German Life and Letters 77:2 April 2024
0016-8777 (print); 1468–0483 (online)

'KULTURKRIEG' BEHIND BARBED WIRE: GERMAN THEATRE IN AN AUSTRALIAN FIRST-WORLD-WAR INTERNMENT CAMP

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ABSTRACT

This article is the first in-depth study of the 'Deutsches Theater Liverpool', probably the most successful non-English theatre ever on Australian soil, selling out daily performances and mounting a new production each week. The theatre's success was due in large part to its location inside the 'German Concentration Camp', the largest First World War (WWI) internment camp in Australia. In contrast to most WWI internment camps around the world, its almost six thousand 'enemy alien' internees were a mixture of civilians – most of whom called Australia home before the war – merchant sailors and naval personnel. For this diverse group of men, the theatre was more than entertainment; it was an important way to spend their time meaningfully. We argue that this meaning was strongly connected to the (re)negotiation of identity through theatre, allowing the internees to contribute to the war effort understood at the time in German public discourse as a 'Kulturkrieg', a battle for the survival of German culture. Theatre-makers and audiences (re)engaged with their Germanness through ideas of 'Kameradschaft', German diligence and the joint duty of 'durchhalten' – 'making do'. The critical importance of female impersonation in the achievement of the theatre's cultural aims rounds out our analysis of the D.T.L.

Dieser Artikel ist die erste detaillierte Arbeit über das 'Deutsche Theater Liverpool'. Mit täglichen, ausverkauften Vorstellungen und einem sich wöchentlich ändernden Spielplan war das D.T.L. wahrscheinlich das erfolgreichste nicht-englischsprachige Theater, das je auf australischem Boden existierte. Der Erfolg des Theaters ist zum großen Teil auf seine Lage im 'German Concentration Camp' zurückzuführen, dem größten Internierungslager Australiens während des Ersten Weltkriegs. Im Gegensatz zu den meisten anderen Internierungslagern befanden sich unter den fast sechstausend dort Internierten 'enemy aliens' Zivilisten – von denen die meisten bereits vor dem Krieg in Australien lebten –, sowie Seeleute der Handels- und Kriegsmarine. Für diese heterogene Gruppe von Männern war das Theater mehr als bloße Unterhaltung, es war eine Gelegenheit dem eintönigen Alltag Sinn zu verleihen. Wir werden zeigen, dass diese Sinnstiftung eng an die (Wieder-)Beschäftigung mit der eigenen (deutschen) Identität geknüpft war. Durch das Medium Theater wurden Eigenschaften wie 'Kameradschaft', Fleiß und die Pflicht des 'Durchhaltens' gemeinsam rezipiert und verhandelt. Für die Internierten eröffnete die Produktion und der Konsum deutscher Kulturgüter in Gefangenschaft zudem die Möglichkeit einen Beitrag zu dem als Kampf um das Überleben der deutschen Kultur verstandenen Kriegsanstrengungen des fernen Vaterlandes zu leisten. Abgerundet wird die Analyse des D.T.L. durch die Untersuchung der Bedeutung von männlichen Frauendarstellern für die Verwirklichung der kulturellen Ziele des D.T.L.

INTRODUCTION

When the First World War (WWI) broke out, Australia was a newly federated Commonwealth nation. First Nations cultures had thrived and developed on the continent for at least sixty thousand years, yet Australia at the time considered itself a 'young nation' with something to prove on the world stage. Much later in the twentieth century, the battlefields of WWI – especially in the Dardanelles and on the Western Front – would come to be regarded as a proving ground for a militaristic, masculine Australian identity. The rejection of WWI conscription by the population notwithstanding, the figure of the Australian 'digger' would become a well-worn trope of Australian nationhood. On the home front, Australian identity was being shaped – and sharpened – in interesting ways. In Australia at the turn of the twentieth century, Germans were the largest non-British group in the settler population. German Australians contributed in many ways to the culture, economy and society of European Australia. German missionaries and scientists had been at the forefront of encounters with First Nations people and their lands. In the newly federated nation, they were to be found in key roles in government, business, academia and the arts. German schools, churches and newspapers formed a part of the multicultural make-up of the settler population.

With the advent of war, Australia's resident Germans went from being productive members of the nation to suspected 'enemy aliens'. German Australians were subjected to searches without warrant, surveillance, limitations on the ownership of communications equipment and firearms, disenfranchisement, dismissal from employment, and internment, regardless of their place of birth. Under the powers of the War Precautions Act (1914), 6,890 German and Austrian 'enemy aliens' were interned. The majority of these had been resident in Australia prior to the outbreak of the war. To their numbers were added merchant sailors from German ships in Australian ports, transferees from other parts of the British Empire, such as the nearby German colonies in New Guinea and the Pacific, and some captured naval sailors, such as the crew of the *Emden*. Outside the barbed wire, Australia was becoming more determinedly British. There was an 'intense ethnic loyalty […] and deference towards Britain' and a rampant hatred of all things German.[1] The treatment of the Australian German population has even been described as 'ethnic cleansing', a global turning-point in the treatment of ethnic minorities that would set the stage for later twentieth-century genocides.[2] But inside the

[1] K. Saunders, 'Stranger in our Gates: Internment policies in the United Kingdom and Australia during the two world wars, 1914–39', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 22 (2003), 22–43 (24).

[2] Panikos Panayi, 'Germans as minorities during the First World War: global comparative perspectives', in *Germans as minorities during the First World War: A Global Comparative Perspective*, ed. Panikos Panayi, London and New York 2014, pp. 1–22 (pp. 3–4).

barbed wire, especially in the so-called 'German Concentration Camp' in Liverpool, west of Sydney, German culture began to thrive on Australian soil in an unexpected and – certainly from the official side – unintended way. As internees sought to pass the time and maintain a sense of purpose, many reached for cultural activities as a meaningful pursuit. And in the crucible of a war framed in Germany as a battle in defence of its unique culture, those activities became suffused with nationalistic and military meanings. The theatre, as the dominant and most accessible cultural form, was an opportunity to stage Germanness and rehabilitate German masculinity on Australian soil.

