# Bédier's Contribution to the Accomplishment of Stemmatic Method

An Italian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

This paper is concerned with an aspects of Bédier's legacy, possibly the least known in the English-speaking world. Bédier's works of 1913 and 1928–29 did not just create a schism in the apparently peaceful context of textual scholarship: through his statements, critical editions produced with a single copy-text regained the academic prestige that Gaston Parisadaptations of stemmatic method had taken away from them. Since then, Bédier's objections have also forced meticulous textual critics to rethink their editorial practice: though retaining the method of shared errors, such scholars (often scarcely known outside Italy) have brought important progress in the methods of textual criticism.

As a reaction against purely mechanical rules for recovering the original of a text from revised and re-revised manuscripts his [i.e. Bédier's] protest was wholesome: no one today would wish or dare to revive the system of Wendelin Foerster in editing the works of Chrétien de Troyes. But to find in this a justification for neglecting intensive comparative study of manuscripts, and for uniformly renouncing efforts to arrive closer than one or another of those manuscripts to the text of the original author, is another matter. Bédier has not, as some may have thought, hewn down at the root the 'manuscript tree'; he did, however, effectively prune from it a number of diseased offshoots. (ARMSTRONG et al. 1939, 412)

1. A less concise version of this paper, delivered to the International Conference of the Society for Textual Scholarship (Seattle, March 20–22 2014), is found in TROVATO 2014, (chapter 4, "Bèdier's schism").

1. Between the late 1920s and early 1930s, genealogical criticism seemed to be faring very well. In 1927 Maas had reformulated with remarkable effectiveness most of the ground principles of the method in a set of brief and clear rules. In 1934, Pasquali had boldly expanded the field of philological inquiry to areas Maas had excluded, but which some Italianists investigated in depth, such as authorial variants (MAAS 1958 [1927]; PASQUALI 1952 [1934]). However, as early as 1913 and, more effectively, in 1928, one of the most renowned French scholars, Joseph Bédier (Paris, 1864–Le Grand-Serre, 1938) expressed a number of often radical perplexities regarding the genealogical-reconstructive method developed by German scholars; which, incidentally, was the method used by his mentor Gaston Paris, as well as by dozens of editors who followed in Paris's wake, albeit sometimes in a naïve and excessively mechanical way.

Although today, a century later, we can prove that Bédier's principal objections were unfounded, the prestige of the great scholar and his extraordinary gift for argumentation brought on an irremediable schism in the relatively peaceful world of scholarly editors. While classicists and Italian Romance philologists remained essentially unaffected, a number of scholars all over the world (francophone Romance philologists, Biblical philologists, etc.) rejected the common-error method.

Nevertheless, the questions raised by Bédier, which are intimately connected to the methodological refinements introduced from 1928 to the present day to refute his criticism, remain of the highest interest.

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In 1890, Bédier published, in the manner of Gaston Paris, a short poem by Jean Renart, the *Lai de l'ombre*. The two-branched stemma he proposed,



(Bédier 1890)

was immediately rejected by Paris in an overall very laudatory review, where he proposed, however, a three-branched stemma:



(Paris 1890).

The fact that two competent editors employing the same method although sometimes in ways we would today call naïve—ended up reconstructing two different stemmata, with all the implications that the shape of a stemma has for the reconstruction of a text, led Bédier to radically rethink his approach (BÉDIER 1913; BÉDIER 1928–1929).

The strongest argument against the genealogical method, known as Bédier's Paradox, is the fact that, out of 110 stemmata of French manuscript traditions Bédier examined, 105 were two-branched. In his own words:

Tous sont pareils, ou du moins 105 sur 110 sont pareils. D'où une loi, qui peut s'exprimer ainsi: dans la flore philologique, il n'y a d'arbres que d'une seule essence: toujours le tronc s'en divise en deux branches maîtresses, et en deux seulement [. . .]. Tout philologue qui publie un texte après étude des copies diversement altérées que nous en avons, arrive fatalement à se persuader que ces copies, si nombreuses qu'elles puissent être, ont dérivé de l'original par l'intermédiaire de deux copies perdues, w et z, et de ces deux-là seulement [. . .]. Un arbre bifide n'a rien d'étrange, mais un bosquet d'arbres bifides, un bois, une forêt? *Silva portentosa*" (BÉDIER 1928–1929, 11–12).

