

Dr Inna GANSCHOW
Research Scientist
Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH)

UNIVERSITÉ DU LUXEMBOURG
Maison des Sciences Humaines
11, Porte des Sciences
L-4365 Esch-sur-Alzette
T +352 46 66 44 9391

inna.ganschow@uni.lu / <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/people/inna-ganschow>

Ink and Paper in the Camp

Ego-Documents of Luxembourgish Conscripts in the Soviet Captivity

Introduction

At the center of research on camp literature sits the genre of memoirs of the Nazi concentration camps' 'Holocaust literature'. The pioneer was the US-American literary scholar and Holocaust survivor Susan Cernyak-Spatz.¹ Russian studies scholars define the genre more broadly. They analyze the memoir texts about the German as well as about the Soviet camps, whereby the authors of the mostly autobiographical texts partly experienced both types of camps. Especially at the end of the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period, in the years 1944–1945, very few former Soviet so-called 'Ostarbeiter' (forced laborers from the East meaning the USSR and Poland) and prisoners of war went directly home from the German camps, because their stay in enemy countries brought them under suspicion of espionage by the Soviet security services.² An elaborate system of collection, transit, filtration and other state security camps shifted people from the German 'total institution'³ to the Soviet one.

¹ Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz, "German Holocaust Literature" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1985).

² S. Nikita Petrov's paper on the persecution of Eastern workers in the postwar period: Nikita Petrov: "Die staatliche Überprüfung sowjetischer Repatrianten und ihre rechtlichen Folgen (1944–1954)", in *Forced Labor in Hitler's Europe. Occupation, Work, Consequences*, ed. Dieter Pohl and Tanja Sebta (Berlin: Metropol 2013), 311–326.

³ Term used by sociologist Erving Goffman to describe closed institutions such as convents, armies, prisons, camps, etc., whose main characteristic is the correction of identity, personality,

In addition to the works of Soviet classics such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn⁴ and Varlam Shalamov⁵ or the Pole Gustaw Herling-Grudziński,⁶ who expressed their camp experiences in literary form, there are many far lesser-known testimonies from camps that were never intended for publication. These include texts by foreign prisoners⁷ that describe life in the Soviet Gulags. Some of them were even written in the camps. A large part of the non-Soviet camp inmates came to the GUPWI camps⁸ after 1939 as a result of the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and finally after 1941 as prisoners of war. The latter group included Luxembourgers who documented their experiences in secretly written diaries and letters or took home memorized poems of deceased comrades. Such textual testimonies give us direct access to the memories and experiences of everyday life in the camps, authentic reflections on one's own fate and the processing of arrest, imprisonment and punishment.⁹

Texts by Luxemburgers in Soviet camps

and behavior. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (London: Paperback, 1991).

⁴ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The GULAG Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974 (written 1973)).

⁵ Varlam Shalamov, *Through the Snow: Kolyma Tales* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980 (written 1958–1968)).

⁶ Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, *A World Apart: Imprisonment in a Soviet Labor Camp During World War II* (London: Heinemann, 1951 (written 1949–1950)).

⁷ For detailed statistics on foreign civilians in various camps and prisons in the USSR in the 1930–1950s, see Pavel Polian, *Soviet Repression of Foreigners: The Great Terror, the GULAG, Deportations*, in *Reflection on the Gulag* ed Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori, Emanuela Guercetti (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2003), 61–104.

⁸ GUPVI – Glavnoe upravlenie po delam voennoplennykh i internirovannykh (State administration in the matter of prisoners of war and internees). On this camp system see Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI: Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956* (Berlin: Oldenburg, 1995).

⁹ On war literature and front letters of the forced recruits, see the chapter by Sandra Schmit, “‘Ons Jongen’ – frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte”, in *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Eupuration* ed. Claude D. Conter et al. (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

Fig. 1 Prisoners of war in camp 188 in Rada near Tambov, ca. 1943–1944. photographer unknown. Private archive Evgeni Pisarev.

Luxembourg camp literature has its literary roots in the prisoner and prisoner of war literature of World War I. During their Soviet imprisonment from 1943 to 1953, the Luxembourg forced conscripts continued a tradition of documentary writing that did not seek to create fictional narrative worlds, but focused exclusively on what they had experienced themselves. A large part of the texts is literature which was not written for a larger audience. These texts were often published by the authors themselves, sometimes decades later – autobiographies, memoirs or volumes of poetry (Faber,¹⁰ Bausch,¹¹ Schauss¹²). A fictional play by the former prisoner of war Joseph Schmit¹³ remains unpublished.

Numerous ego-documents have also been preserved as contemporary history researchers now call them – private, handwritten texts of a personal nature. The range of Luxembourgish texts from the Soviet camps that are examined in this paper extends from ‘smuggled-out’ notes and letters that released comrades brought back to Luxembourg, to diaries, speeches, and homemade dictionaries, to poems and stories that were written partly in the camp and partly directly after the return from Tambov and other Soviet camps. In addition to written materials, there also are drawings.

