

include contemporary shots, photos of extant buildings, reproductions of advertisements, and floor plans. To read in the captions of the “car-roofed” bachelor shack, the “hip-roof” cottage, the “end-gable, side-hall, and cross-gable houses,” and the “gambrel roof” barn introduces the novice to a new vocabulary. But it also provides an invaluable picture of the cultural landscape. In the final analysis, the book itself represents a valuable snap shot of one dimension of the Prairie experience. Because that one dimension intersects with economic, material, social and regional history, historians of various fields will welcome it. In Mills’ words, the “early dwellings ... offer us an opportunity to comprehend the dimensions of the historical processes by which a quarter of a million families converged on the Prairies...” (91).

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Fernand Ouellet — *Economy, Class, and Nation in Quebec. Interpretive Essays* (edited and translated by Jacques A. Barbier). Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991. Pp. xv, 302.

A publisher’s blurb can be terribly misleading. In this case, it comes in the form of a statement on the back cover, claiming that in this book, Ouellet examines the social and economic history of Quebec from New France to the Quiet Revolution. That surely makes it forgivable for the reader to expect a broad survey. But, though there is impressive breadth in this work, it is breadth of a different sort from a survey; and it is obvious that such was the author’s intention.

Fortunately, in the next sentence, the publisher goes some way to making good for that misleading statement with: “A timely and illuminating context for current events on the Canadian scene.” That, it certainly is, though one could wish Ouellet had gone just a little further in relating his work to current events, that he had taken it a step past an analysis of historians to some consideration of their impact.

What Professor Ouellet has contributed is a series of meticulously researched and argued essays which focus on certain aspects of social and economic history. About two thirds of the book deals with New France and with the century following the conquest. Within these essays are what may be termed sub-essays on the development of Quebec historiography. Those familiar with debates over his work, particularly with those on the heterogeneity of New France’s people, on the limits of the impact of the conquest and on ruralization after the conquest, will still find much of interest in this part of the book since Ouellet has also integrated responses to his critics into the body of his writing.

For the period following the mid-nineteenth century, Ouellet follows the same formula, though less satisfactorily. His work remains suggestive but sketchier, limiting itself to very brief treatments of working class life and of women.

Finally, there are a few pages, a very few, on the Quiet Revolution which make up the only disappointing part of the book. Here, one expects, the thesis running through his essays will flower. But it does not. Instead, there is a bland outline of the

Quiet Revolution that screams for at least a sentence or two of the scholarship and blunt common sense that characterize the meatier essays.

The major theme that runs through these essays is that historical scholarship on Quebec has been limited by ideological blinkers that can be traced back to Garneau, that were given quasi-racist definition by Groulx, that have been shared by historians both English-speaking and French-speaking, and that are still worn by some of our most prominent scholars. So it is, for example, that one frequently detects an implied rule of scholarship that Quebec society is and always has been homogeneous.

Even marxist analysis failed to dent the myth of homogeneity. Confronted with class, marxists and marxians have tended to treat all French-speaking Quebeckers as working class — despite glaring evidence that many were not. It was (and is) also common to treat all anglophones as belonging to some privileged class or, at least as common, simply to ignore their existence altogether. As he works through each period, Ouellet provides telling analyses of sample variations on the theme.

He does not extend his analysis to popular historians, an unfortunate omission if only because of their substantial impact. At least one popular historian, for example, did try to square the always fuzzily defined circle of race, class and nation. In his *Petit manuel d'histoire du Québec*, Léandre Bergeron recognized the existence of a francophone middle class, but then dismissed it as “unquébécois” so that he could invent a new and homogeneous race-class-nation, *les canayens* who were all francophone and working class.

One might dismiss Bergeron's analysis as comic were it not that it was so widely circulated and that something close to its assumptions still underlie much scholarship and socio-political discussion in and about Quebec. That is why it is unfortunate that Professor Ouellet did not pursue his thesis into and beyond the Quiet Revolution. It is surely arguable, and well within the framework of his thesis, that perceived homogeneity has not only distorted our understanding of the whole society of Quebec, but has also been used to create a secondary myth of unanimity on political and social questions. In confining himself narrowly to the work of historians, Ouellet has deprived us of what surely would have been stimulating insights into the impact of their scholarship on thinking beyond the academic world.

But this comes dangerously close to suggesting that Professor Ouellet should have written a different book; and that would be a most unfair criticism. What he has produced is a fine example of solid research and close reasoning by an historian whose grasp of theory is equalled (an equation rarer than one might think) by his understanding of the realities of daily life.

No doubt, this book will attract debate and some attack. But it would take a very shallow intellect indeed to dismiss it. And a shallower one still not to delight in the maturity of a scholarship that can fit such precise studies into a broader context. In this case, at least, a publisher's enthusiasm can be forgiven.

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