INTERNING 'ENEMY ALIENS' IN WWI AUSTRALIA

Ernest Scott's volume in the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918* describes a German-Australian community who are imagined as culturally accomplished, but who are regarded with suspicion lest they deploy their considerable cultural capital to undermine the British war effort. Ernest Scott writes light-heartedly about the demise of the Melbourne German Club:

> After the German Club in Alfred Place, Collins-street [*sic*], was closed, some of its former members who had been in the habit of meeting there nightly to gossip over beer and tobacco continued their convivial fraternising at a café kept by one of their compatriots. They were to be seen emerging therefrom in the early hours of the morning. Perhaps they had not been plotting treason, or even discussing politics; they were capable of wrangling about the categorical imperative of Kant, or the construction of a Beethoven symphony. Some of them were well known to the Melbourne public; one was a musician of some distinction […]. The police became suspicious about this knot of enemy subjects who were to be seen emerging by a side door on dark nights. The result was that the entire group was suddenly consigned to a concentration camp to meditate upon its folly.[3]

During WWI a 'wave of anti-German rage' gripped the Australian nation.[4] Mahon Murphy describes the 'role reversal' experienced by German settlers who were no longer cultured fellow Europeans, but an othered enemy – the 'Hun' – who no longer enjoyed 'the rights and freedoms that gave European whites a superior social status'.[5] Gerhard Fischer argues that the Australian government's campaign against German 'enemy aliens' during WWI resulted in the 'destruction of the once powerful and

[3] Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, ed. Charles E. W. Bean, 12 vols, Canberra 1941–2, XI/4, pp. 108–9.
[4] *Ibid.*, XI/4, p. 112.
[5] Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914–1919*, Cambridge 2017, p. 7.

highly visible German Australian community', arguing that it used the War Precautions Act to strategically break up established local communities by selectively interning those who were identified as their leaders.[6] The closure of German-language newspapers, schools and other community organisations and the suspicion towards speakers of German brought about an enduring change to Australia's cultural make-up in the first half of the twentieth century. An interesting cultural by-product of the persecution of Germans in WWI Australia is the way that internment itself enabled and nurtured an unprecedented flowering of German culture on Australian soil, as well as expressions of Germanness that were oriented towards the 'Vaterland' more intensely than before. Through the process of internment, Australian-born and German-born men alike were integrated into a cultural project of Germanness on a scale not previously seen in Australia.

The largest of the Australian internment camps, Holdsworthy, known as the 'German Concentration Camp', held almost six thousand internees by the end of the war. From 1915, most of the smaller camps around the country were closed and their internees decanted to Holdsworthy. There was a policy of self-management at Holdsworthy, enabling a 'colourful, vibrant and richly diverse cultural and social life behind the camp's barbed wire fences'.[7] In this, Holdsworthy was not unusual, as cultural, sporting and social activities were practised in internment camps throughout the world.[8] John D. Ketchum has described this as a 'camp society'.[9] What makes Holdsworthy interesting is the make-up of the camp population. Unlike most WWI internment camps, it contained both civilian internees *and* military prisoners, German-born *and* locally born 'enemy aliens'. The cultural life of the camp began to develop as a kind of 'Germanising' project that co-opted civilians into military discourses and Australian-born Germans into a stronger sense of German identity. Much of the camp's cultural activity strove to create a microcosm of the 'Kulturnation', a notion that at the time was being mobilised to legitimise the German war effort.[10] Rivalled perhaps only by the long-running camp newspaper, the main theatre, known as the 'Deutsches Theater Liverpool' (D.T.L.), was the most influential and successful locus of cultural life in Holdsworthy camp and the most significant foreign-language stage in Australia, employing

[6] Gerhard Fischer, *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia 1914–1920*, Brisbane 1989, p. 7.

[7] Nadine Helmi and Gerhard Fischer, *The Enemy at Home: German Internees in World War I Australia*, Sydney 2011, p. 33.

[8] Harold Mytum and Gilly Carr, 'Prisoner of War Archaeology', in *Prisoners of War: Archaeology, Memory, and Heritage of 19th- and 20th-Century Mass Internment*, ed. Harold Mytum and Gilly Carr, New York 2014, pp. 3–19 (pp. 3–4).

[9] John D. Ketchum, *Ruhleben, a prison camp society*, Toronto 1965, xv.

[10] Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, Paderborn 2014, p. 633; Werber Niels, Stefan Kaufmann and Lars Koch, *Erster Weltkrieg: Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2014, pp. 290–1.

fifty people in well-paid roles, performing – at its peak – seven nights a week with a new programme every week.[11] It speaks for the theatre's reputation that in 1934 Wolfgang Pönsgen mentioned the D.T.L. as one of the most successful internment-camp stages of the war when publishing his dissertation on theatre repertoires during WWI.[12] In just over four years, 152 plays premiered on the stage of the D.T.L., including seven original operettas written by internees Ludwig Schröder, Hans Baum and Hans Hermann Grimme, which alone led to 180 sold-out performances (*DTL*, p. 14). Additionally, the members of the D.T.L. performed around seventy evenings of cabaret, predominantly written by the members of the theatre group, each concluding with a one-act play (*UTK*, p. 59).[13] As this impressive output and high attendance shows, while Australia's internment and the subsequent deportation practices struck a devastating blow to the culture of the German diaspora, the internment interlude represented a years-long blossoming of a very particular kind of German culture on Australian soil.

GERMAN PROVINCIAL THEATRE BEHIND BARBED WIRE

The development of the D.T.L. is closely linked to one man in particular: Ludwig Schröder. He was one of the internees who founded the 'Theatergesellschaft' and became its first – and only – director when it was established on 17 November 1914.[14] Schröder, a journalist by trade, had come to Australia to research a travel book when he was interned and brought to Holdsworthy at the beginning of the war.[15] He was a driving force behind the establishment and success of the theatre and is also an important source of information about the D.T.L. He wrote articles about the theatre's development and reviewed performances for the *Kamp-Spiegel* (which he also founded). In 1919, soon after his release from Holdsworthy and his return to Germany, he published a book titled *Unser Theater in der Kriegsgefangenschaft* which is a comprehensive history of the theatre.[16]

[11] See Hans Grimme, *D.T.L. Deutsches Theater Liverpool: Erinnerungen an meine Gefangenschaft 1914–1919 im German Concentration Camp Liverpool near Sydney (Australien)*, Korntal 1970, p. 14. Further references appear in the text as *DTL*; Ludwig Schröder, *Unser Theater in der Kriegsgefangenschaft*, Hannover 1919, p. 33. Further references appear in the text as *UTK*.

[12] See Wolfgang Pönsgen, *Der deutsche Bühnenspielplan im Weltkriege*, Berlin 1934, p. 101.

[13] Particularly W. Diederichs, called Didi, seems to have been productive in writing new lyrics to well-known melodies. Some of his works are collected in *Didi's couplets in G. C. C.*, ed. E. Heynemann, Liverpool N. S. W. 1916: https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-547568990 (accessed 23 August 2023).

[14] Ludwig Schröder, 'Die Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters in Liverpool', *Kamp-Spiegel*, I/1 (1916), 4–6 (4).

[15] See Helmi and Fischer, *The Enemy at Home* (note 7), p. 33.

[16] Although Schröder's accounts are not free from self-praise and certainly not free from ideological influences, the development of the D.T.L. that he describes in them is confirmed by Grimme (*DTL*),

Schröder was one of the eight founding members of the D.T.L., which was first set up in a twelve-by-five-metre tent equipped with a piano. Six men, among them Schröder, were initially chosen by the camp command, who provided the tent and piano, to coordinate the events. Initially intended to offer the internees a communal space in which they could entertain themselves with 'Lesen oder Gesellschaftsspielen',[17] the men began to hold open-stage nights, playing German music, singing German songs and telling their favourite jokes. The popularity of these evenings soon prompted Schröder to take on a more ambitious approach to the performances to avoid stagnation ('wenn wir nicht versumpfen wollen', *DTL*, p. 10).

