'NAE KING! NAE QUIN! NAE LAIRD! NAE MASTER!': CHILDHOOD AGENCY IN TERRY PRATCHETT'S *THE WEE FREE MEN*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, a psychodynamic perspective informs the discussion of the ambivalence associated with individuation and growing up which manifests during middle childhood (from approximately 6 to 11 years of age). The author

contends that Terry Pratchett explores this ambivalence in his young adult novel, *The wee free men* (2003), in which his young, female protagonist, Tiffany Aching, must resolve the fears and anxieties that stem from her ambivalence in order to claim agency and complete the process of individuation from her childhood home. The author argues that Tiffany's ambivalence is most clearly reflected in her relationships with the two primary adult females in the novel, Granny Aching and the Fairy Queen, and suggests that the resolution of her ambivalence models resilience strategies for Pratchett's young readers who may be navigating this same problem in their own lives.

Keywords: Terry Pratchett, children's literature, latency stage ambivalence, children's fantasy, resilience strategies, psychodynamic developmental theory, Tiffany Aching

1. INTRODUCTION

In Terry Pratchett's young adult novel, *The wee free men* (2003, 2004; all references are from the 2004 edition listed in the reference list), the rallying cry of the pictsies (the eponymous wee free men themselves) is 'Nae king! Nae quin! Nae laird! Nae master! We willna be fooled again!', a cry that sums up their rebellion against authority, the rule of (any) law and their desire for self-definition and self-assertion. And, although she might not consciously think it herself, this statement encapsulates the predicament facing Pratchett's protagonist, Tiffany Aching: 9-year-old Tiffany's awareness of the world around her is broadening and before her lies the choice between independence, which requires that she separate herself from home and step into the outside world, and continuing dependence, which means remaining in the static space of childhood and relinquishing her claim to agency. I thus read this novel as charting Tiffany's struggle to decide between rebellion against or surrender to adult authority and her final emergence from the latency phase of middle childhood into independent adolescence; like the pictsies, she must decide to follow 'nae king', 'nae quin' and 'nae master' in order to come into her own.

Although Pratchett may once have seemed a risqué choice for academic study, since 2000 his work has begun to receive the scholarly attention it has, arguably, long merited. And one of the things that makes Pratchett's novels an increasingly attractive subject for scholars is that they encourage such diverse readings: a snapshot of recent studies quickly reveals the multifarious lenses through which his books have been read, from general discussions of fantasy (Deszcs 2002; Simpson 2011); children's literature (Baldry 2004; Baker 2006; Oziewicz 2008; Gruner 2009); and reading/textuality in the internet age (Mackey 2001; Evangelia 2011) to Shakespeare in popular culture (Brown 2009; Noane 2010; Clement 2013); the application of feminism to children's literature and general feminist readings (Brennan-Croft

2009; Schanoes 2009; Balay 2010); and the discussion of ethics, morality and power (Brennan-Croft 2008; Rayment 2010).

For the purposes of this article, however, I turn to a consideration of Pratchett's children's literature, and, more specifically, to his most recent young adult series, the Tiffany Aching sequence. For the most part, critics who have written about this series focus on its feminist aspects and Pratchett's criticism of the gendered roles available to young girls (Brennan-Croft 2008, 2009; Gruner 2009; Donaldson 2014). This aspect of Tiffany's experience is certainly foregrounded in the sequence but, as with all of Pratchett's books, there remains much more to discuss.

