Over the Rainbow

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Trans Magic

The Radical Performance of the Young Wizard in YA Literature

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> We tacitly expect child readers (most often girls) to (cross)identify with the male protagonists of the vast majority of children's stories, from Peter Rabbit to Winnie the Pooh . . . if this form of gender transitivity is acceptable, why not also encourage . . . reading Cinderella as a male-bodied character, or Robin Hood (like Peter Pan) as a female-bodied one?
>
> —JODY NORTON

This essay will focus on various performances of magic in YA fantasy literature, paying special attention to how magic and gender—as radical and transformative powers—are often linked. Both magic and gender are sites of pedagogy, spaces of learning (where "correct" learning is rewarded, and "incorrect" learning or performance has a variety of social consequences), and wizardry schools like Hogwarts tend to impart gender regulations just as much as magical instruction. For the purposes of this discussion, I will be treating various instances of gendered magical performance, occurring either in wizardry schools, remote villages, alternate dimensions, or contemporary urban landscapes. I will not be talking about the wizardry school tradition as such, since a great deal of work on writers like J. K. Rowling and Ursula K. LeGuin—whose writing deals with such institutions—has already been

done, and done well. I instead want to focus on magic itself as a transformative site for the politics of gender.

The production codes of children's and YA fantasy literature can invite transgressive readings, while simultaneously trying to prevent them. Even when magic seems constrained by gender and class assumptions, it can still deconstruct and derail those assumptions through imaginative readings and rereadings. And, as Deborah Thacker suggests, it is just this sort of flexible reading process often evidenced by child readers—a process commonly disavowed by academic opponents of children's literature as a genre—that allows for such imaginative revision to take place. "Re-reading," she states, "can also be conceived of as an exercise in re-writing, or taking possession of a text . . . [and the] need for children to re-read, sometimes at the expense of parental sanity . . . may proceed from the notion of re-enacting the play of desire."[1] Children, then, become in some sense the readers most capable of discovering gender transgression, just as they are the readers most stridently protected against such transgression by concerned adults.

Critics of fantasy literature in general have been debating articulations of the uncanny, the marvelous, and the fantastic since Freud first proposed the idea of the *unheimlich* ("uncanny") in his 1925 essay of the same name. Tolkien applied the idea to secondary worlds in his lectures on fairy stories (1939) at the University of Leeds, and Tzvetan Todorov drew complex structural distinctions between "the uncanny" and "the marvelous" in his benchmark text "The Literature of the Fantastic" (1973). These distinctions have been variously taken up, extended, and critiqued by later theorists of the fantastic, such as Rosemary Jackson and Anne Swinfin, who offer revisions of Todorov's work that are inflected by feminist and Marxist principles (since Todorov himself writes in a weirdly apolitical mode at times). Although I will not be significantly debating fantasy as a genre within this discussion—since there is already plentiful critical debate around that topic—I would like to align Todorov's notion of the fantastic as "a hesitation between genres" with similar presentations of magic in children's fantasy texts.[2] Magic is also a "hesitation" of sorts, a momentary gap in time/space, in narrative progression, that allows for radical gender insubordination (even in instances where it is designed expressly to contain such insubordination).

J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, for instance, hinges on the dis-

tinction between magic and "normal," wizard and muggle, but there is also a sort of transparent gender binary of male/female at work throughout the texts. There seem to be two critical poles of magic in Rowling's world: there is learned or competent magic, as embodied by Hermione Granger, and then there is intuitive or creative magic, which Harry himself demonstrates on several occasions. Hermione is clearly the most competent wizard at Hogwarts, having read everything from *Hogwarts, A History* to *Quidditch Through the Ages.* It is her logical deductive abilities that allow her, in *The Philosopher's Stone,* to solve most of the magical puzzles directed at Harry, including a nefarious potion puzzle at the end of the book.

Over the course of five novels, she manages to alter time, fend off all manner of monsters with her defensive magic, freeze people in stasis, obliterate door locks, and patiently explain matters of history and philosophy to the clueless Ron and Harry. Yet Hermione declares Harry to be "a great wizard."[3] When he protests, citing her various contributions to their adventures, Hermione completely elides her own skills as a talented wizard by dismissing them as "books! And cleverness! There are more important things—friendship, and bravery, and—oh Harry, be careful."[4] Harry thus becomes emblematic of friendship and bravery, while Hermione's "oh Harry!" utterance repositions her as a frightened girl rather than a powerful wizard in her own right.

