



Satanic Alchemy: Atrocities Of Gilles de Rais

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The spectre of Gilles de Rais, satanist and child-killer, eclipses French history like a dark star. A fallen general, once the champion of Jeanne d'Arc, de Rais' riches and experimentations led him to the very gates of Hell. The juxtaposition of de Rais' obscene crimes and insidious aristocratic glamour lodges him in our minds as some kind of mediaval Hannibal Lecter, and he is indeed believed to be the inspiration behind Perrault's classic fairytale of the serial wife-killer Bluebeard. SATANIC ALCHEMY is a testament to the enduring legend of Gilles de Rais and his status in the popular imagination as history's first ever Devil-worshipping serial killer. With essays from some of the most fertile imaginations of recent centuries - including J-K Huysmans, Georges Bataille and Valentine Penrose - as well as a complete chronology and register of people and places in de Rais' brief but cataclysmic existence, this book is a rich evocation of the perversely seductive aura, the satanic allure of the most intriguing figure in the annals of mass murder. Parts of this book previously appeared in Dark Star (Creation Books, 2005).

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Satanic Alchemy: Atrocities Of Gilles de Rais From Brand: Sun Vision Press Bibliography

- Rank: #1398060 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Sun Vision Press
- Published on: 2012-10-31
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .50" w x 5.50" l, .65 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 216 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Gilles de Rais - one of the most glorious, sinister, enigmatic figures in all European history." -- Henry Miller

About the Author

Candice Black was born in England and graduated from Warwick University. She specialises in Surrealist studies and history.

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Satanic Alchemy is a testament to the enduring myth of Gilles de Rais and his fantastic, if actually less frightening alter ego, Barbe-Bleue, and the way in which the two have fused in the popular imagination of centuries. The spectre of de Rais/Bluebeard has permeated French (and to a lesser degree pan-European) consciousness to almost as great an extent as that of the Marquis de Sade, to the point where Jules Michelet, in his *History Of The French Revolution*, could declare: "Societies perish under atrocity, the Middle Ages by a Gilles de Retz; the old order by de Sade, high priest of assassins". This fascination applies equally to literature; of the surrealists, Georges Bataille in particular engaged with de Rais, closely examining his case in *The Trial Of Gilles de Rais* (1965), while Antonin Artaud in the first manifesto of his *Theatre Of Cruelty* (1932) saw in a putative reconstruction of the Bluebeard story the chance for a "new notion of eroticism and cruelty". While Bataille's interests remain historical and anthropological, the story of Gilles de Rais has attracted as many novelists as historians, drawn to the mythopoetic aura of this most enigmatic of mass-murderers. The first notable literary advocate of Gilles de Rais remains J-K Huysmans, famous for his novel *A Rebours* and its quintessential decadent, *Des Esseintes*. Huysmans' later novel *La-Bas* (1891), a virtual apology for Satanism, is threaded by a version of the de Rais story as narrated by the book's protagonist, Durtal. Punctuated by the author's own poetic interventions, this account depicts de Rais as an arch-decadent beset by demonic visions and ravaging sexual manias - "the 15th century *Des Esseintes*". The most intriguing entry in *Satanic Alchemy* must be the first ever English translation of Huysmans' pamphlet *La Sorcellerie En Poitou* (also known as *La Magie En Poitou*), published in 1897 in a limited edition for private circulation only. Described by Huysmans as a reductionist, non-fiction version of *La-Bas*, it demonstrates the ongoing fascination exerted by de Rais over the author. *Satanic Alchemy* continues with three more views of de Rais by notable, but very differing, authors: Valentine Penrose, Sabine Baring-Gould, and Georges Bataille. Beautifully translated from the original French by Alexander Trocchi, Valentine Penrose's evocation of the de Rais legend is taken from *The Bloody Countess* (1952), her classic account of Elizabeth Bathory. Pitched as a black satanic fairytale ...

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