

# City Glow: Streetlights, Emotions, and Nocturnal Life, 1880s–1910s

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[juh.sagepub.com](http://juh.sagepub.com)**Nicolas Kenny<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

Proliferating streetlights generated complex emotional responses in modern cities. Drawing on recent scholarship in the history of the emotions, this article argues that examining the feelings of pride and prestige associated with technological innovation, but also of anger and fear when light was lacking or unpleasant, reveals the intimate nature of urban dwellers' relationship to their environment. Street lighting is often studied as part the networks of infrastructure that gave cities their contemporary form, or as elements of the commercial expansion that made them centers of consumerism. At the intersection of these trends stood the emotional experiences of those seeking to lay claim to the urban night. If the cultural significance of emotions varies according to historical circumstances, comparing the tensions, politics, and atmospheres of streetlights in distant places like Montreal and Brussels suggests that the rapidly changing urban environment of the period produced its own distinct emotional regime.

**Keywords**

streetlights, emotions, cities, infrastructure, night, Montreal, Brussels

Though less frequented than its iconic downtown business section, the eastern stretch of Montreal's Sainte-Catherine Street running between D ez ry and Davidson Streets was, in October 1901, lively and bustling. In the shadow of the gigantic Hochelaga Cotton Manufacturing Company, stood working-class row-houses, tramway lines, and a small park on which a public market would soon open, with a post office, church, and banks nearby. For F. H. Badger, superintendent of the city's light department, this 1,100-foot portion of road did not receive "proper" illumination in the evenings, prompting him to suggest the city reallocate funds from another ward to this priority area, which, conveniently, would "also be of benefit" to the local fire and police stations.<sup>1</sup> It was equally convenient, no doubt, that populist Montreal mayor Raymond Pr fontaine also happened to be an influential land speculator in that part of town (Figure 1).

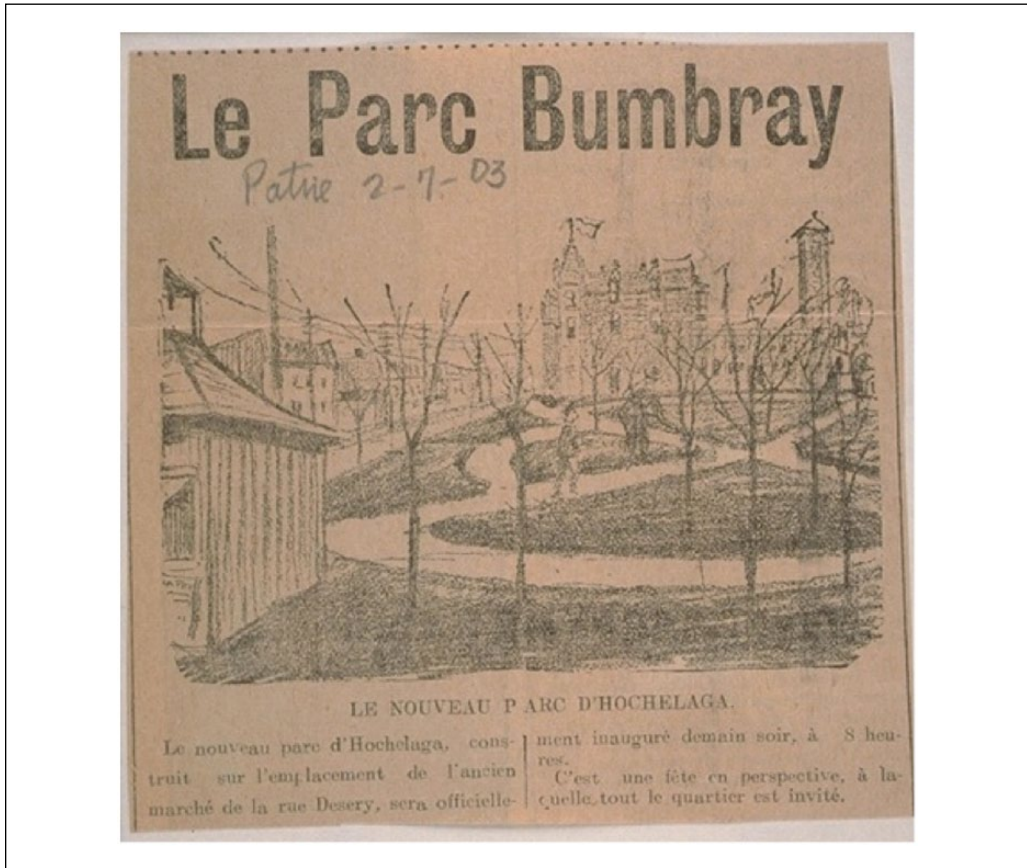
Real or perceived political pressure notwithstanding, the decision to put a light here and not there was all in a day's work for the city electrician, responsible for ensuring that when he left the office each night, as much of the city be as brightly lit as his budget allowed. This was but one of countless gestures shaping the carefully calculated, though contentiously debated, systems of poles and wires, pumps and pipes, roads and tracks designed to enable power, water, vehicles, merchandise, not to mention people, to move smoothly through the modern city, and by which

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**Figure 1.** Bumbray Park, off Sainte-Catherine Street in the bustling east end of Montreal, a high-priority area for additional streetlights, according to the city electrician.

Source: Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec, Albums de rue E.-Z. Massicotte.

municipalities attempted to pull their overflowing agglomerations into more manageable entities. The rapid development of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American and European cities is often analyzed in terms of the construction and articulation of these grids of services and infrastructure. Urban dwellers' visceral, emotional experiences of these developments, however, are typically glossed over, mentioned in passing or overlooked entirely.

This article shifts the perspective away from the mechanics of urbanization to the atmospheres and tensions of city life they generated. For all Superintendent Badger pondered how to distribute lamps throughout the city, urban dwellers' deeply felt preoccupations suggest there was more at stake than cold measurements and account ledgers. Examining two cities, Montreal and Brussels, I am less interested in the process through which networks of streetlights were put in place than in the implications of the presence, or absence, of that light on the way residents understood what it meant to live in metropolitan settings. Comparing cities on different continents illustrates how street lighting was a profoundly emotional issue, revolving around the politics of access to light, of the city's self-representation, and of its residents' sense of belonging. Debates over how, when, and where to light city streets brought individual citizens into direct contact with their municipal representatives and institutions, and illuminated varying ideological divisions about the necessity and right to have light as well as about where the public purse's responsibility began and ended

in this regard. More importantly, this preoccupation with how public spaces were to be lit at night spoke to the complex emotional dispositions of urban dwellers. From chest-swelling feelings of pride and romanticism to stomach-churning fear and outrage, lampposts did more than cast a practical light on the pavement below; they made visible the spectrum of emotions accompanying nocturnal experiences in this period of urban and technological development. If emotions are individual, subjective responses to outside stimuli, their significance lies in the way they feed into social dynamics. Considering the diversity of reactions to this infrastructure shows how emotions, as much as lighting itself, shaped nocturnal atmospheres, and as such placed individuals in dialogue, and often in tension, with the broader urban society they formed.

## Infrastructure and Emotion

By the late nineteenth century, streetlights, particularly when powered by electricity, had become a quintessential symbol of urban modernity.<sup>2</sup> Seen as enhancing security, both by facilitating movement and reducing criminality, and creating new possibilities for industry and commerce after sundown, they embodied the order, standardization, and rationality that proponents of integrated “network-based urbanism” diligently pursued, reinforcing the perception that the city was “an abstract object to be managed and controlled.”<sup>3</sup> Bright lights were also said to confer a cosmopolitan ambiance to cities, accentuating the beauty of boulevards, promising ever-more exciting forms of consumption and leisure, constituting radiant status symbols for municipal administrations eager to display their ability to exercise control over the urban environment and their adherence to the triumphant progression of industrial capitalism. If the blaze of electric light fostered the impression of living in a “dream world,” these were, for those who financed and controlled the power switches at least, dreams of security, efficiency, and profitability in constantly expanding proportions.<sup>4</sup>

The story of urban illumination has generally been written, as historian Joachim Schlör observes, from the perspective not of the night but of the light that seeks to annihilate it, the technological evolution from oil, to gas, to electricity presented as a narrative of “forward-storming progress,” overlooking a more nuanced story of “changing relations between light and dark.”<sup>5</sup> Christopher Otter further argues that the tendency to reduce urban lighting to either an instrument of surveillance or a spectacle of consumerism, veils a more intricate political history of “technological government” that determines who gets to see what in which circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Despite the hubris of many commentators, streetlights never did transform night into day. The pools of light they created may indeed have been bright, but they also caused glare or flickered out. And as soon as one stepped away, the darkness seemed even darker.<sup>7</sup> These invitations to reconsider the cultural significance of this key urban infrastructure are an opportunity to step in and out this light, to analyze it relative to the darkness that, far from being eliminated, continued to surround and impose limits on brightness.

