



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Transformation, Transition, Identity: On the Threshold.
Liminality in *Howl's Moving Castle*“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 870

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft
UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Norbert Bachleitner

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. A Theory of Liminality.....	10
2.1. Border Studies.....	10
2.2. The Concept of Liminality and the Liminal.....	12
2.3. Identity Negotiation.....	15
3. Adaptation and Animation: Liminal Formation Processes Between Cultures.....	18
3.1.1. Creating a Transcultural Adaptation.....	18
3.1.2. Creating an Anime.....	20
4. Transformation and Identity Negotiation: Liminal Identities.....	24
4.1. The Foundation.....	24
4.1.1. Perpetual Movement In-Between Space and Time: The Castle.....	24
4.1.2. The Illusion of Space and the Door to Other Places and Times.....	28
4.1.3. The Curses and Magic Contracts.....	31
4.2. Defamiliarized Shōjo and Female Empowerment.....	37
4.2.1. Encountering Howl or: Into the Sky.....	37
4.2.2. Old Age as Liberation.....	42
4.2.3. Leaving the Familiar and Entering the Space of the Threshold.....	47
4.2.4. Exploration Under Disguise.....	51
4.2.5. Change of Perspective: Back and Forth and In-Between.....	56
4.2.6. A Journey of Selflessness.....	58
4.2.7. Entering Howl's Inner World.....	62
4.2.8. Into the Past: Through Space and Time.....	67
4.2.9. Dying Evil: The Witch of the Waste.....	70
4.2.10. The Power of Words.....	71
4.3. Bishōnen: Fluctuating Masculinities and the Power of the Stranger.....	74
4.3.1. Howl's Physical and Psychological Transformation.....	76
4.3.2. War as Transgressive and Transformative: Metamorphosis.....	80

5. Conclusion.....	83
6. List of Figures.....	87
7. References.....	89
8. Abstract in German.....	93
9. Abstract in English.....	94

1. Introduction

The study of borders and liminal phenomena has only in recent years started to gain the interest of scholars in literary and cultural studies and has rarely yet been attempted in the specific context of Comparative Literature studies. On closer examination this seems astonishing as it appears that there is considerable insight to be gained through such attempts. The key hypothesis of this paper is that the liminal as a threshold space of transition functions as a means of gaining cognition, that it allows characters within stories, as well as the audience – including literary scholars – to gain knowledge. For every act of identity negotiation, a liminal state is entered, a phase of an in-between where former seeming stability is dissolved in favour of potentiality and the unknown. In order to narratively or cinematographically implement the processes of identity negotiation that happen within this liminal state, various liminal phenomena, such as transformations, transitions or threshold spaces are utilized, which will be demonstrated. To select a book and its film adaptation as objects of investigation seems appropriate considering the fact that in this way liminality can be observed on two levels: on the one hand within the works, regarding modes of storytelling, narration and cinematographic depiction. On the other hand, liminality is also noticeable on a level beyond insofar as the transfer from one medium (book) to another (film), and the creation of animation already implicate liminal traits which merit closer inspection. So, focusing on the questions what the above mentioned liminal phenomena are employed for, what they effect, under which circumstances they occur, how they are depicted or described and how their usage differs according to the medium, it is the aim of this paper to draw conclusions regarding the utility of the liminal as a literary/cinematographic/narrative tool on the one hand, and as a concept for Comparative Literature on the other hand. This shall be achieved through the exemplifying study and comparison of the film *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) by Hayao Miyazaki and the British source material, the eponymous book by Diana Wynne Jones (first published in 1986) and by examining liminality in the formation process of book-to-film adaptations and animation against an intercultural, interdisciplinary background.

Hayao Miyazaki has acquired a reputation as one of the masters of animation. Because of his role as a co-founder of the famous Japanese animation studio Studio Ghibli and his great success he has been called the Walt Disney of Japan by some Western audiences. However, this says more about our “need to label creative talents in ways

we find acceptable than about Miyazaki or his work”¹, as Helen McCarthy comments. Such comparisons would give us a quick frame of reference but at the same time also prevent us from having to think too deeply about the content of the work or the individual views of the artist, she argues. And indeed, his films generally not only have a greater depth than most Disney movies through a “rare combination of epic sweep and human sensitivity”, as McCarthy puts it, but they also “fail to fit into any of the neat, child-sized boxes into which the West still tends to stuff the animated art form”.² “Through the medium of animated film, he tackles in both narrative and technique the central philosophical questions of our time”, Susan Bigelow notes, “translating complex issues into an engrossing visual imagery for broader public consumption.”³ While Disney mainly targeted children through telling stories on the basis of fairy tales and adventure stories, putting the emphasis on smooth and realistic animation, Miyazaki always guides the audience into complex phantasy worlds, all the while intertwining pieces of Eastern and Western myths, fairy tales and legends and creating a whole separate cosmos. His stories are always multi-layered and avoid stereotypical character constellations or storytelling.⁴

As East and West on the one hand, and various temporalities on the other hand, subtly coalesce, so do multiple strands of reality and fantasy, enabling the grave matters treated in virtually all of Miyazaki’s productions to be both enhanced and problematized by the interventions of preternatural beings and by the incidence of wizardly feats, dazzling spells and concurrently physical and mental metamorphoses. Through these, the experiences of children and those of adults beguilingly intersect, the complexity and richness of the former being perceptively and persistently emphasized.⁵

This, sure enough, holds true for *Howl’s Moving Castle* and provides the basis for it to be a fertile ground for literary studies and, more specifically, liminality studies.

Miyazaki decided to direct *Howl’s Moving Castle* (orig.: ハウルの動く城 *Hauru no Ugoku Shiro*, JAP 2004) as an adaptation to Jones’ novel in 2002, the film entered production in February 2003 and was completed in August 2004. Both the book and the film have been critically acclaimed, but especially the film became popular very fast

¹ McCarthy, Helen: Hayao Miyazaki: master of Japanese animation. Films, themes, artistry. Berkley, California: Stone Bridge Press 1999. 10.

² Ib. 10.

³ Bigelow, Susan J: Technologies of Perception: Miyazaki in Theory and Practice. In: *Animation*, Vol.4:1 (2009): 55-75.

<http://journals-sagepub-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/doi/pdf/10.1177/1746847708099740>. Web. 56.

⁴ Cf. Nieder, Julia: Die Filme von Hayao Miyazaki. Marburg: Schüren 2006. 7.

⁵ Cf. Cavallaro, Dani: The Animé Art of Hayao Miyazaki. Jefferson, NC: Mc Farland 2006. 9.

and was received very well both by Eastern and Western audiences of all ages. It had the most extensive theatrical release ever accorded to a Japanese film, being screened in 450 cinemas simultaneously (one out of six nationwide though) and set the highest new record for a Japanese film on its opening weekend both in earnings and viewer numbers.⁶ In France it also took the number-one box-office spot in its opening week and in 2006 it got an Oscar nomination for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year along with another 14 wins and 19 nominations including the famous Nebula Award for Best Script by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (Hayao Miyazaki received it together with the English translators Cindy Davis Hewitt and Donald H. Hewitt).⁷ This all goes to show how well received the film was not only in Japan but almost worldwide, raising the question why. Could the success be connected to certain intercultural aspects that could be linked to liminality? Susan J. Napier accredits it to the fact that in the film “different cultures and national identities playfully intermingle[...] to offer audiences an alternative to a sometimes oppressively defined national identity”⁸.

[...] Miyazaki’s characters can almost never be solely described as “performing Japaneseness.” Instead, Miyazaki seems to use his cosmopolitan sources and settings to create characters that, while retaining certain characteristics linked to Japanese society, are distinctively more independent in thought and action from the group-oriented characteristics traditionally celebrated in Japanese culture.⁹

In other words, she continues, Miyazaki’s works would not simply decontextualize foreign countries and cultures to reinforce a national identity (as Disney often does, concentrating on “Other” cultures to construct or at least reinforce its vision of U.S. identity¹⁰), but instead work them into the narrative in a way that “subtly erases traditional distinctions between the Japanese self and the foreign (usually Western) Other”¹¹. This already shows that liminal phenomena and their effects aren’t restricted solely to the story and its characters, but also affect the audience, which is, as is argued in this paper, partly also what makes them liminal in the first place.

⁶ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 157.

⁷ Howl’s Moving Castle. IMDb. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0347149/?ref_=ttawd_awd_tt. Web. 15.04.2018.

⁸ Napier, Susan J.: Confronting Master Narratives: History As Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance. In: *positions: east asia cultures critique*, Vol.9:2 (2001): 467-493. Duke University Press. <https://muse-jhu-edu.uaccess.univie.ac.at/article/27987/pdf>. Web. 475-476.

⁹ Ib. 473.

¹⁰ Cf. ib. 472.

¹¹ Ib. 473.

Diana Wynne Jones has, as one of the most acclaimed writers in phantasy literature for children and young adults, created a solid basis for adaptation endeavours and also for liminality studies. Her story “elegantly deconstructs a number of familiar fairy-tale conventions”¹² and according to Jones herself, the book is highly visual, an aspect that is most likely to have drawn Miyazaki to it in the first place. She also believes that her characters must have immediately appealed to him, saying that he probably set about thinking how to draw and animate a fire demon at once.¹³ While Miyazaki has “pruned the thicket of Jones’s multi-branched plot”, as Dani Cavallaro beautifully puts it, he has remained “fundamentally faithful to its drift and tenor”.¹⁴

Indeed, the film itself evinces considerable narrative complexity, leaving strands of the story open or partially open to allow viewers to complete it by recourse to their own imaginative faculties. Temporal displacements and superimpositions contribute vitally to such complexity, as does the employment of intertwined and prismatic characters whose multi-dimensionality is both increased and made problematic by their interactions.¹⁵

Jones herself has been an admirer of Miyazaki’s work since watching the very first Studio Ghibli film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986). “I was absolutely hit in mid-ships,” she says in an interview with Nick Bradshaw, “to the extent of watching it whenever it was showing.” She continues: “It was the most amazing thing when nearly 20 years later I suddenly got these overtures saying Miyazaki would like to make a film of *Howl*.”¹⁶ Her first contact with Miyazaki though was only when she signed away her authorial rights to his American envoy. After 18 months she was informed that Miyazaki would be visiting her in Bristol for a special screening arranged in her honour. “It was wonderful, [...] I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone before who thinks like I do. He saw my books from the inside out.”¹⁷

In the book as well as in the movie the pivot of the story is indeed also the name giver, the Moving Castle. This castle functions as a threshold and moves perpetually through space and time, in a constant state of flux while simultaneously enabling the people moving in, through and around it to change, transform and grow. It is thereby situated

¹² Cavallaro (2006), 158.

¹³ Cf. ib. 158.

¹⁴ Ib. 159.

¹⁵ Ib. 159.

¹⁶ Bradshaw, Nick: ‘He saw my books from the inside out’. Diana Wynne Jones, British author of ‘Howl’s Moving Castle’, talks to Nick Bradshaw. The Telegraph, 23.09.2005.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3646735/He-saw-my-books-from-the-inside-out.html>. Web.

¹⁷ Ib.

right in the in-between space of liminality, making it such a fitting starting point for the topic at hand and enticing us to engage in a new and promising interdisciplinary, intercultural discourse.¹⁸

¹⁸ It must be noted that my perspective is that of a child of the Western literary tradition, and this paper is intended for a Western audience. As such, I examine the context and themes of Miyazaki's film accessed through the English- and German-language critical responses I have been able to find and rely heavily on other's expertise when it comes to Japanese culture. As Deepthi Welaratna pointedly remarks: "The postmodern techniques and referential realities of the two texts reflect a complex set of messages that may only be fully accessible to members of each culture." (Welaratna 2009). There is certainly a need for continued involvement from other cultural points of views and especially in regard to including an analysis of the use of language in the original Japanese version, since I work with the English version of the film. This paper should be seen as merely a starting point for further discussion and also an invitation to examine other literary and film genres as well, using the theory suggested in this paper.

2. A Theory of Liminality – Border Poetics

If we are to examine concepts of liminality, it is helpful to first take a look at concepts of the border and border studies in order to be able to recognize certain developments.

2.1. Border Studies

The study of borders has become more popular in recent years as an interdisciplinary study not only in geography, politics and sociology, but also in literary and cultural studies. Theoretical and practical studies in various disciplines have been thinking about border formation and border crossings as well as the relationship between the two.¹⁹ In the field of literary studies this has led to attempts of creating a border poetics. Schimanski and Wolfe specify as follows:

Border poetics is a set of strategies for analyzing the successful or failed crossings of institutional, national, or generic borders. Such crossings usually, perhaps always, call forth an occasion for story or narration. The space through which characters move and in which events happen – the space of location and action within the story – is the site of meetings, of border crossings, and cultural encounters [...].²⁰

In border studies there is a certain “tendency [...] to see borders everywhere”, they note, which is both strength and weakness insofar as it shows that there is “something significant about the border and its metaphorical applicability in any number of cultural formation”²¹, as Schimanski and Wolfe put it, as well as in levels of analysis, but makes it harder for border studies and border poetics to make a significant contribution. Thus, it is important to “retain a specificity and a methodological discipline in order to develop and be able to contribute to other fields and other problems”²². A way of doing this is by “attending to a sense of the concrete, however temporary and contingent, and not shying away from the seemingly banal borders [...]”²³, in other words to study and illustrate through the usage of specific examples. But:

¹⁹ Cf. Schimanski, Johan und Stephen Wolfe: Entry Points: An Introduction. In: Schimanski, Johan und Stephen Wolfe (Hg.): Border Poetics De-limited. Tromsøer Studien zur Kulturwissenschaft (Bd. 9), Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag 2007. 9.

²⁰ Ib. 10.

²¹ Ib. 11.

²² Ib. 11.

²³ Ib. 11.

Such empirical touch points must necessarily be brought into contact with theoretical perspectives in different ways, and it is also part of the specificity of border studies that these theoretical concept, models and processes must remain open to a multiplicity of perspectives, for reasons to do with the nature of the border itself.”²⁴

The border in its entirety, that is to say, can never be taken in from all sides because we are always situated in relation to the border and there is never one perspective from which we can see all sides. Therefore different writers will have different perspectives when approaching the border, and “while we might strive towards certain common grounds of discussion, there will never appear an obvious indicative ladder leading to a universal theory.”²⁵ Schimanski and Wolfe propose that it is only by using concepts from the humanities and social sciences to disrupt texts, images and experience, “and thus bringing different models and theories into dialogue”²⁶ that writers working within the framework of border poetics are able to distinguish historical, cultural or literary practices that would otherwise go unnoticed. They argue that, in a way, the common grounds for discussion must be the discussion itself, in which different concepts and approaches can be explored. Nonetheless though, certain common concepts or topoi can be identified. The border marks a relation, in both spatial and temporal terms, between a limit/horizon and a connection.²⁷ Borders have two sides, but the two sides are of the same border, meaning each side always stays in relation to its reverse side. They not only limit or divide, but also connect and enable merging. Dirk Hohnsträter draws two distinctions: between the border as a gate [Schranke] or threshold [Schwelle] and the border as a line [Linie] or strip [Streifen].²⁸ Gate signifies a border that in principle can’t be crossed or transgressed, whereas a threshold can be. According to Hohnsträter, to think about a border that cannot be crossed/transgressed only makes sense in a practical context, not generally. The other side might be *de facto* inaccessible, but to reasonably be able to talk about a border at all, one needs to have already shifted one’s perspective to the other side, or at least have determined it as beyond recognition, paradoxically. If one speaks of border, he argues, one cannot remain silent of transition/transgression.²⁹ Sometimes borders can’t be perforated, but

²⁴ Ib. 11.

²⁵ Ib. 11.

²⁶ Ib. 11.

²⁷ Ib. 11-12.

²⁸ Cf. Hohnsträter, Dirk: Im Zwischenraum. Ein Lob des Grenzgängers. In: Benthien, Claudia (Hg.): Über Grenzen: Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler 1999. 240.

²⁹ Ib. 240.

only displaced or they stay deliberately uncrossed for the sake of building up suspense. If the *Grenzgang* (the act of moving along/on/across the border) is to be more than just the passage of an unnoticeable transit zone, the concept of the border as a line or strip is inadequate. Because in this concept only a back-and-forth between the two sides, an alternating succession and coexistence is possible: oscillation and an ultimately inexistent border.³⁰

Further common concepts/topoi of the border according to Schimanski and Wolfe are that the border also has a performative dimension of border creation and maintenance, as either deed or aesthetic act (with often unpredictable or strange effects) and it is always presented, marked, represented and medialized. Furthermore, identity, individual or communal, is unthinkable without border processes and borders involve movements of people from one place (or time) to another, as well as attempts to control space with borders, “creating situations of radically asymmetrical relations of power; and attempts to imagine the spatial dislocations of people, object or ideologies”.³¹ The authors stress, though, that such topoi “must not be allowed to delimit the subject of enquiry in any substantive way”, because while common points of focus are important, “meaningful differences in methodologies, epistemologies, modes of inquiry, metaphors and rhetorical frameworks” also have to be accounted for.³²

2.2. The Concept of Liminality and the Liminal

The essential trait of multiplicity of perspectives for the study of borders generally, also proves to be true for the concept of liminality and the liminal: literary and cultural studies alike offer differing approaches to what constitutes the liminal and liminality. One commonality the different concepts seem to have is the almost exclusively symbolical, metaphorical character of the talk about borders, thresholds and passages.³³ Nicholas Saul and Frank Möbus even argue that the threshold, as a metaphor for transcendence and identity formation par excellence, holds a special

³⁰ Ib. 241.

³¹ Schimanski, Wolfe (2007), 12.

³² Ib. 12.

³³ Parr, Rolf: Liminale und andere Übergänge. Theoretische Modellierungen von Grenzzonen, Normalitätsspektren, Schwellen, Übergängen und Zwischenräumen in Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft. In: Geisenhanslüke, Achim und Georg Mein (Hg.): Schriftkultur und Schwellenkunde. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2008. (Literalität und Liminalität Bd.1). 16.

status as metaphor of a metaphor by creating mediatory connections between areas.³⁴ The symbolical and the material interlock in the concept of the border insofar as there is not only a reference to a geographical space, but it is the social organization of the geographical space that is constitutive.³⁵ In the symbolical talk about borders lies at the same time however, according to Rolf Parr, the danger to give up all specificity of the liminal in favour of the plain distinction between A and B, to use the term border in the more colloquial sense simply as distinction or difference.³⁶ Therefore it is important to give an introduction to the concepts of liminality on which the observations in this paper are based, which have their roots in anthropological and cultural studies and prove to be useful for literary studies.

The concept of liminality targets the meaning of the threshold as a paradoxical order of the “between”. The status of liminality is insofar paradoxical, as liminality marks both a fundamental category of order and a transitory zone of crossing from one space/state to another. In this crossing, distinction and connection form a whole. In contrast to the rather rigid concept of the border, liminality tackles the interplay of border and transition. The concept of liminality is directed towards the between, the blurred margins of cultural borders, in which the other and one’s own coalesce, towards the initiation of a space of the border and a space between borders where nothing is decided yet and everything is possible.³⁷

The term liminality was first introduced by Victor Turner in the 1960ies in his symbolic anthropology based on the work about rites of passage (*Les rites de passage*, 1981) by social anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep identifies three stages of rites of passage: the phase of separation from the space of origin (“rites de séparation”), followed by the phase of the in-between and transition (“rites de marge”), in particular a phase of the threshold (referring to a change of space), or of transformation (referring

³⁴ Cf. Behschnitt, Wolfgang: Liminale und andere Räume. Grenzräume bei M.A. Goldschmidt und Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. In: Geisenhanslüke, Achim und Georg Mein (Hg.): Grenzräume der Schrift. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2008. 77-94. (Literalität und Liminalität Bd.2). 80.

³⁵ Cf. Parr (2008), 15.

³⁶ Cf. ib. 16.

³⁷ Cf. Geisenhanslüke, Achim und Georg Mein (Hg.): Schriftkultur und Schwellenkunde. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2008. (Literalität und Liminalität Bd.1). 8, and Görner, Rüdiger: Grenzen, Schwellen, Übergänge. Zur Poetik des Transitorischen. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001. 113.

Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and the Third Space (*The Location of Culture*, 1994) is in some aspects similar to the concept of liminality as it also tackles in-between spaces where stable identities are unsettled in favour of new hybrid identities (in a merging of cultures). It is, however, more strongly connected with postcolonialism, questions of authority and the meaning of culture, as well as the politics of polarity. Liminality can sometimes relate to a merging of cultures, but not necessarily.

to a change of state) and finally the phase of affiliation or integration into a new structure.³⁸ Turner develops this model further and calls the first phase the pre-liminal phase, the second the liminal phase and the last phase the post-liminal phase, thus putting the emphasis on the middle phase, which he regards as the crucial moment (limes = Lat. threshold). In this liminal in-between a disintegration of previous conventions, patterns of behaviour and social differentiations takes place, thereby leading to new experiences. It is an ambiguous state of uncertainty, transformation, potentiality and reconciliation and constitutes an irreversible demarcation with no turning back. With respect to the new structure this phase of liminality forms a permeable (one-way), forward leading zone of transition, functioning as threshold, in-between space or passage in which the outset is the dissolution of previous status distinctions and hierarchy, and in which the conclusion is the creation of a community of apparently equal people through participation in a new structure, existing within the “structure” of a society, a space that allows the “Entfaltung reinen Menschseins”³⁹ [development of humanity in its purest form, A/N]. Which is why, according to Turner, liminality as well as “communitas” exist in this in-between phase.⁴⁰ This “communitas” appears threatening, contaminative and anarchistic from the point of view of those whose interest is to maintain the “structure”, but at the same time it is the source of the essence of what it means to be human, from which every society draws renewing strength.⁴¹ Turner’s model is spatial and vectoral, a middle zone is framed on both sides by borders, which are permeable in the direction of the temporal order of events, but not in reverse.⁴²

The reception of Turner’s concept of liminality, meaning the application to new and partly recent fields, themes and theories happened at first in sociology and social psychology and in parallel also in theatre studies. As it has already been mentioned, literary studies have only quite recently discovered the concept which is why not many explicit adaptations are in existence yet.⁴³

³⁸ Cf. Van Gennep, Arnold: *Übergangsriten (Les rites de passage)*. Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus Verlag 1999. 21.

