

KUBUŠ

# The Bednarczyk duo and their Poets' and Painters' Press

Hidden between covers\*

## Introduction

In publishing, the book cover serves as the first point of interaction with the reader, offering a visual portal to the universe of words and ideas it contains. The art of book cover design transcends mere aesthetics, embodying a fusion of semantics and rhetoric, where visual elements not only convey the subject matter, but also evoke the emotions, expectations and curiosity of potential readers. The Bednarczyk duo, Krystyna and Czesław, founders of the Poets' and Painters' Press in London (*Oficina Poetów i Malarzy*, 1949–2011), exemplify this complex interplay of visual and textual narrative. Beyond a limited circle of specialists, especially in Poland, their editorial and artistic work remains largely unrecognised. Despite the challenges of exile, they achieved a unique harmony of image and language, creating a haven of artistic excellence where the simple yet profound cover designs invited readers into their artistic milieu. The founding of their small press was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of producing artistic prints that were literary and illustrative syntheses created by authors in collaboration with typographers<sup>1</sup>.

This article explores the profound impact of the Bednarczyk duo on the art of book design and publishing, highlighting how their innovative use of visual and topographical elements has redefined aesthetic norms in the industry. Their

approach, characterised by a duality between the visual design and the physical structure of their publications, reveals a dynamic interplay that enhances both thematic expression and reader engagement. By examining this juxtaposition, we gain insight into how they have intricately fused artistic design with spatial layouts to intensify the narrative and thematic depth of their work.

The Poets' and Painters' Press often used very simple, unobtrusive covers. This simplicity became an invitation to look inside their artistic publications. The intention was to emphasise simplicity and typographic prominence (as in the case of the literary quarterly "Oficyna Poetów"), which became its trademark. With their visionary approach to binding, illustration, typography, composition and colour, the Bednarczyks transcended the conventional boundaries of book design. Their publications included works by famous writers and were illustrated by renowned artists from around the world. In particular, they invited Polish émigré artists such as Krystyna Sadowska, Władysław Szomański, Antoni Dobrowolski, Tadeusz Piotrowski, Stanisław Frenkel, Adam Hoffmann, Franciszka Themerson and Krystyna Herling-Grudzińska to collaborate with them. They also played a key role in introducing the then relatively unknown Polish poet Czesław Miłosz to the literary world. As editors of the literary quarterly "Oficyna Poetów" from 1966 to 1980, the Bednarczyk duo published poems by nearly eighty Polish émigré poets and thirty poets from Soviet Poland (Polish People's Republic). In addition to their literary contributions, the publishers also presented artistic reproductions by some fifty Polish and foreign artists<sup>2</sup>.

Among the contributors to the Poets' and Painters' Press was Jan Lebenstein<sup>3</sup>, a celebrated painter and graphic artist famous for his expressive and symbolic style. His work, characterised by metaphorical imagery, evoked a deep sense of emotional drama through spontaneous figuration, avoiding cheap sensationalism. Similarly, Marek Żuławski<sup>4</sup> and Marian Bohusz-Szyszko<sup>5</sup> enriched the publications with their unique artistic styles, each infusing a distinctive visual narrative. Initially influenced by Post-Impressionism, Żuławski's style evolved after the Second World War into a preference for simpler forms and muted colours, reflecting a mature introspection in his art. His works often featured still lifes and figurative art, and spanned various media including painting, drawing and printmaking. Noted

for his expressionist and colourful works, Bohusz-Szyszko incorporated short, layered brushstrokes that hinted at the Kapist movement, with a thematic shift to sacred subjects later in his career. This collective of poetic and introspective approaches gave the Poets' and Painters' Press a contemplative and emotionally rich tone. Complementing this, the distinctive logo designed by Zygmunt Turkiewicz, who had gained recognition within the Polish art community in London for his captivating gouaches and bas-relief collages, became emblematic of the Bednarczyk duo's identity.

What really stands out, however, is the extraordinary partnership between the Bednarczyks and Feliks Topolski, which profoundly shaped both their creative endeavours and their personal lives. This alliance takes on added significance when one considers the reception of Topolski's *Chronicles*, a component of his legacy often overlooked by Western scholars. The relative obscurity of this private Polish publishing press in London is probably a factor in the under-appreciation of this partnership. These dynamic relationships will therefore be the focus of my research. Before delving into specific examples, I will provide a brief overview of the editors' backgrounds and highlight the influential context of Feliks Topolski's experiences. I will also examine the current state of research on Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk's contributions and activities, with the aim of shedding new light on their roles and impact.

The Poets' and Painters' Press often used very simple, unobtrusive covers

## Exploring the research landscape

The renowned poet Julia Hartwig has often emphasised the importance of the Poets' and Painters' Press in the context of Polish culture, not only in Poland, but also abroad. She pointed out that while the names of the Parisian monthly "Kultura" or Radio Free Europe (Radio Wolna Europa) are widely known, today the memory of the Poets' and Painters' Press has faded. There is no comparison of their respective importance, since both "Kultura" and Radio Free Europe were primarily political institutions in addition to their cultural activities. The Bednarczyks, on the other hand, devoted themselves exclusively to culture. They deliberately avoided getting involved in political issues and relied solely on their own work. Their publications focused on poetry, a genre often shunned by publishers because of its perceived lack of commercial appeal<sup>6</sup>. Looking back on the work

of the Bednarczyk duo, it is hard to escape the impression that the London publishers have not yet received the attention and recognition they deserve.

Despite the relative lack of interest in the Bednarczyks ventures, several studies have appeared both in Poland and abroad that shed light on their contributions. Authors such as Andrzej Kłossowski<sup>7</sup>, Mirosław A. Supruniuk<sup>8</sup>, Jolanta Chwastyk-Kowalczyk<sup>9</sup>, Maria Leska<sup>10</sup>, Regina Wasiak-Taylor<sup>11</sup>, Jan Kaczorowski<sup>12</sup> and Justyna Wysocka<sup>13</sup> have examined their work. In the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University, under the direction of Professor Janusz S. Gruchała, there is a section of the Poets' and Painters' Press Archive, which carries out important research into the activities of the Bednarczyk duo<sup>14</sup>.

