

Keeping the Piece: Policing by Principle in Terry Pratchett's *Night Watch*

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## **Abstract**

In Terry Pratchett's novel *Night Watch*, Sam Vimes, a police commander, travels back in time, tasked with training his younger self and keeping the peace as revolution mounts. This thesis examines Vimes' philosophies and actions to determine how the novel may translate to a call for police reform in Pratchett's real-world homeland, contemporary Britain. To this end, I use as my guide the Peelian principles, nine statements regarding police duties that influence Britain's practice of policing by consent; many of these principles overlap with Vimes' own police and social theories. By examining the novel's place within its dominant genres, the characterisation of its protagonist and moral centre, and its events as they unfold, this thesis argues that, in depicting Vimes' success at keeping the peace while fighting the othering forces of classism and police corruption, Pratchett calls for greater prominence to be given to the Peelian principles in contemporary policing.

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Lastly, I must thank Sir Terry Pratchett, who found a way to make a bored teenager love reading and to help a complacent university student find her fury.

## Chapter One Introduction

“And who’re you doing this for? The people? They attacked the other Houses, and what’s the Night Watch ever done to hurt them?”

“Nothing,” said Vimes.

“There you are, then.”

“I mean the Watch did nothing, and that’s what hurt them,” said Vimes.

– Terry Pratchett, *Night Watch*

As the above epigraph illustrates, fantasy novelist Terry Pratchett has a penchant for couching incisive critique in clever wordplay. Andrew M. Butler, Sandor Klapcsik, and A.S. Byatt all claim parody to be at the centre of Pratchett’s style. Butler notes especially the “pastiche, parody, satirising and lampooning of society which the later novels engage in” (69-70); Klapcsik uses the term “parodic fantasy fiction” as a point of distinction between Pratchett and other fantasy writers (76); Byatt credits Pratchett with “a multifarious genius for strong parody as opposed to derivative manipulation of past motifs” (par 14). Certainly Pratchett’s early work fits the category of parody, and his later work, as Butler notes, maintains the mocking spirit of the early. In his later Discworld novels, however, especially *The City Watch* sequence,<sup>1</sup> Pratchett turns his mocking lens from generic conventions and tropes to the the dangerous ideologies and power structures that permeate contemporary urban life. Edward James calls the *City Watch* novels “the

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<sup>1</sup> The Discworld series consists of forty-one novels involving hundreds of characters, all taking place within a single fantastical universe. Within the series exists multiple story collections, often called sequences, that feature the same characters – characters who, for the most part, only appear within their own sequence. The Discworld’s *City Watch* Sequence consists of eight novels; in order: *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms*, *Feet of Clay*, *Jingo*, *The Fifth Elephant*, *Night Watch*, *Thud!*, and *Snuff*. This essay centres on *Night Watch*, but incorporates information and quotations from earlier novels as needed, as well as from certain other Pratchett novels in- and outside of the Discworld series that, though they share no characters with the *City Watch* books, evoke some of the same themes and motifs.

most political of Pratchett's works" (203), and Neil Gaiman, writing about Pratchett, reminds us that "beneath any jollity, there is a foundation of fury" (par 15). "Terry Pratchett isn't jolly. He's angry," Gaiman states, in the title of his brief tribute published not long before Pratchett died. Pratchett's "fury" and the City Watch novels' politics together invite us to consider the sequence as social satire and explore what Pratchett may be arguing needs to change.

The novels, published during a period spanning Margaret Thatcher's second term and the years of the Brixton riots, are rife with similarities between the Ankh-Morpork City Watch and London's Metropolitan Police, a force that, throughout this period, were notorious for racism, classism, brutality, and corruption. In this context, perhaps the most significant similarity is that, as one Ankh-Morpork watchman<sup>2</sup> points out, the twin boroughs of Ankh and Morpork "practise policing by consent" (*Men at Arms* 254) – the same system employed in contemporary England, instituted in 1829 when the London Metropolitan Police were formed by Robert Peel. This system is ostensibly governed by the Peelian principles, a collection of nine tenets that articulate the roles and responsibilities of the police within society. Pratchett integrates a version of these principles into the City Watch novels in the form of the policing and social philosophy of City Watch Commander Samuel Vimes. The novels are predominantly focalized through Vimes, and increasingly so as the sequence progresses, contributing to Vimes' status as the moral centre of the novel's argument. Vimes' convictions reflect a view of the

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<sup>2</sup> This is the word Pratchett uses most often to refer to police officers in Ankh-Morpork; he himself, however, calls attention to the term's gendered insufficiency in *Men at Arms*, when Ankh-Morpork's first watchwoman explains her reaction to the recruitment slogan "Be A Man In The City Watch!": "So I thought I'd give it a go. After all, I'd only have something to gain" (101). Since, in the past setting of *Night Watch*, the police officers are all men, I have chosen to use Pratchett's terminology here and throughout for the sake of adherence to the original text.

principles that, though it does not accept their assertions uncritically, adopts such elements of the principles as allow the police to perform their two main functions as Pratchett sees them: “to keep the peace” (*Jingo* 350) and “to balance things up a bit” (*Feet of Clay* 386-7) between the powerful and powerless. The City Watch novels are about Vimes’ attempts to police as justly and effectively as possible within an imperfect legal system as much as they are about solving mysteries.

In fact, *Night Watch* stands out among crime fiction novels, because it does not centre on a mystery. Instead, the tension in the plot comes from the tension between the two police duties mentioned above. In the novel, a magical accident sends Vimes back in time along with Carcer, the murderer he is trying to arrest. To ensure he has a future to return to, Vimes must assume a dead sergeant’s identity in order to track down Carcer, train his younger self (henceforth referred to as “young Sam”), and police a city in the foremath of revolution. In this past world, the City Watch is feckless and corrupt, little more than a machine for following the orders of the city patrician, Lord Winder, who is himself paranoid and self-serving. Law enforcement has become Winder’s way of protecting his property, “[a]nd the Watch, by and large, [are] just another gang” (166). As a result, Ankh-Morpork’s citizens hate and fear the police as much as they do their ruler. To keep the peace in his precinct as revolution mounts, Vimes reminds his watchmen of the principles that shape their duty, including that they are citizens first and that their true master is the law, not the leadership. As Vimes favours duty over orders, he makes choices that cement his role as a protector and peacekeeper in the eyes of the citizens within his precinct. Using a technique formed from his version of the Peelian principles, Vimes keeps the peace in his neighbourhood in the face of violent civil unrest by

adhering to principle over policy, thinking like a citizen instead of a soldier, and dispelling the fear that results from a city's citizens' being abused by their own government. In this thesis, I will use the Peelian principles as a theoretical guide to reading *Night Watch*, tracing their influence on Pratchett's depiction of Vimes' own policing theories and deciphering the extent to which Vimes' technique can be translated into an advocacy of real-world police reform. In the first section, I will consider the ways *Night Watch*'s argument is affected by its adherence to and challenging of certain conventions of its three primary genres: crime fiction, speculative fiction, and revolutionary fiction. In the second, I will analyse Sam Vimes himself – both his development as a character and his own political convictions – to determine what Pratchett uses to build an effective police protagonist. Lastly, I will examine Sam Vimes' choices during the events of *Night Watch*'s revolution to demonstrate that Vimes' choices are governed by a version of the Peelian principles and that these principles are what make him an effective peacekeeper. Vimes' success – in calming a frightened public, in protecting citizens from unjust uses of power and, most importantly, in mitigating state violence – forms a structural call for the same increased focus on principled policing in real-world Britain.



