

# Disrupted Expectations: Young/old Protagonists in Diana Wynne Jones's Novels

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THE WORKS OF DIANA WYNNE JONES SHOW A CONTINUING THEME OF DISGUISED age and age disruption. This question of disguised ages fits within larger concerns with disguise and complex time travel, examined in great detail in the chapter "Time Games" in Farah Mendlesohn's *Diana Wynne Jones: Children's Literature and the Fantastic Tradition*. Questions of age confusion are particularly notable in works for young readers, for whom age is considered a pressing concern. More than twenty years ago, the research of Dale Johnson, Gary Peer, and Scott Baldwin gave solid academic support to the premise that young readers read books with protagonists their own age or a few years older. "If your target audience is seven, make your hero nine, if your audience is fourteen, make your heroine seventeen," says Eugie Foster, in an essay about how to write for children.

A substantial minority of authors have ignored this guideline, with varying success, and as the market for crossover fiction grows (Falconer 2), the age of the implied reader becomes a fuzzier concept. Jones's works, in particular, have never fallen tidily into categories defined by protagonist and implied reader age. In an interview with the BBC, Jones directly addressed the reader/protagonist age truism, writing that "it was thought at one time that the main characters always had to be children. This turns out not to be true" ("Writing"). Many Jones books play with the very concept of age: protagonists who age in more than one direction, protagonists who don't know their own age, protagonists in disguise as characters older or younger than themselves. *Howl's Moving Castle* stars Sophie, a young woman who spends most of the book disguised as an old one, while one of *Howl's Moving Castle's* sequels, *House of Many Ways*, offers up Sophie's husband Howl in the body of an outrageous toddler. Ageless, godlike beings disguised as children or young adults are a common feature, either with their knowledge (such as *Eight Days of Luke's* Luke) or without it (such as *Archer's Goon's* Howard). In *The Spellcoats* and

*The Homeward Bounders*, young protagonists Tanaqui and Jamie spend the book discovering their mystical powers and *become* ageless, godlike beings by the stories' conclusions. In *Fire and Hemlock*, both protagonists are Polly's own age (which ranges from 10–19), and her perception of the ages of characters around her are so complex as almost to defy explanation.

Even in these complex stories with their fluctuating protagonist ages, however, the expected difference between reader and protagonist age is maintained. Ultimately, Howard Sykes spends most of *Archer's Goon* behaving as the thirteen-year-old boy he believes himself to be, rather than as a powerful titan who's lived at least twenty-six years as a human and goodness only knows how long before becoming human. Luke of *Eight Days of Luke* knows he is a Norse God but nevertheless behaves age-appropriately as a companion for schoolboy David. Sophie Hatter might be in disguise as an old woman for most of the action of *Howl's Moving Castle*, but knows all along that she is a young woman, as does Howl himself. "I've been wondering all along if you would turn out to be that lovely girl I met on May Day" (211), he tells her, revealing that he has seen through her elderly appearance all along. Jamie may age a hundred years during the course of *The Homeward Bounders*, but he still seems like a twelve-year-old boy to his friends: "I'm still young," he says (222). In each of these cases, despite the fluctuating or hard-to-pin-down protagonist age, the protagonist still has an *effective* age a few years older than the implied reader of the text.

Two of Jones's texts, however, reveal a much more complex presentation of age. In *Hexwood* and *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, there's no way to pin protagonist age to even the broadest interpretation of Foster's simple formula. The treatment of age in these two texts works against all formulas and expectations for protagonist age in contemporary young adult (YA) and children's literature. These texts disrupt the conventions of the genre, raising questions about implied readership, coming-of-age stories, and the accessibility of wide-ranging character arcs. In comparison, the adult novel *A Sudden Wild Magic*, which also has an unusual representation of character age, is not nearly so genre-bending. Similar patterns, taken out of the context of fiction for young readers, produce markedly different results.

