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The McIlwraiths and Germany

One unexpected revelation in researching the collective biography of the McIlwraith family, now published as *Writing the Empire: The McIlwraiths, 1853-1948* (University of Toronto Press, 2021), was the strong presence in their story of Germany, through its scholars, educators and – especially during the British and French occupation following the First World War – also its general population. The research began as a study of family networks that held the British Empire together, specifically those created by the McIlwraiths between Scotland, Canada, and Australia, but soon enough my work also had to concern itself with corresponding webs of communication in the rising empires, including Wilhelmine Germany, that were striving to rival Britain's ambitions. The following will look at three contexts in which the presence of Germany was especially pronounced, and it will include a number of sources that came to my attention after the book was completed. Of the three scenarios, the first takes up the lion's share because of the complicated textual evidence involved.

1. Sir Thomas McIlwraith's attempted annexation of New Guinea in 1883 and the role of geographer Emil Deckert's article on New Guinea in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* (AAZ) in provoking McIlwraith's actions
2. The Töchter-Pensionat von Gruber in Dresden and its international clientele
3. The British Occupation of Wald (Solingen) following the First World War

1. The Annexation of New Guinea

In December 1882, Frederick Young, vigilant secretary to the Royal Colonial Institute in London, forwarded an article, published a month earlier, from the well-regarded *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* (AAZ) to the British Foreign Office.¹ The writer, the young geographer Emil Deckert, urged Wilhelmine Germany to pursue aggressive imperial politics in the Pacific, specifically to aim for annexation of New Guinea. Alluding to the island's strategic role in Pacific shipping and to its supply of Indigenous labour for sugar and copra plantations, he asserted: "Es dürfte sich aus der Insel nach unserer Meinung gar wohl ein deutsches Java schaffen lassen, eine grosse Handels- und Pflanzungskolonie, die einen der stattlichsten Grundsteine zu einem deutschen Kolonialreich der Zukunft bilden würde" (Deckert 1888, 225).² Throughout the

1 Wichmann provides this citation: Emil Deckert, "Neu-Guinea," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, München, No. 331 (1882): 4873-4874. He explains that the article was based on an earlier presentation to the Verein für Erdkunde in Dresden. The *Allgemeine Zeitung* moved from Augsburg to Munich in 1882, hence the discrepancy in place of publication. I will be quoting from the revised article, which was included as a chapter in Deckert's book *Die Kolonialreiche*.

2 It may even be possible, in our view, to make the island into a German Java, a great colony of trade and plantations, which would become a most impressive cornerstone to a German colonial empire of the future. (All translations in the following will be mine).

ensuing crisis involving Germany, Britain and Australia, information was exchanged with remarkable speed, but it was as yet unusual for an article in the daily press to have such an immediate international impact. Yet Deckert's reflections were to play a crucial role in the diplomatic conflict surrounding the attempted annexation of New Guinea in the spring of 1883 by Queensland's premier Sir Thomas McIlwraith.

Reporting on the episode some twenty-seven years later, C.E.A. Wichmann investigated Deckert's media fame with envious consternation, speculating that the *AZ* article was spared "das gewöhnliche Loos [sic] von Zeitungsartikeln" (Wichmann 1910, 307)³ because it was misread by Germany's rivals as an official statement of Bismarck's colonial ambitions rather than one individual's views, influential as they turned out to be. Wichmann, a geologist and mineralogist from Hamburg who studied at Leipzig with Ferdinand Zirkel but taught at Utrecht University 1870-1921, may have been doubly irritated because Deckert framed his observations with a number of condescending remarks about Dutch colonization. He felt that "das unternehmungslustige Völkchen"⁴ had not especially distinguished itself in New Guinea and concluded his call for greater German engagement in the Pacific with the dismissive comment that "[d]ie Besitzansprüche der Holländer auf die Westhälfte der Insel flössen uns dabei keine allzugrossen Bedenken ein, und wir erachten es deshalb als vollkommen überflüssig, an dieser Stelle auf dieselben näher einzugehen" (Deckert 1888, 220; 227).⁵ It is easy to see why Deckert had a talent for rubbing people the wrong way.

In revenge, Wichmann pointed out that Deckert's knowledge of New Guinea (which he never visited) demonstrated "äusserst bescheidene Kenntnisse" (Wichmann 1910, 307).⁶ Yet the German geographer's information was obviously persuasive enough to make some Britons and Australians very nervous about Germany's intentions. Concerns were intensified by increased shipping near Australia's coasts, specifically the activities of the German navy's steam corvette SMS *Carola*. Wichmann reports that no fewer than 57 assemblies across Australia in 1883 passed resolutions that, in addition to New Guinea, "the Pacific Islands lying between New Guinea and Fiji, including the New Hebrides, should be annexed to the British Crown" (*New Guinea and the Western Pacific Islands*, 88, qtd. in Wichmann 1910, 309). This drastic measure was to forestall the ambitions of any competing imperial powers because in addition to the Germans, there were the Dutch, French and Italians to worry about. Revised to reflect Australia's response to it, Deckert's article was included in his book *Kolonialreiche und Kolonisationsgebiete der Gegenwart* in 1884, with a second edition to follow as early as 1888. Throughout his life, Deckert made escalating claims that Bismarck's interest in colonial acquisition, an area in which the chancellor had previously been notably reluctant to become engaged, was stimulated by the *AZ* article.

