



‘The soul and centre!’: morality and death in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld

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Terry Pratchett’s invention of an essentially secular universe (though one with more than its fair share of small gods) enabled him, as a convinced humanist, to explore the nature of moral imperatives in a world without the certainty of an afterlife, a project lent a new urgency in his final novels by his own terminal illness. On Discworld, where ‘all metaphors are potentially real’,¹ Death really does have a door, and even before cruel necessity made him a campaigner for the right to die, Pratchett wanted us to discover that the desert of black sand on the far side of it is not something we should fear. In his 2010 Richard Dimbleby lecture, *Shaking Hands with Death*, in which he used his early-onset Alzheimer’s disease as the starting point for a powerful defence of assisted dying, Pratchett spoke (through his ‘stunt Pratchett’, Tony Robinson, since he was no longer able to read his forceful words aloud) about his first encounter with the personification which gave rise to his most popular character:

When I was a young boy, playing on the floor of my grandmother’s front room, I glanced up at the television and saw Death, talking to a Knight, and I didn’t know very much about death at that point. It was the thing that happened to budgerigars and hamsters. But it was Death, with a scythe and an amiable manner. I didn’t know it at the time, of course, but I had just watched a clip from Bergman’s *Seventh Seal*, wherein the Knight engages in protracted dialogue, and of course the famous chess game, with the Grim Reaper who, it seemed to me, did not seem so terribly grim.²

Sometimes, if only in obedience to the law of averages, life really does imitate art. By the time he gave his Dimbleby lecture, Pratchett was himself a knight facing death, and one who thought of the terminal stage of his illness, in which posterior cortical atrophy would develop into full-blown dementia, as ‘the endgame’. In the event, though his life was cruelly cut short, the endgame was relatively brief: it was only in his last few months that

words finally failed him, preventing him from completing the autobiography on which he had embarked too late. After his death in March 2015, his daughter wrote that her father 'had done something with more success than anyone else – he made Death friendly', and described the 'tear-inducing letters from fans who were nearing the end of their lives and took great comfort in imagining that the death that came for them would be riding a white horse called Binky'.³ 'Those are the kind of letters', Pratchett himself wrote, 'that cause me to stare at the wall for some time ...'⁴

While few novelists can claim the power to console readers on their deathbeds, Pratchett's apparently cheery spin on Bergman's *Reaper* helps to explain why his fictive universe has seldom received the respectful critical attention accorded to Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. However, if we look more closely at Pratchett's engagement with Bergman's dark portrayal of death and religion in *The Seventh Seal*, we will discover that the Death of Discworld provides him with a comic mask behind which deeply serious concerns can be explored. Bergman's film is predicated on the assumption that audiences will share the existential terror which leads the Knight to declare that if God does not exist, as Death slyly suggests to him, 'then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness'.⁵ Pratchett's genial humanism was underpinned by a moral rage against oppressive thought systems no less intense than the passionate atheism which fuels Pullman's Miltonic war against Milton's God, and his motto was *Noli Timere Messorem* (Do not fear the Reaper). His fundamental opposition both to the idea that death should be regarded as a source of terror, and to those who seek to deploy that terror to frighten others into belief or conformity, provides much of the ethical scaffolding of Discworld.

Pratchett's admirers sometimes suggest that he was 'his generation's Dickens',⁶ since what A.S. Byatt has memorably described as 'his squirming and insanitary metropolis Ankh-Morpork'⁷ is in many ways a fantasy version of Dickens's London, not least in the scope it offers for parodic but keenly targeted social satire. Like Dickens, Pratchett crafted his novels to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Readers in search of a thoroughly entertaining, and ultimately comforting, version of human life (in all its dwarf and troll and werewolf disguises) can immerse themselves in the story while relishing its lively comic wordplay. Others, including Byatt herself, read his narrative on two levels, recognising, beneath the apparently light-hearted verbal surface, the ingenious reframing of powerful, pre-existing story material by a writer 'whose wit is metaphysical'⁸ and who, 'like TS Eliot's Webster, has always been much possessed by death'.⁹ Pratchett himself said that Discworld 'borrows from folklore and mythology, twisting and tangling it on the way'.¹⁰ To describe this as intertextuality risks sounding like a Lecturer in Recent Runes, not least because much of what Pratchett called white knowledge – the songs and stories and sayings and superstitions which, in theory at least, everybody knows, and which Shakespeare drew on before him – did not originate on the printed page.

