



Taking the Subject Further

Margaret Rumbold

Fantasy written for children has tended to restrict the portrayal of subjectivity to one whereby the self achieves a completed state of enclosure and homogeneity. However, some of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasies reflect the less enclosed and more heterogeneous model of subjectivity fostered by postmodern cultural theory. This paper compares three texts—*Power of Three*, *The Spellcoats* and *Hexwood*—to demonstrate a shift from representing the subject as achieving an enclosed and complete entity to representing the subject as being involved in a complex and ongoing process with no clearly delineated beginning or end.

Power of Three and *The Spellcoats* have much in common. Both are preoccupied with the way in which subjects construct and reconstruct themselves and each other and in this sense both treat the subject differently from the way in which it is generally treated in fantasy literature. Both texts deal with a crisis in the protagonist's community when opposing groups misconstrue each other and hold each other subject to these misconstructions. In both texts the ensuing quest to see the opposing groups reconcile differences and recognise a commonality of need and purpose is coupled with the protagonists' growth as subjects with agency.

Furthermore, both texts use features characteristic of the genre to represent self growth. However, despite these similarities the two texts differ markedly in their respective treatment of the nature of subjectivity; while *Power of Three* conforms to the dictates of the genre, *The Spellcoats* makes some significant breaks with generic dictates. *Hexwood*, a far more recent text, shakes off generic dictates almost entirely.

I will examine Wynne Jones' three texts in the light of four generic assumptions about the nature of the self that are common to the representation of the growth of the subject in much fantasy literature. First, this self has a unique individuality to discover, which places it apart from (and often makes it superior to) other selves. Second, this individuality is constituted by the discovery of certain magical attributes or objects, which may only be used by the chosen individual. Third, the self's growth is often determined by virtue of birth or magical powers. Fourth, this self is then destined to exercise agency on behalf of others, by virtue of its superior attributes. These generic characteristics, discernible even across such otherwise divergent texts as Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy and Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*, place restrictions which writers have

difficulty resisting.

Power of Three: the subject remains subject to generic dictates

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

Gest (his father) looked and was rather startled. Gair was dark and pale, like Adara, and stared solemnly up at Gest with big grey eyes. 'Why doesn't he smile?' said Gest.

'They don't at first,' said Adara. 'Even Ayna didn't.'

'I expect you're right,' said Gest. All the same, he remained a little awed by the strange solemn baby, even when Gair was old enough to smile.
(p.39)

Gair's appearance—'dark and pale' and 'with big grey eyes'—suggests mystery and physical frailty. The use of the adverb, 'solemnly' to describe the child's stare, and its subsequent reinforcement by the use of the adjective 'solemn' to describe the baby, indicate perception

and reflection, qualities commonly associated with physical frailty in fantastic literature. (In contrast, a robust appearance coupled with being blond is associated with physical daring and action and a limited ability to perceive and reflect.) The implication is that Gair is to be understood as set apart and as having a unique individuality not immediately obvious but awaiting discovery.

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

Second, Gair's individuality is confirmed when he discovers his gift of Sight Unasked. The gift both confirms our reading of the sub-text and confirms Gair as one who stands apart from all others. The narrative emphasises that his gift sets him apart, and that he must learn to exercise it without help from others. When Gair and his

siblings are in the Giants' house his Gift makes him sense that something hangs like a curse over the family, disrupting relations.

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

The self is constructed here as a lone individual bereft of the opportunity to form itself in interaction with others. While some concession to a dialogic representation of the self is made with Gair's internal dialogue as he resists and eventually learns to accept his internal voice (the Gift), this is really represented as a stage on the self's journey towards

becoming a unitary subject.

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

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

came here alone. And he has the gift of sight unasked.
(pp.255-256)

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

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

Although a central concern of the text is that of recognising the selfhood of others and a commonality of interest, the text does not really construct Gair as moving from a position of solipsism to one of intersubjectivity. Rather, the

sons who occupy the equivalent of his position—Gerald among the Giants and Hafny among the Dorig—are constructed as extensions of Gair. He sees himself in them and is able to recognise their selfhood only in the sense that their experiences mirror his own. Gair does not construct himself in dialogue with his prototypes; they simply serve to affirm his selfhood. The three characters are effectively not three separate subjects but the one subject appearing in three separate guises. Hence one significance of the title is its implication that the three selves combine to make one effective power.