Unseen poles and wires, light considered either obtrusively excessive or woefully inadequate, and the feelings of annoyance or insecurity they caused were reminders of “high modernism’s” failure to impose its “imperialist” and “hegemonic” master plan for the “rational design of social order” on civil society in general, and on cities in particular. Meticulously engineered, these plans ignored local, informal knowledge, making the networked city ultimately disconnected from the “autonomous purposes and subjectivity of those who live in it.”<sup>8</sup> Streetlights amplified these unplanned and contingent aspects of metropolitan life, but these have tended to be forgotten in all the talk of orderly networks and scientific rationality. Otter’s excellent analysis of how liberal conceptions of freedom defined the politics of seeing, for instance, mentions only “in passing” the “modalities of vision that have less to do with power than with emotional and affective experience.”<sup>9</sup> It is this wayward thread I wish to pick up in weaving this story.

Recent scholarship on the emotions encourages us to consider these experiences of the urban night in relation to the spaces and materiality that produce them.<sup>10</sup> Streetlights generated an ever-intensifying, often enthralling, and sometimes troubling aura that seemed to magnify the pleasures and terrors of the night. They were a material component of what geographer Ben Anderson calls the “affective atmospheres”<sup>11</sup> that pervaded urban environments, their occupants associating these objects with feelings of personal safety, aesthetic taste, or aspirations of status. Historians have of late paid growing attention to the way interior sentiments structure social relations and shape historical processes, showing how the way emotions are felt, the meanings they convey, and the different emotional dispositions considered appropriate or legitimate changes according to time and place.<sup>12</sup> Felt individually, emotions acquire broader cultural resonance as they are expressed to others, valorized or stigmatized by the power dynamics of broader social groups which are defined variously as emotional “regimes” or “communities.”<sup>13</sup> My objective here is to read through expressions of a multiplicity of emotions (which are often studied in isolation<sup>14</sup>) in order to understand the interior, ardent, and sometimes unpredictable responses to the intensity of urban life that often clashed with increasingly pervasive attempts to shape and regulate space, as well as behavior within it.

Designed in the quest for rational, technological solutions to problems of circulation and criminality, it is the underlying political and cultural meanings of streetlights that tell us about emotional outlooks on the frenetic, enjoyable, or threatening city. The play of the light through the evening mist, shimmering off windows or glimmering along an animated boulevard, forged an important affective connection to the city, while shadowy corners and dark alleys aroused fear and suspicion, exposing the subjectivities that underlay the putatively rationalist planning imperative, and serving to justify the denigration of urban dwellers on the margins of middle-class respectability. Passionate debates by municipal officials, letters from irate citizens, newspaper investigations, and poetic musings attune us to the way myriad individual responses to urban infrastructure nourished the collectively experienced atmosphere of city life. By their very nature as intangible and fleeting phenomena that nonetheless “envelope and press upon” us, atmospheres are slippery to work with.<sup>15</sup> As feminist theorist Teresa Brennan has shown, atmospheres become perceptible through the affects individuals transmit to one another, both directly and via their environment.<sup>16</sup> Following this reading as well as Anderson’s, then, the glow of streetlamps was but one element of the unique nocturnal atmosphere of these industrializing cities. The light they cast, and the penumbra between them, created varying atmospheres associated with fear or excitement only as individual emotional responses to these spatial and material elements of city life were expressed and shared, normalized or discredited. Interpreting the atmospheres resulting from the meeting of light, bodies, and streets, as well as the emotions underlying them, shows how streetlights encapsulated the interaction between modern urbanism and lived experiences of the nocturnal city, albeit in ways that correspond primarily to those whose background afforded them a place in the discussion. Of those castigated as villains in the shadows, testimonials are rare.

## **Montreal and Brussels**

Similar in size and regional importance, simultaneously and rapidly growing into booming centers of manufacturing and trade, Montreal and Brussels are representative of countless other cities transformed by the intense industrialization of the period.<sup>17</sup> Otter notes that illumination was very much “rooted in locality,” emerging from specific spatial and political contexts.<sup>18</sup> But if examining street lighting in two distant and unconnected cities can indeed help to uncover unique patterns in each, a comparison such as this more broadly shows how these local preoccupations spoke to the ways in which modern urban environments resonated emotionally with their inhabitants. Lighting may have progressed differently in the two places, and the available sources



**Figure 2.** Streetlights on Windsor Street in Montreal, ca. 1908.

Source: Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec.

emphasize different aspects of residents' connections with it, but at the end of the day, this juxtaposition seeks to address wider processes—how the glow of street lamps participated in the emotional landscape of metropolitan life—rather than place-specific narratives. The social nature of emotions is often analyzed in reference to broader regional or national settings, but focusing on cities allows us to observe how emotions were produced in relation to people's tangible interactions with the technologies that were irrevocably changing the way they lived. The conceptions of streetlights discussed below show this dynamic taking shape across cities whose shared characteristics counterbalanced the distance between them, allowing us to generalize about the nature of the connection between emotion and infrastructure beyond these specific cases. Circumstances unique to each generated discrete experiences, but in both places these were related using words, references, and assumptions, which suggest that the modern city was itself constitutive of a distinct form of what historian William Reddy calls an “emotional regime.”<sup>19</sup>

From the time gas fixtures replaced oil lamps, lighting Canada's then largest city was a high-profit, monopolist's game. Founded in 1837, the Montreal Gas Company, known for its inflated rates and inconsistent service, was the city's sole light supplier until the late-century rise of electric power increasingly confined gas to the residential market. Having encountered the technology at the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, the entrepreneur J.A.I. Craig conducted the first electrical lighting tests in Montreal, including a display before thousands of enthusiastic observers, some reading newspapers, as the “night sun” cast a “fine soft pale light” over military exercises underway on the Champs de Mars.<sup>20</sup> In the end though, it was Craig's rivals at the upstart Royal Electric Company who, in 1886 and amid allegations of corruption and political favoritism, won the contract to light the city's streets. Fifteen years later, the gas and electric utilities merged to form the all-powerful Montreal Light Heat and Power Company (MLHP), whose lucrative contracts with the city allowed it to pay its shareholders a steady stream of generous dividends. Smaller companies servicing suburban municipalities were bought out as soon as they were deemed a threat, and without much competition, the MLHP oversaw the rapid expansion of Montreal's street lighting service (Figure 2), all the while charging considerably higher rates than what other North American municipalities paid.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 3.** Streetlights on the Grand'Place in Brussels, ca 1900.  
Source: Painting by Luigi Loir.

With the abundance of hydraulic resources in Montreal's hinterland; growing municipal, industrial, and consumer demand; and close ties between company executives and capitalist-minded politicians, electricity imposed itself more quickly in Montreal than in Brussels. In the Belgian capital, local authorities boasted of having been one of the first cities on the continent to adopt gas streetlights in 1819, decades before even the *ville lumière* of Paris. After outsourcing to two successive companies, the city took direct control in 1875, building and operating a coal-fueled gas plant that employed more than one thousand workers at a time. As of the early 1880s, electricity was used to illuminate landmark theatres, parks, and squares (Figure 3), and it long coexisted with gas, sometimes on the same lamppost. In 1896, the London-based India Rubber Company won a contract to light Brussels's most prestigious thoroughfares. Amid accusations that the city council was favoring the publicly funded gas plant, demands for the generalization of electric lighting became incessant, but the new technology would only come to dominate in the interwar years.<sup>22</sup>

### Prestige on the Boulevard

These demands came from many quarters. Politicians, entrepreneurs, and ordinary citizens each had their own priorities, and municipal coffers never seemed deep enough to keep up with the relentless lobbying for additional and brighter lights to be placed in the petitioners' respective parts of town. On the surface, requests for more light very much reflected the calls for greater accessibility, mobility, and security, which the historiography tells us dominated the discourse on illumination. By elevating the sense of sight over more tactile and auditory forms of perception, streetlights were understood as enhancing the rational individual's freedom not only to move about the city at will but also to adopt the orderly, respectable, and sanitary comportments expected of the occupants of modern cities.<sup>23</sup> Viewing these requests—and the city's attempts to

keep up—solely from the perspective of the light would indeed suggest a relatively clear-cut story of modern technocratic responses to a clearly identified urban problem with scientific, widely applicable solutions. Focusing on emotional experiences at play, however, paints a messier picture in which what took place in the shadow of night was just as influential on urban dwellers' vision of the city as that which happened in the halo of light.

Indeed, the self-consciously rationalist arguments framing requests for lighting cannot be dissociated from the murkier knowledge of the night that spawned them. For instance, several requests before the Brussels administration had to do with the need for more streetlights in the downtown theatre district, evoking not just questions of visibility but also a halting nocturnal atmosphere in which the urbane pleasures of big-city entertainment are burdened with a sense of uneasiness about potential dangers on the journey home.<sup>24</sup> Or, when one city councillor called for “abundant and very intensive” lighting on a busy square en route to the harbor and principal manufacturing suburbs, his vision for more efficient, profit-generating traffic flow was rooted in the immediate lived experience of thousands of vehicles and pedestrians ploughing through the worn-down pavement of a cluttered thoroughfare.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, the supposed progress that street lighting offered was a slow moving affair, punctuated by gaps between expectations and daily uses of the street as wide as the space between the lampposts themselves.