At any rate, Bédier's conclusion was that those trees were not originally two-branched, but, as we shall see more clearly below, had been reduced to that condition, albeit unconsciously, by philologists themselves: "Nos arbres bifides n'ont pas tous poussé tels quels; ce sont, pour la plupart, des arbres ébranchés . . ." (Bédier 1928–1929, 12–13).

2. One of Bédier's most cutting objections to Gaston Paris's method is the above-mentioned accusation of, so to speak, therapeutic or rather philological excess. Philologists, Bédier argued, hunted for alleged conjunctive errors until they obtained a two-branched tree. This allowed them, by a back door, to introduce the subjectivity and freedom to choose between competing readings that the iron rule of majority had driven out the door. In sum, Bédier sees the prevalence of two-branched stemmata as a mainly ideological, or even psychological problem.

Actually, Bédier's own brilliant essay of 1928 lends itself to (broadly speaking) a psychoanalytical interpretation. It is indeed an out-and-out act of rebellion against his academic father, Gaston Paris, with the usual attending self-censorship and denial. One only needs to consider that Bédier constantly refers to Paris's method as "la méthode de Lachmann" [Lachmann's method] — a designation that was to become immensely popular in the twentieth century and is still found in many textual criticism manuals. Now — as Sebastiano Timpanaro guessed in the 1960s and a young but already accomplished scholar, Giovanni Fiesoli, proved in 2000 — Lachmann *never* employed the common-error method, in any of the fields of study he worked in, whether in his essays on classical philology, on Biblical philology, or on Germanistics (TIMPANARO 2005 [1963]; FIESOLI 2000).

But let us return to Bédier's contribution to perfecting the genealogical method. A good starting point is an observation by Gianfranco Contini (Domodossola, 1912–1990), one of the greatest disciples of the French master and one of the main exponents of so-called Neo-Lachmannian philology (which could be roughly characterized as a method that remains faithful to the common-error method, but after taking Bédier's objections into account). In an essay of 1970, "La vita francese di Sant'Alessio e l'arte di pubblicare i testi antichi" [The French life of St. Alexis and the art of publishing ancient texts], whose title is already an evident homage to Bédier, Contini remarks that "to be Lachmannian today, it is indispensable to have gone through an Anti-Lachmannian apprenticeship (that is, Bédier) and a Post-Lachmannian experience (that is, at least in classical philology, Pasquali)" (CONTINI 1992, 68, now in CONTINI 2007, II, 958).<sup>2</sup>

2. On Contini, see Italia 2013.

of Bédier's objections to the new Lachmannism" (Contini 1992, 74, now in Contini 2007, II, 963).

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In my handbook of textual criticism, I briefly discuss the beneficial effect of Bédier's critique of the reconstructive excesses of the early generations of Romance philologists as regards the language of texts, such as, for example, Paris himself's attempt, in his *Extraits de la Chanson de Roland*, to translate into Francien the Oxford *Roland*, which is in Anglo-Norman (TROVATO 2014, chapter 5).<sup>3</sup>

As regards textual substance, Rajna's position in an essay of the same year, 1929, is noteworthy. After carefully considering Bédier's objections, Rajna reasserts his trust in the reconstructive method ("I still find the contested method to be good"), but frankly admits that the method is of uncertain effectiveness when applied to *mixed*, that is, contaminated traditions:

We have paid too little attention to perturbing factors, such as to make the system inapplicable in a great number of cases, and we have made the serious mistake of proceeding in the same manner under very different conditions [. . ]. In mixed transmission [. . .], even when genetic relationships exist between several individuals of a lineage, these relationships become so uncertain that we should give up the notion of identifying them, and the confidence that we can use them to reconstruct the text with procedures *pour ainsi dire mathématiques*, as Paris thought he could (RAJNA 1929, 50).

