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Worldview in Memoirs «Die Kavaliers von Illuxt» by Alexis von Engelhardt

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Abstract: The paper is based on the book of memoirs by Alexis von Engelhardt *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt*, published in 1949. In the territory of Latgale, the Baltic Germans lived in small numbers; therefore, the book is of historical, culturological and literary interest. The text of the literary work is understood as an object of scientific reflection; all its components are connected into a single whole by the author's creative thought. The research methodology is based on the interpretation of the literary text, the synthesis of statistical, cultural-historical, semantic and intertextual analysis in the critical perception of the text. The research aims to reveal the worldview presented in the literary work, which consists of the artistic space, representation of time, characters with their functions and objectives, and moral and ethical values. The particular objectives of the research include establishing the relationship between the text of the memoirs and jokes and entertaining stories of the Baltic Germans (Pratchen), the features of which have been identified in the author's previous research, but which still represent a scientific lacuna. The life realities described in the book *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt* allow the author to reconstruct the organization of the people's lives that has disappeared from the map of today's Latvia. The artistic space constructed in this book shows a closed and stagnant world, a lack of impulses for internal development and an appeal to the past. Historical and event-driven artistic time, the inclusiveness of individual stories into the canvas of historical events brings the narrative closer to Pratchen, i.e. jokes and entertaining stories of the Baltic Germans. Alexis von Engelhardt's book *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt* is currently the only source of jokes and entertaining stories (Pratchen) of the Baltic Germans about Latgale.

Keywords: The Baltic Germans, worldview, Latgale, artistic space, Pratchen.

Introduction

Although a few years ago the Baltic German texts were in the focus of attention of many researchers (Michael Garleff, Wilfried Schlau, York-Gothard Mix, Jürgen Wolff, Gero von Wilpert, Anja Wilhelmi, Benedikts Kalnačs, Māra Grudule, a.o.), various issues still remain either not fully studied or not considered thoroughly enough. First of all, the issues of linguistic originality and the tragic fate of the Baltic Germans, who left their homeland in 1939, were considered. In the last decade, Anja Wilhelmi has been actively involved in studying family issues in Northern Europe; several monographs on the fate of Baltic women and family policy in the 18th–20th centuries written by the scholar have been published. The researchers mentioned above focus on global problems and study the population of large cities neglecting regional peculiarities and problematic issues. There is still no significant study devoted to

the peculiarities of the Baltic Germans' life in those places where their concentration was less noticeable than, for example, in Riga, Jelgava, or Cēsis. The present research is a separate stage within the framework of extensive historical and literary research dedicated to the Baltic Germans who lived in Latgale and, to the extent possible, focusing on the city of Daugavpils. In the fiction by the Baltic Germans, Daugavpils and Latgale, in general, are hardly ever mentioned.

Nevertheless, the remains of the former baronial estates testify that the Baltic Germans had lived in Latgale for several generations. The focus of the present paper is the book by Alexis von Engelhardt *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt* (1949), dedicated to the Engelhardt family's relatives and friends who lived in the area of Ilūkste, a town located 25 kilometres from Daugavpils, the largest city in Latgale. The aims of the interdisciplinary research are to reveal the worldview reflected in the given literary work, understood as an organic combination of artistic space, time and literary characters. Understanding "I" as perceived by others and that of "others" in one's perception becomes especially relevant at present since the study of these interactions on the example of literary texts provides an understanding of the processes currently taking place in modern society. The next objective is to reveal the mental-national question basing on the material of this text. The particular objectives of the research include establishing the relationship between the text of memoirs and the Baltic German jokes and entertaining stories (Pratchen), the features of which have been identified in the author's previous research and still represent a scientific lacuna.

