

“Shame upon you as men!” Contesting Authority in the Aftermath of Montreal’s Gavazzi Riot

DAN HORNER*

The June 1853 appearance of Alessandro Gavazzi in Montreal provoked a violent sectarian riot that left 10 dead and many more wounded. The city’s French-Canadian and Irish elites were outraged that the charismatic anti-Catholic lecturer had been invited to the city by local Protestants. British Protestant elites, meanwhile, perceived the riot as an attack on free speech and on their vision of an orderly city. The debates that occurred in the aftermath of the riot provide a glimpse into the contested nature of identity in mid-nineteenth-century Montreal. Clashing conceptions of public decorum, urban space, and masculine and feminine respectability played a pivotal role in these discussions. French-Canadian, British Protestant, and Irish Catholic elites in the city negotiated the aftermath of the riot in ways that justified their competing claims to power and authority in a period of intense cultural and demographic change.

L’apparition en juin 1853 d’Alessandro Gavazzi à Montréal provoqua une violente émeute sectaire qui fit 10 morts et quantité de blessés. Les élites canadiennes-françaises et irlandaises de la ville furent scandalisées que les protestants locaux eurent invité le charismatique conférencier anticatholique à Montréal. Les élites anglo-saxonnes, entre-temps, virent dans l’émeute une attaque à la liberté de parole et à leur vision d’une ville ordonnée. Les débats qui éclatèrent dans la foulée de l’émeute offrent un aperçu du débat sur l’identité qui avait cours dans le Montréal du milieu du XIX^e siècle. L’affrontement des notions de décorum public, d’espace urbain et de décence masculine et féminine fut au cœur de ces discussions. Les élites canadiennes-françaises, anglo-saxonnes protestantes et irlandocatholiques de la ville interprétèrent les répercussions de l’émeute de façon à justifier leurs revendications rivales à l’égard du pouvoir et de l’autorité durant une période d’intense changement culturel et démographique.

AS THE SUN SET on the evening of June 9, 1853, it might have seemed as though all of English-speaking Montreal had gathered on Haymarket

* Dan Horner is a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester.

Square, a patch of open land in the city's west end. They had been drawn by the controversial appearance of Alessandro Gavazzi, a charismatic public speaker who had gained international renown for his vitriolic attacks on Catholicism. In a city that was no stranger to sectarian and political conflict, residents recognized a familiar tension in the air.¹ Men and women aligned with the city's Evangelical Protestant community filled the pews of Zion Church, home to a non-conformist Congregationalist sect, which sat adjacent the square. Outside, a crowd of angry Catholic demonstrators and curious onlookers had surrounded the church. Troops from the 26th Regiment, who had just arrived in the city from their previous posting in Gibraltar, were gathered along nearby Craig Street, ready to be called into action by Mayor Charles Wilson should the situation escalate, as it had three days earlier during Gavazzi's appearance in Quebec City.²

Despite some jeering from the crowd, the mood in Haymarket Square remained relatively calm until Gavazzi was introduced, strode to the pulpit, and commenced his address. The frustration of the crowd seemed to mount with each burst of applause from inside the church, and it was not long before some began to lob rocks and paving stones towards the building, the windows of which had been boarded up in anticipation of trouble. James Alexander, a military official who attended the lecture, wrote in his memoirs that, as stones rained down on the siding of the church and Gavazzi was forced to interrupt his talk, a group of Protestant men ran towards a storage area behind the pulpit. Assuming at first that they were ducking for cover, Alexander was surprised to discover that they were actually arming themselves from a cache of firearms. The men then stormed through the front door of the church and began firing on the rioting crowd just as the troops began to do the same. Others attending the lecture ran out of the church to escape the tumult and found themselves caught in the terrifying crossfire.³

1 James Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier, or Military Service in the East and West, in Two Volumes* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1857), pp. 177–178.

2 As a consequence of the rioting that had broken out during Gavazzi's Quebec City appearance, Mayor Wilson had convened an emergency City Council meeting, at which he expressed his fear that a similar confrontation could occur in Montreal. He rescinded the city's original offer to host the lectures in the concert hall run by the municipal government, prompting the change in venue to Zion Church (Archives de la Ville de Montréal [hereafter AVM], *Commission de l'Hôtel de Ville*, June 7, 1853. Similar concerns were addressed by some members of the Irish Catholic elite, who circulated handbills calling on the city's Irish Catholic community to remain calm: "Do not disgrace yourselves," the notice read, "by creating a disturbance for the sake of a worthless fellow Your Protestant fellow citizens will be ashamed of their renegade friar yet" (Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier*, p. 176).

3 Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier*, p. 179; *Montreal Gazette*, June 10, 1853; *La Minerve*, June 11, 1853; *Le Canadien*, June 11, 1853; *True Witness*, June 10, 1853; *The Witness*, June 11, 1853.

The fiercely partisan coverage in the local press leaves the exact sequence of events murky. The troops fell into formation at intervals around Haymarket Square as the rioters and Gavazzi's armed supporters continued to taunt each other. Many observers suggested that the men standing on the front steps of Zion Church were the first to fire into the crowd. In the midst of the noise and confusion, the soldiers raised their muskets and fired into the melee. Ten lost their lives in the riot, while upwards of 50 others suffered significant injuries, most from small skirmishes and bullet wounds rather than the soldiers' musket balls.⁴ The list of casualties printed in the French- and English-language press consisted of anglophone men, both Catholic and Protestant, who ranged in age from "young lads" to "old men." While some were labourers, there were clerks and other professionals among the killed and wounded. The son of a prominent city councillor, for example, was shot through the lungs and would not recover.⁵ Furthermore, the number of casualties would continue to grow as small groups of young men took to the streets later that night, bent on revenge.⁶

The Gavazzi Riot, as this series of events has come to be known, sparked an immense public outcry that dominated the headlines of the city's newspapers in the months that followed.⁷ As Catholic and Protestant community leaders traded jibes and accusations at public meetings and in editorials, it became evident that what was at stake was the

4 Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier*, p. 185.

5 The actual number of people killed in the Gavazzi Riot is difficult to ascertain. The *Gazette* lists twelve casualties while *Le Canadien* notes eight victims. Robert Sylvain's 1960 piece in the *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* suggests that only six people lost their lives. The confusion appears to stem from the fact that a number of people died at a later date from infections directly related to the wounds they had suffered on June 9. See Robert Sylvain, "Le 9 juin 1853 à Montréal : encore l'affaire Gavazzi," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 14 (September 1960), pp. 173–216.

6 *Montreal Gazette*, June 11, 1853.

