

REVIEWS

Adomas Pūras**Ugland, T. 2011, *Jean Monnet and Canada: early travels and the idea of European unity*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press.**

What does the European polity of twenty-eight member states owe to an eighteen-year-old Frenchman's journey across Canada in 1907? This question preoccupies Trygve Ugland in his 2011 study *Jean Monnet and Canada: early travels and the idea of European unity*. Ugland presupposes there would hardly be a European Union to speak of if it weren't for Jean Monnet; and he wonders whether there would be a Jean Monnet worth talking about if it weren't for Monnet's formative experiences in Canada as a salesman for his father's cognac firm.

Jean Monnet and Canada is a work in humanistic political science. Positioning himself in the middle ground between Straussian political theory and positivist political science, Ugland calls for an analysis of political institutions based on historical storytelling, an analysis that deals with both facts and values, that is both empirical and interpretative (p. 12). If we accept this argument and Ugland's assertion that the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) "was in large part due to Jean Monnet's ability to identify and exploit available spaces for institutional design" (p. 13), then it is fair to task political scientists with searching Monnet's life story for the roots of his post-war heroics.

What emerges from this approach is a well written narrative of young Monnet's Canadian experiences and an example of accessible political science that could easily attract lay readership. But what does the study actually contribute in terms of empirical and theoretical knowledge? It is to these contributions that we now turn.

As a biographical work, *Jean Monnet and Canada* is a welcome addition to Monnet studies. It focuses on a period of Monnet's life—from 1907 to 1914—that has received little attention in earlier biographical accounts. For example, Duchêne's (1994) classic *Jean Monnet: The first statesman of interdependence* begins with only a very brief overview of Monnet's formative experiences before it jumps to a detailed historical analysis of Monnet's role as a wartime economic planner for the Allies during World War I—the period immediately after Monnet's Canadian experiences explored by Ugland. Before the appearance of *Jean Monnet and*

Canada, we had no comprehensive account of Monnet's life in the booming Canadian town of Winnipeg, of his musings on the Canadian economy and society, or of his successful dealings with the Hudson's Bay Company—which Monnet persuaded to operate as an exclusive agent for J.G. Monnet & Co. Cognac in Canada. These accounts of Monnet's time in Canada are significant *historical* contributions because, as Ugland put it himself, "Monnet's early life is interesting in itself as an independent object of inquiry" (p. 13).

However, the book is presented, first and foremost, as a study in political science, not as a biography, and should be judged as such. In this regard, the central thesis of the book is 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). The thesis is substantiated on a number of argumentative levels.

Ugland writes that Monnet visited Canada at an "impressionable age," and that his Canadian memories and experiences eventually "became an elixir to transform a divided Europe into a consensual whole" (p. 16). In the early twentieth century, Canada was a young and booming polity based on federalist principles and committed to economic planning. "Devoid of the emotive nationalist sentiment burgeoning in Europe prior to the First World War," Canada's 1867 constitutional arrangement—the British North America Act—read much like a commercial contract—requiring, for instance, the dominions to build intercolonial railroad lines within six months of the union's formation (pp. 33-34). As one reads this description, the ECSC immediately pops to mind, and this is indeed the comparison that Ugland is making. After witnessing the success of the Canadian model, Monnet presumably invoked the model in his federalist programme for Europe, based on a businesslike approach to political issues and a functionalist emphasis on sectorial integration.

Furthermore, Ugland tells us that Canada taught the young cognac merchant the role of institutions in altering human behaviour and values. In Winnipeg, Monnet observed newly acculturated Old World Europeans, who had been rapidly reshaped by what he called the 'America on the move' attitude (p. 28). Ugland speculates that this impression, among others, led Monnet to believe that new supranational institutions in Europe could compel Europeans to abandon their deadly nationalisms in order to share their resources in the service of peace and prosperity.

Ugland further elaborates his thesis on the relationship between Monnet's Canadian experience and European Integration by pointing to the important international business contacts Monnet made in Canada, contacts that later facilitated Monnet's access to the political elite in France, Britain, and the United States. Finally, Ugland insists that Canada served as a school of character for Monnet. Tenacity, patience, compromise, courage, and initiative were the five decisive qualities required of a post-war leader of European integration. And Monnet developed all these qualities during his time as a salesman in Canada—or so argues Ugland.

