the explorers, fur traders and travellers who passed through the Valley more
delicious and romantic figures than those who worked and prospered there. A whole
chapter is dedicated to “Traveller’s Tales” where one diary quote follows on the
other until the whole thing begins to wear a bit thin. Sir George Simpson is easily
the hero of the whole piece although he contributed very little to the development
of the region. Legget seems to forget that all those Valley towns were founded by
interesting people whose citizens created their own unique and exciting history.
Only the Wrights of Hull and the Hamiltons of Hawkesbury are mentioned in any
detail and once again Legget had neglected to consult the best primary and second-
ary sources concerning either family.

Finally it should be noted that the book contains many excellent photo-
graphs which add much to its fine design. It is, however, poorly footnoted with
the use of a cumbersome page and line system. As well the last chapter contains a
highways and byways touring guide to the Ottawa River which, while useful in
itself, may be resented by some in a fifteen dollar hard-cover book.

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MAURICE YEATES. — A Main Street: Windsor to Quebec City. Macmillan of
Canada in association with the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs and Informa-
tion Canada, 1975.

Professor Maurice Yeates in this study of the St. Lawrence-Lower Lakes
region, from 1961 to 1971, asserts in his ultimate sentence that the axis “... is the
key to the nation.” Though Donald Creighton might quibble with the tense, he
should be quite pleased with the sentence, both on account of the rediscovery of
the Laurentian Thesis and for the apparent resurrection of the Empire whose loss
he lately laments. “The idea of the St. Lawrence, as the inspiration and basis of a
transcontinental, east-west system, both commercial and political in character” li-
ves on, it seems.

Professor Yeates, however, provides little consolation for the legion of
Creighton critics. Incredulity at the concluding sentence of Main Street could only
be compounded upon discovering that it is also the a priori assumption of the
book. The “domination of the urban areas between Windsor and Quebec City
over the Canadian economy” seems to be taken as given. A primary purpose of
the monograph is merely “to document” the “extent” of domination. Critics of
the Laurentian Thesis would no doubt be even further enraged at Professor Yea-
tes’ somewhat gratuitous observation that “dominance of one area over another is
not to be feared as long as society recognizes its existence, agrees that it is neces-
sary, and accepts as morally justified the methods by which it is achieved.”

The historian, then, however cautious he might be in making judgments on
the highly technical specifics of the book, can nevertheless be highly suspicious of
a work that justifies dominance in general, assumes a dominance in particular, and
finally, in exhaustive analysis after exhaustive analysis, does indeed document
such dominance. Logicians have a not very flattering phrase to describe such a
process. To go on to generate “forecasts” on the basis of such a happy conjunc-
ture of “theory” and “fact” is equally suspect, no matter how accurate the data,
how sound the methodology, or how cautious and circumspect the researcher. To
say the least, the forecasts in the penultimate chapter do not flow from “all the
cumulated evidence based on the past and the present.’’ The necessary domi-
nance of the system is an historically debatable premise, and, even if true, is a
dominance that many Canadians quite clearly have found unacceptable in the past
and continue to do so in the present. The presence of a great, bloated conurbation
between Windsor and Quebec City may, of itself, be as symptomatic of failure as
of success. A cadaver, after all, admits dissection more readily than a living being.

It is this dissection that forms a second major purpose of the monograph.
Here Professor Yeates seems to be on more comfortable ground, and executes his
task with zeal and apparent relish, though it is hard to abandon the nagging suspi-
cion that the analyses are prejudiced by the assumptions, that the clinical preci-
sion of the word is more apparent than real. At any rate, this portion of the book
would appear to represent the “state of the art” in its methodology and finesse.
The Windsor-Quebec axis is poked, prodded, measured, graphed, mapped, traced,
tabled, inputted and outputted in a manner to give the purist joy. Methods appear
to be sophisticated and aptly used. Tables are to the point. Maps are done skill
fully and clearly. All inform. The amateur can only stand in awe, though at times
he may get the feeling that the cadenza has become more important than the
concerto.

