

WORLD WAR II LITHUANIAN EXILE MEMOIRS AS AN ACT OF OPPOSITION TO SOVIET ERA INJUSTICE

LIETUVOS ANTROJO PASAULINIO KARO EGZILIO MEMUARAI KAIP PASIPRIEŠINIMO AKTAS SOVIETINĖJE LITERATŪROJE

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Summary

The occupation and annexation of Lithuania by the Soviets started in 1940. From 1941 through 1952 and even later, the destruction and deportations of the country's inhabitants were carried out. Special laws of the Soviet government were implemented in order to arrest, jail and murder 196,000 Lithuanian citizens, while 136,000 were deported to Siberia. Historical models demonstrate that one out of every four Lithuanians were killed at that time.

Lithuanian literature which deals with these themes is dramatic, varied and rich. The texts of exile and concentration camps often are related to memoirs, diaries and letters which at first were published in periodicals, since the authors met with difficulties in having their work recognized. Nevertheless, after 1989 when official censorship weakened, the opportunity to write freely arose and survivors of these horrible policies in great numbers took advantage of telling their stories and recording their experiences. This kind of literary expression was an act of opposition, a scream of pain, testimony to injustice. Although society no longer has as great an interest in these works, they continue to be written, produced and published even to the present day. The problem of classifying these narratives and labeling their genre remains. This article seeks to show readers the wealth and variety of exile and labor camp literature.

Key words: *exile literature, censorship, World War II memoirs, resistance, dissident literature, Soviet occupation.*

Santrauka

1940 metais prasidėjo Lietuvoje sovietinė aneksija ir okupacija. 1941–1952 metais ir dar ilgiau vyko Lietuvos gyventojų naikinimas ir trėmimas. Pagal specialiuosius sovietinės valdžios įstatymus 196.000 Lietuvos gyventojų buvo suimta, įkalinta ir nužudyta, o apie 136.000 ištremta į tolimą Sibiro kraštą. Istorikų simuliacija rodo, jog dėl bolševikų teroro buvo nužudytas kas ketvirtas ano meto Lietuvos gyventojas.

Lietuvių literatūra, aprašanti šią problematiką yra įdomi, daugialypė ir turtinga. Tremties ir lagerio tekstai dažnai sietini su atsiminimais, prisiminimais, dienoraščiais ar laiškais. Iš pradžių jie buvo spausdinami periodiniuose leidiniuose. Autoriai susidurdavo su daug sunkumų norėdamas tokią literatūrą paskelbti. Nuo 1989 metų, pradėjus silpnėti oficialiai cenzūrai, atsirado galimybė rašyti laisvai, todėl prasideda masinis leidimas. Iki šių dienų, nors jau ir nebėra tokio stipraus visuomenės poreikio, lietuviai dar rašo, spausdina ir vis dar nori išsakyti anų dienų liudijimus. Lieka problema, su kokia žanrine paantrašte susieti šiuos pasakojimus. Šiuo straipsniu siekiama parodyti skaičtytojams tremties ir lagerio literatūros įvairybę bei turtingumą.

Esminiai žodžiai: *Tremties ir lagerio tekstai, atsiminimai, cenzūra, rezistencija, sovietinė okupacija.*

The literature as the symbol of resistance, just for the simple fact that it was, not because of narration's type, way of selection words, weak in criticism, but fighting with regimen, against Soviet system, being the real voice of independence over Soviet's rule. Comparing literary process that in 1968 started in Western Europe countries, especially in Paris, having in mind Sławomir Mrożek characteristic text written in "Paris Match" and "Le Monde" after entering the borders of Czechoslovakia by Soviet's army, thinking of development in feminist's writing, we can't forget about maybe less popular but still important II World War exile's memoir and essays.

The one undeniable fact, emphasizing the interest of such theme among readers and critics is that exile's memoirs were very popular and really willingly read in Lithuania. From the moment

they could appear on the printing market, in press, people started to write, started to read, started to remember those slavery days.

Is it still worth to remember this time, these people. As George Santayana, the philosopher and writer, said: “[...] this who forget of the war atrocities, is condemn to experienced them once more.” (Tołczyk, 2009, 9)

Opponents, among them for example Frederic Nietzsche, say:

remembering about historical devils and scratching the pain again and again causes the effect, that next generations can't forget father's fault and look for revenge. So, maybe better is not to remember but to forget. (Ibid., 10)

Looking at this problem, and analyzing it we can notice that occurs one very important question, if we forget about victims of totalitarianism's system, can't it be considered as the cooperation with the torturer and slaughterer.

