

The Duke of Parma, by Fernando Pessoa: genesis and critical examination

[*The Duke of Parma*, de Fernando Pessoa:
gênese e exame crítico]

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Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, *Duke of Parma*, Genetic criticism, Hermeneutics, Dramatic text.

Abstract

As theorized by Umberto Eco, literary texts are inherently “open”, their interpretation becoming autonomous from authorial intention. This tension intensifies in unfinished and unpublished works, whose instability complicates both hermeneutic and editorial practices. This paper examines these issues through a genetic analysis of *The Duke of Parma*, an incomplete drama by Fernando Pessoa. When a text survives only in fragments, interpretation becomes especially unstable, echoing Jerome McGann’s notion of hermeneutics as a “house built of sand”. Genetic criticism must therefore interpret variants without a final version as reference. Drawing on the concept of macro-variant (Almuth Grésillon) and Gianfranco Contini’s systemic approach to variation, the paper identifies patterns in Pessoa’s *usus scribendi*, focusing on character construction, dramatic action, and performative indications.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, *Duke of Parma*, Crítica genética, Hermenêutica, Texto dramático.

Resumo

Conforme teorizado por Umberto Eco, os textos literários são inerentemente “abertos”, tornando-se a sua interpretação autónoma da intenção autoral. Esta tensão intensifica-se em obras inacabadas e inéditas, cuja instabilidade desafia tanto a hermenêutica como a edição. Este artigo examina estas questões através de uma análise genética de *The Duke of Parma*, drama incompleto de Fernando Pessoa. Quando o texto subsiste apenas de forma fragmentária, a interpretação torna-se particularmente instável, ecoando a noção de Jerome McGann de uma hermenêutica como “casa de areia”. A crítica genética deve, assim, interpretar variantes sem o apoio de uma versão final. Com base no conceito de macrovariante (Almuth Grésillon) e na abordagem sistémica de Gianfranco Contini, o artigo identifica padrões do *usus scribendi* de Pessoa, com foco na construção das personagens, na acção dramática e nas indicações performativas.

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In her foundational *Éléments de critique génétique*, Almuth GRÉSILLON identifies from the outset what she considers the principal limitation of the discipline: “la critique génétique est de fait soumise aux limites matérielles, empiriques et historiques qu’impose son objet” (1994: 24). Even in cases of exceptionally well-documented genetic processes and particularly rich *avant-texts*, genetic criticism remains constrained by the partial nature of its evidence. However extensive the manuscript material, the critic’s access to the compositional process is necessarily incomplete — akin to observing a room through a keyhole — and thus never attains a fully panoramic view.

This structural limitation is further compounded by the fact that a significant portion of the creative process precedes its material inscription. As Pierre-Marc de Biasi observes, “avant de s’exprimer et de s’inscrire sous la forme d’un tracé, la rature est une opération intellectuelle” (DE BIASI, 1996: 6).¹ This remark highlights the inevitable gap between the intellectual processes of composition and their documentary traces — a gap that no *avant-text*, however extensive, can fully bridge.

The analysis of the genesis of an unpublished work brings into sharper focus what GRÉSILLON defines as the “contradiction interne” (1994: 16) of genetic criticism. On the one hand, the study of compositional processes is meaningful insofar as it sheds light on aspects of the work that would otherwise remain inaccessible; on the other, such insight depends on the existence of a reference point against which development may be assessed. The critical value of the *avant-text* thus resides in the comparison of successive stages of writing, rendering visible the dynamics of textual evolution. The author’s choices — preserving, modifying, or eliminating material — delineate a field of potentiality from which the text emerges, revealing its orientations and idiosyncrasies.

This perspective resonates with theoretical approaches to literary fragmentarity. In an article on the twentieth-century literary fragment, Lilach NAISHTAT identifies as a central principle of such approaches the “integration [of the fragment] in literary texts with a special emphasis on the role of the reader” (2025: 6). From this standpoint, the fragment functions as a “synecdoche in which the reader expands the form” and as “a space of tension that opens possibilities of reading that trigger the reader’s interpretation” (2025: 5). This framework is particularly pertinent when addressing unpublished and fragmentary works, in which incompleteness is not merely a lack but a structurally productive condition of the work’s exegetic potential.

Although genetic criticism explicitly seeks to avoid teleological approaches and to treat what Jean BELLEMIN-NOËL terms “le dernier état” of a text (1972: 17) as a regulative horizon rather than a definitive endpoint, the last known version of a work nonetheless occupies a distinct position within the genetic dossier. Despite

¹ The concept of “*rature mentale*” had already been articulated by Michel Butor, who describes writing as grounded in years of “*brouillons mentaux, de ratures mentales*” (Butor, in CHARBONNIER, 1967: 118).

efforts to avoid “le piège du regard téléologique” (GRÉSILLON, 1994: 18), the study of manuscripts remains grounded in the text whose genesis they document and whose interpretive possibilities they help to expand.

Whether published or merely brought to an advanced state without reaching publication, the latest version of a text typically functions as a privileged point of comparison for earlier stages. This methodological premise, present since the earliest formulations of genetic criticism, is reaffirmed by Almuth GRÉSILLON’s insistence that “le généticien doit explorer l’avant-texte comme tel, c’est-à-dire différent de l’œuvre” (1994: 17). At the same time, despite its fragmentary and laboratory-like condition, the avant-text retains full critical legitimacy, as it contributes to “augmenter les corpus lisibles de la littérature” (1994: 17).

Traditionally, the transition from avant-text to text is defined by the moment at which the author can declare: “voilà que ce que j’écris coïncide avec ce que je voulais écrire” (BELLEMIN-NOËL, 1972: 6). All preceding stages correspond to a search for an adequate formulation. In the case of unpublished, unfinished, and fragmentary works, it is plausible to assume that such a moment was never reached, and that authorial intention never fully stabilized in written form. Yet even incomplete drafts preserve traces of this search: the revisions and reformulations they contain make visible a process oriented toward expression, though one that never reaches completion—a movement in which the author does not arrive at what he *voulait écrire*, but persistently tends toward it.

Planning, plot’s structure and characters description

If these considerations apply to works supported by a well-documented *avant-text*, they apply even more forcefully to cases in which the documentary record is sparse and disordered, as in Fernando Pessoa’s *The Duke of Parma*, a Shakespearean-inspired five-act play written in Victorian English, to which the author devoted more than two decades.

The play is mentioned in several lists preserved in Pessoa’s archive (in chronological order: 144D-7^r; 144E-3^r; 48E-29^v; 144D²-7^r; 31-95^r; 137A-24^r; 48B-25^r; 51-89^v), dating from 1909 to 1933 (see DIONÍSIO, 2025: 87). These references attest to the long-term persistence of the project within Pessoa’s literary horizon.

Across these documents, *The Duke of Parma* appears in lists of “English Works” (144D-7^r; 48E-29^v) or “Major [Works]” (51-89^v) and is consistently described either as “a tragedy” (144E-3^r; 48E-29^v; 31-95^r; 137A-24^r) or as an “example of drama” (48B-25^r). A comparative examination of these lists shows that neither the title nor the generic designation underwent any substantial modification over time: *The Duke of Parma* is invariably identified as a dramatic work within Pessoa’s English production. While both the conception of the play and its designation thus appear stable, the same cannot be said of its compositional realization, which is documented by an

extensive and heterogeneous manuscript *corpus*, revealing a complex process of redaction and revision.

The manuscripts directly related to the play are preserved in two folders in Pessoa's archive, identified as 11⁴ D and 11⁵ D, comprising respectively 100 and 84 documents, for a total of 184 sheets, most of them written on both recto and verso. The material is highly heterogeneous in terms of paper type and writing instruments.² Only a very small number of documents are dated by Fernando Pessoa, and the majority are handwritten. A limited set of typewritten documents is also present; however, their textual content does not correspond to any surviving handwritten manuscript in the corpus, suggesting that they may represent fair copies of drafts that have either been lost or have yet to be identified within Pessoa's estate.

These characteristics of the tragedy's *avant-text*, together with the interpretive constraints they impose, make it difficult to catalogue the manuscripts according to chronology or clearly defined stages of revision. Nevertheless, the material can be divided into two principal categories, corresponding to distinct phases in the genesis of the text: planning and writing.³

The majority of the documents belong to the second category and transmit the text of the play itself, ranging from multi-page, structured dialogues between characters to isolated passages, scattered lines, or single phrases jotted down without clear attribution to a specific speaker. A smaller group of documents, however, pertains to the planning phase, consisting of authorial notes on character description and schematic outlines of the plot.⁴

² For a preliminary analysis on *The Duke of Parma* writing materials and writing tools, see DEFENU (2024).