For political and business elites, streetlights served an important legitimating function, displaying their capacity to embrace the expectations of modern metropolitanism and cultivating the image of forward-looking cities, attractive to wealthy investors and respectable citizens. Commentators took seriously, and personally, the prestige exuded by streetlights, exuberantly hailing the “prodigious” and “irresistible” progress that defined the age, to cite the passionate words of a Brussels city councillor. Reminding his colleagues of “the humble tallow candle and smoky lamp” that seemed to take him back a century, his thoughts were turned to the future. “What pride we feel when we compare to those pale and drab candle ends that sufficed for our fathers, and even for ourselves in our youth or our childhood, the flood of light that gas now spreads over us, in our streets and in our homes.” Soon, he predicted, gas lighting would in turn fade into a distant memory, “arousing the same disdain and the same pity as the miserable tallow candle of yore.”<sup>26</sup> Twenty-five years later, the prophecy seemed fulfilled for a Montreal author. The same comfort and reassurance in the technologies of the present informed his vision of bygone times, shuddering at the thought that urban dwellers were once “reduced to lighting streets and public squares either by the light of the moon, torches, resin, lanterns they were forced to carry themselves, or by smoky lamps. . . . Indeed, all of that once existed,” he lamented, before exalting the “progress,” which, “through the discoveries of science, has given us gas and electricity!”<sup>27</sup>

Author Léon Clerbois's 1910 history of municipal lighting in Brussels similarly lauded the “incessant progress” his city had made since the candlelit seventeenth century. Praising the clairvoyant early adoption of gas which had opened nothing less than “a new era that would transform humanity!” Clerbois insisted that the danger, suspicion, and fear that once darkened the night had been eliminated. No matter what ill-intentioned detractors might claim, Brussels had nothing to envy of other European capitals. In measuring up to rival cities, Clerbois struck a sensitive chord. The promise of offering a brighter experience of the night than could be had elsewhere was central to the pride-laden discourse. To criticism leveled at Brussels for its comparative slowness in adopting electrical lighting, Clerbois responded with “official figures” showing that, measured in terms of the number of lamps and length of gas mains, Brussels was in fact better lit than Paris and London, and on par with Berlin.<sup>28</sup>

But in such debates, statistical data was no substitute for firsthand visual experience. Reacting to charges that small towns using the new technology had better lighting than the venerable capital, for instance, the councilman Camille Lemonnier vigorously retorted that nowhere on the continent had he seen better and brighter streetlights. “Our lighting is quite simply magnificent,” further emphasized one of his colleagues.<sup>29</sup> Montrealers made similar claims. Recognizing that

continued improvements remained necessary, Arthur Parent, Badger's successor as superintendent, took solace in finding that his city "compare[d] favourably," when measuring up to such "well-lighted" places as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. During his tour of these cities, it might be noted, he had felt "overwhelmed with kindness" on the part of his hosts, with whom he had had extensive discussions about different technologies and the atmospheres each created.<sup>30</sup> That personal touch was equally important when Montreal hosted visiting dignitaries, as when officials felt the need to quintuple the number of arc lamps shining over the prestigious Dominion Square in order to project "a better impression of our good city," to members of the British Parliament and English Boards of Trade. Surely, Montreal's amour-propre would not allow it to be outdone in this regard by "every big American city."<sup>31</sup>

As much as bright lights stirred feelings of pride and satisfaction, perceived inadequacies aroused corresponding sentiments of shame and embarrassment. For all that defenders of gas in Brussels could boast, others were irritated that electricity remained a luxury into the twentieth century, their city not surpassing, but ranking well behind, its peers.<sup>32</sup> That the switch had been made in some streets but not others accentuated their malaise. Stepping from electric to gaslight, "we are struck by the abandon and sadness in which the street is plunged," sighed one councillor, another lamenting the poor lighting on the boulevard du Midi, a primary entryway into the capital.<sup>33</sup> In Montreal, special fixtures were designed for the mayor's private residence (Figure 4). Mounted on bronze posts, the hexagonal lamps were trimmed with gold and engraved with the mayoral and municipal coats of arms. It was also customary for two lamps to remain outside the residence of the outgoing mayor, and one in front of the homes of all other former mayors.<sup>34</sup> When the administration decided to end the practice for the sometime mayors, the MLHP advised those concerned that they would henceforth have to make their own "arrangements for a continuance of the light."<sup>35</sup> Among these was Raymond Préfontaine, whose ward, we saw at the outset, the city electrician had once taken pains to brighten. "I beg to state that if the City of Montreal cannot afford to pay the ex-mayors of the city the compliment of maintaining the gas lights installed in front of their residences any longer," Préfontaine replied, "they are welcome to remove them."<sup>36</sup> The formulation is superficially polite, but read in the context of the prestige streetlights represented, the nettled tone of the response, and its veiled implication that the decision resulted from the incompetence of city officials, suggests that a miffed Préfontaine took the removal of these lights, and of the honor they conveyed, as a personal affront.

Extending beyond their mere functionality, the emotional associations urban dwellers made with lamp standards were bound up in their design as well (Figure 5). In both cities, municipal officials were sensitive to the aesthetic potential of lampposts, specifying that these should not be "disgraceful"<sup>37</sup> in appearance or "cumbersome" on the streets. Instead, they should have a "pleasant silhouette," be "worthy of our great thoroughfares,"<sup>38</sup> and "adorn a decorative and artistic cachet."<sup>39</sup> Like fine architecture and inspiring monuments, lampposts offered the opportunity to elevate the intellect of the nocturnal user of the street. "Let us never lose sight," pleaded Clerbois, "that the public way should be a permanent and living art museum, inspiring in all a feeling for, a love for beauty, an aversion to all things ugly, banal or vulgar." Though conceding artists' propensity for ignoring such matters as technical requirements and cost, he insisted trifling pecuniary considerations should not hold back the city. In seeking to "uproot" the "excessive indifference, poor taste and utilitarianism" of the times, the author distinctly engaged the question of urban lighting in a more subjective realm of aesthetics, situating the relationship to the street on a plane not of scientific rationality but of individual experience and personal fulfilment.<sup>40</sup>

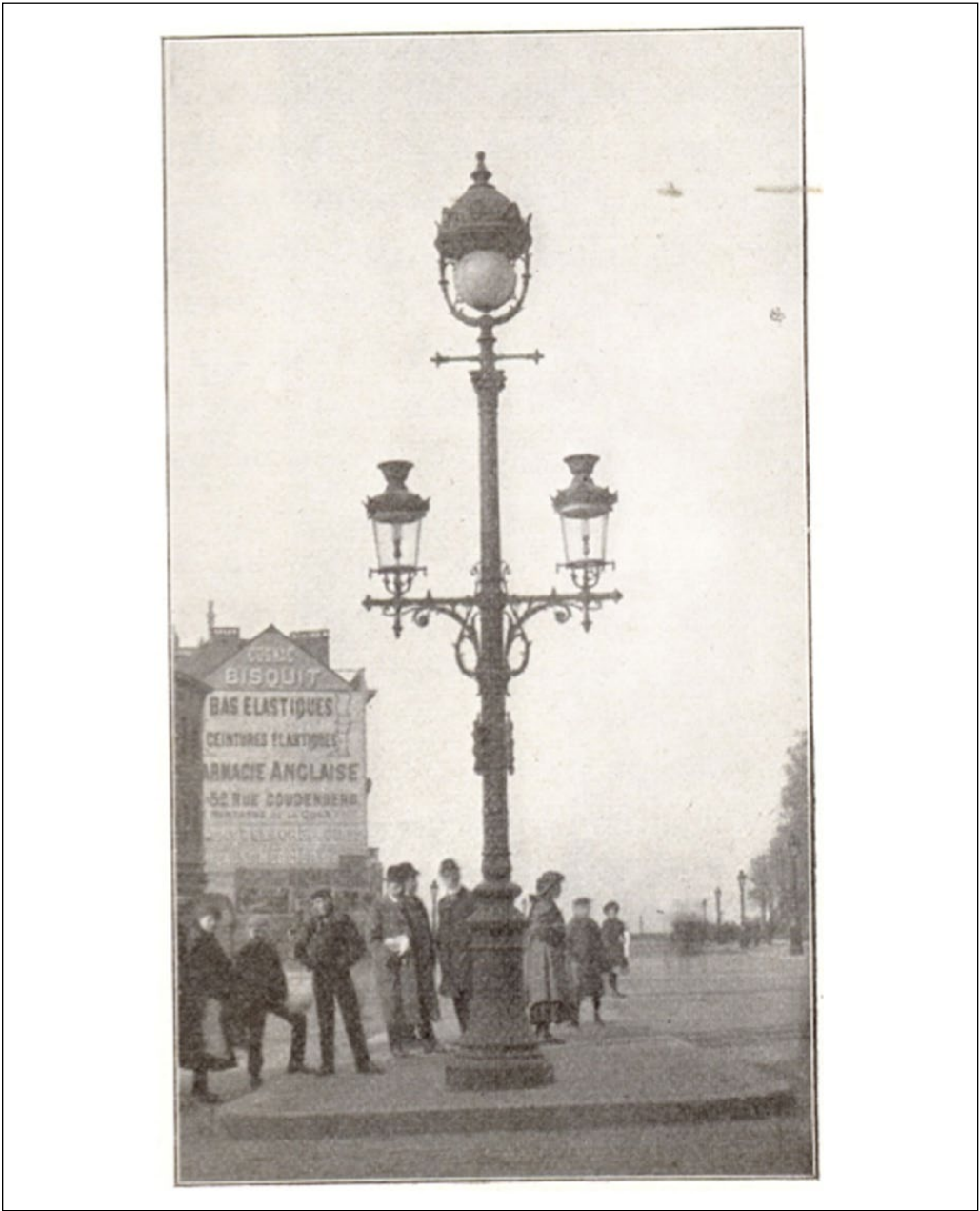
For the critics, this opportunity was being squandered, the lack of artistic interest in the design of streetlights causing a "deplorable effect" on the city.<sup>41</sup> Commenting on the "detestable" sight, one councillor elicited the assembly's laughter by joking that "from a revolutionary perspective, we can congratulate ourselves. These are excellent lanterns for hanging future aristocrats."<sup>42</sup> Residents in both cities were adamant that technological changes had to accommodate their