Despite the notoriety of Deckert's manifesto, surprisingly little attention has since been paid to his work generally and his *AZ* article specifically, and one source even suspects that he was merely used as a cover to shield "higher orders than [the article]

3 The general fate of newspaper articles.

4 Enterprising little people.

5 The claims of the Dutch on the western half of the island do not cause us too much concern, and we therefore consider it as completely superfluous to address these here in greater detail.

6 Very modest knowledge.

showed" (Webster 1987, 271), the "higher order" being Bismarck himself. In 1883, Deckert was at the beginning of his career, but he later became a well-known authority on North American geography, editor of the popular magazine *Globus*, and the first chair of geography at the newly founded University of Frankfurt. He also had the foresight of marriage to Fanny Goodyear. As the daughter of the inventor Charles Goodyear, she was well connected, especially in the States where the Deckerts lived for years with their growing family.

Their comments have generally been brief, but the disciplinary range of the authors who *have* written about Deckert does reveal the breadth of interest he can incite. One economic historian discussing "English and German commercial interests" in the Pacific identifies him briefly as a "German expansionist campaigner" (Ohff 2008, 76) while a scholar of literary environmentalism does not further pursue the observation that the *AAZ* article decisively influenced Bismarck's "Neuguinea-Politik" although doing so would have been relevant to her topic of "Ozeanismus in der deutschen Südseeliteratur" (Dürbeck 2007, 212). A historian of science talks about Deckert but denies that his ideas had any lasting influence on the development of colonial geography, arguing that his methodology, in relying on the fieldwork of others, was too dated to do so (Gräbel 2015, 89-90). This impression is not supported by a geopolitical expert's investigation into the question "pourquoi la géopolitique fut-elle, d'abord, allemande?"⁷ Indeed, Korinman considers Deckert's arguments persuasive enough to have "mis le feu aux poudres" (2002, 25-26)⁸ at a time when few German geographers were able to influence contemporary politics with their research despite a conspicuous increase in university chairs in geography after the Franco-Prussian War: Korinmann lists Leipzig (1870), Munich (1873), Königsberg (1875), Marburg (1876), Bonn and Kiel (1879), Greifswald (1881) and Münster (1883). Ferdinand von Richthofen occupied a second chair in Berlin from 1886. The first had been created as early as 1825 for Carl Ritter.

The overall neglect of Deckert's career may have something to do with embarrassment at his bombast and increasingly shrill pronouncements as the First World War got underway. As a result of the war, Germany of course lost all of the colonial territories it did eventually claim in New Guinea and elsewhere, but as Deckert suddenly died in 1916, he did not know what was coming. Yet, the rivalry between Britain and Germany over New Guinea and the role of Deckert's *AAZ* article in it deserve another look especially now that there is increased scholarly confrontation with Germany's colonial past. Examples of such engagement range from exhibitions such as "Deutscher Kolonialismus" at Berlin's Deutsches Historisches Museum in 2017 and "Schwieriges Erbe" at Stuttgart's Linden-Museum in 2021, to conception of the Humboldt Forum as a space, problematic as some have observed, in which to expose Germany's colonial past (see, for example, Wainwright 2021). The cultural appropriation suspected behind the "Prachtboot" from the island of Luf in the Bismarck Archipelago has been a particular flashpoint. This splendid outrigger boat was transported in 2018 from its previous home at the Ethnologisches Museum in the suburb of Berlin-Dahlem to the centrally located Humboldt Forum, but there have been calls to return it to the original owners from whom it was appropriated (Aly 2021, 193).

7 Why was geopolitics German to begin with?

8 To bring the powder keg to explosion.

Most of my research on the McIlwraiths relied on collections of personal papers, and for those family members who were hardworking businesspeople and scholars, these remained my most important source. However, when it came to creating a sense of Sir Thomas, the politician among them, his place within international colonialism, and Emil Deckert's long-distance entanglement in McIlwraith's story, personal papers were not enough. Among other complementary sources, I combed through newspaper coverage, memoirs and political satire to obtain a better sense of Sir Thomas, an outsize man who impressed friend and foe alike with his personal magnetism, energy and intelligence but dismays present-day critics with the callous views about Aboriginal people he shared with many of his contemporaries. Commentators have described him in terms of a force of nature such as a cyclone or bird of prey. Admirers took his physical size as that of "a giant among midgets" (Casey 1893, 3) who owned "a mental equipment given to few" (Bernays 1919, 56).

The most fascinating source, however, was the parliamentary papers, including the Blue Books of Great Britain and Australasia and the Weissbücher of the Reichstag.⁹ As his family frequently complained, Sir Thomas was a poor letter-writer let alone diarist when it came to his private affairs, but he thrived on diplomatic correspondence and its role in political gamble. Wichmann too was alert to the significance of the parliamentary papers for his topic and sifted through them with care to document the international response to Deckert's *AAZ* article.

