

**Elvins, Sarah. *Sales and Celebrations: Retailing and Regional Identity in Western New York State, 1920-1940*. University of Ohio Press, 2004**

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**Fougères, Dany. *L'approvisionnement en eau à Montréal. Du privé au public, 1796–1860*. Septentrion, 2004, 476 p.**

D'entrée de jeu, avouons que le livre de Dany Fougères, *L'approvisionnement en eau à Montréal*, arrive à point nommé. Au moment où les infrastructures urbaines commencent à intéresser de plus en plus d'historiens, on ne peut que se réjouir de la parution d'un ouvrage consacré à l'utilisation et à la distribution de l'eau à Montréal au XIXe siècle. En fait, l'histoire de l'eau, plus précisément de son utilisation et des moyens de l'acheminer aux différents consommateurs montréalais dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle, nous était à peu près inconnue. Le livre de Fougères comble donc une lacune importante de l'historiographie. Son étude très exhaustive restera une référence obligée pendant longtemps. Historien formé dans un centre de recherches multidisciplinaires (INRS-Urbanisation), Fougères analyse l'émergence et le développement du service d'eau montréalais sous plusieurs aspects. L'une des contributions majeures de son étude consiste à mettre en lumière les conditions socio-économiques, mais également techniques, du passage d'un régime privé à un régime public. Il a su mettre à profit ses connaissances en histoire urbaine pour cerner tous les enjeux de la municipalisation d'un service aussi essentiel que celui de l'adduction d'eau. Ce processus s'est réalisé par étapes. Tout d'abord celle de la mise en place d'un service privé qui n'arrive jamais à devenir véritablement profitable tout au long de la première moitié du XIXe siècle. La Compagnie des propriétaires des eaux de Montréal n'a jamais pu, par ailleurs, répondre adéquatement aux besoins des Montréalais. Ensuite, l'achat par la municipalité de la compagnie en 1845 et, finalement, l'établissement du régime de prestation publique, en 1851, avec l'octroi par le gouvernement central de l'obligation d'usage.

L'ouvrage est volumineux parce qu'il aborde de multiples facettes du développement de cette infrastructure. La question de la santé publique et de l'hygiène est abordée, celle du développement économique d'une ville en phase d'industrialisation n'est pas négligée. Les cadres juridiques de l'obtention d'un monopole à une compagnie privée, de la municipalisation d'un service jusque-là privé ou de l'octroi de l'obligation d'usage sont longuement analysés. Fougères se préoccupe également de l'état des avancements techniques, un aspect souvent négligé en histoire urbaine. L'apport de l'histoire des techniques, plus particulièrement d'une histoire des techniques puisant dans la sociologie des sciences et de la technologie, bonifie d'ailleurs grandement l'étude qu'il nous propose. L'émergence d'un service privé d'eau à Montréal et sa municipalisation subséquente s'inscrivent, nous rappelle l'auteur, dans un contexte nord-américain et européen d'urbanisation. Or, les apports de la sociologie et de l'histoire de la technologie nous apprennent que les grands ouvrages techniques doivent beaucoup à la contingence. Fougères montre ainsi comment le contexte montréalais, à savoir sa géographie, son économie, ses clivages socio-économiques et en bout de ligne ses acteurs mus par leurs intérêts propres, explique en grande partie les formes spécifiques

qu'ont revêtues les différents systèmes techniques élaborés entre 1801 et 1860. Un autre apport important de ce livre de 475 pages est sans nul doute les nombreuses statistiques qui étayaient les thèses avancées par l'auteur. On a désormais un portrait précis des tarifs et secteurs desservis par le service, des coûts des immobilisations, des trajets des conduites d'eau, du nombre d'abonnés, etc. Bref, la recherche a été minutieuse, les sources nombreuses et bien exploitées.

