the typical characteristics of males were supposed to be "reason, temperance, activism, and sovereign order" (Zipes, 2012, p. 48) In a way, this implies that males were supposed to rule, as they are ruled only by their reason and would know what is best to do. This makes them perfect protagonists as heroes, as the listener (or reader, or general consumer of media) instinctually knows that what the hero is doing is the right and good thing to do. You cannot argue with the hero – the hero is "the good guy". This is what makes Tristran's actions so jarring to read about at first. The reader has to fight against the notions of this being the hero and "the good guy", and the fact that he is forcing a harmed woman across all of faerie land. It is no wonder then that she greatly dislikes him at first.

A hero's quest usually concludes with the hero travelling back to where he started his story, making the tale reach a full circle. In short, "When the hero-quest has been accomplished, [...] the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy." (Campbell, p. 193) This structure can have many purposes, but among the most important is that it shows how much the hero has grown and learned on his journey. We see this with Tristran - at the start of the novel, the village of Wall was his home and where he hoped to marry his love and settle down. When he returns to Wall at the end of the novel, we see him in contrast with this little village, and he has clearly grown too big for it. The guardian of the Wall, Mr. Brown, says so himself; "if you are Tristran Thorn - which I'm only conceding for the sake of argument here, for you look nothing like him, and you talk little enough like him either" (Gaiman, p. 168) Tristran has, quite literally, become someone new - he has grown into a hero, and here he is at the end of his journey, returning to where he started with his trophy. His "life-transmuting trophy." (Campbell, p. 193) is Yvaine, the star he was sent to retrieve for Victoria. The irony here is that, while she is more than a trophy to him, she still functions as a trophy, and as Tristran's reward. Victoria does too, although she was supposed to be the original "prize" of his journey - yet, at the end, he gets to choose between the two women. So, this story concludes that a woman cannot be a trophy like Tristran wants to treat Victoria - yet, he still has the opportunity to 'win' her in the end, even if he chooses not to. Yvaine, who has little reason to choose him herself based on his actions through the story, still ends up falling for him in the end.

Brown also argues that the story of Tristran is not a typical hero's narrative, for many reasons. She points out that:

> "Tristran's quest to find his heart's desire, ostensibly an old-fashioned fairy tale, has many qualities readers associate with postmodern fiction: a framing structure that provides a sceptical attitude towards the fairy tale action; an imperfect rather than

heroic protagonist who does not recognize his own heart's desire and who must discover or refine it as the plot proceeds at a breakneck speed" (Brown, p. 217). While the story is, in many ways, a traditional fairy tale, she argues that it is in many ways a more modern tale. The story bends and makes fun of the typical fairy tale tropes – for example the fact that the hero has to give his love some sort of fantastical token to even get a chance at winning her heart – but also makes use of them, especially when it comes to gendered roles and representations.

Stardust plays into the traditional gender roles and stereotypes to a greater degree than *Howl's Moving Castle* does. While both Tristran, Yvaine, and some of the other characters subvert their respective roles, most do not. And even though Tristran and Yvaine do subvert their character archetypes, they still get their archetypical ending. Tristran gets the girl, the kingdom, and lives happily ever after. Yvaine does the same, yet ultimately ends up spending eternity alone, yearning for the stars. Although the couple did get their happy ending, it is worth pointing out that it is a very bittersweet one. The last line of the novel is, ultimately, a sad one - "She says nothing at all, but simply stares upward into the dark sky and watches, with sad eyes, the slow dance of the infinite stars." (Gaiman, p. 194) Yvaine did not get a happily-ever-after ending, and instead yearns for the home she used to have in the stars.

