Revue de la Société française Shakespeare

43 | 2025
Shakespeare à la loupe : l'art du détail

Shakespeare in Fragments: Culture in Captivity at Ruhleben Internment Camp

Amy Lidster

OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/revueshakespeare/423
DOI: 10.4000/15nn9
ISSN: 3100-0436

Publisher
Société Française Shakespeare

Electronic reference
Amy Lidster, "Shakespeare in Fragments: Culture in Captivity at Ruhleben Internment Camp ", *Revue de la Société française Shakespeare* [Online], 43 | 2025, Online since 01 February 2026, connection on 11 February 2026. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/revueshakespeare/423 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/15nn9

This text was automatically generated on February 11, 2026.

Shakespeare in Fragments: Culture in Captivity at Ruhleben Internment Camp

Amy Lidster

> Canst thou remember
> A time before we came into this cell?
> I do not think thou canst. —
> *The Tempest* (1.2.38-40)[1]

1 Under the title "Shakespeare, K.G." (meaning "Kriegsgefangener" or "Prisoner of War"), this extract from *The Tempest* is applied to the experiences of captivity during the First World War. At this moment in Shakespeare's play, Prospero assumes that Miranda does not remember a life beyond the island, as she was only three years old when they "came into this cell." Here, the commonplaced lines are shorn of their dramatic context to make a different point: that wartime prisoners struggle to recall a life before captivity – not because of their youth, but because of the physical and psychological suffering endured during imprisonment. "Shakespeare, K.G." imagines the dramatist as a fellow prisoner of war, linking lines from his plays to different aspects of wartime captivity. It was printed in *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* in 1916, a periodical created by civilian internees at Ruhleben Camp in Germany, many of whom were held there for the duration of the war. Shakespeare became, as Ton Hoenselaars's detailed work on the camp has shown, "one of the spokesmen for the internees"; but his presence was also contested.[2] Ruhleben's Shakespearean fragments – the evidence of his use and reception in performance and print – reveal fractures in his appeal and in narratives that praise the camp as a united, egalitarian micro-society.[3] These fragments demonstrate how Shakespeare could unite internees and help them to process their experience of wartime imprisonment, but could also exclude and divide.

2 Located on the site of a converted racecourse between the Charlottenburg and Spandau areas of Berlin, Ruhleben was an all-male camp that held about 5500 "British" civilians – meaning individuals from Britain and the British Empire who had been in enemy lands when war broke out.[4] The internment of enemy civilians was widespread during

the First World War – owing to a fear they would assist the war effort of their country of origin – and it took place on an unprecedented scale: Matthew Stibbe estimates that "at least 300,000 enemy civilians were deported and/or interned in western and central Europe, a further 300,000 in the Russian empire and probably around 50,000 to 100,000 in the rest of the word." Britain, for example, held about 26,000 German civilians in captivity.[5] Ruhleben was Germany's only strictly civilian camp and reports of its poor living conditions attracted attention in the Allied and Central presses.[6] Internees were housed in horse stables – converted into "barracks" – that often held more than two hundred per stable. Geoffrey Pyke, who successfully escaped from Ruhleben with Edward Falk on 9 July 1915, describes the suffocating conditions inside barracks that offered limited room to move:

> The atmosphere was as thick as cheese; the whole place stank, and you could take the air, and cut it into chunks, throw it about and stamp on it, and yet it seemed about the same viscidity as mud. [...] Nearly two hundred forms, just animate, lay there, each with two square yards in which to live, to eat, to sleep. No one will ever know how much hope, how much despair, how much determination, how much suffering was hid in each of those two hundred huddled heaps.[7]

3 To structure their time in captivity, internees developed their own micro-society, which included political elections, sporting clubs, art exhibitions, dramatic societies, a Ruhleben Camp School and Library, and a series of publications, including the French periodical *La Vie Française de Ruhleben* and the Italian journal *Il Messaggero,* in addition to the main English magazine.[8] Reports of these pursuits passed outside the camp and were printed in Allied and Central presses, including *The Times* and *Berliner Tageblatt.* While internees' correspondence was vetted by camp authorities – and requests were sometimes issued for typewritten letters that made censorship easier – German officials were "more than willing to advertise Ruhleben culture as an example of the Reich's supposedly 'humane' treatment of prisoners and as a means of countering allied atrocity propaganda."[9] In this way, the camp's cultural activities could benefit both the internees and their captors, who could use these reports to suggest that living conditions were comfortable and that those held in Ruhleben were able – as civilian, rather than military prisoners – to enjoy a range of pursuits.[10]

4 Surviving accounts of camp life tend to be partial and fragmented. It was challenging for internees to keep a record of their experiences – not least because camp officials could confiscate these materials. Internees Joseph Powell and Francis Gribble, who wrote a history of Ruhleben after their release, claimed that "[n]otes for future histories [...] were, of course, taken plentifully [in the camp]; but not all the notes remained in the possession of their authors" and were carried off to authorities.[11] Criticism of Germany and the Kaiser was treated as a serious offence: internee Israel Cohen reports that a prisoner who allegedly said that "a pig-sty was too good for the Kaiser to live in" spent four months in solitary confinement.[12] Histories written by released internees and published during the war are often characterized by restraint and moderation, so as not to compromise the experience of those still held in Ruhleben. Pyke's account of his escape was printed in 1916: he refrains from explaining *how* he escaped, so that others might be able to discover the same method, and claims that, in his description of this "city of futility," "discretion is the better part of valour" – making use of an allusion to Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* to explain his reticence.[13] Most published memoirs and letters were overwhelmingly by upper- and middle-class internees – including Powell and Gribble, Pyke, and Michael Stewart Pease – and tend

to convey a resolute, upbeat attitude towards internment and express pride in the wartime society created at Ruhleben.[14] Other internees found it harder to publish their accounts. Harry Edward, who became Britain's first black Olympic medal winner in 1920 and later emigrated to America, tried unsuccessfully to find a publisher for his memoir during the 1970s. It was finally printed posthumously in 2024 under the title *When I Passed the Statue of Liberty I Became Black.* Edward's memoir reflects warmly on the democratic "social atmosphere" he experienced at Ruhleben as a seventeen-year-old internee, claiming that it was not until his arrival in America that racism and the "question of colour" started to affect him.[15] But other evidence of division and segregation within Ruhleben reveals a messier, more conflicted picture of camp life than vetted materials and retrospective memoirs seem to construct. Not only does Ruhleben represent a micro-society, it also witnesses, in miniature, the acts of erasure, marginalization, and forgetting that are often part of historiographical practices.

5 This article proposes that Shakespeare is most conspicuous as a symbol, rather than an everyday companion, for internees in Ruhleben. Shakespeare is used and performed at significant moments (including the 1916 Tercentenary of his death), but is not firmly integrated into the daily lives of the interned community. In this article, I first concentrate on several prominent uses of Shakespeare in the camp's theatre and magazines and then examine evidence of his fractured appeal. Shakespeare was not to everyone's liking, but recovering these dissenting views, as well as the adapted texts used in the camp, is limited by documentary loss, the dispersal of surviving materials in global archives, and the partial nature of the evidence from which critics extrapolate wider claims.[16] Centralizing Shakespeare can deflect attention away from the diversity of the camp's demographics and the range of writers, including Paul Armstrong, Alexandre Bisson, Lewis Carroll, Anton Chekhov, W. S. Gilbert, and Viktor Léon, who were performed in the camp theatre or featured in its magazines. In Ruhleben, Shakespeare exists in fragments and small forms: productions in the camp theatre used abridged texts; short extracts and parodies circulated in print; and, as an even smaller textual form, Shakespeare emerges as a cultural metonymy in Ruhleben, prominently invoked as an elite figurehead, who could be a marker of inclusion and exclusion within the camp.

