Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and The Variorum Chaucer

As is generally known, the Variorum Chaucer is to be not a critical edition but a best-text edition. For the Variorum Canterbury Tales the base text is that of the Hengwrt manuscript, even though its closest rival, the Ellesmere, offers more text than does Hg, which lacks half of the Parson's Tale and all of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale. Further, some of the links in Hg are less full and less accurate than their counterparts in El. Even so, Variorum editors use Hg as their base text and turn to El merely to correct Hg's deficiencies. This treatment of the manuscripts calls for some explanation.

When the Variorum Steering Committee was debating the relative merits of Hg and El, the most current information on the text of CT, and the most informed opinion, was to be found in the Manly and Rickert edition (MR 1940). That edition tends to favor Hg's readings where Hg and El diverge, and its subsequent influence has been such that the Variorum Committee accepted Hg as indeed more authoritative than El for particular readings. In accepting MR's estimate of Hg, the committee obviously decided that the advantages of Hg's slightly greater accuracy outweighed the gross advantages of El. The rationale was that the deficiencies of Hg are few and manifest and thus easily remedied by way of El, whereas those of El are minute and many and would thus require more frequent and more careful intervention on the part of the editor. And since the aim was to provide a good text, not a critical edition, Hg seemed the more serviceable manuscript.

This rationale would remain valid enough today except that its major premise has lately come under duress. The ascendancy of Hg has stimulated a forceful defense of El by George Kane, whose essay in Editing Chaucer (ed. Ruggiers 1984:207ff.) addresses some flaws in MR's editorial reasoning. Specifically, Kane challenges MR's assertion that El is a highly edited text, and he rejects their notion that the law of probability can be instrumental in textual criticism. I do not propose to refute Kane's arguments; my purpose is merely to explain why Hg remains a satisfactory base text for the Variorum. For this purpose I need only to counter his position.

First, it must be allowed that Kane properly criticizes MR for their tendency to interpret-variation in El as the result of editorial intention. He adduces numerous instances of what MR regard as editing for which the mechanics of scribal error offer better explanation. But whether one attributes the variation to editing or to error, the readings in question are unoriginal. Therefore, criticism of MR's theory of editing in El does not undermine their view that the language of Hg is more often authentic than the language of El.

Second, the mechanics of scribal error are so various and the textual environments so multivalent that often more than one editorial solution of textual ambiguity is possible. And in some cases the possible solutions contradict rather than corroborate one another. Take, for example, Kane's analysis of El's reading at GP 612, where the Reeve gets from his master "a coote and hood" according to most MSS, but "a gowne and hood" according to El and four a group MSS. MR see editing here; Kane instead regards the El reading as the likely original because coote and hood is a cliche that would readily substitute itself for gornel and hood. But we may observe that at line 613 the phrase a good appears directly below the phrase a coote. Might not a scribe, glancing quickly at his copy-text, look below the proper line and see a good and unconsciously substitute a gornel or, alternatively, write a go, then perceive his error and

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Chaucer and the London Middle Class

Several years ago, while working in the British Library Reading Room, I came across a fourteenth-century lending law that seemed to be the source of Chaucer's Shipman's Tale. Printed in Borough Customs (ed. Mary Bateson) this law, like Chaucer's tale, depicted a bourgeois financial triangle involving a willful wife, an absent husband, and a third party from whom the wife negotiates a loan. The law not only seemed to supply the plot of Chaucer's tale, but it also accounted for some of the problems raised by that particular story. Feeling that if Chaucer had used this one law in the tale, he would have employed other ordinances too, I scrutinized the language of the work and found laws regarding "tokens," "feigned sales," "tally," and "delivery." Even the curious ending, where the Merchant "believes" his Wife's obvious lie, smelled of the kind of "legal fiction" frequently found in cases of the medieval court. The Life Records records numerous incidents in which the poet was involved in commercial dealings. It was reasonable to assume that he knew a great deal about contemporary laws regarding liability and that he was aware of what he was putting into his work.

I wrote up my findings for an article forthcoming in The Chaucer Review, but many questions remained unanswered. To formulate even tentative answers to the relationship between the poet and this particular ordinance I would have to reconstruct the ambiance of the law.

I immediately learned the difficulties of this task. The law was a "custumal," part of a written collection of the laws or customs of a manor, a city, or a province. Many such documents have been destroyed; others have been left in a chaotic state in various English
choose a convenient synonym for coote rather
than scratch out the mistaken initial g? In
such an ambiguous case the weight of MS
evidence needs to be counted, and in this in-
stance the Hg reading wins by a score of
almost fifty manuscripts to five. The inherent
probability is that Hg et al have the authen-
tic reading.

