

MANUSCRIPT KINSHIP AND FAMILY TREES

STEMMATICS—THE PROCESS TRADITIONALLY used by manuscript scholars to decide which variants to present in an edition—is based on the model of genealogical descent. The German philologist Karl Lachmann is generally attributed with the systemization of the stemmatic method, by which manuscript variants across a textual tradition are compared in order to establish related groupings and probable lines of descent from a hypothetical error-free authorial original. Critiques of the method, and the recensionist editorial practices derived from it, have perpetuated since its earliest development, resulting in various procedural and objective-based adjustments.

The stemmatic approach has been subject to two major and overlapping critiques. The first, mainly coming from editors and book historians working within the discipline of manuscript studies, is that the method does not reflect the material realities of manuscript transmission. I expand on Michael Sargent's suggestion that stemmatics rests on two false principles: the "principle of overdetermination (that although a given manuscript in a complex pattern of diffusion may demonstrate a number of conflicting agreements in common variation with various other manuscripts, it must be assigned a single location in the textual pedigree); and the principle of false Ockhamism (that the smallest number of branches of diffusion must be the most probable)."¹ As scholars have struggled to reprioritize various features of individual manuscripts alongside the text a growing separation has appeared between the material analysis of manuscripts and the way that we map their textual relations. Other models have been proposed to understand scribal copying practices and modes of manuscript transmission. New Philology, Stephen Nicols writes in his seminal introduction to *Speculum's* 1990 special issue on the subject, suggests that "[r]ecalling that almost all manuscripts postdate the life of the author by decades or even centuries, one recognizes the manuscript matrix as a place of radical contingencies:

1 Sargent, "Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors," 212.

of chronology, of anachronism, of conflicting subjects, of representation.”² However, stemmatics continues to visualize textual relations as static chronological and genealogical systems.

Second, feminist scholars reject the language and rhetoric of stemmatics for the cisheteropatriarchal limitations it sets on the field of inquiry. “A rhetoric of heteronormativity, repronormativity, and patrilineality more specifically is deployed to group manuscripts into ‘families’ of originals and derivatives,” observe Roberta Magnani and Diane Watt, “these derivatives are, in turn, chastised for their inferior and corrupt status which removes them further away from the fetishized authorial original.” Per Chapter 1, we might remember that the concerns of the cisheteropatriarchy are also racially inflected. Compare, for instance, the language of corruption used by the antiquary and editor, Joseph Ritson (1752–1803)—a representation of the nationalist philological impulse of the time—, “[t]he Saxon language, after having been corrupted by the Danes, who spoke a tongue of distant affinity, began to be infected, by the Norman-French.”³ Infection follows corruption as changes to the Old English language belie the untenable fantasy of white Anglo-Saxonism. The “patriarchal paradigms” that Magnani and Watt observe, lead to value-laden judgments and what texts deserve academic remembrance, and which manuscripts might be of scholarly import. They act as barriers to inclusion—shaping the demographics of the field by signalling who is welcome and who is not. But they also fail to account for the vicissitudes of much medieval authorship, which often involved elements of compilation, collaboration, and anonymity not transposable onto the idea of masculinist authorship that these models project and reinforce.

This chapter questions, as others have done before, the patrilineal logic that governs models based on genetic filiation. I take up Sargent’s suggestion for a rhizomic model of manuscript relations in order to think more widely about non-linear transmission, with the conclusion that individual abruptions and evolutions of transmission—like the abruption of queer being—provide better models than the cishetero nuclear family for understanding the medieval reading experience. I take seriously the proposition that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizome, and the queer and trans familial politics it has been applied to, provides a different perspective on the relationships governing manuscript production. In doing so, I engage with both of the critiques presented above and demonstrate their enmeshment in a

2 Nichols, “Philology,” 8.

3 Ritson, ed., *Romanceës*, lxii.

shared cisheteropatriarchal logic. Finally, I turn to constellation, used by V. Jo Hsu to formulate relations between literatures that might offer a home to queer and trans Asian Americans. Trans approaches to relationality and kinship, through the rhizome and the constellation, I suggest, present other ways of thinking about manuscript relations that emphasize contingency, counteractivity, cross pollination, and disrupt the teleological drive towards cultural modernity.

The Family Tree

It is important to consider how compulsory heterosexuality—defined as the accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling—shapes what it is possible for bodies to do, even if it does not contain what it is possible to be. Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force.

Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 145.

Lachmannean stemmatics posits that, by comparing scribal variants across a textual tradition, it is possible to understand the manuscripts of that tradition as related families of objects. Karl Lachmann (1793–1851) developed his model as both response to and support for the creation of critical editions: stemmatic modelling is based on the comparison of manuscript variants, and its outcomes help scholars and editors decide which readings to privilege and which to amend in the quest for the urtext. This method became known as the “common-error method,” “according to which it is unlikely that two scribes will make the exact same error in the same place independently. Thus two or more witnesses that transmit the same error most likely derived the faulty reading from a common ancestor.”⁴ The resultant relationship diagrams take the form of family trees that map the descent of manuscript witnesses from a single originary source through bipartite divergences from that source (Figure 4).⁵ For textual critics, the common-error method was codified into the editorial practice known as recension. In the intervening period, scholars have become less convinced by the hunt for an authorial original, but many of the mid twentieth-century editions medievalists rely on are based on recensionist practice (albeit with its objectives altered to focus on establishing a best text or archetype of a tradition.)

⁴ Greir, “Lachmann,” 271.

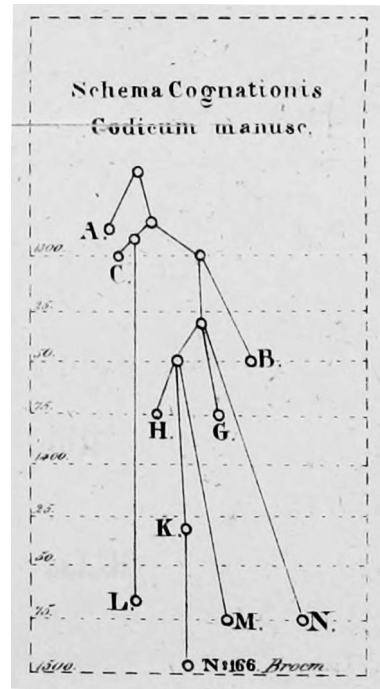
⁵ For a more substantial overview of this history, see Sargent, “Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors,” 199–208.

Figure 4. The earliest known stemma made for a textual tradition. “Schema Cognationis Codicum Manuscriptum,” in Carl Johan Schlyter and Hans Samuel Collin, eds. *Corpus iuris Sueo-Gotorum antiqui*, Samling af Sweriges Gamla lagar, vol. 1. (Häggström, 1827), table 3. Internet Archive.

Moreover, the dramatic increase in computer power over the last generation has marked a return to recension in digital editing projects based on phylogenetic models.

Generations of editors and textual critics have pointed to the anachronisms in Lachmann’s methods. Scribes did more than just introduce error to their texts. Matthew Fisher and others have noted the editorial, sometimes authorial, role taken by some scribes, who took pains to update, amend, and improve aspects of the copy text that they found wanting.⁶ Meanwhile, Daniel Wakelin has emphasized the effort made by most scribes to copy correctly, which might include correcting areas of the exemplar where error was perceived.⁷ Scribal variation, these scholars show, is neither the inevitable product of lazy rote copyists, nor a unidirectional journey away from a platonic textual ideal. Rather, it derives from the material and lived experiences of individual copyists. Variation is a wide-ranging category that might include mistakes, but could also incorporate creative intervention, editing, critical comparison, cross-referencing, and attempts at correction. Moreover, particular words, texts, or material contexts might invite identical variants from different scribes working at unrelated points in the textual tradition, or a scribe may detect and remedy error in an exemplar so that the resultant copy is cleaner than the one before it.

Suggestions to the contrary are characterized by moralizing and pathologizing language indicative of the white supremacist and cisheteropatriarchal standards under which these methods developed. So, when editors like Sir George Warner (1845–1936) describe a group of variant manuscripts of *The Book of John Mandeville* as “defective,” Tom White finds, his use of that word is “underwritten by the essentializing pseudoscientific abstractions



⁶ Fisher, *Scribal Authorship*.

⁷ Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 55.

of Social Darwinism. Textual bibliography and Social Darwinism,” White observes, “shared a deep disciplinary and ideological investment in the elaboration of hierarchies and genealogies, and in the construction of a national corpus purged, as far as was practicable, of its ‘defective’ elements.”⁸ Warner’s work, like that of many of his contemporaries treated in Chapter 1, was heavily imbricated in contemporary colonialism. He edited the text for The Roxburghe Club, an elite literary society with membership limited to forty, mostly imperial politicians and members of the landed aristocracy, and—White has shown—“Warner cannot help but see his *Book* as a precursor to British imperialism.”⁹ Warner’s use of the term “defective” invokes the late nineteenth-century language of disability, and with it (according to contemporary pseudo-science) the heritable features of race.¹⁰ The language, of course, is dehumanizing, both to the scribes who produced these variant manuscripts, and to modern readers and users. It has also limited scholarly attention to this larger group of manuscripts, preventing proper engagement with the variation that they have with one another on the basis of one perceived commonality.¹¹

All this before we get to the thorny category of premodern authorship. Medieval “authors” engaged in a range of activities—translation, collation, compilation—alongside freeform composition. Medieval literature is, as Bernard Cerquiglini puts it, “a literature that is in conflict with that authenticity and uniqueness that textuary thought connects with aesthetic production.”¹² Moreover, some authors refashioned their texts, sometimes after the first copies had been made. William Langland undertook three significant revisions of *Piers Plowman*, resulting in three dramatically different traditions now known as the A, B, and C-text. However, some of the scribes who worked on its manuscripts, clearly came into contact with exemplars from more than one of those textual traditions. Rather than choose between the traditions he encountered, Richard Osborn, the fifteenth-century scribe of Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (or the redactor of another manuscript earlier its copying history) sought to harmonize the work by interpolating

8 White, “National Philology,” 832. See also, Grigely, *Textualterity*, esp. 19–30, which charts a different course through the connections between eugenics and philological method than I did in Chapter 1.

