

Cultural Studies

DICKINSON, PETER. *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities and the Literatures of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 262.

Responding to Northrop Frye's rhetorical question "where is here?" which was intended to deflect the quest for national identity onto questions of regional difference, *Here is Queer* adds sexuality to the set of social factors that make "Canada" essentially unlocatable. Launched from theoretical foundations in Michel Foucault and Benedict Anderson, inspired by George Mosse's *Nationality and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (1985) and the *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (1992) anthology edited by Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, Dickinson's book que(e)ries the canons of Canadian literature, foregrounding the representation of sexuality in literary interpellations and deconstructions of nationality. Surveying Canadian literary production from the early nineteenth century (1832 to be precise, the publication date of John Richardson's "foundational text," *Wacousta*) to the "Homo Pomo" present, Dickinson confirms that sexuality—dissident or prohibited, perverse or straight—is no strange bedfellow to nationalist discourse. What is strange is that, with the exception of Québécois theatre studies where homosexuality is a critical leitmotif, there no body of criticism to explain this provocative, historical coupling.

In his ambition to collect and compose this body of criticism, Dickinson tries to cover it all. With the sixth axiom of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* in mind, he sets out to trace the closeting of homosexuality in a cross-section of canonized Canadian literature and to present an alternative, minority canon of late twentieth-century gay and lesbian writing which troubles received ideas of Canadian nationalism from and across all borders—sexual, racial, ethnic, linguistic, post-colonial, First Nations. Where Sedgwick limits the application of her critical model to a handful of nineteenth-century English and American canonical texts, Dickinson extends the scope of application to the "whole" of Can. Lit. "*Queer*" is everywhere as the critic proceeds to re-represent the literary nation(s) by queering that nation representatively.

Chapter contents reflect Dickinson's idea of a "representative" critique. Critical method is a *bricolage* of literary theories and practices (Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore, Mikhail Bakhtin, Homi Bhaba, Jacques Derrida, Diana Fuss, Linda Hutcheon, to name a few), which build upon the "foundational" theories of Foucault, Anderson, Mosse, which are, in turn, elaborated in specific Canadian contexts by Can. Lit. scholars. In attempting to be representative, Dickinson is thorough and resourceful, and above all, exceedingly careful in acknowledging and interpreting the work of his colleagues and predecessors in the Canadian literary academy.

Since the assembling of primary texts from all of the Canadas, together with foundational European and American theories, together with a medley of "home-grown" criticism is Dickinson's *forte*, the reviewer is pressed to cover the contents. Chapter 1 traces the homosexual subtext of homosocial/heterosexual romances which plot the interpellation of Canadian or Québécois nationalism in canonical works drawn from each "phase" of Can Lit history: "colonial" (Richardson's *Wacousta*), "national" (Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House*),

"postmodern" (Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers*, Hubert Aquin, *Trou de mémoire*). Chapter 2 considers how homosexual dissidence works in covert ways to signify nationalist ambivalence in two canonical post-modern works by Timothy Findley: *The Wars* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Chapter 3 returns to the "nationalist" phase of Can.Lit. (the forties and fifties) to excavate the neglected writing of Patrick Anderson and Scott Symons and show how the forging of the national canon was as homophobically dismissive as it was artistically selective. Recovering and discussing this work, which often looks back on Canada (i.e. Anglo Montreal as residence and milieu) from abroad in self-imposed exile, Dickinson locates the aborted beginnings of a homoerotic literary tradition, as well as an embedded critique of the exclusionary process of canon/nation-building. The compelling originality of this chapter owes more to its exploration in the archives than to its assemblage of theories and criticism.

The following four chapters cover various dimensions of the Canadian postmodern, tracing the subversive and complex couplings of homosexuality-nationality in Québécois theatre (Michel Tremblay, René-Daniel Dubois, Michel Marc Bouchard), Anglo-French lesbian feminist translation poetics (Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt), the postcolonial novels of Toronto-based Trinidadian writer Dionne Brand and the trickster-centered dramaturgy of Cree playwright Thomson Highway. Though the inclusion of chapters on these writers may be predictable in a book on queering the Canadian nation(s), Dickinson extends the field of current critical coverage. He carries discussion on the subversive coupling of homosexuality and nationalism in Québécois theatre over into English Canada, where Québécois theatre is reviewed and produced in translation. He expands the critical coverage of lesbian feminist translation poetics to incorporate the important but marginalized forum of literary journals that were launched by writers involved in that movement (*La Nouvelle Barre du jour*; *Tessera*).

