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Approaches to Teaching the Middle English by Jane Beal, and
Mark Bradshaw Busbee (review)

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Beal, Jane, and Mark Bradshaw **Busbee**, *Approaches to Teaching the Middle English Pearl* (Approaches to Teaching World Literature), New York, The Modern Language Association of America, 2018; paperback; pp. 262; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$24.00; ISBN 9781603292924.

Approaches to Teaching the Middle English Pearl is a multi-author volume seeking to aid teachers in their instruction of *Pearl*, especially at the undergraduate level. This book fills a much-needed role for educators by consolidating over a hundred years of scholarship and translation concerning *Pearl*. The book is comprised of two sections: ‘Materials’, which gives information and locations for sources, translations, and background material helpful for any educator in providing the necessary framework for the *Pearl*; and ‘Approaches’, which is further broken down into historical, literary and theoretical, comparative, and specific classroom contexts.

The ‘Materials’ section of the book is written by one of the editors, Jane Beal, and provides a great deal of information and resources in print and digital format. One of the most helpful sections provided in the book is an exhaustive list of facsimiles, dual-facing editions, and translations to aid instructors in determining the best text for their students. Beal does an excellent job of introducing each of the modern translations and discussing how they relate and engage in other *Pearl* texts. Additionally, there are lists of many other helpful sources one might want from dissertations to multimedia resources. Beal additionally provides summaries of dating the manuscript, authorship, sources and analogues, and *Pearl*’s place within Christian contemplative devotion. Though a smaller section of the book, it is replete with useful resources for building a syllabus.

Next, the ‘Approaches’ section provides a breadth of methods for instructors to consider in their approach to teaching *Pearl*. Perhaps because the belief is that instructors will look only at their desired approach there is a fair amount of overlap in some articles’ introductions. This section’s organization is superb, however, in facilitating quick access to an instructor’s preferred approach. For instructors looking to teach *Pearl* in a survey course, the comparative approaches chapter, especially, provides excellent ways to connect and consider *Pearl* through other texts. Whether instructors are looking to utilize a common interest in Tolkien to draw students in to the *Pearl* or use *Pearl* to begin instruction in Middle English, there are excellent chapters on how to effectively implement it in a classroom. John M. Bower’s chapter, ‘Teaching *Pearl* when teaching Tolkien’, was particularly helpful in discussing the inspiration for Lothlorien from *Pearl*. This was an interesting approach instead of the traditionally linked texts like *Beowulf* or *Völuspá*. Additionally, the ‘Specific Classroom Contexts’ division gives many unique methods for aiding students in approaching *Pearl*. Whether engaging in the difficulty of translating texts, performing *Pearl*, or addressing genre and gender, this section covers a broad scope.

This book contains nineteen articles, each containing a different approach to teaching the *Pearl*, bookended by an exhaustive resource list at the beginning

and study questions at the end. There are also five black and white plates—four with *Pearl* illuminations and one *incipit* folio. The weakest aspect of this book is the repetition of summary of the *Pearl*'s plot and some tonal differences between the articles, but there is an immense amount of content perfect for any instructor preparing to teach *Pearl*, these minor quibbles aside. While this book is designed for quick reference, there is a lot to be gained for anyone's understanding of *Pearl* and many different ways to continue making this text accessible to students who are new to it or to Middle English.

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Blanton, Virginia, **Veronica O'Mara**, and **Patricia Stoop**, eds, *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue* (Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 28), Turnhout, Brepols, 2017; cloth; pp. lxvi, 502; 21 b/w illustrations, 2 colour plates; R.R.P. €125; ISBN 9782503554112.

This collection of nineteen essays emerged from the Antwerp conference on Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe held in 2013. Preceded by collections of papers given at Hull in 2011 and Kansas in 2012, this final volume is the longest in a series of the same name constituting an ambitious attempt to showcase recent scholarly research on medieval nuns from right across Europe, including the British Isles, and extending from Catalonia up to Scandinavia and down to Hungary. The term 'nun' here includes religious under vows, tertiaries, and even secular canonesses, and the term 'medieval' is equally generous, extending from the eighth to the sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries.

The introduction follows the convention of providing summaries of the papers and also addresses retrospectively ten far-reaching questions about pan-European nuns and their literacies—their relationship to books, to Latin, and to the vernaculars. It eschews, however, any '*grand récit*' (p. lxiii), preferring the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle, some of whose pieces are missing or currently hidden. This initial orientation is particularly useful, as not all readers will approach the individual papers (somewhat arbitrarily distributed among four sections entitled 'Rules and Learning', 'Literacy and Visualization', 'Translating and Rewriting', and 'Exchange and Networks') with equal curiosity or enthusiasm. But where else would the average Anglophone medievalist be able to read about Hungarian nuns and their role in developing vernacular literature (Viktória Hedvig Deák), or the reading of Catalan nuns (Blanca Gari), or the enviable life of the secular canonesses of Sainte-Waudru, who enjoyed all the advantages of convent life with none of the disadvantages (a private income, no vows, a residence requirement of only a few months of the year, and plenty of books) (Anne Jenny-Clark)?

Given the preponderance of medievalists who specialize in England, such potential readers should be aware that post-Conquest English nuns do not compare favourably with their continental sisters. They would make a poor showing indeed here were it not for the Syon Birgittines studied by Ann Hutchison, Mary Erler, and Veronica O'Mara. O'Mara writes on the Birgittine scribe she has now identified