The first step in approaching this material is to sort through valuable papers from the years 1943 to 1946. The texts in which their authors recorded camp life can be viewed and analyzed from various perspectives. In the foreground of the present study is the thesis of Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and

¹⁰ Ernest Faber and Pierre Bausch, *Tambov* (Mersch: Fr. Faber, 1946).

¹¹ Pierre-Dominique Bausch, *Poésies = Gedichte* (Esch/Alzette: Schortgen, 2000).

¹² Ernest Schauss, *Pickegen Drot. D'Leide vun engem Lëtzebureschen Zwangsrekrutéierten an Naziaffer* (Luxembourg: ed. and self-published by the author, 2000).

¹³ Joseph Schmit, *Das Labyrinth: Drama in four acts with frame story* by Costa Faber (Esch/Alzette: typed manuscript at Centre National de Littérature, 1952), CNL AU-34.

neurologist from Vienna, which attempts to give meaning to life in the camp through specifically determined actions – logotherapy – which can have a self-healing effect and increase the chances of survival.¹⁴ This analysis will be about texts written by Luxemburgers in Soviet camps in Russia as well as in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany (SOZ),¹⁵ which will be analyzed how writing must have helped to give meaning to suffering and fate. The focus is on leitmotifs, images, and topoi that the authors of the texts consciously or unconsciously drew upon to find spiritual support and (re)gain a sense of control over their own lives.

Inventory: Documents and their function

Fig. 2. Cover of the diary of Arthur Ollinger 1941–1946. Private archive of the Ollinger family.

The analyzed texts can be divided into two categories according to formal criteria or genres. One group includes poems, song lyrics, and narratives, as well as – if we define the term ‘text’ broadly – camp life narrated in drawings, which can be considered ‘artistic narratives’.

The other group can be categorized as ‘ego-documents’ such as letters, speeches, diaries, and dictionaries, which had a concrete addressee and function that lies outside the literary-artistic realm. Both groups of texts have in common the place, time, origin of the authors, as well as the circumstances under which these texts were created. So, the material they process is the same, but the used methods are different.

¹⁴ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006 (written 1946))

¹⁵ SOZ, the Soviet Occupation Zone (russ. Sovetskaya okkupatsionnaya zona Germanii) was one of the four zones into which Germany was divided after the war. It existed from 1945 until the founding of the GDR in 1949.

If we organize the texts according to their function, considering the targeted readers, four groups emerge:

- Personal texts for an addressee: letters and poetry/dedications,
- Texts for other prisoners: speeches and songs,
- Texts for abstract readers: short stories and camp scene drawings,
- Texts for personal use: dictionaries and diaries.

We are interested here especially in the analysis of the textual leitmotifs with which the forced recruits practiced logotherapy after Viktor Frankl: Does the sense of life in linguistic communication lie on the level of the sender (*I put my camp life into words, for myself*) or on the level of the receiver (*I address someone through my writing to overcome isolation*)? Apart from the expected leitmotifs of longing, homesickness, and nostalgia, special attention should be paid to the representation of the new world of experience – (Soviet) Russia as a country, as a stranger, as a source of bondage, as a former military enemy, as a barrier, etc. In some texts it can be seen as a Germany replacement, which had previously been evoked in the forced recruits the same associations.

A total of sixteen authors can be identified, each with one to eight texts, written either in the camp itself or immediately afterwards, in the first months after their return. Accordingly, genres of the texts can be organized as following:

- Letters: Joseph Steichen, Julien Coner, Jean Sprunck,
- Poetry: Pierre Bausch, Constant Woltz, Aloyse Lang, Gaston Junck,
- Speeches or letters: Ernest Schauss, collective letter to Stalin from several senders,
- Song lyrics: André Kettenhoffen,
- Short stories: Ernest Faber, Jos Bailleux, Jos Zeimetz,
- Drawings: Jos Zeimetz, René Leopard, Paul Hamtiaux,
- Dictionaries: Ernest Schauss,

– Diaries: Ernest Schauss, Julien Coner, Arthur Ollinger, François Adams, Metty Scholer.

This paper will focus on those texts which were written in the camp: three diaries, three letters, fourteen poems, and one dictionary and one collective letter each.

Diaries: Hunger, Waiting, Riding

Currently, there are three Luxembourg diaries that were almost certainly written during Soviet captivity, although later corrections or possible completions cannot be ruled out. It can be assumed that, although logging the camp's daily life was forbidden,¹⁶ keeping a diary was possible – depending on the relations with the guards or the skill of the prisoner – despite the lack of paper and the ban on ink. Julien Coner wrote from the camp in northern Segescha in Karelia, where he worked in a wood and paper factory and crafted his own diary, from April to June 1945. Later he was transferred to Tambow, where he continued writing until October 1945, but now in French.¹⁷ Arthur Ollinger ended up in a Soviet camp in the SOZ in the spring of 1945 before being passed on to the Belgians and Americans in Belgium.¹⁸ Erny Schauss began his diary when he loaded the train from Tambow to Luxembourg in the fall of 1945.¹⁹ From all three diaries, one can discern a main theme or leitmotif that connects all the entries.

