

CHAPTER I: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE SCHOLARSHIP CONCERNING THE TALE-ORDER PROBLEM

In this chapter I make a chronological synthesis of the scholarship produced regarding the order of the *Canterbury Tales* in its different witnesses. I also explain the changes introduced by some of the scholars (for example Furnivall-Bradshaw and Skeat) who have edited this poem. For the purposes of this research, I have focused only on scholars who deal explicitly with the problem of the order of the tales and from a theoretical perspective. I briefly explain that even though the editors and scribes responsible for preparing manuscripts and incunabula seem to have faced the same issues when ordering their text, they did not offer a theoretical explanation of their approach to these issues.

Modern scholarship on the problems generated by the different orders appears to have started when F. J. Furnivall put together his “Six-Text” edition, which thus becomes the starting point of the discussion. After this study, many other scholars have dedicated a great effort to try to clarify the reasons for the differences in the order of the tales and which one of these orders, if any, is Chaucerian. When possible, I follow a chronological order for the discussion of the diverse positions regarding tale-order.

The very early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* show different orders, and some of them appear to be the result of purposeful and sharply directed ideas. For example, the position of CL and ME after WB in Hk seems to anticipate the twentieth-

century birth of the so-called “marriage group,” and manuscripts belonging to Manly and Rickert’s genetic *d* group have TG directly after the Cook’s incomplete tale, as if the Cook had changed his mind and decided to tell the Gamelyn story instead of the one he had originally started. Similarly, both of William Caxton’s editions, and those printed later by Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, exhibit different orders. All of these, however, lack any comment on why and how their respective orders were conceived.

In the case of the manuscripts, there are at least three likely alternatives. The first one is that the scribe copied the tales in the order in which they were in his exemplar. The second is that either the scribe or his supervisor decided or was forced (for whatever reason) to change the order of the exemplar being copied. The third possibility is that the scribe might have been copying not from another book from the beginning to the end, but from a series of booklets that came in a casual order and that this, to some extent, determined the running order of the final product. The case of the printed editions could be seen as more straight forward: their orders probably originate, in one way or another, from the manuscript used to modify each of them, although, of course, there is still the chance of an editorial decision made by the publisher. The only fifteenth century edition directly and completely set from a manuscript is Caxton’s 1476 edition (Cx1). When he decided to print a second edition of the work, he used an offprint of Cx1 in which he made changes based on a different manuscript (Dunn 74). According to Greg, all fifteenth century editions, excluding Cx1, of the *Tales* were produced using the same method, i.e. a manuscript was used to correct them, but they used as a copy-text the text of the previous edition.¹ Probably, the tale-orders of the incunabula originated either

directly from the second exemplar, i.e. from the manuscript against which the previous text was being corrected, or from a combination of this text and the printed edition they were using as a base. Later editions, such as Thynne's, also took their tale-orders from manuscripts or previous editions but did not offer any explanations as to why they had chosen a particular order over the others (Blodgett 35-52).

Blake has pointed out that even if the text of the *Tales* has been printed regularly since the fifteenth century, only during the nineteenth century did discussions about textual (including tale-order) problems surrounding the text commence (Blake "Approach"). This does not mean that some of the pre-nineteenth century editors of the *Canterbury Tales* did not have a highly sophisticated agenda and very particular reasons to change the tale-order in their editions. It means simply that for the purposes of this research, I have focused only on texts that deal with the tale-order problem from some kind of theoretical perspective: i.e. that they not only have the intention of modifying the order of the tales but also of investigating and explaining the differences between the diverse tale orders.

When Furnivall assumed the task of producing his "Six-Text" edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, he could not have imagined he would be the first person who would really have to think about tale-order from a theoretical perspective. The reason Furnivall became the first to write about the order of the *Tales* is quite simple: the text of the six manuscripts chosen for publication was to be printed in parallel. Since the manuscripts have different orders, he found himself faced with the need of deciding which one of them to follow.² For the first time, this decision was unrelated to the manuscript being

used as a base, the opposite situation from the one presented by the incunabula, as explained above.

Furnivall corresponded with Henry Bradshaw,³ who suggested that fragment VII (SH, PR, TT, TM, MO, NP) should be moved immediately after ML.⁴ This idea originates in the fact that several manuscripts have a link after ML (L8, also known as the Man of Law's Endlink) in which the next speaker is mentioned. The manuscripts disagree as to who the next speaker is and they present three variant readings: Squire, Summoner, and Shipman⁵. In fact, no matter whether a manuscript has the reading 'Squire' or 'Summoner,' L8 is never followed by SU (Blake, "Links"). This means that even when some manuscripts (Ln Py Ra3 etc.) have the reading 'Summoner,' L8 is immediately followed by SQ. There is only one manuscript that has the reading 'Shipman' in L8 and in which this link precedes SH: the Selden manuscript. Se is generally considered an unreliable manuscript, but is the only manuscript that has the sequence ML-L8-SH-L24-PR-L25-TT-L28-TM-L29-MO-L30-NP, as suggested by Bradshaw.⁶ Bradshaw's idea was not to use the running order in Se, since this manuscript has ML much later than it appears in E1, for example. Instead, he suggested putting the sequence ML-L8-SH etc, immediately after fragment I (group A). The result of this is that we have an altered version of the E1 order in which we start with fragment I (group A), follow with ML and L8, and then we have SH and the rest of fragment VII (group B2). Furnivall went beyond merely following this and also changed the position of PH and PD (group C) to put them between fragment VII (group B2) and fragment III (group D). Furnivall's movement of

group C had a basis in what he considered the internal evidence of the text. About this tale-order, Donald Baker has said:

