

Ink and Paper in the Camp

Ego-Documents of Luxembourgier Conscripts in Soviet Captivity

Introduction

At the centre of research on camp literature sits the genre of memoirs concerning the Nazi concentration camps, or ‘Holocaust literature’, the pioneer of which was the US-American literary scholar and Holocaust survivor Cernyak-Spatz.¹ Russian studies scholars define the genre more broadly, analysing memoir texts about German as well as Soviet camps, whereby the authors of the (mostly autobiographical) texts 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.

In addition to the works of Soviet classics such as Solzhenitsyn⁴ and Shalamov⁵ or the Pole 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 these were even written in the camps. A large part of the non-Soviet camp inmates came to the GUPVI camps⁸ after 1939 as a result of the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, and finally after 1941 as prisoners of war (POW). The latter group included Luxembourgers who documented their

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, and behaviour. 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).

experiences in secretly written diaries and letters, or took home poems memorized from 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

Review of POW literature from other nationals in Soviet captivity

Before focusing on the texts produced by Luxembourgers, either in Soviet camps or immediately after their return, it is important to briefly introduce the research conducted in other countries in order to address the gap in the field of camp life documented by Luxembourgers.

When comparing the experiences of non-German nationals in Soviet captivity, it is noteworthy that the most recent and comprehensive research on Italian POWs, conducted by Giusti¹⁰, focuses on reconstructing the camp conditions and analysing the reasons behind the high death rates among POWs. Giusti refers to later written memoirs and personal interviews that reflect on the camp experience. The analysis explores the lives of Italians in Soviet camps, particularly in Tambov,¹¹ including aspects such as nutrition, death rates, and their ideological treatment in the camp, which had the intention of fostering an anti-fascist attitude. While Italian captivity memories are used as material for reconstruction, they are not the primary research object.

Similarly, in the case of Japanese POWs in Soviet captivity, the texts primarily consist of memoirs rather than ego-documents, which were used for historical reconstruction purposes. The texts produced by former Japanese POWs fall into two groups. The first are Japanese citizens who embarked on a journey after the defeat of the Kwantung Army in 1945. The path of these POWs led mostly north to camps in Siberia, the Far East, and the Middle East, while civilians fled south from the territory of Manchukuo, the state created by Japan from 1932 to

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 Epuration* ed. Claude D. Conter et al. (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

¹⁰ Maria Teresa Giusti, *Stalin's Italian prisoners of war* (New York: Central European University Press, 2021).

¹¹ Unfortunately, there are no indications in the researched documents as to why the camps around Tambov were chosen for the accumulation of Luxembourgers. However, a detailed source-critical monograph provides a deeper insight into camp life in Camp 188 near Rada, where most of the Luxembourgers were held, Camp 64 near Morshansk and Camp 56 near Khotovo. Yurii Mizis, Vladimir Diachkov and Vladimir Kanishchev, *Tambovskie lageria dlia voennoplennykh: istoriia, kontingent, sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie aspekty vzaimootnosheniy vnutri i vovne 1943–1946 gg.* (Prisoner of war camp in Tambov. History, contingent, social-psychological aspects of relations inside and outside 1943–1946) (Tambov: TGU, 2022).

1945. These memories form a distinct genre that is known as “repatriation literature”¹² in Japan, but the research draws on the memories of witnesses, rather than including ego-documents from the camp.

The German experience may appear to be the closest comparison to the Luxembourgish due to the linguistic, cultural, and geographic proximity between the POWs, but these are only superficial similarities. The victim-hero-perpetrator triangle proposed by Wienand¹³ does not apply to Luxembourg. Wienand analyses the experiences of German POWs using a diachronic approach, seeking to identify changing dynamics. In my selected collection, drawing on published and mostly unpublished sources, I aim to use a synchronous approach to examine what was happening both within the camps and immediately afterwards in order to elaborate on common survival techniques. The most notable differences between the German and Luxembourgish experiences, which they had to process narratively in a broader sense, are as follows: first, the length of captivity, as Luxembourgish were some of the first to return from Tambov in 1945 (prior to these, only the French had returned earlier, in July 1944); second, Germans returned to two different countries, Federative Republic of Germany (FRG) and German Democratic Republic (GDR), where memory culture was defined differently, impacting their autobiographical activities; third, the efforts of Luxembourgish individuals to process their experiences were integrated into collective efforts, such as the publishing activities of the Association of Former Tambovians (Amicale des Anciens de Tambov). Finally, the experience of German captivity can be contextualized within the framework of historical German captivity, whereas Luxembourgian POWs were integrated into a foreign occupational army and could not be considered within the framework of "Luxembourgian captivity" because they had no such historical context due to the lack of their own army.

