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THE LESSER ART. ON THE ROLE OF TYPOGRAPHER IN COMMUNIST POLAND

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ABSTRACT

The achievements of outstanding Polish typographers from the time of Communist Poland (PRL) have not been as yet thoroughly studied and popularized, either in Poland or internationally. Communist Poland is generally associated with ugly, poorly published books, however, Polish designers were often awarded in the prestigious Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung contest in Leipzig which was a review of the accomplishments of international publishing. The typographic awareness at the time was relatively low, even among the circles associated with books and the publishing market. One of the reasons being that the books' graphic design was regarded as marginal by the artistic circles. The graphic designers considered as important were first of all the ones affiliated to the 'Polish Poster School' for whom the Polish regime created favourable conditions, e.g., at universities. Designing books, magazines, and leaflets was strongly marginalized. Under such circumstances the group that stood out were the artists affiliated to the opinion-forming *Poligrafika* journal, the first post-WW II magazine dedicated to publishing, which from the very beginning would focus strongly on the importance of aestheticism of print, particularly in

its self-contained supplement *Litera*. It published articles by such prestigious typographers, as: Adrian Frutiger, Albert Kapr, Tibor Szántó, Jan Tschichold, David Kindersley, or Hermann Zapf. An important role was also played by the Polish Association of Book Publishers (Polskie Towarzystwo Wydawców Książek, PTWK), re-activated in 1956. In 1957, the first ‘Best Published Book of the Year’ Contest was organized; with time, it became the most prestigious of the kind in Poland (this year it will be celebrating its 65th edition). Thanks to these efforts in PRL there appeared new designs and projects worth appraising and disseminating. Of a model quality, this output is today worth being shared with a wider public with the use of the universally available digital tools. What is more, in the times when anybody can publish a book, showcasing good models is particularly important. There is a constant need to continually boost the aesthetics of Polish books.

KEYWORDS: typography, graphic design, book, PRL (Communist Poland)

In the studies of the history of designing books the period covering Communist Poland (PRL) has been continuously underestimated; however, Polish typographers when facing political challenges (censorship) as well as economic ones (material shortages, poor machinery, lack of fonts, bad work organization, low work quality) created model book editions which stood out with their noble form. They won numerous prizes in the prestigious Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung Contest in Leipzig, which was the review of the accomplishments of international editing. In 1971, Leon Urbański even won the Grand Prix for the design of the technical book *Cars from Top to Bottom*.¹

1 E. Repucho, *Typografia kompletna, kultura książki w twórczości Leona Urbańskiego*, Wrocław 2016, pp. 145–147.

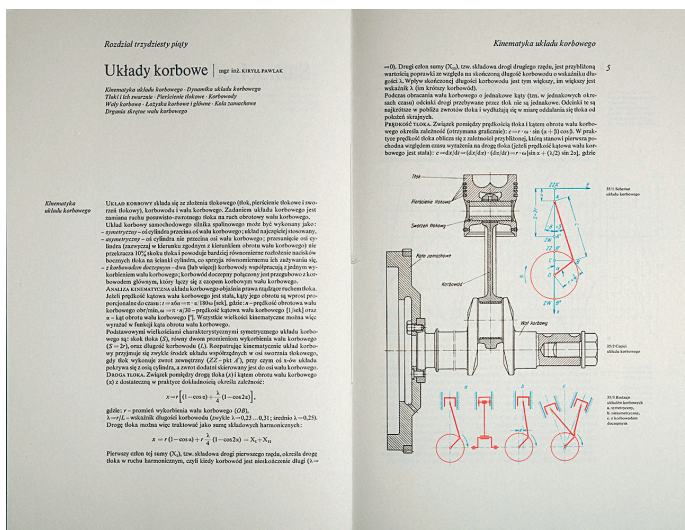


FIG. 1. The awarded design of the technical book *Cars from Top to Bottom*.
Ewa Repucho's collection.

In 1990, Urbański himself was invited to join the exclusive society of British publishers and typographers the Double Crown Club associating the most prominent world typographers, like Matthew Carter, Adrian Frutiger, Jost Hochuli, Martino Mardersteig, Gerard Unger, and Hermann Zapf.² Regrettably, Urbański, who was widely appreciated as a real master amidst that circle, was not spared by the Socialist machinery of the centrally-planned economy.

Some of his designs were never implemented, the example of which could be found e.g., in the *Encyclopedia of the Knowledge of a Book* published really modestly in 1971 by the Ossolineum Publishing House. The publisher merely published the designed cover, having regarded the beautiful design of the interior as too costly.³ It goes without saying that it was a model design, this best testified by the fact that Tekla Malinowska and Ludwik Syta incorporated it as a model example in the manual *Editing of a Technical Book* from 1981.

