



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Les Mystères dans les provinces françaises: en Savoie et  
en Poitou, ã Amiens et ã Reims (review)

Alan E. Knight

French Studies: A Quarterly Review, Volume 60, Number 3, July 2006, pp.  
378-379 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/208197>

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.

TONY HUNT

ST PETER'S COLLEGE, OXFORD

doi:10.1093/fs/knl082

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

By GRAHAM A. RUNNALLS. (Bibliothèque du XV<sup>e</sup> 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

includes these in his second study. Among the Savoyard documents is the *Registre* of the *Passion* staged in Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne in 1573. It is a detailed record of all the preparations made for that play during each phase of the production. Only four other *Registres* are known to have survived, which makes Runnalls's publication of this document an extremely valuable contribution to the study of late medieval theatre. The fourth 'étude' brings together all known archival references to mystery plays in the province of Poitou, as well as all such references in the works of Jean Bouchet, who was an enthusiastic promoter of theatre in Poitou in the early sixteenth century. The fifth essay concerns the *Passion* staged in Amiens in 1500. It has long been known that the city of Mons borrowed that play from Amiens to stage their own *Passion* in 1501, but no-one before now has thoroughly examined the records of the Amiens production. This study, which is an example of archival research at its best, gives us a much fuller picture of the play and its staging. The final study deals with the *Passion* staged in Reims in 1490 and extracts what can be learned about that event from the memoirs of Jean Foulquart. Runnalls here provides us with many previously unedited documents that greatly enrich our knowledge of mystery play production in France. Although the documents contain a profusion of details, Runnalls admits that sometimes 'leur interprétation pose de nombreux problèmes' (p. 147). Throughout the book, however, his interpretations of the archival material seem always to be justified and wholly reliable.

ALAN E. KNIGHT

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

doi:10.1093/fs/knl038

*La Renaissance et la nuit*. By DANIEL MÉNAGER. Geneva, Droz, 2005. 270 pp. Pb SFr 80.00.

In this stimulating volume, Ménager applies his vast erudition to a topic clearly under-researched heretofore. When considering his period and theme, night's negative connotations (fear and danger) must be set against its positive associations: starlight and moonlight redeem it in a wide range of contexts (including scientific astronomy) and it is also a time for rest and lovemaking. Moreover one should not simply equate night with darkness. During the Crucifixion the sun was obscured, but in daytime. Conversely, the nativity occurred on a starlit night. Genesis is also revisited in order to dissociate night (created by God on the fourth day) from *l'obscurité primordiale*, whereas classical antiquity, particularly Hesiod, is less approving, which hostility is reinforced by Renaissance humanists, Ficino in particular, given the prestige they afforded the Sun. In response, Ménager emancipates *la nuit*, a feminine time (p. 82), using a broad variety of materials drawn from philosophy, science, literature, fine art and theology. Although the least perfect of the stars, the Moon is an essential counterpart to the Sun. Traditionally infected by temptation, the hours of darkness can also lead one closer to God, for instance via a contemplation of the Agony, the Christian's tragic night par excellence. Although for some night was a time of melancholia inimical to useful study, others, including Erasmus and Aneau, favoured the midnight oil as endorsed by the emblematic figure of the owl and the *in nocte consilium* topos. In the former connection, Dürer's *Melencolia* is subjected to a deep analysis whose (laudable) aim is to refute superficial appearances: is it not less a