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Tatiana Dunlop, *The Mistral: A Windswept History of Modern France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024. 192 pp. Notes, references, illustrations, and index. $32.50 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780226827544; $31.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780226827551.

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Catherine Tatiana Dunlop's new book on the Mistral might just sweep you off your feet. With a Provençal name derived from the Latin *magister,* or "master," France's well-known wind whisks cold air from the Massif Central down to the Mediterranean. It blows mostly in the winter and spring, at speeds of up to one hundred kilometers per hour. References appear everywhere in the historical record and in France today, yet the Mistral per se has largely escaped most historians' attention. As a reminder that Dunlop is on to something, just as I started reading this book, a relatively rare summer Mistral pushed the warm surface water out into the Mediterranean; as deeper, cold water rose up, the coastal water temperature plummeted. Tourists whined.

The Mistral is an intellectual *quatre quarts* of environmental history: one part, geography; one part, art history; one part, social history; and one part, cultural history. Dunlop writes that this book is not a biography of the Mistral, as her human sources recorded their impressions of the wind, efforts to control it, or use it as a symbol. Yet the Mistral has a certain personification in this book, becoming a sort of historical actor, resisting urban officialdom and nineteenth-century modernization. As Dunlop notes repeatedly, this is a history of the Mistral "from the bottom up." The spirit of dozens of late and living social historians in the Annales tradition are hovering over this book, including that of Alain Corbin in particular. Dunlop is too modest to compare herself to Corbin, but this book reminds me of the joy I first had in reading each of Corbin's.

Dunlop begins the first chapter by describing centuries of local adaptation to the Mistral as artisans and peasants lived with the wind. The typical Provençal stone *mas*, or house, had no windows or doors to the northwest, protecting the interior of the house from the force of the wind. Note that this was the case long before the famous 1798 door and window (property) tax. Frequently, the *mas* even had a corner to the northwest, fortifying the structure itself, as the wind could then pass on either side of the house. In the Camargue, huts built of reed had an apse-like mass that faced the wind, protecting the lightweight structure itself. Inhabitants harnessed the Mistral, living with it. In an area of scarce water, thus few watermills, the Mistral powered windmills for the grinding of wheat, long the primary product of Provence alongside olives and grapes. However, in the nineteenth century, agricultural officials based in Paris worked to control the wind, overseeing the planting of pines and cypresses to

protect fields and enable peasants to grow more varied and potentially profitable crops for market, to be hauled by the expanding railway network. Elite local response to state-directed modernization was skeptical. For the Occitan poet Frédéric Mistral (coincidentally his actual name, not a nom de plume) and other champions of Provençal language and identity in the Félibrige movement, the unwieldy Mistral showed the force of provincial resistance to centralized, modern development. The windmill, no longer used, became like the Occitan tongue, a nostalgic symbol of a "traditional" Provence in danger of disappearing.

In chapter two, Dunlop reveals the impact of industrialization, in the form of steamships, in breaking the Mistral's dominance of maritime shipping. She describes how earlier sailors had used intricate knowledge of the Mistral to undertake local and regional trade. As a name, Mistral is Provençal, but the Catalan (*mestral*), Spanish (*maestral*), and Italian (*maestrale*) languages used comparable terms. Early modern Mediterranean sailors used those names--rather than the earlier Greek *malemboreas* or the Latin *circius*--as they plied the coast and the Rhône River valley. In the nineteenth century, industrialization caused steam to replace sails as the motive force of vessels, and highly skilled sailors gave way to semi-skilled boiler attendants and unskilled coal shovelers. Importantly, travel times shortened as steamships could sail directly into the Mistral, avoiding the complicated and time-consuming tacking of sailing ships. By the early twentieth century, the only remaining sailboats were pleasure craft, as tourism became an increasingly important economic force on the Mediterranean coastline.

In chapter three, Dunlop considers the French state's effort to track systematically and categorize the Mistral, stripping it of its legend, even to the extent of referring to it simply as the "northwestern wind." Dunlop focuses on the observatory established atop Mont Ventoux, the famous Provençal mountain itself named for the wind. Here Dunlop shows that the anemometers used to measure the wind could never hold up to the force of the Mistral; the wind was not easily tamed. This chapter is also interesting in showing the development of elite, Paris-based professional meteorologists assisted by well-heeled local amateurs who climbed the mountain in the summer, sating their curiosity and gaining a certain prestige for their scientific endeavors. By contrast, lower-class men held posts at the inaccessible observatory in the winter, surviving on stored food and developing serious ailments. Clearly, the Mistral even resisted efforts to measure its force.