### **Hexwood**

The protagonist of *Hexwood* initially appears to be Ann, a twelve-year-old English girl who tells people she is fourteen. However, like several other Jones characters, Ann does not know that she is in disguise. Her disguise not only conceals her name, family history, and planet of origin, but also makes her appear substantially younger than her actual age. Ann is actually Vierran, a powerful twenty-one-year-old noblewoman from another planet, with a job

of her own as well as a role in an anti-government rebellion. Ann/Vierran believes she is a convalescent (and age-appropriately sulky) child watching an adventure from the window of her sickroom: aliens and robots are converging in the nearby Banners Wood while a strange older man named Mordion is raising a child to slay a dragon for him. Ann moves from observing to participating in the action, constantly advised by the cohort of four voices she thinks of as imaginary friends. Meanwhile, the story's alternating points of view introduce the readers to the adult Vierran as well. Vierran is a young woman who works unwillingly for the evil galactic overlords known as the Reigners. When Vierran comes to Earth with the Reigners, she is pulled into the magical field surrounding Banners Wood. There, she realizes she has been Ann all along due to the reality-warping powers of the wood. Once Vierran realizes her true identity, Ann's story has effectively ended; with one brief, single-page exception, Vierran henceforth knows who she is and the reality of her situation. From that moment, Vierran's story, at least, moves forward linearly in time, even if the context around her warps and flows, and the story offers no more glimpses of Ann's point of view.

The narrative focus switches frequently as the story unfolds, with two of the primary narrative points of view going to Ann and Vierran as separate protagonists. Even without Ann and Vierran's being conjoined into one character, having young women at such disparate ages take on the primary roles of protagonist is unusual enough. If the precedent that a protagonist should be one to three years older than an implied reader holds, should closer reading show the implied reader of this text to be a young tween or an older adolescent? Professional reviewers interpreted the text as being for the relatively wide range of 10–17, with more reviewers focused on the younger end of the range. In other words, most reviewers seem to be inferring a reader who identifies with Ann.

It would make sense for reader identification to follow Ann more closely, not just because the text is marketed as a high-level middle grade or low-level YA fantasy. Vierran is written as a tightly focused and sympathetic character, but the story begins as solidly Ann's; Vierran is mentioned in passing but not introduced to the reader until more than halfway through the book.<sup>1</sup> When the climactic revelation arrives—that Ann is Vierran disguised as an earthly version of her own child self—the easily approachable portal character gives way to an entirely different sort of heroine: the otherworldly young woman with a history and a love interest of her own. Vierran's story is not one unheard of in YA literature, but it is certainly unlikely in a text whose implied readers would include those who wanted the story of a twelve-year-old convalescent with a rich imagination.

The text continually emphasizes the difference between Ann the child and Vierran the young woman. When twelve-year-old Ann is stuck in a tree,

she's embarrassed at being "indecent," thinking of Mordion, "[h]e must be looking straight up at her pants [...] and her long, helpless legs" (30). Vierran, remembering, is appalled at what she now sees as her childhood flirtatious behavior, even though she had believed herself to be twelve years old and sexually innocent at the time: "Vierran's face flushed hot, and hotter yet as she thought of herself up in that tree dangling her legs in Mordion's face" (205). What's indecency for a powerless twelve-year-old is outrageous sexual agency in a twenty-one-year-old.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Ann—whose sobriquet among her cohort of not-so-imaginary voices is the Girl Child—repeatedly refers to her advanced age in a way that emphasizes her extreme youth. "I'm an active adolescent" (19), she says, and "I'm far too old to think anything so silly" (31). Even her lies about her age are phrased in such a way as to emphasize how young and foolish she was as a child: "Vierran well remembered the way the moment her thirteenth birthday was in sight, she had gone around telling herself—and everyone else—I'm in my fourteenth year now! So *old!* Little idiot" (205; emphasis in original).

