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An Electronic Edition of Eighteenth-Century Drama Manuscripts: Performing for Editing

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Abstract

This article addresses a project of electronic edition of eighteenth-century drama manuscripts, introducing performance art as an active methodology. This was meant to isolate the specific features of eighteenth-century drama manuscripts, in order to assess their improved electronic edition. So, to fully grasp the distinctive features of these historical testimonies, performance art was used as a mediation process, and different interrelated performance initiatives took place. Through performance it was possible to reconstitute the “take place” (Kobialka, 2002) i.e. the eventful nature contained in the manuscripts, instead of searching for metadata innovations, or an ideal critical apparatus. The focus was laid on drama as a particular type of happening and accomplishment, silenced amidst the archive. The happening quality of the manuscripts was then put to proof through different contexts and practices of performance. The resultant digital edition reflects the “remains” of taking drama manuscripts into performance practice, allowing for a new format of reading material.

1. Digital Edition: Concepts in Review

According to McGann (1997) the electronic environment of hyperediting overcomes the codex-based limits, as computerization can optimize the logical categories of traditional critical editing that can then acquire new functions. In fact, to work in a “hyper” mode, an editing project must use computerization in such a way as to get over the analytic limits of hardcopy text. Accordingly, hypertexts allow us to go through a large number of documents and to relate these documents, or parts of them, in complex varying ways.

He further recognizes the importance of organizing a hyperediting project in hypermedia form, since hypermedia editions can incorporate aural and/or visual elements that reflect the multimedia nature of literary works: “texts are language visible, aural, and intellectual (gesture and (type)script, voice and instrumentation, syntax and usage)” (p. 33). One example of a hypermedia project is *The Rossetti Hypermedia Archive*. When presenting this particular project, McGann (1997) introduces a distinction between archive and edition:

It is important to realize that the Rossetti project is an archive rather than an edition. When a book is produced it literally closes its covers on itself. If its work is continued, a new edition, or other related books, have to be (similarly) produced. A work like the Rossetti hypermedia archive has escaped that bibliographical limitation. It has been built so that its contents and its webwork of relations (both internal and external) can be indefinitely expanded and developed (p. 40).

Curiously enough, the author explicitly links the term edition to a book format, with its specific categories of production and dissemination, and, at the same time, connects the archive with an ever-expanding webwork of relations.

However, Drucker (2009) calls attention to the way we have come to analyze, and see the book format. In fact, she claims that it is necessary to identify the specific features of a material form correctly before being able to envision its functionality in a new medial format. She further argues that by looking at all that has happened in the domain of the electronic book, one is prone to understand how the limited apprehension of the specific materiality of the book has originated inadequate digital models. In her opinion, until now the focus has been on the reproduction of the graphic and physical features of the book, while the expansion of bookish functionalities would have been a better tryout.

Deegan and Sutherland (2009) go as far as to consider that in face of the digital tools what is being revised is the concept of text itself and its defining features. Following on the topic, Dahlström (2009) contents idealistic notions of documents, texts and editions, claiming that the nature of editions is rhetorical, social and one that entails complex translation rather than simple transmission. By acknowledging this, scholars would be better prepared to deal with the purposes and critical contributions of their electronic editions.

In this context, a range of possibilities arise, going from the hypermedia multilayered archive, involving multiple research partnerships, to individual manuscript editions. According to Vanhoutte (2009) the audience for scholarly editions is small, specialized, and will scarcely outnumber the scholarly community engaged with the edited title. Hence, in his opinion, this type of editing goes against the importance of the scholarly edition as a cultural product. In fact, the qualifying characteristic of an edition lies in the status of its text, not its function, form of appearance, or method. The electronic edition is thus seen as the optimized medium for the promotion of the scholarly reading edition.

A brief typology of editions is presented in Vanhoutte (1999):

The German, and thus the Dutch, school of *Editionswissenschaft* traditionally distinguishes three types of editions, i.e. the historical-critical edition, the study edition, and the reading edition. Although each one of them is intended for a different audience with different expectations as to the contents and composition of the edition, they all should in theory be based on the same full historical-critical research needed to constitute a *Zitierbare* text. All three of them present the reader with a reading-text, but they differ in broad lines in the extensiveness of the commentary section and in the inclusion of an apparatus criticus or variorum (p. 199).

