

Aspects of Humanity: The Discworld Novels of Terry Pratchett

by

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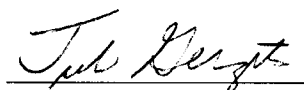
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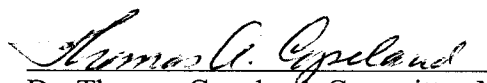
  
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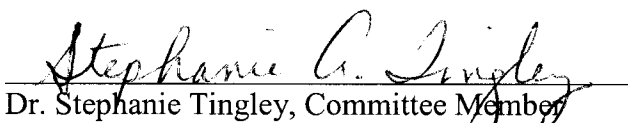
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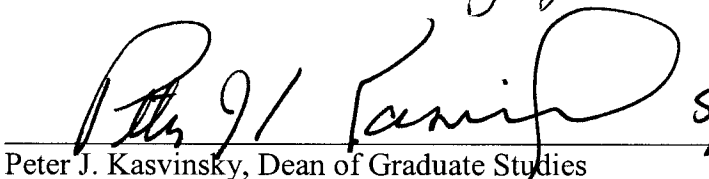
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### **Abstract**

Novelist Terry Pratchett is one of England's most popular living writers; he is recognized, by virtue of his Discworld novels, as one of the leading satirists working today. Despite this high praise, however, Pratchett receives relatively little critical attention. His work is fantasy and is often marginalized by academics—just like the rest of the genre. Pratchett has a tremendous following in England and a smaller but completely devoted fan base in the United States, not to mention enough readers all over the world to justify translation of his work into nearly thirty languages; yet, his popularity has not necessarily resulted in the respect that his writing deserves. However, there is considerable support for Pratchett's place in the literary canon, based on his use of satire and parody to treat major issues.

## **Aspects of Humanity: The Discworld Novels of Terry Pratchett**

### **Introduction**

Novelist Terry Pratchett is one of England's most popular living writers; he is recognized, by virtue of his Discworld novels, as one of the leading satirists working today. Despite this high praise, however, Pratchett receives relatively little critical attention. His work is fantasy and is often marginalized by academics—just like the rest of the genre. Pratchett has a tremendous following in England and a smaller but completely devoted fan base in the United States, not to mention enough readers all over the world to justify translation of his work into nearly thirty languages; yet, his popularity has not necessarily resulted in the critical respect that his writing deserves. Academia and mainstream media are prone to labeling: as Pratchett said in his Carnegie acceptance speech, “Recent Discworld novels have spun on such concerns as the nature of belief, politics and even journalistic freedom. But put in one lousy dragon and they call you a fantasy writer.” The fantasy label, in particular, has not traditionally mixed well with the literary one, carrying the connotation that anything bearing it ought not to be taken too seriously—even if the works in question demand knowledge of history, literature, and numerous other fields for full comprehension. Calling the same works parody only complicates matters; some fantasy fans don't like it when writers mess around with their genre.

The baffling and wonderful thing about the Discworld novels is that they are not simply fantasy, parody, or anything else, simply. In fact, “simple” is an astonishingly bad description of the Discworld novels, reaching a degree of inaccuracy seldom approached outside of elementary school history texts. The Discworld novels are nothing less than a

survey of humanism, in which each novel nonetheless stands out as legitimate fantasy, with questions of parody, satire, and literary form thrust completely aside. They are critiques of the genre, writes Andrew Butler, but the Discworld novels also play fair: they work as fantasy novels (10). Yet Pratchett's genius lies in his ability to package critical issues and ideas in such a way as to slide them past all of the mental and social barriers lately erected by social indoctrination in the minds of young (or not so terribly young) readers. In the past, parody has allowed authors to engage sensitive subjects "in a covert manner, where direct criticism might bring down censorship (or a libel suit) onto the parodist" (Rose 22).

This censorship can be internal or external. Blatant censorship still exists, although less brutally than in the Middle Ages; now and then a community will pull certain books from the school library, or even burn books deemed offensive, but burning the offending author has fallen out of vogue. More subtle is the censorship that comes from inside the reader's mind; readers have a tendency to shut down when faced with what they perceive as an attack on their beliefs. In the case of young readers, the twelve to twenty-two-year-olds who make up a large portion of his readership, these beliefs need not be strong or even well defined; directly approaching the cloud of impressions absorbed from parents, peers, and media in anything other than an attitude of agreement often triggers the construction of walls against new ideas. Evoking amused laughter lowers those barriers, and Pratchett is good at making people laugh. The protective coloration of fantasy is also useful in evading both kinds of censorship. Authorities respect hard facts, so writers who just go around making things up obviously cannot be serious threats, especially if they joke about it at the same time; ironically, when censors

do slither from the undergrowth, fantasy as a genre attracts the sort who are handy with the matches, as scattered burnings of Harry Potter books confirm.

The most sophisticated kind of parody does more than distort the original; it “involves the audiences and tradition of the literary work...” (Rose 53). In other words, it is intriguing to the reader for its own sake as an example of the kind of literature being parodied. It is fiction and metafiction at the same time. As parody and satire, the Discworld novels all function in more or less the same ways as each other; as fiction there are a few differences, although many elements remain the same. There are four distinct story arcs, dealing with four groups of characters: the Lancre Witches, the Ankh-Morpork City Watch, Death, and the wizards of the Unseen University. Pratchett admits that the Unseen University (Rincewind) novels are pure larks, while the other three groups tackle larger issues. The Lancre Witches novels contain large elements of mythology, folklore, and narrative theory; the City Watch novels stand out as a complex pageant of political and social satire; the Death novels approach humanity from the outside. In the end, even Rincewind has something to say about the way fiction works.

All of them deal with humanity, our common heritage, and our future—society as it has been, as it is, and as it perhaps ought to be.

As Pratchett would likely insist, the world is not a story. It is impossible to live well in the world, treating it as a story—if for no other reason than the other characters’ stubborn refusal to learn their lines properly. The hackneyed phrase “not on the same page” takes on new meaning when one realizes that other inhabitants of the world are not, perhaps, even in the same play as oneself. Food eaten in stories, insubstantial delicacies, does not sustain or nourish. Story-stuff cannot be taken for real, not without

consequences. In fairy tales, one starves on fairy-food. People who try to live life as a story likewise find no emotional sustenance, and their souls must wither, just like the bodies of any who try to live on the sweets offered by the fey.

Neither is it possible to live within a map. Even in the most magnificent masterpiece of the cartographer's art and science, the mountains cannot be climbed; never has the river been drawn, be it ever so skillfully done, that would provide a drink or a drowning, or indeed provide water for any purpose, good or ill.

Stories are our maps of the world. As long as we never forget that, stories remain, as ever they have been, our best tools for making sense of our lives. Toni Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, says that "stories are the most effective way knowledge is structured." They captivate our hearts and minds as no other device can do, ensuring the survival of our most valuable truths. Although we cannot live within the stories we tell, it may be that we cannot live entirely without them.

## The Lancre Witches

Symbols, stories, and fate. In the end, they are human creations, all of them. The Witches novels are about the frameworks with which human beings surround and catalogue their own knowledge of the world.

The Lancre Witches, Esmerelda Weatherwax, Gytha Ogg, Magrat Garlick, and Agnes Nitt, are characters who both use and fight the power of myth. All of the Discworld novels are metafictional to some extent, but Pratchett's premise of "narrative causality" shows up most strongly in the Witches story arc, partly because the witches are portrayed as being in tune with their world, and thus aware of the forces at work in it. On the Discworld, with its relationship to the tradition of epic fantasy and world mythology, stories work to control the lives of characters. There are hints that the stories are a semi-sentient, "parasitical life form" (*Witches Abroad* 9), feeding on people and events. More accurate, perhaps, is the idea that stories are a natural force, gathering around and molding lives into preferred shapes in much the same way as evolution might be said to select genetic traits (Kennedy).

Though the forces of narrative causality are at work in all the novels, the witches are different from other characters; even though Pratchett does not hesitate to satirize Wiccan stereotypes and all of the "old crone" conventions of second-rate fantasy pulp, the witches really are connected strongly with the Discworld. Granny is the best "borrower" ever to live, riding as a passenger in the minds of the Disc's creatures from time to time, sharing their experiences and repaying them for the privilege, usually by providing food or shelter. Nanny is a rural matriarch; her large extended family populates the tiny villages of the Ramtops. Magrat is an accomplished herbalist, whose knowledge



of healing plants can sometimes accomplish what even magic cannot. They, unlike most of the other characters, are aware of the operations of stories as a natural force; they are not necessarily aware that they are *in* a story, but they know that there are forces at work attempting to compel lives into certain shapes.

Discworld heroes dislike compulsion, on the whole. They're in favor of people making their own destinies. Even the happiest fairytales limit what is possible. Like the rest of the series, the Witches novels present a positive vision of humanity's capacity to resist the facile fates scripted for us.

Chapter One focuses on one very powerful myth, long used as a metaphor for feminine life: the triune goddess.

**Chapter One: The Maiden, the Mother, and the . . . Other One: The Goddess of  
Terry Pratchett**

*...tell me, are you a goddess or are you a mortal woman?*

—Homer

Whether goddess worship ever was the basis of a primitive culture, the concept of the goddess—especially in her three-fold embodiment as maiden, mother, and crone—certainly exists now for writers who want to explore human lives, especially with regard to gender roles. The witches of the Discworld, with the ghosts of immemorial myth and the newer spirits of Wiccan revival behind them, are both a part of an ancient literary tradition and a developing archetype that “makes visible to us the very depths of what is humanly possible...” (Ulanov, qtd. in Adler 41).

Research turns up no solid evidence of utopian matriarchies in recorded history, or much substantiation of the literal historicity of what Isaac Bonewits called “the Unitarian, Universalist, White Witchcult of Western Theosophical Britainy” (Adler 45). While many cultures in every era and many lands have practiced goddess worship in one form or another, the sociopolitical structure seems never actually to have been controlled by women; nor did ancient matriarchal religious traditions survive unadulterated and undiluted to the modern age. Thus the claims of invocation in Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess* are generally questioned by scholars who argue that the goddess-paradigm operates metaphorically rather than historically (Wood 22); in other words, stories about her are not a literal record of magic, or any one time and place, but a way of thinking about the common experiences of women and the force of belief in creation. In a 1960

postscript to his book, Graves writes that “no god at all can be proved to exist, but only belief in gods and the effects of such beliefs on worshippers” (490). It would be going too far to call fantasy authors worshippers, but they continue to elaborate on the Goddess’s story, which does affirm her presence in the world. Her story is a compelling force. Pratchett uses the triple goddess to explore the power of stories, and all of the roles an individual may play in the course of a lifetime.

The Goddess has persisted through history, making her presence felt all over the world. For long and long, myths, legends, and fairytales have been passed on by elders to teach those who come after, since the far distant time when our kind developed the capacity to plan. Even after literal belief faded, people continued to tell these stories, finding in them examples both negative and positive. The bloody nature of some earlier versions of supposedly familiar fairytales (mistakenly thought to be well-known)<sup>1</sup> supports this because they arose from and reflected the harsh realities of life in the past. Stories happen again and again, serving as inspirations—or warnings—every time. It works so well because, although people are capable of committing stupid acts, selfish acts, and now and again kind or beautiful acts, the entire catalogue of human behavior is somewhat repetitive. Within the normal scope of human behavior, and even in the depths of the distinctly abnormal, there are only so many possible actions. Our lives are palimpsests; the faint traces of the paths of earlier lives, real or fictitious, may evoke insight into our own.

Of course, few stories contain anything like explicit directions for living. Taken literally, many myths would be highly suspect: “...Goddesses [...] apparently got up to some very questionable tricks” (*Equal Rites* 26). Consider the Minotaur, for example. As

a cautionary tale about arrogance, it is very interesting; as a practical manual of animal husbandry, it is more than a little warped. Pratchett says that “mythology happens every day” (McCarty and McLaughlin, par. 25). This is certainly true in the sense that every day people experience anger, betrayal, longing, and love; in the sense that young women frequently fall prey to swans, bulls, satyrs, and showers of gold, probably not. So, literal interpretation is out; we are dealing with metaphors, which require more careful treatment.

One additional difficulty for scholars who want to trace the use of stories to interpret and store human experience is the mutability of some of the principal characters. The most significant figures in the pantheon were reasonably stable within cultures, but although trickster gods and moon goddesses have been a part of religious and literary traditions all over the world, there is significant variation from culture to culture; Loki, Coyote, and Hermes are not identical. The Goddess has worn multiple identities. One possible explanation for the occasional swapping of names or places in Greek myth, especially in regard to deities and their portfolios, is that there may have been several canons of Hellenistic religious doctrine rather than, for example, one widely accepted version as the King James Bible was until comparatively recent times. Another consideration is that gods and goddesses behaved like streams, emerging from some wellspring of belief somewhere to become distinct entities, splitting to form two or more individuals, sometimes flowing together once more, and picking up or dropping properties like sediment all the while. Sometimes another power—such as Isis or Cybele—from some other region joined the flow. These gods and goddesses shed, gained, and exchanged attributes with every permutation. Thus, a minor goddess in one

district might be completely different from another goddess of the same name in a neighboring district. This, of course, accounts for why sources sometimes differ when they list attributes for the three aspects of the goddess, one source including and another excluding motherhood, for example. One source, the Korê, consists of the mother and daughter pair Demeter and Persephone, sometimes called the Demeters; Persephone's revolving existence on the earth and in the kingdom below does provide a link to the cycle of birth, life, death, and new birth, but Persephone alone does not model all of the stages of human life. To include motherhood, Demeter must be part of the story. The Moirai, or Fates, fit the outer mold more truly: Klotho spins out human lives, Lakhesis measures their length, and Atropos cuts them off. But Klotho, nominally the maiden, brings lives into being; Lakhesis, although she measures the length of the lives Klotho spins out, is not particularly known for motherliness. Atropos, in keeping with the role of the crone, does see that these lives end properly. However, the Greek poets did not explicitly depict the three as youthful, matronly, and aged; these three goddesses are another variation in the pattern.