2 Ibidem, pp. 24–25.

3 Ibidem, p. 225.

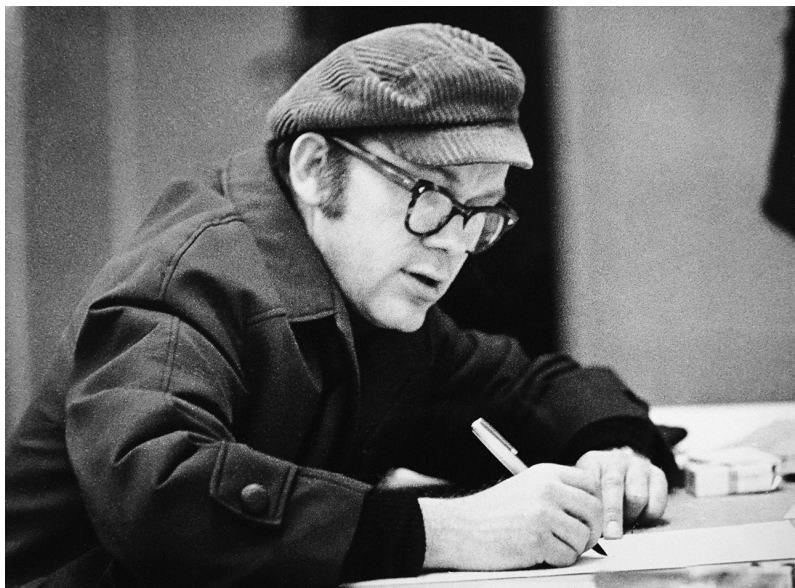


FIG. 2. Leon Urbański, the 1960s. Ewa Repucho's collection.

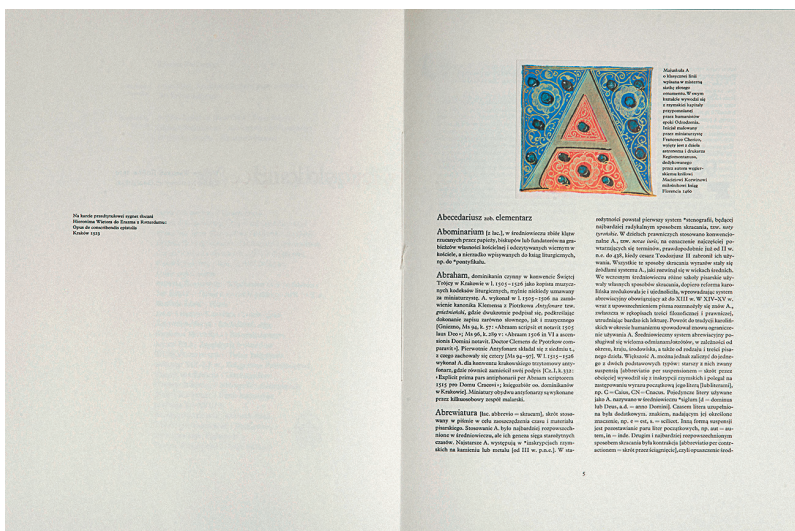


FIG. 3. Unimplemented design of the inside of the *Encyclopaedia of the Knowledge of a Book*. Photo Szymon Aleksandrowicz

The majority of the designs were actually implemented, however, their quality substantially differed from the meticulous typography in the design; e.g. the books in the *Library of the Aphorists* series published by the Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in 1970-1990 were given by Urbański pedantically designed covers, nonetheless their finalization by e.g., the M. Kasprzak Graphic Plant in Poznań, the October Revolution Printing House in Warsaw, and the W. L. Anczyc Publishing Printing House in Cracow left much to be desired.