In short, until now one can easily recognize that digital tools have brought a lot into question, from the definition of text itself to the purpose and typology of scholarly editions. Different projects lay bare the distinction between archive and edition, and hypermedia possibilities are being reinvented. Still, we are recalled that both digital projects and objects are intentional, rhetorical, social, involving complex translation rather than simple transmission. Consequently, McGann (1997) points out that: “But for the scientist and scholar, the media of expression are primarily conceptual utilities,

means rather than ends. Scholars often seek to evade or supercede an expressive form to the extent that it hinders the conceptual goal (whether it be theoretical or practical)” (p. 20). So, scholars tend to overshadow the expressive form in order to enhance the conceptual dimension of a text. The question that immediately arises is whether these two dimensions can be separated and put aside. In fact, digital projects that specifically deal with drama/performance are prone to integrate both, although the conceptual still seems to dominate.

2. Editing Drama and Performance Digitally

This section reviews three scholarly projects that specifically deal with the digital edition of drama and performance. Taking them to be representative of the state of the art in the area, next their main goals, methodology and intended outcomes will be briefly covered.

The general goal of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (<http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/>) is to re-edit the Jonson canon for academic use through updated historical, literary and textual approaches and to present the outcomes of this initiative in a comprehensive and well organized fashion that relies on all modes of textual reproduction.

Unlike other digital archives that remain peculiarly static and rigid, providing for the possibility of addition but not reorganization of material, the CEWBJ seeks to explore electronic textuality, by embracing emerging technologies to lend editorial power to the users that will be encouraged not so much to find as to make order. This ongoing project will thus set a new organizing paradigm within digital scholarly editions, and, at the same time, it will also pursue innovative ways of delivering and using its complex materials. Concurrent with the shift in editorial design from hierarchical to “rhizomatic”, “a term that comes from the tangled root structure beneath a field of grass, a non-hierarchical mass of ever-growing links between and among tufts” (Gants, 2006, p. 124), a series of intensive research and development initiatives is to be implemented in order to achieve increasing robust delivery modes of this new type of resource.

The Project *Shakespeare His Contemporaries* comprises a vast corpus of plays, printed before 1660, made available online to function as metadata, considering that “a quite explicit and rigid system of metadata is part of the genre itself” (Mueller, 2014). Plays are divided into speeches, scenes, and acts, and are constituted by stage directions and speaker labels. Since its metadata is so explicit and consistent across many texts, drama is a genre particularly suitable for digital mapping, displaying quite precise guidelines about how to do it. Therefore, this project aims to deal with the specificity of drama in terms of digital mapping and metadata.

In the context of the project *PO.EX: A Digital Archive of Portuguese Experimental Literature* (<http://www.po-ex.net/>), Portela (2014) calls attention to the different types of media that compound the Portuguese Experimental Literature, namely “visual poetry, sound poetry, video-poetry, performance poetry, computer poetry, and several other forms of experimental writing”. In assessing the different materials that ought to have a digital representation within the project, Portela distinguishes a performative type directly associated with live events.

To find the most adequate digital representation for performative materiality, original documents, such as recordings, audio, video, film and photography, were selected. These original documents were then duplicated in digital files of different format. A second type of documents is manuscripts, typescripts and sketches that will also get a digital encoding. The two sets of original documents are finally related in the database by links between audio/video and textual transcriptions. The starting point to assess the live events that constitute the performative dimension of the PO.EX project is not performance itself but video and audio recordings. In this case, performance is a mere label for an ensemble of specific materials rather than a process of discovering the logics of electronic editing or digital representation.

However, performance can be a legitimate methodology for the right choice in terms of digital representation. Accordingly, when it comes to drama and performance, it would be effective, at least at times, to replace the logics of patterns and analogies by the “take place”, theorized by Kobialka (2002). Drama projects, as argued, seem particularly fitted for metadata strategies and tools, aiming to permit inferences that can help to organize the drama production of an historical period. Although this kind of approach obviously plays an important role in the current study of theatre and performance, it does not pretend to be the sole legitimate option in terms of drama electronic edition. In fact, metadata and hypermedia archives can develop side by side with other types of projects that may gain in “expressive form” what they lose in extension and exhaustiveness.

