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‘THE SONG REMAINS’: NECESSITY OF FICTION IN TERRY PRATCHETT’S *THE LAST HERO*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the novel *The Last Hero: A Discworld Fable* by Terry Pratchett. In this essay, I argue that Pratchett's work operates as a parody of traditional conventions of fantasy with the final intention of asserting the importance of stories of heroes and, by extension, of fiction itself. In this study, the novel is analysed with the aid of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*. Campbell's work helps us identify the usual structure and motifs of heroic narratives and to discern how they appear in the novel. McHale's study is used to demonstrate how these motifs are altered to create a parody. In the conclusion, I will argue that, despite this use of parody (or precisely thanks to it), the novel draws attention to the continuing necessity of fantasy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Discworld

Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* is a comic fantasy series that takes place in a fictional universe of the same name. The world, shaped in the form of a flat disc, is set on the backs of four enormous elephants, which in turn stand on the shell of a giant turtle travelling through space. At the time of the author's death in 2015, more than forty novels and several short stories located in the Discworld had been published.

Discworld series is renowned for making frequent references to other literary works and traditional narratives, from specific characters or quotes to conventional motifs. These allusions come from very different sources, but they are generally taken from fantastic texts (*The Colour of Magic*, *The Light Fantastic*), folktales and fairy tales (*Witches Abroad*). *Discworld* books exploit typical clichés and themes of the fantasy genre, using a humorous tone to parody the conventions shared by these stories —as can be seen in the inscription of the 8th *Discworld* novel *Guards! Guards*!:

> They may be called the Palace Guard, the City Guard, or the Patrol. Whatever the name, their purpose in any work of heroic fantasy is identical: it is, round about Chapter Three (or ten minutes into the film) to rush into the room, attack the hero one at a time, and be slaughtered. No one ever asks them if they want to.
>
> This book is dedicated to those fine men.

But references are not limited to traditional fantasy. *Discworld* works often feature elements from other related genres, such as mythology (*The Last Hero*), cosmic horror (*The Colour of Magic*) or vampire and werewolf tales (*Carpe Jugulum, The Fifth Elephant*). Some of the *Discworld* novels are based on a specific book or story and follow loosely the plot, such as Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (*Maskerade*) or the legend of Faust (~~*Faust*~~ *Eric*); although they function as parodies too since the Discworld versions tend to

introduce humorous elements that alter the original story. We can find an example in the beginning of the 6th Discworld novel, *Wyrd Sisters*, whose plot borrows elements from a number of Shakespeare's plays. As *Macbeth*, it opens with three witches discussing their next reunion:

> The wind howled. Lightning stabbed at the earth erratically, like an inefficient assassin. Thunder rolled back and forth across the dark, rain-lashed hills.
>
> The night was as black as the inside of a cat. It was the kind of night, you could believe, on which gods moved men as though they were pawns on the chessboard of fate. In the middle of this elemental storm a fire gleamed among the dripping furze bushes like the madness in a weasel's eye. It illuminated three hunched figures. As the cauldron bubbled an eldritch voice shrieked: 'When shall we three meet again?'
>
> There was a pause.
>
> Finally another voice said, in far more ordinary tones: 'Well, I can do next Tuesday.' (5)

In addition to mocking fantasy conventions or acting as a parody of renowned literary works, Discworld novels often offer a satirical criticism of society. Through a humoristic view, the series tackles a great range of cultural and political themes that are in fact polemic real-world issues. Regarding social discrimination, there can be found works that deal with racism (*Jingo, Thud!*), feminism (*Equal Rites*, *Monstrous Regiment*) and religion (*Small Gods*, *Pyramids*). Political conflicts, including warfare or revolutions, are also featured in the *Discworld* novels (*Monstrous Regiment*, *Night Guard*). Technological advances that contribute to socioeconomic changes appear in novels that deal with the introduction of the postal service (*Going Postal*) or the printing press (*The Truth*). Other lighter cultural issues concern the popularization of different forms of entertainment, such as the cinema (*Moving Pictures*), football (*Unseen Academicals*) or rock music (*Soul Music*).

In short, *Discworld* novels are an eclectic amalgamation that encompasses from traditional fantasy clichés to contemporary politics, normally addressed from a humorous point of view. These themes do not only concern the Discworld realm, but can be regarded in

an analogy with the real world —in which case they can be considered to offer a social commentary.

1.2 The Last Hero

The novel that concerns this study is the 27th book in the *Discworld* series, Pratchett's *The Last Hero: A Discworld Fable*. For the sake of clarification while analysing the work, a summary of the plot follows.

The novel narrates the story of Cohen the Barbarian and his Silver Horde, a group of veteran heroes that blame the gods of the Discworld for allowing them to grow old. Looking for revenge, they travel to the gods' residence, the mountain of Dunmanifestin, with the intention of eliminating them. According to their plan, just as the first hero of the Discworld arose when he stole fire from the gods —a reference to the Greek legend of Prometheus—, they will return this fire —namely, in the form of explosives that will destroy both the mountain and the gods. They also bribe a minstrel to accompany them, so he can compose the saga of how they died in the explosion while ending the gods.

Unfortunately enough, the mountain of Dunmanifestin is also a powerful centre of magic. To have a detonation in it would severely disturb the balance of all nature; and the Discworld, which needs magic to exist, would be destroyed. The city of Ankh-Morpork is appointed to stop them and prevent the world's annihilation. As they must reach the mountain before the Silver Horde does, Ankh-Morpork inhabitants build a spacecraft propelled by dragons that allow them to fly swiftly around the Discworld.

In the spacecraft, the *Kite,* travel its inventor, Leonard da Quirm; a member of the City Watch, Captain Carrot; and a mediocre wizard who knows Cohen, Rincewind. They arrive at Dunmanifestin in time to attempt to reason with the Silver Horde. Cohen does not yield, resolved to end the world if that is what it takes to annihilate the gods. The minstrel then sadly remarks that, if the Discworld is destroyed, there will not be people to hear their saga, or to hear any more hero stories at all. This is the only argument that persuades the Silver Horde not to destroy Dunmanifestin. But by then, the explosives have already been ignited. Cohen and the Silver Horde carry them to a safe place, dying in the explosion but avoiding the destruction of Dunmanifestin and the Discworld.

After the Silver Horde's death, the gods honour them with a feast arranged for dead warriors, where they can spend eternity fighting and eating. However, the Horde reject it, choosing instead to steal some immortal horses and to travel through the stars discovering new worlds. In turn, the minstrel —whose name is never mentioned in the story—, after discarding the rubies that Cohen and the Silver Horde gave him as a bribe, will nevertheless compose the saga.

As tends to be the case in *Discworld* series, *The Last Hero* uses a humorous tone to exploit clichés and motifs of fantasy tradition. However, although the story takes place in an invented fantastic dimension, there are multiple allusions to the literary tradition —with special emphasis on Greek mythology— and historical events and legends from our real world. The different sources for the references appearing in *The Last Hero* make the novel difficult to classify in the heroic or fantasy genre. What is more, it could be considered that these constant allusions to our history jeopardise the fiction constructed in the Discworld. Do these incongruities disturb the narration so much that it is impossible for readers to continue believing in the invented world?

It is the intention of this paper to explore these issues. The aim is to argue that, despite the constant parody of heroic motifs, the story told in *The Last Hero* can be considered to follow the pattern of classical myths. The insertion of real-world references helps to link this work of fiction with, rather than disassociate it from, a fantasy and mythological tradition. The final consequence is that *The Last Hero* establishes a parallel between the fictional dimension and the real world, defending the importance and the necessity of fiction in the latter.

In order to prove these statements, it will first be necessary to discern whether it is pertinent to class this fictional work in the heroic genre. For this analysis we employ the work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by mythographer Joseph Campbell, a study that aims to outline the supreme structure of all traditional myths —named the *monomyth*. We will then examine the plot and themes featured in the *The Last Hero*, so we can discern how closely they mirror the narrative layout generally followed by the mythological genre.

Next, we will analyse in which ways the humorous view of fantasy clichés and references to real-world features may estrange the text from the monomyth. To accomplish

this, we employ *Postmodernist Fiction* by literary critic Brian McHale, a work which describes postmodernist techniques and how they may bring into question the ontology of a fictional world. We will examine those which appear in *The Last Hero* and study the effect they achieve regarding the text and the reader's view of the story.

