

ARCHITECTURE AND “ENVIRONMENTALITY” IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

> MARC GRIGNON

MARC GRIGNON teaches in the history of art program at Université Laval (Quebec City), and he is a regular member of the Centre interuniversitaire d'études sur les lettres, les arts et les traditions (CELAT). He specializes in Canadian and European architecture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, and he has published articles in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, the *Journal for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, *RACAR* (Canadian Art Review), *Architecture and Ideas*, *Art History*, *Perspective* (*revue de l'Institut national de l'histoire de l'art*), and other scientific journals.

Architectural historians have traditionally associated the profound transformations that occurred in Western architecture around the turn of the nineteenth century with a “cult of styles”¹ that began with neoclassicism and quickly expanded into Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and eclecticism.² Taking into consideration a broader view of architectural production, and shifting away from an approach focused on stylistic labelling, scholars of the last two decades have examined how the architecture of that period established a new relation with history and culture conceived as a whole. Barry Bergdoll portrayed this transformation most clearly when he argued that many important architects from the late eighteenth century attempted to establish a “scientific” relation to historical development, situating themselves on the level of scientists and philosophers.³ But the focus of these studies has remained fixed on a small number of well-known architects-theorists on the forefront of artistic development, and it is not easy to evaluate how their ideas can be used to characterize the period as a whole.

One can argue, of course, that building form depends on a number of ideas and opinions shared by architects and clients alike—ideas and opinions that can generally be associated with identifiable cultural or political trends of the period. Yet, when sources from other areas of culture are taken into account, claims made on that basis often need to be qualified. From this perspective, we will look at literary sources of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in an attempt to circumscribe a conception of architecture that



FIG. 1. CHISWICK CHAP, VIEW OF STRAWBERRY HILL HOUSE FROM GARDEN IN 2012, AFTER RESTORATION. LICENCE CREATIVE COMMONS CC-BY-SA-3.0. | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

characterized more generally the learned elites of the period—among whom, of course, the largest architectural clientele can be found. For an effective impact on readers, literary fiction has indeed to rely on important assumptions about the way people interact with buildings, and it is quite interesting to observe the convergence between certain literary trends and architectural developments around the turn of the nineteenth century. More specifically, Gothic fiction tends to portray the relation between buildings and their users as a direct emotional response with even a physical dimension.¹ In this article, we will try to show that very modern ideas about the influence of environment on people were being formulated in that period.

Directly relevant to our argument, William Taylor's book *The Vital Landscape* focuses on the Victorian understanding of nature, and he demonstrates the rise of a strong environmental awareness in nineteenth-century Britain.⁴ Taylor also introduces the notion of "environmentality" to talk about these "novel environmental sensibilities"⁵ without identifying them too closely to more recent ecological and environmentalist movements. He specifically argues that in the nineteenth century, "lines of philosophical inquiry into sublime nature and the painterly picturesque conveyed from eighteenth-century literature [became] less topical than questions about the suitability of living species for their environment."⁶ According to him, "Victorians came to position themselves, physically and psychologically, relative to an overarching environmental context."⁷ This argument, in our view, is fundamentally correct, provided the notion of "environment" is properly understood in its historical dimension: not as another word to talk about nature itself, but rather as a concept referring to

the physical elements that surround us, seen as forming some kind of "totality."⁸ For that reason, we see a strong continuity between notions of picturesque, sublime, and the theory of character in architecture, on the one hand, and the Victorian perception that living species need specific environments to flourish,⁹ on the other, even if we otherwise agree with Taylor's characterization of what he calls a "culture of environmentality"—and this continuity will constitute the main subject of our discussion.

We will start with an examination of a few classic examples of Gothic fiction and will try to show how, around the turn of the nineteenth century, architecture was more and more widely understood as a physical context having a direct psychological influence on the occupants of a building. The way this influence was understood constitutes the basis of the theories of the picturesque and the sublime, and, in the second part of this article, we will stress the multi-sensorial dimension of those theories of aesthetics in order to qualify the common definition of picturesque in strictly visual terms, and to argue that it contains the seeds of an "environmental" conception of architecture, although a particular one. We will then transport ourselves to Canada in order to discuss how such a conception of architecture may have been interpreted in that particular context, characterized by a direct encounter with wilderness. In this framework, Canada proves an excellent example to examine the "limits" of a picturesque conception of architecture in terms of "environmentality."

ARCHITECTURE IN GOTHIC FICTION

In a classic study from the 1920s, Eino Railo proposed something that may be considered as an evidence today: the

idea that architecture, in the form of the "haunted castle," plays an essential role in Gothic fiction, "so important indeed that were it eliminated the whole fabric of the romance would be bereft of its foundation and would lose its predominant atmosphere."¹⁰ It is easy to agree with him that haunted castles, abbeys, and monasteries—usually filled with long-forgotten passages and secret underground tunnels—are essential ingredients to this literature. But architecture is not only a literary device: references to buildings and the emotional impact they produce on characters suggest the rise of new ideas about architecture itself during that period. In Gothic fiction, one can indeed find an underlying conception of architecture and the environment according to which they have a determining effect on the mood, psychology, even health (mental and physical) of people—something that signals a major turn in the understanding of the relation between people and their physical surroundings.

