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## Nice, Good, or Right: Faces of the Wise Woman in Terry Pratchett's "Witches" Novels

Janet Brennan Croft  
*University of Oklahoma*

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### Abstract

Examines the moral system that guides the use of magic by the witches of Discworld. Considers the definitions of Nice, Good, and Right under this system, and demonstrates how mature witches strive to do what is Right.

### Additional Keywords

Pratchett, Terry—Characters—Witches; Pratchett, Terry. Discworld series—Morality and religion; Pratchett, Terry. Discworld series—“Witches” novels; Witches

## NICE, GOOD, OR RIGHT: FACES OF THE WISE WOMAN IN TERRY PRATCHETT'S "WITCHES" NOVELS

JANET BRENNAN CROFT

"I just make it up in my head; it's up to you buggers in the universities to tell me what it means." (Pratchett, quoted in Butler 56)

TERRY PRATCHETT is one of the most commercially successful fantasy writers of recent decades. It's said that "no British railway train is allowed to depart unless at least one passenger is reading a Pratchett novel" (Hunt 91). One out of every hundred books sold in England in 2002 was written by Pratchett (Richards 1). But "popular" doesn't mean "shallow"; the dust-jacket blurb used on many US editions of his books reveals that he has often been "accused of literature," and even as serious a writer as A.S. Byatt recognizes his brilliance and calls him a writer with "a multifarious genius for strong parody" (Byatt).

Pratchett's Discworld series started with the picaresque comic fantasy *The Colour of Magic* in 1985, which satirized the giants of the genre. Discworld is flat, "like a geological pizza" (Pratchett and Briggs 134), and is supported on the backs of four enormous elephants, which in turn stand on the shell of a vast turtle. It swims through the depths of space attended by a tiny and astronomically improbable sun and moon. Pratchett's work has matured over the years, and he now addresses deeper issues of justice and mercy, religious belief, personal responsibility, racial tolerance, and response to technological and social change. He has developed a classically humanist moral system for his world—"humane, sceptical, and tolerant" (Curry 150)—without, however, losing his ability to make his reader fall off a chair laughing.

Pratchett fills his books with allusions to a wide range of sources, including folklore and legend, literature from high-brow to low, and popular music and opera. As Pratchett has said, "If I put a reference in a book I try to pick one that a generally well-read [...] person has a sporting chance of picking up; I call this 'white knowledge', the sort of stuff that fills up your brain without you really knowing where it came from" (*Words from the Master*). In some respects this is similar to J.R.R. Tolkien's "cauldron of story" metaphor, as described in his seminal essay "On Fairy-Stories" (26).

Most of the Discworld novels fall into distinct series, depending on which cast of recurring characters is featured. The "Witches" series focuses on

two recurring characters, Esmerelda “Granny” Weatherwax and Gytha “Nanny” Ogg, and several different apprentice witches: Eskarina Smith, Magrat Garlick, Agnes Nitt, and in the recent young adult novels, Tiffany Aching. Throughout this series, Pratchett explores themes of free will, right and wrong, and the ethics of power, often using the terms “Nice,” “Good,” and “Right” to express particular moral concepts and outlooks.

### The “Witches” novels

Granny Weatherwax made her debut in *Equal Rites*, published in 1987. She is a tall, lean, silver-haired old woman, gruff, practical, and iron-willed, an expert at what she calls “headology,” and never seen in public without her witch’s hat. She has self-control one could bend horseshoes around (*Carpe Jugulum* 10). “In the opinion of many, not least herself, [she is] the greatest witch on the Discworld” (Pratchett and Briggs 438). In *Equal Rites*, Granny defines the deep differences between the magic of witches and wizards:

It’s the wrong kind of magic for women, is wizard magic, it’s all books and stars and jommetry. [...] Witches is a different thing altogether. [...] It’s magic out of the ground, not out of the sky, and men never could get the hang of it. (8)

