

F. J. Furnivall's *Six of the Best: The Six-Text Canterbury Tales* and the Chaucer Society.

[ABSTRACT]

F. J. Furnivall founded the Chaucer Society in 1868 to print unpublished manuscripts of Chaucer and forward philological work on the poet. It promoted better understanding of the Works, especially the *Canterbury Tales*, by allowing readers to be their own editors through access to the raw data (the manuscripts' variant readings). Thanks to his background in Christian Socialism (he taught the Tales to students at Maurice's Working Men's College), his intentions in founding the Society were essentially democratic. The Society's, and Furnivall's, great monument was his parallel text edition of the *Tales* in six manuscripts: the *Six-Text* (first part published in 1868), later followed by two further manuscripts to make, in effect, an 'eight-text'. It was a radically important publication, and had far-reaching consequences for the later editing of Chaucer. Furnivall was in the thick of discussions, with Henry Bradshaw, Walter Skeat and others, about which were the most 'valuable' manuscripts of the *Tales* and the *Tales'* order. The consequences of this appraisal (if not its underlying assumptions) are still with us. At this time, important manuscripts in private ownership, including Ellesmere and Hengwrt, were becoming more accessible. Furnivall and his associates made these manuscripts household names among Chaucer students.

The *Six- [eight] Text's* legacy has been contradictory in prophetic ways. It democratised the editing process, yet it made possible Skeat's more authoritarian standard edition. It brought Ellesmere into prominence, but asserted the claims of other early manuscripts, notably Harley 7334. It strikingly anticipates recent trends in Chaucer criticism.

i. Origins of the Chaucer Society¹

The Chaucer Society was founded in 1868 by Frederick James Furnivall. Its first initiative was the first instalment of the *Six-Text* edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, a project which perfectly summed up Furnivall's purpose in founding the Society: 'to do honour to CHAUCER, and to let the lovers and students of him see how far the best unprinted Manuscripts of his works differed from the printed texts.'² Like all Furnivall's publication societies, it was not intended to last, but 'dissolve as soon as all the good Manuscripts of the Poet's Works, and all matter wanted for their illustration, are in type... Eight or ten years will suffice, if the Society be well supported, to finish its work.' The Society was a spin-off from the Early English Text Society (EETS), likewise founded by Furnivall, in 1864. In both cases, Furnivall wished to promote the study of the early English literary inheritance, which had been too long neglected among his countrymen: the Chaucer Society was founded, 'first, from the conviction that it was a mean, an unpatriotic thing of Englishmen to have done so little as they had for their great poet's memory.'³ It might be asked why found another Society so soon after the first, and in tandem with it? Why not accommodate Chaucer within the capacious embrace of the EETS?

¹ I am most grateful to Professor Derek Pearsall and Professor Ralph Hanna for commenting on versions of this paper. Errors that remain are my own. The present study has developed from a longer account, in preparation, of the history of the EETS. In the light of this work, it has proved possible in some respects to supplement the account of Furnivall by Donald C. Baker, 'Frederick James Furnivall', in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1984), 157-69.

² From the opening of the Society's statement of purpose, repeated in Chaucer Society publications from the initial prospectus. Furnivall's simplified spellings have been retained.

³ F. J. Furnivall, 'Recent Work at Chaucer', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 27 (March, 1873), 383-93 (390).

Surely he wrote in 'early English' (or, more loosely, 'old' English)? As a reviewer for *The Spectator* observed, 'The Chaucer Society must take warning in time, or it will die with its work yet undone. It can appeal only to a limited audience. Scholars of Old English are few in number, and not often rich.'⁴ Three subscriptions (including the Philological Society, of which many were also members) at one or two guineas a time was a considerable tax on enthusiasts' resources and goodwill. Few of Furnivall's constituents were in the happy position of Henry Hucks Gibbs, director, later Governor, of the Bank of England, as well as aficionado of 'early English'.

Furnivall's remark about how unpatriotic the English had shown themselves by their neglect of Chaucer shows that the Chaucer Society owed its existence to his sentimental imagination as well as practical considerations – a blend which typified most of his literary transactions: 'As one who reads the *Canterbury Tales*, and gets to know the man Chaucer, must delight in and love him, and must feel sorry that so little has been done for the works of the genial bright soul, whose humour and wit, whose grace and tenderness, whose power and beauty are the chief glory of our Early Literature.'⁵ Alois Brandl shrewdly observed that 'With Chaucer he literally lived on terms of personal friendship: Chaucer's character, indeed, was perhaps most closely analogous to his own' – or at least to Furnivall's character as his friends saw him.⁶ He was not the last Chaucer 'lover' to cast himself in the second-best bard's image. Like Dickens's Hon. Bob Stables describing Lady Dedlock, Furnivall said of Chaucer that he had an eye 'for all the points of a woman' – Furnivall, too, had an eye for the ladies, though 'no man knew 'em like Chaucer.'⁷

The Victorian reading public had at least heard of Chaucer, if, in 1868, relatively few had read him. As the popular 'sensation' novelist, Mary Braddon, confessed to Furnivall, 'I hold Shakespeare in my heart of hearts, but I blush to say I know Chaucer hardly at all. There he is on the shelf opposite me as I write this ... I shall tackle him at once' – as though she were manhandling a mighty adversary who also needed dusting.⁸ Women were wary of the *Tales*' reputation for lewdness. Furnivall commended Elizabeth Barrett Browning for her broad-mindedness, 'It's a great pleasure to see how her pure & beautiful soul takes to Chaucer, notwithstanding the few stains of his time, which are all that some small women can see in him.'⁹ Chaucer was overshadowed by Shakespeare: "Shakspeare critics there had been without end, a Shakspeare Society too – no end of minor Shakspeare Societies:- but who ever heard of a Chaucer Society till our own began?"¹⁰ 'What Chaucer critic had there been, till lately, except Tyrwhitt? Was the work of the Thynnes, Warton, Urry &c., or of our moderns

⁴ 'Publications of the Chaucer Society,' *The Spectator*, 42 (2160), 20 November (1869), 1369.

⁵ *Trial-Forewords to my 'Parallel-Text Edition of Chaucer's Minor Poems' for the Chaucer Society, with a try to set Chaucer's works in their Right Order of Time*, by Frederick J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society, 2nd series, 6 (London, 1871), 5.

⁶ *Frederick James Furnivall: A Volume of Personal Record* (Oxford, 1911), 10-15 (11).

⁷ *Trial-Forewords to ... Minor Poems*, 42; he pointed out in a footnote that he meant 'points of spirit, soul, and body'.

⁸ Mary Maxwell (M. E. Braddon), letter of 19 March, 1879, Huntington Library, Furnivall Papers, FU 601.

⁹ Letter to Browning of 27 January, 1872, *Browning's Trumpeter: The Correspondence of Robert Browning and Frederick J. Furnivall 1872-1889*, ed. William S. Peterson (Washington D.C., 1979), 2.

¹⁰ *A Temporary Preface to the Six-Text Edition of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Part I, Attempting to show the true order of the Tales, and the Days and Stages of the Pilgrimage, etc. etc.*, by F. J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society, 2nd series 3 (London, 1868), 3. Furnivall, using his preferred spelling, refers principally to the Shakespeare Society, founded in 1841 by John Payne Collier. Furnivall's own New Shakspeare Society was created in 1873.

enough for CHAUCER? Surely not.¹¹ Furnivall was ‘attempting a difficult work in seeking to do for Chaucer what has been done for Shakespeare,’¹²

At least, thanks to his place on England’s Parnassus, Chaucer had remained in print, unlike the EETS’s more obscure offerings, and was consequently perceived as separate from other ‘early English.’ Thomas Tyrwhitt, in the late eighteenth century, lamenting England’s ‘too much neglected bard’, had produced, by way of remedy, what became the nearest thing to a standard edition of the *Tales* during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹³ He was followed in 1847 by Thomas Wright, who edited them for the Percy Society.¹⁴ The Chaucer Society, existing alongside the EETS, inevitably reinforced readers’ sense that Chaucer enjoyed a special status as Shakespeare’s precursor, a perception which has endured. His prose occupied an ambivalent position. Even the well informed, like Furnivall’s close associate, Walter Skeat, who edited Chaucer’s prose *Treatise on the Astrolabe* for the EETS, ‘thought the Chaucer Society only “went in” for poems.’¹⁵