7 The riot has been the subject of a handful of references. Most notably, Elinor Kyte Senior discussed the event in the context of her study of the British regiment stationed in Montreal, noting that it raised serious questions about what role the military should play in quelling outbreaks of collective violence. See Elinor Kyte Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal: An Imperial Garrison, 1832–1854* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981), pp. 109–133. Robert Sylvain contextualized the riot in the conflict between the Ultramontane Catholic Church and liberalism. The incident also figures heavily in his biography of Gavazzi. See Robert Sylvain, "Le 9 Juin 1853 à Montréal" and *Alessandro Gavazzi: Clerc, Garibaldien, Prédicant des deux mondes* (Quebec: Le Centre Pédagogique, 1962), pp. 387–398. J. M. S. Careless noted the riot as being an important example of the way in which political alliances were shifting in the 1850s. See J. M. S. Careless, *The Union of the Canadas: The Growth of Canadian Institutions, 1841–1857* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), p. 185. Most recently, Vincent Breton used a case study of the riot to demonstrate the uneven development of freedom of expression in Quebec. See Vincent Breton, "L'émeute Gavazzi : pouvoir et conflit religieux au Québec au milieu du XIX^e siècle" (mémoire de maîtrise, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2004), and "L'émeute Gavazzi : violence et liberté d'expression au milieu du XIX^e siècle," *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Winter 2006), pp. 63–69.

legitimacy of two competing claims to authority in mid-nineteenth-century Montreal. This debate would not have been unfamiliar terrain to residents of the city. The previous two decades had been marked by intermittent outbreaks of collective violence, often occurring around elections and pitting those sympathetic to the British Protestant elite against predominantly French and Irish advocates of democratic reform. The evolution of debates about the contours of public life in the colony can be traced against the backdrop of Montreal's rough popular political culture.⁸ This violent streak culminated in the Rebellion Losses Crisis of 1849, when a crowd of rioting British Protestants burned parliament to the ground following Lord Elgin's decision to uphold the principles of responsible government.⁹

The city's British Protestant commercial elite became vocal champions of Gavazzi and the men and women who had attended the lecture at Zion Church. Nearly every issue of the *Montreal Gazette*, which served as a mouthpiece for the community, contained vicious diatribes against the Catholics who had rioted on Haymarket Square, portraying them as the hardened enemies of British liberty and order. Editorials in the French- and English-language Catholic press were equally aggressive in their partisanship. They portrayed Gavazzi's supporters as the true enemies of public order, arguing that they had callously wakened the sleeping dog of sectarian violence by inviting such a polarizing figure to speak in a city like Montreal, which had gained a reputation over the preceding decade as "a turbulent place."¹⁰

These exchanges reveal much about the way in which authority was constituted in elite circles during this period. At the heart of this highly contested and partisan discussion was a conceptualization of masculinity that

8 The rioting that broke out during a parliamentary by-election in 1832 has received the most attention from historians. These works provide helpful discussions of how outbreaks of collective violence fuelled debates about public life in a colonial context. See Bettina Bradbury, "Women at the Hustings: Gender, Citizenship and the Montreal By-Elections of 1832" in Mona Gleason and Adele Perry, eds., *Re-Thinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, 6th ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 73–94; James Jackson, *The Riot that Never Was: The Military Shooting of Three Montrealers in 1832 and the Official Cover-Up* (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2009).

9 For overviews of the Rebellion Losses Crisis in Montreal, see Jacques Monet, *The Last Cannon Shot: A Study of French Canadian Nationalism, 1837–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 334–342; Careless, *The Union of the Canadas*, pp. 121–127; Donald Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, 1760–1850* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1937), pp. 349–385; Gaston Deschênes, *Une capitale éphémère : Montréal et les événements tragiques de 1849* (Sillery, QC: Septentrion, 1999); Dan Horner, "Taking to the Streets: Crowds, Politics and Identity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Montreal" (PhD dissertation, York University, 2010).

10 Isabella Bishop, *The Englishwoman in America* (London: J. Murray, 1856), p. 256. James Alexander made a similar comment about the city in his memoirs, writing that "Montrealers are an excitable people ... there was a strong leaven of party spirit among them, which it was dangerous to rouse into action" (*Passages in the Life of a Soldier*), p. 166.

linked legitimate authority to public decorum and the ability to remain composed and rational in the midst of the rough and bustling popular culture that loomed over public life in a changing urban environment.¹¹ This highly gendered understanding of legitimate political and cultural authority in the years following the rebellions has been identified as a significant transformation in power and governance by historians Cecilia Morgan and Ian McKay.¹² In an ethnically diverse city like Montreal, which was home to both a British Protestant commercial elite and a rising reform-oriented bourgeois elite dominated by French Canadians,¹³ these claims were intensely partisan and fiercely contested. The Gavazzi Riot became a flashpoint in a power struggle that gripped the city in the decades leading up to Confederation. Competing factions of the Montreal elite interpreted the riot in different ways, and exploring this debate raises broader questions about public life in mid-nineteenth-century Canada. Recent contributions to the historiography of this period have emphasized the important role that public meetings, petitioning, and the press have played in the emergence of a vibrant democratic culture in the colony.¹⁴ Examining the Gavazzi Riot,

11 For discussions of how women were marginalized from public life in the nineteenth century, see Catherine Hall, "The Rule of Difference: Gender, Class and Empire in the Making of the 1832 Reform Act" in Ida Bloom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 107–135; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

12 For more on the relationship between gender and power in nineteenth-century Canada, see Ian McKay, "Canada as a Long Liberal Revolution: On Writing the History of Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms, 1840s–1940s" in Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 347–452; Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

13 Éric Bédard, *Les réformistes : une génération canadienne-française au milieu du XIX^e siècle* (Montreal: Boréal, 2009).

14 Jeffrey McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800–1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Steven Watt, "'Duty bound and ever praying': Collective Petitioning to Central Authorities in Lower Canada and Maine, 1820–1840" (PhD dissertation, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2005). Jürgen Habermas's writing on the public sphere is influential here: see *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 [1962]). For engaging critiques of Habermas's theory about the emergence of a public through forums such as the press in the late eighteenth century, see Geoff Eley, "Nations, Public and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century" in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 289–332; Mary Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's

however, provides us with an opportunity to think through the role that outbreaks of public violence had in drawing the contours of public life in British North America during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

The cultural landscape of nineteenth-century Montreal was shaped by its ethnic and religious heterogeneity and the role that the city played as a hub of commerce and migration. With a population that had just surpassed 50,000 in the previous decade, the city was firmly established as the commercial capital of British North America. French Canadians were the single largest ethnic group, making up roughly 45 per cent of the population. There was also a large Irish Catholic community and a British Protestant minority comprised of English, Scottish, and Irish Protestants. Combined, these English-speaking groups constituted half of Montreal's population.¹⁶ The British Protestant community, with its tight economic and political connections to the metropole, had formed the backbone of the social and economic elite in the city since the Conquest of 1763. The second third of the nineteenth century witnessed a crucial transition, as bourgeois elites became increasingly vociferous in their demands for greater access to positions of power and authority in the colony. Although many French Canadians experienced deep poverty throughout this period, the French-Canadian professional and political elite had made significant strides over the course of the nineteenth century and, with the adoption of responsible government in 1848,

Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 259–288.

15 For more on the impact of collective violence in nineteenth-century Canada, see Scott See, "Nineteenth Century Collective Violence: Towards a North American Context," *Labour / Le travail*, vol. 39 (Spring 1997), pp. 13–38, and *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Michael Cross, "The Shiners War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 54 (1973), pp. 1–26; Gregory Kealey, "Orangemen and the Corporation: The Politics of Class in Toronto during the Union of the Canadas" in Victor Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 41–86; Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," *Labour / Le travail*, vol. 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 9–39; Bradbury, "Women at the Hustings"; Dan Horner, "Solemn Processions and Terrifying Violence: Spectacle, Authority, and Citizenship during the Lachine Canal Strike of 1843," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 36–47.

