

To Explore the Past A Great Value of Polish Ephemera Printed in Lower Silesia after World War II

Marta Śleziak

PhD student

University of Wrocław

Faculty of Philology

Poland

Abstract

The article discusses scientific potential of Polish ephemera printed in Lower Silesia in the postwar period (1945–1948). Analysis, examples and conclusions given, base on explorations carried out in years 2012–2015 and focus on collection of ephemera found at the Wrocław University Library. First of all, it will be shown how scientifically interesting are the unique ephemera for many knowledge fields. Ephemera – especially examined by book scientists so far – are valuable source material for historians, sociologists, communicologists and also linguists. Then, the specificity of collected items will be presented according to language, topics, forms and text composition. The article discusses how the complicated postwar situation in Lower Silesia had a significant impact on ephemera. Finally, a few ways of further analysis will be proposed. This method could concern both newspeak and genres of ephemera.

Keywords: Poster, leaflet, print, political propaganda, Regained Territories

1. Introduction

As early as the ancient Greece official notices had been published and stuck in public places to inform citizens about common customs, important authority's resolutions or programs of celebrations. These notices, called *acta diurna*, were one of predecessors of newspapers (Dziki 2004, 32). Such printed materials were and still are a very important way of communication thanks to three distinguishing features: they are small, they have short text, and they are available for everyone. They can be associated with commonly recognized nowadays leaflets, posters and announcements. All these materials belong to a large group of ephemera – publications that play significant role both in mass communication and everyday life; they are even called “the minor transient documents of everyday life” (Rickards 2000, v). To understand the meaning and sense of ephemera it is necessary to divide this term into two Greek words: “Ephemera is the plural form of the Greek word *ephemeron* (*epi* = on, about, round; *hemera* = day). Literally, it refers to something that lasts through the day (...). The word *ephemeris* has long been used in titles of Greek newspapers and *ephemerides* to describe a category of document (calendar, diary, etc.)” (Rickards 2000, v). The origin of this term seems to be interesting and also significant. As the online English dictionary describes it, “an ephemera or ephemeron was originally a fever lasting only one day, an insect with a very short lifespan, or a plant thought to last a day. (...) The word was then applied to a person or thing of short-lived interest. It appeared in its current plural sense in the 1930s, to describe items like tickets, posters, and greetings cards that were of no enduring value except to collectors” (Oxford Dictionaries 2015).

In the past, this term had been used as a title of Greek newspapers. Nowadays, a word *ephemeris* could still be used in special contexts in English publications as an archaic word, being the synonym of ‘calendar’, ‘almanac’. And in Polish, a word *efemeryda* means one-day newspapers, unsystematic magazines, and short-lived publications and is used rather in literary context. According to a lexicon written by Polish book researchers, ephemera are printed materials shorter than four pages, usually of unknown authorship, with temporary and useable content which aim is to give information or achieve propaganda goals (Czapnik et al. 2011, 74). Ephemera is the name for a large heterogeneous group which consists of e.g. posters, leaflets, brochures, invitations, tickets, obituaries, price lists, phone books, menu cards and many, many others (Rickards gives more examples in his comprehensive encyclopedia, 2000). As varied is the group of ephemera, as wide is the group of people scientifically interested in small printed materials.

This group consists of historians, sociologists, ethnologists, specialists of communication research. It is possible to explore what happened in passed centuries when there were no regular newspapers or radio stations. For instance, theatre posters show what drama were played, who acted and in which theatres, that perhaps do not exist today; and sports announcements mention unknown local teams. Old letter and notes present not only former epistolary art but they also provide information about the past, senders' and receivers' relationships. Old obituaries, when compared with actual, show an evolution of this specific literary genre. Undoubtedly, ephemera are attractive for book study specialists mostly. According to Marshall McLuhan's well-known sentence that medium is the message, not only contents are important but also the form of these materials. Each ephemeron has a unique structure influenced by the printing conditions at that time: fonts, paper origins, number of copies, text composition. Basing on all editor details, it is possible to answer the question how printing techniques have developed since Gutenberg's invention to today.

