

STORIE E LINGUAGGI
Collana diretta da Franco Cardini e Paolo Trovato

Digital Philology:
New Thoughts on Old Questions

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STORIE E LINGUAGGI

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Digital Philology: New Thoughts on Old Questions

Edited by
Adele Cipolla

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II. RECONSTRUCTION VS DOCUMENTATION: A SURVEY OF EDITORIAL CONUNDRUMS AND (IR)RECONCILABLE POSITIONS

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Abstract

The debate about 'reconstruction' *vs* 'documentation' has pervaded textual criticism since its very beginning, not only as a general point of contest, but also as a specific issue in the work of single scholars who have provided different answers to it. After giving a survey of the *status quaestionis*, mainly from the point of view of the

Italian philological school, this paper aims to show that a balance should be sought between the understandable tendency towards the establishment of a given text, and the inevitable and undeniable necessity to take into account variation attesting the innovative thrust of either the copyists or the author him-/herself.

l'edizione è [...] *nel tempo*, aprendosi nel pragma e facendo sottostare le sue decisioni a una teleologia variabile.¹

1. Reconstruction *vs* Documentation

The debate about 'reconstruction' *vs* 'documentation' has pervaded textual criticism since its very beginning, not only as a general point of contest, but also as a specific issue in the work of single scholars who have provided different answers to it. I would like to start from the following well-known anecdote.

¹ "edition is [...] *in time*, opening up in the 'pragma' and making the editorial choices subject to a variable teleology." Contini 1990, 14.

Karl Lachmann recognized two redactions in the manuscript tradition of the *Nibelungenlied*: a shorter and more genuine one, contained in the manuscript he called B; and a longer and heavily interpolated one, represented by the witnesses labelled by him as G, E, and M. Though both redactions have reached us disfigured by corruptions and interpolations, Lachmann stated that while the first one cannot be reconstructed in its 'original' form until at least another manuscript, a brother of B, is discovered, the second one can instead be reconstructed by comparing G, E, and M.² Surprisingly enough, when Lachmann himself published the critical edition of the *Nibelungenlied* in 1826,³ he renounced the reconstruction of the longer redaction (i.e. the only one that would have permitted the thorough application of his method), deciding instead to stick to the witness he had called B (usually renamed A in von der Hagen's fashion),⁴ mainly on the grounds that it contains the oldest text.⁵ The lesson here is that even Lachmann may be less Lachmannian than one might expect!

Many such cases can be found in the history of textual scholarship, both cross-traditionally and in early as well as in recent times. Thus a first, crucial issue arises as to how to link the – at least in principle – mechanical process of reconstructing a stemma with the actual process of establishing and then editing the text that is supposed to derive from that stemma.

This fundamental question is still considerably relevant today, and can prove crucial especially in Italy. The reasons for this are to be sought in our country's philological tradition. Italian philologists played an important role in the thirties of the 20th century, when they gave a major contribution to the debate. In 1934 Giorgio Pasquali published a volume titled *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo*, in which he supported the

2 Lachmann 1876, 1. Bd., 86-87. See also the discussion on these topics in Timpanaro 1981, 105-110.

3 Lachmann 1826. Lachmann's *Nibelungen* edition has remained the standard far into the twentieth century.

4 von der Hagen 1816. Here is a list of correspondences between the two sets of *sigla*: Lachmann B = A (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 34); E = C (Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, Cod. Donaueschingen 63); G = B (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 857); M = D (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 31).

5 The subtitle is representative of the author's concern: "in der ältesten Gestalt mit den Abweichungen der gemeinen Lesart" ("according to the oldest tradition with indication of the spurious"). Contrary to what Lachmann postulated in his edition, nowadays scholars are inclined to think that the shorter redaction is the younger.

need to integrate the reconstruction of a stemma with the study of the history of tradition, and suggested that certain ambiguities in the transmission of Latin and vernacular texts could be explained by assuming *ab origine* the existence of authorial changes. The seminal force of the approach suggested by Pasquali lies in the fact that it injects history into the critically reconstructed text; as later on grasped by Contini, Pasquali's historical view worked effectively as an antidote to the radical scepticism of Bédier in the face of the aura of 'eternity' emanated by the stemma. The prelude to the renewal of the Lachmannian practice is exemplified by a passage of Contini's *Tombeau de Leo Spitzer* dedicated to Bédier himself: "Bédier non si rendeva conto che conservare criticamente è, tanto quanto che innovare, un'ipotesi [...]; resta da vedere se sia sempre l'ipotesi più economica".⁶ Sustaining that editorial practices produce *hypotheses* and not *facts* of historical evidence means subtracting their logic to the *ars*, and returning it to the field of scientific thought. Bédier's position therefore reveals itself to be a paradoxical reduction of history to the visible, which gives rise to texts as static as those established by following the Lachmannian method in an excessively strict sense:

Il capovolgimento béderiano (valutazione del manoscritto più delle lezioni; identificazione subliminale di testo e manoscritto) sostituisce una realtà concreta a un fantasma ricostruito; però rinuncia ai soccorsi della tradizione, che noi dominiamo compatibilmente con le distruzioni operate dai secoli, mentre il copista medievale non conosceva di norma che un antigrafo, salvo eventuali supplementi. Così, se il testo lachmanniano si avvicina inegualmente al limite dell'archetipo, il testo béderiano resta fermo, rifiuta i passi avanti resi possibili dal confronto tra i manoscritti.⁷

6 Contini 1961. "Bédier did not realize that conserving critically is as much a hypothesis as innovation [...]; it remains to be seen whether it is the most economical hypothesis." A critical revision of Bédier's doctrines can be found in Trovato's contribution to this volume (161-180).

7 Segre 1978, 494. "The inversion promoted by Bédier (evaluation of the manuscript and of the readings; subliminal text and manuscript identification) replaces a reconstructed phantom with a concrete reality, however it refuses the assistance of tradition, which we deem consistent with the destruction wrought by the centuries, while the medieval copyist did not normally have anything except antigraphs, aside from supplements. Thus, if the Lachmannian text does not equally approach the archetype limit, the Bédierian text remains static, and refuses any advances made possible by the comparison between manuscripts."

In short, one could affirm that the effort of Italian neo-Lachmannism was to incorporate in only one context – the critical edition – two historicities: the ‘micro’ from the evidence provided by a single manuscript, and the ‘macro’ from the history of text transmission, renouncing any obsessive desire for a univocal text definition.⁸

A few years after the appearance of Pasquali’s volume, Michele Barbi embraced his methodology and applied it to various Italian authors, including Dante, Boccaccio, Foscolo and Manzoni. Barbi wrote a book specifically focused on what he called “the new philology”: *La nuova filologia e l’edizioni dei nostri scrittori da Dante a Manzoni* (1938), from which it clearly emerges that, while the main editorial goal in classical philology remains the establishment of *one* text – albeit mitigated by the acknowledgement of its inherent *mouvance* –, within the context of Italian philology the existence of texts that live in variants becomes all the more perspicuous. Authorial variants are, in fact, somehow foreign to classical philology;⁹ on the contrary, they play a crucial role in modern textual criticism. In these cases, the critical apparatus that accompanies the edition of a given text “non mira a fornire materiali per la ricostruzione di *un* originale, ma a porre sott’occhio diversi originali successivi o un originale nei suoi stadi successivi.”¹⁰

The thirties of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of those main features which would characterize the so-called Italian school of textual criticism, namely: a focus on the historicity of tradition, a special attention paid to authorial variants and multiple versions, a mistrust of evaluating manuscripts merely for their antiquity (*recentiores, non deteriores*),¹¹ and the use of geographic criteria in order to weigh up the different readings. As stated by Vārvaro:

8 A more detailed discussion on these issues is to be found in Buzzoni and Burgio 2015.

9 Classicists are accustomed “not to consider the textual variance in the manuscripts as culturally meaningful in itself, but merely instrumental in view of the *constitutio textus*”: Monella, 148-149, in this volume.

10 Pasquali 1952, xxi. “[The critical apparatus] does not aim at providing material to reconstruct *one* original; rather it brings to the fore either different subsequent originals or an original at different subsequent stages.”

11 The title of Chapter 4 of Pasquali’s volume (Pasquali 1952) has become proverbial in textual criticism.

If in other countries for the past half centuries textual criticism was generally considered to be a sort of archeological relic, alien to modern culture [...] so happened that in Italy the subject enjoys instead broad and immense prestige.¹²

Though Vårvaro's view sounds excessively optimistic today, it does capture a feeling which is still deeply rooted in our tradition, specifically that the aim of textual criticism should be that of making texts stand the test of time and be passed on from generation to generation by granting them new life.

Being part of a school conceals certain dangers, the most evident of which is to be sectarian. Further and perhaps more careful reflection is therefore needed on the results achieved by schools other than the Italian neo-Lachmannian one; furthermore this reflection should be as free as possible from any aprioristic prejudices. Cerquiglini's book *Éloge de la variante (In Praise of the Variant)*, published in 1989, was apparently cordially welcomed in Italy; however, quoting Vårvaro once more:

as if it were a sort of butterfly: multicoloured, pleasant, yet lightweight. Why be enthusiastic about it? Why fear it or even take it seriously? Specifically, we Italians felt no need for a 'new' philology – which for us would be what a face lift is for ladies of a certain age – to put ourselves on the cultural market in competition with younger and more attractive disciplines.¹³

