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## PARALLAX: LOOKING AT THE MEDIEVAL THROUGH THE MODERN LENS

**Abstract.** The objective of the paper was to articulate the gap between the medieval manuscript and its modern editions. It emphasises the need to study medieval texts in their natural context, i.e. against the manuscript codex as only then do they speak in full voice. While the usefulness of electronic editions is indisputable, a linguist working with a modern edition of a medieval text must be aware of how far it departs from the text it intends to represent. Therefore, wherever possible, it is advisable to examine manuscript scans which are now widely accessible on internet sites of the libraries housing manuscript resources. It is of paramount importance not only as a way of verifying corpus examinations but also because manuscript examinations complement the findings based on electronic data by offering invaluable clues encoded in the materiality of the manuscript. This postulate is relevant both for historical linguistic analyses and translation studies, and is equally valid for literary studies.

**Key words:** manuscript; codicology; electronic corpora; medieval text.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical linguists working with medieval data are usually at least two steps removed from the text they investigate. First of all, there is the intermediary of a rich body of electronic corpora, which offer medieval data in a conveniently searchable form. But few users of these corpora realise how dissimilar the electronic linguistic data are from the actual text as it appears in the manuscript. The text removed from the page from which it spoke to a medieval reader is at the same time detached from the data “embedded in the physicality of the object itself [... while] the materials and instruments used

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to create, carry, guide, locate, and clarify words are a source of information just as much as the words on the page” (Kwakkel 2015, 60). The divorce of the text from its natural environment, i.e. the page, or even the codex, is detrimental to our understanding of its contents. Natural languages do not exist in isolation—we study them in the context in which they functioned, but the same treatment is denied to earlier stages of their development. While it is natural that historical linguists are limited to written data, it is unreasonable that we should restrict the range of available contextual information even further at our own request.

The second obstacle which hinders meaningful investigations of a medieval composition or translation is to some extent a consequence of the first one, i.e. of isolating the words from the page on which they appear. By doing so we detach the text from the culture it reflects. In effect, we get an old text in a modern guise, suggesting that the only difference between a medieval and modern text is the antiquity of the language. This gives rise to a mistaken idea that we can apply modern concepts to a medieval text. While these concepts are inherited from the Middle Ages, they have changed in the passage of time and have come to denote phenomena which are radically different from their medieval predecessors. What I mean in particular is the change that has affected the concept of *text* and notions closely associated with it. We use them in our investigations as given and, in consequence, describe medieval linguistic and textual reality based on these notions. This results in a misapprehended view of the reality we describe.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to voice an appeal to place medieval studies in the medieval context as much as possible. That requires a return to the manuscripts to “recalibrate the balance between the critical edition and the manuscript” (Nichols 2009, 10)—a postulate advocated by Nichols already in 1990. To convince the reader of the desirability of this approach I will discuss some of the manifold discrepancies that obtain between the medieval codex and the modern corpus of data. I will start by introducing one aspect of the medieval context which will show vividly that even those aspects of medieval reality which seem familiar to us were radically different from the way we perceive them now. In particular, in Section 2 I will discuss the form and function of a book cover in the Middle Ages. Then, I will move on to the medieval text (Section 3) and present the fundamental, albeit often overlooked, differences between a medieval text and its electronic edition (Section 3.1). It will be pointed out how the divide between the two entities can affect historical linguistics and translation

studies. While the matter will not be touched upon here for reasons of space, it is believed that literary investigations are also influenced by the presence of the imperfect intermediary. As will be shown in Section 3.2, the impression of continuity and familiarity, largely following from approaching a medieval text in a modern edition, results in our transplanting modern notions into a reality that was fundamentally different. The purpose of this section, therefore, will be to show the need to redefine some concepts that we have inherited from the Middle Ages but the passage of time has imprinted some ineluctable changes upon them to the effect that we impose our modern perception of these concepts upon their medieval predecessors. This, as will be explained in Section 4, results in what is best described as the parallax error, where the point of view determines how we perceive what we are looking at.

