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Book Inscription as an Expression of Cultural and National Identity

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Abstract:

Panevėžys County G. Petkevičaitė-Bitė Public Library stores a unique, multi-lingual personal library bequeathed of Juozas Miltinis (1907-1994). This set consists of almost 3.5 thousand multilingual publications with a wide variety of book inscriptions. This valuable and important witness is an addition to the personal library content and provides exclusivity and uniqueness of this collection - plenty of surviving handwritten entries and dedications, varying from a compound of a few words to a letter. Personal library of director Juozas Miltinis – a reflection of his communication as an intelligent theatre and drama studio developer, a view of cultural context.

By means of preserved and decoded inscriptions, this report focuses on the analysis of the set of authentic multilingual entries, establishing the relationship with donors through customs and cultural traditions, disclosing donors' mentality and values. Reconstruction of cultural and lingual – Lithuanian and non-Lithuanian – book donation tradition is based on extant classified and investigated inscriptions from this personal book collection. This reconstruction illustrates the expression of national and cultural identity of book authors and donors.

Keywords: Personal library, book inscriptions, relations, correspondence, donation, national, identity.

Theatre director Juozas Miltinis'(1907–1994) personal library serves as an example of a collection of books gathered by means of friendship, contacts and cooperation. From the very beginning his books were collected with clear intentions: self-improvement, personal development, training and education. The said intentions distinctly reflect a part of the history of Panevėžys Drama Theatre (today Juozas Miltinis Drama Theatre), its purposeful activity as well as the peculiarities of actor training in the general context of theatre history in

Lithuania. Director Juozas Miltinis trained and educated actors in his Drama study which was inseparable part of the theatre, despite their occupation in the theatre's productions. He did his best in training versatile, educated, creative and highly intellectual personalities. The actors' personal identity and creativity were revealed through their personal quest and discoveries thanks to the Director's personal library collection. A European-level library was collected in a peripheral town and its uniqueness is obvious.

In 1938, having finished his studies in Paris and traineeship at London theatres, Juozas Miltinis returned to Lithuania and settled down in Kaunas. Here he became the manager of the Drama workshop at Kaunas Labour Palace, but in a short while, upon receiving the permission to organize a theatre in Panevėžys, Juozas Miltinis together with his company of actors relocated to the town on the Nevėžis River. Actors were staying at a hotel, as one of the actors Vaclovas, Blėdis wrote in his diary on December 7, 1940: "We are staying at Rambynas hotel. Today we are having a closer look at the theatre and the dormitory"¹ The theatre was allocated the only building suitable for its requirements, i.e. the Riflemen's Club² – while the actors are offered a temporary stay in the dormitory, however, after a while they were moved to the former Marian Monastery, however "We are not sure for how long"³. Juozas Miltinis' relocation to Panevėžys happened in the period of great historical changes – the beginning of the World War II and the occupation of Lithuania that followed. Despite the changing political, social and economic situation Juozas Miltinis remained loyal to the idea of having his own theatre and implement the stock of plays which he had in mind before even leaving for Paris. He, however, was not able to foresee how much effort and adjustment to new conditions it would require.

The beginning of the theatre could be compared to other theatres in Lithuania and defined by another exceptional feature: alongside rehearsals and engagements in stage performances, actors were being trained at the Drama workshop at the theatre. As actor Gediminas Karka remembers: "The workshop was organized exceptionally on Miltinis' initiative. For the workshop the Director would select young actors, having no prior experience in any other amateurish companies"⁴ (Karka's memoirs) as he did not want them to have any prior experiences or influences. He chose the ones who were willing and able to act. The Director not only organized the workshop, but also made decisions with regard to the actors' talents and put a lot of effort in their training. No doubt, he needed knowledge for this work. His main resource was his personal book collection.