## Chapter Two

### The Argument: The Influence of Form and Genre on *Night Watch*'s Call for Reform

Pratchett's incisive wit and Vimes' righteous rage strongly suggest that *Night Watch* is pointing to something that needs to be fixed, but the peculiarities of the novel's plot raise questions about the extent to which the novel calls for major policy reform. Pratchett chooses for *Night Watch* certain rhetoric and tropes that are typical of politically engaged novels, but he complicates these features with others that present a cynically conservative approach to political reform. Conventionally disruptive narrative elements like revolution and time travel get tempered under Pratchett's critical gaze, being robbed of their efficacy as well as their glory. At the same time, Pratchett confronts the ideologically conservative tendencies of crime fiction, calling into question its frequently traditional depictions of criminality and the status quo. By rejecting romanticised depictions of both of the extreme ends of the spectrum of political reform, *Night Watch* argues for a form of change that, though it be incremental, is also more likely to last, it being based on a change of mindset that favours principles and people over politics. As Pratchett calls for greater prominence to be given to the Peelian principles, he reinforces the value of current law-enforcement system while advocating for a change in how that system is executed.

Stephen Knight's *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* and D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* both introduce ways that some crime fiction's forms and structures work together to reinforce conservative notions about the primacy of order and government authority in a civilized society, even as many of the narratives ostensibly align their anti-heroes with society's marginalized members. Knight argues that "major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about

controlling crime, but both realise and validate a whole view of the world” that changes with the novel or series (2). Narrative perspective, characterization, and plotting combine to express ideas about what justice looks like and how best to achieve it. Whether referring to Raymond Chandler’s insistence “that an isolated, intelligent person, implicitly hostile to others and basically uninterested in them, can . . . resolve apparently puzzling and personally threatening problems by thoughtful, passive inspection” (138) or Ed McBain’s preference for “a shared sense of duty, not personally constructed rules to set against a corrupt world” (187), Knight argues that “form and content together create the crucial realisation of a pleasing, comforting world view” that attracts readers who are persuaded by its rhetoric (5). Miller’s argument extends logically if not explicitly from Knight’s. Miller discusses the way police and the legal system are “marginaliz[ed]” in crime fiction: “Even in the special case of detective fiction, where police detectives often hold centre stage, the police never quite emerge from the ghetto in which the novel generally confines them” (3). Miller stresses that the world of the novel is often one in which “normality” means “*not needing* the police. . . . The investigation repairs this normality, not only by solving the crime, but also, . . . by withdrawing from what had been, for an aberrant moment, its scene” (3). In these cases, the “comforting world view” that Knight refers to is the view that crime falls outside the realm of the natural and acceptable functioning of society, that the police are an unpleasant necessity, and that, once their fixing work is done, they can be put away like the tools they are.

What does this argument mean, then, for the police procedural, a subgenre that has grown in popularity since Miller’s book and into which category *Night Watch* fits? Pratchett places not only police officers, but also the police system, at the centre of the

novel's narrative. Vimes has no mystery to solve in this novel: the killer Vimes chases has already been identified at the outset, and the "repair" work that Vimes must do to the past consists of perpetuating – even enhancing – the role of the police in the everyday life of the city. By focusing *Night Watch* on preventing crime, rather than solving it, and on principled commitment, rather than investigative skill, Pratchett steps outside the most common crime fiction plot, highlighting the necessity of a consistent police presence in civilised society. In fact, Pratchett's focus on crime prevention falls in line with the first of the Peelian principles, which emphasises the need for the "prevent[ion of] crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment" ("Definition"). The structure of the novel's plot reinforces Vimes' conviction that the primary role of the Watch should be to keep the peace.

At the same time, the continual presence of the police reinforces the idea that there are standards of acceptable behaviour in polite society and that a crime-free society is one in which all citizens respect its mores. Louis Althusser argues that, at its core, "[t]he general function of this part of the repressive apparatus [the police] . . . is to provide a material political guarantee of the conditions that the Ideological State Apparatuses require in order to function" (203). He would likely contend that Pratchett's argument for a more ethical method of policing is merely dressing repression in fancier clothing, so it can pose as a more palatable, yet still dangerous ideology, the "conception of the way 'society' works" (178). At work here is what Miller calls "another, informal, and extralegal principle of organization and control," or "the notion of delinquency" (3) – the representation of crime as a falling away or a stepping outside of the bounds of civilisation, with its accompanying class implications. Pratchett engages with this concept

as well, by telling the stories of wealthy snobs and aristocrats fomenting criminal conspiracies to improve their social position (usually by bringing back the monarchy). When murders are committed in these novels, those killed are almost exclusively tradespeople or servants – pawns in the city’s game of political chess. Vimes calls Ankh-Morpork’s encyclopedia of aristocracy “the guide to the criminal classes” (*Feet* 103) and resents having to mingle with them at society functions, as his title and office demand. In *Night Watch*, Carcer’s remorseless low-class brutality is juxtaposed against the conspiracies of equally remorseless upper-class manipulators whose actions, though they are legal in Ankh-Morpork, cause destruction on a much larger scale. The same tendencies within early examples of crime fiction that Miller spotlights are among those Pratchett confronts in the City Watch sequence, and in *Night Watch* especially, in order to question what constitutes “delinquency” in a society that accepts moral repugnance in the guise of good breeding.

While Pratchett’s ethical questions in *Night Watch* are traceable, his proposed answers are much more oblique, if knowable at all. The structure of the novel’s plot and its use of generic conventions obscures its level of political engagement. One main reason for such obscurity is the way Pratchett uses the time travel trope. Elsewhere in and outside the Discworld series, Pratchett treats time as though it is mostly linear, but bifurcating at critical moments. Throughout his young adult novel *Johnny and the Bomb*, he refers to these bifurcations as “the trousers of time,” and the term comes up occasionally in Pratchett’s writing after that point. As the metaphor suggests, each decision of a person’s lifetime sends the person down one leg of the trousers, while in an alternate universe another version of that person travels down the leg corresponding to

the alternate option. Presumably more bifurcations occur as more choices are made.<sup>3</sup> The events of *Night Watch* are different: Vimes' accidental journey constitutes what the history monks call a "rogue history loop" that needs "prun[ing] out" (107). Rather than each splitting off unabated, these two timelines will eventually "snap back together" (104). This alternate past is a problem, and Vimes must "put it right" (110). The vocabulary with which Pratchett describes the accident fits it into Miller's world of "delinquency," of "official criminality: the population of petty, repeated offenders, whose conspicuousness licenses it to enact, together with the police, a normative scenario of crime and control" (3). Lu-Tze even encourages Vimes to think of him as "a sort of policeman" (90). This context contradicts somewhat the novel's potential call for reform. In her article on *Johnny and the Bomb*, Andrea Zarate explains the re-evaluative potential of liminal temporal states: "New worldviews are . . . not merely assimilated or appropriated, but influence how previously assimilated ideologies are perceived and negotiated by subjects" (93). But Vimes' journey, unlike Johnny's, is about correcting not a past wrong, but a present wrong in order to restore the past to order. The more perfectly Vimes does his job, the less will change between his original present and the one he returns to. Vimes does introduce new ideologies to his past world in the sense that they are new to the past, but they are the same as Vimes has been taught by Keel in his own past: "To stay alert, to think for himself, to keep a place in his head free from the Quirkies and Knocks [the corrupt and lazy coppers] of the world, and not to hesitate about

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<sup>3</sup> Vimes experiences this phenomenon in *Jingo*. When faced with the critical decision of whether to pursue a suspected murderer across the ocean or to stay in Ankh-Morpork and try to prevent a war, Vimes elects to do his duty as a police officer and sets sail. In a twist of plot, and as a result of the Discworld's loose relationship with physics, Vimes gets the opportunity to hear (through the voice of his predictive appointment log) what would have happened had he stayed, though he never fully understands what he is hearing.

fighting dirty today if that was what it took to fight again tomorrow” (104). Vimes’ task in *Night Watch* is to restore the temporal status quo as well as the civic one.

