"Some Genetics Are Passed on Via the Soul:" The Curious Case of Susan Sto-Helit

by Imola Bulgozdi, University of Debrecen, Hungary

1 The idea for this essay can be traced back to the fact that no female heroes seem to have impressed Gideon Haberkorn enough to be discussed in "Cultural Palimpsests: Terry Pratchett's New Fantasy Heroes" (2008), although he claims that he will examine Pratchett's revision of the modern fantasy hero, who undergoes "a complete and thorough reinvention" (319). While he admits that Pratchett has created a number of new protagonists and links the witches of Lancre to the social and literary discourses on witches rather than on heroism, all he has to say about Susan Sto-Helit is that this character interacts with the discourse of the fantasy hero in a complicated way, which he does not elaborate on as it "cannot be adequately worked out in a paragraph, or a footnote (see, therefore, note 8)" (330). In order to prove that Pratchett's heroes are indeed palimpsests, since the creative process resembles the original meaning of the word, that is "a parchment, tablet, or other portion of writing material that has been used twice or three times after the earlier writing has been erased" (Webster's 1625), Haberkorn gives an overview of the concept of the hero in general and that of the modern fantasy hero in particular.

2 According to Haberkorn, heroes, as folk models of the ideal member of a given society, embody and defend its most important values, which, understandably, change with time. He argues that Pratchett first scraped clean the surface of the cultural discourse on heroes and then superimposed his own version of the modern fantasy hero (323). Haberkorn traces back this figure to a small group of characters: Robert E. Howard's Conan of Cimmeria, J. R. R. Tolkien's Frodo, Aragorn, Sam, and even Gollum, and he also includes Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser among the select few (333). If persistent enough, one might find out from the above-mentioned note 8 that his sole explanation for excluding Susan from the article is that she is "hardly part of this particular evolution" (336). Bearing in mind the fact that Susan saves the world in all three novels she is featured in (*Soul Music*, *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*), I would like to argue for her rightful place among Pratchett's new fantasy heroes. Her character is all the more relevant as she fits Haberkorn's definition of Pratchett's palimpsests on several points, given that the "reinscriptions both reflect and contribute to the cultural discourse on heroes" (319).

3 Even a brief examination of Haberkorn's section on "Heroes and the Cultural Discourse" reveals several archetypal elements that in one form or other went into the construction of Susan's character: i) "the hero embodies part of the social unconscious to tell society what's on its mind," ii) "the hero establishes himself in the external world by taking a place that is rightfully his. He steps into a rank he was meant for, was in fact born for," iii) "the hero is an individual who, faced with a situation, deals with it in a way that displays abilities a society prizes" and iv) the hero's adventure is "one of

mending the self, and the world: the hero's adventure is one of healing, for he and his world are wounded and in pain" (321). Replace the masculine pronouns with the feminine version and these statements are all true of Susan Sto-Helit. And what can be more pertinent to Susan's self-reflexivity than this: v) "heroes are not just a site of the cultural discourse on heroism; they are interpreters and performers of that discourse, they help shape it, and they can change it" (320).

4 Haberkorn goes on to demonstrate how Pratchett first ridicules and subverts the idea of the modern fantasy hero via the cowardly wizard, Rincewind and ancient Cohen, the barbarian. On the other hand, he claims that the two characters who are unmistakable heirs to the hero tradition and interact with the hero discourse are Carrot Ironfoundersson, heir to the throne of Ankh-Morpork, living in disguise, and Sam Vimes, captain of the City Watch (330-2). Haberkorn's insightful analysis of these characters brings to the forefront Pratchett's rejection of stereotypical patterns and his invention of new ones, which he classifies as "political in a broader sense" (333). He sums up the method as follows: Pratchett creates heroic palimpsests that interact with the tradition by means of repetition, amplification, or repudiation, while the earlier inscriptions can still be detected (334). This leaves one wondering how Susan Sto-Helit could have been disregarded, whose relevance will be demonstrated by a detailed analysis of her character and her role on Discworld.

