

Michael McDaniel

Final Draft

Dr. Westcamp

30 March, 2017

Legitimization of Fantasy using Cultural Issues

The subgenre of fictional writing called Fantasy has never been treated with as much respect as other genres and subgenres. Even in today's world, the subgenre of science fiction is more popular and respected than fantasy. Today's society is less interested in the imagination of the past and more interested in what might be the imagination of the future. This has led to the continuation of the disinterest and disrespect of fantasy writings. There is also a lack of agreed canon when dealing with fantasy. The work of Isaac Asimov will always be at the top of the canonical list of science fiction to most of the world, but fantasy has been around for so long that it is hard to agree upon what should be considered canonical. Fantasy is something that is considered without canon and without reality; that thought is more fantastical than any dragon or fairy tale. Sir Terry Pratchett is one author that has written many stories of fantasy that deal with several real-world issues that it is astounding. In his many years of writing, Pratchett had created a primary series of fantasy called the *Discworld* that has over 40 novels that each could be considered a canonical text for fantasy literature. It is these novels and their inner meanings and world connections that hold a key to the further respect and legitimization of the fantasy genre.

Dealings of impossibility is the first key element that makes fantasy what it is. Giant creatures that fly called dragons, creatures made of stone called trolls, or golems, and the always popular group of witches and wizards. All these are the most common elements of fantasy

literature, and they are indeed in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series. These are both the easiest and hardest factors to get past to really see the real issues that lies underneath; underneath are the lessons in gender equality, retelling of historic situations, and racial acceptance, and more.

Melissa Thomas a writer for *The English Journal*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has written about the importance of fantasy literature and getting past the initial stigma that surrounds it. Another issue that harms the respect of fantasy is the disbelief that goes along some of its aspects.

Yes, talking animals are absurd, and tall green creatures such as trolls or their shorter versions, goblins, are also farfetched to some. Certain issues that are called fantastical are confusing though. How some groups can call a spell-caster or clairvoyance a pure figment of imagination, but still have full belief in someone who divided an entire sea is baffling. If wizards and witches are just myths and fairy tales, then are the witch hunts and trials that happened in the past also fairy tale? Golems are another issue of fantasy versus reality as well; golems are a part of folklore and beliefs of Judaism. George Aichele Jr, is one writer of *the Journal of the American Academy of Religion* who is not afraid to discuss matters of connections between fantasy writing and religion philosophy. Fantasy and theology both are respectful area in the lives of mankind, but respecting them does not require a strict belief in only one, but a semi-belief in both.

After the clouds have been lifted, then light can be shined on the truer issues and methods on how to look at the texts in a lens that showcases the truth that lies in the novels of the *Discworld* series. View through the literary lens of and Cultural Studies, issues and events are conjured from reality as if it were magic itself. These issues and events are written into fantasy from the reality that we live it. Novels such as *Carpe Jugulum* that relate back to the witch

burnings in the past of Christianity, and to more recent events in history like the race wars we experience in the early to mid-1900's in Terry Pratchett's novel *Men at Arms*. Another important memory in our history was female equality and equal rights that influence the *Discworld* novel *Equal Rites*. Before that though, knowledge about the source is needed, and that source lies with one man, Sir Terry Pratchett.

Terry Pratchett was a British author who was born in 1948 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. He left school at the age of seventeen to pursue a career as a journalist at The Bucks Free Press. 1971 was when his first novel, *The Carpet People* was published while he was still working as a journalist. In was in 1983 that *The Colour of Magic*, first novel of the *Discworld* series was published. It was not until 1987, at age of 39, that Terry Pratchett gave up work to become a full-time writer. 1996 was when the Times recorded that Terry Pratchett was the most popular and bestselling author in Britain. 1998 was a real honor for him, the first of many, when he was appointed OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. 2009, a true year to remember in the life of Terry Pratchett, when he was raised to Sir Terry Pratchett. Being knighted, is not the only thing that makes him a respect and acclaimed author. Pratchett was awarded ten honorary doctorates: University of Warwick in 1999, the University of Portsmouth in 2001, the University of Bath in 2003, the University of Bristol in 2004, Buckinghamshire New University in 2008, the University of Dublin in 2008, Bradford University in 2009, University of Winchester in 2009, The Open University in 2013 for his contribution to Public Service and his last, from the University of South Australia, in May 2014. Many of his novels won different awards and accolades over the year, but there was one that he was the proudest of. In 2002, his novel *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* won the Carnegie Medal. Despite the many other awards, honorary degrees and knighthood that followed, he always said that this was

the award he was most proud of. A man with a knighthood and ten honorary degrees under his belt was the proudest of a children's book. He was a great man, but the keyword is "was".