In the next paragraph, I will classify the rare published and the unpublished ego-documents from the captivity period, as well as the very first published works after their release,¹⁴ utilising

¹² “Hikiage bungaku” (Jap.), s. Sherzod Muminov, *Eleven winters of discontent: the Siberian internment and the making of a new Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022).

¹³ Christiane Wienand, *Returning memories: former prisoners of war in divided and reunited Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), (p. 4).

¹⁴ Most of the published memoirs on the Second World War are reflections of the Labor service and the experience at the front. The non-fictional writings by former POWs in Luxembourg are collective works edited by the Association of the former Tambovians (five editions from 1963 to 2021) and self-published editions in small quantities for friends and family (eight books or brochures from 1946 to 2019). The poetry of Pierre-Dominique Bausch was printed by a publishing house in 2001 (see below), along with several books containing collected captivity testimonies by Georges Even (e.g., Georges Even. *Deemools am Krich, 1940 – 1945. Schicksale in Luxemburg – Menschen erzählen: 14 Zeitzeugen berichten* [Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005]). Additionally, the 85 war testimonies, including those from captivity, were collected by Marc Trossen and published by two NGOs (Marc Trossen, *Verluere Joëren. 85 Luxemburger Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs berichten:*

a more philological approach rather than one based solely on memory studies. I am interested in individuals who wrote during captivity or immediately after their release in order to categorise survival techniques through narrative. Therefore, the mechanism of narrative production, the relationship between the text and the individual, the function of the text, the recurring themes, and the systematic nature of common experience will be the central areas of focus for this paper.

Texts by Luxembourgers in Soviet camps

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 Luxembourgish forced conscripts continued a tradition of documentary writing that did not seek to create fictional narrative worlds, but rather focused exclusively on what they themselves had experienced. A large part of the texts is literature that 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,¹⁵ Bausch,¹⁶ Schauss¹⁷). A fictional play by the former prisoner of war Joseph Schmit¹⁸ remains unpublished.

Numerous ego-documents, as contemporary history researchers now call them – private, handwritten texts of a personal nature – have also been preserved. 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 returning from Tambov and other Soviet camps. In addition to written materials, there also are drawings.

Zwangsrekrutierte, Refraktäre, Deserteure, Resistenzler, aber auch Kollaborateure, Kriegsfreiwillige... [Redingen/Attert: Les Amis de l'Histoire Luxembourg, Union des mouvements de résistance luxembourgeois]). The collected stories by Even and Trossen are biographical in nature but cannot be considered as writings from or in captivity.

¹⁵ Ernest Faber and Pierre Bausch, *Tambov* (Mersch: Fr. Faber, 1946).

¹⁶ Pierre-Dominique Bausch, *Poésies = Gedichte* (Esch/Alzette: Schortgen, 2000).

¹⁷ Ernest Schauss, *Pickegen Drot. D'Leide vun engem Lëtzeburgschen Zwangsrekrutéierten an Naziaffer* (Luxembourg: ed. and self-published by the author, 2000).

¹⁸ 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.

The first step in approaching this material is to sort through the valuable papers from the years 1943 to 1946. The texts in which their authors recorded camp life can be viewed and analysed from various perspectives. In the foreground of the present study is the thesis of Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and 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.¹⁹ This analysis includes texts written by Luxembourgers in Soviet camps in Russia, as well as in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany (SOZ),²⁰ and will analyse how writing must have helped to give meaning to the authors’ suffering and fate. The focus is on the 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 texts analysed can be divided into two categories, according to formal criteria or genre. One group includes poems, song lyrics, and narratives, as well as – if we define the term ‘text’ more broadly – camp life narrated in drawings, which can be considered ‘artistic narratives’. The other group can be categorized as ‘ego-documents’, and includes letters, speeches, diaries, and self-made dictionaries which had a concrete addressee and a function that lies outside the literary-artistic realm. Both groups of texts have in common the place, time, and origin of the authors, as well as the circumstances under which they were created. Thus, the material they process is the same, but the methods used are different.

If we organise 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

¹⁹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006 [written 1946])

²⁰ 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.

We are especially interested here in analysing 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 replacement for Germany, which had previously evoked the same associations in the forced recruits.

A total of sixteen authors can be identified, each with one to eight texts, written either in the camp itself or immediately afterwards, during the first months after their return. Accordingly, the genres of the texts can be organised 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, one dictionary, and one collective letter.

[Diaries: Hunger, Waiting, Riding](#)

Currently, there are three Luxembourgish 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,²¹ 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

²¹ Yurii Mizis et al., Tambovskie lageria, 246–457.

to June 1945. Later he was transferred to Tambov, where he continued writing until October 1945, although in French.²² 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.²³ Erny Schauss began his diary when he boarded the train from Tambov to Luxembourg in the fall of 1945.²⁴ 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.