Method

The text of a book is understood as an object of scientific reflection, in which there are no accidental linguistic and content units. "Literary texts are inextricably linked to the context of the time when they were written – culture, historical, and social situation at a particular time influences writers' consciousness and determines the forms and special features of the content of their literary work, as well as literary work affects the consciousness of society" (Romanovska, 2020, p. 357). The methodology of the present research is based on the interpretation of a literary text and the synthesis of statistical, cultural-historical, semantic and intertextual analysis in the critical perception of the text. The research consists of three parts: the first part deals with the artistic place and its constructs. In the second part, attention is paid to the artistic time of the literary work. In the third part, the focus is on the characters and their relationships with people around them. While studying the text, the geographical and personal data of the names and persons mentioned were specified, the preliminary conclusions were juxtaposed with the existing studies. Materials from the Herder Institute archives (Marburg, Germany) were used as additional sources.

The worldview is understood as an integrated, comprehensive interpretation of the world and a person's position in it, which provides

man with a coordinate system for cognition, understanding, description and assessment of reality, as well as with basic concepts and norms that allow one to navigate and carry out practical activities in this world (Lukus, 2009, pp. 11–17). The worldview of a literary work is determined by its artistic space, time, literary characters and moral and ethical conceptions of an individual and the depicted society. All the texts related to ego-documents and literary works are subjective, an immanent property and semantic component of every author's worldview.

Writer, journalist and editor Alexis von Engelhardt was born in 1868 at the Lautzen estate near the city of Daugavpils; he was born into a baronial family well known in Russia and Germany, and died in the surroundings of Berlin in 1954. His most famous works include, first of all, historical studies such as *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Russlands, ihre politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* (1916) and *Der König von Korsika und der Freiheitskampf der Korsen* (1928).

The Structure of the Literary Work

On considering the title of the literary work to be analysed, it becomes clear that the writer focuses on two concepts, namely, people designated in this work as *Kavaliers*, and the place of action, i.e. the town Illuxt, today – Ilūkste, located 25 km from the city of Daugavpils and 250 km from Riga, the capital of Latvia. Ilūkste has always been considered a multinational town. The fact that, along with other nationalities, also Germans lived there can be understood from the analysis of the town's official home page on the Internet, where there is a mention of the fact that in 1798 the *Hauptmannschaft* (gendarme administration) Illuxt was established in the town, while the very notion and the name of the city are provided in German. Based on this, it can be assumed that the Germans occupied a leading position in the town, i.e. they lived and were actively engaged in social and economic activities. The recent census data testify that in today's population of Ilūkste, Germans are not identified separately and belong to the group of representatives of different national groups, which makes up 5% of the town's total population (Ilūkstes novads, 2021).

At the very beginning of the preface to the book, a synonym of the word *Kavaliers* is given – *Edelleute* ('noble people, nobles'), which corresponds to the entry in the explanatory dictionary of the German language (Bibliographisches Institut GmbH, 2021). The subtitle of the book deserves particular consideration: at the time of publication in 1949, the author was 81 years old, and he rightfully refers to himself as an old Courlander. Having survived the tough war, after all the losses, pain and suffering, in his memoirs, the author returned to those times that seemed to him happy and carefree.

The book *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt* with an addition to the title *Erinnerungen aus dem Gottesländchen gesammelt von einem alten Kurländer* (Memoirs of a Divine Country Collected by an Old Courlander) consists of a short preface and eight chapters, four of which

reveal the author's direct relationship with the depicted characters: Onkel Jascha (Uncle Jascha), Onkel Reihnhold und der letzte Maidenau (Uncle Reihnhold and the last Maidenau), Onkel Magnus (Uncle Magnus), Onkel Leopold (Uncle Leopold). The numerous relatives presented in the titles of the chapters create an impression of the writer's wide kinship around Illuxt, while the very district, according to the author of the book, was often jokingly named the "Duchy of Engelhardt" (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 5). Referring to the Courland Civil Registry Book, published in 1977, it can be asserted that at the beginning of the 19th century, the representatives of the Engelhardts were recorded in the Illuxt church community at least seven times, but among the family's estates recorded there is Lautzen, Brüggen and Lassen (Wildemann, 1977, pp. 21–77). These data confirm that Engelhardt had many relatives.