In *Wyrd Sisters*, Granny is joined by two other witches, Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick. Nanny is a plump and experienced old witch of vast and cheerful appetites, and a ruthless dictator to an enormous clan of descendants. She appears deceptively simple, but can “think her way through a corkscrew in a tornado without touching the sides” (*Maskerade* 190). Magrat is an apprentice witch, still reliant on talismans and books and other things the older witches see as irrelevant. She can be pictured as “a slightly watery-eyed expression of hopeless goodwill wedged between a body like a maypole and hair like a haystack after a gale” (*Witches Abroad* 20). Anyone familiar with lore about witches and goddesses will immediately recognize the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone in this trio. They also echo the three witches in *Macbeth*, and part of the plot of *Wyrd Sisters* is drawn from this play. In the end, Granny performs a spectacular feat of magic, spinning the whole kingdom forward in time by fifteen years.

*Witches Abroad* deepens our understanding of Granny’s past and character. Pratchett here introduces a key Discworld concept he calls “narrative causality”—that stories develop strength and etch grooves in the world every time they are retold, to the point where, for example, “[i]t is now *impossible* for the third and youngest son of any king, if he should embark on a quest which

has so far claimed his older brothers, *not* to succeed" (*Witches* 8). The witches travel to Genua, where Granny's sister Lily is using mirror magic to direct people's lives. But controlling people in this way is against everything Granny stands for. She may say she wants everybody to do as she says, but on the other hand, "[s]he hated everything that predestined people, that fooled them, that made them slightly less than human" (210). She defeats her powerful sister, saying, "You shouldn't turn the world into stories. You shouldn't treat people like they was *characters*, like they was *things*" (238).

In *Lords and Ladies*, the three witches return to Lancre to find that to find that it is being invaded by elves. These are not Shakespeare's elves, or even Tolkien's—these are the cruel Fair Folk out of old racial memories, the reason country people hang iron over the door and put out bowls of milk at night. Magrat is engaged to the King of Lancre and plans to give up witchcraft, since she feels she was never a witch "*in the bone*" like Nanny and Granny (*Lords and Ladies* 42). When the craftsmen of the town perform a play suspiciously like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the wedding, the barriers between the worlds are weakened and allow the elves to come through. Magrat finds the strength to defend the castle, while Nanny takes the risky path of awakening the ancient Horned King, the estranged consort of the Queen of the Fairies. Granny faces down the Queen herself:

I ain't having elves *here*. You make us want what we can't have and what you give us is worth nothing and what you take is everything and all there is left for us is the cold hillside, and emptiness, and the laughter of the elves. [...] So bugger off. (*Lords* 281-2)

With Magrat finally married to King Verence, Gytha and Esme find that they need a third witch for their coven. In *Maskerade*, a reworking of *The Phantom of the Opera*, they decide to ask young Agnes Nitt to join them. Agnes is doomed, like many fat girls, to be the one who is always "calm and capable in a crisis" (*Maskerade* 19), but she carries a secret inside: a split personality. Her second self, who calls herself Perdita, longs to be "an interestingly lost soul in plum-colored lipstick" (20) and is mercilessly critical of her hostess. Perdita was born in response to society's pressure to conform to the acceptable stereotype of the sensible, competent, pleasant-tempered overweight girl, but as much as Agnes is annoyed by her, she knows she really needs the safety valve of cynical, observant Perdita.

The short story "The Sea and Little Fishes" involves a power struggle at the Witch Trials, the annual witch's fair and competition. Granny, being Granny, has always won every contest she ever entered. But a self-appointed organizing committee, chaired by new-age witch Leticia Earwig, is determined to keep her

out and allow others a chance to win—or so she claims. Letice's real motivation is to get rid of Granny and her old-fashioned witchcraft, and replace it with her own style, which Granny disparages as "All jewelry and no drawers" ("Sea" 112). Through Granny's superior grasp of "headology," she turns the Trials into a shambles without casting a single spell; as Granny points out, "I put *nothin'* in anyone's head that weren't there already" (137).

In *Carpe Jugulum* ("Go for the Throat"), Granny almost meets her match. King Verence foolishly invites a family of vampires from neighboring Überwald to his daughter's Naming ceremony. As Granny points out, "a vampire don't have no power over you 'less you invite it in, and if it's a king as does the inviting, then they've got their teeth into the whole country" (135). The problem, as Terry Pratchett observed in an interview, is that the vampires are actually superior to Granny: "Stronger, more intelligent, faster, more cunning than she is, better than her in everything she treasures" (Rehfeld et al. 191). A witch who can't bear defeat, even at a local country fair, will have a hard time accepting this.