Harry is often frightened, in fact, but he rarely expresses it, since that would violate the masculine codes of Hogwarts, Rowling's fantastic British boarding school. Beverly Lyon Clark reminds us that Rowling's depiction of such a school is itself exotic, given that Harry seems surrounded by cultural oddities that "nobody younger than 80" in Britain would even recognize.[5] Harry's imagined vulnerability as a child always in danger—he is, after all, locked in a cupboard under the stairs—is a crucial component in selling Harry's "everyboy" identity to both child and adult readers. Suman Gupta interprets Harry at the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as "a sort of boy Cinderella in the Dursley's home . . . he lives in a cupboard under the stairs, a space that serves as both bedroom and punishment chamber."[6] But this vulnerability gradually becomes an artificial one, a construct similar to the masochistic sign of the wounded white male—a figure who can appropriate historical trauma while still cohering as powerful, masculine, and privileged (the character of Spike on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comes to mind). Harry's masculinity may seem conflicted, but he

is always being reinstated as a masculine character through Hermione's exaggerated "feminine" drama and Ron's feminized antics (moaning, complaining, pulling faces, tripping over himself, and other Stooges-like strategies of establishing his own ineptitude).

Let us turn from Hermione Granger to a very different young wizard, Dairine Callahan, a central character in Diane Duane's Young Wizards series (*So You Want To Be a Wizard, Deep Wizardry, High Wizardry, A Wizard Abroad*). Like Hermione, much of Dairine's agency comes from her "excessive" speech, which she uses to defy and critique forms of patriarchy. Unlike Hermione, Dairine is perfectly aware that she is one of the most powerful wizards in the world, and—with the charming hubris of an eleven-year-old—she has no qualms about reordering space and time, meddling with the cosmos, and battling the incarnation of death and entropy itself in order to prove her powers.

Unlike her sister Nita's wizardry, which is grounded in research and textuality, Dairine's wizardry fuses technology with magic. Her "spellbook" is actually a computer, and its arrival seems to coincide with Dairine's own conviction that she is "beating her fists against the walls of life, knowing there's more, more, but she can't figure out what it is, then finding out that someone knows the secret. Wizardry. And it doesn't come fast enough, it never comes fast enough, nothing ever does."[7] This quote is actually taken out of context, for it occurs near the end of the book, not at the beginning. Dairine imagines that "[nothing] ever comes fast enough" later in the text as she is pouring her essence into the race of sentient computer-beings that she has created, attempting to make them understand what "slowlife" (humanity) is.

This desperation at the slowness of knowledge, this anxiety of an eleven-year-old "stick of a thing" who wishes angrily, immediately for what she construes to be the logical and ordering powers of an adult, becomes a site of repetition throughout High Wizardry. Dairine, who has always thirsted for the fantastic powers of Luke Skywalker—who wants to rewrite her own life in an epic, even intergalactic, vein—is the prototypical young hero wishing for agency through adulthood. But she also defies this formula, and it is ultimately her emotion, her brashness, and her irresponsibility—all stereotypical markers of childhood behavior—that allow her to save the Mobiles (her newly created race of beings) from corruption and eventual extinction at the hands of the Lone One. Her role in the literal, almost parthogenetic (from silicon rather than clay) production of the Mobiles becomes, in *High Wizardry,*

a reenactment of the wizard's role in capitalist production. Only, in this case, she's not just casting a spell: she's making a species.

Magic is the circulating capital of epic fantasy, and, like capital, it enacts a contradiction: producing something called "labor power" out of nothing, or nearly nothing. Magical production has to be linked to capitalist production, not only because magic requires raw materials—reagents, liquids, powders, parchment, and sometimes electricity—but because wizards in epic and urban fantasy operate as capitalist agents, using their mystical skill-set in order to survive in a financially hostile environment. Whether it's Middle Earth or Los Angeles, a wizard has to eat. So the ability to fashion a proper spell becomes identical to any accomplished craft or trade. Wizards have guilds and schools, just like medieval crafts communities. And learning to weave speech-acts together to form a coherent meme, a "spell," is structurally similar to learning a musical instrument. David Hawkes, in his article on *Faust*, discusses the contractual and fiduciary elements of demonic magic, which becomes essentially "the ability to appropriate and direct supernatural labor."[8] But what happens when young people are thrown into the financial ring of the working wizard? Do systems of magic, as extensions of late capitalism, have the perverse ability to suppress and regulate desire within kids? Do they often succeed?

