

**QUEER SPELLINGS:
MAGIC AND MELANCHOLY IN FANTASY-FICTION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the connection between magic and melancholia in queer fantasy-fiction, looking broadly at what makes the entire fantasy genre in some fundamental sense “queer.” Synthesizing and applying psychoanalytical theories on mourning and melancholia from Sigmund Freud to Judith Butler, I examine how LGBT-identified characters within literary and visual media by Samuel Delany, Mercedes Lackey, Chaz Brenchley, Lynn Flewelling, J.R.R. Tolkien, Joss Whedon, and others, negotiate their subjectivities and erotic lives through the melancholic incorporation and manipulation of supernatural forces.

In so doing, I contend that fantasy, as a category of generic production *and* gender inscription, reveals an extremely provocative connection between queerness, mourning, and the supernatural. Arguing that magic and melancholia emerge from similar spaces of psychoanalytic “lack,” I position the linguistic and gestural acts of wizardry and spellcasting—the root of all fantastic formulations and fabulations—as *performative* acts designed to bridge an impossible gap in signification.

Keywords: queer, fantasy, science-fiction, melancholy, magic, witchcraft

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all of my families—biological, chosen, and queer—for all of their support, generosity, and love.

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Introduction:

Magic = Melancholia

“The uncanny *is* queer. And the queer is uncanny. [Their] shared secret history goes back some way.”

- Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, 43.

“I am here, sitting simply and calmly in the dark interior of love.”

- Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 171.

“Sometimes we remember our bedrooms, and our parents' bedrooms, and the bedrooms of our friends.”

- The Arcade Fire, “Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels),” *Funeral*.

What is queer about fantasy precisely, and what is fantastic—even uncanny—about queerness?

As a gay kid, I read fantasy literature to escape the boredom of small-town suburban life. Fantasy was my pornography. I would ditch seventh-grade gym class and sit under a giant willow tree in the park next to my middle-school, reading battered old paperbacks: Mercedes Lackey, Margaret Weiss, Diane Duane, Michael Ende. I hated organized sports with a passion, but I came to love what I now realize were the meticulously, even elegantly *organized* fantasy realms within those novels. Valdemar, Fantasia, Lankhmar, Nevèrÿon. Middle-Earth was my middle-school.

I begin with my own autobiography because I think that there's something peculiar, something sad even, about the image of a kid sitting under a willow tree, reading fantasy novels because he hates school. And yet the memory, for me, isn't a sad one, or isn't precisely a sad one, since the sadness is limned with a kind of dark and lovely pleasure. This was the point, I think, where fantasy, melancholy, and queerness—both as an erotic position and as a nonspace of curious exile—became linked for me. It was underneath that willow tree, as the fat drops of rain landed on my copy of Duane's *So You Want To Be A Wizard* (and I read on, dabbing at the pages), that I also began for the first time to read my own gender as a burning character, an aleph, a *secretum*.

This project emerged from the desire to explore how fantasy literature might emerge from structures of melancholy, and, in a broader sense, how this relationship might in some way structure queer life.¹ Although this is a textual analysis rather than any kind of participatory study, which precludes me making any generalizing comments about a larger queer audience, it has always been my personal suspicion that queer readers are attracted to fantasy writing. Even when the characters themselves are not, strictly speaking, homosexual, readers can sympathize with their larger-than-life struggles because being queer often seems larger-than-life. Biddy Martin, in her 1994 article "Extraordinary Homosexuals," locates a "fear of the ordinary" at the heart of queer relations: "Implicit in [some] constructions of queerness, I fear, is the lure of an existence without limit, without bodies or psyches...an enormous fear of ordinariness or normalcy [that] results in superficial accounts of the complex imbrication of sexuality with other aspects of social and psychic life, and in far too little attention to the dilemmas of the average people that we also are" (24).

Riding a luck-dragon named Falkor, pulling a sword from a stone, or performing some ancient, incantatory ritual all seem, at times, as strange, exotic, even as adversarial as the experience of taking up a queer orientation in a world that militates against such expressions, a world, according to Michel Foucault, “where institutions make insufficient and necessarily rare all relations that one could have with someone else that could be intense, rich—even if they were provisional” (“Sexual Will,” 159). These activities, like the liberatory definitions of queerness that emerged, mostly, through creative misuses or luxuriant elaborations of Foucault’s work, also speak to a melancholy fear at the core of contemporary queer life—a fear of being ordinary, really, of being “straight,” that is, of existing in a normative world without the rich possibilities of fantasy, even as this both disavows the fantastic foundations of heterosexuality and repudiates what Martin identifies as the “average” queer, the non-hero.

The argument I will return to throughout this study is that all contemporary fantasy literature has an aspect of mourning to it—the structure of the fantasy quest-narrative and the structure of Freud’s definition of mourning/melancholia are provocatively similar, even identical in places. If fantasy literature allegorizes the psychoanalytic processes of mourning, with its narratives based on loss, lack, and misrecognition, then the most sophisticated and transgressive example of this mimesis occurs in *queer fantasy literature*. Characters in queer fantasy are often doubly-marginalized, forced to negotiate multiple and competing systems of loss, exclusion, and mourning. By reading the history of queer fantasy alongside the history of *melancholia* as both a diagnostic and a mythical concept, I want to explore how queer life is important to the structuration of literary fantasy, and how, equally and concomitantly, fantasy

writing becomes important to the organization of queer life. What is queer about fantasy / what is fantastic about queerness? And, underlying this double-edged question: how do practices of mourning influence both the literary production of fantasy and the historical deployment of queer sexual cultures, especially when and where they depend upon strategies of creativity, imagination, and storytelling?

The History of Contemporary Fantasy Literature

Fantasy literature has a complex queer parentage, a variety of marvelous and competing origins that have their root in queerness and alienation. In order to distinguish between the fantastic, as a kind of suspenseful interval between genres, and Freud's uncanny, defined as "something secretly familiar... which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 220)—as most structuralist fantasy criticism has tried to do since the late-1960s—we should first enact a brief survey of fantasy literature's history. I would also like to state here that the fantasy criticism I am referring to—inaugurated, really, by Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (1970), and elaborated by critics like Rosemary Jackson and Anne Swinfen—has for the most part dealt with fantasy as a psychoanalytic gesture analogous to Freud's uncanny. These critics have debated the inner frameworks and complex schema of fantasy by exploring its ramifications within psychoanalytic discourse, or by tracing its emergence from more coherent genres such as the gothic and the picaresque. Few critics, however, have actually engaged with what has now come to be called *contemporary* fantasy literature—that is, the sword-and-sorcery tradition, created by Robert E. Howard, that saw its

renaissance with the publication of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* in 1937. Tolkien himself was a critic and analyst of fairy-tale literature, and in many ways *The Hobbit* was the first work of theoretical fantasy writing on his part. That particular genre, concerned specifically with magic, swordplay, and high allegory, emerged discretely alongside modernism from the highly concrete conditions of the First World War.

The term "sword and sorcery" was coined by Fritz Leiber in 1961, in response to Michael Moorcock's request² for a name to describe the particular kind of fantasy stories written by Howard (the creator of *Conan* and *Kull the Conqueror*, among other fantasy icons). Pulp magazines like "Weird Tales," created by J.C. Henneberger in 1923, allowed the subgenre to flourish, and Howard's first *Conan* story actually appeared in a 1932 issue (Landon 13). Samuel Delany, whose work I will discuss in Chapter One, admits to being enamored of Howard's work, particularly the erotic character of Conan as a swarthy barbarian-prince. After the success of *The Hobbit* in 1937, Tolkien forever transformed the landscape of postwar fantasy with his *Lord of the Rings* text, a single massive volume first published as a trilogy from 1954-55. *LOTR* created a new blueprint for fantasy worlds that would then be enthusiastically taken up and adapted by writers such as Lloyd Alexander (*Prydain*), Allen Garner (*The Owl Service*), and David Eddings (*The Belgariad*). Ursula K Leguin (*Earthsea*), Marion Zimmer Bradley (*Darkover*), and Joanna Russ (*Alyx; The Female Man*) then orchestrated a feminist overhaul in the late 1960s³, which paved the way for many of the authors to be discussed in this study: Mercedes Lackey, Lynn Flewelling, Chaz Brenchley, and even Joss Whedon.

During the early 1980s, fantasy literature returned to its pulp origins as the genre itself became consolidated with emerging fantasy role-playing games like *Dungeons &*

Dragons, Dragonlance, and Forgotten Realms. The literature of fantasy experienced a dramatic remediation, becoming largely inseparable from the array of artwork, video games, cartoons, and tabletop (dice and paper) role-playing games that were bombarding a new generation of fantasy readers: my generation. *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms*, particularly, which began as specific gaming worlds, produced extensive serial novels meant to explore every fantastic permutation of both ‘realms’ while simultaneously acting as a powerful marketing device. Players became readers, and each novel could then be parlayed into a unique gaming experience, creating a seamless hyperreal environment where adaptation functioned as a kind of sorcery. Where was the source text? Where did the quest begin? When faithful readers could easily choose to alter the fate of their favorite characters, to resurrect Sturm Brightblade, to venture into the halls of the Underdark with Drizzt do’Urden⁴, to rewrite the negative destiny of Raistlin Majere (whom I will discuss as a melancholic mage in Chapter Four)—the reading experience becomes paratactic, endless, a game with rules but without a necessary conclusion, which in itself resembles the type of empty transgression that Biddy Martin associates with queer notions of heroic ambiguity. It also creates a space that is rife with melancholy, since, in a world where texts are infinitely translatable and no origin seems to exist, the player can feel just as much like an unauthorized copy of herself, a marginal reader with no source-text to fall back on.

The cooperation of fantasy gaming-systems with a pulp-style literature seemed to hold endless possibilities for reader/players, many of whom still remembered the student riots at Berkley (among other universities) during which Tolkien’s *LOTR* experienced its first resurgence of popularity when it was re-analyzed through emerging perspectives on

civil rights (Swinfen 1). At one point, newly-Reaganite America was so concerned with the potentially deleterious effects of *Dungeons & Dragons*—its risk of corrupting youth with the inability to distinguish reality from fantasy—that the made-for-TV film *Mazes and Monsters* (1982) was produced. Teen viewers no doubt rolled their eyes at the bizarre sight of Tom Hanks, dressed like a medieval priest and wandering about convinced that he was trapped in a fantasy world. The original title of the film, in fact, was *Dungeons & Dragons*, but CBS dropped it (likely to avoid litigation, during what was probably the only time period when a gaming company like *D&D* had the financial and popular clout to potentially threaten a major network).

From here, modern fantasy literature split into two divergent frameworks: the heroic quest-fantasy of writers like Robert Jordan, David Eddings, and L.E. Modesitt Jr., and the feminist-inflected (and emotionally centered) writing of Mercedes Lackey, Holly Lisle, Tanya Huff, and Ellen Kushner. Jordan and Eddings have routinely made the *New York Times*'s bestseller list since the first publication of Eddings' *Pawn of Prophecy* in 1982. Lackey and Huff, also bestsellers, have more subtly constructed a loyal following of both male and female readers, with Lackey in particular breaking records for having published close to 100 books since 1987 (many co-written with her husband, Larry Dixon).

However, despite the sheer *volume* of contemporary fantasy literature produced roughly between 1979-2000, arguably a discrete era that most closely reflected the genre's debt to its pulp origins and which paved the way for writers like Lynn Flewelling and Chaz Brenchley, almost no substantial critical study of this period has been undertaken. Academia has been interested in the ramifications of the fantastic, as both a

literary site and an *entrée* into studying Freud's uncanny, since Todorov published *The Fantastic* in 1970, but this interest never actually spilled over into an analysis of contemporary fantasy writing as I have outlined it above. Anne Swinfen, in her 1984 text *In Defense of Fantasy*, suggests that "Tolkien made fantasy 'respectable'" (1), but respectable to whom? Academics? The history of Tolkien scholarship does not bear this out, since most of the memorable work done on *LOTR* trickled out after the 1970s, carried on by publications like *Mythlore* and only resuscitated after the success of Peter Jackson's millennial film franchise.

Swinfen also identifies the fantastic as having a "violently disrupted sense of scale" (134) whose actual purpose lies in making the real world seem more vibrant and interesting. Similarly, Rosemary Jackson, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), locates the fantastic as famously "trace[ing] the unseen and the unsaid of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (4). This definition suggests a kind of queerness—with fantasy, as the kind of writing that dare not speak itself (as literature) conveying most efficiently the unspeakability of sexual cultures that, in the early 1960s, were already a mixture of competing traditions and meaningful silences—and Jackson more than Swinfen takes the opportunity to analyze fantasy literature alongside civil-rights debates as a possibly subaltern literature capable of giving voice to "that which has been silenced" (Ibid). Yet neither Jackson nor Swinfen waste any amount of time studying *contemporary* fantasy literature. Both talk briefly about the work of Tolkien and Ursula K. Leguin (with Leguin's work clearly emerging as a more proper feminist call to arms), but for the most part these books are structuralist studies of

“the fantastic” as a fraught term, a kind of position or gesture that seems just as open-ended as “queer.”

Queer Fantasy Culture and Psychoanalysis

As I want to argue throughout this study, all fantasy literature is based on principles of mourning and lack—materialized through such genre-wide scenes as a lost kingdom, an empty throne, a disrupted patrilineal line (which in fantasy signifies a broken home), an abducted royal figure, or a buried artifact. “Treasures,” notes Roger Caillois⁵, “are constituted by privileged objects. It is not the sale value of these objects that makes them precious: that is often nil” (255). In other words, you can’t sell the *Sa’Angreal*, *Excalibur*, or the One Ring of Sauron to the highest bidder, because these icons aren’t about price. Instead, they more closely represent “privileged objects,” what Melanie Klein calls “good objects” in her *Contributions To Psychoanalysis* (1950): “The object-world of the child in the first two or three months of its life could be said to consist of hostile and persecuting, or else of gratifying parts and portions of the real world” (306). As I will discuss in a moment, Klein reformulates Freud’s concept of melancholia as a lack incorporated within the *adult* ego into a much earlier sense of loss, transcribed within the “nucleic” ego of the child as it experiences loss through the disarray of its good objects. This is not to say that every physical object in every fantasy novel, like a nodal point, somehow represents a psychoanalytic figure, but rather to suggest that the most precious objects in fantasy narratives often have the power of *filling a lack*—in the

Lacanian sense that “lack” is literally the *lack of lack*, that life is simply the loss or lack of death, as symbolized by the death-drive.

In *Seminar II* (1954-55), Lacan identifies the psychic migration towards death as an unsolvable paradox within Freud’s work, a problem that he chewed on for decades before explaining it several times to no one’s satisfaction (since his terms were always vague and meant metaphorically to contain the threat of the very idea). “Life doesn’t want to be healed,” says Lacan. “This life that we’re captive of, this essentially alienated life, ex-sisting, this life in the other, is as such joined to death, it always returns to death” (233). The very crux of psychic lack, the “lack in desire,” is that we don’t lack *anything*. “This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists” (223). It is within the interstices of Lacan’s concept of “lack” (as realized by fantasy literature) and Freud’s relation between mourning and melancholia that I want to inject the question: what is the *lack* within queer fantasy literature; and, more generally, within queer fantasy itself?

This is where my argument on fantasy literature as a literature of mourning begins: with the realization that most fantasy epics organize themselves around a scene of psychic lack that can only be recuperated through mythical discourse. The quest always ends in a moment of revelation, and that revelatory moment has to be conveyed within language, or else the quest is never actually complete. It always comes down to a particular linguistic spell to be cast, a word that metaphorically seals the open portal even as its corollary, the physical artifact, completes the task simultaneously. Lucie Armitt identifies the figure of the princess as both “lacking and lack,” since “in order for the prince to fill the lack, the princess must provide it in the first place through her

paradoxical presence as absence” (23). As I will argue later, the queer characters that this study deals with are also both “lacking and lack,” present and absent, exiled due to their sexuality and their mystical abilities while simultaneously invited in by the conservative forces of the kingdom/empire because of the particular *lack* they might be able to fill. The ultimately liberatory task of the queer fantasy hero, then, is not just to have the last word, but to rewrite the *legal* or *national* lack—the quest to be fulfilled—as his or her own psychic lack, the partial object to be recovered, the gender to be revealed, or the personal history to be reclaimed.

With this background in place, let me explain what I am trying to accomplish here. It is not my intention to criticize past fantasy theory with no real acknowledgement of how it has made *this* analysis possible, let alone what I see as the various positive investigations of specific fantasy texts that have been undertaken by more recent critics like Armitt, as well as Nancy Coats, David Lavery, Rhonda Wilcox, and a whole new vanguard of academics who study visual fantasy cultures. I am, rather, interested in delimiting a particular scene of fantasy literature, from roughly 1979-2005 (marked by the end of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), and exploring how specific texts from this period underscore a provocative relationship between fantasy, queerness, and melancholia.

Along the way, I want to both analyze and challenge a variety of melancholic definitions, beginning with Robert Burton’s 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and including the psychoanalytic and gender-based work of Sigmund Freud, Karl Abraham, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. Their rich ideas, their correspondences and arguments, and even what I see as their mistakes and missteps, will shape and inform my discussion of how melancholia relates to queer life, and how both can be said to cathect

around a fantastic core. It is my goal to offer up analyses of a variety of representative fantasy texts, exploring their links to melancholy while pondering how they might form an array of spectacular and seductive possibilities for the expansion of queerness. I say expansion, not definition, because I have no interest in the manifestly impossible task of identifying “queer,” but instead agree with Eve Sedgwick’s oft-cited call to queerness as an “open mesh of possibilities, overlaps, [and] gaps.” (*Tendencies* 8).

We should remember, too, that “queer theory” emerged through a kind of magic spell: Teresa de Lauretis first chose to conjoin the two words, scandalous *queer* with canonical *theory*, for the title of a conference that she was organizing in 1990 at the University of California at Santa Cruz (de Lauretis, “Queer Theory, ”); de Lauretis soon rejected the term that she had engendered, saying that it had become “a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (de Lauretis, “Habit Changes” 297). David Halperin even suggests that “queer theory originally came into being as a joke” (Halperin, “Normalizing” 339). To say that queer academics had corrupted queer theory—even as it was just beginning to emerge as political lens for analyzing queerness—seems to me to be a type of melancholia in itself: the disavowal of academic co-option rather than the acknowledgement that any theory, and especially *queer* theory, would have to be vulnerable and incomplete to begin with. To be queer is, in a sense, to be part of a fantasy, but also to be *fantastic*, somehow different; and there is a kind of mourning involved in that difference, a mourning that infuses the fantasy like an alternating current, but within the blue flame of that arc there is also an immense power.

In *Melancholy and Moralism*, Douglas Crimp locates the tense divide between mourning and militancy within the gay community, specifically as it cathects around the

AIDS crisis of the 1980s. He observes that “although Freud’s theory [of melancholia] concerns an object relationship, if we transpose these situations to the social sphere, they describe very perfectly the condition of gay men during the AIDS crisis” (140). Like Slavoj Žižek, who in a recent talk criticized the knee-jerk political instinct for ‘action’ (i.e., militancy), which is now valued over introspection (UBC, 2007), Crimp argues that the exhortation to feel instant rage over AIDS-related deaths can in itself be a dangerous disavowal of productive queer melancholy:

For those who feel only a deadening numbness or constant depression, militant rage may well be unimaginable, as again it might be for those who are paralyzed with fear, filled with remorse, or overcome with guilt. To decry these responses—our own form of moralism—is to deny the extent of the violence that we have all endured. (149)

Melancholy, suggests Crimp, can take the form of a unique queer moralism, a differently ethical response to the un-ethical *non-response* of conservative institutions who have no desire to grieve AIDS-related deaths (or to acknowledge the existence of people living with AIDS as *people* rather than numerical *survivors*, numbers). Queer relations are always structured through melancholy, since the history of queer desire has been one punctuated by incriminating silences, criminal trials, physical exiles, misrepresentations, and above all, stolen moments of pleasure. To be queer is not necessarily to be locked in melancholia, but part of coming out should also signal the acknowledgment of the violations, the crimes, even the graves that have helped to

structure gay, lesbian, and transgender life since its organization as a possible category (hence, a site to be controlled) in the nineteenth century. Foucault, in a 1982 interview—“Sexual Choice, Sexual Act”—describes the most erotically charged moment for a gay man as “[the moment] when the lover leaves in the taxi” (150). By this, he means to suggest that homosexual desire is an extremely peculiar relation, a relation that could be said to begin—in a particular era—with sex, and which then matures, or foments, through the phallic power of recollection: “It is when the act is over and the guy is gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice” (Ibid).

The connection that I am trying to draw, here, between Crimp’s moral melancholy and Foucault’s erotic melancholy is one that resounds significantly within queer life—the caressing edges of mourning and passion, of melancholy and masturbation, that allow the fantasy or *imago* of the lover to emerge as a central figure for gays and lesbians. When the institutional structures of the social world declare your life itself to be *a fantasy*, even as they grudgingly accept your coital relations as an unpleasant but necessary crisis to be managed within the larger scene of transgression or abnormality, then fantasy necessarily becomes a cipher for the interpretation of your mode of life, your life-style. What is left, Foucault suggests, after the sexual moment fades and the coils of memory take hold, is the eternal question: “what can be done to guard against the onset of sadness?” (152). This tentative but provocative discussion of melancholy within Foucault’s “homosexual mode of life” theory is, I think, underanalyzed, which is one of the motivating forces for this project. How is melancholy particular to gay and lesbian communities, and how can

it be an action as well as an affect; how can it be productive, especially as it occurs within the scene of the fantastic?

Fantasy, the Uncanny, and Melancholia

I promised earlier to distinguish between the fantastic, the uncanny, and “fantasy” as a literary genre, but it has taken me a while to arrive at this task. In order to understand the gap between fantasy writing and *the fantastic*, I first need to take into account the genre’s history, which, as I have shown, is one of significant adaptation, remediation, and interdisciplinarity. Now it is possible to trace the entangled lineages of queer theory and fantasy criticism as they developed through psychoanalysis, and also to answer why such a comparison is necessary in the first place. To accomplish this, however, I first need to draw critical distinctions between Freud’s uses of “fantasy” and “phantasie,” as well as Jean Laplanche’s modification of “the fantastic” into “the fantasmatic”; that is, the psychoanalytic movement from a broad category of fantasies into a very specific ideation of Freud’s primal scene (the moment in which we first perceive our parents having intercourse, and thus, when our erotic life becomes fractured). I want to use the evolution of the concept of *melancholia*, from the writings of Hippocrates to the ruminations of Freud, as a materialist and medical backdrop for examining the development of *phantasie* and *fantasy*. All of this will tie together in the emergence of modern queer fantasy writing, which, I argue, concretizes and elaborates the relationship between fantasy and melancholia through its deployment of sexually and culturally marginalized characters.

Freud wrote his essay, “The Uncanny,” in 1919, four years after writing “Mourning and Melancholia.” The two essays are seldom compared; critics like Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous have already drawn more substantial and obvious links between “The Uncanny” and Freud’s work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—since the death-drive, a concept he introduced in that essay, is also in itself uncanny⁶—as well as “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” wherein he mentions the “problem” of telepathy. Throughout this work, I want explicitly to link mourning with the uncanny in order to unearth what I see as the heart of melancholy within the structural foundations of fantasy literature. I will elaborate a bit later on my equation, “Magic = Melancholia,” which also forms the title of this introduction.

“The Uncanny” is a confusing essay because Freud himself finds the relationship between *heimlich/unheimlich* (homely/un-homely) to be confusing. Cixous calls his discussion more of a “strange theoretical novel” (525) than an essay, and locates transgression in the uncanny because it is “androgynous... a *changing sign*... passing from the affirmation of survival to the announcement of death” (530; 539). Her reading of the uncanny’s “androgynous” nature comes from the reflexivity of *heimlich/unheimlich*, since, as Freud observes, each concept often refers to the other; the repressed always returns. He offers this, the clearest definition he is capable of:

It may be true that the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition. But the selection of material on this basis does not enable us to solve the problem of the

uncanny. For our proposition is clearly not convertible. Not everything that fulfils this condition—not everything that recalls repressed desires and surmounted modes of thinking belonging to the prehistory of the individual and of the race—is on that account uncanny. (“The Uncanny” 224)

Not everything, then, is the uncanny, and not everything is *not* the uncanny; it is an involuntary return of the repressed, and also any scene that exposes what Caillois calls the “mysterious relays” (Caillois, *Edge* 355) between seemingly unconnected objects (and people) in space. Not just when the wires show, but when the wires connect you intimately to something that you would much rather run away from. In *The Uncanny*, his 2003 monograph on the subject, Nicholas Royle further identifies it as “a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper...a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property” (1). Freud famously illustrates a memory in his own life, a moment during which he finds himself wandering (uncannily) in circles:

having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *detour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny (237).

Freud keeps arriving back at the same piazza, where a group of prostitutes have gathered, and he becomes convinced that they are watching him. Their sexual agency

becomes a more specific threat within the heart of the uncanny, that is, the return of the repressed erotic (urge). Freud admits near the end of “The Uncanny” that, however clearly he has tried to lay out its psychoanalytic possibilities, its “aesthetic” possibilities are still largely untracked and unexplored. My connection of the uncanny to melancholia, therefore, is a kind of aesthetic connection, or a peculiar “open mesh of possibilities” that fuses the psychoanalytic with the aesthetic, the fantastic object with the beloved object, in order to expose the complex structures of mourning that fantasy literature emerges from. “The Uncanny” is, after all, an extended piece of literary criticism on Freud’s part, an analysis of a literary monster called “The Sandman” who devours children’s eyes and a beautiful girl who turns out to be a creepy automaton, all interpreted through the paranoia of a young scholar named Nathaniel. It is precisely due to its literary character that, fifty years later, Tzvetan Todorov seizes upon “The Uncanny” in order to explain what will become his own cryptogram: the fantastic.

Todorov describes the fantastic as a “hesitation between genres” (31) rather than a genre in itself, an impossible space or breath between two worlds that can only exist for a limited amount of time. This hesitation is all on the part of the reader, and it emerges when she cannot tell if something is solid or incorporeal, marvelous or sensible, hidden or visible. Todorov is at great pains to separate the uncanny, the marvelous, and the fantastic as distinct genres, even as all three categories insistently bleed into each other, and even as his own definitions grow more incoherent. He locates Freud’s uncanny as a moment of uncertainty during which “the laws of nature remain intact” (41)—that is, an explanation for the strange phenomena, be it doubling, a queer correspondence, or simply a feeling of *something wicked this way comes*, can be offered without having to bend the

laws of nature. Is Hamlet really talking to his father's ghost, or is he just mad (or "mad in craft?"). Are witches really in congress with the devil, or just melancholic old women who have lost their intellectual faculties? This was a crucial question for early-modern inquisitors and audiences during the witch trials. The experience of judging madness or hallucination from wonder is what becomes the substance of the fantastic as a literary genre. The marvelous, on the other hand, requires that "new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena" (Ibid). New worlds, new histories, new perspectives: most, if not all, of the contemporary fantasy novels addressed in this study would fall under Todorov's definition of the marvelous.

But what is *the fantastic*? It is a "hesitation," an "uncertainty," a "possibility," and what Todorov calls an "imaginary causality" (109). In short, it is a subgenre *of* the uncanny, a kind of uncanny within the uncanny; the deepest and most terrifying hesitation possible, but also an interval—a breath, a cough, a turn of the head, a blink of the fixed gaze—that may allow magic to happen. Just as *heimlich* and *unheimlich* can sometimes be the same thing, the fantastic and the uncanny refer back to each other. *Heimlich*, in fact, is used to refer to the medieval "heimlich arts," the art of magic, which Freud cites in his essay ("The Uncanny" 222); and our sense of the uncanny is lifted from medieval Scottish poetry (Royle 12), from the *kenning* or *canny* knowledge that passed between the fairy-folk, the *sidhe* of the *seleigh* and the *unseleigh* court, the black and white orders.⁷ *Seleigh/Unseleigh* and *Heimlich/Unheimlich* are both elaborations of what Cixous calls the "vibration" ("Phantoms" 539) of the uncanny, the tension between negative and positive forces that really defines most of fantasy literature.

The uncanny, then, represents any psychic return of repressed material—

especially as evidenced by bizarre correspondences and spatial connections that give us pause—whereas the fantastic stands somewhere between the uncanny and the marvelous as a literary genre, the manifestation *in literature* of a certain tension between what we are really seeing (as sane viewers), what we might be seeing (as viewers slipping into the field of the uncanny), and what we *couldn't possibly* be seeing (as melancholiacs, insane people, or children). With this extremely flexible definition in mind, it becomes clear how both concepts share a certain tract of epistemic space. They are constantly flowing into each other, helping to create the very field on which language is inscribed. But what is the relationship between magic and melancholy, between language-driven power and critical mourning, between queerness and the supernatural, and how do these relationships help to prefigure so many of the archetypal ideas behind fantasy literature?

Melancholia can act both as a tool or a concept to be employed within psychoanalysis—i.e., “you have melancholia”—and also as what Foucault would call a “style of life” or a *mode de vie* (“Friendship” 158), a mode of living. It is a style, a queer style, which I will explain as we go along. Melancholia, according to Freud, occurs when the ego splits violently, taking *itself* as an object. Because the mourning subject cannot properly withdraw her cathected energies from the beloved object, she instead devours the object, taking it cannibalistically inside of her own ego:

The shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego.”

(“Mourning and Melancholia” 249)

Freud's use of the past tense is curious, as if he is retelling a very old story, a foregone conclusion that must somehow lead to all human relations. "The shadow of the object *fell* upon the ego." It could not help but perform this action, since this action is what allows the ego to split, and thus for the first time to know itself. And, in fact, he *is* telling an old story, or rather, he is drawing upon a whole constellation of old stories about melancholia that emerged within classical literature. He is also plagiarizing from his own life, in a sense, because he had already developed many of the ideas that would become mourning/melancholia in earlier conversations with a friend, a suicidal poet.⁸ Melancholy, however, begins with Hippocrene writing and the humoral theory that was pervasive in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as the Renaissance writing of melancholic "experts" like Robert Burton and Timothie Bright, and the mourning poetry of John Donne and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The story of melancholy is as old as desire itself, and in order to understand Freud's selective deployment of it, we need to contextualize the term's medical and philosophical history.

In *Melancholia and Depression* (1986), his exhaustive historical resource on the evolution of melancholy in both pre- and post-modern thought, Stanley Jackson defines the classical sense of the term as "a mental disorder involving prolonged fear and depression" (4) which derives from an excess of black bile, the most dubious of the four humors in the Hippocratic system.⁹ The Greek *melaina chole*, in fact, refers literally to black bile, whose various malfunctions (it could overheat, or grow too cold) brought on what were known as the "melancholic diseases" (Jackson 5). Classical theorists disagree as to whether black bile is a "real" humor, or if it is a deleterious effect caused by the

overheating or rapid cooling of blood. Hippocrates' protégé, Rufus of Ephesus, identifies black bile as "a thick and cold residue derived from the blood by a process of chilling" (Jackson 10), and perhaps the most well known Roman humoral theorist and anatomist, Galen, discerns that black bile is caused by the "combustion of yellow bile [which] provokes violent delirium" (Galen, *Affected Parts* 88). Whatever mechanical processes the black bile might undergo, it produces *something*, a powerful abject energy, an after-product, known by various humoral theorists as darkness, ashes, fumes, and liquors. Much later, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his *Collected Notebooks*, will even liken his melancholic "Dread" to "cherry juice running in between the cherries in a cherry pie" (*Notebooks*, V2: 2398)¹⁰: a sweet signifier indeed of sorrow.

It is not until the *Problemata*, however, written possibly by Aristotle (but most likely by one of his disciples), that melancholia acquires a truly literary character. The author of the *Problemata* identifies this buildup of black bile as an illness that seems to specially afflict "creative" men (Aristotle, *Problemata* 30.1). Juliana Schiesari, in her work *The Gendering of Melancholia*, points out that "melancholia...became an elite 'illness' that affected *men* precisely as the *sign* of their exceptionality, as the inscription of genius within them" (7). In women, all the signs of melancholia were simply interpreted as hysteria or excessive mourning, but in men, the *par excellence* symbol of ethical acumen was undoubtedly melancholia. It produced chills in some, flashes of heat in others, but it was almost always read classically as an inscription of masculine competence, entirely separate from madness or simple depression. Freud will eventually distill and mutate all of these concepts through the production of his binary mourning/melancholia, which Slavoj Žižek, in his article "Melancholy and the Act,"

describes as a kind of academic gospel, since “the mistake of depreciating melancholy can have dire consequences” (658). Žižek, taking up the work of Lacan, “corrects” the Freudian relationship between mourning and melancholia (a lost object that is given up, as in mourning, vs. a lost object that is unmournable and hence installed *within* the ego, in melancholia)—instead, he explains that “what melancholy obfuscates is that the object is lacking from the very beginning, that its emergence coincides with its lack, that this object is nothing but the positivization of a void or lack” (660). You can’t miss what you never had, and what you want but can never have—in life—is death.

Freud concentrates on particular loss rather than universal lack, and his decision to do this has been criticized quite stridently by psychoanalysts like Lacan, Laplanche, and Klein. But Freud may also have failed to understand just what he was getting himself involved in, like Frodo wandering into Mirkwood. In Freudian mourning, the energies that enwrap the object like grief-stricken tentacles (or like Melanie Klein’s ectoplasmic ego-amoeba) are gradually withdrawn by what Freud calls the “testing of reality” (“Mourning,” 245): the daily exertions, however impossible they might seem at first, of waking up, getting out of bed, dressing, eating, forming words, all of which teach us how horribly and astonishingly life goes on after the loss of the beloved object. In melancholia, however, the “hyper-catheted” energy is not properly withdrawn; it turns inward instead, and the ego objectifies *itself*, splitting to its very foundations like a planet torn apart by tectonic shifting, a rift or a scar on the skin of the Real that reveals itself to be the volatile fluid of the unconscious.

The history of melancholia as a specifically analytic or diagnostic concept (as opposed to a mythical or religious phenomenon) is as fraught as the history of fantasy as

a literature, pieced together from a wide array of existing genres. In 1909, Sándor Ferenczi offered the prologue to melancholia, “introjection,” as a particular neurosis within his essay “Introjection and Transference.” Freud kept up an active correspondence with both Ferenczi and Karl Abraham, even as he subtly pirated and developed their ideas by incorporating them (almost melancholically) within his own project. In 1911, Abraham gave a lecture on “manic-depressive insanity,” which would inform both Freud’s development of melancholia and Melanie Klein’s later theorization of the “depressive position” within infants. Esther Sanchez Pardo, in *Cultures of the Death Drive*, notes that “Abraham’s ideas [were] silently incorporated into the Freudian construction of ‘Mourning and Melancholia’” (25), even as Freud and Abraham maintained an increasingly paranoiac correspondence with each other.

Like “The Uncanny,” the 1915 publication of “Mourning and Melancholia” seems to have produced a recurrent stream of confusion and anxiety among both psychoanalytic and literary critics—what could it mean? Why did Freud’s language seem so bizarrely equivocal, and why did he keep pushing aside problems that seemed to gnaw at the very heart of his thesis on mourning? In a 1924 paper, Abraham used melancholia (both his conception of it and Freud’s) as a contextual framework for developing what he called “partial object love,” a concept that would become essentially the career-defining question within the work of his own protégé, Melanie Klein (Pardo 28). As I will discuss in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, Klein’s idea of the infantile “depressive position”—the original scene of melancholia from which we develop our dependence on “good” and “bad” objects, but which begins necessarily with the creation of the mother’s own body as a “partial object” for the infant—revolutionizes Freud’s work on the

Oedipal position by pushing it back to early-infancy, the suggestion in Klein's work being that we are born *into* a type of melancholia.¹¹ In *Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, Klein states that "there is a close connection between the testing of reality in normal mourning and early processes of the mind...[The] child goes through states of mind comparable to the mourning of the adult" (311). We are, in effect, always mourning, and for Klein, the only true "reparation" for infantile transgressions is what can be achieved through fantasy.

The hallmark of the melancholiac, Freud says, is "communicativeness" which actually delivers no meaning, becoming instead a gradual emptying out of the linguistic sign itself, or exposing the arbitrariness that underpins all forms of signification. The "self accusations" of the melancholic are "hardly at all applicable to the patient himself" ("Mourning" 248), but become merely words piled atop words, always referring to some distant unreachable point, some irrecoverable artifact. Julia Kristeva, in her work *Black Sun*, puts it even more succinctly: "The speech of the depressed is to them like an alien skin...they [speak] a dead language" (53). The skin of their language is already decomposing, already experiencing the autolysis of cellular breakdown like a cadaver lying on a cold autopsy table. But it is above all this very hesitation between life and death, composition/decomposition, that gives form to the uncanny. Melancholiacs communicate constantly, but their signs remain arbitrary; they "seem absurd, delayed, ready to be extinguished, because of the splitting that affects them" (Kristeva 47).

This notion of words as skin is, I think, intimately connected to the structural poetics of spellcraft and wizardry, the secret engines that drive sorcery and the supernatural. Language is a skin that can be extended, that can be *distended*, that can be

stretched, cut, and above all, marked. Roland Barthes, in *A Lover's Discourse*, also says that "language is a skin," and that discourse only occurs when "I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words" (73). The art of spell-crafting and magic, I will argue, is just this: the flux of skin, sound, and *grammatica*, the meeting of self and other, and the most performative example of the melancholic experience as it can/cannot be related through language. Magic = Melancholia. Like the sign of ACT UP, Silence=Death, it is both an equation and an impossibility, a slippage between the real and the imaginary that produces the uncanny. In *Homographesis*, his work on the "textual overdetermination" (6) of gays and lesbians (who have been historically rendered as a text to be written on/spoken about), Lee Edelman notes that "'Silence=Death' is a stunningly self-reflexive slogan. It takes the form of a rallying cry, but its call for resistance is no call to arms; rather, it calls for the production of discourse, the production, that is, of more text" (87). Like Silence=Death, Magic=Melancholia can serve as a rallying cry for queer fantasy-readers, apprentice wizards, and other fantastic minorities who gather in textual margins, but it is also a cry "for the production of discourse." Living with/on melancholia, rather than battling through it, requires a material and magical linguistics that I will discuss throughout.

Freud identifies the primal scene—the moment in which the child listener *hears* his or her parents' sexual congress—as the locus of the erotic imagination. In his early essay, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," he observes that "the fact of a child at a very early age listening to his parents copulating may set up his first sexual excitation, and [that] event may, owing to its after-effects, act as a starting point for the child's whole sexual development" (250). This is a

fantasy-scenario rooted in bodily rhetoric, in the scandalous act of audition rather than, as one might expect, the primal *sight* of the parents' sexuality. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Kaja Silverman insists that "the primal scene thus routes sexuality along the axes of vision and hearing, privileging image and sound over smell, touch, or taste...[The] child held captive within the crib is forced—indeed overwhelmed—by [the sounds]"¹² (164-65). Because of its intense ambiguity, this primal scene acts like a precipice that might lead either to the positive, hetero version of the Oedipus complex, or the negative queer alternative (which Freud links to male and female masochism).

The primal scene, in this sense, becomes a spell cast unwittingly by our parents, an incantatory meeting of their bodies, with every dangerous curve and orifice opened up to signification, which brings the unprepared infant (like a swaddled Oedipus, or even Hercules in his crib, surrounded by snakes) to a rubicon of mystical choice. But which move will she make? If the guilt of this sensual echo becomes too powerful, then the grown-up listener risks descending into moral masochism; he will, as Silverman elegantly puts it, "burn with an exalted ardor for the rigors of the super-ego" (195). If he becomes too engrossed in the material and spatial dynamics of the scene itself, he risks opening himself up to the "perversions" of erotogenic masochism, which will convince him, in Freud's words, "[to] linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (Freud, *Three Essays* 150). In order to deflect all the magical and perverse possibilities that emerge from this primal scene, Freud creates an "ideal" sexual scheme whose stages precisely mirror the "correct" development of the heterosexual adult as he progresses winningly and confidently through the athletic hurdles of the Oedipus complex. "Coitus,"

says Silverman, “is ‘ideally’ a reprise in miniature of the history of infantile sexuality, a history that begins with oral gratification and culminates with genital desire for an object of the opposite gender” (185).

Everything that is called magic—everything that falls beneath the sign of the supernatural—emerges, for Freud, from this primal scene of imaginative fusion, the moment in which the infant “hears sex” and becomes seductively, intensely caught up in the perverse hailing of the parents’ ardor. Even after he had abandoned his earlier “seduction theory” of childhood sexuality (whereby the child is seduced by his or her father), Freud simply substituted the more flexible Oedipus complex for this, and its flying buttresses were his two most provocative fantasy experiences: the fantasy of the primal scene, and the later fantasy of being beaten (which I will take up more explicitly in Chapter Four). Everything that magic “does,” all of its operations to link signifier and signified, to conjure up seductive worlds and enthrall distant lovers, is an elaborate recapitulation of the fantasy-work done in these two instances. As Géza Róheim notes in *Magic and Schizophrenia* (a critically under-employed text in the study of fantasies), “we grow up via *magic*. We pass through the pregenital to the genital phases of organization, and concurrently our mastery of our own body and of the environment increases. This is our own ‘magic’” (44). While Freud is careful to make distinctions between magic and the unconscious, the separate “fantasy” (the primal scene), “phantasie” (the daydreaming imagination, through which we come *close* to the edges, or *limbus*, of the unconscious), and “the uncanny” (anything else he can’t properly explain), Róheim links global concepts of magic and the supernatural with every stage of erotogenic development.

This brings me, finally, to the work of Laplanche and Pontalis, which provides a splendid psychoanalytic context for reading the preeminent text on melancholy: Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which explicitly links melancholia with the fantastic (especially the supernatural, via alchemy and witchcraft). In their extraordinarily dense article "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," Laplanche and Pontalis sketch out a contemporary theoretic for studying the "work" of fantasies within Freud's writing, taking particular care to parse out his confusing and overlapping uses of fantasy, phantasie, daydream, and the uncanny as flexible terms for addressing various aporia within Freud's massive concept of the unconscious. Just as Walter Benjamin, in his work on the German *Trauerspiel*, identifies melancholia as creating a psychic topography or "spatial continuum, which one might describe as choreographic"¹³ (Benjamin 95), Laplanche and Pontalis liken Freud's idea of the patient's fantasy world to "the nature reserves which are set up to preserve the original natural state of the country" (Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy" 6). In opposition to his shifting terminologies of fantasy, they offer their own idea of "the fantasmatic" as a kind of psychic scaffolding for the production of fantasies which becomes—and this is crucial within the context of modern fantasy literature—not a concept, but a *site*, a cartography: "Fantasy [is] not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene" (26).

Laplanche and Pontalis' point here is that, rather than Freud's various shuttlings of fantasy into discrete theoretics like "uncanny" and "primal scene," the human movement towards fantasy and world-building actually constitutes a longing for a *place*,

a Fantasia, a sensorium of marvels that brings us ever closer to the inner lining¹⁴ of the unconscious. In a unique thematization that combines hybridity, monstrosity, and magic, they observe that “Freud even considers fantasy as the privileged point where one may catch in the raw the process of transition from one system to another, repression, or the return of the repressed material. It is indeed the same mixed entity, the same ‘mixed blood’ which, being so close to the limits of the unconscious, can pass from one side to the other” (20). Fantasy makes us monsters to ourselves, providing us with a unique arena—a high, moonstruck tower, an abandoned bastion, a labyrinth at whose centre *something* waits—for the corporealization of our own bodily daydreams, extensions, and gender-prostheses. In his *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, Freud claims that the patient “cherishes them [daydreams] as his most intimate possessions and as a rule he would rather confess all his misdeeds than tell his day-dreams” (46); by the same token, fantasy worlds become visceral and pornographic, the hidden screen on which our most powerful mournings (and most intractable melancholias) are projected, and to share them would be to viciously anatomize us. To be queer is, in a sense, to have *nothing but* these fantasies to sustain a mode of living—to continually ignore the annihilative call of the world that repaginates and writes over you—and yet these fantasies also become the mark of danger, the thing above all that you can’t share, the locked phantasmatic closet.

The Spellings of Sexuality

If melancholia surrounds the lock on this closet like a glowing force-field, then magic provides the inhabitant with an exit strategy. This lock has no key; it can only be

spoken and spelled away. However, despite the fact that recent studies on the supernatural have explicitly linked witchcraft with melancholy (especially Stuart Clark's *Thinking Demons*), there is still little work done on Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* as a highly interdisciplinary text (a spellbook of sorts) that draws provocative connections between wizardry, wonder, and mourning as forces that interpenetrate each other. The *Anatomy's* exclusion from modern psychoanalytic criticism is probably due to its girth: much larger than Tolkien's *LOTR*, it appears daunting, and much of it is repetitive or obsessively detailed. Burton himself was something of a polymath, a collector of knowledge for its own sake without becoming a self-proclaimed expert in any discipline. The *Anatomy* gives many, *many* definitions for a broad array of plural melancholies, deliberately overturning the Aristotelian notion that melancholia is a locatable masculine trait. What makes Burton's text so fascinating is not its variety—that can grow tedious quite quickly—but its *tone*. Burton, very much like Chaucer writing nearly three-hundred years before him, seems unable or unwilling to make anything close to a declarative statement in his various discussions of (various) melancholies. He constantly uses equivocal and modalizing language, referring to supernatural traditions that he doesn't explicitly believe in, but doesn't necessarily discount, either. He describes “experts” who themselves (not Burton) locate a particular form of melancholy as being “demoniacal...obsession or possession of devils...prophesying, and speaking languages they were never taught” (75).

After admitting that these selfsame “experts” have discounted the existence of magic and witchcraft in “several universities,” he then goes on to list a huge variety of melancholic symptoms that might be brought on by demonic possession. In a note (page

78), he even identifies “unnatural melancholy humors,” which are the opposite of the bodily humors, like a kind of negative matter existing in a forbidden universe. These “anti-humors” provoke “mental aberrations” which Burton describes economically as “nefarious,” (Burton 78, n.1) but he never goes into detail. Like Freud, who in “The Uncanny” constantly mentions problems within his thesis—only to shove them away, to leave them aside, to ignore them “for now”—Burton constantly invokes contradictions while playfully refusing to elaborate on them.

What interests me most about the *Anatomy* for the purposes of this study is not any concrete definition of melancholy (which Burton never gives), but the continual correspondences, the “mysterious relays,” that he draws between magic and melancholy. In one specific passage, while attempting to explain the various “orders” of sorcerers—which of course he must know nothing about, since he doesn’t believe in magic—Burton offers a definition of witchcraft that is itself uncanny:

Many subdivisions there are and many several species of sorcerers, witches, enchanters, charmers. They have been tolerated heretofore some of them; and magic hath been publicly professed in former times...though after[ward] censured by several universities and now generally contradicted, though practiced by some still, maintained and excused, *tanquam res secreta quae non nisi viris magnis et peculiari beneficio de coelo instructis communicatur* [as if a secret thing communicated, by the special favor of heaven, only to eminent men]. (100)

Burton’s explanation of magic as “a secret thing,” as something “communicated...only to

eminent men,” is identical to Aristotle’s definition of melancholia—the same definition that Burton was (we think) trying to challenge through his exhaustive categories and taxonomies of psychic and mystical illness. There is an uncanny connection here, a doubling, a return of the rejected. Magic and melancholia share the same structure.

Given Žižek’s warning that “the mistake of depreciating melancholy can have dire consequences [in academia]”—which leads one to believe that the entire North American academy is built on a foundation of mourning and melancholia—Judith Butler’s various interpretations and reformulations of melancholy over the past fifteen years could be said to constitute a daring highwire act. Butler’s critical project has always been to queer Freud’s supposedly stable and un-queerable concept of psychoanalytic melancholia, to extend its flexible coils to the province of *gender* in order to expose how all gender performances and sexual object-choices, be they hetero or homo, are based on the interiorization of acute melancholia. In *Gender Trouble*, she first claims that “gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire” (80). In short, I must *become* (rather than desire) the man/woman that I cannot have (and that I never desired in the first place.) She thus firmly links Freud’s lost melancholic object with a lost or defrayed type of gender identification, giving it flesh and form. Later, in *Bodies That Matter*, she reinforces this connection: “Gender performance allegorizes a loss it cannot grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is phantasmatically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let it go” (235). Her use of the term “phantasmatically” marks a return to the material site of fantasy, to the mythical

scaffolding and psychic topographies—as well as Benjamin’s “choreographies”—that melancholia inscribes *onto* the fantasmatic scene, like a melancholy song transcribed into a wax cylinder (does one hear the singing, the mechanical voice, the “original” text, or simply, as a colleague recently put it, the sensual *whoosh* of the cylinder turning?)

