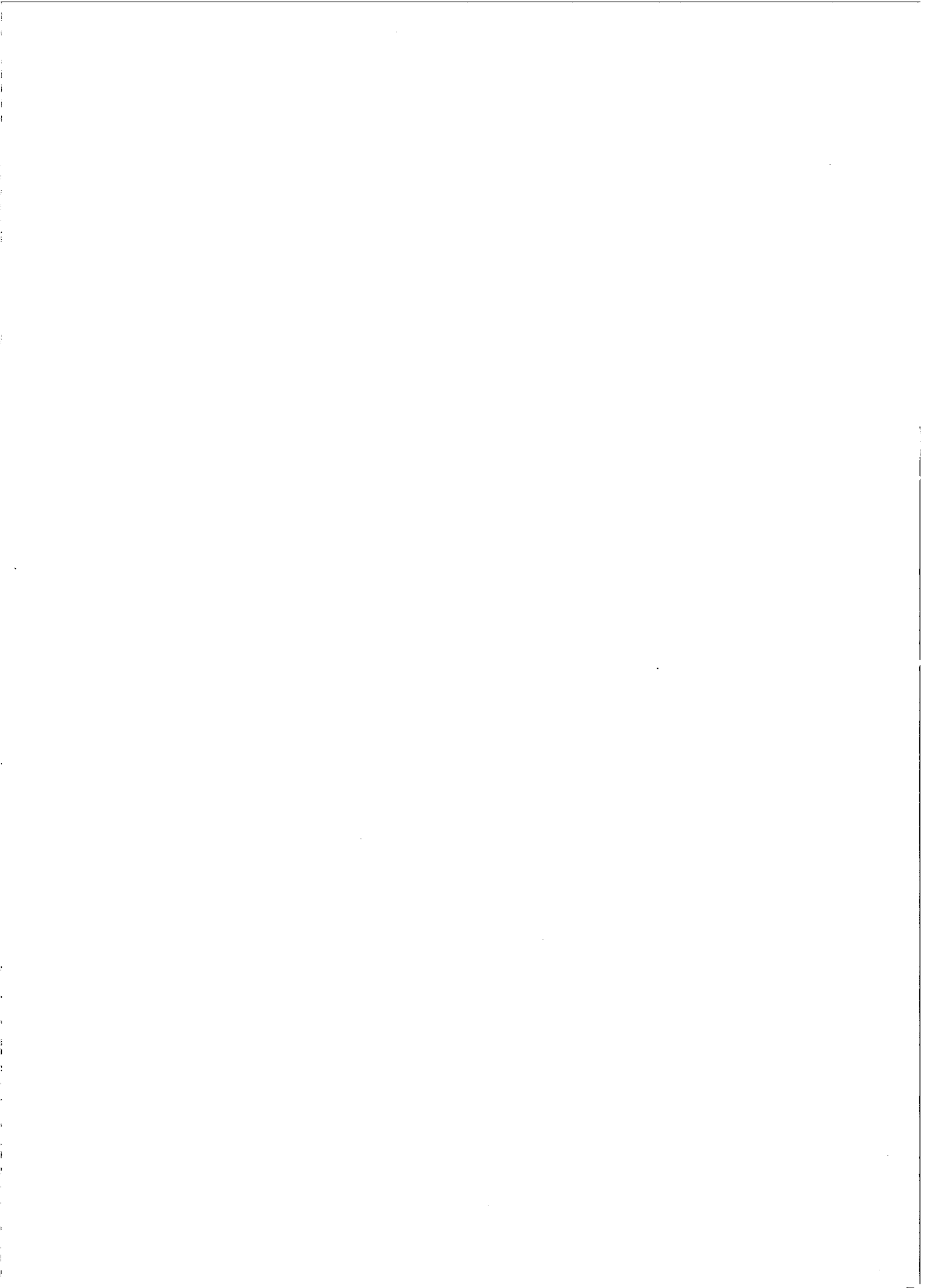


QUEER ALCHEMY



QUEER ALCHEMY:
FABULOUSNESS IN GAY MALE LITERATURE AND FILM

By
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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
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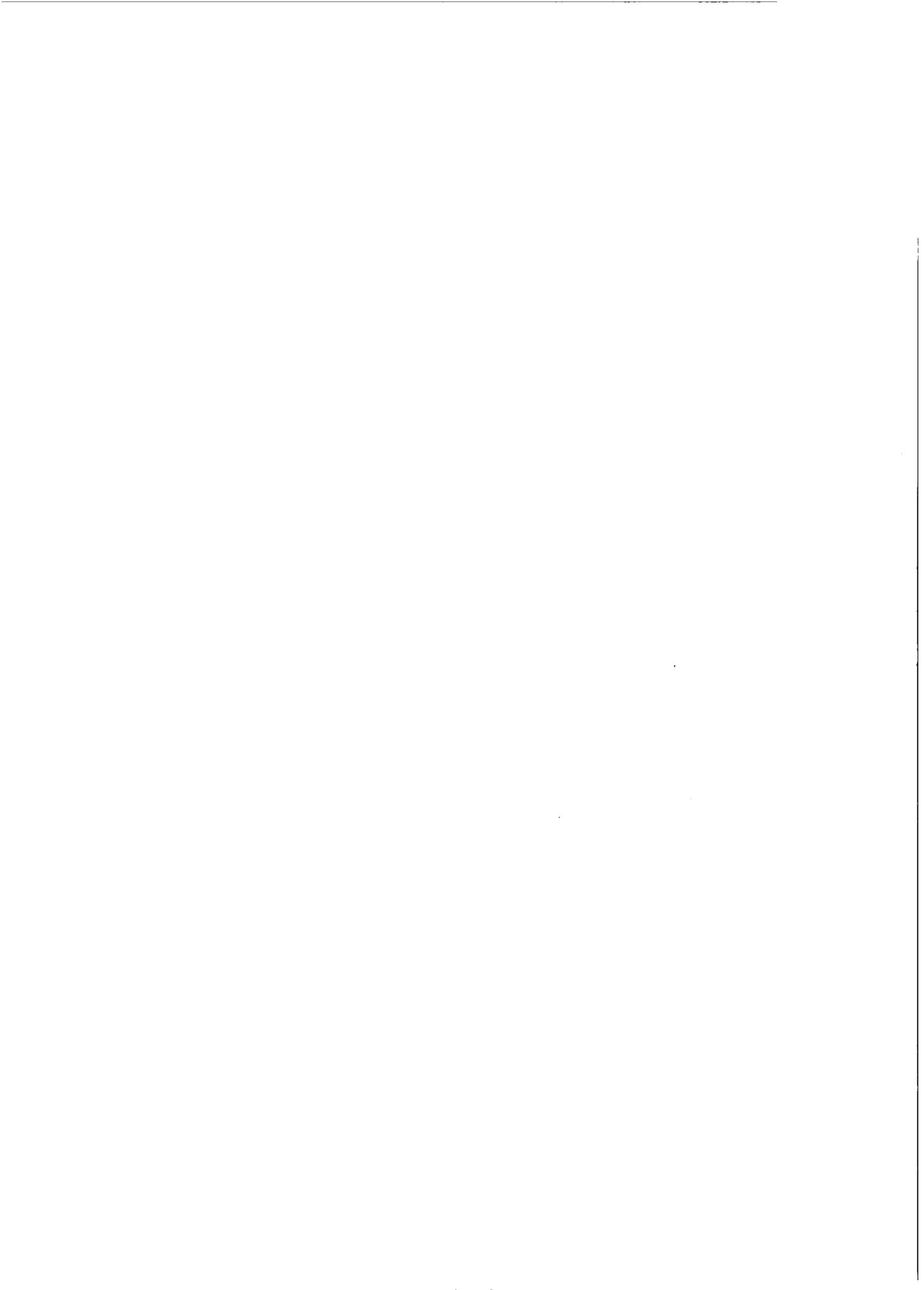
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ABSTRACT

This thesis prioritizes the role of the Fabulous, an underdeveloped critical concept, in the construction of gay male literature and film. Building on Heather Love's observation that queer communities possess a seemingly magical ability to transform shame into pride – queer alchemy – I argue that gay males have created a genre of fiction that draws on this alchemical power through their uses of the Fabulous: fabulous realism. To highlight the multifarious nature of the Fabulous, I examine Thomas Gustafson's film *Were the World Mine*, Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and Quentin Crisp's memoir *The Naked Civil Servant*.



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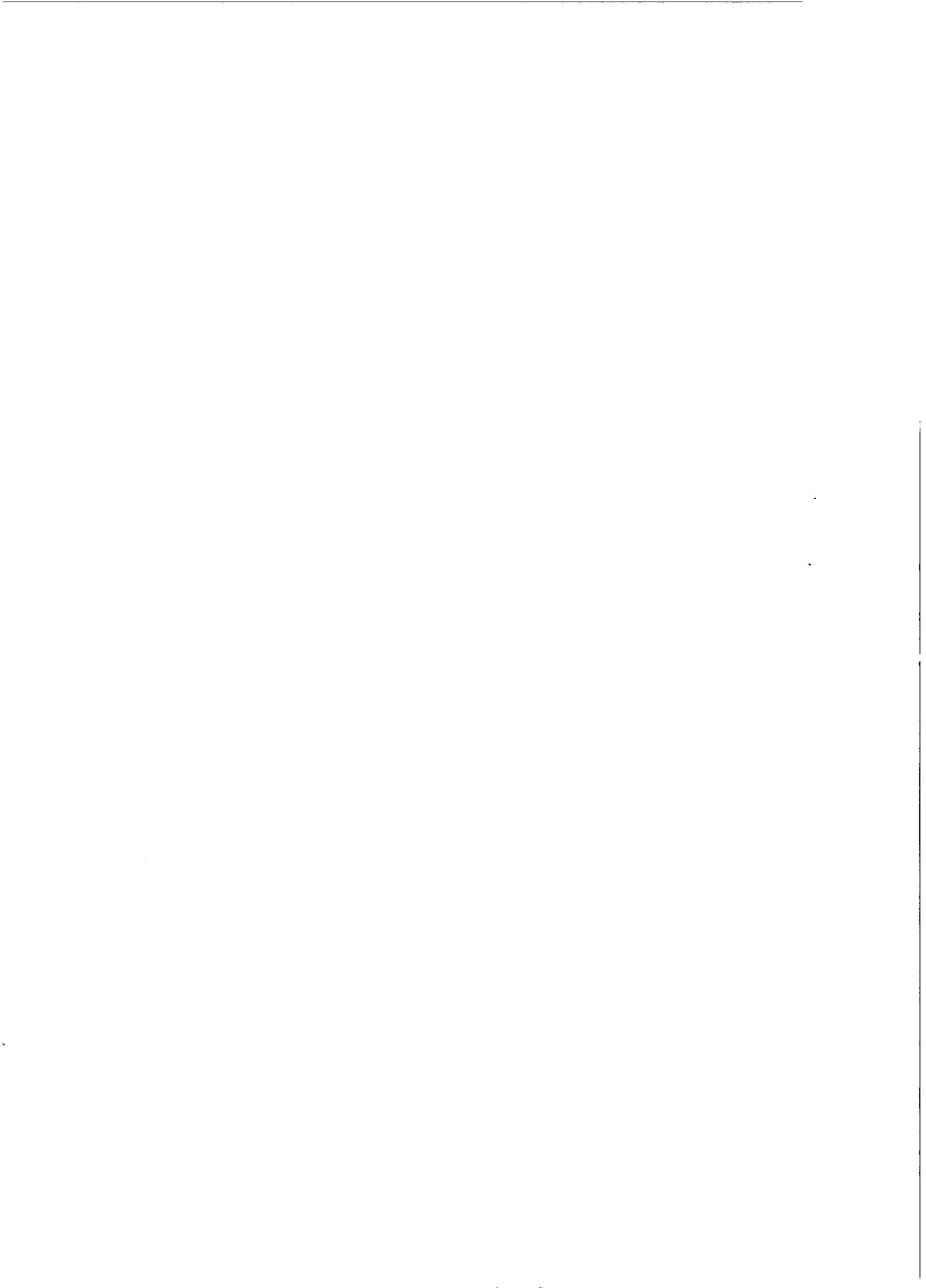


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Introduction

Be Fabulous

While attending my first conference, an international conference at that, I received an email from one of my friends, and at the end he wrote: “Be fabulous.” Being both nervous and frightened that I would make a fool of myself, his poignant command to “be fabulous” had an enchanting, comforting affect. His words, in one sense, were an inside joke between two gay male friends, one of whom (me) flamboyantly overuses the word “fabulous” and its cognates, and the other of whom is “straight-acting” and, coincidentally, rarely if ever uses “fabulous” in a sentence. His call to be fabulous was more than a joke; my friend’s call raises hitherto underexamined questions dancing around gay male subjectivities, and by invoking the concept of “fabulousness” my friend enacted a performative utterance that bestowed upon me a certain strength, while conjuring an ineffable quality particular to gay males; their homojo, if you will.¹

What does one exactly mean when one uses the word fabulous and what is its relation to queer males? Despite the popularity of the term’s circulation within contemporary culture, be it in dominant media representations of “stereotypical” gay men, in the style industry, or its use in contemporary parlance, scholars have directed little critical attention to the term. This is likely due, in part, to the fact that the term evokes stereotypical camp effeminacy (a point to which I shall return in chapter 3). Hence, the term can often be regarded as unintelligible and frivolous

– too feminine. But is it not queer theory’s directive to subvert heteronormative and homonormative condemnations of the unintelligible?²

Within the last twenty years, queer theory has come to signify a deconstructive paradigm born from the fruits of feminist and anti-homophobic scholarship. Queer theorists contend that sexual orientation and gender are social constructions and that there are multitudes of subjects that do not conform to what Judith Butler identifies as the heterosexual matrix:

A hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 208 n6)

Butler’s heterosexual matrix is one aspect of heteronormativity: a normative regime that reads and judges other genders and sexualities through heterosexuality. Queer theorists have underscored the pervasive power of heterosexuality to infiltrate all manner of being: it impinges upon the temporality of heterosexual lives (marriage, reproduction); the spaces that heterosexuals inhabit (suburbia); the bodies of heterosexuals (able-bodied, white). Carrying on from Michel Foucault’s argument that homosexuality threatens heteronormativity as a “way of life,” Judith Halberstam demonstrates that queerness defines itself in opposition to the aforementioned normative scripts (*Queer Time*). By embracing the epithet queer as opposed to gay or lesbian, subjects are actively (re)claiming a

political identity that seeks to unmask the multifarious fictions of heteronormativity.³

In recent years there has been a steady flow of queer theory that examines the heretofore underexamined role of negative affect in queer politics. Scholars such as Heather Love and Ann Cvetkovich prescribe a turn from positivity and advance arguments that encourage critical engagements with negative feelings such as shame, arguing that embracing the shameful permits a more substantial deconstruction and subversion of heteronormativity than proclaiming gay pride.⁴ Due to this attention towards negativity, scholars such as Michael Snediker and Elizabeth Freeman suggest that despite the collusion of negative affects with queerness, it is still possible and critically advantageous to engage queer optimism and pleasure.⁵ While both positions offer fruitful, rigorous projects, I find them both to be insufficient. In their attention to either positive or negative affect, these scholars ignore affective sites that are neither positive nor negative, but liminal, transitory sites that require further investigation. Heather Love observes that “queer alchemy” was central to the gay liberation movement: “powerful utopianism, affirmation of gay identity, and hope for the future resonated with the seemingly magical power of this new movement to transmute shame into pride, secrecy into visibility, social exclusion into outsider glamour” (28). Love’s project appears critical of this “magical power,” but I postulate that it is necessary to explore “queer alchemy” and the manner in which affects, identities, and

realities mutate. I draw on Love's observation – that queer communities possess a transformative power – to analyze how three gay male cultural texts (one film, one semi-autobiographical novel, and one memoir) draw strength from their abjection, thereby transfiguring their worlds.

In accordance with Sedgwick, Douglas Crimp, and Sara Ahmed I share “a discomfort with discourses of ‘queer pride’” or contemporary gay pride (*Emotion* 121 n5). Contemporary gay pride has come to function as a means of capitalist, conservative exploitation; it no longer signifies the radical departure and discomfiture with heteronormativity that dominated the pride celebrations of the 1970's and 1980's: “pride” has come to signify an annual parade dominated by assimilationist politics. As a result, I support the queer turn towards the shameful until such a time that the dominant understanding of pride no longer succumbs to heteronormativity. Stephen M. Barber and David Clark suggest that queer moments occur not through “conversion of shame into pride, but [through] the enjoyment of the negativity of shame, an enjoyment of that which has been designated shameful by normative culture” (Ahmed, *Emotion* 146). Because queer theory tends to embody the notion that sexual dissidence affords a new “way of life,” dominant gay pride discourses can hold queerness as a shameful aspect of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer, Questioning (GLBTQ) spectrum. In 2003 the University of Michigan held a “Gay Shame” conference to confer “potential legitimacy and acceptability on the

discussion of issues that don't make gay people feel proud" (Halperin & Traub 10).⁶ The organizers, David Halperin and Valerie Traub, sought to lift the ban on "unsettling or undignified aspects of homosexuality, specifically questions of emotion or affect, disreputable sexual histories or practices, dissident gender identities, outdated or embarrassing figures and moments from the lesbian-gay-queer past" because, as they state: "[w]e have become proud enough that we are now unashamed of our shame, proud enough to confront the things about homosexuality that still have the power to make us feel embarrassed or abject" (Halperin & Traub 11). This thesis is a continuation of the work that the "Gay Shame" conference set out to accomplish; the texts I examine deal with mind-control, sexual abuse, and scandalous historical figures. I do not embrace these texts because normativity deems them shameful, or because current queer theory seeks to repossess them. I find these texts fascinating because they depict a queer ineffable quality that permits the characters to transform shame into something else, something *fabulous*. I hold with Love's assertion that "feelings of shame, secrecy, and self-hatred are still with us [post-gay liberation]. Rather than disavowing such feelings as the sign of some personal failing we need to understand them as indications of material and structural continuities between the two eras" (20-21). And I further assent to her observation that "shame lives on in pride, and pride can easily turn back into shame" (Love 28). Nevertheless, I feel we do little justice to queer politics by focusing on either shame or pride; both

affects remain intimately tied to normative constructions of what it means to be queer. It is necessary to examine the site of transformation, when shame becomes pride and when we become proud of shame. Fabulousness is the ability to work from negative affective sites, be they shame or melancholy, and mutate them into new pleasures and felicities.

To fabulate is “to invent, fabricate”: to fabulize is “concoct; invent; relate as legend; make into a fable”: to be a fabulator or a fabulist is to be “[o]ne who fabulates or relates fables; a story-teller”: fabulousity and fabulousness refer to “[t]he quality or state of being fabulous”: to be fabulose is to be “[f]ond of fables, myths, or enigmas”: and last, the colloquial ‘fabulous’ is something that is “excellent, marvelous, terrific” (OED). For something to be fabulous is for it to exist in a state of conscious artifice, but with its artifice grounded in materiality. Fabulousness stands in contradiction to the realness of heteronormativity because fabulous subjects are not supposed to be fabulous; they are supposed to be ashamed, melancholic, suicidal, confined to psychiatric institutions or prisons. In choosing this term to examine gay male literature and film, I am drawing on the stereotypical association of the word “fabulous” with effeminacy, drag queens, and gender parody. What is ‘fabulous’ in queer culture is not homophobia or heterosexism, HIV/AIDS, stereotypical media representations, sexism, or the invisibility of same-sex domestic violence. Fabulousness is the ability of queers to rise above such injustices; the ability to create and glory in alternative gender

identities; the ability to engage in multiple intimacies despite threats of violence and death. Fabulosity draws upon the negative and shameful, and transforms them into something palatable, but acknowledges this dark origin. Moreover, fabulousness is the capacity to allow these transformations to alter discursive regimes and the subjectivities informed by them. This project poses culturally relevant questions: what is mundane to queers? What is fabulous for queers? What is mundane in heteronormative discourses, and what is 'fabulous' within the confines of a heteronormative paradigm?

