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## ‘The Mirror Crack’d’: Representation of Characters in Terry Pratchett’s *Witches Abroad*

To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature  
is to go on creating oneself endlessly.

Henri Bergson<sup>1</sup>

Out flew the web and floated wide—  
The mirror crack’d from side to side;  
“The curse is come upon me,” cried  
The Lady of Shalott.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** *The current article presents a discussion of two characters in Terry Pratchett’s *Witches Abroad* (1990), Esmeralda and Lily Weatherwax. These two sisters are almost mirror images of each other, yet each takes a different path in life. Through their similarities and differences, one is able to examine the idea of uncanny repetition, as it was discussed by Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Through the characters’ choices and interaction with each other, one may also be able to explore their identities, as imperfect mirror reflections that contradict and inform each other.*

**Keywords:** *Pratchett, discworld, repetition, difference, double, identity, Granny Weatherwax*

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<sup>1</sup> There is no clear literary reference for said quote. Henri Bergson (1859–1941) is a French Philosopher, and winner of the 1927 Nobel Prize in Literature.

<sup>2</sup> The moment in “The Lady of Shalott” (1842) when the heroine resists the curse, and as such it begins to take effect.

Terry Pratchett's *Witches Abroad* (1990) introduces the reader to Lily Weatherwax, the sister of the Discworld series' recurring character Esmeralda (Granny) Weatherwax. Lily is both the "fairy godmother" and villain of the story, as she attempts through manipulations to force "happy endings" on several characters, and especially on the character of Emberella and the city of Genua. In appearance, the two sisters are almost mirror images of each other, yet each takes a different path in life. By examining their similarities and differences, one may be able to postulate on the idea of uncanny repetition, as it was discussed by Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Through the characters' choices and interaction with each other, one may be able to explore their identities, as imperfect mirror reflections that contradict and inform each other. In her introduction to the book *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze*, Sarah Gendron writes that what is dubbed "repetition and difference," is a variety of repetition that suggests that "there can be no identity without difference. As such, it presents a direct challenge to the classical form of repetition, or the return of the self Same."<sup>3</sup> The article will explore the difference between Esme's established identity and Lily's fractured one, as manifested through her use of different names, charms and mirrors, as well as her inability to recognize her true self amidst the reflections. It will also explore the effect this "copy" bears on the "original" – Esme, as she is one of the heroines whose journey the reader follows throughout the story.

According to *The Deleuze Dictionary-Revised Edition*, Gilles Deleuze is often labelled as a "philosopher of difference," which highlights the critical place of "difference" in his work. "He is concerned to overturn the primacy accorded identity and representation in western rationality by theorising difference as it is experienced"<sup>4</sup>. In his work, Deleuze presents a link between "difference" and "repetition." He does not view repetition as the exact same thing occurring again; for him, "repetition is connected to the power of difference in terms of a productive process that produces variation in and through every repetition"<sup>5</sup>. The incorporation of difference through repetition gives rise to mutation; with life itself being a combination of the two factors.

The discussion regarding "repetition" leads to the notion of "originality." Regarding this concept, Gendron writes:

Derrida calls his reimagining of this hierarchy "the enigmatic quality of the first time," or the "retard originaire." The argument is that in order for there to be a "first time" there must also be a "second time," for if this "first time" is the "only time," it is the

<sup>3</sup> S. Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze*, Peter Lang US, Bern, Switzerland 2008, p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> C. Stagoll, *Difference*, in *The Deleuze Dictionary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition*, ed. A. Parr, University Press, Edinburgh 2010, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> A. Parr, *Repetition*, in *ibidem*, p. 225.

"first" of nothing at all. Likewise, if there were not, from the "first time," a *différance* (a differing and deferring) between that "first time" and what follows it—designating it as a "second"—there would, again, be no "first time" of which to speak.<sup>6</sup>

As such, the relationship between the "first" and "second," or between the "original" and "copy" is that of reciprocity.

Esme and Lily Weatherwax can be described in terms of first/second opposition. Though in terms of age Lily would be the "first," in terms of introduction to the story, frequency of appearance, presence and role as a protagonist, Esme would be the "first" or "original." If, as presented previously, repetition and difference are interconnected, then Lily as the "copy" that both informs and contradicts Esme's identity, lends a glimpse into Esme's "potential self," both battling and highlighting her "realized self." We get to know Lily through her relationship with Esme, and we get further insight into Esme's character and an understanding of her layered personality.

The theme of the "double" has been discussed continuously throughout the years, most notably by Sigmund Freud in his (1919) essay *The Uncanny*. Freud begins his essay by stating that though "uncanny" is a term used to describe everything that is terrible, and things that arouses dread and horror; the concept itself is not always clear, and as such might at times be used to describe anything that excites fear.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the uncanniness of the "double," Freud suggests through his analysis of the German words *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*<sup>8</sup> that the merger of the "unfamiliar" and the "familiar" can cause a sense of dread, or uncanniness. "The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the "double" being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect. The "double" has become a vision of terror, just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes."<sup>9</sup> The two Weatherwax sisters sometimes work as doubles.

