

## Book Reviews

*The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France.* By Simon Nora and Alain Minc. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1980. pp. 186. \$12.50

Preparation for the future implies inculcating a freedom that will cause even the most deep-rooted habits and ideologies to lose their validity. This requires an adult society that can enhance spontaneity, mobility, and imagination while accepting the responsibilities of total regulation.

To the plodding Anglo-Celtic mind, the notion of totally regulated spontaneity may be at first a little difficult to grasp. But for Simon Nora and Alain Minc, both *inspecteurs des finances* and thus part of France's ruling administrative elite, the reconciliation of order and freedom in a future computerized world is simply the latest chapter of a struggle between the interests of the state and the individual which stretches back through three centuries of French history to time of Colbert.

This book, which was originally a report commissioned in 1976 by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, himself a former *inspecteur des finances*, and delivered to him in 1978, has had a considerable impact in France, where it has been widely distributed and discussed. For the North American reader, the book is interesting for two reasons. First, it is most informative about the contradictions and tensions within contemporary France. Second, there is a useful discussion of the evolving technology of computers and telecommunications and of the economic, social, and political implications of computerization for the future.

In the wake of the student riots of 1968 and the economic uncertainties of Europe after the 1973 oil crisis, France has been undergoing a period of intense self-examination, culminating in the Socialist victories of 1981. Nora and Minc's book is evidence of these strains of the late 1970s. They see three overlapping crises facing France: a decline in international economic competitiveness, hostility between the state and the citizen, and the threat to France's sovereignty posed by "excessive pressure from foreign governments or groups whose objectives may run counter to hers."

And which "foreign governments or groups" might those be? No prize for the right answer here: the French have seen the enemy and it is the United States and most especially I.B.M. There is something almost dotty

about Nora and Minc's obsession with I.B.M., whose influence they see as the modern equivalent of the Catholic Church and the Communist International rolled into one. I.B.M., the quintessence of evil and *le défi américain*, must be stopped at all costs, even if it means suffering the ultimate French humiliation of having to be nice to other countries. The authors are positively warlike on this point: "Independence would be vain and as easy to outflank as a useless Maginot Line if it were not supported by an international alliance having the same objectives."

Nora and Minc are calmer in their discussion of the dangers and challenges of computerization for French foreign trade. Their analysis of Japan's success in incorporating technological change in future planning is perceptive and casts a helpful light on our concern in Canada with the development of an industrial strategy.

As for France's internal stability, the authors see the computerization of society having the potential for either exacerbating tensions to the point of explosion or creating a new and more democratic "information society" in which the governors and the governed would be linked in a more equal, decentralized relationship with each other. The ultimate contradiction remains, however: only the central government, guided by enlightened technocrats like Nora and Minc, can do all the planning and regulation for this decentralized society. This is, in short, a very French book.

But on the more general question of how, exactly, the new technology of computers works, the authors are also extremely interesting. It was Nora and Minc who coined the term *télématique* — telematics — which has happily vanquished its ghastly American rival "communications".

*The Computerization of Society* can be recommended to the general reader as a useful guidebook to the whole world of telematics. If you are being humiliated at cocktail parties by people who know what Analog Transmission and Modems are when you don't, Nora and Minc are at hand with a useful glossary. When the telephone, television, and cable companies furiously rage together about satellites, the book helps clarify the enormous significance of the dispute.

The telematics revolution is already upon us. We confront it directly when the bank teller summons up the pitiful remnants of our bank balance from Toronto, when Air Canada optimistically reserves our flight two months hence, when the satellite edition of *The Globe and Mail* arrives on our doorstep in Halifax. And the brave new world of Telidon, electronic mail, and home video display terminals is within our grasp. We are in the midst of an enormous technological transformation, which in the striking phrase of Nora and Minc, "will alter the entire nervous system of social organization." *The Computerization of Society* offers at least a glimpse of that exciting and arduous future.

*Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: A Memoir.* By Austin Clarke, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980. Pp. 192.

In a sense all writing is memorial. In the same vein, too, one can say that fiction is never really fiction at all; that what stems from the creative well of the imagination has its inevitable roots in one's actual life experiences. The case of Austin Clarke, the Barbadian-born Canadian novelist, is no exception, for in nearly all his works he has been plumbing the sources of his background; this search would be inevitable in one aware of his integrity in expressing fidelity to the place in which he was born; it is also significant in terms of identifying a specific ethnic point of view in a pluralistic Canada.

*Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, which won the Casa de las Americas literature prize given in Cuba in 1980, spans the author's life from 1944 to 1950 and indicts his colonial educational system which fostered the virtues of the British and the glories of the empire. In Barbados itself, such an educational system became part of the structure of a society, and ultimately became responsible for much of the self-alienation and self-contempt among its recipients. Thus, an overriding sense of futility is seen in Clarke's irony, in which the central character grapples against becoming a "learning fool" in his growing up—all this with a backdrop of the Second World War in Europe, the very place which was supposed to be the fount of civilization and learning. As the narrator shifts from a childhood to an adult perception of himself, he is confronted by a constantly nagging desire of wanting to prove himself against having his self-image defined for him by his colonial master; contrarily, too, it leads to the obsession of wanting to live up to the standards set by the colonial master, and results in a burning insecurity. This sense is crucially manifested when the creative individual has the impulse to write his memoirs as some form of cathartic release of the prevailing angst. But even here there are problems: failure invites itself. Sam Selvon clearly suggests this in *Moses Ascending* (1975), when the central character, plagued by doubt and distraction says, "I longed to get back to my philosophizing and my analysing, decorating my thoughts with little grace-notes and showing the white people that we, too, could write book" (p. 109).

The young narrator in *Growing Up Stupid* begins life in St. Matthias District, with the aim of becoming a doctor or a lawyer, the passports to a middle class life of ease on the island. At Combermere School, attended mostly by Blacks (the white boys went to Harrison College), "floggings" were the order of the day. Here one is rigorously prepared for the overseas Cambridge School Examination with its irrelevant, semi-classical curriculum and posing "questions which had nothing to do with the way we understood ourselves, with the way we saw ourselves. But they were 'educated' questions, and we were educated Combermere boys" (p. 181). Having ultimately "qualified" with the B.A. Intermediate (external), one was significantly given all sorts of privileges, including having as many

children "from as many women as you like...and you could breed them, those blacker women." Finally, you paid them back by allowing them to use your name—a testimony to the perverse system of patronage that became part of the island's colonial legacy.

Clarke's accurate depiction is spiced, as always, with his humour and sense of irony. The narrator omnisciently looks back and sees himself as a "running fool," the sprinter. Later he joins the Cadet Corps, becomes a corporal, and carries a wooden gun in earnest preparation for soldiery in case Britain calls upon the reserves in the empire. In one of the best comical settings in the novel, we see young black boys executing manoeuvres with wooden guns while the Second World War wages on; while, too, these same boys lustily sing "Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves," and pray for the King and the Royal Family. Additional irony is underlined with everyone aspiring and hoping to live in America—primarily because the educational system had not placed any value on anything indigenous.

Clarke continues in this ironic vein when he describes Belleville Avenue, "the ironical showpiece of my country: clean and white, clean and black," with its tennis clubs, yet containing the road sweeper "efficient as a starved dog," in sharp contrast to the coachmen "dressed like fat cockroaches."

Clarke combines his irony with an unusual penchant for dialogue which cuts short long-winded introspection. Thus he aptly creates his scenes, yet can be playfully mocking ("*Je suis, tu suis*") when the young narrator cannot pass French. He juxtaposes the Queen's English with Barbadian dialect to make his point with compelling effect, using all the nuances of both languages at his disposal, thereby showing his tremendous versatility. Name irony is also used—as with Milton, that of the narrator's, compared with the English poet's, with compelling naiveté and charm: "I asked this new Milton whether his name was real or a nickname. How could someone so close to me, someone I saw walking barefoot everyday....," how could he be named Milton "like that blind man who talked about paradise?" But later the young narrator becomes a "dreaming fool," who constantly carries in his head ideas of English history and culture while aping poetry in the manner of Milton and Keats—as "all this stuck in my mind and I lived this Union Jack time as if I were in an English countryside."

*Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* is further testimony of Clarke's immense talent. It has all the ingredients of his previous books; here, perhaps, Clarke is simpler, but more direct—having fun at history and at himself (no doubt) in a fictional - memorial genre which the best sociologist or historian would find hard to match.

*Cyril Dabydeen*

*Voltaire: A Biography.* By Haydn Mason. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. xiii, 194. \$14.95.