It can be stated that first books of his collection were received soon after his arrival in Kaunas, while he was studying at the Acting school at the State Theatre. Those could be a few publications published in 1928–1930. The other – larger – part of his library Juozas Miltinis managed to collect after he came back from Paris. The inserts or wafers including the names and addresses of Pribacio and Vokiečių bookshops let us arrive at this conclusion. Most of the purchased books were in German and dealt with theatre-related issues because "both bookshops were mostly selling books, received from German, Swiss and Austrian publishers. Pribacio bookshop had a departments of literature in English and French"⁵. Publications purchased in Paris could have been a significant addition to the future Director's library. When relocating to Lithuania, he took with him only a few dozens of books, the rest (about 300), as the Director himself put it, were left at the Lithuanian embassy: "[I] put them in the safest place, at the Embassy of Lithuania in Paris. And now the embassy is taken over and the books are lost – Russians have taken the books away"⁶. According to actor Vaclovas Blėdis and his wife Nijolė Blėdienė, the Director sorely suffered the loss. The major part of Juozas Miltinis' personal collection was compiled with the help of his school fellows, friends

and acquaintances. Books collected in the 1960s–1980s were received as presents from abroad: France, Great Britain, United States, Switzerland and Germany. Mostly they were sent by Lithuanians residing in these countries. Other books were sporadically purchased during trips around the Soviet Union and abroad but they make up an insignificant part of the collection consisting of 3500 publications, left by the Director's will to Panevėžys County Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė Public Library and stored in the authentic environment at Juozas Miltinis Heritage Study Centre.

The aim of this report is to disclose manifestations of customs, cultural traditions, mentality and relations with the donor, based on the inscriptions preserved and deciphered in the publications of director Juozas Miltinis' personal library.

Analysis of inscriptions in relation to the donor using the remaining and very different aspects of information found in the Director's personal collection items is an important factor which helps disclose the multilingual collection as well as its owner's personality as inscriptions witness the cultural identity of both the author and the donor.

Chronological framework of the inscriptions under consideration cover the period from 1932 to 1992. Fewest supplementations to the Director's library were made in the last years of his life. The main group of resources, serving as the basis for the analysis, comprises 452 publications and inscriptions, witnessing a wide range of the Director's acquaintances, communication skills as well as his versatility. According to Daiva Narbutienė “inscriptions found in the books (brochures, maps or postcards) donated by the author are a significant written monument, performing both cognitive and communicative functions”⁷. Book inscriptions are an important cultural heritage and a source of communication and knowledge which may be lost due to unfavourable human activities and environmental factors. Inscriptions in a personal collection help reveal the traces of the past, daily routine of cultural life, historical developments as well as human relations and traditions. The publication of the catalogue of Juozas Miltinis personal collection in 2008–2009 made it possible to identify and include the resource group into the analysis. The catalogue lists all the registered collection publications, inscriptions and other bookmarks which show the relations between the addresser and the addressee or the donor and the recipient.

Letters (of the Lithuanian diaspora) are another primary source used in the analysis of the Director's personal collection inscriptions. They help better understand the significance of the donation act and they inform about the relations between the author and the reader. Letters are also a source of information on emigrants' daily life, they reveal cultural differences and help us understand who these people identified themselves with. From the point of view of topics covered in the said letters, it has been established that they are mostly related to representation, self-expression and cultural environment. A letter is a unique source indicating the number of book senders, topics of the books and intensity of communication. This report focuses on letters featuring book lists.

Before starting the analysis it is useful to define the concept of “inscription”. As the presentation is focused on donative inscriptions Harrod's Librarians' Glossary defines the term as “a record of gifts. It may be kept in a book or on cards”⁸. So all the books which were sent to Juozas Miltinis and their inscriptions or records written to express donation can be regarded as donation inscriptions. They make up the largest number and reveal the most interesting relations between the sender and the recipient. The method of the Director's

collection formation when books were purchased abroad and sent to the collector was defined by historical circumstances.

From 1945, due to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, there were great changes in the provision of foreign scientific books and periodicals to Lithuanian scholars. Book stores received censored publications which greatly influenced the assortment and choice of books published in the West. The only possibility to obtain a desired western book in the period was to bring one from another country or to have one sent. As suggested by the preserved letters, the Director obtained books with the help of close friends and had them sent to him via post. Juozas Miltinis asked for books necessary for his own self-education as well as for actors' training for their roles and development of their personalities.