In fact, after Bédier's objections to the practice of arbitrarily reconstructing texts, all of the most scrupulous Neo-Lachmannian editors, stemmatic conditions being equal, have been retaining the readings of the same base manuscript (It. *manoscritto base*) adopted for the language of the text, after the example of Occitanists. They thereby reduce recourse to the other branch(es) of the stemma to a minimum, that is, only to cases of errors in the witness adopted as the base manuscript.

Another innovation introduced under the spur of Bédier's objections is that for the majority principle to be applicable—and for having what, ever since Pasquali coined the expression, we call a "closed recension"—a three-branched stemma is not necessary. Given a two-branched stemma, it is not at all inevitable for each equally acceptable variant to be found

3. See also Trovato 2013a.

in 50% of the surviving tradition, and thus to be equally probable. On the contrary, in a significant number of cases a majority is obtained, albeit a fractional one. In the following case, e.g., the majority in favor of the reading *pink* (versus *purple*) is overwhelming, even in the absence of three branches: 75% against 25%.<sup>4</sup>



In turn, Contini replied to two very momentous objections by Bédier, viz., that the prevalence of two-branched stemmata reveals an unconscious desire for freedom of choice, and that the discovery of new witnesses can alter the stemma and thus deeply modify the text. Every critical edition, Contini observed, is simply a "working hypothesis", and the quality of results fatally depends on the quality of the documents available to the editor, which varies from one case to the other, but progressive approximation as increasingly adequate solutions are found, sometimes through the discovery of new witnesses, is a typical scientific approach (CONTINI 1992, 32–33, 73–74, now in CONTINI 2007, I, 29–30; II, 963).

3. Other advancements we can credit Neo-Lachmannian philologists with are the result of their attempts to explain the so-called "Bédier's Paradox", that is, the overwhelming prevalence of two-branched stemmata in classical and Romance philology.

Sebastiano Timpanaro already provides a number of possible partial explanations for this phenomenon, including contamination and extrastemmatic contamination, in Appendix C of his fundamental book on Lachmann's method (TIMPANARO 2005 [1963], 157–87).<sup>5</sup>

As to the issue of how the decimation of witnesses affects the so-called real tree over time, significant light has been shed on the question by two articles by the Hebrew specialist Michael Weitzman, who adopted an

- 4. "Si deux familles s'opposent, on a le droit de choisir, mais si une famille s'accorde avec una partie de l'autre famille contre l'autre partie, le calcul de probabilité impose la leçon donnée par cet accord" (COLLOMP 1931, 68).
- 5. The Appendix is entitled Stemmi bipartiti e perturbazioni della tradizione manoscritta [Bipartite Stemmas and Disturbances of the Manuscript Tradition].

experimental approach to address other crucial problems of textual criticism, such as that of "open" traditions. In his 1982 essay, Weitzman adapts a "birth-and-death process" statistical model to virtual manuscript traditions of classical texts. The instructions he gave a computer to automatically generate genealogical trees were based on the hypothesis that texts composed in 500 AD and copied until 1500 could either disappear or spawn descendants. At the beginning of each manuscript tradition (or "population"), texts could only be copied, whereas at the end of the thousand-yearperiod in question (following the spread of printed books) they could only "die". Furthermore: 1) the average size of a survived population—by analogy with various ancient Greek literary works—was set at 40 copies; 2) the average "date of birth" of exemplars had to be 1400, that is, the golden century of Humanism (as is the case for so many *recentiores* of classical literary works); 3) the rate of extinction was set at about 90%.

In 46 experiments, the computer generated 31 populations that became extinct early on, and 15 surviving populations, of various sizes and complexity. Two of these were composed, respectively, of only one and only two copies. The remaning 13, in Weitzman's own words, had the following characteristics:

In all thirteen other experiments, all the manuscripts derived from a lost archetype, i.e. their latest common ancestor (now lost) was distinct from the original. In ten experiments, the tree split thence in two branches; in the other three, it had three branches. At stages later than the archetype, rather more three-way and occasional four-way splits occurred, though most splits were still into two branches only (WEITZMAN 1982, 56).