Apart from providing a host of information, the parliamentary papers are an intriguing textual genre, and it is at times difficult for a literary scholar not to read them as a type of fiction. Even well over a hundred years later, the blow-by-blow account of Sir Thomas's attempted coup, narrated – in several different languages – through official correspondence, telegrams, press clippings, eye witness and expert reports, interviews, logbooks, maps, and glossaries has all the makings of a metafictional thriller. It is not surprising that collections of parliamentary papers documenting particularly tense crises such as the run-up to the First World War became bestsellers, usually in versions especially edited for the popular market. For example, Austria's *Rotbuch zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges 1914* was published not only in all of the Habsburg Empire's many languages but also in French, English, Dutch and Danish (Kabermann 1940, 163).

Deckert's and McIlwraith's contemporaries too repeatedly compared the parliamentary papers to literary works that featured high drama, fantasy and satire in equal measure, such as *Macbeth*, *As You Like It* and Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. The "Circumlocution Office" in Dickens's novel seemed especially apt because British journalists saw it as the infuriating model for the Colonial Office's sluggish response to the Germans' interest in New Guinea (See "Latest Intelligence" 1885; "The Dawdle" 1885). The delay resulted, as one Australian journalist angrily pointed out, in the Germans establishing with "contemptuous effrontery" a protectorate in 1884 after having officially denied any intention of doing so (Traill 1892, 693). Britain followed with its own protectorate only in 1888. This is not the place to discuss the many other literary elements in the McIlwraiths' story, but since sugar as a sought-after product

9 The parliamentary papers of individual nations are generally distinguished by the colour of their binding. See Strupp and Schlochauer (1960-2, 507).

circulating throughout the British and German empires plays a role in Sir Thomas's actions, Louis Nowra's Australian novel *Ice* (2008) is recommended as a depiction, in the magic realist mode, of the trade in frozen meat as pioneered by Sir Thomas's brother Andrew McIlwraith and his shipping partner Malcolm McEacharn. Until I read *Ice*, I could not have imagined the inferno of slaughter near the dock that ensured that meat was as fresh as possible when it was loaded for overseas transport.¹⁰

Their quasi-fictional elements notwithstanding, the textual design of parliamentary papers goes out of its way to suggest that the documents convey nothing but the objective truth. Each volume is prefaced by a detailed table of contents stipulating that history has been captured in a closely woven administrative net. For example, the first few entries in [C.3617], one of the Blue Books containing *Further Correspondence Respecting New Guinea* (1883, vii), read as follows. The numbers in the first column refer to the number of the document and those in the fifth column refer to the page on which it appears.

54	To Gov. Sir A.E. Kennedy (Queensland).	14 April 1883	"Reuter's telegram states Government taken formal possession New Guinea; please telegraph explanation."	131
55	Gov. Sir A.E. Kennedy.	16 April 1883 (Rec. 16 April 1883) Telegraphic.	Reporting that the Queensland Government took formal possession of New Guinea in Her Majesty's name on the 14 th inst., pending the decision of her Majesty's Government.	131
57	The Agent General for Queensland.	19 April 1883	Enclosing copy of a report by Dr. Robertson (extracted from the "Glasgow Herald," of 17 th inst.) giving his reasons for advocating the annexation of New Guinea by Great Britain.	137
58	Colonial Secretary (N.S. Wales) to Agent General, London.	19 April 1883 Telegraphic.	"This Government views favourably annexation of New Guinea to British Crown."	138
59	The Agent General of Victoria.	20 April 1883	Transmitting copy of a telegram from the Premier of Victoria, authorizing support of the action of Queensland in annexing New Guinea.	138

10 For background to Nowra's book, see Koval (2008).

The resulting illusion of seamless documentation is so successful that historians are routinely warned that "[m]uch was always omitted and texts were frequently curtailed," and that "total reliance on them on any period would be a cardinal error" (Temperley, Penson 1938, x). Criticism of parliamentary papers as a textual genre is sparse, but it is revealing that one of the earliest and best discussions comes from a linguist: Johann Sass, *Die deutschen Weissbücher zur Auswärtigen Politik 1870-1914* (1928). Moreover, the commentary can easily become meta-textual, illustrating just how difficult it is to determine both the "truth" of these documents and the "truth" of what is said about them. Thus, depending on their political affiliation, authors may list the manipulations characterizing the parliamentary papers of an opposing nation while remaining apparently blind to similar interventions in their own country's records. An excellent illustration of the latter is Heinz Kabermann's "Die diplomatischen Farbbücher," published in *Zeitschrift für Politik*. He attacks the British parliamentary papers for their omissions, insertions, rearrangements of chronology, mistranslations, and so on but perceives no need to advise similar caution with their German equivalents. The date of 1940 speaks for itself.

