Spending Lifetime:

Death Personified and the Meaning of Time in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*

Carmen Eskin
Master's thesis
Master's Programme in English Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Helsinki
April 2023

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Abstract

Faculty: Faculty of Arts

Degree programme: Master's Programme in English Language and Literature

Study track: —

Author: Carmen Eskin

Title: Spending Lifetime: Death Personified and the Meaning of Time in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*

Level: MA

Month and year: May 2023

Number of pages: 57

Keywords: Terry Pratchett, Discworld, Death, Time

Supervisor or supervisors: Maria Salenius

Where deposited: Faculty of Arts

Additional information: —

Abstract:

Sir Terence David John Pratchett (1948–2015) was an English author and humourist, best known for his satirical, comedic, fantasy series *Discworld* — a book series consisting of 41 novels based within a fantasy world of the same name. In this thesis, I will examine the concept of death, dying and the afterlife as portrayed by Pratchett through his characterisation of personified death, whilst also examining the element of *time*, specifically the meaning of *lifetime*. The primary material for this thesis are five of the *Discworld* novels: *Mort* (1987), *Reaper Man* (1992), *Soul Music* (1994), *Hogfather* (1996) and *Thief of Time* (2001), collectively referred to as the *Death* novels.

By conducting a close reading of each of the *Death* novels, I claim that Pratchett offers his own outlook on the concepts of death, dying and the afterlife through his character Death, and provides a unique perspective on the concept of time, specifically *lifetime*, within the five narratives. I argue that, through textually interwoven observations concluded by Death primarily, Pratchett conveys ideologies on the human condition and comments on certain societal dysfunctions pertaining to elements of Western society (e.g. Western history, religion, politics, culture and literature), in order to convey the idea that humans primarily *waste* lifetime when, in fact, it should be *spent*.

The analysis of Death's characterisation, including how Pratchett subtly and humorously criticises the entire human race through Death's perception, is conducted with the use of *intertextual, mimetic*, *archetypal* and *psychoanalytic literary criticism*. In addition, I examine the physical quantity that is *time* — specifically how *lifetime* is measured, manipulated, stored and *spent* in the Discworld. Examining how the concepts of death, dying, the afterlife, and personified death are portrayed in real-world history, specifically religion, mythology, folklore and modern fiction will lay the groundwork for the analysis of Pratchett's portrayal of these same concepts, as significant parallels can be drawn between both our real world and Pratchett's fictional one.

Through this study I demonstrate how Pratchett both guides his readers to reflect on how lifetime is spent in the real world, and attempts to soften our perceptions of death, dying and the afterlife, making the concept of death more palatable through his humorous character portrayal and narrative themes.

Contents

1. Introduction

> ‘What happened to him?’ Mort asked.
> ONLY HE KNOWS, said Death. COME.
> ‘My granny says that dying is like going to sleep,’ Mort added, a shade hopefully.
> I WOULDN’T KNOW. I HAVE DONE NEITHER. (*Mort* 64-65)

Death, as we have been preconditioned to accept it, is the inevitable end that comes to us all. Though one school of thought takes the approach that the entire being ceases to exist upon death, an even more popular consensus on the nature of death seems to be that it is but a means of travel from the final present to an undisclosed future, the destination of which being ostensibly manufactured based on individualistic belief, and the summation of every fateful choice made throughout the course of one’s mortal existence. Leaning towards the latter theory, in general, the notion of death being nothing less than the ‘next great journey’ has been widely taught among the various belief systems of the world and vastly argued in philosophical texts, from where it has then haemorrhaged into some of the greatest works of fiction of our relatively short literary history. And one such great collective work of fiction is, inarguably, Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld.*

Upon the undulating plains of the flat-faced Discworld, Pratchett offers his own outlook on the concepts of death, dying and the afterlife — an outlook that both stands out among the numerous theories that saturate our historical texts, yet simultaneously draws significant parallels to the esteemed hypotheses of our many acclaimed philosophical scholars, in addition to the vast and varied imaginations of the artfully inclined. In this thesis I will delve into the concept of death, dying and the afterlife as portrayed by Pratchett, whilst also examining the single variable that links each of the three concepts together — *time.* Pratchett provides a unique perspective on the concept of time, which is bound together with the concepts of *life* and *death*, and relays his views through his most eccentric and multi-dimensional character of the Discworld: *Death*, the personification of the abstract concept of death.

Discworld is a book series of 41 satirical fantasy novels written by author Sir Terry Pratchett, beginning with *The Colour of Magic* (1983) and bookended by *The Shepherd’s Crown* (2015). Though there are surely elements within each of the 41 novels that could support this research, for the purpose of this study I will focus my attention on merely five novels: *Mort* (1987), *Reaper Man* (1992), *Soul Music* (1994), *Hogfather* (1996) and *Thief of Time* (2001), collectively referred to as the *Death* novels. By conducting a close reading of each story, I will examine

Pratchett's personification of the abstract concept of death, along with his portrayal of Death's realm, the afterlife, and the physical and spiritual act of dying on the Discworld — all intertwined with my examination of the concept and meaning of *time* as portrayed by Pratchett in his fictional world.

There is a great deal of learning to be attained from Pratchett's work. Though satirical in narrative style and oftentimes thematically ludicrous, at its edifice, the *Discworld* novels are highly philosophical. In this thesis I argue that, through his unique method of storytelling, Pratchett implores readers to critically examine their own methodologies in regard to how they *spend* their exceptionally short *lifetimes*. Instead of explicitly stating his own views and criticisms on the human condition, I will demonstrate how Pratchett subtly goes about the task of enlightening us all with his ideologies pertaining to lifetime through his characterisation of Death, and through his own brand of physics in relation to the overall concept of time, which is eventually anthropomorphised into its own personification in *Thief of Time* (2001).

Pratchett once stated that *time* is the most valuable commodity, and I claim that he continuously alludes to the human race actively *wasting* time when, in fact, it should be *spent* with intention — the underlying criticism being a noticeable thematic undercurrent within the *Death* narratives. Pratchett conveys his ideologies through textually interwoven observations on the human condition and certain societal dysfunctions, mainly pertaining to elements of Western society, specifically Western history, religion, politics, culture and literature. I argue that by shining a light on these artfully disguised criticisms, whilst also critically examining the individual and the collective alike as portrayed by Pratchett in his novels, we may attain a deeper level of understanding toward both the human condition and, consequently, the inner workings of civilisation, in the ultimate hope of taking a step toward uncovering, at least partly, the overall meaning and purpose to our mortal existence. However, in this research I will mainly focus on Death's perception of the impractical and oftentimes detrimental aspects of the human predisposition that contribute to the overall sense that *lifetime* is being wasted, instead of *spent*.

In order to conduct my analysis of Death as a character, and how Pratchett subtly and humorously criticises the entire human race through Death's perception, I will apply *intertextual* literary criticism, *mimetic* literary criticism, *archetypal* literary criticism and *psychoanalytic* literary criticism to my approach. More precisely, *intertextual* criticism will be applied when comparing Pratchett's *Discworld* series, specifically his portrayal of Death, to other fantasy works of the same caliber, with focus on thematic style. *Archetypal* criticism will be applied to Pratchett's portrayal of Death's physical appearance, drawing comparisons between various religious archetypes and other

representations of personified death in Western European folklore. *Mimetic* criticism will be applied when examining Death's realm and various concepts of the afterlife, whilst also examining the religious structures of the Discworld overall, that all lean on a concept coined the *power of belief*. And finally, *psychoanalytic* criticism will be applied to the analysis of Death's complex persona. I intend for these four critical approaches to bring out a well-rounded analysis of Pratchett's personification of death, as well as Pratchett's portrayal of *dying* and the *afterlife* on the Discworld.

In addition to the analysis of Pratchett's Death, I will also examine the physical quantity that is *time* — specifically how *time* is measured, manipulated, stored, spent, and eventually personified in the Discworld, leaning heavily on the science of physicist P. C. W. Davies in his work *The Physics of Time Asymmetry* (1974). In this manner I will prove my hypothesis that, through his character Death, Pratchett alludes to us humans primarily *wasting* our *allotted lifetimes* by conducting our lives utterly and comically *wrong*.

1.1 Terry Pratchett and the Discworld

Sir Terence David John Pratchett (1948–2015) was an English author and humourist, best known for his satirical, comedic, fantasy series *Discworld.* Craig Cabell, who examine's Pratchett's life and early works especially in his book *Terry Pratchett: The Spirit of Fantasy* (2012), reports that before becoming a best-selling author, Pratchett was first published at just fifteen years old. His short story "The Hades Business" (1963) was written two years earlier, when Pratchett was only thirteen (Cabell 2012, 7). Shortly after, Pratchett was hired to work as a journalist at a local newspaper, *Bucks Free Press*, and therefore left school at the early age of seventeen. He was soon given his own column in the paper, through which he continued to publish his short stories for most of the 1970s (Cabell 2012, 10) as well as his first novels, *The Carpet People* (1971) and *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976).

In 1980 Pratchett left the world of journalism to become a press officer for nuclear power stations during which time he continued to write, publishing another stand alone novel *Strata* (1981). He then moved on to write the *Discworld* series (Cabell 2012, 20), which made him the UKs leading author in book sales during the 1990s, with over 85 million books sold worldwide, and translated into 37 different languages. Despite the opinions of many early critics, the *Discworld* became a phenomenal success, and Pratchett saw his books adapted for the stage and screen alike, earning him a knighthood in 2009 for his significant contribution to literature. Pratchett, who had

been battling the effects of a rare form of Alzheimer's disease since 2007, eventually lost his life in March 2015 ('About Sir Terry' 2023).

In order for one to fully gage the level of comedic absurdity that is a " […] continuous history of a world not totally unlike our own, except that it is a flat disc carried on the backs of four elephants astride a giant turtle floating through space […]" (*Mort* 1), we must also acknowledge that the Discworld — like our own world, and many other worlds — is inhabited by a variety of different civilisations. Some magical, some not so magical; some human, others less so. Though the portrayals of theses different civilisations situate somewhere along the sliding scale of ridiculousness, they collectively harbour within them many of the same issues plaguing the multitude of civilisations that inhabit our own world. Within the Discworld's history there are individual stories of humans and non-humans, witches and wizards, law officers and thieves, trolls, gods, vampires, and many other familiar species of the fantasy and folklore tradition, all of whom carefully balance their existence atop a flat, slowly spinning surface, the topography of which mimics earth. Most significantly, there is *magic* within the Disc, in addition to a persistent sense of absurdity which, under closer inspection, can very much be compared to the vibrancy of our own existence — bar the vampires, perhaps.

In terms of worldbuilding, Pratchett was often chastised for his composition of the Discworld, and for his narrative style especially. It is true, that Pratchett continuously blurs the boundaries of his *secondary world* — the term defined as "an autonomous world or venue which is not bound to mundane reality, [...] which is impossible according to common sense and which is self-coherent" (Luthi 2014, 126) — and breaks the spell of *literary belief* (i.e. reader belief in the secondary world) when he narrates "via meta-commentaries or footnotes or characters breaking the fourth wall" (Luthi 2014, 125). Pratchett's portrayal of the Discworld's *magic* especially has been a point of contention between Pratchett and his peers. J. R. R. Tolkien, deemed one of the greatest fantasy writers of all time, once stated: "There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" ("On Fairy-Stories" 2008, 33).

Incidentally, Pratchett does *naught but* parody the magic of the Discworld, along with every other aspect of the world's functionality. Even language itself is not safe from Pratchett's brand of playful mockery, as he often manipulates lexical structures to portray different species, ethnicities, accents, dialects, speech impediments, ages, genders, societal status, and the overall varying degrees of intellect among the Discworld's inhabitants:

Mort had just stepped backwards again.

Through a wall.

The leading thief glared at the solid stone that had swallowed Mort, and then threw down his knife.

'Well, - - - - me,' he said. "A - - - -ing wizard. I hate - - - -ing wizards!'

'You shouldn't - - - - them, then," muttered one of his henchmen, effortlessly pronouncing a row of dashes. (*Mort* 74)

Within this small piece of dialogue, Pratchett does not merely use dashes to portray a commonly used swear word, but also intentionally points to his stylistic choice of refraining from the use of profanities via the voice of the narrator, thus breaking the fourth wall as the reader is, for a moment, expelled from the narrative and placed in the metaphorical shoes of the author himself. This is but one of a myriad of instances in which Pratchett blurs the boundaries of his secondary world — to the delight of his readers, but chagrin of his peers.

Pratchett also often intentionally misspells words or uses alternative spellings to either *add further description* to his characters (e.g. the Igor's lisp in *Thief of Time*: "Never quethtion the marthter ("No, thur, that'th an artery"); never path judgement ("What do you want a hundred virginth for?"); never grumble ("Where am I going to find a brain at thith time of night?")" (*Thief of Time* 208–209)), *deepen contextual understanding* (e.g. the epidemic of illiteracy that plagues Ankh-Morpork's inhabitants: "Curry with Sweat, and Sore Balls of Pig 10p" (*Soul Music* 84)), and/or to *portray some earlier version of the English language* in the Discworld (e.g. the written English in old academic textbooks of Unseen University, and old Ankh-Morpork street signs: "*Wellcome to Ankh-Morporke, Citie of One Thousand Surprises*" (*Reaper Man* 47)). In this manner, Pratchett builds his parodic narrative from the 'bare-bones' outward, leaving no layer of metaphorical muscle, tissue and fibre unscorched by his satirical scrutiny — the *magic* of the Discworld being no exception to this rule.

As it were, Pratchett brazenly opposes Tolkien's aforementioned proviso throughout the entire book series, and for this reason, during his career continuously found himself having to justify his artistic vision. There are, however, more serious aspects to Pratchett's writing: internal and external monologues that incite deep feelings of sadness, pity, anger, outrage, fear, etc., delivered alongside dialogues that make readers laugh from the deepest, darkest, dustiest regions of the gut. But ultimately, Pratchett's writing makes his readers *think*, as his narratives touch on so many issues pertaining to life here in the real world, for which reason the *Discworld* series can be deemed a philosophical masterpiece — despite some of the less flattering views of its critics.

Pratchett conveys astute criticism on the real world within the multitudinous narrative folds of his fantastical one, in equal measure to those authors who have upheld the more classical fantasy tradition. Compared to J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, Pratchett's *Discworld* is just as vast and detailed as Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) or Narnia in the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956). Similarly to Tolkien and Lewis, Pratchett also takes us on an epic voyage through his created world, with its multitude of different civilisations and their detailed evolutionary developments, humorously, yet critically, examining various belief systems, societal dysfunctions, morality, mortality and immortality, various political concepts, and most of all, humanity and the human condition, in the very same manner as his literary peers.

Looking past the element of absurdity that permeates almost every aspect of the Discworld, it is clear to see how the issues plaguing the various protagonists, including the anomalies displayed within certain settings, directly parallel real-world people and matters in society — therefore, Pratchett's legacy upholds the same philosophical standards as that of the more classical high-fantasy epics; philosophical standards that originate back to Homer and his *Odyssey* (1614). Bearing this in mind, in the chapters to come I will more closely inspect these standards by passing a metaphorical magnifying glass over the concept of humanity as conveyed through the unique perspective of Death himself.

