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# The Author Husband, the Publisher Wife, and the Humble Servant Editor, or A Scholar Chasing a Sparrow

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# The Author Husband, the Publisher Wife, and the Humble Servant Editor, or A Scholar Chasing a Sparrow

Dovilė Gervytė

Essay

*Abstract:* Studying born-digital manuscripts often means engaging not only with the living author, but also with their vibrant editors and publishers. The genetic critic encounters the authorial and editorial voices in digital drafts in the form of textual records. These records, however, reach the geneticist as an accumulative entity, and in reconstructing the genesis it is the task of the critic to disentangle the voices of these agents in order to understand how they affected the formation of textual meaning. The question arises as to what varying understandings of the work can be identified through reconstructing its genesis, and how the multiple conceptions of the work held by those agents (author, editor, publisher, or the geneticist themselves) interact in the genetic narrative. In the light of these questions, this article presents a genetic analysis of the novel *Ch.* (2021) written by the acclaimed Lithuanian author Tomas Vaiseta. The case promotes the view that, depending on the intervening agency, a variety of strategies for narrating the avant-texte can be employed.

## 1. The born-digital manuscript continuum

ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES of textual scholarship has been to reveal the “kinetic system” that is the literary work of art (Gabler 1984: 309). Not that the aim has ever changed, but the good news has already spread, and such concepts as a *fluid text* (Bryant 2002), or a *text as a process* (Bushell 2009) no longer sound as revolutionary as they once did in the earlier days of genetic criticism. Another aspect that comes to the fore today is that the dynamic understanding of the work is largely the responsibility of the reader, that is, the genetic critic.

The heavily revised manuscripts are far from being prepared for the examination of textual meaning, and one cannot avoid using the tools of scholarly imagination when delving into the flux of papers. What precedes the intellectual construct of the avant-texte thus is the process of trial and error otherwise known as critical operations (de Biasi 2004). Every step taken by the geneticist in deciphering, interpreting and conceptualising the manuscript material

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1. See, for example: Eggert (2019: 64–79), Shillingsburg (1986: 75–92), and Bushell (2009: 159).

involves a constant revision of one's own premises and principles of scholarly work. This means that reconstructing the genesis is as complex as well as dynamic undertaking in its own right. This is especially the case when the critic delves into the genetic dossiers' born-digital writing processes.

Perhaps the key confusion that arises when analyzing born-digital manuscripts is the heterogeneity of digital inscription, which lies not only "in the range of potential source media, but in the variety of procedures used to create, destroy, and recover data" (Kirschenbaum [2007](#): 70–71). In other words, when analysing born-digital documents, the fundamental question of what is to be considered a writing stage or a version in its own right must be constantly posed.<sup>2</sup> Although the tools for identifying and retrieving the metadata of digital drafts are actively being developed, the nature of digital writing (and thereby the resulting manuscripts) is cumulative and elusive – if not downright chaotic (Van der Weel [2011](#): 32–38).<sup>3</sup> Everything that the critic otherwise tries to dissect from the genetic material (writing and revision sessions and acts) is merged in the digital manuscript.<sup>4</sup> As there are no pre-established, universal analytical concepts a critic can use when working with born-digital manuscripts, they "employ shifting definitions of *version* that are inevitably determined by the work methods and the type of revisions implemented by the author they are addressing" (Pereira [2021](#): 116).

Further, we would like to highlight a particular aspect of the analysis of born-digital manuscripts that, in our opinion, may have been overlooked in the

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2. Indeed, as Dirk Van Hulle suggests: "A writer often simply continues where s/he left off by overwriting the same document in a new writing session. There are of course tools such as 'Revision History' in Wikipedia or 'Version history' in Google Docs, which keep track of versions by making regular backups. This raises the question whether a version needs to be defined in time, which would mean that a version is linked to a writing 'phase' (or writing 'stage'), rather than to a writing 'layer'. And then again, what is a 'phase' in the digital age, and how can it be demarcated? Or is a version determined by the arbitrarily programmed interval with which the computer software makes a backup of a 'document'?" (Van Hulle [2023](#): 64).

3. The tradition of research on born-digital texts centers either on the practice of writing (Kollberg and Eklundh [2002](#); Lindgren and Sullivan [2006](#)), or on textual scholarship with a focus on the archival practices, asking how to handle and classify those documents; see e.g., Kirschenbaum, Ovenden, and Redwine ([2010](#)), Ries ([2018](#)), and Jaillant ([2019](#)). In the field of genetic criticism, born-digital manuscripts are usually studied in the context of developing tools that would enable and stimulate the interpretation of genetic material; see e.g., Bekius ([2021](#)), Bleeker et al. ([2022](#)), and Christie ([2020](#)). For example, in their recent article, Floor Buschenhenke, Rianne Conijn and Luuk Van Waes analysed the keystroke data and pointed out that digital writing can be characterised by text production that "visits" or "jumps" to other parts of the text (Buschenhenke, Conijn, and Van Waes [2024](#): 512). Measuring this non-linearity reveals "the variance in the organisation of the long-term writing process" (532) and "helps to find out how different writers engage with their developing manuscript over time" (512).

4. As Vauthier argues, "word processing flattens out, even crushes the two-dimensionality of the page, and thereby hides the abundant writing operations which manuscripts genetics seeks to unravel" (Vauthier [2016](#): 166).

course of the endless (but, we must stress, productive) search for a means to separate the overlapping acts of writing and revision. Namely, the interpretation of the traces left by agents other than the author who were also involved in the production of digital drafts (and thus literary works).<sup>5</sup>

We believe that it is in the digital manuscripts themselves that the possibility of distinguishing the voices of genesis – i.e., the agents of the work's production – becomes more apparent. Analysing “the *multiple* voices of texts” (Shillingsburg [1997] 154) does not mean diminishing the creative efforts of the author, or emphasising the influence of editors and publishers, or imagining the work as a single, unified voice formed after the author's ideas have passed through the filter of social influences. To understand the work as multivocal is to analyse it in such a way that all the discernible voices can be heard, dynamically woven into how the work is discussed.