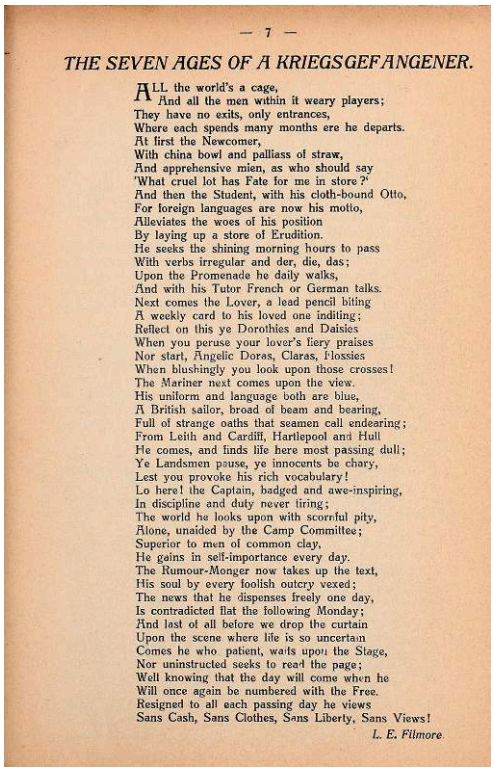
Part 1: Shakespeare on the Ruhleben Page and Stage

6 Shakespeare was used in three distinct ways at Ruhleben: the dramatic societies staged performances; the Ruhleben Camp School (or "University") offered lectures and classes on his work; and the camp magazines featured Shakespearean parodies, quotations, and illustrations. For his enthusiastic advocates, Shakespeare offered a vital connection to a pre-war, peacetime society and could be used to entertain, edify, and boost morale, providing an outlet for handling the monotony and anxieties of internment. Although lectures and performances were not primarily adapted for pointed wartime commentary, the camp's magazines took a direct approach, often using Shakespeare to explore the realities of internment, including the psychological suffering caused by confinement, privation, and the uncertainty of release.

7 One sustained example is internee Louis E. Filmore's parody of Jaques' "Seven Ages of Man" soliloquy from *As You Like It,* which appeared, in 1915, within the main English magazine created by internees and professionally printed – outside the camp – by J. S.

Preuss in Berlin.[17] Under the title "Seven Ages of a Kriegsgefangener" ("Prisoner of War"), Filmore adapts this melancholy, meditative speech on the progress of a human life to show how internees were transformed through their captivity.

Figure 1: Louis E. Filmore, "Seven Ages of a Kriegsgefangener", *In Ruhleben Camp,* 1, 1915, p. 7.



— 7 —

THE SEVEN AGES OF A KRIEGSGEFANGENER.

ALL the world's a cage,
And all the men within it weary players;
They have no exits, only entrances,
Where each spends many months ere he departs.
At first the Newcomer,
With china bowl and palliass of straw,
And apprehensive mien, as who should say
'What cruel lot has Fate for me in store?'
And then the Student, with his cloth-bound Otto,
For foreign languages are now his motto,
Alleviates the woes of his position
By laying up a store of Erudition.
He seeks the shining morning hours to pass
With verbs irregular and der, die, das;
Upon the Promenade he daily walks,
And with his Tutor French or German talks.
Next comes the Lover, a lead pencil biting
A weekly card to his loved one inditing;
Reflect on this ye Dorothies and Daisies
When you peruse your lover's fiery praises
Nor start, Angelic Doras, Claras, Flossies
When blushingly you look upon those crosses!
The Mariner next comes upon the view.
His uniform and language both are blue,
A British sailor, broad of beam and bearing,
Full of strange oaths that seamen call endearing;
From Leith and Cardiff, Hartlepool and Hull
He comes, and finds life here most passing dull;
Ye Landsmen pause, ye innocents be chary,
Lest you provoke his rich vocabulary!
Lo here! the Captain, badged and awe-inspiring,
In discipline and duty never tiring;
The world he looks upon with scornful pity,
Alone, unaided by the Camp Committee;
Superior to men of common clay,
He gains in self-importance every day.
The Rumour-Monger now takes up the text,
His soul by every foolish outcry vexed;
The news that he dispenses freely one day,
Is contradicted flat the following Monday;
And last of all before we drop the curtain
Upon the scene where life is so uncertain
Comes he who patient, waits upon the Stage,
Nor uninstructed seeks to read the page;
Well knowing that the day will come when he
Will once again be numbered with the Free.
Resigned to all each passing day he views
Sans Cash, Sans Clothes, Sans Liberty, Sans Views!

L. E. Filmore.

Boston College Libraries, Burns Library (D501.I469 GENERAL)

8 Filmore's parody (see Figure 1) does not retain any of Jaques' lines; rather, it preserves the structure of the soliloquy and makes syntactical choices that recall Shakespeare's text:

> All the world's a cage,
> And all the men within it weary players;
> They have no exits, only entrances,
> Where each spends many months ere he departs.

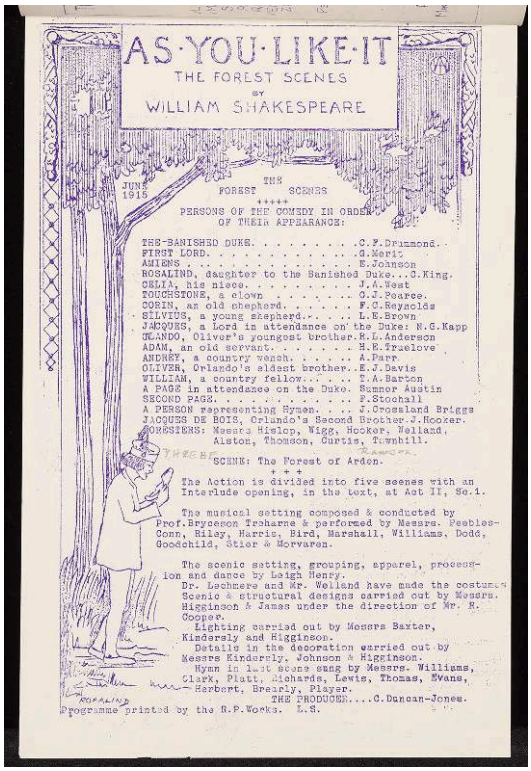
9 These lines closely parallel the opening of Jaques' soliloquy, and their significant substitutions intensify the parody's application to wartime imprisonment: the world is a confined "cage," rather than a performative "stage"; internees have "no exits" from Ruhleben, in contrast to the multiple exits and entrances in Shakespeare's text; and they are not "merely players," but "weary players."[18] In place of Jaques' account of a human life from birth through adulthood to old age and death, Filmore describes the life of an internee: the Newcomer, for example, is apprehensive in his unfamiliar surroundings; the Student attempts to alleviate his suffering by learning new languages; the Lover sustains himself by writing passionate letters home; the Mariner is bold and provocative; and the Captain aims to uphold duty and discipline, gaining in "self-importance every day." It ends with the internee who has lost everything, including these enthusiasms, and can do nothing but wait for the day of release:

> And last of all before we drop the curtain
> Upon the scene where life is so uncertain
> Comes he who, patient, waits upon the Stage,
> Nor uninstructed seeks to read the page;
> Well knowing that the day will come when he
> Will once again be numbered with the Free.
> Resigned to all each passing day he views
> Sans Cash, Sans Clothes, Sans Liberty, Sans Views!

10 The nature of some parts – such as the Mariner who finds life in the camp "most passing dull" because he is accustomed to adventure and travel – suggests that the "Seven Ages" do not reflect one internee's progress through Ruhleben, but represent different internees and their strategies of dealing with imprisonment. The structure and title of the parody do, however, encourage a progressive reading from the Newcomer to roles associated with youthfulness – the Student and the Lover – and maturity, such as the Captain, and ending, finally, with a state of stasis and emptiness after prolonged captivity that is intensified, through the parallel with Shakespeare's text, to signify a kind of death: "Sans Cash, Sans Clothes, Sans Liberty, Sans Views." While also conveying a sense of resilience, the closing lines link the end of Jaques' speech in death with what can happen to someone through the ordeal of imprisonment, becoming a kind of blank who is left with nothing. This Shakespearean parody highlights the psychologically corrosive effects of internment – even above physical suffering – and the need for prisoners to direct their energies into specific pursuits that alleviate the monotony and sense of futility brought about by captivity. While other items in the camp magazines dealt more directly with "barbed wire" disease, this parody also establishes a connection to a pre-war cultural figurehead that could encourage resilience and help both Filmore and his readers to withdraw temporarily from their immediate, often dehumanizing conditions of imprisonment.

11 Although the name "Ruhleben" translates as the quiet or peaceful life, Filmore's text highlights the disjunction between Arden and Ruhleben as places of retreat, a tension that can also be seen in the camp's first Shakespearean productions. In June 1915, the main Ruhleben Dramatic Society performed, under the direction of internee Cecil Duncan Jones, "The Forest Scenes" from *As You Like It* (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Playbill for *As You Like It,* June 1915.