Any call *Night Watch* may make for large-scale political reform is tempered by the novel’s plot structure which illustrates that revolutions are not always the source of hope they promise to be. He counsels Ned Coates, “Don’t put your trust in revolutions. They always come around again. That’s why they’re called revolutions. People die, and nothing changes” (277). The time travel trope illuminates Vimes’ own character development by juxtaposing his present cynicism against his youthful idealism. Young Sam is full of hope that a new city patrician will bring justice and equality, while Vimes knows from experience that Lord Snapcase will be “[j]ust another Winder, but with fancier waistcoats and more chins. Same cronyism, same piggy ways, same stupid arrogance, one more leech in a line of leeches” (248). The morality of revolution in the novel is further complicated by Lu-Tze’s own perspective that the history monks’ job is ensuring that history consists of “not the good stuff. The right stuff” (109). Vimes’ assignment has nothing to do with the revolution’s potential for moral or material benefit, but with its importance on a larger historical stage – an importance that the novel never reveals. Nevertheless, Vimes and young Sam together play their part in history. The changes Vimes cannot resist making are swept up in history’s flow, and, for better or worse, the revolution takes place. Any call Pratchett is making for positive change is attenuated by Vimes’ ambivalence toward the dramatic events literature tends to depict as bringing such changes about.

If the novel does not call for immediate political upheaval, then its rage is more usefully applied toward exploring changes in mindset that can prepare a society for

gradual but lasting reform. This is the kind of change that Vimes hopes his training will be able to achieve in young Sam. He entertains “dream[s]” of fixing young Sam on the spot, but realises that would be another sort of fruitless revolution:

That was always the dream, wasn't it? “I wish I'd known then what I know now”? But when you got older, you found out that you *now* wasn't *you* then. You then was a twerp. You then was who you had to be to start out on the rocky road of becoming you now, and one of the rocky patches on that road was being a twerp. (196)

Instead, Vimes elects to restrict his advice to the things that will make young Sam a better watchman: observational skills, weapons training (including when not to use one), and above all, how to control the rage that Young Sam already has inside him. Without articulating it explicitly, Vimes is teaching young Sam the second through sixth Peelian principles which, combined, assert the importance of earning “the respect and approval of the public” a police officer serves – that it will be more effective in “securing observance of laws” than violence, which should always be reserved as the last resort (“Definition”). Vimes makes sure that young Sam understands that cooperation is preferable to domination when enforcing the law. Jonathan Jackson, et. al., observe that “the experience or perception of the procedural fairness of the criminal justice system is associated with higher perceived legitimacy”; they define “procedural fairness” as “fair and respectful treatment that ‘follows the rules’” (3). Vimes also teaches this practice by example, and the practices of the other principles, as the final section of this thesis will demonstrate. Vimes teaches his watchmen how to be good coppers, not heroes, which is why it is so important to him that they be accurately remembered in the history he

discusses with Vetinari after he returns. “They fought for those who’d been abandoned,” Vimes insists, “they fought for one another, and they were betrayed. Men like them always are. What good would a statue be? It’d just inspire new fools to believe they’re going to be heroes. They wouldn’t want that” (469-70). Rather than securing praise or glory, Vimes would have his watchmen secure the safety of the citizens. This incremental step towards positive change, putting the responsibility for social justice in the hands of those with the power to effect it, is the reform *Night Watch* calls for.

In fact, Pratchett’s bold political assertion in *Night Watch* is simply that it is better to save lives than to rush into revolt, even in the name of the finest political convictions. Farah Mendlesohn explains as much when she outlines a consistent Discworld morality: “Causes, whether religious or political, . . . allow the individual to play games with the value of human life” (245). Pratchett, and Vimes, find such convictions unacceptable. Thus, Pratchett instead offers practical advice for working to save lives within the legal system already in place. The principles themselves have little to do with right and wrong, except in the very general sense that it is *right* for a government to attempt to ensure the security of its citizens. They are only political inasmuch as they instruct the police officer in how best to maintain the citizens’ compliance with the laws in force under a given government regime. Instead they are guidelines for efficacy, for achieving the status and trust necessary to be able to enforce the law in whatever capacity and on whomever the law demands. This level of respect is the change, if any, that *Night Watch* calls for. It is what the police force needs if it is to be the impartial force for justice it purports to be. Vimes realises this much as he is trying to keep Ned Coates from resigning:

“What could you do, then? Arrest Winder?”



...

[Vimes had] arrested Vetinari, back in the future. Admittedly, the man had walked free, after what passed for the due process of law, but . . . [h]ow had they ever got to that stage? How had he even *dreamed* that a bunch of coppers could slam the cell door on the boss?

Well. Perhaps it had started here. Lance-Constable Vimes was watching him intently.

“Of course we can’t,” he said, “but we ought to be able to. Maybe one day we will. If we can’t then the law isn’t the law, it’s just a way of keeping people down” (274).

Criminologist Ian Loader explains that “the principles have no institutional standing or legal force” (431). This is part of his problem with the principles as they stand. In *Night Watch*, Pratchett seems to be calling for a greater focus on these principles, effecting a transformation of law enforcement on an individual level before attempting institutional reform. Although the novel contains a revolution and a trip through time, both tropes that suggest a call for radical revolt, the transformation Pratchett is really advocating is a transformation of the individual relationships police officers have with the citizens they protect.

### Chapter Three

#### The Credentials: Analysing Sam Vimes' Characterisation as an Ethical Agent

Because *Night Watch*'s plot maintains Ankh-Morpork's political and social structures instead of overturning them, the ethical force of the novel lies in its representation of the good that the individual is able to do within a flawed and destructive social system. This premise is codified when History Monk Lu-Tze, charging Vimes with the task of training his younger self and navigating his past world, warns him not to count on things happening the same way, then counsels him, "Just be yourself" (111). James Brown calls Vimes' task "a deadly serious situation in which his real qualities are sounded to the bottom" (289). But what is it about Vimes that uniquely qualifies him to get this job done? Is it simply that Vimes was trained by Keel, and so is poised to replace Keel in training himself once again? This conclusion presumes that events and reactions will remain the same in this version of Vimes' past, which is not the case. Vimes' and Carcer's presence changes how history unfolds, which changes what history needs in order to make sure "the right stuff" occurs (109). A better assessment of Vimes' usefulness in this time and place comes from professional revolutionary Lady Roberta Meserole, who observes, "In a world where we all move in curves he proceeds in a straight line. And going straight in a world of curves makes things happen" (236). First among Vimes' unique qualifications is his willing rejection of the roles a watchman is expected to play – his insistence instead on determining his own course.

Farah Mendlesohn centres Discworld's "moral schema" on "*choice*" (329 italics original) but reminds us that "choices emerge from who and what we are" (240). Vimes' individual assets are not random, but "emerge" over the course of the City Watch sequence as Vimes faces a series of challenges to his fierce ideals: challenges that both

form and are formed by Vimes' ethical positions. Vimes tangles with murderers, conspirators, and political manipulators whose various forms of corrupt arrogance contribute to his theory, as yet unpractised in *Night Watch*'s past world, of where a watchman should stand: Vimes deliberately resists the impending revolution's demand to "pick a side" (255) because, as a watchman, he is "not supposed to be 'for' people" (254). Later, he rewords the same argument when he reminds one of his lance-constables, "You took an oath to uphold the law and defend the citizens without fear or favour . . . . You're an officer of the law, not a soldier of the government" (310). This neutral citizenship – Pratchett's version of the seventh Peelian principle – is at the heart of Vimes' policing theory and the shape his ethics take in the short time he spends in old Ankh-Morpork. But the conviction itself is in large part a product of Vimes' position along other boundaries: those between rich and poor, between power and limitation, and between rage and reserve. Vimes is able to view and enforce the law impartially because of the space he occupies on either side of these boundaries. His status as a liminal figure within social and literary structures allows him to effect change on either side of Ankh-Morpork's social boundaries while also illuminating Pratchett's argument about the roles and responsibilities of police in contemporary society.

