

Report on the Fifth ICLS Congress Dalfsen, Netherlands, August 1986

For the fifth time, our Society met for a triennial Congress, this time in Holland. Each Congress has been unique and memorable, and each has built on the tradition of the others while making innovations. The first Congress, in Philadelphia, was largely the work of the indefatigable Ray Cornier, who also took a part in the play produced by students at Temple University. The 1977 Congress was held in Athens in early spring, when the whole state of Georgia appeared to be in bloom, and included a visit to an ante-bellum mansion. The Liverpool Congress, in 1980, took the Society across the Atlantic, to medieval experiences at Chester Cathedral (Cormier on his hands and knees staring at a carving of the rear end of a horse, shouting "I have found Yvain") and Fountains Abbey. The definitely unmedieval city of Toronto, Canada, was in 1983 the site of the Fourth Congress, with a tour to Stratford and a magnificent banquet hall. In contrast to all of these, the Dalfsen Congress in 1986 was situated in a quiet conference center in a flat part of the Netherlands, beside a barely moving river, among the corn fields and the farms, attended by swans and ...ducks. Even the weather from August 9th to 16th was idyllic.

Some two hundred participants gathered for scholarly sessions, entertainments, excursions, and relaxation. Perhaps because the organizer Keith Busby of Utrecht and Leiden had not informed anyone of when their papers were to be read, very many of the attending members stayed the whole week. But Keith had planned well: the working sessions were skillfully interspersed with plenary sessions and full or half-day excursions. There were numerous and delightful entertainments, and at all times the helpful and multi-lingual student helpers stood ready to dispense beer or coffee according to the hour, or advice at any time. This little band of students who seemed to require no sleep could not have been better chosen and contributed immeasurably to the well-being of all.

Close to a hundred and fifty papers were presented by the participants, who hailed from many countries, including Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, and the United States. The largest contingents were from the United States and Great Britain, and the language of the Congress was largely English. One is tempted to think, however, that Holland is more or less an English-speaking country. It would be impossible to do justice in this short review to the variety of the communications. Fortunately a collection of selected papers is well along towards publication, as advertised elsewhere in this volume of *Encomia*. Plenary addresses were given by William Calin, Alan Deyermond, and Derek Pearsall.

The local arrangements encouraged good fellowship: tables for eight in the dining room, coffee served on the terrace, round tables in the bar and on the terrace, time for relaxation in between working sessions and meals. There were also some first-rate entertainments, with a local dance group, colorfully costumed and clogged, performing traditional dances, and a performance in the open-air theatre of *The Apple Tree*, a morality play, preceded by an indescribably comic rendering of the same story in Dutch, which brought laughter even from those who knew no word of the language.

Two excursions were planned. The half-day trip was to Zwolle, a pleasant nearby town, where the participants were able to wander through the town, visit the church and its famous organ, and finally gather for a reception and a short address from the Queen's representative in Overijssel. For the lucky few, there was then a gourmet treat in Zeegse, at the kind invitation of Elizabeth Daverman. The all-day excursion to Utrecht, on the Tuesday, included a coffee reception in the Catharijneconvent, a tour of the convent museum with its special exhibit on the voyage of Brendan, a tour of the city and its cathedral, and finally dinner at one of the local restaurants. The *rijkstafel* seems to have been the goal of many that evening before taking the buses back to Dalfsen. It was surprising to find in one of the medieval streets a statue to Francois Villon; wonderful to find in the University's garden a hawthorn tree. Most surprising, however, was the afternoon ceremony attended by many of the congressants in which the conference organizer, Keith Busby was married to Jose Lanter, with the city registrar performing the whole operation in English. Congratulations to Jose and Keith, not least for keeping the whole thing secret for so long.

The ducks have been alluded to above. They seemed to know when the mealtimes were over, and congregated at the entrance to the dining room, expecting (and usually receiving) a hand-out of some food. They were less aggressive than the swans, however, as Joe Snow knows, and as such they perhaps deserved to be immortalized. One morning there appeared on the notice board a hand-written fragment of a heroic poem, inspired partly by the ducks and partly by the Old French *Voeux du paon*. The vows seem strangely modern in tone, however, leading many to believe that the explanation that the poem had been found among wrapping papers in an Indonesian takeaway in Utrecht was spurious. The fragment has since been published, in *Olifant* 11 (Fall/Winter 1986), 237-39. As yet the perpetrator has not been revealed, although suspicion has been cast upon many, all of whom were flattered by the suggestion they were clever enough to have composed this little gem.

Elsewhere in this volume of *Encomia* appears a photograph of most of the organizers of the Society's Triennial Congresses. Before them stands an empty chair, to be filled by the organizer of the next, the Sixth Congress. We know there can never be another Dalfsen, or another Philadelphia or Athens or Liverpool or Toronto. They have set a high standard of scholarship, and provided many pleasant hours and days for those attending the Congresses. But we have not been disappointed yet, and we confidently expect that the standard will be maintained.

Forward to 1989!

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