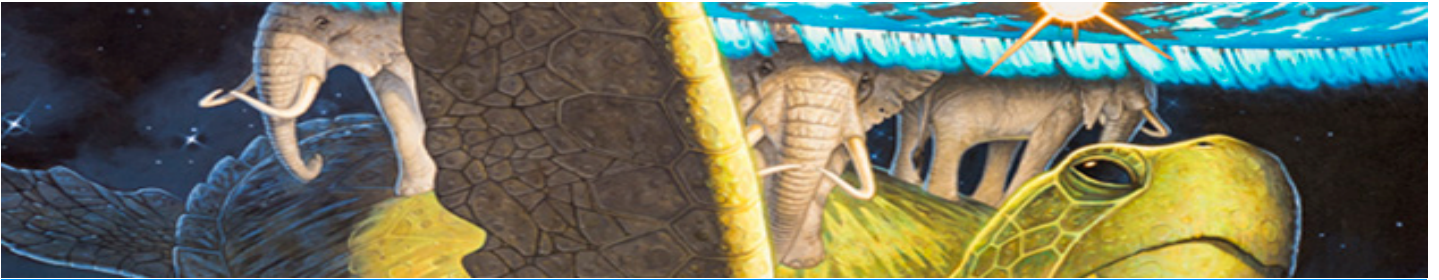


Terry Pratchett is celebrated by critics and devoted readers alike as one of the UK's most brilliant fantasy writers and an inveterate humourist with a knack of creating unforgettable characters. Writing with verve, poignancy and daring, Pratchett is known for his signature style as much as for the bold criticism deftly embedded in his comedic writing. Pratchett made use of comedy to communicate wider truths about what makes people human, pointing out stereotypes and ideals with a sharply poised pen. In honour of Sir Terry, who passed away in March, gender forum proudly presents this special issue dedicated to his unforgettable works.

» [Read on](#)



## Special Issue: Terry Pratchett

Detailed Table of Contents

Editorial

**Lucas Boulding:** "I can't be having with that": The Ethical Implications of Professional Witchcraft in Pratchett's Fiction

**Audrey Taylor:** Trapped: Fairytale in Pratchett and Lackey

**Katherine Lashley:** Monstrous Women: Feminism in Terry Pratchett's Monstrous Regiment

**Imola Bulgozdi:** "Some Genetics Are Passed on Via the Soul:" The Curious Case of Susan Sto-Helit

**Morgan Daniels (Review):** Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity, and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling

**Anja Wieden (Review):** Narrating Victimhood. Gender, Religion and the Making of Place in Post-War Croatia

# Detailed Table of Contents

## [Editorial](#)

### [Lucas Boulding: "I can't be having with that": The Ethical Implications of Professional Witchcraft in Pratchett's Fiction](#)

**Abstract:** Pratchett's fiction is often taken to have an existentialist slant, focusing on the importance of the integrity of the individual, and it is argued that this forms the moral centre of the Discworld stories. However, it soon becomes clear when one looks at the Witches sequence of novels that there are other major well-springs of ethical thought in Pratchett's oeuvre that go beyond the insistence on the individual conscience. These ethical bonds are created in communal spaces, rooted in ordinary life and implicate the apparently highly individualistic characters in their frequently impoverished and working-class communities. One way of showing this is to examine the standards and ideals to which being a professional commits these characters. Drawing on popular representations of witchcraft from Murray to Graves, from modern Wiccans to Renaissance midwives, Pratchett sketches a view of professional witchcraft that commits Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, Tiffany Aching (and many others) to the good of their communities, without regard for their own safety or sanity. Pratchett's insistence on the democratic and demotic as moral ideals foregrounds the work of the witches of Lancre as heroes of quotidian life.

**Author's Bio:** Lucas is currently a PhD student at the University of Kent. His research focuses on the dystopian novels of Margaret Atwood, looking at them from the perspective of virtue ethics. So far it encompasses mad scientists, food, and genetic manipulation. He has presented papers on several aspects of Atwood's fiction, including ChickieNobs and the LongPen. Lucas graduated with a BA in English from Magdalene College, Cambridge in 2011, and completed his MA in English Literature: 1850-Present and the AKC at King's College London in 2012.

### [Audrey Taylor: Trapped: Fairytale in Pratchett and Lackey](#)

**Abstract:** This article examines Terry Pratchett's "Witches Abroad" and Mercedes Lackey's "The Fairy Godmother". Both books look at stories from the other side, they actualise the (sometimes) cliché that stories are powerful, and can shape people. In "The Fairy Godmother" and "Witches Abroad", stories have taken over. Tales have power of their own, and will shape the surrounding people or circumstances to suit, regardless of what the characters themselves think of it. Taking the concept that stories have power a step forward and literalising that power allows both Pratchett and Lackey to explore fairy tales from a different, feminist, perspective.

**Author's Bio:** Dr. Audrey Taylor lectures on English Literature at the University of Bedfordshire. Her PhD from Anglia Ruskin University was on the secondary world fantasies of Patricia A. McKillip. She is an HEA Associate Fellow and member of the British Science Fiction Association.

### [Katherine Lashley: Monstrous Women: Feminism in Terry Pratchett's Monstrous Regiment](#)

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the treatment of equal rights for women in Terry Pratchett's Discworld novel, Monstrous Regiment. Throughout the novel, the main female character, Polly, and several other recruits, are women but disguise themselves as young men in order to join the army. The theories of bisociation, simulacra, and Lacan's the real are used in order to analyze how the comedy within this

fantasy novel is created and how it aids the reader in recognizing the Lacanian real. Messages of the real within the text include ideas surrounding gender: how men have delineated gender for men and women and how these dictates have limited women's rights.

**Author's Bio:** Katherine Lashley is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Morgan State University. Her dissertation analyzes gender and disability in young adult dystopias. She teaches first year writing at Towson University.

**Imola Bulgozdi:** ["Some Genetics Are Passed on Via the Soul:" The Curious Case of Susan Sto-Helit](#)

**Abstract:** While Terry Pratchett created several memorable female characters, this article focuses on Susan Sto-Helit, Death's granddaughter, who, due to the fact that she saves the world in all the three novels she is featured in ("Soul Music", "Hogfather" and "Thief of Time"), definitely qualifies as a heroine. Therefore, I find it quite surprising that Gideon Haberkorn's article, "Cultural Palimpsests: Terry Pratchett's New Fantasy Heroes" (2008) repeatedly excludes her from the discussion as hardly part of the evolution of the barbarian hero, and because of "the complicated way in which Susan and several others of Pratchett's female protagonists interact with the hero discourse, especially that of the fantasy hero." In my view, the figure of Susan definitely deserves attention since her relationship to the hero-discourse and her unique position on Discworld, as mostly human and part immortal, are intertwined with Pratchett's refusal to work with gender stereotypes. The article investigates Susan's character development and coming to terms with her special skills that partly enable her to become a heroine, her possession of both typically male and female characteristics and the way she uses them in different situations, as well as the question of her humanity and the power that seems to come with being not completely immortal like Death. The question whether her ability to "give life" is linked to her being a woman is also addressed.

**Author's Bio:** Imola Bulgozdi is an assistant professor teaching American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. She specializes in the cultural embedding of the creative process of Southern women writers, also branching off to the comparative analysis of Southern novels and their film adaptations. Her publications include "Probing the Limits of the Self" (in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding, 2008) and "The New Criticism and Southernness: A Case for Cultural Studies" (in The New Criticism: Formalist Literary Theory in America, 2013). She is a devoted reader of fantasy and science fiction, as attested by her publications in this field: "'Barbarian Heroing' and Its Parody: New Perspectives on Masculinity" (in Conan Meets the Academy, 2012), "Artificial Intelligence and Gender Performativity in William Gibson's Idroru" (in Navigating Cybercultures, 2013) and "Knowledge and Masculinity: Male Archetypes in Fahrenheit 451" (in Critical Insights- Fahrenheit 451, 2013).

**Morgan Daniels (Review):** [Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity, and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling](#)

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# Editorial

by Laura-Marie von Czarnowsky, University of Cologne

Terry Pratchett is celebrated by critics and devoted readers alike as one of the UK's most brilliant fantasy writers and an inveterate humourist with a knack of creating unforgettable characters. Writing with verve, poignancy and daring, Pratchett is known for his signature style as much as for the bold criticism deftly embedded in his comedic writing. Pratchett made use of comedy to communicate wider truths about what makes people human, pointing out stereotypes and ideals with a sharply poised pen. In honour of Sir Terry, who passed away in March, *gender forum* proudly presents this special issue dedicated to his unforgettable works.

The artwork for this special issue has been kindly provided by English artist Paul Kidby, whose work has been featured as the sleeve covers of Pratchett's novels since 2002 and has illustrated many Discworld publications including *The Art of Discworld* and best-selling *The Last Hero*. For this issue, Kidby has granted *gender forum* use of his visualisation of the "Great A'Tuin" (2005), [1] Pratchett's sky turtle that carries the Discworld on the backs of four large elephants. In this well rounded secondary world, Pratchett presents a rich cast of female characters and the various ways in which they perform gender is at the heart of this special issue.

The issue opens with Lucas Boulding's "I can't be having with that': The Ethical Implications of Professional Witchcraft in Pratchett's Fiction". Evoking Pratchett's indomitable Granny Weatherwax, Lucas Boulding notes that while Pratchett's fiction is often taken to have an existentialist slant, it soon becomes clear when one looks at the *Witches* novels that there are other major well-springs of ethical thought in Pratchett's oeuvre that go beyond the insistence on the individual conscience. These ethical bonds are created in communal spaces, rooted in ordinary life and implicate the apparently highly individualistic characters in their frequently impoverished and working-class communities. One way of showing this is to examine the standards and ideals to which being a professional commits these characters. Drawing on popular representations of witchcraft from Murray to Graves, from modern Wiccans to Renaissance midwives, Pratchett sketches a view of professional witchcraft that commits Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, Tiffany Aching (and many others) to the good of their communities.

Aubrey Taylor too focuses on Pratchett's witch sequence and draws comparisons to Mercedes Lackey's novels with regards to the compulsory power of fairy tale narratives and the gender stereotypes associated with them. In her essay "Trapped: Fairytale in Pratchett and Lackey", Taylor thus examines Pratchett's *Witches Abroad* and Lackey's *The Fairy Godmother*. Both books actualise the cliché that stories are powerful, and can shape people. In *The Fairy Godmother* and *Witches Abroad*, stories have taken over. Tales have power of their own, and will shape the surrounding people or circumstances to suit, regardless of what the characters themselves think of it.

Taking the concept that stories have power of their own a step forward, both Pratchett and Lackey use of that literalisation to explore fairy tales from a feminist perspective.

A feminist reading is also at the core of Katherine Lashley's contribution "Monstrous Women: Feminism in Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment*". Lashley analyses the treatment of equal rights for women in *Monstrous Regiment*, in which the main female character, Polly, and several other recruits, disguise themselves as young men in order to join the army. The theories of bisociation, simulacra, and Lacan's the real are used in order to analyse how the comedy within this fantasy novel is created and how it aids the reader in recognizing the real. Messages of the real within the text include ideas surrounding gender: how men have delineated and prescribed gender norms for both men and women and how these dictates have consequently limited women's rights.

The special issue is rounded off by Imola Bulgozdi's "Some Genetics Are Passed on Via the Soul": The Curious Case of Susan Sto-Helit". Bulgozdi analyses Susan's position in Pratchett's canon and her marginalisation in Pratchett scholarship. Arguing that Susan, who is Death's granddaughter and saves the world in all the three novels she is featured in (*Soul Music*, *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*), definitely qualifies as a heroine, Bulgozdi questions her marginalisation in Gideon Haberkorn's article "Cultural Palimpsests: Terry Pratchett's New Fantasy Heroes" (2008). Haberkorn repeatedly excludes Susan from the discussion and Bulgozdi finds that the figure of Susan deserves attention since her relationship to the hero-discourse and her unique position on Discworld, as mostly human and part immortal, are intertwined with Pratchett's refusal to work with gender stereotypes.

In *Wyrd Sisters*, the first of Pratchett's wildly successful witch novels, Nanny Ogg advises young Magrat Garlick that "[w]hen you break rules, break 'em good and hard" (190). All four articles in this issue show that Pratchett too heartily broke with rules and established notions of how people ought to behave, think, and perform. Pratchett's humorous writing presents strict gender norms as being both restrictive and surmountable, and his fiction easily and clearly subverts gender and genre-specific stereotypes.

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## Notes

1) *gender forum* is only using a smaller section of the painting. For the full image please visit Paul Kidby's homepage. Artwork(c)Paul Kidby, [www.paulkidby.net](http://www.paulkidby.net)

# “I can't be having with that”: The Ethical Implications of Professional Witchcraft in Pratchett's Fiction

by Lucas Boulding, University of Kent, UK

Granny was an old-fashioned witch. She didn't do good for people, she did right by them. But Nanny knew that people don't always appreciate right. Like old Pollitt the other day, when he fell off his horse. What he wanted was a painkiller. What he needed was the few seconds of agony as Granny popped the joint back into place. The trouble was, people remembered the pain. (Pratchett “The Sea and Little Fishes” 235)

1 It is commonly argued that the touchstone of Terry Pratchett's ethics is the individual, construed within a broad existentialist framework, such that the “only true morality is based on the value of the individual” (Mendlesohn 248). That is the central claim of Farah Mendlesohn's contribution to *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature*. While the four essays that comprise “Ethics and the Good Life” in *Philosophy and Terry Pratchett* all approach Pratchett's fiction from different philosophical perspectives, including virtue ethics and Kantian ethics, what the writers celebrate in Pratchett's fiction is the choice of the individual. One example is Susanne Foster's essay, which uses Pratchett's writing to critique Aristotle's virtue ethics for being overly prescriptive, and for not giving enough focus to individual conceptions of the good life (193). However, these views neglect sources of value beyond individual choice which are vital to the understanding of Pratchett's moral schema. The importance of professional ethics in the Discworld novels forces us to revise, to some extent, the existentialist understanding of Pratchett's ethics, and to be more open to the community as a positive source of value in the novels. Witchcraft as practised by Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Tiffany Aching, amongst others, demonstrates how professional values, external to the individual, commit these characters to “the good and best interests of the person to be served” (Pellegrino 62). In the case of witchcraft, these values are made doubly interesting by the gendered nature of the profession, and the 'white knowledge' that informs our understanding of their professional practice (qtd. in Manninen 82).

[1]

2 Pratchett has reflected in a number of ways on the characteristics of his writing over the years; the concept of “narrative causality” (otherwise known as “narrativium”) is perhaps the most famous of these (Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* 8; Pratchett, Stewart, and Cohen, *The Science of the Discworld* 10). Narrative causality shapes events on the Discworld in ostensibly predictable ways, and resembles, at least passingly, the dread hand of Fate, against which one can struggle but to become only more engaged. In the case of witches, the influence of narrative causality can be traced to Shakespeare, Robert Graves, and Margaret Murray amongst others. Individual characters in the novels are temporarily swept up from their normal lives and pulled against their will into the narrative arc of a quite different story, often in the genre of the fairy tale; in the case of *Witches Abroad*, this is Cinderella, and numerous characters find themselves relegated to playing roles for which they are unsuited. As Andy Sawyer puts it, “[w]hat operates our universe is cause and effect...[w]hat operates

Discworld is narrative and personification” (168). This claim makes Pratchett's fiction particularly important to those interested in problems of ethics in literature. Virtue ethicists of all stripes have insisted on the narrative character of ethical problems over and against duty or consequence based views; this is summed up in Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that “to adopt a stance on the virtues will be to adopt a stance on the narrative character of human life” (143–144). By reflecting on how stories shape our ethical sensibilities, we can ourselves become better at and more engaged with practical reasoning, and see that our sources of value are diverse and shared. They do not spring from choice alone, but from our identity defined in much broader terms than those suggested by an existentialist insistence on individual will and self-definition:

I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out. (Taylor 35)

Individuality on the virtue ethics picture, then, is more complicated and more involved than that argued for through existentialist means.

3 The claim for the centrality of individual choice is typically referred to three Discworld characters: Death, Commander Vimes, and Granny Weatherwax. Mendlesohn uses Granny as the paradigm case, quoting her assertion in *Carpe Jugulum* that:

You might be right, you might be wrong, but you had to *choose*, knowing that the rightness or wrongness might never be clear or even that you were deciding between two sorts of wrong, that there was no *right* anywhere. And always, *always*, you did it by yourself. (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* 73)

While morphology may have something to do with the range of choices that you have (for instance, one's ability to play B.S. Johnson's Organ), Mendlesohn suggests that the ethical emphasis is placed on the authenticity of one's choices, and the necessity of sometimes choosing between impossible alternatives against one's own self-interest. Granny's power is said to come from her denial of her shadow aspect. She repeatedly and explicitly resists heeding the “clang of the oven door”, and this stands as a sign of the authenticity of her choices, meaning that she specifically chooses to act against the prevailing Brother's Grimm-based laws of narrative causality that shape the stories of which she is part (Pratchett, *Maskerade* 14; *Carpe Jugulum* 26). The same conclusion is reached in *Folklore of the Discworld*, though reached in a different way, when a discussion on wicked witches turns to the case of Black Aliss, describing her as “not exactly a bad witch, but so powerful that one couldn't really tell the difference, and deeply affected by narrative patterns similar to those which the Brothers Grimm recorded on Earth” (Pratchett and Simpson 231–234). Through self-control, Granny has mastered her internal impulses to be evil. Because of these Grimm-based narrative patterns, we fully expect the figure of the witch to be both of evil and, ultimately, incompetent: a villain prone to being foiled by the third and youngest son, or perhaps a pair of orphans abandoned in the forest. As the vampire Countess puts it in *Carpe Jugulum*, “Witches should be on our side” (26). These narrative impulses are a very real part of Granny's facticity, and arise from her gender, her evident power, her desire to meddle in the affairs of others, and as an inheritance from her ancestor, Alison Weatherwax.