The most important authors of Gothic fiction in the second half of the eighteenth century are of course Horace Walpole, with *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Tale* (1764), Clara Reeve, with *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (1777), and Ann Radcliffe, with several novels including *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance* (1794). Although varied when we look at the details, the way architecture is used by these authors—and by most authors who tried their hand at Gothic fiction—is quite revealing. In *The Castle of Otranto*, as Railo observed, there is no exterior description of the building that is at the centre of the story.¹¹ Indirectly, Walpole's own house, Strawberry Hill in Twickenham (fig. 1), provides an image of the fictional castle, and it is well known that his residence was an inspiration to the story; Walpole himself described Strawberry Hill as his

“own little Otranto.”¹² But in the text the exterior of the castle remains vague, and the parts that are the subject of a certain descriptive development are interiors, such as tunnels and underground structures, usually in combination with the psychological effects they produce on characters. For example, Walpole portrays Isabella’s flight from Manfred, the illegitimate owner of the estate, in the following manner:

The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which grating on the rusty hinges were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness.¹³

This passage is quintessentially Gothic in the oppressive role given to the building; even though in later writings exteriors become more important, the “claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space” remains one of the essential components of Gothic fiction.¹⁴

What is most interesting however is that due to the presence of a ghost—that of Alfonso, the last legitimate owner of the castle, killed by Manfred’s grandfather—the building seems to have a will of its own, as it struggles to return to its rightful heir. Toward the end of the book, the walls, shaken by a supernatural force, fall on Manfred and drive him away: “The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso!”¹⁵

In a short story entitled *Sir Bertrand: a Fragment* (1773), the poet and essayist Anna Laetitia Aikin makes a paradigmatic use of Gothic themes: surprised by nightfall, traveller Sir Bertrand seeks refuge in a “large antique mansion, with turrets at the corners.”¹⁶ The building appears to him at moonlight in a very evocative manner: “It was one of those nights when the moon gives a faint glimmering of light through the thick black clouds of a lowering sky.”¹⁷ The mansion turns out to be inhabited by a particularly nasty ghost who defends it against intruders. And the building also participates in the defense:

The heavy door, creaking upon its hinges, reluctantly yielded to [Sir Bertrand’s] hand—he applied his shoulder to it and forced it open—he quitted it and stepped forward—the door instantly shut with a thundering clap. Sir Bertrand’s blood was chilled—he turned back to find the door, and it was long ere his trembling hands could seize it—but his utmost strength could not open it again.¹⁸

And then Aikin’s story quickly evolves into Sir Bertrand stealing a key from the ghost and delivering the princess held captive in a coffin by some kind of magic...

Following more closely the pattern of *The Castle of Otranto*, Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* also features ghosts who act in order to have the Castle of Lovel restored to its original lineage. Railo credits Reeve for having made a “deliberate use of an empty suite of rooms supposed to be haunted” for the first time.¹⁹ Soon after Lady Lovel’s burial,

[I]t was reported that the Castle was haunted, and that the ghosts of Lord and Lady Lovel had been seen by several of the servants. Whoever went into this apartment were terrified by uncommon noises and strange appearances; at length this

apartment was wholly shut up, and the servants were forbid to enter it, or to talk of any thing relating to it: However the story did not stop here; it was whispered about, that the new Lord Lovel was so disturbed every night that he could not sleep in quiet; and, being at last tired of the place, he sold the Castle and estate of his ancestors, to his brother-in-law the Lord Fitz-Owen, who now enjoys it, and left the country.²⁰

Once again, the building seems to have its own will, acting in perfect harmony with the ghosts of Lord and Lady Lovel. Dressed in armour, the ghost of Lord Lovell scares away the usurpers from the wing in which his body is buried, it protects the legitimate heir of the domain, and, when the moment comes, the castle itself joyfully celebrates the latter’s return: “The moment Osmund entered the hall, every door in the house flew open . . . These doors, said [Joseph, the old servant], open of their own accord to receive their master! This is he indeed!”²¹

In contrast to the earlier texts, Ann Radcliffe’s novels are often seen as moving away from the “true” Gothic genre by providing a rational explanation for everything that might seem to belong to the supernatural. But it is quite significant that in spite of this transformation, architecture continues to affect the characters in exactly the same way as before—however without the proxy of ghosts. As Railo explains, Radcliffe can be credited for the ultimate development of architectural settings: “If . . . Walpole gave us the first features of the haunted castle with the all-important secret passages and trapdoors, and Clara Reeve added the ghost-ridden suite, it was Ann Radcliffe who developed this series of imaginary pictures to the full.”²² Having eliminated the supernatural as such, her novels are based on the assumption that the emotional impact of buildings on people belongs to

the ordinary expectations of an average reader. This postulate obviously confirms our point: that a somewhat deterministic view of the relation between architecture and the mental state of people had become widespread around the turn of the nineteenth century. Radcliffe indeed exploits to the full the psychological effects that buildings can have on her characters. For example, Julia, the heroine of *A Sicilian Romance*, fleeing from her tormentors, approaches “a large ruinous mansion” partly hidden from view by the shades of a forest, “but as she drew near, each forlorn and decaying feature of the fabric was gradually disclosed, and struck upon her heart a horror such as she had never before experienced.”²³ Thus, Julia’s emotions are directly connected to the environment in which she evolves: if the Gothic hall in the castle of Mazzini can inspire horror to all who dare to enter, the view of a monastery calms Julia’s agitated spirits, and a beautiful landscape brings her peace of mind: “The beauty of the scene, the soothing murmur of the high trees, waved by the light air which overshadowed her, and the soft shelling of the waves that flowed gently in upon the shores, insensibly sunk her mind into a state of repose.”²⁴

Most interesting, however, is the fact that right at the beginning of *A Sicilian Romance*, Radcliffe tries to explain in a theoretical manner the psychological effect of objects on people, which she actually sees as unstable. This is the underlying assumption of the book, and it constitutes the general psychological explanation for the way her characters react—a somewhat “basic” understanding of human psychology, to be sure, but one that is indicative of the way in which the relation between architecture and people was understood at the time. In the following passage, the author’s voice interrupts the narration and makes a general claim:

“It is painful to know, that we are operated upon by objects whose impressions are variable as they are indefinable—and that what yesterday affected us strongly, is to-day but imperfectly felt, and to-morrow perhaps shall be disregarded.”²⁵ Objects naturally induce emotions in the minds of people, but such effects may be waning—and this would be a sign that the object itself is somewhat defective. Here, Radcliffe specifically talks about the effect of men on the minds of women, but the claim is more general, as the choice of the word “object” is meant to indicate. And the instability in the effect produced by certain objects may also be due to an agitated or confused state of mind—i.e., the fault may lie in the object as well as in the subject. The general theory according to which objects with certain specific formal characteristics “operate” upon us in a predictable manner thus remains valid: “The evening sun shed a mild and mellow lustre over the landscape, and softened each feature with a vermil glow that would have inspired a mind less occupied than Julia’s with sensations of congenial tranquillity.”²⁶

