

of those ideas raises many questions. It remains for historians to examine these ideas in historical context and trace the impact of the ethos of modernity on American schools.

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Gilles Gallichan. *Livre et Politique au Bas-Canada, 1791-1849*. Québec: Septentrion, 1991. Pp. 519.

Gilles Gallichan announces a remarkably ambitious and multi-faceted project in the opening sections of this book. He proposes to study the insertion of "the book" (as a generic knowledge-form) changing relations between people and the printed word in his period. He proposes to probe the dynamic, set in motion by the Lower Canadian Constitution of 1791, under which the printed word acquired a new importance, both practical and symbolic, in processes of state formation.

Gallichan is to be commended both for the breadth of vision evident in his research problematic, and for the painstaking, minutiae-attentive work which presents us with the first serious history of the libraries of the Lower Canadian and Union Parliaments. There is much to be learned from this work about the kinds of information to which politicians could gain easy access. Is it not intriguing, for example, to discover that, among the 25 works considered by a parliamentary committee of 1801 to be of prime impor-

tance, we encounter, alongside legal dictionaries, constitutional summaries, and parliamentary guides, books by Smith, Beccaria, Bentham, Montesquieu, and Grotius? Even leaving aside the unanswered sociological questions posed by the presence of such works—did anyone read them?—the symbolic importance of these texts is evident. Their presence also suggests a preoccupation, on the part of at least some parliamentarians, with the main political issues agitating contemporary Europe.

In the first of four sections composing this work, Gallichan provides a descriptive overview of social and cultural life in early Lower Canada and a brief discussion of the context and reception of the 1791 Constitution. A second section examines in rather general terms some dimensions of early library history, the various forms of printed material available in the colony, the organization of official printing, and the political place of the press, as well as the reading habits of some members of the Assembly.

The third and fourth sections of the work, by far the longest, are devoted to the parliamentary library. Here Gallichan charts the checkered history of the library collections, examines the biographies and activities of parliamentary librarians, and reflects occasionally on the utility of library materials to politicians. He proceeds to a detailed reconstruction and classification of the parliamentary library catalogues and examines the leading works present in each of some ten categories. An appendix to the work provides information about the physical organization of the libraries.

Much of this information is valuable, informative, and available here for the first time. Yet I found Gallichan's book to be profoundly disappointing, for all its instructive elements. Gallichan simply does not pursue seriously the problematic he announces at the outset of the work. He does not seem to command the sociological categories whose mobilization is a condition for the investigation of the relations among changing knowledge-forms, knowledge-producing and -receiving practices, and the formation of relations of state. In consequence, he presents the reader with a few accounts of skirmishes over print-related matters, before seeking refuge in a conventional descriptive library history.

There is no serious examination here of the general process of the political centralization of knowledge, a process of which the accumulation of a parliamentary library was but one element. Indeed, because Gallichan's operative category is most commonly "the book" he cannot gain access to many of the main practices and forms of knowledge at issue. These practices and forms are at least three-fold. First, practices of systematic social observation and regular reporting generated the report, the sessional paper, and similar forms of knowledge which were commonly preserved in print. Colonial governments became nothing less than bulimic in their generation of such knowledge forms, but Gallichan rarely, if ever, mentions them. Second, and inextricably connected with the former, are practices (primarily of state) aimed at the standardization of objects of knowledge. These practices

were necessary for the generation of knowledge in forms that could indeed be centralized. They include a range of things from the specification of weights and measures to the standardization of the identities of members of civil society. Third, and again inextricably connected, was the organization of centralized and centralizing state forms.

While Gallichan, to his credit, notices the parallel between the development of parliament and changes in the nature of the dominant forms of social knowledge, his appreciation of this phenomenon is impoverished. Where he should point the reader to the ways in which fundamental changes in the organization of political power structured parallel changes in knowledge forms, instead he focuses on minor skirmishes: for instance, that the conventional view of anglophone historians about the literacy levels of francophone deputies was false; that many of them read and enjoyed books. Here descriptive historiography cannot address what is fundamentally a sociological problematic.

Gilles Gallichan has pointed to an interesting and important set of phenomena, even if he seems not to have understood them well. To his credit he does recover a substantial part of the material necessary for others to do so. His examination of the parliamentary library will long remain a standard work.

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