Pratchett was, of course, as prodigiously productive as Dickens, but with the difference that every Discworld novel potentially adds to the backstory of those that follow, enabling him to tackle progressively darker and more ambitious themes. In the opening book of the series, *The Colour of Magic*, 'the Discworld – world and mirror of worlds'¹¹ is the literary equivalent of a fairground mirror, mockingly distorting the stereotypes of post-Tolkien fantasy fiction. However, in his later novels it offers a sharply focused view of the world it reflects – our world, with its challenges and moral dilemmas – though it is a view which only readers open to the creative possibilities of genre fiction are able and willing to see.

The art critic Jonathan Jones, having grudgingly read a single Pratchett novel, *Small Gods*, after being taken to task for dismissing as not worth reading an author he admitted to never having read, shrugs off the unwelcome experience: 'In the real world, as opposed to the Discworld, people have complexities, contradictions. A whole art form has evolved to explore them. It's called the novel!'¹² Pratchett was already dead when Jones delivered this high table put-down. A novelist who has been knighted for services to literature and given an honorary professorship by Trinity College Dublin needs no defending, but it is tempting to imagine what that most complex and contradictory of literary characters, Granny Weatherwax, might have had to say about it. Jones claims in his article that although, like Salman Rushdie, whose *Satanic Verses* was published four years earlier, Pratchett 'is taking on religion and seeking to undo fixed truths', he is merely 'mocking a non-existent faith and risking the wrath of imaginary fundamentalists'. But, as Pratchett himself pointed out, the premise of *Small Gods* is one which 'you would think would offend practically every religion' – that an established church risks becoming so powerful that 'there is really no more room in it for its god!'¹³

Unlike Pullman's all-powerful Magisterium, the Church of Om is fated to dwindle into a schismatic evangelical sect even less influential than the Nine Day Wonderers. In *Carpe Jugulum*, the novel Jones ought to have moved on to had he not decided to limit his reluctant engagement with Discworld to a single text, Pratchett uses the Church of Om to thread a vigorous debate about religious faith and doubt through his central narrative, in which the Lancre witches take on a suave family of invading vampires. When we overhear the troubled priest of the latter-day Omnian church, Mightily-Praiseworthy-Are-Ye-Who-Worship-Om Oats, singing snatches of a hymn he learned as a child – 'burn, with a clear bright light'¹⁴ – the echo of Susan Warner's well-known 19th-century hymn for children, 'Jesus bids us shine / With a pure, clear light',¹⁵ works as a bitter reminder that Christianity, a monotheistic religion originating at a time and in a place very similar to the Omnia of *Small Gods*, once caused human beings to be burned alive. In 16th-century England, heretics died at the stake under both Protestant and Catholic regimes. In Omnia, too, as in post-reformation Britain and the America of Warner's puritan ancestors, it was religion that fuelled the witch hunts. Although, like its real-life counterparts, the Church of Om no longer consigns witches or heretics to the flames, Mightily Oats himself – demoralised by his failure to live up to the injunction, of which Warner's hymn is a nursery version, to 'let your light so shine before

men that they may see your good works'¹⁶ – is haunted by his knowledge of its early history. With his mind 'split in half' by the struggle between faith and doubt, he is left uneasily aware that his appeal to the 'infinite compassion' of Om is only too open to question: '[W]hat compassion? How many people prayed at the stake?'¹⁷

Carpe Jugulum, along with *Maskerade*, the previous book in the series featuring the witches of Lancre, is one of the two novels in which Pratchett directly references *The Seventh Seal*. Oats, who has arrived in Lancre as a hapless missionary, echoes the plea of Bergman's Knight, who has returned home to a land ravaged by plague and questions why it should be 'so cruelly inconceivable to grasp God with the senses': 'I want knowledge, not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge. I want God to stretch out His hand towards me, reveal Himself and speak to me.'¹⁸ Oats, too, 'has hoped that, just once, Om would make himself known in some obvious and unequivocal way that couldn't be mistaken for wind or a guilty conscience. [...] It wasn't that he'd lacked faith. But faith wasn't enough. He'd wanted knowledge.'¹⁹ But, unlike Bergman's Knight, he tries to lay aside his inner struggle in the face of the threat menacing an entire community: 'Right now he'd settle for a reliable manual of vampire disposal.'²⁰