The letter by London's Agent-General for Queensland forwarding "Mr. Chester's report of his visit to Port Moresby, and of the formal possession of New Guinea" was not logged at the Colonial Office until 19 June 1883 although the event had taken place in April of that year. Initial notification, as the table of contents above indicates, had been via Reuter's news agency. Researchers of the role of parliamentary papers in imperial politics have described how administrators employed a tactics of "diplomacy, delay and duplicity" (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 124; see also Bowman 2004) and strategically held back some mail in order to avoid premature disruption of their plans. As the excerpt from [C.3617] above indicates, these same administrators used the telegraph readily enough when it suited their own purposes. Administrators deliberately delaying the mail did expose themselves to possible retaliation at the other end, but with Sir Thomas at least there is the strong impression that risk was part of the thrill of doing political business. One of many political cartoons depicts him in short trousers as "A Bad Colonial Boy" who enjoys setting off firecrackers under the nose of Britain's venerable institutions, in this case the Bank of England.¹¹ There was a good dose of contempt for Britain in some Australians' view of the mother country as "a grandmotherly old wreck [...] tottering with a handbag and a cotton umbrella towards an open grave."¹²

Sir Thomas's actions, which had the Colonial Office aghast at his chutzpah, were in the end thwarted by the intervention of a powerful philanthropic organization, the Aborigines' Protection Society. The Society felt that Queensland's record in dealing with Aboriginal labour was not reassuring enough to allow its premier to proceed with his plans for New Guinea, and the Society's representatives pressured the British Government accordingly until the annexation had been annulled for this and other reasons. They were assisted by information provided in a publication entitled with deliberate irony *The Way We Civilise* and based on often shocking material first

11 The cartoon appeared on the title page of the weekly *Boomerang*, 17 October 1891, and is reproduced in *Writing the Empire* (2021, 53).

12 Widely cited in the Australian press, for example in "A 'Disloyal' Chief Justice," 1889.

published in *The Queenslander* newspaper. In another illustration of the selective principle ruling government publication, the pamphlet is mentioned in the British parliamentary papers of 1883 but not included. This may be due to its length or graphic depictions of violence, but the omission had serious consequences for Australian historiography. According to one critic, when he first began his research, "[n]o copy of this important pamphlet [was] available in Queensland research collections. I finally tracked it down in the specialist library of the Commonwealth Society in 1984" (Evans 2008). Although the document did survive, the original omission of *The Way We Civilise* from the parliamentary papers may be seen as a form of "Operation Legacy," the process by which records have been migrated and sometimes destroyed in order to remove evidence of problematic actions under colonial rule (see, for example, Sato 2017).

When it finally became readily available, *The Way We Civilise* served as important evidence well beyond its original context. It has been cited in contemporary investigations into the treatment of Aboriginal people, including *Bringing them Home*, the Australian Human Rights Commission's 1997 Report on the forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children from their families. Given his comments on former American slaves (see Trautmann 1984), however, it is doubtful that knowledge of the document would have influenced Emil Deckert's views about German colonization.

2. Beulah Gillet Knox in Dresden

If Sir Thomas McIlwraith's skirmish with the Colonial Office brought Britain to the brink of war with Germany (see Dülffer 1997, 317-333), then war became a reality in the second episode in *Writing the Empire* in which Germany played a role. In 1913 and 1914, Beulah Gillet Knox – future wife of the anthropologist Thomas F. McIlwraith and related to the Childs whom he had befriended since high school – travelled in Europe with family, returning to North America just before the outbreak of the First World War. Part of their program was improvement of language skills, in German, French and Spanish, and Beulah spent several months at an exclusive Töchter-Pensionat on Eisenstuckstrasse in Dresden's Südvorstadt, in the company of young women from the aristocracy, military, and moneyed classes.

American-born Will Child, a recently retired steel magnate from Hamilton, Ontario, spared no expense in making the cultural riches of Europe available to his niece, wife, and son, and as a Germanophile, he and his troupe of sightseers assiduously visited sites associated with German literature. Thus they climbed the Brocken Mountain in tribute to *Faust*, and gamely sat through a performance of *Minna von Barnhelm* because Child had read it at college. While in Dresden, Child may have visited Ernst Haeckel at the University of Jena. Haeckel was an honorary member of the Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art Association (also referred to as the Scientifics). As president of the Hamilton Scientifics, Child volunteered lectures not only on German literature but also ethnography and his extensive travels that had taken him everywhere except Australia. Like other Victorians, he managed a scientific career alongside his primary occupation as an industrialist, and his studies in anthropology were accomplished enough to earn him election to the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

One assumes that Haeckel was swiftly voted out of the Scientifics with the onset of war, especially after he had co-signed the declaration "An die Kulturwelt" (1914) in which ninety-two German intellectuals including Max Planck and Gerhard Hauptmann laid the blame for the war at Britain's doorstep. Child's lecture to the Scientifics after his return to Hamilton in 1914 obviously required him to signal radical departure from his former love of Germany, and he did so by bringing his knowledge of anthropometry to bear on the German military. The officers, especially the aviators, displayed "aggressive qualities" in the very appearance of their heads, he proposed (Child 1914, 18). However, on their arrival in Europe, Will Child and his party knew as yet nothing of these developments, and the clueless declaration by one of them on 1 January 1914 that "the year looks about the same as the last" is unbearably ironical to those with the wisdom of hindsight.¹³