³ For the purposes of this paper, which focuses on the study of textual variants in the compositional process of *The Duke of Parma*, the *corpus* is limited to the documents preserved in the two folders mentioned above. However, as Daniel FERRER has observed, the *avant-text* is "always defined retrospectively and arbitrarily in relation to the final work," and thus constitutes a critical construct rather than a fixed documentary entity; it may include any material that enters "into a relation of variation with the final work" (2009: 48). From this perspective, the *avant-text* of *The Duke of Parma* could be extended to encompass additional materials beyond the delimited manuscript corpus examined here. These might include, for instance, documents bearing traces of Fernando Pessoa's reading of Shakespeare, such as marginal annotations in volumes from his private library, which may have served as sources of inspiration for the play. One might also consider the genetic documentation related to Pessoa's attempt to translate Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (see FILIPE, 2018), which may have functioned as an exercise in the imitation of Shakespearean dramatic language. Furthermore, as noted by João DIONÍSIO, a manuscript annotation preserved in document 48C-31^r appears to suggest the existence of a Portuguese source text for *The Duke of Parma*, which Pessoa describes as a translation from an earlier Portuguese work (2024: 89). Although these materials fall beyond the scope of the present analysis, their existence underscores the permeability of the boundaries of the *avant-text* and highlights the broader intertextual and genetic context within which *The Duke of Parma* was conceived.

⁴ This categorization is not chronological but rather typological, insofar as the documents related to the planning of the tragedy do not necessarily correspond to a phase preceding the writing of the play's text, as will be discussed below.

Despite the fragmentary state of the play, a comparison between manuscripts associated with the planning phase and those linked to the writing phase allows for the outline of a plot summary, albeit within the limits of a work that Fernando Pessoa never completed and continually revised. The tragedy is set in a ducal court destabilized by political tension and uncertainty. The Duke's increasingly erratic public behaviour—marked by insults, incoherent speech, and apparent irrationality—provokes widespread speculation about his mental state. While many at court interpret his conduct as genuine madness, others suspect it may be strategic or politically induced. The Chief Chancellor, Alberto, publicly humiliated by the Duke during a council meeting, begins to question the nature of his condition and reveals that he possesses documents casting doubt on the legitimacy of Girolamo, the Duke's brother and designated successor. As Girolamo and his supporters exploit the narrative of the Duke's madness to advance their interests, Alberto considers using his own knowledge to challenge Girolamo's claim. Two competing political strategies thus emerge: one aimed at removing the Duke through a declaration of insanity, the other at destabilizing the line of succession. Although driven by ambition, Alberto develops a complex sympathy for the Duke, whose behaviour oscillates between apparent folly and moments of striking clarity. In a private exchange, the Duke articulates a conscious rejection of courtly hypocrisy, further complicating the interpretation of his conduct. The tragedy offers no resolution, instead portraying a political environment marked by suspicion, ambition, and the instability of truth.

The plot's structure was delineated by Fernando Pessoa mainly in two documents: 11⁵D-43 and 11⁴D-2.⁵

[11⁴D-2^r]

5. V. persuades 2nd C[hancellor] against A — ? here ?
6. <C>/D\ + Chancellor enter — C. speaks a little to V. [→ V. 2nd C. repeat]
7. Scene <†>/of\ night-philosophy — bet[ween] D. + C.

Act II

1. Both A + V. V. doubts A.
2. V. + Duchess
[↓ V. + Duke — A. hears (end at *last).
3. G. <+ †> [↑ expresses] to find his waiting-scheme.
<5>/4\ . [↑ <4 Monologue>] Both D. & A. — they have seen a †.
(All of A's monologue) — D. returns + speaks a little more
5. A <+> [↑ tells] 2nd Chancellor his news — “*exacter” idea of D. + †
In purposes to <heal> [↑ cure] his mind.

⁵ It is useful to recall the transcription symbols used: □ blank space; * hypothetical reading; † illegible word; < > deleted segment; < > / \ overlapping, <below>/above\; [↑] addition above; [↓] addition below; [→] addition to the right; [←] addition to the left.

Act. I

1. A + 2nd C come from counsel where D. has insulted A.
2. A. tells G & *friends. [friends or fiends]
3. G. & *friends confer.
4. D. ill-treats w[ith] wit G's *friends.
5. Duchess + *Hermione d<+>/ecide\ to send for V.
6. A slight passage of arms w[ith] G's friends re[garding] Duke
7. A's [↓ A's monologue on his position + *purpose he has got; re[garding] all his <ambitions> ambitions.]

BackwardAct. V

- <1> [← 8]. Castle scene
- <2> [← 7]. Road to castle scene.
- <3> [← 6]. Murder scene.
- <4> [← 5]. A's monologue
- <5> [← 4]. Mad scene of inquiries, ending in *soiree-scene
- <6> [← 3]. G's monologue + depart
- <7> [← ? 2]. *Scene Intro Duke, V. + All [↑ before G] — *pre— of scene <5>/4\, nonsense, bitter + □ talked + [↓ (We are naked etc)] A comments apart on *weird aspect of Duke
- <8> [← 1]. <+> G. talks to friends re[garding] *placing of [↑ X.] + [↑ as] + † in Rome. After A. monologue on having been unable to see D. <+>/*in\ some days/

Act. IV

6. Scene of madness — monologue, ending in tearing but † + †.
5. Duke speaks to A about G. + V. [→ (D. describes his symptoms)] [↓ /here or before, when reconstructed./]
4. Duke speaks to A's son
3. Val[erio] speaks to D. D philosophises. [↓ G. enters with A. — A. goes to protect his son (?) —
2. Valerio confesses w[ith] [↓ (V. agrees w[ith] 2nd C[hancellor] to speak to D. Then, after, if necessary, to put into *question exclusion of A. 'Tis † *him necessary than ever; And not foreseen this. This is — somehow obscurely, of A's † as duke *have A. has cajoled all into letting him control D., but haste to save him)]
1. *Council-scene.

Act. III

1. 2. 3. — G.'s plot with X + friends.
4. *Candid + G. — They go off to find D.

[11⁵D-43']Act I.

Duke's insult to Alberto causes
A to tell Girol. & others *unguardly.
He <plots> manages & begins his plot
against Duke & *Gir - *through the

documents) – (Duchess decides
to send for <Vincen[zo]> [↑ Valerio].)

Act II

V. arrives, talks with A. (& then
w. Duchess) end of act, A
*ge[t]s well w. Duke & changes his plan.

Act III

G. plots

D. /*insults/ Cardinal [→ & Bp (?).]

though A's sneers at V. or
D's apparent theory, by aversion
to V through [↑ *his] speaking to Duchess &
his suspecting questions of his
unpotency

Act IV

Council takes place, after it
V. questions & examines & advises D.
(& A's son also speaks to Duchess)

Act V dénouement

A comparison between the two documents reveals that the overall structure of the plot is essentially analogous, although the scheme outlined in document 11⁴ D-4 is considerably more detailed. This document not only includes a division of scenes for each act but also shows more extensive revision than 11⁵ D-43, which displays fewer authorial interventions. The corrections observable in 11⁵ D-43 consist mainly in the substitution of the character name Vincenzo with Valerio. This substitution finds a clear counterpart in the dramatic text itself, where the character—an “older chancellor” who seeks to exploit the Duke’s madness in order to plot against both him and Alberto and thereby gain power—appears predominantly under the name Valerio. The name Vincenzo occurs only twice (11⁴ D-12^r and 11⁵ D-75^r); it should be noted, however, that characters are often designated solely by the initial letter of their names.

Document 11⁵ D-43 also contains a substantial addition to the description of Act II, in which the relationship between Valerio and Alberto is further developed. This addition emphasizes Alberto’s contempt for Valerio, thereby reinforcing the rivalry between the two characters. The expanded description appears to correspond to two textual segments of the play, preserved in documents 11⁴ D-14 to 11⁴ D-18 and 11⁵ D-1. A further addition in 11⁵ D-43 slightly modifies the ending of Act III, in which the Duke insults the Cardinal and, according to the authorial addition, also the Bishop. This addition is followed by a question mark, indicating Fernando Pessoa’s hesitation. Nevertheless, it seems to be confirmed by the development of the plot, as evidenced in documents 11⁵ D-54 and 11⁵ D-56, where the Duke threatens the Bishop with being attacked by his hounds.