Cela étant dit, le livre de Danny Fougères n'est pas sans défauts. L'introduction, trop longue, sent le chapitre introductif d'une thèse de doctorat qui a donné naissance au livre. Elle aura tendance à rebuter un certain nombre de lecteurs qui, s'ils persévèrent dans leur lecture, apprécieront cependant le reste de l'ouvrage. Le livre regroupe des chapitres qui renvoient à des thèmes plutôt qu'à des périodes. Si le choix se défend bien, il entraîne, dans ce cas-ci, de nombreuses redondances qui agacent à la longue. Par ailleurs, les citations d'acteurs historiques dans le corps du texte sont mal présentées. Il faut souvent aller voir la note pour connaître l'identité de celui qui parle. Quant aux nombreuses citations d'historiens placées en retrait dans le corps du texte, elles sont mal venues dans un livre savant. L'auteur aurait dû résumer l'interprétation de ces derniers et renvoyer le lecteur à une note en bas de page. Quelques erreurs factuelles se sont également glissées dans cette longue monographie. J'en cite deux au hasard. Il est faux par exemple d'affirmer que l'invention et l'introduction de la chasse d'eau (water-closet) apparaissent en Angleterre dans les 1880 (p. 96). Dès 1857, l'inspecteur des chemins de la ville de Montréal suggère d'en généraliser l'adoption dans toutes les maisons de la ville et un premier règlement, deux ans plus tard, vient encadrer cette commodité. La création d'un Bureau de santé permanent ne date pas de 1854 (p. 186) mais de 1865.

En résumé, le livre intéressera les chercheurs en histoire urbaine. En retraçant l'histoire d'une infrastructure vitale pour le développement d'une grande ville, Fougères montre un aspect jusque-là caché de l'entrée dans la modernité de la société canadienne. La mise en place d'un tel système technique transforme, en effet, le mode de vie des citoyens, leur rapport à l'environnement et leur conception de la santé publique. Elle les rapproche, si l'on peut dire, de nos sociétés modernes dans lesquelles la science, la technologie, le rôle des experts, l'industrialisation et la prise de conscience des effets néfastes de la pollution, jouent des rôles clefs.

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**Elvins, Sarah. *Sales and Celebrations: Retailing and Regional Identity in Western New York State, 1920–1940*. University of Ohio Press, 2004.**

These days, most surveys of American history include a discussion of the development of a mass market and culture in the early twentieth century. Mass entertainment, mass merchan-

dizing, and mass consumption are widely considered to have forged a divided people into a great and homogeneous democracy of brand name goods, movie parlours, and vaudeville stages. Local communities emerge as the victims of this great transformation that saw certain cities (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles) exert increasing influence over manners, tastes, styles, and behaviour. Urbanization, the surveys conclude, created more than just big cities: it produced cultural/industrial complexes that re-calibrated the pace of life in places far beyond their tangible reach.

Until relatively recently (one thinks here of Elizabeth Cohen's *Making a New Deal*), urban historians have been somewhat out of step with this march to the national market. At the moment when historians of consumption and culture have seen a new and increasingly monochrome nation of consumers emerging, local historians have celebrated the distinctiveness of individual places. Urban boosterism, industrialization, class conflict, immigration, and cultural activities have all been described as agents in the creation of localities as distinct places. While few urban historians dispute the fact that some cities came to exert great influence over the economy and national consciousness in the twentieth century, it still remains less clear how they conceptualize the relationship of smaller places to larger and of regional to national cultures.

Sarah Elvins's study of two cities in western New York—Buffalo and Rochester—in the interwar years brings together the two familiar historiographical strands: the rise of cities and the growth of a mass market. Her point of contact is the retail trade—a sector where local boosterism and the national market most obviously collided and interacted. Even as merchants promoted the power of place, they were themselves marketing in ways that homogenized their customers and themselves. How could these two elements coexist? And which was more important—the local or the national?

Elvins comes down firmly on the side of the local. Yes retailers were selling brand name nationally advertised goods, but they were doing so to a local market. They mediated the impact of national goods by selecting lines and styles appropriate to the local custom. They even advertised this fact when they carried goods made in their home cities. They sponsored community commemorations and celebrations. They designed displays that they thought would appeal to people within their home towns. And they stuck to the locality through good times and bad, the 1920s and the Depression years. Local merchants even argued that the Depression itself could be alleviated if people only bought more goods and supported shopkeepers in their home towns.