2. CAMPBELL's THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES

The Hero with a Thousand Faces is a work of comparative mythology by mythographer Joseph Campbell that aims to represent the central pattern adhered to by all mythological and heroic stories. Campbell defends that creation of myths is instinctive in the human being: through all communities we find stories and ceremonies that help humanity to cope with the transcendental landmarks of life and the transformation phases of human development usually represented by the rites of passage (6). And, as he notes, the way these myths are represented does not seem culturally bound or exclusive to a particular society. There are patterns in the tales, common symbols that appear in stories of different ages and civilizations. The reason why myths are replicated, says Campbell, is that they are not casually developed: for 'the symbols of mythology […] are spontaneous productions of the psyche'; and, as such, 'they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently repressed' (ib.1-2). As stories and myths emerge from the subconscious mind, the indicators that form them are repeated through cultures, as all human beings share the same process of self-development.

Using modern psychoanalysis —mainly Jung— as a means to approach these symbols, and by gathering myths and folktales of the world to establish parallels, Campbell is able to develop the concept of monomyth: a basic pattern for myths, composed by those constant icons present in rituals and stories worldwide.

We will now expand on the archetypical progression of the hero and other classic figures of the monomyth. Later they will be compared with the main characters appearing in *The Last Hero* to ascertain whether this novel could be considered to follow the mythic template described by Campbell.

2.1 The Hero. Path of the Hero

The hero, states Campbell, will not have always been a hero. An ordinary person, with no special abilities whatsoever, must suffer a transformation from a mundane upbringing to a hero. Such a metamorphosis, fittingly, can only be achieved through a rebirth (ib.11). The hero will abandon the social constructs and communal boundaries that have been imprinted onto him and withdraw to his basic core, the subconscious mind. Ingrained in the inner self, the hero will find the unlimited potential of the human being.[1]

With this boundless capacity at his service, the hero will be able to avoid getting overly entangled in the troubles that threaten the ordinary world, as they should be interpreted as just consequences. The true origin of any of these difficulties must instead be sought in the archetypes, the universal quandaries that are common to all human beings —be it afflictions or solutions. As stated by Campbell, 'the hero […] is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms' (ib.14). Consequently, to be a hero does not simply mean to possess benign qualities such as courage or kindness: on the contrary, heroes can be quite despicable or possessors of questionable morals (ib.35). For Campbell, to be a hero means to transcend and directly battle the foundations of these predicaments, originated in the symbols inherent in the psyche. Only through this process will the hero be able to teach his peers not to focus on petty struggles and bring about a complete, in-depth renewal of society. For that reason, the hero must be willing to abandon all his personal goals, accept submission to this public mission and only pursue causes that go beyond his own selfish motives. This compliance with a responsibility beyond his egoistic motivations will become his purpose in life (ib.11).

This transformation from a self-centred individual to a hero committed to a cause can be achieved by following a process equivalent to that of the rites of passage —*separation–initiation – return*—; which may in turn be considered the foundation of the archetypical path of the mythological hero (ib.23). We will now describe each of these stages individually.

[1] Although generic masculine pronouns have been used for the hero throughout this paper's study of the monomyth, the hero can be embodied by any human being, no matter their gender.

2.1.1 Separation

Separation from the known world marks the beginning of the hero. The life of an ordinary person is disturbed: may it be through the summoning of a herald to a great quest, may it be by an accidental blunder that will catapult this person out of his customary life, or even by a deliberate decision responding to a crisis that has arisen in his community. No matter how, he receives what Campbell designates as the 'call to adventure', a signal indicating the existence of a region foreign to his familiar limits (ib.42). 'Destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown', writes Campbell (ib.48). The hero will be attracted onto this yet unexplored world, starting to glimpse that abandoning his mundane existence may be the initiation to a new fate, but without fully comprehending the potential that may lie within him or in this new land (ib.42).

Sometimes, the common person tries to refuse the call to adventure. Selfishly, he may try to continue with his familiar life, not willing to give up his personal interests and submit to a greater quest. In such a case, the signals inviting him to discover the unfamiliar new zone may chase him and increase in force, forever in his path until he complies with the call to adventure and follows it to his destiny (ib.46). But if he systematically refuses the call, he will continue being an ordinary person, never transcending as a hero. He will remain a victim of the circumstances and problems attached to his society, still waiting for the hero that will rescue them (ib.49).

If or when the adventurer is willing to follow the call, he will have to pass through a threshold, the entry to the unknown zone. The threshold may be defended by guardians, the protective figures that mark the horizons of the familiar world and prevent common people from venturing into the dangerous, mysterious land of the unknown. The hero will have to defy them if he wants to access this new territory (ib.64). The crossing of the threshold signifies the death of the adventurer, either metaphorical or literal. It is necessary for the hero to be destroyed so he can abandon his old system of values. Once there is nothing left of the individual, he will be able to be reborn, unlocking in the process the unlimited potential that lies within him. 'The passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation', writes Campbell. 'The hero goes inward to be born again' (ib.77).

2.1.2 Initiation

Once the threshold has been crossed, the hero will be put to the test by having to overcome several trials (ib.81). With each trial surpassed, he will successively destroy the social boundaries constructed in him. When he loses all that was left of his old form and the individual that he was before he undertook his quest has disappeared, he will have achieved absolute knowledge. With no human bounds to limit him, he will be able to access the unlimited capacity that lies within all human beings. He will have become a superior man. 'This godlike being is a pattern of the divine state to which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance. This is the release potential within us all, and which anyone can attain –through herohood' (ib.127). Because the knowledge that he has reached is present in every individual, he will be the representation of all humanity. The common world will be improved, completed by his mere presence; and the ordinary person will find solace in his existence (ib.129).

In this final stage of his adventure, the hero is equal to the gods that represent the highest power of his world. The hero may seek them, not looking for a confrontation or their help, but because they are the keepers of the supreme boon: the gift of an eternal life (ib.155). The gods grant their boons according to the wisdom of the petition and the motives that move the supplicants that solicit them. If the person asking the gods for a favour is not worthy enough, he will receive a lesser or even damaging boon in exchange for his efforts. However, the boon will be conceded to a deserving hero: the one who searches for eternal life not for egoistic motives or to enlarge his own existence; but with the purpose of expanding the horizons of his knowledge, to behold human life and its trivial motivations with the abstract, boundless view of the infinite (ib.161).

If the gods, in an excess of concern or mistrust, do not grant the ultimate boon to the meriting hero, they will take the form of evil, greedy creatures. The hero must then deceive them to obtain the boon which rightfully belongs to him (ib.155).

2.1.3. Return

Once the adventure is finished, the hero returns to the community he left to transmit the knowledge that he has acquired during his quest. Sometimes the hero may be overwhelmed by the responsibility and refuses this return and its positive consequences —the transformation and revitalization of his original society (ib.167). But if the hero has decided to return and counts on the sympathies of the gods, they may help him in his journey back home. If the gods do not desire this return or if the hero has taken a boon from them against their desires, his comeback is a frantic pursuit, complicated with magical obstructions and evasion.

The knowledge that the hero needs to transmit to humanity is that divine and human possess the same essence and are two different forms of the same world. To be able to transcend the frontiers between them, it is necessary to eliminate the social constructs and individual limitations that have been forged within them. Only then will humanity be able to access both dimensions without suffering any harm, as the hero has done (ib.188). However, mankind will not easily accept the mind-shattering lesson. The society that the hero encounters is engrossed in the minor problems expected of the human world, and it may not be willing to voluntarily suffer self-annihilation as individuals to access the abstract, superior dimension. The hero may abandon the task of enlightening his peers, finding it impossible to adapt his infinite, boundless principles to the trivial matters of a human community (ib.189). Soon a new hero will be called upon to renew the knowledge needed by society to rise above and transcend its limited horizon.

2.2 Other figures of the monomyth

The hero is not alone in his path. Multiple personalities, some friendly, some hostile, will appear during his journey. In the following sections we will briefly examine some of the secondary figures of the monomyth: the Goddess as helper and guide of the hero, the supernatural aid that supports the hero and the disciple of the hero. We have separated these figures from their original appearance in the hero's monomyth to allow a better study of their features, as they also constitute archetypical characters in his journey.

