

Howl's Moving Castle Study Guide

Howl's Moving Castle by Diana Wynne Jones

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Overview

Howl's Moving Castle is, on the surface at least, a fast-paced romantic romp through a familiar fairy tale landscape populated by witches and warlocks, shapeshifting characters, fire demons, and magic castles. All of these conventional elements are highly entertaining in themselves, as one may expect; however, they are also critical components of the intricate, humorous plotting for which Jones is famous. It is a measure of Jones's great talent that they are furthermore essential components of her theme, for she employs these customary accouterments of fantasy in such a way as to make readers question their own preconceived notions about such serious topics as selfidentity and self-expectation, the personal and social relevance of age, and the many faces and meanings of love.

The author places this entire mixture into yet another familiar context, that of the battle between good and evil, which is expressed here as a struggle between forces which affirm life and the individual, and those which degrade or destroy life. Unlike many fantasies which portray this same battle (for instance, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955] and C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* [1950-1956]), here it is above all perceptual, rather than physical, in character, for it depends on the intricate play of truth and illusion, appearance and reality.

For example, although the reader is always sure Sophie Hatter is on the side of right and the Witch of the Waste is on the side of wrong, there frequently remains doubt as to which side Wizard Howl and his associates belong.

Jones does not perceive such important problems as the difference between reality and illusion or good and evil as pertinent only to the realm of fantasy: The magical door in Howl's castle opens onto not only the fairy landscape of Ingary, but that of modern Wales as well. That is why she places Howl's young nephew, Neil, who is as enthralled by outward appearances as his uncle, firmly within the contemporary Welsh landscape.

The parallel worlds encourage the reader to make connections between a world governed by magic and one governed by media; for both, Jones seems to say, have much in common, much that can harm the dignity (to judge from Neil) and authenticity (to judge from Howl) of the individual. Thus the novel is not only a fantasy romance, but also a cautionary tale, for it reminds the reader that images and appearances can be readily manipulated, with potentially disastrous results.

About the Author

Diana Wynne Jones was born on August 16, 1934, in London, England, to parents who were both educators. Twenty-two years later, in 1956, she received a Bachelor's degree from St. Anne's College, Oxford and married John A. Burrow, a university professor.

Jones began writing as a child so that she and her sisters would have interesting, exciting, and entertaining material to read; this resourceful and inventive attitude towards literature and its production is still evident in her work today. Indeed, the importance of the family and its relationships is a central concern in early works like *The Ogre Downstairs* and *Eight Days of Luke*, both of which examine from a child's perspective dysfunctional familial environments.

Very little information is available about Jones. She translates the raw material and curious perspectives garnered from her experience as homemaker into her fiction, which has as its hallmark the same profuse vitality and comic interaction as the life she apparently leads. In fact, Jones's fresh and unconventional attitude is encapsulated in one of her more telling comments about her writing: She says that her greatest challenge in writing for youth is to make everything simple enough for adults to grasp. A good motto for this singular author would clearly be, "Expect the unexpected."

Gifted with an inventive mind, a quirkily perceptive eye, and a sharp ear for the quips, barbs, and puns which delight the young of all ages, Jones creates work that is anything but dull. It is with good reason, then, that her books have won many honors and awards. In 1975, she received the British Library Association's distinguished Carnegie Medal for *Dogsbody*, and received it again in 1977 for *Charmed Life* (which went on to receive the Guardian Award the next year). She was also awarded the Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book Award in 1984 for *Archer's Goon*, and both *Fire and Hemlock* and *Howl's Moving Castle* were placed by Horn Book on its Honor Lists of 1984 and 1987, respectively.



Plot Summary

Sophie is doomed to live a dreary, boring life. She is the oldest of three sisters, which, as everyone knows, means that she will be the first to fail should she go out and seek her fortune. To make things worse, she is not even poor or ugly. She is a rather pretty girl from a fairly well off family. So far as Sophie can see, she is doomed to spend the rest of her boring life in her father's hat shop.

One day, everything changes in a rather unexpected way. A grand lady enters the hat shop and asks to see some hats. Sophie knows that none of her hats are right for this lady and asks why she bothers to shop there. This grand lady turns out to be the wicked Witch of the Waste, and she is angry at Sophie. The Witch believes that Sophie Hatter is actually Lettie Hatter, and curses her by casting a spell on her to make her old. Once Sophie realizes that she is now a ninety-year-old woman, she decides that she has no option other than to leave the hat shop and the familiar town of Market Chipping.

On her walk toward Upper Folding, Sophie has three magical encounters. First, she finds a poor scarecrow laying on the roadside. Sophie takes the scarecrow and plans him upright on the hedge, believing that this will give him a better chance at being found. Little does she know that she has talked life into this scarecrow or that he is not at all what he seems to be. Next, Sophie finds a poor wild dog trapped in a hedge, with a rope tied around his neck. Sophie rescues the dog, who runs away quickly. Finally, Sophie finds Howl's moving castle outside town. Sophie commands the castle to stop and it does so.

In the castle, Sophie makes herself quite at home. While living with Howl, Sophie discovers that the wicked Howl is not so wicked after all; Howl's apprentice is in love with Sophie's sister; and Sophie herself possesses a powerful gift of magic. She can talk ordinary objects into being alive. Sophie also discovers that she is not the only one under a terrible curse by the Witch of the Waste.



Chapters 1 through 3

Chapters 1 through 3 Summary

In Chapter 1, in the town of Market Chipping, in the land of Ingary, live three sisters and their father and mother. The family owns a hat shop and the girls attend an expensive private school. Sophie is the oldest of the sisters, and therefore is doomed to fail first. Lettie is the middle sister, and is doomed to fail also, second only to her older sister. Martha, on the other hand, is the youngest, and therefore the most likely to succeed. After the father dies, the mother discovers that they don't quite have enough money to keep the shop open and the girls in school. Fanny explains this to the girls, and tells them of their fates. Martha, as the youngest and most likely to find her fortune, is apprenticed to a witch. This will give Martha wealthy courtly friends and witchcraft to help her find her fortune. Lettie, who is unlikely to be successful, is apprenticed to a baker, where she can make a decent living, and hope to attract a good husband. Sophie, being the oldest, is apprenticed to Fanny, and will take over the hat shop after Fanny retires.

After her sisters leave, Sophie spends all of her time making hats for the shop. As spring approaches, business increases, leaving Sophie little time for anything other than hat making. On May Day, Sophie finally works up the courage and will to cross town to see her sister Lettie. Of course, Sophie knows that the Wizard Howl has been seen around the town in his moving castle. Of course, she knows that it is dangerous to leave home alone, as Wizard Howl has been known to kidnap young girls, and steal their souls. Sophie figures that if she runs across town to the baker shop quickly, that she should be alright. Once in the baker's shop, Sophie finds herself in a dense crowd. Lettie sees Sophie, and takes a quick break to talk to her sister, who she has not seen in quite some time. Lettie takes Sophie into a back room and gives her a cream cake. When Sophie tells her sister how glad she is to see her, Lettie replies that she is glad Sophie is sitting down. She is not Lettie. She is Martha.

In Chapter 2, after talking to her sister Martha, and hearing the story of why the two switched places, Sophie begins to wonder if she is being taken advantage of. Martha points out that even though she is an apprentice, she is still drawing a wage. When asked about a wage, Fanny promises to talk to Sophie about it after she has done the book keeping. Fanny never mentions the wage again. One day, while Sophie is alone in the shop, a grand woman enters the shop. This woman is clearly too well off to be shopping in this hat shop, but she asks Sophie to see some hats anyways. Sophie brings out hat after hat, each of which the woman denies. Finally, this grand woman tells Sophie that none of her hats are good for her. Sophie asks why the woman bothered coming into the shop. The grand woman answers that she knows who Sophie is, and that she always bothers when someone tries to compete with the Witch of the Waste. Sophie does not know what the woman is talking about, but does now realize that this woman is the Witch of the Waste, and that she is there because Miss Hatter has in some way become competition to her. The witch casts a spell on Sophie, making her an



old woman. Sophie will not be able to tell anyone about the spell. Not wanting to remain home an old woman, Sophie sets off to seek her fortune. Outside of town, Sophie finds Howl's moving castle and orders it to stop. It stops.

In Chapter 3, when Sophie makes for the large black door in front of her, she realizes that there is a barrier around the castle. Sophie roams around the castle until she finally finds the back door, and figures out how to get through the barrier. When Sophie gets inside the castle, she notices that there is a young man holding the door. He is trying to close it, but will not close it on Sophie. Sophie manages to get to a chair in front of the fire before the young man can say very much. She tells him that she needs to see Wizard Howl. The very polite boy introduces himself as Michael. Michael is Howl's apprentice, but Howl is out for the night. Michael offers to help her, but Sophie insists that only the Wizard can help. Michael is unwilling to turn the old lady out, so he eventually just goes to bed. Sophie wakes up to find that the fire has mostly burned down. She throws a few logs on the fire and settles back into her chair to figure out just what she is going to do. As Sophie sits and thinks, she notices how much the fire looks like a face. Sophie talks to herself, as many old women do, and the fire answers her. Sophie discovers that this fire is a fire demon, who is bound by a contract to do Howl's bidding. The fire offers to break Sophie's spell if she will agree to break his contract to Howl. However, neither Sophie nor the fire demon are allowed to explain the nature of their problems. The fire demon tells Sophie that she must stay so that he can observe her and try to figure out how to break her spell, and that she must study him as well so that she can break his contract. As the fire demon settles down and sings a lazy song, Sophie falls asleep.

Chapters 1 through 3 Analysis

In Chapter 1, Sophie is the oldest of three sisters, and although all three sisters did grow up pretty, she is also the plainest. Sophie knows that since she is the oldest sister, that she will be the first to seek out her fortune and fail. Sophie does not dream of running off with princes, but she does wish that life were a little more interesting. After her sisters leave, and business picks up, Sophie does not have anyone to talk to. She is kept in the back, working on hats, and so does not get to talk to the customers often. Fanny is always so busy working with the customers and the merchants, and the other workers treat Sophie as the future boss, and are not comfortable talking to her as they do amongst themselves. Without anyone to talk to, Sophie simply talks to the hats. When Martha is sent off with a better chance to find her fortune, and Lettie is sent off to where she might find a good husband, Sophie feels that each sister is handled appropriately. She is not surprised when she finds that she is stuck in the hat shop. Sophie is resigned to her fate because that is simple how it is. Lettie, on the other hand, is not so resigned, and refuses to accept that she can't succeed. Lettie does accept her apprenticeship to the baker, but when Sophie goes to see her, Sophie finds that it is Martha, not Lettie who has taken apprenticeship with the baker.