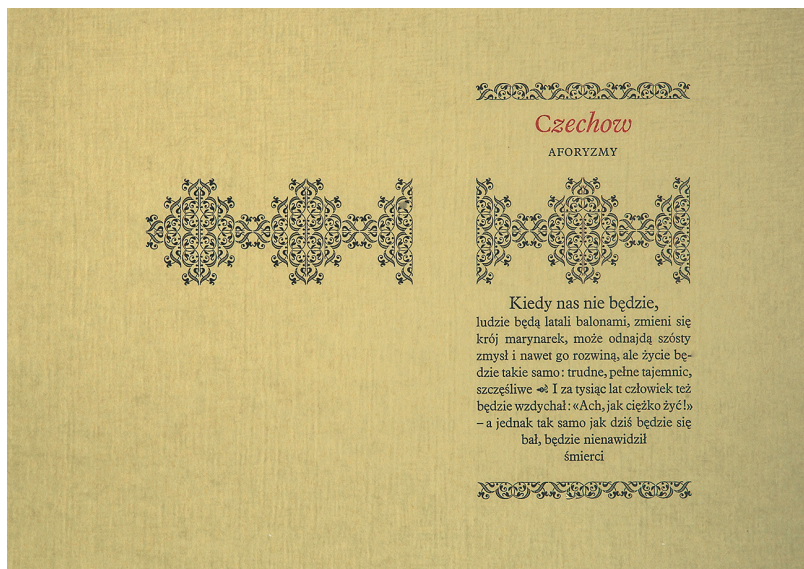


FIG. 4. Design of the cover from the *Library of the Aphorists* series.
Photo Szymon Aleksandrowicz

A similar situation happened with the series of the Polish Oriental Society published in 1966-1987 by the National Ossolineum Publishing House. Workers in the printing houses were simply unable to reproduce the nuances so essential in the typographic layout, yet which were of key importance for the quality of the whole design.



FIG. 5. Title page of a volume from the Polish Oriental Society's series.
Photo Szymon Aleksandrowicz

The majority of the most outstanding book designers, to mention only Jolanta Barącz, Jan Bokiewicz, Stefan Bernaciński, Rafał Glücksman, Andrzej Heindrich, Jan Hollender, Stefan Nargiełło, Tadeusz Pietrzyk, Zenon Porada, Krzysztof Racinowski, Andrzej Rudziński, Marian Sztuka, or Danuta Żukowska did not author any theoretical works which could shed light on the secrets of their tools and views on book designing for future generations.

Typography-related topics did not appear too often in trade and academic journals of the time. Let us focus on the example of the *Projekt* [Design] magazine (published in 1956–1997) dedicated to art, architecture, and design⁴ in which if publishing design was tackled at all, the magazine addressed it only from the perspective of illustrations and covers, or presented it as viewed historically. The author is perfectly right, however, it is worth adding that among the papers dedicated to typography there was e.g., an interesting article by Danuta Wróblewska 'Book Architecture' from 1963.⁵ It is possibly owing to the marginalizing of the typographic issues by the artistic circles that typographers' names have been omit-

4 K. Zychowicz, 'Krytyk sztuki jako przyjaciel artystów', in: *Sztuka i przyjaciele. Pisma wybrane Danuty Wróblewskiej*, ed. K. Zychowicz, Warszawa 2021, pp. 12–26.

5 D. Wróblewska, 'Architektura książki', *Projekt*, 1963, no. 5, pp. 2–7. Reprinted in: *Sztuka i przyjaciele...*, op. cit., pp. 108–114.

ted by bibliographers as well. Even the Polish bibliography in progress *Przewodnik Bibliograficzny* [Bibliographic Guide] has been very selective with their output. In the annual index of all the artists contributing to the graphic layout of books they were referred to as illustrators, which today hampers any research. The index's title was for years inadequate, and after 1984 it was given up entirely (until 1988). This demonstrates that the issues of typography and book designing were marginalized even among the bibliologists.

This underestimation of the role of a typographer in creating a book was justly worded by Leon Urbański in his conversations with Danuta Wróblewska: 'Being a typographer is being almost a nobody'.⁶

At the same time, according to Urbański, in order to become a good typographer 'it is not enough to be sensitive to beauty, shape, to have certain artistic skills, and even a great talent'.⁷ Without the knowledge of the history of script, bases of linguistics, tendencies present in art over the history, as emphasized by Urbański, it is impossible to design a good book. He also claimed, a bit jokingly, that for the above reasons out of a thousand of candidates to study at the Academy of Fine Arts (ASP), five hundred people can become outstanding artists, but only two stand the chance of becoming excellent typographers.⁸ Regrettably, it was a very individual approach to the graphic design of publications. Who counted first of all were the graphic designers associated with the 'Polish Poster School';⁹ these, owing to the lack of competition

6 D. Wróblewska, L. Urbański, 'Leon Urbański rozmawia z redakcją *Projektu*', *Projekt. Sztuka wizualna i wzornictwo*, 1975, vol. 6, p. 48.

7 E. Repucho, 'Nie robię sztuki, pomagam czytać. Poglądy Leona Urbańskiego na temat kształtowania szaty typograficznej książki', *Roczniki Biblioteczne*, 2009, Annual 53, pp. 240–241.

