2008 Congress: A Call for Participants

Swansea, July 18–22, 2008

The Sixteenth International Congress of the New Chaucer Society will be held July 18–22, 2008 at the campus of the University of Wales, Swansea, Wales, UK. The Congress is hosted by the University of Wales, Swansea.

NCS members who wish to give papers or participate in panels at the Congress should send one-paragraph abstracts to the appropriate session organizers by October 1, 2007, preferably at the email addresses given below in the session description. Session organizers will select papers and panels soon afterwards, in consultation with the Program Chairs. The Program Committee will form additional sessions as interests arise. Names of Congress participants will be announced in the Chaucer Newsletter for Fall 2007. Members may apply to participate in more than one session, but they may finally take part in only one.

The Program Committee members are Ruth Evans (Co-Chair), Stephanie Trigg (Co-Chair), Helen Fulton, Alexandra Gillespie, Ethan Knapp, and Diane Watt, with David Lawton (NCS Executive Director) and John Ganim (NCS President) ex officio (with administrative assistance from Sarah Noonan). The Advisory Committee members are Joyce Coleman, Cathy Sanok and Nicky Zeeman, with Frank Grady and John Fyler as ex officio members. The local arrangements will be organized by Helen Fulton, Ifor Rowlands, Liz McAvoy, Catherine Clarke, Deborah Youngs and Glyn Pursglove.

In keeping with the suggestions made at the 2004 Glasgow Congress, there is no single theme for the Congress. The overall structure reflects areas of inquiry that emerged from members' initial proposals for sessions. Sessions will consequently follow several threads: Form and Aesthetics; Transitions, Ruptures, and Temporalities; Geographies and Colonizations; Making the Text (Manuscripts); Gender versus Sexuality; Nature, Science, and Technology; Devotion, Dissent, and Diaspora; Vernaculars and Identities; Gower; Professionalism and Pedagogy. In addition, there will be a number of non-aligned panels and sessions, and several plenary sessions, and a final day of meetings at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

The NCS Constitution requires that Congress participants (except for invited speakers from other fields) be members with their dues paid. We encourage you to share information about the Congress with other interested people who may not be NCS members at present – graduate students, new colleagues, and others working outside the field who may find sessions related to their specialisms. (Graduate students and research students may join NCS at a reduced membership rate.) Finally, a tight limit has been set on prior invitations to participate in any session. The overwhelming majority of participants in the Congress will be those who respond to this call.
CONGRESS SESSIONS

Please note that sessions are numbered consecutively in this listing and designated either papers or panel. A one-paragraph abstract should be sent in to the organizer(s) to arrive before October 1, 2007. Please indicate any specific audio-visual needs.

FORM AND AESTHETICS

General organizer: Ethan Knapp (knapp.79@osu.edu)

The past few years have seen a provocative series of returns to formal and aesthetic questions in the criticism of medieval literature. This thread will seek to gather up some of these energies and offer a closer interrogation of the relation of formal and aesthetic criticism to other categories in medieval studies – categories such as the historical, the material, and the codicological. Is an emphasis on form and aesthetics a departure from these other matters or a renewal of their materials? How is the contemporary interest in form and aesthetics related to earlier formalist movements and how might it be distinctive?

SESSION 1 (PANEL): FORMALISM

Session organizer: Christopher Cannon
cdc1001@cam.ac.uk

Papers on this panel will interrogate issues of form in Chaucer’s writing or discussions of “form” in Chaucer criticism. Recent discussion (and theories) of form in relation to other periods or poets might be brought to bear, but, focusing this discussion might be the general question: has form in Chaucer’s writing received the attention it deserves? Related questions (the first emerging from the last New Chaucer Society) might include: How might a formalist approach relate to the kind of reading we call “close”? Is “formalism” a way forward, or a kind of critical nostalgia? Does a formalist reading need to be historicized? (Does an interest in a formalist reading itself require historicization?) What is the “form” of a text for Chaucer, and is it different for us?

SESSION 2 (PAPERS): AESTHETICS

Session organizer: Maura Nolan
molan@berkeley.edu

Papers in this session will address problems associated with the use of the term “aesthetics” as a way of describing both Chaucer’s poetics and our own critical practice. The anachronism of the term has traditionally been used as a way of suggesting that medieval poets could not have had an aesthetics or an investment in the aesthetic. This session will challenge those ideas, looking at the Chaucerian corpus as a way of discerning what kinds of poetic practices we might describe as “aesthetic” and what forms of sensory impression – of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching – might have comprised Chaucer’s “aesthetic.” Papers addressing any aspect of Chaucerian aesthetics or contemporary critical uses of “aesthetics” in a Chaucerian context are welcome.

SESSION 3 (PAPERS): “IN PRAISE OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH VARIANT”

Session organizer: Andrew Taylor (ataylor@uottawa.ca)

Bernard Cerquiglini’s celebration of the “joyous profusion” of variants in Old French manuscripts has been echoed by a number of influential romance philologists who combine innovative close reading with an attention to manuscript detail. But the approach is less common in Middle English, where much close reading remains firmly based on critical editions such as the Riverside Chaucer. What are the particular challenges of applying close reading to manuscripts in Middle English, as opposed to those in other vernacular languages or in Latin? Should we even bother with what George Kane once dismissed as “debased forms of great Middle English poems”? Do Middle English manuscript studies and Middle English literary criticism constitute distinct academic cultures and, if so, are these cultures compatible and in what ways might they profitably disrupt each other?

