

Recently, I finished reading *The Last Hero* by Terry Pratchett and illustrated by Paul Kidby. The book was published in 2001. It is a fable in the Discworld series. It may be instructive to compare Terry Pratchett to the sculptor Richard Serra who received a three page write up in the June 4th issue of *Time*. They are both trying to accomplish the same goal—making a relevant artistic statement—but they are employing very different strategies.

Here is some of what Richard Lacayo of *Time* wrote about Serra:

...Serra, whose work had once seemed as severe and forbidding as any the 20th century had produced, has developed, indisputably, into one of the greatest living American artists. By now he has also become one of the most popular, with major outdoor commissions around the U.S. and throughout the world....the most famous of those would be *Tilted Arc*, a 120-ft.-long curving steel wall that was commissioned by the U.S. government for the plaza outside a federal courthouse in lower Manhattan, only to become the focus of a huge public battle in the late 1980s when some office workers complained that it had laid claim to so much of the plaza as to make the space unusable. (For the record, they had a point.) When the feds decided to remove the work, Serra sued the government and lost. "It was painful," he says. "A lot of mean-spirited nonsense came my way, but I'd do it again. I believe in artists' rights."

Serra solves the problem of making relevant artistic statements by becoming completely separate from and therefore often opposed to the average person. His art is so sophisticated that only a highly trained art critic can begin to explain it. Here are some of R. Lacayo's enormously penetrating insights:

So to enter and circulate within the distorted bowl of his Torqued Ellipse IV is to find yourself inside a resolutely abstract geometric volume that is somehow a womb, a crater, an inlet and a chamber. By its powerful address to both the body and the subconscious, it sets in motion some very deep mental reflexes, including the ones having to do with anguish, awe, and desire. Yet at the end, its greatest impact is simply as an abstract form that speaks in a language that pre-exists words."

Does R. Serra have any worthwhile insights into the human condition? He is a distinguished member of elite group of artists whose works elicit highly obscure interpretations which could possibly be profound.

Terry Pratchett employs a different strategy to answer the same question. His writing strives to be accessible to the widest range of readers. He incorporates bits a pieces from pop culture as well as science and the intellectual elites. He wants to communicate directly to the reader. His work does not need an interpreter for the average

person to understand it as opposed to Serra's works which seem to be completely obscure.

Does Terry Pratchett have any worthwhile insights into the human condition? Since his work is an amalgam of all sorts of ideas from all aspects of our culture that are presented in a way that is entertaining and informative, it does at least gather together a great many separate strands of thought. It also does it in a manner that is thoroughly non-intimidating and this is a welcome relief from the likes of R. Serra.