



Schooling the gaze: Industry and nation-building in Luxembourgish landscape-writing, 1900–1940

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of industry in the invention of a national landscape in Luxembourg between 1900 and 1940. Luxembourg is a significant case study when it comes to the construction of national identity, because it did not gain its independence (1890) through revolution but was attributed the status of nationhood by the decision of the major European political powers. The period under investigation is also characterized by immense industrial expansion: in the course of a few decades, Luxembourg moved from being a rural state to being a major economic power. Focusing on landscape-writing addressed to a native audience, this paper examines the nexus of the economy, the arts and politics, arguing that writers integrated representations of industrial processes into the discourse of national identity in order to assert Luxembourg's competence and 'right to life'.

Keywords

identity, landscape, literature, Luxembourg, monument, nationhood, World Exhibition

In a European context, the creation of a national landscape occurred relatively late in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Landscape was employed as a tool for nation-building with remarkable frequency during the interwar period, when the nation started to develop cultural self-confidence, as Myriam Sunnen's work has shown (Sunnen, 2008, 2010, 2011). Luxembourg, which borders on France, Germany and Belgium, carries the name of the fortress of Luxembourg, erected around AD 963 as 'one of Sigefroid's strongholds,

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situated in a larger area of activity' (Péporté, 2011: 21). The territory was ruled by the Burgundians, Spanish, French and Austrians – 'all of whom very legitimate princely heirs', with the exception of Louis XIV (Péporté et al., 2010: 5). Due to its attractive position at the crossroads of Europe, the fortress came to be a place much coveted by various European leaders, until it was dismantled in 1867. Significantly, Luxembourg's independence was not the result of a struggle for sovereignty, but was decided by the leading European powers in the context of the Congress of Vienna (1815) the Treaty of London (1839) and an abrupt change in political power in 1890. Given this messy past, the political and intellectual elites who sought to stress that Luxembourg was a unified self-governing political, economic and cultural body had to invent the past as well as the present (Péporté et al., 2010).

In the face of the pan-Germanism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the threat posed by National Socialism in the mid-twentieth century, the need to justify and defend national sovereignty in and through the arts became particularly acute. Insecure political attachment and conflicting identification are the context that shaped Luxembourg's (trilingual) national literature in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹ Thematically, much Luxembourgish writing from before 1940 harks back to a supposedly lost rural past and locates an authentic Luxembourgish essence within the natural landscape, which shows a distinct desire to root identity in the soil (Sunnen, 2011: 10). Significantly, interest in 'authentic' nature rose – particularly on the part of the bourgeoisie – just as another identity-building force became important for the formation for Luxembourgish national consciousness: the steel industry, which, for about a hundred years (1870s–1970s) ensured the country's wealth and international prominence.² Industrialization drastically altered Luxembourgish society, as it resulted in mass immigration, a rural exodus and the brutal but visually impressive transformation of the ore-rich Southern Minette region. Notwithstanding the reactions against the social upheaval and pollution caused by industrialization, the development of the steel industry represents an emancipatory force in the eventful history of the Grand Duchy, allowing the small country to come into its own not only as an important participant in the European economy – as a member of the German Customs Union until 1918, then in an economic union with Belgium, then as a Benelux country – but also as a cultural power.

This article concerns the formative role attributed to industry in the invention of landscape in the 'geografictional' landscape-writing published between 1900 and 1940 (Pianos, 2003). It argues that Luxembourgish writers employed the semi-fiction of landscape discourse to craft a Luxembourgish national identity grounded both in an illustrious natural and political past and in the incomparable momentum of the industrial present. In this identity-building process, three different conceptions of landscape coexist and alternate: first, imagined historical landscape based on places and people that have disappeared; second, landscape built around ruins and other sources of physical evidence; and, third, landscape located in the immediacy of the present. While my article concentrates on the last one, it is also important to stress that the concurrence of these approaches, particularly from the late 1920s onwards, signifies that a tradition of landscape-writing was simultaneously being created and modernized, demonstrating a wish to incorporate the past, present and future into a collective national narrative.

In the construction of national identity, the notions of landscape and *homeland* tend to be closely interlinked. As relevant scholarship has demonstrated, landscape-writing is instrumental in nation-building because it can infuse a territory that is not yet unified with collective symbolic meaning. The desire to narrativize the territory has been shown to arise at historical moments when the potential of the body politic needs to be harnessed for the purposes of nation-building. Sara McDowell has identified this 'desire to represent memory through the making of "place"', as 'a feature of all modern societies [that] is prevalent after every conflict or tragic event' (McDowell, 2008: 38). Because 'national cohesion ... requires a sense of collective awareness', the unified perception and validation of the national territory can foster a sense of belonging and responsibility in the citizen, which transforms a stretch of land into a landscape and a state into a nation. In order to institute this personal and collective groundedness, Thomas M. Lekan has observed, national identities in modern Europe have been shaped by the powerful rhetorical 'assertion that there is an organic link between a people and its landscape' (Lekan, 2004: 1). Lekan notes that the 'so-called belated nation' of Germany, 'which had been unified only since 1871 and whose pathway to modernity was punctuated by political instability', sought to ground itself 'in the natural landscape' (2004: 4). By 'stimulating *Heimat* [homeland] feeling' in the population, German preservationist organizations and landscape-writers 'hoped to forge a more unified nation' (2004: 12). Significantly, the equation of the homeland with the national landscape was not a given, but gradually came about through organized effort. Peter Blickle has similarly argued that the need for the socializing effect of the 'invocation of *Heimat*' tends to arise 'where deep socioeconomic, ontological, psychological, and political shifts, fissures and insecurities occur' (Blickle, 2004: 14). By establishing the homeland as the 'container of history', nations craft a 'spatial conception of identity' that is self-generating: through the internalizing of the *Heimat* rhetoric, the confrontation with the physical characteristics of a geographic area reinforces the emotional and ontological ties that link the individual to the nation (2004: 15). The physical territory is fundamental to the essentialist construction of national identity, because, as Guntram H. Herb has remarked, 'only territory provides tangible evidence of the nation's existence and its historical roots' (Herb, 1999: 10). In turn, the validation of the nation and the population is, according to Olaf Kühne, based on the attractiveness of the given territory. An area that presents a variety of forms and elements thus offers more opportunities for ideological projection than one that is uniformly structured. Kühne makes a crucial point when he argues that in order for the public to recognize territory as landscape, the meanings projected onto the physical territory need to be deciphered, meaning that the collective gaze needs to be socialized. Following Lucius Burkhardt, who holds that landscape is 'invisible' to the 'uninitiated' (Burkhardt, 1977: 20), Kühne argues that the 'stereotypical social message of landscape must be learnt, just like the meaning of all symbolic systems' (Kühne, 2008: 78). From these theories it becomes clear that the perception of national territory as national landscape depends on the introduction of the individual to a set of signifying associations which familiarize him or her with the official ideology projected onto his or her natural surroundings. The symbolic validation received through these associations establishes the individual as part of an imagined community of nationals.