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 accordingly punished him. He finds his logotherapeutic consolation in the daily description of his diligent work and the supposedly sufficient food ration he received for exceeding the working quota. He strives to describe his monotonous camp life on paper in as varied a manner as possible, documenting the weather, leisure activities in the camp, and mentioning other comrades from Luxembourg. In June 1945, 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 Luxembourgers 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 of his 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 also preserved, with views of various localities of Luxembourg (the hometown of Düdelingen and the Capital), which Coner conjured from his memory to remind himself that he was going home, where many people were waiting for him. Besides the daily routine events, he also found space for reflections about prisoners, morality and human dignity:

²² Coner's diary is published in Georges Even, *Deemools am Krich: 1940 – 1945*. (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005), 219–240.

²³ The typed manuscript of Ollinger's never-published diary was kindly provided by his descendants.

²⁴ Schauss' 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.

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 (occupations in the refectory, kolkhozes), 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 previously mentioned, in September 1945 with the departure of the train that is taking him home. Schauss brought around fifteen ego-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 potential Soviet censors, 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 neighbouring track with former Eastern workers who are also being repatriated, but in the opposite direction. The young women came from a forced labour 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, recognising that it is certainly not as bad as 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 thick white thread and is 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, 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; colours – 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 that 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 can 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 (53), and finally to family (44) and home (43). We see that 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 in later entries), gave up waiting and re-married. His mother also died before his return from captivity, as Schauss added later. The belief that someone wanted to see him again at any cost made Schauss try hard to 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 for his life and to motivate him to keep on 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. During his first months in Soviet custody in the special camp Ketschendorf, 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. With this 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 of finding a spark of hope, which he wishes to strengthen with religious components.

The main motive for Ollinger's entries is faith in himself, in God and in his own spirit, which fluctuates with the improvement or deterioration of his 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 no longer appears able to trust his own feelings without precise analysis and control. He constantly and consistently writes down how he prays, how he wants to go on, and how he is seized by apathy after every rumour 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 the 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, concerns the Belgians treating the recently 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 centre 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 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 the 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 'Orientalisation of the foreign'. Among the European-looking Russian men and Russian women, they notice the eastern traits that represent a stereotypical (distorted) image of Russia: the 'Mongolist' Betscherek at Coner's, who works with him in the paper factory; the Russian market at the train station at Schauss' ("like the gypsies"); or the realisation that their treatment in the very foreign Russian camp in the SOZ was better than what they received from their familiar Belgian neighbours. The diarists perceive the foreign and the

exotic, and shift their attention from their own physical wasting away to spiritual enrichment. The exotic stands out, and the unfamiliar and the daunting is emphasised. That foreign Russia could simultaneously also be perceived as fascinating can be seen from the lyric poetry of the forced recruits, which was written 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, although here by means of poetry.

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

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 that are typical of letters written by Wehrmacht soldiers on the Eastern Front:²⁵ Comradeship and friendship, love for their girl and their 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 saviour, 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 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:

²⁵ 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.

“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 (for example the poems *Nachtgesang in Kirsanow*, *Frühjahr in Kirsanow*, *Tambov im Regen*, *Soir à Tambov*, *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. In the new and strange, which always seems potentially dangerous, he finds what is familiar and thus what 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: his “endless steps and roads” apply to the overwhelmed Russia, whereas the homeland is referred to as “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 rather the defiant will for 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 has placed him, and, similar to André Kettenhofen, he finds the culprit “out there,” in an abstract stranger who can just as easily be German or Russian: “From then you're forced into the foreign [...] And therefore we are 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 this situation. The urge for justice turns out to be something on the other side of resigned indifference - the real end.

Fig. 10 Musical notes of the song “Les Sacrifiés” 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. He thus 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 they are 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 RGVA.

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 exile²⁶ among the Luxembourgers, 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, on a lexical level the adjectives and adverbs are especially noticeable, as they are primarily intended to clarify that the Luxembourgers were distancing themselves from the Wehrmacht: “glorious Red Army”; “Grand Marshal Stalin”; “brutally torn from our home country”; “Hitlerian cannibals”; “fascist sadists”; “the fiercest enemy”; “the heroic struggle”; “we, the Luxembourg prisoners of war, hostages of these imperialist brutes”, etc.²⁷

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 went unheeded; the forced recruits thus sat in the camp for another year. The increased death rate in the winter of 1944–1945 (120 people perished among the Luxembourgers) was associated by the prisoners, among other things, with the fact that any hope of return had been extinguished.²⁸

²⁶ The Grand Duchess Charlotte (1896-1985) and the Luxembourgish government left Luxembourg on the day the country was occupied by German troops on May 10, 1940. Until its liberation they remained in London, 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.