TRANSITIONS, RUPTURES, AND TEMPORALITIES

General organizer: Ruth Evans (ruth.evans@stir.ac.uk)

This thread will encompass categories of periodization and the problematics of periodization (epistememes, limits, borders, ruptures, continuities, vernacular technologies, chronotopes); medievalism; the postcolonial oppositions between the modern, the medieval, and the archaic; the impact of the twelfth-century shift in memory practices; the difference that EEBO makes to our understanding of
the fifteenth century; the ways in which academic institutions and popular culture conceptualize and understand ‘the middle ages’ as a historical event in opposition not only to the early modern period but to modernity as such; the disjunctive chronologies of different phenomena: drama, book history, vernacular technologies, and the politics of the archive. This thread will also address recent rethinks of temporal boundary-markers, for example, in Marxist models and in the work of Alain Badiou.

SESSION 4 (PAPERS): THE VALUE OF MEDIEVALISM

Session organizer: Jenna Mead
(jenna.mead@utas.edu.au)

Criticisms and scholarship around medievalism have recently been significantly repositioned. Examples including Stephanie Trigg’s edited collection, *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture* (2005, 06), Bruce Holsinger’s *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (2005) and Carolyn Dinshaw’s recent paper at NCS (NYC 2006) on medievalism and temporalities mark sophisticated engagements with postcolonial theory and, in particular, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Other critical paradigms within the broader discipline have been similarly responsive to cultural, intellectual and economic change. In the context of, for instance, a shift between a mature historicism, a newly emergent formalism and an insistent and felt-need for a nuanced ethics of criticism, critical discussion of the knowledges and knowledge practices facilitated by medievalism is timely. Papers might address such areas as: what is the value/s of such a paradigm? What does medievalism enable us to know and how does it enable such knowledges?

SESSION 5 (PAPERS): MEDIEVAL PATHOLOGIES

Session organizer: Tom Prendergast
(tprendergast@wooster.edu)

Some recent critics have suggested that a pathological approach to the middle ages might actually be salubrious – that to ignore the ways that sickness has structured our idea of the middle ages is to attempt to sanitize medieval studies and, paradoxically, threaten the health of the field. This panel will examine what a pathological model of the middle ages would look like by asking questions such as, what role does pathology play in the production and reception of the idea of the middle ages? Can we link this idea of productive or receptive illness to representations of pathology in individual texts? Would a focus on pathology lead to the death of the field? Papers might address the paradoxical nature of pathology, the gendering of pathology, pathologies of reading and/or historicism, pathologies of the body and/or the mind and especially the broader idea of a pathological middle ages.

SESSION 6 (PAPERS): CROSSING BOUNDARIES: THE DRAMATIC TRADITIONS OF MEDIEVAL BRITAIN

Session organizer: John T. Sebastian (jsebastian@loyo.edu)

The recent publication of the volume on Wales in the Records of Early English Drama (REED) series necessitated the invention of a sub-series called Records of Early Drama (RED): this panel considers the difference an E makes. Are the boundaries of “English drama” in the middle ages geographic, linguistic, generic, cultural, imaginary, non-existent? Is English drama different from British drama? This session welcomes papers exploring boundaries of canon, genre, language, region, place, space, performed and written culture, and secularity and sacrality as well as those examining non-English-language drama (Latin, Anglo-Norman, Cornish, Welsh) in Britain or that employ comparative methodologies.

SESSION 7 (PAPERS): PERIODIZATION AND THE ARCHIVE

Kathleen Davis (kathleen@Princeton.EDU)

This session investigates the relationships between temporal and spatial borders and the problem of the archive. What does the survival, preservation, and institutionalization of documents and artifacts have to do with differentiating between medieval and (early) modern, and/or distinguishing between European and non-European, colonized and colonizer? How do political economies, the politics of time, and the constitution of archives intersect? Papers might consider, but need not be confined to: the political histories of textual loss and survival; patterns of ownership and the constitution of borders; the periodizing effects of disciplinary constraints; or temporal assumptions underlying research and editing.
SESSION 8 (PANEL): THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

Session organizer: Ruth Evans (ruth.evans@stir.ac.uk)

“One of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years,” observes Andreas Huyssen, “has been the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies.” The interest in the politics of memory has impacted variously on the study of Chaucer and the middle ages, in the work of Michael Clanchy, Mary Carruthers, James Fentress and Chris Wickham, Janet Coleman, Aranye Fradenburg and Stephanie Trigg. This panel invites short papers (3–7 minutes) that address any aspect of memory in relation to Chaucer’s texts and late medieval culture in general: the arts of memory in the middle ages; postcolonial memory; the ways in which different regimes of memory practices mark borders between periods (the shift from memory to written record, for example, or changes in attitudes towards the memory of the dead after the Reformation); the construction of mythic pasts; the ways in which our culture remembers — or forgets — the middle ages.

GEOGRAPHIES AND COLONIZATIONS

General organizer: John Ganim (john.ganim@ucr.edu)

This thread will cover a wide range of possible investigations of Chaucerian and other late medieval topographies and geographies, including the settings of works or groups of works, colonial and imperial imaginings, the representation of distant lands in medieval literature, the relation of England to other places in time and space, the ways in which Chaucer and medieval writing in general complicates our, and their, sense of centers and margins, of borders and regions, of the mapping of the world as a way of knowing.

SESSION 9 (PAPERS): WALES AND ENGLAND

Session organizer: Helen Fulton (h.e.fulton@swansea.ac.uk)

This paper session focuses on comparative studies of Wales and England in the late middle ages. Topics might include geographical/topographical representations, political relations, literary influences, linguistic connections, specific authors or genres, translation studies and medievalism. While the central theme of “colonization” is significant, it need not preempt other theoretical approaches and interpretations.

