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**Changing the Unchangeable: The Transformative Power
of Queerness in Magical Realism**

Magical realism, as a genre, mixes and blurs the lines between fantasy and reality. It proposes both as equally true and valid in the eye of narrative. In this sense, one would assume that it produces stories where anything can happen and no topic is off limits. This thinking would be flawed, however, because magical realism has a history of erasing and ignoring the subject of queerness. Often, it goes unaddressed. When actually brought up, homosexuality then acts as a taboo, something to be spoken of and suggested but never truly seen. In this way, queerness becomes myth and fantasy when everything was originally suggested as possible. Even outside novels and other works of magical realism, there is little scholarship and academic criticism to be found, regardless of whatever term one researches under: queer, homosexual, LGBT, or gay.

This practice of ignoring and belittling queerness in magical realism can be found in 1967 in one of the foundational texts of the genre: Gabriel García Márquez's famous novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The narrative of Márquez's work is centered on the grand tale of the Buendía family, situated in the fictional village of Macondo, across many generations as the family gradually destroys itself through a long history of violence and incest. Within the novel, heterosexual relationships, both incestuous and non-incestuous, abound and flourish in fantastical ways. Love comes across in many different forms, a common feature of Márquez's

literature. For example, Michael Palencia-Roth, in his overview of Márquez, remarks that, in the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Márquez portrays basically every type of love imaginable. However, Palencia-Roth also recognizes the criticism Enrique Fernández of the *Village Voice* had for the novel, referencing Fernández's thought that the novel addresses all love "except... homosexual love" (Palencia-Roth 55). In this same way, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* features no queer characters and portrays no queer relationships. It only acknowledges the existence of queerness by using it as an insult for not exemplifying hypermasculinity and performing heterosexuality aggressively. The novel treats the concept of homosexuality as a fantasized and threatened 'other,' while the taboo topic of incest actively appears throughout. As one of the main figures of magical realism, through his work, Márquez starts a trend in the genre that persists long after him, boosted by the power of homophobia and heteronormativity.

Over the years, queerness has found more of a place in the world of literature. Speculative queer works that could be considered magical realism have reached some prominence. One queer author whose literature contains elements of queerness and delves deeply into the speculative realm is Nalo Hopkinson. While often associated with the genres of fantasy and science fiction, Hopkinson's work can also be interpreted as magical realism. In "Nalo Hopkinson: An Introduction," Rob Latham touches upon this difficulty in defining Hopkinson's genre: "Is she producing variants of magic realism? Adaptations of the folk tale to technocultural realities? Futuristic fables? The short answer is that she is doing all of these things, and more" (Latham 338). When it comes to Hopkinson, no singular genre can definitively be placed on her work, so magical realism is one of several possibilities. In her novel *Sister Mine* from 2013, Hopkinson specifically treats her fantastical moments surrounding a family of deities as

normal as her grounded setting of Toronto, Canada. The narrative's primary plot focuses on Makeda and Abby, two demigod sisters who were once conjoined twins, as they struggle to find their missing father and deal with their own strained relationship. With the deity half of their family accepting incest as a common and acceptable practice and treating queer relationships in the exact same manner, Makeda and Abby's own relationship is simultaneously sisterly, incestuous, and queer. Because of these similarities regarding the incestuous family and differences regarding queer representation, a comparison of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Sister Mine* can be made in how they handle queerness in very conflicting ways with such similar premises. By looking at both and studying the diction and imagery present in each work, one can see how, over time, queerness in magical realism has evolved from being represented as purely fantastical to greatly real. Through an examination of the treatment of history, mythology, and normalization in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Sister Mine*, queerness in magical realism emerges as a method for rendering things that appear as fixed and unchanging as these subjects as that is flexible and capable of change. In this sense, to study queerness in magical realism is to queer the genre itself, evolving it so it keeps true to its original promise of everything, from the realistic to the fantastical, existing within the realm of possibility.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND INCEST LAWS IN COLOMBIA AND JAMAICA

