

che hanno spinto l'autore a presentare al pubblico contemporaneo un'antologia di biografie di caduti della Resistenza. In un momento in cui la Resistenza ed i valori che rappresenta sono sottoposti alle critiche di un revisionismo storico a volte troppo distratto e contingente, mi sarebbe piaciuto conoscere quali legami sussistono tra la ricerca dell'autore ed il nuovo clima storico-politico maturato in questi ultimi quindici anni, legami che qui appaiono solo accennati. Ma la lettura del libro di Perry risulta, nondimeno, ben documentata, ricca di spunti interessanti a cui non manca anche qualche nota decisamente commovente.

Giuseppe Tosi, *Georgetown University*

Robert A. Ventresca. *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. Pp. 354.

This book on the Italian election of April 1948 is intended not simply as a "political history of an essentially political event," but as an "attempt at an *histoire totale* of the period" (22). Noting that there is "no single comprehensive scholarly study" of the first parliamentary elections of the new Republic, Ventresca seeks to fill a "conspicuous hole in the literature on Italy's transition to democracy after the Second World War" (7). His account is both wide-ranging and critical of the "conventional explanation" tendered by academics and members of the "vanquished" left alike. This explanation he characterizes as "Vatican intervention, plus U.S. intervention, plus events in Eastern Europe, plus the Cold War, equals 18 April 1948 in Italy" (10) and faults it for making no room for the agency of voters (11).

Although Ventresca considers all of these topics in turn, following Marc Bloch, Carlo Ginzburg, and Mario Isnenghi, he takes a cultural turn, a move that affords him an important methodological optic to study the problem of agency: "A central premise of this book is that an election is a discrete event; a cultural artefact of sorts" (12). Because "an election campaign is no more detached from society than are the social, cultural, and economic forces that define the daily lives of its citizens," it can be viewed "as much a reflection of all of these realities as it is a determining influence" (13). Importantly, "in a democracy, an election is, at heart, a form of societal self-expression," and it "can act as a lightening rod for the deep-seated tendencies and contradictions of the present" and the "unresolved struggles" of the past (13). Arguably, this is Ventresca's finest insight, for it directs his gaze to areas often overlooked by students of politics as ostensibly "non-political." By connecting present and past struggles, he shows how certain discursive and symbolic themes — e.g., the confrontation between the temporal and spiritual — were refashioned in politically compelling ways. As he later argues, "the political struggle for power in the 1948 election campaign became a struggle over history" (199) and Italians' interpretation of their place within it.

Much of Ventresca's narrative is already familiar. Laying no claim to originality on this level, following Bloch, he aims more modestly to "enrich our 'picture of the past'" (13) — and this he does admirably well. To this end, Ventresca combines a judicious synthesis of the secondary literature with a perceptive use of primary source materials to produce a vivid account of the election period. Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of the short-lived experiments in democratic cooperation after the fall of fascism in 1943. Chapter 2 details how, with the increasing polarization between the Christian Democrats and the left-wing parties of the Popular Front, democracy's self-proclaimed defenders in

Washington took drastic measures to influence overtly and covertly the election. However, Ventresca argues, U.S. efforts to determine the election outcome through ideological and material coercion ultimately made little difference in Italians’ political affiliations and electoral choices.

With regard to mobilization, both the left and right took a Tocquevillian tack: they formed organizations to get the vote out in capillary fashion. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the challenge for each to energize their respective bases and to appeal to uncommitted voters. Education and propaganda were vital, and in the case of the PCI, the imperative to both solidify support and attract voters gave rise to its famous *doppiezza*, a problematic strategy that combined (worrisome) talk of revolution with a commitment to parliamentary democracy. Catholics, for their part, mobilized voters with an “alarmist” crusade to defend the “City of God” from the presumed threat of revolutionary and godless communism, a message carried far and wide via the Civic Committees. While street violence and worries about insurrection made public order a pressing problem (prompting authorities to take some repressive measures), as chapter 7 shows, fear did not impede Italians from voting in large numbers.