The plot outline in document 11⁴ D-2 underwent a more radical process of revision. Here, the structure of the play is written in reverse order, with the description of Act V beginning at the top of 11⁴ D-2^v and Act I occupying the lower portion of 11⁴ D-2^r. For this reason, the indication “backward” was added by Pessoa himself at the top of the page. The most substantial rearrangement concerns the fifth act, as the entire sequence of acts was subsequently renumbered. This modification appears, however, to have been made primarily for reasons of clarity, given that the acts were initially drafted in reverse order and only later adjusted to produce a more coherent overview of the play’s structure.

A rearrangement of scene sequencing also affects the structure of Act II, where the intervention appears to reflect a more deliberate reconsideration. The manuscript suggests that Pessoa hesitated over the ordering of scenes 4, 5, and 7. Scene 4 is described as one in which the Duke mistreats Girolamo’s associates, while scene 5 depicts the Duchess and Hermione deciding to send for Valerio. Two half-circles drawn around the numbers 4 and 5, together with an arrow pointing to a further scene description at the bottom of the page—concerning Alberto’s monologue on his position, purposes, and ambitions—introduce ambiguity regarding Pessoa’s intention. One possible interpretation is that he considered inverting scenes 4 and 5 and replacing one of them with the material written at the bottom of the page. However, a second arrow links this latter description to scene 7, further complicating the reconstruction of the intended sequence.

The difficulty of establishing a stable ordering of scenes is further exacerbated by the absence of any surviving draft corresponding either to the dialogue between the Duchess and Hermione or to the episode in which the Duke mistreats Girolamo’s associates. Other insertions in the manuscript, by contrast, do find clear counterparts in the drafts of the play and appear to have been introduced in order to clarify the relationship between the plot outline and textual passages that Fernando Pessoa had likely already composed.

Within this context, the addition of the specification “we are naked” in the description of the second scene of Act V seems intended to clarify the reference to the Duke’s “nonsense, bitter talk”. This description closely corresponds to the content of document 11⁴ D-100, where the sentence “we’re naked” is repeated twice and forms part of a monologue characterized by precisely such a tone. Similarly, the description of the second scene of Act IV contains a substantial marginal addition, which again appears designed to refine the scene’s content and to connect it more directly to the dramatic text. The note added in the right margin, stating that Valerio agrees with the Second Chancellor to speak to the Duke, corresponds closely to the content of documents 11⁴ D-68^r / 69^v, in which Valerio addresses a character identified as “II” (presumably the Second Chancellor), declaring himself both loyal to him and committed to justice and truth.

Following the same *modus operandi*, the insertion of the detail “D describes his symptoms” in the description of the fifth scene of Act IV appears to serve a similar function: to enrich the scene outline and explicitly link it to a pre-existing textual draft, most likely that preserved in document 11⁵ D-8.

This evidence suggests that the plot outline in document 11⁴ D-2^r was not drafted during an initial planning stage of the compositional process of *The Duke of Parma*, but rather at a later phase, when part of the play’s text had already been written and Fernando Pessoa felt the need to organize existing materials and anticipate further developments.

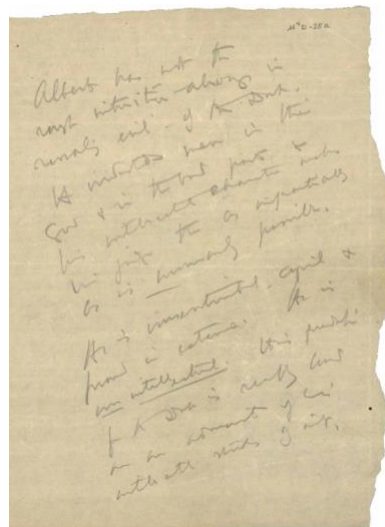
Other documents related to *The Duke of Parma* do not transmit either the text of the play or its plot structure, but instead focus on the delineation of its characters. In this respect, two documents devoted to the character of Alberto are of particular relevance, as they provide insight into his defining traits and into the ways in which Pessoa reworked them over time.

These documents are 11⁵ D-28a and 11⁵ D-43^v. The former shows no substantial authorial intervention; nevertheless, it remains significant insofar as it allows for comparison with the latter. In document 11⁵ D-28a, the character of Alberto is described as follows:

[11⁵ D-28a^r; and Fig. 1]

Alberto has not the
rough intuition – always in
revealing evil – of the Duke.
He understands men in their
good & in the bad parts &
his intellectual <†>/c\haracter makes
him judge them as impartially
as is humanly possible.

He is unsentimental – *cynical &
proud in extreme. He is
an intellectual. His friendship
for the Duke is really *bound
on an *admonition of his
intellectual stunts of wit.

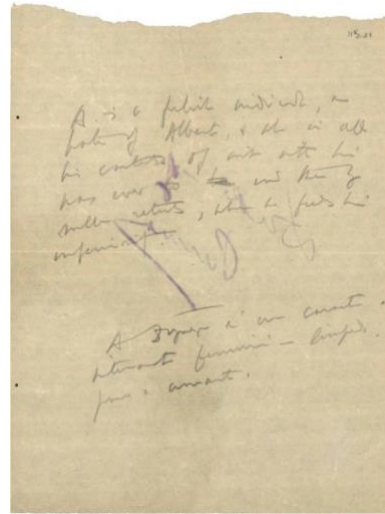


Alberto is defined as “unsentimental,” “cynical,” and an “intellectual.” The verso of the page reinforces this characterization by describing, in Portuguese, Alberto’s intelligence and the Duchess’s affectivity as the “bright points” of the tragedy’s universe.

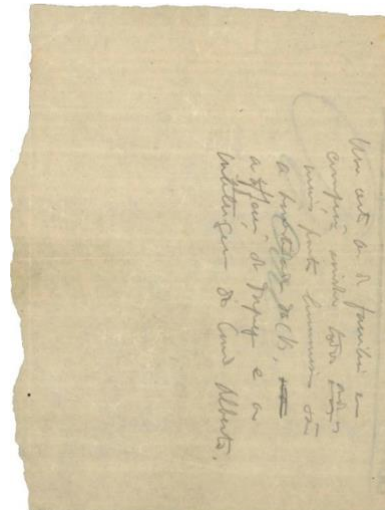
[11⁵D-28^r; and Fig. 2]

A. is a febrile individual, a
 *hater of Alberto, & who in all
 his contests of wit with him
 has ever to <be> end them by
 sullen retorts, when he feels his
 inferiority.

A Duquesa é um carácter
 intensamente feminino – limpo,
 puro e amante.

[11⁵D-28^v; and Fig. 3]

Um certo ar de família em
 corrupção envolve todos <e os> onde os
 unicos pontos luminosos são
 a honestidade do (V), <na>
 a afeição da Duquesa e a
 intelligencia do Conde Alberto.



Page 11⁵ D-28^r appears to contain a *lapsus calami*. The description of the character identified as “A.” (presumably standing for Alberto) presents him as a febrile individual who hates Alberto, a clearly paradoxical formulation. The passage therefore seems to refer to a different character, most likely “V.”

Document 11⁵ D-43^v, by contrast, provides a different and more coherent context for the construction of Alberto’s character, though it does not fully coincide with the profile outlined in 11⁵ D-28a. The manuscript reads:

A, though ambitious & □, is
 far more unstable & <affective> liable
 to wavering through affection than he him
 self thinks – his susceptibility to [↑the D’s] insults,
 his loss of control & consequent [↑vengeful] wish
 to pursue his plan proving it.

Here, Alberto's characterization relies less on intellectual traits and places greater emphasis on his emotional instability. The variants offer particularly valuable insight into Fernando Pessoa's process of refinement. The initial adjective "affective" is revised to "liable to wavering through affection," shifting the emphasis from an inherent emotional disposition to a susceptibility that undermines Alberto's self-perception. This revision suggests a character who is less cynical and more emotionally vulnerable than he believes himself to be. Similarly, the adjective "vengeful" reinforces this interpretation, highlighting Alberto's tendency to react emotionally and to be driven by passion, rather than embodying a purely intellectual figure, as suggested in document 11⁵D-28a.