2.2.1 Supernatural Aid

The hero that follows the call to adventure will find that there is a safeguarding force protecting him. Typically, it is a physical entity, often appearing in the form of a crone or old man that travels with the hero and supplies him with magical objects (ib.57).

This helpful figure represents the assurance that the universe assists the hero: his superior nature, different to the one of the common man, is recognised and rewarded. He will find that, if he is confident in his own power, an unknown energy will support him constantly during his trials. 'The hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side: Mother Nature herself supports the mighty task', states Campbell. 'One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear' (ib.59).

2.2.3 The Goddess

During the successive trials that the hero has to overcome he may encounter the goddess. She is the representation of all that is good in the universe, every prize that will be awarded to the hero for his sacrifices and triumphs during the trials. In this benign face, she represents life, the facet of the Mother of the Universe that looks after her children (ib.92). However, at the same time, she represents death, for a destructive force that ends life is necessary to engender a new cycle of existence. The hero is supposed to accept and love both facets of the goddess: she cannot be regarded either as 'benevolent' or 'cruel', but as a personification of nature, moved only by cycles of life and death (ib.95).

Only heroes capable of accepting this double nature will be able to see her as the benign figure; for the undeserving ones, she will only show her damaging side or appear as a lesser figure. However, if the hero is worthy, she will be his inspiration and guide during his trials, symbolising the unlimited potential inherent in all human beings and that the hero is trying to unlock. 'Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know', states Campbell (ib.97). As the hero

advances in his understanding, she will be able to show herself to him in a higher and more powerful form; if he reaches total knowledge, he will be able to look up to her as an equal.[2]

2.2.4 The Disciple

The hero, who through his journey has become able to cross the borders between the human and divine worlds, must teach his disciples how to transcend their ordinary human limits. (ib.15). This greater insight, not limited by human boundaries, may only be reached when the follower of the hero yields to a public cause, as the hero did before him. In the pursuit of his master, the disciple will have to abandon his motivations and life, suffering the self-annihilation necessary to access the infinite potential without trivial boundaries to limit him. He will become an anonymous presence, subordinated to the enlightenment transmitted by the master (ib.205).

[2] It could be criticised that this conception of the feminine figure might be a limited one. The representation of the woman either as a temptress or as a protective goddess may appear restricted if compared with more active female characters; i.e., those who are the centre of the action or the performer of the deeds. However, Campbell's model has been chosen primarily to delve into the general journey of the hero, even though some of the figures of this path could be questioned. Consequently, we will take this basic pattern of myths as legitimate, leaving aside the possible polemics it may incur.

3. PRATCHETT AND THE MYTH

In the 22nd *Discworld* novel, *The Last Continent*, Death —a recurrent character in *Discworld* series—muses on how Rincewind's cowardly behaviour differs from the expected heroic nature. Furthermore, Death's reflections hint to his awareness that, as a norm, the destiny of the hero demands his return to his people:

> Death was familiar with the concept of the eternal, ever-renewed hero, the champion with a thousand faces. He'd refrained from commenting. He met heroes frequently, generally surrounded by, and this was important, the dead bodies of *very nearly* all their enemies and saying, 'Vot the hell shust happened?' Whether there was some arrangement that allowed them to come back again afterwards was not something he would be drawn on.
>
> But he pondered whether, if this creature *did* exist, it was somehow balanced by the eternal coward. The hero with a thousand retreating backs, perhaps. (57-58)

It is not farfetched to venture that in this paragraph Pratchett is making a not-so-subtle allusion to Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* The fact that *Discworld* series makes direct reference to the renowned study on the monomyth can be taken as further proof of the inspiration that *Discworld* series takes from themes and motifs of ancient myths, to the point of resorting to the ultimate heroic model in order to better mock them.

Similarly, *The Last Hero* will too replicate Campbell's pattern of heroic narratives in its depiction of the characters and their actions. In the next sections, we will analyse how Cohen and the Silver Horde fill the roles of veteran heroes that have fulfilled all steps of the monomyth. In turn, Captain Carrot and Rincewind embody the new heroes that receive the call of adventure —with the proviso that Rincewind follows this call against his will, thus suffering the consequences of being a reluctant hero. Subsidiary figures of the monomyth —

the supernatural aid, the goddess and the disciple— also appear during these heroes' journey in the form of the inventor Leonard da Quirm, the Lady and the minstrel respectively.

3.1. Veteran Heroes: Cohen and the Silver Horde

The Silver Horde led by Cohen the Barbarian epitomises the average heroes of the Discworld. They constitute the clearest evidence that a hero is not always an example of righteousness (they admit to having looted, committed theft, and killed watchmen among other crimes). In their case, the submission necessary to annihilate their individual motivations is achieved through their obedience to the Code, which encapsulates the particular rules of conduct that regulate heroic nature: 'They lived by the Code. […] Without the Code, you weren't a hero. You were just a thug in a loincloth' (Pratchett, 2001: 159).

This Code is not based on following virtuous ideals: in fact, a great part of it seems to consist in trusting blindly that the surroundings and situations concerning a hero will join forces to help him: 'In the past, they'd all *relied* on [the Code]. The higher the odds, the greater the victory. That was the Code. Forget the Code, dismiss the Code, deny the Code… and the Code would take you' (ib.159). This can be directly linked to the supernatural aid introduced in Campbell's work: if the hero is sure of his own nature, the universe will favour and support him during his trials so no harm will come to him. As old heroes, the Silver Horde have experienced this unwritten rule constantly, to the point they can anticipate certain events because they are recurrent situations of the Code —an ability that will be further commented on at a later point.

But the Code is not the only embodiment of the predictable aid that assists the heroes. During their journey, Cohen and the Silver Horde encounter the Lady, one of the most powerful deities in the Discworld. She is the goddess of luck, and as such, she represents the capricious force that can either help or obstruct the hero during a quest. These attributes can be compared to the values of the goddess described by Campbell: either a destructive or a beneficial entity, the personification of the unpredictable. Cohen and cronies, veteran warriors that they are, do not feel particularly compelled to respect her; not even for the sake of the help that she gave them in the past.

For Cohen and the Silver Horde are surely experienced heroes. They surpassed long ago the first threshold to the adventure; since then, they have undergone frequent trials and been hardened in challenging quests. Using Campbell's terminology, they have reached the full potential available for heroes to unlock. They have become superior men, an inspiration for civilization and a symbol for the knowledge that lies dormant in all human beings. Rincewind expresses this feeling when describing Cohen: 'The *big* thing about Cohen is… he's contagious. […] Once they've been around him for a while, people start seeing the world the way he does. All big and simple. And they want to be part of it' (ib.29).

According to Campbell, at this point the hero may seek the gods to obtain from them the ultimate boon they guard, the gift of eternal life. This boon of immortality is exemplified in the afterlife that Cohen and his Silver Horde expect to obtain from the gods: an everlasting banquet as a reward to the heroes who die fighting bravely (ib.47). However, as time passes and the heroes grow old, they begin to feel cheated of their rightful boon and condemned to an ordinary, meaningless end. When finally a member of the Horde perishes fat and old in what they consider an unworthy death —choked on a cucumber instead of in battle—, they get furious. Cohen and the Silver Horde rebel then against the gods that are not giving them the appropriate reward for their heroic life. This is not a new concept, but one that Campbell already introduced in his monomyth: if the mistrusting god is not willing to award eternal life to the deserving hero, he will try to take it by means of deception.

With the intention of destroying the gods, Cohen and his Horde take up disguises and invade the mountain where the deities live. At first it seems that the Silver Horde is not capable of deceiving the gods, as they can see right through their (admittedly rushed) costumes (ib.143). However, the Silver Horde will prove that they can in fact cheat the deities on two occasions. On the first one, the god Fate invites Cohen to play a game of dice, which Cohen wins by slicing the dice in half (ib.153). The second occurs when the gods finally relent and prepare the eternal feast the Horde desired. Though they already have obtained the supreme boon, the Silver Horde refuses to live it under the conditions of the deities, choosing instead to steal magic horses and spend their immortality travelling through the stars (ib.170). The fact that they are successful in foiling the gods' expectations is a further sign that, as Campbell stated, they have reached their full potential: they are equal to the gods that represent the highest power in their realm.

