

## Jożef Grycz (1890-1954) – An Appreciation

Tim Larson

In the history of Polish libraries and librarianship in the twentieth century, no individual achieved such prominence or exerted so much influence as Józef Grycz, being called the leading figure in Polish libraries of the first half of the century<sup>1</sup> and the organizer of modern Polish librarianship<sup>2</sup>. Grycz was active at a pivotal stage in Polish library history from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s. The period began with libraries still independent storehouses of scholarly information not meant for broad public access and with no overall organization or standardization. During the war and German occupation, their very survival remained at stake due to staggering losses. After the war, they underwent a rapid transformation into modern, public service minded institutions with national level organization and networking, staffed by trained library professionals, and regulated according to centralized policy. While many librarians and library leaders were responsible for saving them during the war and bringing about this modernization, none played a more important role than Józef Grycz.

The following sketch of his life and works addresses an important gap in the literature on Grycz: the total lack of material in English. Grycz scholarship is exclusively in Polish, and its quantity is minimal. There is much more written by Grycz than about him. In 1961, the Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library) issued a festschrift in Grycz's honor, which serves as the most comprehensive source about his life and works. This introduction is based largely on Bogdan Horodyski's extensive biographical portrait<sup>3</sup> in this volume. Grycz's letters have appeared in two recent volumes about Polish librarianship during the first half of the twentieth century, one covering 1925 to 1951<sup>4</sup> and the other 1939 to 1945.<sup>5</sup> Then there are Grycz's own myriad writings, many of which represent important contributions to the literature on practical

librarianship and the history of libraries. They include several books, numerous articles in Polish library journals, conference presentations, lectures and course instructions, and perhaps most useful for their historical value, his letters.

This essay will focus on the four main periods of his life and his writings within each period. What emerges from a review of Grycz's life and work is a lesson in the importance of three major concepts in librarianship - standardization of practice in library services, training and education of library staff, and the library's chief responsibility to serve the public. Grycz, a true champion of the professional librarian, was not only a master practitioner of virtually all aspects of librarianship, but also deserves to be considered among the great teachers of librarianship in the last century.

#### **From Local Bookstore Owner to Professional Librarian (1890-1929)**

Grycz was born on December 11, 1890, in Zebrzydowice, a town in the Cieszyn region. As his father was a folk teacher, Grycz grew up with constant exposure to Silesian folklore. Horodyski maintains that this exposure instilled in Grycz a deep patriotism and interest in the welfare of the common people.<sup>6</sup> Though the town was in a sector of Poland controlled by Germany, he chose to attend a Polish gymnasium.

He received his later education in Germanic studies and classical philology at Jagiellonian University, then in Berlin, and finally in Vienna, where in 1915, he completed his doctoral studies in German philology; his true interest remained libraries. He returned to Poland, and tried to get a job at the Jagiellonian Library. Due to financial difficulties the library could not afford to pay him, so, in 1916, he volunteered and supported himself by giving evening lectures. Without a steady income he had to leave the library after only a year. In 1917, he found work at the Kraków bookstore and publishing house of Marian Krzyzanowski. Due to his

intelligence and industriousness, he quickly rose through the ranks from apprentice to the owner's second in command.

In 1920, Grycz opened his own bookstore "Księgarnia Podhalańska" in Zakopane. He used his Kraków experience to develop the enterprise that even extended its operations into publishing. Since his real love remained libraries, however, he left the bookstore and returned to Kraków to continue volunteer work at the Jagiellonian Library. In 1922, Grycz finally achieved a permanent position. Thus began a thirty-two year career in professional library work that would achieve historic significance.

Horodyski provides a succinct description of the shortcomings of Polish libraries at this stage in their development.<sup>7</sup> He emphasizes their disjointedness with each library run according to its own rules. No true "state" libraries existed, with the closest being the three major university libraries in Kraków, Lwów, and Warsaw. Of these, only the Jagiellonian and the Lwów libraries held Polish collections substantial enough to be called Polish. All libraries were run according to traditions handed down orally, and there were no standards of practice, no written guidelines, and no cataloging rules.