5 Our first glimpse of Susan is in *Soul Music* through the eyes of the headmistress of the Quirm College for Young Ladies: as a sixteen-year-old academically brilliant at the things she liked doing, such as Logic and Maths, "there was something frankly unlovable about the child. […] she was brilliant in the same way that diamond is brilliant, all edges and chilliness" (11). Her most striking characteristic is her pure white hair with a single black streak, which defies the school regulation of two plaits by itself and stands on end, giving her the appearance of "a dandelion on the point of telling the time" (20). The personality traits Susan demonstrates even before her ancestry is revealed stand in stark contrast with those expected of a teenage girl: to the great surprise of the headmistress she does not cry when her parents die, "she didn't usually worry about what anyone thought" (14), she is often angry "at the sheer stupidity of the world" (21), and she hates Literature but is good at any kind of sports played with a stick of some sorts that needs swinging (56). Susan knows her own mind, is self-reliant but lonely, living on the periphery of the boarding school community due to the uncannily noiseless way she moves and to her ability to fade from attention and be invisible in situations she wants to avoid.

6 It is clear from the very beginning that Pratchett aims to subvert the traditional figure of the 'teenage heroine,' pretty, naive and romantically inclined, and yet, Susan's plotline is that of a bildungsroman. She, however, is armed with sarcasm when confronted with the choice of following the skeletal rat or going back to bed. The former

> would be a stupid thing to do. Soppy people in books did that sort of thing. They ended up in some idiot world with goblins and feeble-minded talking animals. And they were such sad, wet girls. They always let things *happen* to them, without making any *effort*.

> They just went around saying things like 'My goodness me,' when it was obvious that any sensible human being could get the place properly organized. (*Soul Music* 49)

Susan's sense of duty prevails and decides to follow the Death of Rats to sort out a world that holds "too much fluffy thinking" (49), in other words, suffers from a lack of logic. While her parents did their utmost to minimize the influence of the occult in her world to counterbalance her ancestry, Susan has to learn the difference between real and logical in a crash course when she inherits the family business from her grandfather, the anthropomorphic representation of Death, who seems to suffer from depression and goes missing.

7 Discworld runs on magic, which has significant impact on the power of belief in a world with low reality stability. Human belief created the figure of the seven-foot-tall skeleton in a black robe, who takes a special interest in humans and one day went as far as to adopt an orphaned baby and allowed her to live in his domain. In *Mort*, Pratchett reveals that Death's adopted daughter Ysabell has inherited the ability to do her father's duty and this trait and more is passed down to Susan, too, who is irresistibly steered towards her grandfather's role, since on Discworld "belief makes a hollow place. Something has to roll in to fill it" (*Soul Music* 70). It does not take very long, however, for Susan to express her dissatisfaction with the system: "So … my grandfather was Death, and he just let nature take its course? When he could have done some good? That's *stupid*" (107), she states after freeing the second soul from his body.

8 Her third assignment takes her to Ankh-Morpork to the Mended Drum, where the life of a musician is supposed to end. However, the life of Imp the bard (a.k.a. Buddy) is altered by the gods in a very similar fashion to Susan's, in order to fulfil his promise to be the greatest musician ever: at the moment of his death his soul is taken over by Music, leaving a perplexed Susan with the certainty that it was she who was supposed to save the boy. While it is not difficult to spot the intentional reversal of roles – girl on white horse rides out to save boy who turns into a sleeping beauty by the end of the novel unless on stage and performing – Pratchett continues to challenge more than fairy-tale stereotypes in the parallel stories of Imp and Susan.

9 Devoting a little time now and then to teenager pastimes, such as hating one's boring name, complaining of hair and cheekbones, experimenting with one's image and creating the black dress decorated with lace that will be her attire whenever she appears as Death's granddaughter, Susan, "much more *aware* of the world" than the people who "went through it with their eyes shut and their brains set to 'simmer'" (*Soul Music* 111-2), makes grand plans. Confronting her grandfather about his reluctance to change the world and make it a better place, then disregarding his warning that the responsibility for the change is too heavy to bear, she decides to do justice: "She'd save lives. The good could be spared, and the bad could die young. It would all balance up, too." The idealism of youth, however, is tempered by her core characteristic, sensibility: "But of course it'd be childish […] to think that she could go in waving the scythe like a magic wand and turn the world into a better place overnight. It might take some time. So she should start in a small way and work up" (186).