The writers under investigation seem to have fully recognized the importance of the individual gaze in the construction of national identity. Through their landscape-writing they endeavoured to school readers in the appreciation of an industrial aesthetic. If the public could accept the fire and smoke of the steel factories as visually beautiful, then, these writers inferred, industry could serve an identity-building function as a testimony of inherently Luxembourgish talent. Technology was established as integral to culture and, based on a total identification with geographical location, the industry's expertise, innovativeness and immense productivity were instituted as the foundation of Luxembourg's particular identity. Given that Luxembourg had reached number six in the ranks of world steel production at the beginning of the century, and had thus become a major economic player, the infrequent appearance of industry in fiction is initially surprising (Lorang, 1994: 18). While in the pre-World War I novel industry primarily assumes a background function, as Jeanne E. Glesener and Frank Wilhelm (2009) have shown, two poetry collections focus exclusively on the subject: Nik Welter's *Hochofen* [*Blast Furnace*] (1913 and 1916) and Paul Palgen's *La Pourpre sur les crassiers* [*Crimson on the Slag Heaps*] (1931). Despite this apparent privileging of a 'homeland' aesthetic over industrial subjects in creative writing, the visual intensity of steel production – blazing red fires and glowing slag heaps illuminating the night sky – was consistently employed as a metaphor for modernity and an artistic expression of the faith in progress (Millim, 2013).

The non- or semi-fictional texts under investigation actively counteract the reigning dichotomy between technology and culture by explicitly shaping the readers' aesthetic sensibility. Tamara Pianos, in her 2000 study on the perception and construction of Canadian landscapes, has employed the term 'geografiction', first coined by Aritha van Herk (1990), to describe this distinct genre which is situated between factual geographical writing and imaginative fiction. Pianos is right when she argues that non-/semi-fictional essay collections 'have unique access to the representation of landscape' due to 'the claim of authenticity at the basis of their production and reception, which is missing in openly fictional texts' (Pianos, 2003: 32). The overlap of the factual and the fictional that characterizes such works, Pianos argues, gives insight into the collective desire of a society to craft a homeland it can mentally inhabit: 'the identification with a home or a homeland seems particularly important where the majority of the population migrated to the country or region' (2003: 37). Although, with industrialization, thousands of people immigrated to Luxembourg, it was not for them that landscape-writings crafted a narrative of the homeland. While in Canada the image of the melting-pot dominated the discourse of identity, Luxembourg's self-image was based on the idea of an enrooted homeland.

Particularly from 1900 onwards, the country was appropriated by and through texts that mapped and named its particularities, such as tourist guides, geography manuals and essay collections. This article investigates the discourse advanced by texts that were not primarily designed to attract tourists to Luxembourg, but rather to alert the national public to the variety of its landscapes, such as Michel Engels and M. Huss's *Le Luxembourg pittoresque – Das romantische Luxemburger Land* (1901), Arthur Hary's *Unser Land* (1916) and *Erzland* (1917), and Nicolas Ries and Robert Hausemer's *Le Beau Pays de Luxembourg* (1928). All of these texts attribute a crucial cultural role to industry,

portraying it as a manifestation of the country's tireless work ethic, technological ingenuity and vibrantly inventive spirit.

Writing the landscape

The first impulse of landscape-writing was to seek justification within nature for the fact that Luxembourg did indeed deserve its independence and national sovereignty. There is constant stress on the uniqueness of Luxembourgish landscapes, which are said to display an extraordinarily high 'Reizkomplexität' (complexity and variety of visual stimuli) – a characteristic which, according to Kühne (2008), determines the perceived attractiveness and the ensuing cultural value of a stretch of land (Kühne, 2008: 105). The resulting link between the visual splendour of landscape and the intelligence, knowledge and capability of its inhabitants, is, according to Kenneth R. Olwig, a way to 'lend legitimacy to national identity by suggesting that it is natural, rather than artificial or unnatural' (Olwig, 2008: 73). The first and oldest text under investigation, Engels and Huss's *Le Luxembourg pittoresque* of 1901, presents itself as a tourist guide, but is steeped in a strongly justificatory patriotic rhetoric which praises the country's political *Sonderstellung* (exceptional position) as an independent state between powerful neighbours as an enviable situation, and defends Luxembourgish tenacious adherence to the soil of the homeland. The 'natural beauties' of Luxembourg are portrayed as particularly 'desirable', due to their high concentration, which, according to the authors, is 'seldom found' anywhere else (Engels and Huss, 1901: n.p.). As will be typical in subsequent Luxembourgish landscape-writings, the text presents itself as a tour of the 'wine-rich shores of the Moselle', the 'lovely valleys of the Eisch', the powerful River Sauer pushing through the slate of the Ardennes, the ravines, rocks and deep forests of the famous 'Müllerthal', the 'ever more popular' spa of Mondorf-les-Bains, the ruins of medieval castles, to arrive finally at the mountains of the 'trade-rich' South (1901: n.p.).

