

CHAPTER III: STEMMATIC ANALYSIS AND TALE ORDER

This chapter explores the application of stemmatics to the differences in tale-order in the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, while at the same time examining the validity of this approach and evaluating the possible advantages of its application to an analysis of tale order. Manly and Rickert base one of their manuscript groupings on tale-order, but this approach has been questioned since their genetic groups and tale-order groups are not in complete agreement. This inconsistency, however, could be interpreted as an the result of changes purposely introduced into the order of some manuscripts. In this chapter, I first discuss some of the issues related to Manly and Rickert's groups in order to show the fundamental problem of their work: the inconsistency between their acceptance of the idea of prior circulation of the *Tales* and their attempt to present a single stemma of the textual tradition of the poem. Later, I compare the groups proposed by Manly and Rickert with those suggested by Robinson based on data from WBP and GP.

1. MANLY AND RICKERT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE TALE-ORDER PROBLEM

The work carried out by Manly and Rickert on the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales* raises two points which are critical for my analysis: the question of prior circulation of the *Tales* and the lack of coincidence between the tale-order and the word-variant groups. A close examination of these issues would help to determine if the

stemmatic approach is or is not likely to be useful to an analysis of the tale-order problems.

1.1 The Word-Variant Manuscript Groups

After the completion of the manual collation of the witnesses of the text of the *Canterbury Tales*, Manly and Rickert grouped the manuscripts according to the variants they had isolated in their research. The result is the now well-known groups that are commonly accepted in studies of the *Tales*. These word-variant groups are as follows:

Group a: Cn Dd En1 Ds Ma

Group b: He Ne Cx1 Tc2

Group c: Cp La Sl2

Group d: En2 Ll1 Lc Mg Pw Mm Ph3 Ry2 Ld2 Dl Ha2 Sl1

Manly and Rickert state that, textually, some manuscripts do not belong to any of these groups, and instead form independent pairs. These are Ad3 and Ha5, Bo1 and Ph2, En3 and Ad1, Mc and Ra1, Ps and Ha1, and Ra2 and Ht. They also suggest, referring to their analysis of GP, that:

Of the 49 MSS [in which GP is included], all but six—Hg, Ch, El, Gg, Do, To—are derived from the same common ancestor. Their exact relationships are obscured by the loss of intervening exemplars, by supply of lost leaves, and by much independent editing and contamination. (2:78)

Manly and Rickert's conception of the development of the text of the *Canterbury Tales* is clearly defined, at least for GP. They postulate a single common ancestor from which two copies were made. In this conception, some manuscripts descend from O^1 , while the six mentioned in the above quotation descend from O^2 .¹ In this case, it is less clear how Manly and Rickert conceived the relationships among the six manuscripts descended from O^2 . They also suggest that the **a** group has a single common hyparchetype, and that manuscripts belonging to the **b** group descend from another hyparchetype. But a stemma based on Manly and Rickert's conception of the textual tradition of the *Tales* is so complex to draw that they present only partial stemmata, which explain only part of their conception of the development of the text. For example, for GP they propose the following stemma, which shows some of the relationships between some manuscripts and the **b** group (2:79):