3. Editing Eighteenth-Century Drama Manuscripts Digitally

Thirty four “in oitavo” volumes of plays are kept at the National Library of Portugal (Figure 1). They were copied between 1780 and 1797 by António José de Oliveira, a scribe who usually signs his copies and about whom very little is known, apart from the fact that he was somehow related to the printing process of those works, as some official documents from the Royal Censorship Council [Real Mesa Censória] attest. Each volume contains five or six texts. The majority are in Portuguese (some are bilingual, i.e., also in Italian), and among the identified authors are Carlo Goldoni, Edward Young, François d’Arnaud, Gaetano Martinelli, Giovanni Guarini, José de Cañizares and Salomon Gessner, an evidence of a very eclectic selection. Each of the manuscript volumes seems arbitrary in its organization, mixing genres (comedy, tragedy, drama, farce, etc.) and dates.



Fig. 1: A collection of eighteenth-century manuscript plays kept at the National Library of Portugal.
Available at: http://purl.pt/index/geral/aut/PT/37851_P1.html

For now, the project launched online on January 2015 at the site of the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (<http://cecc.fch.lisboa.ucp.pt/en/projects/postdoctoral-projects/isabel-pinto.html>)¹ is composed of a sample of eight titles from the collection of António José de Oliveira that were never published before.²

As this is the first edition of the plays, there was neither a printed version to help decide what digital format to give the archive nor a past book to direct one's mind to a certain disposition of the text in the page. These plays are mostly reading material, a work in progress reading material, in the sense that they refer to a materiality outside the text, i.e. performance. So, a concept of book or even of e-book was not envisioned for this project of edition.

Alternatively, the project implied looking thoroughly at the specificities that drama manuscripts were to bring along to the process. Their eventful nature (Kobialka, 2002) was the first criteria considered when choosing a methodology. Therefore, this is not so much a project of edition of eighteenth-century authorized authors or canonical texts as one that started by recognizing the impact of the dramatic genre throughout history. Accordingly, it takes dramatic performance into consideration and seeks ways to reflect and codify it in a digital environment, bringing into play the dynamics between archive and performance art.

Schneider (2001) interrogates the ephemeral nature of performance against the permanence of the archive, proposing that “performance remains” attest to the impact of performance well beyond its moment of realization as its memory, and cultural legacy, can cross different time and space boundaries, articulating an embodied transmission of cultural knowledge. The same principle applied to the edited plays, in the sense that by performing with and through them, a memory of these live events was kept, which afterwards was worthy of consideration in the shaping of their digital representation.

By taking performance as a methodology for editing, it was generally intended to further develop the dynamics between archive and repertoire, as questioned by Taylor (2003). In principle, the archive is written, institutional and authoritative, while the repertoire, understood as embodied memory, participates in the storing and transmission of knowledge through varying types of performance based on non-written codes, such as gestures, movement, dance, spoken word and song. Performance transmits cultural memory and can transform and redefine the archive, since the repertoire is part of an active everyday transmission of memory and identity. So, by performing with and through manuscripts, one is able to participate in the ongoing process of embodied reproduction and production of knowledge. Thus the edited plays

¹ This project is supported by the Foundation for Science and Technology under Grant SFRH / BPD / 65068 / 2009.

² The titles are: *Molière ou Segunda Parte de Tartufo* [*Molière or The Second Part of Tartuffe*] (1782), by Carlo Goldoni; *O Homem Vencedor* [*The Winner*] (1782); *Ulisses em Lisboa* [*Ulysses in Lisbon*] (1782), by Francisco José Freire; *Nova e Verdadeira História do Triunfo da Rainha de Volsco* [*The New and True Story about the Queen of Volsco's Triumph*] (1783), by Jerónima Luísa da Silveira; *Não se Vence a Natureza* [*Nature Cannot Be Defeated*] (1784); *Mafoma ou Fanatismo* [*Fanaticism or Mahomet The Prophet*] (1795), by Voltaire; *O Vassalo Mais Fiel no Cerco de Guimarães* [*The Most Loyal Servant in the Siege of Guimarães*] (1796); *As Constâncias de Belisário na sua Maior Decadência* [*Bélisaire*] (n.d.), by Jean-François Marmontel.

took part in a repertoire that both transmits and reinvents cultural knowledge, memory and identity.

