

THE CRITICAL ELECTRONIC EDITION OF THE “ORTO DO ESPOSO”

“Orto do Esopo” is an important but little-known text of Portuguese literature of the 14th Century. The text has a tradition of two manuscripts and three fragments belonging to a third witness. Despite the existence of two critical editions it is nowadays necessary to draft a new edition.

The aim of this project, in addition to demonstrating the importance that text plays in the Portuguese literature landscape, is to underline how the electronic format is the most suited to this edition and, more generally, to critical editions of medieval texts.

Indeed the electronic format is the only one that can return the true nature of the medieval text, its peculiar *mouvance*, its dynamism, feature that is completely destroyed by the traditional paper editions that offer a static, fixed text flattened under the publisher's choices, then an artifact, a reconstructed text therefore nonexistent. As written by Francesco Stella “il testo elettronico ... è proprio quello che privilegia l'accesso ai documenti reali, cioè ai manoscritti, mentre l'edizione materiale, a stampa, presenta solo un dato ideale fondato su una ricostruzione astratta e sempre opinabile, che ha l'unica certezza di essere comunque diversa dai documenti esistenti”.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover to overcome this distortion of perspective, the only path is the electronic one and hypertext in particular. Hypertext in accordance to its intertextuality, its decentralization and its rhizomaticity provides the reader with a mobile text, searchable and verifiable. In practice, therefore, the reader is enriched by the opportunity to interact directly with the manuscripts, making use of their diplomatic transcription, relying once again to the editor's scientifically reconstructed text, but without precluding the direct route to the real “traces” of this text or in other words, as writes G. P. Landow: “Hypertext permits one to make explicit, though not necessarily intrusive, the linked materials that an educated reader perceives surrounding it”.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, all this implies for the editor a work far from easy, in fact, to all the typical preparatory study of a critical edition, all the necessary operations has to be added to digital transformation, in particular the marking of text, that represents for the publisher a very deep responsibility, since it is not neutral but rather a mark established by specific choices and attitudes, a further interpretation of the text. For a correct transcription of the text is strictly necessary to resort to a Unicode font, and concerning the type of marking, to choose the TEIP5.

Specifically this project leads the reader from the main screen to the photographic reproduction of the three witnesses and then develops its research and questions. It's possible to choose an immediate reading of a witness, or consult the diplomatic transcription, or compare the witnesses through the critical apparatus or even more the possibility to read the critical text reconstructed directly from the publisher. Moreover, the critical edition can also serve as a repository (but once again a dynamic repository) for all documents related to the work, from various literature sources to previously published studies. Last but not least, the reader has the opportunity, through high-tech tools to link together the data obtained from the *collatio codicum* to formulate new hypotheses, which inevitably will increase the knowledge about medieval texts and its evolution.

This paper has the aim to show that the possibility to create hypothesis without judging the predominance of a variant on another with the choice of point out and respect the *mouvance* of these kind of texts, is the reason why the electronic hypertext is the most profitable way to use in critical edition of medieval texts.

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1 F. Stella, “Standards digitali per le edizioni a stampa: il successo di un modello in crisi”, in A. Ciula, F. Stella, Digital Philology and Medieval Texts, Pisa, Pacini Editore, 2007, pp. 223-249.

2 G. P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0, Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, United States of America, 2006.