

HYPHENATED HITLERISM

Transatlantic Nazism Confronts Cultural Hybridity

Nazi officialdom wasted little time conscripting dramatic performances into their efforts to foment enthusiasm for Hitler's regime among Germans in Argentina. On April 5, 1934, the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* announced plans for a guest performance by the star-studded German Drama ensemble, featuring Gerda Müller, Eugen Klöpfer, and Käthe Dorsch, under the direction of Heinz Hilpert.¹ As it was a stridently nationalist paper, the *La Plata Zeitung's* propagandistic intent was clear from the outset. Before the celebrity cast had even departed for South America, the paper reported that its rehearsals were preparations for an upcoming cultural "victory" of the new Germany, which would have a profound echo throughout South America.² When the North German Lloyd steamer *Sierra*

1. "Eugen Klöpfer," *DLPZ*, April 5, 1934.

2. "Deutsches Schauspiel 1934," *DLPZ*, April 18, 1934. Although he featured prominently in advertisements for the group and oversaw its rehearsals in Berlin, Hilpert did not travel to Argentina.

Salvada docked in Buenos Aires on May 28, the *La Plata Zeitung* ran an article hailing its passengers as representatives of a new German theater liberated from the shackles of the egoism, sensationalism, capitalism, and intellectualism that had marred stages in the Weimar Republic. By contrast, this ensemble reflected theater in the new Germany, which the paper described as the essence and resurrection of the German soul.³ Although preparations predated Hitler's rise, the German Drama performance in 1934 was a programmatic spectacle engineered to inculcate National Socialist visions of German identity in the Argentine capital.

The following day, the *La Plata Zeitung* reinforced this directive by publishing an open letter from Otto Laubinger, president of the Reich Theater Chamber, to his "countrymen" in South America. Noting that the upcoming event represented the first state-funded theater performance overseas under the Nazi regime, Laubinger goaded emigrants to prove their allegiance to Hitler by upholding the arts as the most exquisite blossom of national life.⁴ He emphasized that the guest performance in Buenos Aires represented a rare opportunity to showcase the artistic accomplishments of Nazi Germany against a multinational backdrop. Metonymically representative of the Nazi regime and its cultural values, the celebrity thespians would assert the new Germany's rightful place among the national populations of the Argentine capital, including France, Italy, and Spain. In a separate article, the *La Plata Zeitung* revealed a more sinister side to the German Drama's cultural mission. Lambasting reports of censorship and repression in Nazi Germany as fatuous "horror stories," the newspaper marked its territory against the "enemies of our fatherland."⁵ If the upcoming event demonstrated the nationalist population's unanimity with the new Germany, as Laubinger and the *La Plata Zeitung* touted, this expression was characterized by aggression and exclusion.

The troupe's performances of the German classics, which reviewers posited as symbolic of a newly awakened sense of national

3. "Deutsches Schauspiel 1934," *DLPZ*, May 29, 1934.

4. "Ankunft der Schauspieler," *DLPZ*, May 30, 1934.

5. "Deutsches Schauspiel 1934," *DLPZ*, May 29, 1934.

pride, were the cornerstone of the combative cultural politics.⁶ The decision to put on the classics, and especially media reports on these productions, reveal that already in 1934 Nazi dramatic theory held sway among nationalists in Buenos Aires.⁷ Echoing Julius Petersen, president of the Goethe Society (1926–38) and chair of the German Department at Frederick William University (1933–41); and Hanns Johst, dramatist, Nazi poet laureate, and president of the Reich Chamber of Literature (1935–45); the *La Plata Zeitung* emphasized the preeminence of the written text over improvisation in dramatic performance.⁸ Both Petersen and Johst perceived actors' clear delivery of the text to be the gateway to establishing an ethnocentric theater in the service of "the national idea."⁹ In an interview about the imminent production of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* (1800) and Lessing's *Minna of Barnhelm* (1767), actress Gerda Müller affirmed this theory, explaining that the classics had resurged in Nazi Germany as a result of the "awakening of a newfound nationalism and transformation of dramatic performances through a greater respect for the author's work."¹⁰ Subsequent reviews confirmed her pronouncements.

The German Drama's performance of *Mary Stuart* emphasized Nazi aesthetics. The austere mise-en-scène broke with the elaborate stage designs of Expressionist theater, rejecting, as scholar Friedrich Rosenthal put it, the "flooding of the world with optical seductions."¹¹ Instead, the *La Plata Zeitung* argued, the stage design for *Mary Stuart* served to foreground the dramatic work and spectators' reflection on the presentation: "The setting is not a burden. Its thrift becomes the mind's wealth."¹² The 1934

6. "Gerda Müller," *DLPZ*, June 2, 1934.

7. In 1934–35, *Minna* received 280 performances in Germany. See Ann Schmiesing, "Lessing and the Third Reich," in Fischer and Fox, *Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, 274; Drewniak, *Das Theater im NS-Staat*, 109.

8. Pfanner, *Hanns Johst*, 128.

9. Pfanner, *Hanns Johst*, 128.

10. "Gerda Müller," *DLPZ*, June 2, 1934.

11. Friedrich Rosenthal, "Verwüstung der künstlerischen Sprache," *Rufer und Hörer* 2 (1933): 487.

12. "Maria Stuart," *DLPZ*, June 2, 1934.

performance of *Mary Stuart* underscored the sanctity of the spoken word in Nazi dramatic theory.¹³ Actors and directors alike adhered to the formula of minimizing the demands on theatergoers' eyes and reducing their lust for visual pageantry in favor of sharpening their focus on dialogue and carefully guided interpretations of thematic purport.¹⁴ Correspondingly, in Heinz Hilpert's adaptation, Elisabeth's monologue replaced Mary's departure as the dramatic climax. Unlike its aesthetics, the thematic substance of Schiller's play resisted unambiguously pro-Nazi interpretations even in this propagandistic production. The *La Plata Zeitung's* review described Hilpert's interpretation as relevant, contemporary, and nonpartisan, concluding that *Mary Stuart's* many subplots and intrigues led spectators to the fundamental dilemma of the work: "The state ruthlessly exploits individuals to push its political and historical agenda."¹⁵ In fact, this ambivalent conclusion could be interpreted to support both nationalist and antifascist platforms.

As if to compensate, coverage of *Minna of Barnhelm* was unabashedly sectarian. The *La Plata Zeitung* praised especially the actors' clear delivery of the dialogue, gushing that it was soothing to the ears "to hear the crisp ring of Lessing's crystalline German."¹⁶ Furthermore, the purity of Lessing's prose temporarily held the "linguistic wilderness" in Argentina in check. The German Drama's rendition of Lessing's dialogue was exploited as a vehicle for aggressive nationalist posturing by an ethnic enclave that felt its identity was threatened by corrupting, foreign influences. Embellishing on these xenophobic overtones, the *La Plata Zeitung* synthesized Lessing's prose with a bellicose analysis of *Minna*. Brandishing the weaponry of literature, Lessing had carved out a place for himself in the ranks of those patriots who fought to liberate German culture from the shackles of foreign powers. Drawing parallels between the Seven Years' War

13. Hans Johst, "Die Heiligkeit des Wortes," in Biccari, "Zuflucht des Geistes"?, 85.

14. Rosenthal, "Verwüstung der künstlerischen Sprache," 489.

15. "Maria Stuart," *DLPZ*, June 2, 1934.

16. "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, June 7, 1934.

and the state of German theater in the eighteenth century, the paper perceived *Minna* to be a deliberate revolt against the “stifling French influence on German stages.” Its theater critic depicted Lessing as a “rebel” and an early forerunner of current National Socialist revolutionaries, even wondering if the play had been written in 1763 or 1934. Criticism of the individual actors in the play also reinforced a nationalist identity based on exclusion. Actor Werner Pledath was censured for his portrayal of the Frenchman Riccaut de la Marlinière: “too moderate, too little sleazy pretension, too good-natured, instead of cold reasoning and Gallic greed.”¹⁷ Pledath’s Riccaut failed to satisfy the *La Plata Zeitung* because he did not adequately fulfill the Francophobic expectations that state-sponsored nationalist German media held for Lessing’s drama.

The antitotalitarian *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, by contrast, was livid about what it considered to be an insidious betrayal of German values and culture. *Tageblatt* contributor and emigrant Paul Zech, winner of the Kleist Prize in 1918, denounced the German Drama and its sponsors in a three-page harangue:

They have the gumption to send out a troupe that brandishes Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe as the summit of German culture. The pawns of this new Germany force their interpretation on people who are decidedly less informed about the depths to which culture and artistic expression have fallen under Hitler.¹⁸

Zech trenchantly observed that the efficacy of Nazi cultural politics lay in the remoteness of populations such as Germans in Argentina, whose perceptions of their homeland were patriotically inclined to the positive and thus were vulnerable to the misinformation filtered to them by Goebbels’s minions. The controversy surrounding the guest performance evinced this vulnerability, as well as the sharply discordant politics of cultural identity emerging in German Buenos Aires.

17. “Lessings ‘Minna von Barnhelm,’” *DLPZ*, June 7, 1934.

18. “Deutsches Schauspiel 1934,” *Argentinisches Wochenblatt*, June 9, 1934.

The German Drama was a seminal event for German theater in Argentina. As in Europe, the German Labor Front and Strength through Joy in Argentina formed the labor and recreation wings of an organization devoted to building a close-knit community of working Germans in support of National Socialism. Theater played an important role in this endeavor. Inspired by the 1934 guest performance, Consul Edmund von Thermann and Strength through Joy organized numerous theatrical productions. In June 1935 an ad-hoc ensemble of local actors sponsored by the Labor Front and the consulate staged Hans Lorenz and Alfred Möller's comedy *Christa, I'm Waiting for You* (1934).¹⁹ Later that August the two organizations funded a guest performance of Ridi Walfried's *The Cobbler in Heaven* by the Riesch Stage, a touring company based in Santa Catarina, Brazil.²⁰ Held at the cavernous Odeon Theater in the heart of the Buenos Aires theater district, these events had the purpose of assembling, consolidating, and expanding a cohesive community under the swastika. Prices were kept low to foster sentiments of horizontal comradeship within the nationalist German colony. Regardless of the disparities of wealth and privilege that existed among its members, the monthly magazine *Der Deutsche in Argentinien* reminded its readership that in accordance with the National Socialist principle of equality, all tickets were general admission.²¹ Within two days the thousand-seat venue was sold out.

The Labor Front exploited these occasions to advance allegiance to Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler. In a speech preceding the performance by the Riesch Stage, Richard Schröder, regional leader of the Labor Front, urged the audience to form a transatlantic kinship with their compatriots in Europe and actively recruit other Germans to join the NSDAP community in Argentina. He longed to inform Hitler that a national community had united itself under the German Labor Front in Argentina.²² Speakers at these events,

19. In 1936 Berlin upgraded the consulate to an embassy.

20. Walfried's play is better known as *Four Weeks in Heaven*.

21. "Kraft durch Freude Veranstaltung," *DiA*, July/August 1935.

22. "2. Große 'Kraft durch Freude'-Veranstaltung: Besuch bei der Riesch-Bühne," *DiA*, October 1935.

including Consul Thermann, directly elicited enthusiasm for Adolf Hitler: "In conclusion, the Consul found honorable words for the host country, Argentina, and ended his speech with a threefold *Sieg-heil* to the Führer and chancellor, which was echoed by hundreds of voices."²³ Although such assemblies were not antagonistic to the host country, Argentina stood in a subordinated role to Nazi Germany. Spectators were pushed to aver that their first allegiance was to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi government, metonymically represented by Consul Thermann onstage.

The potential they saw in these sporadic guest performances to build community and disseminate propaganda encouraged Thermann and Erwin Schriefer, who followed Schröder as chairman of the Labor Front in 1937, to establish a regularly performing local ensemble. When news of Ludwig and Irene Ney's activities in Paraguay reached Argentina, Nazi officials in Buenos Aires contracted them to launch such an enterprise. Ludwig Ney's German Theater, also called the Ney Stage, gave its first performance in Buenos Aires on May 19, 1938.²⁴ By June the small, unseasoned cast was staging variety shows in German neighborhoods throughout the Argentine capital.²⁵ Unlike Paul Walter Jacob, Ney entered an auspicious situation in Argentina. His troupe targeted a large, wealthy, and relatively unified population.²⁶ The Labor Front and Strength through Joy promoted his group in their media arm, the magazine

23. "Kraft durch Freude Veranstaltung," *DiA*, July/August 1935.

24. "Deutsche Kleinkunstbühne Ludwig Ney," *DiA*, June 1938.

25. "Gespräch mit Ludwig Ney," *Teutonia*, September 1938.

26. In *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, Benjamin Bryce makes a compelling case for the existence of distinct and at times conflicting communities among Argentina's German-speaking population between 1880 and 1930, especially according to denominational differences. These are the immigrants who would have become supporters of the German Theater, yet there is no trace of such tensions in sources on Ludwig Ney's theater. One can surmise that the absence is attributable to the diminishing importance of denominational difference among Gentile German speakers, exemplified by stagnate rates of baptism and congregational membership as well as frequent interdenominational marriages. The predominance of Lutherans in most nationalist Pan-German institutions was likely another factor. All sources on the German Theater indicate that its public was unburdened by the conflicts that splintered the antifascist population. Bryce, 147–149.