10 As soon as Susan finds her purpose and starts exploring her power as Death, her attitude to conflicts and confrontations changes dramatically. Whereas she previously used to fade, wait till people forgot about her then slip away, she is now more than ready to take on the challenges the saving of Imp y Celyn presents and is exasperated by the position of insignificance girls are relegated to in traditional societies. She is first mistaken for one of the Tooth Fairy girls by the Archchancellor of Unseen University, whose patronizing attitude she flatly refuses, and then the student wizards further question her identity as Death. Worst of all, Imp himself does not take seriously her warning that the mysterious guitar has taken him over, declaring he will not take lessons from a tooth fairy and she probably does not exist anyway, leaving Susan temporarily speechless. Yet, she is adamant she is not "some stupid girl who couldn't cope" (*Soul Music* 130) and as one of the very few people who are not intimidated by Death himself, she defies his order, partly to "*show* him" and partly because of her conviction of being right, which in her mind overrules the danger: "As for responsibility, well … humans always made changes. That was what being human was all about" (186).

11 In "The Education of a Witch: Tiffany Aching, Hermione Granger, and Gendered Magic in Discworld and Potterworld," Janet Brennan Croft describes Ankh-Morpork as becoming not only multi-cultural but also experiencing an infiltration of women into traditionally male institutions such as the City Watch and into new fields such as the newspaper and clacks businesses. She cites Susan as an example, stating "even Death himself has a female apprentice" (132) and assigns this role to her in all the three novels she appears in. This is certainly the case in *Soul Music*, as she has a lot to learn, remember and come to terms with, but it is not only the arrogance of youth that makes her say "What did he [Death] know about anything? He'd never *lived*" (*Soul Music* 188). Susan has a valid point, one that in the end will make all the difference, but not before she experiences utter helplessness in the face of the mythical force of the Music: "I can't stop it! It's not *fair*! […] What's the good of being Death if you have to obey idiot rules all the time?" (364).

12 Luckily, grandfather Death is back in time to help out. He knows how to stop the music but he cannot start it again, which will result in the termination of the universe. Imp y Celyn is the one who can play the right chord but not without Susan's help. By the end of the novel he ought to have died at least three times, and as it is made clear in the finale, the Music itself wanted him dead in the carriage accident and be remembered as the greatest musician of all. While Death is able to offer immortality in his domain and an unchangeable existence, like that of his servant Albert's, Susan has a different power: she is able to give life, since life can be shared, and thus her disobedience turns out to be a blessing in disguise. Or it might be regarded as a perfectly logical consequence of her ability to remember everything, even the future – though her human mind rebels and protects her and she only glimpses it in dreams, premonitions and feelings – coupled with her humanity. It is this extra dimension, that Death, indeed, does not possess, that gives Susan a unique perspective on Discworld and a role complementary to her grandfather's. She is an apprentice in *Soul Music*, but Croft is wrong to automatically extend this subordinate position to Susan's role in *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*.

13 Besides the successful saving of the world, the end of *Soul Music* is also Susan's rite of passage. Over the course of the novel, she understands the reason why she is different and grows into herself. When confronted by the headmistress on her midnight return to the college, she stops herself from fading, as "there was no need for that. There had *never* been a need for that" (373), and gives the teacher a warm and friendly smile – emotions hardly characteristic of her dealings with humans up to then. But the hardest part comes in the loneliness of the dorm. Susan, who "could *think* sad thoughts" (308) when watching her parents die in the carriage accident but, surprisingly, felt nothing, now sobs for a long time as "there was a lot of catching up to do" (375). Her grandfather understands her predicament: Susan, who led a suspended life, as if in a limbo before the arrival of the Death of Rats, now needs to make a choice between immortality and humanity.

14 As it transpires from *Hogfather*, Susan opted for a normal life on Discworld. She distances herself from her occult ancestry and at the age of eighteen, we see her trying to persuade herself she is making good progress, as "she could go for *days* now without feeling anything other than entirely human" (105). She is a governess, taking practically the only job a known lady can expect to do, and despite her initial pride in "holding down a Real Job" (14), seventy pages later Susan admits it is not regarded as a proper job at all: "it was merely a way of passing the time until you did what every girl, or gel, was supposed to do in life, i.e., marry some man. It was understood that you were playing" (87). Nevertheless, while in *Soul Music* she was characterised by a kind of absence in the 'normal' world of the boarding school, Susan has a more mature presence now: no longer the fuzzy dandelion, her hair knots itself in a prim bun and she is well-respected by all the local monsters and the Unseen University wizards as well.

