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Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the 'Chanson de Geste' (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 Aisilinetta 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