This self-conceited attitude and widespread over-confidence have somewhat hindered debate about important issues concerning the process of *constitutio textus*. Just one question should be mentioned, which is of particular interest for my own research field, namely the problem of the linguistic form that should be ascribed to the critically restored text. Many of the mechanical reconstructions based solely on the stemma have led to unconvincing results,

12 Vårvaro 1999, 52.

13 Vårvaro 1999, 53. Vårvaro stresses the fact that in Italy Cerquiglini's book came "after decades of anti-Bédierist polemics". Yet, the dichotomy between conservation and reconstruction, between the historical value of each single manuscript and the diachronic perspective provided by the Lachmannian *reductio ad unum*, between the copyist's 'truth' and the author's 'truth' has been at the core of the philological debate for over a century, starting even before the so-called 'Bédierian 1913 revolution'.

since a language reconstructed in this way turns out to be a sort of unusable artificial tool. In such cases, the ‘return-to-the-manuscript’ approach as prescribed by the so-called ‘Material Philology’¹⁴ would prove more adequate and effective than mechanical reconstruction and/or levelling.¹⁵ Any drastic intervention on the linguistic structure of the text that aims at removing its surface patina in order to restore an alleged ‘original physiognomy’, now lost, can be dangerous in that it may prove arbitrary.

2. Textual sample

The following example is taken from the text I am presently editing, i.e. the Old Saxon poetic reworking of the Gospel titled *Heliand*. The poem has been handed down to us in two major manuscripts: a continental manuscript M (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 25) and an English manuscript C (London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.vii, ff. 11-175).¹⁶ Since all the editions produced so far are based on M, which has always been the guide-manuscript in editorial practice, the linguistic phenomena that only C transmits have been completely neglected. Yet, at least some of them prove most relevant for the history of Old Saxon and of the Germanic languages in general. For instance, the phenomenon called *attractio relativi* (“case attraction”) is frequently attested in early Germanic languages such as Gothic, Old English, Old High German – and Old Saxon, too, at least judging from C’s readings.¹⁷ Despite this fact,

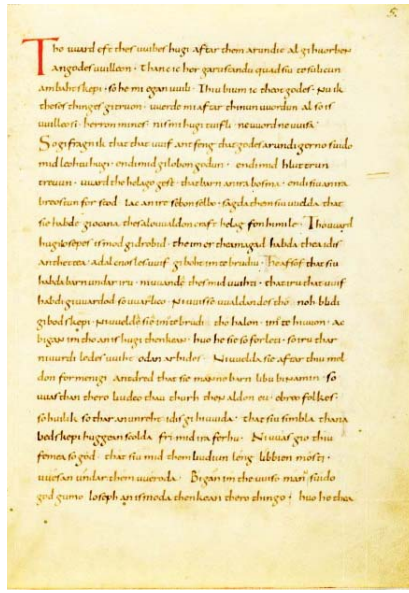
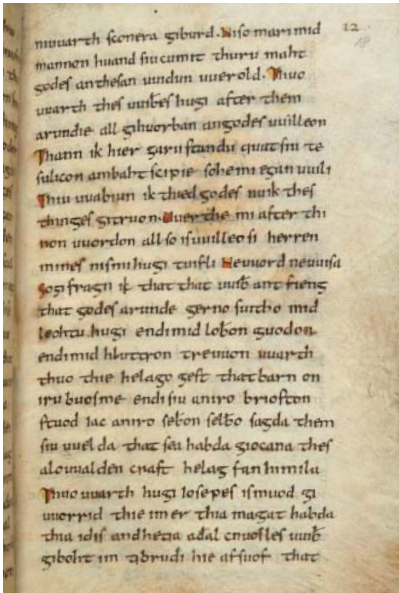
14 Nichols 1997.

15 Levelling takes place when an editor decides to provide a text that is normalized with respect to both the phonological system and the lexical forms of the words.

16 Four more fragments transmit short passages of the text: i.e. V (Codex Palatinus 1447, discovered by K. Zangemeister in 1894 and now housed at the Vatican Library; ll. 1279-1358); P (formerly preserved at the University Library of Prague, now in Berlin; ll. 958b-1006a), S (the Straubing fragment, currently held at the Bavarian *Staatsbibliothek*; ll. 351-722), and – last but not least – the newly discovered Leipzig fragment, found in 2006 (ll. 5823-5870a).

17 In a relative structure, the relative pronoun can bear the case required by the matrix clause – instead of that required by the subordinate – if that case is more marked (where “more marked” means further right in the following hierarchy: nominative > accusative > other). For example: manuscript C *thes uuïdon rikeasi giuuand [thesi Ø [he giuualdan scal]]* “the end of the wide kingdom over which He will rule”, in which the relative pronoun *thes* features the genitive case in agreement with its antecedent *thes uuïdon rikeas* “of the wide kingdom”. Genitive is more marked than the accusative required by the subordinate.

case attraction is not recorded in any ‘official’ grammar of the Old Saxon language, in all probability simply because grammars and related tools such as dictionaries and glossaries depend on editions that regularize both spelling and morphology on the basis of the best manuscript M. In a nutshell, too often editors make their text conform to some idealized linguistic structure, thus creating artificial objects that falsify the data inferable from historical witnesses.