Combining the concept of the "uncanny double" with that of "repetition and difference," one might suggest that Lily as an imperfect copy of Esme, one that is similar yet different from her; at first causes a sense of dread, by presenting a familiar yet unfamiliar view of the character. In a way it introduces the reader to a mutated version of Esme; a version that lends itself to a discussion of the "potential

<sup>6</sup> S. Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge...*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, in *Fantastic Literature: a Critical Reader*, ed. D. Sandner, Praeger Publishers, Westport 2006, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem. "The German word *Unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning "familiar," "native," "be-longing to the home"; and we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar", p. 76. "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich*", p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 87.

self.” What would happen, if Granny Weatherwax allowed herself to succumb to her inner darkness and lust for power?

In order to examine these two characters, let us take a look at an element that is different in both of them – their names. In the field of fantasy, names have always had special importance in relation to identity; so it was in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* series, where to know an object’s (or person’s) name is to know its core and have power over it; so it is in Pratchett’s world, where (similar to headwear) names have the ability to define a person.<sup>10</sup> To change a name, therefore, is practically to change an identity. In *Pyramids* (1989), the narrative pauses in order to reflect on this: “All things are defined by names. Change the name, and you change the thing. Of course there is a lot more to it than that, but paracosmically that is what it boils down to...”<sup>11</sup>

Lily Weatherwax uses names in order to reinvent herself. Though she does not change shape physically, she does so by creating new identities, the latest of which being that of Lady Lilith<sup>12</sup>:

Her name was Lady Lilith de Tempscire, although she had answered to many others in the course of a long and eventful life. And that was something you learned to do early on, she’d found. If you wanted to get anywhere in this world – and she’d decided, right at the start, that she wanted to get as far as it was possible to go – you wore names lightly, and you took power anywhere you found it [...] And you moved around a lot. Because most people didn’t move around much. Change countries and your name and, if you had the right manner, the world was your mollusc. For example, she’d had to go a mere hundred miles to become a Lady.<sup>13</sup>

Yet changing her name does not allow Lily to become a completely new person. The one she was, the one she (partially) still *is* lies beneath the façade. The people of Genua see Lilith, her sister sees Lily; but *she* herself (though unaware of that) is confused about her own identity. This becomes apparent through the constant shift between names in the narrative. At one point she would be “Lilith,” and in the next sentence she would become “Lily.” The instability of Lily’s name mirrors the instability of her identity for herself, the reader and even the plot.

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<sup>10</sup> “[H]ats were important. They weren’t just clothing. Hats defined the head. They defined who you were [...] it wasn’t the wearing of the hats that counted so much as having one to wear. Every trade, every craft had its hat. That’s why kings had hats. Take the crown off a king and all you had was someone good at having a weak chin and waving to people. Hats had power. Hats were important.” T. Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*, Harper Collins, New York 2008, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> T. Pratchett, *Pyramids*, Harper Collins, New York 2013, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Not wanting to read too much into the choice of name, fascinating as it is, let us just say that, Lily’s (Pratchett’s) reasons for choosing said name could span from either a “sophisticated” manipulation of her own name, giving it an aristocratic touch (or changing its “shape” as it were) in order to reinvent herself through it as a Lady; or alternately, the name could be a reference to the Biblical “Lilith” who was Adam’s first wife. That Lilith was created like him from dust; she defied God by refusing to submit to Adam, and subsequently became the first monster-woman, the first witch.

<sup>13</sup> T. Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*, Harper Collins, New York 2008, p. 17.

Lily's name(s) is not the only one that Pratchett uses to emphasize the instability of the plot of *Witches Abroad*. The "heroine" of the supposed fairy-tale which Lily enacts, also changes names many times throughout the story; she is "Embers," "Ella," and "Emberella." Though they are all derivatives of the same name, the constant shift between one version and another, not only adds to the sense of ridicule, but also undermines the plot of the fairy-tale. Interestingly, the confusion of names is accompanied by a more obvious one: Ella's "role" as the heroine of two simultaneous fairy-tales ("Cinderella" and "The Frog Prince"), as well as her secret identity as the "true heir," combined with her constant rebellion against her expected "character type," and her vehement refusal to conform; all of these add to the ambiguity of the plot. If a fairy-tales is "supposed" to play out a certain way, then Ella's rebellion as well as the witches' determination, force the plot to constantly redefine itself.