The interrelations between the two Societies were in practice more complex. The Chaucer Society was in part founded because the EETS could not absorb the sheer mass that including Chaucer would entail. Furnivall’s two principal EETS editors, Skeat and the redoubtable Richard Morris, had their hands full, Skeat, in particular with the not so trivial matter of editing the three versions of *Piers Plowman*. The A Text appeared in 1867, preceded by printed comparisons based on Skeat’s collations of 45 manuscripts.¹⁶ Furnivall decided that the EETS would be used for the satellite texts like the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and the Boece (edited by Morris for the Extra Series in 1868), as well as occasional *faux* Chauceriana, like the ‘Tale of Beryn’, preceded by its more amusing ‘Prologue,’ in which the Pardoner’s later adventures in Canterbury were told. This was ‘borrowed’ from the Chaucer Society because the EETS ‘hadn’t money enough’ to pay for its scheduled titles for 1908-9.¹⁷

The year 1868 was an *annus mirabilis* for early English. If we leave aside other publishers, and, in addition to the foundation of the Chaucer Society, the EETS alone published ten titles

¹¹ *Temporary Preface to the Six-Text*, 2-3. Tyrwhitt described ‘the strange licence, in which Mr. Urry appears to have indulged himself, of lengthening and shortening Chaucer’s words according to his own fancy, and of even adding words of his own without giving his readers the least notice, has made the text of Chaucer in his Edition by far the worst that was ever published.’ (*The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer. To which are added an essay on his language and versification, and an introductory discourse: together with Notes and a Glossary*, by the late Thomas Tyrwhitt, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798), i. xi).

¹² *Spectator*, 20 November, 1869, 1369.

¹³ *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer*, i. iii. See further, B. A. Windeatt, ‘Thomas Tyrwhitt, (1730-1786)’, in *Editing Chaucer*, 117- 43.

¹⁴ *Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages. Edited from Original Manuscripts and Scarce Publications: Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, vol. the first*, ed. Thomas Wright. A New Text with Illustrative Notes, Percy Society 24 (London, 1847). See further, Thomas A. Ross, ‘Thomas Wright (1810-1877),’ in *Editing Chaucer*, 145-156.

¹⁵ Third Report of the Chaucer Society, January, 1872, Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS, E.S. 16 (London, 1872); also published in the Chaucer Society, 1st series 29 (1872).

¹⁶ *Vision of Piers Plowman, I, Text A*, ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS, O.S. 28 (London, 1867), preceded by *William Langland, Parallel Extracts from 45 MSS of Piers Plowman*, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, O.S. 17 (London, 1866).

¹⁷ *Chaucer’s Translation of Boethius’s De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. R. Morris, EETS, E.S. 5 (London, 1868); *The Tale of Beryn, with A Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury*, ed. F..J. Furnivall and W. G. Stone, EETS, E.S. 105 (London, 1909), 3, previously published by the Chaucer Society, 2nd series 17, 24 (1876-87).

including the *Boece*: six in the Original Series, and four in the Extra Series, which was created in that year to create extra space because, as Furnivall said, 'Mr Morris and Mr Skeat ... are willing to give us more work than we can print, and it does seem a shame that they should be kept standing still for want of money only ... Are we to keep them waiting three years ... when they are willing and ready to give us at once fresh music from our far-off early land? "Not if we can help it," say several members to whom I have spoken.'¹⁸

At this time Furnivall was being chivvied by his American friend, F. J. Child of Harvard, to print unpublished manuscript texts of Chaucer. Child planned his own edition, but, in America, did not have access to the manuscripts – hence his wish for diplomatic transcriptions in print. His 'Observations on the Language of Chaucer' was a preliminary to such an edition.¹⁹ Accordingly, as Furnivall said, 'The hands of that Society [the EETS] were too full to undertake an edition of Chaucer, or the texts of him that Professor Child wanted; and there was therefore nothing for it, but to have a Chaucer Society, for which I could print Manuscripts, and get friends to write essays, and print originals, that would be useful for an edition of the Poet's works by some man, or men, more fit for the task than myself.' Furnivall reckoned that even an untrained lawyer like himself could transcribe manuscripts, and learn on the job. As he later admitted, 'when I started Chaucer work, I didn't know even the little that the course of it has taught me.'²⁰ And when Child was caught up in the American Civil War, on the side of the North and against slavery, 'in the great struggle for freeing his land from England's legacy to it, the curse of slavery, could one who honoured him for it ... fail to desire to sacrifice something that he might help to weave again one bond between (at least) the Chaucer lovers of the Old Country and the New? No,' he said, again answering his own rhetorical question.²¹ The *Six-Text* would be dedicated to Child.

ii. *The Canterbury Tales*: where to begin?

The main purpose of founding the Chaucer Society was not literary, or even to produce a definitive new text, but to 'afford material for the improvement of [Chaucer's] text.'²² The Society would issue transcriptions of previously unprinted 'good' Chaucer manuscripts to enable readers to come to their own conclusions about what might be better readings. And Furnivall plunged in with

¹⁸ F. J. Furnivall, 'The Early English Text Society', in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 4 (1867), 212.

¹⁹ Originally published in the *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, and subsequently incorporated in A. J. Ellis's *Early English Pronunciation*, published simultaneously by the EETS and Chaucer Society. Furnivall printed Child's own comment as a footnote in the Chaucer Society's prospectus: 'The printing of the best texts of Chaucer is a *necessary condition* of a satisfactory edition of his poetry. It is not to gratify a fancy, or to furnish material for simply curious researches, that I, for one, want these texts. I do not myself see how the standard edition of Chaucer can be made, on an enduring basis, until all the best texts are before us. And I want the text also for general philological purposes.' See also Child's letter to Bradshaw, 12 February, 1868, in which he expressed some reservations about the Chaucer Society and Furnivall's prospectus, Cambridge University Library (CUL), MS Add. 2591/487: 'In a few weeks I hope to send you a paper on forms with which I some time ago sought to mitigate my impatience at being cut off from those MSS in which you so abound.'

²⁰ *The Harleian MS 7334 of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society, 1st series 73 (London, 1885), v.

²¹ *Temporary Preface*, 3. Child had published *War-songs for freemen: Dedicated to the Army of the United States, and especially to the 2d, 15th, and 20th Regiments of Massachusetts Volunteers in honor of their heroic comrades fallen in the Country's Cause...*, 2nd edn. (Boston, Mass., 1863).

²² Chaucer Society prospectus. King's College, London, Furnivall Papers 5/1/1-2.

the text which he, and his audience, agreed was the big one: the *Tales*. When a major poet was to be rehabilitated, there was no point dithering about with minor works.

In principle, if readers were to judge the superiority of readings for themselves, they could be given the materials by printing collations, rather than full texts which inevitably replicated material. Indeed, the Society did print slabs of collations later on, but the editor, Koch, recognised that the results, try to sweeten them as one might, were rebarbative in the extreme. Moreover, in the circumstances of 1868, with philological work on Chaucer still in its infancy, the advantage of printing full texts, rather than collations, was that collations 'must often omit variations of spelling, &c., unimportant to one editor, but important to another. There are many questions of metre, pronunciation, orthography, and etymology yet to be settled, for which more prints of entire Manuscripts are wanted, and it is hardly too much to say that every line of Chaucer contains points that need re-consideration.'²³ To begin with, Furnivall was the new Society's chief and almost sole 'worker'. He engaged, if not quite to do all the transcription, at least to check all the proofs against the manuscripts.²⁴

The idea that he might edit Chaucer himself, rather than merely transcribe, had occurred to Furnivall some twelve years earlier, when he was teaching Chaucer to students at the London Working Men's College from Wright's 1847 text. This had been designed to replace the established edition by Tyrwhitt, whose great contribution had been his insistence on going back to primary sources. Thus he had consulted the two Caxton editions, collated with 24 medieval manuscripts. Tyrwhitt's preferred manuscripts (for unexplained reasons – he simply gave them 'most credit') had been British Museum Harley 7335, and MS Dd. iv. 24 in Cambridge University Library.²⁵ Wright (while recycling much of Tyrwhitt's annotation) was severe on his predecessor's notions of editing, in part to puff himself, calling attention to the need to 'pick out one best manuscript which is at the same time one of those nearest to Chaucer's time.'²⁶ His preference – a prophetic one - was Harley 7334. But in other respects Furnivall, when he managed to get hold of Tyrwhitt, began to think he had been 'hardly treated' by Wright, 'and is a stunner, though his text can be bettered.' Bradshaw heartily agreed: 'I never could understand how a professed love of Chaucer could despise Tyrwhitt. It is this alone which has given me that extreme prejudice against your, Morris's and Skeat's Chaucer work.'²⁷

In Wright's view, instead of making the text more palatable by partial modernising, 'I would try the experiment of making his writings popular by the very fact of their being correctly printed.'²⁸ These fateful words seem to have had a defining effect on the young Furnivall. Not only was he putting Wright's experiment into practice by trying out Wright's edition on his working men, but he was stirred to head off to the British Museum to take a look at Harley 7334, which Wright described

²³ Chaucer Society prospectus.

