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Gavin Murray-Miller, *The Cult of the Modern: Trans-Mediterranean France and the Construction of French Modernity*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. x + 317 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8032-9064-8.

Review by James McDougall, Trinity College, Oxford.

Gavin Murray-Miller's *Cult of the Modern* re-reads the intersection of French political and intellectual history in the mid-nineteenth century. The aim is not to provide another account of how post-revolutionary France became modern, but rather to explore some of the ways in which a language of modernity, or uses of "the modern" as a category of discourse, contributed to shaping the French public sphere, French thinkers', writers', and politicians' views of themselves and of others, and of the world they were seeking to create. Focusing on the years from the end of the Second Republic through to the end of the 1860s, this book contributes to other work, notably by Philip Nord and Sudhir Hazareesingh, that has resituated the years of the Second Empire as a crucial period in France's modern history—not an aberrant interlude in the march of Republican progress, but an integral and necessary moment in many of the processes shaping the state and nation that emerged from the nineteenth century's long post-revolutionary struggles.

After an introduction and first chapter that set out the aims of the book and lay the groundwork for the detailed discussion, each of the following six chapters focuses on a single main theme, articulated loosely around a principal character or two. In chapter two, these are the Bonapartist state as engine of modernity and Napoleon III's confidant and Interior Minister, Jean-Gilbert Fialin, the duc de Persigny; in chapter three, the "nationalizing" of society and the tensions within ideals of a single political community that would nonetheless unite different "civilizational" elements, and the Emperor's Saint-Simonian Arab affairs advisor, Ismaïl Urbain. Chapter four shifts to the battle over religion and education, and to the historian Victor Duruy, who served as Minister for Public Instruction from 1863 to 1869. Chapter five brings republicanism back in, along with positivism and the more literary and philosophical figures of Émile Littré and Edgar Quinet; chapter six looks at liberal republicanism, the press, the journalist Clément Duvernois, and the writer and politician Jules Simon. Finally, chapter seven returns to North Africa with the leading lawyer and politician Jules Favre's celebrated prosecution of the Doineau affair, to examine how demands for settler-colonial citizenship in Algeria merged with the revival of republican fortunes in the metropole.

The idea of re-examining this period less as the crucible of a material modernity than for the ascendancy of an intellectual and political culture of modernity is a good one, and worth pursuing, although at this stage in the critique of modernity it might be time to be re-integrating the history of modernity's harder surfaces into more discursively-focused studies. Murray-Miller's contribution to this project is well-intentioned and often insightful, but sometimes also somewhat confused or imprecisely expressed. France is "traditionally" seen, we're told, as the "epicenter of the modern", but this only repeats the self-projection that he intends to analyze, and it's not clear for whom (apart from French intellectuals) it has really been "traditionally" true. The book proposes, in the author's words, "an analysis of nineteenth

century French politics and culture that attempts to take modernity on its own terms" (p. 4)—but surely modernity does not have "its own" terms, it only exists in the terms in which it is evoked by those who name it. What Murray-Miller shows best is how labile those terms were and, if sometimes implicitly, how tangential they could be to the harder, more material manifestations or instantiations of modernity in the form of technology, industry, communications and infrastructure, social relations of domination and capitalist development. Modernity as a discursive idiom, rather than as a material condition, remains somewhat slippery in Murray-Miller's own use of the term: it had a "performative function" (p. 6), and was "constitutive" (p. 7) of social relations and political projects, but it also "remained an imaginary construction that carried a variety of meanings and associations" (p. 12).

The book offers a series of well-researched episodes that illustrate some of what those meanings and associations were, and especially how they were put to use in the service of both Bonapartist and republican political projects, over the years in which those projects contended with each other. What emerges most effectively, although it's not always elucidated as clearly as it might be as a central point of the argument, is the extent to which after 1848, visions of both revolution and of "order," bourgeois democrats and authoritarian-populists, Bonapartism and Republicanism, and their claims on the French nation and state and the future of both, came to share a language of modernity as the central ground of their self-image, of their understanding of their place in the wider world, and of their own rivalry with each other in their struggle for political power. Readers are somewhat left to piece together the overall picture for themselves, however, and it may be that the author himself has not known quite how best to summarize the various things that his material shows "the modern" to have meant.

