

# Introduction

## Preserving memory – the truth of text and the truth of image

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The best articles selected from the last five issues of the scientific journal *Napis* [*Inscription*], according to criteria<sup>1</sup> adopted for the three special editions of *Inscription. An Anthology*, are linked not only by the usefulness of the topics they cover, but also by the subject matter of their considerations. It focuses mainly on the image, or rather on ‘images of everything’ (as Bolesław Prus put it in one of his columns, describing what literature means to him<sup>2</sup>). The tool for creating images ‘painted with words’ is the symbolic pen (nowadays: a computer keyboard or tablet, or smartphone screen), while the tool for creating visions ‘written with light’ is a traditional camera, which captures the object on a light-sensitive plate or film, or a digital camera that converts the image into an electronic record. The value of the verbal and graphic images created in this way lies, among other things, in the fact that they save events and the people who participated in them from oblivion. Text and images thus become carriers of ‘wandering’ memory, the key to the ‘piggy bank’ of memories (to evoke

1 These criteria include: representativeness of texts (related to occasionality and utility), quality and novelty of articles, their cross-sectional or interdisciplinary nature, where possible, and topics devoted to broader issues or well-known and translated authors. See: M. Pąkciński, “Introduction: Literature: text and form of social communication” in: *Inscription. An anthology 1* (2022), <https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/272906/edition/236275/content>.

2 The phrase ‘images of everything’ comes from Prus’s chronicle published in *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] on 2 February 1885: ‘Literature is not a pile of paper, but a wonderful panorama in which one can see images of everything that people loved, desired, admired, what interested them, what constituted the content of their beliefs, feelings and customs in all ages’ (B. Prus, *Pisma wszystkie. Kroniki. T. IV: Kroniki tygodniowe, „Kurier Warszawski”, Korespondencje z Warszawy, „Kraj” R. 1885* [Collected works. Chronicles, vol. 4: Weekly Chronicles, *Kurier Warszawski*, Correspondence from Warsaw, *Kraj* [The Country] (1885)], ed. T. Budrewicz (Warsaw–Lublin: 2017), p. 48).

the associations of diarist Aleksander Fredro<sup>3</sup>). Notes in a diary, a photo album, a film, a leaf picked once upon a time and kept as a souvenir – all these material traces of memory allow us to stop the passing of time.

Each of the articles included in the anthology refers to different content and is based on different sources, but they all form a whole, whose common denominator seems to be the answer to the question: how does memory work? The answer merely suggests the complexity of its mechanisms.<sup>4</sup> What is important, above all, are the ways in which this phenomenon can be described. The issues raised in the texts concern, among other things, the essence of photography, whose advantages were discovered long ago for the purpose of seeing and capturing what is invisible to the human eye. Photographic records hold not only a sentimental value (they preserve memories), but also a factual value (they provide visual evidence to support a thesis, filling in the ‘gaps’ in an argument that require it).

This aspect of photography is the subject of Marek Pąckiński’s article on shaping human consciousness through space photography. In it, the author cites the reflections of researchers, theorists and popularisers of astronomy from the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mainly Camille Flammarion and Sir James Jeans). Their research and popular science narrative on astronomy and physics are confirmed by photographic explorations of the Universe, carried out using advanced technologies and optical tools (such as the Hubble Telescope), which capture not only what we cannot see with the naked eye, but also what happened in the cosmos in the distant past. According to the researcher, photography is ‘optical modelling of objects and events’ (p. 20), but also a tool ‘aiding human sight and memory [emphasis added by A. G.-K.]’ (p. 18), which undoubtedly constitutes scientific evidence, but at the same time plays the role of ‘a not entirely trustworthy “intermediary” between the knowledge of the Cosmos relayed to us by the benevolent ray of light and the human eye’ (p. 18). Despite the speed of light, the incredible distances involved mean that numerous photographs of stars and other objects in space provide us with images of the past, images which, by the time they reach us, are merely records of entities that no longer exist. Today, ‘thanks to the benevolence of light and the laws of physics’ (p. 22), we can observe stars, planets, galaxies and even elementary particles (improved optical instruments have

3 See: A. Fredro, *Trzy po trzy* [Rambling on and on] (Warsaw: 1996), pp. 96, 14.

4 Research on memory seems to be an inexhaustible and still relevant topic in the humanities and social sciences (e.g. individual, collective and cultural memory). An extensive overview of research devoted to only a certain aspect of this issue in the Enlightenment era from the perspective of ‘early modernity’ was presented, for example, by Barbara Wolska in her text “Kwestie memoratywne w literaturze oświecenia i ich perspektywy badawcze” [Memorative issues in Enlightenment literature and their research perspectives] (a review of Teresa Kostkiewiczowa’s book *Mnemosyne i córki. Pamięć w literaturze drugiej połowy XVIII wieku* [Mnemosyne and her daughters. Memory in the literature of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century] (Torun: 2019), in: *Napis* issue 26 (2020)).

