Selling Terry Pratchett's Discworld: Merchandising and the Cultural Economy of Fandom

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Abstract

Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as a factor of the subject's position in social space, this article looks at the relationships between merchandise and elite collectible items among fans of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series. Following an introduction to the Discworld series, outlining its accessible nature, and a brief explication of theories of cultural capital the article discusses results of a 2007 on-line survey. The survey (N=1323) allows the heterogeneous nature of the fan community to be established, demonstrating that the same books are enjoyed by a diverse readership. The survey also shows that there is no correlation between levels of education, representing cultural capital, and the more common types of merchandise owned. However, of the elite items the majority are owned by those with higher education. The article concludes that there are ways for fans to perform distinction, despite the general openness of the Discworld fan community.

Keywords: Pratchett, Discworld, comedy, fan, audience, fandom, survey, cultural capital, Bourdieu, merchandise.

Introduction

According to Matthew Arnold culture was 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (quoted in Storey, 2006: 14), it was something to be revered. The use of the superlative confers an elite status to culture; it is something only accessible to the few. However, this notion of culture only refers to that which we now call high culture, leaving other forms as part of the 'anarchy' which Arnold associated with the rising working class. While twentieth century theorists have argued for the significance of popular culture in validating the experience of a working and middle class majority, high culture still has a privileged elite position over low culture, and this is borne out in the underlying premises of Pierre Bourdieu's exploration of the link between class and taste using notions of economic and cultural capital, published in the seminal *Distinction* (1984). However, the division

between high and low culture existed long before the debate that has surrounded it during the 20th/21st centuries. In ancient traditions the distinction was often between religious and secular ceremonies and representations, which led to dichotomies such as spiritual/mundane, serious/funny, eternal/ephemeral. In twentieth century secular France, Bourdieu considers the main distinction to be one of form over function. Thus we can see that comedy, as a secular cultural form that deals with both the contemporary and the everyday, traditionally falls into the low culture sphere. If we consider that comedy is often defined at least in part by its ability to make us laugh, that is, by its function, then even by contemporary standards comedy evades a high cultural status. While Bourdieu focuses on the tastes of the cultural elite a number of cultural theorists have since adapted his work to look at sub cultural capital (Thornton, 1995) or the shadow cultural capital associated with popular culture (Fiske, 1992), while Peterson and Kern (1996) have suggested that the cultural landscape has changed since Bourdieu's research. This article will draw on the theoretical positions offered by notions of cultural capital to demonstrate that even within a popular, accessible cultural form such as the comedy of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, there is still an elite position that may be linked to economic and social capital. An explication of the accessibility of the Discworld series and its fandom will be followed by a discussion on theories of cultural capital, before these ideas are applied to the ways that merchandise and memorabilia are collected by fans.

Terry Pratchett's Discworld

Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a Disc-shaped world carried on the back of four elephants that in turn stand on the back of a giant turtle that swims through space, based on an ancient Hindu worldview. The Discworld series currently comprises 38 novels with ancillary publications such as maps, diaries, companions and a cookbook. It is an ongoing series with the 39th Discworld book due for publication in October 2011. The original idea was a parody of the type of genre fantasy inspired by Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* that was popular in the 1970s and 80s. So rather than a quest involving a hero and a wizard, Pratchett invented Rincewind, a wizard that can't do magic, who rather than being heroic, is a selfish coward. This comedic inversion and parodic play with genre conventions sustains the first couple of books, but by the fourth Discworld novel Pratchett has expanded to play with the conventions of the Bildungsroman and the gothic novel, but at the same time creating something that moves beyond parody, 'both a parody of a fantasy world and an engaging world in its own right' (Hanes, 2007: 287). So while parody is often a feature of the later works, it often functions as a framework or narrative structure rather than being the central motif of the story; many of the books in the subseries featuring the Ankh Morpork city watch may be seen as parodies of detective stories, but at the same time they continue to debate the issue of institutionalised racism; some of the stories featuring the witches of the rural communities of Lancre use the structures of Shakespeare plays such as Macbeth (*Wyrd Sisters* [1997a]) or Midsummer Night's Dream (*Lords and Ladies* [1997b]) but they do not

share the same perspectives as their models and debate issues around responsibility and the environment, with a particular focus on the domestic and female spaces.

Rather than being a straightforward parody, the Discworld series is like the comedy of Aristophanes, using the audience's shared knowledge of other cultural texts to present topical issues in a comedic form that uses intertextuality and references to culturally resonant issues to challenge the audience to question the world around them. Like Aristophanes, Pratchett has succeeded in appealing to a heterogeneous audience making complex ideas accessible to a wide public. While Pratchett uses the multivalent layering that Claessens and Dhoest (2010) consider to be a feature of highbrow comedy, he also uses a full repertoire of humorous techniques. There is farce, such as when three inept guards attempting to kill a dragon feel their only chance is to make it a 'million to one' shot and introduce more and more implausible factors in an attempt to lengthen the odds to that 'million to one'; resulting in 'a man with soot on his face, his tongue sticking out, standing on one leg and singing *The Hedgehog Song*' (Pratchett, 1990: 271); the comic inversion of the clowns of Ankh-Morpork' fool's guild being sinister rather than comedic; the grotesque body of Nanny Ogg, the matriarchal witch who never misses the opportunity to eat, drink, or indulge in the other activities that define the grotesque body of the carnivalesque. But Pratchett rarely confines himself to one comic form at a time, so *Night Watch* opens with a trainee assassin falling foul of one of Vimes booby traps with the result that 'in the old cesspit behind the gardener's shed, a young man was treading water. Well... treading, anyway' (Pratchett, 2002: 7) on the very first page there is both slapstick and scatology. The conversation that follows reveals the absurdity of the assassin's guild, with the comic incongruity of one party on the conversation swimming for survival in shit in a rather extreme comedy of manners. Pratchett's use of comic absurdity or incongruity is often enhanced by the way it is written into a wider narrative. Later in *Night Watch* an explosion leaves Archchancellor Ridcully (head wizard of Unseen University) in his bath on 'the lawn on the octangle' (40), because a wizard is not properly dressed without his hat. He calls for his hat and then goes to investigate, there are then two pages of Ridcully strutting around in just his hat until finally it is commented on, to which he replies:

> 'Hat = wizard, wizard = hat. Everything else is just frippery. Anyway, I'm sure we're all men of the world', Ridcully added, looking around. For the first time he took in other details about the watchmen. 'And dwarfs of the world… ah… trolls of the world too I see… and… women of the world too, I note…' (42)

at which point he asks for his robe. While nudity itself is not necessarily comic, nudity in a public place is a classic comic incongruity, and Pratchett combines this here with a sense of anticipation and ultimately a moment of superiority as Ridcully finally realises what the reader has known for two pages, that he is insufficiently clothed.

Pratchett is also known for his paronomasia, puns and wordplay, so Mort (French word for death, but also short for Mortimer) becomes Death's apprentice, while the capital of the Egypt like Kingdom around the river Djel is called Djelibeybi, which a foot note explains 'Lit. 'Child of the Djel'' (Pratchett, 1989: 20). The reader may see the combination of consonants and feel that this is a suitably Arabic sounding place name, but if they read it aloud they will realise that it is pronounced like jelly baby[1]. In *Soul Music* (1995) this simple wordplay is developed into a running gag; the protagonist, an up-coming popstar, is called Imp Y Celyn, Welsh for bud of the holly, so he changes his name to Bud, giving a reference to 60's popstar Buddy Holly. However, throughout the book he is referred to as looking a bit elvish, which evokes the iconic Elvis Presley. Thus we have references that are accessible to most of the population, but for those with a little more knowledge of pop music, there is a punch line. At the end of the book, when the reality in which Imp/Buddy became a musician is closed down, he is found working in a chip shop, making direct reference to Kirsty MacColl's 1981 song 'There's a guy works down the chip shop swears he's Elvis'. Thus while Pratchett writes a rather erudite type of comedy, it is not highbrow.

The extra pleasure afforded by those levels of humour available only to those with specialist knowledge is not simply available to the social elite; the allusions to a range of popular culture tropes are interspersed with references to a wide range of scientific and philosophical ideas. So the owners of the specialist knowledge may be Bourdieu's proletariat or those in possession of the scholarly type of knowledge that may be acquired through education, which Bourdieu considers inferior to the inherited cultural capital of the social elite. The richness of the text allows for diverse social groups of very different habitus to possess the knowledge to access different aspects of the humour, but these different aspects represent diversity rather than hierarchy, with much of the humour available to a wide audience. Pratchett's Discworld series differs from the highbrow comedy discussed by Claessens and Dhoest (2010), by including sections of the audience through reference to specialist knowledge rather than excluding them due to lack of specialist knowledge.

The Discworld Fandom

Pratchett writes popular genre fiction; while his genre is a hybrid of comedy and fantasy, his status in respect of the literary canon is shared by writers of romance or crime. These are writers whose books sell in large numbers, regularly making bestseller lists, but who are not generally seen as worthy of literary criticism. In his book *Bestsellers*, John Sutherland considers a major function of the bestseller to be ideological' 'It consolidates prejudice, provides comfort, is therapy, offers vicarious reward or stimulus' (1981: 34), suggesting an academic reading of popular fiction that allows it to be seen as a poor substitute for the more elite, high cultural form of literature. Ken Gelder suggests that it is this exclusion from the academic literary canon that leads to the alternative 'para-academic' (2004: 81) expert knowledge of fandom. Thus while there has been relatively little academic writing on Pratchett, there are mature, well developed fan communities, both on and off-line.

Since the beginning of his career, Pratchett has made himself as accessible as his books. He has been known for lengthy book signing tours in which he initially surprised bookshop owners by staying to sign books until the end of any queue that formed, rather than leaving at a fixed time or even at the bookshop's closing time if there were still fans waiting. This knowledge that if you went to a signing you would meet Pratchett led to the book signings taking on a more social dimension according to one fan who 'enjoyed [it] for being like a convention but less so'. So the social and inclusive nature of Discworld fandom is established from an early stage and generally maintained. The emergence of online fandom in the 1990s allowed fans to share their fandom irrespective of geographical location. One of the main usenet groups Alt.fan.Pratchett (afp) began in 1992 and is still active as a google group. Underlining his close involvement with the fan community, Pratchett made his first posting to afp in July 1992. Over the years he used this as one of several ways to communicate with fans, as well as joining in the discussions and running gags that the group evolved. The idea of a Discworld convention was first mooted on afp in July 1992, but it was 1994 before afp started to arrange meet ups including one at Clarecraft in August 1994.