This argument positioning Canada as Monnet's primary character influence is probably Ugland's weakest. His evidence linking Monnet's character strengths to his Canadian experiences is usually speculative and far-fetched. For example, Ugland presents the intersection between Monnet's cognac interests and the rival London and Winnipeg

branches of the Hudson's Bay Company as an instrumental experience, terming it "Monnet's apprenticeship in compromise and patience" (p. 37). Thus, posits Ugland, the skills Monnet acquired in Canada, particularly the skills of "compromise and patience" would be crucial forty years later when Monnet pushed for the formation of the ECSC. The book is full of poetic arguments that are too speculative to be testable.

While *Jean Monnet and Canada* reveals a previously unappreciated source of Monnet's European vocation, Ugland's insistence on the unique and defining role of Monnet's Canadian adventure is unsubstantiated. Ugland makes no rigorous attempt to explain why or how Monnet's Canadian travels should be weighted more heavily in forming Monnet "the father of Europe" than, say, his experience as a deputy secretary-general for the League of Nations from 1919 to 1923, or as an international investment banker working in the US and China during the late 1920s and 1930s. The Jean Monnet of the early 1950s—the author of the Schuman Declaration and the first president of the ECSC High Authority—was a travelled man with varied experiences in the worlds of international business, international finance, diplomacy, and wartime economics. It is worthwhile to study Monnet's experiences and their impact on the man's destiny, but it is much more difficult—if not impossible—to determine the actual weight of his many roles and experiences.

The study also falls short of Ugland's own ontological ambition. In his conclusion, Ugland invites political scientists to produce more studies on "great leaders" and "outstanding individuals," for—according to Ugland—their "individual achievement" is often as powerful an *explans* of political change as are the various socio-economic forces that political scientists usually preoccupy themselves with. This may well be true, but Ugland failed to advance or defend his ontological argument. For example, Ugland claims "the creation of the ECSC in 1951 should be situated in a sequence of events in a slow-moving causal process stretching over extended periods of Jean Monnet's life." Throughout the book, Ugland insists that Monnet played a defining role in kick-starting the European integration process. However, this can be treated as nothing more than a presupposition on the part of Ugland, for no serious theoretical attempt is made to place Monnet in the causal universe of the academic literature on EU origins. Nor does he attempt to oppose authors, such as Alan S. Milward (2000), who downplay Monnet's role in the emergence of European institutions. Ugland is not interested in these debates. In *Jean Monnet and Canada*, Monnet's status as the defining hero of European integration is beyond debate.

Ugland's study of Monnet's Canadian sojourn has a certain hagiographic quality. A lot of Ugland's interpretative work is guided by his general admiration of Monnet and the EU, which Ugland regards as "the most remarkable international political integration project the world has ever known" (p. 83). For instance, the young Monnet's efforts to promote his family's cognac in Canada, a country with strong temperance and prohibition movements, are interpreted by Ugland as an indication of Monnet's great personal tenacity (p. 39). Yet other students of Monnet's life have described some of his business in Canada as murky and morally corrupt, if not outright illegal (Booker & North, 2003, p. 14). Of course, this latter interpretation was also shaped by a political stance, albeit of a very different kind—Booker and North's (2003)

The Great Deception, a history of the European Union, is clearly Eurosceptic. All this is to say that biographical literature on Monnet is often deeply political. This is only to be expected, for Monnet is no ordinary biographee, but a political symbol that can be effectively used as a legitimizing tool in contemporary political struggles over the future of Europe (Kølvraa, 2010).

Nevertheless, his own political stance does not justify Ugland's approach. Even François Duchêne, Monnet's personal assistant and the author of Monnet's defining biography, was at times critical of Monnet—especially for his controversial financial interests in Nazi Germany just before the outbreak of World War II (Duchêne, 1994, pp. 60-63). In *Jean Monnet and Canada*, Ugland's uncritical hero worship blemishes an otherwise convincing and elegant narrative of Canada's lasting impact on one of the key individuals in the history of European integration.

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