The tale of the triune goddess has taken different shapes over the many centuries but Pratchett has refined it into a story-shape so elegant that it may be, at last, the true shape of the myth. As Granny Weatherwax tells the elf Queen, people make their own gods, and "take 'em to bits for the parts when we don't need 'em anymore..." (*Lords and Ladies* 281). After thousands of years, during which innumerable storytellers have used stories as tools to examine the kaleidoscopic aspects of humanity, Pratchett and other modern fantasy authors have taken shards of the Goddess and assembled from them something wonderful, bringing this particular myth, if not to a logical conclusion, then to

a place of stability. As described by Pratchett and others, the triune goddess illuminates the pattern of feminine life with a soft but revealing light; his characterizations fit Everywoman just as surely as the crystal slipper fit Aschenputtel.

She is a moon goddess, with triple aspects. The most common names she has traveled under are Artemis, Selene, and Hecate. Connections are alluded to as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century in a French poem called *Des astres, des forêts* by Étienne Jodelle (1532-73). Jodelle was one of seven sixteenth-century French poets who called themselves La Pléiade; Jodelle's poems and plays often featured classical themes. Edith Hamilton, widely regarded as the first lady of myth, presents a memorable synthesis of earlier sources in her 1940 work *Mythology*. Hamilton wrote that Artemis is identified with Hecate in the later poets, and quotes a passage from one of them:

She is "the goddess with three forms," Selene in the sky, Artemis on earth, Hecate in the lower world and in the world above when it is wrapped in darkness. . . . She was associated with deeds of darkness, the Goddess of the Crossways, which were held to be ghostly places of evil magic. . . . It is a strange transformation from the lovely huntress flashing through the forest, from the moon making all beautiful with her light . . . (31-32)

This figure recurs frequently in modern fantasy fiction as Maiden, Mother, and Crone. In antiquity, Artemis was the virgin huntress; Selene was the fertile moon goddess; and Hecate was the dark personification of lightless, forsaken night.<sup>2</sup> However, as Pratchett claims, the treatment of the myth today is perhaps much more important than what has been done with it in the past. Although he is not the only author who might be considered a modern myth-maker, Pratchett's Discworld series contains one of

contemporary fantasy's most impressive presentations of the goddess myth today in the form of three witches: Magrat, Nanny Ogg, and the extraordinary Granny Weatherwax.

The Discworld witches are not cast in the maiden, mother, and crone mold in any superficial sense, but as Nanny Ogg explains to Agnes Nitt in *Carpe Jugulum*, "that ain't really important, because it ain't down to technicalities, see? Now me, I don't reckon I was ever a maiden ment'ly" (87). Karen Sayer observes that "There is an adherence to the (reproductive) pagan model of maiden, mother, crone, yet 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)" (97).

Magrat Garlick is the virginal figure, and her part is to learn and evolve. She has never walked where the elder two have, but she must grow into the roles she will later play. Magrat acts the part of the reader, asking the sometimes naive questions a reader might ask. Without Magrat, the elder two witches would have no one to teach, and teaching is a very important part of their purpose.

Nanny Ogg is the Mother of the trio: three times married, with fifteen living children and others among the dead. Her fertility is an important illustration of another concept vital to rural life: the continuance of the community. Her excesses of character further her outward image as the ultimate maternal figure. Her deep interest in men and sex, and even the "Hedgehog Song"<sup>3</sup> she sings after a few pint glasses of some liquor normally sold by the ounce are core manifestations of the fertility concept of which she is a symbol.

Esmerelda Weatherwax, or Granny as she is known in the Ramtops, is the most complicated personality in the group. Her proper place in the arrangement is to be the

crone, but in truth she is all three. She remains a maiden, but she acts as a mother to all of the people under her protection. They fear and respect her; they may mutter against her at times, but that is how children behave toward stern parents, no matter how loving they really are.

Jungian psychology indicates that these three characters are all aspects of the mother archetype. The goddess, even in her triune form, is in truth the ultimate mother of all things: she is everything that any woman can be. She embodies every function the female, or in some cases even the male, soul can perform in a lifetime. In his *Four Archetypes*, Jung refers to the Hindu goddess Kali, whom he calls the “loving and terrible mother” as an elaboration of the mother archetype. He invokes terms of Sankhya philosophy in his explanation: “the three *gunas* or fundamental attributes [of the mother archetype are] *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*: goodness, passion, and darkness. These are three essential aspects of the mother: her cherishing and nourishing goodness, her orgiastic emotionality, and Stygian depths” (16).

According to this system, we can call Magrat the incarnation of emotionality because she has not yet matured sufficiently to keep her impulses in check. This state pertains for her at least until *Carpe Jugulum*, wherein she and King Verence, whom she weds in *Lords and Ladies*, have a baby daughter. Clearly, she is no longer technically a maiden, although she is not as experienced as Nanny Ogg and thus does not fully represent the mother aspect of the trio. In *Lords and Ladies*, Agnes Nitt makes her first appearance. As Magrat moves toward motherhood, Agnes is being groomed to become the maiden of the coven.



By Jung's standards, Gytha Ogg is the one of whose "cherishing and nourishing goodness" we see evidence most often. Nanny can provide comfort, whereas Magrat is apt to say the wrong thing, and Granny's sort of help isn't often comforting. In conversation, Pratchett explained that while Granny is the most intelligent of the three, Nanny is by far the wisest. Further, despite having the clearest parallels to the id, which does not enjoy a reputation as the storehouse of wisdom, Nanny Ogg commands the insight to (sometimes) manage both Granny and Magrat effectively. She has "emotional intelligence" (Goleman xii). The concept of emotional intelligence embraces both the "gut instinct" of the id and the nurturing warmth of *sattva*; whereas Granny and Magrat think, Gytha Ogg acts. What she does is usually correct because her instincts spring from a loving understanding of people. This comforting wisdom is what makes Nanny the popular witch. She is called in for births and similar happy occasions, when new lives are in need of cherishing warmth to begin properly.

Conversely, it is Granny whom the people of the Ramtops call out for the dying. At first glance it may seem unfair that Granny is connected to disturbing subjects and left to be Jung's representation of darkness and Stygian depths. Then again, says Nanny, "To tell you the honest truth, there's always been a bit of the dark in the Weatherwaxes . . ." (*Carpe Jugulum* 88). However, dark does not always mean evil. Pratchett raises this point in *Witches Abroad* with mention of a witch of bygone Discworld days called Black Aliss: "Even Magrat knew about Black Aliss. She was said to be the most powerful witch who ever lived—not exactly *bad*, but so powerful it was sometimes hard to tell the difference" (126).

The distinctions between power, darkness, and evil are important, because in the same book Granny notably exceeds Black Aliss by moving the entire kingdom of Lancre fifteen years into the future.<sup>4</sup> Granny is now the most potent witch who ever lived on the Discworld, and the scope and power of her actions make it difficult for ordinary people to realize that they are those of a “good” person. The title of the short story “The Sea and Little Fishes” refers directly to Granny: Pratchett explains that it means that Granny is the sea and the rest of the witches are the little fishes. Her complexity and intelligence often lead her to do things that the people to whom she ministers do not understand. In this passage from *Carpe Jugulum*, she speaks to a rural midwife who does not approve of Granny’s choice not to consult a man whose pregnant wife has been gravely injured, before deciding which life she will save—the mother or the child:

It was doubtful that anyone in Slice would defy Granny Weatherwax, but Granny saw the faintest grey shadow of disapproval in the midwife’s expression.

“You still reckon I should have asked Mr. Ivy?” she said.

“That’s what I would have done . . .” the woman mumbled.

“You don’t like him? You think he’s a bad man?” said Granny, adjusting her hatpins.

“No!”

“Then what’s he ever done to me, that I should hurt him so?” (24-25)

This passage shows the depth and complexity of Granny’s compassion, and gives the lie to the idea that she might be evil. A.S. Byatt notes that Granny “makes the practical choice, and doesn’t ask the husband, who would have made the sentimental one”

(par. 7). By choosing to save James Ivy's wife, Granny also chooses to let his unborn son die. She might have evaded the awful responsibility by asking the man whether he would prefer to be a father or a husband, but by her strength she spares him further and ultimately pointless pain. Her choice preserves the Ivy family; the parents will grieve, but together they will be able to carry on. The rural community, which would have been weakened by the destruction of an entire family, remains intact even in the face of a painful loss. Granny knows this, although she might not articulate it; she also knows, and accepts, that the community under her protection will never thank her for what she has done. She has inflicted pain and caused distress: it is against human nature to be grateful for that, even if some degree of suffering admits the possibility of being spared worse. Most of the Ramtops villagers will never embrace Granny with warmth; their perspective from inside the narrative does not allow it. From outside, we see that measuring Granny by conventional, unthinking standards doesn't work, as readers recognize better than the people around her. The crone's role has traditionally included standing "at the gateway of death, welcoming those about to enter, easing their passage" (Gardner 160), which is often difficult to identify as the mercy it really is.

Granny provides the practical help a remote rural village needs, but she does so most often without using magic. Magic is an easy fix but one that works only superficially, and in the end does more harm than good. In *Maskerade*, when a man comes to her door seeking a remedy for the pain in his back, she is compelled to resort to certain tricks. Before he knocks, her door swings open. Sitting in her rocker with her back to him, Granny greets Jarge Weaver by name and says, "let me give you something for that back of yours" (13). Knowing that he expects a magical potion, she has prepared

one; as she describes it, “a mixture of rare herbs and suchlike . . . including sucrose and akwa” (14). Then she tells him to walk three times around a chestnut tree and put a board from a twenty-year-old pine beneath his mattress. He believes the pine board is prescribed so that the knots in his back can be magically transferred to it. After assuring him that all of the necessary “dancin’ and chantin’ and stuff”(14) was done before he arrived, Granny shows him to the door:

Weaver was never quite certain about what happened next. Granny, usually so sure on her feet, seemed to trip over one of his sticks as she went through the door, and fell backward, holding his shoulders, and somehow her knee came up and hit a spot on his backbone as she twisted sideways, and there was a *click-* (15)

Weaver leaves then, believing that Granny is a clumsy old woman who, despite being rather daft, makes fine potions. As Granny watches him go, the intimate knowledge of human nature she has gained through her long years of service is evident in her thoughts: “People were so *blind*, she reflected. They preferred to believe in gibberish rather than chiropracty” (15).

Granny gives people what they need, not what they want or think they ought to get. What they want is often an easy, absolute answer to the many troubles a human being may experience while living a normal life, especially a rural, farming life. For aches of the flesh and the more abstract pains of the heart and spirit, the villagers of the Ramtops crave cures that will settle the trouble for once and always. Granny is powerful enough to provide such supernatural cures, but she knows that taking the easy way brings grief more often than not. Her wise-woman therapies, which involve some discomfort and

trouble for the patient, work as well as magic but without the troubling side-effect of a community-wide dependence on occult forces—something most would agree is unhealthy.

Granny's intellectual solutions dovetail nicely with Nanny's intuitive, comforting remedies, as well as Magrat's practical medicine. How the three work together is well demonstrated when elves return to Lancre. The elves of the Discworld, though beautiful, are not the frolicking sort of faerie-kin depicted in porcelain gift shop sculpture and some insipid modern children's stories; the comparatively bland Disney elves are the debased heirs of the Seelie Court. Nor do they resemble Tolkien's elves; despite individual weaknesses, the elves from *The Lord of the Rings* are firmly planted in the benevolent tradition of the Seelie Court. The elves of the Discworld bear more resemblance to the much colder, crueller fey of the Unseelie Court; whether they are actually evil is debatable, but that they are nasty, capricious, sadistic, and not possessed of empathy is not. In *Lords and Ladies*, a young would-be witch, Diamanda (Lucy, to her mother) Tockley, in seeking a shorter route to power than the path of long years—decades—of practice traveled by the elder witches, makes a pact with the Queen of the Elves; such pacts seldom end well, and so it happens in this case. Her foolish effort to get something for nothing ties the land of the elves to the mortal world, and gives the elves access to Lancre; she receives the power she is promised, but still loses a contest of witchcraft to Granny Weatherwax, whose power isn't borrowed. After the contest, in a fit of humiliated rage, Diamanda flees through the standing stones to the kingdom of the elves. She encounters the Queen with whom she bargained and learns what elves are really like. Granny comes after the girl, rescuing her—and herself—from death at the hands of the

Queen's warriors; the elves give chase, and Diamanda is wounded by a poisoned arrow. Granny, though powerful, does not know how to cure her. Neither does Nanny Ogg, whose comforting, matronly magic is suited more to midwifery than to surgery. The kind of knowledge and power that allowed Granny to haul Diamanda bodily from the elven kingdom is of no use once they are out. Granny is unable to do anything about the arrowhead lodged in the girl's shoulder, but she knows someone who may be able to do what she cannot—Magrat. The youngest witch, who believes in studying herbal lore and medicine, may be able to help. She knows which herbs can heal infection, provide antidotes to poisons, or bring down a fever. If someone needed a potion calling for Love-in-Idleness, Pratchett explains, Magrat would know which of the many species of plants known by that name was actually required. The following selection from *Lords and Ladies* illuminates the difference between Granny's talents and Magrat's:

The reason that Granny Weatherwax was a better witch than Magrat was that she knew that in witchcraft it didn't matter a damn which one it was, or even if it was a piece of grass.

