

**THE MANUSCRIPT SOURCE OF CAXTON'S SECOND  
EDITION OF THE *CANTERBURY TALES* AND ITS PLACE IN  
THE TEXTUAL TRADITION OF THE *TALES***

Barbara Bordalejo

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A **JUAN BORDALEJO**, que siempre pregunta cómo va 'la otra' tesis...

A **IRMA DOS SANTOS**, que me leyó tantas veces 'El caballo alado'...

Con formas distintas de amor, para los dos.



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**ABSTRACT**

For many years, scholars have thought that the manuscript source used by William Caxton to correct his first edition of the *Canterbury Tales* was a manuscript probably of the very best quality. In 1939, Thomas Dunn wrote a doctoral thesis on the subject, and for his research he used the Manly and Rickert collation cards. Technological advances made in the last decade of the twentieth century have made it possible to collate the witnesses of the *Tales* using computerised tools.

This work presents an analysis of the stemmatically significant variants found in Cx2 and attempts to offer a plausible hypothesis concerning the position of the manuscript source of Cx2 in the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*. This thesis is organised in eight chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the scholarly work surrounding Caxton's second edition and his editorial practices; chapter 2 contains the bibliographical description of one of the copies of Cx2; chapter 3 studies the question of the order of the tales; chapter 4 offers a synthesis of what, for the purposes of this particular research, is understood as a textual variant; in chapters 5, 6 and 7 the analyses of the data and some partial conclusions can be found. The findings of this work appear in the conclusions (chapter 8). There is an electronic appendix to this work in which data that were not deemed essential to its understanding can be found. The electronic appendix includes the complete collation of Cx2 against Cx1, collations of all the available witnesses and variants which were considered repetitive or uninformative.

This work shows that witnesses of the text which have remained unclassified up to this point might be genetically related. Especially evident is the relationship between Ad3 Ch Ha4 and the manuscript source of Cx2. It also appears that Cx2 shares with El and Gg variants which originated below the archetype. This thesis suggests that more work is required in order to clarify the stemmatic relations in the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*.

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These years at the Canterbury Tales Project have been a privilege, and probably the best opportunity of my life to do the things I really wanted (and want) to do. I lack the words to describe the influence Doctor Peter Robinson, my supervisor, has had in my work. My own attempt at thanking him would be clumsy, and for this reason I use the words W. W. Skeat wrote to Henry Bradshaw:

And *now* let me say what I wanted to say before, but could not so well as now.... it is for *me* to know what you have been for me, & what you have done for me. In my beginning to study, I was with the best of intentions, all abroad. I could not read a MS., I did not know what a MS. was. I wanted to read books, but did not know what books.... And in hundreds of ways I wanted to know... all sorts of things more or less connected with MSS. & literature. Well, it is the merest truth that it is, practically, to you that I owe all my best ideas. You have set me thinking where I was before thoughtless, you have helped me to read MSS., you have told me of this or that book or edition, over and over again & thrown out hints... & told me of points, and in fact helped me, in & out, in hundreds of ways & thousands of times. Your remarks have always been *treasured*: some have seemed wrong to me at first, but they generally *came* right.... It is merely and perfectly hopeless to say how much more I owe to you than to anyone else.\*

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\* Quoted by A. S. G. Edwards (1984, 178) from the original letter, italics are his.

As Skeat, I might one day have the right words, but, for the time being, these shall suffice.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### Witness Sigils

#### *Manuscripts*

- Ad1 London, British Library, MS. Add. 5140  
Ad2 London, British Library, MS. Add. 25718  
Ad3 London, British Library, MS. Add. 35286  
Ad4 London, British Library, MS. Add. 10340  
Bo1 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 414  
Bo2 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 686  
Bw Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Barlow 20  
Ch Oxford, Christ Church College, MS. 152  
Cn Austin, University of Texas, Humanities Research Center, MS. 143 (ex Cardigan)  
Cp Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS. 198  
Ct Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS. 6709  
Dd Cambridge, University Library, MS. Dd.4.24  
Dl Tokyo, Takamiya MS 24 (ex Delamere)  
Ds1 Tokyo, Takamiya MS 32 (ex Devonshire)  
El California, San Marino, Huntington Library, MS. El. 26 C 9 (Ellesmere)  
En1 London, British Library, MS. Eg. 2726  
En2 London, British Library, MS. Eg. 2863  
En3 London, British Library, MS. Eg. 2864  
Fi Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS. McClean 181  
Gg Cambridge, University Library, MS. Gg.4.27  
Gl Glasgow, Hunterian Museum, MS. U.1.1 (197)  
Ha1 London, British Library, MS. Harley 1239  
Ha2 London, British Library, MS. Harley 1758  
Ha3 London, British Library, MS. Harley 7333  
Ha4 London, British Library, MS. Harley 7334  
Ha5 London, British Library, MS. Harley 7335  
He New Jersey, Princeton University Library, MS. 100 (Helmingham)