The new coven is broken up by one of the vampires' schemes, and Magrat has to help Nanny and Agnes try to save the kingdom without Granny. The three have some trouble fitting themselves into the roles of Mother, Maiden, and Crone, and in his observations on their struggles Pratchett again comments on narrative causality and the way people often find themselves acting out parts dictated by stories. Agnes may technically be a Maiden, but Perdita, mentally, does not fit the role. Magrat is now a mother, but still too much of a "wet hen" to fit the Mother-archetype perfectly. And Nanny objects to having to be the Crone, being far too cheerful and motherly to impersonate a hag. Granny herself combines all three in one, as Nanny has observed:

She was a maiden, as far as Nanny knew, and she was at least in the right age-bracket for a crone; and as for the third, well . . . cross Granny Weatherwax on a bad day and you'd be like a blossom in the frost.  
(*Maskerade* 8)

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.

The three most recent *Witches* books are a young adult series. In the first, *The Wee Free Men*, nine-year-old Tiffany Aching, who has inherited her magical talent from her sheep-herding Granny, must rescue her baby brother from the Queen of the Elves. Her grandmother taught her a keen sense of responsibility: "Them as can has to do for them as can't. And someone has to speak up for them as has no voices" (159). In spite of her ambivalent feelings about her brother, she knows she will do anything to save him:

I don't love him. I know I don't. He's just so . . . sticky [...] and he's always screaming for things. [...].

[But] He's *mine*. My place, my home, my brother! How dare anything touch what's *mine*! (157)<sup>1</sup>

### Nice, Good, and Right

Farah Mendelsohn suggests that the ethical system of Discworld is based on valuing the individual, and both his right and his responsibility to make his own choices (Mendelsohn 161). *Nice*, *Good*, and *Right* are terms that occur frequently in the *Witches* novels, as shorthand for a complex of ideas about how a witch should or should not deal with this moral imperative: how she should handle her power, treat other people, and face her responsibilities to the world. In simplified form, Nice people don't make hard moral choices but just try to get along in life while offending the fewest people. Good people tend to follow a moral system imposed from outside, and make their choices based on outside authority; being Good or Bad involves making a deliberate choice. Being Right means seeing past Niceness or Goodness; it means making decisions that are just but not necessarily merciful, morally correct but not necessarily pleasant.<sup>2</sup>

How exactly do Nice, Good, and Right manifest in Pratchett's novels? Victoria Martin addressed these terms in a series of articles drawing on discussions with Pratchett on alt.fan.pratchett. The terms are, as she points out, not "mutually inclusive", and "[i]t is a notable feature of [Pratchett's] strong 'good' characters that they have the potential to be evil, whereas the evil characters have no such potential for good" (*Niceness* 1). As she points out, a perfectly good character in the more traditional sense would be equally Nice, Good, *and* Right, but most of Pratchett's protagonists embody only one or two traits at a time (*Niceness* 1).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wee Free Men* is followed by *A Hat Full of Sky* and *Wintersmith*, which further explore Tiffany's interactions with the supernatural powers of Discworld. Tiffany's journey into knowledge and mastery of her powers deserves its own paper, and will not be further explored in this one. But let it be noted she is the only apprentice witch in Lancre permitted to call Esme Weatherwax "Granny" rather than "Mistress."

<sup>2</sup> Pratchett is known to admire Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1987 musical *Into the Woods* (cited Martin, *Niceness* 1; also Pratchett, "Let There Be Dragons" 145), and may have drawn on this source to refine his use of these terms. Nice, Good, and Right are used in various ways throughout the musical, which interweaves the stories of Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, and Little Red Ridinghood. At one point the Witch sings "You're so nice. / You're not good, / You're not bad, / You're just nice. / I'm not good, / I'm not nice, / I'm just right. / I'm the witch. / You're the world" (121).