15 Susan works hard at being normal and is "looking forward to a real life, where normal things happen" (*Hogfather* 103), she also declares she hates her superior senses as they ruin one's life (92) but goes to the undead bar, Biers, when "the pressure of being normal got too much" (77). Her hostility towards her grandfather is also difficult to understand after their friendly parting at the end of *Soul Music*, though Susan's reluctance to sit on Death's horse Binky gives a clue as to the difficulty of her position: "I'll be out of the light and into the world beyond this one. I'll fall off the tightrope" (*Hogfather* 118). She finds immortality so easy in contrast but is aware of the danger that each time she rides the horse brings closer "the day when you could never get off and never forget" (261). With this in mind, no wonder Susan finds what initially seems to be no more than Death's Hogswatch prank exasperating.

16 Death, however, knows his granddaughter's mind and what buttons to push: relying on her sense of duty, curiosity and expressly forbidding her to try and find out what is going on is the infallible way to get Susan's attention. Death deliberately creates a situation very similar to the one his disappearance in *Soul Music* had inadvertently caused, with the aim of ensuring they are on the same team against the Auditors of reality, who want to eliminate humanity due to life's irregular nature compared to the law-abiding cosmos. He resorts to manipulation in order to break through Susan's

armour of normality because he needs her help: the Hogfather, a very significant focus of human belief, is none other than the old god of the winter solstice and he is under attack. If there is not enough belief in the Hogfather, the sun will fail to rise, and it falls to Susan to physically protect him from the Auditors, who want to steal his soul because in this case Death is powerless, as "THIS IS A HUMAN THING" (*Hogfather* 410).

17 Susan's pivotal role in *Hogfather* is not restricted to the scene above: her quest to find out what happened to the Hogfather takes her to the realm of the Tooth Fairy, where she is left to her own resources, as death does not exist in a world conceived by children and therefore, her grandfather cannot enter. By means of ancient magic involving the carefully collected teeth of generations and generations, it is in the Tooth Fairy's castle that the belief in the Hogfather is under attack, according to a plan devised by insane but all the more dangerous assassin, Teatime. On top of this, Susan experiences another drawback: upon entering, her talents inherited from her grandfather are also cancelled out.

> She couldn't step behind time, she couldn't fade into the background and now even her hair had let her down.
> She was normal. Here, she was what she'd always wanted to be.
> Bloody, bloody damn. (377)

18 Nevertheless, Susan has to face and stop Teatime as he has millions of children and adults under control and her only ally is the Tooth Fairy's tower itself, which scares the attackers to death, exploiting their own worst childhood memory. But the tower has no power over Teatime, whose warped mind constitutes a nightmare by itself, so it is Susan's turn to try her hand at psychological warfare. This is a completely new aspect of the character, one she cannot have inherited from Death, as he "didn't know many things about the human psyche" (426) and tends to misinterpret even relatively simple everyday communication. It is, however, very close if not identical to the Discworld witches' favourite weapon named 'headology' by the most skilful witch, Granny Weatherwax. By introducing this trait, Pratchett creates a link between Susan and gendered magic. The parallel is also strengthened by Susan's purpose, as "being a witch is all about doing for those who can't and speaking for those who have no voices" (Croft, "The Education of a Witch" 134).

19 Even though Susan's learning process continues in *Hogfather* and *Thief of Time*, there are several factors that point at her autonomy versus her position as Death's apprentice. Firstly, in *Soul Music* Susan almost instinctively does what she feels is right and has no idea that her help is instrumental in saving the world, whereas in *Hogfather* it is her astute detective work that takes her to the castle of the Tooth Fairy. In this case it is her decision to face Teatime to avert disaster and she knows that the whole world's tomorrow is at risk while protecting the Hogfather, though she still finds it hard to believe. Secondly, in *Hogfather* she performs tasks that Death cannot accomplish, as mentioned above, and in *Thief of Time* she is expressly asked by her grandfather to help fight the Auditors because "YOUR INSIGHT IS VALUABLE, YOU HAVE WAYS OF THINKING THAT WILL BE USEFUL. YOU CAN GO WHERE I CANNOT. I HAVE ONLY *SEEN* THE FUTURE, BUT YOU CAN CHANGE IT" (109). And last but not least,

she has skills unrelated to Death's powers: a keen analytical mind in human matters as well and a great grasp of psychology – completely alien to the young Susan in *Soul Music* but in *Thief of Time* successfully tested against someone as experienced as Nanny Ogg.

