TAKING THE MEASURE OF LACHMANN AND BÉDIER:
AN INNOVATIVE HANDBOOK OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

PAOLO TROVATO, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lachmann's Method. A Non-Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text*, transl. Federico Poole, Padua: libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2014, 360 pp. ISBN 978-88-6292-528-0.[*]

The fundamentals of classical Latin and Greek textual criticism are fairly uncontroversial. Critics often debate how a *stemma codicum* should be drawn up, how much trust should be placed in this or that manuscript, or how a passage should be reconstructed. But they almost always apply the same method, known as the common-error method or the "method of Lachmann"[1]: they use conjunctive and separative textual variants to set apart manuscript families and to draw up a *stemma codicum*.

Not so in Romance philology. It was a Romanist, Joseph Bédier, who launched a withering attack on the "method of Lachmann" in 1928[2]. Bédier was struck by the frequency of bipartite *stemmata codicum* (i.e. ones that have two main branches): 105 of the 110 French manuscript traditions he examined turned out to be of this type. He argued that this strange forest of two-branched trees had to be a product not of any historical feature of manuscript traditions, but of an inherent flaw in the "method of Lachmann". He identified this with a subconscious bias on the part of editors towards creating such bipartite *stemmata*, since these gave them the freedom to print the reading of whichever branch they preferred, unlike a three- or a four-branched tree, which would generally force them to adopt the

[1] I use quotation marks because the method was not invented by Lachmann, as has been demonstrated by Sebastiano Timpanaro in *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann*, Florence 1963[1], Padua 1981[2], translated by G. W. Most as *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, Chicago 2005.

[2] J. Bédier, "La tradition manuscrite du *Lai de l'Ombre*. Réflections sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes", *Romania* 54, 161-96 and 321-56.

majority reading. He proposed to abandon this flawed method of editing and recommended another one: following as closely as possible the text of the best witness available (often referred to as the copy-text), and correcting it only where it is absolutely necessary.

Bédier's astute comments gave rise to a lively debate among Romance and other vernacular philologists that seems to have been settled largely along national lines. His arguments found a wide resonance in France and North America, and they were reinforced further by New Philology, the movement inspired by Bernard Cerquiglini's celebrated book *In Praise of the Variant*[3]. On the other hand, Romanists in Italy continued to apply the "method of Lachmann" and refined it further in order to counter the objections of Bédier.

Paolo Trovato has written this handbook for scholars outside Italy who are not familiar with the "method of Lachmann", and for those who have rejected it in view of Bédier's objections. He engages at length with Bédier and his followers as well as with other scholars who have contributed to this methodological debate. That gives this volume a dialogical quality, which explains in part why it is not a dusty compendium but a virtuoso performance. It is truly outstanding on account of its comprehensive coverage of the field, the depth of its analysis, the lucidity of its presentation, and the sheer sense of fun that is conveyed by many of its pages. This excellent volume is bound to bring new methodological insights to those working on textual criticism, editing, stemmatics, and manuscript traditions, and indeed to anyone who is interested in these subjects.

Classical scholars will benefit especially from the account of the debate in Romance philology about Bédier's claims. One may well wonder why classicists have missed out almost entirely on this discussion (apart from Michael D. Reeve and Sebastiano Timpanaro, who published important studies on the prevalence of bipartite stemmata). In part this is surely due to the compartmentalization of the humanities, which has sometimes prevented scholars from looking beyond the bounds of their field of research. But a number of other factors may also have been involved. Bédier started his revolution (or, as Trovato writes jokingly, his schism) in a fairly young discipline: Romance philology only emerged as an independent field of research during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Classical philology on the other hand goes back to the Renaissance; classical scholars already started working with Lachmannian methods in the early nineteenth century, and Timpanaro has shown that some key insights underlying the "method of

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[3] B. Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante. Histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris 1989, translated by B. Wing as *In Praise of the Variant. A Critical History of Philology*, Baltimore 1999.