The rest of the chapters of the 79-page book expand on the historical picture of the life of a small town and its surroundings in the 19th century: "Die grüne Dame" (Green Lady), "Die vier Brüder Sacken" (Four Sacken Brothers), "Pastorengeschichten" (Pastoral Stories), "Der alte Oettingen" (Old Oettingen).

Artistic Space of the Literary Work

A work of art is perceived as a depiction of the real world and its conception and evaluation by the author (Lahn, Meister, 2008, pp. 250–252), through which the relations of a social, historical, ideological nature are revealed. The layered construction of the worldview, namely, a plant, an animal, a person, a people, a state, which has been discussed by Rudolf Gerber (Gerber, 2004, pp. 1–16), finds a peculiar reflection in works of fiction, often focusing on the relationship man – man, man – collective, man – state, and man – nature.

According to Alexis von Engelhardt, from 1851, the family of his parents lived on the estate Lautzen (Laucesa), located near Dünaburg, then already a big city. The whole story of the book is concentrated on the estates belonging to the Baltic Germans in Latgale. The author depicts life on the estate in general, particularly highlighting the most characteristic habits and customs in the life of the Baltic Germans, for example, storing food supplies in special pantries and massive oak cabinets (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 38–74). In the manor houses, according to the author's description, all rooms were used for their specific purposes, for example, a landlord's study, a spacious room for family celebrations, a home library, etc. (ibid.). In general, the trend, described by Ants Hein in exploring the peculiarities of the interior decor of the 19th-century Latvian estates, was also followed in Latgale: estate owners furnished their homes following their everyday life and daily needs, abandoning pretentious palace-type buildings (Hein, 2006, p. 261). In addition, one can observe the division, not into ceremonial halls and private rooms, but rather the appearance of rooms with a minimal function, for example, lobby, hall, dining room, bedroom, etc. (ibid.). The artistic space of the

house is characterized by closeness, focus on its inner life. Guests were received by going out onto the veranda, closing the inner space of the house from uninvited guests and opening it up for relatives and close friends. The static arrangement of objects, the lack of dynamism in the description of home decor is constant in depicting the inner world of a manor house. Rudolf Helmstetter points out that such objects are an integral part of the continuum or its interruption, which is reflected in the memoirs (Helmstetter, 2011, p. 235). An example is the description of a huge home library of one of the characters: there are Gothic vaults, ancient folios, weapons, archaeological finds and minerals in huge cabinets (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 74). Such a library requires a certain organization and order, which determine the static arrangement of space and a person's immersion in the past.

The second important element of the arrangement of the artistic space of the literary work is the park at the landowner's estate; it is depicted as a place arranged by the thought and creativity of man. The age of these parks is particularly emphasized; the word combination "old park" is a commonplace for their characteristics, which implicitly indicates the duration of the families' residence in their estates for more than one generation. The park is not only a place of specially arranged communication between man and nature, where plants are chosen, and their place and forms are determined according to the owner's taste. There was a coloured geological profile of Courland in one of such parks, skilfully made from various types of stone and soil. Close by that improvised map, the elderly owner of the estate told his young relatives endless legends and tales about their native country. Thus, one can trace a common immersion in the past of several generations ago and a lack of a vision for the future.

In this context, the episode of the construction of a railway station on a plot of land belonging to one of the characters is particularly noteworthy. Not accepting the industrial development of the country, refusing to use the railway, the landowner became the subject of ridicule and jokes (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 74). The desire to preserve the status quo in the own space of the house and the land plot determines the closedness of this space, internal staticity and impenetrability for new ideas, i.e. lack of dynamics.

A large number of estates (13), located in a relatively small territory of Latgale between Illuxt and Dünaburg, creates an impression of a rather high density of Baltic German settlements in this region. From the above analysis, it becomes clear that the book is not so much about the town of Illuxt, but rather about the numerous estates in its surroundings. The town itself is also present in the book of memoirs by Alexis von Engelhardt. From the memoirs of Baron von Budberg (Budberg, 1958, pp. 66–67), it becomes clear that already from the mid-19th century, the Engelhardts were at the head of the town and the entire Illuxt district, indirectly confirming the designation of the "Duchy of Engelhardts" (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 5).