The reason that Magrat was a better doctor than Granny was that she thought it did. (128)

To help the injured girl, they need both types of magic. Magrat's medicines begin to heal Diamanda's physical wounds; unfortunately Magrat, who does not believe in the old wives' tale that cold iron blocks fey interference, disdainfully removes the bars of iron with which the elder witches have surrounded the sickbed. Without the protection of iron, Diamanda falls under the influence of the elves, causing herself further harm and bringing the kingdom of Lancre close to ruin. Working together seamlessly, Magrat and

the two elder witches would have wrought a successful cure; because they did not work together, they nearly failed—the price of that failure would have been high indeed.

Granny, Nanny, and Magrat are the basic trinity of womanhood and, indeed, of humanity. Sets of three work well in fairy tales, possibly because long-dead storytellers realized, centuries or millennia ago, that the simple dichotomy of pairs did not always provide an adequate, satisfactory explanation for the complexities of life. To explain why the human mind is drawn to trinities, Freudian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim claims that the number three represents the id, ego, and superego (102). It is quite easy to see Magrat as the superego, Granny as the ego, and Nanny unquestionably as the id. The purity of higher, superego thinking is equivalent to Magrat's lofty, if misguided motives; our conscious intelligence directs us as Granny directs the Ramtops' tiny coven; we all have an id whose directives are often hard to interpret as wisdom or waywardness.

Obviously, this Freudian characterization supported by Bettelheim's analysis differs slightly from the Jungian viewpoint offered earlier, just as one goddess story differs from others in various respects. This apparent contradiction is just that, an apparition. Both schools of thought offer ways to think about why human lives flow and develop as they do.

Again, the Lancre witches are mortal women; as such, they all carry within themselves the seeds of what they will become and never completely shed the husks of what they were. It would be passing strange if each did not occasionally exhibit traits more closely identified with one of the other two. Magrat, Nanny, and Granny change during the courses of their lives, just as we all must. But consider: Magrat's emotionality, mentioned in the Jungian analysis, does not conflict at all with naming her

the personification of the superego later on. The high-flown motives she has may be attributed to her idealism, which is something she retains *because* of her emotional nature. The elder two have seen too much of a sometimes harsh world to keep that quality; they have learned to compromise and to use their heads rather than only their hearts. And yet, Magrat will grow old one day; the idealism of her youth, though adhered to by the heart, is intellectual in nature. She has the potential to be very much like Granny in time.

In *Carpe Jugulum*, Magrat becomes a mother and gains new power in the evolution, but it upsets the trinity. With the birth of the infant Esmerelda, Granny leaves Lancre because she must wrestle with whatever follows coronation and face the darkness. She is no longer bound by the threeness, so she is free to find out whether she does have darkness in her soul; she is not sure, herself. Near the end of the novel, Granny says to her priest companion, “This is where you find out . . . To the fire we come at last . . . . This is where we *both* find out” (252). It may be personally necessary for Granny to face her own soul, but readers know that the other witches want her to stay. Her temporary departure may have been necessary when the vampires flew into town, but once they are defeated, it is not actually necessary for her to leave Lancre or the mortal plane because the trinity has expanded to become . . . more.

Three works well in fairy tales, but there *are* other numbers. Witches don’t have to come in threes, literally, or when it’s time to abandon a metaphor. “Course not,” said Nanny. “You can have any number up to about, oh, four or five.” Five is exactly the number of personalities, if not bodies, left when the survivors are tallied at the end of *Carpe Jugulum*. Pratchett has gone outside the frame of the physicality of three and into



an exploration of the trinity unbound by mortal flesh. He retains the goddess in the device of the coven, but he allows the coven to expand and include other personalities the better to illuminate the aspects of the goddess not easily shown by means of his established characters.

The original three are all what most people would call “good,” even though Granny’s brand of goodness is difficult for many to understand. The terms *good* and *evil* did not always apply to the divine figures of antiquity, though: Artemis, with her brother Apollo, slew Niobe’s children,<sup>5</sup> but Magrat just isn’t that sort. She does not have the darkness, but she has the core of stone and steel that is Granny’s entire substance, or near enough; readers glimpse it in *Lords and Ladies* when Magrat punches the Queen of the Elves between the eyes.

Pratchett further explores cronedom in *Witches Abroad* by means of Granny’s sister Lily. Lily Weatherwax went bad and tried to make Genua, a New Orleans-style city, into a fairytale kingdom more like Disneyworld than a real city. She used her power to force people into roles that did not fit, in direct opposition to Granny’s basic existence as a crosser of boundaries. Lily wants people to lead scripted lives; Granny, who embraces tradition while rejecting stereotypes, sees no reason to do something just because it would make a good story. Ironically, this attitude is one reason the Discworld books are good stories. This contra-narrative defiance is important for several reasons, both inside and outside of the books themselves. Granny’s perverse nature is more intriguing to readers than the wicked witch template everyone has seen before, and as Pratchett explains, it keeps him interested in writing about her:

The reason I like writing about Granny Weatherwax is that she's so twisted up. All her power comes from denial and refusal—she'd just love to let rip, but she won't because that wouldn't be Right. She's wicked by instinct but good by choice. [...] you could argue that she's so frightened about what she *could* be that she's always testing herself, just to check.

(Gay, par. 8)

Her contrary divergence from the script makes her powerful: from the inside, as a person, and from outside, as a character. Her disinclination to play nicely with destiny makes her the woman and the witch that she is. There is something in Granny that doesn't love the walls placed around people by outside forces. Her sister, on the other hand, has no compunctions about using her power to stuff people into the molds of her choosing. Lily Weatherwax sees herself as good, but her despotic interpretation of the fairy godmother theme is very close to the Discworld definition of wickedness. Granny causes suffering only when suffering is unavoidable; when her choices must affect other lives, she disturbs those lives as little as possible. Lily inflicts pain with her stories, believing that people ought to want for themselves the lives she envisions for them; she scruples at nothing in pursuit of her vision, turning lives upside down to bring about a "happy ending" that only she really wants. Whereas Granny chooses what she will be, her sister tries to choose for others: there is a world of difference between the two. Lily is a temporary character because a truly evil personality has no place in this trio.

The character who does permanently expand the coven by one body and two personalities is Agnes Nitt. Agnes is, according to Pratchett, more intelligent and more powerful than Magrat. However, she is still relatively subdued. It might be to

accommodate a newer style of maiden that Pratchett introduces Perdita, Agnes Nitt's inner voice. Agnes herself is necessary to play the part of the apprentice, but she is as practical as Magrat is earnestly fanciful. When Magrat loses some of her dreaminess in her transition to motherhood, Perdita's gothic fancies fill the resulting gap. Perdita is an edgy, dominant personality, with an inherent darkness that neither Magrat nor Agnes possesses. That darkness might be necessary in a world that will not always have a Granny Weatherwax.

The presence of a new, sharper maiden frees Granny, in a way. She has been pushed out of the crone role, or rather *beyond* it. Now that Agnes is the Maiden and Magrat is a Mother and Nanny is the right age to be the Crone, what the script has in store for Granny is death. The trinity is complete without her; she feels the influence of the myth of which she is no longer an integral part. She feels unneeded because the coven is complete without her, unwanted because her invitation to Magrat's daughter's christening never reached her, and worn out from a lifetime of hard work and harder choices; believing herself beaten by the vampires who have invaded Lancre, she departs for a cave on the moors. Eventually, Granny confronts the vampires and wins. She resumes her life. Why should she lie down and die simply because it would make a tidy narrative? She is the first person on the Discworld to confront the After. All of us wonder what comes After. After *everything*. Granny is no doubt nearer the end of her mortal coil than the beginning, but she is still a maiden, acts as a mother to her people, and has the accumulated experience of the old. Since she has always been all of them, she is now free to expand on all of the roles she has played in her long life. She is no longer subject to labeling because there is no name for what she has become. She is so profoundly

powerful that she can be called the universal female principle. She is the culmination of a female life but without any obligation to die. She creates a new class beyond classification.

The entire series of novels dealing with the Lancre witches has been the story of each witch learning and growing in each novel, and Granny Weatherwax is the end product of that process.

Although, as Pratchett insists, the Lancre witches are mortal women and not divine personifications, their presence in modern fantasy is a vital indication of the enduring nature of the goddess story. People need these models to begin seeing what is possible in life. Even Lily Weatherwax gives readers a valid blueprint for a human life—not a desirable one, but we need counterexamples, too; Catherine Aird might have been referring to Lily when she wrote, “If you can’t be a good example, you’ll just have to be a horrible warning” (196). Her shadow allows us to better see what is implicit in Granny’s kind of darkness. In her time Esmerelda Weatherwax has effected hurt and death, but the Great Mother has her destructive aspect, and it would be foolish and naive to pretend she does not. Her apparent darkness is deceptive, representing the painful aspects of life and death, rather than evil. As Ruth Gardner explains, perceived destruction is not always true destruction: “The Crone stands at the gateway to death—to rebirth. To begin life again, there must first be death . . . the new moon goes on to waxing, and then to full. Death is part of the continuing cycle of wholeness. The Crone closes one cycle so that another can begin” (40). Nanny Ogg, too, has been tested in the course of a long life; Magrat and Agnes will face their own heavy responsibilities as they grow older, each in turn.

These modern characters, with all the force of thousands of years of legend behind them, can only help us to better understand what it is to be woman, and human.

### Notes

1. In one of the older variants of Cinderella published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, called *Aschenputtel*, the wicked stepsisters mutilate their feet with knives to wear the slipper and, at the end of the tale, have their eyes pecked out by doves. From *Grimm's Grimmet*.
  
2. Sometimes Hecate was a young, alluring maiden—a dark maiden whose realm was witchcraft and dark rites, to be sure, but she was not always portrayed as an old woman. Selene could be cast in a broad range of maturity, from young mother to older matron. Artemis was almost invariably young, but how young sometimes varied. There is a certain difference between fifteen years of age and twenty-five, after all. So, within broad parameters, this classification is accurate. However, it wasn't always so. The Maiden, Mother, and Crone arrangement may have started with Macbeth, and a certain staging of the three witches on the moors.
  
3. Verse 1:
 

Bestiality sure is a fun thing to do

But I have to say this as a warning to you:

With almost all animals, you can have ball

But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.

Chorus 1:

The spines on his back are too sharp for a man  
They'll give you a pain in the worst place they can  
The result I think you'll find will appall:  
The hedgehog can never be buggered at all!

Verse 2:

Mounting a horse can often be fun  
An elephant too; though he weighs half a ton  
Even a mouse (though his hole is quite small)  
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.

Chorus2:

The spines on his back are so awful thick  
you'll end up with naught but a painful prick.  
He has an impregnable hole when curled up in a ball,  
Hence the hedgehog can never be buggered at all!

Reconstructed by Matthew Crosby and alt.fan.pratchett from the Discworld  
novels by Terry Pratchett, as recorded on the L-Space Web.

4. Black Aliss may have enspelled the Discworld version of Sleeping Beauty for one hundred years, but she moved only one castle. The nature of both spells involved flying

around the area of effect on a broomstick before dawn, making what Granny did much more logistically difficult.

5. Artemis and Apollo slew Niobe's children as retribution for her overweening pride in having many more than Leto's two.

### **The Ankh-Morpork City Watch**

Terry Pratchett's six novels in the City Watch arc of the Discworld series are very carefully assembled, multi-layered satirical constructs, performing fantastic variations on Horatian and Juvenalian satire as well as other satirical modes aimed at various targets. The City Watch arc, composed of the titles *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms*, *Feet of Clay*, *Jingo*, *The Fifth Elephant*, and the newly published *Night Watch*, are all parodies of not only fantasy but hardboiled detective novels.

Pratchett parodies and satirizes (sometimes simultaneously, sometimes by turns) much of the popular "sword and sorcery" fantasy and "dragons, dragons, everywhere" fantasy published since Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Nor does he spare Tolkien; but the satire aimed at fantasy novels, excepting the truly dreadful ones, is of the gentle, reflective Horatian type in which readers are urged to laugh quietly at the less logical aspects of their favorite novels, as well as at themselves.

Pratchett is less forgiving when dealing with real-world problems such as war and racism. These and other topics receive the same sort of treatment from him as the hunger in Ireland received from Jonathan Swift. The effect is withering—not to mention bitingly funny—when Pratchett's heroes arrest both armies in an imminent battle and the main character, Sir Samuel Vimes, is allowed to voice some scathing Juvenalian dialogue.

In addition, the novels are structured so that the entire world is both a parody of a fantasy world and an engaging world in its own right; each novel reads as a parody of the fantasy genre as a whole. Within the Discworld, the characters in each novel serve as components of the Horatian commentary on fantasy, while also being complex and sympathetic people about whom readers often come to care deeply. The main character in



each book always has some sharply insightful, yet hilarious, observations about the situation presented in the novel.

The whole structure resembles a stage play; each Discworld novel, especially in the City Watch sub-series, has a backdrop of fantastic parody, an extensive Horatian supporting cast, and a Juvenalian hero who takes on the big, bad ideas.

Within this theatrical framework, Pratchett develops piercing insights about all manner of subjects. Because the books are very funny, he also reaches audiences other writers might not. The Discworld books are stunning examples of modern satire and an effective use of humor to make relevant points.

The City Watch novels are all about the human social institutions of law and government, and how human beings operate within their own structures.

