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GIRL WIZARDS AND BOY WITCHES: GENDER IN TERRY PRATCHETT'S *DISCWORLD* NOVELS

Prema Arasu

In the hands of skilled creators, the estranging worlds of Fantasy become spaces in which we might imagine alternatives to hegemonic binaries. This paper examines two of Sir Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels: *Equal Rites* (1987), which is about Eskarina Smith, a female wizard, and *The Shepherd's Crown* (2015), which features Geoffrey Swivel, a male witch. These texts are satirical takes on gendered magic; that is, the assumption in Fantasy writing that men and women are suited towards different types of magic or different social roles involving the use of magic. Using Queer Theory as my major methodological approach, in this paper I consider how gendered metanarratives are performed and subverted in the consensus Fantasy universe (the "Discworld," which is also the name of the series) via active engagement with its often-patriarchal tropes. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that Fantasy can be a highly effective medium of exploring queer experience and subverting hegemonic ideals.

Equal Rites was published two years after Pratchett delivered a keynote at *Novacon 15* titled "Why Gandalf Never Married" (1985), in which he criticised gender conservatism in Fantasy writing at the time:

In the fantasy world there is no such thing as a male witch [...] there certainly isn't such a thing as a female wizard. [...] in the fantasy world, magic done by women is usually of poor quality, third-rate, negative stuff, while the wizards are usually cerebral, clever, powerful, and wise. Strangely enough, that's also the case in this world. (quoted in *A Slip of the Keyboard* 92)

Pratchett draws parallels between gender roles in what he identifies in "the consensus fantasy universe" and in real life (*A Slip of the Keyboard* 92). Although the majority of Fantasy works are "reflections, if not products of conservative politics", Daniel Baker argues in "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy" (2012) that Fantasy has the progressive potential to direct the reader to "radical, emancipated subjectivities" (437-8). What Kathryn Hume in her influential *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984) calls Fantasy's "departure from consensus reality" offers immense imaginative freedom—aesthetic freedom, but also ideological freedom (21). The literalisation of metaphors in

the form of magic and/or the other worlds of Fantasy worlds can be meaningful rhetorical devices through which to defamiliarise ourselves with otherwise inescapable realities such as capitalism, the Anthropocene, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and patriarchy.

Genre and Gender

According to Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), Fantasy has the potential to “undermine dominant philosophical and epistemological orders” by estranging them (103). Both texts in feature characters whose gender deviance is communicated through their queering of the witch/wizard binary. These texts therefore function as examples of what Stephen Kenneally describes as “queer fantasy” in “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Invisibility of Queer Fantasy” (2016); those which use the genre to explore marginal modes of being. It must be noted that this is distinct from Fantasy with queer representation – as Kenneally points out, that there are many texts that “combine LGBT content and fantasy content” but “do not fulfil the queer potential inherent in such a fusion” (9). In fact, representation (although important) often works counterintuitively to Queer Fantasy and Queer Theory by reaffirming rather than challenging the stability and fixedness of identity.

Queer Theory is a theoretical framework that challenges the notion of an essentialised self. In their foundational work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler problematises the supposed stability of sex, gender, and sexual identities, and explores the ways in which “incoherent” or “discontinuous” beings destabilise the notion of identity by disrupting the norms of “cultural intelligibility” through which identity defines personhood (23). Pratchett explores the experience of such “incoherent” characters and the ways in which they make themselves intelligible, or, in some cases, defer intelligibility entirely. This can be a powerful tool in exploring how gender comes about through gestures and speech acts specific to certain social contexts. As Butler argues, gender is “an ongoing discursive practice [...] open to intervention and resignification” produced through the repeated enactment, anticipation, and prohibition of actions, gestures, and desires, the repetition of which “[produces] the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 33). Gender is perceived as the outwards expression of an internal reality, but this supposed reality – sexual difference – is ontologically and historically unstable.