The third element of the spatial arrangement is the town as a place of the public and social organization of life. The small town of Illuxt had its prominent place on the map of Latvia because there was a town council, a court and other institutions of power (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 43). Fairs were held in the town; they were attended by merchants from different neighbouring and distant places. The guest yard on the central square was known for its superb cuisine, and excellent Hungarian wine served for dessert. Old photographs of the town render its originality: in the centre of the town, there were three churches close to each other: Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran. Immersion in the text of the book and its comparison with the old photographs allow for the conclusion that the town lived an open life, delighting guests and maintaining the necessary order in public life.

The metropolis of Latgale was and still is Dünaburg (Daugavpils), the largest city in Latgale. In the small book, the city is mentioned five times; it suggests that Dünaburg had the power of attraction of a big city for all people in the region, including landlords, when it came to necessary purchases or entertainment. In addition, the city was also a fortress, which was being re-laid by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I, and he often checked the construction work (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 43–47).

The observations made as a result of the analysis of the estates and towns mentioned in the book by Alexis von Engelhardt are important for understanding the remarkable presence of Germans in the territory of a tiny region of Latgale. According to the first official data from the first census of the population of the Russian Empire in 1897, 1.8% of ethnic Germans lived in the district of Daugavpils (Benz, 1998, pp. 411–425). Living on their estates, the Baltic Germans maintained family and friendly ties with each other and were engaged in public service, primarily in Dünaburg and Illuxt. The main sphere of their lives remained the estates in which the life of several generations had passed. Thus, in the author's memoirs, a rather closed and static artistic micro-space is constructed.

Artistic Time of the Literary Work

The literary work *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt* has a distinct retrospective character, evoked by the word “memoirs” in the subtitle, and disposes the reader to the perception of reliable information about events and people. Although the author arranges the chapters in diachronic order, the chapters themselves may contain several stories, united by a common character but presented within each chapter in no particular order. Thus, the artistic time in this work can be described as closed, occurring only within the framework of these stories. Observing the characteristic features of the genre of memoirs, the narrative is characterized by a historically eventive character since all the stories are presented as authentic events within the boundaries of specific historical phenomena and processes, such as a visit to the fortress by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I. In addition, at the centre of each story, there are the characters accompanied by the description of time and space, and time is often

depicted in a vague or generalized way. The narrative is built on the principle of discreteness, i.e. the events are presented with time gaps to compress the narrative into a laconic formula for a spoken joke. The artistic time differs in that most of the stories are unfolded by using lexical coordinates “once”, “when”, “later”, etc., which corresponds to the structure of anecdotes (Wirth, 2017, pp. 11–13).

The Concept of Literary Characters and Pratchen

The interaction of literary characters creates an ordered model of the world, in which, under certain oppositions, at least two groups of characters of a literary work are opposed (Schulte-Sasse, 2001, p. 159). The given work, which is divided into separate chapters according to the characters' names, reveals two significant oppositions: on the grounds of nationality: German – not German, and social status: master – servant. The book contains many characters, of which only the main characters are referred by name.

In compliance with the diachronic structure of the book, the narrative begins with the legend about the “green lady” of the Engelhardt family and ends with the story of August von Oettingen, who was not related to that family. The central becomes a unifying sense of pride in the “real Oberländer” (residents of the southern part of the country) (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 5), who were characterized by willpower and understanding of honour. At the same time, it can be argued that, when narrating about specific events and characters, the author deliberately brings the reader to the idea of common national and mental characteristics of the Baltic Germans in Latgale.

An important aspect for the analysis of this literary work is people, *Kavaliers*, i.e. the perception of oneself and other people. This aspect appears to be particularly important for understanding the mentality of the Baltic Germans, particularly of those who lived in the territory of Latgale. Although the author of the book writes about individual members of his large family and friends, the narration analysis allows for making several important generalizations.