The author observes, very reasonably in my opinion, that the high rate of lost archetypes and two-branched stemmata is explained by the high rate (90%) of extinction of individual copies. The ability of Weitzman's software program to monitor variations in a stemma over time by successive "photographic" frames, confirms indeed that the bottom reason for the prevalence of two-branched stemmata and the failure of the archetype to be preserved in Weitzman's stemmas is the high mortality rate of witnesses (entrusted, in the real world, to fragile media, such as papyrus, parchment, and paper). Notably, Weitzman shows genealogical trees of a single experiment, which captures 4 different stages in transmission between the year 941 AD and the end of the process:



In Weitzman's own words: " $\omega$  represents the lost original. All manuscripts alive at the stated time are shown, without any ring, except that four *codices descripti* in the final population ('sons' of 61 and 95, another 'son' of 95 and its own 'son') are omitted. Manuscripts fully ringed are dead; many other dead manuscripts are omitted. A dotted ring indicates a dying manuscript" (WEITZMAN 1982, 59). I corrected the last tree ("End of process") as per Weitzman's own indications (WEITZMAN 1987, 289).

I will now briefly comment on the four trees. Year 941: in spite of the disappearance of witnesses 1–9 and 11, a small two-branched tree lives on (witness 12 on one side, witnesses 10 and 13 on the other). Year 1144: the branch of 12—which had generated 15, 16, 18, 23, etc.—is almost wholly extinct, while the other branch (descended from 13) continues to thrive and reproduce. Year 1287: the first of the two branches of 941 (presumably, but not certainly, original, since transmission began in 500 AD) consists of a single, moribund copy (witness 22, a remote descendant of 12), while the other branch is still prospering, although 13 has by now become extinct. The two-branched stemma we find at the end of the process, with two sub-families per branch, is thus the result of an almost unbroken chain of transformations, including: 1) the extinction of one of the two primary branches in 941 AD); 2) the (gradual) shrinking of the most fortunate of the two initial families from 5 branches in 1144 to 3 in 1297 and 2 in 1500.

Differently from what Weitzman suggests at this point, this is a result not so much of scarce productivity of the upper levels (the real tree, which numbered 101 witnesses, was a lot larger!), but rather of loss, as he himself has noted above. We remark the disappearance, among other things, of:

a) the first 9 copies (941 AD tree);

b) a whole branch of the 941 tree (End of process);

c) several witnesses of the other branch, including witness 13 (the manuscript all the surviving end-of-process witnesses descend from, and hence, if we were to trace their stemma, their archetype).

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Weitzman's longer 1987 essay elaborates on his earlier study. In regard to the trend to two-branched stemmata, Weitzmann points out that earlier attempts to neutralize Bédier's paradox through probability calculus were regarded as unsatisfactory by the proponents themselves, whereas his own mathematical model indicates a 77% probability for two-branched trees for Greek texts, and 71% for Latin texts. Weitzman persuasively concludes: Here [. . .] the phenomena are held to follow naturally from features common to most traditions—the chronological spread of extinctions from the ever present risk of manuscript "death," and the prevalence of archetypes and two-branched stemmata from the high extinction probability for the population arising from any manuscript [. . .]. A mathematical model, as Kleinlogel and others urge, is not the same as the intricate processes of history. It can, however, establish a reasoned presumption, in the place of sheer conjecture; the present model, for example, overturns Bédier's assertion that the majority of stemmata cannot be twobranched (WEITZMAN 1987, 303).

