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Terry Pratchett's Literary Tryst with Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Postmodernist Reading with a Humanist Guide

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Terry Pratchett's Literary Tryst with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: A Postmodernist Reading

with a Humanist Guide

In spite of being honored by the Order of the British Empire for services to literature, receiving several honorary Doctorates and being knighted by the Queen of England herself, Sir Terry Pratchett has remained "unnoticed by academics," and his work is "regrettably…portrayed as an easily-digestible, popular fiction" (O'Connel; Peled).[1] While there have been attempts by the outraged community at large to thrust Pratchett's fiction into literary light, skepticism in academia concerning Pratchett's genre of fantasy keeps doors bolted shut and curtains surreptitiously drawn, as the fantasy genre is not traditionally recognized as high literature worthy of academic inquiry.[2] However, Pratchett states during a *Youtube* interview that his Discworld series "started out as an antidote to fantasy," remedying the influx "of Tolkein floating about…in the early eighties."[3] Pratchett challenges Tolkein's reign as purveyor of the fantasy fiction tradition when he admits that he "thought things needed livening up a bit," and

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[1] Christopher Bryant, in "Postmodern Parody in the Discworld Novels of Terry Pratchett," concurs with Peled's assertion that Pratchett,and the fantasy genre are literarily overlooked.

[2] Through my research, *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* was the only book found, comprised of academic essays exemplifying critical literary readings of Pratchett's work.

[3] See "Terry Pratchet Interview: 25 Years of Discworld" on www.youtube.com, first posted on October 16, 2008.

"started…parodying existing writers" (Pratchett). Out of this attempt to parody existing

writers within the fantasy fiction genre of Tolkein, Pratchett writes *Wyrd Sisters*, first

published in 1988.[4] Pratchett, himself, calls attention to *Wyrd Sisters'* lack of adherence

to the fantasy genre during an interview with BBC'S Mark Lawson, agreeing that "it was

fantasy, but I was having fun with it" (Pratchett).[5] Pratchett distances himself from the

Tolkein tradition of fantasy by structuring *Wyrd Sisters* as a postmodernist parody of

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, incorporating his humanist beliefs with the postmodern structure

of the novel.[6]

  Humanism and postmodernism reach a common ground in Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd

Sisters*, and from this common ground, Pratchett launches an expedition to further chart

the intricacies of the postmodern and humanist tendencies in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In

fact, during the 1980s, "approaches to Shakespeare's histories were strongly influenced

by…deconstruction, Althusserian Marxism, and the various theories of postmodernism,"

which serve to "facilitate new perspectives on those earlier paradigm shifts…of early

modern historical thinking" (Holderness 2). Kenneth Bartlett, however, cautions that "the

critical [postmodern] readings do not really address what the European Renaissance mind

was intending to say" (Bartlett). Instead, the postmodern readings are meant to address

"what first European and later American readers were searching for in their ideological

quest for a new culture order and relevance" (Bartlett). Maurice Hunt clarifies that "in the

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[4] R.B.Kershner, in *The Twentieth-Century Novel: An Introduction* explains how the manipulation of genre, as between "serious" fiction and "genre" fiction is indicative of the postmodernist (76).
[5] See the BBC interview "Terry Pratchett: Science Fiction or Fantasy?" posted by BBCWorldwide on August 7, 2009.
[6] During "Terry Pratchett- The Humanist- BBC" interview, posted by BBCWorldwide on March 19, 2010, Terry Pratchett directly states that "humanism is correct, but probably dull," regardless of being "kind of a bad humanist."

sense that postmodernism describes the intensification of modern disorder and
fragmentation, it echoes the sentiments of Jacobeans" (Hunt 4).[7] Hunt's clarification
exposes that while the postmodernists and the Jacobeans arrived at their disorder from
distinctly unique cultural perspectives, and therefore cannot be directly correlated, they
should be compared and appreciated for similar experience (4). Terry Pratchett, as a
postmodernist, parodies the disorder found Jacobean England as exposed through
Shakespeare's own cultural experience, as well as exposes his experience with the
cultural disorder of his own time period in *Wyrd Sisters* to display how two different time
periods can arrive at the same cultural issues. Such issues arise in both cultures from the
concepts of religion, magic and the supernatural, the nature of the individual and guilt, as
well as cultural truths and expectations.

Pratchett's postmodern vision both critiques and echoes Shakespeare's early
postmodernity and highlights the individual as the focal point where postmodernism and
humanism intersect. William Holman and Hugh Harmon explain postmodernism as
indicative of existentialism, alienation, solipsism, historical discontinuity and asocial
individualism, while Jonathan Dollimore explains how "Marxist humanism has affirmed
a faith in Man, the individual" (Holman & Harmon 370; Dollimore 480). Humanists
maintain an "attitude that tends to exalt the human element, as opposed to the
supernatural, divine elements," and this promotion of the human individual over the
supernatural or divine is focal to the study of Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*: Pratchett, as a

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[7] In "Elizabethan Modernism, Jacobean Postmodernism: Schematizing Stir in the Drama of Shakespeare
and His Contemporaries," Maurice Hunt discusses how Jacobeans felt a cultural turbulence after 1603,
noting that the "anxiety-producing change of monarchs with the turning of the century way have contributed
to a new sense of social apocalypse" (3).

humanist and an atheist, denies divine order in reverence to the individual (Holman,

Harmon 233). This humanist perspective even arises in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.[8] Graham

Holderness notes that "historiographers long ago began to identify…a transitional space

between two great epistemological 'breaks' in historical theory- that of the Reformation"

and of "Italian humanism" (Holderness 2). This schism exposes not only where

Shakespeare draws his historical reference from, but also where he is heading culturally

when he writes *Macbeth* in the early seventeenth century.[9] This fraction that Shakespeare

straddles explains, in part, the cultural disorder between religion and humanism found in

Macbeth. While Pratchett straddles no cultural schism, he incorporates much of the

humanism in *Macbeth* into *Wyrd Sisters*, as well as tackling the cultural disorder

expressed through postmodernism.

Pratchett's postmodern viewpoint, as well as his humanist opinions, denies the

legitimacy of Shakespeare's Christian worldview found in *Macbeth,* thus complicating

the dictation on the soul, which is integral to the support structure of *Macbeth* (Smith 1).

Macbeth's Christian framework is manipulated into ambiguity in Pratchett's parody.

Michael Martin explains that this manipulation of religious uncertainty found in *Wyrd*

Sisters is indicative not only of the postmodernists, but also the existentialists as well

(Martin 7).[10] While Pratchett shows personal certainty in regards to his humanist views

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[8] It is noted that "it is unlikely that Shakespeare was a humanist in the modern sense of the word-that is,
someone who believes that this is the only life we have and that there are good reasons for living a moral
life that do not depend on a belief in gods or life after death" on www.humanism.org.

[9] The seventeenth century also experienced a resurgence of philosophical skepticism, and John Cox
explains that "skepticism…[seems] to be operating at nearly all times" in Shakespeare's work, particularly
in *King Lear* (39). As skepticism was budding at the time of *Macbeth*, skepticism can be evinced in the text
in Shakespeare's representations of the religious order, deconstruction of order, and the witches as well.

