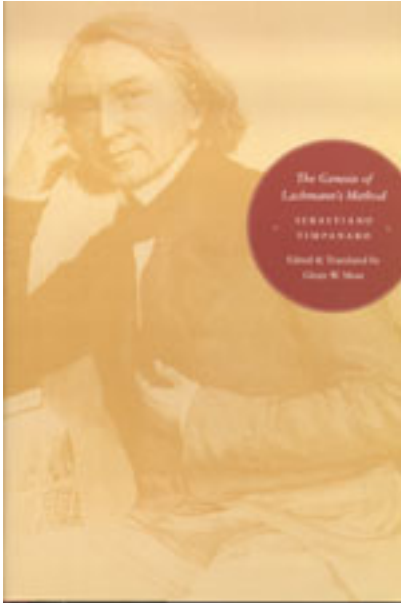


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Timpanaro, Sebastiano

The Genesis of Lachmann's Method

Translated by Glenn W. Most

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This is a book on two extraordinary characters, or rather, it is a book on one such character written by another one. Neither of them was a biblical scholar. But the one, Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), the major protagonist of the book, is known to all in biblical studies through his groundbreaking work on textual criticism and the implications it had in advancing the work on the critical edition of the New Testament. The other, Sebastiano Timpanaro (1923–2000), the author of the book, was above all a classical scholar, like Lachmann, but he was also much more, writing prolifically on many different topics, from history and philosophy, especially questions of political philosophy, to psychoanalysis and linguistics. Timpanaro was one of these typical “outcast” figures, a representative of a particular intellectual tradition, too much of a *uomo universale*, one could say, to have ever even pondered entering the narrow world of the academy. For almost all of his life Timpanaro, a member of the British Academy, worked as a proofreader at the Florentine publishing house La Nuova Italia.

The book under review is the English translation of two articles, originally written in Italian and first published in the journal *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* in 1959 and 1960 and then as a book in 1963. The book went through two revisions (1981 and 1985). A German translation appeared already in 1971 (*Die Entstehung des Lachmannschen*

Method, ed. H. Buske). Now the book has finally also been made available in English, together with a detailed introduction to the life and work of Timpanaro and substantial annexes, at the initiative of Glenn W. Most, professor of ancient Greek at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, the institute where Timpanaro himself had studied classics under Giorgio Pasquali and Eduard Fraenkel in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The Genesis of Lachmann's Method is Timpanaro's account of how scholars from the early humanists on gradually came to study the secrets and specificities of the transmission processes of written texts. The main body of the book totals less than one hundred pages, divided into eight chapters, and three appendices of some fifty additional pages, but this was enough for Timpanaro to describe not only the major developments of the research, covering a period of more than three centuries, but also critically to discuss in pointed detail the significance of this research and of Lachmann's contribution to it. More specifically, the book deals with one of the two methods that together constitute the basis of textual criticism, i.e., recension (*recensio*) and emendation (*emendatio*). "The second had been practised since antiquity," as Timpanaro says in the opening line of his work (43). The other has traditionally been regarded as "the great novelty of nineteenth-century textual criticism," of Lachmann in particular. But the question that Timpanaro wants to address is, "how much of 'Lachmann's method' should really be attributed to Lachmann, and how much should be claimed for his predecessors and contemporaries instead" (43)? The truth is, according to Timpanaro, that a minority of scholars, but among them are some of the most important textual critics (the list of the earliest representatives includes Politian, Piero Vettori, and, above all, Joseph Scaliger), had argued for the precedence of a systematic collation of the manuscript evidence over emendation. However, it proved to be a most difficult uphill fight to get this view accepted and to put it in practice, even for those who in principle believed in it. Timpanaro cites as an example the great classical philologist Richard Bentley, who in his edition of the works of Horace practiced *recensio* but all too often interconnected with *emendatio*, "and indeed for the most part the latter preceded the former" (55). Further, the need for and the importance of *recensio* was fully sensed during the eighteenth century by individuals such as John Mill and J. J. Wettstein, to mention New Testament scholars, only to be restricted in their efforts by the prerogatives of tradition and dogmatic concerns when it actually came to changing the text of the New Testament in light of the evidence that had been collated, restrictions against which Wettstein still fought in vain.

Four of the eight chapters of the book (chs. 3–4 and 6–7) deal almost exclusively with Lachmann. He enters the scene as all but a believer. His first editions (of the poets Propertius, Catullus, and Tibullus) were made on the basis of a very limited number of manuscripts and the fierce conviction that an editor should produce a diplomatic edition