The complete omission of the aesthetic features of industrial production in *Picturesque Luxembourg* suggests that the construction of landscape was at its earliest stage, as the authors needed to convince Luxembourgish and foreign readers alike of the aesthetic value of the small nation in order to trigger the pride of its inhabitants and attract the respect and money of foreign visitors. To this end, the Minette region is promoted exclusively as the centre of capital: 'For the expert industrialist, as much as for the regular leisure traveller, a visit to this region is very interesting' (1901: 68). In contrast to the usual rural silence, the noisy industrial region is populated by 'a large number of blast furnaces and two major steelworks, which are equipped with the most recent achievements of modern metallurgy and bring enormous quantities of this most useful of metals to the world market' (1901: 68). Here the chimneys are portrayed as 'landmarks for the trade-rich region' and have no aesthetic merit whatever. While industry is seen as essential to the economic functioning of the country and even the world, it is strictly devoid of any aesthetic appeal. The ascription of beauty is reserved for nature: the 'rich meadow valleys, fruitful fields, wonderful coppices' are seen to 'embellish' the outskirts of the 'commercial and industrious city of Esch' (1901: 68). The industrial presence is the country's most valuable asset and is therefore proof of Luxembourgish capability and potential, but the description is detached, factual and without enthusiasm. The writers

fail to exploit the colours, smells and noises of the industrial infrastructure as forms of beauty, and implicitly portray them as a necessary eyesore for which nature must compensate.

Unlike Engels and Huss, many later landscape-writers aestheticized, rather than ignored, industry. Nicolas Ries, who, according to Sunnen, was a major figure in the invention of the Luxembourgish landscape, may have had significant influence on the transformation of industry as a material fact into a symbol of national dynamism. The connection that Ries draws between human character and place in his 1920 *Le Peuple luxembourgeois* already informs his earlier edition, entitled *Essai d'une psychologie du peuple luxembourgeois*: 'the human being is a product of the soil that gave birth to him or her, just like flora and fauna are characteristic of a period and a climate' (Ries, 1911: 77). This geographic determinism, which is at the root of all Luxembourgish landscape-writing, implies that the physical aspect, constitution and fruitfulness of the national territory are considered to be a direct reflection of the nature and behaviour of the inhabitants. The vivid description of the industrial south that we find in both editions can thus be seen as an invitation to identify with the image of the Luxembourger as organized, productive, tireless and capable of transforming both the landscape and the sky beyond recognition:

In the shadow of the gigantic blast furnaces and rolling mills, which are among the most important of the continent and which, without pause, throw towards the sky sprays of flames which redden the horizon, an army of workers converts ore into iron and steel. The prodigious heaps of ferruginous soil and the mountains of slag imprint onto the landscape a character of strength and savage grandeur that is not wanting in beauty. (1911: 63–4)

Ries here presents the industrial south as the hub of unabated and very lucrative activity. This fragment of an industrial landscape is of a semi-fictional nature. The lack of specificity concerning the exact location of the scene, as well as the surreally disparate proportions of the colossal infrastructure and the ant-like workers, mark the extract as distinctly literary. Ries is amazed by the power of the human being to re-organize the natural landscape into heaps and to illuminate vast expanses of the sky – for him, human intervention lends an intensity to nature that is in itself beautiful.

Ries intended his association of the national psyche with geographical territory to be an opportunity for personal and national self-recognition, addressing primarily the intelligentsia. While he steered the readers' gaze through both their territory and their psyche, he did not address them directly, and consistently maintained a scientific distance. *Erzland* (1917), Arthur Hary's collection of essays and newspaper articles – many of them addressed to children – presents a surprising number of contributions that aim to encourage the general public's receptiveness to the beauty and identity-building potential of technological processes. J. Minn, in his introductory contribution, seeks to integrate the south into the national landscape narrative when he reassures the 'little burgher of the red soil' that while 'the beauty of the ore country is of a different nature than that which reveals itself to you in the waterfall in the cosy solitude of the forest' (Hary, 1917: 5), it is nevertheless a legitimate and precious form of beauty. Hary's preface, which takes the shape of a prose poem, comprises the multiple agenda of the collection:

We want to tell you about the land of the red soil, my friends. About the ore country, which loudly and hardily sings the song of work, which greets the country every night with a thousand glowing red flags of fire, whose lap cradles red wealth – but also pale death. It is the land of treasures, of beauty, of work, of effort and suffering. This is how you shall learn to understand and love and admire it. (1917: 3)

The contributors, here introduced by the editor, aim to initiate their readers to a new world view: one that is capable of seeing beauty in persistence, diligence and desire for change, which they deem characteristic of the ore country. Significantly, the schooling of the mindset involves establishing a deep emotional connection, which comes about through the aesthetic appreciation of the different facets of being active. Henri Wolles's article 'The beauty of the ore country' (Hary, 1917), for instance, praises the multiplicity of beauty in the region, starting off by ridiculing the 'people big and little who do not have an open eye for the varied beauty that surrounds them. At best, they might find beautiful a glistening summer's day with the smell of flowers and the rustling of forests' (1917: 11). The author contrasts the supposedly small-minded preference for harmonious shapes and colours with the truer beauty of the ore country, which is acutely accentuated by grey rainclouds. An unsuspecting walk through a southern town is likely to be interrupted by the 'fiery soul' of the steel factory whose glow tints the clouds of smoke so that they 'flutter like long golden flags'; as if 'freedom and progress' (1917: 12) were greeting the country. For Wolles, accepted forms of beauty pale in comparison to the ephemeral but magically intense 'Fata Morgana' (1917: 12) of the industrial spectacle. As proof of the cultural relevance of this new form of beauty, Wolles evokes the 'singer of work', namely the poet Nik Welter (1871–1951), whose poem 'To the land of the red soil' (1913) is consistently cited throughout the collection:

I greet you, land of the red
Soil, land of work!
Bright and early from your chimneys
A wink of welcome floats towards me.
In the evening, your mute weathers hem
My peaceful land
And at night my dreams
Mirror their burning embers.