## 2. THE BOOK COVER

In the Middle Ages the book's cover did not explicitly show the title. But that does not mean it did not *reveal* its contents. The format of the book, the type of cover, how the text was arranged and whose possession it was—these and other inseparable details of the context of the book provided sufficient clues as to what was protected by its covers.

The cause of the absence of the book's title might be argued to follow from there often being more than one work in a medieval codex. Another reason why the medieval book cover did not show the title could be that many medieval works tended not to have titles.<sup>1</sup> These two aspects are certainly factually correct and vividly underscore the difference between the medieval and the modern, but neither of them is applicable to biblical pandects or individual books of the Bible, as these neither represented diverse compilations nor did they lack titles. They did not, however, bear titles either. As I intend to show below, this absence derives from how these books were used. And it is their usage that determines their rather unexpected characteristics.

In a study of the exterior of the early Christian book, Lowden (2007, 45) observes that the Gospel books frequently had both the front and the back covers equally decorated. Moreover, these decorations would sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> However, the modern editor of a medieval text “generally gives a title if the text is untitled, thereby suggesting an interpretation, such as the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament*, which might very well be neither a lament nor by a wife” (Caie 2008, 10).

show complete *symmetry*. This treatment contrasts not only with the modern custom, where it is the front cover that receives most attention (apart from carrying all the basic information). It also contrasts with the typical medieval book decoration: books of non-religious nature received rich decoration only on their front cover. This discrepancy of treatment is likely to be misapprehended from the modern perspective, as it is very tempting to assume that religious books were more richly decorated because the Church had sufficient means to invest in both front and back decorative covers. It also tallies nicely with the notion that the cover was meant to reflect the glory of the Word of God contained within it. Note, however, that while it might account for the richness of the decoration, it would not explain the *symmetry*, as it seems to be rarely the case that both the front and the back cover can be viewed at the same time. Nor would the suggestion presented above accommodate the lack of front-back symmetry in richness and decoration in non-religious books as decoration generally characterises luxury books so it cannot be a matter of insufficient means that only sacred books received this special treatment.

As argued by Lowden (2007, 45), this dissimilarity of treatment is to be sought in *how* the book was used, so it is precisely the element of the medieval context which cannot be overlooked here. He states that the primary function of the Gospel's cover was display, either temporary, when the book was carried in a liturgical procession, or long-term, when the book was placed on the altar. Lowden (2007, 45) concludes that it is possible that the books in costly symmetrical covers were intended to be "displayed open with the covers, not with the text, towards the viewer."

Without this contextual information, we can neither recreate the process of opening a book's cover for display, as the custom is no longer part of the liturgy, nor understand its implications. The simultaneous front and back display showed to medieval audience a picture which was to be looked at, or perhaps even read, as a theological statement concerning Christ's divine and human nature (for details see Lowden 2007, 46).

The display of the open Gospel book with its covers facing the congregation offers yet another opportunity to see how we misconceive the medieval by imposing the modern onto it. In particular, we are inclined to think that the book that was carried processionally would be read from at some stage in the liturgy. However, as argued by Poleg (2013, 59), the Gospel book carried in the medieval procession was not put into practical use: it was a symbolic object. The medieval Gospel book was naturally in Latin and was, therefore, incomprehensible to the majority of the church audience. Listening to its text

was, then, much less meaningful to a medieval believer than the message of the glorious cover.

In conclusion, the cover of the medieval Gospel book was “a locus for public affirmation of orthodox belief” (Lowden 2007, 47)—a use inconceivable to us from where we stand.

### 3. MEDIEVAL TEXT FROM A MODERN PERSPECTIVE

As signalled in the Introduction, a modern edition of a medieval text detaches it from the context which supplemented the text itself in a number of meaningful ways. First of all, the materiality of the manuscript encodes a mine of information which is irrevocably lost in the process of preparing an edition. Secondly, preparing an electronic edition entails a variety of interventions. In effect, the linguistic entity created by an electronic edition is very different from the actual text as it was composed or translated and received. These two major dimensions are going to be discussed below.

