

## Candidates for the 2024 Literary Prize

*House of lilies, the dynasty that made medieval France*, by Justine Firnhaber-Baker. Allen Lane. xxix, 409pp. £30.

A history of the Capetian dynasty from its beginnings in 987 when Hugh Capet ruled a small realm in the Ile de France, centred on Paris, to the death of Charles IV, the last in the direct Capetian line, in 1328. In this time through careful marriage and political alliances and also frequent warfare the dynasty came to rule directly a large part of what is now modern France and raised it to the greatest power in Europe, raising Paris from a small town to a great city – an intellectual and cultural powerhouse endowed with magnificent buildings such as the Sainte Chapelle.

*Va-Va voom: the modern history of French football*, by Tom Williams. Bloomsbury Sport. £20. xix,268pp.

The story of the rise and rise of French football in the past 40 years, from ‘losing beautifully’ to ‘winning ugly’, written by a sports journalist.

*Catherine de’ Medici: the life and times of the serpent queen*, by Mary Hollingsworth. Head of Zeus. £30. xxxii,448pp.

The author is a scholar of the Italian Renaissance and this informs her view of Marie de’ Medici as an Italian Renaissance princess brought by marriage into the snakepit of French religious and political clashes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Contrary to the depiction of Marie by many in her time and since as a scheming and murderous spendthrift and the instigator of the St Batholomew’s Eve massacre the author presents her as one who tried to find a way for Catholics and Protestants to coexist in peace and whose patronage of architects, artists and musicians – natural to a Medici - brought a lasting splendour to the French court.

*In pursuit of love: the search for Victor Hugo’s daughter*, by Mark Bostridge. Bloomsbury Continuum. £20. 277pp.

The author relates vividly a fascinating true story as dramatic and strange as any fiction written by Victor Hugo, the subject’s father – the *amour fou* of Hugo’s younger daughter Adele for what seems to have been a very ordinary young British officer called Albert Pinson. After their initial relationship cooled she

pursued him in vain to his postings in the British Empire, first to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and then to Bridgetown, Barbados, where she ended up in rags on the street. In a final twist to the story a local woman, a former slave, took pity on her and brought her back to Paris where she spent the rest of her long life in mental institutions, outliving the rest of her family and dying a rich woman from the royalties from her father's books.

*Amuse bouche: how to eat your way round France*, by Carolyn Boyd. Profile Books. Profile Books. £18.99. 362pp.

A guide to French cuisine, region by region, describing the local specialities town by town, often giving the history as well as the current composition of the dish concerned. Includes some recipes and restaurant and shop recommendations, but not in the manner of a Michelin guide.

*Impossible city: Paris in the twenty-first century*, by Simon Kuper. Profile Books. £18.99. xi, 259pp.

The author is a British journalist long resident in Paris; in this book he describes how Paris has greatly changed in the past twenty years – for example in the greater integration of the suburbs with the city within the *peripherique* as the gentrification of the inner city has driven out many of the poorer and even the middle classes – and yet how much has stayed the same, not least the virtual monopolisation of the circles of power by the old elites and their methods of self-renewal.

*Olivier Messiaen: a critical biography*, by Robert Sholl. Reaktion Books. £25. 255pp.

A biography of the composer dealing with his life, career and thought, including such aspects as his Catholicism, his engagement with birdsong and his influence on his contemporaries and students.

*The troubadors*, by Linda M. Paterson. Reaktion Books. £16.95. 256pp.

After a general introduction to the world of the troubadors, centred on Occitania (the south and south west of what is now France) but whose influence spread wider, the author discusses the life, career and poetry of nine individual troubadors, with close analysis of the structures and texts (in the original *langue d'oc* and in English translation) of their works.

*Henry V: the astonishing rise of England's greatest warrior king*, by Dan Jones. Head of Zeus. £ 25. xiii,450pp.

Written in a lively style by an enthusiastic admirer of its subject, this book is divided into two parts: the first covers Henry's life as Prince of Wales – the roistering Prince Hal as famously depicted by Shakespeare - and the second covers his reign as King Henry V – even more famously depicted by Shakespeare - in which he invaded France to enforce his somewhat dubious claim to the French throne, won his famous victories, married Catherine de Valois and arranged for his son to be crowned King of France.

*Giacometti in Paris*, by Michael Peppiatt. Bloomsbury. £12.99. 369pp.

A portrait of the life and work of Alberto Giacometti in Paris, where he spent his entire creative life except for a return to his native Switzerland from 1942 to 1945 during the German Occupation. The author paints a vivid picture of the lively artistic and intellectual life of Paris during this period; Giacometti came to know many of its leading figures during his time there.

*Wild thing: the life of Paul Gauguin*, by Sue Prideaux. Faber. £30. xiv,399pp.

A lively account of the life, times and art of Gauguin which sets out to analyse and appreciate his art as it developed and also dismantle some of the slanderous myths about his life. The author asks us to judge him by the standards of his time rather than by the more 'woke' standards of ours, but without entirely brushing over the more rebarbative aspects of his character and behaviour.

*Paris '44: the shame and the glory*, by Patrick Bishop. Viking. £25. xxi,374pp.

Despite the date in the title this vividly-written book begins with the German occupation of Paris in 1940 and gathers increasing pace and detail as the action reaches the struggle to liberate Paris by the Resistance within the city and the Allied forces approaching from without. The muddle and political infighting between the liberators are lucidly described; the final chapters cover the retribution wrought on (some of) the collaborators and the subsequent careers of some of the liberators.

*Paris in ruins: the siege, the Commune and the birth of Impressionism*, by Sebastian Smee. OneWorld. £25. xi, 370pp.

A book which intertwines the history of the 'Terrible year' of 1870-1871, which saw the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the end of the Third Empire, the siege of Paris and the Commune, with the history of the development of Impressionism. The book describes the new developments in art in the new Third Republic and lays special emphasis on the relation between Edouard Manet and Berthe Morisot.