By becoming an expert programmer and cyberwizard, Dairine is choosing to work, choosing to *produce*. She refuses what she sees as the vacuous, timeworn princess-role that young female characters are often forced to inhabit in children's fantasy. But being a princess can simply require different tactics of production and labor. Princess Eilonwy, from Lloyd Alexander's Prydain series, remains an ambiguous and overlooked character within the children's fantasy canon. After rescuing Taran from the perilous castle of the witch Achron (her dubious guardian and instructor in the arts of magic), Eilonwy fades into the background while Taran evolves as a heroic character. Yet Eilonwy, despite Taran's many attempts to silence her, remains a verbose presence throughout the Prydain books, establishing her agency precisely through her excessive speech. It is Eilonwy who explains to Taran the crucial difference between "Pig-Boy" and "Assistant Pig-Keeper," telling him (quite stridently) that "you're an Assistant Pig-Keeper! That's honor in itself!"[9] Much of Eilonwy's dialogue seems invested in educating Taran, and the entire Prydain series can in fact be read as a sort of medieval boy's conduct manual—a grand adventure whose extravagance serves to cloak Taran's own moral evolution from boyhood to manhood.

Yet Taran's adolescence is highly inflected by Eilonwy's comments and advice, her many interruptions and criticisms, and her penchant for saying precisely what Taran doesn't want to hear about himself. Alexander's language when describing Eilonwy's magic—especially her "magic bauble," a small golden orb which glows brightly—is always coy without being too suggestive, although it takes very little imagination to make the leap from magic to sex (a conflation often evident in adolescent fantasy, where magic stand in for sex, and/or sex emerges from intensely magical situations). The many scenes in which Taran has to gingerly hold Eilonwy's bauble, punctuated by her exasperated responses, such as "Oh, you'll never learn how to use my bauble,"[10] suggest that magic is being substituted for sexuality here, as in the scene in which Taran asks Eilonwy to "gird" his sword for him, saying nervously, "I want you to be the one to do it," while Eilonwy blushes.[11]

In addition to creating the possibility of sexual tension, these scenes also reinforce Eilonwy's character as an inexperienced girl, a princess who must ultimately be saved by Taran, who is a hero-in-training. The ambiguity emerges when we realize that Eilonwy is, in a sense, the one who is training Taran to be a hero, and not by merely establishing herself as an object of lack, a princess waiting to be saved. Eilonwy provides the majority of Taran's moral instruction, and has no fear of contradicting or even publicly insulting him. While the distinct "femininity" of Eilonwy's magic, its mysterious, organic, and circular qualities, is meant to enforce her femininity as a character, she manages to exceed the constraints of this characterization through her brazen speeches and pointed interruptions of masculine dialogue. While it seems more likely that Alexander meant to present her as a slightly updated version of the archetypal shrewish maiden, Eilonwy—somewhat like Chaucer's Wife of Bath—becomes a character whose sheer verbosity actually explodes the boundaries of her textual construction and confinement.

One of the characters who actually seems most like Harry Potter (and also the character who has been given the least amount of critical attention) in contemporary children's fantasy is Alanna, the female knight of Tamora Pierce's Lioness series (*Alanna: The First Adventure, In the Hand of the Goddess, The Woman Who Rides Like a Man, Lioness Ram-*

pant). In order to attain knighthood, Alanna dresses like a man and becomes "Alan," thereby reinventing herself as a male squire. The two characters are quite different, but both have a sort of greatness and nobility thrust upon them by adults; both are trying to outdistance some essential "flaw" that they see in their own lives (Harry wants to escape from his unwanted fame, and Alanna wants to escape from the social constraints of her gender); both are incredibly powerful and insubordinate, often stumbling into dangerous situations precisely because they have chosen to flaunt adult authority. Yet Pierce's novels tend to ask tougher questions than Rowling's, dealing with the trials of an adolescent female character—including physical development, menstruation, pregnancy, and sex—that the Harry Potter series would never touch.