8 Ibidem.

9 Polish Poster School is a phenomenon known in Polish graphic design from the 1950s to the 1970s. Such artists as Henryk Tomaszewski, Waldemar Świerzy, Jan Lenica, or Roman Cieśliewicz won international renown. See Z. Schubert, *Polska szkoła plakatu*, Olszanica – Poznań, 2024; *Polska szkoła plakatu w szerszym kontekście historycznym i kulturowym*, ed. M. Bieczyński, Poznań 2024; *Polska Szkoła Plakatu : geneza, tradycja, kontynuacja*, ed. J. Ryczek, Poznań 2021; M. Knorowski, *Polski*

in Socialist economy, could create art and not adverts.¹⁰ The approach to design as fine arts and underestimation of the profession of a typographer has been affecting the judgement in Poland till today, since, as justly observed by Agata Szydłowska, “the Polish Poster School” has become the synonym of the paradigm that has continued to dominate design education as well as the promotion policy, and the way Polish graphic design has been shown’.¹¹ Unfortunately, apart from the Polish artists from the 1920s and 30s, it was precisely the poster artists who found recognition on the international arena. The second appreciated group were illustrators; in the perception of many people, designing a book was limited exclusively to designing the cover and creating attractive illustrations. The Communist regime of the time created for them exceptionally convenient development conditions, e.g., at universities, or authorized the launch of the first worldwide Poster Museum. At the same time, design of books, magazines, and leaflets was marginalized, as can be seen in Krzysztof Lenk’s remark: ‘We knew the worth and high quality of our designs, yet these works were appreciated and discussed merely within a narrow circle of specialists.’¹²

What stood out against that miserable background was *Poligrafika*, the first post-WW II magazine dedicated to publishing, which from the very beginning emphasized the importance of the aesthetical quality of the print.¹³ In 1966–1978, it was Roman Tomaszewski, an outstanding typographer, pressman, and bibliophile,¹⁴

plakat XX wieku, Muzeum Plakatu w Wilanowie, postermuseum.pl, <https://www.postermuseum.pl/kolekcja/kolekcja-plakatu-polskiego/> [Accessed January 21, 2025].

- 10 J. Piechota, P. Urbańska, ‘Historia prac badawczych w projektowaniu graficznym’, *Acta Poligraphica*, 2014, vol. 4, pp. 40–41.
- 11 A. Szydłowska, *Miliard rzeczy dookoła*, Kraków 2013, p. 11.
- 12 Quoted after E. Repucho, *Typografia kompletna, kultura książki w twórczości Leona Urbańskiego*, Wrocław 2016, p. 51.
- 13 E. Repucho, ‘Estetyka zaangażowana. Rola *Poligrafiki* w podnoszeniu poziomu estetycznego polskiej produkcji wydawniczej w latach 1947–1956’, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Bibliotekoznawstwo*, 2008, vol. 27, pp. 77–96.
- 14 Roman Tomaszewski (1921–1992), an outstanding typographer, printer, and bibliophile. He contributed greatly to the Polish book market, by e.g., being one of the pioneers rebuilding the printing industry in Szczecin and Wrocław following the

who edited its self-contained supplement called *Litera* dedicated to lettering, fonts, and printing plates.¹⁵



FIG. 6. Roman Tomaszewski. Andrzej Tomaszewski's collection.

war destructions. In 1947–1968, he served as a technical director of 'Czytelnik'. In 1969–1976, he headed the design and research Printing Typeface Centre. He was an active member and board member of the Association Typographique Internationale, ATypl. At the same time he lectured in and popularized typography, running e.g., courses for students at universities in Warsaw and Łódź. He left behind an impressive journalistic output: over 400 articles in Polish and foreign media, mainly specialist journals dedicated to publishing houses, bookselling, and printing. He was honoured with many awards for his accomplishments, including the unique Gutenberg Prize in 1972. See *Słownik pracowników książki polskiej*, Suplement II, Warszawa 2000, A. Sobocińska, A. Tomaszewski, 'Bibliografia prac poligrafa, wydawcy i bibliofila Romana Tomaszewskiego (1921–1992) za lata 1948–1994', in: *Studia o książce dawnej i współczesnej*, eds. I. Imańska, J. Tondel, Toruń 2006, pp. 37–71; A. Chamera-Nowak, 'Roman i Andrzej Tomaszewscy w niewoli książek', in: *W poszukiwaniu odpowiedniej formy. Rola wydawcy, typografa, artysty i technologii w pracy nad książką*, ed. M. Komza in cooperation with E. Jabłońska-Stefanowicz, E. Repucho, Wrocław 2012, pp. 217–231; A. Szydlowska, M. Misiak, *Paneuropa, Kometa, Hel, Szkice z historii projektowania liter w Polsce*, Kraków 2015, pp. 92–93.