The men built a small podium for the performers and benches and tables for the audience. A collection in the camp provided them with the sum of 18 shillings, from which they acquired 'Schminke, künstliche Haare und andere Kleinigkeiten'.[18] A curtain made from old sacks created a makeshift stage which allowed them to perform 'Couplets, Rezitationen, Gesaenge und Musikvortraege […]' and made them wonder 'was wohl aus dieser kleinen Stätte alles zu machen sei' (*UTK*, p. 7). An important milestone was the first appearance of Hans Broich dressed as a woman, singing the female part of the duet *Die musikalische Ehe* with Schröder. The positive reaction of the audience encouraged the D.T.L. to include more plays in their repertoire that required female roles, which expanded their possibilities significantly and led to the emergence of actors who specialised in female roles, a key development that we will discuss in more detail below.

From January 1915, only two months after the theatre society's establishment, the internees volunteered to pay entry fees for the hitherto free shows, providing the D.T.L. with a regular income which was used to acquire the material needed to satisfy growing audience expectations.[19] Soon after, the society began to write their own operettas with librettos by Schröder and music by Baum and Grimme.[20] The ever-growing audience put a strain on the provisional theatre, which was regularly cramped with up to one hundred patrons, and the theatre company requested permission to build a more permanent structure to house its growing project. Once

who recollects his own time as a member of the D.T.L., as well as in a retrospective by an unknown author published in the *Kamp-Spiegel* in November 1918.

[17] Schröder, 'Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters' (note 14), p. 5.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[19] This timeline is somewhat imprecise because the *Kamp-Spiegel*, which constitutes the main source of information about the D.T.L., was not established until 1916. While Schröder's article refers to performances by title, theatre bills and performance reviews that would provide an exact date for when the performances were staged are only available from April 1916 onwards. However, the development outlined above predates the celebration of the *Kaisergeburtstag*, held on 26 January 1916. See Schröder, 'Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters' (note 14), p. 5.

[20] Over the course of the existence of the D.T.L., the internees wrote seven operettas, which saw 180 sold-out performances, and two farces. See *DTL*, p. 13.

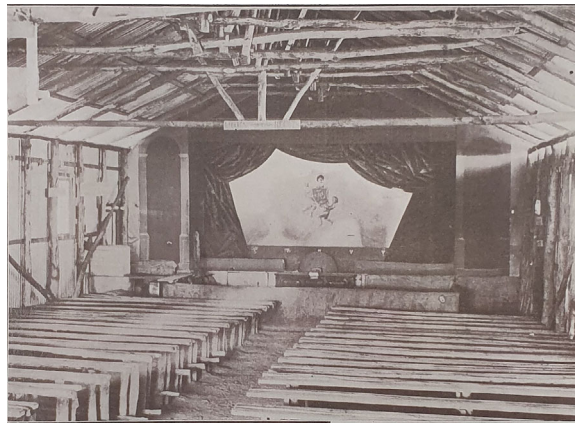

Figure 1. Interior of the D.T.L. with rows of seating, orchestra pit and stage, *ca.* 1917.
Source: 'Interior of the German Theatre Society of Liverpool theatre, Liverpool internment camp, New South Wales, ca. 1917', 1, National Library of Australia, http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-152014025 (accessed 31 January 2024). Image: Out of Copyright.

granted permission, the internees gathered timber from the bush around the camp and built a theatre of thirty metres length and eight metres width (see Figure 1), which provided space for 372 patrons (322 seated/50 standing) and was officially opened on 17 June 1915 (*UTK*, pp. 23–4). Despite the extension, one year after the theatre was built, on 10 October 1916, the theatre management was forced to announce in the *Kamp-Spiegel* that the number of tickets sold to each internee would have to be limited to two, after having received multiple complaints from people who missed out on tickets because they worked during the day and had no chance to buy tickets before they sold out.

The D.T.L. remained popular over the following years, and the theatre building was modernised and extended a further four times. It eventually provided space for four-hundred seated and two-hundred standing guests (*DTL*, p. 13). The extensions included an orchestra pit, dressing rooms, a wardrobe and a casino which was for the exclusive use of the members of the D.T.L. The casino became an increasingly popular social club for the members of the theatre, not unlike the German clubs that used to exist across Australia. It provided cheap meals and drinks, newspapers and journals, generating a revenue of £25 per week (*UTK*, p. 54). After its last extension in 1918, the stage was fifteen metres wide and nine metres deep, with a proscenium providing an eight-by-five-metre window onto the stage (*UTK*, p. 49). What began with a few chairs as props and a curtain made of

sack-cloth became a stage with sophisticated technical equipment crafted by internees using material available in the camp. The first real lighting system, for example, used carbide to produce acetylene gas, sent through a complicated piping system to wherever it was needed, providing all areas with individually controllable lighting (*UTK*, p. 26). Even after the stage was equipped with electric light, an internee named Leiser – the inventor of the gas-lighting system – created what was an early version of a light-dimmer. Submerging one of the electric poles in acidified water, he created a resistor that made it possible to dim the lights across the theatre by controlling the depth (*DTL*, p. 18).

With the help of the many versatile internees who created props, costumes, stage designs and stage technology, the D.T.L. 'brauchte[…] den Vergleich mit der Ausstattung einer kleineren Provinzialbühne in Deutschland nicht zu scheuen',[21] according to Schröder. What began as favours by other internees turned into a thriving business in early 1918, with fifty employees working exclusively for the theatre and receiving a salary paid from the earnings of the D.T.L. which exceeded the salary of the paid camp labour. Besides full-time actors, the staff included costume and stage designers, carpenters and painters as well as stage technicians, including 'Fachleute von grossen australischen Theatern […], wie Schneider, Friseure mit Schmink-Kenntnissen' (*DTL*, p. 16). With professional staff and a growing network of contacts and sponsors in Sydney, the D.T.L. was able to acquire a large wardrobe. While the first actor in a female role wore a wig made from 'gezupftem Teertau', a 'kunstvoll verschlungenes weisses Tuch' for a blouse and a dark 'Schlafdecke'[22] for a skirt, the D.T.L. later possessed twenty 'erstklassige Perücken aus echtem Haar, weitere etwa 20 historische[] Perücken […] sowie viele weitere "Durchscnitts-Perücken [*sic*]"' (*DTL*, p. 21), as well as 'etwa 40 Herren-Anzüge, 50 Damenkleider, 20 Uniformen und 60 historische Kostüme' (*DTL*, p. 21), which were kept in specially built dust-proof storage. Furthermore, the D.T.L. managed to establish a 'kleine Bibliothek' (*UTK*, p. 27) of plays to choose from, which came from dissolved German Clubs across Sydney as well as from the growing number of newly arriving internees. These developments led to an impressive level of professionalism, not only in regard to the performances but also to the stage designs, equipment and quality of costumes. And so the D.T.L. grew over the course of the camp's existence to become a financially successful and prolific theatre that would indeed have rivalled regional theatres in Germany in terms of both audience numbers and output.