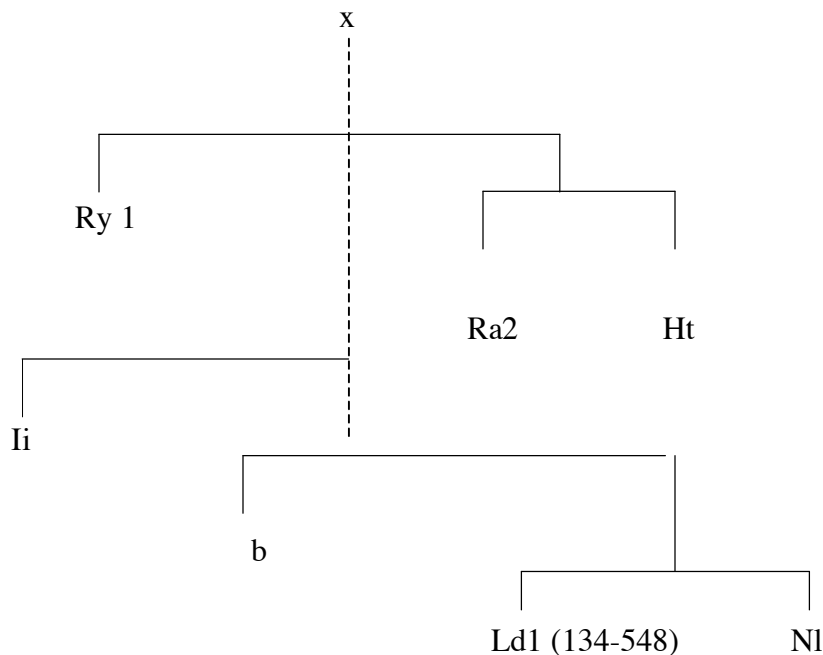


Figure 1. A partial stemma of the **b** group, from Manly and Rickert

It is interesting to notice that partial stemmata are drawn, while very complex ones are absent. One might think that by putting together a series of partial stemmata a full stemma would result, at least for part of the text of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, the problems of contamination and conflation do not allow the easy production of stemmata. In addition to these problems, one of the most serious questions stemmatologists face is to make it clear that there is a difference between reality and a stemma that attempts to explain it. The importance of emphasizing this point could be underestimated, but any such statement is absent from Manly and Rickert's writing. The difficulty they experienced in producing a single stemma of the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales* may have been that they thought they were drawing a tree which was very close to the historical reality of the *Tales*.

In general, stemmata may possibly blur or even erase details of the relationships among different texts. There are several reasons for this: for example, contamination and changes of exemplar (Manly and Rickert 2:24 and ff). On the one hand, an attempt to represent all the complexities of a textual tradition in a single stemma does not seem wise or even possible. On the other, the alternative is to produce a single comprehensive stemma but without losing sight that this might be useful in showing where the problems are and which areas of a tradition need to be explored further. Less complex stemmata can be produced to describe specific parts of the textual tradition. In this way we ensure that we have the best of both worlds: a general indicator of the position of the different

manuscripts in the textual tradition and a more detailed diagram that shows the relationships between closely related texts.

1.2 The Independent Circulation Hypothesis

The idea of the independent circulation of some of the tales cannot be attributed to Manly and Rickert, even though they seem to support it at times.² When Hammond wrote her article about the order of Caxton's editions of the *Tales* it appears that scholars commonly accepted the idea of the tales having circulated independently before the *Canterbury Tales* was put together (Hammond 159-78). Subsequently, scholars have also accepted this hypothesis. Owen, for example, writes: "What happened at Chaucer's death, if not the postulated copying of exemplars? Some of the *Canterbury Tales* were already in limited circulation" (Owen 106). Manly and Rickert are slightly more reserved about the idea, suggesting that their research might finally provide positive evidence of the tales having circulated either independently or only as part of the work as a whole.³ This cautious attitude did not give rise to a clear answer. Manly and Rickert do not seem to have ever reached any firm conclusions on the subject; or, if they did, this is not clearly stated in their work. If the tales circulated independently before they became part of the *Canterbury Tales*, then each tale would have at least two different textual traditions: one where the archetype would be the first version of a tale, circulating on its own; and the second where the archetype is the copy containing all the *Tales* collectively (O).

Conceivably, Manly and Rickert's ideas about how the *Canterbury Tales* developed might have been influenced by their attitude concerning the early circulation of the text. Manly and Rickert provide the more localized kind of stemma (relating to a single group or the relationship to two different groups), but do not produce these for the whole text; instead, they give partial stemmata based on data from a single tale. An examination of Manly and Rickert's ideas suggests that their decision not to offer a complete stemma may have been due to an undeclared conviction that some tales circulated independently before Chaucer's death:

That at Chaucer's death more than one copy of some of the tales –copies differing slightly in wording and in contents– may have been in the hands of some of his friends seems not improbable. It will generally be admitted that the story of "Palamon and Arcite" would not have been mentioned in the Prologue to the "Legend of Good Women" unless the poem were known to the readers to whom the Prologue was addressed. The exact nature of this early version may admit of doubt, but that it was an early draft of KtT can hardly be questioned. For similar reasons the existence and circulation of SNT under the title of the "Life of St. Cecilia" also admits of no doubt. But the tales in circulation can certainly not be limited to these. Chaucer himself in his "Envoy to Bukton" assumes Bukton's familiarity with WBP, and we can hardly go wrong if we maintain that Bukton possessed a copy of this bit, if not the whole fragment D. (2:36)