However, ephemera are a great (and still underestimate) issue to examine for linguistics. Every printed item is an authentic source of information about one-time spelling, orthography, language. It could be scientifically interesting for text composition or speech genres explorers. Every leaflet, brochure, poster can also be treated as a separate speech act; as text planned consciously; as a content which aim is to impress somebody or achieve propaganda goals. Ephemera are estimated to be so important due to the fact that they concern time and place they were published. All given features distinguish a substantial group of ephemera that have been published in Lower Silesia during the years 1945–1948. In postwar time, Lower Silesia was part of the so-called 'Regained Territories' – territories which were included to Poland after World War II as a compensation for areas in the East, which first belonged to Poland and then were including to USSR. As a result of decisions made at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences by the Big Three (United States, United Kingdom and Soviet Union representatives), Poland changed its borders in comparison with 1939 – its area decreased by 20%. It also caused people migrations in a largest scale ever (more: Thum 2008, 32–40; Dudek, Zblewski 2008, 23). Poland became ethnically homogenous, and process of forming Polish administration began in 'Regained Territories'.

Ephemera printed in Lower Silesia were often an only way of mass communication¹. Because of difficult postwar conditions, now it is impossible to count how many people have read every single ephemeron. Only notices made occasionally by librarians may suggest how many copies prepared and how big their range was. The whole analyzed collection consists of 605 items: large-size posters dedicated to very diverse topics and small printed materials, e.g. leaflets, invitations, brochures, menu cards, stickers. There was a separate group of 60 very wide posters with propaganda slogans, so-called *sztraify* (from German *Streifen* 'stripes'). All these materials have been collected and analyzed in years 2012–2015. They belong to the Wrocław University Library, they were kept in the archives and now they are still unavailable for readers². By taking into consideration the topic, period and chosen territory, 605 items were collected. They were printed during the years 1945–1948 in large Lower Silesian cities: Bolków, Dzierżonów, Duszniki-Zdrój, Jawor, Legnica, Strzelin, Środa Śląska, Oborniki Śląskie, Trzebnica and Wrocław – the capital of Lower Silesia Voivodeship.

To prepare the present description, there were a few aspects taken into account: language of ephemera, their forms and text composition, the linguist's and reader's points of view. Every following part summarizes results of my own research. What is important, there are statistics of ephemera printing omitted. It seems to be unnecessary to take it under consideration for linguists and ask the concrete questions of how many posters in which places had been published and which topics they mostly concern. Firstly, a frequency of publishing is more interesting for editors or book scientists. Secondly, the analyzed materials concerns almost every part of everyday life (health, politics, religion, entertainment, sport, learning, buying) and the most important is the way of communication, not topics. It must be noticed that Aneta Firlej-Buzon (2013) wrote a very detailed description of a similar collection, concerning more items published in years 1945–1956. In her book, she proposes typologies and classifications from book scientist's point of view; she describes library's resources and discusses the meanings of ephemera for societies living in Lower Silesia in postwar period.

¹ The first newspaper in Lower Silesia after the war was issued in June, 1945. In Wrocław, the first radio station started in autumn.

² The author thanks Mrs. Danuta Liszkowska-Solnicka, a curator in Wrocław University Library, who show her the ephemera. Wrocław University Library has gathered Lower Silesian ephemera since the year 1945. Aneta Firlej-Buzon discusses the meaning of this collection for region and book history (2013, 97–102).

2. Language

First of all, the texts of all ephemera are valuable evidence of the whole spectrum of language postwar dilemmas. On the one hand, the availability of such publications as encyclopedias or dictionaries was limited in ruined cities after World War II and from 1936 there was no new reform on rules of spelling. On the other hand, there was a significant need to inform quickly and effectively. As a result, the spelling in ephemera texts is often inconsistent, incorrect – if compared with rules nowadays. Not esthetic, but pragmatic goals were thought to be fundamental. As Irena Bajerowa claims (2005, 21–23), not only the war but also economic, political and social changes had destructive impact on Polish language. Especially two factors are worth to take into consideration: on one hand few representatives of Polish intelligence, high-educational people with university degree, and on the other – a mass migration of people who ceased to use their specific dialectal forms in a new circumstances and environment. Consequently, the language of official publications was poorer, unified, adapted to average users. Overall, the language of all posters is very formal. In public notices as well as announcements the main part consists of short sentences with 2–3 verbs.