In Chapter 2, Martha never wanted to learn witchcraft, but Lettie did. Martha only wants to find a good husband and have ten children. When Martha and Lettie use a spell to



swap places, they are happy. Now, they are only worried about Sophie, who is being exploited by Fanny. Sophie does all the work in the hat shop, while Fanny goes out gadding about. Sophie spends the next few days thinking about this, and decides that Fanny is probably taking advantage of her. When a customer comes in complaining that her bonnet did not attract any rich men, as it did for another girl, Sophie loses her temper and then loses a customer. Immediately after, the Witch of the Waste enters the shop. Sophie knows that this grand woman is not likely to find a hat that is a good match for her here, so she brings out the worst matches first, trying to convince the woman that she should go elsewhere. For some reason, the witch is angry with Miss Hatter. The witch accuses Sophie of setting herself up to compete with the witch. When Sophie discovers the nature of the spell, she is not angry. Sophie decides that an old woman better suits her personality than a pretty young girl anyways, although she does have the unfortunate experience of discovering the ailments of old age first hand. Being old does seem to calm Sophie, and causes her to look at the world in a very different way.

In Chapter 3, when Sophie discovers the barrier around the castle, she is not put off. Instead, she sets out to find another way in. Michael is too polite to kick her out, and Sophie thinks it strange that a nice boy like Michael would apprentice to a heartless wizard like Howl. To Sophie, Michael seems more like the son of a wealthy farmer. The fire demon needs Sophie to break his contract with Howl, and tricks her into a bargain. He assures her that the moment she breaks his contract, he will break her spell. Sophie agrees, but then she learns that the fire demon is not able to tell her the nature of his contract's main clause. The fire demon will study Sophie to find the nature of her spell, and wants her to stay around so that she can do the same for him. Sophie's better judgment warned her about making a deal with the demon, just as it did about entering the castle to start with. However, in her old age, Sophie is nearly as worried about the dangers to her own safety as she was when she was young.



Chapters 4 through 6

Chapters 4 through 6 Summary

In Chapter 4, when Sophie wakes up, she is almost convinced that she dreamed the entire thing. However, to her dismay, Sophie discovers that she is indeed in the wizard's castle, and that she has truly made a deal with a fire demon, and that she has been spelled old. When Michael wakes up, he offers Sophie some bread and cheese. Sophie counters that perhaps they should have bacon and eggs instead. Michael explains that Calcifer the fire demon will only bend his head for Howl, and so no one else is able to cook on him. Sophie tells Calcifer that he can bend his head for her to cook on, or she can tell Howl about their agreement. Calcifer is not happy about it, but he does allow Sophie to cook on him. When Howl arrives, he asks who Sophie is. Sophie realizes that Howl is the young man who saw her in town on May Day and called her a mouse. Sophie lies and says that she has never met Howl before. She pretends to be his new cleaning lady, so that she may stay on. Instead of commenting on Sophie's appearance at his home, Howl simply adds more bacon and eggs to the pan, and finishes cooking breakfast for them. Michael explains to Sophie that the castle is an illusion, that the only real part is Howl's old home in Porthaven. The front door has a knob above it, which allows Howl to change where the door opens to. When the king's chancellor arrives to pay Howl for the seven league boots, Sophie is amazed to see Kingsbury beyond the open door.

In Chapter 5, Sophie sets out to do some major cleaning, and if at all possible, find the pile of chewed hearts and girls' souls that must be lying around somewhere. Michael and Calcifer both complain endlessly to Howl about Sophie's incessant cleaning, but Howl simply orders Sophie not to kill any spiders. Despite their complaints, Sophie continues cleaning around Michael and Calcifer until she finishes every room save Howl's. When she goes upstairs to tackle Howl's room, Sophie finds Howl blocking the doorway. Howl explains that he figured it was only a matter of time before Sophie decided to clean his room, and that he would have none of it. Howl tells Sophie that she is not allowed to clean his room, or the yard outside. When Howl rips his sleeve on a piece of iron outside, Sophie offers to sew it for him. Howl demonstrates that he doesn't need her by doing it himself, magically. Howl tells Sophie that she had best go back inside and find some other purpose to be there.

In Chapter 6, Howl does not go out for several days. Instead, he stays in and makes spells, and teaches Michael magic lessons. Finally, Howl does go out, under the pretense of going for a walk, and returns in despair. Howl orders Calcifer to draw him a hot bath, and asks Sophie if she has reorganized his spells. Sophie assures Howl that the spells are all in the same order as he left them, but they are not. After his bath, Howl comes out of the bathroom wailing in despair. His hair seems only to have a slightly red tint to it, yet he feels that his hair is ruined. When Howl begins to wail even louder, and the room itself begins to change, Michael decides that it is a good time to take Sophie outside. Michael points out that it is probably safer for them to leave for a time,



especially if Howl blames Sophie for his hair. After the yelling dies down, Sophie and Michael return to find Howl sitting in a chair, covered in green slime. The slime covers almost all of the main room, even threatening to put Calcifer out. Sophie takes Howl to the bath, and eventually Michael is able to get him into clean clothes. Sophie washes the slime out of the room, and warms some milk for Howl. Howl will not talk to them, and barely moves on his own. Finally, Sophie is able to get him talking by asking the right questions. She asks if it's about the girl who he has fallen in love with, which of course, it is.

Chapters 4 through 6 Analysis

In Chapter 4, when Sophie wakes up the next day, she realizes that she had simply been in shock the day before. Sophie is indeed very angry with the Witch of the Waste, and would do terrible things to her if only she had the opportunity. Sophie is uncertain of how much is real and how much was dream until Calcifer reminds her of their bargain. When Howl shows up, he recognizes Sophie for just a moment. Sophie does not want to admit that she is the fearful girl from Market Chipping who Howl pitied on May Day. After Howl heads off to take his bath, Michael explains that even if Sophie is allowed to stay on, that she should not expect to pin Howl down on anything, as he is not one who likes to be pinned down.

In Chapter 5, Sophie cleans the house not only because it is in terrible need of it, but also as an excuse to nose around for clues about Calcifer's contract. Sophie is still convinced that Howl must be eating the souls and hearts of innocent girls, but can not find any evidence. Calcifer and Michael do not like Sophie cleaning constantly, and complain just as constantly. Howl practically ignores Sophie. If he does not acknowledge her, he does not have to commit to either throwing her out or letting her stay. Howl does not like to commit to anything, and indeed does not like anything at all unpleasant. Sophie points this out to Howl, who does not deny it. Howl does demonstrate that he does not really need her around, as he has magic that is powerful enough to do anything she can do. Michael admits that he does not know why Howl is allowing her to stay, but says that it is likely due to Calcifer.

In Chapter 6, Sophie learns that Howl does not really steal souls from young girls or eat their hearts. Howl will often fall in love with a girl, only to lose interest in her once she falls for him. Until the girl falls for him, Howl is unable to think about anything else, and does many senseless things. Michael always longs for the time that a girl will fall for Howl, as it is the only time he can stand to be around Howl. Sophie asks why Howl can be so heartless as to lead these girls on then leave them. Calcifer tells her that Howl can not help it, as it is simply the way he is made. When Howl throws his tantrum, Sophie feels bad for him. She warms him some milk and asks him about the girl. However, with each sentence, Sophie's sympathy for Howl shrinks. Finally, her sympathy disappears entirely when she discovers who Howl's most recent would be victim is. It would seem that when Martha, disguised as Lottie, told Sophie about her man, she was not talking about someone from the baker's shop.



Chapters 7 through 9

Chapters 7 through 9 Summary

In Chapter 7, Sophie plans to go find Martha and warn her that her suitor is none other than the evil Wizard Howl, but a particularly bad fit of aches keeps her inside. When Sophie finally decides to go down to Market Chipping, Howl rushes out of the door past her, headed to an audience with the king. When Howl has left, and Sophie tries once again to leave, Michael pushes past her, rushing out the door. When Sophie again tries to leave, Calcifer stops her, asking that she leave some logs in his reach. Finally, when Sophie manages to get to the door, she hears a knock on the castle door. Believing that it is Michael come back already, she opens the door. Instead of Michael, Sophie finds a scarecrow looking back at her. It is the scarecrow that she propped in the hedge on her way out of Market Chipping the day of the spell. Calcifer feels sorry for Sophie, and speeds up the castle to get away from the scarecrow. When Michael gets back, he is jubilant. Sophie asks him what is going on, and Michael explains that he is in love with Lettie Hatter, and that she loves him back. Sophie tells Michael that Lettie is Sophie's sister's granddaughter. When Howl returns, he wants Sophie to blacken his name to the king, so that he will not want Howl to find Prince Justin.

In Chapter 8, Howl prepares to go out to see Lettie, but when he opens the door, the scarecrow is standing outside. After a brief struggle with the scarecrow, Howl manages to push it out of the doorway and back onto the hills. After the scarecrow refuses to leave, Howl casts a powerful spell and casts the scarecrow far away. When he comes back inside to apologize to Sophie, he notices that her heart is acting up. Howl and Calcifer do something that strengthens her heart, and then Howl is off to see his beloved. Sophie is determined to go see her sister to warn her about Howl, and Michael shows her the seven league boots. Each step will take them ten and a half leagues, which is just about the right distance. When Sophie tries to use the boot, she accidentally steps down again, and is zipped right past Upper Folding and to the beginning of a marsh. When she tries to return, her momentum causes her to zip past Upper Folding, the castle, Market Chipping, and a great mansion. Eventually Sophie and Michael make it to Upper Folding and out of the boots. When they arrive at Mrs. Fairfax's house, Michael and Sophie discover that Howl is already there, out in the orchard with Lettie. Mrs. Fairfax tells them that she knew at once who Howl was, and doesn't believe the rumors. She has encouraged Lettie to try to fall in love with Howl, who would make a great teacher to her. Michael and Sophie finally make it back to the castle, only to find some one furiously knocking on the Porthaven door. Calcifer informs them that he has been knocking almost from the moment they left.