³⁹ Bräunlein, Peter J.: *Zur Aktualität von Victor W. Turner. Einleitung in sein Werk*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2012. 54.

⁴⁰ Cf. Parr (2008), 21, and Turner, Victor: *Das Ritual. Struktur und Anti-Struktur*. Frankfurt, New York: Campus Verlag 2005. 95-96.

⁴¹ Cf. Bräunlein (2012), 55.

⁴² Cf. Parr (2008), 22.

⁴³ Cf. ib. 24.

Walter Benjamin is one of the first who strongly distinguishes between the threshold and the border in his *Passagen-Werk*.⁴⁴ He differentiates four dimensions of the threshold. Firstly, thresholds function as a sign of spatial-topographical zones of abeyance or transitions of all sorts, like gateways, doors, passages, but also transition spaces like train stations or cemeteries. Secondly, they have a temporal dimension, they are “Erinnerungsschwellen” [thresholds of memory, A/N], which serve as associative conjunction between past and present, individual and collective-historical recollection on the basis of spatial-temporal overlapping and expansion. In or by means of these zones can the (temporal) past be spatially updated, the structure of memory is spatially unfolded. Thirdly, thresholds stand for liminal states of consciousness, including those of transgression, for instance through the use of drugs. Both the topographical passing through the threshold and the transgression of borders of the consciousness transform the person who crosses them. And finally, fourthly, thresholds can be socially marked, according to Walter Benjamin. He describes the figure of the flaneur as one placed on a twofold threshold: of the city and of social class (“Bürgerklasse”). “Keine von beiden hat ihn noch überwältigt. In keiner von beiden ist er zu Hause.”⁴⁵ (Neither of the two has gotten the better of him. He is not at home in either of the them. A/N). Walter Benjamin’s concept is complex in its multi-dimensionality, which allows stasis (for instance staying in transition zones for an extended time) simultaneously to processuality and connects a temporal with a spatial dimension.⁴⁶

2.3. Identity Negotiation

It has already been mentioned that identity is unthinkable without border processes and thus border processes or liminal phenomena are often used in literature, film and other arts as a means of identity negotiation. Thinking again about Turner’s concept of the liminal, it is clear that the liminal constitutes some sort of “other” as opposed to the normal societal state and that the individual in this liminal space is in a process of identity negotiation. Wolfgang Behschnitt makes a case for looking at liminality in association with alterity, but not only as a special form of alterity, which is used as a

⁴⁴ Cf. Benjamin, Walter: *Das Passagen-Werk*. Zweiter Band. Hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1982. 1025.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, Walter: *Das Passagen-Werk*. Erster Band. Hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1982. 54.

⁴⁶ Parr (2008), 48.

relationally defined opposite to identity, but in a more nuanced way. He proposes to use the distinction between two different relations that tend to be intermixed under the relational concepts of alterity: firstly, the relation of difference (“Differenzbeziehung”) which is based on differentiation and distinction and which has the function of creating or stabilizing identity. Secondly, the relation of one’s own and familiar to the unfamiliar and “other” which is based on distance, is connected with curiosity, wonder or fright and challenges the cognitive capacity (“Distanzbeziehung”).⁴⁷ Both a relation of difference and a relation of distance are present in the structure of the rite of transition.

In einem Differenzverhältnis stehen Ausgangs- und Zielzustand. Beide Male handelt es sich um Zustände oder Räume innerhalb der sozialen Ordnung, deren Unterscheidung soziale, kulturelle, religiöse oder andere Identitätskomponenten aktualisiert: Kindheit oder Erwachsenenheit, Kulturraum A oder Kulturraum B [...] usw. In einem Distanzverhältnis stehen hingegen die beiden durch soziale Ordnungen strukturierten Zustände gegenüber dem liminalen Übergangszustand. Für diesen ist die Unvertrautheit konstitutiv, das Neue, Staunen Erregende oder Furcht Einflößende.⁴⁸

[The state of origin and the state of destination are in a relation of difference. Both times it’s about states or spaces within the social order, the differentiation of which updates social, cultural, religious or other components of identity: childhood or adulthood, cultural space A or cultural space B [...] etc. However, both the states structured through social regulations are in a relation of distance opposite to the liminal transition state, for which unfamiliarity, the new, wonder- or fright-evoking is constitutive. A/N].

The relation of distance therefore seems to be the more important one for examining the conditions of the liminal.

The passage from one state or space to another, crossing through or staying on the threshold and thus the unfamiliar, often also includes a moment of transgression. Transgression, Julian Wolfreys argues, is “the very pulse that constitutes our identities, and we would have no sense of our own subjectivity were it not for a constant, if discontinuous negotiation with the transgressive otherness by which we are formed and informed.”⁴⁹ Identity must believe in its own stability for “the conventions of transgression to apply”, he continues, but seeing oneself as having a stable identity is

⁴⁷ Cf. Behschnitt (2008), 85.

⁴⁸ Ib. 85.

⁴⁹ Wolfreys, Julian: *Transgression. Identity, Space, Time*. Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008. 1.

“to misrecognize one’s selfhood”.⁵⁰ This misapprehension, however, is what makes transgression possible again and again “in countless, surprising eruptions from within the very places that we seek to define as safe, controlled and patrolled”.⁵¹ To transgress means to cross a line, step across some boundary or move beyond convention, therefore entering in a way a liminal space. The subject entering the liminal space, exposing itself to the otherness of the liminal, undergoes a transformation and as a result starts resembling the liminal space.⁵² It explores the precarious, intricate conditions of the space between, which shows why it is difficult to keep the balance on the threshold, as Hohnsträter states.⁵³ He accredits the *GrenzgängerIn* [person walking the border, A/N] with the ability to permeate the “border” on both sides, contrary to Turner’s vectoral model, thus being able to choose, temporarily and while upholding the possibility to move back to the space between, to immerse into the world of one side, gaining different perspectives and insights. The improbability of the *Grenzgang* due to the temptation of uncomplicated, stable, less challenging constellations on both sides also casts light on the subject’s mastery, according to Hohnsträter.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ib. 2.

⁵¹ Ib. 3.

⁵² Cf. Behschnitt (2008), 92.

⁵³ Cf. Hohnsträter (1999), 243.

⁵⁴ Cf. ib. 243.

3. Adaptation and Animation: Liminal Formation Processes Between Cultures

The creation of an adaptation and animation itself can be seen as a liminal process as it generates a hybrid in-between space of potentiality: in the act of adapting, similar to the act of translating, the adapter then becomes a sort of *GrenzgängerIn* himself or herself, moving on a threshold between cultures and modes of presentation and acting as designer of said liminal space.

3.1. Creating a Transcultural Adaptation

Adapting is a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, a filtering through one's own sensibility, interests and talents, as Linda Hutcheon notes. Therefore, "adapters are first interpreters and then creators".⁵⁵ It is this ability to "repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity, to be at once both self and Other"⁵⁶ which positions the adapter in the liminal space. In the transfer the non-defined is articulated. If, according to Görner⁵⁷, an artist who reflects upon matters of transition and transfer and makes them an object of their creative work, on the one hand, achieves to transfer life experience into another medium and, on the other hand, reciprocally views the artistic procedure as opportunity to solve problems of life, the transcultural adapter then even takes it a step further. He or she takes the already transferred experiences, reflects upon their structure and composition and seeks the 'right' resetting or recontextualizing, often modifying meaning.⁵⁸ Not only the context of the adapter plays a crucial role in this process, the context of reception has an influence as well on kinetic, linguistic or physical considerations, like facial expressions, dress, etc. as they convey cultural information. Local particularities consequently become transplanted to new ground and something new and hybrid results.⁵⁹ An adaptation is then not unsuccessful in terms of infidelity but in terms of a lack of creativity and skill to make the text one's own, thus autonomous, to make use of the liminal qualities.⁶⁰ Stories communicate narrative meaning *to someone* in some

⁵⁵ Hutcheon, Linda: *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge 2006. 18.

⁵⁶ *Ib.* 174.

⁵⁷ Cf. Görner (2001), 129.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hutcheon (2006), 146-147.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ib.* 149-150.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ib.* 20.

specific context and they are created *by someone* with that intent. Therefore, if the mode of presentation changes, these circumstances also change.⁶¹ The telling mode of a novel is immersive through imagination in a fictional world, whereas the showing mode of a film is immersive through perception of the aural and visual. Hutcheon comments:

In the telling mode – in narrative literature, for example – our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated – that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. We can stop reading at any point; we can re-read or skip ahead; we hold the book in our hands and feel, as well as see, how much of the story remains to be read. But with the move to the mode of showing, as in film and stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception – with its mix of both detail and broad focus.⁶²

Thus, it is a challenge to convey for example intimacy and distance through point of view – some argue that only the telling mode has the flexibility to do so. But there are in fact ways to achieve it. Attempts to use the camera for first-person narration are infrequent, according to Hutcheon.⁶³ Miyazaki, however, translates Jones' figural narrative perspective, which can at times even resemble a stream of consciousness – to both first-person narration on occasion and a cinematic version of figural narrative perspective: Sophie as the protagonist always stays the major focalizer, determining what we know. In a multitrack medium, it is relevant to not only think in terms of first- or third-person narration though, as Robert Stam argues, but to take into account “the authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness”⁶⁴. Everything can convey point of view: camera angle, focal length, music, *mise en scène*, performance or costume.⁶⁵ Some scholars furthermore argue that although film can show us characters experiencing and thinking (exteriority), it can never reveal their experiences or thoughts (interiority) like the telling mode, except through the ‘literary’ device of voice-over.⁶⁶ But, as Hutcheon argues, film can and does find cinematic equivalents as external appearances are made to mirror inner truths, for instance through extreme close-ups to create psychological

⁶¹ Cf. ib. 26.

⁶² Cf. ib. 23.

⁶³ Cf. ib. 54.

⁶⁴ Robert Stam qtd. in ib. 55.

⁶⁵ Cf. ib. 55.

⁶⁶ Ib. 58.

intimacy, or techniques like slow motion, rapid cutting, lighting, etc. to create visual, externalized analogues to subjective elements, Miyazaki's usage of which in *Howl's Moving Castle* will be explored in chapter four.⁶⁷

Concerning the audience's expectation in the face of an adaptation, familiarity is part of the pleasure and frustration through repetition and memory. But "our intertextual expectations about medium and genre, as well as about this specific work, are brought to the forefront of our attention", as Hutcheon mentions.⁶⁸ Therefore, in watching an adaptation knowingly, the liminal character of the adaptation will compel us to reflect upon it, causing us to enter a liminal space of cognition, in which we are enabled to ponder the creation process and become aware of the differences and the characteristics of the transfer. Both the creation of an adaptation as well as experiencing it, are then liminal acts.

3.2. Creating an Anime

Animation per se has its emphasis on movement and transformation and is therefore particularly good at "exploring a continuum of identity"⁶⁹, as Napier argues, because of the nature of the medium itself. Because anime functions in a nonreferential realm, it may allow for a more complex form of identification than live action can – not being based on specific real-life characterizations, it can provide a wider variety of scenarios and images and possesses a credibility that live action cinema no longer has, especially concerning topics of love and justice, she notes. The emphasis on movement can be liberating as it allows the audience "vicariously to explore fluctuating identities that transcend any fixed subjectivity"⁷⁰. It is no accident, Napier continues, that metamorphosis is a key trope in animation. The heterogenous kind of cultural self-representation resists attempts at narrow cultural categorization, leading in fact to a Japanese cultural identity that is increasingly a global one, and making identification possible for viewers of all cultural backgrounds.⁷¹

Indeed, anime may be the perfect medium to capture what is perhaps the overriding issue of our day, the shifting nature of identity in a constantly changing society. With its rapid

⁶⁷ Cf. ib. 58-59.

⁶⁸ Ib. 21-22.

⁶⁹ Napier, Susan J.: *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York, Hampshire 2005. 121.

⁷⁰ Ib. 121. and cf. Bigelow (2009), 69.

⁷¹ Cf. ib.292.

shifts of narrative pace and its constantly transforming imagery, the animated medium is superbly positioned to illustrate the atmosphere of change permeating not only Japanese society but also all industrialized or industrializing societies.⁷²

In *Howl's Moving Castle* Miyazaki employed different animation tricks to convey the identity negotiation of the characters, but also merged Japanese styles with Western elements since Jones' story is set in a European environment. Art director Yoji Takeshige explains that they incorporated Western painting techniques and images into the background drawings, they even took a research trip to Europe, visiting the French Alsatian city Colmar. For architectural styles they based the overall setting "on the wooden architecture style called half-timber so prevalent in German and English homes" and incorporated the light and atmosphere of the city of Colmar throughout the film, "the reddish cobblestone streets, the drifting clouds and sunlight" that left such a strong impression on them.⁷³ "It was difficult to restrain my ingrained Japanese approach to color, so Miyazaki would often instruct me to make my colors "brighter and more colorful". I had experience in oil painting, so I incorporated Western approaches to colors and space into my work."⁷⁴ But his style is also redolent of the long tradition of *ukoyo*, the genre of Japanese landscape painting which presents a 'floating world' remote from the material universe, as Clare Bradford observes – idealized settings that are "disrupted by his introduction of images of Zeppelin-like aircrafts from the First World War, which shower destruction on the pristine countryside and bring fear and horror to its inhabitants."⁷⁵ Miyazaki's entire style of representation and his narrative strategies constantly negotiate across cultures, she remarks further. The influence of manga and anime is particularly obvious in his "flexible deployment of perspective, which directs viewers' eyes toward particular figures or scenes".⁷⁶ He situates us in the narrative in the way comic books tend to do by showing highly detailed tapestries of images and while he prioritizes certain elements over others, this does not limit the viewer's freedom to focus on seemingly

⁷² Ib. 12.

⁷³ Miyazaki, Hayao: *The Art of Howl's Moving Castle*. [Original ed. Edition]. San Francisco: VIZ Media, LLC 2005. 49.

⁷⁴ Ib. 49.

⁷⁵ Bradford, Clare. *Children's Literature in a Global Age: Transnational and Local Identities*. In: Barnboken--BLFT Barnlitterært Forskningstidsskrift/ Nordic Journal of ChildLit Aesthetics, Vol.34:1 (2011).

<http://www.tandfonline.com.jproxy.nuim.ie/doi/full/10.3402/blft.v2i0.5828?scroll=top&needAccess=true>. Web. 28.

⁷⁶ Ib. 28.

peripheral elements.⁷⁷ Negotiating across Japanese, European and American traditions and cultural references, he produces images and narratives “whose transnationalism both caters to Japanese viewers and provides an entrée to the film’s international markets.”⁷⁸ According to Cavallaro, *Howl’s Moving Castle* reverberates, while being based on a fundamentally Western fairy-tale, with echoes of the Japanese fairy-tale heritage: a key topos in this tradition is the notion of interpenetrating worlds – “quotidian realms, non-everyday domains and liminal dimensions between them, across which characters may migrate either of their own volition or as a corollary of spells.”⁷⁹

Anime is now also a mainstream phenomenon in the West, its popularity coinciding with the shift to a digital culture, where the integration of the virtual and the real is redefining what it means to be human. Miyazaki’s art is a transformative site, Susan Bigelow comments, where binary relations of Eastern and Western thought and the aural and the visual converge. He “creates with the Japanese audience in mind, and without trying to neutralize cultural contingency, repurposes the universal language of cinema to appeal across cultures [...]”⁸⁰ Miyazaki still privileges storytelling over digital tricks to transport the viewer to another world of imagination. His technique, Bigelow argues, is perception as his drawing speaks the narrative, not in photo-realistic imagery, but in a way that captures the essence of reality better than reality itself. Instead of a scripted storyline, he starts with images, which are then visualized in storyboards. The story therefore unfolds while he is drawing it and production starts while he is still in the process of drawing.⁸¹ He still hand draws much of his work and is known to insist on each additional frame that “helps to capture the sense of nature’s subtle rhythms, drawing nature into himself and onto the page”.⁸² Miyazaki offers a model of how to function in the digital, liminal space of the hybrid “without succumbing to the totalitarianism of the market and the technological”⁸³ by re-narrativizing the fragment but at the same time combining practically all major animation techniques. The film frequently uses elongation in the passing position between two key frames to realize a smoothly realistic pattern of motion. It

⁷⁷ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 10.

⁷⁸ *Ib.* 28.

⁷⁹ Cavallaro (2006), 169.

⁸⁰ Bigelow (2009), 57.

⁸¹ Cf. *ib.* 68.

⁸² *Ib.* 59.

⁸³ *Ib.* 72.

furthermore alternates between “slow-paced sequences and headlong dives, poised elegance and hyperdynamism, as well as audacious camera angles and depth-of-field effects intended to propose daring juxtapositions of depth and height”⁸⁴, as Cavallaro notes. Walks are used as a means of individualizing characters, manipulating weight and flexibility “to evoke shifts and fluctuations in both individual and relational modalities of motion”⁸⁵ and thereby show their development in flux. The film was produced digitally – instead of cels, the animators use high-resolution frames recorded to high-capacity digital tape and then transferred onto film – and computerized tools and techniques, like digital composition and layering, morphing, 3D rendering, texture mapping, atmospheric effects, etc., were used to adequately convey the shifts, movement and fluctuation. However, Miyazaki stayed true to his commitment to hands-on craftsmanship nonetheless: all of the background art was initially hand-drawn and hand-painted as well as the characters, which instead of being generated in the computer, were also hand-drawn and only then scanned digitally. This fusion is what makes even the smallest gesture, facial expression and transformation come alive in ways that the audience has no choice but to be immersed in what the characters experience. The liminal hybrid space of flux between the cultures Miyazaki creates, therefore lays the perfect foundation for identification and reflexion for audiences of diverse backgrounds.

⁸⁴ Cavallaro (2006), 165.

⁸⁵ *Ib.* 165.

4. Transformation and Identity Negotiation: Liminal Identities

4.1. The Foundation

To enable the liminal identities to be formed and negotiated, certain storytelling and cinematic/cinematographic tools have been employed. They function as a basis and starting point, an underlying structure so to say, and will be briefly explored in this chapter, as well as in parts in the in-depth analysis of the following chapters.

4.1.1. Perpetual Movement In-Between Space and Time: The Castle

The first time the castle is mentioned in the book it is described as a “tall black castle”, which had “suddenly appeared on the hills above Market Chipping, blowing clouds of black smoke from its tall, thin turrets” (4)⁸⁶ at some point, scaring people partly because they thought it belonged to the feared Which of the Waste, but partly what “made it all the scarier was that the castle did not stay at the same place. [...] You could see it actually moving sometimes, with smoke pouring out from the turrets in dirty grey gusts.” (4). In the film the castle is introduced in the opening scene, appearing at first sight floating like a huge pirate ship out of thick, grey mist. It is moving towards the viewer from the perspective of a static camera, walking on chicken legs, puffing and rattling with seemingly every part of it moving separately, additionally to the general slow movement of the whole castle. The film plays with the unknown: because of the fog, the viewer only sees parts of the castle in close-ups while hearing only the sounds it produces, at first without any accompanying music. It could be perceived as frightening, but then the scenery changes, the fog of the unknown starts to lift and as we gradually see more of it, the ‘strange thing’ is put in the familiar space. The castle is shown from far away, against the background of green meadows and mountains, with sheep and a farmer’s house in the foreground and light music starts to play. All of a sudden it merely seems an odd, peculiar sight that provokes the audience’s curiosity. Contrary to its description in the book, it is pieced together in a steam punk fashion out of parts of houses and scrap materials. It has only three turrets that look nothing like those of a typical castle, and it is not just black, but a potpourri of metal, walls,

⁸⁶ Jones, Diana Wynne: *Howl’s Moving Castle*. [First Eos edition] New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 2008. Both primary sources will be the only sources cited in the running text.

roofs, wing-like parts and even a tongue sticking out in the front. In fact, it looks nothing like a castle at all, prompting Sophie to comment to herself: “What a dump! When I think of castle this is not what I picture!” (21:00)⁸⁷. Castles suggest an earlier time when they were still traditional and symbolic seats of power for cities, regions, or countries and served the role of defensive fortification for the leadership and potentially even for many of the citizens, in case of an external threat. They were also usually the home of those with a leadership role in a region or country, as well as their family members.⁸⁸ According to Derek Martin, Howl’s castle could be said to symbolize none of these:

It is no seat of geographical power, for it has no territory to call its own. It also does not look visually impressive, as if it were built to an overall plan or design. Rather, it appears more as if it were cobbled together in a hurry. Its materials, such as metal, wood, stone, and tiles, appear as if scavenged from old structures. In some instances, it looks as if whole sections of preexisting buildings have been incorporated, ones that appear far more suited to rural villages than to royalty. It also is made up of mismatched, and ancient-looking, fortifications, such as turrets that may have been recommissioned from old naval vessels. With its multiple and mismatched turrets and cannons, and its hammered metal armor, it looks much more like a hastily built fortress than a castle, as if it was built more for immediate defense than for any other reason.⁸⁹

And indeed, at first glance it seems curious to call it a castle at all, as it moves and functions mostly as a threshold instead of just a defensive fortification – it might seem impenetrable, but actually is permeable, welcoming anyone in need of shelter.⁹⁰ It is argued here, however, that its power lies precisely in having no fixed territory, in inhabiting – and being – the space between. In this state of constant change, it can function as fortification or as threshold, depending on the needs of its inhabitants. It also shows that through having all options open and permeating borders on both/many sides, Howl can indeed be a leader for his small community and the society he’s in through being a true *Grenzgänger*, even though this does not become clear until later during the course of the book/film.