SESSION 10 (PAPERS): CHAUCER AND THE CRUSADES

Session organizer: John Bowers (john.bowers@unlv.edu)

Though we associate the “crusades” with the age of Richard the Lionhearted, Christopher Tyerman’s recent book God’s War: A New History of the Crusades makes clear that Christian campaigns against religious enemies continued as a pressing political and literary topic throughout the later middle ages. Chaucer’s Knight fought in a variety of military campaigns rationalized as crusades. The poet’s colleague Sir John Clanvowe died outside Constantinople in 1391 while on a journey sometimes described as a crusade. The Travels of Sir John Mandeville transmitted the lore of the Holy Land originally brought back by crusader knights, and The Siege of Jerusalem drew upon latent passion for liberating anew Christ’s sacred city. Philippe de Mézières’s Order of the Passion had attracted members from the cream of England’s aristocracy. This session will continue exploring the whole range of such issues as they were represented in the textual culture of the late fourteenth century.

SESSION 11 (PAPERS): GOWER’S GEOGRAPHY

Session organizer: Lynn Arner (arnerlp@pitt.edu)

This session investigates John Gower’s portrayals of lands and peoples in England, the larger British Isles, Europe, and other parts of the world. Welcoming papers on any of Gower’s writings, this session examines the terms in which the poet conceptualized various geographical regions in either the medieval or the ancient world. Topics might include the participation of Gower’s poetry in proto-nationalism, constructions of geographical boundaries, investments in England’s wool trade, mercantilist discourses, understandings of non-Christian lands, colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies, linkages of the spatial and temporal, and alignments of medieval England with earlier kingdoms and empires.

SESSION 12 (PANEL): BORDERS, REGIONS, LANDSCAPES, NATIONS

Session organizer: Patricia Ingham (pingham@indiana.edu)

Papers are invited on any aspect of locale, geographies, region. How do place and space, localities or landscapes, the boundaries (inclusions and exclusions) of imaginary, geographic or linguistic communities matter to our reading of late medieval literature and why should they?
MAKING THE TEXT

*General organizer: Alexandra Gillespie*  
alexandra.gillespie@utoronto.ca

The thread “Making the Text” at the congress is an opportunity for scholars to describe and reflect upon recent work on manuscripts, and to discuss the continuing development of procedures—paleographical, linguistic, historical—special to and necessary for the study of medieval English books. It is also a forum in which scholars may pose or address new questions, and open English manuscript studies up to new kinds of intellectual inquiry. Writing about the field of book history in the 1980s, D. F. McKenzie observed that “the moment we are required to explain signs in a book, as distinct from describing or copying them, they assume a symbolic status”: bibliographical “forms” he argued “effect meaning.” Papers are invited that describe the material forms of Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian texts, and the contexts for textual production in this period, but that also consider the symbolic status of books, find literary answers to codicological questions, and reconsider the place of the manuscript in medieval English culture.

SESSION 13 (PAPERS): WRITING OUTSIDE THE BOOK

*Session organizer: Alfred Hiatt*  
a.hiatt@leeds.ac.uk

Papers are invited that address any aspect of the physical form and placement of medieval English texts—Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian. Topics might include: texts that appear in non-book form—e.g. documents, maps, letters, bills, ephemera—and/or their interaction with books/texts in book form; the role of writing on material objects or in relation to architectural structures; and the written form of para- and meta-texts.

SESSION 14 (PAPERS): SCENES OF WRITING

*Session organizer: Nicholas Perkins*  
nicholas.perkins@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk

This session will discuss the places where writing happens in Chaucerian and other texts, including scriptoria, bedrooms, bureaucratic offices, and the street; it will consider whether there are distinctive “spatial practices” in the work of Chaucer and his contemporaries and how these might affect textual form and meaning. Topics might include: the significance of imagined sites of composition and writing for Chaucer and other writers; the usefulness of taxonomies for scenes of reading and writing, such as public/private, sacred/secular, known/unknown, or gendered space; and the interaction between actual places of manuscript production and the imagined physical or mental loci explored in texts.

SESSION (PAPERS): CLOSE READING AND MANUSCRIPTS

*Session organizer: Andrew Taylor*  
ataylor@uottawa.ca

This session is also included, and described in full, in the Form and Aesthetics thread, above (Session 3).

SESSION 15 (PAPERS): NON-ENGLISH BOOKS

*Session Organizer: Helen Fulton*  
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The aim of this paper session is to consider the multilingual context of English manuscript production and the impact of manuscript traditions on the kinds of non-English texts that were influential for writers such as Chaucer and his contemporaries. Manuscripts in Latin, Welsh, and French will be of particular significance but works in other languages will also be of interest.

SESSION 16 (PANEL): MANUSCRIPTS BEFORE CHAUCER

*Session Organizer: Elaine Treharne*  
etreharne@mac.com

The aim of this session is to investigate the immensely rich and diverse English vernacular manuscript tradition from the immediate post-Conquest period until the fourteenth century. All forms of manuscripts—from those containing “copied” pre-Conquest English texts to those collections so central to “Middle English” literary studies in the thirteenth and earlier fourteenth centuries—will be considered. Of particular urgency are questions about the relative status of English from 1070 to 1370; the nature of the audiences for the materials copied in English; and the localisation of, and available resources for, the production of manuscripts containing English prose and poetry.

SESSION 17 (PANEL): CHAUCER’S MANUSCRIPTS

*Session Organizer: Estelle Stubbs*  
et.stubbs@sheffield.ac.uk

Papers for this final panel should be no more than ten minutes long: participants are invited to reflect upon issues
raised in earlier sessions in the thread, especially as these might impact upon Chaucer studies, and to present new work on and new approaches to Chaucer’s books. Chaucer’s books is a catch-all term here: it is meant to describe manuscripts (and printed books) containing Chaucer’s texts and those writers associated with him, and the late medieval manuscript cultures that influenced writers in “the age of Chaucer.”