Narrating about the external features of Engelhardts, about their high stature, particular manner of wearing old-fashioned, loose coats, the author conveys their perception in another part of Latvia, in the city of Mitau (Jelgava), where a significant number of Baltic Germans traditionally lived. According to the writer Eduard von Keyserlingk, quoted in the book *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt*, the Engelhardts made an unforgettable impression, so that even to the representatives of German nationality, they seemed not to be Germans, but partly Poles or Russians. It should be noted that nowadays Latgale is considered as being too “Russian”, which is associated with the high percentage of the population speaking Russian as their native tongue, and with the proximity of the common border with the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation.

Describing the social position of the Baltic Germans, Alexis von Engelhardt mentions the officers' ranks and positions in the town's

hierarchy held by the Engelhardts family, thus emphasizing their social significance and respect in all sectors of society.

According to Alexis von Engelhardt, the inhabitants of Courland, especially in the southern part of the country, were distinguished by the fact that there were so-called originals among them, about which numerous jokes were told and passed down from generation to generation among the Baltic Germans. Forty years later, the idea of “originals” was expressed by Lothar Kaehlbrandt, one of the collectors of the Baltic Germans’ jokes (Kaehlbrandt, 1995, p. 104). He asserts that the originals could have been born if three conditions were combined: space, time and economic independence. Pratchen, i.e. jokes and entertaining stories of the Baltic Germans mainly from Riga, Tallinn and Tartu, were recorded by Lothar Kaehlbrandt from their words.

It can be stated that Alexis von Engelhardt relies on his memories and uses the material of some family jokes about the characters depicted. In this respect, his memoirs are similar to the stylistics and structure of the above-mentioned Baltic German jokes (Pratchen). Those jokes were meant to be recited orally when surrounded by a large family and/or close friends of the Baltic Germans. The language was not the only limiting factor for the distribution of the stories. The crucial condition for such jokes and entertaining stories was that their subject and the main character would be well known to the audience at the time of retelling Pratchen. The analysis of the personal collection of the Baltic Pratchens, based on the analysis of numerous sources and consisting of 174 texts, has shown that, regrettably, among the published texts, there is not a single joke dedicated to the Baltic Germans who lived in Latgale. This fact convincingly demonstrates the mental separation of Latgale from the main part of Latvia. In this case, the only source of Baltic German jokes about Latgale is the book by Alexis von Engelhardt.

Most of the situations featuring the “originals” represent the Baltic Germans as people of honour who are loyal to their cause. These common traits of a mental character brought up from early childhood can be traced both in everyday situations and in episodes with the characters – representatives of the nobility and power, for instance, the episode with the Sacken brothers (Engelhardt, 1949, p. 32). On the example of the matchmaking of a German groom and a Polish bride, one can notice that communication was based on mutual respect and common interests, although the father of the future bride, who spoke and understood German poorly, uttered the words “Drang Nach Osten!” four times, which was perceived by the characters in that chapter with humour and no offence. This statement can be illustrated by a quote from Ernst Engelhardt’s letter to his father-in-law in 1934, in which he wrote that in the countryside, people did not consider national differences important (Herder-Institut, Archive file Nr. DSH 111 Engelhardt 30). As mentioned above, the Baltic Germans lived in the territory of Latgale mainly on their estates.

It should be noted that the appeal “Drang Nach Osten!” was used in a pamphlet (written in German) by Julian Klaczko (1825–1906), a Polish

journalist born in Vilnius in 1849. Then the slogan was adopted by Pan-Slavic journalism, which directed its criticism against the Baltic Germans, whom they considered colonists and conquerors (Henzel, 2014, p. 30). It can be concluded that the Polish landowner was familiar with the pamphlet by Julian Klaczko, which, however, did not prevent him from becoming related to a German family.

The idea of a person's dignity, loyalty to a given word, integrity and honour is present in many episodes of the book. Among relatives and friends, according to Alexis von Engelhardt, it was not customary to give promissory notes if one of them needed financial means and asked for help wishing to borrow money (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 52–61). In such a case, the main binding factor was the given word or agreement, to fulfil which was a real matter of honour. It was also a matter of honour to help the impoverished single family members who were moving from estate to estate, where they were given a bed, food, clothing and comfortable existence at large.