- Hg Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS. Peniarth 392 D (Hengwrt)
- Hk Norfolk, Holkham Hall, MS. 667
- Hl1 London, British Library, MS. Harley 1704
- Hl2 London, British Library, MS. Harley 2551
- Hl3 London, British Library, MS. Harley 2382
- Hl4 London, British Library, MS. Harley 5908
- Hn California, San Marino, Huntington Library, MS. HM 144
- Ht Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Hatton Donat.1
- Ii Cambridge, University Library, MS. Ii.3.26
- La London, British Library, MS. Lansdowne 851
- Lc Lichfield Cathedral, MS. 29
- Ld1 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Misc. 600
- Ld2 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Misc.739
- Ll1 Wiltshire, Longleat House, MS. Longleat 257
- Ll2 Wiltshire, Longleat House, MS. Longleat 29
- Ln Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS. 110
- Ma University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS. English 113
- Mc Chicago, University of Chicago Library, MS. 564 (McCormick)
- Me Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS. 21972 D (Merthyr)
- Mg New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. 249
- Mm Cambridge, University Library, MS. Mm.2.5
- Ne Oxford, New College, D.314
- Nl Northumberland, Alnwick Castle, MS. 455
- Np Naples, Royal Library, MS. XIII.B.29
- Ox1 University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS. English 63 (Oxford)
- Ox2 Philadelphia, Rosenbach Museum and Library, MS. 1084/2 (Oxford)
- Ph1 Austin, University of Texas, Humanities Research Center MS. 46 (Phillipps 6570)
- Ph2 Geneva, Bodmer Library, MS. 48 (Phillipps 8136)
- Ph3 Philadelphia, Rosenbach Museum and Library, MS. 1084/1 (Phillipps 8137)
- Ph4 California, San Marino, Huntington Library, MS. HM 140 (Phillipps 8299)
- Pl New York, Columbia University Library, MS. Plimpton 253 (Phillipps 9970)
- Pp Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS. Pepys 2006
- Ps Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. Fonds Anglais 39
- Pw Sussex, Petworth House, MS. 7

- Py London, Royal College of Physicians, MS. 388
- Ra1 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. poet.141
- Ra2 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. poet.149
- Ra3 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. poet.223
- Ra4 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. poet C.86
- Ry1 London, British Library, MS. Royal 17 D.XV
- Ry2 London, British Library, MS. Royal 18 C.II
- Se Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Arch. Selden B.14
- Si Tokyo, Takamiya 22 (Sion College)
- Sl1 London, British Library, MS. Sloane 1685
- Sl2 London, British Library, MS. Sloane 1686
- Tc1 Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. R.3.3
- Tc2 Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. R.3.15
- Tc3 Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. R.3.19
- To1 Oxford, Trinity College, MS. 49
- To2 Oxford, Trinity College, MS. 29

***Pre-1500 Printed Editions***

- Cx1 Caxton, first edition (c. 1476)
- Cx2 Caxton, second edition (c. 1482)
- Pn Pynson (1492)
- Wy Wynkyn de Worde (1498)

## Abbreviations for Tales and Links\*

General Prologue	GP
The Knight's Tale	KT**
Link 1(The Miller's Prologue )	L1
The Miller's Tale	MI
Link 2 (The Reeve's Prologue )	L2
The Reeve's Tale	RE
Link 3 (The Cook's Prologue)	L3
The Cook's Tale	CO
Link 7 (The Man of Law's Prologue)	L7
The Man of Law's Tale	ML
Link 15 (The Merchant's Prologue)	L15
The Merchant's Tale	ME
Link 8 (The Man of Law's Endlink)	L8
The Squire's Tale	SQ
Link 20 (The Squire-Franklin Link)	L20
The Franklin's Tale	FK
The Wife of Bath's Prologue	WBP***
The Wife of Bath's Tale	WBT
Link 10 (The Friar's Prologue)	L10
The Friar's Tale	FR
Link 11 (The Summoner's Prologue)	L11
The Summoner's Tale	SU
The Clerk's Tale	CL
Link 13 (Lenvoy de Chaucer)	L13
Link 14 (The Host Stanza)	L14
The Nun's Tale	NU
Link 33 (The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue)	L33
The Canon's Yeoman's Tale	CY

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\* For a detailed account of the Canterbury Tales Project's sigils and lineation system see Blake (1997, 5-14).

\*\* KT is the only abbreviation in which I do not follow Blake's lineation system (1997, 5-14). In this case I follow the abbreviation used in *The Hengwrt Chaucer Digital Facsimile* (Stubbs 2000).

\*\*\* WBP and WBT have been used at the Canterbury Tales Project instead of Blake's WB, as proposed in the lineation system (1997).

The Physician's Tale	PH
Link 21 (The Physician/Pardoner Link)	L21
The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale	PD
The Shipman's Tale	SH
Link 24 (The Shipman/Prioress Link)	L13
The Prioress' Tale	PR
Link 25 (Prologue to Sir Thopas)	L25
The Tale of Sir Thopas	TT
Link 28 (Thopas/ Melibee Link)	L28
The Tale of Melibee	TM
Link 29 (The Monk's Prologue)	L29
The Monk's Tale	MO
Link 30 (The Nun's Priest's Prologue)	L30
The Nun's Priest's Tale	NP
Link 31 (The Nun's Priest's Endlink)	L31
Link 36 (The Manciple's Prologue)	L36
The Manciple's Tale	MA
Link 37 (The Parson's Prologue)	L37
The Parson's Tale	PA
Chaucer's Retraction	RT

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to establish, as far as possible, the affiliations of the manuscript source of William Caxton's second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* -- henceforth  $\omega$ <sup>1</sup> and Cx2. This research sprang from recent developments in studies of the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales* in which it became increasingly evident that  $\omega$  might have been an important witness to the text. Determining the affiliations and nature of  $\omega$  will therefore help us to understand more clearly the development of the text and might provide new evidence to assess the rest of the tradition.

In order to judge correctly the importance of this work, it is necessary to understand some aspects of the textual history of the *Tales*, including the reasons why editors have preferred one manuscript over another at any given time. This introduction presents a brief survey of the most important editions of the *Canterbury Tales* --including Cx2 itself-- in order to show the changing attitudes towards the text of the *Tales* over the six hundred years since it was written. I also discuss here scholarly works which deal with Cx2, its manuscript source, its position in the textual tradition and relationships with other witnesses of the text.