Clarecraft was a company founded in 1980 by Bernard and Isobel Pearson to manufacture fantasy figurines. In 1990 Clarecraft obtained the rights to manufacture Discworld figurines which became very popular with fans. Bernard aka 'The Cunning Artificer' was also a congenial storyteller, who made fans visiting their premises either to browse or buy feel welcome and at home in their fandom. So in April 1995 Isobel Pearson announced via afp that Clarecraft would be hosting a Discworld Event in the summer and that Terry Pratchett had agreed to come. Again the Clarecraft events at which participants were invited to camp at a local campsite for the weekend to participate in the fun underlines both the inclusivity of the fandom and Pratchett's availability to his fans. Although Clarecraft as a company folded in 2005, since 2001 Bernard and Isobel Pearson have run the Discworld Emporium in Wincanton, which has also taken over the camping fan events which Pratchett continues to attend. The more conventional type of Discworld convention, taking place in the relative comfort of a hotel finally happened in 1996, with subsequent conventions taking place biannually. Since the initial UK based conventions, there have been several international offshoots, with conventions in Australia, USA, Ireland and Germany, all of them attended by Pratchett.

While offline Pratchett fandom developed, so did on-line fandom. In 1996 the Lspace.org, named after Pratchett's invention that connects all libraries in space and time, was launched with a host of Pratchett and Discworld resources. Today LSpace contains links to over 100 other Discworld related sites including sixteen that are in languages other than English. May 1997 saw the launch of a Discworld newsletter, Discworld Monthly, which continues to be circulated via e-mail on a monthly basis to a list of over 20,000 geographically dispersed subscribers. Thus Discworld fandom is one in which the currency of knowledge is freely

exchanged via various fansites and fora, rather than hoarded, demonstrating inclusivity and accessibility rather than exclusivity or elitism. There are also groups in both London (UK) and Adelaide (Australia) that meet up on a monthly basis, highlighting the sociability of this fandom even without the presence of Pratchett himself.

The Survey

In 2007 I conducted an on-line survey of Discworld fans. The aims of the survey were, firstly, to find out who the fans were, secondly, how they accessed and circulated the Discworld diegesis in both book form and ancillary objects and activities and, thirdly, how they understood Discworld. The questionnaire was fairly long and went against general guidelines on avoiding 'the risk of respondent fatigue' (Bryman, 2004: 133), but this was a calculated risk, weighing the fatigue factor against the desire I had witnessed at fan events of fans to share their insights. The survey was initially distributed via the fan newsletter, Discworld Monthly, followed by a snowball effect by which it was forwarded to other on-line fan communities, such as the Alt.Fan.Pratchett group. Discworld Monthly was chosen as the fan means of communication which required the least input from its audience, whilst still having a large circulation. Unlike the convention, there was no outlay of financial capital required, and unlike the various fora it did not require the audience to actively seek it out, arriving on a monthly basis via e-mail with the recipient then choosing to read it or not. Thus it was hoped to reach a diverse range of fans rather than just those who were the most active. An email I received from one respondent stating that he had completed the questionnaire 'although I don't think I'm a 'fan' as in 'fanatical'' suggests that this was achieved.

That said, there is still a distinction between the borderline fan, who at sometime in the past signed up to receive a free newsletter, and the more general reader who may pick up a Discworld book at a train station or airport simply to pass the time, who will account for the majority of the over 70million Discworld books that have been sold. With such high volume of sales, the population of Discworld readers would have to be considered in terms of millions; even in terms of fans, if the number were based on people who had ever queued at a book signing, the number of the population would need to be considered in tens of thousands, however the survey gained 1323 complete responses, that is, respondents who worked through to the end of the questionnaire, although they may not have answered every question. The additional 483 respondents that gave up part way through mostly dropped out at an early stage of the questionnaire suggesting that the lengthy questionnaire was an appropriate risk that paid off, producing a significant sample size.

Despite the use of non-probability sampling the absolute size of the sample suggests that it may be considered representative to some extent. While the on-line nature of the survey and its method of dissemination may mean that certain groups that are more engaged in offline fandom may be underrepresented, the size of the survey allows for a clear picture of

the diversity of Pratchett fans. In basic demographic terms, there was a 45:55 split between male and female. There were respondents in all age groups, including 2% of respondents over the age of sixty-five, so while there may have been some underrepresentation in this age group as less likely to be on-line, there is still a definite fan base in this age group; considering that the series has now been going for nearly 30 years, many early fans who began reading Discworld at a relatively young age may now find themselves in the older half. For marital status most respondents identified themselves as either married (38%), single (36%) or cohabiting (16%), the remaining 10% being either, divorced widowed or 'other', including one respondent, who on opting for 'other' stated 'cohabiting really but I just don't like the word much'. Of particular interest for this article is the heterogeneity in respect of education and occupation. The occupations of the fans ranged across a spectrum that included Bricklayer, Hairdresser and Jail Kitchen Manager as well as a variety of academics and lawyers and doctors. The level of education is another area which may present skewing, here, due to my declared academic status, so the 68% of respondents who have some kind of higher education may not be representative of the wider readership, or even the wider fandom, but still suggests that there is a significant section of the fandom that may be deemed to possess reasonably high levels of cultural capital. At the other end of the scale, there are 7% of respondents who left school aged 16 or younger. Like the over 65 age group, this group may be underrepresented in the survey, but there are enough of them to demonstrate a definite readership among this demographic group. Thus we may suggest that the heterogeneity of the sample both confirms the accessibility and inclusivity of Discworld and at the same time reduces the extent to which the survey may be seen as representative of any more specific group.

In order to consider why this heterogeneity is so unusual and before looking at how variations within it occur within the ownership of items that express fandom, I will now outline the theoretical concept of cultural capital, from its origins in the work of Pierre Bourdieu through its reworkings into ideas that may be used for the analysis of Discworld fandom.