C = London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.vii, f. 18r (left hand), and M = München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 25, f. 5r (right hand)

Here below is a synoptic presentation of an excerpt (fitt IV, ll. 291-320), taken from the 19th-century edition of the *Heliand* by Edward Sievers who provided the text of the two major witnesses, C and M respectively, on facing pages:¹⁸

18 Sievers 1878, 24-25.

- endi mid hluttron treuon. Unarth thuo thie helago gest,
that barn on iru buosme; endi siu an iro brioston *farstuod*
iac an iro seþon selbo, sagda them siu uuelda
that sea habda giocana thes alouualden craft
- 295 helag fan himila. Thuo uuarth hugi Iosepes,
is muod giuuorrid, thie im er thia magat habda
thia idis andhetia, aþalcnuosles uuiþ
giboht im ti brudi: hie afsuof that (12^b) that siu
habða barn under iru:
ni uuanda thes mid uuihti [neua] that iru that uuiþ habði
- 300 giunardot so uuarlico: ni uuisse hie uualdandes thuo noh
blithi gibodscipi. Ni uualda sia im te brudi thuo
halon im ti hiuon, ac began im thuo an is hugie thenkean
huo hie sia thuo* farlieti, so iru thar ni uurði lethes *uuiht*
odan arbedies. Ne uuelda sia after thi
- 305 meldon for menigi: andried that sea manno barn
libu binamin. So uuas *than* thero liudeo thau
thuru then aldon eu, Ebreo folces,
so huilik so thar an unreht idis gihiuuada,
that siu simla thena bedscepi buggean scolda
- 310 fri mid iru ferahu. Ni uuas gio thi u fehmea so guod
that siu gio mid them liudion leng libbean muosti,
uuesan under them uuerode. Thuo bigan im the uuiso man,
suiþo guod gumo Ioseph an is muode
thenkean thero thingo, huo hie thea thiornun tho
- 315 listion forlieti. Thuo ni uuas lang ti thi
that im thar an drome quam drohtines engil,
hebancuninges bodo, (13*) endi hiet sia ina haldan uuel,
minneon sia an is muode: ‘Ni uuis thu’ quathie,
‘Mariun uureth,
thiornun thineru — siu is githungan uuiþ —
- 320 ni forhugi thu sia ti hardo; thu scalt sea haldan uuel,

91 brioston | stuod 300 giunardot 11 muosti *corr.* 2. h. 20 tihardo

91—92. *Tat. V. Mt.* 1, 18 . . . inventa est in utero habens de spiritu sancto. 95—305. *Mt.* 1, 19. Joseph autem vir eius, cum esset iustus et nollet eam tradere, voluit occulte dimittere eam. 12—25. *Mt.* 1, 20. Haec autem eo cogitante, ecce angelus domini apparuit ei

endi mid hluttrun treun. Uuard † the helago gest,
 that barn an ira bosma; endi siu an ira breostun forstod
 iac an ire sebon selbo, sagda them siu uelda
 that sie habde giocana thes alouualdon craft 10
 295 helag fon himile. Tho uuard hugi Iosepes,
 is mod gidrobid, the im er thea magad habda
 thea idis antheatea, adalcnosles uuif
 giboht im te brudiu: he afsot that siu habda barn
 undar iru:
 ni uanda thes mid uuihti that iru that uuif habdi
 300 giuardod so uuarlico: ni uuisse *he* uualdandes tho noh
 bliði gibodskepi. Ni uelde sie im te brudiu tho 15
 halon im te hiuuon, ac bigan im tho an is hugi thenkean
 huo he sie so forleti so iru thar ni uurdi ledes uuiht
 odan arbides. Ni uuelda sie aftar thiū
 305 meldon for menigi: .antred that sie manno barn
 libu binamin. So uuas than thero liudeo thau
 thurh then aldon eu, Ebreo folkes,
 so huilik so thar an unreht idis gihuuida,
 that siu simbla thana bedskepi buggean scolda 20
 310 fri mid ira ferhu. Ni uuas gio thiū femea so god
 that siu *io* mid them liudiu leng libbien mosti,
 uuesan undar them uueroda. † Bigan im the uuiso man,
 suido god gumo Ioseph an is moda
 thenkean thero thingo, huo he thea (5^b) thiornun tho
 315 listiu forleti. Tho ni uuas lang te thiū 10,1
 that im thar an droma quam drohtines engil,
 hebancuninges bodo, endi het sie ina haldan uuel,
 minnion sie an is mode: ‘Ni uuis thu’ quad he,
 ‘Mariun uured,
 thiornun thinaro — siu is githuungan uuif —
 320 ne forhugi thu sie te hardo; thu scalt sie haldan uuel, 5

95 hugi Iosepes, *das erste i auf rasur (für e?)*, *das zweite scheint nachgetragen zu sein* 99 uuand^a 2. hand uuar^olico 2. hand. 1 uueld^a si^a im^o 2. hand brudiu *ausradiert* 2 im^o 2. hand 12 man^N 2. hand

dicens: ‘Ioseph fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam coniugem tuam; quod enim in ea natum est, de spiritu sancto est.