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<sup>1</sup> In this work, the manuscript source of Caxton's second edition of the *Canterbury Tales* is referred to as  $\omega$ , following the tradition of assigning Greek letters to lost hyparchetypes.

# 1. SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON THE TEXTUAL TRADITION OF THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

## 1.1 The Printed Editions Before 1775

The *Canterbury Tales* is preserved in eighty-four manuscripts and four incunabula, which exhibit different tale-orders and present, to a greater or lesser degree, variation in their texts.<sup>2</sup> The *Tales* were very popular from the moment they were published --as attested by the number of manuscripts and the frequency of the printed editions-- but the text has always created difficulties for scribes, printers and scholars. In fact, as early as Cx2, we find that there was concern with the accuracy of the text being published.

It is well known that Caxton provided a prologue to his second edition of the *Tales* (Cx2). The account given by Caxton in this prologue, independently of whether we take it literally or question Caxton's truthfulness, shows that around 1482 it was already acknowledged that the *Canterbury Tales* circulated in different versions. Again, according to the prologue, some could be more accurate than others:

For I fynde many of the sayd<sup>o</sup> bookes / whyche wryters haue  
abyrdgyd<sup>o</sup> it and<sup>o</sup> many thynges left out / And<sup>o</sup> in some place haue  
sette certayn versys / that he neuer made ne sette in his booke /  
of whyche bokkes so incorrecte was one brought to me vj yere  
passyd<sup>o</sup> / whyche I supposed<sup>o</sup> had<sup>o</sup> ben veray true 7 correcte / And<sup>o</sup>  
accordyng<sup>o</sup> to the same I dyde do enprynte a certayn nombre of  
them / whyche anon were sold<sup>o</sup> to many and<sup>o</sup> dyuerse gentyll men /  
of whome one gentyllman cam to me / and<sup>o</sup> said<sup>o</sup> that this booke was  
not accordyng in many places vnto the booke that Gefferey chaucer

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<sup>2</sup> In volume II of the Manly-Rickert edition, we find that they list 82 manuscripts (1940, 2: 46-8). Since Manly and Rickert's classification the manuscript Ox has been divided, and has become Ox1-Ox2 (Blake 1996, 181), and another one has been discovered in Oxford: Trinity D 29, To2 (Harris 1983, 31). The early printed editions have been dated as follows: Cx1 1476-7; Hellinga thinks the likely date is the earlier one (1982, 67-8; 80-1), but Needham dates it 1477 (1986, 84), following Blake (1976, 127-8), who later changed his opinion and stated that the date for Cx1 was 'almost certainly' 1476 (Blake 1985, 1), Cx2 1482-3; the dating of Cx2 depends on that of Cx1, since the book was printed six years after Cx1. Needham dates Cx2 as 1483 (1986, 87). Hellinga dates it 1482 (1982). Blake accepts the dates proposed by Hellinga (1985), Pn 1495 and Wy 1498 (Blake 1985, 5).

had<sup>ð</sup> made / To whom I answer<sup>ð</sup> that I had made it accordyng<sup>r</sup> to my copye / and<sup>ð</sup> by me was nothyng added ne mynusshy<sup>ð</sup> (Caxton c. 1482, aij)

Caxton emphasises that there are indeed books which are written either carelessly or with intentional modifications. Both of these he calls 'incorrecte.' He also makes it clear that he did not introduce any changes into his first edition, but instead he produced an accurate copy of the manuscript he was using as copy text. About this, it is likely that he is telling the truth because the collations of his first edition (Cx1) show it consistently as being part of the **b** group, and so it is probable that it follows closely a single b-group manuscript.<sup>3</sup> Caxton's prologue functions as an explanation of the mistakes in his first edition, but clearly, he did not think that the mistakes were so many or so important since, instead of setting up his second edition directly from the 'very trewe' manuscript he later obtained, he wrote corrections from it in an offprint of Cx1, as suggested by W.W. Greg (1924, 740 and ff.) and shown by Thomas Dunn (1939, 74).<sup>4</sup> After Cx2, when the *Canterbury Tales* was printed each new edition used a previous one as its copy text and one or more manuscripts to improve or correct the text (Greg 1924, 740). A firm statement about this can be found in Greg's article "The Early Printed Editions of the 'Canterbury Tales'":

[N]o print after the first was set up from manuscript; each successive printer, whatever alterations or corrections he may have introduced, set up his edition from one or other of his predecessors.... But it still remains to determine what particular copy the later editions used, and to inquire what

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Manly and Rickert (1940, 2:57-9), Boyd (1984, 22-23) and Blake (1969, 103).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 1, where I discuss Dunn's work.

were the affinities of the manuscripts, if any, which were consulted for corrections. (1924, 740-1)

Greg analysed the six earliest printed editions: Caxton's editions, Pynson 1492, de Worde 1498, Pynson 1526 and Godfray 1532. The method Greg discovered in the early printed editions continued to be used and research has been carried out concerning later prints in order to discover which edition was the base of another. In the case of Thynne, it is still unclear which edition was used as its copy text, but scholars agree that it was one of the previous editions (Blodgett 1984, 46-7). Stow used the "most recent version of Thynne's edition" (Hudson 1984, 60). Speght used Stow's edition (Pearsall 1984, 79). This means that Cx1 is the ultimate source of all the early printed editions and that these grew by the accretion of variants drawn from various other sources.