Furnivall's own contribution to the order was the shift of fragment C (*The Physician's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Tale*) to place no. 4 largely on the strength of the Pardoner's indication that he was hungry. Although the Chaucer Society order and numbering has had much influence in the tradition of the text of *The Canterbury Tales*, this particular shift of fragment C has been largely ignored since it was enshrined in Skeat's edition. Furnivall's speculations on the number of days that the pilgrimage required, and so forth, are of no particular importance for the history of the text of *The Canterbury Tales*. But his adoption of the "Bradshaw shift," . . . has been quite important and continues to be debated. (Baker 161)

The resulting order for the "Six-Text" edition was GP KT MI RE CO ML SH PR TT TM MO NP PH PD WB FR SU CL ME SQ FK NU CY MA PA RT, but as Baker pointed out, Furnivall's own contribution to this order was set aside, and it is Bradshaw's that continues to be debated and analysed. The questioning of what is known as the Chaucer Society order followed soon after.

When Walter Skeat edited his book, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, which was originally printed in 1894, he carefully acknowledged his debt to Furnivall:

[The book] owes everything to the labours of Dr. Furnivall for the Chaucer Society, but for which no satisfactory results could have been obtained, except at the cost of more time and toil than I could well devote to the

subject. In other words, my work is entirely founded upon the splendid ‘Six-text’ Edition published by that Society, supplemented by the very valuable reprint of the celebrated ‘Harleian’ manuscript in the same series. (Skeat vii)

It seemed clear, at that point, that the Chaucer Society’s tale-order was authoritative and had to be followed. However, slowly but surely, Skeat developed his own ideas about how the text should be ordered. Robert Kase suggested that Skeat’s order choice (he followed Furnivall’s in his 1894 edition) was based only on the fact that it had been approved by the Chaucer Society (Kase, “Observations”). This view about the authority of Furnivall’s edition, which continued to be held for many years, has been the result of the critics’ belief that they are more knowledgeable than the scribes were and, therefore, better suited to rearrange the *Canterbury Tales*.⁷ Baker describes Skeat’s change of ideas as follows:

Skeat rejected the Bradshaw arrangement and Furnivall’s own contribution of the arrangement of fragment C [*sic*]; he argued lengthily in *The Evolution of the Canterbury Tales* and in his *The Eight-Text Edition* that there was no “correct” or “final” order but only a “last” order, that we could not go on rearranging tales by what seemed more logical references, place-names, and so on... (167)

Skeat finally argued, both in *The Evolution of the Canterbury Tales* and in his 1909 essay about the Chaucer Society edition,⁸ that the order of Ha4 was Chaucer’s working order:

I shall proceed to show that the chronological order of [composition of] the types of the seven chief MSS., . . . is as follows: –Hengwrt, an archetype; Petworth, showing the first scheme of arrangement; Corpus and Landsowne, the second, Harleian, the third; Ellesmere and Cambridge, the fourth and last. In the first three schemes, we find Chaucer himself, at work, making various experiments. In the last scheme, we find the work of a careful editor. It follows that the authoritative type, the only one which arranges the Tales as Chaucer at last left them, is the Harleian. (9-10)

Skeat's argument for the use of Ha4 shows a clear tendency towards the recovery of authorial intention, although he carefully specifies that the order in Ha4 is, by no means, Chaucer's final order (Skeat 10).

In 1905, four years before Skeat's *The Eight-text Edition*, it was already an old assumption that the reason why we have diverse orders is because the text of the *Canterbury Tales* circulated in booklets. Eleanor Hammond pointed out that "the original form in which the *Canterbury Tales* circulated . . . was fascicular, booklike in several or many parts (Hammond 162)."⁹ From her perspective, only this can explain why there are so many orders in the different manuscripts of the *Tales*. Hammond also stated that the Bradshaw shift required a series of assumptions that she thought were difficult to sustain. The first of them was that Selden could have authority in reference to the order of the tales, but not in any other respect. Another counter-argument against Furnivall's order that Hammond puts forward is that the time and place allusions of the links are being interpreted by him as final. She points out that there is very clear evidence in the text,

such as the feminine pronouns that the Shipman uses to refer to himself or the indication of the Man of Law that he would tell a tale in prose when in fact he tells one in verse, which makes evident that the *Canterbury Tales* still required a vast amount of revision and adjustment. From Hammond's point of view, although the idea of the Bradshaw shift is indeed possible, other views should not be discarded:

[T]he counter-assumption is equally defensible, that the *Canterbury Tales* are not a torso, that the fragments contain contradictions that do not permit their organic union; and that the 'Chaucerian' order of the tales exists more clearly in our imaginations than it did in Chaucer's mind. (165)

Here Hammond seems more in tune with what would be the critical tendency of the late 20th century than with many who wrote immediately after her. The suggestion that the so-called Chaucerian order might be just a figment of the critics' imaginations could prove to be right, if it is true that Chaucer died leaving no fair copy behind. A strong part of Hammond's argument is her insistence on the idea of the tales circulating in an independent manner. At the time, this was, a commonly accepted idea, and the manuscripts were probably more difficult to reach than they might be today, creating problems if one had to rely on codicological evidence.

