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Euridice: Momenti dell'Umanesimo civile fiorentino (review)

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Renaissance Quarterly, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 137-138
(Review)

Published by Renaissance Society of America



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chapters and the book would have benefited enormously from a more focused introduction. This is a book which is to be consulted on particular issues rather than read from beginning to end.

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Gaspare De Caro. *Euridice: Momenti dell'Umanesimo civile fiorentino*.

Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2006. 252 pp. index. €30. ISBN: 88-8109-456-8.

Since it was codified and propagated by Hans Baron in the 1950s, the notion of Florentine civic humanism has been the subject of many scholarly studies on Renaissance Florence. De Caro's *Euridice*, which consists of articles he published between 2000 and 2004, constitutes yet another appraisal of this aspect of Florentine culture. Though De Caro finds Baron's premises of Florentine civic humanism flawed, he nevertheless considers Baron's insistence on the strictly Florentine nature of this cultural phenomenon historiographically relevant. According to De Caro, the merits of civic humanism lie in its rediscovery of, and allegiance to, classical culture, its critical inquiry and philological pursuits, its rational and secular orientation, and its privileging of the *vita activa* over the *vita contemplativa*. However, these cultural attributes were due not to the struggle between Florentine *libertas* and Viscontean tyranny, as Baron argues, but to a *forma mentis* peculiar to Quattrocento Florence. Moreover, Florentine civic humanism was not predominantly egalitarian, as Baron maintains. The masses were forever disenfranchised; nevertheless, a sort of egalitarianism did prevail within the oligarchic system of Florentine society (*repubblica oligarchica*). While the oligarchs' access to political power was mostly a mirage, their hoping for such an access, as one learns from Leonardo Bruni, rendered them proud of the noble principles of Florentine civic humanism. Indeed, contrary to the view of most modern historians, the ideals of civic humanism did not die with the advent and consolidation of the absolutism of the Medici. Rather they were continued by the Florentine patriciate up to the very end of the Cinquecento. To understand this continuity, one must bear in mind the contentiousness (*conflittualità*) that characterized the intellectual life of Medicean Florence.

If it is true that Medicean Florence saw the flourishing of the likes of Francesco Giambullare, Lionardo Salviati, and the Accademia Fiorentina — all of whom were hostile to humanistic precepts and supportive, therefore, of the absolutism of the Medici — it is also true that this historical period saw the prevalence of intellectuals such as Pier Vettori, Ottavio Rinuccini, and Jacopo Corsi, as well as the Accademia degli Alterati, all adherers to the ideals of civic humanism, which they labored valiantly to emulate and preserve. Indeed, it is because of them that humanistic precepts continued to influence the literary as well as the scientific and artistic pursuits of the Cinquecento. De Caro takes issue with those scholars who argue that humanism was devoid of any scientific proclivity. Given its strong

rational and secular orientation, Florentine civic humanism provided the impulse and the method for the scientific investigation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Likewise, De Caro disputes the common assumption that civic humanism was predominantly a literary movement. The tenets of the humanistic culture of Florence significantly influenced the great artists of this venerable city. They were certainly fundamental in the birth of the opera, as attested to by the conceptualization and staging of the *Euridice*. Much of De Caro's work addresses the humanistic and historical facets of this opera, such as the humanism of its *dramatis personae*, the sociopolitical milieu in which it was conceived, and its political symbolism. The assessment of the political symbolism is elucidated by references to Rinuccini's political poems, which De Caro includes in an appendix to the work.

De Caro tends to privilege the civic humanism of Florence *vis-à-vis* other humanistic centers of Italy. The rationalism and the critical inquiry together with the rejection of the Gothic and the impulse for scientific investigation that he attributes entirely to Florentine humanists actually were common to other Italian humanists as well (Valla, Biondo, and Ermolao Barbaro, for example). At times he tends to read too much into the imagery of the *Euridice*. Nevertheless, his work is, on the whole, illuminating and thought-provoking. He gives a fresh interpretation of Florentine civic humanism, which sheds much light on the culture of Quattrocento as well as Cinquecento Florence and which demonstrates successfully that the humanistic ideals of the former persisted in the latter. His assessment of the *Euridice* and of the origin of the opera in general is equally novel and engaging. He argues, for example, that the origin of the opera was due not to the debates of the Camerata dei Bardi but to a rethinking of Aristotle's *Poetics* among the members of the Accademia degli Alterati. His argument is deduced from a close reading of primary sources, and it is collated with numerous and varied secondary sources. The result is a work of broad scope and appeal that is of value to the student of humanism, the musicologist, as well as the Renaissance scholar in general.

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Valentina Prosperi. *Di soavi licor gli orli del vaso: La fortuna di Lucrezio dall'Umanesimo alla Controriforma*.

Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2004. vii + 274 pp. index. €14. ISBN: 88-8419-196-3.

Scholars working independently across several disciplines continue to bring to light new indications of the considerable impact of Lucretius's work, both as a poetic model and as a body of philosophical doctrine, in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. Recent work demonstrates that it is no longer possible to assert that the fortune of the poem, since its discovery by Poggio Bracciolini, was largely underground, or that, after an intense campaign of publication around 1500, the