9 White, “National Philology,” 840.

10 White, “National Philology,” 841–45.

11 White, “National Philology,” 846.

12 Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*, 33.

sections of A and C into his copy of the B-text.¹³ The result is a hybrid text. At least four exempla went into the making of the material that ended up as the text of HM 114, including two copies of the C-text (one potentially integrated into the A-text prologue and one independent).¹⁴ It is impossible, therefore, to relate the manuscript neatly to any one of the three family groups: integrating it into stemmatic representations requires that it appear more than once, or begin a new family of its own. As a result, editors have rejected the manuscript as “ruinously corrupt.” George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson excluded the variants it preserves from their edition of the B-text, as including them would “more than doubled the size of the critical apparatus.”¹⁵

The arboriform stemma, which replicates the form of the cishetero family tree (Figure 4), belies its patrilineal investments, visually privileging the original over all other copies.¹⁶ Like the search for the urtext, this investment partly stems from the valorization of the author as sole originary force. In such models, all manuscripts (worth knowing) are the progeny of a white male author, whose existence forms the basis of their authority and assures them a place in the canon. Conversely, each generation of remove from the author represents a step away from the ideal of the original. The resultant model, therefore, engages in what Elizabeth Freeman calls, the “chronopolitics of development.”¹⁷ It is at once regressive, in its search for the mythologized original, and positivist, in its teleological ambition to plot change over time. The chronopolitics of development describes the ideological conditions that prompt “supposedly post-imperial states” to “track and manage their own denizens through an official time line, effectively shaping the contours of a meaningful life by registering some events like birth, marriages, deaths, and refusing to record others like initiations, friendships, and contact with the dead.”¹⁸ Such chrononormative moments (and their registra-

13 San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (*Piers Plowman*). See Wood, “Nonauthorial *Piers*”; Bart, “Intellect, Influence.” For a full account of the interpolations see Russell and Nathan, “*Piers Plowman* Manuscript.” For the scribal identification, Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes in the City*, 17–37.

14 Wood, “Nonauthorial *Piers*,” 494. See also, Scase, “Two *Piers Plowman* C-Text Interpolations.”

15 Kane and Donaldson, eds., *Piers Plowman B*, 14–15, as cited by Wood, “Nonauthorial *Piers*,” 483n3.

16 Magnani and Watt, “Queer Philology,” 257–58. See, also, Sargent, “Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors,” 212.

17 Freeman, “Erotohistory,” 58.

18 Freeman, “Erotohistory,” 58.

tion in law), according to Judith Butler, are used to produce the “unity and transmissibility of the nation”: by reinforcing the State’s power to confer recognition on to its citizens; by arbitrating over who deserves recognition; and by tying the possibility of recognition to key moments in the normative white cisheterosexual life course with a focus on the reproduction of white cisheterosexual subjects.¹⁹ That is, the interests of stemmatic representation replicate the interests that prompted the founding of the field as I described them in Chapter 1. Stemmatology is invested in the chronopolitics of anachronism, which sees the medieval past/authorial original as both aspirational—as pure and unadulterated in its white cishetero masculinity—and as a black mirror for modernity, revealing its development and sophistication.²⁰ The visual rhetoric of the stemma, then, situates the manuscript within imperialist teleologies of modern cultural production, while also establishing the limits of what it might be allowed to signal (by viewing it as degradation of some superior originary text.)

Moreover, regardless of what its root represents (urtext, best text, or something else), the stemma proposes a linear reproductive hierarchy that transposes manuscript copying onto cishetero familial models. To understand how such models posit arboreal-genealogy as a means of organizing and controlling society, we might look no further than their medieval predecessors. Late medieval English and French genealogical rolls display the dynastic lineage of kings, connecting them, through roundels and branches, to their royal predecessors (see Figure 5). Genealogical rolls were produced in England from the end of the thirteenth-century until well into the sixteenth, with a peak during the reigns of Edward I and II (1272–1327), from which time at least forty rolls survive (not all of which are illustrated).²¹ The early rolls are textually very similar—some are direct copies from known exemplars.²² I take a richly produced example, British Library, MS Royal 14.B.vi, in order to emphasize the visual rhetorics at play in these works. The illustrated rolls typically begin with the early English heptarchy and end with a roundel containing an image of the reigning monarch: in this case, the last illuminated roundel is that of Edward I (r. 1272–1307) (see Figure 5,

19 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 110–12, quote at 110.

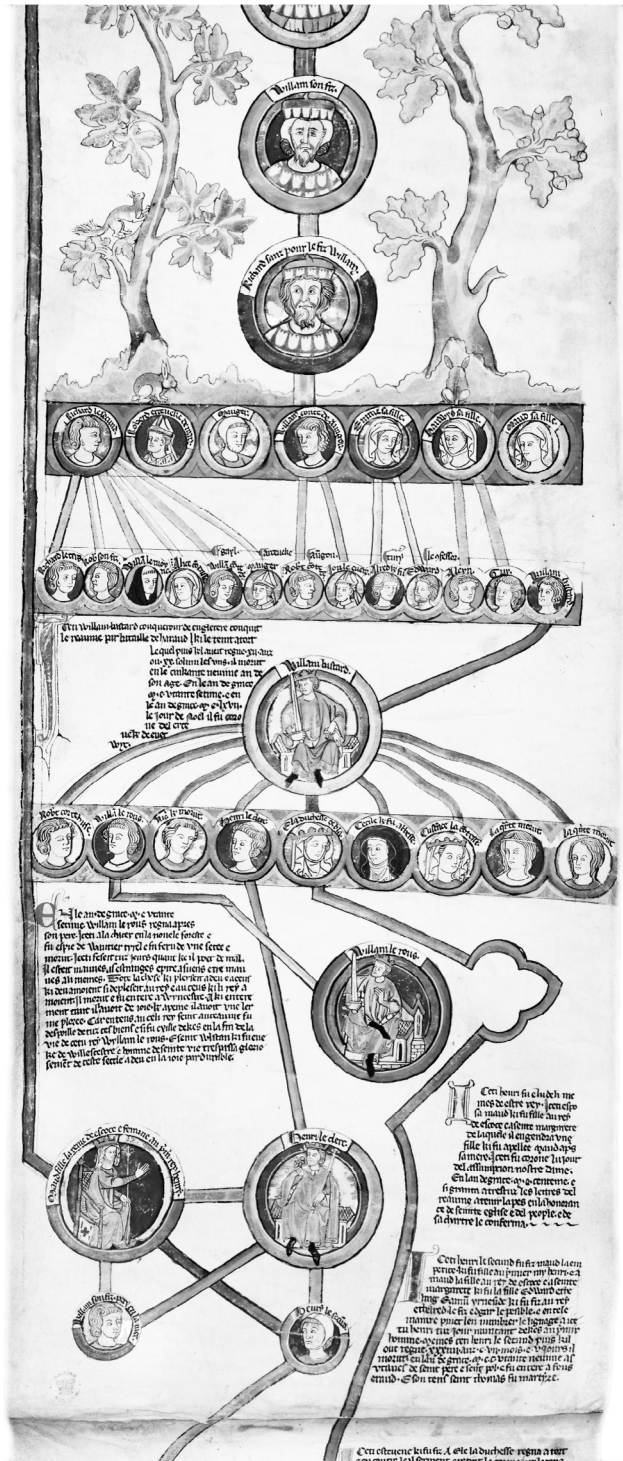
20 See, also, Drimmer, “Queer Transmissions,” esp. 7–8, with reference to Menon, *Unhistorical Shakespeare*, on the technological positivism and “heterotemporality” (7) built into this narrative.

21 de Laborde, “First Manuals,” 4.

22 See, for example Wakelin, *Designing English*, 70–71.

right). The historical commentary, an Anglo-French translation of an earlier Latin work, is organized around the diagram, subordinating text to image. “The English Royal dynasty,” this framing suggests, “acts as the guiding principle of national history and is thus conferred a role in structuring its unfolding.”²³

According to Olivier de Laborderie’s analysis, three significant features underpin the visual rhetoric of the roll: the imagery, the layout, and the format. The image of Edward I at the end of Royal 14.B.vi depicts him in a red and green frame, with a gold backdrop. Edward sits on a throne, wearing a blue robe, a red mantel, and a crown, and holding a sword and sceptre. He has these features in common with most of the other kings on the roll. Only a few are provided with further iconographic identifiers, like Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–1066), who holds his crown aloft to God in a gesture that presumably represents both his pious rejection of earthly wealth and his loss of the crown to the



²³ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 10.