²⁴ Thus he acknowledged help from George Parker, his usual paid copyist in the Bodleian Library, and D. Hall, of Cambridge University Library, *Temporary Preface*, 115.

²⁵ See list in Windeatt, 'Thomas Tyrwhitt', 123.

²⁶ 'The Editor therefore has proceeded as if his author had never been published before. He has formed the text throughout from the Mss. and has paid little regard to the reading of any edition, except the two by Caxton, each of which may now be considered as a Manuscript' (I .Preface, i.).

²⁷ CUL, MS Add. 2591/590, Furnivall to Bradshaw, 16 July, 1868; Add.2591/607, Bradshaw to Furnivall, 5 August, 1868. See further Add. 2591/608, Bradshaw to Furnivall, 6 August, 1868.

²⁸ Wright, xxxix-xl.

as ‘the best manuscript of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* that I have yet examined, in regard both to antiquity and correctness’. It was at about this time or shortly afterwards that Furnivall was beginning his own editorial career working for the Roxburghe Club. Later he was better able to perceive the scale of the task involved in editing the *Canterbury Tales*, and talked about collaborating with Henry Bradshaw, Librarian of Cambridge University Library, and Furnivall’s mentor on manuscripts. But Furnivall had too many other things to do. Until 1872, he was, though one would hardly guess it, except perhaps from his fondness for rhetorical questions, a working lawyer: ‘alas, what with the Philological Soc[iety], and occasional work for its Dictionary, [and] Early English Texts’, it was not to be. Indeed, by the time he penned this comment, there was also ‘Wyclif, Shakspeare and his Quartos and Folios, Browning and Shelley Societies,’ quite apart from his extracurricular hobbies of sculling, and – his latest fad – the ‘Kangaroo Bicycle’.²⁹ But, in the 1860s, fresh from his moment of revelation after reading Wright, he told the printer, George Bell (of Bell and Daldy), specialising in educational books and the classics, and at this time contemplating a grand ‘Aldine Edition of the British Poets’ that ‘his neck ought to be wrung if he merely reprinted Tyrwhitt’s text.’ Bell offered the commission to Furnivall, but ‘I was obliged, for want of both knowledge and time, to hand over the task to my friend Mr Richard Morris.’³⁰

Unlike Wright, who came to the conclusion that ‘in general, I have reaped little advantage from collating a number of manuscripts,³¹ Morris undertook extensive collation, not only in his and Furnivall’s local library, the British Museum, but in Oxford and Cambridge, before coming to the conclusion that Wright’s preference for Harley 7334, collated with Lansdowne 851, was justified, and should be used again for the Aldine edition. Bell and Daldy did not want Morris’s collations. Furnivall was impressed by his friend’s industry and his superior knowledge of Middle English dialects - he was a far better philologist than Furnivall would ever be. It would be a ‘shame’ if Morris’s work in comparing manuscripts could not be put to use – and Child was still pressing Furnivall to print other Chaucer manuscripts. Furnivall could not disappoint him after he had done such sterling work on final –es.

So the time was ripe for the printing of multiple texts of the *Canterbury Tales*, which was intended to get the materials out there in print to enable both serious study of Chaucer’s text, especially its language and rhymes, and, in due course, a new edition based on complete collations. Furnivall was wedded to the idea of printing in parallel; Bradshaw thought the ‘only rational way’ was separate prints of each manuscript. Both won: in addition to the *Six-Text*, the Society also issued separate texts of each of the six.³² Furnivall was true to the principles of editing as understood and

²⁹ Foreword to *Harleian MS 7334*, viii. Bradshaw died suddenly the following year (1886). The ‘Kangaroo’, made in Coventry 1884-7, was a more manageable and safer bicycle than the ‘ordinary’ (‘penny-farthing’), with wheels of more equal size. Its popularity derived from its success in breaking records. Furnivall’s son, Percy, was a champion cyclist.

³⁰ *The Aldine Edition of the British Poets: The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer in Six Volumes* (London, 1866)

³¹ Wright, xxxvi. CUL, MS Add. 2591/256 (Furnivall to Bradshaw, 28 July, 1865), Furnivall arranged for Morris to be paid £100.

³² CUL, MS Add. 2591/607, Bradshaw to Furnivall, 6 August, 1868; in Bradshaw’s plan, comparisons between the manuscripts would be enabled by numbering each of the ‘47’ component parts of the *Tales*, and supplying a ‘skeleton’ plan of the whole. The six were all published separately in parts by the Chaucer Society, 1868-77, all edited by Furnivall; *The Ellesmere MS ...*, 1st series, 2, 8, 16, 26, 32, 38, 50, 70; *The Hengwrt MS ...*, 1st series, 3, 9, 27, 30, 51, 71; *The Cambridge MS ...*, 1st series, 4, 10, 17, 28, 33, 40, 52, 66; *The Corpus MS ...*, 1st series, 5,

practised by his English friends and associates in the London Philological Society. He may not have been much of a philologist, but he rubbed shoulders all his life with those who were. Several of the EETS editions which had already appeared were parallel texts, and, with *avant garde* exceptions, like Oswald Cockayne, or Richard Weymouth's experimental 'critical' edition of Grosseteste's *Castel of Loue* for the Philological Society, parallel texts were the English way. Both Weymouth and Cockayne were interested in the textual criticism of the Greek New Testament. But Furnivall was pledged to diplomatic editing, as, too, was Morris, following Wright. Both Morris and Wright attempted to transcribe Harley 7334 with what Wright called 'literal accuracy', correcting what they both called 'clerical errors' (scribal mistakes) from Lansdowne 851, and in Morris's case from his own excellent knowledge of Middle English dialects. Occasionally Morris succumbed to the temptation, inherited from Shakespeare criticism, to insert an over-ingenious emendation of his own into Chaucer. Thus, in an attempt to make Chaucer's oxymoron even smarter, he substituted Lansdowne's reading 'hatel', 'bitter', for Harley's 'hateful', in 'Poverty is hateful good', from the hag's pillow talk to her reluctant new husband in the 'Wife of Bath's Tale.'³³ He did however mark emendations in his text by printing them in italic. But, as Furnivall later pointed out, that was no use to the serious 'student' without access to the real manuscript reading.

When deciding how many manuscripts to print in parallel. Furnivall was constrained by the printing technology available to him. He settled on six, intending subsequently to produce parallel texts of what he called manuscripts of the second and third class. This distinction derived from Bradshaw's more minute inspection of the manuscripts, and derived largely from the order of the *Tales*, which Bradshaw saw as a temporary expedient, pending full collation of all manuscripts, for judging their quality: 'I had no doubt that manuscripts of the same family in matters of arrangement would also contain for the most part readings of the same family in the text; and it would be a short way of classifying all the known manuscripts for the use of any future editor of the Canterbury Tales.'³⁴ Six first class manuscripts were more than Child had asked for. It was a heroic undertaking, entered into with Furnivall's habitual insouciance. What could be achieved by skilled hot-metal printing was astonishing— it far surpasses the usual *mise-en-page* possible in electronic typesetting. The Six-Text with its six columns printed in royal quarto on its side (9 3/4" x 12"; 246 x 305mm.) protrudes inconveniently from library shelves. But, if irritating to librarians, 'the oblong folio is extremely convenient for collation and reference,' as noted by Thomas Spencer Baynes, professor of logic, metaphysics and English literature at St Andrews, reviewing the Six-Text, 'as we can testify from experience'.³⁵ One can sense its importance from the very nonconformity, not to say cussedness, of its appearance. Furnivall had the inestimable advantage of a sympathetic printer, Charles Childs, of John Childs and Son, of Bungay, Suffolk, who would later be a notable supporter of the New Shakespeare Society too. In 1873 Furnivall reported that the Chaucer Society was heavily in

11, 18, 34, 41, 53, 67; *The Petworth MS ...*, 1st series, 6, 12, 19, 35, 42, 54, 68; *The Lansdowne MS ...*, 1st series, 7, 13, 20, 36, 43, 55, 69.

³³ 'Wife of Bath's Tale', 1195

³⁴ *The Skeleton of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: An Attempt to Distinguish the Several Fragments of the Work as left by the Author*, by Henry Bradshaw (London: 1868), 5.

