



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 33
Number 2

Article 4

4-15-2015

Magical Genders: The Gender(s) of Witches in the Historical Imagination of Terry Pratchett's Discworld

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Sinclair, Lian (2015) "Magical Genders: The Gender(s) of Witches in the Historical Imagination of Terry Pratchett's Discworld," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 33 : No. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol33/iss2/4>

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Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

Fruitfully explores the similarities between Pratchett's theory of narrative causality and the gender theories of Butler and Foucault; all deal with an urge to fit gender performance into an established story. Pratchett's witches engage in a balancing act between the gender expectations of their society and their own quests for agency and power.

Additional Keywords

Butler, Judith—Literary theories; Foucault; Michel—Literary theories; Gender in Terry Pratchett; Pratchett, Terry—Characters—Witches; Pratchett, Terry. Discworld series—Gender



MAGICAL GENDERS: THE GENDER(S)
OF WITCHES IN THE HISTORICAL
IMAGINATION OF
TERRY PRATCHETT'S DISCWORLD

LIAN SINCLAIR

TERRY PRATCHETT¹ HAS BEEN WRITING THE SATIRICAL FANTASY Discworld series since 1983 and has published forty novels. Over thirty years of writing and publishing, the historical context of Discworld, and the broader fantasy genre, has changed significantly, providing a never-ending stream of ideas which Pratchett incorporates into his fantastical world. Simultaneously, Pratchett's style has matured and evolved from mere parodies to engagement with diverse questions of philosophy, history, and politics.

Ten novels and one short story comprise the Witches sub-series, which is largely concerned with the historical imagination of gender. Specifically, the major theme of the Witches stories is the protagonists' quest to balance performing the roles expected of them while still pursuing their own desires. This narrative produces interventions into both genre fantasy as well as our own (historical) imagination of gender. Through these interventions, Pratchett demonstrates to readers that gendered narratives play a constricting force in our lives and that freedom comes when we create the power to subvert or break from constructed narratives.

I will make my argument in four parts: Firstly I will consider gender in fantastical literature and establish the context of Discworld's intervention; secondly I will examine how historical gender archetypes are transcended by the witches of Discworld; I will then consider the way in which Discworld intervenes in historical discourses on gender, using Judith Butler's application of the Foucaultian concept of genealogy to the history of gender; finally I will draw upon the actions of Tiffany Aching in order to demonstrate Butler's concept of 'subversive performances' as a method by which gender archetypes are transcended.

¹ Shortly before this issue went to press, Terry Pratchett passed away. A list of *Mythlore* articles about his works can be found on page 155. It has been announced that Pratchett's final novel, about Tiffany Aching, will be released posthumously.

GENDER IN FANTASTICAL LITERATURE AND THE CONSENSUS FANTASY UNIVERSE

From Ursula Le Guin's powerful exploration of sexual and gender identity through an androgynous race of humans in *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969 to Starhawk's 1993 juxtaposition of a dystopian and patriarchal Los Angeles against a utopian eco-feminist San Francisco in the post-apocalyptic novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, gender has long been a powerful source of imagination for fantastical literature. What is important about both of these books as well as the enduring fascination with gender in fantastical literature is the way in which gender is conceptualized and treated by authors. This process has massive implications for the histories and futures which construct their fantastic worlds, just as it does in ours. In 1960, Kingsley Amis went so far as to claim that:

the sexes are far less divided in this way than we all make them out to be [and] an ideology which turns one sex into a norm of humanity, and the other into a divergence from that norm, has got a lot to be said against it. [...] [A]s things are, the only kind of fiction in which [ideas like female emancipation] could be deployed is science fiction. (89)²

Despite this potential of fantastical literature to provide a unique forum for imagining worlds with alternative histories of gender, texts that deal with gender equality and female emancipation are a minority, especially within the fantasy genre. For the majority of popular fantasy, from the modern *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* to mythologies of King Arthur and Dracula, gender remains a problematic and conservative force. These popular and cult texts draw upon and constitute an inter-subjective, evolving world with "public domain plot items," which Pratchett calls the "consensus fantasy universe" (*Why Gandalf Never Married*). Because the consensus fantasy universe is an intersubjective imaginary, it is dependent on each reader's context—to some readers it might look a lot like Middle-earth while to others it might take on the shape of the world of Camelot. Regardless of the specific form it takes, and the particular worlds that shape the reader's and author's context, the consensus fantasy universe represents a mash-up of canonical fantasy worlds. Given the canon from which it is created, the consensus fantasy universe is undoubtedly a patriarchal one—a consensus however which Pratchett challenges.