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

Fourth, the subject is con-

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

In keeping with the text's conformity to the standard pattern of fantasy *Power of Three* does not use any of the strategies I will discuss in relation to the two other texts. The text's closure is not in the least ambivalent, reflecting the fact that Gair's subjectivity is represented as an enclosed entity, homogeneous and without ambiguity. A strong authorial presence carefully constructs and interprets Gair throughout the text, directing the reader's construction of the subject by relaying and clarifying his thoughts. While the subject is represented as narrating himself, first constructing himself as worthless, his apotheosis leads him to a revised narrative whereby his subjectivity is constructed as resolved and complete. Furthermore, there is no play with multiple signifiers for the one

signified which is a predominant feature of *The Spellcoats*.

Finally, while the text (like any text) draws on a number of intertextual references (the fairy tale notion of giants, the Christian notion of Christ's appeasing sacrificial death, and legends of bargaining with fairies) intertextuality is not used as a strategy for reflecting the interplay of subjects and social discourses which forms subjectivity.

However, while the representation of subjectivity in *Power of Three* is still very much restricted by the dictates of the genre, there is one feature of the text which anticipates the resistance seen in *The Spellcoats* and *Hexwood*. Contrary to generic convention *Power of Three's* predominant concern is not that of an evil force that must be overcome by the forces of good. The narrative initially acts to align the reader with Gair and his people, subsequently identified by the negative signifier of 'Lymen', against those whom we are given to understand are the enemy: the Dorig and the Giants (although the opening chapter establishes guilt on the part of the Lymen). But, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that those groups constructed as 'the other' are simply held subject to misperception. The Dorig choose to construct the Lymen according

to their prejudices and vice versa and the Giants are held subject to the constructions of both Dorig and Lymen, while the Giants deny Dorig and Lymen an existence. Hence, the only evil is that of subjecting the other to a false construct. Once the subjects amend their construction of other subjects so that these are more closely aligned with the way those subjects see themselves, there is no enemy.

While the conflict that results from subjects imposing constructions on each other is a concern one would expect in a text based on liberal humanist assumptions it also has implications for reading a text that drifts towards postmodern notions of the arbitrary nature of any attempt to represent. The effect is to draw the reader's attention to the arbitrary and unreliable ways in which subjectivity can be constructed. By implication then, this preoccupation with the ways in which subjects construct each other has the effect of requiring the reader to interrogate the text, not necessarily accepting those constructs which immediately present themselves. However, such implications are merely hinted at and are chiefly of significance in the light of developments in Wynne Jones' later texts. Here, the text's closure makes it clear that misunderstandings are rectified and a recognition of

commonality is achieved and that the narrative's resolution is reliable. In other words, the overall tenor of the text is not suggesting that attempts at reliable representation are arbitrary and doomed to failure.

The Spellcoats: the subject shakes off generic dictates

The Spellcoats, although published only three years later than *Power of Three*, resists the generic restrictions on the construction of subjectivity in two major ways. First, the text employs a strategy more often associated with realist fiction, that of a first person narrative, and the combination of this first person narrative with fantasy indicates a postmodern playfulness with generic convention. Second, the text uses a number of strategies associated with postmodern texts to suggest the heterogeneous nature of subjectivity.

When considered in the light of the four assumptions underlying the construction of the subject in fantasy literature *The Spellcoats* at first appears to conform with each of them. The first person narrator, Tanaqui, has a unique individuality to discover which places her apart from others. This individuality is constituted by her discovery that she can weave magic, that this ability is determined by her birth, and that she is destined to use her powers on behalf of

others in order to defeat the evil mage Kankredin. However, despite the presence of these generic assumptions, subjectivities are not represented as complete and enclosed entities but rather as series of selves that shift in a dialogic relationship with other selves and with social setting.

The *Spellcoats* employs three strategies to undergird the notion of the shifting nature of the subject constantly constructing itself in interaction with both social and cultural discourses and with other subjects.

