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Michel Pastoureau, *Red: The History of a Color*. Translated by Jody Gladding. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017. 213 pp. Illustrations and bibliography. $39.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-6911-7277-4.

Review by Anna Russakoff, American University of Paris.

Michel Pastoureau is the undisputed master of *longue durée*, thematic historical studies, notably on heraldry, colors, and animals. After tackling *Blue* (2001), *Black* (2009), and *Green* (2014), Pastoureau has now written what will certainly become the definitive study on the color red.[1] (He announces in the introduction that yellow will come next.) A masterful storyteller, Pastoureau's work appeals to a wide spectrum of specialists as well as a cultivated general public. The chronological sweep in this study is extremely impressive, ranging from prehistoric times through to the present day. Pastoureau announces that his main period of specialization--already far broader than most scholars'--is from ancient Rome through the eighteenth century, yet he seems equally in command of ancient Egypt as he is of Soviet Russia. He also clearly announces that this book focuses on western culture. This is a very reasonable limit to set, but anyone wishing for more of a cross-cultural study of red would have to look elsewhere.

In addition to covering a stunning chronological range, Pastoureau's study is also amazingly interdisciplinary. He is very convincing that color can only be studied through multiple lenses. Although he touches on almost every domain imaginable, the main methods of analysis he returns to are linguistic, cultural, and scientific. Interestingly, art-historical approaches, while present, are far behind these three. (Pastoureau writes, "the history of painting is one thing; the history of colors is another, and much more vast" (p. 7).) He also focuses quite a bit on clothing and make-up. The various disciplines complement rather than distract from each other. Pastoureau's command of and expertise in all of these domains is again awe-inspiring. It should be noted that the study also goes beyond "pure" red to examine two related color shades: pink and purple. Not only is this book beautifully produced--with 100 percent of the images in full color--but the explanatory texts accompanying the images are very much part of his "story," and each caption vies for attention with the main text.

The first section begins with cave paintings and ancient languages, and we learn that red is one of the oldest colors, and is often synonymous with color itself. As we move on to ancient Egypt, we see that red often signaled "violence, war, and destruction" (p. 20). Yet for the Assyrians and Sumerians, who copiously painted their statues of gods, red was associated with "creation, prosperity, power" (p. 20). The second chapter, entitled "Fire and Blood," focuses on the powerful associations of the color red with these two natural elements. Wine is also associated with red, and Dionysus was often either represented as dressed in red, or with a ruddy complexion or red hair. The next chapter is entitled "With Pliny Among the Painters." Here Pastoureau emphasizes that the ancient Greeks used intensive polychromy on stone sculpture and architecture. Pliny's *Natural History* is helpful when it comes to pigments, especially the books that deal with minerals, dyes, make-up, and cures. Romans used many pigments to produce red, including lots of cinnabar, even though it was both expensive and dangerous. Romans were the first ones to use color mixtures. The next chapter is about "Dyeing in Red." Historically, the two major colorants were madder and kermes. The next chapter, "Roman Purple," focuses on the prestige of a "sister" color.

Antique purple came from the juice of shellfish found in the Mediterranean, and wearing purple cloth soon became an imperial distinction. In the next section, we learn that Romans valued red stones, especially the ruby, since it was thought to bring good luck. Yet having actual red hair in ancient Rome was not in favor: for women, it meant you had a wicked lifestyle; for men, it was a sign of ridicule or of Germanic ancestry. The next section, "Evidence From the Lexicon," leads us to the dominant chromatic triad: red, white, and black. Unfortunately, the Bible itself is poor with respect to color notations; yet red is by far the principal color.

The second main section is entitled "The Favorite Color: Sixth to Fourteenth Centuries." Colors began to be appreciated as their own entities in the Middle Ages, especially during the twelfth century, with the development of liturgical colors and coats of arms. And red became the new favorite. Red also took on a new ambivalence: it could be the blood of a saint or martyr, or the embodiment of evil. The next sub-section, "The Blood of Christ," traces how blood relics of Christ multiplied over the centuries, developing into the cult of the Holy Blood, a subject studied extensively by Caroline Walker Bynum and others.[2] Starting at the First Council of Lyon (1245), Pope Innocent IV decided that popes should wear a red hat. And shortly afterwards, cardinals were supposed to be dressed entirely in red, albeit only for special occasions. We then move on to the power of red. We know that for Charlemagne's coronation in the year 800, he was dressed exclusively in this color. Red was also used to exercise power, for the vestments of judges and executioners. The following sub-section is on one of Pastoureau's main areas of research: "The First Color of Heraldry." Starting in the mid-twelfth century, there are about 7,000 coats of arms to study, and according to Pastoureau, over 60 percent of them contain the color red (*gueules* in heraldic language). Yet the color red took on more "feminine" associations as well, as we can see in the next section. According to medieval poets and romances, the white skin of the lady should contrast with the red of her lips and cheeks. Yet this coloration could have negative associations as well, transforming certain women into witches or prostitutes. Competition enters the picture in the next sub-section, "Blue Versus Red." For centuries, dyers had not been capable of producing blue tones that would endure. The first person in the West to be depicted all in blue was the Virgin Mary--this contributed tremendously to the advancement of the color. In the dyeing industry, dyers of reds and blues became rivals, and merchants of madder and kermes became increasingly threatened by sellers of woad.