What sets Discworld apart from books like *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* is that instead of creating a significantly new world, Discworld consciously engages with and intervenes in this consensus fantasy

² I would substitute the broadly conceived genre of fantastical literature where Amis only lists science fiction.

universe. In the witches series, Pratchett draws on different established imaginary worlds; specifically, on the Shakespearean worlds of *Macbeth* (in *Wyrd Sisters*) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (in *Lords and Ladies*), as well as the Cinderella fairy tale (in *Witches Abroad*), amongst others. As a satirical, even parasitic parody of popular fantasy, world creation in Discworld criticizes the consensus fantasy universe. Pratchett himself captures this mechanism best in reference to the giant turtle, on whose back the Discworld stands atop four elephants:

Sometimes I wish I'd left out the bit about the giant turtle. It's a respectable world myth, but it might lead some prospective readers to think that it is, well, not serious.

In truth, the turtle doesn't have anything to do with most of the stories except, as it were, to carry the plot. I used it to signal that this *is* a fantasy world, with all the usual suspects: wizards, witches, gods and heroes. The twist is that it is taken seriously; not taken seriously as fantasy, but taken seriously as a world. (Pratchett and Kidby [1])

The Discworld, then, is a world from which interventions can be staged, interventions into the consensus fantasy universe and, through the genre, it can also intervene in our own historical imaginations. Coming to similar conclusions, Rice has clearly identified the nature of Pratchett's intervention in the genre:

The epic heroes in medieval literature are, without exception, male. [...] If, then, it is possible for a woman to be heroic [as we see in Discworld], we must consider why women were excluded from heroic action in Medieval literature. (6)

By creating women heroes, Pratchett challenges the conventions of gender in the fantasy genre. Clearly, he is not the first author to do this, but remains amongst a minority, especially on the best-seller lists.

Of course, the consensus fantasy universe is a kind of mirror to our own history and there are points at which the consensus fantasy universe and our own historical imagination blur into one another, as Hanes reminds us:

There is a historical underpinning to the Discworld novels that may not be evident unless you have a passing familiarity with nineteenth-century British history. The world building of the Discworld novels is particularly resonant with Britain in the nineteenth century, and the arc of the novels moves (recursively, and very generally) with the Witches in the rural Ramtops at the beginning of the century, to the late Victorian period in the urban City Watch series. (11)

During this period, the roles women were playing in Western society changed substantially:

The Evangelical ideal of womanhood remained for many the ministering angel in the house, and working outside the home was a denial of that role. But by the latter half of the nineteenth century, around 25 percent of women had to work outside the home in order to survive. Almost all of the rest worked at home. (Hanes 12)

Similar things are seen (and imagined) to happen on the Discworld. Pratchett's witch characters can be seen as pioneers, not only as women getting out of the house but also by breaking from the role of women workers as servants and 'seamstresses.' Therefore, the witches series not only intervenes in the patriarchal consensus fantasy universe, but also in our own gendered historical imagination by opening up the possibility of women existing outside strict gender roles.

In his essay *Why Gandalf Never Married*, Pratchett states that there is a

generally very clear division between magic done by women and magic done by men. [...] Strangely enough, that's also the case in this world. You don't have to believe in magic to notice that. Wizards get to do a better class of magic, while witches give you warts.

To be sure, Pratchett set out to use the Witches sub-series to directly intervene in the patriarchal consensus fantasy universe and, equally as much, to intervene in the gendered historical imagination of our own world. The stage for the intervention is set by the juxtaposition of the urban wizards who are "inherently cultured, civilized, cosmopolitan, the site of Architecture, intellect and theory" with the rural witches' village, which is "communal, natural, earthy, their subjects practical, their buildings vernacular, embedded and ordinary" (Sayer 131). The first book in the Witches sub-series, *Equal Rites*, attempts to answer the question posed earlier by Pratchett: "Can you imagine a girl trying to get a place at the University of Gnot?³ Or I can put it another way—can you imagine a female Gandalf?" (*Why Gandalf Never Married*).

³The University of Gnot is the Wizard's university in Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle. Interestingly we learn with the publication of *Tales From Earthsea* in 2001, which represents a revision of the first Earthsea trilogy with respect to the position of women, that the university of Gnot was actually founded by women; however that history had been lost because of institutionalization of misogyny within the Earthsea universe (Rawls 135).