Intra-documentary genetic analysis

Since it is impossible to determine the precise moment at which an author moves from a mental conception of a work—the space in which what Pierre-Marc DE BIASI terms "rature mentale" (1996: 6) takes place—to the first jottings on the page, the study of a textual genesis attested by a single witness is, in essence, a criticism of corrections. In such cases, not only do we lack access to what generally remains beyond the reach of genetic criticism, namely the mental operations involved in composition—those "formations verbo-mentales" described by DE BIASI (1996: 48)—but we are also deprived of documents corresponding to the variety of pre-compositional stages in the genetic process, devoted to functions such as initial planning and structuring, which would otherwise allow for the comparison of textual developments across successive stages of composition.

When access to multiple witnesses is unavailable, either because they never existed or because they have been lost, genetic criticism necessarily shifts from an inter-documentary comparative framework to an intra-documentary analytical approach. In the case of one-witness avant-texts, the comparative dimension of genetic criticism no longer lies in the confrontation of distinct documents, but rather in the identification and comparison of different stages of writing and revision observable within the same manuscript *corpus*.

This reconstruction is based on the observation of points of non-linearity within the manuscripts. Such points can be identified through palaeographic analysis, by distinguishing different stages of intervention on the basis of writing instruments, ink or pencil, and the spatial distribution of textual segments on the page.

This task is, however, particularly challenging in the case of *The Duke of Parma*. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the manuscripts were produced over a period exceeding two decades and that the vast majority of them are neither dated nor datable. Consequently, the use of the same writing instrument does not necessarily correspond to a single moment in the genesis of the play: visually similar

black ink, for instance, may in fact derive from different pens used at significantly distant points in time.

In this context, the genetic analysis of the play must explicitly acknowledge these limitations and remain grounded exclusively in what can be defined as variants, understood as traces of corrective operations. Another way of formulating this approach is to consider as the primary object of analysis those non-linear actions traceable in the manuscripts, defined by BUSCHENHENKE, CONIJN, and VAN WAES, Luuk as “any movement away from the current point of utterance” (2023: 8).

While this approach proves particularly effective for the analysis of small-scale, inline revisions—such as additions, deletions, or substitutions affecting individual words or short syntactic units—the application of non-linearity analysis encounters specific difficulties when addressing large-scale emendations. “Current non-linearity analyses”, BUSCHENHENKE, CONIJN, and VAN WAES observe, “use the lower boundary of the document (the leading edge) as a border between linear text production and non-linear actions” (2023: 2). Within this framework, textual elements detached from the leading edge and positioned in peripheral zones of the page are typically interpreted as non-linear interventions.

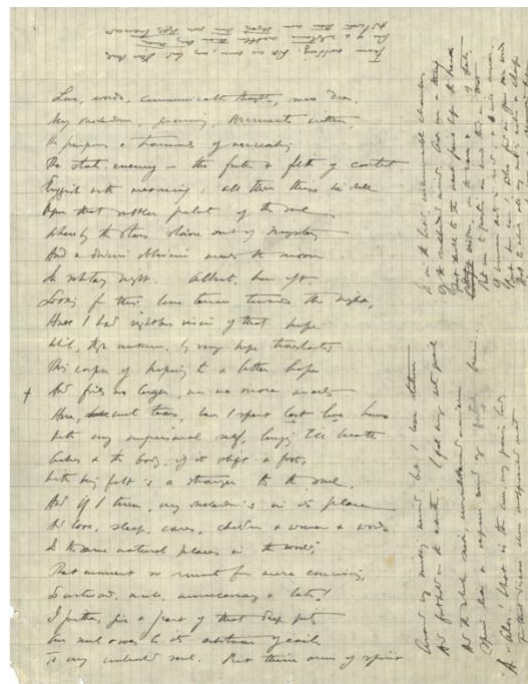


Fig. 4. “Love, words, communicable thoughts...” (BNP/E3, 11⁵D-8^v).

This assumption, however, does not always hold in the case of *The Duke of Parma*. Here, the displacement of text into the margins—particularly in the case of extended passages—may result from practical constraints, such as lack of space, rather than from intentional revision. In such instances, the author may simply have continued an impulsive and rapid drafting process in the available marginal space (see Fig. 4).

In order to restrict the object of analysis to sites of intentional revision, and thus to treat only genuine corrective operations as variants, large-scale emendations are here defined according to the following criteria: 1. they introduce a revision — whether by substitution, alternative formulation, or addition — affecting a textual segment of at least two sentences⁶; 2. their displacement cannot be explained by a lack of space in the main writing area of the page. The second criterion is considered fulfilled when the addition either displays palaeographic features indicating that it was not produced in the course of linear drafting (as in document 11⁵ D-16, Fig. 5), or is executed using a different writing instrument, thereby suggesting that Fernando Pessoa returned to the page at a later moment.

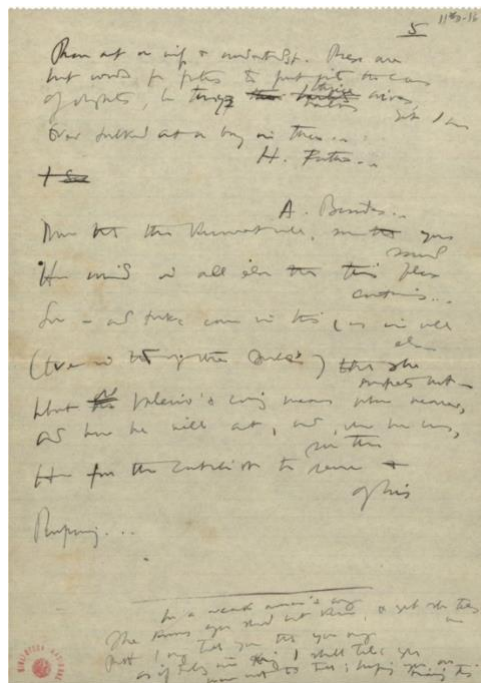


Fig. 5. "Thou art a wife and understandst..." (BNP/E3, 11⁵ D-16⁶).

By observing large-scale emendations according to these criteria and comparing them systematically, it becomes possible to identify a general corrective tendency: the expansion and specification of character traits, as well as of the relationships between characters.

In most cases, large-scale emendations appear to serve the purpose of intensifying the Duke's expression of madness and emotional disturbance. Document 11⁴ D-23 provides a particularly illustrative example. The manuscript records a dialogue between the Duke and a character designated by the letter "M" (most likely standing for Minister and thus referring to Alberto). The exchange concerns Valerio and appears to begin on the verso of the page, where the Duke asks Alberto whether

⁶ It is worth mentioning that no large-scale deletions have been identified in the manuscripts of *The Duke of Parma*.

Valerio possesses “much of a great man.” The dialogue continues on the recto, where the two agree that Valerio is not, in fact, a great man.

It is likely that Fernando Pessoa initially interrupted the dialogue midway through page 11⁴ D-23^r, at the point where this agreement is reached. At a later stage, however, he returned to the document and added, in pencil, an additional speech by the Duke. This passage is not strictly connected to the preceding exchange but instead takes the form of an emotional outburst, in which the Duke declares that “something is coming” over him—presumably a surge of madness—and asks Alberto not to look at him and to leave.

D — Once I had said that, I had thanked myself [↑ aloud] for it.

M — Thinks your lordship otherwise? Your lordship called him great a moment ago<?>/. \

D — I did it to hear them call him little. [↑ I knew thou couldest not think otherwise]

Cullion, he. A pose of him [← A] Cullion, [← a] cullion, [← a] cullion... Alberto, I shall hold thou a fool or then find me not a sublimity in insult for me to clear in [↑ with] his name.

<Le> I

Leave me, good Alberto. I pray thou. I am not proper to be looked at *sir. What is coming or gone. Nay, nay, stay. It is I that will leave thou

Since there is no clear semantic or dialogic connection between the added lines and the surrounding exchange, the function of the addition appears to be primarily to portray the Duke as a figure prone to sudden outbursts of madness, rather than to advance the dialogue itself.

A comparable pattern can be observed in other large-scale emendations, such as that found in document 11⁵ D-54. This manuscript records a dialogue between the Duke and the Bishop on the theme of dirtiness. The dialogue consists of two main segments, written in blue ink on the recto and verso of the page, the latter headed by the number “2.” Three further additions were subsequently inserted in the upper and left margins of the verso, apparently using two or three different writing instruments.