16 Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montreal: Art Global, 1994), pp. 92–93. For a good overview of Montreal's cultural landscape in the nineteenth century, see Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers, "Introduction" in Bradbury and Myers, eds., *Negotiating Identities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Montreal* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), pp. 1–18. For more on public life in Montreal's English-speaking community during this period, see Gillian Leitch, "The Importance of Being English? Identity and Social Organization in British Montreal, 1800–1850" (PhD dissertation, Université de Montréal, 2006).

became an assertive counterweight to the British Protestant faction.¹⁷ Relations between these competing elites turned hostile at regular intervals, most notably during the Rebellion Losses Crisis of 1849. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church capitalized on the political vacuum created after the failure of the rebellions, becoming a dynamic player in the city's public life.¹⁸

This period was also transformative for the city's Irish Catholic community, the ranks of which had swelled enormously during the famine of the mid-1840s. While these new arrivals faced abysmal living and working conditions, the recent work of Sherry Olson and Patricia Thornton has demonstrated that Montreal's Irish community experienced upward social and economic mobility in the years that followed. A smaller but well mobilized and, in some cases, prosperous pre-famine Irish community was also firmly established in the city.¹⁹ Furthermore, their familiarity with the British political culture of Montreal, a city dominated demographically by Catholics, allowed the Irish community's elite to establish a formidable presence by playing an intermediary role between French Canadians and British Protestants.²⁰ All told, Montreal was a city shaped by a complex web of ethnic and class antagonisms and competing claims on public authority.

Throughout the first week of June, Alessandro Gavazzi's upcoming lecture series in Montreal was the talk of the town. Gavazzi's unconventional biography was well known to those who followed contemporary cultural debates. After entering monastic life as a teenager in Italy, he ran afoul of clerical officials because of his increasingly liberal views. Fleeing the continuing strife in the Papal States in 1848, Gavazzi made his way to London, where he quickly established himself as the leading critic of the papacy on the Protestant lecture circuit. His 1853 visit to North America was widely advertised in the city's English-language newspapers, including the *Gazette* and the *Witness*, the latter being the chief organ of the city's Evangelical Protestant community. The lectures were billed as a series of blunt attacks on the theological underpinnings of the

17 For more on the empowerment of the moderate French Canadian political elite, see Monet, *The Last Cannon Shot*; Stéphane Kelly, *La petite loterie : comment la couronne a obtenu la collaboration du Canada français après 1837* (Montreal: Boréal, 1997); Bédard, *Les réformistes*.

18 See Roberto Perin, *Ignace de Montréal : artisan d'une identité nationale* (Montreal: Boréal, 2008).

19 For more on this community, see Sherry Olson, "Research Note: Ethnic Partition of the Workforce in 1840s Montreal," *Labour / Le travail*, vol. 53 (Spring 2004), pp. 159–202; Sherry Olson and Patricia Thornton, "The Challenge of the Irish Catholic Community in Nineteenth Century Montreal," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 35, no. 70 (November 2002), pp. 331–362; Gillian Leitch, "The Irish Roman Catholics in Body Assembled: Ethnic Identity and Separate Worship in Nineteenth Century Montreal" in Jean-Pierre Wallot, ed., *Constructions identitaires et pratiques sociales. Actes du colloque en hommage à Pierre Savard tenu à l'Université d'Ottawa les 4, 5, 6 octobre 2000* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2000), pp. 205–218.

20 Olson, "Research Note: Ethnic Partition of the Workforce," pp. 190–192.

Catholic Church. The Protestant press fuelled public anticipation for the lecture series, describing the reverend's striking physical appearance, his handsome face framed by long, raven-black hair, and noting how audiences throughout Britain had been captivated by his commanding stage presence. Gavazzi was booked to appear on three consecutive nights at the City Concert Hall in Bonsecours Market, an auditorium operated by the municipal authorities. James Alexander and many others in the city's Protestant community filed through local bookshops to purchase their tickets for three pence apiece.²¹ Gavazzi's visit to Montreal was a source of pride for many in the city's Evangelical Protestant community, a minority in Lower Canada. Attracting such a prominent figure to the city drew Montreal into a transnational network of anti-Catholic activism. At Zion Church, the hosts introduced their guest as a speaker of international renown whose presence was a testament to the city's liberal values and tolerance. Gavazzi shrewdly played to this civic pride. In words that must have warmed the hearts of the men and women gathered to hear him speak, he began his lecture by noting that he was pleased to find himself in a "true British country."²²

In the aftermath of the riot, the Protestant press repeatedly constructed events in a way that cast the men and women who had attended the lecture at Zion Church as victims of a brutal attack at the hands of an irrational Catholic mob. On the pages of the Protestant community's newspapers, commentators muted and obscured the fact that violence had flowed in both directions during the riot. In doing so, they created a stark distinction between those who had attended Gavazzi's lecture and those who had gathered in Haymarket Square to voice their disapproval of it. The target of this mob, it was suggested, was everyone in the community who valued freedom of expression and rational debate, values that commentators claimed to be the birthright of British people across the globe. The most unfettered expression of this position was published in the *Gazette* following the release of the coroner's verdict: "The right of free discussion upon religious as well as political subjects, is a political right, a constitutional franchise of British subjects, a right born with all Canadians, either native or immigrant, now living."²³ This language predominated at the public assemblies held in the wake of the violence. During a meeting attended by a who's who of Montreal's British Protestant community the day after the riot, John Leeming, a prominent merchant,

21 The three lectures, originally scheduled from June 9 through to June 11, were entitled "The Popish System – Its Intolerance and Slavery," "Ancient and Modern Inquisition," and "The Present War of Rome against Protestantism" (*Montreal Gazette*, June 7, 1853; Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier*, p. 171).

22 *Montreal Gazette*, June 11, 1853.

23 *Montreal Gazette*, July 21, 1853.

and James Ferres, editor of the *Gazette*, tabled a motion that confirmed “in the most emphatic manner the right of men on all British soil to assemble for the purpose of Free Discussion.” They then expressed their “utmost abhorrence and indignation at the attempt to interfere with this privilege.”²⁴

Those present at Zion Church were thus credited by Protestant commentators as being at the forefront of a global struggle to protect British liberties in a colonial setting. At the conclusion of the public meeting of Protestant men mentioned above, John Leeming was warmly applauded for proclaiming that the British Empire had been spread across the globe by books, public lectures, and free discussion.²⁵ Gavazzi’s lecture had thus been elevated from a minor religious event to a vital public exercise of empire-building. By attending the lecture, these men and women had performed a brave and muscular defence of British values. Since Gavazzi’s appearance in Quebec City in the days preceding his Montreal lecture series had sparked serious rioting there, those who attended the event were no doubt aware that the evening was fraught with the potential for violence and physical danger. Protestant commentators did not perceive attendance as recklessness but as evidence of their courage and steadfastness in the face of attack. Employing sweeping liberal rhetoric, the *Gazette* reminded readers that Britons “would never consent to be deprived by the menaces, or the brute force of an unreasoning and restless mob.”²⁶

Commentators in these newspapers quickly wrote the Gavazzi Riot into their partisan narrative of the colony’s history, arguing that it was the most recent in a series of attacks on British freedoms and institutions that included the rebellions of 1837 and 1838 and the Rebellion Losses Crisis of 1849.²⁷ While this discussion was not explicitly sectarian, threats towards the city’s Catholic community simmered just below the surface. A *Gazette* editorial reminded readers that the “privilege” to practise the Catholic faith openly in Canada was a product of “Protestant toleration.” Portraying Montreal’s Protestants as a beleaguered minority, the *Gazette* referred to their foes as “short-sighted and insane,”²⁸ arguing that the persistent challenge to British governance was the result of a false sense of empowerment that Catholics possessed as “a local majority in this far

24 *Montreal Gazette*, June 11, 1853.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Montreal Gazette*, June 14, 1853.