Partly, one has the impression that Murray-Miller does himself something of a disservice here, and it may be that the author was distracted from a clearer line of argument in this respect by what turns out to be a less successful aspect of the study. In tune with some other more recent developments in the field, Murray-Miller also seeks to integrate the overseas colonial dimension of the Empire into the story; as the title suggests, it was a trans-Mediterranean, not only a metropolitan, France that was the theatre for the construction of French modernity in this period. Here, the argument is somewhat less compelling, although it surely deserves to be made. Aside from the itineraries of a few individuals like Clément Duvernois for whom an Algerian sojourn was a significant stage in a character's career, for the most part the narrative centers on Paris and on a Parisian set of male writers and political activists. There is nothing very wrong with this: one of the book's virtues (much assisted perhaps by the revolutionary effect, for anyone working in printed periodical sources for this period, of the BnF's Gallica platform) is the excavation of a large and rich corpus of writing by journalists and other less prominent shapers of the public sphere who were so numerous and important in this period, but whose output and activities can tend, for us, to be drowned in the tumult of higher politics and eclipsed by the shadows of more imposing figures. Guizot and others appear here, of course, but remain much of the time refreshingly in the background, allowing a more diverse cast to come to the fore.

But except for the first and final chapters, Algeria also in fact remains rather over the horizon of Murray-Miller's study. Partly due to over-reliance on unreliable secondary sources, the author's vagueness on Algeria shows through on matters of detail that lead the argument down mistaken paths: on page 129, for example, the revolt of the Awlad Sidi al-Shaykh (Ouled Sidi Sheikh in French sources), a powerful tribal confederation in the southern Oranais, becomes a revolt led by an imaginary "sheikh Ould Sidi", and is used to discuss the repression of Sufi brotherhoods. Similarly, on page 133, Algeria's ethnic diversity is imagined to imply that Arabic-language scholarship was somehow alien to berberophones and Algerians of Turkish extraction. But in fact, berberophone groups, while having a rich patrimony of Berber oral literature, knew no written learning other than in Arabic prior to the arrival of the French school, and in the Mزاب and Kabylia distinguished scholarly families flourished through their cultural capital of Arabic literacy, on which their societies placed great importance. The very small urban part—"Turkish" (kulugli) population was probably more multilingual (and in fact was much less Turkish than Ottoman, which is to say, pan-Mediterranean as well as Turkic and Circassian

in its ethnic origins), at least in Algiers, but its principal language of learning was certainly also Arabic. Murray-Miller perhaps over-emphasizes the significance of the reform of the structure of central government in Algeria under the Second Empire—the Ministry of Algeria and the Colonies existed only between August 1858 and November 1860. But oddly, he does not explore the expansion of municipal civil government in the *communes de plein exercice*, first announced in 1847 but largely developed in the 1860s, despite the centrality to his narrative of the arguments for civic self-rule by settlers that were so loudly trumpeted through the *colon* press of the period. Correspondingly, the *communes mixtes*, run by military and then by civil administrators—the latter often, initially, in fact former army *bureaux arabes* officers—in areas with few Europeans and without municipal councils, were also created in 1868; this structure was central to the colonial government of most Algerians until the war of independence.

It is sometimes uncertain, more generally, whether the description of a state of affairs in Algeria is meant to tell the reader what was really going on in Algeria, or only refers to the image of Algeria as conjured in contemporary French writings, and especially in polemical and journalistic interventions. These always—as Murray-Miller is well aware and clearly shows—had ulterior motives, usually bearing more on metropolitan than on Algerian realities. This is the case for example with the image of *bureaux arabes* officers as “feudal” sheikhs, as with the scale and significance of the 1867–1868 crisis of famine and epidemic. That crisis was indeed exploited, as Murray-Miller relates, for various missionary ends by Cardinal Lavigerie and the church (notoriously through the oblation of orphans) as well as by civilian settlers and republican lawyers and publicists to discredit the military *régime du sabre*. In this respect, the crisis offers an important early example of humanitarian sentiment harnessed to imperial ends, as Bertrand Taithe has shown. But it was also, as Djilali Sari and, long ago, Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer argued, a genuinely massive catastrophe whose impact was if anything underplayed by most French observers at the time. (The figures for the death toll given on page 240 are certainly much too low.)

Nebraska University Press has done a beautiful job of producing a fine-looking book, although the editing of the actual text here, as so often at present, has not been as careful as it might have been (so we have *de facto* when *de jure* is meant (p. 210), collation for coalition, forbearers for forebears, complimentary for complementary, etc.).

This book will be read with interest by students and scholars of nineteenth-century French culture and politics, especially for the sharp portraits of the individual figures on whom it most focuses. It will be especially valuable for its discussion of the Second Empire’s politics of education and religion, and as a contribution to ongoing debates about modernity as both an emerging condition and the idiom in which that condition was evoked, apprehended, and encoded. Although Algiers’s Port Said Square (Place Bresson, as it then was), with its distinctively Second Empire opera house, adorns the cover, this is not, at its best, a book about trans-Mediterranean France, or about the importance of Algeria in the construction of French modernity. What it does contribute to a more conventionally Paris-centered exploration of the meanings that modernity held for French writers in these years is no less interesting for that.

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