In 1913, imperial Germany was pulling out all the stops. There were celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Nations at Leipzig as well as the silver anniversary of Wilhelm II's ascension to the throne. More impressed by the 100th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth, Beulah and her family attended one Wagner opera after the other when they did not enjoy tango teas or an automobile show, but her letters do contain references to the displays of imperial Germany too, usually adapted to suit her own interests. The first prize for best costume at one of the Pensionat's fêtes, for instance, went to a young woman modeling Gustav Richter's popular painting of Queen Luise of Prussia. While in Berlin for Christmas and the New Year, the travellers joined an enormous crowd outside the Stadtschloss (now reconstructed to house the Humboldt Forum in which the Luf outrigger is displayed) to observe what they could of the Emperor's New Year's Day Reception of the diplomatic corps. Always one to appreciate flashy style, Beulah approvingly noted the carriage of the French ambassador, "with the three men on it [...] all dressed in a kind of bright scarlet flowing cloak." She was particularly thrilled however with the outfit of a Totenkopfhúsar, noting the wearer's "little black jacket lined + edged with white fur and strips of white braid across his chest and black cavalry trousers + boots and a black helmet with a skull + crossbones."¹⁴ The sight was so enthralling that she incorporated it into a wild wartime story she wrote on her return to the States. While a student at Lake Erie College, she fabulated about a Totenkopfhúsar who suddenly (and improbably) drops his disguise in a Moroccan hashish den and reveals himself to be a German spy.

When Beulah attended it, the Pensionat enrolled young women from Britain and Northern Ireland, the Scandinavian countries, Central Europe, Canada, and the United States. Beulah's best friends included two cousins with such similar handwriting, poor spelling and failure to date their letters that I initially believed them to be one and the same person, but the writers were identified eventually as Eileen Plunket and Doris Blackwood, both granddaughters of the First Marquess of Dufferin and Ava. Dufferin's many distinguished postings included one as Governor General to Canada (Eileen's mother Victoria was born at Rideau Hall in Ottawa) and culminated in his appointment as viceroy of India. This tradition in "governorgeneralships," as Beulah called them in

13 Thomas Forsyth McIlwraith (1941-), Personal Papers (hereafter abbreviated as TFMP), Beulah Knox to Carlos Knox, 1 January 1914.

14 TFMP, Beulah Knox to Carlos Knox, 30 December 1913.

imitation of the German compound nouns she was learning, continued into the next generation. Both Eileen and Doris acquired antipodean connections this way. Thus, Eileen's father, Baron Plunket, was Governor of New Zealand from 1904 to 1910, and Doris was trapped "Down Under" for the duration of the war when she accompanied her aunt, Dufferin's daughter Lady Helen Hermione, and uncle, Ronald Craufurd Munro Ferguson, on the latter's appointment as Governor General to Australia in 1914. Doris and Eileen were enrolled at the Pensionat to acquire the skills expected of women of their class while enjoying "all the comfort and care of home-life as well as a thorough education in all the branches of knowledge and art by first rate teachers," as promised by the school's prospectus.¹⁵ Beulah enjoyed the lively company of her fellow students but did not think that the teaching compared to the rigorous curriculum she had enjoyed at Laurel School, Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Opera-mad like most of the Pensionat's teenagers, Eileen and Doris reserved their enthusiasm for everything having to do with Dresden's Hofoper. Beulah and her family were baffled by the craze that had Eileen slip an amorous note to baritone Waldemar Staegemann while another student swooned over the "ripping" legs of tenor Fritz Vogelstrom. Doris highly approved of Carmen's death by stabbing as acted by Fritz Soot and Eva von der Osten. "Wasn't it a rag," she hailed the energetic performance, having carefully compared it with a previous one featuring Irma Tervani. By contrast, Soot's wife who applauded her husband from the audience deserved to be dismissed as "a funny-looking freak."¹⁶ Some operas overwhelmed the girls' imagination such that the roles spilled over into their lives at the Pensionat: the demi-monde toughs in *Carmen* were a favourite disguise, and Eileen identified so strongly with "Lohengrin" that she was "always acting it."¹⁷ In later years, the stage was one of several occupations she briefly tried out to escape the languorous feminine routine prescribed by her class that had her much too often "sit[ting] alone doing nothing in [her] bedroom."¹⁸

The Pensionat not only taught deportment, conversational skills, music and art but also charity toward those who were less well off. One Christmas ritual had the girls sew dolls' clothes to give to poor children, and they looked on when the directors presented food and clothing to a working-class mother and her children, for which the latter gave their thanks by recitals of poetry, "the most absolutely killing things."¹⁹ These philanthropic duties were light enough but became much more serious with the onset of war. Normally a social butterfly, Doris trained as a VAD (member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment) while in Australia, and Eileen served as a driver in the all-female Hackett-Lowther unit in France. The unit, attached to the French army because Britain would not allow women this close to the front, was awarded the Croix de Guerre, and its members were invited to join the French army of occupation in Wiesbaden where Eileen made good use of the German and French she had learnt at the Pensionat. (Coincidentally, an early incarnation of the school had existed in Wiesbaden-Biebrich).

