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CALLING HOME:
QUEER RESPONSES TO DISCOURSES OF NATION AND CITIZENSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN LITERARY AND VISUAL CULTURE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

WENDY GAY PEARSON, BA, MA

SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LITERATURES, PHILOSOPHY & LANGUAGES

2004

CERTIFICATION

I, Wendy G. Pearson, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of English Literatures, Philosophy and Languages, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Wendy G. Pearson

11 April 2004

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ABBREVIATIONS

519	The Lesbian and Gay Community Centre, 519 Church St., Toronto
ACT-UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CDCP	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US)
CEF	Campaign for Equal Families
CHRA	Canadian Human Rights Act
CLGRC	Canadian Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition
CLGRO	Coalition for Lesbian Gay Rights in Ontario
EGALE	Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere
GAT	Gay Asians of Toronto
GALZ	Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe
GLBT	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ILGA	International Lesbian and Gay Association
LEAF	Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
LEGIT	Lesbian and Gay Immigration Task Force
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (a variant of LGBT)
LNPS	*Lesbian National Parks and Services*
NFB	National Film Board
PLWA	Person living with AIDS
RTPC	Right to Privacy Committee
TBP	*The Body Politic*
TPFN	Two-Spirited People of the First Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations AIDS Organization
UCR	Uniform Crime Reporting (Program)
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract

Calling Home: Queer Responses to Discourses of Nation and Citizenship in Contemporary Canadian Literary and Visual Culture

Wendy Gay Pearson

Mobilizing a variety of theoretical approaches from queer, feminist, postcolonial and critical race theory, this dissertation examines the various ways in which contemporary queer cultural production in Canada interrogates and intervenes in discourses of nation, citizenship and the construction of the public sphere. The central questions at the heart of this examination involve, on the one hand, interrogating the construction of home, belonging, and thus nation, as heteronormative, and, on the other hand, adjudicating between the claim made by some queer Canadian scholars that Canada is a queer nation and the assertion, made by other lesbian and gay scholars, that Canada is too heteronormative to allow for the development of a queer public culture. At the same time, postcolonial and anti-racist approaches to issues of Canadian identity and belonging suggest that race and ethnicity remain crucial sites around which competing discourses of the public sphere are mobilized. Particularly when issues of racial, ethnic or indigenous identity are broached in conjunction with sexually dissident identities, questions of queer alterity serve both to problematize and to interrogate the ways in which it is possible to think about what it means to call Canada home.

This thesis approaches these issues in several ways. It attempts to locate the social and cultural faultlines, both in populist texts and in queer cultural works, that reveal the contested and contestatory constitution of queerness both as belonging and as not belonging within the Canadian body politic, in part by looking at two examples that serve as limit tests for both official and popular discourses of tolerance and multiculturalism — the legalization of lesbian and gay marriage and the continued, and perhaps increasing, incidence of queer-bashing, particularly in relation to the 2001 hate-motivated murder of Aaron Webster. However, following Richard Rorty's assertion that it is predominantly narrative cultural texts, such as novels and films, that function "as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress," I concentrate predominantly on narrative examples which both describe and critique the conditions that, often incoherently,

work to effect the exclusion of lesbian and gay Canadians — especially when those Canadians are also, to use Roy Miki's term, racialized — from the public construction of the nation. Using theoretical approaches predominantly from the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Elspeth Probyn, Paul Morrison, and Ann Cvetkovich, I investigate the ways in which contemporary queer cultural production attempts, in Sedgwick's words, to disarticulate and disengage impacted social spaces, such as family and nation, and to create "a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other," a practice in which it is possible to understand the ways in which normative discourses produce ways of thinking about home, family and nation in which "*everything means the same thing.*" The critical, cultural practices I examine include a variety of ways by which queer artists respond to the cultural faultlines that regulate questions of visibility, representation, trauma and the creation of archives. I conclude by arguing that it is in the very disjuncture between competing discourses of Canada's queerness and its heteronormativity that it is possible to assert queerly Canadian ontologies and epistemologies as *public* knowledges and ways of being that are always contingent and uncertain — and always urgently necessary.

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