The most frequent senders of communicates were local authority or commissions, cultural institutions and sport, charity or confessional organizations. In posters, there was usually an eye-catching title given that sometimes defined the genre of the text: *Ogłoszenie* (announcement), *Rozporządzenie* (decree). Moreover, they used standard, universal, understandable Polish for everyone, both educated and uneducated. In Lower Silesia, which had been settled anew by incomers representing different dialects and language habits, the primary aim was to communicate effectively, that is why senders used short simple text and the genres were recognized by most, even less educated people. The language of ephemera depends on the receiver's nationality. Although in Lower Silesia more and more Poles were settling, still many German people lived there in the first months after the war and they were to be taken into account by the authors of ephemera. Announcements and public notices concerning important issues at that time were published also in German. They are a great part of the whole collection: in July 1945 there are 9 Polish-German posters (for all 24 collected), in August – 4 (for 19), in September – 3 (for 22), in October – 1 (for 24). That shows a decreasing trend to prepare bilingual posters as the number of autochthon was also decreasing at the same time.

Besides, this region was inhabited by Russians (generally, soviet soldiers), Italians (probably captives), Jews and small groups of other nations who were living here shortly. As the analysis has shown, Polish-German posters usually relate to current local situations (administrations, properties), Polish-Russian posters concern cultural events (e.g. concerts) and Jewish – general political situations. In the collection there was only one Italian poster (without Polish text): an appeal titled *Italiani!*, addressed to Italians in Wrocław who wanted to go back to their homeland. The choice of language reflects the reality of the times. Especially in the group of posters that concern issues and events taking place in Wrocław, there is a noticeable evolution of symbolic changes. At the beginning of taking power by Polish administration representatives, officially only German street names existed in Wrocław. Therefore, the first Polish posters had addresses written only in German, or sometimes in Polish but with original names in brackets. This tendency is well shown in the text from July 1945 (about Polish schools opening in September):

1. Inspektorat Szkolny, ul. Vorwerk 36.
2. Szkoła przy ul. Blüchera 9/13.
3. Szkoła w Karłowicach, ul. An den Brunnen 25.
4. Szkoła w Zięplinie (Zimpel) ul. Kuckuckweg.
5. Zarząd Miejski, pokój Nr. 470.

The sample above shows a general phenomenon symptomatic for the language in postwar period. According to toponyms, radical changes were impossible to implement immediately and there existed two official names – like two parallel realities – in one place. This trend disappears quickly and in 1946 German names is just occasional.

3. Forms and Text Composition

The most important composition feature is the fact that almost all ephemera have no graphics. In this regard, they do not recall rich painted and colorful posters from years before the war. Small drawings (like jovial figures on a poster informing about a dancing party), an emblem (e.g. of Polish Socialist Party) or a sign of some institution (such as the Polish Red Cross) are ones of the few graphic elements on ephemera.

On one of the poster that was an appeal for help to Warsaw, the little pictures were used to show how the country's capital was ruined after the war; on another one, a small picturesque landscape presents advantages of settling in Bolków, a town with an old medieval castle. Therefore, a small amount of graphics on the analyzed posters make them supersaturated with text. There is no doubt that the informative goal was most important, even though a potential reader could have problems with perception. However, in the whole collection there is a separate group of ephemera dedicated to short, concise statements. So-called *sztraify* (*Streifen*) were suitable for slogans, propaganda phrases, and popular sayings. Every item had one big statement, well visible from afar. They were often printed on colorful, thick paper. The analysis shows that these kinds of ephemera were usually used either before the events (Day of Forest, Marine Day) or were dedicated to some parties (Polish Socialist Party) and institutions (Soldiers Friends Society). As a result of situation in one-time German and now Polish cities, the main part of the collection are large-sized posters: proclamations, announcements, directives. Speech genres were usually defined in bolded lead (*Zarządzenie, Rozporządzenie*) or drew attention by acclamations in titles (*Uwaga!, Wrocławianie!*). Preparing any kind of printed materials was very hard in postwar period because of shortage of such basic things like paper or printing presses in ruined cities. Some examples of reusing the paper and other posters from the war period were collected. There are, for example, some posters from Jawor (1946), on which the front face was a public notice addressed to citizens, and on the reverse there was a theatrical vignette (*Stadttheater Jauer*). These posters were originally German theatrical posters printed on thick paper. Moreover, postwar deficiency forced the compositors to use German machines to print first Polish posters, therefore there are so many texts without Polish fonts, especially from the first postwar months. Hereby, this should not be surprising that the analyzed materials sometimes recall ancient palimpsest – overwritten, with traces of at least two cultures.