Fig. 3. Drawing by Julien Coner, ca. 1943–1945. Private archive of the Coner family.

¹⁶ Yurii Mizis, Vladimir Diachkov and Vladimir Kanishchev, *Tambovskie lageria dlia voennoplennykh: istoriia, kontingent, sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie aspekty vzaimootnosheniy vnutri i vovne 1943–1948 gg.* (Prisoner of war camp in Tambov. History, contingent, social-psychological aspects of relations inside and outside 1943–1946) (Tambov: TGU, 2022), 294–536.

¹⁷ Coner's diary is published in Georges Even, *Deemools am Krich: 1940 – 1945.* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005), 219–240.

¹⁸ The typed manuscript of Ollinger's never-published diary was kindly provided by his descendants.

¹⁹ Schauss's diary is printed in Ernest Schauss, Josy Zeimetz, Paul Colette and Jean Weyrich, *Tambov 1943–1945* (Luxembourg: Amicale des Anciens de Tambow, 1990), 157–163.

Julien Coner

Coner's diary, which could have been discovered and confiscated at any time by the camp guards, reports neutral things for which the guards could not have accused him of espionage and punished accordingly. He finds his logotherapeutic consolation in the daily description of his diligent work and the supposedly sufficient food ration one gets for exceeding the working quota. He strives to describe his monotonous camp life on paper in as varied a manner as possible, documenting weather, leisure activities in the camp, mentioning other comrades from Luxembourg. In June he switches to French and describes, among other things, his survival strategy on the way to the Tambov camp – he traded 'luxury items' for food: soap for milk and tobacco for rusks. Deliberately giving up something in order to obtain something else also has a logotherapeutic effect, because in the camp one is expropriated from their possessions, both in terms of material objects and one's identity, privacy, or freedom of choice. In the Tambov camp, after the departure of the French prisoners ("and many Luxemburgers with French passports" like René Wendling and Alfred Busch), Coner manages to get a job as a cleaner in the canteen, which also increases his rations. On the way from Tambov to Luxembourg, he observes Russian life and documents not only the joy from the reception by the Luxembourg Red Cross on the other side of the border, but also from food and drink. Apart from the actual diary, his drawings are preserved with views of various localities of Luxembourg (the hometown of Düdelingen and the Capital), which Coner conjured from memory to remind himself that it was going home, where many were waiting for him. Besides the daily routine events, he also found space for reflections on the situation of prisoners, morality and human dignity:

Fig. 4. Excerpt from the diary of Julien Coner, 1945. Private archive Coner family.

September 2, 1945, Tambov:

Yesterday and the day before yesterday they performed 'Faust' at the theatre. I cannot say why, but I was reluctant to go and see it. Is it the primitive means of supervision or more generally the circumstances in which we find ourselves which prevented me from going there? But interest in something! Does it know any bounds? Is it weariness on my part?

October 5, 1945, en route to Luxembourg:

It is curious that those who in the camp had enough to eat (occupation in the refectory, colchoses), who boasted and laughed at those who languished for soup and who therefore boasted of never leaning on those who eat, it is Precisely those who also roam the fields, around the kitchen of the transport, etc. Lamentable facts! This is humanity!!! Where is the noble man? What is a man when he is hungry? Something worse. What a beast! Indeed. Oh! I know these apostles. Who is a friend; who a comrade? Answer!.. We must see with superiority on these things and also at first sight act with superiority.... (exchange of thoughts between Pierre Frieden and me).

Ernest Schauss

The diary of Erny Schauss begins, as already mentioned, in September 1945 with the departure of the train that is taking him home. Schauss brings about fifteen first-person documents and objects with him to Luxembourg, which are now preserved in the Musée National d'Histoire Militaire, including two handmade dictionaries (Russian-French and Italian-French), the text of a patriotic anti-fascist speech, and his diary.

Fig. 5. Excerpt from Ernest Schauss's speech, ca. 1943–1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

Similar to Coner, Schauss chooses his words carefully but writes in Luxembourgish without regard for the potential Soviet censor, who would only understand German or French. His excitement is hard to hide, because he keeps the diary as a free man since he is released from the camp. He enthusiastically

documents Russian life along the railroad, the architecture of the Orthodox churches whose golden domes he can see from the train, and above all his impatience to finally arrive home:

October 21, 1945, in transit camp 69 in Frankfurt/Oder:

Today, Sunday, it seems that something has begun to change. We seem to be provided with a train. The latter are ready. We are marching out the gate - to return to the camp again in the early evening.

How many deceptions still need to be endured in order to become free people again?

Truly free, not dependent on anyone?

