Christi plays evidenced in other northern cities: Durham, for example, enjoyed a proven tradition of guild-produced plays associated with its Corpus Christi festival. Whilst there is passing acknowledgement of the wider heritage in the introduction, the suggestion that York and Chester were ‘exceptional’ in having ‘developed civic performance and scripted biblical drama for the occasion of Corpus Christi’ (p. 4) is an unfortunate oversight.

Overall, however, Rice and Pappano’s *The Civic Cycles* is a remarkable study which makes an important contribution to the body of historicist criticism of early English civic drama. Both its approach and argument are very effective, and it is certain to become required reading for scholars of early English drama.

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Alain Corbellari’s book comprises ten chapters (plus an introduction and a conclusion), nine of which were previously published in some form as separate articles (the exception being chapter 4, ‘Transmissions’). Corbellari focuses mainly on fabliaux but he also reflects on the diffusion and evolution of short narratives from the Middle Ages to today and, as such, includes other texts too (e.g. *lais*, *exempla*), some of which are not medieval (e.g. in chapter 2, the avatars of the ‘eaten heart’ motive in the writings of Barbey d’Aurevilly and Léon Bloy). In order to understand the essence of what fabliaux are, Corbellari discusses a variety of issues such as the question of narrative archetypes and their links to exemplarity or humour, the fabliaux’s use (or non-use) of *merveilleux*, dream, wordplay (*calembour*), and monologues, as well as their deep relationship with feigned naivety and fraud. At the core of Corbellari’s view of fabliaux are two strong ideas. First, Corbellari ingeniously anchors the fabliaux in the traditions of urban legends and the retelling of anecdotes, be they jokes or *faits divers*. Second, he refuses to characterize fabliaux as a realistic genre, or to define them as essentially humorous. He prefers instead to see them as ‘machines de guerre, *en actes autant sinon plus qu’en paroles*, contre l’idéalisme majoritaire de la littérature de leur temps’ (p. 19). Corbellari thus foregrounds the materialism of the fabliaux as opposed to the idealism of their time. ‘Materialism’ here should be understood both in terms of bodily needs and appetites and immediate satisfaction as well as in terms of intellectual trend towards rationalism (‘une littérature comique essentiellement sceptique et démythifiante’, p. 66). This collection of elegantly written articles is both interesting and extremely enjoyable to read but the
overall consistency of the book and even the internal coherence of the chapters are not always clearly visible. The conclusion however is both concise and very measured, offering the reader a complex and nuanced view of fabliaux as a genre to be studied and enjoyed.

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Sacred Fictions of Medieval France is the product of long-term research in the field of the literary treatment of Christ’s and the Virgin’s lives written in medieval French and Occitan. Boulton provides both a critical study and a documentary assessment of this diverse body of texts, often neglected by scholars (although important contributions, such those by Geneviève Hasenohr, had already paved the way for investigation on some aspects).

The sacred biography was cultivated by medieval French writers according to a variety of stylistic options and textual functions. Each chapter of this book illustrates a way of retelling either the whole account or selected episodes: early compositions in octosyllabic couplets (ch. 1); compositions in laisses redacted in France and, later, in Italy (ch. 2); the allegorical treatment of Christ’s life in French and Occitan works (ch. 3); the inclusion of sacred biography in prose chronicles (ch. 4); the fifteenth-century text conceived as a textual guide for structured meditation (ch. 5); finally, the persistence of earlier textual traditions into the age of printing (‘Epilogue’). The texts analysed by Boulton include Wace’s Conception Nostre Dame, the Roman de Fanuel, the Christological sections of Matfrè Ermengaud’s Breviari d’Amor, the allegorical Pèlerinages by Guillaume de Digulleville, Jean Mansel’s Fleur des histoires, Jean Gerson’s sermon on the Passion, Christine de Pizan’s Heures de contemplacion sur la Passion, and the French adaptation of the Meditationes vitae Christi by the pseudo-Bonaventure. For each work, Boulton’s close reading examines the author’s stylistic and interpretative choices and illuminates the social implications of such narratives as tools of dissemination and models for religious reflection.

This research, remarkable for its scope and accuracy, is based on extensive knowledge of the manuscript tradition of each text, examined in dedicated sections of the book. Different manuscript versions of the same work are analysed and interpreted. Moreover, the witnesses are examined in their material aspects (with particular attention to illuminations), under the lens of their ownership.