#### 3.1 THE EDITION

A digital edition of a medieval text offers a researcher a very imperfect substitute of a multidimensional material object vibrating with contextual information. Not only does it detach the text from its physical context, thereby impoverishing its meaning, but it also intervenes in the text in a number of ways which transforms the medieval text to an extent to which it is hard to claim the identity of the two. The first part of the discussion in this section (3.1.1) will focus on the divorce of the text from the page and what it entails. The second part (3.1.2) will show ways in which a text presented in a modern edition departs from the source it strives to represent.

##### 3.1.1 *The (lost) significance of medieval manuscripts*

Since it is impossible within the confines of this paper to exhaust the range of data that are lost between the manuscript and its modern edition, I am forced to limit this discussion to only a handful of cases.<sup>2</sup> Material

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<sup>2</sup> The discussion presented here is based on the English situation but it is applicable to the relationship that obtains between a European medieval manuscript and its electronic edition in general.

aspects of the manuscript, such as the type of writing support, the size of the book, and even the proportion of its sides<sup>3</sup> revealed a lot about the owners and uses. The amount of decoration and the type of pigments used had their own story to tell, as did the type and size of script, the professional expertise of the scribe, the arrangement of the text on the page, the pricking, lineation, etc. (Caie 2008; Charzyńska-Wójcik in press a., b.; Kwakkel 2015; Nichols 2008, 2009, 2013, 2015; Taylor 2015). These and other physical features of the manuscript reveal the circumstances of its production and reception, and offer meaningful clues as to the status of the text, thereby also reflecting the status of the language in which the text was written. This is especially important if we realise that medieval England was a multilingual community. Other characteristics of the codex, such as the type of texts bound in the same cover and the language(s) they were written in inform us about the owner of the codex, and of the potential uses of the manuscript. This, in turn, is invaluable in reconstructing the situation in which the text was written and which it inevitably reflects, at least in some respects. As noted above, I will discuss the significance of some of these clues below, starting with the meaning of *mise-en-page* and the languages coexisting on the same page and then I will move on to the significance of the writing support for linguistic analyses.

As I show in Charzyńska-Wójcik (in press a.), where I focus on the internal message of Psalter manuscripts and commentaries, the hierarchy of languages that obtained in England at the time when a given manuscript was copied was reflected on a manuscript page by a variety of paratextual means, all of which are lost in the process of preparing a modern edition of the text. The relevant contextual clues start with the book size. A grand codex was likely to be used for liturgical, i.e. public purposes rather than in private devotion. This naturally informs us of the status of the language of the

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<sup>3</sup> As pointed out by Kwakkel (2015, 71), medieval manuscripts tended to have a relative width of 0.67-0.72 (where the height is 1.0), i.e. proportions resembling those of a modern book. However, there was an unusual category of books, known as “holsterbooks,” with a relative width of only 0.3. This made the book three times as high as it was wide, turning it into an amazing object, both to a modern and to a medieval reader. This (dis)proportion of the book’s sides had its function, as it “guided the pressure of the book’s weight away from fingers and thumb toward the palm of the hand, which made it easier to hold the object in one hand for an extended period of time” (Kwakkel 2015, 71). In this way it is possible to tell the uses of the book from its format: it was particularly comfortable for soloists in the Mass and for monastic teachers (for details, see Kwakkel 2015, 71-73). That is how the information encoded in the proportions of the page allows us to place a manuscript together with its text in its natural context of use.

manuscript. Particularly meaningful clues are offered by multilingual manuscripts, where the colour selected for verse initials, the expertise of the scribe, the size of the script and even of its type—all of them accurately reflect the mutual hierarchy of the languages of the manuscript. Moreover, page layout and contents, especially in the case of translations, offer direct evidence of the function of the translation with respect to the source text. So, if a translation played a subservient role to the source text, the source was more than likely to appear on the page. A translation that meant to displace the source would not normally be accompanied by the source text. However, in the case of Psalter translations, the presence of Latin could be indicative of the manuscript's status as a liturgical book so an independent translation could appear alongside with its source text regardless of the function of the translation. Yet, the way the two texts were arranged on the page offered solid clues as to the relationship between them. Naturally, the relationship of the translation to its source also finds expression in the choice of translation style. Note, however, that analysing a Middle English translation contained in an electronic corpus of texts or a traditional modern edition, we see it without the context in which it appeared on the page because it is presented without the accompanying text(s). This means that we do not know the intention of the translator and whether what we analyse constitutes an attempt at natural language use (in the case of loose renditions) or a gloss-like linguistic entity.

