

Queer Mycology ✨

By Emily Pichardo Wojtyna

Queer *sometimes disparaging + offensive*

1. Adjective
 - (a) strange, eccentric, mysterious, homosexual, other
 - (b) not heterosexual; not cisgender
2. Noun
 - (a) A member of the LGBTQIA2S+ community

Fruiting body *see also: fruit body, sporocarp*

1. Noun
 - (a) A multicellular reproductive structure for producing spores
 - (b) Often feared, revered, fantastical, fabulous, and bizarre

Fruity *sometimes disparaging + offensive, see also: fruitcake*

1. Adjective
 - (a) gay, feminine, crazy, dangerous, mysterious, weird

Mycelium

1. Noun
 - (a) The collection of all hyphae that together make up the fungal body
 - Like “fungus,” can be considered a mass noun, a word that can be either singular or plural

John

John always walked a little bit too delicately

The words “tone it down” and “fruitcake” stained his childhood.

After being disowned by his Christian fundamentalist family,

He fled to San Francisco with hopes of building a new one.

And he did.

But within a year, his family was dying.

Doctors who swore to help the sick rejected them,

Too afraid to catch the “Gay Cancer.”

Lesbian nurses, their LGBT kin,

Who knew what ostracization felt like,

Took the reins and cared for their sick brothers.

One morning, halfway through his cup of coffee,

John received a call from his friend, Barbara.

She whispered the forbidden words over the phone, her voice shaking,

“John, I am so sorry. Your test came back positive.”

The coffee went cold.

Sam

One foggy morning following a day of heavy rain,
A young boy strolled beside his mother and their dog on their hike through the forest.
He stomped his rain boots in a puddle,
Muddy water flinging up onto his blue jeans.
A shiny red fruiting body speckled with white caught his eye,
Gleaming conspicuously against the thick green vegetation.
He ran up to see it, and,
Just before his fingers came to meet its wet cap,
His mother caught notice.
“Sam, don’t touch that! You will be poisoned and die!”
He let his hand fall,
Furrowed his brow,
And walked away.

Grey

Grey and many of their 2Spirit kin found each other online.
The mycelial network helped them to build a community,
Rekindle their strength, rediscover their history,
And dream up new futures together.
But publicity is a double-edged sword.
One evening, Grey received a message from a curious white stranger asking them
To Please Explain what their Gender Identity meant to them,
So he could write about it for a school project.
The question evoked feelings of rage passed down from Grey’s ancestors,
When European settlers directly hunted and removed those who
Did not fall into their binary categories of gender.
Their bodies, history, and traditions intentionally eradicated.
The term 2Spirit, the concept of “gender identity,” and the English language all fall short—
The divine nature of Grey and their queer indigenous family are ineffable—
They are living poems.

Robert / María

Robert was a banker whose wife, Valentina, immigrated from Russia.

On their honeymoon, she prepared edible mushrooms she had foraged herself,

But Robert, a mycophobic American, was too frightened to eat them.

This cultural dissonance led him to a lifelong fascination with and study of the

Traditional knowledge and customs of people and fungi.

Thirty years after the honeymoon, in a project secretly funded by the CIA,

Robert flew to Mexico to meet María Sabina, a Mazatec *curandera*,

To learn how she utilized the *saint children* (sacred mushrooms)

To communicate with the Principal Beings and heal the sick.

Reluctant to allow healthy people to take part in a ritual designed for the ill,

María felt pressured by her friend and town official, Cayetano,

To share her sacred rituals with the blonde men.

María obliged, but Robert and his friends deceived her.

Robert published María's photo in *Life* and revealed her name and whereabouts in his book.

Not before long, her village was inundated with foreigners with long hair in search of God.

A Mazatec community exposed, the sacred no longer secret,

Robert, the curious white stranger collecting information for his school project.

María was harassed by the police, her position as a healer defiled,

Her home burned to the ground.

A year before María passed, she lamented:

"The *saint children* lost their purity."

Alex

Alex had change thrown at her when he was thirteen.

She was on a run in his neighborhood,

When a group of men in a car rolled down their windows.

She learned that day that her body didn't belong to him,

That although he was made of angles, her curves spoke louder.

He cried when he saw powerful women on the TV screen,

But vowed to never become one herself.

Elsie

Elsie was a mycologist by profession.

She provided insights into the elusive nature of fungal reproduction,

Shattering the former misconception that mushrooms produced sperm.

In her experiments with fungal colonies,

Elsie found that fungi, unlike animals, lack two distinct biological sexes.

In mycologists' and taxonomists' feeble attempts to categorize and distinguish,

Fungi have met them with resistance every time.

Rather than fitting into the Male | Female binary,

Fungi have physically indistinguishable hyphae with hundreds of different mating types.

When two hyphae with compatible mating types find each other,

They fuse their cells and start to build a filamentous mycelial network,

In partnership with other, unfused hyphae, as well as with nearby trees, with which

The mycelium has formed multiple symbiotic relationships,

This chosen family pools together resources to build a fruiting body.

When the mushroom has grown and opened its cap,

Billions of spores are released.

Like glitter, they dance in the wind,

And when they land,

They secure a future for many generations of queer others to come.