From a stemmatic perspective, the argument of prior circulation of individual tales has two main problems.⁴ The first is that if individual copies of particular tales circulated before the publication of the *Canterbury Tales*, then the tales would present at least two distinct and independent lines of descent: one that would be the one originated by the prior circulation of a tale, and the second that started when the *Tales* were put together and published as a book. The prior circulation argument gives rise to complications since it could also imply the possibility of authorial revision of the texts: if Chaucer released some of the tales independently, he could have adapted them to make them more suitable for their assigned teller once he had decided who this should be.⁵ If, however, the *Canterbury Tales* was published only after Chaucer's death, it would be possible that he should have had more than one version of more than one tale or link, this becomes more unlikely. The real conflict arises when we examine both Manly and Rickert's ideas at the same time. Although it is possible to reconcile the concept of a single archetype for the whole of the textual tradition with the argument of prior circulation (this presupposes some of the tales could display different textual relationships), it would not be possible to suggest that at the same time there is a single stemma that could explain the totality of the textual tradition of the *Tales* (as Manly and Rickert did). In other words, when Manly and Rickert accepted the prior circulation hypothesis, they should have understood that this required more than one stemma: one for the tradition of the book circulating as a whole, and a new one for each of the tales that had been released previously and were genetically related. If a tale had been released independently, the release copy would be the archetype of its tradition, which would have been independent of the tradition of the same

tale as part of the *Canterbury Tales*. In theory, it is possible to accept that if the version released before inclusion in the *Tales* were exactly the same as the one included in the complete work, then these two would virtually share the same archetype. This is much more difficult in practice, however, since the versions included in the complete poem are likely to have been adapted to fit them with the teller and the context of the story.

The conflict between the arguments for prior circulation and for a single origin to the textual tradition might explain why Manly and Rickert did not produce a stemma for the whole of the *Canterbury Tales*. The way in which they had to handle their data could not have made it easy to analyse sets of variants for each of the tales and then put all of this together to produce a complete stemma of the book. Another obvious problem is the difficulty of handling the data without the help of computers. The difficulty of remembering all the variants and grouping them mentally, makes the use of computers very important. The use of computer technology makes it possible to group variants as required to develop ideas concerning the genetic relationships between the witnesses of the text.

If we were able to build a single stemma based on the word-variant data of *The Text of the Canterbury Tales* would show that, even though Manly and Rickert believed the tales had indeed circulated prior to the publication of the book, the explanation of the textual tradition they offer implies it had had a single origin.⁶ Indeed, some critics have found this contradiction unacceptable.⁷ This is not intended to undermine Manly and Rickert's enterprise; on the contrary, it seems that they tried to remain open to an alternative that was partially disproved by their own work. The groups they proposed

show a high degree of consistency throughout and, although there are some inconsistencies, most manuscripts show the same overall affiliations throughout. Manly and Rickert defend their position as follows:

The question was whether we should treat all the variants as if derived from a single archetype or should attempt, before classifying, to distinguish the separate sources and deal with them separately. Unfortunately it was impossible to separate the different sources except by the readings, and this involved the completion of the work of classification. We have therefore proceeded as if all MSS were from the same archetype, being on the watch, however, for indications of separate origin and separate lines of descent. It is doubtless true, as we are told by all writers on the subject of text-criticism, that the recension –that is, the establishment of the text solely on the basis of the readings in the MSS– can be carried out only when the MSS are all derived from a single archetype. But it seemed to us quite certain that the ordinary processes of classification would call attention to readings and MSS not derived from such a source and would enable the textual critic to distinguish such varied sources as had not become entirely unrecognizable by the spread of the vulgate readings. (2:39-40)

The question Manly and Rickert posed at the beginning of their work; whether some tales circulated independently before the publication of the book as a whole, was not answered. They finished their work without finding any proof of the circulation of independent tales; they seemed to have omitted a clear statement that their research had

not produced any evidence of the prior circulation of some of the tales. They did make very clear, however, they thought the archetype of the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales* was not a complete manuscript, neatly arranged, but rather “a body of incomplete material, in different stages of composition and only in part put in order and corrected.” (2:41)

In general, and referring to the ‘post-publication’ period in which the text of the *Tales* started to circulate as a whole, Manly and Rickert point out that groups **a** and **b** are genetically related, while **c** and **d** are independent of **a** and **b**.⁸ Similarly, they indicate that there are pairs of manuscripts, and that each of these pairs represents an independent line of descent from the archetype of the tradition.⁹ Manly and Rickert expected that both aspects would become evident when all the witnesses of the text had been analyzed, but, as stated above, no explicit reference to this can be found in their work. The conflict between the idea of independent circulation and post-publication development would become evident in the construction of stemmata: it would not be possible at the same time, to have a single archetype for the textual tradition and individual ones for each tale from the pre-publication state.