Capitalist consumer cultures provide one, rather unfabulous, articulation of what it means to be fabulous in contemporary Western culture. Kimora Lee Simmons – fashion designer, Chief Executive Officer and Creative Director of *Baby Phat* fashions – released a book in 2006 titled: *Fabulosity: What It Is and How to Get It*. The hardcover edition is described on Amazon.ca as

A lifestyle guide from one of pop culture's most inspirational, stylish, and refreshingly unconventional female power players... Simmons explains how to balance feminine, stop-them-in-their-tracks glamour with sign-on-the-dotted-line business power; how to get past barriers that exist because of gender, race, or age; how to find a marriageable man who'll support your biggest dreams (while keeping other women at bay); and how to have the most fun of your life while doing it!" (*Amazon.ca* n.p.)

Christian Siriano, a young gay male fashion designer, and winner of the reality TV show *Project Runway* released a similar book: *Fierce Style: How To Be Your Most Fabulous Self* (2009). These texts intimate that within capitalism, fabulosity is reduced to a matter of cultural and economic capital. In her analysis of

fabulousness as a form of cultural capital on the popular HBO postfeminist dramatic-comedy *Sex in the City*, Cristy Turner aptly defines this understanding of fabulousness: it is “embodied in a web of cultural markers that signify status, wealth, style, confidence, attitude, glitter, and panache against the banal backdrop of everyday existence” (1). Turner further argues that “gay men are the gatekeepers of all that is fabulous” (2), but that critics and viewers alike must recognize that “the camp concept of fabulousness must be understood as a raced and classed concept, borrowed from the ‘flamboyance’ of black queer culture and relying on the economic power of high-end consumerism” (1).⁷ Cultural capital, a concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the varying degrees of “cultural competence” an individual possesses. Because this competence is based on dominant cultural understandings of what constitutes valuable cultural knowledge, individuals who conform to and are indoctrinated into higher classes are read as possessing more cultural capital than individuals from lower and middle class families (Edgar 79). I concur with Turner that contemporary fashionistas, celebutantes, and the glitterati have appropriated a specifically queer ability to exist in opposition to the “banal backdrop of everyday existence.” In addition, while there is no doubt that gay men do contribute to this understanding of fabulousness as cultural capital to be acquired through consumerism – Siriano being an excellent example – fabulousness is not merely cultural capital, but is

also a mode of relating to normative discourses and challenging the authority of living a “real” existence in a fictional world.

Tony Kushner, playwright and screenwriter, famous for his *Angels in America* plays, has been the only individual to engage the Fabulous as a critical concept. Kushner identifies fabulousness as “roughly the gay equivalent of that undefinable, ineffable thing...which Jews identify as *menschlichkeit*” (“Notes Toward” 30). Kushner defines its most conspicuous features as:

Irony. Tragic history. Defiance. Gender-fuck. Glitter. Drama. It is not butch. It is not hot – the cathexis surrounding fabulousness is not necessarily erotic. Fabulous is not delimited by age or beauty. Style has a dialectical relationship to physical reality. The body is the Real. Style is Theater. The raw materials are reworked into illusion. For style to be truly fabulous, one must completely triumph over tragedy, age, physical insufficiencies, and just as important, one's audiences must be made aware of the degree of transcendence, of triumph: one must see both the triumph and that over which the triumph has been made...The illusion is always incomplete, inadequate; the work behind the magic is meant to be appreciated. (“Notes Toward” 31)

Kushner’s articulation of fabulousness harmonizes with my own. Queers cannot be fabulous without first experiencing an exclusion, an oppression, or an ejection because it is the ability to overcome, or appear to overcome, these injustices that is remarkable. I stipulate that it is necessary *to appear* to overcome these injustices because I remain unconvinced that anyone could completely overcome dominant discourses.

Kushner further – prophetically – points to the appropriation of fabulosity by capitalism, and demands that queer people abstain from homonormativity:

“[b]ecoming subjects cannot mean becoming unfabulous; becoming people must mean becoming gay people, not straightmen [sic],” because “[t]he Fabulous...is a necessary corrective to the dead earnestness of the butch, corporate, gay Republican assimilationist camp...The Fabulous is the assertively Camp camp, the rapturous embrace of difference, the discovering of self not in that which has rejected you but in that which makes you unlike, and disliked, and Other” (“Notes Toward” 32). Kushner articulates why fabulosity resides predominantly within the domain of gay males. Butchness is the antithesis to fabulousness because hegemonic masculinity is the norm by which alternative masculinities and hegemonic femininity are judged. Aligning oneself with counterdiscourses necessitates occupying the place of the Other, a discursive site that is often feminine; disavowing the legitimacy and efficacy of the Other would result in the failure of “the power of the Bakhtinian, the magic of the grotesque, the carnivalesque” (Kushner, “Notes Toward” 32).

However, a necessary caveat: fabulosity, as I read and use it here is a distinctly queer affective power that draws strength from femininity, and consequently will not appear to be available to queer females, despite the obvious likelihood of a female Fabulous. This is in part due to stereotypical lesbian associations with masculinity, the prevalence of fabulosity as a form of cultural capital for straight women – note that Simmons’s book ultimately teaches women how to get a husband – and as Judith Butler writes “femininity is cast as the

spectacular gender” and to perform masculinity always requires a little less (“Refused” 146). This is not to claim that females lack a transcendent quality. While I speculate queer women do draw on the alchemical powers of the Fabulous, for example within the queer femininity of the femme in lesbian culture, due to the limitations of this project, I cannot readily claim fabulosity to be applicable to both queer men *and* queer women. Moreover, the association of the Fabulous with femininity does not result in the exclusion of masculine subjects from drawing on queer alchemical forces, just that those forces exist under a different idiom. Because this project’s chief concern is with effeminate gay men, I cannot effectively ruminate upon what a masculine approach to queer alchemy would entail.

Fabulousness marks a turn toward the abject and from this turn it exposes the constructedness of the abject as polluting, rather than as life affirming. The Fabulous cannot exist without the abject because it draws out the alchemical properties inherent to abjection: “(a)bjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms the death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (Kristeva 15). For this reason the Fabulous is also quite tenuous, but while tenuousness is often used to mean weakness, I use tenuous here as something that is intentionally lacking reason and clarity, because its efficacy resides in its ability to circumvent demands for reasoned qualification. The three texts that I examine revel in the abject: Timothy turns a large percent of

his town's population gay; Gabriel Okimasis draws strength from his Cree heritage and pleasure from his sexual abuse; Quentin Crisp makes a spectacle of his effeminacy in the pre-Gay Liberation era.

By endowing subjects with new life, new significance, and a new signification, the Fabulous exists in opposition to Lee Edelman's position that queerness resists futurity and sociality. Edelman avers that when queers embrace abjection, they contribute to the end of the social, and the death of the figural Child upon whom contemporary hegemony rests. Edelman contends:

queerness...figures...the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in stigma, sometimes fatal...and hence a place from which liberal politics strives ...to disassociate the queer. More radically, though, as I argue here, queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social. (3)

Edelman's rather narrow, but radical, argument rests on the premise that queerness symbolizes the unrepresentable, or the Real of the Lacanian Symbolic order, and as such, can only ever disrupt identity and the social. Queerness can thus never reproduce itself as there is nothing to reproduce. The ultimate end of queerness, for Edelman, is apocalypse.

Be that as it may, fabulousness is not apocalyptic; on the contrary, the Fabulous is a paragon of presentism and futurity: "we're here, we're queer, we're fabulous, get used to it." Fabulousness exists in the present, and the demand that people "get used to it" alludes to futures not yet born. The Fabulous grants queer

theory the ability to fashion new ways of life outside Edelman's figural Child. Unlike Edelman's articulation of queerness, the Fabulous can become coeval with normative regimes. In fact, without normative regimes and the suffering they inflict, fabulousness would cease to exist. Furthermore, new figural Children not only can and will emerge from a politics that questions not only the linear temporality of Edelman's reproductive futurism – as Andrea Smith observes, and as the texts I examine demonstrate – but they will also displace the straight, white, upper-class Child and the symbolic order it upholds: “The future is the stuff of *some* kids. Racialized kids, queer kids are not the sovereign princes of futurity” (Muñoz, “Cruising” 363; original emphasis). Drag families or houses – keepers and guardians of fabulousness – are an exemplar of figural Children that have the potential to subvert normativity. The children of drag mothers, the gay male disciples of established drag queens, are, indeed, related to the politics of futurity, but one that is steeped in subversion, exclusion, abjection, and fabulosity. Drag is not in and of itself subversive, and as Judith Butler opines, its parodies do not necessarily upend heteronormativity. Nonetheless, the ability to appropriate the figure of the Child, and to fight for the right of drag culture, provides alternatives to both Edelman's “no future” and normative reproductive futurism. Although Edelman's insights are provoking and necessary, embracing a construction of queerness that thrives in a displacement of normative temporality, as Halberstam demonstrates in *In a Queer Time and Place* is a more productive enterprise.

Fabulousness is very much concerned with allowing the past to inform the present, and allowing the present to inform the past.

Due to the ubiquity of fabulosity in the lives of gay men, it is fitting that the cultural texts they produce exude the Fabulous; the result is the formation of a new literary and filmic genre: fabulous realism. Scholars have already engaged with the existing genres of fabulation. According to the OED, fabulation is “[t]he action of fabulating”: the act of relating ordinary events as though they were fable, legend, or myth (OED). Robert Scholes extends and nuances the definition of fabulation: “[f]abulation...is fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way” (Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* 29). He elaborates elsewhere, stating that “modern fabulation...tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy” (Scholes, *Metafiction* 3). Scholes is concerned chiefly with science fiction, or more precisely the roots of modern science fiction and its development throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. His definition moves away from medieval allegories or fables that serve moralistic purposes to include science fiction that “is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science” (Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* 54-55). Narratives that explore human cloning (for example the 2010 science-fiction thriller *Splice*, in which human DNA is

cloned to form a hybrid non-human species) is an example of Scholes's fabulation. Given the relationship of the term to fabulousness, though, the term's definition can be expanded, or rather, queered.

In her own claiming of the term, Marlene Barr argues that feminist science fiction writers create worlds that are radically discontinuous from contemporary patriarchal ones, but act as forms of feminist metafiction, or "fiction about patriarchal fiction, to unmask the fictionality of patriarchy" (Barr 8). According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction is "a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'" (Waugh 18). Barr thereafter suggests that what she defines as feminist fabulation, including authors as diverse in their fictions as Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter, is a metafictional comment upon patriarchal relations, and further expands the definition of fabulation, albeit with the feminist qualifier: "[s]tructural fabulation addresses man's place within the system of the universe; feminist fabulation addresses woman's place within the system of patriarchy" (Barr 11). Given that Barr's text was published in 1992, it is not surprising that she does not recognize the interrelated realm of sexual exploitation that queers face under patriarchy. Moreover, her use of the term raises certain contentions concerning the assumption that there is a universal patriarchal order that oppresses women,

potentially to the exclusion of other oppressive discourses. For example: “[r]eality is patriarchal; realistic texts must mirror the patriarchal myths which form reality” (Barr 14). Reality is indeed deeply invested in patriarchal concerns, but patriarchy and reality are not solely constitutive of each other; heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, capitalism, and globalization all inform various constructions of reality to fluctuating degrees.

Thus, I read queer fabulators or fabulists as endowed with certain fabulistic abilities through their associations with abjection, and as capable of producing specifically queer fabulations that challenge normative constructions of reality from multiple points. In *Were the World Mine* Timothy challenges adolescent powerlessness from within the confines of a lower-class, single-parent family in an all boys private school that is relatively devoid of non-white students. Through his Cree heritage Gabriel Okimasis, in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, subverts a Christian worldview that argues that the ineffable divine exists outside material reality and as a consequence regards sexuality, specifically queer sexuality, as wrong and a path leading towards damnation. Quentin Crisp, in *The Naked Civil Servant*, destabilizes the assumption that in the British post-war period there was a unitary, homogenous turn towards working-class masculinity as the most viable and respectable form of being. These fabulations differentiate themselves from the two previous addenda to the definition of fabulation by positioning themselves as concretely a part of reality, not “discontinuous from the one we know,” and by

situating sexuality as one of the primary critical paradigms from which to investigate what constitutes a universal reality.

By arguing that there are numerous constructions of reality, and that these perceptions are culturally contingent upon various identity categories, I would like to stipulate that queers specifically inclined to fabulosity demonstrate the existence and prevalence of fabulous realism. Not surprisingly, given that I initially envisioned this project as examining queerness in magical realist texts, the genre of fabulous realism bears similarities to magical realism.

Magical realism is a genre of literature that was once primarily located within Latin America, but has since become a global phenomenon. Due to its ability to appropriate the realist genre of European colonialism and infuse it with local mythologies and traditions, scholars regard it as a form of postcolonial discourse.⁸ The magic of magical realism “can mean anything that defies empiricism” (Hart & Ouyang 14), and contrary to fantasy, “the fantastic... is grafted on [to] reality” (Hart & Ouyang 19), relating it as an ordinary occurrence, unchallenged by one or more characters in a given text. Magical realism challenges realist claims to universality, and realism’s ideologically and hegemonic dominance. This is not to declare that magical realism is devoid of ideologies; however,

its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interaction of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a

cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation. (Zamora & Faris 3)

Much of the scholarship on magical realism tends to focus on the ways in which texts draw on non-Western traditions. Although Wendy Faris claims that “[t]hese fictions question received ideas about time, space, and identity” (Faris, “Scheherazade” 173) and that the themes inherent in magical realism evince that “magical realism has affinities with and exemplifies certain aspects of experience of women that have been delineated by certain strains of feminist thought” (Faris, *Ordinary* 170), this body of scholarship lacks any prominent queer engagement.

Reading magical realism as a skeleton from which to draw analogies, it is apparent that there is a queer mode of realism, sharing affinities with the aforesaid genres. Faris suggests five fundamental characteristics of magical realism: first, the “‘irreducible element’ of magic”; second, “a strong presence of the phenomenal world”; third, “the reader may experience some unsettling doubts” in an attempt to reconcile the irreducible element; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; fifth, it disturbs “ideas about time, space, and identity” (Faris 7). In tandem, I present five slightly modified characteristics of fabulous realism. First, the text contains the ineffable quality of fabulosity, embodied through a person or group; second, descriptions of the phenomenal world are gendered or sexualized – although actual sex scenes and bodies may remain ambiguous; third, there is an unapologetic display of sexual and gender dissidence within a

heteronormative world; fourth, queerness seeps into and contaminates the straight world; and fifth, fabulous realism disturbs heteronormative temporality, spatiality, and disrupts claims to intelligible identities. Blending queerness and heteronormative realism, the Fabulous *appears* to grow naturally within and through heteronormative ordinariness, “blurring the distinction between them” (Faris, *Ordinary* 1), but its existence is an effect of normative regimes that attempt to limit the expression of queer-identified persons.

I begin my study with the most recent, and least realistic text: Tom Gustafson’s film *Were the World Mine* (2008). This chapter articulates how Gustafson’s adaptation of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* elides temporal limitations and appropriates previous queer cultural identities, most prominently the figure of the early twentieth-century gay male “fairy,” to reorient fabulously a small American town. Drawing specific attention to how the queer characters, Timothy and Jonathan, act as disorientating bodies to heteronormative temporality through their desires and through Timothy’s ability to harness the magic of Shakespeare, the film veers to the extremes of fabulosity, which enable an effective destabilization of heteronormative fictions.

In chapter 2, I continue my analysis of the role of dreams in gay male culture, but look to Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, which offers an indigenous response to Canada’s colonial history. Highway’s novel is semi-autobiographical as it draws on his experiences in the residential school system of

the twentieth century. My analysis concerns itself primarily with the figure of the Fur Queen, a queer pan-tribal fabulation of the archetypal Trickster figure, whom Highway associates with the Cree hero, Weesageechak. I argue that Gabriel's ability to derive pleasure from his sexual abuse allows him to exorcise the demon of Christianity from his psyche, effectively decolonizing his subjectivity before his body succumbs to the ravages of the HIV/AIDS virus.

Extending my engagement with the realm of autobiographical material and historicism, I round out my exploration of fabulousness with Quentin Crisp's first memoir *The Naked Civil Servant*. Crisp's memoir is the text most grounded in realism, and for that matter offers the most accessible form of fabulosity in comparison to the previous texts. I underscore how Crisp's specifically effeminate persona enables him to fabulate a viable existence for himself throughout the first half of the twentieth century in the pre-Gay Liberation era. *Servant* both distinguishes itself as both a beacon of fabulousness in the face of heteronormativity's relentless tyranny, and addresses the exclusion of effeminacy as a laudable form of gendered embodiment in popular and critical discourses.

At the core of this project is my belief that fabulousness is a pervasive and queer quality or essence that informs the construction of effeminate gay male realities. I realize and acknowledge the ideological dilemma of asserting an "essence" for effeminate gay men in a project chiefly concerned with post-structural analysis and the deconstruction of signs. But the exclusion and

oppression of effeminate gay men results in the shared experience of homophobia's diverse manifestations. Hence, through their victimization an "essence" is enforced upon these men, and it becomes necessary to subvert and use this "essence" against the oppressors. The Fabulous, as an essence is not ahistorical nor global, its materialization and the uses to which it is put are contingent on multiple factors. While I cannot confirm or deny whether fabulousity has been with gay men throughout history, the genre of fabulous realism can only continue to expand. If queers and sexual dissidents continue to incorporate and accede to a politics of Shame, then gay male literature and film will chronicle the alchemical elements of the Fabulous. And through the creation of new means of representation gay males will see different, powerful signs that they can then personify. Transcending race, age, and bodies, gay males will continue to draw on their fabulousness to dispute and combat injustice: fabulousness sanctions subversion and instigates dissidence. As gay males we are prone to embrace the myths we create – we are wired to be fabulose – because our ability to turn the ignominy heteronormativity casts us in into the substance of myths and legends is unprecedented and unrivalled in other genres of literature.

Chapter 1

Awaken and Empower the Fabulosity Within

In contemporary secular discourses, dreams are associated with the realm of nonsense, often requiring interpretation by a specialist; the temporalities of dreams are also often indecipherable: one can move exceptionally fast and painstakingly slow, floating and flying through the past, the present, the future and the unknown simultaneously. It is possible to argue that dreams are infused with magical thinking; nevertheless, for queers, to attain material freedoms requires that one dream big and think outside the box: the ability to dream is the one resource that the oppressed cannot lose. It becomes necessary to fabulate new modes of existing that dominant hegemonies deem unreasonable, far too disorienting, or far too queer: the power of dreams lies in their ability to disorient and reorder ideologies, discourses, and subjectivities. By foregrounding the “irrational,” dreams, and representations of dreams, open a space to critique the structures that define irrationality itself. William Shakespeare’s Renaissance comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* draws attention to the affective power that dreams can have to reorder, and at least momentarily call into question dominant discursive regimes.

