Not Unadjacent to a Play about a Scottish King: Terry Pratchett Remakes *Macbeth*

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My dear boy, people do not come to the theatre to laugh, they come to Experience, to Learn, to Wonder.'

'To laugh,' said Hwel, flatly.
(Pratchett, 1989, p.58)

In the process of reshaping and repackaging the plays of Shakespeare for an audience younger than the usual audiences for Shakespearian drama, several common objectives emerge. These objectives, as Bottoms and McCallum demonstrate, are to promote an appreciation of the plays as works of art and monuments of culture, to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, to transmit shared allusions and experiences, and to reinforce values and assumptions deemed central in Western societies (Bottoms 1996; McCallum in Stephens and McCallum 1998, Ch.9). In order to achieve such outcomes—to affirm the common assumption that audiences come to Shakespeare in order 'to Experience, to Learn, to Wonder'— a reteller must make decisions in four interrelated areas: how to shape the story, since a constant implicit assumption is that the story itself embodies the desired meanings and values; how to handle point of view once the story is transposed from dramatic dialogue to prose fiction; what kind of linguistic register to use, since Shakespeare's own language is simultaneously object of value and barrier to communication; and how to articulate the moral and ethical values deemed to be expressed within the original plays.

In this paper, I will examine some retellings of the tragedy *Macbeth*, in order to complement McCallum's discussion of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* (early comedy) and Bottoms' discussion of *The Tempest* (late romance).[1] Retelling a tragedy entails a different perspective on the world, in that there is a sharper conflict between good and evil and a different mix of morality, politics and individualism in the tragedies than in the other plays. In *Macbeth*, where evil is immanent in the world at the beginning of the play, and awaits only a breach in nature to irrupt throughout the world, what an audience learns, experiences and wonders at belongs to a different realm from the comedies or romances. My focus will be primarily on Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* (1989),[2] which effaces the tragic element by reworking the play as a comic fantasy, and which also incorporates motifs from other Shakespeare plays (especially *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the romances). I will also make some comparisons with four modern prose retellings intended for young audiences: Miles' *Favourite Tales from Shakespeare* (1976; 1983), Garfield's *Shakespeare Stories* (1985; 1988), Birch's *Shakespeare's Stories* (1988; 1993), and McCaughrean's *Stories from Shakespeare* (1994).

Of these several versions, Pratchett's novel is a re-versioning rather than a retelling, and as such is much the furthest from the original *Macbeth*: in the 'Author's Note' to *Lords and Ladies*, Pratchett himself referred to *Wyrd Sisters* as having 'a plot not unadjacent to that of a famous play about a Scottish king' (1992, p.5). At the same time, *Wyrd Sisters* introduces more of the play's original language than is reproduced in the other retellings mentioned, doing so in ways which constitute a bold approach to what Bottoms terms the desideratum of 'creating a sensibility to Shakespeare's own language' (p. 84). Birch, for example, merges phrases and snatches from *Macbeth* into her narration, especially within direct speech, and the effect is inadvertently to produce a pastiche of registers. Pratchett, in contrast, foregrounds his quotations to produce deliberate comic effects from changed contexts and register clash. Thus he distances the narrative from his pre-texts while often directly citing, evoking or reconstructing them for comic and parodic purposes, and when these strategies are placed beside the more replicatory prose retellings

some important questions are raised about the nature of cultural heritage. Most obviously, the use of fantastic genre means that witch-power can function with the same degree of credibility as any other component of the story, as it must have done for audiences in the early seventeenth century. But Pratchett has reversed the moral polarity, so to speak, by moving the witches to the centre of the story and depicting them as powerful but comic figures who elicit an affectionate audience response.

Macbeth, which is commonly considered to have been printed in the Shakespeare Folio from a prompt-copy, follows a straightforward story line. A reteller, therefore, has little to do to produce a truncated prose version apart from eliminating a couple of minor scenes (such as II.iv), reducing others to a brief report, and generally substituting narration for dialogue and soliloquy. As remarked earlier, significance is thus attributed to the structures of story and schematically related characters rather than to dramatic elements such as figurative language. This assumption can have the effect that some story elements are actually expanded, presumably to enhance their explanatory force. Garfield, for example, picks up a reference to drumbeats signalling Macbeth's first meeting with the witches, reproduces the words of the witch who hears them—'A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come!' (I.iii.30-31; Garfield, 1988, p.272)—and expands this into a little scene in which Banquo is the drummer, playing a drum 'taken, perhaps, out of the cradling arms of some dead drummer boy', while he and Macbeth stride through the dusk with 'their kilts swinging and their heads held high'. The drum plays throughout the exchange with the witches, until replaced by another drum, Macbeth's heart 'thudding and thundering in his ears' (p. 273). The effect of this addition is both to prompt a reader's visual imagination, and then to exploit that to underline the moment in the narrative at which Macbeth is first seized by the will to power.