GENDER VERSUS SEXUALITY

General organizer: Diane Watt (diane@aber.ac.uk)

In the last two decades, the focus on sex and gender (primarily conceived in terms of the male-female, masculinity-femininity binaries) in Chaucer and Middle-English Studies has shifted to one on sexuality (which often eschews binary categories and embraces more fluid definitions and categories). Meanwhile, the trend within gender criticism has moved away from thinking about women, the female, femininity, and anti-feminism, to exploring men, the male, and masculinity. At the same time, gender, sexuality and queer are sometimes used as if they were synonymous terms. To what extent, in medieval criticism, is gender opposed to or equivalent to sexuality? Does a focus on sexuality elide questions of gender, especially in relation to women? To what extent does the opposition between gender and sexuality arise out of tensions and conflicts between feminism and queer theory? Indeed is feminism an outdated discourse or are there valid new feminisms (such as postcolonial feminism, or, of course, queer feminism or lesbian feminism)? What can feminist approaches to Chaucer and medieval literature learn from queer studies, and what can queer approaches learn from feminism? As we debate these terms, feminism and gender studies continue to thrive, giving us new insights into periods like the fifteenth century and introducing new ways of thinking about issues like place, time and space.

SESSION 18 (PAPERS): GENDER IN THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY

Session Organizer: Nicole Sidhu (sidhun@ecu.edu)

During the first burst of interest in feminist and gender issues in medieval English literature, the fifteenth century was often overlooked. This was, in part, due to the paucity of historical research on gender in the period. However, recent years have seen a re-invigoration of interest in the period amongst both literary scholars and historians. This session aims to introduce the exciting new work on the gender in the fifteenth century. We welcome papers on any aspect of the subject. Possible topics include (but are not limited to) masculinity, queer theory, relationships between gender and changing political ideologies, sexuality, marriage, or the relationships between gender norms and work. Possible texts include the work of John Lydgate, English drama, the Book of Margery Kempe, Thomas Malory, the Middle Scots poets, and Thomas Hoccleve.

SESSION 19 (PAPERS): NEW FEMINIST APPROACHES TO CHAUCER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Session Organizer: Liz Herbert McAvoy (e.mcavoy@swansea.ac.uk)

Contemporary feminist criticism has been built resolutely upon the foundation blocks of the second-wave feminist impetus, postmodernism and the resultant essentialist-constructivist debate. This session aims to explore new avenues which more recent developments within feminist consciousness have opened up for the twenty-first century scholar of Chaucer and his contemporaries. In particular, it will invite analysis from third-wave, global, queer and postcolonial feminist perspectives which seek to challenge notions of any type of fixed female identity and/or sisterhood and will point towards the continued relevance of late-fourteenth century English literature to a twenty-first century audience grappling with inevitable epistemological shifts.

SESSION 20 (PAPERS): QUEER TIMES AND PLACES

Session Organizer: Bob Mills (robert.mills@kcl.ac.uk)

Queer studies is strongly identified with analyses that focus on disruptions of binary gender and sexuality, but what would be the upshot of imagining queerness as a configuration of disjunctive temporalities and spaces? If, as Judith Halberstam has recently argued, it is possible to identify such things as “queer time” and “queer space” – phenomena that develop partly in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction – what would be the consequences of extending these claims back to the middle ages? Papers are invited that address queer uses of space and time in medieval literature – uses that may intersect with but are not necessarily synonymous with gender or sexuality as isolated categories. Readings of medieval texts that queerly challenge conventional markers of life experience such as birth, marriage, reproduction and death, or that imagine the existence of a queer “way of life”, are especially
encouraged.

SESSION 21 (PAPERS): GENDERED SPACES AND SEXUALIZED SPACES

Session Organizer: Michelle Sauer
(michelle.sauer@moisstateu.edu)

Spatial criticism is a developing field, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, and built upon by numerous others, particularly Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. It is especially important in interdisciplinary approaches to questions of “space,” “place,” and “cultural geography,” with the understanding that space is no longer considered “dead” or “fixed”; rather, it is productive. This session will explore the issues of physical and constructed spaces as they interconnect with gender and sexuality. Papers might approach texts with ideas such as (but not limited to): the structuration of gender; the construction of gendered spaces; the interaction of space, time and place; queer spaces—lived, perceived, and conceived; gendered interpretations of space and time; the intrusion of violence into constructed spaces; and defining sexual spaces/sexually defining spaces.

SESSION 22 (PANEL): GENDER VERSUS SEXUALITY

Session Organizer: Karma Lochrie
(klochrie@indiana.edu)

The title of this panel presumes an adversarial relationship between queer and gender studies for the study of Chaucer and medieval culture generally. But is this really the case now? Despite the sometimes parallel tracks of gender and queer medieval studies over the past ten years, recent scholarship suggests new directions for the intersection of the two. The shift from sexualities per se to normativities (including but not limited to sex) is one such direction in recent queer studies. The return of gender to sexuality studies in the form of transgender studies is another. Both have also productively engaged with recent studies of race, ethnicity, and nation. The more pressing question remains: what are the broader rubrics in medieval studies under which gender and sexuality studies might operate in the future?

NATURE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

General organizer: Nicolette Zeeman (nz202@cam.ac.uk)

It is a while since Chaucer scholarship has addressed itself in a concerted way to the impact of medieval “science” and technology on the poet. In the interim, emphases in the history of science and technology have changed radically. The study of ecology, biology, animal life and human embodiment has altered our view of what might constitute medieval “science”; the borderline between the traditional “science” (medicine and the quadrivium, including music) and medical practice, technology, magic, alchemy or musical performance has become porous. The time seems ripe for a reassessment of medieval “nature” literature – not to mention both medieval and modern categories of science and technology — in relation to Chaucer.

SESSION 23 (PAPERS): THE NATURAL WORLD: ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Session Organizer: Lisa Kiser (kiser.l@osu.edu)

This session will explore how Chaucer and his contemporaries assessed and deployed nature in late medieval textual environments. Approaches may take any form (economic, sociopolitical, philosophical, moral, devotional, folkloric, ecologic, etc.). Issues that papers might address include animal cruelty; tensions visible between literal and symbolic readings of life-forms in the plant and animal world; gendered differences in the ways in which nature was analyzed and used; and the impact of social, political, economic imperatives on the medieval English environment.