⁸⁷ *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. (Orig.: ハウルの動く城 Hauru no Ugoku Shiro).

⁸⁸ Cf. Martin, Derek. Individuation in Miyazaki's "Howl's Moving Castle" (2004). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015.

<https://search-proquest-com.jproxy.nuim.ie/docview/1707928960?pq-origsite=summon>. Web. 118.

⁸⁹ *Ib.* 118.

⁹⁰ Rudd, David: Building Castles in the Air: (De)Construction in Howl's Moving Castle. In: *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol.21:2 (2010): 257-270. 265.

“In the book I wrote”, Jones comments in an interview, “the castle is more like a hovercraft and floats an inch or so above the ground.” She hadn’t thought of the castle having feet and was surprised by it, but also “very fond” of it.⁹¹ It is its own strange persona in the film, organically changing and transforming, while never really ceasing to move forward through the hills of the land of Ingary. Miyazaki told the director of Digital Animation that the story wouldn’t work without the castle moving. “The castle isn’t just part of the background. It’s a character so I want you to treat it as a protagonist.”⁹² To achieve dynamic movements, computer generated imagery (CGI) was used and the castle was broken down into many parts, enabling movement beyond simple stretching and shrinking.⁹³

In the castle, the wizard Howl, his apprentice Michael (book), respectively Markl (film) and the fire demon Calcifer live together as a community before the protagonist Sophie’s arrival on the scene. Referring to Victor Turner’s concept of liminality, their community could be seen as a kind of “communitas” within the social order. As they are in a constant liminal state, they are feared because of their subversive power – or to be precise, Howl is feared, in some places. He has created a reputation for himself as a cold-blooded, heartless wizard, “known to amuse himself by collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them [...], some people said he ate their hearts.” (5). This creation of Otherness shall be referred to again later. Because he is a wizard, he is not restricted to the liminal space at a certain time or in a certain vectoral direction though, but through the creation of the castle he has brought into being a true threshold space, from which he can basically move to wherever he pleases (with some restrictions) and which also enables other members of his community to do the same. It is his literal heartlessness that allowed this creation in the first place, since it is the fire demon who moves the castle and holds it together by having been given Howl’s heart by Howl himself through a contract that saved Calcifer from dying as a falling star. David Rudd comments:

Howl is [...] transformed in the course of the text, and this shift is made all the more convincing when we realize his link with Calcifer, whose name also conceals beneath its inert-sounding surface something vibrant and energetic. Moreover, given that Calcifer was once a Shooting Star, this link seems somehow more ancient, primal, almost chthonic. The name Calcifer, of course, literally means a “stone-bearer,” which describes what this

⁹¹ Jones (2008), Extras, 5.

⁹² Miyazaki (2004), 76.

⁹³ Cf. ib. 77.

Shooting Star does in carrying the castle around the land of Ingary. Beyond this, though, the name also has links with Lucifer [...whose name suggests fire and 'bright star', therefore a] hint of a pact between Howl and Calcifer that brings to mind other such agreements, such as that between Faust and Mephistopheles.⁹⁴

Because of this connection it is argued by some that the castle is in fact a metaphor for Howl's psyche.⁹⁵ While it can be read in that way, in this paper only elements from this theory are taken and it is claimed that the narrative and cinematic castle space is created in part as a symbol or expression of his psyche, changing with the new influences once Sophie arrives.

The setting in which the stories unfold is in a time and place that is partly real and partly fantasy, a "once upon a time", implying a certain timelessness and spacelessness, that is common to myths and fairy tales, while at the same time also depicting a world that we can recognize.⁹⁶ It is moreover, as Derek Martin argues, "set in a place and time where objective reality overlaps with a subjective magical one, and therefore in a realm where the rigid lines of history and geography are loosened and blurred."⁹⁷ In spite of the timelessness, it is nonetheless a time in which it seems that the medieval and modern overlap, especially in the film, with horse-pulled carts, few electric technologies, steam engine-driven vehicles and trains, and internal combustion engines powering flying machines occurring at the same time. While these elements are reminiscent of the late 19th and early 20th century culture and society, images of later epochs as envisioned at the time are visualized as well. Many specific details are creatively altered and embellished and the machines were never actually invented, thus making the precise identification of a time period impossible.⁹⁸ The intriguing power of such images, for Miyazaki, lies in their ability to conjure up a world in which science exists as well as magic without conflicting with each other since they are illusion, and in which conventional boundaries that separate the rational from the irrational, fact from fantasy, are consequently radically undermined, thereby creating the fabric for liminal potentiality.⁹⁹

What Kraemer formulates in the context of Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* also holds true for *Howl's Moving Castle*: boundary-crossing figures are perpetual outsiders, "in

⁹⁴ Rudd (2010), 263.

⁹⁵ Cf. Martin (2004).

⁹⁶ Cf. ib. 122.

⁹⁷ Ib. 122.

⁹⁸ Cf. ib. 122 and cf. Cavallaro (2006), 168.

⁹⁹ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 168.

some ways able to sympathize with more than one group because they belong to none, and never can. Liminality [...] it seems, has a cost [...]”¹⁰⁰ For Howl however, this being an outsider is what he strives for, for it allows him to shuffle out of responsibilities, while trying to live a self-determined life (a topic which will be revisited later). For someone to be able to enter the liminal space of the castle and to become a member of this liminal community, it requires certain skills, attributes and actions that are reminiscent of Van Gennep’s and Turner’s structure of rites of passage (see chapter 4.2.3.).

4.1.2. The Illusion of Space and the Door to Other Places and Times

Once Sophie is inside the castle, the audience gets to explore the space along with her. It becomes apparent that in the liminal castle space that is constantly changing as viewed from the outside there is also stability: the immense size is an illusion to make it look intimidating when actually it is of a manageable size and doesn’t transform much unless a ritual is performed, hinting at the need of even a liminal ‘communitas’ for some consistency and showing that at least some part of a threshold must always be stable for people to be able to move through or on it. Rooms are put together like the community they constitute a home for: different parts from different backgrounds, mixed together to create a peculiar whole. Sophie’s question “I’d like to know where the rest of the castle is.” (76), is met with laughter from Howl and Michael, because there is no ‘rest’. Sophie’s arrival “familiarizes the audience with the castle”¹⁰¹, Cheng-Ing Wu notes, as the narration in the book as well as the storytelling in the film follow her inquisitive exploration of the castle and its workings. “As Sophie becomes more acquainted with Howl, she gets to see more of the castle, she is the privileged agent who can travel freely inside the structure.”¹⁰² We find out that Sophie could only enter it through the ‘backdoor’ because it is in fact the only entrance door, the other doors are illusions, just like the size. The central part of the castle is the room with Calcifer’s fireplace, from which four black doors lead to a bathroom (in the film it is upstairs), a

¹⁰⁰ Kraemer, Christine Hoff: Between the Worlds: Liminality and Self-Sacrifice in Princess Mononoke. In: *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol.8:2, Article 1 (2004).
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol8/iss2/1>. Web. 11.

¹⁰¹ Wu, Cheng-Ing: Hayao Miyazaki’s Mythic Poetics: Experiencing the Narrative Persuasions in *Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle* and *Ponyo*. In: *Animation – an Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 11:2 (2016): 189-203. 195.

¹⁰² *Ib.* 195.

backyard with brick walls opening to the sky, a broom cupboard and wooden stairs to two bedrooms upstairs (Howl's and Michael's/Markl's). Therefore, to go anywhere, the main room must be crossed, it is the heart of the threshold space and contains the heart (in Calcifer) of the driving force behind it (Howl). By means of the *Grenzgänger's* heart, one could argue, the castle becomes the threshold space, but it also works reciprocally: owing to the castle as a threshold space the *Grenzgänger* is enabled to act as one. Susan Bye comments:

While made out of inorganic junk, the constantly adjusting, almost organic form of the castle (its design comprised more than eighty separate pieces) reflects its function as a space where individual lives adapt, both to changing circumstances and to the needs of the group. The castle is a magic space of possibility, but only in response to the possibilities generated by its occupants.¹⁰³

The inside of the castle “is really just Howl's old house in Porthaven, which is the only real part”, Michael explains to Sophie, “Howl and Calcifer invented the castle and Calcifer keeps it going.” (77), but while the actual castle always wanders the hills, its door leads the inhabitants to different locations and even times. Cavallaro notes: “Howl's castle mirrors the magician's own propensity for the eccentric and the sensational, shifting location in defiance of physics and logic and opening at will onto disparate worlds and temporal dimensions.”¹⁰⁴ If the door is opened to another location, people can walk out of the castle as well as inside, it is as if it settles into another place temporarily, but if someone were to forcibly open the door of that place, trying to enter the castle without it being set from inside the castle, they would find nothing but an empty space. The decision of switching places thus can only be made from within the castle, only a *GrenzgängerIn* has the power to initiate such a shift. However, the act of doing so is simple:

There was a square wooden knob above the door, set into the lintel, with a dab of paint on each side of its four sides. At that moment there was a green blob on the side that

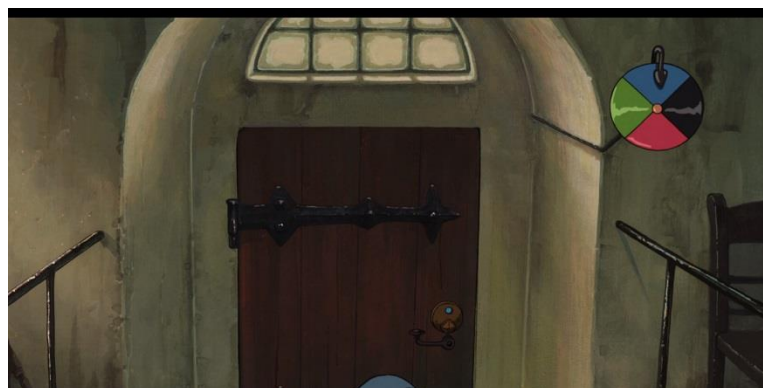


Figure 1: The mechanism of shifting location. Miyazaki 2004. *Howl's Moving Castle*.

¹⁰³ Bye, Susan: Connecting the Pieces in “Howl's Moving Castle”. In: *Screen Education*, no. 74 (2014): 112-117. 113.

¹⁰⁴ Cavallaro (2006), 167.

was at the bottom, but Howl turned the knob round so that it had a red blob downward before he opened the door. (78)

In the book, apart from the black 'blob', all others lead to different places within the land of Ingary: the blue one to Howl's house in Porthaven (blue arguably because Porthaven is located by the seaside), the red one to Kingsbury where the king's palace is situated (red as a king's colour) and the green one to the actual location of the castle, the hills (green meadows). And because the inside of the castle is mainly taken from the Porthaven house, the windows of most rooms look onto Porthaven, hinting that a part of the castle is somehow permanently anchored in the place of 'origin' respectively the places it is connected to. Which is why the window in Howl's room is the only one not looking on Porthaven, taking us back to the black 'blob'. Sophie – and with her the audience – only comes to know where it leads as Howl takes both her and Michael with him in the central chapter of the book (chapter 11 of 21). Until then, it is a secret even to Michael and Calcifer – although the latter could be expected to know as he is the one powering the doors/transitions after all. In fact, the door leads to the 'real' world, the audience's world, which is constructed by Jones as a parallel world to the fairy tale world, thus deconstructing in a poststructuralist way typical conventions and compelling the audience to reflect upon their own perception of reality. The fairy tale world is as real as the 'real' world, or rather the 'real' world becomes the strange world as we experience it through Sophie's perception. All of a sudden, typical for parallel worlds as Stefanie Kimler notes, the space is not bounded anymore, but experienced as possibly infinite. This notion of a space extending ad infinitum and therefore being never completely explorable inspires the possibility of the existence of further unknown and to us hitherto alien worlds or universes.¹⁰⁵ Jones undertakes an actual localization within the 'real' world and has the door lead to suburbia in Wales. In the film, Miyazaki has chosen to translate this to another level and instead of a parallel world, the door leads to scenes in the ongoing and prominent war, as well as to Howl's inner world, respectively past, in two important scenes, sequences that are situated somewhere between actual time-travel and travel into memory, as will be discussed later in more detail. The war is only vaguely mentioned in the book and not of strong importance to the story, whereas Miyazaki includes it in the central plot.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Kimler, Stefanie: Funktion und Konstruktion von Parallelwelten: am Beispiel der Filme von Hayao Miyazaki. Göttingen: Optimus 2010. 74.

Kimler argues that the castle itself could be seen as a parallel space because of its break with conventions of space and time, making it possible to experience different dimensions of time and space almost at the same time.¹⁰⁶

4.1.3. The Curses and Magic Contracts

Apart from the liminal space of the castle, curses are another underlying driving force for identity negotiation as they compel characters to act, as well as enable change. Both major curses, in the book and in the film, are cast by the Witch of the Waste (hereafter also referred to as WotW). The audience only learns of Howl's curse well into the story, even though it is a major reason for the castle being built the way it is. For because Howl had once pursued the WotW for her beauty, but later lost interest, she is since after his heart. To escape her he constructed the castle in the way that he can instantly flee to another place if need be. In the book it is not clarified how he got cursed, only that it happened at some point and that the curse is unavoidable and must and will be fulfilled, as much as he tries to escape it, hinting at the need for personal development and owning of responsibilities as it becomes apparent that, eventually, things turn out beneficial for him. In the book, the curse is in fact a poem by John Donne ("Song"), which inspires the terms of the curse and the wording of which literally comes true, something that is possible only in a fairy-tale land "where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist" (1). It is this "playful flow between the literal and the metaphorical", as Welaratna puts it, "that establishes a world in which every character has a double and objects never have a fixed identity."¹⁰⁷ The poem, she argues further, is the heart of the novel's plot and is "a laundry list of supremely improbable things, from catching a falling star to hearing mermaids singing and serves as a prime example of the metaphysical conceit Donne was so noted for."¹⁰⁸ Jones doubles the original ingenuity by applying "meta-fictional techniques to add layers of meaning until her work resembles nothing so much as a mille-feuille"¹⁰⁹, which is part of the shaping of the liminal space, in which the form itself is a constant crossing beyond the conventional.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. ib. 145-146.

¹⁰⁷ Welaratna (2009), 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ib. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ib. 7.

Only the first two verses are of importance in the book and they can only come true through Sophie entering Howl's life, hinting at her importance in his personal development. It is also in a nutshell what Howl's life mainly consists of: unconventional, often quite improbable, the laws of time and space undermining endeavours and strange sights in search of his true self.

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the Devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou beest born to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
Till age snow white hairs on thee,
Thou, when thou returnest, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And swear,
No where
Lives a woman true, and fair. (176, 220)

"Donne's work bristles with metaphor", Rudd notes, "forever reading the small through the large and vice versa."¹¹⁰ Therefore, he continues, Jones' notion of a floating castle would have surely appealed to the poet as indeed Jones' notion itself is, almost by definition, metaphysical. "In fact, the very word "metaphor" is about, literally (the only time it can be), transporting meanings, which is a major preoccupation of Jones' work from the title on."¹¹¹

In the film, Howl's curse is implemented differently: even though it is made clear that he tries to avoid the WotW, it is Sophie who unknowingly carries the curse for Howl with her when she enters the castle. And while it is as unavoidable as in the book, its

¹¹⁰ Rudd (2010), 264.

¹¹¹ *Ib.* 264.

implementation is much less elaborate, if essentially well translated. Sophie finds a red envelope in the pocket of her dress, which Howl asks her to hand over. The instant his fingers touch it, a small flame bursts out of it and it tumbles down to the table, where it burns itself into the wood and leaves scorch marks in the shape of a falling star, a person-like shape, a heart in-between and what appears to be a sunrise or sunset. The



Figure 2: The curse taking effect. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

importance of the curse is emphasised through a close-up image of both Howl's and Sophie's hand with the curse between them. Miyazaki implements in this shot how both of them are equally affected by it and will have to work together to solve it, further amplified by the mirrored hand posture – they become symbolically connected through the fabric of the curse. Only through Sophie can Howl fulfill his curse and consequently break free from it and only through Howl can Sophie overcome her curse. He seems rather excited and not at all worried as one might expect in such a situation, exclaiming “That is ancient sorcery! And quite powerful, too.” (32:00) He deciphers it as: “You who swallowed a falling star, oh heartless man, your heart shall soon belong to me.” (32:05). Miyazaki simplifies the complexity of Jones' curse and extracts the essence, as he does with narrowing down Jones' various, intertwined and multifaceted side story lines to fit the main plot in a feature film.

Sophie's curse is in fact the trigger for most of the transformation that is to come throughout the story. It is the enabling factor and turns out to be more of a blessing for her and eventually for others as well, than a curse in colloquial terms even though it seems the opposite at first. “Not only does she gain a purpose in life – to break the spell”, as Wasylak puts it, but “she also receives a relevant reason to break away from home and explore the unknown realm of the Waste.”¹¹² In both the book and the film, Sophie is already not in the best mood when the WotW enters her shop only to insult her hats. “Why did you bother to come in?” (34) is what she asks in the book and in the

¹¹² Wasylak, Katarzyna: Isolation, Old Age, and a Post-modern Family in Naomi Kawase's Sweet Bean and Hayao Miyazaki's Howl's Moving Castle. https://www.academia.edu/31134015/Isolation_Old_Age_and_a_Post-Modern_Family_in_Sweet_Bean_and_Howls_Moving_Castle. Web. 11.

film the witch even enters through the locked door, transgressing into Sophie's space, prompting her to say: "I'm afraid you will have to leave now. The door is over here, ma'am, we're closed." (10:30). Casting the curse is only a matter of a small hand movement: "She spread out her hand in a flinging motion toward Sophie's face." (34-35), declaring "I've come to put a stop to you." (34). Statement and action per se are in a stark contrast as they narratively contradict each other. This is of course further amplified when we realise that also its effect initiates the opposite, compelling Sophie to leave and seek her fortune even though, or rather precisely because she has been turned into a 90-year old woman, and consequently actually entering Howl's life when before she had only encountered him once. Miyazaki stages the moment of the curse as a literally transgressive movement. The audience experiences the transgression through Sophie's point of view, as the suddenly half-translucent and therefore ghost-like witch spreads her caped arms like birds' wings and floats in high speed, screen-filling, towards her. At the exact moment we are face to face with her, the perspective is switched through a cut and we view the actual bodily transgression in a figure shot from the side, intentionally being reminded that it is not us who are being cursed, but that we are 'only' observers after all. Similar to the duration of a small hand flinging motion, the scene only lasts for about two seconds (10:46-10:48), highlighting how fast a life can be turned upside down, but that the truly interesting part is how to deal with subsequently entering a liminal phase, how it changes a person's perspective and what processes they go through to find (new) meaning in life. It is a double transgression, into the private property of the house and of her body, both times from within the very place that Sophie seeks to define as safe and controlled ("I could have sworn I locked that door, I must have forgotten.", 10:14), typical for transgressions (see chapter 2.3.). The self being exposed to the transition phenomenon learns to see itself as another.¹¹³ The impact of the curse will be discussed in chapter 4.2.

Another part of the stories' liminal fabric are the magic contracts. Cavallaro states that the magic contract "supplies the figurative basis for adventures whose objective – either voiced or implied – is the facilitation of cooperativeness and solidarity among disparate, even initially adversarial, parties."¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Cf. Görner (2001), 7.

¹¹⁴ Cavallaro, Dani: *Magic as Metaphor in Anime. A Critical Study*. North Carolina: Mc Farland & Company, Inc. 2010. 20.

The concept of the magic contract operates as an effective mechanism for bridging the magical and the non-magical worlds while also allowing magic to retain its necessary alterity. Indeed, the term “contract” locates the supernatural element in a pragmatic reality. Yet, by teaming with forces that clearly bypass normal legalistic considerations, it compels us to appreciate the distinctive workings of agreements founded on otherworldly obligations and rules as phenomena irreducible to the dictates of known and nameable human milieux.¹¹⁵

In both the book and the movie multiplicity is crucial to the handling of the topos of magic contracts as two contracts are at stake. They are fundamentally important for the way in which the stories unfold, and the characters evolve. The first contract involves Howl and the fire demon Calcifer and strikes its roots in the “surrender of Howl’s heart by magical means in order to save the dying star whence the fire demon has originated”.¹¹⁶ One clause of the contract is similar to Sophie’s curse: the people involved in it cannot talk about the main clause unless the person they are talking to already knows. It is ultimately up to Sophie to unveil its source and once she finds out that Calcifer was in fact once a dying star before he became a fire demon, he can talk about it. “When Howl offered to keep me alive the way humans stay alive, I suggested a contract on the spot. Neither of us knew what we were getting into. I was grateful, and Howl only offered because he was sorry for me.” (323). We find out that death is likely, were they to break the contract themselves, even if they both wanted to and only Sophie can eventually break it. Narratively Jones reconstructs the course of events regarding Howl catching Calcifer by having Sophie help Michael with an alleged ‘spell’ he thinks Howl wants him to learn owing to a misunderstanding, which turns out to be the first part of Howl’s curse. They almost succeed with catching a falling star themselves, all the while having the readers understand both their experience as well as Howl’s when he caught Calcifer:

“Michael was stalking the star with soft steps, both arms out to catch it. Sophie could see him outlined against the star’s light. The star was drifting level with Michael’s hands and only a step or so beyond. It was looking back at him nervously. How odd! Sophie thought. It was made of light, it lit up a white ring of grass and reeds and black pools round Michael, and yet it had big, anxious eyes peering backward at Michael, and a small pointed face. Sophie’s arrival frightened it. It gave an erratic swoop and cried out in a shrill, crackling voice, “What is it? What do you want?” [...]