Skeat's ideas about the text continued to evolve and his disagreement with Furnivall became more and more evident. Especially important is the idea that the Bradshaw shift has a doubtful origin:

My notion is, that instead of deleting the whole Prologue [L8], the sole precaution taken was to erase the name of *squier*¹⁰ in the phrase "Sayde the

squier,” and to strike out the headline that described the Prologue. Hence the scribe of Hl. [Ha4] gives us no headline, and (seeing perhaps the *s* of the erased *squier*) wrote *sompnour* at a venture, though the following Tale was that of the Wife of Bath! And finally, finding that he was on a wrong track, never completed the Prologue, but left off in the middle of a sentence, and simply added -- “Here endeth the man of lawe his tale”; and so cut the tale off from all that followed. . . . the assignment to the Shipman is against all the evidence; but I have allowed myself (as Tyrwhitt did) to make believe that it is right, merely for the purpose of preserving the 28 lines, which are certainly all genuine. (Skeat, *Eight-text* 47-8)

Although it appears that Skeat’s main goal is to vindicate Ha4 and to change the editorial perspective towards this manuscript, what becomes very clear in the above quotation is his belief that there is not enough manuscript evidence to support the Bradshaw shift. However, even after such a strong series of statements about the shift and so many doubts cast on the evidence provided by L8, still in 1932, Kase classified the manuscripts in two distinct groups (class A and class B) and based this classification on the sequence ML-SQ. Manuscripts that follow this order belong to class A; those that break it belong to class B.¹¹ Kase describes his class A manuscripts as follows:

[T]he common maintenance of the Man of Law-Squire sequence, the violation of the Squire-Franklin sequence, and the insertion at this point of the disarranged parts of Groups DE, are in brief chief characteristics of Class A manuscripts. (17)

There is no need to go further than this to see that Kase is referring to orders such as that of Hg. It is easy to see where Kase is going: manuscripts that belong to class B are those that have the EI order.

[Class B] violates the Man of Law-Squire sequence and drops the passage which determines it, inserting in this place the parts of DE, now in their proper order. It further maintains intact the Squire-Franklin sequence. In both cases the order following the Franklin is substantially the same, except that a large number of Class B manuscripts, to maintain the consistency of topographical allusions, shift Group G further to the end of the framework.

(19)

From this we can tell not only that EI and the manuscripts that have its same order belong to class B, but also that there is another important characteristic of class A that was not absolutely clear before: the Man of Law's Endlink (L8) is present and serves to link ML and SQ. In contrast, manuscripts belonging to class B drop "the passage that determines the ML-SQ sequence." Kase does not offer a convincing explanation of why the manuscripts should have these two different orders. Moreover, his argument about L8 is inconsistent, since in many instances this link does not have the name 'Squier' in it, and has instead 'Sompnour,' as Hammond had already pointed out several years before. In this sense, L8 does not determine any particular sequence.

Manly and Rickert, as part of their eight-volume work printed in 1940, produced a detailed essay on the *Canterbury Tales*' order. They classified the manuscripts according to the differences that they presented in their tale-orders. As a result of this, four groups

became apparent. Some, however, manuscripts remained difficult to classify and Manly and Rickert put them together in a group labelled ‘anomalous manuscripts.’¹² It is interesting that although their tale-order classification is closely related to their textual groupings, some manuscripts present different textual and tale-order affiliations. An example of this is E1, which is the head of the tale-order **a** group, but has an independent textual status.¹³ The importance of Manly and Rickert’s work is due to the fact that they were the first ones to take on the enterprise of analysing the complete corpus of fifteenth century manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* and, although their work is far from flawless, it has marked all subsequent textual studies. Manly and Rickert were the first scholars to produce an edition of the *Tales* for which all the manuscripts in existence were taken into account. They were also the first to attempt a classification of the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* using the order of the tales as the main classificatory element.

There are fifty-four manuscripts and four fifteenth-century printed editions of the *Canterbury Tales* which are complete enough to allow comparisons of tale order. If we only take into account the table produced by Manly and Rickert as part of their edition as our base, we find that there are some 40 tale-orders.¹⁴ However, this table lacks some information that is of capital importance. Manly and Rickert included the links between the tales, but they failed to distinguish them individually. Their only distinction is a single link (represented as L) or a succession of links between, before or after the tales.¹⁵ During the course of my research, it became evident that more detail was necessary if this table was to be of any use. It was then that I decided to change the nomenclature of Manly and