1.2 The Death Novels

The following section introduces the five *Death* novels in chronological order. Though Death appears in nearly all of the Discworld novels, with the exception of *The Wee Free Men* (2003) and *Snuff* (2011), in the five *Death* novels we are granted access into the life, or *anti*-life, of the 'ANTHROPOMORPHIC PERSONIFICATION' (*Mort* 216) that is Death. We are given insight into Death's inner world, i.e. his thoughts and feelings, or rather *personhood*, along with precise descriptions of his physical appearance, his self-created realm, his duties, and his rather complex history, where his problematic relationship with *time* is most profound.

As a character, Death is highly controversial. Throughout human history, we have attached negative connotation to the concept of death and dying, with the word itself often triggering associations to negative feelings, i.e. grief, sadness, regret and even anger. However, because Death is an anthropomorphised character — and a rather endearing one at that — he challenges our perception of the abstract concept, taking away such negative connotation and allowing positivity, curiosity, hopefulness and humour to reign instead. Perhaps to lessen the sense of fear and anxiety

most of us commonly feel when regarding death and dying, Pratchett offers a humorous alternative to how we can choose to perceive the fate which awaits us all, compared to Western conceptual, religious and spiritual views on death. He once commented on his portrayal of Death during a BBC Sounds Bookclub podcast:

> '[…] I treated him [Death] as a human character, I mean Death is the classic death out of Medieval folklore [...] but he's human shaped. *The theme that extends through Discworld is that shape, to an extent, defines function* [...] He has the same shape as us, and he constantly is puzzled by humanity, we only have 70, maybe a hundred, years if we are lucky and we spend all our brief life making it as complicated for us as we can. We are a source of endless fascination to him […]' (emphasis added, 00:04:49-00:05:38).

By giving Death a human persona, and attaching to this persona emotional and psychological dispositions such as boredom, restlessness, curiosity, sadness, humour, etc., Death can be perceived as highly relatable. In a way, it is easy to regard the *Death* narratives as a story portraying a man in the throes of an existential crisis. This aspect removes a great deal of fear for both the personification and the abstract, as we understand that Death is like us mortals, in a sense, and ultimately has very little to do with the physical act of dying. In fact, the element of fear in reference to dying is a topic of surprisingly little prestige in the *Death* novels, as Death is but a facilitator to the dying, and neither the cause of death nor the entity responsible for souls reaching their intended destinations. Death converses with the dying and the recently deceased before their detached sprits fade away, but in terms of *how*, *why* or *when* a person or entity dies, Death has no control. This omits a certain responsibility on Death's part, as we come to realise that Death has no more say in the game of life and death than any other being in existence — other than *Fate*, perhaps, also a Discworld personification of the abstract concept.

It is because Death does not bring about dying that it is pointless to fear him. As we follow Death's singular journey, any fear we might initially attach to Death's being — fear based on our own social conditioning toward the *concept* of death — is eventually replaced by a sense of fear toward the unknown which takes place *after* death, and not the physical manifestation of an abstract concept. The *unknown*, in this case, can be seen as the *afterlife* which, on closer inspection, is also not given much scrutiny in the *Death* novels either, though it is alluded to on more than one occasion. The following sections are dedicated to brief synopses of each *Death* novel, as it is imperative to be familiarised with certain characters and settings before moving on to the overall analysis of Death himself, and the meaning of time as portrayed within the Discworld.

1.2.1 *Mort* (1987)

> 'And he goes around killing people?' said Mort. He shook his head. 'There's no justice.' Death sighed. NO, he said, handing his drink to a page who was surprised to find he was suddenly holding an empty glass, THERE'S JUST ME. (*Mort* 58)

In *Mort* (1987), the first novel of the *Death* series and fourth *Discworld* novel overall, we are guided through the narrative by Death's newly instated apprentice, Mortimer — or Mort, for short. Mort is brought to the village market by his father, who endeavours to have his son taken on as an apprentice. By nightfall, Mort is the last one standing in the initial line-up of young men, but at the stroke of midnight a large, bony, and heavily hooded figure straddling an enormous white horse, arrives at the market. It is Death, and he deems the boy perfect for the job of soul reaping. Thus begins Mort's new job as Death's apprentice.

Transported to Death's self-created realm, Mort is introduced to Ysabell, Death's homely, adopted, sixteen year-old human daughter, and Albert, Death's manservant. Mort accompanies Death on the 'duty' of reaping souls, yet on his first solo mission, prevents the assassination of the beautiful Princess Keli, in the name of infatuation. This causes a rift in history where, in one pocket of reality, the Princess lives, and in another pocket — the intended one — she is killed and life continues on its predestined course. The pocket of reality where Keli lives begins to shrink under the weight of the latter pocket, and in order to save her life, Mort races around the Disc in search of a solution that will allow Princess Keli to live.

Meanwhile, Death takes a little holiday. He feels bored and restless, and endeavours to remedy these uncomfortable feelings by having some human 'fun'. He indulges in what he has learned to be life's four pleasures: fishing, dancing, gambling and drinking, and when none of these methods work at cheering him up, he eventually finds a sense of peace, happiness and purpose in a new vocation — that of diner cook. The longer he stays a cook, the more he loses his divinity, which slowly begins to pass onto Mort as the apprentice is forced to take on more of Death's duties his absence.

Standing in for Death, Mort steadily loses his humanity and becomes increasingly Death-like. Eventually Mort and Ysabell succeed in correcting Mort's error, and after a brief confrontation between Mort and Death — in addition to some cosmic parlaying between Death and his overlord, *Azrael* (Death of the Universe) — all ends well and cosmic balance is restored to the Discworld, with Death back in his rightful position as the Grim Reaper, and Mort's and Ysabell's nuptials in their new life back in the land of the living.

1.2.2 *Reaper Man* (1992)

> SEE! I HAVE TIME. AT LAST, I HAVE *TIME*!
> Albert backed away nervously.
> 'And now that you have it, what are you going to do with it?' He said.
> Death mounted his horse.
> I AM GOING TO *SPEND* IT. (*Reaper Man* 18)

In *Reaper Man* (1992), the second novel of the *Death* series and eleventh *Discworld* novel overall, when Death is made redundant by the Auditors of Reality, there begins to accumulate an abundance of life-force on the Discworld. With no one reaping souls, the dying either fail to properly do so, or souls become trapped in various spiritual dimensions. To the elderly wizard Windle Poons this is a blessing in disguise. He is one of the first to notice the shift in the natural life cycle, as upon his death he fails to actually die. Though existing in a half-life, Poons begins actually *living* for the first time in decades, and makes himself useful by endeavouring to understand his affliction, ultimately uncovering the cause of built-up life-force. Gradually, all chaos breaks loose in the city of Ankh-Morpork as inanimate objects become animate, and the dead simply refuse to remain so.

Meanwhile, on a farm in the octarine grass country below the towering peaks of the high Ramtop mountains, an aimless Death is looking for a new job. He is employed by an elderly miss Renata Flitworth, who takes in the stranger named Bill Door as a farmhand. On Miss Flitworth's farm, Death tries *living* for the first time in his existence, and struggles greatly with many of its concepts, such as sleeping, dreaming, feeling and understanding basic social interaction. However, he manages to make friends and enjoys simple human pleasures, such as food, drink and work, eventually becoming a well-liked member of village society. The more Death *lives,* the more he fears the final death — sand has appeared in the top bulb of his *lifetimer*, and the grains have begun to flow steadily to the bottom one. Death becomes even more obsessed with *life* and *time* than ever before, and is increasingly fascinated by the ways in which humans seem to squander both commodities.

When Death meets the Death of Rats, it occurs to him that his previous position has yet to be filled, as each species now has their own version of a personified Death. He is unable to turn a blind eye to the impending catastrophe that threatens all life on the Disc, and goes about challenging the higher powers of death in order to be reinstated into his position. When Death is faced with the prospect of final death — though he has rather enjoyed his time as a member of the living — he chooses his eternal lifeless existence, and the 'duty', above himself.

1.2.3 *Soul Music* (1994)

> ‘Are you too *scared* to change the world?’
> Death turned. The very sight of his expression made Susan back away. He advanced slowly towards her. His voice, when it came, was a hiss.
>
> YOU SAY THAT TO *ME*? YOU STAND THEIR IN YOUR PRETTY DRESS AND SAY THAT TO *ME*? YOU? YOU PRATTLE ON ABOUT CHANGING THE WORLD? COULD YOU FIND THE COURAGE TO TO ACCEPT IT? TO KNOW WHAT *MUST BE DONE* AND DO IT? WHATEVER THE COST? IS THERE ONE HUMAN ANYWHERE WHO KNOWS WHAT *DUTY* MEANS? (*Soul Music* 178)

In *Soul Music* (1994), the third novel of the *Death* series and sixteenth *Discworld* novel overall, we follow the budding rock band *The Band with Rocks In* through their exuberant, albeit short-lived, musical career. Managed by the entrepreneurially predisposed ‘Cut-Me-Own-Throat’ (C. M. O. T) Dibbler, the band consists of three members; harpist imp, Imp y Celyn (Buddy), drummer troll Lias Bluestone (Cliff), and horn-playing dwarf Glod Glodsson (Glod Glodsson).

After the loss of his harp, Buddy is possessed by a magical guitar. The very essence of music becomes intertwined with Buddy’s life-force, and the imp becomes a mere host for the music, which seems to play him more that he plays it. The music which flows through Buddy effects his other band members as well, causing them to play their own instruments in a way that far surpasses their actual skill level. The citizens of Ankh-Morpork become crazed by the new music — which grows more and more powerful the more the band play — to the point where the city’s different authorities are forced to take action against the band in order to overcome the impending anarchy that threatens the city’s equilibrium.

Meanwhile, Death is in another one of his *moods*. Upon the deaths of Ysabell and Mort, Death enters the human realm in order to ‘forget’ his grief, and in his absence from office, his sixteen year-old granddaughter Susan Sto Helit is recruited into divine service by the Death of Rats, Quoth the talking raven, and Death’s trusty steed, Binky. However, like all mortals who attempt to do Death’s job, Susan finds the occupation lacking a sense of basic-level humanity and, like her father before her, she tampers with the course of fate in the name of infatuation. She prevents the accidental death of the *live-fast-die-young* lead guitarist of *The Band with Rocks In*, Buddy, which causes the essence of music to fill the top bulb of Buddy’s *lifetimer.* As the music flows through him, taking over his soul, Susan does all she can to save Buddy’s life while Albert, Death’s manservant, sets out into the mortal world once more to find Death and talk some well-needed sense back into him.

1.2.4 *Hogfather* (1996)

> IT'S NICE TO DO A JOB WHERE PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU
> 'Ah,' said Albert glumly.
> THEY DON'T NORMALLY LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING ME.
> 'Yes, I expect so.'
> EXCEPT IN SPECIAL AND RATHER UNFORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCES.
> 'Right, right.'
> AND THEY SELDOM LEAVE SHERRY OUT. (*Hogfather* 267)

In *Hogfather* (1996), the fourth novel of the Death series and twentieth *Discworld* novel overall, the Assassins Guild have been issued a work order by the Auditors of Reality. They want the Hogfather dead: they deem the 'fat man' ill-fitted to their ordered view of the universe, and his disposal is to be the first step in their master plan of eliminating *all* anthropomorphic personifications — including Death, against whom the Auditors harbour a personal vendetta.

Meanwhile, Death forsakes his divine duties yet again as he takes on the role of Hogfather for Hogswatch Eve. In the real Hogfather's absence, *belief* in the 'fat man' begins to dwindle. As a result, the Hogfather's spirit begins to die, causing cosmic imbalance which would eventually result in the end of the world. Death struggles with the role of Hogfather as he takes children's holiday wishes all too literally. Contrary to his character, Death is troubled by the inequality he witnesses among the living during the holiday season, and endeavours to fulfil *everyone's* wishes, no matter how impractical this may be.

As a result of Death's absence from office, Susan Sto Helit is again coerced into picking up Binky's reigns and solving the mysteries of the universe, in addition to carrying out Death's normal duties. She is accompanied on her quest for truth of the Hogfather's fate by the Death of Rats, Quoth the Raven, and Bilious, the *Oh God* of hangovers. Dwindling belief in the Hogfather has caused an imbalance in the overall *power of belief* on the Disc, and new gods (e.g. Bilious) and other supernatural entities (e.g. the Verruca Gnome) begin to pop up into existence, adding to the already significant level of overall mayhem.

As Susan and Death are preoccupied with their own methods of cosmic damage control, the psychopathic — yet highly efficient — assassin, Mr. Jonathan Teatime, puts together a crew of Ankh-Morporkian thugs to complete the task of eradicating anthropomorphic personifications, beginning with the Hogfather. Using methods reminiscent of voodoo, Mr. Teatime begins 'killing' the *power of belief* in anthropomorphic personifications, and in a parallel realm the Hogfather's spirit fights for existence against the Auditors of Reality, and is eventually saved by the collaborative work of Death and Susan.

1.2.5 *Thief of Time* (2001)

Tick. (*Thief of Time* 17)

In *Thief of Time* (2001), the fifth novel of the *Death* series, and twentieth *Discworld* novel overall, the Auditors of Reality employ a young, slightly unhinged, clock maker Jeremy Clockson, to built a Glass Clock, for the purpose of imprisoning *Time* (the anthropomorphic personification of time). They send Jeremy an *Igor* — a lisping, limping, hunch-backed laboratory assistant, who helps him build the clock. Imprisoning Time will still *conceptual* time on the Discworld, bringing about the apocalypse. The Auditors wish to still time, ending all life on the Disc, in order to make the world a more manageable place. Lady Myria LeJean, an Auditor posing as a beautiful human woman, delivers the clock's work order to Jeremy. As she waits for the clock's completion, her internal disturbance steadily increases as *she* tries to come to terms with *her* new body and personhood. No longer a part of the Auditive collective *they*, Lady LeJean becomes entirely consumed by the intricacies of her human body and mind, and with the vibrancy of life overall. She is fascinated by life and living, and eventually chooses to oppose the clock's activation.

Death uncovers the Auditors' plans, yet cannot directly act against them due to 'The Rules' of the Universe. Therefore, he once again employs Susan to help him prevent the world coming to an end. Meanwhile, Death recruits the other four Horsemen of the Apocalypse — *War*, *Famine*, *Pestilence* and milkman *Ronnie Soak* (aka. *Chaos*), all personifications of the abstract concepts they represent — to ride out with him into the galaxy and confront the tsunami of opaque grey robes that descend, threatening damnation, upon the entire Discworld.

In a valley, far, *far* away, the History Monks assign young apprentice, Lobsang Ludd, to the legendary Lu-Tze — a master and legend of *time-manipulation*, with stories of his world-saving antics spreading throughout 800 years. Now retired, Lu-Tze prefers the quiet life of sweeping, gardening and emerging himself in his 'Way' — a small book of philosophies and various wisdoms he himself has written throughout his long life. However, once word of the Glass Clock being built reaches the snowy mountaintops, Lu-Tze heads for Ankh-Morpork with Lobsang Ludd tightly on his dusty heels. The young apprentice harbours unparalleled powers of time-manipulation and is therefore included in the plans to stop Jeremy from completing the clock. The last time the Glass Clock was built and activated it obliterated history, which took the History Monks ages to piece back together. And wrongly so, in parts — Susan realises as she gradually uncovers the mystery of the mythical Glass Clock.