Terry Pratchett suffered from posterior atrophy (PCA), which is a rare form of Alzheimer's that he talks about in his newspaper article for *The Guardian*. He describes his feelings when he found out by saying that "When Milton's Satan stood in the pit of hell and raged at heaven, he was merely a trifle miffed compared to how I felt on that day" (Pratchett). A logical feeling when an author is told that not only does he have dementia, but that it is also destroying his eyesight at the same time. It was apparently his spelling that first alerted him to his condition, it was constantly getting worse and words were blanking on him. Not normal for a man who had written 47 novels in 25 years. All this did not stop him from writing though, he continued with his career despite his condition. He had his friends, family, and fans supporting him. For the next 7 years after his diagnosis he wrote about three novels a year, a truly inspiring feat, until he died peacefully in his sleep in 2015. As a writer, his work ethic and dedication was amazing, just as amazing as the world he created.

Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a truly fantastical world in its shape and design. The world is a circle that is balanced on the back of four colossal elephants that are riding on the back of a galactic-sized space turtle called A'Tuin. The turtle does not speak or any other clichéd fantasy task you may be thinking of. It simply just exists to carry the story along. The middle of this roundworld is not a hole, but a giant peak called Cori Celesti, the Discworld's version of Mount Olympus. The entire disc itself is also balanced by a giant land mass called the Counterweight Continent. The most notable city that will be mentioned is Ankh-Morpork where many of the novels take place. What races live on the world are the normal assortment of fantasy novels: humans, dwarfs, and trolls mostly. Of course, there are also witches that live in the mountains

and towns who act as midwives and other jobs, and wizards who study and learn the prestigious Unseen University. Elves are hated in the history of the Discworld and are feared by many, while dragons are considered myths and legends. A truly unique world, created by a truly unique man; a man who truly loved writing, though his real talent came from his history as a journalist.

A journalist is someone who see the world and writes about the observations that are shown to them. Terry Pratchett applied that style of writing by showing societal issues that were observed in the real world and translating them into a fantasy world. He created a literary universe call the Discworld, the world that series is named after. In this world that is flat and has edges, Pratchett recreates our own world in a way that is easier to look at. He softens the blows, but keeps the same force that comes from writing about religion, gender equality, and ethnicity. All of his works carry with them the truth that is out in the real world, but on a world that is more fantastical. It is these fantasy novels, the *Discworld* series that gives fantasy respect and legitimacy.

Humanity is constantly changing, our language and our beliefs are constantly evolving. In the past, devices such as cell phones were the dreams of science fiction. Now we respect that technology. Yesterday fantasy was not a legitimate genre of literature. Tomorrow, we can hope that people will learn to respect it. The first step is looking at the literature the right way. The beginning of the beginning, that is where things should really start, a first step.

The first step into solving a problem is admitting we have one. People have a problem, and that problem is judging books by their covers. People are wrong if they belief that our society has moved on from this issue. People will always cast judgments and ideas about anything at first glance. It is our nature to cast doubts or assertions on something based on what people have already assimilated into our knowledge. This is the known problem, but another

problem is even worse. People judge books on less than just a cover, books are judged based on what genre they are labeled. Fantasy is a classy and proud genre, that is full of powerful knowledge and stories. It walks with its head held high, and stigma attached at the foot in the form of judgmental chewing gum and toilet paper. This stigma is what is killing the respect that fantasy has earned. People do not see what fantasy is, only the initial stigma that surrounds it.