1.3 The Tale-Order Manuscript Groups

The theoretical inconsistency between single and multiple origins for the textual tradition, however, is not the only one confronting the reader of *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*. A further inconsistency appears when we analyze the word-variant groups together with the tale-order groups. In the second volume of *The Text of the*

Canterbury Tales, Manly and Rickert discuss issues raised by the different tale orders found in the manuscripts. They analyze the different tale orders and draw conclusions based on the manuscript evidence. Their tale-order table shows that the manuscripts are divided into the following groups:

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 BwRy2Ld2 Dl Ry1 Fi Ii Ht Ra2 Pw Mm Gl Ph3

Anomalous manuscripts: Hg Ha4 Ch Ld1 To Hk Ps Se Nl Cx2

The tale-order groups appear to be the result of careful work, but a few details, such as the inclusion of El in the **a** group, are in disagreement with the groups that Manly and Rickert suggested were based only on word-variant affiliations. Other fundamental differences are, for example, the size of the **a** and **b** groups, and the explicit separation of pairs and individual manuscripts in the analysis of word-variants. By not explaining them further, Manly and Rickert weaken the differences between the word-variant and tale-order groups. The groups partly overlap and, the reason for this should be found. Should the differences between the groups derived from word-variant and tale-order data be confirmed, it would be essential to attempt to explain why they occur.¹⁰

1.4 Comparing Tale-Order and Word-Variant Groups

Manly and Rickert's word-variant groups are based on the agreements and disagreements between the different witnesses of the text. The tale-order groups appear to result from a study of a process of development of the different orders.¹¹ Word-variants are clearly a result of the copying process, during which words might be miscopied, misread, intentionally or unintentionally changed.¹² Changes in the order of the tales clearly have a different nature. Even though it may be argued that some changes in tale order occurred to a mistake of some kind in the copying process,¹³ the type of error that would result in an alteration of tale order would be fundamentally different from those changes that produce word-variants. There are three different alternatives concerning the different orders in the manuscripts: the first is that the tale order in the diverse manuscripts is the result of chance or scribal intervention; the second is that it is the result of genetic transmission; the third that there is a mixture of both. If the first alternative were correct, there would be no correspondence between the tale-order groups and the word-variant groups or if there were such correspondence, this would be the result of chance. If there were a genetic relationship between the different tale orders, it should be possible to show that the evolution of the tale order is related to the evolution of the text. However, because the tale order may have been subjected to alteration by an editor or scribe for various reasons, an open mind should be kept in this respect or, at least, intervention of this kind should be expected.

A closer look at both sets of groups conceived by Manly and Rickert, shows that El and Gg are in the tale-order group **a**, but these are shown as having different lines of descent in the word-variant classification. Manly and Rickert point out that:

El, Hg, **a**, and Gg are for the most part derived from a better text. They appear as of independent descent or in varying combinations (e.g. a-El, El-Gg, infrequently Hg-El, more rarely Hg-Gg), or, as in the Knight's Tale, the Monk's Tale, the Nun's Priest's Tale, Block G, and the Manciple's Tale, as from the same source. (2:44)

It is important to remember that when Manly and Rickert suggest that the different lines of descent can occur in varying combinations they are likely to be referring to the slight changes in affiliation found in different parts of the text.¹⁴ The connection between El and Gg has also been picked up by Robinson in "A Stemmatic Analysis of the Fifteenth-Century Witnesses to the Wife of Bath's Prologue," where he discusses the possibility of El and Gg belonging to what he calls the E group, which could explain the frequent agreement between these two manuscripts.¹⁵ Other manuscripts belonging to the tale-order **a** group are classified as independent pairs, the case of En3 and Ad1, Bo1 and Ph2, and Ad3 and Ha5. Both Bo2 and Ad2 belong to the tale-order **a** group, although Manly and Rickert find that they do not have clear affiliations according to their word-variants. The **b** group presents a similar problem. There are witnesses (He Ne Cx1 and Tc2, for example) that overlap between the cells corresponding to Manly and Rickert's tale-order and word-variant groups:¹⁶ whereas, Ha3 Ln Py Ra3 Tc1 are of unclear word-variant affiliation, but present the tale order that can be found in the **b** manuscripts. Mc and Ra1,

both of which belong to the **b** tale-order group, form a pair of independent descent according to the word-variant classification. Group **c** includes Cp Sl2 and La in both cases, for word-variants and tale-order. The **d** group overlaps in the following witnesses: Lc Mg Ha2 Sl1 En2 Ry2 Ld2 Dl Pw Mm Ph3. The word-variant group **d** has an extra-manuscript, Ll1. On the other hand Ra2 and Ht form a pair of independent descent. The manuscripts left in the tale-order **d** group are Bw Fi Ii Ry1 and Gl, which Manly and Rickert thought were of unclear affiliation.