## Chapter Two: Not-So-Modest Proposals: The Satiric Reality of Samuel Vimes and the Ankh-Morpork City Watch

*I have abandoned my search for truth, and am now looking for a good fantasy.*

—Ashleigh Brilliant

An epigraph is like a conversation piece; it can ignite a discussion but cannot see it through to the end. Brilliant suggests that absolute truths are hard to find; a comforting and pleasant, although not necessarily true, worldview based on the imagination might be easier to sustain. He is correct, to a point—but there it ends. It may not be necessary to abandon one for the other because fantasy has historically been one of our best tools for finding that which is true.

For thousands of years, we have used fantasy to teach our most valuable lessons. The fables of Æsop and Grimm’s fairy tales are examples. They encapsulate knowledge our village elders have considered worth keeping and, most importantly, package it in a way that renders it acceptable to the youthful—indeed human—tendency to reject overt moral instruction. These fantasies engage us in that place where didactic language fails; as Bruno Bettelheim writes, “The fairy tale could not have its psychological impact on the child were it not first and foremost a work of art” (12).

Pratchett’s carefully constructed Discworld novels contain a wealth of literary and social commentary in pageant form, and their satiric humor enables Pratchett to slide genuine wisdom past our innate resistance and reach that place in us where it can do the most damage to what he calls the “received opinions, out-of-date information, half-

digested and completely unconsidered factoids . . . we use instead of thinking” (Smith, par. 8).

The Discworld books are, as the name suggests, about a flat world that rests on the backs of four elephants. The elephants stand upon the back of the star-turtle A’Tuin because it would be ridiculous to have them just floating along in space. The world-turtle appears in Hindu mythology, and Pratchett mentioned in a 1993 Usenet post that an African fan sent him a Bantu legend featuring some distant relative of the great A’Tuin. As Pratchett told Science Fiction Book Club interviewer Joyce Wiley, the world-turtle story “is one of the most pervasive myths on the planet. You find it somewhere on every continent.”

Within the Discworld are four recognizable sets of novels, as well as a few that do not fall clearly into one of the story arcs. *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms*, *Feet of Clay*, *Jingo*, *The Fifth Elephant*, and the newly published *Night Watch* are the City Watch titles. Others, such as *The Last Hero* and *The Truth* do not fit cleanly into these categories—although both of these feature characters from the City Watch subseries. As Edward James points out (119), the City Watch books are the most political of the Discworld novels. True enough. The Watch novels are set in the city of Ankh-Morpork and deal with metropolitan issues; the Witches novels are more rural, the Death novels more metaphysical, and the Rincewind novels, though containing metafictional elements, chiefly feature the main character quite reasonably running away from horrible things that are threatening, at very least, to disembowel him.

James states that Pratchett’s own views do not emerge very clearly, which is true in one sense, because Pratchett places an extremely sympathetic character, Carrot, in the

role of uncrowned king while at the same time using his hero, Samuel Vimes, to make very disparaging tirades, both spoken and thought, against the monarchy system. However, a simple attack on the monarchy may not be the main purpose of Pratchett's satire. We may not be able to pinpoint Pratchett's exact views regarding the Queen of England by reading the City Watch novels, but his position on authority, narrative convention, and easy answers is unmistakable: they should all be subject to thorough, unflinching question.

Pratchett's method is not, as Sgt. Colon of the City Watch puts it, "a misery wrapped in an enema" (*Elephant* 68). Rather, it is a carefully layered construct reminiscent of a theatrical production—earlier use of the word "pageant" was not accidental.

The backdrop against which all of Pratchett's characters move is a thorough parody of contemporary fantasy fiction, in all of its somewhat repetitive glory. It is important to note that parody and satire are not necessarily harsh or demeaning. Though Tolkien is satirized throughout, the tone is affectionate rather than hostile. This treatment, known as Horatian satire, is so named for the Roman poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus. Raymond Alden writes that "the satire of Horace is throughout characteristically *reflective*, above all things" (34).

Pratchett's parody becomes more caustic in reaction to the derivative fantasy that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after some of Tolkien's fans, toddlers when *Lord of the Rings* was published, had grown old enough to write their own books; the genre grew, but few apprentices possessed the genius of the master. Pratchett refers to

this explosion of fantasy writing in an interview in *Book* magazine, saying, “. . . a lot of it—how shall I put it?—didn’t bring that much to the party.”

The difference is evident in the following passages from *Guards! Guards!*:

Now a black-robed figure scurried through the midnight streets, ducking from doorway to doorway, and reached a grim and forbidding portal. No mere doorway got that grim without effort, one felt. It looked as though the architect had been called in and given specific instructions. We want something eldritch in dark oak, he’d been told. So put an unpleasant gargoyle thing over the archway, give it a slam like the footfall of a giant and make it clear to everyone, in fact, that this isn’t the kind of door that goes “ding-dong” when you press the bell. (4)

Longtime fantasy readers snort in horrified, yet amused, recognition—we’ve seen those dread portals, and shivered—but Pratchett is right. It takes special effort to make a door look that dreadful.

The parody becomes sharper later on, when the Elucidated Brethren of the Ebon Night (it was *their* door) have summoned a dragon so their hand-picked hero may kill it in a staged, showy and, above all, public way and thereby become king. Samuel Vimes, Captain of the Night Watch, has observed some odd things about the dragon that has been terrorizing Ankh-Morpork—such as the fact that it ought not to be able to fly—and seeks the advice of the local dragon expert, Lady Sybil Ramkin. She tells him:

“If it’s built like swamp dragons, it should weigh about twenty tons.

Twenty tons! It’s impossible. It’s all down to weight and wingspan ratios, you see.”

“I saw it drop off the tower like a swallow.”

“I know. It should have torn its wings off and left a bloody great hole in the ground,” said Lady Ramkin firmly. “You can’t muck about with aerodynamics. You can’t just scale up from small to big and leave it at that, you see. It’s all a matter of muscle power and lifting surfaces.” (143)

It still isn’t terribly vicious, is it? But it does call to mind a certain class of fantasy novel and a certain type of author for whom magic is the ultimate answer to every problem, and for whom “deus ex machina” isn’t a device but a way of life. Many readers may recognize the dragon-inhabited world of Pern from the example above. However, this is no insult to Anne McCaffrey, the author of the Pern series. Pratchett has often talked about the origins of the Discworld, as he does in the following excerpt from a December 1999 interview appearing in *Locus*:

Discworld started as an antidote to bad fantasy, because there was a big explosion of fantasy in the late ’70s, an awful lot of it was highly derivative, and people weren’t bringing new things to it. The first couple of books quite deliberately pastiched bits of other writers and things – good writers, because it’s the good ones most people can spot: ‘Ah, here’s the Anne McCaffrey bit.’ I was rapidly stitching together a kind of consensus fantasy universe. . . . (4)

The “bad” fantasy is notorious among fans for features such as the tendency of writers to treat horses like automobiles. As Diana Wynne Jones points out in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, the horses in inferior novels “are of a breed unique to Fantasyland. They are capable of galloping full-tilt all day without a rest. Sometimes they do not

require food or water..." (73). She speculates that they reproduce after the manner of plants, by pollination.

Yet it is obvious that Pratchett bears some love for the genre as a whole, or he might still be working as Press Officer for England's Central Electricity Office (Western Region), or similar. In *Meditations on Middle-Earth*, Pratchett writes of *The Lord of the Rings* in unmistakably devoted terms. Readers must feel his love of the Middle-Earth landscape when he writes that he "... can still remember the luminous green of the beechwoods, the freezing air of the mountains, the terrifying darkness of the dwarf mines, the greenery on the slopes of Ithilien, west of Mordor, still holding out against the encroaching shadow" (80).

Though Pratchett says that he began the series for the fun of parodying bad fantasy, he maintains that "good fantasy . . . is worth parodying" (Silver par. 7).

The fondly remembered landscape of Middle-Earth is often used in descriptions of Überwald and the kingdom of Lancre, but never harshly. This gentle satire, of the Horatian type, forms the stage on which the Discworld characters move. It is where the stories themselves come from. Without folklore and the heroic fantasy genre, it is hard to imagine the existence of the Discworld.

Likewise, Pratchett's regard for the Ankh-Morpork City Watch is evident. From their humble—extremely so—origins as a motley group of three beaten men in *Guards! Guards!*, the Night Watch have, by the end of *The Fifth Elephant*, become a respectable force. Their drunken Captain, Sam Vimes, has become His Grace Sir Samuel Vimes, Duke of Ankh-Morpork. Carrot Ironfounderesson, the young man (dwarf, by adoption) who began the process of revitalizing the Night Watch, is now Captain of the Watch.

Sergeant Fred Colon and Corporal Nobbs have regained, or perhaps gained for the first time in their lives, a sense of pride in themselves and their profession. The City Watch has dozens of new recruits; word of their proficiency has spread so far that by the time the events of *The Fifth Elephant* take place, an Ankh-Morpork watchman could find a position on a police force in his or her choice of far-distant cities.

This Horatian supporting cast surrounds Vimes and satirizes all of the conventions of genre fantasy. In one memorable scene from *Guards! Guards!*, Sergeant Colon, Corporal “Nobby” Nobbs, and Lance-Constable Carrot wait atop a whiskey distillery for a chance to kill the dragon that has been menacing and selectively torching part of the city. Their plan to shoot it in its “voonerables” depends largely upon the dragon actually having such an exposed spot, and, naturally, they speculate on Colon’s chances of hitting this spot and killing the dragon with one arrow—there won’t be a chance for a second shot. The three watchmen know that in their sort of universe, million-to-one chances always come through, but they begin to worry that they might have only a thousand-to-one chance . . . which will, of course, never happen. They face their uncertainty with pure, unassailable Discworld logic: “So what we’ve got to do then,” said Nobby slowly, “is adjust the odds...” (*Guards! Guards!* 296). The results appear several pages later:

Nobby put his head on one side.

‘It looks promising,’ he said critically. ‘We might be nearly there. I reckon the chances of a man with soot on his face, his tongue sticking out, standing on one leg and singing *The Hedgehog Song* ever hitting a dragon’s voonerables would be . . . what’d you say, Carrot?’



‘A million to one, I reckon,’ said Carrot virtuously. (302)

Their calculations are wrong, however, and Colon’s arrow only makes the dragon notice the three men. In bewilderment and terror, Fred Colon yells, “But it couldn’t have missed! [...] It was a sodding last desperate million-to-one chance!”

But the Discworld will not be manipulated. The arrow does miss, and the dragon’s fiery breath roars toward them. They jump from the roof of the building—which is a *distillery*, remember—just as the flames punch through the timbers to the thousands of gallons of whiskey in the vats below. It seems that Pratchett has betrayed his characters and their knowledge of the story in which they live, but it only seems so. “Fortunately,” writes Pratchett, “the chances of anyone surviving the ensuing explosion were exactly a million-to-one” (305).

This scene satirizes many such instances of remarkable last-ditch efforts by heroes, but most notably the scene from *The Hobbit* in which the archer Bard kills the great dragon Smaug with a single arrow.

Yet we readers do not think worse of Sergeant Colon, Nobby, and Carrot. Their artlessness does not lead us to dismiss them as fools. No, the episode is simply funny. But wait, maybe it isn’t simply funny; we really care whether they live or die, and fear that they may die.

Pratchett is less tender with racism and other nasty things people do to one another. His leading man, Sir Samuel Vimes, is allowed to voice some scathing commentary on various forms of inhumanity in every Watch novel. His Grace the Duke of Ankh-Morpork is the Juvenalian star of the show.

Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis was the founder of Vimes's sort of satire—the poetry of tirade. Juvenal, the *other* satirist, wrote satire that was much different from the style Horace made popular. Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* is probably one of the best known examples of modern Juvenalian satire, yet it is couched in milder language than Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, or even parts of *Gulliver's Travels*. Whereas Horatian satire is usually characterized as friendly, Juvenalian satire is witheringly scornful and contains little of sympathy for its subject. Juvenal's observations of his fellow Romans led him to write in his first satire that "it is hard *not* to write satire. . . ." Upon due reflection, that phrase proves to be a subtle, but incredibly nasty, thing to say. One caveat is that Juvenal's satire, often described as invective, was at times abusive rather than righteous; the full force of his sixth satire, for instance, may not have been deserved by all women of the time. The same cannot reasonably be said of the dogmas against which Samuel Vimes inveighs. In language, Vimes's speeches fall somewhere between *A Modest Proposal* and Juvenal's first satire; in emotional tone, Vimes's anger rivals Juvenal at his most vehement.

In *Men at Arms*, a well-meaning but deranged Assassin with royalist sentiments sets in motion a series of events that results in the disbanding of the Night Watch. Edward d'Eath begins killing people in an effort to destabilize the government of Lord Vetinari, the Patrician, using a terrible new technological device invented by Leonard da Quirm: the Gonne. This device changes the dynamic of power in Ankh-Morpork; formerly it required a great deal of money or great skill to assassinate someone, but anyone with a steady hand can use the Gonne.

Edward's goal is not strongly supported by the powerful guild leaders of Ankh-Morpork. The Patrician's Machiavellian grasp of political reality has made the city into a working system within which the heads of all the guilds know that they are better off than ever before. But Edward, who believes the city to be hopelessly corrupt, wants the Return of the King.

Interestingly, all available evidence indicates that Carrot Ironfoundersson is the true heir to the throne. He has a mysterious, though non-magical, sword; he bears a crown-shaped birthmark; he is honest, good, brave, strong, handsome, and almost supernaturally charismatic. By the end of *Jingo*, even ambassadors from foreign countries are privy to the open secret of Carrot's lineage, but Carrot himself never openly acknowledges any of it.

