

Morris, Jonathan. *The Political Economy of Shopkeeping in Milan, 1886–1922*. (Past and Present Publications). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xv, 31. Bibliography, index. US \$64.95 (cloth)

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Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

pleasing the fem rather than being pleased, certainly stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing norms of masculine sexuality.

One of the consequences of the leadership role played by butches in this time period is that most of the sources for this study are butches, even though several acknowledge that with the years they have relaxed their standards. Fems, many of whom subsequently turned to heterosexuality (though a good number of these came back, often after raising children, to the lesbian community), are not as well represented. Furthermore, most of the women interviewed are white, though great efforts are made to mine the small number of Black oral histories (particularly that of a wonderfully opinionated fem). It is shown that in the 1940s Black lesbians relied on house parties for their social needs, and only began to frequent bars in the 1950s. Some of these were mostly white gay bars; others were mostly Black bars whose clientele seems to have included pimps and minor criminals, and which were also frequented by lesbians and gay men of various races. The lack of information about the non-gay bars and the other relevant contexts within which lesbians moved (e.g. the gay male drag community) is symptomatic of the book's tendency to exaggerate the autonomy of the lesbian community, and to neglect exploring the other, overlapping urban subcultures. Perhaps the authors are overly influenced by old-fashioned anthropology, with its emphasis on supposedly isolated cultures, and not sufficiently influenced by postmodern trends emphasizing intercultural processes such as translation, borrowing, and pastiche.

This incredibly detailed and lovingly compiled work (over 400 pages of small print) will be cited for years by historians of women, of sexuality, of the gay/lesbian community, and of the 'demimonde' of

rough bars. Its complex analysis of the sexual dynamics of butch-fem couples is likely to become the standard source on the topic: but the authors provide an equally sensitive analysis around issues of class, and this perhaps one might not have expected. It turns out that one consequence of assuming a seven-day-a-week butch identity was that one could not work in ordinary women's jobs: butches in the 1950s, then, were confined to cab driving, bar tending, some types of factory work, or unemployment. Some of them even earned money by encouraging or tolerating their girlfriends' prostitution (a fact that will shock many readers, as it shocked this middle-class lesbian-feminist reviewer!). Be that as it may, it is clear that there was a huge gulf between those women who had relationships with and even socialized with lesbians, but who appeared ladylike enough to keep white-collar jobs, and those who absolutely refused to play not just the feminine game but also the near-compulsory American game of upward mobility. The butch identity was as much a class choice as a sexual choice.

This wonderful study, which although clearly a labour of community love does not hesitate to point out the limits and flaws of the culture studied, will undoubtedly contribute to making future studies in lesbian/gay history much more nuanced in terms of class. Whether it has a comparable influence on working-class and urban studies, however, remains to be seen, since scholars in these fields rarely read studies of sexuality. This book gives urban historians a perfect opportunity to begin exploring the rich literature on the history of sexuality.

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Morris, Jonathan. *The Political Economy of Shopkeeping in Milan, 1886-1922*. (Past and Present Publications). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xv, 31. Bibliography, index. US \$64.95 (cloth).

In the two decades since Arno Mayer called for the examination of the *petite bourgeoisie* as a social phenomenon "in its own right," there has been a steady accumulation of studies adding appreciably to our understanding of the lower middle class. A regular refrain in this literature has been an emphasis on the intense localism of this social layer. Shopkeepers in particular played a myriad of social and economic roles within communities of all sorts and clearly their identities reflected the specific circumstances in which they found themselves. A community study, such as Jonathan Morris's intriguing investigation of the small shopkeepers — the *esercenti* — of Milan, is an indispensable entry into this world.

In the late nineteenth century, industrial capitalism and consequent demographic growth transformed Milan. The existence of an organized *esercenti* movement and newspaper throughout this period provides an excellent opportunity to examine the highly diverse "business of shopkeeping" and its relationship to these changes. Most striking was the extent to which the very specific problems of doing business in Milan shaped this movement. Shopkeepers were obsessed, for instance, with the problems created by the fact that the inner and outer city were subject to different taxation regimes, skewing any "natural" economic development and potentially undermining the emergence of a common *esercenti* voice. Similarly, local conditions such as the lack of corporatist traditions and the relatively greater challenge from co-operatives than from department stores or retailing chains established the terrain upon which

shopkeepers' collective identity was forged. Such considerations are necessary to understand the wide variation in shopkeepers' economic strength and organizational capacities between cities and countries, and the author's expert unraveling of Milan's development provides a model of analysis.

