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Review of Jane Bliss, *An Anglo-Norman Reader*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishing, 2018.  
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## Reviews

Jane Bliss, *An Anglo-Norman Reader*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishing, 2018. x + 404 pp. ISBN 9781783743131.

Jane Bliss' *Anglo-Norman Reader* promises 'a new departure in Anthologies, a Reader with a difference' (p. 1), and it does not fail to deliver. The book focuses on the 'importance of readership' (p. 1), both medieval and modern, and organises its collection following the generic criteria established in Ruth Dean's *Anglo-Norman Literature* (1999). Without claiming to be exhaustive, Bliss presents a wide range of literary and non-literary Anglo-Norman texts from across the Middle Ages — covering themes from medieval medicine to murderous monarchs — many of which have not appeared in other anthologies. This structure reflects the frequent 'juxtaposition within manuscripts of courtly and comic, religious and obscene' (pp. 6–7). The book is easily accessible as it can be viewed online for free; it is also possible to download a free XML or PDF version (<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0110>).

Every text comes with an introduction and a facing page translation in English. Though Bliss' translations are not literal, they are close enough to aid those studying the language of the texts, along with the footnotes explaining her translation choices. This volume makes for a fantastic introduction to students reading medieval French for the first time, preparing them for facing translations in modern French editions. The English translations faithfully reproduce the tone of each text in prose and occasionally blank verse, replicating, for example, the difference between the simple past and vivid present tenses. The *Reader* is completely accessible to non-French speakers, who would only need to read the English versions to sense the differing levels of formality in the extracts, for example, 'Listen to me, my lad, if you know what's good for you!' (p. 181). The texts are mainly reproduced from other editions, meaning that there is no standard editorial form, but this poses no problem as it reflects the reality of reading editions of medieval texts — in any case, the translations, all by Bliss, give the volume unity.

The introduction justifies the selection of texts (such as the entirely logical choice to include an account of the Norman Conquest by Wace, a Channel Islander, in the 'History' section) and summarises the themes running through the *Reader*, which are indeed 'common across medieval literature' [...] 'the marvellous, the love (and otherwise) of women, the typical [...] settings for stories, and the significant objects that tend to occur' (p. 11). The first section, 'Story' (pp. 25–165), covers 'History', 'Romance' and 'Short Stories', including the Norman invasion, a romance about giants, a text of Scottish origin, a version of the *Tristan* legend, and

two fabliaux, which illustrate medieval misogynistic humour perfectly. The second part, ‘an Anglo-Norman miscellany’ (pp. 167–253) contains a wide range of texts, ‘[best described] as a collection of moral or social pieces’ (p. 167). The ‘Miscellany’ includes a satire on Arthurian literature, guides to good manners, the medieval equivalent of a French phrasebook, a prescription for gout, and an Anglo-Norman version of Christine de Pizan’s letter to Isabelle of Bavaria.

The final section, ‘Religious Writings’ (pp. 254–371), demonstrates the importance of Christianity in the Middle Ages, reproducing both Biblical and Apocryphal texts. It features glosses on Solomon’s proverbs, three hagiographies by women, a verse homily written for a noblewoman, and a sermon on the *credo* and *pater noster* in Latin and French (accompanied by Middle English versions of these prayers for comparison). An Appendix reconstructs a narrative in twentieth-century Alderney patois, which closely resembles Anglo-Norman, highlighting its modern relevance (pp. 372–7). The bibliography is detailed and the index covers both the language and content of the texts.

The accessible nature of *An Anglo-Norman Reader* makes it ideal for students of both French and History; it would, for example, be a great starting point for a BA or MA dissertation on Anglo-Norman texts or the history of Britain. More advanced researchers will find this book equally informative and engaging; it is both academically rigorous and entertaining, giving great insight into the fascinating world of Anglo-Norman literature.

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