3.2. New Heroes: Captain Carrot and Rincewind

Both Captain Carrot and Rincewind follow in their journey the path of the hero described in Campbell's monomyth. Their role in the Silver Horde's quest begins when they both receive a call to the adventure, a summons that compels them to abandon their particular motivations and yield to a quest for the benefit of all humankind. To rise to the challenge, they must cross the threshold, embark in the magic ship and travel through the space surrounding the Disc. Only then will they be able to explore the unknown territory, full of mysteries and possible dangers, represented by the citadel of the gods.

Due to their heroic nature, in their journey they count on the aid of the magical donor: Leonard da Quirm, who, though unable to perform what normally is considered magic, takes upon himself the role of performing impossible deeds, things that nobody but him can do and are absolutely necessary for the success of the heroes. He is yet another proof that destiny is helping the heroes during their journey and that their quest will undoubtedly come to fruition: 'Leonard had the look of someone who was confident because, so far, he'd never found a reason not to be. He would step off a high building in the happy state of mind of someone who intended to deal with the problem of the ground when it presented itself. And might' (ib.37).

In spite of their identical initiation in the path of the hero, we find that the way both heroes face the same adventure is very different. In contraposition to Cohen and the Silver Horde, Captain Carrot acts as a virtuous hero who performs honourable deeds —such as volunteering for a dangerous mission without expecting anything in return— just because it is the righteous course of action to follow. But as Campbell stated, the heroic nature is not only based on fighting for idealistic principles. In Carrot's case, his status as hero will be proved by his commitment to public causes, such as preventing the Discworld's destruction. Cohen and the Silver Horde accordingly recognise him as a hero, as his behaviour also follows the particular rules of the Code. When Carrot confronts the seven single-handedly, they are forced to acknowledge that the Captain is an equal to them. 'The Horde could calculate the peculiar mathematics of heroism quite quickly. […] The Code was quite clear. One brave man [Carrot] against seven… won' (ib.159). Captain Carrot proves to have a heroic nature because, unknowingly, he also has confidence in the ever-present aid of the universe that

supports a hero, trusting in winning when fighting against several enemies with an ordinary sword.

Conversely, we have Rincewind as an example of the hero that refuses the call to adventure into the unknown. In previous Discworld novels, he demonstrates a tendency to be chased out of his customary life by what appear to be accidental events, which Campbell marks as the signs previous to the call of destiny upon the hero. However, he always resists being embarked on any kind of adventure and longs for an ordinary life without surprises. According to the monomyth, this is a futile desire: the fortuitous incidents that break his routine and summon him to the unknown will always be present in his path until he accepts his heroic nature.

In *The Last Hero*, Rincewind has come to understand that the call to adventure will always follow him and is able to anticipate its signs: 'I'll run away, and probably hide in a crate somewhere that'll be loaded on to the flying machine in any case. […] Or there'll be a whole string of accidents that end up causing the same thing. Trust me, sir. I know how my life works' (ib.39). Thus, in this work he will even be able to avoid the accidents that precede the adventure by presenting himself as a volunteer for a perilous journey before the unknown has the opportunity of summoning him. However, he faces the adventure with a hesitant, unwilling spirit, demonstrating that he still is an example of the reluctant hero.

Because of these differences in their behaviour, the adventure will have different outcomes for Rincewind and Carrot. Carrot is thoroughly committed to the path of the hero, completing the stages that form Campbell's monomyth. Rincewind is dragged to this public cause against his will, and during the whole journey he shows himself fearful and disinclined to continue their quest: he doggedly rejects the heroic calling. For this reason, Cohen and the Silver Horde recognise Carrot as a hero by his submission to the Code, but address Rincewind as an 'old rat' even if he is on the same mission to save the world (ib.160). In the same way, when the gods grant their boons to the heroes, Captain Carrot obtains from them the help they need to repair their magic ship and return home, while Rincewind only asks for a balloon. For we have to remember that, as Campbell stated, 'the boon bestowed on the worshiper is always scaled to his stature and to the nature of his dominant desire: the boon is

simply a symbol of life energy stepped down to the requirements of a certain specific case' (ib.163).

3.3 Disciple: The Minstrel

After his quest, the hero must come back to the society he left and bring the boon that will renovate his world. But sometimes the hero, weary of his adventure, refuses to re-enter his former community. It is then the task of his disciple to transmit to humanity the knowledge gained by the hero.

Cohen and the Silver Horde reject the return. From the very beginning, they do not expect to come back from their journey alive, so they kidnap a minstrel to tell the tale of their quest. For they realise that, as Campbell stated, to unleash the potential inherent in human beings is only half of the deed of the hero. They also have the obligation of transmitting to their society the way to do it: ''Y'see, there's the problem', said Cohen. 'It's no good just doin' it. You got to remember your posterity'' (ib.135).

In this case, the knowledge that must be conveyed to humanity is the saga of Cohen and the Silver Horde and their defiance to the gods. It is the beneficial power that will help the community of the hero and that will guide them to discover their unlimited capacity — represented by the innate power of the stories of heroes and the inspiration they arouse. The transmission of this message will be the final objective in the quest of Cohen and the Silver Horde, and the only thing that will prevent them from destroying the world: the idea that the tales of their adventures, and by extension the wisdom that may be gained from them, will not be passed to the future if there is nobody to remember it (ib.160).

The minstrel kidnapped embodies the disciple in charge of relaying the lesson taught by the hero. Through his journey with the Silver Horde, he abandons his singular specific nature, accepting too the submission to the community and to public causes that the heroes undertook before him. The minstrel reaches the anonymity described by Campbell when he realises that he does not even remember his name anymore, and defines himself just as 'the singer' of the Silver Horde's story (ib.173).

4. MCHALE'S POSTMODERNIST FICTION

Previous sections have established that the plot and main characters of *The Last Hero* fit the pattern of Campbell's monomyth, and therefore follow the structure of heroic narratives. However, we will also find that the book — as is usual in *Discworld* novels— also incorporates multiple elements that imperil this classification: for instance, multiple historical references or allusions to other literary works in what is supposed to be a fantasy dimension with no links to the real world. These references, which interrupt constantly the Discworld construct, along with the fact that the humorous tone constantly mocks fantasy clichés appearing in the book, could make us argue that *The Last Hero* is intended to be a subversion of heroic stories, rather than to follow their pattern. However, as we will argue throughout the following sections, these references do not endanger the heroic narrative: on the contrary, their use stresses the monomythic structure, purposefully calling the attention of the readers to this underlying pattern and even reinforcing it.

In order to ascertain which are the literary devices used to disturb the mythological journey of the hero and the effect that is achieved through these resources, we will use Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction,* a work that describes postmodernist techniques that serve to question the ontological status of a fictional world. In *Postmodernist Fiction,* McHale produces his own construction of the term Postmodernism. Through the study of techniques used in Postmodernist works, he defines the characteristics of literary Postmodernism and describes the aspects in which it differs from Modernism (McHale, 1987: 5).

The differences between Modernism and Postmodernism are summed up in their different dominant, the main features that control a text and are determinant for its composition. According to McHale, the dominant of Modernism is epistemological, and thus it deals with the foundations and scope of knowledge (ib.9). On the other hand, the dominant of Postmodernism is ontological, so it tackles the nature of being and of existence (ib.10). It could be argued that it is impossible to question epistemology without immediately raising

ontological implications. But McHale reasons that one battery of questions must necessarily be raised before the other: in the case of Postmodernism and Modernism, their contrast will be based on which set of queries it is more pressing to answer.

McHale argues that what all ontological topics have in common is that they examine fictional worlds and characters. Therefore, he defines the concept of 'ontology' as the creation and description of any universe. This universe may even be categorised as impossible to exist; for example, because its grounds defy physical laws of our reality. Nevertheless, its simple description may raise ontological issues, and thus it will be taken as Postmodernist fiction (ib.27).

There are multiple ontological questions that may be raised in Postmodernism. McHale defends that this wide range of interrogations must be taken as different ontological themes inside the Postmodernist trend. Therefore, he focuses on studying ontological questions appearing in any kind of fiction, so he can later identify which of them are predominant in Postmodernism or particular to Postmodernist authors (ib.27).

In the following sections, we will describe in detail several selected ontological traits and techniques described by McHale in order to analyse them later in Pratchett's text.