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Vincenzo Guidi and I have recently attempted to reexamine Bédier's Paradox as a whole and explain it in terms of probability calculus, in a study entitled *Sugli stemmi bipartiti*. *Decimazione, asimmetria e calcolo delleprobabilità* [On Two-Branched Stemmata. Decimation, Asymmetry, and Probability Calculus]. To begin with, after collecting the not too numerous stemmata of fifteenth and sixteenth-century printed books known to us (about fifteen), we noticed that almost half of them were three-branched. So we asked ourselves in what way these printed editions were different from manuscripts. The obvious answer is that, since every printed edition is printed in *n* copies, each edition has not one but *n* chances of surviving. This led us to hypothesize that the prevalence of two branches in the stemmata of classical, medieval and Renaissance manuscript traditions depends to the highest degree from the effects of decimation over time, which are more devastating for manuscripts than for printed editions (GUIDI and TROVATO 2004).

This empirical observation has been confirmed countless times. Here I limit myself to another example. The earliest printed tradition for the famous opera libretto *Il turco in Italia* (Romani and Rossini), studied by Fiamma Nicolodi and the present writer (27 editions preserved between 1814 and 1830), has a five-branched stemma (NICOLODI and TROVATO 2003). We could add that, since decimation is directly proportional to the time (=T) that has elapsed between the creation of the witnesses and the moment when textual critics try to reconstruct their text, textual scholars who study printed editions, but also relatively recent MSS traditions, are more likely than most classicists, or than Bédier (who worked on thirteenth and fourteenth century traditions), to run into or obtain stemmata with more than two branches.

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Our subsequent step was to use the stemma of some apparently complete printed traditions—with no witnesses marked with lower-case Greek or Latin letters, that is to say, lost and only logically assumed to have existed—as a possible *model* for a real tree, that is, the ensemble of all manuscript copies that ever existed of a given text. We then decided to decimate one of these model trees more or less severely, between 10 and 90%, and then calculated:

a) the probability of a reduction of originally multi-branched real trees to two or single-branched stemmata;

b) the probability—since philologists draw up their stemmata blindly, with whatever witnesses happen to have survived decimation—of assigning manuscripts belonging to the same (albeit luxuriant) branch of the real tree to different primary branches of the stemma. (This part, of course, was done by Vincenzo Guidi, a nuclear physicist and hence more experienced than I am in fairly complex calculations).

Assuming a not too slender three-branched real tree, formed of about thirty witnesses, and—as is very often the case with the stemmata of the most diverse works—more or less markedly asymmetrical, modest decimation rates (from 10 to 30%) do not result in very significant modifications. High decimation rates (70, 80, 90%), however, result in:

a') a clear-cut increase in the probability (varying from case to case, but not inferior to 60% in the traditions Guidi and I studied) that the tree will lose some of its flimsier branches, turning into a two-branched stemma;

b') a high probability (varying from case to case) that this two-branched stemma will be drawn up from what are actually descendants of a single branch (the more luxuriant one) of a multipartite real tree.

The prevalence of two-branched stemmata thus depends on the intensity of decimation, which, in its turn, depends on T, that is, as I said above, the time elapsed between the early transmission of a given text and the genealogical classification of its surviving copies.

4. While many philologists have overhastily espoused Bédier's positions, putting a "virtual ban on stemmatic studies" (DEMBOWSKY 1992–1993),

a number of scholars, from Greg to Maas, from the American Romanists of the "Chicago School" to Fourquet, Castellani, Timpanaro, Segre, Peri (Pflaum), Blecua, Reeve, Montanari and others, have denounced the limits of Bédier's anti-Lachmannian arguments. As Segre observed regarding Bédier's editions of the *Chanson de Roland*:

L'esprit de système ne pouvait fermer à la réalité les yeux d'un philologue averti comme l'était Bédier: il est absolument impossible qu'un copiste ne commette pas un certain nombre d'erreurs; et puisqu'il y a au moins un manuscrit interposé entre l'Archétype et O [viz., the famous Oxford manuscript], deux séries d'erreurs au moins doivent s'être superposées dans notre manuscrit [...]. Bédier 1938 reconnaît qu'il doit bien se trouver en O 142 lapsus calami et une dizaine d'erreurs (p. 161), puis il accepte les corrections d'autres éditeurs, ici deux (p. 179), ici douze (p. 189),là cing (pp. 190–91), là quatre (pp. 231–32), et ainsi de suite, pour un total de 25 au moins, 35 au plus (p. 520) [. . .]. Que ces concessions de Bédier soient réduites au minimum (leur nombre pourtant est déjà considérable) importe moins que le fait qu'elles ouvrent irrémédiablement une brèche dans le mur des positions de principe. Les copistes se trompent; il faut corriger les textes; la critique textuelle nous donne la méthode pour les corriger, souvent avec la plus grande probabilité d'atteindre l'original au plus près. Les concessions de Bédier impliquent tout cela. Et dès lors l'opposition manichéenne entre "interventionnistes" et "conservateurs" doit faire place à une discussion tranquille, cas par cas, sur la réalité effective de l'erreur (SEGRE [1989] 2003, 11–12 note; my emphasis).

Nevertheless, the thesis that it is not possible to produce a satisfactory classification of the *Lai de l'ombre* has passed scrutiny. In the context of growing adhesion to Bédier's conservatism, all the twentieth-century editions of the *Lai* limited themselves to reproducing, with slight changes, one or another of Bédier's editions, sometimes stressing the higher degree of "scientificity" of the French master's editing method.

Adrian Tudor, for example, observes:

The text was edited twice in the nineteenth century, by Francisque Michel and Achille Jubinal [. . .]. These editions seek an 'authentic' text, one which is made up from all extant manuscripts. The reconstruction of a hybrid text was no longer in fashion when Joseph Bédier published his edition of 1913. He attempted to conserve as much and correct as

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little as possible, a principle generally adopted by scholars today (TUDOR 2004, 7).

Apart from the fact that Tudor appears to be scarcely informed about the editorial history of the *Lai de l'ombre* (the Michel editions of 1836 and the Jubinal edition of 1846, both earlier than Gaston Paris's methodological revolution, are respectively based on mss. A and F, and thus, one could say, Bédierian *ante litteram*; Bédier's "hybrid" edition of 1890 is strangely forgotten), his conclusion that Bédier's attempt "to conserve as much and correct as little as possible" is "a principle generally adoptedby scholars today" is hardly disputable. Actually, editors of various nationalities—French, British, etc.—have shared the perception that editions à la *manière de Bédier*, which are often reticent about the reasons for the choice of the base MS, were extremely respectful of the historical reality of the text, in spite of the warnings of scholars such as Alberto Vàrvaro and Gianfranco Contini. Obviously alluding to the more recent Bédieriste edition of the *Lai*, as well as that of the *Roland*, Contini observes:

As to the radical freedom [of philologists], we can rest assured that no one will ever be able to destroy it. Bédier's skepticism of textual paleontology [i.e., nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions based on the common error method] led him to radically restrict its freedom by confining it to the edition of a single manuscript. However, since it was neither photographic nor diplomatic, but still interpretative, *within that same boundary he had confined it in he made it perform unheard-of orgies* (CONTINI 1992, 78, now in CONTINI 2007, II, 967; my emphasis).

Contini's most relevant objection against the Bédierism of Bédier's epigones is that Bédiérian editors are defenseless when their base manuscript confronts them with a reading that is not manifestly wrong, but which a comparison with other witnesses, and especially the detection of so-called diffraction, in presence or absence, would reveal it to be very probably not original, that is, a latent error:

The decisive objection against the myth of the unique manuscript is the following: besides easily emendable erroneous innovations, besides trivializations (*lectiones faciliores* in the case of several witnesses) that are corrigible [. . .] within tradition, there are also equally acceptable ones that are only detectable by collating the other witnesses, as these all show equally acceptable variants [. . ]. A multiple innovation in the same variation place does not elude reason: why have all the manuscripts [. . .] innovated, and in a colorless manner to boot? Was this not because there was an objective obstacle in the original? (CONTINI 1992, 140, now in CONTINI 2007, I, 67).