Tom Gustafson’s 2008 musical film, *Were the World Mine*, functions as a commentary on contemporary queerness and the ability of the Shakespearean canon to speak to, and effectively represent, contemporary queer theoretical

concerns. *World* draws upon Shakespearean and queer cultural mythologies to critique heteronormativity; specifically, the film uses the double meaning of the figure of the “fairy” in contemporary discourses and the attending historicities of the term: it is both a mythological creature and a pejorative label for male homosexuals. The film’s protagonist, Timothy (Tanner Cohen) brings Robin Goodfellow or Puck, a principle character of *Dream*, to life. By conjuring the magical flower that Puck uses in the play, Timothy enchants and queers his homophobic community, fabulating a new reality for himself and his friends. As a consequence of this fabulation, Timothy creates moments of temporal disorientation by corrupting the heteronormative temporalities that dominate middle-class capitalist America. These moments may appear transient like a dream, yet they alter the subjectivities, attitudes, and perceptions of some of Timothy’s community.

As adaptation scholar Linda Hutcheon argues, adaptations are no longer critiqued based on their fidelity to the adapted text (6-7). Consequently, adapters are no longer under pressure to retain a strict commitment to the original plot and characters and *World* demonstrates this in its departures from *Dream*. Timothy is an adolescent at an all-male secondary school – presumably every gay male teenager’s dream! – yet he is the object of ridicule among his peers. Timothy possesses what he believes to be unrequited love for the rugby star Jonathan (Nathaniel David Becker), which the film discloses as reciprocal during a

“dream” sequence – one of many scattered throughout the film – that occurs during an English lesson. Timothy is eventually cast in the role of Puck for the senior class’s production of *Dream* and during a different “dream” sequence is handed a unique copy of the text from the director and English teacher Ms. Tebbit (Wendy Robie) which discloses to him an incantation or recipe for “Cupid’s Love Juice.”¹ Once possessing this charm – which materializes as a pansy – Timothy is able to subvert and transform the bigoted members of his community, forcing some of them to prance a few miles in his shoes. Hilarity and moral outrage ensue, requiring Timothy to reverse the effects of his spell. The strongest affinity to *Dream* resides in the script’s ability to draw on key themes (dreams, desire, identity, and time) and a number of quotations from Shakespeare that play a significant role in demarcating the aforementioned themes. The play not only provides Timothy with the tools to reshape his world, it also acts as a temporal guide for the carnivalesque elements of the film, since the mismatching of the lovers begins and ends at around the same moments in the play and in the town’s reality.

World’s references to, and inspiration from, Shakespeare underscore the bard’s relevance to questions of desire and identity, and the salience of a subject’s ability to transform the subjective realm through her or his dreams. Marjorie Garber notes: “modern culture writes the plays of Shakespeare in works that range from fiction to film to plays to the daily news – while, at the same time,

Shakespeare writes the modern culture in which we think we live” (*Modern Culture* xxxv). The influence of Shakespearean discourses permeates contemporary ideological constructs. *Were the World Mine World* draws attention to the desirability of the Shakespearean canon and the Shakespearean imagination for contemporary audiences, specifically queer audiences. This is quite remarkable given that it is nearly impossible for an individual in an English-speaking country to not be familiar with at least Shakespeare’s name, and Dorothea Kehler even writes that this particular play is the most suitable to introduce *children* to Shakespeare (“Survey” 4). Shakespeare’s play provides a base from which contemporary queer writers can critique a world where “love looks not with the eye, but with the mind” (1.1.234), as Ms. Tebbit so eloquently reminds her students in one of the film’s first scenes. This line illustrates a concern central to queer theory: sexual desire as contemporary subjects know it, is a social construction, ingrained as biological. I, for one, am surprised that it has taken this long for queers to draw on *Dream*’s themes and imagery.

While no scholarly material – queer or otherwise – currently exists on *World*, film critics have published relatively positive reviews: Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* says it is “an indie alternative to Disney’s ‘High School Musical’ Franchise,” and “it is an enchanting, mildly subversive fantasia that reconciles sassy teenage argot with Elizabethan.” On *AfterElton.com*, critic Brent Hartinger avers that although the film fails in some areas because of its clichéd

portrayal of homophobia, he states that overall “[t]his is a movie that is genuinely different, trying something wholly imaginative and unique. It puts the ‘magic’ in ‘magical.’” With the film winning audience and industry awards in both American and international film festivals, it is clearly a crowd pleaser, but what interests me is that the above critics note the film’s innovation and subversive content, even if it is only “mild.”² That Holden chooses to juxtapose the film against *High School Musical* is telling because the Disney films celebrate pubescent heterosexual desire and the normative progression from adolescence to mature monogamous heterosexual coupledness, denying any palpably queer sexuality to the characters within the films.

Because the film is inspired by Shakespeare, certain themes present within *Dream* are taken up in the film: temporality, dreams, and dissident sexualities. I place myself in dialogue with four key contributions: Marjorie Garber’s and Thelma N. Greenfield’s analyses of dreams, Douglas E. Green’s use of queer theory, and Anne Paolucci’s examination of time. Garber’s piece argues that the dreams in *Dream* act as catalysts for a subjective metamorphosis; Greenfield argues that the dreams should not be interpreted using psychoanalytic approaches that seek to decode hidden meanings, but taken as experiential phenomena. These two propositions are fruitful for a reading of *World* because I do not contend that the “dream” sequences are dreams, but moments of temporal disorientation that Timothy or Ms. Tebbit conjure when he or she steps out of the realist frame of the

film. Paolucci's piece is relevant because she asserts that although it seems to the lovers of *Dream* that they have only been in the woods for one night, it only appears to them as one night because of their normative, limited perception of time, which the fairies have the power to alter. Timothy, as the protagonist, is the medium for these distortions, and, not surprisingly, Green concludes his analysis of the queer potentials of the play with a turn to Puck: "Puck represents the possibility of queering this play, Shakespeare, the English renaissance canon, and the culture of the theatres and classrooms in which they are daily revived" (387). The film actualizes and draws on Puck's potential to, in Green's words, act as "the energy of desire itself" (386), thereby taking Shakespeare's original plot to an innovative level, and, in the process, foregrounding the absence of same-sex lovers within the original play.

"Spirits of Another Sort": Fairies and Temporality

In the film, Timothy's mother, Donna (Judy McLane), expresses trepidation that her son is playing a "fairy" in the school play, despite the fact that it is a prominent role and not a female character (which the other boys are forced to act). She later refers to him as a fairy while attempting to sell cosmetics to a local Church administrator, Mrs. Boyd (Ora Jones):

Mrs. Boyd: We'd love to have you stay for bible study.

Donna: I have wings to make.

Mrs. Boyd: It's a potluck!

Donna: No, for my son. He's a fairy.

Mrs. Boyd (timidly): A fairy?

Donna: In a play.

Mrs. Boyd (relieved): Oooh!

Donna (blithely): Well, in real life, too. He's gay. My son is gay...Or queer. But the wings are for the play.

Mrs. Boyd: A man shall not lie with man –

The scene, necessary to illustrate the prevalence of homophobia in Timothy's community, depicts Timothy's divorced mother, who initially struggles with her son's sexuality, as coming to terms with it, and coming out as the proud mother of a gay son. Mrs. Boyd immediately displays discomfort with the fact that Donna connects "son" and "is a fairy." The film ultimately plays off of this connection in a way that perhaps no other film has; nonetheless, it is necessary to understand the history of this conflation if one is to grasp the subversive potential of the film's resignification.

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies one definition of "fairy" as slang for a male homosexual, with its first entry into the English language in 1895:

Amer. Jrnl. Psychol. VII. 216 This coincides with what is known of the peculiar societies of inverts. Coffee-clatches, where the members dress themselves with aprons, etc., and knit, gossip and crotchet; balls, where men adopt the ladies' evening dress, are well known in Europe. 'The Fairies' of New York are said to be a similar secret organization. (OED)

The entry just before the aforementioned one interestingly states that "fairy" can refer to "[a] small graceful woman or child" (OED). In the Victorian imagination "fairy" comes to signify femininity despite the medieval representation of fairies as both masculine and feminine. Because the homosexual was not a personage or identity until the end of the nineteenth century with the creation and

medicalization of the term “homosexual,” Peter Stoneley’s musings upon the potential similarities of the “fairy” and male homosexuals are pertinent to the discussion at hand:

There have been many points in the fairy’s history where the idea of the fairy might seem to correspond to modern stereotypes of homosexuality. Homosexuals have often been seen as dangerously and excessively sexual. The homosexual could be identified in the same way as the fairy. Much as she moves her hands quickly to hide the fact that her fingers are all joined together, the homosexual too may be over-expressive, as he tries to divert and to attract attention at the same time. Homosexuals have their special places; they are supposed to love to dance, and to be preoccupied with ‘glamour.’ They are also thought to lament over and to revel in their difference. (36)

While Stoneley does note that there these are mere correspondences, the very idea of the homosexual “invert” seems to have grown out of the liminality that fairies hold in folklore and mythology. Fairies and gay men are both characterized by their femininity at the start of the twentieth century, and, as George Chauncey notes, gender identity was the predominant determinant in discovering a person’s sexuality:

In the dominant turn-of-the-century cultural systems governing the interpretation of homosexual behaviour, especially in working-class milieus, one had a gender identity rather than a sexual identity...one’s sexual behavior was thought to be necessarily determined by one’s gender identity. (48)

Effeminate males were deemed “virtual women” or “members of a third sex that combined elements of the male and the female” (Chauncey 48). Overt homosexuals, or inverts, were constructed in and through a discourse of liminal

subjectivity – they were in the world of heterosexuals, but concomitantly outside of it because they could not be either male or female. The fairies in *Dream* also share similarities with stereotypical queers; they are often characterized as youthful and they hold somewhat non-monogamous desires – Titania and Oberon not only accuse the other of extra-marital desires (Titania accuses Oberon of “versing love / To amorous Phillida” [2.1.68] and Oberon notes Titania’s “love to Theseus” [2.1.76]), but scholars also note the eroticization of their quarrel over the Changeling boy, whom Oberon has brought to his “bower in fairyland” (4.1.60).³ Judith Halberstam notes that one aversion to homosexuals rests in their assumed “prolonged adolescence” – which results in an avoidance and rejection of monogamy – because it calls for a restructuring of heteronormative temporality (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 2). In adding to Stoneley’s initial observations, it would appear that throughout the early twentieth century fairies and effeminate gay men came to share a number of traits and characteristics that are unlikely to be mere coincidences.

Chauncey, in his analysis of early twentieth century gay male culture in New York, positions the figure or character of the fairy, an effeminate male homosexual, as central to the formation of same-sex behaviours and identities. Chauncey notes that although the fairies “were not the only homosexually active men in New York...they constituted the primary image of the ‘invert’ in popular and elite discourse” and “[a]s the dominant pejorative category in opposition to

which male sexual 'normality' was defined, the fairy influenced the culture and self-understanding of all sexually active men" (47). Chauncey's work directs critical attention to the subjectivity of the fairy; the fairy is not merely a pejorative term or adjective that modifies a masculine noun: the fairy is an embodied character in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century discourses. In consequence, the injurious power afforded to this term haunts contemporary queers.

What becomes problematic for fairy identities is the manner in which the fairies come to embrace their inversion and abnormality, as opposed to maintaining a state of reasoned desire. The fairies, while "tolerated" as Chauncey notes, were accepted because they did not pose a serious threat to the burgeoning heteronormative order synchronous with modernist ideologies (57): "he is so obviously a 'third-sexer,' a different *species of human being*, that his very effeminacy served to confirm rather than threaten the masculinity of other men" (57; emphasis added). Consequently, by abandoning the privileges afforded to men and the dominant "species of human being(s)," the figure of the homosexual fairy comes to occupy a liminal space between the human and the non-human. This liminal status provides a concrete basis on which to deny basic human rights; if the fairy is beyond or outside the category of the human, and colludes with this, then it follows that he disavows his human rights. In her analysis of *Dream*, Marjorie Garber, interestingly, positions Shakespeare's fairies in the same

manner: “the fairies are predominantly inhabitants of an in-between world, neither wholly fictive nor wholly explainable in natural or even psychological terms” (Garber, “Spirits” 68). Claiming the moniker “fairy,” while productive for the establishment of a community, secured the place of early twentieth-century homosexuals in the realm of the mythical and “in-between world” that is inescapable since the fairy’s relation to “reality” is qualitatively different.

As the gay rights movement progressed – and I say specifically gay in reference to gay men because it was a prerogative of “normal” gay men to disavow this humiliating identity – and the demand for equal treatment grew, to be called a “fairy” accumulated highly injurious properties. The term “fairy” refers back to this moment of non-human status, becoming a marker of embarrassment, shame, and making it necessary to forget this injurious identification: how can it be possible for gay men to claim equal rights and demand the right to marry and be normal when members of the community consider themselves to be “fairies” and outside reality? Fairy is, perhaps, the most innocuous-seeming and yet most powerful insult for contemporary gay males. In fact, the term epitomizes a prominent demarcation within the gay male community: “[t]he scorn, the hatred, of those who prefer to think of themselves as masculine or virile for those they deem ‘effeminate’ has been one of the dividing lines in the self-representations of gay men” (Eribon 3). As such, the injurious force of “fairy” has acquired and accrued levels of discursive weaponry, enabling

it to destabilize and displace men – be they heterosexual or homosexual – from positions of discursive control. Didier Eribon foregrounds the prominence of the insult:

‘Faggot’ (‘dyke’) [‘fairy’] – these are not merely words shouted in passing. They are verbal aggressions that stay in the mind. They are traumatic events experienced more or less violently at the moment they happen, but that stay in memory and in the body (for fear, awkwardness, and shame are bodily attitudes produced by a hostile exterior world). One of the consequences of insult is to shape the relation one has to others and to the world and thereby to shape the personality, the subjectivity, the very being of the individual in question. (15)

Insults, and to be insulted, result in the effect of attempting to avoid further insult, or to minimize the injurious force of the insult. In his project, Eribon wishes to meditate upon “the possibility of recreating a personal identity out of an assigned identity,” which implies “that the acts through which one invents one’s identity are always dependent on the identity that was imposed by the sexual order” (7). For Eribon, to be called “faggot” or the French equivalent “*pede*” necessitates that a subject choose to respond in a number of ways, the most productive being the movement towards a space or community of similar persons that can legitimate the enforced identity as a viable subjectivity: an act of resignification. Not all terms are amenable to resignification, however, and the politics surrounding such acts are dependent upon a multiplicity of factors such as nation, era, class, and race.

For homonormative subjects, occluding effeminate subjects is not problematic. As an ideological paradigm, homonormativity does not seek to disrupt or subvert the discourses which abject homosexuality in the first place; rather, it typically confirms, reinstates, and strengthens these heteronormative discourses. Homonormative subjects attempt to disavow the imposition of the insult; in contrast, queers embrace the insult: “redeployment enacts a prohibition and a degradation against itself, spawning a different order of values, a political affirmation from and through the very term which in a prior usage had as its final aim the eradication of precisely such an affirmation” (Butler, “Critically Queer” 231). In her examination of the current redeployment of “queer” by contemporary queer theorists and activists, Judith Butler directs attention to the tenuous and fabulous temporality of such acts of reclamation:

The expectation of self-determination that self-naming arouses is paradoxically contested by the historicity of the name itself: by the history of the usages that one never controlled, but that constrain the very usage that now emblemizes autonomy; by the future efforts to deploy the term against the grain of the current ones, and that will exceed the control of those who seek to set the course of the terms in the present. (“Critically Queer” 228)

In other words, the temporality of such resignifying acts – as emblemized in material form with the Radical Faeries, a non-hierarchal, communitarian, anti-capitalist, neo-pagan queer spirituality movement – demands that the subjects who seek to redeploy a previously and somewhat currently injurious term, such as “fairy,” acknowledge the temporality of the term.⁴ These re-claimants must

acknowledge that it is unfeasible and undesirable to disavow the shameful history of the term and they must concurrently refrain from any attempts to limit the redefinition of the term in the future beyond themselves:

That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term. (“Critically Queer” 230)

In limiting a term, such as “fairy” or “queer,” subjects disavow the very same power which they claim to be using.

Given that the film’s use of “fairy” conflates a historical construction of gay male subjectivity and a relationship to a mythological past, the film speaks to the aforementioned powers of resignification, suggesting the illegible or unintelligible nature of queers within heteronormativity: “what is not yet culturally legible, is often encountered in embodied, nonrational forms: as ghosts, scars, gods” (Freeman, “Introduction” 159). The film’s ability to embrace what was once culturally illegible, with its references to this past, in the form of Shakespeare’s fairy mythology in *Dream*, adds twists and reverses the linear progression of gay and lesbian activism, drawing attention to the supposedly shameful.

Interestingly, the fairies of *Dream* exist in a realm outside heteronormative temporality. For example, in a line used for Timothy’s audition, Puck states: “And we fairies that do run / By the triple Hecate’s team / From the presence of the sun,

/ Following a darkness like a dream” (5.1.374-377). Hecate is a Grecian goddess of the moon, and, as Peter Holland explains, the moon is connected with madness and unreason (32-33). Puck is asserting that fairies willingly depart and flee from reason (the sun) and the limitations normative reason places upon being a fairy: to be a fairy is to abstain from reason. Homosexuals, as scholars note, have long been associated with unreason, and haunting the edges of intelligible subjectivities.⁵ Hence, there is a doubling of meaning for contemporary audiences when this line is sung at pivotal moments in the film. The first instance occurs at Timothy’s general audition for the play. Right before Timothy can begin, the rugby coach informs Ms. Tebbit that their “time’s up” to which she replies: “Your little warriors may enter in ten minutes.” Already the scene is marked by the passage of time, or more precisely, it is marked by the lack of time accorded to it by heteronormativity, in the form of Coach Driskill (Christian Stolte). Just before singing, when Timothy reads from Puck’s lines and says “Lord, what fools these mortals be!,” Ms. Tebbit replies: “Agreed, indeed!” Ms. Tebbit is marking herself and Timothy against the foolish mortals, whom the audience can only imagine to be the coach and those unenlightened members of the community like him. When Timothy sings the chorus – “We fairies, that do run from the presence of the sun, we follow darkness like a dream” – a second time, Jonathan looks in through the crack in the door, and it appears as though Timothy is singing to him. The scene changes into a “dream” and the two boys (or fairies) come together, with the rest

of the rugby team singing behind them, and with Ms. Tebbit waiting on the future stage with the copy of the play that contains “Cupid’s Love Juice.” After Timothy has been handed the text, the scene reverts to normative time and the boys are standing outside the auditorium examining the cast assignments. Time appears to have slowed down for Timothy; enough time has passed for his audition to be over, for Ms. Tebbit to be finished assigning the students their roles, and for the rugby players to have finished their practice in the gym since Jonathan is waiting with Timothy when Timothy returns to “normal.” The scene illustrates that when Timothy “awakens and empowers what lies within” (a line Ms. Tebbit repeats throughout the film) he is able to transcend the limitations of heteronormative realities and fabulate his own reality into existence. This moment illustrates the (neo-)Shakespearean fairies’ resistance to normative temporality and their aversion to the realms of reason, thereby affording queers a method of resisting oppressive regimes: embrace your creative potential and seek out others similar to you.

This is not to claim that queers, or fairies, are incapable of entering the sun. Oberon reveals in an earlier scene to Puck that they are not constrained to the realm of night.

ROBIN: My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
 For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
 And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;
 At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
 Troop home to churchyards: damned spirits all,

That in crossways and floods have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone;
For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
They willfully themselves exile from light
And must for aye consort with black-brow'd night.