Melissa Thomas describes fantasy novels as such: “Fantasy novels are set in worlds that readers are familiar with, either because they can see it out the window or have some primal memory of it” (Thomas 60). This echoes the thoughts of what many theorist and literary critics believe, that fantasy is derived from our perceived reality. Fantasy must originate from logic. Fantasy cannot exist without reality in the same way that “good” cannot exist without “evil”. Heat cannot exist without being compared with cold. If there is no reality, there is no such thing as fantasy, because fantasy would be reality. Even Terry Pratchett himself agrees with this saying that “for what Discworld is, more than anything else, is ... logical. Relentlessly, solidly logical. The reason it is fantasy is that it is logical about the wrong things, about those parts of human experience where, by tactic agreement, we don't use logic because it doesn't work properly” (Pratchett, “Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories” 160). Fantasy is not a flipped coin of our current world; it is more of bent quarter with some paint on it to make it look different. It shares similarities, and has laws that govern its existence, just different ones than ours. In the Discworld, a fire can still be started by the normal laws of physics, but can also be started by applying the correct amount of thaumaturgical energy needed to create fire.

The magic that wizards in the Discworld is based on strict, logical, magical laws. These laws cannot be broken without extreme repercussions or cost. Transforming someone into a toad is considered quite hard because magic in the Discworld still uses the Law of Conservation of

Mass. You cannot turn someone into a toad without dealing with all the extra mass. Logical, but still magical, is a concept in fantasy that past stigma covers up. To many, far too many, people fantasy novels are just “escapist fluff- full of scantily clad sorceresses and wizards with *long* staffs” (Thomas 60). Fantasy is not escapist fluff; fantasy is our reality disguised in order to talk approach serious matters in a more likable manner. The Discworld, with logic and seriousness, tells stories that bring legitimacy fantasy with novels on racial-social commentary, gender issues, and even religious commentary. Those who perceive fantasy as rubbish and empty of logic are those who truly lack and abuse logic. The same sentiment can be applied to those who argue that fantasy cannot coexist with religion.

To believe in something is not hard; belief is simply the mental ability to know that something follows a certain pattern. People will not doubt that an object that is dropped will fall. People do not doubt that a person they are in physical contact with is real. These are simple enough things to believe, because gravity has always worked and a physical person is indeed real if perceived as such. People also believe that in a holy placed Heaven and a place of sin and repentance called Hell, both of which are in the Bible. Abstract and spiritual places and things that can only be seen in a book; fantasy some might say, since the definition of fantasy is “the faculty or activity of imagining things, especially things that are impossible or improbable” (*OED*). Issues that involve religious faith are powerful to people and their beliefs. Now before this continues, I am not going to claim that dragons, witches and wizards, trolls, and such are real. They are indeed fantasy, but that does not mean that fantastical events or people cannot be respected. People must respect both issues of religion and fantasy because they are both connected by reality. George Aichele Jr., a writer for the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, says that the respect of the two needs a semi-belief in both since, “fantasy is regarded

as the narrative that results from our construction of a world alternate to this one, a "secondary world" which is composed of elements of the "primary world"" (324). Both religious and fantasy writings come from inspiration of our reality, the "primary world" that is the common ground of both. A person cannot believe that a human who uses magic is lunacy while they still believe that winged angels roam Heaven. A person must accept parts of both, a semi-belief that religion and fantasy can be connected and respected. Mutual respect between fantasy and faith is a key issue in the Discworld novel, *Carpe Jugulum*.

Carpe Jugulum that was published in 1998 is the fantasy novel that has many threads and issues connecting religion with fantasy. One of the main characters in the novel is reverend Mightily Oats (full name being The Quite Reverend Mightily Praiseworthy-Are-Ye-Who-Exalteth-Om Oats) who is a priest that follows the word of the god Om. Terry Pratchett does not bash or make religion look weak by any means, but makes Oats into a very real character. Mightily Oats has never defaulted on his faith to Om, or committed any hypocritical acts. He is a full believer in the holy Book of Om, but he still had issues in his own thoughts. He constantly questions life and fails in his religious training to accept things on faith. The plot of the novel can be put into simple terms of "people versus vampires" in which the vampires are the Magpyr family and the people are the citizens of Lancre and Mightily Oats. The main forces in the Lancre population are the witches. The town has a king, but the real power belongs four women. The leader is Granny Weatherwax, a powerhouse of faith herself. She is a witch that has immense influence and magical power. Appearing in several novels, she is a strong-willed, elderly woman with a hard gaze and perfect teeth who always says that she "does not hold with gods" as they just get in her way. This is paradoxical since she has met and engaged with several deities. So the fate of all that live in Lancre rest in the hands Granny Weatherwax and Mightily

Oats; a magic atheist and a questioning, but full-believing priest. A line up for an argument of faith if there ever was one.