John Urry's 1721 edition appears to be different. It was announced as "[c]ompared with the Former Editions, and many valuable MSS," (Alderson 1984, 93) but Urry had died without finishing it and "with the apparatus for his edition still in his head" (Alderson 1984, 98). But even though Urry had collated manuscripts and printed editions, he had "selected the readings which satisfied him, perhaps transferring them along with his own emendations to a single printed copy (conceivably a 1602 Speght, since Speght's 'arguments' and headnotes are frequently reproduced without change in the 1721 edition)" (Alderson 1984, 99). In the end, Urry's edition had also used as its base-text a previous print to which changes had been introduced to improve the text.

Every edition after Cx1 up to 1775, with only the possible exception of Urry's, was produced following the model created by Caxton when he printed Cx2: a

previous edition was used as copy-text and changes were introduced from a manuscript or manuscripts. Although in some cases the source of the printed editions is not readily identifiable, e.g. Thynne, there is agreement in the fact that this was the procedure followed by editors. Because each edition was based on a previous one, it may be assumed that the text of the *Canterbury Tales* read up to 1775 was a modified version of the text of Caxton's first edition. From this situation, one can presume that editors were not interested in the development of the text. Instead they tried to 'improve' previous editions, but without giving too much importance to the text itself. Up to 1775, editions of the *Canterbury Tales* were mainly products to be sold and there was little interest in its textual history.

## **1.2 Scholarly Editions**

### *1.2.1 The Return to the Manuscripts after 1775*

As we have seen, before 1775, the editions of the *Canterbury Tales* were not scholarly works, but were the product of the work of printers. Although these printers could present themselves as concerned about the texts they were printing, this concern was not sufficient to make them search actively for good witnesses or to try to understand the reasons why one text might be different from another. However, one editor was about to change all this and to present a new perspective for the study of Chaucer.

In 1775, Thomas Tyrwhitt published an edition of the *Canterbury Tales* in which he discussed previous attempts at editing the *Tales* and attempted to produce a

new text directly from the manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> Tyrwhitt realised that there was a need to consult the manuscripts and Caxton's editions --to which he gave the same authority as to that of the manuscripts-- in order to produce a reliable text of Chaucer's poem (See Windeatt 1984, 123).<sup>6</sup> The result was a conflated edition, but probably the best printed text up to that point. The importance of this edition is that Tyrwhitt used the manuscripts, not just to improve a previous edition, but to attempt to establish the best readings. He used his knowledge of the different witnesses to assess each variant and determine which ones were likely to have been produced by Chaucer and, for this, Tyrwhitt relied largely on metrical regularity.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of Tyrwhitt's edition there was a newly awakened interest in the use of manuscripts to establish the text of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, at this point, Tyrwhitt still relied on variants found in previous printed editions, but the perspective was soon to change and with this the interest in Cx1 and Cx2.

### 1.2.2 *The Search for the Best Manuscript*

After a period in which several manuscripts were consulted to produce an eclectic text, another change in editorial perspective transformed the way in which the textual history of the *Tales* was perceived. Thomas Wright published his edition of

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<sup>5</sup> Although editors before 1775 used manuscripts to 'improve' the text of their editions, Tyrwhitt was the first to write specifically about his editorial principles and ideas about the *Canterbury Tales*. Tyrwhitt's work earned him a place in the history of editors of Chaucer. He has been referred as 'founder of modern Chaucer editing.' (Cf. Windeatt 1984, 118)

<sup>6</sup> Tyrwhitt consulted the following manuscripts: Bo2 Bw Dd En1 En2 En3 Ha3 Ha4 Ha5 Ht Ii La Ld1 Ld2 Ry2 Ry1 Se Tc1 and Tc2. Windeatt points out that the most used in the group were Dd Ha4 Ha5 La and Tc1 (Windeatt 1984, 124).

<sup>7</sup> Tyrwhitt relies only on editorial judgement to choose the variants to appear in the text. Long before the Lachmann method was developed, scholars such as Richard Bentley advocated a return to the sources of the text, that is the manuscripts (Reynolds and Wilson 1991, 184-7, 209) and J. J. Griesbach was persuaded by his own research to depart from the *textus receptus* of the Greek New Testament to adopt readings which he interpreted to be better (Metzger 1997, 67). Today, the method used by Tyrwhitt is known as *emendatio*, that is, the assessment of variants in different sources to emend the text using the one judged to be the better option.

the *Tales* between 1847 and 1851. He decided to use a single text in what seems to be a reaction against the eclectic text produced by Tyrwhitt. Wright decided to edit the best manuscript that he could find. In this, his method presents a clear contrast with those of the printers before 1775 and with Tyrwhitt's edition. The best available manuscript, according to Wright, was Ha4:<sup>8</sup>

[W]hile Wright's choice of base-text was very unfortunate and while his execution had a number of flaws, he chose a method which was not only sound but which influenced those who followed. (Ramsey 1994, 12)

Although Vance Ramsey labels the decision as 'unfortunate', he also explains that both method and choice influenced those who followed Wright. However, Wright's influence as shown in the choice of copytext for the *Canterbury Tales* did not last for very long, as Windeatt states:

Wright's younger contemporaries eventually lost their original enthusiasm for Ha4 and ultimately rejected it as inauthoritative, though its importance as an early version of the *Tales* continues to be recognized. As the nineteenth century drew to its close, E1 emerged as editors' choice of best text, and it is the basis for Skeat's *Canterbury Tales* that appeared as part of his great edition of the *Works* in 1894. Oddly enough, the appearance of Wright's edition and its reviews may have been responsible for the ultimate recognition of the superiority of E1, which had been ignored by Tyrwhitt and by Wright himself. (Windeatt 1984, 149)

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<sup>8</sup> British Library, Harleian 7334 . This manuscript has been published by Furnivall (1885). See also Tatlock (1909).