Probability is, however, a sore point with
Kane, who rejects MR's axiomatic belief that
the laws of probability can assist in the search
for original readings. The bias of his contrary
conviction, unfortunately, is so recondite that
we are forced to put our faith in his expertise
or to weigh it against that of MR, who also
lay claim on our credence. With MR, and
against Kane, we may set in the balance the
expertise of Vinton Dearing (Principles and
Practice of Textual Analysis [1974]), who be-
lieves that probability does have a place in
textual criticism. My point is not that Kane
is wrong, only that experts disagree and that
the issue is still very much under debate.

In any case, probability theory does seem
potentially very useful in judging the relative
accuracy of Hg and El, because their dif-
ferences are mostly trivial, magnified only by
our desire to ascertain precisely Chaucer's
own idiom and his own sense of meter. The
"sense" of a passage is rarely a factor in our
preferring the reading of the one MS over that
of the other. For this reason, I would guess,
MR gave considerable weight to the number of
unique readings preserved in each MS.
While the possibility exists that in rare in-
stances the unique reading will be the sole sur-
vivor of Chaucer's original text and all others
interlopers that invaded the text early in its
transmission, as a general rule unique
readings are most probably scribal in origin.
As an extension of this rule I would count
"maverick readings," i.e., readings that are
supported by only a handful of other MSS.
I devised this makeshift category in order to
test the proposition that because Hg has far
fewer unique readings than El, it is likelier
more error-free. (MR report that Hg has 47
unique readings, 12 of which the original
scribe altered to the accepted reading; El has
249 unique readings, only four of which were
similarly corrected.) But what if Hg should
have a plethora of readings in which it is join-
ed by fewer than ten MSS, and what if El
should be, apart from its unique readings,
much more often in the mainstream of the
textual tradition? If this were the case, then
MR's faith in Hg would have less warrant and
our own faith in it would be badly shaken.

I have examined the data compiled by nine
Variorum editors who have completed the
Textual Introductions for their respective
tales: these include the published fascicles
(MiT, NPT, ManT) and the typescripts for
PhyT, PrT, SqT, MiT, CTT, and the GP.
The data I double-checked and expanded by
consulting MR's collation cards, which the
University of Chicago donated to the
Variorum project, and which now are kept
in the Variorum office at the University of
Oklahoma. In these cards one can see at a
glance not only what MSS have variants but
also which and how many MSS have the
readings adopted by MR for their reconstruc-
tion of El. Thus I could tabulate readings
without reference to their being right or
wrong. The results tend to confirm MR's
estimation of Hg. In the GP they find that
El is the more reliable text; it has only 37
variants from their text, whereas Hg has 55.
Likewise, I find that although Hg has but one
unique reading to El's five, Hg also has 38
mavericks to El's 30.1 Here we see MR's
editorial method, whatever precisely it may
have been, following the path of evidence
even though that path leads away from Hg.
The same procedure through other tales,
however, leads them back to Hg. The
evidence of maverick readings for all nine
parts of CT that I examined shows a less
drastic distinction between Hg and El than
that revealed by the unique readings, but
nevertheless a significant difference that tends
to confirm Hg's greater reliability. For all
nine tales Hg has 9 unique readings, El 92;
Hg 169 maverick readings, El 301. They
share 43 of these, so Hg has 126 independent
mavericks and El 258, about twice as many.

Whether we attribute El's greater number
of uncommon readings to scribal error or to
textual interference, the message is the same:
Hg's text calls less often for vindication or for
special pleading than does El's text. And this
suggests that MR did not stray far from the
path marked out by the evidence, for the
numbers of variants in Hg and El from MR's
text show the same proportion as the numbers
of maverick readings claimed by each MS.
Kane's allegation that MR had a predeter-
mined preference for Hg is harder to warrant
in light of these proportions. And while my

Chaucer and London

repositories. Nevertheless, some of the or-
dinances are remarkably clear and intact, and
it is possible to elucidate certain aspects of
these records and thereby to forge a link be-
tween the poet and the documents themselves.
And since the most comprehensive and
authoritative collection is to be found in the
archives of the City of London, and because
our records from Chaucer's life often involve
him directly in the affairs of that City, it is
with those that one should begin. For
Chaucer, a citizen busy with London life,
custodians would have in many ways struc-
tured his activities, influencing what he could
or could not do; thus they became "authorities" which he had little choice but to
obey.