20 It is in *Thief of Time* that Pratchett discusses in more detail the nature of Susan's existence, described very briefly as mostly human by the Auditors in *Hogfather*. Up to this point, she is a unique Discworld character due to the combination of two halves of a powerful dichotomy: human and immortal, because "some genetics are passed on via the soul" (*Thief of Time* 94), providing her with an understanding of both worlds. This peculiar perspective allows her to "see things that were really there," which is "much harder than seeing things that *aren't* there" (103-4), but also makes relating to people problematic for her. While in *Hogfather,* she still complains of young men scared off by her hair rearranging itself, here she admits that she finds disconcerting that a tiny part of her considers people "as a temporary collection of atoms that would not be around in another few decades" (104). Therefore, it is not difficult to understand her interest in Lobsang Ludd, the son of a human and the anthropomorphic personification of Time, described by Death as mostly mortal, just like herself.

21 Susan, a few years older, has discarded the grey and dull "protective coloration" (*Hogfather* 426) of her governess attire and is now teaching school, with hair in a tight bun, all in black, cool and calm, moving like a tiger. "Young, but with an indefinable air of age about her" (*Thief of Time* 33), she is much more accepting of her heritage and shows more wisdom when using her skills. This time she is not tricked into helping, and yet, she feels she cannot completely trust her grandfather, since "he knew her weaknesses and he could wind her up and send her out into the world" (125), so her anger flares up again: "you're planning something and you're not even going to tell me, right?" (226). Pratchett uses the same dynamics to get Susan involved, although this time she is more than aware of the danger the Auditors pose: there is curiosity, a mystery to solve and, incidentally, the future of the world to save, or it would be Wednesday, 1 o'clock for eternity. One might think that she overreacts, considering the importance of the task she is given, but I believe her anger is more directed, on the one hand, at a situation that she cannot control, and on the other hand, towards her grandfather, who is able to keep secrets from her and treat her as if she was completely normal.

22 Although she still often wishes "she'd been born completely human and wholly normal" (*Thief of Time* 220), Susan does not like to lose her powers, and despite being described earlier as never showing embarrassment at *anything* by the headteacher, she finds it disconcerting how Nanny Ogg's "friendly little eyes could bore into yours" (230). As Pratchett and Briggs explain in *The New Discworld Companion*, the edge witch's job is more than herb gardens, medical potions and flying on a broomstick, as it involves the hard task of making decisions instead of the ordinary people living on their territories (274). Due to the fact that the edge witch's work is done "in that moment when boundary conditions apply – between life and death, light and dark, good and evil and, most dangerously of all, today and tomorrow" (19), Susan, whose very existence combines the first of these dichotomies and can disregard some of the others at will, has more in common with the plump old

woman as she would first think. Nanny Ogg, who perceives her as a "haughty little miss" with "a heap of trouble of her own" (333), is also impressed with her astuteness, and in the battle of wits Susan is the winner. She shows respect for the witch and does not use Death's commanding Voice on her to get the information she needs, as she did more than once in *Hogfather*. Susan reads her right: "there was, indeed, no way round Mrs Ogg. But there was another way […]. It went straight through the heart" (233). Susan understands the significance of Nanny Ogg's work and moral code, and heruse of headology ultimately pays off.

23 Pratchett, however, endows this "slightly built young woman," who by the events of *Thief of Time* has become a striking presence – "Miss Susan faded into the foreground. She stood out. Everything she stood in front of became nothing more than background" (288) – with physical prowess matching that of the heroes of old. In *Soul Music,* she prevents a cart with two trolls, a human and a dwarf in it from falling into the precipice, in *Hogfather* she slings the Oh God of Hangovers over her shoulder and runs to save him through the collapsing Castle of Bones, she is also able to ride a wild boar in a furious chase and by simply thrusting out her arm, palm first, lifts Teatime off his feet and over the rails in the Tooth Fairy's Castle. The inverted rescue theme stays with Susan in *Thief of Time* as well, as she has to see Lobsang to safety in Auditor-infested Ankh-Morpork, where she loses her special powers yet again but, luckily, her close combat skills remain.