**Figure 4.** Decorative lamp designed to stand outside the Montreal mayor's private residence.  
Source: *La Patrie*, April 25, 1904.

deeply held sense of attachment to the texture of their environment. The exchange between Arthur Parent and Lewis Skaife, Corresponding Secretary of Montreal's Numismatic and Antiquarian Society, is revealing. To Parent's request for permission to install on the society's Chateau Ramsey property "a small pole" for an electric arc lamp, Skaife acquiesced, "provided the pole is of iron and nicely painted." For technical reasons, an iron fixture could not be placed there, replied Parent, careful nonetheless to confirm the wooden post would indeed be "nicely painted," and reassuring Skaife that it would "not in any way be unsightly."<sup>43</sup> For its part, the



**Figure 5.** A streetlight in Brussels.

Source: Published by Léon Clerbois in *Histoire de l'éclairage public à Bruxelles* (1910).

Brussels streetcar company had taken the precaution of promising to install “artistic” lampposts along the central boulevard Anspach in order to quell concerns that the trolley system would disfigure the prestigious thoroughfare. What the city got instead, lamented a councillor, were posts “without the least artistic form” salvaged from Paris, “where no one wanted them.” Worse, the lighting produced by this “horrible line of masts,” though electric, was “petty and insufficient,” he vociferated. “This bad joke must come to an end,” added an outraged colleague.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, though many criticized the slowness of electrification, the switch itself had side effects that also offended aesthetic sensibilities. The “indiscriminate and unregulated” mess of wires feeding not just streetlights but also indoor lighting systems, streetcars, and telephone lines, “strangled” busy intersections, and were compared in Brussels to spider webs, and in Montreal, to a “Chinese harbour after a typhoon.”<sup>45</sup> The lampposts themselves were a frustrating nuisance, blocking sidewalks, impeding circulation, and raising fears in passers-by when decrepit fixtures threatened to topple over and cause fire or injury.<sup>46</sup> Lampposts were also the scenes of more mundane, day-to-day annoyances of city life. Repeated complaints from one resident prompted the MLHP to remove decorative spikes from a pole “to prevent the boys from climbing onto Mr. Callaghan’s roof.”<sup>47</sup> For its part, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union took exception to “the many signs advertising a certain brand of cigarette, attached to disused city lamp posts.”<sup>48</sup> While advertisers frequently asked to hang signs on “dead” gas lampposts, permission was granted at the superintendent’s discretion, and allowing a tobacco company to do so was deemed inappropriate. The WCTU’s exasperation seems to have also been felt by the superintendent himself, whose reprimand to American Tobacco, written even before the temperance group’s complaint, clearly betrayed his own impatience with the company’s behavior.<sup>49</sup>

## Demanding Light

There was, undeniably, a good measure of political grandstanding in the emotionally laden tones that politicians, bureaucrats, and other city promoters adopted in discussing streetlights. The boastfulness of some was an effective way of showing they took municipal aspirations to heart; the indignation of others was a compelling rhetorical tool in the cut-and-thrust of political life. But if they framed the discussion in these terms, it was also because such attitudes resonated deeply with the emotional dispositions of the citizens with whom they interacted. Municipal services, and streetlights in particular, were a primary point of contact between urban dwellers and the apparatus of urban governance. Residents wrote frequently to city administrators, requesting more light here, reparations there, and voicing their concerns about the trials and tribulations with the spaces they encountered on a nightly basis. Their letters, and the vivid, expressive language they employed, offer a window into the potpourri of emotions that framed city life in ways made new by the intensifying encounters between the darkness of night, and the rays of artificial light that sought to tame it.

Fear is the emotion most commonly associated with the night. The very purpose of street lighting had always been to tame this fear, to remove the “perilous obscurity”<sup>50</sup> that threatened the safety and accessibility of the street. In reality, even as more and more people did take to the streets after sundown for both leisure and work, the darkness never did cease to send a frisson of alarm shivering through the spine of many urban dwellers, some of whom professed to not even dare step out after sundown.<sup>51</sup> On a utilitarian level, they worried about their ability to see and move without impediment, especially on busy avenues where streetcars rushed by, heightening the risk of collisions with pedestrians.<sup>52</sup> As lighting proliferated, expectations swelled, people growing impatient when they perceived a lack or absence of artificial light. One Montrealer complained that the “unsatisfactory” lighting in his street placed people using the steps of his house in constant danger of falling. A nearby gas lamp had been removed, and the shadows cast into the darkness of night by other poles in the street had caused at least two accidents, he maintained.<sup>53</sup> A few blocks over, members of a Presbyterian congregation felt that attending evening prayer services should not come with the risk of injury they faced each time they tripped in the stairs of their church, on account of two gas lamps having recently been removed from Dorchester Street.<sup>54</sup> Situations like these caused city folk to “suffer great inconvenience, discomfort and annoyance,” wrote another group of petitioners, voicing the exasperation of countless other similar requests.<sup>55</sup>

These vexations aside, concerns about criminality, including theft and violence, aroused the most pressing nocturnal dread. Even before the electrification debate, residents of the boulevard du Midi were angered that Brussels seemed to cut costs at their expense, many standards remaining unlit each night, others casting but a dim glow. Their council representative enjoined the city to quickly ensure this boulevard received the same secure lighting as all the others, as the current situation made it possible for “murders to be committed in the middle of the night.”<sup>56</sup> For their part, residents of Montreal’s rue Lasalle grew increasingly upset that their neighborhood was becoming “very dangerous.” In a nearby wooded area, they had witnessed “bands of rascals gathering for the night.” “Our wives and children are afraid, with good reason, to go out at night, they added, casting nighttime fear as a feminine trait and associating the provision of light with masculine conceptions of familial responsibility.”<sup>57</sup>

It is significant to note that it was not necessarily actual acts of crime, but rather the fear that crime could happen in these circumstances, that mobilized residents to petition their municipal governments. Many expressed an unwavering faith in the widespread notion that additional light would naturally result in order and good behavior. A Montreal businessman who requested better lighting near his brick factory was perturbed that people in the vicinity were “constantly molested by a crowd of roughs.” He considered the “Police force” (scare quotes in the original) “so insufficient and small that the only protection we can ask is good light and then protect ourselves.”<sup>58</sup> This spirit of self-sufficiency was steeped in the oft-repeated maxim that a good street lamp was the equivalent of an extra police officer in action, a perspective that had municipal administrations dreaming of cost-cutting opportunities. It remains common today to hear the association made between streetlights and personal security, and this despite research suggesting that more lights do not always mean less crime.<sup>59</sup> What is revealing here, however, is less the fantasy of order entertained by rationalist city planners than the way the presence or absence of light enkindled people’s emotional posture vis-à-vis their own willingness to venture out at night, and the intuitively defined level of acceptable risk they formulated at the precise moment they stepped into a set of stairs or walked across an intersection, through an alley or into a park. It is telling to note that when singing instructor Cal Corey begged the light committee to tend to Berthelet Street, “plunged in darkness,” it was above all a “*feeling of security*” he and his neighbors were craving.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, these irritants were real, and if nightfall stoked the imagination, crime did happen. For months, residents of Hermine Street had endured nuisances they attributed directly to the absence of light. “It is overbearing and ridiculous the conduct and insults we have to put up with owing to the darkness,” wrote one Mrs. Canning on behalf of the other “grumbling” tenants. “I could send you from 14 to 16 names that are in the same misery so dark that the [house] numbers cannot be seen,” she continued. All she wanted was to prevent the “scandal” disrupting her family, whose ears she wished to “protect . . . from the abusive language they have to listen to.” For emphasis, she recounted a recent “terrible fight” one night outside her home. “All around was in dread it was a murder the sidewalk was a pool of blood Sunday morning not three feet from our doors” [*sic*]. The obscurity of the night provoked a host of negative emotions in Mrs. Canning: irritation with the atmosphere of the street, anger at the gas company and city officials, worry for her family, and dread at the thought of the scene she had witnessed, her terror spoken by the rambling, unpunctuated style of the missive.<sup>61</sup>