Soon after his appointment as a librarian at the Jagiellonian, Grycz became involved in reforms. As director of the library's main reading room, he supervised a project to improve it with the intent of following British and German models by acquiring the most important basic books in various areas of knowledge. Grycz compiled a catalog of this collection designed to familiarize students with the organization of the library's catalogs, as well as to give them a review of the contents of the basic books. He also wrote, in 1925, a user's guide, *Przewodnik dla korzystających z bibliotek oraz spis dzieł pomocniczych* (Guide for Library Users and List of Finding Aids), which proved to be highly useful to the library's patrons, and is recognized as one

of the first of its kind in Poland. Not just a guide, the *Przewodnik* emerged as a polemical document where Grycz put forth his conviction that libraries should serve not only to help students in their coursework, but also to educate young scholars in the area of library information with the intent of attracting them to careers in library science.

Throughout his account of Grycz's life, Horodyski injects observations about the man's reputation and character. While at Jagiellonian Library from 1922-1928, Grycz became known for being a cataloging authority and an organizer of library administration. He also had a reputation for good humor and comradery with other librarians.<sup>8</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ Grycz also actively worked in the circle of the Polish Libraries Union and the Society of Book Lovers in Kraków, becoming its director of publications. During this period, he also helped to establish the well known Polish library journal *Przegląd Biblioteczny* (Library Review).

\_\_\_\_\_ From 1928 to 1929, Grycz held the directorship of the library at the castle in Kórnik with its rich collection of books acquired by the Działyński family. As director, he endeavored to make the collections more accessible to users and to popularize them. Under his leadership, he remodeled the library rooms, organized the reading room collection, and set up exhibits of the most valuable items. Grycz also founded and edited the first issue of *Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej* (Diary of the Kórnik Library), which first appeared in 1929.

### **First Activities at the National Level (1929-1939)**

While still at the Jagiellonian, Grycz's concern grew about the lack of standardized cataloging rules for Polish libraries. His efforts to bring about a standard set of rules would occupy several decades of his life leading to his first publication on this issue written in 1924, "O polskie przepisy katalogowania" (About Polish Cataloging Rules). In it he argued that

cataloging rules should serve not only to help a librarian catalog a work, but, above all, allow the patron to quickly and easily find the work in the catalog. Horodyski points out this revolutionary viewpoint for the time.<sup>9</sup>

During the period 1925 to 1934, Grycz worked on a campaign to develop standardized cataloging rules. In 1926, he spoke on the need for unification of cataloging rules of various libraries at the Second Conference of Polish Bibliophiles, and produced *Porównanie polskich przepisów katalogowania* (A Comparison of Polish Cataloging Rules). His view entailed that no existing set of rules could be made the standard, but that each had enough in common that a standardized set of rules could be achieved.<sup>10</sup>

The conference agreed that a standard for Polish scientific libraries should be worked out by the Department of State Libraries of the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment. The ministry commissioned Grycz to write it which led to the 1927 *Zasadnicze wytyczne polskich przepisów katalogowania* (Guiding Principles of Polish Cataloging Rules). The Department of State Libraries accepted the principles, but the libraries themselves proved reluctant to adopt them. In an effort to bring greater understanding to the complexity of the task of creating standardized rules for Polish libraries, Grycz wrote about cataloging rules in foreign libraries in “*Porównanie zagranicznych przepisów katalogowania*” (A Comparison of Foreign Cataloging Rules), where he compared the Prussian, Anglo-American, French, Italian, and Czech cataloging codes. Later, in 1934, he compared the variety of rules in Polish libraries in “*Prepisy katalogowania w bibliotekach polskich*” (Cataloging Rules in Polish Libraries).

Grycz wanted standardization of cataloging rules, but did not want to alienate individual libraries. He favored a cooperative approach that would yield a standard in which all libraries had a voice and so would follow. In 1929, he proposed that each library review its cataloging

practices and undertake changes and improvements. The Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment would oversee an improvement project in which thirteen scientific libraries took part. Grycz prepared the guidelines for this project, and directed two more such projects in 1931 and 1932. In 1933, a conference of library directors discussed the results leading to a fourth unification project in 1933. The final set of rules appeared in 1934, meant to govern all Polish state libraries: *Przepisy katalogowania w bibliotekach polskich. I. Alfabetyczny katalog druków* (Cataloging Rules in Polish Libraries, I. Alphabetical Catalog) with all libraries receiving it. As editor, Grycz attached a brief guide to the implementation of these rules and solicited from libraries any accounts of problems or difficulties in adopting these rules. Grycz's leadership in this process led to his appointment, in 1930, as an administrator in the division of scientific libraries in the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment.

