

Federation (founded in 1885 and still in existence), and John S. Clarke, a Scottish Labour official who presided at many Burns ceremonies during the period.

In chapter 4, Malgrati assesses the perception of Burns as the “Bard of Welfare” from 1941 to 1948, claiming that organizations such as the Burns Federation “turned from liberal-conservatism to social-democracy” (107) in their usage of the poet. The role of the Scottish Socialist Party in this process shifts in chapter 5 to the communist appropriation of Burns, with fine analysis of the “ideological translation” of Burns’s works into Russian by Samuil Marshak (131). Malgrati argues that the poet’s popularity in the Soviet Union represented a universalism in his message that had rarely (if ever) been witnessed beyond Anglophone countries. He also examines the contribution of Scottish communist writers like MacDiarmid and novelist James Barke to this globalizing representation of Burns’s life and works. Chapter 6 offers intriguing discussion of late twentieth-century Scottish politics, including philatelic debates about a Burns stamp, the Labour Party’s desire to claim Burns as “part of our socialist inheritance” (158), and the appearance of Burns programming on Scottish television in the late 1970s.

In chapter 7, Burns’s meanings for Scottish political devolution are traced in the works of such contemporary writers as Alasdair Gray, Douglas Dunn, Liz Lochhead, and Robert Crawford. Malgrati also attends to political disputes that plagued the two-hundredth anniversary of Burns’s death in 1996. Chapter 8 examines the political speculation surrounding Burns during 2000–2014, as various groups argued whether the poet would have voted “yes” or “no” in the drive for Scottish independence in 2014. Despite the failure of this vote, Malgrati finds that “the politicization of Burns across Scottish public opinion had reached a new and perhaps unprecedented height” (231). Malgrati concludes by claiming that “a pliable material, Burns’s work can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed endlessly to fit the political requirements of the present” (252). This statement is thoroughly proven throughout *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics*, where countless distortions of Burns’s life and works are shown to be the results of avid politicking from interested parties.

The strengths of this book can be found in Malgrati’s ample narrative gifts, particularly his accounts of twentieth-century Scottish politics. He provides a vivid reconstruction of hard-fought battles between Unionists, Scottish nationalists, and communists to lay claim to Burns’s legacy and promote their causes. However, the treatment of twenty-first century events is less successful, and Malgrati’s analyses of contemporary literary figures are perhaps too speculative in nature to convince. There is also an evident bias toward a more “radical” version of Burns’s legacy from the author. That said, *Robert Burns and Scottish Cultural Politics* is a thoughtful and compelling exploration of the poet’s continuing relevance for Scottish politics and culture.

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COLM MURPHY. *Futures of Socialism: ‘Modernisation’, the Labour Party, and the British Left, 1973–1997*. Modern British Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Pp. 316. \$110 (cloth).

doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.230

The central conceit of Colm Murphy’s book is that the myth of a single, teleological process of Labour’s “modernization” needs debunking. This myth presents “modernization” as “a broadly coherent, singular process of party change, driven by a small group of political actors across the 1980s and 1990s, leading inexorably towards the ‘rise of New

Labour” (9–10). This characterization was, of course, an expressly political act, entangled with “the teleologies of salvation and betrayal” (15–19). For New Labour’s admirers, “modernization” came to describe the only available, necessary process of adapting to a set of objective changes in Britain’s society and economy. For its sworn enemies (on the Left), it became nothing more than “a metaphor for Labour’s accommodation with Thatcherism” (17).

This, he suggests, needs dispelling in favor of a more contingent and pluralistic understanding of the different visions of “modernization” advanced by actors within and beyond the Labour Party in the 1973–97 period. As Labour struggled to come to terms with deindustrialization, neoliberalism, myriad manifestations of “popular individualism,” and an awful lot of election defeats, it was not only a few politicians and apparatchiks who noticed that the remedies of the 1950s and 1960s might not be up to the challenges of an altogether different world. This, then, is a “modernization” story in which Neil Kinnock, Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown are often comparatively minor participants in—or perhaps synthesizers of—a series of sometimes theoretically dense, often heated arguments about the nature of the “new times” and the necessary ingredients of “modernization,” with roots extending well before the latter pair had entered Parliament. It turns out in fact that pretty much anyone you could care to name (and some you couldn’t), of any factional or ideological stripe, agreed the world was changing irreversibly and that what was needed was a dramatically “modern” socialism. They just could not agree on much else (if one were to quibble—and there is little need, since Murphy’s work is such a welcome corrective to a large, myth-heavy literature—one might suggest the focus on ideas means the very real personal enmities, organizational wars of attrition, and painful election defeats appear as rather fleeting presences). To vividly illustrate Murphy’s point, the book opens with quotes from Ken Livingstone, Clare Short and Tony Blair, each articulating a political vision pitched specifically as ‘modern’ (1).