Near the beginning of *Alanna: The First Adventure*, Alanna asks, "Why couldn't [I] have been a boy?"[12] which produces an even more complicated question that runs throughout the series—is Alanna a boy? Furthermore, how does one "be" a boy or a girl in children's fantasy literature? Alanna seems to have a subjective understanding of herself as a girl, a feminine embodiment, but that embodiment is constantly being threatened by her interest in the masculine arena of knighthood. By the end of the second novel in the series, Alanna still doesn't have any female friends (aside from the mother of her love interest, the thief Roger), and seems to actually despise courtly ladies for what she perceives as their seductive qualities and intellectual vacuity. Like Eilonwy, Alanna has several lines that may or may not be read as coy authorial humor, such as when she advises Prince Jonathan (another love interest), "My sword—it's humming."[13] Alanna's sword, the mythical weapon called Lightning, becomes the representation of her phallic power, the most important piece of artifice in her performance as a male knight.

The fascinating thing about this "performance" is that it seems to entirely undermine Pierce's knightly code itself, a code based on masculine ethics of camaraderie, honesty, and honor. Alanna is able to fulfill the code in every aspect without actually being honest about her "real" gender. She does what a woman is not supposed to be able to do, and does it "better" than any of her male counterparts, which suggests that Alanna is actually more masculine than any biological male within the knightly institution. In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam notes that masculinity as a characteristic has emerged just as often from female bodies as from male, and that "manliness is built partly on the

vigorous disavowal of female masculinity and partly on a simultaneous reconstruction of male masculinity in imitation of the female masculinity it claims to have rejected."[14] In comparison to Thom, her feminized brother who rejects knighthood in order to become a wizard, Jonathan, whom she must save from a fatal illness, and Roger, who has no magical or knightly abilities at all, Alanna herself stands out as the most visibly masculine character in the series. What remains odd, however, is that she is never read as queer by any of her (much larger, much more physically developed) male friends. Nobody ever seems to suspect that Alanna, rather than being a "real" boy, or a girl passing as a boy, might actually be a queer boy instead. Pierce is unwilling to confront this possibility, and so Alanna must constantly be reaffirmed as being a "girl on the inside."

On the opposite side of the chivalric spectrum is Sabriel, the heroine of Garth Nix's *Abhorsen* trilogy (*Sabriel, Lirael, Abhorsen*), who has little interest in combat, knighthood, or masculine ethics of any sort. Sabriel is a necromancer, the daughter of the powerful Abhorsen, and her control over the life/death boundary makes her profoundly interesting as a female character. Forced to attend Wyverly, a school for girl's etiquette that also teaches "safe" magic, Sabriel flouts adult authority by continuing to learn the secrets of necromancy. Rather than a sword, Sabriel is given "her father's instruments . . . the tools of a necromancer,"[15] which are actually bells that can summon and bind different spirits. Sabriel doesn't simply blur the boundary between life and death—she actually penetrates the boundary, entering the metaphysical realm of death in order to converse with spirits (or to abjure them).

Sabriel's instructor in the art of necromancy is Mogget, a malevolent and dangerous force imprisoned in the form of a cat. His sarcastic asides have much the same purpose as Eilonwy's interruptions, allowing Sabriel to see past her own adolescent understanding of the world—although, whereas much of Eilonwy's speeches are hopeful and optimistic, Mogget seems bent on transforming Sabriel into a cynic. There is also a touch of sexual mentorship to his instruction, especially given the inscrutable qualities of his "true" form. When Mogget first meets Sabriel, he says, "I have a variety of names . . . as to what I am, I was once many things, but now I am only several."[16] There is something incredibly coy about this description, the tantalizing suggestion that Mogget's "variety" includes a much older, much more experienced male being. When he is freed from his magical collar (itself reminiscent of a fetish ob-

ject), Mogget becomes a ravenous and decidedly evil creature, a tower of white flame capable of destroying Sabriel in an instant. This radical transformation—from a sleek, sensual feline to a destructive force whose sarcasm has now become deadly—suggests a similar transition from teasing boy to threatening man, from innocence to experience.

Later in the first novel, it is Sabriel's power as an Abhorsen that allows her to deal with the "problem" of Touchstone, an illegitimate male heir who has been magically preserved as a statue. At first, when she gazes at the statue of Touchstone and notices that "the details [of the statue] even extended to a circumcised penis, which [she] glanced at in an embarrassed way,"[17] Sabriel seems to freeze. Her necromantic logic has not prepared her for this bit of anatomy in excess, this circumcised penis. Alanna never has to contend with such descriptive narrative techniques, and her sexual activities with Jonathan always become tutorials in "love" that politely fade out into the next chapter. But Sabriel, here, has to deal with the fleshy counterpart to her own phallic authority. Rather than blushing, she "carefully [examines] him from every angle," deciding that "the man's body was an intellectual problem now."[18] It is her power as a necromancer, her removal from any recognizable feminine sphere within the novel's world, that allows her to "intellectualize" this male body hanging before her, reversing the parameters of the male gaze and studying Touchstone with a rigorous gaze of her own.