The tale-order of anomalous witnesses (such as Ha4 Ld1 Hk Se Nl and Cx2) was omitted from the word-variant groups since Manly and Rickert thought these presented no textual connections with any other group. For example, Ps forms one of the independent pairs together with Ha1. Se is a manuscript that Manly and Rickert considered highly conflated and, therefore, unclassifiable; and Cx2 was omitted from all their analyzes because it “became clear that they could not aid in establishing Chaucer’s text” (Manly and Rickert 1:81); later Cx2 became the subject of the dissertation of their doctoral student, Thomas Dunn. Manly and Rickert thought that Ha4 had been copied after the hyparchetypes of each of the groups, and they agreed with Tatlock in deeming this manuscript as “lacking authority” (2:44).¹⁷ Manly and Rickert’s explanation concerning the origin of the anomalous tale-order manuscripts is that they were possibly made by special order for particular owners, while manuscripts belonging to specific groups were the products of the work of professional scribes (Cf. 2: 490).

A clear overlap appears between the word-variant groups and the tale-order groups. This suggests that further research is needed to explain why some witnesses have

different affiliations in the two analyses. The witnesses in which word-variants and tale-order present unexplained discrepancies could be the points at which scribal or editorial intervention changed the shape of the order of the tales. If this were so, we should find that there are places at which the tale-order stemmata and the word-variant stemmata present different relationships among the same group of manuscripts. Manly and Rickert show that there are enough common points between word-variants and tale-order to make it worthwhile carrying out further research on the subject.

2. ROBINSON'S REVISION OF THE WORD-VARIANT GROUPS

The research carried out by Manly and Rickert was of such scope that it took until the last decade of the twentieth century for anyone to try to analyze the same data. The Canterbury Tales Project's main goal is to explain how the textual tradition of the *Tales* developed. One might say that the work carried out by Manly and Rickert is being done anew, this time with better tools and higher standards of accuracy. Robinson was the first member of the Project to carry out stemmatic analyses of different sections of the *Canterbury Tales*. He has pioneered the use of computer technology for textual, and especially stemmatic analysis, he was one of the first scholars to experiment with the application of phylogenetic software to the study of manuscript traditions,¹⁸ and the first to apply them to the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*. Although Robinson has not carried out any tale-order analysis, his successful refinement of the word-variant groups using phylogenetic software and programs such as *Collate* and *V-Base*, suggest that there

is a possibility of analyzing tale-order using similar methods. Robinson's groups based on GP data are as follows:¹⁹

Alpha group: Ad1 Ad3 En3 Tc1

Group **a**: Cn Dd Ds1 En1 Ma

Group **b**: Cx1 Cx2 Ii Ld1 Ne Ni Pn Tc2 Wy

Group **ab**: Ht Py Ra2 Ry1

Group **cd**: Bw Cp Dl Fi Gl Ha2 Ha3 La Lc Ld1 Ld2 Mg Mm Pw Ry2 Se S11 S12

E Group: Bo1 Ph2

Non affiliation or uncertain: Bo2 Ch Do El Gg Ha4 Hg Ln Ra3 To1

The most obvious differences between these and Manly and Rickert's groups are the inclusion of **α**, **ab**, and **E** groups. Robinson has also merged **c** and **d** into a single large group and in this agrees with Manly and Rickert when they say that the two groups were indistinguishable in GP. But Robinson's groupings are slightly different for WBP, for which the manuscripts are classified as follows:

a Cn/Ma Ds/En1 Dd

b Ii He Ne Cx1/Tc2

cd Cp La Mm Ld1/Ry1 Ph3 Pw S12 To Dl Fi Ni S11 Lc/Mg

E Bo1/Ph2 Gg Si

F Bw/Ln Ld2/ Ry2

O Ad1/En3 Ad3/Ha5 Ra3/Tc1 Ch Bo2/Ht Hg

Each of Robinson's groups is thought to descend from a hyparchetype although the **b** hyparchetype, for example, is likely to have descended from a manuscript from the **a** group, that is, ultimately from the **a** hyparchetype. The last group of manuscripts, the so-called **O** manuscripts, are not a genetic group, but rather descend from the archetype of the tradition. Robinson explains it as follows:

Each of the groups AB CD E F appears to represent descent from a single hyparchetype. Therefore, the thirty-three witnesses in these four groups represent just four independent lines of descent (or only three, if E and F descend from a single hyparchetype.) However, if the manuscripts in **O** are indeed only related by common descent from the archetype, then the six groupings in **O** (four pairs and the two singletons Ch and Hg) represent a further six independent lines of descent. For convenience, the witnesses in this group are referred to as 'O,' but they should not be seen as constituting a genetic group in the same sense as do the other groups. . . . ("Stemmatic" 80)

Although Robinson's explanation of the difference between the **O** manuscripts and the genetic groups seems very clear, there has been some misunderstanding about the status of the **O** manuscripts.²⁰ Some of the **O** manuscripts appear as unclassified in GP, and this discrepancy in Robinson's groupings is probably due to the fact that his analyses have been based on the data of two sections of the *Canterbury Tales*. Although they offer a good indicator of the relationships among the manuscripts, they are by no means a

synthesis of what happened overall. A complete set of groups based on research carried out at the Canterbury Tales Project is part of a work in progress.

An important difference between Manly and Rickert's groups and those of Robinson is that in WBP he found that El (in parts) and Gg belong to his **E** group.²¹ This occurs, according to Robinson, because El changes its affiliation around line 400 of the WBP. He suggests that this is due to a change of exemplar at that point in the text. However, the agreement of El and Gg in non-archetypal variants is also found in SQ, which suggests that something else might be causing this coherence between the manuscripts (Bordalejo 206 and ff).²² The variants that El and Gg share possibly indicate that they are more closely related than scholars have thought up to this point. Robinson's classification is not final in the sense that it takes into account only a small part of the data.

Robinson's **α** group includes some of the manuscripts that Manly and Rickert consider to be pairs of independent descent (Ad3 Ad1 En3 and Tc1). Various other manuscripts they thought were of independent descent have been classified by Robinson as having either no, or an uncertain affiliation. To say that these manuscripts have no affiliation means that they do not share any common ancestors with any other manuscript extant in the tradition, but are directly and independently descended from O. In other words, Robinson agrees with Manly and Rickert in pointing out that some manuscripts are unrelated to any other manuscript extant today. Robinson's **a** group exactly coincides with Manly and Rickert's word-variant **a** group. His **b** group includes the same witnesses as Manly and Rickert's: Ne Cx1 Tc2. It also includes all the printed editions after the first

(Cx2 Pn Wy) since all of these were based on Cx1. They share the majority of its variants, which makes them part of the **b** group. Robinson also includes Ii and Ld1 in this group, two manuscripts that had not been classified by the previous analysis.

3. RECONCILING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ROBINSON'S AND MANLY AND RICKERT'S GROUPS

A comparison between the groups formulated by Manly and Rickert and those refined by Robinson may help us to understand how the computerized tools work and whether or not their application to the tale-order problem might be helpful. Many of the groups formulated hitherto are consistent,²³ but the places in which the groups differ are those which are more likely to offer grounds for further research. The best example of a contrasting difference between all groups is the shift of E1 and Gg from Manly and Rickert's tale-order **a** group to independent descent (unclassified) in Robinson's GP word-variant groups.²⁴ This seemingly strange double affiliation could be explained if one of the manuscripts derived from the **a** group were the hyparchetype of the **E** group. This could account for E1 and Gg having the **a** order but very different textual affiliations in the groups devised by Manly and Rickert. It might also imply that E1 could be a derivative manuscript farther away from the origin of the tradition than it has been thought up to this point. In fact, when explaining the ancestor of the **a** group (Dd En1 Ds Cn Ma) and its tale order, Manly and Rickert observe:

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. It is, however, practically certain that the one arrangement was imitated from the other. There are some slight but notable differences between the contents of these MSS and the contents of El. In WBP it is clear that the five additional passages were not originally in the ancestor of El, but four of them were borrowed by El from the ancestor of **a** or some member of the group, **a** itself having doubtless obtained them from a special copy of WBP in which Chaucer had added them. (2:480)