Bourdieu's *Distinction* and cultural capital

Pierre Bourdieu used survey research conducted in the 1960s supplemented by other research and sources from the 1970s to demonstrate the interconnectedness between taste and position in social space, using the notion of habitus to correlate certain sets of values with corresponding social positions. The research surveyed a range of French citizens across different gender, age groups, types of employment and educational and social background. From this data Bourdieu mapped the social space and certain lifestyle aspects that appeared to correlate to positions on the social map. He maps the social space on two axes: the amount of capital and the composition of that capital, whether it is economic capital or cultural capital (1984: 122-3). Economic capital is the fiscal wealth of the individual, whether inherited or accumulated during the subject's lifetime. Cultural capital is the knowledge and

understanding of, or feeling for culture in both the ordinary sense and the anthropological sense. While these are mapped against each other in the social space there is often a correspondence between the two. However, an individual's position in the social space is not fixed, but relative to other positions, and likely to change in relation to those other positions within the subject's lifetime. So Bourdieu suggests that habitus and position in social space is influenced by a variety of factors, predominantly class, but also age and gender and (for the French) how far away one lives from Paris.

For Bourdieu taste and habitus is both defined by and expressed through the possessions owned and the cultural practices performed by an individual (1984: 169), at its basest level it is the 'opposition between the 'elite' of the dominant and the 'mass' of the dominated' (471). Those with less capital find themselves on the lower half of Bourdieu's map, but social position is defined as much by the clothes, food and pastimes of an individual as by their financial assets. On Bourdieu's map economic capital leans to the right and cultural capital to the left, so both the 'the division of the dominant and the dominated, and the division between the different fractions competing for dominance' (472) are evident. So while both a private sector executive and a higher education teacher will have high levels of capital, the composition of that capital will be different, the executive will have more financial capital than the academic and therefore a different habitus and different lifestyle and different expressions of taste. Expressions of taste become the demonstration of cultural capital, as a means of distinguishing oneself from those without the equivalent capital, or as a means of aligning oneself with others who do possess equivalent capital and occupy similar positions in social space.

However, this difference in composition of capital is further problematised by the distinctions created by the differences in cultural capital, the difference between that which is learned through formal education and that which stems from social origin. High levels of cultural capital are performed by the expression of an aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu, 1984: 20), so the feel for artistic beauty rather than the learned appreciation of the art historian, the privileging of what appears to be a natural understanding, which Bourdieu reveals is simply the understanding that is learnt from an early age through inculcation rather than learnt in an educational institution. And it is this understanding and use of symbolic goods 'which bourgeois families hand down to their offspring as if it were an heirloom' (59). Thus we begin to see the connection between economic capital and cultural capital. The families with economic capital understand the value of other sorts of capital and ensure that it is transferred to subsequent generations along with the economic capital.

Bourdieu asserts that there is also a link between economic capital and the lower levels of cultural capital expressed in the popular aesthetic. He suggests that the lack of economic capital leads the proletariat to seek cultural forms that have a purpose. The general lack represented by the lack of financial resources is seen to demand that all aspects of life fulfil

a function, that there is no room in the proletarian existence for luxury, so Bourdieu identifies in them a preference for representational forms of art rather than abstract ones, or the collective participation of popular entertainment, in which he includes 'all forms of the comic' (Bourdieu 1984: 26). Interestingly for this study he finds that:

> the weight of the secondary factors – composition of capital, volume of inherited cultural capital (or social trajectory), age place of residence – varies with the works. Thus, as one moves towards the works that are least legitimate (at the moment in question) factors such as age become increasingly important. (8)

He goes on to suggest that in order to appreciate fine art one requires a distance from necessity, so only those who have access to economic capital are able to have this distance from necessity that allows them to value form over function. As social position changes, the ability to acquire and demonstrate higher levels of cultural as well as economic capital leads to changing lifestyles (48). So the necessity created by lack of economic capital also interrelates with cultural capital so that 'habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning giving perceptions' (166).

While Bourdieu's work is very specific in its historical and geographical origins these concepts and frameworks may be and have been adapted for use in other contexts as I will go on to show in relation to Discworld fandom.

Developing and adapting Cultural Capital for fandom and comedy

Even as Bourdieu was writing *Distinction*, the cultural landscape was changing. In this section I will look at how other scholars built on the notion of cultural capital to make it more relevant for studies of fandom and comedy. In 1992 Wim Knulst published an article that used survey data from the 1950s to the 1980s to show how cultural consumption had changed in the Netherlands in that period. While there was a strong increase in the use of televisual media, there was a steep decline in theatrical performances of traditional high culture, such as ballet and opera. While this research was based on a premise of substitution, with traditional cultural forms being replaced by more technologically advanced forms, there was still a suggestion that a social elite were distinguishing themselves from the mass. In this instance rather than it being the economically privileged able to own the new technology, Knulst found that in 'the age of television traditional participation forms have become the preserve of an elitist rear-guard consisting of the better educated' (1992: 88).

However, on the other side of the Atlantic, Petersen and Kern were comparing survey results on musical tastes between 1982 and 1992 to demonstrate that in America expressions of taste had changed. Petersen and Kern found that rather than the division

between highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow, that those they considered as highbrow, having higher assumed levels of cultural capital, were now tending towards cultural omnivorousness, expressing a liking for both highbrow and lowbrow forms of music. In attempting to explain this shift they suggest that 'presentation of the arts via the media have made elite aesthetic taste more accessible to wider segments of the population, devaluing the arts as markers of exclusion' (1996: 905). Sociologists were already using Bourdieu's conceptual frameworks to demonstrate the changes to his posited structures in the democratisation of culture.