In the textual examples that I have provided thus far, magic operates as both an indicator of gender and a transgression against gender, marking both male and female characters even as it creates imaginative possibilities for breaking gender codes. Eilonwy's grasp of magic may seem, at first, to be childish, with her half-remembered spells and glowing golden bauble, but her agency as a character actually emerges from her ability to speak freely. Her rhetorical strategies become magical, interrupting Taran's own selfish logic and forcing him to carefully consider what "manhood" means to him. Although Alexander's notion of manhood is more than likely in line with heroic stereotypes, the very fact that Eilonwy's speech has in part shaped Taran's manhood makes him, in a sense, a bit queer. It is a female character who has taught him how to "be" a man, and how manhood actually emerges from, as well as incorporates, principles that might at first be read as stereotypically feminine. In Sabriel's case, it is a masculine spirit who instructs her in the process of adulthood, teaching her how to "be" a woman (despite

the fact that Mogget isn't human at all, and seems to have no definitive grasp of gender).

In the case of Alanna, her magic focuses on healing, but her martial skills tend to destabilize any stereotypical notion of "feminine" healing magic. In fact, there are plenty of male healers in Pierce's world, although there are no female knights save for Alanna herself. It is Alanna's multiplicity of abilities, in fact, that makes her the subject of criticism among many teenage readers. In *Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction*, her participant analysis of adolescent fantasy writing, Cathi McCrae notes that several readers found Alanna to be too powerful, and that a common criticism of Pierce's work was that it left very little room for Alanna to actually grow as a character.

Jennifer Dowe, a sixteen-year-old respondent, described the Lioness series as "stale and stereotypical,"[19] and a reviewer in *Hornbook* points out that "the reader must feel that the odds run very heavily in favor of Alanna—not only is she hard-working, sensible, and modest, but she is blessed with beauty, intelligence, apparently invincible martial skills, and possesses supernatural abilities."[20] There should be nothing wrong with a powerful young female character, yet both critics and young readers notice that there does seem to be something wrong. Alanna is lacking the vulnerability that makes characters engaging, and that allows for readers to make a personal connection with them. Alanna's sheer invincibility at times becomes an invisibility, rendering her so heroic and unassailable (even Beowulf could be selfish, after all) that she ceases to have human appeal. Thus, it is possible for a character to have "too much agency" through magic; yet we cannot uncritically say that Alanna is "too powerful" when she remains a heroic figure for many of her teenage (and adult) readers. In part, it is this desire to dismiss "too powerful" female characters (Pierce's Alanna, Buffy, Xena, among others) as being somehow "unreal," somehow "not women," that allows feminist resistance in literature and popular culture to be contained by hegemonic and patriarchal forces of production.

Another character similar to Alanna is Vanyel, the hero of Mercedes Lackey's Last Herald Mage trilogy, who is also given a tremendous amount of power to deal with at a relatively young age. Vanyel is, as the name of the series suggests, the last wizard with the ability to combine the protective powers of the Heralds with the combative spell-casting of the Mages (hence, a Herald-Mage); although, it has been so long since anyone in Valdemar has seen a Herald-Mage that we might as

well call Vanyel the first, just as Alanna is the first female knight. At sixteen (during the first novel, *Magic's Pawn;* the others in the series are *Magic's Promise* and *Magic's Price*), Vanyel is possibly the youngest openly queer character in fantasy-fiction history, and his coming-out process is narrated in exquisite and often painful detail by Lackey, who has never shied away from controversial storylines in her work. McCrae notes that though her work is "inconsistent in quality, Lackey writes her best novels with intense compassion for her teenaged protagonists. Lackey's YA characters, some of whom are abused or gay and many of whom are misunderstood, are authentic."[21]

What "authentic" means is a mystery, but Vanyel's experience of coming out, as well as first sexual experience, is given a surprising amount of narrative focus within the books. DAW Books, which published the Last Herald Mage series (as well as several other Lackey titles), has never again—to my knowledge—published anything more sexually controversial than this series, aimed at a teen audience, which focuses on a queer teen trying to negotiate a hostile medieval world (although they have also published Fiona Patton's excellent Branion series, which has many bisexual/queer protagonists). While fantasy literature itself is often dismissed by literary and poststructuralist critics as being an inferior genre of writing (much like children's literature), Lackey in particular is dismissed even by critics of fantasy literature as being a "romantic" writer, or being "inconsistent in quality." The fact that Lackey is committed to a grueling publication schedule, which demands that she complete a new book every three months, is more than likely the primary reason for this inconsistency. But it remains fascinating that her characters, often completely absorbed by their own dramatic emotional worlds, are often shunted by critics into the realm of formulaic romance.