2. CHILDHOOD AMBIVALENCE TO GROWING UP

In this article the discussion focuses specifically on the first of Pratchett's Tiffany Aching books, *The wee free men* (2003, 2004). In this novel, 9-year-old Tiffany discovers that her world is only one of many, and that the borders between the worlds have to be defended by witches. When Tiffany's grandmother, Granny Aching (the hag o' the hills), dies, Tiffany's world becomes vulnerable to invasion by the evil Fairy Queen, who is reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen; she, too, steals children (particularly boy children) and takes them to her winter kingdom in which nothing either grows or ages. It falls to Tiffany to take responsibility for the Chalk Hills and defend her home, or have it slip into the death-like stasis of the Fairy Queen's reign. Given this pattern, I argue that this book explores the anxieties of the latency stage of middle childhood in which children, aged anywhere from six to 11, have to separate themselves from their home and parents and develop the autonomy necessary to act as independent agents in the broader society to which they belong. Very often children react with a profound ambivalence to the development of independence and I argue that Tiffany's dealings with Granny Aching and the Fairy Queen reflect the emotional conflict experienced by a child at this age. On the one hand, growing up is perceived as a death of sorts, accompanied by a profound sense of loss as the child must separate himself or herself from home and mother – encapsulated by Granny Aching's death and the resulting threat to Tiffany's world; and on the other hand, it is a heady coming-into-power, echoed in Tiffany's accepting the burden of agency and stepping into Granny Aching's position as the new hag o' the hills. And there is the Fairy Queen, whose promise of eternal childhood and a never-ending supply of 'sweeties' is both repulsive and attractive to the child who both fears and desires autonomy.

Throughout the article I draw specifically on a psychodynamic exploration of development in my discussion of the challenges of middle childhood and the ambivalence associated with growing up. I then trace how Tiffany resolves her ambivalence as the novel progresses, her decisions and actions effectively modelling

resilience strategies for Pratchett's younger readers which may enable them to navigate this same confusion in their own lives.

I find a psychodynamic perspective to be particularly useful for an analysis of this kind because of the approach to development that it advocates. Unlike previous theories of development, such as that espoused by Erikson in the 1950s – which influenced developmental studies well through the remainder of the twentieth century (Gilmore and Meersand 2014, 2) – psychodynamic theory suggests that, although people can attribute certain challenges and learning to specific ages, these challenges and lessons may recur throughout life as changes to people's environment and society require them to re-evaluate their prior learning and develop more sophisticated coping mechanisms. Gilmore and Meersand (2014, 2) explain that, while there is some controversy as to how and when re-learning occurs, (most) psychodynamic thinkers agree that

> the popular Eriksonian approach to development throughout the life cycle, with developmental tasks and challenges extending into old age is … insufficiently grounded in the consideration of mental reorganisations and internal maturational pressure characterising the first two decades of life. [And that t]hese critics feel that the term *development* should refer exclusively to a biologically driven progression toward the mature form and should be considered officially completed with the establishment of adult structures and the full array of adult capacities [original italics].

This means that learning and re-learning are probably at their most frenetic during the first 20 years of life and that childhood, specifically, demands the constant revision of acquired knowledge as children repeatedly navigate the developmental challenges and tasks of earlier stages which recur in more complex guises at later ages. As they get older, neurobiological development also allows for more sophisticated engagement with these tasks. Stern (1995, 192) sums this principle up succinctly when he writes that for psychodynamic thinkers life is a

> never-ending series of transformations [so that] the only difference between infancy – or adolescence, for that matter – and any other period or phase of lifespan is one of degree, that is, rate of internal change and rate of encountering drastically new context.

This seems like a common-sense observation for most people who know that they revisit old fears, anxieties and coping mechanisms as life progresses; but this may have specific implications for scholars who apply the principles of developmental psychology to their readings of children's literature. This is because, if the fears and anxieties usually associated with younger readers can and do recur later, this reveals a greater vulnerability in older children and adolescents and a need for literature to model a greater number of resilience strategies that address these earlier anxieties, as well as the ones usually associated with older age groups. I have discussed the influential model of development and requisite coping mechanisms proposed by psychotherapists Weisz, Sandler, Durlak and Anton (2005) in an earlier

article (Donaldson 2014) and so will mention it here only briefly: they discuss the anxieties experienced by young people in contemporary western society and propose using resilience strategies to better equip them for dealing with the world around them, advocating the creation of a culture aimed at children and youth that models 'appropriate resilience strategies in media that appeal to them' (Appleton 2008, 362). Interestingly, Gilmore and Meersand (2014, 6) also draw attention to the fact that the culture in which individuals are embedded is a crucial factor when it comes to development and coping: they suggest that the 'human environment' that influences development and the resolution of developmental crises 'extends beyond the immediate family to the ambient culture'. I could certainly argue that, from before the latency phase well through adolescence, an influential part of a young person's ambient culture is embedded in the artefacts of popular culture. Popular children's literature may thus be an excellent space in which to model resilience strategies which prepare young readers for the developmental challenges ahead of them.

3. RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

This is certainly the case in *The wee free men*: although Tiffany is nine and falls into the stage of middle childhood, her developmental crises in the novel can be traced back to the earlier anxieties of toddlerhood and the book thus models resilience strategies for coping with fears rooted in past experience as well as those brought on by immediate pressures. Very briefly these developmental crises come down to the fact that, during the latency phase (the terms latency phase and middle childhood can be used interchangeably), children are increasingly expected to become involved in activities external to the home; to compete with their peers; and to do all this independently of the support of 'home'. Because this engagement with the outside world is new to them, their self-esteem and sense of competence may be shaky and many children may therefore be overwhelmed by fear and feelings of having been 'pushed out into the world outside their home' (Knight 2005, 186). This brittleness is akin to, and may recall, that experienced by the toddler when he or she first begins to push away from the mother to develop autonomy, but is at the same time terrified of being abandoned. Because those first attempts to develop autonomy often reveal to the toddler how very helpless and small they are (Gilmore and Meersand 2014, 45), this may lead to the development of separation anxiety, a response which is evident in middle childhood too. As a toddler this anxiety is offset when the mother reappears and the child realises it will not be abandoned; during the latency phase, the best way to offset this fear of abandonment and defencelessness is to develop the competencies needed to succeed in the world outside the home. In my discussion of the novel, therefore, I acknowledge the earlier anxieties, discuss their resurfacing in middle childhood and foreground Tiffany's decisions and coping mechanisms in order to emphasise their usefulness as effective resilience strategies.

Before I move on to a discussion of the novel, however, it is necessary to explain very briefly that I use the terms 'child' and 'childhood' and refer to the developmental stages as though they have universal application because that is the approach taken in contemporary psychodynamic thinking, in which the 'modern perspective on development avoids linear concepts and refers instead to heirarchically ordered mental organisations that occur (…) in a relatively reliable way across individuals and across cultures (Abrams 1983; Galatzer-Levy 1995, 2004; Gilmore 2008)' (Gilmore and Meersand 2014, 6). Therefore, while psychodynamic practice is sensitive to the effect of socio-historical context on an individual's experience, the organising principle that describes universally occurring mental and social development at certain ages remains useful. It is also pertinent to point out that while I suggest that *The wee free men* may model certain resilience strategies for Pratchett's readers, there is by no means a 'universal child reader' and the fact that he draws so heavily on a rural English Midlands and Scottish culture to create the fantasy world of the Chalk might well alienate some readers. However, it is possible that willing child readers may be drawn into these books even if the context is alien to them because they relate to at least one aspect, if not more, of Tiffany's experience. Literacy theorists Lewis and Dockter (2011, 82) suggest that 'literature shapes identity only to the degree that the reading transaction (which includes the reader, the text, and context) involves a process of identification …, a connection with some aspect of the reader's identity and the text'. In this case, Tiffany's navigation of some of the anxieties universal to childhood may thus facilitate the connection with the text that Dockter and Lewis mention. Sheldrick-Ross (2011, 203) suggests much the same, writing that this is

> what readers do all the time as they read themselves into texts and read the texts back into their own lives. Research that focuses on the activity of readers rather than solely on the texts indicates that pleasure-readers are poachers: they opportunistically take up whatever speaks to their immediate lives, they forget or simply skip over the parts they don't find meaningful and they rewrite satisfactory endings. (And this) readerly agency makes it difficult to predict on the basis of the text itself what significance a particular reader will take from a text, whether colonising or liberating.

Given Pratchett's growing popularity, it may thus be hoped that the coping mechanisms he writes into his novels for younger readers are equipping a large audience of children and young adults to deal with the world around them.

As I suggested earlier, in *The wee free men*, Tiffany is on the cusp of adolescence and is ambivalent about the increasing independence and responsibility expected of her. Given this, it is telling that Pratchett very quickly establishes a world in which children are patronised and he foregrounds both Tiffany's awareness of this and her impatience with it. Encouraging her ambivalence, which is explored through her relationships with Granny Aching and the Fairy Queen, is thus her impatience to be acknowledged as an agent. This is typical of both toddlerhood and middle childhood,

the 'hallmark' trait of which is 'contradictory gestures and feelings (that) vividly (display) frustration, aggression and mounting ambivalence toward the mother, often demanding and simultaneously rejecting maternal contact' (Gilmore and Meersand 2014, 50). In this case, the 'mother' represents the dependence of early childhood, against which the older child must push in order to become independent. In the novel, Pratchett encourages the desire to be 'free of the mother' by foregrounding the controlling nature of the 'childhood world' and making it distasteful to Tiffany.