In Chapter 9, the knocking was due to the sea captain, who had returned for his spell shortly after Michael and Sophie left. He is angry with Michael for making him wait, and threatens to take it up with Howl if he misses the tide. After giving the captain his spell, Michael sets to work on a spell of his own. It is an advanced spell, and Michael is having trouble with it. After trying several things, Michael's spell finally blows up in his



face. He goes to Sophie for help, and the two of them spend all day going over the spell, trying to riddle it out. Sophie suggests that the steps in the spell might actually be literal, and they have to start by catching a falling star. Michael and Sophie set out with the seven league boots to find a falling star. Once they see one, Micheal takes off after it, and almost catches it. Just before Michael can catch the star, it plunges into the water and dies. Michael is sad and decides that this spell is too advanced for him. He will have to ask Howl. Michael and Sophie go home.

Chapters 7 through 9 Analysis

In Chapter 7, Sophie is worried about her sister. Martha is posing as the much older Lettie, and would seem to be Howl's newest love. Once Martha falls in love with Howl, he is certain to break her heart. Sophie wants to warn Martha, but does not get a chance. Michael is in love with Martha, but thinks that her name is Lettie. Sophie finds out that Howl is in love with a different Lettie, who could only be the real Lettie, disguised as Martha. Sophie approves of Michael and Martha, thinking that they will make a good match, but is worried about Lettie, who is still in danger of having her heart broken by Howl.

In Chapter 8, Sophie is surprised to find that Mrs. Fairfax knows about Lettie and Martha. Mrs. Fairfax assures Sophie that she would recognize one of her honey based spells anywhere. She doesn't mind, as she would rather have a willing student than not, but she does insist that if it is Lettie who is her apprentice, then she must be herself.

In Chapter 9, Sophie wonders if Howl might actually love Lettie, but Michael and Calcifer assure her that they don't. This doesn't help Sophie's feelings any, but Michael tells her that everyone gets over everything eventually. This is his way of trying to make her feel better about Lettie's inevitable heart ache. When Michael comes close to the falling star, they can see that it is made up of light, and is alive. The star asks them what they want. Michael assures the star that they will not hurt it, and that they only want to catch it. The star seems more fearful of being caught than anything else, and quickly plunges to its death to avoid capture.



Chapters 10 through 12

Chapters 10 through 12 Summary

In Chapter 9, the knocking was due to the sea captain, who had returned for his spell shortly after Michael and Sophie left. He is angry with Michael for making him wait, and threatens to take it up with Howl if he misses the tide. After giving the captain his spell, Michael sets to work on a spell of his own. It is an advanced spell, and Michael is having trouble with it. After trying several things, Michael's spell finally blows up in his face. He goes to Sophie for help, and the two of them spend all day going over the spell, trying to riddle it out. Sophie suggests that the steps in the spell might actually be literal, and they have to start by catching a falling star. Michael and Sophie set out with the seven league boots to find a falling star. Once they see one, Micheal takes off after it, and almost catches it. Just before Michael can catch the star, it plunges into the water and dies. Michael is sad, and decides that this spell is too advanced for him. He will have to ask Howl. Michael and Sophie go home.

In Chapter 10, the next morning, Howl confronts Sophie about the suit that she destroyed and her trip to Upper Fold. Then, Howl leaves to go see the king. Since Michael could not work the spell without Howl's help, he decides to go see Martha. When Michael returns, he tries to make it look as if he were busy. Instead, Sophie asks him how her niece was doing. The result is that when Howl returns home, he finds them laughing, and definitely not working. The king has publicly and officially requested that Howl go find his brother, and if at all possible, kill the Witch of the Waste. Howl is in a black mood, and is likely to once again generate the annoying green slime. Sophie finally agrees to go blacken his name to the king, and Michael finally gets to talk to Howl about the spell. Howl informs Michael that this is not a spell, but is instead a song. He realizes now that Sophie looked out the door while the knob was turned to the black spot. Howl decides to go look for the rest of his song, and tells Michael and Sophie to come along behind him.

In Chapter 11, Michael and Sophie follow Howl through the door. They step through the nothingness, which only lasts for an inch or so, then they emerged on a concrete road. Howl takes them to his sister's house. Michael and Sophie are amazed at the magic boxes, which have moving pictures on them. Howl's sister calls him Howell. Howl's nephew, Neil, is a video game fanatic. He is playing a video game when Howl unplugs his computer. Neil is annoyed at Howl for doing it, but admits that he had Howl's weird note. Howl gives Neil a new video game, which features the moving castle. Howl goes to Neil's English teacher's house to make the trade. He turns Neil's poem over to the English teacher and retrieves his spell.

In Chapter 12, Howl leads Sophie and Michael to his teacher's palace. They are led by a page boy to Mrs. Pentstemmon. Mrs. Pentstemmon greets them, and tells them that she is too ill to stand. She sends Howl and Michael away so that she can talk to Sophie alone. Mrs. Pentstemmon is worried that Howl is becoming evil. She asks Sophie if she



knows what has happened to Howl, so Sophie tells her about Calcifer. Pentstemmon informs her that demons do not understand good and evil, but they are willing to trade their power if a human has something to offer. Sophie must find out what Calcifer got from Howl in the bargain so that she can break the bargain. Pentstemmon tells Sophie that the same thing is said to have happened to the Witch of the Waste.

Chapters 10 through 12 Analysis

In Chapter 10, Howl knows that Sophie has followed him to Upper Fold, but does not know that Michael was with her. He also does not know that Sophie is claiming Lettie as her niece, or that Michael is in love with another Lettie Hatter, who is actually her sister Martha. Howl admits that he would not be surprised to see Sophie even if he had found a girl on a distant ice burg to court. In fact, he admits that he would be rather disappointed in her now if he didn't. When Howl finds that Michael almost caught a star, he warns Michael that he should not try anything like that again and that it would have been bad if he had managed to catch the star. Calcifer asks what would be so bad about it, as Howl once caught a star himself. This was the hint that Calcifer promised Sophie, but she did not realize it.

In Chapter 11, Howl takes Michael and Sophie through the door and into a very modern Earth. Once they arrive on the asphalt, Howl transforms their cloths into more appropriate attire for the place. Michael is very uncomfortable in what is described as blue jeans, but Howl assures him that this is as it must be. Howl takes them to his sister's house to see his nephew, who has his spell. When Sophie and Michael enter the house, they find a television. They call this a magic box, as they have no such thing in their dimension. When Howl goes up to Neil's room, he unplugs the computer. When Michael and Sophie hear that Neil will lose his life, they don't understand that he means his lives in the computer game, and wonder at Howl's willingness to kill his own nephew. Sophie and Michael are just as amazed and even more terrified of Howl's car. At the beautiful English teacher's house, Howl is back to his old self again, and asks the lady to go to dinner with him. She turns him down. When the teacher reads the rest of the poem for Howl, he realizes that the Witch of the Waste's spell is soon to catch up to him. When he returns home, Howl finds that Calcifer feels it too.

In Chapter 12, Howl's old teacher knows him as Howell, and knows that he came from another world. She is concerned for his safety and sanity. Wizard Suliman was from the same world as Howl, and was known as Benjamin Sullivan. Mrs. Pentstemmon knew that Suliman was a very powerful wizard, and when Howl appeared from the same world, she realizes that he was also a great wizard, who was in fact even more imaginative than Suliman had been. Penstemmon knows that she is dying, but she is determined to set Howl right before she dies. She knows that something is wrong with him, that something is making him evil. Pentstemmon tells Sophie that she is a witch who can talk to things to bring them to life. After leaving the palace, Sophie realizes that this is true. She talked the walking stick into being a magic wand, and it was Sophie who accidentally enchanted Howl's suit so that it would charm all the ladies. Sophie realizes that it is her gift that probably caused the hat shop to do so much good

business after she begin making hats. Sophie now knows why the Witch of the Waste was angry with her, and cursed her for being competition.



Chapters 13 through 15

Chapters 13 through 15 Summary

In Chapter 13, Howl takes Sophie and Michael to see the king. At the palace, Sophie and Michael are passed from one courtier to another, until finally Sophie is alone and is introduced to the king. The king seems almost like a normal person until he speaks to Sophie, then the weight of his position bears down upon her, leaving her almost mute with stage fright. Sophie knows that she is supposed to delicately blacken Howl's name to the king, so that the king will still use him for small jobs, but not trust him to find his brother. Sophie only manages to tell the king how vain and whiny Howl is, and that he is a coward who sends his old mother to give excuses to the king. The king, however, is not convinced. He knows why Howl has sent Sophie to him, and believes that this is Howl's last resort. The king feels that if he refuses to yield, that Howl will go find Prince Justin after this. The king pronounces Howl the new Royal Wizard, and officially charges him with the job of finding the king's brother before the end of the year. On her way out, Sophie realizes that this is definitely not what Howl wanted to happen.

After leaving the palace, Sophie gets lost in the city. When she finally finds the street on which Pentstemmon lives, she also finds the Witch of the Waste. The Witch recognizes Sophie immediately, and quizzes her about why she is here. The Witch has killed Howl's old teacher, and so Sophie lies and says that she is on her way to see the king. The Witch leads her back to the palace, and waits to see if Sophie will be thrown out or not. When Sophie is taken back to the king, the king asks her what she has forgotten to tell him. Sophie says that Howl will only go in search of Prince Justin if the king will give Howl his daughter's hand in marriage. The king points out that this is not going to happen, and calls his daughter to him. The young princess, who only has four teeth and has not yet grown any hair, crawls out from behind the king's desk and babbles to Sophie in baby gibberish. Sophie feels even more foolish now, and the king assures her that he understands how a parent feels.

In Chapter 14, Sophie is escorted back to the disguised stables in a royal carriage, with ten of the king's men in attendance. When she arrives back, Michael rushes out to meet her. They were worried about her. Howl is in a terrible mood, as he now knows that the Witch is looking for him, that his teacher is dead, and that he is the new Royal Wizard. Howl informs Michael and Sophie that he has already been looking for Prince Justin, and that in fact, the prince had already come by the shop and bought a spell from Michael. Prince Justin is most likely looking for Wizard Suliman, but Howl doesn't know where he is either. Howl comes down with a cold, and is a terrible bother. A dog arrives at the castle, and transforms into a man. The dogman informs Sophie that Lettie is sad and heart broken, and has sent him to the castle. Sophie realizes that the dog is a bewitched human, but she is unable to break his spell.