OBERON: But we are spirits of another sort:
I with the morning's love have oft made sport,
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
But, notwithstanding, haste; make no delay:
We may effect this business yet ere day. (3.2.378-395)

Garber makes note of the fact that the evening spirits Puck refers to are “allied to witchcraft and fear,” and, as a consequence, “thought to roam only in darkness” (“Dreams” 68-69). She further argues that they are

spirits which recall and recollect what has gone before, shadows whose substance is past...they stand in marked contrast to Oberon's ‘spirits of another sort’ – morning spirits, or spirits of dawning. It is perhaps not too fanciful to compare such spirits with the impulse to creation. (“Dreams” 69)

Garber points to the creative potentialities of being a fairy, which as I have been arguing can act as a gateway for queers to upend oppressive regimes. Shakespeare and Garber both raise a number of interesting points that queer readers can draw upon in their attempts to subvert heteronormativity. First, Oberon reveals that fairies are not barred from the presence of the sun; he, for one, has “made sport” during the day, that is, in the realm of reason. Queers, then, can also transgress the boundaries between reason and unreason. In fact, the ability to differentiate

between the two and choose unreason presents itself as the more “reasonable” option due to the restrictions of normative reason.

Second, Garber, unfortunately reading the creative potential of her fairies in a reproductive, heteronormative paradigm, positions fairies as agents of transformation and change through their association with the in-between world of dreams. Garber, in fact, concludes that page with the bold assertion that “the special provenance of the dream world [is] that it presents the imagined as actual and that it does so by means of transformation” (“Dreams” 69). Timothy as both queer, and as a fairy, places a transformative enchantment upon the members of his community that disrupts normative temporal alignments. Timothy comes to personify metamorphosis and represent early twentieth-century discourses of inversion. When he consciously moves into the realm of “family time” that dominates the film, acting as conduit of disorientating energies within his town, Timothy becomes a creature of the past, present, and future.

Queer Temporality and “Family Time”

The relation of temporality to queerness has come into prominence in the last decade. From monographs to the publication of a special issue of *GLQ*, queer temporality has taken centre stage in academia.⁶ Relations to temporality delineate the parameters within which one comes to understand one’s reality. From birth, subjects are progressing towards death and an individual’s identity/subjectivity determines what happens in-between; as such, queer temporalities exist in contrast

to dominant heteronormative temporalities. Two treatises engaging with the concept of queer temporalities inform my reading of *World*: Judith Halberstam's conception of "family time" and Tom Boellstorff's critique of linear "straight time." Halberstam's articulation of "family time" posits that the daylight hours – under the watch of the rational sun – are given primacy in dominant, heteronormative temporality in Western cultures:

The time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by *strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples*...Family times refers to the *normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise)* that accompanies the practice of child rearing. (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 5; emphasis added)

The night becomes the domain of queers, subjects who do not prioritize the figure of the Child or reproductive temporality/futurism. The construction of the capitalist business day works in correlation with "family time" to ensure that subjects who do not participate in both are judged abnormal.⁷ (Re)productivity thus accrues dominance during the day, and leisure activities are predominantly relegated to the night, especially for the middle and lower classes. Eribon even highlights, whilst commenting on the rise of gay visibility, that queerness was often considered an aspect of one's personality that existed outside the day: "gay people have ceased hiding the 'nocturnal' part of their lives" (27; emphasis added). There was a normal persona for the day, and during the night, or during the time away from work and family, the queer persona could blossom. What does it mean for queers if they are relegated to the night and the shadows, and why are

they relegated as such? What are the effects of crossing these boundaries and infringing upon this “family time”? Is such a crossing possible? I am not attempting to suggest that queer people do not go about their lives in the day; what I am suggesting is a change to the symbolic register that acknowledges the presence of queerness during the day and so calls into question normative temporalities. Can the two temporalities fall within the same time? What would happen if the two crossed one another? Boellstorf argues that this crossing provides the opportunity for an even queerer understanding of temporality: “a queer time of coincidence...a queer time in which time falls rather than passes” (228). Boellstorf prescribes an engagement with temporalities that embrace ideologies of co-presence, whereby people and events fall into time, rather than following a strict calendar that accords specific events and actions to specific places and times. Boellstorf uses the example of Friday the thirteenth:

[queer time] might be a time in which same-sex marriage could ‘fall’ in a heteronormative context like Friday sometimes ‘falls’ on the thirteenth: just as that conjunction gives that particular Friday a different meaning, so the conjunction of same-sex marriage and a heteronormative context might transform both. (241)

In other words, since it is impossible to escape heteronormative temporalities, recognizing the way queers “fall” in and out heteronormative temporalities may allow for a reconsideration of what marriage signifies temporally, or how heteronormative temporality informs constructions of marriage and “long-term” relationships in general.

In *World*, when linear or straight time intersects with queer or fairy time, as is the case when Timothy harnesses his “fairy magic,” fairy time dominates and heteronormative subjects are unaware that fairy time has manifested. Fairy time or queer temporalities exist outside of normative perception, and it is only when Timothy enchants other people, blessing them with a “fairy mentality,” that the heteronormative temporality becomes altered. In the play, Puck bewitches the lovers at night; in the film, Timothy is free to place a spell on whoever crosses his path, regardless of time. Furthermore, although the majority of the population is “queered” the night before the performance, the effects of the spell carry over into the next day. In fantasy, alternative temporalities must be reached through a mystical gateway of sorts; for Shakespeare the woods act as this portal, and the presence of the fairies brings about temporal disorientations for the mortals.⁸ In the film, Timothy acts as the agent of temporal disorientation and distortion for the other characters: Timothy brings the world of fairies to them. Imagine that a rock is thrown into a small pond, creating a ripple effect; Timothy is this rock, and his constant movement in a world to which he does not belong creates an infinite rippling. The affected town members not only abandon their work to get married, but they abandon reason and seek to wed individuals for whom the previous the day they only felt platonic affection (if any affection at all).

While initially the prominence of gay marriage in the film at this point can be read as a “straightening” of queer time, I contend that because the marriages

are the results of an abandonment of reason, and an instance of “mass hysteria” – as opposed to the calculated, meticulous planning of a capitalist wedding – they resist a full “straightening.” Timothy has only enchanted them with a “fairy mentality”; they are objects of Timothy’s will, and not thinking subjects. While their reality is altered, and Timothy does indeed imbue his town with a sense of fabulousness, its purpose serves only to critique “blind desire” and the assumption that same-sex marriage will destroy marriage. The “true” same-sex couple, Timothy and Jonathan, does not wish to get married. More importantly, this intimates that it is normative couples who seek to maintain the institution of marriage and the family. The one Bride who speaks is Mrs. Boyd, the religious secretary who condemns Timothy earlier in the film.

When Timothy’s mother informs Mrs. Boyd that her son is a fairy, it is because she needs to finish his wings, which are made out of her *wedding dress*. For reasons unclear to the audience, but intimated to be related to Timothy’s sexuality, Donna and her husband divorced and she is raising Timothy by herself. When she finds out that her son is going to be a fairy, Timothy’s mother sacrifices her wedding dress to make wings for Timothy (without being asked), empowering Timothy to “fly” about town. The symbolism of the wedding dress – *the* symbol of heteronormativity in contemporary culture – being cut up and refashioned suggests that the heteronormative subject (Timothy’s mother specifically) must capitulate to the revelations of queer theory and recognize that heterosexual

weddings do not guarantee the acquisition of a “happy ending.” Timothy as the agent of this transformative and subversive ideology embodies Green’s assertion that Puck is the key to queering the play. Because Shakespeare structures *Dream* around the nuptials of Theseus, Hermia, and Helena in the original play, this wedding dress refers to the centrality of marriage in the play. In the play, their weddings – Theseus’s, Hermia’s, and Helena’s – are the root of the play’s narrative and give Puck the power to fulfill his queer desires and preposterous pleasures: “Puck takes a sometimes voyeuristic, sometimes sadistic pleasure in the folly and pain of others...Puck’s desires are ends in themselves, not displacements of other desires or means of asserting his own prerogatives” (Green 386). Timothy as Puck derives his pleasure from the pedagogical and didactic effects of his charms. In the film, this dress, symbolic of a failed marriage, grants Puck/Timothy the authority and ability to bestow critical insight upon the limitations of heteronormative temporalities.. Further, the dress exists outside of its time, or lifespan; the dress was meant to be worn once, at a specific moment, for a specific purpose in the heteronormative rite of passage, but it is used outside of its temporal purpose to queer the people of Timothy’s town.

Jonathan also acts as a living talisman of disorientation. The audience is provided with little background information on the supporting character Jonathan, aside from the fact that he is a star rugby player, has a girlfriend, and, unbeknownst to Timothy, has a secret crush on him: it is this secret that enables

him to act as a disorientating force. Throughout the first half of the film, the audience is provided with clues that Jonathan does have romantic feelings for Timothy. Jonathan attempts to console Timothy after the other boys taunt him; during an English class, in what appears as one of Timothy's "dreams," Timothy is in fact given prophetic or clairvoyant insight into Jonathan's feelings for him. During a game of basketball he flirtatiously smacks Timothy on the rear and says "Good form"; and after their roles for the play are posted, prior to complimenting Timothy's "pipes" and while leaning on Timothy, Jonathan informs him that "Looks like I am one of the lovers." Jonathan's moments of disorientation come after Timothy is able to help him heed Ms. Tebbit's advice to "awaken and empower what's within." Outside the school's carnival, Timothy questions Jonathan: "You didn't even like me yesterday, remember?" to which Jonathan answers: "Sure, I did. But I fell in love with you today." Jonathan's queerness exists before, after, and during the effects of the spell and cannot be easily located within the film. Did Timothy awaken something dormant? Was Jonathan going to ask him out eventually? After he kisses Timothy at the end of the film, Jonathan states that he "feels like himself," but this is not the same Jonathan. Whether Jonathan can admit to it or not, the spell has changed him, and he is not the same person he was "yesterday." He has felt both intense romantic feelings and the stirrings of adolescent attraction in a span of two days, and, at the film's conclusion, he is out of the closet – a rite of passage for queers. Moreover, in

response to Jonathan's rejection of her in Shakespearean dialogue, Jonathan's girlfriend, Becky (Colleen Skemp), expresses her disbelief by ignoring his affection for Timothy and demanding, "You better pick me up at 7." In other words, you had better maintain our timeline, and disregard your new way of life.

Although the magic of *World* allows Timothy to keep one foot in heteronormative temporality, and another in queer time, he must remain vigilant about the pervasive oppression of heteronormativity. Heather Love is clear, and quite right, when she asserts that "[w]e need to take as our starting point the reversibility of reverse discourse and to keep our gaze directed toward the past, toward the bad old days before Stonewall" (28). Timothy should keep his eyes turned toward the bad old days before he performed *Dream*, because while the lovers of the original play can find happiness with their new spouses, Timothy, although he is now in a relationship with Jonathan, does not live in a world where queers are allowed to thrive. The end of the film gives the illusion that it is the clichéd "happy ending," because while Timothy thought Jonathan only loved him because of the spell, Ms. Tebbit, in her omniscience as fairy godmother, appears to have been aware that Jonathan already had feelings for Timothy. As such, she rightly declares that "it is not enough to speak, but to speak truth." But what about the rest of the town? This is not the fairy tale where the prince marries the princess; these are two fairies who live in a small American town. A large percent of the population was bewitched, but they are tricked into believing it was a

“dream,” perhaps even part of the performance. What about the father who tells an audience of parents that he “showed” his son and his entranced lover a thing or two when they were found in bed together: is he more tolerant? Coach Driskill recognizes the talent of the boys, but the headmaster, Dr. Bellinger (David Darlow), still seems hesitant around Coach Driskill after the coach expressed undying devotion towards him. The town emblemizes Love’s articulation of queer alchemy: “[w]e can turn shame into pride, but we cannot do so once and for all: shame lives on in pride, and pride can easily turn back into shame” (28). The spell’s residual effects that, while effective for Coop (Parker Croft), remain lost on the rest of the town. When the film begins he mocks Timothy by mimicking him with a stereotypical lisp, but by the end of the film he insists that Timothy and Jonathan – “lovebirds” – attend his party. No one has his or her identity changed, and only Timothy and Jonathan remain attracted to the same sex. The town at best can be said to be tolerant of homosexuality, in the same manner that Chauncey notes early twentieth-century subjects were tolerant of the fairies in their midst (57). The one redeeming feature to be drawn from the film’s conclusion is that despite all queer attempts to change dominant discourses, even through recourse to magic and mystical arts, homophobia remains a constant threat, demanding vigilance and a turn towards eras less dominated by the rhetoric of liberation. This requires that queers continue to acknowledge the fabulousness

inherent in our dreams, even if it means delving into some our most scandalous, darkest, and painful memories.

Chapter 2

Kissing Fabulose Queens

In an analysis of postcolonial ruminations upon temporality, Keya Ganguly argues that while the question of time has involved the “periodizing of the postcolonial” within postcolonial scholarship, this “thought-provoking” line of inquiry forgoes “explorations of *how* time has figured in the analysis of the postcolonial” (162; original emphasis). What strikes Ganguly as noteworthy are “the ways in which, and the degree to which, the postcolonial has been taken to represent an ‘other’ time whose logic and historical expression are incommensurable with the normative temporality of clock and calendar associated with Western modernity” (162). Ganguly ultimately rejects Homa Bhabba’s unnecessarily convoluted poststructuralist treatise on temporality in the *Locations of Culture*. Ganguly asserts: “the metaphoric possibilities of thinking about time in the free-falling terms of postcolonial discourse notwithstanding, the fact is that, as social formations, postcolonial nations are (like any others) subject to the dictates of capitalist modernity” (177). I do not deny the material reality that with the advent of globalization all cultures must, in some manner, conform and relate to the temporality of capitalist modernity, but Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* eloquently depicts an alternative, circular, and queer timeline. And although the novel was published in the global postcolonial era, if I were to designate this novel as postcolonial I would contradict Native studies scholars –

the subjects for whom the novel is most representative – who do not cede to the paradigm of postcoloniality.¹

Highway guides his readers through the relatively recent abuse of the Okimasis brothers that occurred roughly from 1959 to 1966. *Kiss* depicts Gabriel and his older brother Jeremiah as they attempt to heal the psychological and sexual trauma inflicted upon them by the head priest, Father LaFleur, of the Birch Lake Indian Residential School. Prohibited from speaking Cree, forbidden to interact with the rest of their family, physically beaten and sexually abused, the boys enter young adulthood bearing the marks of the residential school system's attempts to "modernize" their "primitive" indigeneity. Although Highway derives his inspiration for the events from his own life, and from the rape and murder of the indigenous woman Helen Betty Osborne, the book is fiction. The text examines in detail the affective lives of two indigenous brothers, Jeremiah (born Champion) Okimasis and Gabriel (born Dancer) Okimasis, when they are removed from their family and placed in the Birch Lake Indian Residential School. Highway illustrates how both brothers as adults transform their abject childhood abuse – Jeremiah initially through denial and later through music and Gabriel through dance – into powerful affective states that enact a decolonization of their bodies, primarily through the exorcism and abjection of Roman Catholicism. This decolonization enables the brothers to claim the realm of the "unintelligible" First Nations subject as a viable identity. Highway's insertion of a

magical realist element permits the inclusion of the Fur Queen, a beauty queen pageant winner whose photo acts as the embodiment of a gender ambiguous Cree trickster figure who guides and guards the brothers – a fairy godmother if you will. By examining Gabriel’s ability to reinvent fabulously and reposition himself in a colonial ‘reality’ this chapter reveals the affective power of queers – specifically for this book, the Two-Spirit individual of indigenous spirituality that I return to later – to fabulate a livable, though not utopic, existence. By paying particular attention to Highway’s fabulous interpretation of the Trickster figure as both pan-tribal and queer, this chapter situates itself against the existing criticism of *Kiss* that does not analyze Highway’s use of the Trickster or Two-Spiritedness.² Simultaneously, I examine Gabriel’s ability to access a Cree temporality that resists the strict linear progression of Western capitalism and dominant Canadian culture through an examination of Gabriel’s relation to “the essence of warm honey” (Highway 79). In contrast to Gabriel, I pay little attention to Jeremiah in my analysis, as I view his decolonization as the result of the pedagogical effects of Gabriel’s ability to connect with the Fabulous.

“Why do you think I put on these faa fabulous shows?”: Highway’s Fur Queen

North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures... Foremost of these beings is the ‘Trickster,’ as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. ‘Weesageechak’ in Cree, ‘Nanabush’ in Ojibway, ‘Raven’ in others, ‘Coyote’ in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises...

The most explicit distinguishing feature between North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender...the male-female-neuter hierarchy is entirely absent. So that by this system of thought, the central hero figure from our mythology – theology, if you will – is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously. (Highway n.p.)

The above epigraph is an abridged passage from “A Note on the Trickster,” which Highway includes at the beginning of the text. Highway, referred to by Kristina Fagan as “the most famous spokesperson for the trickster-worldview” (4), makes a number of quasi-problematic assertions in the epigraph regarding the tradition of the Trickster. First, Highway positions the Trickster as a “pivotal and important figure” in “North American Indian Mythology.” He conflates the various tribal manifestations of Weesageechak, Nanabush, Raven, and Coyote into one homogenous, monolithic figure; Highway repeats this conflation in the novel when Jeremiah encounters the Fur Queen: “Honeypot, if I were you, I’d watch my tongue. Cuz you’re talkin’ to Miss Maggie Sees. Miss Maggie-Weesageechak-Nanabush-Coyote-Raven-Glooscap-oh-you-should-hear-the-things-they-call-me-honeypot-Sees” (234). Each of these figures has a specific tribal significance, and the conflation of these differences negates each one’s specificity. The archetype of the Trickster is an anthropological invention that attempts to articulate a homogenous mythological landscape amongst different cultures (Fagan 10). Highway’s trickster paradoxically reduces traditional tribally specific mythologies into one being, while concurrently providing a pan-tribal

figure, who, in light of the dispersal of indigenous people into larger metropolitan areas, provides a diverse population of people, expelled from their homes, the ability to congregate around a shared cultural sign. It is, thus, a conscious fabulation on the part of Highway:

the emergence of the trickster in contemporary Native writing took place in a very urban, cross-cultural, organized, and strategic manner. This conscious recreation of a tradition does not mean that the contemporary manifestations of the trickster are in any way 'fake'. But they are, like all instances of 'tradition,' recreated because of specific and current needs. (Fagan 12)

As a result, Highway's rendition of the traditional Trickster in the form of the Fur Queen speaks to the specific needs of metropolitan indigenous people – specifically queer people – and is neo-traditional given the need for formally disparate tribes to come together in metropolitan locales.

The actual Fur Queen that Abraham Okimasis, the Okimasis patriarch, meets after he wins the Millington Cup World Championship Dog Derby at the beginning of the novel is Miss Julie Pembroke of Wolverine River, Manitoba, a young, exceptionally fair (read: white) girl. Whiteness envelops her: “the radiant Miss Pembroke was draped not with a white satin sash but with a floor-length cape fashioned from the fur of arctic fox, white as day. She had her head crowned with a fox-fur tiara” (Highway 9). When Abraham first sets eyes upon her she is a “white flame,” until she begins to take shape and he can discern a “young woman so fair her skin looked chiseled out of arctic frost, her teeth pearls of ice, lips

streaks of blood, eyes white flames in a pitch-black night” (Highway 10) (appearing verbatim when Gabriel dies). Diana Brydon notes the similarities between the Fur Queen and a vampire: “embodying the threat of a white culture maintaining its vitality through sucking the blood of the colonised” (21). Although Brydon’s observation is astute, the vampire is a noted motif of the *vagina dentata*, the female that castrates.³ Since Highway chooses the image of a young white woman to embody his Trickster, she becomes a hybrid figure, straddling both white and indigenous cultures, and it is also possible to read her as castrating the phallic potency of a pure, impenetrable white culture that constructs indigeneity and queerness as abject.