[10] In "Taking on Being: Getting Beyond Postmodernism" Michael Martin explains that postmodernism is
"marked by…uncertainty, irony, as well as intellectual and spiritual ambivalence" (7).

on the soul, his actual textual discussion of the soul in *Wyrd Sisters*, unlike in *Macbeth*, remains ambivalent. Pratchett conducts this subtle discussion of the soul by utilizing the personification of Death itself who comes to all those who die, regardless of religious affiliation.[11] Pratchett's discussion of the soul, which contains not only postmodern ambivalence but humanist optimism, is exemplified and explained when Pratchett introduces King Verence immediately following his murder by Duke Felmet. King Verence discovers that "while someone he was certainly inclined to think of as himself was sitting up, something very much like his body remained on the floor" (Pratchett 5). This passage indicates two significant things. One is that King Verence is a ghost from the moment he enters the text. The second is the distinction Verence makes between his "self" and his "body". King Verence's "self" is his soul, which he makes a distinction as being separate from his body. Death comes to King Verence to provide inadvertent textual explanations of the soul when he rather hesitantly explains to King Verence, "I'm afraid, you're due to become a ghost" (Pratchett 7). Since Death explicitly states that King Verence is specifically due to become a ghost, the text is implying that not everyone shares this fate. Death continues to explain that "ghosts inhabit a world between the living and the dead," but Death fails to ever delineate what actually occurs when one reaches the land of the dead (Pratchett 8).[12] Considering that *Wyrd Sisters* is a parody of *Macbeth,* and that *Macbeth* is so laced with concern on what happens to the soul after death, it is significant that *Wyrd Sisters* remains ambivalent on what occurs after death as

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[11] Death is a "tall, thin figure…hidden in a hooded black robe, …[with] one arm which extended from the folds to grip a large scythe…made of bone" (Pratchett 5).
[12] In other works, Pratchett goes into greater detail over what occurs when one reaches the land of the dead, such as in *The Truth* which alludes to reincarnation.

it further distances the novel from Christian theory. Pratchett's omission also further drives the novel towards the religious ambivalence of the postmodernists, using the absolute certainty of the afterlife in *Macbeth* as a foil to further illuminate his postmodern uncertainty, while simultaneously recalling his humanist perspective.

Pratchett not only utilizes the character of the ghost to delineate between his humanistic and postmodern perspectives on the soul from the Christian views embedded in *Macbeth*, he uses King Verence to outline a discussion of good and evil in relation to the Christian theories of the soul's eternal salvation and damnation which are so prevalent in Shakespeare's *Macbeth.* Without the Christian belief that the soul transcends this life after death to either achieve Heaven or Hell, preoccupations in the play such as good and evil, sin, and guilt become irrelevant. In Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, theories such as good and evil, sin, and guilt become befuddled and complex whereas in *Macbeth* they are clear and driving forces of not only of the external action of the play, but of the internal war of individual characters. Such theories become unclear and consequently complex in Pratchett's postmodern rendition because postmodernism rebukes universal beliefs and doctrines regarding the soul. Very basically, in Pratchett's novel, King Verence is seen as the "good" king, and he becomes a ghost. Duke Felmet is seen as the "bad" or "usurper" king, much like Macbeth, and yet he too becomes a ghost by the end of the novel. These two kings sharing the same fate shows that, in *Wyrd Sisters,* the afterlife of an individual soul is not determined by qualifiers of good or evil, as it is in Christianity. Without the immediate consequences laid down by Christianity regarding the ramifications of transgressions for the eternal soul, Pratchett interlays humanism and its philosophy that a soul should be governed for the present and not an indeterminate future into *Wyrd Sisters*.

Pratchett conveys humanism, while correspondingly projecting postmodernism by removing the constraints of religious doctrine from the potentiality of life after death and in doing so destabilizes the related concepts of good and evil espoused in *Macbeth*. These ideas are not prevalent in *Wyrd Sisters* in relation to the soul, or Christianity, as King Verence is discussed as having burned people's homes, and having committed a number of other transgressions against his people, but he is still considered to be a "good" king because through all of his flaws, he truly cared for the kingdom (Pratchett 95). Felmet, who is the "bad" king, is distrusted and disliked by all of the common people, and he is also disliked by the manifested concept of the "kingdom" itself.[13] The manifestation of the "kingdom," in the form of congregated woodland creatures, "doesn't care if people are good or bad. But it expects the king to care for it" (Pratchett 95). Felmet does not care for it, only for ambition, and therefore the kingdom revolts against his reign. Macbeth is also preoccupied with ambition, and his kingdom also revolts against his reign, but the kingdom rises against him because he is seen as "bad" instead of simply careless. *Macbeth* focuses on whether or not a king is good or bad, but *Wyrd Sisters* maintains that it is not necessary for a king to be good or bad as long as he cares for that which he has charge over. Pratchett plays with preconceptions of good and bad, and in doing so challenges what the concepts of good and bad actually mean outside of a religious context.

Pratchett works from a postmodernist standpoint, and "because there is no

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[13] Pratchett creates the kingdom as being "made up of all sorts of things. Ideas. Loyalties. Memories...And then all these things create some kind of life. Not a body kind of life, more like a living idea. Made up of everything that's alive and what they're thinking (Pratchett 94).

singular truth within a postmodernist framework, the idea that one culture is closer to truth than another is incoherent," making culturally accepted truths, such the religiously defined concepts of good and bad as good and evil, incoherent as well (Hansen 2). From Shakespeare's frame of reference, evil would be going against the divine order and this action would be deemed a sin. When considering the murder of King Duncan, Macbeth ruminates that "this Duncan hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been so clear in his great office, that his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking-off" (1.7 16-20). Macbeth is aware that Duncan is a good king, and that his murder would be against God, the divine order, and as such would merit damnation for the soul responsible. When the murder is committed, the natural order governed by God is upset, resulting in a violent macrocosmic storm that mirrors the microcosmic storm occurring within the castle (2.3 50-57).[14] Macbeth is aware of the forfeiture of his "eternal jewel," or his soul, in payment to "the common enemy of man," or the devil, for his kingship (3.1 67-8). When Felmet murders King Verence, the act itself is not seen as an act against nature, it is not an act condemnable by eternal damnation, nor viewed as a sin against God. Granny Weatherwax patiently explains that "kings go around killing each other…and doesn't count as murder" (Pratchett 95). Duke Felmet elicits an "obscene delight" from the murder, thus exposing his evil through his perverted pleasure of the murder, instead of the evil originating from the murderous act itself (Pratchett 6). As there is no divine order in Pratchett's views, there is also no

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[14] Shakespeare's skepticism becomes apparent as he deconstructs not only the social order through the murder of King Duncan, but he deconstructs the divine order as well. Shakespeare does reconstruct the order by the culmination of the play, but his initial deconstruction shows the seeds of skepticism being planted in the Early Modern period.

concept of sin in *Wyrd Sisters*, as that would invariably lead back to the Christian judgment. Without a religious context with which to contain concepts such as good and evil, good and evil become the good and bad of societal opinion, sanctioned by nothing other than personal interpretation of a common denominator of belief in what is right and wrong.