Probably from an early age the poet,
whose father was a wealthy vintner, would
have been involved in the mainstream of ac-
tivity which is reflected in the extant records
of the City courts. Such records cover the af-
fairs of craftsmen, petty thieves and
murderers, high-ranking London officials,
and minor public servants. Although occa-
sionally they refer to a case involving knights
or issue royal proclamations, they are strik-
ingly middle class in their orientation and
provide rare insight into the men and women
of this estate and the offences they commit.
These records sometimes include a wealth of
detail—motive, dialogue, setting, and the
fleshing out of the various felons and their
victims—and they can constitute a gripping
narrative. Humorous, tragic, bawdy—they
almost dictate a genre and contain much in

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calculations by no means vindicate MR, they
do indicate that their rationale for making
choices was applied consistently and not op-
portunistically. Their authority, therefore,
though impugned in recent years, remains
strong. So, too, does the basis for the
Variorum adoption of Hg as the best text for
a best-text edition.

Daniel J. Ransom
University of Oklahoma

1It is noteworthy that prior to line 300 of GP
Hg has 22 maverick readings, El 6; after line 300,
Hg has 16, El 24.

This is a condensation of one of the reports read
at the "work in progress" session of the
Philadelphia Congress.
A Thesaurus Proprius for
The Canterbury Tales

But first I pray you, of your carteiseye,
That ye n’arret it nat my vilenye,
Thogh that I pleynly spake in this matere,
To telle you her wordes and her cheere,
Ne thogh I spake her wordes proprely.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man.
He must rehearse as ny as ere he kan
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al spake he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he must telle his tale untrewa,
Or feyne thynge, or fynde wordes newe.
He may nat space, althogh he were his brother;
He must as wel seye a word as another.

As critics, we are faced with making sense of
Chaucer, either in our own words or his.
The historical and personal differences in
language architecture between modern
criticism and Chaucer’s Middle English text
are staggering. And yet the critic must use one
thesaurus or another. It is not enough to
merely cite the text, uncover the hidden
references, display a handful of interesting
associations, and arrive at a captivating motif;
whichever wishes to tell a text after a poet must
rehearse every word, if it be in her power.
The first step is to read the text so often that
the lines themselves ring the shaper’s changes;
but then, because our wits are short,
we need to see the vocabulary whole, to take
the glossary out of alphabetical order and
arrange it according to the tale’s own logic.
That would be my definition of a thesaurus proprius:
an arrangement of a writer’s vocabulary which
displays the texture and associations of
a single text or a group of texts. The value of
such a tool is the sense of proportion it
provides for any thematic study and the fidelity
to the poet’s language it requires.

Hence, this report is meant to serve as a
sequel to J.D. Burnley’s call (at the last NCS
Congress) for the study of the “architecture”
of Chaucer’s language, but with one signif-
cant difference. Burnley argues reasonably
that “stylistic and semantic studies of Chaucer
are best carried out in the context of the work
of his contemporaries and fellow citizens.”
I approach the same objective from a different
direction. I propose to move from the single
tale to the whole text of the Tales, to the author,
and then to the language community. Chaucer
was both at play and in earnest when he chose
in The Canterbury Tales to multiply his voices,
actually, as I count them, to four and twenty
“in a compaignye.” Indeed, he announces
boldly, in the passage I have cited above, that
he is speaking their words “properely,” with
the very proprietas of which Burnley has writ-
ten. Chaucer was a poet enchanted by the
varieties of human expression. Each tale then
represents a refinement of images, references,
and categories “for the none” and “in this
matere.” In other words, it has a thesaurus of
its own. Clearly, in the completed tale, the
poet crystallizes structures of thought and
association which in ensuing tales may just as
easily evaporate as accumulate or reverberate.

