

Autographs of Fate and the Fate of Autographs

Books often forever remain where they were born. Or, on the contrary, as if driven by some force, move along the face of the earth, from continent to continent, from one civilization to another. This movement usually proceeds calmly; it has long been a traditional form of the mutual enrichment of cultures. But in this natural flow, extraordinary events may interfere. Like birds to which rings have been attached, sent out to unknown destinations by raging elements, a book sometimes tells us about the trials it has experienced. And about the trials of those who somehow or other have been connected to it. Such thoughts, together with a feeling of vague anxiety, arise in me every time when in Minsk, most often in the National Library of Belarus, a book in French with an inscription by the author falls into my hands. Why are there so many specifically French autographs? In other languages, English or German, there are far fewer. Why for the most part do they belong to the interwar decades, i.e. the 20's-30's of the twentieth century? Why are these autographs mostly intended for recipients whose names are clearly not Romance language ones? Why in some cases do the names of the authors and recipients belong to people whose lives were brutally cut short during the Nazi occupation? What was the fate of those who were spared by events and time? These questions demand answers no matter whether the signature belongs to a person who did not leave a visible trace in the memory of future generations or we are talking about names that, like the names of Léon Blum and Marcel Proust, marked a whole period of the political and cultural history of France.

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Gift inscriptions on books in principle can be an expression of friendship or a relationship, of common life and creative aspirations, appreciation for a word of sympathy spoken somewhere, a good deed done, as well as only a usual token of attention. But sometimes behind a gift inscription is hidden information about the events and people involved in them that today, after many decades, is very useful for understanding many facts in the life and creative fate of the author and his milieu. The destiny of man and the destiny of the book... The crossing of destinies... Often it looks tragic, especially as regards those caught up in the whirlwind of historical events.

Léon Blum — Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers during the Popular Front, a prisoner of Buchenwald. He began his career as a scholar of literature and a theater critic. Before me is his essay "Reading a Book. Critical Reflections" (1906). Reflections on the novel, the influence of German culture, insightful articles about the contemporary writers Anatole France, Paul Bourget, Jean Renard. And the autograph "To Henry Bernstein in friendship, Léon Blum", perhaps a reciprocal courtesy of the previously received gift from Henry Bernstein, the text of the play "The Roundabout Way" (1902) with an autograph: "To Léon Blum as a token of our friendship that has begun and is already strong. Henry Bernstein."

In general, in our material the name of Léon Blum more often appears as the recipient's name. For example, one of the earliest evidence of his literary connections is a somewhat dry dedication on the book of poems of the young Paul Fort *Ballades* (1896): "To Mr. Léon Blum, respectfully. P.F.". At this time, Blum was only gaining literary and social status: he writes his first critical articles, enters into the membership of the State Council (at the time an advisory body under the government). But his first major publication in 1901 attracts the attention of the well-known writer and active public figure Maurice Barrès, who gave Blum in the same year a journalistic work with the autograph, "To Léon Blum, author of *New Conversations* with feeling. M.B." (the reference is, of course, to Blum's collection of articles

New Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann). Later attentions becoming warmer: "To Mr. Léon Blum with an expression of great respect for his literary activity" (the inscription on a 1907 book by A. Bachelier). In the same year, Paul Adam on the book *Irene and the Eunuchs* writes: "To Léon Blum from an old admirer and great friend" (a natural gesture, considering that a year earlier in the book by Léon Blum named above an entire section is devoted to the work of Paul Adam). Or the inscription of Georges de Porto-Riche (*Anatomy of Feelings*, 1920) - "To Léon Blum, best friend for all times, even before I met him."

If Jean-Richard Bloch in his dedication to the book *The Purpose of the Theater* (1930) still emphasizes the literary and theatrical period in Blum's biography ("To Léon Blum, who knows this purpose thoroughly, with friendship, J.-R. Bloch), by the mid-1930's with the growing influence of left-wing forces and the strengthening of the personal position of Blum as one of the leaders of the Popular Front and subsequently Prime Minister, the character of authors' inscriptions to him changes. The type of books sent to him also changes, incidentally, such as *To Think with One's Hands* (1936), an essay by the rising star of European philosophy Denis de Rougemont or the study by J. Claraza *The End of the Regime* (1936) on the issue of private ownership of land. Especially symptomatic is the dedication by Jean-Paul Garnier on the book *The Tragedy of Danzig* (1935): "For Mr. Léon Blum this historical study of the Prussian policies of the end of the 18th century has not lost its relevance, especially at this time, policies that the Third Reich could have the right to announce as its own! Sincerely J.-P. Garnier. September 25, 1935." Uneasy feelings arise when becoming acquainted with the inscriptions of Abel Hermant on the books *Luxury Trains* (1909) - "To Léon Blum from a grateful friend" - and *Letters to Xavier on the Art of Writing* (1926) - "To Léon Blum from his friend. Abel Hermant". By the mid-1940s fate will separate Blum and Hermant in opposite directions. Blum returns from a concentration camp in Paris, and the country once again will trust him with the highest government position. But Hermant will be excluded from membership in the French Academy for collaborating with the Germans.

The words are filled with a sinister meaning with which Pierre La Rochelle Drieu turns to Blum: "To Léon Blum, recalling our brief conversations. Drieu La Rochelle, May 1920" (*The Lower Depths*, 1920). At the end of the war, accused of collaborating, Drieu for a few months will be in hiding and in the beginning of 1945 will commit suicide in one of the Paris hotels.

