Pierre Anctil, *History of the Jews in Quebec*, trans. Judith Weisz Woodsworth (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2021), 488 pp., ISBN: 978-0776629483.

History of the Jews in Quebec represents the summation of its author's distinguished scholarly career. As the first comprehensive history to focus specifically on the Jews of that Canadian province, the original publication (*L'histoire des Juifs du Québec*, 2017) was justly honoured with the J. I. Segal Award in 2018. The English-language edition, ably translated by Judith Weisz Woodsworth, was accorded the Governor's General Literary Award in 2022. The multilingual sources from the original edition have been skilfully integrated into this translation.

Pierre Anctil trained as a cultural anthropologist and embarked upon his career in scholarship and public policy during the heady period following the election of the first Parti Québécois government in November 1976. Among his numerous publications are studies devoted to the history of relations between Jewish and French-Canadian intellectual elites, the integration of immigrant communities into contemporary Quebec society, and translations of literary and journalistic works from Yiddish to French. Anctil has spearheaded a francophone school of Quebec Jewish (and Yiddish) Studies, which connects to recent trends in Quebec historiography. "It is simply not possible to write a history of Quebec without taking into account the central features of modernity, such as mass immigration, increasing cultural diversity, the variety of backgrounds, and the multiplicity of religious beliefs," he stipulates (3).

Over the course of seven chapters, Anctil traces the evolution of Quebec Jewry, concentrating (from Chapter 2 onward) almost exclusively on the Jews of Montreal. The opening chapter summarizes nearly three centuries of Jewish presence (and absence) in Canada and Quebec, from 1627 to 1900. This is familiar terrain, given preceding historians' focus on the "origin stories" of Canadian Jewry. Since 1900, overlapping waves of immigration to Quebec from different parts of Europe and North Africa have yielded a diversity within Montreal's Jewish population that is distinctive if not altogether unprecedented in the North American context.

A passion for Montreal's Yiddish culture is a hallmark of Anctil's scholarship, and this is abundantly reflected in his *History* (Chapters 2, 3, 5), which includes informative discussions of the Peretz and Folks schools, the Jewish Public Library, the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre, and the *Keneder Adler*. Regarding that newspaper, he observes that it was "a breeding ground for Canadian Yiddish literature" (90). Anctil profiles several prominent Yiddish authors in Montreal, such as the poet Jacob Isaac Segal and the poet and novelist Chava Rosenfarb. Yiddish writers from the United States were frequent visitors to Montreal as "an intense relationship developed

between New York and Montreal" (153). (Many of their lectures were taped by the Jewish Public Library and are online through the Yiddish Book Center.)

Anctil situates the sensitive question of antisemitism (Chapter 4) within the framework of traditional "Catholic doctrine" (164)—as opposed to "racial" antisemitism—while claiming that francophones' predominant attitude toward Jews was primarily one of indifference rather than hostility. Even the economic nationalism of French Canadians, as expressed through the "Achat chez nous" campaigns, he argues, was "a strategy used to defend the faith and the nation"—and was not specifically aimed at Jews (164). (Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Montreal may have interpreted such initiatives rather differently.)

This defensive stance extended to Quebec politicians' vociferous opposition to immigration before and during World War II though, as Anctil points out in Chapter 4, the English-speaking political leaders and federal bureaucrats who wielded power in Ottawa were equally resistant to the admission of Jewish refugees during the 1930s and 1940s. He notes the "bitterness and recrimination in the field of Canadian Jewish Studies" over the extent to which public opinion in Quebec may have influenced policies regarding the admission of Jewish refugees (215). Even so, while taking note of "the unequal power relations between the country's two language communities" (209), Anctil recognizes the demagoguery of Maurice Duplessis, who in 1944, as opposition leader in Quebec's legislative assembly, "purported to be 'divulging' the fact that nearly 100,000 German Jews would be invited to settle on Quebec agricultural land in the near future" (211). To Jews in wartime Quebec and Canada, commented the Yiddish journalist Israel Medres (quoted by Anctil), this "sounded just like Nazi propaganda" (212).

Anctil ascribes Ashkenazi Jews' embrace of English to a combination of educational and economic factors (Chapters 3, 5), including of course the powerful gravitational pull of English in North America (a constant challenge facing Quebec). Indeed, Montreal's Jews have reinforced their relationship to English by maintaining dense institutional, religious, professional, and familial networks across the continent. The "question of schooling" was "one of the most central issues" facing Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their children, Anctil writes (134). Because Jewish pupils were barred from Montreal's French (as well as English) Catholic schools, by default they attended the city's English-language Protestant schools, which admitted them on sufferance. Institutions of higher learning, too, were hardly welcoming during the interwar decades. Prospective university students faced "theological intransigence" at the Université de Montréal and strict admission quotas at McGill University. Still, recognizing that "English was the key to success in the Montreal business world" (142), many Jews managed to overcome these barriers to economic mobility.

Canadian-born Jews experienced upward mobility and relative affluence after 1945 (Chapters 5, 6), while "also adapt[ing] the values and political outlook of the group into which they were assimilating" (257, 260), that is, anglophone Canadians. With the transition from Yiddish to English, French was not "properly taught," widely spoken, or "fully valued" by the postwar generation of Montreal Jews (257). Concurrently, the secular turn of French-Canadian nationalism positioned the "French language [as] the linchpin of the collective identity" and changed "the relationship of the Québécois and the religious and cultural minorities of urban Montreal" (280). In the 1960s, "Ashkenazi Jews suddenly discovered that their integration into French Quebec left a lot to be desired. Anglophone Jews in Montreal would have a difficult road ahead…" (286).