4.1 Heterocosm

One of the main characteristics of an ontological fiction is that it works in an alternative reality, separated from the one where we live. McHale calls this distinct reality a heterocosm, from the Greek for '*another, different world.*'

One possible way of creating a heterocosm can be through an entanglement of *novums*. McHale introduces the concept of the *novum*, developed by Darko Suvin, which consists in the creation of a radical innovation, an original object that does not exist in the reality where the author lives. The heterocosm, contrary to our reality, is created by gathering together a sufficiently large amount of *novums* to create a whole new system (ib.59).

It could be argued that in any genre we can find cases of *novum*: a completely invented character, place or situation will always appear in fiction. However, in Postmodernist fiction

we will not find isolated *novums* intertwined with elements from our reality: rather, *novums* are essential for the structure of the text, and construct a new reality exclusively with original concepts, external to the empirical knowledge of the real world. As an example of this, McHale states that the most representative ontological genre is science fiction. A scheme created by *novums* is indispensable for the composition of the fictional world, and that cannot be achieved with the apparition of few original creations (ib.60).

The purpose of this construction is the contrast it offers with the empirical world the readers know. An opposition between the fictional realm built with the *novums* and the real world emphasises the differences between them: with each clash the reader is reminded that they are different dimensions, which raises ontological queries. In McHale's view, the fantastic genre in particular is one of the most representative examples of this mixture, as it always implies the opposition of two distinct dimensions with their particular set of norms (ib.16). However, just because this fictional reality is divergent from our real world we cannot presuppose that they are totally disassociated. On the contrary, McHale makes a reference to Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*, where Sidney states that the fictional world and the real world share a mimetic relation: they depend on each other to exist, for their contrast is the source of the ontological queries (ib.28). This connection between them, then, must be limited only to resemblance. If both worlds were to be identical, it would not be of use to compare them, for there would not exist any kind of contrast between them. 'A mimetic relation is one of similarity, not identity: the difference between the original object and its reflection', writes McHale (ib.28).

Thus, we find that there is a 'kind of overlap or interpenetration between the heterocosm and the real' (ib.28). The fictional world builds a construct apart from the real world, creating its own references inside this system. However, it can also happen that some of these references are taken from the real world: the introduction of renowned historical figures in a fictional dimension is such an example. In those cases, these two spheres will merge, creating a place of 'dual referential allegiance', a term borrowed from Benjamin Hrushovski: a place where references are shared by both worlds (ib.29).

4.2 Suspension of Belief and Disbelief

The logic of a fictional world requires what McHale calls a 'suspension of belief as well as of disbelief', a concept that he borrows from novelist Ron Sukenick. As the text creates a heterocosm, a new ontology different from the one of our universe, the reader must be prepared not to judge as impossible or unrealistic the elements that form this fictional universe. On the contrary, she or he must be ready to accept the reality that is presented in the text without analysing it according to the principles that govern the reality where the reader exists (ib.33). That is to say, if the text were to affirm, for instance, that humans are capable of flying, the reader must go along with it in order to believe in the ontology of the invented world.

However, if the boundaries between the fictional and the empirical dimensions were to be blurred, it would be much more difficult for the reader to sustain the belief in the heterocosm proposed (ib. 34). McHale cites as examples —taken from critic Thomas Pavel— texts which feature a confrontation between several ontologies: in *Don Quixote*, Alonso Quijano inhabits a fictional universe while at the same time he imagines a different reality in his delusions; in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the tangible world coexists with a supernatural dimension. According to McHale, such examples not only problematise the constructed ontologies, but also weaken the boundary that separates them from reality. They make evident that the boundaries between fact and fiction are much more permeable than it may seem, and expose the correlation between the two of them.

4.3 Transworld Identities and Homonyms

In some cases in the overlap between fiction and reality, we might find that some individuals originating from the real world or other works of fiction are mirrored by equivalent entities in a fictional universe. This literary phenomenon has been called by Umberto Eco *transworld identity*. In order to identify both characters as being the same and coming from the same source, they must only differ in secondary traits that do not affect their essential nature (ib.35).

However, if both characters differ in their basic characteristics as well as in the subsidiary ones, according to Eco they should be considered to share a relation of homonymy. McHale points out that homonyms are 'frequent in literary parodies', and cites as an example Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Henry Fielding's *Shamela*, characters that share a certain similarity but not enough to prove that they represent the same individual (ib.36).

Traditionally, says McHale, instances of transworld identities can be found in historical fiction, where historical figures such as Napoleon or Churchill may appear to give a greater fidelity to the representation of the real world. As long as the main features of the fictionalised characters coincide broadly with what is documented of their real-world personalities, it will give the reader the impression that they are the same entity.

The act of borrowing identities can also be source of ontological interrogations. If the transworld identity is not placed in a historical novel that aspires to mirror reality, but in an invented heterocosm, the appearance of real-world personalities may disturb the fiction. As an example, McHale cites Carlos Fuentes' work *Terra Nostra,* where the known historical facts are negated: for instance, the discovery of America takes place a whole century later than it should. In this case, the novel is not an historical recreation, but a source of ontological queries (ib.17). The reader realises that the resemblance between the fictional and the real world has been violated, which may provoke the questioning of the fictional universe.

4.4 Intertextual Zones

McHale states that each text creates a unique space, a zone where the fictional world is built (ib.57). It can happen that said text features elements have their original source in another work. In that case, these texts are merging their distinct, separate universes into a common construct, creating an intertextual space.

One simple way of creating intertextuality, says McHale, is introducing into text A a character who originates in text B: a 'borrowed' transworld identity. If the character appears recurrently throughout several texts, it then receives the name of *retour des personnages*, a technique supposed to imbue the character with a sense of realness. Every time that a text

contributes with new circumstances and events to the character's life, its fictional personality is reinforced with more details, creating each time a more solid illusion that it must exist (ib.57).

On the other hand, a purposeful mishandling of transworld identities can also be the source of ontological scandal. According to McHale, an abuse of this technique would 'violate, and thereby foreground, the ontological boundaries between fictional worlds': for example, by banding together characters from very different referential texts or so separate in time that they could not have possibly met. In this case, the intertextual space becomes an intertextual *zone*, an 'uneasy juxtaposition of incommensurable worlds' (ib. 57).

Intertextual zones inherently carry ontological queries. The blunt confrontation of two fictional universes serves as a reminder that they are, after all, invented dimensions that do not exist. The boundaries that separate them become blurred, and the intertextual zone that results —conformed of two fictional spaces— may challenge the reader's belief in the text (ib.58).

4.5 Postmodernist allegory

Metaphors can be hypertrophied, exaggerated to the point that they occupy the whole text. McHale mentions as an example Donald Barthelme's short story *The Balloon*, where the simple simile 'a text like a balloon' is represented in a literal form: the balloon is a physical entity that floats over the city of Manhattan, provoking in fictional viewers as well as in the readers themselves the impulse to interpret its meaning. In these cases, it cannot be considered any longer that there is a simple metaphor. Rather, the whole short story must be considered an allegory (ib.140).

Allegorical texts work on two levels. On the one hand, the work possesses a literal meaning, the story constructed without any further implication (in Barthelme's story, the anecdote of a flying balloon and its consequences). On the other hand there is a metaphorical meaning, a figure of speech implicit in the fiction (the implication that the balloon can be taken as a text). This division can be related to the ontological interrogations of Postmodernist fiction, as we find that the hesitation of the text between literal and

metaphorical may bring into question the solidity of the fictional world created. 'Allegory offers a tool for exploring ontological structure and foregrounding ontological themes', writes McHale (ib.141).

5. PRATCHETT AND POSTMODERNIST FICTION

Previously, it has been described how Pratchett's *The Last Hero* follows the model of classical myths according to Campbell's heroic pattern, the monomyth. In the following section, we will analyse how Pratchett also incorporates in his work ontological techniques commonly used in Postmodernist fiction. As a consequence, the grounds that sustain the ontology constructed in *The Last Hero* will be questioned —not with the purpose of destabilising the invented universe, but to stress the indivisible relation between fiction and reality. Although this mimetic relation provides, first and foremost, the humorous tone of *The Last Hero* —as through comparison it parodies the usual motivations and purpose behind a hero's journey—, we will demonstrate that, as we have argued, Campbell's heroic journey is not subverted throughout the novel. On the contrary, the steps that conform a heroic narrative are closely followed. This, combined with the constant references to the world outside the fiction, will make of the work a reaffirmation of heroic narratives, and will thus serve as a vindication of the necessity of such stories in the real world.