Issues of faith are a common problem that people can connect to, which is what this fantasy novel covers.

Granny always looks at life in a logical way, either black and white with witches in the center, “Witches always lived on the edges of things” (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum*, 17). She believes that the middle of light and dark is where real choices are made, but it depends on which light and dark you choose. History is marked with choices that people made “for the greater good,” but what came from those “good” choices were not always justice or right. Was the burning of witches and heretics in the name of innocence a good or evil act? The order of Om, a monotheistic religion that worships the male, “the only thing the Church hasn’t schismed over,” god Om has a history of burning witches (Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum*, 147). What is good to some is evil to others, but the acts were not the biggest issue, it was the belief that people were doing good that is the point that Pratchett makes in this novel. That faith is powerful enough to make real change, but that our choices are what define us. Mightily Oats, choose to follow his beliefs, he choose to stay true to his doctrine, he choose to burn part of his holy book to survive, he choose to believe in his faith when all was lost and a vampire was directly in his visage. Granny Weatherwax had made choices all her life, she has make choices of light and dark since she first became a witch. She choose to stand for what she thought was right, no matter what. It was their choices and faith that gave them the power to face what they had to. Granny faced her own reasoning for her choices and Oats put all his faith first and never wavered. All these choices led to faith being what defeated the vampires and saved the people. A woman’s faith in herself and man’s faith in his god. Faith is a part of any culture and history. Fantasy will always be an

element of both as well. This one novel is a serious argument on the power of faith can have in our society, a novel that is only seen as fiction and fantasy, but should be respected. Being respected, taken seriously, and to have credibility is not only concept that at met in the real world, but also in the *Discworld* novel *Men at Arms*. Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novel, *Men at Arms*, was published in 1993 and gives legitimacy to fantasy with its brilliant views on race.

In the novel, *Men at Arms*, there is a racial conflict between the Dwarfs and Trolls. Their hatred is quite long and confusing. It dates back hundreds of years to the Koom Valley incident. The incident is quite confusing as to who is to blame. Trolls, being made of stone, usually wear no clothing outside of cities. A group of trolls had decided to sleep and make camp for the night, and later a group of dwarfs discovered them and started mining them without knowing the rocks were trolls. The trolls woke up and were being attacked, the dwarfs say it as trap and they were being attacked. It was the first ever unplanned sneak attack on both sides at once. What transpired was huge wars and years of racial hatred. Now once again, it is getting near to Koom Valley day and both the trolls and dwarfs are marching to celebrate their pride. Stuck in the middle of this is the city's watchmen; especially, the first troll and (genetic) dwarf in the Watch, Detritus and Cuddy. Before going into how these characters will further the respect of fantasy, it is important to look at their races. The dwarfs and trolls in the *Discworld* are very different than your normal fluff-fantasy novels. For one, they have actual culture that defines their races, other than being short or made of stone. Jean Franco's "Cultural Studies" chapter in the *Introduction to scholarship in Modern Language and Literatures* says that cultural studies suggest "a remapping of the humanities as a whole around new contents, new canons, new media, and new theoretical and methodological paradigms" (Fanco, 209). Terry Pratchett's works certainly fit in the new

canon pattern, as well as the new content of fantasy that he wrote in his novels concerning the cultures of trolls and dwarfs.