Der Deutsche in Argentinien. These organizations coordinated events in various districts and subsidized performances so that prices remained accessible to the entire nationalist colony. Strength through Joy sponsored guest performances in provincial cities like Rosario and contracted the Ney Stage to appear at well-attended community events, such as the Oktoberfest festival in Quilmes and the inauguration of the Strength through Joy park at Punta Chica in the capital.²⁷ Passages of the *Deutsche in Argentinien*'s preview for the park, a verdant ludic space for the nationalist population, resembled an advertisement for the German Theater. A section of the park was reserved exclusively for performances by the group, and, as the magazine assured its readers, all seats afforded an unobstructed view of the stage and background.²⁸

Such publicity drew large numbers to the German Theater, enabling it to gain a foothold in the nationalist colony. Thanks to the support of Nazi officialdom, and in stark contrast to the Free German Stage, Ney was not constantly rushed to prepare productions. The German Theater produced an average of seven plays per season, usually with four productions in the capital plus additional performances in Buenos Aires province and beyond.²⁹ This allowed far more time for rehearsals, which was beneficial because some members of Ney's cast were not professional thespians. As a former performing arts instructor and ensemble leader in Germany, Ney was well trained to mentor younger actors. He also had the luxury of holding six rehearsals per week, normally beginning three to four weeks in advance of the premiere.³⁰ Presentations thus reached a high level, an accomplishment reflected in the central role the stage played in the solidarity of the nationalist German

27. "Heute in Rosario," *DLPZ*, October 22, 1938; "Münchener Oktoberfest," *DLPZ*, October 18, 1938; "Unser 'Kraft durch Freude' Park," *DiA*, December 1940.

28. "Unser 'Kraft durch Freude' Park," *DiA*, December 1940.

29. "Deutsches Theater," *DLPZ*, February 28, 1943.

30. "Große Vorbereitungen im Freilichttheater der Ney-Bühne," *DLPZ*, January 28, 1941; Egon Straube, "Ein Schauspieler spricht," in *Die Brücke* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Mercur, 1942); "Schauspielproben," *DiA*, August 1943.

population.³¹ In turn, the support of Nazi officialdom enabled Ludwig Ney to forge a loyal public as he molded his troupe into a polished theater company.

Closing Ranks: Comedies at the German Theater, 1938–1944

For German nationalists in Argentina, theater was inextricably linked to National Socialist visions of German identity, and comedies were no exception. The lighter muse provided cheerful entertainment, which grew increasingly urgent as the war turned against the Axis powers, and buttressed nationalist Germans' identification and enthusiasm for National Socialist doctrine. In its Spanish-language supplement, the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* claimed that for Germans artistic expression was intrinsic to nationhood.³² Thousands of miles removed from its fatherland, the nationalist population's theater displayed unflinching loyalty to Nazi Germany. Ney's productions and writings advocated key tenets of Nazism, including the cult of the leader, military expansionism, and blood and soil ideology.³³ Though his anti-Semitism is less blatant, Ney's diatribes against intellectuals and theater entrepreneurs of the Weimer Republic do appear to target primarily Jews.

In a 1941 essay, Ney posited totalitarianism as an ideal form of government to cultivate the arts. He argued that grand artistic

31. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschum*, 65.

32. "Edición Castellano," *DLPZ*, July 28, 1940.

33. Based on new research, this view revises the position of my dissertation and contradicts Andreas Stuhlmann's statements about Ney in his book, *Vater Courage* (2016), on Reinhold Olszewski's German Chamber Theater in Latin America. My dissertation distanced Ney from Nazism to extent, and Stuhlmann also states that Ney was skeptical toward Nazism and did not disseminate Nazi ideology. This chapter and subsequent sections on Ludwig Ney demonstrate these theses to be false. In private, Ludwig Ney may have held reservations about National Socialism, but in public he actively promoted Hitlerism throughout the Nazi period and beyond. Even decades later, he never abjured these beliefs. Stuhlmann, *Vater Courage*, 151.

accomplishments of Nazi loyalists already should have debunked the view that Hitler's regime hindered artists' creativity, and also claimed that authoritarian governments are particularly adept at fostering the development of young artists. To prove his point, Ney narrated the story of a colleague who opened an acting school for aspiring young thespians in the back room of a friend's restaurant. The studio was humble, but "noble and pure," and eventually its students began to land roles at city stages and garner some repute in the Berlin theater world. Then, suddenly, the restaurant owner decided to move to the distant East Prussian town of Memel. The new owner was not interested in art, so the fledgling studio was left in the lurch. In the Weimar Republic the school would have been lost, Ney claimed, but in Nazi Germany it was saved because there existed a watchful and authoritative Reich Theater Chamber. Cognizant of its value, the Reich Theater Chamber granted the studio use of a small theater, where it staged modest productions of lesser-known authors. By 1941 several in its cast had landed roles in Vienna, Munich, and Königsberg. The moral of the story, Ney concluded, was that artistic will flourished in Nazi Germany because the state could rapidly and decisively deploy resources to identify and fund even the meekest enterprises.³⁴ Backed by the Labor Front and Strength through Joy organizations in both Germany and Argentina, Ney likely saw himself as such a beneficiary. His story may even have been loosely autobiographical. Convinced that National Socialism was a boon to artists at all levels, the German Theater unwaveringly supported the Nazi government's endeavor to create a loyal community of supporters in Argentina.

Ludwig Ney selected comedies exclusively by German playwrights, nearly all of which were frequently presented in Nazi Germany. A major objective during the troupe's first years was to renew among nationalist Germans a transatlantic sense of identity and belonging through dramatic performances. Ney believed that the impulse to participate, either as spectators or as actors, in theatrical productions was intrinsic to the German people, but was

34. "Geschichte einer jungen Schauspielschule," *DiA*, June 1941.

concerned that the many years his public had spent outside of Germany had alienated them from this urge.³⁵ Germans' risk of losing their cultural appetite in Buenos Aires was acute, Ney argued, because there had never been a German-language stage in Buenos Aires. Sporadic guest performances could not fill the void of a permanent local theater. Writing for the *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien* in 1943, Wilhelm Lütge, who had just a few years earlier argued that establishing a permanent theater was impossible,³⁶ reflected on Ney's accomplishment:

The sense of togetherness with the local German stage can only develop gradually. When one considers this difficulty, it is astonishing how much Ney has achieved. Many of our countrymen feel the German Theater is "our" stage and visit its productions out of an inner drive to experience cultural solidarity.³⁷

Ney believed that comedies, especially agrarian-themed pieces with strong links to the German homeland, could nurture the nationalist colony's innate enthusiasm for theater and reinforce its collective ethnic heritage. For nationalist media these plays about rural life in Germany were so evocative of their native landscapes and customs that they referred to them as homeland plays or, in German, *Heimatspiele*. Ney contextualized agrarian comedies in racial ideology, writing that the German farmer's blood of the dramatist August Hinrichs saturated his oeuvre with ethnic inspiration.³⁸ Recalling the National Socialist blood and soil mantra, the bond between German farmers and their land was fundamental to their cultural and racial identity.

Just beyond the city limits of Buenos Aires, the vast natural setting at the Strength through Joy park at Punta Chica enabled the German Theater to recreate the northern German pastoral environments of August Hinrichs's *All for Nothing* (1937) and *When the Rooster Crows* (1933). Reviewers identified Hinrichs's characters

35. "Das Programm unserer Ney-Bühne," *DiA*, January 1941.

36. Keiper, *Der Deutsche in Argentinien*, 29.

37. "Das deutsche Theater in der Spielzeit 1942," *JdVA* (1943).

38. "Die Ney-Bühne spielt 'Alles für Katz,'" *DiA*, April 1940.

as faithful representations of German nationhood, contrasting them with modern city dwellers, who had been alienated from their pure ethnic integrity. Shielded from the corrosive effects of modernity and multiculturalism, the farmers in this drama lived and acted like true Germans from millennia ago: “strong and vivacious, without a trace of decadent refinement.”³⁹ Hinrichs’s figures presented Germans in Buenos Aires with a mirror of cultural purity for them to emulate in their urban, foreign, and potentially contaminating environment. Open-air presentations in Argentina corresponded to popular outdoor theater performances in Nazi Germany, which also often emphasized the benefits of life in the countryside. These events at the Punta Chica park physically removed the audience from the crowded city, where they existed immersed among Argentines, and brought them to a racially insular enclave, sealed off from foreign influences. The *Deutsche in Argentinien* fantasized that the performance would enable spectators to “cross the ocean to our homeland with its vast pastures, where German people live a farmer’s life.”⁴⁰ Nationalist press organs claimed that the theatrical exposition of rural Germany enabled theatergoers to approximate their model countrymen by escaping both city and foreign country alike.

This agenda pertained to audience, performers, and even theater itself. The *Deutsche in Argentinien* posited the events at Punta Chica, which were attended by approximately 2,000 people, as a proving ground for Ney and his cast. Their success in this natural setting demonstrated that the German Theater was composed of true artists capable of creating theater self-sufficiently, not pseudothespian deceivers, who “can only dissemble a dramatic illusion in an artificial, stylized environment of theatrical contrivance.”⁴¹ Ney’s open-air presentations broke with the elaborate theatrics of the Weimar Republic and kept the so-called old colony current with new developments in art across the Atlantic.⁴²

Open-air theater was not only opportune because of the warm summer nights in Buenos Aires. Less than half of Argentina’s

39. “‘Wenn der Hahn kräht,’” *DLPZ*, November 8, 1940.

40. “‘Wenn der Hahn kräht,’” *DiA*, September 1940.

41. “Unser ‘Kraft durch Freude’ Park,” *DiA*, December 1940.

42. Ludwig Ney, “Wachsen und Werden des Deutschen Theaters,” in *Die Brücke* (1942).

estimated 240,000 German speakers resided in the nation's capital. Many were farmers who cultivated land granted to them by the Argentine government in far-flung corners of the country, isolated from German culture. Berlin claimed to prioritize cohesion among geographically disparate German communities, so Strength through Joy funded expeditions by the Ney Stage to German agricultural colonies. Selecting dramas appropriate for such audiences was challenging. Nazi authorities emphasized the utility of theatrical productions to update Germans abroad on sociopolitical changes in the so-called new Germany, but producing contemporary dramas presented numerous obstacles in agricultural settlements. Popular contemporary playwrights like Curt Goetz relied on a familiarity with contemporary urban life that was utterly lacking in the rural interior. Many propagandistic works, such as Hanns Johst's *Schlageter* (1933), demanded infrastructure that made their production in agrarian Argentina impossible.

Hinrichs, on the other hand, was a perfect fit. The German Theater traveled to farming communities remarkably contiguous with the settings of Hinrichs's comedies. The characters, settings, and themes were drawn from much the same milieu as that of German immigrant farmers and required only modest props for performance. Ney and his cast brought essential props and then improvised according to whatever conditions awaited them. In 1940, the group traveled over sixty miles up the Rio Paraná to Brazo Largo, a German farming outpost. When the actors arrived, they found that recent flooding had washed away the facility where they had planned to perform. With no other suitable structure for miles around, the presentation had to be held outdoors. Together, residents and the actors erected a platform for the stage and built benches for the audience. The *Deutsche in Argentinien* reported: "Under the friendly light of petroleum lamps and a full moon an image of our Nordic home emerged on Ipicui Island. . . . This evening provided spectators and actors a wonderful experience of active national community."⁴³ The improvised production of *All for Nothing* in Brazo Largo illuminates how Nazi organizations pitched and concocted theatrical presentations as community-building

43. "'Alles für die Katz' in Brazo Largo," *DiA*, April 1940.

events. The allure of German theater drew settlers from far and wide, and because so many individuals actively collaborated on the project, the endeavor to inculcate them with National Socialist propaganda and consolidate their allegiance to Hitler's nationalist community was likely quite effective. Collaborative, entertaining, and collective, live theater was as compelling a form of propaganda as speeches or party rallies. The German Theater manifested the Nazis' paradoxical fusion of an ethnocentric anti-urban message with a highly modern propaganda machine.

The open-air performances caught the attention of antifascists, who suspected Germany might establish a fifth column in rural Argentina, and perceived the large gatherings of nationalist Germans at Punta Chica as a menace.⁴⁴ Municipal authorities appeared during one production of *When the Rooster Crows*. They insisted on viewing the play, and then interrogated the organizers and the cast. A few days later, the municipality ordered Strength through Joy to close the Punta Chica park. Only after weeks of interviews with local police was the group allowed to reopen its facilities. In consequence, Strength through Joy resolutely declared that the Ney Stage would continue to play a key role in their competition against the antifascist colony in Argentina. Against antifascist pressure the nationalist population defiantly closed ranks around its theater, exacerbating tensions among German emigrant blocs.

Nationalist media discussed the incident at length, complaining bitterly about the cowardly hatred of their enemies, who set heaven and hell in motion to defame ethnic Germans. At the same time as it threatened that its adversaries' actions would not go unpunished, the *Deutsche in Argentinien* and the *La Plata Zeitung* exhorted their readers to show the local population and authorities "that we have nothing to hide, and that we will obey Argentine laws as disciplined and self-aware Germans." Ironically, the nationalist press pledged adherence to Argentine law in the act of declaring themselves to be, first and foremost, Germans. Furthermore, the

44. "Naziotische Umtreibe in Misiones," *AT*, July 7, 1940; "Nazis in Misiones," *AT*, December 12, 1940; "Nazioten Nester in Entre Rios," *AT*, August 4, 1941.