Pratchett, as a schoolboy, had been horrified by the Old Testament, which he read in its entirety, and enthralled by Darwin's *Origin of Species*. 'By the time I was fourteen,' he wryly remarked, 'I was too smart for my own god.'²¹ But although, as a humanist, he 'would rather believe that we are a rising ape, not a falling angel', he nevertheless retained 'a sneaking regard for the Church of England and those I disagree with. We should always debate ideas that appear to strike at the centre of our humanity. Ideas and proposals should be tested.'²²

Oats's adversary in the debate about religious faith is the redoubtable Granny Weatherwax, who in *Maskerade* had herself taken on the role of Bergman's Knight, playing a poker game against Death (which he lets her win) for the life of a child, and in *Lords and Ladies*, published in the same year as *Small Gods*, had given a practical twist to the philosopher Koomi of Smale's theory that gods, large and small, 'come into being and grow and flourish because they are believed in.'²³ 'I ain't against gods and goddesses, in their place. But they've got to be the ones we make ourselves. Then we can take 'em to bits for the parts when we don't need 'em any more.'²⁴

One of Pratchett's strengths as a novelist is that he never allows his central characters to harden into mere consistency. In *Carpe Jugulum*, Granny Weatherwax's anguished struggle with her own inner darkness allows her to speak with a new authority which at times is anything but comic. In *Maskerade* she had told Death:

'I have faith.'

REALLY? IN WHAT PARTICULAR DEITY?

'Oh, none of them.'

THEN FAITH IN WHAT?

'Just faith, you know. In general.'²⁵

Now she makes terrifyingly clear to Oats the true price of the religious faith which he should be grateful that she lacks.

'Now, if I'd seen him, really there, really alive, it'd be in me like a fever. If I thought there was some god who really did care two hoots about people, who watched 'em like a father and cared for 'em like a mother . . . well, you wouldn't catch me sayin' things like "There are two sides to every question," and "We must respect other people's beliefs." You wouldn't find me just being gen'rally nice in the hope that it'd all turn out right in the end, not if that flame was burning in me like an unforgivin' sword. And I did say burnin', Mister Oats, 'cos that's what it'd be. You say that you people don't burn folk and sacrifice people any more, but that's what true faith would mean, y'see? Sacrificin' your own life, one day at a time, to the flame . . .'²⁶

Warner's injunction to shine 'Like a little candle/ Burning in the night' has been transmuted into Hugh Latimer's 'we shall this day light such a candle', leaving Oats abashed at his own insufficiency as she warns him not to chase the faith he will never catch. Then, 'almost as an aside', she offers him a way forward: 'But, perhaps, you can live faithfully.'²⁷ At the end of the novel she sends him a gift which once again takes us back to Warner's hymn: a jar in which a phoenix feather burns 'with a clear, cool light.'²⁸ Warner's 'In this world is darkness' applies to Discworld too, and Granny Weatherwax knows how much Oats will need this cool, illuminating clarity as he travels 'into dark places.'²⁹ The god who will keep him safe on his journey, though, will not be Om. As Pratchett told Mark Lawson in the BBC's *The Big Question*:

The advantage that Discworld has got, which is not shared by what we are pleased to call the real universe, is that it quite genuinely has a caring god, which is to say, me. And I see to it that on the whole the good, or at least the less bad, win, or at least don't lose by too much, at the end of the book.³⁰

