The 2006 Congress
New York City, July 27-31, 2006

The Fifteenth Biennial Congress of the New Chaucer Society took place from July 27 to 31 at the Lincoln Center Campus of Fordham University. Fordham University hosted the congress with sponsorship from the Deans of all members of the Inter-University Doctoral Consortium: Columbia, CUNY Graduate Center, Fordham, NYU, Princeton, Rutgers, and SUNY-Stony Brook, and from Hunter College as well.

In this newsletter, you will find responses to the congress written by Nicholas Watson (Harvard University) and Jennifer Summit (Stanford University). Thanks to everyone who presented and attended for making the congress a great success.

The 2008 Congress:
The 2008 Congress will be held in Swansea, Wales. Provisionally, the conference is scheduled to take place from July 19 to July 24. The program committee is composed of Ruth Evans (chair), Helen Fulton (chair, local arrangements committee), Diane Watt, Alexandra Gillespie, and Ethan Knapp, with John Ganim (NCS President) and David Lawton (NCS Executive Director) ex officio.

By Nicholas Watson

It's an honor, and a considerable burden, to have the responsibility of attempting to sum up, respond to, or otherwise help to end on a good note this large, very long, and multi-faceted conference. Jennifer and my main obligation is plainly to be brief, while my first task here as a respondent is as plainly to echo the congratulations just given all those who put the conference together, on behalf of all the participants.

The New Chaucer Society is an organization whose workings, indeed whose very name suggests, its complicated relation to history: not only to medieval history or even the history of the Society itself but also, and especially, to the history of the scholarly field it represents. I was reminded again of this complexity by the terms in which the two David Lawton, David Wallace, and Robert Edwards invited Jennifer Summit and myself to do this summing up, late last year: for our email invitation suggested that we might be particularly appropriate choices to perform this agonizing task, not for the brilliance of our inventive wits, nor even for our clearly exceptional gullibility, but because we both happen to occupy a strategic place, as the email put it, “on the edge” of Chaucer studies – and so, presumably, might comment on the
proceedings with some sort of detachment, as people able at least to pose as semi-outsiders.

Now I’ve no problem with being on the edge: edge is the new margin which, not so long ago, was the new centre. But the terms of the invitation were intriguing because, if my own work, or Jennifer’s, might indeed be considered on the “edge” of the work Chaucerians generally do, the same could be said of some sixty percent of the papers at this conference, which push outwards and forwards – rarely backwards – from Chaucer to cover many of the other writers and topics that current Middle English studies considers important. Wandering around sessions over the last five days, trying to be some of the time in sessions where I’d expect to find myself as well as in others I’d normally be too parochial even to look, I’ve crossed this “edge” over and over again, to the point where I feel quite confident in saying that one of the major, perhaps the major, divide within our discipline is still between its Chaucerian and its non-Chaucerian centripetalisms: between the kind of work in which all roads run to Chaucer and the kind of work in which Chaucer is himself a road leading elsewhere. Perhaps Jennifer and I are really up here because “the edge” of Chaucer studies is the current, somewhat fissured centre of the discipline, which it’s our job to try now to represent back to you, to parse, perhaps to paper over, using this conference as our body of evidence.

Structurally, in its choice of general conference topics, its hosting of the biennial Chaucer lecture, and in the Chaucerian subject-matter still invariably chosen by the Society’s presidents for their address, the New Chaucer Society is still about Chaucer. In practice, as the field of Middle English studies has broadened, and perhaps in particular as jobs have habitually come to be advertised in Middle English, rather than Chaucer, the Society has broadened too, now offering generous room to those many of us “on the edge,” and even to some who, by the standards, say, of the Old Chaucer Society, might have been considered quite beyond the Pale. In this double strategy, the Society has adopted a relatively modest strategy of conservative pluralism, seeking to reflect, rather than direct, the discipline as it changes, while upholding the special value of Chaucer and Chaucerian research both to the intellectual life of our branch of the profession and to such institutional and public prestige as it may have: this is both why the Society’s conference and its journal, Studies in the Age of Chaucer, offers such a good snapshot of the field.

I’m far more nearly persuaded of the intellectual and aesthetic argument here than the institutional one. It’s obvious that, for many here, Chaucer remains simply the most interesting and demanding of all the writers in our field to study and to think about; and that even for those of us whose most passionate attachments are elsewhere, Chaucer is still the place where many of our new intellectual perspectives come from or find their ultimate test (the question “does it work for Chaucer?” can still make or break in this business), as well as being the bedrock of our medieval teaching. Although work on Chaucer can seem inward-looking to the rest of the field – just as work anywhere else in the field can look parochially “medieval” to Chaucerians – as a whole Chaucer is also still one of our chief guarantors of methodological pluralism, if only because he represents so much the most densely cultivated area of that field: a place where we experiment with many of our new ideas and approaches, besides being the place where our relationship to other areas of English study is often most likely to seem close and significant.