Comparing the two witnesses, the first difference that a reader would notice concerns the spelling. A glance at the text edited by Burkhard Taeger, which has naturally imposed itself over the years as the reference edition of the Old Saxon poem, enhances surprise, perhaps accompanied by a feeling of being disguised.¹⁹

291 endi mid hluttrun treuun. *Uuarð* the hêlago gêst,
 292 that barn *an* ira bôsmā; endi siu ira breostun *forstôd*
 293 iac an ire sebon selbo, sagda them siu uueda,
 294 that sie habde giôcana thes alouualdon craft
 295 hêlag fon himile. Thô uuarð hugi Iosepes,
 296 is môd *giuorrid*, the im êr thea magað habda,
 297 thea idis anthêttea, aðalcnôsles uuîf
 298 giboht im te brûdiu. He afsôf *that* siu habda barn undar iru:
 299 ni uuânda thes mid uuihti, *that* iru that uuîf habdi
 300 giuuardod sô *uuarolico*: ni *uuisse* uualdandes thô noh
 301 blîði gibodskepi. Ni uueda sia imo te brûdi thô,
 302 halon imo te hîuuon, ac bigan im thô *an* hugi thenkean,
 303 huô he sie sô forlêti, sô iru thar nu uurði lêdes *uuîht*,
 304 ôdan *arbides*. Ni uueda sie aftar thiu
 305 meldon for menigi: antdrêd that sie manno barn
 306 lîbu binâmin. Sô uuas *than* thero liudeo thau
 307 thurh then aldon êu, Ebreo folkes,
 308 sô huilik sô thar an unreht idis gihîuuida,
 309 that siu simbla thana bedskepi buggean scolda,
 310 frî mid ira ferhu: ni uuas gio thiu fêmea sô gôd,
 311 that siu *mid* them liudun leng libbien môsti,
 312 uuesan undar them uueroda. Bigan im the uuîso mann,
 313 suîðo gôd gumo, Ioseph an is môda
 314 thenkean thero thingo, huô he thea thiornun thô
 315 listiun forlêti. Thô ni uuas lang te thiu,
 316 that im thar an drôma quam drohtines engil,
 317 hebancuninges bodo, endi hêt sie ina haldan uuel,
 318 minnion sie an is môde: “Ni uuis thu”, quað he, “Mariun uurêð,
 319 thiornun thînaro; siu is *githungan* uuîf;
 320 ne forhugi thu sie te hardo; thu scalt sie haldan uuel,²⁰

19 Taeger 1996, 17-18.

20 Fitt IV focuses on the episode of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary in Galilee and on Joseph’s reaction to Mary’s pregnancy. “[...] with transparent loyalty. The Holy Spirit became the baby in her womb. In her heart and feelings she realized what had happened and she

The editor has decided to normalize the text. In so doing, he makes some crucial choices that differentiate his text from both C and M. Consider, for example, the spelling <th> in C (ll. 291, 295: <uuarth>) as against <d> in M (<uuard>). This spelling is kept only when found at the very beginning of the word; everywhere else it is generally replaced by the interdental voiced fricative <ð>. ²¹ A more careful comparison, however, shows that the correspondence: non-initial <th> (C) = <d> (M) = ð (Taeger) is not always consistent, as revealed by <blithi> = <blidi> (l. 2910), spelled with <th> in C and <ð> in M (instead of the expected <d>). The contrary is found in l. 297, where *aðalcnôsles* (Taeger) is spelled with an unexpected <ð> in C and with <d> in M; and also in l. 303, where *uurði* appears as <uurði> in C and as <uurdi> in M. Such anachronisms are not recorded in the critical apparatus provided by Taeger, even though, in principle, they can prove extremely relevant since the morphophonological *facies* of a dead language is necessarily reconstructed from its orthography. ²² In some cases normalization, instead of helping the