Trolls are “silicaceous but humanoid life forms” (Pratchett, *Turtle Recall*, 360). This means that trolls have brains that are mostly silicone, and work at optimal levels in the cold high altitudes of mountains, but get overheated in warmer lowland environments. This is what gives trolls the illusion of stupidity and the reason that trolls often sleep in the day to protect themselves from overheating in the same way normal humans do. Trolls also have a unique view on time. They believe that “they move through time *backwards*,” because “You can see the past, they say, therefore it must be in front of you” (Pratchett, *Turtle Recall*, 361).

Dwarfs in the Discworld are very similar to humans in that “there are no major genetic differences between dwarfs and men, any more than there are genetic differences between bulldogs and poodles” (Pratchett, *Turtle Recall*, 129). Dwarfs are one of the biggest influences on the city life of Ankh-Morpork, the city that *Men at Arms* takes place in. Dwarfs are the “biggest non-human ethnic group. In terms of cultural, the dwarfs are just as rich as trolls: both have set rules for courtships, beliefs, parental values, expectations, languages, and even politics. It is writing and creations such as this, that furthers the need for the legitimization and respect of fantasy. The ideas and beliefs that were created in Pratchett’s Discworld are shown even more by the characters.

Carrot Ironfounder-son, one of the most memorable of Terry Pratchett’s characters and is also one of the main characters in *Men at Arms*. Carrot is a lovable character that can make friends with anyone. He is a pure-hearted person who may seem slow, but simply thinks in broad terms; most likely a cause of his race. Carrot is near 6-foot-tall, broad shoulders, and has been called handsome on many occasions. He is a dwarf. Yes, allow the mind to wonder to films such

as *The Hobbit* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Carrot identifies as that ethnicity and is accepted by his most dwarfs as one of their own. In the Discworld, what makes a dwarf a dwarf is not the height or even the beard (those are very important though), but the traditions of the race. Carrot, after being found in a destroyed caravan, grew up just like any dwarf once he was adopted. He worked in the mine all his life, learned the language, and even went through all the rights and ceremonies that a dwarf goes through in his/her life. Carrot lives by the culture, ethnic rights of dwarfs as much as one in situation can, and thus is accepted by the dwarven community. This is a main point in the situations that happened in *Men at Arms*.

Detritus the troll and Cuddy the dwarf was used to focus on the cultural turmoil that is happening in the city. These two character were representing the coming together between two people who hate each other. Both joined the Watch at the same time for their own reasons. Detritus joined to be respected, “my girl Ruby she say, you want get married, you get proper job, I not marry a troll what people say, him no good troll” (Pratchett, *Men at Arms*, 208). Cuddy was tired of his previous job working for his brother and “got bored” (Pratchett, *Men at Arms*, 208). Neither of these two sentient beings did this out of a quest or a holy mission that is the norm for fantasy-based writings. One wants to have a better job to marry the female he loves, the other was bored of his current life and was seeking a change. That does not sound very fantastical or improbable of an idea. Even Carrot joined the watch for more mundane reasons, he wanted to join because he heard it would make a man out of him. All of this creates a new theoretical paradigm about fantasy. Pratchett was constantly challenging the constraints that society put on the genre of his novels. Another point Jean Franco says about cultural studies is that “what has become central is precisely the struggle for interpretive power and a resistance to stereotyped identities” (Franco 217). Pratchett was constantly challenging the constraints that society put on

the genre of his novels to further our cultural views and to prove that his novels could have a respected place in literature. A challenge of what is currently fantasy fluff, and how we interpret texts.

Building on the sentiment of interpretation, Jerome McGann, another author in the *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Language and Literatures* says “The idea that an active reader can by determined effort discover a document’s significant details and track them to their complete meaning is not just mistaken, it is a mistaken reading” (160). This echoes the earlier problem of judging texts by their genre instead of their meaning. An active reader who reads a novel and only from that believes that he/she knows the entire worth of it has failed to truly understand it. A document cannot just be read to gain its significance, but by linking it to the reader's’ current environment is one way of gaining further insight to significance and meaning. Readers will gain much more significance from *Equal Rites* if they link its gender equality issues to the real world.

The last novel to discuss is *Equal Rites*. This was the third novel in the *Discworld* series, and is where the previous talked about character Granny Weatherwax is first introduced. This novel is the connection to the third and final of the three core issues of our society; gender, mainly equality. Do not judge a book by its cover, but you can infer from the title that this novel is about equal rights. *Equal Rites* is for equal rights, and does this by lighting the fuse on the age-old argument of what women can and cannot do. In this case, it is a girl wanting to become a wizard.