Vierran, on the other hand, is well established as an adult. She has a job, and participates actively in a political rebellion (184). Her father has enough respect for her adult agency that he gives her the means to kill herself to avoid torture if her role in the rebellion is discovered. Unlike twelve-year-old Ann, Vierran is a sexual being, who flirts and feels heterosexual attraction. Additionally, Reigner One reinforces Vierran's adult sexuality by ordering her to "breed with [Mordion]"; he commands her, "make a child with my Servant" (189). At the novel's conclusion, the unknowingly disguised characters populating Banners Wood have their memories returned to them and can reconcile their memories of adult Vierran with those of child Ann. At that moment, Vierran's parents (who had been conveniently disguised as Ann's parents) concur with Vierran's own opinion that she is better off as an adult. Vierran's mother tells her, "I'm glad to see you yourself again [...]. It was bad enough having you as an adolescent *once*" (282; emphasis in original).

In *Hexwood*, therefore, we have a text for which reviewers and publishers interpret the implied reader to be approximately twelve years old, even as the story's climax includes overwhelming scorn (from Vierran and her parents) for the behavior of twelve-year-olds. The convalescent adventure of the child Ann is, by the story's conclusion, a cheerfully idiotic memory. Ann gets no character growth of her own, except insofar as character growth is implicit in her past as Ann compared to her present as Vierran. To the extent that we see Ann gaining agency, it is because she is drawing closer to Ann-as-Vierran: "[t]he more self-conscious and analytical Ann is, the closer she is to her own reality as Vierran," Mendlesohn writes (76). Ann gains the self-knowledge which Mendlesohn describes as partly requisite for development of agency, but she does so by recognizing that her younger self is a fiction. It is Vierran who

gets a character arc, and hers (focused on romance and politics, and learning the necessary shame for her exoticizing flirtation with Mordion) would be entirely unsuitable for Ann.

### ***Dark Lord of Derkholm***

*Dark Lord of Derkholm* is another kettle of fish. The text portrays plenty of disguises: farmhouses disguised as evil castles and geese disguised as leathery-winged avians, alongside more conventional ones such as thieves disguised as wholesome compatriots. Very few of the disguises, however, have much to do with age. Instead, *Dark Lord* plays with age by emphasizing the age discrepancy between the two protagonists: fourteen-year-old Blade and his father, Derk.<sup>3</sup> Each of these two characters has his own, wholly age-appropriate character arc. Each is an essential protagonist of this parodic novel.

*Dark Lord* tells the story of a fantasyland forced into acting as a kind of Renaissance Faire/live-action role-playing game/epic quest adventure setting for tourists from another world. Every year, otherworldly businessman Mr. Chesney sends a host of Pilgrim Parties, tourists from a world something like our own, to rampage through the high-fantasy land which provides the setting for *Dark Lord*. The inhabitants of this magical world—Blade, Derk, and all the rest—are obliged by a demonically enforced contract to provide the theme park experience for the Pilgrim Parties. Contractually, each of these Pilgrim Parties must be guided to every location on a standard Fantasyland map, visiting towns which have been renamed for the duration of the tour from Greynash to Gna'ash and from Sleane to Slaz'in "to give the right exotic touch" (46). Just as a real-life Renaissance Faire has a scripted joust, each Pilgrim Party has scripted encounters with pirates, slavers, dragons, and divine manifestations. The touring Pilgrim Parties must encounter all the requisite characters from an epic quest, including such characters as a Dark Lord and a Glamorous Enchantress. For years, Mr. Chesney's Pilgrim Parties have devastated the land. As *Dark Lord* opens, Wizard Derk is being chosen by a magical Oracle to be this year's Dark Lord, and his son Blade (untrained in magic), has been chosen to be a Pilgrim Party's Wizard Guide.

When Blade and Derk first appear, they are immediately identified in ways which physically emphasize their different ages. Derk is "a tall, fattish, mild-faced man," while Blade is "a boy of about fourteen who looked rather like the man, except that he was skinny where the man was wide" (11). Even their introductory actions emphasize their relationship: when they first appear on the scene, they are having an archetypal father/son argument, with Blade whining, "You always try to stop me doing what I want" (11). Blade wants to go to the university, it transpires, while Derk doesn't want that educational path for his son.