Events like these were exceptional, and while a bloodbath at one’s door unsurprisingly triggered extreme emotions, the wider significance of these letters resides in what they tell us about changing expectations and assumptions regarding ownership of the modern urban night. Demand for the protection of light grew precisely because the urban bourgeoisie increasingly claimed the nocturnal street as a space for them to invest. Though many saw “the distance separating electricity from gas” as “a thousand times greater than the interval separating gas from the candles of our fathers,” historian Peter Baldwin suggests that the real consequence of electrification was not so

much the new visual experience, but rather the more diverse crowds attracted into the streets, as growing numbers of men and women could afford the leisure activities that beckoned.<sup>62</sup> The primarily middle- and upper-class urban dwellers demanding light lay bare their understandings of their own place in the city, of when they could move around within it and to which ends. In their minds, darkness was the domain of “loafers” and “ruffians,” of “apaches” and other “loose characters” who took refuge in the shadows and terrorized the women of the neighborhood. Women themselves were also cast into these roles, since, as historian Mary Anne Poutanen shows, the presence of streetlights made prostitution more visible and simultaneously fueled the discourse of moral opprobrium about illicit nighttime activities.<sup>63</sup> By defining darkness as the realm of what they perceived to be these most disreputable urban types, evoking feelings of anxiety and trepidation, these letters simultaneously cast the lamps as beacons of respectability and moral virtue. If the entertainment and amusements spawned by electric lights “suffused” the night with “moral ambiguity” in the minds of many reformers,<sup>64</sup> nocturnal illuminations guiding bourgeois city dwellers to and from their homes were no less imbued with more reassuring feelings of moral propriety. When an anonymous Montreal journalist published an exposé of the city’s “seamy side,” it was, tellingly, by gaslight that he made his observations. “Back of the well-lighted streets and the open, honest faces are other streets whose lights burn not so brightly, and other faces not so fair,” he cryptically wrote, clearly demarcating the object of his investigation from more respectable citizens and spaces, which, by then, would have been enjoying the bright comfort of electricity.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond their functionality, streetlights built reputations and shaped the way people conceived of their own participation in the spatial arrangements and social structures of city life. Light was needed “not only for illuminating purposes but also in the interest of morality.”<sup>66</sup> Take Montreal’s Busby Lane, for example, decried as being “the night refuge of many of the worst characters in the city.”<sup>67</sup> The situation raised the ire of one landlady, who insisted that because of her tenants, the area was changing and “never had such a respectable class of people living there as there are today.”<sup>68</sup> In buttressing the claim that specific city blocks needed better light on account of the quality of their inhabitants, petitioners often pointed to the presence of churches and convents nearby, pleading that the “select class” frequenting these institutions, as well as the succor they provided to society’s less fortunate, rendered them worthy of illumination, such that their work might be accomplished without trepidation.<sup>69</sup> As darkness harbored the city’s most menacing sorts, more privileged urban dwellers saw lighting as something their upstanding neighbors had come to deserve. Streetlights, they believed, would not only ward off troublemakers but also reward those whose behavior and lifestyle elevated city life to a more confident, self-assured, and serene emotional register.

The tensions underlying the number, placement, and brightness of streetlights in cities like Montreal and Brussels were thus informed by the three-way relationships between fledgling municipal administrations, a booming private sector, and urban dwellers immersed in the busy rush of the metropolis. These relationships were about politics and money, about the exercise of authority and claims to public space, about how infrastructure should function and for whom, about who would pay and who would profit. Like all human relationships, they were infused with emotion. When landlords complained that an absence of streetlights made it difficult to find tenants, or when business owners insisted that the municipal taxes they paid entitled them to more light, financial considerations translated into the anger and exasperation they felt toward city hall, prompting “urgent” demands that “justice be served.”<sup>70</sup> The fear of accidents, theft or violence that motivated so many citizen demands was undeniably bad for business.

As in council debates, the rhetoric wielded by petitioners may have been theatrical, but its repeated use allows us to capture what Peter Stearns describes as the “emotional styles” of the period.<sup>71</sup> Polite formulations remained essential and basic etiquette was never transgressed, though petitioners occasionally sought to break down the boundaries that separated them from the administration by

enjoining officials to accompany them into the darkened streets so that they might experience the discomfort for themselves. At the same time, many letter writers did not hesitate to make their impatience known, not only by insisting on the gravity of their situation, but also by reminding bureaucrats that the demand in question was one of a long series, sometimes stretching over many years. "My dear Robertson," cajoled J. Widmer Nelles, addressing his local councillor on a familiar tone. "You will not I hope think me too great a nuisance," he continued, recognizing the "annoyance" Robertson must have felt in his "duty as a representative of the people." Surely though, Robertson would remember his request from 18 months prior for lights in a part of Rachel Street that remained "uncomfortably dark." "Could you not arrange an arc light [...]?" wondered Nelles. "Please try and do something," he timidly signed off.<sup>72</sup> Residents of Sainte-Élisabeth Street, having seen a first petition go unheeded, sharpened their tone considerably in a second letter five months later. Their ire was manifest not just in the increased number of signatories (11 had signed the first letter, 23 the second, suggesting that the original group's emotional appeals had had a galvanizing effect on their neighbors), but in the decidedly more pointed and urgent language employed – the "complete obscurity" of the first missive was now a "cause of disgrace," a cover for dangerous hoodlums "troubling the peace."<sup>73</sup> City officials, for their part, took personally the accusations they were failing in their duties, conflating the "progressive march forward" of their city with their own sense of self-worth.<sup>74</sup> In this context, Parent made a point of underlining the alacrity of his responses to citizen complaints, requesting a dedicated horse and buggy for faster service and "a badge bearing the Department and Corporation signs" that he might display when making service calls.<sup>75</sup> To the extent that historical assessment of the emotions requires we interpret what individuals felt through the words they left behind, we might reasonably speculate that this desire for status and willingness to display his credentials on his physical person were indicative of Parent's own feelings of devotion and pride toward his mission of making light cut through the pall of the urban night.

Elected officials and bureaucrats who bore the wrath of their constituents in turn projected these emotions to the companies contracted to provide the service. The very role of private enterprises in the supply of light also illustrates the connection between human emotion and the material infrastructure of the city. In Brussels, protracted debates over the relative merits of privatization turned acrimonious. Emotions flared as insults flew and shouts filled the chambers. Over the years, proponents of the free market accused their opponents of putting their feelings of megalomania ahead of the public interest they had been elected to protect, while the latter suggested that recourse to the private sector was beneath the dignity of their great city.<sup>76</sup> In Montreal, meanwhile, the press regularly lambasted the MLHP for gouging the city, and the city for its lack of spine in taking on the monopoly. The relationship between the two entities was decidedly chilly. Upon receiving "very unfavourable reports," the city electrician lashed out at the company that "public opinion . . . is very much exercised at the defective lighting."<sup>77</sup> The same testiness would invariably color the MLHP superintendent's replies, as he sought to minimize the complaints and turn the tables on the city, which, he charged, did not devote sufficient police resources to protecting the company's lamp standards from "malicious and intentional" vandalism.<sup>78</sup>

In Montreal, the frustrations associated with the governance and delivery of this public service came to an emotional boiling point during the wiremen and linesmen's strike that darkened the April nights of 1902. On the 14th, seventy-five electricians of the MLHP and of the Lachine Rapids Company (a suburban supplier) walked off the job, demanding pay raises and nine-hour shifts. Their numbers swelled—a reported total of three hundred fifty strikers joining the ranks within the first few days—and the conflict became the talk of the town. Underlying the daily newspaper coverage and the demands of both parties, we see not only the emotional posturing of both parties but, equally importantly, the heightening of nocturnal fears as the standoff resulted in scores of unlit lamps every night. The workers knew they had a powerful bargaining chip. Urban dwellers had grown accustomed to the comforts of nighttime brightness, and the longer the strike caused darkness, the more pressing became their feelings of discontentment and impatience.