AS·YOU·LIKE·IT

THE FOREST SCENES

BY

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

JUNE 1915

THE FOREST SCENES

++++

PERSONS OF THE COMEDY IN ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE:

THE BANISHED DUKE. . . . . C.F.Drummond.
FIRST LORD. . . . . G.Merit
AMIENS. . . . . E.Johnson
ROSALIND, daughter to the Banished Duke...C.King.
CELIA, his niece. . . . . J.A.West
TOUCHSTONE, a clown . . . . . G.J.Pearce.
CORIN, an old shepherd. . . . . F.C.Reynolds
SILVIUS, a young shepherd. . . . . L.E.Brown
JACQUES, a Lord in attendance on the Duke: N.G.Kapp
ORLANDO, Oliver's youngest brother.R.L.Anderson
ADAM, an old servant. . . . . H.E.Truelove
AUDREY, a country wench. . . . . A.Parr
OLIVER, Orlando's eldest brother..E.J.Davis
WILLIAM, a country fellow. . . . . T.A.Barton
A PAGE in attendance on the Duke. Sumner Austin
SECOND PAGE. . . . . F.Stoehall
A PERSON representing Hymen. . . . J.Crossland Briggs
JACQUES DE BOIS, Orlando's Second Brother.J.Hooker.
DUMAINES: Messrs Hislop, Nigg, Hooker, Welland, Alston, Thomson, Curtis, Twynhill.

SCENE: The Forest of Arden.

+ + +

The Action is divided into five scenes with an Interlude opening, in the text, at Act II, Sc.1.

The musical setting composed & conducted by Prof.Bryceson Treharne & performed by Messrs. Peebles-Conn, Riley, Harris, Bird, Marshall, Williams, Dodd, Goodchild, Stier & Morvaren.

The scenic setting, grouping, apparel, procession and dance by Leigh Henry.
Dr. Lechmere and Mr. Welland have made the costumes
Scenic & structural designs carried out by Messrs. Higginson & Jamas under the direction of Mr. H. Cooper.
Lighting carried out by Messrs Baxter, Kindersly and Higginson.
Details in the decoration carried out by Messrs Kindersly, Johnson & Higginson.
Hymn in Last scene sung by Messrs. Williams, Clark, Platt, Richards, Lewis, Thomas, Evans, Herbert, Bressly, Player.

THE PRODUCER....C.Duncan-Jones.

Programme printed by the R.P.Works. L.S.

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (38499c.5, fol.10r). Reproduced by CC-BY-NC 4.0.

12 The selected scenes stage a withdrawal from courtly society; but, in contrast to the retreat offered by Arden that facilitates an enriching transformation for some characters, including Rosalind, Ruhleben was – even for the most industrious internees – a place of negative transformation. Rather than offering a temporary escape from persecution, it was the locus of that persecution. The Forest Scenes in Arden sit uneasily alongside the realities of the "quiet life" in Ruhleben; but extant production materials do not suggest that the play (unlike the parody) was adapted to reflect directly on internees' experiences.[19] Topical commentary was not always permissible. Camp productions were vetted by internee J. H. Thorpe, the camp censor of plays – German authorities allowed internees to appoint one of their own for this task – who ensured that material did not transgress "the boundaries of political circumspection."[20] Instead, the production seems to have embraced an Arcadian vision of Arden. Stylized illustrations and reviews in the camp magazines (see Figure 3) emphasize the production's design aesthetic, including its "simple green hangings" and modern music, composed by internee Bryceson Treharne, that signaled the "keynote" of individual characters.[21]

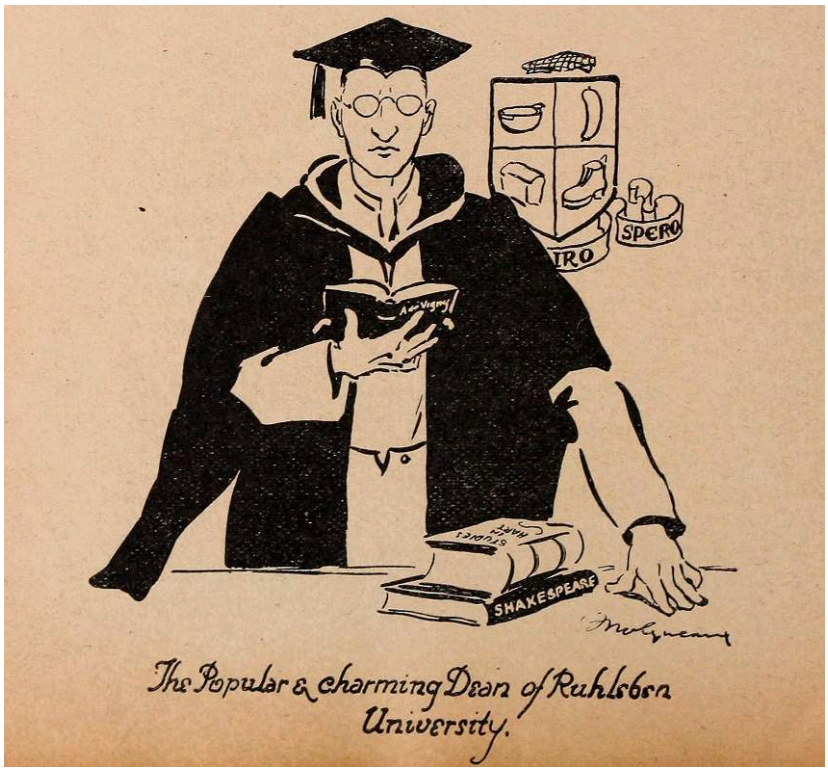
Figure 3: "Some Sketches from *As You Like It* by Winzer", *In Ruhleben Camp* 2, 1915, p. 29.

Boston College Libraries, Burns Library (D501.I469 GENERAL)

13 Other responses were less appreciative. One review admits that *As You Like It* "did not meet with that blizzard of applause with which the Camp – with a Capital C – is wont to receive productions of the character of the 'Revue' and 'Mrs M'Ginty's Lodger'", but that it firmly appealed to the "lovers of Shakespeare," giving them "an entirely new and delightful conception of one of the most delightful of the plays."[22] Similarly, Cohen describes the production as "gratifying from an aesthetic point of view," but that it "did not appeal to the majority, and hence Shakespeare was allowed to rest until the following April."[23]

14 A festival to mark the 1916 Tercentenary, held from 23-30 April, was the most prominent and widely reported Shakespearean event in the camp. It was overseen by a special committee, chaired by A. C. Ford, who had given, according to *La Vie Française de Ruhleben*, seventy to eighty very popular lectures on Shakespeare.[24]

Figure 4: Cartoon of A.C. Ford, *In Ruhleben Camp* 4, 1915, p. 40.

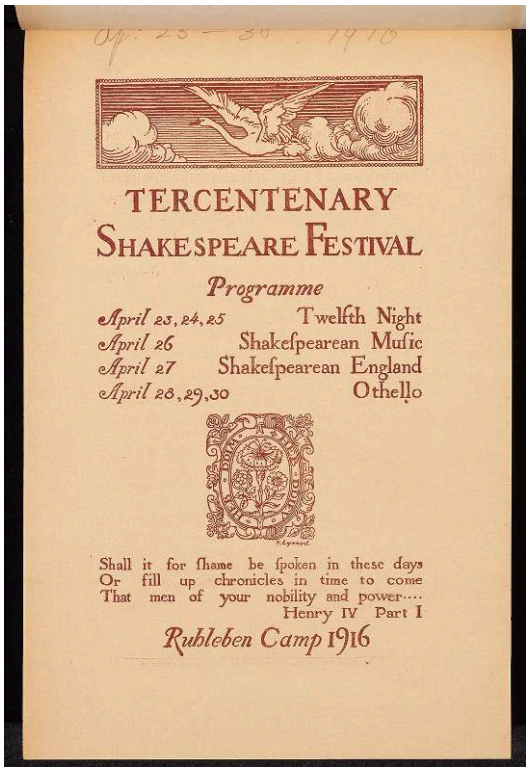


Boston College Libraries, Burns Library (D501.I469 GENERAL)

15 A cartoon (see Figure 4) captures Ford's reputation for promoting cultural and educational pursuits in the camp. He appears in a scholar's gown and cap with books on Shakespeare and Alfred de Vigny, standing in front of Ruhleben's "coat of arms," which features four camp attributes in quarters – a dinner bowl, sausage, black loaf, and boot – and the motto *dum spiro spero* ("while I breathe I hope").[25] Interestingly, this phrase was also inscribed by Charles I on the books, including Shakespeare's Folio, that he read while imprisoned at Carisbrooke and Windsor Castle during the English Civil Wars (1642-51). The selection of this motto links two very different contexts of wartime imprisonment as a poignant reminder of the hope (and hope for release) that these prisoners – both royal and civilian – strove to preserve, while also highlighting their shared use of Shakespeare during imprisonment: as reading material and as performed text.