Deutsche in Argentinien concluded that the most imperative reason to comply with local authorities was because the “Führer” had issued this command.⁴⁵ Nationalist Germans submitted to Argentine governance, but the pro-Nazi media stated that devotion to Adolf Hitler—not loyalty to Argentina—compelled them to do so.

Agrarian comedies were popular entertainment, and their portrayals of cultural purity as well as blood and soil ideology also was effective propaganda. Nonetheless, plays about country life were somewhat at odds with the daily reality of many German nationalists in Argentina. The greatest concentration of theatergoers resided in Buenos Aires, a metropolis with roughly 2.5 million inhabitants. They lived in urban surroundings, had professions in an industrializing economy, and generally favored a modern lifestyle. During the first years of World War II, the German Theater attempted to satisfy this audience’s desire for lighthearted, urban-themed fare without compromising its commitment to the National Socialist agenda.⁴⁶ As in Germany, the talk of indispensable cultural standards in the arts section of the *La Plata Zeitung* was ubiquitous and unrelenting. Whether in Europe or South America, these values were a direct extension of National Socialist ideology. The farce, for example, was anathema to Ludwig Ney, who derided the genre and its authors as capitalist speculators who cared nothing for artistic merit and were motivated by box-office profits alone.⁴⁷ His indictment, in this case directed against the popular Jewish playwrights Oscar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelburg, carried anti-Semitic connotations. Ney and his supporters were uncompromising on this issue. From its inception until Ney’s retirement in 1972, the German Theater and its successors never staged a Jewish dramatist.

The troupe did, however, produce contemporary propagandistic comedies, such as Maximilian Böttcher’s *Trouble Backstairs* (1934), which also had been produced as a feature film under the direction of Veit Harlan in 1935. Set in the rear building of a Berlin tenement

45. “Gewollte oder ungewollte Missverständnisse,” *DiA*, December 1940.

46. “An das Publikum,” in *Die Brücke* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Mercur, 1944).

47. “Krach im Hinterhaus,” *DiA*, August 1942.

house, Böttcher's play features a middle-aged widow whose own daughter unintentionally incriminates her in the theft of a cockle stove. Widow Bock then launches her own investigation and uncovers the true culprit of the crime. A light romantic comedy, *Trouble Backstairs* also upholds National Socialist institutions and policies. Böttcher's Nazi police, lawyers, and judges prove themselves capable and just by granting Bock probation while simultaneously laying a trap for the actual thief, the miserly caretaker. The play ends with a marriage between a mailman's daughter and a young attorney, which the *La Plata Zeitung* identified as representative of the social balance that National Socialism had achieved among different economic classes in the new Germany. Exalting the author as an advocate for the people, the reviewer authenticated the inhabitants of Böttcher's crowded Berlin tenement as emblematic of the German proletariat—rough and prickly outside, but inside honorable and determined.⁴⁸ The paper linked the resolve and vitality of Böttcher's figures with the nationalist colony, noting that the German Theater's Tilde Jahn played the leading role despite having broken her foot just days before the premiere. Except for the caretaker, the *Deutsche in Argentinien* observed, there were no villains in the piece; instead all conflict stemmed from cramped living conditions and insufficient "lebensraum."⁴⁹ The production of Böttcher's *Trouble Backstairs* by the Ney Stage reflected its strategic implementation of the comic genre. The humorous banter and cheerful plot amused audiences, while reviewers emphasized the egalitarian social and justice systems as achievements of Nazi social policy; reinforced Nazi visions of the innate virtues of the German people, exemplified both performatively and phenomenally by Tilde Jahn in the role of Widow Bock; and justified Germany's bellicose, expansionist foreign policy by identifying insufficient living space as the underlying cause of all strife in the play.⁵⁰

In the first years of World War II both agrarian and urban comedies played a key role in establishing Ludwig Ney's German Theater as a conduit for Nazi propaganda and a nexus

48. "Krach im Hinterhaus," *DLPZ*, August 13, 1942.

49. "Krach im Hinterhaus," *DiA*, August 1942.

50. "Krach im Hinterhaus," *DLPZ*, August 13, 1942.

for German nationalists throughout Argentina. Antifascists retaliated against its success, which provoked nationalists to rally around their theater and agitate against their perceived enemies. As its public grew, the German chargé d'affaires in Buenos Aires, Erich Otto Meynen, lauded the German Theater as the "cultural backbone of the German colony," which, he continued, "is of utmost importance for our community life and cohesion."⁵¹ To an extent the success of the German Theater is measurable in ticket prices. Initially quite accessible or even free, by 1943 admission cost from 10 to 22.50 pesos. This was not cheap, considering that wages at the Free German Stage were 120 pesos monthly. Despite the rising cost, high demand for the 1943 winter season forced Ney to move from the 750-seat Politeama Theater into a much larger venue, the National Theater (Teatro El Nacional), which had capacity for 1,150 spectators and was located steps away from Buenos Aires's trademark Obelisk, ground zero of the republic of Argentina.⁵²

Unlike the splintered factions of the refugee population, during World War II the nationalist population generally adhered to a single, coherent set of cultural values and political objectives. While it is possible that there was dissension behind the scenes, whatever tensions might have existed within the colony never degenerated into public altercations. Capitalizing on this accord, the German Theater augmented camaraderie among nationalists by performing dramas that upheld a unified, clearly defined cultural, artistic, and political platform. Its efficacy as a community-building institution during the first five years of its existence built a durable base of support for the tougher times that came when the war turned against Germany.

Laughter and Loyalty: Comedies from 1943 to 1944

In his introduction to the 1940 *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien*, Wilhelm Lütge worried about the potential

51. "Geleitwort," in *Die Brücke* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Mercur, 1943).

52. "Deutsches Theater," *DLPZ*, March 4, 1943.

ramifications of a protracted conflict for Germans in Argentina.⁵³ His concerns were well founded, because as the war dragged on Argentine society grew increasingly inimical toward nationalist Germans. Although the national government continued to sympathize with fascism, the trajectory of the fighting emboldened antifascists. By 1943, anti-Nazi media organs in Buenos Aires were attacking local German institutions daily. Legislative action against fascist organizations gained traction in municipal and national governments,⁵⁴ and the likelihood that Argentina ultimately would yield to Allied demands for “hemispheric solidarity” increased.⁵⁵ Precedents in neighboring Brazil and Paraguay portended grave consequences for local Germans, and, indeed, when Argentina did break off diplomatic relations under immense pressure from Britain and the United States in October 1944, its government banned pro-Nazi media, seized properties, and closed German businesses, cultural centers, and schools. Many institutions did not reopen until years later, and some properties never were returned.

As the Allied offensive gained in lethality, Germans in Argentina feared for their livelihoods and for the lives of friends and family in Europe. A “Letter from Home,” reprinted in the *Deutsche in Argentinien* in 1943, recounted the bombings of Hamburg:

We were sitting in the air-raid shelter when the bombs hit. . . . Violent explosions, wood, glass, and stone shards flew around our ears, the air pressure compressed us and lime and mortar dust covered our faces. We hurried outside. Appalling images of destruction awaited us. . . . We unearthed a grandfather with his little granddaughter from the ruins, the grandmother was dead, the mother was badly wounded. . . . We found a second wounded mother nearby, her two little girls dead. . . . It was horrible.⁵⁶

Under extreme duress, the nationalist German colony sought refuge in its theater. Although they were on opposite sides of the

53. “Zum Geleit,” *JdVA* (1941).

54. The executive branch of the national government remained profascist; however, the lower congressional chamber’s special Investigative Commission of Anti-Argentine Activities represented the momentum behind antifascism.

55. Newton, “*Nazi Menace*,” 217.

56. “Brief aus der Heimat,” *DiA*, June 1943.

fighting, the Free German Stage and the German Theater adopted parallel approaches to attract and soothe audiences in times of crisis. As the news from Europe worsened, comedies came to comprise a large proportion of presentations at both stages. In 1944, reflecting upon the changing mood of the German Theater's public, Ludwig Ney explained that a "thoughtful tenderness" for theatergoers shaped the stage's repertoire.⁵⁷ As director, he had to intuit what genres and themes would satisfy his audience's psychological and emotional needs. Closely and inadvertently echoing Paul Walter Jacob's open letters to the citizenry of Wuppertal in 1932, Ney believed spectators visited the theater in search of reassurance and respite from an everyday suffused with fear, dismay, and doubt.⁵⁸ As he saw it, his challenge was to fulfill this role while affirming Hitlerism. During its final two years of performances, comedies at the German Theater served a three-pronged agenda: to fortify nationalist Germans with mirth and cheer during the grim final years of World War II; to reassure the theater's beleaguered public that its allegiance to National Socialist ideology was worthwhile; and to preserve nationalist German unity against escalating pressures that threatened dissension and atomization.

Plenty of dramas suitable for these goals existed in Germany, but as the war expanded it became nearly impossible in Argentina to obtain printed material from Germany, including current dramas.⁵⁹ The shortage complicated the German Theater's endeavor to satisfy demands for lighter fare without compromising Nazi cultural standards, so older works had to be refashioned to meet the exigencies of a time and public very different from those for which they originally had been intended. To render them fit for performance, Ludwig Ney and the nationalist press were compelled to transform such dramas altogether.

Presented in November 1943, Otto Ernst Schmidt's *Master Flachsmann* (1901) is an apt example. When it had premiered over forty years earlier, Schmidt's contemporaries understood the drama

57. "Was will das deutsche Publikum vom Deutschen Theater?," *JdVA* (1944).

58. "Was will das deutsche Publikum vom Deutschen Theater?," *JdVA* (1944).

59. "Zum Geleit," *JdVA* (1943).

as an indictment of the German education system. In *Flachsmann*, Schmidt criticizes the authoritarian atmosphere at a small, provincial school through his scathing portrayal of its despotic schoolmaster, Johann Flachsmann. He enforces absolute discipline at the institution, visually represented by an enormous poster of school rules that hangs above his desk. Given to dictatorial sayings, Flachsmann commands a militaristic conformity among students. As one faculty member remarks, the schoolmaster is determined to convert his school into a “military boot camp.”⁶⁰ In 1943 in Buenos Aires allies and foes alike could easily construe such lines as critical of National Socialist educational institutions; indeed just a few years earlier the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* had used nearly identical language when it branded the coordinated Humboldt School a “Nazi boot camp.”⁶¹ The playwright’s repeated acclamatory references to the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi were even more problematic. Schmidt’s protagonist, Jan Flemming, acclaims Pestalozzi as an estimable, even saintly educator. Essentially, the plot is encapsulated in a pair of stage props: the clash between the schoolmaster’s poster of rules and the portrait of Pestalozzi that hangs in Flemming’s classroom. In Buenos Aires the Pestalozzi School, founded by a group of antifascists spearheaded by the owner of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, Ernesto Alemann, stood as a vehemently antifascist bulwark against dozens of Nazi-fied German-language educational institutions.⁶² Such glorification of the Swiss pedagogue was anathema to Nazi authorities. Indeed, Schmidt’s play aligned with the political position of the anti-Nazi Free German Stage—not the nationalist German Theater.

Ney’s troupe could not stage *Flachsmann* without major revisions. The drama was especially problematic on the eve of the 100th anniversary of German schools in Argentina, which antifascist media exploited to attack these institutions.⁶³ Before the

60. Otto Ernst Schmidt, *Flachsmann als Erzieher* (Leipzig: L. Staackmann, 1901).

61. “Die Humboldtschule eine naziotische Drillanstalt,” *AT*, June 4, 1938.

62. Thermann to FO, April 18, 1934; Thermann to FO, May 10, 1934, PSA.

63. “Hundert Jahre deutsches Schulwesen,” *DLPZ*, November 21, 1943.

premiere, the *La Plata Zeitung* preempted deviant interpretations by restricting the drama's call for reform to its turn-of-the-century setting. Its preview argued that today, in the new Germany, the school system was a model for education worldwide.⁶⁴ Instead, the paper amended *Flachsmann*, defining the play's central message as censure of an older generation that impeded the education system's progression to its current state under Nazism. Additionally, Schmidt's drama should propel further consolidation of National Socialist pedagogy in Argentina. The performance confirmed these revisions. The cast and community designed period costumes and stage props as visual markers that temporally compartmentalized the play to preclude unintended interpretations.⁶⁵ Ney removed Pestalozzi's portrait and erased the Swiss educator from the script, and also achieved welcome touches of heartwarming humor with his revisions.⁶⁶ The nationalist German press and the German Theater recast *Master Flachsmann* as a cheerful celebration of the Nazification of German schools in Argentina.

