

## All the Disc's a Stage: Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* as Metafiction

Prema Arasu

**ABSTRACT:** Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a post-structuralist landscape where stories are real and magic is a mediating force between reality and representation. Pratchett's Discworld novels possess a strong undercurrent of the recognition of the power of words and the ways in which stories or representations threaten reality. This article examines *Wyrd Sisters* as a work of metafiction, that is, a work that acknowledges its existence as a representational text and experiments with the idea of "representationality." *Wyrd Sisters* takes three witches of the Discworld and places them in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The novel's parodic relationship with its hypotext highlights its existence as a work of fiction and, furthermore, draws upon the Shakespearean *mise-en-abyme* to illuminate the power of representation as a form of magic which has the power to transform, alter, and replace reality. By exposing the artifice of representation, metafiction issues a challenge to the ontological distinction between fiction and reality: by exposing the ways in which texts are constructed by language, the linguistic construction of reality is manifest. By implication, the existence of a verisimilar reality independent of subjective representation is challenged.

**KEYWORDS:** metafiction, fantasy, Terry Pratchett, Discworld, Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, fairy tales, post-structuralism, parody, witchcraft



Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a post-structuralist landscape where stories are real and magic is a mediating force between reality and representation: "The Discworld is about what people *believe* is true."<sup>1</sup> Pratchett's Discworld novels possess a strong undercurrent of the recognition of the power of words and the ways in which stories or representations threaten reality. This article examines the sixth Discworld novel, *Wyrd Sisters*, as a work of metafiction, that is, a work that acknowledges its existence as a representational text and experiments with the idea of "representationality" as a plot device. By exposing the artifice of representation, metafiction issues a challenge to "ontological and epistemological concerns regarding the distinction between fiction, illusion and reality."<sup>2</sup> This article will use Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* to demonstrate that in making apparent the ways in which texts are constructed by language, metafictional texts can highlight the ways in which reality itself is linguistically constructed and by implication challenge the existence of a verisimilar reality that exists independent of its textual representation. I will first summarise the critical discussion surrounding Pratchett and metafiction, then discuss metafiction more broadly and argue that it promotes a poststructuralist ideology in which reality is subjective and discursively constructed. I then discuss Pratchett's use of parody and identify how parody works as a metafictional device, which is suggestive of the insidious power of stories.

Pratchett's metafiction is recognised by several scholars: Anne Alton and William Spruiell note that "Pratchett [makes] readers aware of the ways in which language catalyses meaning."<sup>3</sup> Kevin Paul Smith's *The Postmodern Fairy Tale* (2007) identifies Pratchett's adaptation of fairy tale in *Witches Abroad* as metafictional in that it reflects upon the ways in which stories are transmitted and for what purposes.<sup>4</sup> With reference to the idea of the witch in *The Wee Free Men* (2003), Gideon Haberkorn suggests that fantasy can be "a commentary on the narrative construction of the human world" and "thematise the fictionality of consensus reality [and] the tools and techniques used to manufacture such realities."<sup>5</sup> Pratchett's characters are directly confronted with the power of stories and the power of the human mind and overcome difficulties by recognising that they can change these stories. Here, Discworld becomes theoretical and self-reflexive, and "can be used by readers to better understand the way in which their worlds and their selves are narrative

constructions.”<sup>6</sup> The metafictional potential of fantasy is most persistently and effectively explored through the representation of witches in Discworld. Characters are often challenged by the expectation versus the actuality of “the witch” characters and discover that expectation is shaped by story. Caroline Webb’s book *Fantasy and the Real World in British Children’s Literature: The Power of Story* (2015) elaborates upon the representation of the witch character as a story which can be subverted, and identifies Pratchett’s “literary self-consciousness” in the second Tiffany Aching novel, *A Hat Full of Sky* (2004).<sup>7</sup>

In this article I take as axiomatic the post-structuralist definition of metafiction which, drawing upon the structuralist idea that the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary, emphasises the role of language in the construction of realities, and questions the existence of a reality that predates its ontological articulation. Within this post-structuralist framework, metafiction is fiction which draws attention to its status as text by flaunting and exaggerating the linguistic instability inherent in all works of art. Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as “fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Mark Currie defines it as “writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject.”<sup>9</sup> Metafiction, according to Patricia Waugh, problematises ways in which narrative codes “artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal.’”<sup>10</sup> Metafiction “makes explicit the implicit problem of realism”; it rejects the idea that “good” fiction should present a cohesive internal world which allows readers to suspend their disbelief while immersed in the text.<sup>11</sup> What Waugh calls “metafictional deconstruction”— the exposure of the ways in which textual conventions work— provides novelists and readers with an understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative and goes a step further in offering an understanding of what we perceive to be the real world as semiotic artifice.<sup>12</sup> Metafiction sets out to expose itself as representation, but also that its represented-ness can only be expressed through language which is itself representation. The arbitrariness of language can only be expressed through language. The author of any such work, therefore, is implicitly offering a critical discourse upon the value of representational texts.

