

Philology – the Art of Memory: On Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive

ABSTRACT. Magdalena Popiel, *Philology – the Art of Memory: On Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive*. “Przestrzenie Teorii” special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 15–25. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.1>

The paper discusses the issue of new philology in the context of the project of Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive. Inspired by projects by Jerome McGann and John Bryant (*Rossetti Archive* and *Melville Electronic Library*), the author considers the motivations behind and the benefits of such a venture. Wyspiański’s multimediality and dynamicity of the creative process suspending finality encourage the use of digital tools in academic research and educational activities related to his works. An analysis of Wyspiański’s creative process – a writer, painter, man of the theater – can reveal a complex, heterogeneous simultaneity of his artistic activities.

KEYWORDS: new philology, digital humanities, digital archive, Stanisław Wyspiański, Jerome McGann, John Bryant, fluid text

For the past in the future

I represent a generation whose ears are sensitive to the rustle of pages turning, whose eyes are used to admiring reproductions of paintings in big, heavy albums, whose hands are familiar with the touch of pens and pencils. The senses of readers, watchers, and writers have undergone an accelerated evolution – their bodies have had to get used to looking at screens, writing on keyboards, using a computer mouse. The muscle memory of those who participated in the electronic revolution is a part of the history of the birth of digital culture.

The dawn of the rule of the book – one of foundations of the crisis mythology of present-day culture – is another experience of my generation. According to Pierre-Marc De Biasi, the rule of the book, and, more broadly, “paper as a vehicle of literature and archived material” was short-lasting, from circa 1750 to 2000.¹ At the beginning of the 21st century, we bade farewell to the traditional, paper book and manuscripts, which constituted the majority of archived documents. This is one of the reasons why those

¹ P.-M. De Biasi, *Genetyka tekstów* [The Genetics of Texts], trans. F. Kwiatek, M. Prusak, Warszawa 2015, pp. 26–27.

250 years in culture are explored most by present-day philologists. This is where philological treasures are stored: priceless manuscripts of books, letters, notes, journals, which are the main object of twenty-first century genetic studies, such as those by L'Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes (ITEM, Institute of Modern Texts and Manuscripts).² Some key editions of manuscript corpora devised according to the rules of genetic criticism include works by Flaubert, Zola, Proust, Valery, Joyce, Aragon; there are also original digital archives of Herman Melville (<http://mel.hofstra.edu>) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*The Rossetti Archive*, www.rossettiarchive.org). Jerome McGann, a key representative of digital humanities, is the author of the Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES).

Wolfgang Iser once argued that postmodernist philosophy emerged from the spirit of modernist art, and now De Biasi claims that the modern genetic criticism and new philology owe a great deal to modernist art and its interest in documenting the creative process:

It was authors and artists, who – by placing the creative process at the center of their work, making it public as a “subject” of art and as a subject of aesthetic effect – gradually made the origins of their work its actual challenge, and transformed the object of auxiliary sciences into an essential problem of all research into contemporary art.³

Our mythical narratives about the lifeline of books and manuscripts with their beginnings, culminating points and endings are also stories about the cultural human condition. In her excellent essay *Mała elegia na zamieranie listu* [A Small Eulogy for Disappearing Letters], Teresa Walas stresses the anthropological dimension of writing:

Being written not only shapes an utterance as a linguistic text, but also merges and models our internal, liquid contents – impulses, impressions, emotions, vague convictions, and whenever this modeling leaves some trace in our psyche, it creates and reinforces thus acquired disposition, which is the ability to both form and exercise existence.⁴

The concurrent development in new philology and digital humanities is often stressed in the context of the crisis in modern culture and science. The

² See <http://www.item.ens.fr/>. This is a research unit of the French National Centre for Scientific Research and école Normale Supérieure (CNRS/ENS).

³ P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38. Translation: P. Zagórska.