It should be noted that as the geneticist revisits the work by surveying the spectrum of competing ideas about it,<sup>6</sup> the ideas of the manuscripts' original producers become intertwined with the critic's own individual reading of the materials. Therefore, when the critic narrates the reconstruction of the genesis, his or her narrative in a sense transcends the genesis itself. The events involved in the genesis, which belong to the past, are modelled from the standpoint of the present in manuscript analysis. And yet the critic's narrative does not simply locate the genesis in the present, but contextualises it *for* the present.<sup>7</sup> This means that all the agents (or voices) of the *avant-texte* are considered equally, regardless of the degree of actual influence they had on the work's development, nor their virtue in improving or worsening the work. In distinguishing the presence of intervening agents, the question arises as to how they affect the formation of textual meaning.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Although the creative work of editors and publishers undoubtedly has been the subject of a long tradition of research in textual studies (McKenzie [1986] Cullen [2012]), the issue is still underexplored in relation to the case of born-digital drafts. Most often, the interventions of agents in authorial drafts are discussed when theorising the technologies used to enhance collaborative writing, for example the, “Track Changes” function (Kirschenbaum [2016]), or Dropbox (Crombez and Cassiers [2017]). More experimental, but not without merit, was John Seely Brown's and Paul Duguid's exploration of the concept of agents in the discourse of information technology. This duo of researchers explained how intelligent software programmes can act on behalf of a user without their knowledge and thus gain the potential to transform the way users work (Brown and Duguid [2000] 35–40).

6. For more information on this practice, following what Dirk Van Hulle and Peter Shillingsburg termed the “genetic orientation to text”, see Van Hulle and Shillingsburg ([2015] 36–41).

7. When discussing the “genetic narrative” in historical writings, prominent Lithuanian sociologist Zenonas Norkus argued that in such a narrative “the directly represented event implicitly and explicitly shows itself as part of an even wider context that does not fit into the semantic space of any specific narrative” (Norkus [1997] 471).

8. Indeed, as David Greetham wondered: “Does voice — attributed, concealed, distorted, disseminated, glossed — function as a sign of meaning, even if very indirectly,

In the following, we will attempt to demonstrate how the multiple voices of genesis intertwine in avant-texte analysis by presenting a modern manuscript case.

## 2. The genesis of restitching the novel *Ch*.

In 2021, Lithuanian writer Tomas Vaiseta (b. 1984) published his third book of fiction, *Ch*.<sup>9</sup> The novel's initial reception was (and still is) unenthusiastic, and reasonably so, for the reader of this novel is condemned to the torments of reading itself.<sup>10</sup> As Lithuanian literary critic Dovilė Kuzmickaitė has reflected, the book is far from any "action fiction", and the story revolves around the protagonist Charlie "talking without a break" (Kajėnas 2021). Nevertheless, it is also "a novel of ideas — so rare and lacking in the scene of Lithuanian prose" (Čerškutė 2022: 62).

The book centres on a middle-aged man, Charlie, who comes to work in a theatre as a stagehand. It is noteworthy that this theatre is an atypical one (at least in view of the story's contemporary setting), as the actors perform on stage until they are executed. The story can thus be read as "an allegory of purgatory, abundant in references to the Bible, Carolingian culture and fiction; as an imposter prophet's warning about the end of European culture; or as an ode to cats who were sent to fight the Devil" (EUPL, n.d.).

The mention of the cats requires a separate note, for these creatures not only spice up the novel, but also fuel a crucial metaphor developed throughout the story. As literary history suggests, the image of a cat is usually drawn by writ-

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and how would a change in the attribution, glossing, etc., of voice change an editorial understanding, and perhaps closing off, of the proliferation of meaning?" (Greetham 2010: 215).

9. The opaque title echoes the name of the novel's protagonist, Charlie, and carries a thematic allusion to Charlemagne. The digraph "ch" is used in written Lithuanian to signify the sound of laughter (an English equivalent would be close to "hah"). Vaiseta made his debut in 2014 with a collection of short stories, *Paukščių miegas* [*The Sleep of Birds*]. His first novel was published two years later, under the title *Orfėjas, kelionė pirmyn ir atgal* [*Orpheus: A Journey There and Back*] (2016). In Lithuania, Vaiseta is a recognised author not only of fiction, but also of academic writings (the author holds the position of associate professor at the Faculty of History at Vilnius University). As far as his academic works are concerned, the most important ones are historical monographs on how the expression of sexuality and psychiatric deviations were suppressed under the Soviets: *Nuobodulio visuomenė* [*The Society of Boredom*] (2014), *Vasarnamis* [*Summerhouse*] (2018), *Mažasis o: seksualumo kultūra sovietų Lietuvoje* [*The Little O: Culture of Sexuality in Soviet Lithuania*] (2022). It may be mentioned here that Vaiseta held the position of editor-in-chief of the prominent Lithuanian cultural magazine "Naujasis Židinys-Aidai" (2016–2019). In collaboration with Lithuanian poet Mindaugas Nastaravičius, Vaiseta also hosts the podcast *Pirmas sakinyš* [*First Sentence*] broadcast by the Lithuanian National Radio in which the two interview guests from the literary world.

10. In the recent translation into French, the title of the book has been rendered as *Supplice*, meaning "great pain" or "suffering" (Vaiseta 2024).

ers to embody the idea of civilisation and culture (Rogers 2001). Vaiseta's novel takes up these concepts and grasps the underlying issue: in order to live on, culture must undergo changes. However, the nature of cultural change is ambivalent; reform is usually achieved at the expense of an old belief. In other words, the process of cultural change is a battle, and this is exactly what *Ch.*'s feline characters do: they fight.

Early in the work, a little sparrow swoops into the dreary theatre and wakes up the bored cats. As the story of how the bird is chased is told, one of the most vivid scenes in the novel is presented. Moreover, it is the figure of the sparrow that provides the impetus for a significant shift which takes place in the unfolding narrative and, later, carries into effect the ambiguity of the work's ending. Unlike the bird's quick and sudden entry into the novel's theatrical space, however, the textualization of the creature's function took a little longer than a fraction of a second.

