

## Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

Pierre Boulle and Richard A. Lebrun, eds. — *Le Canada et la Révolution française. Actes du 6<sup>e</sup> colloque du CIEE, 29-31 octobre 1987*. Montréal: Centre interuniversitaire d'études européennes, 1989. Pp. xii, 184.

The Montreal European Studies consortium has published a fascinating selection of conference papers on the receptivity of Quebec elites and rural society to French-revolutionary ideals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two years before the Bicentennial World Congress in Paris (three published volumes on “The Image of the French Revolution”), the Sorbonne historian Michel Vovelle called in Montreal for a comparative world study of the immediate response to the Revolution from 1789 to 1815 and of the “deferred echo” in nineteenth-century ideologies and revolutionary movements. He pleaded for a modernization of the long neglected Palmer-Godechot thesis of an “Atlantic Revolution”, including most of Europe and North America, with special attention to the diffusion of knowledge of the French Revolution.

At issue for other participants was the thesis of historians such as Creighton, Ouellet, Neatby and Galarneau that mass agitation in Lower Canada in the 1790s was localized, isolated and responsive to traditional grievances rather than a product of revolutionary ideology. At best, the Revolution accentuated Quebec conservatism by fostering a counter-revolutionary mythology, reinforced by émigré priests.

Jean-Pierre Wallot has, however, provided a sophisticated neo-nationalistic reinterpretation. Elsewhere, he contended that French agents effectively exploited habitant discontent to help foment the disturbances of 1794 and 1796-7. Here, he stressed the Trudel-Galarneau consensus that some Enlightenment-inspired, anti-clerical Canadian professionals as well as British merchants welcomed the 1789 Revolution. European circumstances only hastened the adoption of the Constitution of 1791 for Lower Canada, a triumph of a Whig coalition for parliamentary government. In 1793, after the execution of Louis XVI and the outbreak of war with Britain, both French and British elites joined the rising counter-revolutionary chorus, and the clergy adopted Chief Justice Smith's theory of the Providential conquest of 1763, which spared the Canadiens the horrors of revolution. In other works, Wallot has claimed that without the defection of the bourgeoisie, the masses might have been swayed to revolution. Here, he showed that conservative historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries slighted French-revolutionary influence for their own reasons.

Jean-Paul de Lagrave's study of Quebec City and Montreal press, particularly Fleury Mesplet of the *Gazette de Montréal*, illustrated the Voltairean and even revolutionary principles purveyed to elite readers from 1789 to 1793. Yet, Lagrave provided little measure of just how widely read was Mesplet's newspaper. By contrast, Roland Le Huenen saw in early Canadian literature a scarcely nuanced conservative counter-revolutionary ideology which even inhibited praise of Napoleon in a drama until 1831.

Mario Lalancette's subtle analysis of seigneurs and tenants in La Malbaie, northeast of Quebec City, found that peasants, far from isolated, knew and appreciated the issues of the French Revolution concerning seigneurial control and tithes. However, Quebec peasant grievances on road construction and militia service predated the revolutionary era. Disputes about fishing licenses worsened, but may be attributable to expanding commercial economy. Thus, the peasant disturbances of the 1790s merely coincided with the French Revolution. Resistance to militia service was also a more serious offence, given elite fears of a French invasion. But these incidents revealed cleavages among the habitants and did not indicate a triumph for revolutionary propagandists. Lalancette would thus balance the permeability of Quebec to revolutionary ideas with the traditional view of long-standing and recent socio-economic grievances.

While Louis Knafla's paper on legal attitudes did not discern a lasting revolutionary impact on Lower Canadian law, he gave a vivid account of how the Anglophone and Loyalist elite chose to use the royal prerogative to institute special English-style sedition laws. Court records enabled him to relate a poignant narrative of the trial and conviction by circumstantial evidence of an alleged French agent, the Vermont Huguenot, David McLane, at the high point of counter-revolutionary hysteria, in 1797. A second, theoretically sophisticated paper on legal evolution by Richard Larue explored the links in the French Napoleonic code among concepts of formal liberty, equality before law and a mercantile, individualistic society. Larue speculated, without furnishing much proof, that the adaptation of the code for Quebec civil law developed a concept of a provincial "community" as a buffer in emerging Canadian federation against any French-style Napoleonic centralizing state and also a shield for collective identity against Napoleonic formal equality of all individuals in a country.