To conclude, Tristran Thorn is an atypical fairy tale hero as he is not very heroic, or even a good person, at the beginning of the novel. He is rather cruel and treats the heroine quite badly. He is also neither strong or brave and seems to get them out of danger by simply by chance. Yvaine, on the other hand, could have been a traditional damsel in distress, grateful to be rescued, but is instead a short-tempered and at times unpleasant heroine that likes to yell. While they get the endings their archetypes say they should have, they still deviate from the norms of their character types. Zipes emphasises that it was "vital [to] bring about socialization through fairy tales and the internalization of specific values and notions of gender." (Zipes, 2012, p. 9) and that "Fairy tales and children's literature were written with the purpose of socializing children to meet definite normative expectations at home and in the public sphere." (Zipes, 2012, p. 9) The goal of these texts was, in short, to manipulate children into acting a certain way. These acts were supposed to be very gendered - with women staying at home and taking care of the home and children, while men went out into the world to bring back an income. In *Stardust*, both of these roles are inhabited by both characters, as they go out adventuring together for several years before settling down in Stormhold to rule. A hero like Tristran underlines that you do not have to be a hyper-masculine hero to win the kingdom and the girl.

3:3: The Dangers of Toxic Masculinity

When fairy tales were first written down by authors such as Charles Perrault in the seventeenth century, it was a way of further strengthening the patriarchal powers in society. Because of this, "men became more closely associated with reason, temperance, physical activity, and sovereign order, whereas females became more associated with whimsy, passivity and irrationality" (Smith, p. 427) As similar stereotypes and archetypes appeared in stories it became normalized, and even considered as an ultimate truth. The apparent differences of the sexes became simple fact. It was "This tendency to 'naturalize' gender inequality in society [that] resulted in women being both denigrated (as powerless and weak) and, simultaneously, idealized (as 'domestic goddesses')". (Smith, p. 428) While the woman was idealized as the perfect homebound goddess, the man was considered a natural ruler. The male being at the top of the patriarchal food chain also led to characters whose sole focus is gaining wealth and power – goals which can leave a negative impression on young readers regarding what constitutes true success and how to gain it. It can be said that "Feminist texts are about private space, home and nurturing, while male-order books are about public space, ownership, and winning." (Lissa Paul in Nodelman, p. 174) This is what the princes in *Stardust* personify – their whole purpose is to travel out into the world (a public space), so that they can win the throne and take ownership of their fathers kingdom. This section will thus argue that the princes embody a type of exaggerated toxic masculinity, and a type of hypermasculine version of the hero. They ultimately work in opposition to Tristran's heroic qualities, and this works as an effective way of criticising how dangerous a type of gender representation can become; by overemphasising its characteristics in such a way that it almost parodies it.

De Beauvoir has famously said "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (de Beauvoir, in Butler, 1986, p. 35) This citation is effective at pointing out how women gradually become more and more like a "woman", by way of being taught by society. An example of one of these societal teachers might be fairy tales aimed at children, where the gender roles exist on a strict binary - so by only reading stories similar to this, a young girl might start to exhibit similar traits as the female characters in the story. She realizes that she is supposed to relate to these characters, and she does by shaping herself in their image. This does not only apply to women though, and one could easily turn de Beauvoir's words around and say that "One is not born, but rather becomes," a man. Judith Butler argues that de Beauvoir's "theory of gender, then, entails a reinterpretation of the existential doctrine of choice whereby 'choosing' a gender is understood as the embodiment of possibilities within a

network of deeply entrenched cultural norms." (Butler, 1986, p. 37) The choices a person can make within male and female norms, are not choices at all, but rather a selected variety that it is possible to choose between. Because of this, there is little choice at all. Someone born male cannot simply choose to be feminine, as this is a wholly female thing to be – they are instead taught by society to adopt and mimic the traits of other men and what society deems to be masculine and male. This naturally creates an illusion of choice, both for women and for men, and others that do not want to be involved in this binary at all. While being the Other is the least desired in any type of society, it is also damaging to be stuck in the role of the oppressor. An effective way of stopping the system of patriarchy is to teach young boys and men the dangers and problematic aspects of this system from a young age, which will hopefully lead to raising children that do not believe in the inequality of the sexes. This is why it makes it important to show how damaging these types of systems can be, to everyone trapped in them - both oppressor and oppressed.