Vimes, who in *Men at Arms* is still Captain of the Night Watch, is trying to solve the murders. The assassin has been trying to kill guild leaders and important citizens, but along the way he shoots a beggar girl whose misfortune it was to be mistaken for the Queen Molly, head of the Beggars' Guild. Though the killer is concerned with the powerful and influential, the people who die are ordinary people: a clown, the beggar maid, and a dwarven artisan named Bjorn Hammerhock. Few humans really notice these deaths, insignificant to anyone with money or position, but the arrest of Coalface the troll for Hammerhock's murder pushes Ankh-Morpork to the brink of the riots that the assassin wants.

Coalface could not possibly have committed the murder; the trolls know it, and the members of the Night Watch know it. But the Day Watch, headed by the corrupt and brainless Captain Quirke, arrests him because he's a troll. Thousands of years of enmity

between trolls and dwarves make it an easy, plausible solution, but the dwarves are naturally infuriated.

In the midst of all this, Captain Vimes is supposed to retire and marry Lady Ramkin. He doesn't really want to retire, but Vetinari has disbanded the Night Watch and taken Vimes's sword. Vimes does not realize that Vetinari is deliberately provoking him so that he will break the rules to solve these crimes, but he does feel abused and manipulated by the men who run the city. Revived from drunken unconsciousness after having been relieved of his sword, Vimes bitterly asks the Night Watch:

—and what good's it all been? What *good* have I done? I've just worn out a lot of boots. There's no place in Ankh-Morpork for policemen! Who cares what's right or wrong? Assassins and thieves and trolls and dwarfs! Might as well have a bloody king and have done with it! (*Men at Arms* 219)

After an embarrassed silence, Carrot says, "It's better to light a candle than curse the darkness, captain. That's what they say."

It is the wrong thing to say. The well-meant platitude does not calm Vimes but instead results in the following tirade: "'*What?*' Vimes' sudden rage was like a thunderclap. 'Who says that? When has that ever been true? It's the kind of thing people without power say to make it all seem less bloody awful, but it's just words, it never makes any difference—' (220)." Samuel Vimes has, however, made a difference. Vetinari revives the title of Watch Commander, elevating Vimes to the post and to the traditional rank of knight that goes along with it—all for his services to the city. Vimes

has also influenced Carrot and set him on the path to being a good police officer. When Vimes is made Commander of the Watch, Carrot is promoted to the rank of captain.

Vimes's influence on Carrot leads directly to the events near the end of *Jingo*. Political machinations by the ruler of Klatch have led to more civil unrest than usual in Ankh-Morpork, and wartime racism against citizens of Klatchian heritage who live there. It is an offense almost too big to see and outside the normal scope of a law officer's duties. But what Sir Samuel Vimes sees, especially after the fire-bombing of a local shop run by the Klatchian Goriff family, are the crimes.

The conflict centers on the tiny island of Leshp, which has recently risen from the bottom of the sea; Klatch and Ankh-Morpork both desire possession of it. The aristocrats on both sides see only political and military advantage; Vimes knows that in wars, people die—the ordinary people he is sworn to defend, even from their rulers. When a Klatchian prince on a peacekeeping mission is attacked on Ankh-Morpork soil, Klatch needs no other reason to fight.

In the beginning of the novel Sir Samuel attends a meeting with the guild leaders and Lord Vetinari to discuss the developments after Leshp rises out of the Circle Sea. One vitally important issue is the nonexistence of an Ankh-Morporkian army. There are several reasons why there is no standing army, but one of them is the uprising that resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and execution of Ankh-Morpork's last king by the Discworld equivalent of Oliver Cromwell. Lord Downey of the Assassins' Guild remarks on this aspect of the city's history: "We all know *why* people don't trust an army," said Lord Downey. "A lot of armed men, standing around with nothing to do . . . they start to get ideas . . ." (*Jingo* 17).

As it happens, this is a sensitive issue for Sir Samuel, who reacts with growing anger at Downey and the entire assemblage:

‘My word,’ he said, with glassy brightness, ‘can this be a reference to ‘Old Stoneface’ Vimes, who led the city’s militia in a revolt against the rule of a tyrannical monarch in an effort to bring some sort of freedom and justice to the place? I do believe it is! And was he Commander of the Watch at the time? Good heavens, yes, as a matter of fact he was! Was he hanged and dismembered and buried in five graves? And is he a distant ancestor of the current Commander? My word, the coincidences just *pile* up, don’t they?’ His voice went from manic cheerfulness to a growl.

‘Right! That’s got that over with. Now—has anyone got a point they wish to make?’ (*Jingo* 17)

Part of Vimes’s anger comes from his knowledge that the nobles and guild leaders regard him as a commoner and therefore an inconsequential person who is, nevertheless, extremely inconvenient to them. The rest comes from his knowledge that these same people have no concern at all for the citizens of Ankh-Morpork, of whom Vimes himself is only one.

The momentum of the push toward war cannot be stopped so early or so easily; despite Vimes’s sweet reason, the nobles of Ankh-Morpork raise private armies and invade Klatch. But Vimes is a policeman, and he sets out to solve a crime—he pursues Prince Khufurah’s attackers all the way to Klatch.

In a moment of mad justice, Vimes threatens to arrest Prince Cadram of Klatch, who deliberately began the war by staging the attempted assassination of his brother,

Prince Khufurah. Lord Rust, an Ankh-Morpork nobleman who has participated eagerly in the effort to get a war going, ridicules him for it:

‘Vimes, you have gone insane,’ said Rust. ‘You can’t arrest the commander of an army!’

“Actually Mr. Vimes, I think we could,” said Carrot. “And the army, too. I mean, I don’t see why we *can’t*. We could charge them with behavior likely to cause a breach of the peace, sir. I mean, that’s what warfare *is*.’

Vimes’ face split into a manic grin. ‘I like it.’

‘But in fairness our—that is, the Ankh-Morpork army—are also—’

‘Then you’d better arrest them too,’ said Vimes. (286)

Vimes goes on, quite happily:

‘Arrest the lot of ’em. Conspiracy to cause an affray,’ he started to count on his fingers, ‘going equipped to commit a crime, obstruction, threatening behavior, loitering with intent, loitering *within* tent, hah, traveling for the purpose of committing a crime, malicious lingering and carrying concealed weapons.’ (286)

Although his distaste for the aristocracy and for politics is well-known, the Patrician creates Vimes Duke of Ankh-Morpork: because he is truly a devoted servant of the city, because he and some few loyal coppers derailed a war, because he can use Dux Vimes in more ways than he can use Sir Samuel, and, quite possibly, because he enjoys the way Sam Vimes squirms. Vimes does not want his new office, especially not the official uniform, which includes tights. But the truth is that Vimes is becoming more

sophisticated, and his views on crime are just what the city needs. He wants to fight the old system, where people said that “there was one law for the rich and one law for the poor.” Vimes doesn’t believe this to be true. Instead, “There was no law for those who made the law, and no law for the incorrigibly lawless . . .” (*Feet of Clay* 162).

Over time, Samuel Vimes has an impact on the city through his simple refusal to go outside the rule of law. By his insistence and force of will, law comes to be expected in Ankh-Morpork.

As they say on the Discworld, the turtle moves. By the end of *Night Watch*, it can’t be any other way. Vimes has traveled through time to apprehend Carcer, a dangerous psychopath—and has finally caught him. The man’s atrocities are such that Vimes knows no one would condemn him for killing Carcer outright as soon as he’s been arrested, but he won’t do it. He turns him over to the impartial machine of justice, saying:

‘I’m hurting and I’m still doing it all by the book.’ [...]

‘The machine ain’t broken, Carcer. The machine is waiting for you,’ he said, tearing a sleeve off the man’s own shirt and fashioning it into a crude binding for his ankles. ‘The city will kill you dead. The proper wheels’ll turn. It’ll be fair, I’ll make sure of that. . . .

(359)

Vimes has grown into his Dukedom and his role as a leader, becoming more successful in each book. His role in *Monstrous Regiment*, although little more than a cameo, shows Vimes in a fully diplomatic role. In *The Fifth Elephant*, Lady Ramkin was a helpful presence, lending him her lifetime of experience with the nobility; in *Monstrous*



*Regiment*, she is back in Ankh-Morpork with their infant son. He is no longer dependent on anyone's help to navigate the political sphere.

The satiric comments Vimes gets to make are real observations of the human condition, and Vimes is a character of real importance. Bettelheim might have been referring to Samuel Vimes when he wrote:

Psychoanalysis was created to enable man to accept the problematic nature of life without being defeated by it, or giving in to escapism. Freud's prescription is that only by struggling against what seem like overwhelming odds can man succeed in wringing meaning out of his existence. (8)

Vimes never stops struggling against injustice. His example carries a vital truth at its heart, and the *City Watch* novels succeed admirably in illuminating the pitfalls we as citizens must avoid. The message is of hope and of change, even though the times seem dark.

Of course, Sam Vimes is a fiction. If perhaps it is a little impractical to emulate a man who does not exist as flesh and bone, it would be pointless to deny anyone an ethical hero in a world where such can seem terribly scarce. If a human being adheres to a high standard of ethical behavior, it is unseemly to ask the source of that moral code. Despite human weaknesses that, besides making characters like himself and Granny Weatherwax more interesting to write, make him seem very real, Vimes is an ethical man; as long as readers remember that stories are maps rather than the terrain itself, it hardly matters whether role models live next door, on another planet, or universes away and centuries removed.

Pratchett's satire is witty, but it carries a powerful message of decency which grows from the lighter jokes of the first books to the character-driven comedy of the later novels. Satire is as old as western civilization; from Juvenal and Horace, to Swift and Pratchett, writers have used it to examine how human beings treat one another. The City Watch stories exhibit a consistent ethical system, most artfully framed. Michel de Certeau writes that "ethics ... defines a distance between what is and what ought to be. This distance designates a space where we have something to do" (199). Vimes exists in this space, choosing, time and again, that which is right over that which is easy. Even Dean Swift couldn't have done it better.

The Discworld is a fantastic place; Vimes, too, is only one writer's fancy. Yet it is hard not to feel that here may be the sort of dream that could lead one to great truths—truths beyond mere reality.

## Death

Metaphysics, ethics, and philosophy are all creations of humans, just like myths and fairy tales. Rather than by the intuitive and symbolic mode of narrative that shrouds the collective knowledge of our kind in a weave which, in the telling, pulls us inward and intrigues us, persuading us to keep the knowledge close even when the truths so mantled are difficult or painful, philosophy is a means of understanding humanity through rational thought. By applying logic, philosophers try to determine how moral human beings should behave. In this way have we sought to become what we believe humanity really is. As a species, we did not come into being with our philosophical systems in full flower; we have created ourselves, in the limited but enormous sense of having invented the concept of “ought.” The Death novels are about the way people have gone about reforming themselves.

This chapter is an examination of the five novels in the Death arc of the Discworld series; these titles, *Mort*, *Reaper Man*, *Soul Music*, *Hogfather*, and *Thief of Time*, are the metaphysical novels of the Discworld. Death, anthropomorphic personification of the Ultimate Reality, forces readers to examine what it means to be human, and mortal.

In *Mort* there is an awful lot of authorial intrusion of the “dear reader” sort. We are reminded that there is the possibility of examining the novel from without, as Death looks at life from without. Lacking the emotion which only living things possess, Death is the perfectly logical philosopher.

Imagining a thinking being who exists to be the single experience that happens to every living thing, without prejudice or quarter, with an unchanging nature and an

unforgiving Duty, enables us to examine our species in the light of a mind that thinks but lacks humanity's inexactitude. Death is not supposed to be creative. Death's lack of prejudice makes the idea of mortality bearable; a Death who might capriciously stay his hand but does not, or who strikes for any reason other than impartial duty, would be a horror. Death, by means of the rules by which he is bound, allows us to examine humankind and the rules we have invented for ourselves. Humanity's contrast with a being who has no choice shows how incredible it is that we, who can do as we please, choose duty and justice over easier things—even part of the time.

### Chapter Three: Death and the Maiden: Using the Ultimate Reality to Realize Ultimate Humanity

*Because I could not stop for Death, he kindly stopped for me...*

—Emily Dickinson

There are several shades of meaning in the word “ultimate.” Death is the personification of all of them. He is the last, the most significant and, to every living thing, the inevitable. Eventually, he stops for everyone; one would think that a species with any imagination wouldn’t want to get chummy with him. Perversely, that is exactly what human beings have done over these many centuries. He has been given face, form, and disposition. Two and a half millennia ago in Greece, he was a bearded warrior; two centuries later, he was a winged youth with a sword. Medieval Europeans had more to fear from Hell than the Greeks had from Hades; they emphasized the corruptibility of the flesh, and Death became grinning bones—a more immediate sort of *memento mori* than a beautiful youth could be for people who lived in a time of plagues.

The novels that feature *this* Death take place in a setting that, apart from the dragons and so forth, resembles the western Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fittingly, the Death of the Discworld is a black-robed skeleton; the scythe and sword he wields, and the pale horse he rides, make him stylishly period. The fact that the horse’s name is Binky makes him uniquely Discworld. Since “being summoned into reluctant existence at the moment the first creature lived” (*Mort* 214), it has been Death’s unyielding duty to free souls from the mortal plane. Dispassionate as he is, his long

intimacy with humankind has resulted in a deep interest in the beings for whom he is the fulfillment of mortality. Pratchett writes that “no one knows why Death started to take a practical interest in the human beings he had worked with for so long. It was probably just curiosity...” (*Soul Music* 5). For whatever reason, curious Death observes humanity, wondering about and at us. Through this fascination, Pratchett examines the cardinal virtues from Death’s eternal, infinitely logical perspective.

