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Trygve Ugland, *Jean Monnet and Canada: Early Travels and the Idea of European Unity*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2011. xvii + 109 pp. Illustrations, chronology, notes, bibliography and index. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4426-4310-9.

Review by Lori Thorlakson, University of Alberta.

What is the power of an encounter with a place and a culture to influence a person's outlook on life and perhaps shape the course of their future? Political scientist Trygve Ugland takes up this question in his examination of the early years in the life of one of the most influential Frenchmen of the twentieth century. Ugland's brief volume focuses on a little-examined period of Jean Monnet's life: the time he spent in Canada as a salesman for his family's cognac business between 1907 and 1914. Trygve Ugland's general thesis is that Monnet's early travels in Canada made a lasting impression on him that presumably influenced his political ideas later in life, indirectly leaving an imprint on his work laying the foundations for European integration. Ugland writes that "it appears that Monnet's trip to Canada in 1907 formed the quintessential core of the inspiration for his lifelong fixation on European supranational unity" (p. 10). In the author's view, "Canada became a source of creativity, both as an inspirational model and as a guiding reference for him in times of turmoil and conflict" (p. 11). That Monnet was well-traveled was an element of his formative years not lost on previous biographers. Nevertheless, Ugland argues that this early Canadian period was particularly formative because it was "his first long voyage, and certainly also the most ground-breaking" (p. 11).

Ugland develops this thesis through three distinct, yet interrelated themes. First and most intriguingly, Ugland argues that the political culture of Canada at the time was influential for the young Monnet. The New World in general and Canada in the early twentieth century in particular introduced Monnet to values that were very different from those he encountered in rural France. Winnipeg in 1907 was a frontier boom town, populated largely by European immigrants and characterized by a spirit of openness and optimism: it was "a city holding immense economic hope for the future" embodying "expectations of prosperity" (p. 3). This, Ugland argues, made a formative impression on Monnet. In Canada, Monnet was initiated to the self-possessed optimism that is peculiar to North America—a trait that is inclined to embrace change. Monnet sustained that trait throughout his entire career and beyond. His encounters with newly arrived immigrants from the Old World in the New World impressed Monnet and inspired him to consider possibilities for fundamental political change (p. 75).

This argument is rooted in observations from Monnet's own memoirs. Quoting these, Ugland reports Monnet's impressions of seeing entrepreneurial European immigrants on the streets of boomtown Winnipeg: "For the first time I met a people whose job was not to manage what already existed, but to develop it without stint. No one thought about limits; no one knew where the frontier was" (p. 23).^[1] To underscore the optimism, social trust and openness that characterized the New World for Monnet, Ugland includes an anecdote about Monnet's travels near Calgary, Alberta. When Monnet stops to ask a local blacksmith how best to travel to a farm in the area, the blacksmith unhesitatingly offers Monnet the use of his horse, with instructions to return the horse to the same hitching post upon his return.

The author is a political scientist and his account, in addition to providing an enjoyable account of Monnet's Canadian travels, contributes in a general sense to approaches that rely on the role of ideas to explain policy change and institutional outcomes. In this case, the book advances the argument that ideas matter: early experiences and associations accumulated and shaped the opinions and worldview of the man who later was to become one of the great institution-builders in Europe. The crucial ideas and values that Monnet encountered in his Winnipeg years, according to Ugland, include the association of Winnipeg's prosperity with Canada's pragmatic economic union. This, combined with a frontier spirit, rapid growth and development, in turn contributed to a mindset that encouraged optimism and institutional innovation.

The second theme in Ugland's work makes the case for another, more practical and direct form of influence on Monnet's life. He argues that Canada served as a crucial training ground that helped him develop essential skills and leadership abilities. In Canada, the young Monnet first established an important business relationship with the Hudson's Bay Company. More importantly for Ugland's argument, this experience helped him hone character traits and leadership skills that would later be key to his success. Ugland singles out Monnet's "patience, compromise and tenacity" (p. 49), as well as his courage and initiative, traits that, he implies, were developed both through the experience of his business dealings and through his encounters with the values and culture of the New World. "[B]oth the pioneer atmosphere and his impressive achievements in the New World boosted his self-confidence and turned him into an assured and assertive young man" (p. 75).

Together with these leadership skills, Ugland also emphasizes Monnet's pragmatism. "Monnet's practical and business-like approach, an approach likely derived from his Canadian impressions, to matters of industrial infrastructure--coal and steel--and ultimately to matters of state, could have been accommodated only in a culture of political invention and experimentation" (p. 5). Ugland argues that this appreciation of the practical is most clearly developed and applied in matters of economic development. Here, too, Ugland finds a Canadian influence. "Monnet seemed to realize from his Canadian travels that interstate economic unions and invention share the same biological mother: necessity" (p. 4).

The book argues that these traits, developed through his Canadian experiences, were as important as the opportunities that came Monnet's way as a result of his business networks developed during this period. The values that shaped his outlook allowed him to make use of his contacts with the Hudson's Bay Company and broker the deal that saw HBC serve as a wartime supplier for the French government. This experience of working with the French state to seek a practical solution to a wartime problem allowed him to cultivate the contacts that led to his later work at the League of Nations and in finance.