Margery Hourihan argues that the hero's tale is a "story about superiority, dominance, and success." (Hourihan, p. IX) It is also a story that, due to colonization, "tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational, and dedicated." (Hourihan, p. IX). In *Stardust,* we see an example of this through the brothers, or Tristran's uncles, that are fighting for the crown in a dangerous one-winner-takes-all type of competition. In a way, they are also going on a hero's quest - only a twisted version of one. Their father thinks to himself that he "had hoped that by the time his end came upon him, six of his seven young lords at Stormhold would be dead, and but one still alive. That one would be the eighty-second Lord of Stormhold and Master of the High Crags; it was, after all, how he had attained his own title several hundred years before." (Gaiman, p. 46) The world they have been raised in is a hyper-masculine, the "stronger takes all" type of world, which seems to have gone back for generations. The expectations they have lived under are simple, but brutal; only one son is deemed worthy to be king, and that will be the one son that has survived his brothers. Power is the ultimate prize, and while a traditional hero would have to kill some sort of beast or evil to deserve his power, the brothers have to kill their own family. The gaining of power has always been an important aspect of the fairy tale, as Zipes emphasises that "He who has power can exercise his will, right wrongs, become ennobled, amass money and land, and win woman as prizes and social prestige." (Zipes, 2012, p. 9) Needless to say, all of these things are very important to the sons of a king.

In *Stardust*, there are a couple of characters that inhabit this hypermasculine role. The seven sons of the lord of Stormhold have been encouraged their whole lives to be the

strongest and meanest - and to kill their brothers for a chance at getting the throne. Some of the brothers are already dead- and they haunt the living like a morbid audience, showing that the consequences of their actions will always follow them, and quite literally in this case, cast judgment upon them. Their father, the current Stormlord, expected them to have killed each other by the time of his death, and he had "hoped that by the time his end came upon him, six of the seven young lords at Stormhold would be dead, and but one still alive." (Gaiman, p. 46) He expected them to conform to his own brutal upbringing, where he not only had to fight for the throne, but for his life. He goes on to criticize his own sons; "But the youth of today were a pasty lot, with none of the get-up-and-go, none of the vigour and vim that he remembered from the days when he was young…" (Gaiman, p. 46) This can act as a criticism of both his own sons, and the youth of today that are becoming less and less like the 'ideal' male of older fairy tales. The Lord of Stormhold belongs to this old tradition, and to a great degree his sons do as well. It is his daughter and Tristran that break with this tradition. The irony in this whole story line lies in the fact that it was their long-forgotten sister that finally ended up on the throne – someone that would not have been considered as an heir in a more traditional fairy tale story because of her gender. Instead, she inherits the throne without having to commit fratricide. The fact that her son Tristran inherits the throne after her, shows that this is going to be the new legacy in this world – it is her legacy that will live on, and not the hypermasculine and violent legacy of her father and brothers. Tristran also does not follow in his grandfather's footsteps, nor does the text mention him having any children himself. This bloody hypermasculine legacy ends with him.

The brothers are ultimately a perfect depiction of a toxic and dangerous hero, whose goal it is to suppress and "Other" anyone that they come across. They are, after all, supposed to be the ultimate King to follow in their father's footsteps; the heroes that should take the throne. Hourihan describes this dualism that often appears in children's literature as something that places everyone that is not the hero in the category of other. This

> "inferiorized 'other' is treated in a variety of ways: It may be backgrounded, that is simply regarded as not worthy of notice, as is the case with females in boys' adventure stories like Treasure Island. It may be defined as radically different, distinct in as many ways as possible from the superior norm, thus underlining its inferiority; this occurs, for example, in the polarization of gender roles in fairy tales." (Hourihan, p. 16)

Stardust deals with this by creating characters that consider themselves at the top of this superiority dualist system that appears in so much children's literature, as we see examples of

here. Instead, they end up losing to what they consider to be the "inferior" characters of the story – Tristran and Yvaine, a woman and a half-baked hero. As Hourihan also points out, the active/passive male/female dichotomy has been especially apparent in the fairy tale genre. In the fairy tale, Zipes points out that "The majority of the tales center on active male protagonists who are 'heroic' mainly because they know how to exploit opportunities that bring them wealth, power and money." (Zipes, p. 14) He also uses the word "active" to describe these male characters, and ultimately how they function in a story. Their main goal is to rise in their standing in society - but only by means of wealth and power. A female character rises in standing by self-sacrifice and by not being selfish, the opposite of the male character ideal.