But to strike my first discordant note with this conference, in this case with David’s splendid and thoughtful presidential address, it’s less obvious to me that we can survive indefinitely as a field on the coat-tails of Chaucer’s steadily diminishing public fame, however creatively he is being read, reinterpreted, and regenerated by contemporary novelists, poets, and performers, most of whom are having far more trouble than us making an honest penny. The prestige accorded high and popular culture in the world at large has undergone one of those strange inversions over the last few decades, and there’s little any of us can do about this: a fact that...
puts us at a huge and structural disadvantage in relation to our early modernist colleagues, who still have Shakespeare, a name not hundreds, nor thousands, but tens of thousands of points higher than Chaucer’s (or anyone else’s) in the recognition charts, and going to stay that way.

Although there are of course areas in which Chaucer’s name is our standard-bearer for all that, particularly with our English department colleagues and in the other, very real, pockets in which high culture is still what it was, there are other institutional and intellectual contexts in which studying Chaucer is one of the least, not most, comprehensible things that medievalists do; we got a whiff of that yesterday, I think, in James Scott’s introductory remarks. We heard from Stephanie Trigg on Thursday of a large Australian research grant awarded in part to medievalists because they subsumed their identity into a category called Early Europe. Good work in Britain is being done that owes its funding to its perceived relevance for the heritage industry. And there are other contexts in which a presentation of our field as primarily an archival enterprise, now poised for revolutionary advance in the digital era, has clearly been beneficial to us.

In other areas, we are still missing out on opportunities, both for self-advertisement and for thinking of our work in new ways, framing ourselves in terms wider than as “Chaucerians,” “Middle English scholars,” or “medievalists.” We could do more than we do to promote our collective authority as cultural and intellectual historians, and we could do much more to promote access to our materials, to frame ourselves more as evangelists of our archives and less as keeper of their mysteries. Why, for example, are we not loudly demanding that Early English Books Online take on manuscript books and make Middle English writing available on the web as a whole, rather than confining our energies to furthering the multiple, ever more-detailed reproduction of a few, chosen books and texts? The current gulf between print and manuscript books as these are represented on the Web effectively reproduces the crudest stereotypes about the revolutionary impact of print, allowing a definition of Early Books as early print books to stand, and so suggesting that it’s only print—tidily entering the picture with the rise of humanism and close in time to the reformation—that brings thought and writing into visibility. Medieval manuscript books, indeed the medieval itself, become a Dark Age once again in the process, brilliantly illuminated by only a few, lavishly illustrated and culturally privileged treasures. We should not be allowing this picture to stand unchallenged.

As a single-author society which also represents the interests of a period field (in all senses of the word “interests”), the New Chaucer Society—and that’s not just the organization’s small group of volunteer directors and organizers but all of us here in the decisions we take to attend, the papers we give, the attitudes we hold towards medieval studies in general—has the difficult task of remembering and reflecting all this. Both the difficulty and the importance of continuing to do so have been evident in the conference now coming to its end.

What can be said about our field on the basis of this conference? Where are we trending? Jennifer is going to summarize some of the conference themes in a moment, so my remarks will be confined to a crude summary of the “what’s in, what’s out” variety. At least going by the aspirations reflected in the titles of sessions and papers, and often by the papers themselves, most things seem to be “in” at present, although there does seem to be a drift towards an ever-greater engagement with the patterns of late-medieval political, religious, cultural, and above all material history, and away from the reflective, the philosophical, and the theoretical. Fifteen years ago, it would have been hard to credit the emphasis on paleography in particular and textual scholarship at this conference, from sessions on Adam Scrivyn and on Digital Chaucer to an e-panel on the Textual Crux and another on Manuscripts and Textual Culture (I’d have liked yet another panel, on editing itself, for balance); and the rise of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as areas of key concern for literary historians, manifested in over a dozen sessions here, is still only
just visible as a trend as recently as The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature from 1999.