Moreover, it is possible to see her service with the unit as a more serious version of the playful switching of gender roles she enjoyed in Dresden. The Hackett-Lowther

15 The prospectus is reproduced in *Writing the Empire* (2021, 257).

16 TFMP, Doris Blackwood to Beulah Knox, 17 January 1914.

17 TFMP, Beulah to Wilm Knox, 19 November 1913.

18 TFMP, Eileen Plunket to Beulah, n.d. [December 1913?].

19 TFMP, Beulah to Neilson Knox, 14 November 1913.

unit was not only known for its members' valour in assisting the wounded, but also appears to have played a significant role in 1920s queer history. Its co-founder Toupie Lowther was the model for "Stephen" in Radclyffe Hall's Lesbian classic *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), and Una Troubridge's diary has Eileen and a female companion invited to Lowther's parties, with the painter Romaine Brooks and Lowther's lover, the Australian singer and teacher of music Nellie Rowe, also in attendance. Still, when she was in her mid-thirties, Eileen married Captain Rowland Lionel Barnard, whom she met during a lengthy stay in Cairo, and had two children with him. A brief newspaper notice indicates that she was respected in the Middle East as an admirable worker during the Second World War as well, but no details are available ("For Women" 1943).²⁰

The correspondence describing Beulah's travels in Europe do not feature the same complexity or global sweep as the documents related to Sir Thomas's attempted annexation of New Guinea, but it does have its own complications. After the family's safe return home in May 1914, Beulah maintained a correspondence – in one case lasting for several years – with former fellow students from Germany, Britain, and Norway. The most interesting exchange was initiated by Eileen Plunket beginning with the late summer of 1914. She repeatedly expressed her longing for Dresden and her companions there even after the war had begun, but she was generally abusive about Germans, at one point referring to her former fellow students as "dirty pigs."²¹ Wanting to compose a scrapbook of political cartoons for a military uncle and godfather, she asked that Beulah contact a German fellow student in Krefeld to request German cartoons to go with the British ones she had already collected. The proposed ruse was that Beulah wanted these for herself but that she was to forward them to Britain. Eileen did not make this request directly to Alice Schaefer because letters between Britain and Germany were heavily censored whereas the United States had not yet entered the war. Though it is unlikely given Eileen's usual brashness, she may also have been somewhat embarrassed to approach Alice when her intention was to ridicule the Germans. Eileen did her best to manipulate Beulah into complying with her scheme, alternately begging and threatening. For whatever reason, her American friend complied.

Alice sent the caricatures to Painesville, Ohio but not without indicating that she was not as naïve as Eileen thought her to be. It was peculiar, Alice noted, that another fellow student in Denmark had received an identical request from Eileen and, unlike Beulah, Thora Daverkosen saw no reason to be discreet. Alice may have agreed to the exchange as an opportunity to tell the German side of the story, or more accurately her understanding of it, especially as she and Eileen had quarreled often about Germany even when they were still at the Pensionat: "I am sure [Eileen] hates me now."²² She collected eight political cartoons, adding brief glosses in shaky English to each. Number four showed a howitzer, its "big mouth" competing (presumably) with Kitchener's: "We will [see?] who of us says the last word." Number six depicted a German soldier catching sight of his first kilted Scotsman, and seemingly determined

20 Una Troubridge, diaries, Lovat Dickson collection, MG30 D237, volume 1, Library and Archives Canada.

21 TFMP, Eileen Plunket to Beulah, 11 July 1915.

22 TFMP, Alice Schaefer to Beulah, 17 October 1914.

to drive her teachers of English to despair, she produced this translation: "Only look, there have two of those lady imitators (?) hidden themselves." At the end of the list, Alice concludes: "So – that is all – the rest I wrote behind the postcards."

Alice's letter, perhaps waved through by the censors because it was useful propaganda in showing German resilience, also updates Beulah on the fate of students and teachers after the declaration of war, to report mournfully on the many letters that were returned as undeliverable, and on Alice's own volunteer work. Eileen seems to have had an uncharacteristic moment of remorse at having exploited her friends, and managed to contact Alice through their Danish go-between to thank her for the package. If Sir Thomas's flouting of British institutions is captured in the cartoon of "A Bad Colonial Boy," then the widely travelled political cartoons for Eileen's scrapbook briefly connected a group of young women who were trying to overcome wartime conditions in order to maintain a semblance of friendship.

With typical disrespect, Eileen referred to the directors of the school as "the Grubs" in allusion to their last name "von Gruber." The von Grubers had run a Pensionat in Dresden since 1875, beginning with Charlotte and Hedwig von Gruber as directors. The school occupied several different premises before settling into a brand new building on Eisenstuckstrasse 45 in 1900. A surprising number of imposing *Gründerzeit* mansions in the area have survived the Second World War and give a sense of the original milieu of "museum presidents, architects, physicians, lawyers, high-ranking military officers and opera singers" (Kröller 2021, 242), who were looked after by an army of tradesmen, skilled workers, and domestic servants. By the time Beulah arrived, Charlotte and Hedwig had passed the reins to their sister Pauline and their niece Marie, and a third generation was in the ascendancy. The von Grubers came from Stralsund, and their prospectus emphasized that the German taught at their school was the Northern variety, considered more refined than Saxony's homely inflections. Their father Johannes was a prominent pedagogue whose achievements were acknowledged with an honorary degree by the University of Greifswald, but he was not the only remarkable figure in this family of educators and scientists.

