Nineteenth-Century French Studies
A scholarly journal devoted to the study of French literature and related fields
For articles: ncfsarticles@gmail.com For reviews: ncfsreviews@gmail.com www.ncfs-journal.org

Morrissey, Robert. *The Economy of Glory: From Ancien Régime France to the Fall of Napoléon*. Trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Pp. 258. ISBN: 978-0-226-92458-8

Melanie Conroy, University of Memphis

Napoléon is such a controversial figure that many studies end up evaluating the man himself, or at least his regime. Taking a largely neutral stance, Robert Morrissey considers how Napoléon established his regime by organizing glory, the currency of his empire. *The Economy of Glory: From Ancien Régime France to the Fall of Napoléon* has important implications for nineteenth-century studies, principally in characterizing the transition from old regime to new. A fundamental addition to the scholarship on the Consulate and the First French Empire, this 2010 book, originally published in French, ranges widely over concepts of glory from the Greek to the Roman to the modern. Indeed, "the Napoléonic moment" is not so much a moment as the culmination of a long tradition; Bonaparte's regime, Morrissey writes, "can be understood as the final battle in the long quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns" (2). For Morrissey, Napoléon brought to a temporary resolution the conflict between equality and liberty by co-opting the neo-classical discourses of the Ancien Régime.

The Economy of Glory is a necessary read for French scholars, particularly specialists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Given the importance Morrissey's book holds for historians and those who study comparative nineteenth-century topics, it is beneficial that Teresa Lavender Fagan's new translation is readable and elegant. Equal parts myth and historical reality, the "economy of glory" was a creation of the Bonapartist regime that made Napoléon into the heir of Achilles and Horatius, while also glorifying the individuals that praised the soon-to-be emperor. To twenty-first-century eyes participation in this economy of glory can look like the base flattery of a despot. "Your glory is immense," wrote a group of French soldiers in praise of General Bonaparte, "the Universe can scarcely contain, and posterity will hardly believe, the authentic events of your illustrious campaign" (1). This open letter to Napoléon, published in *Le Moniteur* in 1804, is one of the historical documents that Morrissey reads charitably by placing it in the context of ancient discourses on glory. Echoing post-Revolutionary historian Antoine-Claire Thibaudeau, Morrissey argues that these expressions of "effervescent solidarity" were "a phenomenon of collective exultation," rather than a "mystification of the people" (2). The "economy of glory" was a system in which Napoléon played the leading role. The French people were, however, not demeaned by their head of state, but elevated to glory by association with a living myth.

For Morrissey, Napoléon effectively put an end to the Enlightenment through the pursuit and management of glory. A self-made man and an inspiration to the Romantic movement, Napoléon is often seen as having inaugurated the nineteenth century. Yet Napoléon was equally a product of the Ancien Régime. Morrissey argues that Napoléon, like Roman emperors or the Bourbon kings, was "living at the confluence of reality and myth" (3). He constructed his image according to traditional, especially Roman, codes. Unlike these traditional despots, however, Bonaparte wanted to embody equality as well as liberty and justice. Because glory traditionally had a meritocratic component, it was the perfect Ancien Régime signifier for the new "aesthetics of fusion": "it was through glory that Napoléon Bonaparte planned to escape from the impasse of revolutionary contractualism" (3). Yet the economy of glory was also potentially dangerous because it appealed to emotions and was an unstable form of unity that threatened to fall apart into disparate concepts like liberty, individualism, or contractualism.

The conclusion, in which Morrissey sketches the relationship between Napoléon's economy of glory and nineteenth-century literature, is the most suggestive, but also least developed, part of the book. He argues convincingly that the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* was a foundational document for Stendhal, Balzac, Vigny, and others of their generation; indeed, this is so much the case that it would be near impossible to make a definitive account of all of the texts that Napoléon's biography impacted. Yet since the conclusion treats a cast of nineteenth-century authors from Chateaubriand to Balzac to Hugo to Renan in less than thirty pages, some parts of the argument remain implicit. Morrissey does show how the economy of glory was not the only option for the fusion of old and new regime values. Novelists supplied another way out of the impasse, ultimately a more influential one. Unlike Napoléon, Victor Hugo—at least the Victor Hugo of *Les Misérables*—wanted to describe an invisible form of heroism—very different from traditional and neo-classical views of the hero as highly visible, or glorious. Jean Valjean is a "model of sacrifice and disinterestedness"; his suffering makes *Les Misérables* into "an epic of obscure heroism" that is nearly the opposite of Napoléon's very visible persona management (208). This last section is very brief and dense; it deserves to be studied and extended, perhaps by other researchers. The concept of the "economy of glory" should prove central to the study of nineteenth-century literature, as will the helpful notion of the "aesthetics of fusion" that Morrissey employs in his discussions of Hugo and Chateaubriand.