Grycz's next big achievement soon came. In 1930, working with Stefan Denby, he co-founded the Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library). Previously, the national library concept had been approved in 1918 as a government institution, but realization with a building to house collections, an administration, and staffing did not occur until 1930. Grycz brought about the organization of the National Library's collections and consolidated them into a single building in Warsaw initially holding over 300,000 volumes. As co-director of the library with Denby, Grycz took the initiative to set out a far reaching program for all phases of the library's operations. He revealed this program in the 1931 article "Biblioteka Narodowa na drugim etapie działalności" (The National Library in the Second Stage of Its Activity) as well as in other articles and presentations before the Union of Polish Librarians. Highlights of the plan included the following recommendations: 1) planned growth of the library's collections; 2) an update of the required depository copy rule; 3) registration of the production of publishers; 4) instead of

overcentralization in the National Library, certain responsibilities would be delegated to a national network of libraries; 5) the weekly printing and distribution of catalog cards and publication and distribution of semiannual and five year bibliographies; and 6) a central card catalog of state libraries which would become the central information bureau of the National Library.

In 1934, he received a nomination to be the National Library Director, but instead assumed the position of director of the division of scientific libraries within the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment. As such, he came in closer contact with all Polish libraries and also with the Council of the Union of Polish Librarians. The same year, Grycz saw two facets of his vision for the Polish libraries become reality: the Polish parliament passed the library depository law setting up a list of libraries having responsibility to collect and register all newly published materials and also outlining rules for the library handling of those materials. Secondly, the aforementioned enactment of the standard Polish cataloging rules occurred.

Another issue of utmost importance to Grycz was the training of professional librarians. He believed that not enough library leaders tried to interest people in library work. He complained to the Polish Union of Librarians about the lack of awareness in librarianship among the employees of the nation's libraries<sup>11</sup>.

This concern for general librarianship influenced his recommendations for a training program based not just on theory but also practice. In 1930, he wrote a systematic library instruction program for an intermediate course for librarianship students, "O kursy bibliotekarskie" (Concerning Courses for Librarians), on providing access to collections. The emphasis focused on the attitude of the librarian to the reader, an approach which diverged from the then dominant object centered view of the librarian, who specializes in the academic area

served by the collection.<sup>12</sup> Again Grycz stood for standardization of practice. He favored training courses and methods for all library employees, not just specialists and employees of scientific libraries. Though his standard curriculum failed to be adopted, Grycz nevertheless played an important role in bringing about the first standardized state examination for librarians, initially administered in 1931.

Another facet of his vision of Polish libraries resulted in a national library law. Grycz believed that state regulations should cover all libraries, including university libraries, and they should regulate collections and labor. They should also be authored by the librarians themselves, since they know best the needs of their patrons. Grycz felt that such a law would lead to planned publishing and a rationally organized distribution of books, and help to eliminate the chaos caused by years in which libraries developed on their own without organizational uniformity or cooperation. Unfortunately, he had to wait until after the war to see his national library law dream become a reality.

Grycz expressed great interest in librarianship outside of Poland. He read much foreign literature on the subject, and from 1935 to 1938, he traveled abroad to visit other libraries and attend international conferences. During a ten week span in 1935, he visited larger libraries in Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. In 1937, he represented the Union of Polish Librarians at a conference of the International Normalization Commission dealing with issues of librarianship and book and serial publishing since the Polish union had entrusted Grycz with the task of organizing a Polish normalization commission. In 1936, he gave a report on Polish libraries at a conference in Paris of the International Committee of Libraries. Also in Paris, he attended a conference on a topic new to librarianship at the time – documentation. He last journeyed to Brussels in 1938, attending the second conference of the



International Conference of Librarians where he discussed a new technology – microfilm and its role in libraries. His article “Zagadnienie fotografii w bibliotekarstwie” (Issues Regarding Photography in Librarianship) was the first on the subject in Polish professional literature.

### **Saving Polish Library Collections During the German Occupation (1939-1945)**

Even before the German invasion of 1939, Grycz worked to protect libraries in the event of war. He remained at his post in the building of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education night and day to direct efforts to save the library collections in Warsaw. He continued these efforts even after the government had fled.

Meanwhile, the Germans closed the National Library, and ordered Grycz to serve as a translator in the city administrative offices. His real activity, however, was to give lectures at a conspiratorial gymnasium of Warsaw merchants organized by Stefan Zólkiewski and Włodzimierz Michajłow. At the same time, he served as a member of the underground group of librarians dedicated to preserving Polish library collections where he secretly registered losses from Polish libraries. His personal contacts with librarians throughout the country, gained from his work in the Ministry of Education, aided him in this inventory work.