Gilles Chaussé's paper on Church hierarchy attitudes from 1775 to 1837 saw no pro-revolutionary sentiment, but rather a litany to social order, loyalty to the British Crown and a fear of the Americans. Even the liberal Catholicism of Lamennais was repudiated when the Vatican turned against him. Luca Codignola focused on the more specialized subject of the displacement of Paris as an intermediary for Vatican communication with North American Catholics from 1760 to 1820.

French religious historian Bernard Plongeron furnished the context for the papers on the Canadian Catholic Church by noting that in France, unlike Canada, there was constitutional, republican Catholic movement, and that the time has come to discard the persecutions and martyrs approach for a comparative history of a religious experience (surprisingly resilient in the Revolution), including non-Catholic faiths.

Anthony Rasporich surveyed the nineteenth-century legacy in the Toronto and Montreal press reaction to the French revolutions of 1848 and 1871. He found the French-Canadian press better informed and obviously not prone to the patronizing condemnations of national character in the *Toronto Globe* or *Montreal Gazette*. Though there were subtle differences between Whig and Tory views, *L'Avenir* was the only *rouge* or democratic paper in 1848. By 1871, there was greater tolerance of conservative republicanism, but a marked antipathy to socialism. Only the liberal *Le Pays* and Toronto's resident intellectual and former Oxford history professor, Goldwin Smith, could be interpreted as sympathetically understanding, if not sharing, aspirations of the Communards.

This volume deliberately underplayed the events of 1837-1838 because the papers discussing them were to be published in *L'Image de la Révolution française au*

*Québec, 1789-1989*, edited by Michel Grenon. The historiographical debate remains open, especially because the authors presented so little evidence of public reception of the exhortations of either newspaper editors or bishops. There seems to be broad agreement that Lower Canada was not so immune from French-revolutionary influence as nineteenth-century historians believed. If the press is a valid guide, urban elites in 1789 were initially enthralled by self-government and the rights of man. As editor, Pierre Boule concludes, however, liberal ideals also came from the Whig tradition and from American-revolutionary sources, not exclusively from France. If Quebec furnished a willing audience for the counter-revolutionary writings of Burke and De Maistre, a key determinant was the massive rejection of the French Revolution by lay elites and the Church after 1793. The continuing challenge for social historians will be to define for other regions the socio-economic discontent related by authors such as Lalancette for La Malbaie, and to find usable definitions of the bourgeoisie and of commercialization of agriculture in the Quebec context. A class-struggle theory may be difficult to apply when the bourgeoisie is divided on national lines and, in some cases, intimately tied to the seigneurial system. Whether the restive peasantry in the face of commercializing seigneurs was insular, economically conservative and nationalist, or a harbinger of a modern-revolutionary consciousness, is another unsettled question. The social history of Lower Canada in the revolutionary era has no more produced a consensus than the social history of the revolutionary France.

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Michael D. Bristol — *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Pp. 237.

Michael Bristol's *Carnival and Theater*, first published in a hard cover edition in 1985, has now been reprinted in this soft-bound version. The work sets out to document and explore the representation of carnival, and the ethos of popular culture expressed in carnival, as an integral element in Renaissance theater. In Bristol's view, theater itself recreates and expresses the traditions of the social collectivity. It does so either negatively (*e.g.*, by challenging the potential of authority to subvert collective tradition) or positively (*e.g.*, by reaffirming that collective tradition in the face of authority).

The discussion of these themes proceeds in four parts. In the first, Bristol locates his discussion in the historiographical development of ideas regarding the role of drama in society. Moving quickly on from the views of, *e.g.*, Brecht and Tillyard, who saw theater as useful in resolving conflicts or presenting a shared and harmonious world view, Bristol moves on to the critiques of Marxists and their modern acolytes, including Foucault, Bahktin, Greenblatt, Dollimore, Williams, *et al.* Here, he develops the notion that Renaissance theater could well be radical and subversive of the dominant ethos, while the carnivalesque, which it integrally embraced, functioned as much more than a safety valve. In fact, he continues, carnival and all which is implied therein provided nothing less than a purposeful working out of the plebeian cultural ethos. Thence, he sets forth to define plebeian culture itself, to access its accessibility to historical