As historian Mary Blewett has shown, emotional standards of the day meant that the success of businessmen in breaking labor demands resided in their ability to maintain a cool disposition, reinforcing their authority by taming their anger to appear fully in control.<sup>79</sup> This was exactly the strategy adopted by MLHP superintendent Gossler, whose daily statements to reporters were hopeful and reassuring. “We are getting on well,” he proclaimed, insisting that the setbacks affecting the service were only temporary. Obstinate refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the electricians’ union, he calmly pointed out that his company was receiving applications from all over the country and that the arrival of replacement workers would mean that “in a day or two everything will be running smoothly.”<sup>80</sup> In private though, Gossler’s correspondence with the city was far more seething than soothing. Outages due to the absence of workers were compounded by vandalism to the wires feeding the lamps. Revealing the anger and consternation he hid from journalists, Gossler’s daily letters to Badger express his growing irritation with the situation, and with what he perceived to be the city’s lack of action in protecting his company’s property.<sup>81</sup> For their part, workers “emphatically” refuted allegation of vandalism, arguing that the company sabotaged its own lines in a bid to portray itself as the victim of an unruly and aggressive workforce. Knowing that while the darkness put pressure on the company, it could also turn public opinion against them, the workers crafted a narrative of positive emotion to portray themselves publicly. Their rallies were described as large and enthusiastic, strengthening their solidarity and resolve. The men were characterized in the press as “solid,” “sanguine,” and in “excellent sprits,” all of which reinforced their confidence they would be victorious.<sup>82</sup>

Between the employers’ outward calm but gnawing rage and the workers’ ebullience were the impatient complaints of residents subjected to nightly outages. Though the lights only went out in certain neighborhoods, Badger received bitter remonstrations from affected citizens, and the press was keen to emphasize that “partial” though the darkness was, the “situation [was] becoming serious.”<sup>83</sup> The “complete obscurity” was anything but “reassuring” for the population, wrote *La Patrie*, while congratulating the strikers for their “good conduct.”<sup>84</sup> Other unions framed their support for the striking electricians less in terms of class solidarity than on the grounds that the darkened streets were shrouded in a “pathetic state of affairs.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the employees’ recriminations that the hired replacements were unqualified, the company managed to progressively restore the lights, much to the papers’ relief. Nevertheless, on the eve of the strike’s resolution, the *Star* continued to report that citizens of some wards were “not in a happy mood.”<sup>86</sup> To their relief, the battle would soon end. A deal brokered by Montreal mayor James Cochrane forced the employer to concede to salary demands, and the incident was soon forgotten.<sup>87</sup> But for the twelve days, and nights, it had lasted, the darkness provoked by the strike had, for different reasons, created rushes of emotion in the different actors concerned—workers, employers, city officials, ordinary residents and the journalists who covered it all—vividly displaying the emotional associations that shaped urban dwellers’ relationship to the materiality of the modern city.

## A Question of Atmosphere

Finally, the simple presence or absence of lamps in the street was only part of the larger implications of urban illumination. Just as central to this dynamic was the quality of the light itself. Nocturnal atmospheres, we have seen, did not simply emerge from new forms of artificial light, but were the product of emotional interactions with it in the distinct social and spatial setting that was the modernizing city. As such, the attempts by municipal authorities to manufacture nocturnal atmospheres they associated with security and efficiency often garnered criticism from those whose preferences were for softer nocturnal hues. Particularly striking in the context of the predictable, progress-oriented discourse on multiplying sources of light is the frequent uneasiness, even resistance, to the intensification of nocturnal light and the corresponding banishment of shadows and darkness. For all that electricity promised to set the night ablaze, many urban dwellers continued to feel a deep personal attachment to what Lynda Nead calls the “poetics of gas,” its “organic and bewitching [power] to

render familiar daytime places strange and unfamiliar” in delicious, if not entirely comforting, ways.<sup>88</sup> Even high-ranking municipal officials, including the mayor of Brussels, Charles Buls, questioned whether the increased illumination promised by electricity was not in fact excessive. Buls was highly critical of the effects of electrification on his cherished city. These new lights produced “a very sad effect,” on the city’s grand boulevards, he argued, pointing out that even the boulevard de l’Opéra in Paris had been stripped of its electric lamps, their unpleasant effect considered inappropriate for the splendor of the setting. Instead, he wished to preserve a “cheerful air,” not by concentrating streetlights so that they might shine more brightly, but by spreading out a greater number of dimmer points of illumination, an effect he argued was better achieved with gas.<sup>89</sup> Creating a pleasant atmosphere that offered respite against the pressures of a dense urban environment mattered far more to him than ensuring the city had acquired the latest technology. Even in Montreal, where electrification was more precocious, Arthur Parent conceded that parks and squares should, in summertime, be lit with a type of petroleum lamp, that “does not disfigure the aspect of the ground with large poles and wires, permitting also to light under the trees.”<sup>90</sup>

Buls’ comments came as Brussels was beginning to experiment with electricity in places like the city’s prestigious municipal park, which occupied the space between the king’s official palace and the national parliament. Despite the shift in technology, the city electricians implementing the plan on an overcast and chilly spring evening of 1894 worked to maintain a soft and romantic atmosphere, much to the delight of those attending the inauguration. Covering the event, a journalist from the daily *Petit bleu* raved about the unique, and to his eyes, pleasurable ambiance. He noted the suddenness with which the shadowy darkness was lit up by a “lunar light,” waking the dormant sparrows into “startled chattering.” Lit from below, the leaves on the trees resembled intricate green lace, interspersed with softly glowing spheres like stars fallen from the sky and hanging in the branches. The success of this “charming effect,” continued the reporter, rested precisely in the sparseness of the lamps. “The light is not blinding,” he explained, giving the walkways “an intimate melancholy of exquisite poetics.” To the “vigorous” light produced by standard arrangements, he much preferred this “slightly capricious and fanciful coquetry.”<sup>91</sup>

Commentators often framed their description of the atmosphere of urban lighting in the image of an evening stroll taken by young lovers. Following a New Year’s tradition of saluting local residents with a few lines of verse, the lamplighters of the Brussels suburb of Saint-Josse, known as “light-carrying knights” serenaded their municipal compatriots with the promise of chasing away obscurity (Figure 6):

So that any honest girl

Facing no danger and well at ease

May walk in the evening

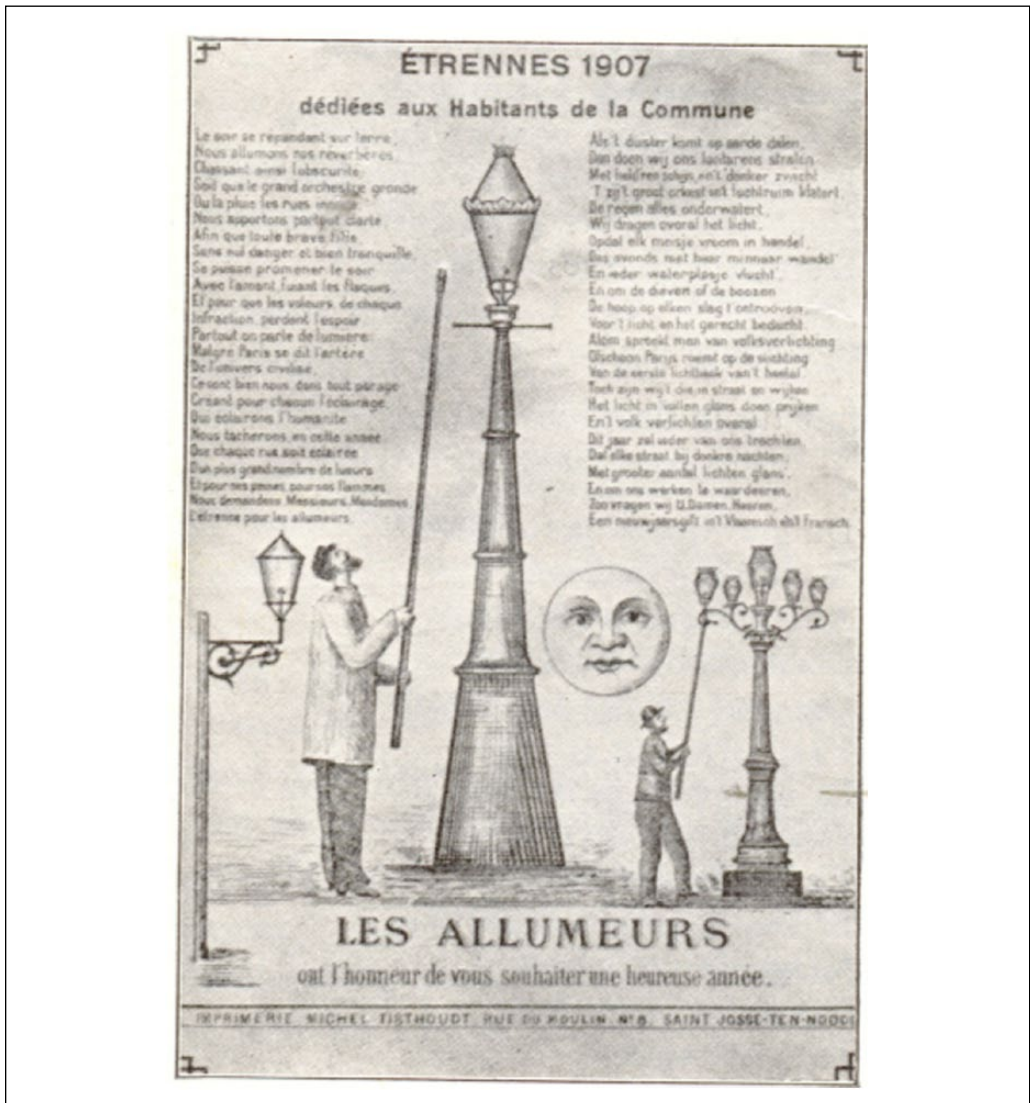
With her lover, avoiding the puddles

But for many, the increasing ubiquity of streetlights meant that lovers could no longer steal away to the soft dimness in the nooks of public walkways as they once did. How the older generation looked back with melancholy at the happy but oh-so-distant time when the slightest bit of greenery could “mysteriously and jealously shelter their love,” deplored the suddenly nostalgic Clerbois.<sup>92</sup> Another *Petit bleu* writer, apparently not sharing his colleague’s enthusiasm for the new electric lights, also denounced the end of cupid’s mystery “in the woods of our old park.”