However, much of the information that has been disseminated has shown inconsistencies, with dates and facts shifting. Some discrepancies, such as the date of Czesław Bednarczyk's arrival in England, have been addressed in his autobiography, *W podmostowej arkadzie. Wspomnienia drukarza i wydawcy*<sup>15</sup>. For example, the editor mentions 1946, while some researchers claim 1947<sup>16</sup>. Clearly, the subject requires a constant commitment to comparative research and fresh perspectives. Nevertheless, researchers are converging in their recognition of the unique value of this legacy. Despite being somewhat overshadowed by the prominence of the Parisian "Kultura", the Bednarczyks managed to publish around a thousand works of poetry and prose. There are discrepancies here due to the different categorisation of editorial work from the actual publishing process, and the application of different time scales to the published works.

In addition to Czesław Bednarczyk's autobiography and the works mentioned above, a number of articles have also drawn attention to the activities of the Poets' and Painters' Press<sup>17</sup>. These contributions offer invaluable insights into the legacy of the Bednarczyk duo, often drawing on previously unpublished information gathered from interviews with the publishers themselves. They aim to contextualise the work of the London-based publishers within historical narratives and to illustrate the dynamic evolution of the Bednarczyks' Poets' and Painters' Press. This transformation saw the emergence of a comprehensive business encompassing publishing, service publishing and printing. It is imperative to outline the chronological development of the Poets' and Painters' Press, which became a vibrant centre of Polish culture abroad.

## Drawing the portraits: Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk

Krystyna (née Brzozowska) was born in 1923 in Warsaw. She graduated from the "Współpraca" private college and then studied painting. She spent the years of the Second World War in occupied Warsaw, joining the ranks of young women involved in the activities of the Polish underground. Although she was mainly involved in the artistic side of publishing at the Poets' and Painters' Press, she was also a poet. She made her debut in the Paris-based "Kultura" in 1951, and her poems appeared in the pages of the literary quarterly "Oficyna Poetów", which she edited. She also published three volumes of poetry: *Obmowy świtów* (1978), *Niedocławane szczęście* (2000) and *Wiersze wybrane* (2005). The Poets' and Painters' Press in London published all of these volumes. From 2005 to 2010, she was the first chairwoman of the Union of Polish Writers Abroad and the editor of the London-based "Pamiętnik Literacki", which, like the former magazine "Oficyna Poetów", began to merge words and images under her leadership. In 2008, in recognition of her contribution to the Polish culture, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Polish University Abroad in London. She passed away in London in 2011.

Born in Kamieniec Podolski in 1912, Czesław had his first encounter with printing in Chełm Lubelski. His introduction to printing began during his college years when he assisted in printing the weekly newspaper "Zwierciadło", operating the handwheel that powered the press. He graduated from the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, the oldest agricultural and natural science university in Poland, its origins dating back to 1816<sup>18</sup>. He took part in the September Campaign, was captured in the Soviet Union and fought as a soldier in the Polish Army in the West.

The idea of creating and publishing his own poetic magazine began in Italy in 1946. In the town of Budrio, near Bologna, where he met his future wife and steadfast collaborator, Krystyna, Czesław Bednarczyk was given the task of editing and publishing a newsletter – "Informator ścienny Batalionu »Żbików« (Lynx Battalion Bulletin)". In later years he recalled:

Gazetkę naszą, jak i inne prace, składano i odbijano ręcznie. Tam też, w tej drukarni, częściowo pojąłem magię drukarstwa. Zrozumiałem, że inaczej czyta się

tekst w rękopisie, inaczej w maszynopisie, a zupełnie inaczej w gotowym już druku<sup>19</sup>.

Our bulletin, like other works, was written and printed by hand. It was there, in that print shop, that I partially understood the magic of printing. I understood that reading a text in manuscript is different from reading it in typescript, and quite different from reading it in the finished print [translated by J. G.].

Although he is best remembered as the editor and publisher of the Poets' and Painters' Press, Czesław Bednarczyk was first and foremost a poet and writer. He made his debut in 1943 in the magazine "Orzeł Biały". His works, like those of Krystyna, appeared in their joint publication as well as in separate volumes. Some of his works saw the light of day only after his death, thanks to the efforts of his wife. He passed away in London in 1994. The following volumes of poetry were published as the part of the activities of the Poets' and Painters' Press: *W walce* (1945), *Ziemia trudna* (1954), *Ob ręce* (1956), *Rdza* (1962), *Rosocha* (1978), *Odrastająca pamięć* (1981), *Z religijnych zamysłów* (1982), *Obrysowane cieniem* (1983), *Szuwary* (1987), *Wiersze wybrane* (1990), *Czy przyjąć musiało?* (1991) and prose: *Kubuś* (1985) and *W podmostowej arkadzie* (1988). In 1972 Czesław Bednarczyk received the Alfred Jurzykowski Prize in New York City for his editorial contributions, and in 1992 he and his wife were honoured with the Włodzimierz Pietrzak Prize in Warsaw, for their significant influence on the literary and artistic community. The Bednarczyks themselves took on the role of benefactors, establishing the Tadeusz Sułkowski Prize for Literature (awarded seven times since 1962). In 2011, in accordance with the will of Krystyna Bednarczyk, co-founder of the Poets' and Painters' Press, they also established the Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk Prize. This prestigious prize is awarded alternately in two categories, literary and graphic, by the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Writers' Association in Kraków.

## From London... to London

Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk arrived in London shortly after the Second World War with dreams of creating exquisite

books<sup>20</sup>. However, they first had to confront the harsh reality of emigration by taking on various manual jobs, including factory work. The beginnings of the Bednarczyks' private presses can be traced back to the turning point between 1948 and 1950.