The composition of bilingual posters is very significant and shows how symbolic can be layout. For example, during World War II Nazi posters were printed on the Polish territory. German texts, as overriding, were above the Polish texts in spite the fact that the content was addressed to Poles. In postwar reality the composition of bilingual official proclamations, addressed to Germans, was opposite: with a Polish text above. This difference symbolically points out the domination of German language. Doubtless, a topic enforces a kind of print, its genre, form and text composition. Official prints are big and visible; they include full text that should be quickly passed on to citizens. However, cameral situations need another, more personalized forms. Among the collection there are also invitation cards, e.g. printed before a conference devoted to the industry of Regained Territories (October 1946). This invitation includes a detailed program of symposium and blank place to complete with the name of participant. On the third sheet there is a typical phrase for all invitations, which concerns the person who invites and who is invited – this formula does not change since the beginning of this genre. As Rickards claims, “eighteen-century invitations tended to revert to the formula *You are desired to attend*, or, sometimes, even less cordially, *You are hereby notified of a meeting*” (Rickards 2000, 183). On prints from October 1946 there is similar phrase: *the industry minister invites...* Then, the place and date of meeting.

Other forms are leaflets focus on narrow chosen topic. Leaflets are very popular in mass communication: “Formerly known as handbills (and in America as flyers), leaflets were the most widely used form of printed publicity in the 19th century. Their popularity derived from their cheapness to produce and distribute, the immediacy and the topicality that the simplicity of their production allowed, and the ease with which distribution could be localized in a desired selling area” (Rickards 2000, 191). However, there are only a few examples of postwar leaflets in the collection. Insufficiencies of paper did not allow printing leaflets in massive scale and this form was less popular than large-sized posters. An example of a leaflet addressed to railroad workers which uses informative style and actually, is an announce what features a good worker should have. With an emblem and aphorism above, this leaflet was formulated to make the workers feel exceptional about their occupation. Another leaflet, prepared by the Polish Red Cross, is in fact a proclamation in smaller form that explains mission and goals of the organization. Two pages of this item are thickly printed and every important paragraph is preceded by the appeal *Polacy!*. There is also a leaflet prepared before the Cultural Congress for Peace in Wrocław, an event that gathered in Wrocław such famous guests as Pablo Picasso and Julian Huxley. On this occasion, numerous small ephemera like leaflets, menu and information cards, stickers and labels were printed in a few languages. All these examples show that every important public issue needed different forms of print. According to contents, receiver and range of message, the genre of ephemera was chosen. Through the text, significant historical events are recalled.

4. Topics

According to the topic of prints, some recurrent themes allow to divide all prints into three groups: current social situation, entertainment, and politics. First of all, ephemera were the sole medium in the first postwar months so their main aim was to inform inhabitants about organizational goals and important regulations. The analysis shows that popular prints were a good way to inform about: obligatory registration of inhabitants, fields demining, and obligatory vaccinations against typhoid, churches where Polish masses took place, schools which started their recruitment after the 1st of September and others – all these topics are mentioned on the posters from the first postwar months. What is important, all these prints have such common features as very informative style, many address details, and very official style, with infinitives rather than long verbal sentences. Some graphic operations like underling or bolding the fonts help the readers to understand text better; it makes the perception more effective. The second group consists of ephemera of which contents is connected with entertainment or cultural events. In this group there are theatrical posters and large-size announcements that inform about concerts, dancing parties, matches between local teams. It is surprising, how much happened in first postwar period, how often there were meetings, concerts, matches, plays organized. A well-known adage printed those days in one of the newspapers seems to have come true: “we have to dance for all lost years during the war” (Ordyłowski 1991, 186). A diversity of entertaining events was very rich. Texts of ephemera provide information on what screenplays were the most popular, which authors were favored. Analysis shows that the most popular were works by well-known Polish authors like Aleksander Fredro or Juliusz Słowacki. As far as the opera³ is concerned, the classic repertoire was used: *Madame Butterfly* by Puccini, *Rigoletto* by Verdi, *Cyrukil sewilski* by Rossini. Apart from that, there are many names of former sport clubs that played an important role in sport those days – the nomenclature of local sport clubs and their activity could be separately explored by linguists, historians or people interested in such issue.

