



# THE CHAUCER NEWSLETTER

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## Reading and Looking Things Up in Chaucer's England

Though of course we debate details, there seems to be widespread consensus that Chaucer read a great deal, and in a great many books. Close resemblances between his text and some other book make an arguable connection, and verbatim quotations make fair certainty. Or so we seem inclined to think. My purpose is to enter some cautionary exhortations. My work in progress for the last three years has been on Langland, not on Chaucer. Nevertheless I have made some discoveries about the character and extent of Langland's reading which suggest that we need to think differently about Chaucer.

What I have learned about Langland is that he worked with a very few books—at first only two—and that he read them under the influence of the method of monastic *lectio divina*—a method of reading which the format and character of medieval manuscripts makes most natural and appropriate.

When Langland began to write, his most important book was Hugh of St. Cher's commentary on Luke. In the brief section of Luke between the parable of the talents in Luke 19 and the apocalyptic exhortations in Luke 21, taken with Hugh's commentary, Langland gets every literal detail of his first draft prologue except the personification of Truth, and comes close to that. There is a tower, there is Lady Church, there is an array of folk responsible for the world, there is the story of the tribute money, there is a reference to Lot in the mountains, drunk after his escape from Sodom, there is synderesis or Kynd Knowing, there is the figure of the plowman as Good Christian. Beyond the prologue, there are in this same section nine specific details, including two verbatim quotations, which correspond to Langland's poem. All the parallels occur in eight leaves of a single codex. Langland's library is very small.

We presume that Chaucer was less isolated than Langland, and also less pious. But he faced the same bibliographic problems. When he used books, he had to use specific books. He could not quote the *Zeitgeist*. He could not quote a book, no matter how famous it was or is, unless a copy were in his hand. It may well be, for instance, that he does not

name Boccaccio because as Lillian Hornstein suggested and William Coleman has very nearly proved, his copies of the *Teseida* and the *Filostrato* were anonymous, or even in French, and not, as Donald Howard has speculated, because he met Boccaccio and didn't like him. Printed books and modern catalogues accustom us to exact information and correct citation. The format of medieval books encourages browsing, serendipities, and a citing of authorities that is little more than name dropping.

In my work on Langland, I have looked at dozens of medieval manuscripts that turned out to be books that Langland never saw. In an effort to be fair to Chaucer, I have looked at still more. All of these are in the Bodleian Library. There is not time to describe each in detail. My exemplary bookshelf includes a *Divine Comedy* (MS. Canonici ital. 97), Bracton on the laws and customs of England (MS. Digby 222), Nicholas Trivet's commentary on Boethius (MS. Auct. F. 6. 4.), the Third Vatican Mythographer (MS. Digby 221), the commentary of Nicholas Gorham on Isaiah (MS. New College 40), the *distinctiones* of Gorham and Nicholas Biart (MS. Hatton 71), and a collection of sermons identified in the manuscript as "Incipit sermo prius libri huius"—a title whose informative character is typically medieval (MS. Bodl. 87, foll. 27r ff.). In each case I have tried to choose a manuscript early enough to have existed in Chaucer's lifetime. The question I wish to ask, and answer, very briefly, is this: what does it mean to be a reader when the only books one has are books like these—manuscripts of the fourteenth century and earlier, lacking all information entered in them later by owners and librarians, and lacking, in almost every case, the context modern scholars can bring to them by having other copies, printed texts, indexes, and catalogues. Answering this question for Langland led me to identify a two-book library which eventually grew to a five-book library. For Chaucer the answer is likely to be analogous.

We all know what utility grade medieval manuscripts look like: a largely undifferentiated sea of abbreviated handwriting, divided by more or less colorful decoration into a large number of parts, lacking running heads, title pages, page numbers, and indices. These are books for browsers, or for people who

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## The Chaucer Library "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves"

The Book of Wikked Wyves is an old project. Karl Young began it. In 1933 he started work on a project he called "The Learning of Chaucer." Eventually he decided to concentrate on collections of anti-matrimonial materials, or "Books of Wikked Wyves," and to try to interest the Chaucer section of the MLA in the whole issue of "The Learning of Chaucer." After his death in 1943, his idea led to the Chaucer Library, and his former student Robert Pratt took over the "Book of Wikked Wyves." It became the first approved Chaucer Library Project. In 1962 Pratt published the first fruits of his work, an article entitled, "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Anti-matrimonial Propaganda and the Universities" (AnM 3, 5-327). In 1980 he invited Ralph Hanna and me to join him, and through our joint efforts, the edition is now nearing completion.