27 These statements bring to mind Linda Colley’s suggestion that British nationalism was defined negatively. What united Britons across the globe was, more than anything else, that they were not French, Catholic, or dark-skinned. Montreal’s English Protestant elite were clearly drawing upon an imperial discourse in their condemnations of the city’s Catholics. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 368.

28 *Montreal Gazette*, July 7, 1853.

corner of the Continent.”²⁹ After four years of relatively tranquil relations between the city’s Protestant and Catholic communities, the Protestant press was depicting the divide between the two major religious communities in increasingly polarizing terms. The response of the British Protestant elite to the riot was more far-reaching than simply calling for greater civil protection against unruly elements among the Catholic working class, though such demands were made with vigour.³⁰ Drawing on a language of robust imperialism, British Protestants pointed to the riot as evidence that only their community elites were capable of wielding power and authority with responsibility and restraint in this challenging colonial environment.

It is crucial to note that opposition to Gavazzi’s appearance in Montreal was not only expressed through physical violence on Haymarket Square, but also in the measured rhetoric found in the city’s French and English middle-class Catholic press. Expressing outrage at Catholics being pinned with the blame for the riot, editors portrayed the Evangelical Protestants who had organized Gavazzi’s appearance in the city as the true authors of the unrest. The implications of this argument went further than dissecting the chain of events on Haymarket Square, but struck at the very core of the legitimacy of British Protestant authority in the city. Inviting Gavazzi to speak in Montreal, which Protestant newspapers considered a principled defence of British liberty and free speech, was described in the Catholic press as an act of hot-headed provocation. Commentators in a number of Catholic newspapers argued vehemently that Gavazzi’s supporters had knowingly instigated the violence by inviting a polarizing and extremist figure to speak in a city with a Catholic majority, thereby callously inviting a breach of the peace in a city that was no stranger to public violence.³¹ Just as they had in 1849, the Catholic press argued, Montreal’s British Protestants were committing acts of irrational provocation because they were no longer in sole possession of the levers of governance in the city.

Both Protestant and Catholic elites saw the relative absence of major acts of sectarian violence since the Rebellion Losses Crisis of 1849 as a key ingredient in the city’s material progress. Gavazzi’s critics in the Catholic community maintained in the aftermath of the riot that this period of calm had been the result of public figures taking care not to instigate conflict. Inviting

29 *Ibid.* The behaviour of Irish Catholics in the Gavazzi riot was contrasted with the response of Irish Catholics in Toronto, where the violence was quickly and harshly condemned. Irish Catholics seemed, the *Gazette* argued, to be well behaved when they were a minority.

30 See, for example, AVM, VM1, *City Council Minutes*, June 13, 1853.

31 In taking this position, Catholic papers hoped to appeal not only to members of their own community, but also to sympathetic readers in the Protestant community. *Le Canadien* argued that not only Catholics were saddened by Gavazzi’s arrival in Quebec, but all honest people (*Le Canadien*, June 6, 1853).

Gavazzi to town was painted as a gross violation of this social contract. The *True Witness*, the organ of Montreal's Irish Catholic community, published a lengthy letter to the editor in which the author pondered the necessary limits of free speech, stating it had been "long known, indeed, that the liberty of thinking — or right of private judgement — claimed by the people of England, and so respected in her colonies, seems to authorise, and to legitimize, all the possible vagaries of the human mind."³² The correspondent argued that the outrage being mustered in the Protestant press against Gavazzi's critics was built upon questionable philosophical grounds. In a sentiment echoed across the pages of the city's French-language press, the writer demanded to know why this vociferous commitment to free speech seemed to be stirred only in moments when Protestants wished to slander the Catholic religion. "They have," he noted, "confounded the right to say everything with the habit of respecting no principle."³³ The *True Witness* took issue with the suggestion that Gavazzi's appearance in Montreal was anything other than a premeditated attack on the city's Catholic majority,³⁴ while another editorial concluded that it was a positive sign that those who supported Gavazzi viewed the Irish Catholic community with such disdain, as anyone who would invite such a divisive figure to speak in the city clearly suffered from poor judgement.³⁵ A correspondent writing in *Le Canadien* espoused the view that, by inviting Gavazzi to speak in their building, the parishioners of Zion Church had transformed their house of worship into a political theatre.³⁶

The sense that the lecture had been conceived as an attack on Montreal's Catholic community was rooted both in Gavazzi's aggressive stance against the Catholic religion (a stance, Catholics argued, that lacked any veneer of civility) and in the physical location of Zion Church, which was just a short walk from the primarily Irish Catholic neighbourhoods on the city's southwestern periphery. The venue was also subject to different interpretations: while the Protestant community noted that the event had taken place inside a house of worship, Catholic commentators frequently noted that the lectures had been held in Haymarket Square, a public space that was frequently a site of popular assembly.³⁷ Despite being critical of those who had resorted to violence in Haymarket Square, certain commentators in the Catholic press were

32 *True Witness*, June 24, 1853. Mary Ryan notes that similar debates emerged in nineteenth-century New York City when repeated outbursts of social violence led many to question whether residents of the city had an inalienable right to stage public processions (*Civic Wars*, p. 231).

33 *True Witness*, June 24, 1853.

34 *True Witness*, July 1, 1853.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Le Canadien*, June 6, 1853.

37 Haymarket Square was, for example, the site of the election violence that had occurred in the spring of 1844. See *La Minerve*, April 25, 1844; *Montreal Gazette*, April 11, 1844.

willing to entertain the notion that the men who had gathered outside Zion Church had, in certain ways, behaved honourably during the riot. The proselytizing efforts of Gavazzi's adherents, *Le Canadien* argued, were not only an affront to respectable Christians, but an attack on Catholic masculinity. While careful to condemn acts of violence, commentators in the Catholic press argued that the rioters were merely acting upon their duty as Catholic men to defend their faith in order to pass it down to their sons. It was no wonder, an editorial in *Le Canadien* stated, that these men proved to be hostile in the face of "ces aventuriers qui veulent s'imposer, bon gré ou mal gré, eux et leurs doctrines à une population heureuse et paisable dans la foi de ses pères."³⁸

As the debate over which party was to blame for the events of June 9 heated up at public meetings and in the press, assertions about masculine decorum became an increasingly important part of the conversation. These competing explanations of the riot had undermined the legitimacy of both Protestant and Catholic authority in the city. In a period when the ability to govern was closely linked to the masculine traits of rationality and restraint, these qualities became the principal rhetorical battleground between competing factions of the Montreal elite. In the Protestant press, they were invoked to attack the legitimacy of the crowd that had gathered to protest Gavazzi's lecture. The *Gazette* emphasized the distinction between Gavazzi's audience and his opponents. Those attending the lecture were portrayed as rational men and women engaging in intelligent discourse, while those in the crowd gathered outside were described as incapable of rational debate, unable to exert even minimal control over their own passions. In the countless eye-witness accounts published in the Protestant press, observers made frequent mention of the deafening cacophony of the crowd, whose members made their presence known to adversaries by wildly "hooting and shouting."³⁹ The *Gazette* used racial metaphors to communicate this idea, equating the noise to "a war party of savages."⁴⁰ The contrast in the language used to describe crowds of Gavazzi's Protestant supporters is remarkable. When 300 men had gathered at the wharf on the morning of Gavazzi's arrival by steamboat from Quebec City, the *Gazette* went out of its way to mention, "there was no noise, nor confusion, not even a cheer, but the assemblage simply saluted the reverend Father, and filed behind the party with whom he walked, escorting him to his lodgings at St. Lawrence Hall."⁴¹ By emphasizing the restraint of Gavazzi's supporters, the *Gazette* was working to legitimize British Protestant authority in the city.