NICE

Martin defines Nice characters as “weak: they don’t want anyone to be hurt, and so they shrink from making the hard decisions, from assuming the burden of responsibility. Niceness [...] is a kind of wishful thinking, a refusal to face facts” (*Niceness* 1). For Granny, witchcraft is the opposite of Niceness: it requires the strength to see the facts clearly and make the hard decisions that have to be made. Magrat Garlick is a textbook Nice character when we first meet her: “The kind of person who rescued small lost baby birds and cried when they died, which is the function kind old Mother Nature usually reserves for small lost baby birds” (*Witches* 20). Her husband-to-be, King Verence, is also Nice; he cares about his subjects and wants to modernize and democratize Lancre, which is happy just the way it is.

In contrast to Goodness, which can be impersonal and idealistic, and Rightness, which is often impersonal and manipulative, Niceness calls for a more personal relationship with other people, accepting them as “fallible fellow creatures” (Martin, *Niceness* 2). Nice people don’t want anyone else to be hurt, because they care about how they feel. A Nice person has insight into the weaknesses of his fellow creatures and makes allowances for them. Granny, on the other hand, has a way of expecting other people to be able to handle whatever burden she gives them. When Granny tries to be “nice” in “The Sea and Little Fishes,” it terrifies the townspeople, and not a witch at the Trials can get her mind under control and do her spells properly. They know they can trust her when she is frowning; the cheerfulness is too obviously a false mask over her true nature. As Nanny tells her, “You’ve never been really . . . good at nice” (120).

The dark side of Niceness is personified in Letice Earwig. “The Sea and Little Fishes” is notable for its very explicit opposition of the terms Nice and Right, and Letice exemplifies how a false mask of Niceness can disguise naked envy and ambition. She would like Granny to make a “nice gesture” by dropping from the competition (109), would like the bonfire to be “nice and safe” and is glad that things “sorted out nicely” (110). When Nanny tries to calm Granny after Letice’s visit, Granny sneeringly uses the word “nice” to describe her motives, her hatpins, and her pink knitted privy lid cover (112). Letice’s mask slips when she accuses Granny of trying to “undermine her authority” (123) and pettily puts a nasty sign on Granny’s jar of homemade jam (128). She finally accuses Granny of putting a curse on the Trials and, when Granny denies it, shouts “*You know you could have done it easily!*” (135). As Granny had pointed out earlier, she always starts off a competition knowing she is going to win. Her opponents make the mental mistake of allowing themselves to doubt that they will win, and as Granny says, “No wonder they lose, if they ain’t getting their minds right” (109)—that is, if they do not have their minds honestly aligned with what is Right, with no masks or self-deception.



Is Agnes, who replaces Magrat in the Lancre coven, Nice? Not entirely; she possesses a sympathetic understanding of other people and their motivations, but Perdita is far from nice and balances any tendency she may have to sentimentality. Agnes was brought up to be Nice: "to do what she was told, not to put herself first, to be respectful to her elders and to use no swearword stronger than 'poot'" (*Maskerade* 67). But she worried about becoming too Nice, and that led to the birth of Perdita, who sees clearer and has fewer illusions than Agnes; her acerbity leavens Agnes's Niceness and creates a more complex whole.

### GOOD

Goodness can be an ambiguous concept on Discworld. Good characters are idealistic, but they also have a tendency to sacrifice individuality to "impersonal ideals" (Martin, *Goodness* 1). Goodness may be a fine characteristic to possess, but a Good person in a position of power has the potential to be extremely dangerous, and may be tempted to "[impose] his idealism on others" (*Goodness* 2). Magrat's epigram captures the danger of allowing the Good to be in charge of the world: "The good are innocent and create justice. The bad are guilty, which is why they invent mercy" (*Witches* 220).<sup>3</sup> There are few examples of truly Good characters in the "Witches" novels; perhaps Mightily Oats, the Omnian priest in *Carpe Jugulum*, comes closest, at least after his wavering faith is tested and refined by his adventures with the witches of Lance. Goodness is a concept Pratchett explores more thoroughly in the "City Watch" novels.<sup>4</sup>

Magrat's husband, King Verence, was Nice when they met, but at the beginning of *Carpe Jugulum*, he is driven by his desire to reinvent Lancre as a member of the modern world community. His ideals are obscuring his understanding of his people as individuals—he is beginning to see them as subjects to be molded, not persons to be accepted with all their faults. His goal, which may be Good, is leading him to devalue individuality.