This certainty that the narrative, for all its twists and turns, will eventually arrive at a happy ending – for, as Pratchett himself would say, a given value of happy – is another reason why critics often dismiss his fiction as escapist, sometimes even in the belief that they are defending it. Rupert Godwin in *The Times* notes that 'Pratchett's

multi-dimensional frolics, spiced with esoterica, common-sense and sympathy, will never be taken entirely seriously. But then joyous escapism has always annoyed the intellectuals.³¹ (It is worth pointing out that the 'tell-tale compression'³² of Jane Austen's pages seldom elicits the same response.) Nevertheless, in his novels as in his life, Pratchett does not shrink from exploring that darkest of dark places which he represents in the Discworld books as a desert of black sand under a dark but star-studded sky. The popularity of the richly comic and deliberately larger-than-life figure of Death gives him the freedom to talk about death with a lower-case 'd', confronting his readers with questions which are not asked lightly. What, if anything, lies beyond the black desert which on Discworld, where 'all metaphors are potentially real', stands for the unknown darkness which rounds all mortal lives? How should we deal with those lived experiences which occur before and after the unknowable moment of death: with dying and with grieving? What constitutes a good death, and, more crucially, in a universe without either a heaven or a hell, what constitutes a good life, and is there any forgiveness for an evil one? And do we agree with Granny Weatherwax that, at 'those times when medicines didn't help and headology was at a loss because a mind was a rage of pain in a body that had become its own enemy, when people were simply in a prison made of flesh', she was right to 'let them go'.³³

The answer in the early novels to the question of what happens after death is that it all depends on the beliefs of the person dying. So in *Mort*, an elderly witch turns into the beautiful young woman she has always seen herself as being, before fading away 'like a Cheshire cat only much more erotic',³⁴ while a venerable abbot returns to the womb for his 54th reincarnation. However, as life on the Disc begins to reflect life on Earth more closely, death on the Disc needs to do the same thing. Pratchett saw himself as being 'in the unenviable position of someone that doesn't believe in a god of any sort but that thinks there may be such a thing as an immortal soul',³⁵ and this paradoxical mindset, together with his repurposing of Bergman's Reaper, gives him an original way of exploring the nature of mortality.

The Death of Discworld offers few clues to the newly dead, but in *Small Gods* he answers the question, 'What is at the end of the desert?' with the single word 'JUDGEMENT'.³⁶ In the closing pages, Brutha, the humble novice whose capacity for 'tolerance, compassion, charity, steadfastness and faith'³⁷ will lead to his becoming the human saviour of the Omnian church, recognises that this is a riddle, and solves it by asking, 'Which end?'³⁸ However, both General Fri't and Private Ichlos have earlier found their own solution by remembering the words of an old song: '*You have to walk a lonesome desert ... You have to walk it all alone ...*'³⁹ Pratchett adapts Woody Guthrie's version of the gospel song *Lonesome Valley* to fit the geography both of Omnia and of the desert of black sand, while retaining all of its haunting power. Fri't, who has fought desert campaigns, suddenly finds himself able to think clearly:

There were no lies here. All fancies fled away. That's what happened in all deserts. It was just you, and what you believed.

What have I always believed?

That on the whole, and by and large, if a man lived properly, not according to what any priests said, but according to what seemed decent and honest inside, then it would, at the end, more or less, turn out all right.⁴⁰

Having discovered that the hell promised by the Omnian church is a fable, and passed the test of self-judgement, he sets out across the sand. For Ichlos, it is even simpler, since 'he was far less sophisticated than General Fri'it, and took more notice of the songs he'd learned in his childhood. Besides, he had an advantage. He'd had even less religion than the general.⁴¹ It is only on Vorbis, the fanatical head of the Quisition, that Death's riddle has the same effect as the doorkeeper's answer in Franz Kafka's ominous parable, *Before the Law*. Unable to be alone with himself, which would require him to recognise the source of his obsessive cruelty and accept responsibility for its hideous consequences, he is reduced, for a hundred years which pass like infinity, to a hunched figure paralysed with fear. He has to wait for the coming of Brutha, whose own nature makes him incapable of denying pity even to the tortured soul of a torturer; to begin his uncertain journey across the desert.

The most comprehensive answer to the question of what lies beyond it is offered in *A Hat Full of Sky* by young Tiffany Aching, who has entered Death's door while still alive to enable a hiver, an ancient disembodied entity which has attempted to possess her, to find the peaceful end it longs for. To learn how to die, it needs a unitary self, so she calls it Arthur, the name which the title of Thomas Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur* indissolubly associated with death. When the newly mortal Arthur asks her what is on the other side of the desert, she gives the reply of someone who does not subscribe to any religion, is keeping an open mind on whether there is 'such a thing as an immortal soul', and has no problem with living 'in the face of death' while accepting the possibility 'that all is nothingness'.

