

natural. That is, if the Self by definition constitutes itself vis-à-vis an Other, and if the Here can only be understood in reference to a There, and if such differences carry a tremendous libidinal charge, the implication must be that human subjectivity *by its very nature* demands the kind of sexualized Other-construction that characterizes pornography in the service of empire. This implication returns us to the historical question of why, then, ethnopornography flourished in specific times (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and focused on particular colonial spaces (e.g., Turkey or Tahiti) as more intensely erotic than others (e.g., Canada or the Congo). Yet, while his analytic contributions are limited, Schick's extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources in many languages will serve as a useful guide to scholars pursuing research in the history of sexuality and colonial modernities.

JULIAN B. CARTER
Stanford University

MARCIA KLOTZ
University of California at Irvine



Here Is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada.
By PETER DICKINSON. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp.
x + 262. \$50.00 (cloth).

It has been almost three decades since Northrop Frye posed the question, "Where is here?" In his recent book, Peter Dickinson responds with a resounding, "Here is queer." Whereas Frye portrayed Canadian literature as distinguished by a sense of national ennui, Dickinson's *Here Is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* rejects this analysis as a "failure of imagination" and instead offers a rethinking of "Canada" that transcends mere geopolitical terms. Indeed, rectifying an apparent "absence" in Canadian writing, Dickinson's study explores the ways in which the literature of this country has been imbued with a transgressive, queer, sexual subtext.

Influenced by the insights of poststructural theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Homi Bhabha, Dickinson juxtaposes "against the predominantly nationalist framework of literary criticism in this country an alternative politics, one propelled by questions of sexuality and, more often than not, homosexuality" (p. 4). Through an analysis of a small selection of novelists, poets, and playwrights, he argues that "nation" and "sexuality" are not discrete entities, but, rather, are profoundly intertwined elements of identity. By performing a queer reading of what he believes to be canonical texts, he complicates the concept of nationalism by addressing the ways in

which sexuality, gender, and ethnicity have informed expressions and experiences of nationhood in Canada. As a consequence, he argues that although Canada has often been assumed to lack a coherent, unifying national identity, its literature has been characterized by a persistent, sexually subversive, counternarrative of nationalism. Refusing to perceive nationalism, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity as autonomous variables of identity, Dickinson reveals them to be overlapping phenomena and, in doing so, challenges many conventional interpretations of Canadian literature.

In his attempt to destabilize Canadian literary tradition, Dickinson focuses on groups that have most often been marginalized by it, such as homosexuals, lesbians, and First Nations. By reading against the grain, he endeavors to transform the “absent presence of queerness in Canadian literature into a more manifest or embodied presence,” and thereby renders “otherness” an important aspect of Canadian nationalism (p. 6). Commencing with a discussion of John Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832), Dickinson assesses the extent to which this novel may be read through the lens of homosexuality. Consequently, he portrays the novel as an example of resistance to “heteronormative nationalism” (p. 5). Rejecting the traditional reading of *Wacousta* as a struggle between wilderness and civilization—indeed, many literary critics have traced the preoccupation with nature as the source of Canadian national identity to Richardson’s work—Dickinson perceives a different “syndrome” at play. For him, the anxiety of the novel is rooted as much in same-sex desire and mixed-race attachments as it is in nature (p. 13). Dickinson also examines these themes within the twentieth-century works of Sinclair Ross, Philip Buckner, Leonard Cohen, and Hubert Aquin. By reading these works in a “queer” light, he challenges the “identificatory *lack* upon which Canadian literary nationalism has historically been constructed,” arguing that it has been facilitated in part by “a critical refusal to come to grips with the textual *superabundance* of a destabilizing and counter-normative sexuality” (p. 4).