In Chapter 15, Michael returns with an armload of stuff and some good news. Fanny is selling the hat shop in Market Chipping, and Michael talks Howl into buying it. Howl's



cold worsens as he goes into town to buy the shop, but he is still dead set on going to the funeral. While Howl is asleep, Sophie cuts up his charmed suit into seven pieces, then finishes sewing the other one back together. Michael casts a enlarging spell on the suit to bring it back up to Howl's size. Once the suit is the appropriate size, Sophie takes it back up to Howl's room. The next morning, Howl oversleeps. Neither Sophie or Michael want to wake him, as both believe that this whole funeral business is a terrible idea, and hope that he will miss it. When Howl does wake up, he comes downstairs in his suit, which is probably several miles long, with buttons the size of millstones. Howl goes into the bathroom, and does not emerge for another two hours. When finally he does come out, he is dressed head to toe in black, with black hair and a black earring. Then, Howl disguises himself as a dog. When Sophie asks what the black outfit is for, if he is simply going as a dog, Howl remarks that this shows his respect for Pentstemmon, who always took care to plan out the details.

Chapters 13 through 15 Analysis

In Chapter 13, Sophie is so impressed with the king, that she forgets all of the delicate things that Howl wanted her to tell the king. Despite all of Sophie's comments about Howl and his flaws, the king continues to ask more about him. Finally, after Sophie has described that he is vain, selfish, whiny, and all in all, just plain confusing, the king makes Howl the Royal Wizard. The king was worried about how quickly Howl accepted the job of finding Prince Justin, and wanted to be sure that he was taking the appointment seriously. The king believes that Howl's sending his mother to the king represents his last resort.

After leaving the king, Sophie finds herself lost. A young man of the court finds her, and thanks her for a spell she had made for him. He had come to her looking for a spell to make him an equal match to a man who challenged him to a duel. Instead, Sophie gave him cayenne powder. In his opponent's fit of sneezing, the young man was able to disarm him. While the young man's opponent is suing him, he really doesn't care, as his love, Jane, returned to him. Sophie realizes that this is the count with whom Jane from her town ran away with, and that it was the hat that Jane had bought from Sophie that made him fall in love with her.

In Chapter 14, when Howl comes down with a cold, he becomes even more whiny than ever. Howl stays up in his room and makes Michael run various errands for him. Sophie refuses to cater to Howl's self pity, so he finally gives up on her. Now that Sophie knows that she is a witch who can talk normal objects into having magical abilities, she tries to dispel the magic that binds Lettie's other suitor in dog form, but is unable to. When Sophie finally does go up to Howl's room, she sees Wales out of his bedroom window. Howl admits that he had a sort of bet with himself about whether or not she would notice the view out of the window, and Sophie storms off.

In Chapter 15, Howl only serves to make his cold even worse with all his activity. Sophie tells him so, and warns him to get some rest so he can get over the cold, but he refuses to stop moving about. Even though the Witch may very well find him, Howl is



determined to attend the funeral of his teacher. When Michael goes into Market Chipping, he and Martha - Lettie despair over their leaving. Martha tells Michael about the hat shop, which Fanny is selling, and Michael talks Howl into buying it. Howl still does not know about Martha, and seems to have forgotten Lettie in favor of his nephew's English teacher.



Chapters 16 through 18

Chapters 16 through 18 Summary

In Chapter 16, just as Sophie gets ready to cook some bacon, Howl's voice comes hoarsely from somewhere, warning Calcifer to ready himself. And just like that, the battle begins. The Witch of the Waste has found Howl, and attacked. Howl and Calcifer battle the Witch and her fire demon. Calcifer is stronger, but the Witch's fire demon is much older, and knows things that Calcifer has never imagined. The battle takes Howl and the Witch out to sea, where they provide a great spectacle for the entire town of Porthaven. After one illusion chases another out into the marsh, no one can hear or see anything. Most of the people simply go home, but Michael and Sophie stay and wait. After a while, a great ball of fire rises up out of the marsh, and a great boom is heard. People assume that the two must have managed to kill one another, and go home. On the way back to the castle, the dogman chases a cat all the way to the front door. The cat turns out to be Howl, who goes in and shares a drink of brandy with Calcifer. Howl is not sure who won, and is certain that he did not kill the Witch. It is time to move. Calcifer must be moved to the hat shop.

In Chapter 17, only a few short hours after his grueling magic battle, Howl shows no sign that it ever happened. Howl and Michael are busy preparing the house for the move. After they have chalked every corner of the house, and drawn a giant star in a circle in the middle of the floor, Howl takes Calcifer out of his grate on a silver shovel. Howl carefully walks Calcifer over to the star in the circle, then turns him around in a circle. Sophie can feel the room turning with them, and then Howl takes Calcifer back to his grate and piles logs around him. When Sophie opens the door, she can see the old familiar hat shop and house, only a little changed with the addition of the castle. Howl takes Sophie out the door to another new place. Here is a great field of flowers. Howl explains that Wizard Suliman started this garden a year earlier. His theory was that if he turned the Waste to a garden, that the Witch would be driven out. After Suliman disappeared, Howl took over the job of maintaining and growing the garden. He plans to use fresh cuttings from this garden in the flower shop.

In Chapter 18, they opened the flower shop the next day. Most people just looked in through the windows for a couple of days, but soon H. Jenkins Fresh Flowers Daily was doing a booming business. When Sophie and Michael sold flowers, people bought many. When Howl arrived in his charmed suit, ladies bought many more. Often Michael would take left over flowers to the baker's shop to Martha. Howl was often away courting Miss Angorian, Neil's English teacher. Sophie was often left alone to sell flowers, but she enjoyed it. To avoid having to throw away left over flowers, Sophie begins to experiment with keeping the flowers alive with her magic by talking to them. Sophie was able to keep the flowers alive, but was still not content. Now, Sophie experiments with planting the dying flowers and roots in the ash from Calcifer's fires. One such root grows to look like a squashed baby flower, which Howl uproots and



discovers the mandrake root as its start. Now that a baby has come from a mandrake root, only one part remains in the Witch's curse before she has Howl.

The scarecrow is in town and is heading straight for the shop. The towns folk are scared, and avoid the scarecrow, but Sophie figures that she can use her magic to make the scarecrow leave. Sure enough, when Sophie tells it that no one is home and that it should keep on going, the scarecrow keeps on going right past the shop. Later that day, the dogman comes in and transforms into a red headed man. He tells Sophie that he was in the shop with the Witch when Sophie was cursed, and that Lettie knows about the curse. He is unable to hold his human form, and goes back to being a dog. Later, Miss Angorian opens the door, and steps into the castle, looking for Howl.

Chapters 16 through 18 Analysis

In Chapter 16, Calcifer is not given much warning about the Witch's attack, and presumably, neither is Howl. The two casters have a magic battle above the town of Porthaven, drawing many of the citizens out to watch. Michael and Sophie disguise themselves using the magic cloaks. Sophie becomes a red bearded man, and Michael a horse. No one seems to notice when a man, a dog, and a horse all emerge from a house, as they are far too distracted by the epic battle being waged above. Howl and the Witch both use a great deal of illusion to confuse their opponent, but there is also a great deal of real destructive magic to go along. When it appears that Howl and the Witch have killed each other, the dogman seems happy about it. When they find that Howl managed to escape and returned in the guise of a cat, the dogman is the only one who is upset. Calcifer does not look forward to moving, but Howl informs him that he can either go to Market Chipping or he can go to the Witch.

In Chapter 17, while Howl and Calcifer are moving the house, Sophie notices something strangely familiar about Calcifer's behavior and appearance. When Howl leaves, Sophie asks Calcifer if he were ever a falling star. Calcifer replies that of course he was, and now that she knows they can talk about it. Sophie know knows that Howl caught Calcifer, formerly a falling star, out on the marshes much as Michael almost did with his star. Calcifer was terrified of dying, and Howl felt sorry for him and offered to keep him alive. Calcifer immediately suggested a contract, as anything would have been better than dying, but neither of them knew what they were getting in to. When Howl shows Sophie the garden on the edge of the Waste, and explains it to her, Sophie begins to worry that the curse is drawing Howl closer to the Witch. When Sophie asks if he is looking for Prince Justin, Howl slithers out of answering as usual.

In Chapter 18, something is wrong and Sophie can't quite put her finger on it. She is happy in the flower shop and Michael seems to be blissfully in love with Martha. Howl goes off daily to court Miss Angorian. Calcifer suggests that maybe it is just the Witch's curse hovering about, waiting to get Howl. Calcifer is lonely and bored, so Sophie spends one hour a day out of the shop talking to Calcifer.



When Miss Angorian shows up at the castle, Sophie doesn't know quite what to do. The teacher tells Sophie that she is only leading Howl on. She claims to really be looking for information about her fiance, Ben Sullivan. Sophie knows him as Wizard Suliman, but does not tell this to Miss Angorian. The teacher claims that Ben disappeared and hasn't returned since. She believes that he disappeared to the same place that Howell keeps disappearing to, but she can't be sure. When Miss Angorian sees the guitar, she claims that it belonged to Ben. Sophie finally manages to push the other woman out the door. Miss Angorian looks at Sophie sadly and calls her a hard woman. After this encounter, Sophie feels guilty and upset, so she takes her anger out on everyone else. When everyone sees Sophie's attitude, they know better than to hang around and get in her way.



Chapters 19 through 21

Chapters 19 through 21 Summary

In Chapter 19, Sophie hits Howl hard with a withering look the moment he walks in the door. She asks him again, what suit he has on. When Howl tries his usual slither outer trick, Sophie tells him that it does matter, and that she wants to know which suit it is. Howl reveals that it is the charmed suit, which only serves to infuriate Sophie more. Just then the dog comes in, and Howl tries to change the subject. Sophie lets on that the dog has a spell on him, which angers Howl greatly. He takes the dog upstairs and removes a part of the spell, turning the man back into a man. The man who was a dog still does not remember much about who he is, but Calcifer discovers that he most recently answered to Percival. The Witch had taken Percival's head off, and set it on a shelf. Then, she reassembled him and planned to use him to find out information about Howl. Sophie goes out into the shop to look at the daffodils that she tried to plant earlier, and finds that they are dead. In her anger, she has made a very effective weed—killer. Howl sends her off to kill the weeds at the mansion, then sends Percival with her. Sophie takes out her anger on the weeds, and quizzes Percival on what he really knows. When Sophie notices that the mansion now looks new and nice, she realizes that Howl has been listening in on her. She returns to the house to find Howl and Michael quickly disassembling the spell with which they eavesdropped on her. Sophie confronts Howl angrily. Howl informs Sophie that he has known since she arrived that she had a very powerful spell on her and that Michael and Calcifer both had told him, as had Lettie and Mrs. Fairfax. Howl has been trying constantly to take the spell off of Sophie while she isn't paying attention, but so far he has failed.