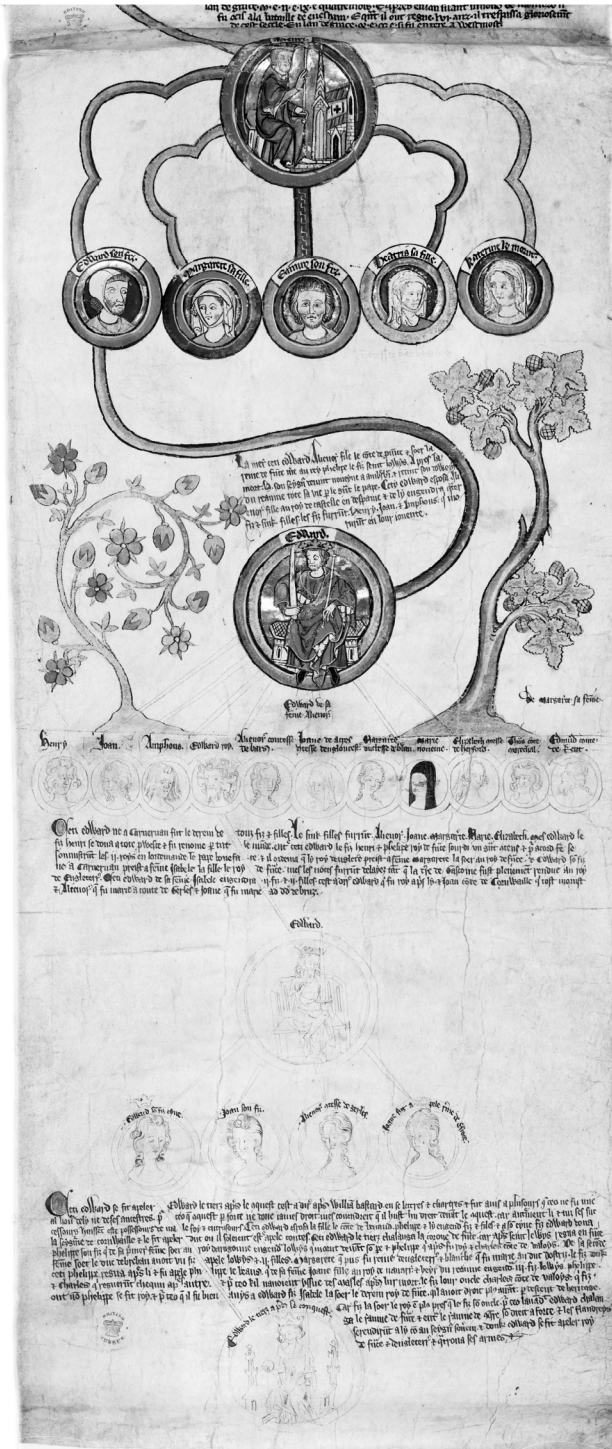


Figure 5. *Genealogical Chronicle of the English Kings*, ca. 1340. London, British Library, MS Royal 14.B.vi, m. 5 and 7. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

Norman monarchs. Colour and position, de Laborderie has shown, can signal reputation and moral standing. However, overall, the artist aims for a “standardized aspect” (compare Figure 5, left).²⁴ De Laborderie draws a compelling comparison to Edward I’s Great Seal, which also depicts an impersonal image of the monarch crowned and enthroned, facing forward, with sceptre and orb.²⁵ This is the imagery of authority and authentication, and the focus here is not on the individual, but on the institution. Despite the disruption of the Norman Conquest, and before it the Viking invasion of 1016, English kingship is depicted as uniform and unified.

The format and layout of the roll assert and historicize the continuity of the royal dynasty. The red and

²⁴ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 18.

²⁵ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 18.

blue connecting lines give the appearance of an unbroken chain descending from Ecgerht of Wessex (r. 802–839), offering legitimacy through continuous connection even if that connection occasionally had to be fudged. As if to underscore the point, trees “flank[...] two essential parts of the genealogy”—the lineage of the Norman dukes and the final roundel portraying Edward I—echoing upward facing Tree of Jesse diagrams, and, de Laborderie suggests, “a metaphor of fertility and fruitfulness.”²⁶ However, as noted above, at certain points the chain does break. To remedy this, the artist of Royal 14.B.vi aligns the Kings along an imagined vertical line through the centre of the roll. In doing so, de Laborderie suggests, they raise the “genealogy of office” (*Amtsgenealogie*, per Ursula Nilgen) to the status of traditional familial relationships, “compensating [for] the unconcealed breaks of continuity as regards the hereditary devolution of the English crown.”²⁷

The visual rhetoric of the layout relies on selection: for kingship to take precedence, the field cannot become over-populated. Decisions over who to include and who to exclude reveal the political motivations at stake. For example, women are rarely highlighted (although daughters are sometimes included among the smaller horizontally arranged lines depicting a monarch’s children), except where they are significant to sustaining dynastic claims. Such is the case for Mathilda of Scotland, who by dint of a thick vertical line connecting her to her mother St. Margaret of Scotland, daughter of Edward the Exile, and “an unusual graphic device” connecting her to her husband Henry I (r. 1100–1135) unites the Norman kings with their early English predecessors, sustaining a linear dynastic hegemony despite the visual upheaval caused by the Norman Conquest and the interleaving of the Norman dukes (Figure 5, left).²⁸

The form of the roll both supported and participated in historicizing the authority of the English crown and regulating the transmission of English culture. “English records, from the Chancery rolls to most manor court rolls,” writes de Laborderie, “were written down on rolls, this format could convey an impression of authority, if not of indubitable official nature. Whatever was kept on rolls must have been regarded by a good many people in late thirteenth-century England as coming from circles partaking, at some level, in the exercise of power.” That is, as with the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the

²⁶ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 14.

²⁷ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 17, citing Nilgen, “Amtsgenealogie und Amtsheiligkeit.”

²⁸ de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 12.

mayoral court discussed in the previous chapter, the format itself conveyed the authority of the crown to its audience. But it also afforded further claims to continuity and an unbroken historic precedent. The ability to “indefinitely extend” the document (through the addition of extra membrane), and to move backward and forward along it, places English kingship within a linear history with no “fix[ed]...temporal limit.”²⁹ In fact, the incomplete plummet figures at the end of Royal 14.B.vi may indicate that at some point it was extended and updated by the scribe to include the reigns of Edward II (r. 1307–1327) and III (r. 1327–1377) (see Figure 5, right). Later rolls, like the fifteenth-century Middle English roll at the Beinecke Library, extend the history backward in time also, preceding the English heptarchy with biblical history and events from the Matter of Britain.³⁰ In this case, the roll traces the descent of the English crown from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, suggesting that Edward IV’s (r. 1461–1470, 1471–1483) authority was not just dynastic but divine, and charting a deterministic Christocentric English history that could easily be absorbed into modern white Christo-nationalist medievalisms. The makers (and—more pertinently—the royal and aristocratic owners and patrons) of these rolls argue, through their material and visual rhetorics, that royal authority and political power, and by extension cultural Englishness, was derived through unbroken patriarchal connection to an early heroic past and its Biblical precursors.

The epigraph for this section comes from the work of cultural theorist Sara Ahmed. She defines “compulsory heterosexuality” as the “accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality.” Compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed tells us, “shapes what it is possible for bodies to do, even if it does not contain what it is possible to be. Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force.”³¹ Ahmed’s formulation originates from Adrienne Rich, who identifies the mechanics through which compulsory heterosexuality produces women as compliant heterosexual subjects, and in doing so reduces them to such subjects. By offering no other social formation as a viable option, “it leads the daughter to ‘accept’ incest/rape by her father, the mother to deny that it is happening, the battered wife to stay on with an abusive husband.”³² The cisheteropatriarchal logic of the stemma, in this case, shapes what is possible to ask about and do with manuscripts.

29 de Laborderie, “First Manuals,” 8.

30 New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS Marston 242.

31 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 145.

32 Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” 645.

For Butler, compulsory heterosexuality is framed in terms of the control and replication of “culture” via the figure of “the poor child,” who queer kinship structures threaten to sever from the normative nuclear family. They observe, in relation to debates surrounding the provision of marriage-type contracts between non-straight couples in the mid-2000s, that homophobic defences centring the rights of the child demonstrated anxieties—like those the genealogical rolls seek to arrest—surrounding “the transfer and reproduction of culture, where ‘culture’ carries with it implicit norms of racial purity and domination.”³³ Here, cultural reproduction is equated with the production of (white cis straight) children, who will go on to produce their own children, within cisheteronormative family units where culture can be shared. “Children,” Jules Gill-Peterson wrote in 2018, “by design deprived of civil rights and infantilized, are easy targets of political violence—just as easily, it turns out, as concerned adults can claim them for protection.”³⁴ Today we find that the first wave of anti-trans legislation, which tends to focus on children—trans children’s access to medical and social interventions and their ability to play sports—does so in the name of protecting cis and trans kids alike: protecting trans children from medicalization by overly “liberal” parents, or from making decisions they cannot take back. Legislation also tends to aim at protecting cis children from their trans counterparts, now cast as a capable and malicious threat. In both cases, “the poor child” must be simultaneously arrested and liberated for cishetero culture to progress as normal.

