

Barebacking Werewolves in Rural America: Queer Erotic and Ecological Fantasies in M/M Paranormal Romance Fiction

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With the rise of paranormal romance fiction in the last decade, the werewolf has been rehabilitated from gruesome monster to romantic hero. Although many scholars have begun examining representations of werewolves in heterosexual paranormal romances, LGBT competitors are often ignored or remain invisible despite the fact that they proliferate and sell in considerable numbers on the e-book market. This paper aims to address this gap in the discourse and examine the erotic fantasy frameworks around the figure of the werewolf in m/m (gay) paranormal romance fiction. Ultimately, the paper argues that despite certain homonormativizing impulses in these texts, they create moments in which gay werewolf characters actively dis-identify with and challenge heterocentrist human *and* paranormal cultures. In this respect, the texts engage with notions of intersectionality and doubled Othering as gay werewolf characters not only deal with their difference from humans but also from other werewolves. The narratives challenge both homophobia and gender essentialism, utilizing the werewolf to imagine the potential for queer utopia. For instance, werewolves are characterized as needing to live close to nature in more remote areas, often creating their own ecological communes that emphasize a nostalgic and harmonious return to the land. This plot device also serves as a vehicle through which to imagine queer existence and romance in rural America—something that tends to remain invisible in metrocentrist representations of LGBT community in mainstream culture. Finally, werewolves in m/m romances are depicted as impervious to human illnesses and diseases, most importantly, sexually transmitted ones. In this fantasy framework, barebacking becomes a utopian (and perhaps nostalgic) erotic fantasy of barrier-free gay sex without consequences.

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