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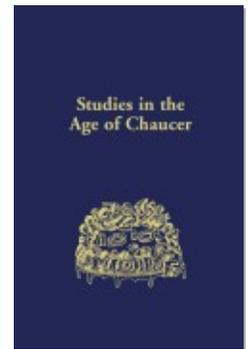
The Nun's Priest's Tale. A Variorum Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Vol. 2, The Canterbury Tales, Part 9
ed. by Derek Pearsall (review)

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anthologies containing selections from Hoccleve, criticism and background information, and articles.

Bernard O'Donoghue (a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford) has prepared a really good selection from Hoccleve's poems, and Carcanet Press has produced a book in relatively inexpensive yet pleasing format that will be available and useful to advanced undergraduates and graduates who want a positive, competent, and accurate introduction to Hoccleve the poet and to one of Chaucer's most charming, interesting, talkative, revealing, and informative contemporaries.

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DEREK PEARSALL, ed. *The Nun's Priest's Tale. A Variorum Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Vol. 2, The Canterbury Tales, Part 9.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984. Pp. xxviii, 284. \$42.50.

Since this volume forms part of the Variorum Edition of Chaucer, it naturally exhibits the virtues and shortcomings of the project as a whole. The volume contains an introduction which is mainly devoted to previous scholarship, particularly that dealing with critical interpretation and textual scholarship. There is a Table of Correspondence among certain early manuscripts together with a description of those manuscripts and modern editions. The text itself is based on Hengwrt, though the apparatus criticus records variants from a limited number of manuscripts and from printed editions. There are copious notes to the text, which is followed by bibliographical and general indices. A question that inevitably presents itself with a volume like this is: What is a variorum edition trying to achieve which is different from other editions? One answer would surely be to present a picture of the way in which the text has been transformed and edited since it was written. In fact this is not achieved. The edition concentrates on the establishment of Chaucer's text to the disregard of many fifteenth-century versions. Only a few early manuscripts are dealt with, and even major additions and omissions which occur in later manuscripts are not recorded in the apparatus criticus. Considerable attention is

given to printed editions (except for the most recent), but they in practice differ less among themselves than the manuscripts do. One is presented with a picture of the text in the early fifteenth century and from the introduction of printing onwards; but what happened to the text in between is largely ignored. In many ways, therefore, this edition repeats what was found in the Manly-Rickert edition instead of providing new insights into the history of the poem as it could, and should, have done. Furthermore, *The Canterbury Tales* presents a particular difficulty in that each editor deals only with a single tale. It is not easy for him to consider the evidence from a whole manuscript or printed edition to evaluate what principles its editor was working with to decide what light it might throw upon his treatment of the tale which is his principal concern.

Some of these features may be considered through the lines not found in Hengwrt, the base manuscript. The *Nun's Priest's Endlink* is found in Dd.4.24 and some other manuscripts, and extra lines are found in the *Prologue* in many manuscripts, including Ellesmere. In addition to the *Endlink* Dd.4.24 also probably contained the extra lines after line 4060 which are found in Egerton 2726, a manuscript dependent on it, though the actual leaf is missing from Dd.4.24 itself. Pearsall thinks that the *Endlink* is an "imperfectly canceled" (p. 5) section of the first version of the tale. The additional lines of the *Prologue* are part of Chaucer's final revised version. So he sees three authorial versions: one with *Endlink* (as in Dd.4.24), one with neither *Endlink* nor extra lines in the *Prologue* (as in Hengwrt), and one with extra lines in the *Prologue* (as in Ellesmere). Whether it is reasonable to accept these three presumed versions is one thing, but once an editor has accepted them, the way in which they are presented is quite another. Pearsall presents the extra lines of the *Prologue* and the *Endlink* in his text, even though he accepts that they are from three separate versions. He does not present the couplet after line 4060, even though it too is part of the first version and like the *Endlink* was "imperfectly canceled." Even with an edited text it is not permissible to present three authorial versions together as part of one conflated text; it is even less appropriate in a variorum edition which should be trying to show how the text developed. Indeed, it is doubtful whether a variorum edition should attach such importance to what is genuine and what is not, for that draws attention away from the development of the text. Because the *Endlink* in Dd.4.24 is regarded as genuine, it is included in the text, but the adaptations and extensions of the *Endlink* in later manuscripts are disregarded

even though they may have something to tell us about the development of the *Endlink* itself.