The next large section is entitled "A Controversial Color: Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries." After facing stiff competition from blue in the Middle Ages, red now also had to contend with the color black, and in Northern Europe, the increasingly restrictive color codes of the Protestant Reformation. The Pope himself started to wear more and more white. Isaac Newton's discovery of the color spectrum shifted red definitively away from its central position. The first sub-section returns us to a familiar place, "In the Flames of Hell." In artistic representations, hell is predominantly red and black. Placing red and black together was even forbidden in coats of arms. Red continues to be the color of punishment: children's school exercises are often still corrected in red ink. The ultimate redhead is of course Judas, who forms the subject of the next chapter. This feature developed entirely in the visual realm: there is no mention in the New Testament or the Apocrypha of the color of Judas's hair. Red hair can also spread to depictions of all kinds of "others": this includes heretics, Jews, Muslims, lepers, and beggars, to mention just a few. The exception to this negativity associated with redheads is the biblical David. Pastoureau informs us that for symbolic systems to function effectively, "there must be a safety valve, an exception" (p. 105). Even in the realm of folklore, witches are depicted with green teeth and red hair. This leads us to the next chapter, more broadly titled "Hatred of Red." Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans all rejected bright colors. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation "declared war on colors" (p. 108). With his wonderful turns of phrase (apparent even in the English translation), Pastoureau elaborates on "Protestant chronoclasm" (p. 110). In this case, the color red was immediately associated with the excessive luxury of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant austerity also spread to restrictions on clothing, makeup, and accessories. Pastoureau uses Rembrandt as an example of a "Calvinist painter," who employed touches of color sparingly; he contrasts this to the great colorist Rubens, who also happened to be a "fervent Catholic" (p. 115). Perhaps one of the most art-historical sections follows, on "The Red of Painters." Painting treatises and manuals always spend the most time on the color red. The pigments for

red have not changed much from Roman to late medieval times: cinnabar, realgar, and minium. In fact, the Middle Ages added only one pigment to the roster: vermilion. Yet the chapter remains more about pigments themselves rather than artists' deployment of them. The next chapter is very scientifically oriented, and is entitled "A Primary Color." Newton's discovery of the color spectrum in 1666 led to the final overhaul of the Aristotelian color system. The next chapter takes us back to "Fabric and Clothing." In particular, an important new ingredient for red, Mexican cochineal (a parasitic insect found on cacti), became increasingly popular in Europe. In the seventeenth century, which Pastoureau characterizes as "somber," red itself became darker, moving into crimson and wine shades. Yet the color red began to creep its way back into aristocratic circles: red heels (*talons rouges*) appeared in Versailles in the 1670s and 1680s.

The final section takes us into the modern and contemporary periods ("A Dangerous Color? Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries"). In contrast to the somberness of the seventeenth century, Pastoureau characterizes the eighteenth century--the century of Enlightenment--as one of real illumination. Yet it was a century he describes as more blue than red. The first section deals with one of red's pendant colors: pink. In the Enlightenment, pink was not a "girls'" color, and was actually quite fashionable for men. Pastoureau attributes the "feminization" of the color pink to the U.S. in the 1970s, particularly in the craze for Barbie dolls. The next chapter focuses on clothing and make-up. Cosmetics became a rage for the eighteenth-century courtly society. Both men and women covered their faces with products that were even known to be toxic: white lead and cinnabar. The red/white/black triad continues. In addition to the white and red of makeup, there were black *mouches*, or small dots, that one could place on one's face, meant to highlight the whiteness of one's skin. Although red continued to be the color of prostitution, lipstick became increasingly generalized, especially after World War I. While the make-up industry developed "veritable dictionaries of red," beginning in the nineteenth century, men discontinued wearing red on their faces (p. 158). Thus, red became increasingly a feminine color. The French army finally abandoned madder-red trousers in 1915. The next section, "Red Caps and Flags: In the Midst of the Revolution," demonstrates how red became a powerful political color. Throughout the nineteenth century, red became synonymous with words like "Socialist," "Communist," or "revolutionary." The *bonnet rouge* was one of the most prominent features of the *sans-culottes* of the French Revolution. Robespierre apparently claimed that he liked neither the *bonnets rouges* nor the *talons rouges* of the aristocracy, which underscores "how in political symbolism, the two extremes very often come to meet" (p. 166). This theme continues in the next chapter, entitled "A Political Color." In the aftermath of the Commune of 1871, the tricolor French flag became the one that symbolized order and legitimacy, and the red flag, the mark of "oppressed and rebellious peoples" (p. 170). This takes us to our next section, "Emblems and Signals," an area with which Pastoureau is very familiar. On flags, the color red is dominant, and appears on 77 percent of flags of 200 countries. Finally, we reach "Red for the Present Day." This leads to a discussion that ranges from fire extinguishers to Santa Claus. Red is still used for punishment, for seduction, and also to attract attention. For his caption to a striking photo of Marilyn Monroe, Pastoureau writes, "Dressed in any color other than red, Marilyn would not be entirely Marilyn" (p. 186). Red plays an essential role in musical and theatrical events, as well as political ceremonies. The final image in the book is one of Mark Rothko's abstract paintings, entitled *No. 16 (Red, White, and Brown)*. Here color has finally become a subject of its own. Pastoureau's last paragraph reveals the paradoxes of the color red: it is apparently no longer our favorite, it is not as present in the everyday environment, but it still remains one of the strongest symbolically. At this point, this reviewer was hoping that the great master would reflect on the strangest turn of color symbolism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: how did the revolutionary red of the nineteenth century became the color of the American Republican party, standing for steadfast conservatism? Certainly the "Red States" are about as far a cry as one could get from revolutionaries or Communism.

But in the end, this omission makes us turn back to Pastoureau's earlier reflections on how sometimes opposites unite in symbolism, and how it's necessary for every rule to have exceptions. It demonstrates just how powerful, polyvalent, and perplexing this color of fire, blood, wine, and passion truly is.

NOTES

[1] *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); *Green: The History of a Color* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[2] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

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