We see that "heroism is gendered." (Hourihan, p. 67) Being a hero is only something that is reserved for the "real man" of the story – they are an ideal that the character is supposed to live up to. There is no wonder then that men and boys feel anxiety about this; it is a high ideal to live up to, and an impossible one as well. It is worth noting that a female character can function as a hero as well. Hourihan points out that while female characters may appear to be heroes' in their own right, "they are little more than honorary men who undertake grand enterprises in a male context and display 'male' qualities: courage, single-minded devotion to a goal, stoicism, self-confidence, certitude, extroversion, aggression." (Hourihan, p. 67) Female heroism is, more often than not, just male heroism in disguise. In many ways, this is what makes Sophie Hatter such an interesting character – she is the main character, and in many ways functions as a hero, yet instead she is a very female type of hero. She does not inhabit any of the traits that Hourihan points out are common for a male hero.

In *Stardust*, Gaiman excels at creating characters that challenge the ideology of gender in fairy tale literature by creating almost monstrous characters that inhabit the traits they are "supposed to" have. He criticises heroic masculinity by doing the same thing as he did with the witches – by creating the princes and the Lord of Stormhold, he shows how ridiculous and actually villainous it is to glorify the heroic character tropes that are normal in fairy tales. Instead, the actual hero is just a normal boy. He is by no means perfect – but he learns throughout how to refuse to fit into his assigned stereotypes, which we see when he refuses Victoria's hand, even when she declares that she has always loved him. The story thus encourages its readers to follow Tristran's example, rather than the ridiculously masculine one of the princes – and, in the end, it is Tristran who gets the happy ending anyway.

3:4: Subverted Heroism

The male character is, in fact, the opposite to the female character in a number of ways. If we consider it from the perspective of Perrault's fairy tales, the blueprint of numerous others after, we see that "The composite male hero of Perrault's tale is strikingly different from the composite female. None of the heroes is particularly good looking, but they all have remarkable minds, courage, and deft manners. Moreover, they are all ambitious and work their way up the social ladder." (Zipes, 2012, p. 41) We see that the typical, and traditional, male character, is supposed to be intellectual and courageous, while, as we saw in Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz study, female characters are supposed to be demure and beautiful. What their study uncovered about female characters has been covered extensively earlier in the thesis, but it is also pertinent to consider what the study uncovered about the representations of male characters.

Their findings can be summed up with this; that "Overall, there are approximately five times more references to women's beauty per tale than to men's handsomeness (the average number of references to women is 1.25 and 0.21 for references to men's handsomeness)." (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, p. 717) The looks of male characters are not considered important, or as a central part of their characterization. Meanwhile, for a female character, it is a fault to not appear beautiful. Ugliness is a sign of evil and laziness, leading to stories where "while beauty is often rewarded, lack of beauty is punished." (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, p. 719). An ugly male character on the other hand, is still a hero, and in fact has a high chance of still being the hero even if he is not attractive. It is his mind and his courage that leads him to victory. While looks are an important aspect of how female characters are described, they point out that this is also true of male characters in recent years, although not nearly to the same degree as female characters. (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, p. 723) This does show that there is a higher emphasis on appearance for both genders, yet even more this shows the difference in focus on character traits between the two genders discussed in this thesis, and ultimately shows the different priorities that exist when it comes to describing male and female characters.