Nadieżda Mendelsztam, Osip's Mendelsztam died in Gulag widow wrote:

Murderers, provocators, denounciators had one certain feature in common. They couldn't imagine, that their victims one day would be able to rise from the dead, that they regain the possibility to speak <...> they razed from memory for ages all sent to Gulags and prisons. . It was incredible for oppressors and they couldn't take it in, that those exile's shadows arise from forgetfulness graves and start to call their torturer's to account. (Mandelsztam 1997, 55)¹

Looking forward and analyzing the historical events of these tragic days, we can notice how big destruction of nation was caused by Soviet's occupation. Some historical facts and dates help to understand that soviet's repressions over Lithuanian nation were done in a big way.

¹ Mordercy, prowokatorzy, donosiciele mieli wspólną cechę, nie wyobrażali sobie, że ich ofiary kiedyś zmartwychwstaną i odzyskają dar mowy [...] Tych wszystkich, których wyprawiali na tamten świat albo do obozów, uważali za wykreślonych z życia na wieki wieków. Nie przychodziło im do głowy, że te cienie mogą wstać z grobu i pociągnąć swych grabarzy do odpowiedzialności (Mandelsztam, 1997, 55). Translated from Poland by author.

Till 1941 there were captured and taken to prison 6606 people, all of them considered as “political opponents”, others from Samogitia (Žemaitija), Highlands (Aukštaitija), and other regions, were sent into exile to Syberia,² most of them to Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk, Altai Republic, Komi Republic and Jakutia. There were two more deportations, did on very large scale called “Spring” and “Autumn” (Anušauskas, 2006, 26).

Today it is very difficult, precisely count how many people died in exile’s, how many in Gulags, how many returned. Rated numbers say about thousand of killed and lost. Historians mention, that between 1940-1941 more than 11,000 died, 18,000 were lost, and between 1944-1953 the number of victimized has increased rapidly to 290,000 (Juozevičiūtė, Rudienė, 2007, 79).

One undeniable fact is that among those oppressed by the Soviet occupation there were 77,9% Lithuanians; 15,3 % Poles; 8,3 % Jews; 3,4 % Germans³ (Anušauskas, 2006). Absolute helplessness of Lithuanian nation standing against crime, terror, and mechanism of the Soviet oppressors’ activity. During the eleven years leading up to 1952, or even longer, (excepting the three year German occupation), echelons carried innocent people, the elderly, women and children deep into Russian territory, with one main objectives of deportation – to provide the regions of Siberia with a free labour force.

These above mentioned figures show by just how much the Soviet occupation destroyed the Lithuanian population.

To paralyze with fear

That was the intention of the occupants. Totalitarianism, a regime aiming at subordinating the whole society to the state

² I talk about “Siberia” having in mind not geographically marked out territory, but the whole land with Gulags camps and all deportees’s exile’s places extended in the Soviet Union.

³ Such evidence is shown in historical study by Arvydas Anušauskas. See: Anušauskas A., 2006, *Okupacija ir aneksija*. Vilnius: Margi raštai.

and its official ideology by means of intimidation, terror and hypocrisy, was destroying each and every citizen.

It is understandable, that people wanted to show their pain, disagreement, sense of injustice. In such conditions of war and occupation the only possible way of expressing their bitterness was keeping their experience in their heads and later starting to write memories, essays, and poems. There were many authors, many titles, and many people interested in reading this kind of literature.

Until the middle of the 80s, beside some texts published by emigrants, and some fragments of memoirs that occur in second hand publishing movement nothing was printed, because in Lithuania itself there was a censorship of literature dealing with the exile and labour camps. Memoirs, letters, notes of those who managed to survive often were hidden deep in drawers awaiting the right time when the truth could be revealed.

From the 60s, as Saulė Matulevičienė writes in his study, official press began an open campaign degrading in the eyes of the public all the people who came back from the exile. There were published articles criticizing any acts of resistance. A book series under a very significant title *The facts accuse* gained wide popularity. The paradox was that the self-critical articles were written by the former victims of oppression forced to publish them in the series (Matulevičienė, 2003).