Is it accidental that some other books are like additions to the biography of Léon Blum, bearing witness to the paths of life of his former ministers?

A long political career fell to Jules Moch, a relatively successful one, if one does not count the twists and turns of the Resistance during the years of the Second World War. The political convictions of A. Chabot, author of the book *Knowing the South* (1927), and of the recipient are clearly expressed: "To Jules Moch with expression of socialist brotherhood". Another typical example: "To Jules Moch go these vague speculations with a longing for action, thanks to which life is made. Cordially, Étienne Antonelli" (in the book *Pure Economics of Capitalism*, published in 1939).

Another minister of the period of the Popular Front, Jean Zay, is known for important initiatives in the field of education. And as a witness to events and personal relationships is the book by Léon Blum *Administration of Power* (1937), a collection of speeches on the sharpest problems of the time: social reforms, nationalization, the forty-hour workweek, secular schools, with the autograph, "To Jean Zay, his friend Léon Blum ". Again, an expression of high respect is the dedication of the outstanding poet in the brochure *On the Teaching of Poetics at the Collège de France* (1937), "To Mr. Jean Zay, Minister of National Education. Respectfully from the author Paul Valéry."

Zay's life was tragically cut short in 1944 - he was killed by Vichyites in North Africa.

And again, a reminder of tragic fate. Georges Mandel had a most distinguished political career. In 1908, at the age of twenty-three years, he was a close associate of Georges Clemenceau, then minister of the Interior. Later he several times was elected to parliament and was appointed minister in various departments. Books owned by him with autographs – there are quite a number – seem to follow him through the stages of this long journey. One of them - the novel *Gods Leave, D'Annunzio Remains* (possibly the consequence of a secular meeting) was given by the Italian author F.T. Marinetti with the inscription: "To Georges Mandel with expression of admiration." The book was published and was gifted in 1908; the following year in Paris Marinetti made his debut with a program, which was turned into the famous Manifesto of Futurist Literature. Later, their lives and political paths will diverge dramatically: Marinetti, as is known, will turn his talents to the service of fascism, while Mandel, Minister of the Interior on the eve of the Second World War, will show himself to be one of the most consistent and hard opponents of Nazi Germany in the French government. He was killed by the Vichy police almost at the same time as Jean Zay.

The autographs of the publicist and public figure Léon Daudet (his father is better known to us, the writer Alphonse Daudet). In the book *Sulla and His Destiny* (1922), parliamentary deputy Daudet appeals to another deputy: "To my colleague Georges Mandel, admiring his political intellectual power." Or in another book *Paris in a Past Life. Right Bank*, published in 1930: "To Georges Mandel, on the anniversary of my return from exile, which he did much to arrange. In friendship, Léon Daudet. "The tone becomes more personal, in essence it is about gratitude. And for this, there was a very good reason. In 1927 Daudet was convicted of "defamation" (he considered the government involved in the death of his son) but fled abroad. In 1929, thanks to the efforts of Mandel he was able to return to France (hence the mention of the anniversary of a return from exile). But there is one thing that gives this fact special meaning. Mandel was a Jew, while Daudet was one of the most ardent anti-Semites of Paris. In his youth he actively collaborated with Édouard Drumont, the well-known anti-Dreyfus accuser, author of the notorious book *Jewish France*, and in later years a founder with Charles Maurras of the nationalist movement *Action Française*. Daudet found himself at the center of a sensational story after during the discussion in 1912 of the candidacy of Julien Benda for the Prix Goncourt, he said that he would not allow the award to be given to a Jew.

Two books with autographs to Mandel donated by Henry Bernstein: "To Monsieur Georges Mandel in friendship Henri Bernstein" (*Volley*, 1914); "To Georges Mandel from an old fan and friend. Henry Bernstein" (*The Messenger*, 1934).

An indispensable character of memoir literature of the '10's-'30's of the twentieth century, Henry Bernstein was perhaps the most striking exponent of the scandalous side of Parisian life. He was distinguished by an inordinate conceit and arrogance that often led him to sharp conflicts with other people all the way to showdowns by duels. At the same time he enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant social lion and cunning ladies' man. This can be seen even in some of his gift autographs, such as on the text of one of his plays: "To Kitty Rothschild, the most beautiful of all Ambassadors on the occasion of a message that touched me, with love and admiration. Henri Bernstein. June 1934." But in the minds of many contemporaries, all this was combined with the idea of him as an extraordinarily successful organizer of theatrical affairs (in France at this time this activity held particularly important cultural significance) and a talented playwright, albeit one prone to noisy glory. His striving to shock was so great that at the request of the indignant public some of his works were removed from production. Thus in 1911 he was forced to withdraw from the repertoire of the Comédie Française his play *After Me* (incidentally, in the National Library of Belarus is the text of this play with an autograph of Bernstein addressed to "Madame Guillaume Ber"). It is understandable why in 1918 André Gide wrote in his *Diary* that he shuddered at the thought that in future French society may be judged by Bernstein's plays. Paradoxically, all this did not prevent Charles de Gaulle in one of his radio speeches in 1943 from

putting the names of Gide and Berstein together among the names of those “who have succeeded in escaping tyranny and who are fighting for the freedom of their country.”

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The tragic events that fell to the share of major politicians give particular significance to the memory of them. No less sharp is the perception of everything connected with the life and work of the people who belong to the intellectual world and the world of arts.