Vanyel's sexual awakening is literally elemental, since he feels as if he is surrounded by ice. The ice is "all around me," Vanyel says. "I'm trapped . . . then I cut myself, and I start to turn into ice . . . [and] I'm all alone. So totally alone."[22] Tylendel, his doomed love interest, is the first person who attempts to melt this ice, and their first physical encounter together grows conflated with Vanyel's own magical power, his own development as a Herald-Mage (similar to the conflation of sex/witchcraft in the relationship between Tara and Willow, two queer witches in *Buffy*). When Tylendel kills himself, Vanyel tries to follow suit, demonstrating the very real and upsetting incidence of attempted (and completed) suicide among gay teens beyond the limits of the text. One of the most explosive scenes in the text occurs when Vanyel's aunt, Savil, confronts his homophobic father, who accuses her of "turning my son into a perverted little catamite."[23]

Savil's reply is worth quoting in full:

> "All *you* can think of is that he did something that your back-country prejudices don't approve of . . . a *man*!" She laughed, a harsh cawing sound that clawed its way up out of her throat. "My *gods*—what the hell did you think he was? Tell me, Withen, what kind of a *man* would send his son into strange hands just because the poor thing didn't happen to fit his image of masculinity?"[24]

This scene, I would argue, recapitulates a very particular psychic landscape within queer life—the defiance of the queer youth against his or her unresponsive parents—but it is also the resistance of the exiled wizard, the magical subaltern who wants to make a claim for social rights in a world that rejects him, even if such a claim seems impossible. Vanyel is making a claim here, and his ability to make that claim emerges precisely from two relations—his magic and his queerness—that should prohibit his attempt in the first place. He is even able to read his father's mind, and he finally erupts: "'Lendel *loved* me, an' I loved *him* an' you can *stop* thinkin' those—god—damned—*rotten—things.*"[25] Years later, in *Magic's Promise,* Vanyel observes that "magic seemed to offer solutions to everything when I was nineteen . . . for a while—for a little while—I thought I held the world . . . but magic couldn't force my father to tell me I'd done well in his eyes . . . it couldn't make being *shay'a'chern* any easier."[26] In many ways, the power to alter the physical world—the same power demonstrated by global labor—becomes useless for him, since it can produce nothing but chains of powerful events, but it can't change his emotional or psychic life.

In my attempts, throughout this discussion, to link magical agency to gender and sexuality, I have possibly (probably) come no nearer to answering the question "What role does the use of magic play in the construction of gender?" The most coherent answer I can offer is that magic is always gendered, sometimes transgendered, and that different authors gender their magical characters in different ways. Harry Potter's magical successes are part of what make him a visibly masculine character, even though he is constantly being undermined by the

knowledge and prowess of Hermione. Alanna's magic, as well as her knightly skills, is what makes her difficult to visualize as a female character, and so Pierce is always having to compensate for this transgendered characterization by reinforcing Alanna's very heterosexual attachments to Jonathan and Roger. Vanyel's magic is fed, in part, by his frustrated queer desires, and despite his impressive storehouse of magical power (much like Harry's and Alanna's broad and legendary abilities) he never arrives at any coherent definition of what it means to be masculine. It is Aunt Savil, in fact, who names him as "a man," although her enunciation of it seems profoundly critical and ironic.

In Madeline L'Engle's *Time Quartet*, the character of Charles Wallace is read as frail, underdeveloped, and even a bit queer, precisely because of his uncanny perceptive abilities. It is his older sister Meg, ultimately, who must grow out of the magic that she experienced as a teenager, which is why she reappears in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* as an anxious mother-to-be who can barely remember what it was like to be an awkward teenager. Magic, for her, seems like a regression, and yet it is Charles Wallace, working in tandem with Meg, who manages to save the world from nuclear annihilation. In L'Engle's work, as well as in the work of many other children's fantasy authors, magic is the province of childhood and adolescence—a power that emerges from deep uncertainty, emotion, and confusion. Magic, like gender, is a site of perplexity and often trauma, something that is supposed to come from "within" but often seems to attack us from the outside world, and a bizarre tradition that we are supposed to intimately understand even as we struggle to figure out what it means to have a body, what it means to desire someone else, what it means to desire incorrectly (and how can we know the difference?).