- 15 A. Luberd, 'Litera Romana Tomaszewskiego. Pierwsze pismo typograficzne w Polsce – zarys historii i przybliżenie tematyki', *Rubryka*, 2017, vol. 3, pp. 52–66, issuu.com/kneuj/docs/rubryka_3 [Accessed January 21, 2025].

As noted by Jakub Maciej Łubocki, *Litera* was a peculiar lettering “window to the West” during the period of people’s democracy in Poland.¹⁶ This is best testified to by impressive names of foreign authors, such as Adrian Frutiger, Albert Kapr, Tibor Szántó, Jan Tschichold, David Kindersley, or Hermann Zapf! We can also find some illustrious names among Polish authors, such as: Szymon Bojko, Zygfryd Gardzielewski, Andrzej Heidrich, Helena Nowak-Mroczek, Henryk Sakwerda, Władysław Semkowicz, or Leon Urbański.¹⁷ In this way, *Litera* served as a natural channel for the flow of the typographic accomplishments of the capitalist block to the socialist one.¹⁸ Had it not been for it, in Poland there would have been no knowledge of contemporary European typography.



FIG. 7. *Poligrafika* together with its self-contained supplement *Litera* edited by Roman Tomaszewski. Andrzej Tomaszewski's collection.

- 16 J. M. Łubocki, ‘Czasopismo *Litera* (1966–1978) jako świadectwo XX-wiecznego dorobku polskiej myśli o typografii i liternictwie’, *Z Badań nad Książką i Księgozbiorami Historycznymi*, 2021, vol. 15, Fasc. 2, pp. 301–302.
- 17 A. Tomaszewski, ‘Wprowadzenie do lektury’, in: *Lit[t]era Romana. Antologia tekstów z czasopisma *Litera* 1966–1978*, Comp. M. Marek-Łucka, A. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 2020, p. 12.
- 18 Ibidem.

The concept of the book's content in bibliology is not homogeneous with the concept of the written work contained in the book, being much broader. When speaking about a book content a bibliologist means, in fact, apart from the written work, also the book's editorial, artistic, and printing shaping.¹⁹ In his concept of functional bibliology, Krzysztof Migoń extends the concept of book's content and of its author as well. We can find it in the words of Jan Muszkowski written down already in the 1950s: 'Bibliology is interested in the already materialized output of the design, its vicissitudes, and external impact. For this reason the concept of the author significantly extends, covering not only the one who created it, but also all those who edited the text'.²⁰

This is also what Karol Głombiowski did: not only did he rank among the book's creators just the author and typographer, but also the illustrator, cartographer, photographer, and bookbinder, however, under one condition. They had to act consciously to be able to become 'co-creators of a definite ideological, cognitive, and artistic concept of the work'.²¹

The views of Polish bibliologists were not isolated. Many designers agreed with them. Leon Urbański, grouping around him a circle of outstanding designers, was of the opinion that the 'typographer's task was to organize information, to creatively interpret it, and to constantly attempt at closing it in an ideal functional form the purpose of actions that the text is'.²²

In functional typography popularized by bibliologists, which seems to be the dominating theory in the 21st century, what matters most is the attitude of a typographer to the design object and the typographer's cooperation with the remaining creators of the book, as well as, as observed by Ewa Repucho, 'the typographer's

19 K. Migoń, *Nauka i książki. Zarys problematyki*, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków 1984, p. 14.

20 J. Muszkowski, *Życie książki*, Kraków 1951, p. 192.

21 K. Głombiowski, 'Nauka o książce w ujęciu Jana Muszkowskiego', *Studia o Książce*, 1972, vol. 3, p. 165.

22 E. Repucho, *Typografia kompletna...*, op. cit., p. 51.

own individual typographic language with the help of which he/she brings about the author's encounter with the reader'.²³

It was already Leon Urbański who called for including the name of the typographer and other co-authors in each book, so that they could become identifiable. His desire was to appreciate in this way their role and creative contribution to the design. Regrettably, until today this claim has not been fully implemented by Polish publishers, and only some publishing houses, actually those famed for the care for the typographic unity of the works they release, give not only the names of the co-authors, but also provide additional information on the kind of paper and applied typeface/font [krój pisma].