Gender identification, for Butler, becomes the concrete living-out of a phantasmatic loss, a loss within a loss. To *be* a man, we cannot *choose* a man—instead, through a logic of repudiation, we must put aside what we desire and, instead, step into his skin, into “the skin of the lion” whose silken lining we yearn for. Through repudiation, then, the subject loves the object *from the inside out*, literally vivisectioning the repudiated beloved, craving the viscera rather than the genitals (the autocratic power of the *phallus* rather than the subtle pleasures of the organ). Butler extends this logic in *The Psychic Life of Power*—which I will discuss further in Chapter Four—and then, in *Precarious Life*, she once again becomes hermetic, metaphorizing the calculus of loss and “grievability” as the measure of what it means to be a human subject: “I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for,” she says in *Precarious Life*, “as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background of my social world” (46). We are, in that sense, who we mourn.

Rather than suggesting a “solution” to melancholia, especially gender melancholia, through magic, I want to posit that the ritual of wizardry mimes the ritual of mourning, and that, through the conscious *symbolization* of our multiple losses, through a self-critical spellcasting, we can undertake a queer mode of life that both allows for and celebrates gaps, dissonances, and imperfections as the *prima materia* of survival, *la survie*.¹⁵ The wizard is the living signifier who animates Butler’s process of gender

melancholia, since she is a minoritarian figure who can nonetheless change both gender and shape at will (Tiresias was transgendered). If all matter, as Butler announces in *Bodies That Matter*, is indeed “founded through a set of violations” (29)—as any alchemist looking for the hermaphroditic philosopher’s stone can attest—then the wizard both flaunts and critiques this fundamentally punitive character of the material, its many exclusions which are, Butler suggests, supposed to grudgingly read as “sad necessities of signification” (58). Matter doesn’t always *matter* in the way that one thinks it matters. Magic signals the crack in this structure, digging patiently further in, until the hierarchy of symbolization—who matters, who doesn’t, and who decides—threatens to collapse like the Tower of Babel, which originally brought monsters into this world.¹⁶

What I am suggesting with this equation, Magic=Melancholia, is that the two signs are interchangeable (like *heimlich/unheimlich*), androgynous, that they enclose and complete each other like the *ouroboros* biting its own tail. This is, after all, the same form as the *auryn*, the snake talisman in Michael Ende’s *The Neverending Story*, which grants its wearer an unlimited amount of wishes. What gets lost in the 1984 film adaptation of Ende’s novel is the inscription on the back of the *auryn*: “Do What You Wish.” Not just “do whatever you want,”¹⁷ but *do* what you *think*, perform every idea faithfully and sincerely, like the heraldic dedication on a knight’s shield. I will discuss this type of heraldic incantation, as well as the ritualistic correspondences (prefigured on lack) between knights and thieves in medieval discourse, in Chapter Three, paying special attention to the role of queer desire within both microcosmic societies.

The “communicativeness” of the melancholiac that says everything and nothing, the constant striving for a cathected object that can only, in the end, be withdrawn into

the ego, the incantatory rituals of obsessional-neurotic behavior that are also votive and ceremonial—all of these contradictions are expressed within the form of the spell, the master-sign of all fantasy literature, the heart of wishful thinking. To cast a spell is to perform an act of mourning, to reach for something irrecoverable, to continually whisper, chant, and describe without saying anything whole, anything *thetic*. Like Zeno's paradox (the arrow that never reaches its mark, since it is constantly stopped by infinite increments of time and space), the spell never reaches its conclusion, the signifier never reaches the signified, and *grammatica* never becomes flesh.

In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler analyzes the ways in which speech can become en fleshed, can produce panic or paranoia, but also the institutional function of speech that *gives us life*, since prior to speaking we are simply a “grammatical fiction” (135). Her interest in naming and its interpellative power is especially appropriate for my discussion of the spell, since Butler identifies the aporia within the name, or what Derrida might call the master-sign: “One who names, who works within language to find a name for another, is presumed to already be named, positioned within language as one who is already subject to that founding or inaugurating address” (29). A wizard is, no doubt, one who “works within language,” a namer, a collector of names; yet what is the name, the originary word, that defines the parameters of wizardly life? In order to name, we first must be named, but this creates a Derridean paradox of origins where every ‘originary’ concept is actually corrupted with partiality. A wizard’s ability to “spell,” to cast something out, emerges apparently from his or her named core, the kernel of the name that defines the caster, yet this might be just a “grammatical fiction.” What I want to argue throughout this discussion of spell-crafting and thaumaturgy is that the wizard is

unnamed, or that the wizard's name, her position, is necessarily a queer one; the act of the spell is also the act of seeking a name, of spelling out a mode of life.

“Spell” comes from the same Anglo-Saxon root as “Speech,” and both refer explicitly to discourse; yet both can also signal a piece of time, a moment, a hesitation, a charm, a backward or sideways glance. Chaucer was actually one of the first English writers to use *spell* in the sense of enchantment (OED), since it had originally been used to signal discourse (such as the heroic boasts or *speche* in *Beowulf*). We cast a spell like casting a net, and a spell always involves descriptive rather than imaginary powers: we *describe* in coherent, elegant detail what we want to occur, and if our will is in the spell, then what we desire comes to pass. Nearly every fantasy novel within the ‘quest’ subgenre, popularized by Tolkien and continued by Eddings and Jordan, contains a magic-system that operates along these descriptive and grammatical lines. In *The Belgariad*, magic is called “the will and the word,” since characters summon up a reserve of psychic energy and then pour (cathect) it into a sign, a word. In traditional fantasy serials like *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms*, wizards commit *verbal* spells to memory, infusing the words with hyper-cathected energy. Once the words are spoken, the energy is gone, and all memory of the spell vanishes from their mind, like mystical anamnesis. This is Raistlin's particular struggle with melancholia, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.

Gandalf speaks “secret signs,” runes, mumbled incantations that the hobbits can never fully understand. Ged, the Arch-Mage of Ursula K. Leguin's *Earthsea* series, learns the true-name of every living thing, and by knowing the name he gains power over the thing; he simply has to speak the name, the word, and the “thing” falls under his

control (he runs into trouble later when someone learns *his* true-name). Merlin, in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, makes the mistake of falling in love (or lust) with Nymue, only to have his own magic words used against him when he is trapped in a crystal cave. Finally, in Diane Duane's *Young Wizards* series, magic is ordered and conveyed by an infinitely complex dialect called, aptly, "the Speech": a language with a name for everything, living and non, sentient and inanimate. Spells are accomplished not by simple words flung into the proverbial darkness, but through flawless description, a dictation of terms and possibilities that resembles a physics experiment. If one syllable is wrong, if the spellcaster confuses the nominative with the dative case, or forgets an accent, gravity could reverse itself, or the universe could stop expanding. This resembles Lee Edelman's warning, in *Homographesis*, that "It can become as dangerous to read as to fail to read homosexuality" (7). Like witches, homosexuals must be recognized if they are to be controlled; but to recognize *too* quickly or too easily, to associate oneself too intimately with the enemy, can risk exposure—it takes one to know one. Similarly queer subjects must cast a spell of mimicry and mimesis in order to survive in a world that excludes them, but if they cast the spell *too* well, they risk annihilating themselves, and if they cast it too poorly, they risk a potentially fatal exposure themselves.

A wizard's mournful sight allows her to look beyond the grid of human relations, and this is a lonely vantage point. Every wizard, at some point, wishes for the simplicity of being normal; of being named, counted, and ordered within an institutional structure. Robert Burton identifies a "religious melancholy" at the heart of mysticism and false prophecy, the mania of "the Devil worshipped as God himself" (347), which only *seems* to produce fantastic visions and powers; in actuality, the belief that one is a prophet

produces nothing but melancholia precisely through “Satan’s engine” (358). I want to locate, instead, a particular kind of melancholia that resides within wizardly relations—a *mortal melancholia* (rather than a ‘moral’ one)—which is actually the mourning for a human life never lived, the mourning for a non-wizardly life within the matrix of institutional relations.

Kristeva offers some cryptic advice in *Black Sun*: “The triumph over melancholia resides as much in founding a symbolic family...as [it does] in constructing an *independent symbolic object*—a sonnet” (162). She suggests here that the way *out* of melancholia is to produce something, to engender a force from deep within—specifically, a linguistic artifact, a spell with a beating heart. But Kristeva, like Freud, also understands that there is no trapdoor leading “out” of melancholia, there is no position of out, only a series of strange and slantwise positions (what Sara Ahmed calls “queer orientations”) adjacent to the experience of critical mourning, which is really the experience or apprehension of the ego itself. The work of the spell or the sonnet, then, is not to escape from melancholia, but to *speak it into being*, to manage it, to enchant it so that it becomes a mode of life rather than an asymbolic prison. We live daily through the contradictions of melancholia, a fact that Buffy Summers understands quite well when she admits that “the hardest thing in this world is to live in it” (“The Gift,” 5.22). To live in the world is to be, on some level, melancholic, but the difference between living *in* melancholia and living *through* melancholia emerges only when we attempt to cast our way out of the abyss—an abyss that Kristeva locates as “an unease at [the] foundations...of our gift of speech” (48).

Wizards do this work. Wizards cast spells; that is their job. All they can do is cast spells, and Burton rightly observes that “for all this subtlety of theirs...neither these magicians nor devils themselves can take away gold...[for] they are base, poor, contemptible fellows for most part...they cannot give money to their clients” (102). Magic is a mode of life, a style of life, for wizards, and as such they use magic to create culture. The labor of the spell, like the labor of the queer body, is one that must always be imperfect, always improperly cathected or just out of reach, but the labor itself produces a continual living divide between the endless mourning and critical denial. This present spell may not have reached its target, but perhaps *the next one will*. This is identical to Freud’s “testing of reality,” the very work of mourning itself. Lost in the labyrinth of defining melancholia, Freud will eventually recast it, in “The Ego and the Id,” as a force that drives the very production of the ego itself, precisely *through* rather than in spite of its various gaps and partialities. This brings melancholia closer to what David Eng, in *Loss*, calls “a depathologized structure of feeling...[Melancholia] thus instantiates the very logic by which the ego and its psychic landscape are constituted” (361). It is these psychic landscapes that wizards both build and explore.

But wizards are also exiled, strange, outlawed, peculiar. They work on the world, but not necessarily *in* the world, since the world (even the fantastic medieval world, with all of its meticulous structural designs and laws) refuses to accept them. Even in fantasy, the wizard is queer; so the wizard, in a sense, through the sense of her body, makes fantasy itself queer. This is what Foucault means when he suggests, in his *Abnormal* lectures (1974-75), that “the domain of what we can call the abnormal opened up before psychiatry. Starting from the localized, juridico-medical problem of the monster...the

domain of the abnormal was opened up to psychiatry” (167). We continually read and relay sexuality through the field of the abnormal, but the abnormal as a category owes its existence to a much earlier construct: the monster. The wizard is the ultimate monster, the boundary violation, the fusion of categories. Like “the fetus born with a morphology that means that it will not be able to live but that nonetheless survives” (*Abnormal* 63), the monstrous figure of the wizard violates categories, violates the legal tendons and cordage that make up social reality, dwelling instead within a teratology that only her spells can break through and demolish.

All wizards have an aspect of sadness to them, a “style” of mourning. Gandalf mutters to himself, sticks to the shadows, smokes his pipeweed; Raistlin clutches his staff, cowers from any human touch, sees death in everyone’s face; Marron, the boy-wizard of Chaz Brenchley’s *Outremer* novels, is terrified of his own power, wounded and violated by the magic that colonizes his body; even Seregil, the master-thief of Lynn Flewelling’s *Nightrunner* trilogy, is a wizard of sorts, a charmer of locks and weaver of lies who nonetheless experiences lack and theft wherever he turns, even as he is forced to steal from his own house, his *heimlich*. As I outline in Chapter Four, wizards and drag queens share much in common, and the performative aspects of drag are often mirrored in the ritualistic gestures and movements of sorcery, the labor of spell-craft and the construction of power through grammar. The drag queen’s disinterested gaze, the witch’s evil eye, the sorcerer’s piercing stare¹⁸, the lidless eye of Sauron, carceral and afire—they all share unlikely but provocative qualities.

Overview

This work, then, will explore the space of “the spell” as a queer style, a queer mode of life, a particular and fraught relation. In his interview with *Gai Pied*, Foucault asks: “Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life?” (“Friendship” 137). Is it possible to create a queer style, a living space that combines the performative value of camp and drag with the wider field of pleasure? How might people of the same sex “share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences?” (136). And to paraphrase him: what is it to be naked among wizards? What I am trying to suggest here is that the work of the spell very much resembles the work of constructing a queer style, a homosexual mode of life. If we are to enact new relations—not simply erotic, but *probiotic*, living and alive—we might very well have the most success enacting them first within the field of fantasy, by expanding our sense of pleasure. We must learn to cast a queer spell, to spell *queer*, to enact queer spellings everywhere, like the Kiss-Ins and Die-Ins of ACT UP and Queer Nation. Fantasy literature, particularly the most popular and widely available novels dealing with prominent queer characters, as I will discuss throughout this project, provides a unique forum for sketching out these new relational possibilities. How to live *through* melancholia, on its skin, slantwise to its monstrous bulk, like a hobbit skating around the eye of Sauron; and, most significantly, to learn a new, queer spelling of our name, like Audre Lorde’s *Zami* (whose tools might “dismantle the master’s house”) or a *Gandalf* or a *Raistlin* that provides us with nothing but dangerous possibilities.

Chapter One will address Samuel Delany’s *Nevèryon*, a peculiar and double-voiced project that occupied him for nearly twenty years. Looking particularly at the

relations between capital and queerness as they unfold within Delany's fantasy world, I want also to explore Nevèryon itself as a site of perpetual lack, a city built atop a ruin built atop a void. Delany's characters are always concerned with linguistic relays, missed signs, botched opportunities, and the uncanny moments that connect unlikely friends and enemies across time. Stretching from the founding of a great city to a medieval version of the AIDS epidemic that kills much of its population, the Nevèryon saga touches directly on how the blurred distinction between magic and the uncanny creates an uncertain field for social relations. The real work of magic here, I will argue, occurs not through *spells* as such, but through the unmasking of language itself as a mechanism for controlling slaves, for ordering race—language as a diagram for power. Magic is expressed as well through erotic relations, through S/M practices as they occur within a feudal context, and I will address this specifically as it has bearing on queer life.

Chapter Two will analyze the work of Mercedes Lackey, particularly her *Last Herald Mage* trilogy, which focuses on a queer teenager living in a hostile medieval world. Vanyel Ashkevron, the “last” herald mage of the title, experiences magic at first as a violation, then as a source of pleasure, and finally as a means for mourning. In this sense, I want to explore his journey into magic as it runs alongside his movement into sexual maturity, looking at how his mastery of supernatural power occurs almost exclusively within the field of mourning and melancholia. In addition to close textual analysis, I will also include a historical discussion of queer suicide, linking Vanyel's own suicidal experience (both of them) with broader conceptions of gender melancholia and queer strategies of mourning.

Chapter Three will deal with two models of apprenticeship that occur often within

fantasy literature: the contract of service between knight and squire, and the relationship of “scurrilous” pedagogy between master-thief and protégé. How does the master ‘lack’ something within the protégé, and vice versa, and what is the ground of absence prefigured in erotic service? I want to explore the various relays between mourning, power, and performance that occur within these categories, as well as their dependence on language as a tool for working through that mourning. Both of these professions share a common speech, and I intend to connect their various speech-acts to the linguistic performance of wizardry. I will be looking specifically at the *Outremer* novels of Chaz Brenchley, which illustrate a sexual vassal/retainer relationship between Sieur Anton d’Escrivey and his squire, Marron; I then want to juxtapose this pairing against the relationship between Seregil, the master-thief, and his pupil Alec, in Lynn Flewelling’s *Night Runner* novels. As I will argue throughout this discussion, not only are discourses of thievery and knighthood intimately connected with each other; they also, in part, define each other as erotic binaries, always resisting yet equally constituting one another as modes of social service.

In Chapter Four I want to examine the connection between wizards and drag queens, looking particularly at the kinship structures within both queer families—mage brotherhoods and drag sisterhoods—in order to explore how they are built upon a kind of gender melancholia. It is not my intention to describe drag queens as magical, or to offer yet another recuperative and transcendent reading of drag performance in the context of radical gender transgression, but rather to tease out links between the shamanic nature of wizards and the mystical transparency of drag as an alternate mode of spellcasting and thaumaturgy. Both families, I will argue, are organized around levels of queer desire, and

both cathect upon a particular notion of the performative that can be liberatory and constricting at the same time. I want to discuss whether reading a spellbook and ‘reading’ a drag-show audience are much the same thing; whether gender-performance is a spell that we cast, and, if so, what ingredients are required, what rituals are demanded, and what the consequences of a ‘failed’ casting might be.

Chapter Five, finally, will look at several visual fantasy texts, but specifically at the relationship between Willow Rosenberg and Tara McClay in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I want to explore how Willow constitutes her identity almost entirely through magic, and how she defines her erotic and psychic relationship to Tara as a kind of spell—a spell that becomes addictive, just as magic itself as a subjectivizing force, what Butler calls the “seduction to subjection” (*PLP*, 2003), becomes addictive. I will examine here the relays between addiction, melancholia, and magic, as well as the literary debt that fantasy owes to Oedipal genres like the gothic, all the while attempting to explain how Willow *is* magic, how she lives through magic as we might live through melancholia, and how her lesbian desire becomes inseparably linked to the sign of the spell in ways that are both positive and threatening at the same time.

In my conclusion, I hope to reiterate the connections between queerness, fantasy, and melancholia, and (like an incantation) to deconstruct and play with my equation of Magic=Melancholia as a sign to be dismantled rather than a ritual to be followed. The questions that we begin with—how is fantasy queer, how is queerness fantastic, and why must melancholia inform both categories?—will be the spectral diagrams, runes, and sigils that haunt this study, unfurling into new relational possibilities and irritatingly unsolvable quandaries. The questions themselves are queer, uncanny.

Queer Street keeps stretching on, endlessly, in all directions, reminding us of where we've been before—"our bedrooms, our parents' bedrooms, and the bedrooms of our friends." Like Barthes, we begin from "the dark interior of love." And he exhorts us, in *A Lover's Discourse*, to fight the demons of language with language itself.

¹ Throughout this work I will use "queer" to refer to overlapping communities joined by both cultural and sexual affiliations, and "LGBT" specifically to denote lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people who could act as potential readers of these fantasy texts. In no way do I want to tack on "transgender" as a kind of sexual addendum to these reader-communities, and I attempt—especially in Chapter Four, but also throughout—to enact detailed and sensitive readings of trans-people as distinct subjects who may feel as if they are only partially connected to gay communities.

² Michael Moorcock, "Science Fiction Has Gone to Hell," reprinted in *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Edward James, 168.

³ Brian Attebery, in *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*, notes that these writers "[were] more than willing to disrupt the binary gender code with such concepts as a literal third sex, a society without sexual division, gender as a matter of individual choice, [or] involuntary metamorphosis from one gender to another" (9).

⁴ Drizzt figures as a popular anti-hero in the *Forgotten Realms* novel, *The Crystal Shard*. His status as a dark-elf makes him a marginalized character who offers aid to other fantastic minorities in the *Forgotten Realms* universe.

⁵ Caillos' text on mimesis, *Man, Play and Games* (New York: Free Press, 1961), is a unique blend of psychoanalysis and biology. He famously connects mimicry with Freud's death-drive by explaining that "[In mimicry] we are therefore dealing with a *luxury*, and even with a dangerous luxury, as it does occur that mimicry makes the mimetic creature's condition deteriorate: geometer moth caterpillars so perfectly simulate shrub shoots that horticulturalists prune them with shears...this could almost be viewed as some sort of collective masochism culminating in mutual homophagy" (97).

⁶ Nicholas Royle, in *The Uncanny* (2003), elaborates: "We all want to die in our own way, on our own terms, according to our own trajectory...one can here perhaps pick up some sense of the uncanniness in the notion of the death drive: everyone has their *own*, the death drive is a matter of what makes every one of us different and tick differently. The death drive is thinkable only on the basis of a weird solitude: a solitude within you" (93).

⁷ “Black Magic” has a complex etymological history. Originally, “necromancy”—which has narrowed over time to refer exclusively to harmful magic and unlawful resurrection—emerged from the Middle English term “nigromancy” with all of its hermetic and colonial connotations. Nigromancy referred to a whole range of occult arts, both positive and negative, and particularly those that occurred within a liminal (literally, “shadow”) space between good and evil.

⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (1998), locates Freud’s essay “On Transience” (1915) as his first real conceptualization of melancholia: “‘On Transience,’ written and published during the First World War, describes a summer walk, just before the war, on which Freud was accompanied by a ‘taciturn friend’...a poet [who] was afflicted with an ‘aching despondency at life’s mutability’...[This] encounter apparently preceded, and influenced, the writing of Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (180).

⁹ In *Melancholy, Love, and Time*, Peter Toohey complicates these definitions even further by describing black bile as “bipolar,” since, in ancient humoral science, it “can [also] cause mania...[Where] the black bile is hot, one would expect what we term the *manic phase* of melancholia. [...] Arateus of Cappadocia (150 C.E.)...does seem to have understood melancholia as part of a bipolar condition” (31).

¹⁰ In *Coleridge’s Melancholia: An Anatomy of Limbo* (2004), Eric Wilson notes that “this combination of irrevocable loss and vague dread—a conjoining from which Coleridge was never free—points to the inevitable disposition of the limbo dweller: *melancholia*” (19). It is perhaps ironic to note here also that, quite recently (April 20, 2007), Pope Benedict and the Roman Catholic Church officially dissolved the idea of *limbo*, claiming that it was always “ambiguous.”

¹¹ Pardo notes that “[For Klein] the ego introjects ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects on the model of the mother’s breast—perceived as good if satisfying and as bad if frustrating. These *imagos*, which are a phantasy picture of the real objects upon which they are based, become installed not only in the outside world but, by the process of incorporation, within the ego” (119).

¹² Jean Laplanche, whose work I am about to take up, compares this “infantile invasion” of sexuality to the famous siren scene in Homer’s *Odyssey*, noting that the “[child is] like Ulysses tied to the mast of the Tantalus” (qtd. in Silverman 165).

¹³ In “After Grief,” her epilogue to David Eng’s collection *Loss*, Judith Butler identifies this performative production of melancholia as “a certain configuration that has its own dynamism, if not its own dance” (469). These psychic topographies become literally landscapes that are inculcated through ritual, through the unrepeatability of spell-work and signification.

¹⁴ Benjamin, in his book on *Trauerspiel*, calls this “the essential inner side of mourning which from time to time, like the lining of a dress at the hem or lapel, makes its presence felt” (125).

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, in his final interview (translated by Judith Butler in 2005), elaborates on the concept of *survival*: “Survival [*la survie*] is the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and, hence, surviving, to death, because survival does not refer to what is left, what remains; it is the most intense life possible...[Survival] is an original concept, that constitutes the very structure of what we call existence, *da-sein* if you wish. We are structurally survivors, marked by the structure of the trace, the testament” (28; 30).

¹⁶ David Williams, in *Deformed Discourse*, (1997) observes that “The association of monsters with language is a profound, longstanding one...[and] several ancient teratological legends trace the appearance of the monster in the world to the moment of the collapse of the Tower of Babel” (61).

¹⁷ Peter Schwenger, one of the few literary critics who mentions *The Neverending Story* (albeit briefly), notes in his book *Fantasm and Fiction* that “outside the book, once again fat and graceless, Bastian finds that he has not lost all of what he acquired within it; despite appearances, he is different...[What] he *has* lost, though, is the actual book” (148). The spell that gives him confidence and wonder also demands a sacrifice, the loss of his memories, which eventually becomes concretized as the loss of the book (which is the whole world of *Fantastica*) itself. Magic, built on loss, requires loss to operate, and also grants its speaker’s wishes by transcribing them within ever more complex economies of loss and exchange.

¹⁸ Géza Róheim notes that “in European folklore, spitting is used as countermagic against the evil eye” (7); as well, animistic magic gives a sacred role to saliva, believing that it might produce a type of “oral orgasm” (8) within the spellcaster. The orality of magic here can be linked to Todd Haynes’ pathbreaking queer film, *Poison* (1991), wherein homophobic sailors spit repeatedly on a queer man who is figured as both abject and ecstatic. This also echoes Kenneth Anger’s revolutionary film *Fireworks* (1946), whose main character alternates between having fluids poured on his body, lighting fires, and being literally torn open and eviscerated by his fiercely desired/desiring attackers.

Chapter One

Chapter One

A Passion for Patterns:

Living and Dying in the Queer Markets of Samuel Delany's *Neveryon*

“I’m tired now. Do me a favor there, Marq. Turn me off.”

- Mother Dyeth, in Samuel Delany's *Stars In My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (345).

“What if certain commodities betrayed the knowledge that they were one day destined to become ‘useless?’”

- Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual* (9).

What might it mean for a character to understand his or her own obsolescence within a fantasy narrative? Is this a form of cultural camp—what Matthew Tinkcom, in *Working Like a Homosexual*, calls a philosophy “that offers explanations of how the? relation between labor and the commodity is lived in the day-to-day by dissident sexual subjects who arrive at their own strategies for critique *and* pleasure[?]” (4). And what relays of mourning and melancholia might become attenuated for characters such as Samuel Delany's Gorgik, Noyeed, and Prynn, who seem to understand both carefully and intimately their marginalized places within a precapitalist society? If the very force lacking in much of Delany's work is precisely magic itself—or the operations of spell-casting and ritual that are present in most other fantasy novels—then what replaces this supernatural efficacy, and how is its absence a critique of fantasy writing in general? I want to suggest here that Delany's substitute for magic is capital, and that the arabesque workings of both pre- and post-capitalist societies become the spell-work and critical

commentary of his *Tales*, just as capital's vast interior becomes the fantastic cartography for Gorgik, Prynn, and Noyeed to wander through.

Of the articles and book chapters that are available on Samuel Delany's writing, most deal with *Dhalgren*—his postmodern apocalyptic text¹—or *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, which is often described as a sort of queer space opera (Russell Blackford, in *Ash of Stars*, calls it “a romance of ugliness, deformity, and mutilation” [39]). *Dhalgren* begins with Delany's famous incantation *in medias res*—“to wound the autumnal city” (1)—and the metropolis itself, Bellona, is crumbling within its own melancholic autumn (fall being the season of melancholia in classical humoral theory). Both *Dhalgren* and *Stars in My Pocket* have received some scholarly attention, but only a handful of critics address the *magnum opus* that occupied him for most of the late-1970s and 1980s: *The Tales of Nevèrÿon*. In his appendix to *Neveryóna*, Delany describes the series as “a children's garden of semiotics” (384), and in *Flight from Nevèrÿon* he calls it a “modular calculus” (299)—that is, a grammatical system, like an engine, which might “slide” over an existing grammar in order to decipher its limitless complexities and probabilities of expression. The *Tales* are not simply a collection of short stories, but rather an actual linguistic artifact, a fully-functioning sign system, and a map leading to...where?

This chapter will discuss two models of lack/absence within *Tales* as they relate to mourning and queer desire: first, there is the symbolic or linguistic sense of lack that Gorgik, the barbarian “liberator,” is most invested in filling, as exemplified by his rambling travels and ambivalent movement through what I will argue are spaces that closely resemble Foucault's notion of the “heterotopic”; second, there is the more

concrete and tremendous sense of loss felt by characters like Pheron and Toplin, who become and infected with an AIDS-like plague in *Flight From Nevèrjon* and find themselves trying to construct a medieval queer community of people living with/dying from a mysterious disease, in a fantasy world that has no metaphorical or medical language for dealing with such a disease. As I want to argue, Delany is deliberately comparing two very different types of mourning—a symbolic mourning for the lost/irretrievable subject, and a concrete mourning for a queer body lost to AIDS—in order to present both mourning practices as a formal equation, like signifier/signified, two halves of the same presence that necessarily structure gay and lesbian life. In *Flight*, Delany switches between the feudal city of Kolhari and the global city of 1980s New York, suggesting what he calls a “modular calculus,” a search for symbolic meaning that cuts diachronically across queer life, while at the same time comparing the Reaganite government’s response to the AIDS crisis with medieval Kolhari’s own ridiculous and uninformed response.

Tales encompasses four books, which are themselves collections of events, or even effects (it would be generically improper to call them short stories): *Tales of Nevèrjon* (1979), *Neveryóna* (1983), *Flight from Nevèrjon* (1985), and *The Bridge of Lost Desire*, sometimes called *Return to Nevèrjon* (1987). The words themselves, *Nevèrjon* and *Neveryóna*, are ciphers, like Derrida’s *différance*, signifying alternative graphical possibilities depending upon how they are read or written. *Nevèrjon* could mean (n)every-one, or never-one, or everyone, or simply *never*, simultaneously. All booksellers, and most online citations of the novels, omit the diacritical marks that make *Nevèrjon* and *Neveryóna* so special, even if the marks appear on the printed texts

themselves. It is a strange coincidence as well that Delany's name is so often misspelled in reviews, and that Delany himself is dyslexic (which he talks about in more detail in his memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*).

The “Magical Matrix” of Precapitalist Kolhari

Jeffrey Allen Tucker's book, *A Sense of Wonder*, devotes a chapter to addressing various sign systems and linguistic plays within *Tales*. Tucker insists that “the series' semiotic analysis of language, commodification, cultural practices, and, most significantly, the relations of domination on which slavery has been based, reveal such systems to be structured conventions as opposed to eternal truths of nature” (149). I agree wholeheartedly that *Tales* needs to be addressed as an exploration of signification through both text and speech, of the graphical impulse that just as often leads to domination as it does to liberation. But this work is also a series of “tales,” vignettes, novellas, poems, songs, and dramatic productions that seek to locate and define desire as a switch-sign—a sign that is both dominant and submissive, master and slave, rooted within historical domination even as it must be adapted and remediated through contemporary S/M culture and individual sexual expression.

Tucker discusses the S/M possibilities within *Tales*, but, since his argument is concerned primarily with the relationship between sign-systems and slavery narratives (particularly the work of Frederick Douglass), he isn't able to address specifically the multiple LGBT relationships that proliferate across all of these stories. Gorgik, Small Sarg, Noyeed, Udrog, Raven, Pryn, Noreema, Myrgot, the Smuggler, Phelan, and even

the metafictional “critic” of the series itself—“K. Leslie Steiner,” existing only in the appendix, who is a variation on Delany himself—all occupy unique and shifting terrains of desire, embodiment, and disclosure. Delany (or Steiner, or “Kermit,” another fictional critic who surfaces in several of the appendices) even speculates in *Flight From Nevèryon* that “if a mid-twentieth-century orthodox Freudian could return to Kolhari and present Zadyuk [an ostensibly ‘straight’ character] with the theory of ‘repressed homosexuality’ (as the basic force behind civilization)—though myself I think the analysis would be false—Zadyuk, a primitive man in a superstitious time, would probably find the notion intriguing and even plausible” (Delany, *Flight* 187).

The *Tales* occur in multiple sites: there is the city of Kolhari, the birthplace of commerce; then there is Neveryóna, the ruined city upon which Kolhari was built, moldering beneath the waves and possibly guarded by a dragon; more broadly, there is Nevèryon, the surrounding countryside, whose borders are as inchoate as the edges of the *Tales* themselves. Within and upon this indistinct map, every desire and embodiment seems possible, so long as it occurs within certain cultural and civic contexts. As characters who traverse and explore the contours of the city, Gorgik and Pryn become *flaneur* and *flaneuse*, respectively, although this relation (largely a modernist one) is transformed when it occurs within a medieval context. Neither Pryn nor Gorgik really have the capital or leisure necessary to fit Baudelaire’s idea of the city-walker (ideally a male poet), although their ambulatory circuits do echo the networks and crystalline configurations of power that criss-cross the city as a social sphere. In his article, “Walking in the City,” Michel de Certeau suggests that “the act of walking is to the urban system what the act of speaking, the *Speech Act*, is to language or the spoken

utterance...*to walk is to lack a site*. It is the indeterminate process of being both absent and in search of the proper, of one's own" (107; 111). All of Delany's characters are searching for a site, a valence, but their constellated journeys also cross each other, defining and depicting the city itself as a living organ.

Although *Tales*—taken as a single long volume, like Tolkien's *LOTR*—has a wide cast of characters, including phantasmal readers and audiences that Delany himself imagines within eerily postmodern passages, for the purposes of this discussion I want to focus on three central actors within the *Neveryon* universe: Gorgik, Pryn, and Pheron. Gorgik is the first character introduced, a barbarian (that is, a white-skinned, yellow-haired man, since hegemonic race relations are reversed in Delany's world), who is born in the city of Kolhari, only to be sold as a slave. After he is bought by an aristocrat named Myrgot, Gorgik embarks on a curious journey that doesn't really take him anywhere—he moves from scene to scene, from person to person, and the same situations repeat and persist for him like Freud's uncanny as the “return of the repressed,” or the melancholiac's daily “testing of reality.” Along the way, he meets Pryn, a slave-girl who in turn is adopted by another aristocrat, Madame Keyne, and who becomes a kind of *supplement* (in the Derridean sense) to Gorgik's own journey; that is, she follows in his footsteps, but also adapts and remediates Gorgik's own process, his own experiences. The two are involved in a type of spatial dialogue, visiting the same places, talking to the same people, and exchanging the same artifacts, which leads us to believe that they are really actors in the game of capital—the game of identity politics that stretches across time and space.

By “identity politics,” I am referring slantwise to Marx’s commodity fetish, which convinces the capitalist actor to see all financial exchanges as purely objective, rather than apprehending them as *bodily* exchanges, meetings between people that occur in overlapping social spheres. It is by this misrecognition, says Marx in *Capital I*, that “man himself, viewed as the impersonation of labor-power, is a natural object, a thing, although a living conscious thing, and labor is the manifestation of this power residing in him” (135). Bodies produce purely fiduciary relations; financial transactions do not (or are not supposed to) produce human relationships, or even mirror the insane collision of bodies, psyches, and souls that are always at play within the matrix of capital. As I will go on to argue, the Marxist commodity fetish, when viewed as a particular type of misrecognition among capitalist workers, can also be used as a framework to analyze the workings of magic and the supernatural within a precapitalist society like Nevèrÿon. Just as, in the politics of early modern witchcraft, the pact between the witch and the Devil was viewed as an economic contract—what David Hawkes, in his article “Faust Among the Witches,” calls “the ability to appropriate and direct supernatural labor” (17)—the pecuniary models of capital can appear analogous in some ways to the ritual ornamentations of both sacred (papist) and counter-sacramental² (demonic) power.

Martin Luther observed that “money is the word of the devil, through which he creates everything in the world, just as God creates through the true word.”³ Whereas demonic magic creates empty signifiers that can never be efficacious (unless a witch happens to believe in them), God’s word—as translated by the papacy—creates *only* efficacious signifiers, only truth. Witchcraft thereby enacts a type of infernal commodity fetishism, believing that the commerce between Devil and witch is a symbolic contract

rather than a meeting of two people (and, in both medieval and early modern literary traditions, the Devil was very much a material force on Earth, a type of “person”). For characters like Gorgik, the melancholic search for a type of magical inscription or explanation across the winding ways of Nevèryon becomes a means for Delany to construct capital itself as a marvelous device, a titanic mystical artifact whose core operations are just as hermetic and far-reaching as any type of premodern magic. Nevèryon is ruled by an empty throne, controlled by an economy of vacant signs, just as, in the words of David Hawkes, “market economies are ruled by the ghostly dead—but supernaturally active—power called money” (5). Various characters, including Madame Keyne, Noreema, and the Empress Ynelgo, all try to explain the workings of capital to Gorgik and Pryn by rephrasing Marxist terms in magical vernacular. This is, as well, how Michael Taussig explains the relationship between magic and the commodity fetish, stating that “social relationships are dismembered and appear to dissolve into relationships between mere things—then products of labor exchanged on the market—so that the sociology of exploitation masquerades as a natural relationship between systemic artifacts” (Taussig 32). In *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, he calls this relationship “the magical matrix of things” (Ibid), defining “magic” explicitly as “precapitalist fetishism” (124). Just as the capitalist commodity fetish replaces the animistic and organic fetishes of the precapitalist world—rooted in bodily and spiritual subjectivities—the laser of rationality usurps the dangerous ambiguities of witchcraft and demonic power.

Gorgik, who has an embattled existence at the heart of this “magical matrix,” is contrasted in *Flight From Nevèryon* with Pheron, a more discrete and contained actor;

Pheron lives and dies within a very specific epoch for Kolhari, the “tale of plagues,” and yet he crosses paths with both Gorgik and Pryn, not necessarily speaking with them, but similarly walking in their footsteps, sharing a street corner with them, lingering on the edges of a room that they might have once occupied. Delany is thereby gesturing to the melancholic operations of Freud’s uncanny, the relays between seemingly unconnected people and places (for which one might mourn, even having *never* met or visited them) that give us a sense of fatality, even as he proves with Pheron’s character that a person living with an AIDS-like virus (“before” AIDS) can construct a meaningful and powerful resistance against institutional structures within a world that tries to erase him. Cindy Patton, in *Globalizing AIDS*, points out that “the first ‘activism’ was conducted not by ACT UP, and not even by self-identifying people living with HIV. The first resistance occurred before AIDS was even given a name” (xvii). There can still be resistance, even if an official language of activism has yet to be established—even in a medieval world with no “modular calculus” for describing what will eventually become a global illness. This echoes my point about queer spellings—the need to find plentiful and alternative graphic, spoken, and literary representations for mourning and loss, even as one acknowledges the debt that mourning pays to queerness and vice versa. The point also, Delany says, in one of his own intra-critical comments on the *Tales* (a comment within the text itself), is to “find a *better* metaphor” (187). Pheron’s purpose is not to act as a metaphorical solution for AIDS representation, but simply to *act*, to live in the face of an uncaring public, to resist through his unwillingness to die.⁴

Pheron is a cloth-maker, a sly queer man with a camp sense of humor, who delights in talking about the secret erotic exploits of carpenters, actors, and others who

walk the “Bridge of Lost Desire” (in the Old Market of Kolhari) looking for sex. Pheron is a kind of patient-zero, one of the first men to become infected within the confines of the city, and without any coherent support group he has to rely on his friends, Zadyuk and Nari, for informal hospice care. Delany describes Pheron himself as a *site* for lack, a type of absence within the narrative that he can’t quite reconcile:

There is something incomplete about Pheron. (Since there *is* no Pheron, since he exists only as words, their sounds and associated meanings, be certain of it: *I* have left it out.) My job is, then, in the course of this experiment, to find this incompleteness, to fill it in, to make him whole. (196)

But as Pheron’s illness progresses, it becomes clear that Delany’s point is not to “make him whole”; rather, he wants to construct Pheron carefully as a human with AIDS, a gay man living in an unfamiliar context (the middle ages), whose experiences with anti-AIDS sentiment are nonetheless chillingly similar to those experienced by men and women during the 1980s crisis years.

Like Times Square, the “Bridge of Lost Desire,” a fulcrum for queer sexuality within Kolhari, becomes a chiasmatic site for linking different bodies, histories, and cultures. But, as with the fabled city of *Neveryóna*, it is just as likely not to exist, or to exist merely in the segmented dreams of reader, writer, and character, the slim neuronal fragments, velveteen soft and more fragile than any of Phelan’s priceless fabrics, whose symbolic imprint makes *Neveryón* gather and cohere as a twilight text, forever limned with the energy of confusion. The bridge, like Foucault’s concept of *heterotopia*, is a site

of difference (a place for ‘putting’ difference), as well as an articulation whose exile helps constitute a world of overriding sameness. In his article, “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault suggests that all social space is bifurcated, divided into enclaves that form a tightrope balance between order and transgression: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (25). Foucault also reads “the garden” as a unique heterotopia, a sacred space, which I will discuss a bit later in this chapter.

Cities are filled with heterotopias, because civic sites are often shifting, changing with the whims of time and commerce, the influence of both majority and marginalized politics. In her work on gay leather culture in San Francisco in the 1970s, Gayle Rubin charts the rise and fall of dozens of leather bars in the “South of Market” neighborhood—many of which seemed to vanish due to increased gentrification, only to reappear as more flexible institutions, often *themselves* defining civic geography even as ‘the city’ itself seemed to impose its will upon them (Rubin 2000). The covert gay and lesbian cultures within Kolhari exist in much the same way, and the Bridge of Lost Desire acts as their visible signifier: in *Flight*, it becomes a monument to gay and lesbian victims of an AIDS-like “plague,” just as the “Homomonument” in Amsterdam, designed by Karin Daan and built in 1987—“three pink granite triangles which together form a larger triangle” (Binnie 192)—serves as an affirmation of gay rights as well as a memorial to anti-gay violence and the global toll of AIDS. The *Tales* themselves are a city (both real and imaginary) within a text, as well as a text within a city; an engine, like the mysterious

astrolabe that guides Pryn to “different stars,” within whose dangerous coils we might catch a glimpse of the nomadic movements of desire itself.

Desire’s Compass: Gorgik, Pheron, and Noyeed

Tales begins in the city of Kolhari, birthplace of Gorgik, who will become a crucial figure operating across all four volumes of the series, even and often especially through his absence. Gorgik’s name is a play on the Rulvyn word *gorgi*, which refers to either male or female genitalia. The old woman Venn—who, like John Venn, the nineteenth century British mathematician and philosopher, also creates diagrams⁵—points out to Noreema that “the Rulvyn say ‘gorgi’ for both [genitals], for which ‘male’ and ‘female’ are just two different properties that a gorgi can exhibit, and believe me it makes all the difference!” (Delany, *Neveryóna* 109). In *A Sense of Wonder*, Tucker suggests that “the ambiguity of the meaning of ‘gorgi’ allows Delany the opportunity to construct a playful but significant pun on Gorgik’s sexuality...[which]—despite his preference for barbarian men—includes an ability to perform sexually with either men or women” (Tucker 120). Now, despite Tucker’s precise and innovative reading of the relationship between semiology and slavery within the *Tales*, his explanation of Gorgik’s name as a “pun” seems unfairly reductive. Gorgik is almost ruthless in the politicization of his own sexuality, as well as his slavery (the two, for him, are metonymic links in a chain of signification), and Delany is not merely “playing” here with this double-voiced name. For Gorgik, sex is deeply imbricated within flows of power, commerce, and servitude, like the coils of the astrolabe, or the cursive loops of Ulvayn writing (which

may be the origin of all written communication within Nevèryon), impossible to separate from the dark palette of structural violence through which it comes into being.

Through ‘gorgi,’ whose non-sexed ambivalence allows it to stand in for the phallus, Delany is critiquing the Name of the Father itself, the sign for patriarchy that emerges into being through the legalistic contract of every social relation, every utterance. “The phallus is not a fantasy,” explains Lacan, “[but] still less it is the organ—penis or clitoris—that it symbolizes....[T]he phallus is a signifier...the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole” (Lacan, *Écrits* 275). Phallic meaning *is* meaning, or rather, all meaning masquerades as the phallic, but the phallus itself is like a set of stairs in an M.C. Escher painting: ambidirectional, always in two different places at once, never where it seems to be, never recognizable, just as the circuit that a particle traverses is an invisible and insubstantial highway. In Delany’s later book, *Phallos*, the phallus becomes a literal object: a killing weapon whose blades actually tear its hapless victims to pieces, the “foul and holy rod” that reduces its sacrifice into a mess of bloody gore (Delany, *Phallos* 70). In *Tales*, objects like the collar, the astrolabe, and even characters themselves become emblems for the phallus, the seat of power in Nevèryon—an empty throne—but the real phallus can never be found.

The *Tales* introduces a world where the phallus remains disarticulated and displaced rather than connected to a specific economy of bodily pleasure. Just as Judith Butler asks in *Bodies That Matter* “why it is assumed that the Phallus requires that particular body part [the penis] to symbolize, and why it could not operate through symbolizing other body parts” (Butler 84), Gorgik and Pryn venture through strange and adversarial spaces where phallic power manifests as a field of relations, exchanges, and

bodily gestures rather than a concrete institutional effect. Nevèryon as a nation is, in effect, in mourning for its own absent centrality, its own veiled relations of power, even as characters like Gorgik, Pryn, and Pheron seek to reconcile their own place within a field of shifting governmentality and psychic terrain, an uncertain loom of competing energies and sexualities where power is offered up just as quickly as it is withdrawn, transformed, and obscured.

Kolhari, Gorgik's birthplace, has been recolonized by the "Child Empress" Ynelgo, who retains her title despite the fact that, by the time that *Flight* takes place, she is "soon to be forty-seven" (235). Ynelgo, I would contend, represents a fascinating structural counterpoint to the Childlike Empress in *The Neverending Story*, who really is an immortal child. Whereas Bastian must give her a magical name—"Moon Child"—in order for her (and all of Fantastica) to survive⁶, thereby beginning a second childhood for the mythical realm, Gorgik is actually schooled by Ynelgo as a kind of barbarian-child when she invites him (near starving) to eat at her table in *Tales of Nevèryon* (33); he is subsequently informed by one of her advisors that "when you entered this game, you entered on the next to the highest level possible...[and] you see, you have just moved from the next-to-highest level of play to the *very* highest" (33). Gorgik, starving and confused, wandering aimlessly through the empty halls of Ynelgo's palace, is frustrated to not understand this "game," which is actually the play between mourning and desire that drives the political engines of Nevèryon. He does not understand why Ynelgo, caught as she is on "the very highest [level]," seems sad, nor why her courtiers are all terrified for their lives. Ynelgo is mourning for her lost and colonized childhood, just as

Gorgik is locked in mourning for his carefree adolescence, spent selling hallucinogenic berries at the Port of Serness, which is Kolhari's answer to skid row.

Kolhari sits uneasily as the capital of Nevèryon, where aristocrats and their slaves (always collared) mingle with proto-burgher and yeoman families such as Gorgik's (his father is a sailor, and his mother "claimed eastern connections with one of the great families of fisherwomen in the Ulvayn islands" (Delany, *Nevèryon* 2). In Nevèryon, and, we assume, beyond, racial hierarchies have emerged that invert those of Europe in the early Middle Ages. "Barbarians," the racially disenfranchised, are light-skinned and fair-haired (often slaves), while the ruling aristocracy is composed of people with dark skin. In *The Monster and the Machine*, Zakiya Hanafi observes that "if the barbarian was distinguished by making no sense, or nonsense, the monster, on the contrary, was distinguished by making several senses" (3). Both the barbarian and the monster are renegade signs here, with the "bar bar bar" cant of the barbarian appearing as a disruptive non-sign, while the monster emerges as a dangerous augury of God's wrath, among other possibilities. Gorgik stands somewhere between these categories, with his power as the "liberator" giving him a monstrous agency, even as his colonial upbringing keeps him within the barbarian's marginalized sphere. Empress Ynelgo, who ostensibly controls all of Nevèryon, has the physical characteristics that make her, in Delany's world, an aristocrat: she is described as having "rough hair...braided around her head, so tight you could see her scalp between the spiraling tiers....[A] thin girl with a brown, wide face...and bare, brown shoulders" (28). Although Nevèryon appears to have an early feudal economy (money itself is a relatively new concept, and credit is just beginning to

emerge, primarily within Kolhari), the relative distance and shared paranoia of the country's nobles suggests a crumbling model of absolutism.