Books of the recognized master and the accursed poet of the new generation, the famous writer and the unknown debutant are evidence of success confirmed by time or (it is easy to judge today) of unfulfilled hopes... And there is always a natural or accidental intertwining of life paths and external events. Names, dates, facts. Before us is a literary museum, more precisely a museum of the history of the book, in which the fate of the book is inextricably linked with the fate of the author and of those whom he addresses through gift inscriptions.

The creativity of Marcel Proust appears today as one of the major milestones in the history of world literature. And through the autographs found on his books once can see the major developments in his destiny. Here is his first major publication - *Pleasures and Days* - issued with the blessing of Anatole France in 1896. On the book is an inscription characteristic of Proust's somewhat epistolary autographs "Versailles, July 1896. 'Kinship ties connect when they do not divide deeply' (Balzac?). To my aunt Madame G.D. Weill. With an expression of love, her nephew Marcel Proust".

Another autograph is associated with a side of Proust's activities little known - a translation from English to French of John Ruskin's book on the Gothic architecture of Amiens (1904). As the translator of this book he writes to a young cousin: "To my dear little Adèle with an expression of tenderness." The work, which might seem to be a random episode in the life of Proust, in fact was deeply motivated: passion for the aesthetic theory of Ruskin is felt on many pages of Proust's main work, the multivolume series *In Search of Lost Time*, the first book of which, *Swann's Way*, came out in 1913. And again there is a symptomatic message to and addressee already familiar to us: "To my dear Aunt with a request to skip the indecent pages and not to deprive her nephew fully of respect. With love and honor, Marcel Proust."

The father of Marcel Proust, Adrien Proust, was a scholar, the author of several studies in the area of social hygiene. Not surprisingly, alphabetically the books of father and son may be side by side on the same shelf in the library. In our case, however, the circumstances communicate an additional emotional feature to this fact. Indeed, in the book of Adrien Proust *Research in the Field of International Health* (1873) is found a dedication to his father-in-law, i.e. Marcel's grandfather on his mother's side: "To Mr. Nate Weill respectfully from his son-in-law" and the father of the "Dear Aunt," to whom Marcel presented his book, fearing however, that some of the pages in it were capable of shocking her.

But autographs connected to Marcel Proust are not limited to the family circle. From his name are threads of friendship or sympathetic ties to many personalities who left an imprint in culture or the annals of social life in Paris of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1922, seriously ill, he wrote to his friend on a copy of *In Search of Lost Time* (the last book issued during his lifetime): "To Constantin Ullmann. This book will make up for the many telegrams to which there was no response, and for a letter that I have no strength to write. With love, Marcel Proust. How go things with your extravaganza? "

And here are books belonging to the pen of Robert de Montesquiou, rather a lot in the National Library of Belarus (primarily with inscriptions to the wife of the banker Edmond de Rothschild). But this man with a complex nature and ambiguous reputation today is interesting primarily in that his characteristics and behavior are discernible in the portrait of Proust's Swann.

It is known that from his youth until his death, Marcel Proust had a deep respect for Madame Strauss, the widow of the composer Georges Bizet and the mother of his gymnasium friend Jacques. About her contemporaries speak with sympathy in their memoirs. At our disposal there is eloquent evidence of this in the form of an autograph "To Madame Strauss with respect" on the book of the prominent publicist Julien Benda *Belphégor: A Study of the Aesthetics of Contemporary French Society* (1918). But her memory will long remain in French culture, first of all due to the fact that the image of this woman was captured by Proust in the features of the Countess de Guermantes, one of the main heroines of *In Search of Lost Time*.

In general, the name of Marcel Proust is extremely rich in diverse cultural, historical and literary associations, which often go beyond the boundaries of his time and immediate environment. It is significant that in public opinion, his name is closely related to the idea that Proust most clearly represents French literature. The situation is unexpected and, until recently, almost unthinkable for French culture, which traditionally has not been prone to designate the most significant among its many great literary heights the way Dante, Cervantes and Goethe represent in their creativity, respectively, Italian, Spanish and German literature.

In the encyclopedia of names marked for especially significant recognition - the Nobel Prize (1915) - appears the name of Romain Rolland. The nature of his autograph, referring to the call *To the Murdered Peoples* (1916), is original. It is an order by the author to give this publication to a few, as he writes, friends (among them appear the names of Vildrac and of Jean-Richard Bloch).

Three autographs belong to André Gide, a future Nobel laureate (1947). They are found in the books *Paris* (1928), *Unprejudiced Mind* (1929), *Persephone* (1934).

Let us also note the name of Maurice Maeterlinck - Nobel laureate in 1911. Notwithstanding the Belgian nationality of the poet, one can hardly consider his work outside the context of French culture. Especially since in our case we are talking about the book *The Ruins of War*, published in 1916 in Paris, with an inscription to the well-known writer and public figure of France Joseph Reinach.

Very many autographs are associated with the names of the "immortals" - the members of the French Academy. Among them are several inscriptions by Paul Claudel (1936) and Henry de Montherlant (1936). In addition to the above-cited inscription to Jean Zay, other inscriptions by Paul Valéry addressed to Georges de Rothschild, Georges Merzbach, Jacques Schiffrin and Ida Rubinstein reflect his well-known quests in the fields of poetics, painting and dance. Finally, we turn to the autographs of Georges Duhamel, addressed to a well-known critic, and autographs of future members of the French Academy - Jean Cocteau ("To my dear Henry with very best memories. Jean" - the presumed addressee being Henry Bernstein) and Thierry Monnier ("To Paul Levy as a sign of respect and with a request to take this newborn, contemporary Rampart. His collaborator Thierry Monnier".) - on a book with the title well-transmitting the state of mind of the author at the time, *Nietzsche* (1933).