In 1940, the Germans ordered him to direct the National Library. Horodyski notes that these were the most stressful and exhausting times of his life. The German library authorities strictly controlled his activities while being under constant suspicion as a collaborator with the Polish resistance.

As director, Grycz determined to save the collections of the National Library, but this proved to be no easy task. The Germans had their own plans for the National Library and the other major libraries in Warsaw. They wanted to make the National Library an archival collection and cease new acquisitions with the developing collection to become the library of

Warsaw University for Germans only. Both the former National Library and Warsaw University Library became the Staatsbibliothek Warschau to which were added the collections of the Krasieński Library. The three collections were to be moved into three buildings according to the following scheme: Division I, general collections and science at Warsaw University; Division II, Polonica at the National Library; and Division III, special collections at the Krasieński Library.

He tried unsuccessfully to discourage the German authorities from these moves due to time and effort, but realized that not cooperating could mean further destruction and breakup of the collections. Instead, he worked to record the transfers as accurately as possible in order to facilitate the return of transferred volumes to their original location after the war. At the same time, he succeeded in getting the German authorities to allow additions to the National Library collections with valuable contributions, such as rich private collections and autographed first editions of Henryk Sienkiewicz and Waclaw Berent. Grycz also won the right to store and protect book collections in the National Library abandoned by government institutions, including the private collections of government leaders, collections from Warsaw schools, collections of private citizens sent to death camps, Jewish reading room collections, and the liquidated stocks of publishing houses.

During the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, Grycz spent much time in the National Library building and helped save parts of its collections from fire. On Nov. 25, 1944, he was forced to leave Warsaw. He went to the small town of Pruszków not far from Warsaw, where he directed the evacuation of library collections from the burned out city. For Grycz, in fragile health, the work proved quite taxing as it had to be done in bitter cold. It involved loading and transporting volumes in an open army truck and spending whole days in a windowless warehouse in Pruszków where the books were stored. He described these perilous times in "Dzienniczek z

okresu powstania warszawskiego 1944 r.” (“A Diary of the Time of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944”).

Throughout this period of personal danger and discomfort, Grycz did not waver in his efforts on behalf of libraries. He wrote to fellow librarian Adam Łysakowski in December 1943:

We will not be idle or postpone the work for our libraries. We will build, or rather prepare the building of a new library structure, legal foundation, labor regulations, reconstruction of the book and book collections, retrieval and augmentation of lost and damaged materials. We will think about our future colleagues.<sup>13</sup>

It is remarkable that during this time Grycz kept up his writings on library matters. He finished the first draft of a practical guide to library work that could serve librarians of all types, *Bibliotekarstwo praktyczne w zarysie. Podręcznik i poradnik* (An Outline of Practical Librarianship. Handbook and Guide). It became the first such practical guide of modern librarianship for Polish libraries.

With Warsaw emancipated in January 1945, the next month saw Grycz returning to the city to oversee the care and return of the Pruszków books, as well as books stored in Warsaw warehouses. The secret inventory work of Grycz and other librarians resulted in the return to their original Polish libraries of many collections carted off to Germany, Austria, and other Western countries.

### **Rise to National Director of Libraries (1945-1954)**

The Germans caused incalculable damage to Poland’s libraries and book collections. Wolosz reports that before the war Poland’s libraries held 22.6 million volumes. Only one third, or 7.5 million volumes, survived. The heaviest losses occurred in general access and school libraries where only 7% survived. Though science libraries lost a smaller percentage of their pre-war holdings with 2.5 million items destroyed, their loss incurred more damage to Polish

culture since among them were the most valuable manuscripts, old prints, drawings, maps, and music scores.<sup>14</sup>

When the Polish government leaders returned from exile they assigned a high priority to education and culture. Wołosz writes, “Emphasis was laid on libraries as major instruments in transforming the social mind, in expanding culture, science, education, and the national economy at large.”<sup>15</sup> The Polish government looked to Grycz for leadership in the library reconstruction effort. In April 1945, he became an inspector in the Division of Libraries of the Ministry of Education. In the same year, the ministry sought to develop a national library law, and based it on principals established by Grycz in the 1930s: 1) The recognition of library as the cultural property of the nation; 2) the creation of a nationwide network of school, public, and science libraries; and 3) the centralization of policy making for libraries of all types in the Ministry of Education.<sup>16</sup> The government passed the new law on libraries and the protection of library collections in April 1946. Thus, Grycz’s dream became a reality.