To understand more of Márquez and Hopkinson's specific cultural contexts regarding queerness, the histories of Colombia in 1967 and modern-day Jamaica will now be examined. Specifically, the laws in place regarding homosexuality must be addressed to see why both authors represent queerness in their own ways. When Márquez wrote *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude in 1967, homosexuality was outlawed in Colombia. It wasn't until 1980 that consensual homosexuality was officially de-criminalized, many years after the novel came out (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group 3). Official Colombian penal codes from the year 1967 present homosexuality as a punishable crime, putting it in the same camp as rape and deceitful seduction by stating that "the same punishment shall be incurred by those who consummate homosexual relations, regardless of age" (Eder 95). Furthermore, for homosexual sex work, the code says, "Anyone who uses a house or establishment for the commission therein of homosexual acts or authorizes another to so use it, shall be subject to the punishment of imprisonment for one to three years" (Eder 96). With these laws, no kind of queer sexual contact is allowed, even if between two consenting adults. Queerness is given no space to openly exist without the fear of retribution.

While Colombia has de-criminalized homosexuality, Jamaica continues to have laws prohibiting it in the present. Known as 'buggery' in Jamaican law, homosexuality, specifically between men, has been established as a crime since 1864 by British colonial forces (Reynolds). The persistence of these 'buggery' laws actively keeps Jamaica an unsafe space for queer people; Hopkinson's own queer identity would not be so publicly known if she still lived there and had not moved to Canada. Indeed, in "The Sweetest Taboo: Studies of Caribbean Sexualities; A Review Essay," Jenny Sharpe and Samantha Pinto talk about how "antihomosexual language reinforces the violence of state discourse on homosexuality as well as the physical threat that many Jamaican gays and lesbians have given as reasons to remain closeted or to leave the country" (Sharpe & Pinto 261). This historical context places Hopkinson's representation of queerness as openly defiant of Jamaican and other Caribbean stigmas against homosexuality. In

contrast, Márquez's own Colombian context raises this question: Should we be forgiving of Márquez's lack of and negative attitude towards queerness in his work, considering the laws surrounding homosexuality at the time of his novel? Is it right to judge him for not including such a taboo subject in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?

While one could argue in favor of this, the inclusion of incest within the novel completely contradicts this point. The practice of incest is criminalized in both Colombia and Jamaica. The Colombian Penal Code in 1967 states that "anyone who has sexual relations or commits lewd sexual acts with a [family member or relative of some kind] shall be subject to imprisonment for six months to four years" (Eder 103). Jamaica's own laws set harsh punishments for those who commit incest: "A person who commits the offence of incest is liable on conviction in a Circuit Court to imprisonment for life" (Jamaica, Ministry of Justice 11). Márquez's use of incest in his novel invalidates any excuse for his treatment of queerness because of its taboo status since he openly wrote about incest, another taboo subject in Colombian society. While one could argue that Márquez's inclusion of incest is used to critique the insistence on biological purity in higher-class white families, he still gives it an active presence in his story while queerness receives nothing but derision. Incest persists and reproduces as queerness is silenced and rendered invisible. Márquez's choice of subject matter reflects his own personal biases and heteronormative viewpoint, as well as how he views the historical existence of queerness.

QUEERING HISTORY IN MAGICAL REALISM

When it comes to history, Márquez and Hopkinson differ greatly on how they interpret queerness's location within it, with Márquez viewing it as a byproduct of colonialism and