³⁵ Third Report of the Chaucer Society, January 1871, 2, 'Knowing beforehand the excellence of the Harleian text, and the general agreement of the six other Manuscripts, we have been surprised indeed at the number of emendations of greater or lesser importance they afford ... These better readings affect mainly the metre, the meaning, or the poetical expressiveness of the existing text,' 'The Text of Chaucer,' in the *Edinburgh Review*, July, 1870.

debt (£700), and 'could not have done what it has done, but for the liberality of its printer, Mr Charles Childs of Bungay, who, a man of great cultivation himself, has taken a generous interest in its work.'³⁶ Their mutual attraction owed something to their shared interest in social reform – a tradition which John Childs passed to his son. In 1877 the company would be bought by Clay's Ltd, which took the name 'The Chaucer Press', and remained the EETS's main printer down to the Second World War.³⁷ Furnivall's publisher was the remarkable Nicholas Trübner, a German scholar and orientalist, who managed to make philology pay in business as well as pleasure. Trübner published the Philological Society's *Transactions*, as well as the EETS books and Furnivall's other publishing ventures.

Furnivall irritated many by his chatty 'forewords', which certainly did not observe the accustomed decorum practised in prefaces (though the ostentatious amateurishness is cultivated as part of his persona). His account of how, guided by his friends, he came to choose his 'six of the best' seems astonishingly casual, especially when one considers how very influential his choices proved to be. The preface was written in haste; indeed, he had not planned to write one at all: 'but as some friends I care for said that it would not be fair to plump down before them, unknowing in manuscripts and Chaucer cram, the bare texts, I am obliged to say what little I can, though at the risk of having to unsay part of it when fuller knowledge comes to me, or those who now have it, speak out, and prove me wrong.'³⁸ Furnivall acknowledged that it was a 'Temporary Preface', which reflected changes in thinking during the course of preparation. Furnivall accepted the prevailing view that Harley 7334 was 'no doubt the oldest and best', but his friend, Morris's, 'careful print' of this manuscript obviated the need to print it again, and Furnivall continued to be guided in his judgement by Morris. In principle, the older the manuscript, the more likely its grammatical forms were to be correct, though, when Morris edited the *Boece* for the EETS, he found the older copy, B.M. Additional 10340 had 'no end of final –e's being left out. This griev'd Dr Morris'soul, and he restored the missing finals from the theoretically correcter MS. Cambridge li. 3. 21.'³⁹

In 1861, during a walking tour in Sussex, Furnivall had visited Lord Leconfield's library at Petworth House, and decided that his manuscript 'was old and good enough to deserve collation for the next edition of Chaucer.' He was doubtless particularly keen to see this copy, which had once belonged to the collection of the Earl of Egremont, on account of the antiquary, Henry John Todd's verdict, that it was 'entitled to the admiration as well as the nicest examination of the future editor of Chaucer.'⁴⁰ It had particular appeal to a Shakespeare-fuelled historical imagination as the 'Hotspur' manuscript, having belonged in the fifteenth century to the Percy family. At this time, the now famous Ellesmere manuscript's reputation was good, but not surpassing - it was but one of several 'good' copies. Yet, although Tyrwhitt had not chosen the Ellesmere manuscript as his copy

³⁶ 'Recent Work at Chaucer', 393. On 3 April, 1872, he told Bradshaw, 'You ought to write an Appeal for money for Chaucer. We are £200 in debt,' CUL, MS Add. 8916/A72/36.

³⁷ Thus, see *The Cambridge MS (University Library, Gg. 4.27) of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society (London, 1869-79), printed by Clay and Taylor, The Chaucer Press.

³⁸ *Temporary Preface*, 1. See further, CUL, MS Add. 8916/A68/88, Furnivall to Bradshaw, 15 December, 1868. He had been delaying, hoping to 'prig' Bradshaw's words in place of his own: 'don't you wince at that thought?'

³⁹ F. J. Furnivall, *Autotypes of Chaucer Manuscripts*, Chaucer Society, First Series (1876-86), Forewords.

⁴⁰ *Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer, collected from Authentick Documents* by the Rev. Henry J. Todd (London: printed for F. C. and J. Rivington, T. Payne, Cadell and Davies, and R. H. Evans, 1810).

text, he had chosen to follow its ordering of the *Tales*, and this view has stood the test of time.⁴¹ Todd, too, showed which way the wind might be blowing, describing it as ‘a copy of the Tales which in no respect is exceeded, perhaps I might say equalled.’⁴² Furnivall got to see the Ellesmere manuscript in 1864 thanks to knowing the Earl of Ellesmere’s doctor, George Henry Kingsley, brother of Charles, whom Furnivall knew from the Working Men’s College. On this first inspection, Furnivall assessed Ellesmere as ‘a good text without the provincialisms of the Harleian 7334, but with (as it then seemed to me) a superfluity of final *e*’s to its *shall*’s, *ing*’s &c.’ It seems a lukewarm response, given Ellesmere’s later stellar history, and Furnivall conceded within the same preface that ‘Tyrwhitt’s arrangement of the Tales was, in fact that of his best MSS, that of the MS which Mr Richard Morris now holds to be the best grammatically, the Ellesmere.’⁴³ Ellesmere’s stock rose; Furnivall printed it first of his six, and, by 1900, when Skeat came to build on the Six-Text in his own edition of Chaucer’s complete works, he was able to describe Ellesmere as ‘the best in nearly every respect ... The publication of it has been a very great boon to all Chaucer students, for which Dr. Furnivall will be ever gratefully remembered.’⁴⁴

The Hengwrt manuscript had only recently come to the attention of ‘students’ when, in 1859, the Hengwrt collection, originally put together by Robert Vaughan in the seventeenth century, was bequeathed by a distant relative to the antiquary and Welsh scholar, William Watkin Edward Wynne, and Furnivall got to transcribe the manuscript before Wynne produced his catalogue of the collection’s contents – Wynne, unlike some of the private owners with whom Furnivall had to deal, was notably generous in allowing access. He ‘was kind enough to bring his MS of the Tales to town for me’ and Furnivall appraised its merits by collating it with the privately printed text of ‘The Clerk’s Tale’, transcribed from CUL MS Dd. iv. 24, prepared just a few months earlier by his Cambridge friend, William Aldis Wright, of Trinity College (printed by Childs).⁴⁵ Aldis Wright had presumably – there is no explanation – chosen the manuscript on Tyrwhitt’s recommendation, and because it was on his doorstep. His choice of ‘The Clerk’s Tale’ was probably thanks to Bradshaw’s perception that the ordering of the stanzas in the ‘Envoy’ was a good, simple ‘test’ for appraising a manuscript of the Tales. Furnivall’s comparison revealed that Hengwrt had ‘more of Mr Richard Morris’s theoretical final *e*’s than the Dd. MS, and was probably more worth printing.’

⁴¹ Ralph Hanna, ‘Presenting Chaucer as Author’, in *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretation*, ed. Tim William Machan, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 79 (Binghamton, N.Y., 1991), 17-39 (21).

⁴² *Illustrations*, 128. The manuscript had belonged to George Granville Leveson Gower, Marquis of Stafford, ‘bequeathed to him by his uncle ... the late duke of Bridgewater,’

⁴³ *Temporary Preface*, 11. Cf. also 45, fn. ‘Mr Richard Morris has confirmed Todd’s report as to the excellence of the Ellesmere MS, so far as regards its grammatical forms, and I look on it as the best that has been through my hands. For though Harl. 7334 was probably written before it, yet the *-ud* and *-is* of the Harl. 7334’s perfects and plurals, its *sch-* &c., are nasty, if not all provincial and make me hope that future editors will take the Ellesmere as the basis of their text rather than Harl. 7334.’

⁴⁴ *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited from numerous manuscripts*, by the Rev. Walter W. Skeat, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894-1900), iv, *The Canterbury Tales: Text*, xvii, xviii, ‘The names of the Earl of Ellesmere, Mr Wm. W. E. Wynne of Peniarth, and Lord Leconsfield have deservedly become as “familiar as household words” to many a student of Chaucer.’

⁴⁵ *Chaucer, The Clerk’s Tale, printed from MS. Dd. 4. 24 in the University Library, Cambridge*, signed and dated W.A.W.. September, 1867 (Bungay, 1867). CUL, MS Add. 2591/377, Furnivall to Bradshaw, 27 June, 1867, ‘If you want to see the Hengwrt *Canterbury Tales*, I have it for a week. It’s a good MS, say 1430.’