The case of *Flachsmann* was not singular. Emil Rosenow, a playwright, Social Democrat, and member of the German parliament, also was conscripted to further fascism on the River Plate. A satire about incompetent officialdom and the hardships of peasant life in rural Germany, Rosenow's naturalist milieu comedy, *Lampe, the Cat* (1902), seems a surprise selection for a theater funded by Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda. Rosenow's play turns on the confiscation of a cat belonging to a poor wood-carving apprentice, Neumark, after it damages some furs belonging to a wealthy factory owner. Neumark eventually raises the money necessary to regain possession of his cat, but in the meantime Seifert, the impoverished village constable, has already slaughtered the animal and eaten it. Seifert is forced to confess when Neumark arrives with money, but he goes unpunished because his superior officer, who also had partaken in the meal, is assigned to lead the investigation. At times an endearing portrayal of village life in the Ore Mountains

64. "Deutsches Theater," *DLPZ*, November 11, 1943.

65. Albert Haigis, "Das Deutsche Theater—und wir," in *Die Brücke* (1944).

66. "Deutsches Theater," *DLPZ*, November 12, 1943.

and a comical satire of inept local officials, *Lampe* concludes with a laugh at the expense of the factory owner, who will not be compensated for damages to his property by the cat. Yet, drama cannot escape its somber undertones. The curtain falls without hope for change in the poverty-stricken village—corrupt politicians remain in power, civil servants continue to earn miserable wages, and the village laborers are doomed to further exploitation by the wealthy factory owner. The choice of *Lampe* is doubly perplexing because, like his compatriots in Germany, Ludwig Ney regarded naturalism as an abomination to National Socialist aesthetics. Writing for the German Theater's yearly almanac, *Die Brücke*, Ney disparaged naturalism as the attempt to reduce the stage to a "psychological bullring," a degrading experiment that had threatened to destroy theater altogether.⁶⁷

The unsuitability of its naturalist aesthetics, grim outlook, and trenchant social criticism raise the question of why *Lampe, the Cat* was chosen for presentation at all. First, in 1936 Veit Harlan had reworked the play into a feature film, in which Aryan villagers rebel against the oppressive factory owner, who now is Jewish. Harlan also lightened the narrative by adding a romantic subplot. While Harlan's propagandistic vision stifled the play's Social Democratic message, in Argentina his film went unmentioned, probably because the German Theater desired a different effect. The chronological discrepancy between Rosenow's play, Harlan's film, and the German Theater's performances had created a double or even triple time register. Midway through 1943, both Rosenow's socialism and, to an extent, Harlan's anti-Semitic crusade were outdated for National Socialist propaganda, which by this time prioritized the war effort. Ney probably chose *Lampe* because the lack of current dramas from Nazi Germany in Argentina forced him to improvise. Instead of Harlan's defiance, Ney purveyed carefree humor and patriotic visions of the German homeland. His theater transformed Rosenow's work into a quaint homeland play. Although both the original drama and Harlan's film call for an austere setting of squalid huts, Ney created scenery designed to evoke idealized

67. Ludwig Ney, "Theater," in *Die Brücke* (1943).

memories of a German winter wonderland. The *La Plata Zeitung* instructed theatergoers to expect a fairytale landscape, replete with snow-covered houses, snowmen, and the holiday charm “that we all love at home.” Ney even added a live brass band to the merry *mise-en-scène*. Rosenow’s scenery might have reminded many emigrants why they had left Germany in the first place, but Ney’s version, ironically, sought to transport them back to the Europe they had left behind: “The audience should forget that it is sitting in a theater in Buenos Aires. We should bridge the distance and feel as if we are far away at home.”⁶⁸ Nationalist media praised the inventive stage design and the thorough revisions to the drama’s text, which muted the exaggerated burden of social problems in favor of humorous, lighthearted dialogue.⁶⁹ This was logical, reviewers argued, because the National Socialist revolution had overcome the problems of Rosenow’s time. Ney’s group retouched the dreary German hinterland, its impoverished inhabitants, and the bleak outlook of Rosenow’s *Lampe, the Cat* to metamorphose the tententious drama into a “cozy homeland play,” supplanting social criticism with a buoyant sense of nostalgia and patriotic cheer.⁷⁰

Not all older comedies required such thorough revisions. In April 1944, the German Theater put on Leo Walther Stein and Rudolf Presber’s *Liselotte of the Palatinate* (1921) to sold-out audiences at the grand National Theater.⁷¹ Stein and Presber drew from Liselotte’s correspondence to depict her life in France at the court of Louis XIV. As the Duke of Orleans’s wife, she was for many decades second in rank only to the queen. Liselotte’s political marriage obliged her to spend her adult life in France; however, she remained staunchly loyal to the traditions and values of her native Palatinate and expressed disdain for courtiers who treated her like a Frenchwoman.⁷² Such sentiments resonated with nationalists, some of whom identified themselves as Germans and held

68. “Deutsches Theater,” *DLPZ*, June 4, 1943.

69. “‘Kater Lampe,’” *DiA*, July 1943.

70. “‘Kater Lampe,’” *DiA*, July 1943.

71. Carl Froelich remade the drama into a feature film in 1935, but the media coverage did not discuss it.

72. Kroll, *Letters from Liselotte*, 243.

fast to German customs even after residing in Argentina for many years. Liselotte also persisted in writing in German, the language of over two-thirds of her correspondence.⁷³ The nationalist population likewise preserved their sacrosanct native tongue by establishing German-language media, schools, and cultural institutions.⁷⁴

As exemplified by her own marriage, the French aristocracy functioned as a foil that accentuated Liselotte's Germanness. Whereas her husband, Phillip of Orleans, was a sickly spendthrift who loathed the outdoors, Liselotte was healthy, robust, and economical, and enjoyed nature. In her letters, health emerged as a strategy of not only resistance and survival, but also of identity formation: illness signified the decadent and corrupt French court, health the morally pure Germany. Depicting herself as a robust German, Liselotte maintained her national identity and individuality in an environment that was based on self-renunciation for the sake of the crown.⁷⁵ In this respect she matched the self-fashioned image of nationalist Germans in Argentina, whose institutions promoted outdoor activities to preserve the fundamentally German qualities of health and vivacity. The German Theater's agrarian comedies and guest performances in rural German settlements also represented the enthusiasm for nature and active, pioneering spirit that the German press traced to Liselotte of the Palatinate.⁷⁶

Though centuries and oceans apart, Liselotte and nationalist Germans shared positions constitutive of exile—all were caught between isolation from their homeland and assimilation to the new, host society.⁷⁷ Cheerful in Germany, Liselotte believed that the homesickness she suffered in France was turning her into a melancholic. Her depression worsened when the king launched an invasion of her native Palatinate, in 1688, and led to her steady withdrawal from the French court to the private, intimate, and

73. Dirk Van der Cruysse, "Madame seyn ist ein ellendes Handwerk," 15.

74. Irene Ney, "Sprachbildungsarbeit," in *Die Brücke* (1943).

75. Baumgartner, "Illness and Health as Strategies of Resistance and Identity Formation in the Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz," 58.

76. "'Liselotte von der Pfalz,'" *DLPZ*, April 13, 1944.

77. Strelka, *Exilliteratur*.

German world of her letters.⁷⁸ Nationalists in Argentina shared this strategy—the epistolary form was often their closest, most meaningful contact with their homeland. Local media also featured letters from home that, as the war endured, echoed publicly the desperate tone in Liselotte's letters about the devastation of the Palatinate. Reviews of the German Theater's performance reinforced the deep historical roots of German nationalism in a hostile foreign environment: "A clenched German rage emanated from the stage and penetrated the auditorium. The audience felt as if they, too, were defending this Germany that had always been threatened by a thousand demons."⁷⁹ In *Liselotte of the Palatinate* theatergoers embraced an emotive, transatlantic bond of mutual, unflinching allegiance to their embattled German homeland.

Marginalized at the French royal court, in her nonfictional letters Liselotte was distraught about her inability to prevent a decade of bloodshed in the Palatinate during the War of the Grand Alliance from 1688 to 1697.⁸⁰ In the German Theater's presentation, however, she overcame the animosity of the French aristocracy and ultimately gained great power and influence.⁸¹ Although the *La Plata Zeitung* credited her for arranging for her son's ascension to power after Louis XIV's death, most studies cite the Parliament of Paris as the determinant voice in the decision. Furthermore, Liselotte's son, Philippe of Chartres, did not become regent until 1715, and even then Liselotte continued complaining to her correspondents about her life in France. Nonetheless, the *La Plata Zeitung* explicitly declared that the drama seemed to reference the immediate present and posited its heroine as a model German for its readers to emulate.⁸² The production of *Liselotte of the Palatinate* manifested the discursive and subjective power of performing history. Instead of relying on historical documents, this live event depended primarily on the director and his ensemble to convince

78. Baumgartner, "Illness and Health," 58.

79. "Liselotte von der Pfalz," *DLPZ*, April 14, 1944.

80. Baumgartner, "Illness and Health," 71.

81. "Liselotte von der Pfalz," *DLPZ*, April 14, 1944.

82. "Liselotte von der Pfalz," *DLPZ*, April 14, 1944.

spectators that the actual historical past had been presented on the stage. Transformed into what Freddie Rokem has called “hyper-historians,” the actors functioned as witnesses of the events vis-à-vis the audience, regardless of the historical veracity of the parts they played and the story they told.⁸³ This transformation enabled a reimagination of German memory concordant with the present-day exigencies of German supporters of Nazism in 1944 Buenos Aires. By inventing Liselotte’s success and then attributing it to her perseverance, the German Theater and nationalist press legitimized theatergoers’ loyalty to Nazi Germany and implied that they, like Liselotte, would prove triumphant.

From the inauguration of the German Theater in 1938 until Argentina broke off diplomatic relations with Germany in late 1944, comedies played an integral role in the stage’s success as a National Socialist community-building institution. Performances of folkloric agrarian comedies in the early 1940s united emigrants throughout Argentina by evoking patriotic nostalgia for their German homeland. Later, in 1943 and 1944, as the war effort grew increasingly hopeless, Ludwig Ney’s company approximated the antifascist Free German Stage through its preference for the lighter muse to attract, entertain, and fortify audiences undergoing existential crises in a time of war. The German Theater’s productions of comedies harnessed the theatrical energies of performing history to sow mirth among audiences, encourage fealty to National Socialist dogma, and sustain unity within the nationalist German colony. Together, Ney’s German Theater and the pro-Nazi press implemented propagandistic interpretive strategies, altered dramatic content, and depicted a revisionist account of historical events to achieve these goals.

Conscripting the Classics (Goethe, Schiller, Lessing)

From 1940 to 1943, the German classics comprised the core of the German Theater’s repertoire. This program corresponded to the

83. Rokem, *Performing History*, 25.

agenda of Reich dramatist Rainer Schlösser, head of the Reich Theater Chamber and chief theater censor, who in 1935 announced that the primary function of his office was to champion and elevate the German classics.⁸⁴ Ludwig Ney's troupe abided by this policy, and, as the director noted in 1943, the works of Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing consistently were its best attended and most deeply resonating performances.⁸⁵ Unlike the Free German Stage, Ney could count on patronage from government institutions and did not need to issue an ultimatum about the consequences of poor attendance. Instead he prepared theatergoers for upcoming presentations by endeavoring to make literary dramas accessible to them. In an essay entitled "Fear of Art," Ney promised working-class nationalists that nobody was ostracized from the "Reich" of art and education.⁸⁶ Artists were fully integrated with other sectors of the workforce; all labored together for National Socialist ideals. The only group prohibited from Ney's collective were pompous elites who did not share the work ethic incumbent on members of this community, including artists. The classics were not an impenetrable morass of antiquated language and arcane allusions, but conveyed timeless values of practical utility for all productive citizens. The German Theater emphasized inclusion. Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing were agents of community building, and the entire nationalist population, regardless of social class and education, could enjoy the German classics and benefit from them.

In previews of Goethe's *Faust I* (1808) in March 1942, Ney conceded that this famously complex drama risked intimidating theatergoers and sought to reassure them. Perversely, he contended that *Faust* was an inclusive drama by excluding certain groups from Goethe's purview. Writing in a populist tone, Ney invoked Karl Moor from Schiller's *The Robbers* (1781)—"I am disgusted with this age of puny scribblers"—to condemn intellectuals of the Weimar Republic for sapping the work of its vivacity. Scholars during the so-called time of the system (*Systemzeit*) had seized *Faust*

84. Schlösser, *Das Volk und seine Bühne*, 27.

85. "Was will das deutsche Publikum vom Deutschen Theater," *JdVA* (1944).

86. Ludwig Ney, "Angst vor der Kunst," in *Die Brücke* (1944).

from its rightful audience by disseminating the falsehood that only an elitist intellectual cabal could understand it. In the weeks before the premiere, Ney asserted that in fact it was the Jewish intelligentsia who were incapable of grasping Goethe's "thoroughly German" masterpiece.⁸⁷

The conservative actress Louise Dumont-Lindemann, for example, claimed in 1932 that because all art is an expression of its creator's ethnicity, only an artist's own people can arrive at a genuine understanding of his work.⁸⁸ Echoing Dumont-Lindemann, Ludwig Ney argued that access to the drama's true meaning is a matter of nationhood, not intellect, because Germans' bonds of Aryan blood with Goethe enabled them to understand the poet intuitively.⁸⁹ Ney's references to Nazi racial doctrine aligned with National Socialist interpretations of *Faust*. Franz Koch, author of the infamous *Goethe and the Jews* (1937), asserted that *Faust* and Faustian striving were symbolic of the Germanic race.⁹⁰ Hans Severus Ziegler, general director of the German National Theater in Weimar, theorized that Mephisto's comment "Blood is a very special juice" represented a basic truth undergirded by new scientific research in eugenics.⁹¹ The Nazis mobilized well-known excerpts from *Faust* as ideological slogans and catchphrases. The *La Plata Zeitung* ratified the drama as a cultural birthright shared by all Germans, maintaining that such familiarity represented German ownership of the work.⁹² Cultural fluency and inherent German traits, such as courage, sacrifice, and the primal German urge "to know what the world contains in its innermost heart," enabled

87. "Gedanken zur 'Faust'-Aufführung durch das Deutsche Theater, Buenos Aires," *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942.