In 1949, Zygmunt Turkiewicz, the designer behind the graphics of many of the books published by them, created their famous logo, which has become the publishers' trademark. This ornamental stamp, with its distinctive rosette seal and the inscription "Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy", is the epitome of Turkiewicz's unique artistic style. He delved into graffiti, frescoes and collages, some of his creations including bas-relief elements, others being ornamental gouaches. Zygmunt Turkiewicz developed an original painting technique tailored to his own needs, which made him a unique figure among Polish artists working in exile<sup>21</sup>. Subsequently, Turkiewicz's logo graced the pages of the magazine "Oficyna Poetów" as an exclusive decorative element on the fourth cover, which remained from the first to the last issue<sup>22</sup>. As an artist,

Turkiewicz himself took centre stage in one of the magazine's monographic editions in 1968<sup>23</sup>.

The idea of founding a small press was rooted in a collective initiative. According to Bednarczyks' concept, members of an artistic

cooperative of poets, prose writers, and graphic artists would take an active part in the creation of their own books. This included the processes of composition, illustration, duplication, binding, and distribution of the volumes of poems and stories they produced. Finally, with the encouragement of Marian Pankowski, the Bednarczyks decided to set up their own private press, keeping only the name – Poets' and Painters' Press/Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy. It was modelled on the publishers was Rudolf Wegner's pre-war Polish publishing house, which promoted books characterised by their content and aesthetic appeal. It also drew inspiration from the publishing efforts of Stanisław Wyspiański and Anatol Girs' pre-war Warsaw publishing house.

In the late 1950s, the Bednarczyks moved into modest quarters in the Dom Pisarza (Polish Writers' House) on Finchley Road. This "Polish hotel" was owned by the Union of Polish Writers Abroad, and managed at the time by Tadeusz Sułkowski. There they set up a small "printing press". Encouraged by Stanisław Gliwa, a typographer residing in the same house, they began with low-scale projects such as business cards, obituaries, and invitations. Shortly afterward,

## Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk arrived in London shortly after the Second World War

they relocated with Gliwa to Mabledon Park. While Gliwa conducted rehabilitation sessions in a Polish mental health hospital, teaching patients printing skills, the Bednarczyks engaged in manual labour, refining their publishing and printing skills in their spare time. They published the book for Bronisław Przyłuski, titled *Akord*, adorned with linocuts by Aleksander Werner. In 1952, they also published *Poems* by Federico García Lorca, translated into Polish by Jan Winczakiewicz, with a linocut by Stefan Baran. However, over time, their trajectories with Gliwa diverged<sup>24</sup>.

For a while, the Bednarczyk duo collaborated with the English publisher Ezra Pound – Peter Russell, and the

subsequent move to Tunbridge Wells. At that time, they concentrated mainly on English titles, but not limited to them. They took on two distinct types of projects: producing layout and printing services for professional publishers, and simultaneously undertaking comprehensive editorial work on texts, integrating their own graphics for institutions like the Polish University Abroad (PUNO). Several more Polish books saw the light of day in 1952: *Liryka szwedzka. Antologia* edited by Łukasz Winiarski, with graphics design by Stefan Baran, Bror Hjorth, Börje Veslen and others; poems by Józefa Radzymińska entitled *Dzika perła* with linocuts by Krystyna Herling-Grudzińska; *Paryż* by Tymon Terlecki with drawings



Fig. 1. Left: The emblem of the Poets' and Painters' Press (Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy) designed by Z. Turkiewicz. Right, above: the title page of a book by C. Bednarczyk with Turkiewicz's logo and a portrait of the poet by F. Topolski. Below: cover of the magazine "Oficyna Poetów" with Turkiewicz's logo on the back (from the collection of J. Gorzkowicz)

by Marian Bohusz-Szysko; *Wiersze i pieśni Powstania Warszawskiego* edited by Andrzej Pomian<sup>25</sup>. Finally, while working on Stefania Zahorska's book, their paths crossed with Feliks Topolski, by then a well-known illustrator of the works of George Bernard Shaw, among others, and an artist appreciated by the British Royal family<sup>26</sup>.

The following years were a transformative time for the Bednarczyk duo. They began a productive collaboration with Topolski, which led to a lifelong friendship. Returning to the Writer's House in London, they received support from Topolski, who had recently secured access to the arches of the South Bank Art Centre under Hungerford Bridge, near Waterloo Station, for his own studio. This enabled the Bednarczyks to obtain permission in 1954 to install presses in the arches of the adjacent Charing Cross railway bridge.

Orders poured in from all over the world, with writers paying for the publishing and printing services. Czesław Bednarczyk would occasionally joke: "My dear, we are profiting from vice"<sup>27</sup>. Despite constant financial difficulties, they continued to invest in their printing works. In the arches of the bridge, they installed three Linotype machines, two high-speed electric presses, an ink-mixing room, a machine for wire-binding brochures, a guillotine, a sheet-folding machine and a small monotype press.

It was on this press that Krystyna Bednarczyk meticulously assembled particularly ceremonial prints.

In 1961, the Bednarczyks bought a house in north-west London, which became an important centre for poets and writers, hosting numerous literary meetings and writers' evenings. These events, like the arches under the bridge, are documented in the memoirs and testimonies of figures such as Kazimierz Wierzyński, Artur Międzyrzecki, Jan Rostworowski, Aleksander Janta, Zbigniew Herbert and Tadeusz Różewicz.

Between 1966 and 1980, the Poets' and Painters' Press published a quarterly magazine in a medium format (32 × 23 cm) – "Oficyna Poetów". This publication was dedicated to Polish poetry, regardless of its geographical origin. It often included artistic inserts with reproductions of paintings, graphics, sculptures and jewellery. In addition, between 1970 and the following three years, an irregular appendix to the magazine was published – the *Polish Poetry Supplement*, containing translations of Polish poetry into English. The magazine is worthy of individual study, and indeed it has been extensively researched, particularly in the field of press studies<sup>28</sup>.

The decision to close the printing house under the bridge was finally taken in 1991. Today there is no trace of it in London's architectural landscape. However, the Union of Polish Writers Abroad is working hard to get a plaque erected on the site. The publishing house continued to operate for another ten years or so, although the typesetting and layout processes had already been converted to digital methods<sup>29</sup>.