As the adventure develops, Blade and Derk have two entirely separate character arcs. Blade wants to learn magic, wants to distinguish himself from his parents and his siblings, and wants to learn what is different about himself. In a classic young man's coming-of-age, Blade (along with everyone else in his world) learns not to take the easy path when people might get hurt by it. Blade's climactic imprisonment as a gladiator along with his griffin brother Kit, an imprisonment engineered by the god Anscher, resembles nothing so much as Aslan teaching lessons about personal responsibility to the young protagonists at the climax of C. S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy*.<sup>4</sup> Blade's childish attempts to become a young man separate from his father are frequently emphasized within the text. "Why doesn't Dad *understand?*" (18), he asks his mother once. Mara, a reasonable mother, describes how different things were when Derk was a boy himself—and, in reminding Blade of the boy Derk once was, emphasizes the passage of time and perforce the age difference between Blade and Derk. Blade's response to his mother's reasonableness is given "rather sulkily" (19). Blade's youth is emphasized even further by his failed attempts to appear older. One of Mr. Chesney's rules is that every Wizard Guide must have an appropriately sage-like beard. Throughout Blade's ill-fated leading of his Pilgrim Party, he has to magically grow a beard nightly, because neither natural nor magical facial hair will persist on adolescent Blade. The old man's beard on Blade's youthful face is a repeated source of comedy to everyone who observes the incongruence.

Derk, meanwhile, follows a very different character arc. Derk is growing apart from his wife, Mara, partly due to his own indifferent (if affectionate) treatment of her. When visitors admire the incredible magic that fixes live stars and planets into the lining of Derk's cloak, "Derk annoyed Mara, as he had annoyed her when every single other wizard had asked about it by [...] saying, "Oh, it's just one of Mara's clever little universes, you know" (23). With poor self-knowledge, Derk doesn't see how many of the problems between himself and his wife are his own fault, and instead he thinks, "This Dark Lord business was already putting differences between himself and Mara, and he had a feeling it could end by separating them entirely" (23). But he loves his wife, and loves his children, and wants to protect them. Derk lingers over bittersweet, nostalgic memories of his children, as his own story is that of a father with children at the cusp of young adulthood.

[T]here was no doubt that Kit had been very difficult lately. He sighed, because he had sudden piercing, overwhelming memories of Kit when he was first hatched, memories of a small, scrawny, golden bundle of down and fine fur; of his own pride in his very first successfully hatched griffin; of himself and Mara lovingly bundling Kit from one to the other; of two-year-old Shona and Kit rolling around on the floor together, rubbing beak to nose and

laughing. Kit had been so small and thin and fluffy that they had called him their Kitten. No one had expected him to grow so very big. Or so difficult. (37–38)

At the novel's climax, it is Derk's belief that Kit is dead that leads to his complete breakdown. Truly, he is portrayed here simply as a father mourning for his beloved son, regardless of that son's external form. Derk's character arc is that of a man whose relationships are changing in middle age. He must learn to take his children seriously as independent actors. He must learn how not to take his wife for granted now that they aren't wholly occupied with raising a family. Notably, the novel ends not with Blade's successful discovery of his wizardry teacher, but with Derk's reconnection with Mara, not with the *Bildungsroman* but with the midlife reconciliation.

As with *Hexwood*, publishers and reviewers don't all agree in their assessment of the text's implied readership. Amazon's publication data lists the book, rather shockingly, as being for ages 9–12. Most of the other major American children's review journals place the book as being for the age range 12 and up. The publication history for *Dark Lord* is varied, with at least one British edition having been published under an adult science fiction imprint. There is a discrepancy here between what most publishers and reviewers believe is the implied reader and the age of at least one of the protagonists. However, unlike in *Hexwood*, there's no devaluing of the younger protagonist's story. Instead, there's a double valuing, with both Blade and Derk's stories being equally valid, even though Blade's coming of age is *explicitly placed in opposition to his role as Derk's son*. Somehow these two stories are simultaneously valued within the text, though genre precedent would say that Blade's character growth can't occur alongside Derk's independent character growth. It is strange enough that this book, marketed for middle grade readers, features a middle-aged protagonist, but it is even stranger to feature that middle-aged protagonist struggling and developing alongside the adolescent protagonist with whom he ought to be in conflict.