FROM CHARACTER TO PICTURESQUE

For architectural historians, passages such as these easily recall the eighteenth-century notion of “character,” according to which architects should conceive buildings that possess the capacity of affecting the moods and the thoughts of their users.²⁷ In the words of Étienne-Louis Boullée—if we can make a brief excursion into France: “*Mettre du caractère dans un ouvrage, c’est employer avec justesse tous les moyens propres à ne nous faire éprouver d’autres sensations que celles qui doivent résulter du sujet.*”²⁸ For Boullée, architects need to understand how the formal characteristics of objects affect people’s emotions, and buildings

should be designed according to principles derived from such an understanding. Thus, a building that has character will take control over the beholder’s sensations, and provoke an emotional response appropriate to its function, from admiration and awe in a religious building to light-heartedness and joy in a country residence.

In making this argument, Boullée follows the teachings of his master, French architect Jacques-François Blondel,²⁹ and he develops into a well-structured theory ideas that were previously expressed with a certain degree of terminological confusion—as Blondel was injecting new content into old words such as decorum (“convenance”). According to Boullée, the main condition for an object (natural or man-made) to have character is the unity of the sensations it produces, something that is summarized in the notion of “*tableau*”—which cannot simply be translated as “picture” in this context. When Boullée talks about the *tableau* created by a scenery, he refers to everything that produces a certain sensory experience in the beholder, affecting his/her emotions. For example, each season produces a distinct *tableau*, resulting in a specific effect on the minds of people subjected to its power: winter with its long shadows and barren forms produces melancholy, and spring with its tender colours and abundance of light brings about joy and admiration. It is this kind of *tableau* that architects need to assemble in their buildings in order to give them character: some kind of controlled environment designed to throw the beholder into a specific mood or state of mind.

In the English context, the notion of architectural character developed particularities that make it interestingly different from Blondel’s or Boullée’s, and that correspond even more closely to the role

given to buildings in Gothic fiction. As art historian John Archer demonstrated:

[T]he writer responsible for the first full formulation of character in English architectural theory was the sometime politician and writer on Shakespearean character, Thomas Whately. In his *Observations on Modern Gardening*, first published in 1770, the three principles of central identity, affectivity, and association were first incorporated into a single notion of character in landscape and architectural design.³⁰

Archer thus argues that the English interpretation of character is built around three essential principles: one single and dominant theme should preside over the design of an object; this object should speak to the emotions; and the production of emotions should rely on the association of ideas, rather than conventional symbols and iconography. The two first principles insist on the internal coherence of the design and its emotional dimension, in a way comparable to the French theories, with which Whately must have been familiar. But the third principle differs from the French notion as it builds upon British empiricist philosophy and the concept of associationism,³¹ and foreshadows the important role given to associations in the nineteenth century in English architecture, especially in the picturesque movement.

This last principle also makes the experience of character in a building or a garden something more personal, since it depends on memory and past experiences. This is one of the particularities that give the English notion of character its greater proximity to Gothic fiction. Already when writing about the older notion of decorum, English theoreticians noticeably had a more personal and individual way of formulating their prescriptions to architects. Of course,

decorum, as the architectural expression of the rank and social status, is a notion quite different from the idea of character, which refers to the capacity of a building of any type to have an impact on the emotions of its spectators.³² But for English authors, decorum does not simply refer to an abstract expression of social rank; already in Henry Wotton's *The Elements of Architecture* (1624), or in Colin Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715-1725), as Archer explains, respect for decorum requires that a building should exhibit some personal traits of its owner.³³

The most fascinating illustration of this personal dimension attributed to decorum and afterward to character in the Anglo-Saxon context can probably be found in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), in which the identification of the house to its owner is absolute. Paying a visit to Roderick Usher, a former friend with whom he had lost touch, the narrator feels the gloom of his estate immediately upon arrival: "I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit."³⁴ This overwhelmingly oppressive ambiance pervades everything from the building itself to the surrounding vegetation, water, and air. In one passage, the narrator tries to explain the strange congruence he witnessed between the physical environment and Usher's personality:

It was this deficiency [*i.e.*, the lack of any other branch to the family], I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency . . . which had at length, so identified the two as to merge

the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.³⁵

And, as we all know, the short story ends with Roderick Usher dying in horror exactly at the moment his mansion collapses and all is swallowed by water: "mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'HOUSE OF USHER.'"³⁶

The second particularity that makes the English notion of character so close to the architecture of Gothic fiction is the multi-sensorial dimension of the experience it is meant to propose. This point is visible all over Whately's treatise, which is based on the principle that the designer should not impose abstract plans on a landscape, but should work with what is there, in accordance with the genius of the place, or *genius loci*: "But in this application, the genius of the place must always be particularly considered; to force it is hazardous; and an attempt to contradict it is always unsuccessful."³⁷ The first part of the treatise examines separately the different components of a garden: the ground, the wood, the water, the rocks, and the buildings. In these discussions, it is clear that Whately understands the perception of a garden as a multi-sensorial experience. This general point appears clearly in his discussion of water, as a pool, a pond, or a lake, all producing distinct atmospheres: "a deep stagnated pool, dank and dark with shades which it dimly reflects befits the seat of melancholy."³⁸ And from the murmur of a rill to the roar of a torrent, the senses are constantly stimulated:

A gently murmuring rill, clear and shallow, just gurgling, just dimpling, imposes silence, suits with solitude, and leads to meditation: a brisker current, which wantons in little eddies over a bright sandy bottom, or babbles among pebbles, spreads cheerfulness [*sic*] all around: . . . the roar and the rage of a torrent, its force, its violence, its impetuosity, tend to inspire terror; that terror, which, whether as cause or effect, is so nearly allied to sublimity.³⁹

