
This edition must be welcomed not merely as an advance in the establishment of the text, but as a very penetrating and instructive essay in textual criticism. The book begins with a list (pp. 3-33) of 132 manuscripts which the author has collated; continues with an analysis of the manuscript tradition (pp. 33-64) and a history of the transmission (pp. 64-76), followed by three sections on the editions, the date and circumstances of composition, and sources and style. The text and critical apparatus occupies pp. 112-184; the last 68 pages contain commentary (critical, not exegetic), bibliography and index.

The transmission of this poem is unusual. H. lists no ms. older than the twelfth century: the distribution thenceforward is as follows: 12C.: 5 mss.; 12-13C.: 2 mss.; 13C.: 25 mss.; 13-14C.: 11 mss.; 14C.: 14 mss.; 14-15C.: 3 mss.; 15C.: 63 mss.; later 9 mss. These figures show a rapidly growing popularity, checked only by the general cultural recession of the fourteenth century. So rich a transmission naturally invited Lachmannian criticism, and first Jeep (1871-76), then Birt (1892) tried to draw up a stemma. These attempts are methodically criticized and found wanting; in particular the Laurentianus is dislodged from the throne on which Jeep placed it, and Birt’s theory of a ‘Doppelrezension’ is shown to be as complete moonshine as such extravaganzas commonly are. Hall’s destructive criticism is entirely convincing, but he does not leave the manuscripts as wholly beyond classification. He outlines his own grouping on p. 55: it is based on the lacunae at 1,141-214, 3,280-360 and 3,438-448. In these lacunae there is no clear reflection of an archetypal pagination, and Hall wisely refrains from claiming parentage as the basis of his grouping. In the transmission he sees contamination as the dominant feature, rendering rigorous eliminatio “quite out of the question”. “We can have no other guides in our search for the truth than the requirements of sense and the linguistic habits of the author” (p. 63).

So negative a conclusion is surprising. Sensible men no longer expect to find all mss. of a text (with postulation of a few lost ones) falling neatly into a stemma which leaves the editor with barely three or four which deserve consideration; for if we assume that only 50% of all once-existing mss. of our text have perished, then the immediate exemplar of any given ms. is as likely to have perished as not. Yet it is hard to believe that out of 132 mss. there

* Mnemosyne, Vol. XXVII, Fasc. 1
is not one which is a direct copy of any other; the odds against this statistically are astronomical. The labour also of checking each of 132 mss. against all the others is perhaps too great to be undertaken by one man.

Be that as it may, Dr. Hall has eliminated none of the mss., and consequently bases his text on all. This decision makes the construction of the apparatus difficult, since to note all variants of 132 mss. would be a Herculean if not an Augean task. He therefore appeals to the recentiores (post—1394) only for readings of some intrinsic merit, and exhibits consistently the readings only of the vetustiores, 55 in number. Unfortunately, to my mind, he has chosen a very complicated way of exhibiting their readings. If six or more in a given class have a given reading, that reading is marked by the siglum of the class; if less than six, the sigla of individual mss. are given. Similarly six or more recentiores in agreement are denoted by the siglum ψ, less than six by their individual sigla. This practice can be tantalizing when one thinks how much information there must be in Dr. Hall's collations, and how little gets through to the reader. Thus 1, 127 the apparatus notes on the word vitulam: vitulum a B L1, L2 UZ. This could mean that 25 of the vetustiores have vitulum, or it could mean that 11 of them have vitulum. In other places some careful work with pencil and paper may reveal what the readings of individual mss. are. Thus at 2, 13 we find "dirum a b 1 oz P2 R4 y; dudum a C L1 o3 (a.c.) R3 P3 (p.c.) R25 (a.c.) U (p.c.); demum R14/26". The reading adopted in the text is dudum, and one may wish to know which mss. have it. Now the textual annotation is in negative form, and so we know that 6 + mss. of each class have dudum. Class a has 20 mss.; 6 + have dirum, 6 + have dudum; consequently either 6 or 7 or 8 have dudum. In class b (15 mss.) 6 + have dudum, four named mss. have dirum, three dudum; this leaves 8 with dudum, viz. B E 1 F 2 F 3 G L 4 R 6 and O 3 p.c. In class y again, 6 + have dudum, 6 + have dirum; 3 have dudum (but in each case there is a previous or a later reading also): this suggests that dudum is found in 6, 7 or 8 mss.; but did P3 and U have dudum or dirum before correction, and did the corrector of R25 alter dudum to dirum or to dudum? Dr. Hall's reader has to be very wide awake and very accurate with pencil and paper if he is to work out what the readings of individual mss. are; and often the task is impossible. Yet all this information must be in the original collations. I cannot escape the conviction that a better plan would have been to exhibit the readings of twelve or fifteen of the best mss. systematically, disregarding the others unless any of them contained an attractive reading. This method would have given an intelligible apparatus, and nothing of value would have perished.