SESSION 24 (PAPERS): NATURE AND MAGIC

Session Organizer: Corinne Saunders
(c.j.saunders@durham.ac.uk)

This session will explore the dynamic relationship between ideas of nature and magic in the medieval period, in particular, the notion of “magyk naturel”, which could include medicine and lapidary science, as well as astrology and alchemy. A special focus may be the opposition between licit, natural magic drawing upon the occult forces of the cosmos, and illicit magic employing the arts of demons. Papers might address Chaucer’s own reading and understanding of the intersection of ideas of nature and magic, the ways that this topic figures within his oeuvre, and its place within the broader context of science, technology and intellectual history.
SESSION 25 (PAPERS): AGE AND GROWING OLD IN CHAUCER

Session Organizer: Sue Niebrzydowski
(s.niebrzydowski@bangor.ac.uk)

This session will explore the ways in which Chaucer engages with growing older: Chaucer’s characters vary in their response to the passing of youth and the onset of older age. Among the questions that papers could address are: To what degree does Chaucer differentiate between “middle” and “old” age? Does advancing age affect speech and behaviour? To what extent does older age determine the space(s) that a character can inhabit and the role(s) that he/she may perform within different genres of Chaucerian fiction? Are different expectations held and assumptions made about older women than about older men? To what degree does Chaucer question the belief that wisdom and spirituality accompany greater age and advocate growing old disgracefully?

SESSION 26 (PAPERS): TECHNOLOGY

Session Organizer: Vance Smith
(dvsmith@princeton.edu)

The technologization of social relations “does harm,” as Habermas says, “to language.” This session will explore the emergence of this harm, or its remediation, in the representation of technology in Chaucer and his contemporaries. How are social relations “technologized” in the fourteenth century? What can we say about the field of thought within which technologies emerge? This session will explore not merely the relations between technological innovation and social change, but between technology and thought, and might consider the particular topics of alchemy, astrolabes, ploughing, calculating, Aristotelian physics, rhetoric, memory, timekeeping, deferring, and narrating.

SESSION 27 (E-PANEL): CHAUCER’S ARTS OF NUMBER, MUSIC AND MEDICINE

Session Organizer: Nicolette Zeeman
(nz202@cam.ac.uk)

Although Chaucer’s allusions to quadrivial science and music were extensively elucidated in the mid-twentieth century, the histories of science, medicine and music have developed considerably, particularly at the interface with forms of practice, performance and embodiment. What consequences do these recent developments have for reading Chaucer? Papers might refer to: astrology, optics, perception, epistemology, psychology, confessional and inward “seeing”; medicine, the art of the barber surgeon, “living in” but also “seeing into” the body, gender, psychological or spiritual “medicine”; music understood as “number”, but also performed music and song, “natural music”, music understood as ‘affective’, music in social practice or ritual, and music as metaphor. Papers can range from case studies to the theoretical.

DEVOTION, DISSENT, AND DIASPORA

General organizer: Catherine Sanok (sanok@umich.edu)

In English cultural history, 1534 stands as the signal date for the inauguration of religious change and difference. But the religious cultures and textual traditions of medieval England were themselves contested, heterogeneous, mobile. Recent scholarship has highlighted the increasing prominence of lay devotion, conflicts over the status of public religion, attempts to define and regulate heterodoxy, contact with Muslim communities, and the continuing legacy of anti-Jewish discourses. This thread examines some of the texts and traditions that register or respond to religious devotion, difference, and cross-cultural contact in medieval England. Four paper sessions explore these concerns through the categories of aesthetics and hermeneutics, the problematics of assimilation, and the textual traces of diaspora, and a panel considers affect as it is informed by religious narrative and practice.

SESSION 28 (PAPERS): TEXTUAL DIASPORAS

Session Organizer: Jessica Brantley
(jessica.brantley@yale.edu)

This panel will consider the movements of medieval religious texts from the center to the periphery. These movements include a text’s (or a manuscript’s) passing from a singular author to a variety of scribes, from a named patron to a wide range of readers, from the metropolis to the provinces, from England to the Continent, or, indeed, from the Continent to England – both in the middle ages and after the Reformation. Papers might address the politics of textual transmission and manuscript distribution, not always as a direct translatio of knowledge and power, nor as a seamless web of circulation, but as a dispersal.
SESSION 29 (PAPERS): ASSIMILATION AND DISSIMULATION

Session Organizer: Christine Chism (chism@rci.rutgers.edu)

This panel explores the diasporic experience of religious assimilation and dissimulation among Christian, Classical, Jewish, and Muslim cultures. To what extent did late medieval Muslim, Jewish, and Christian writers seek to assimilate and re-perform figures and texts from other religious traditions? Do they dilute or exhibit anxiety about these assimilations? These religions share many modes of devotional performance: pilgrimage, prayer, commemoration, witnessing, writing, and remembering the powers of the holy. Under what modes of censorship or appropriation do writers from each religion reimagine their most familiar devotional performances uncannily through the eyes of strangers?

SESSION 30 (PAPERS): HERMENEUTICS AND DIFFERENCE

Session organizer: Lisa Lampert-Weissig (llampert@ucsd.edu)

This panel will explore the role of different hermeneutical communities and practices in late medieval England. Among the questions that papers could address are: What are the roles of difference (gender, sexuality, religion) in questions of hermeneutics? What is the impact of religious dissent on questions of exegetical practice? How can we trace the impact of different hermeneutical practices and traditions in religious and literary texts? Can we talk about “English” hermeneutic practices and how do these practices engage with those from other regions and in other languages?