Panels on Usk and Lydgate as well as Langland and Gower reflect our collective fascination with Chaucer’s aesthetic ambit, but also, probably more strongly, our keen interest in late-medieval London. Non-Londoners, apart from Julian of Norwich, did not get much of a look-in, and Julian was mainly represented as a case study in the modern reception of medieval works (the strength of medievalism in Middle English Studies was on ample and interesting display here). The Gawain poet, still in danger of being renamed the Cleaness poet, currently plays second fiddle to the author of St. Erkenwald. Margery Kempe was uncharacteristically taciturn, and I heard only one paper on provincial drama. Lollards might seem to have been rather loudly absent but were actually subsumed into sessions on medieval religion in general. Religion has gained a lot of ground in the last ten years: since this is my own special interest, I want to say that a sign of the mature place of the religious in our field that I’ve found heartening here is how far the religious has been normalized, so that rather than being set off against the secular, as used to be the case, it can crop up anywhere without either assuming too special a prominence or being represented as the skeleton in the closet. The three sessions on Ethics, for example, mingled discussion of what would once have been distinguished firmly as “secular” and “religious” ethics without anyone seeming to notice – although this was unfortunately in part because the reading of eleven major papers over a period of four and a half hours leaves little time for noticing anything, a sadly clear instance (I can say this because my own paper fell into this group of sessions) of the whole feeling less than the sum of its parts. On the other hand, while there was a good linguistics session on whether or not Middle English is a Creole – the answer is a qualified no, in case you were wondering – the “vernacular” seems a less urgent category here than it has in the recent past, perhaps simply because it’s become too mainstream to merit much comment. This seems, to a lesser extent, also to be the case with the categories of “gender” and “theory,” terms honored more by the titles of sessions than by their content (though I attended a gender e-session this morning). Although we were treated to a rich analysis of Chaucerian orientalism in Susan Crane’s marvelous lecture on inter-species kindness in The Squire’s Tale, I otherwise looked in vain for work on pre-modern encounters with the non-Christian, a strange omission in the current political climate.

Several sessions announced a return to “close reading,” or to a “new formalism,” to an extent representing themselves defensively, as bastions against what I believe Areyne Fradenburg referred to as a “hegemonic historicism.” There are quite persistent signs at present of dissatisfaction at how the aesthetic, the appreciative, is putatively being squeezed out by the field’s emphasis on political and cultural analysis, and trend-spotters may be right to prick up their ears, since this dissatisfaction seems to have successfully shed its former “old guard” image. But it does need to be remarked that close reading, far from being a forgotten art at this conference, remains what it always was, the bread and butter of large numbers of papers, particularly papers on Chaucer. The opposition between historicism and close reading is also likely to surprise the several professional historians in attendance here, since the one area in which literary scholars have demonstrably influenced historical work is in just this area. I suspect the real issues at stake in this opposition are different and worth more thought. Objections to historicism may have more to do with a dislike of the aestheticisation of history, of the substitution of cultural poetics for literary poetics, involved in many current modes of literary history. I don’t think anyone actually objects to formalism any more, although it is true that our collective expertise in the traditional kinds of formal analysis is much diminished.

However exhausting it’s been, I’ve had a marvelous time running round trying and failing to encompass this conference in all its variety and intellectual
Response by Nicholas Watson, Guelph

richness. I’d like to conclude, though, with two concerns with which this experience leaves me, one to do with the matter of periodization, the other with the relative lack of the abstract, or the theoretical and philosophical, in what we’ve heard. Partly inspired by the formidable energies of some of the people most in evidence here, including Paul Strom and especially my colleague James Simpson, a great deal of attention is currently being paid, both to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as areas of study and to the more abstract question of the relationship between the late medieval and the early modern. James in particular calls for a retrenching of the field back within its disciplinary boundaries – for a suspension of our efforts to talk to medievalists in other disciplines – in favour of generating more engaged conversations with our department colleagues working on later literary periods. I could not agree more about generating the new conversations – though I haven’t yet heard many early modernists talking back – just as I could not agree less with his call to de-emphasize the interdisciplinary traditions of our field, for all that it is high time to revisit the terms on which interdisciplinary conversation is conducted. But whatever the rights and wrongs of this disagreement may be, I do want to draw urgent attention to an unintended consequence of our current interest in the moment of transition between the medieval and the early modern: its downgrading of work on the 300 years of vernacular writing, Middle English and Anglo-Norman, before Chaucer, and its reinscription of the false and multiply exploded view that Chaucer is the place where discussion of English literature can legitimately begin. For Middle English scholars, and for the New Chaucer Society, Chaucer and the late fourteenth-century are our inevitable centre of attention, but must be considered the fulcrum of our period, not the moment when it gets interesting enough to talk about. Where, then, was the early medieval at this conference, even the early fourteenth century? Its absence, in the face of the brilliant work that is being done in that part of the field, by far too few people, has been my biggest disappointment over the last few days.

