

not live to experience that passing. For our era of triumphant drunken capitalism she provides a testament to what was.

None of Dennis Lee's essays is an exercise in scholarly detachment, but the element of engagement is particularly strong in the study of George Grant. Grant was a mentor and friend: a quotation from his *Technology and Empire* was one of two affixed to *Civil Elegies*. Lee focuses on what most influenced him, Grant as a questioner of technological modernity who found that radical criticism could not be formulated by one who shared modernity's assumptions. He therefore (Lee feels) turned to the classics, especially to Plato, who moved from assumptions that gave reality to givens such as justice, to give himself a place to stand. Lee feels the analysis was correct but the response erroneous. Lee wishes redemption to start with the individual's sense of alienation, of his consciousness being imprisoned within a bleak hegemony that deprives him of contact with the intuitions of holiness, justice, and love to which his life instinctively shapes itself. One can hear, remotely, the call of John and Charles Wesley. For George Grant, the institutions that matter—jury, courts, law, and justice; the state, democracy, and parliament; the church; marriage and childrearing; universities, knowledge, and free thought—are all pre-modern, and informed by classical thought. They are also the matrix from which modern science and technology developed. Why did the "interrogation" of nature, which Dr. William Oster gave as the essence of modern scientific method, develop from this, and are there any natural or institutional limits? What powers does it serve? Whose good? Lee's essay on Grant is informative while their interests run parallel, but that is only a short way.

For those who have followed Dennis Lee's career, many of the essays here will not be unfamiliar, but it is good to have the fugitive pieces brought together and given a permanent dwelling. *Body Music*, his first essay collection, is a poet's book and of most interest to those who know his poetry. It is also a serious and intellectually stimulating one that should draw new readers to one of Canada's most important writers.

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Peter Dickinson. *Here is Queer: Nationalisms and Sexualities and the Literatures of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. 262. \$19.95 paper.

"In the interests of full disclosure," as the journalists say, I am listed on the acknowledgments page of this book, and I was in fact the external examiner when it was presented as a dissertation at the University of British Columbia. I am sure that there are many among you who will now stop reading, on the grounds that what follows is so tainted as to be useless as a review. All I can offer in justification is that what might be called "Canlit gaycrit" is a small field, and the list of usual suspects is not long. After I agreed to review this book for *English Studies in Canada*, I was asked to do the same by three other journals.

Part of the problem is, of course, the limited view that the hegemony of the majority always has of the minority ("We wanted a black woman on the panel but we asked her and she wouldn't come.") But this is also just one more example of the usual Canadian trajectory. First a minority is noticed sociologically in the United States. Then it is noticed in Canada. Then it is noticed as a factor in American literary studies. Then it is noticed as a factor in Canadian literary studies. Then critics who identify as part of that minority start making noise in the American literary academy (read MLA). Then critics who identify as part of that minority start making noise in the Canadian literary academy (read ACCUTE). Then it reaches the study of Canadian literature.

This might seem an overly cynical view. Still, the conservatism of the study of Canadian literature remains striking, especially when Canadian literature itself is often so adventurous. There are obvious exceptions to this conservatism, often feminist, but they are just that, exceptions. The time when the study of Canadian literature seemed *avant garde* was a time when Canadian nationalism was itself *avant garde*. Today, when Canadian nationalism seems a tired residue maintained by that aging WASPish group, The Council of Canadians, the staidness of the study of Canadian literature just seems a natural fit.

Lest anyone get the wrong idea, I am not a kettle casting aspersions at pots. I was part of the rise of nationalism in the

late sixties, I have been teaching and writing about Canadian literature since the early seventies, and I continue to give money to The Council of Canadians. But this does not delude me into thinking that Canlitcrit is part of the cutting edge.

This increases the importance of critics such as Arun Mukherjee and Rinaldo Walcott, prominent among the growing number who are putting race in the foreground of the study of Canadian literature. And to this I would add the present volume. The blurbs on the back of the book present the usual hyperbole ("revolutionize Canadian literary studies" is a bit much), but phrases such as "first of its kind" and "fresh and challenging" are certainly appropriate.