## Artistic Triad – The Bednarczyks and Feliks Topolski

The history of the Poets' and Painters' Press was profoundly shaped by the collaboration between Bednarczyks and Feliks Topolski, who embarked on his innovative *Chronicle* project. Krystyna Bednarczyk emphasised the significance of this alliance on several occasions. Topolski decorated the books published by Poets' and Painters' Press, while the *Chronicles* was published fortnightly in a print run of a thousand copies. The high quality of the *Chronicles'* printing was achieved by using the block technique, which involved making seven or ten colour changes on the same sheet, subjecting it to multiple press runs.

Initially, woodblocks were used, later succeeded by linoleum. Topolski's affinity for the block technique was so profound that the transition to lithography, after years of dedicated practice, left him deeply disheartened<sup>30</sup>.

Before looking at specific works by the artistic triad, it is important to highlight a few key facts from Topolski's biography. Born in Warsaw in 1907, he graduated from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts<sup>31</sup>. While still a student, he contributed drawings to "Cyruлик Warszawski", a satirical literary weekly (1926–1934) founded by the experimental poets of the Skamander group (Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Jan Lechoń). He painted a mural in the hall for the Instytut Promowania Sztuki Nowoczesnej. He also provided illustrations for Julian Tuwim's *Polski słownik pijacki*<sup>32</sup>.

In 1935 Topolski travelled to London to illustrate the celebrations of the coronation of King George V for the "Wiadomości Literackie". He remained in Britain for the rest of his life, quickly gaining recognition and popularity in the local artistic community. He set up a studio near Waterloo Station, which still houses a permanent exhibition of his work. He passed away in London in 1989. He was

The decision to close the printing house under the bridge was finally taken in 1991



Fig. 2. S. Zahorska, *Stacja Abbesses*, graphic layout and drawings by F. Topolski, Poets' and Painters' Press, Tonbridge 1952, illustrations format 13 × 19.5 cm (from the collection of J. Gorzkowicz)

particularly involved in mural painting; including a monumental 180 metre long series of paintings titled *Memoir of the Century*, on display in his former studio, and was also active in the field of artistic reportage<sup>33</sup>.

Reproductions of his drawings and paintings adorn ten Polish and about fifty foreign books. The literary works illustrated by Topolski ranged in genre from poetic texts and poems to dramas, novellas, short stories, historical texts, biographies and the author's own publications (autobiography, drawing reports, memoirs, albums). Topolski's favourite drawing techniques were pencil, graphite, charcoal and ink<sup>34</sup>.

The first fruits of the artistic triad's collaboration can be seen in the short stories by Stefania Zahorska (*Stacja Abbesses*). The collection was topographically designed by Topolski, who also created a drawing for the cover and six interior illustrations. These images are characterised by their expressiveness and phantasmagoric qualities, evoking a mood reminiscent of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's (known as Witkacy) works and the ambience of dreams or drug-induced visions<sup>35</sup>.

This marked the beginning of their great artistic expedition, which paved the way for the famous creation of *Topolski's Chronicle*, a project that unfolded over a decade under changing circumstances. The first edition of the four-page fortnightly publication, printed in a thousand copies, was produced by the Poets' and Painters' Press in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of the British Queen Elizabeth II. These were beautifully large-format copies, bound in cardboard bindings in folders bearing the title, year and small draw. Within the *Chronicles*, Topolski brought pivotal global events to life and immortalised over a hundred notable figures. This periodical served as his canvas for sharing reflections on people, politics, and events. Topolski's audacious, slightly satirical graphic style manifests in panoramic vistas and meticulously rendered minutiae.

While colour was used sparingly in his illustrative work, it played a central role in his compositions. The illustrations often found their place on large fold-out sheets, sometimes spanning multiple folds. In some editions, a rectangular



format was adopted, with one long side measuring up to 2 or 3 metres. *Topolski's Chronicle* series achieved significant recognition, winning several awards for its meticulous layout and printing, including a prestigious gold medal in New York.

The mutual agreement between the publishers and the now established British artist was clear: Topolski would provide the intricate drawings and plates, while they would oversee the elaborate production process. However, as costs escalated, the joint publishing venture reached a point of dissolution. Despite this, Topolski persevered with his *Chronicles* for a few more years, having already parted ways with the services of the Bednarczyk duo and manual typesetting. Remarkably, their deep-rooted friendship endured even in the face of these challenges<sup>36</sup>.

The artistic trio's collaboration continued to flourish, encompassing a range of smaller projects. In 1961, on the commemoration of Tadeusz Sułkowski's passing, Poets' and Painters' Press unveiled two volumes of his works, illustrated

by Topolski. This literary duo featured a collection of poetry *Dom złoty* and the dramatic piece *Tarcza*. In 1971, the Poets' and Painters' Press also introduced Aleksander Janta-Pończyński's work *Przestroga dla wnuków*, graced by Topolski's artistic touch on its cover.

Shortly before Topolski's demise in 1989, a collection of stories by Czesław Bednarczyk *Kubuś* was published, dedicated to his beloved cat. This book brilliantly showcased Topolski's illustrations, both on the cover and throughout the pages.

Thanks to the generosity of Topolski's heirs, his artistic drawings found a place in subsequent volumes of Czesław Bednarczyk's poems. In particular, *Czy przyjść musiało* from 1991 featured a portrait of the author, and the books published by Krystyna Bednarczyk after her husband's passing, amongst them *A Year Later: Selected Poems*, enriched with six Topolski drawings, including the cover portrait, and *Wiersze: wybór z lat 1978–1991* in 1997.



