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Review of Contesting the Renaissance by William Caferro

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expurgation was particularly severe in Italy. It was made even worse by the fact that – unlike in Spain, for example – no official index of expurgation was ever published by Rome, nor was there any clarity in the *Regole* which were included in the indexes of prohibited books. This left authors, printers and readers in a state of complete uncertainty. The norms were expressed in general and generic terms, and this obliged them to resort to personal negotiations with the ecclesiastical authorities. Similarly, Black does not look at the impact of the Roman church's intervention in reorganizing entire areas of knowledge, which affected scientific and legal works, as well as the way history could be written. Nor does he consider the disappearance from the Italian market not only of individual works which had been banned, suspended, or never published, but also of entire literary genres such as satire and humanist dialogue.

The concern of the book is to show that the inquisitors 'followed fairly clear rules and guidelines, without being dictators' (256); that the inquisition was also committed to re-education, persuasion and conciliation as well as punishment; that the number of its victims was much lower than previously thought, and that after all, things could have been much worse. The book misses an important opportunity to acquaint English-speaking readers with a body of historical work which it mentions but does not use adequately. Above all, it fails to account for a field of research which derives its value and dynamism from the sorts of questions it continually raises, rather than from reassuring labels and pre-packaged interpretations.

William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2010; viii + 253 pp.; 9781405123693, £61.50 (hbk); 9781405123709, £22.99 (pbk)

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William Caferro's *Contesting the Renaissance* offers an historiographical synthesis of the major topics currently debated by scholars of the European Renaissance. The book is arranged around seven thematic chapters, each containing an impressive summation of basic historical content as well as over a century of specialized and often-times contradictory historiography. It is that rare book, one that will appeal to novices and experts alike: its balance between brevity and depth will appeal to scholars who want to brush up on topics outside their particular subspecialty, while the book will also appeal to students who are striving to learn the foundational arguments made about Renaissance Europe over the past 150 years.

Each of the book's seven chapters is structured around the meaning and applicability of the term 'Renaissance'. The initial chapter examines the enduring question of periodization itself, tracing the history of the 'Renaissance' from Petrarch to the present, with special emphasis on the twentieth century. Chapter 2 looks at 'Individualism', a concept crucial to Jacob Burckhardt and one that has found new life – if in revised form – in the recent scholarship. The scholarly investigation of the position of Renaissance women and conceptions of gender, an historiography born largely in the 1970s and one that continues to prosper, occupies Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 turns to humanism. Here Caferro points to the centrality of humanism to debates about the Renaissance, although there is much less emphasis in the chapter on the ever fewer and increasingly insular nature of the study of intellectual history among modern scholars. Chapter 5 focuses on scholarly debates over the state of the Renaissance economy and its impact on contemporary political, cultural and social developments. Chapters on politics and faith/science – with particular emphasis on long-lasting debates over the rise of the modern state, forms of government, the role of secularism, and the relationships between humanism, magic and science – round out the slim volume.

As Caferro himself points out, a book of this nature can never hope to be all inclusive or to satisfy all readers. Scholars will quibble about the space given in such a short book to older works at the expense of more recent scholarship. Other scholars will point to what is left out, such as the visual arts – certainly a sea of scholarship of daunting proportions, but also one that has become more tied to the broader field in recent years. In general, Caferro focuses more on the arguments of others than he does on making his own historiographical interventions or suggestions, which is both a strength and weakness of the book. Caferro's even-handed treatment makes for smooth reading and offers an impressive summary of an enormous amount of material. Yet, it also leaves it up to the reader, with little guidance, to determine which debates should fade from the historiographical forefront and which ones are in need of a further injection of scholarly time and resources.

The problems of periodization underlie every chapter of the book. Caferro shows how scholars inconsistently apply the terms medieval, Renaissance and early modern depending on their subfield and geographic focus. The problem is more significant than just a choice of words: scholars considering themselves students of the 'early modern' period rather than the 'Renaissance' start their studies with different assumptions, engage with different historiographical traditions – and thus different historical questions – and subsequently reach conclusions that are difficult to bring together. Scholars of Renaissance economic history, for example, tend to focus on Italy, study the effects of the Black Death on wages, and look at the relationship between the economy and cultural production. Scholars studying economics in early modern Europe, by contrast, tend to look at northern Europe, proto-industry, and the development of the centralized state. The temporal foci of the two basic groups of scholars often overlap, but their studies engage with different paradigms and scholarly expectations.

Beyond divisions in subfields, the inconsistent application of periodization schema brings other problems. For example, historical categories create chasms between contemporaneous events. Joan of Arc was executed in 1431, two years before Sigismund was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 1433. Three years later the city of Florence was crowned by Brunelleschi's dome. Meanwhile, the Hundred Years War was drawing closer to a conclusion north of the Alps, even as, in a different historiographical world, Leonardo Bruni continued to work on his *History of Florence*. Caferro's book does not offer solutions – if such answers even

exist – to bring divergent scholars and their historiographies together. However, Caferro has compiled an admirable book that clearly shows what many of the present categories are and how they came to be. It is up to the book's readers to decide what to do about it.

John Callaghan and Ben Harker, *British Communism: A Documentary History*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2011; vi + 304 pp.; 9780719082108, £70.00 (hbk); 9780719082115, £18.99 (pbk)

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British historiography has the great merit of producing numerous sourcebooks, which can be essential tools for other researchers in the field. John Callaghan and Ben Harker's collection is the first such book specifically on the history of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Its intended use as a textbook, the authors' own ideas about CPGB history, the party's own ideology and practice, and its place within British political life and the international communist movement have all helped shape the book's content, structure and selection of documents. These various aspects are considered in an introductory essay, survey pieces in each of its 12 chapters, and more than 150 diverse source documents, mainly from party publications and the archives. They reflect key problems of CPGB history over its 71-year existence, as it responded to socio-economic, political and ideological factors both within Britain and internationally.

The collection is structured both chronologically and thematically. Chapters 1 and 5–8 are devoted to the party's domestic politics. Its basic ideology was derived from Bolshevism, and Chapter 1 contains excerpts from various leading party figures outlining the Leninist conception of imperialism, the nature of a soviet state, and the principles of democratic centralism on which the party was based. Chapter 5 deals mainly with the Communist International's (CI) so-called 'Third Period' (1928–1935), with excerpts from party documents and those of the 6th CI congress (1928) which show that first the CI, then the CPGB began to advocate a policy of 'class against class', which led the party into 'ultra-left isolationism' (107). The Popular Front period (1935–1939) is the subject of Chapter 6, in which, following Hitler's rise to power, an anti-fascist front was created. It embraced the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Socialist League and left-wing groups within the Labour Party, but the leading role was played by the CPGB, which strengthened its position within the labour movement. This chapter contains excerpts from CI secretary Georgi Dimitrov's report to the 7th CI congress (1935), as well as articles by R. Palme Dutt and John Strachey. Chapter 7 looks at the CPGB's political line between 1939 and 1947. Up to the German-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939, the CPGB had supported an anti-Hitler coalition of Britain, France and the USSR, and a struggle on two fronts against the Men of Munich and fascism. After war had broken out and the CI