In the late twentieth-century practice of so-called "Bédierist" editing, things do not seem to have improved. According to Dembowski,

many editions of important Old French texts do not offer any appreciable quantity of variants and are not, in fact, "critical" in any sense [. . .]. Unfortunately, many literary scholars do not realize that an acquaintance not only with a good manuscript but with the rest of the manuscript tradition is no outlandish "philological" requirement. This can be vital to the understanding of literary sense [. . .]. The scarcity of variants [*viz*. in Roques's edition of Chrétien de Troyes] does present serious problems not only for text-minded philologists but also for the literary scholars who thereby remain unaware that they are studying the practices of the good but doubtless interventionist scribe Guiot and not the unmediated production of the poet Chrétien (DEMBOWSKI 1992–1993, 525–26)<sup>6</sup>.

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To expose the not exactly impeccable logic of many editions founded on a single MS regarded as the best, one only needs to point out that both Bédier's 1913 and 1928 editions of the *Lai de l'ombre*, and those derived from it, by Orr, Limentani, Lecoy and others, draw on several different witnesses to fill in presumed lacunas in the *meilleur manuscrit*. In the absence of a general genealogical classification, however, it is impossible to know if these are truly lacunas or, on the contrary, interpolations. Sometimes it is even impossible for the reader to understand whether the text he or she is reading, which is in fact a "reconstructed" one, is actually in the real historical manuscript chosen as base witness. In particular, in his 1913 edition Bédier, following A, makes 34 corrections to the base text, including the filling in of what are presumed to be extensive lacunas, and in his 1929 edition he corrects E in 26 cases and suspends judgment in another 10 (BÉDIER 1928–1929, 98; BOURGAIN and VIELLIARD 2002, 17).

6. See also Leonardi 2011, 9–12.

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Reusing Leonardi's observations on recent editions of Arthurian prose novels, we could argue that the text offered by the editors of the *Lai de l'ombre*, including Bédier, "stands in an ambiguous and heterogeneous position, in an indistinct hinterland of the base MS" and "ends up oscillating between the conservation of the manuscript and the reconstruction of its model, without making up its mind for either of these two alternatives" (LEONARDI 2011, 17). Still in Leonardi's words, we could argue that "the editorial formula of adopting the base MS unless there are manifest errors *actually leads to a reconstructive edition, but without the application to this reconstruction of a method* capable of dealing with the dynamics of variants and account for them in the edition" (LEONARDI 2011, 26; my emphasis). The impression, however, is that even in French Romance studies—which are Bédierist by tradition, sometimes without even realizing it (as Frédéric Duval has noted)—the wind is changing.

An interest in editing methods alternative to Bédierism, and especially in a "lachmannisme modéré", is particularly evident, for example, in some recent French manuals or companions such as BOURGAIN and VIELLIARD (2002, 14–22, 40 ff.), and Duval, who goes as far as to argue:

La malaise tient à l'analyse des principes exposés dans les introductions. Repris de génération en génération, ils n'ont pas suivi l'évolution des pratiques, souvent moins nettement bédiériste que ce qui est affirmé [. . .]. L'insuffisance de la réflexion méthodologique conduit à revendiquer un pragmatisme qui n'est souvent que de façade. En effet, quelle que soit la configuration de la tradition textuelle, les éditeurs français ont tendance à suivre des règles identiques, alors qu'il pourraient se situer davantage par rapport à l'archétype en cas de tradition reserrée (DUVAL 2006, 149).

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In conclusion, let us briefly return to the *Lai de l'ombre*. In my opinion, the classification of the witnesses of this work does not pose the insurmountable problems lamented by Bédier, and taken for granted by his followers (TROVATO 2013b). One of the aspects of the problem I subjectively find most instructive is that, in spite of the profusion of alternative stemmata found in Bédier's 1928 study, the stemma which in my opinion is most likely to be correct (or, as Contini would put it, the most parsimonious working hypothesis about the surviving tradition) is radically different from all those that have been proposed so far, which are mostly abstract and more or less baroque elaborations on the stemmata drawn up by Bédier and Paris in 1890, and are not founded on a real re-examination of tradition.

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