So Furnivall had three manuscripts whose private owners were willing to let him print them, and it was desirable to have them made public because of the difficulty of access. A fourth, owned by Lord Ashburnham, eluded him because of his lordship's well-known habit of regarding his collection as what Tyrwhitt had earlier called a 'sepulchre of MSS. which by courtesy are called Libraries'. Ashburnham reasoned that a print would lessen the value of his manuscript should he wish to sell it. For once Furnivall suppressed one of his scurrilous comments in print on people who annoyed him, and which got him into so much trouble, on the grounds that 'an accident to his head in early life should make us feel for, and not be angry with Lord Ashburnham.'⁴⁶ Accordingly, he decided to find his remaining three manuscripts in publicly accessible libraries, choosing, apparently on sentimental, as much as textual, grounds a representative from each of 'our great stores of MSS' in London, Oxford, and Cambridge. The principles of selection seem crazy, but there was a weird logic in the results. In the British Museum, the natural choice seemed to be Lansdowne 851, but its dialect made Furnivall hesitate. However, after toying with Sloane 1685, he took Morris's and Thomas Wright's favourable verdicts 'on trust, after a hasty look at it; though had I known as much of it as I do now, I should have tried harder for a substitute.'

In Cambridge, he was deterred from the natural choice in the University Library, Dd. iv. 24, because of its lacunae, and was talked by Bradshaw into accepting Gg. iv. 27, though initially repelled by its 'provincialisms'. Oxford was easy: Morris had approved Corpus Christi College MS 198 as the oldest in writing, and seemingly the best in text. Furnivall considered using Bodleian Library MS Arch. Seld. B. 14 as 'the best of the disappointing Bodleian lot' to substitute for Lansdowne 851, but was put off by poor readings.⁴⁷ In 1869, Aldis Wright, still interested in 'The Clerk's Tale', commended Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poet. 1133, 'though late in point of date', offering up an 'egregious' variant in another Rawlinson manuscript, Poet. 149, for Furnivall's diversion: 'and God thonked for he was hery' ['hairy'], in place of the generally accepted 'God they thanke and herye ['praise'].'⁴⁸

Furnivall's choice, then, was not dictated by considerations that his German philological friends would call 'scientific'. Was the manuscript older than others? Was it written on parchment – 'vellum' as the antiquaries called it - or paper? What did it do with final *e*'s? Was it marred by dialectal oddities? Did he, on a rapid inspection, think eclectically that it contained a high density of scribal errors? He was guided by common sense, as in rejecting Bodl. MS Barlow 20's reading of 'chickens' for 'cheeks' in 'The Knight's Tale', 2834 – chickens 'scratch', and classical women also scratch their cheeks in token of grief, but chickens, unlike women, do not generally also tear their hair, as Emelye and her women did when mourning Arcite. And Furnivall trusted the opinion of scholars whom he respected: Wright, Morris, Aldis Wright and, above all, Henry Bradshaw, though Bradshaw himself was impatient of Furnivall's desire to present variants, rather than to make decisions between them: 'What I insist on is that, until some of you begin to *edit* books, there is no chance for any of us learning anything.'⁴⁹ Furnivall was fortunate in his friends. There was also the

⁴⁶ 'Temporary Preface,' 6.

⁴⁷ CUL,MS Add. 8916/A68/88, Furnivall to Bradshaw, 15 December, 1868, 'L is rather a beast of a text.'

⁴⁸ Letter to Furnivall, 17 August, 1869, King's College London, Furnivall Papers, 5/1/6. 'Perhaps I ought to say he [the scribe] was in the condition of half-educated people, who know a little, but not enough to prevent them from displaying their ignorance.'

⁴⁹ CUL, MS Add 2591/384, Bradshaw to Furnivall, 16 August, 1867. 'Edit' is triple underlined.

matter of the diverse ordering of the Tales in the different manuscripts – a subject which ‘only one man in the world’ thoroughly understands’ - Bradshaw, who deduced that Chaucer had composed the Tales in groups ‘piecemeal’, pending final revision, rather than beginning at the beginning, going on to the end and then stopping: ‘The critics have unfortunately looked upon Chaucer’s great work as simply a collection of twenty-four tales each preceded by a prologue introducing the next narrator. Until this notion is thoroughly uprooted, the poem must remain an inextricable mass of confusion.’⁵⁰ Bradshaw had promised the Chaucer Society his considered views, but was one of the world’s great putters-off. Yet he did set down his provisional observations in a pamphlet, printed in a short run of 50 or 60 copies; being Bradshaw, he had cold feet four years later, when he discovered that the type was still standing – the textual study of Chaucer was fast moving.⁵¹ Bradshaw did, however, make the important observation that the piecemeal composition in groups invalidated attempts to organise the Tales chronologically, following the route taken, though he considered that the geography within each group was consistent: ‘such discrepancies of time and place are never to be found in different parts of the same fragment.’⁵² And yet Bradshaw also, in an attempt to understand the order to his own satisfaction, pored over maps, enrolled Lydgate’s continuation of the *Tales* in the *Sege of Thebes*, and proposed a detailed rearrangement of the groups whereby Fragment VII was moved to follow Fragment II, so that the pilgrims would not arrive at Sittingbourne before Rochester, a manoeuvre, known as the ‘Bradshaw Shift’. It may have been thinking on paper, rather than a thesis, but Furnivall promptly sent off for an Ordnance Survey map, and found a man on the spot, Mr J.M. Cowper of Faversham, to pursue local enquiries.⁵³ Furnivall, in particular, read literature as a factual resource for understanding social history, and was not easily to be deterred from his favourite pastime, not least because he loved long walks, and thought getting muddy was fun: ‘Let me ... ask any reader who doubts whether 56 miles could take up three days and a half’s ride, to recollect what this 14th century Canterbury road – all stiff sticky London-Clay, mind, except one little bit of chalk ... - is likely to have been ... even now men and their sisters out for a riding-tour do not generally ride more than 20 or 25 miles a-day’.⁵⁴ Much of Furnivall’s introduction to the *Six-Text* is taken up with geographical speculations in an attempt to redeem Chaucer from having made a ‘tremendous mess of his work.’⁵⁵ The only surprise is that he got Cowper to walk the route on his behalf. Furnivall ordered the Tales in the *Six-Text* to accord with this reconstruction of time and place, apparently so confident in it that he talked of having a manuscript rebound to put its order ‘right’. Bradshaw’s response was appropriately scandalized: ‘Your letter frightens me when you talk of cutting up a MS and rebinding it, because it implies such a thorough misconception of what you have to do.’ In Bradshaw’s view the eccentricity of the arrangement in the *Six-Text* could be endured

⁵⁰ ‘Skeleton,’ 17.

⁵¹ ‘Skeleton,’ 54, ‘I have thought it worth while to have a few copies struck off, rather as a memorial of past work than as an earnest of what is to come. Every day seems to render it less likely that I shall every put my hand again to any work of the kind.

⁵² ‘Skeleton,’ 17. See further, Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, Unwin Critical Library (1985), 19-23.

⁵³ CUL, MS Add 2591/622, Bradshaw to Furnivall, 21 September, 1868, and Furnivall’s reply, Add 2591/626, 22 September, 1868. Furnivall forwarded Cowper’s letter of 4 October, 1868 to Bradshaw, Add. 2591/641, and see CUL, MS Add. 8916/A68/50 and A68/96.

⁵⁴ *Temporary Preface*, 15-6,

⁵⁵ ‘Temporary Preface’, 41*.

‘if you do but tell them [sc. ‘half-witted people for whom you make all these simplifications’] that the six-text edition is in a fancy order of your own, corresponding to no MS whatever.’⁵⁶

iii. After the *Six-Text*: The Scramble for Chaucer

Furnivall was enormously proud of his *Six-Text*. Alexander Ellis, as President of the Philological Society, drew ‘special attention to his great contribution to accurate English philology, the magnificent Six-Text Edition of Chaucer, still in progress, which I regard as entirely his own in conception and execution. Mr Furnivall has in this work inaugurated a new era in philology... students who wish to know what the works are like, will now require the lively counterfeits of their oldest existent forms placed side by side for actual comparison with one another, and each part is whole; not a mosaic presentment of discordant patches. This is what Mr. Furnivall has done for our first English poet, mostly with his own hand, entirely by his own thought.’⁵⁷ The enterprise was in Furnivall’s image – he always said he disliked what he called ‘cooked’ texts, in which the editor had intervened. Yet if, in the terminology of the time, the ideal for ‘students’, ‘workers’ and ‘lovers’ of Chaucer was access to diplomatic texts so they could appraise variant readings for themselves, and indulge in the game of every man his own editor, as well as conduct the minute philological enquiries into dialect, morphology and metre which were the Philological Society’s delight, then Furnivall’s decision to omit one of the ‘first class’ manuscripts, Harley 7334, on the grounds that it had already been ‘done’ began to seem increasingly hard to defend. ‘It was not a wise decision,’ as Furnivall himself came to agree. ‘When Editors began to edit Chaucer’s Tales, and wanted to know what the reading of Harleian 7334 is, they often found some italics in Dr. Morris’s text, showing that he’d altered his MS; and as his publisher wouldn’t let him give various readings, a reference to the MS became necessary. This was a great bore, specially when a man lived in Germany or America.’ So Furnivall prepared a ‘simple print of this MS’. The ‘Six’ became the ‘Seven’, but ‘as the investigation of the niceties of Early English goes on, probably no student will blame me for having printed one more MS of *The Canterbury Tales*’. He acknowledged that he had already attracted ‘collators’ curses for the amount of labour I’ve thrown on them.’⁵⁸ Later still, in 1901-2, the seven became eight, with the publication of Cambridge University Library, Dd. iv. 24.⁵⁹

