

of detail. Simultaneously, it is open, complex and oblique in its internalised perspective, focusing on the dislocated consciousness of each central character which can be known and understood only partially if at all. Finally, in demonstrating that the multidimensionality of the novel is a direct consequence of Lowry's revision method, Asals argues for the importance of seeing the text *whole*, rather than as a sum of four characters, or even a study of the alcoholic Consul. Asals makes his case convincingly. His book will serve as an invaluable resource for textual scholars and makes a significant interpretative contribution to Lowry studies.

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Peter Dickinson, *Here Is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities and the Literatures of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), x + 262pp. Cloth. £37.50. ISBN 0-8020-4403-4. Paper. £12.95. ISBN 0-8020-8210-6.

With its emphasis on rethinking issues of identity, this might be called 'sexing the nation'. It is an adventurous study which traces an alternative or 'counter' discourse within contemporary English-Canadian, Québécois and First Nations literatures. This othered discourse belongs to gay and lesbian writing and it is Dickinson's aim as a white gay literary critic working within the framework of postcolonial and queer theory to find a methodology for writing a national narrative that will accommodate not only cultural and racial differences but different sexualities as well. Dickinson tackles this wide agenda with enthusiasm, arguing that the dominant discourse of Canadian nationalism has been masculinist and heterosexual, and that it is the literature of marginalised sexualities which challenges that authority and crosses cultural and national boundaries – true, but somewhat polemical, given the multiple voices which are currently challenging traditional notions of Canadian identity.

Dickinson's selection of writers is deliberately eccentric and eclectic: Timothy Findley, the anglophone Montreal poets and travel writers Patrick Anderson and Scott Symons, Michel Tremblay, Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, Dionne Brand, Tomson Highway. Mapping them all in their specific historical and cultural contexts, he constructs a kaleidoscopic representation of diverse discourses of politics and sexuality, demonstrating that 'a nation's narrative does not tell the truth of all its citizens' (p. 148). The frame discussions are often more interesting than the analyses of texts themselves, for Dickinson covers a wide variety of topics which include Oscar Wilde's visit to Toronto in 1882, homophobia in Montreal during the 1940s and '60s, gay drama in Quebec since the 1970s, translation theory, the politics of location, gay 'trick' literature and Native Trickster figures, and performance theory in relation to identity

construction. Perhaps the most emblematic chapter is the one on the translation poetics of Brossard and Marlatt, where the two women's translations of each other's work have become a celebrated example of lesbian-feminist collaboration, making a strong argument for alternative constructions of community beyond nation and patriarchy. This book engages energetically with contemporary political agendas, though I cannot help feeling that there are wider historical issues relating both to sexual identities and to the Canadian literary canon which also need to be addressed.

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Marta Dvorak (ed.), *Live Atwood: 'The Handmaid's Tale'* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 1999), 126pp.

This collection of the proceedings of the Atwood conference in Rennes deals mainly with the connection between language and power that emerges from the novel. It begins with an earlier address Atwood presented at the University of Rennes which focuses on the question of whether *The Handmaid's Tale* is a feminist dystopia or not. Atwood concludes that it is a dystopia, not a feminist one, and although it is told from a woman's point of view, it could equally well be told from the point of view of a man in the same class position as Offred. Offred is 'just an ordinary person caught up in extraordinary circumstances' and, after all, 'all dystopia begins in utopia'.

The main body of the collection comprises seven papers, two of which are in French. All treat aspects of the dystopian genre, particularly different forms of language as both control and subversion. The first section, 'Text and Testimony', deals with the relationship between literature and society, particularly with respect to the 'moral and political dimensions' of Atwood's text. One paper allies Gilead with American fundamentalism, especially the recent upsurge of the religious right that stresses homogeneity in dress and speech in ways that suggest the powers-that-be in Gilead. The second shows how Atwood uses Offred's first-person testimony and the resulting focus on character as a metafictional device. Other devices used to make the story a believable testimony in spite of the non-referential nature of the postmodern text are its metafictional insistence on the text as a 'reconstruction' (hence, unreliable), the role of the narrator as survivor, and Offred's collusion with the system. Atwood makes these devices underline rather than undermine the testimony.

Section two, 'Transgression and Subversion', focuses on the various strategies the characters use to subvert the system and survive. The author of the first paper makes an interesting distinction between the words 'power' and 'control'.