⁴ T. Walas, *Mała elegia na zamieranie listu* [A Small Eulogy for Disappearing Letters], “Konteksty Kultury” 2021, vol. 18, iss. 2, pp. 190–196.

shared objectives are clear wherever cultural heritage is endangered, and scholars see themselves as protectors of these goods. The dispersion and disappearance of what used to be a significant element of cultural heritage inspires a deep need to preserve it. Both digital philologists and humanists are concerned with textual memory and the materiality of the carriers that store it. Paper books will most likely continue to be printed for a long time to come, and so it seems that twenty-first century culture will be challenged by the coexistence of printed and digital texts, as well as of library archives and digital archives.

Laments over contemporary culture are typically accompanied by strong faith in the digital carrier's immortality. I leave the question of the "endless life" of hard drives to experts – we are forced to trust their deep faith in salvation – ours and our culture's – in the virtual world. One of them is McGann, who argues that digitalization is both a gift and an opportunity, and that humanists – as secular priests – are supposed to participate in the digital revolution.⁵ However, not everyone shares this faith in the deterministic power of digitalization and uncritically accepts its axiom: "Here is surely a truth universally acknowledged: that the whole of our cultural inheritance has to be recurated and reedited in digital forms and institutional structures."⁶ Nonetheless, even those who do not fully share his enthusiasm must admit that digital media can inspire the imagination and liven up humanists' desires.

To me, *Rossetti Archive* by Jerome McGann has been particularly inspiring. It is a digital presentation of works by Rossetti, a painter, designer, author and translator, founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, considered by John Ruskin and Walter Pater to be one of the most original English artists of the second half of the 19th century. Most work on the archive was conducted between 1993 and 2008, but it continues (although significantly more slowly) until today. The aim of the project is to document all his manuscripts, copies, and original editions, paintings, drawings, designs, photographs (often with editorial comments), notes, and glosses.

I imagine what a fascinating venture a digital archive of Stanisław Wyspiański would be. Why his? At first glance, one could say that this choice is analogous to that of McGann, i.e. a highly versatile artist who naturally attracts the attention of digital culture and multimedia narrative scholars. Documenting literary texts and visual works by Wyspiański would be a ma-

⁵ J. McGann, *Nova respublica litteraria. Pamięć i nauka w wieku cyfryzacji* [A New Republic of Letters: Memory and Scholarship in the Age of Digital Reproduction], trans. P. Bem, Ł. Cybulski, O. Mastela, J. Prussak, Warszawa 2016, p. 37.

⁶ J. McGann, *A New Republic of Letters: Memory and Scholarship in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, Cambridge, MA and London 2014, p. 1.

jour venture, and if we added all forms of literary, theater, television, film, music reception, and compiled a list of source texts which would reflect the rich, interdisciplinary research, we would receive something like a digital *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁷

In his psychological analysis of genius artists, Teodor Adorno argued that their psychology is based on “fantasy in a fantasy of omnipotence”;⁸ it would seem that digital humanists are its heirs.

Wyspiański’s works as a “fluid text”

Considerations regarding the genetics of artistic work often balance between two poles: ideal limitlessness and painful limitation; between the Scylla of utopian Fullness, Completeness of data, entropy, and Charybdis of the awareness of exclusively dealing with fragments of texts and endless lacunae. I believe that despite problems resulting from such a perception of documentary-editorial syntheses, a digital archive of Wyspiański’s works is justifiable in our contemporary culture within certain limits, both as a fruitful research area, and an educational tool for many recipients.

Wyspiański’s works are characterized by a feature which makes them ideal for such a venture: I can see an intriguing concurrency between processuality, highlighted by new philology, contained e.g. in the “fluid text” formula by John Bryant,⁹ and the dynamicity of the creative process characteristic for Wyspiański’s works, the practice of textual returns, chorus activities, and postponing closing devices finalizing the creative process. For Wyspiański, every text, object and reality were the living, plastic matter of creation, a mere phase of the ongoing incorporation process, a forever unfinalized act. This rule applied to both cultural and natural artifacts: he wanted to rebuild Kraków and rearrange the Tatra Mountains to make the landscape more interesting. He looked differently at Wawel and the architecture of Kraków’s churches, he saw flowers, herbs, grass in his own way, drawing their realistic details in his *Zielnik* [Herbarium], but simul-

⁷ Some media scholars (e.g. Lev Manović) are against mythologizing new media. However, there are also many voices in favor of creating a digital/audio-visual medium of the whole in the form of a library, archive, network in the literature. In *Od syntezy sztuk do sztuki post-medialnej* [From the Synthesis of Arts to Post-media Art], “Estetyka i Krytyka” no. 17/18 (2/2009–1/2010), G. Dziamski argues that “the idea of multimedia preserves something from Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This is evidenced by the artistic fascination with virtual reality.”

⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis 1996, p. 12.

⁹ J. Bryant, *Płynny tekst. Teoria zmienności tekstów i edytorstwa w dobie książki i ekranu* [The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing For Book and Screen], trans. Ł. Cybulski, Warszawa 2020.

taneously he created Art Nouveau compositions on polychromes, stained glass, pastel drawings, ornaments in books and magazines. He followed the same rule in his literary works, mostly plays.

Modern philologists, especially Maria Prussak, but also Włodzimierz Szturc, Dariusz Kosiński, Katarzyna Fazan, argue with inquisitiveness and competence that neither printing his plays nor staging them marked the end of Wyspiański's work on his texts; he continued to modify and correct the main text, and added stage directions.¹⁰ The impetus of transforming, decomposing, and remaking accompanied his work on subsequent versions of *Warszawianka*, *Leleweł*, *Wanda*. In *Filolog w bibliotece teatralnej* [Philologist in a Theater Library], Maria Prussak argues that Wyspiański often wrote two versions of his plays: one in the form of a book, for readers, and another one for audiences, in the form of a script.¹¹ We know well about the modifications he introduced in the printed version of *Wesele* a month and a half after the play was staged in Kraków in 1901, but other plays have gained documentation and philological-theatrical commentaries only recently.¹² It seems that a vertical digital edition¹³ is the best way of conducting research into Wyspiański's plays from the perspective of "work in progress." Textual variants of Wyspiański's works clearly show that it is the dynamicity of creative thought that should be the intention of both artists and philologists, rather than searching for the canonical version of a text.

Stories of creation

Wyspiański's world consists not only of vast lands, but also well-known islands of literary and visual masterpieces either already existing in their digitized version, or translatable into the digital language. Apart from those

¹⁰ See e.g. M. Prussak, *Brzmienia Wyspiańskiego* [The sounds of Wyspiański], Kraków 2023; W. Szturc, *Diapazony i Fonosfery* [Diapasons and Phonospheres], Kraków 2020; D. Kosiński, *Uciec z "Wesela". Próby z teatru Stanisława Wyspiańskiego* [Escape from "The Wedding": Rehearsals from Stanisław Wyspiański's Theater], Warszawa 2019; K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański, Leśmian, Kantor* [Projects of the Intimate Theater of Death: Wyspiański, Leśmian, Kantor], Kraków 2009.

¹¹ M. Prussak, *Filolog w bibliotece teatralnej* [Philologist in a Theater Library], [in:] *eadem*, *Brzmienia Wyspiańskiego* [The Sounds of Wyspiański], Kraków 2023, pp. 85–104.

¹² The last such analysis (by Dorota Jarzabek-Wasył) refers to the screenplay of the premiere of *Protesilas i Laodamia* in 1903 (digitized for the project *Cyfrowe Arcydzieła Teatru im. J. Słowackiego* [Digital Masterpieces of J. Słowacki Theater]). *Protesilas i Laodamia. Scenariusz prapremiery z 25 kwietnia 1903 roku / Stanisław Wyspiański*, ed. D. Jarzabek-Wasył, Warszawa 2022.

¹³ See P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, the chapter "Genetic Editions", pp. 113–132.

solids and well-known continents, there are two areas in dispersion, which cannot be easily classified. The first one is preserved texts, which were written as constellations of main texts; it is rich and varied correspondence,¹⁴ other personal documents, and functional texts. They also include iconic texts related to Wyspiański's visual arts and theater works, as well as occasional works, such as his design for Kraków City Watch uniforms, or a paper ornament pattern for Towarzystwo Sztuka [Art Association]. The second area includes designs which were intended for realization, as well as those which were not created with any specific plan for implementation, sometimes dubbed "fantasies," such as "An architectural design of a theater" from 1896 (Paderewski's house) or a building made of iron and glass, "colors and plants" for the World Exhibition in Paris.