By people living in Germany or America Furnivall meant principally Child and Bernhard ten Brink, born in Amsterdam, but German educated, and by 1885 working in the new University of Strasburg. Ten Brink was cannily establishing his dominance in Chaucer studies on the Continent, and, a year before Furnivall issued his print of Harley 7334, had published the first full study of Chaucer’s grammar and metre, with all the authority of thorough German philological training behind him.⁶⁰ Back in 1871, like other members of the ‘better classes’ Furnivall had been ‘inclined to

⁵⁶ Letters to Furnivall, 8 and 11 June 1968, King’s College, London, Furnivall Papers, 5/1/1-2. See further letters from Bradshaw to Furnivall quoted at length in Baker, ‘Furnivall,’ 161-4. Later, Furnivall told Bradshaw, ‘Haven’t I often wisht that I was a Librarian and could cut MSS to pieces?’ CUL, MS Add.8916/A72/42, 17 April, 1872.

⁵⁷ From the Second Annual Address of the President, 16th May, 1873, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1873-4), 345.

⁵⁸ *Harleian MS 7334*, v-vi.

⁵⁹ *The Cambridge MS. Dd. 4. 24 of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, completed by the Egerton MS. 2726 (the Haistwell MS.)*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society, 1st Series 95-6 (London, 1901-2)..

⁶⁰ *Chaucers Sprache und Verkunst*. Previously, in 1877, he had published an investigation into the chronology of Chaucer’s works and formulated the later widely accepted division of them into three periods of literary

Germany, but not to Bismarck⁶¹ in the Franco-Prussian war, which concluded in the unification of Germany, describing ‘the furious waves of French vainglory, driven by the guilty ambition of a conscienceless adventurer [Napoleon III],’ which were ‘dashing against the barriers of German patriotism.’ He dedicated his parallel-text edition for the Chaucer Society of the Minor Poems to ten Brink as ‘one of our kin, one of the German Nation, Great in learning and Great in War.’⁶² In such a climate, Furnivall could contemplate without jealousy ten Brink’s intention to bring out a critical edition of the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* to coincide with the ‘birthday of William the Victorious’. Since this present to Kaiser Wilhelm I would exhibit, ‘the improvements that our Six Texts make in its readings,’ it was dependent on English scholarly work, and ten Brink’s demonstration of ‘how the Professor thinks that Chaucer should be edited critically’ would also demonstrate Anglo-German scholarly harmony.⁶³ Furnivall and his associates in the Philological Society made a virtue of their privileged access to manuscripts by making diplomatic editions an English scholarly speciality: as Henry Sweet said, ‘Our energies are mainly devoted to publishing our rich stores of MSS. and making them generally accessible in a reliable form ... The two best features of our editing are minute accuracy and fullness of material. Hence our parallel-text editions, of which the Six-Text *Canterbury Tales*, published by the Chaucer Society is a noble example.’⁶⁴

‘The German Professor’ could not manage without Furnivall and his friends, ‘for he couldn’t get at the MSS.’⁶⁵ But, by 1885, German nationalist ambitions were beginning to seem more threatening. As Furnivall put it, just as Englishmen were beginning to reap the rewards of all this painstaking manuscript work, ten Brink, ‘like a true German uhlan, suddenly and most unexpectedly made his appearance one morning ... and carried off from England the main credit of the reform or re-creation of Chaucer.’⁶⁶ The likening of ten Brink to a member of the new German Empire’s crack cavalry units swooping down like a latter day eagle in the *House of Fame* to carry off Geoffrey Chaucer as spoils of war to honour a German literary pantheon reveals the complexity and ambiguity of Furnivall’s evolving attitude to German philological hegemony. No doubt the remark was in part jocular, but many a true word is spoken in jest, and this expresses the resentment in Furnivall’s circle of what could easily be seen as the arrogance of German scholarship, founded in superior, ‘scientific’, linguistic and textual training. Resentment was fuelled by the increasingly uneasy political relations between Britain and the newly-unified Germany in the late nineteenth century, and

history: French models, Italian sophistication, and mature synthesis, *Chaucer: Studien zur Geschichte seiner Entwicklung und zur Chronologie seiner Schriften*. On ten Brink (and the wider context of the ‘growing phalanx of German Chaucer scholarship’ (p. 107)), see Richard Utz, *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology: A History of Reception and an Annotated Bibliography of Studies 1793-1948*, Making the Middle Ages. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), especially 73-102.

⁶¹ As reported by Max Müller in a letter to his mother in Germany, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller, Edited by his Wife*, 2 vols. (London, 1902), I. 407, letter of 15 January, 1871.

⁶² Furnivall described ten Brink to Bradshaw after their first meeting as ‘a very quiet, modest fellow, - full of learning of all sorts and very keen about all Chaucer points,’ letter of 12 August, 1872, CUL, MS Add. 8916/A72/63. Ten Brink’s thank you letter to Bradshaw, following his visit to Cambridge is MS Add. 8916/A72/72, 19 September, 1872.

⁶³ ‘Third Report of the Chaucer Society ... 1871’, p. 2. *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge made by Andrew Borde, ... A Compendyous Regyment or A Dyetary of Helth, ... Barnes in the Defence of the Berde ...*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, *EETS* E.S. 10 (London, 1870), ‘Foreword,’ dated 30 July, 1870, 110.

⁶⁴ ‘Sixth Annual Address of the President ... 18th May, 1877’, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 17 (1877-9), 10.

⁶⁵ ‘Recent Work at Chaucer,’ 385.

⁶⁶ F. J. Furnivall, ‘Recent Work at Chaucer,’ 385.

German jealousy of Britain's overseas empire – Bismarck was at this time resisting demands that Germany should form colonies until the sudden reversal of this policy in 1884-5, and the subsequent 'Scramble for Africa'. Furnivall took pride in keeping up with current affairs, to which he often referred in his writing, however incongruously. Yet the whole purpose of the Chaucer Society was that Chaucer should be better understood and widely read, and, if Germans and Americans were willing to invest their intellectual and monetary resources in this project, this was to be welcomed.⁶⁷ Furnivall was always staunchly pro-American, but his German sympathies waxed and waned in accord with his views of German foreign policy. Late in life he lost no opportunity of telling Alois Brandl that 'he considered the Germans as cousins only, but the Americans as brothers.'⁶⁸ And yet he had many warm friendships with individual German scholars visiting England: Brandl observed that such men, though accorded a chilly reception in private libraries and 'commercial circles' were sure to be welcomed by Furnivall with practical assistance.

For the time being the English had the manuscripts; however, this was before the purchase of the entire Bridgewater Library, including what was seen by then as its 'choicest treasure', the Ellesmere Chaucer, in 1917 by Henry E. Huntington.⁶⁹ The Englishman best placed of all was Henry Bradshaw, who, as the Librarian of Cambridge University Library, had 'under his hand ... two first-rate and two poorer, manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales ... and soon almost all the Chaucer MSS. in England had passed through his hands.' Furnivall assigned equal honours to Bradshaw and ten Brink in establishing the canon of Chaucer's works from the 'sham', the one by manuscript inspection, the other by rhyme tests.⁷⁰ Bradshaw, who died the following year (1886) after this was written, was no match for the uhlans' 'outputs', though he was extraordinarily generous in making his findings available to Furnivall, Skeat and Morris.⁷¹ Yet his natural testiness was irritated by Furnivall's blithe citation of his views without further corroboration: 'I always object to your writing such nonsense in print as Mr Bradshaw believes this is not Chaucer's, or thinks that it is not. Were it any one but yourself I should take pains to contradict it – it is so radically absurd – but it is no use ever contradicting F.J.F.'⁷²

The great edition, to which the Six-or Seven –Text was a necessary preliminary, was course, Skeat's monumental seven volume edition of the *Works*, in which the *Canterbury Tales* occupy vol.