In cultural studies Sarah Thornton adapted Bourdieu for use in the study of sub-cultural communities, while John Fiske related these ideas directly to fandom. Thornton argues that sub cultural capital marks out the distinction of members of the sub cultural group in a similar way to Bourdieu's legitimate cultural capital, but for different purposes (1995: 26). Fiske suggests that the two primary axes on Bourdieu's social map are insufficient and that other factors such as race, gender, ability and so forth need to be included, and he also criticises Bourdieu's tendency to generalise about the proletariat, while distinguishing between fractions of the bourgeoisie, but he adapts the concept that cultural capital or acquired knowledge equates to status to communities of fandom. Fiske suggests that within the sub-cultural structures of fandom, those excluded from the mainstream social elite can achieve their own social elite through the shared sub cultural capital of fandom (1992: 35). However, Fiske recognizes that not all fans occupy a marginalised social position and he acknowledges that while fan collecting is often inclusive in nature, there are also those 'fans with high economic capital (who) will often use it, in a non-aesthetic parallel of the official cultural capitalist, to accumulate unique and authentic objects' (44). Thus we see that the processes of distinction exist among all levels of social space and as Bourdieu noticed, 'explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of groups closest in social space' (1984: 53). So while fan communities may be inclusive, there may also be distinct rivalries and rivalries of distinction between different fan groups.

While comedy audiences are only seldom considered in terms of fandom, there have been studies that consider comedy in terms of its associated cultural capital. In 2010 Claessens and Dhoest follow Kuipers' 2006 study in looking at the connection between class and forms of comedy. They distinguish between highbrow comedy that requires high levels of cultural knowledge to understand it, middlebrow comedy and lowbrow comedy. While those respondents with lower levels of education predictably preferred the lowbrow comedy, interestingly many of the more educated respondents rejected the highbrow comedy in favour of the middlebrow. However, they often expressed an interest in the highbrow comedy that they did not usually watch, as 'highbrow viewers know they are supposed to appreciate this kind of programme' (2010: 61). This suggests that while comedy, dismissed by Bourdieu, can be categorised in this way, the practices of distinction don't necessarily follow the standard patterns of the social structures. This is further developed by Sam

Friedman in his research on audiences of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Friedman argues that distinctions in respect of comedy and cultural capital rest not in the objects of appreciation, so those with both higher and lower levels of cultural capital like the same comedians, but rather in the manner in which they are appreciated (2011: 359). So those with higher levels of cultural capital maintain that critical distance which Bourdieu considered necessary to appreciate fine art, while those with lower levels of cultural capital appreciate the hearty laughter and 'the spectator's participation in the show and collective participation in the festivity which it occasions' (1984: 26).

Uniformity of taste without uniformity of expression of taste

As these theoretical frameworks suggested that different demographic groups would have different tastes, whether they were on the basis of status and capital in line with Bourdieu or on the basis of age or gender, the heterogeneity of the audience seemed unusual. With such a large series of books (thirty seven at the time of the survey) and such a diverse fandom it seemed prudent to check that they were actually fans of the same books, rather than certain books appealing to different sections of the readership. The respondents were asked to name their three favourite Discworld books. While each book was somebody's favourite, there were eight books named by less than ten people as their favourite, whereas *Night Watch* (2002) was named by 285 people as their favourite, and appeared among the top three of 28% of the sample.

Analysing the sample by age group, gender and, most relevant for this study, level of education, among every demographic segment *Night Watch* (2002) was the most popular favourite. It was not just at the top that the heterogeneous sample expressed similar preferences, with seven of the overall top ten appearing in the top ten for group classified by level of education. This suggests that from a series of thirty seven books there was a clear hierarchy of favourites that crossed all these groups. However, their manner of expressing their preference was not quite so unified. When asked why this was their favourite many people mentioned characters they like, suggesting the closeness of participation that Bourdieu associates with popular culture. On the other hand, a small number (nineteen) referred to the writing or literary values, aligning their taste with legitimate cultural tastes and thereby supporting Friedman's notion that a habitus of high cultural capital can perform distinction in its manner of appreciating a comedic cultural product (2011). However, it should be noted that a large number of highly educated respondents were happy to express a preference without this performance of distinction even though their education would suggest access to the codes that allowed this type of distinction. I will now turn to that part of the questionnaire that asked fans about the type of Discworld items they owned in order to ascertain if there is any performance of distinction in the ways that fans express their fandom through the acquisition of objects.

Discworld Merchandise

Gelder asserts that popular fiction fandoms allow the readers to 'move outside their novels and into the kinds of cultural worlds those novels inhabit' (2004: 81), so this fandom is both supported by and supporting a series of cottage industries, mostly in Wincanton, producing a range of Discworld merchandise. When I first began reading the Discworld books I was struck by the adverts in the back of the books. From childhood I had been accustomed to recommendations of other books appearing in the back of a book, and even the membership for the puffin club, a book club for young readers, so I had expected the last few pages of a book to offer an extension of the reading experience, but what was marketed in the back of the Discworld books was an extension of the Discworld experience, from dribbly candles and figurines to an advert for the guild of fans and disciples, a Discworld fan club. So while other fandoms may have required the fans to look for them, Discworld fans were directed towards fandom from within the pages of their novels. While hawkers of merchandise are a staple of any fan convention, in Discworld fandom the role of Clarecraft in instigating early fan get-togethers, which led to both formal conventions and the less formal gatherings that are still held on a regular basis, means that certain creators of Discworld merchandise, in particular the 'cunning artificer', Bernard Pearson, are seen as an integral part of the fan community.