[nay, nay, am
back... I meant
not aught
I was a dreamer
in my anger, lost
of reality... You
pardon.
I'm ill at
<cor> heart]

[†, let this fool go *then *by the
*other more seeing me covertly.
*S – My lord...
D – How? Out,

will you encounter
 my hounds?]
 [Bp – How! You dare not...
 D – Done... done... Out, out, out.]

The first excerpt intensifies the Duke's awareness of his own madness, explicitly articulated in the line "I'm ill at heart," while the other two reinforce its manifestation in action. In these latter cases, the Duke orders someone to escort the Bishop out and threatens to have him attacked by his hounds. A brief two-line exchange is also added between the Duke and the Bishop, in which the Duke angrily repeats his words: "Done... done... Out, out, out." These additions do not advance the plot, but rather amplify the performative expression of the Duke's raging behaviour.

Dialogues involving the Bishop repeatedly appear to function as a narrative device through which the Duke's madness is triggered or intensified. This is also the case in document 11⁴ D-48, which preserves a monologue devoted to the Duke's experience of madness. The excerpts added at the bottom of both recto and verso further accentuate the depiction of his emotional outbursts. In the first added passage, the Duke regrets having sent someone away—most likely the Bishop in document 11⁵ D-54, which ends with the Duke rudely dismissing him. Once again, the Duke utters a desire to be left alone, echoing the addition observed in document 11⁴ D-48^r:

Why did I bid him go? Oh God, oh God!
 No sir... must I now be alone + face
 Myself! O for a day, a *burst, something
 To have life's *company <move me> [↑ near me] and
 Keep me □
 From my own self

On the verso, two further additions deepen this portrayal by elaborating on what the Duke terms a "twilight saneness" and by describing a renewed "storm" affecting his soul:

[↑ But not this hybrid horror!
 Not this /amphibious/ [→ twilight] saneness.
 I cannot even let me shriek, oh God,
 Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God.
 Stay yet the blow, suspend thy head
 Oh, oh, oh (sits down shivering + hiding his head in his hands)
 One moment yet, oh God [↑ <*tell>] one moment yet!
 Whate'er the next may be!]

[← (tears open his collar)
 Oh to allow
 To wish to die now. To wish anything
 Oh, oh, again the storm is at my soul

Oh (shakes) what thing is
 The object is burst... this...
 (pales with an inarticulate cry)

In these passages, the Duke's emotional collapse is further intensified through the addition of stage directions that dramatize his despair: he repeatedly invokes God, expresses a desire to die, trembles, hides his face in his hands, and tears open his collar.

In document 11⁵ D-37, the Duke's rage and instability are emphasized through a different strategy: a reflection placed in the Bishop's mouth. The manuscript records a dialogue between the Duke and the Bishop on carnality and dirtiness. An additional remark, written at the bottom of the verso in a different writing instrument—and therefore likely introduced at a later stage—frames the Duke's condition from the Bishop's perspective:

[↓ Bp - The devil of the flesh has entered him
 Howbeit in <+> strange wise & wordily
 Rather than in [↑the] act. This is most strange
 But 'tis not pleasant strangeness.]

This addition appears designed to reinforce the perception of the Duke's madness by externalizing it through another character's judgment. Taken together, these large-scale emendations suggest that the Bishop is conceived as a character whose function is to provoke the Duke's outbursts of insanity. It is plausible that these additions were produced during the same revision phase, or at least according to a shared corrective intention.

In other cases, large-scale emendations serve to deepen the Duke's relationships with other characters. In document 11⁴ D-27^v, for instance, a graphite-pencil addition introduces a short speech by Alberto that clarifies his perception of the Duke's nature. The dialogue already establishes Alberto's admiration for the Duke's honesty ("Your soul wears nothing"), but the added lines render this admiration more explicit:

A. There's value in him. He must not be best
 Cursed to the blindness where I thought most darkly
 Towards him.

Other characters are similarly refined through large-scale emendation, as in the case of Valerio. In document 11⁴ D-19^v, a substantial graphite-pencil addition at the bottom of the verso introduces a speech by a character designated as "M" (Minister, thus Alberto), offering a more articulated assessment of Valerio. The dialogue initially

concerns Alberto's interpretation of the Duke's madness and his strategy of channelling bitterness into thought rather than action, in order to preserve the Duke's crown.

The added passage, however, opens abruptly with "What, Valerio?", without any direct connection to the preceding exchange, and proceeds to define Valerio as a "clever fool" and as "the excellence of mediocrity":

M — What, Valerio?
 He is no abject + no complete fool
 He is a clever fool, which is □ worse —
 An intellect all width, with no depth in it
 That sees the surface of things far + wide
 But dreams not even that they have a core.
 The excellence of mediocrity, in fine.
 This is the man.

This passage closely aligns with the dialogue preserved in document 11⁴D-23, in which Alberto and the Duke agree that Valerio is not "a great man."

A similar intention to deepen Valerio's characterization can be observed in document 11⁴ D-42^r. Here, Valerio addresses the Second Minister, expressing suspicion toward Alberto and accusing him of plotting against him. A later addition articulates Valerio's self-representation as loyal to the Duke, the state, and the general good:

There is none
 That is more friendly to <the> him, to the state
 And to the general good.

This representation corresponds closely to the characterization found in document 11⁵D-28^v (already quoted and written in Portuguese), where Valerio's honesty is described as one of the few bright points within a fundamentally corrupt world.

Small-scale emendations

It would be impossible, within the limits of this paper, to provide a complete and detailed overview of all the small-scale emendations present in the manuscripts comprising *The Duke of Parma*. The corpus consists of nearly 200 written pages produced by Fernando Pessoa over a period of more than two decades, bearing the traces of a complex and often chaotic process of writing and revision, in which additions, substitutions, and emendations frequently overlap within the same line.

The possibility of conducting an exhaustive analysis of textual variants is further constrained by the graphic characteristics of the manuscripts themselves. In many instances, the deletion of a textual segment—most often by means of

strikethrough—renders the underlying text illegible. While this difficulty is more easily overcome in the case of large-scale emendations, where broader textual contexts allow for the reconstruction of meaning even when individual words are obscured, it significantly limits the analysis of small-scale variants. In such cases, the corpus of analysable material is necessarily restricted to what remains readable and, therefore, intelligible.

Given both the quantity of small-scale variants and the material constraints affecting their legibility, their analysis requires the application of a systemic approach. This notion, theorized in the early formulations of the Italian *Critica delle Varianti* by its principal initiator, Gianfranco CONTINI (1974), is grounded in the assumption that textual variants should be examined through their analogies and the identification of shared features, with the aim of detecting recurring patterns of corrective intention across a set of variants. On this basis, it becomes possible to define the author's *modus scribendi*, that is, the specific textual elements the author repeatedly sought to modify and the direction in which those modifications tended.

Adopting this perspective makes it possible to identify meaningful connections among the systems of small-scale variants observable in the manuscripts of *The Duke of Parma* that transmit the dramatic text. The semantic relevance of textual variants also serves as a criterion for their inclusion in or exclusion from the analytical corpus. Given the fragmentary state of the work, several authorial variants appear to have been introduced to revise grammatical constructions or to correct spelling errors. Since such changes do not alter the text's content or stylistic features, the present study focuses instead on what W. W. Greg defines as "substantive" variants, namely those that "affect the author's meaning or the essence of his expression" (GREG, 1950: 21).

Before turning to the analysis of substantive small-scale emendations, a brief preliminary remark is in order: one striking feature of the play's compositional process is the high frequency of substitutions with identical replacement, that is, cases in which Pessoa deletes a word only to replace it with the same word. A total of fifty such occurrences has been identified across the manuscript corpus. Although this type of variant does not alter the semantic content of the text and therefore cannot be classified as substantive in Greg's sense, it cannot be fully considered accidental or non-substantive either, since it records a moment of authorial hesitation.

While hesitation is hardly surprising in Pessoa's compositional practice—particularly in light of the fact that *The Duke of Parma* remained unpublished and unfinished, and that Pessoa returned to it intermittently over the course of almost three decades—it is nonetheless significant that such hesitation concerns specific lexical choices even within a highly fragmentary and structurally unstable work. This suggests that, for Pessoa, linguistic expression was at least as crucial as, and perhaps even more crucial than, the overall structural coherence of the play.

