

INTRODUCTION

This research developed from studies carried out by members of the STEMMA Project,¹ with funding from the Leverhulme Trust. The preliminary research suggested that further investigation into the relationships between the early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* could help our understanding of this very complex textual tradition. The present work indicates that the study of the textual tradition of the *Tales* is likely to have consequences for scholars other than textual critics and editors. Indeed, the investigation and interpretation of the codicological aspects of the manuscripts analysed here might be helpful for scholars interested in material culture, scribal behaviour and other such matters. The use of phylogenetic software and the analysis of its methods might be of help in understanding the reasons why these methods work and might serve as an example of their use.

1. CONCEPTS AND IDEAS USED THROUGHOUT THIS WORK

1.1 The Concept of O

It might be useful here to define some concepts and ideas used throughout this work to avoid confusion in the following chapters. A fundamental concept in my research is that there was a single archetype for the textual tradition of the *Canterbury Tales*. This archetype² is referred to as O. Research by the Canterbury Tales Project team shows that O is likely to have been a pile of papers,³ more or less loosely bound, and that this single set of papers was the origin of the textual tradition that is extant today. This concept

differs from Manly and Rickert's notation, which distinguishes an original by Chaucer from the archetype:

The processes of the genealogical method (recension, as they are called) can result only in the establishment of the archetype where an archetype existed and in displaying the rival variants where copies existed separate from the main archetype. Comparison of the MS readings affords no means of passing beyond the archetype to the author's original except where there is reason to believe that certain variants transmitted by extant MSS have been preserved by direct derivation from the author's original. (2:40)

Clearly, Manly and Rickert reject the idea of attempting to reclaim Chaucer's original (O¹), while they leave open the possibility of reconstructing the origin of the tradition (O²). It is difficult, however, to understand what exactly they refer to as 'Chaucer's original.' It appears that they are not referring necessarily to a physical text, since they consider that the archetype of the tradition can potentially be recovered, but they discard the idea that 'Chaucer's original' could have been this archetype. It is more likely that O¹ was understood as an ideal text and not any of its physical manifestations.⁴ Manly and Rickert consider 'Chaucer's original' (O¹), irrecoverable. Instead, O² can be reconstructed. The implication is that the head of the textual tradition, the archetype, is not 'Chaucer's original.' This raises a question concerning the definition of this original. For example, if the archetype was copied by a scribe from wax tablets which contained the text as written by Chaucer, then surely the tablets, not the copy, would have to be accepted as the archetype of the tradition. If this were the case, from a theoretical

perspective, both O¹ and O² would be equally easy to reconstruct. Manly and Rickert's caution is unnecessary. It is interesting to note that Manly and Rickert's prudence appears to have its root in the fact that they seem to have foreseen that the 'reconstruction' of an original was likely to be impossible. They failed to note, however, that the reconstruction of the archetype of a tradition (independently of who generated it) is not borne out by the evidence. The data as they exist today, do not allow us to determine with certainty that the manuscripts we have represent all the branches of the tradition that ever existed. It is conceivable that a complete branch might have disappeared leaving no trace. If such branch had uniquely preserved archetypal readings, these would also have been lost, thus making it impossible to reconstruct the archetype. And because of this, they continued to assert that it is possible to 'recover' it.⁵ My own interpretation of O¹ and O² in Manly and Rickert is that they conceive Chaucer's original as a flawless text (O¹) and therefore find it difficult to explain variants that are clearly archetypal, but are nonsensical (such as the case of 'troce'/'croce' in WBP 484). Manly and Rickert also have difficulty with variants which are not clearly archetypal or non-archetypal (as is the case of 'certres'/'sterres' in KT 1179). The undeniable fact that the archetype of the tradition (O²) contained mistakes, decided Manly and Rickert to keep it separate from what they conceive as Chaucer's original, which, in their eyes, could not contain any errors.

In this work there is no assumption as to who wrote the archetype of the tradition (O) and there is no attempt to recover its order. In order to distinguish the references to O from those of the manuscripts directly descended from it, known as the **O** manuscripts,⁶ bold type is used for the latter. In the case of intermediate nodes in the tree where the

manuscript is no longer extant (hyparchetype), the same rule applies: the hyparchetype is represented using normal type and, when the reference is to the group itself, bold type is used.