Lachmann" had already occurred to Politian, Erasmus, and Scaliger[4]; so the method is rooted much more strongly in Classics than in Romance philology. Nor will many classicists be particularly discomfited by one aspect of the method that its critics have found especially jarring, namely its rejection of historically documented versions of texts in favour of undocumented reconstructions. Classical scholarship has had a reconstructionist bent since the Renaissance, and it still belongs to the research routine of many classical scholars to reconstruct historical phenomena for which there is no direct evidence. Last but not least, the surviving manuscript sources of many classical texts raise questions to which Bédier's method provides no plausible answer. The writings of Aristophanes, Catullus, or Velleius Paterculus survive in manuscripts that were copied many centuries after their time; these manuscripts are full of obvious mistakes; and what is more, certain mistakes appear in some manuscripts, but not in others: all the manuscripts of these authors are late and corrupt, but they are corrupt in different ways. If an editor chooses to base her edition on one copy-text (say, on Catullus' *Codex Oxoniensis*), she can correct its text with the help of other manuscript sources (say, Catullus' *Romanus* and *Sangermanensis*), or she can choose to disregard these and to improve her copy-text only with the help of conjectures. But in either case her choice raises the questions what is the relationship between these manuscripts, what is their source value, and what rationale (if any) can be found for basing an edition on one textual witness out of many. The "method of Lachmann" provides an answer to these important questions, while that of Bédier does not. For all these reasons classicists are likely to be receptive to the "method of Lachmann", even though they do not prove that the method is methodologically correct[5].

That it is correct is a key thesis of this book. Trovato studies carefully and lucidly the method as well as the arguments of its opponents. He provides a patient, empathetic, and highly informed account of the debate unleashed by Bédier and its ramifications. He argues persuasively that even though Bédier's case against the "method of Lachmann" ultimately fails to convince, the intervention of the French scholar has been extremely useful, as it has led to a thorough revision of the method (see pp. 82-5).

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The book opens with an elegant Foreword by Michael D. Reeve, a Preface in which the author explains what led him to write this book, and an

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[4] See Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, 46-52.

[5] Here the difference between the manuscript traditions of classical Latin and Greek texts on one hand and Medieval and Renaissance ones on the other is one of scale rather than of kind. Medieval and Renaissance manuscript traditions raise the same questions, but in a less glaring way, as they do not cover so large expanses of time and do not tend to be so spectacularly corrupt.

Introduction in which he sets out some basic concepts, including textual criticism, philology, and textual corruption. The nine chapters that constitute the main body of the book fall into two parts: "Theories" (chapters 1-6) and "Practical applications" (chapters 7-9).

Chapter 1, entitled "'Lachmann's method'", sets out the history of the method, gives an account of it and of some of its key concepts, including the *stemma codicum* and the archetype, and highlights the contributions to its development by two twentieth-century classicists, Paul Maas and Giorgio Pasquali.

Chapter 2, "Bédier's schism", starts with Bédier's objections to the "method of Lachmann". In response, the author gives a convincing solution to the problem that was pointed out by Bédier: the prevalence of bipartite *stemmata* can be explained as a consequence of decimation, that is to say, through the fact that most manuscript copies of texts that existed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance have been lost. Trovato has studied this phenomenon in depth with the help of computer modelling.

The third chapter offers "A more in-depth look at some essential concepts", including the more familiar ones of textual variants and significant errors, textual contamination, and authorial variants, as well as some notions that will be unfamiliar to most classicists, such as vulgate texts and the difference between *stemmata* and real trees. A particularly useful appendix to this chapter deals with the supposed "eclecticism" of Lachmannian editions.

