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Tales of Vice and Virtue: The First Old French 'Vie des
Pères' (review)

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REVIEWS

Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the 'Chanson de Geste'. By FINN E. SINCLAIR.
Oxford, Peter Lang, 2003. 292 pp. Pb £34.00.

Finn Sinclair has taken as her starting point the writings of Kristeva, Irigaray and Lacan, which she then applies to several epics, in particular *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Berte as grans pies*, *Aye d'Avignon*, *Ami et Amile*, *La Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, *Parise la Duchesse* and the Provençal epic *Daurel et Beton*. Her interest lies in the symbolism of two liquids associated with women, milk, which nourishes the infant — in these cases always male — and blood, which is significant in two ways, the blood line descending through the mother and menstrual blood. Her interpretation of the significance of milk works particularly well in the case of *Daurel*, where the lactating Aisilneta is tortured to make her reveal the whereabouts of Boves's son and heir and the milk and blood spurt from her breasts under the torture. This was one of the most interesting parts of the book as Sinclair's analysis of the relationship between Boves and Gui is thorough and convincing and brings out clearly the extent to which women were subordinate to and ignored by the men in their families. She seems to underplay the role of Beatris in *Raoul de Cambrai*, however, who is surely one of the few women in epic to carve a distinctive role for herself, perhaps because of the obvious influence of romance on this section of the poem. Sinclair considers that epic affords a greater role to mothers than romance (p. 67), which is perhaps rather sweeping, and she also argues that 'roles open to female characters in the *chanson de geste* have long been recognised as more varied and nuanced than those of other genres', which could also be contested. The comparison of Parise with the Virgin seems rather forced. It is a pity that she does not translate her German quotations, and there is one misprint 'whom she knows is a murderous traitor' (p. 245). Those familiar with the writings of Kristeva and Lacan will probably find this book very much to their taste. Those who are less familiar with them or undergraduates may well find the more theoretical parts of the text very heavy going, which would be a pity as the analysis of the actual poems is always challenging and worth reading.

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Tales of Vice and Virtue: The First Old French 'Vie des Pères'. By ADRIAN TUDOR.
(Faux titre, 253). Amsterdam — New York, Rodopi, 2005. 612 pp. Hb
\$169.00; €125.00.

This is a study of the so-called 'first' *Vie des pères*, a collection of forty-one pious narratives, amounting to some 20,000 lines dating from c. 1215–1230, which have previously attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention. Lecoy's edition (SATF) does not present the tales in the order that some scholars consider to be authentic and Tudor further compounds the problem by inventing, for the purpose of his presentation, a somewhat factitious order of his own, according

to the Ten Commandments, the Deadly Sins and the Cardinal Virtues. The case for the unity of the first *Vie* is not well made and, indeed, contains some puzzling contradictions, as does Tudor's estimate of the literary value of the collection. The critical method adopted is a relentless trawl through the texts, beginning with résumés. Almost nothing is left out and the pace is laboriously discursive. No stone is left unturned, but too often there is nothing underneath. The critical landscape seems like an unending plain, quite without the relief of contrasting features or varied landmarks. The author has no sense of economy: every point is made at length, although the style sometimes borders on the informal. Even more dispiriting is the fact that the book is strewn with misprints, particularly in quotations from the *Vie* and in line references, almost half of which are wrong. But no part of the book is immune to creeping inaccuracy, whether it be word-processing mishaps (for instance, p. 106, n. 82), misdatings, or typographical errors. Bibliographically, the author is pleasingly and usefully up-to-date, but he seems to have profited little from all the works he cites. It is to be feared that the same will apply to his readers. To read over 600 pages without so much as the help of an index may seem less inviting than simply reading the original 20,000 lines of octosyllabic couplets and making notes of what is of interest. The *Vie des pères* deserves a critical introduction, but one that is economical, incisive and astute. The author of the present study knows the texts intimately, and the wealth of information might have made the book a useful work of reference, if only an index had been supplied. As it stands it seems ill-conceived.

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Les Mystères dans les provinces françaises: en Savoie et en Poitou, à Amiens et à Reims.

By GRAHAM A. RUNNALLS. (Bibliothèque du XV^e siècle, 66). Paris, Champion, 2003. 311 pp. Hb €55.00.

Since the work of Petit de Julleville in the 1880s, no-one has contributed more to the study of medieval French theatre history than Graham Runnalls. Over the last thirty years, his editions of plays have greatly expanded the corpus of early French theatre available to researchers. More recently, his studies of manuscript typology and printing practices have enabled critics to view that corpus in a fuller historical context. Moreover, his editions of archival materials relating to the production and staging of the great mystery plays have shed new light on all aspects of that complex process. The volume under review combines Runnalls's long experience in all these domains, resulting in an exceptionally rich collection of historical and textual materials. Framed by a prologue and an epilogue, the work is comprised of six 'études', which can be read in succession or independently with full comprehension. The first three studies concern the region of Savoy, where mystery plays were staged as late as the eighteenth century. The chapters deal with a group of Savoyard plays and documents collected in the nineteenth century by a native of that region, but which were presumably lost after his death. Having recently been rediscovered, however, these texts are now described in detail by Runnalls. They include not only the unique *Mystère de l'Antéchrist*, but also two reworkings of Jean Michel's *Passion*, which contain several original scenes written by the revisers. Runnalls