

**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*, 2nd ed., Storie e linguaggi 7, Padova: libreriauniversitaria.it edizioni, 2017. ISBN 978-88-6292-528-0. €28.40 [paperback]/\$25.57 [ebook].**

- [1] Paolo Trovato's work is issued in print (2014, 2017) and electronic book format (2017).<sup>1</sup> The layout is crisp, sober, modern, and elegant, and although the electronic version is well conceived, the figures, stemmata, and bibliographical notes are visually slightly more pleasing in the printed version—the electronic version, on the other hand, has the advantage of being fully searchable and scalable. The revised, second edition includes a postface, wherein Trovato (2017, 347) claims to have included “almost no additions nor significant corrections to the substance of the book.”<sup>2</sup>
- [2] Stylistically, the book successfully infuses maturity of thought with a fluency of tone, to the effect that the reader undergoes a remarkably edifying reading experience. Trovato's presentation of the evolution of Neo-Lachmannian principles is based on sound argument, intricate reviews of relevant studies, and is furnished with appropriately proportioned and well-placed tables and figures.
- [3] One of the certain strong-points of Trovato's work is that it succeeds at meeting an intentionally broad target audience at their respective level of understanding: the structural progression of the presentation is logical, interlaced with insights directly attributable to an evidently long-standing and active exposure to the subject-matter, and furnished with well-selected, numerous leads for further reading<sup>3</sup> that are tailored to engage the general reader, fledgling scholar, and seasoned textual researcher alike. The presentation of the nuanced concepts of what constitutes a textual archetype (§1.5) is a case in point: Trovato provides clarity as to what an archetype is and what it is not in the conceptions of the different schools of thought—more importantly, he convincingly elucidates what unwanted ramifications might ensue from a nebulous conception of the term or from its indiscriminate application. More importantly, this welcome clarification directly contributes to the correct understanding of the contexts wherein the term features in secondary literature, thereby eliminating a major conceptual point of contention in the general debate held among contemporary scholars. While his observations can easily be followed by anyone sincerely interested in the subject matter, they greatly contribute to a deeper and more precise understanding even of the adept scholar.
- [4] The book is structured in two parts and is furnished with a comprehensive general index. The first part, comprising roughly 75 percent of the work, presents the theoretical

<sup>1</sup> Note that at the time of publication of this article, it appears that the revised edition of Trovato's work has been made available via amazon.com without a concomitant update of the description, which, contrary to fact, still advertises the 2014 edition.

<sup>2</sup> Trovato does mention refinements in his treatment of the term “base text” as noteworthy exception to this statement, which he chose to render as “reference manuscript for the linguistic surface” or “surface manuscript”, in the second edition of the work (347).

<sup>3</sup> To illustrate this point, let it be mentioned that Trovato lists introductions to philology and textual criticism tailored to Italian, Spanish, French, and English-speaking neophytes in the opening sections of the work whilst at the same time providing the seasoned philologist with references to little-known specialist knowledge, such as refinements in the classificatory methods of text-genealogical variants that might well advance computerized cladistic editing in the upcoming decades (Salemans 2000, 90–93).

underpinnings of textual criticism and displays a particular emphasis on the genealogical method, with the major topics sequentially discussed as follows:

- Lachmann’s method
  - Bédier’s schism
  - scrutiny of philological concepts
  - computer-assisted stemmatics
  - linguistic features in multiple-witness traditions
  - the ineluctability of critical judgment
- [5] The second part of the work demonstrates the practical application of these concepts by way of case studies of mounting degrees of complexity:
- a simple tradition: the “Tractatus de lovis et tatu sancte terre Jerosolimitane”<sup>4</sup>
  - a tradition of average difficulty: how Bédier approached Jean Renart’s “Lai de l’ombre”
  - a very complicated tradition: Dante’s “Divine Comedy”
- [6] As soon becomes apparent, the scope of the work is comprehensive and profound: Trovato shows the historical developments of the stemmatic and best-text schools of thought; discusses concepts pivotal to the dependable establishment of manuscript relations with considerable detail; does not shy away from highlighting how ancillary questions, such as the scope and significance of authorial intent, impact the theoretical edifice; and provides surprising ancillary details on generally well-known notions. For example, at §I.3.2, Trovato traces back the concept of *lectio difficilior* (“the more difficult reading [is generally preferable]”) to a fully formulated conceptual precursor in Jean Le Clerc’s *Ars critica*, which was published already in 1696 CE.
- [7] Trovato highlights points of contention in the philological discourse, offers insightful ideas that contribute to their resolution, and in doing so presents a remarkable overview over the stemmatic method, Bédieriste objection, and subsequent Neo-Lachmannian innovation. Chapter 3, in particular, offers a “more in-depth look at some essential concepts” and hence draws attention to essential theoretical advancements that will prove to be invaluable assets to any scholar seriously engaged in the pursuit of the steady sharpening of one’s methodological acuity. The following might be cited as illustrative examples:
- §I.3.1 discusses the necessity—and mode—of clear differentiation between a (simple) “variant” and truly a “significant” error;
  - §I.3.4 outlines the distinctions between “contamination” and “extra-stemmatic contamination”;
  - late sections of the chapter discuss cases “in which the genealogical method cannot be applied unless with special adaptations” or where it cannot be fruitfully applied at all (authorial variants).
- [8] What surprised the reviewer, however, is that although eclecticism is indeed cursorily discussed,<sup>5</sup> Trovato chose not to provide an extensive treatment of the school of eclecticism in his work. To the scholar’s credit, in a related electronic exchange to the reviewer, dated 6 August 2018, Trovato justifiably argued that “eclecticism is a term which would require a book” and pointed to the fact that eclecticism was understood by Bédier as something of a euphemism for an unstructured, unscientific, and ahistorical approach to critical editing, as attested to in Trovato (2014, *e-book pos.* 4415–, 4454–). If the eclectic

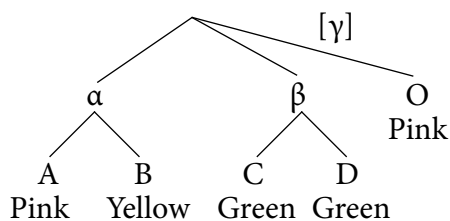
<sup>4</sup> Consult Trovato’s reassessment from the year 2018 for a recent reassessment of text-critical and historical aspects of this work.

<sup>5</sup> Consult Trovato (2017, 174–78) in the main body of the work, as well as appendix 3.10.2: “Appendix 2. ‘Composite’, ‘hybrid’, ‘eclectic’ texts. On the so-called ‘eclecticism’ of reconstructive editions” (Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 4387–).

approach is understood in Bédier's façon, it is perfectly understandable that no further, extensive extrapolation ensues in Trovato's work.

- [9] On the other hand, as Trovato kindly shared with the author of this review, Timpanaro (2005, 159) distinguished between a “random and irrational eclecticism” and a sensible counterpart, “which is based on rational argument and therefore ... not eclectic in the pejorative sense.” Eclecticism in this latter sense might have been gainfully included slightly more extensively in Trovato's expert discussion.
- [10] In defense of Trovato's choice not to include a chapter on the influence of eclecticism on the development of Neo-Lachmannian thought, it needs to be said that, in his own work, Trovato appears to draw on the full range of the eclectic toolkit and seems to fall back on stemmatic evidence in cases that are otherwise inconclusive. This implies, at least to the present reviewer, that a certain degree of theoretical synopsis has induced Trovato to deemphasize the discrepancies between the eclectic and stemmatic approaches. After all, his illuminating electronic communication, dated 8 August 2018, mentions an “inherent eclecticism inbuilt in the stemmatic approach”; since there are attested cases where the stemmatic editor, too, would suspend the “majority rule”<sup>6</sup> in favor of a statistically less buttressed variant, it is perhaps a salient choice to perceive the wider common ground between the two approaches.
- [11] That being said, one cannot help but feel that the eclectic approach—with its obvious relevance to the history and methodology of the stemmatic school—might likewise have gainfully been included in Trovato's discussions. After all, as Tarrant (2016, 4) observed, it is “for good reasons ... [that] the eclectic approach has been the dominant model in classical editing.” As it stands, figures such as Bentley and Housman are mentioned mostly—though not exclusively—in the context of jovial rebuttal. A delightful example of a

