

competent studies on church affairs are few in number, but significant work that has been done (by Roberto Perin on M<sup>sr</sup> Bourget, for example) has been largely ignored. The bibliographical entries at the end of these sections are overly burdened with dated scholarship. Finally, because of the compendium approach to the book itself, and its emphasis on social and economic concerns, the ideological and clerical components of Quebec's past are treated in isolation from the larger global contexts of both nationalism and church history between 1867 and 1929. Just as the economic and social changes that occurred in Quebec were part of a general transformation of western society by industrialization, so, too, was Quebec buffeted by all the intellectual currents that swept Europe and North America in the nineteenth century, ideas and influences that embraced both secular and Catholic notions. To fail to make this clear is to leave the intellectual history of Quebec out of the mainstream of western developments, allowing the province to be treated, as it has been in so many previous cases, as a strange exotic divorced from the experience of the rest of North America and the reality of its time. While Linteau, Durocher and Robert are successful in piercing the haze of mystery surrounding much of Quebec's economic, social and political development in the period, they have not achieved a comparable result when dealing with culture, Catholicism and nationalism.

On balance, as a textbook, *Histoire du Québec contemporain* is a success. Textbooks by their very nature never answer all the questions or explore all the problems. To the extent that this book has opened new themes and presented a fresh approach to the past, especially on the economic and social history of Quebec, it is an important contribution to recent scholarship. Its weaknesses leave room and scope for more work to be done by others with, one would hope, as much care.

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HARVEY J. GRAFF. — *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City*. New York: Academic Press, 1979. Pp. xxii, 352.

Graff's polemic on literacy, much-debated and by now often attacked, raises three distinct questions:

- (1) Does his evidence, drawn from certain nineteenth-century Ontario cities, really show that education for literacy conferred few unique advantages on working people in industrializing cities?
- (2) Does his narrative evidence, drawn from the mouths of Canadian and other school promoters, really suggest that those people imposed literacy education in order to domesticate the "dangerous" working classes?
- (3) Is there some larger frame of reference into which Graff's concerns might be translated, and what would be the appropriate research strategy for such a frame?

Answers to the first two questions can focus our speculations about the third. Graff argues that ascriptive status, not just literacy, gave people advantages. His data also support an alternative formulation, which he begins to state: illiterates had real options, but these options varied with ethnic or class context. The uses of literacy also varied between groups. Often, school promoters who thought to con-

tain the dangerous classes were advocating actual curricula that would serve the training needs of white-collar families. Such "tracking" has a complex social meaning, which may guide research.

Graff's quantitative evidence comes mainly from Hamilton and two other Ontario cities, for 1861 and 1871. Minor quibbles aside, he does show that illiterate workers could often improve their lot, whether by accumulating some money, or buying houses, or acquiring skills, or even going into business. House-buying seemed to be a cultural reflex among the Irish, ready to be activated as soon as they gained any margin from wages. Literate workers, on their side, could fail to work up the occupational ladder, especially if they were Catholics from Ireland or Blacks from the United States. For all the efforts by educators to blame crime on ignorance, arrest and conviction rates were associated with outsider ethnic origin about as much as they were with illiteracy.

The difficulty in all this is that Graff's data set includes few illiterates outside the Irish Catholic. Especially for his sub-set that can be linked to assessment data, he has too few Protestant illiterates to convey anything reliable about further breakdowns within that sub-set. Thus, he cannot say much about different age groups among Protestant illiterates, and cannot reconstruct clear pictures of their typical life history. For rigorous comparisons, there are only two cultural groups in the analysis: the Irish Catholic and the literate Protestant. Even if less stable statistical results suffice, the data can be analysed, not as an abstract comparison between literates and illiterates in general, but as a description of three concrete, distinct social groups: the Irish Catholic, the White Protestant, and the American Black. When Graff writes that the effect of literacy "interacts" with that of ethnicity, he means that literacy had a different meaning for each of these groups, depending on its own historical experience.

For the Protestant, illiteracy had once been common, especially for women, but was now rare. Since Protestants as such had access to the highest opportunities in society, their rare illiterates seemed to suffer from some abnormal handicap. Among Irish Catholics, a substantial minority were illiterate. For them, semi-skilled work was itself a mark of success; many at this level translated their gains into early marriage, homeownership, and large families. Though the inability to handle written symbols barred them from most non-manual work, low proportions of even their literate countrymen advanced beyond the level of semi-skilled work. The ladder of educational and occupational mobility had produced little for any Irish; all, literate and illiterate alike, were pushed to compensate by seeking other gains.

Most revealing, in some ways, is the experience of the small group of Blacks (115 adults in 1861 Hamilton, out of a 9,520 total). About half this group were illiterates; they had a *higher* proportion of skilled workers than the literate had. The more severe ethnic isolation of Blacks, plus their recent experience as illiterates within slavery, meant that illiteracy was little bar to the demonstration of competence within their own community. If anything, literacy gave some Blacks more links to the outside community, confirmed the experience of subordination, and discouraged the free enactment of competence. For illiterates to have the options that Graff insists were real, they needed to live within a community for which literacy was not a trait of success. For the Protestant White, no such community existed. For the Irish Catholic, some such community existed when defined in terms of family, home and savings. For the Black, that community was virtually their whole group. The more segregated a group, and the more strictly barred from the control mechanisms of the society, the less important did its members find literacy for their individual lives.