Pratchett's humanism is a more prominent factor than his postmodern perspective in the discussion of right and wrong, as both he and Shakespeare rely on the individual to determine, independently of external factors, what is right and wrong for themselves. Pratchett and Shakespeare share the humanist faith in the individual to construct personal interpretations of right and wrong. However, Pratchett's disbelief in universal religion results in a postmodern alienation of his characters, which is indicative of the postmodern condition. This postmodern alienation ultimately leads into solipsism, but solipsism also returns to the humanist focus on the individual. Farah Mendlesohn notes that "the crucial issue which underpins the moral schema of Pratchett's work is *choice* and thus the role of the individual" (Mendlesohn 240). Right and wrong becomes a choice based on personal perception and awareness, something to decide and work at to achieve. This personal choice between right and wrong is the basis of individuality. Mendlesohn discusses how "the moral structure of Pratchett's work rests on a conviction that only personal integrity is a useful foundation for free will and true choice" (Mendleson 259). Each individual character embodies solipsism as they personally construct a view on what is good and bad, right and wrong without the constraints of societal or religious dictation. Pratchett embeds his humanist interest in societal solipsism into *Wyrd Sisters* by setting an example through his postmodern characters, such as Granny Weatherwax.

Granny Weatherwax admirably exemplifies Pratchett's humanist and postmodern concept of solipsism, as she does not impose onto others what she has individually determined right and good for herself. Postmodernism favors solipsism as it allows a mutability for the individual, avoiding stagnation and concrete definitions. Granny Weatherwax has formulated ideas about what she considers right and wrong, but they evolve with each new, *localized* situation. When first confronted by the "kingdom" soliciting her aid, her immediate response is to say, "I can't go meddling. It's not *right* to go meddling" (Pratchett 81). Granny Weatherwax remains firm in her belief that it is not right to use magic to meddle in the affairs of others, particularly those who rule, until she becomes sufficiently convinced of the imperative necessity in the specific situation of Felmet destroying the kingdom. This localized situation persuades Granny Weatherwax to alter her beliefs on meddling to allow herself to assist. Granny Weatherwax exemplifies solipsism at its best, maintaining a belief in what is right but altering that belief as necessary per situation. Altering concepts of right and wrong per situation represent a postmodernist as well as humanist concept that operates within the text to create organic, relatable characters.

While ambivalence has become ambience to the postmodern world, and good and bad are no longer concretely defined terms, good and bad do come forth in *Wyrd Sisters* to help frame the humanist perspective of maintaining personal identity. Granny Weatherwax refuses to hand over a child to a pair of angry soldiers "on general principles," and not a dictated philosophy or religious sentiment (Pratchett 12). General principles guide Granny Weatherwax, and those principles are general enough to be mutable when necessary. Pratchett frames Granny Weatherwax's general principles

against Black Aliss', and while there is no show-down that goes down in the text, there is

an underlining opposition between Black Aliss and Granny Weatherwax. Through

implication, it is understood that "Black Aliss is the shadow itself against whom

Esmerelda Weatherwax constantly pits herself, and at the core of Granny's story is the

battle of right vs. wrong" (Sayer 140). Granny's choice is not between the right and

wrong of Christianity, as was Macbeth's choice in *Macbeth*, but a choice within herself

on what she individually accepts as right and wrong.

Choice is a monkey wrench when looking back to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* through

the tinted glass of postmodernism, as where both he and Pratchett focus on the choice of

the individual, Shakespeare constrains this choice within a religious context where

Pratchett does not. Postmodernism promotes the individual, but it also holds the

individual solely responsible for the consequences of choices made, where in

Shakespeare, it can be said that the supernatural temptations and spousal influences

remove an amount of choice from Macbeth's actions. Stacey Hibbs addresses this issue of

temptation when she unapologetically attests that "in spite of all the supernatural

influences in [*Macbeth*], from the malevolent witches to the good king dispensing

miraculous cures, the hell that is created is brought about by human action" (19). The

religious argument of evil temptation corrupting the soul of the innocent as a backdrop to

Macbeth must be discarded when studying the play from a postmodernist perspective.

The evil witches tempted Macbeth and Banquo equally with visions of their future, yet

Banquo tempers this temptation by rationalizing that "oftentimes to win us to our harm

the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles to betray's in deepest

consequence" (1.3 118-124). When Macbeth refuses Banquo's precautions, and instead

perceives that he "yields to that suggestion" of murder for kingship the true evil is thus born not from the evil witches temptations but from Macbeth's conscious choice (1.3 126-141). From the beginning, Macbeth is consciously aware of the religious ramifications of his actions, as well as their moral significance, and yet he willingly succumbs to it for his "black and deep desires" to gain kingship, consciously choosing power over conscience, thus proving Hibbs' argument that the evil inherent in the play is brought about by human choice and not supernatural machinations (1.4 49-53; Hibbs 19). In fact, the war within Macbeth between his desires and his guilt drive the internal action of the play itself, and his desires become tantamount to his guilt as his choices continue to be derived from his desires to gain and then obtain power. While Shakespeare does construct the concept of guilt within a religious framework, he, like Pratchett, allows for the characters to make their own choices, and Macbeth in the end turns his back on his faith in favor of greed and hubris. By allotting for the individual to supersede the influence of religion, Shakespeare recognizes the humanist perspective of the fallacious nature of humanity, which Pratchett also encompasses within his own depictions of guilt.

Guilt is just as prevalent an issue in the postmodern world of *Wyrd Sisters* as it is in the religiously centered *Macbeth*, and while the guilt in *Macbeth* is largely framed by Macbeth's assumption of committing sin, both the postmodernists and the humanists recognize guilt as a condition which is not dependent upon religious affiliation.[15] Where Shakespeare applied religious restrictions to guilt, Pratchett relied on the individual to govern personal guilt. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth experience guilt resulting from

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[15] In "Macbeth and the Tragedy of Sin," Ken Colston attests that "sin, not crime, is the subject of *Macbeth*," as "sin is identified by trepidation and guilt, which involve respect for the divine and the right" (2).

their crimes, but it is not possible to say exactly whether this guilt arises from an internal conscience or from an understanding and regret for their religious transgressions. Manifestations of guilt, in the form of incorporeal daggers and even the ghost of murdered Banquo, plaque Macbeth. Modern critics argue that Macbeth's guilt absolves him of absolute evil, as Ken Colston maintains when he says, "Macbeth may not have damned himself…[because] he has confessed his sin in several places" (34). However, Shakespeare left no doubt of the evil nature of his leading characters, as he writes that "not in the legions of horrid hell can come a devil more damned in evils to top Macbeth" or "his fiend-like queen" (4.3 57-59; 5.11 35-362). In these lines, Shakespeare, himself, denies that Macbeth's guilt is redemptive. Although, only when looking at guilt through religious restrictions does the concept of redemption hold any significance. Shakespeare's concept of guilt is largely focused on the Christian afterlife, where Pratchett's concept of guilt is focused on the present. Without the concept of redemption from remorse, a possible Christian reading of *Macbeth*, Pratchett enacts a deeper discussion of guilt, because the guilt experienced by the characters in *Wyrd Sisters* has a more immediate impact.

Pratchett plays with Shakespeare's representation of the religions paradigm of guilt when he satirizes the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth with his characters the Duke and Duchess Felmet; Duke Felmet is representative of Lady Macbeth, and Lady Felmet emulates Macbeth. Shakespeare constructs Lady Macbeth's guilt one-dimensionally, as it was assumed that one with conscience would feel basic guilt over sinful transgression in the Early Modern period. Pratchett overcomplicates this assumption on the one-dimensionality of guilt in his construction of Duke Felmet's

conscience. Lady Macbeth's guilt manifested in an obsession with the spectral blood on

her hands, which is learned when gentlewoman confesses that "it is an accustomed action

with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of

an hour" (5.1 24-26). Lady Macbeth only mentions this obsession once directly in the

text, when she says, "Out, damned spot; out, I say" (5.1 30-34). Lady Macbeth's

obsession with the blood on her hands is her guilt manifested internally, as she is unable

or perhaps unwilling to bring that guilt through to her conscious. Duke Felmet, on the

other hand, also has an obsession with the blood on his hands from the murder of a king,

but his obsession with blood is intensified by his insanity and paranoia of getting caught

"red handed" for the murder of the late King Verence. Felmet "scrubbed and

scrubbed…eventually he'd gone down to the dungeons and borrowed one of the torturer's

wire brushes…the harder he scrubbed, the more blood there was" (Pratchett 45). In

interlaying feelings of guilt under overt depictions of insanity, fear and paranoia, Pratchett

complicates the feeling of guilt within Duke Felmet to further destabilize assumptions on

common concepts like guilt.[16] Not only is this a postmodern destabilization of commonly

held truths, but Pratchett also deepens the discussion on humanism by exposing at once

the positive and negative sides of the complexity of the human conscience.