Paul points out that "critic Judith Butler, especially in *Gender Trouble* (1990), put forward the idea that gender was a kind of disguise anyway, that is was a kind of performance. Her work opened up the world of trans-gendered possibilities. For children's literature authors and critics, it became possible to breach child/adult boundaries too." (Paul, p. 121) If gender is just a performance, which implies that it is something that you do for

42

society at large and not for yourself, it is fully possible to break free of this and "perform" gender in the way that fits the individual best. This will of course lead to more personal freedom. In this section this thesis will examine male characters that break with their gender norms by being closer to, or influenced by, femininity. Examples of characters like this are Wizard Howl and Tristran Thorn, who both have traditionally feminine characteristics and personality traits. Howl, for example, is vain, focused on love and romance, and is very concerned about his looks to the extent that his bathroom is filled with various potions and beauty products. Tristran, on the other hand, has characteristics from both genders. This pushes the boundaries of what it means to be a hero and shows that it is not necessary to be ruled by either masculinity or femininity. This section will also discuss Captain Shakespeare from the film adaptation of *Stardust*, albeit briefly as the film is not the focus of this thesis. Traits that are masculine, feminine, and neither, are present in all people, and thus it is important to emphasise this. It is also worth pointing out that these ideals constantly change across time periods and cultures, making it even more difficult to conform to them. Trying to live up to a gendered ideal can be damaging, as it is impossible to achieve, which makes it even more important to have male characters that do not inhabit all of the often-dangerous ideals of masculinity.

Laraine Wallowitz argues in her essay that "print and visual text shape our concepts of gender" (Wallowitz, p. 26). The way texts can shape these concepts are greater than many imagine and goes to show that it is important to be critical when reading all texts. To prove this, she taught a module where she made her high school students read a variety of texts, where she afterwards asked them questions and challenged their assumptions. Her "students quickly learned that characters who do not fit stereotypic images of men and women are read as abnormal. A boy who's is sensitive is considered a coward; a girl who is tough is considered a tomboy." (Wallowitz, p. 26) Even high school students, who are or nearing the age of adulthood, caught themselves being affected by the things that they read. A male character that has female characteristics, for example sensitivity, focusing on his looks or being passive, will have negative connotations forced upon him, even if these characteristics are perfectly acceptable in a female character.

Wizard Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle* is such a male character; he has both negative and positive characteristics that are connected to femininity, and especially his most prominent ones. His most prominent characteristics are the fact that he is lazy, passive in such a way that he avoids taking responsibility or taking any bold actions, and that he is very concerned about his own looks. Sophie herself describes him as a 'slitherer-outer' (Jones,

p.75) – someone who does not face what bothers them head on. "'Of course you hate getting angry!' she retorted. 'You don't like anything unpleasant, do you? You're a slitherer-outer is what you are! You slither away from anything you don't like!" (Jones, p. 75) His apprentice Michael says that "Howl never commits himself to anything. I was here for six months before he seemed to notice I was living here and made me his apprentice." (Jones, p. 67) We see that he Howl does almost anything to avoid responsibility and having to act. In many ways, he can be interpreted as a criticism of passive, female characters. He has to be pushed to act by both Sophie, and what happens in the story – he cannot keep escaping the witch and the king. Eventually, he has to do his duty, and Sophie pushes him to do that. Passivity is not a trait that can comfortably exist in a story such as this, especially when it is one of the main heroic characters – yet he has to be pushed to do this. More importantly perhaps, is that he deviates from the traditional active male heroic character. Instead of just going to war as he is supposed to, and instead of fighting the witch, he hides in his moving castle so that he is harder to locate.

Wizard Howl is, in many ways, a failed hero at the beginning of the books. He is from Wales, and very much like Tristran, he enters a magical fairy tale land to explore and become a traditional hero in. Yet Howl, in contrast to Tristran, does not want to go on an adventure; he just wants to hide in his castle and avoid both the war and the big bad villain, two things a hero is often expected to participate in or defeat. He also appears to have a need to be taken care of – which we particularly see in the scene where he is sick with a cold, the least heroic scene in the whole novel. He says "'I feel ill,' he announced. 'I'm going to bed, where I may die.'" (Jones, p. 207) and "Help me, someone! I'm dying from neglect up here!" (Jones, p. 207) He is under no illusion that he is supposed to appear strong and independent as a man – instead, he whines, cries, and demands comfort when he feels Sick. He does not act as a powerful hero or wizard at all, but rather like a young, spoiled child. Yet, later in the novel he does go on to fight the witch – making him both a powerful and unheroic character.