The range of items available includes badges, t-shirts, scarves and jewellery as well as figurines. In 2004, to coincide with the publication of *Going Postal*, Bernard Pearson designed a range of Discworld stamps. Originally, a promotional item, the stamps soon became collectable, first among Discworld collectors, and eventually among mainstream stamp collectors. Another significant development in the availability of fan collectibles occurred with the making of the first televised Discworld narrative in 2006. Heavily involved with the production, after shooting had finished, Pratchett appropriated items of set and props to auction for charity. While elite items had previously been available in terms of cover artwork and book proofs, the film set items allowed fans to own something from the Discworld.

The survey shows that when asked what other Discworld items fans owned apart from books, only 172 answered none.
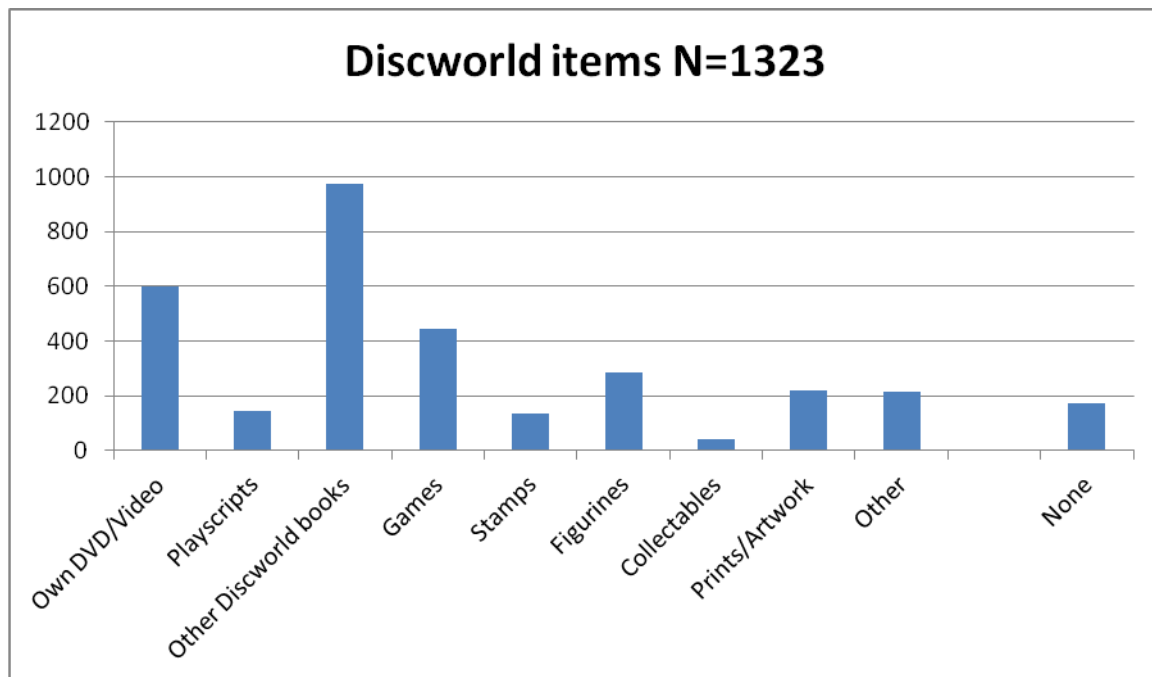
Discworld items N=1323

Fig 1. Ownership of Discworld items

The most common items possessed were the other books, such as companions or cookbooks. Of 1323 respondents 972 (73%) had one or more of these ancillary books. 600 had at least one DVD or video and 443 had games. The playscripts, it seems, were not collected in the same way as books, but suggested some involvement with staging productions of these adaptations. In a separate question on the survey, 21 respondents mentioned having been involved in stage productions as a part of their fandom. The inclusive type of collecting represented in figurines and artwork, was practised by over 200 people, with the stamps having a showing of 137[2]. Collectibles, by definition would be rarer items and therefore less commonly owned by respondents. It is this type of collecting that suggests the potential for exclusivity.

The different types of items owned suggest different types of attitude and activity. There are the functional items such as books or games that suggest an extension of the Discworld narrative, such as maps or companions, or a social expression of fandom, as in games that require more than one player allowing a sharing of the Discworld experience. There are other items which, while not mass produced, are easily available to purchase. The Discworld figurines may be likened to, say, the collecting of Royal Doulton figures, the value of individual figurines may increase over time, but they are most often found as part of a collection. This is inclusive collecting, the aim being to collect the complete set, but at the same time an individual's collecting does not necessarily deprive others. So collectors may compare and swap as a social expression of their collecting and their fandom. Likewise, the collecting of Discworld stamps mirrors and often overlaps with more general philately, with fora dedicated to the swapping/trading of stamps and other items. Finally, there is the collecting of rare items, exclusive collecting which allows the owner of the item to feel the

