



Genetic Criticism in Motion

New Perspectives on Manuscript Studies

Edited by Sakari Katajamäki and Veijo Pulkkinen
Associate Editor Tommi Dunderlin

Studia Fennica
Litteraria

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Introduction: The Widening Circles of Genetic Criticism

In 2001, the pioneer genetic scholar Almuth Grésillon, who is the former director of ITEM — Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes, turned to reflect upon the past and future of genetic criticism in an essay aptly titled ‘La critique génétique, aujourd’hui et demain’ (Genetic criticism, today and tomorrow). She states that the first two decades of the discipline saw many publications, public debates, and internal discussions, and she asks: What is the fate of genetic criticism in the new millennium, especially in the context of the new media; can it survive the constantly changing trends in literary criticism; and should it perhaps be redefined somehow? (Grésillon 2001: 9.)

Looking back at Grésillon’s review of genetic criticism today, after another twenty years, the first thing that comes to mind is that genetic criticism is no longer a single entity represented by ITEM, geographically situated in Paris, France, and linguistically dominated by the French language, as suggested in particular by the remark on internal discussions. Like Frankenstein’s monster, genetic criticism has become a beast that can no longer be detained or controlled, or to use a more positive analogy, it is like a child flying the nest and starting an independent life. ITEM is still the home of genetic criticism, but it is not identified solely with it or restricted by it. The practice of genetic criticism is in motion: it has spread to a wide array of places and languages and it keeps developing in new directions.

Another thing that catches one’s attention in Grésillon’s review is the emphasis on literature. All her examples are from literary manuscripts, even those concerning drawings. With regard to the market fluctuations of research of literature, genetic criticism seems to have survived quite well along the years. Although it has often been stressed that genetic criticism brings a whole new perspective to literary criticism by studying manuscripts instead of published and printed text, by approaching text as a process rather than a fixed and finished entity, it can also be combined with various types and branches of literary theory and criticism and diverse writing practices. For example, Alice Wood has integrated ‘feminist-historicist’ analysis with genetic criticism in her *Virginia Woolf’s Late Cultural Criticism: The Genesis of ‘The Years’, ‘Three Guineas’ and ‘Between the Acts’* (2013); Lars Bernaerts and Dirk Van Hulle have investigated the possibilities of combining genetic criticism and narratology in their article ‘Narrative across Versions:

Narratology Meets Genetic Criticism' (2013); Van Hulle has combined genetic criticism with cognitive narratology, especially the 'extended mind' thesis, in his *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond* (2014) and *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (2022); and Alison Lacivita has merged ecocriticism with genetic criticism in *The Ecology of Finnegans Wake* (2015).

The perspectives of genetic criticism and translation studies have been combined in several books and special issues since the 1990s, such as *Génétiq̄ue & traduction* (Bourjea 1995), *Traduire*, a special issue of *Genesis* (Durand-Bogaert 2014), *Towards a Genetics of Translation* (Cordingley & Montini 2015), and *Genetic Translation Studies: Conflict and Collaboration in Liminal Spaces* (Nunes, Moura & Pacheco Pinto 2020). Furthermore, scholarly editing that represents creative processes on the basis of writers' archives, such as the digital *Faustedition* (Goethe 2018) or the digital archive on Stendhal's manuscripts, *Les manuscrits de Stendhal* (Stendhal 2021), or several editions that stem from the Italian scholarly tradition of authorial philology (*filologia d'autore*) (see *Filologia d'autore* 2010–; Italia & Raboni et al. 2021) are useful and inspiring resources for all kinds of interests regarding the writers' oeuvre.

The original core of genetic criticism – studying writers' creative processes by studying their drafts and manuscripts – is still at the centre of the domain after the half a century since genetic criticism originated in Paris. However, during these decades, new kinds of target areas of study and new forms of written archival material have widened the field of study. Furthermore, different kinds of interdisciplinary intersections and new theoretical perspectives have expanded and will continue to expand the potential of the discipline.

Although the majority of genetic studies still focus on literary manuscripts today, there is a growing interest in non-literary creative processes. This is, for example, reflected by the number of special issues devoted to non-literary topics by the journal *Genesis: manuscrits, recherche, invention* that has increased considerably in the new millennium. Only one non-literary issue was published in the 1990s, whereas eleven non-literary issues were published in the 2000s and 2010s. Besides the aforementioned translation, the topics of these issues include music, architecture, scientific writing, philosophy, theatre, cinema, linguistics, orality, photography, and comics.¹ Today there are also non-literary research teams (philosophy, visual arts, linguistics) side by side with the many teams specializing in different literary periods and topics at ITEM (<http://www.item.ens.fr/equipes/>). The topics of the genetics of music and theatre are also discussed in the essay collection *Genetic Criticism and the Creative Process. Essays from Music, Literature, and Theater* (Kinderman & Jones 2009).