2. Conceptual and Personified Death

> Everything that exists, yearns to live. That's what the cycle of life is all about. That's the engine that drives the great biological pumps of evolution. Everything tries to inch its way up the tree, clawing or tentacling or sliming its way up to the next niche until it gets to the very top - which, on the whole, never seems to be worth all that effort. (*Reaper Man* 70)

There are no other absolute truths regarding death that we know of other than the fact that, eventually, we all cease to physically exist on earth. In light of the unknown, one could argue that it is only natural for there to be a sense of fear and apprehension surrounding the concept of dying and death, and to try to remedy these feelings with the many doctrines that have been devised throughout history to help us come to terms with the inescapable end that steadily approaches. As stated before, dying on the Discworld is not an end to existence by any means, but before we can even begin to analyse the inherent complexities of Pratchett's portrayal of death, dying and the afterlife, we must first take a look at how these concepts have been regarded throughout our own history. Bioethics professor Sherwin B. Nuland offers a highly anthropological approach to death and dying:

> A realistic expectation also demands our acceptance that one's allotted time on earth must be limited to an allowance consistent with the continuity of our species... **We die so that the world may continue to live**. We have been given the miracle of life because trillions and trillions of living things have prepared the way for us and then have died — in a sense, for us. We die, in turn, so that others may live. **The tragedy of a single individual becomes, in the balance of natural things, the triumph of ongoing life**. (Nuland 1994, 267)

Throughout his work, Nuland attempts to demythologise the dying process, but leaves little room for sentiment. *Psychologically* speaking, however, and in the face of hard science, we humans have felt a need for more *comforting* explanations as to the nature of dying and death, in order to lessen any possible feelings of fear and apprehension we may feel when faced with the prospect of fulfilling our evolutionary purpose, as stated by Nuland. Where some lower species may unwittingly accept their inherent evolutionary destiny without quarrel, it is no wonder that, throughout history, man has resorted to devising methods of dealing with the emotional and psychological weight of impending death, finding far more reassurance within religious and spiritual teachings and practices than within epic volumes of evolutionary theory.

Religious and spiritual faiths have largely shaped how death, dying and the afterlife are perceived, as they have provided philosophies for confronting death as well as offered many specific guidelines surrounding death and dying practices and rituals. Theologist Douglas Davies comments on how humans have been conditioned throughout history to perceive death, dying and the afterlife:

> The history of death is a history of self-reflection. Who are we? Whence do we come, and whither go after death? If there is an afterlife, what is it like and how might we prepare for it? But if this life is the fullness of our time, how best might we live it, knowing we are going to die? For much of **human history, popular myth and formal theology have rendered accounts of death's origin and life's destiny. Philosophers, too, add their tight reflections** while, in recent times, the physical and social sciences have opened explanatory agendas of their own. (Davies 2008, 1)

Reflecting on the quote above, even in the absence of true piety our minds have been shaped to regard death through the religious, spiritual and/or philosophical teachings to which we have been exposed from young. Whether these teachings be of one religion or philosophy, or of all of them simultaneously, people tend to turn to specific guidelines when faced with death, dying and questions about life after death. Professor David San Filippo states that, "A belief in the immortality of the spirit has been present in most religions and spiritual practices for centuries. The belief that there is a life after death is one of the oldest concepts of human history" (Filippo 2017, 99). To reiterate Filippo's thought, in societies there is a significant amount of focus on the belief that one's existence does not completely cease upon death, but rather continues after. There is comfort to be had in the the notion of spiritual immortality and the concept of an afterlife, though the '*how?*', '*where?*' and '*for how long?*' of this extended existence largely depends on individualistic belief.

In this chapter I will briefly examine the various teachings throughout history that "have provided structures that support the religious and social needs of practitioners regarding death and an existence after life" (Filippo 2017, 99). In other words, I will examine how death, dying and the afterlife are portrayed in real-world history, specifically religion, mythology, folklore and modern fiction. Examining some of the larger individualistic belief systems of the world will lay the groundwork for the analysis of Pratchett's portrayal of these same concepts in the Discworld, as there are significant parallels between both our real world and Pratchett's fictional one. In addition, I will present findings of the concept of personified death wherever located within our world's seven largest religions, Western mythology and folklore, and finally modern fiction.

2.1 Death in Religion

Different philosophies offer theories as to what death is and what dying entails. According to Filippo, the beliefs and practices throughout history surrounding death have been largely shaped by environmental, social, religious, and spiritual factors:

> Environmental factors are based upon the external elements […] such as climate, predators, food, water supply, and health risks. Social factors included the socialization practices of societies, class structures, governmental structures, and social practices for caring for the dead and bereaved. The spiritual factors include a **belief in a life after death, or not,** and spiritual practices for the caring for the dying, dead, and the bereaved. (Filippo 2017, 100)

One could argue that *belief* in the concept of a life *after* death, as stated by Filippo above, has been devised as a means of alleviating fear. One could also argue, that the purpose of the different religious and spiritual philosophies surrounding death and dying have been devised to incite positive human action, leaning heavily on the belief that we will be rewarded in the afterlife — or in succeeding lives — for good behaviour in the present one. As it were, religion, irrespective of variety, most often advocates living a life filled with positive action, self-reflection, altruism and servitude, with the prize for virtuosity being that of permitted entry into heaven, alleviating suffering by ending/influencing the cycle of reincarnation, or even gaining a seat at Odin's great table, depending on belief.

In the following sections I will examine the religious teachings regarding death within the seven religions that are considered the main faiths of the world: *Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism,* and *Animism.* Though each of the seven harbour similar attributes, they all offer a unique perspective on what awaits us upon death and after. In addition, I will also present my findings on representations of personified death, wherever applicable.

Death in Christianity

Death resides at the very heart of the *Christian* legacy. According to the Christian doctrine, "the first human beings, Adam and Eve, rebelled against the will of God, thus jeopardising their life of eternal happiness" (Wilson 1999, 104). By eating the forbidden fruit, "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (Rom. 5:12). In other words, the bible teaches us that due to the inherited *original sin* of Adam and Eve — the falling from grace and expulsion from the Garden of Eden — conceptual death was born unto the world. It is believed that Adam's and Eve's predisposition toward sinful conduct passed down to their descendants and thus to *all* mankind. Because of this predisposition, immortality was then forfeited,

and henceforth all need atone throughout the mortal life in order to be permitted entry into heaven upon death (Bowden, et al. 1983).

In the Book of Revelation, the Kingdom of Heaven is described as "a heavenly copy of the city of Jerusalem, made of crystal, gem stones, and precious metals, and in the middle of which rested the thrones of God and Jesus wrought in green jasper" (Wilson 1999, 104), where angels reside in the thousands and perpetually sing the divine praises. Later this original concept of heaven transitioned into something more relatable to the common man, with descriptions of the Garden of Eden as a place where "the recently deceased meet with dead loved ones and carry on a life much like an earthly picnic" (Wilson 1999, 105). To reiterate, at its core, Heaven is believed to be the abode of God, God's numerous angels and the righteous dead. To be granted entrance into heaven is the ultimate Christian aim, for in Heaven the soul may unite with Christ and spend an eternity in the presence of God (Ehrman, 2006). In Christian eschatology, many believe Heaven to be a temporary stage, where those who are worthy await the resurrection of humanity, ultimately being returned to a 'New Earth' (Revelation 22: 1–2).

Christian representations of a personified death can also be found in the Book of Revelation, which seems to be the most prevalent image Westerners have of Death:

> And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (King James Bible, Revelation 6: 8)

According to scripture, Death is one of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, and is known in this context as Thanatos, the Pale Horseman (Revelation 6: 1–8). Contrarily, according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Archangel Michael acts as the Angel of Death (among his other duties), aiding souls in their passing from the visceral world to the afterlife at the behest of God (Starr 2007, 39). However, there is no explicit mention of this in the bible, which is why theories on the matter of Death's identity tend to lean toward the former.

Death in Islam

Islam is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion primarily centred around the *Quran* (the Muslim equivalent of the Christian bible), the text of which is considered to be the direct word of *Allah* (God), delivered to man by the main Islamic prophet, *Muhammad* (Burge 2015, 89).

In Islam, death is perceived as the separation of the soul from the body, the soul then continuing onto the afterlife. According to Islamic eschatology, the separation is conducted by the

angel of death, Malak al-Mawt. Once the soul-body tie is severed, it is believed that two of *Allah's* angels, Munkar and Nakir, appear and question the soul after burial, permitting only those who answer their questions correctly to pass into *Barzakh* — a state of waiting for the true *Day of Resurrection*, or *Judgement Day*. It is believed, that in this state of waiting, one can experience a heaven-like existence, immense suffering or a numb-like state, depending on the individual's worthiness in life and the answers provided to the two angels. When Judgement Day comes, an individual is 'called to account' for their actions during their time on earth, the demonstration of their level of faith being especially scrutinised (Burge 2015, 89).

Death in Judaism

Like Islam, *Judaism* is also a monotheistic Abrahamic religion, which consists of the cultural and legal tradition of the Jewish civilisation. There are several denominations belonging to the Jewish faith, yet all share the same perception of death. Rabbi Neil Gillman states:

> Judaism came to assert that death may represent one event within the framework of human life, but not the final event. This later Jewish tradition broadens the time-frame of human destiny; it asserts that, at **some time in the indefinite future, all of the dead will be brought to life once again** (Gillman 2011, 18).

The idea that death is not the final event of one's existence, that one day in the indefinite future all of the dead will be resurrected, is the very reason why death is not considered a tragedy in the Jewish religion. Death is accepted — however it occurs — as a natural process, and one that is merely a part of the divine plan. Gillman states that later tradition asserts the final event (resurrection) being, "that we can anticipate an age in which "there is no death," that death itself will die. […] *When* this final event will take place is less important than affirming *that* it will take place" (Gillman 2011, 18). In other words, when death dies, there can be no more death for the living, upon which time the dead will reawaken and remain so for eternity; thus, the notion of Heaven being, in fact, a return to life.

The personification of death presents itself in Judaism as *Azrael,* which in Hebrew translates as the "Helper of God", yet Azrael is essentially the Angel of Death. The concept of Azrael is the same as Malak al-Mawt of the Islamic tradition, and in fact, Islam also uses the name 'Azrael' for their version of the Angel of Death, depending on which denomination of the religion is in question (Jafar 2015, 5). Azrael, just like Malak al-Mawt and Thanatos, is not portrayed as a malignant character, but merely a benign entity that harbours no judgements nor ill will on those souls awaiting judgement.

Death in Buddhism

Buddhism, which originated in India over two thousand years ago and spread throughout much of Asia, is the fourth largest of the world's religions. Though titled a religion, it is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic, but rather a moral doctrine based on the philosophical teachings of Gautama Siddhartha, the first Buddha. According to Carl B. Becker, "Fundamental to Buddhist thought is the idea that **life continues after death, most commonly expressed in the idea of rebirth** in other human or animal bodies" (Becker 1993, 2). Buddhists believe that "life is but one of millions of continuous lives of suffering, destined to continue indefinitely until the cycle is broken" (Becker 1993, 2). Buddhists endeavour to break the *cycle of reincarnation*, in order to achieve *Nirvana*, i.e. a state of true enlightenment, where the suffering of life finally comes to an end (Becker 1993, 2–3). Achieving Nirvana is based on *karma*, the notion that the summation of both good and bad deeds in the current life will directly influence the level of suffering in the next one (Becker 1993, 8).

Contrarily to Christianity, Islam and Judaism, Buddhists harbour no belief in a personified death. Instead, some followers believe in the Shinigami, a concept that is a part of the Japanese oral tradition. *Shinigami* refers to smaller gods or demonic spirits that lure humans toward death. The Shinigami spirit *Mara* is a demon that possesses humans, inciting within them a desire to die by suicide (Trainor 2004, 34).

Death in Hinduism

Hinduism, the world's third largest religion, is comprised of a diverse system of spiritual thought, i.e. various beliefs and philosophies that are strengthened by a wide array of practices and rituals, most of which support the concept of the four *Purusharthas,* or "proper aims", of human life: ethics and/or duty (*dharma*), prosperity and/or work (*artha*), desires and/or passions (*kama*) and liberation and/or freedom (*moksha*) from the passions and life-death cycle (Flood 1997, 11). "Various concepts of the afterlife are blended in India" (Michaels 2004, 154), but they most strongly relate to karma and reincarnation, as within the Buddhist tradition.

There are many deities within the Hindu religion, but one can be identified as being the equivalent to the Angel of Death in Christianity and Abrahamic religions — *Yama,* the Hindu god of death and justice. Yama is described as the very first man to face death, and presides over *Yamaloka*, the underworld equivalent to Christian 'Hell'. There Yama weighs the karmic actions of earthly sinners, and dispenses law and punishment upon those souls who have been condemned to damnation, contrarily to representations of personified death in the Western world (Britannica 2018).

Death in Sikhism

Sikhism is a religion and philosophy which was founded in the Indian subcontinent of Punjab, in the late 15th century. *Sikhs* follow the *Gurmat*, or 'Way of the Guru', the religion being initially established by *Guru Nanak* and later led by a succession of nine other gurus, who were all said to have been inhabited by the same spirit. Upon the death of the last guru, the shared spirit transferred to the *Guru Granth Sahib,* or "Sacred Scripture", henceforth known as the sole guru. Sikhism's core beliefs include devout faith in, and frequent meditational practice to, the one creator, *Ek Onkar* (God). Sikhism also maintains the idea of breaking the cycle of reincarnation in order to end suffering — the difference, compared to Buddhism and Hinduism, being that Sikhs aim to move closer to God in the afterlife (Nikky-Guninder 2004, 10–12), and not merely end suffering within existence.

Death in Animism

Animism, though defined as a religion, is more accurately described as being the spiritual traditions of primarily Indigenous peoples. At its core, Animism is the belief that every animate being and inanimate object possesses a distinct spiritual essence. Due to this fact, the cornerstone of animistic belief lies within the affirmation of the existence of a soul or spirit, that is believed to survive physical death. In some cases, e.g. the Native American Navajo religion, a spirit is believed to pass unto a more leisurely metaphysical plain which still resembles their own actual one, only more naturalistically bountiful (Taylor 2005, 78–79), paralleling representations of Christian Heaven.

Personifications of death in the Animistic religions pertain to several different spirits, depending on denomination, but the Animistic belief systems do maintain faith in the afterlife. All souls must journey to the 'spirit world' and not be led astray en route by malignant trickster spirits (Harvey, 2005).

2.2 Death in Mythology and Folklore

The terms *folklore* and *mythology* have been used interchangeably throughout history to define the culture of storytelling overall, though they are not, in fact, synonymous. *Folklore* is an umbrella term for the "collection of traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community passed through the generations by word of mouth" (Michalopoulos et al. 2021). As an area of study, folklore "is largely the study of particular folklore genres: myth, folktale, legend, ballad, proverb, riddle and superstition" (Dundes 1989, viii). Though *mythology* also means "originally and literally

"storytelling" and is loosely used nowadays to denote a body of mythical narrative ("Greek mythology"), technically its proper modern sense is "the study of myth"" (Puhvel 1987, 2), the traditional stories and beliefs involving gods or supernatural beings are also heavily intertwined with religion. Though recognised as *stories*, and not actual *historical fact*, some myths are considered sacred, as they contain detailed origin and eschatological stories of the world and all living kind: "At the opposite chronological pole from such accounting of "first things" one finds in many mythical and religious systems some form of eschatology, a sketching of "last things," couched in terms of mythic prophecy" (Puhvel 1987, 21).