THE WITCHES OF DISCWORD: TRANSCENDING GENDER ARCHETYPES

Gender is a recurring theme throughout the Discworld series. Some novels, such as *Monstrous Regiment*, in which the entire army of Borogravia is made up of cross dressing women, place gender at the center of the plot, while in most others, gender remains an important element, if not a central ingredient. Of course, the Witches sub-series provides the most material for gender analysis in Discworld. In part, this is because gender must be central to any treatment of witches. Furthermore the series encompasses ten distinct narratives, written and published over almost a decade and a half, throughout which time the treatment of gender evolves substantially.

In *Carpe Jugulum*, Nanny Ogg lays down a central problem for women in the consensus fantasy universe: "This is Lancre we're talkin' about. If we was men, we'd be talkin' about layin' down our lives for the country. As women, we can talk about laying down" (137-38). The narratives of the witches series largely focus on the witches struggling against their enemies to save the day, as it were, without having to either lay down their lives or 'lay down' with the enemy. The witches' power comes not from masculine bravado nor from feminine submission but from their psychological ingenuity and a stubborn Kantian ethic of not treating people as things.

Equal Rites is a story that imagines what could happen if a girl was accidentally 'chosen' to become a wizard. Eskarina Smith, thought to be the eighth son of an eighth son, is found out to be a baby girl only after her magical staff has been handed to her, marking her as a potentially powerful wizard. By raising this question in a universe more patriarchal than our own, the very nature of gender as an imaginary historical construct is raised in ways that might not be possible or at least more complicated in our own world. Firstly Esk's very existence confronts the local witch, Granny Weatherwax, and her preconceived notions of essential gender roles:

"Female wizards aren't right either! It's the wrong kind of magic for women, is wizard magic, it's all books and stars and jommetry. She'd never grasp it. Whoever heard of a female wizard?" [...] "Witches is different altogether," snapped Granny Weatherwax. "It's magic out of the ground, not out of the sky, and men never could get the hang of it." (9)

This image of the world leaves no place for people like Esk, for women who are good at or desire roles coded as masculine. The rest of the story is largely about challenging this essentialist view of gender, as much as it is about challenging the patriarchal order of wizards.

Before reaching the Unseen University, Esk has already formed a clear picture of the kind of magic she desires:

Why was it that when she heard Granny ramble on about witchcraft she longed for the cutting magic of wizardry, but whenever she heard Treatle speak in his high-pitched voice she would fight to the death for witchcraft? She'd be both or none at all. And the more they intended to stop her, the more she wanted it. (*Equal Rites* 111)

Why should not both worlds be open to her? In fact, both worlds *are* open to people smart enough to realize it and fight for it. Granny Weatherwax herself demonstrates this during the climax of *Equal Rites* when she duels against the most powerful wizard, Cutangle, the Arch-chancellor of Unseen University, and wins. She beats him at his own game, using high magic, in order to save a young wizard from a Lovecraftian⁴ nightmare (167-169). Granny's power comes from knowing when to use which kinds of magic. While "headology" is her favored kind of magic, she can and will use the raw high magic of the wizards when she needs to.

At least one commentator has concluded that because Granny Weatherwax strays from the strictly feminine roles and displays power, "she is more a man than a woman" (Andersson). This itself is essentialist reasoning. The circular logic of essentialist feminism reveals itself when Andersson continues to claim: "In the binary opposition male/female for a person to possess power, that person must be a man." She is unwittingly claiming that women can never be powerful. This interpretation reveals what Judith Butler refers to as the anxiety that "the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism" (vii) and obscures the full characterization of Granny Weatherwax, whose ability to straddle the masculine and feminine magics makes her one of the most important and formidable characters in *Discworld*. A queer reading, as opposed to the essentialist feminist reading, interprets Granny Weatherwax as *subverting* or even *ignoring* binary notions of gender, rather than swapping between the polar extremes of male/female.

We hear nothing more about the fate of Esk until twenty-three years later, when she appears in *I Shall Wear Midnight* to help out the protagonist of that story, the teenage witch Tiffany Aching. Tiffany reflects on the rumors (subsequently confirmed) about Eskarina Smith:

⁴The scene is reminiscent of Lovecraft's protagonist's escape from unnameable, terrifying things in *The Shadow Out of Time*.