As the political situation in East European countries started to change in 1970s and 1980s, very slowly and tentatively an independent publishing movement emerged in the Soviet Republic of Lithuania.

Understandable that a real boom in publishing exile's history started from the 90s, when Lithuania became an independent and free country. Many authors started to write, and many books appeared, for example, written by: Marija Garbačiauskienė, *Jei lamė nebūtų lydėjusi*, Janina Bičiūnaitė-Masiulienė, *Jaunystė prie Laptevų jūros*, Janina Giedraitienė, *Kelionė į niekur*, and many others.

But even that we can't forget about this first brave heros, who started to speak, when it was still dangerous and forbidden.

First extracts of memoirs were published in the Press. In 1970 Justinas Marcinkevičius in his book published one part of the memoirs of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė called *Rebilituota*, the same was published in *Literatūra ir menas* magazine in 1988. Together with Justinas Marcinkevičius took care of the memoirs episodes Kazimieras Saja. The complete version of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's memoirs, together with short stories, titled *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros* appeared in Lithuania for the first time in 1997, and then in 2005. The book was translated in English in 1981, 2001 and 2002; German in 2000 and 2002. The fragments of memoirs written in Russian were published for the first time in 1979 in the magazine called *Memory*, and than the book was published in Jakutks in 1995 and 2001⁴.

Literatūra ir menas published texts concerning exile as well as guerilla resistance during the II World War. It was then when a short story *Mūsų tremties keliai* by Ona Beleckienė and *Ešelonai* by Antanina Garmutė were published. Some texts also appeared in the magazines *Proskyna*, *Nemunas* and *Giria* (Matulevičienė, 2003).

In the same years more extensive extracts were printed by publishing houses *Sietynas* and *Pergalė*. The magazine *Pergalė*, thanks to the initiative of Ludvikas Gadeikis, created a special column devoted to people who were repressed. Some memoirs, letters, and diaries were presented to the public by Antanas Kryžanauskas *Už ką?*, Vladislovas Telksnys *Kamino šešėlyje*, and others.

⁴ This information are from Viktorijos Daujotytės and Saulės Matulevičienės descriptions. See: Matulevičienė S., 2003, Dokumentinė literatūra pokario ir tremties atsiminimai. – *Naujausioji lietuvių literatūra*. Vilnius: Alma Littera, 319–345. Daujotytė V., 2005, Kelyje į literatūros lobyną. – Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*. Vilnius: Lietuvos Rašytojų Sąjungos leidykla, 5–16.

Pergalė also contributed to the creation of special publishing series initially entitled “Pergalės žurnalo biblioteka”, and later from 1990 to 1995 renamed to “Tremties archyvas”.

The above-mentioned dates, places of publishing, are just dry facts that do not fully show the difficulties with which the author and each potential reader had to struggle. Fragments of memoirs, rewritten by hand and circulating among people, were very important, often even enshrined like relics. How suggestive and poetic are the words written about this by Eugenijus Ignatavičius in his study *Kančių žemėlapiai*:

Kiek metų iš rankų į rankas keliavo nučiupinėti, apspurę, plonam rūkomam popieriui mašinėle spausdinti A. Andrukaičio sąsiuviniai. O D. Grinkevičiūtės skaudi išpažintis. Kokia emocinė jėga ir įtaiga jie žadino tiesos troškimą, ugdė nacionalinę savimonę, skatino sukilti prieš neteisybę... (Ignatavičius, 1992, 6)⁵

If we consider again Grinkevičiūtė and her book *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, we can notice how many obstacles faced the author of memoirs, and how many problems had to be solved by many other authors who wanted to publish during the time of communist dictatorship.

Grinkevičiūtės's history is well known in Lithuania, so here only short abstract. She was deported together with her mother and brother in 1941. In 1945 she managed to return to her homeland but in 1950 she was arrested and again sent into exile. She put the manuscript of her memoirs into a jar and buried it in the ground. Viktorija Daujotytė in the preface to Grinkevičiūtės's book *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, wrote about her first memoirs:

⁵ For how many years were the dirty, smoke-soaked typescripts of Andriukaitis passed on from hand to hand. And Grinkevičiūtės' painful confession. How many emotions were aroused by the search for the truth, forming the national awareness. Translated by author.