The episodes about August von Oettingen (1823–1908), the former governor of Livonia and the mayor of Riga, characterize him as a confident, fearless and witty person, able to defend his own opinions and views (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 74–79). Personal acquaintance allows the author to touch on some details of this person's personal life, which brings the narrative style of each episode closer to the above-mentioned jokes of the Baltic Germans – Pratchen. The oral transmission of these stories is also supported by the citation of different Oettingen phrases, which were transmitted with characteristic intonations and voice play (Henzel, 2014, p. 30).

Among the stories that Alexis von Engelhardt narrates with undisguised pride, some show the Baltic Germans as representatives of the privileged layers of the society, as landowners, property owners, farmhands and servants. The book provides several examples with relatives shown as cruel tyrants. For Alexis von Engelhardt, as a person who had seen Europe, had lived in Germany, those episodes were unpleasant, but he tried to justify the cruel behaviour of his characters towards servants as “a given”, as a means in the “system of upbringing” (the author's translation – *V. T.*). The author uses his favourite technique in creating a literary text; namely, a situation with unpleasant connotations is followed by depicting a kind of levelling or a solution to the problem. In one case, this is an episode with the coachman Adamka, who did not allow himself to be beaten because of having overturned the cart. The writer points out that Adamka was a former Russian soldier, and Uncle Magnus was a former knight. The resulting situation revealed a conflict between master and servant, where both considered themselves worthy rivals. The conflict was to be resolved by a duel, according to all the rules of knightly honour. The story ends with the landlord sending the former coachman with a cover letter to another relative, where the coachman was again given a job (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 50–53). It is not difficult to imagine that in the eyes of servants and farmhands, such landowner's behaviour aroused rejection and outright

ridicule. The latter is especially evident in the story of the construction of a railway station in the territory belonging to Uncle Magnus. The “originality” of the depicted characters in many respects bordered with insanity and permissiveness, which Alexis von Engelhardt tries to show with humour and joke, for example, the habit of one of his relatives to shoot starlings with a gun anywhere and at any time of the day (ibid.). All these observations allow for the conclusion that the attitude towards such originals within the circle of family and friends was fundamentally different from the attitude towards them.

One story included in Alexis von Engelhardt’s book differs from the rest of the stories in that it is not about his relatives but pastors in Courland (Engelhardt, 1949, pp. 66–73). This story allows for a more generalized view of the situation of the Baltic Germans in the territory of today’s Latvia. The German pastorate is shown to be far from the needs and concerns of the ordinary people, which is manifested, in particular, in the situation in which a German pastor, having finished the first sermon for the German flock, continues his sermon for the Latvian parishioners, not noticing that they had already left time ago, and it is time to close the church. Although the author tries not to draw the reader’s attention to the manifestation of injustice or negligence towards ordinary people, the text of the book provides a general idea of how the Baltic Germans were perceived in Latgale.

Conclusion

The worldview of the literary work is manifested in the memoirs as closed, devoid of dynamics and immersed in the world of the past, without reaching the contemporary level or a representation of the future. The main oppositions of the characters are the opposition based on nationality “German – “not German”, as well as the social and public opposition “master” – “servant”. The literary work reflects the national character of the Baltic Germans and is a source for studying the way of life, organization of everyday life and mentality of the Baltic Germans living in Latgale. By their characteristic features, some of the amusing stories presented in the literary work can be attributed to Pratchen (jokes and amusing stories of the Baltic Germans). The value of the literary work also lies in the fact that at the moment, it is the only source of Pratchen about the Baltic Germans in Latgale.

Source

Engelhardt, A., 1949. *Die Kavaliers von Illuxt. Erinnerungsblätter aus dem Gottestländchen gesammelt von einem alten Kurländer*. [The cavaliers of Illuxt. Souvenir sheets from the Gottestland collected by an old Kurlander]. München: Heimeran. [In German].

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