(Hary, 1917: 12–13)

The internalized processes of the factory frame the narrator's daily experience of the world so that we can speak of a sustained connection between technology and the human being. Because Welter thus establishes industry as the lifeblood of the southern region, his poetry functioned as a literary monument that helped to institute technology firmly as a cultural, rather than strictly utilitarian, phenomenon. By presenting the poem as the aesthetic culmination of the industrial process of pouring slag, Wolles, like many other landscape-writers, ascribes profoundly physical industrial activities to the realm of the spirit.

Hary's 1917 review of Welter's poetry collection *Hochofen (Blast Furnace, 1913 and 1916)*, which suggests that the creative process is triggered by industrial processes,

similarly stages the poet as the mediator between technology and culture. For Hary, *Hochofen* is the proof and result of the poet's internalization of the industrial landscape, 'whose burning embers are mirrored in his nightly dreams [and] whose wonderful magnificence greets him every night' (1917: 71). The poet's 'heart leaps up' when he is confronted with the industrial light and he then 'carries' this enthusiasm 'inside' until the moment of literary creation (1917: 72, 71). Hary shares Welter's goal of 'open[ing] the eyes of all concerned for this new, grand beauty of work, that they may learn to understand their life differently, find pleasure in the struggle of their workday and discover beauty' (1917: 72). Both seem to wish to integrate the industrial world into the public's worldview and concept of beauty. The reason why the author here operates from a double distance, publicizing his own agenda through the foregrounding of another person's ideas and discussing a group of readers whom he does not directly address, is that he is advocating the addition of *Hochofen* to the mandatory school curriculum 'for the good of all' (1917: 75). Hary concludes that:

Welter's *Hochofen* is a cultural monument of our time and of our country. Through such works we participate in the total culture of the present, in spite of all the patriotic links to the homeland that they incarnate. This work ... gives the most beautiful testimony to our nature and our country. (1917: 75)

Resolutely establishing technology, as mediated through its literary representation, as fundamentally Luxembourgish, Hary emphasizes the relevance and integration of national culture in an international present. He celebrates an industrial aesthetic that leaves the past behind, encourages the country's unapologetic self-confidence in its own culture and teaches the public to know and appreciate the present.

Writing the present

Welter's and Hary's tendency to embrace the present as an affirmation of human (and national) agency is a theme that keeps reoccurring in landscape-writing concerned with industry. This interest in fashioning the nation in the present, in actively shaping lived experience, and in, slightly paradoxically, historicizing the contemporary through writing, is concretely reflected in the style of the writing. The careful attention to the temporal and spatial linearity of events and objects, as well as the self-conscious positioning of the narrator in the depicted scene, indicate the wish to capture the contact between the human being and technology. In their desire to write the present, many of the chosen texts display a conception of landscape reminiscent of that articulated by Jeff Malpas, who claims that 'to experience a landscape is to be active within it, since it is by means of such activity that landscape affects and influences us' (Malpas, 2011: 14). Convinced that landscape analysis should not focus on visual representation, as Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (1988) have proposed, Malpas believes that 'in our engagement with landscape through art, we also ... engage with our own mode of being in the world' (1988: 19). Having so far charted a movement from a merely factual mention of industry to an exhilarated response to its colours and shapes, to the belief that the industrial aesthetic establishes Luxembourg as a modern and timely

nation, I now examine a new aspect of Luxembourgish landscape-writing: the industrial process *as* landscape.

The fact that Hubert Clement (1889–1953), in his piece on ‘The ore country’, records the immediacy of his direct experience of industrial Esch with strict adherence to the present tense can be seen to indicate his reluctance to historicize. Clement was an important, politically active journalist and newspaper editor, who served as the mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette from 1935 to 1940. The text under investigation appeared in Hary’s 1916 collection *Unser Land*, a publication that, like the later *Erzland*, aimed to ‘bear witness to the beauties’ of Luxembourg and ‘to kindle the love for the country in all hearts’ (Hary, 1916: i). Clement’s narrator, surveying the steel factories of Esch from a hill in the park, establishes himself as the centre around which the constantly moving industrial landscape revolves. His initial words ‘I stand’ (1916: i) on the one hand indicate the supremacy of the human intellect over the material universe and, on the other, the effort that the human observer of the industrial world must undertake to gauge and comprehend the expansive practical effects produced by technology. Accordingly, in order to acquire a wider perspective of the industrial world, the observer must further climb the hill so that his ‘astounded’ eye can wander over a ‘sea of houses’, glide past the ‘streaks of red embers’ adorning the slag heaps, straying onward, only to catch a breath on the green patch ‘in the image’ (1916: 38). By thus acknowledging the fact that a written landscape account is necessarily framed by the linearity of language, the author interrupts his narrative to interrogate the suitability of language to ekphrastically express the speed of the modern experience.