[S]he had learned secrets that made the mightiest of magics look like nothing more than conjuring tricks. [...] [T]here really was a woman, then, who could walk through time and make it take orders from her. Wow! (179)

And Esk explains to Tiffany the secrets that have made her one of the most powerful wizards to have graduated from Unseen University:

I never really felt like a wizard, so I never really worried about what anyone said. [...] That's what I learned at university: to be me, just what I am and not worry about it. That knowledge is an invisible magical staff, all by itself. (169)

Another critic, Karen Sayer, draws the same conclusion about all of Discworld's witches:

[N]one of the witches easily adheres to the traditional/mythic roles assigned to them as either women or witches. The witches seek to determine their own lives and therefore rarely live within bounds. (135)

The key take-home message from the Witches sub-series, then, is that hegemonic discourses about gender roles only get in the way of our potential, in as far as the stories they tell precede and restrict our talents and desires.

NARRATIVE CAUSALITY AND THE GENEALOGY OF GENDER

A complicating concept, used in most Discworld novels, and particularly in the Witches sub series, is the idea of 'narrative causality.' Esk, during a lesson from Granny about witches' hats, observes:

"It's a witch's hat because you wear it. But you're a witch because you wear the hat. Um. [...] So people see you coming in the hat and the cloak and they know you're a witch and that's why your magic works?" said Esk.

"That's right," said Granny. "It's called headology." (*Equal Rites* 40)

This is one example of historical imaginations constituting powerful magic forces in themselves. Pratchett explains this further in *Witches Abroad*:

People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it's the other way around. [...]

And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper. This is called the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, *takes a shape*. [...]

Stories don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself.

It takes a special kind of person to fight back, and become the bicarbonate of history. (2)

Granny's need to wear the stereotypical witch's hat instead of her leather hood, which she prefers (*Equal Rites* 39), shows, as Sayer concludes:

The power of texts, language, stories and authorship therefore cut across the sequence. Each is shown to be a construct, but these constructs seem to determine experience just as surely as daggers and swords. (135)

Narrative causality is the result of the repeated recitals of stories; eventually such stories become ingrained in our minds and shape our desires. If we too begin to identify with and perform the roles as they have been recited, the stories become inscribed onto our bodies and identities and the range of imaginable alternatives is circumscribed.

Witches Abroad is a novel about the power of stories. The princess Ella is acting out the typical Cinderella role of damsel in distress and helpless princess. Ella, however, does not want to marry the prince. The three witches Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Magrat Garlick must help Ella break free from the narrative within which she has been trapped and thereby save the city of Genua from the tyrant Lily Weatherwax, who rules the city through stories. Their first attempt to stop Ella from arriving at the ball where she will meet the prince is a total failure: Magrat cuts up Ella's ball gown and turns the princess's carriage into a pumpkin while Nanny gets the coachmen blind drunk and Granny scares the horses off. These actions, of course, only feed the narrative and make it even more likely for Ella to marry the prince. A short while later, Granny realizes their mistake: "'it doesn't make a good story,' said Granny. 'Oh, buggar stories,' said Nanny loftily. 'You can always change a story.' 'Only at the right places,' said Granny" (206). The realization that the narrative can only be changed at particular points leads the three of them to intervene again. The three witches then infiltrate the ball, with Magrat impersonating princess Ella, wearing two pairs of thick socks so that the glass slippers will fit her feet. When the clock strikes midnight, Magrat the princess flees the ball, leaving a slipper behind, which Granny Weatherwax takes and smashes, thus disrupting a critical point in the narrative. From that point on the narrative unwinds and the three witches succeed in saving Ella and Genua from the tyranny of the narrative.

So now we must acknowledge the dual truth that a witch's power, especially Granny's, comes both from being able to know when to adhere to narrative causality and when to subvert it, and the points where intervention is possible. Just like in the earlier *Equal Rites*, Granny's power originates from knowing when to utilize feminine and masculine magics. Freedom, for Pratchett, is achieved when characters gain the power to break free from the constraints of narrative. Janet Brennan Croft captures this concept in an essay on the Witches sub-series: "In the dissonance between the archetypal roles and the real people filling them, Pratchett again reinforces his message that stories cannot be allowed to dictate roles to people" (154). And because the historical imagination, including the history of gender, is made up entirely of stories, we are as much subject to narrative causality as Granny Weatherwax and the rest of the Discworld's characters.