Gorgik himself shares something in common with the city of Kolhari—they both 'function' as a result of organized slavery. Without the slave trade, Kolhari's whole system of commerce would implode. Madame Keyne (a reflection, as well as an adaptation, of the economist John Maynard Keynes) utilizes slave labor to construct her New Market, which will pave over Kolhari's more informal (and erotically charged) Old Market, also the site of the Bridge of Lost Desire. One of Gorgik's earliest memories involves stumbling into a room filled with slaves (who later vanish, leaving only their collars behind), and even as a child he makes the connection that bodies can be trafficked—humans can be transformed into commerce. This is a peculiar magic trick, a spell of capital wherein bodies enter an equation only to vanish. The collars left behind are ciphers, like the ingredients or "reagents" of a successfully cast spell, a hint of ash, a ring of shadow, that remains as the only vestigial link to the powers invoked. When Kolhari is conquered by the army of the Child Empress, Gorgik is sold into slavery, only to be unexpectedly liberated by the Vizerine Myrgot after she takes a sexual interest in him. Importantly, *Tales* begins with a connection across time between powerful women: Gorgik's mother (who "claimed connections" to an even more powerful family), the Child Empress who disenfranchises him, and the Vizerine who frees him (or admits him into a different and more specific kind of servitude, that of being an economic actor within Nevèryon itself). Despite the centrality of Gorgik's role within the series as a queer male character, he is always surrounded (and, to some extent, transformed into a subject) by older and more powerful communities of women. In this sense, Gorgik's

liminal, if embattled, status as a barbarian allows him to take up a uniquely melancholic stance towards these women, learning from them as he strays closer towards his own “gender melancholia,” his own, always fragile repudiation of a biologically female body.

Madame Keyne’s project, the New Market, is not just an ambitious financial project—it is also an attempt to deconstruct and dismantle the erotic/economic relations that came before it, the ruins of the Bridge of Lost Desire. This is the same bridge where Pheron seeks out his first sexual experiences, and where Toplin enters into the male sex-trade (which gets him expelled from school). Later, in *Return*, when the city of Kolhari organizes a carnival in order to distract its populace from the encroaching plague—a carnival that spawns a parallel ceremony, a ritual invoking of the “old gods” meant as a unique practice of mourning for the men and women who have already died—both Pheron and Toplin are already too sick to attend; the reality of their symptoms keeps them from participating in the symbolic event organized in their name: “The first evening of Carnival, Toplin’s mother sat on the side of his bed supporting Top’s forehead with one hand, while he vomited and vomited into a broad crock on the bed’s edge: thin, frothy bile strung from his mouth” (255). Nari and Zadyuk both attend the carnival, only to return home and discover Pheron collapsed, too weak to move. In this sense, Delany is trying to resist the managerial impulse by which, as Douglas Crimp says, “people with AIDS are kept safely within the boundaries of their own private tragedies” (90). The carnival/ritual becomes a public enunciation of “private” tragedy, and the real physical struggles of Pheron and Toplin—the materiality of their symptoms, the way in which they cross into ‘straight’ space by relying on groups of heterosexual friends—act as

interventions within a medieval economy that can only attempt to contain rather than acknowledge the plague that is killing its citizens.

The reader is given tantalizing bits and pieces of information about both Pheron and Toplin, until their two narratives converge near the end of the novella in a relationship of mutual melancholic service: Toplin seeks out Pheron in order to become his apprentice, even as, in a gesture of emotional and physiological solidarity, he also seeks him out as a fellow infected male. Both Pheron and Toplin have, at one time or another, worked unofficially as prostitutes around the Bridge of Lost Desires, but Delany never comes out and suggests that this is the probable cause of their infection. He is, in fact, more interested in metaphorically linking Pheron's and Toplin's multiple experiences of lack and loss with "the Plague" itself as the very macrophage of loss, the material and cannibalistic representation of loss devouring its host-body. In the beginning of *Flight*, Toplin is defiantly unwilling to admit that he has participated in the sex-trade of Kolhari, even though it's clear that he has; this economy becomes both financially and erotically unspeakable, something that he, to paraphrase Butler's terminology in *The Psychic Life of Power*, never had and never lost, the double "never/never" of psychic repudiation. Pheron, on the other hand, continues to imaginatively revisit his own losses, even as he remains unable to vocalize them to his father before the older man dies. The Bridge of Lost Desires becomes a catalyst for their melancholic father/son relationship, especially when Pheron's father tries to give him the "gift" of losing his virginity with a female prostitute, only to discover that Pheron himself has worked the Bridge as a male prostitute several times.

Reminiscing about the moment later, remembering his father's anger—now impossible to account for, since he is already dead—Pheron plays a theatrical game inside his own head, repeating over and over again how he might have altered the situation, how he might have expressed his own sense of mourning for the psychic gulf that separated father and son. In this instance, the Bridge of Lost Desires becomes a disjunctive rather than a connective force, separating two human beings even as it supposedly connects two tracts of civic space:

I wanted him to say: 'I thought about it, Pheron, and I was wrong. I'm sorry. You're my son. And I want you to be my son any way you are. Any way. You have your way. I have mine. But whoever you are, it's fine with me'...(How many times while he'd woven had he rehearsed what his father should tell him?) (222).

Delany returns to this type of imaginative and textual mourning later in *Flight*, when he is trying to describe a sick and infirm Pheron, too exhausted to mount a dignified protest against the ministrations of his heterosexual friends and neighbors as they attempt to care for him. Suddenly stepping out of the text and allowing himself to appear as the author-function, as the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain, Delany adds a metacritical note that resembles raw material, machine code, even the bumps and grooves of a DNA chain that lies yet unfused: "*Expand this scene to some six/eight pp.:...*'[A] very, very thin man sat at the bench alongside their [Zadyuk and Nari's] table, head forward on his arms.' Nari

whispered: ‘Pheron?’[C]lean up some. Work on the red light over the—stone? wood? Omit or change” (346).

Here, not for the first time, the reader becomes privy to the melancholic experience of the author. “Omit or change.” If only that were forever possible. If only, like text to be redacted and over-written, the bodies, hearts, and genitals that so crazily composed the world outside the novel could be changed, omitted, revised. Delany’s feverish laboring over this scene, this image of Pheron by the fire, is similar to Pheron’s own biological labor, his feverish battle with a nameless plague that will eventually outlast and decimate his body. Illness, here, whether it is called AIDS or “the Plague,” becomes a fascist editor, ruthlessly revising and writing over the body, colonizing and devouring the memories and relationships that, like glimmering, indefinable vapors or angelic script, make Pheron who and what he is. If Delany keeps revising, keeps substituting and deferring, he can keep Pheron alive, just as Pheron can keep his father alive if he continues to rehearse, again and again, the meaningful conversation that they might have had so long ago—the coming out denied to him.

All four volumes of *Tales* are, in some way, a study of the tension between Gorgik’s politically transgressive sexuality, and how it relates to the genders and sexualities of the characters whom he encounters, like Pheron and Prynne. Although not every chapter or novella is necessarily about him, there is always some mention of his presence. He is, in fact, a kind of referent. In *Flight From Nevèryon*, Gorgik’s second lover, Noyeed (who actually kills his first lover), even goes so far as to call Gorgik a “signified.” Noyeed implores him:

If you need now or again to be at a specific place and time, use *me!*

Wearing your collar as the mark of your anger and authority, *I* can stand on the city's stones wherever you would place me...why not let me stand in your place? Why not move me as you would move a piece in the game of power and time, sending me here and there, your servant and marked spy? [...] I will be your mark. You will be my meaning. (6)

Noyeed's first connection with Gorgik is one of supreme violence. After his family is killed, Noyeed is sold into slavery and given over to the iron mines (where Gorgik has raised himself to the level of foreman, an illusory autonomy within a coercive social system). Gorgik, along with several other male slaves, beats and rapes Noyeed to the point of near-death. Whether from a sense of guilt, or sheer randomness (we never really know), Gorgik later decides to take care of Noyeed, giving him extra rations and keeping him away from some of the more violent men. They eventually go their separate ways, but Noyeed ends up tracking Gorgik (like a signifier drawn to its signified), and they reunite through yet another act of violence: Gorgik's previous lover, Small Sarg, tries to assassinate him, and Noyeed intercedes, killing Small Sarg. If this seems confusing, it's just a template for the *Tales* themselves, where the gap between plot and meaning is as wide as that between signifier and signified, an impassable ravine. From the very beginning, as evidenced by his act of sexual assault, Gorgik sees Noyeed as merely another mark within a system of similar, indeed interchangeable, marks—commodities—but, to Noyeed, Gorgik represents “meaning.” Gorgik lives the Marxian idea of the commodity fetish: “The relations connecting the labor of one individual with

that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work...but [rather] as social relations between things” (Marx, *Capital I* 45). He therefore reads all human interactions as financial exchanges; Noyeed, however, reverses this philosophy (and reflects Marx’s real point), proposing that all financial exchanges, always implicated within the sexual, are actually human connections, meanings inscribed in flesh and encircled by the complexity of the collar.

This reflects my earlier point, which is that magic and capital both intersect as social indexes driven by mourning and melancholia. To substitute “thingness” for humanity, to miss the collision of bodies that is always present within capital exchange (bodies with a capital *B*), is to be forever frozen in mourning for one’s own position as a social and corporeal being rather than a corporate actor. When corporations become people, then the people who produce the corporate sign are robbed and derided of their particularity as sexed and gendered beings. The magic of capital, which is really just the emergence of something from nothing—surplus value from exploited labor power—creates a buffed and polished surface that reflects only the endless signifying-chain of money back to the viewer, rather than the deformed and bloodied hand that holds the money, the mutilated body of the laborer: “Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx, *Capital I* 377). In the same way, the elaborate and unique gestures of mourning give way to parceled and corporatized, grieving, an easy to assemble grieving-package that keeps one always circling the rim of sensible capitalist relations. The magical spell-effect can mime this type of disavowal, like a relation frozen in carbonite, but can also surpass it if the magi or speaker realizes that she is speaking her own life into being. In reference to witchcraft, this echoes the

point that Walter Stephens makes in *Demon Lovers* that “for some authors, witchcraft energy was not simply identical in type to sacramental energy; it was the *very same* energy, but with its ‘polarities’ reversed” (197). The efficacious effects of capital are derived from the same energies that drive the sacrament, only with their “polarities reversed”—both magic and capital produce a sense of melancholy in their wielder because he or she has no control over those polarities and can’t switch them back.

Noyeed claims to remember only a fuzzy version of the climactic violence that brings Gorgik into his life—he can’t distinguish the identities of his attackers, and all of their faces seem alike (perhaps they are all really Gorgik’s face). “I have no specific memory of you among my abusers,” he says, (*Flight* 122) although Gorgik doesn’t seem to believe him:

Suppose, Noyeed, someday you remember. Suppose, someday, it comes to you—the way the name of a street you once lived in for a month, which, a decade later, you cannot recall, suddenly returns in the night to wake you sharply from half-sleep. Suppose, some moonlit night like this...you suddenly recall my scar from years ago? (122).

Given that Lacan describes the unconscious as a scar (*Seminar II* 271), Noyeed’s reply is enigmatic: “It’s the game we play, Master...[M]y forgetfulness is my revenge” (123). Noyeed calls their relationship a game, a sign, a “piece in the game of power and time” (*Ibid*), a mark on the stones of the city. It is through the failure of signification itself that Noyeed extracts his “revenge”: as long as his memories never align with

Gorgik's (and they never will), Gorgik will never be satisfied (or signed), and Noyeed will forever retain the fantasy of Gorgik's absence from the event that has most shaped his sexual life. And who is to say that Gorgik really *was* present? There are so many shadows, simulacra, misrepresentations, and impersonations of Gorgik throughout the *Tales* that we eventually become unable to define what his presence might mean, where he might actually reside, where he is or isn't. In the "game of power and time," Gorgik comes to represent a floating signifier of sorts, even though his presence is so incredibly physical, his politics so radically specific and unquestionably ludic. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes the function of the specter—like the ghost of Hamlet's departed father—as "a certain phenomenal and *carnal* form of the spirit...neither soul nor body, and both one and the other...this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge" (Derrida, *Marx* 6). Gorgik is a similar phantom, no longer "belonging" to knowledge (the eye of the city, de Certeau's "God-eye" perspective) because he has attempted to remove himself from the map of power relations. He is spectral, there but not there, flesh but also text, possibly a word in someone else's book, or an empty chamber in a sunken city. This echoes Lee Edelman's point, in *Homographesis*, that gay men and lesbians are so often read as a spectral text, a palimpsest that can be violently scraped over: "[A] compulsory marking or cultural articulation of homosexual legibility that proceeds from a concern that the homosexual might be inscribed" (12).

In her article "Nevèryon Deconstructed" (one of only two critical pieces written on the series in particular), Kathleen Spencer notes that, although Gorgik has many "adventures" throughout his career, "nothing conventional comes of any of them. There

are no villains to murder, no ladies to rescue, no dramatic slave rebellions, not even a daring escape. Gorgik never kills anybody or rescues anybody” (Spencer 137). In fact, all Gorgik seems to do is move from place to place, person to person, event to event, passing off peculiar artifacts (like an astrolabe) to other characters, who are themselves peculiar artifacts in a very non-dramatic story. In this sense, Gorgik becomes a shadow for desire itself—his movement is always nomadic, and he never necessarily seeks anything, save for further movement. Lacan describes this relation as a necklace: “‘Signifying chain’ gives an approximate idea: links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links” (Lacan, *Écrits* 145). Like this necklace of signifying desire, where there is always another link in the chain, always another signifier (because language, ultimately, can only reference *ad infinitum* without ever beholding or touching itself as a whole corporeality, a body made flesh), Gorgik is always searching for something even as he follows the circularity of the collar itself, with all the maddening and glorious complexity of a Venn diagram. In this critical sense, Gorgik isn’t simply an emissary for desire (as Noyeed is an emissary for Gorgik)—he *is* desire. By what sexual language, then, does this desire make itself known, and how does it gain expression through the charged commercial world of Nevèryon?

Delany, in interview, states that “it would be wrong to take *Nevèryon* as...some radical limit work, an enterprise lucid with insight and ultimately authoritative, about S/M practices, in any of their forms, gay or straight” (Delany, *Silent* 141). It is through S/M sexuality, however, that Gorgik stages political interventions within the gendered order of his own world; S/M also becomes, for Gorgik, the most appropriately flexible pleasure-practice, a relation that is both global and particular. In a 1983 interview quite

near the end of his life—"Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity"—Foucault states firmly that "the idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure as the root of *all* our possible pleasure—I think *that's* something quite wrong...[S/M suggests] that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies" (165). By sexualizing the collar, the signifier for slavery itself, and radicalizing it as a phallic extension of his own body, Gorgik tries to construct an erotic field in which "very strange parts," in effect his whole body, can produce pleasure. By creating pleasure, he also creates culture, which Foucault identifies as the primary task of his "homosexual mode of life."

The cultural core of Nevèryon, and the sign-system that encloses all things within its borders—including Gorgik, Noyeed, the city, the world—is the Market. Everything happens within the Old and New Markets of Kolhari, and they become the symbolic ground upon which all human interaction, financial and erotic, gay and straight, is driven to emerge. The New Market is empty, not yet built ("this one is going to be six *times* the size of that spread of junk and garbage over in the Spur!" [154], Madame Keyne promises), an in-process sign that nevertheless controls hundreds of laborers and merchants who are already subject to it, while the Old Market remains the nodal point for sexual and financial exchange. Both slaves and sex-trade workers are sold within the Market, some selling themselves, some being sold by others, some lingering in a twilight realm of circulating capital, transacted flesh. Gorgik visits the Old Market to purchase Small Sarg, a slave whom he "liberates," thereby beginning his own transformation into Gorgik the Liberator. The Liberator, in fact, liberates nothing and no one, which points to the peregrinations of lack and loss that Delany is trying to explore in the *Tales*, the

practices by which we strive for liberatory power only to have it fold unexpectedly into another relation, and yet another—an endless signifying chain of lost chances.

Gorgik’s polyamorous relationships with slaves, and specifically his S/M relationship with Noyeed, is presented as an effect of the Old Market, the Bridge of Lost Desire: something cryptic and even otherworldly whose signifying power is now being threatened by the construction of a new relation, a New Market. By juxtaposing Gorgik’s erotic partnerships with the more stable and long-term relationship between Madame Keyne and Radiant Jade, or the pedagogical and sexually-charged connection between Pryn and Madame Keyne, I want to explore how Delany is giving us two queer possibilities: the relation of pure, bodily pleasure, still ordered by the flexible “rules” of S/M, in comparison to the heterosexual idealization of monogamy which can nonetheless be taken up queer men and women. Delany, I argue, plots the tension between these two competing erotic futures in order to mourn the loss of polyamorous pleasure, the loss of a queer relation that intervenes against the social, as it is rewritten by the capitalistic mode of relationship-as-production. Madame Keyne and Radiant Jade’s queer marriage, as opposed to Gorgik and Noyeed’s long-term S/M partnership, act as differing sexual tracks, parallel lines of erotic activity whose in-between space becomes the “heterotopia” in which all other sexual difference is placed.

Desire’s Commerce: Madame Keyne, Radiant Jade, and Pryn

Four women in the *Tales*—Madame Keyne, Radiant Jade, Pryn, and Ini—are linked by an erotic signifying chain, a peculiar community. Madame Keyne is in love

with Radiant Jade, and vice versa; Jade is also in love with Ini, who sometimes grants her sexual favors, but only through a kind of pathological disinterest; Pryn is fascinated by all three women, but, although she's had sexual experiences with women before, she doesn't appear to be *physically* interested in anyone at the moment. Madame Keyne plucks Pryn from a crowded Kolhari street because she finds the girl to be beautiful (Pryn often describes herself as being overweight), but in the end she has to send Pryn away for reasons both sexual and financial. This whole exchange, with all of its maddening twists and turns, takes place in a *locus amoenus*—a garden, within a manor, within a market—always threatening to spiral outward into a kind of sumptuous nonentity, or to collapse in on itself, like a shattered astrolabe or a crumpled letter. Within the garden, there is also a miniature model of a garden (and a manor, and a market), that Pryn first regards with delight, until she is later informed that such models are quite common.

Foucault describes the garden as a heterotopia: “A sacred space...like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basin and the water fountain were there)...the garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world” (“Other Spaces” 26): like Kolhari itself. Everything depends upon perspective, and signs within the mirror are not always as close as they appear. The heterotopic space, in Foucault's formulation, serves as a container for potentially contagious difference. Along with gardens, he recognizes prisons, hospitals, boarding schools, and graveyards as “counter-sites” (24) that are built explicitly to hold “individuals who are in a state of crisis” (Ibid), as well as “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm” (25). These spaces all require rituals of entry (Pryn accesses the garden only via Madame Keyne's largesse), and their inhabitants can also reconfigure the spatial

parameters of the site into new and unexpectedly liberatory possibilities; they can, as it were, switch the “polarities” of their carceral reality. The garden at first seems to exist in opposition to the New Market, as a kind of defiant organic counterpoint to the relations of capital, but Pryn soon realizes that its exquisitely ordered precincts and zones are merely a creative rendering of capital’s own beautiful and crystalline interior, with its potential for endless embroidery and refashioning.

The various repetitions that Pryn experiences while under the care of Madame Keyne—the labyrinthine garden, the proliferation of images caught slantwise in mirrors, the miniature model of the estate itself—all act as eruptions of the uncanny, the “return of the repressed.” Madame Keyne, in effect, is trying to teach Pryn that she is an actor in a game of capital, and that sexual, financial, and energetic “power” all function as essentially the same relation, the same repetitious force. She lives Foucault’s contradiction of “Power/Knowledge,” not opposed to the *effect* of power, but within the coils of its ambivalence, within the endless frames and tensions that make up the social. Madame Keyne’s attempt to exert some small amount of financial control over this reality is also a function of her mourning, the extension of her experience of lack—just as she is trying to create a New Market, she is also trying to create a new marriage with Radiant Jade, despite both of their inclinations to slide back into a more informal, ambivalent, and unclassifiable arrangement of pleasure. Her “militancy,” in Crimp’s words, her desire to act out against a hostile and disorderly medieval world, can also be read as a symptom of melancholia: a reaction against the impossibility of reconciling the old with the new, the violent splitting of the ego between a queer orientation and a capitalist track.

The sexual relationships that traverse all four *Nevèryon* books are not easily classified, although they can be read as different notes within something vast and contrapuntal, fragments of a mirror that fit together only to produce a reflection—that is, the *imago* of desire, which is always on the lam, always being pursued even as it pursues something else. Of the two long-term relationships that emerge from all these circulating desires, one is drenched in power and servitude (Gorgik/Noyeed), and the other vibrates with commerce and control (Madame Keyne/Radiant Jade). Both occur within the logic of a capitalism that is, within *Nevèryon*, moving past the agrarian model and towards a pre-industrial one. Neither of these relationships can be strictly classified as gay or lesbian, nor are they supposed to be, especially if we follow the point that Delany tries to make throughout the series: desire operates within circulating patterns, emerging out of complex historical and political sites, and classifying it within normative categories is as ambivalent a project as writing itself. We can write the character, but does that make it ‘real?’ When did it ‘not’ exist, and have we really brought it into being, or is it more like the other way around? As Old Venn explains in *Tales of Nevèryon*, the act of writing first emerged as an effort to organize and classify the labor of slaves:

I did not invent this system. I only learned it—when I was in *Nevèryon*...and do you know what it was invented for, and still is largely used for there? The control of slaves. If you can write down a woman’s or a man’s name, you can write down all sorts of things *next* to that name, about the amount of work that they do, the time it takes for them to do it. (62)

Such ordering power repeats the original task of the spell, the enforced organization of primordial relations that should, *must*, submit to *logos*, the word. To be named is to be numbered, to be counted, and above all, to be visible—and, once one is visible, one is also open to attack. This is what Lacan means by the gaze as a warzone, the gaze as opening up a field of combat wherein subjectivity remains the prize, subjection the punishment (*Seminar II* 225). The impulse to order human beings within varying taxonomies, be they racial, medical, or gendered, is queerly similar to that impulse by which we attempt to contain mourning within strict psychological parameters, proscribed rituals and movements, manageable surfaces.

This, in fact, is what Pryn ends up doing after she leaves the safety of Madam Keyne's arboreal paradise—writing down tallies for slaves in the iron mine. If Delany is concerned with the adaptability of signs, he is also fascinated by their repeatability, and thus, by the many (uncanny) circulating repetitions that become visible within all human interaction; the repressed always returns, since the repressed is also, always, *heimlich* as well, material, constituted by its own prohibition. So Delany's characters repeat and repeat, revisiting the same sites, criss-crossing the same borders, uttering the same sentences in one context, then another. Noyeed enters the mines as Gorgik leaves them; Pryn hovers around the mines after Noyeed escapes them, writing down the same tallies that Old Venn warned her about; the Vizerine gives a curious artifact—an astrolabe—to Gorgik, who gives it to Pryn, who throws it in the sea (giving it back to the dragon who guards the ruins of Neveryóna), and eventually it finds its way back to Gorgik, who wears it, ambivalently, as he wears his own facial scar.

Madame Keyne 'adopts' Pryn in the same manner that Fagan adopts Oliver Twist: their relationship is pedagogical, yet firmly inscribed by a homoerotic context. The climax, in every sense, of Madame Keyne's teaching is a speech on commodity exchange, through which she imparts the fundamentals of pre-industrial capitalism to Pryn, who listens attentively (even if she is a bit confused). The lesson begins when Pryn, watching Madame Keyne toss an iron coin to a slave-laborer, protests that she just gave away money. The older woman corrects her: "If you think I *lost* in that transaction, then you do not know what the enemy is, nor, I doubt, will you ever" (Delany, *Neveryóna* 136). Then, despite what seems like a foregone conclusion, she attempts to illustrate the principle to Pryn (and, arguably, this was the very reason that she adopted the girl: to offer this explanation, which Pryn will then be able to offer to someone else, thereby creating a symbolic network). "Money that goes out," she explains, "comes back to me. And, you must admit, it costs very little. So now you have the whole system of enterprise...[and] you know where most of the iron for these little moneys comes from, don't you? It's melted down from the old, no-longer-used collars" (134).

But this is only the concrete explanation, an insider's POV of the capital exchange that has just taken place: money has gone out, but it will come back (through the coerced labor of the slave, always in surplus, and now increased, if ever so slightly, by the added incentive of the iron coin); and, in actual fact, the "money"—or the spell—is simply a radical transformation of the slave collar. Marx describes the surplus principle as "an alteration of value. [Labor-power] both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces an excess, a *surplus value*....[F]or the capitalists, [it] has all the charm of a creation out of nothing" (*Capital I* 139; 146). Capitalism creates value from nothing, *ex*

nihilo, and this is the most powerful spell of all—the ability to exploit and order human labor within a field of perpetual motion. The proletarian underclass always has the capacity to do more work than would be compensated by a living wage, or by the expenditure (by the capitalist) needed simply to keep the laborer alive. So often, this exploitation of surplus value occurs through the oppression of migrant laborers, and Rey Chow (in *The Protestant Ethic*) describes it as the unjust “resolution” to a primary contradiction within historical capitalism:

A workforce that actively contributes labor toward the accumulation of capital yet at the same time receives the least of its rewards—namely, an ethnicized population—is the magic formula that “resolves one of the basic contradictions of historical capitalism. (34)

Through this exploitative relationship (ethnic slavery) Madame Keyne is, therefore, getting something out of nothing, or something out of *nearly* nothing, which is capital’s game. In order, however, to explain the outermost limits that define this play (which is also the “game” between Noyeed and Gorgik, a game of remembering and forgetting, a psychic as well as a financial transaction), Madame Keyne cites power itself as the mobility of all capital:

I have watched governments come and go, some led by liberators, some by despots, and I realize that the workers on this side of the fence and the out-of-work on that side—as well as the Liberator they oppose and support—share, all of them, one common *mesconnaissance*: they think the enemy is Nevèryon, and that

Neveryon *is* the system of privileges and powers such as mine that supports it...as long as they do not realize that the true enemy is what holds those places of privilege—and the ladders of power to them—in place, that at once anchors them on all sides, keeps the rungs clear, yet assures their bottoms will remain invisible from anywhere other than their tops, then my position in the system is, if not secure, at least always accessible. (137)

I cite this scene because it is erotic, as well as pedagogic, and because Madame Keyne's desire (for Jade, for Pryn, for Kolhari itself) is wholly inseparable from her position as a key economic actor within the city. All three of these characters become peculiar mutations of economic exchange principles, particularly Marx's statement, in *Capital I*, that "the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them" (51). Madame Keyne, Pryn, and Jade are quite literally *actors* within the play of capital, even as they are performers within the mummer's dance of Kolhari, drawing out the lines and stage directions of their own human relationships, the meetings and partings that their bodies endure on a daily basis. Marx specifies that "every commodity...is only the material envelope of the human labor spent on it" (56), but Delany reverses this conclusion, making all of these characters the "material envelope" *for* commodity, the living, enfolded formula that demonstrates how capital is written on the body. Madame Keyne, like all of us, loves within the boundaries of an increasingly global capital, but she is also tormented daily with the recognition of this paradox, the awful inequality of loving in a

world of signs—in a world where signs mean everything and you mean nothing—and so she tries to give Pryn a way out of this, even if such an egress is wholly impossible.

When Jade first meets Pryn, she is immediately suspicious that the younger woman will usurp her position with Madame Keyne—a position that is both financial and romantic. Jade sees conspiracies and stratagems everywhere, when in fact Madame Keyne has no intention of replacing her with Pryn, and Pryn never gives a thought to getting romantically involved with Madame Keyne (although her relationship with the older woman is traced with an erotic pedagogy). Pryn is forced to rethink the long-term relationship that Madame Keyne shares with Jade when, while stopping by an open window, she overhears a private conversation between the two. This is the moment when Pryn realizes that Madame Keyne has an entirely different private persona, as well as an entirely different name: that is, her first name, Rylla, which she offers only to Jade, and which Pryn can simply overhear (but never obtain). “Do you remember, Rylla,” Jade asks, “when you took me on that business trip to the south?” (Delany, *Neveryóna* 162). Rylla is pleased by the memory, even when she recalls how they shared a room next to a group of bandits (“I was so terrified!”), and, through a combination of fear and ingenuity, they had to devise a system of silent communication. “I took a waxed writing board,” Rylla says, “and wrote you a note.” We are never quite sure what the originary message was (Rylla doesn’t repeat it, and why should she, since Jade knows what was said?), but Jade excitedly repeats her own scrawled reply: “‘I love you more than life and wealth, and they will never know it.’ Or was it ‘wealth and life?’—.” To which Rylla (or is it Madame Keyne?) replies: “I think it was ‘breath and wealth.’ Or was it ‘light and breath?’—No matter; it was the right matter for the time!....[M]y wonderful Jade! You

used to be terrified of so many things back then. Slavers who were bandits; bandits who might be slavers—“ (163). This curious phrase, “no matter; it was the right matter,” is a riddle that pertains to much of the *Tales* as a unified text. It is also a spell, a message sent over the blackened foundations of mourning: the I-love-you which, Barthes wryly observes in *A Lover's Discourse*, actually “has no usages. Like a child's word, it enters into no social constraint...it is a socially irresponsible word” (148). The message is both a matter and no matter, a message and no message. Everything that exists between Jade and Madame Keyne, the enormous tension of two human beings in love, like two speeding trains running parallel but never colliding, is signed through no sign, scrawled into a palimpsest of wax that can later be scraped away, leaving no song, no sign. Like the hyper-communicativeness of the melancholiac who produces no meaning, the language of love—and perhaps, in Delany's terms, queer love especially—produces a dark superfluity of signs, a purloined letter.

Lacan compares the gaze to peering through a window: “The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window behind which we assume he is lying in wait for us...[in the gaze] we are at war. I am moving forward over a plain, and I assume myself to be under a gaze lying in wait for me” (*Seminar II* 220; 225). Pryn is not looking innocently through this window, into this performance of two lives—she is taking her position in “a war” of gazes, a shifting relation where the ultimate prize becomes the hail of the other. Jade completes the signature of this strange correspondence:

At last we were writing back and forth of our most intimate feelings, our most

intimate fears. It was as if the stylus itself were aimed at just those hidden parts of our souls. It was as though the wax already bore the signs and only waited for us to scratch the excess away to reveal the truth. (164)

One of the most powerful erotic moments in the *Tales* occurs just like this, through writing, just as all of the characters' relationships are grammatical connections, their fears and desires all adding up to the uncanny awareness that they might be characters in a book, letters in a text, or merely transient marks bitten into the surface of a wax tablet, always in danger of being scraped away. Just as Pryn is about to abandon the conversation, which seems to have confused her as much as it has intrigued her, she manages to hear one last snippet of dialogue—the crystal that should put everything together:

(Inside, one of them said: “I love you, and I know that you love me. That is all I know. That is all I need to know—“ But the voice spoke so softly Pryn did not catch which woman it was, so that the words seemed like a message glimpsed on a discarded clay tablet without any initialed name above or below, sender and destination forgotten). (166)

Later, Pryn repeats the line to herself, attributing it first to Madame Keyne, then to Jade, then to various other people, imagining that she is the intended recipient of the love letter—but she is never able to remember just who spoke the line, since, at the crucial moment, she wasn't listening quite hard enough. This is the way that desire

moves through *Neveryon*, always overheard but never quite discerned, emerging out of multiple contexts, linking multiple actors, but never a single crystal that one might glimpse from all sides, or the warm surface of a tool that one might hold (or swing, or throw into the sea, since a tool's functionality comes from the user); as Elaine Scarry suggests in *The Body In Pain*, any tool becomes a weapon when it is used against a human being: "The hand that pounds a human face is a weapon and the hand that pounds the dough for bread or the clay for a bowl is a tool" (173). Ini, the character who gets between Madame Keyne and Jade, becomes a tool for violence, even if she doesn't fully understand the violence that she commits, or what forces constrain her into the life of a hired murderess. Like Pryn, she is not invited into that room, that (inside), the hidden *chora*, where Rylla and Jade exchange invisible love letters on a surface that must always be wiped clean.

Working Death

In Delany's world of both queer and straight sex-trade workers, it seems almost miraculous that none of the primary characters—all of whom participate in the sex-trade at one time or another—ever feel as if their lives are being threatened by a largely queer-phobic medieval world. Just before holding a carnival, the traditional "safety-valve" (in Bakhtinian terms) for managing dangerous energy, the city of Kolhari offers an official announcement, a medical 'explanation' of the plague that resembles the rhetoric of the Center for Disease Control in the 1980s:

There is danger in Kolhari of plague. To date there have been seventy-nine probable deaths—and of several hundred who have contracted it, no one has yet recovered. We advise care, caution, and cleanliness, and Her Majesty, whose reign is brave and beneficent, discourages the indiscriminate gathering of crowds. This is not an emergency! This is *not* an emergency! (213)

Underlying this very public health crisis, however, are the private and intensely personal crises of the queer people in Kolhari living with a plague whose symptoms resemble AIDS, but which has no rhetoric to describe it—Toplin's anger at being expelled from school, his curiosity regarding Pheron, who is older and seemingly more independent, his resentment towards (yet exhausted acceptance of) his mother's ministrations, since he cannot care for himself; and there is Pheron's lost relationship with his father, his mourning of the acceptance that his father could never whole-heartedly offer (or that he always mistranslated), and his careworn relationship with Nari and Zadyuk, the young, heterosexual couple who choose to care for him rather than having a child.

It is Nari, in fact, rather than Pheron or Toplin, who first mentions the ceremony that is going on parallel to the carnival. She identifies it correctly as a ritual of mourning, a peculiar spell being cast by a mixture of gay and straight men and women, just as radical and as organic as an ACT UP protest or an event thrown together by the Lesbian Avengers, Queer Nation, the Gay Men's Health Crisis—the wizards and the spellcasters whose *ars magica* defined queer activism from 1980-1995. "They say there's a tavern," Nari tells Zadyuk, "[and] under it, an old cellar's been dug out. Some ancient crypt, I think, that used to be used for...well, I didn't really understand that part. But so many

people are going. So many people are sick” (242). This ritual, held in a dark, poorly-ventilated performance space—the very essence of the type of heterotopia that Judith Halberstam identifies as producing “strange temporalities”⁷—is also an invocation, a naming: the naming of an old god, *Amnewor*.⁸ Delany claims to have drawn this word from a friend’s dream (which, uncannily, parallels the events of the carnival itself), but lexically it resembles a great many ideas that are central to *Flight*: “am” as “auto-immune,” the war/”wor” against illness, as well as governmental inaction towards its effects, and finally, *Amnewor* itself as a queer spelling, a new name or position that could signal resistance rather than capitulation. It is a drag show, a spirit show, a séance, and a funeral all at once, a queer system of mourning that defies classification. Occurring as it does in a newly excavated cellar, above the remains of its unknown occupants, with an *ad hoc* erected throne to house the plague *itself* as a faceless monarch (240), the “Calling” becomes a study in both death and camp. This crystallizes William Watkin’s observation, in *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, that “we have made the sign ‘death’ a permanent citation and so a form of irony. Death has, somehow, along the way, become camp” (Watkin 1). Here is the restaging of death as a drag ball; to borrow the title from a D.A. Miller essay: “It’s My Party (and I’ll Die if I Want To).”

Because many of the same-sex encounters in the *Tales* occur within contained and circumscribed spaces (the Bridge of Lost Desires, in hidden rooms, abandoned manors, caverns, empty cisterns, tunnels, and other liminal sites that manage to escape the formal economy of heterosexual regulation), it seems as if Delany’s characters are often locked within an erotics of political subversion—their acts of physical consummation must always become acts of political defiance, but are rarely described as gestures of

reciprocal love (except in the case of Rylla and Jade, but their physical relationship occurs within private domestic spaces). This becomes particularly clear in *Flight*, when the nameless smuggler (who was once Pryn's lover), unwittingly follows Noyeed into a dark, abandoned series of tunnels for a covert sexual encounter. He doesn't realize that their 'private' moment will have an audience—Gorgik—who seems to enjoy observing sex (even his own) more than he enjoys participating in it. Noyeed leads the smuggler into a secret chamber, and, binding himself in chains, he once again rehearses the sexual performance that defines his submissive role, overlaid with the memory of rape trauma that has brought him to this point (and to Gorgik):

Free me, master...you can do anything to me, lord. Abuse me, ravish me, keep me a slave forever or cast me loose. You have the power! For you, it's all the same...for all eternity. You stand above me. I lie below you. You have only to use it on my miserable, suffering, enchained body...[A]nything, anything, master...you can do anything. (42-43)

Noyeed is addressing two masters here: there is the smuggler, but there is also Gorgik, his arch-master, his constant witness, who is always present (even if Noyeed must evoke that presence through his own imperfect simulation, like a lantern reflecting the shadows of Gorgik's absent body). Gorgik and Noyeed, however, do not share an easily recognizable dominant/submissive relationship. Noyeed is sometimes the active participant in their sexual consummation, but only when Gorgik is wearing the collar—that is, only when Gorgik *consents* to the submission. Whereas Gorgik could easily

overpower Noyeed sexually (and has, if we are to believe his memory of the event, although we could just as easily believe what Noyeed remembers), Noyeed himself has no hope of physically overpowering Gorgik. Their acts of consent are thus very different: Gorgik consents to allow Noyeed to top him, to become the active member of the sexual circuit, but Noyeed consents to *stay* with Gorgik, to constantly place himself within the shadow of sexual violence, to wear the collar for his own insuperable reasons (just as Gorgik has his own rationale). When describing his earlier relationship with Small Sarg, Gorgik states that “for the boy the collar is symbolic—of our mutual affection, our mutual protection. For myself, it is sexual” (Delany, *Nevèryon* 237). But, by the end of the *Tales*, we have to suspect that it isn’t quite this formulaic. The collar, like desire itself, exceeds all of its social and sexual formulations, becoming an endless signifier that might only be visible against bodies, flesh, in the dark, in the expelled breath and powerful communion that two people can share in a stolen moment.

Delany (or Delany’s narrator) in *Flight* describes the *Nevèryon* books themselves as an archive, a connection across time between different formulations of affect, different lives and struggles, different ways of loving, and of dying, that are nonetheless linked because they occur along the same contours of power and signification. The characters have their own hopes, their own longings, but they are also stones within the Bridge of Lost Desire, letters in a complex alphabet, voices in a transmission that—like Jade and Rylla’s tablet—must always exist “without any initialed name above or below, sender and destination forgotten.” Jade herself is a precious stone, a keystone, just as “Rylla” is a partial anagram for “liar,” as well as for “lyre” (in *The Devil’s Discourse*, Armando Maggi identifies the “speech” of demons themselves, in accordance with Italianate

theorists, as a type of musical seduction: “devils do not so much speak as modulate a sort of musical melody, close to an actual singing” [46]). In *Flight*, upon listing the current theories for the transmission of AIDS being discussed in the 1980s—“CMV, ASFV, HTLV, Hepatitis-B model, retroviruses, LAV, the multiple agent theory, the ‘poppers’ theory, the double virus theory, the genetic disposition theory”—Delany’s narrator concludes that, in the end, the resistance to AIDS (and to the oppression of those living, and dying, with AIDS) must be a mnemonic, as well as a political, intervention: “No one will understand this period who does not gain some insight into these acronyms and retrieve some understanding of how they *must* obsess us today, as possible keys to life, the possibility of living humanely, and death” (218). Those acronyms become the historical spells and spellings of AIDS discourse.

In this sense, the *Neverjon* books hold a startling relevance for marginalized readers, however complex their personal relations to marginality might be. This work of Delany’s doesn’t simply address racial and sexual oppression; it maps out both of these realities on a fantastic cartographic surface—the city of Kolhari, the lives of its inhabitants, the *apeiron* of their psychic lives and entanglements—in order to see how both oppressions function within radically different contexts. These characters, although they might seem, at first, to be the tools of a deconstructionist, are no more implements than you are I, since their utility merely reflects the status of all actors within global capital, all humans living within a world whose signs are often cruel, misremembered, misread. Just as any object, when taken out of its productive context, can be fashioned into a weapon, these characters have very different lives, and loves, depending upon who is reading them, and how carefully the reading is measured. Rylla’s guarded privacy,

Gorgik's complex manipulation of the oppressive system that manacles him (even as it gives him subjectivity), Noyeed's bewildering fluctuation between mastery and submission, Pryn's playful experimentation with different sexual realities (even if she only wants to watch)—all of these positions might be taken up, understood, appreciated by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered readers.

Personally, I identify with Pryn—I have walked along the edges of the complex S/M partnership depicted by Gorgik and Noyeed, but never fully participated in it; I have known the frustrating secrecy, the killing silence, of a closeted relationship, but never experienced the epistolary love affair that thrives between Madame Keyne and her Radiant Jade. I am touched textually by AIDS, as I am committed to studying its living history, but I have never lost anyone to the disease (and I came of age in the 1990s, when the more immediate AIDS discourses were beginning to be edged out of public media, while safe sex rhetorics were being pushed in schools, carefully divorced of their gay and lesbian context). Obeying the exhortation of Delany's narrator in *Flight*, all I can do is manipulate the memory; the only tool I have is a complex mnemonic engine, built by activists, by people crusading for humane life (and death), a global network of accounts, letters, interviews, books, articles—ultimately, a shimmering curtain of memories, like the light glinting off the sea where the ruins of Neveryóna lie buried.

'You meant Neveryóna?' Jenta cried. 'But it's only a memory of a city—you said 'ruin,' and it's not even a ruin, most of it. It's just a pattern in the water that shows up under the proper light (351).

This forgetting of Neveryóna, its abandonment beneath the waves (and the gradual erasure of its cultural history by the citizens of Kolhari) mirrors the ‘forgetting’ process of citizenship itself, which is always a reverse-mnemonic trick. In the case of Kolhari, the development of the city is constituted through the denial of the ruins beneath it, just as the ontology of Nevèryon as a melancholic nation emerges through the subjugation of its ethnic population (and ‘ethnic,’ in the case of these books, means light-skinned), as well as through the creation of a proletarian underclass (who are often, like Pryn and Gorgik, visibly mixed-race). Like track-lines, both sexual and ethnic sutures lie across the surface of Nevèryon, becoming the trade-routes and migratory roads traveled by Gorgik and Pryn. Their melancholic task becomes one of remembrance as well as migration: to remember the dead city that lies beneath Kolhari, as well as the ethnicized deaths that constitute the emerging nation, those who have given their bodies and souls for the New Market.

It all comes down to a close look, a *critique* of race, gender, and sexual inequality within the city, which is the ultimate task of Gorgik and Pryn. In the proper light, which is, after all, a refraction of many different colors, all things are possible. To live and die humanely, to read humanely, humanly, about humans who love and betray each other, always the same, across multiple worlds and different tracks of time. Being queer often seems like this: blurry and indistinct, a pattern offered externally, through various media, something *we* are told about by *other* people, like a city being described by someone peering into the waves. “I see something down there that looks like....” But what does it look like? Any other pattern, really. A gorgeous perplexity, like a Venn diagram, like the old woman Venn herself. A letter carved in Jade (by Jade), or a key that opens up a

body (Madame Keyne's body), producing an articulation of hope, a city that we might live in—a place for singing, and for signs.

I want to end how I began this chapter, with the sense of a character—such as Gorgik or Pryn—understanding their own obsolescence as a kind of death-drive within this web of signs. What is the possibility of them articulating any kind of cultural resistance which, through its shadowy gestures, might be called queer camp? In *Stars in My Pocket*, Delany stages a telling conversation to this end between his main character, Marq Dyeth (whose name is heavily symbolic), and “Mother Dyeth,” a holographic projection of one of his ancestors. Like a specter, Mother Dyeth “haunts” the Dyeth residence, suffering her fate of being turned on and off at will by capricious children. She is a melancholy ghost in this sense, but her acknowledgement of this state is also majestically camp. She works *for* death, but also *works death*, in the sense of what Matthew Tinkcom calls “working like a homosexual”; she “reads” (in the drag sense) Marq, and reads his own reading of her, until the two are locked in a battle of camp:

‘I’m tired now. Do me a favor there, Marq. Turn me off.’

‘Mother Dyeth,’ I said, ‘I’m sorry. I don’t know how.’

She was a book, she was a text, she was a set of signs, some present, some absent but implied, and many just forgotten, to be interpreted like the interminable crystals I had been trying to read since adolescence. (345).

The *Never* in *Nevèrjon* is also a riddle, an “interminable crystal.” Never Yonder. Never I/You. Never One. Or perhaps Never Gone?

¹ Jean Mark Gawron, speaking of the metropolis in *Dhalgren*, says that “Bellona’s maddening mixture of the arbitrary and the formal mirrors the arbitrariness and the formality of language, at once marvelous in the multiplicity of its determination and the absolute haphazardness of what is determined” (87).

² In *Demon Lovers* (2002), Walter Stephens elaborates: “Just as an ordinary sign does, a sacrament makes something present in human minds; it *signifies* that thing. But the sacrament also makes the thing present *in reality*, during the very time in which it signifies it” (182). He describes the negative power of witchcraft as “a countersacrament” (184).

³ Quoted in Marc Shell, *Money, Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economics From the Medieval to the Modern Era* (84, n.1).

⁴ This recalls Donald Moffett’s 1990 photo installation: “Call the White House, 1-(202)-456-1414, tell Bush we’re not all dead yet,” as a crystallization of governmental apathy (Crimp 18).

⁵ Many of the interlocking-circle diagrams seen in necromantic and other forms of premodern magic can be interpreted as precursors to the Venn diagram, which serves as the conjunction of multiple and overlapping concepts—whereas Venn diagrams denote mathematical value, magical diagrams denote a blending of psychic contestation and supplication, protection from and metaphysical aggression towards imagined demons. For a detailed discussion of the complexities of circular spell diagrams, especially those drawn from the Solomonic (*The Key of Solomon*) and hermetic traditions and used in a fifteenth-century Munich spellbook, see Richard Kiekchefer’s *Forbidden Rites* (2003).

⁶ In the film, Bastian says that this is “a beautiful name; [it’s] my mother’s name,” but the actual name that he shouts during this climactic moment is nearly unintelligible—viewers would have to read Ende’s novel in order to “hear” the real name, Moon Child, which Ende never actually associates with Bastian’s mother.

⁷ In *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) Halberstam connects “strange temporalities” (1) with participation in non-normative, artistic, and subcultural spaces that are both frequented and fashioned by gays and lesbians: “[U]rban queers tend to spend their leisure time and money on subcultural involvement: this may take the form of intense weekend clubbing, playing in small music bands, going to drag balls, participating in slam poetry events, or seeing performances of one kind or another in cramped or poorly ventilated spaces” (174).

⁸ Delany notes that “Amnewor” comes from a dream that his friend related to him. In *Flight*, he recalls how his friend Ted described a “dream”; seeing a “carnival” on Ninth Avenue in New York, along with a skinny, one-eyed guy who looked like Noyeed with a silver collar—in his dream, the carnival is “Calling of Amnewor” (268; 277).

Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Dying in the Prayer Closet:

Queer Suicide in the Work of Mercedes Lackey

“How does one *give* oneself death in that other sense, in terms of which *se donner la mort* is also to *interpret* death, to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification or destination for it?...What is the relation between *se donner la mort* and sacrifice? Between putting oneself to death and dying for another?”

- Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (10).

Willow: “I’m sorry.”

Buffy: “Don’t be. Death is my gift.”

- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (5.21).

This chapter will focus on Vanyel Ashkevron, who begins Mercedes Lackey’s novel, *Magic’s Pawn*, as one of the only queer adolescent characters in the history of popular fantasy fiction. The only other character in this study who understands and acknowledges his sexuality at such a young age is Marron, the protagonist of Chaz Brenchley’s *Outremer* novels, who—like Vanyel—also struggles with the enormous tension between physical desire and prophetic expectation; both, after all, are figures of legend, gifted with incredible magic and heavy responsibility, yet both find themselves drawn to quiet, erotic lives with other men, away from the drama of kingdoms, crowns, and warfare. In this discussion, I want to explore the ways in which Vanyel’s journey into magical competence occurs almost exclusively through structures of mourning and

melancholia, and how his queer orientation—like his magical one—seems peculiarly linked to a culture of sadness and impossible desire.

Magic's Pawn, the first novel in the *Last Herald Mage* trilogy, culminates in what is almost a double-suicide: after watching his lover, Tyrendel, jump from a high tower, Vanyel slits his own wrists. The cut is deep, “almost to the bone,” and although it is the *wrong* cut—he doesn't quite know how to do it right—the intent is powerful, ineluctable. As Vanyel lies in the small crypt next to Tyrendel's body, listening to the sounds of the storm outside, to the sounds of his equine Companion, Yfandes, trying to batter the door down with her own hooves in order to save him, to the silent spreading of his own blood across the floor, he is resolved. If Vanyel has indeed been a “pawn” up until this point in the violent systematization of magic, which is also the politics of being human, then this becomes his choice, his resistance. But who, or what, is he resisting, and how does this act of self-violence, of self-homophobia, become not just an exit from insurmountable pain, but an *entrance* into some entirely different conversation, the “promise” of book two, which is, quite interestingly, called *Magic's Promise*?

