This course offers an introduction to the processes by which extant sources written in the languages studied in the Tripos have been transmitted, and to the scholarly methods by which these sources are converted into readable form. It aims to provide some familiarity with the evolution of textual criticism, as well as enabling the student to analyse and interpret the critical apparatus of an edition effectively, and furnishing some of the skills necessary for the preparation of such an edition.

Organisation of teaching
The University teaching for the paper consists of eight lectures and a series of classes. The lectures (in Michaelmas Term) are devoted to the general principles and history of textual criticism, as well as to the textual criticism of texts in Insular Latin, Old English, Old Norse, Medieval Welsh and Medieval Irish. Although candidates for the examination will opt to do a compulsory exercise in just one of the ASNC languages (on which see more below), in accordance with the cross-cultural principles of the Tripos, they are expected to attend all of the lectures on textual criticism in the various languages, and are required to discuss examples of texts from more than one language in at least one of the essays in the examination.

In the Lent term there will be a series of classes focussing on practical matters relating to the editing of texts in languages in which the students have some expertise (Medieval Latin, Old English, Old Norse, Medieval Welsh, or Medieval Irish – sessions will be offered for each of the languages in which candidates have expressed an interest in a given year). In weekly preparation for these classes students will be required to work on practical exercises in textual criticism. Students will, however, be expected to read widely in the scholarly literature cited in the bibliographies which will accompany the lectures. In Easter Term there will normally be the opportunity to have one or two revision supervisions in preparation for the examination.

Examination
The examination consists of three questions. The first question (worth 40% of the total mark) is compulsory and is a practical exercise. An exercise will be set for each of the languages studied, from which the candidate may
choose one. The rest of the paper will offer a selection of eight to ten essay-questions on the techniques, terminology and history of textual criticism, as well as on the transmissional histories of individual texts or genres of literature. Of these the candidate will be required to choose two (each worth 30% of the total), and in at least one of their essays must discuss examples of texts from more than one language tradition, drawing on the knowledge acquired in the lectures in Michaelmas term.

Preliminary reading

M.L. West, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique (Stuttgart, 1973)

Michaelmas Term Lectures: Introduction to Textual Criticism

Rosalind Love and others

1 Introduction to the techniques and vocabulary of Textual Criticism
Explanation of the course; bibliographical orientation; some definitions of textual criticism; basic jargon; how scribal error arises

2 The History of Textual Criticism – the Latin Classics and the Greek NT
Problems and issues in the transmission of the Latin Classics; early printed editions; the invention of palaeography; emendation; evolution of stemmatic method; the distinct problems presented by the transmission of the Greek NT

3 Editing Medieval Texts – Problems and Strategies I
The method of Lachmann, criticism of the method (contamination, ‘eliminatio’, conjectural texts, a forest of bifid trees); the best-text method and its problems; Bédier and the base-text method

4 Editing Medieval Texts – Problems and Strategies II
Diplomatic and semi-diplomatic editions with some examples; edition of the scribal version and the critics of that method; polemic surrounding author versus scribe; to emend or not to emend – the problem of orthography; fluid texts; recent critical theory and textual criticism (social texts, ‘performance’, psycho-analysis and textual criticism)

5 Insular Latin Textual Criticism
The history of Insular Latin in print; some case-studies: how to treat orthography (Bede), the problems presented by autograph manuscripts (Frithegod, Boniface, Byrhtferth, Ieuan ap Sulien); fluid texts (Historia Brittonum, Navigatio S. Brendani, liturgical texts, ‘Ad Deum meum’)

6 Old Norse Textual Criticism
The history of literacy in medieval Iceland; the manuscript preservation of poetry and prose; oral tradition and the fixity of texts; variants and versions; critical theory and editorial approaches to Old Norse texts.

7 Old English Textual Criticism
The earliest editors of Old English; assumptions about physical layout; author versus manuscript compilation (the Vercelli book); transcripts as evidence; scribes as editors and emenders – the problem of updated orthography; trends in emendation; the challenge presented by formulaic composition and memorial transmission
Textual Criticism of the Celtic literatures

The differences in the nature of the manuscript evidence presented by Ireland and Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany; the relative rarity of multiple manuscript witnesses; distinction between fixed and fluid texts; normalisation of the language.