Pratchett characterises Tiffany as curious and smart; she enjoys learning and the sense of mastery it gives her. She learns the word 'gibbous' and pays attention to the moon, 'just so that she could say to herself: "Ah, I see the moon's looking very gibbous tonight"' (Pratchett 2004, 62), and is thrilled when she hears something strange because she can identify the sound as a 'susurrus' (12). She has access to one book of fiction, *The goode childe's book of faerie tales*, but readers are told she 'never really liked the book (because) (i)t seemed to her that it tried to tell her what to do and what to think' (62). The book has an obviously pedagogic and ideological agenda that means to instil the virtues of 'proper' childhood in its readers and Tiffany's scepticism thus indicates the successful stirrings of individuation. She is also discerning and observant enough to realise that the adults she knows are not always honest with either themselves or others regarding their motives. Furthermore, it is her ability to see the truth and her willingness to question things, the capacity for 'first sight and second thoughts' (and later third and fourth thoughts), that fits her for becoming a witch, something she very much wants. Tiffany's acquisition of insight and her capacity for both sophisticated observation and introspective evaluation of information is one of the major cognitive benchmarks of the latency phase (Mayes and Cohen 1996; Schukler 1999; Jemerin 2004) and Pratchett's readers should thus be able to identify with and enjoy the sense of mastery that accompanies her dawning understanding and criticism of the world. However, it is precisely this cognitive development that makes the condescension of adults so annoying. When Tiffany's world is threatened, Miss Tick (the witch who comes to find out what is happening on the Chalk) does not believe that Tiffany is equipped to deal with the situation; her response is: '"At that age? Impossible!"' (Pratchett 2004, 15). And Tiffany knows she cannot ask just any adult for help because they will think she is telling stories, as all imaginative children do (14). Finally, she turns to a teacher – the one person children are told they can usually trust – but he proves equally unhelpful:

> 'Zoology, eh? That's a big word isn't it?'
>
> 'No, actually it isn't,' said Tiffany. 'Patronising is a big word. Zoology is really quite short.'
>
> The teacher's eyes narrowed further. Children like Tiffany were bad news. (29)

These experiences would probably be familiar to Pratchett's readers and Tiffany's response to them thus becomes important. She could choose to believe the adults' condescending evaluation of her capabilities but, rather than waiting for adult

intervention and help, she takes responsibility for the Chalk: when Miss Tick leaves to fetch help, her frog says gloomily, '"There's no one to stop [the monsters]"' and Tiffany responds: '"There's me"' (79).

There are two points that are implicit here at the beginning of the novel. The first is that adults are not as superior to children as they pretend to be – and because Tiffany suspects this, she encourages a similar scepticism about adult superiority in Pratchett's readers. And the second is that agency requires that a person shoulder responsibility. Both of these are uncomfortable truths for a child to accept. However, where toddlers find it difficult to resolve their disappointment at the inability of the primary caregiver to 'fix everything', latency stage children are better able to cope with this betrayal because they can control their emotional response to the world. Again, older children's ability to think, to make sense of and to draw meaning from otherwise confusing circumstances, can become their strength (Sugarman 2003). And it is telling that this is the primary 'magical power' of Pratchett's witches: Miss Tick tells Tiffany that: 'A witch pays attention to everything that's going on. A witch uses her head. A witch is sure of herself' (35). These are 'powers' within the reach of Pratchett's readers; and although becoming an agent may be frightening, Pratchett suggests that it is preferable to being patronised in perpetuity.