   Shakespeare creates Macbeth to exhibit signs of insanity when he begins to see his

guilt manifested in corporeal visions, but it is Pratchett's intensification of the

representation of insanity in Duke Felmet that truly complicates the concept of guilt.

Macbeth is an intensely human character, plagued with conscience as he simultaneously

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[16] Pratchett further depicts Duke Felmet's guilt and insanity when Felmet inquires, "is this a dagger I see before me?" To which his Fool replies, "no my lord. It's my handkerchief, you see" (61). There is obvious guilt concerning the dagger used for murder, but that guilt is complicated by the overtone of insanity.

"burned with desire," whereas Felmet becomes so basically structured that he becomes almost non-human, characterized entirely through his insanity (1.5 3-5). "Somewhere deep inside his mind, beyond the event horizon of rationality, the sheer pressure of insanity had hammered his madness into something harder than diamond," which is not indicative of a functioning human mind but of something so innately one-track-minded as to be, again, non-human (Pratchett 123).

Pratchett makes the duchess equally non-human, as she is void of any conscience whatsoever, and this void is exaggerated when in correlation to Lady Macbeth's acute internalized guilt. Since Lady Macbeth internalized her guilt because she either could not, or would not, allow it to infect her consciousness, the character of the duchess is assumed to be likewise introverted. This is not the case. To prove Lady Felmet's absolute, guiltless evil against all suspicion of introversion, Pratchett creates a scene in which Granny Weatherwax performs an act of magic that "knocked down" the walls inside of the duchess' head, releasing "every scream. Every plea. Every pang of guilt. Every twinge of conscience. All at once" (Pratchett 244). If this had been inflicted upon Lady Macbeth and her internalized conscience, it would have been devastatingly destructive. However, Pratchett reveals Lady Felmet's inhumanity when her reaction to this magic is to proclaim, "I've seen exactly what I am…and I'm proud of it! I'd do it all again, only hotter and longer! I enjoyed it, and I did it because I wanted to!" (Pratchett 244-245). This sort of purely bad character transcends the accepted human capacity for bad or wrong and becomes what is culturally understood as evil incarnate. The capacity for guilt is a very human quality, and being entirely void of all guilt, or conscience, removes the duchess from humanity into an iconographic understanding of what is culturally conceived as evil,

which is quite similar to the evil witches in *Macbeth*. The witches in *Macbeth* are

likewise constructed as one-dimensional characters, void of all conscience, but due to the

discourse on witches throughout history, this depiction of witches is acceptable, where

Lady Felmet's negative, non-human depiction is seen as excessive.

Where Shakespeare's representation of witches reflect the historically Christian

views of witches as evil beings of the occult, devoid of human guilt and conscience,

Prathcett's witches are humanized not only through his postmodern representation, but

through his humanist approach as well.[17] The majority of the malignant representations

throughout history of witches and witchcraft are found in conjunction with the Christian

religion.[18] As with the postmodernist's "deliberate intent to unsettle assumptions and

presuppositions," the twenty-first century has seen a revolution of the witch archetype

(Atkinson 74) . Organizations such as Wicca promote a positive representation of

witchcraft, and their reworking of the representation of witchcraft is embedded in

Pratchett's work. Through his parody of the witches of *Macbeth,* Pratchett is able to

exemplify the new image of the witch in striking relief to the witches of *Macbeth*.[19] For

example, the influence of Wicca is boldly apparent in Pratchett's satirical

characterizations of the witches and their witchcraft, particularly through Magrat with her

"silver occult jewelry with octograms, bats, spiders, dragons and other symbols of

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[17] "St. Augustine (354-430), one of the most influential Christian writers and saints, categorically condemned witches and witchcraft," thus influencing "both medieval Catholic and Protestant witch hunters" (Andersson 7).

[18] In "Which Witch is Which? A Feminist Analysis of Terry Pratchett's Discworld Witches," Lorraine Andersson cites in "Exodus 22:18 God tells Moses on Mount Sinai: 'You must not allow a witch to live'" (7) and it wasn't until 1717 that "the last witch trial in England was carried out" (10).

[19] Lorrain Andersson explains that "one of the better-known witch organizations is Wicca…founded by Gerald Gardner…in 1954," (15) and that "Wicca, feminist witches and other modern witches seek to define the witch archetype as something positive and multifaceted rather than all negative" (5).

everyday mysticism," and her belief in "Nature's wisdom and elves and the healing power of colors and the cycle of the seasons and a lot of things Granny Weatherwax didn't have any truck with" because they were "modern" (Pratchett 92; Pratchett 22-23). Pratchett's postmodern tendency to avoid stereotypes is displayed in his parody of the stereotypically Wiccan imagery promoted by Magrat, who is the juvenile member of the trio of witches. Pratchett deconstructs not only the religious views concerning witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but also the newfound Wiccan stereotypes placed on witchcraft to resonate a postmodern interpretation of the witch image.

Pratchett's postmodern critique of the preconceived notions of the supernatural and witchcraft begins with the opening pages of *Wyrd Sisters,* in which Pratchett rewrites the beginning of *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* opens with the stage direction indicating "thunder and lightning. Enter three witches" (1.1 1). These three witches then proceed through an apparently planned meeting, and conclude inquiring "when shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain? When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won" (1.1 1-2). The questions answered, the witches dissolve into the unified chant "fair is foul, and foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air" (1.1 10-11). Pratchett revokes the myth of the malevolent witch of mayhem, using the iconic imagery of the first scene of *Macbeth* to create a very opposite effect.[20] There is indeed lightning: it "stabbed the earth erratically, like an inefficient assassin" (Pratchett 1). There is in fact an unnamed "eldritch voice" which "shrieked: 'When shall we three meet again?'" to the other "hunched figures" (Pratchett 1). It all seems to be going so well and sinisterly, when

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[20] In *The Twentieth-Century Novel An Introduction*, R.B. Kershner states that "many [postmodernists] stress the importance of postmodern 'citation' of older forms or even of particular classic works," and this can be applied to Pratchett's direct use of Shakespearean material (76).

"another voice says, in far more ordinary tones: 'Well, I can do next Tuesday'" and ruins the entire ambiance (Pratchett 1). Pratchett puns the dramatic devices Shakespeare used to demonize his witches to show that the witches in *Wyrd Sisters* are actually quite ordinary, destabilizing the dramatic occult assumptions about witches through their humanized characterization (Pratchett 1). Shakespeare immediately delineates their intent by calling it "hurly-burly," and instead of following suit, Pratchett presents his witches as beneficial to societal order and generally good natured. Shakespeare does not give his witches names, further demonizing them and removing them from any human sentiment. Pratchett names his witches and constructs them with fully functioning human identities. Shakespeare's witches create upheaval and mayhem out of stability, causing hurly-burly, and are indeed irrevocably malevolent creatures of myth. Yet Pratchett's ambivalence to magic highlights the postmodern ambivalence not only in the image of the witch which he critiques, but in the very magic they use as well.