By means of Death’s contact with humans, readers are exposed to the viewpoint of a character who, being a member of no human society or assemblage, does not have any cultural, national, racial, or religious prejudices; because Death has no partisan loyalties, distinctions between differently colored or accented people fall away into the void, leaving only what is common to all, clarifying what is essentially humane. Although it may sometimes seem that all we have in common is our mortality, human societies throughout history and all over the world have pursued the ideals of temperance, prudence, justice, and courage; they haven’t always caught up with them, but the chase has lasted thousands of years. Death is well equipped to observe humanity, being present in potentia everywhere and at all times, but even close scrutiny is not always adequate to enlighten the watcher if what he sees is outside his frame of reference. In such circumstances, the only cure is communication. This approach must present some challenges, considering that as a rule the principal feature of Death’s interaction with mortals is brevity. A further complication is that mortals cannot normally see Death going about his rounds because the human mind isn’t equipped to unflinchingly observe the Grim Reaper stalking through the world; most people see him only when they die and for only a few short moments. Thanks to their connection with the forces of the occult,

wizards and other magical folk *are* able to see him, not that they usually want to. To accomplish anything useful, the narrative must include characters who can perceive Death clearly and, more importantly, for longer than the time necessary to say “hello” and “goodbye.” To satisfy his curiosity, he must relate to people in something other than his official capacity, yet it is hardly surprising that few mortals are eager for such dealings; being the king of terrors is a lonely business.

Despite the constraints of what he calls THE DUTY, Death does have autonomy in matters unconnected to the passage of souls into the afterlife; he has the freedom to do what he pleases on his own time. When fate is not involved, he has the chance to go out and meet people...the prologue to *Soul Music* reveals what happens when he does:

...the Death of the Discworld, for reasons of his own, once rescued a baby girl and took her to his home between the dimensions. He let her grow to become sixteen because he believed that older children were easier to deal with than younger children, and this shows that you can be an immortal anthropomorphic personification and still get things, as it were, dead wrong...

...he later hired an apprentice called Mortimer, or Mort for short.

Between Mort and Ysabell there was an instant dislike and everyone knows what that means in the long term. (5)

Mort’s apprenticeship and the slowly developing armistice—romance is really not the right word—between him and Ysabell are two of the themes in *Mort*. The details of what happens to the universe when the terrible compassion of Death’s duty is left to an emotional youth, on the other hand, provide the metaphysical fabric through which they

are woven. The story centers on the blunder Mort makes on the night he is first allowed to perform the Duty solo: he fails to end the life of a princess who was fated to die, an error of professional judgment that could damage the entire universe. A wise master would never allow a raw apprentice to perform a dangerous duty alone without training, and Death, despite his shortcomings in the social realm, is not a foolish being. Before Mort is let loose on his own, Death takes him along on the terminal round, to show him how to do what must be done. During what may be the strangest vocational training experienced by anyone, real or fictional, Mort tries to save a man, a king in fact, whose life they had come to end. His futile effort does not surprise his master; Death does know that much about human beings. Human compassion in a boy still learning such a trade is as normal as anything could be, under the circumstances. But Mort must be made to understand:

YOU CANNOT INTERFERE WITH FATE. WHO ARE YOU TO  
JUDGE WHO SHOULD LIVE AND WHO SHOULD DIE?

Death watched Mort's expression carefully.

ONLY THE GODS ARE ALLOWED TO DO THAT, he added. TO  
TINKER WITH THE FATE OF EVEN ONE INDIVIDUAL COULD  
DESTROY THE WHOLE WORLD, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

Mort nodded miserably.

"Are you going to send me home?" he said.

Death reached down and swung him up behind the saddle.



BECAUSE YOU SHOWED COMPASSION? NO. I MIGHT HAVE  
DONE IF YOU HAD SHOWED PLEASURE. BUT YOU MUST  
LEARN THE COMPASSION PROPER TO YOUR TRADE.

“What’s that?”

A *SHARP* EDGE. (*Mort* 45)

Some time later, Death decides that Mort has advanced far enough to go out alone. For a while, it looks as though he is right. Readers observe as Mort performs the duty, awkwardly at first; the first and second of his three assignments are a witch and a monk, both elderly and experienced with the occult, who talk him through the process. Unfortunately, the third is a young princess, someone Mort knows; he doesn’t know her well, but she set his adolescent pulse racing the night he tried to save her father. He cannot bring himself to end her life, and Death is not present to do it for him. Whether it is weakness or mercy, Mort’s actions split reality. In one universe, the princess dies as she is fated to do; in the other, she lives, but in a world that no longer has a place for her. Another fantasy and SF writer puts it poetically: “Destiny struggles to reassert the pattern that was meant to be” (Koontz 328). The fabric of the Discworld’s destiny is no longer smooth; the ripples spreading out from the princess touch other lives in an ever-widening circle, which could eventually disturb reality enough that it wouldn’t work anymore.

Of course, it’s only a story, and perhaps Death’s dire warnings to Mort about the catastrophic consequences of interference carry little weight in the real world; nothing within human power can really disrupt the cosmos. Leave the Earth a smoking ruin, yes; destroy all life as we know it, check; erase all the works of man ever to have existed, oh, yes indeed. Yet one hesitates to claim for humankind the power to “tear apart the fabric

of reality.” Such a claim would surely be hubris. Still, if tempted to consign ultimate cataclysms to the realms of science fiction and fantasy, one had better think again. If people didn’t die, our reality would change quite drastically within a very short time. Without making *Mort* into environmentalist propaganda, which it certainly is not, the world would soon be untenably crowded. Nor would the damage be limited to the ecological; human civilization is fitted to the span of human lives, and our customs and laws are built around the fact that people live and then die. It is hard to take such conjecture seriously, given that stopping Death is not possible. But if we could, as *Mort*’s example reveals, we might—and there would be consequences. In fantasy or in reality, meddling with death is a serious thing.

Mort knows rationally why he mustn’t impede the natural process of mortality, but his actions are not driven by intellect. He’s hardly unique in this; an aversion to intellect is one thing that defines our species. We are more driven by love, hope, fear, anger, and other emotions, both beautiful and ugly, than by facts and logic. The world is filled with actualities about which we are less than rational; how else can we explain the simple human refusal to lie down and die in the face of overwhelming odds, from Jeanne d’Arc to Rodger Young?

Ultimately, *Mort* cannot maintain the absolute detachment necessary to be Death and hold on to his humanity at the same time. Yet in the climactic fight between *Mort* and Death, we see that *Mort* has grown up; he is unable to lay aside his emotions, but he is willing to face what he has done. In a vast room filled with hourglasses, he challenges Death in order to defend the life he impulsively saved, and his new maturity enables him to hold his own for a short while. But no mortal can ward off Death forever, and *Mort*

loses. He ought to die, by the law of balances, but Pratchett deftly guides the story in a more interesting and positive direction. During the battle between Mort and Death, a few hourglasses are broken, resulting in deaths on the mortal plane and, more significantly, spaces in the pattern of destiny. One of the shattered hourglasses belonged to the princess's uncle, who assassinated several members of the royal family in his quest for the throne of Sto Lat. In the alternate reality Mort created when he saved Princess Keli's life, the death that should have been hers would have finally put her uncle on the throne; in the other reality, he rules the kingdom after her death. After the collapse of the alternate universe, his untimely removal from the world leaves room for Keli.

The often-repeated refrain of the Death novels is THERE IS NO JUSTICE, THERE'S ONLY ME. In this case, it amounts to the same thing. Death persuades the gods that Mort and the others should return to mortality to repair the damage they have caused. The scene is especially effective because Death initially does not mean to let them live. Ysabell defies her father to defend Mort, whom she has grown to love; he is thus preserved by the same human quality that might have destroyed the world. Mort and Ysabell's story ends with the novel, but in later books Pratchett gives readers glimpses of how it works out. Mort's having to deal with the consequences of his actions serves a much better purpose, both as a story and a morality play, than either killing him or letting him off. Being fully human and coping with what that means is difficult and painful at times, as Mort's story amply illustrates; like Mort, we keep trying, a fact which is all the more poignant because we have no gentle Death to teach us the necessity of resisting despair. We can only believe that to be humane is worthwhile, and we pay the price for it in a universe that does not follow the human precepts of justice and mercy.

In *Reaper Man*, we are treated to a more eloquent expression of the themes of justice, compassion, and what those things cost. Death himself has been demoted to mortality, as punishment for his emerging personality and involvement with humans. “[I]f it is true that the act of observing changes the thing which is observed, it’s even more true that it changes the observer” (*Soul Music* 5), writes Pratchett. As a result of his long watch, Death has changed. He is no longer as neutral as other forces in the universe would have him be; he performs his duties, but he cares about humans. And though Death is a force, there are higher forces to which he must answer. The Auditors, condoned by Azrael, decide that if Death values mortal characteristics so much, he can share the primary one. He is sent to the mortal plane, where he must live until his time is up. He goes, assuming the name Bill Door and finding work on a farm. Miss Flitworth, an old spinster, hires him to help with the harvest; he cannot produce references or any convincing account of his past, but what he can do is use a scythe. Death finds a place in the world and, for a while, some contentment. His allotted span is short, but during that time he behaves in accordance with the human principles he has come to appreciate, in one instance rescuing a little girl from a burning building; he saves the child by giving her a little of his precious time. He is able to do this because while the Auditors can strip away his immortality, they cannot take away his knowledge—and Death knows a lot about how life and time may be manipulated. His action is diametrically opposed to everything he tried to teach Mort, but Death has changed since then: “Death knew that to tinker with the fate of one individual could destroy the whole world. He knew this. The knowledge was built into him. To Bill Door, he realized, it was so much horse elbows” (*Reaper Man* 166). But keeping the fabric of reality whole is no longer his problem; in

taking away his responsibilities, the Auditors altered Death's relationship to humanity. He has nothing left to lose except everything he has, which is different from gambling with the fate of the universe; he is now an individual, not the servant of the natural order. As an individual, he walks into a burning inn to save a little girl. He cannot save her without risking something, nor can he save her permanently; all he can do is grant what is, in effect, a stay of execution. The child remains in a coma, living on borrowed time; to do any more than that, Death must battle and overcome his replacement. The new Death wears a crown, and the implications of this are chilling; the old Death did what was necessary because someone must, but he never wanted to rule over those at his mercy (*Reaper Man* 281). Fatefully, Death runs out of time before he is able to defeat the usurper. His fight, his existence, and his advocacy would all be over, and humankind would suffer in the care of a Death with a taste for tyranny—if it were not for Miss Flitworth. She recognizes that a vain and ambitious Death would be a terrible travesty; while the old Death ended lives, every day for millennia, he was on our side. She gives the embattled Death, *our* Death, enough of her own life to enable him to destroy the other; she's an old woman, and the sacrifice doesn't leave her much. The price she pays is to die sooner than she would have; having won back his place with her aid, Death is the one who will have to come for her. Unlike Mort, he knows his duty and the necessity of it, deep in his bones. He cannot avoid taking Miss Flitworth when her time is done, but he feels his debt to her deeply; like Mort, he is willing to risk the wrath of his master in order to make things right. He appeals to Azrael, who is to Death and universes what Death is to ordinary mortal creatures:

LORD, WE KNOW THERE IS NO GOOD ORDER EXCEPT THAT WHICH WE CREATE...

Azrael's expression did not change.

THERE IS NO HOPE BUT US. THERE IS NO MERCY BUT US.  
THERE IS NO JUSTICE. THERE IS JUST US.

The dark, sad face filled the sky.

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.

AND EVEN OBLIVION MUST END ONE DAY. LORD, WILL YOU GRANT ME JUST A LITTLE TIME? FOR THE PROPER BALANCE OF THINGS. TO RETURN WHAT WAS GIVEN. FOR THE SAKE OF PRISONERS AND THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS. [...]

LORD, WHAT CAN THE HARVEST HOPE FOR, IF NOT THE CARE OF THE REAPER MAN?

[...]

LORD? (*Reaper Man* 322-323)

Death believes that even here there could be room for a little mercy and, in the believing, makes the room. On the Discworld, belief is an energy woven through the world like an electrical charge; when the need for an explanatory metaphor becomes strong enough, there is a flash. This process, which in the fantastic environment of the Discworld has resulted in the literal existence of the robed skeleton we know as Death, is for us a social and psychological phenomenon, sometimes called self-fulfilling prophecy.

Social scientists William and Dorothy Thomas claim that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (qtd. in Wiley, 506-507). Norbert Wiley suggest an expansion of the Thomas Theorem, writing that “If people define selves as real, they are real in their consequences” (507). Ultimately, if people define their ethical paradigms as real, those forces so defined become real in consequence. In terms of both societies and individuals, if we tell ourselves we are humane, then we behave humanely; in behaving humanely or even attempting to do so, we engage in a volitional evolution of the self. Wiley points out that there is a flaw in the theorem: it is “...based on a leap of faith. Self-fulfilling prophecies sometimes collapse. [...] Something can always go wrong” (507). Although Wiley is referring to the developing selves of infants, his statement applies to the actualization of humane ethics as well: we have to want our evolution badly enough to make that leap, even if it seems certain that the world will not change as a result.

On the Discworld, heroes often face these leaps of faith; in their choices we can sense, dimly, what it feels like to surrender the comfortable certainty of what is, in favor of what ought to be. Granny Weatherwax, says Pratchett, is “wicked by instinct but good by choice” (Gay 8). In *Night Watch*, a young Havelock Vetinari observes that Sam Vimes is “a thug. You can see his muscles thinking for him. But he overrules them moment by moment” (179). Death, at his creation given only intellect and Duty, imagines the self he would like to be. Sometimes his reinvention of himself arouses pathos: for instance, Death will never be able to use the items on his dressing table because he will never be a living human being, obviating the need for shaving lotion and hairbrushes. However, this

mapping of the desired self fails only where it touches the physical; within the confines of the mind, what can be imagined can be made real.