The avant-textual material of *Ch.* consists of ten word processing files in *Microsoft Word* format (henceforth referred to as draft files, *sigla* DF)<sup>11</sup> and fall under three categories. Firstly, there are the *provisional files*, where we find passages with creative ideas tried out in the early stages of writing (DF1), the intertexts that the author considered including in the novel (DF2), and textual segments that have been left unused during the writing and revision of individual chapters (DF7, DF8, DF9)<sup>12</sup>. Secondly, there are the *continuous files*, which contain the first few chapters of the novel with authorial notes (DF3), individual chapters written and revised in separate documents (DF6), and chapters put together (from first to last) into a preliminary version of the novel as a whole (DF4). The third group, the *reviewed files*, reveal the editorial work of other agents: there is a file in which the text of the novel is commented upon by the author's publisher, who also happens to be Vaiseta's wife (DF10); another file

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11. A list of the *sigla* of each of the files in the corpus, alongside a description of their technical properties, can be found in Appendix B. The filenames of each of the draft documents can be found in Appendix C. Throughout this essay, when citations reference page numbers that pertain to Vaiseta's draft files, these refer to the page numbers *MS Word* automatically attributes to each 'page' in the Word document — as the author did not hard-code any page numbers in his drafts. Some of the theoretical problems faced while reconstructing the novel's genesis on the basis of these documents can be found in Appendix A.

12. It should be noted that we use the terms "document" and "file" interchangeably, as they both denote the same concept, that is, a virtual material "bearing the configuration of signs that represents a text" (Shillingsburg 1986: 47); the second term, however, can be seen as a specification of the first. Our classification of the documents is loosely based on the functional typology of de Biasi (1996: 34–35). Since the number of manuscripts in our case is relatively small, strict adherence to de Biasi (i.e., assigning drafts to "pre-compositional", "compositional", "prepublishing" or "publication" phases) would be an overgeneralisation. Instead, the files are immediately grouped according to their functions: *provisional*, *continuous* and *reviewed* (the adjectives differ slightly from those proposed by de Biasi for case sensitivity). We believe that this classification nevertheless implies the different genetic phases of the drafts.

includes changes suggested by the editor who was employed by the publisher (the author's wife) and who marked her corrections using the "Track Changes" function (DF5). The fourth category of avant-textual material is the e-mail letter we personally received from the author, where he briefly explains the contents of the documents sent, along with a picture file which the author used as a prototype image for describing the theatre contained within the story in the novel (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Photograph taken by Vaiseta to aid the description of the theatre in the novel. The building in the photo is part of the lofts located around T. Ševčenkos Street in Vilnius, known for their ghostly facades. They used to house the Soviet military electronics factory. Image reproduced with permission from the copyright holder.

Tracking down the relationships between the drafts suggests that, halfway through the process of writing the novel, Vaiseta realized that an additional chapter between the existing second and the third chapters was needed (in total, the published version contains twelve chapters and an epilogue). Thus, he created the new Chapter 3. In theory, an insertion into a narrative that is already tightly structured means that its previous design becomes distorted and the textual units surrounding the insertion have to be re-stitched (Dames 2023). In the case of *Ch.*, when the new Chapter 3 was inserted, the whole tone of the narrative changed. At the centre of this change was, as has already been mentioned,

the sparrow chased by the cats. As the sparrow came to inhabit the limelight in the story, the previous and subsequent narrative segments were consequentially revised. Reconstructing how the textual segments concerning the bird's appearance were edited, the two types of "threads" used in re-stitching the work's structure can be distinguished: the authorial and the editorial.

## 2.1. The author's voice: "At least one chapter is needed"

One of the earliest drafts of the avant-texte, DF3, contains the first four chapters of the book.<sup>13</sup> The most characteristic feature of this draft (and its Chapter 3 in particular) is that the protagonist, Charlie, describes the theatre (formerly a factory) in which he comes to work, employing a number of metaphors.<sup>14</sup> It is also in DF3 that we find an insertion where Chapter 2 ends and Chapter 3 begins, most likely written while Vaiseta was revising the draft, which reads: "Reikia mažiausiai vieno skyriaus" [At least one chapter is needed] (DF3, 10).

Presumably around the same time as the last changes were made to DF3, Vaiseta copied this file and created a new draft, DF4, on which chapters up to Chapter 10 were written.<sup>15</sup> In DF4, however, the narrative structure of the first

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13. As the file's "created" and "last modified" dates in Appendix B suggest, these first four chapters of the novel were written in just over a month (8 June to 11 February 2020). Conversely, the title of DF3 suggests that the last revision in this file took place on 15 February (see Appendix C). Since the last modification property is normally only updated when the user hits "save", we assume that the author made his last changes to the file on 11 February and then renamed it on 15 February. The author may have retitled the document in order to secure the date of completion of this draft and, in turn, to keep a record of the writing process for himself. Or, four days after completing the draft for the time being, Vaiseta may have decided to send it to his wife to read, as was his custom, and renamed the file to reflect the day he forwarded it. It should be noted, however, that in that case, he did not add his wife's name to the filename, which he did do for DF10. In DF3, each of the chapter entries is marked §, followed by the chapter number in words. On pages 10 and 17 we read one-sentence authorial notes in square brackets; more explicit comments are written at the very end of the draft (DF3, 21–22). It is not possible to comment on the nature of the author's revisions, as the writer did not use the "Track Changes" function in this file, and other metadata was lost when the files were retrieved from the author by email.

14. In the following quote, for example, we find Charlie describing the theatre's acoustics: "This entire factory, with its indefinable routes, resembles a human digestive system. The slithering sound comes — due to friction against the walls — from an invisible yet audible giant ascarid of time, spawned by years of pollution and now winding through the corridors, jerking back and forth, unable to free itself — like a boat tethered to the shore, slapping against the water" (DF3, 12). This translation from the Lithuanian (like all other translations attributed to "SA" in this essay) was offered by Skaistė Aleksandravičiūtė, as mentioned in the Acknowledgements section.