The first thing we learn about Howl is that he amuses himself by "collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them." (Jones, p. 4) Instead, the reader learns that he does not have a heart himself, and that he is simply a flirt. The rumours about him are in fact literal. When Sophie starts to clean his whole castle, she comes across the bathroom with containers of beauty products. At first she assumes that are literal parts of girls; "She took every one of them down, on the pretext of scrubbing the shelf, and spent most of a day carefully going through them to see if the labels SKIN, EYES, and HAIR were in fact pieces of girl. As far as she could tell, they were all just creams and powders and paint." (Jones, p. 70) As has been

44

covered earlier in this thesis, female characters are supposed to be beautiful – whether this is consciously or unconsciously done. Howl, however, is very conscious about his appearance, a trait uncommon in male characters. He even has a meltdown when he dyes his hair the wrong colour. As we see, he is a character with a wide variety of traits that does not make him traditionally feminine or masculine – instead, he is his own version of himself, and expresses himself in the ways that he wishes too. And while he does come to accept his role in the story in the end, and after being badgered by Sophie about it, he does in a way become a hero. Although, he is not the only one, and it was a group effort – in a way, they are all heroes in their own right, which makes this a story without a single, solitary hero.

As Brown points out in her essay, there are also signs of the feminine in Tristran Thorn. This novel is, very much like *Howl's Moving Castle*, rooted in the real world - although *Stardust* is rooted firmly in Victorian England. Due to this there are certain expectations of how Tristran is supposed to be a good man, but "rather than following the socially approved male path towards scientific discovery or practical action (becoming a respectable merchant, perhaps), [Tristran] takes flight into the world of feminine desire, the realm of fantasy. It is during this flight that the hero undergoes transformations that call into question traditional associations of the heroic with *masculinity*." (Brown, p. 219) By showing him in a way that would, at the time the novel is set, have been considered feminine, Gaiman creates a connection between the heroic and femininity through Tristran. This is even more apparent when Tristran is contrasted to his hypermasculine uncles, who exist on the opposite of the spectrum. While Tristran is innocent, idealistic and wants to win his one, true love, his uncles are experienced, dangerous, and wholly after the power they will gain through acquiring their father's throne. As Brown also points out, he is not considered masculine in way of the Victorians, who were practical and focused on being intelligent. The man's strength was his mind – and thus he had no time for flights of fancy. Instead, Tristan "takes *flight* into the world of feminine desire, the realm of fantasy." (Brown, p. 219) In short, Tristran has more in common with the women than the men of the period. Due to this, he calls "into question traditional associations of the heroic with *masculinity." (*Brown, p. 219) He is heroic in a very feminine way. Instead of focusing on getting a trade, he romanticises his relationship with Victoria Forester, and hopes to win her hand through a fantastical and romantic quest. "His love for Victoria is represented as innocent, gullible, and idealistic" (Brown, p. 218) While his love for Yvaine is more realistic, and not based on having to find her a treasure to win her heart. While he grows and learns, he still remains a unmasculine character that goes against the norms of both his time and more modern norms.

In the film adaptation of Stardust, the movie did an interesting change to the story that expanded on a male character who was only briefly mentioned in the novel – Captain Shakespeare. His addition to the cast in the film only emphasises what this thesis argues. At first, he appears as another hyper masculine character. He is a pirate captain and appears to have no hesitation when it comes to killing. This is the front he presents to his crew. Behind closed doors though, he enjoys make up and dressing up in feminine and pretty clothes. It is also heavily implied that he is gay. Yet, he is the character that has the greatest impact on Tristran in the film, and ultimately teaches him how to be a real man. By showing his true self to Tristran, he teaches Tristran how to embrace himself as a person too. Captain Shakespeare is a man stuck in a career that forces him to be as dangerously masculine as possible, when in reality he is not. When the truth comes out, one of the most touching scenes of the film takes place. Instead of being denounced by the crew for not being as hyper-masculine as they thought he was, he is instead accepted by them for who he is. Much like Tristran, he is rewarded for being true to his own self – and by ultimately accepting his feminine side and denouncing his constructed hyper-masculine side.