The von Grubers' sister Franziska married Karl Kromayer, a teacher and school director, and the couple moved their family to Alsace-Lorraine after it was annexed by Germany following the Franco-Prussian War. Together, the von Grubers and Kromayers were notable for circulating through both the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires, often working in volatile border regions. Thus, Johannes, son of Franziska and Karl, became a classicist at the University of Czernovitz (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine), founded to help settle the Bukovina region, before he accepted a chair at the University of Leipzig. Johannes's wife Henriette Topuz came from a cosmopolitan family in Izmir, with Turkish, Dutch, and Italian names to her family tree. This background eventually brought the Nazis' racial police on the scene, requiring their son Ernst to prove his Aryan origins in order to continue with his medical practice. Moreover, there were socialists in the family, and the resulting harassment under Nazi rule drove family members to emigrate to North and South America. In Berlin, Johannes' brother Ernst (after whom his nephew had been named), who was a brilliant

dermatologist, committed suicide in 1933, as did his wife. The official explanation was that he suffered from an incurable illness but the date does give one pause.²³

As Alice Schaefer also reports in her letter to Beulah, the Pensionat folded soon after the outbreak of war. The international teaching staff precipitously returned to their countries of origin, and by the fall of 1914 only two students out of the normal enrollment of twenty were left. The school was the von Grubers' source of income, and the disappearance of their clientele meant they were unable to hold on to the Pensionat. By 1915, it is no longer listed, and efforts to find out what happened to the directors have not been successful.

Thomas F. McIlwraith and the British Army of Occupation

And finally, there was Beulah Knox's future husband, the anthropologist Thomas F. McIlwraith. He was less than a year away from enrolling at Cambridge when, on 13 December 1918, the nineteen-year-old marched with the King's Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB) across the Rhine at Cologne as part of the British army of occupation. Captured on film and stereoscopic images, the occasion was made as imposing as possible despite driving rain, and care was taken "to include men enlisted since 1914 and members of the Dominion troops among the first to cross the Rhine" (Kröller 2021, 286). The men were saluted by their commanders and their regimental march was played, in the KOSB's case "Blue Bonnets o'er the Border." Citing Victor von Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säckingen*, the *London Times* suggested that it was important to strike "in one comprehensive sweep at the deepest and most fundamental source of German pride," namely the Rhine river. The quotation from *Der Trompeter* is in the original German, suggesting that – like Will Child – the writer was a disillusioned Germanophile ("On the Rhine").²⁴

In one of many plays on martial mottoes and songs featured in his letters, in this case the music-hall song "When We've Wound up the Watch on the Rhine" and its parody of "Die Wacht am Rhein," McIlwraith was thrilled with being able to wind up his watch on the Rhine. The occasion was all the more important to him because – though he had been enthusiastic about the prospect of warfare – Armistice was declared shortly after his arrival in France. Fifteen at the beginning of war, he was keen to join up as soon as possible, but his parents refused permission until he was eighteen. He was initially rejected because his weight did not meet the requirements for enlistment, a difficulty he eventually circumnavigated by eating as much fattening food as he could lay his hands on, taking antidiarrheal medication, and stuffing his cheeks with lead shot. Once he had arrived in Britain for officer training in early 1918, an influenza epidemic further delayed him into the fall well past his qualifying exams as an officer.

23 Some of my information was obtained from descendants of the family, especially Peter Kromayer and Dipl.-Ing. Klaus Kromayer. Peter's father Heinrich, a nephew of Johannes and Ernst Kromayer, held a doctorate in economics and was a social democrat. His wife Erika was part Jewish. After emigration to the United States, Heinrich participated in the "My life in Germany" contest at Harvard University, with his memoir "Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem 30. Januar 1933." See Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Ger 91.

24 Scholarship on the British Occupation from the perspective of the German population is sparse, but an excellent source is Limburger (2010).

Waiting for his demobilization, which eventually occurred in August 1919, McIlwraith spent much of his time in Germany as an educational officer in Wald (Solingen) in the country's steel belt. The situation was relatively quiet though there were signs of incipient unrest. Especially the presence of "Bolshevichists" was a concern, and as he was reluctant to leave the army so soon after joining it, he volunteered for service in Russia but was turned down because he did not have the language skills. In the absence of a more ambitious scenario, he concentrated on daily life in the company of Germans whom, as a rule, he loathed. With satisfaction, he comments on the "Hun's" chafing at the restrictions and humiliations under occupation: posting the names and ages of occupants on each house, presenting identification for crossings between occupied and non-occupied territory, ceding to British military on trams, trains, and in shops, confiscation of food for British use, taking hats off to British officers, and so on. His closest encounters with Germans occurred in his billets though his reluctant hosts can hardly be called typical of the general population. In contrast to the obsequiousness he suspected in ordinary citizens, he felt that the haughty self-confidence of his privileged "landlords" gave him license to push back. Toward the end of his stay, he lodged for a brief period with Hugo Lauterjung, maker of metal products. (Indeed, knives and scissors were such everyday objects in Wald that some families found nothing ironical about presenting the British soldiers living in their homes with knives for Christmas 1918). He made a mess of Lauterjung's sitting-room, but this was nothing compared to the disturbances he and his mates created at another billet. For the first five months, McIlwraith stayed at an opulent villa owned by August Kortenbach of the umbrella maker Kortenbach & Rauh, whose factory – connected to his home by a special gate – had been repurposed for military production at the beginning of war.