15. DF4 is derived from DF3 as both files have the same creation date, while their last modification properties differ (see Appendix B). As mentioned in Footnote 13, DF3 was completed on 11 February 2020, so DF4 was most likely copied around that time. It is our hypothesis that when DF4 was copied, the author used this file to write subsequent chapters of the novel. As Appendix B suggests, the "last modified" date of DF4 is 4 March

four chapters, as we find it in DF3, has been altered. DF4 contains the newly added Chapter 3. To be specific, when this new Chapter 3 was inserted in DF4, the old Chapter 3 from DF3 was moved one position forward. Thus, the old Chapter 3 became the new Chapter 4 and the old Chapter 4 became the new Chapter 5 in DF4.

If the initial four chapters of the narrative in DF3 introduced the reader to the mysterious, even disgusting, space-time of the novel, the new Chapter 3 in DF4 brought some action into play. A little sparrow flies into the theatre of death and awakens the story's feline characters:

The cats tore headlong toward the bench, one after another, [...] stretching their paws out with curved claws, springing forward to snatch the greyish lump. One after another! All of them! The last to leap into the air was a black-haired, one-eyed cat — now revealed to be the strongest, the squad leader, a true warlord. His right paw shot forward, claws scraping the air just beside that pitiful sparrow. Alas! Alas, he missed [...].

(DF4, 19; translation by SA)

Once the new Chapter 3 (containing the scene with the hunting of the bird) was inserted into DF4<sup>[16]</sup> the next two chapters (3 and 4 in DF3; 4 and 5 in DF4) were revised respectively. It is important to note that these revisions to the next chapters were not made in DF4 directly, but rather in another file of the *avant-texte*, as we shall see. However, DF4 contains the author's "signposting" to himself for the future rewritings. These signposts for revision in DF4 appear as three textual segments marked in red due to the fact that their font colour has been changed by the author<sup>[17]</sup>. The first two segments of DF4 marked for

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2021, i.e., more than a year after the file was copied. The document contains ten chapters of the novel, followed by a detailed plan of the work (63–6) outlining the narrative acts of twelve chapters and the epilogue (the same structure as the published version), while on pages 67–8 further notes are added. In addition to the numerical titles, the headings of all ten chapters in DF4 have conceptual names (as in the published version).

16. While we cannot specify with certainty at what point in the writing process the new Chapter 3 was inserted into DF4, we can, however, infer more about Vaiseta's writing process for the chapter, which was likely largely composed in DF6. As the file's title suggests, DF6 contains a version of the "new" Chapter 3 (see Appendix C). The creation dates of both files suggests that Vaiseta started working on DF6 about half a year after starting to work on DF4 (see Appendix B). But the last modification dates suggest that he continued to work on DF4 for about two months after finishing DF6. Since there are still some variants to be found between DF4 and DF6's versions of Chapter 3, and since the variants of DF4 were later accepted in the publication, this all suggests that the variants in DF4 are more recent than those in DF6. We therefore propose that Vaiseta set out to write his new third chapter in a separate file (DF6), copied its contents into the file with the rest of the text (DF4), and continued to finetune the text there.

17. Since the font change indicates the prospect of changing the marked segments, but without the actual implementation of those changes, we can assume that DF4 presents the reader with at least two conceptions of the novel in the same file. One in which the sparrow has not yet entered the space of the theatre, and one in which the new Chapter

revision are located at the end of Chapter 4 and in the middle of Chapter 5 (see Fig. 2). Both segments are the old fragments of DF3 and recount the theatre director's entrusting of Charlie with the task of finding a new actor for the final performance of the repertoire (to the protagonist's great annoyance since, as Charlie himself argues, his contract as a stagehand did not include human resources).

The revisions of the marked segments were subsequently implemented in the latest draft of the *avant-texte*, that is, DF5.<sup>18</sup> This file's earliest layer reveals that the first red fragment of DF4 has been reworked so that the protagonist's entire conversation with the director about finding the actor for the theatre's final performance has been redesigned, becoming the scene in which Charlie provides a more elaborate description of the director's appearance. The second section in red from DF4, where the scene in which Charlie evaluates one of the candidates for the acting role that needs filling is sketched out, is deleted and replaced with the protagonist's story about his life before coming to the theatre. These modifications are important to the genesis of the novel, as the focus on creating an entirely new character while the story unfolds (the new actor's arrival is strongly emphasised in DF3) shifts to complicating the relationships between existing characters, namely the theatre director, the protagonist Charlie, and, as we shall see, the latter's apprentice.

The third segment of DF4 marked for future revision appears in Chapter 7. Unlike the first two segments, it is not the text of the work that is marked in red (rendered in bold in the quote below), but the author's note in square brackets that has been added to the main text of DF4.<sup>19</sup> This authorial note is inserted in the passage of Chapter 7 which recounts how Charlie and his apprentice,

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3 has been inserted and its effect on the surrounding segments has been reconsidered by the author.

18. This document contains the suggestions and changes made by the editor of the Lithuanian publishing house *Baltos lankos* (the same publishing house that published *Ch.*). The editor's comments have been added, and revisions have been made using the "Track Changes" function. The primary layer of the file and the variants created when the author reacted to the editor's comments — accepting, rejecting, or commenting on the suggestions — are considered authorised. Thus, three versions of the novel were reconstructed: (1) the text of the authorial fair copy submitted to the editor, (2) the text formed by the editor's changes, (3) the text implied by the author's acceptance or rejection of the editorial intervention. DF5 was created by copying DF4, presumably around March 2021 when the latter file was edited for the last time, as the "last modified" date suggests (see Appendix B). In DF5, Vaiseta wrote the three remaining chapters of the novel and made further revisions until it was ready to be sent to the editor. The first revision of the editor is recorded on 14 June and the last, after ten days, on 23 June. The file was then sent back to Vaiseta for him to review the editor's changes, and the author's responses were recorded on 25 and 26 June. See also Footnote 21.

19. We cannot say with certainty whether or not the third segment was marked in red at the same time as the first two segments. However, we align the author's note from Chapter 7 with the previous two segments in red, from Chapters 4 and 5, because we believe that they relate to the revisions prompted by the newly written Chapter 3, which is the focus of our study.