88. Dumont-Lindemann, *Vermächtnisse*, 111.

89. "Gedanken zur 'Faust'-Aufführung," *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942.

90. Franz Koch, *Geschichte deutscher Dichtung*, cited in Thomas Zabka, "Vom 'deutschen Mythos' zum 'Kriegshilfsdienst': *Faust*-Aneignungen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland," in Möbus, Schmidt-Möbus, and Unverfehrt, *Faust*, 315.

91. In Zabka, "Vom 'deutschen Mythos' zum 'Kriegshilfsdienst,'" 316.

92. "Warum spielt das Deutsche Theater Buenos Aires 'Faust?'," *DLPZ*, March 12, 1942.

them to comprehend Faust through “empathy” and “emulation.”⁹³ Declaring that Goethe wanted to be understood in this spirit, Ludwig Ney cited the poet’s instructions to Eckermann that his works should not only be studied intellectually, but also performed physically in a phenomenal sense.⁹⁴

For Ney, the individualism of intellectual analysis was antithetical to spectators’ emotional, even physical, participation in theatrical performances. Only this latter “theater community” could grasp key scenes in the drama, such as Gretchen’s perdition.⁹⁵ The erudite but phlegmatic literati of the Weimar Republic made the futile attempt to understand the final scene of *Faust I* materialistically; however, in 1942 audiences sensed the drama’s integral meaning viscerally via the conduit of their National Socialist worldview.⁹⁶ Like Georg Schott, who identified Hitler as the incarnation of the archetypal Faustian leader,⁹⁷ Ney exculpated Faust any misdeeds in his effort to fulfill his “transcendent idea.”⁹⁸ Anticipating the perspective of Nazi literary scholars such as Paul Husfeldt, Ney wrote that Gretchen was a heroine compelled to sacrifice herself so Faust could achieve larger goals, including the creation of a new Reich.⁹⁹ Gretchen’s perdition exposed the provocative connection between Nazi visions of community and their dependency on sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ Ney exploited this connection to elaborate a strategic interpretation of *Faust* that collectivized his constituency as racially privileged viewers entitled to the drama’s fundamental truths. *Faust* was the exclusive domain of the nationalist German colony, favored by race, nationhood, and allegiance to Hitler.

93. “Gedanken zur ‘Faust’-Aufführung,” *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942.

94. “Warum spielt das Deutsche Theater Buenos Aires ‘Faust’?,” *DLPZ*, March 12, 1942.

95. “Publikum, aktiv!,” *DiA*, August 1942.

96. “Gedanken zur ‘Faust’-Aufführung,” *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942.

97. Schott, *Goethes Faust in heutiger Schau*, 319.

98. “Gedanken zur ‘Faust’-Aufführung,” *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942.

99. “Gedanken zur ‘Faust’-Aufführung,” *DLPZ*, March 8, 1942; Paul Husfeldt, “Schuld und Tragik in Goethes *Faust*,” *Dichtung und Volkstum* 44 (1944): 19–52.

100. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 121.

Paralleling reception of the work in Nazi Germany, the local press conscripted *Faust* into the war effort. As testimony to the drama's role as an inspirational linchpin in the unified German will to victory, Ludwig Ney cited the thousands of German soldiers who had attended presentations of *Faust* while on furlough.¹⁰¹ In Buenos Aires, the German Theater depended on an enthusiastic, active audience to achieve the essence of the drama's Faustian, and thus German, spirit—the "Sieg."¹⁰² Innate to all participants in the presentation, their transatlantic will to victory linked nationalist German theatergoers and thespians to their ancestral heritage as well as to fellow members of Hitler's national community in Europe. Reviews of the sold-out performances endorsed Ney's tactics.¹⁰³ According to the *La Plata Zeitung* the production riveted the entire audience, who all embodied this new "Reich" of the German spirit.¹⁰⁴

The nationalist German media's treatment of *Faust* consistently affirmed propagandistic interpretations of the drama. This is noteworthy because reception of Goethe and *Faust* in Nazi Germany was diverse. Some scholars remained true to the humanism of Weimar classicism well after 1933.¹⁰⁵ Max Kommerell's remark that Goethe was infinitely interpretable indicated the myriad of approaches to *Faust* that existed in Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁶ Beholden to government funding, the German Theater, *Der Deutsche in Argentinien*, and the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* showed no nuance, not even in the instance of *Faust*. Instead they consistently sided with ideologues such as Franz Koch and Paul Husfeldt, who were zealous proponents of Nazi dogma.

The German Theater also undertook to substantiate the classics as common cultural currency by integrating them with daily life in the German colony. Although most would never become personally acquainted, the Ney Stage attempted to inculcate the image of a close-knit, cohesive national community into the mind of each

101. "Zur 'Faust'-Aufführung des Deutschen Theaters," *DLPZ*, March 17, 1942.

102. "Publikum, aktiv!," *DiA*, August 1942.

103. "Goethes 'Faust,'" *DLPZ*, March 29, 1942.

104. "Die zweite 'Faust'-Aufführung," *DLPZ*, March 24, 1942.

105. Mandelkov, *Goethe in Deutschland*, 2:88–89.

106. In Zabka, "Vom 'deutschen Mythos' zum 'Kriegshilfsdienst,'" 323.

individual theatergoer. In anticipation of Goethe's *Götz of Berlichingen* (1773), a reporter for the *Deutsche in Argentinien* followed Ney as he prepared for the upcoming premiere. Ney's errands to a German-owned café, bookseller, clothing shop, and beauty salon in the German barrio of Belgrano juxtaposed the medieval world of Goethe's Knight of the Iron Hand to everyday scenes from contemporary German Buenos Aires. The first stop was Pedro Wörns's general store, where the proprietor was rehearsing for a battle scene. Dressed in a full suit of armor and wielding a heavy sword, he challenged Ney to a duel in the back room of his shop. After numerous encounters in the same vein, the journalist joked that the actors seemed so utterly immersed in Götz's medieval world that he would not be surprised if one of them were to say in a café: "‘Upon my oath, waiter, an espresso.’ Hopefully out of a sense of decorum he will refrain from adding the most famous quote from *Götz*."¹⁰⁷ Narrated in Belgrano German, a linguistic hybrid of High German and local Argentine Spanish, the joke embedded Goethe's eighteenth-century drama in a cultural context at once familiar and unique to Germans in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, Ney was on a first-name basis with everyone he met, and the involvement of so many local businesses in the preparations for *Götz* produced the sensation that the entire nationalist population had a hand in the upcoming production. Such previews bolstered efforts at community building, provided comic relief, and brought the disparate worlds of the German classics and 1940s Buenos Aires closer together. These tactics of constructing community through intercultural identity markers resembled reception of the Free German Stage's presentation of *Charley's Aunt*. Although the pro-Nazi *Deutsche in Argentinien* and the Zionist *Jüdische Wochenschau* occupied diametrically opposing ends of the political spectrum, each publication utilized a similar approach of cross-cultural humor to convince its emigrant readership that the German Theater or the Free German Stage, respectively, truly was *their* local stage. Viewed through the lens of emigration, even Nazis and Zionists approximated each other to an extent.

107. "Rund um das 'Götz'-Festspiel," *DiA*, June 1940.



Figure 6. Poster previewing the German Theater's performance of Goethe's *Götz of Berlichingen* on June 17, 1940.

Source: *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*, June 16, 1940. Biblioteca Nacional Doctor Mariano Moreno—Argentina.

By positioning the classics as a German cultural cornerstone and emphasizing their value to all German nationalists in Argentina, Ney and the local press dovetailed with Julius Petersen, president of the German Goethe Society (1926–38) and chair of the German

Department at Frederick William University in Berlin (1933–41). One of the most influential Germanists of his generation, through his scholarship Petersen contributed significantly to the coordination of his discipline with Nazi ideology.¹⁰⁸ Petersen envisioned that a genuine national theater would arise from the consecration of the German classics as “sacred public property” of all Germans. Therefore, Petersen exhorted directors to overcome the opposition between the common people and academics as well as to fuse entertainment with education.¹⁰⁹ The *Deutsche in Argentinien*’s preview encouraged nationalist emigrants to regard *Götz of Berlichingen*



Figure 7. Audience at the German Theater’s performance of *Götz of Berlichingen*.

Source: *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*, June 19, 1940. Biblioteca Nacional Doctor Mariano Moreno—Argentina.

108. Petersen, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Dritten Reich in deutscher Sage und Dichtung*.

109. Julius Petersen, *Das deutsche Nationaltheater: Fünf Vorträge, gehalten im Februar und März 1917 im Freien Deutschen Hochstift zu Frankfurt a.M.* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1917), cited in Biccari, “Zuflucht des Geistes”?, 87.

as familiar, approachable, and even funny. Postulating Goethe's drama as popular entertainment, the *Deutsche in Argentinien* and the *La Plata Zeitung* campaigned to draw a broad swath of their readership to the German Theater's performances.¹¹⁰ The *La Plata Zeitung* voiced this goal in its review of *Götz*, reporting that Ney's cast had brought together German emigrants in a sublime hour: "This loyal commitment to *Götz* will long be an ideal sign of German unity in Buenos Aires."¹¹¹ The premiere, attended by 1,450 spectators, bore cogent witness to the German Theater's efficacy as a community-building institution not for all Germans as the *La Plata Zeitung* attested, but exclusively for the pro-Nazi German colony.

As the theater's popularity grew, the nationalist press familiarized its audience with its work as an ensemble.¹¹² These accounts stressed that the troupe's achievements were attributable to the actors' cohesion and work ethic. Drivers passing the Punta Chica park could see the intensity of rehearsals, the *La Plata Zeitung* observed, by the stage lighting, which still shined through the trees at 11 p.m.¹¹³ Ney's blend of amateur and professional thespians concurred that the long hours were welcome, because they saw this work as the focal point of their personal and, often, professional interests. Actor Werner Loewer remembered how, in the first years of the enterprise's existence, its members had to create many of their own decorations, stage props, and costumes, and then travel with their bulky cargo to play at rudimentary facilities in rural villages.¹¹⁴ While the public expressed gratitude and astonishment at such tenacity, Loewer felt that these challenges created a feeling of brotherhood in the enterprise. Deploying National Socialist rhetoric, Loewer described how during these journeys up rivers, across

110. "Klassiker als Unterhaltungsliteratur," *DLPZ*, January 14, 1941.

111. "Deutsches Theater," *DLPZ*, June 19, 1940.

112. "Aus der Welt des Schauspielers," *DiA*, November 1943; "Schauspielproben," *DiA*, August 1943; "Die Vision eines Schauspielers," *DiA*, October 1943.

113. "Große Vorbereitungen im Freilichttheater der Ney-Bühne," *DLPZ*, January 28, 1941.

114. Werner Loewer, "Das Deutsche Theater vom Schauspieler aus gesehen," in *Die Brücke* (1943).

the pampas, and through rain forest, the German Theater became their spiritual home. Individuals who did not embrace the imperative of collective sacrifice were quickly removed by Ney, “the führer of our fellowship.” According to Loewer an egalitarian spirit reigned among the thespians, all of whom obeyed their director unquestioningly, confident that he would lead them to the fulfillment of the group’s artistic mission.¹¹⁵ Previewing the 1943 production of Schiller’s *Robbers*, the *La Plata Zeitung* emphasized Ludwig Ney’s role as an inspirational leader, who demanded dedication, humility, and selflessness from his cast. All actors were devoted to the realization of Hitler’s cultural project, “to bring Germany’s great minds closer to its people.”¹¹⁶ In a few years, the German Theater developed from a modest variety stage to a polished ensemble that staged Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, and Hebbel for thousands of spectators at the National Theater. Based on the fascist concept of the leader cult, the press showcased the troupe’s commitment to discipline, sacrifice, and a rigid, hierarchical authority structure as a model for the nationalist German population.

Traditional approaches to onstage movement, speech, and gesture, such as Goethe’s “Rules for Actors” (1803), stress repetition and consistency to set firm guidelines for each role.¹¹⁷ As the actor Egon Straube explained, Ney’s rehearsals established precepts for the minutiae of each scene to attain maximum coherency and prevent any awkward movement from distracting the audience’s attention.¹¹⁸ This conservative methodology spurned so-called transgressive forms of modern theater, in which actors’ performances evaded conventional, standardized, and formalized movements, gestures, postures, or attitudes. In contrast to Max Reinhardt, Leopold Jessner, and other prominent directors of the Weimar Republic, improvisation was anathema to Ludwig Ney,

115. “Deutsches Theater,” *DLPZ*, August 1, 1943.