38 *Le Canadien*, June 13, 1853.

39 *Montreal Gazette*, June 20, 1853.

40 *Montreal Gazette*, June 10, 1853.

41 *Ibid.*

These assertions were, of course, fiercely contested. The Catholic press employed similar methods to attack Gavazzi's supporters. An editorial in the *True Witness* referred to the audience at Zion Church as "the yahoos of Christianity," adding that they exhibited "in their persons how foul, how loathsome, a thing vice is."⁴² The Catholic press lashed out at all those who suggested that sitting in the pews of Zion Church and applauding "the renegade friar" was the epitome of respectable manliness.⁴³ In an effort to demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of men in his community were capable of rational debate and self-control, the editor of the *True Witness* convened a meeting of the city's Irish Catholic men on the grounds of St. Patrick's Cathedral. With upwards of 1,000 men reportedly in attendance, Irish Catholic community leaders condemned both the anti-Irish sentiment found on the pages of the city's Protestant newspapers and the actions of the rioters in Haymarket Square. They held out an olive branch to the city's Protestants, arguing that anyone who had engaged in violent acts during the riot ought to be recognized by respectable people of both faiths as nothing more than vagabonds who likely had no true religious convictions.⁴⁴ Members of the Irish Catholic elite were clearly making every attempt possible to distance themselves from the crowd that had attacked Zion Church. In doing so, they clearly positioned themselves as the voice of reason and calm restraint in the city.

The *Gazette* reacted to the *True Witness*'s interpretation of the riot with vigorous hostility. While noting with a degree of surprise that the Catholic press had repudiated the acts of violence committed by the crowd in Haymarket Square, the editors were unwilling to accept anything short of an outright apology for the riot. The *Gazette* argued that, if the reasoning found in the *True Witness* editorial were taken to its logical conclusion, the men and women who attended the lecture at Zion Church would have to be characterized as rioters. Writing with a flourish of sarcasm, the *Gazette* suggested that "men and women . . . reckless and wicked enough to listen to a foreign preacher in their own church, and who dare to assert this as a right . . . certainly deserve more severe punishment than simple shooting."⁴⁵ Upon discovering its attempt to find common ground dead upon arrival, the *True Witness* lashed out at Gavazzi's supporters: "Shame upon you," thundered its editorial, "we do not say as gentlemen; for we would not desecrate the title of gentlemen by applying it to such as you; — but — Shame upon you as men! Fie — Fie upon your manhood!"⁴⁶ The editorial was similarly dismissive of the men who had accompanied

42 *True Witness*, July 1, 1853.

43 *True Witness*, June 17, 1853.

44 *Le Canadien*, June 20, 1853.

45 *Montreal Gazette*, June 16, 1853.

46 *True Witness*, June 17, 1853.

Gavazzi on the steamboat from Quebec City and the Montrealers who had met him on the wharf. While the *Gazette* had portrayed them as respectable defenders of British liberties, the *True Witness* instead suggested that they were a threatening mob of hard-drinking louts who had travelled to the city to carry out a premeditated attack, a “band of armed ruffians, who, from their conduct, appearance and demeanour, would appear to have been picked up in the vilest class of low grog shops . . . [they were] broken down bullies from the brothels, and similar dens of infamy. In their foul orgies, these scoundrels, over their cups, boasted of what they intended to do.”⁴⁷ Just as commentators in the *Gazette* had cast aspersions on the masculine decorum of the Catholic crowd in Haymarket Square, the *True Witness* maintained that Gavazzi’s supporters had been the ones whose lack of self-restraint and rationality had sparked the violence. The *Gazette*’s unwavering support for these alleged thugs raised questions about how fit the British Protestant elite was to govern the city.

Concerns about masculine decorum also arose during the coroner’s inquest into the casualties, as witnesses attempted to add legitimacy to their testimonies by insisting that they had remained rational and composed during the riot. During his appearance at the inquiry, Alfred Perry, a Protestant volunteer firefighter, persistently maintained that he had not lost control of his faculties during the tumult in Haymarket Square, despite finding himself in real danger. Perry had rushed to the scene upon hearing word that trouble was brewing. He testified that, upon finding himself in the midst of the agitated crowd, he made every possible attempt to reason with different individuals, reminding them that they stood before a Protestant place of worship. Not surprisingly, Perry stated that his efforts had been met with obscene gestures and foul words. When gunshots began ringing out from seemingly every direction, Perry admitted that he had dropped to the ground. When asked by the coroner “what was your object in lying down?”, Perry reluctantly admitted that he had done so to avoid being struck by a bullet. However, he insisted that, even as he lay on the ground beneath the scurrying feet of the crowd, his grasp of the unfolding situation and his memory of the events had not been the least bit blemished. He had remained “cool” and “composed” throughout the entire debacle.⁴⁸

These issues were also at the forefront of the debate surrounding Colonel Charles Ermatinger, the commander of the city’s police force, during the riot.⁴⁹ In early reports of the riot, eye-witness accounts

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Montreal Gazette*, July 2, 1853.

49 Ermatinger was of mixed Scottish and Ojibwa heritage with a family active in the fur trade. See Brian Stewart, *The Ermatingers: A 19th Century Ojibwa-Canadian Family* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

praised the heroism of his actions on Haymarket Square. Much was made of the fact that he had continued to do all that he could to keep the crowd at bay, despite sustaining serious injuries after being struck by the paving stones thrown towards Zion Church. While most assessments of Ermatinger's actions during the riot were favourable, some questioned his poise and decorum on Haymarket Square. One such correspondent to the *Gazette*, while conceding that Ermatinger possessed a "proper amount of physical courage," asked whether fighting off the crowd with a baton was, in fact, suitable behaviour for a civic official of such important stature. "I cannot see," the writer continued, "that his province is to fight, but on the contrary to 'keep cool'."⁵⁰

Mayor Wilson was forced to answer similar questions when he took the witness stand at the inquest. In the attempt to unravel the events leading up to the troops firing their rifles on Haymarket Square, the coroner asked witnesses who had been in close proximity to the mayor whether or not he had ordered the troops to do so. The answers evenly divided the witnesses called to the stand and prompted a more sensory line of questioning: had the mayor maintained his "presence of mind" throughout the riot? When called upon to testify, F. R. Holmes backed the mayor, assuring the jury that Wilson had a commanding presence on Haymarket Square and had read the *Riot Act* in a loud and authoritative voice.⁵¹ Alexander Chisholm, a local clerk, disagreed. He noted in his testimony that Wilson had appeared agitated throughout the evening and that, when he read the *Riot Act*, did so with such speed that it was difficult even for those standing nearby to understand what he was saying.⁵² Lieutenant Whatley of the 26th Regiment agreed and added that the mayor was already crumpling his copy of the *Riot Act* with his right hand before he had finished reading it.⁵³ There was a method to this line of questioning. Such observations of Wilson's gestures were being used to gauge whether the mayor had been an effective and composed authority figure on the night of June 9, or whether his nerves had buckled during the affray.⁵⁴

50 *Montreal Gazette*, June 20, 1853.

51 *Montreal Gazette*, June 21, 1853.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Montreal Gazette*, June 20, 1853.

54 *La Minerve* struck a more moderate tone in its editorial position, arguing that Wilson was an honourable man devoted to the principles of liberal Catholicism and that he had done much to prevent outbreaks of social violence thus far in his mandate. On the basis of both his record and the decency of his character, the paper argued, Wilson ought to have been forgiven for acting "sous l'influence d'une excitation extrême dans le délire du moment" (*La Minerve*, July 30, 1853). Wilson, it should be noted, had a Catholic mother and had married into the Traceys, a prominent Irish Catholic family, and was thus viewed sympathetically by Catholic commentators.