Schauss learns some Russian during his captivity and is able to communicate with his guards as well as with other Russian men (and Russian women). He meets them not only in the Soviet Union, but also in Germany, when his train stops at the neighboring track with former Eastern workers who are also being repatriated, but in the opposite direction. The young women come from a forced labor camp in Esch/Alzette and seem less happy about their return:

October 9, 1945 [...] Russian girls coming from the west under guard ask us: “Where are you going? To Luxembourg?” They themselves travel from Luxembourg, from Esch. There are no happy ones among them, nothing good awaits them. Maybe even Siberia? Their crime is that they saved their lives and had to work as prisoners for those who wanted to raze their homeland to the ground. With tears in their eyes, they wish us a happy journey and say hello to those who helped them in Luxembourg or tried to make their captivity as humane as possible.

Capturing this scene is one of the methods of logotherapy – putting one’s situation into perspective, recognizing that it is definitely not the worst it could be.

Schauss’s Russian-French dictionary gives an insight into his vocabulary and the areas he wanted to talk about. It is a manuscript book (7 cm x 5 cm x 1 cm) sewn together with a thick white thread and made of rough paper, not very thick, now yellowed but probably white at the beginning, half the size of a male palm. The dictionary consists of 81 pages and has no cover. On the back of the last page is

the name of the owner written in red ballpoint pen: Erny Schauss. The vocabulary entries were obviously written in ink.

Fig. 6. Excerpt from the Ernest Schauss dictionary, ca. 1943–1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

The dictionary is structured thematically (unlike its French-Italian ‘brother’ which is composed alphabetically) and therefore resembles a phrasebook. The chapters are arranged in the following order (the numbers indicate the number of words in each chapter): Question words – 12 words, Prepositions (places) – 18; Adverbs (time) –30; School – 82; Plural –9; Year (including week, month, seasons, etc.) –53; alphabet – 21; family – 44; names – 34; home – 43; man –31; garden – 15; flowers –8; colors – 11; farm – 41; orchard – 25; food – 66; clothes – 35; sleep – 16; weather – 26; adjectives – 82; verbs –160. A total of 862 entries were made in the dictionary, with vocabulary which easily exceeds the elementary level of knowledge of the language (A1 with about 780 words) and allows communication on everyday topics.

If we do not consider grammar sections such as ‘adjectives’ or ‘verbs’ and compare only lexical chapters, we better understand how logotherapy worked for Schauss. The largest vocabulary relates to learning itself (82 words), then to food (66), then to the year or time-keeping as such (53), and finally to family (44) and home (43). We can see what is most important to Schauss is what he wanted to talk about in Russian: learning a new language, food (whether in the camp or at home), times he would return home, and who was waiting for him there. His girlfriend, however, as we know from his diary (probably later made entries), gave up waiting and re-married. His mother also died before his return from captivity, as Schauss added this later. The belief that someone wanted to see him again at any cost made Schauss try hard and stay alive at all costs. Had he known that he was no longer present in the life of his girlfriend or mother, this kind of

logotherapy either would not have worked or he would have needed other meaning-giving mechanisms to his life and the motivation to keep living.

Arthur Ollinger

The diary of Arthur Ollinger, who was captured by the Soviet Army in Germany on May 2, 1945, began later. As he notes, he intended to defect to the English. From the end of February 1945 to March 1946, he writes with varying intensity in his small notebook. The first months in the special camp Ketschendorf in Soviet custody, he makes entries in French in order to clearly distance himself from the Germans. When he is transferred to the British occupation zone, he switches to English, probably so that the guards who censor his diary or check it for espionage are able to understand it. At the end, he makes his notes in Luxembourgish because he finds the attitude of the French-speaking Belgians offensive. By the change of language, one sees Ollinger's conflict between his ability to adapt and his ability to resist in an ever-changing environment. His logotherapy consists in finding a spark of hope, which he wants to strengthen with religious components.

The main motive of Ollinger's entries is faith in himself, in God and in his own spirit, which fluctuates with the improvement or deterioration of the conditions of imprisonment. He checks and records his own mental state daily to see how the hope of his imminent return or its disappearance affects his morale. Meaning in life happens through writing, because Ollinger seems no longer to be able to trust his own feelings without precise analysis and control. He constantly and consistently writes down how he prays and how he wants to go on or is seized by apathy after every rumor about the day of return.

According to the testimonies of his descendants, Ollinger was neither a churchgoer nor otherwise religious in the postwar period. He also never kept a diary again, but both were necessary for him in the exceptional situation of camp.

Fig. 7. Excerpt from the diary of Arthur Ollinger, 1945. Private archive Ollinger family.

June 21: Holy Mass. Word that the foreigners leave for another camp, from where they will be liberated (I do not believe it).

June 23: I return to camp, find Nic. Schilling, but the others all went east. (more confidence)

June 24: The day I wanted to be home, I have no more confidence in the morning; but in the afternoon an Austrian told me that in 4 weeks we would be at home, and I regained my confidence.

[...]

July 1: Holy mass, we put class 4, the young and the old in a company together. And we believe that they will be released on Tuesday, July 3; I always pray and regain confidence; but I am afraid to submit to a visit to the Russian commission.