Chapter four considers the presumed healthfulness of Mistral air. For medical doctors, the Mistral became a force for good in the nineteenth century. In an era dominated by the miasma theory of disease as well as scientific racism, the Mistral came to represent good air, not just from the mountains, but from northern Europe. It swept presumably bad air out into the Mediterranean, replacing it with good air and a clear, blue sky. By contrast, the scirocco came from Africa and brought supposedly dirty, bad air. Scirocco air was, of course, a little dusty, as sand particles from the Sahara are a characteristic. By the time it crossed the Mediterranean, it also brought some humidity, especially to the Camargue. For medical theorists, the scirocco was less healthy because it originated in the presumably more pestilential Africa and Middle East. These ideas remained dominant until the displacement of miasmatic by germ theory in the twentieth century.

In chapter five, Dunlop takes up painting. She begins with the local Ecole de Marseille, influenced by Romanticism and Naturalism, and interested in revealing Provence and its adaptations to the Mistral. Dunlop then describes Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters who descended from the north to

consider the effects of light and color in Provence. Here she includes fascinating anecdotes about the struggles that Monet, Gauguin, and van Gogh had in trying to paint outside, as the Mistral whipped up, depositing dust, debris, and grasshoppers on tableaux. Easels overturned, sometimes crashing a painting in progress; van Gogh even crafted a fifty-centimeter spike to anchor his easel against gusts of wind. Obviously, the Mistral challenged efforts to capture the *paysage* originally sculpted by the Mistral. In a sense, this chapter's structure pits the local Ecole de Marseille, which focused on people as well as landscape as subject matter, against northern painters more interested in the atmosphere and colors of the landscape; a sort of thesis/antithesis effectively resolved by Cézanne, the Aix-born, Parisian-trained synthesis who lovingly recorded the particularities of his native Provence, including Mont Ventoux, with a Post-Impressionist's focus on color.

Dunlop's source base is varied. Taking a page from Robert Darnton's classic, *The Great Cat Massacre,* she examines Provençal proverbs as a source for how peasants saw the wind. Dunlop also uses narrative travelogues, maritime accounts, records of early local and Parisian meteorologists, and medical texts. She analyzes Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, as well as the letters of famous and not-so-famous painters who worked in Provence. As Dunlop points out in the introduction, there are no archival files marked "Mistral" containing her sources. Yet the work is richer for not painting by number. In fact, *The Mistral* is a reminder that historians often do our best work when we are creative about tracking down appropriate, if eclectic, sources.

We live in the era of the ever-shrinking historical monograph. To be honest, I am often relieved that a book is not longer. In this case, however, I was left wishing for more despite, or precisely because, Dunlop covers much ground in just 138 pages of text. In many ways, *The Mistral* is a book about the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a short epilogue summarizing the book's contents and describing the innovative natural park at the new LUMA art museum and studios in Arles today. I admire Dunlop's analytical ability, so I wanted to know what she might have to say about the latter half of the twentieth century. To give but one example: I wondered about the massive Mission Racine, which concretized the coast of Languedoc for mass coastal tourism. Certainly, the *stations de tourisme* in the eastern portion are subject to the Mistral, and planners as well as architects worked to control its impact on these tourist sites. For example, at la Grande Motte, the modernist pyramids not only face the Mediterranean but also block the Mistral for tourists sitting on south-facing balconies. Given their size and squareness, don't the pyramids also create a tunnel wind effect at ground level? The tired-looking, lopsided vegetation suggests as much. At Cap d'Agde, the balconies of the round buildings in the *quartier naturiste* were designed to minimize exposure to the occasional summer Mistral while maximizing exposure to the warming sun. Should we see these strategies as efforts to adapt these huge, modernist, concrete and rebar structures to the Mistral or as efforts to control its impact? Or both? Or would Dunlop adapt her analysis to describe twentieth-century development? In any case, one outcome of the Mission Racine would seem to confirm Dunlop's analysis of the nineteenth century. The huge development scheme did not really succeed in drawing many international tourists to Languedoc or in boosting the regional economy overall, as the *stations* are mostly empty in the late fall, winter, and spring when the Mistral usually blows. Should we conclude that yet again the Mistral has thwarted developers' and officials' best efforts to corral it?

The Mistral is innovative, well researched, beautifully written, and richly illustrated--with no fewer than eight color plates and forty half-tones. A general reader interested in Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, Provence, or France, would enjoy it. The book could work well in a survey of

modern France. Were I not retiring this year, I might use it in my graduate historiography course as an example of how a historian effectively works outside the box. Certainly, scholars will want graduate students to read this book, perhaps in graduate reading seminars in French, European, or environmental history. I urge H-France subscribers to have a look, even if it is outside your research subfield. Like me, you might well be swept away by the book, if not the Mistral.

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