It will contain the following texts: first Walter's Map's *Letter of Valerius to Ruffinus Urging him not to Marry*; second, seven fourteenth-century commentaries on the *Letter of Valerius*, all but one written in England; third, Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, Book I, chapters 29 and 41-49, which includes, as chapter 47, the "Golden Book of Theophrastus." All will be translated and annotated. These are the texts that Pratt in his article identified as the components of medieval anti-matrimonial collections. They are also, of course, the major components of Jankyn's book.

In presenting our texts, we depart from the usual Chaucer Library procedure of presenting the readings of a single manuscript "such as Chaucer might have known." Map's *Letter of Valerius*, though it is well known, has never been edited critically. We have produced a critical text. It is based on collation of about eighty manuscripts, including all those of English provenance, and cites variants from twenty-four manuscripts probably written before 1300. In the case of the excerpts from Jerome's *Against Jovinian* and Theophrastus, we stay closer to the Chaucer Library procedure, since, though we cite the oldest manuscript, Verona, Biblioteca Capitolona 17, of the late sixth century, our interest is

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## Chaucer's Reading

read straight through. They clearly are not books in which it is easy to find again any particular passage one has already read, or seen quoted, and wishes to return to. Medieval Bibles do not have verse numbers. Medieval poetic texts do not have numbered lines. My sample Dante did not even have canto numbers, until an owner added them. My sample Bracton did have rubrics, telling what each small chapter was about, but there were no numbers at all for chapters, sections, or books, and an early owner, who listed all the topics treated, in book order in an added front quire, must still have found any particular topic very difficult to find, unless he had the book practically by heart.

The usual medieval strategy for dealing with this problem is to put notes in the margin. But medieval interests are not necessarily ours. Three, I find, are most prominent. First is an interest in intellectual procedure. My sample Dante's scribe puts the word "comparatio" opposite every extended simile, with a bracket showing how long it is. The margins of Gorham on Isaiah are mostly clean, but there are still many "aliter" and "moraliter" and "divisio" notes, and one "questio bona," to indicate what the text is doing. "Versus" indicates that a piece of poetry is being quoted.

Second, marginalia betray an interest in authorities—usually patristic. Gorham's scribe notes Chrisostom and Jerome. These marginalia in Gorham are concentrated in the first twenty folios.

Third, marginal notes point out passages of interest, usually because they are sententious, or otherwise excerptable. Many simply say "nota" or "nota bene" without specifying what there is to note, and so are useless as an index. When they do specify, it is clear that what is important is that this is a codex that contains interesting information, not a particular text by a particular author, with an integrity of its own. My sample copy of the Third Vatican Mythographer, for instance, does call attention to "saturnus primus deorum" (fol. lv) and "pictura Iani bifrontis" (fol. 6r), but there are also notes such as "fabula bona contra raptos et avaros" (fol. 7r), and "Exemplum" (fol. 10r) and "Exemplum contra preseumentes salvari sine pena" (fol. 9v), and "que gentes pigri sunt ingenii" (fol. 9v)—all of which detract from the reader's focus on his text as a reference book, indeed *the* medieval reference book, on mythography.

Decoration helps, but also complicates. The text entitled "incipit sermo prius libri huius" begins with the verse: "Dilectus meus misit manum suam per foramen"—My beloved put his hand in at the keyhole, and my entrails trembled at his touch (Canticles 5:4). It is a carnal verse indeed. But the initial "D" of

*dilectus* contains a picture of a fully clothed possibly female figure in the presence of a blessing hand which protrudes from cloud and is presumably God's. The picture illustrates the allegory, not the carnality, and complicates the reader's reaction at the very first letter of his reading.