The existentialist critics see this as the cornerstone of Pratchett's "coherent ethical schema based on a belief in choice and individual responsibility", as a triumph of the will of Esmerelda Weatherwax over her facticity (Mendlesohn 239).

4 But this is only one interpretation of Granny's relation to herself; Karen Sayer argues that Granny's story is really a "psychomachia", in which virtue constantly vies with vice for control of her self (Sayer 140). Whereas Mendlesohn sees this as a reaffirmation of her individual identity, for Sayer it instead points to her deep involvement with her community, and how profoundly she has been shaped not by her own choices, but by the expectations and hopes and needs of those around her, culminating in the subjugation and denial of her self, or at least of the self as is required for existentialist authenticity. A morality which derives solely from individuality is incompatible with Granny's "lifetime of ought" (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* 199). Likewise, Sayer sees the rural setting, the focus on the body and materiality, and the sustaining interdependence of farming folk – summed up in the vast tribe of Oggs – as a creatively feminine space that rejects, simultaneously, traditional constraints upon femininity by offering acknowledgement and celebration of the professionalism of these women. Having a witch in the family is a boast, and raises the status of all who are related to them – which may be why so many Oggs are in key positions in Lancre. While the model of maiden, mother, and crone may be one way of viewing the various trios of witches (universally headed by Granny), "women's sexuality is not constructed simply – there are various models of motherhood (Magrat and Gytha), maidenhood (Granny, Agnes, and Magrat) and of being a crone (Gytha and Esme)" (Sayer 151). The profession of witchcraft offers freedom from traditional rural narratives for women, and reflects the fact that, according to Pratchett, witches are immune from stories – though this remark is not quite consonant with the tale of Black Aliss or the events of *Witches Abroad*. Perhaps it could be construed as meaning that they are immune to stories except for those that they themselves are complicit in making, or those that they believe to be true of themselves.

5 The mistake in the existentialist argument, in so far as there is one, is in seeing Granny's choice as something that she does in a single moment as an individual. Without wishing to recapitulate the whole virtue ethical position, it is easy to see that a focus on individual choice distorts Pratchett's fundamentally democratic ethical schema.

I wrote [the 1971 version of *The Carpet People*] in the days when I thought fantasy was all battles and kings. Now I'm inclined to think that the *real* concerns of fantasy ought to be about not having battles, and doing *without* kings. (Pratchett qtd in James 31–32)

The Witches sequence, with its stress on the importance of ordinary human life over and against supernatural nonsense, centres upon a kind of ordinary heroism that is tied to professional commitment and care for the community. This is one reason why the witches are the arbiters of morality from the margins of their communities, while the wizards of Unseen University blunder around, eat a lot, and never seem to get much done. Pratchett put it in terms of a "visit from the Equal Opportunities people", pointing out that, "in the fantasy world, magic done by women is usually of poor quality, third-rate, negative stuff, while the wizards are usually cerebral, clever, powerful, and wise" (Pratchett and Wood). Pratchett's near-inversion of this topos speaks to his desire to move fantasy



away from individualist heroes and divinely appointed kings – which are fantasy stock in trade, made near universal by the influence of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* – and towards the co-operative efforts of normal life, which achieve epic qualities by celebrating the quotidian. You cannot be a witch without “a zest for life, a clear-headed grasp of psychology, a gift for natural medicine, and an absolute refusal to be overawed by any situation” (Pratchett, “Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories”). Cheese-making, pickling, and demonstrating a new way to stop people choking, are seen as on a par with the most dangerous magical talents – they might not make you magical, but these, and rural, domestic, bodily and material talents like these, are the talents that form the bedrock of witchcraft (*A Hat Full of Sky* 11).

6 Pratchett frequently repeats the claim that witches are by temperament solitary, and are reluctant to gather together. But when it comes down to it not even Esme Weatherwax, acknowledged as the most powerful witch on the Disc, triumphs on her own in these stories. Nanny Ogg is not a bit player enabling Granny Weatherwax's heroics, but a powerful witch in a different mould, and without whom no novel in the Witches sequence would have turned out in triumph. Granny may say that she does it always by herself, but her self is shot through with the expectations, voices, and hopes of her whole community – that is what it means to be a witch, and indeed a person more generally, though being a witch creates special demands on an individual in the name of community. In many of the novels featuring the witches, this profusion of internalized communal needs is obscured by the lack of first person perspective. In the Tiffany Aching stories, we can see how, although Tiffany is alone in facing the Queen, the hiver, or the Wintersmith, she brings with her a whole host of Second, Third, and, occasionally, Fourth Thoughts, which make constant reference to the communal nature of her values, and indeed personify how deliberation, a process of consultation, is an essential characteristic of ethical thought. [2] When she shows the hiver the way to death, she describes how she is made up of “everyone I've ever met who's changed the way I think” (*A Hat Full of Sky* 11). Even though there is no one else standing on the black sand making the choice, they are present in Tiffany; when she thinks she will die, she regrets not thinking about other people, meaning her family. But her Nac Mac Feegle guide and protector, Rob Anybody, rightly insists that, to the contrary, she thought about saving the hiver and saving the people at the Witch Trials. As the Big Man of the Nac Mac Feegle, and married to Jeannie, the Kelda, Rob is a living embodiment of how the internalisation of communal expectation shapes one's moral priorities.

7 A second feature of Tiffany's Second Thoughts about her ethical choices are that she talks about them as if they have already been made – that is, the consequence of being who she is means that she can only choose in a particular way. This is at the heart of what virtue means to virtue ethicists, who see it not as something to be manifested on a particular occasion, but to really *be* characteristic of a person at a fundamental level. When Tiffany decides that she must lure the hiver up into the mountains because it is the right thing to do, Granny replies that indeed, Tiffany does not have a choice, “[b]ut neither have I. That's why I *will* come with you” (Pratchett, *A Hat Full of Sky* 10). Their individual choices are circumscribed by the type of people that they are, and to look to the moment of choice as the moment that, as it were, shows the presence of the ethical, is a mistake. Granny

Weatherwax's insistence that she is a beginner – “Just starting...every day, just starting” (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* 82) – suggests that becoming a real witch is not about one-time heroic performances, but about a continual quotidian life of making the right choice, in the most trivial and the most serious circumstances.

8 One other way that the importance of community can be shown in the Witch sequence is by reference to the profession of witchcraft itself, and more specifically by examining the 'white knowledge' sources of Pratchett's witchcraft. Inspired by the concept of white noise, white knowledge is “the sort of stuff that fills up your brain without you really knowing where it came from”, otherwise expressed as a reference that “a generally well-read (well-reviewed, well-listened) person has a sporting chance of picking up” (Pratchett qtd in Manninen 82). The Brothers Grimm and Shakespeare have already been mentioned as having a significant narrative causality bending effect, and one can see that, more than that, they generate a sort of white knowledge about witches. Nanny Ogg expresses it perfectly when she remarks on the vampires turning into magpies that “Vampires can turn into things...everyone knows that, who knows anything about vampires” (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* 407). The white knowledge sources of Pratchett's witches give us further grounds for nuancing the existentialist emphasis on individual choice as the primary constituent of Pratchett's ethics, because they show us a profession founded on self-denial and hard work that put aside self-interest for public good, the good of those who seek and who need professional assistance. As Edmund Pellegrino puts it:

What the professions 'declare' is a claim to special knowledge and an allegiance to something beyond self-interest. They make this declaration publicly in their codes and Oaths, and privately every time they offer their services to persons in need of them. Their 'act of profession' is a solemn promise of competence, a voluntary entrance into a covenantal trust relationship. It is thus interpreted by those to whom the declaration is made. (Pellegrino 62)

The white knowledge that forms our views of the profession of witchcraft on the Disc declares just such a relationship between the people of a steading and a witch. The practice of the Witch Trials, which appear in “The Sea and Little Fishes” as well as in *A Hat Full Of Sky* and in a solo-contest variant in *Lords and Ladies*, establish a certainty about the knowledge of witchcraft which is not formalised by oaths, but by the wearing of a hat, the performance of various duties, and the willingness to be at the disposal of one's community.

9 What every person in the Discworld knows is that if you see a woman in a black pointy hat, she is a witch, and from her you can expect a number of things, for example: help, if you should need it; a damn hard stare and perhaps a cutting word if you are being an idiot; a useful way of disposing of old clothes, “especially if there's any decent lace or fine linen with a bit of wear left in it (you wouldn't believe the trouble occult forces can cause with that kind of stuff, it's amazin')” (Pratchett et al. 107). These expectations, a vital part of the “covenantal trust relationship”, shape a witch's personal practice, and certain witches become adept at particular aspects of witchcraft – for instance, Nanny is selected as the greatest midwife of all time, but if you need someone to sit up with the dying and play Cripple Mr Onion with Death, then you turn to Granny Weatherwax. But these roles are shaped, in

their turn, by our white knowledge awareness of the historic opportunities available to women, particularly those during the late Middle Ages and early modern periods. From the rise of the medical profession until fairly recently, midwives and female medical practitioners were represented by the medical profession as dangerous meddlers who put their patients at risk, comparable to “Wicked Jewes”, “Pragmaticall Barbers” and “wandring Mountebancks” and the medicinal practice of these women served as a lightning rod for violent outbursts of misogyny: “Toothelless-women, fudling Gossips, and Chare-women, talkative Midwives, &c. In summe...the scum of Mankind” (Richard Whitlock, qtd in Porter 197–198). This misogynistic view informed the epidemic of witch trials and witch burnings across Europe, and explains to some extent why, in countries where, for instance, sexual relations with the devil did not loom large in the popular imagination, there were no such incidents and where witchcraft is not heavily gendered (Wiesner 274). Though chronically under-documented, mounting research has revised the picture of incompetent and dangerous midwives putting mothers and babies at risk through unsanitary practices into a balanced picture that presents the experience of these early medical practitioners as valuable and important. Women played a central role in health and the administration of justice, particularly in impoverished rural communities. As Mary Fissel reports,

[a]lmost everyone in early modern Europe was brought into the world by women and ushered out of it by women. Women's hands birthed babies, cut umbilical cords, and swaddled newborns. Women's hands treated the sick, comforted the dying, and laid out bodies, readying them for burial. (Fissell 1).

10 Pratchett's depiction of witches brings out elements from both pictures, though rather more from the second, emphasising the practicality and centrality of these figures in their communities which would cease to function without them. Many of the witches show an inherited fear of being hunted and burned by the local populace – a fear that is re-enacted in the penultimate Tiffany Aching novel, *I Shall Wear Midnight* – and the older witches partly conceal their professions by pretending to be simply old women. Rather than using fancy crystal balls to see the future, they use old glass fishing floats or pools of ink. They shun the dress-up of the new age and modern pagan movements in favour of hard-wearing fabrics. Pratchett jokingly, and simultaneously seriously, compares the figure of the “wise woman” with the “District Nurse”, pointing to their central roles in the community, but also to “a certain strength of character, practical experience and the ability to take charge of a situation” (Pratchett and Simpson 229). They ‘take responsibility’ for a particular area, both geographically and in terms of a specialisation. What all this indicates is that witchcraft in Pratchett's writing can rightly be thought of as a profession, which, considering witchcraft's demise at the hands of the misogyny of the incipient medical profession – perhaps the paradigm of modern professions – is somewhat ironic.

11 As mentioned at the start of this essay, the three characters battered onto by the existentialist reading are Death, Commander Vimes, and Granny Weatherwax. Each of these is said to wrestle with their own personal darkness and emerge triumphantly. However, these characters each have a significant stake in their professions. Commander Vimes, the head of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch, is, like Granny, the pinnacle of his profession, and, again like Granny, he is deeply attached to his

community, able to navigate the city with his eyes closed because his feet recognise the distinct types of paving stone used in Ankh-Morpork. He has so internalized the codes of behaviour that his profession demands that he has become an avatar of it, the Watch incarnate – so that when he is asked “Who watches the watchmen?” he can legitimately reply that *he* does. Death, while not thought of as being a professional, takes an apprentice in *Mort* and works as a hired farm hand in *Reaper Man*, and thus builds the experience of being a professional himself: “WHAT CAN THE HARVEST HOPE FOR, IF NOT FOR THE CARE OF THE REAPER MAN?” (Pratchett, *Reaper Man* 264) In explaining how virtue ethics is at the heart of the concept of professions, Pellegrino sets out the defining features of a profession as opposed to a job or a career: the professional promises to care for the person in front of them, in specific ways depending on their deficit – a doctor heals the sick, a priest brings spiritual enlightenment, a teacher imparts knowledge. They are, in their very construction, orientated to communal goods which arise out of shared human vulnerability. Central human goods “cannot be found in a life without shortage, risk, need and limitation. Their nature and their goodness are constituted by the fragile nature of human life” (Nussbaum 341). Each of these professions is said to aim at a single good – a doctor aims at the health of the patient, for instance – and this is one way in which witchcraft diverges from both Death and the Watch. These two professions can be seen to be orientated towards a sole good, namely, the care for dead souls and the maintenance of peace in Ankh-Morpork. However, instead of discrediting Pratchett's witchcraft, this may point to some shortcomings in Pellegrino's account of the professions, and shows further the white knowledge roots of Pratchett's portrayal of witchcraft.

12      While Ankh-Morpork, a bustling metropolis, has Igers galore, inventors, alchemists, engineers, and numerous other guild-professionals, the kingdom of Lancre, and, for instance, the village of Bad Ass, does not. The closest Igor is likely in Uberwald. Neither are justices of the peace present at all times, and nor are there dedicated watchers to sit up with the dead, nor layers-out, nor midwives – or rather, there are not individuals each of whom takes one of these jobs. The figure of the witch fulfils all these roles, and though, as previously mentioned, they specialise to some degree, depending on the kind of witch that they are, the expectation is that a witch will be capable in all these fields – the good at which witchcraft aims is thus the remedy of human frailty itself, where melioration is appropriate. Though it might be argued that witchcraft serves too diffuse an end to qualify as a profession, it is clear that witches comprehend the virtues of multiple professional disciplines and aim them towards the good of their communities. It is this aim that makes Granny's frequent statement that it is not a matter of doing what is good or bad but what is right, not in itself terrifyingly paternalistic, but valuable – the recognition that the code of witchcraft does have defining limits that the professionals who practice witchcraft agree upon. Their profession in fact commits them to being particularly good human beings, and to ensuring that the good life be available for others by redressing wrongs – such as domestic violence – and ensuring that vulnerable people are cared for, as when Nanny organises help for a recent widow: “Dropping a cut of meat on her [widow Scrope's] doorstep once a week wouldn't come amiss, eh? And she'll probably want extra help come harvest. I knows I can depend on you all. Now, off you go...” (Pratchett, *Lord and Ladies* 64) That the witches aim at what is good for the

community is evident in their role in defending their community from supernatural assault, the role that is least talked about by witches and which may not even be acknowledged by the community that is so protected – they may not even remember that they were in mortal danger. The witches seem to go without specific reward for these selfless acts of protection, but the provision of their clothes and sustenance, their homes and the status accorded to them, all indicate a recognition of the centrality of the practice of witchcraft.

13 Looking at a case study may be helpful in showing how the various practices required of witches point to a sufficiently solid good. In *Lords and Ladies*, Granny is challenged to a duel by Diamanda, an up and coming young witch. It is a staring contest, in which they must out-stare the sun.

The duel being ninety minutes advanced, a small boy child upon a sudden ran across the square and stopt within the magic circle, wherup he fell down with a terrible scream and also a flash. The olde witche looked around, got out of her chair, picked him up and carried him to his grandmother, then went back to her seat, whilom the young which never averted her eyes from the Sunne. But the other young witches stopped the duel averring, Look, Diamanda has wonne, the reason being, Weatherwax looked away. Whereupon the child's grandmother said in a loude voice, Oh yes? Pulle the other onne, it have got bells on. This is not a conteft about power, you stupid girls, it is a conteft about witchcraft, do you not even begin to know what being a witch IS? / Is a witch someone who would look round when she heard a child scream? / And the townspeople said, Yess! (Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies* 101–102)

In this incident, the test is designed to show who is the most powerful witch. Granny agrees to it because being the most powerful witch is integral to being who she is. It is done in public, in the centre of the village, so that everyone will know who is the best witch, and this is central to the project. Part of the professional covenant that is agreed upon is that respect has to be earned, and this is done in part to facilitate resolving disputes between witches. The witch trials in “The Sea and Little Fishes” is another such event; no-one is left unsure who is the best witch, though the contest has no explicit standards or measures. However, this duel is not a true test of witchcraft, because witchcraft is fundamentally about community and not about individual power; the trial is resolved when Granny turns away from her power-play and towards caring for the child. The crowd approve this definition as it articulates their expectations of what it is to be a witch. This remains true even once we discover that Nanny Ogg enticed her grandchild into the middle of the contest with sweets – because it is also true that Nanny did so for the good of the community, not for the good of Esme Weatherwax. The witches frequently use deception, in the form of folk psychology, to get people to do the right thing – and the special nature of knowing things that normal people do not know is another part of being a professional. Expertise sets professionals apart. Granny's cures, supposedly effected by miraculous potions, are in fact often attributable to simple psychology or used as misdirection. This is known as 'headology'. Granny is particularly skilled at this aspect of witchcraft, and it may, in fact be her primary skill. It assures her victory in the Witch Trials in “The Sea and Little Fishes” even though she does not enter; she wins by being unexpectedly nice. When Miss Level tries to convince Mr and Mrs Raddle to move their privy away from the well to stop them getting bacterial infections, they do nothing. When Granny tells them instead that the disease “was caused by goblins who were attracted to the smell”, they immediately take action (Pratchett, *A Hat Full Of Sky* 242). A witch has to know, not just what

people expect of her, but what those she attends to think in general, and manipulating this for good ends is the definition of headology. The most impressive display of this talent is the demonstration that, while wizards can create fireballs, Granny sets wood on fire by staring at it until it bursts into flames “out of sheer embarrassment” (Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* 30).