Tiffany hesitated. 'Some people think you go to a better world,' she said. 'Some people think you come back to this one in a different body. And some think there's just nothing. They think you just stop.'

And what do you think? Arthur asked.

'I think that there are no words to describe it,' said Tiffany.

Is that true? said Arthur.

'I think that's why you have to cross the desert,' said Tiffany.

'To find out.'⁴²

Although she is afraid of being permanently trapped between life and death, Tiffany has no fear of the tall, skeletal figure of Death himself. She knows that bones 'were only chalk that had walked around'.⁴³ Granny Weatherwax, who opens a door for her back into the living world, tells her, 'I know this path already. You'll tread it again, no doubt, for some other poor soul, open the door for them as can't find it'.⁴⁴ At the moment of Granny Weatherwax's death, in his final novel, *The Shepherd's Crown*, Pratchett makes this point again, now with the weight of his own mortality and his campaign for assisted dying behind it:

Her visitor was no stranger, and the land she knew she was going to was a land she had helped many others to step through to over the years. For a witch stands on the very edge of everything, between the light and the dark, between life and death [...] Sometimes they need to help some poor soul through the final hours, help them to find the door, not to get lost in the dark.⁴⁵

In his Dimpleby lecture, Pratchett was very clear about how he himself would choose to 'shake hands with Death': sitting on his lawn at home with Thomas Tallis on the iPod and a glass of brandy in his hand 'to wash down whatever modern version of the "Brompton Cocktail" ... some helpful medic could supply'.⁴⁶ And he was very clear, too, about how his father would have died 'if there had been any justice or even narrative sensibility in the universe': at the moment when 'he suddenly looked up and said, "I can feel the sun of India on my face," and his face did light up rather magically, brighter and happier than I had seen it at any time in the previous year'.⁴⁷ Since Discworld 'quite genuinely has a caring god', Pratchett gives a version of that imagined good death to the Baron in *I Shall Wear Midnight*, who dies transformed by a joyful childhood memory into a little boy in an itchy tweed jacket smelling of wee, his face lit up by September sunshine and the flames of the stubble field where the hare ran into the fire and was not burned. It is typical of Pratchett that he adds a serious footnote to the Proustian comic detail of the jacket, explaining that 'The old cloth-makers used urine as a mordant for the dyes used in making woollen clothes, so that the colours would be fixed and not run'.⁴⁸

It is said that a tragic actor can only play tragic parts but a comic actor can play anything, and as a great comic writer, Pratchett was good at portraying grief. In the Tiffany Aching novels, the last three of which were written during the campaigning and creative final years in which he lost both his parents and endured the gradual depredations of a disease which 'slips you away a little bit at a time and lets you watch it happen',⁴⁹ Pratchett casts 'a cool, clear light' on death, bereavement and burial. In *Wintersmith*, he gives the solemnity of a funeral pibroch to the lament that Awfully Wee Billy Bigchin, traditional

bard of the Nac Mac Feegle, plays on his mousepipes (still with the little ears attached), standing on Miss Treason's grave.

Humans could not hear the mousepipes very well because the notes were too high, but Tiffany could feel them in her head. A gonnagle could put many things into his music, and she felt sunsets, and autumns, and the mist on hills and the smell of roses so red they were nearly black . . .

When he had finished, the gonnagle stood in silence for a moment, looked at Tiffany again, then vanished.

Tiffany sat on a stump and cried a bit, because it needed to be done. Then she went and milked the goats, because someone had to do that, too.⁵⁰

In *The Wee Free Men*, when she found her grandmother dead, and knew that 'the world had ended',⁵¹ the seven-year-old Tiffany had been unable to cry.