In the wholesome darkness

Love will no longer draw its bow





**Figure 6.** Poetry offered by lamplighters to the residents of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode in Brussels, in Léon Clerbois, *Histoire de l'éclairage public à Bruxelles*.

...

And now the electric lamp

Strips the shrubs of their poetry

...

You'll no longer hear on the bench

Where the young soldier squeezes the maid

Kisses that sound like trombones  
And the sighs of the regiment  
As it's in the dark and staggered rows of trees  
—Always respected by the gas!—  
That Mr. Buls, true potentate,  
Chases the shadows by the ampere  
Farewell then saucy couples  
Cooing beneath the austere moon  
The grove being without mystery  
The tommy will lose his voice

The verse, humor, and irony wielded against this new iteration of the “*siècle des lumières*” suggests not just a resistance to technological advances labeled as progress but also a masculine conception of the urban night as a privileged site of sexual permissiveness.<sup>93</sup>

Not all critics were so light-hearted, however. Accompanying a visual reportage of the many pleasures made possible by Montreal's artificial lights, a *La Patrie* writer reminded readers that behind the nightlife of leisurely strolls, shopping, theatres, and fancy restaurants was the night work that made it all possible: “Go and see, by the crimson lights of the blast furnaces, the workers in the harsh rolling mills, go and see the glassblowers under the white light,” he exhorted, appealing to feelings of compassion and appreciation.<sup>94</sup> For a group of tired workers treading home from a long day at the factory, described by a Brussels writer, the “magical illumination” produced by streetlamps flickering in the fog went entirely unnoticed. If their strenuous work fueled the progress of the modern city, it ironically made them oblivious to urban charms.<sup>95</sup> Anti-urban commentators went further yet, portraying the illuminated night in overtly negative emotional tones of anxiety and perdition, where the eerie glow of both gas and electric lights bring out the streets' more sinister qualities.<sup>96</sup> To some, the proliferation of electric streetlamps, and especially the temptation for consumption they produced, were among the modern luxuries that not only degraded the moral standards of urban centers but also precipitated worrisome migratory patterns from the countryside to the city, destroying the health and vitality of the nation.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

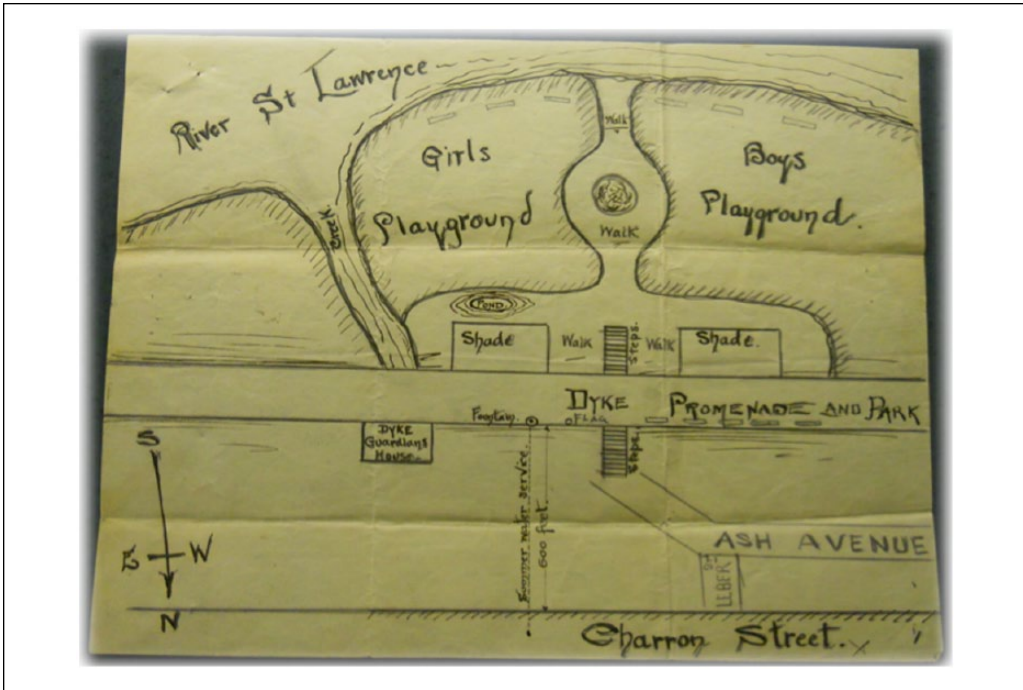
On both sides of the Atlantic, the material and technological structures that reshaped cities were intricately connected to the emotional postures and dispositions of their inhabitants. Modern urbanism strove to evacuate the city of impracticality and fear, removing the obstacles impeding its security and efficiency. Because streetlights were such ubiquitous and emotionally contentious elements of this landscape, they were central both to the ethos of professed rationality and progress through which the city was refashioned, as well as to the complex and interior human experiences that went along with these material developments. When this mission faltered, negotiating the darkness remained a defining feature of turn-of-the-twentieth-century urban life, especially away from the main thoroughfares.



**Figure 7.** “Nostalgic and pensive souls” under the streetlights of Brussels in Marius Renard, *Notre pain quotidien* (1909).

The differing nature of the source material available in the two cities means that certain perspectives, while present in both, can be more fully explored in one locale or the other. The detailed city hall minutes and literary representations of Brussels, written for public consumption, complement the more confidential tones of the reams of letters by Montreal citizens to their municipal administration. Analyzing them together affords the opportunity to grasp the range of emotions intertwined with nocturnal illumination, ranging from pride and self-confidence, to more bitter notes of shame, anger, discomfort, and dread when the light was deemed unsteady, insufficient, or altogether wanting. The similitude in the emotional interaction with streetlights in these distant cities points to the effervescent, modern urban environment itself as one historically specific context in which emotions are expressed, jarred, redefined, and given meaning.

Taken together, this range of feelings surrounding both the politics and the aesthetics of streetlights, this aggregation of minor day-to-day, night-to-night, joys and annoyances, terrors and romances, tell a broader story of the emotional relationship urban dwellers developed with their cities. This is evident in the fictional story of a young maid arriving in Brussels, fascinated with the white clarity of streetlights through the opaque shadows of nightfall, casting their rays into her troubled sense of urban exile through “the sort of dread that the unknown instils in nostalgic and pensive souls (Figure 7).”<sup>98</sup> It is equally evident in the detailed hand-drawn map



**Figure 8.** A hand-drawn map by a group of Montreal residents of Pointe Saint-Charles in 1904 accompanies a request for more lights in order that they might better enjoy their local park. Source: Archives de la ville de Montréal.

accompanying the request for more lights from a group of Montreal residents wishing to enjoy their local park at night, its walks, ponds, playgrounds, and riverfront promenade (Figure 8).<sup>99</sup> These sources, which explore and reveal the intimacies of urban life, tell us about the way city dwellers sought to appropriate urban space, to feel at home within it, even after sundown. Attending to these subjective responses to the increasingly intense illumination of the urban night contributes to our understanding of how individuals are imbricated within the broader social world they inhabit. Far from being fleeting, solitary phenomena inaccessible to the historian, the expression of individually felt emotions placed urban dwellers in dialogue with one another, and participated in the construction of distinct atmospheres that underpinned the connection to their environment. To some, streetlights reflected the value of their city and of themselves, and debates over the number and placement of lights were rooted in conceptions of class and gender privilege in which the placement and number of lamps set apart the respectable and deserving from those considered threatening and illicit. But streetlights also mattered because they contributed to structuring the rhythms of urban life, from the extension of daytime into the darkness of a late winter afternoon, to the riveting pleasures of a summer evening on the boulevards, and to the labor that increasingly stretched deep into the night or resumed even before dawn. Though streetlights were eminently practical infrastructures, the atmospheres they conveyed and the emotions they elicited situates them not just pragmatically on street corners but at the intersection of rationalist modern urbanism and the subjective experiences of space these forces generated.