Over the course of the first two novels in the subseries, Death matures as an individual. In the beginning, Death has few distinguishable traits beyond a sense of duty. According to the Discworld canon, emotion comes from the body; Death cannot feel because, as Ysabell says, "...he's got nothing to feel with, no whatd'youcallits, no glands" (*Mort* 107). Perhaps Death cannot feel, and duty is not really an emotion in the strictest sense of the word. Whatever it is, Death and Pratchett make it work *hard*. In the personification of Death, the word "duty" takes on a depth few people can comprehend, and the subtle shades of meaning within the word begin to look very much like mercy, compassion, and justice. Death's interpretation of his duty is very much like that of Granny Weatherwax and Samuel Vimes: never weak or soft—sometimes to the point of appearing sadistic, as when doing good involves a little unavoidable pain for the deserving—but never vicious, and ever devoid of needless cruelty.

In the third novel, *Soul Music*, history and Death's developing character combine in a way that precipitates a crisis of faith, or something like faith. Death questions his duty and disappears; no one knows where he went, when he will return, or even whether he plans to return at all. The catalyst is an event that he knew would come one day; Mort and Ysabell are killed, and Death's responsibility extends even to people whom he might almost be understood to love. *Soul Music* is partly about what Death does while he is away, partly about what happens in his absence, and partly about power in vessels not designed to contain it. With Death missing, and the only mortal ever to have performed the Duty now dead, the Discworld resorts to heredity. Ysabell may have been



adopted, but genetics is hardly an obstacle to a determined universe. Susan Sto Helit is Mort's daughter and Death's granddaughter, and from them she has inherited certain talents. Susan is drawn into the duty, without having been created for it, without agreeing to do it, and without even knowing what it is—her parents had thought that she shouldn't know too much about her unusual family history; in fact, they had tried to give her the most normal life imaginable. For a start, they'd named her Susan; later on, they'd sent her to boarding school. Their well-intended efforts to help her fit in are not completely successful. Her strange birthright hinders her effort to fit in at school; there really is no getting around the fact that Susan is not a normal girl. Her natural ability to make herself inconspicuous provokes complaints among the faculty, at least the ones who teach subjects she dislikes; she is always in class, but they never see her. Her tendency to answer questions before they have been asked doesn't help.

The plain truth is that she makes almost everyone around her just a little bit uncomfortable, including Miss Butts, headmistress of the Quirm College for Young Ladies. To Miss Butts falls the difficult task of telling Susan that her parents have been killed in a carriage accident; she does her best, but the interview does not seem to advance as expected:

[Miss Butts] was conscientious and a stickler for propriety and thought she knew how this sort of thing should go and was vaguely annoyed that it wasn't going.

'Er...if you would like to be alone, to have a cry—' she'd prompted, in an effort to get things moving on the right track.

'Would that help?' Susan had said.

It would have helped Miss Butts. (8)

Aloof by nature, Susan grows to young womanhood not really fitting in and not knowing who she is; not, that is, until someone shows up to tell her. The Death of Rats, created during the upheaval surrounding Death's demotion in *Reaper Man*, shows up when she is sixteen to bring her back to Death's domain. In her grandfather's absence, she has inherited the family business; her father had to learn it the hard way, but the duty passes to Susan without ceremony because the necessary qualities are part of her nature. During the seamless transition, mortality carries on as usual. People all over the Disc continue living and dying normally, without any special intervention. As a matter of course, most deaths take place without Death's personal attendance, but his presence is required from time to time to keep the process functioning smoothly, and in special cases. Sooner or later, Susan will have to take an active role.

As she wanders through Death's house, memories return to her; some are her own recollections of a few childhood visits, and others go with the job. She remembers the Duty. She doesn't need to be trained the way her father did because she was born to it. On the other hand, she is a teenage girl. One night, a mysterious force saves a young man whose soul Susan has come to collect, and she must seek out her grandfather to find out what it all means. Although he is gone in the here and now, she knows that there is one time and place where and when he may certainly be found: in the room of lifetimers, where he fought her father so long ago. She saddles Binky, and he takes her back to the night her parents defied Death; she slips into the room and watches from behind a pillar, as Death spares Mort's life and sends her parents back to the mortal world. Grandfather and granddaughter then chat for a while, catching up, and soon the talk turns to business;

Death assures her the strange matter of Imp y Celyn's life, unnaturally extended by a sort of elemental music, will resolve itself soon. In practical terms, this means that the bard will die within a few days. Susan, a young girl who found a young man handsome and talented, cannot easily accept this, protesting that "...it's all just chaos. There's no sense to the way people die. There's no justice!" (*Soul Music* 117). Despite the differences between Mort's intrinsic nature and her own, she is a lot like her father.

Susan tries to save Imp; and, although it could be said that she fails, it might also be said that she succeeds—such affairs are complicated on the Discworld. The forces that interfered with Imp's life did not belong on the Discworld, and Death resumes his office to restore the natural course of history. When outside influences have disturbed the fabric of the universe, there is a little room to maneuver; even after everything he has said to Susan and her father before her about the intolerable responsibility involved in changing the world, Death finds a small place for Imp in the mended reality. He exercises judgment and accepts the responsibility. For her part, Susan is glad to give up the scythe; human beings were never meant for such things. She doesn't fully understand some of what she has experienced; Death, the only family she has, does understand. He doesn't quite comprehend the nature of plumbing, being better equipped to deal with concepts of a less material nature, but he can help his granddaughter in her hesitant attempt to come to terms with everything that has happened on this night, and on another night in the more distant past:

'But...you've just broken a lot of laws...'

PERHAPS THEY'RE SOMETIMES ONLY GUIDELINES.

'But my parents still died.'

I COULDN'T HAVE GIVEN THEM MORE LIFE. I COULD ONLY HAVE GIVEN THEM IMMORTALITY. THEY DIDN'T THINK IT WAS WORTH THE PRICE.

'I...think I know what they mean.' (280)

Death returns Susan to her dormitory at school, and it becomes clear that although she weathered her tenure as the Harvester of Souls reasonably well for an adolescent girl, there is a price to be paid for the understanding she gained from it, and the coin of the mortal realm is suffering:

...after a while [there was] the sound of someone sobbing and trying not to be heard. It went on for a long time. There was a lot of catching up to do.

Far above the world, Death nodded. You could choose immortality, or you could choose humanity.

You had to do it for yourself. (*Soul Music* 283)

Susan chose to experience her humanity fully, and that meant standing to face something that she had avoided for too long. Miss Butts was right about at least one thing: Susan really did react to the deaths of her parents with an abnormal, or perhaps an inhuman, degree of detachment. Things are different, now. Caring for Imp committed her to human feeling, and serving in Death's stead made her conscious of her connection with her parents. Her earlier impassivity was a kind of armor against pain, but like armor, it was heavy and limiting; when she realizes how weighty her protection has been, she discards it. In the quiet and dark, the grief she never allowed herself to feel hits hard. New to humanity, Susan finds that being born hurts—but it is the kind of hurt that heals.

The process of suffering, healing, and emerging changed strengthens Susan, which is fortunate; her grandfather will need her again. The Auditors, those emotionless but strangely peevish committee beings from *Reaper Man*, have come back to have another go at tidying up the universe; from their sterile perspective life, especially humankind, is untidy and ought to be done away with. In *Hogfather*, they start by trying to eradicate the ideas that make us human, starting with the Hogfather himself. Children believe that on Hogswatchnight the Hogfather flies all around the Disc in his sleigh, giving presents to all good boys and girls. The idea is preposterous, of course, and Susan doesn't believe it for a minute; at least not until a familiar figure, dressed unfamiliarly in a red robe trimmed with white, arrives at the home where she works as a governess. She's very good at governessing; the children like her because she beats up the monsters under their beds with a fireplace poker.

Death tells her that the Hogfather is real and that he is, for want of a better term, dead. He no longer exists because children no longer really believe in him; most of them feign belief to get the presents they know come from their parents. It doesn't seem like something that could threaten humanity, until one realizes that the same mythological figure is bound up inextricably in our belief that people might choose to give selflessly to one another in the leanest, coldest times of the year. In bitter reality, midwinter is a dark time, a starving time, and a freezing time, but people have chosen to believe that it is a time for lights, generosity, and warmth. Now, *that* is hard to believe. Susan and her grandfather must save the Hogfather and all of the complex ideas he symbolizes. Death cannot do it alone; the men who carried out the Auditors' plan are in a place Death cannot go: the Tooth Fairy's realm, which is defined by the minds of children. It is

beyond Death's reach because children do not comprehend death. However, children understand governesses perfectly well; making oneself understood to children is a large component of the job description.

Susan enters the surreal dominion of the Tooth Fairy, where she discovers a psychopathic Assassin named Jonathon Teatime. Each of them almost kills the other, but Teatime escapes; Death and Susan deal with the Auditors together, on a snowy mountain ridge at the dawn of time. It isn't easy and, still standing there in the growing light, Susan wonders what would have happened if they had failed. She is told that the sun would not have risen, which, even after all she has been through, she still finds hard to believe. What would have happened instead, Death says, is that A MERE BALL OF FLAMING GAS WOULD HAVE ILLUMINATED THE WORLD (*Hogfather* 276). At first, the difference does not seem significant, but she begins to understand that the truth people invent may be the most important kind:

“All right,” said Susan. “I'm not stupid. You're saying humans need...*fantasies* to make life bearable.”

REALLY? AS IF IT WAS SOME KIND OF PINK PILL? NO.  
HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN. TO BE THE PLACE  
WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE.

“Tooth Fairies? Hogfathers? Little—”

YES. AS PRACTICE. YOU HAVE TO START OUT LEARNING TO  
BELIEVE THE *LITTLE* LIES.

“So we can believe the big ones?”

YES. JUSTICE. MERCY. DUTY. THAT SORT OF THING.

(*Hogfather* 276)

Death returns Susan to the nursery where her young charges are, if not sleeping, exactly, doing their Hogswatchnight best to fake it as realistically as possible. There is some excitement surrounding the return of Mr. Teatime, but he is no match for Susan; the children believe in Susan, and they believe in the poker. The same power of belief he deliberately exploited in his attempt to extinguish the Hogfather dooms him. Having failed, the Auditors withdraw; their dangerously insane pawn is dead, and they need a new plan.

Eventually they devise one, which makes up *Thief of Time*. The Auditors commission a clock so precise that time will be imprisoned, and the world will be trapped in the space between moments. One of them incarnates to aid a preternaturally talented clockmaker in the construction of the perfectly accurate clock that will end the world. Death and Susan stop them, with help from an old monk named Lu-Tze, and a young one named Lobsang. The same humanist philosophy that has developed over the course of the Death novels does not exhibit any startling developments in *Thief of Time*. However, it is present just as strongly; the persistent themes are self-knowledge and learning to live with that knowledge. Intertwined with the story of how Susan, Death, Lu-Tze, and Lobsang defeat the Auditors are the continuing stories of Susan's growth as a human being, Death's evolving identity, and Lobsang's journey of self-discovery.

At the beginning of the story, Lobsang doesn't really know who he is. He, like Susan, experienced a childhood incongruous with what the future appears to have in store. Susan lost her parents at an early age and, prior to their deaths, had been raised in

the most deliberately unremarkable fashion possible; before she learns that she is Death's granddaughter, her natural talents help her to get by, but she uses them rather thoughtlessly. After her awakening, though unquestionably handy in her role as a teacher, the abilities she possesses as a demimortal don't help her adjust emotionally to the demands of adult life. The timeless, immortal part of her mind sees people as ephemeral; she cannot form deep connections with beings likely to live for a century, at most.

Lobsang, a foundling, does not know who his parents were or even whether they are still alive. He was taken in, fostered, and trained by the Ankh-Morpork Thieves' Guild, showing enormous talent as a thief; known to the Guild as Newgate, he lives a reasonably ordinary life until a fall from a rooftop reveals far greater talents than he or anyone else realized he had. During the last moments of what would certainly have been a fatal accident, he shapes time and thereby arrests his plunge toward the ground. His talent saves his life, but he is still trapped because he doesn't know how to reenter the flow of time at anything other than terminal velocity. He can live only as long as his strength holds out, and then he will die. But as he hangs there in the alley, suspended by a power he doesn't understand, rescue comes in the form of Marco Soto, one of the Monks of History. Soto offers the young thief training, a new home in the monastery high in the mountains near the hub of the world, and, incidentally, the opportunity not to be splattered across the grimy cobblestones of Ankh-Morpork. Lobsang accepts Soto's help and travels to the mountains, where he enters the monastery as a novice. His early life has not prepared him for the rigors of monastic life or given him the discipline he needs to control his natural talents—in this too, he resembles Susan.



Of course, when Death tells Susan that he has found someone like her, he is referring not to the superficial commonplaces of their lives, but to the fact that Lobsang is the son of Time, and not entirely mortal. But Lobsang does not know whose son he is, and readers see him first as a callow neophyte, smug because his gifts have allowed him to get by without trying very hard. What ordinary men can accomplish after years of training with great effort, Lobsang can do with little instruction and less exertion. He does not, in fact, know how to struggle as human beings struggle, even though he doesn't know that he is anything more than mortal. Although he is gifted and although he is a member of a community that nurtures his unique abilities, something is missing from Lobsang's life. When he is apprenticed to Lu-Tze by the head of their order, it is in the hope that Lu-Tze will be the master who leads him on the journey to find himself; the journey they actually undertake is toward Ankh-Morpork, where the glass clock is being built. Along the way, Lu-Tze shows Lobsang how much he has yet to learn, pushing him almost to the limits of his abilities as they try desperately to reach the city before the clock is activated.