Pratchett satirizes the conjure scene from *Macbeth* in *Wyrd Sisters*, playing upon the postmodern cynicism toward the supernatural. For Pratchett, magic "is both real and unreal: both a matter of occult power and sleight of hand, with the difference between the two seldom clear" (Brown 276). The conjure scene in *Macbeth* is putrid with "poisoned entrails," "fillet of a fenny snake," "eye of newt and toe of frog," "wool of bat and tongue of dog," "owlet's wing" and all sorts of other nasty ingredients, all thrown into "the cauldron [to] boil and bake" (4.1 5-17). Meanwhile, the most sinister thing a cauldron is employed for in *Wyrd Sisters* is boiling water for tea (Pratchett 3). Nevertheless, the witches in *Wyrd Sisters* do partake in a conjuring of their own. Instead of a cauldron, they utilize the old boiler in Nanny Ogg's washhouse (Pratchett 72). Poisoned entrails and

tongues from dogs become "rather old washing soda and some extremely hard soap

flakes" (Pratchett 73). Pratchett takes the extraordinary and makes it ordinary, just has he

did with his witches, creating a certain postmodern pessimism to the supernatural. His

witches, themselves, as well as the magic they use are demystified from the witch myth

found in Shakespeare as Pratchett inverts the dramatic language used to describe witches

and magic in *Macbeth* to expose a postmodern disillusion of the supernatural into

normalcy.

Pratchett's witches, as well as their magic, embody the postmodern critique of the

supernatural by maintaining that "science shares power with…magic," and in *Wyrd*

Sisters, science and magic are occasionally indistinguishable from one another (Snell 2).

Science does play an inevitable role in the magic in *Wyrd Sisters,* combining scientific

theory with magic to create a postmodern depiction of the possibilities of magic.[21] In

"The Witches," Karen Sayer discusses how "Granny explains that time is not rigid, that

really it's stretchy like rubber- a clear reference to current scientific theory, which is

typical of Pratchett's approach" (138). Another scientific hypothesis involved in *Wyrd*

Sisters concerns the experience of flight. With a scientific understanding of the

experience of flight in postmodern culture, the classic image of the witch flying on her

broomstick through the darkest night has been forever disillusioned. Shakespeare, writing

during a time without such scientific knowledge, describes flight on a broomstick as "a

dainty pleasure [to] ride in the air when the moon shines fair," thus expressing an

unrealistically romantic experience (3.5 58). Modern science has taught the

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[21] Granny Weatherwax enters into the scientific debate on time, explaining that time is "like rubber…You
can stretch it to suit yourself" (146) before she embarks on magically propelling her entire kingdom fifteen
years into the future (149-163).

postmodernists that through deductive reasoning it can be rationally determined that

flying on a broomstick in the dead of night at indeterminate altitudes is most probably

considerably uncomfortable and at least moderately problematic. Granny Weatherwax

discovers this exact rationality to be infallibly true. She finds herself "freezing" at such

altitudes and maintained speed, but her physical discomfort becomes the least of her

worries, when "her broomstick pin wheeled sharply across the clouds" on account of

flying "through all that wet mist and then up into the cold air," which resulted in her

broomstick freezing and consequently toppling out of the sky (Pratchett 151; 155; 160).

Pratchett critiques the traditional assumptions regarding the supernatural by exposing

Shakespeare's depiction of witches in flight as overly romantic and highly unrealistic,

which serves to further highlight his own postmodern pessimism.

As is expressed in Pratchett's depiction of witches, the postmodernists are

concerned with cultural truths, and how "the elite determine categories and language

imprisons us" (Snell 2). Much of the elite language which Pratchett critiques in the

characterization of the witches stems from Shakespeare, himself. Duke Felmet represents

Shakespeare's contemporaries' views on witches, using language similar to their views to

spread rumors about the witches in *Wyrd Sisters*.[22] The duke's irrational fear of the

witches is spawned out of his ignorance of their nature, and because he does not

understand them he becomes susceptible to believing that the witches offer "visions of

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[22] Anderson explains that the *Episcopi* is a Catholic work which was highly skeptical of witches and witchcraft and likely written during the ninth century (7). The *Malleus Maleficarum*, written in 1486, dismisses the more skeptical texts on witchcraft, firmly attesting their existence, and was written primarily by the Dominican monk Heinrich Kramer who was obsessed with the sexual aspects of witchcraft (Andersson 8).

unearthly delight…dark fascinations and forbidden raptures, the like of which mortal men should not even think of, and demonic secrets that take you to the depths of man's desires" (Pratchett 44). This passage reads dangerously close to the texts referenced during the witch trials, and it is all the more dangerous that Duke Felmet believes this information without question. Duke Felmet is receiving what he believes to be the truth about witches, but his information is proven false by the actual witches in the text, thus exposing the fallacies in cultural views and myths, and showing the dangerous effects of absolute faith in the truth of the words of others.

Postmodernists recognize the dangers of accepting cultural truths without contestation, and Pratchett exemplifies this danger through his characterization of Duke Felmet. In his irrational fear, Duke Felmet searches for a way to combat the witches who he believes are against his rule, and his Fool determines that "words can fight even witches" (Pratchett 68). Thus was born "crone," "evil eye," and "stupid old woman" into the text, just as it was in the centuries of witch propaganda, when the "vilification of the negative witch image is mainly male activity, with the primary purpose of gaining and maintaining power" (Pratchett 68; Andersson 14). "Words…can spread like fire" and never so quickly as in popular entertainment (Pratchett 68). Pratchett exemplifies this danger when Duke Felmet commissions a play to be written by Hwell, a dwarf who is characterized to be Shakespeare himself, meant to condemn the witches and scratch out the duke's own villainous past from the stone of veracity (Pratchett 140). The play is the tool to bring down the witches by undermining the respect they had built within the community of Ramptopers through negative representation. Postmodernists work to expose the equivocal nature of gossip and absolute truths, and Pratchett deconstructs

these concepts by juxtaposing the actual witches with the gossip and rumors propagated

by the ignorant beliefs of Duke Felmet.

The play within *Wyrd Sisters,* which Duke Felmet commissions, integrates the

precise language Shakespeare uses to describe the witches in *Macbeth*, and Pratchett does

this to further expose the limitations and complications that arise from culturally accepted

truths. The witches watch demonized versions of themselves at the opening night of the

play, as Hwell coached the actors who play the witches onstage into being "scheming evil

secret black and midnight hags!" (Pratchett 223). Hwell's language, used to coerce the

actors into character, is the same language used to describe and vilify the witches in

Macbeth, as Macbeth calls them "secret, black, and midnight hags" (4.1 63). In the

audience, watching the performance of the rallied actors intent on being perfectly evil,

Granny Weatherwax freezes as the "horror of realization was stealing over her" when she

begins to discern that what she and the other witches are watching onstage, in front of the

entire community, are demonized versions of themselves (Pratchett 224) . Granny

discovers rather rapidly that words "were as soft as water, but they were also as powerful

as water and now they were rushing over the audience, eroding the levees of veracity, and

carrying away the past" (Pratchett 225). She reflects that "everyone knows who we really

are, but the things down there are what they'll remember…All we've ever done, all we've

ever been, won't exist anymore" (Pratchett 225). While Lady Felmet admits that "witches

don't do that sort of [evil] thing…they're just stories to frighten people," "the

theater…had a magic of its own…[and] it changed the world" (Pratchett 240; 220). By

calling attention in *Wyrd Sisters* to the ludicrous nature of having blind faith in gossip and

rumor, Pratchett not only conducts a postmodern deconstruction of the way truth is

obtained, but he also warns us how easily truth is undermined by fallacies. His warning

calls back to the postmodern as well as humanist insistence on solipsism, as Pratchett as

well as the postmodernists and humanists believe that the only truth in existence with any

validity is the truth reached within one's own mind. While Pratchett reveals the fallacious

nature of certain cultural truths such as religion and witchcraft imbedded in

Shakespeare's work, both Pratchett and Shakespeare critique the fallacies of cultural

truths governing gender.