Rickert's table to the one used by the Canterbury Tales Project, and to add the links as they were distinguished by Blake ("Lineation"). I also decided to add color to it, in order to make the traditional groups or fragments easier to identify.¹⁶ Based on this modification of the Manly and Rickert table (table 2), we find that there are at least 48 distinct tale-orders in the extant witnesses of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Faced with these data, it is not surprising to discover that the problem of tale-order in the *Canterbury Tales* is a very complex one. It also becomes evident that, if we choose to believe that Hg is the oldest manuscript of the *Tales* now extant, as has been suggested by Manly and Rickert and later supported by other scholars,¹⁷ we must understand that the issue of the order was present in the textual tradition from the very beginning. Codicological evidence shows that there is hesitation on the part of the Hg scribe when arranging the document, and also that there are changes of ink at crucial moments in the text. Anyone who is familiar with the *Canterbury Tales* might find it difficult to identify Hg's order as a well-known one. Indeed, even Manly and Rickert, who thought that the Hg text was superior to that of the El decided to change the order of the former in favour of the latter. Perhaps, as a consequence of this, but also due to the preference editors give to El, the order that most scholars would immediately recognize as "the order" of the *Canterbury Tales* is none other than that of El.¹⁸ This fact owes its origin to the idea (common among scholars during the first half of the twentieth century) that El was the best manuscript with the best text and the best tale order. One of the consequences of this idea was that all editions adopted El as their base text and also its tale-order, since this was supposed to be, by definition, the best.¹⁹ In any case, the

differences between Hg and El indicate that the tale order issue was important from the very beginning of the history of the text. Other early manuscripts also confirm this idea and, in fact, the scribes of most early manuscripts appear to have been searching for a better order in one way or another. But because there are so many different tale orders, it has been very difficult to decide which one (if any) has any precedence over the others.

Manly and Rickert's work had a great influence at the time of its publication, and awakened a renewed interest in textual matters relating to the *Canterbury Tales*, including tale order. In the years following the publication of their work, Germaine Dempster wrote a series of articles relating the manuscript history and the origin of the different orders. She based many of her ideas on the geographical references in the tales, but some of the conclusions she reached seem to have been a matter of common sense. For example, Dempster points out that the **a** order is likely to be editorial, as all are the others. Moreover, she concludes that the **a** order is not independent of that in Hg: "it should be noted that the one unquestionably un-Chaucerian feature of the a-El order, the position of CB² in the second half of the work and after the reference to Sittingbourne, was already in Hg (1139)." Although her conclusion about Hg being the origin of the **a** order seems reasonable, the means that helped her to reach it are dubious. Dempster is obviously working under the assumption that the geographical references are final and that Chaucer would not have changed his mind about them. This position can be questioned, however, since the *Canterbury Tales* was never finished, and therefore it is likely that, even if there was an order for the tales, this was a working order that needed to be revised, and not a final order. As Blake has put it: "The places mentioned are best

understood as provisional and without significance as far as final tale-order is concerned (“Critics” 218).”²⁰ This seems the most reasonable view as far as geographical references are concerned since we cannot be sure what Chaucer might have done if had he continued working on the *Tales*.

Another scholar, Pratt, suggested that L8 is one of the key riddles in the tale-order problem: if we could determine the name of the next speaker based on L8 then we should know if the Bradshaw shift should be accepted. Pratt also realized that there is something else wrong with the Hg order:

The order, ML Endlink-Squire’s Tale, found in at least thirty-one MSS., is also scribal in origin and unauthoritative, being derived from the error of the scribe of Hg, who failed to obtain the Merchant-Squire and Squire-Franklin Links until after he had placed the tales as follows: ML, Sq, Me, Fk. (1148)

In noticing this, Pratt is in good company, but he did not explain why a mistake in Hg (perhaps the earliest extant manuscript but not the origin of the textual tradition²¹) was reproduced by so many other manuscripts that also show the same order. Pratt’s final solution is as follows:

[T]he internal evidence suggests that Chaucer finally intended the Fragments of the *Canterbury Tales* to be arranged in the following order:

I	II	VII	III	IV-V	VI	VIII	IX	X
(A	B1	B2	D	E-F	C	G	H	D)

However, the continuity of the genealogical groups of MSS. through VI and the first half of VII, suggests that soon after Chaucer's death, before copying began, Fragment VII was accidentally misplaced from its "Chaucerian" position in such a manner as to yield the incorrect "1400" order. . . . (1166)

In the above quotation we can see the need of recovering the "authorial intention," and how scholars have searched for any clues as to what this could be. Pratt's argument is mainly based on internal evidence. One might argue that if the indications provided in the *Canterbury Tales* were so clear, then we probably would not have a problem with the order of the tales, but again, we must remember that this was a work in progress and therefore all internal reference might have been revised before the work could be completed.

A very different approach is the one put forward by Larry Benson in 1981, in a lengthy article published in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*. He surveys some of the problems presented by previous interpretations of the order in Chaucer's poem. The most important aspect discussed by Benson is the idea of a Chaucerian order, which of course, would not be sustainable if we believe that Chaucer did not finish his work in the *Tales*. He argues that:

[W]e have Chaucer's own word, in the *Retraction*, that unfinished as *The Canterbury Tales* obviously is, he was finished with it. We have, in short, not a work in progress to which Chaucer intended to return and would have, had not death or illness prevented this, but rather Chaucer's final version, as it was when he decided his work on it was ended. (Benson, "Order" 80)

Here, Benson clearly does not acknowledge that the authenticity of the *Retraction*, not present in Hg Gg Dd or Cp, among other manuscripts, has been doubted by some scholars. In fact, a few years later, Blake observed:

Benson's view that Chaucer had finished with the poem [the *Canterbury Tales*], though it is apparently incomplete, runs counter to the accepted scholarly position and it is supported simply by his interpretation of Rt. In his opinion the inclusion of Rt indicates that Chaucer had finished with the poem. However, the status of Rt is dubious. It is not found in Hg or Corpus, perhaps the two earliest manuscripts, because of the lack of the final folios. It occurs for the first time probably in Ha7334, but that is an early manuscript which contains material which is probably not authorial. Its inclusion in Ha7334 cannot therefore guarantee its genuineness. . . . Furthermore, one may question whether Rt does indeed imply that Chaucer had finished with the poem. ("Debate" 187-8)