In a third theme, Ugland highlights the role and potential of institutions for shaping new political realities. Ugland writes "[t]he successful establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community was in large part due to Jean Monnet's extraordinary ability to identify and exploit available spaces for institutional design" (p. 13). This argument should be understood together with Ugland's emphasis on the centrality of pragmatic action to Monnet's life. Monnet was practically minded, not theoretically minded; he was in situations that required and rewarded practical solutions and the ethos of the New World rewarded innovation and practical solutions. This is an interesting, although somewhat underdeveloped argument. The author then goes on to make the rather strong claim that "[i]n all of these achievements, Monnet's views on contexts and procedures associated with successful political and institutional design were influenced by his early encounters with Canada and Canadians" (p. 13). The argument is plausible, but speculative. It may be somewhat of a jump here to then argue, as he does, that this laid the attitudinal foundations for the institutional innovation of the Schumann Plan.

The argument that Monnet's early travels shaped his outlook and his life is not unique. As Ugland himself notes, other authors have argued that Monnet's travels played an important role in shaping his outlook and expectations. Where this book stands apart is in its emphasis on the role of Monnet's early travels in Canada. This emphasis is both the book's strength and its weakness. Ugland's book stands apart for its sustained focus on Monnet's Canadian travels. The account of Monnet's early business dealings with the Hudson's Bay Company is quite interesting in its own right, taking us into part of the history of Canada's early economic development. It is not entirely clear, however, why we should consider Monnet's Canadian travels, rather than his North American travels more generally, or his broader international experiences, as an essential formative influence on Monnet. One could argue that the mix of optimism and pragmatism that impressed the young Monnet was a trait of the New World and one reinforced by the considerable experience Monnet gained in the United States, both in his visits during that time and in his work as an investment banker in the interwar period.

Indeed, other biographies of Monnet tend to treat his time in Canada as part of his broader North American experience. François Duchêne's biography acknowledges the "special impact" of North America, though downplays the role of Monnet's time in Canada.[2] For instance, while Duchêne's book discusses the contract Monnet negotiated with the Hudson's Bay Company to serve as a purchasing agent for the French government, Duchêne emphasizes that HBC was a British corporation and focuses on the networks that Monnet developed among London's business and financial elite as a result of his dealings with the company.[3] Sherrill Brown Wells provides a similarly brief treatment; the period 1907-1914 is referred to as one of North American travels and emphasizes instead the impact of Monnet's involvement with financial and industrial elite networks in London.[4] Clifford Hackett's chronology contains very few entries concerning the 1907-1914 period Monnet spent in Canada.[5]

Ugland's work makes the case that Monnet's young age at the time of his Canadian travels made him particularly impressionable. Also, historical antecedents allow the author to argue that the experience he gained and the related connections he forged in Canada were crucial and opened doors to future opportunities. We can speculate, then, that Monnet's Hudson's Bay Company connections were the key event that opened the door to his work with the French state, which in turn facilitated his involvement with the League of Nations and fostered connections with key figures in the American political and business elite. Even so, arguing that the Canadian experience was of unique importance may be pushing the point too far. From an early stage in his life, Monnet developed international elite networks, especially among the British, American and French, and travelled widely during the 1906-1914 period, including to Russia, Egypt, Greece, Scandinavia and China.[6] If he had been deeply influenced by the values of the New World, then quite plausibly his extensive professional experience in the United States in the interwar period had a similar--or indeed greater--impact as that of his time in Canada.

Ugland is unfortunately forced to work with a limited number of sources. He notes that many of Monnet's personal letters to his family from his Canadian period were lost during the Second World War, although the Hennessy Archives still hold a limited amount of correspondence between Monnet and his father. The author instead makes use of a number of other archival sources in Europe and Canada (including the Hudson's Bay Company archives) and he enriches his account by weaving in contextual details for Monnet's Canadian travels. This is a welcome contribution; past works have supplied only a very brief glimpse into Monnet's Canadian travels. Ugland's work provides a richer context for this Canadian period.

The book makes an interesting argument about an often-overlooked period of Monnet's life, but its claims are sometimes overstated. It may be fair enough to argue, as Ugland does, that "Monnet's views on contexts and procedures associated with successful political and institutional design were influenced by his early encounters with Canada and Canadians" (p. 13). What is more difficult is to try to make the case that the Canadian experience was uniquely influential or more so than his later American and

international experiences. In the end, the claim that “Canada became a source of creativity, both as an inspirational model and as a guiding reference for him in times of turmoil and conflict” remains plausible yet unproven (p. 11). This is not a serious shortcoming, for the task that Ugland has taken on, that of determining the influence of a particular early experience on a complex and extraordinary life, is by its nature one where the goal must be reasonable plausibility, rather than confirmation. Ugland tells a compelling story that stirs the imagination. His is an interesting book that opens a brief, yet colorful window onto the early, and little-known Canadian period of Monnet’s life.

NOTES

[1] Ugland is citing from Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), p. 45.

[2] François Duchêne, *Jean Monnet: The First Statesman of Interdependence* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), p. 30.

[3] Duchêne, *Jean Monnet*, p. 33.

[4] Sherrill Brown Wells, *Jean Monnet: Unconventional Statesman*. (Boulder: Lynn Reiner Publishers, 2011).

[5] Clifford Hackett, *A Jean Monnet Chronology: Origins of the European Union in the Life of a Founder, 1888 to 1950* (Washington, D.C.: Jean Monnet Council, 2008).

[6] Brown Wells, *Jean Monnet*, p. 9.

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