

ÉTUDES CRITIQUES / REVIEW ESSAYS

Making Patrician Authority in Quebec

YOUNG, Brian – *Patrician Families and the Making of Quebec: The Taschereaus and McCords*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. Pp. 452.

LITTLE, J.I. – *Patrician Liberal: The Public and Private Life of Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, 1829-1908*. Toronto: UTP, 2013. Pp. 376.

Since the publication of Ian McKay's agenda-setting essay on Canada's liberal order framework, the expansion of a project of rule based on the individual, equality, and the right to property has been the focus of much scholarship on the nineteenth century. Somewhat lost in this literature are the social, cultural, and political systems that liberalism surpassed, and how pillars of older social orders navigated these transitions. In Quebec, patrician culture, led by propertied seigneurs, military officers, and religious elites, was the dominant order that was confronted by liberalism. Brian Young, in *Patrician Families* and J.I. Little, in *Patrician Liberal*, both explore this culture, and highlight important ways of understanding authority, power, and privilege in Quebec history.

Framed biographically—Young traces the lives of four generations of McCords and Taschereaus, while Little focuses on the life and work of Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière—these two monographs ask broad questions about the nature of authority, and the relationship between liberalism, nationalism, and conservatism. To understand patrician political culture, both works investigate how the interaction between the personal, the domestic, the familial, the commercial, the administrative, the political, and the public shaped Quebec's history. For the Taschereaus, the McCords, and Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, the power and wealth they drew from the seigneurial system figured heavily into their understanding of social relations. In a society fractured by political affiliation, religion, ethnic identity, class, and increasingly by divided along rural-urban lines, the patrician elite “capture[d] and maintaine[d] authority across the long political and economic haul from the British Conquest to the beginning of the twentieth century” (Young, p.5). As landowners, they were in a position to make a space for themselves as political and cultural leaders. This cultural and economic capital survived even after the abolition of the seigneurialism in 1854.

Based on correspondence, notarial records, and visual sources—maps, surveys, art, self-representations, iconography, and memorials—Young argues that patrician authority was carefully managed and constantly reproduced. This status was not only based on land possession, but also on institutional, religious and

cultural efforts. Patrician elites were civic, political and religious leaders. They developed landscapes, and eventually they celebrated their contributions in public memory projects. Organized generationally, each chapter focuses on a family head, attempting to “align this family and individual time with the geopolitical events that determined lives and, for later generations, their imagined moments” (Young, p.12). For Young, this is an alternative to national chronologies and particularly relevant to lives in periods of sweeping change (Young, p.67). *Patrician Families* shows how the first two generations of Taschereaus and McCords struggled for status. The Conquest and the American Revolution heightened ethnic and linguistic tensions, while inviting questions of loyalty to the Crown. Since the Taschereaus were French Catholics and the McCords were Protestant and Scottish, they experienced this period differently. But for both families, land was central to their futures. They developed infrastructure and fostered industry on their holdings. Resulting from their wealth and local authority, they also rose to administrative and political power.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, both families’ third generations were born to patrician status, whereby “[d]eep family and cultural grooves connected both men [Jean-Thomas Taschereau and John Samuel McCord] to vested landed, institutional, and bureaucratic interests” and to cultural identities (Young, p.141). This status did not mean stability, however. By the end of the nineteenth century the McCord position was diminished by new legal, political, intellectual cultures, and the decline of the Church of England. To counter this fading position and diminishing wealth, McCord family heads turned to memorialization: the construction of a cemetery and founding a museum (Young, pp.190, 249, 305-308). In this same period, Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau was made an archbishop. Comfortable with science, he played an important role in Laval University’s development. His work in Catholic ceremony and public leadership gave him “cult status as the icon of a threatened but proudly French and Catholic nation” (Young, p.291), a role which was memorialized in publications, biographies, and ultimately a statue in Quebec City.

