

**Ego-Documents As First-Person Writings:  
the State of Research in Lithuania and the Diaspora**

**Arvydas Pacevičius**  
Vilnius University

According to the Lithuanian intellectual Tomas Venclova who was forced to leave his homeland in the 1970s, the concept of emigration in the modern global world has lost its meaning and is now but a myth. “You may live anywhere, but at the same time be in Lithuania and participate in its life. Long distances have lost their significance, we live in the world as a whole, and if we want (and I want to) we can still stay Lithuanians and live in this new whole unified world”. However, considering the concept of diaspora, we need to understand the causes of emigration and their diversity.

It is common knowledge that there were three Lithuanian emigration waves: a) before World War I; b) during the interwar period and c) after World War II. It should be noted that the chronological boundaries of the first and third wave of emigration are very widely stretched. For example, among the Soviet era emigrants not only Venclova, but also scientist Vytautas Skuodis was accused and persecuted for *samizdat* (*Perspektyvos*) and for his work “Spiritual Genocide in Lithuania”. In 1980, he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment and 5 years of exile. Being a US citizen (born in 1929, Chicago), Skuodis was allowed to leave just before the Singing Revolution (the restoration of independence). He then became an active member of the diaspora until his return to Lithuania in 1992, where he worked and published a memoir book called “Games in KGB Nets” (1996), a new edition of which is under preparation. Skuodis’ personal library funds was added to the Vilnius University Library collection in 2004. I expanded more on the Skuodis case to show the diversity of emigration. The circumstances of emigration also vary when looking at the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the Lithuanian population was being exiled to Siberia or left for Western Europe or other countries due to political persecution after the uprisings of 1831 and 1863 (I will discuss these cases later). On the other hand, Venclova’s thoughts about disappearing boundaries in a global world are important in the context of emigration archives research: research is impossible without cooperation, digitisation and access.

The aims of my presentation are the following: a) to present an overview of the major deposits of ego-documents (ED) in Lithuania and the Lithuanian diaspora; b) to characterise how they, as historical sources, are being published and researched; c) to discuss perspectives on their digitalisation. Generally, in this presentation the notion of *ego-document* is based on the concept of Jacob Presser: “an open, autobiographical writing in the first person, for oneself, for one’s family or for close relatives”. The concept of ego-document has not been developed in Lithuanian scholarly discourse. Historians employ the concept of *personal document*, as opposed to *pragmatic document*; literary theorists propose the concept of *intimate writings*, which, according to the “Encyclopaedia of Lithuanian Literature”, comprise four genres: *Memoirs*, *Diary*, *Autobiography*, and *Letters*.

**Table 1. The genres of intimate writings according to the “Encyclopaedia of Lithuanian Literature”\***

| Term (in English) | Terms (in other languages) | Term (in Lithuanian)                       | Definition   |
|-------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Memoirs           |                            | <i>Atsiminimai;</i><br><i>Prisiminimai</i> | One of the oldest narrative forms which was born as an expression of emerging historical self-awareness            |
| Diary             |                            | <i>Dienoraštis</i>                         | Dated notes which record events of the day, observations, and experiences; a narrative form and a narrative genre. |
| Autobiography     |                            | <i>Autobiografija</i>                      | A narrative of recollections about oneself, organised  |

|         |  |                |  |
|---------|--|----------------|--|
|         |  |                | chronologically or in problematic sections   |
| Letters |  | <i>Laiškas</i> | The oldest form of written communication, with its own developed ethics and stylistics, ranging from an official report to an intimate tone. |

\* For an electronic version see: <http://www.ile.lt/search3.htm>

Unlike pragmatic writings, intimate writings as well as ego-documents concern private, as opposed to public, life. Not only those who wrote intimate diaries, but also the authors of publicly well-known memoirs had a clear view of the line dividing public writing from private. Michał Kleofas Ogiński, the author of the polonaise “Farewell to the Fatherland”, wrote in the preface to the addenda to his Memoirs (1826–1827) in Exile, unpublished to this day (kept in the Manuscript Department of Vilnius University): “After my death the Memoirs will be passed to my wife and will forever stay in the family archives. I have put therein all the facts that I did not want to publish in my “*Memoirs*””<sup>1</sup>.