Death plays a significant role in folklore and mythology. From literally hundreds of mythical tales and folkloristic myths, legends, ballads, proverbs, riddles and superstitions worldwide, descriptions of conceptual death, personified death, dying and the afterlife have passed into other forms of literature, influencing how death is perceived through various other philosophies. Pratchett's Death, including the structure of the Discworld's various belief systems, most strongly parallel the folklores of the two larger mythologies of the Western European tradition: *Greek* and *Norse* mythology. In this section, I will examine the oral traditions of the Hellenic and Scandinavian people, and also briefly discuss representations of personified death in *Low Country* folklore.

In *Greek mythology*, "The main myths and legends were organized into a pseudo-historical pattern to provide a remarkably coherent history of the universe and divine order of the Greek world in the heroic era […] and this history was underpinned by rigorous systems of divine and heroic genealogy, which were essential if consistent chronologies were to be developed" (Hard 2008, 1). Within Hellenic (Greek) folklore, there are several gods belonging to the mythological tradition, residing in a place "imagined as being the sky itself, now the summit of Mt Olympos on the north-eastern borders of Greece" (Hard 2008, 21), from where each god presides over a specific element of life and living on earth (e.g. *Poseidon*, God of the sea and waters, horses and earthquakes). Death is personified as the god Thanatos (ref. Thanatos of the four horsemen in Christian scripture), who appears to the dying with his twin brother, Hypnos, the "God of Sleep," according to Homer's *Iliad* (Garland 2001, 56).

Norse mythology explores the myths and legends of Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Island) and Viking-Age Greenland. The Scandinavian mythology "has sequences that tell of the origin of the cosmos and of human beings. The story goes on, however, to the destruction and rebirth of the cosmos, and everything in it is presented in light of an enduring struggle between two groups of beings, the gods on the one hand and giants on the other hand" (Lindow 2002, 1). The *æsir* (gods) fight against the *jötnar* (giants) "who aim for the destruction of the cosmos and

disruption of order" (Lindow 2002, 2), in a place largely recognisable as Scandinavia, with stories depicting a topography of mountains, forests and rivers, harbouring Scandinavian wildlife and harsh winters (Lindow 2002, 2). *Scandinavian* folklore personifies death as *Hel,* "Goddess of death," who is also the ruler of the underworld of the same name (Abram 2006, 1). During the time of the Black Plague, death would also be depicted as *Pesta,* the personification of the Black Plague in Norway, the figure portrayed as wearing a black hood and carrying either a broom or rake (Tangherlini 1988, 176).

Later, Scandinavians substituted their female Death icons for a masculine one, sharing similar imagery to the descriptions of personified death in *Low Country* folklore. Specifically in the Netherlands and in parts of Belgium, "the personification of Death is Magere Hein ("Meagre Hein"), the concept of Magere Hein originating from pagan beliefs, yet making an appearance in the Middle Ages as well" (Kets de Vries 2021, 33). Meagre Hein later gained the modern trademark features of an animated male skeleton, dressed in a black robe and wilding a large scythe ("Het Vlaams Woordenboek" 2013), the imagery having since transferred to what the germanic cultures associate as being the personification of death.

2.3 Death in Modern Fiction

Conceptually, death is a controversial topic of conversation, especially in Western culture where it seems inherently taboo. We live in a "death denial society […] which asserts that death is repressed, and it terrifies humans in the industrialised Western world. […] the West has 'fallen out of practice when it comes to the "everydayness" of death and dead bodies" (Penfold-Mounce 2008, 87). Evidence of Penfold-Mounce's theory of a 'death denial society' can be easily located, as it is common in the Western world for negative emotion to surround the entire subject of death and dying, with fear, repulsion and morbid fascination taking precedence over the glorification that most often surrounds concepts of the afterlife, especially in regard to religion.

Yet, in literature, death has been issued a new significance: with the emergence of various popular personifications, shaped by ancient myths in addition to religious and social environments, conceptual death has been transformed to a personified Death, written primarily with a capital D. In literature, these personifications vary in shape and appearance (e.g. gods or goddesses), gender (female or male presenting), roles and functions (e.g. soul reaping and/or passing final judgments on the dead) and can be either worshipped, feared, welcomed or shunned (Vardal 2019, 5), in direct reference to the various representations of Death in early mythological and religious texts.

In modern fiction, Death is often portrayed as an antagonist, of sorts, with characters trying to "trick death, wanting to avoid or control their fate" (Vardal 2019, 6). Such is the case in e.g. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter: The Deathly Hallows* where, in one of the fairytales of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Death appears to three brothers who endeavour to evade him on their adventures. Here, Death lacks deeper characterisation, his portrayal succumbing to the traditional dark and fearsome entity commonly portrayed in many Western European myths.

Neil Gaiman, on the other hand, adheres to a similar philosophy in regard to personifying death as Pratchett. Instead of succumbing to the traditional form of Death, Gaiman created a young, feminine Death in *The Sandman* comic series (1989–1996) — a character with her own arc, and belonging to a group of other anthropomorphic personifications known as the Endless. Gaiman's Death is inarguably modern and original in the sense that *she* is female, and has the appearance of a fashionable teen goth, yet harbours a happy and caring disposition. In this manner, Gaiman ousts the more traditional expectation of a personified death as the Grim Reaper or the Angel of Death, leaning more heavily on the more feminine descriptions of Death as portrayed in e.g. the Latin American tradition (Santa Muerte), Gaelic lore (Banshee) and Norse mythology (Hel). Where earlier representations of Death were more violent, seductive, and/or ominous, contemporary versions belonging to the fantasy genre especially, are presented as much more approachable, even likeable.

Personifying Death is becoming an increasingly popular trend, taking on many forms within modern fiction (books, comics series, films, television series, or video games). Though personifications of Death may vary in their portrayed characterisations, one could argue that, generally speaking, they all serve a similar purpose: the creators turn the abstract concept of death into a personified character, in order to make the entire subject of death more palatable, as is also the case with Pratchett's Death.

3. Pratchett's Death

> Everything that exists, yearns to live. Even things that are not alive. Things that have a kind of sub-life, a metaphorical life, an *almost* life. (*Reaper Man* 70)

Pratchett's anthropomorphic personification of death is portrayed as a combination of the different religious and mythological representations of Death presented in chapter two. In the following chapter, *archetypal*, *mimetic* and *psychoanalytic literary criticism* will be applied to the characterisation of Death, as applying these specific literary criticisms will aid in the analysis of Death's physical appearance, his self-created realm, and the tragedy and humour of his persona. I will also examine the significance of Death's alter egos, *Bill Door* and *Beau Nidle*, and briefly comment on Death's experience as a stand-in for the Hogfather in *Hogfather*. In addition, the Death of Rats, who is an extension of Death himself, plays a large supporting role in the five *Death* novels and therefore also warrants brief examination.

Within this part of the overall analysis of the *Death* novels, evidence will be provided to support the hypothesis that Pratchett criticises aspects of the human condition through his character Death — specifically the frivolity of most human endeavours which thereby results in the overall notion that, for the most part, humans have a habit of *wasting* their allotted *lifetime*, instead of *spending* it.

3.1 The *Anti*-Life of Death

> 'Hallo, skelington.'
> He [Death] swivelled round.
> The small child of the house was watching him with the most penetrating gaze he had ever seen.
> 'You are a skelington, aren't you,' she said. 'I can tell, because of the bones.' (*Reaper Man* 132)

Archetypically speaking, Pratchett's portrayal of the anthropomorphic personification of death represents the more classic descriptions of Death as seen in Western European folklore. *Archetypal literary criticism*, as defined by psychologist Carl Gustav Jung and literary theorist Northrop Frye, "theorises the existence of discrete and interrelated symbols, including narrative forms and character types, in ancient and traditional myths, and examines their recurrence in and uses them to critically interpret later literatures and cultures" (Richter, 2018, 396). In other words, applying

archetypal criticism to a text aids in pinpointing the presence of recurring myths and archetypes, either embedded within the narrative itself or possibly displayed through symbolism and/or other such imagery.

Pratchett's portrayal of Death's physical appearance is inarguably archetypal and most strongly reflecting that of the Low Country *mythos* of Meagre Hein, and Thanatos, of the Christian belief system. Pratchett's Death is a seven-foot skeleton, with empty, fathomless, blue-glowing eye-sockets, and a voice — primarily written in all caps — that directly enters the brain, bypassing the ears entirely. Mortal beings struggle to perceive Death until their allotted lifetime is over, "THERE'S NO MAGIC. PEOPLE CAN'T SEE ME, THEY SIMPLY WON'T ALLOW THEMSELVES TO DO IT. UNTIL IT'S TIME, OF COURSE. WIZARDS CAN SEE ME, AND CATS. BUT YOUR AVERAGE HUMAN… NO, NEVER" (*Mort* 34), and where most are unable to see Death at all, others see a sort of shape in their peripheral vision, which their brains simply refuse to comprehend, "[…] Mr Crumley's eye kept slipping, it wouldn't focus, it skittered away and tried to put the figure [Death] on the very edge of vision. It was like trying to look at your own ear" (*Hogfather* 140).

The reader, however, is given a distinct description of a masculine figure adorned in a heavy black robe, and who wields a scythe so sharp that it is "[…] the very essence of sharpness itself, a field of absolute sharpness that it actually extended beyond the last atoms of metal" (*Reaper Man* 174). To fortify the stereotype, Death rides around the Discworld — and the multiverse, on occasion — on a dazzlingly white, flesh-and-blood horse named Binky. Unlike Binky's real-world mythological counterparts, "[…] he [Death] long ago gave up using the traditional skeletal horses, because of the bother of having to stop all the time to wire bits back on" (*Mort* 44).

In this manner, Pratchett depicts his character as the more traditional dark and ominous version of personified Death in religion, mythology and fiction. Yet, contrary to his physical appearance, Death is an altogether unthreatening character. He does not bring about physical death in the Discworld, but merely adheres to the will of the *lifetimers*, which dictate when the life of any living entity will come to pass. Every single living creature or entity with a finite lifespan has a lifetimer, and all lifetimers are kept upon shelves in their designated room in Death's abode. In other words, Death is not the *cause* of death, merely a facilitator of the dying, similar to the Angel of Death Malak al-Mawt of the Islamic belief system. Death severs the soul from the body, after which the souls dissipates to a place (or places) unknown to even Death himself.

Pratchett borrows from another archetype to describe his version of Death and partly explain Death's origin — that of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse belonging to the Christian belief system:

AH, THE GOOD OLD DAYS, said Death. BEFORE THERE WAS THIS FASHION FOR HAVING A SOLO CAREER.

SQUEEK? The Death of Rats enquired.

OH, YES, said Death. ONCE THERE WERE FIVE OF US. *FIVE* HORSEMEN. BUT YOU KNOW HOW THINGS ARE. THERE'S ALWAYS A ROW. CREATIVE DISAGREEMENTS, ROOMS BEING TRASHED, THAT SORT OF THING. He sighed. AND THINGS SAID THAT PERHAPS SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SAID. (*Thief of Time* 23)

In *Thief of Time* (2001), Pratchett parodies the religious tale of the four Horsemen (adding a fifth to the original four) as a way of deepening Death's characterisation. However, in the Christian belief system, the concept of death is born *after* the creation of the earth and every living thing within it, when Adam and Eve fall from grace through their original sin. Contrarily, Pratchett describes Death as having *always* existed, irrespective of the existence of the Discworld and all of the life atop it. But more on this to come. Here, it is relevant to recognise that Pratchett is hardly the first author to lean on scripture in regard to portraying a personified death, as e.g. J. R. R. Tolkien's *Nazgûl*, the *Black Riders* of Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, can also be linked to the same tale. Granted, the *Nazgûl* are described as wraiths and not personifications of death per se, and their function within Middle Earth differs from that of Death as an Apocalyptic Horsemen in scripture, still, they share similar Death-like physical attributes. They are large, skeletal figures, that ride atop demonic horses — skeletal ones, in this case — and wield long, sharp, wound-inflicting objects with which they are capable of bringing about physical death in Middle Earth, contrarily to the function of Death's scythe in the *Discworld*.

Moving on to the analysis of Death's lifetime, or *anti*-lifetime as it were, since he does not actually 'live' in the literal sense of the word. Death lives an immortal existence, one that has always been, and will always be. From the very first *Death* novel, Death is depicted as having shared the last two thousand years of his existence with his manservant Albert, although others (Ysabell, Mort and Susan) also briefly walk alongside Death in his timeless realm. Though Albert may be content existing in immortality, the others eventually choose to return to their lives on the Disc, where they can experience the passing of time and thus mortality. The concept of *lifetime* incites a great deal of curiosity and anxiety within Death, since his existence has always existed outside of time's governance. Death is a servant of the cosmos and a most essential part of the process of death for *every living thing* on the Disc. He is a divine entity, one that has existed for the length of an eternity yet, on occasion, he struggles with the monotony of his existence and the

tedium of his work especially, his portrayed boredom paralleling the same alarming levels as that of any real-world civil servant working a nine-to-five job.

It is Death's tedium specifically that feeds his fascination with the living, and the reason why he spends his leisure time either surveying a live miniature of the Disc under microscope in his office, or roaming among the living undetected, observing their various ways of life. Throughout his existence Death has become fascinated by the concept of *time*, which does not apply to him, and he endeavours to understand the human condition and ultimately uncover the *meaning of life* and *time* overall. Put simply, Death exists but does not *live.* He is suspended in time and is therefore incapable of using it. He is often plagued with thoughts, feelings and queries he neither fully comprehends nor can aptly verbalise in most cases, yet constantly searches for resolution to his innate sense of restlessness. His ever-growing obsession with time goes beyond the mere existence of it, which he finds remarkable in itself, but rather, he is obsessed with how the living *spend* theirs.

The concept of Death's existence in relation to *time* is quite the complex paradox, for how can one exist — eat, drink, laugh, talk, ride around the Disc on horseback, etc. — immortal or not, without using, or *spending,* the time to do so. Trying to reason this notion is like looking at an optical illusion painting from an inch away — for best results, take a step back, squint, and it may just make sense. But even if all logic fails, the notion of *appropriately spending lifetime* is still a thematic red thread in the *Death* novels, and therefore warrants our keen observation. Death continuously criticises the frivolous and nonsensical ways in which humans spend time:

> TAKE THESE THINGS, NOW, said Death, fingering a passing canapé. I MEAN, MUSHROOMS YES, CHICKEN YES, CREAM YES, I'VE NOTHING AGAINST ANY OF THEM, BUT WHY IN THE NAME OF SANITY MINCE THEM ALL UP AND PUT THEM IN LITTLE PASTRY CASES?
>
> 'Pardon?' Said Mort.
>
> THAT'S MORTALS FOR YOU, Death continued. THEY'VE ONLY GOT A FEW YEARS IN THIS WORLD AND THEY SPEND THEM ALL IN MAKING THINGS COMPLICATED FOR THEMSELVES. FASCINATING. HAVE A GHERKIN. (*Mort* 57)

Though obviously a facetious representation of the hypothesis that Pratchett explicitly alludes to the living *wasting* instead of *spending* their allotted lifetimes, it is still a valid one. Death regularly relays criticism on how humans waste lifetime on what he personally deems to be frivolous endeavours (such as making canapés), yet completely sidesteps bigger issues concerning life and death.