16 Enthusiasm for Ruhleben's Tercentenary Shakespeare Festival – which included productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Othello,* a concert of "Shakespearean Music," and a series of lectures about "Shakespearean England" (see Figure 5) – was high.

Figure 5: Programme for the Tercentenary Shakespeare Festival, April 1916.



The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (38499c.5, fol. 46r). Reproduced by CC-BY-NC 4.0.

17 Cohen reports that, "on the day when tickets were first sold, men began lining up at the box-office at five in the morning, although the sale did not begin until four hours later."[26] Unlike most playbills, which were created using an onsite typewriter in Ruhleben's "Printing Works" (see Figure 2), a special Tercentenary programme was professionally printed by Preuss in Berlin. A dedication on its final page positions Shakespeare as a pre-war cultural touchstone linked to broader English "ideals" and identity:

> This festival is offered to the subjects of the British Empire interned at Ruhleben, as a Tercentenary commemoration that cannot be without a special significance to all who reverence the ideals that spring from English soil and live in the English tongue.[27]

18 The Festival aimed to boost the morale and patriotic sympathies of those interned by suggesting their shared ownership of Shakespeare and their participation in, as some saw it, the superior ideas and language of his works. A similar prioritization of England and Shakespeare's "Englishness" is reflected in some of Ford's lectures: *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* are described as dramas of "national pride [...] written by an English patriot for Englishmen."[28] That Shakespeare's probing historical plays were permitted on the early modern stage, moreover, prompts Ford to applaud the "considerable [...] political freedom of England even at that early time," constructing an image of a tolerant state that has long upheld the individual freedoms and values that the ongoing war sought to protect.[29] There is, similarly, something exclusionary in the Festival's dedication, which suggests that subjects of the wider British Empire are indebted to the cultural contributions of England and the English language, establishing, through the familiar metonymy, a hierarchy that subordinates Scottish, Welsh, and Irish identities,

as well as internees from across the British Empire and beyond, including the West Indies, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and India, who were held in Ruhleben. The Festival positions Shakespeare as a benevolent figurehead for empire and anticipates an approving response.

19 While *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* were designed as full-length productions, the texts were adapted to fit the limited resources of internment. Directed by Duncan Jones, *Twelfth Night* was "for purposes of representation" divided into two main acts, with an interval of ten minutes – although, as internee Thomas Wyndham Richards notes in his Ruhleben diary, "one hour ten minutes [was] used in [scene] changes." It seems to have been well received: Richards enthuses about T. W. Wilson's "superb acting" as Sir Toby Belch and an overall "splendid" production that was "immensely popular."[30] Similarly, Michael Stewart Pease records in his diaries that, whilst "D.J. [Duncan Jones] was rather down about it after the dress rehearsal," *Twelfth Night* was "a tremendous success": Sir Timothy Eden (brother of Anthony Eden, later Prime Minister of Britain) as Malvolio "was excellent" and Harold Goodhind as Olivia "looked wonderful, but acted like a statue."[31]

20 Reports of the Tercentenary performances appeared in several periodicals outside the camp. This enthusiastic letter dated 26 April 1916 from internee Walter Butterworth to Sir Alexander Porter was printed one month later in *The Manchester Guardian*:

> We are having a Shakespeare commemoration week just now ... I tell you it is a real achievement – "Twelfth Night," "Othello," Elizabethan concert, and lectures on Shakespeare's England. [...] It was really wonderful what the boys did with "Twelfth Night." [...] We have many young fellows, often from the public schools and universities. They are usually fine young athletes – smooth-skinned and active as wild deer. We watch them in the morning playing "soccer," Rugby, hockey &c, then in the evening we admire them in [plays...] this week Shakespeare.[32]

21 Blurring the boundary between private and public communication, Butterworth's account as printed supports both the internees and German authorities: it could be taken as evidence that life in the camp is relaxing and edifying – something like a temporary retreat from normal life – which could function as pro-German propaganda and help to counter the reports of appalling living conditions. But the letter also constructs an image of the internees as industrious and undaunted about the ordeal of their imprisonment. It resonates with Bishop Herbert Bury's assessment of Ruhleben, printed shortly after his official visit to the camp in 1916, which offered an optimistic and sanitized account that attracted some criticism: "What impressed me very much was the undoubted fact that the prevailing tone – I made a note of it that very day at Ruhleben – is one of youth, health, buoyancy, determination, and unconquerable spirit."[33] For some internees, Shakespeare and the activities of the Ruhleben Dramatic Society were associated – especially through the communal, collective nature of theatre – with a positive, purposeful attitude towards wartime internment that could alleviate its psychological toll. A review in *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* describes the Festival as one of the camp's "happiest and most successful efforts":

> A joyous and clear note was struck which vibrated for days throughout the Camp, liberating a healthy, spontaneous laughter, strengthening our grip on our confidence in the land of which we are an outpost, and reminding us of that clear and singing spirit which, occasionally submerged, has lived throughout the ages as the vitalising essence of English thought and action, the peculiar mark of England's individuality among the nations of the world.[34]

22 The effect "struck most definitely and consciously" in the production of *Twelfth Night.* Also reflected in the programme's dedication and Ford's lectures, Shakespeare became indelibly linked to the "essence" – and, by extension, superiority – of "English" thought, action, and individuality on the global stage.

23 Some tensions arose over preparations for *Othello,* which was produced by H. G. Hopkirk, who acted the title role and performed in blackface, as shown in a cast photograph that was printed in *The Graphic* (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Cast photograph for *Othello* in Ruhleben, *The Graphic,* 20 May 1916, p. 678.


THE SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY AT RUHLEBEN : "OTHELLO"

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (N.2288 b.7, v.93). Reproduced by CC-BY-NC 4.0

24 Pease records a series of disagreements at a Tercentenary committee meeting on 19 March that lasted for almost three hours and at which he had "never seen such an exhibition of bad feeling and worse manners."[35] It seems that Archibald Welland, a firm advocate for the camp's theatre, had recently been invited to produce *Othello* and was "anxious not to be done out of the glory," but Hopkirk and George Merritt, who would play Iago, complained of "unfair treatment." A vote over the role of producer took place: Welland received only three votes, including his own, and "flounced out resigning from the whole show," after which Hopkirk was appointed as producer.[36] Unlike *Twelfth Night*, the reception of *Othello* was muted. *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* praises Hopkirk's performance, but claims that the "production as a whole did not support his acting either in quality or point of view," suggesting that the "rich costumes [were] too heavy" and "Hopkirk's intenser dramatization overwhelmed the action, reducing the cast to a crowd of puppet-like shadows."[37] Richards offers few comments about the performance itself, because, "at half-time," it "was discovered that J. W. Gaunt and H. S. Galston had escaped," the performance offering, therefore, a distraction that served other aims.[38]

25 It is striking that the first Shakespearean plays to be performed in Ruhleben – *As You Like It, Twelfth Night,* and *Othello* – all feature main characters who are relocated to an unfamiliar environment far from home. In *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night,* Arden and Illyria are, for some, settings of growth and transformation, but, in *Othello,* Cyprus and its military context propel the tragic action: a group of men on a wartime mission find themselves disbanded within Cyprus with unstructured time on their hands, and tensions, anxieties, and racial discriminations escalate within this setting. Civilians imprisoned in Ruhleben were similarly confined within an unfamiliar environment – and one marked by the potential for tragedy, including ill-health, maltreatment by authorities, and the outbreak of conflict amongst internees. The Tercentenary production of *Othello* seems, on the one hand, designed to celebrate Shakespeare as a unifying touchstone for internees, but, on the other hand, it draws attention to the threat of growing tensions within the confined camp setting, which can be witnessed even in the minor disagreements that affected its rehearsal and development. At Ruhleben, Shakespeare tends to appear in fragments, short forms, and adapted texts that – directly or indirectly – highlight the difficulties and suffering brought about by wartime captivity. For some, he was an important cultural figurehead, who could help internees to structure and process their experiences of captivity. But Shakespeare's proclaimed "Englishness" could also serve as a marker of exclusion.