I want to examine two things here which might, at first, seem to bear no relation to each other: fantasy-fiction and queer suicide. I also want to discuss, as I have already foregrounded throughout this project, how fantasy as a genre, as a *ground* for particular queer and (sometimes) suicidal figures, is also a genre prefigured on loss and mourning, and not just a single loss, but a whole system of melancholic gestures, shadows, traces, and deferrals of power, love, intentionality. I include the title quote from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as an *entrée* into fantastic representations of death, as well as a permeable boundary between suicide and homicide¹ (since ‘suicide’ was once literally translated as

‘self-homicide.’) Buffy is told by the First Slayer, her ancestor, that “death is your gift”—a fact that she doesn’t understand fully until she chooses to die for her own sister, Dawn. Vanyel survives his first suicide attempt, only to be killed by the end of book three—although the death is both discursively and materially his choice, his intention. If the history of suicide is a difficult one to trace, then the history of *queer* suicide remains a series of gaps, silences, and deferrals.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed notes that “while the experience of pain may be solitary, it is never private. A truly private pain would be one that ended by suicide without a note. But even then one seeks a witness, though a witness who arrives after the anticipated event of one’s death” (29).² Most often, it is the witness (whose own sexuality remains indecipherable) who chooses to either out, or keep secret, the marked sexuality of the one who has died. The *Last Herald Mage* trilogy is really Vanyel’s queer biography, and although it focuses on multiple deaths (Tylandel’s completed suicide, Vanyel’s attempted suicide, and his eventual death, which could actually be regarded as a completed attempt), it is also concerned with his life in the face of constant risk, violence, and confusion.

A Schooling in Sadness

Lackey’s work sits uneasily within the sword-and-sorcery tradition, since it often leans more towards the conventions of contemporary romance, with its emphasis on characters’ emotional lives and interior struggles. Vanyel’s own story is both familiar and unfamiliar to contemporary queer youth, a fantastic re-telling of their own

autobiographies, and also a further dramatization of the various inequalities that they come up against on a daily basis. As the awkward eldest-child living on a seigneurial manor, Vanyel is aware that his family has only a faint connection to the throne of Valdemar—and he has made up his mind that he wants nothing to do with even that tenuous link. He dreams instead of becoming a bard, although an early “accident” involving the weapons-master, Jervis, fractures his right hand, effectively ending his musical career. Vanyel observes that “Jervis doesn’t have pupils—he has living targets” (Lackey, *Pawn* 24); we only learn later, in *Magic’s Promise*, that Jervis was threatened by Vanyel’s father, Withen Ashkevron, and coerced into brutally transforming the physically unimposing youth into a “real man.” When Withen decides to send Vanyel away to the College of Heraldry, run by Vanyel’s own Aunt Savil, he doesn’t realize that he is sending Vanyel into a site of trauma and power, a place where his sexuality, his magic, and his melancholia will intersect in an explosion of nuclear proportions.

Although other texts in this study deal with queer youth (such as Chaz Brenchley’s *Outremer* books, or Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which explores Willow Rosenberg’s struggle with witchcraft even as she is simultaneously coming into her own queer sexuality), Lackey’s *Magic’s Pawn* remains the only popular fantasy title to focus so clearly and extensively on a young gay man’s sexual development within the context of an educational institution (the College of Heraldry). Vanyel’s narrative is one of intense emotional disclosure rather than detailed physical description, and he often spends more time analyzing his own feelings and desires than he does paying attention to the hostile medieval world outside his interior relationships of affect. In fact, Lackey has often been criticized for producing characters who are “too

dramatic,” or for concentrating too closely on affective narration to the neglect (or outright exclusion) of other plot elements. The copious wars and military struggles in her novels, like those in all fantasy novels, often serve primarily to mirror the internal conflicts of her characters, and their psychic planes of battle fit perfectly over the actual and material theaters of war, thought blending with grass and blood, silent ferocity mingling with iron, skin, flame, and everywhere, death, until one realm is inseparable from the other. I want to argue here that these military campaigns are also re-enactments of melancholia as a psychic conflict, as well as what Walter Benjamin first referred to as the “psychic landscapes” (*German*, 95) that mourning creates, a cartographic organization and colonization of the ego.

In *Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction*, her qualitative study³ of young fantasy readers (12-20 years old) and their critiques of popular authors, Cathi McCrae observes that Lackey is “inconsistent in quality,” but says that she nevertheless “writes her best novels with intense compassion for her teenaged protagonists...some of whom are abused or gay [or both]” (McCrae xxi). McCrae’s teen respondees are always passionate and vocal in their analysis of Lackey’s work, often arguing with each other—some critics cite the emotional complexity and centrality of her work to *their* lives in particular, while others dismiss her books as ‘dime novels,’ a marginalized type of pulp-fiction within an already-marginalized genre. Alison Barrett, 17, says that “if *Forgotten Realms* [a popular D&D franchise] are the dime novels of fantasy, then Lackey’s are the quarter novels. She writes the same story over and over” (qtd. in McCrae 140). Ashley Burns, also 17, argues with Alison directly: “No, Lackey’s books are not dime novel fantasy where the plot is always ‘Oh no, we’ve got to save the world! Instead they focus

on character development...we're actually *seeing* the characters think" (Ibid). The respondees were divided into those who sympathized with Vanyel's internal conflicts, and those who simply wanted him to "get over it, already," in the words of Midian Crosby, 18 (qtd. in McCrae ???).

All of the respondees cite a sense of unyielding repetition in Lackey's work, the same fights happening over and over again—"Vanyel just keeps getting hurt and then keeps getting healed" (Ibid)—and they describe her narrative as "inconsistent," "jumpy," "brooding," and even "pathetic" (which it very much is, in the ancient rhetorical sense). This repetition is, in a sense, uncanny—Vanyel finds himself trapped in the same situations, the same conversations, over and over again, and his choppy "communicativeness" also reflects the asymbolic conversation of Freud's melancholiac, the one for whom signs have become arbitrary. Vanyel is, in the only manner he knows how, trying to talk himself out of melancholia, even as, over the course of three novels, he comes to realize that his orientation itself is melancholic—that he has to live through his relation to enduring sadness rather than trying to short-circuit it. We can even read the College of Heraldry itself, like Hogwarts, or Ged's school on the Island of Roke, or Gandalf's Tower of Isengard (all mystic-pedagogical institutions) as conveying lessons to, in Foucault's words, "guard against the onset of sadness" ("Sexual Choice," 152). These sites of power also impart cultural information, and part of their syllabi concentrate on fashioning healthy, well-adjusted mage-citizens rather than wizards who are steeped in their own sadness and sense of exile; they are, in a sense, the talking cure of the medieval world, the bastion of Freudian therapy attempting to organize magic as a productive energy.

The wizardry school narrative is a common one in fantasy-fiction, usually focusing on a young, untried farm boy who gets molded into a cosmopolitan figure within the confines of the school. These places are always transmutations of the prototypical British boarding school, where students are segregated on the basis of gender, and wizard-professors attempt to impart cultural as well as mystical lessons to their awe-struck audience. In *Magic's Pawn*, the College of Heraldry is actually a sort of utopian realm, a place where Vanyel is allowed to learn just about anything (history, philosophy, music, magic, weaponry and combat) at his own pace, and on his own terms. It is not necessarily a homophobic institution, but rather a heteronormative one, where queer students (there only appear to be two, Vanyel and Tylendel) feel invisible, even if they aren't actively subjected to discrimination or the threat of violence. Vanyel falls in with a coterie of young women, but quickly finds their intrigues dull and unsatisfying. In this sense, Lackey draws a very clear line between her ideal feminine subject—the isolated warrior, the independent wizard—and a stereotypical construction of vacuous femininity that Vanyel must reject. This rejection is always hesitant, since Vanyel senses, however unwillingly, that he might possess the same fragments of femininity. Even his nickname, “peacock,” a term of both endearment and derision, suggests that Vanyel belongs to this coterie more than he's willing to admit, and that his vanity as a young aristocrat remains a stumbling block for him.

The College of Heraldry, like any boarding school, is also a site for the cultivation of appropriate gender-expression.⁴ Withen, Vanyel's father, sends him to the college to become a man, and is outraged when he learns that Vanyel has tried to take his own life after a ruined love-affair with another boy. “I sent him down here for you to make a *man*

out of him,” he says to his older sister, Savil, “not turn him into a perverted little catamite!”⁵ (248). Savil’s reply to Withen, and the battle between father and son that follows, is a crystallization of Vanyel’s own “depressive position” as a queer adolescent who rebels against his family both sexually and magically:

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? (249)

Vanyel’s teasing assertion that “you h-heard I was playing ewe t’ ‘Lendel’s ram, y’mean” (252) only enrages Withen further, since, through his chronic underestimation of his son, he never realizes that Vanyel might actually have the mystical power necessary to kill him ten times over. Vanyel’s halting speech as well, with its gaps and stutters, becomes a kind of battle against the “asymbolia” of the melancholiac—rather than being overly communicative without saying anything, Vanyel is trying desperately here to signify, to find meaning, even as his slurring speech betrays him.

This scene, I would argue, becomes 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. As Judith Butler describes the process in interview: “Universality is actually being

asserted precisely by the one who represents what must be foreclosed for universality to take place. This is one who's outside the legitimating structure of universality but who nevertheless speaks in its terms and makes the claim" ("Changining" 746). 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—*" (252).

Vanyel's exclamation here resembles that of a real-life queer youth, named Tim, who participated in a 2003 study on LGBT suicide by Fenaughty and Harré:

And I thought, well, fuck it, I'm not going to be sorry for who I am, and the way I want to live....[I'm] not going to make excuses for it, or come from that kind of position, and I thought...it's not my responsibility for them to come to terms with it, in a way it's up to them to do that, and they have a responsibility to do that...and I wasn't going to commiserate with them, I wasn't going to mourn with them. (15)

I include this excerpt not as a gesture towards any existing participatory studies of queer youth suicide, but because it formally resembles Vanyel's own words. Tim's assertion that "I wasn't going to *mourn* with them" closely parallels Vanyel's own reaction, his refusal to mourn, like Withen, for his own lost heterosexual life. But this focus on mourning also recapitulates the work of Judith Butler on gender melancholia, and her

suggestion in *The Psychic Life of Power* that “the refusal to recognize [heterosexual] identification...[is] a refusal which absently designates the domain of a specifically gay melancholia...for a gay or lesbian identity position to sustain its position as coherent, heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place” (149). Part of being queer might involve a necessary but impossible repudiation of heterosexuality, which is in no way more coherent or reasonable than a straight repudiation of queer life.

When Withen moves to strike Vanyel—in what the reader assumes is a familiar gesture of paternal violence—the drugged and exhausted boy is still powerful enough to repel his father with magic: “Twice more Withen tried to get to his feet, and twice more Vanyel flung him back. He was crying now, silent, unnoticed tears streaking his white cheeks. ‘How’s it *feel*, Father? Am I *strong* enough now?’” (253). The pallor of Vanyel’s complexion—including his “white cheeks”—is often used by Lackey to signify a kind of delicacy of features, but it can also be read as an almost repulsive, corpse-like quality. Vanyel, who was so nearly dead, has now become the living dead, a queer necromancer, whose burning power keeps him alive. As he strikes his father again and again with magical force, Vanyel remains unsatisfied, since the only way to truly sever his melancholic relation to Withen would be to travel back in time and prevent the trauma from occurring in the first place—or to have Withen acknowledge his own pain through dialogue, which neither father nor son ever does. Magic, in this sense, becomes a violent means for disrupting the structures of melancholia, even as its wielder, Vanyel, realizes that he cannot utilize it to achieve justice. This realization comes too late for Vanyel, just as it does for Tylendel, who tries to use violent magic in order to avenge the death of his twin-brother, Staven.

Channeling Queer Melancholia

When Vanyel first meets Tylandel, he feels an instant attraction, but rejects it just as immediately—especially once he hears the young women in his coterie whispering that ‘Lendel’⁶ is *shaych*, a slang term for the Tayledras word “shay’a’chern,” which signifies a queer orientation. As Savil observes later, “[Withen] might also have protected the boy from even the *idea* that same-sex pairings were possible. So the boy himself wouldn’t have known what he was—until he first found out about ‘Lendel’” (Lackey, *Pawn* 121). Since Vanyel has no sexual vocabulary to understand his own feelings, nor any sense of cultural indulgence for such a same-sex pairing, he instead retreats into an emotionless shell: “If no one touches me—no one can hurt me. All I have to do is never care...this place, this wilderness of ice—if he could hold it inside of him—if he could not-care enough—he could be safe” (52). This idea of *not-caring*, that to not-care about something (or someone) is an act as effortful, as powerful, as *caring*, that it requires just as much psychic organization and physical expenditure, effectively traps Vanyel within a tournament of affect from which he cannot escape. When the artifice of ‘not-caring,’ of anamnesis or *anti-affect*, becomes as performative and constructed as caring, as *living*, then his only real choice becomes no choice at all. Like the impossible choice that Plato’s *Symposium* offers, the decision between earthly and heavenly love, which no mortal can reasonably make, even though s/he effectively makes it every day, Vanyel’s choice signifies the relentless economy of foreclosure that necessitates counting as a human subject.

Vanyel doesn't really begin to understand the emotional text of his own body until he shares it with Tyrendel—that is, until he begins to narrate the dreams that he's been having for the past month, the dreams of death and ice, where his desires literally become killing objects, icicles that threaten to pierce him from every angle:

It's—ice...it's all around me; I'm trapped, and I can't get out, and I'm so cold...then I cut myself, and *I* start to turn into ice. Then—sometimes, like tonight—I'm somewhere else, and I'm fighting these things, and I know I'm going to die. And the worst of it isn't the pain or the dying—it's that...I'm all alone. So totally alone. (117)

When Tyrendel finally reciprocates Vanyel's feelings, telling him that "I understand...I know what it's like to want something, and know you'll never have it" (112), he crystallizes the notion of *eros* as lack. But the dreams don't go away; they merely change shape. The uncanny repetition of these dreams, their continual staging of an impossible battle, as well as the repetition of Vanyel's own grammar—his constant dwelling upon certain memories, places, choices—suggests that he is locked in fantastic melancholia, a mythical stasis that emerges not just from his power as "the last Herald-Mage," but from the complexity of his own sexual life. This echoes the point that I am trying to make throughout this study, which is that magic and melancholia are structurally similar, that they may in fact be the same thing. Just as fantasy narratives are so often driven by lack, and so commonly focus on a crucial death (as well as a necessary rebirth), wizardry, as the visceral foundation of the sword-and-sorcery tradition, is also a unique

systematization of melancholia that reflects the complex negotiation of the human affect- and drive-systems.

Vanyel's "ice dream" is reminiscent of another dream-like work: "Memories That Smell Like Gasoline" (1991), a multimedia photograph by David Wojnarowicz. Both an artist and an AIDS activist, Wojnarowicz died in 1992 due to complications related to AIDS, and his work remains a site of angry, defiant particularity against the various institutions that seek to erase the AIDS epidemic (or to reconfigure it as a nostalgic memory). "Memories" displays the image of a line of bison, all falling (or leaping) off a cliff, like lemmings, along with an overlay of text:

See the signs I try to make with my hands and fingers. See the vague movements of my lips among the sheets. I'm a blank spot in a hectic civilization. I'm a dark smudge in the air that dissipates without notice. I feel like a window, maybe a broken window. I am a glass human. I am a glass human disappearing in the rain. I am standing among all of you waving my invisible arms and hands. I am shouting my invisible words....[I] am screaming *but it comes out like pieces of clear ice*....[I] am disappearing. I am disappearing but not fast enough. (*Fever* 1992)

Like Vanyel, Wojnarowicz describes the way in which melancholia freezes one in ice, transforming verbal communication into "vague movements," misheard signs, hand-waving, even screaming. Vanyel says "it's all ice," meaning his language as well as his

body, and Wojnarowicz speaks “invisible words” which themselves emerge from his melting, transparent body as “pieces of clear ice.”

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva describes melancholia as a kind of *inscription*, a war of drives taking place on an interior surface that is both skin and psyche, a *chora* of originary desires that links all humans back to their memory of a pre-objectal world:

Irreducible to its verbal or semiologic expressions, sadness (like all affect) is the *psychic representation of energy displacements* caused by external or internal traumas...moods are *inscriptions*, energy disruptions, and not simply raw energies...on the frontier between animality and symbol formation, moods—and particularly sadness—are the ultimate reactions to our traumas, they are our basic homeostatic recourses. (21-22)

If sadness is actually a kind of inscription, a transmission (like pressing letters onto a wax tablet, or auditory data onto a wax cylinder), then melancholia—in Kristeva’s formulation—becomes the reversal of this inscription. Whereas sadness represents a unique energy exchange, neither positive nor negative but simply demanding an object, in the case of melancholia the ego becomes *its own* object. Sadness itself becomes a relation of fetishism that sucks in everything else, including the ‘real’ sun that we can never see in our dreams (Kristeva likens the absence of sunlight in dreams to unconscious repression, especially the buried Freudian memory of being beaten—and witnessing a beating—as a child). Throughout *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler complicates the experience of melancholia by relating it to queer object choice, a possibility that

Kristeva seems not to consider. If melancholia signifies a kind of self-repudiation, then this rejection can also be framed within the terms of gender, as the repudiation of an 'improper' gender life:

A love and a loss haunted by the spectre of a certain unreality, a certain unthinkability, the double disavowal of the 'I never loved her, and I never lost her,' uttered by the woman, the 'I never loved him, I never lost him,' uttered by the man...the 'never-never' that supports the naturalized surface of heterosexual life as well as its pervasive melancholia. (Butler, *PLP* 138)

Melancholia, then, whatever form it takes (and from whatever camp it happens to be theorized) depends upon a repudiation that cannot be resolved, or that cannot be resolved except through the radical fracture of the subject in question, the shattering into memories, bone fragments, loves, tesserae, of the imperiled life. If I see this mourning for what it is, if I uncover its actual object (which is, after all, a repudiated piece of myself), then what I know as 'myself' will explode like a denatured chain of DNA, sugars and phosphates and protein chains crumbling, a mess of light and dust, and nothing of 'me' left to reassemble. It is a particular movement of energy that brings the entire drive-chain into sharp relief, a shifting of the world of psychic life that makes the globe itself visible, however impossibly, if only for a moment, but a moment is all it takes for the fortress of our desires to collapse into the sea. It is thus through an act of thaumaturgy, a repetitive magic spell, that we avoid making this impossible choice,

and—within fantasy—it is the structure of magic itself that might represent melancholia’s clearest and most dangerous expression.

Throughout *Magic’s Pawn*, the force of magic is often described in terms of various threshold spaces: as “potential,” as “channel,” as “gate,” or as “talent” that one really has no control over. Trying to describe magic to Vanyel, Tyrendel says that “a lot of people have the [Herald-Mage] potential, but nothing ever triggers it. You’ve just got the potential” (185). In this sense, magic and queerness seem very much alike, with latent power-potential being nearly synonymous with latent homosexuality. Vanyel reaffirms here that he doesn’t *want* to ‘trigger’ his own mage-potential, just as he wishes that he could travel back in time to deactivate his own ‘queer-potential,’ to un-trigger the switch that set his erotic life into motion in ways that he couldn’t control. In my article “Transgendered Magic”, I describe Vanyel’s power as a kind of “queer-inflected magic” which springs from his own conflicted erotic drives: “Much of Vanyel’s magical power, or agency, emerges from his frustrated queer desires and his despair at being exiled by a hegemonic society....[T]his agency is situated quite clearly in his identity as a queer adolescent” (10). As I argue in that work, magic can act as a unique means of sexual and gendered transition, a force by which the magician extends the corporeality of his or her own body. A character like Willow Rosenberg might be read as “male” due to her magical competence, as well as the increased aggression (and “granite butch” aesthetic) that comes with her powers, just as Vanyel might be read as “female” due to the openness and vulnerability of his own uncontrollable powers. Vanyel’s magic is tied to his evolving identity as a queer male, and everything he “does” with it emerges from a type of oppositional consciousness, a queer mode of life.

After Tyrendel's suicide (and Vanyel's attempt), as Savil is giving Vanyel the psychic equivalent of a doctor's examination, we learn that these particular magical drives emerge from organic "channels" within the mind/body, not purely visceral, like organs, but not entirely psychic, either. Savil observes that "all [his] channels were as raw and sensitive as so many open wounds. The channels had not been 'opened,' they'd been *blasted* open" (215). Vanyel is, in effect, raped by his own power, assaulted from the inside out by his own mage-potential, and now hemorrhaging in both the physical and psychic sense. Whereas, in the normal course of events, these magical channels should be "opened" in a context that we can't help but read as sexual (especially when we learn that Tyrendel used to manipulate his talent in order to spy on his brother's erotic escapades with women), Vanyel's magical loci have been brutally ripped apart. In this sense, what emerges from Vanyel's bodily channels, his exposed interior, is a kind of monstrous birth similar to the genre of sensational witchcraft and monster literature that gave birth to the modern-day figure of the wizard. Savil's (and, by extension, the College's) relentless need to control that interior, to regulate Vanyel's own visceral universe, recapitulates the Renaissance drive towards anatomy that was also the cartographic conquering of bodily interiors. The famous frontispiece of Andreas Vesalius's 1543 anatomy textbook, *De humani corporis fabrica*, depicts the image of a female criminal's body being dissected before an awe-struck crowd (Vesalius ii).⁷ Vesalius attempts to rationalize the interior spaces of this nameless woman's body, just as Savil attempts to regulate and classify the radical "channels" within Vanyel that are raw, bloody, and burning with power.

If these channels are phallic, then they echo Lacan's description of erotogenic spaces as thresholds on the body where skin meets skin, the fold of the armpit and elbow, the curve of the thighs, the swell of breasts, and any enfleshed lacuna into which a hand (or even a finger) might fit. The phallus can really be any body part, or any combination of body parts, and so these ruptured "channels" within Vanyel's body and mind are also scarred sex organs, erotogenic sites that have been brutally violated, blasted open, and that require both mental and physical healing in order to resume their proper functioning. Magic, then, operates within a unique phallic organization here, a network of organic channels⁸ and system of energy drives that is latently sexual. In *Born to Run*, the first book in her *SERRated Edge* series (which revolves around present-day wizards and elves who drive race cars), Lackey describes magic as an insuperable force that is, despite its strangeness, still linked to human corporeality. Tanim, the protagonist of *Born to Run*, is a wizard on the side of the elves, who divides his time between racing mystical-prototype cars and rescuing street kids who have gotten mixed up with demonic forces. His challenge in this particular novel is to break up a child-pornography ring, controlled by a renegade elf-wizard and targeting young, street-level sex trade workers, both male and female. When Tanim tries to describe the nature of magic, he finds himself falling back on a tautology:

It uses the energy produced by all living things; it also uses the energy of magnetic fields, of sunlight, and a lot of other sources. It's a tool, a way of manipulating energies; that's the first thing you have to remember. It's not good

or bad, it just *is*. Like, I can use a crowbar to bash your head in, or to pry a victim out of a wreck. (Lackey, *BTR* 63)

In *Magic's Promise*, while walking through the forest that, ironically, he will someday haunt as a ghost (after his death in *Magic's Price*), Vanyel observes that “the magic still slept, deeper than the taproots of the trees and harder to reach—but it slept uneasily. All magic was akin, and all magic touched all other magic” (Lackey, *MP* 75). If magic is a sign-system, that is, a semiological project organized around the manipulation of power, then spells are really no different from sentences; the goals of magic and the goals of human language are the same, and thus they share the same cathexis around a lack that can never be filled. Just as the gap between signifier and signified represents an impossible chasm, a leap from a tower that never quite ends in flight, so the image in the wizard's mind is never *fully* translated into a perfect spell-effect. The words themselves are inscriptions of energy, tools that create a fantastic performance, but the power that they evoke is never precisely what the wizard desires. Vanyel realizes this when he admits 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. It couldn't bring back my Tylendel. It was just power.
(79)

Vanyel is in his late-twenties when he says this, at the height of his power as the last (and most formidable) Herald-Mage, and he has literally become a celebrity throughout the realm of Valdemar. He single-handedly does the job of six or ten other mages, and does it more creatively, more effortlessly, than they ever could. His power is linked to “node magic,” a sort of ley-line or gaian power core that seethes beneath the earth, offering him enough raw energy to blow the College of Heralds to smithereens, or to effectively stop an advancing army (which he does, at the cost of his life). But it’s still, in Vanyel’s own words, “just power.” His magic can never offer him the precise emotional transformations that he desires, just as his words can never bridge the synaptic gap that prevents those desires from ever being fully legible. Vanyel opts to keep using magic, to keep *spelling*, until the final spell-effect, the master-word, conveys the full sense of his inner turmoil. Power is what leads Tyrendel to pursue suicide; it is what Vanyel flees from, choosing death over power, and in the end, it is what Vanyel tries to grasp in order to structure his own sexual life, only to discover that this crucial aporia within the development of power—“I thought I held the world”—is one that remains irreconcilable. Power can’t allow you to hold the world, because power *is* the world, as well as the hand holding it.

Choosing Death

I want this discussion of Vanyel’s Herald-magic as a melancholic force, as well as the investment of power within narratives of mourning and lack, to inform my remaining analysis of queer youth suicide. I don’t mean to suggest that Vanyel’s reasons for

attempting suicide somehow complement or align with the spectrum of reasons cited by contemporary queer youth, but I do want to draw parallels between their situations. Ultimately, it is Vanyel's relationship with power—a power that he views as external and phantasmal—that propels him into a suicidal narrative. Some critics have read this narrative as stereotypical and hackneyed, a reiteration of suicidal tropes within gay pulp literature that confine gays and lesbians to a life of perpetual mourning. I see it, however, as a clear and cutting reflection of suicide among multiple overlapping communities of at-risk youth, especially homeless LGBT youth who move from shelter to shelter. Although Vanyel himself is not homeless (he stands to inherit his father's estate), he becomes homeless, *unheimlich*, in a sense, within these overarching institutions, feeling placeless within both Forst Reach and the College of Heralds. He depends upon the nurturing care of his Aunt Savil, and when Savil is killed, his "place" effectively dies with her. This feeling of homelessness also echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's notion, in *Borderlands/La Fronteras*, of "homeophobia", which is "the fear of going home...and of not being taken in" (20).

Meeting Tylenel is the single most crucial erotic event in Vanyel's life: 'Lendel becomes his "life-bonded," the sexual soulmate with whom he shares a mysterious and indefinable connection. Tylenel chooses him, in a sense, for this bond, in the same way that Yfandes, Vanyel's Companion, chooses him as her interspecies partner.

Companions are horses that communicate telepathically with their "chosen," and when Vanyel first meets Tylenel's companion, Gala, he marvels at their connection: "Gala danced backward a few steps, making sounds Vanyel would have been willing to stake his life were *laughter*. It was pretty obvious that she'd shoved him into Tylenel's arms

with her nose” (135). Aside from Vanyel’s father (who is oblivious, although that will soon change), everyone seems intent on pushing Van and ‘Lendel into this relationship; nobody bothers to ask them if they feel ready for such a pairing, or if they actually fit together in terms of their desires, fears, personal politics, and the like. Vanyel soon learns that Tyrendel is a political radical, firmly committed to his twin-brother Staven’s subversive activities, and it is this commitment that will eventually destroy him.

When Staven is murdered in a political coup, Tyrendel enlists Vanyel’s help to avenge his twin’s death. In the process, however, Tyrendel uses Vanyel’s own hidden reserves of power to unleash a horrific punishment on his brother’s political enemies: he summons a pack of *wyrsa*, werewolf-like creatures whose only instinct is to feed, and sets them upon a group of relatively innocent bystanders. In the midst of this chaos, Gala, Tyrendel’s Companion, uses her own body to shield the humans. When Tyrendel screams for her to get out of the way, she “repudiates” him: “*I do not know you: she said coldly, remotely. :You are not my Chosen.:*” (169). To be repudiated by one’s chosen is tantamount to having one’s maternal connection cut off completely, a symbiotic relationship violently blown apart so that nothing of the former intimacy remains. Gala’s choice to *un-choose* Tyrendel, her rejection of him and sacrifice of her own body (to be torn apart by the *wyrsa*) is ultimately more annihilating than Staven’s death. In that moment, Tyrendel loses “Tyrendel”: every one of his loved objects except for Vanyel is gone, and suddenly, to his crucial disappointment, Vanyel is not enough to sustain him as a human. This chain of suicides, then, begins fundamentally with Gala, who sacrifices her own life in order to save the crowd of innocent bystanders; her psychic and emotional death, precipitated by her separation from Tyrendel’s mind and heart, is the event that

also demands her corporeal death. And perhaps she even senses, in the way that many Companions are often precognitive, that her destructive negation will somehow create the space needed for Yfandes to *choose* Vanyel, as energy rushes in to fill the vacuum left behind by this series of unbearable and abrupt departures.

[Savil] saw Tylendel poised against the lightning-filled sky, arms spread as if to fly—and saw him leap—He seemed to hang in the air for a moment, as if he *had* somehow mastered flight. But only a moment. In the next heartbeat he was falling, falling—she couldn't tell if the scream she heard was hers, or Vanyel's, or both. It wasn't Tylendel's. His eyes were closed. (207)

As a performative act, Tylendel's suicide is all the more powerful because of its extreme public context: he leaps from the top of the highest tower in the College, the tower that houses the Death Bell. Usually, high towers figure prominently in fairy tales. Sleeping princesses wait in the highest room, in the tallest tower, or princes mount the steps of the tallest tower in the land⁹ in order to perform their crucial acts of rescue. But Tylendel transforms the tower into a funerary stage, choosing to render his own body as a wordless suicide note, to end his life in the most public way imaginable. It is a superabundance of context, an act that can be witnessed but never understood. The scream heard is not Savil's, not Vanyel's, not Tylendel's. The scream is the sound of the very world splitting apart, the horrifying *non-sound* of Tylendel's departure from the human relations that he can no longer endure.

Suicide is certainly not uncommon in medieval Europe, and Tyndel's death-performance is, in many ways, a transformation of the medieval *miracula* narrative, the suicide that is averted at the last moment through divine intervention. According to some accounts, Joan d'Arc jumped from a tower in 1431 "when she heard that her captors would hand her over to their English allies" (Murray 94), but was saved *deus ex machina*, and only suffered minor injuries. The most famous death by suicide in the middle ages was probably Pier della Vigna, a papal aid and cultural patron, who is immortalized in Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XIII). Vanyel's haunting of the forest is, indeed, probably a direct adaptation of the Suicide Grove in *Inferno*, where those who take their own life are transformed into trees. In *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, his exhaustively researched and multi-volume work, Alexander Murray suggests that "suicide" as a noun first began as "suicida", an actual designation of subjectivity, seen in the work of Walter of St. Victor in 1178; the word then disappears (in England) until 1637, when it resurfaces in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (Murray 48). Suicide begins not as an act, but as a particular kind of person, that is, a person capable of 'self-killing.'

Murray provides detailed and chilling data regarding suicidality in the Middle Ages, even producing charts which divide each instance of suicide into its brutally constituent elements (mode of death, weapon used, profession of the subject, etc.) According to the extant coroner's rolls, of the 4599 deaths from 1227-85, 2895 were homicides; 107 were suicides (Murray 362). Suicides were often chronicled in town records, and a typical case in Germany looks like this:

On June 4, 1439, a respectable Basle woman called Mrs. Beringer...[got up] around midnight [from bed], got on to the roof and jumped off to her own death. She was buried at St. Leonard's. And it rained continuously for nearly a week, and people said it was because her body was in consecrated ground. So the Basle city council decided that she be dug up and thrown into the Rhine. This decision taken, on the 9 June the rain let up a little. (Bernoulli, ed., *Basler Chroniken*; qtd. in Murraypage?)

To clamber atop one's roof in the middle of the night isn't quite the same as jumping from the tallest tower, but it is still a public act, a choice to make one's death visible rather than concealed. We have no real testimony or evidence to what queer suicide might look like in the Middle Ages, but there is a tradition of ritualistic suicide within the *erastes/ephebe* (or *eomenos*) relationship in Ancient Greece. In his work *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, Anton van Hooff describes the relationship of the classical world to self-killing. Drawing from the writing of Theokritos, he relates a kind of suicide performance that might commonly occur between two male lovers:

The feelings of an anonymous lover are not returned by the *ephebe*. As the last of his many presents the *erastes* brings his own rope and speaks: 'Here is one that died of love; good wayfarer, stay thee and say: *his was a cruel friend*.'

(Theokritos, *Eidyllia* 23; 36 [van Hooff 68]) Van Hooff goes on to describe historical accounts of *erastes*-suicide, which are understandably few and difficult to obtain.¹⁰ "Grief over an unhappy love can be mingled with an element of revenge when

the disappointed or frustrated lover wants to curse the cause of his death. That is what the *erastes* does who hangs himself in the porch of the house of the boy who does not reciprocate his love” (102).

A queer inversion of this type of suicidal performance, in fact occurs in the second season of the HBO series *Rome*. The show focuses on the last days of the Roman republic, culminating in the murder of Julius Caesar and the subsequent battle between Caesar Octavian (his heir) and Mark Antony. Despite its epic register, however, *Rome* mixes historical events with the everyday lives and loves of its characters, particularly two unlikely friends—former legionnaires Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo—and political adversaries, Attia of the Julii (Caesar’s niece) and Servilia of the Junii (mother of Brutus, his murderer). After Brutus is killed, Servilia finally decides to end her feud with Attia in the most climactic way possible: a ritual suicide. The tactic of abasing oneself on an enemy’s doorstep, known specifically as “squalor,” was well known in Roman culture. After huddling in rags on Attia’s doorstep, incanting loudly—“Attia of the Julii, I call for justice”—Servilia completes her performance by cursing Attia:

Gods below: I am Servilia of the most ancient and sacred Junii of whose bones the seven hills of Rome are built. I summon you to listen. Curse this woman! Send her bitterness and despair for all of her life. Let her taste nothing but ashes and iron. Gods of the underworld, all that I have left I give to you in sacrifice if you will make it so (*Rome*, 2.07, “Death Mask”).¹¹

A curse would have been the more scientific, threatening version of a spell in ancient Rome, far more powerful than dismissive *magia*, and Attia needs to take it seriously, especially since it is sealed with Servilia's own blood—immediately after the words are spoken, she buries a knife in her heart. This is a unique and horrifying suicide-spell, a mixture of love, death, and magic, designed to be both a suicide and a homicide, since Servilia means to destroy Attia by sacrificing her own life.

Tylendel's suicide, performed in full view of his lover, Vanyel, is a hybrid event, both retributive (against Vanyel) and palliative (meant to end his own suffering). In a very real sense, Tylendel's death is directed at Vanyel, a transformative act that the other boy must witness for reasons that only Tylendel understands. His flight from the tower is also his signature, his suicide note, just as the rope that the *erastes* swings from makes a terrifying sound that invades the hearth-space of the *ephebe*, a boundary violation whose shadow will remain long after the physical "evidence" (the lover's body) is removed from view. For Vanyel, Tylendel will always be falling, just as, for the *ephebe*, his lover will always be swinging, like a mark inscribed on their very flesh, a sigil written in blood on the psychic surface of the hearth itself. Like the mythical figure Timagoras in Pausanias' *Attica*, who jumps to his death after his lover, Meles, asks him to (suicide is the radical performance of his love), Tylendel's own leap is also a kind of invitation to Vanyel—a question posed while in mid-air, a question that asks Vanyel to measure his own love. And, just like Meles, who jumps after Timagoras because he cannot conceptualize life without him, Vanyel answers Tylendel's impossible question by attempting to follow him.

Vanyel's suicide attempt is spatially the opposite of Tylandel's: he secludes himself in a locked crypt, beside Tylandel's own bier, and ensures that nobody has followed him. The space is, in essence, a locked prayer-closet, a medieval and early-modern architectural site that has always been infused with erotic possibilities. In his series of mystical poems, *Carmen Deo Nostro* (first published in 1670), Richard Crashaw describes the heart as a locked closet, which was a common aesthetic formulation within the middle ages. Speaking, in the fragment *ego sum ostium*, to a crucified Christ—and, as Richard Rambuss describes it in *Closet Devotions*, “[figuring] Christ's violated body as...an open cabinet or chamber” (28)—Crashaw writes:

Now you lie open. A heavy spear has thrown back the bolt of your heart.

And the nails, as keys unlock you on all sides. (Crashaw, *Works*: 1972)

Tylandel's crypt becomes, in this sense, a bolted prayer-cabinet, an architecturally queer space that serves as ground and witness to Vanyel's own desire (both for death, and for 'Lendel himself). It is a chamber within his own body, a spatial extension of his own complex “channels,” his own powerfully erotic drives, which must include the death-drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud identifies this much-debated element of physiology as “the tendency to stability...[which] ascribed to the mental apparatus the aim of extinguishing, or at least of maintaining at as low a level as possible, the quantities of excitation flowing into [the organism]” (256). Rather than operating in opposition to the sex drive—which Silvan Tomkins¹² argues is not precisely a drive at all—the death-drive serves in Freud's formulation as the ultimate goal of sexuality. If sex, like magic, is

too intense to bear, too filled with violent stimuli for the body to endure, then death becomes the logical cessation of erotic invasion. Leo Bersani clarifies this in *The Freudian Body*, when he explicitly links sex with an overload of energetic stimuli: “The pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual excitement occurs when the body’s ‘normal’ range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes somehow ‘beyond’ those compatible with psychic organization” (Bersani 38-39). I would go one step further and link this “pleasurable unpleasurable tension” to the experience of magical possession, which, like sex, involves a sweet sting of overloaded stimuli, an excess of symbols, energies, and affects, almost too much for wielder to take.

Freud’s complex desire for homeostasis, however, is not necessarily what compels Vanyel to press the knife to his wrists. There is no legible reason. Despite the book’s copious internal dialogue, we can never know precisely why Vanyel makes this choice, just as a coroner’s report can tell us nothing about the intricate psychic life, and the desire for death, of the one who completes suicide:

Before he could begin to be afraid, [Vanyel] pulled both wrists up along the knife-edges, slashing them simultaneously. The dagger was as sharp as he had hoped—sharper than he had expected. He cut both wrists almost to the bone; gasped as pain shot up his arms, and the knife fell clattering to the marble. (*Pawn* 224)

Vanyel's suicide attempt becomes the necessary event that galvanizes the entire College, driving everyone to cooperate in order to save him. Even his father, Withen, returns to confront him, only to discover that his son is no longer the defenseless and painfully shy adolescent that he left behind—he has transformed, almost overnight, into a wizard of formidable power, his channels of magic “blasted open” by trauma.

Narratives of Accumulated Loss

Derrida suggests, in *The Gift of Death*, that living in the world means living within a brutal economy of sacrifice. “‘Society’ *puts to death* or...allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children (those neighbors or fellow humans that ethics or the discourse of the rights of man refers to) without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge such a sacrifice, the sacrifice of others to avoid being sacrificed oneself” (86). Do we remember Matt Shepard because he had the particular ironic misfortune of succumbing to death on Oct 12, 1998—the first day of Gay Awareness Week at the University of Wyoming (Loffreda 15)? What about the homophobic “tribute” to Shepard that appeared during the Colorado State University homecoming parade: a float carrying a scarecrow, draped with signs ranging from “I’m Gay” to “Up My Ass”—are *these* the events that stick in our mind, the ciphers that allow us to remember Matt’s death, to continue the process of mourning? The archival process is uneven, often mysterious, and the global textualization of Shepard’s death, the narration of his body (which was his story) across the western world, could only operate through the wholesale erasure of those other lives, those other names.

Vanyel Ashkevron has his own book (three in fact) and so his story can be told; most queer youth aren't fortunate enough to have such a narration. But they do, at least, have access to *Vanyel's* narration, and that seems to be part of Lackey's point in producing the *Last Herald Mage* trilogy. Vanyel's relationship with death is equally as important as his connection to life, and readers can see, even if the very act of looking is painful, that a small flash of agency, of choice, lingers, even in the darkest of locked prayer-closets, the most fortified of hearts. "What is the heart," Derrida asks, "[except] that which is not visible on earth, that whose capital accumulates beyond the economy of the terrestrial visible or sensible...it can never be stolen from you" (*Gift* 98).

Part of Vanyel's enduring appeal to queer teens has to be his instability. He seems always on the verge of a neurasthenic episode, always about to scream or faint or unleash some kind of destructive magical energy, even as he struggles day by day simply to live in a world that has deprived him of his most beloved object: Tylendel. In *Magic's Promise*, his melancholy has not yet abated, and he finds himself becoming emotionally involved with a teenage boy who reminds him uncannily of Tylendel. As this frightened teen, a replica of Vanyel at the same age, struggles to come to grips with his own magical abilities, Vanyel attempts to encourage him even as he finds himself slightly repelled by the pederastic possibilities of such a relationship: "It was Tylendel's face, dazed with shock and vacant-eyed, that looked up at him in confusion beneath the blue mage-light" (*Promise* 153). This moment of recognition comes after Vanyel's exasperated argument with his father about the very same subject of pederasty: "Dammit, Father, *I'm not like that!*...I'm a decent man—I *don't* molest little boys!" (100). In trying strenuously to steer the reader away from suggestions of pederasty, Lackey only succeeds in placing this

forbidden relation at the very forefront of the narrative. In order to relive psychically his own attraction to Tylendel, Vanyel must, however innocently, transform his teen protégé into an erotic object. Vanyel seems to end this novel even more confused, and no closer to reconciling himself with Tylendel's death.

It isn't until the final book in the series, *Magic's Price*—suggesting that the price he/we must pay for power, or subjectivity itself, is always dangerous—that Vanyel comes to the end of this cycle of erotic repetition when he meets Stefan, a young bard. Unlike Tylendel, who was always cautious in his affections, Stefan makes it a point to pursue his older mentor quite aggressively. Near the end of *Magic's Promise*, Vanyel finds himself wondering: “Am I *really* even shaych? Or am I something else?” (122). This presents the idea of *shaych* as a coherent sexual identity, a classification far more specific than *sodomite* which actually gestures towards the creation of a queer culture. It is Stefan, the next generation queer youth, who both concretizes and defines this term for Vanyel by explaining how they both inhabit it: “‘Vanyel Ashkevron,’ Stef said, hoarsely, ‘I am shaych, just like you. I’ve known what I am for years now. I’m not an infatuated child. What’s more...I’ve had more lovers in one year than you’ve had in the last ten’” (132). Stefan’s ability to identify as “shaych” stems specifically from his history of lovers, which might even make him “more shaych” than Vanyel by virtue of the fact that he’s had more sex. This is when Vanyel’s sexual and emotional conflicts finally seem to resolve themselves, and he is able to share a reciprocal relationship with Stefan. Immediately after they have sex for the first time, Vanyel has a vivid dream about Tylendel, who encourages him to pursue the relationship and to “let go.” He is only

really able to love Stefan after transforming his connection with Tyrendel from one of melancholia to one of proper mourning.

But the *Last Herald Mage* series also ends with multiple deaths, leading the reader to understand that Vanyel simply doesn't get to enjoy an easy life after this huge psychological victory. Near the end of *Magic's Price*, Vanyel is raped by a gang of criminals sent to pacify and humiliate him by an enemy-wizard (the mysterious "Master Dark," who takes on all the fantasmatic elements of Sauron)—this trauma ends not in any sort of catharsis, but rather in a magical bloodbath, as Vanyel hunts down the criminals and slaughters them. Is this, one might wonder, the "price" of which the novel's title speaks? That queer identity must always be violated, penetrated, raped in some way, like Vanyel's own tender organic "channels," always thrown open to violence? In the final moments of the novel, Vanyel sacrifices himself in order to save Valdemar from a ravaging mystical army, leaving Stefan behind, who waits his entire life to be spiritually reunited with his lost lover. Tellingly, however, it is not Tyrendel that Vanyel chooses to spend eternity with, but *Stefan*. The two wizards strike a deal, becoming shades (Derridean specters) in order to watch over a sacred magical grove, together. Neither living nor dead, they come to resemble the fantasmatic contours of the melancholic object, which is always being held in stasis by the ego. Yet, rather than turning to his original and frustrated beloved, Tyrendel, Vanyel chooses to remain in this spectral form with Stefan, his young and inexperienced protégé. This seems to suggest that, somewhere within the maze of his own melancholic relations, Vanyel has made a critical decision that allows him to live *through* his sadness, rather than continuing to return to the same uncanny object over and over again as he does in *Magic's Promise*.

I remember, at fifteen years old, hopelessly confused about my sexuality, reading *Magic's Pawn* for the first time and coming across this particular passage. Moondance K'Treva, a queer mystic who heals Vanyel's body as well as his mind, tries to explain something to him—a crucial fact that has taken Moondance himself years, and at least one suicide attempt, to learn:

There is in you a fear, a shame, placed there by your own doubts...I tell you to think on this: the *shay'a'chern* pairing occurs *in nature*. How then, “unnatural?”
Usual, no; and not desirable for the species...but not *unnatural*. (279)

Now, it seems like so much biological determinism—homosexuality occurs in nature, which makes your orientation natural. The same argument for tolerance often amounts to a genetic plea, a citation of DNA as the ultimate determinant of sexual life, indeed, of the sexual soul. But at the time, lost as I was, it seemed strangely reassuring. I remember the perplexity, and also the wonder, of realizing that I might not be alone. The same wonder that Moondance meets with wry amusement when he reveals his own battle scars to Vanyel:

Moondance turned Vanyel's wrist up, showing the scar across it—then turned over his own hand, and the firelight picked out the scar that ran from the gold-skinned hand halfway to the elbow, a scar that followed the course of the blue vein pulsing through the skin. “Who better?” he asked. “We have something in common.”
(269)

What this amounts to is a pedagogy of the body, a recounting of scars, of secrets, and a baring of the veins; a memorialization of the wounded queer body, the wounded heart (so violently broken into, always, despite its locks), so that, however impossibly, a past pain might be utilized to prevent a future one from developing. A mystic gate, like Vanyel's own magic, that can alter space and time if only for a moment, to create the possibility for reparation.

¹ This chapter will focus exclusively on literary and psychoanalytic discussions of queer suicide, since both queer homicide and the history of violent homophobia represent separate and well-documented research areas. For the most current discussion of homophobic violence in Canada, see Douglas Janoff's *Pink Blood* (2006).

² This seems ambivalent to me. Given the intense privacy of certain affects—not all, like shame, are so publicly legible—it seems erroneous to state that every completed suicide is done in search of an eventual witness. The only certain drive behind every act of suicide is something like the death-drive.

³ I include McCrae's work here not in order to launch my own qualitative study of queer readership—which is beyond the purview of this project—but because it is one of the only academic sources that mentions Lackey's writing.

⁴ In this sense it is very similar to Devon, the New-England boarding school in John Knowles' classic *A Separate Peace*, where two very different male students—Gene and Phineas—forge their own queer relationship in opposition to the oppressive backdrop of WWII.

⁵ Although this term refers specifically to the sexual act(s) of sodomy, the reader is never quite certain just how physical the relationship between Vanyel and Tylenel is. They clearly engage in sexual relations of some kind, but whether this includes anal/oral sex, or simply vigorous sessions of adolescent *frottage*, is left up to the reader to decide. Vanyel tells his father that “[you] heard I was playing ewe [to] Tylenel's ram” (252), which seems to suggest a more obvious top/bottom sexual relationship, but this is simply what Withen *hears*—not necessarily what transpires. In this sense, Lackey leaves the particulars of their sexual relationship to the imagination of her readers.

⁶ This is Tylenel's affectionate nickname throughout the novel.

⁷ I will return to Vesalius' *Fabrica* in Chapter Four, in order to discuss the similarities between the Renaissance anatomist and the wizard of the fantasy genre.

⁸ A number of saints have also been reported to possess secret compartments, like Vanyel's "channels," within their own viscera, which usually conceal holy relics that can only be extracted through autopsy. For a detailed discussion of saints' anatomies, see Katharine Park's *The Secrets of Women* (2006).