told whomever she wished, that the power of the All-Ruler coming in holiness from heaven had gotten her pregnant. Joseph's mind and emotions, however, were in turmoil, since he had already brought the maiden – this virtuous woman, this lady of the nobility – to be his bride. He could see that she had a child in her body and ignored the fact that the woman had actually guarded herself well. He did not yet know about the Ruler's merry message. He no longer wanted her to be his bride, his wife within his hall, and began to think in his mind how he could let her go in such a way that she would not at all get hurt or feel hardship. He also did not want all this made known afterwards to people – he was afraid that the sons of men might take her life. That was the custom of those people, the Hebrews, back then, according to the old law. If ever a woman lived or slept with anyone unlawfully, she always had to pay the price for it: her life for her love. There was no woman so good that she could remain alive long thereafter among those people or last long among the crowd. Joseph, that wise and very good man, began to think in his heart of ways to let the girl go secretly. It was not long then before the messenger of the King of Heaven, the Chieftain's angel, came to him there and in a dream and told him to keep her and love her in his heart: 'Do not be angry with Mary, your young lady, she is a proper wife. Do not think too harshly of her. You are to keep her safe [...]'." Translation from Murphy 1992, 13-14.

21 “[...] für die dentale Spirans im Inlaut und Auslaut ð/ð gesetzt ist, [...]” Taeger 1996, xl.

22 Taeger seems to be well aware of the problem since in his Introduction (Taeger 1996, xl) he states: “in solchen Einzelfällen auch weiterhin nach der Regel ausgeglichen, dabei aber stets die Lesung der Leithandschrift im Apparat verzeichnet.” (“in similar single cases, which have been thoroughly uniformed according to the rule, the reading of the guide-manuscript, however, has always been recorded in the Apparatus”). Yet, he doesn't seem very consistent in applying this method.

readers, risks leading them astray and hampering research on more finely grained textual details. The variation existing between and within the manuscripts represents a fundamental and inalienable source of information. Editions that misrepresent what the witnesses contain by means of well-intended “corrections” might frustrate research.

Moving on to dialectal features, the long vowel spelled as <ô> in Taeger’s edition appears in the two major witnesses either as plain <o> or as the Franconian diphthong <uo>, for example ll. 295, 315: *Thuo* (C) / *Tho* (M). A similar treatment was reserved to <e> as opposed to <ie> in l. 317: *hiet* (C) / *het* (M), which is resolved as a long <ê> in both cases. Yet, as already noticed by Valentine Pakis: “it is the presence of the contrasting spellings of <uo> and <ie> which really shows that unmarked <o> and <e> in parallel positions are long.”²³ In this case, normalization blurs a dialectal, specifically Franconian, feature that can be important to the formulation of hypotheses on the provenance of the exemplar from which C was copied and, possibly, on the ultimate origin of the *Heliand* itself.

Line 296 contains a further editorial problem. Here the editor has to choose between manuscript C’s *giuuorrid* “worried” and manuscript M’s *gidrobid* “afflicted”. Taeger – following his predecessors – opts for C’s reading, even though M’s is perfectly acceptable, morphologically as well as semantically. The meaning of the latter might even be closer to the general atmosphere of the excerpt which pivots on Joseph’s emotional state of being “afflicted” because he is aware of the consequences that his actions might have on Mary: they could cause her death.²⁴

3. In search of balance

These examples show that a balance should be sought between the understandable tendency towards the establishment of a given text in a re-constructive perspective, and the inevitable and undeniable necessity to take into account variation attesting the innovative thrust of either the copyists or the author him-/herself. In fact, the first approach, if strictly applied, would produce an artificial text. However, the second conceals some dangers too, like, for example, that of simply providing ‘antholo-

23 Pakis 2010, 32.

24 See also Tatian 5. 7-8; Mt. 1. 19-20.

gies' of diplomatic transcriptions, rather than editions based on sound criteria. Despite the hasty debate that often reflects the clash between already crystallized positions, my opinion is that these perspectives, though different, are not irreconcilable. The more one tries to reconcile them, the better the edition would be: on the one hand, documentation without any attempt of reconstructing the history of tradition may result in careless conclusions (for example: discriminating between conservations and innovations becomes really hazardous without establishing a hierarchy between groups/families of witnesses);²⁵ on the other hand, reconstruction without documentation might produce an artificial *monstrum*.

Prodromal stages of the attempt to find an agreement between these two points of view are again to be sought in the Italian tradition of textual criticism. A paradigmatic example is represented by Gianfranco Contini's notion of "diffraction" or "multiple innovation" in the manuscript tradition. After claiming, in true modern fashion, that "the general disagreement in different variants is a meaningful figure or structure", Contini argues that "a multiple innovation occurring in the same place has a rational explanation: why did all manuscripts [...] innovate and, what's more, in a colourless way? Was it not because of an objective obstacle in the original?"²⁶ Therefore the notion of "diffraction" implies, against Bédier, the examination of all the witnesses belonging to the textual tradition – and not just of the *bon manuscrit* – and, beyond Lachmann, a non-mechanical evolution of the variant readings. In trying to evaluate what the obstacle may have been, Contini resorts to a number of different competences: palaeographic, historical-linguistic, cultural and even psychological. From the perspective of textual criticism, one speaks of diffraction 'in presence' when the best reading among the many variants is preserved, and can be sorted out by following for instance the principle of *lectio difficilior*; one speaks of diffraction 'in absence' when all the witnesses transmit colourless variants, and the best reading can be reconstructed only by judgement (*iudicium*).