Indeed, there is no positive proof that RT is authentic, but even if there were, it could still be argued that the order the poem had at the time the RT was written might not be final, since Chaucer had lost interest in this work and had left it as it was. The simple fact that someone has decided not to do any more work on a book does not mean that by default one should take whatever text happens to exist at that point as what the author intended. If we leave aside the question of intentionality, we can still find some other arguable statements in Benson's article:

The scribes, as we have seen, were willing to tamper with the order, but the mss show no instance of a scribe changing the order of the tales on the basis of anything other than the most obvious clues in the links –'seyde the Squyer' and such. Most scribes were apparently interested only in smooth transitions from one tale to the another, and they were not above making such transitions by adding spurious links or changing readings when this seemed necessary. No scribe was ever influenced by internal evidence within the tales– allusions by one speaker to another tale, or geographical allusions to the Canterbury Road, which apparently no one ever noticed until the nineteenth century. (“Order” 111)

As I have mentioned before, the breaking up of group D in Hk is a clear example of purposeful alteration of the tale order to fit the allusions of one speaker to another. In this light, the phrase “no scribe was ever influenced by internal evidence within the tales” appears to be at least questionable. Not only had the scribe, or his supervisor, organized the tales in reference to the allusions made in the prologues, but apparently he went farther to create a group of tales with a common theme. However, what is probably Benson’s most interesting sequence of statements is in his conclusion, where he makes a series of firm remarks about the authority of tale-order and his Type a:

The mss show that from the very beginning the work circulated in but two orders, both of which can be attributed to Chaucer; one may be an earlier version, in which case the Type *a*-Ellesmere order is the final arrangement, or it might be derived from the Type *a* by scribal error, the accidental

misplacement of the leaves containing G, in which case Type *a* is the only order attested by the mss. . . . (“Order”117)

Here, Benson seems to conclude, at the same time, that his type *a* order is the original and all others derive from it; that it is a later version and therefore Chaucer’s final arrangement; and finally that there is only one Chaucerian order and that is the type *a*. The arguments concerning Chaucer writing RT or not are irrelevant to determine the order of the *Tales*; even if he had decided he was done with the book, this does not mean that the tale-order of his working copy was his final intended order. In fact, the order in which Chaucer’s papers were left at the time he died, or at the time these were found by someone and copied by scribes, was the latest order rather than the ‘final’ one. This is not to say that the order in which the tales were left by Chaucer, and that in which these were copied by the first scribe to produce a unified manuscript, are the same. It is conceivable, if the *Canterbury Tales* were left in a pile of papers, that these could have been mixed up by anyone when putting them together. This seems to make even more doubtful Benson’s statement about the *a* order being Chaucer’s final intention, since it would imply that somehow there were instructions imbedded in the papers left after his death and there is no indication in the manuscripts of such instructions.

Although many critics question the intentionalist focus of previous research,²² in one way or another they seem to follow the same path and end up discussing what Chaucer wanted or what he might have done with the *Canterbury Tales* given the chance to finish the book. Donaldson starts his article “The Ordering of the Canterbury Tales,” by stating that it would be impossible for us to be certain which is the correct tale-order.

Then, as other critics before and after him, he goes on to explain that scholars should make decisions about tale-order in the same way they make decisions about variants: by carefully analyzing the data and then making appropriate choices in each case. Donaldson concludes as follows:

In a critical edition, I suppose the endlink [L8] should be printed either in an appendix as representing the passage genuinely Chaucerian but not placeable, or else, within square brackets, in its usual place after the Man of Law's Tale, with the speaker of the next tale identified as the Summoner (according to Manly and Rickert the reading of O), or, less conservatively, left blank on the grounds that the three names preserved in the MSS are equally scribal. In a less austere edition, I should do what I already have done: adopt Jones' conjecture and read *Wif of Bathe* as probably the character whom Chaucer once had in mind as the speaker of the next tale. But it seems to me, on the basis of the MS evidence, that all treatment of the Man of Law's endlink must be conjectural, and that its status is too uncertain to affect the matter of order.

("Ordering" 202-3)

Even if Donaldson had not provided strong arguments or if these had not been well constructed, he would still have had the merit of bringing editorial concern back into the picture, a subject that was later discussed by Blake in the introduction to his edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, the evidence linking L8 to WBP and WBT does not seem sufficiently strong to suggest that these have to follow it.

Blake has discussed the problem of the tale-order at length. When he edited the *Tales*, using Hg as his copy-text, he raised the question of the discrepancy between the acknowledgement of the excellence of its text and the complete rejection of its tale-order. In other words, he attempted to explain why the manuscript having what is considered the “best” text of the *Canterbury Tales* does not have the “best” tale-order. In order to maintain the status of Hg as the most important manuscript, Blake tried to show that if the tale order in it is not Chaucerian, no other order is either:

Readers will, however, appreciate that the order in Hg, which is the order followed in this edition, is a scribal one in so far as the arrangement of the sections is concerned, since Chaucer had not determined a final order by the time he died. (*Canterbury Tales* 6)

The idea that Chaucer did not have a final order for the poem at the moment of his death is a reasonable one. It seems supported by the lack of internal coherence of the text, which could have been either abandoned by Chaucer or awaiting more revision at some point. This of course, implies that all other orders are also scribal and that any choice of order for a modern edition would have to be a decision of the editor.