The investment of the cisheterosexist political establishment in the control and replication of “culture” is more overt, when the object at stake is not the format of the family, but cultural objects themselves. Here, the transmission of objects of (white western) culture—medieval manuscripts—becomes legible only through subscription to the dominant model for familial reproduction. Culture exists, stemmatic visual representations inform us, because the cisheteropatriarchal family model and the religio-political structures that produce it, makes it so. Queer and trans objects might be incorporated into such structures, through the application of the visual rhetoric of the stemma, or—as is Butler’s concern—the legalization of “gay marriage.” However, to do so implicates queer desire in cultural reproduction by restricting what queer can be: in legislation, Butler states, “desire and sexuality are ratified, justified, known, publicly instated, imagined as permanent, durable,”

33 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 110.

34 Gill-Peterson, *Transgender Child*, 2.

but they are also limited to certain recognizable formations.³⁵ The incorporation of certain queer relationship structures—those that look most *like* their heterosexual counterparts—into state sanctioned and legislated life courses places other queer and trans modes of being outside of those structures. The result is a renewed focus on policing how relationships can fit the model, and to whom conferred protected status does or does not apply. To extend my comparison, whether or not a stemma is invested in the patriarchal model of the authorial original, whether or not the textual criteria by which variation is recognized have been adjusted, the visual rhetoric of the stemma affixes meaning to manuscripts, delimiting them in space and time.

Proponents of a revised “New Stemmatics” propose an approach that is agnostic to the source of variation (i.e., it removes the moralizing implications of assigning “error” to a scribe). Divergence from the hypothetical original is, from this perspective, no longer framed as a defect and all kinds of variations are admitted as evidence of textual relationships. New Stemmatic practitioners aim to produce computer-aided quantitative analysis of textual variation using all of the available variant data.³⁶ That analysis might be delimited and specified by admitting only “substantive variation,” so that only variants that introduce significant modifications to the text are included in the model.³⁷

Phylogenetics and cladistics present two overlapping computerized approaches. Genetic models of descent may appear to provide a natural analogue for manuscript transmission. Both describe a type of reproduction based on copying, in which encoded material (chromosomes/text) is selected and replicated along with any variation it may contain. But a book is not a genome. The scope of code at play in our DNA is at once much vaster than most books (three billion base pairs of DNA on one copy of the human genome compared to roughly three hundred fifty thousand characters in the book you are currently reading) and much more limited (most human chromosomes come in pairs of which one is copied from each parent, with twenty three pairs on a genome). Genetic variation is produced through mutation and recombination at certain points in the genome via predictable and discoverable biochemical processes. Although anomalies exist, large amounts of genetic material are “highly conserved” and not susceptible to variation (hence the oft repeated factoid that humans share roughly half

35 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 111.

36 See Bordalejo, “New Stemmatics.”

37 Bordalejo, “Genealogy of Texts,” 566.

of their genetic code with a banana). Textual variation in manuscripts, on the other hand, comes out of a host of human factors both intentional and accidental, both easily explained and highly erratic, both textual and non-textual. Between any two humans, the level of genetic variation is roughly 0.1 percent, whereas, in a manuscript *directly* copied from an extant exemplar, Wakelin demonstrates divergence at a rate of about 3 percent.³⁸ Some scribes, of course, were more accurate copyists and others much, much less so.³⁹ As William Robins has argued, “genetic mutation, statistically considered, should happen at a similar rate over long periods of time” according to the molecular clock, “mak[ing] it possible to assign rough figures for the time that has elapsed on every branch of a genealogical tree, and... to compare different possible trees on the basis of how likely they are to have occurred given a standard rate of change.” Manuscript copying, on the other hand, is unpredictable: a scribe may copy a manuscript immediately or select an exemplar hundreds of years after it was written.⁴⁰ Moreover, as Barabara Bordalejo explains, phylogenetic variation, which differentiates the evolutionary relationships between organisms, proceeds by binary logic. Genetic code is either changed to produce a differentiated organism or it is not. As a result, phylogenetic stemma are always bifid: one node cannot simultaneously split into multiple branches. However, there are plenty of cases in which one manuscript might be used to produce several copies, or one copy—like HM 114—made from several exempla.⁴¹

Cladistics (the unrooted diagrammatic representation of evolutionary changes prior to establishing lines of descent), as Robins shows, brings with it different issues. Peter Robinson has showed that a cladistic approach (provided by Robert O’Hara) produced a very similar stemma to the Old Icelandic poem *Svipdasmál* as his traditional approach.⁴² However, his cladistic analysis of the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* drew considerable criticism, not least because in order to produce a workable unrooted tree, his team had to exclude fourteen manuscripts (using their own subjective criteria). Similarly, “rooting the tree and determining which state of the text was the earliest relied on traditional notions of error and authorship, not on any

38 National Institutes of Health, “Understanding Human Genetic Variation”; Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 46–47.

39 Robins, “Editing and Evolution,” 113.

40 Robins, “Editing and Evolution,” 113.

41 Bordalejo, “Genealogy of Texts,” 566.

42 Robinson and O’Hara. “Cladistic Analysis.”

new scientific or objective criterion provided by cladistics.”⁴³ Moreover, the objectives of cladistic analysis, in which “sophisticated quantitative analyses borrowed from biology” are directed towards fine-tuning the comparison of variants in search of the authorial text, Robins suggest, are out of step with the trajectory of the field. “Being reliable in a statistical sense,” he writes, “does not necessarily translate into a stemma being compelling in an interpretive sense.” “In this and in other ways...cladistic analysis [does] not seem to have been set sufficiently within the larger context of what we surmise about...textual transmission.”⁴⁴

If we agree that stemmatic models misrepresent the practices of premodern authors, scribes, and readers, the ways those subject positions are prioritized, and the dynamics of movement between them, then another model that—with the aid of a computer—can reproduce those results in greater detail will only replicate its flaws. Recognizing a range of sources of variation is no help if, even as scholars acknowledge that textual variation comes in multiple forms that might enter the tradition in different ways and at different points, they continue to treat them homogeneously in their analysis. New Stemmatics continues to treat variation as an abstract property of the text, which is both governed by and governs textual relations, and not as a material exigency that is situationally embedded. Indeed, Bordalejo clarifies that phylogenetic models present “textual data” not “literal representations” of historical realities. They are, she proposes, “an educated hypothesis created following a specific model” that imposes its own (in this case phylogenetic) assumptions.⁴⁵ Textual data is not un-situated or ahistorical and presenting it as such suggests that the manuscripts that contain it are static objects, frozen in time (or taken out of time) at the point that the manuscript was written.

This is not the material reality that governs the text: a copy of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* provides an apt example. The book was made for Jean d’Angoulême, younger brother of poet and duke, Charles d’Orléans, and grandson of Charles V of France. Angoulême’s coat of arms—three *fleur-de-lys* differenced by a lambel with three pennants, the first charged with a crescent—inhabits the opening initial (Figure 6).⁴⁶ Jean was a prisoner of the English crown for over three decades from 1412 to 1445, after he was given as a hostage to assure the Treaty of Buzançais when he was just thirteen.

43 Robins, “Editing and Evolution,” 109.

44 Robins, “Editing and Evolution,” 111 and 110.

45 Bordalejo, “Genealogy of Texts,” 567.

46 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS anglais 39 (*Canterbury Tales*), fol. 1r.

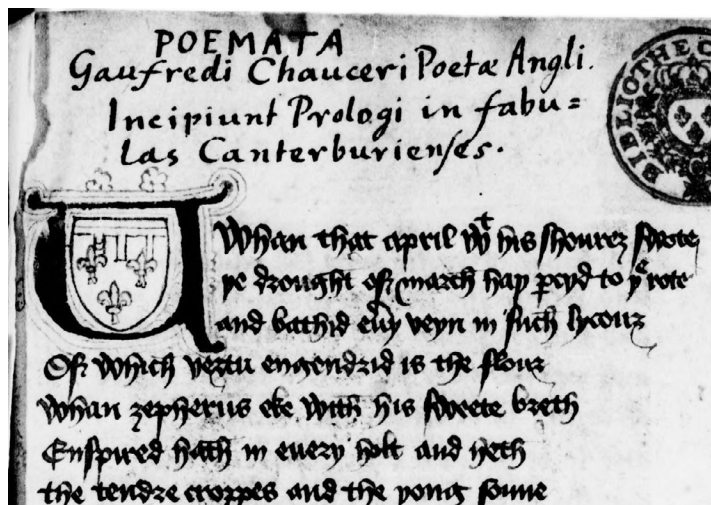


Figure 6. The first opening of the *Canterbury Tales*, 1412–1445. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS anglais 39, fol. 1r. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Source www.gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