In Chapter 20, Midsummer Day dawned damp and gray, as many holidays tend to. Early in the morning, Howl stumbles drunkenly into the castle. After quite a bit of effort, and several falls and running into walls, Howl manages to make it into his bedroom and go to sleep. Michael comes downstairs and proclaims that he is so awake, that they might as well go collect the flowers for the day. Sophie, Michael, and Percival all go out and collect flowers, then make garlands as quickly as they can until time to open the shop. About mid day, Fanny shows up in a nice carriage. She recognizes Sophie at once, and they go inside. Just then, Michael shows up with Martha, who is looking a lot more like herself than Lettie. Then, Mrs. Fairfax and Lettie arrive, and they all have a sort of reunion. In the midst of all the familiar conversation, Miss Angorian arrives looking for Howl. Instead of throwing her out this time, they invite her in for wine and chicken. Instead, she goes out to look at the flowers.

Calcifer bursts to life and yells up the chimney to Howl that the witch has found his sister's family. Howl runs downstairs and out the door to his sister's house. Everyone else goes up to Howl's room to look out the window. They all see the Witch in Megan's yard, beckoning to her and her children. As they watch, Howl bursts into the yard, without even bothering with any magic. He chases the Witch over the fence, and are out of sight.



Back downstairs, there is a knocking at the door. When Sophie opens the door to look for Miss Angorian, she sees the Scarecrow outside. It is waiting on her permission to let it in. Sophie invites the scarecrow in, and it comes in and falls onto the skull. Now that the scarecrow has the skull, which was apparently part of its old body, it can speak. It tells them that it has been sent to gather up pieces. Before the scarecrow can explain any further, the Witch's voice echoes loud in the castle, telling Michael give Howl a message. Howl has fallen for her decoy, and now the real Witch of the Waste has Miss Angorian.

In Chapter 21, as the scarecrow runs out into the waste, most of the people follow it to keep it from escaping. Sophie, however, runs in the opposite direction. Sophie gets her stick and the seven league boots, and sets out after the Witch. After a long walk, Sophie arrives at the Witch's fortress at the heart of the Waste, which is clearly the work of a fire demon. Sophie finds the Witch looking as if her age has caught up with her after all. The Witch has a body sitting upon a seat that is a combination of Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman. All it needs now is a head. The Witch tells Sophie her plan. The Witch has lured Wizard Suliman out to the Waste, and then Prince Justin came looking for him. The Witch combined what she felt was the best parts of the two, and plans to give the body Howl's head. This will create the perfect human for the Witch, who she will put up as the next King of Ingary, and with whom she plans to rule as Queen. Sophie almost manages to escape when one of the walls implodes, and in comes the scarecrow. The witch and the scarecrow have a magic battle, much as the Witch and Howl had earlier. Howl arrives and watches the battle for a moment. Howl uses his magic to kill the Witch while she is distracted battling the scarecrow. The scarecrow begins looking around for more body parts, but Howl tells it to take the headless body and go back to the castle. Sophie doesn't want to leave because she is worried about Miss Angorian. Howl informs her that Miss Angorian is the Witch's fire demon.

When Howl and Sophie arrive back at the castle, Howl goes immediately to Suliman's old guitar. The Guitar explodes, and Angorian is standing there in its place, right next to Calcifer. She informs Howl that the curse is now complete, and she can touch his heart. Angorian takes Calcifer in her hand and squeezes Howl's heart. Howl passes out, and Sophie attacks Angorian with her magic stick. Sophie commands the stick to attack Angorian, but to avoid hurting anyone else. When Angorian drops Calcifer to defend herself from the stick, Sophie picks him up. She asks Calcifer if breaking the contract would kill them. Calcifer tells her that if anyone else broke the contract, he would die, but Sophie has the ability to talk things to life. Sophie commands Calcifer to have one thousand years more of life, then flicks him off of Howl's heart. Calcifer disappears up the chimney, and Sophie pushes Howl's heart back into his chest. Howl wakes up, and immediately destroys the fire demon Angorian. Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman are restored, and Sophie's spell is dispelled. Calcifer returns and agrees to stay, so long as he is free to come and go as he pleases. Howl and Sophie agree to live happily ever after.



Chapters 19 through 21 Analysis

In Chapter 19, when Howl finds out that Percival has been spelled into a dog, he is angry with Sophie and Calcifer both for not telling him. After removing as much of the spell as they can, Calcifer and Howl quiz Percival about why he was spelled. Percival tells them that he can't remember anything, and behaves as if he is a half—wit, but it is just an act. Sophie, who sees through it immediately, quizzes him about it outside the mansion. When Percival admits to knowing more than he let on, he also tells Howl everything he knows via the listening spell. Sophie is angry to find out that Howl is spying on her, and even angrier to find that he has known all along that Sophie is under a great spell. When Sophie asks why he has been unable to lift the spell, Howl informs her that this spell is of her own making, and that until she decides to be young again, he can not break it.

In Chapter 20, when Howl shows up drunk after a rugby game, Sophie decides that it is now time to leave. Each time Sophie tries to leave, something else gets in her way, as something always has before. Sophie is happy to see Fanny, and feels bad for believing what Martha said about her. When Martha arrives, she embraces Fanny as if she never felt what she told Sophie. Lettie apparently feels possessive of Percival, which Sophie does not approve of. When Miss Angorian shows up, Sophie feels guilty all over again for the way she treated her. Miss Angorian feels out of place in Howl's castle, amongst all of the people who she has never met, but clearly all know each other very well. When Miss Angorian goes out to look at the flowers, Sophie warns her not to go too far to the Southeast, and then has to change the door back to Market Chipping to assure Fanny that they didn't actually go anywhere. When Sophie opens the door back on the garden, only to find the scarecrow waiting there, she is torn between closing the door outright and trying to get Miss Angorian back. Sophie is resigned to face the scarecrow in order to save Miss Angorian, but Calcifer tells her that it is asking to enter, and does not mean them harm.

In Chapter 21, Sophie feels bad about Miss Angorian being captured by the Witch. She believes that it is all her fault, and that if she had only been more polite to the girl, that she would have stayed inside. When Sophie meets the Witch in the end, she discovers that she has been deceived once again. Sophie decides that she has messed up even more when she discovers that Miss Angorian is the Witch's fire demon, and that she was not supposed to allow her in the castle. After the battle, Sophie is restored to her right age and appearance. Suliman offers to take Lettie on as apprentice, and clearly is smitten by her. Everyone else is trying to talk to them, but Howl and Sophie can only hear each other. Howl seems amazed that Sophie turned out to be the scared little mouse of a girl he saw in the square on May Day. He reminds her that gray is not her color, and asks what she was so scared of. Sophie Howl and Sophie discuss what life might be like together, and decide that they must stay together and live happily ever after.



Characters

Wizard Howl

The Wizard Howl is known by many names across Ingary, but he is originally from Wales. His real name is Howell Jenkins and he was a college student before he found his way to Ingary. In Ingary, Howl has a reputation for eating young girls alive. This is simply the result of his attempts to blacken his own name, so that people will not expect too much of him and leave him alone. Howl is terribly vain and very dishonest. He is whiny and would have everyone think him wicked and cowardly, though he is actually quite kind-hearted and brave. Howl has a tendency to fall in love with many women. Each time he manages to make one woman actually love him, he immediately loses interest and falls in love with another woman.

Howl rescues a fire demon in the form of a falling star by giving him his heart. In return for life, Calcifer adds his own powerful magic to Howl's. Howl and Calcifer both can see that their bargain will be very bad for them in the long run. Neither of them want to end up like the Witch of the Waste, but the nature of their contract prevents them from discussing its main clause, which of course makes it very hard to break.

Howl and Calcifer both hope that Sophie can break the contract for them, and so Howl allows Sophie to stay when she shows up at his castle. Howl relies on Sophie throughout the story, all the while trying to break the Witch's spell on her. Despite Howl's tendency to fall in love with a variety of women, Howl finally does fall in love with Sophie, the spell is broken, and they agree to live happily ever after.

Sophie Hatter

Sophie Hatter is the oldest of three sisters. To make matters worse, her family is not even poor. In fact, they are quite well off and live in the bustling town of Market Chipping. Since Sophie is the oldest of three siblings from a well to do family, she is certain to fail should she strike out to seek her fortune. This idea that she has makes her terribly fearful of any sort of adventure. Despite this, Sophie dreams of a more interesting life. Sophie's dreams all come true, though certainly not in a way that she would have expected.

The Witch of the Waste casts a spell on the pretty young Sophie Hatter, turning her into a ninety-year-old woman. Sophie runs away, as she could not bear to face her family, and ends up finding Howl. Sophie is not so scared of things now that she is old. In fact, Sophie is quite brave in her old age. She is a terror to Howl and his apprentice, with her incessant cleaning and tidying. Instead of a quiet, nervous girl, Sophie is now a loud, cantankerous old woman. Sophie possesses strong magic, allowing her to talk life into otherwise ordinary objects. Sophie does not know that she has this power until she meets Mrs. Penstemmon, and so wonders why everything she talks to seems to live up



to exactly what she says about it. While Howl is relatively careful with his magic, Sophie is a disastrous whirlwind. She casts magic and talks life into things without barely a thought, causing no end of grief to herself and Howl.

Lettie

Lettie is Sophie's younger sister. She is one year younger than Sophie.

Martha

Martha is Sophie's youngest sister. She is only a half-sister to Sophie and Lettie and is born after their mother dies.

Fanny

Fanny was the youngest shop assistant at the hat shop. After Sophie's mother dies, her father marries Fanny.

Witch of the Waste

The Witch of the Waste was once a good witch. She rescued a falling star, much as Howl did. The Witch of the Waste became wicked after giving her heart to the fire demon, and was banished by the current king's grandfather to the Waste.

Michael

Michael Fisher is Howl's apprentice. He lets Sophie into the castle and falls in love with her sister Martha.

Calcifer

Calcifer is a fire demon who made a contract with Howl. Howl gave Calcifer his heart to avoid Calcifer dying as a falling star.