When it comes the type of writing support: its choice provides a lot of information about the text itself, including the status of the language in which the text was written. The first and foremost distinction is that between the lasting writing support (parchment, papyrus, paper) and that selected for ephemeral uses (wax tablets) such as preliminary stages of text composition, translation or arrangement on the manuscript page. Since the latter is not of immediate interest for us here, we will focus on the choice range within the permanent mode of production. For a long time the only type of writing support characterised by permanence was parchment. Even though, having replaced papyrus in this function,<sup>4</sup> it seemed to have no rival, the type of membrane carried the information concerning the status of the text since medieval parchment came in a wide variety of qualities. “The nature of the membrane reflects its cost and thus suggests how prestigious the text might be

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<sup>4</sup> On the timing, reasons and consequences of this replacement, see for example Kenny ([1982] 2008) and Lyons ([2011] 2013).

considered” (Caie 2008, 16). Therefore, a choice of parchment informs us of the status of the text, in this way providing invaluable sociolinguistic clues. With the introduction of paper into England in the 14th century<sup>5</sup> (Caie 2008, 12) yet another dimension of marking the prestige of the text was added, especially before its use became widespread in the 15th century. In view of the coexistence of the cheaper and less lasting medium with the more expensive and durable one, the choice of one over the other was again very meaningful.

Having signalled the significance of the material context of the manuscript for complementing the meaning of the text, I will now move on to the next issue that illustrates the divide between the medieval and the modern media, i.e. the mode of text circulation in the manuscript culture. It naturally entailed variation resulting from manual copying. Some of it was intentionally introduced by a scribe, but some was inadvertent. “[T]he more widely a text was disseminated, the more derivative copies were produced, which in turn caused modifications in the text despite the best efforts of the copyists and users. [...] Yet the progressive corruption of the original texts, from one copy to the next, was a recurring problem of diffusion” (Bourgain 2008, 151). This issue has manifold consequences: it naturally relates to the next section (3.1.2), where I discuss ways in which a text presented in a modern edition *misrepresents* the source it means to *represent*. It also significantly affects the very notion of the text and underscores the distinction between how it was conceived of in the Middle Ages and how it is conceptualised now—an issue I raise in Section 3.2.

### 3.1.2 *The electronically transformed medieval text*

As was the case with Section 3.1.1, the discussion here does not intend to exhaust the range of problems inherent in a modern edition but is merely meant to selectively signal their types and point to possible consequences they may spawn. That is why only a few issues will be addressed here, the first of which is related to the mode of text transmission in a manuscript culture.

Quite often digitally edited medieval texts offer critical editions rather than an exact representation of a manuscript. This is especially true of texts that received wide circulation and in effect their individual copies, as indi-

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<sup>5</sup> The introduction to paper into Europe is dated to the 12th century (Lyons [2011] 2013, 22).



cated above, differed widely. As a result, what we get in a modern edition is a reconstruction of what might have represented the author's intention but was in fact hardly ever in circulation (Nichols 2009).<sup>6</sup> In that sense it neither reflects the medieval reality in which coexisting copies of the same text were defined by variance (cf. for example, Cerquiglini 1999; Nichols 1990, 2009, 2013, 2014), nor an actual linguistic entity—a text that was copied by a scribe and used by the owner.

Moreover, digitised editions impose on medieval texts modern editing conventions, such as, punctuation, capitalisations, and joined-up vs. separate spellings. Some of these conventions are either completely absent from the manuscript or are used there either inconsistently, or according to different principles. Such editorial interventions not only detach us from the text but also, as can be expected, significantly influence its interpretation.