After some initial attempts at mapping the
vocabulary of the entire text of The Canter-
bury Tales, I am now involved in producing a
thesaurus, tale by tale, beginning with the
Pardoners’ Tale. Time does not permit a full
explanation of how the first literary thesaurus
was made, but a description of my method
and a listing of the Pardoner’s thesaurus will
soon appear in the Journal of the Association
for Literary and Linguistic Computing (Cam-
bridge). In brief, I began with the most fre-
cently occurring lexical morpheme,
DYNKE, and gathered to it all the words with
which it is semantically related. I did the same
for all the morphemes with a frequency of five
or more and by the time I finished I had
organized the vocabulary into twelve major
categories: DYNKE, MAN, TOW, SLE, SWERE,
FELawe, GOLd, HASARD, FYND, WIGHT, WS, and
PLEy. It is impossible to describe a thesaurus
simply, but I mention the twelve categories
here to demonstrate that a thesaurus proprius
is by definition inductive, that is, does not
begin with a paradigm from Aristotle or
Roget. I am not enamored of these particular
categories nor of the methodology of the pilot
project (fully forty-seven percent of the
vocabulary resisted my efforts at synthesis);
but I am excited by the fact that such a tool
can be enlightening for the scholar who pro-
duces it and relatively easy to make, with or
without a computer. An advantage of enter-
ing a thesaurus of this kind into the computer
is that from it one can easily print a semantic
concordance to make further study of the
vocabulary more practical.

Another advantage of the computerized
thesaurus is that it is easier to share. It has
taken me ten years to compile the lexical mor-
pheme dictionary and to write the programs
which generate these partial results. My pro-
blem has always been how to publish it or how
to make it available to others, especially those
with no programming experience. I am en-
couraged by recent developments in computer
science which will help me give my systematic
text of The Canterbury Tales to all who are
interested in the study of Chaucer’s language.
Earlier this year I began to load my programs
and files into Datatrieve, a database system
that runs on a VAX 750 computer, one of the
mainstays of university and college computer
centers. Datatrieve is easily (computer jargon
for “after five to ten failures”) portable and
requires little or no programming experience
to operate. The system contains indexed files
of the text, the location of each spelling in the
text, a lexical morpheme dictionary, a func-
tion word dictionary, and the divisions of the
text into sections including tales, links, and
even scenes. Best of all, it will allow for iter-
ative concordance and thesaurus production.
In other words, the competent user of this
system will be able to build collections of
words and word associations inside a given
tale or subtext and call up at will a concor-
dance of that vocabulary. At the same time,
expanding the thesaurus can help us see what
words and associations are not recalled by the
text. Why, for example, does the Pardoner,
in a tale about slaying and death, never use
any form of the word mordre? In other words,
studying the vocabulary as a whole reveals im-
portant choices of the poet or narrator.

So this report is really an invitation to
graduate students as well as those who have
already plowed the fields of semantic or tex-
tural research, to join a Canterbury
cooperative and help me refine the instrument
by producing thesauri for individual tales,
tellers, and groups of tales. For thematic
study of every kind is enhanced by correla-
tion with Chaucer’s own thesaurus.

How can such expansion be made? I don’t
know as yet. Nothing prevents us from select-
ing any subset of his vocabulary (for exam-
ple, the 103 Middle English terms in
Burnley’s study of Chaucer’s participation in
the philosophical tradition) and starting a
Chaucer thesaurus from there. Coming from
the opposite direction will be the work of Jane
Roberts on the medieval portion of the
Historical Thesaurus of the English Language

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1986 Report of the Executive Director
The New Chaucer Society
Read at the Business Meeting, Philadelphia Congress, 21 March 1986

During the past biennium the New Chaucer Society has held its own very well. Its membership now stands at 600 compared with 552 in 1984. The international membership remains strong: Britain 31, Canada 30, Japan 26, West Germany 13, and 1-4 in Australia, Austria, Belgium, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Switzerland, for a total of 126 non-U.S. members, and 474 from the United States. In the category of retired members, which had not become operative in 1984 (since the Constitution mandates that members who retire after five years of regular membership may become emeritus members at half the regular dues), we now have 27.

Studies in the Age of Chaucer under the editorship of Thomas Heffernan continues to prosper. Library orders now stand at 210 compared with 195 in 1984, about 150 in the U.S. and 60 abroad. This means that total circulation has grown to 810 compared with 756 in 1984. Thomas Heffernan received 25 submissions for SAC 7 of which he printed 6, and again 25 submissions for SAC 8 of which he is printing 6. We were able to increase the size of SAC 7 to 350 pages, up from 288 in SAC 6, and the number of reviews to 36, up from 18 in SAC 6. SAC 8, now in proof, will be about the same size as 7 and contains 40 reviews.

We continue to receive orders, especially from abroad, for full runs of SAC which will soon present a pleasant problem. While we have nearly 100 copies each of most of the volumes, we are down to 10 copies of SAC 4 and 24 copies of SAC 6. We no longer distribute SAC 4 except as part of full runs. It will cost about $2,000 apiece to reprint 100 copies of each of these volumes. As we get down to our last copies, we shall have to cast up accounts to see whether it is worth reprinting.