This idea of narrative causality could be seen as a metaphor for gender theory, especially for many histories of gender. For example, Foucault explains how truth is formed through the exercise of power and discourse throughout history rather than by discovering essential truths:

Truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history. Moreover, the very question of truth, the right it appropriates to refute error and oppose itself to appearance, the manner in which it developed [...]—does this not form a history, the history of an error we call truth? (144)

The practice of genealogy, according to Foucault and Nietzsche, is an investigation of history and the formation of ideas, especially those ideas which "we tend to feel [are] without history" such as gender and sexuality (139). Butler applies genealogy to the historical imagination of gender: "the purpose here [...] is to trace the way in which gender fables establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts" (xi). She then proposes a performative theory of gender—turning the traditional formulation that our actions, gestures, and desires are manifestations or expressions of gender around to create the radical idea that our gender is produced through the repeated enactment, anticipation, and prohibition of our actions, gestures, and desires.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (140, emphasis in original)

Note how similar the construction of gender is to Pratchett's theory of narrative causality: both claim that the repetition of stories are foundational to identity and give the appearance of truth, while having no original or essential truth. We can interpret Pratchett, then, through the use of narrative causality, genealogy, and gender performance in the *Witches* sub-series as largely investigating the gendered narratives and challenging their historical construction as an error called truth.

The error called truth—that gender is a natural category precluding the construction of meaning derived from our bodies in a politicized historical discourse—is where Pratchett is making his major historical intervention. In *Equal Rites* he anticipates a structuralist version of queer theory, summed up as the conceptualization of gender as “a mark that is somehow applied by an institutionalized heterosexuality, a mark that can be erased or obfuscated through practices that effectively contest that institution” (Butler 26). Granny Weatherwax and Esk effectively contest the institution that is Unseen University both by beating the men at their own game and by retaining femininity in a style reminiscent of much first wave and structuralist feminism.

SUBVERSIVE PERFORMANCES

The challenge for Tiffany Aching, a character first introduced in *The Wee Free Men*, is much more subtle and nuanced than it is for Esk in *Equal Rites* and takes on a distinct post-modern flavor. Instead of challenging an explicitly patriarchal institution, Tiffany Aching faces her own internalized demons which only she can fight by finding her place in the world, despite the causality of gendered narratives. Tiffany is a nine-year-old girl who works hard on her family's farm, is particularly good at making cheese but wants to be a witch when she grows up. The struggle for Tiffany is to break free of the typical narrative and gendered expectations of a girl farm-hand and dairy maid to become something else. Her inspiration is her now dead grandma, who was a legendary shepherd. Tiffany becomes aware of the dissonance between the archetypal 'shepherdess' character and the role played by her grandma when she reflects on a memory of her winning a china shepherdess doll.

The china shepherdess doll had an old-fashioned long dress [...]. This wasn't a shepherdess who'd kept up with the champion shearer for seven hours, sheep for sheep, until the air was hazy with grease and wool and blue with cussing, and the champion gave up because he couldn't cuss sheep as well as Granny Aching. (*The Illustrated Wee Free Men* 95-6)

However, Granny Aching was also a loner, revered and slightly feared by the townsfolk for the same reason Tiffany admired her. Tiffany's challenge then is to not only break free of the gendered narratives confronting a young woman, but to inspire the same kind of freedom in others.

In *I Shall Wear Midnight*, a 15-year-old Tiffany defeats the villain through exposing her power as a socially-constructed fiction. When a new, powerful Duchess attempts to take control of Chalk, Tiffany's kingdom, Tiffany not only refuses to abide by the Duchess's strict gendered hierarchy but also inspires others to refuse it as well. In one scene, while ordering Tiffany to the dungeon, the Duchess demonstrates this hierarchy when she chastises Preston, a young guard.

You will not call me madam! "Madam" is a title for the wives of grocers! Nor can you call me "my lady", which is a title for the wives of knights and other riff-raff! I am a duchess and am therefore to be addressed as 'your grace'. Do you understand? (198)

