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Martyn Lyons, *The Pyrenees in the Modern Era: Reinvention of a Landscape, 1775-2012*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 267 pp. Maps, bibliography, and index. \$114.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-3500-2478-6.

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As Simon Schama once observed, landscape “is a text on which generations write their recurring obsessions.”[1] This observation fittingly opens Martyn Lyons’ engaging book about changing perceptions of the Pyrenees from the eighteenth century to the present day. Drawing upon a wide range of sources—from the scientific travel literature of the late eighteenth-century, to the works of nineteenth-century romantic travellers in search of the picturesque, and the observations of tourists, mountain climbers, cyclists, and anthropologists, among others—Lyons provides a kaleidoscopic view of the Pyrenean borderlands as a cultural construct, as an escape route in times of war and foreign occupation, and as a hotly contested “green zone” in which environmental conservationists and local shepherds clash over the reintroduction of the bear in a region where the traditional pastoral economy struggles to survive.

Lyons charts the changing cultural construction of the Pyrenean landscape across 250 years. Stretching 450 kilometers from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, the Pyrenees straddle six French departments from the Pyrénées-Atlantiques in the west to the Pyrénées-Orientales in the east. On its Spanish side, the mountain range covers parts of Catalonia, Aragon, Navarre, and the Spanish Basque province of Gipuzkoa. At just over 3,400 meters, the highest of its massive granite and limestone peaks, Aneto, is located six and a half kilometers south of the Franco-Spanish border in the Maladetta massif.

As a key borderland zone, the Pyrenees have long connected and divided people on both sides of the mountains. The Franco-Spanish frontier was not created until the Treaties of Bayonne from 1856 to 1868; but in Pyrenean agro-pastoral communities, a legal border did not erase the socio-economic and cultural ties forged and maintained by trans-Pyrenean neighbors. Communities established longstanding trans-Pyrenean relations through treaties and pastoral agreements between neighboring valleys, through trade, commerce, seasonal emigration in search of temporary jobs, and smuggling.[2]

Professor Lyons argues in favor of a transnational approach to his subject by taking “a two-sided treatment of how the Pyrenees has been imagined” (p. 6). The historical sources, however, focus much more often on the French side. Tourism flourished there from the late nineteenth century. Moreover, travelers and scientists tended to be French rather than Spanish. Yet the largest number of travel writers who explored the Pyrenees came from Great Britain. Lyons’ kaleidoscope thus has a multi-national lens.

The book is divided into twelve chapters. Chapter one provides a general introduction to the Pyrenees. In chapter two, Professor Lyons focuses upon scientists who explored the mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, seeking clues about the origins of the earth. Enlightenment scientists such as Darcet, Palassou, and Pasumot sought to make the Pyrenees intelligible through

detailed observations and deductive reasoning (p. 23). Through geological surveys, Palassou, for example, amassed a huge amount of empirical data from the entire mountain range. Like many of his contemporaries, he only occasionally paid attention to the local population and their customs. By contrast, Ramond de Carbonnières took an ethnographic interest in Pyrenean society. He became acquainted with local shepherds and smugglers, with whom he shared shelter and food. He forged his own somewhat quirky identity by climbing Pyrenean peaks, not only in search of geological information but also for the sheer excitement generated by such physical feats. Lyons describes Ramond as “a *savant sensible*, a scholar with feeling” (p. 33), whose expeditions yielded exceptional perceptions of the Pyrenees, their striking landscapes, and their “intelligent but uncultured” inhabitants (p. 32).

In chapter three, the author explores the conventions and strategies employed by travellers seeking the “picturesque” and the “romantic” Pyrenees from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Their romantic gaze appropriated the Pyrenean landscape by focusing on particular points of interest, from small-scale scenes to the highly theatrical and popular *cirque* of Gavarnie. Like many of their more scientifically minded fellow travellers, tourists who reimagined the Pyrenees through a romantic lens tended to ignore the people who lived there, unless their inclusion might embellish a particular scene. “Miserable shepherds,” the author notes, “were unlikely to qualify as picturesque, and their sheep were of even less interest” (p. 40). Lyons rightly argues that the picturesque should be distinguished from the concept of the romantic, which was “more loaded”; it stirred emotions and inspired the imagination (p. 45).

Even as travellers in the Romantic period used Pyrenean landscapes to step outside their own everyday lives, tourists also discovered a sense of “otherness” in these multi-cultural borderlands as they reflected upon their own identities as foreign nationals in cultures different from their own. As Professor Lyons shows in chapter four, their travel writings often reflected their own prejudices, fantasies, and emotional longings. The English tourist Georgiana Chatterton imagined Spain as a “land of serenades and romantic lovers” (p. 62), and she enthused about the colorful costumes of the Catalans and Aragonese people. Yet she feared encirclement by bandits, whom she imagined to be lurking in the crowds, and felt traumatized by visual evidence of violence and destruction caused during the Carlist Wars. Despite the allure of Spain, she felt increasingly homesick.