Misogynistic phallic imagery dominates representations of both straight and colonial cultural practices. Highway emphasizes this when Jeremiah notes the “Penetration” of North America in his History lesson. Straightness, as a normative sexuality, is often, but not always, associated with a healthy, virile, and masculine body. Queerness and homosexuality embody perversion because heteronormative discourses conceive of the gay male body as primarily inclined to desire penetration, thus diminishing the phallic potency of the receiving male by becoming feminine. The castrating Fur Queen disputes the assumption that queerness, femininity, and penetration are akin to powerlessness.

Highway’s Fur Queen also evokes “the imperial legacy of the British monarchy and the queer camp parody performed by a cross-dressed ‘Queen’”

(Brydon 20). The drag queen embodies a potential for subversion and has in some instances come to signify queerness itself. Further, as Judith Butler notes, “[a]s much as drag creates a unified picture of a ‘woman’...it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (*Gender Trouble* 187). In a later text Butler asserts that:

drag is not unproblematically subversive. It serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure. But there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. (“Critically Queer” 231)

Despite the fact that a drag queen or drag king can reveal the supposed immutability of gender, this exposure does not necessitate a downfall of heteronormativity. One can postulate that not all drag queens are political and that some are perhaps apolitical in their performances, and that, like other entertainers, these apolitical drag queens (and kings) may just enjoy the act of performing. Nevertheless, due to the political nature of the novel, I contend that the Fur Queen is political and capable of enacting a disintegration of heteronormative and colonial ideologies for Gabriel and indirectly for Jeremiah.

Returning to the epigraph, Highway asserts that the Trickster figure is a gender liminal being in Native American Indian mythology, which is true: *for Highway*. In her Introduction to *Troubling Tricksters*, Fagan deconstructs the

pervasiveness of the Trickster in Native literature and Native studies, and counters Highway's claim that the Cree Trickster is genderless. Fagan discloses that when teaching with a Cree elder, Maria Campbell, the elder stated that "despite the lack of gendered pronouns in the Cree language, "Elder Brother" [a Cree trickster figure] is not genderless; he is a male who sometimes disguises himself as a female" (10). Examining Highway's "A Note on the Trickster" also illustrates that the Trickster is by default envisioned as male: "*he* can assume any guise he chooses... *his* role is to teach us... *he* straddles the consciousness of man and that of God" (n.p.; emphases added). Highway initially wrote the manuscript in Cree and translated it into English, and, while he expresses frustration with the English language, he still privileges masculine pronouns when describing his pan-tribal, gender-subversive Trickster despite his willingness to use ambiguous pronouns later in the text when Gabriel encounters what has been identified as a Two-Spirit (Highway 168). The subversive power of Highway's Fur Queen lies in the inherently masculine originary gender that Highway displaces in favour of representing the Trickster as predominantly feminine. Furthermore, the Fur Queen as a Trickster is not only in gender-drag, but has donned the garb of whiteness, enabling her to move amongst the brothers unnoticed as an authority figure until the brothers can come to respect their indigeneity. While the occlusion of the tribally specific trickster minimizes the diversity of indigenous heroes into one figure, which is especially problematic for non-Indigenous subjects who are

unaware of the nuances inherent to each hero, this neo-traditional Trickster permits Highway to effectively move his narrative through white, indigenous, queer, and heteronormative cultures, a hybridizing gesture which takes precedence over maintaining exclusionary traditions.

Highway's queer, neo-traditional, pan-tribal Fur Queen enables him to represent a distinctly Cree temporality. In an interview with Suzanne Methot, of *Quill and Quire*, Highway expresses his distaste for English with regards to its inability to represent circular time: "everything is so difficult to explain in English. And the business of [circular] time doesn't translate." Cree understandings of time are not strictly linear; they do not separate past and present to the extent that westernized time does. In her analysis of Nanabush, the Trickster in Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, Lina Perkins writes,

Nanabush's time is a 'time of the Other' not because it is 'separate' from westernized time or from the time-scheme followed by the rest of the play, but because it is of a different nature. In Nanabush's time, past and present are both intertwined and distinct. His function is to communicate his sense of time to the rest of the characters. (260)

Perhaps more significantly, although Nanabush exists in the play as an "embodied memory", he "functions more as a catalyst for memory than as something to be remembered" (Perkins 260-262). Hence, the Fur Queen – a literary descendant and potential amelioration of the earlier Nanabush figure – functions as a re-articulation of indigenous cultural memory that encourages not only cross-tribal interaction, but also is the key – the essence and embodiment of

fabulousness – that grants the brothers access to their own traumatic histories. This enables the brothers, specifically Gabriel, the power to magically use his sexual pleasure as a form of healing energy when he embraces Two-Spiritedness in the novel's second half.

“The essence of warm honey”: On the Queerness of Gabriel Okimasis

Highway associates Gabriel's ability to feel pleasure and pain with “the essence of warm honey” at numerous points in the novel (79, 120-121, 132, 169, 191, 283). Each instance relates to Gabriel's sexuality in some manner; be it when he engages in sexual intercourse, uses sexually inflected words, or is covering the lesions spread by the HIV/AIDS virus, “warm honey” is intimately tied to Gabriel's sexuality. It is possible to make the erroneous assumption that Highway is metaphorically rendering semen as warm honey in each of these sections, as I initially did, and as Deanna Reder claims. In her examination of Gabriel's first encounter with his abuser, Father Lafluer, she states that Gabriel can only understand the priest's semen as honey (Reder 287). She also makes the claim that when Gabriel has a sexual encounter in a Winnipeg mall he is performing fellatio and “the semen is sweet on his tongue like ‘warm honey’” (Reder 286). Such readings not only impose upon Gabriel the position of the penetrated body, a point which is left ambiguous as the novel progresses, but they ignore the nuances of their respective passages, and the representation of “honey” in the text as a whole.

Honey and fireweed are two recurring natural images throughout the text. Reder pays particular attention to the presence of fireweed, a deep pink flower – simultaneously phallic and clitoral imagery – found throughout North America, in her analysis of *Kiss*. Reder insists that the plant, known for its ability to grow out of fire-ravaged soil, acts as a metaphor for indigenous autobiography because Jeremiah and Gabriel are both able to flower, despite their traumatic past (279). I would add, too, that human passions – i.e. the uncontrollable libido of the priest – can be read metaphorically as fire: if unchecked, passions can consume a person until there is nothing left. Reder also notes that fireweed “is full of syrup that can be eaten or used by bees to make fireweed honey” (278). Contrary to Reder’s assertion that “it first appears in Gabriel’s hand just as he is about to leave his parents and community for another year of residential school” (he is in fact leaving for a public high school in Winnipeg), fireweed makes its first appearance in the novel when Abraham meets the Fur Queen. Whilst Abraham believes that “he must have been *dreaming*,” the Fur Queen, believed to be a “goddess,” is “sending off ripples of warm air redolent of pine needles and fertile muskeg and wild *fireweed*” (Highway 10-11; emphases added). Fireweed, which possesses the properties to create honey, is associated with the liminal dream world of the Fur Queen, “weaver of dreams, sparker of magic” (Highway 234). Furthermore, as Gabriel, in the form of the child-about-to-be-born, weaves his way through “the land of dreams,” he prances through a “forest lit in hues of mauve and pink and

turquoise.” Mauve and pink are colours consistently associated with fireweed throughout the book. Fireweed thus comes to act as a path to the Fur Queen and her world of dreams; warm honey comes to act as the trigger that reminds Gabriel of this aforesaid path.

Although Gabriel’s heart-wrenching death from complications of the AIDS virus draws attention to the realities of the disease, his refusal to luxuriate in victimhood permits him to affectively engage with the traumas of his personal and cultural past. Gabriel initially fabulizes “the essence of warm honey” during sexual encounters to ignore the pain of sexual abuse; but by the end of the text he is able to draw on the subversive potential associated with his ability to access his own *mithoopoowamoowin* (good dream power) (Highway 247).

Mithoopoowamoowin, as I understand Highway’s deployment of the term, refers to individuals’ ability to put into action their dreaming capabilities, which for the Cree are not solely imaginative but hold certain spiritual and magical significance (Bulkeley 254). By acknowledging the legitimacy of his sexual desires and the worth of his Cree heritage, Gabriel is able to decolonize his body. Gabriel dissolves and refutes the colonial ideologies that construct his indigenous and queer body as inferior, and overcomes the cannibalistic Weetigo of Cree myth that Wendy Pearson aptly defines as “the priest...the monster who devours small children...[and] the spirit of whiteness, of heteronormativity, and of masculinity” (“National Entity” 90). The Weetigo is a fitting sign of colonialism’s never ending

consumption and appropriation of indigeneity, and Gabriel's ability to defeat it at the end of the novel indicates that he possesses the ability to subvert colonial ideologies that construct queer and indigenous individuals as abject.

Interestingly, Highway describes Gabriel's first sexual assault through the actions he is witnessing in a dream: "Gabriel's little body was moving up and down, up and down, producing, in the crux of his being, a sensation so pleasurable that he wanted Carmelita Moose to float up and up forever" (Highway 77). It is only in the next paragraph that readers discover that Father Lafleur's right arm was "buried under Gabriel's bedspread, under his blanket, under his sheet, under his pyjama bottoms. And the hand was jumping up, reaching for him, pulling him back down, jumping up, reaching for him, pulling him back down" (Highway 78). Gabriel's first sexual encounter, undeniably unsolicited, yet containing a mixture of pleasure and fear – "he didn't dare open his eyes for fear the priest would get angry" – is intimately tied to dreams (Highway 78). Climactically, in the moment that the silver crucifix penetrates Gabriel's mouth, Gabriel associates this assault with something pleasurable:

Gradually, Father Lafleur bent, closer and closer, until the crucifix that dangled from his neck came to rest on Gabriel's face. The subtly throbbing motion of the priest's upper body made the naked Jesus Christ – this sliver of silver light, this fleshly Son of God so achingly beautiful – rub his body against the child's lips, over and over and over again. Gabriel had no strength left. The pleasure in his centre welled so deep that he was about to open his mouth and swallow the whole living flesh – in his *half-dream state*, this man nailed to the cross was a living, breathing man, tasting like

Gabriel's most favourite food, *warm honey*. (Highway 78-79; emphases added)

Gabriel receives pleasure from the experience, and this moment shows the young proto-homosexual, Gabriel, "that a sexual desire which seems invalid or even unthinkable has the potential to find reciprocity with another human being" (Goldie 210). This is not to suggest that gay male identities are the result of child sexual abuse; rather, this is a complex scenario, and, although traumatic, it affords the young Gabriel some modicum of pleasure. Jennifer Henderson rightly observes that "the scene of Gabriel's first experience of sexual abuse is both a scene of violation and, as becomes clear when we return to it through Gabriel's adult sexual experiences, an initiation into a particular *mise en scene* of desire" (190). Henderson's project is to read the sexual politics of Highway's text through the theoretical paradigms proposed by Ann Cvetkovich; Henderson opines that through the repetition of seemingly masochistic sex Gabriel is able to revisit the site of his abuse and, in so doing, heal (191-192). I concur with Henderson that Gabriel's abuse is the genesis for the affective states of his future sexual encounters. In addition, by becoming a willing participant he is able to engage with his traumatic past; nonetheless, I believe the associations of fireweed and honey are more powerful than memories and are metaphorical keys to his fabulous potential. Terry Goldie fascinatingly remarks upon Gabriel's apparent masochism: "Gabriel is elevated by the attack of the Weetigo [the priest]. Gabriel

is masochistic” and “his masochism provides a *primary energy*” (217; emphasis added). This primary energy is the spark that allows Gabriel to fabulize and rise above the negativity that surrounds him. I accede to Susan Knabe’s assertion that “Gabriel sees the Christian religion, not his homosexuality, as being perverted by the priest’s violations” (132). Gabriel comes to actively reject the dominant phallic position that the priest represents. Through his early experiences with the Weetigo/priest, Gabriel is able to conjure the “primary energy” that allows him to decolonize his own subjectivity. This scene delineates the path by which Gabriel subverts colonial ideologies through his fabulousness, or more precisely, through his ability to harness his own *mithoowoowamowin*. Gabriel even mischievously asks Jeremiah if what Father Lafleur does to him is *machipoowamowin* (bad dream power) (Highway 91). If he associates his abuse with *machipoowamowin*, does it not follow that he would associate healing with *mithoowoowamowin*?

Gabriel’s abuse at the hands of Father Lafleur causes him to wonder about the possibility of a community of abused boys and a community of males who enjoy same-sex activity. During a conversation with his father, Gabriel realizes that his “education” has shattered the illusions that Christianity imposed on his family. His growing sexual awareness ejects him from the social body of his home; Gabriel realizes that “there was no place for him in Eemanapiteepitat” (Highway 109). Gabriel recognizes his ejection from Christian innocence and realizes that if he remains with his family, his expulsion from innocence and

transformation into a member of a community of abject citizens will haunt him. When he recalls his last encounter with the priest, “he could still feel the old priest’s meat breath, could still taste sweet honey, the hard, naked, silver body of the Son of God. Of the four hundred boys who had passed through Birch Lake during his nine years there, who couldn’t smell that smell, who couldn’t taste that taste?” (Highway 109). It is after Gabriel remembers his last sexual assault, and the last moment of tasting “sweet honey,” that he realizes he must join Jeremiah in the city to find a new community to which he can belong. Gabriel intimates that he wishes to find one of the “four hundred boys” who shared his experiences and found pleasure in them: he wishes to find a community of indigenous men who like having sex with other men.

Before Gabriel leaves, Mariesis gives him the portrait of the Fur Queen he almost forgot. Highway describes how “[f]ramed in a wash of golden light, Gabriel stood, twirling in one hand – pink, mauve, purple – a bloom of fireweed. How handsome he was!” (Highway 110). The flower symbolizes Gabriel’s budding queer sexuality, with both phallic and clitoral references, (Reder 284) and that Gabriel is ready to enter the terrain of his queer sexuality. The link to fireweed and his mother’s insistence that he take the portrait of the Fur Queen with him suggest that although he has been plucked from his native soil he must not forget his Cree heritage.

To illustrate Gabriel's potential for metamorphosis, upon Gabriel's arrival in Winnipeg, Highway juxtaposes the scene where Gabriel and Jeremiah cease "gnawing away with the mob" in the Polo Park Shopping Mall food-court (Highway 119-120), with a sexual encounter in the mall lavatory between Gabriel and a stranger. Just before the moment that the brothers enter the "belly of the beast," the food court, Gabriel transforms into a "rock star with a tan" (Highway 119). Gabriel's ability to easily adapt foreshadows his later ascendance into a Two-Spirit. Gabriel's current transformation seems hardly benign given that this scene is juxtaposed with the moment when the brothers "ate so much their bellies came near to bursting. They drank so much their bladders grew pendulous" (Highway 120). Gabriel and Jeremiah consume and are consumed by the Weetigo in its manifestation as consumerism; Highway describes the food-court as the "belly of the beast" (119) and the brothers are fed on consumerism, and hence on the neo-imperialist/neo-colonialist commodities of Western capitalism. As Brydon notes, this reveals that now "the monster lives inside the boys' guts, gnawing their innards, using the internalized self-hatred taught by the church to devour them alive" (24). As the brothers consume massive amounts of food, amid a mob of "people shovelling food in and chewing and swallowing and burping," they discuss how Weesageechak destroys the Weetigo by "chewing the Weetigo's entrails to smithereens from the inside out" (Highway 120). Yet the brothers fail to realize the irony of their current predicament, and rather than destroying the

Weetigo as Weesageechak has done, in their attempts at colonial assimilation they continue to allow the Weetigo to devour them.

When Gabriel encounters a white man in the public washroom “holding in his hand a stalk of fireweed so pink, so mauve that Gabriel could not help but look, and seeing, desire,” the fireweed becomes the catalyst for Gabriel’s queer desires; Gabriel desires the innocence of his home and the security of the land of dreams. The paragraph ends “the Cree Adonis could taste, upon the buds that lined his tongue, warm honey” (Highway 120-121) and when Gabriel leaves the mall and concludes the story of Weesageechak, “the image of a certain man aflame with fireweed cling[s] to his sense with pleasurable insistence” (Highway 121). Fireweed was not present in the scene in which Father Lafleur masturbated Gabriel; fireweed is associated, rather, with Gabriel’s own growing sexuality and the pleasure he derives from it, but the warm honey returns him to his first orgasm: fireweed and honey become complexly and intimately intertwined. Gabriel’s second sexual partner betokens and draws upon the alchemical energy of his earlier metamorphosis; no longer is he the abused child, but the queer adolescent for whom same-sex desire is pleasurable. In spite of that, the sexual act here remains linked to consumerism and colonialism, especially when one notices that as they leave the mall Highway writes, “[g]rey and soulless, the mall loomed behind them, the rear end of a beast that, having gorged itself, expels its detritus” (Highway 121). Gabriel and Jeremiah do not understand that to destroy the

Weetigo, to decolonize, – they must not succumb to colonial ideologies and be the abject substance the beast “expels.” Gabriel and Jeremiah are unaware that assimilation confirms the colonial ideologies that construct indigenous traditions as inferior and not worthy of propagation.

A turning point in the novel occurs when Gabriel learns the prostate gland is responsible for the production of semen, and the reproduction of humans, and that “without it, a male would not be male” (Highway 124). Here, by way of a pig’s dissection, Gabriel comes to understand dominant ideological views of semen (and subsequently, maleness); this moment instigates the transformation of Roman Catholicism, specifically Holy Communion, from religious authority to cannibalism:

Gabriel peered closer at the miniature hunk of flesh, veins, and bone, envisioning this gland with a mystical allure. He poked around the bladder, the urethra, the genitals, amazed that such inconsequential size could hold such power...

And this is what they drink, he mused, the priests, as they celebrate Holy Communion. Male blood. He removed his eye from the pan. This is what they eat, my mother and father, as they take the body of Christ into their mouths. The essence of maleness. (Highway 125)

It is also here that Gabriel wonders why women “leave him cold as stone” (Highway 125). Two interrelated things occur at this moment. First, Gabriel comes to understand that when Catholics celebrate Holy Communion they consume “male blood...the essence of maleness” (Highway 125). Through Christ’s sacrifice Catholics attempt to imbue themselves with masculine authority

in opposition to the gender ambiguous authority Highway claims for the Fur Queen. Second, when he experiences a queer desire for his teacher, Gabriel can “hear Father Bouchard’s words...the union of man and woman, [is] the union of Christ and his church” (Highway 125). This association, as Wendy Pearson argues, imbricates Christianity “with misogynist violence, with homophobia, and with the rape of the New World” (“Native Narratives” 177), and, I would add, heterosexuality itself. This scene is crucial to Gabriel’s growing awareness of the decolonizing potential he holds as both gay and Cree.