Imagine that we are able to watch closely each creative activity performed by Wyspiański day after day of his short life (1869–1907). Zenon Parvi's account of one day in Wyspiański's life in 1904 ("Kurier Codzienny", 19 February) gives a good idea of the intensity and simultaneity characterizing his lifestyle:

The artist copies his stained-glass project, "Stań się" [Become] for the Franciscans church, from cardboard to a canvas; he proofreads his play, "Akropolis". He cooperates with art schools, sending them patterns and motifs of embroideries, crafted articles from wood and clay; he designs furniture for the Medical Society, he is also thinking about a wooden statue of its president, which is supposed to chair all the meetings. This idea of his, with a clear satirical intention, has been rejected.¹⁵

And this is what Wyspiański's days looked like from his early youth until the end of his life, when, half-paralyzed, he made his self-portrait in Węgrzyce, and left Adam Chmiel some comments regarding the unfinished text of *Zygmunt August* a few hours before his death. His diaries, which are a part of his *Dziela zebrane* [Collected Works] published by Wydawnictwo Literackie, together with alphabetical indexes of his literary and visual works are examples of linear traditions, chronological forms of organizing life and creative work. Meanwhile, a digital compilation of literary, documentary, artifact, and biographical texts carrying Wyspiański's signature inspires the need to see his activity in new terms. The creative process is

¹⁴ For the role of letters in his artistic development and their significance in his work, see M. Popiel, *Wyspiański. Mitologia nowoczesnego artysty* [Wyspiański: A Modern Artist's Mythology], Kraków 2008.

¹⁵ Z. Parvi, *U Wyspiańskiego* [At Wyspiański's], "Kurier Codzienny", February 19, 1904. The last sentence shows how Wyspiański's contemporaries constructed his canonical image by removing his sense of humor and satire.

the area of discovering a network of tensions between all forms of activity. In the introduction to his seminal book, McGann declares: “I mean to follow long-traveled philological roads, moving to explore the mechanisms of both production history and transmission history and their complex, unfolding relations.”¹⁶ These three philological signposts can accompany a new look at Wyspiański’s work.

Uncovering stories of creation in their various twists can take place both on the level of authors’ intentions, and their cultural roots. However, the line between them is blurred, and there has been an ongoing dispute between those in favor of intentionalism, and those in favor of materialism. Bryant proposes a possible synthesis of “work as energy.”¹⁷ This somewhat resembles Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński’s anecdote about Wyspiański: in 1901, when electric streetcars were introduced in Kraków, many inhabitants (including Stanisław Przybyszewski) were against such a novelty in a medieval city. Meanwhile, Wyspiański “with a sly smile” proposed to “introduce electricity for the sake of progress, but keep an «honorable» horse running ahead of it for tradition.”¹⁸ I share this ironic approach to radical attitudes – both pragmatic and methodological.

Stories of creation are not just rooted in different sources – they have different rhythms, tempos, caesurae. Impulses accumulate, arriving from different directions. Textuality understood in the broad sense, including sensual impressions, would refer to the origins of a creative act as well as its material effects. The phonosphere and orality are two possible keys to presenting Wyspiański’s world, e.g. by digitally mapping it. Therefore De Biasi is right in asking:

How to show in a book that a writer simultaneously uses many documents influencing the writing process, in most cases parallelly? Computer tools which allow us to describe and organize an endless number of documents and links seem to be well-adjusted to such a fragmented context, regardless of its complexity and the number of elements it comprises. At this point it is mostly about the legibility of a work method in which we have to deal with many factors at the same time, about combining the origins of elements which are heterogenous by their nature, such as handwritten texts or notes, glosses, sound effects, music, unused materials, in one process.¹⁹

¹⁶ J. McGann, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ J. Bryant, *The Liquid Text...*, Chapter Three, “Work as Energy. Materialist Historicism and the Poetics of Social Texts”, pp. 44–63.