<sup>6</sup> The “majority rule” or “majority principle” is explained clearly in Trovato 2014 (*e-book pos.* 1377–), which elucidates its mechanisms by way of a hypothetical story: “If the heroine of the story to be reconstructed wears, in a certain passage of the text—a ‘variation place’—a sweater that is pink in some copies, yellow in other, and green in still others, to choose rationally between the variants pink, yellow, and purple it is sufficient to apply the majority principle (It. legge della maggioranza). Let us assume a tripartite stemma with the following distribution:



Branch  $\gamma$  — which is worth 33% of the stemma, although it only comprises a single witness, O — has pink. Pink, however, also occurs in one of the two copies of branch  $\alpha$ , namely A, which is worth half of 33%, that is, 16.5%. The variants green and yellow are worth, respectively, 33% and 16.5%. On the strength of the majority principle, pink, which is worth  $33 + 16.5 = 49.5\%$ , is the variant most likely to derive from the vertex, i.e. the archetype, and it is legitimate to assume that the two remaining variants were intentionally or unintentionally introduced, respectively, in  $\beta$  (green) and B (yellow). As we have seen, by ‘majority’ here what is meant is **not the majority of all the mss.**, or all the branches, **but a qualified majority**, so to speak. Only primary branches count, that is, those that branch out from the vertex. If we follow this method, a relatively low number of significant errors—as long as they are sufficient for building a *stemma codicum*—will allow us to rationally choose the most likely alternative among innumerable equally acceptable variants in the text” (*emphasis added*).

typically light-hearted rejoinder to such editors is Trovato's riposte to Housman's statement (1972, 1058), that

a man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises or lectures on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself.

- [12] Trovato (2014, e-book pos. 563–), undaunted by Housman's stature and at times blistering brilliance,<sup>7</sup> wittily retorts with unswerving aplomb that

Housman is obviously overlooking the fact that someone endowed with these faculties—common sense, the use of reason, leisure and industry—could reinvent many things, from the wheel up, or rewrite many chapters in modern medicine manuals.

- [13] Trovato's retort drives home a point which the Italian scholar makes at a later stage in his book, that for too long, critics of the stemmatic approach have bathed and languished in the excellence of their predecessors, their own arguments thereby ineluctably declining in depth and contour over the years whilst all the while the Neo-Lachmannian school underwent a noteworthy process of refinement of their outlook and critical procedure.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Trovato points to the fact that, even in contemporary scholarly literature, the stemmatic approach is recurrently misrepresented or described as defective in ways that appear plausible only against the backdrop of gross oversimplification.<sup>9</sup> The kernel of truth inhering in these statements, coupled with the exposition of Trovato's work leads one to consider, with some awe, the degree to which the stemmaticists' process of refinement has been indeed thorough and effective, since it can most certainly enrich the analytical framework under which we engage primary source material transmitted on a perishable basis.

- [14] While the humorous streak in the engagement of objections launched against the Neo-Lachmannian school enlivens the discussion, Trovato does not use it in order to discredit the plausibility of the objection or as an underhand way of dismissing the content of the criticism they contain. Rather, it would be fair to say that he proceeds with a noteworthy degree of diligence in addressing the issues raised.