5.1 Heterocosm

The Discworld realm displays multiple instances of *novums*, original elements that do not exist in the empirical world the reader knows. The large amount of these *novums* is essential to the construction of the world, to the point that this fictional dimension can only be catalogued as a heterocosm: its main feature is that it holds great differences with respect to the real world. Magic is a common resource, taken as a serious discipline that can be taught and learned in a university. There exist magical objects such as the omniscope, a device that allows the vision of any place. Gods and Death possess anthropomorphic traits and interact regularly with their believers. Human beings coexist with other races such as trolls, dwarves or lizard men… And so on and so forth, the *novums* incorporated are not isolated examples, but elements deeply intertwined with the bases of the fictional world.

This does not mean that the heterocosm of the Discworld does not share any common aspects with reality. Readers will find several occasions where their knowledge of the real world will prove useful for understanding the logic of the Discworld. The most basic scientific principles are generally followed: Leonard da Quirm builds a boat to fly around the world, reasoning that 'with sufficient thrust […] a craft sent off the edge of the world would be swung underneath by the massive attraction and rise on the far side, probably to a sufficient height to allow it to glide down to anywhere on the surface' (Pratchett, 2001: 36). Of course, Leonard da Quirm is making reference to the gravitational field of a planet that attracts other astronomical objects. Other instances of real-world physics are used through the novel: once the device is in space, there is zero gravity inside the spaceship, and the characters need a spacesuit to breathe oxygen when they exit the ship. There are also allusions to real-world metaphysical philosophy, such as Schrödinger's paradox of the cat and the box or the butterfly effect, suggesting that someone must have thought of the same thought experiments in the Discworld.

This contrast between the *novums* that characterise the Discworld as a heterocosm and the real-world principles that are being followed make of Pratchett's work a construction of dual referential allegiance, where the overlap between reality and fantasy is made evident. The reader applies her or his empirical knowledge to the fictional heterocosm, contrasting them through their relation of mimesis. As a consequence of this opposition, ontological interrogations will be raised in the reader regarding the grounds that sustain the existence of the universe created or up to what point this fictional world is different from the real world. She or he is forced to realise that the Discworld is not completely separate, nor can be completely free, from reality: the construction of its invented ontology is intimately based on nonfictional precedents. The constant allusions of the text to factual principles call the attention of the reader to the codependence between the invented universe and the real world, stressing its importance and signaling it as inevitable.

5.2 Suspension of Belief and Disbelief

In order to sustain the entanglement of *novums* that conform the Discworld, a suspension of belief and disbelief will be required of the reader. Only with her or his collaboration will the

fictional construction presented succeed. However, instances where the fiction itself questions the mechanics that make this world believable can be found in the text.

We find one such example in the opening paragraphs of the novel, when the narrator is presenting the Discworld: a flat, disc-shaped world on the back of four elephants that stand on the shell of a giant turtle travelling through space (ib.5). The reader, with a mindset already prepared to suspend belief as well as disbelief, should be able not to doubt the configuration of the fictional world, and will be already disposed to accept as possible this fantastic zone. However, the narrator himself will point out how inconceivable this universe in fact is:

> The *place* where the story happened was a world on the back of four elephants perched on the shell of a giant turtle. [...]
>
> People think that it is strange to have a turtle ten thousand miles long and an elephant more than two thousand miles tall, which just shows that the human brain is ill-adapted for thinking and was probably originally designed for cooling the blood. It believes the mere size is *amazing*.
>
> There's nothing amazing about size. Turtles are amazing, and elephants are quite astonishing. But the fact that there's a big turtle is far less amazing than the fact that there is a turtle *anywhere*.

It will be worth our while to analyse the contradictions embedded in these few sentences. Indeed, the narrator is the one to suggest the ontological queries that the Discworld should awake in the reader, bypassing the unspoken contract between reality and fiction. Moreover, despite everything just said, immediately the narrator attempts to persuade the reader to believe in it. It is not the giant turtle that should be questioned, affirms the narrator with aplomb, but turtles in general. Or, in other words: it is not the fictional universe that should be examined, but *reality* itself. Thus, the narrator takes advantage of the mimetic relation between reality and fiction to question what is familiar to the reader.

The examination of what is usually taken as a given is recurrent throughout the work. Consider, for instance, the basis for the plot of *The Last Hero*, the myth of Prometheus and the theft of fire. We are told that, in the Discworld, it was the hero Mazda who stole fire from

the gods to give it to humankind. Cohen and the Silver Horde become inspired by this first hero when they decide to kill the gods with explosives —that is to say, by returning fire to them. When they find out that the gods punished Mazda by chaining him to a mountain and sending an eagle to eat his liver every day —the same punishment as Prometheus—, they are infuriated on his behalf. They believe the gods to be unjust, and so, their first action when they die is to liberate Mazda. Prometheus, too, was eventually liberated by Heracles, who cut his chains and shot the eagle. But while Heracles was allowed to free Prometheus to either gain more respect as Zeus's son or in exchange for information (depending on the source), Cohen and the Silver Horde gain nothing from freeing Mazda. They just '[take] it in turns to shake his withered hand' (ib. 174) and provide him with a sword so he can slay the eagle.

The apparition of the myth of Prometheus in the Discworld is, once again, a demonstration of the space of dual referential allegiance created in the work: we can safely assume that the inhabitants of the Discworld and we readers share some cultural points. However, we must also account for the significant variations between the Discworld legend and the Greek myth. When performed by the Silver Horde, the story of Mazda is not just a legend of humanity's quest for knowledge: it also becomes a tale of humanity's vengeance against the gods. The discovery that Mazda is still being punished to this day incenses Cohen and is taken as a further proof of the gods' unfairness. Thus, when the Silver Horde liberate Mazda, they do not seek the gods' permission, making it an act of retaliation. In turn, Mazda, as the representative of humanity, is honoured and revered by the Silver Horde, and is given a weapon so he himself can take his revenge against the gods. If the theft of fire symbolises the confrontation between humankind and the gods, in the Discworld, the gods are not the ones who win.

In both of the cases presented —the narrator's questioning of the universe and the myth's reinterpretation—, the boundaries between the fictional and the real world are a source of confusion. The reader, who was prepared to accept any unconceivable *novum* presented by the text, now compares it with that of the empirical world she or he knows. What we have here, in sum, is a collision of ontologies, not only between the established Greek mythology and the Discworld's new version of the events, but between reality and the fictional universe. Recuperating the notion of the suspension of belief and disbelief, what the reader is asked is to forget what she or he takes as a given, and to try a different approach or perspective for

those very same concepts for the duration of the work. The ambiguous boundaries permit, through the questioning of ideas that have a basis in the nonfictional dimension, the questioning of those very same ideas.

The cases examined are far from being isolated incidents: the revision of the factual is constant throughout *The Last Hero*, as the correspondence between reality and fiction is consistently emphasised through several postmodernist techniques. We will describe particular instances in the following sections.

5.3 Transworld Identities and Homonyms

Several inhabitants of the Discworld bear names that inevitably remind us of some real-world historical characters. The protagonist Genghiz Cohen, emperor of an Eastern land, evokes the Mongolian emperor Genghis Khan; while the Silver Horde that Cohen leads points to the Turco-Mongolian Golden Horde.

A similar resemblance can be found between emperor Carelinus, mentioned several times through the novel, and emperor Alexander the Great. A character quotes a classical text describing Carelinus weeping because 'there were no more worlds to conquer', a reference to the words popularly attributed to Plutarch describing an episode in Alexander's life. Also, the legend where Alexander undoes the impossible Gordian Knot by cutting it with his sword finds echoes in the practically identical story of Carelinus, who cuts the unsolvable Tsortean Knot with his sword.

In turn, the multifaceted inventor and painter Leonard da Quirm hints at Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci, known for his multiple talents. In his first appearance in the novel he will be occupied 'painting a picture of a lady from a series of sketches', and later, apparently unsatisfied with how he is painting the smile, he comments that 'perhaps I should show the teeth' (ib.30) —a mocking reference to the possibly most renowned work of Leonard da Vinci, *La Gioconda*, a woman depicted with a closed-mouthed, ambiguous smile. The fact that both seem to share the obsession for flying devices also seems to support this resemblance, as we find Leonard da Quirm surrounded by 'an armada of paper shapes and

bat-winged devices and other aerial extravaganzas' (ib.31) and Leonard da Vinci used to design and test flying crafts.