Fig. 3. *Topolski's Chronicle* series, London 1953–1963 (from the collection of the Polish Library in London, photo: J. Gorzkowicz)

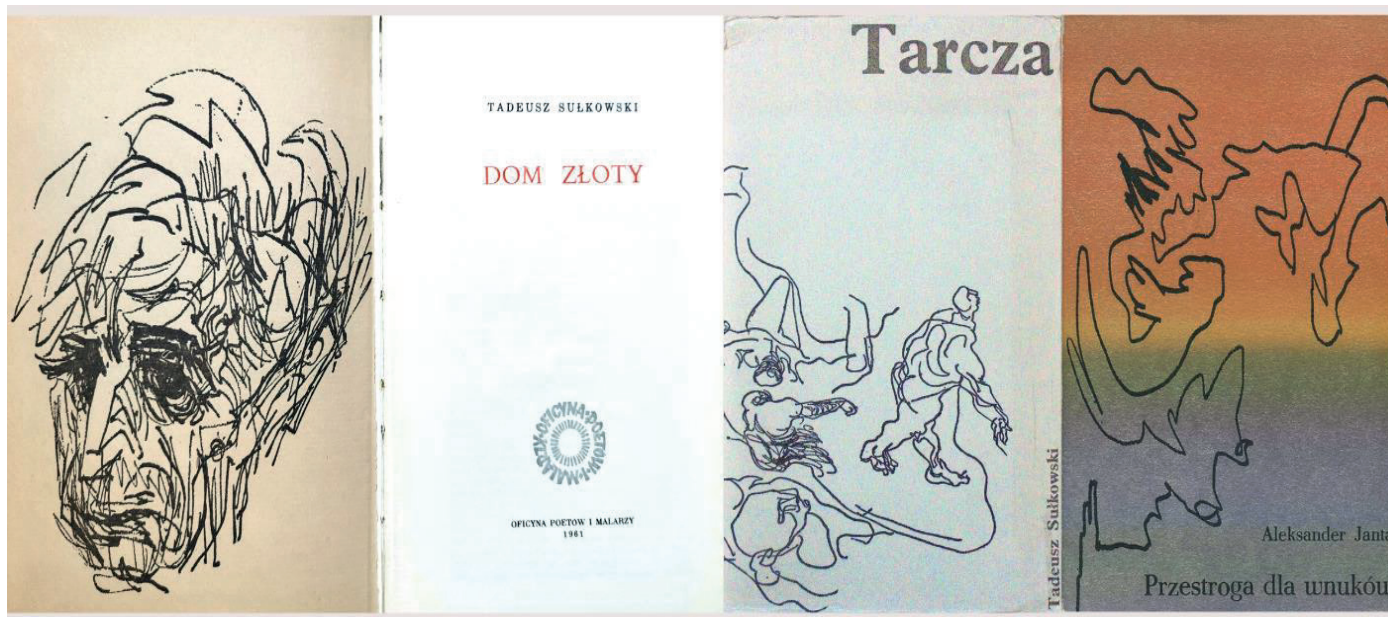


Fig. 4. T. Sułkowski, *Dom złoty* and *Tarcza* (1961), A. Janta-Polczyński, *Przewroga dla wnuków* (1971) – illustrated by F. Topolski (from the collection of J. Gorzkowicz)



Fig. 5. Left: a page from "Oficina Poetów" with poems by K. Bednarczyk and volumes of texts by C. Bednarczyk *Kubus* (1989) and *Czy przyjąć musiało* (1991) – with drawings by F. Topolski (from the collection of J. Gorzkowicz)

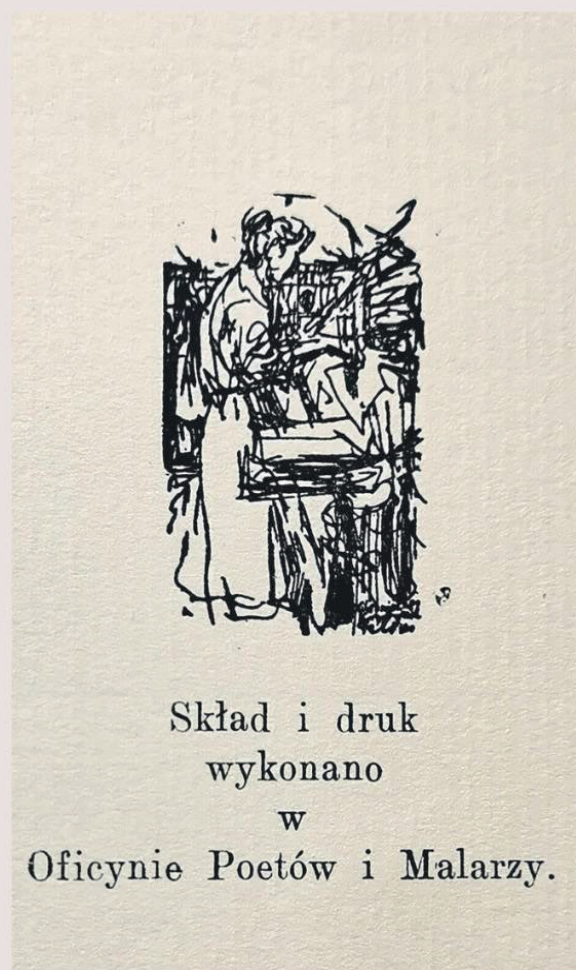


Fig. 6. Left: K. Bednarczyk at the printing press, 146 Bridge Arch, London. Right: Topolski's publishing signet (from R. Wasiak-Taylor collection)

Topolski's creative touch also extended to the publishing seal of the Poets' and Painters' Press, depicting Krystyna Bednarczyk at a manual printing press. This seal adorned the last page of most of the press's printed materials, as well as business cards and catalogue covers.

Another dimension of the artistic trio's output materialised in the form of the quarterly "Oficina Poetów". Although it deserves a full exploration, I will give a brief overview here. Each issue of the magazine was meticulously assembled from sheets measuring 46 × 32 centimetres, carefully folded in half. Initially, these sheets were attached to a slightly sturdier cardboard cover using two metal staples. Over time, this method gave way to glue. Noteworthy among its content were Topolski's portraits of literary figures such as Czesław Miłosz, Harold Pinter, and Tadeusz Różewicz. Certain "Oficina" editions showcased dedicated inserts spotlighting specific artists.

Notably, the second issue of the magazine in 1973 turned its focus to Topolski's work.