July 5: they steal my blanket, they find it; but the police leave it to this Prussian; always bad weather; my confidence remains quite good, because I always say to myself 'in God's name'.

[...]

July 16: From 8 to 12 1/2 h 'Bible hour' and we pray 3 rosaries, in the evening I eat the rest of the bread; we are waiting for the Potsdam conference.

The last entry in French is for the Belgians treating the arrived Luxembourg prisoners as war criminals because of their German uniforms:

September 9: We arrive in Brussels in the morning; we are taken first to the reception center to eat something, and then by tram to a reception house, 'rue du Vautour 68.' There the Belgians do a check and they do not believe us that we were forced into the German army. In the evening we are transported to the foreign police where we go through a new check and they leave us until the night in two floors in the cellar, among German women, etc.

The Belgians treat us like the Germans treated us, much worse than the Russians, but we don't lose courage in this cellar; and after a while I have a fit of anger. They treat

us like criminals, or even like cattle; we still need the Belgians to beat us. It is now that we are right to shout ‘Long live Luxembourg, but shit on Belgium!’ In the night we are transported to the prison ‘au petit château’ where we have to pass a number of checks.

September 11: In the afternoon, suddenly you leave the cell and the prison guard can look for us Luxembourgers for a check-up. We are amazed when we see a lieutenant (Jaquemart) from Luxembourg in charge. They have their personal details and promise to transport us here the next day.

...

September 13: Finally home, my first thought after I woke up in the morning after a nap. The next morning, the few formalities were completed, and as fast as my legs could carry me, I went to the train station. I still had time and passed the doctor and the money exchange. At 12 o’clock train was there and I was off with it. And at 2 o’clock I was finally home with my mother.

In all three diaries, on the level of logotherapy, we find the perception of Russia, which can be described as the ‘orientalization of the foreign’. Among the European-looking Russian men and Russian women, they notice the eastern traits that serve a stereotypical (distorted) image of Russia: be it the ‘monogolist’ Betscherek at Coner’s, who works with him in the paper factory, be it the Russian market at the train station at Schauss’ (“like the gypsies”) or the realization that treatment even in the so foreign Russian camp in the SOZ was better than the one with the familiar Belgian neighbors. The diarists perceive the foreign and exotic and shift their attention from their own physical wasting away to spiritual enrichment. The exotic stands out, the unfamiliar and daunting is emphasized. That the foreign Russia could be perceived also as fascinating at the same time, is shown by the lyric poetry of the forced recruits, which was created in the Tambov camp.

Poetry: big Russia, small Luxembourg

Many of the poems deal with Russia or mention Russian realities. The shift of attention from the horror of captivity, to the observation of nature and people seems to obey the same logotherapeutic mechanism as in the diarists' texts. They draw from new realities, a foundation of meaning in life, but through poetic means.

While most of the poems selected for this paper were already published by Bausch and Faber in the anthology "Tambow" in 1946, there are also unpublished texts, such as the poems of Gaston Junck (1923–2018) or the handwritten dedication of Constant Woltz to Metty Scholer exhibited in the Musée National d'Histoire Militaire. The poems of Constant Woltz and Aloyse Lang, who died in Tambow, had presumably been memorized by their comrades, since corresponding written notes are missing from the museum's collection of written documents brought back from Tambow.

Fig. 8 Excerpt from Gaston Junck's poem "Prayer", 1944. Archive of the Association of Former Tambovians.

Among the 'bright' topoi of the poems are the same leitmotifs typical of letters written by Wehrmacht soldiers on the Eastern Front:²⁰ Comradeship and friendship, love for a girl and the mother, adoration of Our Lady and later of Grand Duchess Charlotte, who established herself in the national consciousness as a symbol of resistance in the role of savior, protector, and guardian of all Luxembourgers. These topoi are directly linked to opposing motifs: loneliness and abandonment, homesickness and nostalgia, hatred and hunger, disease and

²⁰ Sandra Schmit, "'Ons Jongen' – frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte", in *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration* ed. Claude D. Conter et al. (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

death. Russia and everything Russian takes on grim features and self-pity comes to the fore, for example in a song lyric by André Kettenhofen:

“in the bare Russian land / land that is bare and damp / the cold gets to all our bones here, no sun shines on us here / no one has mercy for us here, there is no justice / no one has compassion for us poor people, because we are prison in clothes.”

Pierre Bausch

In Pierre Bausch’s poetry, which uses many toponyms (poems *Nachtgesang in Kirsanow*, *Frühjahr in Kirsanow*, *Tambow im Regen*, *Soir à Tambow*, *Der Weiher bei Rada*, *La steppe et le prisonnier*, *Russisches Nachtspiel*, *La sœur Nina*), one also finds the combination of exotic and at the same time stereotypical images with which the author deals. In the new and strange, which always seems potentially dangerous, he finds what is familiar and thus defuses the threatening, especially because all Russia-related images in his work are almost exclusively feminine (‘Russia’ is also feminine in Russian, ‘Rossiya’): “Gloomy shrouds the steppes, The Russians sing – stars flash,” “the night enigmatic, silent,” “the tendrilous birches,” “Katia sings, facing the steppe,” “the birches, the light-green shrouded, twinkle,” “the storm howls from the white Volga,” “snowy steppe,” “Nina, brunette Kyrgyz girl.”

