

Robert Trumpis  
Personal Reflection – Banned Books Museum Life Project

I joined the Banned Books Museum life project because it aligned with things I've cared about for a long time, censorship, subversion, and the power of books as both symbols and weapons. My contribution was research-focused. I spent most of my time looking into possible countries and library venues where the museum's upcoming seminar could be hosted. That kind of logistical research might seem mundane from the outside, but for me, it was a way to help extend the reach of something I believe in.

There's a Lithuanian word, knygnešys, that translates to "book smuggler." During the late 19th century, the Russian Empire banned all Lithuanian-language publications printed in Latin script. In response, people like the knygnešiai risked prison, exile, and death to smuggle books across borders and keep their language alive. That part of my heritage has always stuck with me. Working with the Banned Books Museum, even indirectly, felt like a continuation of that lineage, not as an act of heroism, but as a small gesture of solidarity across time.

What I appreciated most about the project was how seriously it took banned literature without falling into spectacle. The museum doesn't just highlight controversial titles, it asks why they were banned, who did the banning, and what that says about the systems we live under. It doesn't moralise or flatten things into good vs. bad. It's messier than that, and more honest.

I do wish I'd had more direct interaction with the books themselves. Being more hands-on in the collection or curation process would've added another layer to the experience. But I also understand that the work I did, digging into institutions, evaluating potential partnerships, thinking about how and where banned books can spark conversation in public spaces, is its own kind of curation.

What I gained, more than anything, was a sense of continuity. Banned books aren't just historical artefacts; they're pressure points. Even today, the wrong book can still get you in trouble in the wrong place. That hasn't changed as much as people think. Working on this project sharpened my awareness of that—and reminded me that research, even the behind-the-scenes kind, matters.