24 What may have started as a humorous inversion of roles in *Soul Music* though not regarded by Andrew M. Butler in *The Pocket Essentials Terry Pratchett* as revolutionary in any way based on his observation that "Susan doesn't come across so much as Death in drag as a half-hearted Goth" (48), has evolved into a complex character who displays an incongruous array of qualities, traditionally branded as gender-specific. Susan, in fact, is a great example of Pratchett's aim, defined by Frances Donovan in "Was Terry Pratchett a Feminist?" as revealing "the absurdity of the cultural expectations of femininity while portraying the very real strength and value of women who buck those expectations" (Frances n.p.). Susan's build, style, passion for quality chocolate and way with children are definitely regarded as feminine qualities, while her physical strength, fearlessness, prowess with sword and keen analytical mind are traditionally considered masculine characteristics. Pratchett is composing a palimpsest here, but one that overturns both Roundworld and Discworld gender stereotypes. Susan's fate does not mirror that of Pratchett's most well-known adolescent heroine, Tiffany Aching, the young witch whose story follows the much more predictable pattern of a talented girl educated by older witches. While Tiffany loses her childish belief in magic and learns the rules she needs to practice witchcraft (Haberkorn and Reinhardt 54), her talent and gender are not questioned the way Susan's are. What is more, with the introduction of Myria LeJean, Auditor recently in possession of a human body, Pratchett also examines the bare bones of human existence, both physical and psychological, further challenging our concept of normalcy.

25 In my view, Pratchett's exploration of what makes us human can be traced back to the figure of Death, who is fascinated by humans, and cannot but be, as he explains in *Reaper Man*: "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" (264). In *Thief of Time,* Death elaborates on how being envisaged by humans inevitably entails taking on some aspects of humanity: "EVEN THE VERY BODY SHAPE FORCES UPON OUR MINDS A CERTAIN WAY OF OBSERVING THE UNIVERSE. WE PICK UP HUMAN TRAITS" (110), which, on a personal level, led to his adoption of Ysabell, to be followed by the birth of Susan. On a larger scale, his attachment to Discworld means he is ready to protect it even at the cost of breaking the laws of his existence through 'meddling,' as pointed out by Susan at the end of *Soul Music*. "PERHAPS THEY'RE SOMETIMES ONLY GUIDELINES" (371), he claims, arguing that "SOMETIMES THE WORLD NEEDS CHANGING" (372), attracting the attention of the universe and, presumably that of Azrael, "the Great Attractor, the Death of Universes, the beginning and end of time" (*Reaper Man* 264). Or, as it is a voice only he hears, it may be his conscience – there are signs pointing at him having one – asking: "So you're a rebel, little Death? Against what?" (*Soul Music* 378). Lacking a snappy answer, Death ignores the question, but the point to be noticed here is the similarity between Susan's and her grandfather's attitude and actions, which alludes to where her rebellious gene comes from.

26 The investigation of what it means to be human quite predictably branches out into the character of Susan, who has a unique perspective on the matter. [1] Her learning process continues over the course of the three novels, and she realizes that logical thinking does not equal 'human' and attempting to hide or conform to society's ideas of normalcy does not do the trick either. In *Hogfather* she understands that "HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN, TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE" (422) and her grandfather also reveals that people need to believe in things that are not true, like the big lies that are called mercy, justice or duty in order for them to become true. In *Thief of Time* part of her lesson comes from Nanny Ogg: "seeing things a human shouldn't have to see makes us human" (333), while the other part is delivered by History Monk Wen, who chides her for clinging to logic, which theme again leads to the character of Myria LeJean.

27 Pratchett deconstructs human existence with the introduction of an Auditor incarnated, for whom even breathing and moving its muscles to walk is not a natural, instinctive process. Auditors deny individuality and are the most extreme believers in logic, as their minds do not allow for any other approach to the universe. Hence their loathing of anything living that will not conform to strict laws, so humanity and other sapient species are, naturally, their top target. Myria is an anomaly: an Auditor who finds life and the human body it inhabits intriguing and enjoyable, goes against all the beliefs its intellect held for billions of years, finally fighting its own kind side by side with Susan.

28 The juxtaposition and interaction of the two characters allows Susan to experience the absolute lack of normality and to witness the emergence of some of the building blocks of personhood in Myria, whose name comes from Ephebian 'myrios,' meaning innumerable. While Lobsang needs to adjust to immortality and the viewpoint of a god, Myria, re-named as Unity by a sympathetic Susan, has to do the exact opposite: her encyclopaedic mind finds the complexities of human existence confusing and impossible to grasp. Susan has the same sympathy for Lobsang and helps him along

the way because of her own difficulty accepting her ancestry but, surprisingly, in the course of the three novels she shows common characteristics with the Auditors as well. In *Soul Music*, she claims it is her duty to sort out a world that "held too much fluffy thinking" (49), while in *Hogfather* the Auditors state almost exactly the same: "We have a duty to rid the universe of sloppy thinking" (119). As a schoolgirl she never understood why her classmates were so infuriatingly unreasonable as not to pick her for teams though she "explained […] how good she was, and demonstrated her skill, and pointed out just how stupid they were in not picking her" (*Soul Music* 57), logically but with as much social grace as Myria showed when claiming that Lu-Tze should be the one to sacrifice himself as he is old and does not have much time to live anyway.