Introducing modern punctuation into medieval texts is not only a misrepresentation of the medieval system but it also constitutes a massive intervention into text interpretation. As noted by Mitchell (1980, 385) with reference to punctuation in Old English manuscripts, there are only three things that are certain about it: “there is not much of it; there is little agreement about its significance; it is not the punctuation of modern English or of modern German. For the rest there is uncertainty, dispute, and difference of opinion.” Most importantly, however, he observes that OE texts are not “suited by modern punctuation” (Mitchell 1980, 413).

As shown in Parkes ([1992] 2012: 41), medieval punctuation is best viewed as a succession of systems mutually feeding one another, with changing significance ascribed to individual symbols within the emerging systems. Moreover, these systems were not applied in a uniform fashion across all text types, as from the 7th century onwards some text types tended to have more punctuation than others produced at the same time (Parkes [1992] 2012, 35). It was the liturgical texts that were to be read publically that tended to be associated with more punctuation than texts of non-religious nature. The distinction reflects the importance of punctuation for interpretation: that is why it was more important in the case of biblical texts.<sup>7</sup> Their punctuation was developing in tandem with biblical exegesis

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<sup>6</sup> Nichols (2009, 5) explicitly states that a critical edition is “a modern reconstruction of an ideal that, from our perspective, never existed.”

<sup>7</sup> Augustine explicitly indicated the dangers to the interpretation of the Bible if a reader paused in the wrong places when reading a text. In a culture where the predominant mode of access to a text was aural, proper delivery, in which punctuation was instrumental, had special significance.

(Parkes [1992] 2012, 72-76) and, as noted above, predated the widespread use of punctuation in other text types.

Modern editions of medieval texts, however, offer us a consistent and modern system of punctuation, thereby silently affecting their interpretation. This results in a variety of unwelcome effects, such as resolving ambiguities by a particular choice of punctuation,<sup>8</sup> while there was none originally; similarly, some misinterpretations are inevitably introduced and, on the whole, an impression of punctuation as a consistent system<sup>9</sup> is conveyed, in stark contrast to medieval reality. The effects of these interventions are additionally strengthened by the lack of capitalisation conventions.

When it comes to joined-up vs. separate spellings, it has to be noted that users of modern editions are completely isolated from the medieval spelling system as this tends to be ‘improved’ between the manuscript and its modern representation. They are given the text digested into divisible chunks, i.e. words, regardless of the fact that some medieval texts were written in *scriptura continua* (Saenger 1997). This mode of writing reflects the early reading habits: originally reading was a predominantly oral performance (Kenny [1982] 2008; Saenger 1997) and so the change to a system of divisible units reflects a cultural change in that respect.<sup>10</sup> The origins of the separation of words (and of silent reading) are independent of that change and are to be sought in the circumstances where Latin as a written medium was becoming increasingly difficult to understand. In effect, *scriptura continua* started to be broken down into smaller chunks by Irish and English monks in the 7th and 8th centuries, in an attempt to help readers to decipher the Latin text they were struggling to read. While the new system “was initially meant to help separate semantic units for translation” (Voeste 2012, 168), it ultimately affected spelling methods in the vernaculars as well, constituting an important development towards a grammatical (rather than phonetic) view of writing (cf. Parkes [1992] 2012). However, between the two extreme stages, i.e. *scriptura continua* and a modern system, there are hundreds of years of transition and modern editions of medieval texts completely ignore

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<sup>8</sup> Mitchell (1980, 412) notes that an editor who inserts punctuation in ambiguous contexts “is responsible [...] for misleading his readers.”

<sup>9</sup> In contrast to spelling conventions, which are generally not normalised in modern editions, “it has been customary, since the nineteenth century, to modernize the punctuation of OE texts” (Mitchell 1980, 386); hence the mistaken impression of uniformity and consistency.

<sup>10</sup> An accompanying change was that *prelectio* was no longer a necessary preparatory stage for reading (Saenger 1997, 13).

this dimension by representing consistently divided words, much to the detriment of linguistic analyses.