Like Georgiana Chatterton, the Basques, Catalans, and Aragonese were themselves “Others among Others” (p. 70). The Basques presented travellers with an enigma: neither Spanish nor French but emphatically Basque and decidedly different in terms of their unusual, non-Indo-European language and their longstanding yearning for independence, which one French visitor observed could produce “a ferocity revolting to nature” (p. 61).

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the railway brought mass tourism to the Pyrenees. In chapter five, Lyons shifts his lens to the many travellers who flocked to Pyrenean spas and to Biarritz for sea bathing and the voyeuristic pleasures offered by its beach. Further inland, Pau also attracted visitors owing to its mild climate, dramatic view of the Pyrenees in the distance, and proximity to hot springs and spas. Pau had a substantial British colony, whose members recreated their own mini-England, a “cultural bubble of their own construction” (p. 79). By 1869, some 2,000 British citizens lived there. They enjoyed fox hunting, horse racing, polo matches, and mince pies at Christmas (p. 79). Yet Pau also offered visitors “heterogeneous spaces” in which tourists met both local citizens and a wide variety of foreign nationals—a point that Professor Lyons might usefully have made about Pau society at that time. (He does apply the notion of “heterogeneous spaces” to travellers such as Ramond and his encounters with Pyrenean shepherds.) As one late nineteenth-century visitor to Pau once noted, it was a great pleasure “to circulate in the cosmopolitan crowd, among elegant foreigners, and to listen to them converse in all the languages of Europe, like the diverse songs of birds in a flock.”[3] Chapter five also provides an enlightened overview of Pyrenean spa resorts as a popular nineteenth-century tourist destination. Rare among such spa-goers were those who sought a more “authentic experience” by distancing themselves from the crowds (p. 86). As Lyons argues, “mass tourism engendered its own antithesis—the ‘anti-tourist,’” who shunned the closed, cosmopolitan spa societies in search of a more

meaningful relationship with their local surroundings.

The late nineteenth century also brought mountaineers to the Pyrenees in what Professor Lyons describes as “the heroic age,” a period in which mountain climbing built male character, male bodies, male bravery, and competitiveness. In chapter six, the author shows that such intense competitiveness also spawned hostility and jealousy among climbers, who typically recorded the first ascent of a peak in a narrative (p. 93). By the turn of the century, the Club Alpin Français had opened numerous Pyrenean sections whose upper middle-class members formed mountaineering fraternities. Lyons devotes several pages to Henry Russell, who epitomized the Pyrenean heroic age. The well-travelled, eccentric, Catholic count dominated Pyrenean climbing from the 1860s to the 1880s. Even as he preached the rewards of solitary mountain climbing as a means of contemplating the infinite and gaining proximity to God, Russell also easily fitted into the British colony in Pau, where he played the cello and enjoyed socializing (p. 104).

By the 1890s, climbers had conquered all of the highest Pyrenean peaks. The mountains had become increasingly accessible to the public, largely owing to encouragement from the Club Alpin Français and to the popularity of the bicycle. In chapter seven, Lyons explores competitive cycling, generated by the Tour de France from its inauguration in 1903, as well as cyclo-tourism and excursions promoted by the Touring Club de France. These activities celebrated nationhood in both France and Spain. As a patriotic activity, Pyrenean cycling also enabled people to become better acquainted with their own country, its natural assets, and geography. Lyons also argues that competitive cycling, embodied by the Tour de France, indirectly celebrated nationhood by shaping and consolidating French national consciousness from its origins through its development into an “unprecedented feat of athleticism and endurance” in 1910, with the addition of the Pyrenean stage from Luchon to Bayonne (pp. 117–118). In similar fashion, Basque and Catalan nationalists promoted hiking excursions as a means of strengthening their respective identities, distinctive cultures, and patriotic devotion to the Basque and Catalan motherlands.

In chapter eight, the author shifts his focus to trans-Pyrenean perceptions of the Franco-Spanish border and to the ways in which borderland populations manipulated, lamented, and ignored the frontier through various means—such as the “tribute of the three cows” (dating back to at least the fourteenth century) held halfway between Roncal and Barétous every July 13th, ancient peace charters between Pyrenean valley communities, and smuggling networks dating back to the eighteenth century. The information provided in the first half of this chapter is important but, in my view, would have been better placed in the introduction as contextual and historical background. The latter part of chapter eight briefly treats the rise of Basque and Catalan nationalisms in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lyons traces both movements through severe Francoist repression after the Spanish civil war and, in the Basque case, devotes a few paragraphs to the Basque terrorist/separatist movement, ETA, up to their “laying down of arms in 2006” (p. 136). This quite abrupt ending to the section on Basque nationalism leaves the reader ill-informed. Soon after ETA’s declaration of a ceasefire in 2006, a bombing at Madrid’s airport killed two people. In 2011, ETA declared a permanent and general ceasefire. In May 2018, the organization announced its disbandment (when this book was likely already in press). In addition, this reader would have welcomed a more detailed, deeper analysis of Basque and Catalan nationalists’ perceptions and ritual treatment of the frontier (e.g. through the Basque relay race, *korrika*, in which runners pass through each of the seven historical Basque territories in France and Spain to emphasize their unity ritually).^[4]