*Sales and Celebrations* is a good palliative to the dominance of the national, even if it falls short of constituting a cure. Apart from mail-order businesses, retailers are completely dependent on the size and health of their local markets. Not surprisingly, part of their self-image is their connection and sensitivity to their customers. Downtown retailers, in particular, have to draw

consumers to their stores, and this means promoting the area in which they are located through special features and celebrations and advertising campaigns. They worry about things like parking, crowding, and the cleanliness and beauty of the cityscape, and they understand that people spend more money when they feel happy and enjoy their surroundings.

But this book does not give flight to the idea of the national market, and Elvins doesn't really intend it to. Although affirming the power of localities, Elvins uses words like *mediate* and *broker* to describe the role of local businesspeople. The merchants she documents tried to bridge a gap between national markets and local consumers, funnelling the demands of each in both directions. They promoted national brands, carried national advertising, and publicized national styles for local audiences, while at the same time selecting those goods and services they believed had the greatest local appeal. Elvins's aim is therefore to qualify the received wisdom, not to discount it. As she admits, "claims to 'local' status proves very pliable" as even chain store outlets "still promoted themselves as local institutions." (34–5) Elvins's efforts to balance competing interpretations without actually challenging them can be frustrating. She will often summarize the received interpretation, qualify it on the basis of her local evidence, and then qualify her own interpretation so as to remove the impression that she is upsetting the apple cart. The result is a book that comes off as somewhat guarded and under-powered, smaller than it might have been.

On the positive side, *Sales and Celebrations* does a good job of describing retail boosterism in the 1920s and 1930s. Elvins provides more information on how the anti-chain-store campaign played out on the local level, and she adds to our understanding of how local businesspeople responded to the Depression. I especially liked Elvins's discussion of the way in which retailers picked up on President Hoover's assertion that renewed confidence would be enough to bring back good times. In a deliciously self-serving way, merchants maintained that spending in their stores was everyone's civic duty and a cure-all for bad times. On another level, what Elvins is affirming, of course, is simply the tightening link between consumption and the health of the democracy itself.

Although there is a lot of interesting material in here about the promotional activity of local businesspeople, and Elvins is undoubtedly right to suggest that merchants tried hard to mediate between national suppliers and local consumers, one cannot really say that she puts much more than a dent in the idea of the rise of the national market. After all, what was more important: the fact that consumers everywhere came to recognize brands like Coca-Cola and Heinz, to feel that clothing styles were subject to regular (if not necessarily seasonal) style changes, and to see shopping as a right rather than a privilege, or the fact that local merchants displayed those brand-named goods in towers shaped like city hall, stocked the colours they thought their customers preferred, and associated shopping with civic pride? Local concerns were important, but the great thrust of the age was moving life in a different direction. In fact,

one could argue that this book shows how even the concept of the “local” came to be commodified, homogenized, and turned into a sales feature by stores large and small all across America.

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**Miguelez, Alain. *A Theatre Near You: 150 Years of Going to the Show in Ottawa-Gatineau*. Manotick, ON: Penumbra Press, 2004. Pp. 370. Illustrations, maps, notes, and bibliography. \$45.00 hardback.**

In Giuseppe Tornatore's 1989 masterpiece *Cinema Paradiso* a young boy is introduced to the wonderful world of cinema through his friendship with the projectionist in his village's only cinema. It is a place where children grow up, lovers embrace, and friends gather, a place to experience life and a place to dream. The old movie theatre becomes a character itself, and it is ironic that many of us who saw the film did so in a modern multi-screen cinema, which undoubtedly intensified our sense of nostalgia and loss. Readers will leave Alain Miguelez's *A Theatre Near You* with similar feelings.