The notion of entitlement in regard to allotted lifetime is a particular point of contention between Death and his mortal subordinates, "FAIR? said Death. WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT FAIR? […] FAIR DOESN'T COME INTO IT. YOU CAN'T TAKE SIDES. GOOD GRIEF. WHEN IT'S TIME, IT'S

TIME. THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT, BOY." (*Mort* 59) As demonstrated, Death is often challenged with questions pertaining to his powers of intervention in regard to death and dying, by those with whom he shares his existence. As far as Death is concerned, justice plays no part in the proceedings of who *may* or *may not* deserve to live or die. Mort and Susan especially have questioned and criticised Death's ability to carry out the 'duty' of aiding souls into the afterlife without interfering with fate's predesigned schemes (e.g. preventing some of the more gruesome deaths). As it were, Death's capacity to knowingly 'permit' injustices to take place seems to go beyond human understanding. Which is understandable — when time is measured in proportion to the basic human lifespan rather than in measurements of eternity, time is more precious and therefore coveted. But Death has very little concept of time, and because he has always been in existence, he simply cannot relate to the mortal way of thinking about justice in life and in death.

Mortal *suffering* is also a largely debated topic among Death and his mortal comrades. Generally, Death deems suffering as a part of the cosmic balance where, for some to rise, others must fall — his views of life and the living being practical to fault, and similar to the aforementioned views of Nuland, including the overall views of acceptance of suffering and death in Judaism. However, in *Hogfather,* Death's practicality takes a step back as he once again becomes wrapped up in mortality. He is troubled by the social injustice and economic inequality surrounding the holiday season in the city of Ankh-Morpork, 'IT IS HOGSWATCH, said Death, AND PEOPLE DIE ON THE STREETS. PEOPLE FEAST BEHIND LIGHTED WINDOWS AND OTHER PEOPLE HAVE NO HOMES. IS THIS FAIR?' (*Hogfather* 283), and though he usually remains impartial to human suffering, throughout the novel Death tries to apply metaphorical bandaids to the equally metaphorical gaping, festering wounds of Ankh-Morpork's societal disfunction. In acts reminiscent of Robin Hood, he takes from the rich and gives to the poor without thought of any further ramifications, "Grandfather *always* got things wrong. He saw life from the outside, and never quite understood" (*Hogfather* 285), trying to fix long-term problems with short-term solutions, unable to fully comprehend the complex inner workings of a large society.

As stated before, in terms of fairness regarding the equal distribution of *lifetime*, as well as the manners in which living things die on the Disc, Death has little power, bears little to no opinion, nor does he take sides. Yet, he takes issue with smaller matters (such as canapés) and, for example, makes it his mission to ensure that a group of beggars get a hot meal on Hogswatch Eve, even if it means stealing food from the more prosperous. Through Death's misguided self-righteousness, Pratchett demonstrates his character's humanity. Death feels he cannot, and *should not*, tamper with the wills of higher entities (such as Fate and Destiny, both of whom are personifications of the

abstract concepts), and therefore acts as any *human* might in his methods of problem solving. Albert turns a blind eye to Death's minor interventions, as long as Death fulfils 'the duty'. Mort and Susan, on the other hand, often find 'the duty' hard to accept, and continuously challenge Death to intervene in more minor issues, perpetually turning a blind eye to the 'necessary evils' such intervention often entails.

Because of Mort's and Susan's constant questioning, including his own intrusive thoughts on the matter, Death often re-evaluates the choices he makes in regard to the 'duty', but more importantly, in regard to his own 'life'. Specifically, Death's failure to *live with intention* is something that seems to *niggle* at him like a midlife crisis. Due to his suspension in time, Death persistently attempts to rectify deep-seated feelings of restlessness, which does little more than cause more confusion. Not to mention how going against the proverbial grain of his existence muddles the natural order of the Disc, as whenever Death takes a leave of absence from his duties, dying on the Discworld becomes somewhat delayed (the entire plot of *Reaper Man).* Death regularly questions his life's purpose, similarly to any mortal being predisposed to such torturous thought, and readers can easily recognise and understand the nature of Death's inner crisis due to how closely his thoughts, feelings and actions mimic human experience.

As it were, questions as to the 'meaning of lifetime' can be traced back to real world religious, spiritual and philosophical texts throughout history, as humans "create the meanings that allow us to make sense of, and to make our way in, the world" (Marshall 1986, 125). Knowledge of the certain archetypes of personified Death bequeathed to us educationally and/or culturally help us recognise Death for what he is, yet, it is the reader's capability to make instinctual connections to Death's psychological characteristics that which makes Death such a familiar and relatable character, as well as a successful parody. We relate to Death — not only does he have the physical appearance of a man (albeit a very slender one), but he also exhibits many psychological characteristics typical of the human condition. Because Death is neither malignant nor sinister as a 'person', he is ultimately non-threatening and seems to share a certain camaraderie with the living in the sense that, when it comes to matters of *life* and *death,* he barely understands much more than we humans do.

3.2 Death's Realm

> That was how Death worked. He never understood exactly what he was doing. He'd do something, and it would turn out wrong. (*Soul Music* 342)

Though Death has spent an eternity surveying the Disc's living, he has very little understanding of human life, with all of its physical, emotional, spiritual and philosophical intricacies. He has created his own realm, "A landscape that owed nothing to time and space, which appeared on no map, which existed only in those far reaches of the multiplexed cosmos known to the few astrophysicists who have taken really bad acid" (*Mort* 49), where even living humans can become immortal as the sands in their *lifetimers* cease to flow whilst in the realm.

Nearly everything in Death's realm is the colour black. Death likes black: it's practical, goes with everything. But in truth, the absence of colour speaks more to Death's inability to understand the true function of colour, rather than any explicit intention to be morbid, "'He tries, see,' said Albert, flourishing the dibber. 'It's just that when it comes to colour, he hasn't got much imagination'" (*Mort* 49). Death has also created his house in the likeness of human homes, where the concept of dimension takes on a whole new meaning. From the outside, Death's home is but a small, humble looking cottage, whereas the inside draws dimensional parallels to many a mountaintop monastery. In terms of household items, Death mimics what he has seen in human homes without much consideration for function, "there was a clock by the bedside, because Death knew there should be things like bedside clocks. It had a skulls and bones and the omega sign on it, and it didn't work" (*Soul Music* 102), and favours the skull-and-bones motif whenever possible. His self-manifested wildlife are skeletal versions of their flesh-and-blood counterparts, which again speaks to Death's lack of understanding for human preference — in this case, the need for something to be 'cute and fluffy', such as bunnies for his adopted daughter, Ysabell.

Nothing truly lives in Death's realm. Nor does anything die, for that matter. Things pop into existence and remain unchanged until they are either altered or willed out of existence. Nothing *naturally* changes. There are no sunrises, no winds, no chirping crickets within the faux wheat fields outside of Death's deceptively small cabin. No growth of any living organisms — e.g. the glossy black apples hanging heavily from their stems in the black-treed orchard have been willed into existence, not grown from seed. Food is collected from Ankh-Morpork and brought to the realm by Albert, since what exists in the vegetable patch in Death's garden is purely decorative. Like the landscape of a realist painting, from a distance, all of the features of Death's realm seem realistic. It is only when looked upon closely does one see the falsity of the topography, "I mean the garden's are OK, but the mountains are downright shoddy. They're all fuzzy when you get up close" (*Mort* 50).

The lifeless features of Death's realm feel stifling to those humans who briefly reside there, and Mort, Ysabell and Susan all experience genuine difficulties adjusting to the realm's

changelessness. Ysabell, after being sixteen years old for thirty-five years, is quite desperate to physically progress into womanhood. She is happy to leave the realm and live a mortal life with Mort, and even upon their sudden demise, Mort and Ysabell choose final death instead of immortality within Death's realm, which Death explains to Susan some time after the fact:

> YOUR PARENTS KNEW THINGS MUST HAPPEN. EVERYTHING MUST HAPPEN *SOMEWHERE*. DO YOU NOT THINK I SPOKE TO THEM OF THIS? BUT I CANNOT GIVE LIFE. I CAN ONLY GRANT… EXTENSION. CHANGELESSNESS. ONLY HUMANS CAN GIVE LIFE. AND THEY WANTED TO BE HUMAN, NOT IMMORTAL.' (*Soul Music* 353)

Pratchett portrays Death's offered immortality as something that mimics life, but *feels* altogether insufficient in its stagnancy — like eating without ever tasting. In the narrative it is explained that Mort and Ysabell understand the weight of their decision to leave their infant daughter Susan, yet they still choose mortality and death, i.e. to naturally end their life cycle instead of living a half existence. Even Susan, who is partly "outside humanity" (*Thief of Time* 109), being the half-immortal granddaughter of Death, feels uncomfortable in Death's timeless realm where only Albert, who fears his karmic fate in the afterlife far too much to choose mortality, seems wholly content.

Mimetically speaking, it can be perceived that Pratchett offers Death's realm as a sort of *in-between* place of existence where there is neither life nor death, not unlike *Barzakh* of the Islamic tradition. *Mimetic literary criticism* is a method of interpreting literature as an imitation of various aspects of reality. According to Scholes et al., there are two antithetical types of narrative that emerge from epic synthesis, *empirical* and *fictional,* where empirical narrative places its allegiance to *reality* instead of to the *mythos.* Empirical narrative can then be divided into two subcategories, *historical* and *mimetic*. The historical component relies on the actual facts, of the past especially, rather than on various *versions* of fact. Whereas the "mimetic component owes its allegiance not to truth of fact but to truth of sensation and environment, depending on observation of the present rather than investigation of the past" (Scholes et al., 2006, 13). In other words, mimetic literary theory examines how well a literary work imitates real life and conveys universal truths, in addition to teaching positive moral values and manners of personal conduct.

Leaning on this theory, we observe Death's realm as a place of stillness, where there is no time present for anything to actually move, "There is no real day or night here. That had given Albert trouble at first. There was just the bright landscape and, above, a black sky with stars. Death had never got the hang of day and night" (*Soul Music* 100). *Limbo*, a term of Christian eschatology, describes "the state and place of souls that have neither been proportioned to the vision of God, nor merited eternal punishment through personal sin. It is understood not as a third intermediary state

between Heaven and Hell, but, owing to a lack of beatific vision, as a realm on the border of hell." (McFarland et al. 2011, 280) To reiterate, Limbo can be seen as an in-between place where one who resides there teeters on the edge of damnation, and it can be argued that Death also teeters on the edge of damnation as, in his limbo-like realm of stillness, he is forced to endure an eternal lifelessness from which stems his inherent sense of loneliness. He is only ever able to mimic aspects of the living world, but because he has never truly experienced living, he finds it difficult to 'paint' an accurate description of life. Which is exactly why his realm feels exceedingly fake to any mortal who visits there. In the *Death* novels, we see how Death regularly endeavours to remedy his loneliness, boredom and curiosity by venturing into the human realm with the sole purpose of *feeling* or *experiencing* something, *anything*. But his voyages of self-discovery do not ever fully give the desired result, as Death himself is but a mere shadow of the living, and thus incapable of *actual* living.

Where people of the various belief systems aim for entrance into the afterlife and/or to end suffering by ending the cycle of reincarnation, Death is never granted such peace. He is condemned to an eternity of being perpetually awake in his changelessness, where he is forced to bear witness to that which forever escapes his reach. Death wants to experience the passing of time above all else, yet he is incapable of doing more than merely mimicking aspects of life within his mimetic realm. He is never truly satisfied, his hunger for even a taste of mortality never satiated. Therefore, he is always ever so slightly vexed at how frivolously mortals squander the gift of *life* and *time*, which brings us to the next topic of discussion.

3.3 Humour and Tragedy in Death

> Susan stared at him.
>
> The blue glow in Death's eyes gradually faded, and as the light died it sucked at her gaze so that it was dragged into the eye sockets and the darkness beyond…
>
> …which went on and on, for ever. There was no word for it. Even *eternity* was a human idea. Giving it a name gave it a length; admittedly, a very long one. But this darkness was what was left when eternity had given up. It was where Death lived. Alone. (*Soul Music* 425)

By definition, *psychoanalytic literary criticism* refers to the psychological analysis of the author or of a character in his/her work. Its purpose is to aid readers in understanding the motivations of the author/character, in an attempt to uncover any hidden meaning. Freud, along with other literary critics, argue that literary texts, not unlike the dreams we dream, express the hidden unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, and that their work is a physical manifestation of the author's

own neuroses (Freud 1993, 26). To slightly counter-argue this theory, I claim that, through his work, Pratchett displays desires and anxieties in a highly *conscious* fashion, in the same manner in which he openly discussed his views on how humans spend their brief life making it as complicated for themselves as they can (Ch 1.2). Yet, by cleverly veiling his own values through his portrayal of Death, Pratchett himself is allowed to remain as neutral as possible, shining light on complex issues regarding the human condition and civilisation as a whole, yet refraining from outrightly criticising and/or passing judgement personally. Instead, Death points out what he deems to be abnormalities, allowing the reader to form their own opinions on the matters at hand, and form criticisms and judgements in their own right. However, irrespective of this minor possible difference in intentional or unintentional motive, let us bear Freud's theory in mind as we further examine Death's psychological characteristics.

Though Pratchett portrays Death with a great deal of humour, there is an undeniable tragedy to the character's existence, "Sometimes he [Death] tries to be human, too, he [Albert] thought. And he makes a pig's ear out of it" (*Soul Music* 340). Examining humour first, Pratchett employs a level of ignorance to Death's character that manifests itself as Death saying and doing things that are naive and oftentimes almost childlike. Because Death has never been, nor will ever be, human, he has no true understanding of the human condition. In *Reaper Man*, during his brief stint as a mortal being, Death becomes *Bill Door*, adopting his very first *personhood* as he is relieved of his divine duties by the Auditors of Reality. Sand appears in his *lifetimer,* and for the first time in history, Death has *time* to *spend*. As he sets out into the world to find the purpose of *living*, Death begins to experience certain aspects of human life that he finds wholly confusing, even unsettling at times. Primarily, Death struggles in his communication with the living, "Are you decent, Bill Door? said Miss Flitworth's voice in the darkness. Bill Door analysed the sentence for meaning within context. YES? He ventured." (*Reaper man* 96), often stumbling over basic building blocks of human interaction, as he is unable to sufficiently detect conversational clues. Death takes most things people say quite literally, with metaphor and unspoken dialogue being a source of true mystery, especially when used to represent some underlying human emotion:

> 'It's got cinnamon on it. My Ralph always liked cinnamon.' She sighed.
>
> Bill Door was aware of undertones and overtones in the same way that an astronaut is aware of weather patterns below him; they're all visible, all there, all laid out for study and all totally divorced from actual experience. (*Reaper Man* 96)

In the quote above, Miss Flitworth's wistful sigh does not go unnoticed by Bill Door, but he struggles to decipher meaning in the evident display of emotion which, for most readers, is blatantly

obvious. There are several situations within the *Death* novels, and *Reaper Man* especially, where Death has a difficult time understanding social behaviours. The Ramtop village community, for example, takes kindly to the odd new stranger in their town, and Bill Door's popularity grows amongst the men of the village in ways that puzzles the newly mortal Death.