¹⁸ T. Boy-Żeleński, *O Wyspiańskim* [On Wyspiański], Kraków 1973, pp. 41–42.

¹⁹ P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–197. Translation: P. Zagórska.

Why philology? On the aesthetic experience of an artist and a philologist

I would like to ask perversely: Was Wyspiański a philologist when he read, studied, and remade Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve*? He definitely does not match the traditional image of a philologist: a patient craftsman characterized by clarity, objectivity, and rationality. When he wanted to reach the truth about the past, he talked about himself without any complexes, and as an enemy of "history which counts book pages": "I believe that my academic thoughts / are as good as the thoughts of diploma holders", "And it does not matter whether Academies / will accept and award / the details of my research and studies (...)..."²⁰

Wyspiański had at least two motivations for using existing literary texts. He clearly usurped the right to reorganize cultural memory; he referred a lot to Polish and European traditions with the heavy weight of their canonicity, to the extent allowed by his Galician education, which he saw as both his right and duty as an artist. The scope of his artistic visions designing images of the world of culture are showcased by two gestures of a visionary: his project of reconstruction of the Wawel Hill (jointly with Władysław Ekielski); this set of symbolic-architectural jigsaw puzzles, which were supposed to make his *Akropolis*, is an antique-medieval-sacral-national mixture. His "giant theater," which he composed through its repertoire while he was preparing to take over as the manager (eventually Ludwik Solski was selected instead), was just as fantastic. Working with literary classics, such as works by Shakespeare and Mickiewicz, clearly shows the kind of Wyspiański's aesthetic experiences when dealing with literature. *Studium o "Hamlecie"* [A study in *Hamlet*] follows the creative process hypothesis combining the tradition of Hamlet motifs present in many earlier accounts with Shakespeare's theater experiences. The essay's approach to *Hamlet*'s text shifts, coming closer and constructing empathic closeness, only to move back and become critical. Wyspiański always believed that things could be done better: *Forefathers' Eve* could be rewritten to give a better result, Matejko's "Battle of Grunwald" – repainted... Such a critical attitude to all texts of culture resulted from the energy of imagination and a sense of his own creative power. Therefore, he focused on clearly articulating the past with his own voice. Making contemporary experiences his starting point, he was simultaneously an individual voice, burdened by his identity and individual idiom.

²⁰ S. Wyspiański, *Noty do "Bolesława Śmiałego"* [Notes to "Bolesław Śmiały"], [in:] *Bolesław Śmiały. Skalka / Stanisław Wyspiański*, ed. J. Nowakowski, Wrocław 1969, pp. 183–184.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's proposals from his 2003 *The Powers of Philology* provide a strong impulse to look at Wyspiański's work through the ideas and rules of new philology. Gumbrecht adds an original, clearly anti-hermeneutic reflection, which he developed in his later publications, to the assumption that both old and new philology stem from longing for textual past:

It is my impression that, in different ways, all philological practices generate desires for presence, desires for a physical and space-mediated relationship to the things of the world (including texts) (...) Material fragments of cultural artifacts from the past can trigger a real desire for possession and for real presence, a desire close to the level of physical appetite. Text editing, in contrast, conjures up the desire of embodying the text in question, which can transform itself into the desire of also embodying the author of the text embodied. (...) These ambiguities – the tension, the interference, and the oscillation that the philological practices are capable of setting free between mind effects and presence effects – come close, in both their structure and their impact, to contemporary definitions of aesthetic experience.²¹

This is a homology between an artist's aesthetic experience and a philologist's experience, a special combination of the energy of the imagination with a longing for the presence of a text and (indirectly) its author, which Gumbrecht places in the center of a new conceptualization of philology, refers to the Shakesperare and Mickiewicz created by Stanisław Wyspiański in particular, but of course, it also refers to myself and many scholars who combine the practice of textual restitution with what Jean-Luc Nancy called the birth of longing for presence, "a magic spell."

Would Stanisław Wyspiański's Digital Archive have the power to magically embody his world? For the time being, this question remains unanswered.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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²¹ H.U. Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*, Urbana and Chicago 2003, pp. 6–7.

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