Chapters 3 and 6, on popular religiosity and political propaganda respectively, augment the focus on organization and tactics to show how the electoral struggles were meaningfully linked with discourses, symbols, and cultural practices of the past. Catholic efforts to mobilize voters, for example, were in part successful because they were able to graft a political message onto long-standing devotional practices, such as processions in honor of the Virgin Mary. If the “Virgin carried with her, as in centuries past, the promise of eternal salvation of souls,” in the “context of the pending national vote, she could also be seen as the portent of an uncertain future and a warning sign of celestial displeasure with the prospect of a communist Italy” (105). A section on religious apparitions (117-28) is particularly interesting, for it identifies forms of Marian devotion that were not orchestrated by party or Church. This “miracle boom,” he contends, was a response to the anxiety produced by current or looming social, economic, and political changes. Although Ventresca does not spell it out, such meaning-making activity constitutes an implicit critique of interpretations that would cast such apparitions as part of the Church’s effort to establish ideological hegemony from without.

While implicitly critical of notions of hegemony, Ventresca has little explicitly to say about cultural theory more generally. Despite talk of cultural analysis and frequent references to Tocqueville, there is no discussion — not even an appropriately critical one — of Robert Putnam and the extensive literature on civic culture. Although his reluctance to muddy a lucid narrative with a theoretical digression into what may ultimately be a passing fad of another discipline is understandable, Ventresca missed a golden opportunity to prompt interdisciplinary discussion: the brand of hermeneutically informed history that he practices might have been framed as an alternative to the empiricist approach to culture so prevalent in the social sciences. And the *Annales*’s concern with the *longue durée*, which Ventresca to some extent shares, might have been developed as a counterpoint to Putnam’s path-dependent explanations that deterministically trace long-term developments back to the mists of medieval time.

In this regard, despite his appreciation for Bloch, who was indebted to Durkheim, Ventresca curiously does not engage recent work in cultural sociology, such as the efforts of Jeffrey C. Alexander and others to develop a “Durkheimian sociology” that takes matters of ritual, symbol, and the “sacred and profane” seriously — issues broached in

Ventresca's own discussions of Marian devotion and the propaganda war. Indeed, Ventresca's contention that "what looked like a mortal struggle between sworn enemies was [...] more so in appearance than in reality" (269) could have been more fully developed by connecting it to an important Durkheimian theme, namely, that pitched struggles over the sacred and profane often belie more fundamental agreement on a society's centrally held values. This is not to advocate theory for theory's sake, but to suggest that a more theoretically conscious approach to culture has much to offer, as the work of other historians of Italy, such as David Kertzer, Edward Muir, and Peter Burke, demonstrates. For while Ventresca weaves cultural concerns into his narrative, he does not always convincingly portray why, for example, Marian devotion was so "spontaneous and genuine" (136) to the participants involved. At the very least, more "thick description" would have been useful to unravel its "political logic." If theoretically embryonic, Ventresca's book nonetheless has much to recommend it and could conceivably form the centerpiece — *malgré lui* — of a renewed interdisciplinary dialogue that seeks to go beyond the problematic approaches advocated by the epigones of "civic culture" and Gramscian hegemony alike.

Aaron Thomas, *University of California, Los Angeles*

Karen Pinkus. *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Papparazzi in Fellini's Rome*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. Pp. 157.

When I told my middle-aged Italian mother that I was reading and reviewing an American book about the Montesi scandal, her immediate response was: "Un libro sul caso Montesi? Un libro americano? Ma cosa vuoi che interessi agli americani la storia di Wilma Montesi?!" Her response certainly makes sense: Why would Americans today be interested in the story of an average young woman — "Anygirl," "una ragazza qualunque," is the expression the author of this book, Karen Pinkus, is fond of using — who died mysteriously by the sea near Rome in 1953, over fifty years ago?! Many other young women have died mysteriously the world over since then; many continue to die now. Why would we want to know an entire book's worth about this particular one? Pinkus believes, and her book persuades us, that Wilma Montesi's death and the ensuing events ("il caso Montesi," as it quickly came to be known) can help us to learn more, not only about Rome in the 1950s and since — the Rome of the *ricostruzione*, of Fellini, of the meddlesome photographers since known as *papparazzi* — but also it can more generally instruct us about the close and problematic interactions between reality and the media, photography and its subjects, cinema and life, and, ultimately, representation and existence itself.

The facts, if they can be called that, are the following. Wilma Montesi, the twenty-one-year-old daughter of a lower-middle-class carpenter, disappears from her house in the center of Rome one April afternoon in 1953. Her dead body is found a day later, washed up on the beach at Torvaianica near Rome; she is fully clothed except for a garter belt, shoes, and stockings, all of which are missing. Rumors and investigations begin almost immediately. Is her drowning accidental (her family will insist for years that Wilma was only taking a footbath, and drowned in ankle-deep water?!), suicidal (but Wilma had no known reason to desire death), or an act of murder, and in this case, who