Lily Weatherwax embodies the darker side of Good. She justifies her actions by asserting that her goals and ideals are Good, and uses narrative causality to enforce her expectations of how others should behave. Lily calls herself "the good one" and sees Granny as the opposite of a fairy godmother:

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<sup>3</sup> A fine example of Pratchett's "white knowledge"—this aphorism is attributed to G.K. Chesterton and quoted in a slightly different form in Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories" (44).

<sup>4</sup> Note, for example, Pratchett's description of Carrot Ironfounderson and the possibility that he is the long-lost heir to the kingship of Ankh-Morpork: "He is direct, honest, good-natured and honourable in all his dealings. [...] Few civilizations can survive long under an honest, just and strong leader, which is why they generally take care never to elect them" (Pratchett and Briggs 82-83).

“someone who was poison to stories and [...] quite the most evil creature in the world” (*Witches* 128).

Granny, however, sees herself as having been forced into the role of “the good one” when Lily left home, and bitterly resents it—not because she wanted to be evil, but because it was not her own choice. And during their confrontations in Genua, Lily tries to force the witches into the roles of Nice and Good to keep control over them: “[Y]ou’re the nice one, aren’t you? You have to keep your word. [...] Be good. It’s what you’re good at” (240). Lily insists to Granny, “I’m the good one. I can’t lose. I’m the godmother. You’re the wicked witch . . .” But Granny replies “Good? Feeding people to stories? Twisting people’s lives? That’s *good*, is it?” (243). As Granny later observes, “Good and bad is tricky. [...] I ain’t too certain about where people stand. P’raps what matters is which way you face” (251).

### RIGHT

Right is all about “which way you face.” Choosing to be Right rather than Nice or Good is a risky business. Granny said she had

*always* tried to face toward the light. But the harder you stared into the brightness the harsher it burned into you until, at last, the temptation picked you up and bid you turn around to see how long, rich, strong and dark, streaming away behind you, your shadow had become. (*Carpe Jugulum* 46)

In a near-death experience in *Carpe Jugulum*, she faces just this temptation, but she is strong enough to tell the darkness within herself, “I’ve fought you every day of my life and you’ll get no victory now” (191).

Right is not the same as Good; the duality involved is Right and Wrong (in this case, essential, almost Taoist qualities), not Good and Evil (here meaning definitions artificially imposed by authority), a subtle distinction Granny makes when she claims, “Good and Evil were quite superfluous when you’d grown up with a highly developed sense of Right and Wrong” (*Maskerade* 105). In Genua, Granny says she and her friends “gives people what they know they really need, not what we think they ought to want” (*Witches* 229). A Good person, like Lily, would give people only what she thought they ought to want, according to her own ideals; a Right person would find out what they truly needed in the real world. Nanny makes the distinction clear:

Granny was an old-fashioned witch. She didn’t do good for people, she did right by them [even though] people don’t always appreciate right. Like old Pollitt the other day, when he fell off his horse. What he wanted

was a painkiller. What he *needed* was the few seconds of agony as Granny popped the joint back into place. ("Sea" 112)

Granny defines witchery as the willingness to make the Right choices and take the consequences. At the beginning of *Carpe Jugulum*, she faces the hardest choice a midwife can make: she can save the life of a mother or her child, but not both. She is called in to take over a difficult birth, and the attending midwife is shocked when Granny refuses to ask the husband whom she should try to save:

"You still reckon I should've 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 hat pins.

"No!"