Less convincing is Morris's depiction of the shopkeepers' ideological evolution. Despite his pains not simply "to interpret the *esercenti* political experience as merely a progression from left to right," (p. 289) the rightward trajectory is clear. As evidence of the shopkeepers' independent and potentially variable course, Morris describes their opposition to the party of the large landowners and their admittedly halfhearted and ill-fated support for the "centre-left" administration of 1900-1905. But what drove them to the right was the emergence of a well-organized workers' movement that, even at its early stages, challenged the *petite bourgeoisie's* control over small workplaces (and particularly over hiring) and disputed its self-perception as the rightful spokespersons for the *menu peuple*. With the growth of a powerful and increasingly revolutionary workers' movement, it is not possible to do as Morris asks and "distinguish between anti-Socialism and support for the right" in early twentieth-century Milan. Was there no logic to anti-socialism in this context? From the evidence presented, the tide of class politics simply seems to have carried the shopkeepers in its wake. In short, Morris asserts a *petit bourgeois* autonomy, but increasing the choice was between workers and capital; it is difficult to agree that the "respect of property and the social order, through which the *esercenti* distinguished itself from the working class, did not demand an uncritical acceptance of the bourgeoisie" (p. 298), at least not in the electoral field.

In fact, the author's conclusions are forced onto the narrative. While shopkeepers clearly did have some autonomy, they moved inexorably into the camp of the right-wing party they had earlier criticized. Morris's case might be stronger if he could have elaborated upon the elements of a specifically *esercenti* world view and argued that, in some form, it had survived. Yet the shopkeepers' ideology, beyond a passing reference to Garibaldi and Mazzini in their newspaper and a general opposition to "privilege" is not well addressed. It is difficult not to contrast this with Geoffrey Crossick's rich portrayal of the social fabric of the British lower middle class predicated on anxieties and ambitions often at odds with broader economic developments. No doubt there is an issue of sources; this is perhaps not the kind of information that is easy to glean from the shopkeeper's organ *L'Esercente* or from reports of their federation. But this is crucial to understanding the *petit bourgeois* experience and (with due respect to Morris's concern about a teleology that assumes shopkeepers were inevitably fascists) will help explain their drift in that direction. This is not to say that there are not elements of fascinating social history here, as in his discussion of credit or *il fido*. Shopkeepers could claim credit for sustaining destitute working-class families and communities, although the institution seemed to control them as much as they it.

The lower middle class is a frustrating object of study, although made more so by attempts to follow too stringently Mayer's original dictum to study it in its "own right." This is not to denigrate studies of the *petite bourgeoisie* nor to suggest that we should assign it the status of a residual category of less interest and importance than capital and labour. In fact, the social values we might ascribe to the *petite bourgeoisie* have had (and arguably continue to have) a currency

beyond the economic weight of this sector and need to be understood. But, it would be more useful, I would argue, to take a leaf from E.P. Thompson and view class as nothing if not a social relationship. Throughout this narrative, the *esercenti* are constantly renegotiating their relationship with the other social classes of industrializing Milan. Often Morris is cognizant of what this meant for the shopkeepers' social identity and examines the role of their newspaper in consciously shaping it by seeking common concerns while eschewing discussions that could divide an already heterogeneous social group. While his attempts to claim substantial autonomy for shopkeepers in this process are strained, he addresses issues of concern to all historians interested in changing relations of class in the industrializing city.

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Teaford, Jon C. *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. Pp. xii, 300. 22 black and white plates, tables, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Jon Teaford has written a sprightly history of the network of large industrial cities in the states of the Old Northwest (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin) in the last two centuries. He focuses primarily on what he saw as a common pattern of growth, development and decline in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis (with some discussion of smaller midwestern cities), and uses a biological metaphor of birth, maturity, and aging to study the "urban life cycle" (p. vii).