In his preface Haydn Mason appropriately addresses the question which undoubtedly must cross the mind of any scholar into whose hands this slim volume falls: why another biography of Voltaire and what is the role of this effort when teams of contemporary critics are at work producing definitive biographies of an encyclopedic scope? The author attempts to capture the "essence of the man revealed under the pressure of circumstances" (p. xiii) by concentrating on seven periods in Voltaire's life. The seven chapters are linked by geographical reference: England, Cirey, Berlin, Geneva, Ferney (two), and Paris. The first and the last, youth and death, are directly linked to the detailed chronology in the appendix. The intervening chapters deal with themes: luxury, personalities (Frederick and Voltaire the patriarch), and works (*Candide* and *L'Ingénu*). Mason admits his choice was guided by what appear to him to be periods glossed over by his predecessors.

Mason is a conscientious biographer, sensitive to the many pitfalls open to the writer who attempts to explain a life already recounted by so many others. He is cautious, explaining Voltaire's malaises as both real illness and hypochondria. In reducing the discussion to an exemplary brevity and in attempting to be prudent, occasional sentences startle the reader who is otherwise treated to a lucid style. Here is an example: "No simple explanation of Voltaire's hypochondria is likely to be forthcoming, nor indeed are we in a position to judge whether there were abiding physiological causes to explain it in whole or in part. That he himself suffered greatly from his health can however scarcely be doubted." With similar tentativeness Mason cursorily peeks into the Pandora's box of maternal influence, homosexuality and the equivocal roles of women in Voltaire's life and their influence on him. Mason maintains a judiciously dignified distance and only signals these questions unearthed by other biographers.

Two texts, *Candide* and *L'Ingénu*, are chosen for drawing similarities with Voltaire's correspondance and biography. Mason, again the cautious biographer, notes that he has but one useful function: to delineate areas where the world of the text and the world of the author's daily life overlap in the hope of catching an element that went into the amalgam of forces creating the text (p. 92). He strictly limits his role to locating the interface and leaves interpretation largely to the reader.

This biography relies heavily on Voltaire's correspondance and really attempts to capture the life of Voltaire rather than illustrate a thesis which would explain the man or the works. It contains several interesting digressions from the seven focal points in Voltaire's life. These achronological discussions touch on visitors to Voltaire, particularly of English provenance, and rely on A.-M. Rousseau's book, previously reviewed (favorably) by Mason. Mason also includes a brief consideration of the fluctuations in Voltaire's reputation from his death to the present. The biographer states that "two hundred years on from Voltaire's death an

attempt is being made to see him rounded and whole. It is a major academic industry . . ." (p. 155) This biography may be seen as a part of that industry and the attempt at viewing the philosopher-king as a rounded and whole person. It is not entirely a novel approach to arrive at the whole by concentrating on the parts. Mason acknowledges his debt to Delattre whose notes were published by Pomeau.

Mason's book is a pleasure to read. It will inspire young scholars to read further and will provide them a balanced picture. It will inspire the more advanced scholar to reflect again on the life of Voltaire and to attempt to decide why Mason selected the episodes he did, why he omitted others, and what was the basis for his choice of the very few works in his selected bibliography.

Mason cites the apotheosis of Voltaire and the offering of the laurel crown to the elderly author just a few days prior to his death. Two hundred years later, Mason offers another crown as tribute to the man he terms a model of elegance and whose artistic testament had the classical qualities of balance, conciseness, and clarity. Mason has certainly applied these same standards with great success to his biography.

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*Russia in Pacific Waters, 1715-1825: A survey of the Origins of Russia's Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific.* By Glynn Barratt. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp. 300. \$24.95.

This comprehensive survey of the origins of Russia's naval presence in North-East Asia, in the Aleutian and the Kurile Island chains, and along the North-West Pacific coast of America covers the period from the last years of Peter the Great's reign to the accession of Tsar Nicholas I. The need for a sea route from Okhotsk to the Kamchatkian Peninsula to support and hasten Russian Siberian expansion brought the Russian navy to the North Pacific; in 1715 a small vessel was built at Okhotsk which then made the crossing to Kamchatka. On his death bed Peter the Great signed the orders for Vitus Bering's first voyage to search for the "Strait of Anian". Bering and his naval successors had to transport their crews and supplies overland to Okhotsk where their ships were built. Not until the voyages of Kruzenshtern and Lisianskii in 1802-03 did the Russian Navy begin a series of voyages from the Baltic around the Horn and the Cape of Good Hope to the North and South Pacific. Barratt ends his survey in 1825 with the collapse of the hopes for Russian naval hegemony in the North Pacific ocean and the littoral waters of Russian North America.