distinction that a traditional collector of rare objects would feel. There are some items owned by fans which may cross categories depending on the individual fan's use of those items. Discworld jewellery may be seen as a type of collectible item like figurines or stamps in the hands of a collector, but other fans may have a single piece of jewellery as an expression of their fandom and as a substitute for a costume, rendering the item functional to its owner.
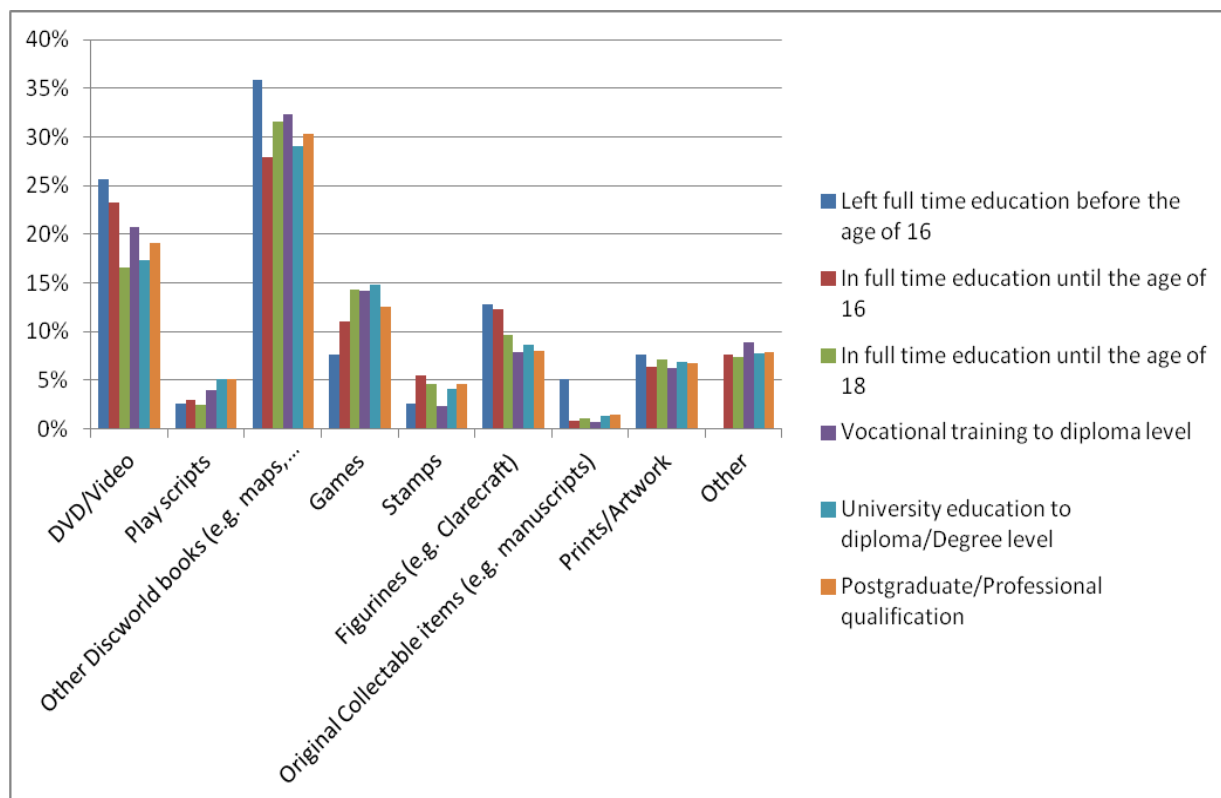

Fig 2. Merchandise type by level of education (percentage)

If fans with different degrees of cultural capital articulate their fandom in different ways there would be correlations between level of education and particular types of fan objects collected. However, as figure 2 shows while there are variations between different items, the overall pattern is roughly the same for each demographic group. Each group has a large proportion of people owning those functional items used for extending the narrative or social purposes, with fewer people involved in inclusive collecting and still fewer owning those items that suggest exclusive collecting. Due to the very different sizes of these demographic groups, the results in figure 2 are expressed percentages of the whole of that group, so the percentage of those who were at school until the age of 16 owning particular items can be reasonably compared with percentage of those who have higher degrees owning the same item. Thus the data shows that there is generally no direct correlation between the cultural capital associated with education and the ownership of different types of merchandise.