An example of a more extended innovation is found in Miles' decision to increase the overt function of the witches. They here frame the story, which begins and ends with their presence, and appear more frequently in instrumental roles. It is suggested that they existed long ago and far away, and might exist still; it is stressed that their function is to tempt people and ruin lives, but that 'They could not tempt good people, only people whose thoughts were already evil' (p.12). Hence Macbeth is apt material for them to work on, because in this version his desire for the crown long precedes his meeting with the witches. That the witches embody Macbeth's desires and ambitions can be readily inferred, but Miles takes away any requirement for the audience to draw such an inference. A clear example can be found in his handling of the well-known 'Is this a dagger which I see before me' soliloquy (II.ii.33ff.). At the end of his speech, amongst various attributes of the midnight hour, Shakespeare's Macbeth includes, 'witchcraft celebrates/ Pale Hecate's offerings'. Miles disposes of the dagger in a sentence, describes Macbeth's emotional state, and then develops the witchcraft cue by explaining that, 'It was really one of the witches who had hung the dagger in the air, masking her face with her ragged sleeve as she offered Macbeth the handle. They now had him completely in their power' (p. 20). Finally, at the end of the story, the witches gleefully gather up some skin, blood and hair belonging to the slain Macbeth to be added to their ever simmering cauldron. A clear outcome of this pervasive revision is that the story is moved generically closer to folktale, and becomes a straightforward narrative about the operation of evil in the world. There is only a dimin-

ished possibility of imagining Macbeth as possessed of a flawed and ruined nobility, which Shakespeare conveyed largely through Macbeth's moral vacillation and powerful language.

The other source of evil temptation in Miles' retelling is Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare endowed her with an overweening ambition which prompted her to act contrary to her sex, as suggested in her 'unsex me here' soliloquy (I.v.39-55). In Miles, however, she had long dreamed of killing the king, and it is she who suggests it to Macbeth. When he recoils, 'she came close to him and pressed her beautiful body against his and whispered fiercely in his ear . . . .' (p. 19). It is perhaps only saying the obvious to point out that in evoking the clichéd conjunction of female sexuality and evil this addition combines with the increased role of the witches to invest the narrative with a misogynist element not present in the source text.

Miles warns his readers that the witches 'were not like witches you read about in fairy tales, but deadly and dangerous ones' (p.12). *Wyrd Sisters* pivots entirely on the question of the nature of witches, and particularly their representation. Are they wise women dedicated to preserving cosmic harmony, or are they agents of diabolical evil? Pratchett's witches declare themselves to be precisely the ones 'you read about in fairy tales', as when they recall the career of a famous forebear, Black Aliss (called 'Black' Aliss because of the state of her fingernails and teeth): she was the magical agent in canonical fairy tales such as *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and liked 'a bit of romance in her spells. She liked nothing better than Girl meets Frog' (p. 139). Such a conflation of roles suggests that the witches are not easily categorised. The older two, Granny Weatherwax (one of Pratchett's most popular creations) and Nanny Ogg, also affect the 'traditional' witch-uniform devised for the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* and thence established in the modern imagination. By making the issue of representation central, Pratchett creates a dialogue between modern popular discourses about witches: on the one hand, the negative representations associated with the Early European 'witch-craze', and on the other, the modern romantic notion of the witch as a healer and generally beneficent force. The latter representation is directly embodied in the aspirations of the youngest of the novel's three witches, Magrat.