These cases can be considered too vague to be catalogued as transworld identities, 'borrowed' personalities from history. Although they possess the characteristics that are generally attributed to the real-world figures, neither the names nor the personal life of these characters exactly match them. It is perhaps more precise to speak of them as homonyms, fictionalised characters that adopt enough secondary traits of the real-world characters to be comparable to them. In any case, it is certain that they are the source of ontological scandal. The reader finds in the heterocosm —an invented dimension which diverges from the real world— some characters that purposely resemble historical personalities. The fiction becomes compromised, not only because these figures are homonyms of some real-world personalities, but also because the historical periods whence their original sources come are several centuries apart, making even less feasible a meeting between them and other fictional characters.

It must be acknowledged that the division between fiction and reality is cautiously, if thinly, preserved. The slight changes in the names allow us to conceivably believe that these are not *exactly* the same historical figures we know from reality: after all, it is Leonard *da Quirm*, not da Vinci, who lives in the Discworld. Nevertheless, the use of these names, along with the replication of anecdotes from their lives, stresses the connection between the fictional homonyms and their real-life inspiration. Like the questioning of the Discworld's ontology, the introduction of historical homonyms draws attention to the interdependence between fiction and reality and allows us to examine the latter from the safe distance that the former allows. *What would the legend of Alexander the Great cutting the Gordian knot or crying for unconquered worlds teach to people who have never heard of them?* seems to ask *The Last Hero*. According to the member of the Silver Horde Old Willie, who deems Carelinus 'a cheat as well as a cry-baby', not much (ib. 119).

5.4 Intertextual Zones

In addition to the appearance of historical personalities, in *The Last Hero* a mixture of allusions to other works of fiction and historical events can be found. The references appear frequently during the novel and belong to many different fields —from classical myths to modern culture, including everything ranging between popular folklore and scientific literature. As a result, an intertextual zone is created, merging the fictional heterocosm with these chronical and literary sources. By echoing them, *The Last Hero* creates an area of common reference, an intertextual space where there is a shared knowledge between the text at hand and other narratives. Furthermore, the intertextual space is extended to the non-textual domain, as the visual imagery that accompanies the novel emphasises the relation between the text and the cultural background.

The constant invasion of real-world references debilitates to a point the internal logic of the fictional universe. The intertextual zone is a source of ontological scandal, as the allusions to the world outside the fiction highlight the connection between the text and the reality where this very work was created. Concrete consequences, which vary depending on the source and frequency of the references, will be analysed below.

5.4.1 Intertextuality from Fiction

Regarding intertextuality between other fictional works and *The Last Hero*, an amalgamation of references from very different literary fields can be found. There will be allusions to modern children's literature —as when Captain Carrot indicates that the way home is 'the second star to the left and straight on 'til morning', the direction that must be followed in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in order to reach Neverland. When speaking of the possibility of flying crafts, a character of the Discworld mentions the legend of a flying ship pulled by swans; which can be related to the medieval tale of the Swan Knight, who travelled in a swan-drawn boat. Academic references also appear when one of the Silver Horde's heroes, Caleb the Ripper, mentions the Toilet of the Gods, which is in fact the name of an essay by science-fiction writer Sir Arthur C. Clarke. Even Cohen the Barbarian, previously mentioned as an example of transworld identity, should also be considered a token of intertextuality if we

suppose him to borrow elements from Conan the Barbarian, the fictional sword-and-sorcery hero originated in the 1930s.

Other examples of intertextuality concern folklore from very different cultures. The most representative example can be found in Great A'Tuin, the great turtle that carries four elephants which in turn support a world in the form of a flat disc. In the foreword of a reprinted edition of the first novel of the series, Pratchett explains how he borrowed elements from several traditions in order to shape the Discworld:

> [The idea] was lying around and didn't look as though it belonged to anyone. The world rides through space on the back of a turtle. It's one of the great ancient myths, found wherever men and turtles were gathered together; the four elephants were an Indo-European sophistication. […] All I had to do was grab it and run away before the alarms went off (Introduction, 2000).

It goes without mentioning that there are also frequent appearances of Greek mythology: as seen, the story told in *The Last Hero* takes as a basis the theft of fire by Prometheus. Additionally, the gods of the Discworld have their residence at the top of the highest mountain, which can be linked with Mount Olympus where according to legend the Greek gods lived. Norse mythology influences the text too, as *valkyries* appear at the end of the novel to carry the dead heroes to the eternal feast.

The fact that these instances of literary fiction appear so frequently in the Discworld debilitates the borders between the fiction of *The Last Hero* and reality. If the purpose of the heterocosm is to create a dimension which —with a sufficient amount of *novums* in its structure— diverges from the real world, the introduction of so many intertextual references serves as a reminder that this, too, is a fictional work. But the relation between reality and fiction is reciprocal, and goes both ways. The frequent references also mean that the fictional ontology could not possibly exist without the world outside of it, as intertextuality is a key element in the conformation of the Discworld. This particular heterocosm —and, by extension, the whole work of *The Last Hero*— could not exist without the intertextual references that are also part of it. And so, the interdependence between fact and fantasy is further stressed.

Perhaps the most representative example of how intertextuality in *The Last Hero* is deeply interwoven into the ontology of the fictional world is the Code. It has already been discussed how the Code consists in trusting that the universe will conspire to help the hero. But this reliability does not account for its predictability. Cohen and the Silver Horde go as far as to anticipate some events because they are recurrent situations in the Code. They avoid fighting Captain Carrot because the Code mandates they will lose ('The Code was quite clear. One brave man against seven… won' [Pratchett, 2001: 159]). Or, when they encounter the villain Evil Harry, the Silver Horde expect to be betrayed by him, because that is exactly what villains do to heroes (ib. 146). In fact, such happenings are too examples of intertextuality: the incidents predicted by the Code are classic themes of fantasy and epic literature.

Cohen and the Silver Horde's being able to foresee these events gives cause to ontological scandal. Heroic motifs come from the literary and folk tradition of the real world, and so they should not influence the behaviour of fictional characters in a heterocosm. Nevertheless, even if the Silver Horde do not have access to this body of narratives, they are most certainly aware of their recurrent topoi. Most of their actions are motivated by their confidence in how the situations should unfold, and they will only show hesitation when the situation is one uncommon in the heroic pattern. When the Silver Horde sense a smell of food on a mountain, they brace themselves for trouble, declaring that 'You know where you stand with a mad priest, but someone cooking as well as that right up here —well, that's a mystery. [...] Mysteries get you killed' (ib.80).

We are told that, for heroes, 'There was, there *always* was, at the start and the finish… the Code. […] You followed the Code, and you became part of the Code for those who followed it' (ib. 159). Thus, the Code embodies the large, perennial body of heroic narratives. Cohen and the Silver Horde not only perpetuate these epic tales by being, as heroes themselves, part of them. By revering the Code, the Silver Horde become defenders of these stories and their significance, cognizant and respectful of a tradition larger than them that they strive to follow and preserve.

Even the ultimate cause for the Horde's fight against the gods has its origin in intertextuality. As established in Campbell's monomyth, the hero that returns to his society

has transcended the ordinary banalities that it offers. He is meant to become a living symbol, an embodiment of the knowledge gained after crossing the threshold. The Silver Horde expects to die with the full honours reserved for a warrior: a seat in the gods' Halls of Heroes. or being placed forever among the stars. But as time passes, and they do not die, they are prevented from leaving behind the sordid reality and fulfilling their heroic nature. When a member of the Horde, Old Vincent, suffers an outrageous death by choking on a cucumber, they blame the gods who did not gave him a worthy end. 'When Old Vincent died, him being one of us', complains Boy Willie, one of the remaining heroes, 'where was the Bridge of Frost to take him to the Feast of the Gods, eh? No, they got him, they let him get soft with comfy beds and someone to chew his food for him. They nearly got us all' (ib. 47). Cohen and the Silver Horde realise they are being cheated by the gods, who treat them like mere mortals and let them succumb to the indignities of old age instead of awarding them the destiny they deserve. The tale of the hero Vincent has an unsatisfactory ending: the steps in the narrative have not been followed, and order must be restored. And so, they rebel against the gods. 'We want to return fire to the gods', says Cohen, '[...] because they've let us grow old' (ib.47).