¹¹⁵ *Ib.* 19.

¹¹⁶ *Ib.* 44.

“I only want to catch you,” Michael explained. “I won’t hurt you.”

“No! No!” the star crackled desperately. “That’s wrong! I’m supposed to die!”

“But I could save you if you’d let me catch you,” Michael told it gently.

“No!” cried the star. “I’d rather die!” It dived away from Michael’s fingers. Michael plunged for it, but it was too quick for him. It swooped for the nearest marsh pool, and the black water leaped into a blaze of whiteness for just an instant. Then there was a small, dying sizzle. [...]

“That was sad,” Sophie said.

Michael sighed. “Yes. My heart sort of went out to it.” (183-184).

The star reminding them that it’s supposed to die reinforces, by means of juxtaposing it in opposition to Calcifer’s wish not to die (“I’d have done anything rather than die.”, 323), the improbability and the daringness of the contract between Howl and Calcifer. Michael’s pity for the dying star makes his heart figuratively go out to it,



Figure 3: Howl catching Calcifer. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

making it all the more relatable that Howl, having the power to do so, made his heart literally go out to Calcifer. Miyazaki, it seems, has taken the above sequence as the foundation for showing how the contract came into being in a sequence with Howl as a child, choosing to give his heart away and thereby determining the development of his personality. We see him in a medium close-up from the side, holding the star, then slowly swallowing it to finally seemingly painfully extract it from his chest, now containing his heart.

Just like Howl’s contract with Calcifer, Sophie’s contract with the latter is also concluded quite fast, almost right after she enters the castle and it grounds her decision to stay in the castle. Calcifer agrees to break her curse on the condition that she first breaks his and Howl’s contract, deceiving Howl. She agrees to it more out of sympathy for the trapped demon, despite the fact that “everything that she had read showed the extreme danger of making a bargain with a demon.” (59). But he “was in earnest, leaping about on its logs in an agitated way. Sophie [...] felt a great deal of sympathy.” (61). Staying in the castle is what ultimately enables her to become a *Grenzgängerin* herself.

4.2. Defamiliarized *Shōjo* and Female Empowerment

Sophie, as the protagonist of both the book and the film, is the main target for identification since we as the audience experience the stories mostly through her perspective, both narratively as well as cinematographically. As such, this chapter explores and spends the largest part concentrating on the key scenes and expression of her liminal identity negotiation, even though, especially in the book, other female characters in subplots, like her two sisters for example, also transform, shape-shift and change their identities.

4.2.1. Encountering Howl or: Into the Sky

The outset of the story in both the book and the film is that Sophie Hatter, 18 years old, eldest of three sisters, is firmly positioned in a social structure that she did not choose for herself, that she maintains out of a sense of duty and the conviction that she would unquestionably fail if she were to seek her own fortune as the eldest: “Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes.” (1). Right from the beginning we are told that ‘everyone knows’ that fairy-tale patterns are true, but also immediately after, that this is not always the case, as Sophie and her sister Lettie are not ugly despite being stepsisters of their third sister Martha and their stepmother not being cruel to her stepchildren. “This gives us two hints”, Caroline Webb observes, “first, that Sophie is wrong in her assumptions; second, that what ‘Everyone knows’ is not necessarily true.”¹¹⁷ The first one relates to Sophie viewing her life as bound to be dull or otherwise a failure and the second relates to Howl, of whom we learn things ‘everyone knows’ which turn out to be mostly untrue.¹¹⁸ It is her unquestioned acceptance of this supposed common knowledge (that few really believe) leaving her feeling isolated and unable to act.¹¹⁹ Sophie’s journey to seek her fortune is consequently constantly undermined by people and events not conforming to her expectations.¹²⁰ By succeeding as an eldest sister, she transgresses the code of (western) fairy-tales, becoming revolutionary.¹²¹ She works in the hat shop

¹¹⁷ Webb, Caroline: ‘Change the story, change the world’: witches/crones as heroes in novels by Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones. In: *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, Dec, Vol.16:2 (2008): 156-161 <http://www.deakin.edu.au/uaccess.univie.ac.at/>. Web. 158.

¹¹⁸ Cf. ib. 158.

¹¹⁹ Cf. ib. 159.

¹²⁰ Cf. Welaratna (2009), 13.

¹²¹ Cf. Napier (2005), 172.

her father had owned before his death and while she is good at what she does, sewing and decorating hats, it is not her passion. “She read a great deal, and very soon realized how little chance she had of an interesting future. It was a disappointment to her, but she was still happy enough, looking after her sisters [...]” (2). In the film we cinematically get a glimpse of what is to come very early on when the other women working in the shop notice Howl’s castle in the distance and start gossiping and giggling, while the audience follows Sophie’s point of view as she moves her head towards the narrow window by her work space facing the mountains, zooming out through the window frame in the direction of where the castle is vaguely visible in the fog (02:05). Her expression is serious in contrast to the laughing in the other room, underlining her (desired) seclusion from the socializing, showing that she doesn’t really fit into her world. It is at this point only her thoughts that wander away towards the castle, anticipating her actual leaving by being forced into using that ‘little chance of an interesting future’ by external forces. These external circumstances are brought upon her through the curse by the Witch of the Waste. The reason for the curse however, is an earlier encounter with Howl and the thereby caused jealousy of the WotW. Hence it is through another *Grenzgänger* that she is enabled to start her journey, leading eventually to her becoming a *Grenzgängerin* herself. Meeting Howl is therefore the first sequence in which she glimpses and sets foot in the threshold space she will soon enter completely. In the book it takes even more will power for Sophie to leave the house to go see her sister, and in the course of it meet Howl, than in the film. She plans to go for days, even thinking it absurd herself that she isn’t, but somehow it seems less frightening to just be alone in the hat shop, talking to the hats and there is always an excuse not to go, even the danger from Howl is one of them: “But she did not go. Either she could not find the time, or she could not find the energy, or it seemed a great distance to Market Square, or she remembered that on her own she was in danger from wizard Howl – anyway, every day it seemed more difficult to go [...]” (16). Her reluctance to go out at all also represents her reluctance to leave the hat shop and seek her own fortune, her main excuse being that she would fail anyway as an eldest, which she tells herself repeatedly. It turns out, doing so evokes the change she secretly wishes but is too conscientious – and afraid – to initiate deliberately. Once she finally gets herself to head out to visit her sister on May Day, she feels “overwhelmed” instead of excited, there are “too many people rushing past, laughing and shouting, far too much noise and jostling. Sophie felt as if the past months of sitting and sewing had turned her into an old woman or a semi-invalid.” (17) Jones inverts the cliché and describes

the young girl as an old woman only to later invert it again when she really is an old woman and suddenly finds the courage to act in a way that one would expect of a young girl. Sophie “crept along the houses” (18) and when she sees Howl’s castle close by, she starts running because she is so terrified, she is scared of the “crowds of young men” celebrating, “accosting girls”, even though it is “perfectly normal for May Day” (19). According to David Rudd, the dominance of the male gaze is disrupted, “such that Sophie can view patriarchy and its machinations with relative impunity”¹²², thus later avoiding the embarrassment we see her experience in the beginning when she runs into Howl, without realising it is him, “a young man in a fantastical blue-and-silver costume”, “a dashing specimen [...] with a bony, sophisticated face” and “shrank into a shop doorway and tried to hide” (19). He looks pityingly and tells her that he only wants to buy her a drink and she shouldn’t look so scared, which makes her “utterly ashamed” (19) and stammer. “Who am I to keep a pretty lady from her sister?”, Howl tells her and offers to go with her, because she seems so scared. “He meant it kindly, which made Sophie more ashamed than ever. “No. No thank you, sir!” she gasped and fled away past him. He wore perfume too. The smell of hyacinths followed her as she ran. What a courtly person! Sophie thought [...].” (20). With a personal narrative perspective that sometimes resembles a stream of consciousness, Jones establishes Sophie’s character as well as Howl’s appearance. Both are to drastically change with Sophie’s change of perspective, but from the perspective of Howl’s ‘target’, a young pretty girl, he is perceived as courtly, gentlemanly and sophisticated, even if we as the audience detect traces of chauvinism when he tells her “It’s all right, you little gray mouse” (19), describing her as the person she makes herself seem to others but really isn’t, which is hinted at through her self-reflection from the beginning on but only becomes abundantly clear once her physical appearance is altered. Miyazaki changes the sequence in an interesting way. It is not Howl who accosts her but two soldiers in a narrow alley. Although she firmly says: “Leave me alone!”, stepping back (04:53), she does seem afraid and Howl comes to the rescue, putting his arm around her shoulder saying “There you are sweetheart, sorry I’m late. I was looking everywhere for you.”

¹²² Rudd (2010), 259.

(05:03). And while he imposes on her just as much as the soldiers, she lets it happen, even though her face shows surprise. Right after he makes the soldiers leave by magically forcing them to, he warns her to act normal since they are being followed. It is therefore instantly implemented that by intervening he involved Sophie in something else too. She trusts him – she doesn't know who he is, as in the book

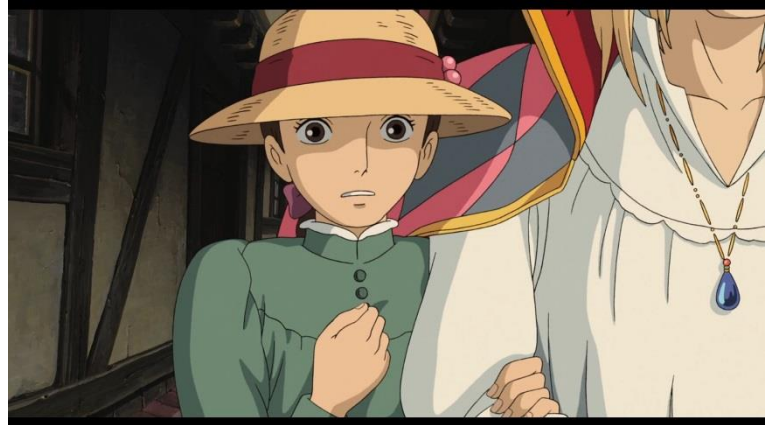


Figure 4: Howl rescuing Sophie and thus involving her. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

– and doesn't look back, but instead does what he says, walking with linked arms. A shoulder close-up shows her from the front, with her eyes wide open in fear and her right arm clenched to her chest, almost half her body hidden behind Howl's tall shoulder. It seems like she doesn't fear Howl, but rather whatever is after them, which the audience cannot yet see. "Sorry, looks like you're involved." (05:51) is what Howl matter-of-factly states with a smirk when huge black blob-creatures with hats start appearing slimily out of walls. Now Sophie looks really scared, but has no choice other than to stay with Howl. They start running and when it seems they are encircled Howl makes them lift off into the air. To enhance the movement in the sequence, Miyazaki used 'path map' (background animation processing), conveying walking and flying motion with background movement, allowing the complex camera movements and three-dimensional depth.¹²³ We then see Howl and Sophie from above, escaping the creatures and the confined space of narrow alleyways (dark brown colours) floating in the air for a moment, when Howl says: "Now, straighten your legs and start walking." (06:14). In this moment, the main track of the score starts to play, a waltz, and as we see Sophie look down on the market square below, we see people dancing on the ground from her perspective, Howl's and her feet visible, emphasising that their walk through the air is like a dance all the same. The music therefore enhances and directs the audience response to Howl and Sophie and their action.¹²⁴ The next shot positions them viewed from slightly below against the limitless blue sky. Moving above the rooftops, she is still somewhat scared until he tells her that she is a natural, which

¹²³ Cf. Miyazaki (2004), 189.

¹²⁴ Hutcheon (2006), 41.

prompts her to smile honestly and not out of politeness for the first time, and she starts to enjoy the experience. Howl enables change by showing her something else, he literally lifts her out of the dark, narrow, claustrophobic space that is her life into the unfamiliar freedom, forces her to change perspective and see the world from a different angle. Miyazaki thereby pre-empted her physical transformation, her following



Figure 5: Sophie being enabled to change perspective by walking the sky. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

change of perspective and liberation from her self-imposed restrictions cinematographically through flying. Napier argues that flying is a major symbol of empowerment for Miyazaki's *shōjo* characters (the meaning of *shōjo* will be discussed in the next chapter), in images of flying “the possibilities of escape [...] are most clearly realized”¹²⁵:

In flight the girls transcend the strictures of the real, be they the expectations of society or simply the limitations of the body itself. Flying also adds a carnival or festival element to the narrative, as these sequences give an impression of exhilaration and excitement [...], an obvious escape from the ordered, earthbound world. Most importantly, however, the image of the flying girl sends a message of boundless possibility in which emotions, imagination, and sometimes even technology [...] combine to offer hope of a potentially attainable alternative world that transcends our own.¹²⁶

For Sophie, this alternative world consists in being able to set out to find and lead a self-determined life. By doing so and entering the liminal community of the moving castle, she escapes her ordered, limited world.

In the film, flying later literally becomes a means of escape when Howl and Sophie flee from the royal witch on a typically Miyazakian flying machine, an air kayak. She is forced to take control of it and while she is at first convinced she is unable to, she manages just fine, leading to her becoming cinematographically part of the family when the castle is “coming to meet” her (1:10:45) and ‘swallows’ her, reconfirmed by her cheerful call: “Markl, I’m home!” (1:10:45) and her ending up in the central room

¹²⁵ Napier (2005), 156.

¹²⁶ *Ib.* 168.

of the castle. And finally, flying is implemented as the ultimate liberation when in the end sequence of the film the castle has been reshaped to a flying castle that disappears into the blue sky beyond the clouds, signifying a complete relief from the former limitations and restraints of being bound to certain locations, bearing with it “an idealistic hope for the future based on the values of community and mutual responsibility”.¹²⁷

4.2.2. Old Age as Liberation

Sophie’s character in the beginning of the film is, like all of Miyazaki’s young female characters according to Napier, indubitably *shōjo* in terms of her age and general innocence.¹²⁸ *Shōjo* literally means ‘little female’ and “originally referred to girls around the ages of 12 and 13. “Over the last couple of decades, however, the term has become a shorthand for a certain kind of liminal identity between child and adult, characterized by a supposedly innocent eroticism based on sexual immaturity”¹²⁹, Napier continues, and the phenomenon now seems to permeate contemporary Japanese culture. The fascination lies with its in-between characteristics: between adulthood and childhood, power and powerlessness, awareness and innocence, as well as masculinity and femininity, in short, the quintessential liminal potentiality.¹³⁰ Miyazaki’s *shōjo* are usually assertive and independent, “courageously confronting the variety of obstacles before them in a manner that might well be described as stereotypically masculine”¹³¹. In the case of Sophie this becomes possible in what Napier calls the phenomenon of “disappearing *shōjo*”, when she ‘disappears’ into the guise of an old woman.¹³² In the book, Sophie finds out she has been turned old not because she feels any different but because she wonders why the WotW’s footman had stared so much. She therefore “puts her hands to her face” only to feel “soft, leathery wrinkles” (35).

She looked at her hands. They were wrinkled too, and skinny, with large veins in the back and knuckles like knobs. She pulled her gray skirt against her legs and looked down at

¹²⁷ Bye (2014), 117.

¹²⁸ Cf. ib. 149.

¹²⁹ Ib. 148.

¹³⁰ Ib. 149.

¹³¹ Ib. 154.

¹³² Cf. ib. 170.

skinny, decrepit ankles and feet which had made her shoes all knobbly. They were the legs of someone about ninety and they seemed to be real.

Sophie got herself to the mirror, and she found she had to hobble. The face in the mirror was quite calm, because it was what she expected to see. It was the face of a gaunt old woman, withered and brownish, surrounded by wispy white hair. Her own eyes, yellow and watery, stared out at her, looking rather tragic.

“Don’t worry, old thing,” Sophie said to the face. “You look quite healthy. Besides, this is much more like you really are.”

She thought of her situation, quite calmly. (35-36)

Narratively, the way she discovers her own altered body is at first like discovering someone else’s body, her legs are the “legs of someone about ninety” and her face is “the face of an old woman”. Like a child in the psychological mirror stage, she slowly recognizes her ‘new’ self. According to Jacques Lacan, in the moment a child sees itself as its own autonomous self, it also experiences for the first time the contradiction between the boundary dissolving possibilities of the mind and the restrictive, limiting reality of the body. Herein the meaning of the body for the understanding of borders becomes apparent.¹³³ Sophie realizes in this moment, that her ‘new’ body may be limiting, but her mind has the potency to overcome the limitations, which is why she doesn’t panic and instead swiftly accepts the transformation. It is then “her own eyes” that stare out at her before she comments that now her body suits her personality much better anyway. She is not even “particularly angry” with the WotW, which shows that really any change is welcome to her as she now has an excuse to finally change her life. In fact, very soon it becomes clear that Sophie feels much more liberated than restricted by the transformation. For instance, when she feels scared of a dog, she tells herself: “The way I am now, it’s scarcely worth worrying about” (39-40), and later on it is stated that “as a girl, Sophie would have shriveled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief.” (83). Old age therefore becomes a form of freedom, as Susan Bye observes, “not only giving her the confidence to be herself but also to take risks and act decisively.”¹³⁴ Indeed, only the confident self can experience borders and dare transitions, as Görner writes.¹³⁵ Because she is prematurely aged, she is freed from the

¹³³ Cf. Herold, Franziska: Der totalitäre Leib. Zur Körpermetaphorik sowjetischer Grenz-Erzählungen der 30er-Jahre. In: Benthien, Claudia (Hg.): Über Grenzen: Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler 1999. 108-135. 109.

¹³⁴ Bye (2014), 115.

¹³⁵ Cf. Görner (2001), 37.

standard patriarchal plot that enslaves most young females and her creative drive is awakened as she is compelled to invent a fresh identity from scratch.¹³⁶ By cursing her, the WotW's aim was to "take away something both precious and powerful: youth and all the dreams and opportunities that come with it", Bye states. She continues:

However, Sophie's youth has offered her few possibilities. She is stuck looking after her dead father's hat shop out of a sense of duty, and is so obliging and self-effacing that she barely exists. [...] Sophie's [newfound] determination to reach her goal[s] is part of an identity-building process of 'becoming'. While young Sophie's identity was based on effacement and a negation of the self, ninety-year-old Sophie is determined to assert her presence and will.¹³⁷

Being old offers her a break from the struggles of adolescence: instead of being pressured to find her own path, she can now rely on the disguise of an old woman who has no reason to worry about societal expectations or plans for the future, as Wasylak observes. "In the discrepancy between her real age and the physical age she can identify her inner self (*ura*) and a public self (*omote*)."¹³⁸ The concepts of *ura* (meaning heart or mind) and *omote* (meaning face) and the ability to maintain harmony between the two as complementing aspects of the self largely shape Japanese self-identity according to the scholars Takeo Doi and Takie Lebra. The public self reacts to societal influences whereas the inner self is fairly fixed and autonomous from the social world and its expectations. Regarding Sophie, suddenly inhabiting an outer self of a person with a more fixed *ura* allows her to realize how much she resonates with the more mature self.¹³⁹

In both the book and the film, old Sophie takes on the role of what Miyazaki's female characters are known for: acting courageously and with integrity when faced with apocalyptic scenarios and bearing the burden of preventing destruction and creating – or recreating – a better world. But she melds it with the humour and fatalism that comes with age.¹⁴⁰ In a deconstructive take on ethics of the fairy-tale, the aged Sophie is more often like the magical hag of fairy-tales than the heroine-in-distress.¹⁴¹ Caroline Webb argues that the figure of the witch, the epitome of negative stereotype, is not only deployed in strikingly positive ways, but with a self-consciousness in relation to

¹³⁶ Cf. Rudd (2010), 258, and cf. Cavallaro (2007), 162.

¹³⁷ Bye (2014), 115.

¹³⁸ Wasylak, 11.

¹³⁹ Cf. ib. 11-12.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Bye (2014), 116.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Cavallaro (2007), 163.

cultural convention that is rarely observed and suggests to (young) audiences that stories, and the social conventions they represent, “may themselves be resisted in the course of establishing individual identity”.¹⁴² “In taking on the physical constraints of the crone, Sophie feels herself free to be personally expressive and so recovers her own agency.”¹⁴³ In this balancing act, Elisabeth Parsons notes, old women can be powerful and weak, positive and negative, nurturing and selfish, maligned and loved – in short, they cannot be easily stereotyped or categorized or dismissed as fantasy malefactors embodied by evil witches. They are moreover not “invisible in the mediascape (Appadurai, 1990), meaningless or without agency, as is typical in western depictions of old women as harmless (read powerless) nurturers.”¹⁴⁴

Jones and Miyazaki both not only attempt to break down the conventional image of femininity but also break down the audience’s conventional notion of the world in general. We are forced to become estranged from what we take for granted and to open up to new possibilities of what the world could be.¹⁴⁵ A liminal space of cognition is created, allowing the audience to reflect and identify with the character as a role model if not as surrogate identity¹⁴⁶, thus setting off a negotiation of their own identity.

Sophie’s discovery of her transformation is cinematographically implemented a little differently if essentially faithfully to Jones’ narrative. After the curse is cast and the witch leaves the shop, we don’t get to see Sophie immediately but instead there is a cut to a four seconds lasting static camera shot of the empty market square in the twilight, the witch’s henchmen carrying her carriage entering the frame from the left, running through it and leaving to the right. This could be read as an emphasis on the liminal character of twilight, a time of passage from day to night and a hint to Sophie’s transition from young to old, a twilight state and situation of confusion or uncertainty, which seems to exist between two different states.¹⁴⁷ In the next scene we see Sophie in a figure shot in the hat shop, bent forward, hiding her head in her arms and then slowly looking around, picking up her hat lying on the floor. In that moment she (and with her the audience) notices her hands which are wrinkly and knobbly, shown in a close-

¹⁴² Webb (2008), 156.

¹⁴³ Ib. 157.

