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David O'Brien. *Exiled in Modernity: Delacroix, Civilization, and Barbarism*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018. xiv + 226 pp. Illustrations (chiefly color), plan, chart, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$89.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 9780271078595.

Review by Heather Belnap, Brigham Young University.

Hailed as both one of the last of the Old Masters (“je suis un pur classique”) and as the quintessential Romantic rebel (“the Victor Hugo of painting”), Eugène Delacroix stands as a towering but liminal figure in the history of art. In *Exiled in Modernity: Delacroix, Civilization, and Barbarism*, David O'Brien explores how Delacroix's later artistic period is deeply engaged with pressing issues of the age, including the development of civilization, the processes of modernity, the conceptualization of the Other, the place of nature, and so on. While acknowledging the place for political interpretations of Delacroix's work, the author is instead interested in mining the considerable philosophical dimensions to the artist's art and writings. He maintains that the artist's paintings from the late 1830s through the 1850s, along with his written musings, articulate his convictions in complex and compelling ways. Delacroix's ceiling murals in the Palais Bourbon, Palais du Luxembourg, and the Louvre, along with the later paintings of North Africa, can thus be read as the manifestoes of an artist who was ambivalent towards civilization and modernity, preferring the primitive and barbaric.

The first chapter, “Delacroix's Civilization,” maps the artist's thought onto the terrain of contemporary discourse and how the terms “civilization”, “primitive” and “progress” were understood in mid nineteenth-century France. For Delacroix, civilization was something humanity created, followed natural laws, and was part of a single historical process that exercised power over all societies. It was also something that tended to stultify the individual, in contrast to the domain of the primitive, which demanded action. Delacroix, who deemed ennui the greatest malady confronting thinking people of the modern age, believed in the power of art to disrupt the banality of the everyday and to move viewers to seek an existence with greater vitality. O'Brien contends that Delacroix's later style was a critical match for his suspicion of modernity, where “he cultivated such unacademic aspects of his technique as gestural brushwork, vivid color, and abstracted form in some part to provide a release from or antidote to what he saw as the humdrum emptiness of modern life” (p. 30). Indeed, while the artist had always believed in the spiritual dimension of art, his faith in painting's palliative powers increased over time.

Chapter two, “Civilization and Mural Painting,” details Delacroix's paintings for the ceiling of the Deputies' Library in the Palais Bourbon (1841-47), the Peer's Library in the Palais du Luxembourg (1841-45), the Apollo Gallery in the Musée du Louvre (1850-51), and the Salon de

la Paix in the Hôtel de Ville (1852, now destroyed). While the entire chapter is excellent, and persuasively argues that the theme of civilization is a leitmotif in all of these murals, it is O'Brien's treatment of the twenty-two paintings on the ceiling of the Palais Bourbon that stands out. Due to its inaccessibility (and perhaps also to the field's general apathy toward art of the July Monarchy), this cycle, "one of the supreme artistic achievements of nineteenth-century France and indeed one of the great decorative cycles in the history of art" (p. 41), has not garnered much scholarly attention. This situation is here ameliorated, with the author deciphering from the panoply of subjects drawn from antiquity a program that examines the dialectic between civilization and barbarism. As part of this discussion, O'Brien provides a plan of the ceiling, a chart outlining the antitheses found in these paintings--nature vs. culture, ignorant vs. enlightened, collective vs. individual, etc.--and a lengthy, illustrated appendix with descriptions and analyses of each of the works in the cycle. This project, which drew upon the cerebral aspects of the artist, is ultimately "a record of Delacroix's open-ended and conflicted meditations on civilization" (p. 54).

In chapter three, the author argues that the artist's European ideas regarding civilization formed his understanding--and hence, artistic production--of North Africa in important ways. In his works from the 1850s, Delacroix transmitted "a world filled with the types of experience that the artist felt modern civilization threatened most" (p. 75), namely unadulterated experiences of nature with all its immediacy, sensuality, and even violence. Interestingly, Delacroix found in North African society a kind of desirable primitivism akin to that found in classical antiquity, and draws such parallels in his writings, which are quoted at length in this chapter.