The total corpus of the edition project is fifteen texts.³ In fact, this can hardly be considered a vast corpus of plays to be treated and dealt in terms of metadata patterns. Instead, by exploring the relationship between archive and performance as a tool for digital edition, it is expected that an improved performative materiality will emerge. Hence, the “performance remains” of the repertoire will continue to guide the electronic edition of the archive, a collection of eighteenth-century Portuguese drama manuscripts. In this case, drama’s specificity is explored as predisposition to an embodied transmission and production of knowledge i.e. the repertoire that can then be used in the preparation of an electronic reading edition that foregrounds an individual engagement with each play.

4. Performing the Archive

Following Borggreen and Gade (2013), as the archive expands from the idea of a physical storage place for objects and documents to virtual archives of metadata, an increasing proximity between performance art and research develops, one that derives from the acknowledgement of common objects, methods and goals: “Literally performing the archive here attests not only to a will to push the boundaries, but to a more fundamental understanding of the archive as a medium and an organism rather than a stable repository” (Borggreen and Gade, 2013, p. 22).

In this attempt to bring archive, repertoire and editing together, it must also be taken in consideration the symbolism of the manuscript itself. Roms (2013) states that the documents that constitute the archive bear a special significance that results from their active promise of knowledge. The tension between this symbolism and the personal/subjective endeavor of the performance certainly plays a role in the political dimension of performing the archive. In other words, heritage and its promise of identity can be reinvented at an individual scale, exposing the subjectivity of a new relationship between artifacts. In fact, drama manuscripts contain in themselves a multilayered embodied dimension: on a first level, the scribe’s body, adopting specific positions and postures to endure the resilient proceeding of the copy; on a second level, the body of the characters that claim for a voice and role amidst the theatrical scene; on a third, and last, level, the body of the performer that accounts for the eventful nature of the manuscript.

The ongoing dialogue between performance art and archive is best summarized by the challenge posed in Clarke (2013):

³ The titles still in preparation are: *O Criado Astucioso* [*The Witty Servant*] (1781); *Semiramis em Babilónia* [*Semiramis in Babylon*] (1784), by Alexandre António de Lima; *Licasto e Mitilene* [*Licasto and Mitilene*] (1786); *O Tartufo Lusitano e a Mulher Vingativa ou O Disfarçado Hipócrita* [*The Lusitan Tartuffe and the Revengeous Woman or The Hypocrite Disguised*] (1796); *Muito Vence Amor e Engano ou O Ignorante por Sábio Admitido* [*Love and Hoax Win a Lot or The Ignorant Taken for a Wise Man*] (1796); *Os Encantos de Medeia, 3ª parte* [*The Enchantments of Medeia, 3rd part*] (n.d.), by António José da Silva; *Sem Ingratidão Ingrato* [*The Ungrateful Without Ungratefulness*] (n.d.). The project deadline is November 2015.

Why not re-perform art history, as well as rewriting it through art history? What about an embodied approach to historiography, experiential ways of understanding and remembering performance? How can we understand, intervene and get mixed up in art history by doing it physically, as well as researching and writing about it? (p. 370)

In what follows, the question of a revised approach to art history is directly addressed, since three different types of performance, in the intersection between art history and performance art, will be presented as a methodology on its own right.

4.1 Manuscript Performance

On 20 December 2013, “Manuscript play” premiered at Galeria da Boavista, in Lisbon, as part of an event organized by DEMIMONDE, a group of performance practitioners from different backgrounds. Mostly, the piece aimed at capturing the audience’s attention toward the research on the drama manuscript collection of the National Library of Portugal, and, in particular, it was intended to present the reading of manuscripts as a rewarding experience.