¹⁴⁴ Parsons, Elizabeth: Animating Grandma: The Indices of Age and Agency in Contemporary Children's Films. In: *Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts*, Vol.1:3-4 (19 October 2007): 221-229. Web. 224.

¹⁴⁵ Napier (2005), 155-156.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. ib. 156.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Twilight definition and meaning. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/twilight>. Web. 08.06.2018.

up in first-person camera. We discover the change along with her as if her hands are ours and we have been transformed. Miyazaki does not resort to “the obvious morphing strategies to which Western animation has accustomed its audiences”, Cavallaro comments. Instead, the film “seeks to convey discreetly the mounting disbelief, shock and ultimately horror experienced by the protagonist as she comes to comprehend the magnitude of her predicament.”¹⁴⁸ Accordingly, not the transformation itself is



Figure 6: Sophie discovering her transformation. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

shown, but rather its aftermath.¹⁴⁹ Contrary to the scene in the book, she does start panicking a little, touching her face, walking to the mirror and after examining her face, exclaiming: “That’s really me, isn’t it! I’ve got to stay calm!” (11:45) and “Now, there’s no use panicking, Sophie! It’s a bad dream, that’s all.” (12:08) while pacing round the room trying not to panic. Miyazaki amplifies the mirror scene by reflecting her face in three different angles, thereby implementing how she sees herself like a stranger, as three faces are staring back at her. While she ages, her surroundings are not changed at all, which makes it seem almost like a glimpse into the future as it shows her how monotonous her life would be, were she to stay in the hat shop her whole life. After waking up the next day and discovering that she is still old, she accepts her transformation, now being able to smile at herself in the mirror saying: “This isn’t so bad now, is it. You’re still in pretty good shape and your clothes finally suit you.” (13:34).

¹⁴⁸ Cavallaro (2006), 166.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. ib. 166.

4.2.3. Leaving the Familiar and Entering the Space of the Threshold

As she cannot stay because her stepmother Fanny “would have a fit” (36) seeing her as an old woman, Sophie is compelled to leave her familiar structure and go seek her own fortune. In the book she is cursed in the morning, while she is alone in the shop, and immediately sets out to close the shop and leave, while in the film, as already mentioned, she is cursed in the evening, sleeps over it and heads out in secret in the morning, after pretending through closed doors to have caught a bad cold. As such, in

both the book and the film she starts her journey in the morning, the day has just started, symbolic of a fresh start. This phase of separation from the space of origin requires some small preparations like collecting her purse and some bread and cheese, but the act of leaving, the transition out of the familiar is quickly accomplished: “She let herself out of the house, carefully hiding the key in the usual place, and hobbled away down the street [...], through the field where the Fair had been,



Figure 7: Old Sophie leaving the space of origin. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.



Figure 8: Sophie crossing the bridge entering the liminal phase. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

over the bridge, and on into the country lanes beyond.” (37). Over the bridge, into the beyond – Jones uses the symbol for transition par excellence, the bridge, indicating that Sophie is now entering a new phase, one of potentiality. Miyazaki stays faithful to this imagery. In the film she leaves the house quietly, secretly and unnoticed through a back door (fig. 7) that leads to a narrow passage between two houses towards the bridge, which spans over the train tracks running in a narrow path between high walls. Going over the bridge therefore (fig. 8), she not only passes over to another side, but also crosses two high walls, a precursor for her becoming a *Grenzgängerin*. Reaching the middle of the bridge, she is devoured by a huge black cloud of smoke from an

arriving train moving towards the audience, signifying on the one hand the uncertainty she has to face from now on – she is quite literally in the dark about where she will end up, and about the journey there – and on the other hand the train moving underneath her while on the bridge can be seen as a symbol for the unstable, ever-changing ground she will inhabit once she sets foot in the castle. The identity negotiation is connected with being on the road, as Görner argues, which signifies to be on the way to oneself and to the other, hitherto unknown within us.¹⁵⁰ Her quest for identity is affectingly dramatized by a day of walking out of town, into the hills and a climb up the steep mountain, the sublime vastness of the nature around her magnifying her puniness¹⁵¹, an initiation from the pre-liminal into the liminal state. As the night starts to fall and Sophie, getting more and more cold and tired, wishes for nothing more than a comfortable chair and a fire to warm herself, in her rising exhaustion suddenly Howl's castle appears:

Sophie's panting and the creaking of her limbs were so loud in her ears that it took her a while to notice that some of the grinding and puffing was not coming from herself at all. She looked up blurrily. Wizard Howl's castle was rumbling and bumping toward her across the moorland. Black smoke was blowing up in clouds from behind its black battlements. It looked tall and thin and heavy and ugly and very sinister indeed. Sophie leaned on her stick and watched it. She was not particularly frightened. She wondered how it moved. But the main thing in her mind was that all the smoke must mean a large fireside somewhere inside those tall black walls. (45)

Sophie being in a way compared with the castle through the sounds they both make anticipates her wish to enter it. Something that is familiar to oneself can scarcely be too frightening, which is further amplified when the castle "obediently" comes to a "rumbling grinding halt" as she "imperiously" waves her walking stick and orders it to stop (46). It is clear that she is determined to enter it, even when it becomes apparent that this is not an easy task. When she tries to open the first door she sees, her hand cannot come near it. "Some invisible wall stopped her hand about a foot from the door" (48). The same goes for the second door she tries. It becomes clear that some kind of ritual is necessary: "evidently you had to go round the castle anticlockwise" (49). It is only the third door, a much smaller and shabbier door ("The back door at last!") that seems to be penetrable, but once she gets near it the castle starts to move again with

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Görner (2001), 41.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 164.

the door traveling away sideways from her. ““Oh, no you don’t!” Sophie shouted. She ran after the door and hit it violently with her stick. “Open up!” she yelled. The door sprang open inward, still moving away sideways.” (49-50). To enter the threshold space of the castle, an act of transgression is first necessary. According to Wolfreys, for a transgression to occur, it needs firstly a form or identity, secondly a movement or motion, “a passage of some kind and therefore implicitly duration or temporality; and this passage from being on the side of the law to being lawless for example; hence *trespass*, to pass over or across, to infringe or impose”¹⁵². And thirdly it needs a spatial or relational position or location. The location from which a person has departed is in this context always on the side of the law or convention, what is taken socially and culturally to be standard and acceptable. The present location in which the subject has placed itself by its own activity is the place of the illicit, the outlaw. To step over or beyond a limit, to cross a threshold or move beyond commonly determined bounds is what constitutes transgression.¹⁵³ And indeed, by forcing herself into the castle, Sophie moves into this place outside the structure of society, where different laws apply, where ‘outcasts’ build their own community, Howl being a wizard from another land, Michael/Markl being an orphan, Calcifer being a talking fire demon only surviving through the possession of Howl’s heart and finally Sophie who got transformed into an old woman. What does it come down to if we talk about the threshold?, Rüdiger Görner asks, and argues that it is the question of the possibility of crossing or transgressing. On the one side of the threshold is a struggle, on the other side complete relaxation.¹⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, Sophie’s transgression into the castle does lead to the so desired relaxation in the form of a low chair with a cushion which she immediately dives for, settling herself comfortably in it. “It was bliss. The fire warmed her aches and the chair supported her back and she knew if anyone wanted to turn her out now, they were going to have to use extreme and violent magic to do so.” (52). In the film, entering the castle is much less hard work, but a transgression nonetheless. The castle arrives and comes to a halt above her, towering like an enormous creature over her. Miyazaki implements Sophie’s newly gained fearlessness at the sight of the castle by first showing her reaction, which is mostly surprise and immediate scepticism – in part also her way of covering fear by ridiculing (“Look at that, they call this a castle?”, 18:58) – followed by a contrasting shot from further away through which the audience can take

¹⁵² Wolfreys (2008), 3.

¹⁵³ Cf. ib. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Görner (2001), 111.

in its massive magnitude (see fig. 9), emphasizing her courage. Contrary to Jones' castle, Miyazaki's castle only has one entrance at the rear end, and while it is already moving again as she discovers the entrance and she has to run to successfully grab the handrail, it doesn't take great effort to enter it. She asks the castle to "make up your mind, are you going to let me in or not?" (19:33), resulting in it leaping slightly



Figure 9: Sophie before entering the castle. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

towards her, which could be regarded as an answer, but could be read both as an invitation (trying to make it easier for her to step on the porch) or a refusal (trying to push her away). Once she is on the porch, however, she has no difficulties entering through the wooden door.

The transgression also signifies the final step of her transition into the liminal phase based on Turner's concept. Being in the castle, she is now entirely in the liminal space. In the between, the self in doubt – the identity negotiating individual – finds leeway.¹⁵⁵ At first, she doesn't plan on staying and even later on she ponders leaving a few times, thus exemplifying the struggles of a *GrenzgängerIn* Hohnsträter describes – being tempted by the uncomplicated, stable and less challenging constellations on both sides of the threshold (see chapter 2.3.). The more she is able to integrate herself and is accepted by the others in the castle though, altering the space to her needs, the more the liminal phase additionally becomes the phase of integration into a new structure, following Van Gennep's and Turner's basic model. 'Communitas' indeed loses its original characteristics over time. From spontaneous 'communitas'-experiencing arises the tendency for routine, structuring and therefore a hierarchization of the 'communitas'.¹⁵⁶ The liminal then eventually is simultaneously the post-liminal, implying that for her, as for the others in the castle, the 'normal' structure (which is usually the one before or after liminality) takes on the structure of the 'anti-structure' of the liminal.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. ib. 9.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Bräunlein (2012), 60.

4.2.4. Exploration Under Disguise

Once she has entered the castle and the bargain with the fire demon, she needs to find an excuse to stay in the castle. Since the castle is dusty, dirty and neglected, her disguise becomes cleaning work. She doesn't leave it to Howl to decide, but firmly tells him: "Why I came, young man? I came because I'm your new cleaning lady, of course." (75). And when he asks who says she is, she just responds with "*I do.*" Her changed perspective makes her fearless and bold, thinking of Howl now as "only a child in his twenties" and how "it made such a difference to be old" (73). With her boldness, she literally conquers his heart right away in the form of "bullying" Calcifer to bend his head so she can cook on him, which he normally only does for Howl. This fact seemingly intrigues Howl and might contribute to him letting her stay, even if he never explicitly allows her to, but he also never makes her leave. Subsequently, she starts exploring the space of the castle, and with it gradually Howl's character, once he has left, which happens analogical to her starting to explore her new self and can be regarded as the manifestation of such. The cleaning process she starts, rather against the wishes of the three protesting male inhabitants ("What are you doing?" cried Michael and Calcifer in a horrified chorus.", 81 and later Howl: "Stop it, woman! Leave those poor spiders alone!", 85) and as such in part a joke about the domestic incompetence of the all-male household¹⁵⁷, is then a way for her to dispel her former heteronomy and assert her own will. Derek Martin comments:

When she dreamily minded her father's store and followed what she believed to be her father's wishes, all [...] her passion for her own tasks had been forced to go underground, i.e., into the unconscious. But in her new role as 'Grandma Sophie' she finds that her anger and passion can be used, that if she aligns herself to her natural way of life her life's energy is able to feed and empower her actions.¹⁵⁸

Susan Bye even identifies a spiritual inertia in the chaotic mess of the castle and argues that dirt and disorder are associated with a "failure to live one's life authentically"¹⁵⁹, which connects to the Shinto understanding that in order to act with genuine sincerity toward others and the world, we need to "cultivate a sound, pure and bright heart/mind". Sophie therefore "brings renewal by working hard to restore order".¹⁶⁰ Renewal for herself and for the others. Sophie's transformation of the castle is deemed

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Bye (2014), 113-114.

¹⁵⁸ Martin (2015), 193.

¹⁵⁹ Bye (2014), 114.

¹⁶⁰ *Ib.* 114.

powerful and has productive social value in that she gradually makes the collection of individuals a family unit.¹⁶¹ In elevating the status and power of behaviours typically associated with real old women and using domestic items, the need for fantasy elements to transcend limitations of reality is debunked in feminist and anti-ageist ways as she subverts the traditional fairy-tale stereotype of meek and servile domesticity, as represented for instance by Cinderella or Snow White.¹⁶²

It could be argued that the liminal space itself (the castle) has not changed in a long time because there hasn't been a new *Grenzgängerin* and consequently Sophie's arrival transforms the liminal space through reviving it as she brings change with her, thus making it truly liminal again.

The task of cleaning lasts for days ("In the days that followed, Sophie cleaned her way remorselessly through the castle.", 88) and she "really enjoyed herself". In the book, it is thoroughly described what and how she cleans, and room by room she discovers the castle, "telling herself she was looking for clues" (88), calculating that she would sooner or later come across "Howl's hidden hoard of girls' souls, or chewed hearts – or else something that explained Calcifer's contract." (89). Soon she starts to like being there, as it enables her to have a purpose, to constantly explore something new: "Sophie knew she would miss this when Howl turned her out. She became more and more afraid that he would. She knew he could not go on ignoring her forever." (91). This however, does not discourage her to act boldly and try Howl's patience. On the contrary, it seems like she actively tries to get a reaction out of him, for example when she will not refrain from his private room and he forbids it. But instead of turning her out, even when Sophie shouts at him for not letting her clean his room and his yard ("Tidying up is what I'm *here* for!", 98), he encourages her to find new meaning in life and actively invites her back inside:

"Then you must think of a new meaning for your life," Howl said. For a moment it seemed as if he was going to lose his temper too. His strange, pale eyes all but glared at Sophie. But he controlled himself and said, "Now trot along indoors, you overactive old thing, and find something else to play with before I get angry. [...]" (98)

¹⁶¹ Cf. Parsons (2007), 224.

¹⁶² Cf. ib. 226, and Rudd (2010), 262.

The honesty between them indirectly advances both, and while Sophie continuously tries to convince herself that Howl is despicable, it is in part this honesty which plays a major part in her identity processes and the foundation of their relationship with each other. It also makes the struggle very relatable to the audience. “You’re a dreadfully nosy, horribly bossy, appallingly clean old woman. Control yourself. You’re victimizing us all.” (97), he tells her, to which she replies that it is a pigsty and she can’t help what she is. Howl responds with: “Yes you can [...]”. Almost more so than Sophie herself he has confidence in her ability to change who she is if she wants to, and openly says so, thereby floating the suggestion. He also helps her realise by serving as an example that setting boundaries is a legitimate part of identity development: “And I like my room the way it is. You must admit I have a right to live in a pigsty if I want. Now go downstairs and think of something else to do. Please.” (97). She is a bit shaken and “surprised” that he doesn’t throw her out of the castle “on the spot”, but later tells him her opinion likewise: “Of course you hate getting angry! [...] You don’t like anything unpleasant, do you? You’re a slitherer-outer, that’s what you are! You slither away from anything you don’t like!” (99), to which Howl only states: “Well now. Now we both know each other’s faults. Now go back into the house.” (99). He accepts her identity negotiation without any consequences even though, more than Sophie herself, he seems to know that the cleaning is not her ultimate purpose, that it is a disguise just as



Figure 10: Sophie cleaning. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

much as her old age and she is still defining herself through her perceived sense of duty to others. “How you must love servitude!” (99) is what he tells her, but for her it is the only obvious opportunity to eventually break her curse, although she doesn’t notice

most of the hints that are given to her. It is thereby amplified that she gradually starts to take a liking to the castle and its inhabitants and in fact, subconsciously, doesn’t really want to find clues as it would mean for her to not have an excuse to stay any longer.

In the film, Howl is almost not at all present when Sophie cleans and explores the castle and she is not shown trying to enter his room in his absence. It is hence the cinematographic exploration of the castle space itself and her reaction to it by which

her identity negotiation is implemented. She starts to explore her fortune, her ‘inner chambers’, so to say, eventually leading to her realizing who she really is and where she wants to be. Static camera shots from different angles show her moving through the castle, signifying that in those scenes, she takes the active role of the explorer and that she is starting to become more active than passive in general. At first, when she furiously works through the worst chaos, she is depicted in figure shots framed by dust and junk, equipped with a broom (“I’m sick of being treated like some timid old lady!”, 33:24, fig. 10). The further she moves, the more she is established in the context of the castle space in long shots, emphasizing the amount of space she has to work through and the different rooms and corridors which could be seen as a



Figure 11: Sophie in transition. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.



Figure 12: Sophie discovering the bathroom. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

symbol for her own psyche and Howl’s at the same time. Every time she enters another room, the audience first gets to see the space and Sophie only then enters said space. So, while we do experience the rooms along with her movement through the castle, not the castle itself is cinematographically established as the unknown for the audience – we get to see it seconds before she does – but Sophie herself in the space. The focus is not on surprising the audience with the space, but with Sophie’s action or reaction in it, thereby concentrating on her experience of the space and what it does to her: surprise, disgust, wonder, excitement (see fig. 11 and fig. 12). Her emotions are most notably conveyed through her eyes, a factor that is likely linked to Japanese culture, as in cultures where emotional control is the standard, such as Japan, the focus is placed on the eyes to interpret emotions, whereas in cultures where emotion is openly

expressed, the focus is on the mouth.¹⁶³ For instance, we watch her come up the stairs from the perspective of out of a corner above her, behind her the flight of stairs leading downstairs, on the left side the flight of stairs leading further up and half the screen on the right covered with a big cobweb, her facial expression for a moment one of discouragement (“What a mess!”, 35:42, see fig. 11). She is also literally and figuratively in a zone of transition. The more she discovers however, the more enthusiastic she becomes, even forgetting her cleaning endeavour when she looks out of the bathroom window and sees the beautiful landscape and how the castle moves. In the course of her exploration it is also illustrated how Calcifer and Markl start to like her more and more, when she tells Calcifer: “I’m thoroughly impressed! You’re a first-class fire-demon, I like your spark!” (36:40). This acknowledgement transforms Calcifer’s servitude into work he can be proud of and also paves the way for his decision to remain part of the family in the end when he could also choose to leave instead.¹⁶⁴ When she steps out onto a balcony, the camera moves along with her stepping outside, following the direction of her gaze into the far distance of an idyllic mountain scenery. It could



Figure 13: Howl's heart in *Calcifer*. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

be argued that in this moment, she realises the unlimited possibilities accessible to her through being in the castle. In the next scene we see Sophie and Markl doing the laundry together in said scenery, thus showing Sophie in a family scene and finally sitting at the

lake, telling Markl: “When you’re old, all you want to do is stare at the scenery.” (39:59), which is in juxtaposition to the previous cleaning frenzy and hints at her not wanting to leave. Howl only shows up once during all the cleaning to revive Calcifer and tell Sophie calmly: “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t torment my friend” (34:50), who Sophie had moved to a pot to clean the hearth – a scene in which Miyazaki implements one of those hints she doesn’t notice concerning the contract, by making Howl’s heart in Calcifer clearly visible and Sophie does not wonder for even a moment what the lump might be.

¹⁶³ Cf. Culture Is Key To Interpreting Facial Emotions. University of Alberta. ScienceDaily. 5 April 2007. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/04/070404162321.htm. Web. 28.06.2018.

¹⁶⁴ Bye (2014), 113.

4.2.5. Change of Perspective: Back and Forth and In-Between

The liminal space of the castle is different for Sophie and Howl respectively because they have a different perspective on it. What Sophie experiences as exciting and wondrous place, constitutes for Howl a rather peaceful, stable entity, which is partly for the reason that Howl is the more adept *Grenzgänger* and knows the castle to its smallest part as he co-constructed it, and is emphasized through the different worlds they experience when leaving the castle on their own. Whenever she leaves the castle, she gains a different perspective in some way. And even if she thinks of leaving for good, she eventually does come back after all. In the book this back and forth, which mirrors the possibility of the castle and the essence of a liminal phase, is realised especially poignantly and almost comically when she “leaves the castle in several directions at once” (147) with seven-league boots to visit her sister. Because the boot is heavy and she doesn’t have complete control over it, she ends up rushing one way, stopping, rushing in another direction, and so on, Michael following her because he has the second boot. Sophie therefore has different perspectives, but little control and in-between most of what she sees is blurry, which resonates with the way she deceives herself about her own feelings and wishes and is only able to regain control with the help of someone else. Miyazaki implements her fluctuating identity negotiation throughout the film – of which she stays oblivious as well – in a very intriguing way through animation technique: she is not always depicted as the 90-year old woman she has been turned into by the Witch of the Waste, but instead physically transforms to sometimes look younger and sometimes older according to her state of mind and her many psychological and affective shifts. Cavallaro states:

In fact, she is never, within the main body of the cinematic narrative, uniformly and incontrovertibly presented as either young or old. Miyazaki has succeeded in lucidly conveying this potentially mystifying idea by recourse to constant and sometimes almost imperceptible fluctuations in the heroine’s countenance and movements and thus delivered, both graphically and psychologically, one of the most complex and satisfying accomplishments in Studio Ghibli’s entire history. [...] As subtle facial adjustments and bodily modulations evoke the impression that Sophie is neither 18 nor 90 but actually several ages at once, glimpses of the young Sophie fluidly infiltrate the images of her prematurely aged self.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Cavallaro (2006), 161.

Every time Sophie feels confident and takes charge of her own life and opinions, doing or acknowledging something for herself, she turns younger momentarily, demonstrating that in fact she does have influence on her curse – and her course of life – without realizing it and at least in part keeps it up herself. In the book, towards the end, Howl tells her that he had detected her curse immediately and tried taking it off when she wasn't looking but “nothing seem[ed] to work” (369), leading him to the conclusion that she “liked being in disguise”: “It must be [a disguise], since you're doing it yourself” (369), he tells her, making Sophie really angry as it is hard to acknowledge the truth from someone else, especially when it concerns the core of her identity and reveals something she has been reluctant to admit before herself. It is thereby owing to Howl that she is enabled to consciously have that realization. In the film, no other character living with her mentions her fluctuating appearance, but in an almost intimate scene when Sophie is sleeping and in her young state for the first time



Figure 14: Sophie being young while sleeping. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

Figure 15: Howl looking at Sophie sleeping. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

again, Howl watches her for a moment and it is shown that he knows, since he is not surprised at all but looks at her gently. It is a moment of vulnerability and truth for both, implemented by showing both their faces in extreme close-ups in a safe, enclosed space, first Sophie's for a long seven seconds (42:47-42:53) and then immediately Howl's, from inside her bedcurtains. He has entered her intimate sphere and the scene connects them both.