More generally, and as a preliminary synthesis of the characteristics of small-scale emendations in the tragedy, it can be argued that the majority of these variants were introduced with the aim of enhancing the stylistic quality of the text, most often through attempts to increase expressive complexity. This tendency is observable both at the level of lexical choice—through the substitution or addition of adjectives that refine characterization or elevate the tone of expression—and, as will be shown, in the modulation of syntactic and rhetorical effects.

[11⁴D-6]

Of restrained laughter or [→ long-waiting] eagerness,

[11⁴D-13]

And find you eloquent [→ and /persuasive/.]

[11⁵D-29]

this is for laughter. [↑laughable.]

The tendency toward the complexification of expression is also evident in textual variants that heighten the lyrical tone of the play. This process operates predominantly through four strategies: (1) the adoption of metaphorical and more overtly poetic constructions; (2) the inversion of conventional syntactic order, through the deliberate disruption of the standard subject–predicate–object sequence; (3) the reinforcement of a Shakespearean idiom through the introduction of archaic linguistic forms; and (4) the substitution of common lexical items with more refined or unusual synonyms. These strategies are illustrated by the following examples:

[11⁴D-9]

Thou art a part of me that's lost. [← /Thou art/ an epilogue to my soul]

[11⁵D-23]

almost the body's? [↑the body's almost?]

[11⁴D-35]

D — <alas, I asked myself this> [↓ 'Twas of myself I asked this.]

[11⁴D-20]

/He who best knows [↑ doth know best] the best <the> way to *serve

[11⁴D-50]

I do agree [↑ accord]

At times, the lexical choices adopted by Fernando Pessoa during the revision process of *The Duke of Parma*, particularly in his use of adjectives, reveal a clear authorial intention to reshape or more precisely define both character descriptions and the interpersonal relationships between them. Variants affecting characterization and

intersubjective dynamics are therefore of particular relevance for the study of the play's compositional process. Given the theatrical nature of *The Duke of Parma*, such variants offer valuable insight into Pessoa's writing practices within a domain of his literary production—the dramatic genre—that has so far received limited critical attention.

A small number of examples may illustrate how adjectival choices function to enhance the characterization of specific idiosyncrasies associated with the roles played by the characters within the dramatic narrative. Document 11⁴D-17, for instance, contains part of a dialogue between the Duchess and an unidentified character⁷, whose full extent spans documents 11⁴D-14 to 11⁴D-18, and whose internal sequence was established by Fernando Pessoa through the addition of progressive numbering at the top of the pages. In this exchange, the Duchess expresses concern that the Duke's behaviour may provoke treason, while maintaining that there is "no shred [...] of madness or disorder | in the duke's mind or actions" and suggesting that accusations of madness are deliberately fabricated ("My lord, you know | How easy to force madness, folly, <+> [↑ looseness] | From every little action of a man"). She subsequently appeals to her interlocutor for assistance.

⁷ In the two main documents in which Pessoa outlines the structure of the plot, documents 11⁵D-43 and 11⁴D-2, the Duchess is shown to interact verbally with only three characters: Valerio, Hermione, and Alberto's son. According to the act and scene descriptions in document 11⁴D-2, dialogues between the Duchess and Valerio and between the Duchess and Hermione are intended to occur, respectively, in the second scene of Act II and in the fifth scene of Act I. In document 11⁵D-43, scenes involving the Duchess are mentioned at the end of the description of Act I ("Duchess decides to send for Valerio"), at the beginning of Act II ("V. arrives, talks with A. [and then w. Duchess]"), and at the end of Act IV ("& A's son also speaks to Duchess"). In the dialogue transmitted by documents 11⁴D-14 to 11⁴D-18, the Duchess addresses her interlocutor as "My lord," a form of address that would be incompatible with Alberto's son, a young boy. The interlocutor makes several references that complicate identification. He refers explicitly to "his father" (doc. 11⁴D-14r: "She, [↑ is ever] | To my father's heart most fair," and doc. 11⁴D-15v: "No, nought to fear from me, who am your friend | The fathers of your friend, are known to you — |") and also alludes to his own age (doc. 11⁴D-15v: "As me whose age + all [↑ its] torpid ills | Cannot make <mute to> deaf or [↑ nor] mute to public care,"). On the basis of these elements, it would be reasonable to assume that the character addressed by the Duchess is Alberto's son. At the same time, the reference to age remains ambiguous and may be interpreted in more than one way. On the one hand, it could suggest youth, implying that the character is still fully responsive to public responsibility; on the other hand, the mention of "torpid ills" might indicate a more advanced age, albeit one that has not diminished civic engagement. Additional elements further complicate this identification and instead point toward Valerio as the interlocutor. The Duchess asks him to "be to me | What my dead father would have been," a request that presupposes a position of guidance not suitable for a young boy, and she also refers to the interlocutor's daughter ("By your sweet daughter's love"), a detail that aligns more clearly with what is known of Valerio's character. Also, at the beginning of her speech the duchess says to her interlocutor that she knows that he was "hastened here", which could be linked to the first and third acts' description Pessoa outlined in document 11⁵D-43.

During the revision of this dialogue, Fernando Pessoa introduced two adjectival additions, spoken by her interlocutor, which contribute to the Duchess's characterization:

= <Lady> Gracious Lady,
I ask no less save that of me more word,
That without <more delay> [↑ useless briguing] I may haste
The task which, though of dark + evil things,
Your <hands having> [↑ fine hands] having given it <almost> [↑ doth] mak<es>/e\

The addition of the adjectives “Gracious” and “fine” (the latter referring to the Duchess's hands) appears to respond to a unified revisional intention. These modifications reinforce the interlocutor's admiration for the Duchess, an attitude already evident throughout the dialogue, while simultaneously sharpening the delineation of the Duchess's personal idiosyncrasies, in line with the role attributed to her in the character description outlined by Pessoa in the previously mentioned document 11⁵D-28.

A Duquesa é um carácter
intensamente feminino – limpido,
puro e amante.

[...]

Um certo ar de família em
corrupção envolve todos <e os> onde os
unicos pontos luminosos são
a honestidade do (V), <na>
a afeição da Duqueza e a
intelligencia do Conde Alberto.

Both the additions “fine hands” and “gracious lady” contribute to the enhancement of the Duchess's femininity and elegance and, on a metaphorical level, to the articulation of her affectionate disposition. At the same time, these adjectival choices foreground the atmosphere of mutual respect that characterizes the exchange between the Duchess and her interlocutor. This characterization is further reinforced by an additional revision introduced by Pessoa in the opening line of the Duchess's speech (“Ds — My lord, | I <heard that you were> [↑ am most glad to meet you] | I heard that you were <t> † + hastened here.”), which accentuates the Duchess's politeness and her explicit appreciation of the interlocutor's presence.

Taken together, these variants contribute to a more nuanced and socially inflected portrayal of the Duchess, in which affective refinement and courteous self-presentation are integral to her dramatic function.

From a complementary perspective, the substitution of “Lady” with “Gracious lady” may also be interpreted in light of a specific category of variants recurrent in the manuscripts of the play, namely those affecting forms of address. Such variants are particularly significant from a dramaturgical standpoint, as they make visible the author’s attention to the delineation of interpersonal relations through linguistic markers of hierarchy, deference, and intimacy. In this sense, revisions to forms of address do not merely refine stylistic surface features but actively participate in the construction of character dynamics and social positioning within the dramatic discourse.

The table below presents Fernando Pessoa’s revisions on the forms of address within the text of the play, revealing a consistent authorial concern with this dimension of the play’s verbal interaction.

