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Montreal, City of Water: An Environmental History by
Michèle Dagenais (review)

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Claire Poitras, with her comparative study of post-war planned suburbs, reveals the variety of suburban life and, among many other things, shows that class is alive and well in suburbia. A longer view of suburbanization and its relationship to immigration is offered by Annick Germain, Damaris Rose, and Myriam Richard in their examination of two early immigrant neighbourhoods, Mile End and Little Italy, and three later ones, Park Extension, St Leonard, and Brossard.

There are high points in several of the other chapters, but the common thread is a lack of historical sensibility. This is a common enough problem in social science history, but in a book that purports to be a history covering five centuries, this all-too-consistent failure to connect past, present, and future detracts from what the individual contributions have to offer the collection as a whole.

At only ninety-five dollars for an abundantly illustrated, attractive hardcover two-volume text, complete with slipcase, this makes a nice gift for that elderly relative who remembers the Montreal of another time fondly. They are unlikely to read it all, but they will appreciate the gesture. It should also be in your university library. The collection does not withstand an attentive reading, but there are more than enough good parts to justify taking it out for a selective read. The early chapters by Viau and those by Lamonde, Taschereau, and Fahrni would substantially enrich an undergraduate survey course on Canadian history. Graduate students in North American history should study Fecteau and Harvey as well as Gauvreau, while those studying urban history in the twentieth century will find the chapters by Poitras and Germain and colleagues worthwhile.

More generally, this collection offers lessons on writing a synthetic history for an informed reading public. While unanimity might be asking too much, most contributors should agree with the central argument, and as many as possible should speak to it. Illustrations, figures, and maps should be fully integrated with the text and connections made between the imagery of differing chapters. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it rarely speaks for itself. Differing perspectives inform best when they recognize their own limitations. Interdisciplinary collaborations need to be self-aware so that the critical dialogue between disciplines can be fruitfully foregrounded for the general reader. Finally, academic publishing houses serve their diverse publics best when they bring their often-rich catalogues into engaged conversations with those preparing new publications.

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Montreal, City of Water: An Environmental History. Michèle Dagenais. Translated by Peter Feldstein. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017. Pp. 231, \$79.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper

Michèle Dagenais' *Montreal, City of Water*, a translation of her 2011 Boréal publication, *Montréal et l'eau*, traces the evolving relationship between the city and its surrounding waterways over the span of the city's industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Published within UBC Press's highly regarded

Nature | History | Society series, the English translation adds an illuminating foreword by series editor Graeme Wynn.

Unlike most “water histories,” which focus on the history of a particular river or body of water, Dagenais devotes her study to “the water of Montreal as a whole” (5): the St Lawrence River fronting the city to the south, the Rivière-des-Prairies ringing it to the north, and the culverted waterways harnessed for water supply and waste removal across the developing city. She is interested in water not only as a physical element but also as a “sociocultural phenomenon” (5). The relationships people have with water and the ways they use it, she finds, are shaped by social and power relations (the policies, technical decisions, and deliberate transformations of environment that provide benefits to some and create consequences for others).

Dagenais divides her work into seven chapters. She begins by analyzing the central historical and geographical works written about Montreal: from the early nineteenth century, when “the river was the road” (13); to optimistic portrayals of Montreal’s “golden age” in the early twentieth century, when technical mastery of the river was at its height; and to the more sober tone of the post-war period, when the opening of the St Lawrence Seaway, combined with the rise of the automobile, saw the loss of Montreal’s advantageous port position and the retreat of the river from the daily lives of Montreal residents. Bridges, tunnels, and highways completed the city’s slide in geographic significance from “an island at the crossroads” to the centre of a larger metropolitan area (119).

Subsequent chapters take up different perspectives on the city’s relationship with water. Chapter 2 explores water history through the lens of transportation and the circulation of goods and people in the early nineteenth-century city. Chapter 3 charts the colonizing reach of the industrializing city and its role in transforming river banks and siphoning water into city-cleansing infrastructure. Here, in the decades after 1850, Dagenais documents the adoption of the sanitary ideal, where running water was championed as the means to cleanse and, by extension, govern the city. Water, in effect, becomes a “technology of power” (60) through the imposition of water rates and inequities in water access, and the realities of a sanitary ideal “realized in Montreal to the detriment of . . . small suburban municipalities” (80). In keeping with the works of other river historians, Dagenais finds that human control over the river is never complete. Despite efforts to transform it into a dumping ground for the city’s wastes and an engine of economic prosperity, “the St Lawrence was never fully tamed” (68). Seasonal floods, port-paralyzing ice, persistent currents, and harbour-degrading sludge deposits created the need for costly maintenance and continual adjustments.

Chapters 4 and 5 trace the adoption of a bacteriological perspective in deliberations about water and public health in the region, as well as growing demands for environmental justice as Montreal moved increasingly to dispose of wastes outside its borders. These themes take expression in a detailed case study of the Rivière-des-Prairies’ incorporation on the north side of the city into its sewage and hydroelectric infrastructure in the 1920s. The final two chapters document the emergence of an ecological perspective among municipal agencies and citizen groups in response to rapid urbanization and deteriorating

water quality in the postwar period. Here, concerns about pollution and public health expand to encompass efforts to restore riparian habitat and reclaim the Montreal waterfront as public space. Throughout, Feldstein's capable translation is complemented by a generous allotment of illustrations, including period images, schematic diagrams, and five attractive and professionally rendered maps of the region.

Dagenais offers a compelling account of the evolution of Montreal's relationship with the water bodies that surround it and the consequences of the city's decisions for neighbouring municipalities, as well as for cottagers and recreationalists seeking to use the city's surrounding waterways for a wider variety of pursuits than transport, water supply, and waste removal. With its emphasis on technocratic responses to water in the city and the volatile municipal politics that determined the relative quality and access to city waters, this book will appeal to historical geographers, planning historians, and historians of urban environments. Less conspicuous are ordinary Montrealers and their experiences with water. While wildfowl hunters and sport fishers, cottagers, and anti-pollution advocates make appearances periodically in response to deteriorating conditions, particularly along the Rivière-des-Prairies, we do not become well acquainted with individual actors and their influence.

By following water in all its forms through the city, rather than leaving it behind at the riverbanks, *City of Water* paints a much more comprehensive picture of the role and effects of water in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century city than other urban river histories have. The book is also, in the end, about memory and forgetting. Dagenais reminds us in her conclusion that for all the rhetoric in recent decades about Montreal's neglected waterfront and forgotten secondary waterways, water has been a potent shaper of urban form and urban and suburban power dynamics since the city began to industrialize two hundred years ago.

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A Land of Dreams: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Irish in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine, 1880–1923. Patrick Mannion. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018. Pp. xvii + 360, \$120.00 cloth, 39.95 paper

The distinguishing characteristic of this study of Irish nationalism is its comparative methodology. Patrick Mannion's first book, based on his recent University of Toronto PhD dissertation, examines Irish identity and nationalist sentiment in St John's, Halifax, and Portland, Maine, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A great deal is already known about the Irish communities of all three cities as the result of previous scholarly studies, but the author claims, with good reason, that comparing them brings out the complexity and variety of ethnic identity as it was shaped and reinvented by both domestic and external forces. All three cities are medium-sized ports on the Atlantic coast, among the closest in North America to Ireland, with mostly Roman Catholic Irish populations. Mannion describes a sense of being Irish in these communities as