

Castonguay, Stéphane and Michèle Dagenais. Ed. *Metropolitan Natures: Environmental Histories of Montreal*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. Pp. 336. Illustrations, photographs, maps

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en faisant une incursion originale dans leur vie quotidienne. Yolande Cohen traite quant à elle des populations sépharades issues du Maroc. Elle souligne notamment l'importance de la langue, de l'origine ethnique et des liens transnationaux pour leur identité communautaire.

Somme toute, la présente synthèse dresse un portrait fouillé de la présence ashkénaze et ultra-orthodoxe dans la métropole, surtout aux 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles, mais elle laisse le lecteur face à certaines interrogations à propos de la communauté sépharade. L'identité particulière des populations juives issues d'ex-URSS, dont plusieurs transitent par Israël avant d'élire domicile à Montréal, est également peu abordée. Notons toutefois l'apport significatif du chapitre de Yolande Cohen au sujet des Sépharades et les possibilités d'élargissement qui sont fournies dans la contribution de Janice Rosen sur les ressources documentaires et archivistiques sur les Juifs à Montréal.

Le ton employé par les différents auteurs traduit l'intention sous-jacente à l'ouvrage, qui était d'exposer la réalité juive en tant que phénomène complexe, en constante évolution et qui tend à se rapprocher de la « majorité démographique » québécoise. Les diverses contributions font bien ressortir l'influence des particularités politiques et linguistiques de Montréal. En ce sens, l'ouvrage arrive à montrer que les Juifs, les francophones et les anglophones de Montréal partagent une histoire et un présent commun. Les liens avec les autres groupes minoritaires de la société montréalaise, notamment les Italiens, sont toutefois relativement absents de la réflexion. Une telle mise en relation, notamment en ce qui concerne le thème de l'insertion des Juifs dans l'espace scolaire, aurait pu ouvrir sur des perspectives intéressantes. Il s'agit à notre connaissance d'un thème sous-représenté dans l'histoire de l'immigration montréalaise. Il est donc à souhaiter que le décloisonnement des études juives et québécoises duquel est issue la présente synthèse continue à donner naissance à des contributions qui permettront encore d'enrichir notre compréhension des multiples facettes de l'identité juive montréalaise. *Les communautés juives de Montréal* constitue néanmoins un premier pas fort respectable en ce sens.

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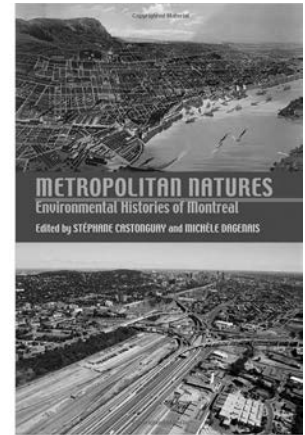
In order to understand the history of North American cities as ecological settings, it makes sense to begin with one of the oldest urban centres on the continent. First established as a colonial town in 1642, Montreal emerged as the commercial hub of the continental fur trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It later grew into an industrial city in the nineteenth

century and stood as “the unchallenged metropolis of Canada” (4) for more than a hundred years. Montreal was one of the first North American cities to face the environmental challenges associated with rapid human population growth and industrial urbanization, including water delivery, sewage disposal, solid waste removal, air pollution, and overcrowding. Its history as an Aboriginal village, the former site of the Iroquois settlement of Hochelaga, dips even deeper into the past. It is surprising then that *Metropolitan Natures* is one of the first books to extensively examine the environmental history of Montreal.

North American urban environmental history, as a relatively new subfield, has devoted more attention to case studies of US cities, including Pittsburgh, New York, Chicago, Boston, Phoenix, Tucson, Seattle, Houston, and Los Angeles, than it has to Canadian cities. Urban development in North America was a continental phenomenon with a historical narrative that extends beyond municipal (and national) boundaries. Given the extent to which urban development across the continent experienced common trends, policies, and practices, the absence of a detailed set of case studies of environmental histories of Montreal was a substantial omission. Castonguay and Dagenais (and the other authors in this collection) now offer a very important contribution to our understanding of the changing relationship between humans and the rest of nature in North American urban environments.

As a Canadian city and a bi-cultural city with both a French and English colonial past, Montreal has not been readily integrated into broader narratives of North American urban history. On the level of environmental analysis, however, this collection reveals the many ways in which Montreal has a shared history with other cities in Canada and the US. As Colin Coates points out in the first essay in this collection, “as for any North American urban center, the history of Montreal is, in part, the result of the attempt to distance the indigenous forests, plants, and wildlife from the town” (19). From waterworks and sewage systems development to the interconnections between city and countryside to the changing perceptions of public health, *Metropolitan Natures* takes readers through a survey of common themes in the environmental history of cities. The editors thoughtfully organized this collection of well-researched and insightful essays into a set of three broad thematic categories that will be familiar to researchers in urban environmental history: representations, infrastructures, and hinterlands.