John Barth sees the “literature of exhaustion”—the exhaustion of forms which presuppose realism—not as a cause for despair, but rather a new area for writers to colonise.<sup>13</sup> Barth, like Hutcheon, frames metafiction as a postmodern phenomenon related to the poststructuralist cognizance of the arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier. Suspicion of the representational limits of language leads to the postmodern metafictional novel being the natural successor to the modernist realist novel. Furthermore, the postmodern incredulity towards “grand narratives” prompted the proliferation of fiction which self-consciously explores “the ways in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self.”<sup>14</sup> Waugh similarly sees metafiction as a result of the changing perceptions of the self and of consciousness of the mid twentieth-century.<sup>15</sup> Waugh and Hutcheon, however, both acknowledge the existence of pre-postmodern metafictional texts such as Laurence Stern’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1803); so while metafiction cannot be designated a specifically postmodern phenomenon, I frame its proliferation in the late twentieth century in relation to post-structuralist theory.

Terry Pratchett’s Discworld is a fantasy world constructed in a way that acknowledges its fictionality. The physical structure of the world—a disc which sits atop four elephants who stand upon the back of a giant turtle—is a setting in which Pratchett stakes his claim that “almost all writers are fantasy writers, but some of us are more honest about it than others.”<sup>16</sup> Metafiction, writes Hutcheon, leaves one with the impression that since all fiction is fantasy, no matter how verisimilar it pretends to be, “the most authentic and honest fiction might well be that which most freely acknowledges its fictionality.”<sup>17</sup> Realist fiction attempts to “mask the gap between linguistic signs and their fictive referents” through the representation of a cohesive internal world which “[constructs] an illusion of an unmediated relation between signs and things.”<sup>18</sup> For Pratchett, “realist” novels which represent a world similar to our own are just as much a fantasy as his Disc. Pratchett takes the ontological caesura between signifiers and signified—the innate inability of the written word to point without arbitrariness to a real-world object—as his subject and uses an unapologetically fantastic setting to explore alternate ontologies. Brian Attebery suggests that fantasies often take on a metafictional dimension because fantasy

“typically displays and even celebrates its structure. If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the outside.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Farah Mendlesohn recognises the metafictional potential of fantasy.<sup>20</sup> The alternative worlds of fantasy, observes Michael Saler, can encourage one to “see the real world as being, to some degree, an imaginary construct amenable to revision.”<sup>21</sup> In *Wyrd Sisters*, words are a form of magic which have a direct effect on the construction of “reality” (insofar as reality exists on the Discworld). On the Discworld, “all metaphors are potentially real, all figures of speech have a way of becoming more than words.”<sup>22</sup>

Pratchett’s writing is characterised by a metafictional “self-consciousness of the artificiality of its constructions and a fixation with the relationship between language and the world.”<sup>23</sup> Pratchett deploys metafictional strategies to continually draw attention to the existence of the Disc and the characters who inhabit it as products of imagination which exist as words on a page. Robyn McCallum identifies four main techniques whereby metafictional texts can flaunt their existence as representational: “parodic play on specific writing styles; thematised wordplay; ... strategies which draw attention to the physicality of texts; and deliberate mixing of literary and extra-literary genres.”<sup>24</sup> Pratchett uses footnotes to expand upon in-universe information or to make jokes which, through frame-breaking, disrupts the linearity of the text. In the postmodern metafictional novel, paratext “crosses” the imagined threshold of the novel.<sup>25</sup> Other frame-breaking techniques include the use of written film effects and non-diegetic sound: “Watch closely, the special effects are quite expensive. A bass note sounds,” to challenge immersion.<sup>26</sup> *Wyrd Sisters* uses parodic elements to refer to its Shakespearean hypotexts which work towards metafictional ends. Parody, argues Hutcheon, is “one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity” which functions as a conservative and transformative force “that recirculates rather than immortalises.”<sup>27</sup> It introduces critical distance from its hypotext which encourages reflection upon why certain stories—in this case, the cultural motif of the wicked witch—are recirculated, what about them is recirculated and what is cut out in the process.