The interest of this quotation lies in the awkward solution Manly and Rickert offer for the differences presented by El and the **a** group: that passages not present in El's hyparchetype, as well as the order of the tales, were borrowed from a manuscript which was different from the exemplar from which El was copied. The fact that El has been considered the best witness of the *Tales* since the end of the 19th and most of the 20th century makes it very difficult for scholars to keep an unbiased attitude towards it. Even Manly and Rickert, who provided strong arguments for the text of Hg as the most accurate witness of Chaucer's work, had to justify the El-**a** relationship at any cost. If we take into account for our analysis both the data produced by the Canterbury Tales Project for WBP and some of Manly and Rickert's observations, we could hypothesize the following stemma:

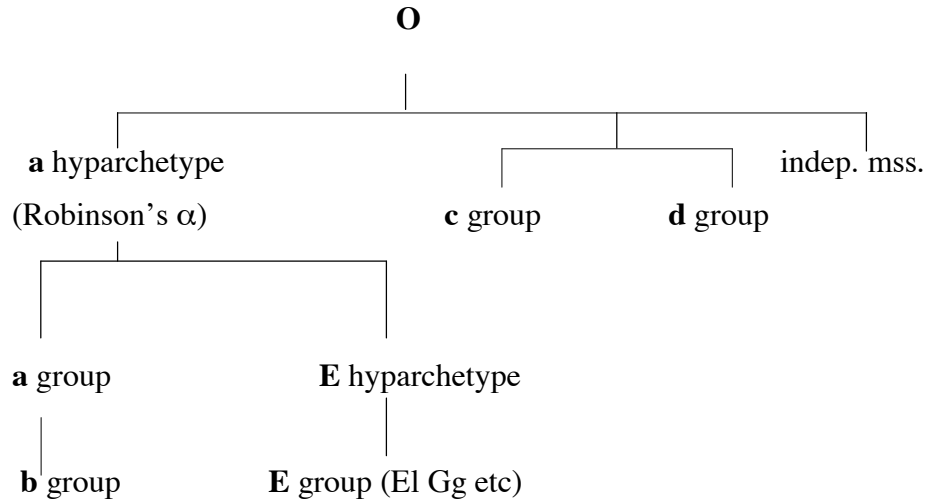


Figure 2. A possible stemma based on my research on Cx2

This stemma is not necessarily correct, but serves to illustrate one of the possible scenarios that can be constructed with the data we possess and their interpretation. I am not proposing to use any stemmata produced with the help of computers, or by manual means, as the definitive solution to the problems presented by the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*; instead, they should serve as a guide to help us to understand the complex relationships between the extant witnesses of the text. Stemmata for tale-order have to be taken into account with the same reservations as those required for word-variant stemmata: it is important to keep an open mind and to be aware that no alternative should be discarded or confirmed *a priori*. It is difficult to date the manuscripts themselves, and one must also consider that the text they hold might be earlier than the date in the manuscript. For example, it is conceivable that a very early manuscript could have been separated by many copies from the origin of the tradition; it is also possible that a very late manuscript could have been copied directly from one separated only by one or two copies from the origin of the tradition. The only certainty is that no extant

witness can explain the textual tradition as it is today. But even this may not be true, since those parts of the tradition that cannot be explained may be the results of later additions to the text.

In order to understand better the textual history and the development of the text of the *Canterbury Tales* we need to explore as many of its aspects as possible, including the text, its order, and the making of the manuscripts, to help us understand whether there is a genetic relationship between the different texts and tale orders. This approach is important inasmuch as that it uses word-variant and tale-order relationships to explain each other, instead of seeing them as separate entities. The results of Manly and Rickert's work show that there are enough common points between tale-order and word-variants in the *Canterbury Tales* to make the exploration of these relationships worthwhile. The new approaches proposed by Robinson show that we can now take a new look at old problems, and offer alternative explanations about them that might help us better to understand not only the text that originated the *Tales* textual tradition, but also the process of transmission in medieval manuscript culture. This research attempts to discover whether the tale-order was transmitted in the same way as the word-variants, or whether the different tale orders were merely random or capricious. If the tale-orders are related we should see some similarities between tale-order and word-variant stemmata, at least for those manuscripts in table 4 we know overlap (such as core **a**). Once this is established, we could move forward and attempt to re-classify the 'anomalous' witnesses of the *Tales*.

