

THE CONVERSATION

Farewell Terry Pratchett: a psychological analysis of Discworld

March 12, 2015 7.53pm GMT

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Sir Terry Pratchett published over 70 novels. Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire

Terry Pratchett, the incredibly prolific fantasy author and creator of the bestselling Discworld series, has died aged 66. He was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease eight years ago.

Pratchett set 40 of his novels in his most famous creation, Discworld. This is a place in which magic is the natural rule and the way to deal with life and its problems. Here, the "scientist" is held in either mild disdain or open disbelief.

This magical world took the form of a flat disc spinning through the universe balanced on the backs of four elephants, who are in turn standing on the back of a turtle. So this is not a world composed of beautiful fairies and helpful pixies, oh no.

The Discworld is full of barely competent wizards, who inhabit a university where the most important event is lunch. They tolerate the strange young men who experiment with crazy stuff, like electricity and a clockwork data analyser driven by ants.

Conversely, there are witches living in rural areas, who have power that hold whole villages in their thrall, and who instead of the wizard's form of magic practice "headology" with a wisdom that puts politicians and psychologists to shame. The rule of three applies to these witches like the traditional ones, but this is not the hubble bubble of the Shakespearean witches. Their trios must comprise a mother, a maiden, and well, the other one.

In 2010 Jacqui Bent and I presented a conference paper about the Discworld witches. This allowed us to indulge our love of his books and their psychological bizarreness, to share this with conference goers also talking about magic and the supernatural. Wearing witch hats a flutter with feathers and glitter, I like to think we injected a bit of silliness and glamour into a very serious and erudite conference.



Pratchett dusting off a model of Discworld. PA/PA Wire

The differing experiences of each of the inhabitants that we follow through the books are, by turns, hilarious, poignant or thought provoking, but never, ever boring. What the words reveal is not just something about the fictitious world and its characters, but that the author has a warm and affectionate sense of humour, a great wit and an understanding of humankind rivalling some of the greatest philosophers. It was also clear that he loved and respected women, as well as championing the downtrodden, the disenfranchised and, of course, the downright silly.

I have been reading Terry Pratchett's work for more than 20 years, immersing myself in the world he created. I feel as if I know each of the people in the books personally. I am a massive fan, of both the Discworld books, and his other works, especially those involving cats, talking or not. I have followed the exploits of the wizards, the witches, the Night-watchmen (and women) the vampires, the trolls, the dwarf miners, the tourist (there is only one tourist in the Discworld) and the Patrician of Ankh-Morpork.

And of course, Death, how could I forget him, and his horse, Binky? It says a lot about Pratchett's view of things that he created a sympathetic figure out of the most feared, and had him stand in when Santa Claus, sorry, the Hogfather, went missing.

When Pratchett was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, as befitted the man, he approached this new challenge head on, becoming the poster boy for all sufferers. He tried every treatment, campaigning for more research funding, and for the right to die with dignity.

He died at home, surrounded by his family and his cat, and will be sadly missed by lovers of great fiction, comic or otherwise. Death has finally arrived to escort him, personally, as befits the most revered inhabitants of all worlds, on his next adventure. It is most fitting that his death was announced through his Twitter account, Death reporting (in capitals, as he is wont to do in the books):

**Terry Pratchett**

@terryandrob

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AT LAST, SIR TERRY, WE MUST WALK TOGETHER.

3:06 PM - 12 Mar 2015

30,488

19,021

**Terry Pratchett**

@terryandrob

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Terry took Death's arm and followed him through the doors and on to the black desert under the endless night.

3:07 PM - 12 Mar 2015

35,908

21,419

**Terry Pratchett**

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The End.

3:07 PM - 12 Mar 2015

45,769

26,947

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