25 Many recent editions of medieval texts renounce systematic reconstruction basically on the ground that no 'original' stage can be enucleated due to the plurality of variant readings shown by the history of transmission. However, these same editions do not renounce the formulation of hypothesis and drawing of conclusions about the proximity of the witnesses to the alleged 'original'. Furthermore, some of them provide the readers with a unique 'critical' text.

26 Contini 1971, here 1990, 140. The 1971 essay, included in the volume *Breviario di ecdotica* (second edition 1990), was originally presented as a talk in 1967.

A few years after Contini, Cesare Segre enhances the idea of ‘historicity’ of a text, discussing the notion of scribal innovations that appear in a given manuscript tradition and that can be ascribed to the mental process at the basis of the reproduction of a text. Segre assumes that “the image of a text is a linguistic structure which actualizes a system” and that “each copyist has his own linguistic system which, in the course of the transcription, comes into contact with that of the text he is transcribing”. Furthermore, “to silence one’s own system is as impossible as to erase one’s own historicity.”²⁷ Thus, each (copied) text can be seen as a compromise between systems, namely as a “diasystem”. The notion of a diasystem is an acknowledgement of the function of time. The work survives only thanks to its transcriptions: errors and innovations are the inevitable sign of the persistence of the text. Therefore: “The old philologist was under the illusion that he might jump across time and reach the uncontaminated original. On the contrary, the philologist must be conscious of this hiatus and, above all, of the fact that, when reading a text, he himself is actualizing a new system.”²⁸ One might wonder whether the peculiarities inherent in the notions of “diffraction” (Contini) and “diasystem” (Segre) deserve proper consideration while editing medieval texts. My answer to this question is undoubtedly affirmative since these peculiarities are not simply embellishments; rather, they form part of the global sense of the text itself.

A fairly recent attempt at clinging to manuscript relationships and grouping in order to establish the critical text is represented by (New) Phylogeny. The term ‘phylogeny’ derives from evolutionary biology and, broadly speaking, it denotes a tree-like structure that represents the history of organismal lineages as they change through time. Its application to the issue of manuscript grouping and ‘family ties’ has raised a lot of debate among textual scholars over the past two decades. Peter Robinson, inspirer and coordinator of the *Canterbury Tale Project*, is the philologist whose name is inseparably linked with this method.²⁹ The *Parzival Projekt* headed by Michael Stolz, who coordinates three research teams based in Switzerland and in Germany, claims to adopt a mixed theoretical framework including both New Philology and New

27 Segre 1976, 65.

28 Segre and Speroni 1991, 57.

29 Barbrook *et al.* 1998.

Phylogeny.³⁰ Other attempts to use phylogenetic trees in humanities, which however have not necessarily led to an edition of the texts under inspection, are represented by studies on “parts of the New Testament, treatises on the use of the astrolabe, writings of St Gregory of Nazianzus, historical poems on the Kings of England, Dante’s *Monarchia*, the *Mahabharata*, and the Finnish legend of St Henry.”³¹ Though further research is necessary, the last few years have witnessed many improvements – or at least attempts at improvement – concerning in particular some problematic core issues like the ecdotic weight that should be attributed to each single variant or how to handle contamination.³² The too optimistic statement: “[i]n general, the conclusions drawn using phylogenetic programs are in agreement with those from conventional scholarship”³³ has been partially reconsidered, though perhaps a supplement of investigation is needed, especially if one bears in mind that “conventional scholarship” includes a wide range of different methods, and that not all the traditions mentioned above have ever undergone proper analysis from a “conventional” perspective. Paolo Trovato’s dense essay “Di alcune edizioni recenti di Antonio Pucci, del codice Kirkup e della cladistica applicata alla critica testuale” (2009) is critical of the achievements of phylogeny in the study of Pucci’s *Reina d’Oriente*. Trovato’s stemmatic hypothesis, carried out by using a neo-Lachmannian qualitative approach to the text, is detached from Robins’s cladograms (both rooted and unrooted) obtained by applying a quantitative method.³⁴ He eventually maintains that:

gli stemmatologi più avvertiti sembrano aver capito che per costruire stemmi non illusori alcune decine di errori significativi servono più di

30 Stolz 2003, 2011, and 2013. Further bibliographical references at the website <<http://www.parzival.unibe.ch/home.html>>.