Existing queer scholarship relating to speculative forms has a strong focus on Science Fiction. The critical success and overtly queer themes of works such as Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) have attracted more queer scholarship in comparison to Fantasy, which is only just managing to shake its reputation of being inherently patriarchal. Science Fiction, according to Marleen S. Barr in *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (1987), is “ideally suited for exploring the potential of women’s changing roles” because its “writers are not hindered by the constraints of patriarchal social reality” (xi). When compared to Fantasy, Science Fiction may appear more conducive to explorations of queerness due to its abundance of tangibly queer bodies in the form of cyborgs, androids, and aliens. However, I argue that the very same can be said about Fantasy. Placing ourselves in opposition to Darko Suvin,

who in his *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) elevated Science Fiction from Fantasy as a more potentially subversive literature of "cognitive estrangement" (8), Fantasy scholars and writers find the same possibilities in magical worlds.

Queer elements in Fantasy texts are recognised by scholars such as Taylor Driggers, whose *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature: Fantastic Incarnations and the Deconstruction of Theology* (2022) explores Fantasy's ability to queer spiritual binaries or in Jude Roberts and Esther MacCallum-Stewart's *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy: Beyond Boy Wizards and Kick-Ass Chicks* (2016), a collection of essays which consider how Fantasy texts challenge and disrupt received notions of gender and sexuality and "encourage their audiences to imagine ways of being outside of the constitutive constraints of socialized gender and sexual identity" ("Introduction" 1). Jes Battis's *Thinking Queerly: Medievalism, Wizardry, and Neurodiversity in Young Adult Texts* (2021) which considers how the wizard-figure in contemporary Young Adult (YA) Fiction might resonate with LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent readers due to their ability to think and see the world differently. Battis identifies Pratchett's Tiffany Aching as a queer figure who "inhabits a mind and body that don't necessarily line up with her society's expectations" (89). Scholarly analyses of witches in Fantasy are largely concerned with positive representations of girls for young adult readers and reclaiming the witch from its negative Fairy Tale connotations, often with reference to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and Terry Pratchett's *Witches* novels (1983-2015). For example, Lori Campbell's "Introduction" to *A Quest of Her Own: Essays on the Female Hero in Modern Fantasy* (2014), describes the volume as a collection of essays on "the empowerment of the female hero as she carves out a permanent, independent position" alongside her male counterpart (5). These texts and the scholarship surrounding them tend to uphold rather than deconstruct gender binaries, however, scholars such as Amanda Jo Hobson in "Bewitching Bodies: Sex, Violence, and Magic in Urban Fantasy" (2018) recognise the witch as a fruitful space for queer and otherwise marginalised identities (54).

In this article I argue that Fantasy is particularly well-placed to explore the historical and ontological instability of gender. Fantasy, especially secondary world Fantasy, brings about estrangement by excavating the insidious mechanisms through which metanarratives such as gender come about. As Driggers argues in "Archaeologies of the Future: Deconstruction, Fantasy, and the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin" (2019), the characters and creatures that inhabit secondary worlds can "unsettle the reader's preconceived notions and gesture towards an alterity that is still yet to come" (112). There is great potential in the ability of secondary worlds to investigate the discursive construction of gender and, by altering or queering the ways in which gender manifests, to explore the idea that gender is, as Butler argues in *Undoing Gender* (2004) "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (1). By shifting the contexts in which these constraints arise, we can estrange, interrogate, and queer the processes by which gender roles become embedded into the structure of society.

Girl Wizards: It's Against the Lore!