Here I disagree with the author's use of the criterion of the *lectio difficilior* (at pp. 117-24). According to the well-established principle of *lectio difficilior potior*, if two or more alternative transmitted readings are supported by textual witnesses of comparable authority and all are in themselves plausible but one stands out on account of an unusual feature of its style, grammar, or anything else, then this more unusual and hence "more difficult" reading is likely to be correct. This is based on the principle of *utrum in alterum abiturum erat?* ("which of the two [readings] was bound to produce the other one?") and on the recognition that textual corruption often involves banalization, i.e. the replacement of a more difficult textual element by a more straightforward one. (Here "difficult" and "straightforward" should be viewed from the perspective of the scribes responsible for the transmission of the text.) This conventional use of the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* involves choosing between several transmitted readings. But Trovato quotes approvingly Gianfranco Contini, who describes how Tobler conjectured a *lectio difficilior* in the *Life of St Alexis* (pp. 119-20). Tobler's brilliant conjecture relies on the same concept of banalization. Yet the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* does not apply here, as what is at stake is not the choice between several transmitted readings of roughly equal authority, but between the transmitted text and a conjecture. Such a conjecture can be truly *difficilior* without being *potior*, for example if the transmitted text is genuine.

If the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* would apply to conjectures as well, then we could start hunting for apparent *lectiones faciliores* in our texts and emend them away, even though most of them are bound to be correctly transmitted readings rather than banalizations of the original. The concept of *lectio difficilior potior* (if not the very phrase) was already abused in this way by humanists such as Scaliger, who argued along these lines for a number of perversely difficult but ultimately unconvincing conjectures with which they could show off their recondite learning. In short, it is best to limit the concept of *lectio difficilior* to transmitted readings, to which we can reasonably apply the principle of *lectio difficilior potior*.

Chapter 4, "Highs and lows of computer-assisted stemmatics", constitutes something of a cuckoo's egg in this book: rather than providing an overview of certain methods or theories of editing, it offers a reasoned history of some of the most significant attempts that have been made to date to map out the *stemma codicum* of a text by feeding its witnesses into a computer. This is a field still very much in development, a situation that is not likely to change any time soon, given the methodological obstacles faced by its practitioners; but it absolutely deserves to be discussed in a comprehensive handbook of textual criticism, if only in order to provide some criteria for assessing the often dauntingly technical work of digital editors. The hero of this chapter is the Dutch scholar Ben Salemans, aptly described as a "computer-using Neo-Lachmannian editor" (p. 219) and commended for "an uncommon ability to make the most of all his traditional philological knowledge without giving up the advantages offered by the new technologies" (p. 222).

At the start of chapter 5, entitled "The criticism of linguistic features in multiple-witness traditions", Trovato helpfully distinguishes the core, "the original language of a text", from its patina, "the linguistic sedimentation that is certainly due to the copyists" (see p. 231). The task of an editor would seem straightforward: to remove the patina and restore the core, as far as possible. In view of that, and of Trovato's powerful advocacy of Lachmannism throughout the rest of the book, it may come as a surprise that the solution he recommends is "to choose as a base manuscript or copy text … a ms. as close as possible, both from a geo-linguistic and a chronological standpoint, to the author's language" and, other things being equal, high up in the stemma (p. 232). This is very close to the method that was recommended by Bédier for editing all aspects of the text, and not just its superficial linguistic features. It may seem a reasonable solution for early Romance texts and others "written in 'living' languages, … because … the copyists continually modify the language (and sometimes also the style) of these texts, adapting them to the usage of their time and region" (pp. 229-30). But one could easily imagine at least three other approaches, namely reconstructing the linguistic features of the original on historical grounds, using the "method of Lachmann" to reconstruct the linguistic features of the

archetype, and trawling the authoritative manuscripts for linguistic relics of the original. In fact two of the examples put forward by Trovato involve a combination of these methods: the case of thirteenth-century Sicilian poetry and that of the *Nencia da Barberino* "which is, linguistically, a parody of the vernacular of [the] Mugello", where "Sicilian or Mugellan forms are found, more or less regularly, in both branches of these traditions" (p. 235). It would have been good to compare the benefits of this approach with the copy-text method. Trovato's unstated view seems to be that the original forms should be reconstructed where we have good grounds for doing so, but where we do not, the copy-text method should be followed.