¹ See the introduction for a definition of Manly and Rickert's O, O¹ and O² and the differences between their conception of the beginnings of the textual tradition and the ideas developed by the Canterbury Tales Project. O¹ and O² are used only while discussing Manly and Rickert's ideas. My own conception of the textual tradition distinguishes only between O (the archetype of the tradition) and its descendants. For my research, I do not deem it relevant to make any further distinction or clarification about the nature of O, other than that it is likely to have been a series of booklets. See the introduction for more details on O¹ and O² and O.

² Manly and Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*.

³ This is how Manly and Rickert describe procedure for their work: "The question was whether we should treat all the variants as if derived from a single archetype or should attempt, before classifying, to distinguish the separate sources and deal with them separately. . . . We have therefore proceeded as if all MSS were from the same archetype, being on the watch, however, for indications of separate origin and separate lines of descent." (2:39)

⁴ The arguments about prior circulation discussed in this chapter are related to the possible theoretical inconsistency from a stemmatic perspective. However, a case can be made to explain the references to some of the texts included in the *Canterbury Tales*. It is conceivable that the tales were read by Chaucer's friends or in court, without necessarily assuming that there were offered to scribes to copy. In such a case, anyone who might have heard one of the tales, could have referred to it. Some of the stories did, in fact, 'circulate' before Chaucer took them over, a fact that does not alter our perception of these having a separated textual history.

⁵ Although this is not the only possible kind of revision, the Canterbury Tales Project research suggests that Chaucer did not revise word by word, but rather, re-wrote and deleted whole passages (Solopova "Authorial" 139). The number of internal inconsistencies in the *Tales* shows that Chaucer did not want or could not give a final form to his work.

⁶ To the best of my knowledge, no one has attempted this task. Manly and Rickert do not provide such 'overall' stemma, and the data presented in their edition is too complex for a manual analysis. In theory, it would be possible to code the information of their edition and use it in conjunction with phylogenetic software; however, the benefits of such task are unlikely to justify the amount of effort required.

⁷ See George Kane ("John" and *Piers A*) and Kane and Donaldson (*Piers B*).

⁸ Manly and Rickert also point out that these two groups are indistinguishable (2:77).

⁹ Some of these pairs have also been identified by Robinson, who also suggests that they descend independently from the archetype ("Commentary").

¹⁰ See chapter 4 for the discussion of tale-order groups based on newly built stemmata.

¹¹ See groups **a** and **b** in table 2.

¹² For a classification of word-variants based on the copying process see Vinaver, "Principles of Textual Emendation."

¹³ An example of tale-order miscopying is that of Hg, where the sequence SQ-L20-ME-L17 -FK is likely to have been the product of the scribe having copied the tales without their corresponding links.

¹⁴ This is by no means proof of independent circulation, since the variants show a certain degree of consistency; instead it might be a sign of scribal habits (some tales might have been more popular and well-known and, therefore more liable to memorial contamination) or it might be due to the nature of the data, which varies from witness to witness (some manuscripts have been badly damaged and, occasionally whole tales are missing). There is proof of independent circulation after publication (some tales were very popular and where included in anthologies), but although this might alter the textual history of a particular tale (which might have been copied more than the others) it should not greatly distort the overall shape of a stemma.

¹⁵ I discuss Robinson's revision of Manly and Rickert's classification later in this chapter.

¹⁶ See table 4.

¹⁷ My research on the manuscript source of Cx2 showed that some witnesses of the *Tales*, particularly Ad3 and Ha4, are likely to preserve archetypal readings. See "The Manuscript Source."

¹⁸ Other scholars who have experimented with these methods are Griffith, “A Taxonomic Study of the Manuscript Tradition of Juvenal” Platnick and Cameron, “Cladistic Methods in Textual, Linguistic and Phylogenetic Analysis” and Cameron, “The Upside-down Cladogram, Problems in Manuscript Affiliation.”

¹⁹ Since Robinson has carried out only word-variant analysis, I do not specify this each time I refer to his groups.

²⁰ See, for example, Blake’s article on Cx2 (“Caxton’s”), where he refers to the “O Group” as though these witnesses were genetically related.

²¹ El does not appear in table 4 as an **E** group manuscript because Robinson argues that its affiliation with **E** is the result of a change of exemplar and not of an overall genetic relationship (Robinson, “Stemmatic”).

²² See also Manly and Rickert 2: 294 and ff.

²³ Examples of this are the core **a** group (Dd En1 Ds Cn and Ma) and **b** (He Ne Cx1 and Tc2).

²⁴ The manuscripts Robinson presents as unclassified are likely to represent independent lines of descent, and therefore do not belong to a specific group (Robinson, “Commentary”).