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# Creative Undoing and Textual Scholarship: <br/>A Rapprochement between Genetic Criticism and Scholarly Editing

## Reporting

### Project Information

**CUTS**

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Project closed

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## Final Report Summary - CUTS (Creative Undoing and Textual Scholarship: A Rapprochement between Genetic Criticism and Scholarly Editing)

When genetic criticism (the study of modern manuscripts and the process of writing) was establishing itself as a scientific discipline in the late decades of the 20th century, it had to try and distinguish itself from traditional philology. In the meantime, genetic criticism has firmly established itself as a discipline in its own right and the time is ripe for a change of outlook. This project combines the forces of textual scholarship and genetic criticism to suggest a new orientation in scholarly editing.

Since genetic criticism has objected to the subservient role of manuscript research in textual criticism, this project (CUTS) suggests a reversal of these roles: instead of employing manuscript research with a view to making an edition, an electronic edition can be designed in such a way that it becomes a tool for manuscript research and genetic criticism.

The project has built bridges and established a rapprochement between textual scholarship and genetic criticism by means of an approach to textual variants that values forms of creative undoing (ways of decomposing a text as an integral part of literary invention) more than has hitherto been the case in textual scholarship. Throughout the history of literature, the creative process has been regarded as either a constructive undertaking or as a process of growth, depending on the respectively constructive or organic metaphors that were current or dominant in different periods. But in this process of composition, decomposition plays a crucial role that is generally downplayed by authors and scholars alike. Acts of decomposition can range from the selection of reading notes to forms of discarding, cutting, deleting, omitting, crossing out and revising in the act of writing.

Samuel Beckett's manuscripts serve as the case study to tackle a topical issue in European textual scholarship: bridging the gap between genetic criticism and textual scholarship, by determining the function of creative undoing in the process of literary invention and its theoretical and practical implications for digital scholarly editing.

In concrete terms, the project resulted in digital genetic editions of 6 works by Beckett (Molloy, Malone meurt / Malone Dies, L'Innommable / The Unnamable, Krapp's Last Tape / La Dernière Bande, En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot and Fin de partie / Endgame ([www.beckettarchive.org](http://www.beckettarchive.org)); 6 accompanying monographs on the making of these works (London: Bloomsbury); a digitalized library of Samuel Beckett (including his notes in the margins) with a book that analyzes the reading traces (Samuel Beckett's Library, Cambridge University Press, 2013); and a monograph called Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

In the digital architecture, we have also incorporated the collation algorithm CollateX (in collaboration with Ronald Haentjens Dekker, Huygens ING), which enables us to flag creative undoing and the variants between versions by means of a dynamic automated collation of all versions. From the perspective of editorial practice, the integration of CollateX shows the potential to be useful both to the specialized field of digital scholarly editing and to a more general audience. From the vantage point of editorial theory, this development has interesting consequences regarding the scholarly editor's role, whose focus may shift from collation to a more interpretive function. In this way, the integration of a collation tool may be consequential in terms of bridging the gap between genetic criticism and textual scholarship.

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