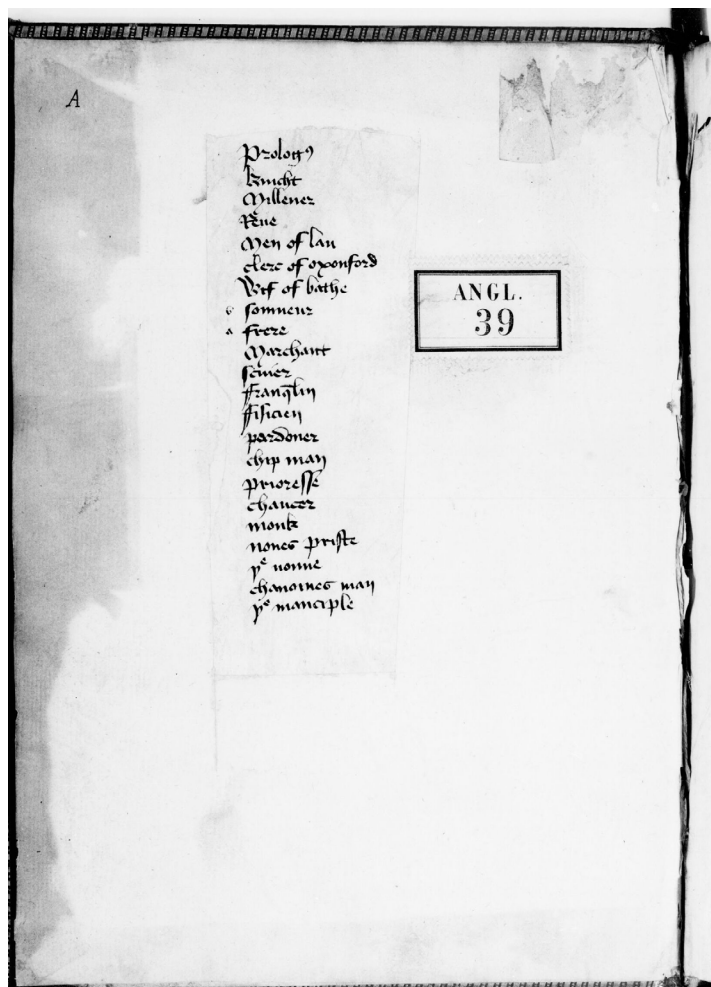


Figure 7. Jean d'Angoulême's contents page for his *Canterbury Tales*, copied in his own hand, 1412–1445. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS anglais 39, fol. A. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Source www.gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

While in England, he collected, commissioned, and copied books, this manuscript among them. The scribe, who signs himself “Duxworth Scriptor,” wrote his English in a northern or north midlands dialect.⁴⁷ The exemplar Duxworth used seems to have been flawed, prompting him to make corrections from at least one other copy. Jean also made a series of corrections with reference to another copy of the *Tales*, perhaps different again.⁴⁸ A number of unique compositions—either by Duxworth or Jean but written in Duxworth’s hand—supplement the corrections to fill larger gaps in the verse, while Latin intertexts abbreviate tales considered too vulgar, absurd, or sad.⁴⁹ These changes to the copy text rest on the back of a network of further material and textual connections: both in the form of the manuscripts they consulted to correct their readings and in the more diffuse web of literary influences that shaped their written responses to the text. At what stage, we might ask, was this text considered finished? When and where should its progress be crystalized within the static structure of the stemma?

The manuscript’s geographic and temporal status is further complicated by the use that Jean made of it. His *Tales* manuscript was probably made by the English scribe while Jean was captive in England. However, on his release he took many of his books back to France, and at the time of his death in 1467 the manuscript was listed among the contents of his library in Cognac.⁵⁰ The coloured capitals appear to be the work of a French artist, perhaps supplied after Jean’s return to the Continent.⁵¹ Jean also added a table of contents, which is now stuck to the front pastedown (Figure 7).⁵² The contents list is brief, giving only the occupation of the pilgrim responsible for each tale. But, despite its brevity, it is—like Duxworth’s additions—linguistically mixed. It begins with the Latin “Prologus (prologue),” followed by the English “Nicht (knight),” “Millener (milliner),” and “Reue (reeve).” Further down the list are found the French, or French-rooted, “somneur (summoner),” “frere (friar),” and “Marchant (merchant),” while the penultimate entry, “chanoins man (canon’s man),” employs a French-English hybrid.⁵³ How do we account for

47 BnF, MS anglais 39, fol. 83v; Crow, “*The Reeves Tale*”; Crane, “Duxworth Redux,” 17.

48 Crow, “John of Angoulême,” 96.

49 Crane, “Duxworth Redux,” 18.

50 The inventory is found in Paris, Archives nationales de France, P 1403, nos. 38–39. The *Canterbury Tales* manuscript is item number 37.

51 Crane, “Duxworth Redux,” 24.

52 BnF, MS anglais 39, fol. A.

53 I thank J. R. Mattison for this observation, which she has discussed in conference papers, and which prompted me to attend to this manuscript.

these mixed-language additions by a Continental French writer, influenced by a series of other works with their own communal networks, and in a manuscript that has spent most of its life in Continental libraries, in a static system that asks for markers of sustained but atomized linear chronological progress.

My objections here should not suggest that a conception of the form of the text (or even some abstract hypothetical originary text) is not important. But it is only a part, and I would argue a rather small one, of the story of what texts can do and their existence across and through time. Efforts to displace the morally freighted category of error in favour of more contextually situated understandings of variation—coincident variation, copying mistakes, addition, alteration, correction, and self-conscious editing—or to supplant the search for authorship with more neutral constructions—of the archetype or the best text—do not address the visual rhetoric of the stemmatic diagram.

Sargent explains the deterministic ascription of meaning in different genetic terms: “an arboriform stemma falsely imputes to the developmental scheme a genetic logic comparable to that by which an acorn can only grow into an oak tree.”⁵⁴ The significance of a manuscript, in other words, is pre-determined by its location on a stemma, which is paradoxically used to decide whether its variants should bear textual weight. The increasing popularity of low-cost mail in genetic ancestry testing services (GATS), V. Jo Hsu argues, has resurfaced the white supremacist underpinnings of deterministic genetic logics. These services often appeal to an essentializing model that promises that “DNA encodes indelible truths about who you are and ‘what makes you unique.’” In actuality, the tests compare key markers on a subject’s DNA with global population data collected by the Human Genome Project, in order to present a break down of “ancestry” or “human variation” via “continental taxonomies (Native American, European, Asian, Oceania, and Africa)” that substitute as “an approximation of race.” “Though GATS (claim to have) emerged from opposing scientific motives” (celebrating “what makes you unique”), Hsu notes, “scientific racism established the primary categories through which we narrativize new data.”⁵⁵ Indeed, the underlying racializing logic of such tests has made them particularly popular with white nationalists looking for evidence of their racial purity.⁵⁶ Importantly, the way

⁵⁴ Sargent, “Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors,” 204.

⁵⁵ Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 112.

⁵⁶ See Panofsky and Donovan, “Genetic Ancestry Testing.”

GATS are positioned as indicative of individual identity (“what makes you unique”), “papers over” racialized histories of “conquest and exploitation,” privilege and subordination, “with biological determinism.”⁵⁷ Similarly, the position of a manuscript within an arboreal-stemma act as a measure of its significance, papering over the individual features that make it interesting. This is not only misrepresentation, but limitation.

What is needed, Hsu concludes, are ways to “conceive of familial lineages...that disrupt, challenge, and reinvent the categories that have isolated and harmed queer diasporic subjects.”⁵⁸ For manuscript studies, we need ways to understand the relations between manuscript, text, and material text that disrupt their use in white supremacist and cisheteropatriarchal cultural production and recognize their status as contingent, socially embedded, and relational cultural products.

Queer Families, Trans Lives

The visual-rhetorical impasse of the stemma, New Stemmatics tells us, is a problem of presentation. The bipartite stemma, we are reminded, offers the shortest possible route between the extant witnesses and a hypothetical original. It is not a “literal representation” of the relationships between manuscripts, but a measure of agreement or disagreement within a textual group.⁵⁹ Thus, Ben Salemans uses the computational genetics program *PAUP** (Phylogenetic Analysis Using Parsimony *and other methods) to model a series of unrooted stemma for the *Lai de l'ombre*—which a century earlier caused Joseph Bédier to doubt the usefulness of the genealogical method—demonstrating that each of the eleven possible arrangements that Bédier proposed for the lai’s stemma encode the same textual relationships. The “chain,” Salemans shows, remains the same, just the placement of its “root” has changed.⁶⁰ In response, Salemans advocates an approach that, rather than determining the root of the stemma *a priori*, orients (or opts not to orient) the chain after variation has been assessed. For Salemans and other New Stemmaticists, this observation overcomes any qualms that scholars might have about the stemma’s apparent hierarchical investments. But as book historians we know that the presentation of information is not

⁵⁷ Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 112.

⁵⁸ Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 113.

⁵⁹ See Bordalejo above, for example.

⁶⁰ Salemans, “Building Stemmas,” 34–35.