[21] Ludwig Schröder, 'Die Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters in Liverpool. 2. Fortsetzung', *Kamp-Spiegel*, I/3 (1916), 4–6 (6).
[22] Ludwig Schröder, 'Die Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters in Liverpool. 1. Fortsetzung', *Kamp-Spiegel*, I/2 (1916), 4–6 (4).

Figure 2. Stage design of a train carriage from an unknown play, *ca.* 1917. *Source*: Paul Dubotsky, 'Railway carriage scene from a play by the German Theatre Society of Liverpool, ca. 1916–18', National Library of Australia, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-152001626 (accessed 23 August 2023). Image: Out of Copyright.

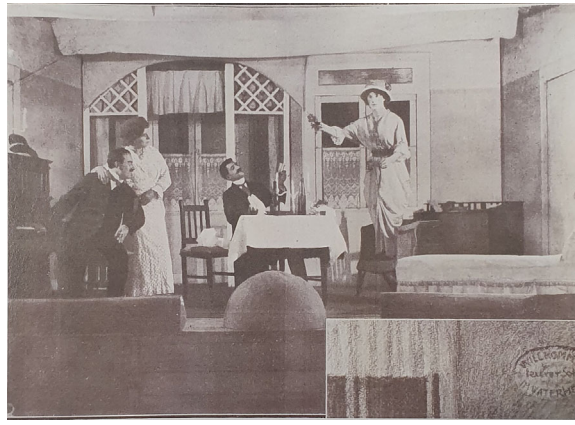

Figure 3. Scene from Arthur Schnitzler's *Liebelei* (1894), *ca.* 1917. *Source*: Anonymous, 'Scene from Flirtation by the German Theatre Society of Liverpool, ca. 1916–18', National Library of Australia, https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-152019472 (accessed 23 August 2023). Image: Out of Copyright.

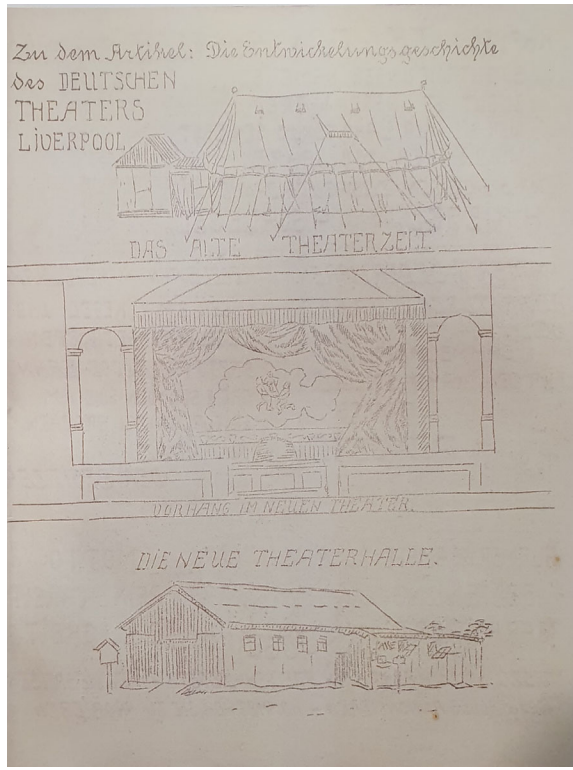

Figure 4. Drawing of the theatre's development: original theatre tent (top), the stage in the new theatre building (middle) and an outside view of the new theatre building (bottom).
Source: Ludwig Schröder, *Der Kamp-Spiegel*, 1916, National Library of Australia, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-19138370 (accessed 23 August 2023). Image: Out of Copyright.

GERMAN CULTURE AND THE LINK TO THE 'VATERLAND'

This brief outline indicates the commitment of D.T.L. members and the theatre's popularity among internees. Schröder understood the theatre's role in the camp society as 'ein allerwertvollstes Anregungsmittel und ein schwer zu missendes geistiges Band mit der Außenwelt, Vergangenehit und Heimat' (*UTK*, p. 3) while being interned 'in einem fernen, fremden Erdteil' (*UTK*, p. 42). In a study of German merchant sailors prior to the outbreak of WWI, David Brandon Dennis discusses the importance of the concept of culture as a 'bridge' to the homeland: 'As overseas expansion,

whether imperial or informal, accelerated in the late nineteenth century, Germans attempted to adapt the Heimat idea to global settings, tying together home, nation, empire and diaspora.'[23] Young merchant sailors (who played an important role in the D.T.L. both on stage and in the audience) are in Dennis's analysis an 'exemplary transnational group' and – as young, working-class men not subject to military discipline – 'in constant danger of being seduced away from [the] fatherland'.[24] The bourgeois civilian Schröder seems to share this image of the sailor as a naïve and vulnerable youth in need of both cultural and moral guidance. The theatre was to Schröder the ideal setting in which to reassert bonds to the homeland and to safeguard impressionable young men of lower status. Its duty, as he saw it, was to provide the 'vielseitige[n] Anregungen, die dem heutigen Kulturmenschen Bedürfnis geworden sind'.[25]

The concept of the 'Kulturmensch' has a long history in Germany. It refers to the dichotomy between German culture, said to be a deep, almost spiritual, property of the German soul in the tradition of great poets and thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the superficial and therefore inferior minds created in other western civilisations, only engaging in matters of pecuniary and other endeavours. In the framing of WWI as a defensive war, which defines the official German position on the event, German culture plays an important, multifaceted role: its superiority served as a general acquittal of guilt – since a nation as cultured as Germany would never start such a war – and simultaneously as the alleged motivation for the enemy's aggression.[26] More importantly, however, its culture was one of the values that Germany was defending. This perspective was famously communicated at the beginning of the war by ninety-three prominent artists, scientists and intellectuals in the manifesto *An die Kulturwelt!* In this declaration, the signatories – among them prominent figures like Gerhart Hauptmann and a D.T.L. favourite, the playwright Hermann Sudermann – describe international characterisations of Germany's aggression as lies. Germany has brought forth giants of literary, musical and intellectual culture, they write, and they will fight this battle 'als ein Kulturvolk, dem das Vermächtnis eines Goethe, eines Beethoven, eines Kant ebenso heilig ist wie sein Herd und seine Scholle'.[27] The sentiment of the German 'Kulturmensch' – and the war as a 'Kulturkrieg' – is prominent in Schröder's thinking. He speaks for

[23] D. B. Dennis, 'Seduction on the Waterfront: German Merchant Sailors, Masculinity and the "*Brücke zu Heimat*" in New York and Buenos Aires, 1884–1914', *German History*, 29/2 (2011), 175–201 (175).

[24] *Ibid.*, 175–6.

[25] Schröder, 'Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters' (note 14), p. 4.