In order to show how the simultaneity of technological and social processes affects the depth of the depicted scene, Clement presents the industrial landscape in layers. His survey, conducted from the point of view of a narrator, starts with the ‘panting and aching machines’ at the station ‘underneath’ him, moving on to the ‘long layers of houses’ strung together, ‘above which’ enormous red chimneys ‘rise up’ to the sky, in which a long ‘snake of yellowish-brown dirty smoke’ winds its way (1916: 38–9). This rather traditional landscape image can be seen as two-dimensional because it focuses on the length, width and colour of objects. In order to visualize the vibrancy of the industrial landscape in language, the author adds depth to his depiction. He does so by assigning natural monuments like the Zolverknapp and Johannisberg (mountains) to the ‘background’, while industrial structures are shown to leap energetically into the foreground (1916: 38). Nature, personified, is trying to compete with the industrial structures: ‘it seems as if the [Zolverknapp] wants to move forward to join the reunion of chimneys’ (1916: 38). The chimneys and smokestacks stick out their ‘smoke-black’ stomachs, reaching towards the horizon, both filling out the circumference of the landscape and punctuating it: ‘chimney after chimney shoots up’ (1916: 38). This noisy abundance of chimneys creates a ‘rhythm of unrest’, which leads the narrator to ask: ‘and this is supposed to be beautiful?’ (1916: 39). Clement answers his own question by stressing that in order to recognize this ‘new beauty’, ‘we must open our eyes to the new play of colours and lights’ in order to ‘understand the world of blast furnaces and gurgling movement’ (1917: 39). The imperative modernization of the gaze that Clement calls for is an invitation to adjust the general aesthetic convention and the socio-philosophical worldview to a territory that has already emancipated itself from nature. The protruding

industrial structures are teeming with energy and express the lust to mould the universe and create modern landscapes that *are* human, not just inhabited *by* humans. The narratological situation in the present both renders and captures history as lived experience, which is seen as the foundation of a powerful, independent nation. Given Clement's lifelong political activism and his likely familiarity with the works of Friedrich Engels, the privileging of aestheticism over a socialist agenda is initially surprising, but highlights the author's commitment to elevating the Minette region into the realm of art.

M. Weber's 'From the Minette stone to the block of iron', which appeared in *Erzland*, stylistically mimics the immediacy of the present even more closely in that it portrays the industrial process as landscape. While Weber terms the first section of his contribution simply 'Blast furnace', the description that follows by no means focuses on the physical aspect of such a structure. Instead, 'we follow the red stones on their way', living, as readers, the process that shapes the landscape (Hary, 1917: 46). The mathematical minimalism underlying the fast-paced staccato style of the narration reflects the movements of the perfectly coordinated components of the steel factory, but it also suggests the emotional excitement of the participating gaze:

The trolleys empty out their load into a huge container made of fortified concrete, which has sliding doors at the bottom. A large pail advances, the stones fall through the sliding doors and the pail rolls away. That is the feeding pail of the blast furnace. Now, a crane slides near from above. Its paw grabs the pail. With steady calm, aware of its power, it rises above; above to the charging platform of the blast furnace. A single human being guides the movement from above. Having reached the top, the pail leans towards the opening of the blast furnace, called the furnace top. A gaping abyss, a fall: the blast furnace's food disappears into its stomach. Many many tons whose destiny is coming nearer and nearer already lie there. Underneath them, in the wide container, a sea of molten stone is seething. The embers gradually reach the latest arrivals. (1917: 46)

The passage is not a scientific *précis*, but rather a fictionalization of technology, which, through the personifications, anthropomorphisms, repetitions, dramatic staging of routine processes and breathless immediacy, creates an atmosphere of uneasy suspense. The dangerously powerful technology becomes a source of visual enjoyment, which is exacerbated by identification with the pain and fear of the anthropomorphized raw materials. Weber's text cannot be seen as landscape-writing in its traditional form because, firstly, it does not describe the external world and, secondly, it does not describe objects, but rather a process that presents itself as a constantly reoccurring linear sequence of practices and sensations. Nevertheless, due to the overlapping and sequential movements of the processes described, Weber can be seen to construct temporal and spatial landscape constellations: indicators such as 'then', 'above' and 'underneath' guide the gaze of the reading presence as if through a landscape.

Because the implied reader's gaze is transported through the steps of production, merging with the Minette stones, he or she both passively observes and actively executes the described movement. The industrial light spectacle has become in itself a landscape the collective narrative persona ('we') have 'often observed from a hill at night time' (1917: 48). This landscape is familiar but nevertheless temporary: 'then, from below, an enormous burst of fire shot into the sky and illuminated the contours of black things.

It glowed in the clouds for minutes, to be transported into the hills of the Oesling' (a northern hilly/rural region) (1917: 48). The author thus reconciles two landscapes always described as opposites under the same sky. Through their participation in the creation of the industrial nocturnal landscape, Weber writes, the readers 'penetrate into the mystery of the spraying' (1917: 48) that provokes the glowing skies. By developing a technological understanding, the readers enter the inner, original landscape that precedes and underlies the 'mysteriously beautiful' scenario of the celestial landscape (1917: 48). This state between novelty and familiarity ensures the comforting and self-affirming combination of surprise and habit. For Yi-Fu Tuan, 'surprise' is elemental in 'the most intense aesthetic experiences of nature' because 'beauty is felt as the sudden contact with an aspect of reality that one has not known before; it is the antithesis of the acquired taste for certain landscapes or the warm feeling for places that one knows well' (Tuan, 1974: 94). The celebration of the consistently extraordinary intensity of industrial production, establishes this very 'surprise' as an 'acquired' taste indicative of the powerfully productive Luxembourgish economic and cultural spirit.

Seeing the present: monuments of the new

While these writers celebrated the lived technological moment as the temporary embodiment of true beauty, they also sought to give it a permanent shape through the very act of writing. The socialization of the modern gaze that they envisaged as necessary for nation-building depended on the 'powerful symbolic agency' provided by the 'inertness, opacity, permanence [and] grandeur' (Nelson and Olin, 2003: 3), as well as the immediacy and accessibility of traditional monuments. To establish the vitality expressed in industrial processes as an essential part of nationhood, writers referred to and cherished monuments that 'redirect[ed] cultural memory' (2003: 3) to the present.