The physical alterations in characters and in the settings, creating a pervasive atmosphere of unrelenting flux as characters and landscapes constantly morph, are technically conveyed by intricate adjustments of the hues that neatly reflect the emotional import of each transformation.¹⁶⁶ Colour Design Director Michiyo Yasuda has commented that “the characters in this film change so much physically from scene to scene the emotional development can be equally drastic. I changed the colors in

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Cavallaro, Dani: *Anime Intersections. Tradition and Innovation in Theme and Technique*. Jefferson, NC: Mc Farland 2007. 159.

detail with every change.”¹⁶⁷ Her development is also implemented insofar as at first, after being turned into an old woman, Sophie hunches while she walks very slowly, uses a cane and needs a break quite often. As the film progresses, she gradually begins standing up straighter with her stamina increasing. When she regains her initial age in the end, she preserves the white hair – a stylistic decision that, according to Cavallaro, could be read as “a symbolic reminder, on Miyazaki’s part, that the past is ultimately indelible and that even though baleful spells may be broken and evil vanquished, the traces of past experiences live on.”¹⁶⁸ Miyazaki commented that what’s wonderful about the story is that the happy ending is not that the spell is broken and Sophie is young again, but that she forgets her age.¹⁶⁹

Sometimes, in order to come to a realization, a more drastic change of perspective is necessary. When Sophie goes to the King to blacken Howl’s name, so he doesn’t have to take responsibility, she becomes literally self-less by taking on the role of Howl’s mother.

4.2.6. A Journey of Selflessness

Once more the sometimes difficult stages of identity negotiation and acknowledgement of one’s feelings are implemented narratively and cinematographically through liminal phenomena. The walk through the streets is long and exhausting and in the book, they first go for a visit to Howl’s former magic teacher, Mrs. Pentstemmon. “Elaborate buildings wavered in front of her eyes”, they turn into a “blessedly narrow, cool street”, are “led up polished stairs” and finally ushered into a shaded drawing room, of which she is sure that “even a palace could not be this elegant” (227-228). Sophie finds out that she is in fact a witch herself, something she “oddly enough” accepts “without any trouble at all” (238): “It was as if Sophie had always known this. But she had thought it was not proper to have a magic gift because she was the eldest of three.” (238-239). So, again part of her liminal process is to get over her own preconceptions of what she can and cannot be or do, which is only possible with the help of other people. The palace finally, resembles a maze. First, the way to the front entrance is “up a huge flight of

¹⁶⁷ Miyazaki (2005), 69.

¹⁶⁸ Cavallaro (2006), 161.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Hayao Miyazaki qtd. in Cavallaro (2007), 163.

steps, with a soldier in scarlet standing guard every six steps” and Sophie “puffed her way dizzily up past them” (241). Once at the top, a whole procedure starts:

At the top of the steps were archways, halls, corridors, lobbies, one after another. Sophie lost count of how many. At every archway a splendidly dressed person wearing white gloves – still somehow white in spite of the heat – inquired their business and then led them on to the next personage in the next archway. [... They] went on being handed from person to person to person. They were taken upstairs, after which the splendid persons were dressed in blue instead of red, and handed on again [...]. (241-242)

First Howl is “politely detached” from Michael and Sophie, then at some point Michael too. Sophie is at this point not sure whether she is not “having a strange dream” (242), but finally she is led to the King. And in the course of trying to blacken Howl’s name as his supposed mother, when she actively has to ponder Howl’s personality, she thereby also has to contemplate her own position towards him and finds herself talking about her mixed feelings to the King in what seems more like a therapy session than a talk with a leader of a country. “For a second it actually seemed to her that Howl had no faults at all. How stupid!” (245), is what she thinks. And when she then does list his faults, “he’s fickle, careless, selfish, and hysterical, [...] half the time I think he doesn’t care what happens to anyone as long as *he’s* all right” (245), it becomes clear that in fact she doesn’t think all that ill of him anymore as she continues: “but then I find out how awfully kind he’s been to someone. Then I think he’s kind just when it suits him – only then I find out he undercharges poor people. I don’t know, Your Majesty. He’s a mess.” (245). It seems like she is indirectly speaking of herself and the mess of her thoughts and feelings. This mess is then directly implemented narratively when she gets lost first in the palace and therefore loses Michael and Howl and again once she has finally found her way out of the palace:

She hobbled down the grand staircase. She hobbled down a grand avenue. She stumped along another, where spires and towers and gilded roofs circled around in giddy profusion. And she realized it was worse than she had thought. She was lost. She had absolutely no idea how to find the disguised stable where the castle entrance was. She turned up another handsome thoroughfare at random, but she did not recognize that either. By now she did not even know the way back to the Palace. [...] She hobbled on hopelessly. (251-252)

Jones uses the personal subject pronoun ‘she’ eleven times in that passage, starting almost every sentence with it and thereby clearly putting the focus not on Sophie’s surroundings or her interaction with other people, but on her person. The personal

narrative perspective makes her physical and mental wandering palpably imaginable to the reader, as well as the growing panic by the usage of short sentences in quick succession. It is ironically enough once again the Witch of the Waste enabling her to break out of a situation she is stuck in by escorting her to the palace – the only excuse Sophie finds to not mention that she has anything to do with Howl or the castle when she accidentally runs into the witch, is that she has an appointment with the King. Just like in a nightmare, she consequently must repeat the whole procedure in the palace to not rise suspicion, the witch even asking her: “Are you sure you can manage all those stairs?” (257).

Sophie looked hopelessly up the long flight of stairs. [...] Since the Witch was obviously going to stand there and make sure she went up, Sophie had no choice but to climb them. Up she hobbled, past the sweating soldiers, all the way to the Palace entrance again, hating the Witch more with every step. She turned round, panting, at the top. The Witch was still there, a floating russet shape at the foot [...]. She was forced to say to the guards, “There was something I forgot to tell the King.” They remembered her. They let her inside [...] and before Sophie had collected her wits, the Palace machinery was in motion again and she was being handed from person to person, just like the first time [...]. It was like a bad dream, Sophie thought [...]. (258)

The nightmarish ongoing transition highlights once again that being on the road is the path to one’s self as the continuous change of perspective, even if forced upon her as she submits to “being handed from person to person”, leads to multiple insights: about her abilities (physical and magical), about her feelings regarding Howl and concerning her wish to be a part of the peculiar family Howl has assembled (“She wanted to sit down in the fireside chair and tell Calcifer the mess she had made of things.”, 251).

Miyazaki changes some of the characters and story in his implementation, but nonetheless intriguingly manages to convey the essence of Sophie’s transitional change of perspective and development. In the film, her being on the road is depicted through alternating between shoulder close-ups on her figure focusing on her facial expressions, her movement displayed by the pavement behind her changing when she is shown from a perspective of slightly above, respectively the facades changing when she is shown from slightly below, extreme long shots with static camera, positioning her in the context of her surroundings and figure shots from the side, emphasizing her movement. To convey the movement, so-called ‘fitting’ was applied to the cobblestones, altering the materials as they were fit according to the outlines of the

cobblestones drawn in the cell animation.¹⁷⁰ She also walks through various portals, each leading to a different realization: the first one is the massive portal of the town wall, the crossing of which opens her view on the palace and prompts her to observe: “Look how far I still have to go!” (53:08). The second constitutes the entrance at the bottom of the huge flight of stairs to the palace and has been endowed with the magic



Figure 16: Sophie climbing the stairs. Miyazaki 2004. Figure 17: Change of perspective. Miyazaki 2004. HCM. HMC.

power to dissolve magic transportation spells, forcing the WotW to continue by foot, while it leads Sophie to encourage herself by commenting to the dog she believes to be Howl: “Come on, Howl, we can do this. Just act natural.” (55:50). Miyazaki implements the personal development in the arduous act of climbing the stairs. Contrary to the scene in the book, the WotW climbs them with her and while at first, Sophie unmercifully tells her: “Too bad I’m not younger or I’d lend you a hand!” (57:31), the change of perspective once she has arrived at the top brings with it a change of heart and she overcomes her anger for the WotW and starts to cheer her on (“Almost there!” and “Come on, let’s go, don’t give up now! Are you a witch, or aren’t you?”, 58:02). On entering the palace, there’s a slight change again and she tells her: “Pull yourself together. Isn’t this what you’ve been waiting for?” (58:40). She eventually splits up from the WotW and is led to Madame Suliman, the royal witch and mastermind behind the king, a blend of the book’s Mrs. Pentstemmon and the royal wizard Mr. Suliman, in a gigantic greenhouse with tropical plants. The open space can be regarded as reflecting Sophie’s space of cognition. Her process of realizing her feelings about Howl is implemented differently than in the book: she barely talks, but listens to Madame Suliman criticizing and insulting Howl, which leads to the same change of view and results in her standing up for him: “He may be selfish and cowardly and sometimes he’s hard to understand, but his intentions are good! He just wants to be free!” (1:03:09). While doing so, her physical appearance gradually changes to her young state, prompting Suliman to discern her true appearance and feelings for Howl. Her

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Miyazaki (2004), 188.

following assessment: “Now I understand! You’re in love with Howl.” (01:03:27), leads to an immediate retransformation Sophie’s into her old stage. By defending Howl, Sophie takes charge of her own opinion, but she hasn’t yet admitted her love for Howl to herself, therefore rejecting Suliman’s notion and as such lying to herself, causing her to turn old again. It is only through a transition into Howl’s private world that she is able to admit it before herself.

4.2.7. Entering Howl’s Inner World

In the book, entering Howl’s place of origin, the parallel world of Wales (see also chapter 4.1.2.), through an inch-thick “nothingness” (202) results in a better understanding of his personality and background, especially when they meet his sister: “Sophie began to understand how Howl had acquired the habit of slithering out. Megan was the kind of person who made you want to back quietly out of the nearest door.” (212). When the latter insults him before Michael and Sophie, and Howl does not defend himself, she takes charge in his favour: “Sophie pushed Michael aside and stumped downstairs, looking as stately as she could manage. “Come, Howl,” she said grandly. “We really must be on our way. While we stand here, money is ticking away and your servants are probably selling the gold plate. So nice to meet you [...] but we must rush. Howl is such a busy man.” (212-213). By entering a strange world (familiar to us but made strange from Sophie’s perspective), “Sophie is liberated from any expectations”, Welaratna comments, “there simply aren’t any pre-conceived notions she needs to conform to. This gives her the courage to play-act an oblique contradiction to Megan’s accusations, supporting Howl in the face of disapproval.”¹⁷¹ Just as her talk with the king, it is the stating of all the ‘negative’ character traits which enables a shift in her perspective. She also meets Ms. Angorian who later turns out to be the human form of the Witch of the Waste’s fire-demon possessing her heart and the main trigger of jealousy for Sophie. In the book, Sophie never explicitly states her love for Howl, it is rather described indirectly by the means of her jealous reactions to Howl’s supposed courting of Ms. Angorian. The quick transition and the “nothingness” to and from the parallel world could be seen as implementation of the lack of active reflection: there is no space of cognition for Sophie in the transition, no inner monologue about the act of leaving one world (hers) and entering another (Howl’s). The act of reflection is left to

¹⁷¹ Welaratna (2009), 16.

the audience. However, in moving into this other world, another connotation of the word moving becomes apparent: to metaphorically shift the meaning of things and consequently our viewpoint of them, which is evident in the defamiliarization of the everyday world in Wales, as Rudd argues. Just as the conceits in Donne's poem become actuality in Ingary, the everyday world of Wales then shifts into metaphor.¹⁷² Television, for example, is described by a seemingly uncomprehending narrator as "magic colored pictures moving on the front of a big, square box" with voices coming from it (204) and like all "magic" boxes it "grew on long, floppy white stalks that appeared to be rooted in the wall" (207). Jones takes it one step further and "deftly pulls any notion of a base of reality from under our feet"¹⁷³ when Howl gives his nephew and friend a computer game, which starts with: "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 ..." (211). Rudd comments: "We are reminded that we are, in fact, players in the game of Jones's fiction, whether it is recorded in a novel or on a computer console – or, in an ironic twist, in an anime film, voiced in the West by American stars."¹⁷⁴ Sophie only "wondered at the familiarity of this" (211), but doesn't pursue the thought any further, it is again only the audience, looking from the outside, who is allowed to actively enter this space of cognition.

Miyazaki translates the entering of Howl's world of origin into two sequences, the first of which being a sequence of Sophie entering Howl's room in the castle in what appears an intrinsically liminal occurrence in a state between the real/conscious and the dream-like/subconscious. It "deliberately blurs the boundary between the actual and the dreamlike", Cavallaro states, "suggesting that while portions of the action really occur, others unfold exclusively within the cavernous chambers of the unconscious."¹⁷⁵ Sophie wakes up, in her young state, after Howl comes home in the middle of the night, seemingly from fighting, in his monster-bird shape almost translucent and injured, leaving traces of blood and feathers behind as he walks to his room. "The blood Howl sheds in his ornithological incarnation is disturbingly palpable", Cavallaro observes, "though he may be a wizard and hence capable of amazing self-healing feats, he is nonetheless alive and made of ultimately vulnerable flesh".¹⁷⁶ Sophie discovers a

¹⁷² Cf. Rudd (2010), 266.

¹⁷³ *Ib.* 266.

¹⁷⁴ *Ib.* 267.

¹⁷⁵ Cavallaro (2006), 164.

¹⁷⁶ *Ib.* 160.

feather which dissolves into nothingness on contact, prompting her expression to switch from worry to determination as she puts on her shoes and lights a candle to go after him. She is depicted centrally in a frontal shot, illuminating the dark corridor leading to Howl's room with only her candle (see fig. 18). The perspective then changes to Sophie's point of view, walking towards the door. In the moment she touches the door handle, there is a cut and we see it from inside the room in a close-up, slowly being



Figure 18: Sophie entering Howl's inner world.
Miyazaki 2004. HMC.



Figure 19: Sophie's rejection after her confession.
Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

moved down and the door cautiously being opened ajar. The camera then moves up to show Sophie's face. "The sequence owes much of its pathos to Miyazaki's rendering of Sophie's reactions as a subtle mix of inquisitiveness and utter horror"¹⁷⁷, comments Cavallaro. And it is indeed once more her expressions through which the audience is able to emotionally experience the scene and her development. In contrast to Jones, Miyazaki puts the emphasis on the act of entering Howl's room, underlining that she is entering out of her own motivation, not out of a sense of duty to anyone, and that it takes in fact an ongoing process of finding the courage and determination to admit and act on one's feelings, which is also the reason for her appearance being her young self. Once she has entered, however, it passes into a dream-like sequence, suggesting that, like in the book, only her subconscious overtly expresses her feelings yet. Howl's room is not in its usual state, but resembles a cave, cluttered with all his charms and children's toys, a tunnel leading into darkness, which can be read as the structure of Howl's psyche being spatially unfolded and therefore Sophie entering Howl's psyche. She walks in a threshold of memory, based on Walter Benjamin's ideas, Howl's recollection on the basis of spatial-temporal overlapping and expansion. Art Director Noboru Yoshida commented the cinematic moment as follows:

In my concept art I experimented with turning Howl's room into a cave. Sophie is holding a candle so I tried incorporating its light, but Miyazaki said, 'No, I want you to treat it as a

¹⁷⁷ Ib. 164.

mental image.’ He informed me how the cave wasn’t filled with real objects illuminated by Sophie’s candlelight, so much as it was a passage to Howl’s memory. So it’s not a concrete illustration, it’s a scene where one’s memory of the past resurfaces. Because Howl’s toys such as the dolls symbolize Howl’s memory, I made the colors bright and immune to the candlelight.¹⁷⁸

By going into the space of Howl’s psyche, Sophie therefore experiences and is exposed to his memory. Memory, Julian Wolfreys argues, is transgressive in the sense that transgression is always a motion that disturbs borders and the understanding of what is included and excluded by any boundary. It is the ‘place’ where identity, space and time come together and it is always the movement or passage across a certain limit.

[Memory] moves across several thresholds and ‘places’; between, for example, the unconscious and the conscious mind, between remembering and forgetting and, as a recording of the past, from the moment of its transcription to the moment of its reiteration in any number of ‘nows’ irreducible to a fixed present or presence as such. [...] It figures as the trace of another me, of myself as an other. [...] Phantasmically, from over the threshold of consciousness the fragment of another’s life arrives to disrupt for a moment the borders of my identity, my identity as I apprehend it in a given *now*.¹⁷⁹

In passing through his space of memory, Sophie is subjected to this transgressive moment, the disruption of the borders of her own identity evoking a dissolution of all disguises and self-delusion in favour of her unmasked identity. She finds Howl in his gigantic monster bird form, groaning and rolled up, signifying that he is in his most vulnerable, exposed state. He tells her to go away, but she is not afraid and answers firmly: “No, I’m not going away! I’m going to help you break this spell that you’re under!” (1:13:56) to which he replies “You, you can’t even break your own spell”, prompting her again to exclaim: “But you don’t understand, I love you!” (1:14:06). This suggests that she realizes she has been keeping up the curse herself to have an excuse not to leave. He refuses her by saying that she is too late, leading to her being transformed back to old age, the camera moving away from her into the darkness along with the leaving Howl (see fig. 19), followed first by a cut to a close-up on the tap of the bathtub being turned on and immediately afterwards by a cut to Sophie startling awake soaked with sweat in her bed. The liminal experience of half-consciousness therefore enables her to shed her own protective barrier and become conscious of the fact that she can accept him even after having seen his very core and his worst, most frightening

¹⁷⁸ Miyazaki (2005), 140.

¹⁷⁹ Wolfreys (2008), 10-11.

state, and that she is afraid of losing him (“I don’t care if you’re a monster!”, 1:22:30). But Howl eluding an answer to her love confession – an act of vulnerability and owing up to her true self – lets her resort to disguising herself again in her old state, because (as she points out in another scene) “the nice thing about being old is you’ve got nothing much to worry about” (1:23:13). In the same way she convinces herself that Howl cannot possibly think that she is beautiful, it also seems to affirm that he cannot love her, because she thinks of herself as not pretty (“I’ve never once been beautiful in my entire life!”, 47:45) and not lovable. In a scene in the book it is hinted that deep inside she knows this to be untrue, when their hearts quite literally react to each other in what could be read as the moment Howl falls in love with her:

[Sophie’s] heart was behaving badly again. Howl realized something was wrong with her. He jumped indoors across his guitar, took hold of her elbow, and sat her in the chair. “Take it easy now!” Something happened between Howl and Calcifer then. Sophie felt it, because she was being held by Howl, and Calcifer was still leaning out of the grate. Whatever it was, her heart began to behave properly almost at once. Howl looked at Calcifer, shrugged and turned away to give Michael a whole lot of instructions about making Sophie keep quiet for the rest of the day. (150-151)

Allowing herself to become vulnerable and at the same time realizing that she is accepted the way she is, outspoken, honest and with strong opinions is an essential part of her identity negotiation.

Miyazaki implements Jones’ construction of a parallel world, apart from Sophie’s entering into Howl’s chambers, in a second, surreal sequence that explains Howl’s troubled background and in which Sophie plunges “Alice-like into an alternate universe”.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Cavallaro (2006), 160.

4.2.8. Into the Past: Through Space and Time

The alternate universe Sophie enters is a temporal parallel world, according to Stefanie Kimler, as she travels into the past. The place is the same, but the temporal dimension is another.¹⁸¹ After the castle has fallen apart because Sophie poured water on Calcifer in a desperate attempt to save the WotW from burning, she sits alone and hopeless



Figure 20: Sophie entering the „nothingness“. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.