The only part of the SAC publishing program which is in trouble is the Proceedings. Even at the reduced price, the York Proceedings volume sold only 231 copies to members, and we have sold only 80 to libraries. (The libraries pay the full price of $30 for their copies.) We hope that more libraries will order it, but at the moment our deficit on this volume is $3,190. We have raised the pre-publication price to members for the Philadelphia Proceedings from $15 to $20, and we will see how we come out this time. But if we lose money again, we shall have to reconsider the wisdom of continuing this series.

The Annual Bibliography compiled by Lorraine Baird-Lange continues to be of service to Chaucerians. At Lorraine Baird’s request, the Trustees have appointed Bege Bowers as Assistant Bibliographer. Bege Bowers is Lorraine Baird’s colleague at Youngstown State University and has recently taken over from Thomas Kirby responsibility for compiling the research-in-progress listing sponsored by the MLA Chaucer Section, published annually in the Chaucer Review; so she and Lorraine Baird can cooperate fruitfully in their bibliographical endeavors.

The Fifth Biennial Congress of the NCS, held in Philadelphia, 20-23 March 1986, was well subscribed, although not as well as York. We had 197 members registered in Philadelphia as compared with 220 at York. This is not surprising considering that this came in the middle of the term instead of the middle of the summer. What was most gratifying was the attendance of 9 from Canada, 7 from Great Britain, and 6 from Europe and Japan at this meeting. Considering the time and expense involved, their presence betokened the importance we all attach to Chaucer studies. Ninety-seven members, representing most parts of the globe, read papers or chaired sessions at the Philadelphia Congress. The committee that arranged this excellent program was chaired by John Fleming, who did most of the work. David Anderson helped with local arrangements, arranged the marvulous exhibit of books and manuscripts, and compiled and edited the useful catalog which all members received through the mail. Florence Ridley and Derek Pearsall served as members of the Program Committee at the planning stage, and William Askins, Betsy Bowden, and others helped David Anderson in Philadelphia in an informal way. Mark Allen helped Jane Fisher with the registration.

Plans for the 1988 NCS Congress, to be held 7-13 August in the Gage Residence Complex of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, are progressing well. UBC should provide something of the York ambiance. The facilities are attractive and the surroundings are breath-taking. The Program Committee for 1986 will be co-chaired by Robert Jordan who will handle local arrangements and Anne Middleton who will organize the program. Paul Strohm and Emerson Brown will serve on the Program Committee in an advisory capacity, and the President, Robert Frank, ex-offico. All of these will meet with the Director this coming fall to develop plans, which Anne Middleton and Robert Jordan will then proceed to implement; so if you have ideas or proposals, you should get in touch with one of these. The call for papers will be published in the spring 1987 Newsletter, and a preliminary program in the fall 1987 Newsletter. How the months do hurry by when we begin to plan ahead?

In Philadelphia, the Trustees approved 6-11 August and the University of Kent in Canterbury as the time and place for the 1990 NCS Congress, and Peter Brown of Kent and Alfred Davis of Indiana University as the co-chairpersons to handle local arrangements and the program. It is far too early to go further than that at this time in making specific arrangements, but I look forward to the next two NCS congresses with particular pleasure.

The NCS Trustees meet biennially at the time of our congresses. The actions of their York meeting were reported in the Fall 1984 issues of the Chaucer Newsletter. They met again on 20 March 1986, and the actions of that meeting are reported in this issue.

The terms of Trustees Derek Pearsall, Florence Ridley, and Chaucery Wood end with the Philadelphia meeting. I feel a pang at their departure since they are the remnants of the Board of Trustees that superintended the transition of the administration of the Society from Oklahoma to Tennessee in 1982. A nominating committee composed of Alfred Davis (chair), John Burrow, Caroline Eckhardt, John Ganin, and Constance Hiett prepared a ballot for new trustees which was included in the Spring 1985 Newsletter (a mistake I shall not make again—it will be sent out separately in the future). But I am pleased to report that as a result of this ballot, Anne Middleton, A.C. Spearing, and Paul Strohm

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Report of the Director

have been elected Trustees to serve from the end of this 1986 Congress to the end of the 1990 Congress. Larry Benson, Alfred David, Jill Mann, and Charles Owen continue to serve as Trustees until the end of the 1988 Congress.