In *Equal Rites* and *The Shepherd's Crown*, Eskarina and Geoffrey respectively encounter apprehension on the part of those around them. Eskarina is bequeathed a staff at birth by the wizard Drum Billet, who believed she would be born a boy; a scene which reflects the assignment of gender at birth according to genitalia. Drum dies before anything can be done about it, and Eskarina is assigned wizard at birth. She spends her early childhood training as a witch with Granny Weatherwax. Once learned in witchcraft, she makes her way to the city of Ankh-Morpork where she intends to begin training as a wizard at Unseen University. Although Granny agrees to take Eskarina, she maintains that "it's the wrong kind of magic for women, is wizard magic, it's all books and stars and jommetry" (*Equal Rites* 8). Granny's mirroring of essentialist discourse demonstrates the ubiquity of fixed ideas about gender in the Discworld and thus the hardship that Eskarina is about to face.

Eskarina is denied entry by the university wizards due to her gender. The university wizards repeatedly insist that "it's absolutely against the lore!" (151). "Lore" is layered with both diegetic and extra-diegetic meaning: it refers to what Pratchett termed the cliché-ridden "consensus fantasy universe," an amalgamation of tropes derived from Tolkien and *Dungeons and Dragons*, which by the 1980s was a common collective of characters and plotlines in which "elves are tall and fair and use bows, dwarves are small and dark and vote Labour" (*A Slip of the Keyboard* 91). The consensus Fantasy universe also dictates that wizards are men and witches are women. Witchcraft and Wizardry are diametrically opposed: witches train as apprentices in pastoral settings, and concern themselves with practical matters such as healing, agriculture, and midwifery, while wizards learn at formal institutions where they attend lectures and write dissertations while doing very little actual magic.

In "Magical Genders: The Gender(s) of Witches in the Historical Imagination of Terry Pratchett's Discworld" (2015), Lian Sinclair observes that Pratchett "consciously engages with and intervenes in this consensus fantasy universe" by having characters express conservative worldviews in a way which invites critique of those views (8). Rather than offering a utopian escape where sexism does not exist, the Discworld setting functions as what Janet Brennan Croft in "The Education of a Witch: Tiffany Aching, Hermione Granger, and Gendered Magic" (2009) calls a "funhouse mirror of our world" where sexism does exist but we can make fun of the people who try to rationalise it (131). Repeatedly, Pratchett asks his readers to think about why a completely imagined world, where everything is possible, would retain a patriarchal social structure in which women are systematically oppressed and men are expected to conform to an idealised version of masculinity. Pratchett's texts, therefore, are critiques of his social reality as much as they are about the Fantasy genre.

In "Be a Witch, Be a Woman: Gendered Characterisation of Terry Pratchett's Witches" (2018), Alice Nuttall observes that the duties of witches are coded as women's work, and therefore represent "tensions faced by women in the real world" (33). As Pratchett points out, the gender essentialism in Fantasy is a reflection of reality, and the "lore" also refers to the gendered narratives which govern everyday life. The wizards encourage Eskarina to abandon her hopes of becoming a wizard and instead encourage her to pursue witchcraft, smugly dismissing it as "a fine career for

girls" (151). They employ patriarchal, pseudoscientific exclusionary discourse to exclude Eskarina on the basis that "high magic requires great clarity of thought, you see, and women's talents do not lie in that direction. Their brains tend to overheat" (152). Pratchett appropriates patriarchal discourse to draw parallels with the language used to exclude women from masculine professions on the basis of supposed biological difference.

The wizard's staff functions as a phallic symbol: the university wizards insist that "you're not a wizard unless you've got a staff" (139). This discourse appropriates the phallogocentric trans-exclusionary language used to vilify transgender individuals from social spaces and legal categories and draws attention to its inconsistent ontological basis. If the possession of a staff constitutes a wizard, Eskarina exploits what Butler identifies as the unstable "metaphysics of substance" of sex in insisting that she must be allowed to train as a wizard as she possesses the necessary equipment (*Gender Trouble* 24-5). Confronted with an unprecedented situation, the wizards reject her, but Sarina's supposedly impossible possession of a staff exposes an ontological gap in their worldview.