14 Pellegrino's account of professions is partly dependent on the explicit and public declaration of oaths and codes of conduct, which witchcraft lacks. However, the donning of a uniform takes the place of the public oaths and ceremonial acceptance of codes of conduct that manifest in the training of physicians. The act of putting on the hat, as Tiffany Aching discovers, the act of wearing it in public, is a vital part of being a witch, and it is in acknowledgement of moving from being an apprentice to being a fully-fledged professional that Tiffany allows herself to wear a midnight dress and to don a hat. Pellegrino explains this by arguing that professionals adopt their professional virtues in deep and abiding ways, such that it colours their own lives. If their lives remain untouched by their work then they are bad or deficient professionals. “But a girl starting out in life might well say to herself, 'Is this it? You worked hard and denied yourself things and what you got at the end of it was hard work and self-denial?’” (Pratchett, “The Sea and Little Fishes”) Tiffany, and indeed all the other young witches except Diamanda absorb the silently declared oaths that demand these sacrifices and willingly take them on. As being a doctor requires that you treat the patient in front of you, no matter how horrendous a human being they are and no matter the lateness of the hour, or being a judge demands that you hold abhorrent and violent people as equal with innocent citizens in the eyes of the law during a trial, professionalism commits its practitioners to circumstances that are beyond many people. The value of the profession, and the necessity of the remedy for the human vulnerability out of which the profession arises, motivates individuals with suitable temperaments to choose these hard lives over easier, less controversial ones.

15 Choice plays an undeniably significant role in the moral schema spelled out by Pratchett across the Discworld novels – but his ethics comprehends more than choice derived purely from individual identity, and in reference purely to the individual will. Without tracing the moral forebears of the Discworld, which I think include many of the Greek thinkers parodied in *Small Gods* – Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism – the case of professional ethics shows that there are other significant springs of moral thought in Pratchett which inflect and nuance the emphasis on the individual. As Mendlesohn and James write,

[i]f the Discworld has gone from strength to strength...it is not because [the novels] are funny (although they are) or because the characters have become so interesting, but because Pratchett has used the storylines and the characters to poke and prod at the 'givens' of our own world, of the stories we tell about it, and of the fantasy worlds many of his colleagues write (Mendlesohn and James 181).

Where other fantasy series may be morally monolithic (Mendlesohn singles out David Edding's *Belgariad*), Pratchett's morality, like his humour, comes from diverse views and perspectives, and this requires more than the disparate voices of lone individuals.

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## Notes

1) 'White knowledge' refers to the formation of background assumptions, and will be further explained in context below.

2) Tiffany acknowledges various levels of consciousness, and describes these levels as her Thoughts, since they often present different views to her normal consciousness. A footnote in *A Hat Full of Sky* describes First Thoughts as everyday and Second Thoughts are reflections about how you think. "Third Thoughts are thoughts that watch the world and think all by themselves. They're rare and often troublesome. Listening to them is part of witchcraft" (61). By *I Shall Wear Midnight*, she begins to experience an even deeper level of insight, the "very rare Fourth Thoughts" which "sometimes led to her walk into door" (252; 11).



# Trapped: Fairytale in Pratchett and Lackey

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“People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it’s the other way around. Stories exist independently of their players. If you know that, the knowledge is power.”(8)

1 Thus begins Terry Pratchett’s *Witches Abroad* (1991). In *Witches Abroad* and Mercedes Lackey’s *500 Kingdom Series*, specifically the first one, *The Fairy Godmother* (2004), stories have taken over. Both books look at stories from the other side, they actualise the (sometimes) cliché that stories are powerful, and can shape people. Tales have power of their own, and will shape the surrounding people or circumstances to suit, regardless of what the characters themselves think of it. Taking the concept that stories have power a step forward and literalising that power allows both Pratchett and Lackey to explore story from a different direction, though I would argue Pratchett does so in a more meaningful way, as will be explored later.

2 Fairy tales often have a predictable nature. Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*, contends that fairy tales are regular enough to warrant an extensive taxonomy. Propp argues, “it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the tale which will be exact as the morphology of organic formations” (xxv). This regularity is taken advantage of by both Pratchett and Lackey. In *Witches Abroad* stories are explained; “their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside” (8). Both Pratchett and Lackey take these grooves as a given — and show in their own ways how story can have a power of its own.

3 Feminist theory lends insight to both Pratchett and Lackey’s works. Susan Sellers in *Myth and Fairytale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction* argues that “the power of myth [is] in giving expression to our common experiences and about the role of narrative in enabling us to undergo, shape, and survive those experiences” (vii). A similar point can be made with regard to fairy tales, as they are, like myths, important to the human experience in ‘real’ life as well as in the fictional worlds we create. Lackey and Pratchett interrogate these narrative expectations by literalising the stories they create, rendering them visible, and occasionally absurd.

4 When stories and their attendant structures are internalised too deeply, Caroline Webb argues that a dangerous kind of escapism can evolve.

This version of escapism involves the reader mistaking what is said in the book: believing that it is true. To fall into this trap need not involve accepting the story as literal truth, although that is a possibility. Rather, the reader may be misled by the pattern of the story, especially by reading stories with similar patterns, into believing that certain solutions to problems are inevitable. (2)

These “similar patterns” are a noted facet of fairy tales, and thus the danger of beginning to believe in the stories they tell, in the happily-ever-afters, is increased accordingly. David Langford argues in his foreword to *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* that “Pratchett also shows the shaping effects of Story as rooted in human desire for narrative neatness, for events that follow comfortingly familiar patterns” (4). Both Pratchett and Lackey question this “neatness”, but also the fact that it is comforting and something that humans seem drawn to (and in turn, work their characters into).

5 Pratchett and Lackey’s use of story, and Pratchett’s use of humour, allows the reader to examine pre-conceived notions about story and narrative. As Webb argues,

[t]he trope is one familiar to readers of Pratchett: he deploys the structure and evokes the conventions of a genre even as his narrator and characters comment on the absurdity of those conventions [...] Pratchett [...] is explicit and metatextual in its operation (31).

But it is useful not only to examine this convention, but to examine why it works so well. Lackey too draws conscious attention to the ordered patterns of fairy tales, but hers does not seem as radical, and this is really what this article seeks to examine. I am not the only to notice Pratchett’s use of story, or his use of humour, but I think it is key that Pratchett changes narrative expectations, and in doing so provides humour. The narrative and the humour are linked, neither would have the power it does without the other, as evidenced by Lackey who seems to have largely missed the comedic aspect and focuses on narrative expectations instead.

6 Pratchett’s popular *Witches Abroad* requires but a brief synopsis. In this Discworld novel, three witches must *keep* a princess in disguise from marrying the prince in a reversal of the “Cinderella” story. Lackey’s *The Fairy Godmother* also begins with a “Cinderella” variant. Elena has all the criteria — a wicked stepmother, two ugly (in character at least) stepsisters, and is sufficiently downtrodden. However, there is no Prince waiting in the wings to sweep her off her feet — and this is where the trouble begins. In both books, the happy (sometimes conflated with an expected) ending is not what is needed. The characters in both books need the freedom to set about their own lives, but are constricted by the stories they should be following. In Lackey’s novel, for example,

Elena had spent her time since her father’s death wrapped in a growing sense of tension and frustration, as if *something* was out there, some force that would make all of this better, if only she knew how to invoke it. That there was a way to turn this into a happy ending, and that her life was a coiled spring being wound ever tighter until it would all be released in a burst of wonder and magic. (39-40)

In both books, there is the premise that stories (specifically fairy tales) have expected and traditional outcomes. Vladimir Propp argues that “fairy tales possess a quite particular structure which is immediately felt” (6). Both Pratchett and Lackey take advantage of this expected and well established structure; James B. South argues that it is “story-shaped destiny” (28-30) which Granny Weatherwax helps people to escape. The same is true for Lackey where a fairy godmother serves the same function.

7 Pratchett and Lackey go about examination of structure in different ways. While Pratchett is the more subtle of the two, as will be explored below, in Lackey's series the expected stories have actual magic power. Lackey for example has a fairy godmother explain, "[y]ou see, whenever there is a person whose life begins to resemble a tale — the brave little orphan lad, the lovely girl with the wicked stepmother, the princess with the overly protective father — something begins to happen, and that something is *magic*" (56). Lackey calls this path "The Tradition" (58) and it works as an impersonal force, shaping stories. When "The Tradition" is thwarted it works to warp that into a new story — both good and bad.

8 Pratchett takes a different tack, He shows stories going badly because there is nothing natural about stories in their entirety. This is exemplified in Pratchett's rendering of the wolf from "Little Red Ridinghood" when a wolf is forced into a person/wolf hybrid and almost starves to death because he is not able to be both. In the end Granny Weatherwax mercifully has a woodman kill him, after the wolf has tried, and failed, to be the big bad wolf of the "Little Red Ridinghood" tale. The villain of *Witches Abroad*, a fairy godmother (and Granny Weatherwax's sister), has tried to force stories where they do not exist. In other words, she has tried to force the actual world into the patterns that are so neatly drawn in fiction. Pratchett capitalises on the incompatibility of neatly drawn story with how the world actually works. Granny Weatherwax explains, "Someone who knows about the power of stories, and uses 'em. And the stories have [...] kind of hung around. They do that, when they get fed" (135). In *Witches Abroad* the villain of the story is someone who is obsessed with the regularity of story, and has forced stories onto people, regardless of how this works out in reality.

9 Having the 'bad' character be someone trying to force happy endings on people is an interesting tactic, and one that forces the reader to more closely examine their expectations of both story and character. Granny Weatherwax explains, "[y]ou can't go around building a better world for people. Only people can build a better world for people. Otherwise it's just a cage" (250). Pratchett thus focuses on freedom, and allowing people to be happy or unhappy; in examining the premise of a happy ending and finding whether that is, in fact, always a good thing.

10 In Lackey, the focus is also on freedom, the power of stories can literally become binding as the tales entrap their participants, but it is less about the lack of personal freedom as in Pratchett and more about the shaping power of stories. As one of the characters explains, "The Tradition doesn't *care* you see, whether the outcome of a story is a joy or a tragedy" (68). In Lackey's work, there are two kinds of stories, those 'good' ones like "Cinderella" where things are meant to be happy, and those like "Ladderlocks" that are not. Much of the action of the book is set about preventing the latter stories while arranging for the former. The horror in Lackey is not the lack of ability to choose one's own way, it is that there are dark stories with terrible endings that someone could be forced to recreate to their tragic conclusions. Thus, unlike Pratchett, Lackey is not examining the basic happily-ever-after premise.

11 Pratchett makes no such distinction as the stories discussed in *Witches Abroad* are all ones with 'happy endings', regardless of how the stories might actually feel to those acting them out. In Pratchett the critique is of the fairy tale assumption that a certain pattern of events is a 'good' thing, a happy ending. Gideon Haberkorn in "Debugging the Mind: The Rhetoric of Humor and the Poetics of Fantasy" argues that "Fantasy can foreground the tools we use to make meaning. Humor can help us notice and correct mistakes our mind makes in its meaning-making" (160). Thus it is both Pratchett's use of a fantastical world where things can be literalised (as is also the case in *Lackey*) and his use of humour that allows the mind to "correct mistakes", which amounts, in this case, to acknowledging the framework that we place stories and ourselves in.

12 Key to both *Lackey* and Pratchett's revisions is the ordered structure of fairy tale. In his introduction to *The Russian Folktale by Vladimir Propp*, Jack Zipes argues that, "[Propp] believes that in order to establish what constitutes a genre, one has to demonstrate that there is a constant repetition of functions in a large body of tales" (xi). This constant repetition is what allows *Lackey* and Pratchett to subvert expectations. Neither book would work without an understanding of how the stories are meant to proceed. Part of the self-reflexiveness of both books is that the characters too are aware of this. In *Lackey*, her main character Elena is prompted for what ought to have been 'her' story, the "Cinderella" story, and she knows it and its variants in detail. The characters in Pratchett too are aware of traditional story. However, Haberkorn argues that "[t]hroughout the book, Granny subverts traditional fairy tales, and the fact that story structure is alien to her is illustrated, amusingly, by the fact that she cannot tell a joke — although she keeps trying" (182). I would disagree; Haberkorn has conflated two distinct facets of Granny Weatherwax's personality into an easy explanation. I will not go into what her inability to tell jokes is a symptom of as this is peripheral to my topic, but I would note that Haberkorn goes on to argue that "[o]nce such patterns have become observable laws, characters are bound to recognize and understand them, and they begin using them for their own ends" (182). And Granny Weatherwax, as one of (if not the) most knowing of the characters in the Discworld is surely part of this. Granny Weatherwax is powerfully aware of the shape and structure of story, which is in evidence every time that she subverts it. Her personal interactions with story force her to contend with it in an intimate manner. For example, her sister styles herself a fairy godmother but in fact works in ways considered evil (or traditionally witch-like), thus forcing Granny to counteract her effect by being 'good' (even if she looks the part of the evil witch). Just as Granny Weatherwax must be aware of story to subvert it, so too *Lackey*, Pratchett and the reader must all be aware of 'story structure' in order for these books to work.

13 In *Touch Magic*, Jane Yolen argues that "the great archetypal stories provide a framework or model for an individual's belief system" (18) and as Albert Laving argues further in the same book: "Myth conceived of as symbolic form...[is] a way of organizing the human response to reality...[and is] a fundamental aspect of the way we 'process' experience" (17). Thus fiction like fairy tales allows us to form belief systems, and shape how the world seems to us. This can be both a negative and positive experience. Freud, Jung and James Hillman, among others, have realised the potential for healing in

stories and myth but these archetypes can also act in a negative way in that these frameworks and processes can become encoded and un-questioned, no matter how unnatural the frame. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* famously argues that gender is performative, a layer of repeated acts instead of something biological or inherent. It is this tendency for repeated acts and customs to seem 'natural' that can sometimes be a danger in formalised settings like traditional fairy tales.

14 Pratchett attacks archetypes and fairy tales in several ways. Instead of having a "Cinderella" variant where she rescues herself (but still becomes entangled with the Prince as in Mercedes Lackey's version *Phoenix and Ashes* (2005)), Pratchett renders the story absurd and destroys it entirely. Lackey, on the other hand, does not question the happily-ever-after sentiment, which is the crucial difference between these authors. This might be because her stories are marketed as primarily romance (they are published by Luna — the fantasy imprint of romance publisher Harlequin). Webb argues "The wider problem of narrative patterning is not unique to fantasy, but the nature of the pattern, and its generally 'happy' conclusion, is perhaps of particular concern within this genre" (2). It is not just a matter of genre however, or at least, it is not *just* a matter of genre that separates Pratchett's take from Lackey's. Pratchett is not particularly known for his subtlety, but he is known for his humour (as John Clute examines in "Coming of Age" and as Andrew Butler explores in his chapter "Theories of Humour"). But in this instance Pratchett's approach is a far subtler one than Lackey's as it relies on a deeper understanding of old fairy tale variants, and an in depth inspection of what the traditional forms mean in the world, not just in the story world.

15 What both Pratchett and Lackey use is the 'classical' form of the fairy tales. But, as Yolen argues in *Touch Magic*, "These stories underwent continuous change, for they were not carved in stone, not set in wood or metal type to repeat themselves endlessly and perfectly on the white page" (22). This setting in stone came later, when many fairy tales had hundreds of different renderings, one of the reasons Propp chose to examine what the characters *did* rather than who they *were* for his taxonomy. However, both Lackey and Pratchett play with this, Pratchett in a slightly more knowing way. Towards the end of *Witches Abroad*, the interfering fairy godmother taunts, "[y]ou've got to put on your red-hot shoes and dance the night away?" (342), referring to the lesser-known "Cinderella" variant where that is the stepmother's punishment. Though Lackey's use of variants is less subtle, it is still evident in the ways in which the fairy godmothers twist the stories to suit their own ends.

16 As in Lackey, fairy godmothers are generally presented as a positive granter of wishes and smoother of ways. In Pratchett however, fairy godmothers are scrutinised. In typical Pratchett style, he uses humour to examine cultural norms. "Cutting your way through a bit of bramble is how you can tell he's going to be a good husband, is it? That's fairy godmotherly thinking, that is!"(118) scolds Granny Weatherwax. And, of course, in fairy tales, that *is* how good husbands are chosen, though it is not presented that way within the fairy tale world. In typical fairy tale worlds the ability to chop wood is presented as a clear strength, one only 'worthy' princes are capable of (just as the ability to chop wood is naturalised as a husband trait -so too is what makes a worthy husband not explored). "Fairy

godmotherly thinking” as Granny Weatherwax exclaims is critiqued throughout Pratchett, exemplified as what could otherwise be termed ‘fairy tale logic’. In the traditional fairy tales typified by Disney, Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and others, a man’s ability to chop through briars is considered a suitable test for matrimony without much thought as to what this might actually mean (or, more accurately, might not mean) in terms of spousal suitability.

