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Crossing the Line: Censorship, Borders, and the Queer Poetics of Disclosure in English-Canadian Writing, 1967-2000

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Abstract

Since Confederation enshrined Canada Customs' mandate to seize "indecent and immoral" material, the nation's borders have served as discursive sites of sexual censorship for the LGBTTTQ lives and literatures that cross the line. While the Supreme Court's decision in *Little Sisters v. Canada* (2000) upheld the agency's power to exclude obscenity, the Court found Customs discriminatory in their preemptive seizures of LGBTTTQ material. Extrapolating from this case of the state's failure to sufficiently 'read' queer sex at the border, this dissertation moves beyond studies of how obscenity law regulates literary content to posit that LGBTTTQ authors innovate aesthetics in response to a complex network of explicit and implicit forms of censorship. The numerous inter- and intra-national border crossings represented by queer writing in Canada correspond with sexual expressions that challenge the Charter's "reasonable limits," remaking the discursive boundaries of free speech in Canada. Informed by a range of literary critics, queer theorists, sociologists, and legal scholars, the dissertation examines compositional strategies that appropriate and exceed the practice of censorship in order to theorize what I call a "queer poetics of disclosure."

Chapter One revisits Scott Symons' pre-liberation novel *Place d'Armes* (1967) alongside the era's divergent nationalisms and the imminent decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969. Symons re-maps Montreal in text and illustration and produces metafictional boundaries that challenge subjective definitions of obscenity. Chapter Two considers *Contract with the World* (1980) by the American-Canadian novelist Jane Rule. Rule's developing style of multivalent narration, coinciding with her anti-censorship advocacy, articulates an ambivalent, or borderline, model of sexual citizenship. Chapter Three concerns Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland's long-poem *Double Negative* (1988), an experimental narrative of their Australian travels. Marlatt and Warland's erotic, language-mediated poetics evade both censure and the individualism of free speech discourse by questioning the limits of lyric expression. Chapter Four examines Gregory Scofield's lyric silences in poetry that asserts a gay Métis subjectivity. Focusing on *Native Canadiana* (1996), this chapter revisits anxieties of blood and border crossings during the HIV/AIDS crisis in order to draw out the implications of settler-colonial sexual censorship just before the Supreme Court's ruling in 2000.

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studies and queer theory, while influenced by feminist criticism, emerges from post-structural interest in fragmented, de-centered knowledge building (Nietzsche, Derrida, Foucault), language (the breakdown of sign-signifier), and psychoanalysis (Lacan). English as a Second Language. World Englishes. Introduction. Variation, Development, and Function. Poetry in English, 1867-1918. The honour of publishing the first volume of verse in the newly confederated Canada belongs to Charles MAIR, whose Dreamland and Other Poems appeared in 1868. Negligible as verse, the volume gained interest when Mair escaped after being captured by Louis Riel during the Red River disturbances of 1869-70. Robert Service aimed at verse rather than poetry, and celebrated the worlds of trapping, ranching and the Klondike Gold Rush. Crossing Borders: Personal Essays is a collection of essays by Sergio Troncoso first published in 2011 by Arte Público Press. The book of sixteen personal essays explores how Troncoso made the leap from growing up poor along the Mexico-U.S. border to the Ivy League, his wife's battle against breast cancer, his struggles as a writer in New York and Texas, fatherhood, and interfaith marriage.