The difference between Ella and Lily is that while Ella's ambiguity concerns foremost the ambiguity of the plot and her "role" in it, Lily's ambiguity is derived mainly from her own confusion and confused identity. In her essay "Faith and Ethics," Farah Mendlesohn writes: "When Lily Weatherwax changes people's shape she does so in the erroneous assumption that this will enable her to change who they are. Because she confuses outward appearance with reality, when asked to find herself she can only look in mirrors."<sup>14</sup> Mirrors are particularly significant to the series; after all, the Discworld itself is a mirror of worlds. In a way, Lily's ruthless appropriation and deployment of familiar tales, "mirrors" Pratchett's intertextual parodying of prior texts. They both use the familiar pattern (or pre-existing texts) as a means to an end; in Lily's case, it is the attainment of ultimate power over the people of Genua, while in Pratchett's case, it is the shaking of old belief systems, and forcing the readers to re-evaluate the moral, ethical and social codes, which they take for granted.

In terms of reflection, Lily and Esmeralda Weatherwax are almost mirror images of each other. Physically they are almost identical, with the exception that while Lily is older, in appearance she seems younger than Granny (we assume she has modified her appearance by magic); Lily's victims certainly seem to confuse the two at first.<sup>15</sup> Of course, like all reflections, they contradict as well as complement each other. While Esme is a witch, Lily is a fairy god-mother. Interestingly, the borders of good and evil are confused. Esme resents her sister for having gone while they were young, and left her with the role of the "good one." Nevertheless, she both cares for, and respects her sister, as shown when she refuses to allow Mrs. Gogol to take revenge on Lily after her defeat, and tries to save her from herself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mendlesohn, F., *Faith and Ethics*, in *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature*, ed. A.M. Butler, E. James, F. Mendlesohn, Old Earth, Baltimore 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Like the people of the sleeping castle whom Granny saves, p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> A hint of her caring is found in the description of Granny's "trip" into Lily's mind. She encounters hints of old regrets, and regretfully surmises that there is not enough time to explore them, p. 239.

Esme's compassion for Lily lies not only in their sisterly bond (and perhaps a bit in her pride of the Weatherwax family), it also lies in Lily's role as an image of Esme's worst potential self. Manipulation, power-seeking, pride to the point of vanity, all of these attributes could easily have belonged to Esme, had she let herself get caught up in her own self, and refused to sympathize with others. She cannot completely condemn her sister for falling into a trap, which she herself constantly needs to be cautious of.

Yet being two proud powerful beings, and "mirrors" of each other, a test of strength is almost inevitable. The plot requires a "show-down," and also requires the distinction of the "real" from the "fake". After a verbal confrontation between the two, Granny breaks Lily's mirror. Subsequently, both are drawn into the mirror world. Lily is pulled inside physically by her reflection, while Granny's body is left behind and she travels there mentally. Trapped inside, they are each confronted by Death, who states that they can only be freed if they are able to determine which of their (many) reflections is the real person. Granny, who is confident in herself, and who has all along preferred to rely on her strong will and gift of Headology rather than outside forces and magical objects, does not hesitate and immediately replies that *she* is the real one. Lily on the other hand, immersed in the power of reflection, and living through mirrors, is confused by the question, and unable to answer him. She ceases to distinguish reality from fantasy, and genuine from fake, becoming merely one of her own many reflection. In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar write: "To be caught and trapped in a mirror rather than a window [...] is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self."<sup>17</sup> Lily Weatherwax, who in her own words wore names lightly, did not use one mirror, but two – consequently, she created an endless stream of reflections, and reflection of reflections. She put her very soul within these illusions, and in so doing, lost it inside an endless sea of images. "Lily had become so good at thinking of the world in terms of reflections that she had lost sight of the real one."<sup>18</sup>

Lily and Esme are doubles that demonstrate the power of "choice," through, among other things, their different use of similar abilities, such as Borrowing. Esme opts to remain true to herself, and morally chooses to pursue a course where upon she is constantly aware of other people, so as not to lose sight of the "bigger picture." Lily on the other hand loses herself in the various images and names that she cultivates for herself. Bearing the same physical shape and abilities, it is the inner shifts through which each sister has developed in a different direction, that shape them as moral and narrative opposites.

In this article, I have presented an analysis of the characters of Lily and Esmeralda Weatherwax. Though the focus is mainly on Lily, and her unstable identity, as

<sup>17</sup> S.M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, New Haven 1979, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> T. Pratchett, S. Briggs, *The New Discworld Companion*, Gollancz, London 2004, p. 442.

stated above both the "original and copy" as well as "first and second" can inform each other. In a way, understanding Lily's character as an uncanny double of Esme provides an understanding of the latter's inner nature. The confrontation with Lily at the end of the novel, a battle that fittingly takes place in the mirror realm, is in many ways a fight against Esme's potential self, her inner darkness, and even her regrets and hidden desires.

## Literature

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