The reality is that men who do not conform to the masculine ideals tend to struggle with both their self-image and their place in society. Hourihan argues that a source of this discomfort can come from the way that masculinity is presented in both fairy tales, children's literature, and modern media. It is impossible to reach these standards, and as Attebery also argued, this can lead to an anxiety in men. This, in turn, leads to "rising rates of suicide amongst young men, the despair of many divorced fathers, the prevalence of male violence against women […] loneliness, and a sense of powerlessness experienced by young men who have learnt to suppress their emotions and sensitivity to win admission to the male 'club'." (Hourihan, p. 70) The hyper individualistic traits of many masculine characters are not always necessarily good to look up to, as was discussed above with the brothers in S*tardust.* For them, these traits only led to their destruction. Meanwhile characters such as Tristran and Wizard Howl, who were not traditionally masculine fairy tale heroes got their happy endings by realizing certain truths about what it takes to be happy. Tristran learned that the love that can be earned in fairy tales is not what it is made up to be, while Howl learns how to be more active in his own life by making decisions and doing his duty. As a reward, they both found love in the end. These are great messages for young readers; instead of performing a gender perception that they might not fully identify with, they are instead presented with male characters that get a happy ending by simply being themselves. The fact that love is the ultimate happy ending is problematic in itself, but it is less problematic than the traditional

goals of wealth and power. And they did these things by performing masculinity in the way that they themselves wished to perform it.

As Hourihan concludes, "such figures are not helpful models for ordinary boys and men who are full of normal imperfections, who must live in a mundane world where there are no unequivocally evil enemies to fight against, and who must learn to develop their internal as well as their external lives." (Hourihan, p. 71) Instead, realistic characters that do not embody unhealthy hyper-masculine ideals (like the brothers in *Stardust* do*),* could provide good role models for young readers. By bending the gender norms and tropes that are inherent in fairy tales and children's literature, Diana Wynne Jones and Neil Gaiman created two great protagonists in Wizard Howl and Tristran who follow their own notions of what it means to be masculine.

3:5: Conclusion

De Beauvoir argues that "Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words pretty and ugly; she soon knows that to be pleased is to be pretty as a picture; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales." (qtd. In "Feminist Perspectives on the Body") This is how a woman experiences living in her own body – constantly comparing herself to beauty ideals, found for example in fairy tales. The male experiences this differently. Instead of being the one gazed at, and the one that has to constantly make sure they are still beautiful, the male is instead the one that holds the gaze. He is the subject, while the woman is his object. As a result of this, the patriarchal system places the man at the top of the hierarchy. While this is a beneficial place to be for the man, it also has negative sides. In a patriarchal system, everyone is trapped and without the ability to choose - which often forces men into taking an aggressive, hypermasculine role, whether it fits them personally or not. As we have seen from earlier texts about fairy tale heroes, they are supposed to be adventurous, brave, and cunning. Their ultimate goal is to become a hero and slay their foe, resulting in them gaining power, riches, and a wife. For many this is naturally undesirable, not to mention heteronormative, and also creates an ideal that men have a hard time to live up to. Due to this, it is important to provide alternatives to masculinity - one that can encompass a wider variety of masculinity that younger readers can relate to.

The first section of this chapter detailed traditional aspects and characteristics of the hero and his journey, and then used Tristran Thorn as an example of a heroic character that subverts his role. While he is not a traditional fairy tale hero, he still earns the traditional fairy

tale hero's reward; he gets power, a kingdom, and a queen to rule by his side. The second section's goal was to detail the destructive side of toxic masculinity, by showing characters that though they were on their own hero's quest with a noble goal. Instead, it was a twisted form of the trope born out of the lust for power and violence. The third and last section deals with male characters that have arguably feminine characteristics - like for example Wizard Howl from *Howl's Moving Castle*. By examining all of these types of male characters, this thesis has provided an alternative to male representations in fairy tale stories such as these, as alongside stereotypical female characters, male characters also need to be broken free from their gendered norms and rules so as to provide a wider variety of realistic heroes for young boys and girls to admire and identify with.