made it possible to capture images of the surface of Venus, where unimaginably high temperatures reaching 420 degrees Celsius and extreme pressure prevail). The same circumstances, so conducive to human cognition, can, however, turn humanity not into a subject, but into an object of observation by ‘peculiar objects (whether they be “gods”, “God”, “other forms of consciousness”, or “qualities not experienced by anyone”)’ (p. 22), which observe us and ‘also photograph us, in a sense’ (p. 40). It is with such a summary, referring to the literary vision of the writer and philosopher Stanisław Lem from his short story *Inwazja* [Invasion]<sup>5</sup>, that Marek Pałciński ends his reflections.

One form of literary exploration of the complexities of the human psyche – areas sometimes as distant as the farthest corners of the universe – is the ‘painting with words’ of emotions and states, depicting them using specific means of expression. The use of symbolism and mood during the modernist period led to significant progress towards a form of literary expression<sup>6</sup> that had an increasingly complete and profound effect on the reader. An example of such a sensually charged work, whose author is also its main intended reader, is Stefan Żeromski’s *Dzienniki* [Diaries], which became the subject of Beata Garlej’s reflection in the article “Stefan Żeromski’s tropes (or traces) of passion”. An analysis of the writer’s attempts, with his fondness for comparisons, metaphors, epithets and enumerative series, to ‘linguistically depict passion’ in the most perfect way, allows us to define the understanding of passion by Żeromski, who is aware of his creative role as an author. The researcher argues that this is not just about preserving strong emotions or physical experiences, but rather about a certain way of thinking on the part of the writer, which led him to create ‘his textual space of intimacy’ (p. 60). *Dzienniki*, containing ‘Images shaped as part of passionate thinking and conveyed with the passion of a thought consummated’ (p. 72), simultaneously allow the author to free himself from obsessive thoughts and capture his experiences in words, thus saving him from oblivion.

The fight against oblivion through the factual value of communication is one of the themes of Marlena Sęczek’s article “Traces of forgotten identity. On the role of sources in the biography of Janusz Korczak”. The motto by Wiesław Ratajczak: ‘It is on the reliability of small things that the success of a philologist and biographer depends’<sup>7</sup> (p. 77) immediately directs the reader to the heart of the text, which is to draw attention to the importance of research reliability in the work of a bi-

5 S. Lem, “Inwazja”, in: idem, *Inwazja z Aldebarana* [Invasion from Aldebaran] (Cracow: 1959).

6 Samuel Sandler’s observation from the introduction to a selection of Prus’s chronicles on literature and art (B. Prus, *Obrazy wszystkiego. O literaturze i sztuce. Wybór „Kronik”* [Images of everything. On literature and art. A selection of *Chronicles*], p. 12).

7 W. Ratajczak, “O potrzebie wierności drobiazgom” [On the necessity to remain faithful to bits and

ographer-documentarian in order to eliminate the phenomenon of ‘long-lasting mistakes’.<sup>8</sup> Getting to the truth through material evidence, such as official documents (for example, birth, death or marriage certificates), is often a long and tedious process, but researchers cannot skip visiting archives and poring over sources. Reconstructing true history should replace artistic creation in biographical works because, as the author of the article claims, ‘even those narratives, which are the most suggestive and attractive to the reader, cannot fill the gaps in historical knowledge’ (p. 95). Finally, drawing attention to the danger of shaping memory based on artistic creation, she adds: ‘When hypotheses mixed with one’s fantasy, however attractive for the mass imagination, are considered as facts, any attempt to explain the meanders of one’s biography can lead one astray’ (p. 100).

Photography as a metaphor for memory in film appears in Ewa Szkudlarek’s text “Photographic portraits in Polish cinema: keepsakes, traces, props”. The phenomenon of this secondary ‘visual memory’, which is much more perfect than the original human one, has been the subject of discussion by numerous researchers (e.g. Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Marianna Michałowska, Jan Kurowiecki, Lech Lechowicz). Using Polish cinema as an example, and referring to television series such as *Noce i dnie* [*Nights and Days*], *Dom* [*The House*] and *Polskie drogi* [*The Passions of Poland*], the role of photographic portraits – individual or as a collection (gathered in a family album as a priceless memento of the past) – is explored here. Following Bernd Stiegler and Roland Barthes, the researcher treats photography as a ‘vehicle’ of memory,<sup>9</sup> which ‘directly evokes the past in the present’ (p. 105), connecting private and family history with often tragic historical events that evoke traumatic memories in the protagonists.