As mentioned previously, being a wizard on the Discworld is more than just being old and having a staff. To be a wizard, a male must first be accepted into the Unseen University and enter one of many magical degree programs. After years of study and hard work, a man may one

day graduate and obtain his degree. Afterward there is the choice of staying at the university and further your education, or go out into the world. Of course, this had always been the options only for men. Men become wizards and women become witches, that is until a mishap gives a girl the ability to become a wizard.

Eskarina Smith was supposed to be the eighth son of an eighth son. This is important because that means that the child would have been destined to be a wizard anyway. What happened was that a dying wizard sought out this child, and passed on his power to it, before even knowing the sex of the child. Then in a flash, the wizard died, and Eskarina (Esk) was left in the arms of her father, who is immediately scolded by Granny Weatherwax as she reveals that his son is actually a daughter. A daughter who now has a complicated path ahead of her, the path of the Discworld's first female wizard. Granny represents the old-world way of thinking, saying that "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" (Pratchett, *Equal Rites*, 9). Granny tries to raise the girl in the normal accepted way, but Esk was not born to be a witch and her powers start going out of control. She eventually had to go to the Unseen University with Granny. All throughout the novel, this girl is told that she cannot be wizard just because she is a girl. The faculty of the Unseen University refuse to believe that she has power like them deny her an education. So many times this happens in today's world, there is no did happen since this kind of thing is still going on today. Esk does not give up, she refutes their beliefs that she cannot be a female wizard just because there has never been one before. She says that she will not be just a wizard or a witch, "she'd be both, or none at all. And the more they intended to stop her, the more she wanted it" (Pratchett, *Equal Rites*, 79).

Another issue of today's society told through fantasy literature, and yet loses not if its importance.

Just like in the real world, people just would not start thinking and it took something drastic to change the minds of the people. It was not a rally, riot, protesting, that got Esk into the Unseen University. Instead she had to save everyone from an invasion of demons that were attempting to cross over from another dimension. After that, she was accepted into the world of wizard academia and eventually graduated and became the first woman wizard. By simply using her own determination and refusing to conform to the gender norms of her world, Eskarina Smith proves that labels mean nothing if you let them. Terry Pratchett proves that a hot topic such as gender equality can be discussed in a fantasy novel and be kept as respectful.

The end of things, the meaning, the source, the center of it all. All of these are ways to question what is the true meaning of things. The true meaning is just like literature; the real reason is to spread messages and to get people to think about their own world. Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels give not just creditability to fantasy, but to the written art itself. His novels are built from this primary world and turn its events and characteristics into something more fantastical yes, but still relatable. His creations showcase the battle of faith and how to approach blind devotion over denial of all but yourself. When even a person's own will has given up, there is always something that you can believe in, even if that something is just belief itself. The *Discworld* novels shake, batter, and destroy stereotypes with writings that bring out how race and ethnicity completely define us. You may be troll, or a dwarf, but that does not mean that you cannot gain respect or stand tall. Novels that burn into this society that a woman equally do anything that a man can, that gender is merely a label that does not define us unless we let it. The

three *Discworld* novels, *Carpe Jugulum*, *Men at Arms*, and *Equal Rites*, were chosen for this work because they were my personal favorites. They were chosen because of their real world viewpoints and interpretations. When questioned about his sources, Pratchett had this to say, given what humans beings have done, practised and believed in the last ten thousand years, it's quite hard to make up anything new and it's a shame to see the old stuff lost, since I doubt that a great deal of it is now electronic. If the signposts I can give can get a few people reading real books, and getting a feel for the depth of their society, then I'll have done my job (Pratchett, "Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories" 167).

Sir Terence David John "Terry" Pratchett completed his job, his story ended with him on March 12, 2015. His job as an author is over, and now it society's job as sentient of higher intellect to read his works and learn from them. It is time for society to recognize his works as canonical fantasy texts and give the genre the respect and legitimacy it has earned.

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