Nowhere, though, were the fluid boundaries of respectable masculine decorum more evident than in the discussions of Gavazzi's behaviour during the rioting. His observations, recorded in a letter to an English friend reprinted in the *Gazette* and the *Witness*, were in keeping with the interpretation of the riot found elsewhere in the Protestant press. Gavazzi included a vivid description of the crowds that had gathered in Montreal and Quebec City to protest his lecture, noting that "the appearance of the assailants was most despicable, for they came dirty, torn, and in their short sleeves, the better to show their origin."⁵⁵ Gavazzi's account took an unexpected turn when he addressed his role in fending off the Quebec City crowd. He began by describing how the crowd had interrupted his lecture, presumably with every intention of dragging him outside the church and murdering him. Gavazzi gloated that he had stood his ground in the face of these attacks "like a true Italian crusader."⁵⁶ With an air of feigned humility, he noted that "having a pulpit twelve feet wide, with the stairs exposed, facing the church, and compelled to defend it against more than sixty savages was rather a difficult task."⁵⁷ Abandoned by even his most staunch intellectual defenders, Gavazzi managed quite heroically to defend his position, first with fists and, later, by swinging a wooden stool over his head. In Gavazzi's account of the tumult, he suggested that his physical prowess was so impressive that, in the heat of the skirmish, even the artillery sergeant of the police force could do nothing more than turn to him and cry the words, "help me."⁵⁸ Gavazzi's somewhat implausible account of the Quebec City riot appears to have been unsettling to his elite Protestant supporters in Montreal. It diverted from their script of masculine restraint and composure that was so tightly linked to authority and respectability by all segments of the Montreal elite, instead drawing attention to Gavazzi's acts of unbridled physical aggression.

The *Gazette*, whose coverage of the riot revolved around portraying Gavazzi and his audience as respectable and peaceful victims of Catholic aggression, moved quickly in its coverage of the Montreal riot to qualify his words and place them in a more favourable light. The first such amendment came not from the *Gazette* but from Gavazzi himself. After regaling readers with the tale of his fisticuffs in Quebec City and Montreal, Gavazzi was careful to note that he had not once lost his temper during the exchange. Although he admitted that he had sustained

⁵⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, June 15, 1853.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* The use of this type of language to describe riotous Irish immigrants became increasingly commonplace in the decades to come. The classic text on this phenomenon is Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1997).

⁵⁸ *Montreal Gazette*, June 15, 1853.

injuries in both scuffles, he proudly assured readers that the wounds had not caused him any pain and that, like Alfred Perry, he had remained in control of his faculties throughout the ordeal.⁵⁹ To draw attention to Gavazzi's composure during the riots, the *Gazette* emphasized his *sang-froid*:

Bibles and Psalm books were hurled at him by the new votaries of the religious toleration of which we hear so much occasionally, and although some of them struck him, he never winced, nor changed his attitude. His demeanour was that of quite impressive nature, which only men of great minds and noble resolutions can assume, in moments of sudden danger.⁶⁰

Another sympathetic observer noted that Gavazzi had faced his attackers with a "smile of contempt" and drew comparisons between the besieged lecturer and Ben Caunt, the English bare-knuckle boxer of great renown.⁶¹

Readers did not once challenge the implausible suggestion that Gavazzi or anyone else would have been capable of maintaining an air of total calm while being pelted with projectiles by an enraged crowd. Likely they understood these assertions of restraint and masculine decorum to be part of a larger attempt to justify and legitimize a British Protestant authority that many considered to be in decline. In the years leading up to the riot in Haymarket Square, Montreal had seen itself stripped of its status as the capital of Canada, while the political scene became increasingly dominated by the voices of a dynamic younger generation of urbane French-Canadian politicians like George-Étienne Cartier and Louis Hypolite La Fontaine.⁶² The reaction to the Gavazzi Riot in newspapers like the *Gazette* can be read as something of a last-ditch effort to re-establish British Protestant men as the purveyors of rational authority in the colony.⁶³

The reaction towards women's participation in the events on Haymarket Square and in the debates that occurred afterward sheds further light on how access to public life in the city was being drawn around a very specific

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, June 9, 1853.

⁶¹ Bayne Ranken, ed., *Canada and the Crimea or Sketches of a Soldier's Life from the Journals of Major Ranken* (London: Longmans, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1863), p. 157.

⁶² Brian Young, *George-Étienne Cartier: Montreal Bourgeois* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981); Monet, *The Last Cannon Shot*; Stanley Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815–1873* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), pp. 137–169.

⁶³ A similar argument is made in the American context by Gail Bederman, who argues in her examination of masculinity that the ability to control one's impulses was central to nineteenth-century notions of manliness and was used to justify the ability of men to govern over those who lacked this ability. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 12.

notion of restrained masculinity. Whether by attending Gavazzi's lecture, by joining the angry crowd outside Zion Church, or by signing petitions that appeared on the pages of the city's newspapers, women had few opportunities to engage in the events surrounding the riot. Those they did have were heavily restricted by the gender discourse of the period. Gavazzi's critics and supporters used moments when women were drawn into the fray of public debate as opportunities to attack their opponents and the legitimacy of their authority in the city.

Descriptions of women in the pews of Zion Church during Gavazzi's lecture provide one example of how elite male commentators conceptualized the gendered boundaries of public life. Rather than applauding the women in Gavazzi's audience for defending free speech and rational discussions alongside their sons, husbands, and brothers, Protestant newspapers placed a heavy emphasis on women's reactions to the outbreak of violence, noting that the majority fainted in the affray, while those who remained conscious emitted "the most frightful of screams."⁶⁴ By calling attention to the din produced by the women in Zion Church, such reports drew clear parallels between women and the crowd gathered outside. These statements and interpretations suggested that, in the eyes of Protestant commentators, only the men gathered at Zion Church were capable of rational engagement in public life, again bestowing legitimacy on their authority and the masculine character of public life in the city.

The fiercely contested place of women in public life was made even more evident when an anonymous group of women from the city's Protestant elite made their support for Gavazzi known shortly after the cancellation of the remaining lectures. The women purchased advertising space in the *Gazette* to announce that they were organizing a "general meeting of the ladies of Montreal." They wished to register their disappointment at the lack of support that Gavazzi was receiving from civic officials and Protestant community leaders, who in the immediate aftermath of the riot had hastily agreed to cancel the remaining lectures. Their petition concluded by stating that the "ladies beg to apologize for thus presenting themselves in a public capacity; but owing, they regret to say to the marked indifference of the Gentlemen of Montreal, they are compelled to do so, for the maintenance of civil and religious liberty."⁶⁵ The women made it clear in their missive that the religious character of Gavazzi's undertaking had opened a legitimate, albeit narrow, space for them to make their voices heard in public debate. The text provides a glimpse of women from the social elite engaged with the events occurring on the streets of their city, thus challenging notions that wealthy women were

64 *Montreal Gazette*, June 10, 1853.