29 Susan's relationship with humans has changed a lot after her decision to choose humanity over immortality, but some of her character traits are not helping. Logic still intrudes, for instance, in her evaluation of Lobsang's decision to go back and try to help his master, Lu-Tze, who was too slow to follow him when they had to race lighting to stop Jeremy from starting the glass clock. She calls Lobsang a hero in "the tone in which people say 'You idiot,'" explaining that

> 'Heroes have a very strange grasp of elementary maths […]. If you'd smashed the clock *before* it struck, everything would have been fine. Now the world has stopped and we've been invaded and we're probably all going to die, just because you stopped to help someone. I mean, very worthy and all that, but very, very … human.'
> She used the word as if she meant it to mean 'silly'. (*Thief of Time* 290)

At this point she even concedes that Lobsang is right when he sarcastically suggests she meant "cool calculating bastards" (290) are needed to save the world.

30 In some cases her analytical mind can also be a drawback and the sensibleness she was so proud of in *Soul Music* is later considered by part of her mind as "some kind of character flaw" (*Hogfather* 418), only to become a major one in *Thief of Time*, one she regrets as "it did not make you popular, or cheerful, and – this seemed to her to be the most unfair bit – it didn't even make you *right*" (341). In *Hogfather,* she already possesses a tiny part, "the inner baby-sitter" (417) who watched, explained and analysed her actions and feelings, while she bandaged the Hogfather's wounds and saw him metamorphose. In *Thief of Time,* this part seems to have already become dominant, as she continuously speaks to herself, analysing her experience of getting through the glass clock to Time's glass castle, to Lobsang's slight irritation. This section is remarkably similar to Myria's analysis of the reactions and workings of her body and the way it is linked to her mind, drawing a further parallel between the Auditors and Susan, who comes to the conclusion that "the human soul without the anchor of the body would end up, eventually, as something like an Auditor." The revelation that therefore Myria, "who was getting more firmly wrapped in flesh by the minute, was *something like a human*" (397, italics mine) follows, and Susan has to admit this definition fits not only Lobsang, who can materialise out of thin air, but also herself.

31 Susan, who has never felt completely at home in the human world, try as she might, seems far more normal when compared to Unity, who sadly concludes that "being human is incredibly difficult and cannot be mastered in one lifetime" (*Thief of Time* 408). Nevertheless, Susan also complains to

Wen, who in theory makes it "sound grand and simple," of "a world that's full of *complications*" (392) for the individual, betraying the insecurity of a human wrestling with the perspective of an immortal: even 800-year-old Lu-Tze, who has learned to read people and shows respect very sparingly, describes her as "a story that went back a very long way. […] This was someone to treat with respect" (363). This, however, does not mean that Susan is always right, as she finds out at her own expense: the meaning of Wen's cryptic answer "everything is as important as everything else" (392) dawns on her when she realizes that it is not a human trait to prioritise based on logic only. Susan's heartache after losing Lobsang, the only person who shares her particular position in the world, makes her admit she was wrong in her assessment of a hero's duty as superior to the individual's needs and emotions, a statement only to be reiterated later by Lu-Tze, for emphasis.

32 Despite the covert similarities between Susan and the Auditors' way of thinking, the strongest emotion she betrays in the course of the novels is anger so intensive that Lobsang is shocked and scared of her: "as if some secret place inside her boiled with wrath, and with the Auditors she let it out" (*Thief of Time* 322). This anger is directed at their ability to manipulate the human mind and the fact that as enemies of creativity they also cause people not to take responsibility or action. The battle she fights is for the good of humanity, something that is not at all on a typical Discworld hero's mind, but is very much like the witches' duty, whose moral standing is analysed in detail by Janet Brennan Croft in "Nice, Good, or Right: Faces of the Wise Woman in Terry Pratchett's 'Witches' Novels."