In Communist Poland already in the 1950s, the colophon included the name of the printing house, also the paper mill, and the names of the managing editor, the academic and technical editors, and the proofreader. However, as can be read from the orders from higher authorities, the purpose of that was to motivate factory workers to improve the quality of their production and as part of the 'the editing quality boosting'. The authorities thought that this was one of the means to solve the challenge of the poor quality graphic layout and book making, particularly those meant for mass sale.²⁴ The method was not systemically applicable until the 1989 transformation. In reality, the major reasons for poor quality publishing output were as follows: obsolete printing machinery, poor typesetting potential, lack of staff with adequate technological and academic background, poor quality of materials, such as paper, printers' ink, or bookbinding materials.²⁵ What the typographers of the time found particularly painful was the extremely modest choice of typefaces that the printing houses had available. A carefully selected typeface is the key element of a typographic project, contributing to its success. Although the typefaces are on

23 E. Repucho, 'Typografia w przestrzeni cyfrowej jako przedmiot badań bibliologicznych', *Acta Poligraphica*, 2016, vol. 7, p. 41.

24 Zob. A. Chamera-Nowak, *Książka a stalinizm*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 361-382.

25 Ibidem.

their own in their shape, they can serve as a perfect conveyor of emotions. Printing houses offered fonts available depending on the quality of the machines they had. In principle, the majority of books printed in the 1960s and 70s were released in relief printing applying the line-laying technique, and only two fonts: Sile-sia and Candida were available. In the 1970s, the phototypesetting technique was slowly introduced, with the use of photomatrixes purchased with hard currency, mainly in England. This allowed a wider range of fonts.

It is true that what dominated at the time was mass production, of poor quality material and design, while typographic awareness was not high, even in the circles affiliated with books and the publishing market. However, there appeared projects which deserved high appraisal. An enormous contribution to boosting the quality of Polish books must be attributed to the abovementioned opinion-forming *Poligrafika*-associated community and PTWK which both, however, for reasons completely different than those of the regime, aimed at the quality change of the Polish high-circulation publishing output.

PTWK was justly of the opinion that one of the means of popularizing and perfecting the contemporary book art worldwide were editorial contests. In 1957, the first ‘Best Edited Book of the Year’ Award headed by Roman Tomaszewski was organized, and with time it became the most prestigious book contest in Poland.²⁶ In 2022, it was renamed ‘The Most Beautiful Polish Books’. The jury assesses publications which feature genuinely Polish editing, are published by printing houses located in Poland, and are designed by graphic designers and typographers who are Poland’s permanent residents. It considers the publishing concept, the graphic and typographic layout, as well as the artistic quality of the illustrations. Books are assessed in several categories in order to have the specificity of their typographic and printing shaping taken into

26 E. Repucho, ‘Konkursy. Najpiękniejsza książka’, in: *Encyklopedia Książki*, Wrocław 2017, p. 629; A. Tomaszewski, *Sześćdziesiąt konkursów „Najpiękniejsza książka roku”*, Warszawa 2021.

account, dividing them into the following categories according to their content:²⁷ 1) fiction, 2) scientific and academic literature, 3) books for children and teenagers, 4) manuals and specialist literature (educational and training materials, dictionaries, guides), 5) art and photography (albums, catalogues), 6) other (bibliophilic publications, maps, music, etc.). Over the many years of the contest numerous outstanding Polish artists who played a key role in the development of Polish designing were awarded. Individual awards were given to, e.g.: Leon Urbański, Tadeusz Pietrzyk, Andrzej Heidrich, Hubert Hilscher, Zofia and Andrzej Darowski, Wojciech Freudenreich, Krzysztof Racinowski, Danuta Żukowska, Jan Bokiewicz, Henryk Tomaszewski, Maciej Buszewicz, Lech Majewski, Władysław Pluta, Stanisław Salij, or Janusz Górski.²⁸



FIG. 8. Steering Committee of the Contest Court at the 'Czytelnik' Publishing House seat: Roman Tomaszewski standing, Prof. Krystyna Remer on the right, 1962. Andrzej Tomaszewski's collection.

27 T. Bierkowski, E. Repucho, *Typografia dla humanistów. O złożonych problemach projektowania edycji naukowych*, Warszawa 2018, p. 39.

28 A. Tomaszewski, *Sześćdziesiąt konkursów...*, op. cit., p. 8.

The Award constitutes an important event for publishers, designers, illustrators, and printers. It integrates the community, while at the same time promoting beautifully published books, prepared meticulously, whose typographical form is intrinsically connected with the history of the designing of the Polish book reflecting its development, aesthetical and technological changes, and the succession of the generations of graphic designers. The contest in question can be regarded as a research field, in PRL alone covering about 200 book artists and about 1,000 editions.

Let us, for example, point to the fact that from among all the publications awarded in 1956-1980 the only title that reiterated as many as three times was *Master Thaddeus* by Adam Mickiewicz (1959: Arkady, GD Henryk Białoskórski, illus. M. E. Andriolli; 1963: 'Czytelnik', GD Andrzej Heidrich; 1973: Arkady, GD and illus. Józef Wilkoń).