In the Division of Libraries, Grycz devoted all his efforts toward salvaging books and libraries. Many books had been removed to warehouses and bookstores while others fell into the hands of people who did not realize their value and sold them at a fraction of their worth. The records Grycz kept proved indispensable in relocating volumes.

In March 1946, Grycz reached the summit of his profession when the Ministry of Education established the Principal Directorate of Libraries and named him its head. He now had jurisdiction over the nation’s public and school libraries, science libraries, and book publishing. He faced monumental problems in this position since the Directorate funds remained meager, though growing slowly. Furthermore, a severe shortage of trained library personnel existed, and the implementation of the national library law had to be done gradually in stages.

Grycz put into practice his writings on the training of library professionals. He directed the systematic education of public librarians who would work in 1,600 new district and regional libraries and 20,000 library service points. In 1947 and 1948, he presided over the State Examining Commission for Librarians. In 1949, Grycz received the appointment as Vice-Director of the National Library, the organization which twenty-five years earlier he co-founded and which he helped to preserve during the war. He worked with the director, Władysław Bieńkowski, on agenda development, internal regulations, and advancement of the qualifications of its personnel.

Grycz continued to write and teach seminars and courses for librarians in his last years. During this period he produced the second edition of *Bibliotekarstwo praktyczne w zarysie* (Outline of Practical Librarianship) (1951), *Skrócone prepisy katalogowania alfabetycznego* (Abridged Rules of Alphabetic Cataloging) (1946, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1949), *Historia bibliotek w zarysie* (Outline of the History of Libraries) (1949), *Z dziejów i techniki książki* (Concerning the History and Technology of the Book) (1951), and *Bibliografia w teorii i praktyce* (Bibliography in Theory and Practice) (1953). Grycz worked on library projects until the end of his life. He participated in the planning for a new building for the Public Library in Warsaw, as well as in talks concerning a forthcoming encyclopedia of knowledge about the book. On October 23, 1954, he passed away.

### **His Importance for Today**

Today libraries in all countries face the challenge of making their collections and services available not only to their domestic users, but also to a global audience via the Internet. Maria Jankowska has written about the role Poland's libraries should play in this global information infrastructure. She points out three major changes in Polish librarianship after 1989 that make

this participation easier: 1) growing democratization - end of censorship and freedom of the press and publishing; 2) movement toward international standards - library automation; and 3) growing access to international contacts and cooperation with the European Union<sup>17</sup>

What is needed now in the librarianship profession in Poland, she argues, is a greater emphasis on service-oriented librarianship. Among her recommendations are: “creating a more active, service-oriented model of librarianship; bringing libraries to their users; implementing the idea of ‘access versus ownership;’ organizing and participating in professional development and training.”<sup>18</sup>

One can well imagine Józef Grycz advocating the same thing if he were alive today. His tireless efforts on behalf of standardization of library practice and training of library professionals, as well as his commitment to the user-centered mission of libraries are as relevant today as they were in the mid twentieth century.

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> *Z zagadnień teorii i praktyki bibliotekarskiej : studia poświęcone pamięci Józef Grycza* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1961), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyklopedia wiedzy o książce*. (Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1971), 844.

<sup>3</sup> Bogdan Horodyski. “Józef Grycz,” in *Z zagadnień teorii i praktyki bibliotekarskiej*, 22-54. Horodyski (1904-1965), a well known librarian and activist within the Polish Society of Librarians and the Polish Union of Librarians, was Grycz’s colleague at the National Library after the war. See the sketch of his life in Jan Baumgart. *Bibliotekarstwo, biblioteki, bibliotekarze*. (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 1983), 252-262.

<sup>4</sup> *Bibliotekarstwo polskie, 1925-1951 w świetle korespondencji jego współtwórców* (Warszawa: Wyd. SBP, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> *Biblioteki naukowe w generalnym gubernatorstwie w latach 1939-1945 : wybór dokumentów źródłowych* (Warszawa : LTW, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Horodyski, 22.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Bibliotekarstwo polskie, 1925-1951 w świetle korespondencji jego współtwórców*, 274. My translation.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Wołosz. "Librarianship in Postwar Poland." in *Polish Libraries Today* (Warsaw: National Library, 1991), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid..

<sup>16</sup> Horodyski, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Maria A. Jankowska. "Polish Libraries' Participation in a Global Information Highway." Bulletin full texts – EBIB no. 7/2001. <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/english/a7.php>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.