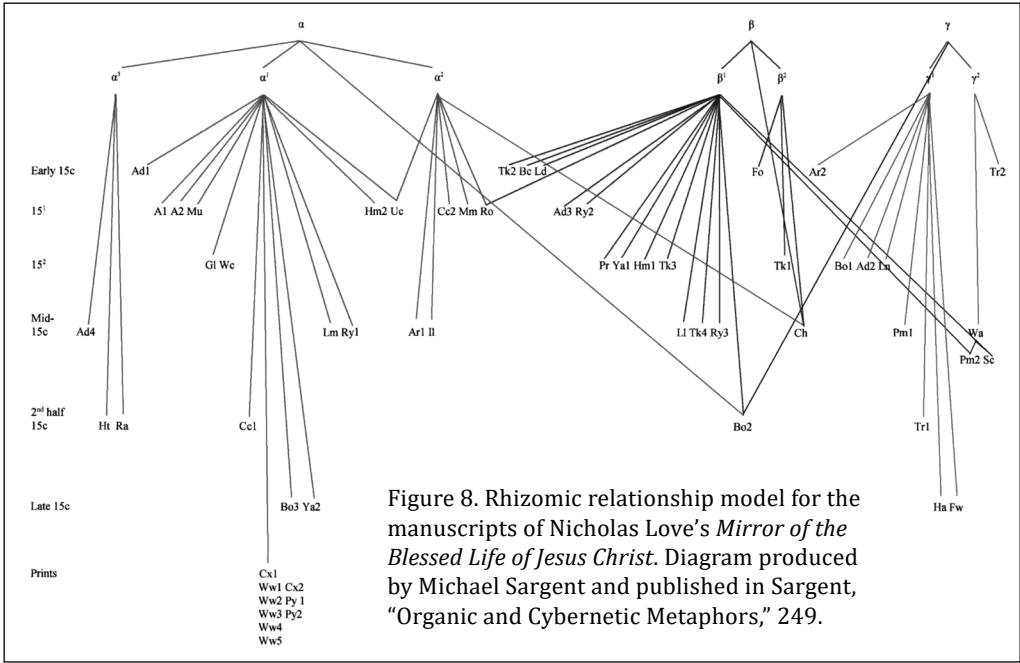


Figure 8. Rhizomic relationship model for the manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Diagram produced by Michael Sargent and published in Sargent, "Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors," 249.

neutral. I have shown above that, whether rooted before or after complete variant analysis, arboriform stemma are oriented towards particular intellectual outcomes (constructing canonicity, introducing hierarchies, and fixing textual objects within a progressivist temporal frame) and implicate manuscripts in the construction of oppressive socio-political realities (those which benefit from a teleological and positivist formulation of white Euro-American society.)

Unrooted forms remove some visual hierarchies but retain other stemmatic problems, as Sargent explains. They do not solve, for example, the inability of recensionist stemmatics to differentiate between sources of textually similar variation. Nor can they tell us more about the relationships between manuscripts (only their textual differences) or allow for connections between nodes.⁶¹

Sargent's solution is the rhizome. Prior to Sargent, David Greetham and Michael Stoltz also found the rhizome a "useful" model.⁶² Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, each employs the rhizome as a means of avoiding the patrilineal assumptions of the arboriform stemma

61 Sargent, "Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors," 241.

62 Sargent, "Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors," 247.

and envisioning the practice of textual criticism beyond recension.⁶³ “The rhizome,” Sargent imagines, “like a mushroom ring or a circular stand of larch trees, has multiple “points of origin” at the surface (every time a rhizomorphic radicle breaks the surface of the ground, it sends up another tree), branching and interconnecting in ways whose “direction” (mother plant to daughter plant) cannot be determined.”⁶⁴ This concept of non-hierarchical interconnection allows Sargent to posit an edition of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* where every manuscript text can be viewed in relation to every other by varying the base text depending on where the reader enters the rhizome (Figure 8).⁶⁵ If we enact the rhizome not just as an apt visual metaphor for the (unrooted, anti-hierarchical) relationships between witnesses to a textual tradition, but as a model of connectivity and production, what else might we learn about medieval books and their transmission? I suggest that the rhizome, particularly as it is interpreted and developed in trans criticism, presents a conceptual alternative to the stemma that recognizes the situationally embedded enmeshment of textual production. The rhizome offers an understanding of manuscript production that is transferable, relational, that develops and changes across time, and that is always in process.

Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the rhizome also departs from a critique of “arborescent” logic. This structure, they note, “has dominated... Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy.”⁶⁶ Trees, they suggest, provide a model that can only account for bifurcating linear descent. Such models force dualist logic. Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari, “[a]rborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths.”⁶⁷ The nodes in an arborescent system, can always be traced back through bifid connections to the root, and share no connections to the nodes at the same remove from the root, but on different branches. The result is a unidirectional top-down hierarchy, in

63 Greetham, “Phylum-Tree-Rhizome”; Stoltz, “Linking the Variance.”

64 Sargent, “Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors,” 247.

65 Sargent, “Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors,” 247–51. See also, Sargent, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 72n12.

66 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 18.

67 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 16.

which the root represents both the pure and unadulterated original and the source of linear progress, and from which the outcome is overdetermined. Further, arborescent thinking operates by reproduction, its objective to replicate the structure that came before, and its logic is therefore totalizing (all nodes point back to the root). So far, so recensionist.

When Deleuze and Guattari introduce the rhizome, it is in relation to the production of books. In this case, it is their own book that they constitute as an “assemblage” that “functions” in relation to other things—other objects, including other books, but also dematerialized linguistic and social structures (or structures materialized otherwise)—that operate outside of and against pre-determinate hierarchies of power.⁶⁸ Crucially, unlike the arborescent stemma, which figures the text as a self-sufficient reproductive entity, the rhizome recognizes the entanglement of actors and forces that come together in the production of a book as materialized text. “There is no difference,” proffer Deleuze and Guattari, “between what a book talks about and how it is made.”⁶⁹

The rhizome is defined by seven key principles:

Connection. The rhizome does not fix the order or direction of connection between objects; any node may be connected to any other. The relationship is not mono-directional. The connections are mobile and fluid, evolving, spreading, and changing.

Heterogeneity. The nodes in a rhizome need not be textual or linguistic, or even ontologically the same: “semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status.”

Multiplicity. The object is not unitary. It is not a central “pivot” around which other objects, forces, and cultural signifiers circulate (and which can therefore be reproduced), but an enmeshment of all of those things. Hence, the term node used above to describe the placement of participant aspects is a misnomer. Deleuze and Guattari prefer to understand these aspects as “lines” or “planes,” which, because they are flat, cannot be split according to binary logic, but proliferate and multiply through space.

68 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 4 and 7–8.

69 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

Asignifying rupture. When the relationship between objects in an arborescent model is broken, it cannot be reformed. The branch is severed from the root. In a rhizome, breaking allows for remaking. Relationships are constantly forming and reforming. A line may take off in a single direction (“a line of flight”), but it will also retain connections, and form new connections, within the whole system.

Cartography. The rhizome is not an image produced through replication or genetic reproduction (“tracing”). It is a process, a “map” that “is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.” The rhizome is mobile and accessible from different perspectives.

Decalomania. The rhizome cannot be described in totality: to do so is to convert it to a fixed structure (to trace it) and thereby shut down its possibilities. However, objects can always be resituated within the rhizome. “A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch.”⁷⁰

For trans and queer studies, the rhizome offers an alternative to the patrilineal reproductive logics that govern the arborescent family tree. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as “an antigenealogy,” that “operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots”; “a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality.”⁷¹ Alternative modes of family building—families that take shape outside of patrilineal reproductive frameworks—have been crucial to many queers, for whom (cishetero) familial ties are often fraught. The rhizome offers a model for relationships that emerge from a breakdown in the natal family unit (4), that prioritize multiple, variable connections (1 and 3), and that allow for discrepancy between the subject(s) and object(s) of affections, their modes of expression, and the overlapping forms of closeness these relationships entail (2).

Such relationships may be temporally or spatially multidirectional. On reflecting on her friendships with queer colleagues, Sedgwick notes that they “deroutinized the temporality” that characterizes heterosexual “generational relations.”⁷² Jack Halberstam defines queer temporality as the model “that emerge[s]...once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois

70 See Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 7–16.

71 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 10 and 18.

72 Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading,” 25–26.

reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” behind.⁷³ Trans people especially may experience time as a series of compressions, extensions, and abruptions: the typical markers of the overdetermined straight cis life course—infancy, adolescence, marriage (and divorce), retirement etc.—may be inaccessible, delayed, repeated, or skipped.⁷⁴ For Julian Carter, “transitional time” moves “forward, backward, sideways, [and] tangential[ly].”⁷⁵ Carter’s essay, which is in part a commentary on the trans historicizing practices of dancer and choreographer Sean Dorsey, presents a “vision of transitional time and transitioning bodies, as dynamic and relational negotiations of wrongness... Anticipation, retroflexion, and continuity co-exist in the same body, at the same moving moment of space and time.”⁷⁶ As Ruth Pearce summarizes, transitional time is “the embodied coexistence of past, present and future, along with physical and social changes that might occur, will occur, have occurred. I read this as futurity without linearity...we can regard the transitioning body as simultaneously rooted in a future through anticipation—or even multiple, differently gendered futures—and in the past through social readings that sex the body’s physical frame.”⁷⁷ The rhizome defies expectations that one’s life, and the relationships formed across it, should be either temporally linear (descendent) or biologically guaranteed. Instead, it presents the possibility of relationships that are communally embedded, unconstrained, and fluctuating in connection across a lifetime.

By introducing temporal and relational mobility into manuscript affiliations, we can imagine connections between multiple textual branches of a tradition. Such connections might change across a period of writing, reading, or ownership. For instance, there is no longer pressure to place the harmonized copy of *Piers Plowman* in HM 114 within one familial group. Instead, we can understand this copy of the text as connected to multiple groups, with priority given to particular connections at particular points. But, more importantly, the rhizome positions the manuscript in relation to objects and forces beyond the textual. Understanding the rhizome as a network of interconnected forces and actions working on people and objects, allows us to

73 Halberstam, *Queer Time and Place*, 6.

74 José Esteban Muñoz terms these normative experiences “straight time”: Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 7.

