

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

STEPHEN HAROLD RIGGINS, *The Pleasures of Time: Two Men, A Life*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003, 310 p.

I first read *The Pleasures of Time* in the early summer soon after it appeared in print. I have since read it again (something I hardly ever take the time to do!), and have picked it up over and over to savour its wisdom, its gentle yet clever framing, its capacity to distil Paul Bouissac's semiotic and cultural studies research without, as Riggins' so evocatively and effectively puts it "...making anyone cross-eyed" (p. 204). This is a sociological book that defies categorization. It is an examination of the intertwined lives of two men, of the birth and growth of cultural studies over a critical historical period, of Bouissac's and Riggins' wondrous encounters with the unexpected (the title of the penultimate chapter is "The Search for the Unexpected") both intellectually and personally, of their amazing personal intersections with Levi-Strauss, Foucault (who Riggins interviewed—a rare event indeed!), Sartre and de Beauvoir, Alan Bloom (the list goes on), and of an era of tumult, politically and socially. It is also very much a personal history, a kind of auto-ethnography, of a committed gay relationship and of the transforming and transformative gay world in the late 20th century. And it is anthropological ethnography as well. It is, in sum, an extraordinary book, a significant book and a book that touches the reader's heart as well as the reader's mind.

The book, as its title hints, has been long in the making. It is based on meticulous diaries kept by Riggins since the early 1970s. It is set in far-flung places: the cafes of Paris, the rainy old streets of St. John's, Newfoundland, Toronto, rural areas wherever circuses perform, and in small-town Indiana and its forests. Riggins' powers of observation are without equal sociologically. He writes like a poet, observing, for example, a man "wearing some utterly worthless jewellery reflecting the taste of a cosmopolitan magpie." There is a gem of writerly poetry, not only on each and every page, but in each and every sentence!

The book is constructed as a series of vignettes, opening and closing like a kaleidoscope, with each image deepening the reader's sense of the majesty of life, of the wonder of the unexpected, and to a large degree, the meagerness of most lives in comparison with the rich lives of these two men. The book, once opened, cannot be put down. It simply jumps back into one's hands!

Paul Bouissac says of why his gaze was drawn to studies of the circus, “It [the circus] is a mirror reflecting the social conditions of the society, a crucible in which cultural codes and rules are combined in new ways ...” This can be said no less of Stephen Riggins’ mirror on his and Paul’s life and on the intellectual shifts at which they were at the crossroads, if not the centre. Their lives and times are a crucible for combining cultural codes and rules afresh. As they live, they observe and analyse what the mirror reveals.

This is a book worthy of a wide sociology and anthropology readership. It is a tender study of social change, of couplehood in changing times, and of cultural history from the insider’s perch.

Susan A. McDaniel *University of Alberta*

© Canadian Sociological Association/La Société canadienne de sociologie