

Genetic criticism, developed in the late sixties of the last century in Paris, and now mostly popular in Europe, aims to reveal the writing process of a document

How useful is this concept for documentary editors?

It is certainly useful, as this example shows

Minute of an Act of a public notary in Amsterdam from February 1616 containing statements in a quarrel between members of the Eglantine, the most important rhetorical society in Amsterdam. The members were continuously arguing on the governmental politics of Amsterdam and on the future of the society. Some of them sent a request with evidence on behalf of all the members to the court of Amsterdam to remove one of the members from the society for misbehavior. The accused defended himself by sampling statements of other members as evidence of the contrary.



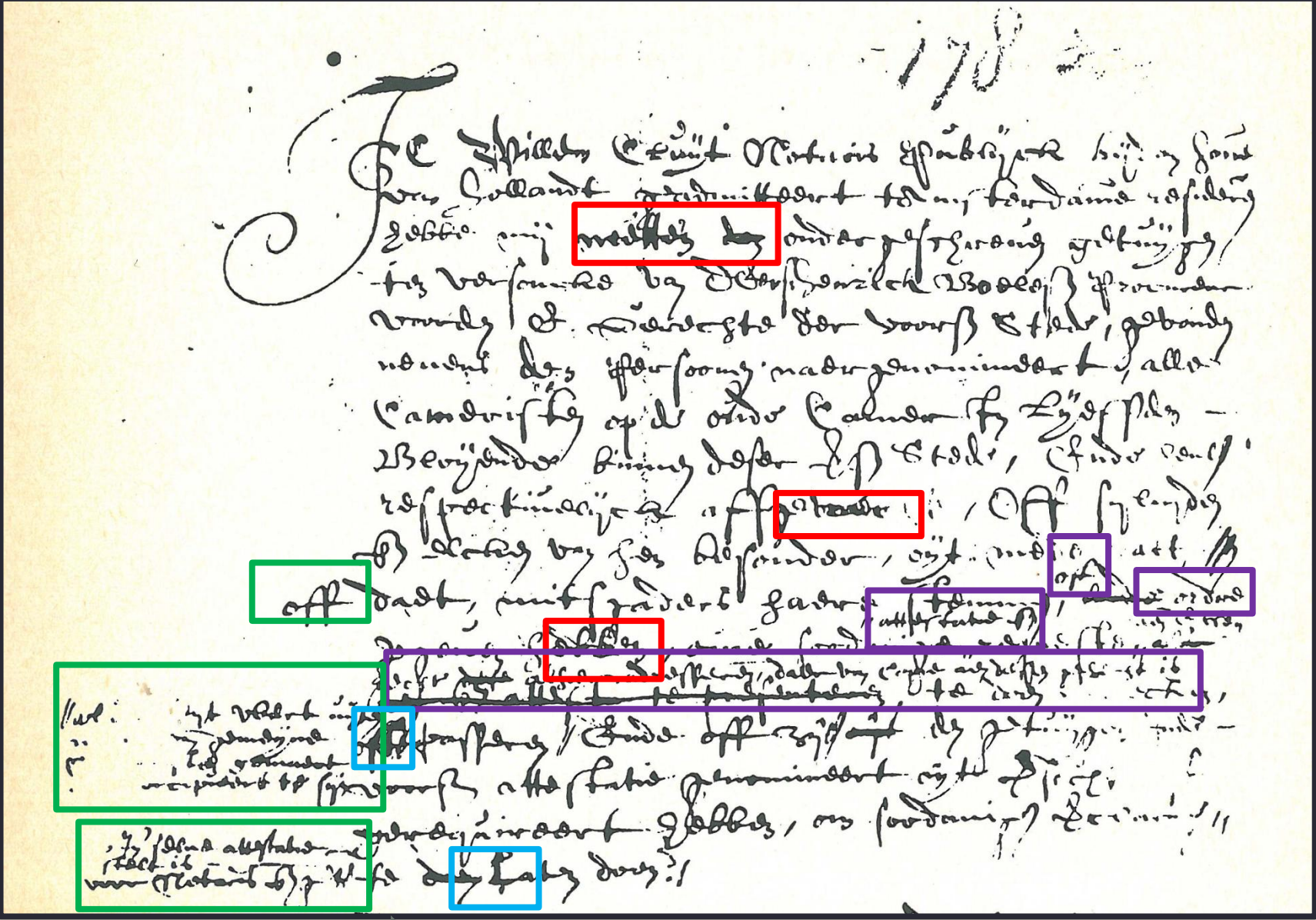
Emblem of the society, founded in 1528, with the motto Blooming in Love. The society was especially influential in the cultural life of Amsterdam as well in politics.



Two of the most influential members at that moment: Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (left) and Peter Cornelisz. Hooft (right)