- The narrative: The construction of the narrative reflects the subject constructing and reconstructing itself as it tells stories about itself and brings itself into being over and over again
- Closure: Open, ambivalent endings reflect the shifting nature of the subject
- Play with multiple signifiers: The use of multiple signifiers indicating the one signified suggests the multiple nature, and shifting character, of the signified

Narrative strategies that develop the sense of a shifting subject

One of the strategies employed to produce this effect is a narrative strategy whereby the narrating subject tells stories about itself and so constructs

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

To everyone else my story will

look like a particularly fine and curious rugcoat. But it is for myself that I am weaving it. I shall understand our journey better when I have set it out.
(p.33).

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

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

Here, despite the subject's

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

The second section—The Second Coat—represents Tanaqui telling another story about herself. Her first narrative is insufficient, and she must re-tell herself, choosing to recount events previously ignored and giving greater prominence to some than to others. In this sense Tanaqui is not represented as one autonomous subject, but rather as a subject who can be constructed in a variety of ways in any number of narratives. Furthermore, Tanaqui reads her own story after she has woven it into her first coat. In other words, the subject reconstructs her own narrative about herself by the act of reviewing and reinterpreting her previous

narrative which then informs and directs her second narrative.

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

Ambivalent closure as a strategy for highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the subject

The second strategy which The Spellcoats uses is that of ambivalent closure to reflect the shifting, incomplete nature of the subject. As Tanaqui's narrative draws to a climax and she looks to complete her weaving in order to defeat Kankredin, she receives a vision from her grandfather—the One.¹ In her vision the One rises up, tipping up and reshaping the landscape and destroying Kankredin and all his mages. Tanaqui must then weave the vision to bring it into being but her narrative concludes with an element of uncertainty. On the one hand she claims that: 'This vision I have woven with Cenblith's thread, knowing it will come to be' (p.276). But in the final sentences of her narrative a note of uncertainty is introduced:

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

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

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

It is precisely this feature of re-telling and reinterpreting which the closure of the text (as

opposed to the closure of Tanaqui's narrative) suggests. The 'Final Note', purporting to be written to accompany the Spellcoats (now denoting the coats Tanaqui wove rather than the title of the novel) where they are displayed as antiquities, re-interprets Tanaqui. The text constructs an authoritative voice (belonging to the 'Keeper of Antiquities' in a museum) to re-tell and effectively reconstruct the subject. But in effect it acts to further reinforce the notion that subjectivity shifts and reshapes and cannot be regarded as enclosed and complete. In the speculative tone common to academic discourse the writer suggests a number of possible identities for the Weaver of the Spellcoats (the narrator) but does not reach a definitive conclusion as to her identity:

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

North (Cen-Noreth). (p.278).

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

Furthermore, we are given to understand that the narrative is a translation and that 'certain obscurities in the text have been amended to avoid confusing the reader' (pp.277-278). Here the reader is reminded that the voice of any subject is funnelled through amendments and interpretations, and is constructed by others and by itself in an attempt to give it a cohesion, which it lacks. Again, the text works to query and ultimately deny a unitary, enclosed subject. Similarly, when the speaker in the 'Final Note' speculates that the landscape may have changed, the reader could be intended to infer that Tanaqui's vision was fulfilled but is nevertheless left uncertain so that an unambiguous closure is ultimately denied.

The 'Final Note' means that the text itself ceases to be a homogeneous entity. While the bulk

of the text consists of one voice, with the introduction of a second voice the text undergoes a shift in register; the nature of the syntax alters and the tone shifts from the personal and informal to the impersonal and the formal. The heterogeneous nature of the text as it reaches closure serves to undergird the text's construction of subjectivity as ultimately multifaceted and constantly shifting.

The use of multiple signifiers to reflect the heterogeneous nature of the subject.

