

A. SOBOUL, G. LEMARCHAND and M. FOGEL. — *Le Siècle des Lumières*, tome I: *L'Essor (1715-1750)*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977. Two volumes: pp. 1036 "*Peuples et civilisations*" series, vol. XI.

In the universities of the English-speaking world there are several hundred historians reading, writing and teaching French history as a professional duty. In French universities you could count on your fingers the historians professionally devoted to the history of the English-speaking world. Combined with other facts, such as that the English-speaking peoples have gone abroad in large numbers ever since the period of this book, whereas French peoples have tended to stay at home, this curious imbalance betrays a mentality in France that is so pathetically self-centred, so chauvinist, that it has to be experienced to be believed. It is a mentality in which the wars of the past are seen almost as though they were still in progress and the enemies of past centuries still enemies today. Ordinary Frenchmen still absorb anti-English feelings, like anti-Semitism, in early childhood from their elders who keep up old hatreds, even in songs from the period of the present book, such as *Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre* or *Le 31 du mois d'août (Les Plus belles chansons de France*, Hachette, 1977, pp. 25 and 55), the English equivalents of which dropped out of use many years ago. The writers of *Le Siècle des lumières* are among that large number who use history as General de Gaulle used foreign policy, to disparage the English-speaking peoples, to cultivate a sense of French self-importance, and so to improve upon the mess which a busy Deity made of the last three centuries in the original.

Consider, for example, the series in which this book appears, *Peuples et civilisations*, widely thought to be the most authoritative general histories. The editors recently decided to bring the series up to date with new volumes to replace some of the old, but Robert Mandrou's new volume on the second half of the 17th century is still called, *Louis XIV en son temps*, and the two old volumes on the period 1789-1815 are still in place under the titles, *La Révolution française* and *Napoléon*. On the other hand, the old volumes XI and XII, *La Prépondérance anglaise* and *La Fin de l'Ancien Régime et la révolution américaine* have now been dropped in favour of the present volume and the one to follow it under the general title, *Le Siècle des lumières*, in which we are to be left in no doubt that *les lumières* were Frenchmen using the French language (e.g. pp. 365-6).

Some rather vigorous re-arrangements were necessary to eliminate the English-speaking peoples from the titles to the 18th-century volumes. The century had to be divided at 1750 instead of 1763 in order to diminish the epoch-making British victories of the Seven Years War by removing them from the end of the volume where they once marked the climax of *La Prépondérance anglaise* and putting them meaninglessly at the beginning of a volume that will lead up to the French revolution. Then, the volumes for the entire period 1715-1789 had to be combined under the one title, *Le Siècle des lumières*, because it is too hard even in France to find a title for the first half of the century that does not somehow recognize British preponderance even in the history of ideas. Finally, the new title had to be chosen for only one of the three equal parts which make up this book. It has no reference whatever to the other two parts which deal with economic, social, political and diplomatic history. Those parts were precisely the ones, however, that the old title fitted most inevitably. Thus, only one-third of the present volume is about the Enlightenment, and the title seems to have been chosen as one that might be used to make the early 18th century seem French. If British historians approached history in the same spirit, they could reasonably entitle the entire two centuries from 1715 to 1915 *La Prépondérance anglaise* and be done with it.

These changes in title reflect changes in interpretation which disparage the English-speaking peoples in the manner familiar to students of Gaullist foreign

policy. Take, for instance, the early industrial revolution in Europe. This was as British a phenomenon, after all, as the French revolution was French, and if history shows anything it shows that the rest of the world followed the British example in this field. Indeed, the present volume candidly records some of the salient facts: that Britain had a preponderance in maritime trade with 26.1% of European shipping (p. 16), the most modern and sound currency (p. 123), a unique series of technical and mechanical improvements (pp. 187-93), a cotton industry in which the take-off was "foudroyant" (p. 219), and so on, all this with a population and territory only one-third the size of the French. Yet these facts are robbed of their collective significance in this volume by being scattered about, and in the general conclusion of the subject Britain has been blended into an anonymous "western zone" (pp. 177 ff.). The underlying assumption is that all nations were inexorably moving into a modern industrial stage, a process in which British primacy had no importance because France and other nations were industrializing independently. This wobbly assumption has already been widely adopted in France where it is being propped up with some energetic spadework. It gathers further support in Marxist circles everywhere because it satisfies the Marxist dogma that history in an inexorable unfolding and in no sense accidental or contingent.

This book assumes a double standard throughout. Catalonia, Alsace and Corsica are treated as naturally and inevitably French, but Ireland as subject to "British tyranny" (p. 685). The Swiss, Rousseau (pp. 365-6) and the Corsican, Buonaparte, are French; but the naturalized English composer, Handel, who wrote all his major works in English and in England during the half century he lived there (longer than either Napoleon or Rousseau lived in France) is a German composer (p. 429). The French Jansenists are properly summarized, but the English Quakers are only one of Voltaire's quaint hobbies. The authors know that Locke and Newton were "les maîtres à penser du XVIIIe siècle" (p. 359) and the Italian Beccaria's great book, "une des œuvres maîtresses du siècle des lumières" (pp. 376, 392) but they go on to discuss the early Enlightenment for 300 pages as a French phenomenon. At this rate, Americans may find in the next volume of the series that their war of independence was won, like the Second World War, by the French *résistance*!