4. TIFFANY's DESIRE TO BE A WITCH

That Tiffany wants to be a witch may reflect her 'wished-for self-image', an aspect of childhood experience (first proposed by Jacobsen in 1964 and explored further by Milrod in 1982) that begins in toddlerhood and is resolved naturally as the older child develops the agency and autonomy the toddler desires (Jacobsen 1964; Milrod 1982). These wishful self-images often begin as a desire to emulate parents who appear all-powerful to the toddler; however, in *The wee free men*, Tiffany's father and mother are, by and large, invisible and it is Granny Aching's presence that dominates the book even though she is dead. It is thus clear from the beginning of the novel that Granny Aching is the role model Tiffany looks up to and, although she may not have been called a witch by the people of the Chalk, for all intents and purposes, she was one – the Hag o' the Hills – because she did what a witch does: she took responsibility for things, '[speaking] up for things with no voices' (Pratchett 2004, 43) and making sure that right was done on the Chalk. Readers are also told that Tiffany wants to be a witch because 'she couldn't be the prince, and she'd never be the princess, and she didn't want to be a woodcutter, so she'd be the witch and know things, like Granny Aching' (38). Pratchett draws particular attention here to the fact that there are few roles for plain girls to play in society (princesses need blonde hair and blue eyes, or perhaps red hair and green eyes) but he also suggests that real agency is equated with 'knowing things', with being smart and perceiving the truth, not believing the lies society tells itself. This is a crucial point to make

during this stage of a child's life in which adult authority is still so influential and individuation hangs in the balance: agency means having the courage to think for yourself. Of all the characters in the Discworld, Pratchett's witches embody agency most precociously and for this novel, in which agency is so central a concern, it is telling that Tiffany wants to be a witch almost before her journey even begins, largely due to the influence of her grandmother.

It is thus interesting that Pratchett has Granny Aching die before the book begins because her death serves multiple purposes from the perspective of a discussion of latency-stage ambivalence. Gilmore and Meersand (2014, 162) write that during the latency stage the child experiences a

> deepening sense of separation from the parents [as] the unique intimacies of the earlier parent-child bond are relinquished and mourned. This painful process engenders both guilt and satisfaction [because] the latency child comes to terms with a diminished view of the parents while discovering his or her own newfound competencies.

And they draw particular attention to the fact that, while children may enjoy the developing sense of self that is 'separate and self-reliant', they are often also left feeling 'lonely and bereft' (Gilmore and Meersand 2014, 156) because of the necessary separation from parents. This feeling of Tiffany's being alone and bereft permeates *The wee free men* because events in the present are continually interrupted as Tiffany remembers things Granny did or said and the things she taught Tiffany. Granny's death thus becomes symbolic of the loss Tiffany is experiencing as she grows up, and because that death is also a physical and immutable separation from the one person who has been 'home' to her, agency seems a paltry thing to be gaining in her stead. Pratchett in no way sugar-coats the difficulties of individuation which is a painful thing for a child: when Granny dies, readers are told that: '[Tiffany] was seven and the world had ended' (Pratchett 2004, 151) and that 'in the years since then, everything had gone wrong' (132). The world as Tiffany has known it is gone and the pain she feels at the separation might almost be enough to make her turn from growing up and wish for the safety of never-ending childhood, and this is when the Fairy Queen makes her appearance.

5. THE FAIRY QUEEN

Thus, Granny's death ends life as Tiffany has known it, not only because the one person to whom she was special is gone but because there is no hag to defend the Chalk from invasion. Like other authors of children's fantasy, Pratchett uses fantastic scenarios as metaphors to reflect children's experience: as Tiffany stands on the threshold between childhood and adolescence, having lost her childhood 'home', there is a literal 'ripple in the walls of the world' (10) and the thinning of the veil allows nightmarish monsters to invade her home. The space that used to be safe for

her has been compromised. Pratchett thus suggests that stepping into the new world of adolescence (and looming adulthood) may be an overwhelming experience for a child, calling up all his or her childhood fears and horrors with no surety that the adult world will step in to help him or her.

However, the antidote to this fear lies partly in Miss Tick's explanation to Tiffany that the monsters are

> '[a]ll the things they lock away in those old stories. All those reasons why you shouldn't stray off the path, or open the forbidden door, or say the wrong word, or spill the salt. All the stories that gave children nightmares' (55).