17 In Lackey, the fairy godmother is presented in a more traditional light. A fairy godmother is a saviour — someone who ensures everything goes right. She is someone from within the stories who has a tradition of her own. When the Fairy Godmother of the title is first put into her costume, she exclaims, “And that wand looks, well, silly. Like something out of a book of tales” and one of her magical servants exclaims, “That’s the *point!*” (131) The power in Lackey can be found and used within stories. The slight variation is that the fairy godmother is the main character — allowing Lackey to show the work put into keeping tales ‘happy’. For example, Lackey’s main character Elena in her new role as fairy godmother assists a woman whose baby “The Tradition” insists on turning into a Ladderlocks. Elena, as fairy godmother, works from within the tale to twist it into a different story. Elena makes sure to play the part of the ‘angry witch’ character so that when payment is demanded of the thief father as is traditional in the “Ladderlocks” story, Elena can turn the child into a character from “the princess and the pea” story instead. The child will thus still move in status from peasant to princess as “The Tradition” wishes her to, but in a far less damaging way to all involved. However, both stories are still standard variants. Pratchett uses standard variants as well — but a few times one of the witches, usually Granny Weatherwax, makes note that there are other variations of the tales than those presented.

18 When Pratchett’s fairy godmother throws a toymaker in jail because he only makes toys (and does not whistle, or tell stories) we laugh, but are also reminded of narrative expectation and the way in which those roles may be binding. Maria Tatar argues “protagonists of the tales are often schematised or reduced to their function within the plot” (quoted in Sellers, 9), and this is true of characters in both Pratchett and Lackey. Lackey’s character Elena is aware that as a young woman she has very few options within the tales available, and even within her world at large. And it is true that though men are impacted by fairy tales, it is the women that both Pratchett and Lackey focus on because it is the women who have fewer choices, and who are easier to dispatch in curtailed ways.

19 Richard Bradford uses the familiar structure of fairy tale to make a point about stylistics when he argues,

a folktale in which the princess kidnaps her father, the King, in the hope of eliciting a ransom from the villain would be dismissed as absurd because it distorts the usual realm of possibilities within the social-familial network of roles and functions in the non-fictional world.  
(54)

This is just one example of many where the strict and traditional order of fairy tales can be used to startle its readers. Fantasy too uses this element of surprise, and as both Pratchett and Lackey work

within both these traditions this element of surprise can come from several different expected outcomes. Although not stretching to quite to the extreme Bradford goes, Pratchett and Lackey both disrupt the ordered, and the expected, and in doing so cause the reader to examine their expectations as well.

20 Pratchett's approach allows the fairy tales to be examined from within, highlighting the disadvantaged. Pratchett's witches discuss the "Little Red Ridinghood" story,

It's all right if there's woodcutters! One of them rushes in [...]" "That's only what children get told [...]" "Anyway, that's no good to the grandmother, is it? She's already *been* et!" "I always hated that story," said Nanny. "No-one ever cares what happens to poor defenceless old women. (122)

As Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg have both pointed out, it is often women, and sometimes elderly women, who bear the brunt of the fairy tale. Perhaps young Little Red Ridinghood herself is given a happy ending, but what *about* the grandmother? This recognition, this seeing the other side of the tale, runs throughout both Pratchett and Lackey's stories.

21 This is an interesting play on the theme of stories coming alive, something which has become more common in recent years. In the children's book *The Great Good Thing* (2001) by Roderik Townley for example, the characters of a story book are alive within it, for instance, needing to dash from page to page in order to be in position for their next scene. There it is a literal 'seeing the other side', but Pratchett and Lackey approach similar questions from a different angle. There is a focus on highlighting the usually less important members of a story in all of these books. Pratchett does that multiple times throughout *Witches Abroad*, such as when the witches encounter the wolf from "Little Red Ridinghood", and Lackey does it to a lesser extent by focusing on the suitors who must die for a Ladderlocks, or the parents that lose their daughter at sixteen to be a Princess bride.

22 Donald Hasse and others have focused on female re-tellings, or revisions of traditional fairy tales in an effort to discover (or perhaps, re-discover) how women have subverted a male dominated tradition for hundreds of years. Elizabeth Wanning Harries argues that "Fairy tales provide scripts for living, but they can also inspire resistance to those scripts and in turn, to other apparently predetermined patterns" (103). This, though specifically applied to female feminist retellings, strikes me as exactly what Pratchett is doing. Feminist examinations of fairy tale have been prevalent since the 1970's, and fairy tales themselves have changed in that time. Perhaps it is time to examine them from both sides of the gender spectrum. As the title of the book *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* humorously proclaims, Pratchett has taken on a number of literary conventions and, in his own unique way, punctured or played with many of them, creating literature out of humour and fun. In her introduction to *The Hard Facts of The Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Tatar argues that "The cast of folkloric characters is remarkably limited when compared to that of literature, and the plots in which the characters of folktales move unfold in a relatively uniform matter" (xvi). Thus Pratchett frees fairy tales from their traditionally constrained forms, and allows the characters outside their normative patterns.

Lackey too does this. Both create spaces for the characters to move in, and thus provide options for readers living outside of these stories as well.

23 Studies have shown that humour is an effective way of remembering, or signposting where attention should be paid. Comic moments abound in Pratchett, like when a house lands out of the blue on one of the witches, and she is shaken but not harmed; and the “bad” fairy godmother thinks, “Witches ought to be squashed when a farmhouse lands on them. Lilith knew that. All squashed, except for their boots sticking out. Sometimes she despaired. People just didn’t seem to be able to play their parts properly” (146). Lilith, and in turn the reader, know that this is the outcome from *The Wizard of Oz*, and thus an expected, and familiar, outcome. Andrew Butler argues that “we can begin to look at the Discworld as a secondary world which gives Pratchett a comic distance from reality in order to criticise the world of the everyday” (36). It is this comic distance, I argue, that separates Pratchett’s effort from Lackey. Lackey seems to have fallen short of the comedic with her use of the expected — she instead focuses on the happiness or tragedy of the stories. That is not to say that Pratchett’s look at stories is altogether humorous. Even though Pratchett is primarily known for his humour, he has also used it to convey serious messages. Perhaps humour is not always what Pratchett is using, maybe Brian Attebery’s argument about fantasy literature as a whole gives the key, “Fantasy is fundamentally playful — which does not mean that it is not serious. Its way of playing with symbols encourages the reader to see meaning as something unstable and elusive, rather than single and self-evident” (2). Both Pratchett and Lackey “play with symbols” and in doing so, cause the reader to question the stories that have surrounded us, often since birth.

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# Monstrous Women: Feminism in Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment*

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1 *Monstrous Regiment* by Terry Pratchett is part of his larger series of books called *Discworld*. Although part of a series, *Monstrous Regiment* can stand alone because of its seemingly isolated events concerning the small country of Borogravia, the war it is fighting, and the small batch of newest recruits joining the army. The matter of the female hero in *Monstrous Regiment* is complicated because of the convoluted actions that the women take in order to enlist in the army and then to carry out their plans. The theories of bisociation, the real, and simulation lead to a feminist conclusion. Each of these themes contributes to comedy and fantasy, which comment on western culture's establishment of gender and its treatment of women.

## Explication of Theories

2 Since *Monstrous Regiment* is both comedy and fantasy, the theories of bisociation, the real, and simulation work well in analyzing the feminist message. The theory of bisociation holds that there are two main plains of logical reactions to actions. When one action or saying interacts with another that seems unrelated and is unexpected, comedy may occur. This theory is laid out by Arthur Koestler in his work on comedy, *The Act of Creation*. Koestler makes it clear that comedy comes through an unexpected reaction that must be logical, though it does not need to adhere to the logical reaction we expect. Because the two different reactions — the one anticipated by the reader and the one actually provided by the character — are logical, the tension bursts, leading to comedy (Koestler 35).

3 The unanticipated reaction, because it does not follow the expected line of action and reaction, then forces the characters and situation to change accordingly, and this change in the plot can lead to further bisociation. "The higher forms of sustained humor, such as the satire or comic poem, do not rely on a single effect but on a series of minor explosions or a continuous state of mild amusement" (Koestler 37). In *Monstrous Regiment*, this phenomenon occurs as certain scenes include a series of minor bisociations which carry the comedy throughout the novel. [1]

4 Jacques Lacan's theory of the real is applied to certain key points within the plot, since it is recognized that both comedy and fantasy can hide the real while at the same time revealing it for the reader. The real consists of the impossible and dangerous, causing great anxiety for those who contemplate its possibility:

To the extent that a dream may get to the point of entering the order of anxiety, and that a drawing nigh of the ultimate real is experienced, we find ourselves present at this imaginary decomposition which is only the revelation of the normal component parts of perception. (Lacan 166)

Although the real may exist within one's perception, the occurrence in the real does not yet have a name and it is not recognized — it does not exist in 'the symbolic' which encompasses those actions and ideas that do have names and are recognized by people.

5 The theory of simulacra applies to *Monstrous Regiment* because a simulacrum is the copy of an item. As an exact copy, the imitation can be confused with the original and can even take the place of the original object. Simulacra are seen throughout *Monstrous Regiment*, and it is this simulacrum that also adds to the comedy. Gilles Deleuze says that simulacra produce an effect, and the different effects are seen throughout *Monstrous Regiment*. Deleuze posits that "[t]he simulacrum is not a degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates both original and copy, both model and reproduction" (53). This positive power of the simulacrum negating the original and the copy is also seen within the novel. Thus, the simulacra in the novel create new, original gender expectations, especially for women. For each of the major scenes and instances throughout *Monstrous Regiment*, first the areas of bisociation will be analyzed, then the real will be critiqued as it is constructed as a result of the bisociation. The simulacra are analyzed in conjunction with bisociation and the real because the simulacra contribute to the comedy and challenge of gender stereotypes.

6 The theories of simulation, Lacan's the real, and bisociation are present in Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment* — it is this combination that generates the humor. *Monstrous Regiment* follows the story of Polly and the other recruits who join the Borogravian army and serve under Sergeant Jackrum. They disguise themselves as men so they may join the army in order to accomplish their own personal goals. As Polly and the recruits begin their journey across their country of Borogravia to join the rest of the military, their gender is discovered by Jackrum, who helps them to hide their identities. Along the way, they are set upon by a group of enemy cavalymen, whom they defeat, and they initiate an attack on a small band of enemy soldiers, whom they also defeat. Their ultimate success comes when Polly and the recruits disguise themselves once again — this time as washerwomen. They sneak into the Keep and take it back from the enemy. Tired of maintaining their different disguises, they reveal their true identities to their officers, whom they discover are also women disguised as men. Despite their successes in battle, Polly and the recruits are treated like silly women by being sent home with girly uniforms and orders to continue working female jobs. Polly and Maladicta — one of the recruits who is also a vampire — decide to remain in the army as soldiers. Though now they dress in girly uniforms, they are still intent on bringing equality to the women of Borogravia.

7 Although Polly does not discover Jackrum's identity until the end of the novel, Jackrum is also a female disguised as a man. Because Jackrum remains in her/his disguise throughout the novel, the novel uses male pronouns for Jackrum. Therefore, in this paper, I will also refer to Jackrum with male pronouns. I will, however, refer to Polly and the other recruits using female pronouns because readers and other characters learn very quickly that they are actually female and think and speak in terms that reflect their dual presentations of female and male.

### **When Jackrum helps Polly disguise her identity**

8 When applying bisociation to the scene when Jackrum helps Polly disguise her female self, one notices that Jackrum provides the unexpected reaction which leads to comedy. Jackrum adds humor to the situation of being surrounded by women yet continuing to refer to them as his “little lads” as he tells Polly:

‘Still, I said I’d look after you. You are my little lads, I said.’ His eyes gleamed. ‘And you still are, even if the world’s turned upside down. I’ll just have to hope, Miss Perks [Polly], that you picked up a few tricks from ol’ Sarge, although I reckon you can think of a few of your own’.  
(Pratchett, *Monstrous* 258)

9 The real, here, is the fact that someone who knows about a woman disguised as a man will sometimes help her and not always disclose her identity. Jackrum does this as he keeps Polly’s identity a secret. Indeed, Polly wonders why Jackrum would keep her secret. He surreptitiously tells her to use socks as a way to fill her britches, making it appear as if she had a penis. The idea of another man helping her is disquieting, because she does not know if he has some kind of malicious intent. The same suspicion is also raised in the reader who may even prepare for a harsh revelation of Polly’s identity. The idea that anyone would help a woman maintain her disguise in an exclusively male environment goes against hegemonic cultural standards Pratchett uses as a background for the narrative. The fact that Jackrum keeps her secret without any pleading by Polly adds to the unsettling feeling and questions about his intentions.

10 Here, the simulation of Polly’s imitation of a young man is shattered because at least one person — Jackrum — knows her identity. But the key here that adds to the comedy is the fact that Jackrum is willing to help Polly continue this simulation — to make her imitation of a young man even more convincing so that no one would be able to tell that Oliver Perks is really Polly Perks. In the first part of the novel, one may also wonder how much Colonel Strappi knows. Has Strappi recognized Polly and the other recruits as women? Strappi even messes up her name when Polly is pretending to shave her face with a blunt razor: “What d’you think you’re doing, Private Parts?” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 36). With such a mistake, it is once again made clear to Polly that the one main difference that distinguishes her from a male soldier are her private parts. More comedy is introduced by this observation because socks aside, Polly is not an exact simulation of a male soldier. This fact arises in the issue surrounding the act of going to the bathroom: “In short, with care and attention to detail, she’d found that a woman could pee standing up” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 33). Regardless, this clever tactic of Polly’s still is not enough because the idea of a woman getting away with her disguise in an army full of men is unrealistic: the soldiers sleep, bathe, and change clothing together. Although Polly and the recruits manage to get away with their impersonations in their small, ragtag army, it appears that a number of the male characters, and even some readers, may assert that male and masculine impersonations would not succeed in an actual army.

11 Nevertheless, it is evident that her impersonations help her to an extent. Elisabeth Rose Gruner analyzes the education that Polly instinctively uses: “she discovers, learning, like working as a

witch, mostly seems to mean keeping her eyes open” (“Teach” 225). Polly keeps her eyes open and learns how to act as a man by observing men before she begins her journey: “She watched how they [boys] moved, she listened to the rhythm of what passed, among boys, for conversation, she’d noted how they punched one another in greeting” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 57). Even after she joins the regiment, she continues observing the men around her, at first not realizing that she is actually copying females who are also imitating males. Thus, more humor is added when she copies supposedly masculine behavior by women disguised as men.

### **When Polly and the recruits dress up as men**

12 Much of the bisociation is caused by knowing that these women pretending to be men are completing ‘typically male actions’ in the army, which for them includes being physically rough and cussing. When Polly and Corporal Strappi spar, everyone expects Strappi to win. The bisociation appears when people do not expect Polly to outwit Strappi exactly by pretending to fight like an inexperienced swordsman. Later, when the recruits ready themselves to leave camp to move on to their next stop, they are set upon by a group of enemy cavalymen. One would not expect the recruits to fight, but to surrender. Instead, comedy occurs when they struggle against the cavalymen and succeed by dressing as women and using unconventional weapons.

13 These instances point to the main bisociation of gender that provides the humor. Many characters may expect the women to attempt these missions, but to fail as both soldiers and as men. The fact that the recruits are actually successful in their endeavors by using feminine tactics of warfare, including wielding pots and pans as weapons, and thus manage to triumph over their enemy adds humor to the story. Nevertheless, this humorous element also reflects misogyny in the fact that the women are successful as soldiers when they employ those feminine actions in battle: fighting with pots and pans instead of swords, and even wearing dresses instead of the soldier’s uniform. Some of the recruits let their feminine actions and ways slip through their disguises, which heightens the comedy and adds to the bisociation. The feminine actions enable Polly to discover that the recruits are also women. Even Polly, though conscious to maintain her disguise, slips in her masculine portrayal under pressure when she has to prepare the tea for Blouse and an enemy officer they just captured by saying “Oh, *sugar!*” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 162). This feminine statement in its allusion to the housewife who bakes and has a sweet tooth and is a substitute for cursing escapes her lips and reveals the delicate balance between her masculine and feminine roles. However, Jackrum completes the bisociation for her by telling her where the sugar is: “Just down there, in the old black tin” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 162).

14 Jackrum intensifies the bisociation by telling Polly and the other recruits that their being females does not bother him: “Can’t do anything, can I? You were born like it” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 254). He could not help it that they were born female, and he would not gain anything by telling on them. Here, Jackrum refers to their natural state as women, pointing out an obvious fact: these women

had no choice in the sex they were born with. Likewise, they also had no control over the rules, laws, and conventions of society that influenced them as they matured. Amanda Cockrell, in anticipating the reader's reactions, writes

Ah, this is parody, we think, we know the parodied material, so we know where this is going—just as expected, only with a pie in the face. But one of the things that Pratchett also likes to do is stand fantastic convention on its head, so that parody departs from source material and takes on a deeper, more substantial life of its own. (7)

The reader may recognize that *Monstrous Regiment* is full of parody, yet Pratchett uses this to challenge readers' expectations. Jackrum acknowledges that the army should be open to women as they could not help their sex at birth or the cultural conventions. While Jackrum laments that he could not have any of his famous feats as herself, as a woman, both she and Polly recognize that Borogravia needs this easing-in period of women disguised as men in order to begin the process of change.