Equal Rites transposes the man/woman binary onto the Fantasy world in the form of the wizard/witch binary. This allegory brings about a sense of estrangement, raising the question of how these gender roles came about in the world of Fantasy and the wider generic conventions from which they came. As Sinclair argues, the construction of gender "is raised in ways that might not be possible or at least more complicated in our own world" (11). Sarina's staff serves as a more pointed component of this allegorical comparison, acting as a symbol of her movement between genders and satirising the ontological instability of the phallus. When Eskarina is barred entry from Unseen University, she then makes her way in as a servant and her staff transforms itself into a broom. Eskarina is finally accepted as a university student when she demonstrates her ability to control her staff, rescuing the university wizards in the process. The wizards eventually concede that they may have something to learn from witches as well.

Eskarina does not give up witchcraft to pursue wizardry any more than she gives up her broom for a staff; she is determined to "be both or none at all" (154). Rather than take up the identity of an honorary man, Eskarina occupies the dual role of witch and wizard, male and female. In the books that follow, however, it would appear that Eskarina's adventures did not prompt any systemic change. Witchcraft and wizardry remain as strictly demarcated categories. Eskarina appears briefly in *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010) which was published twenty-three years later as part of the young adult Tiffany Aching sub-series, also chronologically set some years later. She appears as a mentor figure to young witch Tiffany, and expresses a persistent sense of never being truly accepted:

I never really felt like a wizard, so I never really worried about what anyone said. [...] That's what I learned at university: to be me, just what I am and not worry about it. That knowledge is an invisible magical staff, all by itself. (169)

It is evident that despite Eskarina's skills and her time at university, Eskarina did not feel that she

belonged there. Eskarina opts for self-acceptance over establishing herself as an honorary man or wizard in a society (or genre) resistant to change.

The Nomenclature of Magic Users in Fantasy

Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have made the most impact in challenging the trope of gendered magic. Rowling offers a system in which "witch" and "wizard" are gendered labels for the same thing, a setup which rejects the malevolent connotations of witchcraft but retains its gender. Arguably, Rowling's witches are far closer to female wizards than witches in the traditional sense, as their magic is learned at an institution and contained within an intellectual tradition. However, in "Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series" (2008), Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace consider the post-feminist co-educational system of Hogwarts a "façade [that] merely camouflages the novels' rather traditional gender roles" (260). The immutable gender system Rowling constructs might be read as a reflection of her own trans-exclusionary politics, which I have elsewhere argued is embedded into the house-sorting system of Hogwarts and the school architecture ("Hogwarts *Legacy's* Game Mechanics Reflect the Gender Essentialism at the heart of *Harry Potter*" n.p.). Other popular series of the last two decades tend to avoid using witches, wizards, and other gendered terms in favour of invented terms such as "benders" (*Avatar: The Last Airbender*, 2005-2008), "grisha" (*Shadow and Bone* (2012) by Leigh Bardugo), or "Antari" (*A Darker Shade of Magic* (2015) by V. E. Schwab).

Boy Witches: A Gentleman's Staff

There are very few male witches in modern English-language Fantasy. Most existing examples which do feature male magic users who are called witches do not actively engage with the gendered tensions encoded in the male witch as part of their plot; they often instead depict alternate worlds in which 'witch' is simply not a gendered term. This is a subversive choice in itself as it resists a longstanding genre convention with roots in folklore, fairy-tale, and history. These texts include Lynn Flewelling's *Nightrunner* series (1996-present) which has a society with male and female witches who practice distinctly different kinds of witchcraft; *Half Bad* (2014) by Sally Green which has a half "white witch" (good) and half "black witch" (evil) protagonist; and *Witchmark* (2018) by C. L. Polk which features a male magic user who is referred to as either a mage or witch and the two being the respective gender-neutral names for high and low social classes of magic. Although gender is not a prominent theme in any of these texts, all of the protagonists of these novels have romantic relationships with other men, indicating that the male witch may be a way of exploring or indicating queerness even if gender is not an active source of narrative tension.