Real reference books were, admittedly, possible. My sample *distinctio* collection has numbered columns and numbered lines, to which an elaborate analytic index refers with stunning accuracy. This is an Oxford book, and the exception that proves the rule. But such things were exceedingly rare.

Much more could be said, for which there is not time. I proceed to cautionary exhortation. First, Chaucer is more likely to have owned few books, rather than many—and more likely to have owned what the bookshops happened to have for sale than particular titles deliberately sought out. Copying could be commissioned, or one might even copy a book for one's self, if one were in the right place for the right amount of time, with nothing else to do. Paradoxically, in an age when popular books had to be custom copied from exemplars, the very rare book, or the unfashionable one whose exemplar was being remaindered, would be cheaper than what was well known and widely used, and therefore more likely to end up in a civil servant's personal library. Chaucer was a busy man, financially more at the level of comfortable than wealthy, whose time was not his own, and who lived for the most part where his work took him. Such a man inevitably related to the fourteenth century book trade in a way very difficult to trace after six centuries.

In any case, fourteenth century personal libraries were not large, and show signs of being composed largely of what can fairly be called ecclesiastical remainders. Giovanni Sercambi, to whom Chaucer is sometimes compared, had twenty books, other than his own works, plus certain unbound quires, including a Psalter and three books "di cose ecliastiche," and the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, but not the *Inferno*, of Dante. In general, the "marchands écrivains" whom Christian Bec describes, secular as they were, had libraries whose core books were as pious as Langland.

Second, if one owned a book, one used it repeatedly, even serendipitously. For scholars this means that quotations, excerptings, and influences trace in batches, or not at all. If Chaucer cites a book only once or twice, even if accurately, he must be presumed to have got his quotes at second hand. When Chaucer does quote from a specific book, he knows the context of the quotation. In this connection, I must mention R. A. Shoaf's *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1983), which proves

## Jankyn's Book

not in what Jerome wrote but in the text as it appears in the anti-matrimonial collections of Chaucer's time. Our procedure for the excerpts is to present a continuous text of Book I, chapters 29, 41-46, and 48-49 based on a thirteenth-century English manuscript, Cambridge University Library li. vi. 39, with collations of the variable and idiosyncratically-arranged selections which appear in the anti-feminist collections. For the Theophrastus, which occurs as a free-standing excerpt in about sixty-five manuscripts, we collate thirteen copies produced between its first appearance as an excerpt (about 1190) and the turn of the fourteenth century.

I should make it clear that Karl Young's essential idea was to show that the notion of a book of wicked wives was not Chaucer's invention—such books actually existed. Our book, however, will be at once shorter than Jankyn's book and fuller than any actual collection. Jankyn's book is a hyperbole: it contains texts—the Book of Proverbs, Ovid's *Art*, and so on—that do not actually appear in the

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Chaucer a great Dantist by showing how he knew and used the full contexts of his quotations from the *Comedia*, and a great deal more of it besides. Professor Shoaf has here defined an important new direction in Chaucer studies.

Third, any book that one owns will not seem rare. In an age of unique manuscript books, every book is rare, but the one that one owns can be taken for granted. According to Beryl Smalley, Hugh of St. Cher's works were rare in England—but his Luke and Psalter commentaries were not rare to Langland.

Fourth and finally, sources are often not the ones we would expect. Medieval writers do not, as a rule, go carefully to any Teubner-like series of primary texts for their quotations. Instead, perforce, they quote whatever happens to be available on the desk. Langland's quotations from Matthew come from glosses on Luke. His Job comes from Hugh on Psalm 25. I dare not predict, and do not believe, that we will some day find an *exemplum* collection that contains the masterplots of all the Canterbury tales in Ellesmere order. But I do think it quite likely that Chaucer actually had in his hands and used fewer books than we suppose, and perhaps not the ones we suppose either.

Judson Boyce Allen  
University of Florida

This is a condensation of one of the reports read at the "Work in Progress" session of The York Congress. Others will be published in subsequent *Newsletters*.

## Ballot for 1986-90 NCS Trustees

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See verso for Proceedings order form.

Return by 15 April to The New Chaucer Society, Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996.