The presentations of his pieces were preceded by an introduction from Krystyna Bednarczyk. In it, she wrote that the reproductions of Topolski's works covered only a small part of his paintings, prose, films, reportages, finished or in-progress pieces. The quest for new artistic expressions no longer fits within the confines of a single Topolski. Most strongly resonates the Topolski for whom the fate of humanity and its tragedies are not foreign to him<sup>37</sup>. Important in emphasising the aesthetic dimension of the artworks presented in the *Supplement* was the magazine's layout. In addition to the standard cream paper, colour pages were strategically interspersed, often in shades of yellow and grey, as well as more subtle shades such as pale green, blue and khaki. As was the case with Topolski's work, the illustrations in the artistic appendix

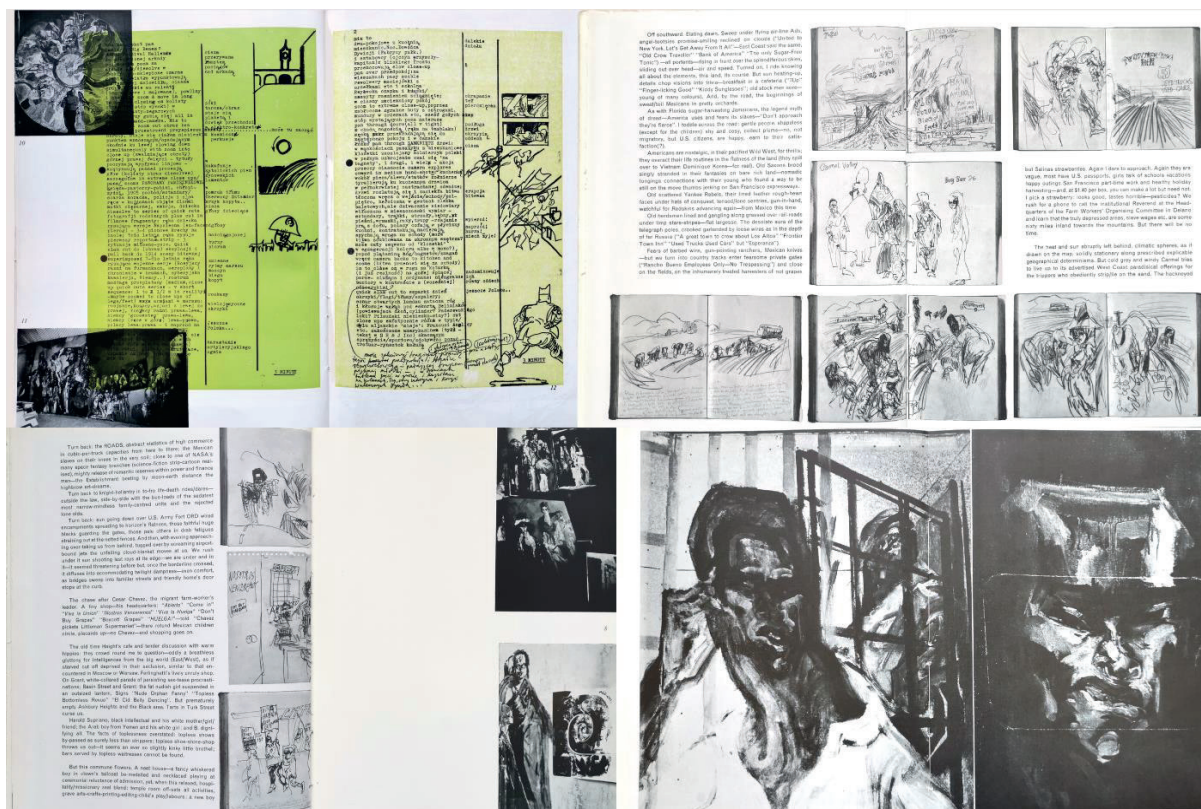


Fig. 7. Exhibition of Topolski's works in a special edition. "Oficina Poetów" 1973, no. 2 (29) (from the collection of J. Gorkowicz)

were often presented on white, heavier chalk paper, creating a striking contrast. Double-break layouts were common in print, especially for poetry and prose in later editions<sup>38</sup>.

## Conclusion

Throughout their career, the Bednarczyk duo faced accusations of eclecticism and a lack of precise editorial criteria from their critics, who claimed that they only published financially motivated and inconsequential material. Supporters, however, countered that their approach was programmatically multi-stylistic and open-minded. Exploring the legacy of the Poets' and Painters' Press reveals a fascinating sphere where artistic vision, literature and human relationships intertwine. Behind the seemingly simple covers of their publications lies a profound meaning, one that encompasses both the expression of art and the complexities of human existence. What may initially appear to be a fusion of literature and art transcends mere aesthetics; the "shadows" that emerge from the publications become more than mere portals to literary realms – they encapsulate the warmth and camaraderie woven into the fabric of the Poets' and Painters' Press.

Beneath the surface, the collaboration between the Bednarczyk duo and acclaimed artist Feliks Topolski grew into a friendship that transcended artistic boundaries and adversity. This bond stimulated a unique artistic approach, reflected in the *Chronicles* project, in which Topolski's intricate drawings capture the essence of history. The synergy of this artistic partnership transcends ink and paper, illuminating the meticulous craftsmanship of Poets' and Painters' Press. Topolski's *Chronicles* showcased not only his skill as a draughtsman, but also the Bednarczyk duo's unwavering dedication to their craft. For a decade, these chronicles offered readers an extraordinary perspective – an intimate window into the world hidden between the covers.

The fusion of the Bednarczyk duo and Feliks Topolski extended art beyond the boundaries of the printed page. Their collaboration transformed the print shop in the underbridge arkade into a special place where visual and textual elements converged to evoke emotion and provoke the reader's curiosity. Here, art transcended the confines of individual pieces; it permeated every facet of their work. Through this collaboration, the Poets' and Painters' Press stood as a testament to the enduring impact of the printed word, revealing the artistic treasures hidden within its folds.