Charles the Little (abbreviated CL in Vaiseta's drafts), are constructing the prop needed for the final performance at the theatre, a guillotine, which the protagonist himself refers to as "The End". Watching his apprentice at work, Charlie narrates:

I even squinted my eyes in fascination — no point in hiding it — as I watched that little four-legged bug, hugging an oak log, clutching a metal lock in one hand and a cordless drill in the other, climbing upward; and then, it seemed, he was practically hanging in midair — perhaps no longer a bug at all, but like a wintering bat — tinkering with the lock, scraping, drilling, and hammering — **[here we need the episode where CL releases the feather downward]** and soon enough, he slid back down with a carefree bound [...].

(DF4, 43; translation by SA)<sup>20</sup>

As the authorial note explains, the guillotine construction scene was not yet completed in DF4. We interpret Vaiseta's note to mean that the paragraph does not only need to be expanded, but that the expansion should relate this scene from Chapter 7 to the previous events of Chapter 3, where the sparrow shows up. The author's note therefore implies the idea of creating a link between the building of the guillotine and the hunt for the bird which occurs four chapters earlier. In the later file which we have already mentioned, DF5, the passage in question is rewritten and reads as follows:

I even squinted my eyes in fascination — no point in hiding it — as I watched that little four-legged bug, hugging an oak log, clutching a metal lock in one hand and a cordless drill in the other, climbing upward; and then, it seemed, he was practically hanging in midair — perhaps no longer a bug at all, but like a wintering bat — tinkering with the lock, scraping, drilling, and hammering. **Having screwed in the lock, he set the drill down upon the summit of The End, slipped his hand into his trouser pocket, pulled out a barely discernible object, waved it between two fingers like a flag of truce, and triumphantly tossed it into the breath-filled air. I must admit, before I could even shout "What are you doing?!" — just opening my lips to mouth out the warning of "Careful!" (the little fellow was behaving far too recklessly, to my mind) — the object slipped from Charles the Little's fingers — and by then I could see ever so clearly it was greyish — and floated down so gently that, had I not shut my mouth in time, it would've ended up in my throat; instead, it landed on my parched lips. Crossing my eyes, I glanced at that thing, though I would have guessed anyway what it was and to whom it belonged. A feathered imp! The imp's feather! Charles the Little slid back down with a carefree bound [...].**

(DF5, 63; translation by SA; Vaiseta's insertion rendered in bold)

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20. Text that was originally marked in red by the author is here rendered in bold for improved readability of the online version of this essay.

The significance of the insertion is that it explains the mysterious disappearance of the bird in Chapter 3. As Chapter 7 unfolds in DF5, the reader is informed that it was Charlie himself who caught the sparrow and hid its body in the cupboard of his cell. Hence the inserted episode meant that Charlie’s apprentice went into his room and stole the sparrow. In turn, the insertion suggests that the great change brought by the little bird in Chapter 3 has finally been enacted, or revealed, to Charlie in the form of the feather that has fallen from the top of the guillotine: Charlie is no longer merely the theatre’s stagehand, and his apprentice Charles the Little is not the actor who will play in the final performance anymore; their roles have been reversed. It is now Charlie who is to die on the guillotine they have been building.

DF5 is the only draft of the avant-texte in which we find Chapters 11, 12, and the epilogue written out in full. It is worth noting that Vaiseta created DF5 by copying DF4 just as these final sections of the novel were taking shape (see Footnote 18). This is reminiscent of the same action he carried out when, during the revision of DF3, the idea for the new Chapter 3 was born (see Footnote 16). In other words, we interpret the act of creating the new draft by copying the “working” file as an indicator of the important development in the narrative that is about to take place.

The epilogue of DF5, similarly to that which appears in the published novel, contains the second fight of the theatre’s feline inhabitants. This time, the cats are driven into a frenzy as they chase after a ball toy, the guillotined head of the protagonist Charlie. We interpret the epilogue as having been created largely to intensify and ambiguate how the chasing of the sparrow is to be read. The epilogue functions as a flashback to the rewritten Chapter 3, but the playful hunting down of a bird no longer seems so innocent when contrasted with the bloody game of cats chasing a decapitated head. In other words, what had seemed to be a positive and promising change earlier in the novel (the arrival of the sparrow) turns against itself as a tragic and disillusioning act at the end. Taking all of this into account, Figure 3 offers a visualization of the changes that were made to bring the new Chapter 3 into line with the narrative of the work.

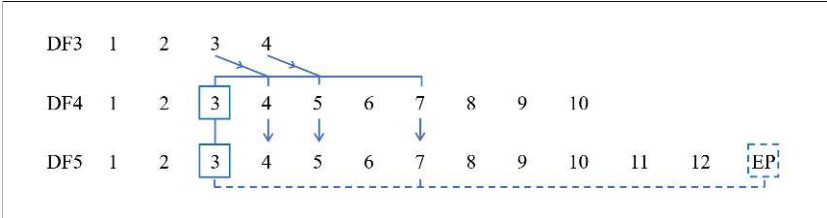


Figure 3: The genetic development of the chapters (marked using a regular blue line) and the relationship of the insertion of Chapter 3 to substantial changes in the narrative (marked using a dotted blue line). Figure licensed under a [CC-BY 4.0](#) license by the author.

## 2.2. The editors' voices: from "Fist" to "Cry"

When the final changes were made to DF5, Vaiseta sent this file to the editor Regina Katkevičienė (henceforth referred to as *siglum* RK)<sup>21</sup>. This editor was employed by Vaiseta's publisher (and wife) and was therefore accountable to both the author and the employee. Needless to say, RK may not have been aware of the reworking of the novel's narrative through the insertion of the new Chapter 3. In other words, her approach to the "sparrow" and its function in the novel came from a different interpretive angle than the author's.