To further substantiate these claims, Dickinson explores various expressions of literary nationalism in the twentieth-century context and the ways in which a homosexual discourse has influenced the shapes they take. In reference to the work of Timothy Findley, Dickinson argues that homosexuality here serves to signify an ambivalent attachment to the idea of nationhood. In the cases of Patrick Anderson and Scott Symons, he sees homophobia and discrimination as the causes for the exclusion and underappreciation of these authors. Concerned primarily with the reception of their work, Dickinson argues that Anderson and Symons in the latter half of the twentieth century were perceived as sexual and national deviants, dangers to the heterosexual “norm,” and consequently were exiled from the canon of Canadian literature. The threat that Anderson posed to the formation of a “masculine, virile” poetry of Canadian experience

rendered him a virtual “foreigner” among literati. Likewise, Symons came to be labeled a “sexual outlaw,” and his contributions to Canadian postmodernism were eclipsed and ignored in discussions of Canadian literature. Dickinson attempts to rectify their marginalization and to reposition their work by applying recent developments in gender theory and postcolonial studies. In doing so, he views Anderson and Symons “not merely as poet and novelist respectively, but also as travel writers,” or as “sexual tourists” whose perspectives as outsiders shed much light on traditional expressions of Canadian nationalism (pp. 82–83).

Dickinson uses the themes of otherness and exile, delineated in the works of Anderson and Symons, as an opportunity to draw a parallel between homosexuality and Quebec nationalism. Indeed, in his discussion of the works of Michel Tremblay, R. D. Dubois, and M. M. Bouchard, he uses homosexuality as a trope for the oppression and marginalization of Québécois culture within Canada. Dickinson claims that the “problem faced by each is essentially the same: how to affirm a gay identity that is at once part of and separate from a cultural narrative of nationalist overdetermination” (p. 107). In this regard, queer theory proves to be particularly relevant and insightful. As queer theorists have frequently struggled with the problem of how to affirm difference without blurring entirely any sense of community, Dickinson’s application of this theory to French-Canadian literature highlights significant parallels between the two groups and the problems often inherent in the politics of difference.

Although the majority of Dickinson’s book focuses on white males and the theme of homosexuality, female writers are dealt with, albeit to a lesser degree. Dickinson examines gender as a variable that undermines any attempt to draw a dichotomy between nationalism and sexuality, and as an identifier that challenges national orthodoxies in Canadian writing. In his chapter “Towards a Transnational, Translational Feminist Poetics,” Dickinson begins with a discussion of Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*. Although he gives the reader much hope for an analysis of the gendered dimensions of nationalism and socially constructed hierarchies of citizens, he focuses instead on the ways in which the translation of Nicole Brossard’s and Daphne Marlatt’s poetry “map a space between English-Canadian and Québécoise women in this country, creating a community of feminist writers and readers ‘across national and other borders’” (p. 134). Unfortunately, this endeavor gives the impression that Dickinson is trying to create a sense of universal womanhood in Canada, and furthermore, it obfuscates a number of seminal issues. Although it is important to see translation as a political act, Dickinson shies away from an in-depth, critical discussion of gender power-dynamics and how they affect expressions of nationalism, making his analyses somewhat one-dimensional and shallow. How did women’s place within English and Quebec nationalism differ? If the marginalization of Quebec by

English Canada allowed homosexuals more space within that province, did it do the same for women? Ultimately, had Dickinson been more attuned to the crossover between patriarchy and nationalism, the existence of any gender differences between English and French-Canadian nationalism would have been illuminated.

