

*Teaching Medieval and Early Modern Cross-Cultural Encounters*. Karina F. Attar and Lynn Shutters, eds.

The New Middle Ages. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xxiv + 254 pp. \$90.

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This ambitious volume addresses the need to rethink how we teach medieval and early modern studies in ways that properly consider the global reality of the periods, thereby pushing back in classroom environments against traditional anglocentric pedagogical assumptions about literary and cultural studies. It comes at a time when more attention is being paid from across humanities disciplines to progressive forms of pedagogy and the idea of research-based and experiential learning. *Teaching Medieval and Early Modern Cross-Cultural Encounters* offers a valuable contribution to this discourse and demonstrates effective ways in which scholars can establish transformative learning environments in interdisciplinary genre and period studies.

The twelve contributed essays offer cogent and straightforward case studies of graduate and undergraduate courses in literature, language and culture, and art history. Some foreground the interdisciplinary nature of the courses, both as explicitly cross-listed offerings and in terms of the approach to subject matter; some recommend new theoretical approaches that will help to reshape course structure; many point to forms of co-teaching that are particularly valuable in presenting such complex and nuanced material. The best of the essays identify, clearly and succinctly, the learning outcomes for individual courses and how the materials covered over the semester need to be managed and sometimes limited to ensure thorough understanding of the course objectives. The less successful essays, while equally informative, suggest that the authors focused on their own research and how it has benefited from pursuing a globally inflected approach rather

than the consideration of how such pursuits should be managed alongside learning goals and the expectations of and for students. It is always exciting to learn about the ways in which scholars find rich and creative ways to bring their own research interests into the classroom, and it is refreshing and admirable that in this volume many of the authors are philosophical about the relative success of their attempts. It is important, too, that so many recognized that the cultural makeup of their classes offered an invaluable opportunity to engage in rich discussions about bias, racism, and xenophobia that have not traditionally been so well managed in these pedagogical areas.

The editors have chosen to situate the volume in a post-9/11 context, even going so far as to include a split image on the cover: one half an etching of a medieval king, the other half a silhouette of a saluting soldier. Some authors appear to struggle with the incorporation of the presentist aspect of the volume: while it is certainly important to find ways to challenge students to think about how traditional relationships between countries and cultures have shaped our world view, this volume does not demonstrate convincingly that the current political and cross-cultural climate somehow makes the study of medieval and early modern subjects more relevant or appealing in the classroom.

The audience for this volume — those who are seeking inspiration for new and more progressive ways to teach the medieval and early modern periods across disciplines — will not be disappointed. They will find rich and diverse approaches that range from the incorporation of a variety of unexpected theoretical frameworks, to ways in which student experience can strengthen classroom discussion, to the importance of thinking through how such rich and complex subject matter can be taught effectively, without putting undo strain on the syllabus, overwhelming the instructor, and/or losing the students' focus. These essays provide valuable signposts forward to those who are eager to refresh their approaches to canonical literary works and to those who hope to challenge themselves in the classroom and invite their students to take part in more sophisticated and nuanced discourse about our subject in order to break misconceptions and reconsider works that might appear stale and yet are always relevant.

DIANE K. JAKACKI, *Bucknell University*