75 Carter, “Dancing in the Folds of Time,” 130.

76 Carter, “Dancing in the Folds of Time,” 131.

77 Pearce, *Understanding Trans Health*, 124.

consider each moment of manuscript production and transmission as situationally embedded. In the case of the harmonized *Piers*, that might start with the acknowledgement that, as Scase observes, the same sections of the C-text prologue were interpolated at a different point in another *Piers Plowman* manuscript, and that both manuscripts were copied by scribes associated with the London Guildhall.⁷⁸ A manuscript rhizome centred on these manuscripts, then, might build a picture of the Guildhall copyists negotiating between different versions of the text and their own perceptions of authority. Such models exchange the abstracted text in favour of one that is materially situated. In doing so, they make explicit the socio-political structures—of the Guildhall, the patron, and the exemplar—that govern cultural production (rather than visually participating in those structures).

“A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.”⁷⁹ Very rarely, in models of textual transmission, can we evidence the root of the chain. Perhaps, on the rare occasion that an autograph manuscript survives, we might find ourselves somewhere near the beginning; but even then, a composition does not spring on to the parchment fully formed. Medieval authors compiled, collated, drafted, translated, so that every composition represents a network (rhizome) of dimensions, influences, and activities. Contrary to the chronopolitics of recensionist manuscript studies, which prefers to look for beginnings and ends, manuscripts operate from the middle. Embracing the in-between means first dispensing with the idea of the manuscript as product—a complete endpoint from which we can assert textual or cultural authority. As Elaine Treharne shows, manuscripts may exist at many stages of completion at different points in their life, each of which can be figured by those they exist in relation to as a kind of wholeness.⁸⁰ “Contrary to a deeply routed belief,” Deleuze and Guattari assure us, “the book is not an image of the world.”⁸¹ It is not an unproblematic copy (tracing), nor a model of textual relations. Instead, the rhizome allows us to understand not just scribal copying, but the manuscript itself, as processual. It is enmeshed in the objects and forces—social, political, cultural—that brought it in to being and that continue to sustain

78 London, Senate House Library, MS S.L. V.88; Scase, “Two *Piers Plowman* C-Text Interpolations”; see Wood, “Nonauthorial *Piers*,” for an updated findings and an account of the scholarly debate around these manuscripts.

79 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

80 See Treharne, *Perceptions of Medieval Manuscripts*.

81 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 11.

it. Understanding a manuscript as process provides a better picture of the coming together of material and action that is not overdetermined, to echo Sargent's critique.

In the case of Jean d'Angoulême's *Canterbury Tales*, we encounter a manuscript that has been variously complete at different times in its making and use. The "defective"—but presumably wholly written—text was corrected with reference to at least one, possibly two other copies, with additional original compositions widening the manuscript rhizome from other manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* to a broader swathe of textual influences. A recensionist approach to the manuscript might discount those corrections and additions, or even the manuscript as a whole, but an approach that understands the manuscript as always in process could see this book as representative of a continuum of textual and material influence. The textual tradition as represented by this manuscript demonstrates the movement and availability of exemplars; the practices of a reader not concerned with authenticity but with a particular vision of the reading experience; and the bookish aspirations of Jean as a patron who reread and perfected his books. The contents list that Jean produced is one indication of a process of textual refinement that included removing content that he or his scribe found distasteful, as well as adding and correcting. Modern editions, and analysis like the present discussion, participate in these material relations, extending the temporal frame of the rhizome into the present. Prioritizing manuscripts that demonstrated these extended relational networks might displace patriarchal authority in favour of diffuse and variable use. It provides a gateway for understanding reading as participant in the transmission of texts, while recognizing that the perspective of the scribe and the reader—or the scribe-reader—was always partial, limited, interrupted. And because of that, could be creative and co-constitutive.

While manuscripts may be "in the middle," they are not at the centre. The rhizome is not static, it continues to move, break off, and reform. As queer and trans rhizomics remind us, the planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization. This planar movement is part of scribal production also. Wakelin's analysis of the various habits of correction employed by scribes copying middle English texts shows that they developed patterns of interaction with their exemplars that might be lateral, cyclical, and/or fractured. Most scribes, most of the time, tried to transfer the text of the exemplar directly to their copy, however material circumstance might prompt other behaviours, including leaving gaps, cycling back to difficult areas, rereading, substitution, and emendation. Changes in movement (intellectual and physical) might be momentary or

they may take place over long periods, even generations, as new exemplars were acquired and consulted. The relation between copyist and exemplar, then, is not one of mechanical reproduction, but a necessarily embodied experience requiring prolonged and multi-directional negotiation between environmental constraints, an abstract conception of the work, and the realities of the material text.⁸²

Each scribe, just like every reader that follows them, presents a new way into the manuscript map—the manuscript and its variants are not a replicable experiment. As a result, any single vision of the manuscript-rhizome will be limited. Or as Greetham puts it, “we can never find a ground from which to perceive the structure at large (because it is incomprehensible, cannot be ‘grasped’).”⁸³ Consequently, the relationality of the queer rhizome must be communally constituted: the manuscript is required to act as a social space. Due to its vastness, a vision of the rhizomic-network may only be constructed through the communal vision implicated by the multiplicity of the rhizome itself. In fact, I suggest, interacting with the rhizome enters us into its network. Such is the implication of Jafari S. Allen’s “Black/queer rhizomatics,” which he describes as a “habit of mind” that is “processual—not teleological or ‘narrativized in advance’” and that “progresses through interdisciplinary juxtaposition and communal relations.”⁸⁴ Allen’s students read through a rhizome of Black queer scholarship and artwork presented against generic or chronological divisions. In so doing, they enter into relation with the authors and creators they encounter and form their own communal bonds and commitments: “Today,” Allen assures, “the runway on which Black/queer youth turn it—new-way intellectual death drops, duck walks, and poses—is not ‘new’ in the sense of without precedent or untraceable or cut off from its people. Theirs is another iteration emerging from legendary attitudes and grammars.”⁸⁵ “[Q]ueers survive,” Elizabeth Freeman suggests, “through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies...across time.”⁸⁶ Medieval manuscripts, this book proposes, offer one venue through which a shared politic, based on intergenerational, transtemporal kinship relations, might be built.

82 Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*.

83 Greetham, “Phylum—Tree—Rhizome,” 108.

84 Allen, “Black/Queer Rhizomatics,” 34 and 28 respectively.

85 Allen, “Black/Queer Rhizomatics,” 38.

86 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 58.

Constellating Manuscript Witnesses

As a system of thought, rhizomes offer manuscript studies a means of embedding our objects of investigation within wider, non-hierarchical, and crucially unrooted networks imbricated in a range of transtemporal social and material formations. Such frameworks recognize each manuscript copy as an independent object produced under specific social and textual conditions, by scribes with their own particular sets of concerns. The questions we can ask, therefore, become less about how a manuscript relates to the textual tradition, and more about how manuscripts of a textual tradition relate to one another, to the world around them, and crucially, to an ongoing community of users. How do we relate to these manuscripts? The rhizome resituates the manuscript from the static ahistorical and sanitized realm of the research library to the dynamic and continual arena of the book in use. However, marshalling the ever-expanding network of connections a rhizome might present—Greetham’s “incomprehensible” structure—and making meaningful sense of those connections is—I have suggested—not necessarily possible or desirable.

Hsu develops their method of “constellating home”—used in their monograph to negotiate, through interconnected story-paths, the “multiple displacements” experienced by QTAPI (queer and trans Asian and Pacific Islanders)—out of decolonial knowledge-making processes.⁸⁷ In *As We Have Always Done*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes the “constellation” as “an organizing concept” that positions Indigenous groups and individuals practicing various “everyday acts of resurgence” into a political formation capable of radical co-resistance.⁸⁸ Constellations are “strategic, relational arrangements” that are dynamic, hold their subjects in relation to one another, and accommodate multiple modes of being. Community constellations open up “lines of flight,” expanding capacity, allowing for collaboration, cross-pollination, and improvisation, and providing means to navigate “pathways through a contemporary political landscape increasingly defined by blockages and impasses.”⁸⁹ Constellations might be socio-political, but they can also be conceptual, material, or linguistic: Jarrett Martineau analyzes the practices of art and music collectives; Malea Powell and

⁸⁷ Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 116.

⁸⁸ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 216 and 192 (and throughout).

⁸⁹ Martineau, “Creative Combat,” 50.

the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab offer a framework for Native story-work.⁹⁰ For these scholars and activists, constellation is both the method through which story is told and shared (through repetition and iteration that adjusts the hearers perspective at each encounter) and a measure of the community relations it represents (as intersectional, geographically dispersed and displaced, and multigenerational). For Hsu, constellating stories through their structures, themes, and poetics provides a way of constructing the space of home among displaced communities.