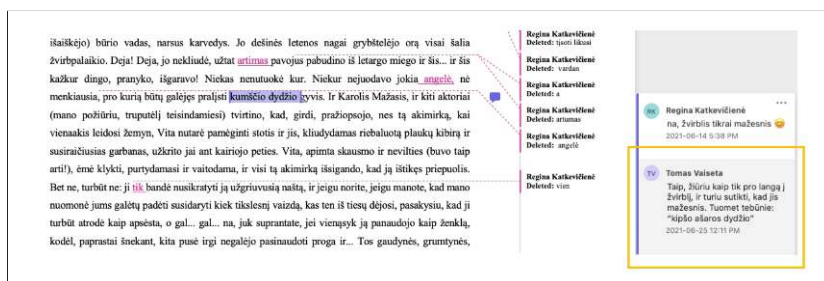


Figure 4: Tomas Vaiseta, *Ch*. Fragment from DF5, p. 28. Revisions by RK are marked in rose in the *Microsoft Word* file, using the demonstration mode of the "Track Changes" feature. The left and right margins of the *Microsoft Word* document have been cropped in the illustration and the scale has been minimised in the screenshot for demonstration purposes. Image reproduced with permission from the copyright holder.

In DF5 the scene of the first fight between the cats ends with the quote that the bird they were chasing "disappeared somewhere, vanished, evaporated! No one had the faintest idea where to. Nowhere was there the slightest sliver

21. The time reference of RK's added comments where she made suggestions, as recorded by the "Track Changes" function, shows that she began editing the draft on 14 June 2021 and worked continuously for four days. There are no comments added by her on 18–19 June, and further remarks are added on 21–23 June. Vaiseta's first response to RK's suggestion was recorded two days later, on 25 June. It is worth noting the speed with which the author responded to all of RK's comments: Vaiseta responded to comments on pages 3 to 46 in the morning of 25 June (10:07–13:07), to comments on pages 50–102 in the afternoon of the same day (15:46–18:24), and to the comments in the final pages (98–111) the next morning (10:27–11:19). These timestamps suggest two interpretations: either 1) Vaiseta was overcome by the creative impulse to work through the revisions straight away; or 2) he had no choice but to respond as quickly as possible to the approaching deadline for sending the file to press. It is also important to note that the addition of the last authorial comment in DF5 at 11:19 am does not coincide with the "last modified" time of the file, which is 8:32 am. This only proves that no definitive and certain conclusions about the chronology of genesis can be drawn from the metadata of born-digital drafts alone.

of darkness through which a *fist-sized creature* could have slipped” (28; translation by SA; emphasis added). The latter description of the “sparrow” was commented on by RK in the following way: “well, the sparrow is smaller indeed [smiley face]” (translation by SA). In response to the comment, the author replied with a touch of irony: “As it happens, I’m just now looking through the window at the sparrow, and yes, I must agree, it is way smaller than the fist. Let it be ‘of a size of an imp’s teardrop’ then” (translation by SA; see Fig. 4, marked in a yellow box). As a result of this discussion, the new variant of the description of the bird (“an imp’s teardrop”) was agreed upon and included in the publication (Vaiseta 2021, 66).

Another agent of genesis was Saulina Kochanskaitė (henceforth referred to as *siglum* SK), the editor-in-chief of the publishing house that printed *Ch.* and wife to the author.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Vaiseta sent her a version of his novel for reading just before sending it to RK. The author presumably copied eight chapters from DF5 and pasted them into a new file, DF10,<sup>23</sup> for the purpose of sending it to SK, as he was still working on the last three chapters of the novel in DF5. In D10 the description of the “sparrow” we quoted from DF5 is analogous. Unlike the first editor, SK did not find the expression problematic. The image that caught her attention was the one that RK did not comment on later in DF5.

In DF10, Charlie narrates: “I cannot tell you which of the cats was the first to hear *the cry of the wings* of the sparrow who was not allowed to enter the heavens” (20; translation by SA; emphasis added). Under this sentence, SK commented: “I find it difficult to imagine the very idea of the cry of the wings. Perhaps consider the sighing, moaning, or lament?” (translation by SA; see Fig. 5, marked in a yellow box). If we examine the later documents of the *avant-texte* — both DF5 sent to RK and the publication (44) — none of the three alternatives proposed by SK were accepted as changes by the author.

The textual variants regarding the features of the “sparrow” thus imply three functionalities in the reconstruction of the genesis. First, the authorial inscription was open to being re-read by the two individuals; second, the authorial change was to be made by considering the first editor’s note; and third, the editorial change was suggested by the publisher but ultimately not accepted by the

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22. The order in which the first and second agents appear in the article does not imply any attempt to evaluate their contribution, nor does it indicate the chronology of their intervention.

23. DF10 documents the reviewed files of the *avant-texte* and contains the suggestions and changes made by the publisher of the Lithuanian publishing house *Baltos lankos*, as its filename suggests (see Appendix C). The publisher’s comments have been added and revisions have been made using the “Track Changes” function. The primary layer of the file is considered authorised, and two versions of the novel were reconstructed: (1) the text of the author’s fair copy submitted to the publisher; and (2) the text formed by the publisher’s changes. Vaiseta created DF10 on 3 June 2021. SK’s first editorial addition is recorded the next day. Presumably, SK read and revised the document from 4 to 11 June, as the date of her latest revision in the draft corresponds with the “last modified” date of the file (see Appendix B).

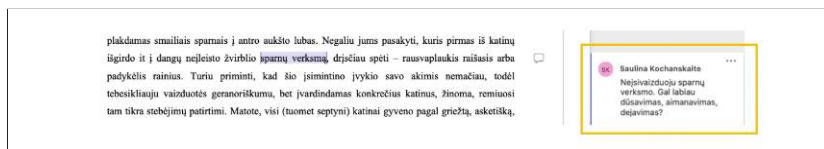


Figure 5: Tomas Vaiseta, *Ch.* Fragment from DF10, p. 20. The comment posted by SK is marked in a yellow box. Image reproduced with permission from the copyright holder.

author. It can therefore be suggested that at least three overlapping conceptions of the novel's narrativity were involved in the construction of the analysed shift in *Ch.*<sup>24</sup>

The first conception of narrativity reconstructed is the authorial one. Producing the manuscript means, first and foremost, finding a literary expression that corresponds to the creative idea in mind.<sup>25</sup> This would be one that not only corresponds but indeed conforms as closely as possible to that idea. The record of Vaiseta writing the phrase “fist-sized creature” thus attests to the act of putting the abstract into a verbal form such that the “sparrow” would serve both a transformative and a figural function within the story.<sup>26</sup>

The second conception of narrativity is reconstructed by analysing the editor's inscriptions. At the pass for press stage, Vaiseta usually chooses to work with the editor who insists on grammatical correctness, the stricter the better. Although most of the editor's suggestions concerning non-grammatical aspects of the text were discarded, the author was assured that no inconsistencies in spelling, inflection, or punctuation remained.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, most of the edito-

24. In contrast to the term “narrative”, which implies a finished result, a specific conceptual structure of the novel, “narrativity” is conceived as a set of organising principles or strategies for achieving this structure (Bal 1997: 14, 222).