In order to achieve that, interaction with the manuscripts through bodily responses was adopted: they were carried around, used as protection and shelter (Figure 2), pushed, with a series of well defined movements featuring an active response to their presence. The general idea was to experience the collection in a renewed fashion that did not entail analyzing, studying, but rather expressed closeness and a sense of belonging, and, at the same time, to defy manuscript conceptualization as a steady and solemn object of knowledge, an icon of the immutable past. As a result, the manuscripts were placed, moved, dislocated as much as possible, in order to transform them into a symbol of mobility and rapid change. In this way, they no longer pertained to the silent, distant and ambiguous past, or either to the subjective world, but were now part of the globalised world in which we all live in.

This performance was based on a narrative, in which the manuscripts were the threshold to another level of reality, one where subjective storytelling would become a matter of common ground. The interaction with the manuscripts was well-succeed to the extent that it aroused the Other’s attention. It was necessary for someone to notice what was going on and how special and unique that could be: another performer was trying to follow the lead, to get where the manuscripts were heading, to give the right response to what their materiality was demanding.

However, as the performance goes on disclosing the centrality of manuscripts to interpersonal communication, the audience could not avoid but noticing the hesitation on the part of the other performer, her awkwardness as if moving into a world where almost everything was out of place. For the better or worse, she never gave up, always trying to keep the track of what was going on, and also finding a way of making sense of all that historical reading material right on the move.



Fig. 2: Looking for a shelter, or maybe a gentle disguise, Galeria da Boavista, 20 December 2013, courtesy of Freya Group.

4.2 Digital Manuscripts and Body Move

How does the body react to the stimulus of digital drama manuscripts, manipulated to acquire varying forms and shapes? The archive is thus technologically reconfigured and as such is part of a video performance that took place in the studio of the Foundation for National Scientific Computation, on 18 April 2014.

The primary goal of this performance was to contend the premise that the digital environment is leading to an increasing disembodiment. Relying on an array of digital drama manuscripts differently shaped, the video showcases how the human body can fully react to the digital stimulus. Instead of merely sitting down and watch, the body can hope to expand, dramatize, shorten, reproduce manuscripts that seem to be looking for a rhythmic dimension where they can set about. By performing with and toward digital manuscripts, both the body and the digital take their materiality a bit further as to recreate a new physical landscape.

The sequence of digital forms being displayed (Figure 3), comprising stars, inverted and flying figures, in contiguity or not so, gave rise to a choreographic piece that responded to the arrival of each new digital stimulus. In between stimulus little ruptures occurred, breaking a fluidity that mangled the digital and the breathing body. In the whole, the movements reflected the difficulty of interacting physically with the digital. Although the body is the main instrument to succeed in communicating, the performer has to manage a balance between his/her bodily responses and the defying iconography of the digital world.

A black full bodysuit, with very long sleeves, was used as costume. It had the effect of suggesting a silhouette against the digital landscape of the homogeneously colored manuscripts. In this way, the movement would result visually emphasized in a setting where the silhouette look could be taken to represent either the world of video-games or the circus. Hence, the manipulation and redefinition of digital visibility was also tried out and rehearsed.



Fig. 3: One of the manuscripts forms of the video-performance. Foundation for National Scientific Computation, 18 April 2014.

4.3 *A Ninfa Siringa ou Os Amores de Pan e Siringa* [*The Nymph Syrinx or The Love between Pan and Syrinx*] (1741)

The last performance took place on 8 October 2014, at the National Library of Portugal, as part of the exhibition *Do manuscrito ao espetáculo: a coleção de António José de Oliveira* [*From manuscript to performance: The Collection of António José de Oliveira*], on display until 31 December 2014.

An excerpt of each act of the play *A Ninfa Siringa ou Os Amores de Pan e Siringa* [*The Nymph Syrinx or The Love between Pan and Syrinx*], by Alexandre António de Lima (1699-1760), was presented. Originally, the play premiered on the Carnival of 1741 at the Bairro Alto Theatre, in Lisbon. In terms of performance, it was fundamental that the exhibition should function as setting. The exhibition was constituted by six show-cases with selected eighteenth-century drama manuscripts from António José de Oliveira's collection. Additionally, there was also an advertising placard.