There are other aspects of modernising the text which are more controversial than the ones mentioned above. For instance, how to handle scribal mistakes? Medieval manuscripts abound in scribal slips, some of which are self-corrected by the scribe, some by a later hand, and some are left untouched (cf. for example Wakelin 2014).<sup>11</sup> The mistakes left uncorrected are often rectified in electronic corpora to reflect the text as it was intended rather than how it was written. While it seems a right approach for non-palaeographical studies, there is always a danger of the editor's misinterpretation, which adds insult to injury.

### 3.2 THE NOTION OF TEXT

What has been said above with respect to text transmission in the manuscript culture seems to affect the very notion of the text *per se*. The difference between our understanding of what the text is and a medieval approach is so great that the question arises whether we should be using the same term for both. Kiss et al. (2013, 17) observe that there is a “gap between the medieval and the modern concept of text” and note that “[t]he material form of texts as they are present in medieval sources challenges our modern notions of textuality in many ways.” In the manuscript culture, due to its mode of textual transmission, defining the text poses a serious problem. Copies of the same work exhibited a lot of variance, which was not only accepted, but in fact fully embraced (cf., for example, Cerquiglini 1999; Nichols 1990, 2008).<sup>12</sup> Kiss et al. (2013, 22) observe that “[m]edieval scribes and readers did not necessarily consider these versions identical, but they attributed the same function to them. Such functional approach rendered the boundaries of a text open and permeable.” In effect, “there was nothing inviolable about a text” (Bourgain 2015, 154). Medieval texts, which were continuously re-copied, either in their entirety or as selections, amalgamated into new texts, and interpolated with other texts (Bourgain 2015, 154; Kiss et al. 2013, 30) should rather be viewed as composite realities.<sup>13</sup> So, after the text left the au-

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<sup>11</sup> The same is true of ancient manuscripts (Kenny [1982] 2008).

<sup>12</sup> As observed by Cerquiglini (1999, 37), in a manuscript culture “pleasure lay in variance.”

<sup>13</sup> This characterises ancient manuscript culture to the same extent. For one thing, as noted by Kenny ([1982] 2008), the fate of the book was beyond the author's control once he parted with its first copy. Long (1991, 854) observes that “[t]here was no legal or practical way to safeguard the

thor's hands, there was no way of controlling it. As pointed out by Bourgois (2015), Johnston and Van Dussen (2015), and Taylor (2015), this inherent mutability of manuscript texts and ensuing false attributions was a source of concern for many late medieval authors but there was not much they could do to prevent it. That is why a medieval text should rather be viewed as a process than a product (Johnston and Van Dussen 2015, 9; Kiss et al. 2013, 30).

In conclusion so far, the medieval text was by definition, prone to alterations: its mode of transmission predestined it to be represented by as many different forms as there were copies, be these differences intentional or accidental, with both types additionally accumulated by re-copying. Moreover, the alterations which were *intentionally* introduced into a text by a scribe require a reconceptualisation of the very notion of the author in those days.

Just as our modern idea of the *text* departs from its medieval predecessor, so does the modern notion of the *author* differ from the way it was conceived of in the Middle Ages. This is corroborated by Taylor (2015: 199), who observes that “[m]edieval textual composition was recognized as a collaborative process,” in which the scribes, compilers, commentators, translators and authors form a continuum and their work could not always be easily distinguished. In our eyes, they are all separate professions, which meet on the manuscript page and participate in producing a manuscript. In medieval reality the boundaries between their responsibilities overlapped. In effect, the translator was to an important extent responsible for composition: he decided which parts of the source to translate and which to supplant from some other work as more suitable or profitable for the audience for which the text was meant. Similarly, commentators, compilers and scribes—they all formed a chain in the production of a work in a way that is as dissimilar from the modern situation as it can be. As stated by Taylor (2015, 210), “the surviving manuscripts testify to the fluidity of the categories of ‘author’ and ‘work’ during the late Middle Ages, in comparison to the relative stability these categories acquired in later print culture.”