Although he does not use the term “picturesque” often, Whately obviously discusses ideas that have a direct echo in the theories of the picturesque developed at the turn of the century by Richard Payne Knight, Uvedale Price, and a few others.⁴⁰ In Price’s *Essays on the Picturesque* (1796), especially, an environmental conception of garden design appears in several places. Just as for Whately, Price insists that the *genius loci* should be “consulted” before bringing any transformation to a park or a garden.⁴¹ Criticizing his predecessors Capability Brown and William Kent for the ease with which they get rid of existing elements, his argument considers scenery as providing an immersive experience, as when he describes the seasons:

This leads me to observe, that it is not only the change of vegetation which gives to autumn that golden hue, but also the atmosphere itself, and the lights and shadows which then prevail. In September and October the sun describes a much lower circle above the horizon than in May and April; and consequently the lights and shadows, during a much larger portion of the day, are broader, and more resembling those, which in all seasons are produced at the close of it. The very characters of the sky and the atmosphere are of a piece with those of the two seasons; spring has its light and flitting clouds, with shadows equally flitting and uncertain; refreshing showers, with gay and

genial bursts of sunshine, that seem suddenly to call forth and to nourish the young buds and flowers. In autumn all is matured; and the rich hues of the ripened fruits, and of the changing foliage, are rendered still richer by the warm haze, which on a fine day in that season, spreads the last varnish over every part of the picture.⁴²

Similarly to every author discussing the notion, Price says that a good understanding of the picturesque can only be developed through the study of painting. This recommendation, however necessary, is nevertheless insufficient: the picturesque is “no less independent of the art of painting” than the beautiful or the sublime,⁴³ and Price’s way of defining it can easily recall Whately’s own warning against the reduction of garden design to pictorial composition.⁴⁴ But he also goes further than Whately and explicitly refers to sensory experience as a whole. The term “picturesque,”

. . . (as we may judge from its etymology) is applied only to objects of sight, and indeed in so confined a manner as to be supposed merely to have a reference to the art from which it is named. I am well convinced, however, that . . . the qualities which make objects picturesque, are not only as distinct as those which make them beautiful or sublime, but are equally extended to all our sensations, by whatever organs they are received.⁴⁵

For Price, a well-conceived garden constitutes a controlled environment capable of providing an immersive experience of similar intensity to literary fiction, and in one passage he explicitly compares his “improver” to an author: “the improver should conceal himself, like a judicious author; who sets his reader’s imagination at work, while he seems not to be guiding, but to be exploring new regions with him.”⁴⁶ Another significant passage can

be found in Price’s discussion of avenues, where the literary device of moonlight transports the beholder into a fictional world:

All the characteristic beauties of the avenue, its solemn stillness, the religious awe it inspires, are greatly heightened by moonlight. This I once very strongly experienced in approaching a venerable, castle-like mansion, built in the beginning of the 15th century; a few gleams had pierced the deep gloom of the avenue; a large massive tower at the end of it, seen through a long perspective, and half lighted by the uncertain beams of the moon, had a grand mysterious effect. Suddenly a light appeared in this tower—then as suddenly its twinkling vanished—and only the quiet, silvery rays of the moon prevailed; again more lights quickly shifted to different parts of the building, and the whole scene most forcibly brought to my fancy the times of fairies and chivalry.⁴⁷

This passage could easily be the opening of a Gothic novel. It clearly shows how the environment of a park or a garden has the capacity of transporting a beholder into an imaginary space, by means of the ideas it suggests and the emotions it produces.

THE PICTURESQUE IN LOWER CANADA

Let us now turn to Canada: it is the establishment of a new British colony in the wake of the Seven Years’ War that makes its situation particularly relevant to our discussion. In the article quoted earlier, William Taylor included among the factors that contributed to the development of the Victorian sense of “environmentality” the multiplication of British communities worldwide, which brought a variety of experiences that “helped convey particular perceptions of urban and natural landscapes as providing contexts for living species (especially humankind) to



FIG. 2. ROBERT SPROULE, VIEW OF THE ESPLANADE AND THE FORTIFICATIONS OF QUEBEC WITH PART OF THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY, 1832. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, ACC. NO. R9266-1176, PETER WINKWORTH COLLECTION OF CANADIANA.

adapt and evolve, thrive or wither."⁴⁸ One interesting set of such experiences can obviously be found in Canada, with the particularity that it was taken from the French in 1759, and that the St. Lawrence valley was well settled by the time the British took over.

In an article about "The Limits of the Picturesque," Ian S. MacLaren argues that finding the picturesque in Canada was something important for artists of British origin, because "[t]he picturesque sustained the sojourning Briton's sense of identity when travelling beyond European civilization."⁴⁹ A picturesque environment was considered the most appropriate for British culture and way of life to thrive in the new lands. MacLaren interestingly shows how, in Canada, picturesque aesthetics was confronted to multiple situations that tested its applicability. In many

areas, artists encountered difficulties in portraying the landscape with picturesque conventions, and they had to considerably rearrange what they observed.⁵⁰ Developing this idea further, Marilyn J. McKay argues that Canadian landscape often showed resistance to familiar aesthetic categories, and that the distinction between the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime was not always easy to establish. Canadian landscape could be confusing to British eyes, as features that belonged to the picturesque confronted others belonging to the sublime—and this confrontation created hesitations and tensions within the artworks themselves.⁵¹

Behind these difficulties and hesitations, however, lays a more general idea about the sensitivity to one's environment. Taking an example that McKay uses herself to show how the categories of the

beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime also confronted each other in literary works, a closer look at Frances Brooke's epistolary novel *The History of Emily Montague*—which is often considered the first novel written in Canada—reveals how the ability to respond emotionally to one's environment could in itself be valued as a human quality. In several places, the colourful character Arabella Fermor makes a clear distinction between people who are sensitive to the beauty of Quebec's surroundings and the emotions it can produce, and those who are not. For example:

The French ladies never walk but at night, which shews their good taste; and then only within the walls of Quebec, which does not: they saunter slowly, after supper, on a particular battery, which is a kind of little Mall: they have no idea of walking in the country, nor the least feeling of the lovely scene around them; there are many of them who never saw the falls of Montmorenci [*sic*], though little more than an hour's drive from the town. They seem born without the smallest portion of curiosity, or any idea of the pleasures of the imagination, or indeed any pleasure but that of being admired.⁵²

Through the eyes of Arabella, the author here observes the *Ancien Régime* practice of ambulating on urban promenades—such as the Esplanade in Quebec City (fig. 2)—with a preoccupation of seeing and being seen, and all the required decorum.⁵³ She opposes this practice to the simpler excursion into the countryside and the accompanying "pleasures of the imagination," which she prizes most. Thus, the ability to perceive the beauty of a landscape and to feel the emotions that a picturesque scenery may provide constitutes, for Arabella, an important criterion in her appreciation of the people she encounters—and it is interesting to see that this kind of sensibility to nature

permeates the views of Quebec City produced by British artists around the same time (fig. 3).⁵⁴ If the previous quote is aimed at the coquetry of “French ladies,” Arabella applies the same kind of judgment to George Clayton, whose attention to rank and decorum makes him a rather insipid person to her eyes. She thus sets out to discourage her friend Emily from marrying Clayton, and is thrilled when Emily’s heart finally leans toward the more romantic personality of Edward Rivers.

Unsurprisingly, George Clayton is also incapable of feeling the aesthetic qualities of the countryside—and this opinion is confirmed by Edward Rivers, who travelled with him on one occasion:

I study my fellow traveller closely; his character, indeed, is not difficult to ascertain; his feelings are dull, nothing makes the least impression on him; he is as insensible to the various beauties of the charming country through which we have travelled, as the very Canadian peasants themselves who inhabit it. I watched his eyes at some of the most beautiful prospects, and saw not the least gleam of pleasure there.⁵⁵

In a way that can be compared to Ann Radcliffe’s theory, therefore, Brooke does not see the capability of “objects” to affect thoughts and emotions as an inescapable force, but rather as dependent upon the receptiveness of the beholder. The capacity of applying the aesthetic categories of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque to natural context is clearly dependent on such receptivity. In Bella’s descriptions, the Montmorency Falls obviously correspond to the sublime, but Canadian thunderstorms, on the other hand, are almost beautiful: “We have much thunder and lightning, but very few instances of their being fatal: the thunder is more magnificent and awful

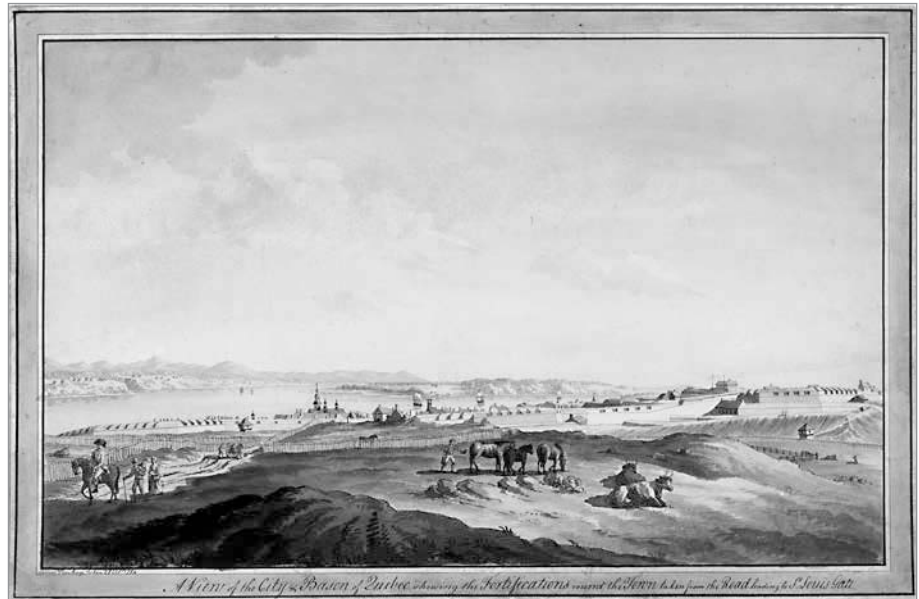


FIG. 3. JAMES PEACHY, VIEW OF THE CITY AND BASIN OF QUEBEC, 1784. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, ACC. NO. 1989-217-4.



FIG. 4. WILLIAM OGLE CARLILE, QUEBEC FROM SPENCER WOOD, C. 1873. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, ACC. NO. 1992-616-1.

[sic] than in Europe, and the lightning brighter and more beautiful; I have even seen it of a clear pale purple, resembling the gay tints of the morning.”⁵⁶ The novel thus offers a generally optimistic view of the possibility for the British to settle in

Canada, even though the main characters return to England at the end of the book.

In order to conclude this essay, it seems appropriate to make the jump from fiction to reality, and to examine descriptions of



FIG. 5. JULES-ERNEST LIVERNOIS, SPENCER WOOD, END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, PA-023553.