FIG. 8. From the left: *Master Thaddeus* 1959: Arkady, GD Henryk Białoskórski, illus. M. E. Andriolli; 1963: 'Czytelnik', GD Andrzej Heidrich; 1973: Arkady, GD and illus. Józef Wilkoń.

It is thus possible only on this example to compare various editions and show how the same text could achieve three totally different, but at the same time so typographically and aesthetically different versions, yet appealing enough to attract the Award's jury's attention.

In harmony with R. Tomaszewski's concept, when assessing the submitted publications, the jury took into account the following: the editorial concept; the purposefulness of the choice of form and equipment (wyposażenie) with respect to the factual content of the book; the graphic design, its association with the content and harmony with the text; the choice of font; column layout; technical preparation of illustrations; but also the typesetting and text's makeup; the quality of plates (klisze) and illustrations; printing of the text and illustrations; the bookbinding quality; and the choice of paper and of other basic raw materials (canvas, texture- (tekstura?), etc.).²⁹

The sizeable accomplishments of Polish artists from the period of Communist Poland, contrary to those of their Western counterparts, are not widely known, yet they are equally relevant. The most frequently published contemporary studies on that period relate to designing from the perspective of illustrations and book covers. The Polish illustration school has already been dedicated many studies, including academic monographs: *Polish School of Illustration* by Jivonee Lee (unpublished doctoral dissertation under Piotr Piotrowski from 2008 available only in two libraries) and that by Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna *Illustration Station*,³⁰ as well as numerous popularization studies, e.g., a collective work titled *Admirals of Imagination. A Hundred Years of Polish Illustration in Books for Children*,³¹ as well as: Barbara Gawryluk's *Male and Female Illustration*.

29 R. Tomaszewski, 'Dobra treść w pięknej formie', in: *Artyści polskiej książki. 50 lat konkursu Polskiego Towarzystwa Wydawców Książek*, ed. K. Iwanicka, Warszawa 2009, p. 14.

30 A. Wincencjusz-Patyna, *Stacja ilustracja. Polska ilustracja książkowa 1950–1980 : Artystyczne kreacje i realizacje*, Wrocław 2008.

31 *Admirałowie wyobraźni. 100 lat polskiej ilustracji w książkach dla dzieci*, ed. A. Wincencjusz-Patyna, Warszawa 2020.

tors. *Butterflies from the Covers and Dragons with No Moustache*.³² Apart from that there have been studies released related to the publishing market, censorship, Socialist Realism, writers, among the most recent ones, e.g., *You, Creators of Books. History of the Publishing Community in Communist Poland*³³ (it contains mainly interviews and a general characterization of publishing houses). One of the few books encompassing analysis of the design layer is that by Janusz Górski *Literrally. Lettering and Typographic Covers of Polish Books 1944-2019*,³⁴ however, it focusses exclusively on covers, and of one type only. The second important study is the publication *The Beautiful of the 20th Century. Polish Designers and Graphic Designers*³⁵ edited by Jacek Mrowczyk, yet showing a large-scale research, it does not exhaust the topic.

What is worth pointing to is Ewa Repucho's monograph on aforementioned Leon Urbański,³⁶ which can serve as an example of a comprehensive study of his oeuvre and contribution to the development of Polish typographic art. Nonetheless, it is the exception that proves the rule. As already signalled, up to now merely single and partial studies dedicated to the topic have been published.

Additionally, the research into the book's graphic design requires greater specifying of methodology. The very description of a codex and its analysis require the context taking into account the time of the invention of print, the aesthetical trends of the time, and technological capacity. Therefore, work with such a material should not only include the description of printing materials and typographic expression means, but also a broadly perceived aesthetical trend and taste of the given historical period. It is worth taking into account the predominating fashion that affects the publishing market: although the most frequent motivation for buying

32 B. Gawryluk, *Ilustratorki, ilustratorzy. Motylki z okładki i smoki bez wąsów*, Warszawa 2019.

33 *Wy-twórcy książek. Historia społeczności wydawniczej w czasach PRL-u*, ed. J. Mrowczyk, Kraków-Katowice 2023.

34 J. Górski, *Dosłownie. Literne i typograficzne okładki polskich książek 1944-2019*, Kraków 2020.

35 *Piękni XX-wieczni. Polscy projektanci-graficy*, ed. J. Mrowczyk, Kraków 2017.