### Jankyn's Book

collections, and which we are not editing. But neither do we confine ourselves to the nine manuscripts we have that can be called Books of Wikked Wyves. None has all the commentaries; some have no commentaries at all. Rather, the actual Books of Wikked Wyves establish what are the major texts. Having identified these, we have sought out all the witnesses we could find for them, whether they appear in collections or by themselves.

I wish now to describe briefly the commentaries on Valerius. Chief among these are one by the Dominican Nicholas Trivet, and one by his contemporary, the Franciscan John Ridewall, both of whom lectured at Oxford in the first half of the fourteenth century. Trivet wrote three versions of his commentary: the first is lost, but we have five witnesses each of the other two, and twelve of the Ridewall. Both Trivet and Ridewall are chiefly interested in explaining Map's difficult Latin and his allusive references to history and mythology. Both men are, in fact, among the "classicizing friars" of Beryl Smalley's *English Friars and Antiquity in the 14th Century*. Sharing the same humanistic penchant for "classicizing" are two anonymous English commentaries, *Grues ut dicit Ysidorus* and *Lucinia avis est*. The latter appears only in British library MS. Harley 3724; the former appears independently in two manuscripts, and is conflated with Ridewall's commentary in three more. A final "humanist" commentary appears in MS. Vatican Latin 5994, in which it is said to have been copied down by Friar Paul Guastaferris of the Order of Preachers when Friar Eneas of Siena lectured on it in Siena. Both men flourished in the first half of the fourteenth century. Eneas's lectures seem to be the ultimate source of the rich glosses that appear in twenty-five or so manuscripts from France, Germany, and Italy, mostly of the fifteenth century.

All five "humanistic" commentaries, and the glosses spawned by one, are evidence that the *Letter of Valerius* was studied by people learning Latin, presumably because of its witty style and wealth of allusion. Naturally it also tended to induce or reinforce a commitment to celibacy, particularly, it would seem, in the schools of the mendicant orders. Nevertheless, the humanistic commentaries are remarkable in not treating the central issues of women and marriage. There is, to be sure, a constant assumption that Valerius is right, and an urge to reinforce his teaching by making his meaning clear. What these commentaries do stress, indeed, is that Valerius's advice is for the wise man, for a man who wants to be an intellectual; they make one see that the text is in its way a *protrepticon*, an invitation to the philosophic life, and not simply a diatribe against women, or against marriage.

There remain two commentaries not written for schoolboys that are moral and Catholic rather than humanistic in their emphases, and to my mind much the most interesting. The first of these is extant in two Cambridge manuscripts, St. John's 115 and Clare 14. It begins "Hoc contra malos religiosos." The focus is consistently moral. Its author had the wit to see that the *Letter of Valerius* contains a number of prudent moral sayings, and he sets his on these. Whereas the implied audience of the humanist commentaries is boys learning Latin, the implied audience here is young men about to be ordained and preachers in search of moral material. What the author says is continually interesting. He has a prudential moral cast of mind quite like Chaucer's, and there is much useful background for Chaucer, especially on men and women and on taking advice. A long discussion of the injunction "Increase and multiply" is almost worthy of the Wife of Bath. "Where did the command stop?" he asks. "That is, up to what number did there

have to be multiplication, and at what age did one have to start, and how many wives could one lawfully have, and how long did one have to keep it up?"

In the one place where the author confronts the woman question directly, he declares against Valerius that Eve's sin does not entitle us to malign women. The incipient feminism of that remark leads us into the final commentary, *Valerius qui dicitur parvus*, unfortunately extant in only one manuscript, Oxford University 61. This commentary is also written for adults, and like *Hoc contra* includes some suggestions for preachers. But the author's major purpose is nothing less than to correct Valerius, to refute his major argument that marriage is bad and all women bad. He does this with spirit and resourcefulness, arguing that marriage is neither good nor bad but indifferent. He grants that marriage is objectively inferior to virginity, but insists that "a married man can be so deeply loving that he can outstrip the merits of a less loving virgin." He then criticizes Valerius's bad logic in moving from the proposition "some women are bad" to the conclusion "all women are bad." He grants that the woman Ruffinus was to marry was probably not worth it,— "but it does not follow that every woman is like her." And so on. He suggests some neutral ways to draw allegorical applications from Valerius's anti-feminist anecdotes, but he warns that a preacher who does so "has to speak in such a way that women will not take offense." Altogether this brief commentary is remarkably refreshing to the modern reader. It documents the common sense with which one supposes *a priori* a good many medieval men and women approached the subject of marriage, but which (as the Wife of Bath points out) rarely got written down.