It is no wonder that the Director's letters contained short updates on staged matters, cultural events and finally a list of desired books. He had the habit to end these letters with a laconic but meaningful and generalizing sentence: "So this is a short list"⁹. Without going into more detail of his collection method it is worth mentioning that in this way a unique and multilingual collection was accumulated in Panevėžys region. As it has already been mentioned, the purchased, donated and posted books had the donors' inscriptions. They varied depending on the fact whether they were donated by the author himself or by a patron, thus having different salutations, style and content. Due to such collection features, two kinds of records can be identified: autographs, witnessing the author's gift and inscriptions made by other persons, either buyers or donors. Though the inscription itself, irrespective of the fact whether it was made by the author or the buyer, is considered to be a dedication as well as a sign of gift. However, the differences can be noticed in the expressiveness of style, i.e. how the author identifies himself with the book and the content of the inscription. Due to all these circumstances the inscription can be viewed as a representation of donation culture.

It is worth noting that not all the inscriptions can be reconstructed. Speaking of the book inscription as an artefact of donation, a few examples from the Director's personal collection could be viewed in more detail. Semiotician Julius Greimas in his book *Du sens: essais semiologiques* given as a present to the Director leaves the inscription: *Juozui Miltiniui – bendrakeleiviui – prasmės ir reikšmių ieškotojui. Alg. Greimas. 21.10.71*¹⁰ (To Juozas Miltinis – fellow-traveller, seeker after sense and essence. Alg. Greimas. 21.10.71), and in the second part: *J. Miltiniui žvaigždei – žvaigždė*¹¹ (To J. Miltinis a star from a star). The content of such inscriptions not only expresses respect, but also clearly shows who both the giver and the receiver identify themselves with. Analogical examples can be found in other books. A more reserved but also positioning identity is an inscription by Dovydas Judelevičius – *Gerbiamam ir mielam Juozui Miltiniui, meno žmogui par excellence – nuo literato, įsibrovusio į teatro sferą... D. Judelevičius. 64. 12. 21 P.S. Tikėdamasis Šekspyro (ir ne tik Šekspyro) dėka dar ne kartą susitikti*¹² (To highly respectable and dear Juozas Miltinis, a man of art par excellence from a man of letters who has encroached into the sphere of the theatre... D. Judelevičius 64.12. 21 P.S. With hope to meet time and time again by courtesy of Shakespeare (and not only Shakespeare.)) Authors not only give their books as presents but also word their own uniqueness or even status.

The intersection of German and Lithuania cultural traditions is well illustrated in the inscription found in the book Dresden Bilderbuch *Dem guten „alten –jungen“ Freund Meltinis. Der Goya hat un durch seine real-irrationale Welt der Traüme und seinem plebeisch harten Kampf um die Vernunft auf Erden zusammengebracht. Es möge so bleiben Konrad Wolf Berlin 19.XII.1969*¹³. Sometimes inscriptions distinctly identify the aim and nature of donation. An example to this could be the inscription in Jacob Burckhardt's book

La civilisation de la Renaissance en Italie: Juozai, Please forgive my long silence. Aš jau pora savaičių guli ligoninėje ir tuo laiku nelabai kam galėjau rašyti. Dėkoju už įdomią iliustruotą knygą „Jurgio P. Klajones“. „Lietuvos Flora“ jau gavau iš draugo Vilniuje – nebeieškokite jos. Man labai nepatogu rašyti čia lovoj. Rašysiu daugiau, kai grįšiu namo. Iki kito karto Jolanta Vaičaitis¹⁴. (Juozas, Please forgive my long silence. I have been in hospital for several weeks and could hardly write. Thank you for the interesting illustrated book „Jurgio P. Klajones“. I have received „Lietuvos Flora“ from a friend in Vilnius, no need to further search for it. It is uncomfortable for me to write in bed. I'll write you more when I get home. Good-bye for now, Jolanta Vaicaitis). Besides, this inscription is an example of rather frequent bilingual inscriptions (when another language, usually English or French, is inserted into an inscription). This donation inscription may also be an unconscious belief that messages of gratitude strengthen the relationship.

Inscriptions found in the books of Juozas Miltinis' personal collection reflect another phenomenon when meanings are constructed not only by common nationality, nature or status but also help maintain the feeling of strong relationship: *Vargo dienelem Paryžiuų prisiminti geram savo prieteliui ir draugui Juozui Miltiniui. A. Liaugminas. Kaunas 1939.X.22*¹⁵ (In memory of troubled days in Paris to my good fellow and friend Juozas Miltinis. A. Liaugminas. Kaunas 1939.X.22.) Inscriptions also serve as symbols of common past, culture and nature and they render the donated book a kind of appreciable meaning which are hard to word.