116. Adolf Hitler, *Hitler: Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen: Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933*, cited in Biccari, “*Zuflucht des Geistes*”?, 110.

117. Goethe, “Regeln für Schauspieler,” in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Werke, Kommentare und Register*, 12:259.

118. Straube, “Ein Schauspieler,” 10.

who believed that meticulous planning was the key to artistic accomplishment. The German Theater's rehearsals were in lockstep with National Socialist dramatic theory.

Theater scholar Gaetano Biccari has stated that the predominance of the written text over improvisational acting was a transitional marker that differentiated stages of the Nazi period from those of the Weimar Republic.¹¹⁹ As I have noted above, both Julius Petersen and Hanns Johst perceived fidelity to the dramatist as a gateway toward fulfilling theatrical nationhood.¹²⁰ Petersen identified the link between textual primacy and nationalist theater to be the spoken word, claiming that each nation's identity coalesced around its language, which also was the most immediate expression of ethnic character.¹²¹ Hanns Johst also glorified the sanctity of the word,¹²² declaring "language conveys the mission of the theater and the life of the nation."¹²³ Language was a hallmark of conservative, nationalist approaches to German theater.

As an ethnic minority geographically isolated from its country of origin, nationalists saw their common native tongue as intrinsic to their endeavor to distinguish and insulate Germans from other nationalities in Buenos Aires, as well as to substantiate and deepen bonds between German emigrants and their European fatherland. Conservative theories of dramatic performance prevailed among nationalist theater critics in Argentina, who strongly emphasized language in reviews of the German Theater, especially its productions of the German classics. Evaluating Werner Loewer's depiction of Faust, the *La Plata Zeitung* applauded the actor's "linguistic perfection." The pivotal monologues of "Night" and "Forest and Cavern" achieved a spiritual resonance,¹²⁴ leaving the audience with indelible impressions of "the deepest image of the

119. Biccari, "Zuflucht des Geistes"?, 84.

120. Pfanner, *Hanns Johst*, 128.

121. Petersen, *Das deutsche Nationaltheater*, cited in Biccari, "Zuflucht des Geistes"?, 85.

122. Johst, *Standpunkt und Fortschritt*, cited in Pfanner, *Hanns Johst*, 259.

123. Johst, "Theater und Nation," 97, cited in Biccari, "Zuflucht des Geistes"?, 136.

124. "'Faust'-Aufführung des Deutschen Theaters," *DLPZ*, March 22, 1942.

German soul.”¹²⁵ Language also dominated reviews of Lessing’s *Minna of Barnhelm*, which were strikingly consistent with reactions to the same drama from the 1934 guest performance. The *La Plata Zeitung* declared the ensemble’s greatest merit was its vibrant and rhythmic delivery of Lessing’s dialogue. Irene Ney’s portrayal of Minna was praised for being “a linguistic masterclass, utterly compelling in every accent and nuance.”¹²⁶ Language conveyed the virtues of the German protagonists and exposed the depravity of the drama’s single non-German figure—the Frenchman Riccaut de la Marlinière. On this point the *La Plata Zeitung* exceeded its coverage from 1934, in which the paper had criticized Werner Ple-dath for an insufficiently Francophobic performance of the droll Frenchman. Now, in 1943, Riccaut was vilified as a transgressor against German cultural values, especially language.¹²⁷ To make its point, the paper focused on Riccaut’s dialogue with Minna, in which he tries to convince her to lend him money for his gambling habit. After a lengthy exchange in French, Minna explains to Riccaut that in her homeland she prefers to communicate in German. Riccaut then retorts scornfully: “German is such a poor language, such a graceless and inept language.”¹²⁸ Assailing him as the antithesis of the other characters, reviewers distinguished the “dowdy” Frenchman from the honorable Germans by dint of his “putrid” speech.¹²⁹ For nationalist emigrants, Riccaut’s greatest offense was his ridicule of their sacrosanct native tongue.

The German Theater’s emphasis on language was well received. In January 1943, Irene Ney opened her own language and acting studio, specializing in elocution, recitation, and vocal formation. The school expanded several times until March 1945, when the Argentine government shut down most Nazified German institutions. Its self-avowed purpose was to enhance emigrants’ appreciation for

125. “Zur ‘Faust’-Aufführung des Deutschen Theaters,” *DLPZ*, March 17, 1942.

126. “Lessings ‘Minna von Barnhelm,’” *DLPZ*, April 7, 1943.

127. Schmiesing, “Lessing and the Third Reich,” 274.

128. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Minna von Barnhelm*, in Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Werke*, 1:670.

129. “Lessings ‘Minna von Barnhelm,’” *DLPZ*, April 7, 1943.

their “hallowed mother tongue.”¹³⁰ The studio organized recitation evenings, in which the maxims of conservative theater scholars such as Louise Dumont-Lindemann’s “power of the word,” Friedrich Rosenthal’s “theater of poetry,” and Hanns Johst’s “service to the word” found a strong echo.¹³¹ Such precepts are tenets of a national aestheticism that emphasized the folkloric qualities of German drama, especially the classics.¹³² The nationalist population warmly welcomed the preeminence of the word in national aestheticism, because language was a decisive element in the formation and preservation of its constituents’ ethnic heritage and cultural identity as Germans abroad. A binding element among emigrants as well as between them and their countrymen in Europe, language linked the German Theater with Nazi dramatic theory across the Atlantic.

The embrace of national aestheticism carried clear political undertones. Reich dramatist Rainer Schlösser perceived the Nazi movement for literary theater to be a fusion of politics and art. By dint of the “force of their rhetoric, through the sculpting of the word,” Schlösser regarded Goebbels and Hitler as both statesmen and artists. The fruit of intensive labor, their eloquence was inspiring for all Germans.¹³³ In defining the oratory of Goebbels and Hitler as performance art, Schlösser suggested that Nazi ideology and dramatic representation overlapped. The rigor of Ney’s rehearsals typified Schlösser’s theory and helps explain why Nazi supporters in Argentina believed theater to be vital for community building. Through intensive engagement with the written work, the actors sought to establish a profound bond with their public.¹³⁴ Their language and text-oriented preparation coincided with the Nazi front poet Otto Paust’s formulation that the supremacy of the dramatic word manifested service to author and audience alike.¹³⁵ Beginning with an assiduous refinement of enunciation,

130. Irene Ney, “Sprachbildungsarbeit,” in *Die Brücke* (1943).

131. “Sprechabend des Deutschen Theaters Rainer Maria Rilke gewidmet,” *DLPZ*, June 20, 1943.

132. Biccari, “*Zuflucht des Geistes*”?, 101.

133. Schlösser, *Das Volk und seine Bühne*, 83.

134. Straube, “Ein Schauspieler,” 8.

135. Biccari, “*Zuflucht des Geistes*”?, 122.

tone, and gesture, the group's highest objective was to attain an ecstatic sense of community, in which the ensemble and audience become one with the dramatic work.¹³⁶ The German Theater imagined theatergoers to be a "spiritual collective of individuals,"¹³⁷ which molded each presentation.¹³⁸ Together, spectators and thespians collaborated "in service of the people's sacred power."¹³⁹ The ensemble's ethnocentric charity performances for the benefit of the German Relief Organization reflected this principle. One event, entitled "The Little Theater of Daily Life," embedded the imagery of Goethe's works, such as Auerbach's cellar and Götz's castle, in contemporary German Buenos Aires. In support of their compatriots, the colony expressed a buoyant pledge through their shared reverence for German culture from the emotive perspective of South American dispersion.¹⁴⁰ Against the backdrop of emigration, sacrifice, and charity, the German Theater fulfilled ethnic Germans' patriotic duty to spiritual and material solidarity with their countrymen overseas.¹⁴¹ Propagandists in Germany and Argentina portrayed the true bond between audience and ensemble as one of devotion to a transatlantic, racial ideal of nation.

At the core of emigrants' emphasis on the dramatic genre is a concept that Loren Kruger has termed "theatrical nationhood," a project in which inchoate, tenuous sentiments of national identity are articulated, developed, and reinforced through dramatic representation.¹⁴² The German Club of Buenos Aires published an annual almanac for the Ney Stage, *Die Brücke*, which dovetailed with this agenda. Ney explained that the title *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) emphasized the troupe's three-pronged cultural mission: to create bridges between themselves and their public, between members of the emigrant population, and between Germans living abroad

136. "Vorwort," in *Die Brücke* (1944).

137. Carl Ludwig Schleich, "Psychologie des Publikums," in *Die Brücke* (1944).

138. "Publikum, aktiv!," *DiA*, August 1942.

139. "Zum Spielplan der Ney-Bühne," *DiA*, September 1940.

140. "Zum Fest des Deutschen Theaters am 5. September zu Gunsten des Deutschen Hilfswerks," *DLPZ*, August 23, 1942.

141. Haigis, "Das Deutsche Theater—und wir," in *Die Brücke* (1944).

142. Kruger, *National Stage*, 86.

and their cultural heritage in Europe.¹⁴³ Reprinted in the Argentine newspaper *La Razón*, a speech given by Joseph Goebbels at the 1938 Reich Theater Week in Vienna resonated with these objectives: "There exists a single German people, which is not subject to borders, but instead can be found anywhere where German people live who speak German, think in German, and feel themselves to be Germans."¹⁴⁴ During the Ney Stage's presentations, the Argentine National Theater became a surrogate for national theaters in distant Germany and Austria. In Buenos Aires, the provocative spectacle of theatrical performance summoned the idea of a transatlantic, National Socialist sense of German identity in the poignancy of the audience's absence from its fatherland.

The German classics were fundamental to this program. Nationalist media sought to validate Nazism as a nucleus for German cultural identity by claiming the movement had deep historical roots, thus touching on one of the problematic paradoxes of nationalism—a nation's objective modernity versus its subjective antiquity.¹⁴⁵ The press attempted to surmount this paradox by linking canonical dramas to the recent rise of Nazism. The 1943 edition of *Die Brücke* featured an article by the sociologist and historian Hans Freyer, head of the German Institute for Culture in Budapest from 1938 to 1944. In calling the nation to confront its future, Freyer asserted, statesmen also urge citizens to draw from the past, thereby uniting past and future in an eternal present. Hitler's regime had purposefully opened the inflow of history, shaping the new National Socialist Germany from the depths of millennia.¹⁴⁶ In tandem, the German Theater deployed performances of canonical dramas to claim and ratify the historical origins of Nazism.

Propagandists on both sides of the Atlantic grafted their own interpretations of national memory onto the German classics, which they believed directly addressed contemporary events. Literary

143. "Vorwort," in *Die Brücke* (1943).

144. "Semana del Teatro en Viena," *La Razón*, June 14, 1938.

145. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

146. Hans Freyer, "Das neue Reich," in *Die Brücke* (1943).

works were not a product of their authors' intellect, but instead the author functioned as a conduit for the will of the people.¹⁴⁷ Nazi scholar Rudolf Ibel argued that the eternal German spirit inspired Goethe to articulate the still inchoate ethnic impulses toward National Socialism in *Götz of Berlichingen*, anticipating the "visible realization" of these values by future generations.¹⁴⁸ In a lecture to his cast, Ludwig Ney traced the Knight of the Iron Hand to National Socialist ideology—and not the other way around—when he described the drama as a literary expression of peasants' instinctive knowledge of their organic attachment to German blood and soil. Furthermore, *Götz's* scorn for the regional princes and reverence for the Kaiser reflected an intuitive, Teutonic longing for an authoritarian state.¹⁴⁹ The *La Plata Zeitung* theorized that Goethe's dramatization of the German Peasants' War (1525) was the first harbinger of the National Socialist revolution. Hitler's seizure of power proved how prophetically the poet had foreseen the coming changes.¹⁵⁰ Writing for the *Deutsche in Argentinien*, the cultural critic Johannes Franze, who in 1959 won the West German Federal Cross of Merit, listed several examples of how *Götz* accorded with contemporary world events.¹⁵¹ Lerse and George, characterized by their tenacious loyalty to *Götz*, represented "precursors to the most recent German revolution, fighting only with different weapons and under different names." Franze also interpreted the timely intervention of *Götz's* ally, Franz von Sickingen, as anticipatory of Russia's military alliance with Germany in 1940. German nationalists excluded all other interpretations of the drama to secure its links to a National Socialist worldview; any reading not attuned to Nazism only masked *Götz* from true understanding.¹⁵² Goethe's work represented a visionary expression of the eternal will of the German people, which reached its righteous zenith in Hitler's rise.

147. "Zur Aufführung des Schauspiels 'Die Räuber,'" *DiA*, August 1943.

148. "Die Räuber," *DiA*, August 1943.

149. "'Götz von Berlichingen' und der Bauernkrieg," *DiA*, June 1940.

150. "Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen,'" *DLPZ*, May 26, 1940.

151. Franze won the award with no resistance from the West German embassy. Bestand B8, Band 372, PAAA.

152. "'Götz von Berlichingen' und der Bauernkrieg," *DiA*, June 1940.