Notable examples: important in the context of European and even world culture and scholarship, Addenda to the Memoirs of Oginski, which we have already mentioned here, should also be published as soon as possible, or made available on-line in digitised form. Because these Addenda – unknown neither to the general public, nor scholars– symbolically mark the end of the Romantic era and the end of statehood not just in Lithuania, but also in the entire historical region which became part of the Russian Empire. The Memoirs of Ignacy Domeyko (1802–1889), philomat, Vilnius University graduate and émigré, mineralogist and Rector of the University of Santiago, Chile, also await public continuation and international dissemination.

Especially important for research are serial ego-documents, reflecting the mentality of the gentry and its changes, monogenic in form or even in content. Such as, for instance: a) travel

<sup>1</sup> Oginiskis, Mykolas Kleopas. *Atsiminimai apie Lenkiją ir lenkus nuo 1788-1815 metų pabaigos*. 1 tomas. Vilnius: 2007, p. 248.

diaries, including those by women, descriptions reflecting new routes ; b) mothers' diaries, written for children (for when they are older); c) diaries and memoirs of exile. Among them, the Diary of Tomasz Zan (1797-1855) stored in the Lithuanian State History Archive is not yet published in full. Especially important are entries reflecting the Protestant mentality and its stability, mostly by the head of the family, not just about the farm and the household, but about the family as well. In this sub-culture/ sub-confession, attention devoted to the offspring was obviously greater than in the dominant Roman Catholic setting. Writings of this kind, namely a chronicle put down into a family Bible generation after generation, have been mentioned by the famous artist of Lithuanian origin in exile, Jonas Mekas, in his "Reminiscences". Family chronicles, which, quite probably, were the earliest Lithuanian ego-document writings are represented only in fragments in institutional depositories (private archives in Lithuania are not yet well recovered and restored after the Soviet repressions). It has to be emphasised that this situation is a remnant of the Soviet era, when ego-documents were viewed as unreliable, misleading and (as produced by the class enemy) even hostile sources. Honest librarians used to hide them in remote corners of repositories, so as to preserve them from destruction.

In Lithuania there has been no focused research targeting ego-documents as a complex whole. Scholars use ego-documents as sources for their routine work, and there have been attempts to analyse and actualise single ego-documents in critical publications of sources<sup>2</sup>. Some attempts were made to publish memoirs of the last wave of émigrés, for example the "American Notebook" of Kazys Almenas of Kaunas University research papers "Oikos"<sup>3</sup>. A special issue of the research paper "Knygotyra" in 2008 (Vol. 50) was dedicated to the printed and hand-written heritage abroad in exile as well as in the diaspora (papers of Jolita Steponaitiene, Daiva Dapkute, Lee G. Burchinal, also colleagues from Estonia, Anne Valmas and Piret Noorhani). Such events, conferences, and research papers help the networking of the cultural /documental heritage of the Baltic diaspora. Nevertheless, as was mentioned above, there is a lack of research targeting ego-documents as a complex whole. Why?