with no concern at all for the meaning or grammar and entirely free from exegetical “meddling.” Timpanaro tentatively suggests that it was through his work on German medieval epical poetry that Lachmann gradually moved away from his original position. This was probably occasioned in part by pragmatic reasons (“the greater accessibility of the manuscripts”) and in part by the different purpose Lachmann had in mind. If as a classicist he was fighting the imagination of previous generations of scholars in emending the text, as a Germanist he was countering the ideal of the archetype that was readily accessible. The search for the original and for the reconstruction of the history of the text became all important, but it was handled in a “Lachmannian” way, that is, in an almost mechanical way that does not allow for “interpretation” to interfere with textual evidence. This latter aspect has often been ignored, not in the least by Pasquali, Timpanaro’s former professor, who made Lachmann, “a less mechanical, less Lachmannian, more Pasqualian Lachmann” (87) than he was. To put it bluntly, if Pasquali thought that editing without interpreting is impossible, Lachmann on the contrary made it his primary rule not to interpret, and there is no way to read Lachmann otherwise, Timpanaro argues. But at the same time he adds that this principled position must necessarily remain purely theoretical “and never anything more than boasting” (88). In chapter 5 (“Contributions of Lachmann’s Contemporaries”) Timpanaro then goes on to demonstrate that not only earlier generations but also some of his contemporaries have in many respects preceded Lachmann in developing the methodology of *recensio*.

Timpanaro’s account reads as the deconstruction of a legend, and the author is well aware of this, as is clear from chapter 7 and the way he comments on each of the four major aspects of the method for which Lachmann has been acclaimed. Systematic consultation of the manuscript evidence had been promoted and practiced already by Bentley and others; distrust of late (humanistic) manuscripts is already expressed by Scaliger; the genealogical approach of the manuscript evidence to reconstruct the history of the text, “an essential characteristic of ‘Lachmann’s method’” (115), was to a large degree the result of the work of Madvig, Ritschl, and others; and so was the fourth aspect, the formulation of criteria for a mechanical determination of which reading goes back to the archetype, which Timpanaro recognizes to be “Lachmann’s most genuine contribution,” but with the important qualification, “even if his debt to Bengel and, nearer in time, to Madvig must be acknowledged” (116). This might lead us to ask how Lachmann then did manage to obscure all the others. Timpanaro mentions three reasons: the imposing figure of Lachmann (his “oracular tone”; Lachmann’s friend J. Grimm put it somewhat less nicely when writing, “Er hatte die philologische Rechthaberei”); the fact that, unlike most of the others who have been mentioned here before, Lachmann focused solely on matters of textual criticism; and his practical mind that led him to produce editions and prevented him from being caught up in questions of methodology only. Or as Timpanaro

puts it, “He was a great simplifier, with all the virtues and vices this brings with it” (117). The same conclusion on the real contribution of Lachmann to “his” method was reached by the author of a recent monograph (see W. Ziegler, *Die wahre strenghistorische Kritik*, Hamburg, 2000, 59).

A word finally about appendix C, which was added in 1963 when the articles were republished as a book and which was adapted and updated for the reprint of 1981. It deals with a very technical matter that has always retained the attention of Timpanaro, the phenomenon of bipartite stemmas, and on which he continued to reflect, as is clear from an unfinished note found in his papers at his death and published here for the first time (207–15). The additional note sounds like a *retractatio*, or rather as an outright *damnatio*, of the view he had previously held. In the appendix Timpanaro examines an observation made long ago by J. Bédier (1928) on the (allegedly) overwhelming number of bipartite stemmas, that is, stemmas with two and only two subarchetypes, and the criticisms of Pasquali and P. Maass. Bédier had argued that the large number was due to the philologists’ and textual critics’ twofold desire to get as close as possible to the one original, yet leaving a minimal opportunity for being able to choose between two alternatives. Timpanaro is mildly critical of Pasquali’s argument that multipartite stemmas are more frequently attested than Bédier was ready to admit (160). He is far more critical, even uncharacteristically polemical, of Maass’ criticism, which is based on flawed statistics. Timpanaro’s own conclusion is (1) that bipartite stemmas are indeed what editors frequently reach at, primarily as a result of sticking to an axiological model in assessing the value of individual manuscripts (based ultimately on the alternative “good” and “bad” ones), instead of using a genuinely genealogical method (174); and (2) that in fact in far more cases contamination has unfortunately rendered it impossible to arrive at any ascertained results and leaves us with “disturbed” traditions only (182). Should we forget about these conclusions, as Timpanaro urges the reader to do in the introduction to the unpublished note when replying to the criticism of M. D. Reeve (in P. Ganz, ed., *The Role of the Book in Medieval Culture*, 1986, 57–69)? On a closer look it appears that this is not to be taken literally. Timpanaro still very much sticks to his position, as when he challengingly asks Reeve, “Would he be able to trace out a stemma of the manuscripts of the New Testament, of the Iliad, ...?” (212). And that the appendix should best not be dropped is also the opinion of Reeve himself, who beyond all criticism concludes, “there is no better warning against the pitfalls that may occur in classifying manuscripts” (Reeve, 69).

That it took so long for this book to be translated into English was largely due to Timpanaro opposing it on the grounds that the book was obsolete and needed thorough revision. Fortunately, Glenn Most finally succeeded in convincing Timpanaro’s widow to have the project realized, producing a fine and accurate translation of the original.