⁶⁷ Chaucer Society Prospectus. Child wrote to Furnivall on 27 July, 1869, to say that the £50, 'with its wonderful interest' did not excuse him from additionally paying the annual 2 guineas subscription, King's College London, Furnivall Papers, 5/1/6.

⁶⁸ *Frederick James Furnivall*, 14, 'This feeling ebbed away in course of time, and in 1909 he made his peace by a charming act of courtesy, when he once more nominated a German to a vice-presidency in the Early English Text Society.'

⁶⁹ See the account in the *New York Times*, 27 May 1917, quoted in Alfred David, 'The Ownership and Use of the Ellesmere Manuscript', in *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (San Marino, Ca, and Tokyo, 1995), 307-26 (321).

⁷⁰ 'Recent Work at Chaucer', 385.

⁷¹ Compare Skeat's obituary for Bradshaw: 'It was he who gave me constant assistance in discussing the rimes and metrical analysis of Chaucer's verse ... We all know how profusely, I might say how royally, he gave his aid... it is really more than twenty years ago, that Mr Bradshaw welcomed me as a student at the Cambridge University Library, and first began giving me his ready help ... I can remember to this day the expression on his face, and the occasional remarks, which alike so plainly seemed to imply – "I help this man because he seems in earnest, but he has a great deal to learn if he ever means to come to any good,"' 'Fourteenth Address of the President ... 21st May 1886,' *Transactions of the Philological Society* 20 (1885-7), 344-5.

⁷² Letter to Furnivall, 17 October 1870, King's College London, Furnivall Papers, 5/1/1-2.

4.⁷³ Skeat offered his edition of the *Tales* as ‘an entirely new one, owing nothing to the numerous printed editions which have preceded it.’ But, ‘On the other hand, it owes everything to the labours of Dr Furnivall for the Chaucer Society, but for which no satisfactory results could have been obtained, except at the cost of more time and toil than I could well devote to the subject. In other words, my work is entirely founded upon the splendid “Six-Text” Edition published by that Society, supplemented by the very valuable reprint of the celebrated “Harleian” manuscript in the same series. These Seven Texts are all exact reproductions of seven important MSS., and are in two respects, more important to the student than the MSS. themselves; that is to say, they can be studied simultaneously instead of separately, and they can be consulted and re-consulted at any moment, being always accessible. The importance of such opportunities is obvious.’⁷⁴ Obviously, too, the utility of the ‘Six-Text’ depended on just how ‘exact’ the reproductions of the manuscripts could be in an imperfect world. As Furnivall said of the seventh, Harleian, text, ‘It is as accurate as twice reading of every line with the MS by me can make it; but no doubt little slips have happened: they always will befall.’⁷⁵ The answer was reproduction in facsimile.

Furnivall took a keen interest in new technology, and saw an opportunity after Joseph Swan (inventor of the incandescent light bulb) patented in 1868 his new process for producing permanent photographic images, and set up the Autotype Co. of London to commercialise it. Autotypes enabled publication of manuscript facsimiles without the intervening stage of engraving (itself a form of transcription, and open to the same ‘slips’).⁷⁶ They were not, however, cheap, and the Chaucer Society could only publish single images, not entire manuscripts, amounting to 30 plates over 10 years. And, if the *Six-Text* was clumsy, this, standing 20” (50 cms) tall, was a monster. Yet Furnivall intended ‘in course of time’ to publish autotypes of ‘all the chief Chaucer MSS. among the Society’s publications.’ ‘Not because the illuminated ones look pretty, but to enable students who can’t get at the MSS to judge of their age and character.’⁷⁷ This was taking the principle of every man his own editor to extremes – in practice the chief beneficiaries ought to have been those trained in palaeography who were unable to consult manuscripts themselves, including the Germans and Americans. But it could be difficult to persuade owners to lend their manuscripts for photography, and the photographer’s time was limited. Not all the ‘chief’ manuscripts could be included, at least in the first tranche. Thus it was not possible until the very end to include an image of Ellesmere, and C.U. L. Gg iv. 27 was also elusive.⁷⁸ The exercise of selecting the images gave Furnivall the

⁷³ See the summary of proposals to produce a comprehensive edition of Chaucer in the second half of the nineteenth century given by Pollard in his preface to *The Globe Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard, *et al.* (London, 1908), vii-viii. Pollard’s ‘Globe’ edition, published by Macmillan, was the successor to Furnivall’s and Bradshaw’s plans; Aldis Wright, John Earle, and later Skeat, pursued plans for a ‘Library’ edition, to be published by the Clarendon Press (which subsequently developed into Skeat’s ‘Oxford Chaucer’). Bradshaw was to have assisted by collating the Cambridge manuscripts (CUL, MS Add 2591/286, Earle to Bradshaw, 7 March, 1866). See further CUL, MS Add.8916/A70/62. The ‘Globe’, intended to be a more popular edition, based the text of the *Tales* on the Chaucer Society’s ‘seven’ texts’, using Ellesmere as the copy text (xxix). See further A.S.G. Edwards, ‘Walter W. Skeat’, in *Editing Chaucer*, 171-89.

⁷⁴ *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. iv, *The Canterbury Tales: Text*, vii.

⁷⁵ *Harleian MS 7334*, vi. See the assessment of Furnivall’s accuracy by Baker, ‘Furnivall’, 164-5.

⁷⁶ See further, J. R. Sawyer, *The Autotype Process, Being a Practical Manual of Instruction in the Art of Printing in Permanent Pigments* (London, Autotype Fine Art Company, 1877).

⁷⁷ *Autotypes of Chaucer Manuscripts*, Foreword to Part 1, signed 16 March, 1877. The plates are not restricted to the *Canterbury Tales*.

⁷⁸ By 22 March, 1877, the Syndics of Cambridge University Library permitted the loan of their manuscript ‘on a Bond of £500,’ Foreword, n. 1. ‘Mr Pretorius, who takes the negatives,’ only had time to photograph C.U.L. li.

opportunity to review the dates of the manuscripts: E. A. Bond, and Edward (later Sir Edward) Maunde Thompson, Keeper, and Deputy-Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, agreed to compare the handwriting of the Chaucer manuscripts with dated charters in the Museum's collection – the result was, again, to elevate the high status of MS Harley 7334, 'which we've all along held to be of 1400 A. D., or very soon after,' to that of 'oldest Chaucer MS. known'. But, because it did not belong to Bradshaw's 'A-type', it was still 'a less valuable MS. as a basis for the text than the best of the A-type set.'⁷⁹

Everyone admired the *Six-Text*, but, whereas Furnivall saw it as the start of a project to print at least 'specimens' of all surviving Chaucer manuscripts because 'real students of Chaucer want to see all evidence themselves, and not take other folks' word for facts,' 'our German fellow students and lovers of Chaucer' wanted to use the material to construct a genealogy of the manuscripts which might, in due course, be used to construct a critical edition.⁸⁰ But the printing of all variant readings to be found in the 57 manuscripts known to Furnivall containing the *Canterbury Tales* was a task beyond even his energy and resources. Even the *Variorum Chaucer* publishing initiative by the University of Oklahoma Press, beginning in 1979, 'only' offers variants in individual Tales from 'some thirty or so copies,' using 'important' manuscripts and printed editions.⁸¹ Subsequently the 'Canterbury Tales Project' has undertaken complete collations of all manuscripts and early printed books; to date it has issued 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' (published in 2006).⁸² In the absence of the Project's 'computer collation program', Furnivall's *Six-Text* was the precursor of eight further volumes in the Chaucer Society of 'Specimens' from manuscripts considered to fall into the same groups, all printed in the same 'oblong folio' format.

Because Furnivall's researches for the *Six-Text* had identified the 'Pardoner's Prologue and Tale', with the preceding 'Doctor-Pardoner Link', as especially prone to textual variation, he chose this part of the *Tales* for the *Specimens*; subsequently the Society also printed the variants to 'The Clerk's Tale' from eight manuscripts not included in the *Six-Text*, or other Chaucer Society publications, as a means of investigating the 'worth' of manuscripts which lacked the 'Pardoner's Tale'.⁸³ As a foundation for a critical edition, the project was flawed from the outset, as the titles of the volumes themselves acknowledge: these are *Specimens of All the Accessible Unprinted Manuscripts*. The uncooperative Earl of Ashburnham continued to make the Chaucer manuscripts in his collection inaccessible. Assessment of these three manuscripts had to be deferred until after his

3. 21 (containing the *Boece*) during his visit. The last plate represents fo. 57v of Ellesmere ('Man of Law's Tale').