Vimes' vision of policing may call for impartial enforcement of the law, but his view of what the law itself should be is anything but that. Vimes, who grew up poor, is acutely aware of the role of class in how the law is made and enforced, making the legal system unfairly weighted in favour of the rich and titled. In the novel *Feet of Clay*, Vimes remarks that "while it was regarded as pretty good evidence of criminality to be living in a slum, for some reason owning a whole street of them merely got you invited to the very

best social occasions” (103). Vimes’ egalitarian perspective is complicated, however, by the fact that, after marrying well and being extorted into a series of professional promotions, Vimes is a duke and the richest man in Ankh-Morpork, thereby “annoying the rich and arrogant people who ought to be annoyed” (*Night 14*). Thus, Vimes now has the class privilege to effect change, but carries the former experience of being trapped in an economic and legal system designed to protect the position of the rich.

Pratchett uses one of Vimes’ own philosophies to illustrate how Vimes’ former poverty is an advantage to him as a watchman. In *Men at Arms*, Vimes outlines his frustration with class immobility using a concrete example:

He earned thirty-eight dollars a month plus allowances. A really good pair of leather boots cost fifty dollars. But an affordable pair of boots, which were sort of OK for a season or two and then leaked like hell when the cardboard gave out, cost about ten dollars. Those were the kind of boots Vimes always bought, and wore until the soles were so thin that he could tell where he was in Ankh-Morpork on a foggy night by the feel of the cobbles.

But the thing was that good boots lasted for years and years. A man who could afford fifty dollars had a pair of boots that’d still be keeping his feet dry in ten years’ time, while the poor man who could only afford cheap boots would have spent a hundred dollars on boots in the same time and would still have wet feet. (35)

Vimes’ understanding of the limitations that face Ankh-Morpork’s poor affords him insight and empathy, but also material benefit. Vimes’ ability to read the streets becomes

instrumental to the plot in *Night Watch*, as, at a crucial moment of uncertainty and anxiety, Vimes “th[inks] with the brains in his feet” and lets them carry him back to the History Monks for the answers he needs to keep going (277). Without this second meeting, Vimes would not have had the chance to ask for the sustaining lifeline that his returned cigar case represents. Later, it is this lifeline that stiffens Vimes’ resolve, allowing him to choose the law over Lord Rust’s orders. Vimes’ former poverty equips him emotionally and practically to make the choices necessary to maintain peace in his precinct.

Vimes’ experience with poverty helps him to enforce the law equitably, but, significantly, this democratic approach is not based on any idealisation of individuals, as this passage from *Feet of Clay* illustrates: “‘The common people?’ said Vimes. ‘They’re nothing special. They’re no different from the rich and powerful except they’ve got no money or power. But the law should be there to balance things up a bit. So I suppose I’ve got to be on their side’” (386-7). Like Vimes’ approach to maintaining civic order, his approach to enforcing the law is based on advocating for those that Ankh-Morpork’s heavily classed economic system has left powerless. Vimes’ split status in this case serves him by allowing him a thorough understanding of how wealth happens, as suggested when Vimes ponders using the barricades as a filter for sorting the “decent people” from the “bastards” (391). He calls Ankh-Morpork’s corrupt aristocracy “leeches,” “hangers-on,” and “people who [don’t] know or care about the machine but st[eal] its grease;” he considers trapping them in a circle formed by the barricades and “leav[ing] them to do what they’ve always done, which [i]s live off other people” (392). Vimes’ fundamental problem with the rich is that wealth is achieved through taking. It is

not a coincidence that three of Vimes' most hated groups are aristocracy, assassins, and vampires.

Vimes gives voice to Pratchett's argument for a fairer distribution of power as well as money. Nickianne Moody notes the tendency of journalists and reviewers to recognize Dickens' influence on Pratchett's depictions of what she calls "the ideological negotiation of power," remarking that both Pratchett and Dickens "[examine] how individuals become complicit in social injustice" (158). For Vimes, individual criminality is inextricably connected to the way Ankh-Morpork's power and money are distributed. In *Men at Arms*, he absolves shady street vendor Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler of criminality, stating, "He just disagrees with people about the position of . . . money. He thinks it should all be in his pocket" (129); Corporal Nobbs has "a criminal mind" (347) because of his tendency to steal small things from Ankh-Morpork's citizens, especially the dead ones; but the greatest animosity Vimes feels is for the aristocratic snobs he claims have "criminal soul[s]" (347) – that is, "with one easy word, [they] would steal the humanity from people" (129). The difference among these characters is the amount of power each has over others. Even a low-ranking watchman wields more power than the average citizen, but the guiltiest are those who use their considerable power to perpetuate social inequality. This complicity in a criminal society keeps Vimes from feeling comfortable in his aristocratic position; thus, his is less a rags-to-riches than a rags-to-resentment story, and when, in *Night Watch*, he must wear his ducal uniform with gold ornamentation, he suffers from "gilt by association" (16).

For all that *Night Watch* argues the value of the reinforcement of principles-based policing, its alignment of the rich and titled with takers, and of the system that elevates

them with oppression, challenges the ideology hidden in the principles that merit drives success and that those in power deserve to remain there. Vimes' class resentment reflects a similarity between the City Watch novels and the Martin Beck series created by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Katarina Gregersdotter notes of Beck that "he is unable to separate himself from the crime and the criminal, and for one major reason: society itself is also perceived as criminal" (44). Vimes' detestation of his own rank stems from his association of that rank with entitlement and bigotry. Mendlesohn distinguishes this ethos from the ideology common in "traditional fantasy" – that "[t]hose who rise through the social structure do so because quality is hereditary and will out" (248). Thus, Pratchett criticizes both the social and literary conventions of false meritocracy in one stroke. Mendlesohn calls Vimes "our check, the one who continually questions the assumptions," and as such, it is Vimes who reveals that "[j]ustice, such as it is in Ankh-Morpork, is a function of class" (252). Throughout the City Watch sequence, Vimes learns this lesson to his repeated disillusionment, and this disillusionment is what drives his conviction that the law ought to be enforced impartially. If justice is only for the rich, then it is not justice. Instead, Vimes must teach his watchmen and especially the idealistic young Sam how to distinguish serving the greater good from serving those in power, taking advantage of his experience on both sides of the class divide.

As Vimes rises in class, he also rises in his degree of autonomy, yet Pratchett carefully balances Vimes' increasing power with limitations that moderate his ambitions and convictions. Pratchett introduces Vimes in *Guards! Guards!* as "drunken Captain Vimes of the Night Watch" (10), marking his alcoholism as the most important thing about him – more important even than his first name. His first strained attempt at

philosophy is an allusion to Ed McBain's 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct novels: "The city wasa, wasa, wasa wossname. Thing. *Woman*. . . . Strung you along, let you fall in thingy, love, with her, then kicked you inna, thingy, . . . *Teeth*. . . . Only thing you were sure of, you couldn't let her go. Because, because she was yours, all you had, even in her gutters"

(10). James notes that this and other textual references link Vimes to "the American hard-boiled cop tradition" (197), juxtaposing him against the far-more proper and deliberating Carrot Ironfoundersson, whom James calls "the ultimate bobby on the beat" (198). But the specific choice of reference is also significant. Pratchett uses Vimes' own musing to give the city agency – a hold over him. The ideological limits of the police in history and fiction are here translated onto Vimes in two concrete ways, and he immediately becomes a man defined by what he cannot do. Vimes' drunkenness persists through the beginning of the novel, until it is superseded by the need to solve a mystery that threatens his city:

So, he thought, something big and fiery came out of this alley but didn't come into it.

And the Patrician is very worried about it.

I've been told to forget about it. . . .

