
Shirley Tillotson
frustration of a debutante's life in the Ottawa of the Thirties—during which she reveals what an oasis of culture the Scott home near Lisgar and Elgin represented:

Last Thursday I had tea alone with the Duncan Campbell Scotts at their house on Elgin St. The nice big room and the contented atmosphere and the sane language. I felt at home, although they were both polite to me—she especially asking about my foreign travels and other things which made me suspicious lest she be trying to make conversation and thaw me out or something else incompatible with mutual friendship. Left loving them both and walked all the way home in the cold. He lent me a book on the Rossettis, Morrises, etc. 2

One wishes also that, instead of Arthur Bourinot’s brief poem “Night on the Ottawa River,” John Bell had included an excerpt from his nostalgic autobiographical poem To and Fro in the Earth 3 (1963), a superb evocation of the Ottawa of early in the century, and the perfect companion piece for Joan Finnigan’s poem “Ottawa and the Valley,” that the editor wisely included here. Finnigan’s poem, with its descriptions of middle class Centraltown during the Depression, touches on one of the great mysteries of Ottawa life:

... although I prefer [the] City of Halifax, with its varied aspects, and fine sea views, still ... it is richly endowed and not unattractive to the eye. (p.43)

There is a certain flat affect in Ottawa that emanates from its bureaucratic heart, and no literary work, to my mind, has yet transported us to the centre of paralysis—the Ottawa government office and the minds and hearts of the civil servants at work. Ottawa awaits its Joyce—that much is clear. But there is one astonishing omission in the book. The omitted writer is a presence in some selections, and he wrote perhaps the quintessential Ottawa document. I refer, of course, to the diary of William Lyon Mackenzie King, whose presence haunts the city like that of no other man. Reminders of King are everywhere—from the statue of Sir Galahad he erected to his friend Henry Harper in front of the Parliament Buildings to the eerie maternal portrait in Laurier House to the synthetic ruins of Kingsmere—the classic Ottawa outing. One wonders on what editorial principle an excerpt from the King diary was excluded, for this is like a portrait of Paris without Proust or London without Pepys.

Even without Mr. King, Ottawa: A Literary Portrait is a worthwhile book, and should find a place on the bookshelf beside John Taylor’s fine Ottawa: An Illustrated History (1986) and Sandra Gwyn’s estimable The Private Capital (1984). But Ottawa is a harder portrait to paint than that of Halifax. Of Bell’s two anthologies, I must quote Joseph Howe, who appears in both anthologies, about the Ottawa volume:

In spite of the usage “state formation” in the sub-title, neo-Marxist sociology is not uniformly the book’s unifying perspective. For instance, Douglas McCalla’s piece on railways and economic development criticizes the “defensive expansionism” thesis simply in empirical terms, without altering the conceptual frame to take in matters of moral regulation and political legitimacy. Nor does Michael Piva speak to theoretical debates about bureaucratization in his masterful technical discussion of crisis-driven improvements in public finance administration. Peter Baskerville, discussing rail- way regulation, actively takes as his target Corrigan’s and Sayer’s “long waves” of revolution in government whose conceptual presence is palpable in an essay such as Brian Young’s broadly integrative piece on class and state formation in Lower Canada. With amplification by Greer’s and Radforth’s

References


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Behind this simply-stated question lie more complex ones, both historical and theoretical: Exactly what are the social and the political? How can the two be distinguished? From whence does our sense come that they need to be separated? As the topics covered in Colonial Leviathan suggest, these questions are usefully explored through analyses of developments in bureaucracy and law. In case after case, different contributors show how the routinizing and codification of values into these state forms anointed particular interests and perspectives with the sacred oil of objectivity. For example, in the case of the school inspectors discussed by Bruce Curtis, the impersonal (i.e., bureaucratic) authority of leaders took its specific content from the personal (i.e., social) values of the first cadre of notables enlisted in the service of public education. As Mariana Valverde and her co-authors suggest for gender relations in other areas of state expansion, this transfer of values reproduced in the state/society hierarchy the hierarchies of civil society. Often the growth of the state amplified the inequalities of social power that lay at its origin. On these questions, this collection leaves one wanting to know more about the tensions associated with the emergence of hierarchies within the state system. For example, did the local/provincial hierarchy, at its origins, carry the same meanings as at its decline in the 1930s?

Two of the essays stand out for their fresh conceptualization of the relations of state and civil society. Jean-Marie Fecteau’s mainly theoretical piece brings to historians’ attention a set of ideas with major research potential, not only for the nineteenth century (Fecteau’s focus) but also for the twentieth. His subject is the place of “associational life”—an abstraction that includes everything from business corporations to literary clubs—in relation to the state. Sketching changes in this relationship, he argues that the hostility towards associations inherent in eighteenth century liberalism became enthusiasm among nineteenth century liberals as, through mid-century, associations were redefined as manifestations of the individual will—i.e., as “voluntary” associations rather than feudal estates—and endorsed in a controlling legal framework. While association came to be seen as an aid rather than a threat to governance (think of agricultural improvement clubs or women’s benevolent societies), it also had the potential to act as a counterweight to or even a replacement for the state, a potential contemplated explicitly in corporatism and various socialisms. In making these connections, Fecteau places associational life squarely in the political, reaffirming but refining the Thompsonian insight about how life ways are linked to political agency.

Graeme Wynn’s considerably more accessible essay, focused on the Maritimes, is no less sophisticated than Fecteau’s in its conceptualization of the social and the political. Stating his conclusion in a metaphor, he achieves that never-to-be-undervalued goal: complexity of apprehension combined with simplicity of expression. Having a horror of paraphrased poetry, I refer you to the original for Wynn’s conclusions. What can be noted about his perspective is his satisfying historical sensitivity to multiple social identities, and his appreciation of how such identities were both based in state forms, and were the state’s necessary underpinnings. Historians with a deep repugnance for abstraction will find some of Colonial Leviathan unbearable, but Wynn’s piece nicely ends the collection by speaking to the lover of stories as well as to the philosopher in all of us.