All of the abovementioned new target areas of genetic criticism bring along new theoretical and methodological impulses to the study of genetic processes, from art history to film studies. However, this kind of interdisciplinary cross-fertilization still has much unused potential and new pathways for development. Many other disciplines that share similar viewpoints, research interests, or objects of study with genetic criticism could

afford many more interdisciplinary benefits than have thus far been used. These kinds of disciplines cover many traditional humanistic fields, such as palaeography and biographical research as well as many interdisciplinary branches, such as didactics, creative writing studies, or artistic studies. Furthermore, creativity studies and genetic criticism have thus far not had much collaboration despite their shared common interest in human creativity.²

In her review, Almuth Grésillon (2001: 9–10) discussed the fate of genetic criticism which seemed to be in jeopardy in the digital age two decades ago, especially as the ever-increasing digitalization of the writing process seemed to wipe out all the traces of the writing process, leaving the genetic critic with just neat and tidy printouts. Digital technology and tools have since been widely adapted especially in scholarly and genetic editing, such as the pioneering Beckett Digital Manuscript Project directed by Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, and the CATCH 2020: Computer-Assisted Transcription of Complex Handwriting project at the University of Antwerp that has researched the possibility of exploiting automated Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) for genetic criticism and critical editing. Interestingly, Grésillon's (2001: 13–14) speculations about a word processor that would enable following the writing process in real time as it were a film, has become reality in some respects, as writing processes are now studied with the help of keystroke logging software that record all the keys that are struck on a keyboard (see, for instance, Bekius 2021; Bécotte-Boutin et al. 2019; Leijten & Van Waes 2013). Concerning the wiped-out traces of digital writing processes, digital forensics have provided methods and tools for the genetic study of born-digital manuscripts that make it possible to find traces (temporary files, metadata, deleted versions, and text fragments) of the writing process from storage media (Kirschenbaum 2008: 116–117; Ries 2018: 11–12).

What, then, is genetic criticism? What has it become during the past two decades? In her review, Grésillon rightly states that in order to survive in the digital age, genetic criticism has to give up the autograph deletion as the primary model of rewriting and extend the study of the creative process to other media, such as typescripts, audiotapes, videos, and digital documents (Grésillon 2001: 11–12). This extension of genetic research material has clearly happened, but the definition of genetic criticism could also be extended to explicitly include all possible sign systems and their respective material support besides linguistic writing that can be used as vehicles of creativity, such as auditory, visual, mathematical, and digital systems.

The current collection of essays stems from the conference *GENESIS – HELSINKI: Creative Processes and Archives in Arts and Humanities* that was organized in 2017 by the Finnish Literature Society – SKS and ITEM together with several other European institutes in the field of textual scholarship. The conference in Helsinki started a series of international and interdisciplinary conferences on genetic criticism with various topics. The idea has been to offer a multi-disciplinary and collaborative forum for researchers working with archival material and creative processes. After Helsinki, the subsequent editions of the conference took place in Cracow

(2019), Oxford (2022), Taipei (2023), and the next one will be arranged in Bologna (2024). Despite the bond with the GENESIS conference series and the scholarly community around it, the current book does not comprise proceedings of the first conference, but is instead an independent and thematically organized collection evolving, for the most part, from the papers presented in Helsinki.

Apart from the introductory chapter, the collection is divided into four parts that illuminate different kinds of perspectives on genetic criticism or use different types of source material. The collection begins with the section *Writing Technologies*, which focuses on the material and medial aspects of manuscripts that deserve as much attention in genetic criticism as their verbal content. In his essay, ‘Genetic Criticism and Modern Palaeography: The Cultural Forms of Modern Literary Manuscripts’, Wim Van Mierlo discusses the topic on a more general level presenting a set of principles of manuscript analysis that could lay the foundation for a more rigorous and systematic palaeography of modern manuscripts. These include the description of handwriting, writing spaces, and the form and function of writing supports, whose relevance to revision analysis Van Mierlo illustrates with carefully chosen examples from English literature. The essay calls for a comparative study of the cultural aspects of the modern manuscript since the true understanding of palaeographic evidence necessitates an awareness of their sociohistorical, geographical and cultural situatedness.

The second essay, ‘A Curious Thing: Typescripts and Genetic Criticism’, concentrates on a particular writing technology, the typewriter, and could as such be described as a case study on modern palaeography suggested by Van Mierlo. In it, Pulkkinen draws attention to how little attention typescripts have received in genetic criticism in comparison with manuscripts, reflecting a common view of the inauthenticity and impersonality of typewriting which is also occasionally repeated in media philosophy. In his detailed examination of the role of the typewriter in the genesis of the unpublished poem ‘Kuun pata’ (The Cauldron of the Moon) by the Finnish poet and translator Elina Vaara (1903–1980), Pulkkinen demonstrates how forensic methods can be used in obtaining information concerning the dating of the poem and determining the different writing sessions.

The second part of the book, *Digitality and Genetic Criticism*, represents the two faces of digitalization in the context of genetic criticism: a solution and a challenge. Dirk Van Hulle’s essay, ‘The Logic of Versions in Born-Digital Literature’, discusses the theoretical challenges that genetic criticism faces with born-digital writing processes. The study of live genetic writing processes with keystroke-logging software in particular produces data at such a detailed level of granularity that it threatens to render the traditional concept of version obsolete. The essay not only examines diverse definitions of the notion of version and demonstrates their unsuitability for the born-digital context, but also provides a pragmatic solution for the problem.

In genetic scholarly editing, digital technology and tools have solved many challenges related to the representation and making intelligible the genesis of works as well as in making them available to a wide audience. The essay ‘The Genetic Edition of Nietzsche’s Work’ by Paolo D’Iorio presents

Genetic criticism investigates creative processes by analysing manuscripts and other archival sources. It sheds light on authors' working practices and the ways works are developed on the writer's desk or in the artist's studio.

This book provides a cross-section of current international trends in genetic criticism, half a century after the birth of the discipline in Paris. The last two decades have witnessed an expansion of the field of study with new kinds of research objects and new forms of archival material, along with various kinds of interdisciplinary intersections and new theoretical perspectives.

The essays in this volume represent various European literary and scholarly traditions discussing creative processes from Polish poetry to French children's literature, as well as topical issues such as born-digital literature and the application of forensic methodology to manuscript studies. The book is intended for scholars and students of literary criticism and textual scholarship, together with anyone interested in the working practices of writers, illustrators, and editors.



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