*She'd felt coldness spread through her. It even had a sound – it was like a thin, sharp musical note. It had a voice, too. Her own voice. It was saying: It's too late, tears are no good, no time to say anything, there are things to be done . . .*⁵²

Now she has learnt what tears are good for. In *I Shall Wear Midnight*, when Roland, the Baron's son, who has been turning his anger at his father's death against her, mutters, 'Can you take away this grief?', she quietly replies, 'I would not do so even if I knew how. *It belongs to you.* Only time and tears take away grief; that is what they are for.'⁵³ But, as Nanny Ogg shows her at the Baron's funeral, the right song is needed too. The song the Baron's father had sung on that long-ago September day had a special significance for Pratchett, as he told Ginny Dougary in an interview about his documentary on assisted death, *Choosing to Die*.

On the day that he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, he was out in the garden singing (he demonstrates, and has a mellifluous steady voice): "Tis pleasant and delightful on a sweet summer's morn / To see the fields and the meadows all covered in corn / And the small birds are singing on every green spray / And the larks they sang melodious at the dawning of the day."⁵⁴

As Nanny Ogg cajoles a crowd of strangers into 'harmonizing like a choir', 'Tiffany wept, and saw through the tears a little boy in his new tweed jacket that smelled of wee, walking with his father under different stars.'⁵⁵

What constitutes a life well lived in Pratchett's fictive universe is harder to define, not least because the two characters who might be seen as its moral guardians, Sam Vimes and Esme Weatherwax, are as angry, obstinate and driven as each other. They act as mentors rather than role models, Vimes to his younger self in *Night Watch* and to Feeney Upshot in *Snuff*, and Granny Weatherwax, after Pratchett brings her back at the end of *The Wee Free Men*, to Tiffany Aching. When it comes to the cardinal virtues, neither of them has any time for prudence, and though Vimes, the reformed alcoholic, certainly has need of temperance, it is only in the Victorian sense, while Granny Weatherwax takes austerity to a deliberately intimidating extreme. Her bare cottage is described in *A Hat Full of Sky* as 'the house of a life peeled to the core.'⁵⁶ For both of them, it is justice, and the fortitude necessary to defend it, which are of paramount importance. Vimes impresses on Feeney that 'no policeman swears allegiance to the civil power, he swears allegiance to the law,'⁵⁷ and Granny Weatherwax tells Mightily Oats that 'Mercy's a fine thing, but judgin' comes first. Otherwise you don't know what you're bein' merciful about.'⁵⁸

As for the theological virtues, Granny Weatherwax, as we have already seen, has a capacity for faith, even if mainly in herself, and thus also for hope, but her crucial lesson for Tiffany is the importance of charity in its practical modern sense:

It's sittin' up all night with some poor old man who's leavin' the world, taking away such pain as you can, comfortin' their terror, seein' 'em safely on their way [...] then going home and sitting down for five minutes before some shouting *angry* man comes bangin' on your door 'cos his wife's havin' difficulty givin' birth to their first child and the midwife's at her wits' end [...] *That is the root and heart and soul and centre of witchcraft, that is. The soul and centre!*' Mistress Weatherwax smacked her fist into her hand, hammering out her words. 'The ... soul ... and ... *centre!*'⁵⁹

The inhabitants of the Chalk have their own moral guardian, Tiffany's dead grandmother, the shepherd who never lost a lamb. The overarching presence of Granny Aching illustrates Pratchett's belief that 'one thing that certainly survives is the outer soul of a person.'⁶⁰ A woman of few but effective words and the unerring ability to temper mercy with justice, she too has a lesson for Tiffany: 'Them as can do, has to do for them as can't. And someone has to speak up for them as has no voices.'⁶¹

As Tiffany grows into her vocation and takes on the task of caring for the vulnerable and the voiceless, she discovers for herself that justice and mercy can sometimes be two sides of the same coin. She cuts down the wretched Mr Petty, who has tried to hang himself after beating his pregnant 13-year-old daughter so hard that her baby was stillborn: 'here was a man one breath away from death. She had no option, no option at all. She had to give him that breath, for the sake of a handful of nettles.'⁶²

The stinging weeds which Petty has arranged as funeral flowers around the little corpse are proof that 'inside the wretched hulk' there was a 'tiny spark' of goodness.⁶³ But for the Cunning Man, who represents the contagious poison of prejudice, there can be no forgiveness. Although Tiffany is able to 'feel the pain of a creature that had twisted through the world for hundreds of years',⁶⁴ and to wonder where evil begins, she lures him into the flaming stubble field where the hare ran into the fire and lets him burn.