*Wyrd Sisters* is “written using 100% recycled words.”<sup>28</sup> Pratchett embraces the idea that stories will always draw upon collected cultural knowledge and that retold stories have value; as he insists “it’s quite hard to make up anything new and it’s a

shame to see the old stuff lost.”<sup>29</sup> *Wyrd Sisters* takes three witches of the Discworld and places them in the setting of *Macbeth*. Many of Pratchett’s novels are partial adaptations or parodies, however, *Wyrd Sisters* is “the most palimpsestic of the Discworld novels” because of its direct references to *Macbeth* and to a lesser degree, *Hamlet*.<sup>30</sup> The novel’s parodic relationship with its hypotext(s) highlights its existence as a work of fiction and furthermore, draws upon the Shakespearean *mise-en-abyme* to illuminate the power of representation as a form of magic which has the power to transform, alter, and replace reality.<sup>31</sup> Pratchett uses parody as a metafictional strategy to engage dialogically and critically with *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*; elements of which are pilfered from the genre of tragic drama and transplanted into a comic fantasy novel to subversive effect. Parody, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, by definition must impose upon the hypotext an “orientation diametrically opposed to its own,” as without this opposition it would be imitation.<sup>32</sup> In parody there must be a sense of the dialogic: the discourse parodied must be heard behind the first discourse, that is, the audience must be aware of the thing being parodied. Polyphony, the contrast of discourses or multiple voices where dialogism is present, occurs at the point where one text confronts the other. In *Wyrd Sisters* more than any other of his novels, Pratchett directly quotes his source text; the archaic language of which is then contrasted with “ordinary” language, which, in the new context, draws attention to the artificiality of the quoted speech and establishes his parodic intent. The first spoken line in *Wyrd Sisters* is the same as the first line of *Macbeth*, in which the three Weird sisters agree to meet Macbeth “when the battle’s lost and won” (1.1.3):

As the cauldron bubbled an eldritch voice shrieked: “When shall we three meet again?”

There was a pause.

Finally another voice said, in far more ordinary tones: “Well, I can do next Tuesday.”<sup>33</sup>

The three witches of the Kingdom of Lancre—Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Magrat Garlick—are meeting for the first time as a coven. Magrat, as an idealistic younger witch who is less assured of her profession, often insists on speaking in such a manner, to the indifference of the other two.<sup>34</sup> Pratchett’s use of bathos introduces a

polyphony of discourses which “destabilises the ability for any one ideology to prevail of the other.”<sup>35</sup> The novel form is uniquely capable of allowing this clash of discourses, which does “justice to the inherent dialogism of language and culture by means of its discursive polyphony.”<sup>36</sup> A recurring theme throughout the novel is the subversion of the “wicked witch” stereotype, which is often first suggested in a direct reference to *Macbeth* as in the above example, then parodied. Parody, therefore, is a way in which Pratchett can challenge the malevolent stereotype of the witch and expose it as artifice. The deconstructive potential of parody facilitates “the translation necessary for one dominant to replace its hegemonic antecedent in cultural practice.”<sup>37</sup> It is a metafictional technique which invites critical commentary on the hypotext and exposes the ways in which cultural motifs are transmitted. *Wyrd Sisters* parodies the persistent cultural motif of the wicked witch by subverting one of the cultural mainstays through which the motif is so persistently communicated across time and cultures.

The Discworld is a “world and mirror of worlds” where reality is “a quality that things possess in the same way that they possess, say, weight.”<sup>38</sup> The Kingdom of Lancre is “solid folklore,” it is a setting self-consciously constructed by its own tropes; it is a place where stories happen.<sup>39</sup> In the typical fashion of tragic drama, King Verence’s cousin, Duke Felmet, kills the king, exiles the king’s infant son, and takes his place. Felmet is spurred on by his wife, the Duchess Felmet, who serves as a Lady Macbeth figure. King Verence’s ghost haunts the castle, seeking revenge, but is unable to take action. The feudalist setting against a backdrop of murder most foul establishes links with the main pretexts, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, as well as the wider genre of tragic drama by using its main motifs of betrayal and usurpation. The narrative tone, however, remains comedic, foregrounding Pratchett’s parodic intent:

“If you think so much of the old king, you don’t seem very worried about him being killed. I mean, it was a pretty suspicious accident.”