Even if the reader can be satisfied with what “Main Street” is, he is bound
to ask at least one more question: how does it work? The evidence produced
seems to demonstrate that the system has more people, with more money, with
more problems, using more resources and adding more value than any other part
of Canada. What made and sustains such preponderating excess is never clearly
considered. Perhaps such concerns go beyond the reasonable province of the geo-
grapher, perhaps they go beyond the “macro” nature of the work, perhaps they
are externalities that do not admit of hard analysis, or perhaps they are not im-
portant. If so, then the forecasts and conclusions are not unreasonable. Otherwise,
they are presumptions, and given that the work was commissioned by the Secre-
tary of State for Urban Affairs, so too will be public policy based on them. In a
sense, the monograph presumes too much and attempts to do too much. As a
one-dimensional description of the particularities of an urban axis, the monograph
can stand on its own. But burdened as it is with premises, forecasts, and generali-
zations, which are more the litany than the soul of the social sciences, it becomes
a rather misshapen and tottery edifice. Half a book would have been better than
one.

So much that is good about the book is beggared by much that is foolish and
superficial, especially in the first chapter. Professor Yeates’ apologies for aliena-
ting physical geographers and frustrating “those with a more historical range of
interests”, in his “cursory glance at their domains”, does not provide an adequate
corrective for his insensitivity toward other dimensions of the system under study.
Why add half-baked gingerbread if only to apologize for it? A few examples are
revealing. “The climate of an area is the product of many features, such as rain-
fall, temperature, amount of sunlight, and so forth.” “The second feature [of
early Canadian settlement] was the mechanism of colonization through the
seigneurial system, which attempted to superimpose the French hierarchical social
structure through land ownership in the New World.” “The second event [acceler-
rating the opening of Interlake Ontario] was the aristocrat-led leftist (in those
days!) revolution in the Thirteen Colonies....” If such domains are to be treated
at all they demand more than to be “stuck on.” Still, there is perhaps little need
to become over-heated on the subject. As Creighton said in the closing pages of
The Empire:

Above all, the river remained, the river which cared not whether it was
valued or neglected, the river which would outlast all the ships that sailed upon
it and survive all the schemes which it could possibly inspire.

And to give Creighton the last word as well as the first seems only just, for among the missing in the bibliography of Main Street are both the author of the Laurentian Thesis and his great work.

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Voilà assurément un lourd tâche et, compte tenu de l’état de l’historiographie montréalaise, périlleuse. Disons tout de suite que le défi est relevé élegamment, mais non sans laisser le lecteur sur sa faim. Pour aborder son sujet, l’auteur utilise trois larges coupures chronologiques, en plus d’une mise en situation qui occupe les deux premiers chapitres. Il distingue donc trois périodes: celle de la «ville frontière», correspondant aux années 1642-1840; le Montréal victorien, allant de 1840 à la première guerre mondiale; et enfin, la ville du vingtième siècle.

L’ouvrage étant une synthèse, il repose massivement sur des sources dites de seconde main, surtout pour les premières parties. Il est évident qu’il ne saurait être question ici d’en faire grief à l’auteur; toutefois, nous devons souligner le danger qu’il y a d’utiliser sans trop de critique, les travaux de certains historiens anciens, surtout ceux qui se sont intéressés au régime français. En effet, comme l’ont souligné des spécialistes1, on a eu tendance à n’utiliser pour le régime français que des sources officielles, reflétant beaucoup plus la réalité telle qu’elle devrait être, que la réalité vécue. En plus, les préoccupations des historiens étaient assez éloignées de celles d’une histoire sociale dont l’auteur de Montréal en évolution a besoin pour situer ses données dans un perspective historique. Précisons que Jean-Claude Marsan est diplômé d’architecture et urbaniste de formation, ce qui lui permet d’apporter une vision architecturale de la ville et des modèles conceptuels auxquels les historiens ne sont généralement pas habitués; mais nous y reviendrons plus loin. Pour conclure sur la question des sources, la connaissance de l’histoire de Montréal que démontre l’auteur est impressionnante, surtout si l’on considère l’épaisseur du temps qu’il remue.