Patrician Families is an ambitious and far-reaching work. Showing his background as a social historian, the text is empirically rich. Charts record family trees, school attendance, contracts, administrative records, and burial sites. These details highlight the importance of administration to patrician elites. Strategies for the family, the community, and their own businesses were managed in minute details. That is not to suggest the text is dry. Inspired by his time as a history museum’s board member, Young pays close attention to visual culture, suggesting that “[t]hrough maps, surveys, plans, portraits, drawings, and photos that they commissioned and archived, we can penetrate patrician culture through their sense of fence design, panoramic sightlines, headstone inscriptions, ornamental trees, and classical urns” (Young, p.20). These images are integrated seamlessly and beautifully into the text, and show how the Taschereaus and McCords attempted to portray their families at the center of Quebec’s national history.

While Young examines social and cultural expressions of patrician power,

Little provides a political biography of Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, a seigneur, businessman, lawyer, conservationist, provincial and federal politician. Inspired by microhistory, and based largely on Joly's correspondence, Little seeks to investigate what Joly's life and work "revealed about Quebec and Canadian society, economy, politics, and culture during the Victorian and Edwardian eras" (Little, p.xii). The book is arranged chronologically around Joly's life and career, dedicating chapters to Joly's family, his work as a seigneur and entrepreneur, his work in Quebec's Liberal party, his efforts for forestry conservation, his time as a federal cabinet minister, and his service as lieutenant governor of British Columbia. For Little's Joly, all these activities were intertwined; his business ties and his family background informed his political life. Little stresses biculturalism as a guiding theme in Joly's career. Born to a Catholic, seigneurial family on his mother's side, and a Parisian, Protestant, commercial one on his father's, Joly's business sense and politics, argues Little, came from his father, while his social conservatism and status as a seigneur came from his mother (Little, p.35). Similarly, as a seigneur of Lotbinière, his career benefitted from "a system of dependency—both coercive and benevolent" with those who lived and worked on the land he controlled (Little, p.96).

These two influences, the patrician and the liberal, were prominent throughout his life. He approached his family, the renters on his land, and the federal employees in his department with a paternalistic care (Little, pp.245-246). In legislature, he opposed corruption and waste, and suggested political and agricultural reforms based on "his patrician sense of responsibility as well as distaste for the materialist values and ruthless business practices of the bourgeoisie" (Little, p.100). Joly opposed Confederation because he felt it threatened French Canadian traditions, and would be financially wasteful. Once it passed, however, Joly worked to maintain national unity, so far as to quit the Liberal party over their exploitation of Louis Riel's 1885 resistance and execution (Little, p.155). Little shows how navigating these influences meant that Joly does not fit neatly into "either a conservative or a liberal mould" (Little, p.246). Rather than attribute this to inconsistency, he relates it to the interaction of patrician background and his liberal politics.

Little makes an important contribution to Canada and Quebec's political histories by complicating the primacy of Canada's liberal order. Joly grappled with many of the key political issues of the nineteenth-century: railway building; civil service reform; party discipline; national unity; imperialism; and bicultural cooperation. Because of his religious and political backgrounds, Little stresses that Joly "embodied the cultural duality of Canada as well as the tension between land-based aristocratic values and urban bourgeois ones" (Little, p.xiii). Identifying as a political liberal, Joly's politics were still influenced by his paternalism. Rather than focusing on the rights of the individual, his seigneurial background made him appreciate the reciprocal expectations and obligations to those in his community, district, office, and party.