Part 2: Shakespearean Fractures

26 Despite Shakespeare's appeal for some internees and officials, he was a disputed figure for others in the camp. In the first instance, his plays were not actually staged very often, and most performances coincide with St George's Day and the anniversary of Shakespeare's death, including *As You Like It* (23 April 1915), the Tercentenary Festival (23-30 April 1916), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (25 April 1917). Internees staged over 150 plays during their time in Ruhleben, and, of these, only five were by Shakespeare.[39] Ruhleben culture reflected the "polyglot character" of its population: the camp had separate Irish, French, and German dramatic societies and staged plays in several European languages.[40] Even the main Dramatic Society offered a diverse repertory, featuring plays by Adolphe L'Arronge, Hermann Bahr, Tristan Bernard, Anton Chekhov, Paul Gavault, Henrik Ibsen, Viktor Léon, Otto Ludwig, and Gerolamo Rovetta.[41] While Shakespeare was regularly invoked as an "authority" for Ruhleben's theatre, his name often acted as a metonymy, standing in as a shorthand for highbrow culture (occasionally alongside Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw) – and in contrast to dramatic offerings, such as revues, melodramas, and pantomimes (including *Cinderella*) that were seen as "lowbrow" entertainment. Some internees stressed the importance of using their time in captivity for education. In a letter to his mother, Pease declared that "one's object in life here is not to kill time and that one's brain is, if anything, the more active and eager for serious work."[42] Within Ruhleben's dramatic societies, Shakespeare's name signified this kind of aim.

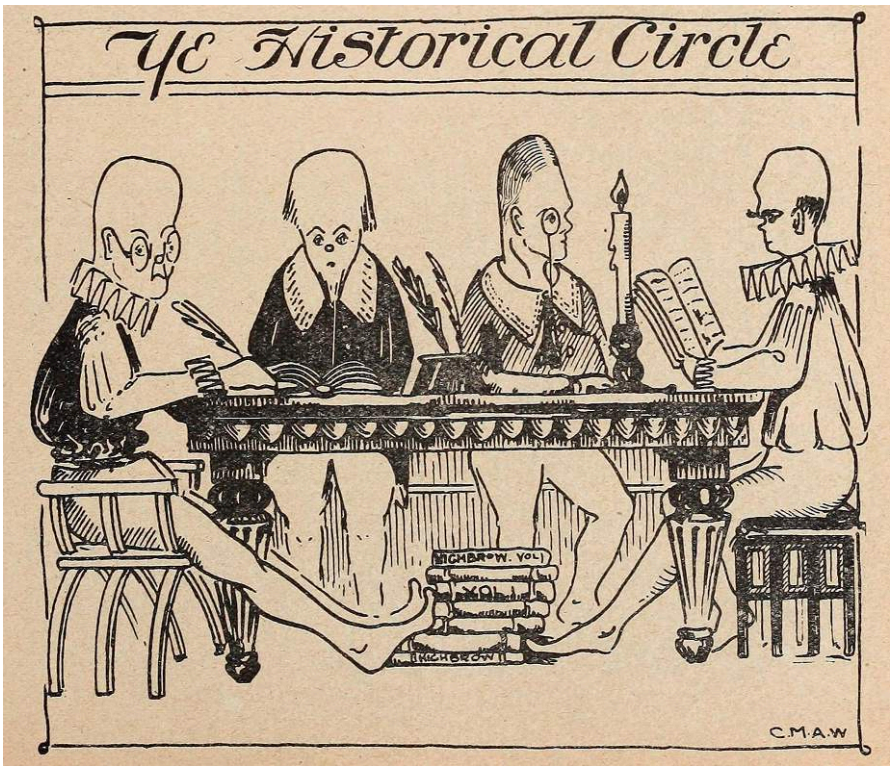
27 For the same reason, Shakespearean productions attracted criticism from internees who believed that the theatre should be used for entertainment, rather than education, stressing that "our internment had already made us serious enough."[43] While one anonymous internee writing from "The Corner of Barrack 10" objected to "pump[ing] Ibsen [and] further Shakespeare" into the repertory because of the poor quality of

productions that created a "pseudo-Shakespeare," most criticism claimed that the dramatist was too highbrow to suit the needs and interests of internees.[44] Two "rival spirits" competed within the main Dramatic Society – "the spirit of edification and the spirit of amusement" – and led to disagreements over its repertory, as Powell and Gribble recall:

> One group of men looked to the theatre only for amusement; to another group it was the most serious of all the arts, and the handmaid of the Churches and the Schools. The latter were ridiculed by the former as Supermen.[45]

28 The choice of the word "Supermen" alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* developed in *Also sprach Zarathustra,* and is applied to, as Cohen puts it, "a little body of enthusiastic intellectuals, who felt it their mission to instruct and edify their fellow-prisoners by organizing lectures and performing Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Shaw."[46] Cohen's account of the camp's "Supermen" identifies Shakespeare – alongside Ibsen and Shaw – as a metonymy for their "serious" drama. Similarly, a cartoon called "The Historical Circle," printed in *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* (see Figure 7), depicts four Elizabethan figures, one resembling Shakespeare, writing at a table, with a stack of books beneath bearing the title "High Brow" on their spines.[47]

Figure 7: "The Historical Circle", *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* 1, 1916, p. 21.

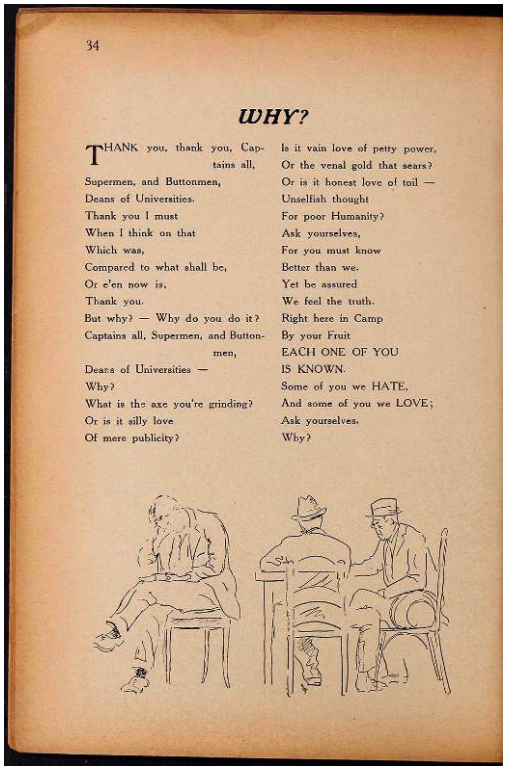


Boston College Libraries, Burns Library (D501.I469 GENERAL)

29 Ruhleben's "Supermen," including Duncan Jones, Leigh Vaughan Henry, H. S. Hatfield, Norman Kapp, and R. H. Pender, were committed to the camp's Shakespearean productions.[48] Duncan Jones produced *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*; Henry designed the stage and costumes for *Twelfth Night*; Kapp played Jaques in *As You Like It*; and most were part of the festival and executive committees for the Tercentenary. But their efforts did not appeal to all internees, some of whom expressed misgivings in the camp

magazine. For Aubrey Hersee, the theatre should be "a medium of entertainment and amusement" and the Dramatic Society should "not overtax the leniency shown by a considerate Camp," as internees might sit through productions they did not enjoy, rather than endure the alternative: boredom.[49]

Figure 8: "Why?", *In Ruhleben Camp* 6, 1915, p. 34.



34

WHY?

THANK you, thank you, Captains all,
Supermen, and Buttonmen,
Deans of Universities.
Thank you I must
When I think on that
Which was,
Compared to what shall be,
Or e'en now is,
Thank you.
But why? — Why do you do it?
Captains all, Supermen, and Buttonmen,
Deans of Universities —
Why?
What is the axe you're grinding?
Or is it silly love
Of mere publicity?

Is it vain love of petty power,
Or the venal gold that sears?
Or is it honest love of toil —
Unselfish thought
For poor Humanity?
Ask yourselves,
For you must know
Better than we.
Yet be assured
We feel the truth.
Right here in Camp
By your Fruit
EACH ONE OF YOU
IS KNOWN.
Some of you we HATE,
And some of you we LOVE;
Ask yourselves.
Why?