Let us note also the autographs of Roland Dorgelès - member of the Goncourt Academy beginning in 1929 and its president beginning in 1955, winner of the Femina Prize in 1919.

Authors awarded the Grand Prix of the French Academy (for their creative work as a whole) in our material, in addition to those already mentioned in another context the writers Rolland, Montherlant, Monnier, Vildrac, are represented by the names of Anna de Noailles and Jules Supervielle.

Particularly interesting is the inscription of Supervielle on the book *Child of the Open Sea* (1931): "To Mademoiselle Louise Weiss, who does so much for Europe and the world. Her sincere fan Jules Supervielle." The inscription not only gives an indication of the author's interest in the political problems of the era, but also draws attention to the personality of the recipient - the little-known to us public figure and publicist Louise Weiss.

The idea of a united Europe, so natural and familiar today, in its time had great difficulty making its way. When in 1851 Victor Hugo first proposed this idea at a session of the Legislative Assembly, he was subjected to universal ridicule and declared a madcap. In France, the first steps for its promotion and implementation usually refer to the late 1940's - early 1950's of the twentieth century and are associated with the names of major statesmen Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. It is curious that for 20-30 years before, the young woman journalist was successfully defending European ideals, publishing among others a special magazine *New Europe* and that her enthusiasm did not go unnoticed. Among writers who gave her their books (usually on socio-political or historical themes) are very sonorous names of pre-war France. Jules Romains and Julien Benda addressed Louise Weiss with words of sympathy on their books *European Problems* (1933) and *Sketch of the History of the French. In Their Efforts to Be a Nation* (1932). Indicative is the inscription of M. Gay, translator of Sherwood Anderson's novel *Winesburg, Ohio* (1927): "To Mademoiselle Louise Weiss in the hope that this book will be just as well received in *New Europe*, as in *Payennes d l'Ohio*." A remark in passing: some publications bear indications of the deep interest of Louise Weiss in their content. Such is the book by Jules Moch *Capitalism and Transportation* (1932) with a dedication autograph: "To Louise Weiss, chairwoman of *New Europe*, this modest experience of foresight with respect and sympathy" - which is covered with pencil marks and underlinings (a fact not always concomitant with a gift, since often the books remain not even cut open).

Many years later, in the 80's of the twentieth century, Louise Weiss will be triumphantly elected to the European Parliament, and in Paris in her honor a street will be named in a new intellectual center that is now emerging around the National Library on the banks of the River Seine.

Let us highlight especially the numerous inscriptions of the author Colette – a woman writer, whose name before the Second World War cannot always be found on the lists of academies, among the winners of numerous prestigious awards in France. But at the same time throughout Colette's creative life, her books evoked considerable interest and in many cases were bestsellers. In general, her books make up a significant feature of French pre-war culture, and her personality for her contemporaries was considered significant and unique. Does that not explain the fact that already in the twilight of her life Colette is elected as a member of the Goncourt Academy (1945), and when she died (1954), France, as if recollecting itself and wanting to repair the injustice it had permitted, arranged for her national funeral-honors that in their time had been provided to Victor Hugo, Émile Zola and Paul Valéry? Among the dedications by Colette the following are particularly interesting: to the poet Paul Adam the book *Long Hours* published in 1917 (the earliest autograph of the writer that we have), to the playwright Henry Bernstein already mentioned earlier on her novel *Duet* (1934) as well as on the her play *My Dear* written together with L. Marchant - "To my dear friend Deutsch, whose heart and talent I love." But especially attract attention the autographs addressed to Louis-Louis Dreyfus, both by their number (8), by their constancy over time (the autographs are almost evenly distributed between the 1920's and the 1930's), and by their tone - emotional to intimacy in the beginning of the decade and calm, almost neutral at the end: "To Louis-Louis, a great mot! From an old friend " (*My Dear*, 1920); "To Louis-Louis Dreyfus. But, dear friend, can there be for you hidden women? " (*Hidden Woman*, 1924); "To Louis-Louis Dreyfus" (*Sido*, 1930).

And one more stroke to the picture of awards, titles and distinctions, marking wide public recognition. Can one imagine the French poetry of the first half of the twentieth century without the work

of Léon-Paul Fargue and Paul Fort, alike somehow by a certain consonance of names, sophisticated simplicity of style and nostalgic sketches of Paris? Is it because immediately after the establishment of the Literary Prize of Paris, the City Hall awarded it to Léon-Paul Fargue (1946) and later to Paul Fort (1953)? You recall this on seeing the autograph of Léon-Paul Fargue and Valéry Larbeau on *Verses* by J.-M. Lowe (Fargue and Larbeau wrote the introduction to this book). Paul Fort evidently particularly liked to provide inscriptions on his works. It is known, in particular, that in some cases on each copy of a book published (although an edition of 100-200 copies was commonplace) Fort would leave autographs not without calculation, perhaps, on the interest of bibliophiles. We have several witnesses to this. Such is the book *Latin Quarter* (1929) with his autograph – a calligraphic poem written by hand, intended for L. Deitch.

Prestigious prizes and awards are for writers the official form of public recognition. But in the general creative process are manifested ambitions that correspond little to the usual criteria of respectability and that are freer in the choice of ideological and aesthetic guidelines. What is meant are avant-garde trends in literature, the French version of the “slap in the face to public taste.”