The different colors show the stages of the writing process



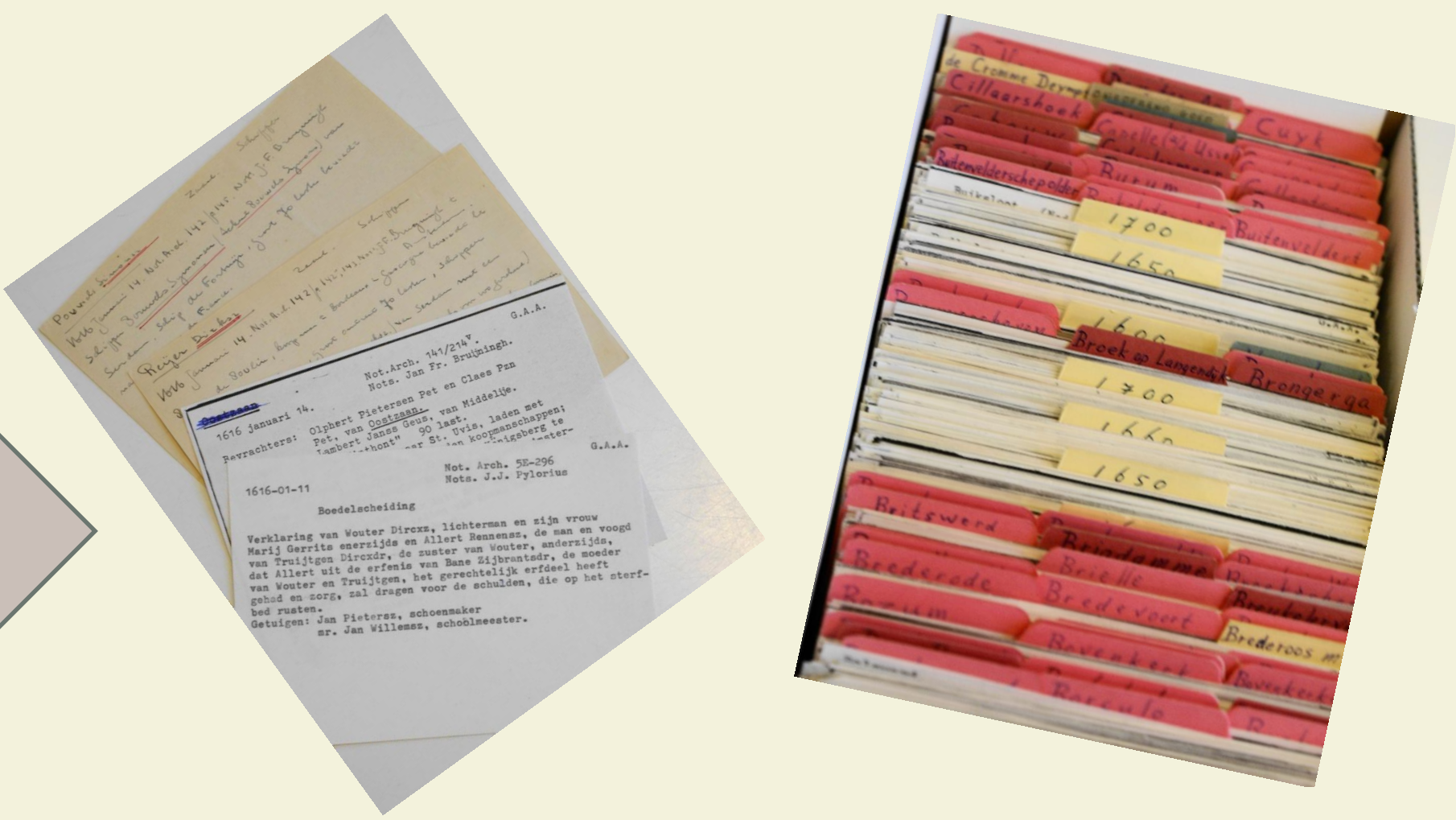
Jc Willem Cluijt Notaris Publijck bijden houe van Hollandt geadmitteert tAmsterdamme residerende hebbe mij **metten den** ondergeschreuen getuijgen ten versoucke van DEers. henrick Boelesz Procureur voordien E. Gerechte der voorsz Stede, gevonden neuens den Persoonen naergenomineert, alle Cameristen op de oude Camer In Lijeffden Bloijende binnen deser voorsz Stede, Ende henluyden respectiuelijck affge**vracht**, Off syluyden **ende** elcken van hen besonder, oijt mede raet **ende** **off** daet, mits gaders haere stemmen, **ende** **offt** ordre gegeuen haed **ebben**, omme soodanige **attestatie** **ende** requeste **als** **aende** E. Ge-
... **ende** **atteste** te **presenteren** **rechte** **dese** **alhier** **adresserende**, **daer** **van** **Copie** **aen** **desen** **gehecht** **is**, te doen maecken, **ende** **ofte** **passeren** **als** **geseijt** **wert** **uitten** **name** **vande** **gemeijne** **Cameristen** **gemaect** **ende** **geconcipteert** **te** **sijn** Ende off zijluyden oijt den getuijgen Inde voorsz attestatie genomineert oijt versocht oft gerequireert hebben, om soodanigen **verclaringe** **als** **Inde** **selue** **attestatie** **gestelt** **is** **voor** **Notaris** **ende** **getuygen** te **doen** **Laten** **doen**

What does genetic critisme learns us in this case?

The notary who did all of the writing, changed the sequence of the statements. Most of the members who made a statement about the request to remove one of the members had not read it. The notary received a copy of the request only after the statements were already made. He add between the lines a reference to the copy of the request that was attached to the act (in purple). He changed some of the statements between the lines (in purple) and add some text in the margin (in green) to make the request and the statements consistent.

It certainly does have a price: this kind of edition while it is extremely time consuming and there are another 1,999,999 to go, only in Amsterdam

Fortunately they are calendared, however not yet digitized



Conclusions:

Genetic criticism is a strong instrument to analyze the writing process of a single document.

An edition using genetic criticism is very time consuming. Therefore it will be impossible to edit in that way serial historical sources, such as the millions of notary acts. Scholars may edit some of them after a strong selection. The process of selection requires however, the opening up of series of documents, e.g. by calendaring.