Not merely about class and administrative issues, patrician culture was an arrangement that provided gendered codes of conduct for men and women. The

gendered social order affected public and domestic spaces. Marriages could be strategies to consolidate family wealth. In Joly's case, the Lotbinière seigneurie came from his mother's family. The first generation of Taschereaus explored in Young's text begins with the marriage of Thomas-Jacques Taschereau to Marie-Claire Fleury de la Gorgendière. As New France's treasurer for the Ministry of Marine, Thomas-Jacques had a title. The Fleury de la Gorgendières provided the wealth and the established position in the colony (Young, pp. 27-29). Marie-Claire Fleury de la Gorgendière played an active role in establishing Taschereau authority. After her husband's death in 1749, she became family head and used marriage settlement, the seigneurie, and customary law to manage the distribution of property. Signing documents as 'widow Taschereau,' Young writes that she was "characterized by her complicity in the prevailing customs of patriarchy" (Young, p.29).

The customs of patriarchy meant that the role of women in this society was largely "structuring the patriarchal family" (Young, p.47). Male heirs were given primacy in marriage hierarchies and in inheritances. Joly's daughters were educated to support their future husbands' status, which in turn would maintain family position (Little, p.57). Young traces the roles of wives and daughters in managing domestic space, cultivating images of gentility through art and gardening, and participating in and leading religious ceremonies. Religiosity was a prominent feature of respectable women in this culture. Many Taschereaus joined the Ursuline order. This had dual functions: it demonstrated familial faith and kept family resources undivided by marriage dowries. As Protestants, Joly's daughters "did not have the option available to their patrician Taschereau cousins of choosing a vocation by entering a convent" (Little, p.61). As the McCords turned to public memory, the place of women in family history also became a problem. Military, judicial, and honorary titles were prominently displayed around headstones. Focusing on titles made women's contributions difficult to memorialize. Instead, those where "politically useful" were remembered as the wives of prominent men (Young, p.308).

Reading the two books side-by-side, the role and experiences of women is noticeably less prevalent in Little's work. Part of this is a result of his biographical approach. Focusing on a single life leaves less room for multiple narratives than Young's prosopography. Another is an effect of the sources. There are few mentions of Joly's daughters in his correspondence (Little, p.57). But Little does pay attention to the daughters' marriages and Joly's concern for them. One of the sources used to reconstruct Joly's private life and suggesting he was an caring and involved father is a fictionalized storybook written by Hazel Boswell, his granddaughter, *Town House, Country House* (Little, pp.51-52). Joly's parenting was based on the same paternalism that informed Joly's attitudes towards his tenants and those in his departments.

Patrician culture was a masculine culture. It was performed in military and religious rituals, in voluntary and intellectual associations, on the hustings and at home. Young also shows how these masculine ideals configured the Montreal and

Quebec City's architecture and landscape. In planning their estates, the Mount Royal cemetery, and civil landscapes, the McCords turned to ideas about the gentleman and his garden, and about respectability. (Young, pp.209, 234-240). Joly too took part in patrician culture of masculinity. In his conclusion, Little states that "[t]o state the obvious, the dominant masculinity that he embodied was of a very different kind than that of his impetuous and adventurous younger brother," who had a military career serving in the British infantry in India and volunteering in the Crimean war (Little, p.244). Joly's promotion of an alternate type of masculinity could have been drawn out more forcefully throughout the text. This is especially relevant in discussions of political corruption. When decrying a federal offer of money to Quebec in exchange for supporting a railway construction bill, Joly declared, "Let the Government bring out the measure manfully on its own merits & stand or fall by its result" (Little, pp.144-145). This is an explicit recognition that standing by a proposal was a performance of masculinity.

Performing a particular type of honest masculinity is relevant, and noticeably absent, in Little's sustained discussion of Joly's attitude towards the civil service. In proposing a policy for dismissals in his department, Joly promised that any employee accused of wrongdoing would be given the opportunity to defend himself (Little, p.203). Again, this could be drawn out in presenting oneself 'manfully.' More than just political scruples, this indicates the type of man that he understood as qualified for public office, and the type of man he considered himself. Again, in opposing the formation of a provincial civil service commission for Quebec, Joly suggested "the government should exercise the self-discipline that would make such innovation unnecessary" (Little, p.144). Little does an admirable job of demonstrating the constant interplay between nineteenth-century politics and patronage. This was a system Joly found unseemly, but his paternalism made him interested in the fate of those in his department. Analytically, however, this could be examined as more than corruption and reform. These practices, and the proposed reforms, were debated through tropes of masculinity, such as independence, self-discipline, and pride in their honest work.