It seems clear that Ha4, used as a base-text by Wright but also favoured by Tyrwhitt, lost priority in favour of El. This shift towards El was the result of the comparison of the texts of Ha4 and El as pointed out by Blake:

In its early period of discussion, interest focused on Ha7334 and its relation to El. This was because Ha7334 was the manuscript that had been used as a base text in many nineteenth-century editions and because it contained unusual readings. (1985, 33)

Ha4 had been regarded as a very good witness of the text of the *Canterbury Tales*, but doubts appeared following Furnivall's comparison of the metre with that of El<sup>9</sup> (Cf. Furnivall 1868-77). By the time Furnivall produced his "Six-text edition " he had decided that El was the best manuscript of the *Tales*. Scholars have expressed surprise at the fact that Furnivall had identified Hg<sup>10</sup> and El as the most important manuscripts:

Although Hengwrt receives very little discussion, Furnivall recognizes it, in spite of its poor condition, as a manuscript of the first importance, the "second best" to Ellesmere. While Furnivall is still impressed by Harleian 7334, that manuscript's weaknesses are exposed by the detailed comparisons provided by Morris (pp. 78-80), and Furnivall did not include it in the Six-Text edition. (Baker 1984, 159)

When Skeat's edition appeared, between 1894 and 1895, the text of El started to become the canonical text of the *Tales*. From this point on, up to Manly and Rickert's

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<sup>9</sup> Huntington Library MS 26 C 9. There are several facsimiles of this manuscript, for example, Chaucer, (1911); Hanna (1989); Woodward and Stevens (1997). Furnivall produced an edition based on the manuscript (1868-1879) and variants from its text can be found in Ruggiers' facsimile of Hg (1979).

<sup>10</sup> MS Peniarth 392 D, National Library of Wales. Furnivall produced an edition of Hg at the end of the nineteenth century (Furnivall 1868-1879). Later Manly and Rickert used Hg as their base-text (1940) and it has also been used as a base by the *Variorum Chaucer* (Andrew et al. 1993). Blake edited it in

edition, E1 became the base for editions of the *Canterbury Tales* and, following Furnivall's *Six-Text Edition*, there was also a tendency to follow the E1 tale-order.<sup>11</sup> Even after Manly and Rickert, E1 was favoured by the majority of the editors who think that the manuscript's metre and readings are better than those found in the rest of the witnesses. In his 'Introduction' to *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, F. N. Robinson made an important case about how few variants in Ha4 could be taken into account (1957, xxxvii-xxxvix). Moreover, he suggested that these are the result of either emendation or contamination, and he clearly emphasises his preference for E1 (Robinson 1957, xxxix).

Until Manly and Rickert's<sup>12</sup> thorough analysis of the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*, preferences for certain manuscripts over certain others were coloured by personal impressions. Manly and Rickert are the only scholars to have carried out a complete and systematic analysis of the whole textual tradition of the *Tales*; a labour that took them some twenty years and probably led to their deaths. The results of their work were published in 1940 in eight volumes, of which the first two are dedicated to the descriptions of the witnesses and the analysis of their findings and the resulting genetic groups.

The two most important and enduring conclusions reached by Manly and Rickert concern the status of the text of Hg and the general grouping of the witnesses. They showed that Hg, not E1, has probably the best extant text of the *Tales* and used this manuscript as their base-text. Further, although their groupings present

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1980. There are two facsimiles of the manuscript: the one produced by Ruggiers with variants from E1 (1979) and the *Canterbury Tales* Project digital facsimile edited by Estelle Stubbs (2000).

<sup>11</sup> This tendency to follow the E1 tale-order does not apply to Skeat's 1908 edition. Despite his part in the scholarly favour towards E1, Skeat proposed that Ha4 was the manuscript that represented Chaucer's latest intentions (1907, 9-10).

<sup>12</sup> For scholarly opinions on Manly and Rickert's work see Dempster (1946); Kane (1984); Blake (1983) and Ramsey (1994).

considerable problems, their structure has been retained and used by every scholar after them. Ramsey points out that, before Manly and Rickert, the majority of the studies carried out --with limited amounts of data-- ended up by concluding a binary classification of the manuscripts, a fact that did not recur on this occasion (1994, 153). This fact takes us to another important contribution Manly and Rickert made to textual scholarship: the refinement of the stemmatic method. They proposed that not only do errors have to be taken into account when establishing a stemma, but also agreements in correct readings.<sup>13</sup> From this it follows that all agreements are indicative of what they call a 'variational group,' but only those that are 'persistent' and 'consistent' can show the relationships between genetic groups (Manly and Rickert 1940, 20). Aside from the prominent importance given to Hg by Manly and Rickert, they also showed that certain manuscripts are of special relevance. Manly and Rickert proposed four groups and an agglomeration of unclassified manuscripts, and this classification has been in use since the publication of their work. Only very recently have there been some suggestions about changes to their original groupings, but these are more refinements of these groupings, not rejections of them (Robinson 1996b 2000b). Manly and Rickert could have exerted a bigger influence in later research if their work had been presented in a more accessible way. As put by Kane "no Chaucer edition before it [Manly and Rickert's] had been supported by such an elaborate apparatus: six volumes to accompany two of text" (1984, 207), and although his interpretation of the vastness of their work is that it was "evidently important," it might also be inferred that the sheer volume could have been enough to keep away even the most daring textual critics. Another factor that influenced the reception of Manly and Rickert's work is that this has often been misinterpreted and attacked:

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 1, page 23 for further discussion about this point.