Savo tremties tekstus ji atkakliai rašė siekdama, kad jie kada nors galėtų dalyvauti tiesos ir teisybės byloje. Pirmuoju bandymu labiau pasidavė spontaniškam siekimui ne tik papasakoti, bet ir išsipasakoti, pašmone jausdama, kad atvertos traumos greičiau nyksta. (Daujotyte, 2005, 12)⁶

After her return to beloved Lithuania she wrote down her memories from exile once again. The second version is a bit different:

Iš naujo pradėdama rašyti – po 1974 metų ... šiek tiek keitė pasakojimo taktiką; negalėjo nekeisti, nes jau kitas buvo jos patirties lygmuo, kiti uždaviniai. (Ibid., 2005, 15)⁷

The difficulties of publishing are discussed by Vladas Vyšniūnas in his book titled *Šiaurės eskizai*. It was there, when the first memoirs appeared, in 1988. In the preface there is a note that the text is published in its original version only with small editorial corrections. The author in the letter to the reader states that he wrote down all that he remembered from staying in the camp. He has not revealed any names as he was afraid that it could expose his friends to danger:

[...] rašymo metu šitie atsiminimai galėjo baigtis blogai ne tik autoriui, bet ir paminėtiems asmenimis. (Vyšniūnas, 1988, 8)⁸

Unfortunately, those who have written such memoirs have not always managed to survive to see Lithuania's independence. Therefore, an important role was played by oral histories remembered by exiles' families, sons, and daughters, who later, after

⁶ Stubbornly she wrote down her memories hoping that one day they will express the truth. Her first efforts resemble spontaneous conversations as like she subconsciously felt that open bitterness will quickly disappear. Translated by author.

⁷ When she started to write again after 1974 she changed the tactics of expression; it was a different scale of experiences, different tasks. Translated by author.

⁸ [...] at the time when the memoirs were being written down they could endanger not only the author but also his companions who are mentioned. Translated by author.

1990, wrote them down and published them. It was the case of Onutė Alksinytė-Garbštienė diary who had been writing since 1942 for 14 years. In the preface it is stated:

Simboliška ir tai, kad jų vaikai, kuriems visų pirma ir buvo skirti dienoraščio įrašai, išsaugojo juos iki mūsų dienų. Išsaugojo ir pasidalino motinos prisiminiais su kitais. (Alksinytė-Garbštienė 1993, 8).⁹

The last issue is left to be explained, a question arises: why did they write, why did they reminisce about those years of wrong, pain, enslavement?

Considering this aspect from the perspective of literary analysis, it is necessary to understand the role that the author had to fulfill, the tasks that were set before them by the post-camp, post-exile life “at large”.

In case of many, the prevailing conviction was that they are obliged to tell the truth. There were many messages of the following kind:

We should want and demand that the returning, the miraculously saved [...] write down their memories [...] it is an obligation that none can evade. God let some people see hell in their lifetime and come back, so that they could give witness to the truth.¹⁰

To give witness to the truth

This was the primary aim of all people who wrote down their memories of the exile. While it is true that the diary-like accounts of the authors, being both witnesses and participants of the events, lack distance, they are at the same time deeply reflexive. They talk about the immensity of human suffering and humiliation,

⁹ It is symbolic, that children, for whom those notes were written, prevailed them until our time. Prevailed and shared their mother's memoirs with others. Translated by author.

¹⁰ These words were written by the author of the article, after the interviews with Lithuanian Siberia's deportees.

about disintegration of personality and heroic attempts to save one's own "self". The authors are aware that it is impossible to show the full truth about the world of Gulags. They know that to many readers that world, creating an immensely brutal image of destruction, incapacitation and enslavement, seems unreal. As a reminder, in Western Europe memories of the exile and Gulags were received with reserve, people did not want to believe in the accounts of witnesses, this kind of truth about soviet Russia seemed hard to accept. The writings of the most well-known and most often published Alexander Solzhenitsyn were received with great disbelief – Anne Applebaum, among others, wrote about this in her book *Gulag*, published in 2005. (Applebaum, 2005)

I wanted to prove with my own life that people have the right to freedom...