On top of raising the issue of gender in patrician culture, both works show the limits of treating Quebec as a monolith. As landowners, all three subjects were anchored to a place—Quebec City and Beauce for the Taschereaus, Montreal and the Eastern Townships for the McCords, and Lotbinière for Joly. All three families had close ties to the regions where they owned and developed land. As they became entrepreneurs, magistrates, officers, administrators, and elected representatives, their authority was linked to their relationships throughout their regions. Patrician power was rooted in specific communities. Political and cultural developments, like the Rebellions of 1837-38, professionalization, the rise of academic science, and capitalist expansion were experienced differently in each of these regions. For example, one of the results of these particular histories is that the patrician elite was eclipsed in Montreal while remaining strong in Quebec City. Among English Canada's leading historians of Quebec, and having both written surveys of Quebec's history, Young and Little are in strong positions to highlight this.

These histories are firmly grounded in place. But both these works also understand that patrician families participated in transnational exchanges of knowledge, capital, trade, and culture. In building libraries, promoting popular education, and, in the case of Jean-Thomas, founding a newspaper, the Taschereaus were familiar with European intellectual trends. While settling in New France's colonial setting, the McCords remained part of familial and financial networks that spread across the Atlantic. By the nineteenth century, for Thomas McCord and his son John Samuel, these networks included scientific information. They joined international institutes, bought scientific journals, and obsessed over data and measurement (Young, pp.56, 120-121, 196). As Little stresses throughout *Patrician Liberal*, Henri-Gustave Joly's commercial and political interests were developed in Paris, where he was educated and his Father was born. From his father, Joly also took an interest in science, particularly that of forest conservation. This too was related to international trade, since Lotbinière lumber was exported to the United States, and it was leading North American lumbermen who were concerned about maintaining forest resources (Little, p.176). Joly promoted conservation through political and commercial activities, criticizing regulations of timber leases and calling for export duties. For all three of these patrician subjects their authority was local, established through participation in cultural and administrative activities. Yet, at the same time, their worlds were transnational, taking cues from colonial elites on both sides of the Atlantic.

In examining the lives and times of wealthy, propertied elites, both *Patrician Families* and *Patrician Liberal* show how dominant social orders shifted and adapted with societies in transition. Patrician power was not only about wealth; it relied on professional, seigneurial, religious, and familial authority. Titles, public positions, cultural performances, and family histories were all crucial in establishing patrician status. With industrialization, capitalist development, and urbanization, a new class of urban elites challenged this status. Not all patricians experienced these challenges in the same way. While McCord hegemony was diminished in Montreal, the Taschereaus became entrenched with Laval University and symbols of a Quebec's French Catholic background. As a provincial and national politician in the second half of the nineteenth century, Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière balanced his patrician background with his liberal politics. He approached questions of national unity, administrative reform, and the state's role in society with a respect for office and a paternalistic concern for those he represented. Maintained over generations, patrician culture coexisted with the rise of capitalism and professional administration.

By shedding light on the long histories of patrician elites, both *Patrician Families* and *Patrician Liberal* contribute to better understanding the nature of power and cultural capital in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Quebec. This history is not just a question of before and after liberalism. Rather, both works investigate how hegemonic families relied on property, marriage, status, ritual, and history to establish their positions. There remained a space for patrician authority, even as new claims on authority became prominent. The continued reliance

on older strategies of rule highlights the importance of understanding political history as more than the history of elections and parliaments. For the McCords, Taschereaus, and Jolys, patrician authority was not simply a result of their class status, but made and remade, drawing on the personal, the administrative, the cultural, and the social.

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