"Then what's he ever done to *me*, that I should hurt him so?" (21)

Rightness sometimes requires making decisions "so that others didn't have to, so that others could even pretend to themselves that there *were* no decisions to be made" (*Carpe* 30); so that, if they chose, they could remain Nice and be innocent of responsibility. This compassion for human frailty makes Pratchett's witches, even the righteous and almost superhuman Granny, far more likeable. Without it, Right could be harsh and antiseptic and perhaps even selfish; it could shade quite easily into manipulateness, a crime against valuing individual choice. But in its ideal form, Right is tempered by an understanding of human nature and the willingness to take on the burdens of others. Right is, in a way, akin to mercy, since it can involve "taking on oneself the consequences, emotional and otherwise, of another person's wrongdoing" (Bridger 98)—or weakness. Taking Right even further (and a step closer to Charles Williams's principle of coinherence), in accepting these burdens, as Grace Veach suggests, one may be "invited to share in the role of savior" (125).

Rightness can, however, sit on the knife-edge between right and wrong. Granny could very easily be a bad witch; she has "a quick temper, a competitive, selfish, and ambitious nature, a sharp tongue, [and] an unshakeable conviction of her own moral probity" (Pratchett and Briggs 440). Granny wants to be remembered as the greatest witch who ever lived, but her secret fear is that she will turn out like Black Aliss. Aliss was a very powerful witch who lived before Granny's time, and performed legendary feats like sending a castle to sleep for a hundred years. When Granny succeeds in moving the whole kingdom of Lancre forward fifteen years in time, she is very pleased to hear Nanny say it was "Better than Black Aliss" (*Wyrd Sisters* 196). But Aliss ended badly, pushed into her own oven by two children. Aliss had "become so good at magic that there wasn't

room in her head for anything else" (*Maskerade* 2). Faced with this example, Granny secretly worries that "if you actually were evil, would you know?" (Rehfeld et al. 191). Evil does run in her family—her sister Lily tyrannized Genua, and her grandmother was thought to have gone bad just like Black Aliss. But by the end of *Maskerade* Granny comes to terms with her fear and understands herself better:

"There was a wicked ole witch once called Black Aliss. She was an unholy terror. There's never been one worse or more powerful. Until now. Because I could spit in her eye and steal her teeth, see. Because she didn't know Right from Wrong, so she got all twisted up and that was the end of her.

"The trouble is, you see, that if you *do* know Right from Wrong you can't choose Wrong. You just can't do it and live." (207)

If Magrat is Nice, and Granny is Right, where exactly does Nanny fit in? It would be symmetrically pleasing if she was Good, but that would mean giving in to the demands of narrative causality. Nanny prides herself on being "ordinary as muck" (*Witches* 138), but she is more complex than she appears on the surface. Her "ancient moral code" is older by far than that of the other witches (Pratchett and Briggs 275). There is a suggestion in *Lords and Ladies* that the Ogg family has a longstanding relationship with the Horned King, which would connect her with early Discworld fertility cults (not inappropriately for a woman with fifteen children). Her guiding ideal is a wide-ranging tolerance for all human weaknesses. She has no problem with the many religions on Discworld, as long as "none of *them* object to *me*" (*Carpe* 36). She is "in a strange way, a highly moral person; it's just that she doesn't confuse morality with strait-laced cowardice and want of adventure" ("Imaginary" 164). In fact, she is as Right as Granny, but given her more elastic approach to the truth, Nanny has no compunction about hiding her Rightness under a veneer of Niceness when needed. As she muses, "You got on a lot better with people when you remembered to put frills round it" ("Sea" 112).

Nanny clearly shares certain characteristics with Nice people; she has "an honest, earthy outlook" and "a non-judgemental understanding of human nature" (Pratchett and Briggs 301).

Nanny didn't so much enter places as insinuate herself; she had unconsciously taken a natural talent for liking people and developed it into an occult science. [...] Nanny Got On with people. Nanny could get a statue to cry on her shoulder and say what it really thought about pigeons. (*Maskerade* 154)

She even thinks of her cat Greebo, whom others describe as "a fat, cunning, evil-smelling multiple rapist" (*Wyrd* 121), as an old softy. She "radiate[s] a perpetual field of It'll-be-all-rightness" (*Carpe* 186).