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### Notes

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15. Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," 77.
16. Theresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
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24. *Bulletin communal de Bruxelles* (hereafter BCB), March 1, 1909, 145; December 24, 1910, 1804; December 16, 1912, 1603.
25. BCB, November 7, 1910, 1490.
26. BCB, August 29, 1881, 240.
27. Gaston Labat, *Almanach de Montréal* (Imprimerie Guertin, 1906), 17. Unable to resist a good pun, the author of a guidebook published by a luxury hotel in Montreal wrote of the "joy" he felt at living in this "enlightened age." *Queen's Hotel, Montreal* (s.n., 1906), 3.
28. Léon Clerbois, "Histoire de l'éclairage public à Bruxelles," *Annales de la Société d'archéologie de Bruxelles* 24, no. I–II (1910): 137, 74–76.
29. BCB, December 19, 1908, 1264.
30. Parent, Report to the Chairman and Members of the Fire and Light Committee, November 10, 1904, VM 50, S2, D79, AM.
31. Horn to Robertson, FLC Chairman, July 8, 1903; Parent to Roberston, July 28, 1903, VM 50, S2, D71, AM.
32. BCB, July 7, 1902, 27.
33. BCB, November 20, 1911; October 27, 1913, 1089.
34. Parent to FLC, March 3, 1904, VM 50, S2, D75, AM; "Les réverbères de M. le Maire," *La Patrie*, February 18, 1904, 10; "Les réverbères du maire, prêts à être installés," *La Patrie*, April 25, 1904.
35. MLHP to Jacques Grenier, February 25, 1904, VM 50, S2, D75, AM.
36. Quoted in MLHP to Parent, March 3, 1904, VM 50, S2, D75, AM.
37. City of Montreal, "Cahiers des charges," 1904, VM 50, S2, D64, AM.
38. BCB, December 11, 1905, 1001.
39. BCB, December 11, 1905, 1008.
40. Clerbois, "Histoire de l'éclairage," 171; Hugo Lettens, "Sculpture et lumière électrique à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers de la Fonderie* 23, 1997.
41. BCB, May 8, 1892, 297.
42. BCB, April 29, 1907, 846. The reference is to the practice of hanging representatives of the Ancien Regime from street lamps during the 1789 French Revolution. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Berg, 1988), 100–3.
43. Parent to Skaife, July 27 and August 1, 1904; Skaife to Parent, July 30, 1904, VM 50, S2, D 77.
44. BCB, November 19, 1900, 732, 739.
45. *Ibid.*; Electrical Department, Montreal, October 9, 1902, VM50, S2, D69, AM; Percy Nobbs, "City Planning as Applied to Montreal," in *For a Better Montreal: Report of the First Convention of the City Improvement League* (Montreal, 1910), 46.

46. Parent to Badger, November 17, 1898, VM50, S2, D56, AM; John Barlow, City Surveyor, to Badger, VM50, S2, D68, AM; George Hadwill, Montreal Board of Trade, to City of Montreal, March 21, 1902, VM50, S2, D69, AM; Petition from twenty-four signatories to FLC, June 9, 1903, VM50, S2, D71, AM.
47. J.J. Callaghan to Parent, n.d.; Gossler, General Superintendent, MLHP, to Badger, July 4, 1902, VM50, S2, D68, AM.
48. Elizabeth Muir McLachlan, president, WCTU, to Mayor of Montreal, June 1, 1904, VM 50, S2, D76, AM.
49. Parent to American Tobacco Co., March 30, 1904, VM 50, S2, D75, AM. On attitudes toward tobacco in Montreal during the period, see Jarrett Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke: Tobacco Consumption and Identity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).
50. BCB, December 24, 1910, p. 1804.
51. Victor Morin to FLC, October 6, 1902, VM 50, S2, D69, AM.
52. Residents protested to the company directly, and both residents and company directed their complaints to the City. Montreal Street Railway Co. to Roberston, October 30, 1902; Petition from residents of Huntley Street to P. Martineau, City Councillor, December 1, 1900, VM 50, S2, D69, AM.
53. Barnard and Dessaulles, Advocates, on behalf of Edward major, to L.O. David, City Clerk, October 17, 1904, VM 50, S2, D79, AM.
54. John Hyde to Robertson, Fire and Light Committee, October 14, 1904, VM 50, S2, D79, AM.
55. Petition from seven signatories to Fire and Light Committee, November 16, 1898, VM 50, S2, D56, AM.
56. BCB, August 7, 1882, 150.
57. Petition from fourteen signatories to Fire and Light Committee, May 7, 1909, VM 50, S2, D101, AM.
58. Ed. Sheppard to Badger, June 3, 1899, VM 50, S2, D57, AM.
59. Stephen Atkins, Sohail Husain, and Angele Story, "The Influence of Street Lighting on Crime and Fear of Crime" (Crime Prevention Unit Paper No. 28, Home Office, London, 1991); Paul R. Marchant, "Have New Street Lighting Schemes Reduced Crime in London?," *Radical Statistics*, no. 104 (2011).
60. Corey to FLC, March 4, 1901, VM 50, S2, D63, AM. Emphasis mine.
61. P. Canning to FLC, October 3, 1904, VM 50, S2, D79, AM.
62. BCB, June 23, 1883, 583; Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 155-57.
63. Mary Anne Poutanen, *Beyond Brutal Passions: Prostitution in Early Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming 2015). Cited with author's permission.
64. *Ibid.*, 157.
65. *Montreal by Gaslight* (s.n., 1889), 8.
66. J. D. Miller, Toilet Laundry Co., to FLC, April 9, 1902, VM 50, S2, D67, AM.
67. Petition from eight signatories to FLC, September 29, 1902, VM 50, S2, D69, AM.
68. Isabella Ransom to Surveyor's Office, September 20, 1902, VM 50, S2, D69, AM.
69. Petition from sixty-one signatories to FLC, September 17, 1898, VM 50, S2, D56, AM; Petition from twenty-one signatories to P. G. Martineau, city council, September 20, 1899, VM 50, S2, D58, AM; L. J. Forget to A. A. Lavallée, October 28, 1903, VM 50, S2, D72, AM.
70. A. Mathieu to FLC, September 21, 1899, VM 50, S2, D58, AM.
71. Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).
72. Nelles to Robertson, November 7, 1903, VM 50, S2, D72, AM.
73. Petition from eleven signatories to FLC, November 27, 1901, VM 50, S2, D72, AM; Petition from twenty-three signatories to FLC, April 23, 1902, VM 50, S2, D73, AM.
74. BCB, December 1, 1884, 590.
75. Parent to Badger, August 20, 1900, VM 50, S2, D61, AM.
76. BCB, August 29, 1881, 226-63; November 19, 1900, 733.
77. Badger to Gossler, March 17, 1903, VM 50, S2, D70, AM.
78. Gossler to Parent, November 3, 1903, VM 50, S2, D76, AM.
79. Mary Blewett, "Passionate Voices and Cool Calculations: The Emotional Landscape of the Nineteenth-Century Textile Industry," in *An Emotional History of the United States*, ed. Stearns and Lewis (New

- York: New York University Press, 1998), 109–25. A strike by workers at the Brussels gas works had caused similar controversy in Brussels five years earlier, raising fears of both the “black” of night and the “red” of socialism. See Luc Keunings, “L’usine à gaz de Bruxelles en grève. La peur du noir à la fin du 19e siècle,” *Cahiers de la Fonderie* 23 (1997).
80. “Electrical Workers Still Confident,” *Montreal Star*, April 18, 1902, 6.
  81. Gossler to Badger, April 16, 17, 18, and 19, 1902, VM 50, S2, D67, AM.
  82. “Over Two Hundred Linemen Are Out,” *Montreal Star*, April 16, 1902, 6; “Electric Workers Strike is Still On,” *Montreal Star*, April 17, 1902, 2; “Electrical Workers Still Confident,” *Montreal Star*, April 18, 1902, 6; “Nouvelles Ouvrières,” *La Presse*, April 17, 1902, 11; “La grève des électriciens,” *La Patrie*, April 21, 1902, 1. On emotions and labor, see Peter Bischoff, “Fear, Loyalty and Organization: Unions as Emotional Arenas, 1880-1919,” in *Emotions and Cultural Change*, ed. Burkhardt Krause and Ulrich Scheck (Tubingen: Stauffenburg, 2006), 263–77.
  83. “Over Two Hundred Linemen Are Out,” *Montreal Star*, April 16, 1902, 6.
  84. “La grève des électriciens,” *La Patrie*, April 24, 1902, 1.
  85. Boot and Shoe Worker Union to FLC, April 24, 1902; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners to FLC, April 23, 1902, VM 50, S2, D67, AM.
  86. “Strike May Be at an End To-morrow,” *Montreal Star*, April 22, 1902, 6.
  87. “La grève est finie,” *La Patrie*, April 26, 1902, 24.
  88. Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 83–84.
  89. BCB, December 3, 1894, 665. This critique echoed the opprobrium that had earlier been leveled at gas lamps, when these were first placed in front of the Opéra in 1872. Peter Soppelsa, “Finding Fragility in Paris: The Politics of Infrastructure after Haussmann,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 37 (2009), 235.
  90. Parent, “Report to the Chairman and Members of the Fire and Light Committee,” November 10, 1904, VM 50, S2, D79, AM.
  91. *Petit bleu*, May 2, 1894.
  92. Clerbois, “Histoire de l’éclairage,” 157.
  93. *Petit bleu*, May 2, 1894.
  94. “Montréal aux lumières,” *La Patrie*, January 11, 1913.
  95. Louis Dumont-Wilden, *Coins de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Association des écrivains belges, 1905), 31.
  96. See, e.g., Émile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires précédées des campagnes hallucinées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 113–14.
  97. Edmond Nicolai, *La dépopulation des campagnes et l’accroissement de la population des villes* (Brussels: Weissenbruch, 1903), 61.
  98. Marius Renard, *Notre pain quotidien* (Brussels: Association des écrivains belges, 1909), 57–58.
  99. Petition from twenty-five signatories to Fire and Light Committee, December 10, 1904, VM 50, S2, D80, AM.

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