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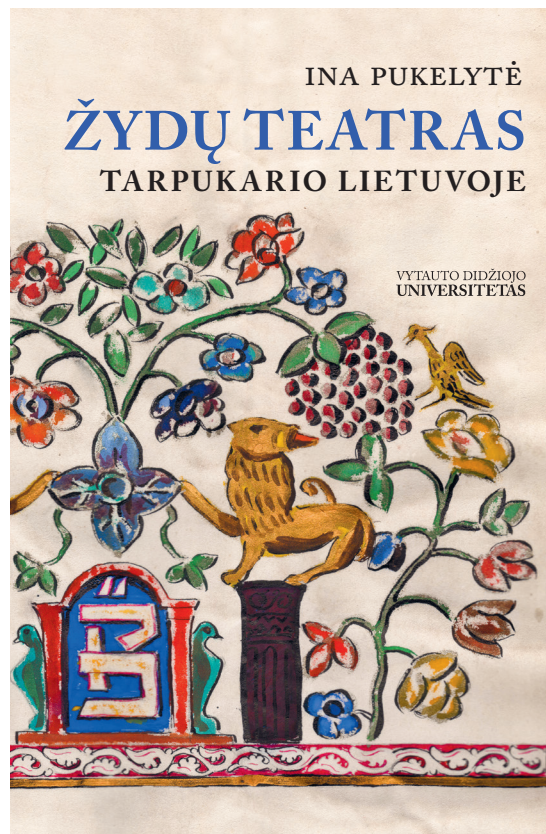
## MONOGRAPH BY INA PUKELYTĖ *ŽYDŲ TEATRAS TARPUKARIO LIETUVOJE (JEWISH THEATRE IN LITHUANIA DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD)*

### BOOK REVIEW

Ina Pukelytė, *Žydų teatras tarpukario Lietuvoje*.  
Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, 2017,  
summary in English.

There are (at least) two approaches that guide every historiographical endeavour. One type of historian is metaphorically led by Leopold von Ranke and his call for representation of historical events “as they truly were”, i.e., representation must be backed by all possible empirical, material, and documental evidence. Another type of historical thinking produces historiographical works that are usually referred to as post-positivist or rhetorical. In this case, discursive strategies—i.e., methodological and theoretical ways, means, and frameworks of representation of past realities—are emphasized. The bifurcation of these approaches becomes especially evident in the multiplicity of historiographies of late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when historiographical research begins to incorporate cultural and linguistic studies, feminist, and post-colonial studies in all their shapes and directions. As a guiding principle, these historiographies often pursue to voice silenced histories of agents traditionally not included in mainstream cultural memory and its metaphorical archive.

Historiography of Lithuanian theatre traditionally gravitated towards the first approach. The importance of archival research and urgency of gathering and preserving documents on the past of Lithuanian theatre were strongly imbedded in works of Balys Sruoga, arguably the best academically equipped theatre scholar of the Twenties and Thirties. Later, the



“ice-box” of the Soviet occupation in terms of new approaches to theatre historiography could not provide a favourable background for alternative research, and Lithuanian theatre historians focused on more or less complete archival, document based, and objectifying study of past periods and personalities. The two volumes of “Lietuvių teatro raidos bruožai” (“Features of Development of Lithuanian Theatre”) by Vytautas Maknys, published in the Seventies, demonstrate a variety of archival sources that the scholar was basing his argument on. In terms of theoretical background, the Romanticist concept of national culture was Maknys’ main point of reference.

A considerable change in writing and representation of Lithuanian theatre history took place after 1990, when the re-established independence of the country allowed local academe to absorb Western intellectual trends and, thus, to produce theatre research of higher theoretical sophistication. Volumes such as “Kaitos ženklai: šiuolaikinis Lietuvos teatras tarp modernizmo ir postmodernizmo: teorinės perspektyvos” (2008) by Jurgita Staniškytė and “Laikinumo teatras: lietuvių režisūros pokyčiai 1990–2001 metais” (2010) by Rasa Vasinauskaitė, as well as the collective monograph “Postsovietinis Lietuvos teatras: istorija, tapatybė, atmintis” (2014), appeared and dealt with contemporary and historical theatre in a more nuanced way, emphasizing specific issues and dwelling on conceptual theoretical frameworks.

Ina Pukelytė’s “Žydų teatras tarpukario Lietuvoje” (2017) is a noteworthy book on several accounts. First, it clearly demonstrates the tension between Rankean and post-positivist historiographies. Pukelytė’s book, being the first to attempt to map the presence of Jewish (mainly Yiddish) theatre in the territory of Lithuania, relies a lot on archival research. However, the author bases her intriguing argument on notions belonging to classical cultural studies, emphasizing concepts of “cultural memory”, “liquid modernity”, and “nomadism”, among others. Thus, the book combines both approaches, and it is the reader who has to decide if he or she finds such combination convincing.

In my opinion, Pukelytė’s book presents a good point of departure for anyone interested in Jewish theatre in Lithuania. The author gives a general overview of the development of Jewish theatre in Lithuania, focusing on the Twenties and Thirties—two decades of the first independence of the country. Pukelytė argues that the roots of the Jewish theatrical practices in Lithuania are to be found in a broad cultural matrix formed by a network of Jewish artists who were highly mobile, traveling between Europe and North America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fast paced economic development of independent Lithuania and rapid growth of its cities, in the author’s opinion, were favourable conditions for establishing and maintaining Jewish theatre companies, one of the first attempts being

Leonid Sokolov’s Jewish drama theatre in Kaunas, established in the early Twenties (p. 43). Pukelytė subsequently introduces impresarios Gabrieliūš Lanas and Borisas Bukancas, prominent figures and organizers of the Jewish theatre scene in Kaunas, later describing the main companies and studios that formed its landscape. Meanders of appearances, disappearances, mergings, and ruptures of these highly popular yet always unstable establishments are the most rewarding part of the book. The story itself that Pukelytė offers to her reader perfectly illustrates her argument that permanent motion and change were as central to Jewish theatre in the Twenties and the Thirties as they are to its understanding from historical perspective.

One could only wish that this fascinating story was even more detailed: the bibliography of the book reveals that Pukelytė conducted research at Lithuanian, American, and Israeli archives, yet some of the materials that give more detail on the aesthetic features of analysed companies were regrettably left untouched, for example, the numerous event permissions that Jewish societies and entrepreneurs were required to obtain from the municipal police. These documents contain detailed programmes and are available for research at Lithuanian Central State Archives. I was also not convinced by the employment of Baumanian and Deleuzian-Guattarian notions of liquid modernity, nomadism, rhizome et al. Despite being interesting as ideas that can, possibly, frame and explain the phenomenon of Jewish theatre, in Pukelytė’s book they largely remain in the first chapter, not turning into interpretative tools for arranging and commenting the historical material.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not undermine the main effect of Pukelytė’s book. Her monograph gives voice to the untold history of Jewish theatre in Lithuania for the first time. Mainstream Lithuanian theatre historiography only mentions Jewish theatre in passing and largely dismisses it as amateurish and aesthetically irrelevant. Thus, Ina Pukelytė’s “Žydų teatras tarpukario Lietuvoje” becomes indeed an inspiring point of departure for further research and discoveries.

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