This is how Gulag prisoners explained the point of writing down memories. It is a personal reason, an individual settlement with the past. This shocking confession, so meaningful in its essence, which can refer not only to exiles but to every man entangled in totalitarianism, was the motto of many works related to the exile. Communism, which did not operate in an ostentatious way, led to moral erosion through deceit, destroying people from the inside. Personal settlement with the world and fate, moral dilemmas, the struggle for one's own soul became the testimony of the Gulag generation, a literary confession in which the "rights of the soul" prevailed over the "rights of the body".

Searching for and tracking traces

This motif, particularly emphasized in works based on documentary-like, report-like description, has one aim – to save from oblivion. In this sense, literature becomes not only a witness to the truth, a personal settlement with the past, its message becomes

a dramatic cry for remembrance and sacralisation. The writer is aware that the traces, being witness not only to crime, but also great heroism, are constantly destroyed, that everything falls into oblivion because that is the effect of time. As Ignatavičius wrote:

Žmogaus istorija nesibaigia su jo mirtimi. Kol gyvitos istorijos liudytojai ir dar viskas nepasakyta apie tą neteisybę, tol aktualūs ir šie paliudijimai. (Ignatavičius, 1992,6)¹¹

Analyzing exile's memoirs from the point of view of literary concept it is possible to mention about three main methodological point of interpretation¹².

1. Having in mind time

There are two moments when the „exile's writer” can share with his thoughts with the receiver of the text:

- these written by the person still being on the exile
- these written by the person returning home after many years of deportation

As we can predict there are not many texts written on exile. Very difficult conditions, lack of nearly everything, emaciation, weakness, hunger didn't inspire writing. The most popular form of contact were letters¹³. In such point, the narration, of course, is very simple, short, without deep consideration. They seems to be like news, reportage like form rather than literary composition.

All texts that were written after successful return home are completely different. First of all, they are longer, more conservative, considered, finished up. Despite documentary relation,

¹¹ The story of a man does not end with his death. As long as witnesses to this story are alive and the truth has not come to light yet, testimonies of truth are important. Translated by author.

¹² It is necessary to add, that this way of interpretation of Exile's Memoires is individual and innovatory way of analyzing this kind of literature, done by the author of the article, as till now, this problem wasn't widely discussed and described.

¹³ About exile's letters it is possible to read in the article published: Pokorska-Iwaniuk M., 2014, Laiškai iš tremties – ryšių, ilgesio ir prisirišimo prie tradicijos simbolis. – *Acta litteraria comparativa. Laiškas literatūroje ir kultūroje: Mokslo darbai*, (2014–2015), 7, 249–262.

authors try to fill their works with moral and didactical elements, patriotic they want to awake nation's conscience, people's soul.

2. Having in mind the sender of the text

It seems very important to analyze memoirs having in mind the author of the text. Completely different can see Syberia and other exile's places an adult, who left homeland and remember his native land and still feels homesick, and from the other point describes his feelings a child, sometimes born on the exile, for whom, very often, the new place of living is a newness, or even the only home.

3. Having in mind the place of exile.

Talking about the place of exile we can digress and advance a thesis about "places dualism". Reading exile's memoirs the reader can notice that there are two expanses. First, the geographically described land, seeing by everyone, cartographers, explorers on the maps, in books. Second, the land created in deportees mind, seen in visions and described in memoirs. Studying "geographical exile's places" we can form the new map of the Soviet Union, or speaking more clearly, the map of huge Soviet's Gulag, which is extended on the enormously wide territory, which has got his own law regulations, which marks out new borders. This Gulag's map is very special, very particular, because is created from human's memoirs, experience, feelings. It is not homogenous and differs in every aspect, like people's life. It is vivid and evaluates and the only stable traces lead to written proofs, like memoirs, letters. That's way, this kind of literature is very important in many aspects of analyzing, not only because of its literary value, but also because of its historical searching and simply people's memory.

Summarizing, one can ask, if it is possible to talk about created literature's fictional world, or maybe it is only the reportage, but in this divagations the most important seems to be the fact,

that memories of the exile, expressing the truth, the cruelty and human helplessness in the face of totalitarian regime, were a tool of opposition and resistance, a factor protecting the national identity and giving rise to the protest against sovietisation. They did not accuse or point fingers at the guilty; they did not put the torturers and the executioners against a wall. They became the whole nation's voice of conscience, the memory of the times of persecution and enslavement of people.

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