4: THESIS CONCLUSION

4.1: Summary

Subverting the gender norms of fairy tales and children's literature will lead to a more inclusive variety of characters that the readers can admire and identify with. As Paul points out, "What feminist theory has done for children's literature studies - and for all fields of literary study - is to insist on the right to be included, not just as honorary white men." (Paul, p. 115–116). The texts that are the focus of this thesis, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Stardust,* illustrate the importance of this through their depictions of characters and themes.

Howl's Moving Castle subverts femininity by challenging the notions of beauty through its protagonist Sophie. Due to Sophie's sudden transformation into an old woman, she ultimately becomes more comfortable being herself without having to consider the suppression of both the male gaze and the gender norms of traditional fairy tales that she has trapped herself under. Yet she still retains aspects of the traditionally feminine – she is almost aggressively domestic in her conquering of Howl's castle, and as Mendlesohn argues, "Jones has consistently insisted that the fantastic takes place in the same realm as the domestic." (Mendlesohn, p. 108) Wizard Howl's journey complements Sophies journey in that "Sophie learns to reject the story line she has been handed, but Howl learns instead to accept the storyability of his life" (Mendlesohn, p. 105–106). As a passive character that almost mimics passive female fairy tale characters, Howl has to become more active so that he ultimately can end up saving the day; and this only happens because of Sophie pushing him to this. Ultimately, *Howl's Moving Castle* encourages all of its characters to embrace who they really are so that they can take control of their own destiny, whatever gender and sex they might have. Messages like this are important for young readers, in contrast to more traditionalistic fairy tale stories where children are encouraged to fit into whatever box that corresponds with their sex.

Stardust subverts tropes in a different way. While the main characters Tristran Thorn and the star Yvaine do differ from the traditional hero and damsel in distress, the greatest effect comes from the over-exaggeration of the femininity and masculinity of the witches and the princes in this story. Tristran is an atypical hero, in that he (at first), only is a hero because he is on a journey – but for reasons that the text emphasises as ridiculous and even selfish, while also pointing out how fundamentally selfish it is of traditional heroic characters to go on adventures for power. Yvaine is an atypical damsel in distress, simply because she opposes

the hero at every single turn. Yet, they still manage to fall in love at the end. It is the exaggeration of the witches and the princes that is the most effective subversion in this story though. Both groups go to extreme lengths to be able to keep up with their notions of what constitutes the height of femininity and masculinity. The witches are willing to kill to attain magical power so that they can look young and beautiful, while the princes kill their own brothers just so that they can ultimately be the king of the hill. Both of these groups of villains lose because of this, and what wins is love.

While the effect of subverting these gender roles can seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, it can be a good start when it comes to creating more varied gender representations in media. For children and young adult readers, stories, and representations like these show that their own individual stories can take many forms, and that they do not have to abide by the roles that can be found in older stories of this kind. This subversion also leaves room for the fairy tales to keep so much of what makes these stories so attractive and magical to all audiences. Ultimately, these stories will show the readers that as long as they just follow their own truths, they will still end up winning love and happiness, and live happily ever after like the heroes and heroines in these two texts.

4.2: Possible Future Studies

Some possible avenues for future studies could be to examine how subversion of gender appears in more modern texts than the ones covered by this thesis. How has gender been represented the past ten years? Or the past five years? This would be especially interesting considering that genres like young adult and children's literature have more and more diverse characters as the years progress. It would be particularly interesting to see if the way male and female characters' depictions has changed at all since the publication of *Stardust* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, and the possible effects of this.

Had the scope of this thesis been bigger, it would have been worthwhile to dedicate a chapter to characters that do not identify as either male or female. There has in general been little focus on nonbinary characters in any form of literature, so it would be interesting to see how they appear in fairy tale and children's literature, and in what ways they are represented. Not identifying as either man or woman is, in many ways, the ultimate subversion of gender roles, as it denies the binary altogether and crafts a new type of gender expression. This would also make an examination of these themes through a queer lens instead of a feminist one particularly interesting.

50

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