15 Jackrum encourages the young recruits because he recognizes that they have what it takes to be soldiers. Elisabeth Rose Gruner, in writing about the messages that fantasy literature sends to children regarding education states that “[e]ach child, in the tradition of hero stories, finds one or more mentors who to some extent help to direct his or her education” (“Teach” 219). Also in writing about education, Janet Brennan Croft observes a trend typified by Pratchett's Tiffany Aching and Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*, which can be applied to the women in *Monstrous Regiment*: “Responding to a calling in the blood, Tiffany and Hermione both recognize that the opportunity to gain knowledge is the opportunity to gain power—power to control their environments, to chart their own courses in the world, and to protect those they care for” (“Education” 129-130). Both Jackrum and the recruits recognize that education means power. Here, education is not limited to book and school knowledge, but it is expanded to include training as men on the field and in battle. This training is important, because Jackrum helps these recruits, who are already performing well, in becoming soldiers. Jackrum — a woman who has spent at least twenty years as a man and surrounded by men — asserts that these recruits “were better than men at being like men” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 379).

16 Croft comments on the links between education and a girl dressing as a boy in order to achieve the education she desires:

And in stories where girls disguise themselves as boys to get an education, we can see young people taking the initiative to tailor their education to their own needs, attempting with various degrees of success to bypass gender/education/power issues altogether. (“Education” 140)

The women in the regiment decide which education they need. Not only is there the political and cultural influences that women have to contend with as they defy the limitations placed on them, but religion also needs to be taken into account. Cockrell observes that “Pratchett's take on religion, organized and otherwise, like his take on most things that human beings can devise, is screamingly funny and bone-chillingly serious at the same time” (3). The combination of comedy and seriousness is reflected in the holy book for the people of Borogravia. The Book of Nuggan includes the various abominations against their god: such as women dressing in men's clothing and women learning how

to write. These taboos show how questionable some religious practices can be, especially those relating to women. Polly and the recruits challenge Nuggan and the book of abominations: "Rather, they [the characters] engage, directly or indirectly, with religion as a cultural force. Both take seriously the threat posed by unquestioning belief in the unseen, in a truth beyond knowing expressed especially in religious texts" (Gruner, "Wrestling" 278). The abominations are questioned and challenged, especially by the women who flaunt them. In doing so, the women contribute more actions which lead to more bisociations.

17 By analyzing religion in Pratchett's Discworld, Gruner observes: "Pratchett, by working outside the constraints of religious language and overtly religious (especially Christian) narrative, more subtly empowers his heroine to wrestle successfully with religion itself" ("Wrestling" 291). The struggle with religious mandates is evident in Polly's desire to find a middle ground for women so that they do not have to be seen as entirely lowly women or entirely celestial, perfect beings.

18 In these instances, the simulation morphs into women masquerading as men. Their simulation is wavering — it is no longer perfect and convincing. After all, Polly and the recruits have found out one another, which introduces a different aspect of simulation: the simulation is so similar and identical to the original that it can be mistaken for the original. But then the simulation changes and becomes its own entity. The women, by imitating men and then by allowing certain feminine qualities to mesh with their masculine fronts, create something different from male or female. They create a warrior woman who is not ashamed of her clean language, ability to cook, and sometimes irrepressible giggles. Despite the traits that are stereotypically associated with women that the females allow to seep into their simulations, they manage to perform their missions better than the actual male soldiers who could not capture the Keep. Also, we can even assert that stereotypical feminine traits may be irrelevant in regards to whether they are successful or not, because their success appears to depend largely on using logic and not on using traditional feminine or masculine traits.

19 These instances point to the real in Lacanian terms, which is something that can be true but which some people may have trouble accepting. In this case, the real posits the idea that 'women can make better men.' Polly and the recruits demonstrate that while they are female, they are just as capable (if not more so) than men, when it comes to fighting and ending a war. Qualities stereotypically associated with females slip through their disguises. The stereotypes of male and female actions both enable and complicate gender imitation because some people recognize that these are stereotypes and should not be held to, whereas others adhere to them. If feminine actions can taint the behavior by the recruits but not hinder them, then this means that gender — masculine and feminine — is unimportant when it comes to ending a war. Nevertheless, these women still retain some of the feminine behaviors.

### **When Blouse dresses up as a woman**

20 Up to this point, the bisociations have occurred with the women disguised as men; however, bisociation is also present in the reverse situation. The scene where Blouse disguises himself as a woman illustrates the perversity of stereotypes. Polly's idea for infiltrating the Keep consists of her dressing as a washerwoman and entering through the lightly guarded servants' entrance. However, Blouse decides that he will complete this task because he tells Polly and the other recruits that they act too much like boys:

'But, y'know, a good officer keeps an eye on his men and I have to say that I've noticed in you, in *all* of you, little...habits, perfectly normal, nothing to worry about, like the occasional deep exploration of a nostril maybe, and a tendency to grin after passing wind, a natural boyish inclination to, ahem, scratch your...your selves in public...that sort of thing. These are the kind of little details that'd give you away in a trice and tell any observer that you were a man in women's clothing, believe me'. (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 238)

Therefore, he dresses up as a washerwoman, giving himself large breasts. He continues this performance as he joins the other washerwomen walking to the entrance. Later, Polly learns that Blouse has no trouble persuading the guards: Blouse speaks in falsetto, swings his hips, says what a silly girl he was for forgetting his work papers, and bursts into tears. This performance gets him into the castle without a problem — the guards do not suspect that this washerwoman who fulfills all the feminine stereotypes is actually a man.

21 There are several small bisociations that interact in order to create the larger bisociation of Blouse's female disguise. When Polly voices her idea of dressing up as washerwomen, she expects some argument from Blouse and Jackrum, but she believes that with some persuasion, they will allow her to try. Therefore, the comedy arises when Blouse tells Polly that she acts too much like a boy and that she has not grown into a refined man. The farting, belching, and scratching that Polly and the others have been doing in order to persuade Blouse and Jackrum that they are male is now backfiring. Acting as refined young men may not have been enough to cover their femaleness, so they went to extremes. This excess of young, inappropriate male behavior then convinces Blouse that they would not make convincing women. His reaction creates comedy, which is heightened as the reader knows that Polly and the other recruits should make the best representations of women simply because they are women. The dramatic irony here, which is reminiscent of Shakespeare and *Twelfth Night*, creates humor because the readers already know about the gender-associations and assignments by now.

22 Nevertheless, when Blouse executes his plan to enter the Keep as a washerwoman, Polly does not expect him to succeed because of his exaggerated feminine actions. However, overacting and over-performing gender seems to be the key to a successful gender performance. The comedy of bisociation occurs once again as Polly learns that the soldiers fall for Blouse's disguise. A man who speaks in falsetto, wears a ridiculous wig, swings his hips exaggeratedly, and bursts into tears should not be able to persuade anyone that he is a she. One would think that anyone could see through the disguise. But the guards believe it because it is easier for them to apply stereotypes and



generalizations to women than to accept the fact that true women exhibit different behaviors and mannerisms.

23 This combination of the bisociations — recruits making unbelievable women and Blouse succeeding in his female disguise — point to the real, which is the fact that men can make ‘better women’ than women, and can fool the men. Sometimes men can perform femininity better than women. This also indicates that men have delineated the stereotypes and expectations for women. Indeed, women have not set forth their own actions and claimed them as female. Instead, the men of a patriarchy have decided which actions to label as feminine, expecting women to fulfill them. Polly’s behavior asserts that no actions are inherently feminine or masculine, but assigned to these sexes in order to maintain some semblance of control and distinction. Without clear behaviors designated as masculine or feminine, one could posit that culture would fall apart. If there were no clear actions for women, then they could end up completing actions previously regarded as masculine. If there are no distinct labels, then the characters could even have difficulty distinguishing if someone were a man or a woman. The real is that only a few sexual differences distinguish men from women, and this threatens male dominance.

24 The simulation of a man impersonating a woman is supposed to be comical, especially because of the extremes he will go through in order to make a convincing woman. This resembles some instances of drag because Blouse gets distracted in the act of being a washerwoman: he becomes popular among the other washerwomen who recognize that he is a man. He teaches the women how to iron correctly, and he even agrees to an assignation with one of the enemy officers. Nevertheless, the simulation of a man imitating a woman likewise causes problems of gender and identity. Blouse’s getting through security in his gendered disguise consequently enables him to demonstrate how a woman ought to act. The patriarchal codes of conduct for women are then demonstrated in order to show them exactly what men want and expect. According to Blouse and the soldiers who fall for his disguise, men desire women to adhere to a certain physical type — never minding the fact that not all women are endowed with large breasts and hips for swaying. Some men also desire women to be so gentle and fragile that they burst into tears. The fact that Blouse poses as a washerwoman indicates that some men see women as fit for only certain chores such as washing and ironing clothing.

### **When Polly and the recruits dress up as women**

25 More bisociations are created in the scenes that reflect Blouse’s cross dressing when the female recruits disguise themselves as washerwomen. The recruits reverse the damsel in distress trope when they believe that something has happened to Blouse and that they have to enter the Keep in order to save him and continue their mission. In order to save the male damsel in distress, they give up their male disguises as soldiers and dress as women. The narrator and the characters are careful to say that they dress up and disguise themselves, because these women are not simply putting on their former female selves. For one thing, they have to steal their dresses and costumes from a brothel

because they do not have any feminine clothing with them. As young men, these women did not need women's clothing; therefore, such garments were left behind. Once they obtain the ill-fitting clothing, they dress themselves to ensure that they look more like women. Polly and the others encounter the problem of their hair, for they cut it short in order to pass as boys. Polly further struggles with the issue of physicality: her small breasts enable her to pass as a boy, but can hinder her disguise as the dress she wears was made for a woman with more cleavage. The irony comes when Polly uses the socks, which were previously used as a penis, as fake breasts.

26 These women's female disguises lead to an outrageous bisociation: the women expect to pass the guards without any problems, but they are stopped, pulled aside for questioning, and then criticized as men impersonating women:

'Gentlemen, let's not mess about, shall we? You walk wrong. We do *watch*, you know. You walk wrong and you stand wrong. You,' he pointed to Tonker, 'have got a bit of shaving soap under one ear. And you, lad, are either deformed or you've tried the old trick of sticking a pair of socks down your undershirt'. (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 278)

The humor in the bisociation increases when the soldier accuses Polly of misshapen breasts, which give her away supposedly as a young man. With the collapse of gender constructions, there is nothing else left for the women to prove themselves besides revealing their female sex. The revealing of cleavage and breasts is not adequate as Polly's sock implants suggest; therefore, Shufti, the pregnant woman, lifts up her dress to reveal her sex to the soldier. That the women have to revert to such primitive and basic ways of distinguishing themselves from men attests to the real that the only difference between men and women is in the genitals and in becoming pregnant — apparently, having breasts simply is not enough evidence to establish that a female is in fact female. The idea that the physical differences are the only ones that matter — they allow one to distinguish between a male and female for biological purposes — add to the real presented about gender: women dress up as women because women are not inherently women.

27 The simulation of a woman dressing up as a woman refers to the impossible image of a woman. A simulation can certainly be an imperfect imitation, which is what the women are when they have long hair, wear dresses, and perform womanly chores such as cleaning and cooking. As women simulate women, they mock the idea of womanhood set up by the patriarchy, because they cannot perfectly imitate the ideal woman. Since the simulation of a woman falls apart, the imitation of women disintegrates as well, especially since a woman should know how to act like a woman. Whether or not she tries to impersonate a woman, she will fail for there will be some degree of masculinity in her.

### **When Polly and the recruits reveal their sexuality**

28 Even more bisociations occur once the women are in the keep and reveal their true identities. After Polly and the recruits have been successful in capturing the Keep, there is a bit of confusion as to their gender: if they are men dressed as women, then job well done. But if they are women who accomplished this feat, then they are in trouble. These women know that there could be several

consequences for them if their officers learn that they impersonated men and that they really are women. The male disguises have worked thus far; therefore, there is no reason to believe that they would admit that they are women, but they do. Another instance occurs when the recruits are put on trial before the officers, where there ensues a confusing, convoluted discussion about men dressing as women, women dressing as men, and women dressing as women. The confusing conversation itself adds to the bisociation because such matters as cross dressing and gender apparently cannot be discussed in a logical, easy-to-follow manner. More comedy enters when Polly and the recruits have the chance to take back their assertion that they are indeed female. If they assert that they are men dressed as women then they can remain in the army. Yet if they verify their female sex, then the army will treat them as women and demote them from being in a male army.

29 Their revelation helps bring about the end of the war sooner, and the women are used as mascots as they are sent with the white flag and notice of surrender to the enemy. Polly sees through the celebration to realize that they have been treated as women, even by some of the other women. One treatment of women that Polly is all too familiar with is the idea of womanhood being temporary: once the war ends, she is no longer needed. This fleeting status of being merely temporary soldiers is reflected in the uniforms that are designed for them as females:

The uniforms that had been made for them had a special, additional quality that could only be called...girly. They had more braid, they were better tailored, and they had a long skirt with a bustle rather than trousers. The shakos had plumes too. (Pratchett 386)

The uniform with its braid, bustle, and plume, is constructed as visibly girly or feminine and values looks over practicality as it is intended to make it difficult for the women to walk, run, and fight.

30 She continues to reflect on her uniform — the outfit she would wear if she tried to earn women more rights — “Her tunic had a sergeant’s stripes. It had been a joke. A sergeant of women. The world had been turned upside down, after all....But maybe, when the world turns upside down, you can turn a joke upside down, too” (Pratchett, *Monstrous* 386). Yes, she had been jeered at and had been made to feel small, insignificant, and embarrassed, but she, as a woman, has the strength to overcome sexism. By continuing to take herself seriously, and even by taking the joke seriously by wearing it, she can prove to men and women alike that a woman does not have to pretend to be a male soldier in order to be respected; instead, she can be a female soldier and receive the respect that she rightfully deserves.

### **When we learn that the officers are women**

31 Until this point, the bisociations have been limited to Polly, the recruits, and Lieutenant Blouse. The bisociations concerning gender have not exactly affected anyone besides them. However, in the scene where we learn that most of the officers are women, the bisociation expands, making it clear that the comedy, the real, and the simulations affect everyone. Many of the officers of Borogravia are women and they too reveal their gender identities. The ignorance of the female officers attests to the real that women enjoy the thought of being the only one: the only woman in the army, the only woman

disguised as a man and getting away with it. Therefore, these officers enjoyed thinking that they were the only ones.

32 Women become men because it is recognized that, “women’s work gets far less respect and it is considered illegal for a woman to own property, inherit a business, etc.” (Croft, “Education” 131). The fact that women’s work garners little respect inspires these women to abandon womanly items and become men so they may enjoy at least some of the rights and privileges reserved for men only. Since it is illegal for women to perform certain actions, own property, and inherit a business, these women then devise ways to maneuver around these limitations. These laws and the masculine women who transcend them send the message that if a woman desires to be more than a dolt, wife, mother, or prostitute, she must leave behind her womanly self and masquerade as a male. She cannot have the equal freedoms of education, choice of vocation, and respect as a woman while wearing a dress and acting like a woman, even if she does possess and demonstrate more masculine qualities. The fact that everyone can see her as a woman automatically places limits — both religious and societal — upon her.

### **Conclusion**

33 Pratchett provides an essay that includes his thoughts about Discworld:

For what Discworld is, more than anything else, is...logical. Relentlessly, solidly logical. The reason it is fantasy is that it is logical about the wrong things, about those parts of human experience where, by tacit agreement, we don’t use logic because it doesn’t work properly. On Discworld all metaphors are potentially real, all figures of speech have a way of becoming more than words. (“Imaginary” 160)

Because Discworld still uses logic through alternate experiences, metaphors, and figures of speech, humor and bisociation occur. The logic of women dressing as men works temporarily, because the recruits defend themselves in small skirmishes, and other women become officers. Beyond a short time period, however, the logic of women disguised as men falls apart because it is impossible to continue such a disguise and to continue to promote women as men. Therefore, the patriarchal society needs to reevaluate the treatment of its women as women.

34 The comical idea of women disguising themselves to enlist in the army turns into a serious and poignant commentary on Western society. The theories of bisociation, Lacan’s the real, and simulation aid in analyzing the commentary on women present in *Monstrous Regiment*. Bisociation — the intersection of two actions that lead to comedy — reveals the comedic in gender assumptions and differences. Nevertheless, this comedy brings the issue of feminine gender to the forefront. By making gender stereotypes prominent throughout the novel, Pratchett puts the real into stark contrast with the symbolic. One example of the real occurs when the women disguise themselves as men, because the symbolic maintains that women would not dress as men, join the army, and in actuality make better men and soldiers than the actual men and soldiers themselves. The theory of simulation pervades the novel, and it also bolsters the two previous theories of bisociation and the real. Each instance of a woman imitating a man is a simulation of a man. This simulation leads to the comedy that is analyzed

throughout bisociation, and it also supports the feminist analysis. The two main simulations present throughout the novel and analyzed previously allude to the facts that the imitation of a man (a woman pretending to be a man) and the imitation of a woman (a man pretending to be a woman) are often more believable than the original. Once again, this leads to comedy.

