

Richard Moll – English 9002A – October 28, 2013
Medieval Editing

reading: Anne Hudson, "Middle English," in *Editing Medieval Texts: English, French, and Latin Written in England*, edited by A.G. Rigg (New York: AMS Press, 1977), pp. 34-57

18th century:

Thomas Hearne's edition of Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* (1724)

—Hearne mentions Robert of Gloucester's "prose additions" but says they are unimportant because he was only interested in words that differ between the prose additions and the main text. He wasn't interested in the additions as new text.

—There are also verse additions that Hearne also wasn't interested in and doesn't mention.

Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)

Joseph Ritson's edition of *Robin Hood Tales* (1795)

—edition as antiquarian artifact

19th century:

bibliographic clubs: editions by and for club members

—Roxburghe Club (1812): around 30-40 members – first edition done for club in 1818, edition of William Caxton's *Ovid* in 1819 – editions of 100 copies: 2 for each member + 20 for UK libraries

—Bannatyne Club founded in 1823 by Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh (lasted to 1861) – first attempts to represent medieval texts in their original form

—Frederick Madden edits *Havelock the Dane* (1828) – serious scholar; hired and paid to do it

—Madden edited *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for the Bannatyne Club in 1839 – goal of representing the manuscript as closely as he can

—typically no glossary, emendations, notes; many transcription errors; very brief introductions – often use Black-Letter font

societies:

—Early English Text Society (EETS): founded in 1864 by Frederick Furnivall and others

—desire to make medieval editing more regular – some glossaries but editors had no good etymological dictionary of English available to work with – in the 1830s a *Grammar of Old English* by Rasmus Rask was translated from Danish to English (Rask also discovered the linguistic principle now known as Grimm's Law – it explains the relationship between consonants in Germanic and Romance languages)

—in early days, tried to solve textual problems via correspondence with friends and colleagues

—society still exists – still no standard editing policy; each editor uses own method – some = try to reconstruct authorial intent; others = stemmatics: work backwards to recreate original text

20th century – various methods of editing medieval texts:

1) stemmatics: editing via a stemma: work backwards to recreate original text – attempt to recreate not the fair copy (what the author wrote) but the archetype (earliest witness that the editor can get to via reconstruction) (see page 3 for a hypothetical stemma)

[*Sir Gawain*, and all surviving Old English verse, exists in only one surviving manuscript, so stemmatics can't apply to these texts]

- 2) an eclectic edition, as in *Piers Plowman* (1960, 1975), edited by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson – text taken from dozen or so surviving witnesses in attempt to get closer to original text – controversial assumption that no surviving manuscript is authoritative or more authoritative than another and editors' assumption that they understand Langland so well that they can decide what words go where – results in eclectic text + impenetrable apparatus makes it impossible to reconstruct what any surviving manuscript looked like
- 3) something like copy-text editing: transcribe surviving MSS, take one with fewest errors, emend using other MSS – choose as copy-text the MS that is as close as possible to the archetype (not closest chronologically but fewest errors according to your understanding of error)
- 4) a variation of copy-text editing: edit not to get closer to lost original text but to offer an accurate version of what one scribe produced – use other witnesses (other surviving MSS) to correct obvious errors or (sometimes) for convenience of reader
- 5) use one surviving MS to correct another and indicate variations in margin – variations = scribal error or scribal intervention?
—example: edition of Robert Mannyng (chronicler from 1330s), ed. Idelle Sullens (1996): two MSS, base text of poem printed with variants printed to right of poem: perhaps more efficient way of doing facing-page edition
- 6) if two MSS are so unlike each other that they can't be collated, print separate plain-text edition of each MS – or facing-page edition for easy comparison
—example: *Awntyrs of Arthur*: four surviving MSS, all four corresponding pages printed on same page

why the problems?

—paleography: the handwriting is difficult

—authorial MSS have rarely survived

—multiple copies survive but with scribal errors and transcription mistakes

—various kinds of corruptions

—stemmatics often break down, especially if a scribe apparently looked at a different MS from the one he was mainly copying from in response to a problem

—pages could get mixed up and out of order

—stemmatics remains the norm for Middle English editing work, but more copy-text approaches to editing have become prominent

examples of problems in William Caxton's English translation of Ovid (*The Ovide Moralisé*)
translated from French prose version

1) missing word

2) mistranslation

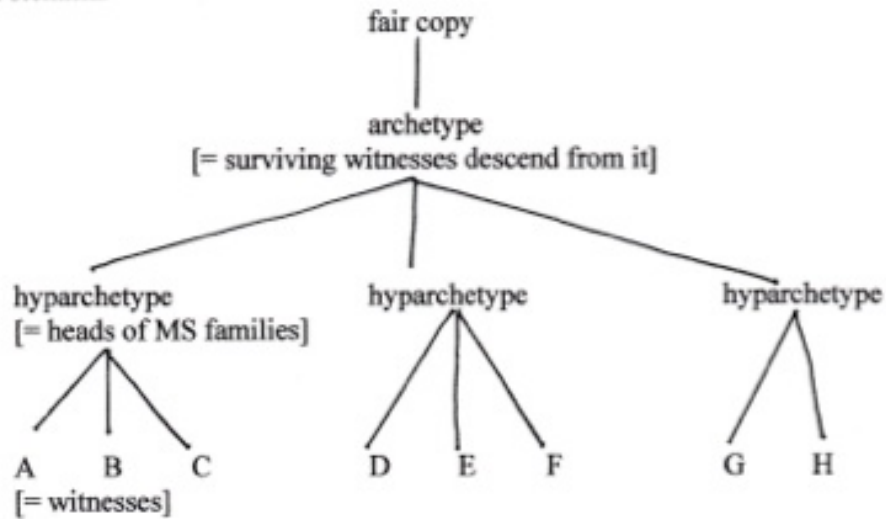
3) eyeskip

4) complicated punctuation

from poem *Sir Orfeo*: 5) verse emendation

from Caxton's Malory: 6) punctuation

a hypothetical stemma:



fair copy = work in author's hand, hardly ever survives

archetype = the copy that the surviving copies all ultimately derive from – also often doesn't survive – probably not the author's copy

hyparchetype = head of a group of MSS – reconstruct via “shared error”