### ***A Sudden Wild Magic***

It is worth focusing, finally, on Jones's first major adult novel, *A Sudden Wild Magic* (1992).<sup>5</sup> Like many Jones novels, *Sudden Wild Magic* offers the narrative viewpoints of myriad characters—more than in either *Hexwood* or *Dark Lord*—coming together to form a joyfully cacophonous whole. The primary point of view (and corresponding arc of character development) is that of Zillah, a university dropout, single mother of Marcus, and powerful untrained witch. Many of the other characters who get a reasonable amount of narrative focus are relatively close to Zillah in age: Tod, the magically gifted young

nobleman from another world and Zillah's erstwhile lover; Mark, Marcus's unwitting father and the most powerful male witch in Britain. But *Sudden Wild Magic* also features characters far from Zillah in age: various monks from Tod's world; Marcus, Zillah's toddler; and Gladys, a seemingly batty elderly woman. While Marcus acts more as MacGuffin than as independent actor, the other characters are important movers of the plot and have point of view assigned to them for vital scenes.

A substantial percentage of *Sudden Wild Magic's* problem-solving and power come from Gladys, whose epithet from the novel's opening is "the old woman" (9). Gladys is not just old, but is continually differentiated from the young people, whose physical descriptions emphasize youthful beauty or organized tidiness: stunningly beautiful Zillah with "strangely luminous eyes" (75) and "meticulously clean-shaven [...] unremarkable" Mark (5). In contrast, Gladys seemingly fits all of the stereotypes of a crazy cat lady, complete with outlandish clothes, fuzzy slippers, and behavior that smacks of dementia. Mark's point-of-view description of Gladys is full of scorn for an old woman who displays so many stereotyped markers of crazed, elderly femaleness.

He stood and surveyed her, a fat and freckled old woman wearing a red dress and pink ankle socks, squashily embedded in a floral plastic chair and busy shelling peas or something. Her hair had been dyed a faded orange and fussily curled. Her cheeks hung around her lax mouth, white where they were not freckled, and her garden was strewn with objects and aswarm with cats. As usual. He had forgotten all those cats. The place reeked of cat. His foot pushed aside a saucer of cat food lurking in the grass, and he was unable to avoid fanning at the smell with his hat. And on top of all this, her name was Gladys. It was hard to believe she was any good. (11)

One of *Sudden Wild Magic's* great ironies is that despite her seemingly feckless appearance, Gladys is one of the most powerful characters in the multiverse. Myriad gods speak to her and solicit her for aid, she carries within her an aspect of the Goddess, and her closest friend is an immensely powerful extra-dimensional being. When Tod meets her, though he sees her initially as an "old woman with the mad jingling robe and big, hairy feet" (324), he soon realizes she is a more talented magic user than anyone from his own world. Without question, the humorously elderly Gladys is crucial to *Sudden Wild Magic's* happy ending.

But though Gladys's intervention is necessary to help tie together the many plot threads, this is not a character development story for her. She plays the part of an independent puzzle solver, a kind of elderly eccentric magical spy. While Zillah, Mark, and Tod follow developmental arcs, each growing into a moral, relatively well-adjusted individual,<sup>6</sup> Gladys's actions don't

change her self-knowledge. They help save the world and they gain her a romantic partner, but they don't change *her*. Just like a detective in a mystery novel, her role is to move the plot, not to grow as a person.

Despite the presence of outliers on *Sudden Wild Magic's* age curve, this novel belongs to Zillah and the other young adults. They are the ones who have character growth and development commensurate with their point-of-view scenes. Although Gladys's power is immense and her narrated puzzle solving is necessary to provide a clearer explanation of events for the reader, it is not Gladys who saves the day. Instead, it is Zillah who, out of nothing but love and untrained wild magic, puts Mark back together, and Mark who acts in hope and love and power to save his son's life. Gladys is merely the cleanup squad, making sure the impulsive actions of the young don't bring the multi-universe crashing down around them all. This is the story of young love blundering through, the romantic comedy of the spurned single mother rescuing her child's father from a shrewish hag and saving the universe at the same time.