The other strategy which The Spellcoats uses to indicate the shifting nature of the self is that of employing multiple signifiers to refer to the one signified. The strategy can be observed most particularly with the text's construction of 'the One'. At the beginning of the narrative 'the One' is the signifier used to refer to one of the three household gods or 'undying'—inanimate objects that sit in niches by the hearth. The other two are referred to as 'the Lady', and 'the Young One'. As the narrative progresses it transpires that the undying take this form because they have been bound or held in subjection. Throughout the narrative, the One is referred to on different occasions by different signifiers—Adon, Amil, Oreth, the Old Man and grandfather. At the point in the

narrative when 'the One' is unbound he is referred to by all his names at once. The effect is to construct subjectivity as multi-faceted and to defy the restriction imposed by any one signifier. Conversely, attempts to represent subjectivity by means of one all-encompassing signifier are seen as denying the subject agency and holding it in subjection.

Hexwood

While *The Spellcoats* resists generic restrictions Diana Wynne Jones' recent children's fantasy, *Hexwood* (1993), openly flouts them.

On an initial reading the text does conform to the four characteristics of the subject that inform much of fantasy literature. However, on closer examination these characteristics, while certainly present, are undermined and contradicted by other features of the text. In fact the text deliberately evokes these characteristics in order to deconstruct them. Subjects in the text are represented as having a unique individuality to discover. Early in the text 'the Boy', and 'the Servant' are anonymous figures represented as devoid of identities and in search of them, and the subject constructed as Ann at the beginning of the text later discovers her 'true self' as Vierran. Similarly, The Servant/Mordion must undergo a process of acknowledging

memories and expunging guilt for his past, thus uncovering a previously forgotten identity. However, despite these features, the subjectivities of these characters are constructed as disjointed and dispersed and not as autonomous entities. 'The Boy', as he is first referred to in the text, is given a series of identities under a plethora of signifiers and so is referred to as Hume and then ultimately identified severally as Merlin/Martellian/Wolf/the Prisoner. Furthermore, as the narrative progresses, the text constructs Hume as shifting back and forth in age, hence problematising the notion of a linear self-growth that is integral to the genre. Mordion's subjectivity is also constructed as that of a dispersed and heterogeneous self. When, towards the conclusion of the narrative, he is reconstructed in the form of a dragon he is represented as a series of connected but separate points.

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

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

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

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

dragons. In this sense the text both resists and draws attention to the generic convention of the gifted subject destined to fulfil a pre-ordained role.

When examining the text in the light of the fourth assumption—that the self uses its unique attributes to exercise agency on its own behalf and on behalf of others—we notice a subtle variation on the generic convention. Certainly, the convention is observed in that a group of subjects use the supernatural attributes they possess as a result of their birth in order to defeat the Reigners and take on the role themselves, restoring order and justice. However, no single subject is a heroic figure complete in itself. The central group of subjects named as the future Reigners—Vierran, Mordion, Martellian, Sir Artegal and Fitela Wolfson—are constructed by the text in a dialogic relationship. Each subject is represented as constructing itself in interaction with the voices of the four others that it hears inside its head. When Vierran for a time loses contact with the voices and then later recovers them the text represents her selfhood as dependent on this dialogic relationship with other selves. Furthermore, the recovery of the voices is linked with her hearing her own voice speaking to her when the text represents her as a subject consisting of

more than one self rather than as a unified self.

'Vierran. This is Vierran speaking. Vierran to myself. This is at least the second time I've sat in the inn bedroom despairing and I'm beginning to not quite believe in it. If it happens again, this is to let me know there's something going on.' . . .

Four soundless voices fell into her head. It was like getting back the greater part of herself. (p.196).

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

intersubjectivity.

Textual strategies that undermine the notion of a homogeneous subject

As is the case with much of Diana Wynne Jones' fantasy the text plays games, deliberately misleading and confusing the reader. Identities become confused, are sometimes interchangeable and even merge, linear causality and sequence disappear and intertextual references abound. While the text does not employ an ambivalent closure as we observed in *The Spellcoats* (on the contrary, closure is unambivalent and complete) *Hexwood* exhibits other postmodern features that undergird the notion of a heterogeneous subject. A key strategy employed in *Hexwood* is that of intertextuality whereby texts are in a dialogic relationship, changing in significance when juxtaposed with each other. This acts as an image for the interplay that takes place between subjects and social discourses in forming individual consciousness. In other words, the text itself is dependent on other texts and social and cultural discourses in order for it to be constructed, just as the individual subject cannot construct itself in isolation and is dependent on a plethora of social interactions.