In his book, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales*, Blake gives a thorough analysis and describes how different scribes faced the task of making sense of Chaucer’s text. Blake argues that Chaucer could not have finished the poem, and once more raises doubt as to the authenticity of parts of the text, such as RT. He insists on the fact that Chaucer had not released the poem at the time of his death, even though he

accepts that parts of it might have been read in court. The description of how the *Canterbury Tales* was first compiled is as follows:

Chaucer had been composing his poem for some time. He did so by writing individual tales which were gradually amalgamated with other tales through the provision of links... When he died a friend or some friends decided to publish the poem. To do this they collected the various sections of the draft from Chaucer's house and put them into some order. In the course of this exercise they realized that some linking passages were missing and that their first attempt at organizing the tales had certain flaws. They were therefore obliged to provide certain links to give the poem a veneer of completeness, and they also found it necessary to experiment with the order of some sections, although the bulk of the poem remained in the order in which was first devised for it after Chaucer's death (Blake, *Textual* 174-5).

This description seems to imply that some of the links, even in the first manuscripts produced, are by definition non-authorial, and although this point is certainly possible, there is no sure way to prove that the links that are present in the earlier manuscripts were or were not written by Chaucer. It seems a more likely possibility that the links were written by Chaucer, who must have had a working order for the tales. Robinson, while analysing the Hg sequence SQ-L20-ME-L17-FK, shows that the differences in meter between Hg and E1 in L17 and L20 are the result of changes introduced by the Hg scribe ("Can We Trust" 204 and ff.). Robinson, as others had done before him (Cooper 245-62), argues that the Hg scribe received the tales without the links and copied them in the order

SQ-ME-FK, leaving the appropriate space for the links that would follow. When the scribe got the links he realized that he had copied the tales in the wrong order and altered the readings of L17 and L20 so they would link the tales in the order he had copied them. The result of this is that Hg (otherwise metrically more regular than E1) has a series of lines that are metrically inferior to those in E1 and all of these lines are the ones in which the names of the pilgrims have been altered to conform to the Hg tale-order. In this view, Robinson accepts that the original order of this section is that of E1, i.e., ME-L17-SQ-L20-FK. The problem for him is to explain how the Hg tale-order appears in the Manly and Rickert *d* manuscripts:

The only possible explanation is that the text of the links was not altered just in Hengwrt. It was altered, probably by the scribe's supervisor, in the exemplar, that is, in *O* itself. The three tales were then placed in the exemplar in the same order as they are copied in Hengwrt, with the now-altered text of the links connecting them. This newly reshuffled *O*, then, in turn became the exemplar not only of the type *d* copies but also of Manly and Rickert's *c* group, and the additional group I label *f*. ("Can We Trust" 207)

I accept this interpretation as a likely one, which explains why we can find the altered sequence and the altered variants in a group that does not descend from Hg. This implies that Robinson's α^{23} was copied before Hg, and if this is true, then we can also assume that *O* was a pile of papers that were not bound together. In fact, this last assumption is supported by evidence put forward by Stubbs in *The Hengwrt Chaucer Digital Facsimile*, where she points out the odd quiring and the change of color of the ink in MI:

Quire six, fols. 42-43, consists of only two folios and quire seven, fols. 44-49, is a gathering of six leaves. This is the first irregularity in the assembly of the manuscript. The vellum of both quires is distinctly different from that of the quires before and after. All leaves are extremely dirty and the vellum has a different feel. Doyle and Parkes indicate the difference in ink and size of writing frame compared with the quires on either side. Because of their shared characteristics, the two quires have the appearance of a unit despite the division of folios. A two-leaf quire is an oddity though there are a number of possible explanations... The division into two uneven quires might be indicative of an earlier stage of text adaptation. A single outside bifolium would have contained the two disparate quires and created a prologue and tale unit of ten folios in a flexible format. As the Hg scribe came to the end of his copying of the Knight's Tale he was told to adapt the 'booklet' which he had copied previously and incorporate it into the larger block of tales which was to become Section I in Hg. In order for this to be an effective incorporation, the original outside bifolium of the older booklet would have to be discarded. The text contained on its original opening leaf would be recopied onto the final leaf of quire 5, fol. 41, to provide a smooth continuation from Knight to Miller.

Stubbs explanation, although possible, attempts to show that the Hg scribe was extremely careful and precise. The change in the ink color that goes almost to the end of MI suggests that the so called fragments might not have existed at all, and that, instead, some

of the tales were assigned their places because of the references in the links. In any case, if this hypothesis does not hold for the whole of the *Canterbury Tales*, it could at least be useful to explain what seems to have happened with “section I” in Hg, since scholars agree about the internal consistency of this part of the text (GP-KT-L1-MI-L2-RE-L3-CO), broken only by Ad3, which places the L3-CO at the end, between the Manciple’s Tale and the Canon’s Yeoman’s Prologue and Tale.²⁴ The digital facsimile also allows us to see the problems presented by L17 and L20, which were also written in a different ink color that Stubbs calls the “yellow” ink, implying that is the lightest found in Hg. About L17 Stubbs says that:

After copying the newly acquired ending for the Merchant’s Tale in the gray ink, the Hg scribe left half a page blank and then began copying the thirteenth line of the Franklin’s Tale... Presumably this was on the instruction that a link would need to be accommodated between Merchant and Franklin. The link was finally copied on to an inserted leaf making an irregular quire of nine leaves. It is unclear at what stage this extra folio was added but it may have been when the scribe attempted to ‘finish’ the manuscript in the yellow ink, copying as well as the link, the missing twelve lines of the Franklin’s Tale.