25. “[T]he image of the author is modelled to the assumption that his artistic intent is directed primarily towards creative work” (Hurlebusch 1988: 105).

26. Among other examples of the author's meticulous attention to detail for literary descriptions in DF5, there is an instance where RK makes a change to the phrase “kviečio grūdai”, intended to evoke the biblical “God's grain”, by deleting its first word, presumably for the purpose of saving words (it is noteworthy that, in Lithuanian, the phrase “kviečio grūdai” does not bear a strong link with the said biblical image). Under this deletion, as displayed by the “Track Changes” feature, Vaiseta posted the following comment: “Please keep ‘God's grain’ even if it sounds a bit unnatural. Saint Ignatius of Antioch was thrown into the arena in Rome in 107 AD and torn apart by a lion. He is credited with the saying that he wished to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts like God's grain so that he might become Christ's pure bread.” (DF5, 38; translation by SA).

27. For example, to enhance the effect of Charlie being beheaded *while* this character is speaking, Vaiseta ended the final sentence of Chapter 12 in DF5 in the middle of the protagonist's last word: “one moment please, just one moment, maybe I can manage, despite my shackled arms and head, to move — just like this, with my whole body — to move this thi” (109; translation by SA). The first editor created a comment under the

rial comments in DF5 can be understood as a greater approximation of the work's textuality towards the norms of standard Lithuanian usage.<sup>28</sup> The clash between the normative and the unrestrained authorial imagination reminds us that sometimes the latter does not succumb to the rationalisations of the former. In response to the editorial comment about the "bird", Vaiseta simply looked through his window and measured the exact size of the sparrow.

The third conception of narrativity was identified by tracing the publisher's notes. She commented on the use of Lithuanian words in the same way as the first editor, but the publisher's suggestions reveal a significantly different approach to the text of the work. Her comments were sharp and strict, as if she were checking that the narrative elements she had previously discussed in detail with the author at an in-person meeting had been fully realised on the page.<sup>29</sup> Such comments functioned as an inquiry into how the textualisation of the work corresponded to the ideal of the work (which we can assume the publisher was at least somewhat familiar with, as she was actively involved in every step of the work's production). The publisher's dissatisfaction with the description of the "sparrow's" wings, and the fact that her suggestions were neglected

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unfinished word, asking: "perhaps an ellipsis?". Vaiseta replied with certainty: "No, no, please let's leave it as it is — that unfinished word and the sentence without any punctuation are very important" (translation by SA).

28. On page 73 we find the first editor's deletion of Charlie's phrase "it is necessary to introduce a certain clarification" and addition of "it is necessary to clarify slightly". The scrupulous revision was later commented on by the author, who said: "The Lithuanian language always opts for a verb rather than a noun, but in this instance the linguistic clunkiness of 'to introduce a clarification' is necessary in my view. I would like to stick to the earlier version." As this and similar painstaking revisions by RK suggest, "making things 'better' can contain a normative, ulterior sense of correcting something that is 'wrong', if only aesthetically. But there is also an ultimate motive; the desire to do something that is 'good' for its own sake" (Greenberg 2018: 24–25).

29. In DF10, SK commented on sporadic phrases and sentences by simply asking "What's that?" (22), "Incoherent sentence?" (17), pointing out that "Something's off" (24), "Strange sentence" (76), or addressing the protagonist himself by inquiring "Why didn't Charlie develop this interesting thought at all? Charlie?" (22; translation by SA throughout). The latter suggestion implies a different, deeply personal relationship with the novel, and allows us to consider the publisher and her being an author's wife as two forms of agency, albeit performed by one person. The idea that the novel's protagonist has become something of a real person in the author's family is suggested by the dedication of the book, which reads: "To Saulina, for we both fell in love with Charlie" (Vaiseta 2021: 5; translation by SA). Thus, when identifying with the character in the drafts, the dual function of the wife / publisher, meets the dual function of the author / first-person narrator Charlie.

As a matter of fact, the agency of the wife figure in the genesis of the work may require a separate investigation. For example, in the archival materials for John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) kept at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, there is a folder with a note written by the author, in which he explains that the manuscripts in question contain "comments of my sternest editor, otherwise my wife. They made me change the text considerably before it was sent out for professional reading" (Fowles 1977).

by the author, encourages us to think about the interaction of agents not only in terms of authorial acceptance or rejection, but as a thought-provoking exchange of divergent understandings of the work.

Interpreting textual variants may depend on the particular conception of narrativity held by the agents of genesis. This means that the textual records of these agents can serve as distinctive focal points from which to narrate the reconstruction of genesis. As the critic employs the reconstructed understandings of the work to frame the narrative of genesis, the fourth type of narrativity concerning the work emerges, namely that which the genetic critic themselves demonstrate in presenting their manuscript analysis.<sup>30</sup>

First of all, the critic *selects* draft material that they believe may reveal important aspects of the genesis. Interacting with the agencies involved in the production of the work, but also being one of the agents himself or herself, the geneticist extracts the “essences” that he or she believes are crucial to the re-imagining of the idea of the work. In this respect, the critical activity comes close to the way in which the work is approached through the agency of the author’s assistant or, as we have noted in the case of Vaiseta, his wife, since both the assistant and the critic have the opportunity to become familiar with the wide range of genetic stages: from the initial brainstorming (sketches, plans) to the polishing of unsatisfactory verbalisations (continuous drafts). Secondly, the researcher *combines* the aspects of textual variation spread throughout the documents into a coherent structure (the *avant-texte*). The critic approaches the manuscripts in such a way that the result of this engagement is the narrative itself. It goes without saying that one of the underlying aims of such a narrative is to render the reader more willing imaginatively to revisit the understanding of the work that they may have had before reading the study. And thirdly, the geneticist *self-discloses* or reflects on his or her undertakings. Although the procedures of selection and combination are based on scholarly premises, the narrative of the reconstruction of genesis produced by the researcher is an intellectual construction that is not actually present in the material documents.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

As Peter Robinson asked, “exactly what is the text which the editor represents as present in the document?” (2013, 113). Suppose we approach the geneticist’s narrative of reconstruction as a practice of selecting, combining, and dis-

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30. “[T]exts are embedded in complex webs of discourse, with multidimensional relations between author, text, everyone involved in the making and reception of a text, editor and audience” (Robinson 2013, 107).