The term of Beryl Rowland as President ends with the Philadelphia Congress. She, too, as International Secretary for Canada, presided over the re-formation of the Society in Knoxville and we greatly appreciate her service and support. She will be ready at the end of this meeting by Robert W. Frank, Jr., whom you all know as the founder and long-time editor of the Chaucer Review as well as expert on The Legend of Good Women, Piers Plowman, and other topics medieval. Bob Frank will serve as NCS President through the 1988 Congress.

NCS accounts had grown sufficiently complicated that the 1984 figures were submitted to a certified public accountant who audited them and made out our tax report. The 1985 figures are ready to be submitted at this time. In 1984 the total income from membership dues and library subscriptions and York Congress registration was $37,324 and expenditures $22,499, leaving a balance of $14,825; the 1985 income (in the absence of registrations) was $31,775 and expenditures $26,346, leaving a balance of $5,428; a total reserve of $20,254. Through contributions to the Endowment Fund we now have $2,000 in Certificates of Deposit and a savings account of over $700. The cash balance has enabled us to pay some of the expenses of the Trustees and International Secretaries who met in Philadelphia, as we were not able to do in 1984. The 1986 accounts will include income related to the Philadelphia Congress, but this Philadelphia meeting will be much more expensive than the York meeting and will probably further deplete our slender reserve. Were it not for the contributed services of Jane Fisher and a $3,000 annual subvention from the English Department of the University of Tennessee our finances would be even more precarious. The English Department has just purchased an IBM PC into which Jane Fisher will this summer enter the NCS mailing list, which will eventually be more economical than keeping it on the University mainframe. Jane Fisher expresses her appreciation for the $100 a month which the Trustees authorized in 1984 towards the expense of administering the affairs of the society from our residence, and she takes some satisfaction in pointing out that this amount all comes from the interest the bank pays us on our current account, not from Society income. All in all, we may say that our finances are adequate for the modest level on which we operate.

Two attractive items have been sent to all members this year in addition to SAC, the SAC Proceedings, and the Newsletters. In September 1985 we mailed a membership list with addresses of all members who had paid their dues till that time. In February 1986 we sent the catalog of the exhibit at the Ross Gallery and Rosenbach Library arranged by David Anderson. Not only has David Anderson put together an outstanding exhibit and organized and edited a splendid catalog, but he has secured grants of $3,000 towards the publication of the catalog, and from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council a corresponding amount toward transporting, mounting, and insuring the books. David's remarkable achievement in planning and mounting this exhibit should not go unrecognized.

The Constitution of the NCS last printed in the Fall 1983 Newsletter specifies that the Constitution must be printed once every four years. Hence, it is scheduled for reprinting in the fall of 1987. In the meanwhile, any member may obtain a Xerox copy by writing to the Director. It also mandates that the Executive Director shall report to the members at each biennial Congress on the administration and financial situation of the Society, but that the governance of the Society shall rest in the hands of the President and the eight Trustees and mail ballots of the entire membership. This statement comprises my official report for 1986. Madam President, I would propose that the floor be thrown open for discussion of the report. If there are questions that I can answer, I will be happy to do so. If there are suggestions as to procedures or future activities of the Society, I will take them before the Trustees who will either act on them or submit them to a mail ballot of the membership.

John H. Fisher
Executive Director

Actions of the Trustees

The New Chaucer Society

Present President Beryl Rowland (York University) Trustees Alfred David (Indiana University), Charles Owen (University of Connecticut), Derek Pearsall (Harvard University), Florence Ridley (University of California, Los Angeles), Chauncey Wood (McMaster University), President-elect Robert W. Frank, Jr. (Pennsylvania State University), Trustees-elect Anne Middleton (University of California, Berkeley), A.C. Spearing (Cambridge University), Paul Strohm (Indiana University), Absent Jill Mann (Cambridge University), Larry Benson (Harvard University)

International Secretaries Juliette de Caluwé d’Or (University of Liège, Belgium), A.S.G. Edwards (University of Victoria, Canada), Joerg Fichte (University of Tübingen, West Germany), Tadahiro Iekage (Seijo University, Japan) Absent Stephen Knight (University of Sydney, Australia)

Staff and Observers John H. Fisher (University of Tennessee), Jane L. Fisher (Knoxville, Tennessee), David Anderson (University of Pennsylvania), Lorraine Baird-Lange (Youngstown State University), Peter Brown (University of Kent, England), John Fleming (Princeton University), Thomas J. Heffernan (University of Tennessee), Robert Jordan (University of British Columbia, Canada)

1. Publications

It was decided to proceed with the publication of the Proceedings of the Philadelphia Congress despite the poor sale of the York Proceedings volume. On the basis of the sale of the York and Philadelphia volumes, the Trustees will in 1988 consider whether to continue publishing proceedings volumes or seek other alternatives. John Fleming and Thomas Heffernan will serve as co-editors for the Philadelphia volume, with David Anderson, Derek Pearsall, and Florence Ridley serving as the editorial committee.