Gender and sexuality are inseparable from magic in children's fantasy fiction, since they all seem to emerge from the same organic drives, the same spaces of wonderment and confusion, and the same uncertain borderlands between body and mind, male and female, queer and straight. Magic is, after all, a queer force—a force that makes one "not normal" (if you happen to live outside of Hogwarts), but which can also paradoxically make you fit in (if all of your friends are wizards). Like gender, magic seems wholly unverifiable, a collection of disparate influences and physiological coincidences—since magical ability is often passed on genetically—that adults often pretend to understand even when they haven't the faintest clue what they're looking at. Like

gender, magic is a power that confuses children, a power that they are supposed to ascertain clearly but often don't, and a power that they would often like to be rid of. And to be a child who embraces fantasy literature, a child who skips out of gym class to read *The Hobbit*, who walks around the school field dreaming up new adventures for Harry and Hermione, is also to be a sort of queer child, an exiled child, a person who doesn't fit in among her peers precisely because, through the fantasy tradition, she is critically questioning what it means to be a boy or a girl, what it means to be a child, what it means to be human at all.

Any young girl who has thrilled along/alone with Bastian Balthazar Bux as he rides Falkor the luck dragon, any young boy who has hummed with excitement as he discovers the secret garden with Mary Lennox, or wished that he might be as clever as Hermione Granger, any straight teenager who has sympathized with Vanyel and thought, I know how it feels to be alone like that, to be surrounded by ice and alone with nowhere to turn, has experienced the ways in which magic can cross gender lines and allow us to escape (or extend) the signature of our own bodies.

The most enduringly powerful thing about children's fantasy texts is their openness, their willingness to invite multiple readings, and their desire to queer what Jan Jagodzinski calls "the capitalist construction of 'youth' since its inception in the eighteenth century . . . [as] a fetishized substance"[27] with the ability of young readers to surpass, adapt, and rewrite what is also the capitalist construction of gender as it delimits what they should feel, desire, and understand. These imaginative expeditions into new gender territory are as possible, as plentiful, as the many luck dragons, boy wizards, and lady knights waiting patiently in the children's section of the library—knowing that, as Clark contends, "canonical works are always, in some sense, children's literature,"[28] since they are the works that we try to pass onto children, and so the "children's section" of the library is actually the entire library. Accordingly, gender and sexuality, as the intimate matter of children's literature, are required by and belong to child readers, just as the entire library belongs to them.

NOTES

Jody Norton, "Transchildren and the Discipline of Children's Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.3 (1999): 420.

1. Deborah Thacker, "Disdain or Ignorance? Literary Theory and the Absence of Children's Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.1 (2000): 4.
2. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973).
3. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2000), 208.
4. Ibid.
5. Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 164.
6. Suman Gupta, *Re-Reading Harry Potter* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 111.
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Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts

Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction

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Many of the most devoted aficionados of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series have not merely contented themselves with the just-completed septilogy, but have gone online in droves to create and publish new Potter stories. These new narratives are called "fanfiction"—fiction that utilizes preexisting characters and settings from a literary or media text. Fanfiction ("fanfic" or "fic," for short) differs from other forms of "recursive" fiction[1]—such as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Geraldine Brooks's Pulitzer Prize–winning *March*, and every Sherlock Holmes pastiche ever created—by its unofficial methods of distribution.[2] The legal status of fanfiction based on in-copyright texts, such as the Potter books, is uncertain, though in the United States it is likely defensible under transformative fair-use laws.[3] Fanfiction is, by preference or necessity, not formally published; it initially was circulated by way of self-published "zines," and, these days, on the Internet. While fan writers are unable to capitalize on their work in terms of money or official recognition, they are compensated by not being restricted to institutionalized discourses. Fan writers are often characterized as refusing merely to consume media, but rather to engage actively with texts; fandom as a space of engagement is especially valuable for young fans, who constitute a significant portion of Potter fandom. In our era of what Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture,"[4] fan-produced writing provides a means for studying the impact of the Potter