65 *Montreal Gazette*, June 17, 1853.

being shielded from public life during this period. Rather, this group of women revealed themselves to be keen observers of public debates who were attuned to moments when idealized gender roles could be transgressed, thus giving them licence to enter the fray.⁶⁶

Their intervention into the tense debates prompted by the Gavazzi Riot did not go unchallenged. The French-language press immediately attacked the virtue of Gavazzi's female defenders. *Le Canadien* thought it "vraiment pénible de voir le fanatisme égarer à ce point le sexe dévot et changer son caractère naturellement doux en celui du tigre altéré de sang."⁶⁷ For French and English Catholic commentators, the women's petition was further evidence that Gavazzi's supporters had instigated the unrest, arguing that the women were condoning an escalation of violence in a city where there was already "assez de sang dans les rues." The women's notice received little mention in the pages of the Protestant press, which can be interpreted as either a subtle endorsement or a rebuke of the women's message as well as their right to have their voices heard in the public sphere of debate.

The editor of the *True Witness*, meanwhile, took the women's notice as an opportunity to attack the respectability of Gavazzi's female supporters by penning a lengthy parody that portrayed the authors as prostitutes.⁶⁸ The *True Witness* parody illustrates the degree to which Gavazzi's female supporters were operating on the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour. Their precarious venture furnished Catholic commentators with an opportunity to attack the respectability of all who had come to Gavazzi's defence and thus the legitimacy of British Protestant authority in the city. The piece was signed by one "Sally Jones, Twenty Years on the Town and well known to the police — bad luck to them."⁶⁹ The parody reiterated the arguments made in the original advertisement, but did so using a coarse and, presumably, working-class dialect, with thinly veiled references to prostitution and vice. "T'other night, my young ladies and me, stimulated by gin, and a'reading of your Wednesday's *Gazette*, and being, as everybody knows, strongly attached to the

66 Mary Ryan's observation that the "female citizens of nineteenth century cities battered at the walls of the public sphere" seems a particularly apt description of how these particular women engaged with the Gavazzi debates. See Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, NJ: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 14. Similarly, in her study of political culture in Upper Canada, Cecilia Morgan argues that evangelical religion provided women with a greater sense of social citizenship during this period (*Public Men and Virtuous Women*). The actions taken by Gavazzi's female supporters certainly support this line of argument.

67 *Le Canadien*, June 17, 1853.

68 In her study of women in French public life, Michelle Perrot notes a similar tendency for commentators to portray female political adversaries as prostitutes in post-revolutionary France. See Michelle Perrot, *Femmes publiques* (Paris: Les Éditions Textuel, 1997), p. 30.

69 *True Witness*, June 17, 1853.

maintenance of Civil and Religious Liberty ... took it into our heads that we could not do better than ... invite Father Gavazzi ... to return to Montreal, right off, and finish his lectures.”⁷⁰ The parody went on to refer to Gavazzi as “such a duck of a man ... who knows our tastes entirely.”⁷¹ In this most blatant attack on Gavazzi’s female supporters, the *True Witness* concluded with the words, “when he comes, me and two or three other ‘gals’ intends giving him what you call a reception.”⁷²

The Gazette employed a similar strategy during the coroner’s inquest, when the Catholic press championed the testimony of Margaret Brown, a widowed tavernkeeper who had witnessed the events in Haymarket Square. Brown was the only woman called to the stand during the inquest, and her memory of the events in question challenged the dominant narrative of the riot. Her testimony was presented in both Catholic and Protestant newspapers as an extraordinary interval in the proceedings. The testimonies given by men, be they civic and community leaders, military officials, the elites in Gavazzi’s audience, or other onlookers, were neatly summarized on the pages of the city’s newspapers. Only Brown’s appeared as an unabridged transcript in the press for public perusal. Brown’s appearance at the inquest began inauspiciously. In a measure that appears to have been adopted uniquely for her, Brown was asked to provide letters from “respectable” members of society assuring the coroner that her testimony was reliable. Upon arriving at the inquest, she struggled with the oath-taking process. The coroner had to ask her repeatedly “to state all you know slowly and in a loud voice, so that all the jurors may hear you distinctly,” and she bristled when doubts were raised regarding the accuracy of her memory.⁷³ While interjections and interruptions were omitted from the reports on other testimonies, Brown’s was portrayed as a ribald affair, including frequent outbursts emanating from the gallery and laughter erupting when she lost focus during questioning. As the process dragged on, it was noted parenthetically that the witness had slumped down in her chair and required medical attention and that, afterwards, she had protested the intense style of questioning employed by the coroner. Brown’s appearance on the witness stand was the only moment during the coroner’s inquest when we are reminded that this was a semi-public forum, carried out in front of a gallery filled with interested parties who gathered each day to sort through and haggle over evidence. In a statement that mirrored the sentiments of Gavazzi’s elite female defenders, Brown was forthcoming throughout her testimony that, as a woman, she felt uncomfortable being compelled

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Montreal Gazette*, July 8, 1853.

to play such a prominent and public role in the proceedings.⁷⁴ Her recollection of the riot followed an entirely different narrative structure than the one presented by male witnesses. Brown based her testimony almost entirely on her personal experiences rather than the observations of troop formations upon which others had focused their attention. Judging from the transcripts printed in the local press, the coroner repeatedly attempted to draw Brown back to the customary line of questioning, but she kept veering back to descriptions of how she had felt intimidated and vulnerable in the crush of troops and rioters on Haymarket Square. She noted in particular that a number of soldiers had used “hard” words in her presence and that other troops had stepped on her feet and pulled on the drawstrings of her bonnet.⁷⁵ Brown’s testimony, like the debates prompted over the call for a meeting of respectable ladies, demonstrates the widespread apprehension that women encountered upon engaging with public life. It is vital to note, however, that they were present. The role of class is also evident here; Brown was not afforded the veil of respectable anonymity granted to the women who placed the advertisement in the *Gazette* or to the women who filled the pews of Zion Church to hear Gavazzi speak.

The *Gazette* immediately set out to discredit Brown’s testimony, describing her as “a fanciful sort of woman.”⁷⁶ The paper mocked the Irish Catholic community for allowing her recollections to play a more prominent role in crafting a narrative of events than those of military commanders and other elite men. “They have the testimony of a woman apparently half-crazy,” exclaimed the *Gazette* in its summation of the inquest.⁷⁷ Like the parody of the women’s notice that appeared in the *True Witness*, the *Gazette*’s attack on the way that Gavazzi’s critics had used Brown’s testimony played on contemporary attitudes towards women to raise doubts about the judgement of Catholic elites.

As the debates concerning the Gavazzi Riot retreated from the front pages of the city’s newspapers, these competing claims on authority in the city were not resolved. The coroner’s inquiry into the deaths that occurred on Haymarket Square, which had been the principal public forum for much of this discussion, wrapped up its proceedings at the end of July. In keeping with the sentiment of the debate, the jury split

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, July 18, 1853.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Although Margaret Brown’s appearance before the coroner’s inquest was reported as spectacular, it must be noted that working-class women were not strangers to the city’s legal institutions. Women consistently testified before the lower criminal courts during this period, whether it was to defend themselves on charges or accuse others of breaking the law. See, for instance, Mary Anne Poutanen, “Regulating Public Space in Early Nineteenth Century Montreal,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 35, no. 69 (May 2002), pp. 36–57.

tidily along sectarian lines. While both the Catholic and Protestant juries condemned the violence and the recklessness of the troops, differences between the two verdicts hint at considerable discord with regard to the policing of future outbreaks of social violence. The Catholic jurists echoed calls that had appeared in a number of French- and English-language Catholic newspapers in the aftermath of the riot for the creation of a new branch of the police force that would be specifically trained to deal with rioting.⁷⁸ The Protestant jurists were silent on this issue. The different reactions reflected a significant split in public opinion regarding the challenges of urban policing. While the riot fuelled calls for a better funded, more professional police force,⁷⁹ these demands were countered by a vocal minority of British Protestants who openly questioned the effectiveness of this type of civil protection. The police force, after all, was a municipal institution and thus had to be governed through inter-ethnic collaboration. Many British Protestant community leaders therefore viewed the police force as little more than an engine of Catholic patronage that was incapable of defending Protestant interests. Instead, a handful of Protestant commentators supported the idea of hiring an independent police force that would offer specific protection to the city's British Protestant community during events such as Gavazzi's lecture.⁸⁰ It is unclear how many British Protestants supported these propositions, but it seems likely that dissatisfaction with the police force was widespread in the immediate wake of the Gavazzi Riot.⁸¹ This was another manifestation of the competing claims on power and authority in the city.