What will our volume contribute to understanding of Chaucer? Perhaps nothing

## Jankyn's Book

striking, since the three texts are familiar, and the commentaries offer no single remark that Chaucer can be proved to have read. But it should enable us for the first time to read these pieces in a reliable texts and with the commentary probably known by Chaucer, perhaps when he was a schoolboy. One thing the commentaries will drive home is the extent to which these texts were tied into the whole world of Latin learning, as well as with the world of ethical culture—they contain the same mixture of Greco-Roman history and mythology, of Senecan-Christian morality, and of satiric-comic interest in the relations of the sexes that we find in Chaucer's poems. Beyond Chaucer studies, the commentaries offer us an extended view of medieval education and, though not to the extent one might wish, of attitudes toward women. Finally, the commentaries reveal the wit in Map's *Letter of Valerius*. Too many modern readers dismiss it, I think, because its subject seems repugnant—they overlook its playfulness. Perhaps through the commentaries it can achieve a more sympathetic readership. Such an appreciation may lead us to realize that Chaucer's purpose in the Wife of Bath's Prologue was not merely to turn these writings upsidedown—in many ways his comic approach to the subject of marriage is an imitation, not a parody, of the approach of Walter Map.

Traugott Lawler  
Yale University

This is a condensation of one of the reports read at the "Work in Progress" session of the York Congress. Others will be published in subsequent *Newsletters*.

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## MLA Chaucer Division: Call for 1985 Papers

The MLA Chaucer Division plans three sessions at the 1985 convention in Chicago: one on manuscripts and texts; one on the historical context; and one on critical interpretation. There will be three 20-minute papers at each session, one invited and two selected from among those proposed. Daniel Ransom will read the invited paper at the manuscripts and texts session; Laura Kendrick will read the invited paper at the historical context session; Lee Patterson will read the invited paper at the criticism session.

Members wishing to propose papers for the two remaining slots in any one of the sessions should send a 300-500 word prospectus before 15 March to John H. Fisher, Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Those whose papers are selected will be notified by 5 April. Copy for the 1985 program must go to the MLA office by 9 April. All participants in the 1985 convention must be MLA members by 1 April.

## 1986 Congress Call for Papers

The 1986 Congress of the New Chaucer Society will be held 20-23 March in The Hilton Hotel on the campus of The University of Pennsylvania. The Program Committee is composed of John Fleming, Princeton University; David Anderson, University of Pennsylvania; Derek Pearsall, York University; Florence Ridley, University of California, Los Angeles; and President Beryl Rowland, *ex officio*. The program is in the early stages of planning. As in the past it will feature, among other things, a series of panels of three twenty-minute papers on related topics. The following list contains a number of panels already decided upon together with the names and addresses of those scholars who have undertaken to organize them. If you are interested in learning more about any particular panel or in offering a paper as part of it, you should write directly to the organizer.

ORAL CHAUCER Betsy Bowden, Department of English, Rutgers University, Camden NJ 08102

CHAUCER'S LANGUAGE: STYLE AND INTERPRETATION J. D. Burnley, Department of English Language, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN England

TEACHING CHAUCER Jane Chance, Department of English, Rice University, P.O. Box 1892, Houston TX 77251

LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN Sheila Delaney, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, Canada, V5A 1S6

LITERARY GENRES IN THE CANTERBURY TALES J. O. Fichte, Seminar für Englische Philologies, Universität Tübingen, Wilhelmstrasse 50, 7400 Tübingen 1, Germany

CHAUCER'S BIOGRAPHY Donald Howard, Department of English, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305

"GOOD" AND "BAD" MANUSCRIPTS George Kane, Department of English, Uni-

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You are reminded of the \$200 New Chaucer Society Prize for the best graduate student paper submitted. Graduate students may submit papers in any of the three sessions. These must be completed papers, not prospectuses, and must likewise be received by 15 March. Graduate Student papers must be accompanied by a letter from a graduate professor confirming that the submission is by a graduate student. And graduate student participants must likewise be MLA members by 1 April.