Jones writes in "Two Kinds of Writing?" about her hopes that writing for adults would free her from the strict constraints of writing for children, and how those hopes were dashed when she came face-to-face with "these hidden assumptions about writing for adults" (4). In *Sudden Wild Magic*, a novel written and published for adults, we have a tale which more closely resembles a strict *Bildungsroman* than either *Hexwood* or *Dark Lord*, with their more complex sets of characters. Though all three novels feature multiple generations of protagonists, it is the two books for younger readers which break away from focusing on a simple child's or young adult's character development. Perhaps this makes sense in light of Jones's own reflections upon writing for adults, when she muses on how unfit for complexity she assumes her adult readers to be: "I grew very tender of [adults'] brains and kept explaining," she says, continuing, "we have books for adults, who might be supposed to need something more advanced and difficult, which we have to write as if the readers were simple-minded" ("Two Kinds" 2).<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

In many ways, *Hexwood* and *Dark Lord* are fairly dissimilar. *Dark Lord* offers a linear, relatively easy-to-understand narrative. *Hexwood*, on the other hand, offers one of the twisting, hard-to-map, non-linear timelines for which Jones is known. The lack of age coherency I've described in *Hexwood*, therefore, with its slippery notion of identity, would at first glance seem unquestionably different from the linear narrative of *Dark Lord*. *Dark Lord*, after all, may offer two protagonists, but those two have ages and identities clearly identifiable to the reader, in sharp contrast to the age-shifting heroine of *Hexwood*. But however these dual narratives are constructed, the end result for both is a story that

doesn't fit any of our preconceived notions of children's or YA literature. *Sudden Wild Magic's* consistent story of youthful adults finding romance with the assistance of a Gandalf-like wizard guide (if Gandalf were a frumpy old woman in fuzzy slippers) is a not-unusual romantic comedy. The two texts for younger readers, however, do not fit nearly so tidily into genre conventions.

Genre relies on familiar structures. There is nothing familiar in children's and YA literature about a novel which grants a young man a *Bildungsroman* in a quest for independence from his father, while giving equal weight and respect to the midlife crisis of that same father: *Dark Lord* is something new. And while adult memoir-style writing often presents the protagonist both as child and as the adult she becomes, that writing for adults offers a nostalgic lens on childhood: *Hexwood* is different. *Hexwood's* Ann is presented neither patronizingly nor nostalgically when the narrative focus is hers; until the point of view shifts from Ann to Vierran, there is nothing stylistic distinguishing the representation of Ann from the representation of any other twelve-year-old Jones character. *Hexwood* eventually privileges the YA story over the child story, but treats both respectfully as they occur. *Dark Lord*, on the other hand, privileges neither adulthood nor young adulthood, respecting both equally as narrative threads. These two texts present truly dual narratives to a young (and potential adult crossover) readership.

Maria Nikolajeva writes that “[t]he conflict between the protagonist and the parental authority is the pivotal point of any novel of adolescence,” adding, “[i]n Jones’s novels, parents are often represented by supernatural, omnipotent powers against whom the characters feel completely helpless” (33). In these two texts, each of the young adult protagonists (namely, Vierran and Blade, rather than Ann and Derk) has a coming-of-age which pivots on the conflict between the protagonist and an authority—even though the authority in question is a non-parental “supernatural, unabated power” who holds the character in seeming helplessness. Because that overpowering authority is not parental, it gives the texts the freedom to allow for parental figures to participate in their own struggles against seemingly omnipotent powers. It’s not just Vierran and Blade who must learn how to relate to power structures; it is also Derk, Ann, Blade’s siblings, Mordion, and Hume.