Dickinson's book takes various recent studies of nationalism (most notably Homi Bhabha), blends them with similar works on sexuality (most notably Judith Butler), and applies them to contemporary Canadian literature. Dickinson does not "queer Canlit," in the sense of looking at a variety of texts and showing gay and lesbian aporia, but rather examines the canonically gay and lesbian stars of contemporary literature, such as Timothy Findley, Scott Symons, and Michel Tremblay, and Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard.

The title might be a bit misleading to some. It represents a new take on Northrop Frye's statement of Canadian existential angst: "Where is here?" Dickinson is not making an oppositional statement such as that of Queer Nation but rather is performing explorations. It is not "We're here. We're queer," but "Is there something to this 'queer' literature that explains something?" Dickinson is suggesting that these sexual fringes perhaps reveal the meaning of Canada better than culture that appears to be closer to the centre.

It is an interesting thesis, one that Dickinson pursues very well. I must admit that while the readings of the various texts are adroit, I am not convinced that they significantly change what has been said elsewhere. Also, arguably they might be at times guilty of cheerleading. Dickinson is very much supportive of gay writers. He records one public forum where he asked a question that Timothy Findley did not like. He pointed out that Findley never depicts a positive view of homosexuality. But in *Here is Queer* Dickinson turns from this anecdote to a claim that *Not Wanted on the Voyage* shows just that. Well, sort of.

While the novel certainly loves camp and perhaps homosexuals, once again Findley slides by positive representations of gay sex.

Here is Queer is happier dealing with vagaries than with literature that makes statements. Thus the study is much more comfortable with being queer than it is with being gay. I say the study rather than "Dickinson" because Dickinson explicitly refers to himself as "gay" and seems to have no trouble at all with that identity. But his book seeks a poststructuralist queering rather than some stable sense of self. This makes for an appropriate blend as the watchword of Canadian culture is "confusion" or at best "process," as shown in so many jokes. Question: "What does it mean to be a Canadian?" Answer: "Is that a question or a statement?"

This also serves Dickinson as he moves into areas in which his own identity might seem to fit less well, such as lesbian literature and writing by visible minorities and Native peoples. In his analysis of the plays of Tomson Highway, Dickinson concentrates on the trickster. This is often the tack pursued by white critics of Native literature (as often noted satirically by Native writers, such as Ojibwa playwright Drew Hayden Taylor), but in this case Dickinson is able to link it to both Highway's sexuality and the general queering of Canada.

There are very few places where I find fault with Dickinson's readings. More important, his use of these texts for comments on Canadian culture is excellent, at times brilliant. I would compare some of the moments in *Here is Queer* to Frank Davey at his best, which for me is high praise. Yet, as well, I find something in Dickinson's analysis of the poet Patrick Anderson that is symptomatic of how much Dickinson is a part of his zeitgeist.

Recently, gay critics have been paying significant attention to Anderson, as an interesting poet of the forties whom homophobic Canada dismissed. As Dickinson notes, Anderson's contemporary, John Sutherland, used thinly veiled comments on Anderson's sexuality in the process of dismissing his poetry as effete. But when I was first looking into Canadian literature in the late sixties, we accepted that Anderson had to be dismissed, along with heterosexuals such as A. J. M. Smith, in order to raise the stature of what might be called the gritty ethnics. We saw Anderson and Smith as the remnants of the old WASP or-

der who interfered with the establishing of a North American Canadian mentality, exemplified by poets such as Louis Dudek and Irving Layton. Sutherland's homophobia was not a cause but an unattractive tangent in the general effort to get Canada out from under the so-anglo yoke represented by Anderson. For us, Auden and Spender were not gay—they were English!

The world has changed. Anderson's resurrection as a gay forefather seems more than appropriate, especially at a time when writers such as Dudek and Layton appear far less ethnic and even passé. And yet, is this the final word on Anderson? I wonder whether *Here is Queer* is the best title for the book. Perhaps it should be *Here is Queer — For Now*.

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