As is well-known, the sharpest form of aesthetic (sometimes also social) protest is expressed in the manifestos of the Dada movement that is associated primarily with the names of Tristan Tzara and Salvador Dali. On a copy of the Dada manifesto one can see the autograph of Tzara. The autograph of Salvador Dali addressed to Henry Bernstein is associated with a curious fact of the biography of the famous Spanish artist. This refers to his book *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937, in French), which uncovering aspects of his personality not always well-known to the public, allows a better understanding of the general aesthetic principles of Dali.

An autograph of Paul Éluard, whose artistic explorations and social positions were closely tied with the rebel movements in the period between the two world wars, is symptomatic. In his book *Capital of Sorrow* (1926), we read: "To Boris Souvarine, heartily, Paul Éluard." The name of the addressee, well known as one of the founders of the French Communist Party - at that time already excluded from it, by the way - shows a fairly early although not finally determined political engagement of Paul Éluard.

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Emmanuel Berl (1892-1976), one of the most prominent publicists of pre-war France, had a sharp pen and the abilities of a subtle socio-political analyst. He enjoyed great prestige among the intellectual-artistic and political elite of the country. There is some unique evidence of this on the books given to him by well-known authors: "To Emmanuel Berl cordially and with good will, André Gide" (*The Unprejudiced Mind*, 1929); "To Emmanuel Berl from his friend André Malraux" (*An Amusing Kingdom*, 1928) or "To Emmanuel Berl with friendship, Leon-Paul Fargues" (*Views of Paris*, 1932); as well as the inscription by an historian, a prominent statesman: "To valorous Emmanuel Berl, his debtor in the art of the word and his creditor in friendship, Anatole de Monzie" (*Illegal Widows*, 1936) and a caricaturist: "To Mireille and Emmanuel Berl with affection, Jean Effel" (*The Second Ritournelle . 100 Drawings*, 1939).

The friendly tone, common feelings and sentiments in regard to the addressee. But in a few years everything gets mixed in the events of the war and will sometimes take on a tragic character. How as a bad omen is perceived today the inscription "To Emmanuel Berl with the most pleasant memories of a meaningful conversation, in friendship, Paul Valéry." This autograph was made in a brochure containing

the welcome speech of Valéry in connection with the admission to the French Academy of the World War I hero Pétain in January 1931. Nine years later Pétain would betray his country.

Still another bit of evidence of the tragic turn of life. In 1935 Robert Brazillach will give to Berl his talented book *History of Cinema* with the inscription "To Emmanuel Berl - this picture of bourgeois morality." In 1945 Mr. Brazillach will be accused of collaboration and executed for treason.

On the eve of the war it is as if Berl foresaw this terrible rift within the nation and in the souls of people. In the book *Brother Bourgeois. Are You Dying?* (1938), he tried with his usual sharpness to predict the behavior of some of his colleagues of the pen under an imaginary dictatorship that soon, however, turned into a reality. This prognosis applies also to two writers who gave him his books with dedications – Louis-Ferdinand Céline (the play *The Church*, 1933) and Paul Nizan (the essay *Watchdogs*, 1932). In Berl's opinion, these irreconcilable opponents (one - very right, the other - very left), under certain circumstances will converge on a common position of serving a "strong hand". "Celine would become a Nazi ..." - suggests Berl. And so it turned out. In regard to Nizan, the prediction was wrong: in the summer of 1940, he was killed on the battlefield.

The fate of Berl himself in those years was not easy, as for many thousands of his countrymen. In fact, the rift almost decided his fate. The recollection tormented him until his death - he did not immediately realize the sinister role of the former hero of Verdun and for some time after the defeat of France served under Pétain in the capacity of what today would be called a speechwriter. The "racial Laws" opened his eyes to the essence of the Vichy regime. And then emigration, loss of rights, loss of everything that had filled his existence. And the confiscation of his books, their involuntary journey to Germany, and then, after the war - to Belarus.

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The ability of art to anticipate the future is one of its mysterious traits. Often a prophetic idea of an artist combines with a nuanced assessment of the future from cautious optimism to gloomy outlook and even tragic predictions - for example, in the case of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which was perceived by Ehrenburg as a premonition of nuclear apocalypse. A tendency to prophecy, not necessarily recognized by the artist himself, sometimes may be discerned in his personality, particularities of behavior and, of course, in his creative work. The life and poetry of Robert Desnos may serve as a convincing illustration of this.

When reading the poems of Desnos, one gets the feeling that in his texts and, more broadly, in his state of mind, appears some disturbing anxiety, an agonizing fear, the impetus for which can serve as a real event. Such is a poem associated with the fate of his friend André Platard: "I do not like the street of Saint-Martin since André Platard no longer lives on it ... They took him away, nothing more is known." A picture of occupied Paris, the unknown fate of a person close to the poet. In these words can be read a farewell to a friend and a hidden, barely discernable epitaph, a fateful premonition of his own destiny. How can one not think so when in the Quartier Saint-Germain on the wall of house number 19 in the rue Mazarine you see a memorial plaque informing that there Desnos lived for 10 years and that from there he was taken away by the Gestapo on February 22, 1944 "There is no need to beg the saints, the Saints Marie, Jacques, Gervais and Martin, and Valerien, hiding on a hill." A most sinister ending. Who does not know that on Mount Valerien (Mont Valérien), which rises on the north-western outskirts of Paris, during the war the Germans carried out mass executions? The saints of Paris could not save Platard. But Saint Teresa was also helpless in the east of Europe, where Desnos found himself after his arrest. In June