While French- and English-language Catholic commentators sympathetic to the project of bourgeois reform looked to sharpen and enhance the role of the state as a means of creating an orderly city, some voices in the British Protestant community appear to varying degrees to have supported a turn inwards and away from a state that they could not steer without obstruction, collaboration, and compromise. Instead, they

78 *Le Canadien*, June 15, 1853. The Attorney General of Lower Canada, Lewis Drummond, wrote a letter to the Police Commission suggesting the possibility that municipal and provincial governments share the costs of founding such a corps, which Drummond felt ought to consist of military pensioners (AVM, VM1, *Police Commission Minutes*, June 22, 1853).

79 Reference to the existing policemen in the city as "miserable riff-raff" (*Montreal Gazette*, June 25, 1853) was just one of many complaints in the *Gazette* regarding the existing force. Many of these complaints were directed specifically towards the additional nightwatchmen who had been hired in the aftermath of the riot, as a number of residents reported being awakened in the middle of the night by their rambunctious behaviour (*Montreal Gazette*, June 14, 1853).

80 *Montreal Gazette*, June 14, 1853.

81 Elite dissatisfaction with police forces has been examined by Peter Goheen in the context of Victorian Toronto. Goheen notes that elite periodicals such as *Saturday Night* were often highly critical of the police force, lambasting police not only for professional incompetence, but also for their shortcomings in public decorum. See Peter Goheen, "The Assertion of Middle Class Claims to Public Space in Late Victorian Toronto," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29 (2003), p. 76.

explored the prospect of reverting to an earlier model of governance under which British authorities would frame their power around the paternalist undertaking of protecting themselves from hostile subjects.⁸² In certain instances during the aftermath of the riot, this led to calls by some extremists for vigilantism, which obviously struck a chord with segments of the British Protestant community, as hundreds of boys and young men volunteered to patrol the streets after dark and usher Gavazzi through the city.⁸³ While the *Gazette* insisted that the sole concern of these volunteers was to keep the peace, it seems likely that this gesture contained an element of physical intimidation.

This reaction reflected the halting attempts of Montreal's British Protestant elite to adapt to the changing contours of public life in mid-nineteenth-century Canada. After many of them had basked in their success in suppressing calls for democratic reform in the rebellions of 1837 and 1838, the subsequent decade had witnessed the emergence of a canny and well-connected political elite devoted to furthering the project of democratic reform. The determined opposition of many in the British Protestant elite to responsible government had culminated in their violent and ultimately futile reaction to the Rebellion Losses Bill. In many ways, the British Protestant elite's reaction to the Gavazzi Riot was a last-ditch effort to assert the legitimacy of a social vision centred around an unhindered grip on power and authority. For Catholic elites, meanwhile, the Gavazzi Riot was further evidence that the British Protestant elite was still struggling to adapt to public life in the era of

82 The reaction of many British Protestants to the Gavazzi Riot and their subsequent attacks on the city's police force are another example of the uneven process of state formation throughout this period. Donald Fyson's work has done much to challenge the traditional narrative of state formation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Lower Canada, which suggested that the 1840s were pivotal in the growth of the state because of such phenomena as the professionalization of the police force. See Donald Fyson, *Magistrates, Police, and People: Everyday Criminal Justice in Quebec and Lower Canada, 1764–1837* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 137–138. For a different perspective on this narrative, see Jean-Marie Fecteau, "Note critique. Primauté analytique de l'expérience et gradualisme historique : sur les apories d'une certaine lecture du passé," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Autumn 2007), pp. 281–289. For more on the process of mid-nineteenth-century state formation in Canada, see the essays collected by Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Jean-Marie Fecteau, *La liberté du pauvre : sur la régulation du crime et de la pauvreté au XIX^e siècle québécois* (Montreal: VLB, 2004) and *Un nouvel ordre des choses : la pauvreté, le crime et l'État au Québec, de la fin du XVIII^e siècle à 1840* (Outremont, QC: VLB, 1989). The Gavazzi Riot also demonstrates how difficult it was for the authorities to prosecute rioters during this period. For more on this aspect, see Donald Fyson, "The Trials and Tribulations of Riot Prosecutions: Collective Violence, State Authority and Criminal Justice in Quebec, 1841–1892" in Barry Wright and Susan Binnie, *Canadian State Trials, Volume III: Political Trials and Security Measures, 1840–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 161–203.

83 *Montreal Gazette*, June 13, 1853.

responsible government, under which it would no longer be able to wield power and authority with the arbitrary and authoritarian clout it had possessed prior to 1848.

By the end of the summer of 1853, the Gavazzi Riot and the controversy it had instigated were no longer at the forefront of public debate. This hiatus did not signal the end of sectarian strife in Montreal, and outbreaks of collective violence occurred intermittently for decades to come. The events of June 1853 show the fiercely partisan and contested nature of power and authority in the city. It is evident, though, that the consensus that had emerged among different factions of the city's elite following the Rebellion Losses Crisis with regard to popular violence continued to harden. While different factions of the city's elite clashed during these confrontations, they were also collaborating in forums such as the municipal government in efforts to foster a more genteel urban culture.⁸⁴ In so doing, these elites were engaging in a transnational bourgeois discourse around issues of public order and democratic reform.⁸⁵ The debates that swirled around the Gavazzi Riot demonstrate how determined competing factions of the elite were to disassociate themselves from the city's turbulent popular political culture. They were clearly negotiating the parameters of public life to suit their purposes. The emphasis on masculine restraint and composure shared by both Protestant and Catholic elites played a significant part in marginalizing women and the poor. The basis for legitimate authority was set around elite masculinity, a crucial point in an urban environment on the verge of industrialization. The politics of ethnicity and democratic reform, which had dominated colonial public life in the 1830s and 1840s, were, by the early 1850s, being eclipsed by questions of national and capitalist consolidation. In this cultural and political context, outbreaks of collective popular violence were increasingly seen by elites of every ethnic and partisan stripe as a social problem that required the careful management of the state. That being said, the Gavazzi Riot was a reminder that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, for all the talk of an emerging public sphere rooted in rational deliberation, manifestations of a rough urban popular political culture continued to play a significant role in shaping the contours of colonial public life.

84 For more on ethnic collaboration in Montreal's municipal government during this period, see Michèle Dagenais, "The Municipal Territory: A Product of the Liberal Order?" in Ducharme and Constant, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony*, pp. 202–220; R. J. Morris, "Montreal and Belfast in the 19th Century: Social Relationships and Social Stability" in Caroline Andrews, Pat Armstrong, and André Lapierre, *World Class Cities: Can Canada Play?* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), pp. 251–266.

85 James Vernon's work on British political culture between the *Reform Acts* of 1832 and 1867 demonstrates how initiatives for democratic reform actually pushed these social groups further to the margins of public life. See James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).