Document Number	Textual Variants
11 ⁴ D-3	Broadcloth language, <your lordship> [↑ my lord] + *pristine phrase?
11 ⁴ D-3	You[→ r] <are of> [↑ lordship that] is of those <+> above
11 ⁴ D-3	A — My wit did not bend here, <my lord> [↑ sir]; it bound up.
11 ⁴ D-3	M — Dreamed you of *drapes, sir? (Did your lordship dr[eam] of *drapes then?)
11 ⁴ D-5	<u>2nd</u> M — My [↑ good] lord I heard it
11 ⁴ D-6	to tell <you> [↑ your {↑ his}] next-to-dukeship.
11 ⁴ D-14	Ds — My lord □, I <heard that you were> [↑ am most glad to meet you] I heard that you were <+> + hastened here.
11 ⁴ D-14	Spontaneous to affection; therefore, <madam> [↑ lady],
11 ⁴ D-15	Some strangeness or disorder of the <King> [↑ duke],
11 ⁴ D-15	<Mad> [↑ Lady], how is the duke?
11 ⁴ D-17	<Lady> Gracious Lady,
11 ⁴ D-20	A I do confess, <my lord> [↑ sir, that] I understand not
11 ⁴ D-20	<The lord> [↑ Our good] Alberto + this □ at tilt
11 ⁴ D-21	at the same time [↑ lord] Alberto, the
11 ⁴ D-21	Chief Chancellor [↑ first counsellor] attempts to <+> do
11 ⁴ D-28	/D — I am angrily thankful to him for he is <A □ fellow> one who wrought favours on me.
11 ⁴ D-31	How does your lordship [↑ eminence] find him?
11 ⁴ D-34	To pregnant emptiness. My lord <our> [↑ the] Cardinal,
11 ⁴ D-35	<The chief of a small> [↑ A duke in his own] du<ke>/chy\, *girt and AB — <Why + good Lord?> [↑ My good Lord. +...]
11 ⁴ D-36	I say, my [↓ good] lord, it is not paradox. [↓ and what is paradox? {↓ what is paradox?}]
11 ⁴ D-37	<The L> Alberto is no fool that he should carry
11 ⁴ D-37	A clear contrivance of <our +> my □ state <.> duty.

11 ⁴ D-37	How I can put it to <the lord> Alberto that you,
11 ⁴ D-38	<u>X</u> – My <lo> good lord,
11 ⁴ D-38	For <the hight chief> lord Alberto's plan.
11 ⁴ D-39	<u>X</u> . Your <lordsh> [↑ *grave] lordship makes
11 ⁴ D-41	G – [↑ Farewell.] I am ashamed of the fools near me.
11 ⁴ D-42	V – There's worse, my lord, I think that <this t> [↑ Lord Alberto]
11 ⁴ D-43	V – <Sir,> Those who distinguish much can complicate
11 ⁴ D-44	P ² – I, <sir l> my lord?
11 ⁴ D-45	V – First this, make not [↑ the] Lord Alberto know
11 ⁴ D-45	V – Then... How reasoned he about the <t> [↑ Duke]...
11 ⁴ D-48	Onto the grief; not so <we> [↑ I] ebb + ebb...
11 ⁴ D-56	A – <Ay, y>/Y\our lordship <is> always finds the contrary
11 ⁴ D-57	When, <you> [↑ my] good lord, you fell or ill or □
11 ⁴ D-57	(after enters <u>B</u> [↑ other counsellor] to interrupt as agreed w. Valerio)
11 ⁴ D-67	A – That, <my go> /[↑ *dear my lord {↑ my gracious lord}]/, is perhaps wit
11 ⁴ D-73	Spare me, my lord, oh spare me, [↑ my] good lord!
11 ⁴ D-86	Speak not to <high> [↑ lord], I beg thou, nurse.
11 ⁴ D-89	Speak not thus [→ my] good lord.
11 ⁴ D-90	<my lord> [↑ my love]
11 ⁴ D-98	<my lord> [↑ (tell <your> {↑ thy} lord this)]
11 ⁴ D-99	Of <the> his lordship the Duke,
11 ⁵ D-1	<the mind> his mind <Of his great lord>
11 ⁵ D-2	<gentlemen>[↑sir]
11 ⁵ D-23	B No[t!] <my highness.> [↑My lord.]
11 ⁵ D-23	your lordship [↑highness]

Table 1. Fernando Pessoa's revisions on the forms of address.

As the table indicates, Pessoa frequently hesitates in his lexical choices among forms of address such as “sir,” “lord,” “highness,” and “lordship,” as well as between “madame” and “lady.” In some cases, these variants appear largely interchangeable, as no substantial semantic difference is introduced by addressing, for example, the Duke as “my lord” rather than “your lordship.” In other instances, however, revisions affecting forms of address implicitly modify, or serve to clarify, the interpersonal relationships between characters, thereby acquiring a distinct dramaturgical significance.

A particularly revealing case is found in documents 11⁴D-20 and 11⁴D-37, both of which contain dialogues in which characters are engaged in plotting against Alberto. In document 11⁴D-20, the speakers are identified as “A” and “B,” where “A” does not refer to Alberto but to an unnamed character; in document 11⁴D-37,

the speakers are Girolamo, the Duke's brother, and "X," likely one of his followers. In both cases, the variants concerning forms of address appear to be directly connected to the conspiratorial nature of the exchanges.

In document 11⁴D-20, the addition of the adjective "our good" in reference to "Lord Alberto" ("<The lord> [↑ Our good] Alberto + this □ at tilt") introduces a clear note of irony. This sarcastic inflection becomes evident in light of the surrounding dialogue, in which the characters express a wish for the nation to descend into disorder while declaring their intention to remain inactive, waiting for others to "strain against each other," including the "good Alberto." The revised form of address thus functions as a subtle marker of duplicity within the plotting discourse.

A comparable mechanism is observable in document 11⁴D-37, where Girolamo and X once again conspire against Alberto. While X consistently refers to Alberto as "the Lord Alberto," Pessoa revises Girolamo's speech to remove the honorific "lord" in two occurrences:

<The L> Alberto is no fool that he should carry
[...]
How I can put it to <the lord> Alberto that you,

Here, Girolamo refers to Alberto either solely by his name or through the distancing expression "that Alberto," in contrast to X's more deferential usage. This asymmetry in forms of address suggests an intentional characterization strategy: Pessoa appears to emphasize Girolamo's lack of respect for the Chief Chancellor, a figure with whom he entertains a strong rivalry and whom he seeks to undermine. In this way, revisions to forms of address operate not merely as stylistic refinements but as meaningful indicators of power relations, hostility, and strategic positioning within the dramatic conflict.

Paratextual additions

Paratextual additions are observable in a variety of manuscripts comprising *The Duke of Parma*. In some instances, these additions take the form of authorial notes or marginal remarks commenting on the quality of the expression, either to register Pessoa's satisfaction with a given passage or to indicate the perceived necessity of further revision. Such interventions, which operate at a meta-textual level rather than within the dramatic discourse itself, provide valuable insight into Pessoa's self-evaluative practices during the compositional process, as illustrated in the table below:

Document Number	Paratextual addition	Explanation
11 ⁴ D-20 ^r	[← Badly expressed]	The manuscript contains a dialogue between two characters identified as “A” and “B”, who are engaged in plotting against Alberto. The authorial remark “badly expressed” refers to three lines spoken by character B: He who best knows [↑ doth know best] the best <the> way to *serve Runs not the furthest nor the fastest. The simplest subtlety is e’er the best. This para-textual intervention indicates Pessoa’s dissatisfaction with the formulation of these lines and signals a moment of stylistic self-evaluation.
11 ⁴ D-21 ^v	[← this is best perhaps]	This paratextual intervention concerns hesitation regarding the development of the plot. While the recto contains the text of a monologue by Alberto, the verso includes a series of authorial annotations outlining alternative narrative options. These notes culminate in two possible courses of action for Alberto: [...] at the same time [↑ lord] Alberto, the Chief Chancellor [↑ first counsellor] attempts to <†> do the same thing in another way — /to present a <some> child of the Duke [↓ so he might dominate completely] or /to let the madness be confined, then to overwhelm Girolamo + his lot with the proof of Girolamo’s illegitimacy/ or to [...] The authorial indication concerning the “best” option refers to the second alternative, which is indeed the one later integrated into the plot structure.
11 ⁴ D-94 ^r	(is this natural to B?) [↓no.]	Refers to a line attributed to character “B”: “B — I would that thou wert but my enemy.” Pessoa adds the question “Is this natural to B?” and subsequently answers himself, using a different writing instrument, with “no.” This exchange

		offers a particularly explicit trace of authorial self-interrogation concerning character consistency and psychological plausibility.
11 ⁵ D-30 ^v	[Put this <+>/b\etter]	The document bears a monologue by the Duke on the theme of carnality. The authorial note most likely refers to the second part of the monologue as a whole, suggesting a global evaluative judgment.
11 ⁵ D-33 ^r	[This kind of speech is no good. It is too much words.]	The manuscript contains a Dialogue between the Duke and Alberto. The authorial note (added at a later stage with a different writing instrument, a graphite pencil) refers to the following line: [(*aside! This tongue-sewer [↑language] no good)]
11 ⁵ D-36 ^r	[←good!]	The manuscript contains part of a dialogue between the Duke and Alberto, probably linked to the dialogue in 11 ⁵ D-33. Here, the authorial note refers specifically to a line spoken by the Duke: I ached my ardent thought on many things

Table 2. Fernando Pessoa's self-evaluative practices during the compositional process.

