

**UCLA**

**Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies**

**Title**

The St. Gall Passion Play (review)

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5fh1b8zs>

**Journal**

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 9(1)

**ISSN**

0069-6412

**Author**

Fuller, Susan D.

**Publication Date**

1978-10-01

Peer reviewed

Janissary was "very likely a person of low intellectual caliber" (p. 38). But in calculating the loss to the Greek people when the children were stolen for the corps he says that they were "the most sound of mind and body" (p. 42). Also, in discussing Orthodoxy he states that the sense of being Christian blotted out the sense of nationalism among the peoples of the Balkans (p. 127). He neglects to point out, however, the serious struggles that existed between Slavic and Greek Orthodoxy for control of the local churches, a struggle that took on very nationalistic connotations.

The book is, however, an excellent review of the formative stage of the Greek nation. In addition to its clear organization, the book has excellent notes and detailed maps. It also has 48 plates, most of which are prints taken from the works of early travelers. These prints add a charming and evocative touch to this careful look at a sad period in Greek history.

Mark Wojcik  
University of California  
Los Angeles

**Larry E. West**, *The St. Gall Passion Play*, translated with an Introduction and Notes. Brookline, Mass. and Leyden: Classical Folia Editions, 1976. Bibliography. Pp. 126. Paperback, \$11.50.

This English translation of the *St. Galler Passionsspiel* is to be welcomed, both as a sign of renewed interest in the German Passion play and as the first English translation of any German Passion play. As the author rightly notes, scholarly neglect has been unwarranted, since these plays do occupy an important position in the history of medieval German drama. Inasmuch as there are as many theories concerning the origins and development of the Passion play as there are scholars who have examined it, the entire field clearly requires further study. It is doubtless too much to expect that a translation alone could provide the impetus required; but hopefully this translation indicates an awakening of interest in this field.

Mr. West's translation is a good one. The student of comparative literature or theater arts whose German is not fluent will find it a handy aid linguistically, as well as interesting to read. For the Germanist, the actual translation is not very useful. Anyone fluent in modern German could easily read the exceedingly simple language of the text, even without ever having studied Middle High German. Germanists, however, could have trouble reading the play without a knowledge of Latin. The stage directions and the frequent Biblical quotations have been translated by Mr. West. In this respect, then, the translation can also serve students of German.

The style of the English translation is slightly archaic and stilted, but it accords well with the Middle High German text itself, which is written in rather stiff rhymed couplets. Mr. West, however, does us the favor of not trying to reproduce the rhyme in English. His translation is true to the Middle High German text without being too literal or clumsy in English. Compare, for instance, the following:

215           Be quiet, my sister, and let me have my fun.  
              You may well be an old fool.

- But you would too, if you were like me;  
 but you are very unfriendly.  
 Therefore, you feel you must condemn such merriment,  
 220 because no one enjoys your company.
- 215 Swester, swig, la mich gehören  
 du math wol sin ein alte doren,  
 du dedest ez auch, werestu als ich:  
 nu bist du gar vnminnenlich.  
 des mustu ez vngerne lan,  
 220 wan nieman wil bit dir deil han.

More important to the Germanist than the translation itself are the Introduction and Bibliography provided by Mr. West. The Introduction contains an excellent summary of previous research on the origins and development of the Passion play and its relationship to the Easter play. A second section discusses the general development and staging of the Passion play from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. West also provides a catalogue of scenes which commonly occur in most Passion plays. Then he proceeds with a "Survey of Major Passion Plays" which places the St. Gall Passion Play firmly in its context. Eight important Passion plays or groups of plays are treated in this section. It is extremely useful to have sketches of the other major Passion plays readily available for comparison as one reads this drama. A final section of the Introduction is devoted exclusively to the St. Gall Passion play—its editions, the manuscript, the dating and localization of the play, its relationship to other Passion plays, its transitional status in the genre, and its probable staging. A detailed analysis and discussion of the play itself follows. A substantial bibliography for the German Passion play is provided at the end of the book, and a long note on page 9 gives a "representative sampling" of the major research on the Easter play. The notes are quite complete and frequently provide significant bibliographical information on other problems related to the Passion play. All in all, Mr. West's introduction to the German Passion play and his translation of a representative of the genre will be of great benefit to Germanists, comparatists, medievalists, and all who are interested in the history of German drama.

Susan D. Fuller  
 University of California  
 Los Angeles