Note that redefining the notion of *text* required adjusting that of the *author*, which in turn necessitated touching upon the *scribe*, *translator*, *compiler*, and *commentator*—the domino effect. Observe that the terms affected by our discussion are fundamental to modern research: we analyse the lin-

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integrity of a text or limit the number of copies. [...] After its first distribution, it was not unusual for parts of a book to be excerpted into anthologies. It might also suffer adulteration in various other ways, including distribution, under the name of a new ‘author’.”

guistic features of a *text* from the perspective its *author* as representing a particular dialect, class, age and social group, while these features are often determined with respect to the linguistic characteristics revealed in the text. However, we have just seen that neither the *text* nor the *author* represents an easily discernible category: the mediation and influence of a scribe and other participants in the creative continuum need to be considered as well since they also show in the text.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The inherent difference between the medieval concepts and their modern equivalents can be appreciated in full by appealing to parallax, which illustrates this dissimilarity with vivid accuracy. *Parallax* can be defined for the purposes of this discussion as the effect whereby the position of an object appears to differ depending on the viewer's position, for instance, through the viewfinder and the lens of a camera. So depending on the assumed perspective we get different views of the same setting. This is called the parallax error.

The parallax error illustrates very well what happens when we define the medieval concepts retroactively from the perspective of their modern successors, thereby isolating them from the context in which they emerged.<sup>14</sup> We tend to look at a medieval production from where we are, applying the modern concepts as tools with which we dissect it into its component parts and draw conclusions on the basis of what we see. This, however, only reflects the way *we* define these concepts instead of getting us closer to understanding the reality we examine. It was the objective of this paper to emphasise the need to dissociate ourselves from our modern perspective in order to *conceive* rather than *misconceive* medieval culture. This can only be achieved by putting medieval texts back into their natural context. In other words, medieval texts need to be studied against the manuscript codex as only then do they speak in full voice. I do not deny the usefulness of electronic editions, but I want to underscore the need to use them wisely. A linguist working with an electronic edition of a medieval text must be aware how far it departs from the text it intends to represent. So, whenever possible, it is advisable to examine manuscript scans which are now widely accessible on

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<sup>14</sup> I am relying here on Nichols's (2015, 40) description of a modern understanding of a medieval codex.

internet sites of the libraries housing manuscript resources. This will not only verify corpus examinations but also complement their findings by offering the invaluable clues encoded in the materiality of the manuscript. This postulate is relevant not only for historical linguistic analyses and translation studies, as I hope to have shown, but is equally valid for literary studies since, as pointed out by Aresu (2015, iii), “the interpretation of a text needs to be accompanied by an inquiry into the material conditions of its production, circulation and reception.”

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BŁĄD PARALAKSY  
CZYLI ROZBIEŻNOŚĆ ŚREDNIOWIECZNEJ  
I WSPÓŁCZESNEJ PERSPEKTYWY

Streszczenie

Celem pracy było ukazanie głębokiego rozdźwięku pomiędzy średniowiecznym manuskryptem i jego współczesnym wydaniem. Podkreśla się potrzebę studiowania tekstów średniowiecznych w ich naturalnym kontekście, czyli w postaci kodeksu rękopiśmiennego, jako że jedynie wówczas tekst średniowieczny mówi do nas pełnym głosem. Mimo bezspornej przydatności korpusów elektronicznych, badacz pracujący ze współczesnym wydaniem średniowiecznego tekstu musi mieć świadomość, jak daleko odbiega on od tekstu, który w zamierzeniu reprezentuje. Dlatego też, niezwykle ważne jest, aby w miarę możliwości sięgać do rękopisów powszechnie dostępnych na stronach internetowych bibliotek. Bezcenne wskazówki zakodowane w rękopisie jako przedmiocie materialnym, pomogą nie tylko dokonać weryfikacji wniosków wyciągniętych na podstawie analiz tekstu elektronicznego, ale także te wyniki w sposób istotny uzupełnić. Postulat ten jest równie istotny dla historycznych analiz językoznawczych i studiów tłumaczeniowych, jak dla badań literackich.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** manuskrypt; kodykologia; korpusy elektroniczne; tekst średniowieczny.