Multiple signifiers

The use of multiple signifiers

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

The multiplicity of signifiers used for Hume is particularly linked with an overlapping and interweaving of subjectivities. When Hume first appears in the narrative in the second chapter of Part One he is simply referred to as 'a boy' and then subsequently by the singular masculine pronoun or 'the boy'. It is not until he encounters Yam that he is given the signifier 'Hume' referring to his humanity. He is constructed as knowing nothing, not even who he is himself. Later in the narrative (although presumably earlier in chronological terms) he is formed by Mordion when he combines his blood with that of Ann.² Hence, the text constructs Hume as a newly created subject who has been created by Mordion with the specific purpose of destroying the Reigners and who must gain self-knowledge in order to

fulfil this quest. However, when in the text's closure he is revealed as Martellian/Merlin/the Prisoner, the nature of his subjectivity is suddenly ambiguous. It is not simply that two supposedly separate subjects have slid into one (as is the case with Ann/Vierran) but that the two overlap and merge despite apparent contradictions. How can Hume, whom the text constructs on the one hand as newly formed, be one with Merlin/Martellian who has been imprisoned for centuries? Such arbitrary and unpredictable play with concepts of a unitary subject serves to problematise the firmly held tenet that a text constructs a subject to follow a pattern of linear growth until they are a complete entity.

Intertextuality and intersubjectivity

Jeremy Hawthorn distinguishes between transtextuality, where the relation between texts is a more straightforward process, and intertextuality which indicates, '...a more diffuse penetration of the individual text by memories, echoes, transformations, of other texts' (Hawthorn 1992, p.85). This description of the working of intertextuality is a particularly apt description of the way in which the Arthurian legend, computer games and role playing games are evoked in *Hexwood*. The Arthurian

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

Intertextuality as a self-reflexive means of examining generic constructions of subjectivity

The text's intertextual references also serve as a commentary on the generic restrictions placed on the subject which can deny its autonomy and reveal it as a victim of external forces. Central to the text is a construct referred to as the Bannus who is understood to play the role of controlling author, and to whom all other subjects, it transpires, have been subject.³ When the Bannus' identity merges with that of Yam (a reference to the Old Testament deity's description of himself as 'I am') his godlike control of all events identifies him all the more closely as a figure who exercises authorial control. Just as all subjects in any text are constructs of the author and subject to the roles ordained for them, so the Bannus makes subjects captive to the dictates of the notion of fantasy that forms the intertext. Hence, as the Reigners arrive on earth and are absorbed into dictated roles in the Arthurian quest fantasy being played out by the Bannus, they become subject to the dictates of a genre and are denied subjectivity. Reigner Two is forced to adopt the role of the King with the unhealing wound, Reigner One to become the dragon and so on. They are, as it were, taken captive and held subject to the dictates of all

those half-remembered fantasy motifs which are often only lightly touched on but which penetrate and inform the text.

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

Then, as far as everyone else in the hall could see, Sir Harrisoun appeared to go mad. He shook his fist at the ceiling. 'You there!' he shouted. 'Yes, you! You just stop this! All I did was ask you for a role-playing game. You never warned me I'd be pitched into it for real! And I asked you for hobbits on a grail quest, and not one hobbit have I seen! Do you hear me?' He stared at the ceiling for a while. When nothing happened, he shook both fists upwards. 'I ORDER you to stop!' he yelled. His voice cracked high, almost into a scream...He glared round the hall. 'And you're all figments!' he said. 'My figments. You can just carry on playing by yourselves. I've had enough.' (pp.255-256).

But of course, even his protest is simply the author's construct, designed to draw our attention to the subject's lack of agency and subjection to the dictates of the genre. The text is making a self-reflexive commentary on

the nature of the genre and the restrictions it places on subjectivity. Despite Sir Harrisoun's claims to the contrary, he is subject to the dictates of the genre and is ultimately destroyed by them.

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

'What conclusion do you think the machine is trying to make us arrive at?'

'I have no idea,' said Yam. 'It could be that the people deciding are not us. We are possibly only actors in someone else's scenes.'

