When compared to works such as The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde, there is a relative dearth of scholarship on Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess. As Jamie C. Fumo points out in her introduction, only two book-length studies on the Book of the Duchess have been published. Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations attempts to fill this gap. Even so, most of the articles in the collection fail to address the Book of the Duchess exclusively, but read it in conjunction with Machaut, Spenser, or the Roman de la rose.

Nevertheless, this is a worthy publication. The division into two parts is odd, since two of the articles in the first section, ‘Books and bodies’, deal with the Book’s relationship to Spenser and Machaut, and thus would fit equally well under part II, ‘The intertextual Duchess’, while several articles (Espie’s, Sturm-Maddox’s, Phillips’s) deal with either books or bodies as well. But other essays stand out as especially good: Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards give a strong overview of the problems with the Book’s manuscript history; B. S. W. Barootes argues that Chaucer – uniquely – is making an argument for reading not being ‘idleness’ in the way that chess and games are; while Philip Knox breaks open the theoretical problem (one could almost say ‘performative speech’ problem) of the connection between ‘what we say’ and ‘who we are’. [Kathy Cawsey]

John Gower: Others and the Self, ed. Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager, Publications of the John Gower Society 11 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017). viii + 384 pp.; 5 figures. ISBN 978-1-84384-474-7. £60.00. Originating from papers given at the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society, this collection brings together essays on themes pertaining to others and the self in the works of John Gower by a variety of scholars. The volume is divided into three sections: ‘Knowing the self and others’, ‘The essence of strangers’, and ‘Social ethics, ethical poetics’. The first section focuses on self-encounter, with five essays on topics such as ‘The materiality of cognition’ (Russell A. Peck), ‘Reading faces in Gower and Chaucer’ (Karla Taylor), and ‘Gower and mortality: the ends of storytelling’ (Helen Cooper). The second section turns its focus outwards, examining topics such as sympathetic villains (Kim Zarins), ‘Gower’s Jews’ (R. F. Yeager), and ‘The advocacy of peace’ (Yoshiko Kobayashi). The third section unites public and private in six essays that explore topics such as rule, authority, and reading, including ‘Gower’s governmentality’ (Matthew Giancarlo), ‘Judicial corruption in Book VI of the Vox clamantis’ (Robert J. Meindl), and ‘Gower in early modern Spanish libraries’ (Ana Sáez-Hidalgo). The volume also contains an introduction by Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager, and a bibliography. This will be a valuable resource for anyone researching or studying Gower.

A Critical Companion to John Skelton, ed. Sebastian Sobecki and John Scattergood (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018). xii + 233 pp. ISBN 978-1-84384-513-3. £60.00/$99.00. This volume provides a much needed critical introduction to the important early Tudor poet John Skelton. Scholarly and popular interest in Tudor culture has surged during the last fifteen years and Skelton has been the subject of substantial monographs by two of this volume’s contributors. The volume serves both to introduce Skelton to readers unfamiliar with his work and to outline the current state of scholarship in order to facilitate further research. It responds to the acknowledged difficulties presented by Skelton’s polylingual poetics, his formal idiosyncrasy, erudite allusions, and the
historical and political context in which his work is embedded. An opening contribution by John Scattergood outlines Skelton's life and career. The cultural and intellectual milieu for his writings is examined in contributions by Thomas Betteridge ('Religion'), Sebastian Sobiecki ('Law and politics'), John Scattergood ('Classical literature'), and David R. Carlson ('Humanism'). Further contributions by J. A. Burrow ('Satires and invectives'), Julia Boffey ('Lyrics and short poems'), Elisabeth Dutton ('Skelton's voice and performance'), Jane Griffiths ('Literary traditions'), Greg Waite ('Skelton and the English language'), Carol M. Meale ('Skelton's English works in manuscript and print'), A. S. G. Edwards ('Skelton's English canon'), and Helen Cooper ('Reception and afterlife') offer perspectives on Skelton’s diverse œuvre and his contemporary and critical reception. Nadine Kuipers provides a comprehensive research biography on Skelton and related scholarship. The contribution by Burrow is posthumous and the volume as a whole is dedicated to his memory. It will surely prove an invaluable resource for students and scholars working in the burgeoning field of Skelton Studies.

Ken Jackson, Shakespeare & Abraham (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). xii + 164 pp. ISBN 978-0-268-03271-5. $27.00. In this monograph, Jackson sets out to examine the pervasive influence that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac had upon Shakespeare’s plays. In particular, Jackson argues that the story of Abraham and Isaac lies behind the many instances of child killing and near child killing in Shakespeare’s early corpus, notably the three parts of Henry VI, King John, Richard II, Titus Andronicus, and The Merchant of Venice, along with the later play Timon of Athens, all of which are given detailed attention in this study. However, Jackson goes beyond a mere argument of influence or sources, suggesting instead that Abraham's near-killing of Isaac provided a central part of Shakespeare’s world-view or philosophy, shaping how he viewed and portrayed particular actions and characters. Jackson also discusses the various readings Abrahamic influence on Shakespeare has received in literary and philosophical history, giving this study a broader range than the corpus of Shakespeare’s plays. The first chapter reflects this broader focus on tracing readings of Shakespeare through history, along with Shakespeare’s own readings of religious and literary history, as Jackson begins with a discussion of the Abraham and Isaac episodes dramatized in the Wakefield Cycle. Drawing on continental philosophy, theories of ‘the gift’ and the so-called ‘other’, and explorations of religion, Jackson provides a new way of understanding Shakespeare’s plays and his broader world-view.

Barbour’s Bruce and its Cultural Contexts: Politics, Chivalry and Literature in Late Medieval Scotland, ed. Steve Boardman and Susan Foran (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015). xii + 246 pp. ISBN 978-1-84384-357-3. £50.00. This collection of essays sets out to re-examine the form, purpose, and literary nature of John Barber’s Bruce. Steve Boardman and Susan Foran’s introduction sets out a full discussion of the poem, its sources, and context, which is helpful for the reader less familiar with the Bruce. Chapters are not sub-divided, with the result that they flow freely and comment on each other cumulatively. The opening chapters have a somewhat introductory feel: the volume begins with a survey of the manuscript and print contexts of Barbour’s Bruce by Emily Wingfield, while the third essay, by Theo van Heijnsbergen, offers a reading of the prologue or opening section of the poem that sets out an argument for the national scope and purpose of