31 Quotation from and related bibliographical references in: Howe and Windram 2011.

32 Some additional information in Andrews and Macé 2014. On additional data processing which take into consideration indicative errors (*Leitfehler*) to produce a usable stemma, see Roelli and Bachmann 2010. For a different opinion (“weighting the variants, in our work with real manuscript traditions, had virtually no effect on the quantitative analysis”) see Robinson 2016, 648. On some interesting results with contaminated traditions, see Buzzoni 2016.

33 Howe and Windram 2011.

34 Motta and Robins 2007.

migliaia di varianti geolinguistiche o flessionali, massimamente poligenetiche (per es. Salemans 1999 sottolinea che “only very few variants can be building tools”, propone condivisibili regole di selezione degli errori significativi e parla esplicitamente, già nel titolo dei suoi lavori, di un aggiornamento del metodo di Lachmann).³⁵

Similarly, Richard Tarrant has recently maintained that “[c]ladistic analysis by itself is a relatively blunt instrument, in part because of its inability to distinguish between original and non-original readings [...]”.³⁶ To be honest, however, some of the limitations mentioned by Tarrant are not drawbacks (quite the contrary, I would claim): for instance, it is true that the tree graphs produced by applying phylogenetic methods are unrooted, but they can be rooted afterwards by integrating external (e.g. historical) data.³⁷ And it has been shown that they can be rooted also in the middle of a branch, not only at its base (node). In my opinion we should accept that these models give abstract representations of the possible affiliations of witnesses (those representations that are allowed by the specific algorithms used); the core problem is that their reliability (and therefore their usability, at least from an editorial perspective) is not ‘stable’ but rather ‘fluid’, depending on different factors linked to the nature of the manuscript tradition under inspection. This forces the editor to run more than one program, and then compare the results obtained, trying to make sense of the bad ones – an operation which is undoubtedly burdensome, as well as time-consuming. Other core issues still open to debate are normalization, as well as complete transcriptions of primary textual data and their subsequent alignment (especially when dislocations occur). However, the advantage of having at our disposal more data which are also more easily reusable, and, if necessary, integrated or corrected, is not to be neglected.

35 Trovato 2009, 93. “The most expert stemmatologists seem to have understood that in order not to provide illusory stemmata some tens of significant errors are more valuable than thousands of geolinguistic or inflectional variants, mostly polygenetic (for example Salemans 1999 underlines that ‘only very few variants can be building tools’, he sets up rules to select significant errors which one can agree with, and makes explicit reference, even in the title of his works, to an updating of the Lachmannian method).”

36 Tarrant 2016, 152.

37 See, among others, Roos and Heikkilä 2009.

4. Role of the critical apparatus

Last but not least, the debate about the role to be assigned to the critical apparatus deserves mention. The apparatus represents the core of a scholarly edition. According to Cesare Segre, it is the location where the tension between the respect for the antigraph and the innovative thrust of the copyist is brought to the fore. For this reason, as early as 1974 he suggests a turnaround in the hierarchical relationship between the text and the apparatus:

Occorre [...] capovolgere i rapporti gerarchici fra testo e apparato, dare la maggiore enfasi all'apparato e considerare il testo come una superficie neutra [...] su cui il filologo ha innestato le lezioni da lui considerate sicure, fra le tante considerate. Ma l'edizione si merita l'attributo di *critica* molto di più attraverso l'apparato, se discorsivamente problematico: perché esso sintetizza il diasistema della tradizione, e perché svolge un vaglio completo, anche se non sempre conclusivo, delle lezioni.³⁸

Thus a question arises as to which kind of edition can render immediately accessible to the reader all the evidence he/she needs to grasp the multi-faceted intratextual and intertextual connections mentioned above, as well as the diasystemic nature of the apparatus. While bidimensional paper editions might prove not fully suitable for representing the communicative power of each single witness,³⁹ scholarly electronic editions with their hypertextual structure appear very promising in this respect. In fact, they allow the editor to present the critically reconstructed text, as well as the different versions and the many forms the text assumes when it becomes part of a historical transmission chain – Contini's requirement of an edition-in-time which should be subject to a variable teleology can be thus better fulfilled than in paper.⁴⁰

38 Segre 1978, 497. "There needs to be a turnaround [...] in the hierarchical relationships between the text and the apparatus, give greater emphasis to the apparatus and consider the text as a neutral surface [...] on which the philologist has grafted the readings which he deemed certain among the many considered. However, the edition deserves the attribute of being 'critical' through the apparatus, if discursively problematic: because it summarizes the diasystem of the tradition, and because it carries out a full assessment, even if not always conclusive, of the readings."

39 The degree of suitability that a paper edition displays depends on the nature of the documentary tradition and on the goals that the editor intends to achieve.

40 Recent debate available in Pierazzo 2015; see also Buzzoni 2016.

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