Although in *Wyrd Sisters* Pratchett critiques the religious ideology, concepts of

the supernatural, and fallacies of absolute truths in *Macbeth*, Pratchett's and

Shakespeare's views intersect in one significant area: their deconstruction of gender.

Where the "disruption of the binaries that define things as either/or," such as gender is

attributed to the postmodernists, Shakespeare begins the disruption centuries earlier

(Atkinson 74). Lady Macbeth can be considered one of the first gender bending literary

characters of the Early Modern period, exemplifying neither an immersion in masculinity

or femininity. However, instead of celebrating her independence of gender, she is

demonized within the play for altering her accepted gender role because she does so in a

way that pollutes the concepts of what is masculine and feminine.[23] She is described as

being "fiend-like," thus connecting her with the evil androgynous witches within the play

(5.11 35-36). The demonization of the gender bending of Lady Macbeth must be

construed as the product of the manipulation and ultimate poisoning of the gender ideals

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[23] In "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism," Jonathan Dollimore maintains that the gender issue from the early modern period did not have an issue with positive representations of women, nor from female equality. The gender concern arose from "representations of disreputable women who disrupt the scheme of (hetero)sexual difference" (483).

that Lady Macbeth unwittingly personifies. What Lady Macbeth "craves…is an alternative gender identity, one which will allow her to slip free of the emotional as well as the cultural constraints governing women," and she sees this alternative gender identity as the male gender (Chamberlain 9).[24] Lady Macbeth "attempts to seize a masculine power to further Macbeth's political goals. To overcome her husband's feminized reticence, Lady Macbeth assumes a masculinity she will prove unable to support" (Chamberlain 1). Even though Chamberlain claims that Lady Macbeth is unable to support the masculinity which she so strives to personify, Lady Macbeth never actually achieves masculinity because she does not understand what masculinity is. In her ignorance, she assumes masculinity is totally void of emotion and weakness, full of cruelty and power, thus she rejects "that which she has been made to think is weak and womanly within her in order to become cruel and manly." In doing so, "she moves away from her humanity toward the demonic, toward becoming a life-denying witch instead of toward that sixteenth-century secular idea" (Kimbrough 7). Lady Felmet also moves away from her humanity and toward the demonic, but unlike Lady Macbeth she does so without denying her gender or sex, but rather her humanity itself.

While Lady Felmet, as a postmodern character, needs no gender manipulation to gain power, Lady Macbeth attempts to alter her gender into a misunderstood masculinity to obtain the power which she believes she needs. In her attempt to embody her misunderstood masculinity, she implores the

"spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from the

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[24] In "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism," Jonathan Dollomore attests that during the Early Modern period, "the woman can only conceive her equality by taking on masculine guise- or as a claim to equality made possible by a gender inversion" (483).

crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty…stop th'accused and passage to

remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell

purpose…Come to my woman's breasts, and take my milk for gall." (1.5

37-42)

While this entreaty to murderous and evil spirits seems sinister enough, interlaced with

the maliciousness of her imagined masculinity is her feminine conscience. She believes

that being unsexed and filled with direst cruelty will give her the strength to go against

her conscience and commit the crime she is truly afraid to commit. Her unquiet

conscience becomes apparent when she entreats that the spirits stop the passage of action

to remorse, or guilt, as she is afraid of her own guilt once she aids in killing the king. She

is also concerned about compunctious visitings, which would only become prevalent if

she was having intense misgivings derived from a sense of guilt. She also makes the

mistake of asking to be unsexed prior to offering her woman's breasts for suckling. If she

indeed understood and embodied the unsexing, she would not recognize her body as a

woman's with substance to offer for suckling. Lady Macbeth constantly returns to

feminine imagery and sentimentality whilst wishing for an imagined masculinity to give

her the strength to continue her plans. Returning to Lady Macbeth's description by Robert

Kimbrough as a life-denying witch, her infanticide speech is a deliberate perversion of the

female gender identity to obtain power over her husband. In this speech, she absolutely

demonizes the secular ideal of the woman, but she does this in an attempt to display a

masculinity founded upon emotionally detached cruelty and control, not as a confession

of actual malicious intent. She says,

"I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks

me. I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple

from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you

have done to this." (1.7 54-59)

Stephanie Chamberlain explains that "this savagery surfaces at a moment of greatest

intimacy between mother and child [which] only adds to its incomprehensible brutality"

(11). This moment could not have been imagined without the initial capacity for intimacy

and love for the child by the mother, Lady Macbeth. While this does on one level make

the imagined scene all the more horrifying, it also makes it more powerful. Lady Macbeth

desires power, and she uses her feminine sentimentality of motherhood to create a

powerful moment in which to sway Macbeth to stick to his purpose. No man could have

concocted a persuasion quite so cruel, and so Lady Macbeth oversteps her perceived

masculine cruelty to a special category all unto herself. Even though Lady Macbeth's

words are vicious, she uses them to elicit a power not afforded to her by her culture,

whereas Lady Felmet simply embodies the power she takes for herself.

 Like Lady Felmet, Lady Macbeth maintains power over her husband, and this

power over husbandry is a postmodern deconstruction of the gender expectations placed

on the traditional marital patriarchy. Lady Macbeth often berates Macbeth, calling him

"foolish" and "infirm of purpose," while interchangeable cajoling him with admonitions

of "worthy thane" with "noble strength" (2.2 19; 2.2 50; 2.2 42-43). Stacey Hibbs and

Thomas Hibbs note that Lady Macbeth did not "force Macbeth to commit murder, but

[knew] well his character and how to play upon his chief passions, how to manipulate his

strength and weaknesses to their own ends" (Hibbs 11). Through alternating verbal abuse

and emotional support, Lady Macbeth elicits a predetermined response from her husband

through feminine manipulation of the masculine power. Lady Macbeth has the power of persuasion, but not of action. For that, she uses her power over her husband, who in turn commits the crime. Lady Macbeth is only complicit in the murder of King Duncan, as she was not party to the murder plot for the life of Banquo and his son, and she was not aware of the plan to annihilate Macduff's family. When she becomes aware of the murder of Macduff's family, she says, "The Thane of Fife had a wife…will these hands never be clean? No more o'that, my lord, no more o'that" (5.1 36-39). Her conscience is rising against the additional murders to the one that put them on the throne. She does not condone the slaying of women and children, and wishes to council her husband against such cruelty by admonishing "no more o'that my lord". Finally, even in death she is unable to escape her femininity, as Kimbrough explains that "to Elizabethans, insanity and suicide were signs of weakness, signs of cowardice, therefore partaking of the 'feminine'" (13). Lady Macbeth meets her end "by self and violent hands took off her life" by leaping from the battlements during the final combat, thus aligning herself with the femininity of suicide as discussed by Kimbrough (5.11 35-36) . Lady Macbeth might have maintained power over her husband, thereby shaking the assumptions of gender within marital hierarchies, but in the end she returns again to her female gender.[25] Pratchett is able, through his postmodern deconstruction of gender, to strip Lady Felmet of all gender restrictions, while Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth must forever return to her feminine identity, unable to escape the constraints of her gender.