Miss Angorian

Miss Angorian is Neil's English teacher. She is also the Witch's fire demon, and has fully taken the Witch's heart. Miss Angorian wants to take Howl's heart to replace the Witch, which means killing Calcifer.



Wizard Suliman

Wizard Suliman was the Royal Wizard to the King of Ingary. He was also a young man from Wales, by the name of Benjamin Sullivan. Suliman was trying to defeat the Witch of the Waste by planting trees in the waste. When she got done with him, most of what was left of Suliman was cursed to roam about as a dog.

Prince Justin

Prince Justin is the King of Ingary's brother. He was a good friend of Wizard Suliman, so when the Wizard disappeared, he went to look for him. After the Witch of the Waste was done with him, most of Prince Justin was a scarecrow with a turnip head, which Sophie talked back to life.



Objects/Places

Ingary

The land of Ingary is a magical kingdom in which Sophie and Howl live.

Market Chipping

Market Chipping is Sophie's hometown. In this prosperous town, Sophie's mother and father own a hat shop.

Kingsbury

Kingsbury is the capital of Ingary and the home of the king.

Wales

The kingdom of Wales is part of Great Britain and is the original home of the Wizard Howl or Howell Jenkins.

Porthaven

Porthaven is a small port town where Howl lives with his fire demon.

Seven League Boots

Seven league boots are one of Howl's magic inventions. They allow the wearer to move seven leagues per stride, allowing them to cross great distances in a short walk.

The Waste

The Waste is a barren wasteland that is home to the Witch of the Waste.

Howl's Moving Castle

Howl's Moving Castle is an invention of Howl and Calcifer's magic. In reality, it is simply Howl's old house at Porthaven.



Magic Boxes

When Howl takes Michael and Sophie to his sister's house in Wales, they observe televisions and computers. To Michael and Sophie, these are magic boxes of moving pictures and sounds.

The curse

The Witch of the Waste plans to combine Howl with Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman to make her perfect man. In order to capture Howl, she took a poem by John Donne and make it a curse to trap him. According to the curse, Howl will catch a falling star, see a child born of a mandrake root, find all past years and know who cleft the Devil's foot, hear mermaids sing, and then become honest. Once all of these things have happened, before Howl is ten thousand days old, the Witch will have him.

Setting

The novel takes place in the magical land of Ingary, "where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist." Because such impossibilities are presented as the norm—that is, the conventions of countless fairy tales are taken as the book's "reality"—the reader is led to expect certain things to happen in certain ways, just as they do in the fairy tales: The stepmother will inevitably be wicked, the stepsisters ugly, the good wizard victorious. Indeed, the expectations set up by the story's setting are so strong that even the characters themselves share them, as Sophie's thoughts and actions reveal. But events—as in real life itself—have a way of not meeting one's expectations of them; or, if they do, they do so in completely unanticipated and humorous ways, as happens in this novel, which is as brilliant and mercurial as the moving castle itself.

The castle naturally plays a large part in the book, both in terms of physical setting and symbolic function. Irregular, black, and forbidding, from the outside the castle seems made of coal, yet emanates an eery chill. The doors on each of its four sides are magically blocked to intruders, yet it is capable of roving freely across the countryside, making horrible noises and emitting dark plumes of smoke—an intimidating spectacle. On the other hand, from the inside, it presents an entirely different picture: Small, dirty, and ramshackle, it is more a collection of cubbyholes and warrens than something as threatening and majestic as a castle-fortress. Like its owner, it is all facade. Indeed, as it ends up the castle is not really a castle at all—it is in actuality only a modest dwelling in Porthaven, a small sea town. And it does not truly move, either—its tramping across the countryside is as illusory as its impressive size, for it is merely an apparition, a convenient illusion. Yet it is still quite definitely the abode of a powerful wizard: If the curious furnishings do not prove it, then the magic door assuredly does. Significantly, this door opens not only onto Porthaven, but also onto Kingsbury (where the King lives, of course), the Waste (the witch's domain), and even Howl's otherworldly homeland as well. The castle therefore both symbolizes and summarizes the book, which the inside cover describes as a "giant jigsaw puzzle of a fantasy, [in which] nothing and no one are quite what they seem to be." Through the strength of its imaginative power, the castle, like the book itself, lingers long in the reader's memory.



Social Sensitivity

Although Howl's Moving Castle is an engaging romp through a predominantly light and attractive fantasy world, it does have some dark spots.

Most obviously, of course, there is the capricious destruction which the Witch of the Waste wreaks on the land in general and on some of the characters in particular. What the witch does to Sophie—stealing some seventy years of her life—is mild compared to her gratuitous cruelty to Percival and the murderous desecration she carries out on the persons of the Royal Wizard Suliman and Prince Justin. Fortunately, the author reveals the true nature of evil with such a light and deft hand that it never becomes graphic or sensational.

This is true of her treatment of the sexual undertone of the novel as well.

Jones has made the comment that she tries "to use fantasy—just as one would use a metaphor—to say things about life." In Howl's Moving Castle she uses magic as a metaphor for power, but not power of a political, social, or ethical kind. The power which concerns Jones in this fantasy romance is rather of a sexual nature, and so this may concern some parents or readers, especially since it is clearly referred to in Howl's gruesome reputation, in his ominous castle which roves the countryside like a wolf, in his use of enchantments to heighten his physical attractiveness to women, and, most particularly, in his cat-and-mouse conflict with the Witch of the Waste.

These dark or negative aspects are effectively mitigated, however, by other aspects in the story, most especially Howl's own character, which is endearing, childlike, and good, and the wonderfully constructed relationship between the young wizard and Sophie.

It is within this relationship that the author paradoxically sublimates the question of sexual power while simultaneously providing it a with an appropriate and authentic outlet. The sexual subtext of the novel is thus channeled in a positive and unobjectionable direction, with the whole—story, relationship, and development of the principal characters—brought to an appealing and eminently satisfying conclusion.

Jones makes it clear that Howl and Sophie will soon find sanction in marriage for their mutual love and attraction.



Literary Qualities

Howl's Moving Castle is a rousing fantasy adventure romance with a Chinese puzzle-like plot. Much of the richness and complexity of the book is derived from its reliance on the reader's recognition of its fairy tale conventions, which the author then goes on to joyously subvert so that the story and the characters will follow a direction completely unanticipated. This aspect, like the hidden door which connects the real world with a fantastic, topsyturvy one, reveals the novel's affinity to Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). Jones's novel does not have the arbitrary or irrational quality of Carroll's, however, for in it everything has its own rhyme and reason, as is revealed in the neat resolution of the book's conclusion.

In addition, the novel also depends heavily on the reader's familiarity with cultural traditions and characters associated with magic. The mysterious pact between Howl and Calcifer, for example, alludes to the old Faust legend.

This allusion is important, not only because it gives the story greater cultural depth, but also because it reinforces in the reader's mind the possibility that Howl may indeed prove as corrupt as the Witch of the Waste, who has also entered into a similarly Faustian pact. It should not be surprising to find, however, that Howl is also associated with a great magician who is famed for white, not black, magic, for Jones is a writer who delights in ambiguity and paradox. Allusions to the great Merlin are subtle, but numerous: Howl is from Wales, just as Merlin was, and one of the names he goes by is Pendragon, a moniker of King Arthur's, who Merlin taught and put on the throne of Britain. Like Merlin, Howl is also named Royal Wizard, and, like Merlin, he tends to disappear suddenly and inexplicably. Indeed, Jones's wit and humor in treating Howl and his magic (as well as the troubles Sophie gets herself into when she tries to set things to rights on her own) is reminiscent of T. H. White's highly original novel about Merlin and Arthur, *The Sword in the Stone* (1958).

Perhaps Jones's greatest literary achievement is the creation of lively, endearing, and non-stereotypical characters. Sophie and Howl are a delight, and their humorously rocky relationship shares more with romances in the real world than with those from fairyland. And their being surrounded at the end of the novel by a multitude of delighted couples—all of whom have contributed in their own way to the happy ending—affirms the sense of community and caring which opens the book. In fact, taken as a whole the book has the feel of classical comedy, with everyone gathering together after all of their trials and tribulations to celebrate, finally, life's bounty and its renewal—symbolized by a wedding in classical comedy, as indeed it is here.

Jones's talent is such that one cares enough about her characters and their adventures to want to see more of them even after the book ends.



Themes

Destiny

Sophie believes firmly that she cannot escape her destiny. She believes that as the oldest of three sisters, all of whom are pretty and from a well-to-do family, that she is destined to fail in any endeavor she attempts. Due to this belief, Sophie is quite and meek and accepts her boring life as her family is content to direct it, even though she is bored and longs for adventure. When the Witch curses Sophie, she is forced to leave the "comfort" of home, and ends up meeting Howl. Throughout her time with Howl, Sophie still maintains that she is doomed to fail. After all, she is the oldest of three. Howl, Michael, and Calcifer all try to help Sophie, but in the end, they are powerless against Sophie's belief in her destiny. Only when Sophie begins to believe in herself and falls in love with Howl, does Sophie realize that her destiny is her own to make.

Howl, on the other hand, believes that he makes his own destiny. In fact, he spends much of the novel trying to escape being pinned down to any one specific fate, either good or bad. Howl has been cursed by the Witch, but he does not believe that his hand is forced. Howl believes that if he can simply avoid the conditions of the curse, that he will not really have to worry about it. Howl does find some worry about his destiny as more and more of the curse conditions are met, but ultimately he is able to dodge the destiny that the Witch has planned for him.

Vanity

Vanity plays a large role in the downfall of the Witch of the Waste as well as the near downfall of Wizard Howl. Both are more concerned about their own physical appearances than almost anything else. The Witch uses a powerful spell to keep her young and beautiful, while she is actually well over one hundred years old. She was supposedly once a nice witch, but has allowed her demon to consume her heart, taking with it more and more of her humanity as time passes. She consumes great power to stay young, and even curses Sophie because she thinks that Sophie is competing against her for Howl's attention and admiration. The Witch is perfectly willing to destroy three men just to combine them into what feels is the perfect man.

The Wizard Howl is, if possible, even more vain than the Witch. He spends hours each day in the bathroom grooming, just to make sure he looks as close to perfect as possible before he goes anywhere. Howl also has the bad habit of "falling in love" with every pretty girl he sees. He's terribly shallow, and only really cares about the girls' beauty and love. However, once a girl falls in love with him, Howl loses interest in her and finds another. This has caused heart ache for countless girls and has given Howl the reputation that he eats young girls' hearts and that no maiden is safe from him. Howl's vanity is almost the end of him when he falls in love with Miss Angorian, who turns out to actually be the Witch's fire demon. By really falling in love with Sophie, Howl



becomes more honest and kind and is able to avoid going down the same path to destruction as the Witch.