Chapter nine offers an interesting account of perceptions about the frontier in twentieth-century wartime. Professor Lyons limits his focus to the period 1936–1945, including the south-to-north exodus of Spanish Republicans into France during the Spanish civil war (1936–1939) and the north-to-south, trans-Pyrenean crossings of fugitives from France into Spain during the German Occupation of 1940–1944. A section on trans-Pyrenean relations and perceptions of the frontier during the First World War (mentioned only in relation to cycling in chapter seven) would have made a welcome addition. French Basque men, for example, frequently evaded military service or deserted during that conflict. They

typically sought refuge in Spanish Basque villages on the other side of the frontier.[5]

In several chapters, the author uses the notion of the “gaze” to explore outsiders’ perceptions of the Pyrenees and its inhabitants. In chapter ten, he develops the notion of an “anthropological gaze” by turning to scholarly works across several academic disciplines. Professor Lyons defines the “anthropologist” very broadly as a “label for all those social scientists whose researches adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, an ethnographic vision” (p. 163). Unlike tourists, anthropologists take a deep, keen interest in the local people and not only observe them but also live with them for an extended period. Professor Lyons first focuses on an extremely popular work, *Montaillou: village Occitan, 1294-1324*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, an historian of Languedoc who adopted an “anthropological gaze.”[6] Ladurie reconstructed the Cathar beliefs that led to the arrest of the entire village in 1308. He also examined the socio-economic structures upon which those beliefs were based and the everyday lives of the Montaillou people. As Lyons notes, the book’s “heady cocktail of sex and religion” no doubt boosted sales (p. 165). Its popularity also derived from popular interest in French regionalism and regional identity—especially Occitan identity—in the 1970s and 1980s (p. 16). But, as Lyons rightly insists, Occitania and the Pyrenees “are far from the same thing, though their respective geographies are sometimes confused (p. 166). Chapter ten also more briefly explores, among other works by French social scientists, Frédéric Le Play’s perceptions of the Pyrenean stem family as stable and harmonious alongside Pierre Bourdieu’s contrasting views of it as “an increasingly dysfunctional entity” (p. 172).[7]

Since the late 1960s, the French government has made various attempts to reimagine the Pyrenees as “green” by re-introducing the bear. From the 1970s, ecologists and their supporters further politicized the Pyrenean landscape through their own efforts to rebuild the bear population in what has since become a highly heated controversy. Having done fieldwork in the Pyrenean shepherding community of Ste-Engrâce since 1976, I have a close understanding of the passion with which its people oppose all attempts to repopulate these mountains with bears. During the early years of fieldwork, local shepherds worried greatly about bear attacks during the period of summer transhumance. They programmed “bazookas” to fire automatically throughout the night near their flocks and herding huts. No one there mourned the death of Cannelle, the last female brown bear indigenous to the Pyrenees, when a hunter from a nearby Béarnais valley shot and killed her in 2004 (p. 179). During my annual trip to Ste-Engrâce this summer, I saw protests painted on the narrow roads leading up into these highest of the French Basque Pyrenees: “No to the bear!” Attempts were yet again being made to introduce bears to the region. As Martyn Lyons observes, the re-introduction of the bear embodies the most recent reinvention of the Pyrenean landscape.

This book is a welcome addition to the existing literature on the Pyrenees; it will be of interest to both a scholarly and a general readership.

NOTES

[1] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana, 1996), p. 12.

[2] For a detailed analysis of trans-Pyrenean relations in the French Basque province of Xiberoa (Soule), see Sandra Ott, *War, Judgment, and Memory in the Basque Borderlands, 1914-1945* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008).

[3] Pierre Tuco-Chala, *Petit histoire du Béarn (du Moyen Âge au XXe siècle)* (Pau: Princi Néguer, 2000), p. 135. Quoted in Sandra Ott, *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-1948* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 33. Pau features prominently in this book.

[4] See Teresa del Valle, *Korrika: Basque Ritual for Ethnic Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994).

[5] See Sandra Ott, chapter three, “Basques in the Great War,” *War, Judgment, and Memory in the Basque Borderlands, 1914-1945* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008), pp. 33-49.

[6] Oddly enough, Ladorie’s book is not included in the bibliography, though some of his other publications about Montaillou are.

[7] For a detailed analysis of the French Basque household, kinship relations, and inheritance practices, see Sandra Ott, *The Circle of Mountains: A Basque Shepherding Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2nd edition 1993) first published in 1981.

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