Stubbs also points out that L20 was copied in the same ink as L17; she also mentions that this is the ink used for what is believed to have been copied at the very end of the production process: the Nun’s Priest’s Tale and the Manciple’s Tale and the title of the book on folio 2r. This might indicate that both links were probably later additions to the manuscript.

At least in appearance, the problem of the order of the *Canterbury Tales* seems to be extremely difficult to study. The traditional approaches to it have left many questions unanswered, and scholars continue to debate which one is the order that Chaucer intended or which is the one that we should use when editing the *Tales*. It was required that someone propose a new approach to study the order of the tales. For these reasons, and as part of the work of the STEMMA Project it was decided to use phylogenetic programs, designed to meet the needs of evolutionary biologists researching relationships between different species of animals, to try to cast new light on the problem of tale-order in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Programs such as PAUP (Phylogenetic Analysis Using Parsimony, Swofford) and SplitsTree (Hudson) had been used successfully by Robinson to construct word-variant based stemmata, but they had never been tried with problems such as tale-order. In fact, there were questions about whether or not there might be a stemmatic relationship between the different tale-orders. The data that we used for this research is the result of the conversion of table 2 into computer-readable form.²⁵ In this sense, the work of STEMMA would not have been possible if it had not been for the new lineation system devised by Blake (“Lineation”). This system treats each link and tale as a separate item (the reason why table 2 offers richer data than the one produced by Manly and Rickert) and has allowed us to go beyond the groups and fragments into a more complex, but more precise, set of relationships.

STEMMA’s initial research indicates²⁶ that there is evidence of a genetic relation between the different tale-orders. Moreover, we can also show that there are equivalent

relationships in a word-variant stemma and in one produced using tale-order data. However, the aim of the STEMMA Project is to give us a clearer idea of how and why the programs work with manuscript data, and there is no time for more detailed research on the order of the *Tales*. For this reason that I decided to take our research forward, as my PhD dissertation, and attempt to make more explicit those problems that members of the STEMMA project did not have time to pursue further.

There are several points that become evident after years of debate on the order of the *Canterbury Tales*. For example, it seems very clear that some of the manuscripts might have had “edited” orders, i.e., orders that arose because the scribes or their supervisors tried to make sense of the text. However, it is also clear that these manuscripts with edited orders might have been copied from, which means that the later manuscripts (and their tale-order) descend from them.

A second point is that there is clear evidence that the text, as Chaucer left it, was a work in progress,²⁷ and that for this reason it is not possible to discuss authorial intention in a traditional way. Which of Chaucer’s intentions should we discuss? His intention on the day he died, on the day he started the work, or on the day he wrote (if he did) the Retraction? If we accept that the *Tales* is a work in progress, none of the references within the tales can be taken as final, whether these are geographical or to the time of the day. Any of these references could have been changed at any point, and perhaps some of the incoherences that bother the scholars so are the result of changes in the order that Chaucer did not revise in more detail. Chaucer probably did not have a final order for the

tales completely planned, but he must have had a working order that he might have changed over and over as his work on the *Tales* progressed.

There are more interesting problems relating to tale-order than those of authorial intention or realistic accuracy. For example, the general relationship between all the tale-orders in the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*. The comparison between these might lead us to the most important question on this research from an editorial perspective: is there any way to decide which is the most appropriate order to present to a reading audience in an edition of the *Canterbury Tales*? The answer to this question would probably generate others. If one tale-order is more appropriate than others, one should wonder if it exists already in a manuscript or has to be the result of editorial intervention. If editorial intervention is required, then one should ask what the justification of it would be.

In this work I use evolutionary biology programs to build stemmata based on tale-order and on word variants. I compare the results of these stemmata to see if it is possible to establish a clear genetic relationship among the tale-orders in different manuscripts, and finally, I use codicological information to try to clarify the origins of the tale-orders in some of the fifteenth century witnesses of the *Canterbury Tales*. With this approach I expect to draw a clearer picture of the variation in tale-order in the manuscripts, and also to outline a new perspective for editors of the poem.

¹ “While Caxton’s first edition was the only one set up from a manuscript, the printers of the next five editions all had recourse more or less extensively to manuscript sources in the hope of improving their texts.” (Greg, “The Early Printed Editions of The Canterbury Tales” 737-61).

² Furnivall chose to include El Hg Gg Cp Pw La (*Six-Text*), and later the Chaucer Society would print Ha4 (*The Harleian MS 7334*) and Dd (*The Cambridge MS. Dd. 4.24*) in order to complement the group.

³ For a brief account of the Bradshaw-shift see Pearsall, *Life* 234 and ff.

⁴ For a comparative table with all the different fragments, groups and sections see table 1 in the appendix.