Magic

The presence of magic in Ingary allows the characters to achieve amazing results with minimal efforts. Howl is able to merely think his clothes clean and mended. However, he still chooses to allow Sophie to do the mending and cleaning. Howl often cautions Michael and chides Sophie on using magic without fully thinking it through first. Sophie, who is new to magic and does not quite know all of the rules yet, often makes a great mess of things with the use of her magic. Sophie often does not mean to use her magic, but does so accidentally. Whether or not Sophie means to use her magic, the results are often the same. When Sophie talks to the hats, she imparts on them the magical ability to pass what ever attribute she assigned to them on to the wearer. Sophie was not initially aware of this, but soon notices the results of her work. Sophie told one hat that it would have to marry money. When her stepmother began wearing it, she married a wealthy man. Sophie told Howl's suit that it was made to bring in all the ladies, and sure enough, it became a charmed suit that attracted women to Howl. Even when Sophie does finally try to be more careful in her use of magic, she is not careful enough. When Sophie commands her walking stick to attack the fire demon, but not hurt anyone else, she sees an unforeseen problem with her order. Once the demon discovers that the stick will not hit anyone else, she begins hiding behind other people. This shows that the use of magic, while powerful, convenient, and relatively easy, is also dangerous. If one does not carefully think through the use of magic, it can have disastrous results and can even cost lives.



Themes/Characters

Howl's Moving Castle enjoys a magical cast of characters including one mournful dog-man, an inarticulate but athletic scarecrow, a chattering skull, two apprentice enchanters, three headstrong sisters, and a host of others. The Wizard Howl is, of course, one of the major characters, as is the determined Sophie Hatter, who proves by the end of the story to be both his match and his mate. Calcifer the fire demon and the Witch of the Waste round out the central foursome, and it is through their intervention that Howl and Sophie originally come—and eventually remain—together.

The book opens with Sophie, the eldest of three sisters. Although gifted with intelligence, diligence, and a supportive nature, Sophie constantly denigrates herself because of the expectations surrounding her birth status: In Ingary "it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst." This assumption would no doubt have proven a selffulfilling prophecy if not for Sophie's fateful meeting with the malicious Witch of the Waste, who, mistaking her for someone else, puts the attractive young woman under a spell which transforms her instantly into a decrepit ninety-year old. Sophie's reaction to this development is a good indicator of her character: She does not rage, or wail, or even rebel, but rather calmly reflects on how her life has changed and what she must do to remedy it.

Forced now to take an active rather than a passive role in her own life, Sophie unexpectedly finds liberation from her own assumptions and her increasingly debilitating self-consciousness. The precipitous maturity which should have been a curse is thus in reality a blessing, for it permits Sophie to express the autonomous, assertive, and dynamic qualities of her personality, qualities she had been denying because of her perceived "duty" to what is actually only a stereotype (the danger of stereotypes is another important idea in the book).

Sophie's search for her own identity leads her to another, larger mystery, that of the dark castle terrorizing the countryside and the enigmatic wizard inhabiting it. Popular opinion declares that Wizard Howl is a kind of Bluebeard, a terrible enchanter who eats young women's hearts or sucks the souls right out of their bodies. Sophie thus demonstrates a great amount of bravery in entering his castle, even if she is now an old woman: Wizards are always dangerous, especially predatory ones like Howl. But when Sophie finally meets the infamous mage, she is taken by surprise over his appearance and demeanor: "Good gracious! Wizard Howl is only a child in his twenties, for all his wickedness! It made such a difference to be old, she thought."

What Sophie slowly discovers is that the accusations against Howl are only metaphorically, not literally, true: He does indeed "consume" the hearts of young girls, but only in the sense that, as soon as they fall in love with him, he leaves them. Howl is therefore more like Don Juan than Bluebeard, and so has better hopes for reform.

Howl is actually quite endearing, and not only because of his magic: His extreme anxiety over his appearance indicates a deep insecurity, a childlike spirit further



revealed in his temper tantrums and his habit of lying to himself (but not to others). He is no innocent child, however; the man of power and mystery is always present, as his reputation betrays. Not only is he figuratively a heartless Casanova; he is literally a man without a heart. The revelation of his condition as an actual, not metaphoric, truth, is one of the most brilliant strokes of Jones's narrative: Howl became heartless, and all the suffering it has subsequently caused him and others, provides much of the story's meaning and motivation.

It also lends to his character a humanity and a poignancy lacking in most of the other characters.

Significantly, it is Sophie who must find the secret to Howl's condition, for it is a vital part of the pact the wizard has made with Calcifer. When Sophie makes her own pact with the demon in the hopes of breaking her own spell, she is placing herself in a situation similar to that of Howl's, and so gains insight into his own state. Although Sophie believes that Howl's biggest problem is that he is a "slitherer-outer" (that is, a person who "slithers away" from unpleasant situations), she does not understand why he is this way; because Howl himself cannot or will not challenge his untenable situation with either Calcifer or the witch, his own liberation depends on Sophie's intervention, just as Sophie's depends, albeit in a grotesque manner, on the Witch's. Thus Sophie's fairy tale mission—to find a way to break Calcifer's contract with Howl so that the demon can break the witch's spell on her—is in fact a complex double search for identity.

Calcifer is the key to this search, and his unstable, ambiguous nature is symbolic of its vicissitudes and its elemental significance. Now a proud, powerful, and belligerent fire demon, Calcifer was originally a small, terrified star which Howl accidentally happened upon as it was falling to Earth. As he poignantly tells Sophie, "when you fall you know you're going to die. I'd have done anything rather than die." Since Howl felt sorry for him, he offered to keep him alive the way humans do—with a heart, Howl's own. As Calcifer sadly continues, "Neither of us knew what we were getting into." The message here is clear: The price of life, and of love, can be a very high one indeed.

By forfeiting his own heart, even if for an apparently good cause, Howl opened himself to attack by the forces of evil, a fact acknowledged in his pursuit by the Witch of the Waste. More practiced in the ways of magic and even more heartless than he (for she too has a fire demon, one infinitely more ambitious and wily than Calcifer), the witch hunts Howl down, ostensibly because the wizard had seduced and deserted her as he had so many other women. In actuality, however, the witch is no creature of passion, but rather an empty husk, a husk taken over by a clever fire demon. It is this archmanipulator who has lured Prince Justin and the Royal Wizard Suliman to their deaths in order to create a perfect body from their parts; as the witch reveals during the final confrontation, "When we have Howl's head, we shall have [our perfect human,] the new King of Ingary, and I shall rule as Queen." Thus cold ambition is, paradoxically, the force motivating the witch and her demon. But ambition of itself is not what makes them evil; rather, it is their utter disregard for others which places them firmly on the side of evil.



Equally firmly on the side of good are a host of engaging secondary characters, all of whom affirm the value of friendship and family. Sophie has two sisters, Lettie and Martha, who cunningly switch places so that each can lead the life she desires; both come to Sophie's aid at the proper time. There is also Fanny, Sophie's stepmother, who tries to do the right things for her fatherless children, yet only succeeds in making them all miserable until they manage to set things to rights on their own. Like Sophie, Howl too is "blessed" with family—two of them, as a matter of fact: In Wales he has a married sister (who thinks Howl is a no-good wastrel) with two children (who will speak to their uncle only if he bribes them with new computer games), while in Ingary his surrogate family consists of his well-meaning but inept apprentice, Michael (an orphan Howl had found and adopted), and the thoroughly undecipherable Calcifer, who, paradoxically, reveals Howl actually does have a heart even when he does not possess one.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told from in the third-person subjective, or limited third-person viewpoint. Sophie is the main character and the focus of the narrator. Her thoughts and observations are revealed, but she is not the narrator.

The plot of this story is revealed mostly through dialogue. Some exposition is used to fill the gaps, of course, and most of the physical world is built on descriptive exposition. There are two distinct kinds of dialogue in this story, both of which are necessary for the development of the plot. There is dialogue between the characters, showing the character interactions throughout the story, as well as that between Sophie and herself. Old Sophie tends to talk to herself, as many old people do. This allows Sophie to reveal her feelings and observations even when other characters are not present. Sometimes when Sophie feels that she is talking to herself by talking to inanimate objects, she is actually unwittingly talking life into them through her magic.

Setting

Most of this story takes place in the Land of Ingary. Ingary is a land of classic fantasy. Technologically, Ingary is seems very similar to much of Medieval Europe. However, there are strong wizards and witches who work very powerful magic. Ingary is linked via Howl's castle to a very modern Wales. Throughout this story, Howl is able to travel from the common room of his castle to his sister's house in Wales, as well as several places throughout Ingary. All he must do is turn the selector knob to the appropriate color, then step in through the door. Howl is originally Howell Jenkins, a modern college student from Wales. He somehow ends up in the magical land of Ingary and becomes a powerful wizard. The only thing that marks Wales as being different from any other location on the door is an inch or so thick wall of gray nothingness just outside the door. This likely signifies that the character is crossing into a different dimension.

The weather in Ingary varies by location and season, much as it does on Earth. The weather in this story is just as variable as the location. It is not uncommon for a character to enter the castle from a rainy street in Market Chipping and emerge, after turning the knob of course, into a bright sunny day in a field of flowers.

Language and Meaning

The language of this story is informal and simple. It is very easy to understand and much of the story is told through dialogue. The descriptive parts of this novel are vivid, with many adjectives. The author uses many humorous descriptions in this story, such as calling Howl a "slither outer." The nature of the language does change a little. When Sophie is still young, meek Sophie, the dialogue reflects her youth and timidity.



However, when Sophie finds herself old and not quite so timid, she begins to speak like an elderly woman.

Structure

Howl's Moving Castle spans four hundred twenty nine pages in twenty one chapters. The chapters are all fairly uniform, each being between twenty and thirty pages long. The chapters are both numbered and named. They are named in a way that describes either an event in the chapter or the entire chapter.