Accordingly, Nicolas Ries and Robert Hausemer's opulently illustrated *Le Beau Pays de Luxembourg* of 1928 sets out to teach its 'dear reader-friend[s]' precisely this sophisticated appreciation of Luxembourg's present 'treasures of beauty' (Ries and Hausemer, 1928: 7). Their objective was less the transmission of historical knowledge, but rather the aesthetic instruction of the gaze, since, to them 'the territory only reveals its secret to those initiated to its mysteries' (1928: 9). The fact that the book unites the important sights in one space is instrumental in inspiring a sense both of belonging and of possession in the reader:

despite the smallness of the territory, which, for almost ten centuries has formed a state distinct from its powerful neighbours, we are proud to tell ourselves that all these natural beauties and all the richness of these villages are properly ours. (1928: 98)

The authors here institute the notion of 'foreign domination' largely accepted by Luxembourgish historiography until recently (Péporté et al., 2010: 43). Since, as Péporté et al. argue, before the 1850s Luxembourg did not exist as a nation, 'there were no Luxembourgers (in a "national" sense of the word)' and, consequently, 'there could also be no foreigners' (2010: 44). When Ries and Hausemer delight in the fact that Luxembourgers themselves can now assume the function of naming, mapping and thus

embodying the territory, they thus display an 'essentialist or perennialist conception of the nation ... based on the notion of the existence of some historic group identity of "Luxembourgers"' (1928: 43).

Despite their strong desire to establish Luxembourg as an entity that has existed for a thousand years, Ries and Hausemer's text is distinguished by a distinct interest in the present. Their philosophy as landscape-writers is best expressed in and by their piece on the 'land of the red soil'. While they proudly establish that the region, with its 47 blast furnaces, 'is among the richest in Europe', they prize its modernity over its economic merit: 'this beauty is neither retrospective nor romantic like that of the ruins and lost paradises; it is made of progress and trust in the future' (1928: 140). During its miraculous evolution from marshland to cosmopolitan city, Esch – the capital of ore – has created a variety of landscapes much more complex than those simply pleasing to the eye. Its 'Hoehl' quarter populated by Italian miners, the underground galleries fully illuminated by electricity, and the open-cast mining areas in which dynamite releases precious rocks, represent genuinely new human and physical landscapes. Significantly, the 'shaken mountains' that characterize Esch's visual aspect do not denote destruction but creation as they 'speak of the stubborn persistence of tireless and fruitful work' (1928: 152). The much-lauded nightly light spectacle equally represents the 'apotheosis of painful labour commenced in the darkness of the mountain and finished in the triumphantly gushing flow of molten ore' (1928: 155). The new landscape is not only reflected in the character of the inhabitants of the region, but, more importantly, the actions of the population have visibly altered the physical shape of the region. For the authors, the reorganized landscape is the embodiment of their concluding principle: 'every useful deed is bound to finish in beauty' (1928: 159). If beauty is valued as the highest national possession, and if industry is capable of producing beauty, then technology is established as a doubly useful demonstration of human inventiveness. This shift from a passive contemplative geographical determinism to an active reshaping of the natural environment is finally praised by a more worldly, durable monumentalization: the 'Palace' of the ARBED steel company, completed in 1922, is, according to the authors, 'a manifestation and symbol of power' (1928: 159). The fact that in their first chapter, entitled 'The capital of a country without history', the authors also list the building as one of the most noteworthy sights indicates that, for them, it establishes Luxembourg as a historical nation. This textual circularity suggests that, for Ries and Hausemer, the nation becomes embodied in its new industrial and architectural landscape, reflecting economic, political and cultural self-governance.

As is evident, Nicolas Ries assumed a major role in Luxembourg's national self-assertion. In 1923, he co-founded the journal *Les Cahiers luxembourgeois* and served as its editor until 1940. In its effort to shed light on diverse aspects of Luxembourgish culture, the publication viewed industry as an integral part of the national patrimony. As opposed to its contemporary, the conservative *Landwîol*, which sought to counteract the rural exodus by advertising the life of the farmer, *Les Cahiers luxembourgeois* manifested a very cosmopolitan agenda. While both publications rooted national identity in concrete reality, the latter embraced the industrial intervention into the soil as a productive and liberating evolution. In his introduction to the Jubilee edition of 1936, co-founder

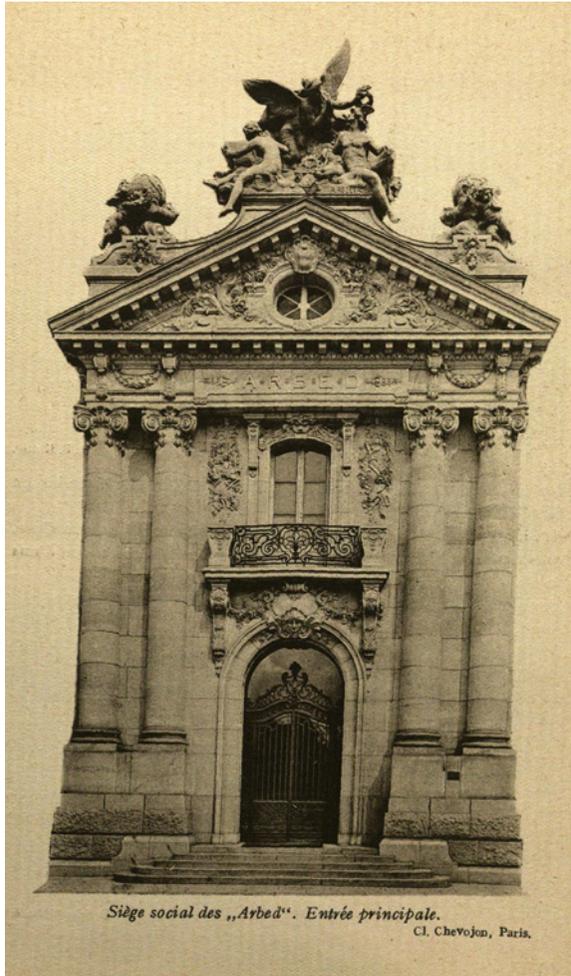


Figure 1. ARBED (Acîéries Réunies de Burbach-Eich-Dudelange) head office: main entrance. In Ries and Hausemer (1928: 13).