Figure 21: Sophie falling Alice-like into the worm hole. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

between the scraps of the castle, when suddenly the ring Howl gave her beams a ray of light. She is young but with white hair. She asks the ring: “Is Howl still alive? Can you lead me to him?” (1:43:19) and indeed, it starts pointing towards what turns out to be the remains of the castle front door, leaning against the rock face. For the ring to show the way, as Howl had explained, all she must do is “summon Calcifer with [her] heart” (1:07:35), which indicates that their hearts already have a ‘connection’ and she just has to actively permit the feeling for it to lead her the right path. Even though the castle itself is shattered to pieces, it can still uphold its function as a threshold by means of the *Grenzgängerin*. The colour on the dial is black, alike the one leading to Wales in the novel. The border crossing or transition into the past itself could be said to be based on Jones’ description of “nothingness”, as when she opens the door she is indeed faced with pitch black nothingness resembling a thick liquid on putting a hand in it. It emits the sound of a deep cave system. A close-up to her face shows her concerned and then determined, as she decides to enter. For a long six seconds after Sophie and the dog have vanished, we still watch the same shot of the castle door, the nothingness at the heart of the picture, opening a space of cognition for the audience. We cannot but ask ourselves: what will happen? Can she succeed? With the subsequent cut we take Sophie’s perspective as she passes, surrounded by darkness, her figure however strangely illuminated, through a tunnel towards the (initially blurred) blueish room of Howl’s childhood cottage, from which she walks out into the marshes to witness the

¹⁸¹ Cf. Kimler (2010), 148.

origination of Howl's and Calcifer's contract (see also chapter 4.1.3.), transcending time. The whole story pivots on a notion of time based on the principle of "eternal circular return", as Davide Tarò proposes, which is graphically epitomized by the "climactic sequence dramatizing the wizard's visionary premonitions".¹⁸² Howl sees in a moment where "past and future magically coalesce, the future companion he will await, faithfully and desperately, until the 'beginning of the film', which takes place about ten years later".¹⁸³ Through Sophie's perspective, we witness Howl's major transformation, the outcome of which is the person we see during the course of the film. The scene also highlights the cyclic structure of change: every termination of one transformation is the beginning of another. In reconstructing Howl's past through Sophie's eyes and direct physical involvement, Cavallaro notes, the film does not follow the developmental curves typically associated with the conventional bildungsroman.¹⁸⁴ She continues:

Thus, even as it articulates a growing-up trajectory, [the film] eschews the notion of linear maturation – and hence of any reparative teleology – by intimating that the present-day wizard is the outcome of choices and actions that cannot be conclusively relegated to the past but actually go on haunting the here-and-now as tangible, albeit spectral, forces.¹⁸⁵

These mental and actual transitions back and forth between past and present and here and there are what lays the ground for – and at the same time is the expression of – the liminal state both Howl and Sophie are in through the course of the book and film, it is the fabric that constitutes the liminal space. They do not, however, delineate a standard quest pattern, according to Cavallaro, but on the contrary "abide in the viewer's memory as wistfully quiet glimpses of that crucial period where childhood gives way to adolescence, and the only constant, paradoxically, is flux".¹⁸⁶

Sophie calls out to the young Howl "It's me, Sophie! I know how to help you now! Find me in the future!" (1:47:28). In discovering the secret and thereby knowing how to break their contract, the scene is also the manifestation of Sophie's character development from the young girl resigning herself to her seemingly unnegotiable fate, to the self-assured woman, actively taking control of her own life and helping her friends out of genuine love and her own incentive, instead of due to a sense of

¹⁸² Cavallaro (2006), 160.

¹⁸³ Davide Tarò qtd. in ib. 60.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Cavallaro (2007), 160.

¹⁸⁵ *Ib.*, 160.

¹⁸⁶ *Ib.*, 160.

obligation.¹⁸⁷ “The setting’s atmospheric and lighting qualities contribute substantially to the evocation of a pervasively cryptic mood”, Dani Cavallaro comments, and thus convey the intensity of the revelation for both Sophie and the audience.

The enchanting effects conjured up by the nocturnal scenery, showered by rapidly proliferating banks of sparks endowed with alarming physical density, provides both an uplifting counterpart to the images of destruction presented in the preceding sequences and a fearful intensification of the weight of the unknown. The viewer is hence asked to experience the episode as both a moment of disclosure and as a deepening of the grievous darkness that besets both Sophie’s and Howl’s tasks from all sides.¹⁸⁸

The suspension of conventional temporal boundaries is matched by an equally drastic erosion of spatial demarcations as a worm hole opens below Sophie and she “falls into the abyss between an eternal sunset and darkness”.¹⁸⁹ Miyazaki wanted it to look like “a hole suddenly torn through the background art, [...] mysterious, like a black hole.”¹⁹⁰ To convey the gradations of curves, cell drawing didn’t suffice, so they created it with digital animation. The hole was “drawn with vertical and horizontal paths (contour lines) and morphed over a time interval. [...] We had the hole morph in extreme to convey its overwhelming power”¹⁹¹, director of digital animation Kataama explains. Falling through the sky, between clouds and finally into complete darkness again, she is once more suffused with a faint glow, gradually stops falling, regaining control as the force of gravity is progressively reinstated and walks with what seems like red clouds below her further through darkness until the castle door appears again. Once Sophie and the dog step out of it, it vanishes and she discovers Howl, still a huge wounded bird. She does not hesitate to show her feelings anymore and is now determined she can save Howl by breaking his contract and curse and thereby reunite their little community. The depicted border(less) situation of transition through space and time is transformed into a life-threatening extreme situation as she is sucked into the worm hole and spins in free fall through the sky. The outcome of such a situation is not only uncertain, as Annette Simonis notes, but involves furthermore the probable failure of the protagonist. Thereby, Simonis continues, quite often not only the existence of single individuals is at stake, but the future of whole societies.¹⁹² While it is, in Sophie’s

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Kimler (2010), 149.

¹⁸⁸ Cavallaro (2006), 161.

¹⁸⁹ Miyazaki (2005), 186, and cf. Cavallaro (2006), 161.

¹⁹⁰ *Ib.* 187.

¹⁹¹ Miyazaki (2004), 187.

¹⁹² Cf. Simonis, Annette: *Grenzüberschreitungen in der phantastischen Literatur: Einführung in die Theorie und Geschichte eines narrativen Genres*. Heidelberg: Winter 2005. 291.

case, not the future of a whole society that is on the line, it is nevertheless the future of her new-found community, or family, as one may say and with it her own, self-chosen future. The sequence therefore can be understood as epitomizing her whole process of identity negotiation in the course of the film, including episodes of loss of control as part of asserting one's self (for example getting lost when becoming literally self-less as Howl's mother, or her unacknowledged jealousy in the face of Howl's alleged pursuit of other women).

4.2.9. Dying Evil: The Witch of the Waste

The WotW's development in her quest for Howl's heart is an amplifying countermovement to Sophie's development (and her quest for his heart) and culminates in letting the WotW (film), respectively her heart in the shape of the fire-demon Ms. Angorian (book), enter the liminal space of the castle – an act of overcoming her jealousy, thus paving the way for the climactic resolution of the story. In the book, it is the witch's own fire-demon getting the better of the WotW. Sophie actively enters her fortress to rescue Ms. Angorian, not knowing that she is the witch's fire-demon yet and that it is in fact a trap to lure Howl there. Entering is compared to going to the parallel world of Wales and she soon finds out that the WotW is weakened:

It was a little like going through the castle door with the knob black-down. There was a moment of nothingness, followed by a murky light. [...] The fortress seemed enormous, though she suspected that it was deceptive, just as the castle was. The Witch was standing there waiting. [...] When Sophie walked straight up to her, brandishing her stick, the Witch backed away. "I am not to be threatened!" the Witch said, sounding tired and frail. (402-404)

Sophie is afraid but her determination allows her to act like she isn't, the comparison to the processes of transition in the familiar castle encouraging her. Even though the witch is weak however, it is only Howl who can confront her and he does so by means of a spell, which transgresses and kills her with "claps of sound" that ring "echo after echo" and carry a "cloud of magic" that "vanishes in wisps and swirled away in murky eddies", leading the WotW to "fold in herself, thinner and whiter than ever", finally falling in a heap. Miyazaki changes the plot and instead of having her die, her powers are taken away and she is completely transformed. It is not Howl instigating said transformation, but the king's sorceress' magic, starting with the sequence of Sophie

and the witch having to walk up the stairs to the palace by foot. What is for Sophie symbolic of her personal development (see chapter 4.2.6.), is for the WotW symbolic of her defeat, the juxtaposition enhancing the audience's perception of Sophie's growth. The more Sophie succeeds in her identity negotiation and takes control, the more the witch loses control and falls apart. Miyazaki implements the peak of her transformation through a ritual reminiscent of steam punk aesthetics, in which "eerie lights emanating from peculiar vessels worthy of the most dexterous alchemist of old are seen to coalesce into 2D origami-like figures that then proceed to revolve in a carousel pattern around the helpless victim of the charm in a feat of dazzling choreography"¹⁹³, as Cavallaro aptly describes the scene. The transformed witch is unrecognizable, retaining none of her former air of power and elegance, resorting in Sophie taking pity on her, introducing her into the community of the castle and henceforth caring for her. While she does not have to vanish completely as in the book, it is the evil in her that must die. She is therefore not depicted as "unredeemable fiend" and her humanity is underscored by the "animation's emphasis on a disabling sense of frailty" (Cavallaro). "The character is ultimately accorded positive attributes – primarily the ability to empathize, in her own idiosyncratic fashion, with the heroine's predicament", Cavallaro comments, "and even though she retains elements of her initial penchant for self-indulgence and covetousness, she is finally able to act selflessly".¹⁹⁴

4.2.10. The Power of Words

Sophie eventually succeeds in breaking Howl's and her own curse by accepting her abilities (magical and otherwise) and making use of them. Her heroic journey is based on gaining confidence in her own powers of judgement, allowing her to embrace her identity and take confidence in her ability to critically judge her world.¹⁹⁵ Even before she consciously knows about her magical ability, she already uses it unknowingly, talking life or qualities into inanimate objects. Entering a liminal phase and being on the road however, enables her to consciously utilize it and thereby decide a life-and-death issue, not only affecting the lives at stake, but her own as well. She thereby bridges through magic her mind and reality with words. Her words then are like an in-

¹⁹³ Cavallaro (2006), 168-169.

¹⁹⁴ *Ib.* 160.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Welaratna (2009), 16.

between space themselves, a liminal space of seemingly endless possibility of creation. This empowers her to achieve the impossible act of magically reinserting Howl's heart into his body, after she has "carefully nipped [Calcifer] off the black lump" (422), transgressing Howl's bodily borders. Bodies too are border sites, Schimanski and Wolfe state, marking the distinction between inside and outside, self and other. They can be distinguished only where contacts are inscribed on them, which is the paradox of the frontier – the points of differentiation between two bodies, created by contacts, are also their common points.¹⁹⁶ In physically returning his heart, a connection and a distinction is made, not only physically but also symbolically: Howl can now fully love again, connecting him to Sophie and his family of 'outcasts', but also distinguishing him as a henceforth whole individual again (separated from Calcifer).

Kneeling down beside Howl, she carefully put the black lump on his chest in the leftish sort of place she had felt hers in when it troubled her, and pushed. "Go in," she told it. "Get in there and work!" And she pushed and pushed. The heart began to sink in, and to beat more strongly as it went. Sophie tried [...] to keep up a steady, firm pressure. Her hair kept getting in her way. It fell across her face in reddish fair hanks, but she tried to ignore that too. She pushed.

The heart went in. As soon as it had disappeared, Howl stirred about. (423)

Determination and persistence is what it takes to succeed in this act of border transition as well as in the other acts of crossing or existing on the threshold, traits that are imperative for the *GrenzgängerIn* to remain as such, referring to Hohnsträter's theory (see chapter 2.3.). Sophie of course, turns out to be the "woman, true and fair" from the poem/curse who is supposed to not exist. The paradox remains as we must ask: is she true because the logic of the "Song" dictates it, or because her taking charge of her own life and abilities has made her become true to herself? We might also ask what exactly she is asking of Howl's heart when she tells it to "Get in there and work!" – a literal beat or a more metaphorical throbbing, or, as Rudd argues, perhaps both, thereby once again deconstructing the possibility of there being a literal meaning without some metaphorical implication.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Schimanski, Wolfe (2007), 20-21.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Rudd (2010), 266.

In the film, Sophie's magical ability is never explicitly mentioned, but it is clearly implemented nonetheless and hinted at in various scenes (e.g. Markl to Sophie: "Are you sure you're not a witch?", 38:15; Sophie jokingly to a customer: "That's right, I'm the scariest witch of them all!" 25:34). It is most obviously implied when Calcifer tells her that he will be okay if it is her giving Howl back his heart and thus breaking their contract. Sophie and Howl are finally depicted in a close-up looking at each other, they are now established as equals, amplified by their mirroring position, even their hairstyles



Figure 22: Sophie and Howl as equals. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

are the same. Their transformations are – for the time being – concluded, they both are their unvarnished selves and can now start a new process together. The remains of the castle on which the scene takes place, still move until Calcifer is freed. Calcifer leaving results in the castle coming to a halt and the last bit breaking apart. Miyazaki thereby dramatically shows the disintegration of old patterns that is necessary to then create a new structure – a flying castle, free from its former restrictions.

Sophie's magical ability can be read on a level beyond the story as symbol for words having the power to bring to life a story in the audience's minds, thus evoking a liminal space in which the words can be processed into mental images and consequently come to life through the audience's imagination.

4.3. Bishōnen: Fluctuating Masculinities and the Power of the Stranger

While the focus regarding identity negotiation and its narrative and cinematographic implementation through liminal phenomena lies largely on Sophie as the main character, Howl also goes through a character development, changing and transforming in ways that are worthy of closer study. His character is in the book as well as in the film the typical *bishōnen* type popular in contemporary anime. It means ‘beautiful young boy’, usually tall, slender, with no body hair, little muscle, expressive eyes and androgynous or feminine features, describing an aesthetic of a young man “whose beauty (and sexual appeal) transcends the boundary of gender or sexual orientation”.¹⁹⁸ Its popularity may stem from the concept breaking down stereotypes



Figure 23: Androgynous Howl. Miyazaki 2004. HMC. Figure 24: Howl as plumed monster. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

surrounding feminine male characters and providing a non-traditional outlet for gender relations.¹⁹⁹ The gender identity of men in contemporary Japan is as much in flux as that of women, argues Napier, possibly even more so.

Japanese men today are being forced out of traditional notions of masculine performance and presented with a wide range of possible identities. These choices can lead to a situation that is both exhilarating and threatening, since these changes are deeply connected with the current disturbances in the social fabric. [...] It is in the world of Japanese animation and manga [...] that we can find a particularly wide variety of masculine representations [...].²⁰⁰

The emphasis on movement and transformation (as has already been discussed in chapter 3.2.) enables viewers to explore fluctuating identities. Identifying with a gender involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, as Judith Butler notes. It is always an ambivalent act, because there is a cost in every

¹⁹⁸ Bishōnen. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bish%C5%8Dnen>. Web. 17.06.2018.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. ib.

²⁰⁰ Napier (2005), 121.

identification, namely the loss of some other set of identifications.²⁰¹ Therefore Howl, as a *Grenzgänger*, can resist such clear identification in favour of an in-between state. This also holds true for his emotional representation, as he does not shy away from openly expressing his feelings – something usually regarded as stereotypically feminine. He sets great value upon his appearance, dressing elegantly and even wearing jewellery like feminine earrings (see fig. 23), his character however, is darker and more complex than the usual *bishōnen*. While he is portrayed rather light-heartedly as amusingly vain – he spends hours in the bathroom every day using various “creams, powders and paint” (91) – he transforms in the film into what looks like a gigantic bird of prey (see fig. 24) in his “one-man mission to defuse the weapons of war that fill the skies around him”, suggesting “a more intense and dark form of masculinity”²⁰², as Napier states. But even when he doesn’t morph into a monster, he still switches identity day-to-day. He “has a knack of swapping names no less flamboyantly than physical appearances”²⁰³, Cavallaro comments. Howl is then interchangeable with “Mr. Jenkins” and “Mr. Pendragon”, depending on context, location and occasion. He states himself to have “as many [aliases] as I need to keep my freedom” (50:52), however he is only his true self inside the castle, again hinting at the need of a true *Grenzgänger* to be on the threshold in order to be himself. He constitutes the persona of the stranger, as his constant meandering leaves him mysterious everywhere to some extent. In the book he represents a stranger additionally insofar, as he indeed originates from a different land and world. Apart from the Witch of the Waste, who he defeats in the end, the two most powerful wizards, Howl and the royal wizard Suliman, both come from the parallel ‘real’ world (Wales). The stranger is therefore powerful due to the fact that he is a border crosser, he has seen and learned from more than one realm.

That being said, it is Sophie who sets off Howl’s psychological transformation by first causing involuntary physical transformation.

²⁰¹ Cf. Judith Butler qtd. in Napier (2005), 48.

²⁰² Napier (2005), 123.

²⁰³ Cavallaro (2006), 163.

4.3.1. Howl's Physical and Psychological Transformation

Howl does not mind Sophie's appropriation of the castle space in the form of cleaning and tidying up, even when Michael/Markl and Calcifer vociferously protest it, until it affects him directly. By accidentally invoking change through mixing up his hair paints, she forces him into the unwanted liminal state of uncertainty. Since it is normally Howl himself who determines the configuration and terms of the liminal space in which he moves about, Sophie compels him in this way to see a new perspective and start a process of identity negotiation as a result. In both the book and the film, the sequence is humorously dramatic and leads to him quite literally dissolving.

[...T]he bathroom door crashed open and Howl shot out, wailing with despair.

"Look at this!" he shouted. "*Look* and it! What has that one-woman force of chaos *done* to these spells?"

Sophie and Michael whirled round and looked at Howl. His hair was wet, but, apart from that, neither of them could see that it looked any different. [...] He sat down with a thump on the three-legged stool and jabbed at his wet head with his finder. "Look. Survey. Inspect. My hair is ruined! I look like a pan of bacon and eggs! [...] You couldn't rest until you made me miserable too. Look at it! It's *ginger*! I shall have to *hide* until it's grown out! He spread his arms out passionately. "Despair!" he yelled. "Anguish! Horror!" (115-116)

Being beautiful is one specific appearance until he is invited to reflect upon it only to conclude the following day that his "hair looks rather good this color" (126). It can thus be read as an indictment of a culture obsessed with beauty, the "Beauty Myth", as Cavallaro calls it.²⁰⁴ Overcoming it, first takes a dissolution of bodily borders and almost the literal liquidation (with green slime) of Calcifer and thereby his own heart and existence, showing the potential danger of an act of transformation as it can force one to the limit of existence, as for example through depression. "I see no point in living if I can't be beautiful" (46:42) is what he states in the film. The direction of the gaze is reversed, according to Rudd, in that it is Howl who feels the need to be continually looked at and appreciated, and when "his self-worth suffers in this regard, he loses his outward form and *savoir faire*, and starts to dissolve into a slimy mass"²⁰⁵. He starts to summon "huge, cloudy, human-looking shapes" that "bellied up in all four corners" (116) whose "throbbing screams" (117) permeate through the walls, transgressing from the castle into the houses of the whole street in Porthaven, where Sophie and Michael

²⁰⁴ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 166.

²⁰⁵ Rudd (2010), 265.

flee to. The castle's interior structure transforms along with his emotions, which are visually represented through the castle's altering structure.²⁰⁶ In order to

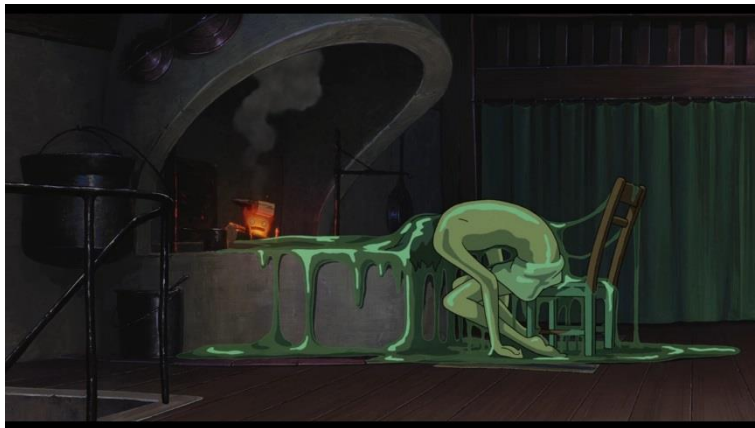


Figure 25: Howl dissolving in green slime and despair. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

cinematographically convey the transformation, ‘morphing’ was used, dissolving previous images into the subsequent images in uneven time intervals to achieve a wavy motion.²⁰⁷ On coming back, they discover Howl in an “attitude of utter despair”, covered all over in green slime: “There were horrendous, dramatic, violent quantities of green slime – oodles of it. It covered Howl completely.” (119). Jones emphasizes – and pokes fun at – Howl’s emotional inner world through the extensive usage of adjectives associated with extremes. Christoph Kalb argues that with suffering, the self enters a liminal phase of its existence, a state of ambiguity in which the symbolic borders of the world and the self are transgressed as it seems to open a gateway to another world. Suffering, he continues, is not only experienced as chaos, annihilation and death, but also as a place of order, recreation and rebirth and belongs to the phases of transition and transformation in which meaning is constructed. In the transition point between an identity in crisis and a fixed identity, questions like ‘Who am I?’, ‘In which way of life do I recognize myself?’, ‘What values determine my actions?’ are decided anew. Suffering is a threshold space in which we perceive ourselves and the world differently. It is liminal because it is experienced as a disruption within the everyday reality.²⁰⁸ Sophie, who would have considerably more reason to react dramatically after her change into an old woman but didn’t, stays quite unimpressed in the face of his “tantrum”, as she calls it (122). As the one inflicting the change, she also helps him deal with it and therefore helps him go through the transition faster: ““Stop it!”, she said. “Stop it at once! You are behaving just like a *baby!*”” (119), and takes matters into her hand, cleaning him and the castle up again. In the film, it leads to his acceptance of his naturally black hair – which becomes

²⁰⁶ Wu (2016), 195.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Miyazaki (2004), 189.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Kalb, Christof: Selbstbildung im Leiden. Zur Rekonstruktion beschädigter Identität in Ritual und Kunst. In: Benthien, Claudia (Hg.): Über Grenzen: Limitation und Transgression in Literatur und Ästhetik. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler 1999. 161-162, 164.

associated with the positive changes induced by Sophie as well as Howl's increasing capacity to direct his gaze away from his own selfish needs and desires, started off with the honest self-assessment: "I'm such a big coward, all I do is hide. And all of this magic is just to keep everybody away. I can't stand how scared I am." (50:24).

