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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 cliché that would readily substitute itself for *gowne 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 gowne* 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 bourgeoisie 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, smacked 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 ambience 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

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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 instance the Hg reading wins by a score of almost fifty manuscripts to five. The inherent probability is that Hg et al have the authentic 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 basis 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 believes 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 differences 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 instances the unique reading will be the sole survivor 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 joined 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 (*MilT*, *NPT*, *ManT*) and the typescripts for *PhyT*, *PrT*, *SqT*, *MkT*, *CIT*, 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 reconstruction of O¹. 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 dramatic 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 editorial 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 predetermined preference for Hg is harder to warrant in light of these proportions. And while my

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repositories. Nevertheless, some of the ordinances are remarkably clear and intact, and it is possible to elucidate certain aspects of these records and thereby to forge a link between 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, customs would have in many ways structured 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 activity which is reflected in the extant records of the City courts. Such records cover the affairs of craftsmen, petty thieves and murderers, high-ranking London officials, and minor public servants. Although occasionally they refer to a case involving knights or issue royal proclamations, they are strikingly 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 opportunistically. 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 yow, of youre curteysye,
That ye n'arete it nat my vileynye,
Thogh that I pleylny speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother;
He moot as wel seye o word as another.

(GP 725-738)

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; whoever 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 significant 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 "proprely," with the very *proprietas* of which Burnley has written. Chaucer was a poet enchanted by the varieties of human expression. Each tale then represents a refinement of images, references, and categories "for the nones" and "in this mateere." In other words, it has a thesaurus of its own. Clearly, in the completed tale, the poet crystalizes 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 Canterbury Tales*, I am now involved in producing a thesaurus, tale by tale, beginning with the Pardoner's. 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* (Cambridge). In brief, I began with the most frequently occurring lexical morpheme, DRYNKE, 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: DRYNKE, MAN, TWO, SLE, SWERE, FELawe, GOLD, HASARD, FYND, NYGHT, WIS, 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 produces it and relatively easy to make, with or without a computer. An advantage of entering 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 morpheme dictionary and to write the programs which generate these partial results. My problem has always been how to publish it or how to make it available to others, especially those with no programming experience. I am encouraged 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 function word dictionary, and the divisions of the text into sections including tales, links, and even scenes. Best of all, it will allow for interactive 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 concordance 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 important choices of the poet or narrator.

So this report is really an invitation¹ to graduate students as well as those who have already plowed the fields of semantic or textual 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 correlation with Chaucer's own thesaurus.

How can such expansion be made? I don't know as yet. Nothing prevents us from selecting any subset of his vocabulary (for example, 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 marvelous 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-officio*. 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 Chauncey 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 David (chair), John Burrow, Caroline Eckhardt, John Ganim, and Constance Heatt 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 succeeded 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* and 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 main frame. 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 now 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 of the New Chaucer Society Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 20 March 1986

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 Ikegami (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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Actions of the Trustees

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 accepted 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 be 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), George 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 low 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" through "Chepe and Newgate to Cokkeslane," the noise of the musicians calling attention to the crime. Perkyn, too, is associated with this practice. Chaucer notes that he "somtyme lad with revel to Newgate," 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 correspondances 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 minevar 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 customals, particularly those concerning petty criminals and the areas of Chepe and Newgate, it may be possible to locate closer parallels to Perkyn Revelour. London laws could easily have been the impetus for this portion of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Other aspects of Chaucer's work invite comparison with customals and give intimate glimpses into fourteenth-century London life. Ordinances concerning fraudulent millers and corndealers, 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 Pardoner in his Prologue, invite further investiga-

tion. 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 Sargeant 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 customals 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, Cheap, and the Vintry, areas meaningful to Chaucer's life. One can now deter-

Continued p. 7

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 werk unresonable?': Narrative Frustration and Generic Redistribution in the *Franklin's Tale*."

Submissions for the 1987 competition—accompanied by 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 and London

mine in certain sections of the City just *who* lived *where*, what trade he or she was involved in, and what laws would have governed that trade. It should therefore be possible to correlate archaeological evidence with certain records of Chaucer's life and with existing customs and to get a unique perspective of the London Chaucer knew, the middle class he wrote to and about, and the way in which his works were affected by the custom of law.

Flowers Braswell
University of Alabama, Birmingham

This is a condensation of one of the reports read at the "work in progress" session of the Philadelphia Congress

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 "thinges feyned" or at least distinguish more carefully between "worldes olde and newe."

Walter S. Phelan
Rollins College

¹A 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 thesaurus cooperative to: Steve Phelan, Department of English, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL, 32789 or call 305-646-2409.

This is a condensation of one of the reports read at the "work in progress" session of the Philadelphia Congress

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 unsuitable 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

Langland Yearbook

Manuscripts are being sought for a new annual, *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, edited by John A. Alford and M. Teresa Tavormina. The inaugural issue will appear in 1987.

The *Yearbook* will include articles, notes, and reviews of special interest to Langland scholars: for example, studies of *Piers Plowman*, of other works in the alliterative tradition such as *Winner and Waster*, and of the pertinent social, religious, and intellectual history. It will also contain an annotated Annual Bibliography and a Correspondence section listing work-in-progress (including dissertations), professional announcements, desiderata, general queries, books received, and so forth.

To be considered for inclusion in the volume of a given year, manuscripts must be received by February 1 of that year. Preferred manuscript lengths: articles, 20-40 typescript pages; notes, 1-10 pages. All manuscripts should be double-spaced and conform to MLA style. Please send two copies of the manuscript, a self-addressed envelope, and return postage or reply coupons to: *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Proceedings Issue

We call your attention to the statements about the SAC *Proceedings* volumes in the Actions of the Trustees and the Report of the Director in this issue. We hope that we can continue this series, but it depends on whether it can achieve sufficient circulation. Many libraries that subscribe to SAC have not yet ordered the *York Proceedings*. In most cases, this is simply because they are unaware of the volume, even though we have endeavored to inform them. Libraries respond more to faculty requests than to mail. Please check with your library and see that it has this volume.

The *Philadelphia Proceedings* are now in preparation. Until they are published (in the fall of 1987), they may be subscribed for by members at \$20—just send your check to the NCS, 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.

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