⁹ As I have already discussed in the introduction, the Tower of Babel as the prototypical "tall tower" also figures as a site where language and monstrosity meet.

¹⁰ The archetypal Greek suicide narrative comes from Pausanias' work *Attica*, which describes the double suicide of Meles and Timagoras: "[An] altar within the city [of Athens], called the altar of Anteros (Love Avenged), they say, was dedicated by resident aliens, because the Athenian Meles, spurning the love of Timagoras, a resident alien, bade him ascend to the highest point of the rock and cast himself down. Now Timagoras took no account of his life, and was ready to gratify the youth in any of his requests, so he went and cast himself down. When Meles saw that Timagoras was dead, he suffered such pangs of remorse that he threw himself from the same rock and so died." (Pausanias, *Attica* 1.30.1).

¹¹ Elizabeth Butler, in *Ritual Magic*, includes an extant Greek incantation, from the *Graeco-Roman Papyri*, that would have been the historical corollary of Servilia's curse: "Go to N.N. and deprive her of sleep, and let her burn, let her senses be chastised, let her be rendered wild with passion and drive her out from every place and every house, and bring her here to me" (Preisendanz, *Papyri Vol I*, p. 148f; qtd. in Butler, 14).

¹² Tomkins argues that "In his [Freud's] conception of motivation he attributed the urgency, innateness, and time insistence of the drives to the Id, and at the same time he invested the Id with some but not all of the freer, more flexible attributes of the affect system. The Id was therefore at once an imperious, demanding, not to be put off investor of energy, and yet at the same time an investor who was capable of liquidating an investment, of seeking remote markets for investment when the immediate market was unfavorable, of even delaying an investment until a more profitable opportunity arose, and of becoming a silent partner in any psychic enterprise" (see Sedgwick in Frank 49). Therefore, Freud's sex-drive becomes both an affect *and* a drive, directly in opposition to Tomkins' own definition of the drives as "feedback systems" with very little room for adaptation or transformation (unlike the interpretive enormity of the sex "drive").

Chapter Three

Chapter Three

Queer Break-Ins:

Sexuality and Apprenticeship in the Novels of Chaz Brenchley and Lynn Flewelling.

“They go in silence. Their first attack is the most terrible...they sing in chorus the *Psalm of David*, ‘Not unto us, O Lord,’ kneeling on the blood and necks of the enemy, unless they have forced the troops of the enemy to retire altogether, or utterly broken them to pieces.”

- Pilgrim’s account of the Templars; anon (Barber 179).

“We are all epistemological orphans.”

- Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (2).

This chapter will deal with two models of apprenticeship that occur often within fantasy literature: the contract of service between knight and squire, and the relationship of ‘scurrilous’ pedagogy between master-thief and protégé. Both of these professions share a common language, and I intend to connect their various speech-acts to the linguistic performance of wizardry; I also want to explore how relationships of service are structured around a particular *lack*. By lack, I am referring to both the mourned-for/unmournable object that is central to psychoanalysis, as well as Lacan’s understanding of life *as* lack (literally the “lack of lack”) as discussed in the introduction and Chapter One. We will examine in what way the knight is “lacking” the squire, and vice versa—what gap their partnership fills, and how both might be in mourning for each other in some way; that is, how the entire dynamic of service can gesture towards a type of shared melancholia. I will be looking specifically at the *Outremer* novels of Chaz

Brenchley, which illustrate a sexual vassal/retainer relationship between Sieur Anton d'Escreivey and his squire, Marron; I then want to juxtapose this pairing against the relationship between Seregil, the master-thief, and his pupil Alec, in Lynn Flewelling's *Night Runner* novels. As I will argue throughout this discussion, not only are discourses of thievery and knighthood intimately connected with each other, they also, in part, define each other as erotic binaries, always resisting yet equally constituting one another as modes of social service. Just as being a knight means, quite patently, *not being* a thief (and vice versa), the veiled presence of queer sexuality within both of these complex relationships emerges as a force both vitiating and paradoxically cohesive, the expelled particular (like the uncanny, and/or the queer) within the universal that, occasionally and outrageously, issues the very claim to universality that it shouldn't be able to make—the bubbling of Thieves' Cant in a crowded tavern, or the intimate whisper between a knight and his squire, that small queer movement that pushes everything into crisis.

I want to highlight here the essential queerness upon which the professions of knighthood and thievery are founded, as well as their uncanny connections to each other as repudiative concepts¹—sites that allegedly exist by rejecting each other. I have chosen to include primarily medieval and early modern sources pertaining to both knighthood and thievery because I think that these sources provide a useful historical context for Brenchley and Flewelling as fantasy novelists, both of whom are familiar with historical materials on knighthood and roguery. This in no way suggests that I am trying to make an especially concrete historical connection here between rogues and knights, especially given the significant time gap between early modern rogue pamphlet literature and late-medieval knight manuals. I recognize that the intervening century or so between these

materials signals all kinds of important political upheavals in England and abroad, and I don't want to uncritically enact a comparison between two very different—yet similarly rare and marginalized—genres of “conduct.” I am far more interested in gesturing towards the types of historical literature that writers like Brenchley and Flewelling are no doubt adapting from, and thereby asking whether or not the queerness that *they*, as novelists, impute to their own knights and thieves (in the *Outremer* and *Shadows* books, respectively) might not have already been *present* within much earlier accounts of knightly and roguish behavior. Due to the constraints of this study, I cannot give each of these particular sources the attention that they critically deserve—although great work has already been done on them by medieval and early modern historians—and so I present them as a kind of suggestive reading list, or as guideposts in order to enrich and inform my reading of fantastic texts. As I will argue below, the master “fills” a lack in the squire, just as the squire recuperates or modifies something—queerly—within his *Sieur*. The master thief/protégé relationship is the socially repudiated flip-side of the knightly partnership, but it mirrors that relation as well as transgressing and parodying it.

By reading historical pamphlets and conduct manuals alongside these fantasy novels, I want to create a broad critical space within which to address the various types of queerness that Brenchley and Flewelling are playing upon within their own writing. Texts like Thomas Dekker's *The Belman of London* give the reader a rogue's eye view of London's notorious Alsatia and Limeside districts, just as Seregil, in *Luck in the Shadows*, gives the reader a similar “insider's” perspective of the fantastic city of Rhiminee—which, like Fritz Leiber's city of Lankhmar, bears an uncanny resemblance to early modern London. Similarly, the precepts of the historical Knights-Templar, which

have generated a significant amount of criticism among medieval scholars, also mirror Brenchley's "Order" within the *Outremer* novels, just as Brenchley himself attempts to mirror/queer the historical sources related to the Knights-Templar that he has access to. My goal in reading these texts alongside each other is not to enact a strict historiographic comparison, but rather to look at how fantastic texts can modify and queer the historical traditions that they adapt, while at the same time exposing the attendant queerness already present within those sources.

Both the *Outremer* and *Nightrunner* series share similar plots—Flewelling's thieves must defeat a power-hungry sorcerer, and Brenchley's knight and squire must protect the mystical equivalent of a biological weapon, called the "King's Daughter." The Daughter is the miraculous progeny of the King, who intends it to join symbiotically with its wielder, miming the organic connection between monarch and state.² The real thrust of both narratives, however, occurs within the creative parameters of these pedagogical relationships, knight/squire and thief/protégé, both of which move past the homosocial and into the terrain of queer desire. As I intend to argue, it is, in fact, the sexual and sensual charge of these partnerships that makes their pedagogy succeed, and the shared desire of these characters that allows them to devise such a powerful circuit of reciprocal knowledge. I want to explore how these knowledge practices might attempt to subvert what I have previously described as the melancholic aspects of magic, or whether they are themselves actually inscribed *within* a deeper melancholia of learning, knowing, and forced separation from bodily security.

The Queer Affiliations and Disciplinary Relations of Knights and Thieves

As mirror models of each other—uncanny repetitions—knighthood and thievery required oppositional (and competitive) “how-to” guides. Their doublings and recursions are manifestly textual, producing mirror-image guidebooks that simply recapitulate each other in uncanny forms. Chivalry manuals, such as Ramon Llull’s *The Book of Knighthood and Chivalry* [1310], or Geoffroi de Charny’s *Livre de chevalerie* [1352], taught young readers how they might become a knight (by watching other knights). On the contrary, rogue manuals—that is, the wealth of pamphlets and other chapbooks that circulated during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and especially the works of John Awdley, Robert Greene, and Thomas Dekker—instructed how not to become a thief (or how not to be swindled by one, a protection also achieved through vigilant watching). Both literatures evidence a curiously analogical relationship between the terms “knight” and “thief,” a metonymic slippage that seems to belie the fact that both social orders are supposed to be mutual antagonists. Although this may not be a crucial historical point—many professions probably share similar repudiative characteristics, such as priests and lawyers, for instance—it is significant in terms of analyzing how knights and thieves are important to the fantasy canon. If both professions are perverse mirror images of each other, simultaneously becoming heroes and anti-heroes within contemporary fantasy novels, then their queer historical roots allow us to see how both “titles” represent heroic contrarities within fantasy writing, polarized opposites that are necessary for the fantasy narrative itself to function. Just as the evil necromancer needs a white wizard, the disciplined knight needs a rakish thief in order to cohere as a military and governmental category within the fantasy world.

Ramon Llull reminds us that “the office of the knight is also to search for thieves” (38), and Geoffroi de Charny seems particularly concerned with gambling or carousing of any sort in his *Livre de chevalerie*: “one should leave playing dice for money to rakes, bards, and tavern rogues” (113; 19, L95-96). Conversely, Robert Greene’s *Cony-Catching Pamphlets* [1591] mention titles such as “apple-squire” and “rogue-knight” used in Thieves’ Cant (or “Pedlar’s French”³) to describe bawds and pimps, along with “Orders of Knaves” that satirize the knightly system of peerage. Pedlar’s French becomes a magical language-form for rogues, allowing them to enspell different radical possibilities for themselves while avoiding institutional scrutiny. Thomas Dekker’s *The Bellman of London* [1608] presents a contract between the apprentice-thief and the “Upright Man,” the guild-leader, that looks like a chivalric agreement.⁴ In fact, the figure of the Upright Man in Awdeley’s *Fraternity of Vagabonds* [1561] seems remarkably like an esquire, with his powers of search and seizure, his demands of unquestioning fealty, and his brutal courtship of young female prostitutes, or “doxies.”⁵ Both literatures seemed unduly concerned with each other, even going so far as to mimic each other (while denying that any such thing was happening, much like Robert Burton continually denies his belief in witchcraft in the *Anatomy*). Since there is already a critical tradition pertaining to alternative and subversive languages, such as Polari, Lingua Franca, and “Pedlar’s French,” I don’t have the space within this chapter to address that work in the detail that it deserves. However, I do try to gesture to it as much as possible, and I outline other, more comprehensive sources. My primary argument around wizardry and language focuses on psychoanalytic, rather than specifically *linguistic* sources, although I

recognize that linguists such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Ferdinand de Saussure could provide an important critical context for this work.

Knights and thieves, therefore, are structural antagonists, yet need each other to signify. They should have nothing in common, save for mutual distrust; yet, they speak similar languages, engage in similar clandestine rituals, and adhere to similar ethics of labor: for, despite their reputed idleness, Elizabethan rogues were anything but lazy. Their complex coordinations, fraternities, safe-houses and sign-systems, trading networks, and evasive maneuvers kept them perpetually busy. And itinerant rogues—the homeless, the jobless, the penniless, and the disabled—represented *en masse* the impoverished population that knights, especially the Order of Templars, were supposed to aid through daily acts of charity. In fact, wandering rogues bore a close resemblance to the itinerant wizards of early modern England, who moved from town to town earning scant coin in exchange for performing poor wonders. Kevin Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, even states that “at the turn of the sixteenth century, well-informed contemporaries...thought the wizards roughly comparable in numbers to the parochial clergy” (245). Like rogues, wizards were everywhere.

The fantasy that produces and sustains knighthood is similar to Freud’s inaugural erotic fantasy, “A Child Is Being Beaten,” which prefigures the Oedipus Complex. It is upon the ruined foundations of this original, incestual fantasy, Freud claims, that Oedipal relations are first constructed, interweaving with the curious psychic flotsam of the fantasy that came before. In this primal scene, the child-voyeur imagines a mysterious figure who is beating another child (“a child whom I hate”). This beating somehow concretizes the father’s love for the child who is watching, since “my father does not love

this other child, he loves only me ("A Child" 181). But as the scene slowly resolves itself, the child (who is taking a sadistic pleasure in watching the beating), comes to realize that *she*, in fact, is the one being beaten: "My father is beating me (I am being beaten by my father). This being-beaten is now a meeting place between the sense of guilt and sexual pleasure. It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for it" (184). The beating occurs as a punishment for incest, and sadism mixes with ordinary masochism—*a child is being beaten/I am being beaten*—to reveal that masochism as an erotic response actually prefigures sadism within childhood development—the punishment becomes the pleasure, and vice versa.⁶

Freud maintains that this interstitial moment of realization—my father is beating me, and I love it—"is never remembered, [and] has never succeeded in becoming conscious" (180). It remains a cryptic spell-component, a cipher or secret word that could produce a magical relation within our own understanding of sexuality, if only we could uncover the proper formula. And if we come to sexuality, to gender even, through the complex operations of a fantasy—what Freud tries to construct as an *origin* to fantasy, an incorruptible beginning to which there can be no supplement—we also come to the institution of knighthood and medieval warfare through the same fantasy. Richard Zeikowitz, in *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, plays on Freud's beating fantasy by creating a scenario which he calls "A Knight Is Being Beaten":

Phase 1: knight A is beating knight B [whom the reader hates]

Phase 2: the reader fantasizes being beaten by knight A

Phase 3: knights A and B are beating each other, which the reader is observing
(79).

The point here is that, according to Zeikowitz, “there is nothing as pleasurable as being beaten in a good fight. The [medieval] text again reveals the homoerotic foundation upon which each fight scenario is played out” (81). Knights, who regularly accuse rogues of engaging in base tavern-brawls and pointless fights, partake in the same pleasures, the *jouissance* of the “good fight,” even if their battles are seemingly contained by pageantry and ritual. Every fight has its climax, whether it takes place over some cut purse-strings or a stolen kingdom.

Knights and rogues—acting as medieval categories for containing differing types of social relations, possibly queer ones—cannot escape each other, just as fantasy writers cannot seem to escape them as literary tropes. But what happens, as in the case of Chaz Brenchley’s and Lynn Flewelling’s work, when the covert queerness that motivates both of these social categories is suddenly made visible? What happens when the knight’s kiss to his “brother” is no longer chaste, or the “queer birds”⁷ of which rogues speak in *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* are actually queer? My discussion will approach these questions, while also foregrounding the elements of magic and the supernatural that inhere within both historical and literary accounts of thievery and knighthood. Throughout this project, I intend to explore how magic, and specifically what I want to call *magical melancholia* (as the deployment of desiring lack within heroic narratives), is a force that links knights, thieves, and wizards together, forming a queer affiliation of sorts between them.

The *Outremer* saga revolves around Marron, a hapless squire who meets the older knight, Sieur Anton D’Escrivey, through a violent coincidence—Anton wounds him

during a practice fight. This wound continues to fester throughout the series, representing a kind of organic lack that cannot be healed, as well as a permeable space, perhaps even a genital space. Anton makes Marron his squire for a variety of reasons, guilt being certainly one of them, but also due to what I want to describe as an acute sense of lack. Marron's physical wound, described as a "mark" given to him by Anton, also comes to signify Anton's own psychic sense of loss. There is something about Marron, something within him, that Anton recognizes as a prohibited or obscured part of himself, and Marron draws the same conclusion about Sieur Anton; in the same sense that the ego attempts to incorporate a beloved object within itself during melancholia, the sieur attempts to incorporate the squire, the master-rogue attempts to incorporate the protégé, in order to produce what Kristeva, in *Black Sun*, calls a "cannibalistic" relation (12).

When Anton becomes embroiled in the war over Surayon, a hidden kingdom with distinct Middle-Eastern connotations—*Outremer* is, after all, an uncanny retelling of the Crusades—Marron finds himself caught up in a political struggle involving wizards, princesses, *djinni*, and a mystical-biological weapon called "the Daughter." Marron and Anton are eventually separated, only to reunite (on opposite sides of the war) in the final novel, *Hand of the King's Evil*, wherein Marron must choose not only between two warring nations, but between two male lovers—Anton, his old master, and Jemel, a young native of Surayon. Lynn Flewelling's *Nightrunner* novels are less epic in scope, but revolve around a similar relationship of erotic service. A young trader, Alec, is liberated from a dungeon by a master-thief named Seregil. As the two grow closer, Seregil adopts Alec as his protégé, even as his physical attraction towards the younger boy makes him uneasy. While Anton schools Marron in the ornate rituals of knighthood

and squireship, Seregil schools Alec in the complexities of rogue culture, including a secret form of sign-language. The most uncanny experience within the *Nightrunner* novels occurs, I think, when Seregil orchestrates an elaborate test for Alec—a test that, should he complete it successfully, will guarantee him the title of rogue. This job actually forces Alec—unknowingly—to break into his own home, the home he now shares with Seregil, whose interior has been cleverly disguised. In this moment, Alec literally becomes *unheimlich*; he violates his own, misrecognized house.

Both series begin with a scene of interrogation. In Flewelling's *Luck in the Shadows*, Alec lands himself in a dungeon, and has to rely on Seregil (posing as someone else) to escape.⁸ Although we don't hear the precise questions that Alec's interrogators are asking, we do see him emerge with "dark bruises and welts [that] showed against his fair skin" (Flewelling, *Shadows* 5). Marron's interrogation in Brenchley's *Tower of the King's Daughter* is more metaphysical: he is subjected to the gaze of the "King's Eye," a magical scrying device that appears as a globe of white-hot flame (which prefigures the mystical device known as the "Daughter," also a glowing red orb, that Marron will eventually learn to control—both energies seem to be two halves of the same arcane force). Fra' Tumis, one of the clerics of the Order to which Marron belongs, describes the Eye as "the God's benediction upon the King, that he may watch over all this land"; Marron himself sees it as "hard light...like white-hot rods of glass, so rigid and so still" (Brenchley, *Tower* 8).⁹ Later, Rudel—a character who turns out to be a covert wizard—admits to Marron: "I've known men twice your age who pissed themselves when I conjured a little light, and then refused to admit it after. Refused to admit either part of it, the light or the piss" (295). Light as a trope within these novels, be it the truth-seeking

light of the King's Eye, or the penetrative and annihilating light of the Daughter, is always interrogative, never gentle.

I mention the act of interrogation for two reasons: because the pain of interrogative disclosure comes to mark all of these characters' lives, and because knights and thieves seem to represent opposite sides of a disciplinary relation. Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality I*, identifies the rise of confession in Europe—contiguous with the decline of magic and witchcraft—as the historical turn during which sexuality became linked to a ruthless economy of self-disclosure. Knights were quite involved in the beginnings of this panoptic turn: those with enough social clout often served as an executive branch of the medieval courts, even going so far as to investigate tough cases for the local coroner. Peter Coss notes that hereditary knights, or those with suitable standing in the community, “were often called upon in the criminal sphere...their testimony might be sought, or offenders might be committed to their custody. They could be sent to inspect the scene of a crime or examine the wounds of a victim of assault” (Coss 33). In twelfth-century England, a plaintiff could forego trial on the battleground and choose instead to submit to the *grand assize*: a jury of twelve knights. As the military field gave way to the courtroom, knights took on an increasingly complex role in late medieval society, becoming investigators, jurors, contractors, bondsmen, and symbols of *judicial* rather than martial power. By the time that Awdeley's *Fraternity of Vagabonds* was published in 1561, the knightly over-class was already being commuted into the early-modern gentry, or “esquires”, who would retain a military reputation that—although not strictly ornamental—did not force them to attend too many pitched battles. Rogues, as the target of knightly justice (and the satirists of late chivalry), served an

important if under-analyzed role in the production of this new middle class: the English gentry. Quite possibly, the esquires that emerged from the disarticulated knightly class were chimeras—a queer admixture of both knights and thieves, drawing liberally from both groups in their march towards early capitalism.

When Seregil rescues Alec from imprisonment, he also begins the boy's apprenticeship in the craft of thievery. Although the master-thief disdains the title of rogue, stressing to Alec that "I specialize in the acquisition of goods and information" (35), his frequent forays to taverns and brothels in the city of Rhíminee bring him into close contact with the marginalized communities of Flewelling's world. Witty, cunning, devilishly handsome, with long dark hair and bedroom eyes, Seregil takes his place among a long line of debonair rogues within the fantasy tradition. Fritz Leiber's "Gray Mouser" was one of the first of these shady bachelors, skulking through the fog-choked streets of Lankhmar with his warrior companion, Fafhrd. Formerly "Mouse," a wizard's apprentice, the Gray Mouser donned the cloak of master-thief when his teacher was killed by a tyrannical duke. So-named because his gray vestments made him resemble a mouse in the night, the Mouser (along with Fafhrd) found his way into, and out of, dubious neighborhoods, secret guilds, impregnable treasuries, un-stormable castles, and a plentitude of women's bedrooms; his adventures, as well as his complex and homosocial relationship with Fafhrd, form the substance of Leiber's *Lankhmar* stories, now anthologized in four books. The Mouser is intimately connected with the architecture of Lankhmar itself, a city-walker and *flâneur* whose body is a coiled extension of the streets, back-alleys, lacunae, and dark recesses of the metropolis, stinking of smoke and ordure.

Other charismatic thieves within the sword-and-sorcery tradition, such as Jimmy the Hand (in Raymond E. Feist's *Midkemia* novels), or Silk, the unattractive but velvety-smooth rogue in David Eddings' *Belgariad* series, play with the boundaries of gender through tricks of invisibility, sleight-of-hand, and even cross-dressing, but always remain ardently heterosexual. Seregil, as a "queer bird," presents readers with a unique social model of thievery that requires further contextualization. He takes his place among a rowdy group of morts, doxies, rufflers, gamblers, bawds, and pimps—but, at times, and despite his wealthy holdings, he seems to inhabit no place at all. He tells Alec at one point that "I can't think of anything that means less to me than money" (67), and yet capital—as a mystical relation—is at the center of his life.¹⁰ Despite the relative comfort in which Seregil lives with Alec, he remains *unheimlich*, un-homely, possessed of a variety of exchangeable sites but not a home.

Unlike the itinerant vagabonds of Robert Asprin's popular *Thieves' World* series, who spend most of their time gambling and carousing at the Vulgar Unicorn¹¹, Seregil hails from an aristocratic family and owns substantial property in the city of Rhíminee—thievery, for him, is like Foucault's concept of sexuality as a "style," a complex series of chosen intimacies and gestures rather than a de facto social or biological class. In offering Alec a thief's apprenticeship, he is also offering a set of multiple relations to transgression and discipline, a particular way of looking at the early capitalist system that has begun to grip Flewelling's world, and a mode for living that also allows room for the presence of queer sexuality. After their escape, Seregil informs him teasingly that "under those bruises and that scowl, you're fairly pleasing to look at"; Alec, however, misses the almost predatory look that Seregil gives him, and readers are told that "[Seregil's]

expression betrayed nothing more than the thoughtful concentration a man might show when sizing up a horse he was about to buy” (Flewelling, *Shadows* 20).

Horses are, in fact, an appropriate metaphor, since apprenticed squires are so often equated with livestock in chivalry manuals and the accounts of chroniclers. *The Rule of the Templars* [1187], a conduct manual for the Order, frequently conflates squires themselves with the destriers (war-horses) that they tended: their clothes were often kept near the stables rather than in the regular vestry, and it is noted that the Under-Marshall “may take squires from the caravan and give them to brothers who he sees are in need of them, and place caravan squires in the horse caravan” (Upton-Ward 62; 176). There is a curious principle of substitution and exchangeability that applies to apprentices and squires, since their role within the emerging capitalist economies of these medieval worlds seems to resemble that of a proletarian underclass. This also relates to Rosi Braidotti’s claim, at the beginning of this chapter, that all squires are “epistemological orphans.” Braidotti is referring to the children of modernity, but this idea can be equally applied to squires and protégés within medieval discourse, who always seem to lack family connections—which is precisely why they must be adopted by masters. Both Alec and Marron are orphans in a variety of crucial ways, orphans within an epic narrative that requires them to be part of a family-system in order for them to signify properly within the social world; an epic narrative constantly in mourning for itself, since it cannot acknowledge or reconcile its own repudiated queerness.

Language, Silence, and Shared Relations of Service

Seregil's first seduction attempt towards Alec is not physical, but rather verbal. He relates his own exploits and adventures to the younger man, as any rogue would, but under Seregil's rhetorical skill the words take on an aura of sexual invitation. I was struck, actually, by the similarity between Seregil's speech and that of Illyria, the demonic character on Joss Whedon's *Angel* who replaces 'Fred. Illyria tells Wesley that "I walked worlds of smoke and half-truths...opaline towers as high as small moons. Glaciers that rippled with insensate lust" (5.18). Seregil tells Alec that

I've seen [dragons] flying under a full moon in winter. I've danced at the great Festival of Sakor and tasted the wines of Zengat, and heard mermaids singing in the mists of dawn. I've walked the halls of a palace built in time beyond memory and felt the touch of the first inhabitants against my skin. (Flewelling, *Shadows* 37)

Seregil is casting a spell over Alec here, a spell of sexuality; he thereby wins Alec over, not through the promise of sex, or even fame, but through the compelling account of his own emotional life. This is the erotic edge of every spell, the sexual contours that most highly-ordered thaumaturgy attempts to disavow—not just the quest for a lacking object, but the casting of a net, the ensnaring or enspelling of a love-object. Alec *sees* the "Festival of Sakor," he *tastes* the "wines of Zengat," and he wants to share in Seregil's own private sensorium.¹² Like Seregil, he wants to feel "the touch of the first inhabitants against my skin," just as, unknowingly yet, he wants to feel Seregil's touch.

Seregil also frequents the “Street of Lights”, Rhíminee’s district of carnal pleasures (similar to Delany’s “Bridge of Lost Desires”), and is unapologetic about his same-sex affairs. “Your Dalnan priests frown on such couplings,” he tells Alec, “claiming they’re unproductive...[but] that depends on what one intends to produce” (256). He is, in a sense here, referring to the spell of capital—the production *ex nihilo* of something from nothing, of the magic of labor power—but also to the anti-productive power of queer relationships; the paradox of the erotic relation that “produces” something unsignable. Although he doesn’t even share a kiss with his wide-eyed apprentice until the end of *Luck in the Shadows*, his courtship of Alec (and Alec’s slow but steady responses to his erotic life) forms much of the book’s narrative. Near the beginning of *Luck in the Shadows*, for instance, after narrowly avoiding capture and escaping through a sewer, Alec, Seregil, and Seregil’s old friend Micum—who happens to be Seregil’s first love, which makes the scene resemble a modern collision of warring boyfriends—are forced to doff their wet clothes and dry off by a hastily improvised fire. Alec, ever curious, is unable to stop himself from cruising both Micum and Seregil’s naked bodies, but neither man seems to mind. It is Micum, in fact, the straight warrior, who seems most flattered by Alec’s uncertain gaze:

Micum’s [scars] were by far the more numerous and serious. The worst was a pale rope of tissue that began just beneath his right shoulder blade. It curved down around his back to end just short of his navel. Noticing the boy’s interest, he turned toward the light and ran a thumb proudly down the edge of the welt.
(*Shadows* 78)

Just as Brenchley's character Marron will come to bear the sexual and metaphysical scars of the "Daughter," Alec finds himself intrigued, even envious, of the scars "proudly" exhibited by Micum. Not just exhibited, but fondled, caressed, as Micum "[runs] a thumb proudly down the edge of the welt." This desire for the scar comes to signify a melancholic need for something that can never satisfy, a longing relation to hole-ness and incorporeality, liminality, that will return with a vengeance after Seregil is significantly wounded and Alec has to nurse him back to health later in the novel. Alec wants not only the ragged signature of Micum's scar, but also the memory of trauma, the bonding sigil that would join him to the same company that he sees these two men belonging to—a company that is in itself queer, since Seregil is not precisely a thief, and Micum is not a titled knight, but both adapt and manipulate these roles in order to find the living space inside of them. These scars are not simply phallic in the empowering and patristic sense, but also patently erotic, since the dimpled surface and silky-rough texture of the tissue recalls the feel of genital flesh.

Anton's courtship of Marron is also a slow burn, occurring as it does beneath the homosocial curtain of knighthood. His first act upon meeting Marron is to injure him, most likely as a violent reaction to the boy's own willfulness (he refuses to submit to the knight during a practice exercise), and it is no coincidence that the resulting wound becomes a perpetual mark. Marron calls it "a brand of ownership that he could mar but not mend....[A] fat and ragged mouth of red-wet flesh, half grown-over before it was torn again and yet again" (Brenchley, *Tower* 244). *Mar* is even a part of his own name—*Marron*—which, like *Nevèryon*, is a graphical site for difference, a catachresis. Marron

is perpetually marred, just as Ennis del *Mar*, the tortured cowboy in Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*, comes to embody the destiny of his own name. The wound is also, as I have already described, the physical "return of the repressed," the uncanny signification of Anton's own sense of lack, which he inscribes upon Marron. It is this tearing, "again and yet again," a constant splitting and suturing, that creates a biological site for the Daughter's unstable power—it feeds on his blood, on the very openness of his body, regardless of Marron's own wish to be "like a locked tower." Magic, in this sense, throws all the locks open, rendering the male body as violable, uncertain, replete with bloody chambers and vermilion exit strategies, riddles of bone, lymph, and viscera through which the transforming power of the uncanny might escape.

The Order to which Marron belongs is modeled after the Templars, and shares many of their precepts. Founded roughly in 1119 by Hugh of Payns, and ratified by the 1129 Council of Troyes, the Order of Templars grew exponentially—from a band of ragged knights whose clothing was donated by papal goodwill, to an international medieval corporation extending across the Mediterranean (Barberpg ref?). At its height during the early fourteenth century, according to Malcolm Barber, the Order "may have had as many as 7000 knights, sergeants, and serving brothers...by about 1300 it had built a network of at least 870 castles, preceptories, and subsidiary houses, [extending] from London to Cyprus" (Barber 1). Designed after the existing Knights Hospitallers, who ran infirmaries and charitable houses throughout the crusader states, the Templars' original purpose was to conduct pilgrims safely through war-torn "Outremer": the Old-French term for Palestine and its surrounding environs, the "land beyond the sea." King Baldwin II, who was living at the time in the al-Aqsa mosque in

Jerusalem (thought to be the original site of the Temple of Solomon; also the inspiration for the *Key of Solomon*, an early-modern magical text), “gave them [the Order] a base in his palace, to the south side of the Temple of the Lord, which was the name given by the Franks to the Dome of the Rock” (7). Building upon the national palimpsest of the fragmented Turkish state, the Templars employed a far-reaching system of papal-sanctioned propaganda in order to swell their ranks; by 1300, they were turning away applicants, and coming down especially hard on anyone thought to be embroiled in simony or bribe-taking. Simony is, in fact, the number-one offense punishable by expulsion from the Order. Murder is number three, and sodomy is number seven (Upton-Wardpage ref?).

Like the Templars, Marron’s “Order” is based upon a lengthy set of precepts—widely available to the literate brothers, but absolutely secret to the world outside the refectory. Like the strict protocols of wizardry, the alchemical formulae and hermetic riddles that structure magic, the Order thrives upon its own perverse rules. As a hired knight with a hereditary title, Anton is a part of that world, but he is simultaneously an outsider—mistrusted by the clerics, feared by the brothers, and preceded by his sodomitical (and murderous) reputation. As one sly trader tells Marron, “That’ll be why your friends are so unfriendly; Sieur Anton’s squire must be Sieur Anton’s boy” (97). This early in their partnership, Marron still has no idea what it might mean to be Anton’s “boy,” let alone his squire.

But, ultimately, it is Marron himself who decides upon the particulars of this sexual contract, just as it is Marron who invites, and allows, intimacy from Anton. Even after discovering that Anton killed his younger brother (who caught Anton with another

boy), Marron still submits to his apprenticeship, because something about Anton fits his own scars, the locked chambers within his uncertain boy's body. Like so many gay teenagers who experience their first sexual encounter with an older man—in an era when such relationships are regarded as predatory rather than pedagogical—Marron takes something from Anton, even as Anton claims the reciprocal desire that their contract implies without ever stating. This resembles Kristeva's process of cannibalistic incorporation, which she describes in *Black Sun*: "Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested...than lost. The melancholy cannibalistic imagination is a repudiation of the loss's reality and of death as well" (12). Both Anton and Marron attempt to incorporate each other within their own private field of melancholy, not realizing until much later that their shared relation of service is primarily what creates melancholia as a private universe.

Not unlike a rogue, Marron remains under constant watch, since his Order functions as a medieval panopticon. He is told where to go, what to do, and with whom he should do it, until his days and nights become a blur of paternosters and penitent silences. Like the Templars, the Order functions primarily through an ethics of visual containment, teaching the brothers how to police themselves no matter how far they stray from the clerics. Standing beneath the mystical King's Eye, which is yet another technology of surveillance, Marron "thought he was coming into the presence of something that could outweigh the purpose of the God Himself, unless perhaps it was the absence of the God that filled this hall, or left it so very empty" (37). Daily, he is forced to hide the horror that he feels for his past deeds, including the razing of a village done in the name of the Order. For Marron, this bloodshed reaches an inescapable climax when

he kills an infant with his bare hands: he remembers “gripping its ankles and spinning with the frenzy like a mad priest on the temple steps...crazed even to his own ears as he dashed the babe against the stones of the wall there, as he saw its skull split and heard its sudden silence” (14). This “sudden silence,” the uncertainty of his conviction, along with the deafening non-sound of a human life unraveling, is what the ecclesiastical routine is supposed to cover over. The anamnesis of the killing moment, never quite remembered, always adjacent to perception, when the catastrophe of his own blood mixed with the infant’s only serves to prefigure the Daughter’s awful power.

The killing of an infant is the ultimate anti-productive gesture, the ultimate defiance against the capitalist structuration of life; it is also a mad version of the ancient dance of St. Vitus, the frenzied performance that can only end with the dancer’s own death. Silence becomes Marron’s coping mechanism, a form of melancholia—with the object of his sadness eventually gaining corporeal form through the Daughter’s magic—and he tells no one of this until much later in the series. Silence is also the *pharmakon* to magic, in the sense that it is magic’s opposite while at the same time helping to constitute the mystical relation: there must be silences between the words, but there must also be words between the silences, in order for the spell to succeed. The Order (both the actual Templars, and their uncanny double within Brenchley’s *Outremer*) enshrines a productive type of silence: brothers are exhorted not to shout or swear, and never to boast (especially of past sexual exploits) but it is truly the murmur, the whisper, the barely heard and dimly seen gesture, so uncanny, that the *Rule* fears the most.

The whisper is always transgressive amid the Order’s silent precincts, and therefore it should not be surprising that a whole constellation of rules around voice, tone,

and the appropriateness of the whisper have been set down in the *Rule*. The suppertime period of prayer, compline, has its own particular demands for speech and silence: knights are told that “when compline has been sung...if he [the brother] wishes to say anything to his squire, he should say it quietly and calmly, and then may go to sleep. And when he is lying down he should say one paternoster” (Upton-Ward 87; 305). Similarly, after vespers, each brother “should go to his bed quietly and in silence, and if he needs to speak to his squire, he should say what he has to say softly and quietly” (27; 31). These moments of quiet intimacy—the tease of a whisper, the proximity of lips, the press of two faces together, perhaps even the drag of stubble and reek of warm breath—suggest a space of creative lust between knight and squire: the gap between speaking “quietly and calmly,” and then “going to sleep,” seems a tantalizingly small one, as if both parties are already sharing the same bed. How, after all, can a knight speak “softly and quietly,” whilst in bed, if his squire is not already within whispering distance? And what loud desires might these “calm” words possibly prefigure?

Under Seregil’s tutelage, Alec is also learning the value of silence, although his silence is a kind of Derridean “supplement” to the gestural communication of rogues. After teaching him a few coin tricks, he graduates to sign-language:

Without lifting his arm from where it rested across his knee, Seregil moved the fingers quickly in a smooth ripple, as if drumming briefly on an invisible tabletop. “I just told you to have the horses ready. And this—“ He raised his right index finger as if to scratch under his chin... ”This means we’re in danger from behind.” (Flewelling, *Shadows* 28)

Seregil's encouragement to Alec as he learns the rogue's sign language—"No, that's too much. You might as well shout! Yes, that's better. Now the horse sign. Good!" (pg ref?)—sounds like pillow talk: a sexual neophyte being gently trained in the craft of roguish foreplay by a more experienced Molly. It is also a spell-language, a verbal strategy that allows rogues to communicate beyond institutional constraint.

The bulk of Thieves' Cant was not gestural, but rather lexical. *Cant* or *canting* probably emerged from the Latin verb *cantare*, meaning "to sing," and was attributed to the singsong tones of beggars and vagabonds who worked the notorious London district of Alsatia. *Cant* also shares grammatical ties with *canny*, in the sense of speech as a knowledge-practice, a knowing; and, more perversely, both forms of the word serve as the origin of the Latin slang *cunny*, which referred to genitalia (somewhat like Gorgik and *gorgi*). Although Thomas Harman was the first to connect canting with "beggars' language" in a 1566 text (a clear indictment against the theory of some historians that Robert Greene simply invented canting in his *Cony-Catching* pamphlets of 1591), references to cant as a "language of beggars" appeared in Germany as early as 1514 (Gotti 7). In *The Language of Thieves and Vagabonds*, his lexical study of canting in England, Maurizio Gotti describes the rogues' jargon as "containing terms commonly used by beggars and thieves to denote the essential elements connected with their mischievous way of living" (16). Gotti, in fact, points to soldiers—what was left of the knightly class—as a primary constituent of the growing rogue population in sixteenth century London, since military men were often destitute between wars, and had to rely on begging and petty thievery to survive.

Canting, like sign-language (or the proscribed whispers and regimented prayers of the Templars) allowed thieves to communicate the complexity of their vast interior world, and outsiders were none the wiser. Like the mysterious lexica of magic and spellcraft, the bubbly sing-song of cant and “cony-catching”¹³ conceals a powerfully transgressive edge—the ability to defy normative censure and authority, to maintain a secret enclave of marginalized folk, to communicate dense meaning that might only be translated by the initiated. The craft of lock-picking, in fact, is referred to as the “Black Art,” and includes terms like “charm,” which sometimes means the lock-pick, and other times the actual person doing the lock-picking (a thief is a charm, and a charm is a lock, like a locked closet). Greene states that “the charm hath many keys and wrests, which they call picklocks, and for every sundry fashion they have a sundry term; but I am ignorant of their words of art, and therefore I omit them” (175). Obviously, he is not “ignorant,” since he spends much of the *Cony-Catching Pamphlets* describing detailed language and terminology—like magic, this particular “Black Art” is a sort of catachresis within rogue discourse, a secretive lexicon practiced in dark rooms, crowded taverns, and hidden guilds.

Breaking and Entering

Language and ritual, then, seem to me to be the crucial queer signifiers that link rogues and knights together, and which thereby connect the fantasy works of Brenchley and Flewelling. When I asked Brenchley about the apparent queerness that I was

imputing to fantasy literature, he saw a definite connection between queer life and fantasy writing as two similar genres, two modes of living in the world:

I do think that's right. Something about the way magic subverts hierarchy, maybe? Queer definitely relates to magic: it's that adolescent secret that you daren't quite tell, but you do let it show in how you are and what you do, and you wait for other people to understand; and it's dangerous, and powerful, even if its power is only negative, even if it fucks your life up, that's okay because you're just the sorcerer's apprentice, you're only just learning to control this stuff. And of course that's true for straight kids too, but for us it's bigger, more dangerous, different. We're the wizards, they're the swordsmen; there aren't many of us and we have to look after each other. (Email, Sept 17 2005)

His link between magic and queerness, like my own, depends crucially upon a secretive or melancholic language that operates in a similar way to sadness, even as it grasps wildly for power and definition. The Daughter, a negative energy-force that grips Marron's body, is a kind of naked singularity that sucks in all biological life around it, crushing and dismembering in its attempt to—what? To devour, to be whole, to understand a world that *it* deems hostile, to belong? Or perhaps to sate Marron's own developed sense of vengeance, which culminates in the brutal death of his best-friend and former lover, Aldo. Marron himself describes the Daughter as “nothing but smoke, red smoke that hung in the air and suggested something living, an animal, an insect, a monstrous breeding of the two” (*Tower* 231). This harkens back to Foucault's definition

of the monstrous, in the *Abnormal* lectures, as a “mixture of life and death...[T]he transgression of natural limits, the transgression of classifications” (63). Like wizards themselves, the Daughter—a creation of wizards, the *ex nihilo* production of the anti-productive class—is monstrous, unclassifiable, and dangerous.

Both Marron and Seregil are haunted by a spectral power—Marron has the Daughter, which he must protect as a mystical treasure even as it attempts to destroy him from the inside, but Seregil also has a shadow of sorts that pursues him. Like the shadow that haunts Ged in Ursula Leguin’s *Wizard of Earthsea*, proving after all to be a dark and repudiated part of his own psyche, Seregil’s own stalker is an uncanny monster:

Even at the distance of a bowshot Seregil could see something amiss in the lines of the figure, some profound wrongness of proportion that disturbed him more than the fact that Alec obviously couldn’t see it...[it] regarded him silently, then bowed deeply and began a grotesque dance, leaping and capering about in a fashion that would have been ridiculous if wasn’t so horrible. (*Shadows* 136)

As it turns out, the monster is connected to a charmed amulet, called a “telesm,” that Seregil unwittingly steals. The amulet takes over Seregil’s mind, just as the Daughter takes over Marron’s body, until both man and boy are rendered unrecognizable to their companions, cruel simulacra of their former identities. This metaphor of abject possession, the devouring of human life by a hungry and shadowed power, echoes what Sándor Radó describes in 1928 as the “dread of starvation” (Pardo 40) at the heart of melancholia, the cannibalistic impulse that paves the way for Klein’s later work on

melancholia as the tension between incorporable (good) and un-incorporable (bad) objects. Seregil is, quite literally, being eaten alive by magic, and what is left—weathered, exhausted, a mumbling and incoherent wreck—resembles uncannily Freud’s own description of the melancholiac (in “Mourning and Melancholia”) as “he [who] knows whom he has lost but not *what* it is he has lost in them” (245).

Ritual allows us to control the enormity of magic, just as it places structural limits on knighthood and thievery as social categories. Chivalry manuals are unduly concerned with curtailment of “ornamental” social activities—eating too much (or knowing too much about food and wine), sleeping in soft furs, wearing the latest fashions, even decorating one’s armor with baubles, glitter, and flare—all of which might render knights as being a bit too fabulous. Yet knightly rituals are firmly entrenched within a homosocial symbolism that, most often, breaks through into the realm of homoerotic expression and same-sex desire. These are magic naming rituals, the same kind that create wizards with fantastic new identities like *Sparhawk* (formerly Ged, the village goatherd), or *Mithrandir* (once a boy named Pug, the hero of Raymond E. Feist’s *Midkemia* novels). The process of creating and dubbing a new knight, itself replete with nudity, bathing, dressing, and a few chaste kisses—demonstrates quite readily the erotic power of these transformative rituals.

“On the eve of the ceremony,” says Charny’s *Livre de chevalerie*, “all those who are to be knighted the next day should enter a bath and stay there for a long time, reflecting on the need to cleanse their bodies henceforth from all impurities of sin and dishonorable ways of life; they should leave all such impurities in the water” (166-67; 36, 4-10). This divestiture of “impurities,” along with the “long time” that a knight must

spend in his ritual bath, seems to hint at a particularly vigorous masturbation session, capable of leaving *all* impurities to swirl away in the water. Later, the would-be knight should “go and lie in a new bed in clean white sheets; there they should rest as those who have emerged from a great struggle against sin” (169; 36, 11-13)—the “great struggle,” one assumes, referring to whatever happened in the bath. After this psychological battle, the celebrant is approached by his knightly peers, who dress him in “red tunics...black hose...[and] white belts, with which they gird them, signifying that they should surround their bodies with chastity and purity of the flesh” (169; 36, 16-31). This is a reverse strip-tease: the knights begin with his feet and end with his mid-section, girding him with the belt that is supposed to signify a knight’s chastity—a poor protection against all of the sexual opportunities that he will soon experience on the continent.

It is difficult to determine precisely when Marron transitions from being a squire to being the “Ghost Walker”—a *Mau’dib*-type prophetic figure for the Sharai (harkening back to George Herbert’s *Dune*), who is able to wield the power of the Daughter. As I have previously argued, the squire represents a forgotten underclass in chivalric literature, often mentioned only for his curious interchangeability and exchange-value. The squire is a sign for lack, since a million squires would still somehow be interchangeable, still be worth nothing (less than a horse); and yet the squire also comes to represent the psychic lack within the master, the knight, and in that way he gains a peculiar type of agency. A squire is like the idea of a coin—without the brass—a placeholder for capital, or a spell-ingredient that only gains power when it is combined with the proper words. Much of the *Rule of the Templars* is devoted to recording the amount of swappable squires that each knight, lord, or high-ranking cleric is entitled to,

as well as how one kind of squire might be easily traded for another. Matthew Bennett argues that the word “squire” probably derives from the Anglo-Saxon *scutifer* (“shield-maker”), which “[became] by the thirteenth century clearly identified with the care of horses...the principle duty of the squire” (Bennett 2).

Marron, unlike most squires, takes a firm hand in his relationship with Sieur Anton, even going so far as to initiate and encourage sexual contact with him. In a scene both moving and playful, after his wounded arm (scarred by Anton, remember) has been bandaged and bound, Marron gently and patiently gives Anton instructions on how they might carefully have sex:

“Now, how shall we manage with this? We must put it out of the way. If you lie on the bed, thus, it should not trouble us. Good. Does that feel comfortable?”

“You won’t hurt me, sieur.”

“You seem very sure of that.”

“Yes, sieur.”

“Marron, my name is Anton. Only for tonight, while we’re alone, do you think you might manage to use it? Or at least not to call me sieur in every sentence?”

“No, sieur, I like it.” (Brenchley, *Tower* 186-87)

Marron’s pleasant affirmatives—“no, sieur, I like it”; “you won’t hurt me, sieur”; “do it again, sieur”—demonstrate his submissive mastery of the situation. Marron is, in fact, a

bit of a switch-hitter, as he demonstrates later with Jemel, able to assume both dominant and submissive roles, like Gorgik, depending upon the specificity of the erotic encounter (or upon his own personal whims and desires). Unlike Gorgik, he doesn't require the social sign of the collar to do this. He does it because he wants to.

This also demonstrates Foucault's notion of S/M as a series of practices that "produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies" (*Advocate* Interview 165). Marron's wounded arm becomes a fetish object within this scene—he is able to control and produce pleasure *through* his wound, precisely because his body has been marred or damaged in a specific way. The tunings of pain and power become the framework for this sex scene, where pleasure emerges from the very site that should prohibit or complicate its generation. Marron effectively transforms his own physical lack, the mark of his failure as a squire and the signifier of his incompleteness, or openness, into an erotogenic zone. His wound is simultaneously an orifice and a phallus, which we have to admit is an impressive act of magic.

This sexual education, however, is also a social one, and both Sieur Anton and Seregil try to instruct their protégés in moving up the political ladder, while simultaneously teaching them how to fill an acute social lack, a black hole represented by their working-class origins. Considering that Seregil dons drag (becoming "Lady Gwethlyn") several times throughout *Luck in the Shadows*, it seems as if Alec is attending a kind of rogue's finishing-school here, training how to become a proper lady¹⁴:

First, the hanging sleeves of a formal robe are pushed—never rolled—halfway back to the elbow, no farther. You may place your left elbow on the table, never

the right, although it's generally acceptable to rest your wrist at the edge. Food is handled with the thumb and first two fingers of each hand; fold the others under, like so. (278)

As Alec himself observes, life in Seregil's manor has "a charmed quality," and part of the charm involves the unraveling of high-society mysteries. He is being indoctrinated into a particular queer style of life, a *mode de vie*. But it is also no coincidence that, for his first real challenge as a burglar and cutpurse, Seregil has Alec unknowingly break into his own home. Despite their charmed life together, Seregil still feels the need to teach Alec that "home" is an unstable signifier for anyone, *unheimlich*—a burglar can easily defy the most complex lock, just as burglar's own life can be disrupted by churning socio-political forces beyond his control.