In short, they are the '"creatures invented by adults to scare children away from dangerous places"' (55). This point is crucial because a child at this stage of his or her development, stepping across the threshold into a new world, may also be afraid specifically because adults have been warning him or her against the outside world, in the most terrifying terms they could probably muster, for most of the child's young life (for the child's own good, of course). Pratchett explicitly suggests here that children have less to fear than they believe they do because monsters are invented by adults in an effort to curb their agency. And it is thus equally important that Tiffany is not afraid of the monsters: when they appear, she stands and fights (usually with a big frying pan and mostly because she refuses to appear cowardly) and the stubborn ordinariness of her bravery models resilience against fear for Pratchett's readers. The only monster who does pose a threat is the Fairy Queen herself.

The Fairy Queen's realm floats around, attaching itself to other worlds in order to leech life from the dreams and fears of the inhabitants: no life is created in Fairyland, nothing grows and nothing ages – there is only perpetual winter. In this novel, Fairyland has latched onto the Chalk because the borders have weakened since Granny's death and the Fairy Queen has stolen two children: Roland, the Baron's son, and Wentworth, Tiffany's younger brother. I find it interesting that the Queen steals two boy children from the Chalk because this could almost be read as her taking Tiffany's animus hostage (animus being a Jungian term signifying the active, masculine part of a girl's psychological make-up). In rescuing these two boys, Tiffany therefore reclaims her animus and her ability to act with agency. Because Wentworth is a toddler, however, he may also be read as representing that part of Tiffany which does not want to grow up, at the same time as her impatience with him is an ironic nod to her ambivalence regarding remaining a child.

Readers are told that the Fairy Queen loves children but, while sweeties and the abrogation of responsibility might be attractive to a child, this is not the kind of 'love' he or she needs. The Fairy Queen represents the monstrous mother who blocks her child's attempts at autonomy in order to keep him or her bound to her and Fairyland is a stagnant, static space that enforces a never-ending childhood. The fact that Granny Aching is dead and has been supplanted by the evil Fairy Queen in

Tiffany's life is a motif typical to fairy tales (a genre Pratchett draws on extensively in this series) that may well support both the toddler and latency child's need to resolve his or her ambivalence regarding individuation (Knight 2005), specifically anger at and love for the mother; as Bettelheim (1978, 68) writes:

> The typical fairytale splitting of the mother into a good (usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother serves the child well [because] it is not only a means of preserving an internal all-good mother when the real mother is not all-good, but it also permits anger at this bad 'stepmother'.

This is precisely the manner in which Pratchett uses both Granny Aching and the Fairy Queen in the novel, allowing Tiffany to grapple with her desire to be independent without having to navigate the guilt children feel when they push their (good) mothers away. The fact that this pattern tends to be prevalent in fairy tales with female protagonists (e.g., Cinderella, Snow White, Vasalisa the Wise, Sleeping Beauty) is interesting because, as Olesker (1990) argues, girls are likely to be more sensitive to the responses and feelings of their mothers and may thus be more inhibited when it comes to individuation and claiming agency because they do not want to hurt their mothers' feelings. The fairy tale motif of the dead good mother and the evil stepmother may thus be a particularly useful model for young female readers in terms of helping them resolve the guilt they feel at their desire for independence.

6. TIFFANY's 'COMING INTO HER POWER'

Fighting the Fairy Queen is thus Tiffany's greatest challenge in the book, representing as it does the resolution of both the guilt and fear associated with claiming independence. Fortunately, Tiffany receives support and help from the pictsies, a band of small, blue warrior folk who themselves rebelled against the Fairy Queen and were expelled from Fairyland. Not only does their successful rebellion against the Fairy Queen give them insider knowledge that benefits Tiffany, but they may also play a role that ties in with the particular needs of latency stage development. With this in mind, it is significant that only Tiffany really sees the pictsies and has dealings with them because this may qualify them as 'imaginary companions', a phenomenon usually associated with younger children but the benefits of which may well extend into older childhood. Gilmore and Meersand (2014, 90) write that:

> Although the benefits to older children are less clear, pre-schoolers with imaginary companions manifest the following characteristics compared to peers without them: richer fantasy and play narratives, better developed communication skills and higher levels of social-emotional knowledge and competence, including theory of mind acquisition.