33 Even though in *Thief of Time* we see Susan pitting her wits against Nanny Ogg, their similarities have already been pointed out, and she does bear resemblance to the more reserved personality, self-assurance, practicality, uprightness and no-nonsense attitude of Granny Weatherwax, the Disc's greatest witch. The witch's calling, as summarized by Croft, "requires the strength to see the facts clearly and make the hard decisions that have to be made," which also involves taking the consequences. It is a calling to try "to help the world go right" ("Nice, Good, or Right" 156), be it as trivial matters as solving family disputes in the village or as serious as protecting the Kingdom of Lancre from elvish invasion in *Lords and Ladies* or from vampires in *Carpe Jugulum*. The lessons in humanity that Susan learns bring her closer to the position of the 'wise woman,' since her analytical abilities and innate sense of what is right and wrong needed to be "tempered by an understanding of human nature," something that characterises Pratchett's good witches, according to Croft ("Nice, Good, or Right" 159).

34 The fact that Susan has common characteristics with the Auditors as well as the witches not only emphasises the duality of her position, but also sheds light on the anger burning inside her. The total incompatibility of the lynchpin of the witches' moral code – the principle that they respect the individual as a moral agent and never ever treat them as an object (Croft, "Nice, Good, or Right" 161) – with the bodiless Auditors' denial of individuality as a form of existence is a powerful source of conflict, one that Susan, too experiences. As pointed out by Croft, Granny Weatherwax faces a similar dilemma, since evil runs in her family and she secretly fears her ambition to be remembered as the

greatest witch might turn her evil, but she knows she has a choice: she is strong enough to tell the darkness within herself, “I’ve fought you every day of my life and you’ll get no victory now” (*Carpe Jugulum* 191, qtd. in “Nice, Good, or Right” 158).

35 In my view, the parallel between Granny Weatherwax and Susan helps understand the inner conflict of the latter: she, too subconsciously fights the darkness inside. Her claim that she has never been afraid of anything “not really *afraid*” (*Thief of Time* 388), but feels anger instead, confirms this, since the most powerful unleashing of her fury is in *Thief of Time* against the Auditors dissecting human existence. The fact that she feels anger whenever her humanity is threatened can also be interpreted as evidence, as well as her conscious and sometimes self-restrictive embracing of her own humanity in the course of the novels. As a result of the lessons learned in *Thief of Time*, Susan realizes that her emotions do not have to be completely repressed and ends up defining herself as “only *mostly* logical” (428) – while Pratchett turns the illogical woman/logical man stereotype upside down and inside out, making her illogicalness an acquired characteristic.

36 In conclusion, I would like to argue for Susan Sto-Helit’s status as a hero in her own right, as a character who deserves to be mentioned alongside Pratchett’s other new palimpsest fantasy heroes, identified as Vimes and Carrot by Haberkorn. Even though Susan’s sarcasm and inherited knowledge exclude a comparison with the sharp but naive Carrot, who is an idealist and sticks to the letter of the law, her character shares significant traits with Vimes, who fights his inner demons, as well. While Susan protects the Discworld from the Auditors, a darkness coming from outside, Vimes, Captain of the Ank-Morpork City Watch “knows about the dark side of humanity, and he sees it as his job to watch out for it, to keep it in” (Haberkorn 332). He is aware of the fact that there is a need for “a second line of defense, not outside but inside – a wall keeps human nature at bay, keeps the darkness in, reduces violence to the last resort” (332). Besides their healthy disrespect for authority, analytical abilities and the nose of a detective, Susan and Vimes have another, far more momentous thing in common: they both know that finding a solution does not necessarily mean playing by the rules. Susan becomes a hero through rebellion: Pratchett has created a female character whose traits and story challenge gender-related stereotypes, true to the warning he gave in a 1985 speech:

> the fantasy world, in fact, is overdue for a visit from the Equal Opportunities people because, in the fantasy world, magic done by women is usually of poor quality, third-rate, negative stuff, while the wizards are usually cerebral, clever, powerful, and wise. (*A Slip of the Keyboard* 96)

What is more, he even makes sure that her very existence goes against a basic rule of human existence, mortality. Small wonder then that she rebels against unwritten, yet existential laws, such as death itself, in order to do the *right* thing.

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Notes

1) Shortly after finding out about his ancestry, Lobsang Ludd becomes the new anthropomorphic representation of Time, since he turns out to be mostly immortal, not quite like Susan.