

## 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