> That evening the men were practising archery on the green. Bill Door had carefully ensured a local reputation as the worst bowman in the entire history of toxophily; it had never occurred to anyone that putting arrows through the hats of bystanders behind him must logically take a lot more skill than merely sending them through a quite large target mere fifty yards away.
>
> It was amazing how many friends you could make by being bad at things, provided you were bad enough to be funny. (*Reaper Man* 132).

Being "bad enough to be funny" at something is an aspect of group interaction that we readers can relate to, yet this is another example of Death's complete lack of innate knowledge of basic social norms that make his interactions with the living so humorous.

Death's character is not all humorous, though, as has already been established. Throughout the *Death* novels, Pratchett gives the reader insight into the darker side of Death's personality and predicament, where feelings of predominant loneliness reside in abundance. In *Soul Music*, Death once again sets out into the mortal world, this time in order to do something about his *memory*, which is the sort of memory that remembers things even before they have even happened. He joins the *Klatchian Foreign Legion* (parallel to the French Foreign Legion) in the hopes of *forgetting* his grief at the loss of his adopted daughter, Ysabell. Sitting idly in deep rumination amid a gang of memory-impaired human *offendi* trying to survive in the middle of a war zoned desert, Death is aptly given the name Beau Nidle (read 'bone idle'). Throughout the story Death's new alter ego allows him to express his emotions more emphatically than ever before, and he releases his emotional pain through uncharacteristically bitter rants pertaining to the human condition:

> BUT MOST PEOLE ARE RATHER STUPID AND WASTE THEIR LIVES. HAVE YOU NOT SEEN THAT? HAVE YOU NOT LOOKED DOWN FROM THE HORSE AT A CITY AND THOUGHT HOW MUCH IT RESEMBLED AN ANT HEAP, FULL OF BLIND CREATURES WHO THINK THEIR MUNDANE LITTLE WORLD IS REAL? YOU SEE THE LIGHTED WINDOWS AND WHAT YOU WANT TO THINK IS THAT THEIR MAY BE MANY INTERESTING STORIES BEHIND THEM, BUT WHAT YOU KNOW IS THAT REALLY THERE ARE JUST DULL, DULL SOULS, MERE CONSUMERS OF FOOD WHO THINK THEIR INSTINCTS ARE EMOTIONS AND THEIR TINY LIVES OF MORE ACCOUNT THAN A WHISPER OF WIND. (*Soul Music* 177)

This rather harsh criticism on the nature of humanity is laced with emotion, as Death momentarily allows the bitterness his is feeling at the loss of his daughter to take over his faculties. He is talking through his personhood, Beau Nidle, which is the part of him that truly struggles to cope with the grief he is experiencing. From a logical point of view, he understands sadness and grief, but is

unfamiliar with the *feel* of it. After attempting to impair his memory in the Klatchian desert, Death moves on to Ankh-Morpork, still desperately searching for a way to be absolved from his emotional torment. Adhering to one of the most common human remedies for grief, Death attempts to drown his memories in alcohol, and when that fails to do much more than get him mugged and thrown onto the river Ankh, he falls into the company of the notorious Ankh-Morpork beggars living under a bridge:

> They were invisible people, Death realised. He was used to invisibility. It went with the job. Humans didn't see him until they had no choice.
>
> On the other hand *he* was an anthropomorphic personification. Whereas Foul Ole Ron was human. At least technically.
>
> Foul Ole Ron made a small living following people until they gave him money not to. (*Soul Music* 309)

Here, Pratchett relays a keen observation on how the homeless and/or economically challenged are treated within large societies — as though they are invisible. What is of more prominence to the narrative though, is that the beggars can actually *see* Death, though they are mortal humans. In the presence of the beggars, and for the first time throughout the story, Death feels emotionally at ease. His misery receives some much needed company among the beggars, as it seems Death shares a certain camaraderie with the social outcasts that are the embodiment of his own invisibility and loneliness:

> Then they'd stopped and listened, as new music poured out over the park and took every man and woman and thing by the hand and and showed him or her or it the way home.
>
> The beggars stood and listened, mouths open. Someone looking from face to face, if anyone *did* look at the invisible beggars, would have had to turn away… (*Soul Music* 382)

Death's invisibility and the loneliness he feels in his solitary existence is his most pressing woe — his solitude that which always seems the root of his emotional discomfort. As stated in the quote at the beginning of this subchapter, Death lives alone in an eternal darkness "which went on and on, for ever" (*Soul Music* 425). The same could be said of the beggars, the only difference being that they will eventually be absolved of their suffering upon death, unlike Death himself.

It is natural to feel a sense of pity when observing Death. However, we must bear in mind that these observations are made by mortal beings, both inside and outside of the narrative. Death himself does not perceive his predicament in quite such an emotionally charged way, as he does not exactly self-pity. It seems that his restlessness and loneliness manifests out of boredom primarily, more than anything else. But his loyalty to the 'duty', though definitely irksome at times, ultimately

overrides occasional budding feelings of bitterness, for the simple reason that the 'duty' far surpasses the significance of any human endeavour. The fact that Death develops a personhood at all is wholly impractical, as "Where there is personality there is discord" (*Reaper Man* 7) according to the Auditors of Reality. Being a divine entity, a personification of an abstract concept, an impartial observer of the living and the minor executor of an ultimate cosmic overlord, the Auditors feel that Death "Becoming a personality *is* inefficient" (*Reaper Man* 6) in relation to the entire universe, and they "don't want it to spread. Supposing gravity developed a personality. Supposing it decided to *like* people?" (*Reaper Man* 6) It is through the Auditors perception that we begin to understand just how much Death's developed personhood threatens the balance of all life on the Disc.

In terms of a developed sense of self, Death is capable of accessing certain feelings, though we get the sense that these emotions are somehow less intense than the emotions of mortals. Like *shadows* of joy, anger and sorrow, which may flare up but quickly fade. These 'emotional flareups' cause Death much confusion, a confusion which then manifests as disturbances in the cosmic balance as Death becomes too distracted by his emotions to carry out his job. It is for this reason exactly that the Auditors of Reality persistently plot to remove Death from the cosmos, as they despise anything that has the potential to cause universal imbalance. The Death of Rats is a prime example of a physically manifested part of Death's inner imbalance. The Death of Rats used to be a part of Death himself, but was separated from him upon Death becoming momentarily mortal in *Reaper Man.* In the story every species develops their own version of Death in the real Death's absence, but once Death is reinstated, all of the other minor Death's 'rejoin the mothership'. Except for the Death of Rats, who Death kept as a separate entity for sentimental reasons, Pratchett explains in the narrative, which is another good indication of Death's developed personhood.

Psychoanalytically speaking, Death is an excellent character through which to relay criticism on the human condition. He is an impartial observer, yet his memory permits him to see all things that have happened, are happening and will happen. Ergo, Death can see the course of *time* itself, and the actions and fates of every living and existing thing that adhere to it. This foresight allows for a certain level of high-mindedness, yet Death understands that the universe must maintain balance between good and bad in order to function, making him practical to a fault. Never having been born means never having lived, and consequently Death is incapable of fully understanding human behaviour. Death envies humanity but also harbours a profound appreciation for all life in general. In essence, Death's inner musings boil down to the same core criticism: that life should be *spent*, not *wasted*.

4. The Meaning of Time

> […] TIME IS ONLY A PLACE. IT'S ALL SPREAD OUT. THERE IS WHAT IS, AND WHAT WILL BE. IF YOU CHANGE THAT, YOU CARRY THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHANGE. AND THAT IS TOO HEAVY TO BEAR. (*Soul Music* 178)

Time is infinite. It has always been in existence, regardless of whether or not its passing is recorded. It never stops progressing, which ultimately means that nothing escapes time, just like nothing living escapes death. Based on earlier Greek mythology, Plato presents a speculative cosmology in the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus,* "in which he describes time as the "moving image of eternity". On this account, time reflects physical attributes of the cosmos, namely the celestial spheres which are eternal in nature" (Evans, 2003, 4). In this regard, *time*, even more so than *death*, can be understood as the ultimate force that governs the universe, as "A number of scholars have observed that in ancient mythologies, for instance in the Persian, Greek and Indian traditions, time was deemed to be one of the foundational principles of the cosmos" (Evans, 2003, 3).

Time dictates every instance that has ever happened, is happening and is about to happen, and "adds an important and necessary dimension to our understanding of the world and our place in it – it seems almost impossible to conceive of what our world of experience might be like in the absence of time; after all, events happen *in* time" (Evans, 2003, 3). In other words, without time, nothing would actually *live*. And if nothing lives, nothing *dies.* In this sense, *death* and *time* are intertwined — for without time there simply would not be anything in existence to adhere to the life cycle. In the absence of time there would be only a sort of stillness, and one could argue: if there is no time, can there even *be* existence of any such sort? Luckily, this thesis in not aimed at answering such queries on the complex nature of the written and unwritten laws that govern our universe, but we can, however, attempt to dissect the laws that govern such matters within the Discworld's universe.

Death lives outside of time's governance, and is therefore fascinated by it. Thematically speaking, Pratchett adds much significance to the notion of *time* within the *Death* novels, eventually giving *time* its own personification in *Thief of Time* (2001). In this chapter I will discuss the significance of time in the Discworld, and something called the *universal tick* (*Thief of Time* 17). This is described as being time's *origin*, and therefore the most absolute and accurate form of time on the Disc. The concept of a 'universal time' is a notion that has, in fact, been researched and argued amongst real world physicists:

> The view that time constitutes, at some level, part of the physical fabric of the cosmos, and as such is physically real, accords with what I will term the common-place view of time. According to Langone (2000), most people believe in this view of time, **a 'true' time, a time that actually exists in a physical sense**; on this account, time is objectively embedded in the external world, as reflected in the physical laws which govern the environment we inhabit. While time may itself be "imperceptible", it is nonetheless real, manifesting tangible consequences. (Evans, 2003, 3)

The theory that time itself manifests as something physical, in addition to the notion that there is in existence a 'true time', is the very philosophical foundation of Pratchett's *Thief of Time* narrative. The Glass Clock in *Thief of Time* is built to not only measure the *universal tick,* but also to physically capture it*,* rendering all other clocks obsolete and also stopping actual time on the Discworld, which is the Auditors' ultimate motive. At its roots, the entire fifth story of the *Death* series is a culmination of Death's fascination with time, the theories surrounding the *meaning of time* portrayed in creative, scientific, mystical and philosophical ways.

Bearing this in mind, I will again dive into the deep philosophical waters of Pratchett's narratives, examining along the way how time is measured in the Discworld, specifically in regard to *lifetime* as held within the *lifetimers*. I will also explore ideas on the *afterlife* as presented throughout the series, briefly touching on some of the philosophies that parallel our real world by examining them through the lens of *intertextual literary criticism*. Lastly, I will take a more critical look at the significance of the portrayal of the *Auditors of Reality*, and how they situate within the concept and measurement of time in the Discworld's universe.

4.1 Lifetimers

> She [Susan] let herself in the Room of Lifetimers.
>
> She'd liked the sound of it, when she was a little girl. But now the hiss of sand from millions of hourglasses, and the little *pings* and *pops* as full ones vanished and new empty ones appeared, was not so enjoyable. *Now* she knew what was going on. Of course, everyone dies sooner or later. It just wasn't right to be listening to it happening. (*Hogfather 122*)

Within the walls of Death's multidimensional cottage, there is a room of infinite proportion dedicated to the storage and management of *lifetimers.*

Lifetimers are hourglasses, whose inner sands represent lifetime. They come in various sizes, shapes and colours, and are spread out, row upon row, on shelves that expand into hidden depths of the Room of Lifetimers. 'Millions' barely covers the vast quantity of these fragile, life-harbouring objects, for *every living thing* — besides, perhaps, singular atoms — on the Disc has a *lifetimer.*

From the tube worms of deep sea trenches (*Hogfather* 54-55) to the Discworld's Gods of *Dunmanifestin,* every living organism and existing entity bears the same form of fragility in their existence, which is represented by the flowing sands of their lifetimers. The sands of lifetimers trickle steadily from the top bulb to the bottom one, and in relation to the lifetime of *mortal* beings, the matter of how their lifetimers function is rather straightforward — once the sands run fully from the northern hemisphere to their southern counterpart, the being to which the hourglass belongs ceases to live on the Disc. To specify, their mortal bodies cease their progression in *time*, but their souls carry on to a place or places unknown to even Death.

As stated in the above quotation, lifetimers pop in and out of existence in the Room of Lifetimers. The glass structures are a perfect representation of how time literally *flows* and is relative to space, for it "has long been recognised by theorists that linguistic expressions for time utilise linguistic structure pertaining to motion events and locations in three-dimensional space […] It has been further observed that it is virtually impossible to talk about time without invoking motion and spatial content to do so" (Evans, 2003, 13). The three-dimensional lifetimers measure time in accordance to the theory above, where sands flow in each lifetimer *at the same pace*, but their volume differs according to the size of the lifetimer, allowing for some to have more lifetime than others.

The origin of the lifetimers remains undivulged in the *Death* novels, though it has been alluded to that *Fate*, the personification of fate, might be party to their existence. However, it is Death who presides over the lifetimers, and fills his 'days' carrying out the 'duty' of adhering to the will of the divine glassware. Death removes those lifetimers whose top bulbs are nearly empty and sets out into the mortal realm to reap the souls of the recently deceased. Though Death cannot control how much sand any lifetimer harbours within it, he does possesses the power to interrupt or stall the flow, when he brings someone into his own "SPECIAL CONGRUENT REALITY" (*Hogfather* 108), i.e. a timeless pocket of reality where the normal rules of physics are suspended. This also happens automatically, when Death brings a mortal being to his timeless realm. In this way Death extends existence, but cannot influence the length of actual lifetime, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Even gods and personifications have lifetimers, though neither *live* in the traditional sense of the word. They *exist*, and therefore their existence must also be measured in time, just like the lives of mortal beings. These *special* lifetimers are kept in a hidden section of the Room of Lifetimers, "There was a much smaller room on the other side. It was merely the size of, say, a cathedral. And it was lined floor to ceiling with more hourglasses" (*Hogfather* 122-123), and are vastly more

mystical than those lifetimers belonging to mortal beings, "The hourglasses were… wrong. The ones in the main room, however metaphorical they may be, were solid-looking things of wood and brass and glass. But *these* looked as though they were made of highlights and shadows with no real substance at all" (*Hogfather* 123). A fitting description for lifetimers that belong to what are supposedly non-physical entities. However, gods and personifications do manifest into physical form on the Discworld, taking on corporeal appearances in adherence to what humans *believe* them to look like (e.g. humans *believe* Death is a seven-foot skeleton), therefore, it is only fitting that the lifetimers (and sands within) of such entities would mimic the same abstract. Where the lifetimers of mortal beings are as solid as the lives they measure, the lifetimers of *immortal* beings are altogether "other", mirroring the existences of those to whom they belong:

> She [Susan] peered at a large one.
> The name in it was: OFFLER.
> 'The crocodile god?' She thought.
> Well, gods had a life, presumably. But they never actually died, as far as she knew. They just dwindled away to a voice on the wind and a footnote in some textbook on religion.
> (*Hogfather* 123)

A subplot of *Hogfather* depicts how gods can be willed into existence. This phenomenon is, naturally, rather exaggerated in the story as, due to an imbalance within the cosmos, a mere passing thought of a fictitious god or supernatural entity automatically generates it into existence — such as is the case with Bilious, the *Oh God* of Hangovers, and the Verruca Gnome in *Hogfather*. Supernatural lifetime cannot be measured in the same manner as mortal lifetime, but rather in *historic* time. To specify, the lifespans of gods, demigods, personifications and other supernatural entities on the Disc are determined by how long mortal beings *believe* in them, which is why supernatural lifetimers do not harbour sand within them. The more people *believe*, the stronger the god or entity. In the same sense gods and entities can experience death, of sorts, if people cease to believe in them.