“That’s kings for you,” said Granny. “They come and go, good and bad. His father poisoned the king we had before.”

... “Only now no-one must say Felmet killed the king,” said Magrat ... “He said anyone saying different will see the inside of his dungeons, only not for long. He said Verence died of natural causes.”

“Well, being assassinated *is* natural causes for a king.”<sup>40</sup>

Granny’s apathetic response to the frequency of regicides in the kingdom parodies the tropes of Shakespearian tragedy. Such metafictional strategies “[reveal] the very fictionality of [Pratchett’s] world, seemingly destroying the literary belief which is necessary for reader immersion.”<sup>41</sup> *Wyrd Sisters* is conscious about existing as a fiction and this is often articulated by Granny Weatherwax, who as a witch is “immune from stories – witches make stories for other people.”<sup>42</sup>

True to Shakespearian tragedy, Felmet proves to be an oppressive ruler, raising taxes and burning farmland to assert his power. Also like certain Shakespearian kings, Felmet holds beliefs about the innate evil of witches:

“I expect she said some magic words, did she? I’ve heard about witches ... I imagine she offered you visions of unearthly delight? Did she show you—” the duke shuddered— “dark fascinations and forbidden raptures, the like of which mortal men should not even think of, and demonic secrets that took you to the depths of man’s desires? ... Admit it—she offered you hedonistic and licentious pleasures known only to those who dabble in the carnal arts, didn’t she?”

... “No Sir,” ... “She offered me a bun.”<sup>43</sup>

Felmet’s beliefs about witches are the same ones which informed Shakespeare’s construction of the Weird sisters, who are according to Laura Shamas “a complex feminine trinitarian mythological construction, a unique amalgamation of classical, folkloric, and socio-political elements” with a strong undercurrent of misogyny.<sup>44</sup> Involvement in political affairs is a characteristic of witches in the Scottish tradition, which Shakespeare adopted in adapting *Macbeth* for James I and IV from the original Holinshed chronicles. Shakespeare used James I and IV’s *Daemonologie* and *Newes From Scotland* as sources for witches — the Macbeth witches are far more Scottish than English.<sup>45</sup> Duke Felmet blames the witches for raising storms in much the same way James I and IV claims in *Daemonologie*: “I never shipwrecked anybody! ... They



just said they shipwreck people! I never did!”<sup>46</sup> The figuration of Scottish witches was influenced by continental ideas and, unlike English witches, held covens and sabbaths where they worshipped the devil. English witchcraft, writes Howell Calhoun, “was a very homely and primitive affair by comparison, having its roots mainly in the domestic life of the lower classes.”<sup>47</sup> Following in the English tradition, Pratchett’s witches generally “don’t go in much for the structured approach to career progression ... it had been [Magrat’s] idea to form a local coven. She felt it was more, well, occult.”<sup>48</sup> They meet in a group of three because “three has always been an important number in stories, and in magic. All good things come in threes, and all bad things too.”<sup>49</sup> As a younger, less experienced witch, Magrat’s ideas about how to be a witch come from stories—her insistences on sabbaths, candles and pentagrams come from “reading them funny books” and are met with apprehension from the two older witches.<sup>50</sup> Magrat wears occult jewellery and amulets which

[jingle] together; an enemy wouldn’t only have to be blind to fail to notice that a witch was approaching, he’d have to be deaf as well.

“Something comes,” she said.

“Can you tell by the pricking of your thumbs?” said Magrat earnestly. Magrat had learned a lot about witchcraft from books.<sup>51</sup>

Magrat’s beliefs about witches, like Felmet’s, come largely from representation and not her experience or association with Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg (although Felmet’s beliefs are amplified by his fear and insecurity). Once again, the text refers to the construction of witches in *Macbeth*: “By the pricking of my thumbs/Something wicked this way comes” (4.1.44–45) and promptly ridicules it. Magrat’s self-styling highlights the way in which the “witch” is a constructed figure in fiction and is suggestive of the danger of stories in shaping one’s beliefs.

In addition to Magrat’s characterisation, Pratchett uses metatheatre or *mise-en-abyme* to reveal the way in which witches are represented in stories and how stories may affect reality. When rumours about the murder of the King circulate, Duke Felmet blames the witches for inciting discord and conspiring against him, as he

believes witches are wont to do. He turns to the advice of the court Fool, who informs them,

“Words can be more powerful even than magic.”