Hopkinson depicting it as something that has always existed. Márquez's few passing references to queerness are largely directed at the white European characters in his novel. After being described as a pale blonde Italian, Pietro Crespi, who pursues Rebeca and then Amaranta, is called "a fairy" by José Arcadio Buendía and is portrayed in feminine-coded ways, wearing "very elastic and tight" pants and "dancing slippers" (Márquez 60). Pietro's whiteness is seen as inherently feminine and queer in the text in contrast to the intense masculinity of the Buendía family. His sudden appearance in Macondo and his pursuit of Colombian women parallels the arrival of colonizing forces to Colombia and the diluting of Indigenous identity through reproduction between white men and Indigenous women. However, because he is feminized and derided as queer, the novel refuses to acknowledge him as a true threat. Later, when José Arcadio returns to the family, Rebeca begins to desire him over Pietro Crespi because of José Arcadio's hypermasculinity: "She thought that Pietro Crespi was a sugary dandy next to that protomale whose volcanic breathing could be heard all over the house" (Márquez 91). The use of language like "dandy" and "protomale" highlights the importance of masculinity from Márquez's perspective. "Dandy" as a word specifically has ties to the concept of the effeminate gay man, painting Pietro Crespi further as queer. With this, Márquez's limited mentions of queerness make it appear as an invading yet feeble parallel to white colonization. It implies that queerness exists as a purely white invention. However, Theodore De Bry's 1594 engraving *The Massacre of Indians* serves as a counterexample to this, with Henry Keazor's article discussing how this image involves the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa punishing and killing a group of "Indians whom he charged with sodomy" (Keazor 143). Pulling from this historical depiction of Indigenous peoples, queerness is shown to not be a foreign concept to the Americas but as

something that existed before white Europeans arrived. Márquez's attempt to erase the queer history of Indigenous peoples demonstrates how his heteronormativity drives him to see queerness as an 'other' with no basis in historical or chronological normality.

Meanwhile, Hopkinson depicts many of her characters of color as explicitly queer within her text, even her main characters. Makeda and Abby, as two Black women, openly express queer feelings for others and one another. Makeda feels a "spike of jealousy" when Abby speaks fondly about her new boyfriend Lars, and they are described in the novel as having happily engaged in sex together when they were younger: "We spent the rest of the morning giggling and tumbling puppylike over each other, sniffing, probing, and tasting, urging each other on" (Hopkinson 83 & 125-126). By characterizing both of her central characters as queer, Hopkinson immediately recognizes queerness' existence. She does not allow it to go unsaid, be brought up but not represented, or be limitedly shown in the periphery of the text. Through Makeda and Abby, she grounds queer Black identity within a present context. However, she ensures that this message applies to the past as well through her godly characters. Specifically, Uncle Jack, who holds power over life and death, is shown to be queer when Makeda summons him and assumes the sexual partner he was just with was a woman, to which he replies, "Back to *her*? You know better than to make assumptions like that" (Hopkinson 262). By creating queer characters who exist both within the present and since the beginning of life itself, Hopkinson positions queerness as something that has always held a presence within the world. Such a practice is important in order to reject Márquez's rendering of queerness as colonial and Jamaica's homophobic practices. According to Amandine H. Faucheux in "Race and Sexuality in Nalo Hopkinson's Oeuvre; or, Queer Afrofuturism," this is a technique that Hopkinson employs

in other works like *The Salt Roads*: “Hopkinson’s reinscription of the black queer body throughout time and space...functions as a counter-narrative to the whitewashing of queer theory, and...the heterosexualization of African-American history” (Faucheux 571). Through Hopkinson’s writing, a new historical narrative emerges where the queer Black body is given a space to finally be seen as visible and have a past not centered in whiteness. Hopkinson uses her novel’s magical realism to question history’s supposed objectivity and expose it as subjective, transforming history into a myth that she equally queers.