Looking more closely at the items that would reasonably be associated with high levels of capital, the collectibles, the percentage method of presenting results in figure 2 suggests that a higher proportion of those with the lowest level of education are more likely to be collecting these rare items. However, this is due to the relatively small number in that demographic group, thus it is a higher proportion of a smaller group. Figure 3, showing the number of collectibles and 'other' items shows that the majority of both of these types of item are owned by respondents with some form of higher education, so in this exclusive collecting, the overall assessment of the data shows there is a correlation with education and levels of capital.
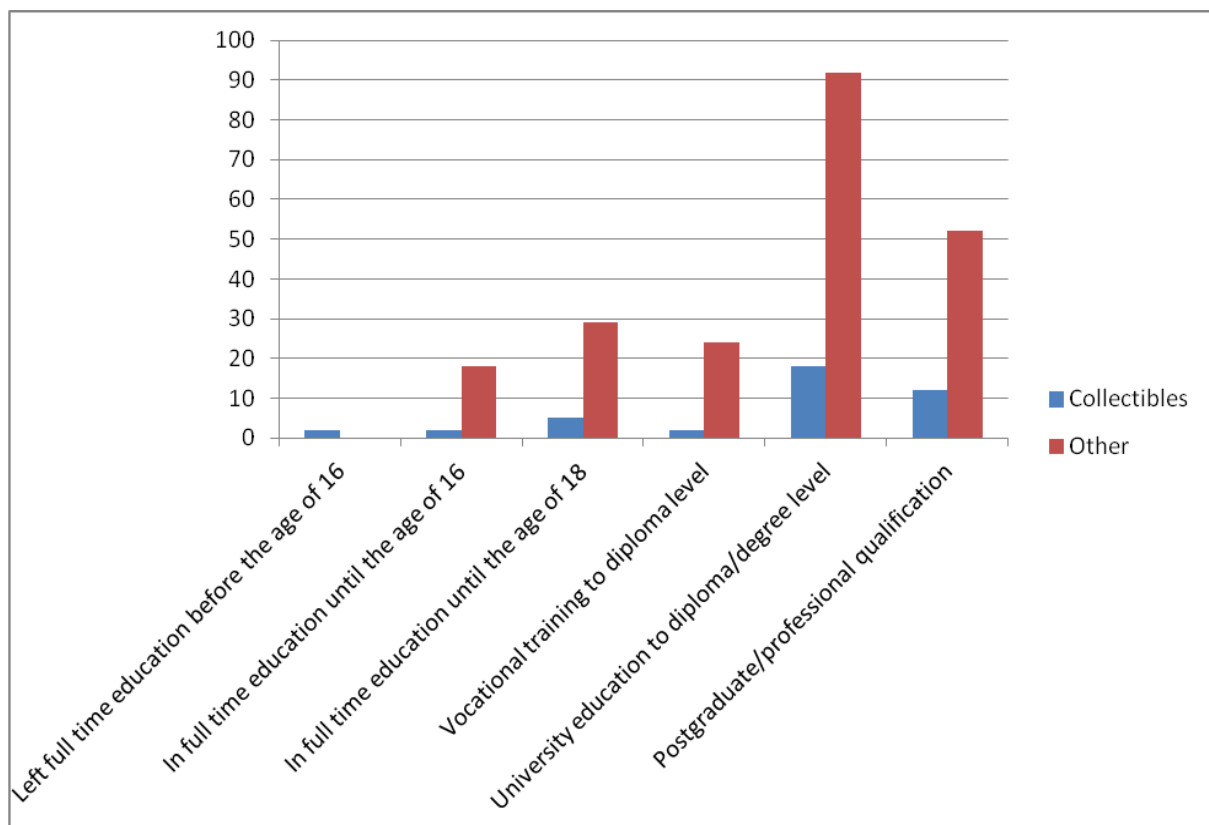

Fig 3. Collectibles and 'Other' items by level of education

At this point I would like to return to the idea that there is a link between the different types of capital. The rarer items tend be acquired as a result either of social capital (Hills, 2002: 56) or economic capital. Social capital is the capital gained from knowing or socialising with people. In Bourdieu's work, this is convertible into economic capital as networking that leads to better paid employment. Within fandom, social capital is often seen as unconvertible. So sitting with Terry Pratchett in the bar or at lunch may give fans both pleasure and a certain amount of kudos with other fans, but buying Pratchett a drink is not generally seen as a financial investment. Likewise the lengthy book signings mean that Pratchett's autograph is not particularly rare or valuable. However there are items that have a rarity value by being connected to Pratchett or others around him, so fans have

considered items such as 'a hand written letter from Terry' or a 'figurine of Magrat signed by Bernard and Terry' to be particularly valuable to them. On the other hand many of these items have been bought for considerable sums of money. At the 2010 Discworld convention, a metal sign from the 2010 sky production of *Going Postal* announcing 'Sto Plains Link Relay Tower' was sold for £460 in the charity auction. Outside the formal charity auction another item was bid for and bought on the spot. Following the onset of Alzheimer's which renders Pratchett unable to comfortably read in public, his PA read from an unpublished manuscript. At the end of the session they suggest that Pratchett could autograph the printout of the work in progress and 'perhaps someone could offer us a tenner for it'. The bidding quickly took off and the partial manuscript fetched £360. Another fan collector with a full set of proofs and first editions has paid over £1000 each for manuscripts and other elite items. The regular purchase of high value items at the charity auctions may suggest that this fan capital is actually convertible; however, while fans may have paid substantial amounts for these items there is no guarantee that they will hold their financial value in the same way as a 'legitimate' work of art. Likewise, one of the most expensive items in earlier charity auctions, having a Discworld character named after you, has no tangible value at all. However, like sitting with Pratchett at lunch, the purchase of these high value items, both tangible and intangible, do give their new owners both pleasure and kudos among the fan group.

Conclusion

While earlier studies of the social space associated comedy with popular entertainment and low levels of cultural capital, changes in the cultural landscape have legitimated comedy as a cultural form and led to a less rigid division of cultural forms associated with class. Terry Pratchett's Discworld series may be demonstrated to be accessible to a diverse readership occupying a range of subject position within the social space. Discworld fandom is a mature fandom that is heterogeneous in its make-up and known to be both creative and inclusive. However, not all Discworld fans wish to share this habitus. In line with Bourdieu's notions of distinction, some individuals will wish to distinguish themselves with demonstrations of their accumulated capital. While taste within the Discworld community does not suggest distinction, at times the manner in which that taste is expressed suggests an alignment with legitimate cultural tastes in the performance of distinction that echoes Friedman's (2011) findings on comedy audiences at the Edinburgh Fringe. While the merchandise owned and collected by many Discworld fans may represent either an extension of the social aspect of the fandom or an inclusive type of collecting, such as the stamp collections, the collecting of elite items, that is the acquisition of specific sub cultural capital either by expenditure of economic capital or as the result of social capital allows some Discworld fans to feel like an elite, like Discworld connoisseurs. Thus while Discworld and its fandom tends towards inclusivity mirroring the more general democratisation of culture, there remain individuals that will perform distinction within this social group.

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Notes

[1] A jelly sweet common among British children, which is the equivalent of the, now more popular, gummi bear.

[2] When the survey was conducted collecting Discworld stamps was in its infancy, if the same question was asked now, the number could be significantly higher.