1945, only a few weeks after the liberation of Western Bohemia by the Americans, Desnos died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

And you relive all this drama, when unexpectedly in Minsk there falls into your hands Desnos' book *Bodies and Things*, published in 1930. There is a nagging feeling as if you are again in the Quartier Saint-Germain on an old narrow street not far from a Catalan restaurant, where, according to some accounts, one could see him in the company of Picasso and Éluard. In the book is an inscription by the poet that is striking in tone - friendly, witty and even a bit free in the choice of words: "To Florent Fels in memory of 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923 ..." - and so on until 1930 and even 1980, crossed-out, however, and with the addition of: "good, good, let's talk about all this, damn it!" Fans of the poet will recognize in these words his impulsive nature, perhaps will feel the excitement that in the times of surrealism he shared with André Breton and Luis Aragon and a bit later with the Prévert brothers and Raymond Queneau. They will hear his heartfelt and joyous voice and perhaps will imagine him the way Max Ernst preserved him for us - light and fragile - in the painting *Rendez-vous of Friends*. And with anxiety they will feel how important for Desnos was the sense of time – of the restorable past and the questionable future. With anxiety, because jokingly the frontier of friendship planned for 1980 in Desnos' autograph was nervously crossed out and because we know how early, and under what circumstances his life was cut short.

The name of Florent Fels in the dedication of the poet is, of course, no accident. It may rarely come up today in the cultural memory of the French, it is difficult to find anything about him in modern encyclopedias and reference books such as *Who's Who*. But for his time he was a remarkable figure, especially among the creative intelligentsia.

An active life in culture for Fels, a soldier honored with a medal for Verdun, begins after the First World War. He wanted to become a poet, encouraged in this by Max Jacob – a very bright personality, himself a poet and painter, friend of Picasso. But Fels did not succeed in becoming a poet, he became a critic, an organizer of the business of magazines, a patron of the arts. In the journal headed by him with the symptomatic title *Action* wrote the young authors of the avant-garde - the future glory of French culture: the writers Luis Aragon, Jean Cocteau, Andre Malraux, Raymond Radiguet, Paul Éluard, the composer Erik Satie. Here were published Maxim Gorky, Ilya Ehrenburg. One can easily imagine the non-conformist-minded poets and critics, constantly charged up in disputes in the environment of the magazine's editing office that affirmed then, together with the literary café, the new focus of the intellectual life of Paris. A few decades later, they will be numbered among the cultural elite, and one of them will even become a minister. But at the time they were young, easily excitable and ready to go against public opinion. Fels himself in the memory of his contemporary Maurice Sachs appears as a choppy, noisy person, not hesitating in conversation to use strong words or the open expression of intimate feelings.

The chronology and personalities of his wide-ranging creativity are impressive: the 1920's are marked by his interest in painting, in particular, in the trends already firmly established in public taste. But Fels' predisposition to avant-garde quests clearly emerges such as Cubism (Pablo Picasso), Fauvism (Henri Matisse, Maurice de Vlaminck) and, relatively speaking, of the Paris School style (Moïse Kisling). It is noteworthy that in his book *Conversations with Artists* (1925), Fels assesses the state of painting of that time on the basis of such representative, in his opinion, examples as the works of Monet, Derain, Léger, Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Segonzac, Utrillo.

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The name of the author and the name of the addressee ... Between them is a thin thread of attention, friendship or some vaguely discernible interest. Most often it is perceived as something individual, personal, as a greeting accidentally overheard in another's conversation. But sometimes a book with an autograph is elevated to a special symbolic meaning, acquiring general significance and connected in our understanding with a major cultural phenomenon.

It is symbolic that on the book of Max Jacob *Saint Matorel* illustrated by Pablo Picasso are preserved their autographs. The book was published in 1911 with a dedication to Guillaume Apollinaire - an expression of great friendship and a powerful fusion of energy that until the present still nourishes artistic culture.

It is also symbolic that names that are habitual for the French ear are often heard together with the names of those who came from other national worlds. Those who in their time, like the Spaniards Pablo Picasso or Juan Gris, the Dutchman Kees van Dongen, the Italian Amedeo Modigliani, populated the lowly abode of artists – the "Laundry" in Montmartre or the "Beehive" in Montparnasse. And some brought great fame to their homeland and to France.

Here is also present the spirit of East Slavic culture - Belarusian and Russian.

The book with the brief title *Marc Chagall*, the title page of which is presented in one of the attached scans, can be considered a special mark in the life of the artist. In essence it was more or less the first monographic work about Chagall published in Paris, "the capital of world art", thereby indicating recognition of him among French art lovers. Prior to this books dedicated to Chagall dedicated had been issued in Russia, Italy, Germany.

The book was issued by the publishing house Gallimard (second edition) in 1928 in the collection *New French Artists*. Together with the introductory article by art critic Waldemar George, the reader will find in it 29 reproductions of the now well-known paintings and graphic works by Chagall.

But for us the cognitive meaning of the book, of course, is not confined to this. From the usual, seemingly bibliophilic rarity comes a delicate cultural aura reminding us that in the period between the two world wars, profound intellectual and artistic processes filled the spiritual life of Paris. In all of this were felt also the peculiarities of the political climate in Europe, not the least of which were related to the revolutionary upheavals in Russia. Against this background, the interest of the French public in the "strange artist from mysterious Russia" is quite understandable.

But in this case, there is a very bright and personal aspect to the book. On its title page is a handwritten dedication that involuntarily raises questions about the nature of the relationship between the author and those to whom it was directed.