When Alec, curious, follows Seregil to the infamous Street of Lights, he sees that "despite the early hour, each house had one or more colored lamps burning above its entrance. There were only four colors: rose, amber, white, and green" (232). Each color represents either a heterosexual or queer possibility: straight male prostitutes who sleep with women, straight female prostitutes who sleep with men, queer women who sleep with women, and queer men who sleep with men (with, one imagines, a certain amount of playful overlap). After following Seregil into one of the queer houses—which is really the fantastic version of a historical Molly House¹⁵—Alec finds himself in a new environment both aesthetically and erotically charged:

The murals [in the room] were divided into panels, and each presented handsome male nudes intertwined in passionately carnal acts....[A]s Alec watched, Seregil leaned his head back and his robe fell open to reveal the smooth column of his throat and the lean planes of his chest and belly. Fascinated and confused, Alec felt the first hesitant stirring of feelings that he was not prepared to associate with his friend and teacher. (151-152)

Alec discovers here that the tantalizing murals and friezes, as well as the various configurations of queer bodies in different poses, all represent a powerful kind of erotic lack that, up until this point, he has been trying to fill by stealing goods, breaking into houses, and performing a particular kind of roguish identity. The Molly House is melancholic because it dramatizes a homosexual relationship that could never occur outside, by the light of day, and Alec is surprised and a bit terrified to realize that he has always somehow been a part of that impossible circuit. What he desires is not simply Seregil's body, "the smooth column of his throat," almost vampirically, but also the cultural legitimacy of a real erotic and emotional relationship with his teacher: he wants their sexuality to be immortalized, on one of those scandalous murals, even as he balks at their crass sensuality.

Marron and Alec both find ways to use their masters' language in sly and innovative ways, choosing not to use "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house," à la Audre Lord, but to stage a break-in purely to expose the violability of the masculine manor. After Alec breaks into Seregil's home, the two are still able to live there; after Marron submits to, and enjoys, Anton's sensual burglary/buggery, the two are

still able to function as knight and squire. The apprentice's power, then, seems to stem from submission, just as the bottom's control emerges from an act of "surrender" that is actually an enormously focused deployment of pleasure. At this point, all sorts of analogies emerge between burglary and buggery, between cant and camp, between knave and nelly (or master and Molly), and this only serves to reinforce the linguistic heritage that knights, rogues, and queers all share. Polari, like a magic spell, releases wild signs that seem, at first, entirely arbitrary, but simply require the ear of a queer bird, or a few sly tools learned in the "queer cove" (canting slang for "prison.").

Contracting Melancholia

Marron's journey from squire to master does not end particularly well. At the conclusion of the series, he finds himself witnessing an impossible duel between his ex-lover, Sieur Anton d'Escrevey, and his current lover, Jemel. In a Gordian twist, it seems that Anton killed *Jemel's* former lover, Jazra, and Jemel's desire for retributive justice is as unquenchable as the Daughter's mindless hunger. This is also the uncanny "return of the repressed," like the many seemingly pointless journeys of Gorgik and Pryn—the circulations and perambulations that represent the tension between *heimlich/unheimlich*, or what Helene Cixous identifies as "the return road which passes through the country of children in the maternal body. You have already passed through here: you recognize the landscape. You have always been on the return road" (544). Jemel has already entered into a lover's contract with Jazra, similar to the contract between knight and squire: "Whom I love, him do I fight for / whom I fight for, him do I love" (Brenchley *Tower*

183). In Thomas Dekker's *The Bellman of London* [1607], we are shown another contract, between a would-be rogue and the Upright Man, that closely resembles this agreement of lover's service, a rogue's spell linking vassal with master-thief: "I, [blank], do stall thee, [blank], to the rogue, by virtue of this sovereign English liquor, so that henceforth it shall be lawful for thee to cant, that is to say, to be a vagabond and beg, and to speak that Pedlar's French" (Judges 308).

These contracts become performative utterances, calling into being the very identities—rogue, knight, lover—that they cite. In the end, it seems, Jemel is fighting more for the contract than he is for his lover's blood. This is a passion of the contract, and just as Marron cannot bear to see Jemel destroy his ex-lover, neither can he bear to watch his new lover die at the hands of his former teacher. In a sense, this is a battle of two texts, a clash of contracts that Marron himself must disrupt—by calling on the power of the Daughter one last time, he becomes the living mark that sunders this paratactic sentence, this list of desires and duties, the splash of blood against vellum that washes all trace of a signature away:

[Marron] flung his body between the two duelists, and was impossibly lucky not to find himself twice-skewered as he deserved—but he always had been lucky, just as he always had been desolate...he seized one of the startled figures and dragged him through a sudden raw wound in the world, a ripped red gateway to a golden land. (*Brenchley Hand* 759)

Just as Tylendel drags Vanyel through a mystical door, and Noyeed leads the hapless smuggler through a maze of dark passageways, Marron seizes the power here to defy the text—he tears a hole in the world, pulling—who?—someone through. Either way, as Marron pulls back the curtain that separates Outremer from Surayon, the mortal world from the secret country that lies beyond (as inchoate and illegible as the Temple of Solomon, or the Dome of the Rock), he projects his own ragged wound onto the surface of social life, rendering the world itself as wounded, bleeding, ragged from failed sutures and ever-violable; the world as lack, in mourning for its own “poverty of relations,” (“Social Triumph” 159) as Foucault describes it. Maybe he pulls nothing and nobody but his own shadow through the portal, the fetish of his own melancholic sadness that no amount of mystical power can assuage. In this climactic moment, it is unclear if he actually devours the Daughter, or vice versa. Alec is unable to rip open a gate in space-time, but he does open a door of sorts, invoking the hinge of desire that joins his curious body with Seregil’s more experienced one. In spite of the older man’s caution and avoidance, Alec gambles on a kiss, which—like the kiss of the knight—is a text replete with its own contradictions, legible perhaps only within that warm chiasma, the meeting-point of lips where we surrender to the broader social contract that links us as human beings, the melancholic riddle of affect: “It was Alec who brought their lips together. Seregil’s first reaction was disbelief. But Alec was insistent, clumsy but determined...it spoke silent volumes of bewildered honesty” (Flewelling, *Shadows* 443).

As both squire and protégé demonstrate within these works, the metaphor of the locked tower and prayer-closet is not enough to convey the various melancholic articulations of drama and desire that circulate within apprentice relationships. There is

definitely something queer about being either a rogue or a knight, but if I have not quite put a spotlight on what 'it' might be, that is probably because both relations are ambivalent in themselves. The economy of looks between knight and squire, the hungry gaze of young men as they watch heroic knights, is similar in every way to the dense array of looks, nods, gestures, and invitations that might occur in any urban neighborhood dominated by gay men—Polk Street, Davie Street, Cheapside in Tudor London, or the Street of Lights in Rhíminee. Blink, look away, and you might miss it. But, as I hope I have demonstrated, the connections that bind knights and rogues together are not simply visual or imaginary. They both share similar linguistic, historical, military, and geographic conventions, and they both serve as literary foils to each other, so that one could not possibly exist without the other: there is no Sir Lancelot without Robin Hood, and no *Livre de chevalerie* without *The Fraternity of Vagabonds*. The queerly reciprocal service contracts each profession enacts also bring out the melancholic bonds that structure all social relations.

Fantasy, as a genre, is also a thief of sorts: it steals liberally from other genres, including the gothic, the western, the romance (both medieval and contemporary), the epic, the thrilling boy's stories of the pulp tradition (pre-Hugo Gernsback), and the bulk of classical mythology—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in particular. Like a raven, fantasy builds its nest from all sorts of discarded materials, stitching together tropes and conventions in order to produce something old and new at the same time. Like Alec, fantasy breaks into the houses of literature, of myth, and of history, not just to expose the fragility of the canon, but to marvel at the complexity of its locks. Sometimes, home has to be broken into, so that it continues to signify *as home*, with all of its cracks, alleys,

clogged gutters and broken windows.

¹ The cultural repudiation of rogues by knights, and vice versa, can be compared broadly to the sexual/gender repudiation upon which, arguably, psychoanalysis is based, and which critics like Judith Butler continually return to in their work (Clare Hemmings rejects this model in *Bisexual Spaces* [2002]).

² In *Thinking With Demons*, Stuart Clark points out the common connection of magic with monarchy in both the medieval and early-modern periods: “The association of witchcraft with political disorder [was] literal; some authors even considered witches and devils as potential challengers to the ruling powers....[T]he monarch who banished evil with a look was the antithesis of the magician or witch who inflicted it by the same means” (558; 627).

³ This is Greene’s term; it also comes to be connected with “Parlyaree,” the language of early modern circus-performers, which eventually mutates into “Polari,” a type of British queer slang used specifically during the second world war. For a more detailed discussion of the history of Polari, see Paul Baker’s *Polari: The Lost Language of Gay Men* (2002), in which he notes: “One of the earliest recorded language varieties that probably influenced what was later to become Polari was Cant, a secret code language used by criminals in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries....[P]ossibly, Cant could be traced back as far as the eleventh century, when, under the Norman Conquest, many Saxons became outlaws and thieves—with their language becoming that of the conquered” (20).

⁴ Raymond E. Feist, who penned the acclaimed “Riftwar” fantasy series during the 1990s, uses the title “Upright Man” to refer to the master of the Thieves’ Guild in his novel *Silverthorn*; this book marks the first appearance of Jimmy the Hand, one of Feist’s most popular characters, who happens to be a rogue. Feist’s inspiration for Jimmy was no doubt an earlier young rogue, Silk, popularized by David Eddings in his *Belgariad* and *Malloreon* novels, as well as even earlier characters like the Grey Mouser.

⁵ The most recent incarnation of a character who resembles the historical image of the “Upright Man” is Al Swearngen, the nefarious tavern-owner, pimp, and star of HBO’s *Deadwood* series.

⁶ In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Silverman makes the following observation about competing versions of masochism: “Erotogenic masochism, which Freud defines as ‘pleasure in pain,’ provides the corporeal basis both for feminine and moral masochism...[with] both feminine and moral masochism ‘bleeding’ into each other at the point where each abuts into erotogenic masochism” (188).

⁷ Thieves’ Cant, identified by John Awdley, which refers to rogues or prisoners.

⁸ Seregil poses as an effeminate bard, which foreshadows the eventually disclosed fact of his queerness.

⁹ Interestingly, after dying and being resurrected, Buffy Summers makes the same observation in the beginning of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season Six: “Everything [in the world] is hard, and bright, and painful” (6.03, “Afterlife”).

¹⁰ This marks a return to the connection between magic and capital that I began to explore in Chapter One, referencing David Hawkes’ and Michael Taussig’s work, specifically.

¹¹ The popular pub in Asprin’s series, which also serves as a setting for the *Thieves’ World* role-playing game which thrived during the late 1980s.

¹² Seregil also, oddly enough, has an aversion to practical magic. Any type of mystical power seems to backfire around him. When I asked Lynn Flewelling about this, she described it as something between an allergy and a disability: “Nothing concealed or mystical. It’s like a learning disability or food allergy” (Email, Oct 26 2005). In this way, I think that he compensates for his lack of corporeal magical ability by refining a type of verbal magic, which becomes crucial to his skill as a thief.

¹³ A cony was defined as “naive quarry,” literally a rabbit, who could be preyed upon through a variety of pickpocketing and extortion schemes, or “cozenage” (Dionne and Mentz pg ref?).

¹⁴ Alec is troubled by the sight of Seregil in drag, which foreshadows his own eventual coming-out as a queer character: “‘Lady Gwethlyn’ sounded a troubled chord in him as well. Seregil’s convincing illusion stirred up a confusion in him that Alec hadn’t the philosophy to put into words” (*Shadows* 108).

¹⁵ Alan Bray, in his groundbreaking text *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, observes that, by 1725, “[there] was across London a network of such houses, known to society at large as well as their customers as ‘molly houses’....[S]ome were in private rooms in a tavern rather than in a house...while others were private meeting houses” (82). He even cites a Molly House revolt that predates the Stonewall riots by over two-hundred years: “When a molly house in Convent Garden [London] was broken up in 1725, the crowded household, many of them in drag, met the raid with determined and violent resistance” (97).

Chapter Four

Gandalf is Burning:

Wizardry and Drag Performance

“It is the curse of the magi that they must constantly study and recommit their spells to memory every day. The words of magic flame in the mind, then flicker and die when the spell is cast.”

- Raistlin Majere, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (75).

“It’s like my mother always used to say: two tears in a bucket, motherfuckit.”

- Lady Chablis, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

In this chapter I want to examine the connection between wizards and drag queens, looking particularly at how both professions (and life-modes) are built on a type of gender melancholia. It is not my intention to describe drag queens as “magical,” or to offer yet another recuperative and transcendent reading of drag performance in the context of radical gender transgression, but rather to tease out links between the shamanic nature of wizards and the mystical transparency of drag as an alternate mode of spellcasting and thaumaturgy. Are reading a spellbook and ‘reading’ a drag-show audience much the same thing? Is gender performance a spell that we cast, and if so, what ingredients are needed, what rituals are necessary, and what happens if/when we botch the incantation? How do we know when the spell is successful, and can even the most powerful Magus pull it off without revealing the strings attached?

Both drag and literary fantasy share an epic register. Think of Bernadette in *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, wandering like Moses through the Australian outback, pausing every now and then to freshen her lipstick while the sun beats down on her perfectly resolved face. In her pathbreaking study of female impersonators, *Mother Camp*, Esther Newton, states that “there is no drag without drama” (37), and it is often the rendering of the drag performer’s life into an epic that drives the show. Like a wizard, a drag performer casts a spell; something dangerous and powerful springs from their glamour, an enchantment capable of holding an entire audience in thrall. The very word “glamour” can refer both to the pageantry of 1960s glitter-queens and the spellcasting illusions of the Irish fairy-folk, the *sidhe* who stole children and replaced them with volatile changelings.¹ Gandalf’s fireworks in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Raistlin Majere’s hypnotic stare in *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, Pepper LaBeija, her mink coat whirling as she casts shade and vogues up a storm on the ball floor—all of these performances are magical and share historical and ritualistic antecedents.

This discussion will focus on two wizards who couldn’t be more opposite: Gandalf the Gray, beloved Magus of Tolkien’s *LOTR*, and Raistlin Majere, the cynical and power-hungry enchanter who becomes the anti-hero of Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman’s *Dragonlance* chronicles. While Tolkien’s work has spawned a voluminous critical industry, very little, if any, scholarship has been produced on the *Dragonlance* books, despite the sheer enormity of the project (still going strong and producing novels since the early 1980s)—probably because they don’t signify as novels so much as commercials within the fantasy marketing machine. Although I will be the first to admit that the *Dragonlance* novels aren’t exactly poststructuralist masterpieces, the *Chronicles*

sub-series, which inaugurated the saga and which closely addresses the development of Raistlin as a character, remains a classic of contemporary fantasy literature. Raistlin and his brother Caramon are fraternal twins, growing up in a rural village with their older sister, Kitiara, acting as the primary parent. As Kitiara begins a tumultuous romance with their friend, the half-Elvish (and therefore stigmatized) Tanis, Raistlin and Caramon remain a tightly-knit, geminate group, whispering secrets to each other and depending upon a kind of soothing insularity.

After Tanis leaves to reclaim his Elvish heritage (a failed attempt), and Kitiara joins the army², Raistlin decides that he also needs to cathect his energies around something, a beloved object of some kind. His answer is to become a full-fledged mage, but he doesn't anticipate the near-fatal test that will gain him his red robes. Like a drag outfit signifying "butch realness" or "femme queen," his red robes also signify a particular type of ethical alignment—neutrality—as opposed to the "lawful" white and "evil" black robes; Raistlin is firmly in the middle, which is a kind of melancholic position, since he remains unable to move into any other ethical field. While enduring his test in the Tower of High Sorcery, he finds himself battling an impossible enemy—a dark spirit, called a wraith (the magical abject)—and in order to survive the test he must call upon much older, more powerful spirit: the ghost of another great wizard, Fistantalus (his name even sounds like a magic spell), who Raistlin has always emulated. Like a spectral, melancholic presence, Fistantalus has clung to the Tower of High Sorcery for ages, waiting for a powerful enough protégé to infect parasitically. Raistlin's body, in this sense, becomes the host for a kind of centuries-old melancholia, an ancient and depressive magic that can only be sated by devouring him from the inside.

This is why he comes to physically resemble, in Tanis's own words, "the living dead and the dead living" (113).

I choose Gandalf and Raistlin as representative wizards because I think that they are two halves of the same aspect—Gandalf is the drag-wizard who offers aid, the House Mother looking after her children, while Raistlin is the ambitious queen who values power above humanity. I should reiterate that I don't plan to read these wizards *as drag queens*, and thereby suggest that anyone who wears a robe and carries a staff is also a drag performer; rather, I want to offer comparisons between two modes of performance, drag and wizardry, in order to explore how both are connected, and how both figure within a queer culture of melancholy. During the medieval and even the early-modern period, itinerant wizards, "wise-men," were actually quite similar to female impersonators, traveling from town to town, performing show after show in the hopes of surviving. The sumptuary laws that affected actors and performers, especially in the Elizabethan period, emerged from the same regulatory project that sought to expel wizardry and sodomy from the English consciousness.

Reading and Misreading

Gandalf the Grey and Raistlin Majere both experience very different trajectories in their respective careers as magi, but they also share similar origins. Gandalf begins *LOTR* as a doddering old mage, the very epitome of the absent-minded conjuror (similar to T.H. White's acerbic Merlin in his *Once and Future King* epic), only to end the series as a legendary figure. Raistlin experiences a childhood punctuated by illness and

isolation, living in the shadow of his robust and more popular twin-brother, Caramon, until he happens to witness an illusionist plying his trade at the village fair. After that, Raistlin's obsession with the dark arts begins, and he metamorphoses into a frightening mage who seems to care for nothing but the acquisition of fame and power. Both wizards are defined by a symbolic and literal death—Gandalf at the hands of the Balrog, and Raistlin during his wizardry-test in the Tower of High Sorcery—and both emerge changed from their experience, stronger, surer, and more imposing. Once he dons the white robes, Gandalf describes himself as “very dangerous: more dangerous than anything you will ever meet” (Tolkien 488), and Raistlin tells Tanis—the closest thing he has to a friend—that “I have *power* now” (Weiss 26), as if power makes up completely for his shattered health and fractured mind.

In *The Changing Room*, his historical survey of drag and theatricality, Laurence Senelick connects the drag queen with the shaman: “Cross-dressing abets the visionary process....[T]he actor is thus a shadow of the shaman, traveling back and forth across the frontiers of gender and carrying with him fantastic contraband” (33). Aside from the many shamanic traditions in India and South Africa that utilize cross-dressing for their rituals, the figure of the shaman—like that of the Magus—is at the very least psychologically bisexual, capable of inhabiting the psychic contours of both masculinity and femininity for the purposes of divine magic. Magic, after all, has always been structurally similar to the divine, and Kevin Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, states that “the medieval Church thus appeared as a vast reservoir of magical power, capable of being deployed for a variety of secular purposes” (45). Spells and prayers share linguistic conventions: both are invocations to an unseen power, both are

supposed to produce results that might not immediately be visible, and both require specific parameters of space and time—the proper room, dress, time of day, or frame of consciousness—if they are to be successful.

The challenge of the medieval church was to integrate the politically useful aspects of magic and spellcraft into their own daily modes of expression, thereby absorbing the pagan conventions that were already operating quite smoothly in England—much as Hollywood films, like *The Birdcage*, *Connie and Carla*, and *To Wong Foo*, have attempted to smoothly integrate drag culture (with varying degrees of success). The Theodosian Code of the fifth century officially separated benign and vaguely helpful magicks, what the Romans dismissively called *magia*, from the Satanic *maleficium* that needed to be systematically rooted out and punished. Valerie Flint explains that, for the church, “certain apparently specialized and relatively secret arts...that were magical in the sense that they sought to control illness and the elements in apparently supernatural ways, could be preserved in the service of a highly reputable end” (25)—that is, preserved in order to fleece and legitimate the protocols of the church, which had no problem utilizing the object-fetishism of animistic paganism and transferring it quite splendidly to the cross, bell, censer, and coffers.

I am connecting the divine to drag performance here because both depend upon a critical performance of melancholia (loss as supplement), and both fetishize a transubstantiation of matter—blood becomes wine, bread becomes flesh, and the gendered body (in the case of the performer) transitions between male and female. It is never, of course, that easy, and drag requires a tremendous amount of preparation and psychological preparedness, just as liturgy requires a certain pace, style, and

ornamentation. Like blood out of wine, the performance of gender—be it high glamour, or butch “realness”—becomes a miraculous narrative of the flesh that never quite resembles its canonical original along the continuum of the human. Judith Butler’s much-contested claim in *Gender Trouble*—that drag mimics the imitative (and melancholic) structure of gender itself, thereby becoming an imitation of an *imago*, a shadow of a shade (Butler, *GT* 169)—can also be applied to magic, whose fantastic contours actually expose the imitative structure of the empirical world as a text to be read. Butler has extensively revised her claim about the transgressive power of drag performance, citing its original difficulty as a fault of her reading public—we, apparently, “misread” her intention, just as a female body might be misread as male, and vice versa. Drag is, in fact, all about reading of various kinds, and in this respect it is linked to spellcraft and wizardry, which revolve around books, scrolls, and the power of the written and spoken word.

In Jennie Livingston’s oft-cited documentary, *Paris is Burning*, Venus Xtravaganza offers an explanation of “reading” in the context of drag that is also a challenge to the audience: “Now you wanna to talk about reading? Let’s talk about reading.” What she delivers is a collage of insults, a web of signifiers, each a particularly incisive interpretation of the audience’s own bodies, their faces, their psyches, their collective lives. “Touch this skin darling...touch this skin...touch all of this skin. You just can’t take it.” The legendary Dorien Corey describes reading as the evolution of shade, which began on the ballroom floor as a pantomime battle—rather than throwing their fists, drag queens would radically mimic and critique the movements of their competitors. “Shade comes from reading,” says Corey, “reading came first. Reading is

the real art form of insult. [With] shade, I don't tell you you're ugly...but I don't have to tell you, you *know* you're ugly." In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler describes the death of Venus Xtravaganza—who was murdered by a client, presumably after he discovered that s/he was a preoperative transsexual—as “a tragic *misreading* [my italics] of the social map of power” (131). Jay Prosser, in *Second Skins*, responded to this by calling Butler's argument an example of “critical perversity,” claiming that “[Butler] locates transgressive value in that which makes the subject's real life most unsafe” (Prosser 49). That is, the “misreading” of transgressive power onto the transsexual body, rendered somehow transcendent because it is liminal, simply perpetuates the structures of violence that seek to maim and destroy that very body.

It isn't my intention here to summarize Butler's own reading of *Paris is Burning*, nor to explore the controversy that has followed from two of her most contentious claims: the power of drag to mime the imitative structure of gender, and the transgressive agency of Venus as a person whose bodily reality somehow disrupts the operations of normative gender. Much work has already been done to both challenge and clarify these arguments, and done well, by critics like Prosser, Vivian Namaste, Susan Stryker, among others. Instead, I want to use *Paris is Burning*, along with other films on drag performance, to contextualize the characters of Gandalf and Raistlin as bearers of a particular kind of melancholic *drag aesthetic*. Just as Dorian Corey notes in interview that, as a House Mother, s/he “took in everyone under my skirts,” [9/11 book] I want to argue that Gandalf and Raistlin emerge from similar structures of fantastic kinship. The brotherhood of mages—called “The Wise” in *LOTR*, and simply “The Order” in the *Dragonlance* novels—is a reflection of the sisterhood of drag queens exemplified by

legendary houses operating in New York during the time that *Paris is Burning* was released: LaBeija, Dupree, Xtravaganza, Pendavis, Omni, and Ninja. They sound like magical kingdoms, but they are actual kinship groups operating at street-level, collectives struggling against homophobia, racism, and abject poverty in order to survive.

The iconic Magus is one who walks alone, without a family. Simon Magus, who appears in Biblical apocrypha, is pictured as Peter's earthbound adversary, a sort of anti-apostle. Noah's son, Ham, also practices the black arts, and was an always-popular villain within the medieval mystery plays—in contrast, the Magi, or Wise Men, who announced the birth of Jesus, became what Valerie Flint calls “the Christian countermagus,” whose very job was to replace the “discredited magus” of the Old Testament (364); similar to the safe Hollywood drag queen. While the old magus walked alone (that is, without God, or through the idolatrous worship of pagan spirits), the revisionist magus was part of a kinship group; a member of a family. I want to argue that this move towards the family represents a struggle against melancholy and mourning, even as the iconic isolation of the wizard makes this move a kind of impossible counter-spell. Gandalf the Grey begins his career as a lone magus, but by the end of *LOTR* he has essentially adopted the hobbits, thereby allowing him to distance himself from lone wizards like Saruman, or the nameless Necromancer. Raistlin, on the other hand, ends his career as he began—alone, mistrustful of family and friends, bereft of a love interest, yet still somehow recuperated. Why does Raistlin never quite become the villain of the *Dragonlance* novels, and why is Gandalf never read as the hero of *LOTR* (this honor is usually given to Frodo, or perhaps retroactively to Sam). By reading the lives of these psychologically different, but mythologically similar, characters, I hope to approach

some of these questions, as well as to query the place of the Magus within the context of drag performance.

The Never-Neverland of Magic and Melancholia

Raistlin often reminds me of an edgier, more medieval version of James Bond—that is, he is capable of enormous cruelty, he is often at the center of violence, and yet one can't help but find him endearing. Like Titus Pullo, one of the anti-heroes of HBO's *Rome*, who is always guzzling wine, swinging an axe around, or just being deliciously homoerotic, the terms “hero” and “villain” never quite seem to fit. One scene in particular with Raistlin comes to mind: while trying to locate the treasure-horde of a mythical dragon (who turns out to be as least as cunning as Raistlin himself—almost a kind of drag/on queen, or *drag-on*; and aren't dragons the real queens of the fantasy realm?), the mage and company encounter a community of gully dwarves. Now, if dwarves themselves already have the reputation for being slightly single-minded, even savage, then gully dwarves are at the bottom of the intellectual ladder. Yet Raistlin strikes up an odd friendship with a gully dwarf named Bupu, who seems to idolize him. After a near-fatal encounter with the above mentioned dragon, it is Bupu who rescues the most precious item of treasure from his horde: the spellbook of Fistantalalus, which becomes almost a prosthetic for Raistlin, an extension of his body.

When Bupu gives Raistlin the spellbook as a parting gift, the mage's reaction is nothing short of remarkable. Raistlin almost never initiates physical contact with another

human being, since he sees all bodies (especially his own) as abject. But, despite this, he touches Bupu, and touches her in a sweetly uncomplicated manner:

A look of infinite tenderness touched Raistlin's face, a look no one in this world would ever see. He reached out and stroked Bupu's coarse hair, knowing what it felt like to be weak and miserable, an object of ridicule and pity. (265)

Just as Gandalf never entirely cuts himself off from human compassion, since he is always safeguarding the hobbits, Raistlin never quite coheres as the villain of the *Dragonlance* novels. This is partly because he walks an ethical tightrope between complete power-mongering and tentative humanity, and partly because the figure of the Magus, by virtue of his or her Foucauldian "monstrosity," confounds ethical categories to begin with.

In the beginning of *The Hobbit*, Gandalf appears as a kind of fabulous presence on Bilbo's doorstep, transforming Bag End into the ultimate White Party (or Gray Party?) as he invites in a troupe of Dwarven explorers. Later, in *Fellowship*, Gandalf scratches his mark on Bilbo's door—a stylized "G," which could signify all sorts of interesting queer possibilities (like "Gandalf the Gay"). His outfit, like Raistlin's, is particularly eye-catching: "He wore a tall pointed blue hat, a long gray cloak, and a silver scarf" (Tolkien 24). The gleaming white cloak, which he attains after becoming "Gandalf the White," is reminiscent of Pepper LaBeija's perfect mink coat (the irrecoverable loss, since it was destroyed by his mother—his *objet-a*), or Felicia's blinding silver gown that trails behind her in *Priscilla*, as she balances atop a bus speeding through the Australian

outback. In point of fact, the transsexual drag-queen Bernadette, played divinely by Terrence Stamp, bears an uncanny resemblance to Gandalf as played by Ian McKellen in the film franchise. Both are, in all probability, “more dangerous than anything you will ever meet”; both possess the ability to stop people with a word.

I have mentioned Pepper LaBeija’s mink coat more than once, and I want to contextualize this reference as a gesture towards melancholia. In *Paris is Burning*, Pepper describes his mother’s angry reaction to finding women’s clothes in his closet: “She burned a *mink coat*.” He places his hand over his eyes, as if discussing something too melancholy for words, and sighs deeply. For Pepper, the mink coat is a liberatory symbol, an object of incomparable beauty—something to be worn like a wizard’s robe, a badge of power and survival. When his mother burns it, the coat becomes something forever lost, an *objet-a*, in the language of Lacan, which comes to signify a whole constellation of different losses for Pepper. Lacan describes the *objet-a* as “the object lost and suddenly refound in the conflagration of shame, by the introduction of the other” (Seminar II, 182). The lost object becomes something continually reached for and “refound,” only to be lost again, whose sense of missing(ness) becomes enflamed and activated by the other’s gaze. However we formulate our own sense of psychic loss, whatever object we graft it to, becomes “the object as absence....[M]erely a shadow, a shadow behind a curtain” (Ibid). Even Lacan’s metre here is spell-like, incantatory: an object, a lost object, merely a shadow, a shadow behind a curtain, with each idea returning slightly modified as in the process of the uncanny. If real loss, in Lacan’s understanding, occurs as a side-effect of living, then the drag-performer both enacts and tries to recuperate this economy of loss through a performance of shadows, curtains, and

mink coats. Drag restages melancholy, but it also has the capability to transform it into a productive performance, a “refinding” of loss that redraws *loss as living* upon the sparkling stage.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Judith Butler builds upon her repudiation-as-melancholy theory in *Bodies That Matter* by proposing an elaborate form of “gender melancholia” in *The Psychic Life of Power*. She explains gender choice or “attachment” as a process of repudiation: “If one is a girl to the extent that one does not want a girl, then wanting a girl will bring being a girl into question” (PLP 136). Along the same lines, a man “wants the woman he would never be. He wouldn’t be caught dead being her: therefore he wants her. She is his repudiated identification” (137). Butler’s incorporation of death here is interesting: a heterosexual male “wouldn’t be caught dead” *being* his female object-choice. Someone like Raistlin, however, who is partially dead already, or the “living dead,” might be able to take up this repudiated object, to be the woman he desires, precisely because his spectral body doesn’t allow him to cohere as either male or female. Butler’s account of repudiation obviously doesn’t take magic into account, but what remains surprising is her avoidance of bisexuality as something that disrupts the process of repudiation, as well as any discussion of transgender or intersexed bodies that might also trouble or refigure this equation. She notes that homosexual desire “panics gender” (136), but there are also multiple sites of erotic consciousness and attachment that “panic” her repudiative model.

Clare Hemmings, in *Bisexual Spaces*, claims specifically that “the fact that a bisexual subject consciously makes both object choices must therefore either be ignored or taken to indicate a failed or flawed engendering....[S]ince the bisexual does not

repudiate opposite-sex object choice, she must therefore *be* heterosexual” (10).

Bisexuality becomes what Hemmings calls the “undisputed middle ground” necessary for theories of queer performativity to function, yet these same theories also tend to ignore bisexuality as a unique model of erotic plurality that *creates* the repudiative model of gender-attachment even as it dismantles it. Butler’s discussion of gender melancholia in *The Psychic Life of Power* stands as a queer revision of Freudian and Kleinian models of melancholy/mourning, but Butler goes one step further by identifying melancholia as a kind of field upon which gender acquisition takes place, a rack on which we stretch our bodies in order to fit a particular type of gender-life by repudiating the “opposite” gender and recoding it as a sexual object choice. She calls this process of heterosexual embodiment and attachment

A love and a loss haunted by the spectre of a certain unreality, a certain unthinkability, the double disavowal of the “I never loved her, and I never lost her,” uttered by the woman, the “I never loved him, I never lost him,” uttered by the man...the “never-never” that supports the naturalized surface of heterosexual life as well as its pervasive melancholia. (138)

This “never-never” relation, I want to argue, does form the basis of a type of melancholia that characters in fantasy texts are often trying to overcome, but it is also a highly imperfect model for reading melancholia as a necessary axis along which life and consciousness actually occur. This “spectre of a certain unreality” not only ignores the multiple erotic relations produced by bisexuality, transgender embodiment, and other queer genders, it also instantiates a series of impossible binaries—man/woman,

hetero/homo—which Butler herself, as a founding thinker and activist within the development of queer theory, has always attempted to decouple and challenge within her own body of work. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, she is attempting precisely to ask *why* this should be the only choice available to sexual beings, why a series of legal and epistemological “rules” must force a subject to choose one gender-form at the risk of forever mourning its opposite; however, in asking this very question, Butler risks enforcing “*the choice*” as a type of heterosexual ultimatum that precludes all other erotic possibilities. This potentially bi-phobic and trans-phobic move, I think, is actually an exercise in linguistic perplexity. In trying to deconstruct the homophobic language of psychoanalysis—which offers queer sexuality as a symptom of melancholia—her argument comes up against a wall of fossilized terms and binaries that she must cite in order to pulverize; but the citations themselves suggest a sort of uncritical support. The difficulties of peeling apart layers of psychoanalytic theory around melancholia actually force Butler to present the melancholic choice that inaugurates heterosexual life as the *only* choice possible, to the exclusion of all others.

Rather than this “never-never” relation, which elides both bisexuality and any kind of transgender or differently-gendered body³, I would like to propose a melancholic relation that is unique to the fantasy text: a “never-neverland” relation. If one reads magical performance not merely as Hemmings’ “bisexual middle ground,” but as a field of learning and speaking that actively seeks out the decomposition and decay of the signifier/signified relationship, thereby allowing a variety of sexed and gendered orientations for its wizardly “performer,” then magic becomes a unique circuit for redefining the connection between gender and melancholia. This is not as simple as

claiming that wizards and drag queens are both melancholic, which means that magic and melancholia are structurally the same. Instead, I want to suggest that magic, like drag performance, provides a way *in* rather than a way out of melancholia, stirring its complex insides and exposing its layers like saline injected into dead flesh—a forensic process meant to raise a lost fingerprint. Magical performance provides the opportunity for the wizard to ride the hyphen between gender-binaries, to experience the “dying” of one gender within the birth of another, and it does so by using excessive (and excrescent) language to reveal the linguistic impossibility of making gender real. We cannot have who or what we desire—*yet*. But maybe, with the next spell, it or *s/he* might arrive. The wizard knows how difficult and painful it is to attempt signification through spell=craft, and yet *s/he* keeps trying, not because of a hoped-for success, but because of a pleasurable and enjoyable failure. The wizard lives in and on melancholia rather than bypassing it or repudiating it, thereby proving through each performance that the power of sadness can be critical and productive. One can mourn for magic, even as one learns to magically mourn in a way that opens up new and fantastic choices.

Magic Time/Time’s Magic

Gandalf’s first act in *Fellowship* is to give the hobbits a stage-show of sorts—a fireworks display whose extravagance rivals anything that they’ve ever seen before:

There were rockets like a flight of scintillating birds singing with sweet voices.

There were green trees with trunks of dark smoke: their leaves opened like a

whole spring unfolding in a moment...there were fountains of butterflies that flew glittering into the trees; there were pillars of colored fires that rose and turned into eagles, or sailing ships, or a phalanx of flying swans. (27)

Much of Gandalf's later magic seems almost entirely performative—his voice deepens, his shadow lengthens, his appearance *seems* to change, but we can't be entirely certain. When he speaks the language of Mordor in the hall of Elrond, the Elven King, his voice becomes "menacing, powerful, harsh as stone. A shadow seemed to pass over the high sun" (248). This shadow that "seems" to pass over the sun is like the magic that "seems" to emanate from Gandalf's body—it is all in the eye of the beholder, and at times, he appears to be nothing more than a doddering old man, an incorrigible scholar and acerbic conjuror with no "real" power to speak of.

Gandalf, in fact, identifies himself as something of a queer bird among the already-queer wizards, since he is the only one who chooses to study hobbits: "Among the Wise I am the only one that goes in for hobbit-lore; an obscure branch of knowledge, but full of surprises" (47). In a sense, Hobbit Theory becomes Queer Theory here, and Gandalf emerges as the progenitor of a queer type of scholarship. There is something Foucauldian about this magus—he is strong but fragile, clear but vague, studying world-shaking prophecies while he reads about the daily ephemera of hobbit-lore. He is a contradiction, a sigil, the very stylized sign that he carves upon Bilbo's door, which might, after all, mean anything. When Frodo asks him how qualified he is to explain the workings of the One Ring, Gandalf tells him dismissively that "I knew much and I have learned much...but I am not going to give an account of all my doings to *you*" (55). This

is perhaps the first instance of Gandalf casting shade—one of many bitchy remarks that he levels against the hobbits, thereby keeping them at arm’s length while confirming his own rarefied status as a removed and renowned academic.

Although Gandalf has no love interest (save for the hobbits themselves, who serve as his surrogate children/loves), that hasn’t stopped readers and audiences alike from imagining a romantic pairing for him. In interview with *The Guardian*, Ian McKellen playfully suggests an alternative:

I was suggesting to Peter [Jackson] yesterday that he should insert some love interest for Gandalf in a later [movie]. He suggested Galadriel...I said, no, I was thinking more of someone like Legolas. (Ferguson, Feb 17 2002)

I have always read Gandalf as a queer character, although I can’t quite explain why—nor is the purpose of this discussion to queer Gandalf by offering evidence of his homosexuality. No, what I mean, and what other queer readings have attempted to do, is to expose the play between sexuality that exists in so many canonical texts, since that space of play is also a living space. By saying that Gandalf has a drag aesthetic, I am giving him a new sense of play. Tolkien was probably not a fan of drag shows, although he had no doubt heard of the dramatic escapades of the Hasty Pudding Club—Harvard’s drag-drama review, which had been dressing straight athletes in stockings since the turn of the century. *The Hobbit* actually emerged after the widespread performance of military drag reviews during WWII; and nobody was about to suggest that the privates of the Ninth Field Ambulance Core were a bunch of mollies, even if they did wear pearls.

Although Gandalf grows into a sort of good-natured bitchiness as *LOTR* progresses, Raistlin arrives from the first moment as a wizardly diva. Dressed in flowing, blood-red robes with golden sleeves, wielding a tall staff with a dragon's claw clutching a crystal ball, Raistlin enjoys the attention that he attracts. Tanis, one of the only companions who sees through his ever-present sarcasm, watches Raistlin as keenly as Raistlin himself watches everyone else—"the young mage," he observes, "[gets] a cynical pleasure out of seeing his friends' discomfiture" (Weiss 36). This "discomfiture," putting it mildly, emerges from Raistlin's appearance, which has changed radically since he was 'tested' at the Tower of High Sorcery:

The mage's white skin had turned a golden color. It glistened in the firelight with a faintly metallic quality, looking like a gruesome mask. The flesh had melted from the face, leaving the cheekbones outlined in dreadful shadows. The lips were pulled tight in a dark straight line...[and] the eyes were no longer the eyes of any living human Tanis had ever seen. The black pupils were now the shape of hourglasses. (26)

To the casual observer, this would appear to be the effect of makeup—a particularly expert parody of a human face, a mask. But it is, in fact, Raistlin's real face, and his horrifying eyes let the observer know that he sees things differently, that he knows things that perhaps should be left unexplored. His hourglass eyes see all things as time affects them, and, as he imperiously tells his friend: "Even as I look at you now, Tanis...I see you dying, slowly, by inches. And so I see every living thing" (27). Trust a

drag queen to tell you that you're "dying, slowly, by inches," and right after you put on your best suit of polished armor. Raistlin, in fact, like Gandalf, seems to be out of joint with space and time, a Magus apart. Michael Cunningham, in his 1997 article on Dorian Corey, describes what he jokingly calls "drag queen time"—what Corey describes as "morning" is actually "about three in the afternoon, for most people" (Cunningham, *Open City*). Time exists differently for magi and drag performers, who, perhaps, have altered space and time in the context of their own performances so much that they now actually stand apart from straight time.

Judith Halberstam, within her recent work *In a Queer Time and Place*, describes a similar queer appropriation of time, an ontological shift that occurs when the twilight vertices of "queer time" intersect with those of their straight counterparts. She calls these temporal backbeats "queer life modes that offer alternatives to family time and family life," including "stretched-out adolescences" and "subcultural involvement" (174). Indeed, the cramped quarters of the Inn of the Last Home, where Raistlin and his companions spend their time, resembles the "cramped and poorly ventilated spaces" where Halberstam suggests that queers spend most of their time—the liminal spaces of gender performance, the pubs and bars and halls and after-hours clubs and secret basements, where global time gets fractured into bits of dazzle, flashes of fire on cheap gemstones, the rustle of gowns, and the sequins of fabulous, fierce particularity. Time works differently for Raistlin, the melancholic mage, because he sees not just his own death and decay, but the death and gradual dissolution of everyone around him. This is what Judith Butler refers to, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, when she describes the intersection of "norm-time" with experiential life, the radical disconnect between how we

feel ourselves to *be*, and how the ornamentation of social life goes on past us, without us, sweeping us away:

The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not fully mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So, in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities, one which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained. These norms are, as it were, indifferent to me, to my life and my death. (Butler 35)

Raistlin does not control the norms that structure his life, that alternate vector of temporality that cares nothing for his particular lived reality—but, unlike most people, he is able to see, materially, the effect of those norms through the passage of time, the mark that the world makes upon us. Raistlin sees, always, the death that approaches him, and it is this perhaps that forces him to accumulate more and more power, hoping however uselessly that he will be able to make his own mark. He is so ferociously independent and single-minded, in fact, that when he actually meets another magus for the first time in years, he is nearly rendered speechless. “You are magi?” he asks, as if he can’t quite believe it. “*I am magi!*” Fizban’s reply—“no kidding”—is the priceless rejoinder of a legendary drag queen, the reply of someone who has long since ceased to care about his own position on what Butler calls “the social map of power.” Because of his eyes, Raistlin cannot help but ‘read’ people. He sees their flaws, their follies, their mistakes,

their stupid and pathetic loves and horrors, as he would scan letters on a page, or runes burned into the surface of an all-powerful ring. Raistlin's hourglass eyes, rendered by several different artists—most famously, Larry Elmore—in an effort to get them right, are in fact unintelligible, invisible. Nobody can meet his gaze.⁴

Glamorous Gazes and Fiery Egos

The eye is crucial to Weiss's *Dragonlance* novels, just as it remains central to Tolkien's *LOTR*, given a spectral presence through the Eye of Sauron. When Frodo first stares into Galadriel's magical reflecting pool, he sees

a single Eye that slowly grew until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing. (544)

Raistlin's eyes, similarly, are "no longer the eyes of any living human...the black pupils were now the shape of hourglasses" (26). As he sits in the shadows, his eyes constantly "flicker" or "glow"—and yet, the light that emerges from Raistlin's body, the light acting as a spectral trace for his magic (and therefore his absent body, destroyed by magic), is not always grim and terrifying. Even Sturm, the knight who trusts Raistlin the least—possibly because he was once in love with Raistlin's half-sister, Kitiara—is able to find solace within the comforting shell of the young wizard's magic. As he drifts off to sleep

by the campfire, he sees “the light from Raistlin’s staff [glowing] brightly, keeping away the darkness” (185). The eye of the staff’s crystal orb, like the eye of Sauron, is a vessel from which all humanity has been evacuated—a source of luminance neither warm nor cold, and that comforts only with a cruel edge. It is the wizard’s gaze, looking out over the audience with a mixture of sadness and love, mocking and inciting and casting shade even as it strives to keep everybody together, to somehow create a family.

In *Drag Queens of the 801 Cabaret*, an interviewee named Kevin (but known as Lady Victoria), states that “one queen...gave me the secret of drag. How to get that eye, to make it look right, like an eye, the glamour eye” (15). This eye, the “glamour eye,” so difficult to replicate and “get right,” is so teasingly similar to the Eye of Sauron, to Raistlin’s hourglass pupil, to Gandalf’s heavy-lidded eyes that see the destiny of the hobbits before they recognize it themselves. Drag itself can be read as a kind of prophecy, a destiny. Lady Victoria calls it “my destiny,” and many other drag queens who agreed to participate in Taylor and Rupp’s study identify a moment of prophecy in their lives, usually defined by a homophobic epithet. “That boy’s going to be a faggot”—the parental prophecy, the destiny handed down by the Oedipal drama, that somehow linguistically seals their fate as queers and drag performers. It is in this sense that Didier Eribon states that “a child can know at ten—without knowing it completely, but knowing something of it in any case—that the word ‘faggot’ just about designates him and will do so entirely one day” (Eribon 62). Just as witches and mages are prophesied figures in fantasy literature, so is drag often given a prophetic role, becoming a negative destiny, a curse delivered by cruel friends, relatives, parents, that can nonetheless be reconfigured into a wide and beautiful life.

Drag performance dramatizes a circuit of melancholy, a peculiar sort of longing that flows between the performer and her/his audience; magic, too, is a melancholic act, a striving for something that has been either lost or repudiated, that elusive signifier—the heart, perhaps? I am reminded of Jean-Luc Nancy’s argument that the heart comes into existence only at the moment of its fracture—we only “know” that we have a heart once it breaks, indeed, at the very instant of its breaking (Nancy 263), like a seam being torn deep inside of us, an avulsion of tissue that we never truly recover from. The wizard impresses her burning letters, her spellcasting runes and ideographs, onto the surface of the air, and then waits for something to happen; the drag performer mouths the words to old songs like an incantation, or even sings in his/her own voice, and the darkness of the air, and the heat of the club, and the glowing ember of her cigarette all become a hypnotic eye, drawing in the audience and inviting them to live for a moment on the border of gender transition. The chiasma of performer/performance is not always successful, and, like a spell, it can fail to work its magic. But how do we even judge success in this case, and what actually constitutes failure? Is a spell reversible? Is a curse ever livable, a destiny endurable? The drag show, suggests Newton, is more for the queer observer than the straight one, since within it “the covert homosexual can see the homosexual identity acted out openly, and this he evidently regards with mixed proportions of disapproval, envy, and delight” (Newton 30). Somewhere in this space between disapproval and delight, a change occurs, a thing happens, and that thing is difficult to identify. Perhaps it is magic, or just a trick of your light, the glint of someone else’s eyes.

The figure of the melancholy/melancholic drag queen has always intrigued filmmakers, who seem to look at her through the camera with a mixture of fascination

and fear. Often, she has been read by audiences as a trope of high tragedy, a psychic and bodily register for some type of grand gender dyspepsia, rather than a living, sexualized person whose particular embodiment, and embattled political situation, makes it difficult—sometimes impossible—to carve out a safe life, to find a loving partner. There is Divine, who acts as a prophetic figure of sorts in *Pink Flamingos*, the Tiresias of the trailer park; there is Bernadette, the high Magus/Magess of *Priscilla*, who stoically tells Felicia to “toughen up” after she’s been bashed in a remote Australian town; there is Judy, the transsexual woman (and probably the only really fascinating character) in *Better Than Chocolate*, who angrily sings “I’m not a fucking drag queen,” but then promptly begins to pine for her own muse, the scholar-butch, Francis; and of course there is the inimitable Lady Chablis (who insisted on playing herself) in the film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, who alternates between acting out playfully and irritatingly following John Cusack around the streets of Savannah, despite the fact that he has ardently (and somewhat paranoically) declared his own straightness. All of these characters share a visible sense of melancholy, a world-weariness, a mode of drag *ennui* that makes them attractive to filmmakers because of the sensational bitchiness that can be exploited from such a position.