In his discussion of art spawned by the artist's experiences in Morocco and Algeria, O'Brien also challenges the wholesale application of Said's paradigm of Orientalism to Delacroix's oeuvre. He distinguishes between Delacroix's paintings of the 1820s and 1830s with those produced afterwards and marks a shift from the ethnographic to the imaginative, and to developments in his thinking about the dualities of civilization and barbarity. The author's discussion of Delacroix vis-à-vis French Orientalism as it developed at midcentury offers an important corrective to the tendency of ignoring the nuances to an individual artist's approach to the Other over time and space, and collapsing distinctions amongst artists representing the non-European despite chronological, geographical, philosophical, and aesthetic differences.

Throughout the course of his career, the artist situated the drama of civilization and barbarism in the spaces of nature, and in the final decades of his career, his preferred players were those from in the animal world. In chapter four, "Delacroix's Wild Kingdom," O'Brien considers how the artist's lion paintings from the 1840s and 1850s extend his ruminations and clearly champion the unrestrained qualities of the primitive world. It is in these works that the primal sensuality of the artist's style is given full expression. Delacroix's interest in animal painting accelerated around 1847 and would constitute a shift in his artistic practice--one, the author claims, that was driven by his personal obsession for the subject and its expressive possibilities. While O'Brien discusses Delacroix's corpus of such works, he trains his attention on the extraordinary *Bordeaux Lion Hunt*, which was painted on the occasion of a retrospective of Delacroix's oeuvre at the World's Fair of 1855. Given the privileging of the notions of civilization, progress, and modernity at the exposition, this painting, which functioned as "a silent protest at the very center of the Exposition universelle" (p. 138), celebrated the anti-modern with its emphasis on primitivism and the unruliness of the animal kingdom and its predators.

As the book's title suggests, O'Brien views Delacroix as a begrudging interloper, even outsider, to this modern age. The author reminds readers that Delacroix, often considered one of the first of the moderns, espoused many traditionalist philosophical positions, and was socially and politically conservative. But his conviction of the salvic powers of art, emphasis on originality and individuality, and quest for the heroic were decidedly progressive conceptual frameworks. In *Exiled in Modernity*, O'Brien lobbies for a more nuanced consideration of the artist and his work in light of the unevenness of the mid nineteenth-century's "emergent modernism" (p. 12).

In drawing attention to Delacroix's philosophical engagement with some of "the big questions," and to the oft-overlooked art he produced in the late July Monarchy and early Second Empire, this book lays groundwork for future scholarship. Delacroix's later oeuvre and the significance of culturally-constructed ideas and institutions of civilization, barbarism, progress, primitivism, and modernity to his art and writings will interest those working on the intersections of art with race, gender, sexuality, class, and other subject positions. It bears noting that O'Brien is not only a stellar scholar, but a generous one as well. Throughout the book, he readily acknowledges the work of colleagues in the field--this author is particularly indebted to the scholarship of Michèle Hanoosh--and how his work builds upon theirs.[1]

As a threshold figure and an artist of paradoxes, Delacroix will probably always remain somewhat elusive. But under O'Brien's masterly care, the artist is rendered more scrutable. David O'Brien's *Exiled in Modernity: Delacroix, Civilization, and Barbarism* gives lucid explanations of contemporary discourse on civilization, barbarism, and modernity, along with probing and poetic explications of how Delacroix's late style gave expression to his thinking on these matters. Not only does the author paint a vivid portrait of the artist as thinker, but also manages to revitalize modes of inquiry (i.e. the history of ideas) and manners of interpretation (i.e. visual analysis) that are perhaps too readily bypassed by contemporary art historians. This thoughtful examination of Eugène Delacroix's meditations in prose and paint will be of use to scholars in many fields, but especially to those eager to put aside conventional ways of framing the mid nineteenth-century French art world and to embrace its complexities.

NOTE

[1] Michèle Hanoosh, *Painting and the "Journal" of Eugène Delacroix* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and "A Painter's Impressions of Modernity: Delacroix, Citizen of the Nineteenth Century," in Richard Hobbs, ed., *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 9-30.

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