As Dickinson suggests, just as gender disrupts the binary between nationalism and sexuality in Canadian literature, so do race and ethnicity. Exploring ethnicity and race in the final two chapters of the book, Dickinson further destabilizes the “bicultural model of Canadian literature” (p. 9). Turning to the work of Dionne Brand and Tomson Highway, he explores their works as performances, as dynamic interchanges between the author and the reader. By examining the politics of location, the placement and displacement of writer and reader, he demonstrates how Brand struggles to inscribe her national and sexual experiences in historically defined representational forms and how he, as a reader, accedes to those representations through a negotiation of his own experiences and historical context (p. 157). By employing such an approach, Dickinson reveals the ways in which Brand’s work challenges hegemonic nationalist discourses by transgressing the boundaries of sexuality and nationalism. Likewise, Dickinson argues that the plays of Highway move far beyond normative constructions of “identity,” “marginality,” and “community” (pp. 177–78). Consequently, Dickinson reads Highway’s works as performative constructions in which “multiple subject positions (Indigenous, white, male, female, gay, straight, etc.) are offered to the reader/spectator/listener as part of a participatory exchange of cross-cultural identifications and political agencies” (p. 178).

Dickinson’s book provides an exciting new way to read Canadian literature, but his analyses are marred at times by a number of shortcomings. He frequently refers to the reception of literature, yet readership aside from critics and journalists does not figure at all in his work. Ironically, he claims to examine both the production and reception of literature in Canada, but we are given very little sense about how the works of writers were actually received by the Canadian populace. For example, he writes of the “readerly panic” provoked by *Wacousta*, but makes no reference to the early nineteenth-century society in which the book was written and first published. Consequently, although Dickinson claims in his preface to be concerned with the “production and reception of Canadian, Quebecois, and First Nations literatures,” the important reception is by critics in the latter half of the twentieth century, and not by the general population contemporaneous with the respective literatures. Moreover, Dickinson is selective in terms of the issues he addresses; he attributes Symons’s neglect to homophobia and makes only flippant reference to the fact that this writer is notorious for his misogynist tendencies and frequent diatribes against women (p. 80).

In his introduction, Dickinson claims that he has organized his “national narrative of Canadian homosociality” into three sections, which fall into a chronology of colonial, modern, and postmodern. However, in the body of his study, the reader is given very little sense of time and historical context. As is the case with many queer theorists, Dickinson presents time as static and does not provide the reader with any sense of how things changed or remained the same. As a result, his chronological categories remain undefined and ambiguous throughout the book. This lack of historical contextualization is particularly annoying in his discussion of *Wacousta*. Although the evidence he provides for the existence of male homosocial desire in Richardson’s work is persuasive, he analyzes the novel without sensitivity to the context in which it was written. For example, Richardson’s description of Charles de Haldiman’s character certainly seems “queer,” and the friendship between him and Sir Everard Valletort seems imbued with sexual tension; but, is this reading just the consequence of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century sentiment and the fact that our notions of male friendship differ from nineteenth-century ones? This insensitivity to historical context is further demonstrated in such statements as, “Grainger seems to have taken Sedgwick’s concept of the triangulation of male homosocial desire” (p. 16). That an early-twentieth-century author could take a late-twentieth-century concept suggests either that Dickinson believes in the ability to transcend time, or that the editing was inadequate.

Finally, Dickinson’s selection of “canonical” works is poorly defined. How exactly did he determine which works were “canonical”? The neglect of such authors as Marie-Claire Blais is curious in a study of transgressive counternationalist narratives, and the literary criticism of Margaret Atwood should have been addressed as well (or at least mentioned). Moreover, in his discussion of “whites going native” in *Wacousta*, a discussion of the work of nineteenth-century poet and performance artist Pauline Johnson would have been an insightful addition. Unfortunately, Dickinson’s selection of seminal Canadian texts has a pronounced mid- to late-twentieth-century bias, which helps perpetuate the notion that Canada lacks a literary tradition.

For many, Dickinson’s interpretations may seem at times too subjective and contrived (indeed, he openly admits that “there is a lot of *me* scattered throughout” the book). Nevertheless, his analyses serve to open up a number of spaces for alternative readings of literature and further complicate conventional interpretations of Canadian national identity. Indeed, for those who find Canadian literary criticism sterile at times, Dickinson’s focus on sexual transgression will be an exciting departure.

JANET MIRON
Department of History
York University