Significantly, theory of mind acquisition refers to the specific mental skills Tiffany displays in the novel: thinking, discernment and sophisticated observation. And, while Meersand and Gilmore do point out that these benefits pertain to pre-schoolers,

Tiffany is a 'pre-schooler' in the novel because she has yet to attend school. Imaginary companions provide support for children in that they provide a safe space in which children can develop the inter- and intra-personal skills necessary to navigate the social world beyond the home. The pictsies provide just such a space for Tiffany: as she interacts with them she practises her 'magic', trying on the role of the hag; she practises authority and learns what it does and does not involve; and she discovers that some of the responsibilities of growing up are not as frightening as she had expected they would be.

However, their help is also of a more practical nature, given that they go into battle with her and their Kelda (the alpha female who cares for her clan much like a queen bee) gives Tiffany insight into the Fairy Queen, and what growing up means. The Kelda specifically tells Tiffany that growing up cannot be all sweeties, as the Fairy Queen promises, but that hardship and pain are necessary if a person is to become strong; she says that, while Wentworth might want sweeties, '"what he needs is love an' care an' teachin' an' people sayin' "no" to him sometimes and things o' that nature. He needs to be growed up strong. He willnae get that fra' the Quin. He'll get sweeties. Forever"' (Pratchett 2004, 141). Again, on the surface this may seem to be precisely what a frightened child would want, but Pratchett very clearly characterises the stasis of the Queen as something bad and growing up as 'strengthening'. That he foregrounds the fact that children grow stronger, and therefore capable of facing their fears, as they get older is purposely aimed at offsetting the defencelessness the latency stage child feels at this point. Growing up will not be easy – Tiffany's pain at the loss of her grandmother is testament to that – but pain is necessary in order to grow into a person's strength. As the Kelda says, '"the Quin wouldnae harm a hair o' [Wentworth's] heid. And there's the evil of it"' (139).

Harking back to adults' condescending attitudes to children, this episode with the Queen also reminds Pratchett's readers that being treated 'like a child' can be annoying: when Tiffany finds Roland in Fairyland he tells her that the Queen told him to 'sing and dance and skip and play' because 'that's what children do' (226). Significantly, he refuses to do these things because he would 'feel like an idiot' (226). Pratchett simplifies the choice before Tiffany and his readers: deal with the fear, discover your strength and grow up, or be treated like 'an idiot' forever. When Tiffany confronts the Queen she is therefore facing that part of herself that might not want to grow up, but which is balanced by her frustration at being treated 'like a child'. Tellingly, Pratchett also equates the part of Tiffany that does not want to grow up with the part of her that is fearful, so that choosing not to grow up means being a coward. In Fairyland, Tiffany sees an old man who, like Roland, used to belong to the real world but chose to stay here. She says, he 'looked like someone who'd been frightened for so long it had become part of his life' (229), recognising that this is the fate of those who do not face their fears. And so, when she is terrified, she '[runs]

towards [the monster], raising the pan' (188) because the alternative is far more distasteful to her.

But Tiffany's final confrontation with the Queen is markedly different from those with the fairy tale monsters she knows she can beat. They were the made-up monsters Miss Tick talked about earlier, and are easily identified by readers as illusions. Now, however, the Queen plays on Tiffany's very real insecurities and fans her doubts that she can survive the world, undermining Tiffany's fledgling sense of mastery and 'preparedness': '"It's so sad," she continued. "You dream that you are strong, sensible, logical … the kind of person who always has a bit of string"' (278). And Tiffany is drawn in because 'what there was about the Queen's voice was this: it said, in a friendly, understanding way, that she was right and you were wrong. And this wasn't your fault, exactly' (235). The Queen thus voices the sensible, caring, authoritative, adult doubts that children are equipped to handle the real world, reminding Tiffany that she is, after all, merely a defenceless child. She manipulates Tiffany into believing that it would be better to let her (and adults) control things and, as Tiffany surrenders to the Queen's logic, snow begins to fall on the Chalk and the real world is swallowed by the wintery stasis of Fairyland.