My other disappointment has been with the extent to which our current interest in material culture runs the risk of sidelining what I think of as the philosophical side of the field: its interest in the history of ideas, in literary theory, and in the other modes in which we engage directly, as intellectuals, with the thinking our medieval texts are doing. I do think it’s significant, and a pity, that the only non-literary scholars who feel it worth their while to attend this conference are social historians. Although I learned a good deal from the historical plenary on Sunday, next time we meet, it would be good to be addressed, say, by a political theorist, a theologian, a philosopher with medieval interests; and wonderful if, instead of summoning these extra-disciplinary intellects to speak at us through the medium of the plenary – informing us of what we need to know to practice our own craft better, surely an awkward situation in which to place a visiting expert – they came and could engage with us and our papers in dialogue. However this suggestion goes down, I do derive from this meeting the lesson that Chaucer studies, or Middle English studies, can have too much historicism, if by historicism we refer to the local enterprise of literary history.

I’ll hand over now to Jennifer, after adding that I do hope that the discussion that follows this will include some thoughts from people about the form of the conference, its conduct as an intellectual event. Do we really want our panels so stuffed with papers there is so little time for discussion? How can we get around that, given everyone’s need for a turn to speak? How does this NCS’s innovation, the un-themed conference, work? Might it be worth focusing, next time, not on one but on three or four areas of field concern, and reserving really substantial discussion and response time for panels dealing with each of them? These and other questions are for the next conference’s program organizers to decide, but now would be the time for everyone to make suggestions.
My title is "what is the age of Chaucer?" With this I want to take up some of the questions and challenges about temporality that were raised in the opening sessions and have resonated throughout the five days of our conference, while also hinting at the ways in which those questions are already foregrounded in the title of our society's official journal. By asking "what is the age of Chaucer" I want to consider not only how we conceive the period that we roughly define as "the age of Chaucer," but also how the notion of an age—a period defined through a single lifespan, or a set of defining events—was conceived in "the age of Chaucer" itself, whose inhabitants may not have been aware that they were living in "an age of Chaucer," but who, as many of the papers in this conference have shown, appear to have defined their period through myriad reference points and temporal models.

By now, July 27 may feel like a lifetime ago, so let me start by summarizing some of the key questions that were raised on that opening day, which seemed to issue a challenge that was variously taken up over the days that followed.

The conference opened on the theme of what David Wallace called in his presidential address the "nonlinear temporaliies" that seemed operative in the work of Chaucer as well as in the decidedly nonlinear receptions of Chaucer in our own age. In a crowded session that followed, entitled, "What is happening to the Middle Ages?", the question of medieval temporality received a lively hearing. In it, James Simpson challenged us to jettison the binary of medieval/early modern that was the by-product of what he calls early modernity's "revolutionary moment." Philip Thiel recalled the ways in which the marginalization of "the medieval" by the modern is reinforced in the institutions that train and credentialize medievalists. Stephanie Trigg alerted us to the possibilities opened when we refuse to relegate "the medieval" to the past but recognize the "medievalisms" of the present. And Carolyn Dinshaw recalled, against the temporal narratives that seem to distance us from that medieval past, that the "stream of time" doesn't run in a linear direction but tends, as she evocatively put it, to overflow its banks.

Complaints about the marginality of medieval studies within relentlessly modernizing academic institutions can seem like depressingly old news. But what gave this opening session a new energy (I found) was its invitation to rethink in creative and unsettling ways the temporality of "the medieval." Medievalists are not alone in this enterprise. Looking across the great early modern divide, Margreta de Grazia is currently attempting to unsettle the largely nineteenth-century narratives that continue to define the period known as "the Renaissance" as the beginning of modernity. But in contemporary historical models, she notes, "the new"—that marker of modernity—was a thing not to be embraced but to be treated with caution and suspicion. Similarly we might consider how inhabitants of "the Middle Ages"—who never seem to embrace "middleness" as a particular identity—produce alternative temporal models that might be deployed against, in order to defamiliarize, the temporalities of modernity that have for so long defined that period.

Temporality is different from history, as we learned in the session on "Time, Measure, and Value in Chaucer's Art and Chaucer's World." By exploring how time became quantifiable in the Middle Ages, Dan Ransom and Dawn Simmons Watts reminded us that time is not the measuring stick of history but the product of human history, such as the histories of technology, religious practice, and narrative. This point was played out in the many models of medieval temporality that emerged from this conference.