SESSION 31 (PAPERS): DEVOTIONAL AESTHETICS

Session organizer: Tara Williams (tara.williams@oregonstate.edu)

While medieval studies has challenged disciplinary and, more recently, chronological boundaries, it has largely preserved the separation between poetic and religious texts — a separation reinforced by the heavier emphasis on the historical rather than literary significance of the latter. This session seeks to address that separation by examining the aesthetic strategies of devotional texts and their connections to literary as well as religious traditions. Papers might consider questions such as: How do devotional writers draw on — or diverge from — poetic texts? How do devotional texts comment on the category of aesthetics? How do social and religious concerns — whether orthodox or heterodox — shape devotional aesthetics?

SESSION 32 (PANEL): RELIGION AND AFFECT

Session organizer: Fiona Somerset (somerset@duke.edu)

The feelings people have about their religion are intimately bound up with the actions they perform in its practice and the stories they tell themselves (and others) about them: affect as incited by narrative and practice makes the historically remote or the divinely ineffable immediate to experience. This is as true for members of dissident or diasporic religious groups in the later middle ages as it is for those who see themselves as part (even if a perfectionist part) of the mainstream. This panel seeks to foster new cross-disciplinary and comparative work on affect and late medieval English religious writings.

VERNACULARS AND IDENTITIES

General organizer: Joyce Coleman (joyce.coleman@ou.edu)

Geoffrey Chaucer is commonly seen as a man of London, working out his fictions in relation to Continental literary and linguistic traditions. A Chaucer meeting set in Wales is an opportunity to re-evaluate the contribution of native vernaculars and worldviews to the shaping of Chaucer’s literature and to the insular literature of his time. Each of the three sessions proposed for this thread addresses a different vernacular language and/or tradition: the French of England; the multilingual literature of Wales; and the native English tradition. Papers can address the status of these languages and traditions; their contacts with each other; the identities — personal, linguistic, national, or other — negotiated around these traditions and along their zones of contact; and, of course, their relationship to Chaucer.


Session Organizer: Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (jwb502@york.ac.uk)

Recent scholarship on the relations between documentary and literary culture and on medieval multilingualism offers further evidence and new ways of conceiving
London as a linguistic and cultural environment. Short papers (5–10 minutes long) are invited for this panel, whose focussing dates allow consideration of the generation before Chaucer, Chaucer himself, and the early reception of his work in trying to map an appropriately complex account of relevant materials and methodologies.

SESSION 34 (PAPERS): CHAUCER: MIDDLE ENGLISH SOURCES AND MODELS

Session Organizer: John Hines (hines@cardiff.ac.uk)

Do the parody of “Sir Thopas” and the Parson’s scornful reference to the alliterative mode accurately represent Chaucer’s attitude to literary models available to him in English – if so, why? This session will examine the scope for identifying significant Middle English sources and influences in Chaucer’s writing, and discuss whether these have systematically been neglected in favor of a “European” image for the author, perhaps even by Chaucer himself. Proposals addressing the question of how analogous material found in other languages could have been adapted in English versions before passing to Chaucer are encouraged.

SESSION 35 (PAPERS): WELSH LITERATURE IN MANY LANGUAGES

Session Organizer: Helen Fulton (h.e.fulton@swansea.ac.uk)

This session will consider the range of languages available to writers in medieval Wales and how these languages – Welsh, English, French, Latin – were used to negotiate identities and power relations after 1284. Papers might consider issues such as: multilingual texts; languages of history and administration; translations; linguistic contacts and borrowings.

GOWER

General Organizer: Frank Grady (fgrady@ums.lsu.edu)

While this thread is obviously focused on Chaucer’s contemporary John Gower, it is also entwined with some of the conference’s other major themes, featuring sessions on Gower’s geographical imagination (cross-listed with the “Geographies and Colonizations” thread) and the pedagogical challenges of teaching Gower in a Chaucer-saturated world, as well as on Gower’s thematics of repose.

SESSION 36 (PAPERS): GOWER’S GEOGRAPHY

Session organizer: Lynn Arner (arner1p@pitt.edu)

(Cross-listed with the Geographies and Colonizations thread, and described in full above).

SESSION 37 (PAPERS): GOWER AND REPOSE

Session organizer: Elizabeth Allen (eallen@uci.edu)

At the conclusion of the Confessio Amantis Venus gives John Gower a pair of black beads that say “por reposer.” She prays for his peace and release from love, urging him to find refuge where moral virtue dwells: in books. This panel seeks papers on the dynamics of repose. What sort of refuge or release do books offer for Gower, perhaps in comparison or contrast with his contemporaries, including Chaucer? How does Gower figure repose elsewhere in the Confessio or his other poems? To what extent and for what purposes does the poem advocate rest or peace, as opposed to physical or mental work, penance, laborious moral endeavor, conflict, war? On the other hand, how might repose differ from sloth? Is death a final rest, or a restless temporality? We invite papers on the thematic, historical, and/or formal significance of repose — temporary respite or permanent retreat; escape or hiding away in sanctuary; ideas of home, privacy, or intimacy; old age and death; narrative escapism; poetic stasis; devotional peace or enclosure; safety, welcome, and hospitality; spatial movement to the center or retirement to the margins; the legal parameters of a king’s or community’s peace.

SESSION 38 (PANEL): GOWER AND THE CHAUCER SYLLABUS, OR WHY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS TEACH THE TALE OF FLORENT ALONGSIDE “THE WIFE OF BATH’S TALE”

Session organizer: Malte Urban (malte.urban@kcl.ac.uk)

The MLA has just announced plans for an Approaches to Teaching John Gower volume, the web companion to the Norton Anthology of English Literature includes excerpts from Gower’s Vox and Miroir, and Gower’s works are becoming increasingly available online. These developments pose the question of how these texts, which often mirror texts by Chaucer, can successfully be brought into the often predominantly Chaucerian undergraduate classroom (and schoolroom) and help to address what Nicholas Watson called, in his response to the 2006 NCS Congress, the “the major ... divide within our discipline ... between its Chaucerian and its non-Chaucerian centripetalisms.” Short papers are invited for a panel (5-7 speakers) that will take up the pedagogical, polemical, and
practical issues involved in teaching Chaucer and Gower together.