Partly because of these differences in community structure, educational "statesmen" did not necessarily expect to accomplish any social-control goals

through literacy as such. Often, literacy was simply a skill that made great sense for the particular ethnic group to which the school promoters themselves belonged. Like many teachers and administrators since then, they conceptualized policy in terms of their own life histories. Beyond that, they feared what literacy might do to mobilize the lower orders, and they therefore tried to embed it in the cushioning effects of moral education. But Graff insists on conflating the goals of literacy with the goals of the school systems. He writes regularly about "literacy education", when his own sources described a schooling designed to nip any liberating effects from literacy. He mentions without serious comment those few labour spokesmen who hoped that literacy would enable workers to decode the culture for themselves. And he may romanticize the extent to which face-to-face communication ever permitted workers to form independent judgments about the larger cultural system whose hegemony they accepted.

But Graff's central argument is valid, and should be integrated into the larger picture that is accumulating from the work of investigators as diverse as Michael Katz and Patricia Cline Cohen. The whole question of social tracking needs to be re-analysed. On the one hand stands the unilinear model, in which all abilities, cognitive products, goods, rewards and powers are distributed along a single scale of status. If a truly unilinear scale, some point on it would also mark a break between classes. That simple picture is obviously unreal. At the least, there are alternative routes of individual development that allow for differences in taste. But here arises an ambiguity of conceptualization. Where any set of alternative tracks receives expression, whether it is the alternative between Whig and Tory, or between left-brain and right-brain, this can be a divergence that society only recognizes, or one that it utilizes. To what extent does any such tracking reflect, to what extent does it rather diffract and de-fuse, some underlying unilinear system? Much recent literature has assumed that tracking is necessarily hierarchical and discriminatory. But notice the following pairs of tracks: the literate and the oral; the bureaucratic and the property-oriented; the verbal and the numeric; the analytic and the intuitive. These categories do not translate neatly into each other, but they have a common problematic character. Each embodies some genuine distinction as to quality or temperament, but each *may* also transmit a distinction of hierarchy. Sometimes there are real possibilities for reversal of values when it comes to deciding which side of the pair will carry the greater prestige. Was high verbalism a prerogative of a university-trained governing caste, or was it a polite "accomplishment" allowed to preachers and women? The fragmenting of social hierarchy into apparent qualitative differences, and into an array of such differences on which the analyst can play transformation games, is itself a major feature of nineteenth-century society. It reveals the connection between industrial specialization and romantic temperament. The fact that the culture can play tricks with itself about what literacy means — or what left-brain dominance means, or what feminine temperament meant, or what liberalism means — only reveals the contradictory uses of the dichotomizing impulse: for proliferating ways to mobilize energy, and for deflecting energy away from conflict.

Graff argues, persuasively, that the illiterate were quite capable of basic numeracy. He does not note that such numeracy bears to oral skill the same relation that symbol-using bears to literacy — and that there is a "higher numeracy" just as there is a "higher literacy". In the consciousness of many, the distinction between *levels* of symbol-using can be deflected into a qualitative distinction between the symbol types in which individuals specialized. This shift between the hierarchical and the qualitative is not only a methodological aspect of how the investigator thinks. It is also an aspect of the social phenomena to be investigated, whenever we confront the intersection between the social and the

cognitive. For the historian, the important task is to make something concrete out of this shift, and not merely exploit it for critique mongering in the Foucault mode.

Graff works on one of these shifts: that from insider/outsider into literacy/illiteracy. He takes his material mainly from *who* the literates/illiterates were, and from *what* historians and other polemicists have said about that shift. He tells us what illiterates could achieve. He suggests, mainly in his copious, informative footnotes, the wealth of problems that remain to be explored, on those boundaries where different cognitive modes combine to form complex styles. Historians of electoral politics have come to recognize that they should either unearth individual data, or make aggregate data serve the ends of individual analysis. Likewise the cognitive historian, especially the one who aims to rehabilitate some popular mode, should search out examples of popular cognition, or should contrive to make high culture serve as indicator to the popular. With such materials, the historian can then analyse concrete examples of how the hierarchical and the qualitative interact in daily thought. Only then will it become possible to see some way out from the fragmented strategies of popular coping, into comprehensive schemata of popular understanding.

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GREGORY S. KEALEY. — *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. xvii, 433.

Gregory S. Kealey has written a courageous book, which attempts to chart a direction for Canadian labour history in keeping with E. P. Thompson's focus upon class as an emergent phenomenon. In its application to Toronto (chosen as a case study), Kealey's programme constitutes an interpretation of craft-based trades unionism, Knights of Labor producer consciousness, ethnic organization, elements of Tory electoral politics, and a variety of particularistic political controversies under the aegis of "class struggle". This is not a linear, progressive development, however, but — in the period discussed — one in which pre-industrial concepts and behaviours continued in varying degree to characterize Toronto workers. As Kealey puts it neatly, in summary:

Much of the [labour] movement's strength lay in the workers' knowledge of a past that was totally different from their present. They knew that industrial capitalism was a social system with a history. ... This realization injected their struggles with a precocious vigour. (p. 295)

This vigour, however, inevitably was sapped by the failure to envision an alternative future for the industrial life of the city.

I find myself in considerable sympathy with Kealey's programme. At the same time, I cannot report that Kealey succeeds in either establishing his thesis or demonstrating that Toronto materials can sustain his analytic framework. Out of respect for the seriousness of Kealey's enterprise, the balance of the review will concentrate upon what I think is a substantial shortfall between ambition and realization, leaving generally unsaid the respect I feel for the author as pioneer and as assiduous researcher.