At first glance, the meaning of the dedication "To my friend Fels - Chagall" seems elementary. In any library collection of autographs, you can find many similar examples from the standpoint of content. But in the structural solution of the dedicatory inscription can immediately be seen the hand of the cunning master. Its layout in interaction with other aspects – a portrait of the artist and executed in a verified font – gives the title page particular expressiveness. At the same time the female figure and the Star of David serve as an idiosyncratic way of "distancing": they paradoxically connect, it would seem, the unconnected – commitment to Judaic symbolism on the one hand, and the violation of the religious prohibition against depicting human figures on the other. But here it is not worth seeing an idea being demonstrated, since for the creativity of Chagall, with his early defined religious tolerance and openness

to other cultural worlds, this problem was not urgent. Nor could it be relevant for Fels in view of the nature of his professional activity.

And yet another fact that has just come to light from a long period of non-existence thanks to the high professionalism of the staff of the Research Department of the National Library of Belarus. Marc Chagall's book *My Life* (Paris, 1931) translated into French by the wife of the artist, Bella Chagall, has been found in the holdings of the library. As regards the uncertain fate of the Russian original of the book many have written - it still has not yet been found. Those who are familiar with the Russian version of the book in the reverse translation by N. Mavlevich may be interested to know that in the French version, Chagall's text was preceded by a very informative preface by André Salmon. And with deep emotion the residents of Vitebsk sense as missing for some reason in the latest editions of the Russian translation the piercingly personal dedication of their great countryman: "To my parents, my wife, my hometown."

But we want to draw attention to still another point. The French version of the book, of course, survives today in many copies. It is, without doubt, represented in the libraries of Moscow and St. Petersburg, not to mention the book repositories of Paris. But the Minsk copy – the particular Russian drawing in the picture of Chagall's Parisian life - is unique. On it is a specific mark, a handwritten by Chagall in Russian and partly in French: "To the Turgenev Library from the author. Paris 1933. Marc Chagall" (the library was created over 130 years ago on the initiative and with the direct participation of Ivan Turgenev for Russian students studying in Paris).

It is striking in what forms the similarity of life situations of like-minded people finds expression. In the National Library of Belarus, as if to complement the autographic dedications on the books of Chagall or Desnos to Florent Fels are found similar messages in content and stylistic tone from Salmon to the same addressee. In his book *Young French Sculpture* (1919), we read the inscription: "To old man Fels from his friend André Salmon." Or much later in the book, *Saint André* (1936): "To you, my dear Florent, on this autumn Thursday of 1937 in memory of the Thursdays of spring of 1920. André Salmon."

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The star of Sergei Diaghilev attracted the whole galaxy of the brightest talents of Russia, France, Spain – of all Europe. Let us recall the musicians Igor Stravinsky and Nikolai Tcherepnin, Maurice Ravel and Francis Poulenc, the artists Alexandre Benois and Léon Bakst, Maurice Utrillo and Marie Laurencin. And once again come to mind the names of Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau, as well as many, many others, all those who composed music, wrote librettos and drew sketches of costumes or painted scenery for the Ballets Russes and who, according to contemporaries, opened under the influence of Diaghilev a new era in Parisian life. With the death of Diaghilev (1929), the brightest expression of the notorious âme slave, according to Benois, "Russian seasons" faded in Europe and America, but the personality of Diaghilev through reflected light shone a long time in the talent of his students and followers. A book by the dancer and later director Serge Lifar, *Dance* (1938), with an inscription to Pierre Lazareff, also a native of Russia, who together with his wife Hélène Gordon, founder of the most popular women's magazine *Elle*, left an imprint on modern French journalism. From Diaghilev's entourage also came Ida Rubinstein, who was born in St. Petersburg, danced for Diaghilev, became a director and philanthropist – a contradictory, bright personality. Not in vain do her portraits captivate us until now, drawn by Léon Bakst and Valentin Serov, and of course it is not by chance that

we see many autographs dedicated to her on the books of famous writers such as André Gide or Paul Claudel (she ordered texts for her productions), on publications related to the art world, or on the books of Russian writers in French translation, for example, Ivan Bunin.

Let us note a curious fact — some autographs of Ilya Ehrenburg are on books published by him in the 1930's in Paris in French and are inscribed mostly to the critic Léon Pierre-Quint and Louise Weiss.

It would be unfair to forget about those émigrés who today are in the shadow of more famous people but at the time nonetheless rose to prominence among the makers of French culture.

The name of Jacques (Yakov) Schiffrin in the 20's-30's of the twentieth century is associated primarily with the establishment and flowering of one of the most exciting initiatives in the field of books in France — the publishing house Gallimard. The initiator of a number of successful projects, such as, for example, the still popular series "Pléiades", among writers Schiffrin enjoys the reputation of a person of broad interests and fine artistic taste. The high respect for this "architect of the book" is evidenced by the numerous inscription-autographs belonging to the pen of the most outstanding personalities of pre-war France: Paul Valéry, Georges Duhamel, Charles Du Bos, Jean Tardieu, Jean Schlumberger, Julien Green et al. But of interest is the Russian aspect of his activity. Here, for example, are translations into French of the tales and short stories of Alexander Pushkin, presented in two separate books and carried out by Schiffrin with André Gide (a little known fact from the creative biography of the latter). Or a beautifully published *Boris Godunov* by Pushkin in the series "Pléiades" in a translation by Schiffrin and with flawless graphics for the national spirit by the Russian artist Vassily Shukhaev (1925). Later Schiffrin will entrust Shukhaev with illustrating also a book by Alfred de Musset, then Alexandre Benois and Alexandre Alexeieff in the same prestigious series with the works of André Maurois. In general the Russian artistic element (one can cite also the examples of Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Ivan Lebedev, and others) occupies a prominent place in the French publishing practice of that time. Equally important in this respect was the work of Marc Chagall, but this is a large question that requires special study.