One dominant model of medieval temporality, recalled in David Wallace's address and several papers that followed, is that of pilgrimage, a movement across space that is also a movement across time. The direction of
pilgrimage is not linear, as no reader of the Canterbury Tales needs to be reminded; if it moves forward across space in wandering digressions, it also reaches backward in time, aiming to close the loop between the experiential present and the sacred past. It also reaches into futures unseen; it's significant that Chaucer's afterlife in our own age, as Wallace detailed, is so frequently figured in acts or adaptations of pilgrimage, showing how the signature Chaucerian experience of temporal wandering resonates with our own age's sometimes rootless uncertainty.

Other models suggest experiences of temporality that are less itinerant than recursive. For a penitential culture, as Ann Astell showed us (with support from Levinas), the promise of forgiveness is a retro-action, a redemption of the past that makes its significance for the future. If the linear progression of "the stream of time" also implies a patrilineal continuity of generation, as Carolyn Dinshaw suggested, a text like St. Erkenwald offers its own anti-patrilinear retro-action in the spectacle of patricide that is also, Frank Grady tells us (with support from Freud) a foundational act of culture. Retro-action, the return to origins, seems always fraught for Chaucer—and this is one point in which we could say that Chaucer is not a poet of "re-naissance." Just as the pilgrimage never reaches it goal, Lisa Cooper remarks (in one of the e-seminars) that homecomings are particularly vexed in Chaucerian texts like The Knight's Tale, suggesting not so much a return to origins as a realization that you can’t go home again.

Against the experience of temporality as retro-action, models emerging in other papers address the temporality of change. In place of the defining modern narrative of change as a violent break from the past, alternative medieval models envision change through forms of re-making, transformation, and adaptation. Some of these possibilities emerge, for example, in the model of metamorphosis explored by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, who finds that Chaucer engages in a "continual metamorphosis," by exploring acts of change that are never unidirectional. Similar models of change might be suggested in the figure of alchemy, as discussed by Jonathan Hsy, that of conversion, as discussed this morning by Jennifer Jahner, or those of economic exchange of translation, discussed in many papers, which involve change from one material, medium, or state of being to another.

Claire Jardillier explored the question of change through architectural transformation, observing that Theseus doesn't destroy materials but uses them to make new things: he clears the forest but harvests wood that makes the funeral pyre. This model of material change differs from the destruction that we're used to finding in the Reformation's break from the medieval past. But how complete is that break, and what are the possibilities for seeing it too as transformation and adaptation? If medievalists are used to seeking "finials in farmhouses," as David Wallace remarks, those finials' very survival indicates that the Reformation didn't always eradicate medieval buildings but sometimes—indeed, often—adapted them to new uses. Change in this model of material culture isn't an act of destruction but one of metamorphosis.

Material culture was a recurrent concern across many of the panels—John Ganim, who ran an e-seminar on Institutions and Objects, estimated that it defined the focus of nearly half the panels at this conference: we heard papers considering domestic architecture and space, material objects and their exchange as goods or gifts, and the materiality of textuality itself, the pens, ink, and parchment (or paper, as Orietta Da Rold reminded us) that made up the stuff of scribal culture.

Material objects can be time travelers, emissaries, like the body of St. Erkenwald, from the past into the present. Indeed, the aim of bridging past and present through material culture formed the original mission of the Cloisters museum; as we learned, Rockefeller wanted Americans to be able to walk into the Middle Ages, so he concentrated on large-scale objects—architectural artifacts, tapestries, and furnishings that made visiting the museum feel like a trip back in time.
Yet the attempt to recreate medieval space in a modern context suggests that spatial experience somehow transcends time, a suggestion that several papers that we heard on medieval architecture would contest. And if medieval objects today seem to bridge the past and the present, to medieval eyes, objects were sometimes less like time-travelers than they were symptoms of a more threatening historical change. As Andrea Denny-Brown shows, in the universally excoriated figure of the "gallaunt," an over-indulgence in material objects and fashion was associated with the dangers of the new.

Objects offer another possible inroad for rethinking modernity's "universalizing humanism," by unsettling humanism's poster-child, the liberal subject. As Mark Miller points out, today the effects of liberalism have been generalized to the point of invisibility, particularly its definition of human subjectivity as a private interior space harboring a hidden and individualized truth within. But studying the medieval object proves that the division between human and thing, as Kellie Robertson suggests, is less absolute than it appears. This argument resonates with that of Susan Crane, who showed us how the boundaries between animal and human are traversable through compassion. Just as animals ask us to rethink the meanings of the human, so do things. As Robertson shows, medieval things have agency. Similarly Louise Bishop shows that in a Galenic universe things (like eggs) can even have emotions. The inquiry into medieval emotions that was sustained through several panels likewise proved unsettling to the liberal subject of "universalizing humanism." As several papers showed, medieval emotion is less an inner truth to be revealed and expressed than a situated performance to be enacted.