Highway not only colludes Christianity with the material effects of heteronormative ideologies, but as the novel progresses Highway unites Christianity with the monotony of normative temporality. The silver crucifix, what Henderson identifies as the “fetish...[that acts] as a vehicle for sexual activity that attempts to counter victimization and the loss of memory” (191), begins to haunt him outside of his sexual activities. While waiting in his brother’s apartment, Gabriel is driven insane by the “*tick-tock, tick...*” of the metronome and ponders the meaning of the swinging silver crucifix: “Gabriel could see the *pendulous* silver crucifix across the breast of the priest’s black cassock. What was it about the naked man nailed to that beam of wood that caused his pulsating restlessness?” (Highway 129; emphasis added). Highway conflates normative time, the time of the capitalist clock that monitors every second, with sexual abuse. Maintaining this temporality becomes tantamount to prison for Gabriel and

he has to escape to a bar, *The Hell Hotel*. Highway draws attention to the fact that Gabriel's relation to time shifts after he becomes drunk with Wayne, or Dwayne: "[t]ime oozed into a haze of pleasurable pulsation" (Highway 131); pleasurable time, or queer time, becomes an undifferentiated haze for Gabriel and it appears as though Gabriel has ascended into the realm of dreams: "[h]is jacket was opened, his T-shirt pulled up, his zipper pulled down, his maleness flailed. The cold November air was like a spike rammed through the hand – his feet floated above the earth – and he saw mauve and pink and purple of fireweed and he tasted, on the buds that lined his tongue, the essence of warm honey" (Highway 132). Floating visions of fireweed and warm honey in the back alleys of Winnipeg? The melding of past and present overcomes Gabriel's inebriation and propels him into the Cree Land of Dreams.

Gabriel must accept both his Cree identity and his sexual identity to have the power to defeat the Weetigo and decolonize himself, though. Before he loses himself to the throes of passion, he witnesses the rape of Madeline Jeanette Lavoix, and does nothing (Highway 132). This is a very problematic moment for Gabriel; he is a witness to rape and could provide the police with evidence, but to admit he saw something could lead to a questioning of his own activities. Both Gabriel and Madeline are Cree: "the female whimpering, moaning, the northern Manitoba Cree [was] unmistakable" (Highway 131). Rather than face the reality of the predicament they are both in as violated Cree people, Gabriel behaves quite

irresponsibly. Henderson notes that Madeline Jeanette Lavoix and Evelyn Rose MacCrae, a young woman raped earlier in the novel and witnessed by Jeremiah, “are unwelcome, uncanny reminds of the young men’s own sexual victimization” (197). Henderson suggests: “Highway’s use of the trope of rape carries with it a model of harm that implies the contamination of an original state not just of integrity but of purity” (197). For Henderson it becomes impossible to return to a pure, precolonial past. The bodies of the women that haunt the brothers suggest that although Gabriel has accessed a Cree temporality, the Cree cultural past is sullied by an inability to help each other. Although he may find a sense of pride, that pride can easily turn back into shame.

A pivotal moment of fabulousness occurs when Gabriel, continuing his sexual explorations, encounters a manifestation of the Fur Queen at a gay bar, *The Rose*, because it is here that the Fur Queen appears as the Native Two-Spirit. The Two-Spirit is a uniquely indigenous sexual and gender identity that was born at the third annual gathering of gay and lesbian Native people in Winnipeg in 1990, in order to provide a counterdiscourse to white GLBTQ movements and the imposition of the term *berdache* (Driskill, “Doubleweaving” 72). Scholars such as Qwo-Li Driskill insist that the term enables indigenous people to form a sovereign erotic: “an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations” (Driskill, “Stolen” 51). Driskill appears to

opine that the Two-Spirit references a pre-colonial gender and sexual utopia where all behaviour was embraced, positioning white supremacist culture as the harbinger of homophobia; this is not the case. As Daniel Heath Justice argues, “[s]uch sweeping assumptions, while comforting, don’t always stand up to scrutiny; they assume the universality of an ironically Edenic tolerance and lack of complex concepts for issues of sexuality and gender that aren’t paralleled in any other facet of Indigenous cultural expression” (215). Indigenous traditions can be just as liberal and equally oppressive as colonial ideologies.

Highway does not use the term Two-Spirit in the text (perhaps due to the text’s narrative timeline existing prior to the term’s creation) and although Goldie and others have applied the term, perhaps hastily, I wish to stipulate why this figure is a Two-Spirit, despite Highway’s abstention from this terminology. According to Driskill, “*Two-Spirit* places *gendered* identities and experiences at the centre of discussion” (“Doubleweaving” 73; second emphasis added). When Gabriel encounters “the only other Indian in the room [at *The Rose*],” he immediately comments upon this person’s gendered embodiment and does not consider sexual orientation: “he was neither male nor female. Or perhaps both” (Highway 168). Initially he finds this person “disturbing,” but, as “his eyes remained hostage” (Highway 168), he comes to accept this person. As Gabriel continues to watch the figure, Gabriel begins to believe that he-she is attempting to baptize him “with sprays of holy water,” and “he-she” becomes “a sorceress, a

priestess, clandestinely reviving a sacrament from some dangerous religion” (Highway 168). Highway’s diction is pertinent. This figure is not a witch, as Gabriel has been taught to perceive Chachagathoo (the last medicine woman to oppose Christianity); this gender-ambiguous figure is a “sorceress, a priestess,” two titles that do not carry the same negative connotations as a “witch.” Moreover, he-she is “clandestinely reviving a sacrament from some dangerous religion”; he-she is secretly transferring to Gabriel the subversive, alchemical power Gabriel requires. Driskill further posits that “*Two-Spirit* asserts ceremonial and spiritual communities and traditions and relationships with medicine as central to constituting various identities” (73). Hence, it appears that Highway is invoking the image of the Two-Spirit to provide Gabriel with the information necessary for his decolonization. In fact, this intertribal term and identity are remarkably similar to Highway’s Fur Queen; his destiny is to become her physical vessel. This is where Highway’s intervention and fabulousness come into play most prominently because the text is more concerned with sexuality than it is with the construction of gender identity: sexual violence, not gender violence, is at the crux of the narrative, and neither Gabriel nor Jeremiah appears to wish to negate his masculinity.⁴

Astonishingly, as Gabriel participates in an orgy after his encounter with the Two-Spirit, time again alters and “had passed through him” so that his memory of the orgy is vague and hazy. As multiple men puncture his orifices,

“somewhere in the farthest reaches of his senses, the silver cross oozed in and out, in and out, the naked body pressing on his lips, positioning itself for entry. Until, upon the buds that lined his tongue, warm honey flowed” (Highway 168-169).

The memory, in what is likely a drug or alcohol induced state, of the crucifix is “positioning itself for entry,” but it does not penetrate either Gabriel’s body or his consciousness; the crucifix attempts to enter, but Gabriel experiences the essence of “warm honey” before it does: the memory has been altered. Gabriel is performing the queer healing that Cvetkovich articulates:

[t]he subversive potentialities of repetition with a difference which have been valorized in discussions of butch-femme, drag, and other queer cultural practices, therefore provide the basis for healing rituals and performances... [it is] a queer healing practice [that] would turn negative affect or trauma on its head, but by embracing rather than refusing it. (88-89)

After his “baptism” by the Two-Spirit, whether Gabriel fully realizes it or not, he is able to find pleasure outside the full repetition of his abuse at the hands of Father Lafleur. This change enables Gabriel to recognize that although the past informs the present, he is not doomed to repeat and live in the past as though it were immutable.

Because the Fur Queen in the guise of the Two-Spirit has baptized Gabriel, he is now capable of transforming his status as abject and ejected subject by embracing the fabulous Two-Spiritedness that Highway constructs for him. Gabriel discards the cannibalism of the communion and confronts Jeremiah with

the truth: Christians are “savage” and are the ones who engage in cannibalism (Highway 184). Gabriel comes to enjoy subverting the authority and sacredness of Christian discourse; when Jeremiah asks how to say university in Cree, a grinning Gabriel says, “*Semen-airy*,” allowing “the word [to flood] his palate like a surge of honey” (Highway 191; original emphasis). In addition, as Gabriel comes to embrace his Cree heritage and queer sexuality, colonial ideologies come to signify the process of abjection. After taking communion, Gabriel bursts out laughing and flees the church with “his mouth spewing blood, his bloated gut regurgitant, his esophagus engorged with entrails” (Highway 181). Gabriel’s body rejects the body of Christ because Gabriel now derives power from outside dominant discursive regimes. Gabriel effectively metamorphoses into a Two-Spirit individual, and when Christianity and colonialism come close to him, and threaten the boundary he has created, his body reacts with emesis. When Jeremiah defends the Church and attacks Gabriel for his blasphemy, Gabriel draws attention to the symbolism inherent in Holy Communion: “Christianity asks people to eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood – shit, Jeremiah, eating human flesh, that’s *cannibalism*. What could be more savage – ?” (Highway 184). Gabriel no longer needs a trigger to tap into his fabulousness; Gabriel embraces his homosexuality and finds pleasure in it because he accepts his Cree identity, which allows him to conjure a discursive position that is not heteronormative. Through his encounter with the Two-Spirit, and through “repetition with a difference” Gabriel is able to

acknowledge that, while he was abused, he should not feel ashamed for deriving pleasure from the abuse.

The last instance when Highway uses “honey” in reference to Gabriel occurs when he is putting on his shaman make-up for a performance of *Ulysses Thunderchild*, the play that he and Jeremiah create together to expose the realities of colonialism and their sexual abuse at the hands of Father Lafleur. This moment occurs after he has acquired HIV/AIDS: “[w]hen he arrived at that now familiar blemish on the right side of his neck, he brushed it over with honey-beige base until the purplish red could pass for a hickey” (Highway 283). This moment indicates that although Gabriel now embraces his Two-Spiritedness, he must now draw upon the power of “the eyebrow pencils, the make-up – magic weapons of a shaman, a weaver of spells” to create the illusion that he is physically healthy (Highway 302). The artifice of a fabulous reality comes into full force here; while Gabriel is content with himself, the reality of HIV/AIDS demands that Gabriel maintain an illusion of perfect health in order to survive in the Canadian social body, especially as a dancer. For Gabriel the disease further intensifies the manner in which external forces penetrate and control his body; his abject status intensifies with the fear that he carries within him a contagious infection. Iris Marion Young argues that although

homosexuality has become increasingly de-objectified, no specific characteristics – physical, genetic, mental, or ‘moral character’ – mark off homosexuals from heterosexuals...Homophobia is one of the deepest-held

fears of difference precisely because the border between gay and straight is constructed as the most permeable. (208)

HIV/AIDS caused an escalation in these fears and the hatred directed towards the queer community because media and medical discourses insisted upon the depiction of this border as highly susceptible to contagion through contact with queer individuals. Although Gabriel appears as the sacrificial lamb who must die to empower the heterosexual hero, Gabriel is not a passive victim; until his dying moments, Gabriel actively resists the forces of the Weetigo and colonialism, allowing his fabulosity to act pedagogically for Jeremiah.

Before Gabriel dies, he comes to understand what it means to exist outside a Western ideological frame, and more important, he is able to communicate his understanding of this to Jeremiah. Leading up to his final encounter with the Weetigo, Gabriel asserts that like his father, upon his death, he will be greeted by

Weesageechak for sure. The clown who bridges humanity and God – a God who laughs, a God who's here, not for guilt, not for suffering, but for a good time. Except, this time, the Trickster representing God as a woman, a goddess in fur. Like this picture. I've always thought that, ever since we were little kids. I mean, if Native languages have no gender, then why should we? And why, for that matter, should God? (Highway 298)

Gabriel vocalizes his Two-Spiritedness and asserts his similarity to the Fur Queen; he embodies her essence and abilities, which provide him with the necessary fabulousness or *mithoopowamowin* to defeat the Weetigo only moments later in the text. As previously noted, the Fur Queen is described at Gabriel's death using diction that draws on vampirism. Furthermore, her 'kiss' to

Abraham opens the narrative and her 'kiss' to Gabriel when he dies ends the narrative; she gives and takes life for the Okimasises. After aligning himself with the essence of the Fur Queen, Gabriel comes to embody a queer appropriation of the vagina dentata, suggesting that Gabriel ascends into a subjectivity powerful enough to castrate the phallic Weetigo/priest. Gabriel's mouth emblemizes the vagina dentata because he is able to assert his own identity, and his own pleasure, by speaking in Cree. Gabriel comes to act upon the realization that he made earlier in the novel: "if *machipoowamoowin*, bad dream power, was obviously powerful enough to snuff out a human life, then would not *mithoopoowamoowin*, good dream power, be as strong?" (Highway 247). In Gabriel's last encounter with the Weetigo he destroys it:

The Weetigo came at Gabriel with its tongue lolling, its claws reaching for his groin.

'Haven't you feasted on enough human flesh while we sit here with nothing but our tongues to chew on?' Hissed Gabriel. But the cannibal spirit now had the face of Father Roland Lafleur. Gabriel crept towards the holy man. 'But I haven't eat meat in weeks, my dear *Sagweesoo*,' Gabriel whined, and flicked his tongue at the old priest's groin. 'Don't move away.'

The creature lunged at Gabriel, brandishing a crucifix.

'Get away from me,' Gabriel thrashed. 'Get away, *awus* [go away]!' (Highway 299-300)

When the Weetigo brandishes a crucifix at Gabriel for flicking "his tongue at the old priest's groin," he is able to cast the priest away when he demands, "Get away, *awus*!" (Highway 299-300). When Gabriel demands that the priest leave, he does so in Cree, the language he was forbidden to use a child. Through his

exorcism of the Weetigo, Gabriel is able to abject Christianity and acknowledges the abuse done to him, not as “the right of holy men,” but the actions of a beast (Highway 78). Through his *mithoopoowamoowin*, Gabriel is able to destroy the Weetigo and all that it represents, so that Jeremiah in turn will be able to defend Gabriel’s rite to an indigenous death ritual. The Weetigo does not appear again in the text, and when a priest attempts to enter Gabriel’s room, Jeremiah proudly stands by Ann-Adele Ghostrider, an Ojibway medicine woman, and asserts “We’re Indians! We have a right to conduct our own religious ceremonies, just like everyone else!” (Highway 305). Jeremiah learns from Gabriel’s fabulous expulsion of the Weetigo that he, too, can personify fabulousity and refuses the priest entry. The Fabulous is not the sole property of any individual, and although Gabriel is the first of the brothers to manifest it, Jeremiah proves that he is able to learn from his brother and harness his own *mithoopoowamoowin*.

The narrative comes full circle with Gabriel’s death. As he lies dying, the Fur Queen approaches him, kisses him and transports him to the land of dreams:

And then the Queen’s lips descended. Down they came, fluttering, like a leaf from an autumn tree, until they came to rest if only for a moment, though he wanted it to last a thousand years, on Gabriel Okimasis’s left cheek. There. She kissed him. And took him by the hand. (Highway 306)

There is no description of where they go, and images of both honey and fireweed are absent from Gabriel’s departure. The land of dreams to which Gabriel departs is unknowable and, presumably, he can now experience pleasure the likes of

which he has never been able to access through fireweed and honey. Gabriel will live on through Jeremiah and the work he did as a dancer, and his death will provide Jeremiah with the strength necessary to continue the process of his decolonization. What Terry Goldie calls Gabriel's "triumphant embrace of indulgent gay sexuality and Native values" (216) reveals that this text crosses the boundaries of both Native and queer literature; it is a unique mixture in that it places particular emphasis on the healing of sexual trauma through the repetition of that trauma in both artistic and sexual arenas. This novel exists within the genre of fabulous realism for its ability to transform the painful legacy of the violence and oppression of Canadian colonialism. The text illustrates the ability of apparently 'abject citizens' to assert the legitimacy of their own narratives, and to reclaim and change the course of the narratives told about them. Highway's novel, while admittedly semi-autobiographical, draws readers into an alternative queer community occluded from *queer* scholarship and activism – not postcolonial or Canadian scholarship – despite the obvious worth and legitimacy of its right to be included. Nonetheless, this unreasonable exclusion of Highway's fabulous realist fiction is foreseeable given the fact that queer scholars shun memoirs, such as Quentin Crisp's, *The Naked Civil Servant*.

Chapter 3

Crisp, Quentin Crisp: Post-War Fabulator

In accordance with the turn towards “Gay Shame,” it becomes necessary to recognize controversial queers who dissented from the early homophile movements (precursors to the homonormative GLBT movements dominant today). Rather than attempting to assimilate to heterosexual Britain, and rather than supporting the efforts of British homosexual organizations, Quentin Crisp adamantly – and courageously – embraced his effeminate homosexuality. At the outset of his narrative, he states that he was “not merely a self-confessed homosexual but a self-evident one” (Crisp 5) and he goes on to elucidate that this is due to his effeminacy. His conflation of effeminacy with homosexuality is intentional; this may be problematic to homosexual males who require the masculine privileges symbolically accorded to them. Is there really anything inherently wrong with this conflation, though? Is it really so horrible for effeminate men to be considered homosexual, and why is it so offensive that homosexual men be deemed effeminate and not “masculine”? The problem lies with dominant constructions of both categories as abject and inferior. It is my hope that by directing attention towards the affective abilities of Quentin Crisp, effeminate homosexual extraordinaire, although heteronormativity feminizes the Fabulous, this gendering will no longer be problematic.

Born in 1908 as Denis Charles Pratt in Sutton, Quentin Crisp published his first of three memoirs, *The Naked Civil Servant*, in 1968. Crisp wrote the text in a period that saw the growth of liberal attitudes towards homosexuality in Britain; he witnessed the publication of the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* in 1957 (more commonly known as the *Wolfenden Report*) and saw the decriminalization of homosexuality in England through the *Sexual Offences Act* of 1967. Despite this increasing tolerance towards homosexuals, which for Crisp was “the result not of enlightenment, but of boredom” (214), the end of the Second World War brought with it an intensification of anti-effeminate sentiments. Alan Sinfield maintains that anti-effeminate tendencies marked the literary landscape of postwar Britain, and that the new generation of literary intellectuals sought to overthrow the upper-class effete literariness that was dominant in the pre- and interwar periods (Sinfield, “Queers” 90). Despite the prevalence of these effeminophobic sentiments in postwar Britain, Crisp rose to (infamous) prominence with the publication of *Servant* and its subsequent film adaptation in 1975. Crisp’s memoir details his disdain for the banality of working-class masculinity and avows his effeminate flamboyance. As “twentieth-century working-class culture defined itself against the middle-class queer” (Sinfield, *Wilde* 147), the fabulose Crisp took up the position of the menacing, mincing homosexual that Sinfield argues possessed the ability to disrupt class distinctions through inter-class relationships. Crisp’s

effeminacy became threatening not through his relationships, but through the lower-class status he was forced to embrace after leaving his parent's household. *Servant* is a testament to Crisp's remarkable repositioning of effeminacy as a viable form of embodiment for bohemians, prostitutes, working-class, middle-class, and, in Crisp's case, anti-working-class Britons.¹ Crisp's resiliency and tenacity in becoming "not merely a self-confessed homosexual but a self-evident one" are commendable (Crisp 5). The absence of scholarship on Crisp's exquisite fabulosity creates an unsettling gap in queer history that is neglectful and unacceptable, but given that he disavows any allegiance to early homophile organizations, the subsequent disregard for his work is not surprising.