Each of them stage their own particular kind of intervention against violence and homophobia: Judy enacts her defiance through an actual drag act (“I’m not a fucking drag queen”), and Lady Chablis faces a legal court in Savannah. Only Bernadette, however, reacts physically against a direct threat of violence. When Felicia is being attacked by a group of men intent on beating (and probably raping) her, Bernadette actually interposes herself between Felicia and the mob. When she kicks one of the

attackers in the groin, saying “there—now you’re *fucked*”, Bernadette literally redefines the parameters of fucking. She isn’t just a drag queen—she’s a *dragon-queen*. And then there is Pepper LaBeija, the real-life Mother of House LaBeija (“everyone in New York is wrapped up in being LaBeija”), who appears every inch the melancholy monarch as she expresses regret for the follies of her children, or the sins of her mother (“my God, she burned a mink coat”). Pepper seems fiercely, almost angrily driven when she performs at the ball, but in her interview scenes, she exudes a tired sadness that immediately allows the audience to render her tropological—the weary drag Mother, the disappointed parent, thereby refiguring her within the Oedipal drama and almost erasing her drag persona entirely. Like a wizard, Pepper has attained “legendary” status within drag ball culture, but what, precisely, does this mean for her?

Drag balls—historically engineered by predominantly African-American and Hispanic communities as a performance of drag cultures within accessible urban spaces—were, and are, *work*. At times, they seem an almost unfeasible amount of work, especially given the economic backgrounds, various health-conditions, and simultaneous commitments of the devoted house-mothers and volunteers who organize them. In *How Do I Look*, the 2006 sequel to (and remediation of) *Paris is Burning*, produced at grass-roots level by the drag Houses themselves rather than Jennie Livingston, we see Pepper, former mother of House LaBeija, arrive at a ball in a motorized wheelchair. Devoid of makeup, wrapped in a sweater and blanket, Pepper is both nothing and everything like the fierce house-mother that we saw over fifteen years ago in *Paris*. Yet she continues to work, and the peculiar vicissitudes of life as a drag legend have also worked Pepper, have

worked Pepper's body (through illness, through exhaustion, and through the simple yet inconceivable labor of *temps perdu*, time passing) in painfully visible ways.

The wizard, we should remember, is almost always *white*—the most significant exception to this being Ged, the Arch-Mage of Ursula Leguin's *Earthsea* novels, who was written as a person of color but transformed by the publishing industry into a white man. Only a few covers of the *Earthsea* trilogy depict Ged as having dark skin, just as only the earlier editions of the *Nevèryon* saga depict both Gorgik and Pryn as having dark and slightly lighter skin, respectively. I understand, then, that a serious negative effect of the fantasy publishing domain has been to lighten, or whiten, *fantasy* as a province of the imagination—to produce exiled wizards who are white, and who therefore can claim a type of wounded male masculinity while still asserting ownership to a type of default racialization. So I am aware of the problems inherent in drawing connections between white wizards and drag-queens who are often people of color. But I also want to explore how melancholia operates among both cultural communities as a peculiar signifying force, a negative magic capable of underscoring a whole host of inequalities and repudiated positions—racial, sexual, and economic.

In this sense, drag queens and wizards share a common bond, for the lonely Magus, the solitary wizard, the sad enchanter, is also a mythological staple of the fantasy genre. I have already mentioned the sad and sarcastic Merlin of T.H. White's *Once and Future King*, but there is also the Arthurian Merlin himself, pining after Nimue (who rejects him), living vicariously through the sexual and martial exploits of Arthur (and Vortigern before him), and finally finding himself sealed forever within a crystal cave; there is Gandalf, of course, who never even approaches the social map of love in the eyes

of readers, and who—I argue—can experience physical intimacy only through his pedagogical and motherly relationship with the hobbits; Belgarath, the incorrigible “old wolf” of David and Leigh Eddings’ *Belgariad* novels, doomed to loveless immortality and having to live through the romantic experiences of his daughter, Polgara (she marries a blacksmith, no less); Vanyel Ashkevron, the teenage wizard of incalculable power in Mercedes Lackey’s *Last Herald Mage* series, whose relationships always seem to end in tragedy and death; and, finally, Raistlin Majere, whose very body is rendered absent due to its disability⁵, who psychologically tortures his only love interest (the priestess Chrysanina), and finally abandons the idea of romantically pursuing her—Raistlin, whose sole enduring relationship remains with his twin-brother, Caramon, a relationship that I want to argue is replete with Oedipal fireworks.

This returns us to the relationship between magic and melancholia, between what I’m calling a *drag aesthetic* and the immortal distance of the Magus. In classical humoral theory, melancholia was also thought to produce *heat*—the melancholiac subject being literally on fire from the inside—and, taking this possibility into account, I am struck by the many descriptions of Raistlin in *Dragonlance* as being “fiery,” “glowing,” or “consumed by an inner fire.” Tanis notes that “[he] could feel the heat of Raistlin’s body radiate through the red robes, as though he were being consumed by an inner fire. As usual, Tanis felt uncomfortable in the young mage’s presence” (129). What I have been trying to argue throughout this project is that magic, like melancholia, is a burning state that exposes the wounds of the ego, even as it provides a unique field on which to transgress the bounds of the subject. Just as the melancholiac replaces the lost object with her own ego, the magician is subsumed by her own magic, and every spell attempts

to reconcile the original gap of despair between signifier and signified (the same gap between the lost loved-one and the still-living mourner).

“Kinship Between Life and Death”

We cannot bring the dead back to us; we cannot bring the dead word back to life, cannot craft a spell that will translate our own affect, cannot paint mystic runes on the surface of the air that will bring back a single lost moment, a single life passed over, a single dream never fully attained. “Magic seemed to offer solutions to everything when I was nineteen,” says Vanyel in *Magic’s Promise*—“for a while—for a little while—I thought I held the world” (79). But all of his power can’t return his lover, Tylendel, to him, just as it can’t secure his father’s love. When a wizard takes on this power, what does s/he lose, and what does s/he gain? There is always a new name taken, a more powerful signifier: Gandalf becomes “Gandalf the White,” or “Mithrandir”; Ged, the poor village boy in Ursula Leguin’s *Earthsea* novels, becomes “Sparrowhawk,” the Arch-Mage of Roke; Harry Potter becomes “the boy who lived,” the sole survivor of Voldemort’s curse; Gara, the daughter of Belgarath, becomes *Polgara* when she takes on the robes of the sorceress, a God’s chosen daughter. By taking on this new name, they enter a new kinship system, a fraternity of wizards from which they will derive (presumably) love, support, and power. And yet, ultimately, they remain alone with their agency, alone with their spellbooks and their scrolls, watching the deeds of humans and hobbits with a kind of eternal hunger—because they can love, they can err, while the Magus must remain frozen in perfection.

Drag queens, like wizards, have the gift of thaumogenesis, the power to create something from nothing, *ex nihilo*, gender out of...what, exactly? Gender out of the ruins of representation? Gender out of its own simulacra, a copy emerging from a copy, or something else entirely? Milla, a drag performer and interviewee in Rupp and Taylor's *Drag Queens of the 801 Cabaret*, says that "we know how to make something out of nothing...You know, we'll go right up to a garbage can and pull something out of the fucking trash" (22). Kylie, another interviewee, sometimes known as Kevin, states enigmatically that "nobody calls me Kevin anymore. Sometimes I worry that Kevin is gone" (34). But where has Kevin gone? Where did Kylie come from? In *The Two Towers*, when the company confronts Gandalf the White for the first time (after his transformation), he seems confused by the name that they call him: "'Gandalf,' the old man repeated, as if recalling from old memory a long disused word. 'Yes, that was the name. I was Gandalf'" (484). When they ask him about his relationship with Saruman, the fallen-mage of *LOTR*, Gandalf/Mithrandir replies that "I *am* Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been" (484). His transformation, from the sometimes-bitchy Gandalf, to the glamour-queen Mithrandir ("hair...white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe"), also allows him to incorporate Saruman within his body and psyche, like an ego reincorporating a past grief—without Gandalf, Saruman cannot exist; and, as his later death proves, Saruman cannot *be* separate from Gandalf. In the end, there is only Mithrandir, resplendent in his gleaming white gown.

Gandalf's transformation is, in itself, sensual. As he faces the Balrog on the Bridge of Kaza-Dûm, fire meets fire, shadow collides with shadow. The Balrog is "a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe," but

Gandalf himself is “a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Arnor” (321-22). Flame and shadow, shadow and flame. Gandalf calls the Balrog “flame of Udûn,” orders it to “go back to the Shadow,” and yet so much of his own magic, his own illusion—up to this point—has been merely a manipulation of shadows, an elongation and shaping of his own mysterious shadow, like the amoebic ebbings and flowings of Klein’s “ego-nuclei” which seek to test the world for incorporable objects. As Gandalf’s “fire of Arnor” rises up to meet the “Flame of Udûn,” his own fiery drag queen emerges, the immortal and fabulous Mithrandir, like Dorian Corey rising up to smack the Balrog down, down, into the deep and dreamless earth. Fizban’s “no kidding,” Dorian’s “hooray for you,” Gandalf’s bitchy “*fools*” (a regular epithet of his, always directed at the hobbits), all unite in a fiery chiasma of shadow and shade, as Gandalf offers the Balrog his final reading (“do you want to talk about Sauron? Fine, let’s talk about *Sauron*”). And the bridge shatters; and they fall:

Long I fell, and he [the Balrog] fell with me. His fire was about me. I was burned...we fought far under the living earth, where time is not counted. Ever he clutched me, and ever I hewed him...[thus] naked I was sent back, for a brief time—until my task is done. (490-91)

There you have it—death, sex, and rebirth, all within the trackless, amniotic underground, the “bowels of the earth” where the One Ring must be destroyed—or reborn, which is more likely. Unlike Gandalf, however, Raistlin’s rebirth does not produce a positive figure, a glamour-queen, but rather a Shadow Queen—an empress of

shade. As Raistlin moves further down the path of the dark arts, held back only by the ethical urgings of his brother Caramon, he makes the transition from Red to Black, from a wizard of neutrality to a mage of evil (in the D&D universe, from which *Dragonlance* emerged as one possible narrative, “lawful evil” is an orientation with its own rules and inscriptions, its own internal code, which Raistlin actually blurs). “My body was my sacrifice,” he tells Tanis. “Nothing can help” (64). But help *who*, exactly? The “real” Raistlin trapped within the decrepit and decaying wizard? The childhood Raistlin, who loved magic and illusions, and who—despite his outward distance—loved, fiercely and forever, his protective brother Caramon? Who has Raistlin lost, and who/what is he trying to reclaim?

He rejects every outward display of Caramon’s affection, despite the fact that his brother is probably the only person in the world (aside from Tanis, who is peculiarly without judgment) who puts up with him, who still trusts him. On one occasion, when Caramon asks him how he feels, Raistlin’s reply is incisive: “How do I ever feel?” whispered Raistlin bitterly. ‘Help me up. There! Now leave me in peace for a moment’” (163). Caramon endures Raistlin’s moods, his bitchiness, his lust for power, not simply because the two are joined by blood, but because Caramon himself achieves subjectivity through his mothering of Raistlin. They are two mothers, in fact—Raistlin the caustic and disappointed mother-figure, the devouring mother, and Caramon the loving and smothering maternal figure, the caretaker, who experiences his own sense of self only when he is reeling from one of Raistlin’s sarcastic retorts. Like Willow, who serves as the mild counterpart to Buffy’s Slayer-fueled anger and authority, Caramon is

Raistlin's own repudiated mother-love, his exiled sense of belonging and security, which only emerges from the blurred love of shared kinship.

As Raistlin's health deteriorates throughout *Dragon's of Autumn Twilight*, Tanis watches the young mage become more and more dependent on his brother's physical ministrations, even as he grows more and more bitter about his own dependency:

[Raistlin] lapsed into a fit of coughing. Caramon put his arm around him, holding him close, almost as if the big man were trying to hold his brother's frail body together. Raistlin recovered, wiped his mouth with his hand. Tanis saw that his fingers were dark with blood. (61)

Caramon is, indeed, the only force capable of holding Raistlin together, of instituting the self in Raistlin, just as Raistlin creates Caramon's own subjectivity through a conjuration of shade, a dark spellcasting. The two are Gemini, joined in a psychic and intimate embrace that, as with Judith Butler's discussion of Antigone's quest to bury her brother Polynices in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, confounds the original incest taboo (also the taboo against homosexuality). In Michel Tournier's *Gemini*, which details the deeply erotic relationship between two identical twins—Jean and Paul—Jean observes of his relationship that: "I have a living image of myself of absolute veracity, a decoding machine to unravel all my riddles, a key to which my head, my heart, and my genitals open unresistingly. That image, that decoder, that key is you, my twin brother" (205).

Raistlin defies the social order by claiming a power that should not belong to him, the power of the Magus to alter space and time, but he also stages a defiance of the incest taboo within his own, frail body. His love for Caramon is not precisely erotic, but not precisely fraternal, either. Caramon is, in essence, the only person that Raistlin *does* love in the world, the only person he could conceivably die for. “Good Caramon,” he says, after his brother agrees to rescue an ancient spellbook for him. “Excellent Caramon” (236). Somewhat like Gollum’s declaration to the ring, “my precious”—Caramon, here, becomes not simply a brother, but a vessel for all of Raistlin’s desire and rage, “one ring to bring them all / and in the darkness bind them.” Or him.

As Tanis sits beside Raistlin on the eve of a wedding (not his of course, and never Raistlin’s), he is “startled to see the mage’s resemblance to his half-sister, Kitiara. It was a fleeting impression and gone almost as soon as it came, but it brought the woman to Tanis’s mind” (440). Like the beautiful Gemini twins, neither male nor female, but rather a Grecian link of both sexes, Raistlin and Caramon possess both a masculine and feminine ‘aura,’ a drag aesthetic of sorts. Raistlin is able to “[bring] the woman to Tanis’s mind,” because Tanis, in fact, sees him, *reads* him, as a woman already. His strange face, “no human’s face,” with its sallow cheekbones and hourglass eyes, is an uncanny image, but it is also a cruel reflection of the drag queen’s face, the product of endless ornamentation and sculpture. What makes Tanis so uncomfortable about Raistlin, quite possibly, is not the young man’s lust for power, but his *lust* in general—lust for Caramon, lust for Tanis, and lust for performance.

What is it mean to be a brother, a sister, a wizard, a human? If magic, through its ritual, its speaking-subject, tries to reverse the schizophrenic drama between the signifier

and signified, tries to make incarnate and bring back what can never be recovered (a life, a soul, a broken heart, a subject, or sometimes just a word), then the melancholia that lies at the heart of sorcery is also Butler's "melancholy of the public sphere" (Which Butler? 81), the question—what have I lost / what have we lost—that drives human consciousness. Just as the ego only sees itself, only experiences objectification, through melancholia, so do the queens, wizards, and kin of the world only access their own interior fire through mourning, only experience their own subjectivity as a shadowy spell-casting, a hot and dark club, thick with incense, perfume, and the smell of powders, like a drag-queen's changing room, a wizard's apothecary.

Performing "Un-Freedom"

Several fascinating collisions between fantasy, magic, and drag performance occur also in the work of the musician Azis, a Romani pop-singer who performs epic ballads in Bulgarian while also cross-dressing in fantastical outfits. Azis works within the emerging musical genre of *chalga*, a fusion of Bulgarian folk music, pop, and electronica which has been identified as everything from a musical revolution to the absolute obliteration of folk tradition. What makes Azis such a crucial figure within this unique performance genre is his defiant politicization, as well as his continual manipulations and queerings of standard musical cliches. In a 2006 interview with *The World* correspondent Matthew Brunwasser, he identifies himself as "the face of democracy" while dressed in full drag. Having briefly campaigned with the Euroroma party (representing Romani politics in Bulgaria), Azis represents a highly visible gender-

variant figure within Bulgarian political and popular culture—although Brunwasser, in correspondence, notes that “they [Euroroma] never had a serious chance of getting into parliament...there is a 4% ceiling, and they knew it” (Email, May 3 2007).

Azis fuses drag aesthetics with magical and fantastic elements in his songs, particularly in the videos for “No kazvam ti stiga” and “Nikoi ne moje.” In “No kazvam ti stiga,” which translates as “enough, I say,” or “I tell you, enough,” Azis literally performs a dance of mourning around the ruins of a queer space, a construction site upon which something (the audience is never quite sure what) is being built. Wearing an incredible black head-dress, a veil, and a black gown meant to cover what looks amazingly like a suit of body armor, he dances in circles around a group of (nearly naked) construction workers, singing: “I tell you, enough / Don’t kill me /Don’t set me on fire.”⁶ Azis casts a spell of mourning over these men, transforming the impossible desire he feels for his lost love into a kind of love-charm that ensnares the workers, who eventually join him in the dance. A refrain throughout the song—“you shatter my air”⁷—actually resembles the medieval and early modern notions of melancholy as a disease or distemperment carried through the air by demonic spirits, or as the air itself as a “dark” medium for psychic and demonic transcription. The image of Azis, wearing a type of drag-armor and ensPELLing a group of butch laborers, seems to be a fantastic coincidence of fantasy, queerness, and mourning, all fused in order to produce an incantatory performance that has also risen to the top of the Bulgarian pop charts.⁸

I am not suggesting, with these various fantastic comparisons and examples, that melancholic sadness remains the primary agency for human life; rather, I am trying to explore Foucault’s claim that the subject, like iron, understands itself only when it comes

into crisis, only when it is struck. The heart knows itself only at the precise moment of its own fracture, only once it has already been broken. And, as Butler explains in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, “this struggle with the unchosen conditions of one’s life, a struggle—an agency—is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of un-freedom” (Butler, *Account* 19). If melancholia is a perpetual ‘un-freedom’ of the mourning subject, then it is also through this struggle that a peculiar power emerges, that is, the power of the mourning subject to both give and take an account of him/herself. From the crucible of crisis, an unstoppable living emerges, a performance that refuses to acknowledge the stage because it has actually become the stage, the club, the night, the world.

I will end this discussion with the most elusive and tantalizing image of Gandalf, which occurs just before he faces the Balrog—in *The Two Towers*—when he is waiting with the hobbits in the Mines of Moria. Tired, bitchy, and angry, Gandalf suddenly realizes the source of his bad mood: “‘I know what is the matter with me,’ he muttered, as he sat down by the door. ‘I need smoke! I have not tasted it since the morning before the snowstorm.’” (306). Yes—Gandalf needs a cigarette. Like a performer about to go on stage, s/he fumbles around for that last cig, that object of oral fixation, hoping to draw the smoke through his own lungs just as s/he draws the shadow of performative energies through her body, the vapor and ether that, in the end, is all that we can ever make of gender, since each of us experiences it as a personal mystery, a scroll that we can never quite decipher, a transsexual text that the world reads for us, against our will:

The last thing that Pippin saw, as sleep took him, was a dark glimpse of the old wizard huddled on the floor, shielding a glowing chip in his gnarled hands between his knees. The flicker for a moment showed his sharp nose, and the puff of smoke. (Ibid)

The smoke, the ember, the flame, the shadow—who can tell them apart? The cool light of the cherry in Gandalf’s pipe, like that ash from the cigarette that never quite drops, the balloon that doesn’t fall, the hand always lifted up, as if to say *just reach don’t worry I’ve got you*, the sleepy light of Raistlin’s glowing staff—what is lost, precisely, within the light’s corona, along the shadow’s edge, in the hem of black, red, gray, and white robes?

It may, after all, be irrecoverable—a gap that can never be measured, and a ritual loss from which we ourselves emerge, the children of loss.

Chapter Four

¹ For more on the *sidhe*, see Lady Gregory’s classic *Gods and Fighting Men* (1970).

² These events are recounted in *The Brothers Majere*, as well as the *Twins* series.

³ Hemmings argues: “For Halberstam, Butler, and Hausman, transgendered performance is a tool for validating and prioritizing a queer discontinuity that ultimately resides in a lesbian or gay, but not transsexual, body” (124). The repudiative model creates a quest-type destiny for the gay or lesbian subject, who must somehow conquer melancholia in order to reclaim his/her lost gender, but this process ignores the sexual lives and object-choices of those who identify neither as straight or gay.

⁴ Raistlin remains the most frequently drawn character in the *Dragonlance* universe, appearing on over a dozen book covers and other marketing/promotional materials for various RPGs and gaming systems.

⁵ The connection between fantasy texts and disability studies still needs to be made, since wizards are often presented as physically weakened characters, those who have sacrificed their bodies (and often their minds) for the mastery of supernatural power. In that sense, the transition from mortal to magi also resembles a form of transsexual reassignment, since the surgery necessary to reconfigure one's sex takes from the operant body as much as it gives, similar to the physical remainder that magic—the magic of gender identity?—also requires of its subject. Jay Prosser, in *Light in the Dark Room* (2005), notes that those who choose surgery often literally give up body-parts in exchange for others: “One makes this decision knowing...that the end result will anyway leave severe scarring, the loss of flesh in the donor body part sometimes so shockingly large as to leave that part dysfunctioning. Literally, to have a penis one must give an arm and a leg.” (172).

⁶ Special thanks go to Pavel Nikolov, Matthew Brunwasser, and Anne Weshinsky for providing me with translations of Azis's lyrics. The lines in Bulgarian are:

в ъ з д у х ъ т м и ц я л р а б и в а ш ,
н а п р а в и с е , ч е р а з б и р а ш .
а к о т р я б в а и з л љ ж и м е -
к о л к о м е о б и ч а ш . (Nikolov Apr 26 2007).

⁷ The Bulgarian phrase is: Н о к а з в а м т и с т и г а (Ibid).

⁸ In the video for “Nikoi ne moje” (literally, “nobody can”), the action alternates between Azis—without drag—confronting his former lover at a club, and then Azis dressed in a pink gown and diamond headdress singing about mourning and lost love, with “zapomni” (“remember”) recurring as a lyric. In a similar queering of traditional genres, the video for “Sabo ze tev” is shot as a western, with Azis riding a horse and playing an acoustic guitar (but still surrounded at all times by a backdrop of sparkling beads).

Chapter Five

Chapter Five

Willow's Pharmacy:

Desire and Addiction in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

But she goes back and forth remembering
gentle Atthis and in longing
she bites her tender mind

- Sappho, 96.1 (Tr. Anne Carson).

I'm under your spell,
God, how can this be—playing with my memory
You know I've been through hell,
Willow, don't you see,
there'll be nothing left of me

- *Buffy* ("Once More With Feeling," 6.07).

This chapter will look specifically at the addictive relationship between Willow Rosenberg and Tara McClay on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the iconic television show created by Joss Whedon that ran for seven seasons on various networks between 1997 and 2003. However, I will also be analyzing substance abuse as a sign for covert queer desire in other fantasy narratives. My argument is that queer addiction can act as a symbolic representation of melancholia, and that magic, prefigured as an addictive substance, becomes the physical signifier of the beloved object lost within melancholia. I will be comparing Willow's case to other narratives of addiction, including Charles Dickens' *Edwin Drood* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in order to contextualize the relationship between queerness and addiction, as well as to explore the overlapping terrain shared by the gothic and the fantastic. I want to examine how a drug

is like a spell, how a kind of *narcotic melancholia* lies at the heart of all these narratives, and how *Buffy* stands as a unique representation of the queer fantastic.

A brief summary of Willow's role in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is in order. *Buffy* revolves around Buffy Summers, a modern-day vampire slayer who battles supernatural evil in Sunnydale, a fictional California suburb.¹ Willow Rosenberg and Xander Harris are Buffy's best friends, and together, all three form the "Scooby Gang"—a close-knit group whose coordinated activities help to keep Sunnydale relatively demon-free. Throughout the course of the series, Buffy dies (twice), Willow becomes a powerful witch, Xander loses an eye, and two vampires—Spike and Angel—vie with each other for Buffy's romantic affections. What most interests me, for the purposes of this discussion, is how the moment of Willow's embrace of witchcraft coincides precisely with her experimentation with queer sexuality. Her powers are first fully activated when she meets Tara McClay, a bit of a social outcast like her, and together they discover that their individual powers are actually fueled by erotic desire. Willow, I want to argue, becomes addicted to Tara and magic simultaneously, until it becomes impossible to tell where one desire begins and the other ends. Through this coincidence of queer sexuality with narcotic addiction, I want to investigate the ways in which addiction can mirror a state of melancholia, as well as how Willow's desire for Tara is primarily a love traced with sadness and melancholy.

If this discussion has a specific organizing principle, it is the Greek *pharmakon*, which Derrida describes as a "'medicine' [or] philter...[which] acts as both remedy and poison....[O]perating through seduction, the *pharmakon* makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 70). Socrates locates

the practice of writing itself as a *pharmakon*, an addictive drug, a double-edged “phial” that proposes to increase human memory, but that simultaneously destroys oral culture by creating *hypomnesis*, or a kind of “false memory.”² Since the act of spellcasting is bound up in both written and oral practices, this discussion will also investigate the variety of ways in which magic’s inscription acts as a *pharmakon* for Willow, causing her to forget herself, her personality, even as it revises her—both physically and psychically—as a living signifier for magical addiction. Willow’s desire for Tara is, arguably, what holds this addictive transformation at bay, but the frustration of this desire is also what propels Willow along the darkest and most destructive paths of ‘black’ magic. “The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living,” says Derrida. “The *pharmakon* introduces and harbors death” (*Dissemination* 142). Concealed underneath Willow’s increasingly addictive spellcasting, especially after Tara’s death, is the melancholiac’s classic incorporation of the lost love object within her own ego, which threatens to consume her even as it voraciously sustains her. In what ways is this symptomatic of the entire fantasy genre? How does queer desire manifest itself in fantasy texts as a paradoxical force, both a cause *and* an effect of substance abuse? In this chapter I explore these questions in part by juxtaposing the relationship between Willow and Tara, as represented in *Buffy*, alongside another Greek paratext, Sappho’s translated fragments serving to remind of us of the queer memory traces that might be mourned through the incantatory processes of (re)writing.

Gothic Addictions, Fantastic Affections

Elsewhere in *Dissemination* Derrida describes the process of “hypomnesis”, of partial memory through writing, as “[memory] letting itself get stoned [*médusée*] by its own signs, its own guardians” (105). The French *médusée* refers, obviously, to a literal bodily transformation, the petrifying glare of the medusa, but it also playfully denotes intoxication—memory is getting stoned, getting high, on writing; writing is the ultimate high. What might it mean to get stoned, *médusée*, through magic? As I will discuss later, many of the magical rituals in *Buffy*—and especially those performed by Willow and Tara—have a narcotic quality to them, with the original meaning of the Greek word *narcosis* being “to benumb,” to sail the River Lethe, to get stoned on the sorcery of the sign. Like wizards, drug users have their own language, their own paraphernalia. The Latin *paraferna*, in fact, originally referred to the wife’s own physical property, not including the dowry, that belonged technically to the husband but could be “utilized” by her—chiefly, her wedding dress and jewelry. Just as the poor wizard’s *paraferna* might be his robes (a kind of wedding dress), staff, and jewelry, a drug-users *paraferna* are thaumaturgical tools of a sort: pipe, papers, lighter, and sometimes, needle. The tools give access to the mind-altering power of *médusée*, just as the staff, spellbook, and spell-ingredients (usually a dried powder of some sort) give access to the mystical realm. The sweet puff of smoke held in the lungs, the passing of the pipe or the joint, the conversational circle under dim light, the strains of music floating in the background, and the gradual loosening of signs/speech—all are a spell of sorts.

Willow’s addiction to magic resembles two intertwined addictions, opium, and sex, in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*; the novel begins with Lord Henry Wotton, seen ghost-like and indistinct by Basil Halward “through the thin blue wreaths of

smoke that curled up in such fanciful whorls from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette” (Wilde 24). Near the end of the book, Dorian himself visits an opium den in London’s notorious Limeside district, which by that time (1891) had practically become a gothic convention, showing up in Dickens’ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) as well as *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. It is not my intention to collapse the gothic with the fantastic here—since both are distinct genres—but rather to expose the play between the two, as well as to examine how queer sexuality is often explained away by addiction (in the gothic³) or by magic (in fantasy). Although Willow, a contemporary teenager, would probably be more interested in something like ecstasy or crystal-meth (both of which continue to act as dangerous subcultures among urban gay men⁴), her gradual swoon into the dark arts tends far more to resemble something straight out of Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822). The “den” that she visits, which is magically cloaked and belongs to an illicit warlock named Rack, is almost identical to the opium houses described by Dickens and De Quincey, complete with soiled couches and prone clientele lying collapsed over rotting divans.

Whereas the fantastic often deals with lone characters negotiating a troublesome destiny, the gothic is concerned with families—more specifically, with perverse, extended, and incestuous families. In *Between Men*, her study of homoeroticism within Victorian culture, Eve Sedgwick observes that “the Gothic seems to offer a privileged view of individual and family psychology. Certain features of the Oedipal family are insistently foregrounded there...[many Gothic novels] are about one or more males who not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male” (Sedgwick 91). Dr. Jekyll’s servants are his own queer

extended family; Edwin Drood's murderer (we think) turns out to be his beloved uncle, John Jasper; in *Dorian Gray*, both Henry and Basil act as surrogate father-figures to Dorian, offering him competing aesthetic philosophies that come to represent the primary psychic struggle of his decadent life. "Decadence," Sedgwick also suggests, "is a notably shifty idea, but clearly its allure to the middle-class adolescent lies in its promise of initiatory shortcuts to the secret truths of adulthood" (90). Willow Rosenberg, a confused twenty-year-old, having only recently come out as a lesbian—and freely admitting her own "lack of lesbo street-cred"⁵—is in search of just these "initiator shortcuts," however dangerous they turn out to be. What makes *Buffy* such an interesting generic-hybrid is that it attempts to combine the fantastic with the gothic, producing a text that is simultaneously about a lone vampire slayer and her extended family (both human and demon). Buffy is consumed by melancholy from Season Five onwards, after she dies for the second time⁶—understandable—but it is Willow's own exploration of melancholic relations that I want to address here.

In Season Seven, when it becomes clear that the "big bad" that Buffy must face is none other than evil itself—called "the First Evil"—the Scoobies attempt to gather all of the younger "potential" slayers across the world together in order to fight the coming army of vampires that the First is amassing.⁷ One of these potentials is Kennedy, a nineteen-year-old who quite freely identifies herself as a lesbian, and who pursues Willow's affections with a single-minded intensity that Tara would never have been able to manage. When Kennedy asks Willow when she first "knew" that she was gay, her answer is careful, bordering on cagey: "Three years ago. That's when I knew. And it wasn't women, it was woman. Just one" (*Buffy*, 7.13, "The Killer In Me"). Tara is

Willow's own *pharmakon*, the living embodiment of her self-knowledge, and we might even argue that—without Tara—Willow wouldn't actually be gay. This may seem like a homophobic conclusion, but I think that it resonates with many queers, myself included, who “discovered” their same-sex desires almost entirely through a first crush, an early moment of unauthorized love. If it hadn't been for the boy that I fell crazily in love with at fourteen, would I “be” gay? Would I be me? This echoes Judith Butler's question in *Precarious Life*, her reading of the self lost in mourning: “If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who ‘am’ I, without you?” (Butler, *PL* 22). Who is Willow, without Tara? And who is Willow with Kennedy, who arguably serves as Tara's younger, more impetuous replacement? When Tara says “I'm yours” to Willow, is she also addressing herself?

Willow's relationship with Tara is shadowed by melancholy from the very beginning. Just as she begins to fall for Tara, her previous lover, Oz, reappears, and he is anything but happy to see that his ex-girlfriend has suddenly developed an interest in women. However, to the show's credit, this storyline becomes focused on desire's flexibility rather than its mutability. In the episode “New Moon Rising” (4.19), after Oz transforms into a werewolf and tries to kill Tara—the course of true love never runs smoothly for characters on *Buffy*—Willow says that she was simply tired of waiting for Oz to come back, that she “couldn't live like that.” She offers no tangible explanation for falling in love with Tara, and Oz never demands one. But Willow holds out a kind of legendary hope for their relationship, even if she refuses to define it: “I was waiting. I feel like some part of me will always be waiting for you. Like if I'm old and blue-haired, and I turn the corner in Istanbul and there you are, I won't be surprised. Because...you're

with me, you know?” (4.19). In this sense, desire becomes a peculiar effect of time passing, missed moments. Now is not the time for Willow and Oz, but it might be at some point—a suggestion that some have taken to mean that Willow is “not really” gay, but which actually gestures more to the complexity of desire itself as a kind of assembly, always in motion. Willow suddenly “sees” Tara as an erotic object when she is most missing Oz, and Oz, paradoxically, reappears in Willow’s life precisely as she is falling in love with Tara. The tension of this equation is what produces so many romantic possibilities, even as it makes Willow’s “orientation” impossible to locate. This, arguably, becomes Tara’s own experience of melancholia: the constant anxiety that Willow might somehow return to Oz, and to heterosexuality, which forces her to constantly blame magic for Willow’s various transgressions when what she ought really to blame is Willow’s own unspoken paradoxes and ambivalences.

If the gothic was focused on critiquing the dissolving English aristocracy, themselves often represented as a pedantic family-unit, then *Buffy*’s project was/is to explode the notion of the nuclear family by treating the kinship ties between humans and vampires, demons and witches, slayers and werewolves. This is how *Buffy* marshals both the fantastic and the gothic in order to tell its story, combining the lone warrior of fantasy (*Buffy*) with the perverse and intricate family-structures of the gothic (the Scoobies) to produce a patchwork product. “*Buffy* and *Angel* both depend enormously, if not exclusively, upon their queer families” (Battis, *Blood Relations* 12). And these queer families are also reflected in the family-units constructed by drug-users, kinship groups that can only survive through a sense of cooperation and protection. VANDU, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, is one such group, frequently trying to ensure

the rights and safeties of IV drug-users in Vancouver's downtown east side. Drug-users have their own support-systems, their own highly specific language, and in part that language develops as a resistance against institutions that seek to erase them, a subaltern talking-back. The persistent connection between narcotic-abuse and depression returns me to the argument that the "magical" effects of drugs, their world-altering and escapist properties, are so often an attempt to negotiate the contours of a killing melancholia.⁸ Drugs become the less fatal substance when the only alternative is a living/undead sadness that cannot be ameliorated or fulfilled, since the ego under attack can never glimpse a full-length reflection of the battlefield.

Sex and Death

Willow first meets Tara when she joins the UC Sunnydale Wiccan group, a collective of witches who are mostly concerned with organizing bake sales and making "a really empowering lemon bundt" (4.10, "Hush"). Willow later expresses her frustration to Buffy, complaining that "nowadays every girl with a Henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she's a sister to the dark ones." Already, the lines between magic, addiction, and desire seem permeable—Willow regards the "wanna-blessed-be's" with the same contempt that a seasoned queer might demonstrate towards a college freshman who was dabbling in bisexuality, or the "five-beer-queer" heterosexual who will do just about anything of enough alcohol is involved; the same contempt that a seasoned drug-user might show towards a newbie who wasn't holding the bong properly. Willow and Tara both surface here as the "real" witches, the ones who are actually concerned with, as

Buffy aptly terms it, “going further,” the ones with the real hunger. This desire for witchcraft almost perfectly mirrors the representations of lesbian desire that we see in the gay pulps written from 1950-1970, with taglines like “we walk alone through Lesbos’s lonely groves” (*We Walk Alone*), or “happy and miserable at once, they were wracked by feelings neither could fully understand” (*The Constant Urge*).⁹ These taglines precisely resemble the terms of melancholic investment, an irresolvable paradox where pleasure/pain becomes inseparable.

The relationship between Willow and Tara accumulates slowly, starting with friendship and then evolving into something that ultimately seems unclassifiable. Their first kiss occurs unexpectedly in “The Body” (5.16), an episode otherwise devoted entirely to the death of Buffy’s mother, Joyce:

Willow: I have to be supportive! I...Buffy needs me to be supportive, I... God, why do all my shirts have such stupid things on them? Why can't I just dress like a grownup? Can't I be a grownup?

Tara: Sshh, sshh, darling—

Willow: (crying) Tara—I can't do this—

[Tara kisses her on the forehead, then on the mouth].

Until this moment, the sexiest moment between Willow and Tara has been merely a tease: at the end of “New Moon Rising,” Willow blows a candle out, and their room is plunged into darkness. The rest is left to the audience’s imagination. Now, they are given a visible erotic moment between the two, a loving kiss, during an episode that is supposed to be about death and mourning. Queer desire, in this particular instance, emerges entirely from Willow’s inability to mourn, from her confusion over Joyce’s death, but also from the tenuous divide between sex and death that *Buffy* always treads through its romantic relationships. It is less an instance of love “rising” from the ashes of death, and more the acknowledgment that love and death are actually native to the same drive, that sexual desire can be activated through necrotic means, and that Tara and Willow’s relationship has been based on mourning from the start. Willow is shattered after her abrupt breakup with Oz—who cannot control his own lycanthropy¹⁰—and she throws herself into a passionate friendship with newcomer Tara. In the episode “Family” (5.03), viewers learn that Tara herself is running from her abusive family, who blame her for the death of her mother (her father has invented a demonic “curse” to explain both Tara’s and presumably Tara’s mother’s witchcraft, when in fact he merely wants to lock them both in an abusive relationship). Tara and Willow both come to each other, therefore, as Rosi Braidotti’s “epistemological orphans,” (*Patterns 2*) as women in mourning for a variety of erotic and familial circumstances beyond their control. It is only fitting, then, that their first visible kiss should occur within a narrative focused on death and mourning, since both are attempting to reconcile a mourned-for life with their presently developing relationship that itself defies convention.

Like an addiction, the reality of their relationship seems to emerge during the unlikeliest of moments, always at twilight, constantly edged just out of frame or in the margins. Like Radiant Jade and Madame Keyne in Delany's *Neveryóna*, we seem to glimpse them through a window left ajar. Perhaps the first time we really *see* Tara is when she dies¹¹, and at that point, *Buffy's* own core narrative splits in two, dividing like a mutated cell between Willow's narrative of vengeance and Buffy's desperate attempts at recuperation (is she saving the world, or saving Willow?). Tara's body, in fact, lies coldly and brutally forgotten on the floor of their bedroom, until Dawn stumbles in and finds it. After nightfall, Buffy finds Dawn curled next to Tara, weeping softly, unwilling to move. "I didn't want to leave her alone," she says simply. "I don't understand" (6.20, "Villains"). Unlike Joyce's body, which becomes the vortex at the centre of the episode, Tara's body is almost immediately forgotten—why? Like Dawn, I don't understand. Willow's attempt to magically resurrect Tara fails, and at that moment, her whole subjectivity breaks—she leaves herself, and leaves Tara. What Dawn finds, then, is not just Tara's material body, but the spectral outline of Willow, the repudiated shadow of her own intolerable grief that she has left behind. By not understanding, by refusing to understand, Willow can only leave, and Dawn can only stay. At their heart, both reactions are a variation of the same departure, the same non-choice that Butler describes as our "primary condition of unfreedom" (Butler, *Account* 19).

Every relationship in *Buffy* is intimately connected to death and mourning. Buffy herself falls in love with a vampire, Angel—rather than experiencing a happy ending, Buffy is forced to send Angel back to hell in the finale to Season Two. Like the uncanny, however, Angel returns (as a savage, animal-like presence), and Buffy finds herself

concealing his presence from her friends, slowly rehabilitating him back into a kind of hybrid-humanity. Xander first falls in love with Buffy, who dies (twice), and then with Anya, who also dies in the series finale.¹² Willow falls in love with Tara, who is murdered by Warren, and then she brutally tortures and kills Warren herself.¹³ Rupert Giles, Buffy's mentor, falls in love with Jenny Calendar, a "techno-pagan," who is killed by Angel, who is himself killed and then resurrected by Buffy, only to be ultimately (we think) killed in the series finale of *Angel*—although, once again, media extensions like the *Angel* comic series suggest that he escaped death. The point here is that love, or erotic fulfillment of any type, seems not only to emerge from death, but to occur exclusively within the field of death, so that mourning becomes a precondition for loving. *Buffy* attempts to show, then, how the sex-drive and the death-drive are intimately connected, which Freud suggested much earlier in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* when he claimed that "the greatest pleasure attainable by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with a momentary extinction of a highly intensified excitation" (625). The aim of sex is death; therefore, to enter into a relationship, queer or straight, is to mourn that relationship's eventual decomposition, even as we anticipate the death of desire with a curious pleasure.

Rituals of Unknowing

How is this connected to addiction? Tara first begins to suspect that Willow is addicted to magic in Season Six, but Willow's own desire for mystical power begins long before that. As early as Season Two, she admits to "researching the black arts for

educational fun” (2.21, “Becoming Part I”), and the spell that she casts to restore Angel’s soul (in “Becoming Part II”) culminates in a deeply unsettling trance—Willow herself seems to disappear. But who replaces her? When Giles confronts her in Season Seven, after she has murdered Warren in retaliation for Tara’s death, she states coolly that “Willow doesn’t live here anymore” (6.22, “Two To Go”). But when has “Willow,” or the person we think we know as Willow, ever really dwelt within that site, that body? Would we even know her if we say her? As I argue in *Blood Relations*, it is Willow’s very lack of selfhood that makes her an empty vessel for destructive magic. Buffy calls her “Will—she of the level head,” and Xander refers to her early in the show as being “like my guy-friend who knows about girl stuff,” but Willow herself seems to have no discernible personality, save for the variously positive and negative qualities that her friends invest her with. It is not until she becomes irrevocably addicted to magic—as a means of actually recovering or creating selfhood—that Willow begins to actually resemble someone new.

Willow and Tara attempt their first powerful spell in the episode “Who Are You” (4.16), when they try to create a “passage to the nether realms” in order to expose Faith’s true identity (after she uses a cloning spell to steal Buffy’s body). The name of the episode, like the name of a spell, is also that perennial human query that defines self-identity, the call to the other. In this case, Faith and Buffy have mystically switched bodies, and Tara is the only one who notices that Buffy’s aura seems to be “fragmented.” As they embark upon the spell, Tara’s warnings are heavy with sexual innuendo. The ritual is “intense,” and “not like anything we’ve done before.” It requires complete trust between both parties, and Tara tells Willow that “I’ll have to be your anchor.” Willow’s

assent to the ritual is also the assent of gay woman about to share physical intimacy with her partner for the first time. Both women sit within a painted circle, and slowly, almost lazily, they begin to move their fingers through the air, describing separate arcs with their limbs. Mist flows from their fingertips, and the erotic sigil takes on a life of its own, becoming a radiant circle of energy. They chant: “The inward eye, the sightless sea. Ayala flows through the river in me. The inward eye, the sightless sea. Ayala flows through the river in me.”

Who, or what, is “Ayala?” The word—is it a proper name?—is never used again within the context of witchcraft, and although Willow and Tara often invoke goddesses in their spell-work, this particular deity seems to avoid description. This presence, Ayala, virtually a long and sensuous vowel spoken by two women facing each other, becomes “a sightless sea” that “flows through the river” already present in both women’s bodies. Ayala is, therefore, the spectral representation of a sexuality shared between the two, a sexuality rooted in mourning. Like Samuel Delany’s “Amnewor,” which signifies the AIDS crisis in an era that has no name for AIDS, “Ayala” becomes a meaningless but charged morpheme of pleasure and pain, the “sightless sea” of a desire that both women, even at its outset, know must somehow be temporary, fleeting, vulnerable to death. Just as they are journeying to the “nether realm” in order to find a charm that will help Buffy, Willow and Tara are also engaged in a nether-relation of their own, an indefinable type of queer desire and attachment that they have no proper name for, and no previous experience with. This is also Willow’s first real moment of mystical disclosure with Tara, as Tara realizes just how powerful Willow is (even as a beginner). Afterwards, Willow appears triumphant, but Tara’s expression is slightly downcast, even afraid. She

is humbled by Willow's power, and possibly scared by the attendant dangers, which places her in a kind of preemptive mourning long before her lover has begun to seriously abuse witchcraft.

At the spell's climax, Willow literally falls backward, thrusting with her eyes closed as light explodes all around her. The pose is similar to Tara's in the episode "Once More With Feeling" (6.07), while both characters sing a duet entitled "I'm Under Your Spell." As Willow disappears from the frame, Tara begins to float, crying out "you make me *complete*" in what is unmistakably an episode of fantastic oral sex. Magic thus becomes the privileged signifier for lesbian desire within the show, a *pharmakon* that produces both pleasure and pain, a play both generative and destructive. This particular ritual—designed to expose Faith's true identity—actually creates something *ex nihilo*, a miraculous mystical birth. It is a small glowing orb of green light, captured from the "nether realms," which has the power to reverse Faith's spell. When Willow shows it to Giles, it is carefully kept inside a box, and she seems almost embarrassed to reveal it—as if the glimmering wisp of light was actually a piece of her own body, a clitoral site that she has just recently discovered (and only with Tara's help). It also resembles the *sphaira*, or "lover's ball," which was a convention of Greek lyric poetry. As a love-token meant to be tossed, the *sphaira* could be an actual ball, an apple, or something else entirely, but "tossing the *sphaira*" was such a commonplace gesture that it spawned the nickname "Eros Ballplayer" (Carson, *Eros* 20).

This ritual is all about knowing—who is Faith, who is Buffy, who are you?—and, for Willow, it is knowledge that will become her chosen narcotic. The more she learns about dark magic, the more she learns about her own repressed desires, her own fantasies,

her own dreams and unfulfilled wishes. It is this self-knowledge that drives her mad, forcing her away from her friends, her family, until she is completely desolate and alone. Like Buffy's own bubbling sense of insanity when she temporarily becomes telepathic (in the episode "Earshot" [3.18]), and can't shut out any of the competing voices in her head, Willow is actually trapped in a brutal cascade of self-knowledge, an explosion of black characters and body-text, all of which burn too painfully to be read. In the end, so many of her mystical manipulations, her spells designed to ensure Tara's love and complacency, all boil down to a single, unanswerable question—who are you / who am I—that tortures her even as it defines her existence as a speaking-subject, a witch, a gay woman, a family-member. She isn't Tara, and she isn't Willow, and this is the cruelest cut of all, the reality that she can't face without magic as an anodyne.

Although Willow embraces dark magic as an opiate immediately after Tara's death, she is involved in it long before that. She uses it to have "her will be done" in the episode "Something Blue" (4.09), and again in "Tough Love" (5.19) when she tries to fight Glory, the evil goddess who wants to reclaim her throne by opening a portal to a chaotic dimension that will destroy Earth. After Glory attacks Tara—leaving her unable to communicate, simply mumbling and whispering in the traditional manner of the Freudian melancholiac—Willow attacks Glory with dark magic. Later, she casts a spell to erase Tara's memory, which is exposed in "Once More With Feeling" when Tara broken-heartedly sings "God how can this be—playing with my memory?" Still, she casts the same spell *again* in "Tabula Rasa" (6.08), only the spell backfires and *everyone* ends up losing their memory. *Buffy* is playing with mnemonic ideas here, but it is also more seriously gesturing towards the possibility that who we are, and who we love, is

defined almost entirely through memory. If writing is the *pharmakon* that fractures oral memory, then magic also becomes the illicit substance that pollutes and occludes subjectivity, making everyone strangers to themselves. Willow, recognizing that her desire for Tara has accumulated primarily through recollection, decides that she can manipulate that desire by manipulating time itself. This exposes a further link between magic and melancholia: the mystical desire to reclaim a lost love, or a lost state of pleasure, by altering the very fabric of time and space, by violating one memory by writing over it with a more powerful mnemonic framework.