Bege Bowers (Youngstown State University) was appointed Assistant Bibliographer, to work with Lorraine Baird-Lange in compiling the annual NCS annotated bibliography.

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2. Congresses

The week of 9-13 August (Tuesday through Saturday) was confirmed as the time for the University of British Columbia NCS Congress in 1988. Robert Jordan and Anne Middleton were appointed co-chairs of the Program Committee for the meeting, Robert Jordan to handle local arrangements, and Anne Middleton to arrange the program. Emerson Brown and Paul Strohm were appointed as members of the committee on which NCS President Robert Frank serves ex officio.

The week of 6 August and the University of Kent in Canterbury were approved as the time and place for the 1990 NCS Congress. Peter Brown and Alfred David were appointed co-chairs of the Program Committee for the meeting, Peter Brown to handle local arrangements and Alfred David to arrange the program. Other appointments to the Committee will be made at the 1988 Trustees meeting.

3. Administrative and Financial

The reports of the Director and the Secretary for Membership and Finance were approved as delivered. The report of the Certified Public Accountant on the 1984 finances was received. John Fisher announced that he and Jane Fisher planned to retire from the administration of NCS affairs in 1990 and asked that the Trustees by prepared to approve new arrangements for NCS administration at their 1988 meeting. John and Jane Fisher were asked to write descriptions of their activities to serve as the basis for new arrangements.

4. International Secretaries

Juliette de Caluwé d’Or (Belgium), A. S.G. Edwards (Canada), Georgé Fichte (West Germany) continue as International Secretaries. Scholars from other countries were proposed for this category. It was recognized that as their number increases, travel support for International Secretaries will have to be limited.

5. Acknowledgements

Gratitude was expressed to John Fleming and David Anderson for their excellent arrangements for the Philadelphia Congress, and to John and Jane Fisher and the English Department of the University of Tennessee for their continuing service and support for the administration of the NCS.

Chaucer and London

formation that a poet with a keen eye and ear could use for the benefit of his own art.

And it seems that Chaucer did just that, for customary laws can be seen shaping the narratives surrounding certain bourgeois characters in The Canterbury Tales. Fourteenth-century London life, for example, is echoed throughout the Cook’s Prologue and fragment. London laws were often concerned with brawlers and “thieves and other persons of light and bad repute [who were] commonly, received and harboured in the houses of women of evil life within the City.” Moreover, London ordinances often note that dissolute individuals are brought “with minstrels,” and “Chepe and Newgate to Cokkeslane,” the noise of the musicians calling attention to the crime. Perkin, too, is associated with this practice. Chaucer notes that he “somtyme lad with revell to Newgat,” prison, perhaps from “Chepe,” an area he is said to have frequented.

In addition to these verbal parallels between Chaucer’s tale and the ordinance, there are other correspondences as well. The structure of the law on “Thieves and Courtesans,” the “characterization,” and the language are remarkably suggestive of the fabliau. And it contains lively plot elements which could be adapted for poetic use. For example, a warden searches for the courtesan and the thief. She is recognized by the forbidden cendal and minver that line her dress and hood. The two felons are captured and imprisoned for forty days. Without more information, we cannot link this particular law to Chaucer, but with more access to London custumals, particularly those concerning petty criminals and the areas of Chepe and Newgate, it may be possible to locate closer parallels to Perkin Reveulour. London laws could easily have been the impetus for this portion of The Canterbury Tales.

Other aspects of Chaucer’s work invite comparison with custumals and give intimate glimpses into fourteenth-century London life. Ordinances concerning fraudulent millers and coarealers, for example, play throughout the background of the stories of the Miller and the Reeve and may have significantly influenced those tales. References to tavern life, to apothecary laws, and to Spanish wines sold in Chepe and Fishstreet, discussed by the Parson in his Prologue, invite further investi-

These were all subjects of customary debate and may give further insight both into Chaucer’s tale and into contemporary social history. All references to food and its abuses, to lodging, to contracts and partnerships— recurring subjects in the laws—and all mention by Chaucer of specific areas of London should be studied closely alongside legal documents to see how Chaucer’s audience would have read them. The Canterbury Tales may prove to be much more a product of the poet’s London environment and much more merchant class in orientation than we are often led to believe.