And when Preston refuses to lock Tiffany in the dungeon, the Duchess promises: "You have not heard the last of this, witch girl!" to which Tiffany responds "Just witch, madam. Just witch" (200). Through this dialogue, Tiffany is both refusing to abide by the hierarchy set down by the Duchess and insisting on her own simpler identity as a witch, an identity based on a skill set, not embedded in a hierarchy. Eventually, as part of a calculated strategy, Tiffany allows herself to be imprisoned in order to fool the Duchess and because she knows she can escape. Tiffany retains her power by never giving in to subservience or conformity and indeed she inspires other characters to also enact subversive performances in defiance of the conservative code the Duchess is attempting to impose. When she escapes from the dungeon, Tiffany goes straight to Letitia, the Duchess's daughter and the future wife of the Baron of Chalk, who is an archetypal damsel princess. Through talking honestly with Letitia and thus subverting the imposed hierarchy between them, Tiffany manages not only to make friends with Letitia but also inspires a surprising act of bravery when they both have to stop the witch-burner escaping from the book *The Bonfire of the Witches! (I Shall Wear Midnight 251)*. Tiffany recognizes the budding powers of a witch in Letitia and encourages her to seek training (265). In the end, the Duchess's play for power fails as Tiffany's performance effectively subverts the control she has over other characters and simultaneously increases 'livability' both for herself and those around her by breaking down archetypal roles.

Tiffany's strategy has evolved from *The Wee Free Men* to *I Shall Wear Midnight* because she has broken free of the loner archetype and is instead able

to inspire other characters to rebel with her. We can analyze Tiffany's resistance to the Duchess's power through Butler's concept of 'subversive performance.' Defined by Butler, "subversive performances such as parody and drag reveal ontological inner depths and gender cores as regulatory fictions" (Butler & Salih 93). That is to say, if all gender is performance, then particular performances can be enacted which reveal the constructed nature of the supposed 'original' formulation. However, just as Granny Weatherwax must be cognizant of the unfolding narrative in order to find the strategic point at which to intervene, Butler proposes that we must be aware of the historical and cultural context of gender construction in order to enact performances which are effectively subversive. While Butler points to parody and imitation as examples of such performances, the door is left open to any acts which "extend the norms of 'livability' to sexual minorities who live their daily lives in the irreducible complexity of identity categories" (Butler and Salih 94) and extend "legitimacy to bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal and unintelligible" (101). The successful subversive performance, whether it takes the form of an 'imitation of an imitation,' as in the case of drag, or by creating new identities and roles, in the case of Tiffany's unique performance of 'the witch,' exposes the prior performance as having no essential base, no original truth, and therefore subverts its power.

None of this suggests however that enacting such subversive performances is an easy task. Butler and Salih point out that:

People who fail to "do" their gender correctly, or who do it in ways which accentuate its genealogy and construction, are punished by cultures and laws which have a vested interest in maintaining a stable distinction between surface and depth, sex and gender, the body and the psyche, homosexual and heterosexual, masculine and feminine. (93)

Likewise, Tiffany and Esk are punished by authority figures and other characters who more easily conform to gender and class based hierarchies—they are both socially ostracized to some extent because of their non-conformity. Despite these 'punishments,' the witches are portrayed as overwhelmingly respected, successful, and happy characters, as opposed to the foes whom they overcame who are hated, failures, and ultimately dissatisfied.

CONCLUSIONS

The queer theory of Butler is not merely concerned with understanding abstracted genders and sexualities. It also provides tools that can be deployed in order to understand the weak links in gendered systems and identify points where intervention might be effective, as this essay deploys genealogy and Pratchett deploys narrative causality. These deployments can

be judged successful if they create the conditions for livability in the lives and imaginations of readers; that is when possibilities for true, real, or intelligible genders are expanded.

While fantastical literature has great potential to imagine gender outside the constraints of our world, this potential is left largely unfulfilled by canonical works. This is the dissonance Pratchett exploits in the Witches sub-series, not only to produce compelling satire, but also a desperately needed intervention. Throughout the Witches sub-series, Pratchett has navigated the transition from structuralist to postmodern gender theory and presents readers' imaginations with a range of mechanisms to combat entrenched gender hierarchy. Esk eventually becomes the most powerful magic user in history, yet is forced to live underground; Granny Weatherwax steps outside the boundaries of gender only when alone or when the stakes are high; and Tiffany's very life is a subversive performance within *Discworld*, in the larger consensus fantasy universe and, hopefully, in the imaginations of readers. The witches are Pratchett's 'proof' that we need not let our lives be ruled by stories, historical constructions of what we should do based on the ways our bodies are coded by others. In short, Pratchett is a master of engaging with the conventions of fantasy in order to subvert them along with our own imaginations about historical truth. The final question will be if these interventions are taken up by enough authors of fantastical literature and if the genre can overcome regressive tendencies to fulfill the potential to imagine a multiplicity of genders and relations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Robert Stuart, University of Western Australia and Janet Brennan Croft, Rutgers University, for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

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