But as she once warns, "[D]on't go thinking I'm nice. I'm only nice compared to Esme" (*Maskerade* 171). As a talented and experienced witch, she is capable of the same sort of decisive Right action as Granny. In fact, Granny envies her apparent ability not to agonize over her decisions (*Carpe* 46). Nanny knows how to use Niceness to disguise the steel within: as one character who crossed her observed, "Sharpness from Nanny Ogg [...] was like being bitten by a big friendly dog. It was all the worse for being unexpected" (*Maskerade* 170). For example, she is unexpectedly ruthless when she approaches the Horned King in *Lords and Ladies*. She wants him to stop the Queen of the Elves, but she won't let him come back to the outer world either:

I've got kiddies, y'see, and they don't hide under the stairs because they're frit of the thunder, and they don't put out milk for the elves, and they don't hurry home because of the night, and before we go back to them dark old ways I'll see you nailed. (256)

### **The Morality of Witchcraft on Discworld**

Nice, Good, and Right can therefore be seen as three ways of responding to one's moral right and responsibility to make choices. Niceness tries to evade the responsibility; it is a way of muddling along until circumstances or other people make your choices for you. Goodness assigns the moral responsibility for choice to an outside ideal; the ideal tells you how to choose and thus, if you are true to your ideals, you are not truly responsible for your choices. Rightness respects the individual as a moral agent and never descends to treating him as an object. Right places the burden of choice squarely and perpetually on each individual's shoulders; but a Right person with a strong sense of empathy may take on the burden of making a decision for someone who is unable to do so.

The philosophy and ethics of witchcraft are firmly based on striving for Rightness. Throughout the "Witches" series, we can see the younger witches first resisting, then growing towards this ideal. Rightness is linked to the fact that magic on Discworld is a neutral power, neither black nor white: "There is simply

magic, in whatever form, which may be used in whatever way the user decides” (Pratchett and Briggs 277). A mature witch has to respect the rights of the individual and be willing to take complete responsibility for her own actions. But she must also do for those who can’t do, and speak for those who can’t speak—that is, sometimes she has to make choices for those who lack the strength or ability to do so. Witchcraft is not a path to an easy life—as a glimpse at Granny’s life shows, “You worked hard and denied yourself things and what you got at the end of it was hard work and self-denial” (“Sea” 113). It is more of a calling to try to help the world go right.

As Granny put it,

You had to choose. You might be right, you might be wrong, but you had to *choose*, knowing that the rightness or wrongness might never be clear or even that you were deciding between two sorts of wrong, that there was no *right* anywhere. (*Carpe* 45)

But witches must restrain their power as a matter of principle. Using magic on people removes their right to choose, and therefore using magic conflicts at a very basic level with being Right. And using magic on *things* can engrain the habit of using magic and lead to using it on people. As Nanny points out,

The more you get used to magic, the more you don’t want to use it. The more it gets in your way. [...] [W]hen you get along in the Craft, you learn that the hardest magic is the sort you don’t use at all. (*Wyrd* 157)

Nanny says this about Granny’s reluctance to use her powers: “[S]he thinks you can’t help people with magic. Not *properly*. It’s true, too. [...] [B]ut you can help them with skin. By doin’ real things, she meant” (*Witches* 94). This is a lesson that all the young apprentice witches eventually learn: the most important thing about magic is knowing when to use it, and when to use ‘skin’ instead.

Through the medium of Granny Weatherwax, Terry Pratchett speaks most clearly on the ethics of Rightness and witchcraft in *Carpe Jugulum*. Part of the book tracks Granny’s travels with the Reverend Mightily Oats, as they try to reach the vampires’ castle in Überwald. And being Granny, she spends most of her conscious hours arguing theology and ethics with him. This conversation goes to the heart of Discworld’s ethical system:

“There are so many shades of gray” [Oats said].

“Nope.”

“Pardon?”

"There's no grays, only white that's got grubby. I'm surprised you don't know that. And sin, young man, is when you treat people as things. Including yourself. That's what sin is."

"It's a lot more complicated than that—"

"No. It ain't. When people say things are a lot more complicated than that, they means they're getting worried that they won't like the truth. People as things, that's where it starts."

"Oh, I'm sure there are worse crimes—"

"But they *starts* with thinking about people as things [...]" (217-8)

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