Boston College Libraries, Burns Library (D501.I469 GENERAL)

30 An anonymous poem, "Why?" (Figure 8), in the camp's English magazine asks why the "high-ranking" prisoners – the Captains, Supermen, Buttonmen, and Deans – are so invested in steering the society at Ruhleben: "is it silly love / Of mere publicity," or the "vain love of petty power," or the "honest love of toil"? The poem is ambivalent: it admits to hating and loving some of these internees, ending uneasily by asserting, in capital letters, that "EACH ONE OF YOU / IS KNOWN," a reminder that their actions and intentions were being scrutinized by others in the camp.[50]

31 Despite some effusive reports that Ruhleben was the model of a unified, egalitarian society, the camp witnessed divisions and inequalities that inform Shakespeare's significance. His most vocal and enthusiastic users tended to be upper- and middle-class white internees, including the "Supermen," who made up less than twenty per cent of the camp's population.[51] These individuals are disproportionately represented in surviving camp materials and published memoirs, especially those printed during the war and in its immediate aftermath. Pyke recalls the support he received from fellow internees on his arrival in Ruhleben; but his account reveals a stratified society in which individuals from similar pre-war backgrounds gathered together: "I found a large Cambridge and Oxford colony and we were all very merry."[52] Ruhleben witnessed various kinds of segregation and discrimination: "Pro-Germans" or "PGs" – typically British subjects who had been born and raised in Germany and sympathized with its

war effort – were allocated separate barracks in April 1915.[53] Ostensibly to enable them to eat kosher food, Jewish internees, including Cohen, were segregated in Barrack 6, "the oldest and dirtiest stable in the compound."[54] It was an incomplete segregation, as some Jewish internees did not declare their faith (which caused additional tensions), and the division continued to unravel because overcrowding necessitated the dispersal of some internees to other barracks. It mainly served, as Cohen suggests, to divide and discriminate, fuelling, for example, anti-Semitic jokes in the camp magazines (especially *In Ruhleben Camp,* under its first editor).[55] Part of the camp's significant black and Arab population was also segregated – initially in Barrack 13 and later in Barrack 21.[56] Harry Edward was held, however, in "Barrack XI, loft", which may have been owing to his European background as a British citizen who had been born and raised in Germany.[57] Most of those segregated were sailors from Africa and the West Indies.[58] Bury's much publicized visit and account of Ruhleben reflects a colonial attitude towards those segregated:

> The negroes are in their own barrack, and have two of our very best men in charge of them, who just simply love their work. It would never have done to put one of their own numbers in charge; but as it is they have just what the two races need – the white chivalrously helping the black, giving leadership and sympathy, and the black looking up to the white, confident of getting a really helpful and friendly lead. [59]

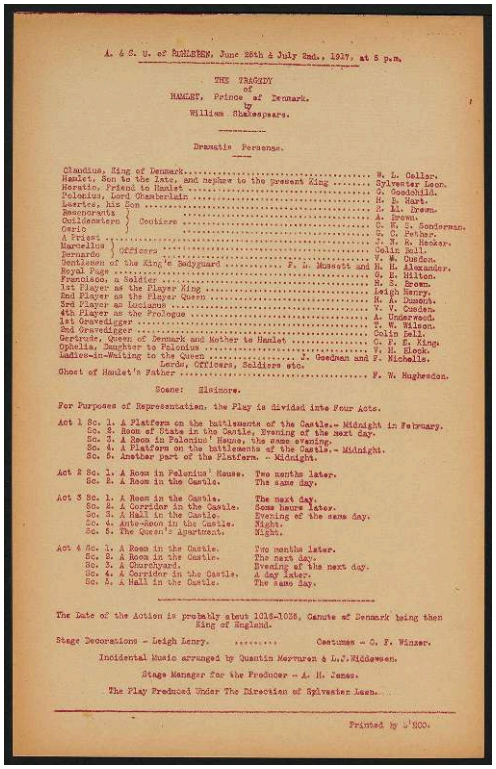
32 Bury subordinates the camp's black internees, while praising the white captains in charge of their barracks and offering an approving view of colonialism and empire by presenting the white colonizer as enlightened and chivalrous towards the colonized. Bury enthuses that "a more heterogeneous community [could not] be imagined"; but, as these accounts demonstrate, it was one marked by acts of segregation, discrimination, and inequality. Ruhleben's black and minority populations seem to have had much less involvement in the camp's collective cultural activities and, instead, developed their own society centred around the barrack in which music, including violin and banjo-strumming, played a central role.[60]

33 Some black internees did become involved in the camp's cultural events, including Sylvester Leon, a Jamaican actor who had been studying drama in Germany and regularly performed in Shakespearean productions before the war. In 1915, Leon was elected Secretary of the Ruhleben Literary and Debating Society and offered a "Dramatic Recital," with explanatory remarks by Cohen, on 7 December 1915.[61] It seems that Leon was initially involved in the Shakespeare Tercentenary preparations. Pease, who was part of the Festival Committee, disparagingly remarks that, at a meeting on 14 January 1916, that "dreadful man Leon [was] very much in evidence but very effectively snubbed in the end – so much so that he resigned." The committee, including Pease, decided "to accept Hopkirk's *Othello* and Duncan Jones' *12th Night* for festival week."[62] Further details about the disagreements are lacking; but these events may lend support to internee Frank Stockall's claim that Leon was "the finest actor we had," but was "seldom seen [outside his barrack] as even then the colour bar was his greatest obstacle."[63] As part of the Tercentenary Festival, *Othello*'s racial prejudices are mirrored by the very performance context of this production that could subordinate the participation and experiences of others within the camp.

34 Leon did take centre stage in one Shakespearean production – his own adaptation of *Hamlet,* which he directed for the Arts and Science Union, rather than the main Dramatic Society. It was not linked to St George's Day or any Shakespearean

anniversary, but was performed on 25 June and 2 July 1917, with Leon playing the title role (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Playbill for *Hamlet,* directed by and starring Sylvester Leon, 1917.



A. & C. U. of RUHLEBEN. June 25th & July 2nd., 1917, at 5 p.m.

THE TRAGEDY
of
HAMLET, Prince of Denmark.
by
William Shakespeare.

Dramatis Personæ.

Claudius, King of Denmark ..... W. L. Cellar.
Hamlet, Son to the Late, and nephew to the present King ..... Sylvester Leon.
Horatio, Friend to Hamlet ..... O. Goodchild.
Polonius, Lord Chamberlain ..... H. B. Hart.
Laertes, his Son ..... L. Ll. Brown.
Rosencrantz) ..... A. Brown.
Guildenstern) Courtiers ..... C. H. J. Sonderman.
Osric ..... G. C. Pether.
A Priest ..... J. S. R. Hecker.
Marcellus) Officers ..... Colin Bell.
Bernardo) ..... V. W. Cuscden.
Gentlemen of the King's Bodyguard ..... F. L. Mussett and H. H. Alexander.
Royal Page ..... H. A. Dunsch.
Francisco, a Soldier ..... G. E. Hilton.
1st Player as the Player King ..... H. S. Brown.
2nd Player as the Player Queen ..... A. Underwood.
3rd Player as Lucianus ..... F. W. Wilson.
4th Player as the Prologue ..... Colin Bell.
1st Gravedigger ..... C. F. E. King.
2nd Gravedigger ..... V. H. Block.
Gertrude, Queen of Denmark and Mother to Hamlet ..... Michelle.
Ophelia, Daughter to Polonius ..... J. Goodman and F. Michelle.
Ladies-in-Waiting to the Queen ..... F. W. Hughesdon.
Lords, Officers, Soldiers etc.
Ghost of Hamlet's Father .....

Scene: Elsinore.

For Purposes of Representation, the Play is divided into Four Acts.

Act 1 Sc. 1. A Platform on the battlements of the Castle.- Midnight in February.
Sc. 2. Room of State in the Castle, Evening of the next day.
Sc. 3. A Room in Polonius' House, the same evening.
Sc. 4. A Platform on the battlements of the Castle.- Midnight.
Sc. 5. Another part of the Platform. - Midnight.

Act 2 Sc. 1. A Room in Polonius' House. Two months later.
Sc. 2. A Room in the Castle. The same day.

Act 3 Sc. 1. A Room in the Castle. The next day.
Sc. 2. A Corridor in the Castle. Some hours later.
Sc. 3. A Hall in the Castle. Evening of the same day.
Sc. 4. Ante-Room in the Castle. Night.
Sc. 5. The Queen's Apartment. Night.