We in Canada, with our present devotion to bilingualism, would do well to think carefully about our position in this French landscape of modern history. When we ask classes to read French history books such as *Le Siècle des lumières*, we are asking them to enter a world where English-speaking Canadians have no place unless they are willing to deny their own origins and trample on their own history. There are in this book fourteen entries for Plaisance (Nfld.), but none for Saint John's, only five for Boston and thirteen for New England. The Acadians are noisily expelled and we are told that the Quebeckers, too, might have been expelled if there had been fewer of them; but there is not a word about the authoritarian government, the intolerance, the legal torture and other unpleasant features of the French regime in Canada which used to rile the British-American colonists to the south. Canada gets nearly as much space as New England, but only because it was a French colony. Montcalm is already here as "le défenseur de Québec" (p. 36), but Wolfe the victor is absent. In the Anglo-French struggle of the period, the British and Americans are made to seem somehow wrong and the French right. But then, the bibliographies on Canada do not list Harold Innis, W.J. Eccles, C.P. Stacey, Gerald Graham, E.E. Rich and many others, but they do list Cameron "Nisch" (p. 25) sporting a new "c" lost by Robert "Shakleton" (p. 387). These omissions and distortions may not be intentional. They may be only the unconscious products of a self-centred world where few historians really read, much less write, the history of any other nation but their own. After all, the bibliographies in the

present work also omit the major writings of Ragnhild Hatton, Charles Wilson, Charles Boxer, Ralph Davis, P.G.M. Dixon, Richard Herr on Spain, David Smith on Helvétius and many others. Need one say more? It is plain that the authors of *Le Siècle des lumières* must be forgiven, for they know not what they do. They do not seem to have read the historical literature on the period.

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PIERRE-JAKEZ HÉLIAS. — *The Horse of Pride. Life in a Breton Village.* Foreword by Lawrence Wylie. Translated and Abridged by June Guicharnaud. New York and London: Yale University Press, 1978. Pp. xvii, 351.

Ce livre (traduit d'abord du breton en français, puis maintenant du français en anglais) se singularise par le fait qu'il est une étude en ethnologie et folklore réalisée par un membre du groupe étudié, qui est aussi un universitaire. Monsieur Pierre-Jakez Hélias, professeur de langues celtiques et de folklore à l'Université de Rennes, doit moins à ses titres académiques qu'au fait d'être issu d'une famille de pauvres paysans bretons, pour l'extraordinaire chaleur et l'adresse avec lesquelles il trace le portrait de son milieu d'origine. Par certains côtés, les ambitions d'Hélias en 1975 sont semblables à celles de Jules Michelet en 1845 dans *Le peuple*. L'un et l'autre sont des intellectuels ayant leurs racines dans le peuple. Tous deux cherchent à leur façon propre à exprimer la compréhension profonde et intuitive qu'ils pensent avoir du peuple. Tous les deux se sentent capables de tirer l'essence même de cette connaissance. Pour Michelet la vertu première du peuple de Paris était son esprit de sacrifice; pour Hélias, la plus belle qualité du paysan breton était son orgueil obstiné. Il est évident que le procédé de simplification est néanmoins beaucoup plus raisonné et méthodique chez Hélias que chez l'illustre historien du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, souvent arbitraire dans ses jugements.

Non pas que Monsieur Hélias ne nous offre pas parfois une envolée originale, dans *Le cheval d'orgueil*, au cours de ses méditations sur les changements culturels et matériels rapides que ce peuple a subis au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Sur le mode humoristique, dans les toutes dernières pages, Hélias imagine un avenir où le breton sera parlé dans plus d'un tiers du territoire français (laissant le reste de la France rurale au provençal et au basque) par une élite aisée qui aura abandonné les villes pour s'installer à la campagne. Cette élite laisse les énormes cités-prisons industrielles à une classe ouvrière parlant français et composée de paysans bretons émigrés.

Cependant, l'essentiel du livre ne traite pas du futur mais du passé — un passé appelé avec l'affection et le profond respect d'un fils fidèle à la société de ses ancêtres. L'exemple de *Le cheval d'orgueil* montre que la piété filiale peut inspirer un travail solide. Dans le livre d'Hélias cet attachement lui permet de recréer le passé vécu de l'ancienne Bretagne d'une manière fort persuasive.

En 1882, une trentaine d'années avant la naissance d'Hélias, Guy de Maupassant écrivait au sujet de cette région:

Connaissez-vous Pont-l'Abbé? — 'Non' — Eh bien! C'est la ville la plus bretonne de toute cette Bretagne bretonnante qui va de la pointe du Raz au Morbihan, cette contrée qui contient l'essence des mœurs, des légendes, des coutumes bretonnes. Encore aujourd'hui ce coin de pays n'a presque pas changé (Guy de MAUPASSANT, « Un fils », dans *Les Contes de la Bécasse*).