But as Tiffany sinks into a death-like surrender to the Queen, something inside her rises in rebellion: that part of her that is Granny Aching's heir. And this brings readers back to the value of Granny Aching's death: because Granny is no longer alive, she exists only in Tiffany's potent memories of her – which means that she can be, and has been, absorbed into Tiffany's make-up. Where Tiffany may initially have wanted to emulate her grandmother, reflected in the wished-for-self-image, now, because Granny Aching is no longer a separate person, Tiffany can embody, can incarnate, Granny's strengths and power so that they are her own. Pratchett seems to suggest that the loss experienced in childhood as children's relationship to their parents changes and as individuation leads to a sense of isolation, can be offset by the recognition that children's parents, their family, are embedded in them: children find within themselves the adult strength and potential of their parents. This idea is expressed very clearly in Tiffany's realisation at the very end of the book. Earlier, when discussing Granny Aching's death, Tiffany says that 'Granny Aching, who always said that the hills were in her bones now had her bones in the hills' (109). And now, as she lies dying, the narrator tells readers:

> Silence covered Tiffany, and she drew it into herself. The silence smelled of sheep, and turpentine, and tobacco. And then … came movement, as if she was falling through the ground, very fast' and she realises, 'The land is in my bones.' (280)

Tiffany has always associated Granny with silence and these scents and when she draws these into herself, she draws into herself the ability to be the witch Granny was: the potential is in her very bones, just waiting for her to claim it as her own and Tiffany realises that '[Granny] never left me.' (291)

In that moment Tiffany claims her birthright, recognising the potential for adult authority in herself and the narrator continues:

> The wheel of stars and years, of space and time, locked into place. She knew exactly where she was, and who she was, and what she was. She swung a hand. The Queen tried to stop her, but she might as well have tried to stop a wheel of years. Tiffany's hand caught her face and knocked her off her feet. (290–291)

Because the Queen draws all her power from Tiffany's fears, which are rooted in her insecurities, when Tiffany is finally sure of who she is, the Queen's authority unravels and Tiffany defeats her. In this final scene, Pratchett thus asks readers to really consider the source of their fears because those fears may not survive objective scrutiny, as Tiffany's do not. It is also interesting that the moment of Tiffany's 'coming into her power' is described as a 'wheel of stars and years [locking] into place' and her hand is invested with the power of 'a wheel of years' when she hits the Queen, In these images Pratchett foregrounds the importance of time and passing years, suggesting that strength comes as time passes and only if children allow time to do its work in them can they claim the strength that comes from growing up. This passage thus encourages a subtle and powerful symbolic understanding to occur between readers and the text: aging is not something children need to fear because the process itself will strengthen them, equipping them to deal with the challenges ahead and their power will come from the force of years that gathers in them.

It is also important that, once again, Pratchett draws attention to the fact that most fears are illusory, reminding readers that what they fear may often appear far worse than it is. In this case, once Tiffany has defeated the Fairy Queen, the Queen is diminished and appears in her real form: a pathetic little monkey. Tiffany pities the Queen, and banishes her from the Chalk. Pratchett's readers may emulate Tiffany's actions here, absorbing the resilience strategies necessary for facing and banishing their fears in the real world because, as Pratchett suggests, the greatest power at their disposal is clear-sightedness and objective thinking, skills that they have, even if they need to be honed.

7. CONCLUSION

In this reading of *The wee free men*, I have focused on Pratchett's exploration of the fears that arise during the latency stage: the fear of growing up; the fear of not growing up; nervousness about the world outside; and the guilt associated with separation from the mother. I have argued that he sets out to undermine the monstrosity of the outside world and equip his readers with the savvy clear-sightedness necessary to navigate their fears. He leaves readers with this final thought: when events have drawn to a close and Miss Tick finally arrives with the no-longer-needed help, Tiffany says to her: "'I worked it out. This is the school, isn't it? The magic place? The world. Here. And you don't realise it until you look'" (303). Tiffany thought it would take

a special 'school for witches' to learn the magic necessary to survive the world, but Pratchett leaves readers with this final truth: the real world is the magical school and they, like Tiffany, will learn everything they need to survive if they choose to *live* and do not hide from the things that frighten them. They do not need magic to survive, just ordinary courage. Individuation thus requires that Pratchett's readers, like Tiffany, separate themselves from home and the safety net of adult authority: Tiffany rebels against the adult authority of the Fairy Queen; faces the monsters created by adults to keep her from stepping beyond the door; and begins the process of her individuation. And, like the pictsies, 'nae king', 'nae queen' and 'nae master' will fool her again.

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