Miguelez sets out to recapture the history of Ottawa-Gatineau's many cinemas, and he offers an interesting account of each, arranged chronologically from the earliest stage and vaudeville theatres, nickelodeons, and the first true cinemas and picture palaces, through the new talking-picture theatres of the 1930s and 1940s, the cinemas that graced shopping malls and office complexes between the 1960s and 1990s, to the end of the century turn to the megaplex. The reader is left with no doubt where the author's heart lies. Early theatres such as the Imperial—known at the time as Canada's most beautiful—are described in loving detail, and although each new megaplex is treated judiciously, Miguelez is certain that their branded architecture and big-box location fail to satisfy. His preferences are revealed in a telling caption to a photograph of the Phoenix on Bank Street, once the famous Rialto known popularly as the Rat Hole: “The Phoenix did not fit into the multi-screen plans of its owner, Cineplex-Odeon. But just to make sure it would not fit into anyone else's plans, the wreckers were called in. Seventy-seven years of movies were crushed to the ground in 1991” (141).

The Imperial at least survived. It began its days at the start of the First World War. Its magnificent facade boasted two lion's heads, arches, pilasters, lead-glass windows, and walnut doors (made by the same firm that made the doors of the Château Laurier). The sumptuous interior contained friezes and paneling set off by bas-reliefs, not to mention the walnut and leather seats and its famous organ built at the princely cost of \$20,000. The Imperial thrived under various owners until 1955, when it closed its doors as a cinema. It later served simultaneously as a furniture store, television warehouse, and smaller theatre, and as a nightclub and burlesque house until it finally morphed into Barrymores, still one of Ottawa's principal live music venues.

Only two neighbourhood cinemas survive in Ottawa to this day, the Bytowne and the Mayfair, and the author offers poignant accounts of the more recent closings of the Elgin and Somerset theatres.

Miguelez traces each history meticulously through archival sources, newspaper reports, and anecdotal comments from individuals. He employs an impressive range of photographs, all of which are produced beautifully here—Penumbra Press is to be very much congratulated on the very high quality of this book. The photographs provide ample demonstration of the range of styles and designs adopted for the theatres, from the neo-classical to the Spanish villa-mission, and of the many distinctive interiors enjoyed by patrons. Each is accompanied by carefully written captions sometimes offering astute observations, as when the author notes that the box office area of a new megaplex cinema resembles an airline check-in counter. Other illustrations provide glimpses into the social history of the cinema, from advertisements and posters to promotional devices such as a late 1940s photograph of ushers dressed up as characters from *L'il Abner* or a photograph of the dishes moviegoers could collect by visiting the Glebe's Avalon Theatre in the 1930s and 1940s. The author draws on local knowledge to offer glimpses into popular culture, such as the antics of children who caused chaos in Theatre Française by shouting “des rats” as they rolled marbles down the aisles or the “iconic” role played by the Bytowne Cinema's program for fans of “alternative” cinema. Some broader social issues are referenced, such as the way in which the location of the Rialto in the less salubrious part of Bank Street made it particularly attractive for truant school children, the importance of Theatre Française in servicing the francophone community on both sides of the Ottawa River, and the clash between community and corporate interests in the campaign to save the Elgin. What emerges, then, is not simply an impressively detailed account of each of the capital region's theatres, past and present, but a social history that goes some way to realizing the author's aim of offering a picture of the nation's capital beyond Parliament Hill.

The book is not without its flaws, of course. Drive-in theatres are surprisingly absent, and the maps are a little ungenerous in scale. More importantly, the book ends rather abruptly with a discussion of American Multi-Cinema's latest megaplex in Kanata. A final chapter pulling together some of the social and spatial issues found in many of the particular discussions and located these changes within the broader literature on landscape, space, and urban environments would have made this book more valuable. There are some tantalizing issues raised in the introduction that deserve more focused and extended discussion, particularly the author's suggestion that there were four distinct phases of theatre closings in response to the popularity of television, his argument that the growth of the suburbs has played a major role in reshaping the cultural landscape and his observation that the two largest theatre chains have seen fit to develop megaplexes in the downtown cores of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, but not in Ottawa. Nevertheless this