versity of North Carolina, Chapel Hill NC 27514

REVISIONARY PERSPECTIVES IN CHAUCER'S LOVE DEBATE James Rhodes, 54 Day Spring Avenue, Hamden CT 06518

CHAUCER AND DANTE R. A. Shoaf, Department of English, Yale University, New Haven CT 06520

CHAUCER AND THE ARTIFICIALITY OF FEMALE LIVES Hope Weissman, College of Letters, Wesleyan University, Middletown CT 06457

POETRY AND MAKING: CLASSICAL AND VERNACULAR IN CHAUCER Withrop Wetherbee, Department of English, Cornell University, Ithaca NY 14853

CHAUCER AND THE ROMAN DE LA ROSE James Wimsatt, Department of English, University of Texas, Austin TX 78712

CHAUCER AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY Chauncey Wood, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4K1

Several panel topics remain to be established. If you have a suggestion concerning one please write to John V. Fleming, Maplewood, Picklers Hill, Abingdon OX14 2BB, England. The committee also hopes to establish a number of sessions that will consist of two papers that approach a single topic from differing points of view. If you wish to suggest a paper or topic, please write to David Anderson, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA 19104. The Program Committee intends to send a fuller description of meeting plans by special mailing to all members during February. It hopes to have the program complete by September 1985.

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## The Endowment Fund

The Society expresses its gratitude to the following members who contributed in 1984 to the Endowment Fund. The Fund now stands at \$1,433.

Charles R. Blyth, E. Talbot Donaldson, Caroline D. Eckhardt, Patricia J. Eberle, John H. Fisher, Lavon B. Fulwiler, Allen Greer, Ellin M. Kelly, Bernard S. Levy, Marjorie Malvern, Russell Peck, Daniel J. Ransom, Mary Schieffelin, Chauncey Wood, Thomas L. Wright, Christian K. Zacher, Donald R. Howard, Sherry L. Reames, Lorraine Chaskalson, Esther Birdsall, Judith Davidoff, Eiichi Suzuki, Paule Mertens-Fonck, James Wimsatt, Beryl Rowland, Marjorie Collins.

## SAC York Proceedings Volume

Below is the table of contents for the York Proceedings volume, to be published in the summer. This is the last opportunity to subscribe for the volume for \$15. After publication it will cost \$30.

### *Reconstructing Chaucer: Selected Essays from the 1984 NCS Congress*

#### *The Presidential Address*

Derek Brewer, "The Reconstruction of Chaucer"

#### *The Biennial Lecture*

Larry D. Benson, "The Queynte Punnings of Chaucer's Critics"

#### *Influence and Auctoritee*

Nicholas Havelly, "Tearing or Breathing? Dante's Influence on *Filostrato* and *Troilus*"

David Wallace, "Chaucer and the European Rose"

James Wimsatt, "Froissart, Chaucer, and the *Pastourelles* of the Pennsylvania Manuscript"

Peter Travis, "The Nun's Priest's Tale as Grammar-School Primer"

Bella Millett, "Chaucer, Lollius, and the Medieval Theory of Authorship"

Alfred David, "Recycling *Anelida and Arcite*: Chaucer as a Source for Chaucer"

#### *The World of Chivalry*

Anne Middleton, "War by Other Means: Marriage and Chivalry in Chaucer"

Laura Kendrick, "Fame's Fabrication"

Anthony Tuck, "Carthusian Monks and Lollard Knights: Religious Attitude at the Court of Richard II"

#### *Rhetoric and Poetic*

A.C. Spearing, "Literal and Figurative in the *Book of the Duchess*"

Denis Walker, "Contentio: the Structural Paradigm of the *Parliament of Fowls*"

Joerg O. Fichte, "Womanly Noblesse and 'To Rosemounde;': Point and Counterpoint of Chaucerian Love Lyrics"

Robert M. Jordan, "Vision, Pilgrimage, and Rhetorical Composition"

H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "The Wife of Bath as Chaucerian Subject"

