
It is hardly necessary to say that the remaining twenty-nine titles are as promising as the eight mentioned above. Take, for example, the article “On the Carriage of Petrarch’s Letters” (Speculum, 1960, 14 pages), in which Wilkins combines proven historical fact with quite plausible conjecture in his fascinating account of how Petrarch managed to carry on his voluminous correspondence with various people over great distances. The article, besides dealing with Petrarch and the means he employed for communicating between, say, Milan and Prague, is also a profound study of this problem as it existed in the Middle Ages generally, and is, therefore, a social as well as literary document. Or, take the two articles “The Date of the Birth of Boccaccio” (The Romanic Review, 1910, 8 pages) and “The Discussion of the Date of the Birth of Boccaccio” (The Romanic Review, 1913, 9 pages), in which Wilkins critically sums up what had been said on the subject up to that time and then goes on to give what appears to be incontrovertible evidence in support of his own findings and conclusions. We have here some of the finest discussion based on accurate research, not to speak of a lively polemic with such literary notables as Hauvette, Bacci, Massèra and Torraca.

The compilation of a work of this kind is an important event and, therefore, to be welcomed. Professor Bernardo is to be commended for rendering this service and for having done it in such a scholarly manner.

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The central intent of this book is to attempt to restore some credibility to the Marxist analysis of that most singular crisis in the history of Renaissance Florence: the Ciompi Revolt. Although a number of European historians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries developed the notes made by Marx himself on the economic and social conditions of Trecento Florence found in the history of Gino Capponi, the belief that the successful revolt of the wool workers of 1378-82 represented a classic example of class struggle over the means of production has been dismissed by almost every historian of Florence writing after the turn of the century, except those, of course, in Eastern Europe and Russia. The modern tradition of the Ciompi Revolt is that the politically naive and volatile populo minuto was manipulated by demagogic leaders from the patriciate in their factional struggles to control the Signoria. In this interpretation, the Ciompi are only tools of the populo grasso, and the legitimate history of the event is to be found in the study of the factional politics of the patriciate, not in any investigation of the labouring classes.

To establish his argument, Cohn had to give the Ciompi both a history and a character. As is the case with most groups outside the received scholarship of traditional history, the Florentine labouring classes lacked
a voice of their own to define themselves and their place. Cohn solves this problem by using sources never before investigated in any systematic way for this purpose: the notarile and the criminal archives. The former contain redactions of marriage and dowry agreements which "were central to the complex web of social networks of association not only of individuals but of families, occupational groups, neighbourhoods and classes" (17); the latter reflect two important considerations in Cohn's thesis: the level and character of popular, collective violence, and the operation of the coercive power of the state against the Ciompi.

The conclusions Cohn draws from his samples — and only a sampling is possible, given the voluminous nature of these sources — are remarkable and significant. Taking two different periods in two different centuries, one a time of general upheaval and civic instability, the other of relative social quiet, Cohn has discovered that the popolo minuto was not a static group. In the Trecento the labouring classes were characterized by associational rather than communal or parochial contacts; the workplace and tavern were probably of greater significance in forming the interactive bonds of the Ciompi than the parish church; and the marriage alliances of the plebe were often made outside their parishes, indicating a city-wide network of contacts and activities. In the 15th century, however, the situation had changed so that the popolo minuto was inward-looking, parochial and confined to their working class ghettos and bound by their parishes.

Cohn's explanations for this phenomenon are plausible and stimulating. Immigration from areas beyond the Florentine contato — indeed from northern Europe — drove the Ciompi into "national" ghettos for mutual support; the great rebuilding of the centre of the city during the Quattrocento displaced large numbers of poor as their houses and tenements were razed for the splendid palaces and piazzes which still characterise the city — Florence, for the first time, exhibited a "class geography." Finally, the oligarchy, restored after suppressing the last remnants of the Ciompi guilds, and, later, the Medici hegemony clearly used the power of the state, especially the new agencies such as the Otto di Guardia, to control the popolo minuto so that collective class action became much more dangerous, if not impossible.

By illustrating these themes and using traditional sources in a new and profitable way, Cohn has contributed much to his subject and has succeeded to a large extent in giving the popolo minuto a voice, a history. The conclusions drawn from his analysis are important and probably correct in themselves: the Ciompi were not static as a class; the demography of the city did change from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century; and the events of the Ciompi Revolt and the subsequent popular government of 1378-1382 should be seen as more than just another "Italian imbroglio" (205). Also, the method of computerised quantitative analysis employed by Cohn and his application of modern research tools in general to this old subject deserve the highest praise.

Unfortunately, the reader is left unconvinced. Despite the heroic attempts described above, Cohn has not really succeeded in forcing the Ciompi Revolt and the circumstances that occasioned and followed it into a classical Marxist paradigm. Indeed, it is a pity that he tried: the material collected and studied stands comfortably alone and speaks eloquently for itself without the author's Marxist imperative. It was, I expect, this imperative of ideology that drove Cohn to avoid discussion of some other of
the canons of received scholarship on his subject. Most importantly, there is no reference to the tradition that the Medici faction enjoyed the strong support of the *popolo minuto*, including the *contadini*, and manipulated it for their own ends, a purpose which Cohn describes as instrumental in the establishment of a coercive, repressive state. Dedication of the labouring classes to the faction of the richest man in Florence and their support of his policies would explode the Marxist design. Still, the issue is critical. As Dale Kent noted in *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence, 1426-1434*, "... there is no need entirely to dismiss the importance of the Medici reputation for popular support, nor the possibility that the latter may have expressed itself in alternative forms as a crucial factor in the Medici victory. The role of armed force, for example, in the events of 1433 and 1434 is not clear; the mere existence of a large following among the *contadini* and the urban artisans could have been exploited as a threat to bring strategic pressure on the governing patriciate" (8). For the labouring classes to have embraced their oppressors is incomprehensible in a Marxist analysis, despite the evidence that it may have been the case.

Therefore, Sam Cohn has produced a remarkable and important book. The great wealth of data contained in the 70 pages of tables in the appendices alone make the volume valuable. He has succeeded in drawing a far more sophisticated portrait of a dynamic class previously seen as amorphous and historically insignificant, except in times of civic unrest. The flaw rests in the demands of ideology, an element not required by the argument and not explicit in the sources.

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Con questo recente studio Gian Carlo Ferretti ha suscitato delle discussioni molto vivaci in Italia. Il libro è un’analisi del romanzo contemporaneo italiano e della parabola che ha seguito dal boom dell’inizio degli anni sessanta fino al cauto consumismo di oggi. Ma allo stesso tempo è una provocazione (è stato definito un pamphlet, ma più di questo è un discorso documentato) a quelli che vogliono che la letteratura sia successo di pubblico anziché di critica, predeterminata, il più delle volte, da una meticolosa e sofisticata campagna promozionale, e quindi il prodotto industriale di una programmazione sociologica.

Ferretti studia il sottile rapporto che esiste fra la chiave del successo di un best seller e le aspettazioni, la coincidenza di intenzione fra uno scrittore e il “suo” pubblico, il “suo” mercato. Un orientamento, quindi, verso le esigenze di questo mercato e la promulgazione di una mercificata cultura di massa. La sinistra, ossia quella critica consideratasi militante, ha, da tempo, parlato del testo come prodotto, del suo autore come “scrittore,” del suo lettore come consumatore. In questo contesto prettamente mercantile, i testi vengono di consuetudine preceduti da una prudente solcatura di terreno (basta sfogliare qualsiasi terza pagina, o pagina cultu-