

### Art, Biography, History, Ideas, Society

Edith GARNIER, *L'Alliance impie: François I<sup>er</sup> et Soliman le Magnifique contre Charles Quint, 1529-1547*, Collection "Les marches du temps" (Paris: **Edition du Félin**, 2008), 304pp., ISBN 978-2-86645-678-8, €22.00 (pb).

This engrossing book by the historian Edith Garnier retraces the "impious alliance" between France's king, François I, and the Ottoman sultan, Suleiman I, known as Suleiman the Magnificent in the first decades of the 15th century. François I turned to Suleiman for support against his arch-enemy, Charles V, whose Habsburg empire, encompassing Spain and the Kingdom of Naples as well as the Low Countries, encircled France. When François I's progress in Italy was halted by Charles V, Suleiman was tempted by the French king's offer of an alliance which gave him an opportunity to set foot on the Italian peninsula. The alliance ultimately failed, to the satisfaction of those in the French court who opposed it. Garnier deftly traces the world of intrigue and double-dealing in the various courts and armies and neglects none of the colourful figures of the time (François I's Genoese admiral, Andrea Doria, left him to lead Charles V's fleet, so that he had to fall back on the support of Suleiman's man-at-sea, the pirate Barbarossa). The commercial implications of controlling the Mediterranean's trade routes were one of the key issues of the rivalry between those three larger-than-life rulers and of their fascination with Italy.

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Indira GHOSE, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), viii+230pp., ISBN 978-0-7190-7692-3, £55.00 (hb).

Attitudes to laughter and its significance are culturally conditioned and anthropologists are still unclear as to its origins and meaning. The wide range of modes of, and occasions for, laughter to be found in Shakespeare's works shows that it is a complex, contradictory and indeed serious matter. Medieval Christianity linked laughter with lust, sloth and pride, but also turned to humour to combat terror and the fear of death. Humanism and Neoplatonism were more indulgent: Erasmus and Sir Thomas More, collected jests; Erasmus and Montaigne perceived its ability to hold up a mirror to others but also to ourselves; Ficino was a champion of laughter, advancing that "the heavens created you out of joy" — a notion Beatrice,

in *Much Ado About Nothing*, applies to her own birth, that Ghose fails to note. The scientific concern to understand what triggers off mirth accompanied a move from laughter as an expression of derision to laughter as indicating pleasure. Two main directions may thus be identified in the early Renaissance, which Ghose traces in Shakespeare: a disquieting sense of derision and futility, conducive to darkness rather than lightness of mood; and comic sequences based on wit and verbal humour, with the idea of the wise fool articulated by Erasmus in his book *In Praise of Folly*. To this may be added the communal function of laughter and its aesthetic dimension, at a time when "entertainment takes precedent over didacticism". It is precisely the sense of pleasure associated with the theatre and expressed through laughter that the Puritans reproved and their campaigns against the theatres were bound up with their attacks on gratuitous laughter. In the context of tragedy, Ghose suggests that laughter "articulates the strain of scepticism about a stable worldview that traversed the early modern age and undercut its sense of optimism", intensifying rather than alleviating the sense of doom, as in *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and, she might have added, *Titus Andronicus*, when Titus' "ha, ha, ha" is the only possible response to an accumulation of horrific events. Working from a wide range of Early Modern writings on laughter (from Castiglione's *Courtier* and Erasmus to medical treatises and religious pamphlets), Ghose explores forms of laughter and recreation through figures such as Falstaff and Lear's Fool, as well as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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Clare LAPRAIK GUEST, ed., *Rhetoric, Theatre and the Arts of Design: Essays presented to Roy Eriksen* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2008), 416pp., ISBN 978-82-7099-496-0, NOK 385.00 (€43.00) (hb).

(Contents. Part I. Figural texts, textual figures — literature and the visual arts. William Wallace: *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto*. Paul Barolsky: Michelangelo and the Poetry of Vision in Italian Renaissance Art. Frida Forsgren: A Bowl of Porridge and Renaissance aesthetics: Guido Mazzoni's *Modena Nativity* and the Gruel Sister. Kristine Kolrud: Titian's *Allegory of the Victory of Lepanto* and Habsburg Family Portraiture. Lasse Hodne: Faces of Time: Allegories of Change and Fortune in Petrarch's *Trionfi* and their Illustrations. Jahn Thon: *Speculum Boreale*: The Joy of Mirrors and the Triumph of Paratexts. Victor Plahte Tschudi: Serlio and Sabbioneta: A City built of Prints. Clare Lapraik Guest: Figural Cities: Brunni's *Laudatio*