Research of cultural expressions in donation inscriptions revealed another group of donators where donations are associated with the expression of friendliness and respect: *Brangiam mokytojui dr. J. Miltiniui Panevėžio dramos teatro X-mečio proga. Br. Babkauskas 1951. III. 15.*¹⁶ (To my dear teacher Dr. J. Miltinis on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Panevėžys theatre. Br. Babkauskas 1951.III.15.) – an inscription in Meyer Alfred Gotthold's book *Donatello, or Pour Miltinis, compagnon des misères et des bonheurs parisiens de nos vingt ans, avec l'amitié fraternelle et fidèle de Jean Vilar. Vilnius, Avril 1971*¹⁷ (To Juozas Miltinis, our 20-year olds, Parisian joys and hardships fellow-traveller, with fraternal and faithful friendship, Jean Vilar. Vilnius, 1971 April) – an inscription in the Director's close friend Jean Vilar's book on theatre tradition. Times in Paris are also referred to in another Charles Dullin's study fellow Jean Louis Barrault's record in the inscription of his donated book: *Pour mon cher Miltinis en souvenir de notre jeunesse et de notre affection*¹⁸ (To my dear Miltinis, to remember our youth and our relations) – common past or common cultural background and symbols render the book some difficult to word but well-felt meanings.

Another instance of respect towards the Director becomes obvious from Doloresa Kazragytė's inscription in her book *Tiltai be turėklų – Gerb. Maestro, ...tolimas ir nepažįstamas Didysis Režisieriaus... Ši mano knygelė – tik silpnas "čiauškėjimas" Jūsų klausai ir išminčiai, bet...kaip pagarbos ir kažkokio mistiško prisirišimo prie Jūsų vardan, – priimkite ją nuo manęs. Doloresa K[azragytė]. 1987.IV.17*¹⁹ (Dear Maestro, ...distant and unfamiliar Great Director... This book of mine is but a weak "twitter" to Your ear and wisdom, but ... as a sign of respect and some mystical attachment to You, please accept it from me. Doloresa K[azragytė]. 1987.IV.17.) The inscription clearly expresses a respectable distance because the statuses of the donor and the recipient in the society are unequal. The inscription by Ona Pakštienė: *Naujajam Teatrui <...> 1937m. lap. 15 d.*²⁰ (To a new theatre <...> 1937 Nov. 15) in Bennett Arnold's book *How to Make the Best of Life* may be regarded as a wish or memory about the dream of life which is about to come true.

Another group of inscriptions are letter-like inscriptions in books given as presents to Juozas Miltinis. The inscriptions, to be more precise an inscription together with a letter, are distinguished by form, contents, and purpose. For example: *Brangus (Dear) Miltinis, I left this book with my mother when leaving Toronto. She will have it sent to you. I'll write to you from Arles or from Paris. All the best till then. Jolanta.*²¹ Letter-like inscription in books lack the solemnity which is peculiar of other types of inscriptions, preserve the structure of a letter and are intended to express certain results or make generalizations. Among them is that in Sellin Eric's book *The dramatic concepts of Antonin Artaud: 20.09.78 Paris My dear diabolical Miltinis. The book list you gave me is ancient, and most of the publications are out of the print, therefore extremely difficult to find. I made a special trip to London just for you, and after an entire day of searching through antiquarian shops come up with only Z of the books on the list. However, I am not the type to give up easily. I'll find them somehow. Jolanta [Vaičaitis]*²². The content of such letter plays a functional as well as communicative role – informs about the processes of fulfilling requests.

Having carefully researched the inscriptions found in the books of director Juozas Miltinis' multilingual personal collection, the following conclusions may be drawn: inscriptions reflect donation culture, habits and expression of relations with the recipient. Besides, they design the concept of national and cultural identity.

Thorough analysis of inscriptions also made it possible to confirm that clear elements of bilingualism witness the continuation of linguistic as well as cultural traditions in the Lithuanian diaspora. Information derived from letters, which are another source for analysis, complements book inscriptions and helps identify circumstances of Juozas Miltinis' life and importance of his relations.

Despite the fact that in the Soviet times the choice of books was very limited, the Director's close friends, residing abroad, and members of the Lithuanian diaspora played an important role in accumulating multilingual and multi-topical book collection. Due to the Director's personal and cultural contacts the collection manifests the remaining tradition of cultural identity.

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