31. In describing the activity of the geneticist, we have drawn on the concept of fictionalising acts proposed by Wolfgang Iser (1993, 4–21). Since Iser’s conception originates from the analysis of fictional discourse, we apply it to genetic research *mutatis mutandis*, i.e., on the basis of the principle of there being a similarity between the acts of the writer and the critic.

closing aspects of the textual materials under development. Whichever narrative path the geneticist takes in his study (sometimes manuscript analysis resembles a detective story, sometimes a *bildungsroman*), structuring the narrative of the avant-texte is akin to playing with a kaleidoscope. Each time the critic returns to the manuscripts, the fragments of the avant-texte fall into slightly new (sometimes contradictory) interpretive combinations. In the case of born-digital manuscripts, these combinations can also acquire a distinctive hue depending on the voice of the agent involved in producing textual variants.<sup>32</sup> To tell the story of the reconstruction of genesis is trying to catch the sparrow as it is about to fly away.

## Appendix

### A. Description of the avant-texte

Given Vaiseta's active involvement in cultural and academic life, our proposal to inspect the draft files of his novel was received with both the curiosity of a scholar and the reticence of an author. Access to the drafts presented in our study was granted by Vaiseta himself, who emailed us the files as attachments from his hard drive (if we were to repeat our research from scratch, we would re-evaluate this method of obtaining data from the author). Hence the limitations to the depth of our forensic analysis. All the metadata (e.g., MD5 values, version history), apart from that visible in the document files themselves, was beyond our reach during the genetic analysis. Nevertheless, the metadata that we were able to access included the creation and last modification dates of the files, as well as comments and revisions recorded by the "Track Changes" function. In reconstructing the avant-texte, all ten files were analysed, but in this article we will focus on five of them, DF3–6 and DF10. We are grateful to the author for his permission to cite the manuscripts.

In addition to the files received, there were other documents that Vaiseta claimed to have used while working on the novel, but which were not accessible to our study: the notes he took on his personal mobile phone, the *Word* files he deleted while cleaning the creative environment, and the files of intermediate versions stored on the cloud. As Gabriele Wix has noted, the manuscripts produced by so-called digital natives suggest that "there is no clear cut between 'modern', e.g., private documents, be they handwritten or typed, and 'beyond', e.g., digitally created", so that when analysing such a genetic dossier, the new "transitory stage" must be taken into account, i.e., "a transitional phase" that emerges because modern and digital writing processes inter-

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32. "The dream of an agent-free neutral environment [...] is an illusion, for at each stage on the electronic highway there will be paths taken and not taken, and the cumulative mapping of these paths will delineate a presence, no less or more lacking in authenticity than all those other choices that editors and readers have had to make over the centuries" (Greetham 2010, 245).

mingle (Wix2024, 106).

B. The draft files of *Ch.*

The following table acts as a reference point for the digital files quoted in the essay, and referenced with the sigla listed here. The file names of each of the files can be consulted in Appendix C. Each row in the table represents an individual digital file, saved in the *Microsoft Word* format (with .docx extension) by Lithuanian author Tomas Vaiseta. Each of the files is the property of Vaiseta, who generously allowed the author of this essay to copy the files, include them in her private archive, and quote from the files in her research. Apart from the sigla for each of the files, the table also records their size (in kilobytes and pages), and time and date of their creation and last modification (as it is recorded in the file, which may not always be completely accurate, as also discussed in the essay).

siglum	created	last modified	kilobytes	pages
DF1	2019-03-08 [09:48]	2020-01-04 [20:22]	34	9
DF2	2019-04-21 [16:08]	2021-03-06 [18:13]	30	9
DF3	2020-01-08 [12:16]	2020-02-11 [13:19]	118	22
DF4	2020-01-08 [12:16]	2021-03-04 [11:34]	248	68
DF5	2020-01-08 [12:16]	2021-06-26 [08:32]	504	111
DF6	2020-07-15 [07:16]	2021-01-12 [13:54]	43	9
DF7	2020-07-15 [07:16]	2021-01-13 [10:39]	17	1
DF8	2021-01-26 [13:08]	2021-02-03 [10:13]	16	1
DF9	2021-05-03 [07:34]	2021-05-11 [07:39]	32	10
DF10	2021-06-03 [19:09]	2021-06-11 [10:07]	208	81

Table 1: Sigla and technical properties of the draft files quoted in the essay.

C. File names and their translations

The following list displays the original filenames of each of the files referenced in the essay, with translations into English where relevant.

- **DF1:** Choras.docx [Choir].
- **DF2:** Medziaga.docx [Material].
- **DF3:** Ch\_2020\_02\_15.docx.
- **DF4:** Ch\_Iki\_vienuolikto\_skyriaus.docx [*Ch.* up to eleventh chapter].
- **DF5:** Ch\_taisytas.docx [*Ch.* revised].
- **DF6:** Ch\_Trecias\_skyrius\_naujas\_2021\_01\_12.docx [*Ch.* third chapter new 2021-01-12].

- DF7: Trecio\_skyriaus\_liekanos [Third chapter leftovers].
- DF8: Astunto\_skyriaus\_liekanos.docx [Eight chapter leftovers].
- DF9: Liekanos.docx [Leftovers].
- DF10: Ch\_Saulinai\_astuoni\_skyriai.docx [*Ch.* for Saulina eight chapters].

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