Anctil expertly displays his social scientific training by delineating the complex and rapid process of collective identity formation undergone by a relatively recent immigrant cohort, French-speaking Jews from Morocco. While their linguistic adaptation to Quebec came easily, their religious self-identification involved an adjustment as heirs to an Iberian Sephardic identity, in counterpoint to the dominant, English-speaking Ashkenazi community that they encountered in Montreal. Concerning another group of post-1945 immigrants, Anctil skilfully underscores the diversity of Hasidic sects that comprise a rapidly increasing segment of Montreal's urban population (Chapter 6).

While acknowledging the shock that the Quiet Revolution and the rise of the Parti Québécois dealt to Montreal's anglophone Jews (Chapter 6), Anctil underplays the causes and impact of the outmigration of thousands from the province. To be sure, Montreal was not alone among North American Jewish communities experiencing population loss during this period (cf., Winnipeg). But if Toronto's economic dynamism undoubtedly "persuaded a significant number of Jewish Montrealers to leave their hometown" in the 1970s (316), the dramatic reshuffling of the political and linguistic power dynamic in Quebec was a catalyst to the dispersion of Jewish Montrealers.

The "slow decline" of Montreal's Jewish population "translated into a loss of influence on the national stage for Montreal Jewry," Anctil observes (Chapter 6). However, "a new Jewish identity began to emerge in Quebec, a phenomenon that had no equivalent in the rest of the country, nor in the rest of the world for that matter" (316). A constellation of factors has brought about this result: the sheer diversity of Montreal's Jewish population, the success of the community's francization (in particular, younger Jews' high level of bilingualism), its geographical concentration within certain metropolitan districts, and the Quebec government's subsidization of Jewish schools and social service agencies. Regarding the latter point, Anctil refers to the Jewish community's "institutional completeness"—its well-established panoply

of social service, charitable, and educational organizations (many of them now supported by Federation CJA).

That many Jewish Montrealers have grown to value the special qualities and distinctiveness of their community is evidenced by the creation of the Museum of Jewish Montreal and the Canadian Jewish Heritage Network (2, 383). (Likewise, planning is now underway to relocate the Montreal Holocaust Museum to a site on the now-trendy Main, once the heart of the Jewish immigrant district.) One might add that the development of Montreal's "new Jewish identity" has not proceeded in isolation from trends unfolding elsewhere in the Jewish world. Indeed, Jewish Montreal has become something of a "brand," as the international popularity of Montreal-style bagels, smoked meat, and the YouTube series "YidLife Crisis" attest.

The intended audience of the French-language edition would presumably be non-academic readers in Quebec curious to learn more about a somewhat unfamiliar topic. This might explain the plethora of references to personalities of Jewish background that are (or once were) familiar to francophone Quebecers, such as Jules Helbronner, the Alsatian-born editor-in-chief (starting in 1892) of the daily newspaper *La Presse*. The book's final chapter (Chapter 7) contains capsule biographies of notable Quebec Jews of the past sixty years, including radicals (the trade union organizer and feminist activist Léa Roback, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, the pioneering abortion rights advocate), political figures affiliated with the Parti Québécois (Henry Milner, Paul Unterberg), successful politicians either associated with the Quebec Liberal establishment (Dr. Victor Goldbloom, Herbert Marx) or opposed to it, such as Robert Libman, the "unofficial spokesman for disgruntled Anglophone Jews" who was elected to the Quebec National Assembly in 1989 representing the pro-Anglo rights Equality Party (374). The final chapter also profiles prominent cultural figures, artists, architects, entrepreneurs, and writers, such as Leonard Cohen and, with some caveats, Mordecai Richler, "one of the most remarkable voices in contemporary Montreal literature." (Anctil warmly praises several of the Richler's novels while expressing unease with "the deliberately disrespectful portrait Richler had painted of" Quebec's political leadership in his essays [386].)

For anglophone readers (and francophones, too), Anctil might have addressed more closely the allegiance of most Quebec's Jews to the federalist cause during the 1960s and beyond. One name that does not appear in *History of the Jews in Quebec*, for example, is Pierre-Elliot Trudeau, who was a central actor in the constitutional debates that affected the future of Quebec—and its Jews. Not only that, for nearly two decades (1965-1984) Trudeau was MP for Mount Royal, one of the most heavily Jewish ridings in Canada, first as minister of justice and then as prime minister. By contrast, Trudeau's principal foil in the political jockeying between Ottawa and Quebec City, Premier René Lévesque, appears frequently. On the other hand, Anctil does mention

Trudeau's immediate successors as MPs—his fellow Liberals, both Jewish, Sheila Finestone and Irwin Cotler, who served as Canada's minister of justice from 2003 to 2006.

Anctil's passion for his subject matter shines through on every page of *History of the Jews in Quebec*. "A vital and very grounded form of Jewishness" prevails in Montreal, with Jewish identity sustained by a complex mix of internal factors (351–356). Their collective identity is reinforced by funding that the Quebec government provides for historically Jewish institutions. This dynamic, combined with the Jewish communities' religious diversity and bilingualism, has established "a new framework for the encounter between the French-language majority and the Jews of Quebec" (399). Beyond that, the "institutional completeness" of Montreal Jewry serves as "a model for other, more recent immigrant groups… [including] non-Christian minorities" (401). This book's underlying message is that Jews have contributed much to what makes Quebec a "distinct society," while carving out their own discrete place within it.

Zachary M. Baker
Stanford University