even rely on ‘memorial reconstruction’ to explain them; Chaucer must have had a manuscript of the Decameron. Heffernan next treats Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s anti-fraternal tales. The comedy of Thomas’s fart differs qualitatively from that of Nicholas’s; she says nothing about the difference. The Friar’s captious, malicious humour is something else again; it, like Jankyn’s ‘ars-metrike’, inheres in anti-fraternal satire in ways that, as Heffernan notes, do not operate in Boccaccio, where we laugh at the wit of an Alberto (IV.2) rather than at the parodying of friarly ideals. Cipolla’s inventiveness hilariously undermines one’s confidence in relics; the Pardoner’s corrupts them from within. Is anything about the Pardoner, including his Eucharist joke and his ‘gaude’ (both undiscussed), actually comic? The Pardoner, moreover, is not a friar; what he has to do with anti-fraternalism is never explained.

Heffernan’s most nuanced chapter is her last. She discusses the humour Chaucer added to the Filostrato, chiefly through Pandarus. His manipulations, she suggests, secret doors and such, invoke the fabliaux; that they make us uncomfortable even as they make us laugh is a key element in Chaucer’s transformation of Boccaccio. Heffernan also discusses Troilus’ final laugh; its comedy resides in the removed perspective that permits him to see the folly of human endeavours. That this realization will bring pagan Troilus no comfort when judged by a Christian God qualifies, one imagines, its comedic tenor; Heffernan does not address the issue.

I wish I could report that Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio does its topic justice. Heffernan’s book is under-researched—she cites virtually no Italian scholarship on the novelle and leaves aside pertinent studies on parody and satire in English; she overlooks important Chaucerian criticism as well. Too many passages too frequently repeated also brought frowns where one had hoped to smile.

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Samantha J. Rayner’s monograph explores ideas of kingship in the work of Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the Gawain-poet: the four poets dubbed ‘Ricardian’ by John Burrow on account of certain values and narrative characteristics he thought they shared, and whom Rayner views as similarly united on the subject of kingship. The images she examines are really restricted to those of kingly governance; Rayner is not interested in the trappings and pageantry of monarchy, but in the ethical principles influencing a king’s rule of himself and his people. Gower’s poetry is given the most selective coverage of the four, which may seem a counterintuitive strategy as, as Rayner points out, ‘the most heavily explored theme in all three [of Gower’s major] poems is wise rule’ (p. 5). The other Ricardian poets rarely engage with the theme of kingship explicitly, so her method in their respective chapters relies more on finding out
directions through indirections – for example, by noting the tactical absence of such commentary or extrapolating perspectives on secular kingship from parallels between other ruling agencies in the poems who might be viewed as comparable to kings. She does not discuss the praxis of kingship in the reign of Richard II other than to point to the failures of Richard as an earthly king as the main reason for what she sees as a ‘turning away from the monarch and [a] restating [of] the importance of individual’ (p. 161) in the work of her four poets. The study concludes that, in their own way, they all responded to the instability of the times by transferring images of good governance from the person of a king and projecting them upwards towards God (in whom the attributes of a good ruler are ultimately realized) or outwards towards the individual citizen who is seen as subject to the same demands of self-rule in his or her personal and civic life as kings should be.

Rayner’s exposition of her chosen texts is commendably lucid and intelligent, but the reader may question whether a different focus and methodology would have served her better. While she generally succeeds in convincing us that her poets share a ‘closeness of response’ (p. 161) to kingship, it is hard not to feel that the study loses more than it gains from her decision to omit any detailed discussion of the kind of historical, political, and philosophical sources we might expect it to draw on to illuminate the evidence from the literary texts. In particular, some close comparison of the advice given to rulers in Mirrors for Princes and the principles for ruling the self which she identifies in Ricardian poetry might have strengthened her conclusions overall, and helped further her argument that book VII of the Confessio Amantis may be seen as a new departure for the genre, a literary Mirror directed at the individual rather than a prince. This and the study’s tendency to give exposition at the expense of critical analysis in places may make it more suitable for a student audience and teachers seeking a quick grasp of what it is that Chaucer and his contemporaries say (and do not say) about kingship than for those interested in how this might be understood in the wider context of Ricardian culture. It is to be hoped that Rayner will add to this study along these lines, as she intends to, at a later date.

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Amanda Holton examines those Chaucerian texts ‘with sustained narrative sources’ which could have yielded the entire ‘target-story’ (p. 5). This methodology allows her to compare and contrast source-text and target-text in detail even though, unsurprisingly, it radically limits the Chaucerian texts upon which she can draw. Holton’s study is contained to a handful of tales from The Legend of Good Women, the Knight’s Tale, the Manciple’s Tale, and a few tragedies