<sup>7</sup> Let it be mentioned that Housman, to whose ideas the reviewer is admittedly somewhat receptive, displays intermittent bouts of empathy with scholars whom he deems deserving, though not overtly so. For example, Housman delivers his praise of Lachmann's "first scientific recension of Propertius" in an indirect fashion, by enveloping it in a dismissal of the philological capacity of Lachmann's predecessors, whose situation he likens to "the condition of mankind before the advent of Prometheus" (1972, 233). Meanwhile, Housman's mature works and lectures, such as the opening remarks of his Leslie Stephen-lecture (1933, 5), betray a genuine streak of humility and are delivered with a healthy dose of self-deprecatory irony. Despite his rarer, more benign proclivities, however, less fortunate scholars, such as Elias Stoeber, are at times treated with comparatively less ample amounts of courtesy: "Stoeber's mind, though that is no name to call it by, was one which turned as unswervingly to the false, the meaningless, the unmetrical, and the ungrammatical, as the needle to the pole" (Housman as quoted on p. 21 in Tarrant's work of 2016).

<sup>8</sup> This criticism is not only directed at the eclectic school, but also "against the Bédierism of Bédier's followers, who, unlike the Master, lacked the necessary competence to choose the best manuscript in a tradition." Trovato (2014, e-book pos. 2265–) here is paraphrasing Contini's encyclopædia entry on "Filologia."

<sup>9</sup> In Trovato's (2014, e-book pos. 1249) estimation, examples "of erroneous or imprecise descriptions of the common-error method include: Dearing, 5; Van Mulken, *The Manuscript Tradition of the Perceval*, 13ff.; Robinson, 'Computer-Assisted Stemmatic Analysis', 72–73" and other contemporary works.

[15] To some extent, in a fair number of instances Trovato offers explanations of empirical nature that successfully relativize the empirical leverage of each of these objections raised against the stemmatic method without, however, at least in the estimation of the present reviewer, satisfactorily solving the underlying theoretical difficulty<sup>10</sup>—that being said, it might indeed be argued that a theoretical difficulty with minimal practical impact is indeed not crucial to fully resolve.<sup>11</sup> To cite a conspicuous example, Grier (1988) doubts that each manuscript-scribe made “monogenetic,” genealogically “indicative errors,” or, in his words, “firm detectable errors, in every text he copied.” As a corollary, Grier argues that in the absence of such certainty, “the entire fabric of the common-error method collapses.” Although Trovato’s reply, based on probability calculus and empirical evidence he considers to have been “confirmed experimentally by Kantorowicz, Pasquali and Peri (Pflaum),”<sup>12</sup> does not fail to convince that, for all practical purposes, Grier’s contention does not throw a wrench in the works of the common-error method, he does not offer a full theoretical dissolution of the problem. Trovato explained his rationale for taking this particular approach to address Grier’s objection by way of electronic communication to the reviewer, dated 8 August 2018, wherein the scholar shared his perception that it

is very easy to imagine exceptional situations which you can not treat (even in medicine), but I find more important to explain the normal situation. Normally scribes were paid (very poorly) for completing a quire or half a quire every day. No Maas explained to them that their first duty was correcting the text. Of course there are also learned scribes, geniuses etc. But they are the exception.

[16] While the reviewer is not intimately acquainted with the work of Grier and might hence be imputing a sense that was not originally intended, the much more significant aspect of the latter’s objection appears to be the question regarding the uncompromised dependability of the indicative potency of the error—here somewhat ambiguously termed “firmness.” If we were attempting to define that necessary firmness of an error somewhat more precisely, we could take it to mean its being so constituted as to rule out the possibility of any of the following scenarios being applicable:

- contamination<sup>13</sup> has occurred,

<sup>10</sup> A common criticism of the genealogical approach is that it draws conclusions regarding manuscript relations based on a distorted and incomplete set of data. While Trovato (2014, *e-book pos.* 2009) acknowledges this as a methodological drawback, he concludes “that new witnesses found after the completion of a critical edition belong, as a rule, to the most common vulgate texts, while the discovery of ‘new’ upper-level manuscripts, such as to modify significantly the shape of the stemma, is unfortunately a rather uncommon event.”