Fig. 9. Dedication for Mathias Scholer by Constant Woltz. 1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

Gaston Junck, Constant Woltz, André Kettenhofen

Gaston Junck takes a similar approach in his Prayer in Captivity: “endless steps and roads” apply to the overwhelmed Russia, whereas the homeland is called “small Luxembourg” (which probably reflects the self-perception of helplessness in captivity). Even though the lines do not contain a poetic metaphor, but reflect real facts about the size of the countries, this juxtaposition in a poem is particularly striking. In Constant Woltz’s Ode to the Fatherland, there is likewise

a comparison with other countries, which probably helps him to emphasize, this time, not the greatness but the defiant will for the independence of his homeland: “You Luxembourg, you beautiful country, How I love you!” “My little country”, “What better country does the sun shine on”, “Come from France, Belgium, Prussia, /we would show you our pride, /Ask around on all sides, /We never wanted to be Prussian”, “a little and free Luxembourg”.

Gaston Junck also reflects on his own country and the situation in which his imprisonment brought him, and, similar to André Kettenhofen, finds the culprit “out there,” in an abstract stranger who can be just as German as Russian: “From then you're forced into the foreign [...] And therefore we all imprisoned.” The poetry of the forced recruits from Tambov is dominated by their self-perception as victims, which on a logotherapeutic level means that they felt unfairly treated and wanted to rectify that. The urge for justice turns out to be something on the other

Fig. 10 Musical notes of the song “Les Sacrifies” by André Kettenhoffen, ca. 1943–1945. Archive of the Association of Former Tambovians.

Despair is dramatically expressed in the lyrics of Aloyse Lang, who died in Tambov: “Or should you always understand that I am – / Lost, caught in the foreign?”, “O mother, I feel I must die, / If I stay longer in this foreign land”. Pierre Bausch sounds less bitter, but also sad: “Tears of despair, / of anguish and sorrow”, “at the barbed wire / with the loneliness I keep watch”. Bausch uses particularly interesting literary devices to suggest between the lines his existence as a stranger in the new culture. Thus he resorts to translingual wordplay, crossing Russian words with German or French homophones: “Mein Auge ist Glas” (Russian ‘glass’ – German ‘eye’), “Sur un tombeau morose” (Russian ‘moroz’ – French ‘froid’), etc. Whether resigned and despairing or attentive and observant,

the authors write because their minds are searching for an explanation and their imprisoned existence demands a higher meaning.

Letters: home and to Stalin

Fig. 11. Excerpt from the letter of the Luxembourg prisoners of war in Camp 188 to J. Stalin, October 13, 1944. Military Archives v the Russian Federation RGWA.

A particularly striking textual testimony from the camp is an open letter to Stalin written in French. The five-page document, dated October 13, 1944, can be viewed as one of the survival strategies of the forced recruits in Tambov, 286 of whom signed it as “anti-fascists.” In this letter, written in October 1944 (whether it left the camp is uncertain), they asked Stalin to give them the opportunity to go to the front and fight together with the Red Army against Nazi Germany. This opportunity, after all, would have been given to the French. The fact that the Alsatians and Lorrainers had already been released from the camp in July 1944 led to bitterness and reproaches against their own government in exile²¹ among the Luxemburgers, which can still be heard today among the descendants of the forced recruits.

Apart from the overall stylistics of the letter, which is based on Soviet propaganda language, adjectives and adverbs are especially noticeable on the lexical level, which are primarily intended to clarify the distancing from the Wehrmacht, to which the Luxemburgers were counted: “glorious Red Army,” “Grand Marshal Stalin,” “brutally torn from our home country,” “Hitlerian cannibals,” “fascist

²¹ The Grand Duchess Charlotte (1896-1985) and the Luxembourg government left Luxembourg on the day the country was occupied by German troops on May 10, 1940. Until its liberation they remained in London, from where they carried out their diplomatic work. The Grand Duchess Charlotte gave her moral support to the country on BBC radio, speaking to her subjects in Luxembourgish.

sadists,” “the fiercest enemy,” “the heroic struggle,” “we, the Luxembourg prisoners of war, hostages of these imperialist brutes,” etc.

Fig. 12. Excerpt from Jean Sprunck’s letter of May 11, 1944. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.