Not only entertaining but also educational meetings were popular. Public lectures *Powszechne wykłady uniwersyteckie* took place at the University of Wrocław since March 1946. They were addressed to everyone and they were not free of charge. Although the entrance cost 5 zł, they were very popular and continued every month. There were diverse topics discussed, concerning physics, biology, mathematics, history or law. Simultaneously, other lectures took place; they were devoted to the issue of ‘Regained Territories’, its history, administration, development. The third group is the biggest and includes all ephemera of which texts are connected to politics. It seems interesting that this is related to national or international politics. Examples from towns like Strzelin or Dzierżoniów show that local institutions or politicians willingly engaged in mass demonstrations. For example, one poster printed in Strzelin 1946 was the immediate reaction against James Byrnes’ speech in which he defined Polish postwar borders in the West as temporary. The text of this poster, using patriotic slogans, was an appeal to all citizens of Strzelin and neighborhood to take part in demonstration like the act of solidarity with the whole Polish nation. The second example shows very similar predilection but in wider range. In Dzierżoniów, the city inhabited by many Jews after the war, there were posters that informed about celebrations organized after important for Zionism peoples’ death. Poets, deputies and scientists from other countries (Palestine, United States of America) arrived to small towns in Lower Silesia and gave lectures. An occasion for invitations was usually an important international event. Indeed, there was a tendency to treat ephemera as a way of mass mobilization.

However, in Poland during the analyzed period two major events that caused mass ephemera printing took place: The People’s Referendum and general elections. Referendum (in Poland the so-called ‘Three Times Yes referendum’ because of three suggested answers) took place on the 30th of June 1946 and there were many special ephemera printed before. In Trzebnica there were released a few large-size posters with appeals to vote three times ‘yes’. One of them distinguishes a parallel structure of text and each paragraph starts with ‘and that is why...’ – an explanation of suggested choice. According to historians, results of the referendum were faked, although local authorities made a big effort to influence the electorate’s decisions with the help of ephemera. The second significant political events were elections in January of 1947. As the collection shows, not only posters were used, but also other types of ephemera. For example, a special 8-paged brochure was printed with postulates addressed to the electorate. Every group in the ‘Democratic Bloc’ (orig. *Blok Stronnictw Demokratycznych*) presented its demands and in few sentences invited to vote for its list.

³ An opera season was opened on the 8th of September with a performance titled „Halka” by Stanisław Moniuszko. A big poster that informed about this inauguration is also part of the analyzed library collection.

Due to diversity of the political groups, the whole brochure could be interesting for political scientists, and because of every single text it could be fascinating for linguists interested in propaganda language. In addition to referendum and election issues, there were more aspects connected with the official propaganda. Political propaganda – defined as all techniques which aim to influence citizens, used by authorities, national institutions, parties, lobbying groups etc. and to modify their behavior according for their own purposes (Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 1999, 31) – uses printed ephemera in an instrumental way. By politicians, ephemera could be seen to be a propaganda tube like newspapers, radio or television. Among the collection, there are many examples of using items for propaganda goals. The main motive was to convince the society, that ‘Regained Territories’ have been always Polish, since Piast dynasty’s domination. Many printed texts persuaded that remains from the past, such as the grave of Saint Hedwig of Silesia (Trzebnica) or a church with Saint Wojciech’s grave (Wrocław) are evidence of pure Polishness. There were printed special ephemera with an invitation for pilgrimage to Trzebnica or with information about an opening of Church of Sts. Dorothea and Wenceslaus. Moreover, the texts of ephemera devoted to anniversaries and celebrations were excuses to refer to the following topics: German nation as an enemy and oppressor, Russian soldiers as heroes and liberators, Warszawa as a capital in total ruin – an allegory of the whole society and need of collective work. Because of the vocabulary and forms of these items, complied with ideology, every single motive could be a subject of individual studies.