<sup>11</sup> Note that Trovato, by way of electronic communication, dated 8 August 2018, suggested that even “in physics, there are parts of the general theory (Einstein ...) that were not explained at all” or for which “a provisional explanation [has been drawn up] only a few years or months ago. They [= the hard scientists] assume that the output is good even if not all the process is clear.”

<sup>12</sup> Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 1271–.

<sup>13</sup> Maas (1950, §6, p. 6) himself declared: “Voraussetzung ... ist, daß die seit der Hauptspaltung geschehenen Abschriften immer nur je eine Vorlage wiedergeben (d.h. daß kein Schreiber mehrere Vorlagen ineinanderarbeitet, ‘kontaminiert’).” As becomes evident from Maas’s reviews, he was aware that contamination is a frequent element yet appears to contend that it does not render the basic mechanism inoperable.



- convergence between ostensibly identically derived errors is in fact merely coincidental,<sup>14</sup> and
  - [scribal] correction is obfuscating the actual manuscript relations.
- [17] The certainty of an error's freedom from association with the above possibilities, is—as it seems—very difficult to truly vouch for, for which reason one might state that the firmness of an error always remains subject to at least some degree of healthy doubt.
- [18] Regarding the third point, the impact of scribal correction, it should be said that though scribes very likely, on average, commit a great number of errors, they also enact corrections. Since a [successful] correction, like an error, manifests as textual deviation from the source, it can be misapprehended by the editor as deprecation to be discarded when in fact it mirrors the state of the original text (more closely) than its source text. The ensuing corollaries can prove decidedly disruptive not only to the accuracy of the hypothesis regarding given manuscript relations, but they might be seen to obviate the very *raison d'être* of the stemmatic pursuit: why exert analytical effort to construe a hypothesis regarding manuscript relations that allows one to single out and eliminate *descripti* if these *eliminandi* can, in individual instances, contain (more) original readings than the remaining witnesses or even the (hyp)archetypes reconstructed on their basis?
- [19] A further objection that the Neo-Lachmannian approach would have to address is aimed against the contention prevalent amongst its proponents that a stemma—fundamentally a hypothesis regarding likely manuscript relations—provides “an objective and mechanical tool.”<sup>15</sup> However, it appears instead to be the case that, though admittedly guided by rational principles, stemmata remain fully dependent on the subjective judgment, experience, and capacity of the (team of) editor(s) who set(s) out to construe them. Trovato kindly took the time and effort to address the issue of inherent subjectivity by way of electronic communication, dated 8 August 2018, wherein he stated that his research suggests that Contini was very much aware of the subjective nature of textual criticism of any ilk. In fact, Trovato argues that the Contini
- is famous for writing and saying ... that any edition is simply a “working hypothesis”. In the sequence you criticize ([in my humble opinion] too heavily), he simply claims that the (logic of the) stemma is an objective tool, and this seems correct even if there are many cases in which we do not apply the majority rule. As Pasquali said, T[extual] C[riticism] is not mechanic, [it] is methodic.
- [20] While the reader will be certain to find an intricate treatment of all these objections in the book,<sup>16</sup> the reviewer shall, for fear of excessive words, limit himself to a short discussion

<sup>14</sup> To strip an objection with much wider connotations of all its secondary implications, let the gist of the critique be presented as the fact that it is not necessarily the case that identical errors in disparate textual versions of a possibly identical branch of textual transmission indicate a shared source; after all, mistakes can occur independently. It is hence possible to doubt that there are truly “monogenetic” errors that stemmatic theory commonly presents as indicative of manuscript relations.

<sup>15</sup> Contini (2007) “Frammenti di filologia romanza”, quoted in Trovato (2014, *e-book pos.* 1326). To quote Contini in full: “Stemmata are an objective and mechanical tool, invented to sort out, in the first instance, the quarrel between variants that are in themselves equally acceptable.”