36 E. Repucho, *Typografia kompletna...*, op. cit.

a book stems from its content, the public also often choose books following their aesthetical preferences. The period of Communist Poland was unique in this respect: material shortages caused that aesthetics had to be relegated to the factors of secondary importance; what mattered more was the very fact of purchasing a book... Such limitations led at the same time to the creation of a peculiar formally self-restricting designing style. Apart from the analysis of the printed materials as such it is also theoretical works, serving as the source of inspiration for the artists, that gain prominence. In the case of the PRL books such a priceless reservoir of theoretical writings can be found in trade journals publishing not only technical papers, but also translations and summaries of Western works, at the time unavailable to the wider public. Regrettably, the access to them is today extremely challenging, since they are in the possession of few libraries in Poland only. Therefore, an interesting phenomenon that has been observed for several last years are the publications recalling those theoretical works from the times of Communist Poland. As an example let me quote here *Lit[t]era Romana*, an analogy of the most important papers published in the aforementioned *Litera*. As justly observed by J. M Łubocki:

Even today, in the era when the tools available to a typographer, graphic designer, printer, or a publisher have thoroughly altered, the contents in *Litera* can still serve as assistance and inspiration, since despite a total technological revolution in printing, they have remained topical: not only do they represent high factual quality, but also a peculiar approach permitting more to show the purpose and essence of lettering work than its actual fulfilment. This fact helps us realize that the core of lettering work does not merely consist in craftsman's skilful use of the tools and technique, but first of all a certain peculiar, humanistic in its character, way of thinking about letters and communication with their use.³⁷

Unfortunately, the anthology was edited in 500 copies, and was unavailable in bookshops. Another interesting item is *Art and Friends*.

37 J. M. Łubocki, 'Czasopismo *Litera* (1966-1978)...', op. cit., p. 294.

Danuta Wróblewska's Writings selected by Karolina Zychowicz,³⁸ whose first part: 'Graphic Design' contains e.g., Wróblewska's critical papers and her interviews with book-related individuals.

The solutions applied by PRL's designers were intriguing in as much as they stemmed from a peculiar political and economic situation. On the one hand, there was censorship affecting the choice of the applied means; since censors suspected political undertones even in the most innocent projects, one can observe visible attempts at avoiding censorship or at a conscious taking the risk through allusion, travesty, or pastiche. On the other hand, the insufficient machinery and material shortages forced the artists' self-limitation: they would consciously give up excessive means, using their peculiar material and technological shortcomings as their chief asset or even a kind of demonstration (today's design trends go back to those limited means under the banners of being environment-friendly or consciously minimalistic). Furthermore, what seems interesting is also the phenomenon of an apparent isolation; Communist Poland's artists, seemingly closed up behind the Iron Curtain, were not so unaware of the trends present in the West.



FIG. 9. Session of the Jury during the Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung Concest. It was headed by Jan Tschichold (in the centre); Roman Tomaszewski is next to him (on the right), 1965. Leipzig. Andrzej Tomaszewski's collection.

38 *Sztuka i przyjaciele. Pisma wybrane Danuty Wróblewskiej*, ed. K. Zychowicz, Warszawa 2021.

Contacts with illustrious typographers were not limited to merely incidental trade congresses or prize awarding events, but they also involved more ordinary lettering professionals. It was through trade magazines, such as *Litera*, *Poligrafika*, or *Projekt* that professional knowledge also reached young or less qualified employees. The trade magazine translated and published works by outstanding Western typographers: Jan Tschichold, Adrian Frutiger, Albert Kaper, Walter Schiller, Gerrit Willem Ovink, and Walter Tracy.

In 2016, Ewa Repucho formulated a desideratum for biographical research³⁹ whose goal would be to successively prepare monographs on the oeuvre of the most illustrious typographers of Communist Poland, preparation of monographs of selected artists, which turns even more relevant to the typography within digital space.

What becomes of key importance is the documentation and preservation of the best Polish typographic projects. And the period of PRL, Communist Poland, mainly in the 1960s and 70s, seems to be particularly interesting in this respect, since a book is not only a content carrier, but also an object of applied art forming an important specimen of material heritage. For a book to be created: a book which is functional, yet beautiful at the same time, a team of specialists is needed; they prepare the design, create illustrations, the decorative material, and they also design the graphic message placed on the cover.

In the era of digitization, namely when tools permitting publication of a book are widely available to everybody, it seems that the editorial art is in danger. Editing principles fall into oblivion, while the publishing market becomes dominated by amateurs promoting kitsch and junk. These are all the more reasons for rules of artistic craftsmanship that typographic art has been for centuries and will remain so to be disseminated and preserved from oblivion; they should also inspire publishing, artistic, and print-

39 E. Repucho, 'Typografia w przestrzeni cyfrowej...', op. cit., p. 41.

ing circles by showing good models to follow, e.g., the output of the artists who so consciously treated every printed material, and whose work was a search for the dependence between the form and content.

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