As Heather Love observes, in light of recent achievements for queer activism such as gay marriage and an increased affirmative presence in the media and popular culture, contemporary gay and lesbian activists attempt to disavow the shameful, abject aspects or persons of the communal queer past (10). What remains to be seen is who have we have forgotten, occluded, or simply ignored in the process of liberation and for what reasons. Two pieces of existing scholarship examine *Servant* through the lens of camp theory and through the genre of autobiography/memoir. Sinfield's examination of effeminacy in *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* mentions Crisp briefly throughout the text to give weight to larger claims. Crisp's expulsion from gay men's history is due to his self-confessed, self-evident effeminacy, and in part due

to his staunch disdain for the working-class. Serendipitously, Niall Richardson and Paul Baker both illustrate that effeminophobia (the fear of effeminate men) still marks contemporary British culture. Interestingly though, representations of male femininity or effeminacy proliferate in contemporary British film and television.² Yet these contemporary depictions of effeminacy currently exist as symbolic abjections, reflecting a heterosexist rhetoric that, until recently, theorists and activists have been unable, and in some instances uninterested or unwilling, to quell. Turning back to *Servant* exposes one person intent on resisting the enchantments of masculine virility in favour of a fabulously queer femininity. Effeminacy comes to represent the very pink of being; effeminacy's pinkness, here, exists in stark contrast to the dark melancholic disposition that dominates British culture.³ *Servant* is an example of "fabulous realism" since Crisp, as both author and character, draws on his own fabulousness to survive the oppressive climate of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Effeminacy, Effeminophobia, and Heteronormative Melancholia

The twentieth century saw the genesis of what I term "heteronormative melancholia." Crisp observes that "[t]he men of the twenties searched themselves for vestiges of effeminacy as though for lice" (26-27). And in postwar Britain, "[t]he imperial modern heroes were consistently positioned in opposition to the effeteness of the times: whether a soldier, an adventurer, or simply an embodiment of 'manliness', the hero believed that his society was getting soft"

(Baron 144). It was a requirement for postwar British men to maintain their virility in the aftermath of the war: effeminacy was not a viable option for any sane male. Crisp agrees, stating that the animosity directed toward him was because "obviously gay boys were 'spoiling it for the rest'" (87). Following Eve Sedgwick, I believe that, as the demand within gay and lesbian politics to subvert the "tradition of assuming that anyone [...] who desires a man must by definition be feminine" grew, effeminacy became "the haunting object of gay thought itself" (141-142).⁴ Richardson aptly identifies this affective response to effeminacy as effeminophobia:

In an era where masculinity is thought to be 'in crisis', the spectacle of a man actively renouncing his masculine privilege is, for some people, a disconcerting image...more importantly, the effeminate man is exposing the plasticity of gender. When a man does 'femininity' he demonstrates that masculinity is not the natural property of male bodies. (529)

Rather than questioning and abandoning their preconceived notions of gender, normative subjects refuse to re-orient their ideological assumptions towards more liberal, multivalent understandings of gender.

Sigmund Freud holds that there is a distinction between the desirable process of mourning, in which a subject gradually detaches from a lost love-object to allow the libido to form other object-attachments, and the adverse process of melancholia, whereby the ego forms an intense and indefatigable affinity to the lost love-object (584-585). Within heteronormativity, effeminacy exists both as an object of love, in that it is markedly 'other' to normative genders through its

abstention from the regulations of the heterosexual matrix, and as a corollary object of loathing, since it flouts gender regulations as though it were immune to the law. Consequently, within heteronormativity, male femininities always already incite melancholia in normative subjects.

Male femininity becomes doubly troublesome when read in light of Butler's theories of "heterosexual melancholy." Butler argues that melancholy attachments form the core of gender identification: "the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed...[by] *preempting* the possibility of homosexual attachment... which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss" ("Refused" 135). Normative subjects assume an identification with the other that they cannot love, causing heterosexual men "to elaborate the difference between him and her" ("Refused" 137). This refused and repudiated identification will haunt "him," or "her" in the case of women. Effeminacy calls into question masculine identification, and the process of identification itself: should masculine males desire feminine males if one acquires masculinity through repudiated identifications and a subsequent desire of femininity; or, should feminine males be subject to punishment for their destabilization of gender identification? Furthermore, if other men form feminine identifications, how can masculine identification continue?

Hence, to avoid losing an outlet to express their gendered anxieties, heteronormative subjects embed effeminacy within their psyches, with angst

turning upon the self in an attempt to destroy the other within, preventing the libido from orienting itself towards affirmative representations of male gender variance: the libido remains fixated upon ideologies that fortify Butler's heterosexual matrix. Nevertheless, in *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam states: "it is important...not simply to create another binary in which masculinity always signifies power" because the "unholy union" of maleness and femininity "can produce wildly unpredictable results" (29). It is therefore necessary to (re)examine the nuances of gendered power dynamics and the effects produced by gender irregularity.

Heteronormative melancholics not only sink into a cantankerous state, they become ashamed of themselves and project their shame onto the site of their frustrations: male femininity. For Freud, the investment that the melancholic subject has in the lost love-object is so deep that the opinions of others are irrelevant: "[f]eelings of shame in front of other people...are lacking in the melancholic, or at least they are not prominent in him [sic]" (585). Halberstam proclaims that "shame is...a gendered form of sexual abjection: it belongs to the feminine, and when men find themselves 'flooded' with shame, chances are they are being feminized in some way and against their will" ("Shame" 226). By embedding the image of the effeminate within their psyche, heteronormative melancholics do feel shame, and in turn shame the effeminate.

Is it possible, though, to shame a subject who embraces femininity? In his defense, Crisp proclaims: "I wanted it to be known that I was not ashamed and therefore had to display symptoms that could not be thought accidental" (34). He later writes, though, that "no power on earth" can "remove the homosexual's feeling of shame" (213). Crisp maintains that he "cried aloud for pardon" and "that if all were known [he] would be forgiven" (213). Crisp clings to the construction of his homosexuality and his effeminacy as an "illness" (87); by rhetorically denying himself to be like real people, his "condition" becomes excusable. Crisp is not on par with the queer theorists who currently embrace shame; Crisp could not choose between a politics of Pride and a politics of Shame. Crisp exemplifies what postwar Britain considered shameful not because it was shameful, but because if he foreswore his shameful demeanour he would deny his effeminate homosexuality, which for Crisp, are mutually inclusive.

An Unreasonable Queer Ancestor

Sinfield devotes an entire chapter of *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* to the conflation of effeminacy and homosexuality in the literary establishment of mid-century Britain, though he does not include Crisp in his criticism. Sinfield insists that through the 1940s to the 1960s there was a conflation of effeminacy, homosexuality, and the leisure class, but that there was also an elimination of "the concept of the homosexual male: such men were not really men" (73). Crisp repeats this sentiment:

[the] problem that confronts homosexuals is that they set out to win the love of a 'real' man. If they succeed, they fail. A man who 'goes with' other men is not what they would call a real man. This conundrum is incapable of resolution, but that does not make homosexuals give it up. They only search more frantically and with less and less discretion for more and more masculine men. (64)

Crisp ultimately asserts: "[t]here is no great dark man" (149). The search for a great dark man (in contemporary discourse a straight-acting man) is futile given the parameters of hegemonic masculinity. Men, by dominant definitions, cannot love other men; they can only identify with other men or subject effeminate to abuse (Crisp 66).

Through his co-opting of the dandified effeminate stereotype, Crisp disputes the demarcations of both class and sexuality that buttress his maltreatment. As Sinfield argues, "[t]he lower-class man who was prepared to commit himself, as Crisp was, might affect the Wildean stereotype; for it had come to signal sexuality as much as class" (*Wilde* 148). Crisp unmask the heteronormative fiction that effeminacy was available only to the upper classes and the uses to which Crisp puts his effeminacy render it as form of ideological sedition. Crisp affirms that in the 1920's class distinctions were rigid: while there were surely "many different strata...among the people [homosexuals] [he] was now getting to know, there were only two classes. They never mingled except in bed. There was 'them', who acted refined and spoke nice and whose people had pots of money, and there was 'us'" (27). Crisp's class demarcations appear rather

hazy, though; in one instance Crisp “would still have been ‘them’ because [his] slight cockney had been flattened” but “because [he] was in the same sexual boat as they” the lower-class homosexuals – the “us” – he was forgiven (27). Crisp writes that he did not grow up in poverty, but in debt (7), so he was never one of “them,” nor was he of the working classes.

Throughout the first half of his memoir, Crisp professes that when he was unable to find suitable employment, he did not object to stealing because he “couldn’t really afford virtue so [he] settled for vice” (44), eventually admitting that he finds great “joy at the prospect of one day being able to draw unemployment insurance” (48). This, to be sure, suggests that Crisp recognizes that he should work, but that he prefers a life of idleness. Crisp describes his destitution as “‘Soho’ Poverty. It comes from having the airs and graces of a genius and no talent,” but since he was free to be, he continues to avow his contentment (49). Inevitably, Crisp comes to believe that the only talent he possessed “is not for doing but for being”: he became a model (129). Crisp accedes that his “morbid nature to which dreams were more vivid than reality” resulted in his ability to obtain happiness, but at the cost of economic and cultural capital: “[m]oney, fame, wisdom, which are the booby prizes of the elderly, [he] had never been able to win. [His] preoccupation with happiness had been total” (180-181). One could infer that Crisp’s articulation of effeminacy reifies class ideologies that idealize a life of leisure, thereby making him appear as a rather

disgraceful queer ancestor who appears ignorant of the relationship between class politics and sexual or gender politics. Be that as it may, Crisp is not attempting to acquire capital; he seeks to derive pleasure from a world that abjects him. Crisp's listlessness does not reify class ideologies; it restructures class ideologies by relocating the pursuit of happiness above and independent from the pursuit of capital. Crisp acquiesces to what heteronormativity deems abject – the nonsensical disavowal of masculine privilege and capital in favour of a lifelong quest for any manifestation of felicity he could acquire – which distinguishes him as one of queer history's most dissident, and therefore dishonourable, figures.

Consequently, like Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Crisp's abject flamboyance throughout *Servant* "displaces questions of sexual secrecy and knowledge" (Love 107). Crisp confronts readers with his effeminate flamboyance on the first page: "I wore make-up at a time when even on women eye-shadow was sinful" (5). Because Crisp avowed his effeminacy as abnormal, the early homosexual clubs and organizations expelled him from their midst due to his claim that "[h]omosexuals generally do not look forward with pleasure to living in a world where the facts about their abnormality would be common knowledge" (87). Due to the overwhelming effeminophobia present in Crisp's lifetime, both within and outside the queer community, the British and GLBT scholars look on Crisp as an unreasonably, troublesome figure, he is not

included within the canon of gay and lesbian literature, gay male literature, or post-war British literature.

To understand the absence of criticism and silence on the matter of Crisp within the halls of queer academe, I think it best, following Love, to draw upon Erving Goffman's concept of "identity ambivalence." He writes:

The stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. The sight may repel him, since after all he supports the norms of the wider society, but his social and psychological identification with these offenders holds him to what repels him, transforming repulsion into shame, and then transforming ashamedness itself into something of which he is ashamed. In brief, he can neither embrace his group nor let it go. (Goffman 107-108 qtd. in Love 102)

Love draws upon Goffman to examine contradictory critical reactions to *The Well of Loneliness*. This spectacle still 'undermines' gay male activism because homonormative (read: dominant) gay male activists are incapable of viewing dominant discourses as tyrannical and oppressive. For gay literary critics to actively analyze Crisp as an aberration, or an effeminate monster could be read as misogynistic; as a result, scholars ignore Crisp. Love aptly observes:

While it would be neither possible nor desirable to go back to an earlier moment in the history of gay and lesbian life, earlier forms of feeling, imagination, and community may offer crucial resources in the present. Attending to the specific histories of homophobic exclusion and violence – as well as their effects – can help us see structures of inequality in the present. (Love 30)

Servant depicts a specific history of homophobic exclusion and violence: “people would turn without a word and slap [his] face; if [he] wore sandals, passers-by took care to stamp on [his] toes” (50): a taxi driver removes Crisp from his car, even though there was a gang of homophobic men surrounding the taxi (69). Despite this violence, Crisp “was not frightened. Because [he] still believed that [he] could educate them, [he] was happy” (50). Crisp’s exclusion from mainstream gay male social establishments during his lifetime accentuates the almost atemporal persistence of effeminophobia: regardless of the era, Crisp’s presence seems unwelcome. He laments: “I was beginning to meet a greater number and a greater variety of homosexuals and having to face the fact that, almost without exception, they did not like me” (Crisp 86). In contradiction to those homosexuals, and abiding by Love’s lead “to avoid the exposure of queer historical figures as ‘internally homophobic,’” I wish to identify and think with, rather than critique, Crisp (23). This approach may run the risk of repeating past mistakes, as Love observes. Like Love, though, I do not think it is possible to posit what a mistaken queerness is or could be; queerness, in theory, is not about rigid categories or binaries of “right” and “wrong” (Love 23).

I consider Crisp’s unreasonable, effeminate subjectivity as a queer structure of being, born in response to heteronormativity. Drawing on the significant and paradigm-shifting insights from Lynne Huffer’s *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory*, I read Crisp as submitting to

ideologies that construct queer subjectivity as pathological to allow him relief from justifying his orientation. Huffer contends that the oft-cited passage of Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, which includes the assertion that "the homosexual was now a species," contains errors in its translation, and notes "that nowhere in the passage does the word identity appear" (70). Further, she asserts: "he uses the words *individus* (individuals), *personnage* (character), and *figure* (figure) to name a phenomenon of emergence that Anglo-American readers have interpreted, again and again, as identity" (Huffer 70). Foucault is professing that different characters emerge in different ethical contexts and "[i]t is not the distinction between acts and identities that matters" (Huffer 71). It becomes necessary, then, to engage with how Crisp exists as a specific character, and how Crisp's character intersects with his own fabulousness.

Crisp, as a queer character, emerges from "[t]he combined structures of rationalist exclusion and bourgeois morality" (Huffer 72). Crisp embodies a madness that, following Descartes's assertion "I think therefore I am,"

becomes the 'condition of impossibility of thought' ...and the mad, as a result are excluded from thinking. In this system that confers sovereignty on the thinking subject – *I think therefore I am* – to be excluded from thinking is to be excluded from being. The logic is clear: the thinking subject's use of reason to abolish madness from himself exiles the mad into a category of nonexistence. (Huffer 56; original emphasis)

Crisp is a character constructed by and through psychoanalysis, psychology, and psychiatry and post war discourses that require him to exist outside the realms of

intelligibility. I realize that it is highly contentious to suggest that Crisp's effeminate homosexuality does not constitute an identity, but rather a character; nonetheless, for Crisp nothing could be more true. First, Quentin Crisp was born Denis Charles Pratt; second, whilst introducing the film adaptation of *Servant* he states: "I have spent sixty-six years on this earth painfully attempting to play the part of Quentin Crisp: I have not succeeded. Yes of course you must have an actor to play me, he will do it far better than I have done."⁴ Crisp professes the artifice of his own persona, which can more accurately be read as a character created in response to dominant discourses that exclude him from the real world.

Challenging Genres: Fabulous Kitchen Sink Surrealism

Servant draws largely on a camp aesthetic to re-imagine and re-write the banality of domesticity as something exotic, what Gary McMahon terms *domestique*: "domestic with esoteric flourish. His tonal range is domestic, from bland to deadpan, a grounding counterpoint to his sweeping generalizations, his flourishing eccentricity, and his extraordinary narrative turns of fortune" (175). This enables Crisp to queer the genre of kitchen-sink realism prevalent in postwar Britain through his fabulous interjections. Juxtaposing Crisp against kitchen-sink realism magnifies Crisp's reimagining of femininity; the 'kitchen sink' is literally a traditional site of domesticity and femininity within heteronormative discourses. Crisp, as Paul Robinson demonstrates, "had no interest whatever in domesticity, in spite of its long association with the female sphere" (157). Crisp states he

“would never become [enthralled] to rituals of domesticity” (109) because “there was no need to any housework at all. After the first four years the dirt doesn’t get any worse” (109-110). It is possible simply to read apathy in these Crispisms; I prefer to read these as indicative of his distaste for the conflation of femininity and domesticity. Crisp’s abstention from the “rituals of domesticity” exists as a challenge to the kitchen-sink dramas that proliferate the conflation of the domestic and femininity. Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* is an excellent example. Only Helen and Josephine are able to occupy the role of mothers, and the pseudo-mother, Geoffrey, an effeminate homosexual, is ultimately unfit and ejected from the domestic sphere.

While his style may be *domestique*, the genre to which the text belongs is fabulous realism. What is fabulous for Crisp is not homophobia or effeminophobia, the war, gay-bashings, or even sex. What is fabulous about Crisp is his ability to be “the survivor they [the gay liberationist rescue party] hoped they would not find” (Crisp 220); it is his ability to create and luxuriate in his effeminacy, titling himself “one of the stately homos of England” (Crisp 178); it is his insight that sexual intercourse “becomes a substitute – and a poor one – for masturbation” (Crisp 121). Crisp’s fabulosity draws out the negative aspects of his life – his aged body, his incompatibility with other homosexual men – and transforms them into something humorous and ironic while still drawing attention to the fact that “the chasm between the two states of being [fantasy and reality]

never narrowed” (Crisp 16). Crisp’s writing transforms the reader’s perception of what constitutes “the real” by positioning himself as eccentric and the embodiment of unreason.

From the outset, Crisp distances himself from heterosexuality: “[f]rom the dawn of my history I was so disfigured by the characteristics of a certain kind of homosexual person that, when I grew up, I realized that I could not ignore my predicament...I exercised the last vestiges of my free will by swimming with the tide – but faster” (5). By “swimming with the tide,” Crisp means that rather than change who he was, he welcomed his “disfigurement,” and given that he was born in 1908 this was quite controversial. When describing his birth Crisp represents himself as the anti-Christ: “In the year 1908 one of the largest meteorites the world has ever known was hurled at the earth. It missed its mark. It hit Siberia. I was born in Sutton” (6). Crisp associates an astronomical event, the Tunguska Event, with his birth; in contrast to Jesus Christ, though, Crisp intimates that whoever controls the universe meant to destroy him. He further distorts the assumption that his birth was by any means normal with his claim that as he “stepped out of [his] mother’s womb on to dry land, [he] realized that [he] had made a mistake” (6). Crisp declares a level of cognizance and agency for himself as an infant, and an almost otherworldly descent into the world by choosing to step on to “dry land,” rather than being forced out of the womb. These fabulations transform his birth from the meager arrival of a fourth child, to the appearance of

a self-professed queer messiah. Such reimagining is not surprising given that from childhood Crisp finds fantasy to be “more fluid, freer and more beautiful” than real life (16) because heteronormativity could not limit his imagination: “[i]n the one [fantasy] I was a woman, exotic, disdainful; in the other [reality] I was a boy” (Crisp 16). Reality comes to signify heteronormativity for Crisp, while fantasy permits his fabulose imagination an outlet. Reading his nativity in light of this indicates that Crisp wants to make his entrance into the world queer and imbued with the Fabulous.

As a child Crisp maintained a strong dislike for masculinity, coming to associate it with violence and realism: “I had no friends who were boys because boys wanted to fight. I knew I would get hurt and not win. Also they would not play my games of make-believe” (13). Crisp can exert authority over girls, admitting that he had no qualms about verbally or physically assaulting them if they refused to do what he said. Being effeminate, Crisp only wanted to play one game with them: “We dressed up in their mothers’ or even grandmothers’ clothes...and trailed about the house and garden describing in piercing voices the splendours of the lives that in our imaginations we were leading” (14). Crisp and his girlfriends perpetuate a highly stylized imaginary for themselves; they attempt to invest the banality of childhood powerlessness with feminine sophistication; he describes using a wheelbarrow as a carriage, admonishing his servants, and being both proud and beautiful in the process (14). Since he writes that his father “did

not like [him],” and that his mother was prone to only “spasmodic indulgence” of him (10, 9), his forays into fabulosity allow him to live in a world where he is the centre of attention, something which every child – especially ones who know they are different – yearn for.