'Not me,' said Ann. 'I'm important. I'm me...' (p.67).

Yam goes on to say that

'Nothing can make either a person or a machine do things which it is not in their natures to do' (p.67).

Here we have a familiar aspect of Diana Wynne Jones' texts. While on the one hand they exhibit obvious postmodern features, on the other hand they continue to subscribe to a concept of the self as self-determining and autonomous. However, it is these very contradictions that add to her eclectic and ambivalent repre-

sentation of subjectivity in this most recent text.

Conclusion

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

driac, caused by the flat of a wooden sword. Postmodern play in *Hexwood* allows the representation of subjectivity to shake off generic dictates in order to experiment with different modes of representation. Thus, subjects are, at different points in the text, represented as victims of the arbitrary dictates of a controlling author, as multi-faceted and indeterminate figures and as constructing themselves in dialogic relationship with other subjects.

Notes

1. The text's representation of Tanaqui's weaving/telling her story as completed in dialogue with her grandfather (and with her mother) is a further demonstration of the text's representation of the self as constructing itself in dialogue.
2. This episode, hedged about with various references to sexual attraction and to Ann's sense of being vulnerable and sexually exposed to the more experienced and older Mordian, is effectively a means of fulfilling Reigner One's plan to breed from them while avoiding any reference to sexual union.
3. The Bannus is possibly the first cyborg to feature in a work written for children. Cyborgs (the word is derived from a combination of 'cyb(ernetical)' and

'org(anism)' and refers to a human being with certain physiological processes aided or controlled by mechanical or electronic devices) are very much characteristic of postmodern writing.

Bibliography

Gilead, Sarah (1992) 'Magic abjured: closure in children's fantasy fiction', in Peter Hunt (ed.) *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*. London and New York, Routledge.

Hawthorn, Jeremy (1992) *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. London and New York, Edward Arnold.

Hutcheon, Linda (1991) 'Discourse, power, ideology: humanism and postmodernism' in Edmund J. Smyth (ed.) *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. London, Batsford.

Hunt, Peter (1991) *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Kuznets, Lois R. (1985) "'High fantasy" in America: a study of Lloyd Alexander, Ursula Le Guin, and Susan Cooper'. *The Lion and the Unicorn* 9, 19-35.

McCallum, Robyn (1992) '(In)quest of the subject: the dialogic construction of subjectivity in Caroline Macdonald's *Speaking to Miranda*', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 3, 3, 99-105.

McHale, Brian (1992) *Constructing Postmodernism*. London, Routledge.

Mackey, Margaret (1990) 'Metafiction for beginners: Allan Ahlberg's *Ten in a Bed*', *Children's Literature in Education* 21, 3, 179-187.

Norton, Michael and Still, Judith (eds) (1990) *Intertextuality: Theory and Practice*. Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press.

Ommundsen, Wenche (1993) *Metafictions? Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts*. Carlton, Melbourne University Press.

Smith, Paul (1988) *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Stephens, John (1992a) *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. London and New York, Longman.

Stephens, John (1992b) 'Modernism to postmodernism, or The line from Insk to Onsk: William Mayne's *Tiger's Railway*', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 3, 2, 51-59.

Stephens, John (1992c) 'Metafiction and interpretation: William Mayne's *Salt River Times*, *Winter Quarters* and *Drift*', *Children's Literature* 21, 101-117.

Waugh, Patricia (1984) *Metafiction: the theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. London, Methuen.

Webster, Roger (1990) *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London, Edward Arnold.

Childrens Books Cited

Jones, Diana Wynne (1993) *Hexwood*. London, Methuen.

Jones, Diana Wynne (1989) [1976] *Power of Three*. London, Arrow.

Jones, Diana Wynne (1993) [1979] *The Spellcoats*. London, Reed.

Biographical Note

Margaret Rumbold has a BA Dip Ed from the University of Sydney and an MA in Children's Literature from Macquarie University. Her MA thesis is titled 'Playing with Fantasy: How Diana Wynne Jones Pushes Back the Boundaries of the Genre'. She has taught secondary English and has tutored in the undergraduate course at Macquarie University. Margaret now works in her own business but maintains a keen interest in children's literature.