5.4.2 Intertextuality from History

As with fictional intertextuality, numerous historical references appear in *The Last Hero*. Most of them consist in light-hearted oblique allusions to decisive moments in history; and, since a great part of the novel takes place in space, we will find many nods to renowned events in spaceflight. When finding that the wizard's librarian —unfortunately shaped as a monkey due to an incident with magic years ago— has illegally boarded the flying ship, Leonard da Quirm contacts the inhabitants of Ankh-Morpork supervising the flight and announces: 'Ankh-Morpork, we have an orangutan'. This directs us to the popular sentence 'Houston, we have a problem', attributed to the crew of the spacecraft Apollo XIII when encountering technical difficulties. Similarly, Rincewind recommends walking on the moon with 'small steps, no giant leaps', which cheekily evokes the famous first words said by astronaut Neil Armstrong when he stepped on the Moon: 'One small step for man, one giant

leap for mankind'. And of course, the crew of the *Kite* will not forget to plant a flag on the surface of the moon, as Earth did in their expedition to their own satellite.

Additionally, as we have seen, there are also frequent appearances of homonyms — fictional characters that share enough traits with real-world personalities to be considered to come from the same source. Genghiz Cohen, Leonard da Quirm, the Silver Horde and the emperor Carelinus have been studied as instances of this relation of homonymy. But, interestingly enough, many of these characters do not only appear in *The Last Hero*: most of them were featured for the first time in other Discworld novels, and their actions in *The Last Hero* constitute a continuation of their adventures. The wizard Rincewind and Cohen the Barbarian met as far back as the first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*; and their acquaintance continued in other works of the series prior to *The Last Hero*, such as *The Light Fantastic* and *Interesting Times*. Rincewind himself corroborates their familiarity when asked by the Patrician: 'We've met a couple of times and he didn't kill me. […] That probably counts as [friendship]' (ib. 29). The Silver Horde, too, made an appearance before *The Last Hero*: in *Interesting Times*, they invaded and conquered the Agatean Empire, where Cohen became emperor (it was, in fact, their retirement plan, and it was a success). Leonard da Quirm and his inventions also are mentioned in earlier Discworld novels: a crucial plot point in *Men at Arms* is Leonard's Gonne, Discworld's first firearm; and in *Jingo*, his submarine (named The Going Under The Water Safely Device) proves invaluable to solve an international conflict.

Cohen, the Horde or Leonard are homonyms; and, as such, their historical inspiration debilitates the fictional construction. But, on the other hand, their recurrence actually *reinforces* the heterocosm. Considering that none of these characters are originally from *The Last Hero* —as they are first presented in other Pratchett's stories—, their reappearance constitutes a *retour the personnages*, the comeback of a character featured in other works by the same author. Due to the use of this recourse, the more these homonyms recur in the Discworld novels, the more credibility they gain, ironically enough. In each of their manifestations in the series, characters undergo fictionalised events that increasingly contribute to differentiate them from their historical counterparts. Taking once again the character of Leonard da Quirm as an example, his artistic productivity in previous novels

fleshes him out and separates him from Leonard da Vinci —who, as we know, never got around designing a handgun.

Indeed, many of the Discworld characters featured in *The Last Hero* are modelled after historical personages, which should endanger the fiction. What is more, these characters are surrounded by real-world references —from history to science and myths—, which emphasises fiction's basis on reality. But, at the same time, these characters —and, by extension, their fictional universe— are firmly grounded in their consistency. They appear regularly, they display reliable characteristics and personalities, and, with each story, their past becomes more complex, strengthening their fictional identity. Both tied to facts that inspire their existence and to the fantasy that allows them to grow as characters of their own, Discworld homonyms embody the ever-present reciprocity between reality and fiction.

5.4.3 Intertextuality in Illustrations

A brief note on the art of *The Last Hero* must be made. The edition studied in this paper is illustrated by Paul Kidby. His drawings for the work ingeniously complement the intertextuality in the text, as many of the illustrations use as references other works of art. To mention a few, the picture of the wizards gathered around the magical omniscope (*Science of the Discworld*, Kidby 1998) is a parody of Joseph Wright's 18th century painting *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*. The image of Rincewind looking at the viewer with a shocked expression on his face (*The Rincewind Scream*, Kidby 2002) echoes Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. And when the narrator describes Leonard da Quirm working on the Discworld's version of *La Gioconda* ('I've never been very good at smiles', he declares, '[…] Perhaps I should show the teeth' [Pratchett, 2001:30]), we find a mock reproduction of the painting in which the lady in the portrait exhibits a wide grin.

In accordance with the text, illustrations in *The Last Hero* not only appropriately match the humorous tone of the narration by making fun of renowned classical art. The visual intertextuality complements the work's continuous references to the world outside the fiction. Art and text in unison draw attention to the non-fictional dimension and the synergistic relation that it has with the created heterocosm.

6. POSTMODERNIST ALLEGORY

Ambiguous boundaries between the Discworld and reality, multiple instances of intertextuality, a narrative voice that questions the reader's suspension of belief or disbelief... All these elements are the cause of ontological scandal and contribute to destabilise the fictional world. But behind the disruption of the heterocosm through postmodernist techniques lies a persistent assertion of the characters and the story they are living. The constant references to the world outside the fiction do not manage to destroy the credibility of the fictional ontology: rather, the text acknowledges and reclaims the indivisible union of fiction and reality. As a consequence, *The Last Hero* becomes a postmodernist allegory, in which the text operates as a metaphor for the function of fiction in reality.

Part of the concept of the hero is that his story must be told as an example to inspire humanity. In *The Last Hero*, we find that the account of heroic deeds is manifested at two narrative levels. One of them is the literal meaning of the text: the bard's saga of how the heroes Cohen the Barbarian and the Silver Horde defied the gods of the Discworld. Even though their actions continuously mock heroic traditions, ultimately their journey —and that of the rest of the main characters— complies with the monomyth, Campbell's model for the structure of mythical stories. It would also seem that this model gets disrupted once postmodernist techniques are introduced, as they cause the questioning of the grounds that sustain the fictional world. However, despite all the features that debilitate the consistency of the Discworld, the fiction is never completely shattered. Rather, postmodernist elements contribute to link this fictional universe to the real world, while taking care not to entirely disrupt the fiction —or, in other words, not to abandon the monomyth that makes of the story, after all, a heroic tale. The believability of the heterocosm for the reader is preserved, while she or he is also constantly encouraged to associate the Discworld with reality.

This introduces the second narrative level of the story: the physical book of *The Last Hero*, a text about heroes written in and for the real world. Postmodernist techniques help us

not to consider the fictional world as an isolated construction, but as part of a tradition of heroic narratives. *The Last Hero* is not just a comic rewriting of renowned myths (although it serves that function splendidly). Through the postmodernist techniques, the reader is made aware that the work follows an ancient heritage of epic, folklore and fantasy stories; and, by emulating these narratives, *The Last Hero* perpetuates their existence. The tale of Cohen the Barbarian, who refuses to destroy the world to save the stories that live in it, does not only concern the inhabitants of the Discworld; but also, the readers who are witnesses of this new instance of heroic narratives. Therefore, the moral of the literal story —the necessity of tales of heroes to inspire mortals— becomes a message for the higher narrative level, the reality where the fiction is written. The Discworld fable passes its lesson along: as in the fictional world heroes need a bard to tell their saga and inspire the Discworld's inhabitants, in the real world fiction is needed to inspire humanity.

The Last Hero reclaims the intersection between fiction and reality and teaches us that it does not always result in the complete instability of the heterocosm; nor in a purely mimetic, unoriginal reproduction of life. It celebrates their connection and emphasises the importance of their mutual enrichment. Through the postmodernist allegory, we readers are made aware of the ties between traditional myths and fiction, between classic stories that have served as an inspiration for centuries and how important it is that these creations should continue. And the physical novel of *The Last Hero*, as the bard of Cohen the Barbarian before him, is stripped of its literal identity and becomes an anonymity, a resource used to make the fiction go on. For, as *The Last Hero*'s narrator declares at the end of the book: 'No one remembers the singer. The song remains'.

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