There are also men who practice 'witchcraft' but are never identified as witches. The protagonist of Diana Wynne Jones' *The Lives of Christopher Chant* (1988) is an enchanter who can also do witchcraft, a different (lesser) type of magic. Andrzej Sapkowski's Geralt of Rivia from *The Witcher Saga* (2006-2018) is a "witcher," translated from the Polish "wiedźmin." In *Historia i fantastyka* (2005), Sapkowski and Bereś confirm that this is an invented masculinisation of the Polish

word for witch, "wiedźma" (268). There is also J. R. R. Tolkien's "Witch-king of Angmar" in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) – Tolkien's use of the term is likely motivated by the malevolent connotations of the word rather than its gendered associations. Such texts might present an implicit challenge to the patriarchal consensus Fantasy universe by rejecting gendered connotations, but do not explicitly explore what they have chosen to reject or why. In contrast, Molly Ostertag's middle-grade graphic novel *The Witch Boy* (2017) features a boy protagonist whose desire to become a witch is at odds with societal (and generic) expectation, as does Terry Pratchett's *The Shepherd's Crown*. In making their protagonists' divergence an element of the plot, these two texts prompt a more active consideration, on the part of the reader, as to why traditional gender roles exist in fictional worlds. Both books involve the boys overcoming gender norms and eventually excelling at witchcraft, but witchcraft retains its status as a tradition led by women and steeped in feminine knowledge. Neither Ostertag nor Pratchett aim to 'neutralise' witchcraft; rather, they use boy witches to challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity by depicting protagonists who embody fluidity.

In the Western tradition, both the historical and cultural imaginations conceive of the witch as a female figure. A historical investigation by Alison Rowlands in *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (2009) reveals that seventy-five to eighty per cent of those tried as witches were female, however, this number varies greatly according to region (1). Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's 1487 witch-hunting manual *The Malleus Maleficarum* uses the feminine plural noun, indicating that they believed all witches were female. They reasoned that women are more susceptible to corruption by the Devil due to their mental weakness and insatiable carnal lust. Early modern society too believed that men who became witches did so because they had feminine weaknesses which led them to be influenced by the Devil. In some cases, male practitioners of malevolent magic were referred to as warlocks. Lara Apps and Andrew Colin Gow in *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (2003) note that historians often translate the Old English terms *wicca* (masculine) and *wicce* (feminine) into the entirely different words "warlock" and "witch" by historians; a process which has excluded men from historical discussions of early modern witchcraft and witch-hunting (8-9). There remains considerable debate about whether witch-hunting can be directly equated to women-hunting (See: Barstow 7, Kelkar 126, Rowlands 1).

Occasionally, a warlock is thought of a male witch. Even if warlocks are just males who practice witchcraft or witch-like magic, there still remains a lot to be said about their relative absence in Fantasy literature compared to female witches (and male wizards). Warlocks are, as Pratchett points out, uncommon in the consensus Fantasy universe (*A Slip of the Keyboard* 92). They seem to only ever exist when a story demands malevolent male magic users who are distinct from witches and wizards, as in the case of the television show *Charmed* (1998–2006) and Cassandra Clare's *Shadowhunter Chronicles* (2007-present). In *Harry Potter*, warlocks are wizards with duelling proficiency and/or knowledge of the Dark Arts. Albus Dumbledore is the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot; there is no indication as to what a witch would be called if she were to occupy this position. As is the case for male witches, warlocks as a concept present the opportunity to explore the question of why there even needs to be a separate term for boys and men who practice witchcraft.