1.2 Variants

1.2.1 Variants and Readings

In this work, there is no real distinction between the term ‘variant’ and the term ‘reading.’ For example, a variant may be referred to as the ‘archetypal variant.’ This concept of archetypal variant might seem a contradiction in terms for many textual critics. In the context of traditional stemmatics, intentionalism and other schools which have as their goal the ‘recovery’ of a text, the notion of an archetypal variant might even be considered nonsensical. It seems clear, however, that to say that one can isolate an ‘archetypal reading’ would be to admit that one can be certain of being in the presence of the text that originated the textual tradition. The idea of the reconstruction of the archetype is, of course, possible up to a certain degree, but it could enter into conflict with the concept and formulation of the New Stemmatics.⁷

1.2.2 Word Variants vs. Tale-Order Variants

For the purposes of this research, a distinction has been drawn between different kinds of variation. Usually, textual critics refer only to ‘variants’ (or, sometimes, ‘textual variants’), but, for the purposes of this research there was a strong need to differentiate between two different kinds of variants. For this reason, the terms ‘word variant’ and ‘tale-order variant’ are used to make this difference clear. The use of these terms allows

the explicit contrast and separation of two different aspects of the tradition, both of which are textual (which is why the term ‘textual variant’ is clearly inadequate).

2. BRIEF NOTES ON TEXTUAL CRITICISM

The results of this research would have a more fitting context if they were analyzed in the context of current perspectives on textual criticism. It seems clear that different editors of the *Canterbury Tales* have presented very different tale-orders in their editions. In large measure, this is because different editors have worked to different editorial theories.

2.1 The Intentionalist School⁸

When Greg published “The Rationale of Copy-Text,” he could not have predicted the enormous influence this article was going to have in Anglo-American scholarly editing (Greg “Rationale”). Fredson Bowers and G. Thomas Tanselle, in work based on Greg’s ideas, have produced editions that attempt to uncover the intentions of the author and to reconstruct these intentions. The prestige of these scholars led to the widespread practice of editing from this perspective. In fact, the language used by Tanselle to describe the different kinds of editions does not seem objective:

Whereas noncritical editions aim at preserving the texts of particular documents, critical editions aim at constructing, by means of the editor’s critical judgement, texts that come closer to attaining some desired standard than any of the surviving documentary texts happen to do. . . . Because no preserved document may contain a text that fully reflects its author’s

intentions, the critical editor undertakes the task of deciding, after an assessment of all available evidence, which preserved text is most authoritative and what alterations are required in it so that it will conform still more closely with the author's wishes. (37)

Although Tanselle leaves open the possibility that other approaches might be used in critical editions, he privileges the one of recovering authorial intention. It seems that the task of the 'critical editor' is to make the text conform to the wishes of the author. This perspective was a common approach for many years, so much so, that D. C. Greetham explains:

I was fully part of this ideology. The editions produced by my doctoral students were all eclectic, intentionalist editions, and my editorial work on John Trevisa, while not formally eclecticist, was in practice precisely that -- the construction of an ideal text approximating to the intentions of the absent author and dependent on the paradox of both a rejection of the evidence of scribally corrupt manuscripts and the employment of this corruption in constructing an idealist 'text that never was.' (373)

Greetham refers to his 'intentionalist' period in the past tense, thus suggesting that this is an outdated mode of editing. The situation he describes in *Theories of the Text* was generated by Jerome McGann's controversial 1983 book (*A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*) in which he proposes an alternative approach to the editing of texts. The intentionalist approach has dominated the landscape for editions of Chaucer's *Canterbury*

Tales. This is especially true of editions which seek to ‘complete’ or ‘fulfil’ what Chaucer did not finish himself, for example by establishing what tale order Chaucer (in the editor’s view) ‘really’ intended.⁹

2.2 McGann and the Sociological Approach

After the publication of *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, a debate started as to what was the best editorial method. McGann proposed that texts were not just produced by their author, but that they were the product of a collaborative effort of copy-editors, proofreaders and publishers with the author. McGann turned out not to be alone in proposing such a sociological approach, and soon his book was joined by D. F. McKenzie’s *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986). Even though these texts were published in such a relatively brief period of time, their theories were unrelated:

[T]he dual existence of McGann and McKenzie’s work does itself have sociological import. It is striking that, until McGann’s 1988 review of McKenzie’s Panizzi Lectures (‘Theory of Texts’), the two social critics seemed to operate independently of each other, within their own textual societies. (Greetham 407)

But even with this real or supposed independence, McGann and McKenzie were perceived as part of a new editorial ‘movement’ (Tanselle “Sociology” 84). Tanselle had his say on the debate in 1998 when he published what may be considered to be an answer to McGann’s *A Critique*. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no attempt to produce a sociological edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, if one were to bend the

concept of ‘collaboration’ to include any kind of scribal accretion, then any facsimile or documentary edition could be presented as a sociological edition. However, it seems clear that these are not what McGann would consider to be sociological, since these editions do not seem to accept the scribe as an ‘equal’ to Chaucer, and they tend to ‘correct’ the mistakes that might have been introduced into the text.

2.3 The Editing of Medieval Texts

There have been editions of medieval texts which are eclectic,¹⁰ and some that are not.¹¹ In eclectic editions, the intentionalist approach is clearly at work. Sometimes, as is the case of the Kane and Donaldson’s *Piers Plowman*, the authorial intention is recovered by the use of editorial judgement alone. In other cases, such as Manly and Rickert’s edition, there is an attempt to recover the archetype of the tradition rather than the author’s text. Other editors, such as Ruggiers in his edition of Hg with variants from El and Blake (*Canterbury Tales*), have prepared best-text editions into which they have intervened to a greater or lesser degree.

In chapter 2, I describe a method by which it is possible to construct a text that explains the texts as they are extant today. The New Stemmatics is an alternative editorial method which could represent a better approach to the study of the *Canterbury Tales* and perhaps of other medieval texts.

3. THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS WORK

This work is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on scholarly work relating to the order of the *Canterbury Tales*; chapter 2 presents a brief history of the stemmatic approach to the criticism of texts; chapter 3 explores the possibility of studying the order of the *Tales* from a stemmatic perspective; chapter 4 presents the results of the use of phylogenetic software applied to the study of the order of the tales and analyses these results; chapter 5 analyses the relationships between the tale-order and the word-variant stemmata; chapter 6 presents codicological analyses of Ad3 Ch Cp Dd Ha4 and Hg. The conclusion considers the implications of the different orders and presents the outcomes of this work.

¹ STEMMA stands for Studies of Textual Evolution of Manuscripts by Mathematical Analysis. The Project is lead by Christopher Howe from the University of Cambridge, and has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust. I will discuss the main goals of STEMMA in chapter 2.

² The term archetype is used to refer to the text from which all other texts in the tradition descend. The term hyparchetype refers to the text from which a genetic group descends.

³ This has been suggested before by Derek Pearsall, who has even proposed that the *Tales* should be published in this way and that the reader should be allowed to re-arrange them at will (*Life* 233).

⁴ Manly and Rickert are not completely precise about the nature of the archetype and do not offer an explicit statement about its nature.

⁵ This is not to diminish the importance of Manly and Rickert's work. By separating the 'author's original' from the archetype, Manly and Rickert present an important advancement in the theoretical aspects of the application of stemmatic analysis to the study of texts.

⁶ The **O** manuscripts have been described by Robinson as follows: "if the manuscripts in O are indeed only related by common descent from the archetype, then the six groupings in (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. . . ." For WBP, Robinson gives the **O** manuscripts as follows: Ad1/En3 Ad3/Ha5 Ra3/Tc1 Bo2/Ht Ch and Hg ("Stemmatic" 80). In spite of the clarity of this quotation concerning the nature of the **O** manuscripts, they have often been referred to incorrectly as if they were a genetic group (Cf. Blake, "Caxton's").

⁷ See below where I briefly describe some contemporary textual critical views.

⁸ For more details on intentionalism and especially on stemmatics see chapter 2.

⁹ See, for example, Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer*, Furnivall's *A Six-Text Print of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in Parallel Columns* and Pratt's "The Order of the Canterbury Tales."

¹⁰ Lachmann's editions fall into this category, but so also do Kane and Donaldson's *Piers Plowman*, Manly and Rickert's *The Text of the Canterbury Tales* and the *Riverside Chaucer*. Although all of these editions are eclectic, the procedure followed by their editors was different. See chapter 2 for more details.

¹¹ Basically, all facsimile editions would be considered by Tanselle documentary editions.