35 Gideon Haberkorn observes that: "As the Discworld and its inhabitants have evolved and changed and gained complexity, lighthearted ridicule has often given way to serious reinvention" (322-323). The reinvention of women and their roles in society can influence the reader to reflect upon his or her own society and how women are treated. Although it is mainly assumed that women in Western society have already gained freedoms such as voting, education, and careers, the text questions the extent of these achievements. The text shows that women have come a long way in society, yet work can still be done toward equality. Caroline Webb points out that Pratchett "invite[s] the child reader to recognize and critique the conventions of story as they reflect and shape the conventions of society, and especially to resist the constraints such conventions place on their own agency and development of individual identity" (160). Pratchett invites not only the child reader, but the teen and the adult reader as well, to recognize the conventions in society: how women are treated in society and what women can do to challenge these conventions. As a comic fantasy, *Monstrous Regiment* certainly offers a critique of culture that must be analyzed by readers and critics alike.

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## Notes

1) Bisociation has been previously used by Thomas Scholz to discuss the construction of comedy concerning the zombies and vampires in the Discworld novels.

# "Some Genetics Are Passed on Via the Soul:" The Curious Case of Susan Sto-Helit

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1 The idea for this essay can be traced back to the fact that no female heroes seem to have impressed Gideon Haberkorn enough to be discussed in "Cultural Palimpsests: Terry Pratchett's New Fantasy Heroes" (2008), although he claims that he will examine Pratchett's revision of the modern fantasy hero, who undergoes "a complete and thorough reinvention" (319). While he admits that Pratchett has created a number of new protagonists and links the witches of Lancre to the social and literary discourses on witches rather than on heroism, all he has to say about Susan Sto-Helit is that this character interacts with the discourse of the fantasy hero in a complicated way, which he does not elaborate on as it "cannot be adequately worked out in a paragraph, or a footnote (see, therefore, note 8)" (330). In order to prove that Pratchett's heroes are indeed palimpsests, since the creative process resembles the original meaning of the word, that is "a parchment, tablet, or other portion of writing material that has been used twice or three times after the earlier writing has been erased" (Webster's 1625), Haberkorn gives an overview of the concept of the hero in general and that of the modern fantasy hero in particular.

2 According to Haberkorn, heroes, as folk models of the ideal member of a given society, embody and defend its most important values, which, understandably, change with time. He argues that Pratchett first scraped clean the surface of the cultural discourse on heroes and then superimposed his own version of the modern fantasy hero (323). Haberkorn traces back this figure to a small group of characters: Robert E. Howard's Conan of Cimmeria, J. R. R. Tolkien's Frodo, Aragorn, Sam, and even Gollum, and he also includes Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser among the select few (333). If persistent enough, one might find out from the above-mentioned note 8 that his sole explanation for excluding Susan from the article is that she is "hardly part of this particular evolution" (336). Bearing in mind the fact that Susan saves the world in all three novels she is featured in (*Soul Music*, *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*), I would like to argue for her rightful place among Pratchett's new fantasy heroes. Her character is all the more relevant as she fits Haberkorn's definition of Pratchett's palimpsests on several points, given that the "reinscriptions both reflect and contribute to the cultural discourse on heroes" (319).

3 Even a brief examination of Haberkorn's section on "Heroes and the Cultural Discourse" reveals several archetypal elements that in one form or other went into the construction of Susan's character: i) "the hero embodies part of the social unconscious to tell society what's on its mind," ii) "the hero establishes himself in the external world by taking a place that is rightfully his. He steps into a rank he was meant for, was in fact born for," iii) "the hero is an individual who, faced with a situation, deals with it in a way that displays abilities a society prizes" and iv) the hero's adventure is "one of

mending the self, and the world: the hero's adventure is one of healing, for he and his world are wounded and in pain" (321). Replace the masculine pronouns with the feminine version and these statements are all true of Susan Sto-Helit. And what can be more pertinent to Susan's self-reflexivity than this: v) "heroes are not just a site of the cultural discourse on heroism; they are interpreters and performers of that discourse, they help shape it, and they can change it" (320).

4        Haberkorn goes on to demonstrate how Pratchett first ridicules and subverts the idea of the modern fantasy hero via the cowardly wizard, Rincewind and ancient Cohen, the barbarian. On the other hand, he claims that the two characters who are unmistakable heirs to the hero tradition and interact with the hero discourse are Carrot Ironfounder'sson, heir to the throne of Ankh-Morpork, living in disguise, and Sam Vimes, captain of the City Watch (330-2). Haberkorn's insightful analysis of these characters brings to the forefront Pratchett's rejection of stereotypical patterns and his invention of new ones, which he classifies as "political in a broader sense" (333). He sums up the method as follows: Pratchett creates heroic palimpsests that interact with the tradition by means of repetition, amplification, or repudiation, while the earlier inscriptions can still be detected (334). This leaves one wondering how Susan Sto-Helit could have been disregarded, whose relevance will be demonstrated by a detailed analysis of her character and her role on Discworld.

5        Our first glimpse of Susan is in *Soul Music* through the eyes of the headmistress of the Quirm College for Young Ladies: as a sixteen-year-old academically brilliant at the things she liked doing, such as Logic and Maths, "there was something frankly unlovable about the child. [...] she was brilliant in the same way that diamond is brilliant, all edges and chilliness" (11). Her most striking characteristic is her pure white hair with a single black streak, which defies the school regulation of two plaits by itself and stands on end, giving her the appearance of "a dandelion on the point of telling the time" (20). The personality traits Susan demonstrates even before her ancestry is revealed stand in stark contrast with those expected of a teenage girl: to the great surprise of the headmistress she does not cry when her parents die, "she didn't usually worry about what anyone thought" (14), she is often angry "at the sheer stupidity of the world" (21), and she hates Literature but is good at any kind of sports played with a stick of some sorts that needs swinging (56). Susan knows her own mind, is self-reliant but lonely, living on the periphery of the boarding school community due to the uncannily noiseless way she moves and to her ability to fade from attention and be invisible in situations she wants to avoid.

6        It is clear from the very beginning that Pratchett aims to subvert the traditional figure of the 'teenage heroine,' pretty, naive and romantically inclined, and yet, Susan's plotline is that of a bildungsroman. She, however, is armed with sarcasm when confronted with the choice of following the skeletal rat or going back to bed. The former

would be a stupid thing to do. Sappy people in books did that sort of thing. They ended up in some idiot world with goblins and feeble-minded talking animals. And they were such sad, wet girls. They always let things *happen* to them, without making any *effort*.



They just went around saying things like ‘My goodness me,’ when it was obvious that any sensible human being could get the place properly organized. (*Soul Music* 49)

Susan’s sense of duty prevails and decides to follow the Death of Rats to sort out a world that holds “too much fluffy thinking” (49), in other words, suffers from a lack of logic. While her parents did their utmost to minimize the influence of the occult in her world to counterbalance her ancestry, Susan has to learn the difference between real and logical in a crash course when she inherits the family business from her grandfather, the anthropomorphic representation of Death, who seems to suffer from depression and goes missing.

7 Discworld runs on magic, which has significant impact on the power of belief in a world with low reality stability. Human belief created the figure of the seven-foot-tall skeleton in a black robe, who takes a special interest in humans and one day went as far as to adopt an orphaned baby and allowed her to live in his domain. In *Mort*, Pratchett reveals that Death’s adopted daughter Ysabell has inherited the ability to do her father’s duty and this trait and more is passed down to Susan, too, who is irresistibly steered towards her grandfather’s role, since on Discworld “belief makes a hollow place. Something has to roll in to fill it” (*Soul Music* 70). It does not take very long, however, for Susan to express her dissatisfaction with the system: “So ... my grandfather was Death, and he just let nature take its course? When he could have done some good? That’s *stupid*” (107), she states after freeing the second soul from his body.

8 Her third assignment takes her to Ankh-Morpork to the Mended Drum, where the life of a musician is supposed to end. However, the life of Imp the bard (a.k.a. Buddy) is altered by the gods in a very similar fashion to Susan’s, in order to fulfil his promise to be the greatest musician ever: at the moment of his death his soul is taken over by Music, leaving a perplexed Susan with the certainty that it was she who was supposed to save the boy. While it is not difficult to spot the intentional reversal of roles – girl on white horse rides out to save boy who turns into a sleeping beauty by the end of the novel unless on stage and performing – Pratchett continues to challenge more than fairy-tale stereotypes in the parallel stories of Imp and Susan.

9 Devoting a little time now and then to teenager pastimes, such as hating one’s boring name, complaining of hair and cheekbones, experimenting with one’s image and creating the black dress decorated with lace that will be her attire whenever she appears as Death’s granddaughter, Susan, “much more *aware* of the world” than the people who “went through it with their eyes shut and their brains set to ‘simmer’” (*Soul Music* 111-2), makes grand plans. Confronting her grandfather about his reluctance to change the world and make it a better place, then disregarding his warning that the responsibility for the change is too heavy to bear, she decides to do justice: “She’d save lives. The good could be spared, and the bad could die young. It would all balance up, too.” The idealism of youth, however, is tempered by her core characteristic, sensibility: “But of course it’d be childish [...] to think that she could go in waving the scythe like a magic wand and turn the world into a better place overnight. It might take some time. So she should start in a small way and work up” (186).

10 As soon as Susan finds her purpose and starts exploring her power as Death, her attitude to conflicts and confrontations changes dramatically. Whereas she previously used to fade, wait till people forgot about her then slip away, she is now more than ready to take on the challenges the saving of Imp y Celyn presents and is exasperated by the position of insignificance girls are relegated to in traditional societies. She is first mistaken for one of the Tooth Fairy girls by the Archchancellor of Unseen University, whose patronizing attitude she flatly refuses, and then the student wizards further question her identity as Death. Worst of all, Imp himself does not take seriously her warning that the mysterious guitar has taken him over, declaring he will not take lessons from a tooth fairy and she probably does not exist anyway, leaving Susan temporarily speechless. Yet, she is adamant she is not “some stupid girl who couldn’t cope” (*Soul Music* 130) and as one of the very few people who are not intimidated by Death himself, she defies his order, partly to “show him” and partly because of her conviction of being right, which in her mind overrules the danger: “As for responsibility, well ... humans always made changes. That was what being human was all about” (186).

11 In “The Education of a Witch: Tiffany Aching, Hermione Granger, and Gendered Magic in Discworld and Potterworld,” Janet Brennan Croft describes Ankh-Morpork as becoming not only multi-cultural but also experiencing an infiltration of women into traditionally male institutions such as the City Watch and into new fields such as the newspaper and clacks businesses. She cites Susan as an example, stating “even Death himself has a female apprentice” (132) and assigns this role to her in all the three novels she appears in. This is certainly the case in *Soul Music*, as she has a lot to learn, remember and come to terms with, but it is not only the arrogance of youth that makes her say “What did he [Death] know about anything? He’d never *lived*” (*Soul Music* 188). Susan has a valid point, one that in the end will make all the difference, but not before she experiences utter helplessness in the face of the mythical force of the Music: “I can’t stop it! It’s not *fair!* [...] What’s the good of being Death if you have to obey idiot rules all the time?” (364).

12 Luckily, grandfather Death is back in time to help out. He knows how to stop the music but he cannot start it again, which will result in the termination of the universe. Imp y Celyn is the one who can play the right chord but not without Susan’s help. By the end of the novel he ought to have died at least three times, and as it is made clear in the finale, the Music itself wanted him dead in the carriage accident and be remembered as the greatest musician of all. While Death is able to offer immortality in his domain and an unchangeable existence, like that of his servant Albert’s, Susan has a different power: she is able to give life, since life can be shared, and thus her disobedience turns out to be a blessing in disguise. Or it might be regarded as a perfectly logical consequence of her ability to remember everything, even the future – though her human mind rebels and protects her and she only glimpses it in dreams, premonitions and feelings – coupled with her humanity. It is this extra dimension, that Death, indeed, does not possess, that gives Susan a unique perspective on Discworld and a role complementary to her grandfather’s. She is an apprentice in *Soul Music*, but Croft is wrong to automatically extend this subordinate position to Susan’s role in *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*.

13 Besides the successful saving of the world, the end of *Soul Music* is also Susan's rite of passage. Over the course of the novel, she understands the reason why she is different and grows into herself. When confronted by the headmistress on her midnight return to the college, she stops herself from fading, as "there was no need for that. There had *never* been a need for that" (373), and gives the teacher a warm and friendly smile – emotions hardly characteristic of her dealings with humans up to then. But the hardest part comes in the loneliness of the dorm. Susan, who "could *think* sad thoughts" (308) when watching her parents die in the carriage accident but, surprisingly, felt nothing, now sobs for a long time as "there was a lot of catching up to do" (375). Her grandfather understands her predicament: Susan, who led a suspended life, as if in a limbo before the arrival of the Death of Rats, now needs to make a choice between immortality and humanity.

14 As it transpires from *Hogfather*, Susan opted for a normal life on Discworld. She distances herself from her occult ancestry and at the age of eighteen, we see her trying to persuade herself she is making good progress, as "she could go for *days* now without feeling anything other than entirely human" (105). She is a governess, taking practically the only job a known lady can expect to do, and despite her initial pride in "holding down a Real Job" (14), seventy pages later Susan admits it is not regarded as a proper job at all: "it was merely a way of passing the time until you did what every girl, or gel, was supposed to do in life, i.e., marry some man. It was understood that you were playing" (87). Nevertheless, while in *Soul Music* she was characterised by a kind of absence in the 'normal' world of the boarding school, Susan has a more mature presence now: no longer the fuzzy dandelion, her hair knots itself in a prim bun and she is well-respected by all the local monsters and the Unseen University wizards as well.

15 Susan works hard at being normal and is "looking forward to a real life, where normal things happen" (*Hogfather* 103), she also declares she hates her superior senses as they ruin one's life (92) but goes to the undead bar, Biers, when "the pressure of being normal got too much" (77). Her hostility towards her grandfather is also difficult to understand after their friendly parting at the end of *Soul Music*, though Susan's reluctance to sit on Death's horse Binky gives a clue as to the difficulty of her position: "I'll be out of the light and into the world beyond this one. I'll fall off the tightrope" (*Hogfather* 118). She finds immortality so easy in contrast but is aware of the danger that each time she rides the horse brings closer "the day when you could never get off and never forget" (261). With this in mind, no wonder Susan finds what initially seems to be no more than Death's Hogswatch prank exasperating.

16 Death, however, knows his granddaughter's mind and what buttons to push: relying on her sense of duty, curiosity and expressly forbidding her to try and find out what is going on is the infallible way to get Susan's attention. Death deliberately creates a situation very similar to the one his disappearance in *Soul Music* had inadvertently caused, with the aim of ensuring they are on the same team against the Auditors of reality, who want to eliminate humanity due to life's irregular nature compared to the law-abiding cosmos. He resorts to manipulation in order to break through Susan's

armour of normality because he needs her help: the Hogfather, a very significant focus of human belief, is none other than the old god of the winter solstice and he is under attack. If there is not enough belief in the Hogfather, the sun will fail to rise, and it falls to Susan to physically protect him from the Auditors, who want to steal his soul because in this case Death is powerless, as “THIS IS A HUMAN THING” (*Hogfather* 410).

17 Susan’s pivotal role in *Hogfather* is not restricted to the scene above: her quest to find out what happened to the Hogfather takes her to the realm of the Tooth Fairy, where she is left to her own resources, as death does not exist in a world conceived by children and therefore, her grandfather cannot enter. By means of ancient magic involving the carefully collected teeth of generations and generations, it is in the Tooth Fairy’s castle that the belief in the Hogfather is under attack, according to a plan devised by insane but all the more dangerous assassin, Teatime. On top of this, Susan experiences another drawback: upon entering, her talents inherited from her grandfather are also cancelled out.

She couldn’t step behind time, she couldn’t fade into the background and now even her hair had let her down.

She was normal. Here, she was what she’d always wanted to be.

Bloody, bloody damn. (377)

18 Nevertheless, Susan has to face and stop Teatime as he has millions of children and adults under control and her only ally is the Tooth Fairy’s tower itself, which scares the attackers to death, exploiting their own worst childhood memory. But the tower has no power over Teatime, whose warped mind constitutes a nightmare by itself, so it is Susan’s turn to try her hand at psychological warfare. This is a completely new aspect of the character, one she cannot have inherited from Death, as he “didn’t know many things about the human psyche” (426) and tends to misinterpret even relatively simple everyday communication. It is, however, very close if not identical to the Discworld witches’ favourite weapon named ‘headology’ by the most skilful witch, Granny Weatherwax. By introducing this trait, Pratchett creates a link between Susan and gendered magic. The parallel is also strengthened by Susan’s purpose, as “being a witch is all about doing for those who can’t and speaking for those who have no voices” (Croft, “The Education of a Witch” 134).

19 Even though Susan’s learning process continues in *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*, there are several factors that point at her autonomy versus her position as Death’s apprentice. Firstly, in *Soul Music* Susan almost instinctively does what she feels is right and has no idea that her help is instrumental in saving the world, whereas in *Hogfather* it is her astute detective work that takes her to the castle of the Tooth Fairy. In this case it is her decision to face Teatime to avert disaster and she knows that the whole world’s tomorrow is at risk while protecting the Hogfather, though she still finds it hard to believe. Secondly, in *Hogfather* she performs tasks that Death cannot accomplish, as mentioned above, and in *Thief of Time* she is expressly asked by her grandfather to help fight the Auditors because “YOUR INSIGHT IS VALUABLE, YOU HAVE WAYS OF THINKING THAT WILL BE USEFUL. YOU CAN GO WHERE I CANNOT. I HAVE ONLY SEEN THE FUTURE, BUT YOU CAN CHANGE IT” (109). And last but not least,

she has skills unrelated to Death's powers: a keen analytical mind in human matters as well and a great grasp of psychology – completely alien to the young Susan in *Soul Music* but in *Thief of Time* successfully tested against someone as experienced as Nanny Ogg.