While Lady Macbeth oscillates between her unavoidable femininity and attempts

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[25] Shakespeare expresses his skepticism by deconstructing, through Lady Macbeth, the gender norms of the time period. Again, however, he returns the order which he deconstructs, as Lady Macbeth returns consistently to her female gender.

at misunderstood masculinity, Duke Felmet is the embodiment of both the masculine and the feminine of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Duke Felmet has been previously described as insane, and so would have been considered weak and feminine by this point alone if considered from Kimbrough's explanation of the Elizabethan standpoint on insanity and suicide (13). His death remains ambiguous, as because of his insanity it is unclear whether he fell from the battlements intentionally or unintentionally, but he nevertheless shares the same fate as Lady Macbeth and is therefore aligned with the feminine. While Macbeth views his wife as his "dearest partner of greatness," Duke Felmet sees his wife not as a partner, but as the driving and governing force of his life (1.5 10). Instead of seeing her as an equal, he muses on his "good luck in marrying her" for "if it wasn't for the engine of her ambition he'd be just another local lord" (Pratchett 18). While Macbeth bent to the will of his wife more often than not, and did indeed defer to her in most things, he was never entirely guided by her. He sought her council, but was never guided without question by her will. The relationship of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth was controversial enough during that time period, but the relationship of the duke and the duchess reads more as a postmodern deconstruction of the traditional marriage hierarchy of husband and wife.

Pratchett works to further deconstruct the gender expectations in *Macbeth* by continuing to invert the deaths of his main characters, as Lady Felmet subsumes the masculine power from her husband when she shares Macbeth's fate. As the castle is under siege, Macbeth and Macduff face off in final combat. Macduff entreats Macbeth to "yield" to which Macbeth rebuts, "I will not yield," and "I will try the last" (5.10 23-32). His hubris drives him into the final battle, not a heavenly intervention for a divine

sacrifice.[26] Lady Felmet likewise charges her assailant with hubris. After having been

imprisoned by the rightful heir to the throne for her dastardly deeds, Lady Felmet escapes

her captivity and runs into the forest. As she is running down the forest path, she becomes

aware that the track she is on was going "more or less in the right direction, but the trees

on either side of it were planted rather more thickly than one might expect and, when she

tried to turn back, there was no track at all behind her" (Pratchett 260). As the duchess

becomes aware of the forest leading her in the wrong, and possibly dangerous, direction,

she says, "I'm going…but I will be back," and it is "at this point that the track opened out

into a clearing that hadn't been there the day before and wouldn't be there tomorrow"

(Pratchett 261). While the country in *Macbeth* is discussed in personified language as it

"sinks beneath the yoke" and "weeps" and "bleeds" as "each new day a gash is added to

her wounds" it is understood that this language is metaphoric and not intended to be a

literal account of a separately sentient being that is the country itself (4.1 41-42). In

Pratchett, as was previously discussed, the kingdom does literally become sentient, and

the forest is then able to rise up and avenge the one who inflicted the gashes, the wounds

rendered. The clearing into which the duchess stumbles harbors "assembled antlers and

fangs and serried ranks of glowing eyes" (Pratchett 261). In the face of almost certain

death, she is bold Macbeth, hubris haunted Macbeth, as she "raised her knife and charged

the lot of them" (Pratchett 261). The creatures converge upon her fragile human form, and

"the kingdom exhaled" (Pratchett 261). Where Birnam wood technically moves against

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[26] In "Macbeth and the Tragedy of Sin," Ken Colston maintains that Macbeth's final cry of "lay on
Macduff, and damn's be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'" (5.8 30-34) "opposes the prophecies of the
evil will and throws himself up as a bodily sacrifice of the divine will" as a "surprising act of martydom"
(Colston 31).

Macbeth, the forest of the Ramptops literally moves against Lady Felmet. Lady Felmet

dies fighting a losing battle, like Macbeth, unable to relinquish her power or her hubris.

Through characterization, Pratchett is able to utilize the postmodern penchant for

deconstructing existing concepts like gender and power structures. By inverting the

gender of his characters from their Shakespearean counterparts, Pratchett not only

exposes the postmodern critique of gender stereotypes in Shakespeare, but he also

expresses his humanism in creating characters that transcend gender through their

personal identity.

Shakespeare's characterization of the witches from *Macbeth* can be seen as a

precursor to Pratchett's postmodern gender deconstruction, as Shakespeare's witches

embody both male and female physical traits, thus removing themselves from gender

classifications. These witches are first described by Banquo as he claims, "you should be

women, and yet your beards prevent me to interpret that you are so" (1.3 43-45).

Chamberlain discusses how "as characters their gender is rendered ambiguous; they are at

once both masculine and feminine, deconstructing, like Lady Macbeth, fixed categories"

(Chamberlain 9). However, the fact that the witches in *Macbeth* are constantly referred to

in the feminine tense cannot go unnoted. Banquo himself calls them "weird women" and

during one of the first sequences, they refer to themselves as "weird sisters" (3.1 3; 1.3

30). Macbeth calls them "hags," which is a term with strictly female interpretations.

While "physically, the witches challenge gender expectations," it is their "self-assured

authority more than their bizarre physical appearance which destabilizes the patriarchal

world of the play" (Chamberlain 9). Challenging gender expectations as well as

patriarchal power, the witches in *Macbeth* are also of the occult and could not be

contained within normal gender definitions, so androgyny was key. In becoming androgynous, they became non-human, neither male nor female. Shakespeare removes the shackles of gender binding the witches, echoing the plight of the postmodernists concerning gender constraints centuries later.

Like Shakespeare, Pratchett seeks to remove the shackles of gender constraint from his text, and in doing so he constructs his witches in *Wyrd Sisters* as postmodern representations of unrestricted gender possibility. All three witches in *Wyrd Sisters* are sexually female, but not every one of them embodies the female gender. In fact, one of the witches exudes androgyny over either specific gender. Of the three witches, Nanny Ogg is undoubtedly the most traditionally female, as she had "been married three times and ruled a tribe of children and grandchildren all over the kingdom" (Pratchett 23). Where Lady Macbeth denies her femininity in perverting the image of the mother during her infanticide speech, Nanny Ogg exemplifies the embodiment of the feminine image of the mother. Magrat Garlick is "the junior member of the trio," yet is still distinctly feminine (Pratchett 3). Her femininity arises in her tryst with the Fool, through which they discover that "ninety percent of true love is acute, ear-burning embarrassment" (Pratchett 127). Both Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick alter assumed perceptions of the female gender by maintaining power within themselves as feminine women, but it is Granny Weatherwax that is the true gender bender of the trio. All three witches maintain a level of femininity, while simultaneously critiquing gender constraints. While Shakespeare was unable to critique gender constraints from within a feminine identity, requiring his characters to remove themselves from their stereotyped gender to conduct his critique, Pratchett is able to deconstruct the feminine myth from within femininity

itself.

