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“Cladistics and Italian Philology”

Recent years have seen the first two attempts to employ the method of cladistics in editing texts from medieval Italy. The edition of Dante's *Monarchia* by Shaw (2006) tackles a Latin text, while the edition of Pucci's *Cantari della Reina d'Oriente* by Motta and Robins (2008) tackles one in the Italian vernacular. In light of these two editions, and in light of the reviews that they have received, it is now an opportune moment to pause and consider the possible role that cladistics might play within Italian philology in the twenty-first century. This paper describes how and why these two editions turned to cladistic analysis, and also considers what their results suggest about the method's potential for stemmatic analysis. The paper goes on to suggest some ways in which cladistic approaches to textual criticism might benefit from closer alignment with the rich philological traditions of Italy.

My paper begins with a quick overview of cladistics that focuses on three features in particular. First is the difference between cladistics and earlier, statistically-derived methods for the quantitative analysis of textual traditions, such as the approaches of Quentin and Dearing; most crucially, there is a different logic of inference for coming up with tree-shaped models of textual descent (*cladograms, stemmata*). Second is the way cladistics confronts the problem of “polygenesis” by trying to distinguish between the noise of polygenetic similarities among variants and the signal of shared descent. And third is the problem of “rooting an unrooted tree” (i.e., determining the position of the archetype); textual cladists differ on whether quantitative evidence is sufficient for rooting a cladogram or whether qualitative evidence, such as the traditional philological notion of error, is required. I argue that turning to qualitative evidence is a necessary procedure at this stage. After this overview, I assess how the editions of the *Monarchia* and the *Reina d'Oriente* have grappled with these issues.

The second half of the paper asks: What might Italian traditions of philology offer to cladistics? The main answer is that they can offer much the same sort of historical sensitivity that characterized the Italian appropriation and transformation of Lachmannian methods during the twentieth century. In Paolo Cerchi's words, “Italian philologists remained Lachmannian because they constantly criticized the mechanical quality of the genealogical method ... they did everything they could to change the method from a mechanical to a historical one” (440). In this light I suggest ways in which cladistics might be strengthened by a more thorough encounter with Pasquali's insistence that editorial work consider the entire *storia della tradizione*; in particular I consider the thorny problem of *contamination*. I will also suggest ways in which cladistics might align itself with the kind of *variantistica*

associated with Contini; for this I turn to a consideration of the phenomenon of *diffraction*.

Contini once claimed: “In order to be a Lachmannian today, one should have passed through an anti-lachmannian training (Bédier) and a post-lachmannian experience (that is, in classical philology at least, Pasquali).” At the end of this paper I briefly comment upon my own experience with cladistics when editing Pucci, seeing it as an itinerary that required moving through Lachmannian, anti-Lachmannian, and post-Lachmannian stages. From this perspective I will make the claim that cladistics, despite being a quantitative method of analysis, might possess more than just a few points in common with the “trans-Lachmannian” directions that have characterized Italian philology in recent decades.