The story of *Wyrd Sisters* is elaborate, but the main line is as follows. The three witches—Granny, Nanny and Magrat—become drawn into the politics of the small kingdom of Lancre when, upon the murder of the reigning king, his son is thrust into their care and they hide him by fostering him with a troupe of travelling players. The usurpers, Duke Felmet and his wife the Duchess, perceive the witches as a threat to their continuing power and seek to suppress witchcraft. On the suggestion of the court Fool, they embark on a propaganda campaign—'Words can fight even witches. . . . Crone. Evil eye. Stupid old woman' (p.67)—and finally decide to commission a play by means of which words can become history (p.134). The Fool is sent off to hire a playwright and acting troupe and (of course!) the troupe he finds is the same troupe where the missing prince, now named Tomjon, was fostered. In the meantime, in order to enable and hasten the restoration of the throne to the rightful heir, Granny Weatherwax has projected the kingdom of Lancre fifteen years into the future. The play the Fool commissions is, needless to say, what *Macbeth* would have been if James I had been descended from Macbeth rather than Banquo, so when the 'authorised' version is displaced the play takes on the function of the 'mousetrap' play from *Hamlet*. During the crucial performance, and after

much byplay, Granny steps to the front of the stage and utters a very (well, almost) Shakespearian incantation in tolerable iambic verse pentameters (the characters have already observed that the verse just goes 'tumpty-tumpty-tumpty'):

> 'Ghosts of the mind and all device away, I bid the Truth to have -' she hesitated—'its tumpty-tumpty day.' (p.223)

Once the Truth is disclosed, Duke Felmet, to whom Pratchett has transferred Lady Macbeth's slide into insanity (the hand-washing motif is blown up to grotesque proportion), wanders off distracted and dies falling from the castle battlements, and the Duchess is arrested. Tomjon resists becoming king, and so the Fool who, in true folktale style, turns out to be Tomjon's half-brother, ascends the throne. The fairy tale doesn't end with a marriage, but with the anticipation of one: the Fool/King and Magrat will marry in *Lords and Ladies*, the third volume of Pratchett's trilogy about the three witches.

The question of whether or not this story has an inherent meaning is more complex than for the essentially stripped-back retellings of *Macbeth*, because what Pratchett has done through a barrage of intertextualities is connect *this* story to a myriad of other stories (other plays, folktales,

Marx Brothers films, and so on). If there is a message emerging from this web of connections and coincidences, it is that articulated by Granny Weatherwax at the end of the novel in an utterance which throws down the gauntlet to all ideologies which deny human freedom, from deterministic theories of tragedy to poststructuralist notions of subjectivity: 'Destiny *is* important, see, but people go wrong when they think it controls them. It's the other way round' (p.251).

Pratchett's handling of story also exemplifies a major importance of his work for the reading experience of adolescent readers: for a reader who has developed some sophistication in literacy, the text has the potential to stretch and expand reading ability and critical literacy. At the level of story, for example, it encourages readers to pay close attention in reading for the sense, and to develop skill in making connections across extensive stretches of narrative. That is, Pratchett consistently focuses readers' attention on the textuality of story by accumulation and by obliquity, at times using these strategies in conjunction with each other. Hence the text encourages the development of inferencing skills: if readers want to know 'what really happened' they must pay close attention and then draw

inferences and make connections. The process of connectivity is humorously presented as a *mise en abyme* by the recurrent references to one of Nanny Ogg's favourite songs, a 'rugby' ballad known by its risque refrain line, 'The Hedgehog Can Never be Buggered at All'. Introduced by title on page 36, one- or two-line snatches of the ballad are given throughout the text, usually when Nanny has been drinking and is therefore in the right context for this genre. No suggestion is given that by the novel's end the ballad has been performed in its entirety, and indeed it is potentially endless, as ingenuity could readily supply new verses (at last count, Pratchett fans contributing to an internet site had extended the ballad to 150 stanzas). Nor is the meaning of the refrain line ever explained, but emerges as an inference from its relation to preceding lines. Putting the song together, and inferring what lies in the gaps, is very like the more complex process of reading a novel, of holding things in the mind, making hypotheses, and resolving these by connecting various parts of the story.

In other examples, often more local, apprehension of the sense demands more than a merely cursory reading. A good example occurs with the description of the end of the evil Duchess. Late in the novel,

after the usurpers have been overthrown, the Duchess is placed under a kind of house arrest. She easily escapes, and flees through the forest. A central story element which finds partial culmination at this moment is the ancient belief that the health and well-being of the land is inextricably and sacramentally linked with the nature and being of the king— an idea clearly underpinning *Macbeth* itself. In *Wyrd Sisters*, Felmet and the Duchess had produced perturbations in the natural world equivalent to those stemming from Macbeth's illegitimate and bloody reign. As the Duchess escapes, she finds that her route seems to be shaped by the forest itself (in an oblique transformation of the Birnam Wood incident), until she reaches a clearing in which the forest animals are massed awaiting her:

> There was total silence for a few seconds, broken only by a faint panting, and then the duchess grinned, raised her knife, and charged the lot of them.
>
> The front ranks of the massed creatures opened to let her pass, and then closed in again. Even the rabbits.
>
> The kingdom exhaled. (p. 248)

A superficial reading might deduce from 'let her pass' that the animals continue what the trees have been doing and ensure she leaves the kingdom, allowing her through and closing the path behind her. This would create a suggestion of future threat, since a few sentences earlier, in response to the realisation that the trees were determining where she went, the duchess had said, 'All right. I'm going anyway. I *want* to go. But I will be back.' That the duchess is instead killed at this moment is, of course, only conveyed by implication, which readers must infer from specific textual details: 'the *front* ranks ... opened' (but not those behind); the semantic distinction between *closed* and *closed in*; and the emphasis of `*Even* the rabbits'. How much a reader has to work at this stretch of text is brought out by a contrast with Stephen Briggs' stage version of the novel:

> MAGRAT: What happened to the Duchess?
>
> GRANNY: She escaped from the castle. Didn't get far. Had to go through the forest. The animals got her.
> (Briggs 1996, p.150)

A still subtler example lies in the twist Pratchett gives to the business of the heir to the throne. The ghost of the murdered king roams the castle, craving revenge and the restoration of the throne to his son. Readers are told many times that such a ghost is only visible to cats, people with psychic ability, and close relatives, but only in retrospect are they apt to remember that neither of the King's 'sons' ever sees him. They *are* brothers, as several characters deduce from their physical likeness; the twist is that their father is not the King but a Fool, a character who is mentioned but never actually appears in the novel's action.

The obliquity which produces such gaps in the story is further manifested in the crucial issue of focalisation. Bottoms has demonstrated how in retellings of *The Tempest* the narrative is framed by the voice of the narrator and the perspective is invariably that of Prospero, the ruling character. It might be expected that the polarisation of good and evil in *Macbeth* would stimulate in its retellings a more polyfocalised range of perspectives, in an attempt to convey the range of voices and positions available in the play, but instead the retellings are predominantly narrated, with rare traces of character focalisation. Rather, the narratives develop a common convention in children's literature, with which *Macbeth* appears to concur, that those who surrender themselves to evil will become its victims. This is essentially the point made by Miles's deployment of the witches, but is apt to be most overt in the more abbreviated accounts of the end of Lady Macbeth. In Miles she simply expires from guilt-

induced insomnia; McCaughrean elaborates her death through a religious discourse involving a conjunction of mind, soul and guilt:

> *Lady Macbeth, her life weltering in blood, was fast going mad. At night she walked in her sleep, wringing her hands in an endless nightmare of washing. The murder weapons that had bloodied her hands in the King's bedroom that night had stained her to the very soul. In her mind's eye, the spots were still crimson and indelible on her palms. With the invading army within a day's ride of Dunsinane castle, she killed herself, crushed by guilt.*
> (McCaughrean 1994, p.129)

Such an explicit presentation of the destructive rebound of evil actions is far removed from the play's more subtle staging of the observed and commented sleepwalking scene and the report of Lady Macbeth's off-stage death. Moreover, the rebound of evil is here *narrated* rather than experienced by the character, and the absence, as with all the summary retellings, of a narrative strategy to replace the play's soliloquies once again means that narrative falls back on the assumption that significance is somehow inherent in story itself.

Pratchett's re-version avoids this kind of failure in two ways. First, he uses the resources of an extended narrative fiction to effect polyfocalisation, so that the narrative constantly slips between a dominant, albeit playful and parodic, narratorial voice and multiple character perspectives. At least ten of the characters focalise at some point, and hence are both narrated and focalised at other points, so that readers are given complex perceptions comparable to the dramatic situation whereby Macbeth is presented in dialogue, in soliloquy, and as the object of conversation between other characters. The upshot is that the focalising characters appear as a bundle of attributes and desires, with the more fully elaborated characters such as Granny or Magrat displaying a range of both positive and negative attributes. Second, Pratchett converts the metadramatic strategies of *Hamlet* and the comedies into powerfully expressive metafiction, so that readers are continually reminded that *Wyrd Sisters* is a kind of dialogue with its pre-texts, especially *Macbeth*. As McCallum points out, prose retellings of the plays rarely exploit this latter potential, but it is a highlight of Pratchett's comprehensive reworkings. Consequently, the text not only foregrounds the ontological gap between fiction and reality, as is usual with metafiction (McCallum 1996, p.399), but also highlights the difference between tragedy and comedy as ontological schemes. All this is evident in the following scene, in which the actors Gumridge and Wimsloe, under the influence of Granny's spell, forget their script and reproduce what 'really' happened:

> *'Do you fear him now?' said Gumridge. 'And he so mazed with drink? Take his dagger, husband—you are a blade's width from the kingdom.'*
>
> *'I dare not,' Wimsloe said, trying to look in astonishment at his own lips.*
>
> *'Who will know?' Gumridge waved a hand towards the audience. He'd never act so well again. 'See, there is only eyeless night. Take the dagger now, take the kingdom tomorrow. Have a stab at it, man.'*
>
> *Wimsloe's hand shook.*
>
> *'I have it, wife,' he said. 'Is this a dagger I see before me?'*
>
> *'Of course it's a bloody dagger. Come on, do it now.'* (p. 224)

Such scenes are many layered indeed, and without being at all heavy-handed (or intentionally didactic), such writing has the potential to enhance greatly a young reader's apprehension of textual processes. It pivots on the code mixing consequent upon the pastiche of close reminiscences of *Macbeth*, as in 'Is this a dagger [which] I see before me?' (*Macbeth*, II.i.33), of outrageous inversions of the pre-text, as in 'Of course it's a

bloody dagger' (*Macbeth*, II.i.45-46: 'I see . . . on thy blade and dudgeon, gouts of blood'), and modern idioms such as 'Have a stab at it' (with its atrocious pun). The metafictive frame is attested by the reminders that the words are spoken by characters who are also actors. That their utterances here speak themselves, regardless of the intentions of the speakers, functions as a parody of the Barthesian notion that a text is written by the culture in which it is produced—by its language, its history, its available genres, its rhetorical forms, and so on. It emerges, then, that a particular incident is not necessarily innately tragic or comic, but is constituted as such by textual conjunctures—for example, of pre-text, register and genre—as shaped by an authorial hand. The metafiction thus has two special implications. It reminds readers of the constructedness of fiction, and hence draws attention to how meaning is apt to be grounded ideologically; and it connects the embedded play with the novel's wider humanistic concern with social and political freedoms and responsibilities, and with the operation of justice.

The key to all this is language, and language is the central issue in Shakespeare retellings. When advocating strategies for making Shakespeare's own language available to students, Bottoms (1996, p.85) contends

that 'if you take [it] away, . . . what you are left with is simply not worth the name'. And yet Shakespeare's language is simultaneously an object of cultural capital, a source of interpretative richness, and a barrier to communication: as Granny says after the first act of Hwel's play, 'Some of those speeches were very good. I couldn't understand hardly any of it' (p. 220). A problem for serious retellings which strive to retain something of the original language within register shifts between demotic and epic linguistic modes is that the shift is not just between different registers, but between different synchronic linguistic systems. Unless the grounding register is already archaic, as is Garfield's practice, for example, the outcome will be an unproductive register clash. So while Pratchett's citations of his pre-texts are largely iconoclastic and may be supposed to offend purists, as is often the case with parody, they also complement their sources and by defamiliarising them tend both to interrogate and affirm established aesthetic norms (see Hutcheon, 1985). In other words, by embedding Shakespeare's language within his own very inventive writing, and in so doing instituting a cross-over between high culture and popular culture comparable to what pertained in receptions of the plays in the

early seventeenth century, Pratchett may effectively do more to cause young readers 'to Experience, to Learn, to Wonder' than more sober retellings can achieve. Any doubts about the self-reflexive nature of this crossing-over are quickly dispelled by textual moments which cross in the other direction, so to speak, such as when Hwel momentarily imagines a Laurel and Hardy film, an idea about 'two clowns, one fat, one thin . . . '*Thys ys a Dainty Messe youe have got me into, Stanleigh*' (p.159).

As with story and narrative, Pratchett's handling of language is calculated to stretch his readers by vocabulary expansion. This becomes most evident when one or other of the witches comes across a word she doesn't know. These are sometimes explained, and sometimes allowed to develop meaning contextually. There is a neat example when the ghost of King Verence flatters Granny Weatherwax by addressing her as 'doyenne of witches' (p.125): the context makes clear it is a compliment, even though Granny 'wasn't quite sure what "doyenne" meant' (p. 126); shortly afterwards, Nanny Ogg picks up the phrase but distorts it to 'hoyden of witches' (p. 139). And if readers are still in the dark, there's a helpful hint here when Granny corrects her: 'Doyenne,' said Granny, who had looked it up. 'Not hoyden.'.