Regardless of gender, witchcraft is and has always been associated with femininity if not femaleness in the Anglophone tradition and, as Apps and Gow argue, this femininity – especially when expressed by males – historically posed a threat to the patriarchal social order (13). Malcom Gaskill in “Masculinity and Witchcraft in 17th-Century England” (2009) suggests that men accused of witches were “implicitly feminised” and were associated with the negative feminine characteristics of “weakness, spite, envy, wantonness, and inconstancy,” and regards witchcraft as a “uniquely female crime, regardless of the sex of the offender” (172). In *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (2009), Heidi Breuer links the emergence of the witch-hag figure in early modern literature to anxieties about the shifting position of women within the context of nascent capitalism and the threat of mercantilism on the maternal norm (137). The early modern witch-hunt is also commonly attributed to societal prejudices against women, particularly barren or disabled women who failed to conform to social expectations. In “White Wizard Male Privilege: Gendered Witchcraft and Racialized Magic” (2021), Fahey argues that wizards in both history and fantasy experience white male privilege: in the medieval era, male mystics such as Nostradamus were revered as wise prophets whereas female mystics such as Joan of Arc were persecuted for heresy and witchcraft (n.p.).

Presently, the witch-hag figure is subject to feminist reclamation from her role as a villain in folklore and Fantasy Fiction. Referring to Hélène Cixous’ notion of “writing the body” from “Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), Breuer suggests that the witch can be and is currently being reclaimed by modern feminists through the discursive generation theorised by *écriture féminine*; the “creative use of language, reclaiming positive meanings for negative words, retelling ancient stories and writing new ones, telling our own stories” (159). When considered in the aim of turning the derogatory label of ‘witch’ from a persecuted, demonic figure into a symbol of feminist empowerment, the possibility of male witches might be seen as a threat to the process of reclamation. Male witches in the contemporary cultural context – that is, male or masculine individuals who identify as witches and/or wiccans – are very much aware of these processes of reclamation, and in many cases, adopt the term to express their gender nonconformity and their counter-cultural ideologies. The male witch is an expression of non-hegemonic queer masculinity and rather than being a threat to the feminist reclamation of the term, he becomes a part of it. The male witch in literature, I argue, can function in a similar way. He is a challenge to fixed notions of femininity and masculinity; he is inherently counter-cultural, queer; he engenders and embodies fluidity.

Pratchett refers to the ostensible oxymoronicity of a male witch in the same speech presented in 1985, but it was not until almost thirty years and thirty-nine *Discworld* books later that Pratchett wrote a male witch into his last novel, *The Shepherd's Crown*, published posthumously. Geoffrey Swivel, Pratchett’s male “sort of” witch, is a minor character in *The Shepherd's Crown*. The book is mostly about Tiffany Aching, Granny Weatherwax’s apprentice, and the Nac Mag Feegles. Geoffrey is as a very clever albeit unusual boy who is discontented with life as the third son of a lord. He thinks about what he wants, and asks an old farmhand if he might become a witch, to which the farmhand replies,

“Everyone knows men can’t be witches.”
 “Why not?” asked Geoffrey.
 The old man shrugged and said, “Nobody knows.”
 And Geoffrey said, “I want to know.” (29)

Geoffrey finds Tiffany, who has been appointed to the position of Head Witch after the death of Granny Weatherwax. He tells Tiffany that his tutor “told me of one witch who became a wizard, so surely, mistress, the concept must go both ways?” (151). Eskarina remains unnamed but her achievement is recognised and she here serves as an inverse precedent for Geoffrey’s desires. As Head Witch, Tiffany realises that she is now in a position to decide who and who cannot be witches. She takes Geoffrey on as an apprentice and finds that he excels at the domestic, community-based nature of their work.