MYTHOLOGICAL QUEERS AND BEING RENDERED FANTASTICAL

Something particularly striking about the way Márquez talks about queerness is how he instantly mythologizes and bases it entirely in the realm of fantasy. He accomplishes this metamorphosis when, in speaking about Pietro Crespi, José Arcadio Buendía says, “The man’s a fairy” (Márquez 60). The term “fairy” comes up later as well when Colonel Aureliano Buendía is about to be executed while continually repeating to himself, “A person fucks himself up so much...just so that six weak fairies can kill him and he can’t do anything about it” (Márquez 128). By specifically using the word “fairy,” obvious homophobic connotations come to mind. However, on the level of language, engaging with this particular slur also serves to represent the concept of queer identity as an imagined fantasy. The mythological creature of the “fairy” acts the stand-in for queerness, being too ridiculous to be conceived as possibly existing within the text. This heteronormative diction is similar to a practice in the science fiction genre regarding aliens, as explained in “SFS Symposium: Sexuality in Science Fiction” during De Witt Douglas Kilgore’s section: “What lessons do we draw from the genre's imagined extraterrestrial races

whose reproductive and sexual relations have been imagined as ‘other’?...[H]eteronormative human beings are the privileged standard” (“SFS Symposium: Sexuality in Science Fiction” 394). Speculative fiction in general has a tendency to render queer characters as not human, making them into fantastical creatures like fairies or aliens so that they are explicitly known as ‘not normal.’ By representing queerness through the figure of the “fairy” that never actually appears, Márquez’s heteronormativity again becomes apparent in how he makes queerness mythical and gives it no room for possibility in the real world.

Hopkinson, on the other hand, incorporates a large amount of mythology from all around the globe in her work that places queerness in the realm of fantasy while simultaneously finding a basis for it in reality. Like Uncle Jack, several of the other godly characters are queer. The Beji twins, for example, once dated Makeda and Abby simultaneously and are stated as identifying as different genders whenever they feel like it: “One was a he-Beji and one was a she-Beji...they’d showed us that they switched that up whenever they got bored with it” (Hopkinson 170). The Bejis aren’t the only ones who have a queer sense of gender; all the gods are said to actually serve another bigger God who goes unseen within the plot but is identified by Makeda as “the Big Boss...he (or she, or they, or it)” (Hopkinson 95). Through these characters, Hopkinson roots her story’s unique mythology in queerness. The fact that Hopkinson is queering real mythology makes this all the more important. Kinitra Dechaun Brooks, in “Black Women Writing Fluid Fiction: An Open Challenge to Genre Normativity,” sees all of Makeda and Abby’s family as members “of the pantheon of West African gods/orishas” that are combined with “Indigenous and European influences” (Brooks 83 & 85). By representing these deities as queer, Hopkinson challenges heteronormative myth-making and creates a space where queer people can see

themselves portrayed in these cultural practices as well. However, she doesn't only represent queerness in characters who are gods and demigods. Human characters are characterized as having queer sexualities and genders, like Hallam, who has "got himself a new boyfriend," and Solaris, who Makeda is unable to assign a gender to: "I first thought that Solaris was a guy. Then a girl. Maybe. Then I gave up trying to figure out which" (Hopkinson 18 & 22). Hopkinson not only grounds queerness in mythology but reality as well. She refuses to 'other' it like Márquez and actually shows it existing beyond the boundaries of the fantastical. She lives up to the promises of magical realism and ensures that everything is within the realm of possibility.

NORMALIZING QUEER EXISTENCE AS A PRESENT REALITY

For Márquez, queerness isn't just impossible. It's also a point of derision that must be singled out and rendered 'not normal.' Aside from the "fairy" line with Pietro Crespi, the novel constantly places other negative attention on male characters when they do not act out perfect masculinity and heterosexuality. Several times, characters become upset when men act feminine or are implied to possess feminine-coded traits, like when Pilar Ternera fights "with a woman who had dared to comment that Arcadio had a woman's behind" or when Amaranta dislikes "the submissiveness of" Gerineldo Márquez (Márquez 62 & 162). Furthermore, heterosexuality is stressed with how people think differently of a young Colonel Aureliano Buendía when he remains a virgin as an adult: "Everyone thought it strange that he was now a full-grown man and had not known a woman" (Márquez 50). In each of these cases, the characters emphasize machismo as the most important ideal that a man can live up to. Anything considered outside the bounds of machismo is deemed 'not normal,' and as Encyclopedia Britannica points out, those