Historians of European expansion will readily note that the flag followed trade in this story of Russian maritime expansion. As the fur trade drew the explorers of Hudson Bay and the Northwest Companies to the Pacific, even earlier it had drawn Cossack traders to the Aleutians. The Russian-American Company, founded in 1799, took over the trade and developed a presence on the Canadian and American Pacific coasts, at Sitka (Novo-Arkhangel'sk) and Fort Ross (just North of San Francisco). Although making a significant scientific and cartographical contribution, the navy's primary role was to support the activities of the fur traders. Naval officers, unhappy with this role and inspired by dreams of Russian hegemony in the North Pacific, achieved control over the Russian-American Company only to lose the backing of the state as it became concerned over the international implications of its claim to all territory in American down to 51° North, extending to 115 miles offshore on both the North American and Asian sides of the Pacific ocean. This claim could not be sustained and in 1824-25 Russia signed conventions with Britain and the United States restricting the southern limits to 54°40' North and opening its territories to American and British hunters.

Barratt argues that had Russia expanded its ventures in the North Pacific in the period 1808-12, when England was preoccupied with Napoleon and the United States with England, she could have established a Russian Columbia. However, the navy could never manage to provision regularly the Russian settlements either from Okhotsk or from the Baltic; nor did the settlements ever become self-sufficient in food, having to rely on New England traders and Spanish California. The navy was never able to maintain sufficient ships to ensure protection of what were no more than Russian trading establishments; settlement proved an impossibility. The Russians did learn the lesson, although it had to be relearned after the Battle of Tsushima in 1904, that the *sine qua non* for a strong naval presence in the North Pacific was a permanent base there.

The photographic reduction of an eighteenth-century English version of G. F. Müller's (Sammlung Russischer Geschichte, 1758) map showing the accounts of voyages by Bering and A. I. Chirikov does assist the reader, but a map portraying the other voyages over a one hundred twenty year period would have done much to support Barratt's lengthy descriptions of them. The map of the North Pacific region at the beginning of the book, while useful, does not suffice. The photographic reproductions of contemporary prints illustrating naval officers and their activities in the North and South Pacific well complement the text.

Of particular interest to scholars of Russian maritime history is the comprehensive and detailed description of archival sources in the Soviet Union available to the western scholar.

*Russia in Pacific Waters* is the first in a continuing series dealing with naval history and related maritime subjects published by the University of British Columbia Press. Glynn Barratt has set a high scholarly standard for the series and one can only hope it will be maintained.

*General Ludd*. By John Metcalf. Downsview: ECW Press, 1980. Pp. 301.

Satire requires at least a dash of lunacy or a leavening of compassion (and preferably both), if it is to rise above snide remarks and the spewing of bile. John Metcalf's latest novel, *General Ludd*, regrettably lacks both lunacy and compassion. The story is that of James Wells, a Writer-in-Residence by profession, as he first impinges upon, and later bounces off, the English Department at St. Xavier's University in Montreal. The line of the narrative illustrates Metcalf's problems with structure: the novel opens with considerable gusto on a note of high comedy (the reception given to Wells on his arrival, instantly and painfully familiar to any inhabitant of a Canadian English Department), but from this high point it descends into *Weltschmerz*, *la nausée*, and the utter horror of life in Canada, with the speed and authority of an elevator which has snapped its cable. The consequent feeling of depression lasts all the way through the rest of the novel. Wells himself illustrates Metcalf's problems with character: as an enemy of society he is feeble (his notion of a heroic act of contempt is to steal and hock the typewriter provided for his use), and as a poet (the ostensible reason for his appointment) he is not particularly credible. There are occasional flashes of humour, admittedly, and another good set-piece in the visit by Wells to a bizarre night-club, but for the most part the novel simply follows Wells through a succession of alcoholic binges, keenings for a dead friend (supposed to be a magnificent spirit, but who comes across as destructive, dishonest, and paranoid), hopeless sessions with hapless would-be poets, and sundry other unpleasantnesses.