When the castle needs to be moved to other places because the Witch of the Waste (book), respectively Ms. Suliman (film), has found out its locations, Howl's development is most strikingly implemented spatially. When before the castle was designed and positioned mostly to his own needs, he now modifies it to include Sophie's needs, even switching the main base from his own house in Porthaven to Sophie's former house and hat shop, hinting at her taking a solid place in his life and his now feeling responsible for the wellbeing of someone other than himself. For it to happen however, a rite of passage is necessary that again is potentially life-threatening, indicated by Calcifer warning: "You know this could kill me, don't you?" and Howl responding with: "Look on the bright side [...] it could be me it kills." (317). Howl and Michael chalk every corner with "strange signs" (314) and a five-pointed star inside a circle on the floor, Howl repaints the colour blobs on the door and finally carries Calcifer on a shovel into the centre of the chalked star, slowly turning one complete turn, and the transformation starts:

It felt as if the whole room turned with them. [...] Michael staggered. Sophie felt as if their piece of the world had come loose and was swinging and jiggling round in a circle, sickeningly. She did not blame Calcifer for looking so frightened. Everything was still swinging and swaying as Howl took the same long, careful steps out of the star and out of the circle. [...] The room rocked and settled. [...] The castle room seemed to wriggle itself into place inside the parlor [in the house where she had been born], pushing it out here, pulling it in there, bringing the ceiling down to match its own beamed ceiling, until the two melted together and became the castle room again, except perhaps it was now a bit higher and squarer than it had been.

If we view the castle as an expression of Howl's psyche, the transformation can then be read as symbolic for his identity negotiation. Initiated through Sophie, he gradually changes from the vain and rather superficial beau avoiding responsibility to a responsible, caring and considerate person by wriggling and swinging and changing his 'inner structure' with the influence of Sophie's honest and sometimes harsh assessment, as well as her determination and kindness. In the film, the transformation is not portrayed as life-threatening and while a ritual with chalk-symbols is also

performed, it is done in a much more light-hearted fashion than in the book, and faster. However, the actual transformation is conveyed very fittingly using harmony, a technique in which harmony (the painted material applied directly on the cell sheet transferred from the trace machine) is combined with the background art. “I had to draw the transformation of each piece of furniture”, comments harmony process supervisor Noriko Takaya, “Howl’s magic ends with background art, but everything else up until that point is harmony.”²⁰⁹ The sheer power of magic makes Calcifer change to a huge blue flame (the only time he is depicted as described in the book) and Howl and the others start to float in the air while the castle shakes and moves back and forth, expanding and adapting into another space. One of the new ‘portals’ – the one to the actual location of the castle – now leads to the edge of the Waste, a dream-like, idyllic landscape with high moors and flowery meadows that Miyazaki wanted to come across as so beautiful that it seems “otherworldly”.²¹⁰ It is, in the film, Howl’s “secret garden” (1:20:48), the place where he “spent a lot of time” when he was young and the setting in which the time-travel sequence also takes place. It is also a place symbolic of the freedom he so desperately needs, the untouched space of potentiality and therefore a visualization of his liminal space. Howl presents it to Sophie as his gift to her, implying that the transformation also brings about his willingness to open up and share his intimate hide-away space and space of memory with Sophie.²¹¹

The scene is interrupted by the intrusion of a war-aircraft. “If the poetics of space optimizes the ideal of the universal human yearning for peace and for an integrated family, the most fearful threat to this is war”²¹², comments Wu. While in Jones’ novel it is merely mentioned that the country is under threat from the neighbouring countries and a war might be impending, Miyazaki introduces war into the film as an underlying main plot, complicating and intensifying the relationships being developed and explored²¹³ – an ongoing transformative force for Howl.

²⁰⁹ Miyazaki (2004), 155.

²¹⁰ Cf. ib. 151.

²¹¹ Cf. Wu (2016), 195-196.

²¹² Ib. 196.

²¹³ Cf. Bye (2014), 113.

4.3.2. War as Transgressive and Transformative: Metamorphosis

War is unequivocally depicted as invasive and transgressive as it is shown in contrasting shots entering the peaceful scenery of the picturesque haven in form of a burning battleship or enemy propaganda flyers, or an air-battleship transgressing into the dream-like landscape of the high moors, towering in its monstrosity of futuristic metal construction over the small hut amidst flowery meadows (Howl: “What is that thing doing out here?”, 1:23:28). By the battleship transgressing into Howl’s intimate space, which he just started to share with Sophie, it is symbolic of the disruptive power war has on the psyche and on their relationship as well as shared space, forestalling the endangerment of the secure space of the moving castle and with it their lives.



Figure 26: A battleship transgressing into the peaceful scenery.
Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

The king’s order that all wizards must fight for the country, forces Howl to engage in a war that he deems pointless and that gradually makes him lose his humanity as he transforms into a bird-like monster every time he fights, and it gets harder each time to regain his human form. Despite his emotional cowardice he becomes an anti-war hero.²¹⁴ Even his withdrawal from the war becomes an active rebellion against the military power.²¹⁵ The other wizards fighting for the king have already completely lost their humanity, attacking Howl even though he is “one of their own”. He remarks to Calcifer: “After the war they won’t recall they ever were human.” (42:25). “Howl is a wonderful metaphor for what happens to soldiers – even antisoldiers – in war”, Antonia Levi comments. “He fights only to defend others, especially those he loves, but the act of fighting is turning him into a monster.”²¹⁶ The film was made during the Iraq war – Miyazaki, openly opposing the war, seems to have used the theme as an opportunity to make an anti-war statement and, according to the film’s producer Toshio Suzuki, to explore the qualities that make people human and enable them to

²¹⁴ Cf. Levi, Antonia: Howl’s moving castle. In: *Mechademia*, Vol.3:1 (2008): 261-263. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.0.0059>. Web. 262.

²¹⁵ Cf. Wasylak, 10.

²¹⁶ Levi (2008), 262.

retain their humanity in a world brutalized by bloodshed and greed.²¹⁷ These qualities turn out to be love and compassion. It is therefore ultimately only Sophie who is capable of keeping Howl from losing his humanity completely, the whole extent of which is implemented in the scene in which they escape Ms. Suliman. As the one forcing all wizards to fight in the war under threat of taking away their magical power, she tries to trap Howl who refuses to fight for one side but rather sabotages single-handedly the means of war of both sides. This is revealed when Sophie asks in a scene in which an air-battleship disturbs the tranquillity of the high moors: “Is it the enemy’s



Figure 27: Howl in metamorphosis. Miyazaki 2004. HMC.

or one of ours?” and Howl sombrely replies: “What difference does it make?” (1:23:35). With a tap of Suliman’s staff a star-studded hollow suggestive of an inverted sky appears in the ground and unleashes a flood that swallows them only to then turn into a sunset sky. They float between heaven and earth, seemingly free through the illusion but actually trapped, when star-children, in a dance reminiscent of the ritual that took away the WotW’s magical abilities, start circling them. And indeed, Howl involuntarily begins to transform in an apparently painful procedure into his monster-bird shape, plumes breaking through his coat, his feet and hands changing into claws. Sophie saves him from Ms. Suliman’s attack and complete transformation by shouting: “Stop, Howl, it’s a trap!” (1:06:34), and covering his eyes with her hand. She thus disrupts the magical ritual and they can escape just in time by flying upwards – viewed from above – and out of the simulated inverted sky, breaking through the top of the glass dome. On leaving the dome, he transforms back to his human form. The scene conveys the helplessness in the face of war and its inescapability and hopelessness, were it not for someone providing a purpose to not give up. Similar to Sophie’s constantly changing appearance, Howl’s metamorphosis too manifests in varying degrees, depending on the situation. Sometimes it is just one hand that sprouts feathers, sometimes it is his body except for the face and sometimes he completely transforms into a monster. In the course of the film, the transformations become more and more body-consuming as

²¹⁷ Cf. Bye (2014), 113.

his identity negotiation progresses. Paradoxically, the closer he gets to approaching his true self through taking responsibility, the more he loses it for the same reason: defending and protecting the newly established family gives him an authentic purpose to fight and not follow his former escapist tendencies anymore, to the seeming point of no return.²¹⁸ Howl turning into a monster also emphasizes once more his status as a *Grenzgänger*. As Anne Allison comments, monsters are border crossers “with identities culled from a (monstrous) blend of the familiar and unfamiliar [...]. By definition, monsters live between two worlds and threaten to collapse or break down the mediating border.”²¹⁹ In fluctuating between his monstrous and human shape, hence accepting both his darker, uncontrollable aspects as well as his human facets and not being entirely one or the other, Howl doesn’t collapse the mediating threshold space, but in fact upholds it and makes it accessible to the members of his assembled family. And while it seems like Sophie rescues him from having to change into a monster, a possible relapse is not completely unthinkable as some dark traces will continue to inhabit every human mind. The film therefore does not suggest that Howl should follow a redemption path to a hidden better-self which one might expect from a Western narrative of metamorphism (such as for example Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, 1999), but instead deliberately incorporates in Howl’s (and Sophie’s) existence both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ traits, both yin and yang.²²⁰ It is consequently a much more realistic ‘happy end’ than in typical fairy-tales, underlining that identity negotiation never ceases, in the novel humorously conveyed when Howl states: “I think we ought to live happily ever after. [...] It should be hair-raising.”, and Sophie says: “And you’ll exploit me”, to which Howl answers: “And then you’ll cut up all my suits to teach me.” (427).

²¹⁸ Cf. Wu (2016), 196.

²¹⁹ Allison, Anne: *Millennial Monsters. Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. Berkley: University of California Press 2006. 32.

²²⁰ Wilson, C. and G.T. Wilson: Taoism, Shintoism, and the ethics of technology: an ecocritical review of *Howl's Moving Castle*. In: *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*: Vol.2:3 (2015): 189-194. <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/18428>. Web.

5. Conclusion

In exploring both the book and the film *Howl's Moving Castle* with regard to liminality, enough evidence can be gathered to support the claim that liminal phenomena are in fact narratively and cinematographically implemented in a variety of ways to convey acts of identity negotiation happening within the liminal state that is entered. They induce a gain of cognition in the characters as well as in the witnessing audience, as we are ourselves transferred into a liminal state in which we are enabled to reflect upon our own identity, thus opening up a liminal space of cognition. The phenomena spatially realize the liminal state, displaying the possible structure of a liminal space. In comparison of book and film they are sometimes realized very similarly, whereas in some parts they differ substantially – partly because of the nature of the different media. In the book, it is first and foremost the process oriented narration that points to the ongoing transition and movement. Jones deploys typical imagery like bridges, crossing through doors and therefore frequent change of perspective, passages, staircases that demand arduous climbing, or general moving through and on thresholds, including necessary rituals of change or passage. In this constant movement, the protagonist gradually explores her 'new' life, finding meaning for herself, becoming self-confident and taking an active role as she shifts perspectives. According to Annette Simonis, this is a rite of transition in itself that phantasy literature can initiate: the transition is then the mental or psychological process of development both of the protagonist, as well as the reader through the spacemetaphorical structure of the text.²²¹ The crossing of spatial borders marks at the same time the transitions between different stages of the character's development or maturity levels.²²² Magic functions, by the means of words, as creator of a liminal space of potentiality, hinting at the power of words to create meaning. By deconstructing conventional fairy-tales, she furthermore invites the reader to question cultural conventions and what is taken for 'reality', consequently forcing us to reflect and thereby creating a space of cognition. The very title already is a warning that it is not a typical fairy-tale we are about to experience (a moving castle is a seeming antagonism in itself) although all necessary elements are present throughout the text, they are in a completely different order. This provokes the reader's interest and reflection as we

²²¹ Simonis (2005), 55-57.

²²² Cf. ib. 58.

become aware that we “are to expect the unexpected”, as Seda Yavaş notes, preempting our own cognitive involvement.²²³

Miyazaki widely adopts Jones’ usage of imagery and additionally employs various techniques of animation to amplify the identity negotiation, like ongoing transformation and metamorphosis (realized for example through morphing), change of perspective and movement through space through contrasting shot lengths and cuts (path map and fitting), flying as borderless liberation, cross-dimensional travel, or constantly adjusting colours. Sophie discovering her freedom and power in old age is a (literally) maturing experience as she, according to Napier, “confronts and triumphs over some of the darkest fears of the human race: those of aging, illness and death.”²²⁴ In becoming a *Grenzgängerin* and stepping into different worlds while continuously transforming, she enables the audience to explore with her the wide range of identities, between the familiar and the unfamiliar in a world of possible states and possible identities that anime facilitates.²²⁵ It is in fact the main attraction of anime that it allows the viewer to “play in a liminal world of entertainment, free to take part in an infinitely transforming state of fantasy”, giving movement and life to any and all fragments of identity.²²⁶ Metamorphosis is one of the most striking ways Miyazaki implements identity negotiation, as it is used to render Sophie’s and Howl’s psyche visible on the outside, a kind of ongoing border crossing in itself as especially Sophie’s appearance is in constant flux.²²⁷ In combining Japanese and Western elements and negotiating across mixed cultural traditions and heritage, Miyazaki not only caters to Japanese viewers, but to viewers across the world who are able to project issues of identity construction onto the characters. It is possible that the film is so popular around the world for this reason, because in the successful evocation of a liminal process in viewers, they are challenged to reflect upon their own identity and discouraged from taking appearances at face value but instead accept the existence of discrepancies.²²⁸ Sophie as a ‘disappearing’ shojo character and Howl as a bishonen character with darker traits, both in an ever-present flux, challenge traditional gender codes and invite and demonstrate the formation of complex identities, not only for

²²³ Yavaş, Seda: Diana Wynne Jones’s Howl’s Moving Castle (1986) or The Story of a New Mythology. In: *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, Vol. 4:3 (2015): 30-36. <http://kutaksam.karabuk.edu.tr/index.php/ilk/article/view/467>. Web. 31.

²²⁴ Napier (2005), 192.

²²⁵ Cf. ib. 293.

²²⁶ Ib. 294.

²²⁷ Cf. Kimler (2010), 152.

²²⁸ Cf. Cavallaro (2006), 163.

Japanese audiences but for audiences of various cultural backgrounds. In the metaphor of the body, codings of individual and collective identity overlap.²²⁹ It is not only Japan that exists in a liminal situation; according to Rifà-Valls, uncertainty, multiplicity, diversity, ambiguity, and dissolution form us all as postmodern subjects.²³⁰

The narrative of both the book and the film is like the moving castle itself – a constantly evolving structure “made out of a jumble of diverse fragments”²³¹ and the idiosyncratic characters populating the world are distinguished by their continually metamorphosing identities. It highlights the impact of changing circumstances and relationships on experience, behaviour and ultimately identity. “This narrative impulse involves a rejection of any simple dichotomy between good and evil, and instead conceives of experience as fluid and relational.”²³²

As a transnational text it also invites complex styles of reading which acknowledge the positionality of readers. Outsiders to Japan’s culture cannot unproblematically understand all implications, traditions and their manifestations in the film, challenging us, as Clare Bradford suggests, to “re-think our agency” to “avoid judging or interpreting minority texts in the light of our own cultural assumptions and knowledges”²³³. It is thereby also a chance to “critically scrutinize our own histories of selfhood and scholarship and their influence on how we understand the “other””²³⁴, opening again a liminal space of cognition. Jones, while her text may be less cross-cultural than the film, still manages to create a similar space of cognition as well by (often humorously) deconstructing the conventions of typical fairy-tales, allowing us to notice and reflect upon cultural traditions and perceptions of reality and the self, mostly along with Sophie, sometimes however also ahead of her.

The supposition that we as the audience are transferred into a liminal state ourselves through experiencing the narratively or cinematographically implemented liminal phenomena, means that it is consequently possible for writers, directors or other art creators to employ those phenomena as tools to deliberately induce the creation of a liminal space of cognition, meaning the evocation of (self-)reflection. As such, in a next

²²⁹ Cf. Herold (1999), 109.

²³⁰ Cf. Rifà-Valls, Montserrat: Postwar Princesses, Young Apprentices, and a Little Fish-Girl: Reading Subjectivities in Hayao Miyazaki’s Tales of Fantasy. Web. 96-97.

²³¹ Bye (2014), 116.

²³² *Ib.* 116.

²³³ Bradford (2011), 32-33.

²³⁴ *Ib.* 33.

step, liminality in the context of identity negotiation could be a useful tool for reception research, especially with regard to the study of adaptations. Possible research questions could include: Is an adaptation perceived as fundamentally faithful to the source when it succeeds to invoke the same liminal space of cognition as its source? How is this perception influenced by the audience's cultural background?

It could further be argued that Comparative Literature itself, as a discipline that is based on interdisciplinary, intertextual and intercultural transfer and discourses, could be regarded as a liminal space of cognition in a meta-level of self-reflection in terms of disciplinary identity of literary studies.²³⁵

Stories have an important role in forming human beings, Miyazaki believes.²³⁶ Liminality is a possible way to explore (and convey) character development in stories, regardless of the medium, for both creators as well as literary scholars, and can in particular be useful as a determining factor in the creation and study of adaptations. Further research is necessary to evaluate if certain traits resurface throughout various studies – also in different literary and film genres – to possibly enable the creation of a catalogue of liminal phenomena used, respectively usable, for character development.

²³⁵ Cf. Parr (2008), 43.

²³⁶ Cf. Hayao Miyazaki qtd. in Bigelow (2009), 70.

6. List of Figures

Figure 1: The mechanism of shifting location. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 25:57].

Figure 2: The curse taking effect. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 31:48].

Figure 3: Howl catching Calcifer. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:46:38].

Figure 4: Howl rescuing Sophie and thus involving her. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 05:40].

Figure 5: Sophie being enabled to change perspective by walking the sky. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 06:20].

Figure 6: Sophie discovering her transformation. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 11:45].

Figure 7: Old Sophie leaving the space of origin. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 14:10].

Figure 8: Sophie crossing the bridge entering the liminal phase. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 14:17].

Figure 9: Sophie before entering the castle. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 19:00].

Figure 10: Sophie cleaning. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 33:23].

Figure 11: Sophie in transition. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 35:42].

Figure 12: Sophie discovering the bathroom. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 35:48].

Figure 13: Howl's heart in Calcifer. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 33:59].

Figure 14: Sophie being young while sleeping. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 42:48].

Figure 15: Howl looking at Sophie sleeping. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 42:53].

Figure 16: Sophie climbing the stairs. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 57:07].

Figure 17: Change of perspective. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 57:48].

Figure 18: Sophie entering Howl's inner world. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:12:28].

Figure 19: Sophie's rejection after her confession. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:14:14].

Figure 20: Sophie entering the "nothingness". *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:44:08].

Figure 21: Sophie falling Alice-like into the worm hole. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:47:31].

Figure 22: Sophie and Howl as equals. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:53:07].

Figure 23: Androgynous Howl. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 34:50].

Figure 24: Howl as plumed monster. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:14:07].

Figure 25: Howl dissolving in green slime and despair. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 48:24].

Figure 26: A battleship transgressing into the peaceful scenery. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:23:46].

Figure 27: Howl in metamorphosis. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli, JAP 2004. DVD. Distributed by Shout! Factory LLC, LA. [Film still, 1:06:32].

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8. Abstract in German

Diese Arbeit untersucht und vergleicht den Film *Howl's Moving Castle* von Hayao Miyazaki und die gleichnamige britische Vorlage, den Jugendroman von Diana Wynne Jones, auf der Grundlage von Theorien des Liminalen und Grenzpoetiken im Zusammenhang mit Identitätsprozessen im Hinblick auf liminale Phänomene. Es wird erörtert, dass für jeden Akt der Identitätsverhandlung ein liminaler Zustand betreten wird, eine Phase des Dazwischen, in welcher vorherige scheinbare Stabilität zugunsten von Potenzialität und dem Unbekannten aufgelöst wird. Um die Prozesse der Identitätsarbeit, die innerhalb dieses liminalen Zustands geschehen, narrativ, respektive filmisch, umzusetzen und den RezipientInnen zu vermitteln, werden liminale Phänomene wie Transformationen, Metamorphosen, Übergänge oder Schwellenräume eingesetzt. Dadurch wiederum können auch die RezipientInnen selbst in einen liminalen Zustand versetzt werden, in dem sie befähigt werden, ihre Wahrnehmung der eigenen Identität, und in Folge ihre Identität, zu reflektieren und zu verändern, womit ein liminaler Erkenntnisraum eröffnet wird. Darüber hinaus können auch der Entstehung von Adaptionen und Animationsfilmen an sich, besonders vor einem interkulturellen, interdisziplinären Hintergrund, liminale Eigenschaften zugeschrieben werden. Um Identitätsprozesse an RezipientInnen zu vermitteln und dabei Denk- und Reflexionsanstöße zu geben, können, so die Folgerung, bewusst liminale Phänomene von AutorInnen, Filmschaffenden oder anderen KünstlerInnen eingesetzt werden. LiteraturwissenschaftlerInnen können Liminalität als Forschungsgrundlage verwenden um Charakterentwicklung zu untersuchen, auch für die Analyse anderer Literatur- und Filmgenres als in dieser Arbeit, gegebenenfalls einen Katalog der liminalen Phänomene für Figurenentwicklung erstellen und möglicherweise, in einem weiteren Schritt, sogar als Werkzeug für die Rezeptionsforschung nützen.

9. Abstract in English

This paper explores the film *Howl's Moving Castle* by Hayao Miyazaki and the eponymous British source material, the novel for young adults by Diana Wynne Jones, on the basis of theories of the liminal and border poetics in the context of identity processes with regard to liminal phenomena. It is argued that for every act of identity negotiation a liminal state is entered, an in-between phase in which former seeming stability is dissolved in favour of potentiality and the unknown. In order to narratively and cinematographically/cinematically implement the processes of identity negotiation that happen within this liminal state and convey them to the audience, liminal phenomena such as transformations, metamorphoses, transitions or threshold spaces are employed. Thereby, the audience can be transferred into a liminal state as well, in which they are enabled to reflect upon and change their perception of their own identity and consequently their identity, thus opening a liminal space of cognition. Furthermore, it can be said that the creation of adaptations and animated films in itself, especially against an intercultural, interdisciplinary background, also shows liminal traits. It is concluded that authors, filmmakers or other artists can deliberately employ liminal phenomena to convey identity processes to audiences and thereby set them thinking and reflecting. Literary scholars can use liminality to study character development, also in the analysis of other literary and film genres than examined in this paper, and possibly eventually create a catalogue of liminal phenomena deployed for such purposes, as well as gain insights for reception research.