Reviews of productions of Schiller's *Robbers* and Lessing's *Minna of Barnhelm* in 1943 reiterated this message. Like Götze, *The Robbers* represented a visionary gaze into the future, a "certainty of what was coming, an early anticipation of our thinking."¹⁵³ Schiller's drama was set in the distant past, but it addressed political and intellectual problems that remained as current in 1943 as they had been in 1777. Karl Moor was an archetype of the great leader figure. Were it not for his brother, Franz, Karl could have inspired his nation to glorious conquests and victories. The *Deutsche in Argentinien* contrasted the Moors in terms evocative of anti-Semitism, labeling Karl "autochthonous" and "deeply rooted," whereas Franz was the "complete opposite of autochthonous." Karl naturally inspired comradeship, but Franz was incapable of amity or empathy. His purely calculating, materialistic nature ultimately drove him to suicide. The magazine concluded that this lesson was particularly relevant to the current global war of ideals. In the dizziness of technological advances entire cultures had been swayed by materialism, and they would end in the same self-destruction as Franz von Moor.¹⁵⁴ Schiller's *Robbers* proved that Nazi idealism would triumph over the philosophical poverty of its foes.¹⁵⁵

Lessing's *Minna of Barnhelm*, set in Berlin shortly after the Seven Years' War (1754–63), was also celebrated for its contemporary relevance: "A great, soldierly epoch roars through the scenes of this drama. It seems to have been written in this war and not 170 years ago."¹⁵⁶ The *Deutsche in Argentinien* was convinced that all spectators discerned the closest similarity between these characters and their own lives in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁵⁷ Most importantly, as German chargé d'affaires Erich Otto Meynen put it, even in 1943 Lessing's drama continued to provide mirth and inspiration for all Germans.¹⁵⁸ Reviews of *Minna* undertook to

153. "Schillers 'Räuber,'" *DLPZ*, September 3, 1943.

154. "Zur Aufführung des Schauspiels 'Die Räuber,'" *DiA*, August 1943.

155. "Schillers 'Räuber,'" *DLPZ*, September 3, 1943.

156. "'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 5, 1943.

157. "'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DiA*, April 1943.

158. "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 7, 1943.

establish historical links to Hitler's Germany and instill the nationalist colony with an uplifting confidence in National Socialism. The pro-Nazi media created a bond among its public that represented a nationality in the modern sense, an insular ethnicity organized by historic fiction into an imagined community.¹⁵⁹

Drawing from historical precedents they traced to the German classics, theater critics in Europe and Argentina inculcated their readers with authoritarian hierarchical structures. The protagonist of *Götz of Berlichingen*, the Knight of the Iron Hand, prophesied the rise of a "powerful state" under the "führer figure" of Adolf Hitler.¹⁶⁰ Ernst Rudolf Huber, a leading architect of the Nuremberg Laws, praised *Götz* for its emphasis on state rule, hierarchy, and order.¹⁶¹ In Buenos Aires, Ney averred that the tragic conclusion to *Götz* should cause Germans everywhere to be grateful for Hitler's clear leadership and creative energy.¹⁶² The *La Plata Zeitung* attempted to legitimize absolute obedience to Hitler's regime on the basis of *The Robbers*. Referring to Kantianism, the paper argued that the actions of each individual must represent the laws of his nation.¹⁶³ This misinterpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) revealed another paradox inherent in nationalism: political power versus philosophical poverty, even incoherence.¹⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt states in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that compliance with the singular will of society becomes uniform in a perfect totalitarian government.¹⁶⁵ In Nazi Germany this meant obedience to Hitler, because the leader's words had the weight of law. Thus, the *La Plata Zeitung* contradicted Kant's rule that the principle of one's will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws. Instead it demanded that, as loyal Germans, nationalist emigrants submit collectively to the absolute authority of Adolf Hitler. The hierarchical models of service and devotion in the works of

159. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 103.

160. "Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen,'" *DLPZ*, June 16, 1940.

161. Mandelkov, *Goethe in Deutschland*, 2:100–101.

162. Notes, *Götz*, CNC.

163. "Schillers 'Räuber,'" *DLPZ*, September 8, 1943.

164. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

165. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 136.

Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller—Just to Tellheim in *Minna*, Lerse and Georg to Götz, and the robber band to Karl in *The Robbers*—epitomized and buttressed loyalty to Adolf Hitler in German Buenos Aires.

As the war turned grim for the nationalist population, the German Theater conscripted the classics to encourage commitment to Nazism through both cheer and darker innuendo. For the German Theater's production of Schiller's *Wallenstein* (1798/1799) in March 1944, Ludwig Ney deliberately heightened the drama's relevance to World War II by striking all references to astrology and minimizing Max Piccolomini and Thekla's romance. Instead, Ney focused exclusively on the "fundamental moral" of *Wallenstein*—that is, treason and its consequences.¹⁶⁶ The *La Plata Zeitung* indicted the general as a war criminal and identified egoism as his downfall. Motivated more by his own lust for power than by patriotism, *Wallenstein* was doomed by his treasonous arrogance even before he acted against the emperor: "The mere thought of treason begets evil, even if it has not translated into action. Merciless vengeance ensues inevitably."¹⁶⁷ Given the tenuous state of Argentina's neutrality in the war, the review can be read as a veiled admonition to the nationalist population. Sanctified as the pure expression of an eternal German people, Schiller underscored the relations of power in the Nazi regime and issued grave warnings against even thinking about transgressing against this hierarchy. Hitler's chief diplomat in Argentina, Consul Edmund von Thermann, regularly attended the German Theater and metonymically reinforced Nazi authoritarianism at its events. Erika Fischer-Lichte has theorized that the bodily copresence and collaboration of thespians and theatergoers endow dramatic presentations with a vital social dimension; however, this theatrical energy is malleable and volatile.¹⁶⁸ The Free German Stage struggled to harness its capacities, unwillingly generating dissonance as well as harmony. Nazi propagandists, on the other hand, adroitly exploited theatrical intimacy as

166. "Schillers 'Wallenstein,'" *DLPZ*, March, 22, 1944.

167. "Schillers 'Wallenstein,'" *DLPZ*, March, 22, 1944.

168. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 19.

a menacing affirmation of Hitlerism. The feeling of togetherness at the German Theater conduced not to social egalitarianism, but to political submission.

Reviewers also manipulated the classics to substantiate the Nazi myth of an eternal, unified, and exclusive German race. Major von Tellheim and Minna von Barnhelm represented timeless, eternal ideals, "veritable symbols of race and nation."¹⁶⁹ Lessing's greatest accomplishment was his inclusion of low-ranking military men and civilians, such as Werner and Just, respectively, in his portrayal of ethnic virtue.¹⁷⁰ Johannes Franze arrogated Goethe to campaign for National Socialist values of kinship, self-sacrifice, and social equality. During the siege of the Jagsthausen castle, Götz acted as a mouthpiece for the "growing intuition of our people's Germanic strength." Götz, who eats from the same plate as his serfs, advocates the construction of a nation pervaded by deep horizontal comradeship when he exhorts Georg to devote his life to improving the welfare of the common people.¹⁷¹ Lessing and Goethe foreshadowed a National Socialist community, which was racially exclusive but admitted all German followers of Hitler into its fold.

The nationalist German community in Argentina could only be fully imagined through the exclusion of "Others."¹⁷² Some authors were celebrated as much for not being French as for being German. Herder was lauded for steering Goethe away from French rationalism, and Lessing, too, was credited for liberating the comic genre from French influences.¹⁷³ Peter Stallybass and Allon White have asserted that such tactics of exclusion are the effect of a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear, and desire in the construction of subjectivity. Exclusion results in a psychological dependency upon precisely those Others who are being rigorously opposed and excluded from the community being built.¹⁷⁴ In Buenos Aires this

169. "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 1, 1943.

170. "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 7, 1943.

171. Goethe, *Götz von Berlichingen*, in *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Werke, Kommentare und Register*, 4:143.

172. Stallybass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 5.

173. "Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen,'" *DLPZ*, June 16, 1940.

174. Stallybass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 5.

opposition found expression in racial anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Celebrating Götz as an exemplary German, the *La Plata Zeitung* vilified Metzler and Link as sadistic, materialistic, democratic Jewish agitators.¹⁷⁵ Johannes Franze excoriated enemies of Nazism in Goethe's drama, including the pompous, perfidious, mercenary army of Great Britain, the salon aesthetics and literary prattle of the 1920s Jewish intelligentsia, and the corrupt judges presiding over scandalous trials in the Weimar Republic.¹⁷⁶ The reader must rely on the calumny against the greed, cowardice, deceit, arrogance, and corruption of Others to glean German traits, such as generosity, bravery, honesty, humility, and integrity. Both reviews are remarkable for their stress on institutions, individuals, and traits antithetical to Nazi visions of Germanness.

In the creative process of imagining nationhood through tactics of exclusion, periphery and center can trade places. In Lessing's *Minna of Barnhelm*, the Frenchman Riccaut is socially peripheral, but symbolically central. Although he figures in only a few scenes, Riccaut was played by the German Theater's first actor, Ludwig Ney. Critics praised Ney for giving the most effective performance of the production even as they condemned Riccaut's Gallic aristocratic conceit and passion for gambling and chicanery.¹⁷⁷ Rejected as un-German, Riccaut is as central to definitions of ethnic virtue as Minna, Tellheim, Werner, and Just—all model Germans. The *La Plata Zeitung* corroborated the primacy of the Others by remarking that Ney's depiction of the outcast Frenchman represented an "accomplishment that will go down in the history of Germans on the River Plate."¹⁷⁸ His portrayal of a figure excluded from this population paradoxically garnered Ney's legacy within it. To enact the strength and the stability of the community's center, dramatic presentations had to depict its boundaries and inveigh against its enemies as well. By means of encountering difference through theatrical excursions beyond their colony's fringes, the German Theater imagined a community of illusory fullness by performing what nationalists believed they were not.

175. "Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen,'" *DLPZ*, May 26, 1940.

176. "Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen,'" *DiA*, June 1940.

177. "'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 5, 1943.

178. "'Minna von Barnhelm,'" *DLPZ*, April 5, 1943.

The German classics illustrate a dual transatlantic alignment on- and offstage between the German Theater and the Nazified press in Argentina, on the one hand, and fascist dramatic theory and propaganda in Germany, on the other. Without fail, thespians and reviewers in Buenos Aires endorsed and enacted the precepts of conservative scholars, authors, and actors in Germany. These included meticulous rehearsals and rigidly programmed speech, movements, and gestures onstage; fanatical reverence for the spoken word and literary text as immutable ethnic exaltation; disdain for erudite analysis in favor of populist posturing; and abhorrence for anything associated with theater in Weimar Republic, such as improvisational acting and extravagant stage designs. Additionally, Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe were uniformly subsumed under the mandate to foment fealty to Hitler's regime. The ensemble and media manipulated every production to indoctrinate theatergoers with tenets of Nazism, such as the cult of the leader and the principle of the authoritarian state, the glorification of war, the ignominy and nemesis of treason, as well as racial anti-Semitism and ethnically exclusive community building. In contrast to the refugee population, which lacked a central orientation beyond opposition to Hitler, nationalist Germans followed clear models from across the Atlantic to pilot their project of transatlantic theatrical nationhood. Moreover, whereas refugees often rejected overtly political theater, German nationalists embraced the fusion of drama and dogma. At least in public, they unvaryingly submitted to Nazi ideology on- and offstage. Unlike the Free German Stage, the German Theater existed as a remarkably homogenous cultural institution, braced by the stability of government funding and a cohesive constituency. Its productions of the German classics effectively harnessed the energy of live theater to construct and sustain a close-knit community in support of Adolf Hitler.

Nationalist Hybrids: Local German Dramatists in Argentina

In addition to the German classics, Ney's group also put on plays written by emigrants, such as Werner Hoffmann's *Utz Schmidl* (1941) and Otto Czerski's *The Farmer General* (1940). *Utz Schmidl* was such a success in Argentina that it reportedly was later reprinted

and staged in Germany, and Ludwig Ney honored Czerski by choosing his *Farmer General* to celebrate Hitler's birthday on April 20, 1941.¹⁷⁹ By presenting canonical authors alongside local community members, the German Theater aimed to instill a sense of common cultural heritage among the nationalist population. In the only dramas set outside of Germany, Czerski and Hoffmann upheld Nazism, but they also underscored the vast distance separating emigrants from their native Europe and revealed a complex sense of identity that belied the uniform veneer of German nationalism in Argentina.

Czerski's *Farmer General* is a historical play about the 1788 Turkish siege of Werschetz, a settlement with many German inhabitants on the current eastern border of Serbia. In the drama, Werschetz is surrounded by 40,000 Turks and has been abandoned by both Hapsburg troops and most of its residents. Just seventy Germans, led by the courageous farmer general, Johann Jakob Hennemann, remain. Through an elaborate scheme of deception, Hennemann's troops dupe the Turks into believing that Hapsburg forces still occupy Werschetz. After the Turkish military withdraws, the municipal council ennobles Hennemann for rescuing the town.¹⁸⁰ The birthday performance was well timed, because the Yugoslav Union had fallen to the Nazis in the war just four days earlier, on April 17, 1941. German officials later renamed the town Hennemannstadt in honor of the legendary farmer general.