Pratchett recognizes Shakespeare's use of androgyny to supplant a gender identity, and while he maintains a certain femininity in Granny Weatherwax, Pratchett uses Granny to exemplify a postmodern androgyny in *Wyrd Sisters*. Like the witches of *Macbeth*, Granny Weatherwax is described physically as both feminine and masculine drawing her closer to androgyny than either gender. She is referred to as "mother of the night," while at the same time being described as "handsome" (Pratchett 13; Pratchett 25). Also similarly to the witches from *Macbeth*, Granny's physical description is not the only aspect of her character that delineates her as being both masculine and feminine, outside of the feminine gender constraints that Pratchett, and postmodernism, works against. Sayer mentions that *Wyrd Sisters* is "an entirely female driven plot line instead of the Shakespearean male hierarchy," and it is Granny Weatherwax as the "most highly-regarded of the leaders" of the witches who is at the helm (Sayer 130; Pratchett 4). A conversation with Magrat shows Granny Weatherwax's conscious distancing from the female gender, as Magrat reports that she has not been to see the theater troupe in Lancre because it "'tis not right, a woman going into such places by herself" (Pratchett 26). Magrat exhibit's the classic feminine reticence, which Granny Weatherwax "thoroughly approved of…so long as there was, of course, no suggestion that they applied to her" (Pratchett 26). While she understands femininity, she holds no truck with it herself. Unlike Nanny Ogg, Granny Weatherwax does not fulfill the traditional role of the female, that of bearing children. Granny Weatherwax is quite uncomfortable with her sexuality, going as far as to try "to prevent gravity from seeing up her skirts" as she plummeted quite accidentally out of the sky (Pratchett 161). By debunking the traditional role of the

female, while simultaneously maintaining a certain femininity, Granny Weatherwax sets

up a postmodern view of gender by allowing gender to be mutable to the individual

person.

Pratchett's postmodern view on the mutability of female identity continues to

unfold after Magrat experiences a sexual advance of sorts, and she tells Granny

Weatherwax of the encounter. Granny Weatherwax becomes painfully uncomfortable,

tentatively asking if anyone had previously discussed with Magrat the finer details of

"men and such" (Pratchett 37). When Magrat's response to this question is to look "as if

she was about to panic," Granny reflected that she "had done many unusual things in her

time, and it took a lot to make her refuse a challenge…but this time she gave in" and

suggested to Magrat that "it might be a good idea…[to] have a quiet word with Nanny

Ogg" about the subject (Pratchett 37). Granny Weatherwax is unable to guide Magrat

through the womanly understanding of the birds and the bees because she herself has

never acquired the knowledge, as she has never married and rejects such sentiments

throughout her dialogue as she sniffs "disapprovingly" (Pratchett 23). Granny

Weatherwax recommends Nanny Ogg for Magrat's enlightenment on this particularly

sensitive issue because she herself has no reference base for this knowledge, as she is not

familiar with the feminine and Nanny Ogg, who after "three marriages and an

adventurous girlhood" is quite familiar with just that kind of knowledge (Pratchett 160).

Granny Weatherwax, unlike Lady Macbeth, never directly denies her sex and in doing so

exemplifies postmodernism's disinterest in binary terms by embodying both masculine

and feminine at once without favoring one over the other.

Pratchett is not the first to propose a postmodern interest in joining multiple

gender identities into a single character to further deconstruct gender binaries, as Shakespeare does something very similar in his characterization of Macduff. Kimbrough explains that "the point Shakespeare makes through Macduff is clear: bravery and compassion are not incompatible; they are both natural, human attributes" (4). Macduff is not confused within himself about his gender because he accepts willingly both the feminine and masculine within himself without having an internal struggle between the two. The concept that Granny Weatherwax and Macduff illuminate is that gender is secondary to humanity. The twenty-first century has been able to transcend basic male and female identity labels and arrive at an amalgamation of different traits of both the masculine and feminine identity that work together to best fit a single individual. Here again there is the postmodern distaste for overarching definitive definitions which limit individuals into a predetermined margin of variance. Yet again postmodernism champions the humanist vision of the individual situation as being sole proprietor of personal definition. Chamberlain has been previously noted as claiming that Lady Macbeth desired an "alternative gender identity," one which she was unable to obtain but one which Granny Weatherwax effortlessly embodies (9). Shakespeare began his contemplations on gender "to help us overcome the limitations imposed by every day actuality as experienced in nature and society, only one of which is gender," and centuries later Pratchett takes up the same plight (Kimbrough 14).[27]

     Everything in Pratchett returns to the individual, and it can be argued that

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[27] In "Shakespeare's 'While History' Drama and Early Modern Historical Theory," Graham Holderness explains that "Shakespeare was able…to manipulate a wide range of historical perspectives, including providentialism, Machiavellianism, quasi-scientific positivism and a popular tradition of 'comic history'" (1).

Shakespeare does so as well, continuously reminding humanity to look inside themselves instead of just staring at the stars. Pratchett is a humanist, and believes that for better or for worse we are all there is, leaving no one else to blame but ourselves. His concern for humanity begins with the individual, and his work critiques and criticizes concepts such as religion, guilt, gender and truth to assist humanity in looking at itself through disenchanted eyes. Pratchett does take the reader on a postmodernist journey through a re-envisioned Macbeth, and he does so to help the reader reach a deeper understanding of personal responsibility. Through his witches, and the negative example of Duke Felmet, he entreats his readers to pursue knowledge, and to look for truth not externally, but within one's own self. Granny Weatherwax comes to the reader through the pages, "her black shawl [billowing] around her like the wings of an avenging angel, come to rid the world of all that [is] foolishness and pretense and artifice and sham" (Pratchett 226). Shakespeare may use his art to hold a mirror up to life, but Granny Weatherwax warns that "that's why everything is exactly the wrong way around," and therefore the mirror image should be appreciated for the opportunity it gives for looking at a the world from a different perspective and not necessarily as an absolute truth (Pratchett 226). Pratchett's witches are up close and personal with the reader, and sometimes it seems as if he intended for them to hit the reader "on the back of the head with the cauldron" of human understanding (Pratchett 245).

A more profound understanding of humanity is the ultimate culmination of both Shakespeare's and Pratchett's works, as both strive to deepen the discourse on what it means to be human. Shakespeare is revered for the ability of his works to reach through the centuries and touch the human soul, inspiring integral human understanding that feeds

the seeds of compassion in his readers, and like Shakespeare, "beneath everything [Pratchett] writes…is a fierce, palpable love for his fellow human beings, however flawed they may be" (Smith). Pratchett, as a self-proclaimed fantasy writer, has been routinely overlooked as an author of literature. To continue to maintain that the fantasy genre is mere entertainment, incapable of producing works significant to the literary field, is reprehensible. Silencing the voice of an entire genre based solely on the prejudice of literary elitism debases the principle of literary study. If the study of literature serves to enrich understanding not only of a single work, but of the way that work reflects and impacts the culture in which it was created, and if it serves to deepen the appreciation for the complexities of humanity, society, and culture then no single genre can remain unexplored as each has an individual voice interwoven together in the tapestry that is art. Certainly Sir Terry Pratchett creates true literary works, teaching compassion, human understanding, and the responsibility of the individual, as well as contributing to the fields of postmodernism and humanism, and to overlook this author would be to turn away a life-preserver in the sea of "artifice and sham" (Pratchett 226).

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