In *Hogfather*, the Hogfather 'dies' — not only is his *lifetimer* smashed, but the assassin Mr. Teatime possess the minds of children in order to stop them *believing* in the Hogfather. Only in this way can one attempt to kill an, "ANTHROPOMORPHIC PERSONIFICATION. YES. HE HAS BECOME SO. THE SPIRIT OF HOGSWATCH" (*Hogfather* 107), such as the Hogfather. It is Death's success in restoring *belief* in the Hogfather that keeps the Hogfather's spirit alive, for without belief immortal beings cannot exist in the Discworld. But more on the power of belief in the next section. What is important here is to understand the nature of *lifetime* being held within small, glass structures, one

for each and every living and/or existing thing. Even Death has a *lifetimer* — one framed in black with a scull and bones, and the omega sign on it. It is void of sand, for the existence of Death does not require mortal belief. Death, just like *time*, exists irrespective of belief. Therefore, time simply does not apply to Death and he exists outside of time's governance. Except in *Reaper Man,* when sand appears in his *lifetimer* for a brief period. Death becomes mortal for the first time in his existence, and becomes 'hooked' on life and living. As his final death approaches, he refuses to submit to his fate and fights for his immortality back in order to carry on existing and observing the living, even though it means giving up his new found life and personhood as Bill Door.

4.2 Dying and the Afterlife

> YOU TRIED TO WARN HIM, he [Death] said, removing Binky's nosebag.
> 'Yes, sir. Sorry.'
> YOU CANNOT INTERFERE WITH FATE. WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE WHO SHOULD LIVE AND WHO SHOULD DIE?
>
> Death watched Mort's expression carefully.
>
> ONLY THE GODS ARE ALLOWED TO DO THAT, he added. TO TINKER WITH THE FATE OF EVEN ONE INDIVIDUAL COULD DESTROY THE WHOLE WORLD. (*Mort* 65)

Dying in the Discworld is not always a linear process for, in the *Death* novels especially, the process of dying is often interrupted. Even more mysterious than dying is the concept of an *afterlife*, a common topic of conversation between Death and the recently deceased. It is never disclosed to where the souls actually fade away upon their severance from the mortal body, and even Death himself does not know what the afterlife entails, considering how he himself has never actually died.

Examining the concept of dying in the Discworld first, it is a notion which sparks a significant amount of controversy in the *Death* novels. As stated in previous chapters, both Mort and Susan have a hard time accepting some of the injustice surrounding dying, and they both take it upon themselves to interfere with the processes of the *lifetimers*: Mort prevents the assassination of Princess Keli in *Mort,* causing a rift in reality, whereas Susan rides around the Disc trying to keep the lead singer of the Band With Rocks In, Buddy, from being taken to an early grave by the music itself in *Soul Music*. In the quote above, Mort is on his first ride out on the 'duty', and after a failed attempt to interfere with an assassination, is reprimanded by Death. Yet, Death himself constantly interferes with the will of the *lifetimers* when it suits him, with his manservant, Albert, being a prime example of this intervention. Upon the death of Ysabell and Mort in *Soul Music*, Death offers the pair extension, which they deny. Here Death asserts his personhood most significantly,

demonstrating sentiment where there should not be any. Acting as Bill Door in *Reaper Man*, Death lends sand from his own *lifetimer* to a dying little girl, after having saved the child from a fire in which she was intended to die. In these cases Death defies the will of the lifetimers, and attempts to alter the fates of those he cares about. As it were, Death defies the will of his *own* lifetimer in *Reaper Man*, and not for an entirely selfless purpose. He is not merely worried for the fate of the universe if he were to be removed from it by the Auditors, but it is as if he develops a *fear* of dying, and desperately *wants* to exist as he is forced to face the unknown for the first time in his existence.

Luckily for the most part, Death remains impartial to the dying. Though Death is in charge of *all* dying on the Disc, he does not make an appearance to all beings during their final moments. Death regularly checks on all dying processes on the Disc, to make sure that the life cycles of all living beings are running uninterrupted — e.g. checking on the deep sea tube worms in *Hogfather* — but prioritises his appearances where promised, mainly to the dying patriarchs, monarchs, witches and wizards of the Disc, the latter two of which can actually visibly see Death in their living state. He converses with the dying and the recently deceased as, "He found it best to let the recently departed get things off their chest" (*Thief of Time* 220), before they fade away unto spiritual plains unknown.

In the *Death* novels Pratchett gives little attention to these spiritual plains that can collectively be gathered under the same term, the *afterlife.* The Disc harbours within it many religious belief systems and folklores, each with their own description of the afterlife, this being a prominent point of intertextuality within the novels. *Intertextual literary criticism* interprets text by use of another text, relying on the "reader's recognition of alluded to texts and events, and their familiarity with different genres and conventions, and with literary history more generally" (Richter, 2018, 62). To put it simply, reader familiarity with a text will affect their response to, and interpretation of, the text. With regard to Pratchett's portrayal of *belief,* specifically religious and spiritual belief on the Disc*,* a basic-level knowledge base of the world's religions, including the Norse and Greek mythologies is beneficiary to the reader, as without such knowledge many of the intertextual religious and mythological elements in Pratchett's work will go unrecognised.

Generally speaking, intertextual elements can be embedded, either intentionally or unintentionally, within a text using different strategies. Intentional compositional strategies such as quotation and plagiarism (Genette, 1997, xviii), translation or parody, to name but a few, explicitly help readers form connections between texts, which ultimately deepens reader experience. Unintentional compositional strategies are such that connections between texts are perceived by the reader or audience, irrespective of author intention. Intertextually speaking, it is obvious that

Pratchett uses the intentional compositional method of *parody* in his worldbuilding by satirising just about every aspect of a living, thriving planet, in all of its complex diversity, and in a distinct fashion that offers readers a skewed version of the real world. From the very topography of the Discworld — which humorously mirrors our own planet, except that it is flat, as used to be the popular belief — to the inner workings of each and every civilisation, human and non-human alike.

In the same fashion, the Disc's many religious belief systems are prominently intertextual, and it could be argued that these representations speak to Pratchett's own views on the topic of religious belief, 'Possibly the gods exist, and possibly, they do not. So why not believe in them in any case? If it's all true you'll go to a lovely place when you die, and if it isn't then you've lost nothing right?' (*Hogfather* 74). These words spoken by the Discworld's Quirmian philosopher Ventre who, upon his death, "woke up in a circle of gods holding nasty-looking sticks and one of them said, 'We're going to show you what we think of Mr Clever Dick in these parts…'" (*Hogfather* 74), may possibly be the author's own view on the matter of belief in religion, or they may not be. But it is explicitly stated in the narratives of *Discworld* that the gods exist (oftentimes by the gods themselves) and if the gods exist, so does the afterlife. Reincarnation, for example, is a concept of the afterlife that is openly acknowledged and discussed in both *Mort* and *Thief of Time*, and seems to be somewhat of an option for mortals who possess certain magical capabilities, as is the case with a recently deceased abbott in *Mort*:

> 'Don't rush off,' he said. ' I always look forward to these talks. What's happened to the usual fellow?'
> 'Usual fellow?' said Mort, bewildered.
> 'Tall chap. Black cloak. Doesn't get enough to eat, by the look of him,' said the abbot.
> '*Usual* fellow? You mean *Death*?' Said Mort.
> 'That's him,' said the abbot cheerfully. Mort's mouth hung open.
> 'Die a lot, do you?' He managed.
> 'A fair bit. A fair bit. Of course,' said the abbot, 'once you get the hang of it, it's only a matter of practice. (*Mort* 102)

Filling in for Death, Mort comes across an abbot who regularly reincarnates, the text alluding to the afterlife concept being a choice. In *Thief of Time*, the leader of the History Monks also reincarnates, and at the time of the narrative's present, is portrayed as being in the infant stage of his new life. He is fully aware of this fact, as he is able to speak like an adult, yet is physically hindered by his infant state. In this way, Pratchett humorously parallels the Buddhist and Hindu concept of reincarnation, but also draws significant connective lines between other aspects of polytheistic religious belief systems, yet even more prominently the two most significant Western European mythologies. There

are many gods belonging to the Discworld, with each representing some aspect of the living (e.g. *Jimi*, the God of Beggars, or *Zephyrus*, the God of Slight Breezes, etc.), their portrayal mimicking the Norse and Greek mythological traditions. As mentioned earlier, gods exist in uncountable numbers within the Discworld and physically manifest depending on the *power of belief.*

The *power of belief* is discussed in all five novels. Gods and demigods of the Disc remain dormant until intellectual inhabitants of the Discworld conceive of them. When belief spreads to large enough numbers for the gods to take on a physical shape, they strengthen, and gain enough power and prestige to eventually join the Disc's vast pantheon. To further explain this, the mountain-top kingdom of *Dunmanifestin* strongly resembles that of *Olympus* in Greek mythology, and harbours within it a vast array of different gods with a similar hierarchy. For example, *Blind Io* is the King of all the Gods, and is a combination of Zeus and Odin, with elements of Thor mixed in. *Offler*, the Crocodile God, has been compared to the ancient Egyptian god *Sobek*, who is the "deification of the cult of the crocodile" (Ikram et al. 2005, 200). Then there are the more parodic representations of the divine, such as *Vometia*, the Goddess of Being Sick, and *Errata*, the Goddess of Misunderstandings. The list goes on, but suffice to say that the *power of belief* in the various gods and goddesses is what causes them to physically manifest and influence life on the Disc.

This theory can be applied to the concept of an *afterlife* in the Discworld. In the same manner as readers are allowed to remain impartial to the belief systems of the many different civilisations on the Disc, the same theory is applied to belief in the afterlife. Pratchett tantalises his readers' imaginations by alluding to the fact that those who die get what they *believe in* or what they think they *deserve*, just like in real life. For example, Barbarian heroes believe that Valkyries will carry them off to the hall of Blind Io (*Soul Music* 121), the idea paralleling Norse Mythology, where fallen Viking warriors gain a seat at Odin's great table in the Hall of Odin in *Valhalla*. Similarly, desert Klatchians believe that paradise awaits them on the other side, not unlike that of the Islamic and Christian belief in Paradise and Heaven. Contrarily, some souls indefinitely inhabit parallel dimensions and ghostly netherworlds, from where they can be accessed and/or conversed with, as is the case with medium witch Mrs. Cake and sprit *One-Man-Bucket* (*Reaper Man* 175–178). In the *Discworld* novel *Eric* (1990), everyone seems to be in *Hell,* which is portrayed as a corporeal place. "The Desert", which features in other Discworld novels, is a concept of an afterlife journey where each mortal soul must traverse through a desert plain toward the mountains beyond, after being severed from their bodies by Death. This notion parallels the Animistic belief of souls travelling the spirit world towards an unknown destination, and being tested by trickster spirits attempting to lead them astray, rendering them trapped in the spirit world indefinitely — not unlike a sort of limbo.

Despite these different theories on the afterlife in the Discworld, it is not a significant topic of the *Death* novels, as the narrative focuses more on life and living, Death's personhood and *time*. However, it is relevant for this analysis to understand that, just like with the gods and other such supernatural entities, it is the *power of belief* that gives these entities (including the Disc itself) their existence, and how Death and *time* exist outside of the *power if belief.* As do the Auditors of Reality, bringing this analysis to its concluding point of examination.

4.3 Auditors of Reality

> She [The Auditor posing as *Lady LeJean*] wanted more *time.* The habits of a billion years don't yield entirely to a mouthful of bread, and she could see that a crazy life form like humanity should not be allowed to exist. Yes, indeed. Certainly. Of course.
>
> But she wanted more time. (*Thief of Time* 258)

Not all supernatural beings of the Discworld's universe require mortal *belief* in order to exist. These such beings are the *Old High Ones*, the *Things* from the *Dungeon Dimensions*, and the *Auditors of Reality*. The *Old High Ones* are eight supernatural beings that are more powerful than the gods they govern, as they control the workings of the multiverse. *Azrael* is one of the eight, and presides over *all* death. Azrael, as well as the other seven *Old High Ones,* exist irrespective of belief, as the general populace of the multiverse remains completely ignorant of their existence. The creatures from the *Dungeon Dimensions* — an endless wasteland where neither space nor time exists — are a perpetual concern for the wizards of Unseen University especially, as their magical tamperings have been known to open portals to the vast underworld. The creatures that reside there known as *The Things*, are in a constant state of readiness to enter the Discworld, due to the fact that there is no magic in the underworld.

Then there are the Auditors of Reality. A major recurring antagonist, the nameless, shapeless entities operate in accordance to 'The Rules' and can be seen as the executive arm of all eight *Old High Ones*, in the same way that Death is the executive arm of Azrael. The Auditors control the different dimensions of the universe, govern time and space, and complain a fair bit about the shenanigans of the living. In a sense, they are celestial bureaucrats: they make sure such concepts as *gravity* functions, and remember to file the necessary paperwork for each and every chemical reaction. They continuously "break things down into their component molecules" (*Thief of Time* 317), for their job is to understand the function of each and every atom, molecule and compound in existence. They despise all *life*, as life makes their job far more complicated with its messiness and

unpredictability, not to mention how it adds to their auditorial paperwork. They despise humans even more so, for the same reason.

A simple way to perceive the Auditors of Reality collectively, would be to think of them as the personification of *physics*. They could also be thought of as gods, since they have many godlike qualities, but their existence is not dependant on human belief, unlike the Discworld's gods. As it were, Auditors find *belief*, and all other aspects of imagination, inherently messy. They view the world in the literal, and are perpetually breaking down the physical world to a molecular level in order to better understand it and govern such laws that uphold it. Auditors "had hundreds of senses, since every possible phenomenon had to be witnessed and recorded" (*Thief of Time* 246) which is why, in their mind, such things as *imagination* and *belief* are the most infuriating aspects of the human condition, as cataloguing or quantifying concepts of the imagination and belief, e.g *dragons* or *justice*, are complicated. To the Auditors' annoyance — though they are not permitted feelings of any kind — they cannot simply eradicate life from existence. Doing so would go against 'The Rules'. Auditors cannot break 'The Rules' mainly because they *are* 'The Rules', and certain physical rules simply must not be broken, as breaking them would cause cosmic destruction. Since the Auditors cannot simply dispose of the living they instead operate within a loophole which allows them to influence humans into doing their bidding for them. Like the Shinigami spirit Mara (Ch 2.1), the Auditors perpetually strive to get humanity to dispose of themselves.