Of the base manuscripts used for this edition only Dd.4.24 has the *Endlink*. Its relation to the other manuscripts is not discussed, though it is accepted as a group *a* manuscript. First let us consider the concept of this “imperfectly canceled” passage in Dd.4.24’s exemplar. It suggests that scribes were automata who tried to copy what was in front of them. If the passage was properly canceled, it implies, the scribe of Dd.4.24 would not have copied it. But cancellation in manuscripts is usually by underdotting or stroking through with a line, and most passages are readily legible after cancellation. If we accept that scribes were capable of putting their own imprint on the text (as Pearsall does with some scribes like that of Ellesmere), we have no need for this “imperfectly.” Scribes exercised considerable initiative; they could disregard authorial intentions. Second, we need to consider in what manuscript this passage was canceled. Naturally such a cancellation would be appropriate in Chaucer’s first draft rather than in an exemplar of the *a* group, unless of course the two are the same. If so, it would suggest that other readings in Dd.4.24 were authoritative and should be given greater weight than they are. There would indeed be more than one archetype. Yet this possible solution has further difficulties in that Dd.4.24 has the extra lines in the *Prologue* which come from Chaucer’s revised version, and so its exemplar cannot have been a Chaucerian first draft, in which the extra lines of the *Prologue* would not have occurred. It is perhaps not surprising that the editor did not go deeply into the background of the development of the text, for he would have found himself beset with some irreconcilable propositions. The third, and possibly the most important, point concerns the nature of Dd.4.24. Why is it the earliest manuscript with the *Endlink*, what are its editorial principles, and what relationship does it have to other manuscripts in group *a*? Because the edition concerns only one tale, there is little in it to help us with these problems. The scribe of Dd.4.24 believed that each tale should be introduced by a prologue, and he left gaps before those tales which had none. This was quite a regular feature in the manuscripts of the poem, and it is found for the first time in Hengwrt. Group *a* manuscripts are characterised by the placing of fragment G after *NPT*, and it is reasonable to suppose that this order was introduced into the poem in group *a*. In other manuscripts *NPT* was followed by *The Manciple’s Prologue*, and so there was no need for any other linking device. That prologue was sufficient. But

when fragment G was placed after *NPT*, the problem of how to introduce the following *Second Nun's Tale* arose. The scribe of Dd.4.24 left a gap to accommodate whatever link was found or provided. In fact instead of a prologue to the following tale, all he got was an endlink to the preceding tale. This was not suitable for the purpose, and although the scribe included it, he placed the rubric to the end of *NPT* after the *Endlink*, which is thus made part of the tale. The rest of the gap was left blank. This at least seems clear, though it is not reported in this edition.

The problem then arises about the relation of Dd.4.24 to the other manuscripts in group *a*, including Ellesmere. Now that M. L. Samuels has suggested that Ellesmere is somewhat later in date than previously thought ("The Scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 5[1983]:49–65), it is possible that Dd.4.24 may be the earliest manuscript of group *a*. If so, why do later manuscripts in the group not follow it by having the *Endlink*? The view espoused by Pearsall is that the exemplar had a canceled *Endlink*, which some scribes copied and others did not. As already noted, this view runs into the problem of an exemplar having a canceled first draft and a revised version. However, the *Endlink* may have been introduced because of the need to have some introduction for the following tale. Yet it clearly did not fulfill that need, as even the scribe of Dd.4.24 recognized. It is not too difficult to assume that later scribes reacted in two different ways: one was simply to omit the *Endlink* because it did not satisfy the needs made on it; and the other was to expand it by including some further lines to act as a prologue and hence to satisfy those needs. Both solutions are found, the first in Ellesmere and the second in British Library Additional 5140. Manuscripts like Ellesmere which omit the *Endlink* satisfy the need for an introduction to *The Second Nun's Tale* by dividing it into *Prologue* and *Tale* after line 119—a division not found in the earliest manuscripts. The solution outlined here is one that can be arrived at only if one considers the nature of the whole manuscript and its relationship with other manuscripts, and this is something the Variorum Edition inhibits. Yet it is one of the most interesting aspects of the history of the poem, and one which a variorum edition ought to elucidate.

Similar considerations apply to the extra twenty lines of *The Nun's Priest's Prologue*, but there is no space to tackle that particular problem here. The text Pearsall prints is based almost exclusively on Hengwrt, and it is good and accurate. One or two emendations seem unnecessary to me, but they represent fine decisions. The Table of Correspondence concen-

trates on variants from the published text, but it may suggest to many readers that the quantity of variants is more important than their quality. Several of the emendations and many of the variants are based on metrical criteria, and it might have been helpful to have a section on meter and how different scribes responded to the meter of the poem. This would have given us some insight into the nature of individual scribes and their manuscripts.

The introduction and notes contain an impressive review of scholarship dealing with the poem. Here Pearsall is at his best. His judgments are judicious without in any way being mealy-mouthed. His reports of previous scholarship are balanced and fair, though it is clear he has little sympathy with some approaches to the poem. All who use this edition will find its breadth of scholarship stimulating. Little seems to have escaped his net. Those works that are not noticed often concern the language of the *Tale*, such as a series of notes by N. E. Osselton in *English Studies* on the demonstrative adjective (p. 232), though they do not refer to this particular example. The printing is reasonably accurate with the majority of the misprints occurring in the lemmas of the apparatus criticus and notes. However, these are small blemishes in a work which provides a vast amount of information in a learned but easy manner. It will no doubt be quarried by scholars for many years to come.

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A. G. RIGG and CHARLOTTE BREWER, eds. William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The Z Version*. Studies and Texts, vol. 59. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983. Pp. x, 137. \$11.00.

The editors of this work offer for our consideration what seems, at first glance, a shocking and nearly incredible thesis: that more than one hundred years of academic research and criticism devoted to the three versions of Langland's masterpiece have overlooked the existence of a fourth version of *Piers Plowman*, which Rigg and Brewer, taking a hint from Walter W. Skeat, have labeled the "Z Version." The arguments assembled in their very learned and judicious introduction aim to convince us that folios