Nicolas Braunshausen related Luxembourgish writers' 'spiritual acrobatics' and their simultaneous interest in the 'perceptible world' to the feats of industry:

Is it not the same spirit that has guided our engineers and the directors of our great industry when they erected, foot by foot, prudently and patiently, but with magnificent intuition, the amazing building of our steel industry, which is one of the most beautiful jewels on the crown that our small country wears in the eyes of foreign countries. (Braunshausen, 1936: 382)

The neo-historicist ARBED (even though the 'B' stands for Burbach (Sarrelouis, Germany)) Palace has become a key symbol of cultural value in two ways: firstly, it is the product

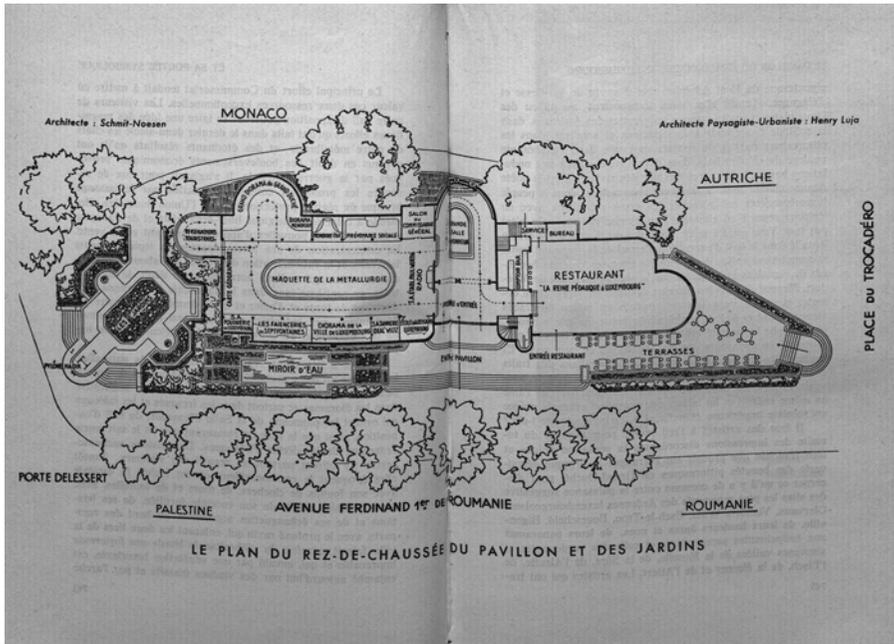


Figure 2. Plan of the ground floor of the pavilion and the gardens (1937). *Les Cahiers Luxembourgeois* 7: 728–9.

of, and evidence for, the creative exploitation of the soil that is seen as inherently Luxembourgish. Secondly, the building provides the assurance of being valued abroad. Ironically, the expansive industrial landscapes of the south came to be represented by this one, very presentable, symbolic building, which ignored the fires, soot and labour of the land of the red soil.

Although the sleek public face of the ARBED was a handy symbol for the nation's industrial prowess, the *Cahiers'* accounts of the 1937 Paris World Exhibition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life show a more holistic celebration of the reality of steel production – both on the part of the Luxembourgish organizing committee and the commentators. Luxembourg's pavilion, designed by architect N. Schmit-Noesen and landscape architect Henri Lujá, and decorated by such esteemed artists as the sculptors Auguste Trémont and Lucien Wercollier, the metal artist Michel Haagen, and the painters Joseph Kutter and Harry Rabinger, illustrates the harmonious coexistence of Luxembourg's two major industries: agriculture and the steel industry.³ While the artefacts, dioramas and stalls depict the country's major landscapes, such as the rocky north, the wine-making Moselle region and the spas of Mondorf-les-Bains, the impressive three-dimensional model of the southern steel territory is without doubt the most impressive testimony to Luxembourgish enterprise.

Eighteen metres long and 2.5 metres wide, the model figures as the centrepiece of the Great Exhibition Hall, representing the factories of the various steel-towns of the Minette



Figure 3. Interior of the Main Hall with the model of the heavy metallurgy (1937). *Les Cahiers Luxembourgeois* 7: 725.

region. Nicolas Ries, one of the commentators to report on Luxembourg's performance at the exhibition, deemed it desirable that the model should be conserved intact in the future museum which the city of Esch planned to set up in collaboration with the steel companies. While this museum never saw the light of day, the wish that this exhibition piece, a material act of self-presentation, should permanently turn industrial activity into cultural heritage indicates that Luxembourgish politicians, writers and artists wanted to assert their nation as an independent and powerful international player.

While international exhibitions are known to be important hubs of cultural exchange that allow their participants to make their mark in a wider context, Luxembourg's 1937 pavilion seems to have assumed a particularly important nation-building function. Nicolas Konert, in his 'Impressions et considérations', writes that the pavilion

contains a treasure that the people will always regard with pride and tenderness. It holds within it the fruit of our common labour. Long and innumerable efforts in all areas have been necessary to bring this fruit to the state of maturity in which we see it today. (1937: 758)

While, for Konert, labour is thus at the root of the nascent Luxembourgish national identity, the work ethic in question is devoid of a 'work for work's sake' mentality. Rather, it is proudly seen as the testimony of 'the very soul of our race, the particular genius that distinguishes us from all other peoples' (1937: 758). The presence of the model – the concrete artistic expression of the country's sublimated work ethic – allows the writer to present an alternative to the soil as an identity-forming instance. Backed up by national art, or the art of nationhood, Konert believes that the Luxembourgish work ethic that