The essays in the first section on “representations” focus on the various ways in which people have imagined and portrayed the environment of the island of Montreal since Europeans first encountered this landscape in the 1530s. Almost all of the



authors agree that the landscape of the city has long been dominated by its two most prominent features: the mountain and the river. Victoria Dickenson goes so far as to suggest that these landscape features are so enduring that one can still know the sensory experiences of centuries past from atop Mount Royal and from the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Perceptions of the urban environment were more than just fantasies of the mind and, in fact, they shaped material responses to urban development, especially in the area of public health. Whether it was the effects of urban pollution or the spread of Spanish influenza, as Nicolas Kenny argues, sensory experience informed policy and human agency as “the body played a fundamental role in mediating their relationship to this environment” (52).

The editors, however, are rightly cognizant that “the focus on the representations and meanings of urban experiences has sometimes been to the detriment of the study of the physical reality of the city” (8). As such, the second and most substantial section of the book looks at “infrastructures” or the material interactions between humans and nonhuman nature through various urban infrastructure projects, including surface water drainage, waterworks, reservoirs, flood control, streets, and highways. Not surprisingly, the environmental history of an island city situated at the confluence of two of the largest rivers in North America has been dominated by water. Dagenais’s own contribution to this collection offers one of the most interesting essays in this section, uncovering the interconnections between the development of the water networks and the social networks of power in nineteenth-century Montreal. The essay serves as a wonderful précis for her recently published monograph-length study of water in Montreal. Similarly, Dany Fougères’s fascinating history of surface water drainage in pre-industrial Montreal shows the physical challenges city-builders faced from the wet environment of the island. Readers will find the photographs of elevated snow-packed streets in the nineteenth century especially powerful symbols of the material limits that nonhuman nature placed on urbanization.

Finally, the concluding section of *Metropolitan Natures* picks up on the theme of metropolitanism or the relationship between city and countryside. Best articulated in Canadian historiography through the work of J.M.S. Careless and later developed in US environmental history by William Cronon, the metropolitan relationship between Montreal and its surrounding hinterland is examined in a series of case studies that focus on a diverse set of topics, including agricultural transformations, fox hunting, suburban Indian reserves, and hydro-electric development. Castonguay’s essay on the transformation of agriculture on the Montreal plain provides an excellent example of the linkages between urban and agricultural environments in what he refers to as “an autonomous agri-economic context” (187). Each essay reveals the interdependence between city and hinterland in the development of Canada’s leading metropolis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The collection does not, however, offer any case studies of the waning influence of post-industrial

Montreal in the later decades of the twentieth century and the effects of urban decentralization on surrounding suburban environments.

*Metropolitan Natures* offers researchers in urban and environmental history important new insights into the development of one of the most significant metropolises in North America. It provides fresh analyses of the relationship between nature and cities, demonstrating some of the vibrancy that environmental history brings to the well-established field of urban history.

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**André Corboz, Lucie-K. Morisset (2010). *De la ville au patrimoine urbain : histoires de forme et de sens*, Québec, Presses de l’Université du Québec, 315 pages.**

L’initiative de Lucie K. Morisset de rassembler dans un seul ouvrage certains textes parmi les plus importants d’André Corboz doit être saluée. L’ouvrage offre des qualités qui à la fois répondront aux attentes des chercheurs et feront le bonheur des passionnés d’architecture et d’urbanisme. Plaisir de lire et rigueur d’analyse sont ici intrinsèquement liés.

Avec un esprit agile et une plume élégante, Corboz, historien de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme accompli, offre des réflexions profondes sur nos façons d’appréhender et de concevoir les formes bâties. Ses riches études ouvrent sur des questions fondamentales qu’il aborde de front avec une rigueur exemplaire. Si elles rejoignent d’emblée les historiens, elles ne s’y limitent pas, bien au contraire. Elles trouvent écho chez tous ceux, universitaires et praticiens, chercheurs et penseurs interpellés par l’aménagement, et ce, toutes disciplines confondues. Ici, le regard de l’histoire contribue à mieux comprendre l’articulation des savoirs et des pratiques : la mise en évidence de rapports entre penser et faire l’architecture et la ville, à un moment donné de l’histoire d’une communauté, constitue une étape cruciale dans le développement d’une réflexivité, notamment en cours d’action, et d’une rigueur scientifique.

De plus, alors qu’il cherche à mieux saisir ce que ces formes révèlent des rapports entre l’humain et la culture, les façons mêmes de les étudier retiennent aussi son attention. Tenant de l’approche critique, inscrit dans une perspective phénoménologique affirmée, André Corboz propose des analyses qui participent d’une réflexion épistémologique qui demeure d’une actualité percutante.