The staff/broomstick recurs in Geoffrey’s tale as a reminder of the ontological unreliability of the phallus: when attempting to purchase a broomstick, Geoffrey’s request is met with discomfort and bewilderment. He is instead offered “a gentleman’s staff [...] with the... special indentation for the... delicate parts” (181). As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White asserted in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), genital-related jokes exemplify Bakhtinian “low” discourse: the “grotesque realism” which emphasises the openings and orifices of the carnival body work to subvert the normative order of things, in this case, gender (9). In this way, Pratchett’s use of humour is both entertaining and powerfully subversive. In “Seriously Relevant: Parody, Pastiche and Satire in Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* Novels” (2018), Gideon Haberkorn argues that Pratchett’s novels, far from being amusing Fantasy escapism, “connect to the world of their readers and have serious things to say about that world; and that this is not in spite of the humour and fantasy but through it and because of it” (138). Pratchett’s appropriation and reconstruction of discourses, argues Ann Hiebert Alton and William C. Spiriall, has the effect of drawing attention to the hegemonic processes behind them (4-5).

In “All the Disc’s a Stage: Terry Pratchett’s *Wyrd* Sisters as Metafiction” (2019), I discuss his use of humour more extensively with reference to Linda Hutcheon’s definition of parody in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) as a transformative force which “recirculates rather than immortalises” (2). Humour, as Simon Critchley argues in *On Humour* (2002) “is produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the joke, between expectation and actuality” (1). This definition bears similarities to Martin Swales’ argument in *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (1978) that the “nonfulfillment of consistently intimated expectation” when writing within a genre “can, paradoxically, represent a validation of the genre by means of its controlled critique” (11-12). A text’s repeated failure to fulfil the expectations of the genre within which it situates itself has the potential to be comedic in a way that works critically. *Equal Rites* and *The Shepherd’s Crown* are particularly effective in their use of comical appropriation of heteropatriarchal discourses as a way of subverting and queering the patriarchal tropes of Fantasy.

As Butler argues in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (1988), the subversive possibilities of gender transformation are found “in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (520). The discursive processes of gender construction are made strange by the otherness of the world itself as well as the magical elements. Although Tiffany supports Geoffrey, she does question why he has chosen the path of a witch and not a wizard:

“I am intrigued, Geoffrey,” she said. “Why do you want to be a witch instead of a wizard, which is something traditionally thought of as a man’s job?”

“I’ve never thought of myself as a man, Mistress Tiffany. I don’t think I’m anything. I’m just me,” he said quietly.

Good answer! Tiffany said to herself. Then she wondered, not for the first time, about the differences between wizards and witches [...] why shouldn’t this boy want to be a witch? She had chosen to be a witch, so why couldn’t he make the same choice? (153)

Like Eskarina, Geoffrey does not perceive himself as having any gender – both characters seem to perceive gender as something imposed upon them by others and not a core part of their identities. Both Eskarina and Geoffrey’s narratives of development are contingent on self-acceptance rather than enacting widespread social change. Neither are trailblazers of revolution – Eskarina remains the first and only female wizard, and Geoffrey is the first and likely only male witch, if even that. Still unsure about whether or not Geoffrey can – or will be accepted as – a witch, Tiffany eventually refers to him as a “calm-weaver” in reference to his apparent ability to put people at ease. It remains unclear as to whether this is a new term equivalent to a male witch or a specific label for Geoffrey’s specialisation within the field of witchcraft.

Queer analysis of *Equal Rites* and *The Shepherd’s Crown* demonstrates that the estranging worlds of Fantasy might be productive spaces in which we can question the hegemonic processes that shape our identity. By encouraging us to reconsider how practices, traditions, and beliefs are established, secondary worlds are lenses through which we might critically reflect upon similar processes in reality. As Mark Wolf argues in *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012), in “suggest[ing] alternate ways of living to consider or make strange our own world by contrast with other possibilities,” secondary worlds expose the ideologies, epistemologies, and ontologies that structure our lived reality (xxvi). Pratchett’s novels playfully consider how cultural metanarratives are encoded in non-realist forms and challenge such metanarratives through the critical revision of extant tropes, in this case, gendered magic. Eskarina and Geoffrey demonstrate that Fantasy is far from mere escapism – it is a way of imagining subversive and progressive possibilities outside of the normative order of things.

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