That is perhaps a reasonable position to adopt in the case of Romance texts, but Latinists will hardly need to be reminded that the linguistic features of classical Latin literary texts are never restored according to the copy-text method[6]. Their most authoritative manuscript witnesses often come from the Middle Ages and they are full of late or specifically Medieval forms such as *hyemps*, *michi*, and *rede* (for *raedae*), so it would be gravely anachronistic to use them as copy-text. However, the reconstructed Latin spelling that has been used in most recent critical editions is also mildly anachronistic, as it is classical but slightly late, appropriate perhaps for Quintilian but not for Virgil, who must have written *quoi* not *qui* and *caussa* not *causa*, and even less so for Plautus, who must have written *deicere* not *dicere*. But the spelling of classical Latin was fluid even within one temporal or cultural context: Roman inscriptions often show a notable degree of inconsistency in their use of forms such as *ni*, *nei*, and *ne*; the Roman grammarians who write about spelling often contradict each other; and the evidence that we have for the spelling habits of individual Roman authors is minimal, as the surviving manuscripts of classical texts tend to go back to a fairly late archetype, and even if they conserve archaic spelling variants or other unusual features, we cannot tell whether these were introduced by an author or by a later archaizing scribe. So the use of a consistent spelling for classical Latin texts may itself be an anachronism—but it is clearly desirable in a scholarly edition. Editors can choose to follow the later Imperial Latin spelling conventions currently in use, or they may reasonably decide to restore the spelling current at the time a text was written, especially if it is supported by the textual witnesses. The latter approach seems especially well suited to the literature of the third and second centuries BC. On the other hand, editors of classical Latin texts are lucky in that the literary language was fairly homogeneous, so there tends to be little space for doubt regarding matters such as morphology.

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[6] The case of ancient Greek literature is more complex, as its current editors use forms (notably accents) that are postclassical, but are eminently useful in that they represent authentic features of the classical language.

The theoretical part of the book is rounded off by Chapter 6, "The ineluctability of critical judgment (choice out of variants, conjecture)", in which Trovato discusses the implications of working towards a reconstructed text. It was already noted by Contini that a critical edition is a "working hypothesis" (p. 85). Trovato proceeds to discuss the theory and practice of choosing from several variants and of emending the transmitted text, and provides a number of illuminating examples of how this can be done.

The second part of the volume is devoted to practical applications of the "method of Lachmann". It consists of three chapters that present three textual transmissions, arranged in an increasing order of difficulty. In Chapter 7 Trovato reconstructs on the basis of partial data the *stemma codicum* of the twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Tractatus de locis et statu sancte terre Jerosolimitane.* He also devotes attention to the date and origins of this text, a question that is bound up with one's assessment of the individual witnesses.—The tradition of medium difficulty studied in Chapter 8 is that of Jean Renart's *Lai de l'ombre*, which led Bédier to field his famous attack on Lachmannism in 1928. In a spectacular feat of scholarship, Trovato presents a new and highly convincing *stemma codicum* for this controversial text[7].—In the first two chapters of this section, Trovato offers a full account of how he has drawn up his *stemma.* The third chapter discusses in less detail a long text with a complex transmission that has given rise to a considerable amount of secondary literature. The author understandably limits himself to presenting an outline of the debate and the *status quaestionis*, before setting out some of the results of the researchers who have been studying this text under his leadership. The text in question is Dante's *Commedia.* Its transmission is especially interesting as it is very rich and thoroughly contaminated, and it shows how a vulgate can displace earlier versions of a text.