<sup>16</sup> Trovato addresses the problem of contamination particularly at §I.3.4, among other places. The problem of “coincidental convergence” is addressed in the distinctions drawn between “monogenetic” and “polygenetic” error, the latter being an error “that several copyists could have made independently of one another” (Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 1309–). Likewise, Trovato lists acute awareness of the closely intertwined “basic notion” of “poligenetical banalization” as a neces-

of the third point as he encountered it in Trovato's exposition. As we know, "separative errors," by Paul Maas's own admission, can only be indicative of genealogical relations provided that they be "so constituted that our knowledge of the state of conjectural criticism in the period between A and B enables us to feel confident that it cannot have been removed by conjecture during that period".<sup>17</sup> As in the refutation of Grier's objection, the Neo-Lachmannian retort appears to rely somewhat more stringently on statistical probability calculus than methodological or theoretical innovation:

the existence of long series of significant errors that are not separative in the strict sense affords the critic a rather easy way around the rule, since even the most gifted conjecturer could hardly have repaired all the damage in his or her exemplar.<sup>18</sup>

- [21] The above extract might well incite us to conclude that it is on a case-to-case basis that one should assess the degree to which the possibility of scribal correction might impact the process of forming hypotheses regarding manuscript relations.
- [22] It remains to be explained, however, how the stemmaticist can, in good conscience, dismiss apographs of extant, accessible textual versions if the possibility cannot be ruled out that the latter might contain superior readings, arrived at by way of scribal correction during the process of scribal transmission. That being said, it needs to be mentioned in defense both of the modern Neo-Lachmannian approach in general and Trovato's innovative employment thereof in particular, that the stemmaticist following Trovato's exposition is extremely thorough and is required to read each manuscript in its entirety—including each variation place—at least once. As a result, each variation, even before the process of *eliminatio* is incepted, is theoretically noted before dismissal. This fact, coupled with the possibility for suspension of the majority principle when warranted, drastically diminishes the potential impact the theoretical objections presently discussed might otherwise have on the actual practical execution of Trovato's Neo-Lachmannian approach.
- [23] Let it be noted in closing that what truly sets apart this work from comparable contributions is the second section of the book, wherein Trovato lets the reader "peek over his shoulder" during the process of identifying strategic, tactical, and logical errors, as well as fateful omissions and instances of sheer misunderstanding, in previous scholars' approaches to manuscript traditions.<sup>19</sup> This truly invaluable section allows us to witness philological scrutiny as it happens and enables us to directly profit from Trovato's expertise at work. For that opportunity alone, the work is viewed by the present reviewer as a

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sary prerequisite for successful editorial assessment and processing of random convergence. This possibility of "banalization" might well oblige "you to prefer a reading which has no majority (of primary branches). But in the last case you must be able to explain why reading A (which has the majority) is more banal than reading B" (electronic communication, 8 August 2018). Note that "poligenetical banalization" in Trovato's publication—both electronic and in hardcopy format—is treated as coterminous with "trivialization," which latter term is employed somewhat more oftentimes therein and would yield higher search results for any researcher interested in this particular aspect of the theory.

<sup>17</sup> Maas and Flower (1958) cited in Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 1309–.

<sup>18</sup> Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 1311–.

<sup>19</sup> Note that with mounting complexity of the manuscript transmission under scrutiny, Trovato increasingly emphasises salient features and strongpoints in the fabric of earlier studies. Thus, while he rightly points out factual shortcomings in Kedar (2006), delineating possible ways of mitigation, he gives credit to the "remarkable features of Moores's approach" (Trovato 2014, *e-book pos.* 7574–) and other greats working on Dante's 'Divine Comedy'.

highly commendable asset to any researcher working with primary sources transmitted on perishable bases and will hopefully be increasingly consulted by a rising number of academics whose work is contingent on the accurate, historical evaluation of text and the textual transmission of its subject matter.

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