

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

The publication of Peter Dickinson's new book *Here Is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* is a major event in Canadian literary scholarship. The surge of interest in Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies in the United States over the past fifteen years has been phenomenal. Canadian universities, by contrast, have been slow to acknowledge the importance of Sexuality Studies. As the title of Dickinson's book so proudly proclaims however, these days even in Canada 'here is queer.' New programs, such as the University of Toronto's Sexual Diversity Studies, and individual courses in Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Studies, now exist across the country. Conferences such as 'La Ville en Rose' in Montreal in 1992 or 'Queer Sites' in Toronto in 1993 or 'Queer Nation?' at York University in 1997 demonstrate the growing importance of Queer Studies. The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association now meets every year. A new journal, *torque*, is about to appear. At the same time, an increasing number of excellent literary works written by openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual writers are being published. Despite this wealth of cultural and scholarly work, Dickinson's book is the first full-length study of Lesbian/Gay/Queer literature in Canada and Quebec. Its appearance is, clearly, overdue.

I find much to praise in Peter Dickinson's book. He is a talented, intelligent – even brilliant – young scholar. His readings of literary texts, from John Richardson's 1832 *Wacousta* to works by Timothy Findley, Tomson Highway, Dionne Brand, Daphne Marlatt, Scott Symons, Michel Tremblay, and others, are consistently elegant, thoughtful, and deeply satisfying. The historical and theoretical range of his reflections on Canadian literature and culture is very impressive. He points out in his introduction that: '[i]n the emerging narrative surrounding the canonization of Canadian literature ... the discourse of (homo)sexuality, and its role (or non-role) in the formation and organization of a literary tradition in this country, is virtually non-existent.' However, Dickinson's analyses of various Canadian and Quebecois literary works convincingly show that "'queer' as a literary-critical category of an almost inevitable definitional elasticity ... challenges and upsets certain received national orthodoxies of writing in Canada.' He indicates how sexuality has acted as a powerfully operative yet mostly unacknowledged or misread force in Canadian literature and literary studies.

I have great admiration for Dickinson's achievement in *Here Is Queer*. Still, I must admit to a discomfort, even dissatisfaction, with two features of his approach to his topic. First, I find his constant assumption of the primacy of the idea of 'nation' irksome. Quebec's possible future separation from 'English Canada' remains a crucial and contentious issue today.

However, the sense of urgency regarding 'national identity' that characterized the Canadian cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s strikes me as somewhat provincial now. After all, contemporary life in Canada is increasingly shaped by a moving beyond borders in order to see ourselves in a more global perspective. Canadian literature also reflects this trend.

More troubling is Dickinson's restricting himself to a fairly narrow 'canon' of contemporary queer texts. The roster of writers whose work he discusses, though very worthy, is also rather predictable and safe. Dickinson is careful to devote attention both to white writers and writers of colour, to lesbians and to gay men, to francophones and to anglophones. I applaud this concern for balance and diversity. Nevertheless, Dickinson has omitted from his book any discussion of works by some of the finest queer writers in Canada and Quebec: Anne-Marie Alonzo, Jean-Paul Daoust, Bill Bissett, Robin Blaser, Erin Mouré, RM Vaughn, Daniel David Moses, and André Roy, among others. Furthermore, among the writers whose work he does discuss, he tends to privilege their more accessible, narrative texts. Thus, Nicole Brossard's novel *Le Désert nuage* receives considerable attention from Dickinson, whereas he discusses her more demanding 'theories-fiction' much more briefly. In fact, Blaser, Bissett, Alonzo, Daoust, and other poets excluded from *Here Is Queer* have published works that are arguably more challenging and subversive – more queer – than many of the novels and plays that Dickinson presents.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Peter Dickinson's book performs a crucial service to Canadian Literary Studies. The author skilfully demonstrates the multifaceted vitality and complexity of Lesbian/Gay/Queer writing in Canada in the twentieth century. One hopes that numerous other scholarly studies of queer Canadian literature displaying the same level of critical intelligence as *Here Is Queer* will be published in the twenty-first century. (JOHN C. STOUT)

Anton Wagner, editor. *Establishing Our Boundaries: English-Canadian Theatre Criticism*

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In the complex of relationships that manifest themselves in theatrical culture – among artists, businesses, private philanthropists, governments, and audiences – the role of the critic may be the most difficult to define. After reading this thought-provoking book, a few roles come to mind: to sell newspapers at any cost through controversy and force of personality; to sell tickets at any cost on behalf of the theatrical producer who has purchased advertising; to act as an 'average' representative of a hypothetically homogeneous readership, reporting on the acceptability and accessibility of the event; to act as resident authority, informing a hypo-