"Memory," another topic invoked by several papers, emerged less as a personal experience of the individual subject than the condition of collective identity. In her paper early in the conference, Stephanie Trigg argued that as an analytic category, "memory" allows us to consider the afterlife of the medieval past in the present. We might recall that the act of "remembering" is also one of "re-membering," that is, the incorporation of parts into coherent wholes, a process that we learned is fundamental to medieval textual culture. In a paper on medieval pamphlets, Joel Fredell called attention to the significance of the "little quire," the small booklet, which was made in order to be bound, or re-membered, in a fascicle. In this sense, fascicular re-membering is the opposite of the modern acts of dis-membering that were for so long visited on medieval books—not only in the shape of Ruskin's infamous scissors but also in librarians' and collectors' impulses to separate medieval quires into individual units. The medieval fascicle invites us to trouble distinctions between the agency of writer and reader, since the act of compiling quires into a volume allows every reader both to re-member texts and to make them anew. So too we've clearly reached a key moment for reconsidering the distinction between production and reproduction as it once differentiated, and hierarchized, the work of author and scribe. If scribes like Adam Pinkhurst are coming out of the shadows of anonymity, thanks to the extraordinary work of Lynn Mooney, we are also learning new things about authors who were scribes themselves, like the Thomases Hoccleve and Usk. If new research on scribes is asserting their importance to medieval literary culture, one of the most encouraging developments I saw in this conference was an apparent breakdown of the traditional division between manuscript study and literary study. While in previous conferences these have been divided into our own version of the "two cultures," this year the two were more clearly integrated and in productive dialogue with one another.

As several sessions suggested, through their traditional expertise in manuscript study, medievalists can make a unique contribution in addressing some of the broader methodological challenges of literary study. The study of manuscripts can mediate the imperatives of historicism and close reading, whose divorce was lamented by Derek Pearsall in the opening panel of the series on close reading.
For all the texture it brings to the experience of literature, close reading has sometimes been seen as an enemy to the broad, diachronic analysis called for in the opening sessions, to such an extent that my colleague Franco Moretti advocates what he calls, tongue only partly in cheek, "distant reading," a practice aimed at bringing the big picture into view. But if manuscript study is one way to read closely in a historically attentive way—as was suggested in the discussion following that first panel on close reading—it also offers a route for tracing diachronic change as it is registered on and through material objects as they traversed their own itinerant spatial and temporal routes. In this, manuscript study potentially brings together many of the themes that have been played out across this conference—material culture, close reading, and temporality—in the copying and re-membering of texts through time. Consider the very textual objects of our study: released from the monastic contexts in which they were made, medieval books then traveled into the hands of early modern collectors, and from them, into the major collections on which the discipline of medieval English literary studies continues to ground itself: the Bodleian, the Cotton library in London, the Parker library in Cambridge. These collections offer us concrete examples of how, to recall Simpson from the first day's session, the medieval past was remade by the subjects of early modernity. But in our own continued interactions with the same books, we recall Stephanie Trigg's assertion that the medieval continues to be remade, and that we remake it in our own acts of remembrance.

My own effort to re-member this conference and thus to bind together its diverse elements into something approaching a fascicular whole recalls how imperfect and individual a process this is—especially in the face of concurrent sessions, long days, and the frailty of human memory, namely mine. I must stress that the view I've presented is no map but, like the medieval fascicle, a highly individual and sometimes selective compilation.

With this I want to move toward a conclusion. I've been considering how the challenge raised on this conference's first day—of how to refigure the "multiple temporalities" of the Middle Ages, apart from the narratives of break or rupture imposed on "the medieval" by later periods, was variously taken up and addressed across the five days of this long and rich conference. In place of the unidirectional linearity of "the stream of time," we've been given what might be recognized to be alternative models of temporality. These are visible, for example, in the idea of circulation, as it governs goods, objects, manuscripts, and people across spatial travels that are also travels through time. So too medieval narratives of penitence, redemption, translation and even exemplarity suggest temporal schemes based on the ability to bring the past into the present in order to remake it anew. If the medieval was produced through modernity's self-defining break from an abjected past, this conference has suggested that the materials that we need for critiquing and unsettling that narrative are already close at hand.