Crisp’s mother sent him as a young adult to her doctor, because she “thought it only polite to regard [him] as ill” (25). The doctor was not a psychologist as “psychology had not yet reached the middle classes” and he merely recommended that Crisp receive a “lesson in life” (25). Crisp received this lesson, when, in an attempt to “vary the monotony of his existence,” Crisp stumbled upon another effeminate homosexual, who happened to be a prostitute on Piccadilly (25). Crisp encountered a world of queens who obsessed over camp stylizations and engaged in catty conversation, because they all thought it to be “so very feminine.” They expressed deep resentment towards their daytime occupations because they were often “unfeminine” and prostitution was always feminine for those queens (29-30). Crisp’s introduction to the world of homosexuals is rife with stereotypical behaviour, but behaviour that attempts to distance itself from the reality of boys’ predicament as abject men.

Although Crisp writes that “[i]f anyone offered me money in exchange for sex I accepted it gladly” (31), which he saw as compensation for the insults he received daily from other persons, on numerous occasions throughout the text Crisp displays a high level of contempt for intercourse, preferring masturbation:

“the habit [fit] snugly into [his] well established world of make-believe” (19). Sex comes to “preserve the illusion of rape” (66), and during intercourse Crisp is left to wonder how his partners feel towards him. Through masturbation, Crisp knows what his imaginary partners feel, because the power is in his hands, and for Crisp: “[a] lifetime of being constantly at the mercy of others left [him]...crushed and seething with a lust for tyranny” (Crisp 222). Reality acts as a constraint for Crisp, he finds it necessary to distance himself from heterosexuals on numerous occasions throughout the text, and he does so most poignantly in the first half:

Every detail of the lives of real people, however mundane it may be, seems romantic to them. Romance is that enchantment that distance lends to things and homosexuals are in a different world from the ‘dead normals’ with many light-years dark between. If by some chance an hour of pointless gossip makes fleeting reference to some foible, some odd superstition, some illogical preference that they find they share with the speaker, homosexuals are as amazed and delighted as an Earthman would be on learning that Martians cook by gas. (Crisp 51)

Crisp depicts heterosexuals and homosexuals as alien races, claiming that not only do homosexuals live in a reality so different from heterosexuals, but that similarities come to be occasions for celebration. How can heterosexuals and homosexuals have any similarities? In the early twentieth century, not only was homosexuality widely recognized as an illness, but to act upon these perverse desires was illegal. Homosexuals such as Crisp suffered on a daily basis, requiring them to indulge in fabrications; that homosexuals could recognize a modicum of resemblance with heterosexuals was indeed a matter, not of celebration, but of

immense inquiry. Despite the fact that Crisp recognizes his alienation from heterosexuals, in response to the relative tolerance towards homosexuals in the fifties and sixties, he concludes his text apathetically: “[i]t was much too late for me to rejoin the human race I had left in childhood. I would have had no idea how to go on in the presence of real people as their equal” (Crisp 215). Crisp was obviously a biological person; nevertheless, he is right to assert that he was not a real person. It was only near the publication of *Servant* that his existence was decriminalized; Crisp’s exile from the realm of the real, by legal, social, and medical discourses resulted in denying him almost any power over his life.

In response to his existence on the margins, Crisp fabricates a new existence for himself in which his appearance would educate the unenlightened British masses about the plights of bigotry (Crisp 50). Despite this attempt to fight on behalf of other homosexuals, the existing homosexual societies rejected Crisp, expelling him to the fringes of their underworld: “[t]he coldness with which I was received by my fellow-guests at small gatherings of the faithless was wounding in the extreme. I felt it amounted to ingratitude as I thought of my life as a burnt offering laid on the altar of their freedom” (Crisp 88). Despite the ingratitude of fellow homosexuals, when physically attacked by homophobes one night, Crisp responds: “I seem to have annoyed you gentlemen in some way” (Crisp 69). Crisp is able to affect his assailants in such a way that disarms them and they cannot help but laugh at the “silly queen” who does not beg for mercy. Crisp constructs

his attackers as lacking proper social etiquette by suggesting that their method of dealing with people who annoy them is barbaric and savage. Crisp does not view these attacks lightly, and, although he was knocked unconscious, he never sought to give up his effeminacy. Consequently, living becomes a battlefield and he becomes a warrior, with such trivial and mundane events as shoe shopping ironically becoming a “dangerous mission” (Crisp 63). Crisp appears to suggest that masculine virility is inferior to his effeminacy; their country calls upon virile British soldiers in times of need, but Crisp battles his neighbours, his community, and his country every day. Rather than engage in the homicidal fantasies he unveils to readers at the end of the text, Crisp fabulates a world that he can inhabit. The simple act of referring to scissors as “paper shears” indicates that Crisp was capable of transforming the mundane into something fabulous:

I had bought scissors for five shillings. When I returned [to work] and told the girl who kept the petty cash book how much they had cost, she became distraught. ‘I can’t put down “Scissors, five shillings”,’ she wailed. ‘You can buy a pair in Woolworth’s for sixpence.’ I tried to calm her by enumerating the ways in which the article I had bought was superior to anything sold by Woolworth’s. While doing this, I happened to utter the words ‘paper shears’. Her ivory brow smoothed out immediately. ‘Oh,’ she sighed, ‘I can put down “Paper shears, five shillings”. That’s quite all right.’ (73)

What motivates Crisp is his optimism, which, despite setbacks, never appears to fully fade. What does recede (especially after his rise to fame with the publication of *Servant*) is Crisp’s relationship to the ‘real world’: “[t]he essence of happiness is its absoluteness. It is automatically the state of being of those who live in the

continuous present all over their bodies. No effort is required to define or even attain happiness, *but enormous concentration is needed to abandon everything else*" (Crisp 54; emphasis added). Crisp references a golden age throughout the text, and while I do not believe such an age has fully been reached, the world in which we now live is markedly different from the one Crisp grew up in; as McMahon succinctly observes: "Crisp demonstrates that today's fantasy inspires tomorrow's reality" (179).

Conclusion: Crazy Old Queen or Trailblazing Activist?

In *Servant*, Quentin Crisp retrospectively recounts his life in Britain up to and including the postwar period. *Servant* clearly "represents a missing link in pre- and post-war Britain" (McMahon 163). Interestingly, Crisp re-presents himself and the first sixty years of his life as anticlimactic, while contradictorily depicting the normally uninspiring monotony of the everyday as surreal and fabulous. Crisp, therefore, challenges the assumptions that homosexuals are not concerned with the trivialities of the everyday (e.g. food, accommodation, employment) and are not normal; synchronously, he maintains that the hostility toward effeminate homosexuals necessitates a certain ability to fabulate and live an artificial life that does not follow normative temporal scripts (e.g. marriage, childbirth, intercourse). Paul Robinson rightly draws attention to a highly contentious aspect of *Servant*:

The Naked Civil Servant generalizes freely about how homosexuals behave and how they 'are.' It betrays none of the caution we have learned to exercise as we have grown more sensitive to the dangers of stereotyping – of mistaking historical accident for genetic fact. Both sexually and otherwise, homosexuals are for him a natural kind, indeed 'my kind.'
(157)

Stereotypes do exist, though; Crisp, while quite willing to conflate effeminacy with homosexuality, does not embody the contemporary stereotypical effeminate queen who is obsessed with fashion, sex, partying, and lacks intelligence. Crisp is articulate and critical of heteronormativity, and stereotypes are inconsequential to him. Crisp is an effeminate homosexual, and if that makes him abnormal, he accepts this, because, while this was an "illness," Crisp never seeks out a cure. Despite the class position he held during the first sixty-six years of his life, Crisp enjoys being effeminate; he does not see an illness as necessarily detrimental. He is an almost ideal embodiment of the queer subject that contemporary queer theories desire. By turning to Crisp, and thinking with him, readers, academics, and activists will come to view effeminacy and the Fabulous not solely as sites of abjection, but as spaces where the abject transforms and has the capacity to become subversive. Crisp's fabulosity reminds us that fabulosity is contingent on a subject's ability to continually harness its energies because there is no guarantee of a "happy ending" unless you strive to make one for yourself.

Conclusion Being Fabulose

My engagement with *Were the World Mine*, *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and *The Naked Civil Servant* serves as the genesis of a hitherto underexamined and undervalued field of inquiry: the Fabulous. Drawing on the genres of fabulation and magical realism, and through an extrapolation of existing definitions of the Fabulous, I have tried to show that the ineffable, alchemical quality inherent to gay liberation and queer activism does indeed possess “the seemingly magical power...to transmute shame into pride, secrecy into visibility, social exclusion into outsider glamour” (Love 28). Following Love’s lead, I have stipulated that although the Fabulous may appear to transcend shame, secrecy, and exclusion, the texts that I examine do not necessarily end on optimistic notes wherein the prince gets the princess and everyone lives happily ever after forever and ever: but it is their visionary dissent from the normative “happy ending” that constitutes their fabulosity. Being different, and being true to the realities of queer identified persons, takes certain strength, with the Fabulous being one example of that strength. The delineation of the Fabulous throughout these snippets of gay male cultures illustrates that there is perhaps more “realness” in the Fabulous, and by extension fabulous realism, than in realism itself.

Despite the existence of fabulous realism, this work is necessarily incomplete. As I specified at the outset of this thesis I was only able to examine

gay male literature. Although I cannot confirm this, I do not believe the Fabulous – so powerful an affective state – is solely the domain of gay males. Lesbians and queer men (female to male transsexuals) may be associated with appropriating masculinity, but this does not mean queer women, be they “lipstick lesbians,” male to female transsexuals, or bisexual women are incapable of tapping into the Fabulous. Moreover, I believe Cristy Turner’s examination of the heteronormative appropriation of fabulousness by straight women and capitalist culture in *Sex and the City* deserves a much more nuanced examination to acknowledge the complexities surrounding such a move.

It is my intention, therefore, to expand this project further and search for the presence of the Fabulous in the work of British lesbian author Jeanette Winterson. Winterson’s *The Passion* focuses upon the bisexual, cross-dressing Villanelle who possess the ability to walk on water, and consume her own heart; Villanelle possess her own understanding of Venice and her abilities allow her to tread on spaces very few others can. In fact, when exposed to her world, the heterosexual Henry goes insane. This novel appears to contain an element of the Fabulous in Villanelle’s ability to escape her pursuers and survive – quite literally – without a heart.

Kabelo Sello Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* also contains another bisexually inflected instance of the Fabulous that deals with the politics of race in the Post-Apartheid (and therefore postcolonial) era of South Africa.

Duiker's work, while problematic in its representation of femaleness, engages at a nuanced level with the most abject of citizens: the insane, male-rape victim who engages in prostitution. Yet, like Highway's Gabriel, Duiker's protagonist, Tshepo, does not wallow in his victimization but seeks out the means to counter it and survive in what he concludes to be a doomed world.

Returning to my inspiration for the Fabulous, I think it fitting to gaze upon the realm of celebrity and cultural capital; specifically, Drag Queen illusionist extraordinaire, host of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and President of *RuPaul's Drag U*. RuPaul's drag persona defies assumptions of raced embodiment through her trademark blonde wig. Throughout the oeuvre of her television shows and her recent publication, *Workin' It: RuPaul's Guide to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style*, RuPaul expounds the belief that drag is a powerful, alchemical illusion available to all. *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a drag queen competition in which contestants perform weekly challenges (e.g. best comic drag performance) that culminates in a weekly runway presentation. *RuPaul's Drag U* uses contestants from the former show to act as "professors" to biological women who are lacking in self-esteem, sex appeal, etc. The women must learn a drag routine, complete a drag look, and convince the judges that they have taken the lessons of drag – in others words, fabulousness – to heart. Given the conflation of fabulousness with RuPaul's celebrity status, and fabulousness as a form of cultural capital to be shared, there is much that can be teased out about dominant understandings of

fabulousness as a form of queer cultural capital, especially when read next to the self-help guides of Simmons and Siriano.

Being fabulous or fabulose is impossible to achieve all the time (Kushner, “Notes” 32), and no matter how fabulous a person can be at one moment, it is, on occasion, necessary for subjects to be reminded to “be fabulous” in moments of doubt, pain, or depression. A work such as this is critical because it can act not only as an exploration of what it can mean to be fabulous, but more important as a testament that fabulousness can be manifested, however tenuously. To complete the fragment that serves as the title of Michael Warner's provocative text, *The Trouble with Normal*: it stops one from being utterly fabulous!

Notes

Notes to Introduction:

1. Homojo: a neologism from the NBC situational comedy, *Will and Grace*, Season 5, episode 15, aptly titled "Homojo." Although it is absent from the OED, *Urbandictionary.com* provides the following definition: "the words 'homo' and 'mojo' [combined], used to indicate an aura or halo of gayness surrounding a person or thing" (Plasmatron-7). In other words, it is an essence of gayness.
2. When using "heteronormative," unless I specify otherwise, I am by extension including under its scope "homonormative": a discursive regime that adopts heteronormative ideologies, but replaces the heterosexual couple with a homosexual imitation. See Duggan, 50.
3. See Butler "Critically Queer," for the politics surrounding the reclamation of "queer" by contemporary theorists and activists.
4. For scholars who examine negative affect, see Cvetkovich, Edelman, Halperin and Traub, and Love.
5. See both Snediker and Freeman ("Time Binds," "Turn the Beat") for an extended analysis of queerness and its relationship to positive affects.
6. For a critique of the conference's problematic aspects (i.e. the displacement of shame onto racialized others by the presenters) see Halberstam, "Shame."
7. I do not deny that much has been appropriated from black queer culture into mainstream white culture, however, since Turner does not provide any source to substantiate her claim that "the term's subversive origins" derive from "drag queens of colour" I remain unconvinced that the *term* was appropriated from black queer culture.
8. Slemon's canonical piece examines the relationship between postcolonialism and magical realism at some length.

Notes to Chapter 1:

1. Secure upon-sat stones of promontory, / Spark'd essence of the madly shooting stars, / One drop or two of anything wat'ry, Some semblance of a milk-white western flower. / Fulfill a pot of purely mineral with / Ingredients which you've gathered carefully. / Upon said bowl, bestow harmonious breath / Til thou remember'st pure who love you seek. / Allow

this precious time to meditate; / Their quenched thirst your just deserved prize! / United they conspire to charm your mate / With purple liquor destined for Love's eyes. / Now with a deft and musical note, rejoice, / To give your deepest love-desire strong voice.

2. Jury Awards (Won): Grand Jury Award for Outstanding U.S. Dramatic Feature (Heineken Red Star Award): *Outfest 2008*; James Lyon Editing Award for Narrative Feature: *2008 Woodstock Film Festival*; Scion Award for First-Time Director: *2008 Philadelphia Int'l Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*; Best Music in a Narrative Feature Film and Best LGBT Feature Film: *2008 Nashville Film Festival*; Directors Award: *2008 Connecticut Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*; Jury Award for Best Overall Film: *2008 Fort Worth Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*; Adam Baran Rainbow Award for Best Narrative Feature: *2008 Honolulu Rainbow Film Festival*; Jury Award for Best Feature Film: *2008 Outflix Film Festival*. Audience Awards (Won): Best Narrative Feature: *2008 Florida Film Festival*; Best Narrative Feature: *2008 Turin International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*; Best Feature: *2008 Inside Out Toronto*; Best Feature: *2008 Kansas City Gay & Lesbian Film Festival*; Best Feature: Cinema Diverse 2008: *Palm Springs GLFF*; Grand Prize Best Feature: *Rhode Island International Film Festival 2008*; Best Feature: *2008 Vancouver Queer Film Festival*.
3. For an analysis of how the Changeling boy is eroticized for both Titantia and Oberon, see Green 376-378; Garner 128-131.
4. For an examination of the Radical Faeries, see Morgensen.
5. Foucault's *History* one of the most exhaustive studies in this area; for particularly queer orientated analyses of Foucault's text see Huffer and Eribon.
6. For a sample of the recent queer turn towards temporal critiques see Castiglia and Reed; Cvetkovich; Dinshaw; Edelman; Freeman; Halberstam, *Queer Time*; Halperin; Henderson; Love; Rohy.
7. For an analysis of specifically capitalist temporalities, see Sewell, Thompson.
8. See Paolucci's brilliant examination of time in *Dream*.

Notes to Chapter 2:

1. Native studies scholars regard their current subjectivities as decidedly colonial, and undergoing the continual process of decolonization: "[an] ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural

continuance, and reconciliation” (Driskill “Doubleweaving” 69). As scholars examining *Kiss* we must acknowledge that, although the novel’s theme of healing in a postmodern Canadian nation-state of the late twentieth century is necessary to the decolonization of indigenous bodies, minds, and souls, the text is in fact about decolonization in a colonial era, not a postcolonial era.

2. For existing criticism that does not engage with Highway’s usage of pan-tribal motifs but points to the significance of the Trickster or the Two-Spirit see Brydon 20-22, 24-25; Goldie 206-209; Henderson 194-198; Knabe 142; McKegney; Pearson “Duplicity” 85, 88; Pearson “Interrogate” 173, 180.
3. The vagina dentata is a literary motif representing male fears of castration. Some of the most popular examples are the Medusa, who attracts and repels, and the vampire, who since the nineteenth-century has come to signify dangerous sexuality. See Creed for analysis of contemporary representations of the vagina dentata in horror films.
4. See Henderson for a more detailed analysis of the ways in which the text privileges sexuality over gender-identity.

Notes to Chapter 3:

1. I claim that Crisp is anti-working-class because throughout *Servant* he moves from various artistic careers that require the least amount of effort in an attempt to create the illusion of leisure-class living. While he was able to enter the leisure-class post-publication of *Servant* does not change his class position whilst he was writing it.
2. Male femininity is an umbrella term that includes, but is not limited, to any male-born subject that embodies feminine traits; while effeminacy or the effeminate is a male-born subject that embodies feminine traits but embraces their maleness. In other words, every effeminate subject is representative of male femininity, but not all feminine males are effeminate. As such, potential film characters include: Minx, in *Rage*; Captain Shakespeare, in *Stardust*; Ned Kynaston, in *Stage Beauty*; Lola, in *Kinky Boots*; and Patrick ‘Pussy’ Braden, in *Breakfast on Pluto*. Similarly, television characters include: Brūno Gehard, on *Da Ali G Show*; and Daffyd Thomas, on *Little Britain*.
3. I am aware of the racism lurking in such statements as “the very pink of health”, as it privileges white embodiment as the standard from which to judge healthy and non-healthy bodies. My justification is two-fold. Firstly, pink is a colour so interminably tied to femininity, and this paper

acknowledges the salience of femininity, it is only fitting that I employ this term. Secondly, the cause of melancholy was historically believed to be caused by cholera adusta (black bile), one of the cardinal humours (OED). I therefore wanted as close an antonym to this term as possible that would be available to a queer witticism.

4. Given the turn towards gay or queer shame scholars are beginning to acknowledge figures such as Crisp. Nonetheless, a recent debate on a queer blog demonstrates that effeminacy remains a problematic and disreputable site for many gay men (see Rogers).
5. This statement is taken from a speech that Crisp claims to have had with the film's creators. The full speech reads thus: When these people came to me and said, "We should like to make a film of your life." I said "Yes, do, films are fantasies, films are magical illusions. You can make my life a fantasy as I have tried but failed to make it." But then they said "We want the film to be real, you know real life." So I said, "*Any* film, even the *worst*, is at least better than real life." Then they said, "Though of course we should have to have an actor to play you." I said "I have spent sixty-six years on this earth painfully attempting to play the part of Quentin Crisp: I have not succeeded. Yes of course you must have an actor to play me, he will do it far better than I have done."

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