Some insights based on ego-document analysis apparently led to the following conclusion: in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuanian intellectuals emerging together with the modern society lost the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, „Diary of the II War Time” (*Karo metų dienoraštis*, 1941–1944 m. Parengė Gediminas Rudis, Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2007) of Zenonas Blynas was published in 2007

<sup>3</sup> Saldukas, Linas ; Almenas, Kazys. „*Amerikos*” *sąsiuvinis VII* ("American Notebook") In: *Oikos*, 2008, no. 2 (6). See also : <http://www.iseivijosinstitutas.lt/index.php?cid=18>.

ability to write authentically about themselves and their family, as the attention was fully diverted towards external (social, political) matters. Book smuggler Juozas Rimša opens his autobiography with the sentence: “My family has been living in the Lithuanian spirit.” There is no more information about the family in this autobiography... This paradox has produced real difficulties for the research of 19<sup>th</sup> century family history, purely because of the lack of empirical data for any exhaustive analysis. On the other hand, it implies a crucial problem: why was the public interest in and theorising on family issues by intellectuals in late the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century not reflected in their own notes and letters?<sup>4</sup> These questions are fundamental, methodological. They could only be answered after publicly displaying more extensive lists of ego-documents and after making a comparative analysis of them not just on a Lithuanian, but on a regional and European scale including the Lithuanian diaspora. Here, I want to present some examples about the state of ego-document depositories in Lithuania and in the diaspora. One of the biggest in the Lithuanian diaspora is the Lithuanian World Archives, which contain personal collections of émigrés with extended chronological data of documents until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Aleksandras Paškevičius’s family collection represents not only official or pragmatic documents, but also correspondence, diaries, genealogical materials and testaments from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Lithuania, ego-documents are stored in various memory institutions: in archives, libraries and museums. The biggest resources are in the libraries of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, National M. Mažvydas and Vilnius University. There are some ego-document serial documents at the Vilnius University Library: the autobiography of Jurgis Gimbutas (Germany, USA, 1949-1993), the memoirs of Stasys Raštikis (USA, 1948-1985), the diary of Ona Šimaitė (1953-1970), the diary of Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė (1929-1938) and others. The Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences received 16 diaspora collections from 1990 until now, these collections contain ED, especially correspondence<sup>5</sup>.

The listing, censuses and research of ego-documents is inseparable from digitalisation, unavoidable in our times. The digitalisation of the cultural heritage in Lithuania is being implemented on the basis of the approved state strategy (with the help of structural funds of the

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<sup>4</sup> Marcinkevičienė, Dalia. *Vedusiųjų visuomenė: Santuoka ir skyrybos Lietuvoje XIX amžiuje-XX amžiaus pradžioje*. Vilnius, 1999, p. 98-99.

<sup>5</sup> Among them F 354 Alė Rūta, 360 Algirdas Gustaitis, 263 Kazimieras Alminas, F382 Jonas Antanas Stundžia, F388 Bražėnas Vilius and others. – According to the information of Rima Cicėnienė, the Head of the Manuscript Department at the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

EU), co-ordinated by the Ministry of Culture. Regrettably, only a marginal place is given to scientific research in this strategy, but the situation should improve soon with the launching of the National Scientific Research Program, the first of its kind in the history of independent Lithuania: “The State and the Nation: Heritage and Identity”. It provides for complex studies of cultural heritage, and digitalisation is recognized as an applied scientific activity, indispensable for fundamental and interdisciplinary research. The digitalisation of ego-documents and their publication on-line and the establishment of relevant data bases are related to the expanding information system [www.epaveldas.lt](http://www.epaveldas.lt) (the project of the European Digital Library), as well as to local projects [www.aruodai.lt](http://www.aruodai.lt) and [www.baris.lt](http://www.baris.lt). The creation of a European electronic library of ego-documents might encourage scholars to go beyond texts written in their own languages or available in their own country.

## **Conclusions**

Lithuanian state memory institutions possess ego-documents of European value, some of which are unique, although serial texts and those reflecting the history of everyday life have been neither methodically listed nor provisionally researched. In spite of the unfavourable general line of memory institutions which carry out conservation without public dissemination and in spite of unsettled terminology, there are opportunities for provisional and topical-analytical ego-document research, applied digitalisation research, establishment of data bases, and for a type of information system. Methodical assistance from EU countries would be of utmost importance, as well as common comparative studies of ego-documents, with the subsequent integration of the results into the European space of information science and communication.