**CHAUCER SOCIETY RECEPTION AT MLA**

The New Chaucer Society will be holding a reception at the MLA at the home of David Wallace, Past President of NCS, and Rita Copeland. The party will be on Friday, December 29, from 8:30-11:00 at 1722 Delancey Street, Philadelphia, about a 15 minute walk from the conference hotels. Thanks to David and Rita for hosting this event.

The reception follows the Chaucer Session which ends at 8:30. Questions may be directed to David Wallace at (215) 546-1177 or John Ganim, President, NCS, at john.ganim@ucr.edu.

The 6th biennial congress of the International Association of Robin Hood Studies will be held July 19th-22nd, 2007, at Gregynog, Wales. The theme: 'Robin Hood, Crime and Bandits'. For information about the congress and the Call for Papers, please contact the local organisations at Cardiff University, Helen Phillips (PhillipsHE@cf.ac.uk) or Stephen Knight (KnightS2@cf.ac.uk).
ARTICLES
"Paths of Long Study": Reading Chaucer and Christine de Pizan in Tandem (Theresa Coletti)

Narrative Artistry in St. Erkenwald and the Gawain-Group: The Case for Common Authorship Reconsidered (Marie Borroff)

Povre Griselda and the All-Consuming Archewyves (Andrea Denny-Brown)

The Parson’s Predilection for Pleasure (Nicole D. Smith)

Private Practices in Chaucer’s Miller’s Tale (Maria Bullón-Fernández)

Images of Pity: The Regulatory Aesthetics of John Lydgate’s Religious Lyrics (Shannon Gayk)

A New Fragment of the Romaunt of the Rose (Simon Horobin)

COLLOQUIUM: The Afterlife of Origins:

"The Physician’s Tale and Remembered Texts" (Kenneth Bleeth)

"New Terminology for Sources and Analogues: Or, Let’s Forget the Lost French Source for Miller’s Tale" (Peter G. Beidler)

"Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale: Sources, Influences, and Allusions" (Amy W. Goodwin)

"Proverb Tradition as a Soft Source for The Canterbury Tales" (Nancy Mason Bradbury)

"The Alchemy of Imagination and the Labyrinth of Meaning: Some Caveats about the After Life of Sources" (Carolyn P. Collette)

"The Buried Bodies’ of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch: Chaucerian ‘Sources’ for the Critical Fiction of Obedient Wives" (Dolores W. Frese)

"A Feel for the Game: Bourdieu, Source Study, and the Legend" (Betsy McCormick)

"The Afterword of Origins: A Response" (Ruth Evans)

"Codices and Community: Networks of Reading and Production, 1350-1550," the tenth biennial conference of the Early Book Society, will be held at the University of Salford and Chetham’s Library, Manchester, from July 7 - July 11, 2007.

The conference is hosted by Sue Powell, University of Salford, with visits and sessions to be held at Chetham’s Library & the John Rylands Library, Manchester. Contacts are Martha W. Driver (mdriver@pace.edu, marthaedriver@hotmail.com) or Sue Powell (s.powell@salford.ac.uk). For further information, consult the EBS website: http://www.nyu.edu/projects/EBS

Letter to the Editor:

Dear Editor,

I think that I was the only founding member of the NCS present at the first meeting last August, and I should like to congratulate the current President and members of the Board for a satisfactory meeting after 30 years. But I do hope that the suggestion by Neil Watkin that the name of Chaucer be dropped from the title of the Society is otherwise eviscerated without re-accepted. The range of papers delivered is evidence of the already broad scope of the studies sponsored by the NCS, and to lose the name of Chaucer will lose its focus and mean that it is only another of the small admirable groups concerned with medieval studies. Loss of identity will entail gradual disappearance.

Yours faithfully,

Derek Brewer

I have about 100 copies left of my book, Imagining Fame, and would like to give them to any high schools or colleges that would be interested in teaching from this original and translation of HF with commentary.