All three of Pratchett's guardians – policeman, witch, and shepherd – live for their work, not out of worldly pride (although a little of that comes into it) but because it lies to their hand and urgently needs to be done. But being wedded to the job comes at a heavy price in human intimacy, though it is mitigated for Sam Vimes by his love for his formidable wife. 'Terrible is the temptation to do good!' Brecht says in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*,⁶⁵ and Tiffany shares that temptation. When the kelda, the wise matriarch of the Nac Mac Feegle, questions her at the start of *The Shepherd's Crown* about her relationship with Preston, the young doctor who appears to be the perfect match for her, she replies, 'we like our work, both of us, in fact you might say we are our work [...] And I can't help thinking about Granny Aching and how much she liked her life, up on the downs ...'⁶⁶ At the end of the novel, when Tiffany has chosen to live in a shepherd's hut high up on the Chalk, she has a vision of 'two figures, both strangely familiar',⁶⁷ Granny Aching and Granny Weatherwax, side by side. Witches come in threes, and since her two dead but still omnipresent elders are the mother and the crone, it is Tiffany's role, at least for now, to be the maiden.

Working with his editor on *Snuff*, Pratchett was incensed to be told, 'You know usually in a career like yours, round about now would be the time that you would kill off a major character.'⁶⁸ When he actually does so in his final novel, the dedication page reads: 'For Esmerelda Weatherwax – mind how you go.'⁶⁹ It might seem a bleak and lonely death, meticulously prepared for in solitude, but Esme Weatherwax has the company of an old acquaintance, almost an old friend, who tells her, 'I CAN SEE THE BALANCE AND YOU HAVE LEFT THE WORLD MUCH BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT.'⁷⁰ The Death of Discworld is 'implacable, because that is his job', but unlike Death in Bergman's *Seventh Seal*, he is 'a kindly Death, cleaning up the mess that this life leaves, and opening the gate to the next one. Indeed, in some religions he is an angel!'⁷¹ He is also no chess-player. Only able to think in straight lines, 'he always forgets how the knights move.'⁷²

In Paul Kidby's painting, *Check Mort*, Sir Terry in his trademark hat sits opposite his most popular character, smiling cheerfully, as a skeletal hand hovers over the chess board between them. Kidby has arranged the pieces to ensure that the Knight will win the game.⁷³

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Notes

1. Terry Pratchett, 'Imaginary Worlds: Real Stories', *Folklore* 111 (2000), 160.
2. Terry Pratchett, *A Slip of the Keyboard: Collected Non-Fiction* (London: Corgi, 2015), 335.
3. Terry Pratchett *HisWorld: Official Exhibition Companion* (London: Dunmanifestin Ltd, 2018), 184.
4. Terry Pratchett and Paul Kidby, *The Art of Discworld* (London: Gollancz, 2005), no page number.
5. Ingmar Bergman, *Det sjunde inseglet (The Seventh Seal)* (Göteborg: Rock! Editions, 1957), 13.
6. Tristram Fane Saunders, 'Meticulously crafted, HisWorld shows why Terry Pratchett was his generation's Dickens', *The Telegraph*, 16 September 2017.
7. A.S. Byatt, 'A comforting way of death', *The Guardian*, 9 November 2002.
8. A.S. Byatt, 'Harry Potter and the Childish Adult', *The New York Times*, 7 July 2003.
9. A.S. Byatt, 'A comforting way of death'.
10. Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of Discworld* (London: Corgi, 2009), 10.
11. Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man* (London: Corgi, 1992), 7.
12. Jonathan Jones, 'I've read Pratchett now: it's more entertainment than art', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2015.
13. Terry Pratchett and Mark Lawson, *The Big Question*, BBC Television, 1 February 1998.
14. Terry Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* (London: Corgi, 1993), 370.
15. Susan Warner, 'Jesus bids us shine', *The Scottish Psalter and Church Hymnary* (Oxford University Press, 1929), 812.
16. Matthew, 5:16, King James Version.
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