In retrospect, the history of the Poets' and Painters' Press reverberates beyond its textual and artistic achievements. It resonates as a powerful narrative of creative partnership, friendship and an unwavering belief in the power of a shared vision. The legacy they have left behind is not just a testament to their individual creative prowess, but a beacon that illuminates the profound connections that come from the union of artistic minds. A decade after the completion of Feliks Topolski's *Chronicle*, another "exhibition window on the world", as Stanisław Frenkiel put it, emerged from the hands of the Bednarczyk duo. This new path took the form of the first issue of the quarterly "Oficina Poetów i Malarzy". Published in Polish London until 1980, this literary project contained a wealth of fascinating associations – literary, artistic and personal. It was not only a continuation of their legacy, but also a testament to the enduring power of shared creativity, cementing the Bednarczyk duo's role as vibrant conduits of cultural expression.

**Key Words:** Krystyna Bednarczyk, Czesław Bednarczyk, Poets' and Painters' Press, Feliks Topolski, art publishing

**Abstract:** The article introduces the activities of the Polish émigré small press, Poets' and Painters' Press, founded by Krystyna and Czesław Bednarczyk. It highlights their unconventional approach to publishing design, with a particular focus on binding. In this case, the covers not only exemplify visual mastery, but also serve as a key to understanding both literary content and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, forging links between publishers and authors. The Press operated in the London publishing market from 1949 to 2011, producing unique works in which form and content were harmoniously intertwined. Its contribution to the publishing world and its distinctive aesthetic are the focus of this article. Particular attention is paid to the Bednarczyks' collaboration with the acclaimed artist Feliks Topolski.

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<sup>1</sup> *Opium. Z Krystyną i Czesławem Bednarczykami, założycielami i właścicielami Oficyny Poetów i Malarzy rozmawia A. Ziembicki*, „Nowe Książki” 1981, nr 10, p. 1–6; *Historia Oficyny. Krystyna Bednarczyk, Czesław Bednarczyk. Rozmowę przeprowadził M. Pytasz*, „Fraza” 1998, nr 1/2, p. 112–118.

<sup>2</sup> See *Oficina poetów. Bibliografia zawartości: 1–25*, ed. A. Tauber-Ziółkowski, London 1973; *Oficina Poetów i Malarzy, Bibliografia zawartości 26–57*, eds E. and M. Pytasz, London 1996.

<sup>3</sup> J. Bielska-Krawczyk, *Lebenstein – ilustrator. Malarz jako czytelnik, obraz jako lektura*, Kraków 2011.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. Sienkiewicz, *Marian Bohusz-Szysko 1901–1995. Życie i twórczość*, Lublin 1995; idem, *Sztuka w poczekalni. Studia z dziejów plastyki polskiej na emigracji 1939–1989*, Toruń 2012.

<sup>5</sup> M. Żuławski, *Studium do autoportretu*, Toruń–London 2009.

<sup>6</sup> J. Hartwig, *Pisane przy oknie*, Warszawa 2004, p. 139. Cf. idem, *Drukarnia pod mostem*, „Więź” 2004, nr 2, p. 137–140.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kłossowski, *Na obczyźnie. Ludzie polskiej książki*, Wrocław 1984; idem, *Bibliofilstwo polskie za granicą. Wybrane zagadnienia teoretyczne. Organizacje bibliofilskie i oficyny artystyczne*, „Studia o Książce” 1993, nr 19; idem, *Polskie „private” i „small presses” na obczyźnie*, in: *Kultura skupisk polonijnych. Materiały z III sympozjum naukowego*, Warszawa, 12 i 13 maja 1988 r., eds K. Groniowski, A. Kłossowski, W. Stankiewicz, Warszawa 1994; idem, *45 lat Oficyny Poetów i Malarzy z Londynu*, Szczecin 1996; *Literatura polska na obczyźnie 1940–1960*, vol. 1–2, ed. T. Terlecki, London 1965.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kryszak, M. A. Supruniuk, *Oficina Poetów i Malarzy 1949–1991*, Toruń 1992; M. A. Supruniuk, *Dwoje drukarzy godnych ballady. Krystyna Bednarczyk (1923–2011)*, „Archiwum Emigracji. Studia – Szkice – Dokumenty” 2011, nr 1–2; idem, *Pomiędzy podróżą artystyczną a turystyczną wyprawą. Drogi doświadczeń i inspiracji artystycznych na przykładzie życiowych losów i twórczości Feliksa Topolskiego, Marka Żuławskiego i innych artystów polskich zamieszkałych w Londynie w XX wieku*, in: *Turystyka jako dialog kultur*, eds Z. Krawczyk, E. Lewandowska-Tarasiuk, J. W. Sienkiewicz, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>9</sup> J. Chwastyk-Kowalczyk, „Oficina Poetów” – niskowy kwartalnik literacko-artystyczny (1966–1980), „Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 2013, t. 16, z. 2 (32).

<sup>10</sup> M. Leska, *Londyńska Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy Czesława i Krystyny Bednarczyków w latach 1949–1995*, London 1998.

<sup>11</sup> R. Wasiak-Taylor, *Ojczyzna literatura. O środowisku skupionym wokół Związku Pisarzy Polskich na Obczyźnie*, London 2013; eadem, *Czesław i Krystyna Bednarczykowie – wydawcy, drukarze, poeci*, „Zeszyty Naukowe PUNO [Polski Uniwersytet na Obczyźnie w Londynie]” 2013, nr 1.

<sup>12</sup> J. Kaczorowski, *Gdy treść i forma idą w parze. O edytorskich i estetycznych walorach czasopisma „Oficina Poetów” wydawanego w Londynie w latach 1966–1980*, „Studia o Książce i Informacji” 2017, nr 36, DOI: 10.19195/2300-7729.36.9.