²⁷ Daily life under the totalitarian regime is explored in Stephen Kotkin's “Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization” (London: University of California Press, 1995), where he argues that Stalinism is not only a political system but also a way of life. In this regard, the language used in the media can be seen as a form of daily communication, not solely propaganda, particularly during the 1930s-1940s when the new Soviet state was still defining its features in the process of “building communism.” However, Goldman perceives a disconnect between the public rhetoric of the Stalinist era and the private daily practices, resulting in a phenomenon known as “dual-mindedness”, which was rooted in the fear of state terror. Wendy Z. Goldman's book “Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) supports this viewpoint and discusses it in detail (p. 304). Additionally, the meticulous study of Soviet diaries by Hellbeck sheds light on the utilisation of official propaganda language in private diaries. He explains that the authors employed the language of reflection and self-expression “simultaneously as they learned to read and write”. Jochen Hellbeck's work, “Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin” (New York: Harvard University Press, 2009), delves into this topic (p. 7).

²⁸ “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 Luxembourgers released 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: p. 79.

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 on, for lack of paper, 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,” Sprunk 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 Sprunk 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 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 Tambov camp along 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 other 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 is primarily projecting²⁹ onto it his own need for a letter from home. A message from home was the most expensive currency – one fought for it in the camp, and with it one could extort edibles from one another. Coner writes about 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 quota, 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 POW 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; however, Soviet authorities did not forward them to the addressees, but instead published them in the press and printed them in leaflets at the end of the war.³⁰

Conclusion

In the current political context and the war on the European continent, the meaning of situations 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 Luxembourgish POWs texts produced in Soviet camps: what gave meaning to life in captivity?

²⁹ On projection as a defence mechanism in which one ascribes to the other (or to something external) the same thing that one feels inside oneself (psychically, psychologically), see Anna Freud, *The Ego and Defense Mechanism* (Bern: Paperback, 1984).

³⁰ Yurii Mizis et al., *Tambovskie lageria*, 477.

Writing was unquestionably one of the best survival strategies. Apparently, writing itself manifests the desire to not 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 a 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.

Among those who kept diaries, one can see the confrontation with everyday life, the attempt to not lose one's mind in the monotony, to give meaning to the trivial by documenting one's existence. They wanted to write a document and acted as chroniclers of their 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 of 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 summarise the strategies of logotherapy in a few key words: escapism (the escape from reality in Bausch's poetry); positivism (finding the good within the bad in the diaries of Schauss and Coner); religion (a belief in God, but even more in oneself, in Ollinger's diary); and patriotism (declarations of love for one's homeland in the poetry by Junck, Woltz, and Lang, although this strategy proved ineffective for the last two, as they died in the camp).

Many diaries did not make it to Luxembourg; the postcards sent got stuck in dossiers of the camp administration. Nor did every author survive, as Lang and Woltz prove. 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 about the life of these POWs to later generations of children and grandchildren. This is the case even for those whose fathers brought home nothing from the Eastern Front, or who never wanted to talk about their time as Wehrmacht soldiers. In their sparse diaries and naïve poems lies a testimony of the past, an entry into the conversation about experience, and a lesson for the generations who would follow.

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.
- Bailluex, Joseph. *Memoires*. Copy of the manuscript. Centre national de littérature Mersch, L-210, 1945.
- 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. Schicksale in Luxemburg – Menschen erzählen: 14 Zeitzeugen berichten*. 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.
- Giusti, Maria Teresa. *Stalin's Italian prisoners of war*. New York: Central European University Press, 2021.
- Goffman, Erving. *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. London: Paperback, 1991.
- Goldman, Wendy Z. *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hellbeck, Jochen. *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*. New York: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- 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.
- Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. London: University of California Press, 1995.
- Mizis, Yurii and Diachkov, Vladimir and Kanishchev, Vladimir. *Tambovskie lageria dlia voennoplennykh: istoriia, kontingent, sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie aspekty vzaimootnosheniy vnutri i vovne 1943–1946 gg.* (Prisoner of war camp in Tambov. History, contingent, social-psychological aspects of relations inside and outside 1943–1946). Tambov: TGU, 2022.

Muminov, Sherzod. *Eleven winters of discontent: the Siberian internment and the making of a new Japan*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 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 Zwangsrekrutierten an Naziäffer*. 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.

Trossen, Marc. *Verluere Joëren. 85 Luxemburger Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs berichten: Zwangsrekrutierte, Refraktäre, Deserteure, Resistenzler, aber auch Kollaborateure, Kriegsfreiwillige... Redingen/Atttert: Les Amis de l'Histoire Luxembourg, Union des mouvements de résistance luxembourgeois*.

Wienand, Christiane. *Returning memories: former prisoners of war in divided and reunited Germany*. Rochester: Camden House, 2015.