5. Conclusions

As the description has shown, there is a substantial diversity of ephemera printed in Lower Silesia after World War II – both in forms or genres and contents. Forms were changing simultaneously with changes of social situations (from bilingual posters to only Polish texts) and with improvement of social conditions (more availability of paper, printing machines or techniques). According again to Marshall McLuhan’s statement, it is possible to draw conclusions about the situation and reality of the analyzed period basing on authentic material – printed ephemera. As far as content is concerned, it mostly depends on topics. On the one hand, posters which aim to inform about the current important issue, are usually short, objective, without redundant elements like epithets. They include such details as addresses, terms, names of institutions responsible for some regulations. Even cultural ephemera includes essential information that seems to answer the particular question (who, what, where and when) and use commonly known forms. On the other hand, political posters distinguish themselves within the whole group. They are heterogenic, focused on specific issues, e.g. elections, history. To give much information, the surface of each ephemeron is used completely; font is small and closely printed. Undoubtedly, ephemera which were analyzed are a valuable source of information about postwar history in Lower Silesia. A diversity of details given on posters, such as: names of groups, institutions, politicians; dates and programs of celebrations; initially German, and then Polish names of streets or buildings – all these factors shape the history of this region, interesting both for historians and onomasts. It could be also interpreter as a calendar of postwar events and experiences as well as the process of changing conditions after the war. However, it must be admitted that the collection is homogenous. Due to the fact where and what time they have been printed, they reflect problems and conditions of those days. Forms as well as texts are an evidence of reality, it shows the development of mass postwar communication *in statu nascendi*.

6. Prospects

Each ephemeron is a kind of medium that communicates in one direction: from sender to receiver. Like in press, possible fast and direct reaction of the receiver is impossible. Ephemera could be analyzed by communicologists as a specific way of communication, a part of mass communication. An area where the ephemera have been printed allows historians to treat them as one of information sources. The text of ephemera from the first four years after the war is a valuable example that shows how the language of propaganda was developing step by step. The years of 1945–1948 are the period of comparative pluralism, both in politics and mass communication. Officially, the role of the Catholic Church was still strong, and there were a few parties on the political arena. The central authority at that time did not yet insinuate what it should be written about. Nevertheless, only ephemera from the first postwar weeks are free of propaganda, and further publications include expressions and language constructions typical for propaganda. These are the years which start the battle for domination which lasts until 1948 when the Communists consolidated their power and has its final a few years later – when the official name of Poland is changed to the Polish People’s Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL*) according to Constitution of 1952. The newspeak of PRL, its authority and mass communication, is very well explored. An earlier period, here represented by ephemera, could be an interesting example of newspeak beginnings.

Moreover, every ephemeron could be explored separately – as an example of using a specific language or a single speech act. It could be interesting to analyze a single poster according to development of some genre. For example, the public notices seem to be the most considerable group among collected items because the postwar chaos and difficult of social situation forced to send clear unequivocal statements. Upon initial review, they fulfill the traditional genre model that was presented by the authors of *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera*: “The printed public notice is a close relative of both the formal proclamation and the commercial poster, but it occupies a distinct middle ground between the two (with total authority on the one hand and mere seduction on the other). Historically the public notice partakes more of the proclamation than the poster. It adopts the autocratic look and language of command and, most commonly, severely warns. In this mode it is an instrument of control” (Rickards 2000, 257).

These types of ephemera were usually used in new territories to keep control over the society. Language of command, short and strict sentences and, finally, information about punishment for disobedience distinguish public notices printed in Lower Silesia. However, this is only one example of genres possible for thorough explore. The rest, if compared with the past, could be an evidence of ephemera evolution. A short further characteristic of public notice could be the most appropriate summarizing of all printed ephemera: “The public notice was for centuries the only medium of mass communication. In a barely literate community and with newspapers in any case an expensive luxury, the simple printed announcement was the standard vehicle of warning, appeal, contention, and commercial information. With its extensive coverage of human affairs – local, regional, and national – it provides a uniquely detailed store of source material for social history” (Rickards 2000, 257). Undoubtedly, the forms and genres of ephemera changed over the years and each text was adapted to the unique situation. Regardless of all the circumstances, some features are still present: they are a very important medium of mass communication, old but continually used, and they are a valuable source for scientists from different fields. As John Johnson, a great English ephemerist used to say, the ephemera of today becomes the evidential data of tomorrow⁴.

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⁴ This is the motto of the Centre of Ephemera Studies, University of Reading, United Kingdom (website: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/typography/research/typ-researchcentres.aspx>).