The most useful aspect of this book is also the most frustrating. It assembles, elucidates and deploys a battery of complex critical tactics, which cannot fail to convince the most resistant, homophobic, reader of the interaction between signifiers of (homo)sexuality and nationality in the multicultural text of Canadian literature. Yet no new critical paradigm emerges from this unwieldy bricolage, which is an intricate, unique, virtuoso performance we can neither repeat nor build upon. Moreover, it is a performance which ultimately prompts one to ask *where is the "here" of queer?* If nationality is no longer a question of regionality but a much more de-centralized inquiry spearheaded by subversive tropes of sexuality, then what is left of "Canada" in the literary domain?

The most *situated* chapter of the book is the one on Quebec theatre, probably because it draws so heavily on the scholarship of Robert K. Martin and Robert Schwartzwald—critics and academics who have a long-standing, intimate relationship with (gay) Québécois culture and politics and whose passion for and knowledge of life in Montreal is evident in everything they write on the subject. It is not so easy to locate Dickinson, who hails from a younger generation of new talent. Like the narrator of a picaresque novel, Dickinson poses as an assembler, moderator, interpreter of a vast forum of poetic, theoretical, critical, national, racial, ideological, subcultural voices. Lest his own voice be lost, he inserts periodically an autobiographical testimony of formative moments of initiation into the Can.Lit. scene. These insertions—iterations—of personal awakening to the political situation, telling as they are, read as a *serial performance* of

location, of academic positioning in the narrowly institutional, in a broadly metropolitan, universe—which, for all its queerness, is bewilderingly whereless. If a rhetoric of belonging must be staged in order to re-read the nation representatively, then where is the “Canadian” reader? What is the communal, if not national, function of literature and where is the future of community?

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LAMOUREUX, DIANE, CHANTAL MAILLE, and MICHELINE DE SEVE, eds. *Malaises identitaires: Echanges féministes autour d'un Québec incertain*. Montréal: Les Editions du remue-ménage, 1999. Pp. 204.

The central issue of the provocative essays gathered in *Malaises identitaires* could be summed up in the question posed early in the introduction: “In a context where the idea of an oppression specific to francophones ... no longer seems the natural rallying point for progressive forces, is the idea of Quebec sovereignty still defensible from a feminist point of view?” (translation mine). The collection offers more questions than answers, but several of the essays suggest that the project of Quebec sovereignty, based on concepts of citizenship and identity that are fundamentally modern and masculine, reveals itself to be in need of substantial revision when submitted to the critical perspective of a postmodernist feminism.

The volume's three editors, Diane Lamoureux, Chantal Maillé, and Micheline de Sève, all specialists in politics and feminism, raise the question of women's place in the Quebec identity project in illuminating and provocative ways, in their introduction as well as their individual contributions. True to their pluralist vision of feminism, however, they have not been content to limit their essay collection solely to a discussion of political theory. Instead, they have broadened the dialogue to include literary perspectives, as in the articles by Katharine Roberts and Sherry Simon, and discussions of women and nationalism in completely different settings: Marie-Blanche Tahon writes of women and nationalism in Algeria, and Anne-Marie Fortier contributes a study of women and ethnic identity-formation in an immigrant community in London. While apparently moving away from the pointed questions raised by the introduction, these essays place the volume in a broader context of postmodern identity reflection. Indeed, if there is an argument underlying the volume's appropriately heterogeneous perspectives, it is the need to recognize the complex nature of identity in the contemporary world, an identity formed of intermingled strands of belonging and described in terms of hybridity and nomadism.

The discussion suggested by the volume's subtitle—*Echanges sur un Québec incertain*—is centered in the articles by the editors that focus on the sovereigntist political project. The introduction, in particular, critiques contemporary forms of both nationalism and feminism in Quebec and argues for a major redefinition of both. Supporters of Quebec sovereignty and other elements of the PQ platform (whom the authors imply are few in number), may react against the editors' brusque dismissal of the issue of francophone oppression and their disdain for Quebec's economic progress, characterized dismissively as “Quebec Inc.” Feminist readers, too, may be taken aback by the authors' tendency to condemn the substantial accomplishments of the Quebec feminist movement as evidence