Act 4 Sc. 1. A Room in the Castle. Two months later.
Sc. 2. A Room in the Castle. The next day.
Sc. 3. A Churchyard. Evening of the next day.
Sc. 4. A Corridor in the Castle. A day later.
Sc. 5. A Hall in the Castle. The same day.

The Date of the Action is probably about 1015-1035, Canute of Denmark being then King of England.

Stage Decorations - Leigh Lenry. ..... Costumes - C. F. Winzer.

Incidental Music arranged by Quentin Maeruren & L. J. Middlewsen.

Stage Manager for the Producer - A. H. Jones.

The Play Produced Under The Direction of Sylvester Leon.

Printed by D'HOO.

Maurice L. Ettinghausen Collection of Ruhleben Civilian Internment Camp Papers, 1914-1937. Harvard Law School Library. Historical & Special Collections, Box 2, Folder 11, seq. 409. https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:hls.libr:2643638?n=409

35 Few details about the production survive, but aspects of the play's action could resonate with internees' experiences: Hamlet's soliloquies explore profound existential concerns, including a recourse to suicide, which was also a pressing issue within the camp. Elsewhere, isolated lines offer swift parallels that could be applied to life in Ruhleben: "what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?" (2.2.238-40). Despite the relevance of the play, Leon's production, unlike other Shakespearean events, does not feature within camp memoirs or internees' correspondence. Pease recorded many theatrical events in his diaries, but does not seem to have attended *Hamlet*, and a typewritten repertory list of camp productions held within the Maurice L. Ettinghausen Collection at Harvard Law School Library does not include either performance.[64] The reasons for this documentary silence are unclear; but the marginalized position of internees such as Leon may have played a role.

36 While some internees, including Harry Edward, describe Ruhleben as a broadly "democratic" society in which "all men were created equal," others disagreed, and the levelling effect of wartime imprisonment was not uniformly felt across the camp.[65] If they had the funds, internees could purchase additional food and supplies from stalls on the camp's "Bond Street," and many received regular parcels from family and friends at home that eased their privations. As Cohen sardonically puts it, "[s]ocial

distinctions were not altogether effaced, even though noblemen's sons lived like commoners in a horse-box; and a certain prestige clung to those who were privileged to dine in the 'Casino' restaurant and pay big prices for little meals."[66] Edward reports that access to the Casino was "only by passes issued by the [camp] Captain's office" and "meals had to be paid for at restaurant prices," adding that "I was never rich enough to pay for a single restaurant meal, hence never saw the inside of the Casino."[67] The ability to pay for these meals not only provided internees with additional food – notwithstanding Cohen's criticism about the "little" portions – but was also a marker of status that furthered stratified the camp.

37 Post-internment accounts written by upper- and middle-class internees also emphasize difference and partition. Gribble, when reflecting on the psychological suffering, sometimes leading to suicide, that was endured by internees, claimed it was "gratifying to observe that the weakest vessels were those who had least English blood in their veins, and were most indebted for their education to German culture."[68] Gribble evaluates his fellow internees on their national origins, class, and education, and claims approvingly that "the most cheery were those who had been at English public schools":

> The others wandered about like lost dogs, though some of them had the grace to express admiration for the greater energy of their companions in misfortune. "You English," one of them said to me, "seem to set to work as if you were founding a new colony."[69]

38 Gribble relishes this comment about the colonizing initiatives of the English and, echoing Butterworth, sees the "pure-blooded," public-school educated English as among the superior camp members. Similarly, Bury's account constructs a hierarchy in descending rank that reinforces a highly stratified society, beginning with "our nobility," followed by the Oxford and Cambridge dons and public school boys, before describing the camp's bankers, merchants, sea captains, sailors, trawlers, and, "finally," its black population from "West Africa, East Africa, the West Indies, Barbados, Singapore, Liberia, and other places."[70] Bury ends his account by recalling how he praised the internees at his subsequent reception by King George V: "[t]hey have made me more thankful than ever that I am an Englishman."[71] While Ruhleben was "officially styled *Engländerlager*" (meaning an English camp), Bury's remarks underline a slippage not only between English and British, but between English and the multicultural, polyglot community within the camp that was often marginalized.[72] These communities had their own cultural pursuits, but were not often featured within accounts of Ruhleben. Internee Joseph Ntwanambi, for example, performed Xhosa songs in the camp and a 1917 record of him on wax cylinder and shellac discs by two German ethnologists who visited Ruhleben may be the earliest surviving recordings of Xhosa music.[73] In his history of the camp, however, former internee John D. Ketchum asserts that Ruhleben's cultural life was established by its Supermen and "intelligentsia," because these "educated men *needed* intellectual and aesthetic stimulation as well as food and shelter", in contrast to the "less educated" majority, who did not have the same "psychological" needs.[74] Ketchum's assessment of the camp's cultural life concentrates on the prominent societies and committees that were dominated by the English upper- and middle-class internees – and for whom Shakespeare was a prominent figurehead for England and empire – while overlooking the interests of a wider cross-section of the interned community.

39 Ruhleben's diverse population and cultural activities demonstrate the importance of transnational identities within the camp; but Shakespeare seems – through the claims

of his most vocal users – to be firmly mobilized as a national English icon or as a figure of professed universal appeal that is used, paradoxically, to advance the superiority of English culture and language. The dramatist became particularly associated with Ruhleben's "Supermen" and its upper- and middle-class internees, acting as a metonymy for elite culture – especially in wartime performance. For others, Shakespeare had less appeal and could be a figurehead of exclusion: his plays were only performed on a few occasions and were sometimes criticised in the camp magazines as too highbrow or ill-suited to the conditions and limited resources of internment. Because of the difficulty in preserving personal records at Ruhleben, accounts of Shakespeare's use are distorted in favour of those which German authorities deemed acceptable and advantageous to pass outside the camp, and those written retrospectively by released internees. Until the recent recovery of materials about, for example, Edward and Leon, these memoirs – overwhelmingly by upper- and middle-class white internees – created, as Jo Stanley puts it, an impression of Ruhleben as a "place where cultured white gentlemen self-respectfully made a splendid effort to prove and uphold British mettle."[75] But camp demographics were diverse and contrast sharply with the uniformity of voices among these memoirists and their accounts of Shakespeare.[76] Internees at Ruhleben established their own micro-society, but it was not a uniform, homogenous one in which Shakespeare occupied an assured position.

NOTES

1. *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* 3, 1916, p. 41.

2. Ton Hoenselaars, "ShakesPOW", *Linguaculture* 2, 2010, 67-82, p. 68, and "In Exile with Shakespeare: British Civilian Internee Theatre at Ruhleben Camp, 1914-1918", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 23, 2011, 1-10, p. 1.

3. This article builds on Amy Lidster, *Wartime Shakespeare: Performing Narratives of Conflict,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 183-197.

4. Matthew Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914-18,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 2. Stibbe calculates that a total of about 5,500 Britons were held in Ruhleben, "with a population ranging from 4,273 in February 1915 to around 2,300 at the time of the armistice" (p. 2).

5. *Idem*, p. 4, 11.

6. Hoenselaars, "In Exile", *op. cit*., p. 2.

7. Geoffrey Pyke, *To Ruhleben – and Back: A Great Adventure in Three Phases,* London, Constable, 1916, p. 122, 125.

8. Israel Cohen, *The Ruhleben Prison Camp: A Record of Nineteen Months' Internment,* London, Methuen, 1917, p. 156. The English magazine was printed under the title *In Ruhleben Camp* in 1915 and as *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* in 1916.

9. Stibbe, *op. cit*., p. 83. For the censorship of letters, see *In Ruhleben Camp* 8, 1915, p. 20.

10. Ton Hoenselaars, "The Company of Shakespeare in Exile: Towards a Reading of Internment Camp Cultures", *Atlantis* 33.2, 2011, 89-103, p. 99.

11. Joseph Powell and Francis Gribble, *The History of Ruhleben: A Record of British Organization in a Prison Camp in Germany,* London, Collins, 1919, p. 199.

12. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
13. Pyke, *op. cit.*, p. x.
14. See also Douglas Sladen, ed., *In Ruhleben: Letters from a Prisoner to His Mother,* London, Hurst and Blackett, 1917.
15. Harry Edward, *When I Passed the Statue of Liberty I Became Black,* ed. Neil Duncanson, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2024, p. viii-ix, 1-2, 35.
16. Harvard Law School Library's digitization of two major collections of Ruhleben ephemera – the Maurice L. Ettinghausen Collection and the John Masterman Collection, both from former internees – has helped to expand access to surviving, but nevertheless still selective, materials from the camp. See also Stibbe, p. 15-17.
17. *In Ruhleben Camp* 1, 1915, p. 7. Most issues were printed by Preuss on Dresdener Strasse, Berlin (see imprint in issue 2, 1915, p. 48, 50). The magazine was "published" by internee "T. A. Barton for the Education Committee of the Engländerlager für Zivilgefangene, Ruhleben, Berlin."
18. For Jaques' soliloquy, see *As You Like It,* 2.7.138-165.
19. See also Hoenselaars, "Company of Shakespeare", *op. cit.*, p. 98-100.
20. Powell and Gribble, *op. cit.*, p. 183.
21. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 162; Sladen, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 68; *In Ruhleben Camp* 2, 1915, p. 28.
22. *In Ruhleben Camp* 2, 1915, p. 28.
23. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
24. "Types Du Camp", *La Vie Française de Ruhleben* 3, 14 July 1916, p. 1-2. "*Ses conférences sur Shakespeare dont il donna de 70 à 80 dans le camp, furent très populaires, ainsi que les 40 à 50 sur Alfred de Vigny*."
25. *In Ruhleben Camp* 4, 1915, p. 40. Cohen also discusses the coat of arms: see *op. cit.*, p. 143.
26. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
27. Harvard Law School Library, Maurice L. Ettinghausen Collection of Ruhleben Civilian Internment Camp Papers, 1914-1937: Box 2, Folder 10, seq.340. (Accessible online at: https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HLS.Libr:2643637, last accessed 10 October 2025).
28. *Idem,* Box 1, Folder 1, seq.27.
29. *Idem,* Box 1, Folder 1, seq.20.
30. Thomas Wyndham Richards, *Wyndham's War being the Diaries of Thomas Wyndham Richards, a Cardiff Schoolmaster interned in Ruhleben and Havelberg 1914-1918,* ed. Derek Richards, Newport, Vine Press, 2014, p. 216.
31. Sarah Kimbell and Rowan Pease, *Are We Downhearted? The Diaries and Letters of Michael Stewart Pease from Ruhleben Internment Camp, Germany 1914-1918*, Poplars Press, 2020, p. 89.
32. "Mr Walter Butterworth: Shakespeare Celebrations at Ruhleben", *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 May 1916, p. 10.
33. Herbert Bury, *My Visit to Ruhleben,* London, Mowbray, 1917, p. 9.
34. H.M., "Our Theatrical Notes", *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* 4, 1916, p. 33-34.
35. Kimbell and Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 78 (entry for 19 March).
36. *Ibid.*
37. *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* 4, 1916, p. 33.
38. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
39. These plays were *As You Like It* (1915), *Twelfth Night* (1916), *Othello* (1916), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1917), and *Hamlet* (1917).
40. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
41. Hoenselaars, "In Exile", *op. cit.*, p. 3.
42. Kimbell and Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
43. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 160-161.
44. *In Ruhleben Camp* 6, 1915, p. 45.
45. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 160; Powell and Gribble, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

46. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
47. *The Ruhleben Camp Magazine* 1, 1916, p. 21.
48. See John Davidson Ketchum's list of "supermen" in *Ruhleben: A Prison Camp Society,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965, p. 267; and Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 20, 410-411.
49. *In Ruhleben Camp* 6, 1915, p. 42.
50. "Why?", *In Ruhleben Camp* 6, 1915, p. 34.
51. According to Ketchum (p. 23), seafarers made up the largest occupational group in the camp (at 34.5%), followed by businessmen and clerks (at 24%).
52. Pyke, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
53. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 102-105. They were assigned to Stable 1, Barracks 14 and 15, and the Tea House.
54. *Idem*, p. 40, 46.
55. *Idem*, p. 50, 196, 206-207.
56. Stibbe, *op. cit.*, p. 98-100
57. Edward, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
58. Ketchum, *op. cit.*, p. 118. Barrack 13/21 held about one hundred internees, but Jo Stanley suggests that there were over three hundred black and minority ethnic civilians in the camp. See Stanley, "Ruhleben 1914-1918: African Diaspora and Arab Civilians Interned in Germany", *International Journal of Maritime History* 31.2, 2019, 416-422.
59. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 33-35.
60. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
61. *In Ruhleben Camp* 10, 1915, p. 40.
62. Kimbell and Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
63. Stockall, unpublished memoirs, quoted in Stibbe, *op. cit.*, p. 99; see also Ketchum, *op. cit.*, p. 117-119.
64. Kimbell and Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 204-206; Harvard Law School Library, Ettinghausen Collection, Box 2, Folder 19, seq.854-859.
65. Edward, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
66. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
67. Edward, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
68. Francis Gribble, "Leaves from a Ruhleben Notebook," *Fortnightly Review* 99, 1916, 60-70, p. 65.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 33-34.
71. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
72. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
73. Dave Dargie, "The Voice of a Prisoner: Recordings of Joseph Ntwanambi in the Ruhleben Prisoner of War Camp, Berlin, 1917," *African Music* 10.1, 2015, 180-199.
74. Ketchum, *op. cit.*, p. 254-255.
75. Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 419.
76. Stibbe, *op. cit.*, p. 15, and Hoenselaars, "ShakesPOW", *op. cit.*, p. 71.

ABSTRACTS

During the First World War, about 5500 “British” civilians were interned at Ruhleben Camp in Germany. Internees developed their own micro-society that featured performances of Shakespeare’s plays, including a 1916 Tercentenary Festival, as well as Shakespearean parodies, commentaries, and extracts within the camp’s magazines. By examining the short forms and adapted texts developed by internees, this article evaluates Shakespeare’s presence at Ruhleben, arguing that it is characterized by fragmentation in appeal and evidence. While some internees, including the camp’s “Supermen”, prized Shakespeare as an essential cultural touchstone during their imprisonment, he was a disputed figure for others in the camp and was not performed very often. Shakespeare was most significant as a metonymy for an elite, highbrow culture that was valued by some internees, but was exclusionary and unappealing for others. Understanding the dramatist’s presence at Ruhleben is also compromised by the limitations of surviving evidence and the fact that extant testimonies and memoirs predominately reflect the views of upper- and middle-class white internees, who championed Shakespeare as a representative of superior “English” culture and language. Centralizing Shakespeare can deflect attention away from the diversity of the camp’s demographics and the transnational range of dramatists performed at the camp theatre.

Pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, environ 5500 civils britanniques ont été internés au camp de Ruhleben en Allemagne. Les internés ont développé leur propre micro-société qui présentait des représentations de pièces de Shakespeare, notamment un festival du tricentenaire en 1916, ainsi que des parodies shakespeariennes, des commentaires et des extraits dans les magazines du camp. Cet article examine la présence de Shakespeare à Ruhleben en examinant les formes courtes et les textes adaptés développés par les internés et soutient qu’elle se caractérise par une fragmentation des appels et des preuves. Alors que certains internés, y compris les surhommes du camp, considéraient Shakespeare comme une référence culturelle essentielle pendant leur emprisonnement, il était une figure controversée pour les autres membres du camp. Shakespeare n'était pas joué très souvent, mais il était surtout important en tant que métonymie pour une culture d'élite et de haut niveau qui était appréciée par certains internés, mais était exclusive et peu attrayante pour d'autres. La compréhension de la présence de Shakespeare à Ruhleben est compromise par les limites des preuves survivantes et par le fait que les témoignages et les mémoires existants reflètent principalement les opinions des internés blancs des classes supérieures et moyennes, qui défendaient Shakespeare comme un représentant de la culture et de la langue anglaise supérieures. Centraliser Shakespeare peut détourner l’attention de la diversité démographique du camp et de la gamme transnationale de dramaturges joués au théâtre du camp.

INDEX

Mots-clés: adaptation, As You Like It, Hamlet, mémoire, Othello, Première Guerre mondiale, prisonnier, propagande, Shakespeare Tercentenary, Twelfth Night
Keywords: adaptation, As You Like It, First World War, Hamlet, memoir, Othello, prisoner, propaganda, Shakespeare Tercentenary, Twelfth Night

AUTHOR

AMY LIDSTER

University of Oxford