Manly and Rickert were aware that agreement in original readings is "non-classificatory" (2.24), but the edition does not show that they were troubled by the indeterminate originality of their base for collation, "Skeat's 'Student's Edition'" (2.5). What seems to have preoccupied them was the second difficulty of classification, that created by convergent variation (2.20-27). To counter this they made an independent venture into the rationale of textual criticism with the postulate that "The law of probability is so steady in its working that only groupings of classificatory value have the requisite persistence and consistency to be taken as genetic groups" (2.22). That postulate is a fallacy, for it assumes that manual transmission is uniformly erratic (all texts are equally corrupt), that there will always be relatively abundant agreement in error between genetically related manuscripts. Scribes copying Middle English manuscripts were not generating "mass phenomena" in respect of which "the regularity of the operations of chance " (2.23) can be invoked, but operating as highly specialized individuals in sets of highly individualized situations. Of course the editors knew that the assumption was baseless; they appear not to have seen how it affected their postulate. (Kane 1984, 209)

Kane's criticism of Manly and Rickert's choice of base text is valid in the sense that their base does not occur at any point in the manuscript textual tradition. However, his censure of the idea of the persistency and consistency of the genetic groups is not correct since it is based on his own preconceived idea about stemmatics. Kane's understanding of stemmatics is that the method relies on errors introduced in copies made from the original, that is, only errors can help to determine textual relations.

However, Manly and Rickert clearly state that not only errors should be taken into account, but also agreements, no matter of which kind, should be considered (Manly and Rickert 1940, 20).<sup>14</sup> The weakness in Manly and Rickert's argument is not that they do not rely solely on errors to establish genetic affiliations, but that often they fail to recognise an archetypal variant as such and attempt to classify and group texts based on such readings.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, even though scholars use Manly and Rickert's groupings and sigils, very few have dedicated careful analysis to their text and apparatus. Instead, because of the influence that Furnivall and Skeat had on later scholarship, E1 became the most common text of the *Tales* --and it still is, since the most popular reading edition, the *Riverside Chaucer*, is closely based on Robinson's edition.

However, the work of Manly and Rickert influenced some later scholars who followed their choice of Hg as the best witness of the text of the *Tales*. Ruggiers published a facsimile of Hg with transcriptions and collations from E1 in 1979. This facsimile of Hg was printed as part of a series to accompany the *Variorum Chaucer*:

The facsimile series, the prime support for the various texts provided by the *Variorum Chaucer*, was inaugurated in 1979 with the publication of the facsimile of the Hengwrt manuscript (Peniarth 392D) of *The Canterbury Tales*. The series was begun with this particular manuscript on the obvious ground that it was our base manuscript for *The Canterbury Tales* and that the treatment of *The Canterbury Tales* was the part of the project that initially commanded our greatest attention. (Andrew et al. 1993, xi)

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion see chapter 4, Theoretical Aspects of Textual Variation.

The influence of a project such as the *Variorum Chaucer* persuaded other scholars of the importance of Hg, and shifted the balance in its favour.

The following year, Blake published his edition of the *Canterbury Tales* with a text which is a very lightly emended Hg with added punctuation and capitalisation and in which CY appears in the appendix, since this tale is not included in Hg and Blake had doubts about its authenticity.<sup>16</sup> Later in the same decade, in 1985, Blake published *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales*, a book that shook, once more, the perception of the textual history of Chaucer's poem. In *The Textual Tradition*, Blake hypothesises how the text of the *Tales* developed through the years. According to him, Hg is the earliest stage of the text, followed by Cp. Scribes later produced other developments of the text such as Dd, Gg, El, Ha4 and others. Blake's position about the text of the *Canterbury Tales* can be summarised in two main statements. The first is that he thinks that the text of Hg is the most reliable manuscript and that its spelling system is very close to Chaucer's own. The second has to do with the lack of in depth studies of individual manuscripts of the *Tales* and of the textual tradition in general:

The effect [of the preponderance of El] has been to prevent the evidence of the manuscripts being organized in a coherent textual tradition, for the manuscripts have not been allowed to speak for themselves. The assumption that what is in El is genuine has dictated the way in which many textual scholars have tried to recreate the textual tradition. Unless we are prepared to approach the evidence of the manuscripts without prior

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<sup>15</sup> The phrase “archetypal variant” is used throughout this work. The use of “archetypal reading” implies a degree of certainty that is not always possible to achieve.

assumptions, we will never be able to make sense of the textual tradition.

(Blake 1985: 187)

The idea of going back to the manuscript evidence proved to be of great importance for the future development of research about the *Canterbury Tales*. Under this perspective the manuscripts gain new importance and can be studied individually in order to understand their place in the textual tradition. In the same way, the importance of incunabula and their sources can be reassessed.

### 1.2.3 Studying the Textual Tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*

The situation concerning textual studies of the *Canterbury Tales* started to change thanks to the renewed interest promoted by scholars such as Derek Pearsall, Ian Doyle and others, who, as Blake, wanted to return to the study of the manuscript tradition.<sup>17</sup> The editors of the *Variorum Chaucer*, specifically referring to the Hg facsimile, state:

[W]ith the reliance upon the Hengwrt manuscript as the base text for *The Canterbury Tales* and with the provision of a running comparison between the transcribed Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, the *Variorum Chaucer* returns to the sources from which virtually all modern editions of *The Canterbury Tales* have emanated. (Andrew et al. 1993, xi)

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding the status of CY, Blake wrote: "...there is evidence in Hg to suggest that CYT was a late piece and so spurious." (1980, 6)

<sup>17</sup> See for example the proceedings for the 1981 conference at the University of York (Pearsall 1983) and the 1978 article, "The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century" (Doyle and Parkes 1978).