Another typology of small-scale textual variants that merits analysis, particularly in light of the dramatic nature of the text, consists of those variants introduced to modify or add stage directions. Despite the theatrical ambition of *The Duke of Parma*, the majority of the surviving manuscripts do not contain explicit stage directions, suggesting that Pessoa's primary focus during composition lay in the redaction of dialogue rather than in the detailed articulation of performative elements.

In some instances, stage directions are inserted during the initial act of writing, typically enclosed in parentheses, and, therefore, do not constitute textual variants in a genetic sense. More frequently, however, information concerning stage directions is added at a later stage of writing, subsequent to the first jotting of the dialogue. A further noteworthy feature is the uneven distribution of such interventions: stage directions are added systematically only in a limited number of documents and dialogues. This concentration suggests that Pessoa developed a clearer sense of the performative dimension for certain scenes, while leaving others comparatively underdetermined in this respect.

Document 11⁴D-84 provides a significant example. Although it is headed with the title “Last words of penultimate scene,” the manuscript contains almost no spoken dialogue and instead consists primarily of a description of Alberto’s actions (here identified as “M”). The textual variants observable in this document testify to Pessoa’s intention to revise and refine the performative dimension of the scene:

M – (<taking from his> is moving away, but suddenly
takes from his pocket the /papers/)
The papers proving Girolamo's illegitimacy. [← is almost to tear them, but
stops, looks <guard> round etc]
<All> (Knows round & goes up
to a sort of hole [↓ in the ground])
Ho! here is a deep hole. This is really
grand. God, god!
(Drops the papers in.) [→ They then fall slowly from his hand]
<For a future> An [↑ evil] chance for a future historian.
(exit)

These variants do not substantially alter the sequence of actions but rather enrich it through the addition of detail. Pessoa initially describes Alberto as taking the papers from his pocket and later adds the indication “is moving away,” specifying movement and interruption. A further stage direction introduces hesitation by suggesting that Alberto is on closed to tearing the papers before stopping. Similarly, the action of dropping the papers is revised to diminish deliberate intentionality, proposing instead that the papers fall slowly from his hand. While the action itself remains unchanged, the added details allow for a more precise and intentional visualization of the scene.

An analogous revision process can be observed in document 11⁵D-9, which contains a dialogue between the Duke and the Nurse at the end of the play, culminating in the Duke’s death. The genetic transcription of the recto shows that the vast majority of Pessoa’s additions consist of parenthetical stage directions. These are inserted in the interlinear space above the dialogue and written with the same instrument as the main text, though they were likely added in an immediately subsequent phase of revision:

Duke of Parma
(end)

D – Nurse, lay thy hand here, on my
heart: no, here, here Does it beat?

N – [↑ (before touching his heart)] Why, <ht> child, it beats [↑ (touches it)] – Ah, it
scarce seems to beat... [↓ know it beats...] [↓ feel it beat]

D – Lo!

N – [↑ (her hand still there)] So weakly [↑ faintly] [↓ faint], child!... What ails thee?

D – All.

N – Wilt thou [↑ not] sleep? It will make thee well.

D – Ay to both, ay ... [↑ (**moves to the bed**)] Nurse, dost thou remember this song...

N – [↑ (**walking after him**)] What song, child?

D – [↑ (**sits on the bed**)] That song thou usedst to sing when I was the child thou callst me. That of the lady in [↑a] garden

N – Ay, I mind me, child. It ran [↑ was]...

D – [↑ (**interrupting**)] I shall lie one dream here [(↑ (<sits> **leaning his head over**) on [↑ to] **the bed**)] and

thou wilt sing till I sleep, whatever

sleep may be. (puts his feet <over> [↑ **slowly over**] on [↑ to] the bed)

N – Ay, Child. But I sing <badly> badly now; only to myself because none hear me

D – No matter, I shall not hear...

The density and precision of the stage directions in this document reach a level unmatched elsewhere in the corpus of *The Duke of Parma*. This concentration likely reflects Pessoa's particular attention to the final scene of the tragedy, conceived as the moment of the Duke's death, and suggests a heightened concern for performative realization alongside verbal expression.

The added stage directions describe relatively simple actions: the Nurse touching the Duke's chest to feel his heartbeat, the Duke moving toward the bed, the Nurse following him, the Duke sitting down, interrupting her, and finally lying down. Despite their simplicity, these directions offer an almost unique opportunity within the corpus to visualize the scene in its entirety, not only as a verbal exchange but also as a staged event. In this respect, they provide valuable insight into Pessoa's sporadic but highly focused engagement with the performative dimension of his dramatic writing.

Conclusion

The Duke of Parma constitutes a paradigmatic case study for genetic criticism, as it foregrounds a number of methodological and theoretical challenges that have been central to the discipline since its beginnings. From its earliest stages, genetic criticism has in fact been concerned with reassessing its relationship with textual criticism and with questioning the applicability of the evolutionary approach of traditional philological models to modern manuscripts (LEBRAVE, 1992: 41). In this context, genetic criticism has progressively sought to define an autonomous field of research and to develop analytical approaches capable of accounting for the specificities of modern manuscript practices, while resisting the tendency to read drafts exclusively in relation to a presumed final or printed text (GRÉSILLON, 1994: 18). This shift has

entailed a revaluation of each material manifestation of the *avant-text* as a legitimate object of literary and critical interest.

The genetic analysis of *The Duke of Parma* demonstrates that even in the case of a highly fragmentary, disordered, and heterogeneous corpus of manuscripts, it is nevertheless possible to identify meaningful connections among systems of textual variants. These interrelations allow for the recognition of critically significant traces and recurrent idiosyncrasies within the compositional process, thereby shedding light on the dynamics of Pessoa's creative practice. At the same time, such an extreme case necessarily raises substantial practical and methodological difficulties, which must be addressed with particular rigor.

First, the difficulty of deciphering the manuscripts renders their transcription inherently provisional, transforming it into a critical reading proposal rather than a definitive establishment of the text. The complexity of Fernando Pessoa's handwriting, combined with the physical deterioration of the manuscripts over time, complicates the process of interpretation and requires that any transcription remains open to revision. This problem is especially acute in the case of textual variants, where deletions and substitution often obscure already unstable textual segments. In this respect, the systematic study of variants proves especially valuable, as the identification of recurrent revision patterns and authorial habits may contribute to the interpretation of passages that currently resist intelligibility.

Moreover, the unfinished status of the play introduces an additional layer of complexity. The absence of a finalized version in which plot, structure, and textual coherence converge makes it difficult to reconstruct a stable narrative trajectory for *The Duke of Parma*. Nevertheless, the analysis of variants, particularly those affecting plot outlines and structural annotations, suggests that certain additions were introduced to establish connections with textual segments that Pessoa had likely already composed. Beyond providing useful criteria for dating individual documents and for situating them within distinct phases of the compositional process – an approach with potentially significant implications for establishing a critical text and for understanding the play's genetic stratification – such observations also offer valuable insight into Pessoa's *modus operandi* in the composition of his dramatic work.

The possibility that Pessoa outlined the plot's structure only after drafting fundamental portions of the text, together with the observation that elements central to defining the play's dramatic nature – such as stage directions and forms of address – were added during a later revision phase of certain manuscripts, suggests that the more overtly theatrical conception of the play was not his primary concern. Rather, Pessoa appears to have been less invested in theatrical realization and in the intricacies of the plot than in its discursive dimension.

From this perspective, the present study addresses a significant gap in Pessoa scholarship. Pessoa's dramatic production, as well as his writings in English, has long remained marginal within critical discourse, resulting in limited knowledge of

his compositional strategies and tendencies in this genre. By focusing on large-scale emendations, this paper has shown that revision in *The Duke of Parma* is not primarily oriented toward structural reorganization or plot development, but instead functions as a site of semantic intensification and dramaturgical refinement, particularly in the delineation of characters and in the articulation of their discursive and ideological positions.

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