[26] See Andreas Dorrer, *Neider überall zwingen uns zu gerechter Verteidigung: Legitimisation and De-Legitimisation of World War I in German Dramatic Literature*, Berlin 2021, particularly pp. 34–44.

[27] Der Aufruf der 93 'An die Kulturwelt!' (1914), *Themen portal Europäische Geschichte*, published online 2006: https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-28308 (accessed 23 August 2023).

example of the German 'Gemüt', for which Germany's 'Widersacher' have 'nicht einmal eine treffende Übersetzung des Wortes' (*UTK*, pp. 43–4). His emphasis on 'die alte deutsche Liebe zur Musik' (*UTK*, p. 7), understood in the tradition of Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*, can also be regarded as expressing the idea of German culture being deeply embedded in the nation's soul. From this point of view, the internment of prominent figures from the German-Australian community throughout the country must have seemed a confirmation for those who, like Schröder, saw German culture at large as threatened.

For Schröder, the theatre served 'für unser Deutschland eine wichtige Aufgabe' (*UTK*, p. 30) in more than just one way. Being one of the most popular cultural institutions in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century and building on a long tradition within German culture, the theatre built bridges to the fatherland. The performative and immersive experience it provided for both audience and cast, together with the collective nature of its perception, made it the perfect medium for a 'Kulturkrieg' in an internment situation. Schröder thereby pre-empted the end of the war and the task that awaited the internees after their captivity. As such, the theatre had to have an 'anregend[en] and erzieherisch[en]' effect and the 'Pflicht, uns den Körper und den Geist frisch zu erhalten für die große Aufgabe, die unserer harrt, wenn wir in die Heimat zurückkehren'.[28] For internees, maintaining their health was a way to defy the enemy who kept them captive, but also to ensure they were available to serve the fatherland 'after the war', as Brian Feltman observes of German POWs in WWI Britain: 'Prisoners saw camp organizations as a means of ensuring that they would return home mentally and physically sound, confident that they had represented themselves, and their country, well on enemy soil.'[29]

Furthermore, the theatre was also a means of active 'Kampf' that was, unlike the field of battle, within their reach, as Feltman states:

> [f]ollowing the outbreak of the Great War, the British attempted to sever the cultural ties that bound them to their most threatening enemy and denounced German culture as barbaric. […] By expressing and celebrating their Germanness, prisoners challenged the hegemonic culture of their captors and reaffirmed their commitment to a nation at war.[30]

[28] Schröder, 'Entwicklung des Deutschen Theaters' (note 14), p. 5.
[29] Brian K. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender*, Chapel Hill, NC 2015, p. 134.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Iris Rachamimov observes a similar phenomenon among officer POWs in Eastern Europe, who 'flexed their cultural muscle vis-à-vis their Russian captors' with their own ambitious theatre productions.[31]

The theatre certainly did challenge the hegemonic culture of the captors, not least by deconstructing the surrounding Australian landscape to build what would house an expression of German culture. The repertoire of the D.T.L., despite including some international plays by Henrik Ibsen, Nicolai Gogol and George Bernard Shaw, further demonstrates that it was not only established to make theatre as an art form but to showcase 'Leistungen in kultureller Beziehung' (*DTL*, p. 23). Alongside famous playwrights such as Arthur Schnitzler, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Henrik Ibsen, Nicolai Gogol, George Bernard Shaw and Heinrich von Kleist, Sudermann spearheaded the theatre's repertoire. While Schröder speaks of a 'Sehnsucht […] auch klassische Werke bei uns aufzuführen' (*UTK*, p. 49), it is notable that the repertoire demonstrates a knowledge of the German theatre landscape at the beginning of the twentieth century that goes far beyond classics by the playwrights listed above.[32]

Schröder took great pride in 'die Hochachtung und Bewunderung selbst unserer bittertsten Feinde' (*UTK*, p. 4), which he took as a kind of cultural victory over his captors, who were trying to suppress the culture and identity of the internees. One event noted in Schröder's memoir was the visit of Sergeant Major Walker, an Australian censor who had asked for a ticket to see one of the D.T.L.'s performances. A letter Walker wrote to Schröder after the show in November 1915, in which he congratulated the D.T.L. for 'a most pleasant evening' (*UTK*, p. 29), prompted Schröder to emphasise that the D.T.L. would perform an important task 'für unser deutsches Vaterland' when representing German culture for its 'Gegner' (*UTK*, p. 29). The Australian enemy's admiration for the cultural achievements of the D.T.L. demonstrates, according to Schröder, an 'Eigenschaft unseres Volkes, der es sich noch gar nicht im vollen Umfang bewußt geworden ist, von jener herrlichen Eigenschaft, die es befähigt, gerade unter erschwerten Bedingungen Großes und Schönes zu schaffen' (*UTK*, p. 4).

'DEUTSCHE KUNST, DEUTSCHER FLEISS'

We have described how the D.T.L. curated for internees – whether they were theatre workers or audience members – a sense of cultural identity and purpose as a 'Kulturmensch' and a connection to the distant homeland. The theatre, like other cultural activity in the camp, was

[31] Iris Rachamimov, 'The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)Gender Performances among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914–1920', *The American Historical Review*, 111/2 (2006), 362–82 (381). Further references appear in the text.

[32] Max Halbe, Ludwig Thoma, Hermann Bahr, Karl Schönherr and Ludwig Fulda or Otto Ernst are just some of them. See *UTK*, pp. 55–9.

therefore much more than just a means of passing the time, even though it was important for the theatre simply to foster the wellbeing of internees. Rachamimov writes of the German and Austrian officer POW camps in Russia, where theatre was a prevalent cultural activity, that the theatre was 'perhaps the most important medium for exploring and expressing the pressures of captivity'.[33] We would add that it was also the most important forum for an exploration of identity under those pressures. The emasculating process of capture and internment created for all men – not just for soldiers – a crisis of identity. The activity in the camp was therefore a necessary measure for addressing the loss of purpose experienced by men unable to perform in their roles as sons, husbands and fathers, or as patriots of a country at war. Internees, according to Feltman, 'sought to redeem themselves by framing their activities in the larger context of national service'.[34] In Holdsworthy, not withstanding that a minority of internees were servicemen, the majority being civilians, camp cultural activity was frequently represented in terms of military and martial tropes. Similar to the way in which Australian-born and Australian-raised interned Germans were invited to reorient themselves towards the German fatherland, civilians in the camp were enlisted into the discipline of cultural activity understood to be a part of the war effort. As Feltman writes, camp cultural activity was a redemptive project for men who had experienced the loss of purpose and identity through internment: 'working for the future through organized camp activities was the only chance for salvation'.[35] Schröder expresses this idea quite directly when describing the impact on the internees of the arrival of the captured crew of the *Emden* in Holdsworthy. The sight of wounded sailors – 'Opfer des Weltkrieges, der in sagenhafter Ferne von uns tobte' (*UTK*, p. 31) – arouses pity but also envy in the internees for these men who would be able to return home with pride in their hearts, 'während wir kamen mit leeren Händen!' (*UTK*, p. 31). Schröder sees the theatre as the only way, 'einen kleinen, einen winzig kleinenTeil abzutragen von der Schuld, die wir auch diesen Braven gegenüber hatten' (*UTK*, p. 31), and thus frames the D.T.L. as the only effective compensatory mechanism for the impotence of internment. As Feltman argues, POWs attempted to 'redeem' their situation by being active in cultural activity in the camp:

> The German prisoners of the British believed that their response to captivity said something significant about their national character and, more importantly, their identity as men at war. The culture of captivity became a culture of resistance and redemption. Prisoners chose action over passive acceptance of their fate.[36]

[33] Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' (note 31), 364.
[34] Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender* (note 29), p. 132.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The immense drive required to establish and grow the theatre as both a physical space and a collective human effort in constrained circumstances aligns with the German soldierly virtue of 'durchhalten' or 'making do' that was propagated during WWI, a virtue required due to the lack of resources for the German Imperial Army.[37] Schröder describes at length how the stage technicians and set makers made do with materials they were able to access in the camp: 'Unter ihren geschickten Händen entstehen aus Petroleum-"Tins" die schönsten Blumenvasen, Waffen, Rüstungen und Beleuchtungsgegenstände. […] an Findigkeit fehlte es nicht' (*UTK*, p. 46). Despite the 'bedrückte Kampverhältnisse', internees worked together to achieve a common ideal. Schröder emphasises '[w]elcher Aufwand von Arbeit, Können und Energie eigentlich für eine gutklappende Aufführung erforderlich sind' and lauds the 'nie erschlaffende Spannkraft und Begeisterung' (*UTK*, pp. 44–5) of his actors in masculine/militaristic terms.

Alongside the trope of 'durchhalten', the dominant masculine military virtue in WWI Germany (though by no means uniquely German) was the concept of 'Kameradschaft', an ideal that was supposed to transcend the rigid class society of Wilhelmine Germany. Such an ideal is apparent in Schröder's celebration of the way internees of all backgrounds joined in the physical effort to build the theatre:

> Auch die der körperlichen Arbeit gänzlich Unkundigen machten es sich zur Ehrensache, auch praktisch etwas geholfen zu haben. […] Großkaufleute, deren Wirkungskreis den Erdball umspannte […] Konsul und Beamter [nahmen] die Spitzhacke und die Schaufel in die Hand […]. Und solches Tun kittet die Menschen aneinander. Es gleicht die Unterschiede aus und läßt ein echtes, wahres Gefühl der Kameradschaft emporkeimen […] an der alle Unterdrückungsversuche von außen scheitern mußten. (*UTK*, p. 23)

The image of men of influence and status taking up tools to work physically alongside their fellow countrymen is for Schröder a reassertion of their honour ('Ehrensache'). The notion of equality was an important idea in the German war effort ever since the famous speeches of Wilhelm II on 1 and 4 August 1914, in which he proclaimed that from now on he would only know Germans, meaning that political, class or religious barriers must be eliminated for the greater good of the country.[38] By working towards a common goal, internees not only regained their honour but also thwarted their captors. When Schröder spoke at the opening of the new hand-built theatre, he recited the following verse:

> Die deutsche Kunst, der deutsche Fleiß
> halfen den Bau gestalten,

[37] Anne Lipp, *Meinungslenkung im Krieg: Kriegserfahrung deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914–1918*, Göttingen 2003, pp. 156–64.

[38] Niels Werber, Stefan Kaufmann and Lars Koch, *Erster Weltkrieg: Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2014, p. 280.

> drum soll an dieser Stätte auch
> echt deutscher Frohsinn walten. (*UTK*, p. 24)

This pairing of art with industry, culture with labour, echoes the rhetoric of the manifesto *An die Kulturwelt*, framing the war as a battle in which the survival of a superior culture ('Weltkultur') is at stake. The comradely fusion of the middle-class qualities of the 'Kulturmensch' with the proletarian lot of hard work – framed as a virtue – produces 'echt deutsche[n] Frohsinn' in spite of the confines of the barbed wire.

A further aspect of the theatre as a contribution to the war effort was its role in maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing of internees. Schröder saw the D.T.L. as creating model citizens in the social and cultural life of the camp. Those in the theatre contributed constructively to other aspects of camp life – such as lectures and the establishment of a garden – due to their having maintained healthy bodies and minds 'durch stete Arbeit' (*UTK*, p. 59) as a collective effort.

In his memoir, Grimme, one of the first to perform female roles on stage, cites Schröder's injunction that the theatre must present high-quality content in order to better motivate fellow internees: 'Wir müssen und wollen auch unsere Kameraden aufmuntern und auf andere Gedanken bringen, denn es sitzen jetzt schon zu viele vor ihren Baracken und grübeln vor sich hin' (*DTL*, p. 10). Grimme came to Australia in 1912 to work in the Australian branch of a German mining and steel company and was later sent to Nauru, where he was captured and sent to Holdsworthy after the outbreak of war.[39] In particular, Grimme credits the dramatic works performed by the D.T.L. with preventing mental illness among the internees. It was these more serious works that had a 'wohltuende Wirkung, denn die Probleme dieser Stücke regte [*sic*] die Gedankenwelt unserer Kameraden an, sodass wohl mancher vor dem geistigen Siechtum bewahrt blieb' (*DTL*, p. 24). Rachamimov notes that POW theatres in Eastern Europe were perceived by those involved 'as a therapeutic diversion from the mental and physical decay that came with imprisonment. […] quasi-bourgeois theater life aimed at re-creating a prewar sense of comfort, power, and self-worth'.[40] The mental health of internees is the primary lens through which Feltman views the significance of POW theatre in his study:

> Barbed-wire disease was a serious threat to the emotional health of any man who had been in captivity for an extended period, and thwarting depression was one of the primary reasons that prisoners participated in and attended camp theatrical productions. In many ways, camp theaters combated physical and mental decay among both performers and their audiences.[41]

[39] After being turned in by a fellow prisoner during transport to the Australian mainland, Grimme was even sentenced to death by hanging for allegedly burning a British battle flag but was acquitted the next day as it turned out to have been a different flag that only looked like an British battle flag.
[40] Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' (note 31), 364.
[41] Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender* (note 29), p. 127.

In the British POW camps studied by Feltman, the camp administration would sometimes punish internees by restricting cultural activity in the camp. At Holdsworthy the positive effect of the theatre on the 'Gemütsverfassung des ganzen Lagers' (*DTL*, p. 17) was noted by the camp's military administration as well as the military command in Sydney, which led to a loosening of restrictions on bringing materials for the theatre into the camp.[42] Holdsworthy had experienced significant social unrest including riots, extortion rackets and even a murder; the camp administration therefore had good reason to support the theatre as a constructive outlet for the internees.[43] Thus the ironic situation persisted that the military command enabled and promoted an overtly nationalistic German cultural enterprise, the scope and success of which had never before been seen on Australian soil.