In its content and aesthetics, Czerski's drama was a conformist, propagandistic drama. It affirmed the central tenet of national aestheticism—namely, the supremacy and power of the word.¹⁸¹ In *The Farmer General* a choir recited verses to inspire the German residents of Werschetz to take up arms against the Turks:

God gave us a plow,
sharp, heavy, and good,
Now we till with our lives,

179. Johannes Franze, "Das künstlerische Leben in Buenos Aires 1941," *JdVA* (1941).

180. Tafferner, *Quellenbuch zur donauschwäbischen Geschichte*, 88.

181. Biccari, "Zuflucht des Geistes"?, 101.

with our German blood.
 The farmer lives, and can die
 for his precious land.
 He who wastes his field,
 may he lose his hand!¹⁸²

Czierski's stanzas evoked dramas in Nazi Germany, such as Richard Euringer's *German Passion* (1933) and Wolfgang Eberhard Möller's *Frankenburg Dice Game* (1936), which also featured choral verses. For the *La Plata Zeitung* the choral deployment of the spoken word activated a militant patriotism that had long lain dormant in the soul of the German people.¹⁸³ In the 1941 presentation, German emigrants from Transylvania, near Werschetz, recited these verses onstage. Augmented by transatlantic links to current German dramatists as well as the living, physical memory of the immigrant performers, Czierski's verses reinforced the perception of a besieged homeland that urged loyalty and defense from all Germans.

The Farmer General fortified the nationalist community in Argentina by emphasizing that Werschetzer Germans' greatest strength was their unity. Underscoring previous interpretations of the German classics and comedies, Czierski's work demonstrated that wherever they might live, Germans' intrinsic solidarity stemmed from a timeless national identity. The *La Plata Zeitung* called the work a people's play because it depicted an ethnically inspired kinship and courage that "bound the fate of the individual to that of his people, and defined nationhood as eternal."¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the Werschetzers' innate German traits foretold Germany's National Socialist destiny.¹⁸⁵ As Nazi troops invaded Yugoslavia, nationalists found justification for the aggression in Czierski's allegory of the timeless mantra of German striving.¹⁸⁶

182. Czierski, *Der Bauerngeneral*, 22.

183. "‘Der Bauerngeneral’: Festspiel anlässlich des 52. Geburtstages Adolf Hitler," *DLPZ*, April 21, 1941.

184. "‘Der Bauerngeneral,’" *DiA*, September 1940.

185. "‘Der Bauerngeneral,’" *DLPZ*, December 5, 1940.

186. "‘Der Bauerngeneral,’" *DLPZ*, April 21, 1941.

Invoking an immortal spirit of “ethnic order,” the *La Plata Zeitung* asserted that Werschetzers’ obedience to Hennemann revealed an inborn German characteristic—the ability to recognize a leading personality—that anticipated Adolf Hitler and proved that Nazism manifested Germans’ ethnic destiny.¹⁸⁷ This historical framework inspired the *Deutsche in Argentinien* to declare its blind faith in the Nazi state: “We survey the past, present, and future, and we know that under Adolf Hitler the German people are invincible.”¹⁸⁸ Acclaiming emigrants’ European heritage with a bold prophecy of victory in World War II, the Ney Stage’s performance of Czierski’s *The Farmer General* on April 20, 1941, was a birthday gift from the nationalist colony to its reverential leader.

Yet, not all local nationalist playwrights projected such seamless transatlantic unity with Nazi Germany. A teacher at the Goethe School and frequent contributor to the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* and the *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien*, Werner Hoffmann wrote his drama as a retrospective on the life of German adventurer Utz Schmidl. After fighting with Spanish soldiers on numerous exploratory expeditions in Paraguay and Argentina, Schmidl returns to his hometown, Straubing, Bavaria, and converses about South America with old acquaintances in a local tavern. Their reunion functions as a framing device that fades into the main body of the work: Schmidl’s experiences with the Spanish colonial army in Paraguay. Caught in a web of intrigue between rival officers, Schmidl obeys the military hierarchy because he is certain that this is the only way to maintain order, but the Spanish troops do not share his values. Instead, they scoff at his convictions and ridicule him for being a mercenary. The soldiers’ insults deeply offend Schmidl, who, for all his exploits and devotion to the Spanish mission, remains a lowly sergeant due to his German nationality. Ultimately, he is unable to stay clear of their power struggles. Bitter and impoverished, but with ambitions for strong armed forces under German command, Schmidl returns to Straubing only to find that his visions of national military might literally lull his tavern companions to sleep.

187. “‘Der Bauerngeneral,’” *DLPZ*, April 18, 1941.

188. “Zur Aufführung des Festspiels ‘Der Bauerngeneral,’” *DiA*, April 1941.

Like Czierski's Hennemann, Hoffmann's Utz Schmidl represents National Socialist archetypes of Germanness. A disciplined and selfless soldier, he is brave in battle and committed to the racially motivated Spanish mission, the conquest of the so-called New World for the white race.¹⁸⁹ Hoffmann emphasizes Schmidl's loyalty, contrasting him with the capricious Spaniards. Schmidl refuses a promotion when he learns it would require him to spy on a Spanish general, and the sanctity of military order moves him to assure his commander that authority trumps morality: "I will be loyal to you, my führer, whether you do right or not."¹⁹⁰ Disillusioned by the Spaniards' refusal to reward his service, Schmidl returns to his hometown of Straubing. However, he is not content in Straubing either. As Hoffmann himself explained, his protagonist longs to sail again, but for Germany. The times, however, are "not yet ripe, so he will remain in Straubing and dream of a united German Reich."¹⁹¹ Explicitly encouraging theatergoers to draw parallels between *Utz Schmidl* and Nazi Germany, Hoffmann inculcated his contemporaries with an awareness of their patriotic duty as German emigrants in 1940.

Schmidl's German traits distinguish him from the Spanish and indigenous characters in the play. Where they are fickle, unreliable, dishonest, and lazy, Schmidl is loyal, dependable, forthright, and industrious. These differences, which Hoffmann always traces to ethnicity, are so definitive that the Spaniards address Schmidl as "German" instead of calling him by name or rank. Surrounded by foreigners, who scorn his German idealism and integrity, Schmidl is ostracized and returns to Bavaria bitter and impoverished. The *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes* lamented that many Germans abroad shared Schmidl's plight. They, too, were burdened with obligations but denied civic rights, economic opportunities, and political influence.¹⁹² Equating the undervalued, maltreated

189. "Das künstlerische Leben in Buenos Aires," *JdVA* (1941).

190. Hoffmann, *Das Spiel vom deutschen Landsknecht Utz Schmidl*, 82.

191. "Das Spiel vom deutschen Landsknecht Utz Schmidl," *DLPZ*, June 26, 1940.

192. "Das künstlerische Leben," *JdVA* (1941).

Schmidl with other German emigrants, the yearbook admonished its readers always to be mindful that Germany was their true home. Or, as the *Deutsche in Argentinien* put it, "German people, remember that you are Germans!!"¹⁹³ Funded by the German embassy, both media organs opposed integration with Argentine society and advocated instead for the primacy and perseverance of emigrants' German heritage.

Yet there exists crucial slippage between *Utz Schmidl* and the official Nazi platform in Argentina. Although Hoffmann is at pains to distinguish Schmidl from Spanish soldiers and native Americans, his protagonist lived in South America for decades. As the author perhaps unwittingly reveals, Schmidl is no longer only a German. His identity is now hyphenated and, like so many German-Argentines in Buenos Aires, Schmidl has become a hybrid. This is clear in the drama's frame when, upon his return to Straubing, the adventurer is distinctly not at home in Germany. Although he sits and converses with them for some time, his former friends do not recognize him and insist on calling him "foreigner."¹⁹⁴ The residents of Straubing have a fundamentally different worldview from Schmidl and betray utter ignorance when they speak of South America. Oblivious that a fire devastated Buenos Aires years earlier, they also believe Paraguay is inhabited by cannibalistic women and giants roam Patagonia. Schmidl is incensed as he listens to them, muttering, "Lies, lies upon lies!" Although they are overjoyed to see him when he identifies himself, Schmidl's compatriots fall asleep when he recounts his travels. They do not understand why he left Bavaria nor, really, why he has returned. His experiences abroad distinguish him from local citizens. When asked whether he has gained wealth abroad, Schmidl states: "Little and lots, when I think of what I've accumulated up here (*points to his forehead*)."¹⁹⁵ His cohorts do not have this knowledge, and neither party can overcome the gulf it opens between them. The barman sums the resultant alienation up neatly when, after they

193. "Verpflichtung," *DiA*, June 1940.

194. Hoffmann, *Utz Schmidl*, 8.

195. Hoffmann, *Utz Schmidl*, 9.

have chatted for hours, he tells Schmidl: "You've become rather foreign."¹⁹⁶

The only German nationalist drama set in South America, *Utz Schmidl* was not officially presented by the German Theater, although some ensemble members participated in its performance. Thus, its locale and cast were removed somewhat from the official Nazi propaganda machine, allowing for more nuanced treatment of nationalists' feelings toward their German past and Argentine present. *Schmidl* challenged the notion of a seamless unity between Germans in Buenos Aires and their compatriots across the Atlantic. Even propagandists like Johannes Franze agreed with Hoffmann—German-Argentines were hyphenated Hitlerites. Franze recognized that in 1940, too, many Germans had a false idea of life in Argentina. He lamented that his countrymen failed to comprehend emigrants' drive to search for opportunities and spread German virtues throughout the world. Indeed, this "essential aspiration of Germans abroad" struck other Germans as lunacy. Despite their mutual patriotism, there existed fundamental, widespread, and enduring differences that separated emigrants from Germans in Europe. Neither would ever truly comprehend the other—a dilemma that Franze viewed as the tragedy of Germans abroad.¹⁹⁷

Emigrants' self-identification with Schmidl consisted partly in his alienation from Germany, but also in the affection he developed for South America. Initially, Schmidl had traveled to South America to seek adventures; however, in time his feelings toward his new environs evolved: "I began to love this land, its forests and rivers."¹⁹⁸ Franze also remarked that Schmidl's inextinguishable affinity for South America motivated him to leave Germany again at the drama's conclusion. Both Germany and Argentina exerted a strong pull on many nationalist emigrants. Max Tepp, who like Hoffmann taught at the Nazified Goethe School, wrote a book, *The Environment of Ethnic Germans in South America* (1930), which instructed German pupils to love Argentina. Hoffmann

196. Hoffmann, *Utz Schmidl*, 93.

197. "Das künstlerische Leben in Buenos Aires," *JdVA* (1941).

198. Hoffmann, *Utz Schmidl*, 64.

himself wrote poetry about South American flora and fauna,¹⁹⁹ and the German League even referred to Argentina as a new “fatherland.”²⁰⁰ Even “Hitler’s banner” on the River Plate,²⁰¹ the *La Plata Zeitung*, indicated the broad appeal of Hoffmann’s drama when it asked: “Who among the millions of Germans abroad is not another Ulrich Schmidl?”²⁰²

A year after the inaugural performance Hoffmann published a verse epilogue, entitled “Homeland.”²⁰³ Reflecting on emigrants’ varying degrees of integration in Argentina and their consequent alienation from Germany, Hoffmann conveyed the conflicted identity of Argentina’s nationalist German population. Whereas some emigrants are scarcely aware of their heritage and are discomforted by their peers’ patriotism, others feel an inexorable sense of disreputation. These emigrants long for a homeland to which they will never return. Their nostalgia will never translate into action, and steady estrangement is the inevitable result. The poem concludes with individuals who act on these bonds and sustain a vital connection to Germany through deeds. In his epilogue, Hoffmann goaded Germans to participate actively in the preservation and cultivation of their culture in Argentina. A stand-in for contemporary ethnic Germans, that is, German-Argentines, the hybrid, Schmidl had been alienated from his native country by his experiences abroad, precluding his reintegration into German society. Many Germans in Argentina supported Nazism; however, Hoffmann’s drama and epilogic poem exposed their allegiance to being distinct from Germans in Germany. As emigrants, they lived abroad, and many were genuinely fond of their new home.

The relationships between the nationalist German population and non-Germans, the Argentine host country, and their German fatherland represented an emotional entanglement that Nazi

199. “Das Spiel vom deutschen Landknecht Utz Schmidl,” *DLPZ*, July 7, 1940.

200. “Aufgaben des Deutschen Volksbundes,” *Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für die La Plata Staaten* 23 (1916): 317.

201. Ismar, *Der Pressekreis*, 80.

202. “Das Spiel vom deutschen Landknecht Utz Schmidl,” *DLPZ*, July 7, 1940.

203. “Epilog zu *Utz Schmidl*,” *JdVA* (1941).

officialdom and its media were loath to admit. Indeed, coordinated press organs had hitherto squelched all dialogue about any sort of cultural ambivalence. As illustrated in numerous instances at the antifascist Free German Stage, it took the shared spectacle of live theater to push this polemical conversation into the public sphere, although one imagines that many emigrants in both colonies had debated such questions of national affection and alienation in private. Hoffmann's dramatized historical analogy thus represented a powerful rhetorical strategy, which raised contested ideological issues onstage and thereby attenuated the offstage discursive practices used in more controllable political contexts such as government-funded publications. Despite strict oversight by the German embassy, the dramatic presentation and ensuing repercussions of *Utz Schmidl* revealed an onerous truth to Nazi authorities: German speakers in Argentina comprised a distinct community characterized by a plurality of cultural and national identities. Their conflicting affinities undercut and destabilized the National Socialist project to construct a single, transatlantic German community under the swastika.