*Futures* takes us on a tour through socialist and social-democratic debates about the changing constraints and possibilities for the Left. Did a modern economic agenda mean reasserting the sovereignty of a nation state increasingly vulnerable to the whims of multinational corporations and international financial markets, as per the Alternative Economic Strategy, or accepting its limits? (Ch.1). Could workers be empowered through Bryan Gould’s decentralist vision of “socio-economic democracy,” or through Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s agenda of flexible labour markets and social investment in service of a more egalitarian, more dynamic “knowledge economy?” (Chs.2, 6). What was the place of feminism within a modern socialist vision: was the task to “accelerate change” or to adapt to existing changes in society and the world of work? (Ch.3). And how did the politics of race fit into “modernization” narratives? (Ch.4).

The answer to the latter it turns out, in the book’s most compelling chapter, is rather uncomfortably. In part this was because of the rather fractious Black Sections debates which were rather more complex and divisive *among* non-white members than some recent scholarship suggests. In part it was because the very concept of “modernization” was by the 1990s increasingly understood to be irredeemably enmeshed with Eurocentric Enlightenment metanarratives. And of course, there was old-fashioned electoral arithmetic.

Each of these debates, their shifting trajectories, and key players, are elaborated in often surprising ways. You get the sense Murphy is familiar with every column committed to the pages of *The Guardian*, *The New Statesman*, and some rather more obscure titles, yet these are woven together with great narrative clarity. For other historians of the politics and policy debates of the period, this book is going to be an invaluable reference (what was the Left’s response to Mitterand’s U turn; why did Stuart Holland change his mind about Europe; what was the knowledge economy about, anyway?).

This is, then, a great historical intervention. But the book can also be read as a political intervention—a view buttressed by the author’s own ventures into more contemporary debates. It might be read as a plea for a rather more contingent view of Labour’s past and therefore its future options; greater curiosity about the actual content of and reasoning behind the ideas of different political factions; and indeed a more pluralistic intellectual approach to its

present. These are all good things to argue for, especially when good faith exchanges of differing political perspectives feel especially hard to come by. *Futures* might even be read to suggest that periods of disorienting, even existential crisis for political parties should be viewed, from a distant enough perspective, with more sanguinity. These might well be the very moments in which the best (re)thinking gets done. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine the 1997–2010 sequel would contain quite the same level of generative, big-picture debate.

Murphy's approach is—to his credit as a historian—cautious, but it is a powerful example of the role historians can play as debunkers of inherited, politically motivated mythologies from our recent past; as narrators of complexity; and as arch-pluralists, urging us to understand political actors and thinkers on their own terms. Will it change the mind of anyone who already knows what they think about the New Labour governments? Probably not—although latter-day Blairites, Old Labour romantics, and indiscriminate opponents of the changes the party underwent in the period might all gain something from a confrontation with the imagination, dynamic thinking, and intellectual energy that went into this period. After all, the tragedy lurking behind Murphy's book is that, after the raucous cacophony he describes, as the possibilities were narrowed down and attention turned to the day-to-day grind of delivery, at some point the music stopped.

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IPSHITA NATH. *Memsahibs: British Women in Colonial India*. London: Hurst Publishers, 2022. Pp. 496. £30.00 (cloth).  
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.239

Ipshtita Nath's *Memsahibs: British Women in Colonial India* aims to examine the lives of the titular memsahibs as they experienced them, and in doing so challenge some of the entrenched stereotypes that developed contemporarily and in post-colonial popular culture. Like many in both India and Britain, Nath grew up surrounded by certain (mis)representations of white British women during the colonial period and became increasingly “frustrated to see repetitive and limiting representation[s]” (xxvi) of these women. Building therefore on postcolonial and feminist histories, which questioned if these women could speak, Nath instead argues that they have not been heard. Utilizing both published and archival narratives from the women themselves, Nath examines the lives of memsahibs during the entire period of colonial rule, from the early expansion of the mid-eighteenth century to the mass exodus of Britons following Indian independence.

Nath's analysis follows the journey of British women as they leave their families and lives in Britain to journey to India, encountering the harsh realities of life at sea and the trials of finding a husband on their arrival in India's bustling port cities (chapter 1). From there Nath follows the women as they navigate marriage, motherhood, domestic and servant management, social entanglements, and the challenges of loneliness, boredom and homesickness (chapters 2 and 3) before examining the centrality of travel and mobility to the lives of memsahibs and their families (chapters 4, 5, and 6). Moving beyond these experiences, Nath begins to challenge the contemporary representation of memsahibs as frivolous, extravagant, and lazy. She does this by examining their responsibility for maintaining and participating in imperial culture through life in the hill stations (chapter 7); the central role of motherhood to the colonial enterprise (chapter 8); and the changing perception of memsahibs as paragons of strength and virtue in the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Rebellion (chapter 9). The book concludes in 1947 with the exodus of colonial officials following the granting of Indian Independence, and a short consideration of the lives of memsahibs as they returned to Britain.