Right now, he needed a drink. But perhaps it ought to wait. (107)

With the impulse to put off intoxication for the sake of a puzzle, Pratchett links Vimes to Sherlock Holmes, but instead of the thrill of piecing together the clues (Vimes "instinctively distrust[s] them" (*Feet* 205)), Vimes' motivation comes from a proprietary urge toward his city and its citizens. Over the course of the sequence, as Vimes rises in power and gains somewhat more freedom to use that power to protect the helpless, his alcoholism loses a degree of its hold over him.



Vimes does rise in power – from Captain to Commander to Ambassador, from commoner to knight to duke – but he continues to be limited in his ability to use that power to create the world he wishes for. As James remarks, “Samuel Vimes never really had any ambitions, save an inevitably frustrated desire for justice – inevitably frustrated because for him justice means social justice, and not just the capture of criminals” (194). Each new level of power Vimes acquires comes with responsibilities that limit Vimes’ ability to punish criminals fairly, because his various ranks remain part of a system of government that does not treat justice and the impartial enforcement of law as the same thing. Whether because the criminals involved possess a kind of genius that is too profitable to extinguish, as in *Feet of Clay*, or hold a position that would make punishment diplomatically imprudent, as in *Jingo* and *The Fifth Elephant*, Vetinari insists on prioritizing the prosperity of the city as a whole over the letter of the law, leaving Vimes severely limited in the only power he sees as mattering. Under Vetinari, abstract values like justice rank lower than the concrete benefits of profit and political capital, leaving Vimes limited by his vision, despite his mounting power. Mendlesohn argues that “Vimes, for all that he burns with indignation, understands compromise” (240), but “understand[ing]” it is not the same as accepting it, and even as Vimes concedes to compromise, he does so against his will.

In *Night Watch*, Vimes’ limited vision becomes an asset, as his rank drops to one that matches his bent and allows him to be uncompromising *within his range of authority*. Vimes negotiates for himself the rank of sergeant-at-arms, “a pretty ancient pre-coppering term, back in the days when the court employed a big man with a stick to drag miscreants in front of it” (114), a rank that Lady Meserole calls “the optimum balance of

power and responsibility” (234). The rank gives him enough power to be in charge of his precinct and to undo the effects of the “half-hearted timorousness and lack of imagination” that characterizes the sergeant he replaces as senior (104); he teaches them to stop taking bribes, to serve the law, not their superiors, and to be citizens first. His rank, however, also lets him remain aloof from the conspiracy and political jockeying happening around him and focus instead on keeping people calm and saving lives. In *The Fifth Elephant*, Vimes acknowledges that while other political leaders around him “[look] at some sort of *big picture* . . . he [is], and always [will] be, a little picture man” (414 italics original). It is why he refuses, as he says in *Night Watch*, “to help people to die just to replace one fool with another” (255). In the face of grand ideas and glory, Vimes’ limited rank allows him to prefer the immediate concrete benefits of lives saved and peace kept. Vimes thus takes advantage of his limited power to show his watchmen, and young Sam, an example of police service.

Vimes’ growing autonomy manifests in his status both as an agent within his world and as a character within the Discworld novels. The first two City Watch novels feature Vimes as one of an ensemble, in both a dramatic and a professional sense. Although he is the Watch Captain, he gives few orders and expects little formal respect. Recalling his childhood “in the gutter,” he reflects that, rather than “work[ing] his way up . . . [he] had merely worked his way *along*” (61 italics original). The *Night Watch* as a whole is no more effective; early on, Vimes is surprised to hear that one of his watchmen (then-Lance-Corporal Carrot) has arrested the head of the Thieves’ Guild, shouting, “But we don’t do things like that!” (63). The sequence’s narration bears out Vimes’ limited autonomy by sharing the narrative focalization more in the earliest novels. In *Guards!*

*Guards!* and *Men at Arms*, significant portions of the narration are focalized through other Watch members and even the stories' antagonists; as the sequence progresses, this distribution shifts dramatically in favour of Vimes, making his inner monologue the primary narrative force and making Vimes what Edward James calls the sequence's "hero . . . with whose degradations and triumphs we almost invariably sympathise" (194).

Vimes' status as hero, combined with his fervent idealism, makes him the moral centre of the City Watch novels, and it is meaningful therefore that, in *Night Watch*, he abnegates his pursuit of higher, abstract ideals in favour of more attainable goals: giving his younger self "a swift course in basic policing" (104), "keep[ing] a handful of decent, silly people" out of trouble (358), and maybe, "get[ting] a hard-boiled egg" (344). Vimes, as autonomous hero and moral centre, rejects the idealistic pursuit of political reform (even a pursuit he knows will be fruitless) in favour of stability and safety. Vimes' abnegation of certain aspects of his mounting power allows him diegetic success at the same time as it reinforces the cohesive morality that Discworld asserts.

Vimes' final liminal quality is not imposed on him from the outside, but emerges from within, becoming more prominent over the course of the sequence as Vimes rises in class and power. Vimes has always been an angry man, but it is only later in the sequence that Vimes' rage begins to possess a power of its own. Once Vimes realizes his situation in *Night Watch*, he feels this side of himself stirring: "*there was that small part of him he'd heard sometimes during strenuous arrests after long chases, the part that wanted to punch and punch long after punching had achieved its effect. There was a joy to it. He called it the beast. It stayed hidden until you needed it and then, when you needed it, out it came*" (79 italics original). The beast's evolution and motivation recall the dark side of

Granny Weatherwax, Discworld's most powerful witch, who, as explained in the novel *Carpe Jugulum*, has always felt drawn toward black magic:

She'd *always* tried to face towards the light. But the harder you stared into the brightness the harsher it burned you until, at last, the temptation picked you up and bid you turn around to see how long, rich, strong and dark, streaming away behind you, your shadow had become – (75)

Like the dark side of Granny's image which grows as she tries harder to do good, Vimes' beast grows over time, just as his power does – the accumulation of every time he could have behaved brutishly but didn't. As Pratchett constructs it, the beast resembles Freud's uncanny double, the representation of the id: this wilder side of the self is “nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (“The Uncanny” 148). Freud explains the concept of the double as the “embodi[ment]” of “all the suppressed acts of volition that fostered the illusion of free will” (143), which suggests that Vimes has always had the beast with him and has fed it even as he has caged it. This gradual development accounts for why the City Watch novels do not mention the beast until Vimes becomes a duke in *The Fifth Elephant*, despite the tendencies already being present in young Sam. In fact, Vimes views the beast as a tendency in every person: as a “copper,” Vimes knows “how close men [live] to the beast” and that the vilest criminals – usually among the upper classes in Pratchett's critical universe – are simply those who choose not to repress it.

Although he does not focus on it, Gideon Haberkorn acknowledges the universal nature of the beast when he argues that “Vimes knows that there needs to be a second line of defense, not outside but inside – a wall keeps *human nature* at bay, keeps the darkness

in, reduces violence to the last resort” (332 italics mine). The “wall” Vimes uses to hold back the beast is the badge – not just the object itself, but the idea of it:

[T]he law had always been...*out there*, but somewhere close. He’d always been pretty sure where it was, and it definitely had something to do with the badge.