Contact Ann Prescott at: Awp77song@aol.com
**Member News**

**The Age of Gower 1408/2008**  
**London, 14-16 July 2008**
To mark the 600th anniversary of Gower's death, the John Gower Society, in conjunction with Queen Mary and Westfield College and the Centre for the Study of Medieval Society and Culture, Cardiff University, will hold its first international congress July 14-16, 2008 in London, on the campus of Queen Mary and Westfield College, located at Mile End. The plan calls for a multidisciplinary conference, locating Gower historically in the context of the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV, critically amid the writers of his time, and archaeologically in the later 14th-early 15th-century London and Southwark areas in which he spent his life. The initial organizing committee consists of R.F. Yeager (President, John Gower Society, and University of West Florida), Elisabeth Dutton (Worcester College, Oxford), John Hines (School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff) Julia Booffey and Rosamund Allen (Queen Mary and Westfield College). Work is now underway on the program, which in addition to plenary and paper sessions will include an evening in Southwark Cathedral with readings from Gower's French, Latin and English poetry, evensong and a reception in the Refectory; a conference dinner on the Thames; a visit to the medieval Inns of Court; and a guided walking tour of "Gower's Southwark." Depending upon interest, coach transportation, with a stop-over in Ewelme, Oxon., can be made available on 17 July for those wishing to travel from the Gower Society congress to Swansea for the New Chaucer Society congress. A formal call for papers will be issued shortly. At this time, however, interested individuals may propose topics either sessions or papers for consideration by the program committee, c/o RF Yeager (rfyeager@hotmail.com). Information about the congress will be kept current at the Gower Society website, www.johngower.org.

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**NEH Summer Institute (for US citizens)**

**The Cathedral and Culture: Medieval York**  
**June 18-July 13, 2007**

Directors: Paul E. Szarmach (The Medieval Academy) & Dee Dyas (Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York)

Focus on Anglo-Saxon England and Northumbria and late Medieval York. Information: Paul E. Szarmach pes@medievalacademy.org

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**SPECIAL ISSUE ON E. TALBOT DONALDSN:**


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**Call For Articles:** Proposed volume, Revisiting the Canterbury Tales—21st Century Interpretations. For information contact Dr. Kathleen Bishop – kab4@nyu.edu.

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The ACH is sponsoring a 6-week seminar for high school teachers on The Canterbury Tales and Medieval Culture. The seminar will be held from June 25 to August 1, 2007 at Yale University and directed by Lee Patterson, L. W. Hilles Professor of English at Yale. Any employee of a public or private secondary school is eligible to apply. This seminar is part of the outreach to secondary school teachers that is central to the growth of Chaucer studies and members in contact with secondary school teachers should make every effort to inform them of this opportunity. Full information about the seminar, participant evaluations of previous seminars, and application instructions can be found at http://www.yale.edu/medieval/ach.html or by emailing lee.patterson@yale.edu.
**Member News**

**Pilgrims and Pilgrimage; Journey, Spirituality and Daily Life through the Centuries CD-ROM (£15).**

Editor: Dee Dyas. Associate Editors: Sarah Blicke, Paul Cavill, Miriam Gill, Jane Hawkes, Diana Webb.

"Shows brilliantly through word and image the importance of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages and beyond." Professor Derek Brewer (Emmanuel College, Cambridge)

"Highly informative with excellent illustrations from illuminated manuscripts and architecture – an indispensable resource for anyone teaching or studying medieval religion." Professor Eamon Duffy (Magdalene College, Cambridge)

Available to order from 15 December 2006 at www.york.ac.uk/inst/cms/candc

**VISTAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MEDIEVAL SPIRITUALITY: architecture, drama, literature, liturgy, manuscripts, painting, stained glass, sculpture

July 16-18, 2007 York Minster**

Sponsored by York Minster and Christianity and Culture (Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York)

The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is to explore the visual dimensions of medieval spirituality in a way which will enhance both research and teaching across a range of disciplines. Speakers include: Alan Cameron, Sarah Blicke, Brenda Bolton, Laurence Broughan, Michelle Brown, Sarah Brown, Helen Cooper, Mary Clements, Davina Eamon Duff, Rosalind Field, Jane Geddes, D. Thomas, Hanks, Pamela King, Richard Marks, Liz Herbert-Kolated, Nigel Morgan, Helen Phillips, Stella Panayotova, Tim Rhodes, Mickey Sweeney, Lynn Staley, Sarah Stanbury, Lorraine Stock, Robert Swanson, Paul Szarmach, Paul Thomas, Diana Webb, Susan Yager.

For further information see http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cms/medspirit or contact Dee Dyas (dd11@york.ac.uk)


The medieval offered a series of models to modern England. Some of these were entertaining, escapist or nostalgic; others corrected ideas of origin and identity, and offered ideals and challenges to reform.

This is the first account of the Medieval Revival as a whole, from the literary experiments of the 1760s to the visions which transformed Victorian Britain and which influence the present. It addresses the social, political, religious, architectural and artistic aspects of the Revival, especially in their literary manifestations. This essay in cultural history ends with a look at medievalism in popular culture.

Michael Alexander held the Chair of English at St Andrews University, Scotland. He has published verse translations from Old English and edited Chaucer for Penguin Classics, and A History of English Literature with Palgrave Macmillan.

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**The New Chaucer Society**

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