PROFESSIONALISM AND PEDAGOGY

General organizer: Thomas Hahn
(thomas.hahn@rochester.edu)

SESSION 39 (PAPERS): CHAUCERIAN PEDAGOGY: HOW DO WE TEACH?

Session organizer: Thomas Hahn
(thomas.hahn@rochester.edu)

Papers addressing the principles and practice that govern classroom environments, empirical and experiential features of teaching, taking up questions of content, method, innovation, and preservation, tensions between history, theory, and textual analysis, issues of source and language, and other concerns of teachers, whether specialists or generalists.

SESSION 40 (PAPERS): PROFESSING / PROFESSIONALIZING CHAUCER: WHY DO WE TEACH?

Session organizer: Thomas Hahn
(thomas.hahn@rochester.edu)

Papers addressing the larger motives and patterns that govern pedagogy, conceived as classroom practice on both the graduate and undergraduate level, as scholarship, and as the reception of Chaucer in the public sphere. Perspectives on the history of scholarship, schools of criticism, particular figures, or institutional interventions.

SESSION 41 (PANEL): ROUND TABLE ON PROFESSING CHAUCER

Session organizer: Thomas Hahn
(thomas.hahn@rochester.edu)

Participants will be asked to offer brief and provocative position papers; the session will then move to open discussion among the participants, and finally to inclusive discussion among all present for the session. Issues might include the disappearance of the major author course, displacing Chaucer from the syllabus with other English or translated texts, linguistic knowledge versus critical engagement, making it new or keeping it old.

E-DISCUSSION GROUP AS PRELIMINARY TO ROUND TABLE

Session organizer: Thomas Hahn
(thomas.hahn@rochester.edu)

An electronic list open to all those wishing to contribute to the Round Table on Professing Chaucer, offering the chance to expand or refine topics and issues for the real-time session.

SPECIFIC TOPICS

SESSION 42 (PAPERS AND A RESPONDENT): HAUNTED CHAUCER

Session Organizers: George Edmondson
(george.edmondson@dartmouth.edu) and Robert M. Stein
(rms9@columbia.edu)

The Chaucerian text is haunted by figures of the dead and the undead: the drowned Seys, the little clerk, Trojan in the eighth sphere. This panel invites participants to use the trope of a “haunted Chaucer” to think not only about individual visitations, late-medieval representations of death and dying, and such broad topics as Chaucer’s relation to time and to his poetic inheritance, but about other forms of Chaucerian haunting as well: melancholia as a mode of thinking gender, political subjection or political resistance; the ethics of failed/refused mourning; ruined landscapes; what Carla Freccero calls “queer spectrality.” What of the “hauntings” of Chaucer studies? Is our field haunted by Chaucer – or not haunted enough? Need we conjure or inter?

SESSION 43 (PAPERS): CHAUCER’S DREAM VISION POETRY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Session organizer: Erin Felicia Labbie
(labbie@bgnet.bgsu.edu)

Chaucer’s dream vision poetry and Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams both question our ways of knowing and symbolizing the world, while they complicate issues of agency, authority, and responsibility within textual production. What do Chaucer’s dream vision poetics have to do with the way that we define and delimit the interpretation of dreams? Do Chaucer’s dream vision poetics offer us any lessons that will illuminate or correct Freud’s theory of dream interpretation? Do psychoanalytical approaches to dream interpretation teach us anything about dreaming in the middle ages? This panel seeks to advance conversation about the interpretation of literature and the interpretation of dreams by juxtaposing
Chaucer’s dream vision poetry with a psychoanalytical understanding of dreams and dream analysis.

SESSION 43 (E-SEMINAR): LUCAN’S BELLUM CIVILE AS A CHAUCERIAN INTERTEXT

Session organizer: Cathy Sanok (sanok@umich.edu)

Chaucer’s several references to Lucan touch on a number of areas of critical interest-among them, the classical past, representations of the “East”, and epic as celebration and critique of the status quo. We will use the seminar format for broad discussion of Lucan’s Bellum Civile and its medieval reception, as well as the projects developed by seminar participants.

SESSION 44 (PANEL): READING THE POETRY OF WAR IN A TIME OF WAR

Session organizer: Cathy Sanok (sanok@umich.edu)

This panel will consider the reception of war poetry – such as Lucan’s Bellum Civile but not limited to it – in the context of the late medieval experience of war. Addressing works affiliated with military encounters abroad and those affiliated with the War of the Roses, the panel opens questions about how external and internal conflicts are refracted in literary culture.

SESSION 45 (PAPERS): NEW WORK ON THE ‘PRIORESS’S TALE’

Session organizers: Kathy Lavezzo (Kathy-Lavezzo@uiowa.edu) and Geraldine Heng (heng@mail.utexas.edu)

Over the last twenty-five years, the “Prioress’s Tale” has served as the locus for influential scholarly discussions of questions of religion, race, and ethnicity in the middle ages (i.e., Despres, Fradenburg, Kruger, Langmuir, Patterson, and others). Attentive to the fact that these problems have hardly been resolved and remain pressing, this panel seeks new work on the tale and/or its sources and analogues. In particular, we invite papers on anti-Semitism and such topics as urban architecture, orientalism, material culture, usury, crime, ethics, history, and horror.

SESSION 46 (PAPERS): LATE MEDIEVAL READING

Session organizer: James Simpson (jsimpson@fas.harvard.edu)

The recent upsurge of interest in the material history of the book has not always connected with histories of reading. This panel invites contributions that address histories of reading in any field of late medieval and early modern studies, whether religious or secular. Topics could include the following: the material history of the book and histories of reading; represented images (visual or verbal) of readers; implied readers; the authority of textual communities versus the authority of texts; the psychology of reading.