The obvious plot of this story is Sophie's quest to cancel the spell on her. The evil Witch of the Waste has cast a spell on Sophie making her old before her time. The spell also keeps her from talking to anyone about it who does not already know of it. Sophie's growth from scared little girl to confident woman and and powerful witch is another plot, one that shadows her quest. As Sophie gets closer and closer to ending the spell, her magic and her confidence grow. Another subplot is Howl's quest and his curse. Howl is on a quest to find Prince Justin, the missing brother of the king, as well as to defeat the Witch of the Waste. Howl has been cursed by the witch, and as Howl and Sophie continue on their now joined quests, they continue to fulfill bits of the Witch's curse. Yet another subplot is Howl's own personal growth to maturity. When Sophie and Howl first meet, he is vain, whiny, shallow, and dishonest. Howl "falls in love" with various girls, then loses interest in them once they love him. As the story progresses, Howl becomes more thoughtful, less whiny, and more honest. He also begins to fall in love with Sophie, who so far has been a very good influence on Howl's personality.

This story begins about sixteen years before Sophie meets Howl, but only devotes one chapter to this era. The main story actually runs from some time in May, when Sophie meets Howl, to some time in June when they defeat the Witch of the West. Filled with interesting dialogue and written in a language that is easy to read, this story has a quick pace.



Quotes

"It's not fair! Why should Martha have the best of it just because she was born the youngest? I shall marry a prince, so there!" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"I always bother when someone tries to set themselves up against the Witch of the Waste. I've heard of you, Miss Hatter, and I don't care for your competition or your attitude. I came to put a stop to you. There" (Chapter 2, p. 3).

"We'll think of one. Howl's pretty useless at most things. In fact, he's too wrapped up in himself to see beyond his nose half the time. We can deceive him - as long as you'll agree to stay" (Chapter 3, p. 62).

"Why I came, young man? I came because I'm your new cleaning lady, of course" (Chapter 4, p. 74-75).

"Howl never commits himself to anything. I was here six months before he seemed to notice I was living her and made me his apprentice. I just thought a bed would be better than the chair" (Chapter 5, p. 88).

"Then you must come from Market Chipping. Howl sent me down there to blacken his name when we first set up the castle. I - er - I said that sort of thing. It's what aunts usually say. It's only true in a manner of speaking" (Chapter 6, p. 111-112).

"Fifteen last May Day, Calcifer sent fireworks up from the castle. Didn't you, Calcifer? Oh, he's asleep. You're probably thinking I'm too young to be engaged - I've still got three years of my apprenticeship to run, and Lettie's got even longer - but we promised one another, and we don't mind waiting" (Chapter 7, p. 137-138).

"Mrs. Fairfax, wasn't it my niece Martha who was supposed to come to you?" (Chapter 8, p. 165).

"I was afraid you'd start thinking that, but you'd be deceiving yourself, just like Mrs. Fairfax" (Chapter 9, p. 170).

"You may get one later today" (Chapter 10, p. 192).

"You are in an enchanted castle with four doors. Each opens on a different dimension. In Dimension One the castle is moving constantly and may arrive at a hazard at any time" (Chapter 11, p. 211).

"I'm scared too. I shall suffer with Howl if the Witch catches him. If you don't break the contract before she does, I won't be able to help you at all" (Chapter 12, p. 225).

"Tell Wizard Howl, Mrs. Pendragon, that I am appointing him Royal Wizard as from now, with our Royal Command to find Prince Justin, alive or dead, before the year is out. You have our leave to go now" (Chapter 13, p. 248).



"I got everything, and there's a real piece of luck, Howl. There's an empty shop for sale down in Market Chipping. It used to be hat shop. Do yo think we could move the castle there?" (Chapter 15, p. 285).

"Brace yourself, Calcifer! She's found me!" (Chapter 16, p. 300).

"Please, don't tell Mr. Jenkins I was here. To tell you the truth, I only encouraged him in hope of getting news of my fiance - Ben Sullivan, you know. I'm positive Ben disappeared to the same place Mr. Jenkins keeps disappearing to. Only Ben didn't come back" (Chapter 18, p. 345).

"I sold Wizard Suliman's skull when I sold his guitar. Prince Justin's head is walking around somewhere with the other left over parts. This body is a perfect mixture of Prince Justine and Wizard Suliman. It is waiting for Howl's head, to make it our perfect human. When we have Howl's head, we shall have the new King of Ingary, and I shall rule as Queen" (Chapter 21, p. 406).



Topics for Discussion

Throughout this story, Howl does courageous things while calling himself a coward. Why does Howl feel that he must trick himself into being brave? How do the other characters seem to feel about this?

Discuss vanity. Which characters in this story are vain? How do they show their vanity?

Discuss the nature of magic in Ingary. Is it important to be careful about casting magic? Why or why not? What are some of the effects of casting magic without thinking it through first?

Why does the Witch choose old age as her curse for Sophie? How does Sophie react to being made old magically? How does she feel toward the Witch?

Discuss destiny. How do Sophie and Howl feel about destiny vs. choice? How do they feel about their own destinies?

Why did Howl make a bargain with Calcifer? What is the nature of their bargain? How do the other characters in this story feel about the bargain?

There are rumors that the Witch was not always wicked. What causes her to become evil? How has this affected her status in society?



Essay Topics

1. Sophie remarks throughout the book that she is a failure, and that this comes from being the eldest of three.

Do you agree with her assessment from the perspectives both of real world experience and of fairy tale convention? Why or why not? What does her comment tell you about her personality?

2. In Chapter 2, Sophie and Martha express two completely different views of Fanny's character and actions. Why do you think they hold such different opinions? What do their opinions tell you about Fanny and themselves?

3. How does the fact of being prematurely aged affect Sophie and her perception of herself? Does the experience influence her understanding of the world or of other people? Why do you think the author used this particular technique to develop and express Sophie's character?

4. In Chapter 9 Michael and Sophie almost succeed in catching a falling star. Why does the experience affect them so deeply? How does this scene relate to other scenes or characters in the novel?

5. Howl seems very eager to have Sophie, posing as his mother, meet his old teacher, Mrs. Pentstemmon. Why do you think it is so important to him?

What does Sophie learn from the encounter, and how does this knowledge help her to understand herself and her relationship with Howl?

6. When Howl decides to move Calcifer and his real home from Porthaven to Market Chipping, he ends up in Sophie's old house. How is this significant, and what does it symbolize?

7. The author juxtaposes two powerful images in Chapter 17, that of the Waste, which the witch inhabits, and that of an Edenic garden, planted by the Royal Wizard Suliman before he disappeared. What do the two mean, and why are they so close together?

What do the places reveal about the characters associated with them?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Diana Wynne Jones has said that, although she writes fantasy, she sets her characters "in some firmly contemporary situation beset with very real problems, and explore[s] the implications by means of magic and old myths." Do you think this approach can be applied to *Howl's Moving Castle*?

If so, how?

2. Most fairy tales rely heavily on certain conventions and stereotypes, such as the wicked stepmother, the successful eldest child, the "happily ever after" ending, and so on. How does the author use—or not use—these conventions to help tell her story? Do you think presenting them the way she does makes her work more effective and memorable than it might otherwise have been?

3. *Fire and Hemlock* is another fantasy romance for young adult readers which Jones published the year before *Howl's Moving Castle*. Unlike *Howl*, which is humorous and tightly-plotted, *Fire and Hemlock* has been described by some readers as somber and rather loosely-shaped. Compare the two books and see if your conclusions agree with these observations. Which novel is better, and why?

4. The author depicts Howl as quite a ladies' man. How would you compare his character to other, more famous, literary figures such as Don Juan, Bluebeard, or Casanova? What does he have in common with them, and how is he different?

5. An alternate fantasy world is a very popular device in literature for young people, as such classics as Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) and C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) reveal. What are some of the main characteristics of such alternate worlds, and why do you think authors use them to tell their stories?



Further Study

"Diana Wynne Jones." In *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 26. Detroit: Gale, 1983: 224-233. This article offers an overview of significant critical commentary made on the body of Jones's work up to 1983.

Fisher, Margery. Review. *Growing Point* 25,6 (March 1987): 4772-4773. Fisher offers a psychological interpretation of the castle, and praises the novel for its tender affirmation of the human spirit.

Jones, Diana Wynne. "Far Out Fantasy." *Books for Your Children* 16,3 (Autumn/Winter 1981): 4-5. The author discusses how and what she writes, and compares it to "the enchanted circle" formed by children's games like "Let's pretend."

Letley, Emma. "A Storm of Magic." *The Times Literary Supplement* 4367 (December 12, 1986): 1410. Although brief, this article indicates how Jones uses and updates themes and motifs from the realm of fairy tales in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Twichell, Ethel R. Review. *The Horn Book Magazine* 62,3 (May/June 1986): 331-332. Justly declaring that the novel "all but denies synopsis," Twichell comments particularly on the warmth and wit of Jones's writing.

Yates, Jessica. "Diana Wynne Jones." In *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*.

3d ed. Chicago: St. James, 1989: 500501. This excellent but short entry deftly summarizes the chief characteristics of Jones's work while providing insight into why such a prolific and gifted author has yet to reach the large readership she deserves.



Related Titles

Jones has written two different linked sequences of novels which rely heavily on magic, just as Howl's Moving Castle does. The first, referred to as the "Dalemark" Cycle because it is set in the fictional world of Dalemark, is made up of *Cart and Cwiddler*, *Drowned Ammet*, and *The Spellcoats*. Unlike Howl, the magic portrayed in these novels is derived primarily from supernatural sources; that is, magical powers are granted to the characters by the gods of Dalemark. This mythological approach seems to make the magic—and the action—more somber and heroic than that found in Howl. The "Chrestomanci" Cycle, on the other hand, is much freer and humorous in tone.

Comprised of *Charmed Life*, *The Magicians of Caprona*, *Witch Week*, and *The Lives of Christopher Chant*, the cycle concerns the adventures of Christopher Chant, the "Chrestomanci" (a government-appointed head enchanter whose job it is to make sure magic is used correctly). The character of a Chrestomanci also appears in two tales from the short story collection, *Warlock at the Wheel and Other Stories*.

Besides her interest in the worlds of magic, Jones is also fascinated by "doors" into other times and places, a device she uses to good effect in Howl's own castle. Novels like *The Homeward Bounders*, *The Time of the Ghost*, and *A Tale of Time City* are developed along the premise that such doors do indeed exist, and normal people can inadvertently pass through them and stumble on dimensions of reality—such as the vigilant Time Patrol, which protects the integrity of historical events, and the Time Lady, who is apparently out to alter history for her own purposes—previously unimagined.



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