20 It is in *Thief of Time* that Pratchett discusses in more detail the nature of Susan's existence, described very briefly as mostly human by the Auditors in *Hogfather*. Up to this point, she is a unique Discworld character due to the combination of two halves of a powerful dichotomy: human and immortal, because "some genetics are passed on via the soul" (*Thief of Time* 94), providing her with an understanding of both worlds. This peculiar perspective allows her to "see things that were really there," which is "much harder than seeing things that *aren't* there" (103-4), but also makes relating to people problematic for her. While in *Hogfather*, she still complains of young men scared off by her hair rearranging itself, here she admits that she finds disconcerting that a tiny part of her considers people "as a temporary collection of atoms that would not be around in another few decades" (104). Therefore, it is not difficult to understand her interest in Lobsang Ludd, the son of a human and the anthropomorphic personification of Time, described by Death as mostly mortal, just like herself.

21 Susan, a few years older, has discarded the grey and dull "protective coloration" (*Hogfather* 426) of her governess attire and is now teaching school, with hair in a tight bun, all in black, cool and calm, moving like a tiger. "Young, but with an indefinable air of age about her" (*Thief of Time* 33), she is much more accepting of her heritage and shows more wisdom when using her skills. This time she is not tricked into helping, and yet, she feels she cannot completely trust her grandfather, since "he knew her weaknesses and he could wind her up and send her out into the world" (125), so her anger flares up again: "you're planning something and you're not even going to tell me, right?" (226). Pratchett uses the same dynamics to get Susan involved, although this time she is more than aware of the danger the Auditors pose: there is curiosity, a mystery to solve and, incidentally, the future of the world to save, or it would be Wednesday, 1 o'clock for eternity. One might think that she overreacts, considering the importance of the task she is given, but I believe her anger is more directed, on the one hand, at a situation that she cannot control, and on the other hand, towards her grandfather, who is able to keep secrets from her and treat her as if she was completely normal.

22 Although she still often wishes "she'd been born completely human and wholly normal" (*Thief of Time* 220), Susan does not like to lose her powers, and despite being described earlier as never showing embarrassment at *anything* by the headteacher, she finds it disconcerting how Nanny Ogg's "friendly little eyes could bore into yours" (230). As Pratchett and Briggs explain in *The New Discworld Companion*, the edge witch's job is more than herb gardens, medical potions and flying on a broomstick, as it involves the hard task of making decisions instead of the ordinary people living on their territories (274). Due to the fact that the edge witch's work is done "in that moment when boundary conditions apply – between life and death, light and dark, good and evil and, most dangerously of all, today and tomorrow" (19), Susan, whose very existence combines the first of these dichotomies and can disregard some of the others at will, has more in common with the plump old

woman as she would first think. Nanny Ogg, who perceives her as a “haughty little miss” with “a heap of trouble of her own” (333), is also impressed with her astuteness, and in the battle of wits Susan is the winner. She shows respect for the witch and does not use Death’s commanding Voice on her to get the information she needs, as she did more than once in *Hogfather*. Susan reads her right: “there was, indeed, no way round Mrs Ogg. But there was another way [...]. It went straight through the heart” (233). Susan understands the significance of Nanny Ogg’s work and moral code, and her use of headology ultimately pays off.

23 Pratchett, however, endows this “slightly built young woman,” who by the events of *Thief of Time* has become a striking presence – “Miss Susan faded into the foreground. She stood out. Everything she stood in front of became nothing more than background” (288) – with physical prowess matching that of the heroes of old. In *Soul Music*, she prevents a cart with two trolls, a human and a dwarf in it from falling into the precipice, in *Hogfather* she slings the Oh God of Hangovers over her shoulder and runs to save him through the collapsing Castle of Bones, she is also able to ride a wild boar in a furious chase and by simply thrusting out her arm, palm first, lifts Teatime off his feet and over the rails in the Tooth Fairy’s Castle. The inverted rescue theme stays with Susan in *Thief of Time* as well, as she has to see Lobsang to safety in Auditor-infested Ankh-Morpork, where she loses her special powers yet again but, luckily, her close combat skills remain.

24 What may have started as a humorous inversion of roles in *Soul Music* though not regarded by Andrew M. Butler in *The Pocket Essentials Terry Pratchett* as revolutionary in any way based on his observation that “Susan doesn’t come across so much as Death in drag as a half-hearted Goth” (48), has evolved into a complex character who displays an incongruous array of qualities, traditionally branded as gender-specific. Susan, in fact, is a great example of Pratchett’s aim, defined by Frances Donovan in “Was Terry Pratchett a Feminist?” as revealing “the absurdity of the cultural expectations of femininity while portraying the very real strength and value of women who buck those expectations” (Frances n.p.). Susan’s build, style, passion for quality chocolate and way with children are definitely regarded as feminine qualities, while her physical strength, fearlessness, prowess with sword and keen analytical mind are traditionally considered masculine characteristics. Pratchett is composing a palimpsest here, but one that overturns both Roundworld and Discworld gender stereotypes. Susan’s fate does not mirror that of Pratchett’s most well-known adolescent heroine, Tiffany Aching, the young witch whose story follows the much more predictable pattern of a talented girl educated by older witches. While Tiffany loses her childish belief in magic and learns the rules she needs to practice witchcraft (Haberkorn and Reinhardt 54), her talent and gender are not questioned the way Susan’s are. What is more, with the introduction of Myria LeJean, Auditor recently in possession of a human body, Pratchett also examines the bare bones of human existence, both physical and psychological, further challenging our concept of normalcy.

25 In my view, Pratchett’s exploration of what makes us human can be traced back to the figure of Death, who is fascinated by humans, and cannot but be, as he explains in *Reaper Man*: “ALL THINGS

THAT ARE, ARE OURS. BUT WE MUST CARE. FOR IF WE DO NOT CARE, WE DO NOT EXIST. IF WE DO NOT EXIST, THEN THERE IS NOTHING BUT BLIND OBLIVION" (264). In *Thief of Time*, Death elaborates on how being envisaged by humans inevitably entails taking on some aspects of humanity: "EVEN THE VERY BODY SHAPE FORCES UPON OUR MINDS A CERTAIN WAY OF OBSERVING THE UNIVERSE. WE PICK UP HUMAN TRAITS" (110), which, on a personal level, led to his adoption of Ysabell, to be followed by the birth of Susan. On a larger scale, his attachment to Discworld means he is ready to protect it even at the cost of breaking the laws of his existence through 'meddling,' as pointed out by Susan at the end of *Soul Music*. "PERHAPS THEY'RE SOMETIMES ONLY GUIDELINES" (371), he claims, arguing that "SOMETIMES THE WORLD NEEDS CHANGING" (372), attracting the attention of the universe and, presumably that of Azrael, "the Great Attractor, the Death of Universes, the beginning and end of time" (*Reaper Man* 264). Or, as it is a voice only he hears, it may be his conscience – there are signs pointing at him having one – asking: "So you're a rebel, little Death? Against what?" (*Soul Music* 378). Lacking a snappy answer, Death ignores the question, but the point to be noticed here is the similarity between Susan's and her grandfather's attitude and actions, which alludes to where her rebellious gene comes from.

26 The investigation of what it means to be human quite predictably branches out into the character of Susan, who has a unique perspective on the matter. [1] Her learning process continues over the course of the three novels, and she realizes that logical thinking does not equal 'human' and attempting to hide or conform to society's ideas of normalcy does not do the trick either. In *Hogfather* she understands that "HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN, TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE" (422) and her grandfather also reveals that people need to believe in things that are not true, like the big lies that are called mercy, justice or duty in order for them to become true. In *Thief of Time* part of her lesson comes from Nanny Ogg: "seeing things a human shouldn't have to see makes us human" (333), while the other part is delivered by History Monk Wen, who chides her for clinging to logic, which theme again leads to the character of Myria LeJean.

27 Pratchett deconstructs human existence with the introduction of an Auditor incarnated, for whom even breathing and moving its muscles to walk is not a natural, instinctive process. Auditors deny individuality and are the most extreme believers in logic, as their minds do not allow for any other approach to the universe. Hence their loathing of anything living that will not conform to strict laws, so humanity and other sapient species are, naturally, their top target. Myria is an anomaly: an Auditor who finds life and the human body it inhabits intriguing and enjoyable, goes against all the beliefs its intellect held for billions of years, finally fighting its own kind side by side with Susan.

28 The juxtaposition and interaction of the two characters allows Susan to experience the absolute lack of normality and to witness the emergence of some of the building blocks of personhood in Myria, whose name comes from Epehebian 'myrios,' meaning innumerable. While Lobsang needs to adjust to immortality and the viewpoint of a god, Myria, re-named as Unity by a sympathetic Susan, has to do the exact opposite: her encyclopaedic mind finds the complexities of human existence confusing and impossible to grasp. Susan has the same sympathy for Lobsang and helps him along

the way because of her own difficulty accepting her ancestry but, surprisingly, in the course of the three novels she shows common characteristics with the Auditors as well. In *Soul Music*, she claims it is her duty to sort out a world that “held too much fluffy thinking” (49), while in *Hogfather* the Auditors state almost exactly the same: “We have a duty to rid the universe of sloppy thinking” (119). As a schoolgirl she never understood why her classmates were so infuriatingly unreasonable as not to pick her for teams though she “explained [...] how good she was, and demonstrated her skill, and pointed out just how stupid they were in not picking her” (*Soul Music* 57), logically but with as much social grace as Myria showed when claiming that Lu-Tze should be the one to sacrifice himself as he is old and does not have much time to live anyway.

29 Susan’s relationship with humans has changed a lot after her decision to choose humanity over immortality, but some of her character traits are not helping. Logic still intrudes, for instance, in her evaluation of Lobsang’s decision to go back and try to help his master, Lu-Tze, who was too slow to follow him when they had to race lightning to stop Jeremy from starting the glass clock. She calls Lobsang a hero in “the tone in which people say ‘You idiot,’” explaining that

‘Heroes have a very strange grasp of elementary maths [...]. If you’d smashed the clock *before* it struck, everything would have been fine. Now the world has stopped and we’ve been invaded and we’re probably all going to die, just because you stopped to help someone. I mean, very worthy and all that, but very, very ... human.’  
She used the word as if she meant it to mean ‘silly’. (*Thief of Time* 290)

At this point she even concedes that Lobsang is right when he sarcastically suggests she meant “cool calculating bastards” (290) are needed to save the world.

30 In some cases her analytical mind can also be a drawback and the sensibleness she was so proud of in *Soul Music* is later considered by part of her mind as “some kind of character flaw” (*Hogfather* 418), only to become a major one in *Thief of Time*, one she regrets as “it did not make you popular, or cheerful, and – this seemed to her to be the most unfair bit – it didn’t even make you *right*” (341). In *Hogfather*, she already possesses a tiny part, “the inner baby-sitter” (417) who watched, explained and analysed her actions and feelings, while she bandaged the Hogfather’s wounds and saw him metamorphose. In *Thief of Time*, this part seems to have already become dominant, as she continuously speaks to herself, analysing her experience of getting through the glass clock to Time’s glass castle, to Lobsang’s slight irritation. This section is remarkably similar to Myria’s analysis of the reactions and workings of her body and the way it is linked to her mind, drawing a further parallel between the Auditors and Susan, who comes to the conclusion that “the human soul without the anchor of the body would end up, eventually, as something like an Auditor.” The revelation that therefore Myria, “who was getting more firmly wrapped in flesh by the minute, was *something like a human*” (397, italics mine) follows, and Susan has to admit this definition fits not only Lobsang, who can materialise out of thin air, but also herself.

31 Susan, who has never felt completely at home in the human world, try as she might, seems far more normal when compared to Unity, who sadly concludes that “being human is incredibly difficult and cannot be mastered in one lifetime” (*Thief of Time* 408). Nevertheless, Susan also complains to



Wen, who in theory makes it “sound grand and simple,” of “a world that’s full of *complications*” (392) for the individual, betraying the insecurity of a human wrestling with the perspective of an immortal: even 800-year-old Lu-Tze, who has learned to read people and shows respect very sparingly, describes her as “a story that went back a very long way. [...] This was someone to treat with respect” (363). This, however, does not mean that Susan is always right, as she finds out at her own expense: the meaning of Wen’s cryptic answer “everything is as important as everything else” (392) dawns on her when she realizes that it is not a human trait to prioritise based on logic only. Susan’s heartache after losing Lobsang, the only person who shares her particular position in the world, makes her admit she was wrong in her assessment of a hero’s duty as superior to the individual’s needs and emotions, a statement only to be reiterated later by Lu-Tze, for emphasis.

32 Despite the covert similarities between Susan and the Auditors’ way of thinking, the strongest emotion she betrays in the course of the novels is anger so intensive that Lobsang is shocked and scared of her: “as if some secret place inside her boiled with wrath, and with the Auditors she let it out” (*Thief of Time* 322). This anger is directed at their ability to manipulate the human mind and the fact that as enemies of creativity they also cause people not to take responsibility or action. The battle she fights is for the good of humanity, something that is not at all on a typical Discworld hero’s mind, but is very much like the witches’ duty, whose moral standing is analysed in detail by Janet Brennan Croft in “Nice, Good, or Right: Faces of the Wise Woman in Terry Pratchett’s ‘Witches’ Novels.”

33 Even though in *Thief of Time* we see Susan pitting her wits against Nanny Ogg, their similarities have already been pointed out, and she does bear resemblance to the more reserved personality, self-assurance, practicality, uprightness and no-nonsense attitude of Granny Weatherwax, the Disc’s greatest witch. The witch’s calling, as summarized by Croft, “requires the strength to see the facts clearly and make the hard decisions that have to be made,” which also involves taking the consequences. It is a calling to try “to help the world go right” (“Nice, Good, or Right” 156), be it as trivial matters as solving family disputes in the village or as serious as protecting the Kingdom of Lancre from elvish invasion in *Lords and Ladies* or from vampires in *Carpe Jugulum*. The lessons in humanity that Susan learns bring her closer to the position of the ‘wise woman,’ since her analytical abilities and innate sense of what is right and wrong needed to be “tempered by an understanding of human nature,” something that characterises Pratchett’s good witches, according to Croft (“Nice, Good, or Right” 159).

34 The fact that Susan has common characteristics with the Auditors as well as the witches not only emphasises the duality of her position, but also sheds light on the anger burning inside her. The total incompatibility of the lynchpin of the witches’ moral code – the principle that they respect the individual as a moral agent and never ever treat them as an object (Croft, “Nice, Good, or Right” 161) – with the bodiless Auditors’ denial of individuality as a form of existence is a powerful source of conflict, one that Susan, too experiences. As pointed out by Croft, Granny Weatherwax faces a similar dilemma, since evil runs in her family and she secretly fears her ambition to be remembered as the

greatest witch might turn her evil, but she knows she has a choice: she is strong enough to tell the darkness within herself, “I’ve fought you every day of my life and you’ll get no victory now” (*Carpe Jugulum* 191, qtd. in “Nice, Good, or Right” 158).

35 In my view, the parallel between Granny Weatherwax and Susan helps understand the inner conflict of the latter: she, too subconsciously fights the darkness inside. Her claim that she has never been afraid of anything “not really *afraid*” (*Thief of Time* 388), but feels anger instead, confirms this, since the most powerful unleashing of her fury is in *Thief of Time* against the Auditors dissecting human existence. The fact that she feels anger whenever her humanity is threatened can also be interpreted as evidence, as well as her conscious and sometimes self-restrictive embracing of her own humanity in the course of the novels. As a result of the lessons learned in *Thief of Time*, Susan realizes that her emotions do not have to be completely repressed and ends up defining herself as “only *mostly* logical” (428) – while Pratchett turns the illogical woman/logical man stereotype upside down and inside out, making her illogicalness an acquired characteristic.

36 In conclusion, I would like to argue for Susan Sto-Helit’s status as a hero in her own right, as a character who deserves to be mentioned alongside Pratchett’s other new palimpsest fantasy heroes, identified as Vimes and Carrot by Haberkorn. Even though Susan’s sarcasm and inherited knowledge exclude a comparison with the sharp but naive Carrot, who is an idealist and sticks to the letter of the law, her character shares significant traits with Vimes, who fights his inner demons, as well. While Susan protects the Discworld from the Auditors, a darkness coming from outside, Vimes, Captain of the Ank-Morpork City Watch “knows about the dark side of humanity, and he sees it as his job to watch out for it, to keep it in” (Haberkorn 332). He is aware of the fact that there is a need for “a second line of defense, not outside but inside – a wall keeps human nature at bay, keeps the darkness in, reduces violence to the last resort” (332). Besides their healthy disrespect for authority, analytical abilities and the nose of a detective, Susan and Vimes have another, far more momentous thing in common: they both know that finding a solution does not necessarily mean playing by the rules. Susan becomes a hero through rebellion: Pratchett has created a female character whose traits and story challenge gender-related stereotypes, true to the warning he gave in a 1985 speech:

the fantasy world, in fact, is overdue for a visit from the Equal Opportunities people because, in the fantasy world, magic done by women is usually of poor quality, third-rate, negative stuff, while the wizards are usually cerebral, clever, powerful, and wise. (*A Slip of the Keyboard* 96)

What is more, he even makes sure that her very existence goes against a basic rule of human existence, mortality. Small wonder then that she rebels against unwritten, yet existential laws, such as death itself, in order to do the *right* thing.