McIlwraith was deeply impressed by Kortenbach's mansion on Weyerstrasse, a street lined by several equally imposing houses owned by local industrialists. Designed by Heinrich Plange, preferred architect to the area's entrepreneurs, the building was so new that some amenities such as a conservatory had not yet been completed (see Kirchhoff 2004, 351-359).²⁵ Even so there were luxuries in this marble-clad and parquet-floored building that few of McIlwraith's clique had previously encountered in their civilian lives, and he insisted on one photo after the other to be taken of himself, fellow officers and superiors posing in front of it. If his letters home say precious little about his work as an educational officer, they talk a great deal about his social life in KOSB company. Even so, he had to sanitize his descriptions for his family's benefit because the Presbyterian McIlwraiths would have been aghast at the whisky-fuelled partying, with recitations of Rudyard Kipling and other martial poetry as long as the presenters were able to stand up, that their son gleefully recorded in his diary.

The men were particularly taken with a music room featuring a mechanical piano (a "piano-player"), a gramophone with a large collection of records, and musical instruments displayed on the walls. Along with a sitting room claimed by McIlwraith and two other officers who shared his quarters, the music room became the scene of late-night revels with juvenile pillow-fights and bayonet charges on silk screens. There was plenty of liquor as the military became increasingly restive with little to do until demobilization. With their numbers dwindling rapidly, one officer after the other was

25 According to Kirchhoff (2004) the villa was demolished in 1966.

given a raucous send-off, and on one of these occasions, McIlwraith and his mates – accompanied by bagpipes – insisted on marching through an adjacent room where the Kortenbachs were having a gathering of their own. In exasperation at the noise, the owner of the house cut the electricity to the piano-player, only to be obliged to have the damage repaired, naturally at his own expense. In contrast to their elders, by the way, the children of Wald seem to have adored the Scots in their kilts, perhaps concluding that they were a replacement for Carnival, for obvious reasons summarily cancelled that year. They followed the pipers wherever they could, and began to pick up various expressions and gestures from them.

As in the postal relay among the former students' of the von Grubers' Pensionat, here too political cartoons were at the centre of a particularly tense standoff at the Kortenbachs. In addition to keeping McIlwraith in plenty of letters and packages from home, his family and their friends sent so many newspapers and magazines that, with limited success, he repeatedly asked for clippings instead. One family friend mailed a copy of *Life* Magazine with a cartoon, entitled "The Last Review," in which the Kaiser and Hindenburg were seen inspecting a large army of skeletons in uniform. When the "Huns" became "a trifle uppish" by ordering the batmen around, McIlwraith tacked the cartoon up on the living-room wall, along with translation into German and notices that the image was not to be taken down. The Kortenbachs retaliated by removing the cartoon to one of the officers' rooms, but it was returned to its original location. The image of a submarine on the opposite wall – an astonishingly incendiary object to keep around during occupation – was provided with a caption that had the sub removed to Britain to be surrendered. Additional captions, all designed to provoke as much as possible, went up on the walls. Objections were met with reminders to the sinking of the *Lusitania* or a shoulder-shrugging "C'est la guerre!"

The Kortenbachs refused to enter the room for days on end, and the cleaning staff too kept away, until the officers concluded that their orderlies did not do as good a job as the maids and their point had in any case been made. For the benefit of his family, McIlwraith describes the episode as comedy, but the diary relates a bellicose and nerve-racking situation.²⁶

The McIlwraiths and, in Beulah Knox's case, a McIlwraith-to-be encountered Germany in a variety of contexts, ranging from global politics to intimate friendship. In each case, the extreme circumstances of war destroyed previous mutual appreciation or else sharpened the negative stereotypes nations already held of each other. That realization may be nothing new, but the diverse documentation of the McIlwraiths' activities provides a richly nuanced picture, confirming that informative revelations about empire can be found "in the [d]etails" (Lutz 2006) and that the result is not always of one piece. Such details help to determine "the many fissures, contradictions, historical particularities, and shifts in imperial processes" (Lutz 2006, 593) and so contribute to a more complete understanding of "how this all worked" (Farge 2013, 44).

26 All of the quotations in this and the previous paragraph are taken from Fonds of 2nd Lt. Thomas Forsyth McIlwraith, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum, T.F. McIlwraith, letter to mother, 14 February 1919. For World War One cartoons, see for example Wilson (2015), Chapman and Ellin (2014).

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