Readers are still not *told* what the word means, however, and in fact now have two apparently contrasting terms to think about, the new one being a very apt description of Nanny Ogg herself. The point is made still more obviously by Magrat towards the end of the novel: 'I looked up *droit de seigneur*. Goodie Whemper had a dictionary.' (p. 249). Pratchett assures his readers that it's all right not to know, but if they wish they can also find out, and that might empower them as readers as Magrat here feels empowered by knowing. The rewards for pursuing the latter example turn out to be several: merely to understand a recurring allusion; to discover that Nanny Ogg, while getting the general drift, misunderstands the meaning of *droit*; and to gain access to the irony underlying the paternity issue, and thus be able to solve the riddle at the end and to appreciate the parodic inversion of folktale conventions to which the riddle points.

I conclude this discussion with an example illustrating one of the novel's principal themes, the subtle blend of insubstantiality and power which makes language so rich and so dangerous (as Granny realises while watching the play, '[words] were as soft as water, but they were also as powerful as water', p.213). In the example, Granny has a slight altercation with a peasant, who asserts that he has rights:

> 'What rights are they?' said Granny.
>
> 'Dunnage, cowhage-in-ordinary, badinage, leftovers, scrommidge, clary and spunt,' said the peasant promptly. 'And acornage, every other year, and the right to keep two-thirds of a goat on the common. Until he [Duke Felmet] set fire to it. It was a bloody good goat, too.'
>
> 'A man could go far, knowing his rights like you do,' said Granny. 'But right now he should go home.' (pp.106-7)

Within this list, leftovers, the transparent nonce-word *acornage* and common-rights function as semantic nodes to suggest that all the terms belong to a lexical set pertaining to feudal agriculture. Any reader who follows Granny or Magrat's example and uses a dictionary will quickly discover this is not so, and that we are thoroughly in the realm of mock-Shakespeare: *scrommidge* and *spunt*, as far as I can tell, are meaningless nonce words, and the rest, while sounding plausible, are playful absurdities. Thus *dunnage*, for example, is 'material used in ships to pack cargo to prevent damage from movement or moisture', and *cow[h]age* refers to 'the hairs on the pods of the tropical plant *macuna pruriens*, which cause intense itching', and so

on with the others. Pratchett is here playing an extended joke with, or on, his readers, but there is also a more serious implication: 'rights' are defined in language, can be tangled up in language, and may be simply illusory, as suggested by the fate of the goat and Granny's dismissive rejoinder.

Hwel's stand in the self-reflexively metafictive debate is right, of course. People read *Wyrd Sisters* in order to laugh. But that doesn't cancel the other possibility. As with many retellings and re-versions of canonical literary texts, *Wyrd Sisters* transmits traditional cultural ideas and values, but reshapes them so as to make them operable in the context of modern experience of the world. So even as it sports with its pre-texts, the novel affirms a deeply humanistic sense of human existence and responsibility. Along with this world view, the novel's gift to young, able readers is that it can stretch their skills in critical literacy. It has the potential to extend the following capabilities, and I will close by simply listing them: reading for sense; reading for significance and theme; understanding how theme unifies and integrates narrative; grasping the textual and cultural effects of working across the boundary between 'high' and 'popular' culture; understanding how language and narrative construct or

distort reality; grasping the point of the constructedness of fictional characters; developing awareness of the key principles of verbal humour; understanding genres; understanding the important textual functions of intertextuality and metafiction; and possessing a wide and expanding vocabulary. All that is, indeed, to come to Experience, to Learn, to Wonder.

Notes:

1 My own discussion is especially indebted to McCallum's analysis.

2 The title of the novel is taken from one of Macbeth's references to the witches:

I will tomorrow,
And betimes I will, to the weird sisters:
More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know,
By the worst means, the worst.
                    Macbeth III.iv.132-35

3 The idea is in fact a cliché in contemporary medievalist fantasy, established and reinforced by the Waste Land motif. See for example Springer's story *The Raven* (in Yolen 1995): 'It was a strange exalted and terrible thing, to be King Arthur. When he made mistakes, the sky clouded, the corn grew short, women wept, hundreds of men marched into battle.' (p.137)

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