“Clown!” said the duke. “Words are just words. Brief syllables. Sticks and stones may break my bones—” he paused, savoring the thought—“but words can never hurt me.”

“My lord, there are such words that can,” said the Fool. “Lair! Usurper! Murderer!”

The duke jerked back and gripped the arms of the throne, wincing.

“Such words have no truth,” said the Fool, hurriedly. “But they can spread like fire underground, breaking out to burn—”

“It’s true! It’s true!” screamed the duke. “I hear them, all the time!” He leaned forward. “It’s the witches!” he hissed.

“Then, then, then they can be fought with other words,” said the Fool. “Words can fight even witches.”

“What words?” said the duchess, thoughtfully.

The Fool shrugged. “Crone. Evil eye. Stupid old woman.”<sup>52</sup>

Ulrike Landfester identifies the fool in early modern drama as a character who, solely, is aware of “exactly where the boundaries between the metadrama’s different levels of playacting are to be found.”<sup>53</sup> On some level, the fool recognises that he or she is in a work of fiction and is a fictional character, a truth that can only be expressed by theatrical means. Heeding the advice of the Fool, the Duchess comes to realise that “reality is only weak words, you say. Therefore, words are reality. But how can words become history?”<sup>54</sup> Drawing on the ability of theatre “to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature” (*Hamlet* 3.2.21–22), the Duke and Duchess enlist a troupe of players to write and perform a “historical” play about the murder of the previous king by the three witches.<sup>55</sup> This, of course, is a reversal of the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, intended to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.567). The play-within-a-book is a type of *mise-en-abyme*, a segment which “reflects, reproduces or mirrors an aspect of

the larger primary narrative” and “functions to indicate ways in which the larger narrative might be interpreted.”<sup>56</sup> Granny, Nanny Ogg, and Magrat watch in horror as their on-stage counterparts enthrall the audience:

“It’s art,” said Nanny. “It wosname, holds a mirror up to life.”

Granny turned slowly in her seat to look at the audience. They were staring at the performance, their faces rapt. The words washed over them in the breathless air. This was real. This was more real even than reality. This was history. It might not be true, but that had nothing to do with it.<sup>57</sup>

Granny realises that words possess the ability to rewrite the past. The villagers, despite knowing the witches as benevolent members of the community who make herbal remedies and help deliver babies, are taken with the “three gibbering old baggages in pointy hats” who “put babbies in the cauldron” they see on stage.<sup>58</sup> The reference to the “finger of birth-strangled babe/Ditch delivered by a drabe” (4.1.30–31) as an ingredient in the witches’ cauldron emphasises the discontinuity between the construction of witches in the play(s) and in *Wyrd Sisters*’s reality. Pratchett warns us that words have power: even if theatre is “all just paint, and sticks and paper at the back,” powerful representation threatens reality.<sup>59</sup>

Granny recognises that the power of representation works much in the same way that magic or “Headology” does: “whoever wrote this Theatre knew about the uses of magic.”<sup>60</sup> Headology is the type of “magic” used by the Discworld witches, and often does not involve any actual occultism. It is essentially psychological persuasion; Granny Weatherwax’s medicines are effective because people see her cloak and hat and believe that they will work:

If you give someone a bottle of red jollop for their wind it may work, right, but if you want it to work for sure then you let their mind make it work for them. Tell ’em it’s moonbeams bottled in fairy wine or something. Mumble over it a bit.<sup>61</sup>

Curses work in the same way: if someone believes that a witch has cursed them, they will find their own misfortune. Witches “make a good living out of other people’s understanding of folklore,” that is, they rely on the power of people’s belief in the witches’ “magic” for the so-called magic to take effect, in the same manner of a

placebo.<sup>62</sup> Magic on the Disc is representation. It “glues the Discworld together” and is “generated by the turning of the world itself, magic wound like silk out of the underlying structure of existence to suture the wounds of reality.”<sup>63</sup> Parallels between magic-making and storytelling, writes Brian Attebery, invite metafictional readings because, in exposing the ways in which stories are constructed, they “[invite] us to see the degree to which reality itself is structured like a story—or indeed ... is constructed through the act of storytelling.”<sup>64</sup> Pratchett therefore utilises the fantasy setting of the Discworld to metafictionally expose the artifice of representation.