The badge was important. Yes. It was shield-shaped. For protection. He’d thought about that, in the long nights in the darkness. It protected him from the beast, because the beast was waiting in the darkness of his head. (300, italics original)

Vimes associates the badge with the law, making it count for more than just a paycheck. Moreover, Vimes distinguishes the law from orders, as he explains to his men: ““You took an oath to uphold the law and defend the citizens without fear or favour,’ said Vimes. ‘And to protect the innocent. . . . Nothing in there about orders, even from me”” (310). Vimes accepts the law as a platonic ideal for the governance of society, separate from the imperfect way it is often enacted, and the theories he develops – that mimic the Peelian principles – perform the role of his superego, what Freud describes in “The Uncanny” as the “special authority” that “performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism” (142), and in “On Narcissism: An Introduction” as a reaction to “the admonition of others and . . . the awakening of his own critical judgement” (558). For Vimes, these principles are embodied in the badge; it is why, when asked to surrender his badge (*Guards! Guards!* 267, *Men* 185-6), he does not even seem to understand the question, and why, when Captain Tilden offers him his new badge in *Night Watch*, Vimes eyes it “hungrily” (115). Vimes has so successfully sublimated his id’s desires into a

respect for the law that he does not know how to be himself when he is not standing for it. Moody places Vimes and Granny Weatherwax among the Pratchett characters for whom “work and identity are synonymous” (163); in Vimes’ case, it is because his work is intrinsically linked to what is right. Never is this clearer than when Vimes finally arrests Carcer back in the present. Despite Vimes’ frustration, despite his disgust, and despite “[t]he beast scream[ing] inside” him, Vimes arrests Carcer rather than killing him: “There was the beast, all around him. And that’s what it was. A beast. Useful, but still a beast. . . . You didn’t have to do what it wanted. If you did, Carcer won” (466). Vimes recognizes that, for a watchman to yield self-control to lawlessness means also yielding control of the city to the criminals. He understands the need for police to adhere to a principles-based ethical code that supersedes their impulses and orders.

Young Sam already shows signs of the beastly impulse, and Vimes, able to recognize them, teaches Sam how to control it. Sometimes Vimes’ advice is more practical than philosophical: “You *don’t* bash a man’s brains out when he’s tied to a chair!” (331), but never does Vimes tell Sam to try to eliminate the beast. Rather, Vimes counsels Sam, “Tame it! Don’t waste it! Send it Back! It’ll come when you call!” (331). Vimes recognizes that, though the beast is dangerous if left unchecked, it can serve a purpose in a watchman’s job. The beast is a fighter, but Vimes does not use it in every fight. Vimes has learned to direct his rage towards injustice; he uses the beast to restore balance. In *Night Watch*, Vimes unleashes the beast three times: once against a mob of corrupt guards led by Carcer; once against Carcer alone, who has no rules of his own; and once against the torturer Captain Swing, head of the Cable Street Particulars, just after he expressly assigns greater importance to the security of the State than to individual “so-

called rights” (338). Vimes lets the beast intervene on behalf of the voiceless – lets it execute the law in the name of those whom individual laws fail to protect. The beast’s power is immense, as is its potential for corruption. Ian Loader emphasizes this point when he identifies “the fact that officers are allowed to perform acts that would be illegal if undertaken by citizens” as a “key – and troubling – [dimension] of police power” (428n). Vimes explains it more philosophically when he muses, “When we break down, it all breaks down. That’s just how it works. You can bend it, and if you make it hot enough you can bend it in a circle, but you can’t break it. When you break it, it all breaks down until there’s nothing unbroken” (466). Vimes allows the beast to push the edges of the law, but only in order to shape it to serve its purpose of enforcing social equity. Beyond that, Vimes lets the badge have control.

Stephen Knight says of the 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct novels that in them, “the purity of the police . . . is the basis for their casual, barely explained success in most cases” (187). Here is one way, then, that Pratchett’s *City Watch* sequence deviates from the novels that Edward James uses to align Vimes with the American tradition, for Vimes’ character is far from pure and his success far from casual. Instead, Vimes’ hard-won, and always incomplete, victories come as a result of the straddling Vimes performs across key divides. Both rich and poor, both leader and servant, and both copper and criminal, Vimes draws on each of these aspects of his personality as assets in his job as peacekeeper in Ankh-Morpork. Farah Mendlesohn asserts that “the more truthful (or integral) one’s sense of identity, the more one can construct a sense of honour which is grounded in reality” (249) – in this case, the “reality” of what people are like rather than an idealized conception of how they should be (249). Thus, in *Night Watch*, Vimes is

pitted against two antagonists: Carcer and Captain Swing. Carcer is the villain who also recognizes society for what it is, but reacts in opposition to Vimes; Captain Swing is the much more insidious antagonist who “sat and thought: ‘This is how the people ought to be, how do we change them?’ (164), which Vimes recognizes as a theoretical approach dangerously far-removed from the reality of policing. He prefers managing citizens as they are to relying on theoretical conceptions of morality. Incorporating qualities from each of these sides of himself, Vimes constructs, instead of a morality, a code of ethics that equips him to make difficult choices, especially in the past reality of *Night Watch*, where his ethical code stands in conflict with his orders. When the state of the city’s political and social structures leaves the common citizens on the outside, Vimes uses his experience being caught between extremes to keep himself grounded as he negotiates with the “*two enemies*” that remaining in “the middle” pits him against (255 italics original). Though John Keel may have been the right man to lead the revolution, only Sam Vimes can achieve a revolution while keeping the peace.



## **Chapter Four**

### **The Job: Undoing the Othering that Results from Partial Law Enforcement**

As has already been discussed, however, Vimes does not want revolution. Revolution will inevitably lead to death. That is why, when Captain Tilden, faced with the news of rioting in the streets, tells Vimes, “Do whatever you feel necessary, sergeant” (215), Vimes immediately recognises it as a “stupid, dangerous order” (216). A 1991 report on community policing commissioned after the last of the Brixton riots makes a similar assertion, only on a larger scale: “The term ‘crime prevention’ . . . reinforces the view that it is solely the responsibility of the police. On the other hand, the term ‘community safety’ . . . could encourage greater participation from all sections in the community in the fight against crime” (13). The report later notes that when crime prevention is “left to the police . . . attention to social issues was rare” (20). Both statements assert, in their own ways, the dangers of giving the police too long a leash in their roles as crime preventers: the commissioned report argues that attempting to prevent crime without systemic and economic support from the community is wasted effort; Vimes argues that giving too much autonomy to people with big swords and little understanding is asking for unnecessary violence. *Night Watch* illustrates the truth in both arguments and the link between them. In Ankh-Morpork’s corrupt past, the rich, living in the wealthier Ankh area, are “a law unto themselves” (73), “posh coaches” are out of reach of Lord Winder’s paranoia (250), and Winder’s use of tax farming means he “sold [the poor] to his mates” (139). The government’s systematic othering of the poor causes the poor to react by othering the police as the anonymous arm of oppression. In *Jingo*, Vimes learns, as Ankh-Morpork prepares for international war, what actions people are capable of justifying when thinking only in terms of “us” and “them” (199). As the city

prepares for civil war in *Night Watch*, Vimes recognises the same mentality at work; the strategies he employs to keep the peace are guided by the Peelian principles and are not about controlling the public, but about undoing – from both ends, as fits Vimes’ liminal character – the othering that has inspired rebellion against the face of authority.

The riots that lead to the revolution in *Night Watch*, although they stem from fear of and frustration with the city’s current government, are directed toward the police themselves. The revolution itself – the assassination of Lord Winder and his replacement with Lord Snapcase – happens well above the turmoil. In fact, Vimes remarks that “[t]here were never that many rebels” (430), musing that the worst of the fighting is less a righteous war than “tension . . . unwind[ing] like a huge spring, scything through the city” (294). Vimes understands as much when he meets with Lady Meserole to refuse his involvement: “Meetings in rooms. A little diplomacy, a little give and take, a promise here, an understanding there. That’s how real revolutions happen. All that stuff in the streets is just froth” (252) – froth being a symptom of deeper movement, but far removed from it. When Vimes refuses to ally with Lady Meserole’s agenda, therefore, it is because he recognises how little the revolution has to do with him and accepts that, for the average citizen, the fighting has more to do with individual resentments than lofty ideals. In short, Vimes refuses to see people as “The People” (294), refuses to turn them into another cause. His ability to treat people as material individuals instead of changeable units in a theoretical collective allows him to anticipate their specific needs and resolve their unique fears, thrusting him into the leadership role he does not really want.