inspired them functions as the ‘moral justification of our independence and political sovereignty’, showing that ‘a small state jealously defends: our right to life’ (1937: 758). While Luxembourg celebrated its nationhood as an achievement, Konert, at this moment of self-assertion, also admits the vulnerability of the small state. His mention of the ‘right to life’ implies the relief and the hope of being spared obliteration by more powerful states, particularly accentuated in confrontation with the colossal pavilions of the super-powers Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Through monumentalizing the present and paying tribute to agricultural and industrial production, Luxembourg sought to ground itself in and through its nascent national heritage. Joseph Hansen, in his contribution on the symbolic importance of the pavilion, notes that Luxembourg had set itself a ‘triple agenda: affirm its invincible faith in its destiny, acquit a debt of gratitude to France and provide decisive proof of its triumphant vitality’ (Hansen, 1937: 741). Destiny here has the quality of entelechy – Hansen’s description confidently justifies Luxembourg’s independence as the means through which it may maximize its potential. Nevertheless, he insists that Luxembourgish identity is influenced by French traditions. He then grounds the guarantee for national success in nature, which allows the country to ‘look good’ next to the ‘levers of economic production’, because of two ‘advantages’: the abundance of ore in the Minette and ‘the particular charm of the Luxembourgish landscape’ (1937: 742). While, according to Hansen, the ‘principal effort’ of the organizing commission was to present ‘these two exceptional resources’ (1937: 742) to visitors, his own agenda was to instil confidence in the native population that the territory they inhabited had indeed become a nation respected by others. Hansen’s article shows that the Exhibition allowed the Luxembourgish public to perceive itself from a distance: the territorial characteristics are rendered by artists and designers, exhibited in Paris, reported on by writers and journalists and read by a varied public.

The contribution of Joseph-Émile [Müller] (1911–99) establishes this self-objectification on foreign, temporarily international, territory as the precondition of appropriate self-recognition through art. Describing two paintings by the expressionist Joseph Kutter (1894–1941), which figured at the Exhibition and which portray the cityscapes of Luxembourg and the northern Clerf, the author transfers the experience of the visitor in Paris to the reader in Luxembourg. For Joseph-Émile, as for Hansen and Ries, the perception of the self through the eyes of the artist is at the basis of self-recognition. He views the distortion inherent in artistic representation as superior to the mimetic accuracy of a more objective photograph because it gives access to the real nature of the depicted object or scene:

We stand before a landscape that we know and we stand before it as if we were just discovering it. We see it in a completely new light, with unusual clarity. All things are more impressive, more relevant, we might say – more right. (Joseph-Émile, 1937: 761)

In Joseph-Émile’s theory, the artistic rendition of the known strips it of the details of the mechanically familiar, liberating its intensified essence and facilitating the emotional connection of the viewer. The artist’s endeavour epitomizes the schooling of the gaze: the eye that meets the painting confronts an image identical to the perception of the

already schooled gaze.⁴ Even though the works that Joseph-Émile considers do not represent industrial subjects, his review is nevertheless highly relevant because it posits that the industrial process can be seen as a metaphor for artistic creation (see Shklovsky, 1966 [1917]: 762):

The path from nature to art is the path from one order to another, the path from iron ore to iron, the path that leads through a blast furnace. Yes, the true artist has always been a blast furnace that processes and moulds. The true artist has only ever made use of nature and never subjected himself to it.

In the author's equation, iron ore (the raw material) relates to the known, iron represents art, and the blast furnace, making this process of productive refinement possible, stands for the artist. The latter's uniquely new vision of a given territory invents it as a landscape whose cultural value surpasses its everyday relevance. Joseph-Émile turns the known into art based on the assumption that technology supersedes authenticity, that artificiality rises above mimesis and that the industrial process creates something new that is more valuable than elemental nature.

Conclusion

This article has shown the ways in which an organic link between a people and its landscape has been employed to establish Luxembourg not only as a politically accepted nation, but also as a producer of culture. The writers under examination responded to a prevalent need for the visualization of this link in and through art. Through schooling the public gaze in the appreciation of industry as an aesthetic phenomenon, they did not aim to disseminate the knowledge of what constitutes beauty, but rather to teach their audience to understand the collective symbols that they based on that beauty.

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Notes

1. See G Hausemer (2008) *About... Literature in Luxembourg*. Luxembourg: Information and Press Service, 2. Early literature was in the vernacular – *Lëtzebuergesch* (Luxembourgish) which originates from Moselle-Franconian – pioneered by Antoine Meyer's (1801–57) 'E' Schrek op de' Lezeburger Parnassus' (1829) and developed into a rich tradition of 'homeland' literature by Michel Lentz (1820–93), Edmond de la Fontaine (1823–91) and Michel Rodange (1827–76). Literature in French and German burgeoned at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the francophone writers Marcel Noppeney (1877–1966), Paul Palgen (1883–1966) and Nicolas Ries and the germanophone writers Nikolaus Welter (1871–1951), Batty Weber (1860–1940) and Albert Hoefler (1899–1950).
2. According to Stefanie van de Kerkhof, the Minette region in the south of Luxembourg represents 'the most significant ore-based region of the European process of industrialisation' (Kerkhof, 2002: 225). In 1838, Luxembourg's substantial iron ore deposits were rediscovered, but these resources could only be fully exploited with the invention of the Thomas–Gilchrist process, for which the Luxembourgish Metz brothers were the first to acquire an operating

- licence. In 1850, the Metz's started buying cheap land to house iron foundries. The industry expanded quickly from nine foundries in 1854 to 17 in 1869 and from seven blast furnaces in 1850 to 14 in 1869. While Luxembourg produced 8000 tons of pig iron in 1850, it generated 93,408 tons in 1868. The Thomas–Gilchrist refinement of the basic Bessemer steel-making process allowed Luxembourg to turn out more than 500,000 tons of steel in 1895.
3. According to Catherine Lorent (2011: 316), notwithstanding its small national territory, Luxembourg was allocated a generous thousand square metres of exhibition space in Paris.
 4. The editorial committee, deploring the fact that the famous large-scale composition by Harry Rabinger entitled 'Red Soil' did not figure in Joseph-Émile's review, was eager to integrate industry into the report of the artwork presented at the Exhibition and promised its readers a complementary discussion of it in the next edition.

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