Elżbieta Dąbrowicz-Płachecka’s article is an example of an analysis of forms of commemoration other than photography or film. The text presents the history of a selected entry from Cyprian Norwid’s handwritten “Książka Pamiątek” [‘Book of Memorabilia’] as an interesting example of a special form of autobiography. The author focuses on the content of a card with three dried leaves bearing the inscrip-

pieces], in: *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* [Poznań Studies in Polish Literature. Literary Series] no. 35(55) (Poznań: 2019), p. 411.

- 8 The term used in Tadeusz Budrewicz’s article “‘Długie trwanie’ pomyłek (Maria Konopnicka, Maria Bartusówna, Napoleon Ekielski, Florentyna Niewiarowska)” [‘The Long Life’ of Mistakes (Maria Konopnicka, Maria Bartusówna, Napoleon Ekielski, Florentyna Niewiarowska)] (*Napis* issue 26 (2020), pp. 56–69). In it, the author primarily addresses the issue of exposing errors identified by researchers conducting thorough bibliographic work, which is not only a necessity but also a ‘humanist’s duty’ (p. 67).
- 9 B. Stiegler, *Bilder der Photographie: Ein Album photographischer Metaphern* [Images of photography: An Album of photographic metaphors] [2006]; quoted after the Polish edition: *Obrazy fotografii. Album metafor fotograficznych*, transl. by J. Czudec (Cracow: 2009), p. 163.

tion: 'Wychodząc z więzienia 1846' ['Leaving prison 1846'] (p. 33) and examines it as a verbal and visual rebus, attempting to guess its meaning in the context of Romantic souvenir culture. This intriguing floral and verbal note by Norwid serves to commemorate an important moment in his life, but it is not the only such instance of the poet's self-communication. Following the artist's biography, more examples can be found, such as the laurel leaf sent to Diotima (a gesture of giving her 'a leaf from Tasso's wreath' (p. 41), which became an important message for the poet) or the sprig of ivy taken from the grave of Zofia Węgierska as a material trace of the memory of Norwid's friend, a Parisian chronicler and columnist associated with numerous domestic magazines. The leaves plucked by the poet have become part of a unique cultural code used in communication with oneself or others. Only the sender and recipient of this message will understand its meaning.

Critical editions of their works are undoubtedly another way of preserving the memory of old writers and maintaining their presence in academic circles. Joanna Hańczkiewicz's article "Scholarly editing in the face of technological progress illustrated with the example of Waław Potocki's *Moralia*" analyses the advantages and disadvantages of modern tools that facilitate the preparation of such works for future generations. Its first part is an introduction to the subject, devoted to characterising the current state of digital scientific publishing and the latest technologies that enable the quick and effective preparation of writers' works for publication. The second part of the text is a case study – an analysis of Waław Potocki's *Moralia*, which is being worked on by a group of researchers at the Jagiellonian University as part of the Digital Humanities Lab project, testing the use of machine learning to automatically generate a transliteration of a seventeenth-century manuscript.

The punishment known in ancient times as *damnatio memoriae* – the prohibition of mentioning the name and erasing the deeds of an executed criminal from historical records, thereby condemning him to eternal oblivion – was considered the most severe, as it appealed to one of man's deepest fears – the fear of being forgotten. Preserving one's own existence and achievements, leaving a mark on the world, gives meaning to human life. On the other hand, the loss of memory is also the loss of personality, of what makes a person unique. That is why people resort to various methods to protect their memories and images from the past at all costs – whether in text or graphic form. For what is a person without them? Are they not a blank, unwritten book that does not 'draw anyone to itself'?<sup>10</sup>

*Translated by Marek Pąckiński  
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10 A. Fredro, *Trzy po trzy...*, p. 42.

**ABSTRACT**

Special issue of the academic journal *Inscription. An Anthology 3* is a selection of the best articles selected from the last five issues of the academic yearbook *Napis [Inscription]*. Their main theme is the issue of memory, preserved through texts and images/photographs, which allow us to, among other things, explore the past, record emotions, communicate with ourselves and others using established cultural codes, and, finally, verify biographical information. For instance, the photographic record holds not only a sentimental value (it preserves memories) but also a factual value (it provides visual evidence).

In the introduction, these issues are briefly discussed using specific articles as examples.

**KEYWORDS:** anthology, memory, image, photography, occasional and applied literature