FIG. 6. JAMES PATTISON COCKBURN, MR. SHEPPARD'S VILLA AT WOODFIELD, C. 1830. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, ACC. NO. 1989-260-9 A042-01.

some of the suburban domains developed by the British elite around Quebec City.⁵⁷ In James Macpherson Lemoine's famous *Picturesque Quebec* (1882), it is possible to understand how these domains were perceived, and it becomes clear that such

picturesque locations were also conceived as controlled environments, meant to have a multi-sensorial effect on their visitors. *Picturesque Quebec*, as we know, is structured as a promenade around the city and its surroundings, and it associates

historical information and anecdotes with comments about the scenery, thus filling the landscape with numerous historical associations. Approximately half of this five-hundred-page publication is thus given to the surroundings of the city, from the Montmorency Falls to the Chaudière River. The most impressive of these suburban estates, according to Macpherson Lemoine, was Spencer Wood (today Bois-de-Coulonge), with its multiple views on the St. Lawrence River and Quebec City (fig. 4)—a place that Lemoine knew through different periods, before and after the fire that destroyed the original villa in 1860. Recalling the times when the merchant Henry Atkinson was the owner, he says:

It was then a splendid old seat of more than one hundred acres . . . —enclosed east and west between two streamlets, hidden from the highway by a dense growth of oak, maple, dark pines and firs—the forest primeval—letting in here and there the light of heaven on its labyrinthine avenues; a most striking landscape, blending the sombre verdure of its hoary trees with the soft tints of its velvety sloping lawn.⁵⁸ (fig. 5)

Lemoine's description of these suburban estates does not fail to register every feature that would support the immersive quality of the environment, such as flowers, fountains, pavilions, and *chaises perdues*:

[Spencer Wood] had also an extensive and well-kept fruit and vegetable garden, enlivened with flower beds, the centre of which was adorned with the loveliest possible circular fount in white marble, supplied with the crystal element from the Belle-Borne rill by a hidden aqueduct; conservatories, graperies, peach and forcing houses, pavilions picturesquely hung over the yawning precipice on two headlands, one looking towards Sillery, the

other towards the Island of Orleans, the scene of many a cosy tea-party; bowers, rustic chairs *perdues* among the groves, a superb bowling green and archery grounds.⁵⁹

Descriptions of other domains—such as Woodfield (fig. 6), Catarqui, and his own Spencer Grange—although less extensive, also give hints of the multi-sensory experience for which these parks and villas were appreciated. Lemoine mentions the smell of flowers, the singing of birds, and so on, almost as though these elements were there by design. About Rosewood, “a tiny and unostentatious cottage buried among the trees” that had been the property of merchant James Gibbs, he writes: “You can also, as you pass along, catch the loud notes issuing from the house aviary and blending with the soft, wild melody of the wood warblers and robin [*sic*]; but the prominent feature of the place are flowers, sweet flowers, to charm the eye and perfume the air.”⁶⁰

Lemoine also pays close attention to the existence of greenhouses—a building type most representative of the Victorian “culture of environmentality,” if any, because they constitute the perfect expression of the vital relationship between an environment and its inhabitants.⁶¹ In this regard, the most interesting description of a greenhouse in *Picturesque Quebec* may be the following one, about Catarqui. This is a domain that Lemoine knew at the time of Henry Burstall, who had a villa built according to the plans of Edward Staveley in 1850-1851, and a greenhouse by the same architect in 1856 (fig. 7).⁶² His comment establishes a sharp contrast between the winter scene outside and the tropical vegetation inside:

We had the pleasure on one occasion to view, on a piercing winter day, from the

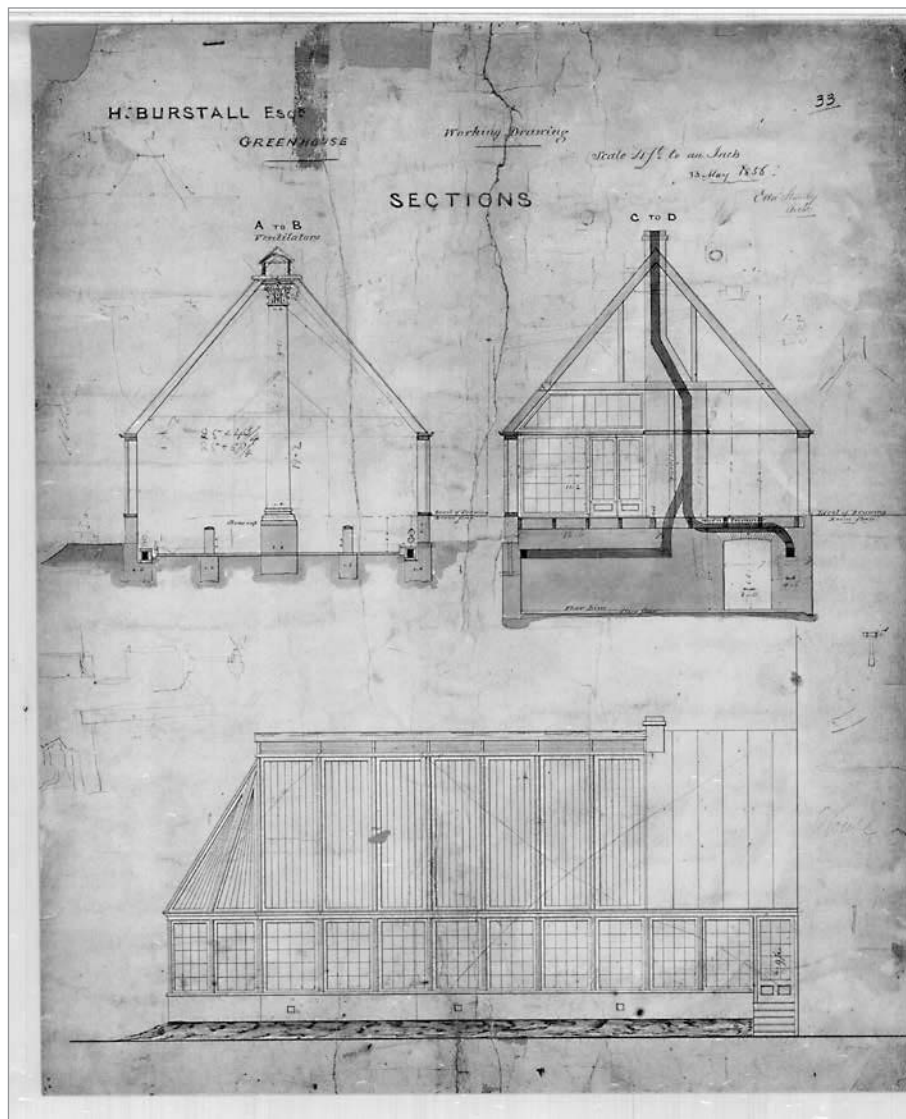


FIG. 7. EDWARD STAVELEY, DESIGN OF A GREENHOUSE AT CATARAQUI FOR H. BURSTALL, 1856. | BIBLIOTHÈQUE ET ARCHIVES NATIONALES DU QUÉBEC, CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDOS STAVELEY, P541.D33.