The original letter, preserved in the Russian military archive RGVA, remained unanswered and most-likely unheeded; the forced recruits sat in the camp for another year. The increased death rate in the winter of 1944–1945 (120 people perished among the Luxemburgers) was associated by the prisoners, among other things, with the fact that the hope of return had been extinguished.²²

Among the dead was Jean Sprunk (1923–1945), who had been captured just as the French were being released – in July 1944. Shortly before that, he had sent a letter home from the German Eastern Front, for lack of paper on birch bark. In it, he reported that they were getting the Luxemburger Wort in the Wehrmacht and that he had thus kept abreast of the situation. “Here it’s raining cats and dogs almost every day. When another four months are over, it will already be winter again, and hopefully it will be over by then,” Sprunck wrote. He concluded the letter with “Onward, soldiers of Christ!” Four months later, it was indeed over for him at the front – he arrived at Camp 188, where he died in June 1945. Jean Sprunck was neither a poet nor an artist; he literally lived by correspondence. Without the opportunity to correspond, he was deprived of the logotherapeutic axis. Without contact, home became less and less real and the hope of return

²² “It cannot be denied that moral depression contributed substantially to the fact that some sick people who had finally lost courage could not get out of bed,” details the report of Roger Thillen, one of the first released Luxembourgers from Tambov to Luxembourg’s Foreign Minister, June 24, 1945. A Russian translation can be found in the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, forwarded to the Soviet Foreign Ministry by Renè Blum, head of the Luxembourg Mission in Moscow. Inv. 4, Reg. 1, fol. no. 14, folder 102. 011 – “Notes from the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to the Luxembourg Mission,” 73–79, here: 79.

diminished. It is precisely hope, however, that remains one of the strongest motivations for survival in captivity.

Fig. 13. Letter from Joseph Steichen from Camp 188, August 1, 1945. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.

On October 8, 1945, a small group of 146 sick people were released and transported back to Luxembourg. Through his friend Jos Zeimetz, Jos Steichen sent a short note to his family. Three out of four sentences include the word ‘hope’: “[I] hope you are well [...] I hope we will come home soon [...] I hope to see you soon.”

Jules Coner also managed to send a letter home after the end of the war through René Wendling from Esch/Alzette, who was released from the Tambow camp with the French:

Tambov, July 24, 1945.

Dear parents!

You certainly haven’t received such a truncated letter from me yet. But it is from Russian captivity, and I think it is worth more than all the letters put together. Your prayers and requests were not in vain. We all trusted in the Mother of God and she also helped us.

Fig. 14. Letter from Julien Coner from Camp 188, July 24, 1945. private archive Coner family.

When Coner writes about how much his letter would mean to his parents, he projects²³ in it, primarily his own need for a letter from home. A message from

²³ On projection as a defense mechanism in which one ascribes to the other or to something outside the self something that one feels inside oneself (psychically, psychologically): Anna Freud, *The Ego and Defense Mechanism* (Bern: Paperback, 1984).

home was the most expensive currency – one fought for it in the camp and with it one could extort edibles from each other. Coner notes on this in his diary:

12.06.1945 [...] 40 men are working in the sawmill today. We load logs onto a lorry and unload them by the water. Mail is said to have been answered from Vienna and Dresden. When will our letters arrive home?

13.06.1945 The sky is cloudy, but the sun is shining. At noon I lie in the sun on a few boards that I have laid out. Already at 4:00 p.m. we had fully met our norm, i.e., to transport 24 logs. What happens is like this; One sits down, writes a letter with a camp address, then says to a comrade: ‘What will you give me if I deliver a letter from your wife?’ The latter gives him a portion of bread! The swindler is in prison, the other in a military hospital.

Although neither Soviet prisoners of war in Germany nor interned Wehrmacht soldiers in the Soviet Union were allowed to correspond during the war, at the end of the war, the Soviet government decided to use prisoners’ correspondence for propaganda purposes. The Red Cross distributed so-called ‘Postcards of the Prisoner of War’ in 1943, which Soviet authorities, however, did not forward to the addressees, but used for publishing in the press and printing leaflets at the end of the war.²⁴

Conclusion

In the current political context and the war on the European continent, the meaning of the situation of distress and danger in which someone would find the strength to write poetry, keep a diary, and jot down trivialities such as ‘today I feel fine’, becomes more understandable. Such earlier (supposedly) inexplicable actions lead us back to the initial question of this small insight into the corpus of

²⁴ Yurii Mizis et al., *Tambovskie lageria*, 477.

Luxembourgish POW texts produced in Soviet camps: what gave meaning to life in captivity?

Writing was unquestionably one of the best survival strategies. Apparently, writing itself manifests the desire not to give in to a vegetative existence. Writing poetry, keeping a diary, sending notes home or writing open letters to Stalin – a palette of strategies becomes visible, which the authors consciously or unconsciously resorted to in order to provide themselves with the necessary mental support and to (re)gain the feeling of control over their own lives.

Fig. 15. Prisoners of war in camp 188 in Rada near Tambov, ca. 1944–1945. photographer unknown. Private archive Evgeni Pisarev.

