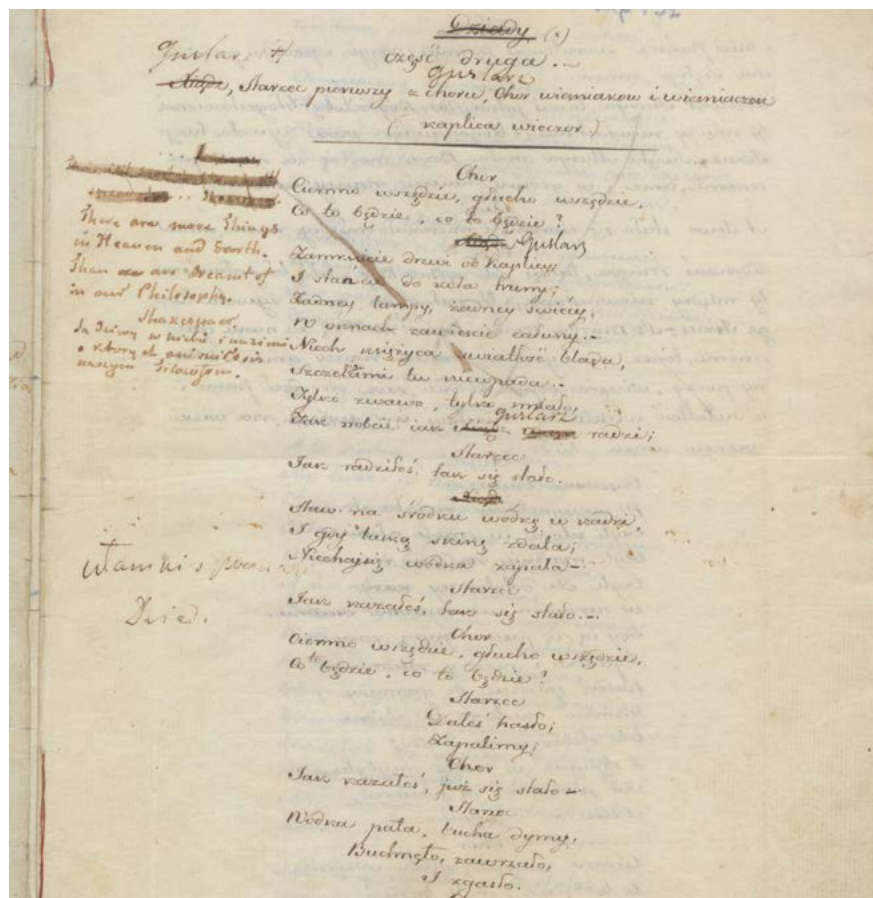




Jeudi 8 octobre 2026

17h30-19h - CESR, salle Rapin
et en visioconférence

⇒rejoindre

#13 The Afterlife of a Digital Edition. From the Philomaths' Archive to Mickiewicz's Phonogenesis

Wojciech Kruszewski - The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland)

In 1817 a group of students at the University of Vilnius founded a secret society. One of them was Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855, Polish poet, dramatist, essayist, publicist, translator and political activist, regarded as a key poet of Polish romantic period). Their papers – letters, minutes, poems, drafts – survived arrest, confiscation and two centuries of European history, and are today scattered across four archives. Between 2018 and 2025 our team published them as a born-digital scholarly edition at arfi.kul.pl: 475 source files encoded in TEI XML, transliterations and transcriptions, document descriptions, commentary, and a prosopographical database of more than three hundred people, many of whom appear in no other database in the world. Then the grant ended. This lecture is about what happened next.

I want to use the word afterlife in three senses at once.

- > The first is reuse. The files were made in order to publish an archive. They are now being asked a question nobody had in mind while encoding them: how did Mickiewicz's poems come to sound the way they do? A new project, funded by the Polish National Science Centre, treats the edition not as a publication but as a corpus, and studies the genesis of sound – the phonogenesis – of Romantic verse. The edition turned out to be an instrument.
- > The second is survival. Software ages faster than scholarship. Our visualisation tool can break, our links can break, our interface will one day be unreadable; what remains is the XML. But the more uncomfortable discovery was this: the content of a digital edition cannot be lifted out of its encoding. A digital edition is not a text stored in a format. The format is part of the text.
- > The third is reception. In 2025 the body that had funded the edition reported that it was unable to reach the materials it had paid for – although the edition was finished, open, online and unchanged. I will discuss this episode openly, because it is not an administrative anecdote but a diagnosis. A digital edition asks to be navigated rather than read, and the readership able to do that is still being formed. Possibly in this room.

Finally, I want to show where all this becomes genuinely difficult. We encoded for a tool, and the tool quietly shaped what we were able to say: when our visualisation software insisted that every line of transliteration be permanently bound to its transcription, we had to invent a third view of the text in order to publish documents whose pages had survived in the wrong order. Now a second project asks the same files about sound – about clusters of phonemes that cross word boundaries and refuse to sit inside the XML tree – and the encoding does not know how to answer.

This is not a failure of the edition. It is what an afterlife is: the moment when a piece of work is made to answer for decisions taken years earlier, by people who could not have known what would one day be asked of them.

Wojciech Kruszewski is a literary scholar, editor and translator at The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), working on Polish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on scholarly editing and on the digital humanities. His editions include Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady*) and the notebooks and collected poems of Anna Kamieńska, alongside monographs on twentieth-century Polish literature. Between 2018 and 2025 he led the team that produced the born-digital edition of the Philomaths' Archive (arfi.kul.pl), encoding in TEI XML the papers of the student society to which the young Mickiewicz belonged. He is currently the principal investigator of *Euphony in Adam Mickiewicz's Writings: A Genetic Approach*, a project funded by the Polish National Science Centre. The project studies how the sound of a poem takes shape across successive states of its manuscript. He is presently at work on a Polish translation of Camilo Castelo Branco's *Amor de Perdição*.

Plus d'infos sur
cesr.cnrs.fr



Centre d'études supérieures de la Renaissance
59, rue Néricault-Destouches - 37000 Tours
Contact - erc.prima@univ-tours.fr



Grant n° 101142242