All the main characters of the play intervened in the performance: Syrinx and Pan, the masters, accompanied by "Golosina" and "Coscorão", the respective servants. The plot reproduces the mythological narrative, with Pan desperately in love with Syrinx that despises him. "Coscorão", in particular, mocks the love entanglement and defies the authority of his master Pan. In fact, the language of the play is entrenched in ambiguity, which brings forth class awareness and sexual and erotic connotations.

The piece made use of that ambiguity, expanding it through acute physical responses. By emphasizing the physical interaction between characters, a clear contrast emerged between the confined space of the exhibit and the enlarged action of the plot. In concrete, the limited space available between show-cases was used to explore the comic effect of the encounter and disencounter between characters (Figure 4): Pan was looking for Syrinx, and “Coscorão” was able to find him, but then “Coscorão” escaped; Syrinx was finally found, but to avoid the reencounter, she was transformed into a rush, and was never to be seen again, only heard... But once again it was only “Coscorão” mocking at Pan.

The artificiality of eighteenth-century opera was also reflected in the make-up of the performers that looked a lot like puppets instead of real figures. There was also singing moments, in clear allusion to the arias that typically occurred between dialogue scenes within that theatrical genre.



Fig. 4: *A Ninfa Siringa ou Os Amores de Pan e Siringa [The Nymph Syrinx or The Love between Pan and Syrinx]*, at the National Library of Portugal, on 8 October 2014. Photo by the author.

5. From Performance to Electronic Edition

In the whole, these three moments can be understood as an experimental way of rethinking the limits of the archive by engaging in the “take place” (Kobialka, 2002) contained in drama manuscripts. As posed by Clarke (2013), scholar’s interaction with art history can use performance art as a method, namely to develop a new insight on categories like document, text and edition. These three initiatives were necessary means to prepare an improved reading edition of a selected set of unpublished eighteenth-century drama manuscripts.

Each of these performances contributed to an orienting principle of the electronic edition:

- “Manuscript play” related to the idea that the edited play must assume a double functionality: the transmission of heritage and subjective interaction;
- The video-performance underlined the performative nature of drama manuscripts, even if digital;
- The performance of *A Ninfa Siringa ou Os Amores de Pan e Siringa* [*The Nymph Syrinx or The Love between Pan and Syrinx*] showed how the physical preponderance of the characters’ interaction can redefine 21st century communicative purposes.

These considerations, in turn, elicited three priorities within this editorial project:

- The design of the edition was from its beginning totally conceived in terms of digital format, including the cover of each of the texts. Each cover was imagined and selected taking in consideration the visual impact of the digital environment, and also as a visual strategy to distinguish between plays, in order to facilitate a subjective interaction with each one (Figure 5).
- There is no attempt of visual/graphic unity within the edition, differently from what happens with a printed book or many electronic versions of it: first, there is an introductory text, with the link to the manuscript at the National Library of Portugal; then there is the transcription of the front page of the manuscript, and, finally, the play.
- There was a deliberate concern in stressing the role of the characters (the name of the characters appears consistently in bold and uppercase style throughout the plays), and in separating dialogue from stage directions (always centered and bold) that mainly entail bodily actions (Figure 6).

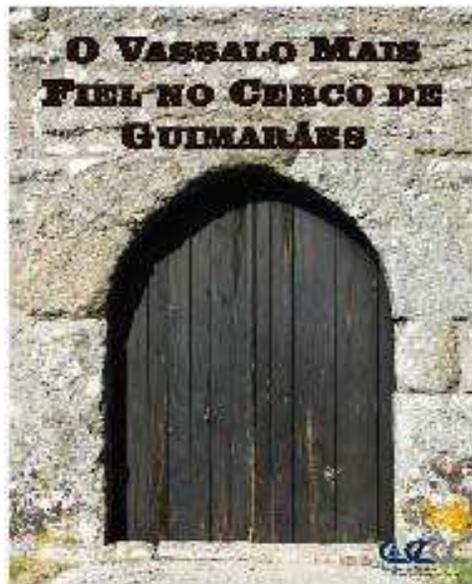


Fig. 5: The cover of one of the edited plays, *O Vassalo Mais Fiel no Cerco de Guimarães* [*The Most Loyal Servant in the Siege of Guimarães*] (1796).