Glending Olson, "Rhetorical Circumstances and the Canterbury Storytelling"

#### *Chaucer and Science*

Ynux V. O'Neill and Mark H. Infusino, "Arcite's Death and the New Surgery in the *Knight's Tale*"

## Chaucer's Bones

Sporadically, for the past eight years, I have pursued a spare time research project. My study involves locating a coroner's report from late 1889. Apparently, while the grave of Robert Browning was prepared in December 1889, the purported remains of Geoffrey Chaucer were uncovered. Henry Troutbeck, coroner for Westminster at the time, substantiated his examination of Chaucer's bones some years later (*Nineteenth Century*, xlii, 1897, p. 336). "I had the privilege of examining Chaucer's bones when they were exposed in the digging of Browning's some years back. From measurements of the principal long bones remaining tact, I calculated that his height must have been about 5 feet 6 inches." In his edition of *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, J.M. Manly mentions the incident briefly (Holt, 1928, p. 37), as do Crow and Olson (*Chaucer-Life Records*, p. 549). Simple curiosity has spurred me to investigate this matter more thoroughly than appears to have been done previously.

I first corresponded with officials at London in 1976. D.L. Thomas of the Public Record Office informed me that Westminster Public Libraries Archives Department preserved coroners' reports, but that records of inquests for the period 1880-1893 were not extant. Howard M. Nixon of the Muniment Room and Library, Westminster Abbey, along with his colleagues, had never heard the story. In fact, he felt the whole affair was unlikely, since Chaucer is thought to be buried north and across from Browning's grave. Nixon added that coroner for Westminster then was actually John Troutbeck, but that the "coroner had a brother called Henry." One wonders of Henry Troutbeck, whoever he was, and of his credibility.

Later contact with the Huntington Library in San Marino, California did not help substantially in my search. On the advice of one librarian there, I examined the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 December 1889. The exact placement of Browning's remains made no mention of discovery of any bones prior to the funeral.

Wilton M. Krogman, a research anthropologist at the Lancaster Cleft Palate

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Peter Brown, "An Optical Theme in the *Merchant's Tale*"

Lorrayne Y. Baird-Lange, "Trotula's Fourteenth-Century Reputation, Jankyn's Book, and Chaucer's Trot"

Clinic in Pennsylvania, once studied at the Biometric Laboratory of London University. At that time the Laboratory was greatly interested in craniology, racial and historical. In the latter category were George Buchanan, Robert the Bruce, Lord Darnley, and Cromwell. I wrote to him as a possible lead. But at no time had Dr. Krogman heard any mention of Chaucer, either in terms of a possible craniometric study or in reference to a "coroner's report from late 1889."

Correspondence with Martin M. Crow in 1978 did not bring much to light, either. Crow points out that Troutbeck would seem to have been in a position to know what he was talking about, if anybody could be. Troutbeck's statement, Crow feels, may be taken at face value. Crow knows of no coroner's report, such as I have sought. And there ordinarily would be no reason to mention the uncovering of Chaucer's remains in an account dealing primarily with the location of Browning's body, he asserts.

Donald Baker, V.A. Kolve, and others of academia, whom I have consulted, are of the same thinking as that of Crow. If the actual inquest report existed something would have been said about it. But, like Crow, all have stated how interested they would be to learn of any new information my search might reveal.

N.A.M. Rodger, of the Public Record Office, at my request, searched two separate classes of documents housed there, HO 85 and HO 166, consisting of burial acts, licenses for exhumations, and re-interments, and requests to coroners for reports of inquests, from the period 1845-1909. They turned out not to be fruitful, and Rodger reported "there is no mention of Troutbeck, Chaucer or Westminster Abbey in either." I appeal to interested readers to lend suggestions for resolution of this mystery.

Robert M. Penn  
Whittier, California

(Ed.) I asked Tony Edwards to follow up on this in London. He writes: "I spent a certain amount of time pursuing this matter in the Westminster Abbey library with wholly negative results. I also checked with the Clerk of the Works with negative results. There is nothing in the correspondence dealing with Browning's proposed interment. It must be said that a number of records were lost in WWII . . . but I think there clearly has been some error; the whole business seems to be a red herring."

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