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The complex subject-matter of this volume is presented lucidly and elegantly. The book was written in Italian, translated into English by Federico Poole, and revised by Michael D. Reeve (see p. 25). The result is a clear and enjoyable text that still has a handful of rough patches and Italicisms[8] that may be the inevitable consequence of bringing out an English translation with a non-Anglophone publisher—but would a big international publishing

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[7] He discusses this tradition in detail in "La tradizione manoscritta del *Lai de l'ombre.* Riflessioni sulle tecniche d'edizione primonovecentesche", *Romania* 131, 2013, 338-80.

[8] E.g. p. 83 "an essay … whose title"; p. 92 "a decidedly brief summary" (evidently for "decisamente breve"); p. 134 "conforting"; p. 161 "to be able of applying"; p. 253 "self-irony is without question"; p. 255 "texts by modest personalities" (evidently for "persone modeste" or something similar); p. 257 "the knight ingenuously declares" (instead of "ingeniously").

house have accepted such an unconventional volume? Typographical errors are rare[9], as are outright mistakes[10].

One slight inconsistency calls for special comment. On page 129 Trovato quotes a famous sentence from Paul Maas' *Textkritik* in the translation of Barbara Flower as "No specific has yet been discovered against contamination", and in its German original as "Gegen die Kontamination ist kein Kraut gewachsen"[11]. The two versions of this sentence do not mean the same: the original categorically rules out the possibility of a remedy for textual contamination, while the translation merely states that no such remedy has been found yet. Is there a mistake in one of the two? The answer is no. Flower's translation of 1958 was based not on the third edition of *Textkritik*, quoted by Trovato, which appeared in 1957, but on the second edition, which came out in 1950[12]. There the sentence reads "Gegen die Kontamination ist noch kein Kraut gewachsen"[13]. The adverb "noch" was dropped in the edition of 1957, as Maas appears to have become more sceptical about the possibility of finding a remedy for textual contamination[14].

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[9] E.g. p. 72 "*itali*"; p. 81 "one of Bédier´s last essay"; p. 83 "method, in" with misplaced comma; *ibid.* "Bédier," for "Bédier),"; p. 84 "avec una partie" in a French quotation, evidently Italianized by a computer; p. 86 "1400, that is, <the start of> the golden century"; *ibid.* "frames, confirms" with misplaced comma; p. 87 "fotograph"; p. 101 "time"." for "time")."; p. 103 "<based> on ms. E"; p. 120 "The legitimacy of <a> *difficilior* conjecture"; p. 153 "for examples".

[10] On p. 15 the archetype is defined as "by definition lost", but what about the cases in which it survives, or there is a *codex unicus*?—On p. 41, line 12 "context" should presumably read "contents".—The "method of Lachmann" was not only developed in "late eighteenth [sic] and early nineteenth-century Germany" (p. 50), but in continental Europe, with contributions from scholars based in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland.—The lacuna in the *Tresor* of Brunetto Latini that is described on p. 258 belongs not in section 6.2, headed "Identifying the correct reading out of competing variants", but in 6.3, which is headed "The emendation of the archetype (or of the single witness)".

[11] P. Maas, *Textual Criticism*, transl. B. Flower, Oxford 1958, 49 (not 62, as indicated by Trovato); P. Maas, *Textkritik*, Leipzig 1957³, 34 (not 31).

[12] In his Preface to Flower's translation, Maas states that the "translation was originally made from the second (1949) German edition, but … occasion has been taken to include the changes incorporated in the third (1957) German edition". In fact the second edition appeared in 1950. Flower could not oversee the revision of her translation because, as is noted by Maas, she passed away in 1955; so it need not surprise that not all the innovations of the 1957 edition appear in the published version of her translation.

[13] P. Maas, *Textkritik*, Leipzig 1950², 31.

[14] Thus already E. Montanari, *La critica del testo secondo Paul Maas. Testo e commento*, Florence 2003, 415.

All in all, this elegant volume is bound to offer new insights not only to its intended public (scholars unfamiliar with, or hostile to, the "method of Lachmann"), but also to anyone interested in manuscript traditions and textual criticism. It deserves to be read by every textual scholar.

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