⁷⁹ Foreword. Furnivall noted other relatively minor differences between the new dates and 'my own previous notions'. But 'an amateur's opinion can't stand against those of trained officials, with Charters beside them.'

⁸⁰ 'Note by Dr. Furnivall', *Specimens of All the Accessible Unprinted Manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales ...* put forth by F. J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society 92 (London, 1898), xx.

⁸¹ www.ou.edu/variorum/ accessed 8 May, 2014.

⁸² www.canterburytalesproject.org, accessed 29 July, 2014. The Project originated in 1989-90, and is now based at the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing at the University of Birmingham.

⁸³ Chaucer Society, 1st series, 81, 86, 90-94, 97, published between 1892 and 1900; see further Zupitza's comment, Preface to Part 1, iv, and Furnivall, 'Specimens of the Various Readings in the Doctor-Pardoner Link,' *Six-Text*, Part IV (1872), 58.

death and their sale in 1897. Another uncooperative owner, Lady Cardigan, held out until long after the Chaucer Society had been wound up.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Julius Zupitza, first Professor of English Philology at the University of Berlin, and subsequently Johann (John) Koch, school teacher, also in Berlin, agreed to edit the *Specimens* from the transcriptions prepared by others, including Furnivall.⁸⁵ Koch succeeded to the project after Zupitza's sudden death in 1895. Their parallel texts are preceded by lengthy discussions of the variants in an attempt to reconstruct the manuscripts' 'pedigree' (both working upon the initial groupings proposed by Bradshaw). They are heavy going for even the most devout Chaucer 'lover', though Koch attempted to mitigate somewhat 'the monotony naturally connected with a subject like this.' Zupitza provided a *stemma codicum* (except that the term was not yet available in English) of the first tranche of seven; Koch subsequently described a 'trial-pedigree' of the manuscripts in the Petworth House group, derived from Zupitza's notes. Koch was not confident about presenting his findings in a diagram – Mark H. Liddell, of Texas, did this for him. Because both Zupitza and Koch acknowledged the probability that scribes compared their exemplars with other manuscripts, the result resembles the web of a spider on acid.⁸⁶ And this evidence is taken merely from 'The Pardoner's Tale' – as Koch pointed out, his researches on 'The Clerk's Tale' suggested that, though similar, the textual history of that tale was not identical.

Furnivall, sceptical about critical editions, nevertheless welcomed Zupitza's and Koch's daunting royal quarto tomes because they were providing a goldmine of Chaucer manuscript data. The facts were the thing – the two last volumes in the series consisted merely of slabs of parallel text without any prefatory Chaucer 'cram' whatsoever. So what use could be made of this welter of information, which had taken 34 years (from the publication of the *Temporary Preface to the Six-Text* in 1868)? Koch himself urged 'the greatest caution in the construction of a critical text,' though he felt able to publish his own critical edition (based on Ellesmere) of 'The Pardoner's Tale' in Germany, and simultaneously in the Chaucer Society.⁸⁷ After all the effort expended, and thanks expressed for the Germans' goodwill, energy and learning, Furnivall's verdict was devastating, 'The object in printing these *Specimens* was to let students see what the MSS from which they were taken were worth, and what the chance was of improving Chaucer's text from them. Personally I expected little, and have not been disappointed.'

iv. There and Back Again

⁸⁴ As Furnivall noted, 'we have now *Specimens* of all the known MSS. of the *Canterbury Tales* containing the Pardoner's Tale, except (I suppose) that of Lady Cardigan (which will doubtless be printed when she dies,' 'Note by Dr Furnivall', *Specimens*, 92, xx. The sale of 177 lots of what was called the 'Appendix' Ashburnham manuscripts, took place in May 1899; Koch's preface to this volume is signed January, 1900. The 'Cardigan' MS. was stolen in 1923, restored to the owner in the following year, but sold on 7 April, 1925 to the University of Texas at Austin. See further, Clara Marburg, 'Notes on the Cardigan Chaucer Manuscript', *PMLA*, 41 (1926), 229-51 (she was enabled to see and describe the manuscript during its brief sojourn at Vassar in 1924).

⁸⁵ On Zupitza (1844-1895) and Koch (1850-1934), see further, Utz, *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology*.

⁸⁶ *Specimens*, Part IV, ed Julius Zupitza, with an introduction by John Koch, Chaucer Society 90 (London, 1897), iii, xlvi, xlvi.

⁸⁷ *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, by Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Edition*, by John Koch, Englische Textbibliothek 7 (Heidelberg, [1902]); also Chaucer Society, 2nd Series 35 (London, 1902).

This is a downbeat note on which to conclude, and Furnivall always bounced back, ‘Let no one think the money and work spent on the printing of these *Specimens* thrown away.’ The legacy of the *Six-Text* is contradictory. On the one hand, his remark that ‘Real students of Chaucer want to see all evidence themselves, and not take other folks’ word for facts,’⁸⁸ has been prophetic. Technological developments are slowly making possible Furnivall’s dream of easy access to manuscript images and parallel texts – though team efforts cannot replicate Furnivall’s one-man ‘go-ahead-it-iveness’, as Skeat called it.⁸⁹ There is a sense abroad that we have been deafened by Ellesmere from listening to other possibilities: the evidence which, as Ralph Hanna says, ‘remains in all its robust plurality’, still awaiting investigation: ‘Thoughtful consideration of such manuscript alternatives may produce a rather different, a more fractured and various Chaucer the author.’⁹⁰ On the other hand, Skeat’s edition (made possible by the *Six-Text*), and his descendants, Robinson I and II, and Riverside, have well served the need for an authoritative text of a canonical writer.⁹¹ In some ways, because Furnivall and friends were pioneers, the *Six-Text* was a magnificently wayward enterprise. It is as well that the six eventually went up to eight: three of the original six chosen (Corpus, Lansdowne and Petworth) essentially present three iterations of the same information. The importance of Harley 7334 was early understood, and, when Victorian critics’ eyes were not dazzled by Ellesmere’s splendour, continued to be acknowledged. The puzzle it presented was that Harley contained some excellent readings, which, as Tatlock said in an influential 1904 essay, ‘it is very tempting to attribute to Chaucer’, and which Skeat also thought contained ‘some emendations from an inspired source’. But it also contained many more which seemed unworthy. Because it was difficult to imagine Chaucer’s muse cohabiting with an ‘ordinary scribe’, Tatlock concluded that it represented a ‘non-Chaucerian revision’, albeit with some lucky hits.⁹² Skeat’s reappraisal of Harley 7334 was more positive. Though its scribe was careless to the point of ‘idiocy’, nevertheless, ‘we must regard this MS as being absolutely the most *valuable that exists*, because it gives *the best and latest authoritative arrangement of the Tales*.’⁹³

The claims of Ellesmere and Hengwrt to represent the unsettled state of Chaucer’s text at his death have long been recognised. And, along with Corpus 198, Harley 7334 is returning to the critical purview as a vital witness to the ‘fractured and various’ Chaucer *de nos jours*.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ *Specimens ... Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale, put forth by F. J. Furnivall ... with an introduction by Prof. John Koch, Chaucer Society* 91 (1898), xx.

⁸⁹ A coinage probably based on the colloquial Americanism, ‘stick-to-it-iveness’. See *OED*, first recorded usage 1867. See further, Derek Pearsall, ‘Frederick James Furnivall (1825-1910)’, in Helen Damico, ed. *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, 3 vols., (New York and London, 1995-200), II. 125-38 (134).

⁹⁰ ‘Presenting Chaucer as Author,’ 39.

⁹¹ *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston and New York, 1933), 2nd edn. (London, 1966); *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson, et al. (Boston, 1987).

⁹² John S. P. Tatlock, *The Harleian Manuscript 7334 and Revision of the Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer Society, 2nd series 41 (London, 1909, for 1904), 32.

⁹³ Skeat’s italics. ‘It was Bradshaw who regarded this type as being “the most authentic,” and he is usually right,’ W. W. Skeat, *The Eight-text Edition of the Canterbury Tales, with remarks upon the Classification of the Manuscripts, and upon the Harleian Manuscript 7334*, Chaucer Society, 2nd series 43 (London, 1909, for 1905), 32-5.

⁹⁴ See further Estelle Stubbs, ‘“Here’s One I Prepared Earlier”: The Work of Scribe D on Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 198, *RES*, NS 58, No. 234 (2007), 133-53; Ralph Hanna, review of the Oklahoma Variorum, *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography*, 8 (1984), 184-97.