The Auditors have no discerning characteristics. Characteristics lead to individuality, and individuality alludes to personality. Personality is for the living, and to *live* is to *die*. Therefore, Auditors appear as opaque, drab, grey cowled robes. They exist in infinite numbers and function as a collective. When they speak they avoid personal pronouns, as one speaks for all. They do not have faces, and therefore do not actually talk, but rather impart the memory of having spoken directly into the minds of the recipients. This idiosyncratic form of communication presented plain text without quotations:

> One said, It is the Discworld. It rides through space on the back of a giant turtle.
> One said, Oh, one of *that* sort. I hate them.
> One said, You're doing it again. You said 'I'.
> One said, No! No! I didn't! I never said 'I'!… oh, bugger…
> It burst into flame and burned in the same way that a small cloud of vapour burns, quickly and with no residual mess. Almost immediately, another one appeared. It was identical in appearance to its vanished sibling. (*Reaper Man* 7)

Because life always ends in death, to be an individual is to *live.* Therefore, to an Auditor who has developed any semblance of a personality, Death happens instantly, because the *intervening time* in

between living and dying is but a mere speck to entities who operate in lengths of eternity. As soon as an Auditor vanishes, another exactly like it pops into existence to take its place, as demonstrated in the above quotation.

In the *Death* novels, the Auditors develop a personal vendetta against Death. It is Death's personhood which breaks 'The Rules', i.e. opposes the rules of physics and upsets universal order, and throughout the series the Auditors endeavour to remove Death from existence. In *Thief of Time,* they wish to eradicate all life, as they do not apply any significance to life and the living. However, despite themselves, the Auditors begin to develop personhoods whilst within their self-manufactured human bodies, becoming more human as "form defines function" (*Thief of Time* 302). They become fascinated by the inner workings of the human body, their focus specifically on how the brain *thinks*, how emotions *develop* in the chest, and how the body *acts* of its own accord via instinct:

> The bag of soggy tissue behind the eyes worked independently of its owner. It took in information from the senses, and checked it all against memory, and presented options. Sometimes the hidden part of it even fought for control of the mouth! Humans weren't individuals, they were each one, a committee! (*Thief of Time* 237)

As the Auditors begin to introspect within their human form, their mission to eradicate life on the Disc becomes delayed. The allure of life's exuberance begins to take precedence and they start to question their motive as a collective. Put simply, *physics* begins to develop *personality.* In order to fully understand the significance of the Auditors' characterisation in reference to the overall concept of time, it is beneficial to examine how Pratchett portrays time in the Discworld, using the phenomenology of time in real world physics as an aid:

> Historically, physicists have had a picture of time as something like an ever 'ever-rolling stream'— an all pervading motion carrying the contents of the universe irresistibly from past to future. When first introduced as a mathematical parameter into the laws of physics by Newton, great emphasis was laid on the uniformity of time and the precision of its forward flow. **Newtonian time was absolute and universal**, and standard clocks were supposed to agree on the rate of flow irrespective of their location or motion. (Davies, 1977, 2)

Pratchett uses a great deal of intertextuality to portray time in the Discworld, relying heavily on real world theories pertaining to the physics of time. Especially the concept of *universal time*, which Pratchett portrays as the *universal tick*, mirroring Newtonian time as professed in the quote above. In the *Thief of Time*, time is said to have been captured and stilled once before, and in the space of a single *tick* the world unravelled and reassembled. Time is not only measured as a pervading

moment, but as a temporal structure as well. Ergo, existence is portrayed as a present moment which *glides* into the *future* leaving *past* behind, as "the very meaning of 'past' and 'future' are determined at a psychological level by this experience. Before the days of spacial relativity, it was quite acceptable to suppose that the entire universe had real existence for only one instance (now!), *the* past world having passed out of existence, *the* future world yet to come into being" (Davies, 1977, 2).

Structurally speaking, time in the Discworld is portrayed as having real existence for only a single instance, as Davies states. Yet, though time is personified as a female character in *Thief of Time,* I argue that the Auditors of Reality are actually themselves a part of the physical manifestation of time, in addition to being the personification of every other concept of physics upon which the laws of the universe rest (similarly to how *lifetimers* are the physical manifestation of *lifetime*). Identically to Death, the Auditors have also always been in existence; an existence which is portrayed as an 'ever-rolling stream' in how the Auditors pop in and out of actuality, existing both inside and outside of time, i.e. *within every dimension of time simultaneously*. This phenomenon can again be explained using real-world physics theory:

> The arrival of spacial relativity brought about the collapse of the whole concept of an absolute, uniform time, and a universal now. Time itself became a part of a new structure: **four dimensional space-time**. In this new structure, intervals of space are always associated with intervals of time, so that the concept of the 'same moment' in two different places is without absolute meaning. In the new four dimensional world picture, the entire past and future history of a system must be considered to be in existence together. (Davies, 1977, 2)

The Auditors seem to exist within this 'four-dimensional space-time' proposed by Davies. They exist everywhere, and at all times, meaning past and future are always linked in a single moment. Because they exist in this manner, the Auditors have no concept of time in relation to mortal existence. They themselves cannot die or simply cease to exist, therefore they harbour little understanding of mortal life. They see life as a disordered inconvenience upon their laws, for which reason they endeavour to bring about an apocalypse by stilling time and therefore ending life.

As stated previously, it is when the Auditors themselves get a taste of life that they begin to view it in a new light. As they host human bodies which adhere to time's laws, time suddenly becomes something of interest to them. In this final section, I will focus on the character portrayal of Lady Myria LeJean in *Thief of Time.* Here I argue that Pratchett once again relays observations on the human condition, only this time though the character Lady LeJean, specifically alluding to the idea that spending lifetime begins, and is most significantly achieved, within the body itself.

Lady Myria LeJean is an Auditor, who has been placed within a perfect representation of the human female body. Over a short period of time she develops a personhood, despite her best efforts to ignore her human senses, and no longer wishes to destroy the Discworld by going along with the plan of stilling time via the Glass Clock. Fascination with life begins to stir within the folds of Lady LeJean's "soggy tissue behind the eyes" (*Thief of Time* 237), and through her perception of what it means to be human and to *live*, the reader's attention is directed to the vibrancy of the human body (thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc) and to the imaginative creations of the human mind (chocolate, art, fashion, etc.).

Lady LeJean begins to appreciate what we perceive as the 'smaller things in life', whereas she deems them as 'big things', experiencing them for the first time. "Water is like wine" (*Thief of Time* 329) and "a dry biscuit almost killed me" (*Thief of Time* 329) Lady LeJean remarks as she remembers the pleasure of *tasting* for the first time. She deems toast a fine delicacy, and manages to weaponise chocolate against the other Auditors, for "'chocolate… Even the mind stops. There is nothing but the taste.' She sighed. 'I imagine it is a wonderful way to die'" (*Thief of Time* 329). She is fascinated by how paint becomes art, and how there are rules to fashion. Her instincts and impulses perplex her deeply, yet she revels in the experiences of salivating at the smell of food, or blushing at being asked out on a date. *Everything* is new to Lady LeJean, and the more time goes by, the more she yearns for more human experience, as demonstrated in the quote heading this subchapter.

Passively observing what we perhaps deem standard human bodily experience — our minor daily thoughts, feelings and impulses — through Lady LeJean's perception, it can be argued that here Pratchett enforces the message that even merely observing oneself, and surrounding life, is a way of actively *spending* lifetime. To be more *present* in each fleeting moment, adopting a 'stop and smell the roses' attitude towards our own existence, instead of chronically lacking awareness of our own mortality until it is too late. Myria LeJean deems herself mad, "I have betrayed my own kind. And I am hideously insane. I can never be at home anywhere. And staying here would be an agony" (*Thief of Time* 423) for merely being captivated by life's vibrancy, the criticism being that, in our daily lives, we humans often fail to even notice such vibrancy as we are so accustomed to it. By portraying lifetime in the form of *lifetimers*, presenting dying and the different afterlife scenarios as something to look forward to, and depicting the Auditors of Reality as the fluidity of conceptual time itself, Pratchett makes us purposefully aware of the fragility, significance and uniqueness of our own mortal existence.

5. Conclusion: Spending Lifetime — The Wisdom of Terry Pratchett

> THERE IS NO HOPE BUT US. THERE IS NO MERCY BUT US. THERE IS NO JUSTICE. THERE IS JUST US.
>
> The dark, sad face [of Azrael] filled the sky.
>
> ALL THINGS THAT ARE, ARE OURS. BUT WE MUST CARE. FOR IF WE DO NOT CARE, WE DO NOT EXIST. IF WE DO NOT EXIST, THEN THERE IS NOTHING BUT BLIND OBLIVION.
>
> AND EVEN OBLIVION MUST END SOME DAY. LORD, WILL YOU GRANT ME JUST A LITTLE TIME? (*Reaper Man* 264)

Time is the ultimate theme of the *Death* novels, specifically *lifetime.* It is materialised into physical form in the portrayal of the *lifetimers* and the Auditors of Reality*,* and conceptualised, personified, manipulated and regarded as the most valuable commodity in the entire universe, as it governs all living things. Almost everything exists within time on the Discworld, and life itself is the actual *fruit* of time, allotted to those lucky enough to be born into it.

Death exists outside of time. He is one of very few entities in the Discworld's universe to whom time does not apply. For this reason, time fascinates and perplexes him, and he is perpetually slightly envious of all who exist within it. His envy is not malignant, yet it is apparent that Death's curiosity regarding time will never be fully satisfied, as he himself cannot experience it first hand. Instead, Death contends himself to the role of impartial observer and tries to understand the complexities of life and all living kind. Because Death has always been in existence, he perceives the human lifespan as a mere atomic speck on the eternal timeline, making his opinions on time and how humans squander it understandable. One could argue, that if we were to physically possess our own lifetimers and could bear witness to the flowing sands within, perhaps we too would regard most human endeavours as a *waste* of time. At the very least, each daily choice would be regarded more critically — we would perhaps monitor the flowing grains carefully and constantly calculate our remaining lifetime, remaining mindful of how we spend the time we have left.

In this thesis I argued that Pratchett cleverly relays criticism on many aspects of the human condition through his portrayal of Death and time, shining a light-hearted, metaphorical light on deep philosophical questions pertaining to how lifetime should be *spent* and not wasted. He does this through Death's perception mainly, although many other characters in the *Death* novels relay the same criticisms. Pratchett does not go so far as to state his own ideologies of what living with purpose ultimately entails, but rather — and through Death — seems to implore his readers to ask

themselves this question in the hope of them finding an answer which suits them. Through obvious criticism pertaining to certain aspects of the human condition and societal dysfunction, Pratchett challenges us to re-evaluate our own notions of belief and certain ideologies pertaining to living within civilised society. It is as if he implores us to not automatically adhere to the customs and philosophies that have been bestowed upon us, but to challenge such notions with the sole purpose of finding our own truth, and/or enhancing or modifying preexisting truths to suit the present time.

I conclude that, through his narratives and character portrayal of Death, Pratchett advocates that we continually *evolve.* His narratives support *belief* and *non-belief* alike. He demonstrates how feelings of purpose, joy and fulfilment can come from notions both *big* and *small*. From what could be considered a high-power career, Death finds more personal joy and fulfilment as a diner cook, than ever before throughout his duties as the Grim Reaper. Filling in for the Hogfather also connects Death to humanity in ways he has never been able to experience, deepening his level of appreciation for life and the living. Through Death, it can be argued that Pratchett's message is simple: time should be *spent* with intention, not wasted through indifference or disregard. The living should be mindfully aware of time passing, regard death without fear, and uninhibitedly entertain notions of a life beyond death because, why not?

Pratchett's portrayal of the Auditors of Reality, and Lady LeJean especially, reminds us to be more present in the body and the mind. Lady LeJean's visceral experience as a human serves as a reminder to appreciate the complex simplicity of plainly being alive. Having thoughts, experiencing feelings, and to be present in all five senses is, in itself, something miraculous. Unlike Lady LeJean, Death is not allowed this experience, even during his brief time as a mortal being in *Reaper Man*. The other Auditors who experience the mortal body are also completely taken by the power of it, and the longer they stay human, the tougher it becomes for them to maintain the idea that all life should be destroyed. In this manner, and many others, Pratchett conveys deep levels of thought within his Discworld narratives, the use of fantastical stories to convey criticisms, judgements, ideologies and philosophies being a notion that can be traced all the way back to ancient mythologies:

> There is an *allegorical theory* to Greek Mythology, where "One of the most ancient explanations is that these tales of wonder are allegories, concealing some deep and edifying meaning, which the wisdom of primeval sages prompted them to hide in this manner, either to prevent great truths passing into the hands of persons too ignorant or too impious to use them aright, or to attract by stories those who would not listen to a dry and formal discussion. (Rose 2004, 1)

As demonstrated above, stories have been devised throughout the history of storytelling to teach humanity about life and living, and to aid in the understanding of the complexities pertaining to the human predisposition. Religious texts preach morality and virtuosity, mythological texts take the mind out of the present to explore the endless regions of the imagination, and spiritual doctrines implore individuals to *think* independently, whilst also regarding the rules and regulations of religious texts, including the written laws of societies, with a respectfully critical eye. In the same fashion Pratchett also conveys his own philosophies on life, living, dying, death, and the afterlife, through entertaining, humorous, thought-provoking and intensely philosophical narrative that ultimately implores the reader to be more present in oneself and to *think* independently on how best to utilise *lifetime*.

The concept of time — in its present, passing and future — has allured many a creative mind throughout the history of art in all forms, and is a constant source of fascination and creative exploration in literature especially. In the same manner as Shakespeare once presented his ponderance on the meaning of time in his poetry (appendix A), Pratchett also offers his views on the meaning of time in all five of his *Death* novels: Mort's race against time as he attempts to save a single life while risking cosmic collapse in *Mort*; Death gaining sand in his lifetimer and choosing to *spend it* with purpose in *Reaper Man*; Susan contradicting fate in her attempt to restore the flowing sands of Buddy's *lifetimer* in *Soul Music*; Death, Albert and Susan racing time to maintain belief in the Hogfather in *Hogfather*; and finally *Thief of Time*, where Pratchett takes the reader on a highly philosophical journey through the very fabric of *time* itself. Though the structural make-up of *time* in the Discworld leans heavily on real world science in the same way that many of the Discworld's characters and thematic elements find their roots in real-world religious, spiritual, philosophical and mythological texts, Pratchett adds his own artistic twist to how he relays his philosophies in order to engage his audience and stimulate readers' own capacity to think about such complex topics. He tells his morally enriched stories in the same fashion as those brilliant minds who once devised the powerful mythologies that still bear philosophical fruit to this day.

Through the evidence gathered in this thesis, it is plain to see how Pratchett conveys the idea through his character portrayal of Death, that humans primarily *waste lifetime* where, in fact, it should be *spent*. He offers no resolution to this notion deemed problematic in his narratives, but merely attempts to focus our thoughts on the most prominent aspect that governs our existence — *time*. He forces us to regard *time* in general, but specifically consider the concept of *lifetime* — to manifest in the mind a clear picture of our own metaphorical *lifetimers* in order to be constantly aware of the passing of time. Through Death's perception of life and living, Pratchett places

emphasis on merely being alive as, despite all of the different theories and philosophies on the subject, both inside and outside of the narrative, there are simply no guarantees that any of us will be permitted re-entry into life. The message that time is precious and we are but specks in its infinite history, is exceedingly prevalent. Ergo, time should not be squandered, but utilised to the best of our abilities, and when Death comes he is to be greeted readily with the knowledge that, however much time we were given, it was *spent* wisely.

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Appendix A

Sonnet XII: When I do count the clock that tells the time

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls, all silvered o'er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
Then of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
And die as fast as they see others grow;
    And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence,
    Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

William Shakespeare