drawing room of Cataracoui [*sic*], through the glass door which opens on the conservatory, the rare collections of exotics it contains—a perfect grove of verdure and blossoms—the whole lit up by the mellow light of the setting sun, whose rays scintillated in every fantastic form amongst this gorgeous tropical vegetation, whilst the snow-wreathed evergreens, surrounding the conservatory waved their palms to the orb of day in our clear, bracing Canadian atmosphere—summer and winter combined in one

landscape; the tropics and their luxuriant magnolias, divided by an inch of glass from the realms of old king frost and his hardy familiars, the pine and the maple.⁶³

The paradigmatic character of greenhouses as an expression of the relationship between living things and their environment, however, appears most clearly in the comments about Spencer Wood, whose greenhouse was rebuilt after the fire of 1860, and destroyed



FIG. 8. JULES-ERNEST LIVERNOIS, SPENCER WOOD, END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. | LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, PA-023535.

again in 1966 (fig. 8). In Lemoine's opinion, the heydays of Spencer Wood were the years when the domain was the property of merchant Henry Atkinson, from 1835 to 1854, and when the gardens and original greenhouses were in the care of Peter Lowe, the Scottish gardener brought by Atkinson:

Mr. P. Lowe, during many years in charge of the conservatory, furnished us with the following note:—"The hot-houses belonging to Henry Atkinson, while in my charge, consisted of pinery, stove and orchid house. In the pinery were grown specimens of the Providence, Enville, Montserrat and Queen pines—a plant of the latter variety, in fruit, being exhibited at the Horticultural Exhibition, Montreal, in September, 1852, the fruit of which weighed between five and six pounds, being the first pine-apple exhibited of Canadian growth, but not the first grown at Spencer Wood; it was noticed in the *Illustrated London News*."⁶⁴

As we can see from these few quotations, Macpherson Lemoine shows a keen

interest in the multi-sensorial quality one could experience in the parks of these private domains. He has thus clearly assimilated the sense of "environmentality" associated with English gardens and the theories of the picturesque. At the same time, his fascination for greenhouses, for the control they give over the environment and for the exotic species they allow to grow, reveals another side to this story. Since the eighteenth century, the increasing awareness of the relation between living species and their environment has been regularly accompanied by attempts at controlling this relation through design, and greenhouses should be seen as consistent with this preoccupation.

In conclusion, we therefore must underline the profound ambiguity of the Victorian "culture of environmentality." It is clear that the nineteenth-century sense of nature as environment is only partly related to the environmental awareness of today. Sources essential for understanding the historical sense of "environmentality" can be found in

literary fiction and in late-eighteenth-century architectural theory. In both cases, human subjects are portrayed as responding more or less automatically to features of their surroundings—some authors giving more importance to the receptivity of the beholder, others less. The theory of character in architecture renders quite explicit the will to control the emotions and ideas of the users of a building. At times, literary fiction makes such control happen in a quasi-absolute manner, while in other cases, a certain amount of freedom in human subjectivity is recognized. The creation of picturesque estates, appealing to similar "environmental" principles, is obviously based on more realistic expectations, but the desire to push the limits of environmental control is clearly expressed in the omnipresence of greenhouses. Thus, the nineteenth-century sense of "environmentality" has to be understood in its multi-faceted complexity, as a prelude to both twentieth-century environmentalism and ecological awareness, on the one hand, and the modern desire to create totally controlled environments, on the other.

NOTES

1. The expression comes from Summerson, John, 1991 [1953], *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830*, London, Penguin Books, coll. "The Pelican History of Art," p. 447 *et seq.*
2. This article is part of a research project financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (with Martin Bressani as principal investigator, Jodey Castricano, Nicholas Roquet, and myself as co-applicants). I would like to thank my research assistants Mathilde Bois and Agueda Iturbide-Kennedy, students in the history of art program at Université Laval, for their most useful work.
3. See Bergdoll, Barry, 2000, *European Architecture 1750-1890*, Oxford University Press, Oxford History of Art Series, chap. 1; Bergdoll, Barry, 2001, "Romantic Historiography and the Paradoxes of Historicist

