For all of the power and attractiveness of individual essays in *Chaucer: Contemporary Approaches*, it must be said that, with the exception of Justice’s last words, they do tend to speak in the same voice and with the same academic priorities. It is a pity, perhaps, that these essayists did not speak amongst themselves. Perhaps that asks too much, but, lacking such engagement, the ‘effervescent conversations’ promised us by the editors seem more like business as usual. Much, finally, is missing from this collection: visual culture, spatiality, emotion, psychoanalysis, the life of things, for instance. It is some measure of its success, however, that it provokes thoughts of other lines of enquiry.

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In *Structuring Spaces: Oral Poetics and Architecture in Early Medieval England*, Lori Ann Garner comprehensively demonstrates that the architecture and the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons drew from a single body of traditional encoded symbols and images. Furthermore, the architectural poetics developed in early medieval England endured under Norman rule. Garner shows that when an audience is confronted with ‘foreign verbal images’ they will attempt to determine a meaning by turning to images already familiar from their own experience and to phraseology previously encountered in poetic contexts. From surviving Anglo-Saxon texts, Garner reveals how architecture and language reinforce one another and that there was a shared language of architectural form which was used to transmit meaning.

Her first example of this is the use of the building materials of timber and stone in *Beowulf*. From the archaeological record, Garner argues that timber was a preferred building material of the Anglo-Saxons and with improvements in their building techniques it remained the preferred material. It was suitable to build a royal hall of an admirable height, such as Heorot. Grendel approaches Heorot, the high house, while Grendel’s lair was built of stone and was low and underneath the water. Similar associations are made with the stone dragon’s lair and the wooden funeral pyre of *Beowulf*. The two materials are encoded with images of heroic deeds and venerability: they ‘are key components in the architectural world of Old England poetry and serve to symbolize the world of *Beowulf* in its totality’ (p. 64).
Building with timber and stone was within the experience of the Anglo-Saxons, however, the poets often used architectural descriptions from other sources to convey spaces with which they were less familiar. The Anglo-Saxons borrowed from other architectural experiences but created new structures and poems of their own. In the Old English *Andreas*, a prison is described as grated building, darkened and narrow house. A structure of confinement, tumult, and darkness helps to anticipate the heroic action that is about to happen. But this type of prison is likely to have come from a Latin source, for it is not a prison that the Anglo-Saxons would have known; prior to Edward I it is thought that prisoners were confined outside in a yard. Whether describing prisons, Hell, temples, or pavilions far removed from their experience, the Anglo-Saxon poet used similar architectural descriptions from traditional points of reference to convey their own notion of built space.

When using narratives from other sources, the Anglo-Saxon poet had a tendency to reduce the number of elements but increase the detail of these elements. Architectural metaphors are frequently retained and expanded to reflect the Anglo-Saxon world. Architecture, for instance, had a prominent place in the large body of Anglo-Saxon riddles which are seen as attempting to explore and understand natural phenomena. Garner surveys Anglo-Saxon riddles and architectural metaphors revealing that even though many of these texts are derived from classical and/or biblical sources they are clearly grounded in Anglo-Saxon oral poetics and material culture. She then turns to poems such as the *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, and *Beowulf* that construct a memory using architectural metaphor.

The last two chapters examine the continuation of this tradition into post-Conquest England. Works such as Laȝamon’s *Brut* looks back at the age of timber halls and the social code that they epitomized with some nostalgia. The dominant, stone Norman castle displaced the timber halls of the Anglo-Saxons. The changes in literature were gradual but with many hundreds of French words entering the spoken English language the written language changed as well. The different social orders of the Anglo-Saxons and the Anglo-Normans found expression in the architectural transition of this period. As an early post-Conquest text the *Brut* retains traditional architectural imagery and language, but the castle’s structure is a purely military one, while the hall conveyed ideals of loyalty to king, family, and heroic deeds. In the final chapter, Garner considers the poems *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These four poems continue in the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition and they display Anglo-Saxon poetics through architectural description.
*Structuring Spaces* is an extremely scholarly book, it is well written with an extensive bibliography. The 32 black and white photographs have reproduced very clearly and demonstrate Garner’s ideas very well. Above all it is an engaging book that is well worth the read.

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The demands of the medieval liturgy meant that clergy and religious spent many hours in the choir stalls. This book explores the world of images that decorated the misericords, which, while generally not seen by the laity, were visible to the members of the choir. According to Professor Hardwick, misericord carvings were neither ‘sites of profane exuberance’ (p. 2) nor ‘books for the unlearned’, but were intended to speak to an educated audience at multiple levels, through symbolism and allegory. In this book, he argues that the bewildering variety of images, most of which are not overtly religious, can only properly be understood when situated within the context of the ‘doctrinal and devotional culture’ of late medieval England, using late medieval Christianity as the ‘primary lens’ (p. 2) through which to view them.

The work is not a complete survey of surviving misericord carvings in England, but provides an informative and entertaining overview of the non-foliate images, and offers an insight into their meaning. The cultural context of the images is explored, with a particular emphasis on literary works, especially Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, although art, drama, sermons, Lollard texts, and even popular sayings are also invoked. In each of the book’s six chapters, the author explores a theme and examines one or two carvings more closely by way of ‘case study’. The thematic distinctions are loose, due partly to the wide range of scenes depicted in misericords, but also because, in a society in which symbolism assigned spiritual meanings to temporal things and moral lessons could be drawn from romance, the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ could not always be distinguished.

The first chapter covers depictions of ‘everyday activities’ including work, leisure, scenes of domesticity, agriculture and hunting, taverns, music and entertainment, as well as fools and proverbs about folly like ‘shoeing the goose’. Only one surviving carving depicts the activity of ploughing, which