Evidently, the path was set for studies that included more than a few manuscripts. The interest had shifted towards the study of the whole textual tradition.

But it was not until Blake's interest in the matter prompted him to join Peter Robinson and Elizabeth Solopova that the Canterbury Tales Project was officially started in 1993 and a complete assessment of the textual tradition and the relationships between all the fifteenth century witnesses of the *Tales* began. In the preface to the *Occasional Papers I*, Blake and Robinson wrote:

The Project aims to make available, in computer-readable form, transcripts, images, collations and analyses of all eighty-four extant manuscripts and four pre-1500 printed editions of the *Canterbury Tales*.

(1993: 1)

The Canterbury Tales Project has ambitious aims, even more ambitious than those of Manly and Rickert: not only all witnesses have to be transcribed and collated, but new tools, such as Vbase,<sup>18</sup> have been developed to help scholars make sense of the vast amount of variation found in the manuscripts. A major contribution of the Canterbury Tales Project has been the study of new methods for analysis<sup>19</sup> and Robinson's development of new software for publication of electronic editions.<sup>20</sup> Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Canterbury Tales Project has been transcribing and collating fifteenth-century witnesses of the *Tales*. Based on these materials, the

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<sup>18</sup> Vbase is part of the suit of programs used in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue on CD-ROM* and *The General Prologue on CD-ROM*. This piece of software helps to isolate variants according to their distribution among the witnesses of a text.

<sup>19</sup> Especially the application of phylogenetic software, originally designed to hypothesise relationships between different species, applied to the study of manuscript traditions. These methods have been successfully applied by Robinson to the study of Old Norse texts (Robinson and O'Hara 1996) and to the *Canterbury Tales* (Robinson 1997 and 2000a). For other studies see Salemans (1996, 2000); Platnick and Cameron (1977); Cameron (1987); Robinson and O'Hara (1993); and Robinson (1996).

<sup>20</sup> The Anastasia Publishing System is currently being used for the Canterbury Tales Project editions as well as for other important editorial projects such as the Electronic Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, and Linne Mooney's *Revised Index of Middle English Verse*.

Project has published three CD-ROMs, two of which contain, as explained in the previous quotation from the *Occasional Papers*, transcriptions, collations, images, etc, of particular sections of the *Canterbury Tales*, more specifically, WBP and GP. *The General Prologue on CD-ROM* (Solopova 2000) contains even more detailed analysis than *The Wife of Bath's Prologue on CD-ROM* (Robinson 1996b), since it includes the 'Analysis Workshop' (Robinson 2000a) and the 'Stemmatic Commentary' (Robinson 2000b). The analyses of these sections have shown that Manly and Rickert's manuscript groupings can be developed further. Robinson proposes that Manly and Rickert's c and d groups are actually a single one, and that there are, at least, two further groups: E and F. Robinson's E group is formed by Bo1 Ph2 Gg and Si, while his F group is Bw Ln Ld2 and Ry2.

The research carried out at the Canterbury Tales Project is helping scholars to reassess previous ideas about the textual tradition and the relationships between the different witnesses of the *Tales*. Scholarship is shifting again and studies of individual witnesses and their relationships are acquiring more importance. Robinson's analysis of WBP indicates that there are areas in the textual tradition which require further study. Further, the revaluation of the tradition suggests that areas such as the incunabula need to be closely studied, since these books could contain evidence of manuscripts which are no longer extant.

## **2. THE ALPHA EXEMPLAR, ITS POSITION IN THE TEXTUAL TRADITION, AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH Cx2**

The reassessment of the textual tradition carried out under the sponsorship of the Canterbury Tales Project has helped to shift the attention from a group of

traditionally important early manuscripts (E1 Hg Cp) to the study of the whole tradition. This has had very important consequences for the study of the incunabula, since these are now considered, once more, as important as witnesses as the manuscripts.

From the perspective of the research on  $\omega$ , the most important hypothesis put forward by Robinson's analyses of the *Canterbury Tales* is about a lost manuscript which he calls  $\alpha$ . Robinson also defines an  $\alpha$  group, which contains manuscripts derived from the  $\alpha$  exemplar, these are Ad1 Ad3 En3 and Tc1 for WBP. The  $\alpha$  manuscript, according to Robinson, was of the very best quality. He suggested that  $\alpha$  or a manuscript close to it could have been the origin for the new readings in Cx2. Robinson's groupings for GP are as follows:

[T]he manuscripts of The General Prologue may be grouped in the following lines of descent from O:

- From the alpha ancestor (the alpha, ab a and b groups): 22 manuscripts -
- alpha subgroup: Ad1 Ad3 En3 Tc1; ab subgroup within alpha: Ht Py Ra2 Ry1; a subgroup within the ab subgroup: Cn Dd Ds1 En1 Ma; b subgroup; within the ab subgroup: Cx1 Cx2 Ii Ld1 Ne Nl Pn Tc2 Wy
- From the cd ancestor: 17 manuscripts -- Bw Cp Dl Fi Gl Ha2 Ha3 La Lc Ld2 Mg Mm Pw Ry2 Se Sl1 Sl2
- From the e ancestor: 2 manuscripts -- Bo1 Ph2
- E1
- Hg (probably with Ch Ha4 )

- A further six manuscripts appear to descend directly from O, and represent an uncertain number of lines of descent: Bo2 Gg Ln Ps Ra3 To1 (Robinson 2000b)<sup>21</sup>