things considered 'not normal' are associated with femininity: "In machismo there is supreme valuation of characteristics culturally associated with the masculine and a denigration of characteristics associated with the feminine" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). By calling out these men for acting feminine, they become isolated and seen as different from the norm. This process of being rendered 'not normal' has heavy queer implications. In another discussion on aliens' relation to queerness, Amanda Thibodeau, in her article "Alien Bodies and a Queer Future: Sexual Revision in Octavia Butler's 'Bloodchild' and James Tiptree, Jr.'s 'With Delicate Mad Hands'," states that "aliens always already exist outside the normal, and... 'queer' means that which is outside or resists regimes of the normal" (Thibodeau 265). By mocking his male characters for venturing outside typical machismo, Márquez actively resists the normalization of queerness and supports a strict policing of masculinity. It represents queerness as something odd that must be focused on with intense scrutiny however it appears. Through heteronormativity, it ensures that queerness cannot be seen as anything but an 'other.'

Contrarily, Hopkinson does the exact opposite and goes out of her way to endow everything, from her characters to the very settings and objects of her story, as intentionally and unquestioningly queer. Aside from the queer representation already mentioned, she also positions these characters' identities as something that is simply accepted within the universe of her novel. For instance, when Makeda narrates about her and Abby's former relationship, she says that they "had Dad's and Uncle's blessings" (Hopkinson 126). This acts in contrast to the relationship between Abby and Lars, which is considered "too weird" by Makeda and as something that Abby knows will receive disapproval from the deity half of their family (Hopkinson 78). By allowing Makeda and Abby's relationship to be accepted and Abby and Lars' relationship to be treated as

‘not normal,’ Hopkinson reverses the typical heteronormative, homophobic standard and lets queerness be seen in the way heterosexuality usually is. This works to normalize queerness and subvert the status quo. Hopkinson also accomplishes this through her queering of her story’s inanimate settings and objects, from Makeda saying the “Shiny building was flirting with” her to seeing “tiny rainbows in the puddles of brown water” to other characters possessing “a rainbow-colored metal bracelet” and “a vast golf umbrella decorated with a swirl of rainbow colors” (Hopkinson 16, 22, 64, & 78). By incorporating queerness into every potential aspect of her novel, Hopkinson completely queers magical realism by changing something as daunting and seemingly unchangeable as social norms. She challenges magical realism and other speculative formats to accept queerness as part of the everyday and not single it out as the strange ‘other’ contrasting with the assumed normalcy of a heteronormative world. This aspect of her writing is, in fact, beneficial to magical realism. Lewis C. Seifert explains this best in “Introduction: Queer(Ing) Fairy Tales”: “Queer reading practices work against the expected, the familiar, the predictable—of gender, sexuality, and structures of domination more generally—exposing their unexpected, unfamiliar, and unpredictable sides” (Seifert 17). If magical realism opens up to more queer subject matter, it can only improve and include the genre to more writers, stories, and possibilities. Queer magical realism insists upon subverting what is considered normal by society, finally placing the real and the fantastical on equal footing.

CONCLUSION

In comparing the treatment of queerness within *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Sister Mine*, Márquez’s heteronormative biases repeatedly emerge and damage the premise of the genre

his novel is based in, while Hopkinson's inclusion of queerness in her own work allows magical realism to achieve its full potential as something that breaks down the boundaries between the realistic and the fantastical. Instead of submitting to a narrative where history, mythology, and social norms remain fixed like Márquez, Hopkinson defies the supposedly unchanging permanence of these categories, restructuring them to undo the stigma of queerness as a colonial byproduct, allow queer people to definitively exist within established realities and fantasies, and treat queerness on the same level as heterosexuality with its integration as an accepted normalcy of everyday life. By studying Márquez and Hopkinson together, one can see how magical realism can evolve and change with the times rather than to keep to the standard Márquez and other writers initially set down. Queer magical realism has the power to open up the creative world to new possibilities and expose the unjust structures already at play, so what's the harm in giving it a space in the literary world?

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