Pratchett similarly uses magic to frame his recycling of stories and appropriation of *Macbeth*. Physics on the Discworld is governed by the fundamental particle “narrativium,” which ensures that events and people adhere to particular “story shapes.”<sup>65</sup> Stories, for Pratchett, tend to repeat themselves—they are “great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time” which “have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time ... [they are] a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself.”<sup>66</sup> The weak die, the strong survive, stories evolve. This concept is literalised in the play Hwel writes for Duke Felmet, which begins to “come alive and start twisting itself around ... trying to change itself.”<sup>67</sup> Instead of telling the false story Felmet wants it to, the story takes on a mind of its own and tries instead to reveal the truth of the King’s murder.

*Wyrd Sisters*, like *Hamlet*, concerns itself with the power of the play and the blurring of the threshold between play and reality. The theatre has “a magic of its own, one that didn’t belong to her, one that wasn’t in her control. It changed the world, and said things were otherwise than they were.”<sup>68</sup> By exposing the way in which the false representation of witches threatens reality, Pratchett reveals the ways in which texts are constructed. The *mise-en-abyme* makes the “space of play visible by redoubling it” and thus exposes the methods through which realities are represented.<sup>69</sup> It serves the metafictional function of deconstructing the process through which roles are performed for an audience and therefore draws attention to the fictionality of the work itself. By adapting the play-within-a-play from *Hamlet*, *Wyrd Sisters* is self-reflexive; it persistently draws attention to the greater reality in which it is encompassed and exposes the ways in which the novel is structured. The troupe of players return to the capital city of Ankh-Morpork and build a theatre, which the

playwright Hwel calls The Dysk, “because there’s everything inside it. The whole world on the stage, do you see?”<sup>70</sup> Hwel understands that “the whole world *was* a stage, to the gods... Presently he began to write. *All the Disc it is but an Theater*, he wrote, *Ane alle men and wymmen are but Players*.”<sup>71</sup> The inclusion of a playwright character—especially one who understands that the world on which he lives is a stage—blurs the ontological boundaries between fiction and reality.

In Discworld, magic is representation, and representation is power. *Wyrd Sisters* is one of the most overtly metafictional Discworld novels because of the ontological confusion between reality and representation made apparent in Pratchett’s use of *mise-en-abyme*. His “mixing of textual realities challenges our own reality and questions whether there is even a stable reality to challenge.”<sup>72</sup> Pratchett’s Shakespearean parody and the dialogic exchange with *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* draws attention the methods of reproduction of particular cultural motifs—in this case the archetypal wicked witch—and reveals the processes by which those motifs or beliefs are reproduced. In exposing the ways in which representations are constructed and can threaten to overcome reality, the novel invites a consideration of the way in which reality is constructed and questions the existence of a reality which predates its ontological subjectification. Metafiction, therefore, is a method of self-reflexivity which discloses the ontological instability of language and representation and exposes the fact that all novels are constructed by endless permutations and recombinations of “100% recycled words.”

PREMA ARASU is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Australia. They have a BA (Hons) in English and Cultural Studies from UWA and an MLitt in Contemporary Literature and Culture from The University of St. Andrews. Their current research is in the field of creative writing with a focus on gender in fantasy worlds.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of Discworld* (Transworld, 2008), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Zipfel, “Very Tragical Mirth,” in *Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, ed. Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner (Rodopi, 2007), 205.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Alton and William Spruiell, "Introduction," in *Discworld and the Disciplines Critical Approaches to the Terry Pratchett Works*, ed. Anne Hiebert Alton, William C. Spruiell, Donald E. Palumbo, and C. W. Sullivan III (McFarland, 2014), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Haberkorn, Gideon, "Debugging the Mind: The Rhetoric of Humour and the Poetics of Fantasy," in *Discworld and the Disciplines: Critical Approaches to the Terry Pratchett Works*, ed. Anne Hiebert Alton, William C. Spruiell, Donald E. Palumbo, and C. W. Sullivan III (McFarland, 2014), 181.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Webb, *Fantasy and the Real World in British Children's Literature: The Power of Story* (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Currie, "Introduction," in *Metafiction* ed. Mark Currie (Longman, 1995), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Taylor and Francis, 1984), 22.