- Architecture," in *L'architecture, les sciences et la culture de l'histoire au XIX^e siècle*, Saint-Étienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, p. 145-164.
4. Taylor, William, 2004, *The Vital Landscape. Nature and the Built Environment in Nineteenth-century Britain*, Burlington, VT, Ashgate.
 5. Taylor, William, 2012, "The Culture of 'Environmentality' and the Exceptionality of the Countryside," in Martin Hewitt (ed.), *The Victorian World*, New York, Routledge, p. 260.
 6. *Id.* : 260.
 7. *Id.* : 261.
 8. The second definition of the word "environment" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* reads: "That which environs; the objects or region surrounding anything" (I am using the 1971 *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Toronto, Oxford University Press). On the use of the word in the nineteenth century, see also Spitzer, Leo, 1942, "Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics (Part 2)," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 204-206.
 9. Taylor, "The Culture of Environmentality..." : 261.
 10. Railo, Eino, 1964 [1921], *The Haunted Castle*, New York, Humanities Press, p. 7.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. The point is regularly made in the comments about the house, beginning with: Clark, Kenneth, 1974 [1962], *The Gothic Revival. An Essay in the History of Taste*, London, Icon Editions, p. 57. See also: Reeve, Matthew M., 2013, "Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 95, no. 3, p. 411-439.
 13. Walpole, Horace, 1993 [1764], *The Castle of Otranto*, London, Everyman's Library, p. 24.
 14. This aspect being combined with "a fearful sense of inheritance in time." See Baldick, Chris, 2009, "Introduction," in Chris Baldick (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. xix.
 15. Walpole : 100.
 16. Aikin, Anna Laetitia, 2009 [1773], "Sir Bertrand: A Fragment," in Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Railo : 8.
 20. Reeve, Clara, 2003 [1777], *The Old English Baron*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Series "Oxford World's Classics," p. 29.
 21. *Id.* : 115.
 22. Railo : 9.
 23. Radcliffe, Ann, 1993 [1790], *A Sicilian Romance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Series "Oxford World's Classics," p. 111.
 24. *Id.* : 42.
 25. *Id.* : 20.
 26. *Id.* : 171.
 27. See Szambien, Werner, 1986, *Symétrie, goût, caractère : théorie et terminologie de l'architecture à l'âge classique 1550-1800*, Paris, Picard.
 28. Boullée, Étienne-Louis, 1979, "Essai sur l'art," in Françoise Fichet (ed.), *La théorie architecturale à l'âge classique*, Bruxelles, Mardaga, p. 479.
 29. These teachings are collected in Blondel, Jacques-François, 1771-1777, *Cours d'architecture*, Paris, Dessaint.
 30. Archer, John, 1979, "Character in English Architectural Design," *Eighteenth-century Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, p. 339-340.
 31. *Id.* : 363. See also: Archer, John, 1983, "The Beginnings of Association in British Architectural Aesthetics," *Eighteenth-century Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 241-264.
 32. See Pérouse de Montclos, Jean-Marie, 1989, *Histoire de l'architecture française*, Paris, Mengès / Caisse nationale des monuments historiques, p. 407-408; and Szambien : 169-173.
 33. Archer, "Character in English Architectural Design" : 354.
 34. Poe, Edgar Allan, 2009 [1839], "The Fall of the House of Usher," in Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 35. *Id.* : 86.
 36. *Id.* : 101.
 37. Whately, Thomas, 1777, *Observations on Modern Gardening, Illustrated by Descriptions*, London, T. Payne and Son, p. 256.
 38. *Id.* : 62.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. Only one short chapter is dedicated to "Picturesque Beauty." See Whately, *id.* : 146-150. His importance in relation to the picturesque is however recognized by Christopher Hussey in his classic study: 1967, *The Picturesque. Studies in a Point of View*, Hamden, CT, Archon Books, p. 152-153.
 41. Price, Uvedale, 1796, *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, London, J. Robson, p. 348.
 42. *Id.* : 201-202.
 43. *Id.* : 49.
 44. See Whately's above-mentioned chapter on the picturesque (note 37).
 45. Price : 53.
 46. *Id.* : 389.
 47. *Id.* : 271-272.
 48. Taylor, "The Culture of Environmentality..." : 261.
 49. MacLaren, Ian S., 1985, "The Limits of the Picturesque in British North America," *Journal of Garden History*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 100. A similar argument about the political dimension of the picturesque is made in Parent, Alain, 2005, *Entre empire et nation. Les représentations de la ville de Québec et de ses environs, 1760-1833*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval.
 50. MacLaren : 100.
 51. McKay, Marilyn J., 2011, *Picturing the Land. Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500-1950*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 51.
 52. Brooke, Frances, 1769, *The History of Emily Montague*, London, Dodsley, letter XVI (Internet: *The Gutenberg Project*, [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/search/?query=The+History+of+Emily+Montague], accessed September 18, 2014).
 53. For an interesting discussion of this practice, see Girouard, Mark, 1985, *Cities and People. A Social and Architectural History*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, p. 166-167.
 54. This view can be compared to the following passage, in a letter by another of Brooke's characters, Edward Rivers: "Nothing can be more striking than the view of Quebec as you approach; it stands on the summit of a boldly-rising hill, at the confluence of two very beautiful rivers, the St. Lawrence and St. Charles, and, as the convents and other public buildings first meet the eye, appears to great advantage from the port. The island of Orleans, the distant view of the cascade of Montmorenci, and the opposite village of Beauport, scattered with a pleasing irregularity along the banks of the river St. Charles,

add greatly to the charms of the prospect” (Brooke : letter II). This description establishes a clear relationship between the viewing position, the city itself in the middle ground, and the elements visible in the distance. The way it is structured typifies the picturesque mode of representing Quebec City from the 1760s until late in the nineteenth century. See Grignon, Marc, 1999, “Comment s’est faite l’image d’une ville : Québec du XVII^e au XIX^e siècle,” in Lucie K. Morisset, Luc Noppen and Denis Saint-Jacques (eds.), *Ville imaginaire. Ville identitaire. Échos de Québec*, Quebec, Nota Bene, p. 99-117.

55. Brooke : letter XVII.
56. *Id.* : letter X.
57. The main study on the subject remains Gagnon-Pratte, France, 1980, *L’architecture et la nature à Québec au dix-neuvième siècle : Les villas*, Quebec, Ministère des Affaires culturelles. See also Wright, Janet, 1984, *Architecture of the Picturesque in Canada*, Ottawa, Parks Canada, p. 105-136; Williams, Ron, 2014, *Landscape Architecture in Canada*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, p. 80-184.
58. Lemoine, James MacPherson, 1882, *Picturesque Quebec: A Sequel to Quebec Past and Present*, Montreal, Dawson Brothers, p. 336.
59. *Id.* : 336.
60. *Id.* : 382.
61. This point is taken from Taylor : “Prevailing interest in creating exotic worlds in glass-houses and conservatories were coupled with growing awareness that of the environmental conditions within public buildings and residential districts, in the countryside and places further afield” (“The Culture of Environmentality...” : 260). In his earlier book (*The Vital Landscape...* : xvi), he also writes: “While these concerns were prefigured by the study of plant life in the closed world of the conservatory, they encouraged new modes of environmental awareness in other spheres of human interest such as the Victorian house and garden.”
62. Smith, Frédéric, 2001, *Cataraqui. Histoire d’une villa anglaise à Sillery*, Quebec, Les Publications du Québec, p. 16-21.
63. Lemoine : 380-381.
64. *Id.* : 335.