Using constellation to describe manuscript relations involves hazards. Manuscripts are not neutral technologies. The medieval European manuscripts that survive, which form the primary focus of this book, transmit discourses of power, especially those of law and religion, that are bound up in the building and retention of empire (see Chapter 2). Manuscript studies is not a neutral, let alone minority, discourse—as discussed in Chapter 1, the field of manuscript studies takes its cues from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial rhetorics active in the founding of the modern university. Constellations, on the other hand, are decolonial technologies. The constellation, as Simpson defines it, produces “flight paths out of settler colonialism” by connecting acts of “radical resurgence, generative refusal, and reciprocal recognition” into a collective political movement that circumvents colonial power structures.⁹¹

Crucially, constellations are not equally available to everyone: they “are coded mappings...for those with star literacy,” the significance of which is “opaque” to colonizers not embedded in Nishnaabeg ways of knowing.⁹² In part, it is its opacity that affords the constellation its navigational power. Opacity and uncertainty are tactics of resistance to identity politics, which Indigenous and decolonial knowledge keepers see deriving from a colonial politics of recognition that seeks to categorize, legislate, and assimilate or eradicate minority groups. Refusing identification is protection and resistance.⁹³ Populist media sources have associated queer and trans people with

90 Martineau; “Creative Combat”; and, for example, Riley-Mukavetz and Powell. “Making Native Space.” As far as I can tell, the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab is no longer active. Members included Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, and Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson: see “Our Story Begins Here.” See, also, the artist collective, Black Constellation.

91 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 213.

92 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 212–13.

93 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 175–80. See, in this context, Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.

a shift towards identity politics. Conservative pundits cite the existence of trans people and their desire for legal rights, in particular, as evidence of the divisiveness of identity politics. First, it is important that we call such claims what they are—dog whistles from the right that politicize trans lives in an effort to sow suspicion and cast resentment on to marginalized communities.⁹⁴ Indeed, in light of such attacks, which so easily give way to state-sanctioned (and state-led) violence, we might reflect on the value of embracing obscurity. However, we should also engage thoughtfully with where the projects of claiming and obscuring identity categories intersect, especially if those projects operate from within settler colonial academic institutions. To that end, I reiterate two priorities for this book: first, I use trans (and queer) not as labels that define people according to any external markers, but as an expansive category of structural insistence; and second, I use trans critique as a means of dismantling legacies of white supremacy and cisheterosexism. When applied in the manuscript studies context, as anywhere else, constellating cannot be extractive. It should emerge from critique and seek to resurface, in whatever temporary formations those take, displaced and unseated ways of knowing that refuse oppressive institutional structures.

Constellations can temporarily stabilize and delimit rhizomic networks. Like rhizomes, constellations may present a mix of objects, people, and ideas. For Hsu, this mixture includes “linguistic, visual, and other cultural artifacts.”⁹⁵ However, unlike in a rhizome, where possible connections are always changing and multiplying, a constellation requires selection. For a constellation to be meaningful it must include some stars and exclude others, picking a pattern out of the night sky. The selected stars present a narrative that collocates the shape of the constellation in the sky and the stories represented by that shape. However, when the stories are over, our vision or our concentration is broken, or the daylight comes around, the selected stars may recede, becoming ontologically indistinct from all other stars in the sky. Stars in a constellation work in concert with one another and with the negative space that surrounds them (allowing them to be picked out and joined together), while remaining part of a larger—ever-moving and growing—whole. The rhizome of the night sky, then, is temporarily delimited in the form of the constellation, but it is not fixed in that form. Consequently, I look to constellating as informant to the practice of describing,

94 For in depth analysis of such aims, see, for instance, Cannon, *Politicization of Trans Identity*.

95 Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 130.

understanding, and making decisions about rhizomic manuscript relations. Where the rhizome presents renewed possibility, emancipating the manuscript from heteropatriarchal organizational structures, the constellation directs that disruption toward alternative, resistive, redistributive social narratives.

Constellations situate networks of relations in space and time. As Simpson reminds us, our view of the stars and their relation to one another is intimately bound up with place. In the northern hemisphere, Ursa Major (part of which is known colloquially to anglophone American settlers as the Big Dipper, to British English-speakers as the Plough, and to the Nishnaabeg as the Gchi Ojiig (Great Fisher) formation and story)⁹⁶ is visible all year round, but from points between the equator and 25° latitude south the constellation is only visible close to the horizon, most prominently in the spring, while at points south of this the main asterism (the Plough part of the constellation) cannot be seen. In cities all but the largest and closest stars disappear in the glare of artificial streetlights. “[C]onstellations are place-based relationships,” Simpson explains, “and land-based relationships are the foundation of Indigenous thought,”⁹⁷ whether that land be, like Simpson’s, on the ground in Nogojiwanong (known by settlers as Peterborough, Ontario), the collective “Nishnaabewin (Nishnaabeg intelligence),” or like Hsu, the more metaphysical claim to a space to call home.⁹⁸ In either case, place is restored by carving out space within dominant discourses (in neoliberal political norms grounded in capitalist imperialism, and limited prejudicial images of Asian American culture respectively) to effect resistance. One objective of this book is to build a home within the discipline of manuscript studies for trans, queer, and minoritized students and scholars. But it is also to demonstrate that transness already occupies manuscript spaces. Constellating manuscripts against rooted stemma—according to other non-genealogical relational bonds (as I will in Chapter 4)—and prioritizing (as a rhizome alone cannot and should not) the connections that resonate trans and queer experience, presents a tactic for uncovering such formations.

Constellations build relationships across time. When we look at the sky we are seeing back in time. The starlight that reaches our eyes may have travelled many hundreds of years to get to us (the light from our own sun is

⁹⁶ See Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 214–15.

⁹⁷ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 213.

⁹⁸ For Nishnaabewin, see Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 22–25, and Simpson, *Short History of the Blockade*.

already eight minutes old when it reaches Earth). Alioth, the brightest star in the Plough asterism, is around 300 million years old, and 82.5 lightyears away. Stars in the same constellation may be millions of miles away from one another, and millions of years apart in age. The Nishnaabeg, Simpson clarifies, do not “dissect time into past, present, and future.”⁹⁹ So, when Simpson invokes ancestral relations, it is with the understanding that her ancestors’ knowledge, life, and experiences play active roles in her actions in the present, and in the construction of “an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism.”¹⁰⁰ Simpson’s “present future”—the shared knowledge of futurity in the now—chimes with Ruth Pearce’s concept of trans temporal anticipation, which redeploys the (often negative) experiences of the past as a strategy to orient oneself toward a different and better future in the present.¹⁰¹ Hsu’s constellated connections with QTAPI ancestors are a mode of coalition building that secures QTAPI space in the present and future. Their readings “reconceptualize ancestry” (for QTAPI, whose sense of that term has been populated by “stories often used to essentialize Asian or Asian American identities and cultures”) “as an array of stories through which QTAPI place themselves in longer traditions of resistance, courage, and care.” Such connections present trans and queer kinship across time as a source of interdependent and “collaborative resilience,” through which trans people construct futurity. Trans history is not about proving that trans people are, or have been, “real,” or even (only) about demonstrating trans viability for other trans people, but about coalition building for the promise of better futures in the present.

Constellations are culturally and communally embedded: “Each constellation is only one possible configuration among infinite permutations, but it draws meaning from the connections we agree upon.”¹⁰² So the histories, presents, and futures that star-literate Nishnaabeg read in any given constellation will be different from those read by other nations or those recalled by classical Greek or Roman mythology. The narratives that Hsu constellates are embedded in, and invested in creating, community. Like Eric Darnell Pritchard before them, Hsu’s constellations of transtemporal kinship

99 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 213.

100 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 173. For Simpson’s understanding of ancestral time, see, for example, *As We Have Always Done*, 6–10.

101 See Pearce, *Understand Trans Health*, 119–55. The same strategy of anticipation is also used as a mode of protection against disappointment and negative experiences. Trans temporal anticipation is never solely positive.

102 Hsu, *Constellating Home*, 11.

constitute a form of world-building in the mould of Muñoz's vision of queer-ness as "an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."¹⁰³ In indigenous thought, ancestral constellations orient toward fugitivity: the refusal of colonial logics of statecraft and the process of rebuilding an alternative existence outside of those structures. For manuscript studies, different reorientations are at stake: yes, of the method and direction of textual criticism and material studies as highlighted by this chapter; but (more importantly) of the provision of space for trans operators through meaningful communal connection to historic trans experience that provides homes in the present future of the field.

This chapter sets up constellation as a trans tactic for navigating the cisheteropatriarchal structures still used in manuscript studies and textual criticism to organize our understanding of manuscript relations. It proposes that other ways of organizing our objects of study are possible, and that such models can offer ways to de-prioritize white supremacist, cisheterosexual modes of canon formation and material analysis, in favour of situated processual networks of communal relations. These networks—rhizomic, constellatory—offer a messier, more realistic model of the materially inflected reality of manuscript production and consumption (and all the positions in between.) As a corollary of that observation, we might consider that constellation was already happening among manuscript producers. For example, in the case of Jean d'Angoulême, who became aware of other copies of the *Canterbury Tales* through which to correct, extend, or adapt his own manuscript. As a dissident tactic for negotiating oppressive structures, constellating manuscripts and other cultural forces was available to medieval trans and queer subjects. Constellations organized according to trans kinship implicate interdependent transtemporal communities of trans experience, offering a path toward trans futurity. In the chapter that follows, I put this suggestion into practice in two different ways: first, by considering how medieval trans and queer readers might encounter community through their own book use; and second, by suggesting that as modern subjects we might also participate in that community formation.

103 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1. See, also, Pritchard, *Fashioning Lives*.