Vimes is able to undo othering by resolving fears because the othering process is, at its core, a manifestation of fear. Sarah Ahmed explains that “fear does something; it re-

establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface” (63). Ahmed’s primary focus is racist othering; the way she categorizes fear, however, is especially applicable to the economic othering of Ankh-Morpork. The city’s take-based economic system, as discussed in the previous section, neatly fits into her argument that “fear works by establishing others as fearsome insofar as they *threaten to take the self in*” (64 italics original): “Fear creates the very effect of ‘that which I am not’ . . . To this extent, fear does not involve the defence of borders that already exist; rather fear makes those borders” (67). Fear within Ankh-Morpork’s waning aristocracy drives them towards politics and policies that neglect the needs and marginalize the voices of the city’s poor and working classes. In turn, class resentment moves the lower classes to generalize about the self-serving intentions of the rich and titled. The working class ascribe to the rich an evil position in opposition to their own good, thus matching Frederic Jameson’s discussion of Nietzsche, and the depiction of “the archetypal . . . Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other” (Jameson 115). Difference marks the starting point for a judgement. Vimes explains his view of this us/them mindset in *Jingo*:

It was so much easier to blame it on Them. It was bleakly depressing to think that They were Us. If it was Them, then nothing was anyone’s fault. If it was Us, what did that make Me? I’m one of Us. I must be. I’ve certainly never thought of myself as one of Them. No-one ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We’re always one of Us. It’s Them that do the bad things. (199).

Vimes sees the relationship between the othering process and the common tendency to view groups of people as concepts (i.e., The Poor, The Rich, The People) rather than a collection of individual selves. The hard-defined class system in Ankh-Morpork makes it all the easier to officially reinforce this tendency.

A major factor in the dual othering process at work is the city itself. The othering begins with the geographical separation inherent in the city's borough divisions (especially in force in the Ankh-Morpork of *Night Watch*'s past), the wealthy living in Ankh and the working class in Morpork, with the poorest living closest to the city's worst criminal area, the Shades. Minimal contact aids generalization, which perpetuates fear, which then reinforces an emotional distance added to the physical, as Ahmed argues: "Stereotypes seek to fix the meaning of the other, but . . . [render] them a site of insecurity" (64). Thus, Ankh-Morpork, in its revolution-era state, is locked into a cycle of mutual economic othering. In the present of the other City Watch novels, Ankh-Morpork's patrician, Lord Vetinari, has stabilized this cycle, not by reducing it, but by adding a professional dimension – valuing it in the form of specialization. Any trade can form a guild if they have enough numbers, and some formerly illegal trades are legalised. In Foucault's terms, Vetinari's "discipline[d]" Ankh-Morpork is "a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (170). He adds, "The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery" (177). Vetinari recognises the power that resides in the working class quite separate from any political authority – the power to control how the city functions, as Vimes remarks upon watching the disruption in agricultural trade during the riots in *Night Watch*: "Vetinari, Vimes

realized, thought about [the efficient functioning of the city] all the time. . . . He wouldn't have let something like this happen. Little wheels must spin so that the machine can turn, he'd say" (390-1). Vetinari values security higher than prosperity, or more accurately, he recognises that Ankh-Morpork's citizens do: "They think they want good government and justice for all, Vimes, yet what is it they really crave, deep in their hearts? Only that things go on as normal and tomorrow is pretty much like today" (*Feet* 94). His peaceful Ankh-Morpork is evidence of Althusser's statement: "When nothing is happening, the Ideological State Apparatuses have worked to perfection" (206). Vetinari has created a system of what Jonathan Jackson, et. al. would call "legal legitimacy" (1) – a shared recognition that obeying the law is profitable for all. This allows the police to "powerfully represent the law," meaning "the link between the obligation to obey the law and obligation to obey the police seems unproblematic" (4). Vetinari's system of government enables the police to enforce the law fairly and be respected for it, rather than to follow orders out of fear and be taken for thugs.

Thugs is what Winder's watchmen are, in the past Ankh-Morpork of *Night Watch*: "just another gang" (*Night* 166), devoted to maintaining the hierarchy of power that has Winder at the top. Foucault describes discipline as "a power that seems all the less 'corporal' in that it is more subtly 'physical' (177), adding that "the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (201), but Winder's Watch, especially the Particulars (a gang of ruthless undercover agents), are decidedly corporal – extracting cooperation and confession through torture rather than the ideological compliance that would render Winder's control perfect. Captain Swing's control is often literally corporal, as he uses craniometrics to determine the guilt or innocence of his

prisoners. Much more so than the regular Day and Night Watches, the Particulars have achieved a panoptical dominance over the city: “They were the ones that listened in every shadow and watched at every window. That was how it seemed, anyway. They certainly were the ones who knocked on doors in the middle of the night” (120). The compliance Winder and Swing exact is of the kind Jackson, et. al. describe as “simple ‘crime control’ models,” one major assumption of which is that “offenders . . . are responsive primarily to the risk of punishment, and another of which is that “offender rights [are] a constraint on effective crime control” (2). Hence, Winder’s Ankh-Morpork is under curfew, taxes are prohibitively high, and the Particulars have free reign to torture citizens, often to death. Jackson, et. al. make another observation, though, that such crime control models are less effective than models that focus on legal legitimacy as a way of “influenc[ing] decision-making processes in more socially and economically advantageous ways” (2). *Night Watch* demonstrates the ways Winder and Swing’s fascist, brutish approach to justice fails where Vimes’ principle-based tactics succeed in restoring peace to a frightened city.

Ankh-Morpork’s frightened reaction to Winder’s oppressive rule does not play out in a single, markable breach of the peace. The events surrounding what is referred to throughout the novel as the “Glorious Twenty-fifth of May” are so thickly packed that it would be impossible to cover them all; there are, however, certain points worth analysing – decisions Vimes makes that illustrate his governing ethics. Before analysing them according to their corresponding principles, it is worth laying them out briefly in chronological order. Before Vimes’ precinct gets involved in any action, there is a riot in another part of the city. It begins with a “protest . . . over the price of bread,” and it is in

response to this unrest that Tilden orders Vimes to “Do whatever you feel necessary” (215). Vimes’ response to the order is the opposite of what gets done at every other Watch House in the city: Vimes opens the House doors wide and lights “the blue light over the door” (216). He keeps the Watch House open all night, answering questions and fending off provocations from citizens; he also injures and arrests three of the Particulars who have tried a sneak attack on the Watch House. He interrogates the Particulars before returning them to Cable Street. The next day, Tilden is replaced by a new Captain, Lord Rust, who leads the men out on patrol. The squad encounter a barricade, and Rust orders Vimes to tear it down and arrest the builders; when there is a delay, Rust orders a volley of arrows to be shot over the barricade. Vimes refuses and knocks Rust unconscious with one punch, “[taking] command after the captain’s sudden attack of insanity” (306). Vimes then takes charge of constructing the barricade, moving it to a position that protects his whole precinct. Because the area behind the barricades includes the Cable Street Watch House, Vimes storms the House, rescues any citizens he can find, and “destroy[s] the nest” with fire (334). He returns to the barricade and spends the rest of the revolution “defending [his] doorstep” (298), letting in as many citizens as he feels he can, and devising ways to turn his enemies into allies instead of killing them.