But one cannot speculate that customary laws shaped Chaucer’s works without finding the connection between the poet and the documents themselves. Such a connection would require a more rounded picture of the City court and the people whom it comprised than we have available at present, but certain facts are nevertheless suggestive. Much of Chaucer’s official life involved him in law. Therefore court transactions would have been open to him. We know that they had to be attended by a certain number of citizens, and Chaucer’s London connections—Philipot, Brembre, and Churchman, for example—made him a prominent one. Moreover, in his early years, Chaucer might have served as a “pecune”—as one who attended court sessions and took notes—and because he was literate, he might have copied court records in his own hand. Furthermore, Chaucer had documented connections with Thomas Pynchbeck—probably the model for the Sergeant of Lawe—who tried London cases involving property, and with Ralph Strode who prosecuted victuallers, vintners, and artisans on behalf of the Corporation of the City of London. Research into the actual cases tried by these men should yield significant results.

London archives contain many unpublished documents which would flesh out this study. For example, a number of fourteenth-century custumals are housed in the Guildhall Library and in the Corporation of London Record Office; archaeological materials, under the auspices of Dr. Derek Keene, are on display at the Museum of London. Recent excavations have made it possible to reconstruct parts of fourteenth-century Algate, Cheapside, and the Vintry, areas meaningful to Chaucer’s life. One can now deter-
NCS/MLA Prize Paper

Members are reminded that the NCS supports a prize, in a competition judged by the Executive Committee of the MLA Chaucer Division, for the best essay on Chaucer by a graduate student in a North American university. The prize is $200, and the winning essay is presented by its author in the form of a 20-minute paper at one of the Division's sessions at the December MLA meeting. The winner for 1986 is Linda Charnes, of the University of California, Berkeley, for her essay, "'Why han ye wrought this work unreasonably?': Narrative Frustration and Generic Redistribution in the Franklin's Tale".

Submissions for the 1987 competition—accompanying a note from a faculty member in the entrant's graduate department, certifying that the author of the paper is a degree candidate in that department—should be sent to the MLA Chaucer Division Chair, postmarked no later than February 15, 1987 to allow time for judging by the Committee, and for the preparation of MLA program copy to include the winning paper. The 1987 Division Chair is Professor Anne Middleton, Department of English, University of California, Berkeley CA 94720. Essays should normally be no longer than a journal article: approximately 20-25 double-spaced typed pages (including notes); the paper as presented must necessarily be no more than half that length to fit its slot in the Division program.

Anne Middleton

CHAUCER SESSIONS AT 1987 MLA

Anne Middleton, 1987 Division Program Chair, announces that there will be three sessions at the 1987 San Francisco MLA. Proposals for papers can go to the session organizers at once; completed papers (15-20 minutes) must be in the hands of organizers by 15 March 1987.

"Chaucer and Society: 'New History' and 'Old Problems,'" organizer Paul Strohm, Indiana University, Bloomington [this term at Williams College]

"Troilus, Text and Culture: Recent Syntheses and Beyond," organizer David Wallace, University of Texas, Austin

Any Chaucer topic, organizer Anne Middleton, University of California, Berkeley

Chaucer Thesaurus

scheduled to appear at the end of this decade. The method of compilation adopted by the editors of the Historical Thesaurus is deductive and largely based on Roget's paradigm, a decidedly non-medieval architecture. When that thesaurus of Middle English materializes, we shall more easily recognize "things feyed" or at least distinguish more carefully between "worlde olde and newe."

Walter S. Phelan
Rollins College

A prepublication copy of the system is now available (free except for the cost of magnetic tape, postage, and handling) to scholars with access to a VAX computer using the Datatrieve query system. Send inquiries about the systematic text or The Chaucer Newsletter, distributed twice a year to members of The New Chaucer Society, is intended primarily as a vehicle for Society business. Its ephemeral character makes it an unstable repository for substantive articles, but it is happy to publish discussions of research in progress and other activities of interest to Chaucerians. Deadline for the Fall issue is 1 September; for the Spring issue, 1 January. Materials should be sent to the editor, John H. Fisher, Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville 37996. After the volume is published, the price will rise to $30. We have plenty of copies of the York Proceedings left, now, alas, at $30 apiece.
The Endowment Fund

The Society expresses its gratitude to the following members who have contributed in 1986 to the Endowment Fund. The Fund now stands at more than $2,800.


THE NEW CHAUCER SOCIETY

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