Shared Rooms, Secret Runes

It isn't until she befriends the witch Amy, however, that Willow commits herself entirely to dark magic. At first, she tells Buffy that it's simply "nice to have another magically-inclined friend around," but before long the two of them are throwing magical power around with little care for the consequences. They visit the "den" of Rack, a sleazy warlock who deals in contraband magicks, and at this point Willow's own contemporary narrative of addiction intersects with past literary works, such as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. Rack's hell-hole is a prototypical opium den, complete with passed-out clientele, grease and grime-stained walls, and a couch in the center upon which the voyeuristic warlock himself can lounge and watch the effects of his spells. Rack himself is an Id-figure, and his den literally becomes the stage for Willow's psyche. When he first meets Willow, he greedily sucks her magical energy, whispering in her ear: "you taste like strawberries" ("Smashed,"

6.10). Later in the episode, Rack lazily tosses power to Willow as she clings to the ceiling, rolling around in ecstasy, while Amy spins and spins in the centre of the room until her form becomes nothing but a blur. In the midst of her opiate dream, Willow sees a grove of trees (the vines seem to be springing from mid-air)—and then, a pair of disembodied legs being dragged through the trees by an unknown monster. She screams; Rack laughs. Her eyes turn completely black.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood begins with a similar episode of fragmented consciousness—John Jasper, in the midst of his drug-reveries, sees a tower that shouldn't be there, a cityscape that shouldn't exist (like the lost city of Neveryóna, or the Tower of High Sorcery). The image fades, and he is brought back to his surroundings, which now appear even more uncanny:

He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms. Through the ragged window-curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed, upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. (Dickens 2)

As he tries to make out the faces of those he shares the room with, they all seem to melt together, becoming like smoke: “He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his color, are repeated in her” (3). For Jasper, opium becomes not simply a means for escaping his own unsatisfied life, but a speculum through which he (and we) can catch

glimpses of covert rage and desire. The more he smokes, the more he thinks obsessively about his “beloved” nephew, Edwin. This split-consciousness allows, in Jasper, what Sedgwick calls “[a] compartmentalization of passivity” (Sedgwick, *Between* 189), a strategy for subsuming his own homosexual desires beneath his ability to “ingest [opium] at will”—that is, his narcotic competence replaces his own queer uncertainty, and everything abject,

In *Emperors of Dreams*, Mike Jay notes that “opium was marketed directly at children,” given names such as “Atkinsons’s Infants’ Preservative” and “Street’s Infant Quietness” (Jay 73). The largest concentration of opium-dens were in the dockside areas of Poplar and Limeside in London’s East End, which were also communities of Chinese migrants. Dickens’ opium-den in *Edwin Drood* was most likely based on his visit to a similar house in Bluegate Fields, and Jay states that “this notion of the opium-den, with its quasi-medical associations of plague and contamination, were replicated hundreds of times over the next few decades—most famously, perhaps, in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” (83). Like Jasper, Dorian is crucially disappointed by his drug when he most needs it, which happens to be on the eve of his psychotic break; the drug’s spell doesn’t satisfy him, just as the wizard’s spell fails in its effect. After murdering Basil Hallward, Dorian sinks into a life of amazing decadence, described by page after page of exotic accumulation and Orientalist fetishism. Upon fleeing to his favorite Limeside opium-den after a particularly guilt-ridden night, Dorian finds, however, that he can’t quite bring himself to face it:

Dorian winced, and looked around at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lusterless eyes, fascinated him. He knew in what strange heavens they were suffering...they were better off than he was...memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away. (Wilde 224)

For Dorian, opium functions as a deferral of his own sexualized guilt, a magic spell that allows him, temporarily, to forget that he has passionately murdered Basil; for Jasper, it functions as a homoerotic screen, an imaginary speculum in which he can see his darkest desires enacted without actually having to live them. When the smoke clears, when the mirror cracks, when Jasper's psyche begins to act upon the surface of the world—in short, when Edwin is murdered—the efficacy of the screen gives way to the realization that everything is actually a mirror within a mirror, an endlessly recursive series of screens and paper shadows, a gleam in Dr. Jekyll's cheval glass. Like Utterson, thrashing around helplessly in bed as he dreams of Hyde's inexpressible face, Willow dreams deeply, almost fatally, in the episode "Restless" (4.22), when she is trapped in a nightmarish world of her own creation. After summoning the spirit of the "First Slayer," Buffy's primordial ancestor, in the previous episode—in order to infuse Buffy with the power to defeat a cybernetic villain called Adam who resembles a postmodern Frankenstein engineered by the military—Willow finds herself in a dream vision. In *Why Buffy Matters*, Rhonda Wilcox observes that Willow's dream "begins in Tara's red-curtained, womb-like room, where Willow is using a brush to write black Greek letters on

Tara's back" (Wilcox 166). Willow calls it "homework," but it is actually fleshwork, a Sapphic invocation to Aphrodite:

Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
do not break with hard pains,
O lady, my heart

but come here if ever before
you caught my voice far off
and listening left your father's
golden house (Sappho, 1.1).¹⁴

Much is remarkable about this inscription, not the least of which is the simple fact that it is *correct*, that the characters are written expertly, that it can be read like Sappho's own poetry upon the flesh of Tara's back. Like Aphrodite herself, Tara leaves her "father's golden house," leaves her biological family in order to be a part of Buffy's chosen family. The "hard pains" of the heart foreshadow Willow's own descent into dark magic, as well as the errant bullet that will eventually take Tara's life. Still in reverie as she continues to paint/write, Willow asks Tara if "you've told me your name," and Tara smiles coyly, saying: "oh, you know *that*." Even in her dreams, Willow is consumed by this desire to know, to name, to both read and inscribe the letters on Tara's body which will somehow answer the ontological question: who are you? This Sapphic ode becomes

the *pharmakon*, the double-voiced drug of writing itself that Willow traces onto Tara's willing flesh. The more she writes, the less she remembers, and the more shadowy the membrane of the dream becomes. Willow is more than a witch here—she transitions into what Derrida calls the “Pharmakeus,” the Magi, who controls not just the natural elements but also the written word. She is using the Logos as a weapon—and Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, does call it a “living thing”—carving her own letters into Tara's skin, even as Tara herself reclines in an opiate dream-state, enthralled by the *pharmakon* as it flows jet-black and star-flecked from Willow's wicked pen.

This is a dream about boundaries, about outlines. The miracle of the Greek alphabet, says Anne Carson, is that it vocalized the idea of the consonant for the first time. As a phonetic system, it was “uniquely concerned to represent a certain aspect of the act of speech, namely the starting and stopping of each sound. Consonants are the crucial factor. Consonants mark the edges of sound” (Carson 55). Whereas the earlier Phoenician alphabet used symbols to represent *any consonant plus a vowel* (that is, the consonants themselves didn't exist as “edges”), the Greek alphabet created unique characters to represent what were really, in themselves, nothing but ideas, breaths, invisible borders. The letters on Tara's back are written in an old style called *boustrophedon*, wherein the end or edge of each line “turns,” like a ploughed furrow, to become the beginning of the next line—an unbroken syllabic and aesthetic chain. The edge of each letter thus clashes with the “turn” of each line, both opened and closed, invasive and organic, like Tara's own body with its unity of open and closed chambers, jagged and smooth lines. This turn represents the turn to the uncanny, the return of the repressed, even as it also mirrors the repetition of melancholia, the constant cravings and

gestures that make up an unstable erotic equation. Do the Greek characters become the outline, the shadow, of her body, or does her body become the outline, the *symbolon*, of the characters? A *symbolon* was, after all, originally one half of a knuckle-bone, presented to someone who held the other half as vouchsafe of one's identity—porous, organic, alive. Like Logos.

Sappho knows about Logos. In another fragment, she describes the pain of holding knowledge, the euphoria of being known, or named, of knowing or naming:

not one girl I think
who looks on the light of the sun
will ever
have wisdom
like this (56.1.)

The “light of the sun” is a force that blazes through Tara’s red curtains, illuminating a desert that may very well be “the desert of the real,” a ruinous place where the shadow of the First Slayer dances. “There’s something out there,” Willow says, but she can’t quite see it, can’t quite put the pen down and remember. The First Slayer is the materialization, the enfleshment, of her own melancholia, her repudiated hunger for power and knowledge that will ultimately separate her from Tara in Season Six. Tara’s bliss is that she needs Willow, not magic; Willow’s torture is that she needs both, as cause and effect, in order to dwell within the red-curtained dream.

In another dreamlike episode, after Tara has rejected her biological family (in the episode aptly entitled “Family,” [5.06]), both women dance in the middle of the Bronze. They are wearing similar dresses, made of a flowing, velvety material, very witch-like, but the audience is not yet aware that these will become *symbolon* for Willow’s own frustrated desire. Later, after Tara has broken up with her and moved out, Willow lays out Tara’s empty dress on the bed, then uses magic to “inflate” it, to make it feel as if Tara is actually within it; then she lays in the lap of the spectral dress, which wraps on impossible arm around her, comforting her, as Tara herself once did. In the cinematic adaptation of Annie Proulx’s *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis del Mar does the same thing, holding Jack Twist’s shirt close to his face, smelling it (scent is the most powerful mnemonic trigger). Their relationship is also punctuated by the language of addiction, with Jack exclaiming “I wish I knew how to quit you,” and Ennis describing their desire for each other as a “thing” that “grabs hold of us,” as if love were a daimonic force that gripped them savagely from the outside, gripped them by the neck and shook.

Sappho was particularly interested in dresses—she mentions them several times in her fragments. In 22.1, she says enigmatically: “if not, winter / no pain,” and then describes a scene that, I argue, is recast between Tara and Willow in this episode:

I bid you sing
of Gongyla, Abanthis, taking up
your lyre as (now again) longing
floats around you,

you beauty. For her dress when you saw it
stirred you. And I rejoice. (22.1)

In a later fragment, 177, she also describes a “transparent dress,” perhaps a dress—like Tara’s—infused with magic and air. Back in the Bronze, Sunnydale’s premiere (and only) all-ages nightclub, Willow and Tara embrace as they dance, and suddenly, they begin to float. “Best birthday,” Tara says, as she is lifted by magical means into the air—and no one notices. Or, perhaps everyone notices, but not a word is said. Not even the slightest erring glance is thrown in their direction. Are the inhabitants of Sunnydale so brainwashed by supernatural forces that they can’t, or won’t, pay attention to a couple who are magically levitating in their midst? Or is the show creating yet another impossible moment—an unstable unity of the mystical and the mundane, wherein both categories blur, bleed, lose their knowability and become merely shadows of each other?

At the end of the episode “Tabula Rasa” (6.08), Tara accuses Willow of violating her mind with magic. “Do you think I’m stupid?,” she demands. “I know you used that spell on me.” Indeed, Willow does use magic in order to smooth over a fight she has with Tara earlier that morning, only to end up accidentally erasing everyone’s memories. Rather than resulting in a Shakespearean comedy of mistaken identity, this episode ends with an angry confrontation between Willow and Tara. Willow protests, to the best of her ability, but Tara suddenly seems exhausted—she has finally realized that Willow’s dependency on magic isn’t getting any better, that she can no longer tell what Willow loves anymore, what her object of desire is: she sees herself through Willow’s own eyes,

which are horribly like Jasper's, melting face into form, magic into flesh, until Tara herself becomes nothing but a spell:

Willow: I realize, I, I did it wrong—

Tara: You did it the way you're doing everything. When things get rough, you ... you don't even consider the options. You just ... you just do a spell. It's not good for you, Willow. And it's not what magic is for.

Willow: But I...I just want to help people.

Tara: Maybe that's how it started, but ... you're helping yourself now, fixing things to your liking. Including me.

Given that their desire for each other has been expressed, up until this point, almost entirely through magical metaphor, we have to acknowledge the fact that Tara's rejection of magic—or Willow's misuse of it—is also a rejection of the very erotic fabric that composes their relationship, the warp, thread, and flesh that expresses the surface of their queer sexuality and love. By repudiating Willow's magic, Tara must repudiate Willow herself. Their love is a *pharmakon*, written in magic and ink, in blood and light, the flaming tracery of two women whose connection has the power to stop time, and by cutting off the sentence, Tara must cut off her own limb. Her ineluctable logic penetrates

the *boustrophedon*, the alternating lines and flows, of their linked body, becoming the cruelest cut of all, the period, the end.

Memory and Melancholy

The Sapphic fragment that I began this chapter with, I think, references Willow and Tara's relationship poetically, and even describes the schism that divides them, the addiction that both sunders and paradoxically constitutes their erotic connection:

her light
stretches over salt sea
equally and flowerdeep fields.

And the beautiful dew is poured out
and roses bloom and frail
chervil and flowering sweetclover.

But she goes back and forth remembering
gentle Atthis and in longing
she bites her tender mind. (96.1)

The uncertain pronoun, “her” provides a suitable ambidexterity for exploring Willow and Tara’s relationship. There is definitely a “bite,” that takes place, a violation of someone’s “tender mind,” and a “back and forth remembering,” a relay of remembering and forgetting, as Willow herself attempts to control Tara’s own economy of recollection (through memory, she can, maybe, grasp love). But who, ultimately, delivers the bite? Does Willow bite into Tara’s “tender mind,” or is it her own mind, thrown open like an unlocked door, that she bites into, macerating herself in an effort to expunge all of her imperfections and insecurities with the hot rush of power? Everything is “bloom” and “frail” and “back and forth,” a delicate, almost confectionary tapestry, a romance of spun sugar and gleaming light and mystic symbols drawn on blood-red carpet, whose yielding surface cannot endure the bite of magic’s *pharmakon*.

This takes us back, however frustratingly, to the unrepresentability of lesbian desire, the outline, the shadow. In describing the Oedipal drama that the *pharmakon* helps to flesh out, Derrida notes that “[it] is all about fathers and sons, about bastards unaided by public assistance, about glorious, legitimate sons, about inheritance, sperm, sterility. Nothing is said of the mother, but this will not be held against us. And if one looks hard enough, as in those pictures in which a second picture faintly can be made out, one might be able to discern her unstable form, drawn upside-down in the foliage, at the back of the garden” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 143). The mother’s form, the woman’s cameo, is “unstable,” a form “drawn upside-down,” lost amid leaves and foliage. Like the disembodied legs that Willow sees being dragged around in her opium-fueled dream, the woman’s body, the maternal signifier, exists as a double-exposure, a shadow of the *pharmakon* that Derrida cannot quite reconcile. This is what Luce Irigaray means, in

Speculum of the Other Woman, when she says that “the whole Universe is already under the Father’s monopoly” (Irigaray 353). In reading Plato’s originary cave as a matrix, a womb, Irigaray is tracing the lost contours of the mother, the shadows of her upside-down and leaf-choked image, which is also the sidelong reflection of lesbian desire—a flame in Dr. Jekyll’s cheval glass, a flicker on the mirrored surface of Plato’s cave:

The fact that the place [the matrix; *hystera*] has been covered over for all useful purposes by the language of reason is only now beginning to be interpreted, in the shape of a dream that is *also* truth. Of *another kind of gender*, no doubt...[covered over] by the economy of metaphor...[W]hat’s *behind is always withheld from view*. Even if one took a tour halfway around it, it would retreat, yet further, into the background. Evasive, invisible. (Irigaray 346; 350)

In the shape of Willow’s dream, the unrepresentable, the withheld-from-view, the sigma and sigil of lesbian circuitry and same-sex desire, gathers power and light between the edgeless characters of the Greek ode, the points of contact between ink and flesh where human wonder shelters. “Stand to face me beloved / and open out the grace of your eyes” (Sappho, 138.1). We cannot separate the love from the addiction, the (i)magery from the remembering, the spells from the speech, because the *pharmakon* runs hot, an engine of desire whose enigma would only shatter us if we attempted to peel away the film, to open the curtains, to shed the dress. In the end, Willow, Jasper, Dorian, Jekyll—all are plagued by fever dreams, all attempt to manipulate a power capable of destroying them, and all find themselves lost within “back and forth remembering.”

Magic is memory, and it is also melancholia, a reaching for the apple, the *sphaira*, that always lies poetically and proleptically out of our grasp, sheltering in the impossible Greek tense, *deute*, which means always-now.

Melancholia operates along remarkably similar pathways to addiction, and in some way, we are all addicted to our own private worlds of melancholy. In *Melancholia and Moralism*, Douglas Crimp locates the criticism of radical queer activism leveled against those caught up in mourning, “[that] we cling to AIDS as melancholiacs unable to mourn our losses and get on with the business of living” (7). Yet mourning *is* productive, and to short-circuit the proper relations of mourning by claiming anger instead can be just as harmful as staying frozen within the melancholic relation. As Freud and Klein have both attempted to explain, melancholia is not a stage to be overcome—as if the psyche has “frozen up,” like an irritating computer—but a crucial event during which the ego, as a result of its own painful splitting, becomes aware of *itself* as an object. All of our language operates as a buffer against constant mourning, swirling around the “abyss”¹⁵ that Kristeva locates as the foundations of the sign-system, the remainder left over by individuation.

Foucault asks “what can be done to guard against the onset of sadness”¹⁶ within the queer erotic experience, and yet a host of cultural production seems to suggest that queer folk *like* sadness and melodrama. Rather than guarding against such an experience, we seem to invite it, to romanticize it, since watching the lover leave in the taxi has become our own melancholic scene par excellence, the moment of pleasing introspection during which we imagine a relationship beginning, even as, like Raistlin Majere, we are secretly amused by the idea of it crumbling—since a relationship’s end affords its own

pleasures, its own fascinations, even its own erotics. Roland Barthes, in *A Lover's Discourse*, states:

The true act of mourning is not to suffer from the loss of the loved object; it is to discern one day, on the skin of the relationship, a certain tiny stain, appearing there as the symptom of a certain death: for the first time I am doing harm to the one I love, involuntarily, of course, but *without panic*. (108)

Willow recognizes this moment of “involuntary” sadism in her relationship with Tara, and yet she does nothing to prevent it; in fact, she encourages it. Why? In part, the answer is that queer relationships—lacking any conservative rules for the enforcement of monogamy, historically censured, and yet building and adapting on the material of heterosexual unions—are always in transit. Like an incomplete spell, they are never verifiable, and that allows them to become a nodal point for all sorts of competing transitory pleasures and betrayals.

Relationships themselves act as a magical relation, a source of enchantment that one can easily become addicted to. *I was one, and now I am two*. This is an act of production every bit as miraculous as capital itself, or the highest-level spell in the sealed *grimoire* of Fistandantalus, something even Raistlin would be afraid to cast. Gay marriage allows for the proper codification of queer unions, the paperwork, but the barest and most perfunctory of legal documents are poor protection against centuries of enforced homophobic violence. Marriage, like magic, tries to bridge a gap that is impossibly large, and the spell-effect is not always what we hoped it might be. This puts

me, as a queer person, in a violent paradox just as insurmountable as melancholia itself. My own sense of difference, of specialness, of *magic*, even, emerges in part from my queerness—yet it is precisely this brand of difference that makes me ineligible for certain rights and liberties, that makes me vulnerable to physical and verbal attack, that makes me afraid. Am I addicted to my own difference, even as I fear it?

And what might it mean to be addicted to difference, or to *différance*? In structuring this chapter around magical addiction and its relation to melancholia, I wanted to explore how a character like Willow is actually addicted to the idea of being queer—to the queerness that emerges from being a witch, a lesbian, a hero, a demon-hunter, and a person capable of saving the world. When Tara, in the episode “Family” (5.03), worries about being unable to help the Scoobies in their world-saving activities—“I just never feel useful”—Willow tries to reassure her: “You are. You’re essential.” But Tara has her doubts, as does Willow. Despite the fact that Tara has some rudimentary magical abilities, she isn’t nearly as powerful as Willow, and she has no slayer-strength like Buffy, no ability to change shape like Oz. How, in fact, is she “essential?” This episode ends with Willow and Tara floating as they embrace on the dance-floor, but this is all Willow’s doing; Tara simply closes her eyes and enjoys the moment. The real threat, here, is not that Tara will be hurt in some mystical misadventure, but that, by laying down her magic, Willow might actually be *almost normal*, like Tara. In this way, Willow participates in the queer addiction to the marvelous, the fantastic, that I discussed in the Introduction to this work. She wants so badly to change the world, to wield cosmic power, that she becomes terrified of her own normalcy, which could return at any

moment—much as the stereotyped version of bisexuality which could magically “revert” to heterosexuality at any moment, without the proper vigilance.

Unlike Tara, Willow is unable to dwell in what Clare Hemmings calls the “bisexual spaces” of queer life, the lacunae and paradoxes that would allow to her ask the same question as Hemmings: “What other kind of performativities might be imagined if visible lesbian or gay sexuality is not a precondition for queer behavior” (117).

Willow’s own sense of queerness, in fact, resides not in her witchcraft, or even in her lesbian desire, but in her closeted sense of normalcy. To be queer, for Willow, would be to lay down her power, to become somehow average, unremarkable. It is Tara who recognizes that, through her increased uses of magic, Willow is slowly killing the teenager she used to be, the girl who first befriended Buffy and Xander without any supernatural help. Tara, we should remember, first catches Willow’s eye and smiles at her before she knows the extent of the woman’s powers. She is drawn to Willow as a person without any definitive sexuality at all, whereas Willow doesn’t actually notice Tara until the two of them are placed in a magical situation together. This doesn’t mean that Willow’s love for Tara emerges wholly from magic; it simply suggests that, for Willow, love and belonging are tied to the notion of being anything but normal, while, for Tara, love seems possible without an excess of magic. The sadness at the core of Tara’s love for Willow comes from her fear that Willow, ever ambivalent about her affections, might not really be in love with *her* per se, but rather in love with the way that Tara’s body affects her magic. *You don’t love me—you just love the way I make you feel.* But aren’t the two inseparable? And isn’t that the tragedy?

Tara never reappears in the show after she dies—for the audience, this is a “real” death, a theft that cannot be reversed through any kind of magic, and that creates an extra-diegetic sense of sadness, a global melancholia. Tara is really gone, really. But her spirit does flirt with the final narrative of Season Seven, and one could argue that she returns both metonymically and metaphorically. In the episode “Conversations with Dead People” (7.07), the First Evil taunts Willow by pretending that it can “see” Tara’s ghost: “Remember that time on the bridge when you sang to each other? Well, she says even though you can’t hear it, she still sings to you.” Its goal here is to convince Willow to kill herself, since then she’ll be able to “see” Tara again, but Willow—having already tried to commit global homicide at the end of Season Six by turning her rage over Tara’s loss against the world¹⁷—chooses not to go this route. The First Evil continues, however, to taunt her, claiming that, by murdering Warren, Willow has forfeited her right to Heaven: “You killed people. You can’t see her. That’s just how it is. I’m sorry.” Willow’s own participation in death thus prevents her from properly mourning Tara, since she can’t say goodbye to her one last time; and yet, neither can anyone else, so is this really an impediment to human mourning, or is it yet another instance of Willow’s normophobia, her fear of being unempowered?

She isn’t able to “accept” Tara’s death until a later episode, “The Killer In Me” (7.13), when an old adversary—her rival, the witch Amy—curses Willow so that she takes the shape of the man she supposedly killed: Warren. This transformation occurs after Kennedy has already been pursuing Willow aggressively, or “aggressively” according to Willow, which basically resembles the attempts of any frustrated queer woman to get some action with someone she knows is interested in her. Willow,

however, continues to shy away, and when she is magically transformed into Warren, she assumes that the spell itself is subconscious: an attempt by her ruthless superego to punish her for finally giving in and kissing Kennedy. By the end of the episode, Willow confronts Kennedy with a loaded gun—Warren’s gun—uncannily duplicating the scene wherein Buffy and Tara were shot by Warren in “Seeing Red” (6.19). Kennedy begins to understand, at this point, that Willow is not merely cursed by Amy’s spell—she is trapped in a melancholic spell of her own devising, a perpetual mourning for a lover, Tara, whom she can never again see, touch, hear. Willow brokenly tells Kennedy:

Shut up! You do not get to say her name. Offering it up to whoever's there.
Tricking me into kissing you....[I] kissed you, just for a second, but it was enough.
I let her go. I didn't mean to....[I] let her be dead. She's really dead. And I killed her....[P]lease, baby, I'm so sorry. Come back. I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Come back!

When Kennedy kisses her again, the spell is reversed, and Willow returns to her “normal” body. But, in the moment just before, as she is pleading “come back,” a moment of aural and visual synesthesia occurs. We hear first Willow’s voice saying “I’m sorry,” then Warren’s voice, then Willow’s again, and finally an unearthly combination of the two. Is it Alyson Hannigan, who plays Willow, speaking from the deepest end of her vocal register, trying to sound like Adam Busch who plays Warren? Or is it Adam Busch’s voice, Warren’s voice, blending with/emerging from Willow’s voice, like a sonic spell, a magical coincidence of two voices and two genders? “Baby, I’m so sorry.” Is

Warren talking to Willow, or Tara? Is Willow talking to Kennedy, or Warren? This is the spatial moment during which melancholia fractures, and the audience is able to see the many competing voices, genders, and lives—some repudiated, others invited—that compose Willow’s own psyche. It is Kennedy’s kiss that creates this masque of mourning, but, rather than silencing these voices, the erotic gesture actually coalesces them into one, a voice that is *deute*, always now, always plural. This moment isn’t about healing melancholia, or solving the paradox of mourning; rather, it attempts to present a staging of the melancholic relation itself, a theatrical, choral performance of mourning and melancholia which dramatizes Willow’s own internal struggles—the graves that mark her own subjectivity, the bodies she’s left behind (including her own), as well as the touches that await her from future lovers.

Willow feels queer power in both memory and melancholy; she knows how to remember, how to reach. The memory of floating, the oneiric pleasure of song, and the “homework” that was her life with Tara, the work of home between them, the body of work. She reads, and she remembers; she reads to remember, and remembers to read.

And Sappho:

someone will remember us

I say

even in another time. (147.1)

¹ The epic scope and metatextuality of *Buffy* makes it nearly impossible to summarize. For a clear and precise discussion, see Rhonda Wilcox’s monograph *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Television* (I.B. Tauris, 2006).

² Plato discusses this at length in the *Phaedrus*, which is Jacques Derrida's primary source-text in the "Plato's Pharmacy" section of *Dissemination*.

³ Eve Sedgwick devotes a chapter to queerness and addiction within *Edwin Drood* in her book *Between Men* (1985), and I will be drawing upon this discussion later.

⁴ For a current discussion of meth culture among gay men, see Duncan Osborne's recent book *Suicide Tuesday: Gay Men and the Crystal Meth Scare* (2005).

⁵ Willow cites her "lack of lesbo street-cred" in the episode "Tough Love" (5.19), when she is arguing with Tara about her own ambivalent sexuality—she refuses to identify either as bisexual or lesbian. This is one of their first real fights as a couple, and it ends with Tara being attacked and nearly killed by Glory, an evil goddess, who first mocks her for being lesbian before "feeding" on her mind and effectively rendering her insane.

⁶ In the finale to Season Five, "The Gift" (5.22), Buffy sacrifices herself in order to save her surrogate-sister, Dawn, and is consumed by magical energy. In the beginning of the next season, she is then resurrected by Willow, who uses powerful and dangerous magic with little thought for her own safety—or for how Buffy might emerge from the afterlife. In "Afterlife" (6.02), Giles—Buffy's "Watcher" and protector—calls Willow a "stupid girl" and "a rank, arrogant amateur," which only enrages her further. This establishes Willow quite firmly as a character in need of fulfillment through mystical means, who feels "whole" only when she is using magic, just as Buffy only feels "whole" when she is fighting demons.

⁷ According to *Buffy* canon, there is only supposed to be one slayer at one time, but many other women wait as "potentials" whose power could be activated at any time. When Buffy drowns in the finale to Season One ("Prophecy Girl", 1.12), a new potential slayer is activated or "called"—a young black woman named Kendra. But Buffy actually survives her drowning, and this splits the slayer "line" into two, allowing for two slayers to exist at the same time. When Kendra is killed, the alternate slayer-line continues, and Faith is called. Faith is Buffy's opposite in every way—dark-haired, tactless, butch, and pathologically selfish. Much of Season Three is focused around the struggle between Buffy and Faith as competing slayers.

⁸ I am not suggesting that all drugs are a sought-after release from depression, nor that all IV-drug users are necessarily living with clinical depression, bipolar disorder, or any other number of anxiety disorders. Rather, I am pointing to a distinct group of lifelong drug-users who consume narcotics in order to ameliorate the appalling conditions of enforced poverty, as well as the middle-class addicts who mime them without actually experiencing the inequalities that lead most to use in the first place. This form of mimesis, like Willow's abuse of dark magic, seems to emerge from the desire to be abused *like a drug*, or to vanish into the act of drug-use itself.

⁹ For both a popular and scholarly analysis of gay pulp literature, see Susan Stryker's book *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions From the Golden Age of the Paperback* (2001). Note also that gay pulps, like fantasy literature, emerge from a "golden age" of sensational mythology, often detailing narratives that are unsuitable for contemporary "realist" fiction.

¹⁰ Lycanthropy has also been historically associated with melancholia. This connection occurs most notably in John Webster's 1614 play *The Duchess of Malfi*, which centers on a duchess whose own brothers vie for her affection and enact a revenge-tragedy which consumes them both. For a closer examination of melancholia and lycanthropy within Webster's play, see Lynn Enterline's *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (1995).

¹¹ In the episode "Seeing Red" (6.19), Tara is shot by a stray bullet when Warren, a persistent villain throughout that season, tries to kill Buffy. Warren is the leader of "the Troika," a group of three self-proclaimed nerds (including minor characters Andrew and Jonathan) who attempt to use their amateur magical and technological skills to become a real adversary for Buffy. After he is publicly humiliated by Buffy in the same episode, Warren—who has already murdered one woman, his former girlfriend—decides to kill Buffy, and nearly succeeds. Tara is caught in the crossfire, and Willow, after her mystical attempt to resurrect Tara fails, fully "gives in" to dark magic and becomes a kind of female necromancer. It is, paradoxically enough, her descent into dark magic which allows Willow to save Buffy's life, since when she absorbs the power from a number of forbidden spellbooks, she also absorbs the knowledge to heal Buffy.

¹² Anya, in fact, dies defending Andrew, the "rehabilitated" Troika-member, who is consumed by guilt for murdering his best friend, Jonathan.

¹³ However, the 2007 *Buffy* comic series, penned by Joss Whedon, suggests that Warren may not be dead after all.

¹⁴ All translations of Sappho here are from Anne Carson's recent collection, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Virago Press, 2003).

¹⁵ In *Black Sun*, Kristeva describes the act of signification as something swirling around a prelinguistic abyss: "Our gift of speech...could exist nowhere except for beyond an abyss. Speaking beings...demand a break, a renunciation, an unease at their foundations" (42).

¹⁶ See Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," 152.

¹⁷ In the episodes "Two To Go" (6.21) and "Grave" (6.22), Willow decides that the world is too full of suffering to survive, and so she attempts literally to destroy the earth—normally the tactic of the demons that she and Buffy have fought for the last seven years.

It is actually Xander who redeems Willow by reminding her of her humanity, a scene that I discuss in detail in Chapter Four of *Blood Relations*.

Epilogue:

Tears for Queers

“His eyes were stinging. He hated to cry, because the sparks could blind him.”

- Chaz Brenchley, *The Bridge of Dreams* (186).

“You can’t take a picture of this. It’s already gone.”

- Nate Fisher [to Claire], *Six Feet Under* (5.12, “Everybody’s Waiting”)

What is queer about crying? And why do we always seem to cry at endings? In his book *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, Tom Lutz notes that “Alcuin, the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon prelate, describes four kinds of tears, based on their functions” (46); these include “moist” tears to “wash away the filth of sin”, as well as salty, warm, and “pure” tears. So why not “queer tears” as a fifth category? While mourning is supposed to necessarily produce tears as the very signature of grief, melancholia is regarded as pathological because it fails to produce those same tears—instead, it produces endless chattering, speech with no meaning, or a type of killing silence. So what happens when we fail to cry at a funeral, or—even worse—we laugh, as does Mary Tyler Moore when her character famously begins to giggle, then to laugh uncontrollably, during the funeral of “Chuckles” the clown? Is this a queer performance? Do tears mark us as queer when they occur at the wrong time, or fail to occur? And how are tears linked to a kind of queer culture?

There is no definitive “science” of tears, no lacrimology, although various poets have suggested a “philosophy of tears,” and Charles Darwin especially was concerned

with working out the functionality of crying. It may come as a surprise that we are actually crying all of the time—these are “basal” tears, the type used to moisten our eyes and drain away excess fluid. The cornea has an irregular, pockmarked surface, almost like that of the moon, and “tears smooth out these irregularities...and thus make possible vision as we know it. Without this everyday teary layer, we would see a world of weird diffractions and absences, be unable to move our eyes, and lose them to infection” (Lutz 67). Other tears include the “reflex” type, which spring forth when we are chopping onions, and the complex emotional kind, which Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in *The Little Prince*, described as “such a secret place, the land of tears.”^{lxxix}

In *The Bridge of Dreams*, the first book of his most recent fantasy series, Chaz Brenchley creates a magic-system based primarily on water. The hero of *Bridge*, Issel, is a young water-seller who works in “the Shine,” the poor quarter of the mythical city called Maras-Sund. Issel is able to manipulate water, shaping it into any form imaginable, but this also brings with it some unexpected complications. Issel himself has to avoid crying at all cost, since “the sparks could blind him” (186). Even his own tears are potentially dangerous, and water becomes a double-edged force in this series, a medium capable of transmitting information, healing, obliterating, and engulfing. At the end of the second novel, *River of the World*, Issel is mortally wounded—much like Marron in the *Outremer* novels—and he must utilize a pool of water in order to heal himself. He actually invites scalding, molten water into his body, letting it cauterize the wound as he is simultaneously penetrated by it (Brenchley ref?). Remember, too, that Marron often describes the power of “the Daughter” as a kind of “mist,” a blood-red

precipitation or stain that is somehow a mixture of fire and water. How are tears a part of magic? Do tears make magic queer?

Heroes and heroines do not often cry in fantasy novels—they simply don't have time, since they're concerned with saving the world as stoically as possible. But crying does seem to mark queer fantasy-fiction as a different type of genre. Marron cries in bitter frustration and loneliness while lying next to Elisande in the middle of the desert: "Please, I can't, I can't sleep. I love this country by daytime, but in the dark it frightens me....[I]'m—not accustomed to this...to lying with a girl" (*Feast* 233-34). Alec cries in exhaustion while having to take care of Seregil in *Luck in the Shadows*, fearing that he might die. Vanyel cries throughout most of *Magic's Pawn*, but especially when Tylenel confronts him about his sexuality, and his sobbing eventually results in an unexpected night of sexual fulfillment—proof that, as suggested by Ovid in *The Art of Love*, crying can be an aphrodisiac (see Lutzpg ref?). As I discussed in the previous chapter, Willow and Tara share their first onscreen kiss immediately after Willow begins to cry, enraged by her own futility in the face of Joyce's death. In *Farscape*, "all-American" astronaut John Crichton tells his newborn son, D'Argo Sun-Crichton, that "Crichtons don't cry...often" (*The Peacekeeper Wars*, 2005)—but he is crying when he says this.

I am, in some way, sad about the ending of this project. I have been working on it for nearly four years, and it's quite nearly done. Where will I be then? *What* will I be? "What do we do now?" Xander asks Buffy, in the final episode. An apt question. What do I do now, and how do I end this clearly, queerly?

Boys are taught to associate crying with queerness. To cry is to outwardly mobilize an affect that should be kept secret, an interior sigil that should remain, like

your guts, on the inside. Silvan Tomkins notes that “the crying response is the first response the human being makes upon being born. The birth cry is a cry of distress” (Sedgwick 109). But this birth-cry is due to a superabundance of stimuli, and as adults, we are not supposed to cry during similar scenarios—loud music, angry shouting, visual disorientation, or simply an explosion of ideas that we can’t hold in. We aren’t supposed to, but we do. Some cry in secret; some cry only when others are around; some find it cathartic, while others abhor the experience. Since the very point of crying, Tomkins delineates, is “to motivate both the self and others to do something to reduce the crying response” (111)—that is, to stop crying—the experience itself can become toxic, horrifying, exhausting.

As much as I have tried to offer here a balanced survey of queer fantasy-fiction within the context of mourning and melancholia, there are numerous important fantasy texts that I haven’t been able to address—either because they weren’t exclusively concerned with melancholia, or simply due to the constraints of time and space. Fiona Patton’s *Brandion* novels center on a queer prince and his lover, a professional courtesan, as well as other same-sex couples. *The Painter Knight* (1998), specifically, retells a loving queer relationship through flashbacks, ending with the melancholic experience of the painter in question as he communes with the ghost of his lover. Tanya Huff’s *Keepers* series focuses primarily on the sibling relationship between Claire and her younger, lesbian sister, Diana—the more impetuous of the two, and also a more powerful wizard, or “keeper.” When Diana playfully asks Claire, in *Summon the Keeper* (1998), “didn’t mom tell you? I’m a lesbian,” Claire’s reply is perfunctory at best: “Isn’t everyone?” (302). In *The Second Summoning* (2003), Diana is told by Samuel—who

happens to be an angel trapped in the body of a cat—that “you say you’re a lesbian, but you’ve never actually made it with a woman although you did make it with a guy and it wasn’t entirely his fault it was such a disaster” (264). Unlike *Buffy*, which seems anxious about deconstructing Willow’s sexuality, Huff playfully presents Diana as a sixteen-year-old girl who has no problem with bisexuality.

Diana seems largely modeled after a preteen character, Dairine Callahan, who features prominently in Diane Duane’s earlier *Young Wizards*^{lxxx} series, although Huff never mentions having read Duane’s work in interview. Duane also spends the first three books of her *YW* series developing a close sibling relationship between Nita and Dairine Callahan, both of whom eventually become wizards. Although Dairine never has a significant romantic relationship with anyone, and Nita seems to be heterosexual—although she is still too preoccupied with saving the world to really consider dating—there is still a bit of stealth queerness in Duane’s novels, as personified by two “senior” wizards, Tom and Carl. When I first read *So You Want To Be A Wizard* (1986) as an eager eleven-year-old, and then again at fourteen, I completely missed the fact that Tom and Carl shared a house, bickered about finances, had pets, and seemed mostly inseparable. Duane has never addressed their relationship or its place within a children’s series, but very little detective work is required to suss out a distinctly matrimonial vibe between the two older men. In *Deep Wizardry* (1988), for instance, Nita finds herself alone and crying on a beach—trying to reconcile her own decision to sacrifice herself in order to complete a magical ritual that could save millions of lives—and her grief is so profound that it actually summons Carl: he appears on the beach next to her, dripping, wearing only a towel, since she has actually pulled him from the shower. Despite the

rather provocative connotations of the scene, however, Nita is completely comfortable as Carl hugs her wearing only a towel, which suggests that she has already identified his sexuality as queer and non-threatening.

One text in particular that revolves around sexuality, tears, and fantasy all at once is Alan Ball's *Six Feet Under*, which ran successfully on HBO for five seasons. I mention *Six Feet Under* in the context of fantasy culture because, like *Buffy*, it is a show that depends critically on the fantasy-production of its characters. Nate, David, and Claire have long, involved conversations with dead people, including their father, Nathaniel Sr. (and each other, once Nate dies in the final season). Claire has the most active fantasy life, as evidenced by several extended daydream sequences: including a starring role in *Flashdance*, a serenade of Billie Holiday's "What a Little Moonlight Can Do," and a rock performance of Debbie Boone's "You Light Up My Life" (changed, in the context of an oppressive office, to "You Ride Up My Thighs," as an ode to her skirt and pantyhose). Claire's final fantasy, it can be argued, occurs in the last five minutes of the show's finale, when she is able to look into the future and witness the death of every principle character, whether she was present during their demise or not. As David Lavery points out in an online article for *Flow*^{lxxxi}, "it is by no means clear whether all these culminations are to be taken as the driver's [Claire's] own mindscreen imaginings or part of the official narrative itself" (Lavery, "Crying Game," 2007). Is Claire fantasizing about death, or actually seeing it as it will occur, eventually, within the course/corpse of *Six Feet Under's* official narrative? Lavery continues:

Claire herself is not spared: she dies in her bed, at the age of 102, in a room filled with her award-winning photographs. We linger for a moment on her cataract-scarred eyes and then, in a stunning match cut, return to her still fresh, beautiful, young eyes as they gaze out on the road ahead. (Ibid)

This scene does not make me cry, which is one of the reasons why I include it in this conclusion about queer tears. It makes me sad, but it doesn't make me cry, despite repeated re-watchings, and I don't know why. Claire herself is crying uncontrollably as she drives toward New York, an experience that I will be duplicating in only a few months when I leave Vancouver (my home, my friends, my family). Lavery describes himself as feeling "unmanned" by this scene, as it makes him launch "into irrepressible crying." Most people I know who have watched this scene cry every time they see it again. In fact, when I saw it for the first time, I felt strange, queer, because I *wasn't* crying. I felt like something was wrong with me, that my affects were out of joint, even that I was missing some kind of primordial emotional response.

Other fantasy-themed texts, both visual and print, make me cry with all the regularity of an alarm-clock going off—dependably, predictably. During "The Body," the episode when Buffy's mother, Joyce, dies from a brain aneurism, I cry quite reliably from the first appearance of the credits to the final fade-to-black: that's forty-four minutes of dependable, gut-instinct crying. When watching *The Peacekeeper Wars*, the four-hour miniseries that wraps up *Farscape*, I cry for at least the final half-hour; and if I watch "Wait for the Wheel," the episode where Zhaan dies, I'm a wreck from start to finish. Although Joss Whedon's *Firefly* only spanned thirteen episodes, at least half of

those make me cry, and “Out Of Gas” in particular opens the floodgates from almost the first moment. Similarly, when Fred (who is not even a human character, but actually a sentient “white hole”) sacrifices himself in Duane’s *So You Want To Be A Wizard*, or Artex, Atreyu’s dependable horse in *The Neverending Story*, gives in to sadness and allows himself to be claimed by quicksand, I’m absolutely shattered. Every time. I know what’s coming, but that changes nothing.

I have cried numerous times while writing this project, since it is, at heart, about sadness—more specifically, about the relationship between sadness and sexuality, and how that relationship is staged within fantasy literature. My critique of melancholia, therefore, as a particular queer strategy for negotiating life, and as the visceral material of most fantasy literature, is also an investigation of my own sadness, my own troublesome affects. People often describe themselves as “struggling with depression,” or “battling sadness,” as if it were a wrestling match. I feel my own depression as the uncanny stranger following me on a dark road, the pathway that always leads me to the same crossroads. It isn’t a wrestling match so much as a continual circuit of negotiations, a queer life-mode, and I remember this every time I pop a small orange pill into my mouth each morning, my mood-stabilizing drug, which is supposed to work like a magic spell but actually requires far more ritual work than I suspected at first.

I have always been drawn to sad things—this emerges, in part, from a fantasy that I have about sadness: the fantasy that sadness can link disparate people, objects, places, and times together, in an infinite relay. This is similar to the shared anguish or outrage that binds queer communities together, the sense of grieving for someone we never knew, of being angry about something that never happened to us. Sorrow is a spell that allows

us to imaginatively connect with other humans, even with other animals and objects, despite the ‘fact’ that such a connection might be nonsensical. I am sad because magic—at least the magic that I discuss in this project, the magic of wizards—might not exist in the world; but I am also hopeful, because I could just as easily be wrong. Fantasy, like science fiction, is a critically utopian genre because it imagines new ethical possibilities for us. Unlike SF, however, which addresses what “should” be, what might be, or what eventually *will* be, fantasy enshrines what never was, or what *always already is*, depending on your perspective.

I am sad that this project is nearly over, but sad in a sort of abstract way, as when I think about myself as a lonely kid reading fantasy novels. The sadness comes with an attendant sense of pleasure. And what pleases us most about negative affects is that, although they mobilize predictably within a person given their particular personality, they can still always emerge in a new way, or attach themselves to a new object. Peter Schwenger, in *The Tears of Things*, notes that “melancholy attaches itself to everyday objects when they slip out of the symbolic system that controls them and so manifest their uncanny otherness” (33). Anything can make us sad, anywhere, at any time, for any reason at all, even if it never did so before, just as anything can unexpectedly produce an enduring fantasy. *The Neverending Story* really does change every time you read it.

I have tried to explore, throughout this discussion, how melancholy attaches itself to fantastic objects, places, and people; and, more broadly, how queer theory can productively participate in fantasy culture. The same questions that I started with—how is fantasy queer, and how is queerness fantastic—remain at the end. Over five chapters, I have attempted to navigate these questions by addressing a broad range of fantasy texts,

beginning with Tolkien's pathbreaking *Lord of the Rings*^{lxxxii} and culminating in recent works by Chaz Brenchley, Lynn Flewelling, and Joss Whedon. My goal was never to queer fantasy (since the genre itself is already manifestly queer), but rather to offer provocative linkages between sexuality, melancholy, and the fantastic. This study is nowhere near exhaustive, and entire books could be written on queerness within British fantasy-fiction, postcolonial fantasy literature, cinema, and contemporary television.

It was also never my desire to offer definitive explanations of *melancholia*, *the fantastic*, or *the uncanny*, since these terms have been debated since their inception within literary and psychoanalytic discourse. And I will never be interested in framing queerness as a singular or utilitarian concept, for the same reason that I would never package myself in a box and mail myself to a university. Queerness is valuable precisely because it has no value, like Marx's value-relation itself; it is a relational capacity, a hesitation, a question mark, and spell book.

It is my hope that this study will further analysis of contemporary fantasy literature and visual culture, which still remains under-represented and under-taught, and that it will also compliment existing studies of queerness, melancholy, and the fantastic as crucial psychoanalytic and cultural conceptions. The fantasy genre, as I have tried to suggest, is not a bastion of conservatism—a genre written mostly by white men, and filled with female stereotypes—but rather a multifaceted and multi-generic play of different literatures, medias, and cultures, many of which are queer in the sense of outsidership, alienation, exile, and gendered/sexual difference. Fantasy provides a realm where same-sex relations can be presented uniquely and provocatively, since alien backgrounds and backdrops provide a space where conservative ethics are always

dismantled, decoupled, and turned upside-down. But those same realms, the faraway kingdoms and the distant planets, can also merely recapitulate homophobic and patriarchal tenets. It is up to feminist and queer fantasy writers to create new worlds where this tension can be explored, and it is also up to queer and straight readers to continually acknowledge, appreciate, and even extract moments of queer pleasure from fantasy texts.

My argument has always been that fantasy and melancholia are intertwined, and therefore that the fantasy genre has to be prefigured through a structurally complex and diverse type of melancholia that need not be seen as wholly damaging or non-negotiable. Rather than finding themselves trapped within the coils of a neverending sadness, a constantly multiplying sense of lack, or a wound that cannot heal, characters in fantasy texts have the unique opportunity to explore their own core of sadness through the workings of magic and ritual, which dramatize that sadness and render it as linguistic and performative. Magic makes all characters queer, in a sense, since it places them at a remove from normal human relations, but it also releases a potentially global queerness, a force like an enormous spell that can change human relations, bodies, psyches, class positions, and gender expressions. By linking the Freudian conceptualizations of melancholia and the uncanny, I want to ignite a queer space between them, a spark, a “never-neverland” relation that dramatizes the melancholy circuit as a profoundly queer performance, a ritual limned by sadness and shadow, but also, hope.

Even Raistlin Majere, ever the cynic, might agree, allowing—just for a moment—the muted light from his staff to watch over his companions as they sleep. A fairy godmother in blood-red robes.

Epilogue

^{lxxix} *The Little Prince* is a remarkably queer text, although much of its cultural queerness seems to have accrued by accident. It centers on the relationship between an unnamed pilot (generally understood to be de Saint-Exupéry himself, who disappeared in a plane crash somewhere in the Sahara desert), and an interstellar visitor whom he nicknames “the little prince” due to his princely regalia and demeanor. James Dean was incredibly fond of the book, and his copy of it was supposedly passed on to Elizabeth Taylor after he died—William Bast, Dean’s longtime friend, says that Dean originally gave the book to him, admitting that “at this point I have no idea whether Elizabeth Taylor still has my copy or not. I imagine she treasures it, as she ought to” (Email, January 25 2007). Dean, in turn, was most likely given his copy by Rogers Brackett, a producer and acquaintance with whom he was probably involved sexually. In a moment of queer remediation, Morrissey featured *The Little Prince* in the video for the song “Suedehead” (from his 1990 *Viva Hate* album), primarily because it was connected to Dean. From its original French-language publication in 1942, the book has been adapted into a film, a cartoon series, and an opera.

^{lxxx} Duane’s first book in the series, *So You Want To Be A Wizard*, was originally published in 1985, although the series is still going strong with nine volumes and a tenth in progress through Scholastic Press. For a detailed analysis of Nita and Dairine’s sibling relationship, see my article “‘I Am the Molten Heart of the World’: Language and Metamorphosis in Diane Duane’s *Young Wizards* Series,” forthcoming in *Mosaic* (Winter 2007).

^{lxxxii} David Lavery, “The Crying Game: Why Television Brings Us To Tears.”

^{lxxxiii} For a more detailed discussion of queer hobbits within *LOTR*, see my article “Gazing Upon Sauron: Hobbits, Elves, and the Queering of the Postcolonial Optic” (2004).

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