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## Notes

1) Shortly after finding out about his ancestry, Lobsang Ludd becomes the new anthropomorphic representation of Time, since he turns out to be mostly immortal, not quite like Susan.

# *Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity, and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling* by R. Tyson Smith. United States: Duke University Press, 2014

by Morgan Daniels, Queen Mary, University of London & Arcadia University, London Center

1 R. Tyson Smith plays a dangerous game. This is because his new ethnography, *Fighting for Recognition*, takes in not one but two subjects which wreak havoc with participant observation: the world of professional wrestling and, broadly and hesitantly speaking, 'working class life'. That in documenting the latter one runs the risk of homogenising 'lived experience' – of being patronising – is evidenced not just in the great boom in reality television programmes since the 1990s, which rather demand such homogenisation for ultimate gawping benefit, but also, for example, the very well-intentioned Mass-Observation movement, Tom Harrison's strange anthropology of the British everyday, meaning pubs and dirty jokes and football pools. Wrestling, meanwhile, almost dares the observer to have a go at lifting the lid on its dirty secrets, to blow apart, finally, the sheer, audacious artifice of it all, safe in the knowledge that those dirty secrets have always been perfectly open at the same time. (The second autobiography by Mick Foley, once one of the foremost stars of mainstream, televised grappling, is entitled *Foley is Good: And the Real World is Faker than Wrestling*.) How can the writer or anthropologist or documentary filmmaker ever hope to do justice to a dupe so knowing, to a camp so high? One might as well write an exposé of pantomime.

2 A dangerous game, indeed! *Fighting for Recognition*, based upon two years of research at Rage, an independent wrestling outfit stationed in a suburb of New York City, could quite easily have said nothing new and done so offensively. But I want to say that, for the most part, Smith is successful. For one thing, he dismisses wrestling's "fakery" as basically unimportant, noting that wonder at popular storytelling, which is what we are dealing with, really, "distracts from other important meanings" immanent in sports entertainment. A "richer understanding of professional wrestling's representation", reckons Smith, "goes beyond form and content to consider effect: What, if anything, makes the story resonate? How does it transport you out of everyday life?" (2-3) More interesting than fakery is the interest in fakery, in that desire by the uninitiated to ask whether you know that wrestling is a ruse. And more interesting than that, for Smith, is the question of why, therefore, young men – nearly always men – bother: Why risk injury (or worse) and, because of the perceived fakery, ridicule in an insular world offering up so little in terms of obvious or immediate recognition? What type of identity-seeking is this?

3 It is this nearly always men that is important here, the 'point', if you will, of *Fighting for Recognition*, which frames pro wrestling as a means "of expressing, of working through, puzzles and paradoxes of contemporary manhood" (152). Central to Smith's argument is that in order to do masculinity – that is, to perform "caricatures of working-class masculinity" (94) – wrestlers must

“unlearn the rugged, individualistic habitus they have spent their lives being groomed into” (96). Intimacy is key. “When the intent to defeat or harm is removed,” he writes, “rolling around on a mat with other half-dressed men is a very tenuous exercise for men who pride themselves on their adherence to heterosexual ideals” (113). In wrestling, Smith insists, homophobia and homoeroticism quite readily come together.

4 Not just ‘gay’, is wrestling, but apparently effete, too: this masculinity-doing also demands leg shaving, the applying of makeup and regular sessions at tanning salons. What is more (and I think this is perhaps Smith’s most useful contribution), the emotional labour of – shall we say – pretending to fight is insistent upon softness and caring in order to work properly. Pro wrestling is empathic stuff: protection (of one’s opponent) and trust (in one’s opponent) are the watchwords, with lightness of touch the method for achieving the spectacle of hardness. “The primary physical technique for wrestling”, we learn, “is the development of a loose and light body. When both performers are malleable, pliable, and relaxed, moving as a synchronized couple is easier” (71). Even a wrestler’s handshake ends up oh-so-gentle. The additional twist, of course, is that nothing is manlier than being able to take pain. A hugely complicated type of identity-seeking, then, is the answer to my question: indie wrestling provides a (pretty secret) space for figuring out male bodily worth, something, the argument goes, provided increasingly less and less by paid work. “Western masculinity has never been untroubled” asserts Smith, following Tim Edwards’s lead in declaring it as crisis, not in one (147).

5 I agree. Yet I must express a concern. There is another tension, another contradiction running right through *Fighting for Recognition*, namely one between two quite different books: the text itself, i.e. the fairly ‘straight’ ethnography of a suburban independent wrestling promotion, and the text-that-might-have-been, hinted at in the author’s appendix explaining method. “Despite no longer being a big fan of [pro wrestling]”, Smith writes,

I could appreciate the appeal of being a wrestler. During my undergraduate years I took some drama classes and performed a large-scale production. I wholeheartedly endorse combining theater, physicality, and playfulness, things, I am afraid, that many men do not (unless intoxicated, of course). I still have the occasional fantasy of getting in the ring in front of a crowd. I know the character I would adopt (“the Mad Professor”), and I have thought of several promo lines, too (“I will school you!”). (161)

6 In the end Smith did not participate at any Rage event in a wrestling capacity, fearing, more than reasonably, severe injury. This is not my issue: I do not consider it imperative to take a metal chair to the head in order to write successfully about wrestling. That fantasy, however, is what gets me, that sporadic dream of being a wrestler, wherein I intuit important ramifications for writing per se. What I will try to say about writing per se is that it is implicated in any discussion of hegemonic masculinity in or as crisis.

7 Take another work of manly sporting ethnography, Loïc Wacquant’s *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2004). Here is a book which embraces the seduction of its subject: in fact,

says Wacquant, “boxing ‘makes sense’ as soon as one takes pains to get close enough to grasp it with one’s body”. (Note that Smith’s fears for his body, which I again stress were well-placed, prevented fuller participant observation. Once more, wrestling resists documentation.) The author’s chosen means of making sense of boxing’s making sense was through mixing “sociological analysis, ethnographic description, and literary evocation”, an experiment in writing that sees the last third of the book given over to a novella (7). The intention behind blurring the usually-segregated, Wacquant explains, was to allow the reader “to better grasp pugilistic things ‘in the concrete, as they are’ and to see boxers in motion” (8). This is in quite some contrast to *Fighting for Recognition*, which is straightforward (I feel too straightforward) ethnography: a chapter dedicated to ‘profiles’ of the Rage subjects leads to a further four thematic chapters, each ending with neat closing ‘summaries’. The author is not absent from the text – far from it: there is a photo over halfway into the text featuring Smith and the aforementioned Mick Foley backstage at a Rage show – but the author-cum-would-be-wrestler, the author with wild fantasies about performing, is nowhere to be seen. The effect is that very little of wrestling’s appeal is truly conveyed, and the cast and crew of Rage are rendered somewhat data-like. We do not see wrestlers “in motion”. *Fighting for Recognition* is just not very fun.

8 To do justice to boxing in writing, meanwhile, it is clear that Wacquant had to put in quite the performance. He grasped boxing with his body and, in attempting to relay that grasping on the page – how desperate does grasping sound? – collapsed ‘standard’ academic practice. This is why I ask: Where is the performance in *Fighting for Recognition*? It sounds like a trifling question, a concern merely with the cosmetic, but observe that Smith makes the connection himself between hegemonic masculinity and the politics of style, noting both the need for theatre and playfulness and also their being things, along with physicality, seldom combined by “many men”. (Of course there is a connection: as obvious as what I am saying is, being male affords one great privileges, and so does being a writer.) It is surely not overdoing it to say that writing eschewing performance runs a risk of reproducing that which it criticises.

9 But from where do these stylistic differences spring? In *Body & Soul*, Wacquant lets us in on a fieldnote expressing his unbridled joy in “simply participating”, such that the job of observing was now “secondary”. He continues: “I’m at the point where I’d gladly give up my studies and my research and all the rest to be able to stay here and box, to remain ‘one of the boys’.” Those studies, the “tutti frutti of academe”, had become “totally devoid of meaning and downright depressing, so dreary and dead” (4). In other words, the academically-reckless approach of *Body & Soul* is informed by the rather spectacular collapsing of Wacquant’s identity as a writer, researcher, whatever.

10 Smith has a different experience. He admits that, despite initial reservations, he came to embrace being known at Rage as “the book writer” because it gave him “a stable identity”, and it is this identity and its stableness which is my real concern. *Fighting for Recognition*, attitude-wise, is defined not by seduction but by practical problems (i.e. avoiding both the humdrum question of “fakery” and romanticising the less privileged, plus the physical risks entailed in a too-involved type of participant

observation), and by an aloofness, an outsidersness, something reaffirmed in the text by the uncomfortably frequent references to his studying for a PhD or being an academic (the “Mad Professor”? Really?), my point being that this is a response to the aforementioned traps built into writing ethnography of indie wrestling. I cannot blame Smith for slinking back into his writer’s shell. Quite the opposite. Yet if western masculinity is crisis then so is writing, I want to say, aware of how glib I sound, but equally aware that such awareness might possibly mean I am on to something.

### **Works Cited**

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# *Narrating Victimhood. Gender, Religion and the Making of Place in Post-War Croatia* by Michaela Schäuble. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014

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1 Ignoring any warnings of potential dangers that might lurk in the supra right wing and Eurosceptic Dalmatian hinterland, anthropologist Michaela Schäuble set out to explore the rural margin of the Croatian nation. For many months, the town of Sinj became the author's home, where she built close relationships with the locals. In comparison to many urban liberals, Sinj's inhabitants have made Croatia's violent history, marked by the Homeland War, the Communist past, and the Ottoman invasion, their personal trademark. Stuck in their pasts, the locals display pride in understanding themselves as victimized people – people that will always exist at the margins of political or economic power. Schäuble conducted the biggest part of her research in 2012, which means that Croatia had recently applied for membership in the European Union. The locals anticipated economic exploitation of their farmers if Croatia would fall under EU leadership. In general, the socio-economic situation in rural Dalmatia leaves much to be desired. The majority of the population is poor, with homemade produce providing an important source of income and being a necessity to bolster the kitchen table. As a result of their mistrust in contemporary political developments, Sinj's inhabitants revitalize conservative family values and local traditions, all of which idealize strict definitions of masculinity and femininity. In my opinion, the strength of Schäuble's work lies in uncovering the pitfalls of these gendered notions. The author paints a sad picture of the once oh-so sexy dandy soldier who bravely defended Croatia during the Homeland War. Today, his sex appeal is as good as gone. Instead, he is an aged veteran without hope or financial security. Sadly, he has turned into a mere mockery of masculine heroism. As a result, the rate of domestic violence and suicide in veteran families has risen tremendously in the postwar years. Women, on the other hand, are expected to provide psychological support both for the nation and their immediate families. Femininity means to embrace and live out the role of eternal self-sacrifice in the form of the mater dolorosa. Women's Marian identification represents the dignity and aesthetics in lamenting the loss of a child – in the case of Dalmatia's women, this equates to the loss of their sons who fell as soldiers. Hence, women embrace and reproduce the local's self-image of victimization.

2 In the first chapter, Schäuble illuminates the significance of the Sinjka Alka, a yearly tournament held in Sinj that celebrates the successful resistance against the Ottoman invasion in 1715. The Alka is a celebration of pure masculinity, underlining Croatian men's destiny to defend their nation. According to the legendary tale, the inhabitants of Sinj had a Marian painting in their possession, which assisted them in fighting against the Turkish invaders. As legend has it, the painting came alive and a floating lady in a white dress appeared, causing the Ottomans to flee the battlegrounds. Ever since, the events of the past have been retold, modified, and translated all over



the world. Schäuble observes that the locals whole-heartedly believe in folkloric tales connected to Ottoman resistance; the Sinjka Alka celebration has turned into a mutually political and religious statement. As a strictly gendered event, men occupy the sphere of politics, representing their status as the nation's defenders, while women represent the spiritual side. Only men are allowed to re-enact the town's history in traditional dress and proudly ride the horses at the tournament. The reader learns from Schäuble's vivid depictions of the traditional festivities that the self-deprecating image of victimization has temporarily vanished when the reader looks at that open display of male excellence. Women, on the other hand, keep the image of victimhood alive. They openly pray at the Marian painting, exemplifying their close identification with the suffering of the Virgin Mother. Their expressive mode of worship, almost ritual-like, is not echoed by the cheering masses that accompany the men at the Alka tournament.

3 The notion of eternal female suffering finds its starkest expression in chapter two, "Marian Devotion in Times of War." Here, Schäuble depicts the life of Marija, who has literally become the embodiment of the *mater dolorosa*. Marija lives in Gala, a neighboring town of Sinj. In 1983, a few children witnessed a Marian apparition close to Marija's home; among these young seers was Marija's son Jurica. Under Communist rule, state authorities pressured the inhabitants to ignore what the children had witnessed. Marija, however, firmly believed in the apparition. Her religious devotion has strengthened even more since her son Jurica died in his thirties. In order to cope with his death, Marija identifies with the Virgin Mother who also lost her son at a young age. On a regular basis, Marija visits a nearby Marian statue. There, she prays and mourns for her son. On the way, Schäuble accompanies Marija. This is one of the first times in Schäuble's work where she shares her personal emotions with the reader, admitting that Marija's life has touched her deeply. Moreover, Schäuble gives the reader an intimate depiction of Marija's interaction with the statue: "Praying, for her, is a sensory and an aesthetic experience: the way she touches and caresses the statue conveys a deep love and connectedness" (114). Besides portraying an empathetic picture of Marija in this chapter, Schäuble manages to give a voice to the Marian apparition in Gala. Ever since 1983, this town has been ridiculed for believing in the children seers, which the author attributes to local competition for pilgrimage sites.

4 In chapter three, "Re-Visions of History through Landscape," Schäuble discusses Croatia's stark resistance to acknowledging wartime perpetrators, particularly in the right-wing circles of the Dalmatian hinterland. According to the locals, Croatia cannot be viewed as a nation of war crime committers since the country has always served its role as defender and not invader. Commemorative rituals that take place on massacre sites of the Homeland War where thousands of Croatians lost their lives underline Dalmatia's self-image of a victimized people. As the author demonstrates, in Sinj and its surroundings, the living hunt the dead and not vice versa. In other words, the dead are utilized as a political statement; their slaughtered bodies stand for Croatia's eternal suffering as an innocent people. In the right-wing circles, any allusions or hard evidence to wartime crimes committed by Croatian soldiers during the Homeland War, which incidentally became a crucial concern when Croatia

applied for EU membership, are viewed as an insult against the nation. On September 3 of 2005, Schäuble took part in the Mass for the Victims of the Communist Regime at one of the massacre sites. Here, she observes that the Franciscan minister overtakes more of a political role than a religious one. In his speech, he shows solidarity with former Homeland War generals Mirco Norac and Ante Gotovina, who were both convicted of wartime crimes. While men, like the Franciscan minister, commemorate the dead by utilizing their suffering for contemporary political purposes, women commemorate on an emotional level. They publicly act out their sorrow for Croatia's lost sons by gathering around the massacre sites, lamenting aloud, and thereby constituting a counter-image to male self-control.

5 In chapter four, "Of War Heroes, Martyrs and Invalids," Schäuble runs a call against the government's treatment of its veterans. She uncovers how indifferent the state reacts to the physical and psychological ailments of Homeland War's ex-combatants, resulting in almost no outreach programs in the rural areas of Dalmatia. Hence, the author comes to a deflating reality check: domestic violence and suicide are not uncommon among veterans in the rural regions. The younger men especially have little hope for a better future. Schäuble demands for the government to urgently provide support for these men and their families who also suffer from secondary wartime trauma. As the author demonstrates, the Mr. Clean image that many former soldiers enjoyed when they entered the Homeland War has left a bitter aftertaste, even feelings of guilt, due to the public discussions of wartime crimes committed by Croatians. While giving male veterans a voice, Schäuble also raises awareness for female ex-combatants. In contrast to men, their military contributions have never inspired the country to acknowledge women's heroism. In Dalmatia's strict gendered society, women are solely portrayed as worried brides and mothers during the war, while their husbands and sons serve the state. Still, these women deserve acknowledgement, especially in the form of state support in order to fight their wartime traumas.

6 "Mobilising Local Reserves" is the concluding chapter of Schäuble's work. The hinterland's Euroscepticism is the main focus here, which ties into the author's depiction of the veteran's negative view of the immediate future. Taking into consideration that the author conducted her research shortly before Croatia became a member of the European Union, Schäuble is able to give first-hand depictions of the locals' fears of exploitation. In that context, the author demonstrates that the inhabitants regard rural simplicity and the search for autonomy as powerful counter-images to urban neo-liberalism. They express their anti-European Union course by going as far as equating the EU to Yugoslavia in public campaigns. While rejecting any approximation with the EU, the locals emphasize their close connection to the Mediterranean. Schäuble views this identification "as a particular form of regionalism" (265), which helps the population to put a positive spin on their marginal position. In other words, relating to the Mediterranean offers a connection to the romanticized ancient Europe. This identification secures Western recognition, a recognition that does not need to be officially sealed with a membership of the European Union.

7 In sum, Schäuble delivers a well-rounded account of the Dalmatian hinterland and Sinj's inhabitants in particular. Her focus on victimhood and gender differences shed light on a marginal population who idealize their past and rely on their traditions as a safety net for an unpredictable future. The strong suit of her work lies in Schäuble's sensitive and non-judgemental approach of sharing the world views of the locals, whose right-wing and anti-liberal beliefs, as the authors openly admits, she does not share. Schäuble's detailed account highlights Croatia's multifaceted culture and its struggle to find a unified identity, an identity that is able to represent the country beyond its borders.