The classic adolescent coming-of-age identified by Nikolajeva becomes more universal, something which can be experienced by a character of any age if dressed in age-appropriate trappings (learning how to be a good husband for Derk, learning how to hold adults accountable for their mistakes for Ann). As Charles Butler, also writing about Jones’s work, says, “while adults are different from children, their condition is also continuous with and interpenetrative of childhood” (273).<sup>8</sup> In these dual narratives, we see the difference and the continuity playing out in a way that the usual constraints of genre, which would forbid these multi-generational narratives, make unavailable to us. The

multiple generations represented in *Sudden Wild Magic* (and permitted by the genre expectations of adult readership) are made available to the younger readers of *Hexwood* and *Dark Lord*—along with an added salt from defiance of expected conventions. Mendlesohn writes that in Jones’s works, “[a]dulthood is not wondrous, and it cannot be magical” (38). In a simpler form of narrative, the supernatural, omnipotent power which holds our protagonists helpless would stand in for all adulthood, and by necessity make adulthood wondrous and magical—or at least, wondrously dark, magically wicked. These two texts for younger readers, instead, decouple that terrifying power from adulthood. Instead of positing adulthood as the source of power which our young adult protagonists will eventually obtain for themselves merely by growing, these texts posit a constant and repeating cycle of growing up.

## Notes

1. The story is not wholly Ann and Vierran’s. Mordion and, oddly, Hume also get coming-of-age character arcs, Mordion’s enabled by flashbacks to his childhood, and Hume because the entire book gives him the opportunity to have a second childhood in order to have a learning experience (which is loaded in and of itself; see Mendlesohn 42 for further discussion). Their learning processes parallel Vierran’s, and I focus on her because the two girls act as the primary portals into the narrative.

2. “Pants” here means underpants, rather than trousers. The sexual implications of this scene seem ripe for further exploration through a psychoanalytic lens.

3. Perspective shifts among a multitude of characters frequently in this text, with the point of view often changing from one character to another multiple times in the course of a single page, but while multiple characters occasionally hold the narrative focus, Derk and Blade are the primary protagonists.

4. Anscher’s involvement in the story’s conclusion more directly parodies divine manifestations from quest series such as David Eddings’s *Belgariad* and other epic fantasy works.

5. The first novel Jones wrote and had published explicitly for adults was her first book, 1970’s *Changeover*. *Changeover* is clearly juvenilia, out-of-print for decades until it was reissued in a by-fans-for-fans edition in 2004. In 1975, when she was known exclusively as a children’s author, Jones was willing to identify *Changeover* as “my only published adult novel” (“Diana” 168). By 1992, however, *Changeover* was sufficiently forgotten that when Jones wrote an essay on the similarities between writing for children and adults, she writes as if *A Sudden Wild Magic* is her first adult work: “[R]ecently I wrote a novel specifically for adults. This was something I had long wanted to do” (“Two Kinds” 1). She doesn’t state explicitly that she’s never written for adults before, but it certainly comes across as if she hasn’t when she discusses “try[ing] my hand at an adult novel” (1).

6. In Mark's case, literally, he's been split into two discrete individuals by the novel's villain, and his arc is incomplete until he is re-formed into a single, flawed human for Zillah to love.

7. "Two Kinds of Writing?" is not an unproblematic essay. It essentializes both children and adults. It makes sweeping generalizations about how children enjoy puzzles, while alternately claiming adults are rather thick and then claiming instead that it is publishers who force authors to assume that adults are thick. However, its insight into Jones's own discoveries of genre conventions (in both children's and adult fiction) is fascinating, as is her viewpoint of what she thinks is complex or simple in her works.

8. Butler is discussing Jones simultaneously with Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, and Susan Cooper in this quotation.

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### Abstract

The works of Diana Wynne Jones consistently break genre expectations regarding the age of the protagonists and secondary characters. This article explores the function of age and expectation in Jones's works, primarily focused on *Hexwood* and *Dark Lord of Derkholm*. As a point of comparison, it examines the function of age in the adult novel *A Sudden Wild Magic*. This article explores how an adult or age-shifting protagonist implies a child reader in a genre with fairly solid conventions for protagonist age. It examines the texts' building of sympathy for mixed-generational groups, instead of presenting adults as antagonists, mentors, or parental figures. It explores how the reader's interpretation of a protagonist does or doesn't change when that character belatedly shifts from young adolescent to young adult. Finally, this article examines the unusual nature of all of these treatments of age, and examines them in the context of fixed genre expectations.