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A book in itself is a testament to an era. But with the author's dedication, it can rise to a special symbolic meaning, acquiring a generalized significance and linking in our understanding the author's identity, the circumstances of his life and work, the circle of his close friends and associates. And all this against the background of the unique fate of a great culture and of the sometimes tragic turns of history.

You can escape from the personality of the author - thanks to its contents, the book will retain the value of a document, of a chronicle of societal moods, new tastes, large and small events. However, time is deposited in our memory not only in connection with events, but to no less a degree thanks to the image of the people involved in them. Hence, perhaps, comes the habit of characterizing time through names and symbols. In this sense, many of the above-mentioned figures stand before us.

But a book in its capacity as a cultural fact attracts attention to itself and through other aspects that are well known in various types of collecting, especially antiques. In the originality of how the letters are drawn, in the format and cover of a used book, in the color and even the smell of the paper in its own way is time felt. This may explain bibliophilic traditions that seem strange and incomprehensible to the consumer-pragmatic mind, for example the collection and storage of uncut books or the purchase of books with a special, typographically executed indication that the given copy has been prepared for

someone's library (for example, Rothschild). Needless to say, the value of a book rises if it relates to its first edition during the life of the author, all the more if the number printed is only some tens of copies. Such in particular is the above-indicated publication of Paul Valéry's *On Teaching Poetics* – only 80 copies.

Truly a rare sign of the era are the Max Jacob's *Saint-Matorel* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, released in editions of just 100 copies. These books are decorated with etchings by Pablo Picasso. But these are no ordinary typographical copies of book illustrations. They are made in the form of individual prints and are, thus, original works of the great artist.

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And for all that again the question arises: how did books that, it would seem, were meant to have a quiet life on the shelves of libraries in Paris, including in home libraries (these are not the least of such book collections), all of a sudden change their fate and appear in our country, in Minsk? The answer seems to be not difficult: after the military defeat of France they were extracted from there by brute force, gathered together and, as trophies were sent to Germany (on the circumstances of the confiscation and transportation of books to Germany, see Lucien Polastron, *Books on Fire*. Moscow: Text, 2007). And after 1945, they wound up in Belarus, in essence as reparations for the cultural ravages imposed on the republic during the years of occupation. The military tornado also ripped through these books, many of them of course died in the fire and under the ruins, others like veterans bear the mark of the war. More than one reader of the National Library of Belarus has had to take in his or her hands a book with a gaping torn hole on the cover - in its "body" stuck a sharp splinter.

These libraries had their own holocaust. They suffered as suffered many thousands of people who for political, racial or other reasons were considered enemies of the Reich. Obviously, among such people "guilty" in the eyes of Nazism were many of those who were deprived of their rights, property, forced to seek refuge in other countries, and perhaps were deprived of life, and who for a long time remembered himself in such an unusual way.

Even 30-40 years ago, some of these people could have learned about the wanderings of books belonging to them. Only in 1960 did Ida Rubenstein pass away, in 1976 Emmanuel Berl. In 1983 Jules Moch and Louise Weiss were still alive. But, perhaps, the fate of these books is not a matter of indifference to their relatives, their owners and their authors. The descendants of Louis Dreyfus are unlikely to remain indifferent to such dedications: "To Louis Dreyfus in friendship, Clemenceau", "To my esteemed and dear colleague Louis Dreyfus, respectfully, Paul Doumer. January 1906 ". In the first instance, of course, the autograph is by Georges Clemenceau, the famous "tiger", chairman of the Council of Ministers of France in the final stage of the First World War. The second signature belongs to Paul Doumer, the future president, who was killed in 1932 by the Russian émigré Paul Gorgulov.

Perhaps representatives of the Rothschild clan would find it interesting that among the many books with the bookplates of Edmond, Robert and Maurice Rothschild has been found a handwritten *General Catalogue of Books* of James Rothschild, the founder of the Paris branch of this dynasty of bankers, as well as the 3rd volume of the catalog of *Collections* of his son Alphonse (description and reproduction of watercolor miniature enamels made by old French and Venetian masters).

I would like to convey to specialists as well as to descendants of the above-mentioned prominent cultural and political figures the message that in Belarus are carefully kept books with their autographs or publications presented to them by other witnesses of the era that are marked for the authors and the addressees with the tragic events of the Second World War.

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An autograph-dedication gives a book a special additional quality. Thanks to it, the book stands out from the general mass of works, be they of profound content but nonetheless in multiple copies. Singling out a book with the live touch of his feelings, the author puts it into a particular humanized time and space, since an autograph is not an abstract appeal to people but a direct speech with an explicit, individualized addressee. In these circumstances the author is no longer perceived only in the halo of a creator, alienated from the reader, but as the real face of usual behavior with everyday capacity to express simple thoughts and feelings, which makes an autographed book a unique object.

At the same time books with autographs are not only a reminder of the identities of the author and the addressee, but also literature as an important part of culture in an abbreviated but sufficiently representative form - of course taking into account the time that has passed that has brought about changes in the assessment of one or another figure and his or her role in the spiritual life of society.

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