FROM 'PSEUDODAME' TO 'MEECHEN': FEMININE ROLES IN THE D.T.L.

We have described how the performance of serious dramatic works was key to the artistic aspirations of the D.T.L. and decisive in the promotion of wellbeing for internees. The ambitions of the theatre as a cultural project that connected internees to the homeland, represented their contribution to the war as a battle of culture and supported their mental health so they could choose to continue productive lives after the war, all depended on a potentially disruptive move: the drafting of men into the performance of female roles. In Schröder's telling, the entire enterprise of the D.T.L. as a serious theatre depended upon this 'epochenmachende[s] Ereignis' (*UTK*, p. 13). The appearance of actors on stage in feminine roles – predominantly 'Schiffsjungen und Jungmatrosen' (*DTL*, p. 22) – opened up a serious dramatic repertoire to the theatre, but it also introduced the potential for gender non-conformity into the homosocial environment of the camp. In her study of German and Austrian officer POW camp theatres in Russia, Rachamimov outlines two possible interpretive approaches to female impersonation in the camp theatres: one sees it as affirming and maintaining gender and other hierarchies, while offering a 'safety valve' for the expression of sexual desire in a homosocial environment; the second (preferred by Rachamimov) identifies a disruptive potential that gives rise to 'sanctioned forms of homoerotic relations and transgender identifications'.[44] We outline above how the camp theatre articulated hegemonic masculine values of the day, including military values, and how it was imagined as a contribution to the war effort in numerous ways.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[43] See Heather M. Benbow, 'Secrets, Lies and Criminality in Australia's "German Concentration Camp"', in *Geheimnisse / Secrets*, ed. Heather M. Benbow, Andrew W. Hurley and Brangwen Stone, Sydney 2022, pp. 211–88.
[44] Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' (note 31), 364.

This conception of the theatre extends to a significant degree also to the female impersonators ('Damendarsteller'); however, we wish also to highlight the potential that these actors introduced 'a certain measure of homoerotic intimacy between prisoners'.[45] In so doing, we are alert to the pitfalls emphasised by Jennifer Evans and Elissa Mailänder of attributing a 'self-evident gay or trans identity to the female impersonators'.[46] We are, however, interested in the 'unforeseen performative side-effects' of cross-dressing and argue, drawing on the work of Rachamimov, that female impersonation in the D.T.L. had both 'disruptive and normalizing potential'.[47]

Schröder's memoir attests to the grappling with that disruptive potential of female impersonation on the stage. One of Schröder's roles in the theatre was as a leading man. His accounts of playing opposite the 'Damendarsteller' alternate ambiguously between, on the one hand, a self-conscious framing of the actors as 'fake' women – butch men whose appearance in feminine dress is incongruous – and on the other, expressions of desire for these stage women. He speculates on the presumed secure masculinity of the 'Damendarsteller': 'die erste Liebhaberin raucht in der Zwischenpause *wahrscheinlich* die kurze Pfeife oder spielt *vielleicht* morgen stramm Fußball' (*Unser Theater*, p. 44, emphasis added). Insisting on the secure masculinity of the actors, however, means that everything depends on a convincing portrayal, otherwise the audience will witness a 'Liebeserklärung an einen als Mädchen verkleideten Mann', which may be 'lächerlich oder gar anstößig' (*UTK*, p. 18). These thoughts go through Schröder's head as he contemplates his first performance opposite a 'Damendarsteller', but his reservations dissolve in the authentic moment of performance and it is as if he holds 'eine liebliche Jungfrau an meiner Brust' (*UTK*, pp. 18–19).

The feminine as a spectacle in the all-male camp opened up affective possibilities for both audience and cast. The theatre members were anxious to experience the audience reaction to the first performance with a 'Damendarsteller'. Schröder describes the voyeuristic moment in which he and his colleagues observed the audience through a number of 'Gucklöcher' from behind the sets: 'Mit fiebernden Pulsen standen wir hinter den Seitenkulissen, um die Wirkung dieses Phänomens auf unser Publikum zu beobachten' (*UTK*, p. 13). The first appearance of a 'Pseudodame' caused general hilarity among the audience as the actor appeared as a 'Riesendame' (*UTK*, p. 13). A more petite actor was soon recruited, however, who 'wenn er in Röcken steckte, zu einem reizenden kleinen Backfisch herausgeputzt werden konnte' (*UTK*, p. 14).

[45] *Ibid.*, 382.

[46] J. Evans and E. Mailänder, 'Cross-dressing, Male Intimacy and the Violence of Transgression in Third Reich Photography', *German History*, 39/1 (2021), 54–77 (74).

[47] Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' (note 31), 264.

Grimme, one of the first 'Damendarsteller', describes his initial aversion to the task: 'Da fuhr es mir denn doch in die Knochen! […] ich als "Damen-Darsteller"? Ich entsann mich des etwas zweifelhaften Rufes dieser "Künsterlinnen" auf deutschen Varieté-Bühnen und sträubte mich energisch' (*DTL*, p. 10). Grimme's concerns were given short shrift by Schröder and he went on to enjoy a successful career at the D.T.L. in female roles. For several months, he was the only female impersonator on the stage of the D.T.L., but he encountered 'nur gelegentlich – etwa beim "Essen-Holen" aus der Lagerküche […] eine Bemerkung […] etwa wie: Dat is det Meechen von gestern Abend' (*DTL*, p. 19). In order to separate his performances from those of the disparaged 'Varieté', Grimme focused on acquiring authentic, high-quality costumes. This he did initially via a request to a lady in Sydney with whom he had been exchanging letters. A number of actors went on to specialise as 'Damendarsteller' who were noted for their 'zierliche[n] Hände' and their suitedness to roles as 'fesche Dienstmädchen' or 'alte Damen' (UTK, p. 28) in the case of a 40-year-old navy cook.

Within the theatre, Grimme observes, the 'Damen' were treated with respect, even reverence, something he says went to the heads of some actors, who insisted on special treatment from the costume and make-up departments. 'Eifersüchteleien', particularly among contenders for roles as '"hübschen Mädchen"' (DTL, p. 22), were not uncommon. Schröder notes the tendency of those performing female roles to become demanding when it came to costuming:

> Wenn nur eine Kleinigkeit an der Garderobe fehlte, so glaubte jeder, das Publikum müßte diesen Mangel unfehlbar bemerken […]. Besonders unsere Damenwelt ging in dieser Beziehung sehr weit. Ich habe mich manchmal gefragt: 'Ist es möglich; daß sich ein Mann durch häufige Darstellung von Frauencharakteren so verändern kann, daß er selbst im privaten Leben manchmal den Anschein erweckt, als hätte er sich Fraueneigenheiten als Charaktereigenschaft erworben?' Am meisten trat das vor Beginn der Vorstellung im Garderobenraum zutage. (*UTK*, p. 50)

The development of a 'prima donna cult' around the Eastern European POW theatres of WWI is observed by Steinpach and Rachamimov.[48] The prima donna behaviour described above was buttressed by the fandom of internees around female impersonators. For example, Schröder describes a young sailor who had a 'Schlanke Figur, ebenmäßiges Gesicht, angenehmes Organ' (*UTK*, p. 28) and received cake daily from his friends and admirers in the camp.

