

**Review: Le Saint-Laurent d'Île en Île: Rencontres et Paysages
(The St. Lawrence from Island to Island: Meetings and Landscapes)**

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Teisceira-Lessard, Philippe and Pontbriand, Olivier. *Le Saint-Laurent d'Île en Île: Rencontres et Paysages*. Montreal, Canada: Les Éditions La Presse, 2019; 192pp. ISBN: 9782897057480, paperback, \$36.95.

Between the USA and Canada, the St. Lawrence River takes its source in the five Great Lakes and then crosses two Canadian provinces from south towards north: Ontario and Québec. But between Montréal (which is itself an island) and the Atlantic Ocean, the St. Lawrence River has countless islands, most of them inhabited and inaccessible without a boat. *Le Saint-Laurent d'Île en Île: Rencontres et Paysages* is written in French and is about twenty-two of these islands dispersed in various regions; its title means “the St. Lawrence River from one island to another: encounters and landscapes”.

Each of these islands has its own history and its specific ecosystem, somewhat like a unique microcosm that is briefly described here. Some have only one family living on them; others are more widely populated. Very few islands are accessible with a ferry-boat service that sometimes is free (for L'Île aux Coudres, pp. 142-151). A map locates each of these described islands (pp. 12-13). Further on, each island is briefly presented with some statistics: its size, vocation (agricultural, ecological reserve, tourism and leisure, or none), and yearlong population (in some cases, 0). Some of these islands, like L'Île au Ruau (pp. 182-189), have a very long history of four centuries and were inhabited even before the Canadian Confederation of 1867, when this vast territory was a part of France (known as “Nouvelle-France”).

The authors' main focus points are the inhabitants of these islands and their ways to organize everyday life: for example, how do they manage to find food and basic services, how do children attend to school and socialize, how do individuals deal with tides, tempests, and the Canadian winter? (pp. 166-167). In fact, every islander must forge his or her own solution and an appropriate lifestyle. Most of these islands have a particular environment that imposes an unordinary, original way of life: it is true for

faraway places such as L'Île Harrington, which seems to have only a few sidewalks between houses, but there are no roads in-between and no cars (pp. 14-25). Other islands have just a lighthouse and a guardian.

The various commentaries gathered in this Canadian book are mostly all about how these citizens can live all year long on those remote places and face harsh and windy winters. One could ask: "Why are you still living here, despite the everyday difficulties?"; "Aren't you attracted by the easy living you could enjoy elsewhere?" Photographs are numerous and focus on individuals but also nature, landscapes, and wildlife, which are splendid. Some islands have found a vocation: L'Île aux Oies is sometimes nicknamed "L'Île aux Peintres" ("Painters' island), while L'Île aux Grues is famous for its cheese with a unique taste because the cows on this island eat grass on a site surrounded by salted water; therefore, this local cheese is naturally salted (p. 173).

Too small to be considered as a "coffee-table-book", *Le Saint-Laurent d'Île en Île: Rencontres et Paysages* is a rare opportunity to get a glimpse — in testimonies and images — of some of the most remote places in Canada. Photographs are often impressive, aptly capturing the Canadian wilderness, but also the isolated dimension of these islands and the (relative) smallness of each territory surrounded by an infinity of hostile water and powerful tides. For those who dream about a desert island in another land, these portraits of islanders bring some down-to-Earth reality.

One last question remains: will the lay reader be able to appreciate this book in French? While there are many wonderful photographs to be appreciated as such, depicting each of these 22 selected islands, one will have to master at least a basic knowledge of French in order to appreciate this text, even though it is clearly written and without jargon. Because it is a hard-to-find import in bookstores outside Canada, public libraries should own this book.

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