<sup>11</sup> David Lodge, David, "The Novel Now," in *Metafiction* ed. Mark Currie (Longman, 1995), 154.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," in *Metafiction* ed. Mark Currie (Longman, 1995), 161.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1995), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Pratchett, *A Slip of the Keyboard* (Doubleday, 2014), 88.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Robyn McCallum, "Metafictions and experimental work," in *The International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (Routledge, 2004), 589.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Attebery, "Structuralism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 83.

<sup>20</sup> Farah Mendolsohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 59.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

- <sup>22</sup> Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary," 160.
- <sup>23</sup> Mark Currie, "Introduction," 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Robyn McCallum, "Metafiction and experimental work," 594.
- <sup>25</sup> Jim Casey, "Modernism and postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121.
- <sup>26</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Equal Rites* (Corgi-Transworld, 1987), 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (Methuen, 1985), 28.
- <sup>28</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters* (Orion, 1988), i.
- <sup>29</sup> Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories," *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000): 167.
- <sup>30</sup> Kevin Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 135.
- <sup>31</sup> The term "hypotext" is used by Gerard Genette in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982) to refer to the earlier text referenced by a "hypertext."
- <sup>32</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories, and Things* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 192.
- <sup>33</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 9.
- <sup>34</sup> Magrat's linguistic self-fashioning of herself as a witch foreshadows the ways in which the villain Duke Felmet, and the troupe of players will, later in the novel, similarly deploy theatrical language to turn the townspeople against the witches.
- <sup>35</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (University of Texas Press, 1982), 324.
- <sup>36</sup> David Lodge, "The Novel Now," 156.
- <sup>37</sup> Eugene McNulty, "Parody, Metatheatre, and the Postmodern Turn: A Secret History of Irish Drama," in *Drama and the Postmodern: Assessing the Limits of Metatheatre*, ed. Daniel K. Jernigan (Cambria Press, 2008), 64.
- <sup>38</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Moving Pictures* (Corgi-Transworld, 1990), 2.
- <sup>39</sup> Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary," 162.
- <sup>40</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 59–60.
- <sup>41</sup> Daniel Lüthi, "Toying with Fantasy: The Postmodern Playground of Terry Pratchett's Discworld Novels," *Mythlore* 33, no. 1 (2014): 125.
- <sup>42</sup> Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary," 166.
- <sup>43</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Laura Shamas, 'We Three': *The Mythology of Shakespeare's Weird Sisters* (Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2007), 3. Laura Shamas establishes the misogynist undertones which shaped the Scottish witch-hunt and the subsequent portrayal of witches in Jacobean plays including *Macbeth* in *We Three: The Mythology of Shakespeare's Weird Sisters*.

<sup>45</sup> See Henry N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth: When, Why and How It Was Written by Shakespeare* (The Macmillan Company, 1950).

<sup>46</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 250.

<sup>47</sup> Howell Calhoun, "James, I and the Witch Scenes in *Macbeth*," *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin* 17, no. 4 (1942): 184.

<sup>48</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 12–13.

<sup>49</sup> Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson, *Folklore*, 103.

<sup>50</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–6.

<sup>53</sup> Ulrike Landfester, "The Invisible Fool: Botho Strauss's Postmodern Metadrama and the History of Theatrical Reality," in *Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, ed. Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner (Editions Rodopi, 2007), 129.

<sup>54</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 156.

<sup>55</sup> The play-within-a-play, or in this case, book, also parodies the way in which Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* to appease James I and IV and cast him as the descendent of a long line of Scottish kings.

<sup>56</sup> Robyn McCallum, "Metafictions and experimental work," 594.

<sup>57</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 252.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 252–3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>61</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Equal Rites*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary," 165

<sup>63</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Brian Attebery, *Stories*, 88.

<sup>65</sup> Pratchett's "Theory of Narrative Causality" is elaborated on in *Lords and Ladies* (Corgi-Transworld, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* (Corgi-Transworld, 1992), 12–14.



<sup>67</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 256.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>69</sup> David Roberts, "The Closure of Representation," in *Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, ed. Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner (Rodopi, 2007), 39.

<sup>70</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*, 189–90. Interestingly, Hwel is pronounced "Will," and in *Lords and Ladies*, he writes a play called *The Taming of the Vole*, because nobody was interested in *Things that Happened on a Midsummer Night*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. The spelling of Disc/Dysk is Shakespearean pastiche, a technique which Pratchett frequently employs. For Pratchett's commentary on the use of "mock-archaic" language, see "Elves Were Bastards" in *A Slip of the Keyboard*, 103–6.

<sup>72</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (Macmillan Press, 1999), 137.