But in this battle against the Auditors, Susan, Death, Lobsang, and Lu-Tze are each powerless in different ways, and each has a separate part to play. Only Lobsang can sense where the clock is located, and he cannot get there without Lu-Tze. Death is forbidden to interfere in human affairs and cannot ask Susan for help directly. As Susan muses, "It was all to do with The Rules. He couldn't interfere, but he knew her weaknesses, and he *could* wind her up and send her out into the world..." (*Thief of Time* 89). He sends her out to find Lobsang, who is already trying to stop the clock, but who will need Susan's help to do it; to a person like Susan, whose nature inhibits bonds with

normal people, Death believes that the lure of “someone like you” will be irresistible, and he is right. He compels her with the surprising disclosure that there is someone like her, the son of Time, and with a book called *Grim Fairy Tales*, which contains a legend from long ago about a Glass Clock conceived of and constructed by a madman. The current menace is actually the second one to be built; the Auditors are only capitalizing on humanity’s tendency to meddle with things better left alone. Death leaves Susan with the knowledge of a possible ally, and the story of how the first clock and its maker were both undone by a single metal component in the clock’s mechanism—a weakness that the second clock does not share. The first clock shattered the timeline of the Discworld when the spring gave way and the clock exploded, but time resumed its course and the Monks of History restored the fabric of the world, leaving traces of the terrible damage.

As she considers what she has been told, Susan’s thoughts return over and over to the idea of someone mostly mortal, someone like herself. Although she still resists being drawn into family affairs of the immortal kind, her only family is Death; although she has found a sort of place in the world, her stability still depends very much on her inherited abilities and not real relationships with other people. Even though her humanity gives her the right to interfere with human affairs as much as she likes, the same immortal heritage that enabled her to save the Hogfather, to do what ordinary mortals could not, still keeps Susan apart from them; she cannot escape who she is, and to try would not only be a failure of maturity; it would be disastrous for the world. The critical difference is that now she has now grown beyond running from herself, instead turning to face everything that goes with her unique position in the world—she seeks out her grandfather to ask for information, taking the first step toward fighting for humanity in both the general and in

the personal sense, and toward a possible connection with the only person in the world who might understand her completely. The disengaged young girl from *Soul Music* resisted both the supernatural entanglements her grandfather represented and the more natural interactions of normal life, consciously in the former case, and unknowingly in the latter. This Susan is a grown woman, and she doesn't flinch from either. With the information she gains from the interview with her grandfather, she begins the search for Lobsang. To find him, she must find Nanny Ogg and ask for her help. Neither she nor her grandfather can sense the clock or Lobsang, because Time is not subject to Death. Only the midwife who delivered the infant, so long ago, might be able to help Susan find him now. She must search alone: Death can only point her in the right direction before attending to other duties.

Lobsang and Lu-Tze do not reach the clock before it strikes, and Susan does not find Lobsang until time has stopped for every human being on the Disc except the two of them. By the grace of their individually singular ancestries, Susan and Lobsang are perhaps the only people on the Discworld who can save it from the unnatural stasis imposed by the Auditors' glass clock. But Lobsang still isn't ready. Fortunately for the world and Lobsang's own well-being, Susan can guide him through a process of self-recognition similar to what she was forced to go through alone; she is able to help him find the missing part of himself. Once that happens, Lobsang becomes the man he was born to be, or, more accurately, the god he was born to become. He becomes the Incarnation of Time in his mother's stead; with Susan's help, he shatters the glass clock and then restores the fabric of history to wholeness, just as his brother monks did after the

destruction of the first clock. The tremendous effort involved weakens him, though, and he must retire from the world for a time.

Meanwhile, Death must carry out the other duties of his office; the revelation of exactly what these duties include leads to further development of Death's own character and to an unmistakable declaration of allegiance with life and humanity. After all, this is the Apocalypse, and the pale horse must ride out; because this is the Discworld, Death must first persuade Pestilence, Famine, and War to accompany him. They refuse at first, wanting nothing to do with the conflict; believing that his attempts to gather the horsemen fail have failed, he faces the innumerable legions of Auditors alone. But he has not actually failed. The others realize that they, too, are of humanity and ride to join him in the cold space high above the world, where they confront the gray-robed, incorporeal Auditors:

*And now you must all go and bring terror and destruction and so on and so forth,* said the Auditor. *Correct?*

Death nodded. Floating in the air above him, the Angel of the Iron Book slammed the pages back and forth in an effort to find his place.

EXACTLY. ONLY, WHILE IT IS TRUE WE HAVE TO RIDE OUT, Death added, drawing his sword, IT DOESN'T SAY ANYWHERE AGAINST *WHOM*.

*Your meaning?* hissed the Auditor, but now there was a flicker of fear.

"He means," said War, "that he asked us all to think about whose side we're really on" (278).

And so the four ride out against the Auditors, but they are four against legion. Their courage falters because, as Death tells them, they have become too human; as they lose hope, Death reminds the other three that, while humans are indeed vulnerable, they also face insurmountable odds without surrender. For mortals, simply living is revolt against the inevitable—the four horsemen of the Apocalypse ought to at least go down fighting. IN ORDER TO HAVE A CHANGE OF FORTUNE AT THE LAST MINUTE, YOU MUST TAKE YOUR FORTUNE TO THE LAST MINUTE, he tells them. WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN (285). And if they lose, says Death, THEN WE DID WHAT WE COULD...UNTIL WE COULD NOT (285).

Fortunately for humankind their courage, held to the last moment, buys enough time for that change of fortune; with them at the last, against the implacable Law of the Auditors, rides the fifth horseman: Chaos, the one who left before they became famous. Against all five, especially Chaos, the army of Auditors cannot stand.

Throughout the novel, Susan reflects on knowledge she has gained since the night she first crept from the window of her dormitory and rode Binky to the great dark house between the dimensions. She has changed a great deal since then, becoming whole and growing up. Death, too, has changed, enough to fight openly on the side of humanity. Though Pratchett writes that Death cannot truly feel, in every novel his actions reflect the development of a humane system of ethics. Death exists on the edge of life, and the edge is an ambiguous place. In *Carpe Jugulum*, he tells Granny Weatherwax that ON THE VERY EDGE YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND SOME UNCERTAINTY. With uncertainty comes the necessity for judgment, as Granny realizes (24). When the rules by which we act are unclear, any act is a choice. Although his sense of duty does not weaken, Death

becomes more comfortable in this space, described by Michel de Certeau as the space between what is and what ought to be (199). Death's maturation mimics the human awareness that where our actions touch the lives of others, there are consequences. We cannot hope to see all of the unintended effects we have on the world, but we can imagine that there is a right thing to do. Susan's coming of age unfolds in the last words of the novel, with Lobsang's return to the world. At last, each of them knows someone like themselves, and their alliance holds all of the possibilities of any mature human connection. She and Lobsang have both succeeded in merging the two sides of their divided natures. For all of them, though Lobsang is no longer mortal and Death's brief period of mortality never made him a human being, the realization of true humanity comes when they throw in their lots with humankind unreservedly. Each accepts that the rules are, in fact, only guidelines; their shared story is a vivid message that if we humane beings want courage, justice, and hope—enough to sacrifice for them—then nothing in the universe can prevent our having them.

### Notes

1. Thomas, William and Dorothy S. Thomas. The Child in America. New York: Knopf, 1928.

## Conclusion

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—*

*Success in Circuit lies*

*Too bright for our infirm Delight*

*The Truth's superb surprise*

*As Lightning to the Children eased*

*With explanation kind*

*The Truth must dazzle gradually*

*Or every man be blind—*

—Emily Dickinson

Humankind has been searching for truth for a very long time, as if it either were something we possessed once and lost, or exists in some place we have not yet discovered. But for all of our searching, we seem curiously resistant to anything offered as truth, perhaps because truth often challenges our comfort. Our ability to create concepts like justice and mercy by believing that they exist is not a completely safe power; we can also construct for ourselves comfortable worlds that are at variance with the cold equations of the world we inhabit. We react with caution to new information that appears to run contrary to what we already believe because the revelations we receive sometimes hurt or shock us—even new information that does not distress us in some way often requires reevaluation of everything we believed we knew about the world. We are primed to meet direct challenges to our perceptions not with invitation, but with suspicion.

It's a good thing we are clever enough to realize this about ourselves, and inventive enough to develop a game to play with the truth—through poetry, literature, music, and art, we allow truth to overcome us by stealth. By sidewise means, poets, authors, musicians, and artists “can illuminate our experience, explore the consequences of our beliefs, challenge the ways we think, and criticize our ideologies” (Lakoff & Turner xi). Writers allow the truth to be diplomatic, gentle, or even sly; their oblique approach illuminates dark places that would otherwise go unexamined. Satire and parody are sly truths, the trickster gods of literature; by invoking them in his Discworld novels, Terry Pratchett does everything George Lakoff and Mark Turner claim that poetry can accomplish. In this, Pratchett is a part of a great literary tradition; the startling part is that he illuminates and challenges readers while also being funny enough to cause grown men and women to snort incautiously sipped beverages all over their laps.

But even after overcoming our internal defenses with humor, the sheer impenetrability of modern society presents another barrier. Each of us is assaulted on a daily basis by an overwhelming volume of information; we are forced to live by triage, assigning our attention only where it seems warranted. Information presented in colorless lists is likely to be rejected by many, but when it captures the imagination with theme and plot, we have some incentive to keep it around, even to treasure it. Seizing and holding the attention of more than a few people at a time, however, is tricky. Karen Sayer remarks that “popular fiction is often dismissed as escapist and an easy accomplishment, but to achieve bestseller status a writer has to realize a heterogeneous appeal at least across class, gender and age perspectives. Bestsellers achieve their status by being culturally resonant” (109). Pratchett accounts for six and a half percent of all hardcover



sales in England, according to Michael McCarty and Mark McLaughlin (par. 1). That's a kind of resonance few have achieved.

Pratchett's incredible popularity means that he can reach readers in numbers most other writers only dream about, but it also means that he is sometimes classed with what is often called "popular entertainment." A short look around is enough to convince many people, and certainly many academics, that pop culture is vacuous and need not be examined too closely; whether this conclusion is the result of good taste and insight or the product of an elitist trend to subconsciously assume that the masses are stupid and that anything popular must also be plebeian is left to the conscience of the individual. It's hard to defend popular culture in the presence of so many examples that try to stretch one joke into a trilogy of movies, half a dozen books or, heaven forbid, countless hours of bad television. The cardinal sin of the main body of pop culture is that it asks so little of its acolytes. The cardinal virtue of good pop culture is that it affords such great scope for the exercise of more than minimal mental effort. While it is possible to read a Discworld novel simply as an adventure story, much of the humor requires some familiarity with history, culture, and literature. Pratchett writes like Dickens or Cervantes, placing a level of expectation on the reader that we are unaccustomed to seeing very often, and preserving aspects of literary heritage, history, and folklore that might otherwise be lost. Every book is dense with allusions; just getting them all on the page while maintaining legitimacy as a narrative and satire must be very difficult to do. The only writers who were ever able to do anything comparable are remembered as masters. How remarkable it is that we have one living now, and how much more so that there are also video games based on his work.

This juxtaposition of the sublime and the ludicrous only casts the aptness of the Discworld as an extended metaphor for the real world into relief so sharp that it cuts. The world on which they live may be flat, but the characters are not. In Granny, Nanny, Susan, Vimes, and even the likes of Fred Colon and Nobby Nobbs, readers recognize traces of people they know well—often, readers see themselves. They are extraordinary portraits of people we have met, people we have been, and, in some cases, the people we wish we could be. People insist on metaphors. We must have them, write Lakoff and Turner, who claim that metaphors are “indispensable not only to our imagination but to our reason” (xi). As they explain in fascinating detail, the concept of death as a journey is accessible to nearly everyone capable of reason; we have all been on journeys, and the parallels are many. Pratchett’s characters are remarkable in their resemblance to real human beings; by virtue of that accuracy, we may more easily identify with one or more of them and, by so doing, share the space behind their eyes. Granny Borrows the bodies of woodland creatures, traveling with them for a short time, experiencing life as someone or something else; we as readers do likewise with characters with whom we feel some affinity, vicariously experiencing everything that happens to them. This is sympathetic magic of a very real kind—by living other lives through fiction, complete with all of the bewildering array of terrors, tragedies, assurances, and joys such as lives often hold, we are gifted with a kind of prescience. Through such characters, future events that might otherwise confound us hold less anxiety; we can go bravely into the future, secure in having been there before.

You can’t live in a story, but you can visit one long enough to learn something. On the Discworld, it is possible to learn a lot about what it means to be human. Humanity

is defined, time and again in the Discworld canon, as “things that [don’t] have a position in time and space, such as imagination, pity, hope, history, and belief.” Without those, writes Pratchett, “all you [have is] an ape that [falls] out of trees a lot” (*Thief of Time* 6). The Discworld novels are not a correspondence course in how to be a human being, but as Harlan Ellison observes, Terry Pratchett is “the kindest, most fascinating teacher you ever had.” Whether intentional or not, planned or not, the series as a whole shows us possibilities. Humans invented the concepts of justice and humanity; having invented ourselves, we do not have to settle for what we are today—we can continue to work at it until we *are* the people we want to be.

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