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Nevertheless, given the scale of the task Davies has taken on here, and the impossibility of comprehensive coverage, he has done an excellent job and set a high standard for this series.

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Michael Plaisance, *Florence in the Time of the Medici: Public Celebrations, Politics, and Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, trans. and ed. by Nicole Carew-Reid (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008). ISBN-13: 9780772720368, 220 pp., $29.50, £16.76.

A prolific French scholar of Italian Renaissance literature and society, Michael Plaisance has published numerous monographs, essays, and critical editions in French and Italian over the past three decades. This volume makes available for the first time a selection of his articles to the English reading public. In the introduction, Plaisance describes the three scholarly interests represented in this collection as follows: 'research on theater and performing arts in Florence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, research on cultural life and institutions and research on Italian literature of the Renaissance' (p. 9) Of the eight chapters that compose the book, seven focus on Florence and one (Chapter 8) includes material by non-Florentine Tuscan writers. Plaisance draws from a broad range of sources (mostly published but some in manuscript form), including epistolary collections, high- and low-brow literature, city chronicles and diaries, and Savonarola's sermons.

One of the most interesting aspects of these essays is that they cross the traditional chronological boundary between the republican and the grand ducal periods of Florentine history. Plaisance is thus able to highlight several continuities and a few changes between the cultural politics of the period of Lorenzo the Magnificent (r. 1469–92) and Cosimo I (r. 1534–74). The first five chapters examine different aspects of the public festivals, ceremonies, and theatrical representations from the 1470s until the 1550s. Carnival is the thread that links these five chapters together, with the feast of Saint John the Baptist, patron of Florence, offering further points of comparison. Lorenzo the Magnificent was proactive in the sponsorship of new forms of entertainment and even wrote songs for Carnival masquerades. After the Medici family became a ruling dynasty with absolutist pretensions, Cosimo I 'kept a close watch on the Carnival programs' (p. 111), as the extensive correspondence between him and his secretaries testifies. He sought, for example, to curb criticism of social hierarchies. In fact, the transition to a more aristocratic society was already visible during the entrance of the

French king Charles VIII in Florence, celebrated on 17 November 1494, when many of the city's most distinguished families dressed in French style. Florentine chronicles also indicate a remarkable continuity between the family names of those enrolled in the companies charged with organizing public festivities before and after 1513.

It will come as no surprise to readers that Savonarola (r. 1494–98) targeted Carnival as a symbol of both moral dissolution and Medicean rule. His austere and theocratic reforms turned children into a primary instrument of social redemption and messengers of God. In practice, this idea meant that children as young as four and five years old appeared in religious ceremonies and were sent off to monitor the conduct of ordinary adults. Plaisance says less about women, the second target of Savonarola's social and moral reforms. So profoundly did the culture of Carnival and public festivals penetrate the everyday life and politics of Renaissance Florence that Savonarola's antagonists also clung onto them as forms of resistance. In 1498, the 'Compagnacci', an anti-Savonarolan party, restored the Carnival brigades.

Chapter 6 examines the impact of the ecclesiastical censorship on Florentine book publishing during and after the Council of Trent (1545–63). Whereas in theory both the bishop and the inquisitor were required to inspect all works before publication, the Medici were able to negotiate modest margins of autonomy. As a result, the inquisitor alone usually gave his approval in Florence. Ecclesiastical censors were required to keep a copy of all the manuscripts that they examined. Few of them survive, but Plaisance examines one preserved in Brussels. He is thus able to restore the authentic text as well as to show all the steps through which censorship impacted upon it before publication. Chapter 7 analyzes the recurrent theme of madness in several short stories and finds it to be both a rhetorical device and an instrument of social exclusion. Chapter 8 recounts the views of city and country dwellers, as well as mountain people, in three Tuscan novelists.

This fine collection will be of interest to historically-minded literary scholars and literary-minded historians, though it will not satisfy those hungry for a theoretical approach. Chapter 7 pays a formal tribute to Foucault but does not engage with his work. The detailed reconstruction of Florentine festivities shuns broader anthropological interpretations of the sort that Richard Trexler and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber pioneered. Historians will be somewhat surprised by the lack of engagement with Lauro Martines and others who have made the relationship between literary and historical sources a staple of Florentine Renaissance historiography. Some

of the original documents published in the appendix raise interesting questions that are not explored in the text. In the buffalo races of 1546, for example, there appeared some '*mori bianchi*' ('white Moors'), '*ethiopi*' ('Ethiopians'), and '*mori bigi*' ('dusky Moors') (pp. 125–26). One wonders who these people really were and what role African and other Mediterranean slaves or free people played in court and city festivals at the time of Cosimo I – a theme that Giovanni Ricci has recently explored with impressive results for the court of Ferrara.[1]

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1 Giovanni Ricci, *Ossessione turca: In una retrovia cristiana dell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), pp. 43-54.