Perhaps the most important choice Vimes makes over the course of the revolution is to keep the Watch House open; Vimes demonstrates a commitment to availability and transparency that reflects the eighth Peelian principle: “To recognise always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to usurp the powers of the judiciary” (“Definition”). While the other Watch Houses are closed, the Treacle Mine Road House remains available as a resource. Vimes anticipates “a bunch of

ordinary people turning up . . . because they've heard what happened" (219), and he keeps the House open to be able to resolve the citizens' concerns about the early riots: "And yes, we know about Dolly Sisters and we don't like it any more than you do. And we've heard about Dimwell Street and we don't like *that* either" (226). This availability, though, is only a small part of the spirit of transparency that Vimes creates as a way of combatting rumour. In Ankh-Morpork's present, Vimes ignores paperwork for as long as he can, but in the uncertainty of this past moment, Vimes makes sure to document his actions with paperwork as well as witnesses. When citizens come to complain at the Watch House, Vimes makes sure both of his hands are full, but not with weapons, to highlight his friendly intent. When Joss Gappy injures his hand breaking a bottle, Vimes freezes for a moment "to fix . . . in people's minds" the image of him, far away from Gappy, holding a mug and a cigar (224). When Dr. Lawn needs to take Gappy into the Watch House, Vimes brings citizen witnesses in with him "to see fair play all round" (226). Vimes makes it clear that he is not overstepping his role as peacekeeper – he will not let himself appear similar to the Cable Street Particulars, who take prisoners away without due process. He adheres to "the procedural fairness" that both secures legitimacy and eases the fear of the unknown. As the night winds down, he keeps the Watch House open and continues to go out on patrol, committed to keeping the Watch visible and available. When young Sam asks Vimes, "What good'll that do?" Vimes' response is "More good than if we didn't" (271). Vimes understands that visibility and transparency dispel fear more effectively than seclusion and secrets.

Vimes demonstrates amply throughout the novel that he adheres to the seventh Peelian principle, "that the police are the public and the public are the police"



(“Definition”), but during the events of the revolution, Vimes takes this unity a step further. Not only does Vimes show that his watchmen are civilians too, he shows that they are “friendly-looking, local lads” (216). Un-othering the police requires showing them to be individuals – more than just a concept; Vimes puts familiar faces out front because he knows “if [the mob] just see a couple of men in uniform with swords you’ll be in trouble” (217). When watchmen as a group are a target for violence, the best tactic is to present the mob with watchmen who are defined by facets other than their jobs. Ankh-Morpork is an amalgamation of neighbourhoods, and its fixed class structure means people live in or near the same place much of their lives. Family ties and friendships are lasting bonds that connect citizens to watchmen despite the othering cycle: “It was one thing to have a go at faceless bastards in uniform, but quite another to throw stones at [men] you’d known since you were two years old and played Dead Rat Conkers with in the gutter” (229). Vimes takes advantage of these connections and the hesitations they inspire to reduce the violence in his precinct. He even takes advantage of them in reverse, when he uses “grannies” to convince the soldiers to desert:

The neighbourhoods of the Republic were a natural recruiting ground for the regiments. It was also an area of big families and matriarchs whose word was family law. It had almost been cheating, putting them on the parapet with a megaphone during the lulls.

“I knows you’re out there, our Ron! This is your Nan! You climb up one more time and you’ll feel the back of my hand! Our Rita sends her love and wants you to hurry home. Grandpa is feeling a lot better with the new ointment! Now stop being a silly boy!”

It was a dirty trick, and he was proud of it. Messages like that sapped a fighting spirit better than arrows. (416)

While Vimes is trying to get the mob to see his men as people, he is trying to get the soldiers to see themselves in those people too, undoing the distance they need in order to fight against their own kin.

Vimes, simply put, wants to avoid as much violence as possible. Peelian principles four, five, and six all pertain to avoiding violence, and Vimes draws on the ideals from each. Principle four advocates persuasion over violence, and Vimes practises this when he refuses to allow arrows to be fired at unarmed citizens, choosing to reason with them instead (305). When Rust gives him the ill-advised order, he removes Rust with a single punch so young Sam would not need to fire his crossbow; thus, he demonstrates the counsel in principle six “to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective” (“Definition”). Principle five requires of police officers “ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life” (“Definition”). Pratchett makes such sacrifice one of Vimes’ defining characteristics:

He wanted to go home. He wanted it so much that he trembled at the thought. But if the price of that was selling good men to the night, if the price was filling those graves, if the price was not fighting with every trick he knew...then it was too high.

. . . There was no universe, anywhere, where a Sam Vimes would give in on this, because if he did then he wouldn’t be Sam Vimes any more.  
(385-6)

Vimes has internalised the principle of avoiding violence to such an extent that violating that principle would compromise his very identity. Vimes is able to lead a peaceful revolution because he clings to two convictions: that no political agenda is worth a life, and that his own life is no more important than others.

These convictions remain with him, even when he rejects all the other principles. When Vimes deals with the Particulars, his objective stands in opposition to his goal of unifying his watchmen and the citizens. In confronting the Particulars, he relies on the othering mentality, calling attention to the ways they stand out from other coppers and stimulating in them the fear he tries to appease in others. He coerces Gerald Leastways into giving a confession by convincing him that his fellow prisoners were being tortured (241-3). He uses presumptuousness and threats of violence to get his way at the entrance to the Cable Street Watch House (324-5), and he intimidates the Particulars' clerk into giving evidence against Swing, by telling him, "You're all alone here. . . . You have no friends here" (328). Every trick that the Particulars use to exact compliance from their victims – lies, threats, and intimidation – Vimes undoes, and then turns them on their creators: every trick but one. He will threaten violence, but he still only uses what is necessary. He resists the beast's pull to beat the duty torturer excessively, knocking him unconscious with a single blow and tying him up instead (327). He refuses to leave the torturer tied up after he sets fire to the building, instead risking his own life to untie him (335). When Vimes kills Swing in self-defence, he silently "tosse[s] the ruler on top of him and limp[s] away" (338). This gesture, or lack thereof, recalls a past moment when Vimes has had to kill: in *The Fifth Elephant*, after Vimes kills Wolfgang, he declines to make any witty remarks about it "because if he had said any of those things then he'd

have known that what he had just done was murder” (429). Vimes, in a meta-gesture of contrition, refuses to aestheticize the killing he knows he must sometimes do. Although Vimes hates the Particulars and resents their inclusion in the ranks of watchmen, he will only let himself go so far in avenging their wrongs.

Vimes’ police tactics are largely about drawing lines and moving lines. The barriers he seeks to remove are those between the public and the police, while at the same time, he constructs hard and careful lines between a genuinely helpful police force and those who would abuse the power they are given. In a city like the Ankh-Morpork of *Night Watch*’s past, eliminating one line necessitates creating another: corruption and greed are so rampant as to mandate separation and hierarchy. That being the case, Vimes sees the need for the hard lines to be between the police and the corrupt administration, because the police need the people to trust them. As he realises when hearing an account of the violence on the other side of the barricade, “being a copper only worked when people let it work” (311). Unifying the public and the police is a duty, because public cooperation is necessary for peace.

## Chapter Five Conclusion

At the heart of Vimes' success as a leader and a policeman is his refusal to think of people only conceptually, understanding that "[a]s soon as you saw people as things to be measured, they didn't measure up" (295). Although he philosophises extensively about human nature and class distinctions, his interactions are guided by a committed humanism that lets him think ethically for himself while hoping others will do the same. He holds fast to a principles-based model of policing, but only uses those principles as guidelines for effectiveness in his job, not as standards of righteousness. Jackson, et. al, conversely, refer to the Peelian principles as "foundational myths of the Metropolitan police," fearing that the reality is that British policing focuses primarily on "enforcing the will of the state (the law) on the people" (5). Certainly this assessment is borne out by the rampant racism and classism of the British police during the years in which Pratchett wrote the City Watch sequence. A Home Office report on the Brixton riots of 1981 states that "by April 1981, there had arisen a serious gap between the police and important sections of the community" (47). The report avers that "[t]he raw material of the explosion [of disorder] was the spirit of angry young men" (37). This same spirit is what Neil Gaiman ascribes to Pratchett: "that anger, it seems to me, is about Terry's underlying sense of what is fair and what is not" (par 13). Pratchett imparts some of that rage to Sam Vimes, who carries it with him as he tries to bring a consummate fairness to his city's criminal justice system. The mocking spirit that is sometimes aimed at fantasy, sometimes at detective fiction, and sometimes at Vimes himself, is also pointed at the ridiculous in life. Disguised in wordplay and adventurous diversions, many of Pratchett's novels also function as calls for change, if not in policy, then at least in mindset.

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