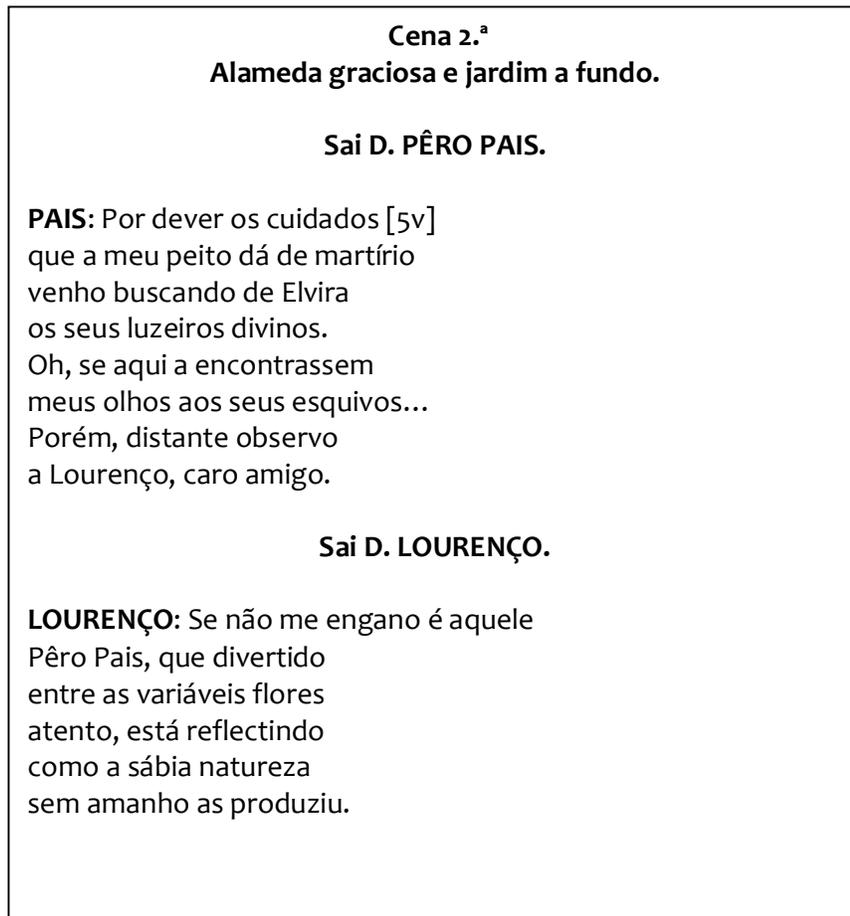


Fig. 6: An edited sample from *O Vassalo Mais Fiel no Cerco de Guimarães* [*The Most Loyal Servant in the Siege of Guimarães*] (1796).

Therefore, the visual clues of this edition do not either recall the book format or make explicit reference to it. Accordingly, the eight edited texts launched online on January 2015 should not be called volumes or even electronic books. They are plays that try to relate as much as possible to specific material forms.

These plays were specifically edited in a manner that is thought to benefit their performative use. In other words, they are supposed to participate and engender new performative practices that attest to the functionality of the repertoire and “performance remains” as grounds for scholarly engagement in the rethinking of the concept, methods and uses of editing.

6. Conclusion

When facing the challenge of an electronic edition of eighteenth-century Portuguese drama manuscripts not yet published, performance art can be embraced as an active methodology (Kobialka, 2002). Nevertheless, the richness of information of metadata options surrounds us (McGann, 1997), and in that context drama's specificity has already been considered (Mueller, 2014). The decision to approach it in a new perspective, one that would relate electronic editing to the durability of performance beyond its moment of happening, originated a set of performance initiatives that, in turn, fueled the edition of eighteenth-century drama. Following that trend, it is argued that the repertoire (Taylor, 2003) and "performance remains" (Schneider, 2001) can take action in the preparation of an electronic reading edition of the archive, laying bare the ongoing dynamics between scholarly research and performance art (Clarke, 2013).

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