[48] Alfred Steinpach, 'Der Damendarsteller im Kriegsgefangenentheater', in *In Feindeshand: Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Hans Weiland and Leopold Kern, Vienna 1931, pp. 138–45 (p. 145); Rachamimov, 'Disruptive Comforts' (note 31), 378.

The presence of female impersonators on stage in realist dramatic roles opened up the disturbing possibility of affective responses between actors and from the audience. Schröder noticed a young sailor in the audience observing a female impersonator 'mit weit geöffneten Augen und halb offenem Munde' (*UTK*, p. 21). He speculates that the young man was experiencing a sexual ripening as he witnessed the love scene on stage, something of which internment had until then deprived him. Witnessing this moment, Schröder describes feeling called upon to continue with this project 'in dem sich viel Schönes und Gutes schaffen ließ' (*UTK*, p. 21). Schröder's concern for the young sailor missing out on formative experiences reflects discourses around the merchant sailor prior to the war that see him as 'alienated not only from his "father's house" but also from his "fatherland"'.[49] Schröder clearly saw in the dramas performed by the D.T.L. the potential to address 'anxieties about the dissolution of familial, communal and national bonds' by providing an image of heterosexual gender relations in a bourgeois cultural context for young, impressionable working-class men.[50] For Schröder, the authenticity of female impersonation ensured the young sailor was guided towards sanctioned forms of sexual affect that bound him to his patriotic duty as a son of the fatherland (and future husband). And yet we cannot know what kind of awakening the young man experienced.

That same-sex desire existed but remained 'unspeakable' in the camp is suggested by the transcendent silence described by both Schröder and Grimme in the context of female impersonation in the D.T.L. Schröder writes that when the theatre previewed two brand new female costumes made by a women's tailor, the audience was rendered 'sprachlos' (*UTK*, p. 26). Grimme, for his part, describes a collective sigh that emanated from the audience when he appeared on stage, which he depicts as 'ein allgemeines, ehrfürchtiges Raunen: "Ah!"' (*DTL*, p. 11). That this vocalisation perhaps expressed more than admiration for the authenticity of the costumes, as Schröder and Grimme surmise, is suggested by a rough cartoon published in an early edition of the *Kamp-Spiegel* newspaper. The cartoon depicts a theatre patron in a top hat looking through opera glasses at a female impersonator with his leg raised towards him, affording an excellent view under his skirt. The patron's formal attire, and the caption – 'Ah, ah, einfach entzückend!' – suggest a refined appreciation of the art form, but the crudity of the image and its explicit sexual suggestion indicate that desire was indeed a factor in the audience response to female impersonators (see Figure 5).

Participants in the D.T.L. saw the advent of female impersonation as a decisive development that allowed the theatre to strive for authenticity and opened up the range of dramatic repertoire. It was only through

[49] Dennis, 'Seduction on the Waterfront' (note 23), 191.
[50] *Ibid.*

Figure 5. Cartoon published in an early edition of *Der Kamp-Spiegel*. *Source*: Ludwig Schröder, *Der Kamp-Spiegel*, 1916, National Library of Australia, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-19035257 (accessed 29 January 2024). Image: Out of Copyright.

the realistic portrayal of female characters that the D.T.L. could escape the connotations of the 'zweifelhaften Ruf[] dieser "Künstlerinnen" auf deutschen Varieté-Bühnen' (*DTL*, p. 10) with which Grimme initially associates female impersonation. And yet, in portraying female characters so realistically, the D.T.L. undoubtedly opened up a space for same-sex desire in the camp. This desire attached, at least for some, to the actors themselves and even extended beyond their stage characters, as exemplified by fan behaviour. And yet, this realism and authenticity was tied inextricably to the nationalistic project of the D.T.L. and its aspiration to rival a German provincial theatre. The D.T.L. had to accommodate expressions of homosocial desire in order to achieve its aims of providing a cultural link to the fatherland, comradely and purposeful activity and an experience of heterosexual relationships that were absent in the camp.

CONCLUSION

The anti-German sentiments German Australians faced after the outbreak of the war hit them almost overnight. The sudden focus on their Germanness and the questioning of their loyalty to the country they called home forced them to engage with something many had never questioned: their identity as German Australians or even as Australians of German descent. The label 'enemy aliens' did not leave any doubt about how Australia interpreted their role in the war. Those interned due to this new status soon found themselves in a situation which

amplified their alienation and the question of their identity. The close confinement of large numbers of civilians, merchant and naval sailors, Germans, German Australians and many more variations of 'enemy aliens' created a microcosm in Holdsworthy camp that gave rise to a particularly pointed practice of German culture. We have shown how the camp theatre became one of the most productive places for internees' (re)engagement with their German identity. For Schröder, theatre was an expression of German culture, a bridge to the fatherland and a way of challenging the cultural hegemony of his captors. Scholarship investigating the cultural production of these camps has tended to focus on its contribution to the internees' 'emotional survival'. We have argued here that an intentional part of this cultural activity is participation in the 'Kulturkrieg', thus counteracting the emasculating effects of captivity. The D.T.L. represented German culture in the service of the war effort, expressing the German masculine military tropes of 'Kameradschaft' and the ability to 'make do'. In all of this, female impersonation played a central role. The inclusion of 'Damendarsteller' was integral to the theatre's ability to produce performances that represented German culture in its fullest and most authentic dimensions, in the bourgeois drama. This inclusion of heterosexual narratives in the homosocial environment of the camp, where internees spent several years of their lives, was intended to create the fullest image of national virtues, and yet it also introduced the potential for disruptive desires, of which we find traces in the sources.

While internees were far from the fields of battle, the theatre was intended to help prepare them for active roles in the fatherland after their release. Sources such as the camp newspaper and the memoirs and letters of D.T.L. members and their audience provide a treasure trove that is yet to be fully utilised in this context. Our focus here on printed sources is but the beginning of a fuller reckoning with the meaning and significance of internee cultural activities.[51] Above all, this research raises the question of how well the internees were prepared by the activities of the theatre when they were – to a man – deported to Germany after the war, regardless of their place of birth, identification or the family and professional ties they had to Australia. Did the incredible success of the D.T.L. equate to successful integration of internees into German society, *on German soil?* How did these men face their new lives in Germany – a country many had never visited – and what stayed with them from their time in captivity? This article opens up further questions about the transformative role of theatre in the lives and identity of interned German men during the Great War.

[51] The authors wish to thank Inja Stracenski for her invaluable assistance with organising sources from the State Library of New South Wales collection and Ruby Mineur for editorial assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Melbourne, as part of the Wiley - The University of Melbourne agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.