⁵ Elizabeth Hammond was the first to suggest that perhaps the reading had been partially erased from the archetype and that the only visible part was the initial 's.' See Hammond 159-78. The variants do not generate a problem with the meter and, for this reason, they are difficult to assess from an editorial point of view.

⁶ The running order in Se is : GP-KT-L1-MI-L2-RE-CO CL-L14 WB-L10-FR-L11-SU L15-ME-L17a -SQ-L02 L7-ML-L8c-SH-L24-PR-L25-TT-L28-TM-L29-MO-L30-NP NU-L33-CY-L34-PH-L21-PD FK L36-MA L37-PA RT

⁷ For example, M. L. S. Lossing states: "... no MS of the *Canterbury Tales* has the authority of the order adopted by the Chaucer Society. That is, modern editors have better resources at their command to aid them in determining the order of the *CT*, and consequently their arrangements have more authority than those of scribal *editors*." (153-63). Of course, statements like these have not been uncontested. Robert Pratt has pointed out the "undeserved respect" that scholars have granted to the Chaucer Society order. He suggested to emphasise the internal evidence to try to arrange fragment VI in a better position (1141-67).

⁸ *The Eight-text Edition* is not an edition; instead, it is an essay mainly focused on the eight texts which had been published by the Chaucer Society (see note 4 in this chapter).

⁹ This assumption is still accepted by some scholars. Pearsall, for example, states: "Chaucer had no copy of *The Canterbury Tales* made, and did not prepare the work for publication. Parts of it circulated in written copies, but it was not until after his death that the work began to be copied as a whole" (190).

¹⁰ Just as a name was erased in Hn. in Group I, line 1.

¹¹ It seems important to observe that Kase's groups are unrelated to Manly and Rickert's, since when he was writing their work was far from finished.

¹² The groups that Manly and Rickert produced based on tale-order are distributed as follows:

Group a: El Gg Dd En¹ Ds Cn Ma En³ Ad¹ Bo² Ad³ Ha⁵ Ad² Bo¹ Ph²

Group b: He Ne Cx¹ Tc² Ha³ Ln Py Ra³ Tc¹ Ma Ra1

Group c: Cp Sl² La

Group d: Lc Mg Ha² Sl¹ En² Bw Ry² Ld² Dl Ry¹ Fi Ii Ht Ra² Pw Mm Gl Ph³

Anomalous: Hg Ha⁴ Ch Ld¹ To Hk Ps Se Ni Cx²

¹³ "The MSS of group a have essentially the same arrangement as El, but it is textually clear that the group is not derived from the same immediate ancestor as El" (Manly and Rickert 2:480).

¹⁴ This figure depends on whether we choose to believe Manly and Rickert when they presume that certain leaves now missing in some manuscripts contained particular tales or links.

¹⁵ See table 1.

¹⁶ The groups were devised by Skeat, for his edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. The fragments are those used in the *Riverside Chaucer*.

¹⁷ Cf. Blake (*Canterbury Tales; Textual*), Pratt (1141-67) and the *Chaucer Variourum*, for example.

¹⁸ Among the editors who have followed the El order we find F. N. Robinson (*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*) and Benson (*The Riverside Chaucer*). For more details about the use of El as copy-text see also Pearsall (234).

¹⁹ For example, Cp has a tale-order arrangement in chapters rather than as tale-link-tale. See Blake, *Textual*.

²⁰ Sandy Feinstein also supports this view: "I would take Blake's point a step further and argue that the effect of our narrative expectations, our need for verisimilitude in plot and structure, may blind us to different but nevertheless conventional, even common, forms of reading the past: reading aloud, reading to an audience, performance, recitation." (137).

²¹ It has been suggested by several scholars, including Manly and Rickert (*The Text of the Canterbury Tales*), Blake (*Textual, Canterbury Tales*) and Robinson ("Commentary," "Analysis"), that Hg is, at least, one stage removed from the origin of the textual tradition. In other words, not all the extant manuscripts

descend from Hg. Most of them descend, in one way or another, from a hypothetical manuscript which has been called O.

²² See, for example, Norman F. Blake, “Critics” and “Debate.” E. T. Donaldson, “Ordering.”

²³ Robinson has hypothesised that the α exemplar originated both E1 and the **a** and **b** groups. He has also suggested that this manuscript was very close to the one used by Caxton to correct his second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. See Robinson, “A Stemmatic Analysis of the Fifteenth-Century Witnesses to the Wife of Bath's Prologue” and “Can we Trust the Hengwrt Manuscript?”

²⁴ The running order of Ad³: GP-KT-L1-MI-L2-RE L7-ML WB-L10-FR-L1-SU NU CL-L13-L15-ME-L17-SQ-L20-FK PH-L21-PD SH.....PR-L25-TT-L28-TM-L29-MO-L30-NP L36-MA L3-CO L-33-CY L37-PA.

²⁵ The encoding of the data was carried out by Matthew Spencer. This has been described in an unpublished article, “‘Gene Order’ Analysis Reveals the History of *The Canterbury Tales* manuscripts.”

²⁶ Currently, STEMMA has two articles on tale-order under that are being considered for publication –one in a scientific journal, the other in a computers and the humanities book. A third is being produced for a humanities journal.

²⁷ This is independent of the fact that he might or might not have been working on the book until the moment of his death.