In the example of those who kept diaries, one can see the confrontation with everyday life, the attempt not to lose one's mind in the monotony, to give meaning to the trivial through documenting one's existence. They wanted to write a document and acted as chroniclers of captivity. The poets perceive the foreign as a poetic challenge, they receive the nature and the land, they look for the familiar, i.e. the stereotyped and the unknown. The letter writers speak above all, to themselves of courage and hope. Writing in the camp turns out to be not only one of the few available intellectual activities, but also a 'clean' activity that made one forget about lice, stench, rags and dirty dishes for a few minutes a day.

We can summarize the strategies of logotherapy in a few key words: Escapism (escape from reality in poetry by Bausch), positivism (finding the good in the bad in diaries of Schauss and Coner), religion (belief in God, but even more in oneself in Ollinger's diary), and patriotism (declarations of love for one's homeland in poetry by Junck, Woltz, and Lang, although this strategy proved ineffective for the last two since they died in the camp).

Many diaries did not make it to Luxembourg; the sent postcards got stuck in dossiers of the camp administration. Not every writing author survived either,

such as Lang or Woltz. The few surviving yellowed pieces of paper are all the more precious. They had a logotherapeutic function not only for the authors themselves, but also for their comrades and their descendants. The memory of the deceased fellow-sufferers, preserved in the printing of their texts, in the publication of their own memoirs or in the singing of camp songs, also communicates something of the life of the prisoners of war to the generation of children and grandchildren. Even to those whose fathers brought nothing home from the Eastern Front or never wanted to talk about their time as Wehrmacht soldiers. In the sparse diaries and naïve poems lies the testimony of the past, the entry into the conversation about the experience and the lesson for the following generations.

Fig. 16. Luxembourg prisoners of war returning to Luxembourg on November 5, 1945. 1st from left is Jos Steichen. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.

Bibliography

- Bausch, Pierre-Dominique. *Poésies = Gedichte*. Esch/Alzette: Schortgen, 2000.
- Cernyak-Spatz, Susan E. "German Holocaust Literature". PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1985.
- Claude D. Conter, Daniela Lieb, Marc Limpach, Sandra Schmit, Jeff Schmitz, Josiane Weber (Hg.), *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration*, Mersch: Centre national de littérature, 2020
- Even, Georges. *Deemools am Krich: 1940 – 1945*. Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005.
- Faber, Ernest and Bausch, Pierre. *Tambow*. Mersch: Fr. Faber, 1946.
- Frankl, Viktor *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.
- Freud, Anna. *The Ego and Defense Mechanism*. Bern: Paperback, 1984.
- Goffman, Erving. *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. London: Paperback, 1991.
- Herling-Grudziński, Gustaw. *A World Apart: Imprisonment in a Soviet Labor Camp During World War II*. London: Heinemann, 1951.
- Karner, Stefan. *Im Archipel GUPVI: Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956*. Berlin: Oldenburg, 1995.
- Mizis, Yurii and Diachkov, Vladimir and Kanishchev, Vladimir. *Tambovskie lageria dlia voennoplennykh: istoriia, kontingent, sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie aspekty vzaimootnosheniy vnutri i vovne 1943–1948 gg.* (Prisoner of war camp in Tambov. History, contingent, social-psychological aspects of relations inside and outside 1943–1946). Tambov: TGU, 2022.
- Ollinger, Arthur. *Diary 1941-1946*. Manuscript. Family Archive Ollinger.
- Petrov, Nikita. "Die staatliche Überprüfung sowjetischer Repatrianten und ihre rechtlichen Folgen (1944–1954)", in *Forced Labor in Hitler's Europe. Occupation, Work, Consequences*, ed. Dieter Pohl and Tanja Sebta (Berlin: Metropol 2013), 311–326.

Polian, Pavel. Soviet Repression of Foreigners: The Great Terror, the GULAG, Deportations, in Reflection on the Gulag ed Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori, Emanuela Guercetti. Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2003, 61–104.

Schauss, Ernest and Zeimetz, Josy and Colette Paul and Weyrich, Jean. Tambow 1943–1945 Luxembourg: Amicale des Anciens de Tambow, 1990, 157–163.

Schauss, Ernest. Pickegen Drot. D'Leide vun engem Lëtzeburgesch Zwangsrekrutéierten an Naziaffer. Luxembourg: ed. and self-published by the author, 2000.

Schmit, Joseph. Das Labyrinth: Drama in four acts with frame story by Costa Faber Esch/Alzette: typed manuscript at Centre National de Littérature, 1952. CNL AU-34.

Schmit, Sandra. “‘Ons Jongen’ - frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte”. In Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg: literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration, edited by Claude D. Conter, Daniela Lieb, Marc Limpach, Sandra Schmit, Jeff Schmitz, Josiane Weber (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

Shalamov, Varlam. Through the Snow: Kolyma Tales. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. The GULAG Archipelago. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Thillen, Roger. Report to Luxembourg's Foreign Minister, June 24, 1945, forwarded in Russian translation to the Soviet Foreign Ministry by René Blum, head of the Luxembourg Mission in Moscow. Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Inv. 4, Reg. 1, fol. no. 14, folder 102. 011 – “Notes from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to the Luxembourg Mission,” 73–79, here: 79.