News

Corrigenda

The footnotes in Andrea Denny-Brown's essay, "Povre Griseldea and the All-Consuming Archewyves" (SAC 28 [2006]: 77-115), were inadvertently misnumbered; note 31 in the text actually corresponds to note 30 at the foot of the page, and this misnumbering continues through text note 64 on page 105. The editor apologizes for the error.

NCS at MLA

Our thanks to all who attended the New Chaucer Society-sponsored party at the MLA on December 30, 2006, but especially to Rita Copeland and David Wallace, Past-President of NCS, for hosting the party at their home. Thanks also to the several Chaucerians who assisted David and Rita with set-up and clean-up duties. Over 70 members and friends attended the party, making it one of the largest NCS events ever held between our biennial congresses.

Letter to the Editor

Seiden, Knight, and review of my collection (co-edited with Michael Pechter), The Middle Ages at Work: Technology, Interests in Late Medieval England (Studies in Chaucerian Culture 38 [2006]: 1-25) contains significant factual errors regarding both the purpose of the volume and the contents of individual essays. These errors would be insulting to readers of the review who have not read the book, to themselves. Highlight only a few below.

The reviewer claims that the contributors do not cite
The New Chaucer Society

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Address:
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Swansea, Wales

Site of the 2008 International Congress of the New Chaucer Society

Located on the South Wales coast immediately to the east of the Gower Peninsula, Swansea is the second largest city in Wales and is considered the gateway to the Gower Peninsula. The Gower Peninsula received its name when a marcher lordship was created following the Norman Conquest. This lordship included land around Swansea Bay as far as the Tawe, and the manor of Kilvey beyond the Tawe as well as the Gower peninsula itself. Swansea was designated as its chief town and subsequently received one of the earlier borough charters in Wales.

The wonderful and varied landscape of the Gower Peninsula was the first place in Britain to be designated as an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) by the Countryside Agency on behalf of the UK government, and is one of only five within Wales. Excluding the small urbanised area in the south eastern corner of the county, the whole of the Gower Peninsula is part of an AONB. About three quarters of the county is bordered by the sea.

Not surprisingly, the AONB and the parks of the Gower peninsula have become havens for some of the richest wildlife and varied habitats in the UK. Historic reminders of past, from castles, medieval churches, iron age fortifications, and prehistoric standing stones, dot the landscape. This rich natural and cultural treasures are set against an awe-inspiring backdrop of hills, valleys, beaches, cliff tops, woodlands, dunes, marshes and caves.

The region’s wide sandy beaches, such as those at Langland, Caswell and Limeslade, are popular with swimmers and tourists with children, and the wide and calm waters of Swansea Bay attract the water-sport
enthusiast. Coastal paths connect most of the Gower bays and Swansea Bay, and hikers can enjoy countryside views throughout the year. Although little known on the tourist map, the North of Swansea has some of the most outstanding vistas in the country, with panoramas of the Welsh mountains. One of the most popular tourist destinations in the county, the former fishing village of Mumbles (located on the western edge of Swansea Bay) has a variety of restaurants and coffee shops. The promenade at Mumbles offers a panoramic view of Swansea Bay.

The Sixteenth International Congress of the New Chaucer Society will be held July 18–22, 2008 at the campus of the University of Wales, Swansea, Wales, UK. King George V laid the foundation stone of the University in July 1920, and from the beginning, Swansea has excelled as a scientific and a technical institution and has become a centre of excellence in the humanities. Conference participants can choose to stay in the University’s student accommodations.

While the New York Congress will be a hard act to follow, we aim to capitalize on its strengths without seeking to duplicate it. We look forward to seeing you there against the backdrop of the beautiful and culturally rich Welsh countryside!

TRAVELLING TO SWANSEA:

Swansea and the University of Wales, Swansea are easily accessible by road, rail, sea and air. Cardiff International Airport is less than an hour away and the M4 motorway, the main east-west arterial route from London, passes through the northern outskirts of Swansea. Swansea railway station is on the main west coast line from London Paddington, less than 3 hours away. There are also frequent ferry crossings from Swansea to Cork in the Republic of Ireland.

For more information on the University of Wales, Swansea, visit their website at: www.swansea.ac.uk.
Information on the surrounding area can be found at: www.enjoygower.com.

Pennard Castle, Three Cliffs Bay, Gower, Swansea, Wales
May 4, 2007

Dear Colleague:

It is time to elect four new members to the New Chaucer Society Board of Trustees for the 2008-2012 term. These new Trustees will replace Elizabeth Archibald, John Fyler, Lisa Kiser, Helen Phillips, all of whose terms expire in 2008; the terms of Susanna Fein, Rosalind Field, Laura Kendrick will expire in 2010.

The ballot below contains the names of eight candidates recommended by the Nominating Committee; the four candidates receiving the most votes will be declared elected. NCS by-laws stipulate that only signed ballots will be counted. Ballots must be returned to the NCS office by September 1, 2007. Counting of ballots is strictly confidential.

____________________________________________________
Signature

____________________________________________________
Print name

Balloon
Please vote for four (4) candidates

_________ Glenn Burger
(CUNY)

_________ Christopher Cannon
(Cambridge University)

_________ Jeffrey J. Cohen
(George Washington University)

_________ Juliette Dor
(University of Liège)

_________ Ruth Evans
(University of Stirling)

_________ Alexandra Gillespie
(University of Toronto)

_________ Sarah Stanbury
(College of the Holy Cross)

_________ Stephanie Trigg
(University of Melbourne)

By September 1, 2007, please return this form to: The New Chaucer Society, One Brookings Drive, Washington University, CB 1122, St. Louis, MO 63130, USA
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