The novel would not be quite so irritating if it were merely bad. But it isn't altogether bad: parts of it are quite promising — even enticing (such as Wells' visit to the Communication Arts complex, which I read with much pleasure under the impression that it was preparation for some wild climax to the story); but having been enticed, one is disappointed (the Communication Arts Complex and its maniac director are simply left behind, and the expected climax never materializes). It is conceivable that the overall pattern of letdown after a promising start is a new satiric technique, although if it is, I have considerable doubts about its value. After all, a narrative technique which leaves readers in a state of enraged frustration with the novel itself presents numerous and varied hazards to any author who hopes to make a point about society.

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*Domestic and Heroic in Tennyson's Poetry.* By Donald S. Hair. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. 229. \$25.00.

*Tennyson and Swinburne as Romantic Naturalists.* By Kerry McSweeney. Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1981. Pp. 222 + xvii.

Both these studies locate their subjects within specific literary traditions, thereby avoiding the endless justifications of Victorian writing on social-historical grounds, and providing illuminating analyses of the poets' original use of traditional conventions.

Donald Hair regards Tennyson's pervasive concern for domestic life as a transmutation of pastoral conventions. To the Victorians, home "occupied the same place...that a pastoral retreat did in the imaginations of earlier ages," (p. 5) being a refuge from contemporary strife and a stronghold of moral values. In the same way that traditionally the pastoral environment was a preparation for heroic life, Victorian domesticity was regarded as provisional for public life.

Hair's analysis of 'In Memoriam' as a domestic elegy employing the conventions of pastoral elegy does not require the pretext that it enables us "to respond more to it as its original readers may have" (p. 225): his predominantly archetypal approach provides new insights which rescue the poem from the age-old charge of disunity between the subjective vision and the social issues. Hair traces a development of the domestic and heroic motifs from Tennyson's earlier idyl and epyllion "a version of the romance-quest", (p. 226) towards the combination of romance with psychological realism in *The Idylls of the King*. By shifting the focus of action in *Idylls of The King* from the traditional martial and chivalric to the contemporary concern for the domestic, Tennyson internalises the romance-quest and thus makes crucial decisions and events "take place within each character" (p. 227). It is this aspect which appeals as much to the twentieth-century reader as to the Victorian; "...he has the fate of Arthur's civilisation depend, not on quests and battles, but on the failure of a marriage...." (p. 227). Tennyson's use of romance indicates for Hair "the immense importance he attached to human desires. . . (as) witnesses of a divine plan. On this basis he affirms his belief in immortality and in the value of earthly life" (p. 104).

It is this belief which for McSweeney distinguishes Tennyson from Swinburne within the tradition of 'Romantic naturalism', which regards "man's intimate sympathy with the natural world and its patterns of cyclic change as wholesome and liberating, not as confining and destructive" (p. xiii). The analysis of Tennyson's and Swinburne's romantic concern for "self-expression, vision, a life of immediate sympathy with the natural world, and the apprehension and creation of beauty" (p. xv) is less informative than the examination of their differences within this broad context.

McSweeney professes to "employ different critical stances... all concerned with tracing naturalistic vision through the work of both poets" (p.

xv) in order to "make qualitative distinctions." The analysis of "Swinburne's Tennyson" in the first chapter is far more illuminating than its modest "literary historical" claim suggests. Swinburne struggled out from under the shadow of "the great exemplary poet of the Victorian period" (p. xv) by criticising Tennyson's "grasping at other - wordly straws." Whereas for Tennyson "human love implies divine Love...if there is no immortality (the showing forth of divine Love) there can be no human love, only degrees of lust" (p. 13), Swinburne eschews anything "which would deny him the freedom, dignity, and the possible sublimities of trusting in no power higher than himself or other than the natural processes with which he identifies himself" (p. 13). Swinburne's perception of Tennyson supressing a fundamentally naturalistic vision occasions McSweeney's diagnosis that Tennyson was responding to the literary climate of the 1820's and 30's which were inauspicious for Romanticism.

McSweeney is 'historical' in so far as he examines Tennyson and Swinburne "through each other's eyes" but the result is an original analysis which focuses, as does Hair's on a specific literary tradition exemplified in the poetry.

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