<sup>13</sup> J. Wysocka, *Wykaz publikacji Oficyny Poetów i Malarzy 1950–2007*, Kraków 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Pracownia – Archiwum Oficyny Poetów i Malarzy [webside: Katedra Edytorstwa i Nauk Pomocniczych UJ], <http://www.edytorstwo.polonistyka.uj.edu.pl/oficina-poetow-i-malarzy> (accessed: 20.08.2023). See: Publishing series et. *Materiały do dziejów Oficyny Poetów i Malarzy*, ed. J. S. Gruchała. Published so far five volumes: J. Wysocka, op. cit.; S. Laks, K. i C. Bednarczykowie, *Korespondencja*, ed. J. Malik, Kraków 2018; M. Pankowski, K. i C. Bednarczykowie, *Korespondencja*, ed. E. Cybińska, J. S. Gruchała, Kraków 2018; *Listy jako wezwanie dla edytora*, ed. J. S. Gruchała, Kraków 2019; C. Miłosz, K. i C. Bednarczykowie, *Korespondencja*, ed. G. Fijas, Kraków 2021.

<sup>15</sup> C. Bednarczyk, *W podmostowej arkadzie. Wspomnienia drukarza i wydawcy*, London 1988.

<sup>16</sup> J. W. Sienkiewicz, *Londyńska „Oficina Poetów i Malarzy”*, 2016, <https://www.cultureave.com/londyńska-oficina-poetow-i-malarzy/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>17</sup> See inter alia: E. Pytasz, M. Pytasz, *Bednarczykowie jako wydawcy (rekoncesans)*, in: *Pisarz na obczyźnie*, eds T. Bujnicki, W. Wyskiel, Wrocław 1985; I. Janas, *Polskie firmy wydawnicze w Wielkiej Brytanii po II wojnie światowej (1845–1985)*, „Rocznik Biblioteki Narodowej” 1985–1986, vol. 21–22, Warszawa 1990; A. Kasprzycka, *O działalności niektórych polskich wydawnictw w Wielkiej Brytanii*, „Polonistyka” 1990, nr 4; K. Dybiak, *Panorama literatury na obczyźnie*, Kraków 1990; T. Radzik, *Z dziejów społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii po drugiej wojnie światowej (1945–1990)*, Lublin 1991; M. Danilewicz-Zielińska, *Szkice o literaturze emigracyjnej*, Wrocław 1992; W. Cieśla, *Książka to kruche narzędzie*, „Dziennik Polski”, 5 II 1998; M. Pytasz, *Wygnanie – emigracja – diaspora. Poeta w poszukiwaniu czytelnika*, Katowice 1998; R. Habielski, *Polski Londyn*, Wrocław 2000; A. Kochończyk, *Piękne książki Bednarczyków*, „Akcent” 2004, nr 1/2.

<sup>18</sup> Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Warszawie, webside: <https://www.sggw.edu.pl/en/home/university/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>19</sup> C. Bednarczyk, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> The description of the Bednarczyks' lives and activities is based mainly on the findings of Regina Taylor and Mirosław A. Supruniuk.

<sup>21</sup> J. W. Sienkiewicz, *Artyści Andersa*, Toruń 2016.

<sup>22</sup> R. Wasiak-Taylor, *Czesław i Krystyna Bednarczykowie*.

<sup>23</sup> „Oficina Poetów” 1968, nr 4 (11). According to Jan Kaczorowski's findings, such monographic presentations in the „Oficina Poetów” have been enjoyed by, among others: Feliks Topolski, Franciszka Themerson, Marek Żuławski, Tadeusz Piotrowski, Stanisław Frenkiel, Gaber Rechowicz, Adam Hoffmann, Tadeusz Koper, Stanisław Eleszkiewicz, Aleksander Werner, Edward Koniuszy, Władysław Szomański, Halina Sukiennicka, Władysław and Irena Fusek-Forosiewicz, Zdzisław Ruszkowski, Jan Lebenstein, Mieczysław Paszkiewicz, Krystyna Sadowska, Krystyna Marek-Święcicka. There were also occasional presentations of the works of foreign graphic artists, painters, sculptors and illustrators, such as Wyndham

Lewis, Georges Rouault, Jacques Bellange, Michel Seuphor, Sabine Vess. See J. Kaczorowski, *Gdy treść i forma idą w parze*, p. 170–171.

<sup>24</sup> A. Kłossowski, *Bibliofilstwo polskie za granicą*, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> R. Wasiak-Taylor, *Czesław i Krystyna Bednarczykowie*, p. 136. Cf. *Książki/Books*, in: *The Virtual Archive of the Poets' and Painters' Press/Oficina Poetów i Malarzy*, <https://opim.yum.pl/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>26</sup> F. Topolski, *Fourteen Letters: Feliks Topolski Autobiography*, London 1988.

<sup>27</sup> C. Bednarczyk, op. cit.; R. Wasiak-Taylor, *Czesław i Krystyna Bednarczykowie*.

<sup>28</sup> J. Kaczorowski, *Gdy treść i forma idą w parze*, p. 155–177.

<sup>29</sup> R. Wasiak-Taylor, „Przedłużył mi życie”. *Krystyna Bednarczyk prezesem Związku Pisarzy Polskich na Obczyźnie*, lecture presented at the international academic conference dedicated to the activities of the Poets' and Painters' Press: *Wokół Oficyny. Twórcy związani z londyńskim wydawnictwem Krystyny i Czesława Bednarczyków* [UJ – Union of Polish Writers Abroad], Kraków 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. W. Sienkiewicz, *Londyńska „Oficina Poetów i Malarzy”*, <https://www.cultureave.com/londyńska-oficina-poetow-i-malarzy/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>31</sup> F. Topolski, op. cit., p. 2–8 and others.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> J. Kaczorowski, *Feliks Topolski jako ilustrator i artysta książki*, „Studia o Książce i Informacji” 2012, nr 31, p. 29–67; Topolski Studio, <https://topolskicentury.org.uk/> (accessed: 20.08.2023); *Feliks Topolski (1907–1989), Artist*, National Portrait Gallery, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?search=ss&firstRun=true&stText=topolski&linkID=mp07899> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>35</sup> J. Kaczorowski, *Feliks Topolski jako ilustrator*.

<sup>36</sup> R. Wasiak-Taylor, *Czesław i Krystyna Bednarczykowie*.

<sup>37</sup> „Oficina Poetów” 1973, nr 2 (29).

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem; J. Kaczorowski, *Gdy treść i forma idą w parze*, p. 155–171.