Some of the relationships that have been discovered during the present work can be seen in Robinson's groupings. However, these are not entirely consistent with his groups. The most important feature in Robinson's stemmatic analysis is that he refined the groupings proposed by Manly and Rickert and that his groupings show some witnesses in a different light. For example, his statement of the closeness of Hg Ch and Ha4 in GP represents a break with previous interpretations of the quality of these particular witnesses. This is especially interesting in the case of Ch, usually seen just as a late manuscript, but which might contain a very early version of the text. This work, together with analysis of individual manuscripts is currently reshaping our perception of the textual tradition while opening new lines of research into some of the most controversial witnesses of Chaucer's text. Robinson has refined his hypothesis about the **O** manuscripts, he now proposes that there are approximately ten such manuscripts that descend directly from the archetype and that these represent -- in GP-- six different and independent lines of descent. These lines of descent are represented by are four pairs of manuscripts --Ad1/ En3, Ad3/Ha5, Ra3/Tc1, Bo2/Ht- - and two singletons --Hg and Ch. They "represent a further six independent lines of descent. For convenience, the witnesses of this group are referred to as 'O,' but they

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<sup>21</sup> Although Manly and Rickert distinguish between Chaucer's original (O1), a text they believe to be recoverable, and (O2), the archetype of the tradition, which they believe to be recoverable (Manly and Rickert, 2:40); the Canterbury Tales Project does not make this same distinction. In this work, O is used to refer to the archetype of the tradition, that is, there is no distinction between two copies of the *Tales* as in Manly and Rickert's work. **O** is used to refer to the witnesses directly descended, through independent lines, from the archetype. The same principle applies to the other genetic groups (bold type) and their hyparchetypes (normal type).

should not be seen as constituting a genetic group in the same sense as do the other groups..." (Robinson 1997, 80).<sup>22</sup>

The manuscripts classified by Robinson as belonging to the  $\alpha$  group --Ad1 Ad3 En3 and Tc1-- in GP, had been classified as **O** manuscripts for WBP. This might represent a change in the nature of the text of the  $\alpha$  exemplar or it could just be due to the fact that the variation in certain parts of the text differs from that of others.<sup>23</sup> The importance of the present study resides in the fact that Cx2 is the only source for the variants of a manuscript that appears to have had a text of the *Canterbury Tales* which was extremely close to the text of O. The understanding of relationships and affiliations of this manuscript might be determinant in shaping our comprehension of this textual tradition.

### 3. ABOUT THIS WORK

The present work has been produced under the sponsorship of the Canterbury Tales Project. The transcriptions of Cx1 and Cx2<sup>24</sup> (first two readings) were done by myself for the whole of the *Canterbury Tales* with the exception of SH, L24, PR, L25, TT, L28, TM, L29, MO, L30, NP and L31; these were carried out by the Brigham Young University Canterbury Tales Project team, lead by Paul Thomas. All

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<sup>22</sup> For more details about these see (Robinson 1997, 80) and my discussion in chapter 4, "Theoretical Aspects of Textual Variation".

<sup>23</sup> It is possible that the rate of variation differs from one part of the text to another. Even the unfinished state of the *Canterbury Tales* could have had an influence in such variation. Another influential factor is the nature of the text, in this way WBP is subject to a larger number of scribal glosses than other prologues in the same manuscripts. The scribes had different attitudes towards different parts of the text.

<sup>24</sup> All the transcriptions follow the Canterbury Tales Project's guidelines. The original version of the guidelines can be found in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue on CD-ROM* (Robinson 1996) and the *Occasional Papers II* (Blake and Robinson 1996).

checks after the second reading have been carried out by the De Montfort Canterbury Tales Project team.

All the materials produced by the Project up to this date have been made available for this research,<sup>25</sup> which is based on the first complete collation of all available Canterbury Tales Project's transcriptions.<sup>26</sup> Since Manly and Rickert's edition no one had actually produced new collations of the *Tales*, and the collation results alone represent a vast sea of new data that can be assessed to further our understanding of the textual history of Chaucer's text.

The objective of the present work, however, is not so ambitious: it does not attempt to draw conclusions about the whole textual history of the *Canterbury Tales*. Instead, I have chosen to focus on a very specific aspect of the textual tradition, the study of the source of the corrections of Cx2. There are several differences between my work and the single manuscript studies previously produced by doctoral candidates attached to the Canterbury Tales Project. The first one is that this research has its focus on textual matters. The second is that my work does not centre upon an actual manuscript, but upon one that is no longer extant. In many ways, my work has been that of a detective of the text. I have had to isolate those variants which could have potentially come from the source of the corrections of Cx2, and have later classified and analysed them all in order to answer the question of what place this manuscript occupied in the textual tradition of the *Tales*. The main question that this research attempts to answer therefore is: what are the textual affiliations of the manuscript source of Caxton's second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*?

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<sup>25</sup> These transcriptions were carried out by the Canterbury Tales Project teams at Oxford, Sheffield and De Montfort universities.

<sup>26</sup> For practical purposes, the variants are silently regularised in the discussions.

This work is organised in eight chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the scholarly work surrounding Caxton's second edition and his editorial practices; chapter 2 contains the bibliographical description of one of the copies of Cx2; chapter 3 studies the question of the order of the tales; chapter 4 offers a synthesis of what, for the purposes of this particular research, is understood as a textual variant; in chapters 5, 6 and 7 the analyses of the data and some partial conclusions can be found. The findings of this work appear in the conclusions in chapter 8. Data that were not deemed essential to the understanding of this work have been put into the electronic appendices, in which all the data produced during this research can be found.